

## *Colonial Patterns in Latvian Popular Enlightenment Literature*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The article addresses the question of colonial interpretation of Latvian secular literature of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has been argued recently that because of the colonial language used by contemporaries to describe ethnically determined social relationships between Baltic peasants and the German upper class in the Enlightenment era in the Baltics, it would be possible to expand the understanding of peasant enlightenment by applying to it theoretical approaches of postcolonial studies. Aspects of colonial features in the peasant discourse of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Baltics are analyzed in the article by paying special attention to their role in creating the secular writing praxis in the Latvian language.

**Keywords:** Popular Enlightenment, postcolonial studies, German-Latvian relationship, history of Latvian literature

The Enlightenment era brought a new shift of meaning in the definition of “people”, making education its main reference point. It was one of the starting points for the popular enlightenment. It is believed that the first to give a name to the *Volksaufklärung* (popular enlightenment) movement was a German Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn in 1784 when participating in the debates of *Berlinische Monatsschrift* on the topic “What is Enlightenment?”, under which an essay with the same title was written by Immanuel Kant. Mendelssohn offered to consider as one of the criterions the scale of enlightenment – to what extent it has spread in all social classes, setting as one of the targets the distribution of books, the popularization of reading and addressing all social classes with the written word. The more it would be done, the more justified would be the talk about an “enlightened nation” (Mendelssohn 1981: 117; compare Böning 2002: 6–7; Schneiders 1974: 43–51). The movement itself had already existed for several decades before the article by Mendelssohn

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appeared and had developed as a typical phenomenon of the German-speaking cultural space. Such a process was also connected to the specifics of German enlightenment, centring on the concept of “enlightened upbringing” that even allowed talking about a “dictatorship upbringing” (Vierhaus 1984: 110).

Popular enlightenment developed as a “polyphonic discourse” in Germany that cannot be looked at “as a monolithic phenomenon, rather as a regionally political differently structured movement covering several generations” (Völpele 1996: 23). What united the different tendencies was the idea that “enlightenment enlightening only the enlightened and leaving in the dark most people [...] absolutely does not earn the name of enlightenment” (Schnappinger 1818: 154). Popular enlightenment was based on the initiative of both individuals and society and was aimed not only at spreading knowledge, but also at changing the traditional way of thinking. The role of the popular enlightener was mostly adopted by rural pastors. (Wyss 2007: 134–145)

An important role in this process was played by the juxtaposition of the countryside and the city. The countryside and life there gradually became the central motives in the 18<sup>th</sup> century literature: as commented on by Gottfried Weissert, the countryside became “nature”, but its inhabitants – “natural people”. Jean Jacques Rousseau was one of the first to promote the idea of the “ideal man” embodied by the peasant and German enlighteners followed suit, thus the “sentimental return to nature” can be looked at as a parallel phenomenon in “a countryman’s upbringing” (Weissert 1966: 68).

“The people” had become one of the trendy words in the public discussions of the German-speaking enlightenment. In accordance with the stereotypes of the era, the peasant could be “rude” and “narrow-minded”, yet the idea that he was not like that by nature, that he was *turned into one* like that, became more and more popular. Approaching the peasant class with a reform programme in an era in which class thinking was predominant was one of the innovations of popular enlightenment: it was an experiment to look at peasants (a class identified as rude and narrow-minded) as valuable individuals – a new, innovative concept suggesting that the mental activity of an individual does not depend upon his social affiliation.

The popular enlightenment signalled a significant change in awareness, reinforcing the notion that the intellectual skills of an individual do not determine his belonging to one or the other class.<sup>2</sup> The notion that mental

<sup>2</sup> Quite a typical early example in German writing before the physiocrats’ ideas became current was the dialogue between a Swiss peasant and a pastor in 1738. The peasant when talking to the pastor admits: “So the peasant class is a happy class as God has made it before the flood of sin.” The pastor answers that in the Holy Writ agriculture

and physical activities affect each other was influenced by the concept of the *tabula rasa* and the idea arising from it that knowledge is not hereditary, it is the result of experience, determined by such factors as faith, moral standards, life style, economic structures, living standards, social structures etc, as shown by African “Europeanization” studies. (Tiainen-Anttila 1994: 191)

The development of popular enlightenment ideas in Livonia and Courland can be described as similar but they were interpreted differently from Germany – causes can be found in the relationship structure of a colonial people and the educated elite. When characterizing Baltic colonialism at the time as far as the secularization of literature is concerned, it is important to keep in mind that the discourse of colonialism not only helps to illumine the social and historical context of this secularization, but also provide theoretical concepts for text interpretation.

One of the key questions in the awareness of the colonial context is connected with the possibility of a double definition for the target audience of literature – Latvian peasants – in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: in the public discourse Latvians were both a “nation” in the early social meaning of the concept (respectively, the people) and a “nation” in the understanding of Herder. Moreover, a nation that according to aristocratic stereotyping is inherently “slavery – a hereditary characteristic of Latvian peasants” (Stepermanis 1934: 14). It should be at the same time taken into consideration that as during the 18<sup>th</sup> century the concept “Latvians” in the modern, respectively, the national awareness, did not exist, it lacked national connotations in its most popular use (See further: Hroch 2007: 97).

The enlightenment concept of a “people”, in the Latvian case the peasants as an unprivileged group in society, in public debates on “nation” and “people” mainly functioned as an attribute of social status on the vertical axis as the opposite of “aristocracy” and not as an ethnically equivalent attribute on the horizontal axis (Leerssen 1998: 171). The discourse of agrarian reform in the Baltics changed this situation during the 1870s and 80s by updating the ethnic aspect of the master-peasant relationship, though they had always been ethno-linguistically determined (Blumbergs 2008: 244). Turning to Latvians and identifying them as peasants, popular enlightenment in Livonia and Courland

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is described flatteringly indeed, quoting further the ancient authors – Ovid and Virgil – in order to prove the “high” position of peasants. The peasant concludes: “So, our class, as I hear, is a class not only laudable and happy, but also an important and necessary one?” See: Nägeli 1738: 23, 25. In such a way the creation and strengthening of a new peasant identity was constructed, of which not only the elite but also peasants themselves needed convincing.

first excluded such individual groups from the definition of Latvians as Latvians town-dwellers or Germanized Latvians. This logic could be explained with a reference to considerations connected with the social and not the ethnic trend of communication and probably a better knowledge of the German language in the towns (Undusk 1999: 348). Besides, the civilizing mission was basically connected with the modernization of the countryside.

Being peasant-oriented, the popular enlightenment not only did not challenge but even strengthened the concept of Latvians being predominantly “peasants”, gradually creating a myth of Latvians as a “peasant nation”, besides constructing it unconsciously, namely, mechanically reproducing the physiocratic ideas concerning the nobleness of peasantry in Livonia and Courland. That in the context of popular enlightenment updated the question about the agrarian roots of Latvian identity (Blumbergs 2008: 222). By defining Latvians through their belonging to the peasant class, popular enlightenment established a later much reiterated concept in literature of “a peasant nation” (Krēsliņš 1998: 10). In the Baltic context this problem can be addressed in connection with “national protonationalism” (Hobsbawm 2004: 62).

The idea of Latvians as peasants and the synonymous use of the concepts “Latvian” and “peasant” were typical of the enlightenment era in literature addressed to Latvians. This question was briefly and precisely commented on by the writer Matīss Kaudzīte:

Until the middle of the previous [19<sup>th</sup>] century the Latvian did not know himself and did not call himself anything other than a peasant as thus he was addressed by everyone else who at the time seemed to be higher placed than himself or were indeed of a higher class. [...] If a “Latvian” was mentioned, it was understood to mean a peasant, as nobody could imagine that a peasant and a Latvian were two different concepts. (Kaudzīte 1994: 25)<sup>3</sup>

The Latvians who obtained an education and settled in cities ceased to be Latvian, for, to quote the German-Baltic pastor Christian August Berkholtz, “it is not possible that such a person would still remain a Latvian” (Āronu 1929: 94). The talk here is not only about Germanization, but also about the construction of an identity: in the Baltic cultural space at the time social and ethnic identities could not be separated, thus the concept “German” in the Baltics had not only ethnic, but also social connotations, marking the privileged class. Therefore it is logical that popular enlighteners “clung to the

<sup>3</sup> Here and further all translations into English are mine. P.D.

general opinions of that era that a Latvian is a peasant and his language is that of a peasant" (Klaustiņš 1907: 108).

Besides this also the educational aspect existed that has already been mentioned. Unlike Germany, it had a clearly ethnic dimension in Livonia and Courland:

Formerly in Latvia and Estonia Germans had been those who had initially come from Germany or had been educated there. The town-dwelling Latvians and Estonians who had obtained an education that previously was only a German prerogative were counted as Germans. (Krēsliņš 1998: 50–51)

Therefore, alongside "the Latvian/the peasant" in the public debates also another dichotomy was a constant presence: "the German/the educated", denoting one's belonging not only to the socially and to a certain extent politically dominating class, but also to the intellectual elite. It took a long time to overcome this concept of a "class society conforming to nationality" (Grudule 2005: 26), which attributed an ethnic and later also a national dimension to the self-awareness of Latvians, but during the enlightenment era this question was so self-evident that only a few authors addressed it. Until the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, German and Latvian literary communication, by reproducing the German-speaking popular enlightenment canon, materialized as a dialogue between the elite and peasants, ignoring the Latvians in towns – from a social and not a national perspective. Gradually it became the basis for a politically and culturally determined Latvians' "connection to the land" (Beitnere 2002: 158).

Ethnic connotations result from the above said, accompanying the addressing of the peasant audience and the peasant characterization. Though the German-Baltic pastors' statements in this matter did not principally differ from the concept of peasants who existed in the German-speaking cultural space, applying it to Latvians (comp. "slavish", "narrow-minded", "superstitious" as peasant descriptions in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Germany, e.g. Werdermann 1785: 11–12; see also: Garve 1790), along with the ethnic parallelism a new means was created for perceiving conscious or unconscious ethnic generalizations in these texts. When the various *elite and people's* relationship models were represented in literature, among them the *teacher–apprentice* relationship between the pastors and peasants or the patriarchal *father–child* concept in master and peasant relationships, simultaneously these models became a perspective from which the German and Latvian relationships could be encoded, though in the original German popular enlightenment texts – directly or indirectly

adopted – such a perspective could not be found even on the level of intention. Belonging to the peasant class was considered the main characteristic and even the destiny of the Latvian ethnic group. For example, in the Courland calendar it was said:

That land and home tending is, dear Latvians, a work given to you by God [...]. For if there is a certain class of people needed in the world and good; then it is the class of a peasant or a land worker: you and your children of this class are put to this work by God. (Brant 1784: 37)

This reflects an understanding of Latvians and Estonians as “fragments of people” (Peiker 2006: 111) who are not able to have an independent, self-contained existence but are given a certain role in the world that is in tune with the mission of their enlighteners. One German pastor drew the following conclusion:

The task of Estonians and Latvians is certainly not the pursuit of intellectual knowledge and skills. Their cultural mission is not there, it is in the field of practical activity. Long centuries have ripened them into an honourable peasant people whose hard work, serious mind and frugality can serve as an example for all other agricultural workers of the Russian state. (Quoted after: Peiker 2006: 111)

The identification of Latvians with peasants being stereotypical, it would also be part of the Latvian self-reference, as shown by the sociologist Dagmāra Beitnere, well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Beitnere 2002: 150–163). For the present we can only hypothetically discuss to what extent this awareness of one’s identity affected the later Latvian self-awareness of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though recent studies intimate that the enlightenment tradition is manifest in the Latvian positivist literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (compare: Grīns 1936: 3).

In the enlightenment transfer of German ideas concerning nationality to Livonia and Courland two trends come together: the pathos based on the physiocrats’ idea of peasants as the welfare source of the nation and the most honourable profession on the one hand, and the ascribing of these physiocratic ideas to the ethnic group – Latvians on the other. Thus the attitude towards peasants in Livonia and Courland – starting with the traditional stereotypes covering, for example, rudeness, laziness, superstition or alcoholism, and finally the physiocratic praise of the peasant profession – gained ethnic connotations. “One of the most important obstacles is the low cultural level we are finding

Latvians on,” noted Ch. Brockhusen, defining Latvians as a “*rude nation*” (Brockhusen 1803: 92). Similarly, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a debate about how to raise them to the level of “moral culture”, e.g. in the essays by the German-Baltic pastor Friedrich Wilhelm Kade (Kade 1805: 20). Such statements led to national stereotyping which gradually became more significant in the enlightenment debates.

It can be said that the “peasant’s character” transforms automatically into “national character”, even when the context changes.<sup>4</sup> Thus the “discovery” of the people in Livonia and Courland became the discovery of the Latvian nation. It was mainly connected to the agrarian enlightenment debates.

But what does the term “nation” mean when applied to Latvians during the enlightenment era?<sup>5</sup> During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the concept *Nationalen* in the Baltics was a designation of the local peasants who were mainly designated as “natives”. The German historian Hans Rothfels, when commenting on the concept “national” in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe, writes of the Baltic context in this matter:

<sup>4</sup> A typical example is *Labu ziņu un padomu grāmata* (*The book of good news and advice*, 1791) by Gustav Bergmann which tells a story of a peasant girl who gets involved in a romantic relationship with a German and is disappointed when he leaves her after discovering that she is pregnant and her parents are to die from grief. This story is a shortened version of the translation of the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter from the book *Noth- und Hülfsbüchlein* by Rudolf Zacharias Becker. (Bergmann 1791: 15) If the German version emphasizes the difference of social classes when reworking the “forbidden” relationship theme – a peasant girl and a landlord, then the Latvian version emphasizes ethnic differences – a Latvian and a German, in order to provide identical conclusions at the end of the book. Compare: Becker 1788: 199–204.

<sup>5</sup> For example, the enlightenment publicist Heinrich Johan Jannau called Latvians and Estonians “both nations” (quoted after: Blumbergs 2008: 21). Latvians as “this nation valuable to us” were called so by a German-Baltic pastor Gotthard Friedrich Stender (Stenders 2001: 92). It is not an accident that the Riga Latvian book publisher Julius Conrad Daniel Müller addressed “the friends of general wellbeing, especially all friends of the Latvian nation”, who wish to help it (Müller 1791). A German-Baltic pastor and publicist Liborius von Bergmann talked about “the wellbeing of the Latvian nation” (Bergmann 1791: 95). Gustav Bergmann referred to “the unique way of thinking of this [Latvian] nation”, declaring: “It is known that the peasants of Livonia are rude and savage.” (Bergmann 1792) One can ask, what was the basis for Gustav Bergmann’s joining together savagery and nation in one paragraph, and did it not create a contradiction to the synonymy between Latvians and peasants. The concept of “nation” here, of course, had not been used in the modern meaning of the word.

In the Baltic States so were called the natives, peasants and land workers, who cannot value higher ethical goods because of their lack of civilization [...] and therefore loaf about “in the state of nature as a race and language”. It could be said that this *Nationalen* concept was somewhat akin to how the Greeks viewed the barbarians. To be “nationalistic” was not an honorary title as such, [it] simply was a form of nature. (Rothfels 1960: 196–197)

This argument illustrates the process of colonial fantasies hardening towards the peasants. It should be noted that such fantasies and metaphors were not unknown elsewhere in Europe. They were connected with the civilizing mission of the enlightenment and the differently interpretable notion of “savagery”. Colonial metaphors were in use also in Russia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe where serfdom was associated with class and not race. (Wolff 1994: 66)

It should be emphasized that such an attitude was not a phenomenon related only to the Baltics. There was a general interest in uncivilized tribes and fascination with their primitive community and closeness to nature which merged with the tendency to civilize them. The “crowd” or “peasants”, who – at least from the elite point of view – had for centuries lived in intellectual isolation and in a world essentially medieval, came into the spotlight and sparked reflections on the circulation of enlightenment ideas during the 18<sup>th</sup> century and eventually on the enlightenment elitism as a “central dilemma” (Payne 2003: 260).

The colonial findings mentioned before gave new connotations to the concept of “savagery” which was interpreted as “rural savagery” by the American historian Eugen Weber (Weber 1976: 4). Yet even during the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries intellectuals used to compare peasant societies, which they visited, with tribal societies, about whom they read, indicates the British cultural historian Peter Burke, explaining that peasants lived close to nature, were less affected by foreign habits and had preserved primitive traditions longer than anybody else (Burke 2009: 46–47). On a certain level in the awareness of the educated European elite peasants did not much differ from the “savages” and were looked upon with the same combination of power, idealism, sentiment and prejudice one would employ with uncivilized tribes in the third world. It is repeatedly noted that during the 18<sup>th</sup> century peasants existed as incomprehensible beings living in a completely different world in the consciousness of the elite, they cannot understand enlightenment ideas and are encapsulated in irrational traditions, pagan rituals and seemingly senseless superstition (Outram 2007: 26). When characterizing French peasants even in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was emphasized that what they are lacking is

“civilisation”, they temporarily submit to savage instincts seemingly originating from isolation and misery (Weber 1976: 4). In the German cultural space the perception was similar. Peasants were perceived as “little civilized, yet capable of upbringing” (Völpel 1996: 24). Therefore it can be said that a peasant in the popular enlightenment awareness was not the “noble savage” but a “civilizable savage”.

In this context it should be noted however that, for example, Garlieb Merkel viewed the original Baltic peasants as “noble savages” and the modern ones as “heartless slaves” in order to critique the aristocracy. Slavery in Merkel’s understanding had spoiled Latvians and Estonians, to refer to Piret Peiker: “Both people, thus, still had the noble savage in them, but in a perverse disfigured form.” (Peiker 2006: 112) Especially metaphors concerning the pre-Christianisation period in German-Baltic journalism were useful as an argument for the “barbarism” and “savagery” of Christianised tribes (compare: Anonymous 1784: 9), yet these metaphors were not separated until the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

It can be said that the concept *the people* was understood in three ways, besides quite differently – as a personification of dullness, as producers of goods and as the victims of elite carelessness (Payne 2003: 260). Its admission to the focus of enlightenment is thus a relatively gradual process: it was associated with intellectual and moral limitations as *gens des bras*, i. e. individuals who are characterised by working with their hands and not using their minds (Farr 2000: 29). The key concept in the awareness of this phenomenon was the philanthropy of enlightenment allowing the educated European elite to construct a new self-image based on culture, science and civilization (Garrioch 2004: 495). A statement in a German philanthropist magazine in 1783 is characteristic:

Who makes the people smart and virtuous makes it also happy. [...] Thus also our activity increases [...], we will become more useful to the world and the world becomes more useful to us. (Steenwinkel 1783: 252–253)

The people were no longer only a subject of observation and anthropology: it became the object of enlightenment, respectively, of civilization. In contrast to the “rude” (Anonymous 1788: 147) German peasant Latvian peasant was a “savage” not only in the “rural savagery” sense. Also the German historian Irene Neander reminds us that to a certain extent the enlightenment interest in Latvians resulted from the inspired interest of Rousseau and Defoe’s interest in the “savage”. However, to the church (and not only) Latvians were more than

just interesting “savages”. There was interest in their past and present, scientific interest mixed with spiritual work (Neander 1956: 140). While continuing to maintain the myth of Christianization in legislation and public debates, linking crusaders’ arrival in the Baltics with the strengthening of serfdom, the socially ethnic relationships in the Baltics during this era were gradually put into a colonial frame: it was associated also with the language in use: both the system’s critics and its defenders, where the latter referred to the Roman rights, talked about “slavery” (*Sklaverei*) and not “serfdom” (*Leibeigenschaft*). (Elias 2005: 18)

Yet serfdom itself after the Northern War and after Sweden’s reforms allowed comparison – both grounded and groundless – with some aspects of slavery in the colonized territories. For this reason, in the public debates of Baltic Germans the reflection on ethnic relationships with Latvians was gradually linked with colonial metaphors. Latvians were identified as “different”, namely, as native, and a signal came from the colonial metaphors in the discussions of agrarian reform.<sup>6</sup> The identification of Latvians with black slaves, from which the equation of serfdom with slavery derived, was consciously or unconsciously allegoric and only partly – if at all – based on the historic reality. Yet these metaphors gave a reason to put Baltic ethnically social relationships into a colonial frame. The language used during the 18<sup>th</sup> century allowed talk about barbarism, civilization, savagery, almost wondering that the described population has a white skin (Wolff 1994: 366). There was also movement in the opposite direction: when in 1772 the British Lord Mansfield judged the case of the enslaved African James Somerset, the defenders used “parallels between African slaves in Virginia [and] serfs from Eastern Europe” (Boulukos 2008: 100).

It follows that the discovery and identification of Latvians during the enlightenment era developed as part of the colonial discourse and fantasy, first becoming apparent in connection with calls to reform serfdom and secondly in

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<sup>6</sup> Garlieb Merkel wrote about Latvians: “During an era when even the proud Brit strives to give freedom and citizen rights to their negro slaves, there are several nations in Europe that are recognized as unable to enjoy personal freedom.” (Merķelis 1969: 52) The German man of letters Ambrosius Bethmann Bernardi pointed out that “in some [Livonian] manors or maybe some parishes the suffering of serfs is so great that it can be compared to the sufferings of Negro slaves in the West-Indian colonies” (Bernardi 1799: 154–155). Johan Georg Kohl compared the arrival of crusaders in the Baltics with the discovery of America of Christophor Columbus and wrote about “aboriginal nations” (Kohl 1844: 103). And finally, Johann Gottfried Herder efficiently concluded: “The negro depicts the devil as white, and the Latvian does not want to enter into heaven as long as there are Germans there.” (Quoted after: Spencer 2012: 168)

connection with making Latvians the objects of enlightenment and education, i.e. civilisation.

It was just one step from the opinion that Latvians (and Estonians) in their savagery were approximately at the same developmental stage as the Saami (Saami people), the Samoyedic people or Africans, who had been marginalized in the European mind already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Ulrike Plath, when interpreting this myth, points out that the Latvian classification coincides with older and already established notions, going back to the Middle Ages, drawing parallels between Latvians and Northern pagans or uncivilized slaves. It meant that the Latvian “otherness” was primarily encoded as “savagery”, metaphorically comparing them to African slaves, Hottentots, natives of Tahiti or even with the mythical troglodytes described in the *Lettres persanes* (1721) by Charles-Louis de Montesquieu. In historiography, a basis for parallels between the discovery of the New World and Baltic Christianisation during the Middle Ages arose. They flourished during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but were renewed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, alongside the debates on the abolition of serfdom (Plath 2008: 65–67).

On the one hand, Herder’s idea of Latvians and Estonians as the “last savages of Europe” (Plath 2008: 37–67) created a dichotomy between the colonists (Germans/Europeans) and the colonized (Latvians), thus the latter were virtually, if not territorially, banished from Europe. The term “savage” has always been Europe-centred, establishing the West or Europe as the norm in contrast with the other, the different. On the other hand, it is evident that serfdom and Latvian and German relationships were not colonial in the direct sense of the word, yet they were linguistically made to be so in the debates of that era, besides from three sides at the same time. First, the opponents of serfdom turned to colonial metaphors, thus showing the misery of the social system. Secondly, the defenders of serfdom identified the 18<sup>th</sup>-century social system as a result of the colonisation of the Baltics during the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This was a mistake, as serfdom was established only during the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century conservative Baltic Germans it seemed logical to associate themselves with the 13<sup>th</sup>-century colonists. Thirdly, the initiators of Latvian enlightenment and the civilizing project, in order to legitimize their activities, referred to colonial stereotypes. There were references to the effect that “Latvians were savage [*grausames*] by nature and a corrupt nation” (Bernardi 1799: 140) or just as an “undeveloped nation” (Merķelis 1969: 71). Thus it can be said that in the object of popular enlightenment – the savage yet civilizable peasant – two discourses of savagery were synthesized: the rural and the colonial.

The above said outlines a contradictory idea and a network of representations that create the basis for attributing colonial interpretations if not

to the social reality of the enlightenment era then to the analyses of public debates and literary texts. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when post-colonial studies expanded and gradually included not only the inner colonialism of the Third World but also of Europe (e.g., in the cultural history of Ireland), this approach was criticised as unfounded. (See Talib 2002: 46.) At the same time, interpreting the concept of colonialism more flexibly, the approach mentioned has been able to offer also productive interpretations, as argued by David Chioni Moore, emphasizing that historically the West has not monopolized colonial activities but has quite often been colonized itself (e.g., Ottoman or Habsburg empire), including the Baltic States in the reflection. (Desai & Nair 2005: 514–538)

The mentioned text echoes with a remark made by a Canadian historian of Latvian origin Karl Jirgens, that “[w]ithin the context of Holquist’s perspective, the writings of the colonizers during these periods are especially revealing”, mentioning as an example Stender’s poetry as an attempt to “colonize the minds of the impoverished Balts”<sup>7</sup> and concluding that in the Baltic situation “parallels with the slave-culture in the United States are remarkable” (Jirgens 2006: 68–69). In the middle of these discussions, justifying the necessity to update the colonial dimension in the historic relationships between Latvians and Germans in the recent studies of Latvian folksongs can be mentioned (Lietiņa Ray 2003: 1–21).

Together with the colonial context, in which the imported popular enlightenment ideas got to Livonia and Courland, the question of culture transfer problems became topical. When treating the secularization of the Baltic peasant literature as a regional variant of popular enlightenment, it should be taken into account that the popular enlightenment texts and the importing of models and values incorporated in them into the region did not happen mechanically but in dynamic relationships with the native “non-German” tradition of written culture. Alongside it local differences and the colonial frame in which these differences can be interpreted should be mentioned, transforming it into an implicit Latvian “enlightenment project” that had no fixed, stable centre or

<sup>7</sup> The example mentioned by Karl Jirgens is about accepting one’s poverty. Here we cannot talk about a colonial tendency directly, as the original of Stender’s poem – the Müller’s “Was frag ich viel nach Geld und Gut” (“Why do I keep asking for money and goods”) is connected with a motive of German Anacreontic poetry – the modesty ideal of the emerging middle class. It is indicated that the popularity of this poem also among German peasants indicates the popularity of middle class values and not a will to manipulate. See: Bäsken 1937: 103. At the same time one should agree that when translated into a different context, a text can gain also a manipulative potential. A colonial approach in this case asks for a receptive approach.

ideology. But it was as strongly influenced by both the actual discussions of the German-Baltic educated elite about the native non-German inhabitants' social and anthropological features and the network of German enlightenment ideas, of which Latvian literature became a logical part. While the German-speaking popular enlightenment had an important meaning in the agrarian history of Germany, the variant of popular enlightenment in Livonia and Courland gained a far-reaching meaning in the history of the local peasants' national awakening.

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