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Living Socialism:

An Icelandic Couple and the Fluidity between Paid Work, Voluntary Work, and Leisure

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The Icelandic couple Þóra Vigfúsdóttir and Kristinn E. Andrésson were married from 1934 until Kristinn's death in 1973, their joint story spanning fifty years in the turbulent 20th century.¹ Devoted socialists and friends of the Soviet Union, Þóra Vigfúsdóttir (1897–1980) and Kristinn E. Andrésson (1901–1973) dedicated their adult lives to working for the socialist cause in their native country of Iceland. Their strong belief in socialism defined everything they did, completely blurring the boundaries between work and leisure. Moreover, in spite of abundant proof to the contrary, they believed in the superiority of socialism for their whole lives and remained openly loyal to the Soviet system, even Stalinism.

In many ways, Kristinn and Þóra led privileged lives. They were members of the transnational European creative intelligentsia who traveled widely; corresponded diligently with members of the Icelandic and European cultural elite; had a large and loyal group of friends; and spent most of their time reading, writing, and thinking. They both – at varying times – held paid positions but notably, their working lives always reflected their political views. In addition, their social lives, consisting mostly of voluntary work and leisure time, were so closely connected to their paid work that the boundaries between them were continually unclear, even non-existent. This was only possible because the leitmotif of their lives – their unwavering belief in socialism – provided a connection and blurred the lines between time spent on work and leisure.

This article uses a biographical approach to cast light on the blurred boundaries between work and leisure in the lives of these two Icelandic intellectuals. It argues that their devotion to socialism and to the Soviet Union, i.e. their strong ideological belief, sustained the evident fluidity between paid work, voluntary work, and leisure in the lives of Kristinn and Þóra. While the time Kristinn and Þóra spent on ideological work can be categorized according to the dichotomy of work and leisure, it is important to note, that when Kristinn and Þóra wrote about work (paid and voluntary) and leisure, it was always in relation to their ideological goals. They measured the value of all of their activities (or time spent) in terms of how they succeeded in advancing the socialist cause. In their privilege as intellectuals, they had control over their time (also in most of their paid positions) and in line with their socialist worldview, they »worked on themselves« during their leisure time.² Throughout this article, I emphasize that for the two of them, work was omnipresent as it was engrained in their lives' mission. They do not often differentiate between paid or voluntary work in their own

1 In this paper, I will adhere to the Icelandic tradition of addressing people by first name. It should also be noted, that this paper is a part of a larger project, which focuses on the lives of Kristinn E. Andrésson and Þóra Vigfúsdóttir in much more detail.

2 Vadim Volkov, *The Concept of kul'turnost: Notes on the Stalinist Civilizing Process*, in: Sheila Fitzpatrick (Ed.), *Stalinism: New Directions*, London 2000, pp. 210–230.

writings, but they address the meaning and value of time spent on work in general. When they discuss what we theorize as leisure time, it is usually as a synonym with purposeful restoration, which, as we will see, was an ingrained part of the ideological mission of socialism.

To be sure, it was Þóra and Kristinn's idealism and unshaken conviction that sustained their ability to dedicate their whole lives, both their working lives and their leisure time, to advocating for socialism. Socialist values, however stringent they may seem, were under constant attack in Kristinn and Þóra's lifetime. The article therefore discusses how they devoted their lives to an ideological belief system, which in Kristinn and Þóra's case was as firmly grounded in anti-Americanism as it was in their adherence to Soviet socialism. Throughout their lives, they never wavered in their conviction, even as many of their compatriots and friends changed their minds, for instance during the momentous events of 1956 and later in 1968. Indeed, by dedicating their lives to the socialist cause and the moral and cultural education of Icelandic youth, farmers, and workers, Kristinn's and Þóra's lives were lived in close accordance with Marx's definition of »meaningful work.«³ However, Moscow (and East Berlin) frequently contributed to their goals with direct and indirect funding; allowing Kristinn to earn a living (however unstable) and contributing to the Soviet propaganda and ideology work Kristinn took responsibility for in Iceland. Moreover, as will become clear, the official structure of socialist leisure (or »meaningful leisure«) aimed to confirm in loyal socialists the continued meaning of advocating for the cause. This paper argues that the mental restoration of international socialists was strategic and played an important role in their ongoing support.⁴ Indeed, the socialist propaganda and agitation system anticipated the need to provide for both »meaningful work« and »meaningful leisure« in the lives of its followers, as exemplified in the lives of Kristinn and Þóra.

The Icelandic Context: Ideology and Socialist Intellectuals

During the Second World War, Iceland was occupied by the Allies: first by the British in 1940, then as of 1941, by the US military. The war years were economically prosperous for Iceland and in 1944 Iceland declared independence from German-occupied Denmark. Kristinn was a Member of Parliament for the Socialist Party from 1942 to 1946 and the editor of *Þjóðviljinn*, the socialist newspaper, in 1946/47 and was therefore in the midst of several political storms both during and immediately after the war. Only recently independent from Denmark, postwar Iceland had strong cultural ties to the Nordic countries but the long struggle for independence (dating back to the 19th century) and the allied occupation of Iceland during the Second World War, contributed to a strong sense of patriotism. This patriotism became especially apparent during the early days of the Cold War, when the Icelandic parliament granted the US-American military use of Keflavik airport for transit purposes in 1946 and later, in 1949, when Iceland became a founding member of NATO. Then, in 1951, with the Korean War raging, the United States and Iceland signed a Defense Agreement, which brought American soldiers back on Icelandic ground.⁵

3 Richard J. Arneson, *Meaningful Work and Market Socialism*, in: *Ethics* 97 (1987) 3, pp. 517–545.

4 This builds on Diane Koenker's argument about travel and leisure in the Soviet Union. See her book: *Club Red: Vacation Travel and the Soviet Dream*, Ithaca/NY 2017.

5 Valur Ingimundarson, *Immunizing Against the American Other: Racism, Nationalism, and Gender in US-Icelandic Military Relations During the Cold War*, in: *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6 (2004) 4, pp. 65–88, here p. 65.

Because of all this, Icelandic nationalism manifested itself in part as cultural resistance to American modernity. At the same time both superpowers had launched a full frontal propaganda war, which was noticed throughout the world.⁶ This propaganda war took the form of an actual cultural Cold War in Reykjavík with both sides relying heavily on cultural relations to win the hearts and minds of the Icelandic population.⁷ The financial means, organizational, and administrative structures of cultural relations of the superpowers varied a great deal, yet misinformation and mutual suspicion had both sides believing that they were engaging in an uphill battle in the fight for Icelandic popular opinion.

It is important to note that while efforts to establish and maintain cultural relations in the postwar period relied in many ways on earlier initiatives from the 1930s, the Second World War only strengthened people like Kristinn and Þóra in their belief. The victory of the Allies, especially the war effort of the Soviet Union, was celebrated amongst Icelandic socialists who felt justified in their fight for socialism and viewed the ensuing Cold War as an attack on the Soviet value system. In addition, the Icelandic Socialist Party took part in government from 1944 to 1947 and in the postwar years, supported by close to a fifth of the electorate in its openly pro-Soviet and violently anti-American stance.⁸

After the war, socialists all over the world found new energy advocating for the Soviet peace initiative and Þóra and Kristinn were no exception. In Iceland, the intense but ambivalent relationship with the United States gave local socialists a sense of urgency: in addition to maintaining the peace they had to fight the allure of the American way of life with all their might. Kristinn and Þóra were at the forefront of this ideological war, devoted to showing the Icelandic population that the Soviet modernity was morally superior to its American counterpart. They experienced the Soviet Union and Soviet people first hand: as of the mid-1930s, Kristinn and Þóra traveled regularly to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and they hosted Soviet artists and visitors in their private home in Reykjavík when they visited Iceland. They spent most of their time with likeminded individuals, at home and abroad, indicating their unwavering devotion to the fight for socialism in Iceland and globally. When financial worry was draining Kristinn, Moscow, and sometimes East Berlin, repeatedly stepped in and contributed to his cultural and socialist projects in Iceland. Both granted direct funding, but also provided all-inclusive invitations to health resorts in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to help them both maintain the energy and motivation to advocate for socialism in Iceland.

Paid Work, Voluntary Work, and Leisure in the Life Course of Kristinn and Þóra

Þóra and Kristinn left a large collection of personal sources, including diaries and letters that cast light on their inner lives, thoughts and reflections about their daily goals, interactions with colleagues and friends, and their overall idealism. The sources are rare in the sense that Þóra and Kristinn constantly reflected on global events as well as on local politics and culture.

6 For more on Soviet ideology and propaganda in the postwar years, see Rósa Magnúsdóttir, *Enemy Number One: The United States of America in Soviet Ideology and Propaganda, 1945–1959*, Oxford 2019.

7 See Rósa Magnúsdóttir, *Menningarstríð stórveldanna á Íslandi, 1948–1961*, BA Thesis, University of Iceland, 1999, and *ibid*, *Menningarstríð í uppsiglingu: Stofnun og upphafsár vinafélaga Bandaríkjanna og Sovétríkjanna á Íslandi*, in: *Ný saga 12* (2000), pp. 29–40.

8 See, e.g. Ingimundarson, *Immunizing Against the American Other*.

They describe the Cold War from the frontlines of the battlefield, fighting a propaganda war against the very powerful American presence in the small country of Iceland with the support of Soviet propaganda chiefs. The nature of the sources allows the historian to see instances of reflections on work, rest/leisure, and retirement, and in the case of Þóra and Kristinn, to show the fluidity of these categories when it comes to how they spent their time. It should also be noted that after Kristinn's death, it was Þóra herself who curated and donated their personal papers to the Icelandic National Library, indicating that she was aware of the value they might have for future historians.⁹ There is no indication, however, that they consciously differentiated between the value of paid work, voluntary work, and leisure. Rather, their industriousness in all aspects of their lives is analyzed with regard to the ideological belief that motivated them, and Soviet efforts to sustain their drive. Þóra and Kristinn lived their lives in line with Soviet propaganda at the time, when the construction of the »new Soviet man« introduced the concept of »working on oneself.«¹⁰ In their free time, or leisure time, their efforts to advance their understanding of socialism through reading and writing were therefore entirely in line with Soviet propaganda about how to be a good communist.¹¹

Kristinn and Þóra met in 1933, which is also the year they started their life-long devotion to communism and each other.¹² Kristinn had just returned home from Germany where he had studied Nordic and German Literature. He traveled to Italy in 1928 and was appalled by Italian Fascism; he saw Hitler – cheered on by Goebbels – giving a speech in Berlin in the early 1930s and was equally disgusted by the spectacle.¹³ Soon after returning to Iceland in February 1932, he became chairman of the prewar Icelandic Friends of the Soviet Union Society (*Sovétvinafélagið*), the first of many voluntary positions Kristinn would take on in his lifetime. Two years later, in 1934, he and Þóra got married and traveled to the Soviet Union for the first time.¹⁴ They were completely in awe of what they witnessed there, and they were not alone. Numerous Western intellectuals visited the young Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s to witness the »great experiment« and as Michael David-Fox has said, these tours »must be regarded as one of the most consequential cross-cultural encounters of the twentieth century.«¹⁵

The 1934 visit was certainly consequential for Kristinn and Þóra. Like many intellectuals, Kristinn came home and published a travelogue based on the visit, thereby contributing to a much-valued genre in the propaganda department, i.e. materials written about the Soviet Union from the outsider perspective. Soviet authorities highly appreciated travelogues that provided the Soviet project with legitimacy and international prominence, and from the very beginning, Kristinn was on favorable terms with his Soviet friends.¹⁶ Later, when reflecting

9 In the larger project, the subjectivity of the diaries and letters is discussed in much more detail.

10 See Volkov, *The Concept of kul'turnost*.

11 Þóra and Kristinn identified as communists and therefore, the terms socialist and communists are here used interchangeably.

12 Rósa Magnúsdóttir, Þóra, Kristinn og kommúnisminn: Ævisagan og hið stóra samhengi sögunnar [Þóra, Kristinn, and Communism: Biography and the larger historical context], in: *Skírnir* 187 (2013) 1, pp. 116–140.

13 Kristinn E. Andrésson, *Enginn er eyland: Tímar rauðra penna*, Reykjavík 1971, p. 51.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

15 Michael David-Fox, *The Fellow Travelers Revisited: The »Cultured West« through Soviet Eyes*, in: *The Journal of Modern History* 75 (2003) 2, pp. 300–335.

16 Kristinn's book, *Frá Reykjavík til Odessa* [From Reykjavík to Odessa], was published by the Icelandic Friends of the Soviet Union Society in 1934.

on some of the Soviet Union's most difficult moments internationally, Kristinn would return to the 1934 visit as the basis for his own conviction about the righteousness of the Soviet project: what he saw in 1934 justified all actions Soviet leadership had taken in order to achieve its goals ever since.¹⁷

This strong belief in the Soviet socialist project is also reflected in the paid work, voluntary work, and leisure activities of both Þóra and Kristinn. Þóra trained as a massage therapist in Denmark in the late 1920s and worked as such for a few years in Akureyri and Reykjavík, but she did not work in her profession after she married Kristinn. Earlier, she had received good reviews as an actress but as of the 1930s, she was first and foremost a wife, an activist and a homemaker. However, she also held various small jobs, such as maintaining the women's page of the socialist newspaper, founding and editing a feminist-socialist journal, and translating and writing numerous articles about travelling to socialist countries, literature, fashion, and culture in general. Some of the work she conducted was certainly paid work, but many of her efforts were not; she took them on anyway because she believed they were important to the socialist cause. Þóra also took stints at working part time in her husband's publishing house and bookstore. Equally important, she repeatedly hosted large and small groups of friends, in addition to entertaining delegations from socialist countries and the employees of Kristinn's publishing house. Her compatriots often noted her natural charm and intellect, and it was in large part due to her skills as a hostess that the home of Kristinn and Þóra, at various places in Reykjavík, was renowned for highly intellectual discussions about culture and contemporary events that often went on late into the night.

Kristinn was educated as a literary scholar in Iceland and Germany in the 1920s and the 1930s and wrote several books and hundreds of articles on literature and cultural issues in general. He wore many different hats in his lifetime: he was a politician, teacher, newspaper editor, and publisher. As mentioned before, in his wage-earning working life, he served as a Member of Parliament for the Socialist Party from 1942 to 1946, and editor of the socialist newspaper Þjóðviljinn from 1946 to 1947. Already in 1937 he had become the chief executive officer at one of the leading publishing houses in Iceland, *Mál og menning*, which was officially affiliated with radical and socialist writers and at times received generous financial support from Moscow. He held this position for over thirty years, until he retired in 1970.¹⁸ Without a doubt, Kristinn's main identity was that of a publisher. He used his status in the intellectual community, in Iceland as well as in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, to raise funds and awareness for his various literary and socialist projects. His diaries and letters also show that Kristinn did not have a steady, monthly income, but was paid to the best ability of the publishing house at each point in time, which can be seen as yet another piece of evidence to the ideological incentive behind all this work.

Kristinn was always very active in voluntary work, taking on much responsibility in several cultural organizations. He had been one of the initiators of the Society for Revolutionary Writers in Iceland (*Red Pens*) which was founded in 1933 as well as a small publishing house established in 1934, *Heimskringla*. Both were a result of the Comintern urging Icelandic

17 This is clear in Kristinn's autobiographical book, *Enginn er eyland*, which is written in essay form and focuses mostly on the 1930s.

18 On the funding of Nordic Communist and Socialist Parties, see Morten Thing (ed.), *Guldet fra Moskva: Finansieringen af de nordiske kommunistpartier 1917–1990*, Copenhagen 2001, especially the chapter on Icelandic funding: Jón Ólafsson, *At tjene landet – og partiet: de islandske socialister*, *ibid.*, pp. 187–205.

communists to organize their cultural work¹⁹ and Kristinn was heavily involved in all initiatives from this time, not only in the world of literature and publishing. He also took on the role of chief coordinator of both the 1930s organization, *Friends of the Soviet Union*, and the Cold War Soviet-Icelandic Friendship Society, *MÍR*, established in 1948. Additionally, Þóra and Kristinn were members of several international socialist front organizations and attended meetings and conferences all over the world. For example, Þóra was active in the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and Kristinn participated in the World Peace Council.

These various organizations were described as »public societies« in the Soviet Union but it was common knowledge that they were not independent of the Soviet government. Similarly, even if all the work Kristinn did for these societies was of voluntary nature, it was so closely intertwined with his overall cultural and educational goals in the service of socialism that he considered it a natural consequence to devote his time to these voluntary organizations. Kristinn had control over his daily schedule, which allowed him to spend time on his various voluntary work obligations when needed; and if his publishing house needed to be prioritized, he made sure that it was.

All of the work Kristinn did for these various organizations overlapped with his faith in socialism. As both a scholar and organizer of culture and propaganda related activities in Iceland, Kristinn wrote several reports to the Comintern and later to the *All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries* (VOKS). He also frequented the Soviet Embassy in Iceland to update them directly on the political mood of the country, advocating for stronger cultural relations, or recommending people for travel or study in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. Furthermore, there are lengthy reports on conversations he had with officials in Moscow and East Berlin every time he visited, showing the importance of the cultural work he was doing as well as the encouragement and guidance he received from the relevant authorities.²⁰ On such occasions, for example, he negotiated financial agreements with Soviet officials who contributed to the construction of the building that housed his publishing house and the associated bookstore as well as paving the way for friends and others to visit the Soviet Union as guests of the socialist state, meaning the Soviet state covered the costs for both him and Þóra, if she was with him.²¹

Finally, both Kristinn and Þóra were nature lovers. Taking long walks in nature, either just outside Reykjavík or on their trips abroad, was an important way for them to restore their energy and spend time together. Their leisure time, however, was often spent reflecting on their ideological goals as seen in the fact that their restorative stays at socialist sanatoriums were often planned in relation to Kristinn's work. But they also spent countless hours hiking or in the company of family and friends. If, nonetheless, leisure seems to have played a minor role in their lives, it is because their social networks mostly consisted of likeminded individuals.

Meaningful Work – Meaningful Leisure

In Kristinn's and Þóra's diaries and letters, the overlap between work and leisure is visible in their repeated stays at health resorts in the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic, where they spent up to two months gathering strength after exhausting themselves

19 Hannes Hólmsteinn Gissurarson, *Íslenskir kommúnistar*, Reykjavík 2011, p. 100.

20 See various archives, mainly in Moscow but also in Berlin.

21 Jón Ólafsson, *Kæru félagar: Íslenskir sósíalistar og Sovétríkin, 1920–1960*, Reykjavík 1999.

with work and financial worries over lengthy periods. One such stay, at Schloss Teupitz about 60 km southeast of Berlin, took place in 1960. Very typically, Þóra and Kristinn combined the trip with work, starting out by spending a few days in Copenhagen, meeting people and running errands. From there, in company with Danes and Norwegians, they traveled by train and ferry to Rostock for an organizational meeting regarding the upcoming Baltic Week.²² From Rostock, they caught a car ride to Berlin where they stopped briefly, only to continue to Leipzig to attend the yearly Book Fair. Kristinn wrote in his diary that after some difficulty in finding accommodation, they were given the best hotel, the Astoria, but after that was settled, he went »straight to work.«²³

Kristinn attended as a publisher, editor, and writer. He worked hard to get book contracts and spent most of his time at the book exhibit or in meetings. In a letter to her foster daughter, Halla Hallgrímsdóttir, Þóra wrote that Kristinn had spent all day at the book fair »and felt like he was in a sort of book-paradise.«²⁴ After Leipzig, they went back to Berlin, where Kristinn continued to meet with publishers and representatives of the Ministry of Commerce. Here, Þóra again described their activities in more detail than Kristinn, who focused on the business side of things. She wrote that Kristinn had just as much to see to in Berlin as in Iceland, making sure that books were printed for the publishing house and meeting with people. But her letter also recounts how they took advantage of the cultural life in Berlin, as they attended the theater several times and in general had a lovely time.²⁵

Finally, on March 12, they reached Schloss Teupitz where they were supposed to spend two weeks resting. On that day, Kristinn wrote in his diary that upon arrival, he headed straight to the library to look at all the books available. He had brought several books with him and started out by reading his own books that very first morning before later turning to the depository at the library. Kristinn noted the strict schedule of the day in terms of carefully timed meals and the focus on outdoor activities, but this was not surprising. Socialist tourism was supposed to be both restorative and meaningful. Other studies have shown that even the library books at these health spas were chosen for their appropriateness, i. e. in terms of how representative they were of socialist values and ideology.²⁶ Kristinn and Þóra were nature lovers and as such they were in the habit of taking long walks, which they also did at Schloss Teupitz, but Kristinn likewise wrote about how he had diligently studied Russian history, taking detailed notes about his readings and observations in his diary. Apparently, the library allowed him to catch up on the premodern history of several European countries, »exhausting the available books on the subject in a few days« although he found it conspicuous that the library held no books on Greece. The Soviet campaigns for culturedness in the 1930s had encouraged reading of the literary canon and historical knowledge in order to advance the new Soviet man and woman. Kristinn's detailed account of his time at Schloss Teupitz shows

22 For more on the Baltic Week, which was a response to the West German Kiel Week, see Valur Ingimundarson, Targeting the Periphery: The Role of Iceland in East German Foreign Policy, 1949–89, in: *Cold War History* 1 (2001) 3, pp. 113–40, especially pp. 128–129.

23 The Diary of Kristinn E. Andrésson, National and University Library of Iceland (NULI), Lbs25 NF.

24 Letter from Þóra Vigfúsdóttir to Halla Hallgrímsdóttir, March 26, 1960, Private Archive.

25 Ibid.

26 See Molly Wilkinson Johnson, Review of Die politische Rolle des FDGB-Ferienstes in der DDR: Sozialtourismus im SED-Staat by Thomas Schaufuss, in: *The English Historical Review* 130 (2015) 542, pp. 256–258.

well how he, like a good socialist, »worked on himself« as a part of his mental and physical restoration and was never idle.²⁷

During the stay, Kristinn and Þóra received letters and were visited by friends and colleagues. Translators and publishers sought out Kristinn, and he remained active the whole time they were at Schloss Teupitz, showing how even time reserved for restoration and leisure was optimized for work when appropriate. Their stay was prolonged until April 4, after which they spent three »very busy« days in Berlin before arriving in Moscow on April 7. Kristinn also had a busy schedule in Moscow, meeting with representatives of ministries and public organizations to plan and discuss the work of his publishing house as well as the activities of the Soviet-Icelandic Friendship Society. Þóra ended up sick and spent the majority of their stay in Moscow in a hospital.²⁸

They were back in Copenhagen by the end of April and spent a month there. Copenhagen was like their second home, Þóra had studied there in the 1920s and they had lived in Copenhagen for two years in the late 1940s. As the old Icelandic metropole, Copenhagen was the place where Kristinn often went to conduct business for his publishing house, to meet other intellectuals, and to get some writing done away from the busyness of the everyday life at home. Þóra focused on getting back to health, and visited her foster daughter in Sweden.²⁹ Kristinn, however, focused on his writing and extended his stay in order to finish what he was writing before going home: »where he expects he will not have much time to write.«³⁰ He came home a week after Þóra, who upon return had spent a whole day sorting through the mail and the papers. She was busy the whole week and Kristinn also »had enough to see to« when he finally came home; moreover, many people wanted to visit now they were finally both home.³¹ Kristinn did not finish the writing he set out to do in Copenhagen. He was involved in the official Icelandic committee, tasked with negotiating with the Danish government about returning some of the saga manuscripts home, and ended up having to attend many meetings.³² He still felt the stay had been good for him, »even if he could not complete what he had set out to accomplish.«³³ All in all, they spent about four months away from home in the spring of 1960, with a large part of the trip devoted to rest and meaningful leisure, often overlapping with paid and voluntary work. The way they spoke of their everyday life and routines demonstrates how much they valued industriousness; it was natural for them to have a lot to see to and their travel and stays abroad were always a mix of work and leisure, with the boundaries between the two ever so unclear. Still, traveling abroad offered a respite from Kristinn's and Þóra's everyday lives and they used the time abroad to unwind and recharge.

In a way, Kristinn and Þóra were living the Marxist idea of the right to »meaningful work.« The rationale behind meaningful work was that all citizens in advanced industrial societies, as the American philosopher Richard Arneson put it, would have

27 See Volkov, *The Concept of kul'turnost*.

28 *The Diary of Kristinn E. Andrésson*, NULI, Lbs25 NF.

29 Letter from Þóra Vigfúsdóttir to Halla Hallgrímsdóttir, April 30, 1960, Private Archive.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Letter from Þóra Vigfúsdóttir to Halla Hallgrímsdóttir, June 26, 1960, Private Archive.

32 The repatriation of the Icelandic manuscripts was an ongoing story, originating in the 19th century and culminating with the Danish decision to return some of the manuscripts in 1965.

33 Letter from Þóra Vigfúsdóttir to Halla Hallgrímsdóttir, June 26, 1960, Private Archive.

»a right to employment in which the work for which pay is received is interesting, calling for intelligence and initiative, and in which the worker has considerable freedom to determine how the work is to be done and a genuinely democratic say over the character of the work process and the politics pursued by the employing enterprise.«³⁴

In the Soviet Union, the concept of work was of course, in theory, very clear, as well as its relationship to class and social identity. Work was an obligation, »the foundation of personal worth« and it »ennobled; it was mankind's highest calling.«³⁵ Furthermore, as the historian Diane Koenker has argued, the Soviet system agitated for *meaningful* leisure, which in the Soviet Union applied to both tourist activities and rest (*otdykh*). This meant that the Soviet state also aspired to control its citizens' and visitors' recreational activities. In early Soviet times, »the health spa vacation was the norm,« building on aristocratic habits of spending time away from the cities, where the privileged could restore their energy. As the Soviet project progressed, spa vacations gained »a high degree of purposefulness« and prioritized industrial workers. The goal was »to allow the vacationers to recover their health and energy and return to production stronger than before.«³⁶ In addition to the purposefulness of the spa vacation, socialist rest and restoration advocated for industriousness at all times – Kristinn's account bears witness to the pervasiveness of this narrative.

The Soviet Union understood that in order to maintain the »necessary conditions for productive labor« it would have to include rest and restoration as an important part of the socialist structure.³⁷ The Soviet state strived to »repair« workers, allowing them to restore their strength under the supervision of medical personnel, so that they could continue to work in the factory for another year.³⁸ As members of the creative intelligentsia, Þóra and Kristinn were able to structure their working lives independently and were unrestrained by aspects that every ordinary factory worker would have had to consider, be it inside and outside the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the »restoration« of creative and ideological workers was just as important, as exemplified in their repeated stays at socialist health spas.

Judging from the writings of Þóra and Kristinn they were never idle and they valued hard work. Their time was devoted to one idea, namely socialism, and they spent their whole lives working toward increasing knowledge about the socialist project and socialist culture. If they showed signs of anguish, it was not related to if and how they should divide attention between work and leisure, it was more in terms of whether or not they felt accomplished and productive. For example, in January 1957 Kristinn wrote a letter to Þóra from Copenhagen where he was trying to get some work done:

»The days are passing, and for nothing. I have not even given myself time to see anyone, or to take care of any errands. I have not wanted to, not had the energy to, and not been in the mood to do it. And then I will come home as a beaten dog, embarrassed and ashamed for not having gotten any work done. And how am I supposed to apologize to you, for having spent the days doing nothing? How can I face you, and how will you ever trust me again?«

34 Arneson, *Meaningful Work*, p. 517.

35 Koenker, *Club Red*, p. 12.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 2–4, quotes on p. 3 and p. 4. For more on leisure in the Soviet Union, see f.ex. Katharina Kucher, *Der Gorki-Park. Freizeitkultur im Stalinismus, 1928–1941*, Köln 2008.

37 Koenker, *Club Red*, p. 12.

38 *Ibid.*

He then proceeded by telling Þóra that he would stay a few extra days to see if he would eventually be able to write a bit, hoping that the thinking he was doing would eventually lead to something in writing.³⁹ Kristinn's letter shows several things. It displays the struggle of intellectual work; how he has been isolating himself in order to be productive but has been too mentally exhausted to get »any work done.« Ultimately, it reveals his fear of being perceived as lazy and unworthy of representing the socialist way of life in general.

The type of ideological work they did would most certainly have been impossible without unconditional faith in socialism and vice versa. Communist party leaders in the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic were well aware of this quality of Kristinn E. Andrés-son and supported him and Þóra in every way they could so that they would continue advocating for socialism. Even if Þóra's work for socialism was not always acknowledged publicly, at the end of his life, Kristinn noted how they had always »worked hand in hand, devoted to our common ideals«⁴⁰ and gave her full credit for her part in their joint efforts.

»Although I now retire [...] I am not at all dying or leaving work«

In late 1970, Kristinn decided to stop working. What he meant by leaving work, was to quit the busy and challenging paid work at the publishing house as well as resign from the various voluntary positions he held in cultural organizations – but he was not going to spend his time in idleness. Þóra had been asking Kristinn to retire for a long time. His health had been declining for a while and he finally agreed to let go of his many responsibilities and claimed he wanted to focus on his writing in retirement.⁴¹ Kristinn had a difficult time walking up the stairs to their third floor apartment, and Þóra was tired of the constant bills and demands made of him, especially on behalf of the publishing house. It seems that Kristinn had run the publishing house mainly on passion, solving the financial side continuously, often at the cost of their personal financial security. Kristinn wrote in his diary, that no one knew better than Þóra how difficult his work had been at *Mál og menning*, »how insoluble it had seemed to keep the firm alive, because of the financial issues and the amount of debt, but the strong intention and the ambition to never remit, but to always start a new offensive and find new and new ways when the prospects were at their worst.«⁴²

Kristinn finally followed the advice of Þóra and his doctors but had no intention to sit around doing nothing after he retired. He was going to write. The endless struggles to find undisturbed time and space to write would now finally stop and he carved out an ambitious plan for writing about his two passions: Icelandic literature and communism. Þóra encouraged him, saying that he was »the only one who could cast light on the times we live in, tell the truth about them, otherwise everything that has happened in our time will be misrepresented and falsified.«⁴³ Kristinn did not get to write as much as he wanted, but he published two books before he died in 1973 and his last diaries show that he was diligent about writing and always hard at work during retirement.

39 Letter from Kristinn E. Andrés-son to Þóra Vigfúsdóttir, January 17, 1957, NULI, Lbs25 NF.

40 Letter from Kristinn E. Andrés-son to Ambassador Sergei Astafiev, October 14, 1970, p. 6, NULI, Lbs25 NF (in English).

41 The Diary of Kristinn E. Andrés-son, October 6, 1970, NULI, Lbs25 NF.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

Upon his retirement, Kristinn was awarded the Soviet jubilee medal devoted to the centenary of Vladimir I. Lenin. He wrote a thank you letter (in English) to Sergei Astafiev, the Soviet Ambassador in Iceland, asking him to pass on his gratitude to the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union. In the letter, he took the opportunity »to clear up with you some personal and common problems combined to my lasting friendship with the Soviet Union, my activities and my experiences.«⁴⁴ After going over some business matters with the bookstore and the difficulties with marketing and selling Soviet books in Iceland, Kristinn turned to what he called »personal problems«: »I will not anymore be working as manager of Mál and menning or any other of our enterprises. I have on the advice of doctors, because of illness and old age, to retire from such a hard work.«⁴⁵ In the long letter, he felt a need to go over his most important obligations, and accounted for his working life in the following way:

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»Next year I become seventy years old and I have been manager of Mál og menning since its start 1937 and also of the publishing house Heimskringla since 1933, and the founder and now chairman of our printing work, Hólar, since 1946, and later inspiratory and manager of Vegamót, our new modern building in the centre of Reykjavík since 1958. And now, when I retire at the end of this year, this enterprises possess valuable properties, the printwork together with its buildings [...] big building Vegamót in the centre of Reykjavík, now locating the biggest bookshop in the city.«⁴⁶

It was important to Kristinn to list what he had accomplished in his time as manager of the publishing house. He had worked hard his whole life and even if the ideological war was still ongoing, he had much to show for his efforts. Kristinn had made sure that his protégé succeeded him at the publishing house. He also resigned from all of the various organizations he had volunteered for, some for over thirty years. After many years as one of the most influential members of the intellectual movement, a younger generation, somewhat less politically orthodox had taken charge.

Kristinn also went over some of the more turbulent times in his professional and personal life. For example, the »reactionary« US military presence in Iceland (especially the NATO base in Keflavík) and the political turmoil following »the unveiling of terrible crimes in the Stalin times and the hysterical reaction to it« in 1956, when he managed to »at least safe *Mál og menning* and my authority on the cultural front.« Kristinn must have felt a need to safeguard his legacy, knowing that the younger generation thought him and Þóra too strident in their beliefs. Moreover, Kristinn noted in the letter to Astafiev (which he called »a confession«) that »[i]n some way we sometimes feel as outlaws, and I must say I even feel more at home in the Soviet Union or East Germany among your people and our friends there.«

This was perhaps not too unusual. Kristinn wanted to make sure he was remembered for his contributions to the cause and wanted his Soviet friends to know that he was still loyal and doing well. His reflections on retirement clearly show his attitude towards the value of his working life:

44 Letter from Kristinn E. Andrésson to Ambassador Sergei Astafiev, October 14, 1970, NULL, Lbs25 NF (in English).

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

»Although I now retire from *Mál og menning*, I am not at all dying or leaving work. On the contrary, I, may be, have my most valuable work still to do. As you may be know, I have not only been a publisher, a politician, a communist member of Parliament, the leader of Friendship Societies with the Soviet Union since 1932, secretary of the Peace movement in Iceland and a member of the World Council of Peace, but I have also been a writer, an editor of literary Periodical since 1935, even chief editor of *Thjodviljinn* for two years and author of some few books, f.i. *History of Modern Icelandic Literature*, translated into Russian and Swedish, but my first one was a small travelling booklet with the title: *From Reykjavik to Odessa*, published after my first trip to the Soviet Union in 1934.«⁴⁷

Kristinn expressed his wish that the books he would write in retirement would be published in English, German, and Russian, as he felt that his life's work could be of interest to others. He claimed that he would as of now, »concentrate all [his] energy on this work.«⁴⁸ In his reflections, Kristinn did not differentiate between paid work, voluntary work, or literary writings. It all mattered equally in relation to his ideological mission, which he would now continue during retirement with a focus on writing.

For Kristinn and Þóra, retirement came with failing health and ideological isolation. History has not been kind to such strong believers of the socialist system as Þóra and Kristinn.⁴⁹ Their eloquent writings show how their value system was always unshaken: what others considered fallacy, they saw as their lives' purpose. The encouragement they received from their likeminded friends and acquaintances in socialist circles everywhere they went helped maintain their faith in the socialist system, which again contributed to the ever present overlap of work and leisure in their lives. The trails of their lives show how the Soviet project was navigated, displayed, and interpreted in the small country of Iceland. Furthermore, their joint life story depicts how loyal supporters of the Soviet Union defended Soviet socialism and adapted their propaganda methods in the face of fierce and constant criticism at home. The dramatic turnaround they experienced in interest and access to the Icelandic public in the wake of the 1956 Secret Speech and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, however, did not have an impact on Kristinn's or Þóra's own devotion and beliefs. They adapted their ideological work in Iceland to the changes in Soviet cultural relations that took place in 1958⁵⁰ and made sure that Soviet-Icelandic cultural exchanges continued, even if they had to reduce their ambition and only invite loyal communists to participate in delegations and events.

Kristinn and Þóra passed away in 1973 and 1980 respectively. They never lost their faith in communism, and the incredibly rich nature of the sources they left behind make their story relevant, not only for the cultural and political history of Iceland or for their international intellectual networks, but also for transnational history as such. Kristinn and Þóra had strong

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 David Caute, *The Fellow Travellers: Intellectual Friends of Communism*, New Haven 1988, and Paul Hollander, *Political Pilgrims: Travels of Western Intellectuals to the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba 1928–1978*, Lanham/New York 1990. As members of the Icelandic Socialist Party, Þóra and Kristinn were not fellow-travelers, but openly committed to socialism at every level. David Caute argued that »fellow-travelling involves commitment *at a distance* which is not only geographical but also emotional and intellectual« (p. 3), which certainly does not describe Þóra and Kristinn.

50 The structure of the Soviet organizations involved in cultural relations with foreign countries was changed in 1958 and they were reflected in the national organization of cultural relations. See Magnúsdóttir, *Enemy Number One*, p. 124.

relationships with leading figures in Soviet and European cultural and political life but at the same time they were far removed from the dangers of Stalinism or the daily struggles of Soviet life. This special position makes their diaries and inner conflicts all the more interesting because unlike Soviet citizens, they lived in a democratic society and were exposed to forceful anti-Soviet campaigns in Iceland throughout their lives. Both Kristinn and Þóra devoted their lives to advancing people's understanding of Communism and in light of how much of their time they invested in this project, it is perhaps understandable that they did not renege. It has also been argued that in the absence of religion, Soviet people found meaning and purpose in life through the active participation in clubs and socialist associations' activities.⁵¹ In a way, this could also apply to Þóra and Kristinn, who sought the company of likeminded individuals and were in the forefront of socialist cultural organizations and institutions in Iceland. Their socialist identity was based on Soviet core values, such as purposefulness and industriousness, which throughout their lives defined their time spent on paid and voluntary work, as well as their leisure activities.

51 Gleb Tsipursky, *Meaning and Purpose in a Non-Western Modernity*, in: *International Journal of Existential Psychology and Psychotherapy* 6 (2016) 1, pp. 1–13.