

**Between Comedy and Tragedy: From Imaginary Travelers to Temporarily
Settled in Moldova**

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to examine what travelers determine as 'otherness' when traveling in post-Soviet Moldova. It is my central argument that the travel narratives of contemporary Moldova serve to portray the country either in a comedic or tragic light. It is in doing so that authors of travelogues risk turning the country into a farcical spectacle that reinforces certain stereotypes of their respective home audiences. In this thesis I invert the view of travel writing, a genre which is supposed to unravel a foreign culture and I attempt to unravel the travel writer and the home audience.

Keeping the *longue durée* of stereotypes of Eastern Europe in mind, I take various travelogues on Bessarabia, Moldavia, and then finally Moldova to see how the view of the country has temporally changed but also to see some aspects which have surprisingly stayed similar. It is my contention that the era of communism in Eastern Europe has added a further dimension to the stereotyping of the "East".

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Introduction

Sasha Baron Cohen and his character 'Borat' seem to typify all of the “Western” perceptions about the other. Borat's backwardness is displayed throughout the comedian's TV series and also through a full length movie. Yet what exactly are “Western” (and non-Western audiences) laughing at? For one, Borat is from a country that sounds imaginary to many in the. Kazakhstan does not have a long history as an independent nation, and so it comes to typify stereotypes about newly independent post-Soviet states in Central Asia and Eastern Europe. Borat speaks a sort of composite language, some Czech and some Polish and some invented but it is not really important for the audience¹. What is important is that he represents a certain unquestioned otherness that some have come to accept as truth. For example, Borat is constantly making racist and sexist remarks that are considered offensive to European and American audiences, yet he does not see anything wrong with these statements. This is partially because it is understood that the character's culture does not take issue with these kinds of attitudes. It is the character's political incorrectness and naiveté that are part of the perception of the other, in this case Kazakhstan however it is not hard to imagine a “Westerner” applying these stereotypes to places that he or she has never heard of; Moldova, Macedonia, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania; the list is long. Yet Cohen's joke may be on the, and its stereotypes.

Borat is not the only example of this generalization of 'the east', 'the orient', or 'the other'. Vesna Goldworthy's book, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* deconstructs how certain stereotypes came to be associated with the Balkans by Western filmmakers and literary figures; from Bram Stoker's *Dracula* to Anthony Hope's *Ruritania*². Yet it is not hard to look for images and portrayals that deal also with post-communist nations in more modern stereotyping. For instance, Tom Hanks in the film *The Terminal*, portrays a character from an imaginary country called 'Krakozhia'. The

1 Larry Charles, dir., *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (USA, 2006).

2 Vesna Goldworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

country descends into a brutal, ethnically charged civil war while Hanks' character is about to fly out of New York City, leaving him stranded at the airport because his passport is no longer recognized. The heavily accented character's country is vaguely identified as an ex-communist Eastern European or Balkan country. The country's bloody descent into civil war reflects some of the recent stereotypes presented to American and Western European audiences about the Balkans of the 1990's. The quirky and slightly naïve character Hanks portrays displays his otherness while trying to adapt to living his life in limbo at an American airport³.

Another example of this otherness is portrayed in the movie is *The Beautician and the Beast*. The main character portrayed by Fran Drescher is invited to the imaginary country, called 'Slovetzia'. It becomes her mission to modernize the imaginary post-communist dictatorship that lies somewhere in the Trans-Carpathian Basin near Ukraine⁴. Similar to Borat there is an imagined language that is formed using Czech and Polish words. Sounding vaguely like a composite of Slovenia and Slovakia, once again the stereotypes of the backwardness are littered throughout the movie for the American and Western European audiences to laugh at, but also possibly feel a bit of sadness for. This is a bit similar to how Roma people are portrayed as well. For instance, there seems to be two images of Roma people; the poor Roma street child vs. the happy go lucky Roma musician.

What is Moldova, who are Moldovans? This will be the main focus of my work. I deconstruct how different travelers determine what constitutes 'the other' when traveling in Moldova. Some of the approaches that I will draw on to answer this research question are the respective approaches of Edward Said's Orientalism which was further developed by Larry Wolff in regards to Eastern Europe and Maria Todorova in regards to the Balkans. While they use different concepts of how otherness is constructed by various people throughout Western Europe and North America, they argue that the stereotypes were indeed constructed. The image of the other is connected to the image of the home country and stands to define the home country. Furthermore, they argue that an intricate hegemonic

3 Steven Spielberg, dir., *The Terminal*, (USA, 2004).

4 Ken Kwapis, dir., *The Beautician and the Beast*, (USA, 1997).

power game is played by linking the image of the other to the home country. The main sources I will be using for this approach are travelogues written by “Westerners” during the post-Soviet period in Moldova. Through their travel narratives I explore the place of Moldova on their own mental maps and also what they view as different about Moldova from their own home countries.

Travelogues are useful because they first and foremost deal with cultural encounters with the other. They seek to untangle a given culture, yet through my analysis I invert the paradigm to look back at the home audience. The debate about what genre travelogues fall under or if they constitute their own genre is ambiguous and not part of my focus. I will argue that travelogues can be viewed as a historical source by contextualizing the author and also contextualizing the popular literary conventions and/or tropes of a given time. While travel guides are an important part of modern day travel, I will not include them in my research because they are a composite text of different experiences in a country. However I use one imaginary travel guide for an imaginary country which bares a striking resemblance to Moldova. I will also include some imaginary travelers' accounts of Moldavia and Bessarabia (what present-day Moldova was sometimes referred to at different junctures of history). Imaginary travelers are important because while they never traveled to the territory, they offered some important opinions on the territory which helped shape others' perceptions.

By and large, I am interested in one-time travel experiences in Moldova by travelers. Another source for my research are interviews I have conducted with former Peace Corps volunteers who served in Moldova. It is my contention that in the post-Soviet period, travelogues and travel narratives about Moldova can either serve as comedy or as tragedy to illustrate the otherness of the country while sometimes implicitly and other times explicitly reaffirming Western ideals, practices, and norms. In many cases the travelogues can include dimensions of both comedy and tragedy. By starting with imaginary travelers and Enlightenment era travelers and ending with Peace Corps volunteers, I will demonstrate how some stereotypes that have roots in the Enlightenment era as a process of constructing 'the other' remain similar today, yet they take on an added dimension because of the Soviet period. It is

in this way that I analyze the *longue durée* of the stereotypes of Eastern Europe.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, perhaps no country has come to define the image of this Western imagination more than Moldova. It is a borderland which has historically been contested by Romania and Russia. It was conquered by seemingly every empire in the region. It was part of the Soviet Union and it even represented a sort of provincial backwater for the Soviets. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the borders of the Soviet Union were opened to travelers and their perceptions and imaginations. Moldova is commonly portrayed today as being rife with corruption, nepotism, bureaucratic inefficiency, gangsterism, human trafficking, hyper-masculinity, nostalgia for Soviet times, agrarian, cold, and depressing. It seems to fit every stereotype of an invented place, yet it is real. So its perception as being prototypical is why Moldova is important for my test-case.

David Chirico importantly points out that travelogue are of historical importance because of the context in which they are written. Literary conventions of the time are followed by writers, even many of the most luminary writers are sort of stuck within the confines of these literary conventions. In thinking with Chirico, a central part of my argument about the travel writing on Moldova falls either in the genre of comedy or tragedy. Most of the travelers include a combination of comedy and tragedy when discussing post-Soviet Moldova. I contend that the tragic and comic emplotments can serve to elucidate the stereotypes of ex-communist countries in Eastern Europe.

The structure of my work will firstly include a theoretical basis for the research. The theoretical chapter will outline how different scholars have approached travel writing. Furthermore, I will give a detailed description of the trajectory of travel writing with regards to the different tropes of the genre. In the second chapter, I look at Moldova through the eyes of different travelers at different junctures before the contemporary period. This is in order to understand how the view of the territory has changed in some regards while remained the same in more subtle ways. The next two sub-chapters of include the aspects of comedy and tragedy of the travel narratives, respectively. The last sub-chapter is

based on interviews with Peace Corps volunteers who served in Moldova. My research ranges from imaginary travelers of the Enlightenment period to temporarily settled to elucidate the stereotypes of Moldova and to understand what the travelers view as different about Moldova from their home countries.

Chapter 1- Constructing the Other

From Orientalism to Balkanism: The Case of Moldova

The aim of this chapter is to provide a theoretical underpinning to my research. I will introduce some of the key approaches and concepts that are necessary in understanding the focus of this work. Some of the scholars I will be thinking with are Edward Said, Larry Wolff, Maria Todorova, David Chirico, and Alex Drace-Francis⁵. One of the important tenets of my research will be to hold up the approaches of these scholars to the case of Moldova in the post-independence period. I will use blueprints laid by Said, Todorova, and Wolff to look at the changes or lack of changes in Western attitudes toward Moldova and the region temporally and spatially. Recently independent Moldova provides a test case to conceptual methods of Todorova and Wolff because I will be using more modern literature to elucidate a sort of *Moldovanism* as seen by travelers. I am interested in investigating whether the temporality of these approaches can be confined to past epochs of Western European and North American thought or if they can be transported to a more contemporary subject. Where does the traveler place Moldova on his or her own mental map? On the other hand, I will use the work of Wendy Bracewell, David Chirico and Alex Drace- Francis to understand the inverse application of Todorova and Wolff's methodology by turning toward Eastern European travelers' narratives about Western Europe. Turning back toward what Chirico says about travel narratives following literary conventions of their respective tropes, it is important to turn toward Hayden White for an understanding of how history can be emplotted.

In Hayden White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*, White argues that a historian's first task is to order events into a coherent narrative. In crafting a narrative the

5 Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Publications, 1979). Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. Wendy Bracewell, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe*. (Budapest and New York: Central University Press, 2008)

historian must choose a mode of emplotment to deliver his or her argument. White determines that there are 4 modes of emplotment; comedy, tragedy, romance and satire. For my purposes, I will briefly discuss what White says about the former two. To illustrate the modes of emplotment, he takes Alexis de Tocqueville as an example of the tragic mode and Leopold von Ranke as an example of the comedic mode. Take Tocqueville first, he claims that the Frenchman is an example of tragedy in history writing because he sees something which is irreconcilable within humankind. White, using Tocqueville's travels around the United States as an example, notes that Tocqueville came to see a tragedy within the democracy of the United States because it corrupted morality. White claims that Tocqueville was forced to characterize history as a degeneration. In this way, the Frenchman's conception of history is that where humankind arises naturally, then creates a society out of reason and will, then battles with society in a destructive manner⁶. By characterizing history in this manner, Tocqueville's audience is forced to contemplate the forces at work in their own societies in order to tame them in a way⁷.

Hayden White also discusses the comic emplotment of history by discussing the historian, Leopold von Ranke. In breaking with Romanticism and urging for a more scientific study of history 'as it actually happened', Ranke's mode of emplotment is argued to be comedic because it 'permits the observer to see in the microcosm an *intimation* of the larger coherence contained in the totality.'⁸ To pinpoint these nuances in which the historical reality manifests itself was Ranke's conception of the historian's task. In resisting a conceptual basis for history as espoused by Hegel, the Organicist explanation rests on a certain amount of obscurity entering the picture. In other words, there are certain things which are beyond analysis and are unknowable⁹. It is in this way that the mode of emplotment of Ranke's organicism is comic. Furthermore, White argues that this mode of emplotment can turn the world into Absurdist Drama as Burckhardt successfully did in order to try to elucidate how reality

6 Hayden White, *Metahistory*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1975), 226.

7 Ibid, 226-7.

8 Ibid, 188. The word 'intimation' is italicized by the author.

9 Ibid, 188-9.

actually was.¹⁰

Edward Said in his book, *Orientalism* contends that by using Michel Foucault's notion of discourse we can understand the West's conception of Orientalism. One can understand how the Occident has described the Orient, made statements about it, settled it, ruled over it, etc by examining Orientalism discourses in Western countries. For him, the very definition of the Orient has been amorphous in the "West" and has managed to even create 'the Orient' politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, and imaginatively¹¹. Importantly, Said argues that European identity was fostered by creating the Orient in order to define Europeaness. Said builds upon Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural of hegemony to arrive at his definition of Orientalism. For Said, Orientalism is a 'distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts...'¹² that cuts the world into halves, the Orient and the Occident. He claims that this discourse is related to Western political, intellectual, moral, and cultural practices. Essentially, Orientalism has more to do with the Western world than the Orient.¹³

Larry Wolff in his book, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* adapts and reconfigures Said's approach to Orientalism by focusing on another case study. Wolff claims that the idea of Eastern Europe was entangled in the evolving Orientalism. Eastern Europe was frequently left off of maps of Europe by Enlightenment philosophers. As opposed to Said's argument that the orient defined the Occident, for Wolff Eastern Europe defined Western Europe. Using various American and Western European travelers' texts, Wolff claims that Eastern Europe came to represent a sort of middle-ground for the barbarism of the Orient vs. the liberty of Europe; it was an intermediary position on the map of Enlightenment thinkers.¹⁴

Travelers were important in this process of mental mapping claims Wolff. Mental mapping for

10 Ibid, 189.

11 Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Publications, 1979), 2.

12 Ibid, 12

13 Ibid, 12

14 Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 7.

Wolff involves associating and comparing the lands of Eastern Europe. Wolff claims that the travelers 'carried a mental map to be freely annotated, embellished, refined, or refolded along the way.'¹⁵ The way that this mental mapping process was able to take its conceptual shape in the minds of Enlightenment travelers, was that it was compared and contrasted with Western Europe. This was not done on a case by case basis though, the lands of Eastern Europe were shaped into a cohesive entity. This entity came to divide the continent along the lines of development. However, different travelers had different conceptions of how to map Eastern Europe. For example, some travelers believed that manners were of the utmost importance and had a certain idea of what constituted European manners.

Wolff is largely in agreement with Edward Said with respect to Eastern Europe's similar construction. The possibility for real conquest paralleled the study of Eastern Europe involved intellectual mastery, integration of knowledge and power, and perpetration of domination and subordination¹⁶. The style of this process could be philosophic or over-imaginative. By conceiving of Eastern Europe as a single unit, this allowed for the study of it as an economic periphery by economists. Wolff argues that Western Europe's first notion of economic underdevelopment came from its economic studies of Eastern Europe. Eastern Europe became a model of underdevelopment. Comparisons were made and definitions were posited as to why the ambiguous cultural space of Eastern Europe lagged behind Europe proper. Backwardness and development had to mediate between civilization and barbarity claims Wolff. Importantly for my research, Wolff claims that Eastern Europe would continue to play a similar, ambiguous role that it had during the Enlightenment. This role writes Wolff would lie 'between inclusion and exclusions, both in economic affairs and in cultural recognition.'¹⁷ Expanding on Wolff's argument I will elucidate the latter part of his claim, how travelers culturally include and exclude a former second world country. I am also interested in Wolff's claims that a tone of condescension developed during the Enlightenment era toward Eastern Europe and also

¹⁵ Ibid, 6.

¹⁶ Ibid, 8.

¹⁷ Ibid, 9.

that Eastern Europe began to be used for comic purposes during the Enlightenment¹⁸.

One criticism of Larry Wolff's approach comes from Bernhard Struck who analyzes German travel writing about France and Poland during the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. What Struck finds in his research is that instead of there being an East/West construction by the travelers, in actuality it is an urban vs. rural construction. Struck finds that the travelers essentially make the same criticisms of rural areas in Poland and France; they have poor hygiene in the villages, poor manners, and bad infrastructure. Furthermore the claim that Eastern Europe was an unknown zone can be countered by the perception among many travelers that areas of Scandinavia, Ireland, and Spain were unknown¹⁹. Struck even points to criticisms by German travelers of different areas of their own country due to religion. For the Protestant German traveler, southern Germany was backwards because it was largely Catholic²⁰. Struck's criticism should be kept in mind because it argues that the "West" is a relative category and that social, economic, and educational backgrounds of travelers are important.

In her book *Imagining the Balkans*, Maria Todorova expands on Edward Said's definitions of 'Orientalism' and 'Occidentism' by applying them to the Balkans. Said argued that the West had a certain image of the Orient as being a land of exoticism, intrigue, and mystery. The Orient also represented 'Otherness' from 'Europeaness'. Some critics claim Todorova uses the term 'Balkanism' as a structural variant of Said's approach to her work but also criticizes Said for essentializing the West²¹. Todorova claims that Balkanism is not a sub-species of Orientalism and that substituting the Balkans for the Orient is not an adequate approach for the Balkans. She goes further in criticizing Said's approach on the grounds that it is contradictory. On one hand Said uses Foucault's Nietzschean-inspired notion of discourse theory in a way which is transhistorical. This in itself is anti-Foucauldian because Foucault is rooted in European modernity. For Todorova, Said represented the "" as the hegemonic

18 Ibid, 311.

19 Bernhard Struck, 'Historical Regions between Construction and Perception: Viewing France and Poland in the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries'. in: *East Central Europe/L'Europe du Centre Est. Eine wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift*, vol. 32, I-II (2005), pp. 84.

20 Ibid, 91.

21 Todorova, Maria. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997,10-11.

part of the dichotomy between East and West²². In this way, the term “East” has waned in discursive usage but the term “West” still remains important and even dominant in the ways that others orient themselves toward the . The stated aim of Todorova's work is to position herself 'vis-à-vis the orientalist discourse and elaborate on a seemingly identical, but actually only similar phenomenon'²³. For Todorova, Balkanism and Orientalism have many differences between their categories.

Todorova states that while the Orient represented a region with abstract boundaries, the Balkans remain something quite concrete for the West. She argues that the Balkans were a construction of enlightened Western Europe. If we can call it a process, it was a disjointed one at that. At different times, the Balkans has meant different things to Western travelers yet the perception of the Balkans as being something different from Europe has never faded, even when discussing contemporary times. In essence the Balkans stands for backwardness, ethnic violence, and resistance to modernization²⁴. In contrast to Said's Orientalism which he argues has feminine traits, Todorova argues that the Balkans is imagined as a masculine geography thanks in large part to the wars and ethnic violence.

Western travelogues were generally very interested in understanding the race(s) of people in the Balkans. For instance, there was a Western tendency to see a mixture of East- in actual people. In superficial observations of race, the travelers would usually make pseudo-scientific conclusions about people in the Balkans. These observations would come to play an important role in the future of the Balkans argues Todorova. As opposed to Western Europe and the United States where groups of people lived more or less in homogenous blocs, the Balkans represented a cultural mixture. A common theme in the travelers' accounts until the late 19th Century is the 'mongrel racial' features of those in the Balkans. This analysis adapted itself during the time of eugenics laws in the 19th Century United States and elsewhere. This had a decidedly negative impact on the Western outlook on the Balkans. The perceived differences by travelers are perhaps summed up best by a quote used by Todorova by

22 Ibid, 13.

23 Ibid, 11.

24 Ibid, 11.

Friedrich Nietzsche “The Reputation, name, and appearance, the usual measure and weight of a thing, what it counts for- originally almost always wrong and arbitrary,....- all this is grows from generation unto generation, merely because people believe in it, until it gradually grows to be part of the thing and turns into its very body. What at first was appearance becomes in the end, almost invariably, the essence and is effective as such.”²⁵ Even in a confessional sense, the travelers in some cases also describe Christian Orthodoxy as being a sort of middle ground between Islam and Christianity. For Todorova, Orientalism deals with a difference between ascribed types of people, while Balkanism treats the differences within one type²⁶.

Dimitar Bechev argues that regional construction of Southeastern Europe is largely due to identification with Europe. He uses the case of Milosevic's Serbia as an example of how the country perceived itself in relation to the West. It was a perceived independent streak that legitimized Serbia's foreign policy toward the West. In the same way, it was Franjo Tudjman's Croatia that chose to identify not with the Balkans but with Mediterranean countries²⁷. Importantly, Dimitar Bechev argues that Romania's foreign policy during the time of Ceausescu was largely determined by the way it was viewed by the West, as a sort of geopolitical no man's land. Romanian, a Latin language was the starting point for the legitimization of this foreign policy. Also, the recurrent label 'The Paris of the East' for the country's capital Bucharest by travelers and then Romanians alike was further justification for this foreign policy. The Dacians, who are credited as being the ancestors of the Romanians were a group of local Roman soldiers in present-day Wallachia and Moldavia. The ties between the Dacians and Romanians were used by Romanian political leaders at various junctures against Soviet hegemony²⁸. Bechev also mentions a particular motto in Slovenia that was popularized in the early

25 Ibid, 19

26 Ibid, 19

27 Bechev, Dimitar. "Constructing Southeast Europe: The Politics of Regional Identity in the Balkans." *Europe and the Mediterranean Convergence, Conflicts, and Crisis* (2006). 13. For further reading on the subject of the study of historical regions refer to: Maciej Janowski, Constantin Iordachi, Trencsenyi Balasz, 'Why Bother About Historical Regions? Debates Over Central Europe in Hungary, Poland, and Romania. *East Central Europe* 1 (2005) 1-2- pp. 5-58. Also: Maria Todorova, 'Spacing Europe: What is a Historical Region?' *East Central Europe* 1 (2006) pp. 59-78.

28 Ibid, 12-13

1990's 'Burek, nein danke'²⁹. A burek, a popular type of pastry found in the Balkans and Turkey became a part of the Balkan symbolism. The Slovenian motto typifies, this European view of the Balkans. By replying in German, the motto is an appeal for Slovenians to identify with Central Europe and to reject a Balkan identity³⁰. Similarly, the Moldovan national anthem's title *Limba noastră* might be seen as a call to disassociate with Russia and to lurch toward Europe.

Bechev's argument is interesting for the case of Moldova because the political leadership of the country plays such an important role in its regional identification. It has been referred to many times that Russia and Romania played a 'tug of war' for Bessarabia (Moldova) over history. Yet now with the EU's formal membership process, which designates that countries enact certain reforms and follow certain European standards, Moldova in theory has the opportunity to enter the European club. The Romanian government even offers citizenship to Moldovans who can prove that their grandfather was a citizen of Greater Romania during the interwar period. This has become a veritable backdoor into Europe for many Moldovans. As a counterweight, Russia's sphere of influence remains important in a country that houses a breakaway region with extremely close social and cultural ties.

In their anthology of Eastern European travel writing, Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis invert the popular paradigm of West looks at East by looking at various texts of Eastern European travelers who traveled Western Europe. Drace-Francis disagrees with Larry Wolff in categorizing Eastern Europe as solely a Western European construct. Drace-Francis argues that Eastern Europeans did not have a purely passive role in the creation of Eastern Europe as a site of 'undifferentiated barbarism' however.³¹ With Eastern European travelers witnessing the technological advancements and architectural grandiosity of Western Europe, a feeling of inadequacy of their home situations developed. While my research is constrained to the looking at Moldova, the inverted approach is something that we should keep in mind. I think that it helps to invert the West inventing

29 Ibid, 13.

30 Ibid, 13.

31 Alex Drace-Francis, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe*. ed. Wendy Bracewell. (Budapest and New York: Central University Press, 2008) 5.

East approach because it demonstrates how effective the construction of identities can be. Travelers from the East in many cases in the Bracewell and Drace-Francis books perceive their own countries' backwardness when visiting Western Europe.

Wendy Bracewell in her book, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe* argues that Eastern European travelers oriented themselves and others to a symbolic map of Europe, its limits and divisions defined according to moral, material, civilization, or ideological criteria³². This could be seen as an addendum to the Wolff and Todorova claims about Western perceptions shaping Eastern European and Balkan inner perceptions. Many of the Eastern European travelers found themselves ashamed, amused, or indifferent to their orientation on the map. She argues that in these travel narratives the reader can not only see the view from Eastern Europe but what it meant to some of the travelers to be from the region³³. She acknowledges, however, that the narratives are almost all of a certain upper strata of societies though.

The importance of travel narratives is claimed by David Chirico to be a good starting point for analysis of both individual texts and of the different functions of travel at different times. So for Chirico, not only is it important to analyze the travel narrative but it is also important to look at how attitudes and literary styles of narratives change over time³⁴. This is in line with the approaches of Maria Todorova and Larry Wolff who take care to contextualize the time periods, as well as the social background of the travel writer. Chirico goes about defining where travel writing falls in the spectrum of literary genres by using the term 'intertextuality'. This term essentially categorizes travel writing as a sort of hybrid that can operate between different literary conventions; from autobiographical to adventure novel. For him, the most compelling definition is Tsvetan Todorov's "classes of texts" which

32 Wendy Bracewell, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe*. (Budapest and New York: Central University Press, 2008), XIV

33 Ibid, XVI

34 David Chirico, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe*. ed. Wendy Bracewell. Budapest and New York: Central University Press, 2008. 28.

states that genres can be viewed in an abstract analysis or in a purely empirical way³⁵. Todorov also points out that the freedom from purity of genre is a post-modernist norm. Chirico uses this as his definition to legitimate travel writing as a tool of comparative analysis³⁶.

I agree with Chirico's assessment of intertextuality in regards to travel writing when he characterizes it as "A transfer across the boundaries drawn by literary conventions is, like a transfer from author to another, or between two national literatures..."³⁷. Due to the fact that there are links between autobiographical works and travel narratives, the reader can assume that the work is non-fiction because it is implicit in the work itself³⁸. Related texts that are not considered travel texts but are related to travel texts are guidebooks, novels with travel themes, biographies of travelers, etc because they are not firsthand accounts of events. I will be using this definition of travel texts in my research and primarily constraining my focus to travel narratives. Chirico argues that an added dimension to the travel text is that authors can defer judgment in their narrative because they can report on only what they encountered in a foreign place, this masks the true opposition of the narrator. This approach is critical in my work because I look at different quotations and experiences of travelers to understand their viewpoints on Moldova. The overarching importance of Chirico's argument is to point out how literary genres are mediated by generic and social conventions. Chirico's analysis asks the reader to historically and socially contextualize the text that he or she is analyzing.

In describing the Russian imperial administration of Moldavia and Russia, Viktor Taki reminds us that Eastern Europeans did not play a merely passive role in the construction of identities. In the early 19th Century, Russia was expanding its borders. Newly conquered territories meant encounters with new, unknown people such as those in Wallachia and Moldavia. Taki describes the travelogues, diaries, memoirs, and statistical descriptions to recreate the feelings of Russians toward the principalities, which included much of modern-day Moldova. Taki states that two of the most prevalent

35 Ibid, 30.

36 Ibid, 34

37 Ibid, 35

38 Ibid, 47

terms in the primary sources were “Oriental Despotism” and “corruption of morals”. He also notes that “barbarity” was a term used to describe the principalities. For the Russians, the River Dniester represented “the real boundary between civilized and semi-savage countries” but it also represented a climatic boundary as well³⁹. The climate was reported to be more exotic than that of Russia's, with there being an abundance of uncultivated land. The climate also supposedly contributed to laziness and idleness on the part of the peasantry. While the article's focus is not completely on what we know as Moldova, it is included in the research. This presents an interesting case because it does incorporate Moldova into this mental mapping process which Russian travelers took part in.

By thinking with Edward Said, Larry Wolff, Maria Todorova, and other scholars' approaches I aim to elucidate a more contemporary “Western” understanding of what traits equate to “Eastern Europeaness” or “Moldovaness”. Starting with the Orient then reducing the size of the scope to Eastern Europe then further reducing the scale to the Balkans now even further reducing the scale to Moldova, I will explore on a more micro level how this mental mapping process works via travelers in a contested post-Soviet country such as Moldova. In this way I will disentangle characteristics that the travelers conceive of as Moldovan. Before that though, I will provide a more detailed description of the tropes of travel writing and the utility of analyzing travel writing for historical purposes.

1.2 Travel Writing as History

In this section I will provide a brief summary of how travel writing has evolved as a genre through its different tropes and what can be taken from the study of travel narratives. Hagen Schulz-Forberg characterizes travel as having always been a forgery of self-identity. For Schulz-Forberg, the identities that form as a result of travel are constructed, both the traveler's and the culture the traveler

39 Victor Taki, “Moldavia and Wallachia in the Eyes of Russian Observers in the First Half of the 19th Century.”, *East Central Europe*, No.1-2, vol 32, 2005. 105.

has written about. He also claims that travel writing is a truly international genre from the Enlightenment until today because of these characteristics. So the travel text is essentially a text which strives to “unravel a civilization” as Schulz-Forberg claims⁴⁰. It is an attempt to sift out the truth of a culture; which includes its social, cultural, and economic complexities. At the same time however, the travel writer is attempting at understanding himself or herself by being faced with foreign, unknown elements. The travelers however should not be criticized for their writings because they are in some ways unknowing of the discourses and stereotypes that they may reinforce or even seek to break. Steve Clark points to the utility of travel writing in his analysis of Edward Said's Orientalism when he quotes Said's definition of Orientalism as a “system for citing texts and authors” to posit that the travel literature genre then is elevated to a central paradigm by virtue of its continuous re-staging of earlier journeys presents a notable achievement of ideological productivity. Even the most creative writers of their times were stuck in what they could say or experience in the Orient. It is that the condition of their creativity is confined and constrained⁴¹. In this way, I understand the traveler and travel text as a sort of anthropological study. By analyzing a travel text which seeks to unravel a culture, I instead invert this paradigm and investigate the home culture's perceptions.

Today, the study of travel writing is a reflection of new methodologies of historical interpretation, which can include but are not limited to discourse analysis and hermeneutics. However, the definition of what is actual travel and tourism are today remain ambiguous in scholarly fields. Looking at the relative longevity of travel literature, Casey Blanton points to its power of narration as an important feature which is both symbolic and literal. On one hand the traveler sees a new place and describes it, yet on the other hand the traveler goes through a personal, psychological journey in which he or she must come to a conclusion about their character as well as the character of the culture versus

40 Hagen Schulz-Forberg, *Unravelling Civilisation: European Travel and Travel Writing*. (Bern: Peter Lang Publishing Inc: 2005), 1-2.

41 Stephen Clark, *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*. (London: Zed Books, 1999), 11.

their own culture⁴².

As the reasons for travel have changed from political exploration or commercial endeavors to plainly traveling for the sake of traveling, the narratives have fundamentally changed as well. The travel narrative came to borrow from fictional works in the rising and falling of action rather than a purely descriptive narration of what the narrator sees. Other elements of modern travel texts borrowed from fiction can be conflict, resolution, and the establishment of motivation. Yet as Paul Fussell argues, the main thing we have come to expect from travel literature today is that it operates between two poles. On one hand it describes the actual physical settings it sees and on the other hand it is a psychological journey. The traveler is forced to confront his own character by being faced with a foreign culture⁴³. Travel literature is addressed to the home culture, and so the travel writer is always conscious of his or her home audience when narrating. In this way the writer must be conscious of the stereotypes and preconceptions that their audience has⁴⁴. In order to entertain the home audience, it can be common for the narrator to incorporate stereotypes of the foreign culture into their narratives.

In the earliest travel writing, the descriptions of actual settings was more interesting to the home audience than the writer's own psychological journey. Sights and strange customs all could be found in some of the earliest travel narratives. Take for example Herodotus who traveled to Egypt in the 5th Century BC just to see for his own eyes if other travelers' accounts of animal sacrifices were true. So for him, his reason for travel is verification. It is argued that this mere recording of sights and customs begins to change with travelers such as Egeria, a Gallic woman who made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the 4th Century. Her experience argues Mary Campbell, shows the first hint of modern travel writing because she is concerned with interpreting what she sees, using Christianity as her guide. For her the pilgrimage almost represents a journey back into ancient times⁴⁵. The common thread between Herodotus and Egeria is that the narrative is assumed rather than imagined.

42 Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing (Genres in Context)*. (London: Routledge, 2002), 2.

43 Paul Fussell, *Abroad: British Literary Traveling between the Wars*. (New York: Oxford USA, 1982), 126.

44 Stephen Clark, *Travel Writing and Empire: Postcolonial Theory in Transit*, 1.

45 Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing (Genres in Context)*, 7.

The Thirteenth Century's travel writing is characterized by Christopher Columbus and Marco Polo. Pushing the bounds of geographical knowledge was part of the goals of these travelers. Casey Blanton also writes that they carried their own values and norms with them in their travels and in this way exercised a kind of foreign control over the foreign cultures. Marco Polo's stated aim was to write a book for Europeans who could not experience different parts of the world for themselves. Yet in many of his writings he seems to reconfirm their worst fears about the dangers of traveling. This supports his readers' own world views⁴⁶.

The 16th and 17th Centuries saw a sharp rise in the amount of Europeans traveling and writing about their travels. This was a period in which the traveler was discovering 'new regions' of the globe. The traveler was often times in search of wealth and riches. This was typified by Sir Walter Raleigh's voyage to the imaginary El Dorado, the city of gold located somewhere in present-day Guyana. While Raleigh did not find the imaginary city, he entertained his readers with a suspenseful account of his travel memories. This was in the time of the fascination with the new world and so Raleigh is thought to have an acute awareness of what his audience would want to read about. Interestingly Raleigh adds a more humanistic narrative to his essay while also withholding from his reader until the very end of the story whether or not he accomplishes his goal. Raleigh portrays himself to his audience as a sort of Romantic hero while creating a story which has purpose, danger, adventure, and new potentialities for travel writing⁴⁷.

The entanglement with the self and world was one of the main concerns of 18th Century travel writers⁴⁸. Part of the reason for this was that experiences in the external world could foster intellectual growth. More accounts, thoughts, and reactions to being in a hostile foreign land were also becoming part of travel writing. This is coupled with the emergence of the grand tour being of importance for students and writers. Also, the publication of Carl Linne's *Systema Naturae*, which purported to be able

46 Ibid, 9.

47 Ibid, 9-10

48 Casey Blanton, *Travel Writing*, 10.

to classify all plants and animals, had an effect on travel writers. Kristi Siegel claims that “the imperialist traveler thought they could simply understand a culture by looking at it”⁴⁹. She argues that travel writing is important to studying political culture because it concepts of Europeans and their European identity are not static and they transfigure and change over time. However, it is in this period that Europeans come to define European as modern. Their travels were similar to that of Egeria's yet secular and so they secularized time by not connecting it to religion. It could be political, universal, or historical qualities in this way. The 18th Century audience could expect to see both scientific and sentimental travel accounts.

The late 18th Century audience could expect to learn about the odd customs, manners, and habits of people in foreign lands as well. However, these inclusions were largely left to be determined by the individual travel writer him or herself. The debate between travel writers, Tobias Smollett and Laurence Sterne largely reflects the difference of opinion on manners and how to write about them. Smollett was largely annoyed by foreign customs he came across in his travels while Sterne took a more empathetic approach, believing that travel should be didactic in a positive way. This is part of a larger trope whereby the narrator increasingly puts him or herself in the narrative via feelings, adventures, and sights⁵⁰. Travel writing after the 18th Century is characterized by Casey Blanton as “stylistically and thematically marked by the ways in which writers navigate the adventures, the sights, and their own feelings.”⁵¹ It was in the mid to late 18th Century that readers could see a connection between travelers' personalities and their relationship to the world. There was no justification needed for going abroad any longer.

European and American travel writing took on different notions for travel writing in the mid 19th Century. For those American travelers in the mid 19th Century, travel was more of an idea instead of a reaction to new surroundings. These writings are usually about a search for some form of

49 Kristi Siegel, *Issues in Travel Writing*. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002), 2.

50 Ibid, 11.

51 Ibid, 14.

transcendental knowledge⁵². In Europe, the Romantic period dominated travel writings with its poetic portrayals of natives and its inertia toward what Janet Gunn calls the 'imperial self'. The Romantic period of travel writing in Europe saw the autobiography become more important in the narrative.

By the interwar period, travel writing had become hugely popular because of writers like Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, and Graham Greene. The realities of the interwar period are reflected in the comic disillusionment in many of the British authors' writings. Also, in the lead up to World War II, travel writing becomes more aggressive and political⁵³. Modern-day travel writing has maintained many characteristics of older travel writing. Travelogues still have linear plots, are narrated in the first person (or occasionally in the third person), are written for the traveler's home audience, and represent a sort of middle-brow form of entertainment that can include elements of different genres such as biography, comedy, tragedy, adventure, etc.

In regards to travel writing after World War II, it failed to continue its popularity. With the development of the modern tourism industry, it is questioned how authentic travel can actually be in the post-modern era. For scholars such as Steven Wearing, Deborah Stevenson, and Tamara Young tourism is very much connected with modernity and how individuals create identities in modern society. In their book *Tourist Cultures: Identity, Place, and Traveler* they discuss how individuals in contemporary times react to the commodification and rationalization of leisure and tourism⁵⁴. Dean MacCannell also discusses how the modern tourist industry works to create a staged authenticity for the tourist. For MacCannell, the tourism industry creates a social reality for the tourist⁵⁵. MacCannell's idea of front and back stages in tourism I find particularly helpful. The tourist wants to unravel the culture and so he or she wants to see how things really are. In a structuralist view of tourism, MacCannell argues that certain realities are staged in tourism so the tourist cannot decipher the falseness of their authenticity.

52 Ibid, 14-15

53 Ibid, 15-16.

54 Stephen Wearing and others, *Tourist Cultures: Identity, Place, and the Traveller*. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2009), 4.

55 Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 11.

When applying this to the Moldovan case, my research presents different varieties of travelers with different access to Moldovan culture, some may actually reach 'the back stage' or the authentic view of the culture which is not pre-packaged for them.

With regards to Eastern Europe after World War II, the entire region save for Yugoslavia was not particularly open to average tourists. During the Cold War, a series of stereotypes of the Other developed between both sides. From the “Western” perspective, Eastern Europe represented a region which lacked freedom with its rigid state planned economies, travel restrictions, lack of independence from Soviet hegemony, etc. Numerous films, television, and radio programs portrayed the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence as the “enemy” bent on the destruction of “Western” values and ideals. It became the antithesis of what Western Europe and North America stood for. So when the Soviet system collapsed and travel to the region became more feasible, a series of perceptions of the people of Eastern Europe had been set in place by various mechanisms and this is reflected in travel writing about Moldova. Furthermore, the break up of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia greatly altered the maps of Europe. This left an aura of intrigue to the new countries that burst onto the contemporary world scene which is reflected in the travel writing. In a similar way that Enlightenment era travelers traveled Eastern Europe with their own preconceptions, as Romantic era travelers had before them. In the following chapter, I use the test-case of Moldova as an example of how these travelers defined a small piece of territory over the *longue durée*.

Chapter 2- Travelers in Moldova

2.1 Pre- Contemporary Travel Writing and Imaginary Travelers in Moldova

In Larry Wolff's *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Wolff makes mention of the experience of the French Baron Francois de Tott who was a military man and an artillery officer in the French army. He became an unofficial military advisor of the Ottoman Sultan in the mid 1770's, in charge of reforming the Sultan's military. Tott is characterized as a product of the Enlightenment writes Larry Wolff. He also had a long service to the Ottoman Empire, having served there for 23 years. In his memoirs, Tott sought to demythologize a lot of the rumors and preconceptions of Western Europeans toward Eastern Europe. Tott was concerned with examining the "Variety of Manners" that characterized the lands in between Russia and Turkey. In his memoirs, Tott recounts his journey from Paris to Ukraine which began in 1767 and took him through Ottoman Moldavia and across the Dniester River.

It is on this journey that Tott meets a travel guide named Ali-Aga. Ali-Aga was in charge of Tott's accommodation and provisions while in the Ottoman territory. Initially in his memoirs Tott objects to the treatment of the peasantry by their Ottoman overlord, Tott states that "A family promptly dislodged made place for us, and two sheep slaughtered, roasted, eaten, without payment, together with several blows distributed unnecessarily, began to put me in a mood against my conductor." Larry Wolff describes the treatment of the peasants by Ali-Aga from Tott's memoirs, "In order to cross the Prut River, Ali Aga uses his whip to assemble Moldavian peasants for a construction of a raft, and then, waving his whip, assured Tott that the peasants would all hang if even a pin of the luggage was lost in the crossing.'⁵⁶. Wolff claims that this behavior of the Ottoman overlord was not unique in Eastern Europe, as many Western Europeans had seen peasants being brutalized by their overlords. What is

⁵⁶ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, 70.

interesting for the case of Ali- Aga, Tott, and the Moldovan peasants is the conclusion Tott eventually arrives at about the peasantry.

Tott is originally repulsed by Ali-Aga's behavior toward the peasantry. Wolff places Tott firmly in Enlightenment thinking when he has this dialogue with Ali-Aga about the peasantry. What arises out of the dialogue between the two men is a bet. Tott pledges that he can obtain the same services from the peasantry by handsomely paying them. Ali Aga disagrees with this approach by saying, “You won't have any bread, I tell you, I know the Moldavians, they want to be beaten.”⁵⁷ So Tott approaches the village elder speaking Turkish, then Greek asking to pay for foodstuffs. The elder does not respond, only physically signaling that there are no supplies to be had in the village. Ali-Aga then takes the village elder aside saying to Tott that “if you don't have the most excellent supper in a quarter of an hour, you may return to me all the blows that I will give him.”⁵⁸ Ali-Aga proceeds to beat the peasant whilst speaking Turkish. The peasant responds in Turkish saying that the village is poor and has nothing to offer them for a meal. The beating continues until the foodstuffs were delivered within a quarter of an hour as Ali-Aga had promised. About this exchange, Wolff states that Tott had wagered for the soul of Eastern Europe, and he had lost. The optimism of the Enlightenment, its faith in human nature, had failed the test of Eastern Europe, and Tott allowed himself a dispensation from his “stubborn humanity”⁵⁹. Furthermore, what arose from this exchange between the Moldavian, the Turk, and the Frenchman was a three-character play which was meant for entertaining Western European audiences. It was a comedy.

In Voltaire's *Charles XII*, the narration follows the king of Sweden through the military operations which conquered a large portion of Russia and Poland. Although Voltaire was only six years old at the time of the king's military expedition, the account is considered a traveler's account although a wildly imaginary and vicarious one claims Larry Wolff. The city of Bender which is in present-day

⁵⁷ Ibid, 72.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 73

⁵⁹ Ibid, 74

Transnistria, was where Charles was being held prisoner by the Ottoman sultan. Voltaire describes the city as a formerly great commercial center under the Greeks, then under Genoese, as being only ruins amid 'desolation and barbarism'⁶⁰. Voltaire characterizes the Tartars as bandits, yet they had learned the virtue of hospitality from their Scythian ancestors. Although much of Voltaire's mental map is completely made up, it was influential on Enlightenment Europe claims Wolff⁶¹.

Alexandre Maurice Blanc de Lanautte Comte d'Hauterive served as the official French Secretary and unofficial French consul in the present-day Romanian city of Iasi between the years 1785-1787. He was concerned with knowing the people of Moldavia. Moldavia included much of Bessarabia at this point in time. Hauterive fully embraced the genealogy of the Romans, recognizing their language as a Roman one, and comparing their traits to that of the Romans and also the Scythians. Wolff claims that this crossing of Roman and Scythian to produce the modern Moldavia provided the perfect cultural antidote to Russian imperialism at the time⁶². Hauterive was seeing the West and East in the Moldavians. He claimed that the language spoken by Moldavians was from the soldiers of Romulus, one of the mythological founders of Rome. Wolff claims that Hauterive forced a national identity upon the Moldavians by claiming that they were ancestors of Trajan's column. The threat the Moldavians faced as seen by Hauterive was in the form of the Cyrillic alphabet used by Russians. To illustrate this, writing to his audience he professes how silly it would be if the French language used Cyrillic. This almost foreshadows the situation which would occur in Moldova over the controversy of their language. Larry Wolff notes that in Moldavia, the same place where Voltaire had yearned for the province to be conquered by Catherine's Russia, Hauterive two decades later attempted to use linguistic and historical issues as anecdotes to Russian dominance of the principality⁶³.

Wolff also makes note of the perception Hauterive had of women in Moldavia by using a very intimate example found in Hauterive's travelogue. The Frenchman while staying at a young Moldavian

60 Ibid, 93.

61 Ibid, 89.

62 Ibid, 293.

63 Ibid, 293.

woman's house upon first sight calls her a 'duchess' and makes a comparison between the skills of embroidery of Moldavian women versus his home country's women. While it is unclear from the travelogue whether or not there was intimacy between Hauterive and the Moldavian woman, Hauterive in the morning calls her a “madonna”⁶⁴. Wolff makes the point that Hauterive's image of the girl changes in his mind as he slips her some money and she kisses his hand. This perception of gender is also shared by Russian imperial travelers who did not think much of the boyars and Phanariotes in Moldavia, but thought that the women of the principalities were much more receptive to higher thinking, as well as being receptive to their sexual advances.

In many of the early 19th Century Enlightened Russian travelers' views, The Greek Phanariotes were criticized for making the Romanian boyars cunning, corrupt, and greedy. The Phanariotes were blamed for corrupting Wallachian and Moldavian society and leaving it at a level of despotism. For some Russians, the principalities came to stand for sexual intrigue. Boyars' wives were claimed to be more readily adaptable to European standards than their husbands. Some Russians gave the peasantry positive connotations though. They were deemed virtuous and obedient by some such as the Russian Consulate-General. However, for many the peasantry had traits that made them “Oriental”, like being mistrustful and suspicious. These traits were given to them by the long period of Ottoman rule. Russian authors sympathized with Romanians on the grounds of common Christian Orthodoxy and some even compared the principalities to an older Russia that was yet to pass through the Enlightenment, although this was rare⁶⁵. Russia was to impose on the Romanian principalities a new political organization in the name of civilization and humanity, and their views of it are reflected in travelogues.

By the late 19th and early 20th Century, it becomes apparent that the view the Russian Imperial administration took of Moldavians was largely paternalistic. This is corroborated in the memoirs of Prince Serge Dmitriyevich Urussov who was governor of Bessarabia in the early 20th Century. He

64 Victor Taki, “Moldavia and Wallachia in the Eyes of Russian Observers in the First Half of the 19th Century.”, 114.

65 Ibid, 115.

describes how he viewed Bessarabian peasants and the Jews. What is interesting about his memoirs is that he does not hide his paternalist attitude toward the peasantry. For him, the Bessarabian peasants were in need of protection from the usury of Jewish lenders. The Prince characterizes Moldavian peasants as being largely naïve, poorly educated, easily duped, and largely good-natured⁶⁶. Some scholars argue that it was the paternalist view of the Russian administration that led to the pogroms in Kishinev which made headlines in international newspapers. Indeed some travelers in contemporary times are aware of the pogroms of the early 20th Century that took place in what is modern day Chişinău⁶⁷.

In a minor footnote, Karl Marx mentioned what he saw as the injustice of the annexation of Bessarabia by imperial Russia. This footnote was pointed to by the Romanian Academy as proof that Bessarabia had unjustly been occupied by Russia, implying that it was unjust for Bessarabia to be controlled by the Soviets⁶⁸. Nicolae Ceausescu echoed this line when he made an inconspicuous reference to an 1888 letter from Friedrich Engels to a Romanian socialist journal. He condemned the line that the then underground Communist Party of Romania had taken during the interwar period by supporting the annexation of Bessarabia by the Soviets. While Marx and Engels had not traveled to Moldova, their opinions on the situation mattered and they were subsequently used by Ceausecu's Romania as a reason for the return of Bessarabia to Romania.

The English travel writer, D.J. Hall in his book *Romanian Furrow* travels to Bessarabia during the interwar period when it was part of Greater Romania. The author travels to Romania after he had been told of different stories from those in the United Kingdom about how difficult the country would be. He also mentions that it was “a country which people in the West seemed to think was half-

66 Prince Serge Dmitriyevich Urussov, *Memoirs of a Russian Governor, Prince Serge Dmitriyevich Urussov: The Kishinev Pogrom*. Translated by Herman Rosenthal (New York: Bergman Publishers, 1970), 154. For further reading on the Russian Imperial Administration of Bessarabia during the time period of the Kishinev pogroms refer to: Edward Judge, *Easter in Kishinev: Anatomy of a Pogrom (Reappraisals in Jewish Social and Intellectual History)*. (New York: NYU Press, 1995), 10. Also: Shlomo Lambroza, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. Shlomo Lambroza and John Doyle Klier. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 196.

67 Dan Laor, “Kishinev Revisited: A Place in Jewish Historical Memory”, *Prooftexts*, 25 (Winter/Spring 2005): 31.

68 Charles King, *The Moldovans*. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1997), 105.

civilized that I had little hope that whatever I might wish to do in that corner of the world would be realized". Immediately at the beginning of the narrative there is doubt conveyed to the reader. Doubt about the journey and the decision to continue forward in looking for whatever inner journey Hall is looking for. The doubt continues in Bucharest when he calls himself ignorant for trying to enter into the lives of a strange, earthy people whose language I did not understand and who might never have seen an Englishman⁶⁹. At the end of the book Hall makes it to Bessarabia. He describes his first night in Tighina when being awakened by Bolshevik gunfire across the Dniester River. He is quite startled by the gunfire but his host consoles him, assuring him that it happens every night and it is because people are trying to escape the Soviet Union⁷⁰. Hall is obviously startled by the nonchalance of his host. For him this is something new and it is something that does not happen in his home country.

When trying to gain permission to visit the fort in Tighina, Hall must see the Prefect. While the man appears to be very busy to Hall, he makes time for conversation. Hall states that "There is always time for conversation in this country."⁷¹ Another part of his visit in Tighina is his visit with refugees from the Soviet Union. Originally he jumps at the chance to meet refugees but is depressed when he sees their squalid and emaciated bodies. He then travels down to the river to look eastward and imagines what it must be like in Russia, Siberia, and China. He wonders if all of the land was like what he was seeing, empty farmland⁷². In an even bigger stroke of imagination, Hall looks into Russia from the Dniester River imagining that in such a massive country, lives could be crushed on the vast steppes without any care⁷³. For him individuality would be completely repressed by such a place. DJ Hall writes his book about a Romania that represents a vanishing Europe. A Europe that used to have a folksy, rural character. For Hall, Romania represents this Europe and Bessarabia is a borderland with a foreboding menace lying just over the River Dniester. With the encroachment of industry and

69 DJ Hall, *Romanian Furrow* (London: Metuchen and Co Ltd., 1933), 11.

70 Ibid, 204.

71 Ibid, 207.

72 Ibid, 216.

73 Ibid, 220.

modernization from seemingly every angle, writers like Hall search for a past Europe in the present Greater Romania. So when compared with the early 19th Century Russian view of Bessarabia, Hall's view of Bessarabia is quite different. He sees the Soviet Union as something that crushes individuality while the Imperial Russian administration saw Bessarabia as an uncivilized land. The view of Bessarabia can look quite different depending on when and whom is doing the viewing.

An imaginary travel guide for an imaginary composite country of Eastern Europe called 'Molvanîa' mocks present-day travel guides. The mock travel book was written by three university-educated Australians as part of a mock travel book series called 'Jetlag travel' which creates imaginary countries based on vulgar Western stereotypes and perceptions⁷⁴. 'Molvanîa' bears a striking resemblance to Moldova although it seems to be a combination of Moldova and Albania. The tag-line for the book is 'A Land Untouched by Modern Dentistry'. This pseudo guidebook is helpful because it demonstrates how the stereotypes of Eastern European countries can be elucidated and made to be comic, like pandemics and pollution from nuclear reactors. On the cover of the book, is a presumably peasant man with a huge, toothless grin holding a bottle of wine. Immediately the implication is that the people are impoverished, yet happy-go-lucky. The history of the imaginary country is of importance to us. Molvanîa is stated to have been on the axis powers' side during World War II and then fell under Soviet hegemony afterwards. This image of early 20th Century Eastern Europe countries being fascist first, then communist is a fairly common stereotype. It seems to mesh well with the narrative that Eastern Europe has largely been a territory fought over and dominated by different empires. It also seems to imply that there is tragedy embedded in the history of the region. I interpret this particular stereotype as essentially saying: *they just could never end up on the right side of history*.

⁷⁴ Santo Cilauro and others, *Molvania: A Land Untouched by Modern Dentistry*. (New York: The Overlook Press, 2004). The two other mock travel guides in the series are: *San Sombrero: A Land of Carnivals, Cocktails, and Coups* and *Phaic Tan*.

2.2 Comedy in Contemporary Travel to Moldova

“Even the name sounds melancholy. Moooooldova. Try it. Notice how your jaw drops reflexively and your shoulders slouch, Eeyore-like. (Unlike “Jamaica,” which is impossible to say without smiling.) I can even imagine the word “Moldova” doubling as a synonym for generic disquiet.

“How are you doing today, Joe?”

“Not so well. A bit Moldoooova.”

“Sorry to hear it. Cheer up.”

-Eric Weiner

In his travel book, *Playing the Moldovans at Tennis*, comedian and travel writer Tony Hawks makes a seemingly impossible bet with his friend back in their home country, England. After watching an England vs. Moldova World Cup qualifier match in 1997, Hawks states that with his junior level tennis skills, he can beat the entire Moldovan National Football Team at tennis. If Hawks cannot track down and defeat the entire Moldovan National Team at tennis, he will have to sing the Moldovan national anthem naked on Baltham High Road in London⁷⁵. If he can accomplish this feat, his friend will have to get naked and sing the national anthem. Hawks' mission is clearly established from the onset of the book as he flies to Moldova. Hawks could elect to try and find the English national football team to play at tennis, yet he assumes it would be easier to track down footballers from a country he had never heard of.

The reader is left in suspense for the entirety of the travelogue, wondering if Hawks will accomplish his task. This also allows for a deeper meaning of Hawks' personal goal, if he can track down and gain permission to play the entire team, his eternal optimism will be rewarded. So there is a lot at stake for him personally as he tries to navigate through the Moldovan Football Federation's bureaucracy, negotiates fake business deals with Transnistrian gangsters, and travels to Israel to find the last Moldovan football player. Moldova is the testing ground for Hawks' optimism, as its institutions

⁷⁵ Tony Hawks, *Playing the Moldovans at Tennis*. (London: St. Martin's Griffin, 2002), 3. Comedian Tony Hawks is no stranger to making outlandish bets involving his travels. In another of his travel books, he bets that he can hitchhike around the whole of Ireland with a mini refrigerator. See: Tony Hawks, *Round Ireland with a Fridge*. (London: St. Martin's Griffin, 2001).

provide major obstacles for the narrator in achieving his mission. Interestingly, a major lesson Hawks takes from his time in Moldova is to not take for granted his freedom of movement. Moldova for Hawks represents a country where the communist past lives on in the restriction of travel even inside the country because of the fear of surveillance. Ironically, Hawks' home country since the publication of his book has become one of the most internally monitored countries in the world⁷⁶.

One of the themes in Hawks' book is his dealings with the corrupt Moldovan bureaucracy, poor customer service, and Moldovans' general inability to think outside of the rigid protocol in their professions. When at the airport attempting to catch a flight home, Hawks is told that his baggage is overweight and it will cost him \$225 to carry the extra luggage. He cannot pay this fine and tells the airline employee that he cannot pay this sum as he only has \$50 on his person. Hawks offers the bottles of alcohol in his luggage to the airline desk staff instead, thinking that the Moldovan employees would jump at the chance for free alcohol. However they just look at him not knowing what protocol to follow. After a few minutes of them discussing the situation amongst each other, they tell him that he can pay \$50 for his overweight baggage. Hawks comically says, "Fifty dollars? What a coincidence. His extensive calculations had produced the exact figure which I'd earlier revealed as being what I had left in my wallet."⁷⁷ This is obviously a situation that would have ended differently in Western Europe, and so Hawks makes light of it by making comedy out of the situation in this case. The stereotype of the rigid yet corrupt communist bureaucracy is played out in this scene.

Hawks characterizes the people of Moldova as being cautious and circumspect. In many cases, he hypothesizes that, "the years spent living under an oppressive regime with its institutionalized system of secret police and informers had left the population favoring a cautious approach to any public display of emotion."⁷⁸ He goes on to characterize Moldova as the antithesis to southern Europe, where they have animated conversations complete with gesticulations. Hawks even claims that reticence is the

76 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6108496.stm

77 Tony Hawks, *Playing the Moldovans at Tennis*, 173.

78 Ibid, 29.

national characteristic of the country. Interestingly, Hawks when trying to look like a local tries to adopt the most disagreeable face he can think of⁷⁹. Manners and facial expressions of Moldovans are described in length at various times in the travelogue, for instance Hawks makes reference to queuing at the bus station in Chişinău and constantly being shoved out of queue when he was due to be the next in line. Referencing these types of mundane situations being made more difficult in a foreign place, makes the scene a bit comical for the reader yet it also makes the reader think about how different it is in their own home environment⁸⁰. The otherness of Moldova is represented through facial expressions.

Pondering what Moldova was like during Soviet times is another theme that Hawks explores in his book. He constantly makes mention of the poor planning and lack of aesthetics of Moldova. Various institutions in the country have not yet learned how to make themselves appealing to Western customers. Chişinău itself bears the marks of poor Soviet planning for Hawks, for instance there is a comedic imaginary self dialogue about the planning of a football stadium for one of the biggest clubs in Chişinău, that lies a far distance away from the city center, Hawks writes:

“Comrade 1: Comrades, the Proletarian must have recreation. And the workers must be rewarded for attaining the levels of production specified in Comrade Brezhnev's last Five-Year Plan- therefore it is proposed that we reward them by building them a stadium with 22,500 capacity in the middle of sodding nowhere.

Comrade 2: Excellent idea Comrade.

Comrade 3: Nice one.”⁸¹

The reader is thus treated to some comedy about the Soviet times and can imagine in this little digression a major reason why the Soviet system collapsed. Bureaucratic inefficiency and poor planning, contributed to the fall. The author who points out this unique post-communist feature as he sees it, poor planning is not common in the United Kingdom and so it can be made into a comedy. Also, the communist past is important in the comedy of this imaginary dialogue by the author. Western Europe escaped the clutches of communism and so it does not have poorly planned, dull cities like Moldova does.

The legacies of Soviet rule in Moldova are referred to by other travelers such as Michael Palin,

79 Ibid, 95.

80 Ibid, 129.

81 Ibid, 82.

in his book *New Europe*, yet they are not looked at upon as critically by Palin. As part of his TV and book series called *New Europe* which premiered in 2007, the former member of the British comedy outfit 'Monty Python' visits countries that were once under the yoke of the Soviet Union or part of ex-Yugoslavia. Palin comments about the lack of customer service in a hotel in Moldova as being 'quite refreshing to meet people who say what they really mean and behave how they really feel as opposed to Western hotel insincerity.'⁸² He seems to take a guarded liking to Moldova and Moldovans because of its lack of Western pretensions. Palin conceives of Moldova as a part of a disappearing Europe, the freshness of the raspberries is referred to as 'a juiciness almost forgotten'⁸³. Importantly he mentally maps Moldova when he comments that the street signs in the center of Tiraspol, the capital of Transnistria, 'point 2 ways, to Chişinău east to Odessa', engendering a strong feeling of being on the outer edge of Europe as we know it⁸⁴. The border of Europe is abstractly drawn by references to 'Old Europe' vs. 'New Europe' and the East vs. dichotomy.

Some travelers such as National Public Radio correspondent, Eric Weiner are less inclined to determine Moldova's place in either the East or . Weiner in his New York Times bestseller, *The Geography of Bliss: One Grump's Search for the Happiest Places in the World* travels to Moldova because it had recently designated the least happy country in the world by Sociologist, Ruut Veenhoven's study of the 'Happiness of Nations'. From the outset of the chapter we see that Weiner is looking for a bad time in Moldova and he is quite possibly looking for all of the negative stereotypes of

82 Michael Palin, *New Europe*. (London: Phoenix Publishers, 2008), 117. The publishing company describes the travelogue as one that, '..opens up a new and undiscovered world to millions of readers.' Examples of travelers dealing with bad customer service in Moldova are fairly common in travelogues. Another example of this is a travel story written by Kevin McCaughey in which he complains about the quality of the wine at a restaurant. A comical scene unfolds when McCaughey can't find the right words in Romanian to voice his displeasure with the wine. The waiter then takes McCaughey to the upstairs room where the wine tap is and pours him another glass of the unsatisfactory wine, thinking that the situation has somehow been remedied. McCaughey's account of his travels in Moldova is largely comical, even his reason for being there in the first place is comical. For instance, he had decided to teach English in a country that began with the letter 'M'. His first two choices were Mongolia and Morocco, but the entry requirements were too stringent. A desperate school in Moldova ended up being the easiest route for him in accomplishing his goal. See: Kevin McCaughey, *The Best Travel Writing 2010: True stories From Around the World*. ed. Sean O'Reilly, Larry Habegger. And James O'Reilly. (Berkeley: Travelers' Tales, 2010), 99.

83 Ibid, 120.

84 Ibid, 126.

the country. Like Palin and Hawks, Weiner is concerned with the aesthetic appeal of the country when he describes the neighborhood where he is staying as featuring 'a few stray pieces of decrepit playground equipment, far outnumbered by the empty beer bottles strewn about. There's more trash inside the stairwell, plus some examples of Moldovan youth at their most expressive, graffiti that says, "White Power" and "Fuck the System"⁸⁵. For Weiner, the expressions of the people match what he sees as a dull, dingy landscape. He identifies the look of people by comically calling it the 'Moldovan Scowl'. One of the only positive yet comical remarks Weiner has for his visit to Moldova is that the fruits and vegetables are fresh. The references to vegetables and fruit seem to belie the agrarian character of Moldova as the nation's only redeeming quality. This is compared to one of the hallmarks of modernity, supermarkets, with their produce from around the globe and unpredictable freshness. For many of the other travelers, there is a recurrent theme. While everything is pretty miserable in Moldova, the fruits and vegetables are fresh.

Stephen Henighan combines a comedic and tragic outlook at his time in Moldova when he was an English teacher, immediately after Moldova gained independence. The Canadian literature professor's dramatically named *Lost Province* takes a critical look at Moldova. Throughout the travelogue, there are examples of the author's own political leanings as he goes on constant digressions about globalization and capitalism and their effects on the social, cultural, and political atmosphere of Moldova. While much of Henighan's travelogue takes a depressing tone, there are comical moments scattered about the book to please the reading audience. For instance, there is a chapter where the son of Henighan's host family, Andrei, tells Henighan his business idea that he has been working on for three years. The business pitch is a TV show where Moldovan families having problems will be brought to resolve their differences. Andrei takes pride in what he sees as the key point to his business pitch to the Canadian journalist which is that the Jackson family will sing at the end of every one of these shows. The narrator Henighan crushes Andrei's dreams about having the Jackson family reunite

⁸⁵ Eric Weiner, *The Geography of Bliss: One Grump's Search for the Happiest Places in the World*. (New York: Twelve, 2009), 189.

to do a TV show in Moldova⁸⁶. This begins a series of disappointments for Andrei regarding the character of Stephen Henighan. The misconceptions of the MTV-addicted Andrei provide for comic relief but they also fulfill what Henighan sees as a tragic misunderstanding by Andrei's generation about what life is like in the West. For the author, there is a mixture of comedy and tragedy in Moldovan perceptions and tastes in Western mass culture. There is tragedy in what Henighan believes is adopting the wrong economic system, but he represents it as a comedy in the form of a twenty-year old Moldovan naively thinking that his plan to get an outdated American pop family group can solve his money problems.

Henighan's travelogue and experience in Moldova are quite different from the other travelogues discussed so far. The main reason for this is that Henighan speaks Romanian and he is able to enter into the personal lives of his host family more so than other travelers. Henighan's knowledge of Romanian language puts him into some pretty fierce, yet comical debates between some of the English students in his class. While most of his pupils are middle-aged, this does not keep the Russian speakers from quarreling with the Romanian speakers. For the Canadian Henighan, the language issue is one that makes him ponder his own country's history of being bilingual. He even knowingly neglects to mention in his example for his class how the brutality of the English Canadians allowed for an internal discrimination against French-speaking Canadians in order so he can side with the Romanian speakers. The classroom setting and Henighan's esteemed role of being a native speaker and their teacher gives Henighan a sort of patronizing voice when talking about classroom arguments between the Romanian and Russian speakers. Interestingly Henighan comes to notice in himself a sort of chauvinism toward Russian language and some Russian speakers that he had never noticed before⁸⁷. It is claimed by the author that in Moldova it is extremely difficult to not take sides on the language issue. Henighan even questions how he has come to support the Romanian speaking side of Moldova when he characterizes

86 Stephen Henighan, *Lost Province*. (Vancouver: Prospect Books, 2002), 26-33. The name of the chapter is 'The Jacksons are Coming!'. In summaries of the book, this chapter is referred to as an integral part of the travelogue although the majority of the travelogue is focused on social, political, and cultural issues.

87 *Ibid*, 42.

them as being very nationalistic and more oriented to free-market reforms than the Russian side. This poses an interesting dilemma for the author who when forced with this self-conflicting realization, must justify to himself his support of the Romanian speakers.

Henighan's trip to Tiraspol, the capital of the breakaway territory of Transnistria also has a comical conclusion to it. The author says about Tiraspol:

“walking along the broad, bare streets of Tiraspol, I longed for the showy, languid warmth of Chişinău. Tiraspol had no street life, no flare or flamboyance. I felt deprived. People plodded about their business. There was no loitering, no sidewalk stalls, no hucksterism or gossip, the city lived for its rancor.”⁸⁸

This may come as a surprise to the reader who at this point in the travelogue has come to understand through Henighan's living with a Moldovan family that the country is indeed poor. To add to the strangeness of classifying Chişinău as “flamboyant”, Tiraspol's perceived Soviet character serves to entertain the reading audience. While Henighan is taking pictures of the dull Soviet architecture and the massive bust of Lenin in the center of the city, he is approached by a man speaking English with a French accent. The man explains that he had been to a Jehovah's Witness conference in Ukraine and was invited to stay with a family in Transnistria which had attended the conference. The unusual situation of being approached by a French Jehovah's Witness and offered a lecture about the religion in the capital of a breakaway, Soviet- style territory is an obvious moment of comedy which ends Henighan's visit to Transnistria⁸⁹.

Travels to Transnistria can surprisingly be comedic. A well-known American newspaper columnist Anne Applebaum also visited Tiraspol as part of what I will call her 'grand tour' of the borderlands of the Soviet Union for her book, *Between East and West: Across the Borderlands of Europe*⁹⁰. Applebaum travels to Tiraspol with a feminine, ardently nationalist Romanian man named Nico who is a journalist. Applebaum's description of Tiraspol is different from Stephen Henighan's. She

⁸⁸ Ibid, 82.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 85.

⁹⁰ For a general understanding of the concept of 'The Grand Tour' see: Hugh Kenner, *The Elsewhere Community (The Massey Lecture Series)*, (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1998), 3-29.

characterizes the communist past facade of Tiraspol as follows:

“Red flags, uplifting banners, hammers and sickles decorated the other official buildings, the streets were still named after the October Revolution, the Five-Year Plan, and the Victory of Fascism; people still stood in line for bread, wearing their expressionless faces like masks, just as they had in the past. It was like stepping onto a film set. The Communist symbols seemed almost quaint, reminiscent of gas streetlamps or horse drawn fire engines; these were things one would expect to see in a town that somehow had been preserved from the effects of time.”⁹¹

This description is interesting because Applebaum had been around the entire borderlands region of the Soviet Union, yet she likely had not seen many places that were seemingly proud of their Soviet heritage. As Applebaum and her travel companion, Nico wait for a meeting with the press spokesman for government. Applebaum is less than impressed with the office as she says “I had been to dozens of office buildings like this- every Communist country had them.”⁹² This is an interesting remark because it demonstrates how one of the main tenets of travel writing has not changed much since the inception of Carl Linne's system of animal and plant classification. The seasoned traveler Applebaum has already seen the inside of one communist building and so she has seen them all. She possesses the knowledge of them and demonstrates this to her reader, albeit in a way to entertain her audience. A western audience has its preconceived notion of this seemingly imagined place, reinforced. Everything there is drab, once you have seen one of the communist buildings, you have seen them all.

The audience is then treated to a stalemated argument between Applebaum's travel companion, Nico and the Transnistrian press secretary over nationalism and which group had inhabited Transnistria first, Romanians or Russians. It is in this way that Applebaum closes her chapter on Moldova, with an argument between two nationalists about which people were there first and who had created a culture for the area. Applebaum suspects that both men are agents. It is assumed by her that the Transnistrian

91 Anne Applebaum, *Between East and West: Across the Borderlands of Europe*. (New York: Pantheon, 1994), 276. On a 'grand tour' of breakaway regions, TV host of the series 'Holidays in the Danger Zone: Places that Don't Exist' Simon Reeves also visits Transnistria. While the documentary takes a stern perspective of Transnistria, the TV host meets the then President of Moldova Vladimir Voronin. During an interview with the Moldovan President about the danger of Transnistria, the conversation is cut short because the President catches a fish in a nearby lake. In a comical scene with the President and his wife, Reeves then is forced to consume too much Moldovan cognac with the President.

92 Ibid, 277.

press spokesman had been sent from Russia as a sort of 'spoiler' for Moldova⁹³. She is not sure who Nico had been sent by however. This leaves the reader to assume that the struggle between Russia and the had manifested itself in Moldova, and furthermore that the argument between the two nationalists is a sort of microcosm of the tensions between Russian speakers and Romanian speakers in Moldova. To the reader, it may seem like just another one of those places over there with ethnic tensions and spies.

Perhaps no travelogue sums up the comedy of Moldova better than Kim Wildman's travel account in Transnistria. After being threatened with jail time for staying beyond her allotted period of time by the Transnistrian border control. Wildman bribes the border officials with Australian currency so she can cross back into Moldova proper. The lesson Wildman has for her reader is to keep bribe money on your person at all times. In this way, the corruption of Transnistria is able to teach an important, comical lesson. It reaffirms the notion that government officials are likely corrupt in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. One should be prepared to bribe border officials in Eastern Europe if you're from Western Europe or North America.

2.3 Tragedy in Contemporary Travel to Moldova

I've looked into the faces of certain officials, stunned by their apathy, sickened by their greed as they've tried to squeeze a bribe from me, just to let me go help the kids they're supposed to be responsible for, and it has taken every shred of self-control I possess not to rip their throats out. I'm sorry if that doesn't sound very Christian, yet I cannot imagine God feeling anything less than profound anger when He sees the cruelty inflicted upon these children.

-Philip Cameron

In the previous subchapter I have discussed how Western travelers have discussed Moldova in a comedic fashion. Stereotypes of Moldovans and Moldova extend beyond the genre of comedy into tragedy. Often times travelogues have elements of both genres in their stories. In this subchapter I will describe some of the ways in which travelers talk about the inherent danger and lack of safety in

93 Ibid, 280.

Moldova, the tragic history and ethnic relations of the country, and the perceived lack of future the country has. In the mental mapping of Moldova by travelers tragedy seems to be dominant in travel narratives.

The inherent danger of visiting Transnistria is discussed in many of the travelogues of Moldova⁹⁴. For example, in Tony Hawks' book, he has an encounter with a Transnistrian crime boss and football team owner in the hopes of being able to play one of his footballers in tennis. Hawks and his translator are ushered off to the private house of the crime boss. It is discovered that the man thinks Hawks is there for more than just tennis. The man thinks Hawks is an investor, and he begins pitching ideas about businesses to Hawks about tourism and cognacs in Transnistria. The narrator feels that he and his translator are being held hostages by the Transnistrian crime boss, in an extravagant mansion. Hawks begins to despise the man because while the man has a swimming pool and a basement filled with expensive, aged liquors, the majority of Moldovans struggle to earn a living. Finally, Hawks and his translator make it out of the situation. However, Hawks refers back to the Transnistrian gangster throughout the story when talking about the problems of the country. Hawks' host family makes their living as doctors, yet they can barely scrape by. The narrator has great compassion for Moldovans trying to make a living through legal means, yet he views it as struggle. A scene which symbolizes this struggle is when he and his host family are waiting for a bus home and:

“a large Mercedes sped past, splashing Grigore with muddy water from a roadside puddle. \$50,000 worth of car had just sprayed shit over the Head of Paediatrics outside his decrepit hospital as he waited patiently to avail himself of public transport. Grigore brushed himself down with all the dignity he could muster. It looked like he'd done this a hundred times before.”⁹⁵

The gangsterism of Moldova is alluded to by the Mercedes Benz spraying mud on the morally upstanding doctor. This allegory is an important one for Hawks who seems to imply that it is almost

94 For another example of the perceived danger of visiting Transnistria see: Kim Wildman, 'Europe from a Backpack: Real Stories from Young Travelers Abroad', ed. Mark Pearson and Martin Westerman (Seattle: Pearson Venture Group, 2004). Wildman's story chronicles her trip to Transnistria with a driver and translator in order to collect information on Tiraspol for a travel guide on Transnistria for a travel book publisher. She is told by the Transnistrian border control that she has to leave within a few hours of her arrival. Their rented car dies and so she and her translator literally run around Tiraspol interviewing residents about the best restaurants and hotels. They do not make it back to the border in time and Wildman is threatened with being detained, only to be released by bribing the border guards.

95 Tony Hawks, *Playing the Moldovans at Tennis*, 91.

impossible to make a living in Moldova without being in some sort of illegal activity. The gangsterism of Moldova is a major theme not only in Hawks' travelogue but other travelogues about the country as well.

Just the act of traveling to Transnistria in general reconfirms suspicions about the danger of Eastern Europe. Instead of traveling to the autonomous, peaceful territory Gagauzia in the south of Moldova, the travelers normally travel to Transnistria. Gagauzia did not break away from Moldova and it does not have the generally bad reputation that Transnistria has for gangsterism and Soviet nostalgia. So it is a non issue for most travelers, as they do not bother to visit. A travelogue by Kevin McCaughey even equates business in Moldova to gangsterism. So for him, whenever a Moldovan is in 'business' they are in reality a gangster⁹⁶. This illustrates a perception of the ex-Soviet Union as a sort of lawless, gangsters' paradise. The former communist countries' transitions to a market economy equates to gangsterism to some skeptical travelers. The example of McCaughey seems to be a manifestation of American folk wisdom in application to an entire segment of Moldovan society⁹⁷.

Poverty and corruption can have devastating effects on the children of Moldova argues Philip Cameron, a Scottish evangelical minister in his travel accounts of Moldova. In opposition to the innocuously entertaining experience of Tony Hawks with bureaucracy at the airport in Chişinău in the last sub-chapter, Cameron is often emotional and plainly angry at many government workers in Moldova. Cameron had done previous work establishing orphanages in Romania. When Cameron saw a newspaper article entitled, 'The Dying Rooms' of Moldova in a London based newspaper, he decided that he had to act. The poverty of Moldova is also described in detail. The narrative chronicles Cameron's difficulty and dismay at seeing Moldovan children living in dire poverty, he calls Moldova

96 Kevin McCaughey, *The Best Travel Writing 2010: True stories From Around the World*, 92. For more examples of the portrayal of Transnistria as a haven for gangsterism see: Holidays in the Danger Zone: Places that Don't Exist: Episode 2- 'Trans Dniester'. Produced by the BBC. Hosted by Simon Reeve, 2005.

97 For a more detailed description of the definition and practical use of folk wisdom see: Istvan Rev, 'Reconstruction Reconsidered: An Examination of Police Philology. The Case of Laszlo Rajk'. Transcript from University of Pennsylvania Slavic Languages and Literatures Symposium. Retrieved from http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/slavic/events/slavic_symposium/Comrades_Please_Shoot_Me/Rev_Rajk.pdf on 17/5/2011. Rev argues that during the time of the Stalinist show trials in Eastern Europe, police forces regarded travel to Switzerland as a suspicious activity and used it as evidence of wrongdoing in the case of Laszlo Rajk.

“a Third World nation in the heart of modern Europe” and he also refers to the region as ‘this crazy part of the world’⁹⁸. He is even shocked to find out that there is a country which treats its orphans worse than Romania. Philip Cameron's book paints a dire picture of Moldova and its orphanages so that the audience will contemplate donating money to Cameron's ministry.

Perhaps no scene illustrates the tragedy involved with Cameron's narrative of Moldova better than his first arrival in the country. He is given a tour of a dilapidated orphanage where there is no warm water and not enough food. Many children died of starvation or froze to death in the orphanage that winter. Yet when Cameron visits, the children gather around him to sing songs. Due to his experience, Cameron writes that difference between children at home and children in the orphanages of Moldova is that:

“when our kids gather to sing or perform, we're always there, encouraging them, praising their efforts, telling them how great they did. Here, they had no one but themselves to sing to, except that today, a few strangers were visiting, and they were ecstatic at the opportunity for performing for a real audience.”⁹⁹

The poverty of the children of the Moldovan orphanages for the minister Cameron represents what he sees as a sort of purity. In his home country, Cameron imagines that all children are supported by their families and so they might take for granted this support. Yet in Moldova, a poor country, children are genuinely happy to sing and perform. In describing the tragedy of the orphaned children, Cameron glorifies the poverty in the sense that it creates genuinely good-hearted orphans. To think with Dean MacCannell's concept of the front stage and back stage for tourists in this case, it is not hard to imagine that this scene is indeed a front stage, inauthentic scene. Yet Cameron believes that the starving, freezing children of Moldovan orphanages sing frequently with no audience. Knowing that he is involved in the scene is a somewhat minor detail for Cameron. The children in 'this hellhole' as he describes it, were genuinely singing just to sing for an audience. And so Cameron decides that he cannot turn away from the children of the orphanages, he and his ministry must help in the improvement of the orphanages and the construction of new orphanages.

98 Philip Cameron, *Stella's Sisters: Voices from Moldova*. (Montgomery: Philip Cameron Ministries, 2010), 115.

99 Ibid, 122.

The shock of how children are treated is repeated in Cameron's narrative as well. He compares how some animals are treated better than the orphans¹⁰⁰. It is not hard to imagine that Cameron is talking about his home country when he makes this dichotomy. Cameron's even claims that his own Christian belief in nonviolence is threatened when he meets Moldovan government workers who do not seem to care about the plight of the orphans or even worse, want a bribe from him. Cameron's narrative seems to display many of the stereotypes of Moldovan society that home audiences may have already have. He mentions how the children are neglected and can fall prey to sex traffickers who are sometimes even alerted by the orphanage administrations as to when young women are forced to leave the orphanages. High AIDS infection rates, child prostitution, poverty and corruption are also mentioned in his book. Nearly everything Cameron says about Moldova is tragic. His home audience then in theory should be compelled to donate to his ministry to help the orphaned children of Moldova.

While many people in his audience have no doubt never heard of Moldova, they are educated by Philip Cameron as to what the country is like. To the home audience, television images of the orphanages in Romania may have been witnessed before, and now they are being recounted similarly in a compilation of Moldovan orphans' stories and Philip Cameron's reflections. The home audience, if compelled to help the orphaned children of Romania and Moldova can do so, because the children's governments are too corrupt and inefficient to do so. What is the home audience to think about all this talk about corruption, sex trafficking, etc? The home audience can imagine for itself through narratives like Cameron's, how the familial and social structures of Moldova have been decayed via communism. Furthermore, religious groups may take it as a sign that they are needed in Moldova and that the word of God should be spread there.

Eric Weiner whose travelogue was mentioned before in the previous subchapter, traveled to Moldova with a clearly preconceived notion of how things were there. In his pursuit of happiness, he uses Moldova as the antithesis of happiness and also creates a set of guidelines for what makes a

100 Ibid, 142.

country miserable based on his experiences in Moldova. Like Cameron, Weiner places poverty as a prerequisite for misery. A tragic history, lack of culture and manners, and lack of national identity are also prerequisites for national misery. For Weiner who is quick to compare countries, Moldova is compared to Qatar, which has no culture in his estimation but at least has wealth unlike Moldova¹⁰¹. Then Weiner compares Moldovan democracy to Swiss democracy. His analysis of Switzerland's democracy is that it is a sort of bonus for the wealthy Swiss. Using political scientist Ron Inglehart's conclusion that happy people are more inclined to make democracies, this for Weiner is one of the main reasons why Moldova is unhappy. They do not have the proper soil for it. This explains why Moldovans are nostalgic for the Soviet times, they had jobs and some money. Now the country is doing poorly economically and there is a malfunctioning democracy¹⁰².

Like Philip Cameron who characterizes the orphaned children as helpless, Weiner characterizes the whole of Moldova as being helpless. Using the Romanian phrases 'ce sa fac?' and 'No este problema mea' which respectively mean 'what can I do?' and 'not my problem', Weiner claims to have found two of the other causes of the unhappiness in Moldova. The helplessness is summed up in the first phrase. In a country which has numerous problems, there is a certain acceptance of bad fate argues the author. He uses an example of a malfunction on a mini-bus for public transportation as his example of this phrase. Weiner examines the defeated looks on the faces of Moldovans as they are forced to exit the bus and walk a long distance to catch another bus. The second phrase is supposed to elucidate the lack of cohesion in Moldovan society. For Weiner, Moldova represents a place where suspicion and envy runs rampant. These two national characteristics make Moldova a cold place. The former characteristic is particularly tragic for the author because Moldovans in his estimation spend so much

101 Eric Weiner, *The Geography of Bliss: One Grump's Search for the Happiest Places in the World*, 197.

102 For further reading on the style vs. substance debate see: Diana Mishkova, *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*. ed. Maria Todorova, (New York: NYU Press, 2004). Mishkova discusses how two seemingly opposite groups in Romania (Junimists) and Serbia (Radicals) oriented their ideologies in relation to Western Europe. The Romanian conservative group, Junimea argued for substance over style when building new institutions. This was in opposition to Romanian Liberals who were copying Western institutions in enacting reforms. See also: Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*. (Budapest: Central European Press, 2001). Boia discusses Junimea and their political notion of substance over style in greater detail.

time being envious of material goods they will never have, thus making it impossible to be happy.

Ironically Weiner claims that by comparing themselves to Italians and Germans, Moldovans are setting themselves up for depression, yet Weiner compares Moldova to handfuls of countries.

Weiner then makes yet another comparison, this time to Japan. He claims that the Japanese might be the most polite people on earth¹⁰³. Weiner claims that this politeness is what makes society run well in Japan. It is also politeness which makes people feel better about themselves. Moldovans though, do not have the luxury of being polite. There is an embedded style vs. substance argument Weiner is making in regards to Moldovan manners and democracy. For him, manners and behavior have to come first rather than how he sees how it actually happened. In a way, complaining about the lack of manners of a country echoes the Enlightenment era trope where manners were of the utmost importance when unraveling a civilization. Another echo of Enlightenment era travel in Weiner's writings is characterizing the Moldovans as "superstitious people". Evidence of this lies in the Moldovan belief in not opening windows in moving vehicles. This demonstrates Weiner's knowledge of his audience and in a way it demonstrates how little the audience for travel writing has changed since the Enlightenment. Odd quirks of cultures are still included to please the reader and illustrate the otherness of the subject people. Weiner interestingly claims that unlike the former Soviet republics in Central Asia who had their religion to fall back on during hard times, Moldova had nothing of their own.

In his examination of the unhappiness of Moldova, Weiner also points to the history of the country as an example of:

"nation building gone horribly awry, and like plastic surgery gone horribly awry, the results are not pretty. You want to look away. The Russians tried to create a nation out of Moldova, when historically one never existed, at least not the kind of nation that the Soviets had in mind. Moldovans are basically Romanians. They share the same historical roots; the Moldovan language isn't a distinct language any more than American English is from British English. Someone once published a Romanian-Moldovan dictionary, it was more of a pamphlet."¹⁰⁴

103 Eric Weiner, *The Geography of Bliss: One Grump's Search for the Happiest Places in the World*, 212.

104 Ibid, 192.

Weiner quotes scholar Charles King's idea that Moldova is a 'stipulated nation' but goes one step farther in this by calling Moldova a “fabricated nation”¹⁰⁵. For Weiner, 'existence' is a key for bliss and so Moldova does not meet his criteria. The lack of national identity is at the center of Weiner's analysis and thus the history of Moldova being conquered by seemingly every major power in the region. This history is what leads Moldovans to accepting their bad fate. The theme of nonexistence is also an important one when it comes to Moldova. In this way it echoes the invented nation idea that I mentioned in my introduction. Eric Weiner and Simon Reeves' travelogues respectively portray Moldova and Transnistria as places without an existence¹⁰⁶.

Moldova is perceived to be a hyper-masculine country by some of the travelers. While Edward Said categorizes Western perceptions of the Orient as having largely feminine features and Maria Todorova categorizes perceptions of the Balkans as being mostly masculine, the perceptions of Moldova are more in line with the latter. Perceptions of masculinity are important to the designation of Moldova as masculine. For one, Stephen Henighan seems to perceive himself as a failure under Moldovan eyes because he is over the age of thirty and he does not have a house and a family. One gets the sense that he defines Moldovan men and women by different characteristics. For a Moldovan man, it seems to be their involvement with business or illegal activities to make money which makes them Moldovan men. Also, this often times includes alcoholism. Henighan makes many references to his host family's father being an alcoholic, yet also how he seems lost without his wife at home. The father is unable to cook for himself and the family is portrayed as running out of food. For Henighan, a Moldovan man is usually involved in 'business' and an alcoholic. Henighan's narrative seems to rate Moldovan women higher than men. One reason for this might be the discursive framework of Henighan's home country seems to allow for the criticism of men more easily than the criticism of women. In this way, it would be difficult for Henighan to plainly criticize Moldovan women. Instead, it is far easier for Henighan to praise his host family's mother while criticizing the masculine culture of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 213.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 192-193.

Moldova.

Moldova has an odd resonance with Henighan, in a way that is seemingly different from the other travelers. For Henighan, the country is lost as is evidenced by the name of his travelogue, *Lost Province*. His affection for the country seems to stem from his own personal situation at the time, that situation being one where he was unsure about his future career and personal prospects. Being a Canadian also seems to contribute to his mapping of Moldova as an underdog country. He references talking about Canada when he was an undergraduate attending university in America. One can imagine how Henighan begins to have compassion for Moldovans, especially the Moldovans he forms personal relationships with.

The reasons for Moldova being 'lost' are fairly similar to many of the other travelogues though. Henighan uses his own mental geography and history as two of his major examples as to why Moldova is lost. Taking mental geography first, Henighan who had traveled Poland shortly after 1989 believes that Poland had actually managed to hold onto some of its European characteristics though. Unlike Poland, Moldova as well as Belarus and Ukraine are the line where Europe does not cross into. When characterizing Moldova specifically, Henighan says, "The country was a shard of the Balkans that had been tossed incongruously into the post-Soviet brew"¹⁰⁷. Probably to chagrin of Maria Todorova, Stephen Henighan uses the term 'Balkan' to describe the historical ethnic issues of Moldova. In sifting out 'Moldovanism', it is fair to say that 'Balkanism' is incorporated into the definition for many travelers. The ethnic tension as well as the war in Transnistria are of paramount importance for defining Moldova.

There is certainly little doubt about where Henighan places Moldova, it is strictly in the confines of Eastern Europe. The entire region for him has earmarks of autocracy and proof of this can be found in the literature, he says:

"At a stroke, I had grasped why writers from Prague eastward, whether Slavic, Magyar, or Romanian whether living under the Habsburgs, tsars, commissars, or post-Communist successor states had sustained such a

¹⁰⁷ Stephen Henighan, *Lost Province*, 6.

consistently rich vein of fantastic writing. Regardless of ideology, these societies' authoritarian ethics, filtering down into family life, thwarted personal fulfillment at such a basic level that the flight into fantasy became a vital recourse for maintaining mental equilibrium. The more autocratic the oppression, the more extravagant the fantasy required to compensate for it.”¹⁰⁸

It is important to remember Larry Wolff when thinking about this quotation. Henighan reaffirms the mental map of Eastern Europe by giving the entire region a characteristic of repression. Subsequently a certain type of imagination is expected when reading the literature of Eastern Europe. The differences between the Habsburgs, tsars, communist regimes are not important in this regard, what they represent is a continuity in the imagined legacy of Eastern Europe. Moldova is solidly behind the border of Europe for Henighan, it rarely exhibits any features of Europeaness. This lack of Europeaness should be read as a lack of national identity as well as incompatibility with European style institutions.

2.4 Moldova Through the Eyes of the Temporarily Settled

The following section is based on the results of interviews I conducted with former Peace Corps volunteers who have served in Moldova. Broadly speaking, the American volunteer agency's mission is “to create a better understanding of Americans and for Americans to gain a better understanding of the people it serves”, yet candidly some volunteers admit that their situations as Peace Corps volunteers put them in position of ambiguity and uncertainty in their respective villages. The Peace Corps has been active in Moldova virtually since the beginning of the country's independence. This section will deal with the more concrete preconceptions of Americans in Moldova. I am interested in understanding how the country is framed by the volunteer agency. One of the main questions I was interested to find out via the interviewees was; what were the volunteers' preconceptions of Moldova and Moldovans were before they left the United States? While I did pose the question, ‘how did your perceptions change when you began living in Moldova?’ I was obviously very interested to understand how the country was perceived by them beforehand.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 24.

Elizabeth Worden is a professor of International Education at American University who writes specifically about the education system of Moldova and had just finished a book about the amorphousness of the teaching of history in Moldovan schools at the time of our interview. She began serving in Moldova when she was in her early 20's. The year was 1997 when she began, around the same time that Tony Hawks published his travelogue. Moldova seemed to be in a particularly dire situation at that juncture. Not many streets in the capital city were brightened with street lights at night and many Moldovans went through winters in the late 1990's without proper heating systems for their homes. Also, manhole covers were being removed from the middle of the streets by gangs in Chişinău in order to sell them for scrap metal. This obviously created the possibility for auto accidents and pedestrian accidents. Yet the danger of being in Moldova that is echoed in the travelogues was not mentioned by Peace Corps volunteers. Elizabeth Worden mentioned that one of her main memories of Moldova was being cold. She explained that her host family, like many other people in the village did not have hot water¹⁰⁹. The Peace Corps actually made exceptions for its volunteers. They were encouraged to travel to Chişinău on their weekends off to take warm showers.

Another exception that was made by the Peace Corps was related to alcohol. Worden stated that she thought that many of the volunteers in Moldova had begun developing alcohol problems as a sort of coping mechanism for being in Moldova. In response, at Peace Corps events the volunteers would only be allowed one glass of wine or beer. What is interesting to note about this is not the Moldova specific policy instituted by the Peace Corps at this time but the fact that travelers do not make mention of their own alcohol abuse if it indeed happened. In the Simon Reeves' BBC documentary, 'Holidays in the Danger Zone: Places that Don't Exist: Transnistria', the documentary seems to imply that most people in Moldova drinks alcohol because president Voronin gets Reeves intoxicated on Moldovan cognac¹¹⁰. The travelers do not mention whether they had their own problems with alcohol while in

109 Elizabeth Worden, interviewed by author via Skype, April 29, 2011.

110 Holidays in the Danger Zone: Places that Don't Exist: Episode 2- 'Trans Dniester'. Produced by the BBC. Hosted by Simon Reeve, 2005.

Moldova yet are quick to comment on Moldovans' perceived heavy alcohol consumption. I contend that this subject is used in the travelogues as a bit of entertainment for the audience but also the authors seem to highlight the misery of Moldovan life by mentioning just how the Moldovans consume alcohol. Tony Hawks comments numerous times on how lifeless the Friday night social scene is in Chişinău and he also comments on the gloominess of the bars. For many of the travelers, when Moldovans drink, they do so out of frustration and they are not particularly social when doing so, unlike the travelers' home countries.

Another interesting topic that came up with Elizabeth Worden was the perceived masculine nature of Moldovan society. When asked if there was a clear cut difference between the way male and female volunteers were treated, she stated that there was a definite difference. Worden used a story to elucidate her point, talking about the differences between her own situation in a village versus her male friend's situation in another village where he became a sort of “king of the village”. About this situation, she stated: “we always analyzed it as, it was OK for him not to be married and it was OK for him to be on his own, he couldn't possibly know how to cook for himself or do anything for himself. And so he was catered to and included in social events in ways in which women were not”¹¹¹. She also stated that she had no evidence to back up the claim that Moldovan culture was masculine, but she and many of her Peace Corps colleagues came to a similar conclusion about the masculine character of Moldovan society¹¹².

This masculinity hypothesis was echoed by Samira Kate Hull who served in the Peace Corps from 2005-2007. Like Worden, Hull has a post-graduate degree in international education. When asked if there was a disparity in the way women were treated compared to men, she was not as adamant yet she stated that when choosing her host family, she picked a family that was not very typical Moldovan as she saw it. The reason for this was that her host family's father was comparatively liberal for Moldovan standards in that he allowed the household to be run by his wife. Other characteristics that

¹¹¹ Elizabeth Worden, interviewed by author via Skype, April 29, 2011.

¹¹² Ibid.

made him unique to Moldova for Hull lies in the fact that he was proactive. She cites his starting an NGO as proof of this¹¹³. In defining him as not typical, the implication is that most Moldovans are a bit helpless and lethargic. In further response to my questioning about this perception, Hull pointed to Moldovan history as one of the causes for this sort of learned helplessness. Some of the themes I have already discussed, were part of Hull's response. She cited a lack of history and subsequently a lack of identity as being one of the major causes. Going back and forth between different empires is the cause of some of this helplessness according to Hull.

The language situation also followed a similar line for Hull as it did for some of the other travelers. In the way that the Canadian traveler, Stephen Henighan said that he came to dislike Russians because of his time in Moldova, Hull echoes the same sentiment. Samira Hull, like Stephen Henighan characterize Moldova as a place where it is hard to remain neutral on the language issue. Interestingly, for Elizabeth Worden, she too noticed the divisiveness of the language entering into her own perceptions of different groups, yet in addition to her developed anti-Russian sentiments she states that she began to resent Romanians who laughed at the way she spoke Romanian with a Moldovan accent¹¹⁴. In this way, Moldova represents a tragic, splintered nation for some foreigners. It is apparent to this author that national identity is an important factor for many of the travelers as to why Moldova lags behind in its development when compared to much of Soviet successor states in Eastern Europe.

Erik Heinonen also echoed the opinion of Moldovans being accepting of a poor fate, citing the history of the country as proof of this. He worked as a health education counselor during his time in the Western part of Moldova. Interestingly, some of his preconceptions of Moldova were actually shaped by Tony Hawks' book. Heinonen went on to say that he had a positive opinion of Hawks' travelogue before his stay and during the early part of his stay in Moldova. Yet, after about half a year in the country his opinion toward the book changed drastically. He claimed, similarly to what I claim in this

113 Samira Hull interviewed by author via Skype May 18, 2011.

114 Elizabeth Worden, interviewed by author via Skype, April 29, 2011.

research, that the travelogue makes the country 'a farce' just by its very nature¹¹⁵. For Heinonen, it would be impossible to know Moldovan culture by just staying for a few weeks or months.

Another important question posed during the interviews was; what travels did the volunteers go on during their vacations from Moldova? Samira Hull traveled to Ukraine where she came to think of Ukrainians as having a more solid notion of their own identities. Her reasoning was that Ukraine had had a longer period of being an independent nation and so the contemporary independence period is not completely new for them. To Hull, Ukrainians also seemed more free wheeling than Moldovans who were reserved¹¹⁶. Possibly, Hull perceived the objective free-spiritedness of Ukrainians as being related to their relative confidence in Ukrainian national identity.

Erik Heinonen traveled to Egypt during one of his vacations from Moldova. His experience led him to look at Moldova more comparatively. He characterized Egypt and its slums as having more issues than Moldova¹¹⁷. Again, similarly to what I argue Heinonen takes a subjective look at Moldova through his travels. If a traveler only travels through Western Europe then visits Moldova, Moldova looks like a relatively poverty-stricken nation. Heinonen also compared Moldova to the Czech Republic, saying that indeed Moldova had a long way to go in order to achieve the Czech level of development¹¹⁸. Yet, when compared with countries in Africa and the Middle East, life in Moldova looks a bit different. Who is doing the comparison should be noted when looking at travelogues. Additionally, it should be important to note the other countries where the author has traveled.

Some of the social issues of Moldova were hard for the volunteers to remain neutral on. Samira Hull found the way her host family treated their grandmother to be appalling. For instance, she mentioned how Moldovans criticized the 'Western' practice of nursing homes yet Hull described how she witnessed her host family treating the elderly woman poorly, physically and mentally abusing

115 Erik Heinonen, interviewed by author via Skype, May 25, 2010.

116 Samira Hull interviewed by author via Skype May 18, 2011.

117 Erik Heinonen, interviewed by author via Skype, May 25, 2010.

118 Ibid.

her¹¹⁹. For Hull, this was something that separated Moldova from Western Europe and the U.S.. Erik Heinonen thought that many of the problems were a product of the urban vs. rural divide in Moldova, explaining that skepticism toward the Peace Corps was a result of failed government policies and government neglect toward people in rural areas.

From interviewing the Peace Corps volunteers, it is apparent that they generally see their time spent in Moldova as difficult. Daily life became a source of frustration for the volunteers. When asked about what made the situation in Moldova so frustrating, Elizabeth Worden pointed to the descriptions provided in her pre-training of Moldova that sort of set her up for a disappointment. She also stressed the Peace Corps as having, “So many of the descriptions of Moldovans in the session were centered around the notion of hospitality”¹²⁰. In reality, Worden and also Samira Hull generally thought that Moldova was not overwhelmingly hospitable, but importantly they claimed that situations were subjective. In the Peace Corps Welcome Book for new volunteers, Moldovans are characterized as, 'open, warm, friendly, and generous people and are renowned for their hospitality'¹²¹. In some ways, the narrative about Moldova from the late 19th Century Russian government seems to hold true. From this Peace Corps definition, one can guess that Moldova is indeed mostly a rural country, but that this equates to a sort of happy-go-lucky nature of Moldovans. There is a layer to this definition which strikes this author as being a modern update to a rudimentary, oversimplification about a country and its people.

119 Samira Hull interviewed by author via Skype May 18, 2011.

120 Elizabeth Worden, interviewed by author via Skype, April 29, 2011.

121 United States Peace Corps 'Publication for New Volunteers: Moldova',
<http://www.peacecorps.gov/welcomebooks/mdwb261.pdf> (accessed May 27, 2011).

Conclusion

In one of his minor works, which has been published under the name *Amerika*, Franz Kafka chronicles the imaginary journey of a young German boy through America. While Kafka never finished the book and did not even give the book its official title, the book represents one of his first attempts at writing a novel. Yet it also represents Kafka's search for his own literary style and thematics. In attempting to write a novel similar to Charles Dickens, his 'American novel' came to be a starting point for his own identity as an author by combining the symbolic hopefulness of America and the author's more crestfallen tones¹²². Kafka was a reader of travelogues and memoirs which he used to attempt to make an authentic picture of America. By examining the other, Kafka had begun to discover how he defined himself as a writer.

What is also interesting to note for our purposes is what the editor's foreword says about the novel. Having never visited America, Kafka makes some mistakes with his characterization of the country like when describes a metro system in a rural part of New York or more interestingly, when Kafka's main character is stopped by policemen and asked for his national identity card. E.L. Doctorow points to this scene to highlight the misunderstandings of Kafka about America¹²³. While the United States has never had a national id card system, it has often times entered the national discourse as a result of the perceived 'other' in America. One of the perceived fears about a national identification card is that it is a mark of a totalitarian society. E.L. Doctorow makes the more subtle point that the national id card is something that is European, thus un-American. While Doctorow might have been comfortable discussing the lack of national identification papers at the time of writing the foreword, the debate has more recently heated up in recent years. It would be less comfortable for Doctorow to elucidate this mistake made by the young Kafka in contemporary America.

There are differences between who writes travelogues in contemporary times and who wrote

122 Franz Kafka, *Amerika*. Trans. Edward Muir (New York: Schocken, 1996) ix-x.

123 Ibid, x.

travelogues during the age of Enlightenment. Enlightenment travelers were usually of the highest strata of their respective countries. As Larry Wolff convincingly points out, the Enlightenment era travelers were also often times commissioned to make observations and classifications about a catalogue of issues that would inform the home culture about the other. Contemporary travelers on the other hand do not have such stated lofty goals. In many cases travel books serve as entertainment yet they usually include various genres in their writings. In the aim of entertaining its audience, the travel writer makes certain observations which are directed at defining the foreign culture for his or her reader. The writer is also expected to go on a psychological journey in which the writer reflects on and meditates on the foreign surroundings that he or she is confronted with. In the case of Moldova, this psychological journey often times seems to reaffirm certain stereotypes of the imagined prototypical post-Soviet republic. This can range from the seemingly benign issues like bad food and bad customer service to the more divisive issues such as societal treatment of orphans and the elderly.

One of the travelogues I have mentioned in great detail, Stephen Henighan's *Lost Province* is a good example of Tocquevillian of historical thinking. For one, the author sees the world as being sort of cannibalizing itself via globalization. Moldova for Henighan is a tragic place because it seems to be excitedly turning toward the free-market policies of Western Europe and North America without fully contemplating what that will mean for their society. For Henighan and some of the other travelers, Moldova will never materially attain what Western countries have attained and so they are being tragically misled about the economic system they are adopting.

Tragedy is inherent in Moldovan history for Henighan. For him, it seems to be a country where identity is inherently lost just by virtue of its existence. In this way, Moldovans are born into an identity-less existence. With seemingly every group in the region having conquered the Moldovans; the implication is that the United States is conquering the Moldovans via culturally hegemonic means. It is in this way which Henighan tries to point out the tragedy in Moldovans jumping head first into free-market capitalism, it continues their inescapable past of conquest, yet it also continues their cultural

malleability, which is a trait designated to the Moldovans by the large majority of travelers I have discussed in this research. Many of the ex-Peace Corps volunteers I interviewed mention the lack of identity as being a Moldovan trait. This trait allows for a hesitance and reluctance to be proactive in solving the country's problems which only further adds to the lack of identity for Moldova. What can be taken from this analysis is that many travelers believe an identity is crucial in building a nation, and the Moldovans purely do not have an identity.

The communist past of Moldova is also pointed to as a reason for the country's problems. It is for Tony Hawks, one of the reasons for the lack of liveliness of the population. Another traveler, Eric Weiner sees the communist past as causing mistrust and resentment amongst neighbors. It seems as though the communist past of Moldova is viewed not only as politically and economically destructive, but that it tragically prevents the building of friendships and relationships in Moldova. Being an ex-totalitarian society is something which is hard to erase because it seeped into relationships between neighbors according to many of the travelers.

Still one traveler, the religious Minister Philip Cameron must portray Moldova and its orphanages as badly as possible for his home audience in order to receive donations for his orphanage work. Dealing with an apathetic, corrupt bureaucracy is frustrating for Cameron, especially in that children are portrayed to be put at risk by it. Cameron sees the social fabric of the country as so deeply corrupted by communism that the private sector is the only avenue for the children. Travelers such as Cameron who portray Moldova in a tragic light repetitively, may help to make this narrative a reality for Moldovans.

Perhaps no travelogue of Moldova is a better example of comedy than Tony Hawks', *Playing the Moldovans at Tennis*. For one, the audience is treated to some absurdism just by the title. Their interest may be brought on by the title more so than a travelogue named 'Playing the Swiss at Tennis' would. What the book seems to promise is an insight into the absurdism that seems to be Moldova. And Hawks book may seem to offer an understanding of some of the nuances that make the people who

they are. An example of these nuances according to Hawks, is when he includes comedic imaginary dialogues between communist officials. This imaginary dialogue in which the communist officials decide to build a football stadium kilometers outside the city seems to represent the Soviet Union and the Soviet administration of Moldova. It is in this way that Hawks devises his narrative which is supposed to elucidate the nature of the country. Hawks uses Moldova as his obstacle to achieving his goal. The travelogue ends on an optimistic note, Hawks did the seemingly impossible and conquered the bureaucracy of the country and won at tennis.

Kim Wildman creates suspense in her travelogue where she travels in Transnistria. When she is stopped and harassed when trying to exit the Transnistrian border, she remembers the currency she had stashed away on her person. Funnily enough for the home audience, Wildman's conclusion and moral lesson of the story is to remember to bring bribe money when traveling (presumably traveling Eastern Europe). Stories of corruption can be in the case of Philip Cameron tragic or in the case of Wildman comedic. The home audience is able to see the otherness of the Moldovan bureaucracy when compared with their own because it is covered in length by both travelers. Their preconceptions are reconfirmed via the travelogues but it is the author's choice which style, goals, and ideology he or she chooses to employ in their narrative.

There is one anomaly in the travelogues that is loosely a Romance emplotment, that of Michael Palin's *New Europe* which seems to idealize some aspects of Moldovan culture vis-à-vis his own country's culture. In this way, Palin's writing is reminiscent of a traveler during the Romantic Era or even a vaguely disillusioned traveler like D.J. Hall, searching for 'Old Europe' during the interwar period. However, the travelogues' overarching structures represent Moldova as either a tragedy or comedy to define the country for their reading audience. The literary implications of these tendencies create an image of Moldova and Moldovans with the audience in mind. Certain traits which may well have begun during the Enlightenment are updated and given a new coat of paint. Communism in many ways now is the pointed to as what makes Moldova lag behind the "West". What is risked by the

travelers in their emplotments is what ex-Peace Corps volunteer Erik Heinonen called 'turning the country into a farce'. It is in this way that I have argued and explained how this farce is created and further embellished via travel writing. The implications of representing a country in such ways is ambiguous to some extent. What is clear from the travel narratives is that the travelers do not include Moldova in the “West” and many do not even include Moldova in Europe. With the European Union, the borders of Europe are clearly defined as ever, yet there is the possibility for enlargement depending on Moldova's ability to make the prescribed reforms. In a way, Moldova must exhibit what many travelers characterize as a national trait of the country; its malleability so that it can be accepted as part of the European club.

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