Abstract: This chapter focuses on Polish travel accounts of India from the 1960s, exploring the relationship between the two countries: one belonging to the Soviet Bloc, or ‘Second World’, and the other, among the newly decolonized countries of the ‘Third World’. The perception of India in the travelogues of Janusz Gołębiowski and Wiesław Górnicki is influenced by various discourses. On the one hand, the Poles often used Orientalist imagination unrecognizable from their Western European counterparts. However, on the other, the Russian School of Orientalism and, later, Soviet Oriental Studies had an important role in shaping Soviet approaches to foreign and cultural policy, which in turn were imposed on other countries in the communist bloc. As a result of these conflicting influences, Polish travellers found themselves in an ambiguous situation: they had to reconsider their own position and rethink their own identity. They had to reconcile the preconceptions on India with the need for a new, socialist way of thinking.

Ryszard Kapuściński, the icon of Polish reporting who started his career in the communist period, recalls how he dreamed of going abroad. The magazine he was working for called him one day, announcing that they are sending him on a foreign mission. Kapuściński expected he would be going to ‘Czechoslovakia’—this was as far as he could imagine travelling abroad. But, to his surprise, in 1956 he was sent to India. Following Jawaharlal Nehru’s visit to Poland, the authorities were eager to intensify relations with the Indian Republic. Kapuściński only briefly mentions his stay in India in his Travels with Herodotus, written in 2004, as he never published the account of his first foreign journey. When confronted with India, he is absolutely overwhelmed:

In time I grew convinced of the depressing hopelessness of what I had undertaken, of the impossibility of knowing and understanding the country in which I found myself. India was so immense. How can one describe something that is—and so it seemed to me—without boundaries or end? […] India was my first encounter with otherness, the discovery of a new world. It was at the same time a great lesson in humility. Yes, the world teaches humility. I returned from this journey embarrassed by my own ignorance, at how poorly read I was. […] I tried to forget India, which signified to me my failure: its enormity and diversity, its poverty and riches, its mystery and incomprehensibility had crushed, stunned, and finally defeated me.¹

Contrary to the Orientalists who studied the Orient and claimed having superior knowledge of the many cultures and religions that this label

encompasses, Kapuściński refrains from writing about India. He knows that he would inevitably fall into a trap of clichés, mental shortcuts, and generalizations. However, several reporters visited India and attempted to describe the country and its culture, as well as their own experience of the subcontinent, in the form of a travel book. Some, like Jerzy Putrament² and Włodzimierz Janiurek,³ were part of, or closely related to the structures of communist power. Others, such as Jan Józef Szczepański ⁴ and Jan Zakrzewski⁵, were critical of the regime, though the censorship would not allow them to express their views openly. Many were journalists or reporters of the mainstream, state-approved dailies, magazines, and news agencies: among them were Jerzy Ros,⁶ Kazimierz Dzewianowski,⁷ Wojciech Giełżyński,⁸ Wojciech Żukowski⁹ as well as Janusz Gołębiowski¹⁰ and Wiesław Górnicki.¹¹ In this article, two travelogues written by authors who both travelled to India in the early 1960s are used as examples: _Posted from Delhi_, by Janusz Gołębiowski, and _A Journey for a Handful of Rice_, by Wiesław Górnicki. Their political position was in theory neutral, since their aim, as journalists, was to present an ‘objective’ picture, though it can be assumed that as employees of state-controlled media they could not travel without the consent of the communist authorities. Since it was only several years after Stalin’s death, the difficulties in obtaining a passport for travel abroad, especially outside the communist bloc, were still considerable. That is why early socialist travel accounts are mostly written by reporters on an official

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