

Time Travel and the Social Imaginary of the Steppe in *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years*

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Abstract

Kirghiz author Chinghiz Aitmatov's novel, *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years*, contains multiple forms of travel that trace the contours of the Sorozek Steppe. Travel imagery radiates from the "meridian" of the railway line, fueling a social construction of the Steppe from myth and folklore. I use recent work on the formation of a social Imaginary (Castoriades) to examine how incomplete past and present images fuse into a collective narrative that yokes the contradiction of the desire to roam, nomadism, with the desire to settle, pastoralism. The longing to live in a nomadic "natural state" on the unspoiled Steppe is apparent in the interplanetary space travel motif, a utopian call to a purer existence. Contrary to the Socialist aesthetic of the Soviet Cultural Revolution, bodies in the novel matter beyond capacity for work in the realms of family life, sexual attraction, and burial customs, which in Islamic tradition claim body and land together. The novel has value for nation-building since it reclaims nomadic myth and a cultural adaptation of Islam, demonstrating the rich remnant of the Steppe's half-lives in the imagination, even under harsh suppression.

Keywords: Aitmatov, Bodies, Diaspora, Islam, Kazakhstan.