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Provoking Tolerance:
History, Sense of Self, and Difference in Latvia

by

Dace Agnese Dzenovska

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in Charge:

Professor Alexei Yurchak, Co-Chair

Professor Saba Mahmood, Co-Chair

Professor Charles Hirschkind

Professor Gillian Hart

Fall 2009

Provoking Tolerance: History, Sense of Self, and Difference in Latvia

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By Dace Agnese Dzenovska

Abstract

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Dace Agnese Dzenovska

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Alexei Yurchak, Co-Chair

Professor Saba Mahmood, Co-Chair

In this dissertation, I explore how the post-Soviet Latvian state and people are pressured to become European through discourses and practices of tolerance promotion, which have emerged as an integral element of contemporary liberal political culture in Europe. I locate this intervention in the broader context of the “minority problem” through which Eastern European states and peoples have been and continue to be governed by supranational organizations, such as the League of Nations at the beginning of the 20th century and the Council of Europe in the present. My work examines concrete practices of tolerance promotion through which local and international human rights and minority organizations, as well as international monitoring bodies, ask Latvians to reflect upon and remake their *attitudes* and *conduct* in relation to ethnic, racial, sexual or religious difference.

Due to the fact that tolerance promotion initiatives draw legitimacy from the various political treaties and human rights conventions that shape the European present in Latvia, many Latvians exhibit skepticism and resentment towards such initiatives and view them as political and legal injunctions that misrecognize the historical specificity of public and political life in Latvia, especially the way in which the Soviet past bears upon the present. In the view of human rights and minority activists and organizations, the prevalence of narratives of historical injury and emphasis on historical particularity in public and political life in Latvia derive from Latvians’ nationalist sensibilities, which hinder tolerance promotion initiatives and constitute an obstacle on the road to acquiring political and cultural membership in Europe.

In my research, therefore, I focus specifically on how the Latvian historical community is constituted through arguments about tolerance. Rather than explain Latvians’ reluctance to embrace the liberal politics of tolerance as a problem of backward nationalism, I offer a more complex analysis of the historical and political trajectories that produce such a reaction. For example, my research shows that the transnational discourses of tolerance tend to take for granted particular notions of sexual, racial, and ethnic identities, which, in turn, give rise to specific understandings of public and political life. Consequently, Latvians’ skepticism and resentment are largely reactions to the ways in which the discourses and practices of tolerance attempt to remake public and political life. In six chapters, which focus on the politics of injury, minority politics, injurious language, anti-racism, gay and lesbian activism, and the practice of critical reflection, I show that arguments about racism in Latvia are not only about whether there is racism in Latvia or not, but also about how public reflection on racism matters for the collective life of Latvians in the current historical moment; or how arguments about intolerant language are not only about which words are injurious and which are not, but also about the historical conditions that enable the question

of injury to be posed at all; or how arguments about gay and lesbian politics are not only arguments about normative morality, but also about different conceptions of self and associated forms of political engagement. Most importantly, I show that arguments about the ways in which Latvians should relate to ethnic, racial, or sexual identities are profoundly shaped by concerns that the injunction to publicly reflect on the problem of intolerance misrecognizes the demands that the recent and injurious Soviet past places upon the present.

The dissertation is based on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted between 2005 and 2008 on the implementation of the European Union funded National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance, which was launched in 2004. My primary research object was the practices through which the problem of intolerance was introduced, addressed, and contested as a matter of public reflection and conduct. My field site was therefore constituted, on the one hand, by the activities of a network of government institutions and human rights and minority organizations that aimed to address problems such as racism, homophobia, and intolerant speech, and, on the other hand, by ordinary Latvians' responses and reflections on these issues.

While my ethnographic research focused on the discourses and practices of tolerance that have emerged in the Latvian public sphere during the last seven years, my work is not primarily aimed at a critical examination of tolerance as a particular kind of political rationality. Rather, I am interested in *arguments* about tolerance that unfold in a specific historical conjuncture in Latvia at the intersection of the Soviet past and the European present. Moreover, I am interested in the kind of *political subjects* and relations between them that are constituted through arguments about tolerance and what they tell us not only about the post-Soviet Latvian present, but also about the European present more generally. To summarize, in analyzing the discourses and practices of tolerance, my aim is thus threefold: (1) to trace how the historical community of Latvians is constituted through arguments about tolerance; (2) to show that this historical community of Latvians cannot simply be characterized as animated by deeply rooted nationalism, but is rather an effect of political subjectivation that unfolds at the intersection of imperial, colonial, and communist trajectories; and (3) to show how the historical specificity of public and political life in Latvia illuminates the possibilities and limitations of particular analytical frameworks, such as that of nationalism, as well as of liberal political culture in Europe.

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Introduction: Liberal Politics of Tolerance and the Problem of Nationalism

In this dissertation, I explore how the post-Soviet Latvian state and people are pressured to become European through discourses and practices of tolerance promotion, which have emerged as an integral element of contemporary liberal political culture in Europe. I locate this intervention in the broader context of the “minority problem” through which Eastern European states and peoples have been and continue to be governed by supranational organizations, such as the League of Nations at the beginning of the 20th century and the Council of Europe in the present. My work examines concrete practices of tolerance promotion through which local and international human rights and minority organizations, as well as international monitoring bodies, ask that Latvians reflect upon their *attitudes* and *conduct* in relation to ethnic, racial, sexual or religious difference.

Due to the fact that tolerance promotion initiatives draw legitimacy from the various political treaties and human rights conventions that shape the European present in Latvia, many Latvians exhibit skepticism and resentment towards such initiatives and view them as political and legal injunctions that misrecognize the historical specificity of public and political life in Latvia, especially the way in which the Soviet past bears upon the present. In the view of human rights and minority activists and organizations, the prevalence of narratives of historical injury and emphasis on historical particularity in public and political life in Latvia derive from Latvians’ nationalist sensibilities, which hinder tolerance promotion initiatives and constitute an obstacle on the road to acquiring political and cultural membership in Europe.

Such an articulation between Latvian nationalism and the problem of intolerance is related to the tension constitutive of the contemporary Latvian nation-state—namely, a tension between an explicit commitment to enabling the flourishing of the Latvian *tauta* (people or *Volk*) in the aftermath of Soviet rule and adherence to liberal democratic principles, which include the duty to protect and enable individual and minority rights and freedoms. As a result of the post-Soviet Latvian state’s strong emphasis on mitigating, if not reversing, the effects of Soviet rule—such as the domination of the Russian language in the public and political life of Soviet Latvia—post-Soviet state-building has privileged the state’s commitment to ensuring the flourishing of the Latvian *tauta*. For example, the Latvian language was declared the official state language in 1989. Thereafter, all public servants, as well as select private sector employees, were required to speak Latvian (see Chapter 3). Since most of the Russian-speaking Soviet era newcomers did not speak Latvian, Latvians came to dominate in public office and state administration. Moreover, entities such as “public space” and “society in general” have become symbolically and materially Latvian. It is not surprising, therefore, that demands to publicly reflect on the problem of intolerance which are addressed to the general public interpellate Latvians in particular and that Latvians often understand such demands as suggestions that the Latvian *tauta* harbors the vice of intolerance.

In my research, therefore, I focus specifically on how the Latvian historical community is constituted through arguments about tolerance. Rather than explain Latvians’ reluctance to embrace the liberal politics of tolerance as a problem of backward nationalism, I offer a more complex analysis of the historical and political trajectories that produce such a reaction. For example, my research shows that the transnational discourses of tolerance tend to take for granted particular notions of sexual, racial, and ethnic identities, which, in turn, give rise to specific understandings of public and political life. Consequently, Latvians’ skepticism and resentment are largely reactions to the ways in which the discourses and practices of tolerance attempt to remake public and political life. In six chapters, which focus on the politics of injury, minority politics, injurious language, anti-racism, gay and lesbian

activism, and the practice of critical reflection, I show that arguments about racism in Latvia are not only about whether there is racism in Latvia or not, but also about how public reflection on racism matters for the collective life of Latvians in the current historical moment; or how arguments about intolerant language are not only about which words are injurious and which are not, but also about the historical conditions that enable the question of injury to be posed at all; or how arguments about gay and lesbian politics are not only arguments about normative morality, but also about different conceptions of self and associated forms of political engagement. Most importantly, I show that arguments about the ways in which Latvians should relate to ethnic, racial, or sexual identities are profoundly shaped by concerns that the injunction to publicly reflect on the problem of intolerance misrecognizes the demands that the recent and injurious Soviet past places upon the present.

The dissertation is based on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted between 2005 and 2008 on the implementation of the European Union funded National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance, which was launched in 2004. My primary research object was the practices through which the problem of intolerance was introduced, addressed, and contested as a matter of public reflection and conduct. My field site was therefore constituted, on the one hand, by the activities of a network of government institutions and human rights and minority organizations that aimed to address problems such as racism, homophobia, and intolerant speech, and, on the other hand, by ordinary Latvians' responses and reflections on these issues.

This work does not comfortably fold into a single area of expertise, such as, for example, an inquiry of postsocialism. This is so because, despite constituting the immediate past, the legacy of socialism does not exhaust or determine the ways in which the past bears upon public and political life in the present. Latvia's public and political life is also shaped by different—that is, non-Soviet—historical trajectories. Soviet socialist rule in Latvia lasted for about 50 years from 1945 until 1991, with the World War II period characterized by multiple occupations by Soviet and German armies. Prior to that, Latvia was an independent nation-state from 1918 until 1940, with the last 6 years of independence characterized by the authoritarian nationalist rule of Kārlis Ulmanis. Prior to 1918, when Latvia became a nation-state due to historical contingency rather than a concerted effort at political self-determination, the various lands and peoples that made up the Latvian state had been provinces of the Russian Empire. While political rule was under the tsar, since the 13th century Livonian crusades, Baltic Germans continued to dominate the region economically and culturally. As I will show in the dissertation, all these historical trajectories intersect in moments when the past comes to bear upon the present, thus, for example, enabling Latvians to claim victimhood at the hands of various political regimes, while simultaneously asserting Europeaness as civilizational superiority in relation to Soviet-era Russian-speaking residents of Latvia (See Chapter 1). It becomes difficult, therefore, to position an inquiry of contemporary public and political life in Latvia as solely an inquiry of postsocialism. Rather, it is an inquiry of collective life shaped by the intersection of imperial, nationalist, socialist, and liberal trajectories.¹

In the remainder of this Introduction, I trace the historical context for the emergence of the problem of intolerance as an important obstacle to the project of cultivating Europeaness in post-Soviet Latvia, as well as illustrate the ways in which relating to racial, ethnic, and sexual difference came to be seen as a question of tolerance. I also consider the analytical and political merits of the language of nationalism for engaging with the discourses

¹ Bruce Grant's (2009) work on the Caucasus constitutes an excellent example of historical anthropology that extends beyond an inquiry of socialism and considers imperial relations of domination that preceded it.

and practices of tolerance and argue that, as a result of the political life of the “problem of nationalism” in Eastern Europe, a reliance on the analytical frame of nationalism may hinder rather than aid inquiry. The project of rethinking the analytics and politics of nationalism remains central to my engagement with contemporary public and political life in Latvia. I conclude by analytically and politically locating my work in relation to a critical inquiry of tolerance as a central element of liberal political rule.

A National State with a Minority Problem

In 1991, after collapse of the Soviet Union, Latvia re-entered the international arena as a national state—that is, as a state formed for the purpose of political self-determination of a particular national group.² Moreover, Latvia re-entered the international arena as a national state with a unique minority problem due to the large percentage of Russian-speaking residents (about 30% at the time of independence) that, as David Laitin (1998) remarks, were “beached” once the borders of their country—the former Soviet Union—receded.³

The minority problem emerged as both a legacy of Soviet rule, and also as a product of the history and political logic of nation-state formation in Eastern Europe. The minority problem was a legacy of Soviet rule insofar as the defining feature of Soviet rule in Latvia was a substantial alteration of the make-up of the population as a result of large-scale population transfers, which entailed the deportation of Latvians and other ethnic groups and an in-migration of significant numbers of predominantly Russian-speaking Soviet citizens of various ethnic backgrounds. The two population groups that were subsequently solidified—namely, Latvians as the titular nationality and non-Latvians as a Russian-speaking Soviet people—emerged in the post-Soviet period as groups with profoundly different historically generated understandings of self and therefore diverging ethics and politics. The minority problem was also a product of the political logic and history of nation-state formation insofar as obtaining political independence and joining the international community of nation-states entailed dividing the population along a majority / minority distinction in lieu of the distinction between a generic Soviet people and particular nationalities prevalent during the Soviet period (see Chapter 3). Thus, similar to most other Eastern European states—though for different historical reasons and with regard to different populations—the minority problem became fundamentally constitutive of the renewed Latvian state.

The large Russian-speaking population that resided in Latvia as a result of the Soviet occupation of the interwar Latvian state meant that the renewed state was faced with the challenge of defining the juridical status of this segment of the population. Despite the promise of the so-called zero-citizenship option put forth by Latvian politicians during the

² Drawing on Soviet terminology, I use the term “national” rather than “ethnic.” Within Soviet and post-Soviet usage, the term “national” implies the historically formed sense of collective life of an ethnos supported by an institutional framework, such as educational institutions and so forth. In contrast, the term “ethnic” could be used to describe a group which may or may not think of itself as a collective subject (Hirsch 2005).

³ I use the term “Russian-speaking” to refer to residents of Latvia whose primary language of communication is Russian, though they may be of various ethnic backgrounds. This term is on occasion contested by Latvians on the grounds that they too are Russian-speaking and that therefore the term is confusing. However, it is preferred by those who emphasize the primacy of language as an important element of self-identification (Laitin 1998). This group is quite varied, however, in how those identified by it might relate to the notion of the national state and themselves as either national or non-national beings.

independence struggles of the late 1980s, whereby citizenship would be granted to all residents residing in the territory of Latvia at the time of independence, Latvian politicians were weary to follow through with the promise once political independence was achieved for fear that the loyalties of Soviet-era Russian-speaking incomers ultimately lay elsewhere. The political leaders of the late 1980s and early 1990s thus chose to correct the injustice of Soviet occupation by juridically restoring the prewar Latvian state (1918-1940) rather than conceiving of the post-Soviet Latvian state as a new entity. This meant that the post-Soviet government in Latvia was faced with the challenge of building a nation-state by reconciling two inherited trajectories of continuity: that of the pre-war Latvian state, which mostly manifested itself in juridical measures and nationalist discourses, and that of the Soviet state, which manifested itself in population make-up, socio-economic structures, administrative practices, and the occasional piece of legislation. For example, one official of the Latvian Border Guard told me that the Law on Borders of the renewed state was essentially a translated version of the equivalent Soviet law. Consequently, until not too long ago, Latvia was one of the few states in Europe, if not the only one, that practiced emigration control (that is, checking personal documents upon exit), as well as immigration control.⁴ The new Latvian state, therefore, was quite literally an amalgamation of the pre-Soviet and Soviet past and the European present.

The restoration of the pre-World War II body politic meant that the new body of citizenry was constituted from those who could establish a direct or descent-based relationship to the interwar body of citizenry, which consisted of various ethnic groups, including Russians who resided in Latvia prior to the Soviet occupation. The multiethnic make-up of the pre-Soviet body of citizenry derived from the fact that the first independent Latvian state granted citizenship to all those residents of the Russian Empire who had resided in the territory of Latvia prior to World War I.⁵ The division between citizens and non-citizens instituted by the post-Soviet Latvian state, thus, does not map onto specific ethnic groups. Moreover, as I will illustrate in Chapter 3, even the line between citizens and non-citizens becomes blurry upon a closer look at contemporary minority politics. Nevertheless, as a result of the post-Soviet Latvian state's citizenship policy, about 329,000 of Latvia's current residents (out of 2.4 million) are still neither citizens of Latvia nor of any other state.⁶ They are, however, tied to the Latvian state through the political institution of non-citizenship, which emerged as a compromise in the early 1990s between variously oriented political forces and international organizations.⁷

⁴ See also Chapter 3 for continuities with regard to minority politics.

⁵ According to Christian Joppke's discussion of ethnicizing and de-ethnicizing orientations of institutions of citizenship, the citizenship policies of the first Latvian state can be thought of as de-ethnicizing. Joppke defines de-ethnicization as follows: "the process of facilitating access to citizenship, either by opening at the margins in terms of liberal naturalization procedures, or through adding *jus soli* elements to the modern main road of birth attributed citizenship *jure sanguinis*. Through both measures the state opens up its membership to newcomers, and breaks through the closed circuit of exclusively filiation-based membership that constitutes "ethnic" citizenship in the narrow sense" (2006: 69). According to such criteria, Latvia's body of citizenship was initially non-ethnic, even as the state posited itself as a national state established for the purpose of enabling the flourishing of the Latvian *tauta*. Consequently, the body of citizenry restored in the post-Soviet period was also not strictly ethnic.

⁶ Since the beginning of the naturalization process, about 150,000 people have obtained Latvian citizenship either through naturalization or other means, such as the registration of children born after 1999 or young people who have graduated from a Latvian language school (<http://www.np.gov.lv/index.php?id=440&top=440>).

⁷ Ruta Marjaša, personal communication 2008; Leo Dribins, personal communication, 2005.

The political institution of non-citizenship posits Latvia's non-citizens as "candidates for citizenship" much like the European Union designated Latvia and other Eastern European states as "candidates for membership" following the collapse of Eastern European and Soviet socialism. Latvia's non-citizens are thus folded into the state's protective and regulative apparatus, yet are required to meet a set of criteria and undergo naturalization in order to become full members of the polity. Distinct from resident aliens whose stay in Latvia is temporary, resident non-citizens have a right to permanent residence and avail to the same social and economic rights and protections as citizens, including consular protection. At the moment, the most contested juridical difference between citizens and non-citizens pertains to the latter's inability to vote in local elections, though others, such as inability to occupy certain civil service positions that have to do with state security and to join the military, also exist. The difference in voting rights is thought of as especially unfair since citizens of other European Union member states, many of whom reside in Latvia for significantly shorter periods of time than most Russian-speaking resident non-citizens, are entitled to partake in local elections if they register as residents of Latvia three months prior to the election.

Naturalization requirements in Latvia do not differ much from those of other countries—individuals are required to fulfill a residency requirement (which no longer applies to those who were residents of Latvia prior to 1991, as well as to those born in Latvia), to express desire to become members of the polity by applying for citizenship, to pay a state tax, and to pass an exam which tests their Latvian language skills, knowledge of the national anthem, as well as of history and the Constitution.⁸ What introduces a difference, however, is the perceived injustice of the requirement to naturalize among people who have lived in what is now the territory of Latvia for decades or have been born in it prior to 1991 and thus do not have any real ties with other states. It is precisely this requirement to ask for political citizenship in conditions where many feel that they have been loyal social and economic citizens of the place in which they live or were born in—regardless of the nature of the state that reigns over it—that contributes to resentment among many Russian speaking-residents who could apply for citizenship, as well as pass the exams, but choose not to do so. Many feel profoundly offended due to the state's retreat on the initial promise of citizenship

⁸ Joppke makes the important point that citizenship laws do not necessarily reflect the particular state's conception of the nation, because those who work them out copy each other more than anything else. Thus, for example, Prussia's introduction of "sanguinis" coupled with a naturalization procedure were copied from France and further adapted across Europe (Weil in Joppke 2006: 67). Also, while the language and history exam are considered to be fair, it is also the case that many current non-citizens are elderly and simply cannot learn enough Latvian to pass the exam. Currently all those over 65 are exempt from the written part of the Latvian language exam, but they still have to pass the oral exam, as well as the exam in history and the constitution. Several human rights organizations, including the UN, have recently suggested that the elderly should be exempted from all exams. And yet, it is, of course, precisely this demographic that constitutes the greatest threat to the Latvian state and is the most resented by the Latvian *tauta*. They are the ones who have lived in Latvia for 40 plus years often without learning a word of Latvian and therefore embody the Soviet state's Russification policy. Their current resentment and anger is especially dangerous, given that, upon acquiring citizenship, they are expected to vote for reactionary communist political forces. Other exemptions include: persons who have acquired basic education in Latvia who are exempt from the Latvian language exam; students who have passed the centralized Latvian language exam as part of their graduation requirements, who are exempt from the Latvian language exam for two years. Children who have acquired full education in Latvian can simply register citizenship without undergoing the full naturalization procedure. Children born in Latvia after 21 August 1991 to non-citizen parents can be registered as Latvian citizens upon request of their parents. Once they reach the age of 15, they have to repeat this procedure, as well as demonstrate their Latvian language skills (www.np.gov.lv)

that was to be granted to all residents residing in the territory of Latvia at the time of independence. And rightly so, given that the promise itself is narrated as a tactical move by some of the political players of the day. For example, one of the former activists of the Popular Front—a moderate political force central to the independence movement—provided the following narrative:⁹

Theoretically, Latvians had the possibility to honestly fight for their independence with arms in their hands. And this would have led to bloodshed. The other option seemed more meaningful—to use legal means in order to enter the government structures at that time. This option required votes—at that time, all of Latvia’s residents voted. And we were consciously saying that our goal was the so-called zero-option. Yes, these were conscious lies, which helped to avoid human casualties (Panteļevs in Silova 2006: 57).¹⁰

The problem of minority rights and protections, especially the problem of non-citizenship, became a central issue in Latvia’s membership negotiations with various European and United Nations structures, such as the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and, most importantly, the European Union.¹¹ The monitoring reports issued by international and supranational governmental organizations and human rights watchdog organizations that began to proliferate shortly after independence posited the minority and citizenship problem as one of the central political challenges to be resolved if Latvia wanted to become a full member of the European political community.¹² The reports did not, however, challenge the Latvian state’s claim that the institution of non-citizenship was necessary in order to correct the injustice of Soviet occupation and the effects of Soviet rule, and that it was not a violation of human rights, because all those who were not automatically granted citizenship could naturalize in accordance with a set of established criteria. Early reports criticized so-called naturalization windows, which were part of the

⁹ The Popular Front was a political movement that emerged during the independence struggles of the late 1980s. It united most of Latvia’s intellectual and political elites and was considered a moderate political force which was willing to integrate some institutions of the Soviet past into the independent Latvia state. The Citizens’ Committee, on the other hand, was a more radical nationalist movement which demanded a radical break with the Soviet past. Both movements supported restoration of citizenship to the interwar body of citizenry and their descendants, however, it was the Citizens’ Committee that refused to grant citizenship to Soviet-era immigrants. The resulting political institution of non-citizenship and the naturalization regulations were a compromise between these two political forces (Budryte 2005: 103).

¹⁰ It is interesting to note here that an automatic granting of citizenship to persons born or residing in a particular state is not necessarily always perceived as a good worth receiving by the new citizens, especially if their relationship with the state is fraught. For example, Roger Brubaker describes how second-generation Algerian “immigrants” were surprised and appalled to find out that they were deemed French when they applied for residence permits in France upon reaching the age of 16. The Algerian government too considered such a move to be “a neocolonial affront to Algerian sovereignty” (Brubaker 2004: 143).

¹¹ See European Union Parliamentary debates on the question of voting rights for Latvia’s non-citizens in local elections, February 3, 2009 (<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+CRE+20090203+ITEM-015+DOC+XML+V0//EN>)

¹² For example, Agenda 2000—Commission Opinion on Latvia’s Application for Membership of the European Union (European Commission 1997), Latvia’s Contribution to the Regular Report from the Commission on Latvia’s Progress Towards Accession (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1999), European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance: Report on Latvia 1999, and many more.

initial Law on Citizenship adopted in 1994 and which stipulated that the non-citizen population could qualify for naturalization in gradual segments devised in accordance with the candidate's age (Zepa 2004). As a result of international and domestic pressure, naturalization windows were removed following a national referendum held in 1998. Thereafter, the reports urged the Government of Latvia to increase the rate of naturalization and to facilitate integration of Latvia's Russian-speaking residents into Latvian society through various measures, such as Latvian language training.

It should be noted that political oversight of minority politics by supranational institutions was not new for Latvia. During the interwar period between 1919 and 1939, when new Eastern European states were carved out of collapsing empires, these states came to be known as minority states with minority populations and were placed in—or pushed into, as some would argue—a supervisory relationship with the League of Nations which, incidentally, also oversaw colonial mandate relationships between European and African states or territories (Weitz 2008). Through a series of interconnected policies and figures prominent in world politics at the time—such as Otto von Bismarck's organization of the 1885 Berlin West Africa Conference and the 1878 Berlin Congress, the Woodrow Wilson 1917 Commission of Inquiry, and the 1919 Paris Peace Conference—a number of Eastern European and African states and peoples were placed in supervisory or tutelage relationships with what has come to be known as the West (Weitz 2008:1316).

When such reporting and monitoring activities resumed in new forms after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Latvians expressed resentment towards the zealous overseers—such as the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities, Max van der Stoel and the President of the Council of Europe's Senate Committee for Human Rights, Religion, and Minorities György Frunda, who constituted themselves as liberals par excellence by subjecting Eastern Europe to close scrutiny while not being able to do the same to Western Europe (Mežs 2005, Cālīte 2005).¹³ Minority and citizenship questions also became the defining feature of Latvia in the eyes of Western scholars and the general Western public. Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, it was almost certain that if one were to meet a Western scholar or journalist in Latvia, they had arrived in hopes of deciphering the question of minority rights. Indeed, it is overwhelmingly the case that many, if not most, Western scholars—that is scholars associated with Euro-American educational establishments—who write about Latvia write about some aspect of minority rights (e.g. Waitt 2005, Gaelbreth 2006, Papagianni 2003, Budryte 2005, Silova 2006, Aasland and Flotten 2001, Shafir 1995, Chinn and Kaiser 1996).¹⁴ While to some extent this scholarly

¹³ During his tenure, the most patriotic of his Latvian critics named Max van der Stoel “Angel of Death,” whereas György Frunda has come to be known as “the Transylvanian Vampire.” The latter's lack of knowledge and understanding of the historical conditions that have shaped the minority problem in Latvia was loudly criticized from all ends of the political spectrum during his visit to Latvia in 2005 (Streips 2005).

¹⁴ These are just some examples of scholarly literature on the topic of minority rights and nation-building or nationalism. During the last several years, as I attended international conferences with panels on the Baltic or post-Soviet states, most of the papers I heard on Latvia focused on some aspect of minority rights, if not on the danger of nationalism. Thus, one such paper linked the problem of homophobia to Latvian nationalism, despite the author's stated awareness that attitudes towards gays and lesbians did not differ much within the Latvian and Russian-speaking segments of the population (see Chapter 5 for a more elaborate discussion). An author of a paper on minority integration in Latvia who served as a discussant for my paper was so immersed in the project of furthering minority rights that she could not make a distinction between my assertion that my object of analysis is the *claim* that Latvians lack a critical attitude towards themselves from the claim itself.

interest in the minority question reflects challenges of the historical moment, it also constitutes Latvia as overdetermined by it.

The Problem of Intolerance

The post-Soviet period in Latvia was thus characterized by an almost immediate reorientation towards the future horizon of Europe. While there were critical voices that questioned the replacement of one center in Moscow with another in Brussels, most residents of Latvia, especially Latvians, considered joining the European political and economic structures necessary for ensuring the flourishing of Latvia as an independent state in conditions where relations with Russia remained strained as a result of disputes over the Eastern border, diverging interpretations of history, and the status of the Russian-speaking population. In September 1991, Latvia applied for membership in the Council of Europe and became a member in 1995 after fulfilling country specific membership requirements, such as adopting the Citizenship Law in 1994 and expressing an intent to ratify the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman and Degrading Treatment and Punishment.¹⁵ In 1995, Latvia officially submitted its application for membership in the European Union, though it had been considered a “candidate-state” and included in the pre-accession process immediately following independence. In 1993, the European Union member states agreed on the accession criteria for new candidate states (the Copenhagen Criteria). The pre-accession and accession negotiations entailed a lengthy process of the alignment of legislation and political and juridical institutions. Protection of human rights and minorities remained central among the political accession criteria. The signing and ratification of documents such as the European Convention for Human Rights (ratified in 1997) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ratified in 2005) were seen as indicators of Latvia’s willingness and readiness to acquire political membership in Europe.

However, membership in Europe was not only about the alignment of legislation and institutions, but also about the alignment of attitudes and conduct. As local and international human rights activists labored to get Latvia’s politicians to ratify and implement various European conventions and European Union directives, they became increasingly convinced that the process was hindered by problematic attitudes and sensibilities widespread among the politicians as well as within the general population itself. As several human rights activists conveyed to me, even if conventions were ratified, the enforcement of human rights—such as reporting on and prosecuting discrimination—was hindered by a lack of awareness and widespread prejudice. Thus, when reporting on human rights enforcement in Latvia, some non-governmental organizations—such as the Latvian Center for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies—relied on quotes of problematic statements made by politicians, civil servants, and journalists to demonstrate a climate of intolerance (LCESC 1999, 2000). Human rights activists often debated whether this climate of intolerance was the product of politicians’ incompetence, because, having grown up in the Soviet Union, they did not know any better, or whether they knew their electorate all too well and thus the problem was located in the attitudes of the general public. Most often than not, the answer was assumed to lie somewhere in the middle.

It was through the practices of reporting on and debating the obstacles for smooth implementation of international human rights treaties and directives, as well as due to

¹⁵ See Opinion 183 (1995) on the application by Latvia for membership of the Council of Europe. Available on <http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/AdoptedText/ta95/EOP1183.HTM>

personal and professional commitments of concrete human rights activists, that the problem of intolerance first emerged as a matter of public and political concern in Latvia. During the course of my fieldwork, I was frequently reminded that it was Nils Muižnieks, then the Special Tasks Minister for the Integration of Society, who initiated the development of the National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance and who almost single-handedly obtained its approval in the Cabinet of Ministers in 2004. Muižnieks, who was born in the United States to Latvian parents and holds a doctoral degree in political science from the University of California, Berkeley, himself told me that the discourse of tolerance—as a framework within which to address racial, ethnic, or religious strife—emerged in Latvia in the mid-1990s when he was still Director of the Latvian Center for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies—a non-governmental organization that worked to promote and monitor human rights related issues in Latvia. The Latvian Center for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies was a member of several international human rights networks and frequently prepared reports on the situation in Latvia for European human rights monitoring institutions. Back then, in the mid-1990s, they were writing reports for the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights and its standardized report required that they prepare a section on the problem of intolerance.¹⁶ “The category was ready,” as Muižnieks put it.

In 2000, the language of tolerance had taken hold in Europe as nation-states and international organizations tried to grapple with the aftermath of ethnic conflicts in the Balkans and the increasingly negative attitudes towards immigrants from North Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Eastern Europe. In fact, in Europe the term “immigrant” became a marker for undesirable difference in general, insofar as many of the people deemed to belong to the immigrant population were actually citizens of the European countries in which they resided.

At that time, European governments and human rights organizations were also preparing for the upcoming anti-racism conference in Durban, South Africa, which took place in 2001. Muižnieks became actively involved in preparations for the Durban conference. It was then that he realized that the problem of intolerance, thus articulated, opened possibilities for institutional support at the European level and presented funding opportunities for addressing the problems of racism and xenophobia. He thus began to address the problems of racism and xenophobia that his Center for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies had identified in Latvia in the language of tolerance. As a Minister, he proceeded to put the problem of intolerance on the policy agenda of the Latvian government and to establish an institutional framework for tackling these issues. He put together a working group which consisted of human rights experts and representatives of non-governmental organizations and government institutions. This group came to form the core of what I refer in this dissertation as *tolerance activists*. The working group drew on policies that were already operational elsewhere in Europe and developed what is now known as the National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance (thereafter the Program) (ĪUMSILS 2004). In subsequent years, the working group members and their organizations congealed into a network of tolerance activists who worked within the framework of the Program, but also expanded their activities beyond its confines.

Though significant international effort has gone into its standardization, intolerance as an attitude—*attieksme* or a way of relating to difference—is difficult to define, capture, and measure. Thus, as one of its first actions, the National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance—a policy framework for developing and implementing various projects aimed at the promotion of tolerance—drew on a long list of United Nations and European Union

¹⁶ The International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights was a human rights watchdog organization that was forced to file bankruptcy and close down due to financial fraud committed by its former financial manager. See: <http://www.ihf-hr.org/>

declarations and conventions to convince the Latvian government and the public that the problem of intolerance merited attention.¹⁷ In addition to invoking a long line of international documents, the Program claims that people in Latvia harbor negative attitudes towards difference. The Program introduces the problem of intolerance as potentially affecting all residents of Latvia, but as especially urgent in the form of prejudice against ethnic and religious minorities. The research methodology used for defining, assessing, addressing, and monitoring the problem of intolerance—a combination of literature reviews, focus group discussions, media analysis, and sociological opinion surveys—draws heavily on established European academic and policy research traditions (BSZI 2004, Kruks and Šulmane 2005, Koņkova-Krūmiņa and Tēraudkalns 2007). To substantiate the argument that intolerance is a problem in Latvia, the document uses survey data from 1999 which shows that 27.2% of Latvia’s residents do not want to live next door to the Roma, 14.5% do not wish to live next door to Muslims, and 5.2% would not want to be neighbors with Jews (ĪUMSILS 2004).

After the launch of the Program, such surveys were conducted regularly. For example, research conducted by the Baltic Social Studies Institute in 2004 indicated that the situation had worsened—now 45% of Latvians and 41% of non-Latvians residing in Latvia considered Muslims to be undesirable neighbors (this in conditions where the Muslim population in Latvia is miniscule), while 38% and 37% respectively did not want to live next door to sexual minorities (BSZI 2004). It is noteworthy that this and similar sociological surveys consistently divide their respondents into Latvians and non-Latvians, thus responding to and reinforcing the assumption that these are two distinct historically formed communities with different sensibilities and orientations. However, since this data set indicates that the dispositions of Latvians and non-Latvians towards imagined others do not differ much, it is especially important to examine how the problem of intolerance comes to be articulated with the problem of Latvian nationalism (I return to this shortly).

The National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance also suggests that negative attitudes may translate into discriminatory practices or neglect of discrimination, and supports this argument by quoting more survey data showing that 24% of Latvia’s residents consider that they have experienced discrimination during the last three-years (ĪUMSILS 2004). The statistical data made available by the Ombudsman’s Office and the Security Police seem to suggest that discriminatory practices and hate crimes are not widespread in Latvia; however, tolerance activists argue, and my research corroborates, that much remains underreported and that “visible minorities”—that is persons who are visually different from the predominantly white population, such as the Roma, Africans, and so forth—feel increasingly unsafe in Latvian public space (Latvijas Republikas Tiesībsargs 2007, European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance 2008). During a European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) roundtable discussion on racism and intolerance in Latvia in May 2008, the General Prosecutor of the Republic of Latvia reported that the number of cases initiated under Paragraph 78 of the Criminal Code (incitement to national and racial hatred) has increased in the last couple of years compared to 2005 and before, though the numbers remain small. He also reported that there have been fewer cases which the Security Police has declined to investigate under Paragraph 78, instead classifying them as hooliganism (Maizītis

¹⁷ For example, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Declaration on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the United Nations International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Council of the European Union Directive 2000/43/EC which implements the principle of equal treatment of all persons regardless of race and ethnicity, the Basic Charter of the European Union, the 2nd Report on Latvia of the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, and several others (ĪUMSILS 2004).

2008) (see Chapter 4). For many tolerance activists, this meant that the authorities had become more educated about how to use Paragraph 78 and thus no longer readily dismissed potentially racially or ethnically motivated acts of physical or verbal violence as mere hooliganism. The data also indicates that the years 2006 and 2007 have seen an increase in street attacks (6 cases in 2006 and 6 in 2007 compared to none in the years before). However, this may be a result of a shift in reporting practices as much as a shift in the frequency of such incidents. The 2007 Annual Report of the Ombudsman's Office indicates that in 2007 there were 12 written complaints about discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity, 17 written complaints about discrimination on the basis of language, and 43 unclassified oral complaints (Latvijas Republikas Tiesībsargs 2007: 36). In addition to receiving and reviewing complaints, the Ombudsman's Office had initiated several investigations that pertained to discrimination of the Roma, such as the inadequate classification of a hate crime against teenage Roma girls and the dissemination of stereotypes about the Roma on television and in the press.

For most residents of Latvia, these numbers are insignificantly small. In arguments about tolerance, people often invoke events in neighboring Russia, where fatal racially motivated attacks are reported with disturbingly increasing frequency. In fact, statistics often worked against tolerance activists, insofar as their efforts were perceived to be hollow imitations of European practices that tried to create a problem where there was none. Tolerance activists, however, thought that it was precisely this kind of attitude that constituted the problem. As one member of the African Latvian Association noted during the aforementioned ECRI roundtable discussion, "yes, we may not have as many incidents as Russia, but even one is too much, and we should be deeply concerned about it." Thus, concrete attacks and discriminatory practices, while disturbing and important for tolerance activists, were not the main focus of the Program. While the Program linked intolerant attitudes with practices of discrimination and hate crimes—that is, that the former leads to the latter—since discriminatory practices and hate crimes are handled by other institutions, such as the Ombudsman's Office (*Latvijas Republikas Tiesībsargs*) or the Security Police (*Drošības policija*), its primary focus was on *attitude*. Thus, the Program aimed to intervene in relation to a general climate of intolerance, including indifference towards the problem of intolerance, which was thought to create conditions favorable for discriminatory practices and hate crimes.

The Program also brought a variety of modes of difference (ethnic, racial, and religious), each with their own history, under the umbrella discourse of tolerance. While the working group had initially included sexual minorities as one of the beneficiaries of the Program, Nils Muižnieks realized that if sexual minorities were included the Program would never get approved by the Cabinet. As he put it, the politicians had learned to operate in the field of ethnic, religious, and racial difference, yet they "had not yet been socialized" to talk about sexual minorities despite the fact that the Government of Latvia decriminalized homosexuality in 1992, thus distancing itself from the Soviet era politics of repression. Consequently, the Ministry for the Integration of Society removed sexual minorities as beneficiaries of the Program and did not return to the question until the problem of homophobia erupted into public and political life in 2005 (see Chapter 5). It is noteworthy that the Program focused on what might be termed "new differences," such as race and religion, which were not publicly discussed during the Soviet times when national difference dominated the political landscape and when "friendship of the peoples" was the slogan of the day. By the time the National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance was launched in 2004, the relationship between Latvians and Russian-speakers—the two historical communities that were solidified during the Soviet period, as well as between Latvians and national minorities, was already institutionalized under another policy framework, namely that of integration (See

Chapter 2).¹⁸ Russian-speakers, national minorities, and Latvians were to be integrated into a single political entity and a unified political and public space. Racially marked others, such as the Roma or other residents of Latvia visually identifiable as different, as well as those who embodied other kinds of differences that were not visible during Soviet times—such as the disabled and eventually gays and lesbians—became objects of tolerance.

As my interviews with the working group members indicate, the group initially spent a considerable amount of time discussing what tolerance was and whether it was the most appropriate mode for cohabitation across difference. Some argued that people should not be tolerated but rather respected. Others questioned whether perhaps the discourse of tolerance was too elitist and thus would be rejected by most people in Latvia. One of the program beneficiaries—a member of a Roma organization—admitted to me that he could not really understand the difference between intolerance as a problem and tolerance as its solution. Comparing the English word *tolerance* with its equivalent in the Latvian language—*ieciētība*, he pondered that if intolerance meant that you could not stand someone (*neieredzēt*), what exactly was tolerance? What was its positive content?

In various discussions, seminars, and conversations that took place during the preparation stage of the Program, as well as during its implementation, organizers and participants discussed what tolerance meant. In doing so, they did not necessarily look to definitions provided in policy documents, but rather tried to make sense of the term by drawing on resources that were more familiar to them. In a seminar on Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, Uldis Bērziņš, a poet and translator of the Quaran into Latvian, said that he had looked up tolerance in a Soviet-time dictionary and that this dictionary had grounded its explanation in a description of life on a Soviet collective farm. The definition it gave was that tolerance (*ieciētība*) was a mode of conduct whereby one behaves gently, “without objections” (*bez iebildumiem*). Given this interpretation and the historically constituted Latvian sense of self as always struggling against foreign domination (see further sections of this Introduction), it is no surprise therefore that many in Latvia understand tolerance to be the type of behavior by which one puts up with domination. Drawing on his own set of resources, including Islamic tradition, Bērziņš offered a different interpretation of tolerance, namely as the ability to limit oneself if there is reason to believe that others may not like some aspect of one’s actions or that such actions may cause them suffering.

In a strategic planning session of the gay and lesbian support organization I worked with (see Chapter 5), one of the leaders of the organization explained to the participants that tolerance is not simply putting up with something. “It is not like when there is a synagogue being built on my street and I am sitting at home and suffering, putting up with it. No. I go get the Jews and we go build a mosque for the Muslims,” she concluded. On another occasion, a facilitator of methodological seminars for Latvian language teachers in minority schools explained to me that teachers tend to understand tolerance as “white [that is, good] virtue” (*baltais tikums*), as compassion, internal empathy (*līdzciešana*), and that she had trouble getting them to think about it as a social and political rather than an ethical matter. She also reiterated the view that Latvians have been taught to think of tolerance as resilience and patience, as the ability to put up with something and to survive. Once again, such an understanding of tolerance easily lead to the interpretation of the call for tolerance of difference as a call to put up with foreign domination in the form of European directives or undesirable foreign immigrants. And, yet, invoking a Latvian folksong, she noted that

¹⁸ With the support of international organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme and the European Commission, the Government of Latvia started developing a National Program for the Promotion of Integration of Society in 1996. The Cabinet of Ministers approved it in 1998.

tolerance as a virtue rather than as a socio-political mode of conduct is at the foundation of the Latvian tradition: “*Ko māmiņa man mācīja? Ne sunīti kājām spert...*” (What did my mother teach me? Not to kick the dog...).

Despite the uncertainty of what tolerance as a positive mode of conduct entailed and the multiple resources people drew upon to make sense of it, most tolerance activists agreed that their efforts should focus on two tasks: first, tackling intolerance as negative attitude towards racial, ethnic, religious and, eventually, sexual difference, and, second, obtaining recognition that the problem of intolerance merited public reflection and political intervention. Tolerance activists thus proceeded to organize seminars, discussions, public campaigns, and media appearances. These events were aimed at the general public, as well as at specific target groups, such as teachers, students, journalists, policy makers, government officials, the Border Guard, police officers, and civil servants. Articles on tolerance-related issues began to appear in various newspapers and popular magazines, usually in the form of commentaries or reports on an event that had taken place, such as, for example, the commemoration of the International Day of Tolerance on November 16. Tolerance activists themselves began to prepare articles for the press. Some of these articles addressed the problem of intolerance in general while others aimed to familiarize the public with the “other” by publishing interviews with members of the African Latvian Association or the LGBT association “Mozaika.” Given that most articles were also published in online versions of the respective newspaper or magazine, tolerance activists made it a habit to follow the commentaries that appeared on websites. Articles on tolerance and related themes were sure to generate a heated discussion and a long line of comments despite the fact that most of the commentators claimed that intolerance was not a problem in Latvia. Many commentators were resentful towards the accusatory and disciplinary messages they thought the articles entailed. More often than not, the commentators used strong language, sometimes even hate speech, towards the “victims of intolerance” and “their defenders” to get their point across. In the eyes of tolerance activists, internet commentaries began to serve as an indication of the widespread problem of intolerance, eventually leading to the launching of the project “Internet Without Hatred,” which aimed to curtail hate speech in cyberspace.

As the implementation of the Program proceeded, human rights activists became more and more concerned about the fact that attempts to initiate discussion on the problem of intolerance generated such resentment, especially among Latvians. Thus, they concluded, Latvians not only harbored intolerant attitudes—something that did not necessarily set them apart from Russian-speakers—but they also refused to critically reflect upon themselves. It is precisely this refusal to publicly reflect on the problem of intolerance that solidified the articulation of the problem of intolerance with Latvian nationalist sensibilities. As I will show in the chapters that follow, for the tolerance activists, this refusal served as an indication that Latvians were uncritically attached to the Latvian *tauta* and to its injurious past. This attachment came to be seen as a problem that hindered not only the project of promoting tolerance, but also the process of democratization more generally.

The Problem of Nationalism

In late 2006, I interviewed the managing director of a popular Latvian language online news portal. I will call him Kārlis. We met to discuss the “Internet Without Hatred” project launched by the non-governmental organization “Dialogi.lv.” Kārlis was invited to participate in the project along with directors, managers, and editors of other portals. All project participants were invited to publicly express commitment to an internet without hatred and to increase monitoring of user commentaries for statements that constituted hate speech. During

our conversation, we discussed the challenges of determining which statements amounted to hate speech and should therefore be subject to censorship and which, while perhaps unacceptable to some groups or individuals, did not merit intervention (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of tolerance and linguistic conduct). During this discussion, Kārlis also offered his thoughts about what he called “tolerance projects” more generally. Namely, he expressed concern that this and other similar projects did not address questions that were of concern to the Latvian *tauta*, but rather focused on, as he put it, “the façade.” In other words, in his view, “tolerance projects” did not deal with the fundamental issues that Latvians were facing in this particular historical moment, but rather engaged superficial issues, such as politically correct speech and conduct. He attributed this to the fact that “tolerance projects” simply demanded that Latvians align their conduct with the rest of Europe and did not pay attention to the historically specific conditions that shaped the post-Soviet present in Latvia. He emphasized that the situation in Latvia is different than elsewhere in Europe: “In Europe, nobody has lived for fifty years with strangers in forced togetherness and nobody has undergone such demographic changes in this way.” He thus invoked what many consider to be one of the most injurious aspects of Soviet rule, namely the radical remaking of the Latvian state’s population through the deportations of local residents and the in-migration of a large labor force from Russia and other parts of the former Soviet Union (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of the ensuing distinction between Soviet-era migrants and national minorities). Given the present effects of Soviet policies and practices—namely, the fact that 28.4% of Latvia’s residents are Russian-speakers—Kārlis argued that Latvians simply cannot afford to open their doors to everyone if they want to maintain the Latvian state as a state that ensures the flourishing of the historical community of Latvians.¹⁹ “We do not want this place to look like other places in Europe,” he added, referring now to the visibility of “non-European Europeans” in the metropolises of Western Europe.

Admittedly, his transposition of the historically generated resentment towards Soviet policies and Soviet-era migrants to an imagined threat from visually different “non-European” immigrants was disturbing to me. At that moment, I felt irritated that *we*—Latvians—continued to craft politics around a claim of injury (see Chapter 1), which seemed to generate new hierarchies and practices of exclusion. This visceral reaction was not necessarily one of a scholar with a progressive political agenda observing a backward nationalist in action and who, moreover, was committed to the language of inclusion / exclusion. I was well aware that the charge of being exclusionary did not have political traction in Latvia since the problem that Latvians had with the Soviet regime was its vast inclusiveness. Latvians often joked that they’d rather be excluded than included, and thus were not entirely sure why they should strive for inclusion of self or others. Thus, while my reaction did mark my dissatisfaction with the ways in which my own fellow travelers lived the sense of historical injury which I shared, it did not mean that I readily embraced the progressive political agenda offered up by some of the local and international tolerance and human rights activists, for I also felt irritated with the almost knee-jerk diagnosis of Latvians as backward nationalists that usually accompanied allegedly progressive political visions. As I read it from my intertwined position as a scholar and a Latvian, such a diagnosis does indeed disregard the salience of the historical injury that shapes Latvians’ sense of self and public and political life.

Unsatisfied with both scenarios, I came to see that the discourse of nationalism was not helpful for making sense of the ways in which Latvians’ perceived and reacted to the

¹⁹ In 2006, the population (2,294,590) consisted of 59% Latvians, 28.4% Russians, the rest made up of Belorussians, Ukrainians, Poles, Lithuanians, Roma and others (Centre for Demography, http://www.popin.lanet.lv/lv/index_lat.html)

various tolerance projects. Instead of illuminating the complex intersection of historical and political factors, the diagnosis of nationalism placed Latvian sensibilities into a recognizable political and moral category, which nationalism had become in the political discourse of the day. Such placement usually marked the end of critical inquiry and the beginning of political and policy interventions aimed at mitigating or taming the problem of nationalism.

Thus, while Kārlis' statement was irritating, even potentially embarrassing—if uttered in liberal circles it would undoubtedly be labeled as reactionary, nationalist, xenophobic, or racist—he also had a point. He explained that he had not noticed that the concerns of Latvians were addressed by tolerance activists. He said that it was unacceptable to argue that we have to be tolerant because that is how it is everywhere: “Every time I hear someone say that this is how they do it in Europe, I always think that Sweden joined the European Union with a condition that they can retain their tobacco sucking practices. The European Union made an exception. There are different cultures and different practices.” Indeed, most of the so-called “tolerance projects” did not directly engage with the concerns of Latvians that arose from their historical sense of injury; rather, they treated such concerns as obstacles, as something that needed to be put aside in order to learn to live openly and without prejudice. For many Latvians, including Kārlis, this amounted to a profound misrecognition of the historical conditions constitutive of the Latvian community. While Kārlis did put forth the contested view that there should not be too many foreigners in Latvia, he did not therefore render the work of tolerance activists irrelevant. Rather, he asked that they directly engage the questions that occupied him and others like him. In that sense, Kārlis invited an argument rather than simply policed the borders of the nation.

In light of Kārlis' statements and for the purpose of further discussion, it is important to make some distinctions with regard to discourses of nationalism. The first distinction I want to make is between theories of nationalism and the political life of the discourse of nationalism in relation to the contemporary historical moment in Latvia. This distinction is imperative for understanding how nationalism emerges as a problem in the context of arguments about tolerance and how its political life hinders rather than aids inquiry. The second distinction is between *state-based nationalism* and *non-state nationalism*, whereby state-based nationalism pertains to the state-oriented nationalism of political communities (whether based on civic principles or ethnic affiliation) and non-state nationalism pertains to a historically shaped sense of belonging to a community that, while potentially political, does not think of itself in relation to a state—any particular state or the state in general.²⁰ I begin with explicating the second distinction between state-based and non-state nationalism as it plays out in the case of Latvia and return to the first one—between theories of nationalism and the life of the discourse of nationalism—thereafter. This requires a brief historical engagement with 19th century Latvian nation-building practices.

For historical reasons, some of which I have earlier outlined, the cultural and historical community of Latvians—the Latvian *tauta*—is deeply entangled with the contemporary Latvian state, but it is not consubstantial with it. The Latvian *tauta* has historically existed as a cultural community outside the confines of the Latvian state. Therefore the community of Latvians can neither be thought of as merely an ethnic group on the basis of which a political nation has been formed nor as simply a product of state-based nationalism—that is, as an invention of the political project of Latvian nationalism. This is due to the fact that during the 19th century, which was characterized by Russian imperial rule and Baltic German economic and cultural domination in the territory of the current-day

²⁰ See Ignatieff 1995 and Kymlicka 1999 on the distinction between “civic” and “ethnic” nationalism. See also Brubaker 2004 for a related yet divergent distinction between state-framed and counter-state conceptions of nationhood and nationalism, which I discuss shortly.

Latvian state, the Latvian nation was first and foremost constituted as a cultural community without clearly articulated or broadly supported political aspirations (Zaķe 2007, Dribins 1997).

As numerous scholars have shown, rather than countering the political domination of the Russian Empire, 19th century Latvian nation-building efforts aimed to counter the cultural and socio-economic hegemony of Baltic Germans (Deglavs 1951, Dribins 1997, Bērziņš 2003, Blese 2003, Bula 2000, Zaķe 2007). Most of the 19th century Latvian nation-builders were sons of peasant families who were educated at Tartu University (in current-day Estonia) and who subsequently worked as teachers or civil servants in Russia's imperial centers, such as St. Petersburg or Moscow. While the Russian imperial government supported the education of Latvian peasants in hopes that they would ally with the Russian imperial administration against the German landlords and eventually would merge into the greater Russian people, the new Latvian intellectuals, influenced by German Romanticism and the Russian Slavophile movement, set out to construct a specifically Latvian identity by selectively cultivating aspects of peasant culture, such as folk songs and the vernacular language, and, subsequently, by educating the peasants about their newly constituted Latvianness (Zaķe 2007, Dribins 1997).

As Ieva Zaķe argues in her analysis of 19th century nation-building efforts, these Young Latvians (*Jaunlatvieši*), as they came to be known, did not aspire for political independence or self-determination for the Latvian *tauta*, but rather for equality among German and Russian intellectual elites.²¹ They emphasized their, and thus Latvians', capacity for culture rather than set out to prove the people's political maturity. Drawing on an analysis of publications in late 19th and early 20th century periodicals, such as "*Mājas Viesis*," "*Pēterburgas Avīzes*," and "*Jaunās Avīzes*," Leo Dribins (1997) shows how these intellectuals argued over whether political self-realization in the form of a state was at all necessary for cultural self-realization or whether cultural self-realization could be achieved within the framework of the Russian Empire. Given that Baltic Germans had solidified themselves as the dominant socio-economic class since the 13th century Livonian crusades and thus that the newly constituted Latvianness solidly mapped onto the peasant class, these intellectuals also argued over whether the consolidation of the Latvian *tauta* should be a project of economic and social emancipation, cultural self-realization, or both (Zaķe 2007). Thus, in addition to cultivating particular cultural forms, such as folk songs and the Latvian language, the Young Latvians also established a *tradition of argument* about the central goods of a Latvian way of life.²²

The legacy of 19th century nation-building efforts—a cultural canon consisting of folk songs, historical narratives, and a record of arguments about collective identity and the good life—has shaped Latvians' sense of themselves as collective subjects in relation to various political regimes, including the former Soviet Union and the contemporary Latvian state. As I will show throughout the dissertation, folk songs are frequently invoked in the context of arguments about tolerance. Similarly, the possibility that the cultural self-realization of the Latvian *tauta* can be imagined without political independence haunts contemporary public and political life—for example, convinced state-based nationalists carefully monitor public

²¹ Interestingly, the name Young Latvians was first used by a German priest, G. Braše, who upon reading a collection of poems by one of the intellectuals associated with the movement identified him as an insurgent. Initially, the name was used in a derogatory sense, but its connotations changed once the Young Latvians themselves embraced it.

²² Drawing on Alisdair MacIntyre, Talal Asad develops the notion of tradition as a dynamic argument over the goods that constitute a particular tradition and which unfolds over time (Asad in Scott 2006a; MacIntyre 1981, also Pandian 2008, Mahmood 2005).

discourse for signs that political sovereignty might be in danger not only because of a threat from abroad, but also because Latvians themselves might put it at risk in a rush to ally either with Europe or Russia. While this might be read as a legacy of Soviet rule or simply as a populist use of the figure of threat, I suggest that it is also a legacy of a previous historical moment when other forms of organizing collective life were seriously debated. Finally, the legacy of 19th century nation-building efforts also includes a sense that the Latvian *tauta* came into existence through the hard labor of cultivation in less than favorable conditions. This labor of cultivation continues to remain central to Latvians' sense of self.

I want to move now towards a consideration of how influential theories of nationalism help (or not, as the case may be) to illuminate the specific ways in which the Latvian nation was formed and how it became articulated with the state. Thereafter, I will turn to my second distinction—between theories of nationalism and the political life of discourses of nationalism—which will help me to bring both distinctions together to rethink the language of nationalism in relation to the current historical moment in Latvia.

I begin by considering Benedict Anderson's (1991) work on the nation as an imagined community. If one looks at contemporary scholarly engagements with formation of the Latvian *tauta* at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, it is striking that these works are mostly informed by an analysis of public discourse in the form of newspaper and magazine articles (Bula 2000, Hanovs 2003, Dribins 1997, Zelče 2009). While it might be taken to be evidence in support of Benedict Anderson's (1991) thesis about the role of print capitalism in imagining the nation (or the influence of Benedict Anderson's thesis on the study of nation-building for Latvia), the Latvian case introduces an important difference insofar as the state did not play a role in these processes until 1918 when it first came into being. For Anderson, however, the nation is by definition state-oriented—it is an “an imagined political community” either backed by the state or aspiring towards statehood (1991: 6, see also Nielsen 1999: 122). In Anderson's account, it is political state-based nationalism that constitutes nations as timeless and transcendental entities, which, in turn, give legitimacy to the states that have produced them. For example, Anderson argues that “if nation-states are widely conceived to be ‘new’ and ‘historical,’ the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more importantly, glide into a limitless future” (1991: 12). Anderson here invokes the example of Sukarno who is reported to have said that Indonesia has endured 350 years of colonization while Indonesia as an entity has not existed all that long. To be sure, Latvians too speak of 700 years of German rule even as the Latvian *tauta* emerged only during the second half of the 19th century. Yet, this rhetoric might be as much effect of the articulation of the Latvian *tauta* and the political Latvian nation that emerged in the 1920s as of the non-statist 19th century nation-building efforts which also generated narratives of Latvian suffering under the German yoke.

Let me turn to another brief example to illustrate the statist bias of Anderson's theory of nationalism. In the opening pages of “Imagined Communities,” Anderson talks about the centrality of monuments to the Unknown Soldier in the national imaginary. He does so because he considers that dying in the name of the nation is the ultimate and, in many ways, the most puzzling sacrifice that nations have been able to demand from their subjects. For Anderson, the practice of constructing monuments to the Unknown Soldier is a practice that requires the backing of a state to both construct the monument and to cultivate its centrality in the national imaginary through various rituals. Anderson argues that “many different nations have such tombs without feeling any need to specify the nationality of their absent occupants. What else could they be but Germans, Americans, Argentineans...” (1991: 10). In its modern history as a state, Latvia has not constructed monuments to the Unknown Soldier. Rather, some Latvians have honored the graves of foreign soldiers in the Latvian territory hoping that people in foreign lands would do the same for Latvians killed while fighting for foreign

armies. Others have labored to craft imaginaries of Latvian soldiers as fighting for the *tauta* even if they were members of foreign armies, such as during World War II when men of the same family often ended up fighting on different sides of the enemy line. Depending on the location of the front line at any given moment, some men were conscripted into the German army while others went into the Soviet army. Some joined one or the other side thinking that side a lesser evil from the perspective of national survival and the self-determination of Latvians who had experienced political independence between 1918 and 1940. The point here is that, contrary to the relationship to the Unknown Soldier described by Anderson, where he could not but be “German, American, Argentinean,” most Latvians attempt to specify the identity of the Unknown Soldier in monuments constructed by non-Latvian states, such as the Soviet one. This historical predicament that precedes both Soviet and Nazi rule is often gestured at in folk songs, such as the one below, where a brother (*bāleliņš*) has to protect a border of a foreign state in order to protect the fatherland:

Nem, brālīti, zobentiņu,	Brother, take your sword,
Ej uz prūšu robežām,	Go to the Prussian border,
Ej uz prūšu robežām.	Go to the Prussian border,
Sargā savu tēvu zemi. ²³	To guard the land of your fathers.

Anderson’s theory of nationalism, therefore, is not adequate for considering the historical distinction between state-based and non-state nationalisms. In focusing on such a distinction, what is interesting is not only the fact that such a distinction can be made, but the ways in which historically specific state-based and non-state nationalisms come articulated together or sundered apart as a result of particular political projects. Yet, such an articulation does not mean that the two are therefore merged together and an attempt to distinguish between them is futile. The fact that their merging is a result of a historically contingent articulation means that things could have been otherwise. As I hope to show throughout the dissertation, viewed from the perspective of a present that may or may not have taken foreseen trajectories, such past possibilities are integral to the present possibility of a future imagined otherwise.

Thus, in order to proceed further with the discussion of nationalism and the state, I suggest to think of nation-building projects, state-based or not, as contingent articulations that come together in specific historical conjunctures (Hall 2002). Imagining and organizing the collective future as national, the national future as political, and, thereafter, the political future in the form of a specific state formation, are historically contingent imaginaries and practices. Thus, in the post-World War I period, when the contemporary system of nation-states was solidified during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 (Jackson Pierce 1997, Weitz 2008, Smith 2002, Liebich 2008, Purs 2002), Latvia became a nation-state because of the collapse of empires rather than due to widespread political aspirations of the Latvian *tauta* (Eksteins 2000: xiii).

With the establishment of the Latvian state in 1918, the relationship between the Germans, Russians, Latvians, Jews, and other groups residing in the territory of Latvia was reconfigured along the majority / minority division, though the initial constitution of the Latvian state was notably pluralistic, insofar as representatives of the new minorities—Germans, Russians, Jews, and others—were part of the governance apparatus and minority groups were granted considerable educational and cultural autonomy (Pabriks 2003, Silova 2006). This pluralism, however, was largely the result of the political and economic weight of the newly emerged minorities rather than a result of an explicitly

²³ www.dainuskapis.lv.

pluralist orientation of the new Latvian state. At the time of independence, all those who were officially registered as residents of the territory that constituted the new state before August 1, 1914 were granted citizenship without consideration of their ethnic belonging.²⁴ At the same time, it was precisely because the new state was home to a number of different groups with a long history of relations of domination between them (German landlords over Latvian peasants and all under the Russian Empire), that it was especially important for the “state people,” namely Latvians, to secure the national character of the state. After all, it was also its ability to be a national state—not only the ability to ensure minority protection—that incorporated the new state into the international nation-state system. On September 22, 1921 Latvia became a member of the League of Nations and on July 7, 1923 Latvia formally agreed to subject its national minorities to the protection of the League of Nations. In a somewhat ironic turn of events, the Baltic German minority submitted one of the more serious complaints to the League’s Minority Commission charged with overseeing the majority / minority relations in the newly created states (altogether complaints from minorities in Latvia constituted 1% of all complaints received by the League of Nations—Bartele 2003). The complaint pertained to the dispossession of Baltic German lands in the process of agrarian reform. Up until independence, 162 Baltic German families had owned 77% of the land (Eksteins 2000). As a result of the reform, Baltic German nobility lost their family seats; their large properties were considerably reduced in size and divided up into smaller plots. Latvia thus became a land of smallholder farmers (Eksteins 2000). Bartele (2003) reports that the Latvian government defended itself against this complaint quite successfully by arguing that a lack of a radical agrarian reform would produce social tensions that might sway the sympathies of the population towards Soviet Russia. The complaint was quickly dropped.

The tension ensuing from the predicament of being a national state under conditions enforced by the League of Nations is brilliantly described by historian Aldis Purs in his article “The Price of Free Lunches” (2002). In it, he traces the workings of a secret government committee established in the 1920s for the purpose of unifying the national state and securing its nationally ambivalent frontiers. During that time, the political arena was characterized by educational autonomy for minorities, which manifested itself through state support for minority schools in areas where there were at least 30 minority children (Pabriks 2003: 27). Thus, 28.1% of all schools open during the school year of 1930/31 were minority schools (Pabriks 2003: 27). Purs shows, however, that within the bureaucratic corridors of the government, a number of civil servants, with the support of politicians, were secretly planning the Latvianization of the nationally ambivalent Eastern frontier where a significant number of minority schools—Belorussian, Russian, and other—were in operation during the post-World War I period. Capitalizing on war-induced poverty, the bureaucrats of the new national state came up with the idea to secretly channel money to Latvian schools in the area to enable them to provide free lunches, which would attract minority children to Latvian schools and away from minority schools. Purs suggests that with the advent of the regime of Kārlis Ulmanis in the 1930s, which ushered in authoritarian state-based nationalism, the secret committee could continue its work in the open, because the idea of a national state became fully implemented in state rhetoric and policies. In the name of national unity, Ulmanis closed minority schools, thus paving way for minority support of socialist forces, as

²⁴ This did introduce a problem for Latvia’s Jewish residents, because many could not be registered as official residents in Rīga, which fell outside the Pale of Settlement during Russian imperial rule. This was amended only in 1927 when Jewish persons could obtain citizenship on the basis of witness testimony rather than official registration documents (Marģers Vestermanis, personal communication, 2009).

well as carving out historical grooves for the strictly national orientation of state practices that came to characterize post-Soviet imaginaries of how collective life should be organized.²⁵

Despite the strong state-based nationalism that emerged in the 1930s and, again, in the 1990s, the legacy of the Young Latvians, coupled with the effects of the Soviet nationalities policy (see Chapter 2), has contributed to a prevailing sense of distinction between the Latvian *tauta* and the Latvian state, as well as to the tension between the state's self-ascribed role of facilitating the flourishing of the Latvian *tauta* and its liberal democratic commitment to protection of individual and minority rights. In the current historical moment, however, the Latvian *tauta* has become *both* something that has a historical existence prior to political self-realization in the form of a nation-state *and* a product of current nation-building efforts and state-based nationalism. So much so that it is difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins. It might therefore be tempting to abandon the distinction altogether, if it were not for reasons described above, as well as for the ways in which the “problem of nationalism” has emerged as Latvians' uncritical attachment to the *tauta* as a cultural community. I therefore now turn to a consideration of the distinction between theories of nationalism and the political life of “the problem of nationalism.”

Theories of nationalism, especially those pertaining to postcolonial contexts, are certainly useful for making sense of the nation and state-building that occurred in the interwar period and that has unfolded in post-Soviet Latvia (e.g. Barrington 2006, Forrest 2006, Chatterjee 1986, Anderson 1991, Fanon 1963, Balakrishnan 1996, Brubaker 2004, 1996). Yet, as Roger Brubaker has pointed out, recent

study of nationhood and nationalism has been marked by deep ambivalence and intractable ambiguity. On the one hand, nationalism has been associated with militarism, war, irrationalism, chauvinism, intolerance, homogenization, forced assimilation, authoritarianism, parochialism, xenophobia, ethnocentrism, ethnic cleansing, even genocide; it has been characterized as the “starkest political shame of the twentieth century” (Dunn 1979: 55). On the other hand, nationhood and nationalism have been linked to democracy, self-determination, political legitimacy, social integration, civil religion, solidarity, dignity, identity, cultural survival, citizenship, patriotism, and liberation from alien rule. (2004: 132)²⁶

It is imperative, therefore, to be precise when using the language of nationalism in any inquiry of public and political life in Latvia lest it obscure rather than illuminate the question at hand. It is equally important to trace how the distinction between “good” and “bad” nationalism operates in conjuring up the “problem of nationalism” in the context of discourses and practices of tolerance in Latvia. As I will show throughout the dissertation, the language of the “problem of nationalism” entails a moral and political judgment which sets into motion projects of intervention, such as, for example, projects that aim to cultivate people's capacity for critical reflection that I analyze in Chapter 6.

More often than not, in the context of arguments about tolerance, the “problem of nationalism” is shorthand for an uncritical attachment to the Latvian *tauta* and its past suffering under Soviet rule, an attachment which is thought to hinder not only the project of

²⁵ It should be noted that the Soviet government did not provide more support for minorities than the authoritarian government of Ulmanis, for it closed down the remaining minority schools and proceeded to cultivate two groups in Soviet Latvia—Latvians as the titular nationality and a Russian-speaking Soviet people (see Chapter 2).

²⁶ Partha Chatterjee notes that the distinction between “good” and “bad” nationalism emerges as a result of what he calls the “liberal-rational dilemma” of nationalism (1986: 2-3).

tolerance, but democratic public and political life more generally. For example, during a recent discussion at a Baltic Studies conference in Lithuania in June 2009 of the Latvian-made film “The Soviet Story,” which was meant to inform the world about the crimes of the Soviet regime in an attempt to garner international recognition of the brutality of the Soviet regime, some participants suggested that the film was tendentious and contained propaganda rather than historical truths. Referring to a specific episode in the film, a Russian anthropologist noted that the film mistakenly suggests that the Soviet regime murdered children in general, whereas, she continued, such things only happened in prisons. Attempting to intervene in the ensuing heated argument about which aspects of the film were true and which were not and whether and how that affected the message of the film, a policy researcher and human rights activist from Latvia—a person whose native language is Russian, yet who speaks Latvian and claims to associate with others on the basis of political affinities rather than cultural or ethnic kinship—suggested that all historical narratives are contestable, therefore history should be left to professional historians and the rest of us should devise an ethos of engagement based on universal principles rather than particular histories. In her view, too much attachment to the past hindered such a project.

Scholarly writings too tend to use nationalism (also referred to as neo-nationalism) as shorthand for xenophobic and exclusionist politics (e.g. Gingrich and Banks 2006). While these may be analytically poor conceptions of nationalism, they do suggest a particular tendency that characterizes the present. Thus, describing the post-Soviet Latvian present as nationalist carries the risk of being read as suggesting that Latvians are a backward and reactionary lot. There are attempts in scholarly circles to rescue the language of nationalism by suggesting, as Will Kymlicka does, that “some nationalisms are peaceful, liberal, and democratic, while others are xenophobic, authoritarian, and expansionist” (1999: 133). However, this particular distinction frames the discussion of nationalism as alternating only between two possibilities: liberal (and good) and illiberal (and bad). Kymlicka’s contribution is therefore not particularly useful for the type of scholarly engagement with public and political life in Latvia that aims to bracket moral judgments and normative politics, especially since Latvia already figures in the international arena as an exemplary case of “bad ethnic nationalism,” which is used by other states—such as that of Kazakhstan, for example—to depict themselves as civic, tolerant, and inclusive (Brubaker 2004: 134).

Roger Brubaker notes that within scholarly circles the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism is increasingly recognized as political in addition to being analytical and that therefore it has become unacceptable to map it onto whole states or geographic regions. Brubaker suggests that it has become more common to argue that elements of both civic and ethnic—and thus good and bad—nationalism are articulated together in practice (2004: 136). While the political ramifications of the distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism decrease the analytical import of the language of nationalism, the moral valuation mapped onto it does, however, prompt one to inquire into the conditions that have made it so salient, as well as into the conditions that make the “problem of nationalism” such a widespread marker of much that is wrong with politics today. It also urges a consideration of what other language might be available to speak about public and political life in Latvia that would bracket the moral and political judgment without obscuring the national nature of contemporary state-building and nation-building practices.

As I way to move forward, I propose to experiment with the distinction between *state-based* and *non-state* nationalisms I delineated earlier. This distinction resonates with Roger Brubaker’s call to replace the division between civic and ethnic nationalism with a focus on *state-framed* and *counter-state* nationalisms, where “in the former, the ‘nation’ is conceived as congruent with the state, and as institutionally and territorially framed by it” and “in the latter, ‘nation’ is imagined as distinct from, and often in opposition to, the territorial and

institutional frame of an existing state or states” (2004: 144). My aim in drawing out the opposition between *state-based* and *non-state* nationalisms is different from Brubaker’s insofar as I would like to emphasize the difference between the kind of nationalism that imagines itself in relation to a state—a particular state or the state in general (and thus could be both state-framed and counter-state)—and the kind of nationalism that does not necessarily imagine itself in relation to the state or through state-based language. I would like to invoke Michael Warner’s (2005) distinction between publics and counter-publics here to bring the difference into sharper focus. Warner defines publics as imagined stranger socialities that exist through the circulation of public discourse that address a general public, yet that are nevertheless enabled by particular conditions, such as a particular language and a commitment to reasoned debate. He views publics as arising from state-based thinking that, for example, privileges reasoned debate over other modes of engagement. In that light, counter-publics refers to a different kind of public sociality—one that is not similar in kind, yet oppositional in content, but rather one that unsettles the normative parameters of state-based thinking and thus of state-based conceptions of publics.²⁷ If Brubaker’s language more closely resembles Warner’s language insofar as he uses the term *counter*, my distinction between state-based and non-state is closer to Warner’s distinction in spirit. I too wish to point to a difference between a state-based formation and one that, while still identifiable as nationalist, may nevertheless unsettle the normative parameters of state-based nationalism.²⁸

In making this distinction, I want to invite attention to how non-state nationalism might proliferate alongside state-based nationalism in Latvia and consider how keeping this distinction in mind might be helpful in deciphering arguments about tolerance. In a way, I want to rescue a non-state understanding of nationhood and nationalism from the trash heap of backward ethnic nationalism and see what possibilities and limitations such a move entails. This is not without its risks, however. Insisting on the distinction might play into the hands of the argument that I want to critique, namely that it is Latvians’ passionate and uncritical attachment to a cultural community that lends the state its xenophobic and exclusionist tendencies. For example, it might therefore be argued that inscribing the status of the Latvian language as the official state language into the Constitution is not in itself a manifestation of “bad nationalism,” for, as Roger Brubaker has shown, it has been historically argued—more notably in the context of the French Revolution—that a common language is conducive to republican citizenship as it facilitates access to political power and communication across difference (2004: 139). This was also, clearly, the argument of the Soviet regime, though Russian was never inscribed as the official language of the Soviet Union until the late 1980s (see Chapter 3). To continue with such a line of hypothetical argument, should the ensuing language politics be deemed as pushing onto the terrain of “bad nationalism,” this could be attributed to the problematic nationalist sensibilities of concrete persons or the people in general, which corrupt the otherwise “good” state practice. Something of a similar approach has been previously deployed by Hans Kohn who has depicted Eastern European extra-political nationalisms as profoundly illiberal and therefore problematic (see Brubaker 2004:

²⁷ By way of an example of a counter-public, Warner describes an 18th century Club-of-She-Romps—a semi-public female club that was based on raw physical play rather than on discussion (2005: 109).

²⁸ It might be said that perhaps state-based nationalism is nothing but communitarianism. Such a trajectory of argument is worth considering. However, I am inclined to say that the notion of *tauta*, as well as its historical trajectory, suggests different orientations than the notion of *kopiena* (community).

140).²⁹ Nevertheless, the risks therefore entailed do not justify occluding the fact that in Latvia a non-state and cultural-historical nationalism did indeed exist and that it has left traces in the present, and that these traces might entail certain possibilities as well as limitations. It is my hope that in the chapters that follow, keeping in mind this ambiguous extra-state existence of the Latvian *tauta* will be helpful for understanding how the Soviet past is experienced as an injury on a visceral and collective register and how this sense of injury animates public and political life, including arguments about tolerance (see Chapter 1).

In order to bring out the non-state elements of the Latvian *tauta* and to introduce another language for speaking about it besides the language of nationalism, I want to turn to the notion of *tradition* as used by anthropologists of ethics and religion, such as Talal Asad (in Scott 2006a, MacIntyre 1981), Saba Mahmood (2005), and David Scott (2000). The concept of *tradition* refers to narratives and arguments that give directionality to the life of a community, but do not determine it. David Scott describes tradition as follows:

An historical tradition of difference is a distinctive moral community which has, over time, developed an argument (or an intersecting complex of arguments) about who it is, about how and why it has come to be who it is, and about what it takes to continue being who it is. This argument (or a complex of arguments), moreover, has come historically to be embodied in practices and institutions through which distinctive moral selves are cultivated and in which the valued virtues of the tradition are inculcated and reproduced. An historical tradition of difference is not internally homogenous. There are always diverse positions and points of view. This is precisely why it is an argument. What is shared, though, is what is held in common, what is argued about” (2000: 301-302).³⁰

Introducing the notion of tradition as a way to speak about the Latvian *tauta* allows me to continue with an inquiry of how the legacy of cultural nationalism and the sense of past injury inform contemporary public and political life without rushing to issue the diagnosis of the “problem of nationalism,” which can guide inquiry along predetermined routes. Thus, I do not define the Latvian *tauta* solely by criteria such as language, ethnicity, or citizenship, but also by arguments about how Latvians ought to conduct themselves in present conditions in order to further their collective flourishing.

By doing so, I also want to distance myself from recent anthropological engagements with neo-nationalism in Europe (Gingrich and Banks 2006) which focus on “bad nationalism” as a result of conventional politics where interest groups are mobilized by charismatic politicians and contingent alliances are formed across the political spectrum. In this reading, the supporters of populist right-wing politics in Europe (such as Jean-Marie Le Pen in France or Jörg Haider in Austria) are rendered as subjects who have become susceptible to populist neo-nationalist politics (also referred to as a “politics of emotion”) due to particular political and socio-economic conditions. As I read it, there is a reluctance to embark upon an ethnographic inquiry of what nationalist ways of being actually consist of for fear of generating an ethically ambiguous understanding of its problematic sensibilities and politics and thus of “going native“ among a less than morally and politically inspiring lot

²⁹ We might also turn to Elizabeth Povinelli (2002) here to think through how a similar dynamic works in liberal contexts. For example, Povinelli describes how Australian liberal multiculturalism emerges cleansed from the shameful colonial past because it attributes responsibility to misguided ancestors rather than the institutions of the liberal state. As I discuss in Chapter 1, such mechanisms of cleansing seem to be less available for Latvia and other Eastern European states and peoples.

³⁰ For further elaboration of the concept of tradition, see Mahmood 2005, Scott 2000, 2006a, Pandian 2008.

(Friedman et. al. 2004).³¹ In a way, some of these dangers do not concern me. I am already a “native” insofar as I am invested in the contemporary arguments about the collective life of the Latvian *tauta*, as well as, to some degree, share in its sense of historical injury at the hands of the Soviet regime. My research is thus a way of distancing while remaining within rather than a way of establishing a relationship from the outside. I therefore ask how particular practices and statements come to be seen as a problem of nationalism or intolerance rather than how the problematic practices of nationalism or intolerance take root in Latvia. As I hope the chapters that follow will show, this does not preclude a critical engagement with the Latvian *tauta* and its contemporary conceptions of the good life, as well as with the discourses and practices of tolerance.

The Politics of Tolerance as an Object of Inquiry

As is evident from my discussion of nationalism, while discourses and practices of tolerance were my primary object of ethnographic inquiry, they constituted a site through which I accessed larger questions of contemporary public and political life in Latvia. Thus, my engagement with tolerance is somewhat different from that of Wendy Brown in her influential work “Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire” (2006). Whereas Brown’s analysis of tolerance focuses on late liberalism as a hegemonic political rationality in Europe and the United States, my engagement with tolerance focuses on the ways in which discourses and practices of tolerance promotion are rendered operational and received in Latvia at the intersection of the Soviet past and the European present. Drawing on Brown’s analysis of how Euro-American discourses of tolerance operate in relation to “non-liberal others,” such as Muslims, one might say that to some extent the discourses and practices of tolerance in Latvia do operate as a civilizational injunction, whereby Latvians are often posited as the unwilling subjects of liberalism who are mired in nationalism and thus unable to generate the distance necessary to engage in critical reflection. And yet the relationship between the transnational discourses and practices of tolerance and the historical community of Latvians is not one of the global impacting the local. Informed by translocal connections, tolerance is also debated as a deeply local phenomenon with specific historical trajectories and cultural meanings, both of which have emerged in a contested field of power relations. Far from being united by a consistent logic, the discourses and practices of tolerance in Latvia are best described as arguments about how one should conduct oneself in this particular historical conjuncture where both the European future and the Soviet past place demands upon the present. Importantly, these arguments are not limited to the question of how Latvians should relate to difference, but also pertain to modes of public reason and the language in which arguments about collective life should take place.

This articulation of historical conditions and contemporary power relations introduces significant differences with regard to how tolerance operates in Latvia—differences which bring into focus important shortcomings of the preoccupation with liberalism in contemporary critical theory. Thus, for example, Wendy Brown (2006) argues that tolerance is a supplement to liberal political rule in conditions where it is becoming increasingly

³¹ Perhaps Douglas Holmes’ (2000) work “Integral Europe” constitutes an exception insofar as he does attempt to understand the way extreme nationalists think, as well as develops the notion of integralism as a particular mode of being, but it does not escape the negative valuation that precedes inquiry. As Andre Gingrich has noted, “integralism” gets deployed by European anthropologists as a term that subsumes “all kinds of chauvinistic, territorially based essentialism in Europe at the end of the 20th century” (Gingrich and Banks 2006: 3).

difficult for liberalism to mask its particularity and to respond to ethical dilemmas from the position of proceduralism and universalism. In other words, tolerance is deployed to handle the difference that liberal equality cannot reduce, eliminate, or address. Brown suggests that with the proliferation of the discourse of tolerance, the public domain is thickened with particularity, whereas tolerance becomes the duty of the private citizen. Tolerance thus entails moves that enable it to reproduce structures of domination through the depoliticization of difference by “construing inequality, subordination, marginalization, and social conflict, which all require political analysis and political solutions, as personal and individual, on the one hand, or as natural, religious, or cultural on the other” (2006: 15). In Latvia, however, discourses and practices of tolerance attempt to intervene in a context where particularity was never hidden under liberalism’s procedural and universal mask. Rather, particularity was cultivated under the Soviet project, as I will show in Chapter 2, and emerged as a strong basis of the new nation-state in the post-Soviet present even as the state also subscribed to liberal democratic principles. The public and political terrain in Latvia is thus characterized by an explicit tension between particularity and proceduralism. Critical tools for rendering visible the masked particularity of allegedly universal and procedural public and political life thus do not have traction in post-Soviet Latvia.

Moreover, though powerful and perceptive, Brown’s analytical and political moves are intertwined with culturally and historically specific understandings of politics. Inspired by a Western leftist commitment to progressive politics, Brown considers an emphasis on ethics instead of justice as politically inadequate: “while such practices often have their value, substituting a tolerant attitude or ethos for political redress of inequality or violent exclusions not only reifies politically produced differences but reduces political action and justice projects to sensitivity” (2006: 16). Brown is critical of the fact that the field of political battle and political transformation is replaced with behavioral, attitudinal, and emotional concerns. In her view, this reduces political participation and political change to “sensitivity training or what Richard Rorty has called ‘improvement in manners’” (2006: 16).

My engagement with discourses and practices of tolerance is not animated by a lamentation of the loss or lack of a particular kind of politics because the historical and political context in Latvia is significantly different from that in Western Europe and the United States. Therefore, even as Brown makes a powerful argument about the depoliticizing effects of the tolerance discourse in relation to the Euro-American political domain, the preference for politics as a struggle for justice and equality over politics as ethics cannot be easily transposed to Latvia, lest one too engages in a civilizational project. In Latvia, the historical experience of another modern project—that of socialism—has generated skepticism towards politics that claims to deliver equality and justice in the name of universalism and proceduralism. Such claims are always-already (and rightly so) perceived as carrying particular concerns with them and are viewed as entangled in relations of domination.

The situation in Latvia is also different from that of Western Europe insofar as we cannot talk of a resurgence of neo-nationalist sentiment in a terrain thought to have been cleansed of problematic particularities in the name of the universal solidarity of an integrated Europe. This is so despite the tendency in popular and scholarly writing to think of the socialist past as a lid that was put on primordial ethnic hatred. As Chapter 2 will show, the Soviet past cultivated particularity as much as it tried to promote a merging of peoples into a nationally indistinct Soviet people. The Soviet past thus generated a post-Soviet present characterized by a politics and ethics that are always already suspicious of universalist claims. Thus, the Latvian emphasis on the historical injury under Soviet rule and the ensuing politics in the present cannot be easily compared to the rise of the new right in Europe, though popular and even scholarly writing often posits both as elements of the same ethical-political formation.

At the same time, calls for more localized versions of politics, often entangled in the language of culture and tradition, look reactionary to those committed to particular versions of progressive politics. Thus, bracketing the impetus to embrace Euro-American versions of progressive politics allows me to pay attention to the political and ethical resources that may emerge through local arguments about tolerance that do not easily fold into recognizable political frameworks. Even if my data does not allow me to devise a fully fleshed out and autochthonous alternative conception of political and ethical engagement, I am able to offer glimpses of just such possibilities as these emerge when liberal politics runs into limits in the context of arguments about tolerance in Latvia.

To summarize, then, while my ethnographic research focused on the discourses and practices of tolerance that have emerged in the Latvian public sphere during the last seven years, my work is not primarily aimed at a critical examination of tolerance as a particular kind of political rationality. Rather, I am interested in *arguments* about tolerance that unfold in a specific historical conjuncture in Latvia at the intersection of the Soviet past and the European present. Moreover, I am interested in the kind of *political subjects* and relations between them that are constituted through arguments about tolerance and what they tell us not only about the post-Soviet Latvian present, but also about the European present more generally. In analyzing the discourses and practices of tolerance, my aim is thus threefold: (1) to trace how the historical community of Latvians is constituted through arguments about tolerance; (2) to show that this historical community of Latvians cannot simply be characterized as animated by deeply rooted nationalism, but is rather an effect of political subjectivation that unfolds at the intersection of imperial, colonial, and communist trajectories; and (3) to show how the specificity of arguments about tolerance in Latvia illuminates the possibilities and limitations of particular analytical frameworks, such as that of nationalism, as well as of liberal political culture in Europe.

I undertake this project as a scholar, but also as a Latvian who reflects upon one's own tradition without fully distancing from it. While engaging as a researcher, I was also inevitably a participant in the arguments I studied and was perceived as both a researcher and participant by the people I worked with, as well as by those I interviewed. As someone concerned with the life of the historical community of Latvians and the Latvian tradition, I found myself critical of the ways in which Latvians related to difference, but I also found myself critical of the ways in which tolerance activists attempted to remake public and political life. This dissertation, then, attempts to carve a space for the kind of engagement with public and political life in Latvia that allows for ethnographic emergence rather than folds the present into politically and analytically recognizable categories.

Chapter 1: Soviet Past, European Present, and the Politics of Injury

Life of the Past in the Present

In the summer of 2009, I was sitting in a café famous since Soviet times for its cakes and coffee and talking about the economic crisis and academic careers with my friend and colleague Alex who was just beginning his fieldwork in Rīga on the political subjectivities of Russian-speaking youth, when the two women sitting at a table next to us caught our attention. They were both in their 70s—the usual clientele of the café. They had glasses of cognac in front of them, as well as the traditional meat salad (*gaļas salātiņi*), coffee and some of the café's famous pastries. They had clearly arrived for a longer sitting rather than just for a quick coffee and cake. We could not help but overhear that one of them was reading a letter to the other: “You could see the consequences of the war outside the train window. Buildings were destroyed. Once the train crossed Zilupe, we got out on the platform and, when we saw the forests, we proudly sang “*Še kur līgo priežu mežā*” (Here where the pine forests sway in the wind). We stopped again in Rēzekne, where we bought some plums and apples. It was hard to believe that we were finally arriving. As we were approaching Rīga, we packed our things and prepared to get off the train. There were many people greeting us in Rīga—aunts and uncles. They took us directly to the bathhouse....”

The woman read what seemed to be a return narrative of someone who had been exiled in Russia or deported to Siberia in the 1940s. The event that the letter described—returning home by train—occurred a long time ago, yet the reading of the letter vividly conjured up the injury that it entailed—namely, exile and family separation that affected most families in post-World War II Latvia. While some individuals and families were deported to Siberia, where many perished (Kalniņa 2001), others emigrated from Latvia just before Soviet power was re-established in 1945. Many of those who left thought their departure was temporary, however, most never returned. Every family can tell a story of forced migration either because someone became a war refugee, was deported to Siberia, or was taken hostage during World War II by the German army, as was my own grandfather who thereafter spent most of his life in Australia without seeing his 2 and 4 year old sons for forty years until after the fall of the Soviet regime. Family reunions were made difficult, even impossible, due to travel restrictions imposed by the Soviet government, as well as by a fear of the consequences of family reunions for those family members who remained in Soviet Latvia. This meant that siblings, parents, and children may not have been able to see each other for decades, and stories of exile, separation, or return were not openly shared until the fall of the Soviet regime. Today, people talk about it often, for most family histories reflect the turmoil that was World War II in the region. Men of many families were drafted in either the Soviet or Nazi armies in the 1940s. Brothers often ended up on opposite sides of the enemy line. Most, however, thought that they were fighting for Latvian independence against a greater evil—either Soviet or Nazi regimes—rather than for any particular ideology. The authoritarian nationalist regime of Kārlis Ulmanis that lasted during the last 6 years of Latvian independence (1934-1940) had also created conditions for strong nationalist dispositions within the population, lending a hand to the German forces, which promised to free Latvia from its Soviet occupiers. Consequently, Latvian police battalions were incorporated in the German army and some are said to have participated in the extermination of Jews either in the territory of Latvia or Russia, though these claims remain contested (Ezergailis 2005, Stranga 2008, Eksteins 2000). Today it is widely debated to what extent Latvian police battalions and ordinary people in Latvia collaborated with the German forces

and to what extent they too were victims of history (Eksteins 2000).³² While some voices insist that Latvians should be held morally accountable for their collaboration with the Nazi's (Kurzem 2007), others argue for the need to remain attentive to the complexity of historical entanglements (Eksteins 2000). Diverging historical accounts and contemporary debates suggest the difficulty in using unambiguous moral language to make sense of the past, as well as of the ways in which it bears upon the present.

History thus saturates the everyday landscape in Latvia and shapes people's sense of self and their relationships with others. More often than not, this history is thought of as injurious. As Latvians will often state: we are a small people swept up in the struggles of superpowers; they make History, we suffer from it. However, while narratives of injury mark important aspects of Latvians' self-understanding, they also can and do reduce the past—Soviet and otherwise—to a past of suffering. As the rest of the chapters will illustrate, the past is certainly more ambiguous than straightforward suffering. The late Soviet generation in particular does not carry as strong a sense of injury as their parents, for their childhood experience was generally a happy one (see Chapter 3). Consequently, views about the role of injury in shaping Latvians' sense of self and contemporary public and political life vary. Many consider an excessive emphasis on suffering a hindrance that prevents people from active and positive (rather than reactionary) involvement in the making of the future and thus craft interventions which aim to bolster Latvians' self-confidence (as in the case of the film I discuss below). At the same time, the pressure to “put the past behind” that accompanies contemporary liberal politics, including the discourses and practices of tolerance, does not present a satisfying alternative, because of an overly strong emphasis on taming the past and banning it from public and political life. So much so that even those who may be critical of Latvians' excessive emphasis on past suffering consider it important to occasionally remind the international community of the injurious nature of the Soviet regime and the demands that its effects place upon public and political life in the present.

Among former Soviet citizens, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians have been particularly vocal in demanding that Europe recognize the suffering inflicted upon them by the Soviet regime. In July of 2009, these efforts culminated in the form of an OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) resolution entitled “Reunification of a Divided Europe,” which equated Stalinism and Nazism as violent totalitarian regimes that have committed crimes against humanity. The resolution posited the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in August of 1939, in which Hitler and Stalin divided up Europe, as enabling World War II. This triggered a public outcry in Russia where many perceived the resolution as an attempt to revise the most important and positive moment in Soviet history. For most former Soviets and many Russians, the Soviet Union won World War II rather than was implicated in its beginning.

The reactions in Russia exhibited a variety of sensibilities that could not be easily mapped onto recognizable political affiliations or onto the distinction between the government and the opposition. For example, some opposition intellectuals embraced the resolution, while others were critical of the ways in which it singled out Russia as an heir to a totalitarian regime. Several commentators pointed out that it was unfair to condemn Russia's role with regard to events such as *Holodomor* in Ukraine when the crimes of Europe's own colonial projects—such as the 1943 famine in Bengal allegedly caused by British export policies—remain largely unacknowledged. The resolution thus sent ripples throughout Europe, positing the question of the nature of past regimes—Soviet, Nazi, and colonial—as central to contemporary European identity and politics. More than anything else, the resolution suggested that despite the European Union's efforts to build a unified Europe that

³² See Anton Weiss-Wendt's “Murder Without Hatred” (2009) for a resonant discussion on Estonia.

commemorates the past, the past demanded a politicization of the present for which Europe found itself unprepared.³³

In this chapter, I begin a discussion of how a politics of injury emerges in the context of a contemporary moral economy within which suffering can be a lucrative, if stigmatized, feature of political subjectivities. I consider how the language of injury can be both enabling and constraining for talking about the public and political life of the past in the present. I illustrate how Latvians navigate the contemporary moral economy by shifting between the position of victimhood and assertions of Europeanness as civilizational superiority.

The Politics of Injury

In the case of Latvia, the demand for international recognition of past suffering under Soviet rule can be viewed as a move that, on the one hand, aims to obtain political support for particular state-building practices in the international arena and, on the other hand, as a politics that is animated by injury constitutive of Latvians' sense of self in the current historical moment. It should be noted here that in the context of Euro-American identity politics, as Wendy Brown reminds us, claims of injury can be reactionary insofar as they reinscribe relations of domination (Brown 1995: 9). Brown argues that "it is freedom's relationship to identity—its promise to address a social injury or marking that is itself constitutive of identity—that yields the paradox in which the first imaginings of freedom are always constrained by and potentially even require the very structure of oppression that freedom emerges to oppose" (1995: 7). Thus, for example, crafting a politics in the name of racialized identities can reinscribe the relations of domination that produced the racialized identities in the first place.³⁴ Moreover, Brown continues, "when institutionalized, freedom premised upon an already vanquished enemy keeps alive, in the manner of a melancholic logic, a threat that works as domination in the form of an absorbing ghostly battle with the past" (Brown 1995: 8). In this view, a politics of identity grounded in claims of injury is far from progressive due to its embeddedness in the categories produced by past injuries—"it can hold out no future—for itself or others—that triumphs over this pain" (Brown 1995: 74). Yet moving beyond such politics is complicated, for it cannot happen through a simple forgetting of the injurious past, since it is precisely erased histories and historical invisibility that were part of the pain in the first place (Brown 1995: 75). Brown therefore proposes a careful reorientation from identity politics to a future-oriented politics, from an "I am" to an "I want."

With regard to the Latvian case, Brown's discussion of injury invites consideration of the possibilities and limitations of a politics of injury as a way to bring the past to bear upon public and political life. This is a topic to which I remain attentive throughout the dissertation and to which I return in the Epilogue. Her discussion of the reproduction of relations of domination is less relevant insofar as the Latvian *tauta*—in whose name the claims of injury are made—cannot be considered an identity constituted through social injury in the same way that racialized, gendered, or sexual identities are constituted in the political context of the United States. While the Latvian *tauta* was first constituted in the 19th century in conditions

³³ See Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman's "The Empire of Trauma" for a critique of the tendency to commemorate the past—for example, in the works of Pierra Nora (1996), Marc Augé (2004) and Tzvetan Todorov (1995)—and thus contain "the voices of the vanquished" (2009: 17).

³⁴ Though it seems that Judith Butler's (1997) analytic of performative reiteration is more generous towards identity politics insofar as it introduces the possibility of subversion alongside the possibility of subjection.

of political, socio-economic, and cultural domination, its constitution itself is not thought of as injurious today, but is rather viewed as the result of a difficult, if incomplete, overcoming of the injury entailed in the denial of culture. Instead, it is the relations of domination constitutive of the Soviet socialist project that conjure up the sense of injury that shapes the contemporary public and political life of the Latvian *tauta*. It is therefore not at all clear whether and how emancipation from the collective subject position of the Latvian *tauta* shaped, in part, through injury would be progressive or desirable.

Thus, while aware of the risks associated with the language of injury, I nevertheless want to suggest that the idiom of injury is at least temporarily useful for describing how the past comes to bear upon Latvia's post-Soviet present both in the form of specific political projects and in the form of a collective sensibility. I will thus stay with the language of injury for a while longer, if only because there is no easy way to shed it, especially since the liberally inclined injunction to put the past aside reiterates the conditions of injury. Yet, while using the language of injury, I hope to remain attentive to ethnographically emergent possibilities for developing another language in which to address the issues that Kārlis—whom I introduced in the discussion on nationalism in the Introduction—sees as important for Latvians in the current historical moment. Let me elaborate on some additional reasons for staying with the language of injury by delineating how Latvians' sense of injury differs from sensibilities conjured up by some related categories, such as *injustice*, *trauma* and *memory*.

Latvians' sense of injury extends beyond injustice as an imposition of political rule and new forms of life insofar as it also derives from the particular dynamic of cohabitation between Latvians and Soviet-era Russian-speaking incomers. Many Latvians feel that they suffered not only as a result of mass deportations and the political and cultural domination of the Soviet regime, but also as a result of the disdain and disrespect towards Latvians and the Latvian language on the part of Soviet-era incomers (see Chapter 3).

Furthermore, while there were extraordinary injurious events in the Soviet past—such as mass deportations of Latvia's residents—that could be thought of as unjust and traumatic (Skultāns 2008, 1998, Kalniņa 2001, Fassin and Rechtman 2009), the prevailing sense of historical injury is not tied to a single injurious event and cannot be exhaustively addressed through commemorative events aimed at closure and containment of past injuries, even as commemorative events marking specific episodes of the Soviet past are present in public and political life. Moreover, the injurious Soviet past cannot be subsumed under the category of trauma, if only because there is not a sufficient distance between the Soviet past and the European present (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 18).³⁵ Instead, the current historical moment is thought of as an intersection of the Soviet past in the form of Latvia's Russian speaking residents and the European present in the form of pressure to adhere to various minority protection measures, including the demand to reflect on tolerance. As such, the sense of historical injury is a continuously lived historical experience. Drawing on Didier Fassin, we might perhaps say that the treatment of time in this configuration relates “less to the logic of sites of memory (Nora 1996) than to the problematic of the integration of history” (Fassin in Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 273).

³⁵ There are other reasons for not embracing the language of trauma to speak of the Latvian sense of historical injury. For example, the language of trauma suggests a kind of universal psychological condition which the victims experience, thus opening the possibility of equally universal normative prescriptions for handling trauma. As Fassin and Rechtman suggest, “universalization of trauma results in its trivialization” (2009: 19). Moreover, Vieda Skultāns shows that people in Latvia, including medical professionals, explain health problems with narratives that gesture towards collective historical injury—“all those mad times” and “all those chaotic times”—rather than individual trauma, thus eluding the medicalization of historical experience (Skultāns 2008: 128).

The present life of history shapes the way in which Latvians perceive the demand to reflect on the problem of intolerance as reminiscent of Soviet attempts at total social transformation in the name of a universal socialist future. Liberal politics—within which the politics of tolerance is located—aims to intervene by demanding that Latvians put aside their historical experiences so that they do not bear upon public and political life, which is to be guided by universal principles of engagement rather than by specific historical experiences. The discussion surrounding the film “The Soviet Story” described in the Introduction is a case in point. The activist’s call to leave history to historians resonates with the voices of prominent intellectuals in Western Europe. Expressing concerns about the “upsurge of memory,” Pierre Nora has talked about the rise of “memory terrorism” and, together with a number of other French intellectuals, has called upon the government and the public to leave history to professional historians (Fassin and Rechtman 2009, Nora 2002).³⁶ While Nora’s critique of the French government’s attempts to criminalize the past through various legal measures that fix the meaning of particular historical events—such as the Armenian Genocide—has a point, it does not address the fact that the so-called “upsurge of memory” is not necessarily about the proper handling of past events, but rather about the ways in which silencing of such events—for example, the French massacre of Algerian demonstrators in 1961—perpetuates relations of domination and oppression in the present. Clearly, politically enforced commemorative measures are not sufficient for addressing such relations of subordination. Nevertheless, public and political recognition of the previously forgotten events risks unsettling the comfortably commemorative and scientific present, which seems to be precisely what Nora wants to protect by insisting on the depoliticization of history.

The insufficiency of the category of memory, in turn, to talk about the ways injurious past animates life in the present is apparent in Mark Rothberg’s work “Multidirectional Memory” (2009) where he sets out to develop an alternative to what he calls the model of competitive memory whereby different claims of injury compete with each other in the public domain. In taking up “one of the most agonizing problems of contemporary multicultural societies: how to think about the relationship between different social groups’ histories of victimization,” Rothberg argues that such a relationship need not be conceived as a competition, but rather as a productive engagement that foments solidarity in suffering. Focusing on the relationship between Jewish and African American memory, as well as Jewish and Algerian memory in France, Rothberg analyzes the work of select intellectuals and artists to demonstrate how intimate understanding of the suffering of the other does not foreclose, but rather enrich the understanding and memory of one’s own suffering. While one might empathize with the ethical and political sensibilities that animate Rothberg’s work, it nevertheless invites reflection on the uncritical use of the concept of memory as an umbrella term for contemporary politics of the Jewish Holocaust, American slavery, and French atrocities during Algerian war. Memory here works to render these diverse contexts as matters of the past, thus erasing important distinctions with regard to how particular events of the past bear upon life in the present. It is hardly the case that the French treatment of Algerians or American slavery and colonialism are matters of the past in conditions where relations of domination continue in the present. Rather, they are memories that flash up in moments of danger and thus require addressing the present as much, if not more, than the past (Benjamin 1968).

Such containment of the past in the historian’s office or memorial sites and its removal from daily encounters is not intelligible to most Latvians. For many, the call to expel the past from public life exhibits an uncanny resemblance to the figure of the Soviet-era

³⁶ See also the statement by *Liberté pour L’Histoire* on <http://www.lph-asso.fr/actualites/42.html>

migrant in the Latvian imaginary as someone who did not know and did not care where they came from, as long as they knew their place in socialist society (Oushakine 2009: 36). Thus, the salience of the Latvians' sense of historical injury in the present is not a fundamental and essential characteristic of the historical community of Latvians or only a legacy of the Soviet past. It is also a product of contemporary power relations, whereby the European Union puts pressure on Latvians and the Latvian state to meet the standards of political and cultural membership in Europe. Such pressure often amounts to demands to contain the injurious past so that it does not bear upon public and political life. In turn, many Latvians perceive such demands as a misrecognition of the historical injury and thus of practices necessary for Latvians to craft a collective life in the present. As such, they constitute another form of injury.

Consequently, instead of readily granting recognition to the problem of intolerance, many Latvians perceive the invitations and demands to publicly reflect on intolerance as themselves a provocation that cannot be tolerated. This does not necessarily always manifest in an articulate rebuttal of the demand to reflect on the problem of intolerance, but rather in puzzlement. For example, in the spring of 2006, during my ethnographic fieldwork on Latvia's implementation of the European Union-funded National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance, I was invited to participate in a seminar for Latvian language teachers in minority schools on the problem of intolerance in Latvian society. Amidst discussions on whether and how the use of the word *nēģeris* (negro) amounted to racism, one of the teachers noted that the label of racism tends to be easily attached to people without sufficient discussion of what exactly is racist about their practices and statements. "Before I can grasp what is happening," she said somewhat resentfully, "I am labeled a racist."³⁷

Such a sentiment was not hers alone. During the past five years, as international monitoring institutions and local human rights and minority organizations have intensified calls for public reflection on intolerance vis-à-vis media campaigns, public discussions, and targeted seminars, many Latvians have reacted with puzzlement and resentment. In formal interviews, informal conversations, and a variety of discussion forums between 2005 and 2008, I frequently encountered bewilderment that particular statements or practices were deemed intolerant and that the problem of intolerance was posited as a matter of public concern and reflection.

As a way to challenge the expressed need for public reflection on the problem of intolerance, including that of racism, some Latvians suggested that public concern with racism is rather the problem of the former colonial powers of Europe. "We don't have a colonial past; why should we collectively worry about racism," asked some participants of the seminar for schoolteachers. Their stance suggested that it is the presence of former colonized subjects in the national spaces of European states that constitutes not only the material conditions for the emergence of the problem of racism, but also serves as a continuous reminder to the national public of its colonial past, a past that exerts moral obligations in the postcolonial present. The implication of this view with regard to the invitations to reflect on the problem of intolerance was that Latvians, who have themselves recently emerged from "centuries of domination" are not subject to such moral imperatives and, frankly, have other things to worry about. Yet, narratives of suffering were also intuitively recognized as stigmatizing, thus they often were accompanied by simultaneous

³⁷ See Marianne Gullestad (2005) for an analysis of debates about the word *neger* in Norway. It should also be noted here that some members of the African Latvian Association have suggested that, depending on the context, the word *nēģeris* tends to be used as both *negro* and *nigger*. The word *nigger*, however, is usually rendered as *nigers* in the Latvian language (see Chapter 4).

assertions of Europeanness, which posited a tension between glory and suffering as constitutive of the Latvian *tauta* in the current historical moment.

Between Glory and Suffering

In September 2006, I attended a film screening about the historical connections between Latvia and Gambia. This was a preliminary screening to friends and sponsors, as the film was still being edited and assembled. The film—entitled “*Rīga-Bandžula-Skarboro: Pa latviešu sapņu pēdām*” (Riga-Banjul-Scarborough: Tracing Latvians’ Dreams)—was made by a seasoned Latvian TV director and a film enthusiast who was born to Latvian parents in the United States, but who now lives and works in Latvia. The film traced the travels of a group of Latvians—which included a historian, a cultural anthropologist, some sponsors, and the filmmakers themselves—through Gambia and Tobago.

During the screening, as well as in a subsequent interview, the filmmakers emphasized that they hoped that their stories of Gambia would conjure up images of heroic exploration that could mitigate the crisis of self-confidence they identified as plaguing present-day Latvians (see also Jurševica 2008). Moreover, the filmmakers claimed they wanted to promote tolerance in Latvia by familiarizing Latvians with Africa. They had specifically invited the African Latvian Association to attend the screening, presumably as the potential beneficiaries of the film’s efforts at cultivating tolerance. Moreover, the screening of the film took place at the *Melngalvju Nams* (House of the Blackheads)—a building that housed a 17th century German merchant association, which had selected St. Mauricius—the black Christian leader of the Roman Theban legion in the 3rd century—as their patron saint. The filmmakers pointed out their choice of the site as strategic, thus suggesting that the reference to translocal trade routes and racially marked historical figures (the building is decorated with numerous heads of St. Mauricius, all rendered in black) might be conducive to their project of cultivating tolerance.

As the visual images shot from a boat panned across the coasts of Gambia, the film’s narration suggested that contemporary Latvians could find reason for self-confidence in the memory of their ancestors who sailed dangerous seas and constructed colonial forts on *Andrejsala* (St. Andrew’s Island) at the mouth of the River Gambia. Gambia and the island of Tobago in the Caribbean were, after all, both colonial possessions purchased by Duke Jacob, a Baltic German who ruled over Courland and indentured serfs in the 17th century. Looking at the waters of the River Gambia, as the narration suggested, a Latvian can dream about the ships of Duke Jacob and take pride in the fact that there is an *Andrejsala* in Gambia and a Bay of Courland in the Caribbean. Though Duke Jacob is said to have been a ruthless ruler over Courland serfs (Andersons 1970a), Duke Jacob’s rule in Courland is for the most part treated with reverence in Latvian historiography, which focuses on the Duke’s impressive navy and the prosperity he brought to Courland. The only historical work dealing specifically with Courland’s brief colonial rule in Gambia (1651-1661)—émigré historian Edgar Andersons’ “*Tur plīvoja Kurzemes karogi*” (There Flew the Courland Flags) (1970a)—only mentions the slave trade in passing in sentences such as “the Courlanders traded in slaves, ivory, bee honey, rice, and small amounts of gold” (1970a: 19, see also 1970a: 39, 110).³⁸ Rather than specifically consider the issue of slavery in relation to Latvia’s colonial past, the author sets out to carve a place for Courlanders in the making of History, which is equated

³⁸ See also Andersons’ “*Senie Kurzemieki Amerikā un Tobago kolonizācija*” (Ancient Courlanders in the Americas and the Colonization of Tobago) (1970b). Both works were written and published abroad rather than in Soviet Latvia.

with the history of European colonial expeditions. Thus, and somewhat resentfully, he begins the book by noting that “the activities of Courlanders in Gambia and in other places in Africa have been neglected as an object of history. [...] The name of Courlanders in African history has remained unmentioned or, due to some special interests [i.e. British], silenced” (1970a: 8). Identification with colonial rule here becomes an identification with the glory of Empire and with Europeanness as such. Neglect of Courland in “African history” and European colonial historiography thus comes to be seen as denial of Latvians’ very Europeanness.

Despite the stretching of the imagination that is required to fold the colonial rule of Duke Jacob into the Latvian national heritage, this historical moment has nevertheless produced a rich national imaginary in the form of various novels, place names, plays, and films. Whether in the 1920s, the 1970s, or today, Duke Jacob is largely remembered as a successful ruler with little reflection or even mention of the slave trade and colonial exploitation that went along with his glorious pursuits and those of other European powers the Duke’s ships met, battled, and cooperated with along the way.³⁹

In that context, it could be said that, in a small way, the film “deals with the issue of slavery,” as the filmmakers claimed. It pays homage to the history of slavery by showing the monument to the abolition of slavery in Gambia side by side with the symbolically charged Freedom Monument of Latvia.⁴⁰ And, yet, throughout the film, moments of solidarity with the once enslaved Gambians intermingle with performances of coloniality. Once on St. Andrew’s Island, for example, the filmmakers present the flag of the Duchy of Courland—a black cancer on a red background—to their Gambian guides. The film shows Gambians raising the flag above the former colonial fort. “We need to learn the history of slavery,” says the Gambian guide, “and that’s why we need to learn the history of Courland.” The fact of the slave trade in which Courlanders were involved, even if indirectly, is noted and condemned; yet Latvians are cleansed from any negative association with it through an emphasis on their own indentured status within the Duchy of Courland. This absolution through self-positioning in Latvians’ historical narrative of domination becomes the basis for an affinity between the filmmakers and Gambians. Thus, without any apparent irony, in response to the Gambian guide’s comments, a member of the film crew adds: “knowing history can make us take our place in history.” While the Gambian guide saw the history of Courland as part of the narrative of slavery, the Latvian film crew lamented what they perceived as an unjust exclusion of Courland (and thus Latvia) from History and aimed to raise the name of Courland on par with that of Britain. One of the insights that a consideration of contemporary Latvia through the prism of post-coloniality offers is the realization that the suffering that Latvians posit as formative of the Latvian tradition is not

³⁹ In the conclusion of his book, Andersons describes that, following the famous flight of the controversial Herberts Cukurs to Gambia in the 1930s, there was much excitement among Latvians about the former colonial possessions of Duke Jacob and their place in the Latvian national narrative. He further notes that the Baltic Germans did not necessarily like it, because they thought of this historical moment as their heritage. However, “now [1970], both Baltic Germans and Latvians dwell in common dreams. The ancient competition over the heritage of ancestors has dissipated. After all, Latvia was the homeland—or at least the land of ancestors—for both” (1970a:216). It should be noted that Herberts Cukurs was a Latvian aviator, but also a member of the Arājs Commando—German occupied Latvia’s police unit (*Hilfspolizei*), which participated in the extermination of the Jews during the Nazi rule in Latvia. Cukurs was never tried or convicted; it was widely believed that he did not personally kill anyone, because he served as the unit’s mechanic. He was killed in 1965 in Montevideo by the agents of Israeli secret service MOSSAD.

⁴⁰ The Freedom Monument was built during the first Latvian republic with funds donated by most of Latvia’s population. It was designed by architect Kārlis Zāle. The monument remained standing during the Soviet period and in the late 1980s served as a symbolic place of resistance.

only the suffering of a serf at the hands of a master, but also of a particular denial of European heritage and Europeanness, whether through exclusion from colonial glory in European historiography, through denial of a capacity for culture by Baltic Germans, or through Soviet rule.

For example, the last two decades have seen the proliferation of autobiographical writings—fiction and non-fiction alike—that describe the horrific experiences of those deported in the 1940s and 1950s during Stalin’s attempts to cleanse the Soviet socialist space of class enemies, often traced through ethnic identities or kinship relations (Hirsch 2005, Slezkine 1996). The Soviet past has come to be remembered as continuous and unrelenting repression—political, cultural, and physical—often exacerbated by Latvians’ ability and willingness to put up with, that is, to tolerate, domination. People in various contexts, ranging from nation-branding experts to amateur film-makers, suggest that Latvians’ lack of self-confidence and their display of something called “serf-mentality” need to be urgently rectified if Latvians are to achieve economic success in free-market conditions and to ensure the survival of the Latvian *tauta* in a rapidly homogenizing world.⁴¹

As deployed in such discourses, “serf-mentality” refers to a historically cultivated and inherited submissiveness in the face of power and authority that is thought of as characteristic of the Latvian *tauta*. It is this imagined constitutive submissiveness that is conjured up through discourses of tolerance, therefore making discussions about modes of cohabitation across difference ever more difficult. For example, Latvians often lament that they themselves will readily switch to Russian in encounters with Russian-speaking residents rather than wait and see whether they are able to speak Latvian. Yet, narratives of suffering and of serf-mentality are accompanied by assertions of timeless Europeanness as a cultural and civilizational disposition that remained resilient in the face of oppression, most recently the Soviet project of total social transformation (often perceived as the Russian invasion).⁴² Many stories about Latvian–Russian relations either in Soviet Latvia or the various destinations to which Latvians emigrated or were deported to thus entail comparisons between Latvians and Russians in terms of their level of civilization, cleanliness, or sophistication. For example, an often-told story by Latvians of all walks of life narrates how the wives of newly arrived Russian military men went to the Rīga Opera House in the 1940s and 1950s wearing negligees, thinking them to be exquisite clothing. Just in the summer of 2008, a colleague recounted how her elderly neighbor, who lived in a lavish private home at the time of the arrival of the Soviet army and who therefore was demanded to house its soldiers, still tells a story of a Russian general washing his hair in the toilet bowl, therefore exhibiting utter unfamiliarity with the basics of civilized life. Life stories of the deportees collected as part of an oral history project run by the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the University of Latvia entail references to Russians living in the same room with their animals, such as pigs, suggesting that Latvians would never do such a thing, regardless of how harsh the living conditions got.⁴³ It should be noted, however, that asserting civilizational superiority is not solely a feature of discourses marked as Latvian. There are

⁴¹ For example, several of the nation-branding proponents I interviewed emphasized that traits they saw as characteristic to Latvians, such as modesty, passivity, fear, and short-term thinking, are products of oppression and need to be corrected in order to raise the national self-esteem that is necessary for successful nation-branding (Dzenovska 2007).

⁴² See also Kārlis Račevskis’ (2002) work where he outlines the potential usefulness of asserting strategic positionality in the international arena in the aftermath of Soviet rule. However, he notes that Latvia’s inherited histories of colonial possession in Gambia and Tobago do not mean that Latvians fit the typical profile of the colonized—their sphere of interests has always been more European than Third World and, in Račevskis’ view, thus points to Latvia’s European heritage.

⁴³ See www.dzivesstasts.lv.

similar, though differently inflected discourses that are marked as Russian and that exhibit what Latvians often refer to as the “great Russian chauvinism.” Such discourses tend to argue that Russians have produced cultural figures and works of universal value while the Latvian culture is ethnographic and therefore provincial.

In a recently published volume entitled “Baltic Postcolonialism,” David Chioni Moore (2006) points out that the Balts lost the opportunity to be labeled postcolonial by claiming to be European, while labeling Russians as “Asiatic” or “other.” Moore calls this “compensatory behavior.” His contribution is part of an edited volume, which explicitly aims at securing international recognition for Baltic suffering through deploying discourses of colonialism (Kelertas 2006). In the volume, Western scholars, mainly from the Baltic diaspora, suggest that the Baltic peoples can and should be thought of in postcolonial terms. Violeta Kelertas (2006) thus argues that the oppression and suffering Baltic nations underwent under Soviet rule is on par with that experienced by the former British and French colonies. From a literary studies perspective, Karl Jirgens (2006) agrees that the Baltic present can indeed be thought of as postcolonial, though in relation to a past of domination in general rather than of Soviet domination in particular.

Discourses of colonialism and postcolonialism are not generally prevalent in Latvia—with the exception of calls for decolonization emanating from ultra-right nationalist organizations and publications. While striving to garner recognition of past suffering is intelligible to many Latvia, the turn to discourses of colonialism and postcolonialism is less so. However, contemporary debates among scholars of socialism and postsocialism about the colonial identity of the Soviet state extend beyond the Baltic context. They usually focus on the following issues: attempts to assess the criteria by which to determine whether the Soviet state was colonial or not; questions about how to reconcile the colonial-like practices of the Soviet socialist project and its anti-colonial claims and orientations; considerations of the analytical and political motives that prompt posing the question of colonialism in relation to the Soviet state; and considerations of the analytical and political consequences of posing such a question.⁴⁴ Many arguments about the colonial nature of the Soviet project share the premise (sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly) that cross-cultural domination is integral to the colonial relationship, and that it matters greatly whether the Soviet state treated its non-Russian subjects—for example, Kazakhs—differently than Russian peasants (Slezkine 2000:227, Northrop 2004, Edgar 2005, Chernetsky 2003, Hirsch 2005). For these scholars, determining whether the Soviet empire was colonial or not depends on the ability to establish the always-already particular, namely Russian, identity of the allegedly universal and modernizing Soviet state and its involvement in cross-cultural modes of domination.

At the same time, a number of scholars of socialism and postsocialism have raised the issue of “internal colonization,” arguing that colonialism works just as well across class lines. For example, emphasizing a lack of research on the forms of domination of the Russian peasantry, Alexander Etkind argues that Russian cultural politics in the 19th century “emerged in the context of internal colonization and produced internal Orientalism” and that the relations between the gentry and the peasantry were comparable to relations between the colonizer and the colonized in European colonial empires (in Collier et. al. 2003:18). Similarly, Jon Kyst (2003) suggests that postcolonial theory is imprecise, for it does not allow for the notion of self-colonization; Kyst suggests that Russia itself was a victim of colonization, since Russian intellectuals attempted to mimic the West.

Variouly informed by the large and diverse body of analytical and political work that goes under the sign of postcoloniality, these scholars deploy the labels of colonizer and

⁴⁴ For more on this see debates in a special issue of *Uibandus* (2003, vol. 7), as well as Russian Review (2000, vol. 59).

colonized as a binary pair for the purpose of indexing variously arranged hierarchical relations of difference. In other words, given the shifting relationship between the colonized and colonizer slots and the bodies that fill it, these subject positions are currently used to index relations that posit consequential differences between hierarchically arranged entities that entail symbolic and actual violence, economic exploitation, political domination, or the transformation of a way of life. Positing the Soviet project as colonial, then, seems to point to the presence of such concrete consequential differences in relations between the Soviet project and its subjects, whether that be Central Asian women (Northrop 2004), the small peoples of the North (Slezkine 1996), or inhabitants of the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands (Brown 2005).

Thus deployed, the colonial label does not speak to the complexity and multiplicity of the Soviet socialist project and risks becoming a stand-in for crude notions of domination. As Yuri Slezkine argues:

[...] cross-cultural encounters cannot be fully described in terms of domination, [...] colonial representations cannot be wholly reduced to the “gross political fact” of colonialism; [...] there are meaningful differences between various colonial voices, and [...] it really matters to everyone concerned (including historians) whether a hunting band is to be “protected” or “developed”, and [...] whether one enters a tundra encampment expecting a demand for alcohol or an interest in world revolution. (1996: x)

While provisionally deploying the labels of colonizer / colonized with regard to Soviet rule might point towards consequential differences that concrete practices introduce for particular groups of people or for their ways of life, this in itself is not analytically or politically satisfying, for it neither illuminates the complexity of the Soviet past or post-Soviet present nor does justice to the complex and varied postcolonial problem-space. Thus, the volume on Baltic postcolonialism too tends to sacrifice analytic specificity to political positioning. In order to reflect on the effects of relations of domination in the Baltics and, more specifically, within the Latvian tradition, it may not be necessary to embrace the discourse of postcolonialism or the analytic of postcoloniality. In fact, such a move may even obscure the diversity of modes and relations of domination that shape the current life of the Latvian *tauta*.

As I have illustrated above, the intersection of the multiple historical modes of domination and contemporary power relations that are formative of the Latvian *tauta* produces a tension between glory and suffering that enables both pride and identification with the achievements of European colonialism and a distancing from its excesses through refuge in narratives of serfdom and resistance to domination. It is precisely Latvians' ability to navigate a shifting and fluid space of identification between the positions of master and slave, inhabiting one *and* the other without being fully determined by either, that best defines the current predicament of the Latvian *tauta*, as well as reveals the contours of the contemporary moral economy (Fassin and Rechtman 2009).

Caught in the tension between glory and suffering in moments when attempts are made to fix responsibility and accountability for past and present practices, Latvians on occasion claim to be average—no more and no less racist, anti-Semitic, or intolerant than the rest of Europe. Thus, alongside taking the viewer on an exotic tour of Gambia and Tobago, the film about Latvia's connections with Gambia and Tobago also entailed some historical narratives about the reign of Duke Jacob. Professional historians consulted by the filmmakers argued that in the last instance, one should not evaluate the pursuits of Duke Jacob through the prism of today. Ultimately, their narratives went, Duke Jacob was simply doing the same as

everyone else in 17th century Europe—building a navy, obtaining colonies, trading in coveted goods and in enslaved Africans. He was no more and no less colonial or ruthless than the rest of Europe, and therefore the colonial aspect of his mercantile activities did not require special consideration. Historians’ emphasis on Duke Jacob’s average coloniality suggested that what matters for Latvia and Latvians in the current historical moment is the ability to claim Europeanness. To do so, however, it was not necessary to reflect on the nature of colonial rule.

Similarly, with regard to the highly contested issue of Latvian collaboration with the Nazi regime, Latvian historian Aivars Stranga has argued that here too Latvians have been quite average.⁴⁵ Namely, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries they have been no more and no less anti-Semitic than the rest of Europe. During a conference dedicated to the 100th anniversary of Isaiah Berlin’s birth held in Rīga in June 2009, Stranga delivered a presentation on Jews in Rīga, arguing that, despite the almost total annihilation of Rīga’s Jewish population during World War II, in different historical moments Rīga has been a safe, though not necessarily a welcoming, haven for Jews.⁴⁶ When someone from the audience asked Stranga about anti-Semitic sentiments of the general population that may have facilitated the Holocaust not only in Rīga, but in Latvia more broadly, he replied that Rīga has never been an intellectual, but rather a commercial center, and thus there were no material conditions for producing ideological and thus racial anti-Semitism. Rather, Rīga’s residents, including Latvians, exhibited *saimniecisks*, that is, socio-economic anti-Semitism. Since there was no intellectual potential to produce an independent strand of anti-Semitism, Stranga continued, Rigans and Latvians imported their anti-Semitism from elsewhere in Europe. As such, they were not unique; they were *no more and no less* anti-Semitic than the rest of Europe. They were and are average.⁴⁷

In yet another context, a friend of mine—a woman working for a liberal think-tank—brought to my attention a children’s poem written in 1908 by a seminal Latvian literary and political figure, Jānis Rainis, which was republished in 2006 in a volume of Rainis’ poems for children. She told me that the poem was so blatantly racist that it was impossible for her to show the poem, and thus the whole book, to her children. The poem—all of its 6 lines—was about encountering *moris* (a moor) in the streets of Rīga. It described the colorful livery he wore and was accompanied by an illustration which depicted a very dark-skinned, thick-lipped man (see Image 1). The poem was entitled *Briesmonis* (the

⁴⁵ Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust have emerged as especially sensitive issues in Latvian historiography. Latvian historians, as well as many Latvians, see the international interest in Latvians’ relationship with Nazi forces as excessive and unfair to the historical complexity of the period. See Modris Eksteins’ (2000) “Walking Since Daybreak” for a sophisticated treatment of the issue.

⁴⁶ Elsewhere Stranga argues that about 66,000 to 68,000 Latvian Jews and about 22,000 Jews from elsewhere in Europe were killed in the German occupied territory of Latvia (2008:359).

⁴⁷ On occasion, claims to being average can become a source of irony, as was the case with the interview on the economic crises that the former Latvian Prime Minister Atis Slakteris gave to Bloomberg TV in November 2008. Struggling with English, Slakteris responded to the journalist’s question about what happened in Latvia to bring it to such a detrimental financial situation by stating: “Nothing special.” In the aftermath of the interview, the phrase was printed on T-shirts along with other English language blunders generated by Slakteris at the time of the interview. A new rock band called itself Nothing Special and claimed that this phrase was a conceptual work of art that they found very inspiring (Gasuna 2008). (Thanks to Alexandre Beliaev for pointing out this connection to me.)

monster).⁴⁸ When I sought to clarify what exactly bothered her, she noted that she thought the title was not appropriate—“why would you call a black person monster?” While she allowed the possibility that at the time of writing—in 1908—such a poem would have gone unnoticed, she questioned the judgment of the editor to include the poem in a contemporary reproduction of the book. “With that in mind,” she said, “I put the book away on the top shelf and have never read it to my children.”



Image 1: The poem by Rainis titled “*Briesmonis*” (Monster).⁴⁹

Following this exchange, I located the book and introduced the poem to a group of teachers who had been gathered to discuss tolerance in the framework of the National Programme for the Promotion of Tolerance, and asked them to share their thoughts. Given the fact that I introduced the poem by conveying my friend’s suggestion that it was deeply problematic, they knew, of course, that something was “wrong” with it. Most obviously to them, it was the title. The teachers set out to explain the odd title, which, they thought, did not fit the otherwise gentle and friendly tone of the poem. The possibility that gentle and friendly texts could also be racializing or orientalist, if not racist, was not in their discursive and visceral repertoire. Their sensibilities were not cultivated to recognize, whether viscerally or cognitively, the entanglements of both the image and the text in colonial power-knowledge regimes. They thought that the words used did not exhibit any explicitly negative intention, and that the sense of wonder in the poem expressed a natural sentiment with regard to the unfamiliar. One teacher speculated that Rainis lived during a time when black people would have commonly be perceived as “frightening others” in Europe, and thus there was no reason to emphasize this poem as especially problematic. In other words, the teachers were not exactly sure why they should be concerned with this particular representational practice and others like it. Resonating with historians’ suggestion not to judge Duke Jacob from the perspective of today, the teachers did not find the poem as indicative of particularly unique or noteworthy Latvian sensibilities, but rather as an average product of a historical moment that extended well beyond Latvia.

⁴⁸ The poem read: Do you know who I saw on the street? A black African moor! He had a hat on this head; It was small, and round, and stood straight up. And his dress was long and red, And he had gloves on his hands.

⁴⁹ The image is reproduced with permission from the publishing house Zinātne.

In Latvia, traces of the racialized and colonial histories of Western liberal democracies intersect with the Soviet legacy to form the peculiar condition of being average. For example, during the Soviet time, it was Africans and especially African Americans who were the paradigmatic objects of racism, even as they were not the only racialized and racializing subjects (Matusevich 2007, Blakely 1986, Lemon 2000).⁵⁰ This perception continues to shape contemporary sensibilities when it is argued that racism is and always has been a foreign problem. For example, during the same discussion with teachers about the use of the word *nēģeris* (negro) which I mentioned earlier in the chapter, several participants referred to Soviet-time representations of Africans or African Americans in newspapers, literary works, stories, and jokes, to argue that the image behind the word *nēģeris* in the Latvian imaginary continues to be that of someone oppressed and therefore good (or, in the Soviet frame of reference, potentially revolutionary), even as the ideology within which this image made sense has been discredited. One teacher referred to a Soviet-time story about a *nēģeris* who was cleaning a white man's boots. She argued that the circulation of this and other similar stories has cultivated an image of *nēģeris* as "the good guy" and that therefore the word does not have any negative associations in the Latvian language. Another participant recalled a joke a colleague had shared with her when they were riding a slow-moving train. The colleague had said that the train is moving so slowly, because the *nēģeri* cannot pull it fast enough. While invoking this joke to suggest that Latvians think of Africans as hard-working and therefore oppressed and good, the teacher did not linger on the scene itself where Latvians, while associating with the hard-working *nēģeri*, were riding the train pulled by them—or to the laughter that this image invoked. This joke seemed to enable a simultaneous identification with the black body through narratives of work and oppression and a distancing from it through identification with the white master whose train was being pulled (or whose boots were being cleaned).

Not unlike the fluidity of identification at work during the showing and viewing of the film on Gambia, the teachers were simultaneously drawing on seemingly contradictory identifications to position themselves as both different from and similar to the oppressed and racialized bodies of *nēģeri*. Whereas in my analysis of the film and the discourses surrounding it, I argued that the simultaneous master / slave identification is enabled by the articulation of the histories of oppression with civilizational aspirations and pressures to become European, this particular instance demonstrates that it is also enabled by socialist discourses and practices. Through the invocation of the story and the joke, the teachers were partly claiming socialist subjectivities, which allowed them to identify with depictions of *nēģeri* as "the good guys" and thus absolved them from inflicting injury. They did so even as they firmly located themselves within national narratives. They posited themselves as socialist subjects who had been continuously exposed to depictions of hard-working and oppressed blacks suffering at the hands of racism and capitalism—images which cannot but have shaped the way they perceived of racialized difference today. While not identifying with the Soviet socialist project, the teachers nevertheless claimed it has had a constitutive role in the way they orient themselves in the world.

The Political Stakes of Being Average

As I have suggested, Latvians on occasion claim to be average when the push and pull dynamics between glory and suffering threaten to become too unsettling. This happens most frequently when Latvians are invited to critically reflect upon either the past or the present

⁵⁰ See Chapter 4 for a more elaborate discussion on the subject of race and racism.

and, in reflecting on the past and present blemishes, strive towards a better future. On such occasions, claiming to be average seems to gesture towards a particular political logic that emerges in relation to the moral economy that structures contemporary political life. By way of consideration of what such a political logic might tell us about the current historical moment, I would like to briefly turn to Elizabeth Povinelli's (2002) account of Australian liberal multiculturalism. Discussing the way in which the Australian nation constitutes itself as a liberal democratic nation through the discourses and practices of multiculturalism in relation to its Aboriginal population, Povinelli argues that shame about the colonial past becomes constitutive of the liberal democratic Australian nation and a necessary element of nation-building: "An embeddedness, implication, and engagement in the nation's historic brutality towards its colonial subjects is rewritten as the necessary condition of nation-building in late modern liberal democratic societies. It is the crucial affective element in the definition of borders, interiors, discourses, imaginaries, and identities" (2002: 161). The shame, however, is not attached to the liberal democratic institutions or to the nation as a collective. Neither the law, nor the people are bad; rather, it is misguided good intentions of predecessors of the contemporary liberal democratic nation that have resulted in acts that are deemed repugnant from today's perspective. And thus the rectification of unintentional wrongs becomes constitutive of liberalism: "the articulate pain of the other simultaneously allows the liberal subject to feel herself or himself to have been unintentionally causing wrong and to be constantly moving to rectify that wrong" (Povinelli 2002: 163).

In contrast, many in Latvia consider that historical complexity does not allow such extrication from the past. It is not at all clear whether it is the state, the people, the occupying forces or some combination thereof that should be deemed responsible for past wrongs. Moreover, which wrongs? The historical entanglement of suffering and inflicting suffering exceeds a simple juxtaposition between bad Latvian nationalist sensibilities and those that have suffered from them or continue to suffer in the present. As Modris Eksteins has eloquently described World War II in Latvia, "collaborators, resistance fighters, SS soldiers, Jews, peasants, professors, prostitutes, children, paupers, bankers, criminals, clergy-men. Every nationality, age, social class, type. They were all present amidst devastation" (2000: 220). The front line had moved through Latvia twice; Latvians had joined or had been conscripted in both German and Soviet armies; both armies raped, pillaged, and killed; "fear and hatred were ways of life" (Eksteins 2000: x). In such conditions, it seems that claiming to be average amounts to an attempt to approximate the historical complexity and to acknowledge the fact that, as Bruce Grant has argued in the context of Caucasus, "the ordinary and the extraordinary are equally embraced as structuring elements of everyday life" (2004: 731).

Thus, shame and the claim to being average not only emerge in relation to different historical situations, but also operate in accordance with different political logics. In the liberal democratic / postcolonial context of Australia—and possibly in other similar contexts—public shame about the past does not unsettle the liberal subject, but rather makes it stronger, for it is not the concrete past, but rather universal principles that lend direction to the liberal subject's sovereign agency. In the context of Latvia, public shame about the past is not likely to have the same effect. Given the already existent proliferation of a liberally inclined discourse on the need for Latvians to "honestly deal with their past," many in Latvia suspect that public discussion of particular kind of past wrongs—such as collaboration with the Nazi regime, for example—would permanently taint Latvians as a historical community (Reinsch Campbell 2004). Interestingly, on the one hand, "dealing with the past" supposedly entails distancing from it in order to assert autonomy and exercise choice and critical reflection in the present, yet, on the other hand, such distancing is impossible, for the past ends up haunting and tainting the historical community of Latvians precisely through the

injunction to “deal with the past.”

Contemporary invitations for public reflection on the problem of intolerance are often placed in the same category as public shame about past wrongs and therefore resented or ignored. Here too Latvians claim to be average. Yet, public claims to being average engage with the past and the present in a different manner. With regard to the past, the claim to being average acknowledges that suffering or inflicting suffering were not prerogatives of any one particular group, but rather an effect of historical contingency. As such, it acknowledges human finitude in relation to historical conditions, though it can, on occasion, attribute too much determinative power to circumstance. With regard to the present, the claim to being average seems to invite expanding the focus from Latvians as especially nationalistic and reactionary subjects to Latvians as subjects constituted at the intersection of imperial, colonial, and communist trajectories.

In what follows, therefore, I do not attempt to adjudicate between incommensurable claims of injury—that of Latvians in relation to the Soviet past and the European present and that of minorities in relation to the Latvian state and the *tauta*. Rather, I consider what the multiple and intersecting experiences of history and claims of injury that unfold in contemporary Latvia tell us about the “moral economies of our era in which they find their place” (Fassin and Rechtman 2009: 279).

Chapter 2: (Post)Soviet People and the Minority Question

Epistemology of Ethnicity and the Soviet People

Reflecting on the creation of new states in Eastern Europe following World War I, Hannah Arendt called the process preposterous since it

...lumped together many peoples in single states, called some of them “state people” and entrusted them with the government, silently assumed that others (such as the Slovaks in Czechoslovakia, or the Croats and Slovenes in Yugoslavia) were equal partners in the government, which of course they were not, and with equal arbitrariness created out of the remnant a third group of nationalities called “minorities,” thereby adding to the many burdens of the new states the trouble of observing special regulations for part of the population. (1979: 270-271).

The break up of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in another wave of creation and re-creation of new states in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. To be sure, there were some resonances with this earlier moment in history, since, as in the case of Latvia, several of the new states posited themselves as restored versions of interwar states. However, the socialist period had also introduced important differences, especially with regard to states that emerged from the former Soviet republics. Most importantly, the Soviet ideological and governmental practices produced conditions for the emergence of a *Soviet people* who did not easily fold into the epistemology of ethnicity, namely an understanding of the world as consisting of ethnically defined peoples or nationalities which could be assigned their own state or which could become a minority in someone else’s state (Weitz 2008, Jackson Pierce 1997, Arendt 1979).

Within the political logic of the Soviet socialist project, Soviet people (*Sovetskii narod* in Russian), as a specifically socialist collective identification, was supposed to replace national identification as the diverse peoples of the Soviet Union fought backwardness and moved towards the future of socialism. It was to be a non-ethnic collectivity united through socialist principles. Its seemingly ethnic form—for example, Russian language as the language of communication—was not thought of as ethnic by the Soviet regime, since Russians occupied an ambiguous position as a non-ethnic people closer to the ideal of “socialist in content, national in form” than any other peoples of the Soviet Union. So much so that the Russian national form ceased to be national and came to be viewed as Soviet. Ironically, the Sovietness of Russians made them first among equals within the national hierarchy of the Soviet Union (Slezkine 1996). Such positioning was perceived in several national republics—for example, in the Baltics—as an indication that the Soviet socialist project was nothing but Russian imperial expansionism.

However, the Soviet people was not an identification that was instantly imposed upon the diverse population of the Soviet Union, even as it remained its long term goal. As Yuri Slezkine (1994) has shown, the 1920s and 1930s were characterized by excessive focus on nation-building throughout the Soviet Union in order to diffuse the animosity many “nationals” felt towards Russian imperialism, as well as to facilitate the development of the various “backward peoples,” for which national language was an important tool (see also Martin 2001, Northrop 2004, Edgar 2005, Hirsch 2005).

The project of nation-building was contested and questioned from the very beginning both in Moscow and in some of the republics by those who thought that excessive institutionalization of national difference was not conducive to the socialist project and that

class should be the primary unifying principle (Slezkine 1994). Lenin and Stalin both disagreed, emphasizing the importance of the transitory stage of national self-determination, and Soviet nation-building proceeded at full pace throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. Nation-building was conceived as the institutionalization of ethno-territorial and linguistic autonomy. Soviet ethnographers and administrators proceeded to identify ethnic groups residing in the Soviet territory and to evaluate the maturity of their national consciousness and the objective conditions of their national development to see whether they merited nation-building or whether they should be folded into a larger national group (Hirsch 2005). The first two decades of Soviet rule were therefore characterized by the endless categorization and division of the new Soviet citizens into national groups and by the creation of corresponding administrative units in the form of national republics, autonomous regions and ethnic party cells within the larger structure of the Communist party (Slezkine 1994). At around the same time that Europe created minority states with minority populations and folded them into the monitoring structures of the League of Nations, the Soviet Union pursued an aggressive policy of protecting minority rights, which entailed the active creation of national minorities (Hirsch 2005).

However, the fervor of nation-building subsided around 1934 when Stalin announced that backwardness was conquered and that the socialist future had arrived (Slezkine 1994: 442). The Soviet government proceeded to cut down the national units, but did not question the prevalent conception of nations as ethno-territorially and linguistically autonomous units. It was then that Sovietness also became strongly articulated with Russianness. Yuri Slezkine describes that turn in the Soviet nation-building efforts as follows:

If the legitimacy of an ethnic community depended on the government's grant of territory, then the withdrawal of that grant would automatically "denationalize" that community (though not necessarily its individual passport carrying members!). ... By the end of the decade [1930s] most ethnically defined soviets, villages, districts and other small units had been disbanded, some autonomous republics forgotten and most "national minority" schools and institutions closed down. ... However—and this is the most important "however" of this essay—the ethnic groups that already had their own republics and their own extensive bureaucracies were actually told to redouble their efforts at building distinct national cultures. ... the nationality policy had abandoned the pursuit of countless rootless nationalities in order to concentrate on a few full-fledged fully equipped "nations." (Slezkine 1994: 445)

An important aspect of this shift and, moreover, one that often gets overlooked in analyzing Soviet nation-building efforts and their aftermath is that members of national communities residing outside of their designated ethno-territorial units, as well as those ethnic communities without corresponding ethno-territorial units, were left to their own devices, even as within the ethno-territorial units nation-building was intensified and standardized (Slezkine 1994: 446). All national groups were supposed to discover their great writers, cook national cuisine, dance folk dances, and be deeply moved by the art of other national groups (Slezkine 1994: 447). For that purpose, national life became highly performative. It was shortly after this shift that Latvia was incorporated into the Soviet Union. According to the Soviet standards of the day, Latvia exhibited too much rather than too little national consciousness, and, what's worse, of the bourgeoisie kind, thus Soviet power focused on cleansing the population of nationalist elements—Latvian and otherwise, bringing in Soviet citizens from other parts of the Soviet Union, and closing down the remaining minority cultural and educational establishments (Pabriks 2003, Silova 2006). Soviet nation-building in Latvia, therefore, emphasized the cultivation of a Soviet people and

a Latvian national form with socialist content in accordance with the standardized understanding of national difference as a spectacle.

Most historical inquiries of the Soviet nation-building practices cease around 1940s. Yet, it is precisely the Brezhnev years of stagnation, following Khrushchev's thaw, that solidified a particular version of the "friendship of the peoples" which paved the way for postsocialist nationalism in the former Soviet Union and other former socialist countries (Verdery 1991). These years also formed the conditions of possibility for the emergence of a particular kind of Soviet people in the post-Soviet present.

In order to understand the emergence of Soviet people as a post-Soviet phenomenon, it is imperative to trace what actually happened to those ethnic communities who were left to their own devices when aggressive nation-building ended in the 1903s, as well as to those Soviet citizens who, in a true Soviet manner, moved across the Soviet Union for work or other reasons. Settling in national republics where only the titular nationalities could have a public national life, these people became the Soviet *narod* (people) *par excellence*, congealing into a historical community that, while consisting of individuals of various ethnic backgrounds as inscribed in their passports, was held together by a specifically Soviet kind of solidarity. While many of them spoke Russian as their first language, they did not necessarily think of Russian as a marker of ethnic identity, but rather as a language of communication, leading scholars of postsocialism, for example, to speak of a specifically Baltic Russian identity based on linguistic affiliation (Laitin 1998). This, however, is not a sufficient account, for it does not engage the specific ways language unites this segment of the population. As I will attempt to show in this chapter, what matters more than language and more than ethnic identification is whether this population can or cannot imagine collective life as national and how they therefore relate to the Latvian state and the *tauta*.

Given the large number of Russian-speaking Soviet citizens who were transferred to Latvia during the Soviet period, many of whom became truly Soviet, the post-Soviet Latvian state faced a differently configured population than the post-World War I Latvian state. It is important to think of this shift not only as historical and demographic, but also as epistemological. Prior to World War I, the Latvian *tauta* thought of itself as a cultural community that did not necessarily require political and territorial autonomy. An articulation between cultural community and territorial autonomy was subsequently solidified during the period of independent statehood from 1918 until 1940 and during the period of national autonomy within the Soviet Union. Yet, the Soviet period also produced a historical community of Soviet people, which made post-Soviet nation building difficult not because these people wanted another national state, but because they did not think of themselves as a national group and thus could not find a place for themselves in a national state; moreover, they did not easily fold into the distinction between a majority and national minorities.

While the notion of the Soviet people—as a supra-ethnic identification that cuts across and eventually does away with national difference—has to date been commonly understood as an ideological discourse of the Soviet regime, I suggest that the notion of the Soviet people should also, if not most importantly, be understood as a collective subject position that generates and is generated by particular ethical and political orientations. As some scholars have demonstrated (Mason 2009), in the post-Soviet period, people in the former Soviet space occasionally mobilize non-ethnic Soviet identities to make political claims or to claim a public presence. In the case of Latvia, a political ethos that springs forth from a collective Soviet subjectivity becomes most visible when some segments of Latvia's Russian-speaking population do not recognize themselves in the post-Soviet Latvian state or are not recognized as proper national subjects by the Latvian state. The post-Soviet Latvian state, as I have already noted, is a self-proclaimed national state which, in addition to adhering to liberal democratic principles and guaranteeing individual freedoms, derives

legitimacy from claiming to enable the flourishing of Latvians as a historically formed cultural community. In the post-Soviet context, rather than an overarching and supra-ethnic identification, Sovietness appears on the margins or in the interstices of nation-states that have emerged in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Sovietness, therefore, emerges as a profoundly post-Soviet phenomenon that not only presents a political challenge to specific national states, but also introduces an epistemological difference with regard to an ethnic understanding of the world.

Within the context of minority politics in Latvia, the Soviet people present a threat and an opportunity. On the one hand, their presence constitutes an opportunity for the post-Soviet Latvian state insofar as the state—as a national state—boosts its legitimacy by setting out to undo the effects of Sovietization (or Russification, as it is widely known) and to re-ethnicize the population. Arguably, those who can be identified as Soviet, but non-Russian—namely people who may speak Russian and exhibit Soviet sensibilities, but are also identifiable as Ukrainian or Belorussian—are seen as constituting an opportunity for the Latvian state, though Russians are not necessarily automatically excluded. On the other hand, their presence constitutes a threat insofar as they do not fold into the ethnic epistemology at the foundation of the national state. This threat, however, does not derive from a simple political opposition between ethnic groups that compete over state power or aspire for their own state. Rather, it threatens the ethnic epistemology itself and thus the nature of the national state.

In this chapter, I give historical and ethnographic texture to the epistemological divide between Soviet people and nationally-oriented persons, as well as argue that this divide is best understood as a dynamic ethical-political distinction rather than something that can be fixed by criteria such as language, citizenship, or kinship. I also demonstrate that the distinction between Soviet people and nationally-oriented persons cannot necessarily be mapped onto specific population groups, as even people who seemingly fold into the epistemology of ethnicity—such as the Tatar women I engage with in this chapter—exhibit sensibilities which can conjure up the image of the Soviet people. The distinction between Soviet people and nationally-oriented persons is thus a distinction between two discursive subject positions. While the bodies that occupy these subject positions may change, there are, however, historically shaped patterns and some people are more likely to occupy one subject position rather than the other. The distinction between Soviet people and nationally oriented persons is important to understand as a structuring factor of minority politics in Latvia. Thus, for example, it is central for understanding the way that other categories, such as migrants and minorities, operate within state politics and in popular imaginary.

I also argue in this chapter that the Latvian state's and people's reaction to the presence of Sovietness is shaped not only by Latvians' sensibilities with regard to the Soviet past, but also by the political logic of minority / majority relations which emerged in Europe following World War I. This logic assumed that populations can be divided into hierarchically arranged ethnic groups and did not consider the possibility of excess in the form of something like the Soviet people. Suggesting that Latvian minority politics are largely shaped by tensions built into the modern nation-state form does not necessarily amount to suggesting that Latvia or other Eastern European states do not face serious challenges with regard to their diverse populations or that their diverse populations do not face serious challenges with regard to the state. Rather, it amounts to asking how is it that these challenges are made intelligible through minority / majority discourses and how is it that they are almost always perceived as emerging from the somewhat backward and passionately nationalistic dispositions of Eastern European peoples and states rather than the cultural politics of the nation-state that implicate France and Germany as much as Latvia and Poland.

National Minorities and Migrants

In 2005, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cooperation with a Latvian member of the European Parliament (a representative of the center-right party *Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK*) prepared a poster exhibit on national minorities in Latvia to be presented to the European Parliament (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006). For more than a decade since independence in 1991, the minority question had figured prominently in Latvia's relations with the international community, yet the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, many politicians, as well as Latvia's residents, thought that the international community still did not understand the historically specific contours of the minority question in post-Soviet Latvia. The exhibit was meant to raise awareness about the ways in which the past placed particular demands upon Latvians' and their state's relations with minorities.

The exhibit was launched in Brussels with the participation of representatives from minority cultural associations. Among the attendees was Vjačeslavs Ceļešs—a Belorussian artist who has on numerous occasions stated that Latvians' pronounced national consciousness inspired him to cultivate his own national consciousness back in the 1950s, when he had been an unknowing victim of Soviet Russification policies (Hermanis 2003, Klinšāne Bērziņa 1998, Pommere 1998, Tērvetes svētki Rīgā 2003).⁵¹ As Ceļešs told me in an interview, he arrived in Rīga as a young man in the 1950s speaking only Russian. After becoming friends with Latvians at the University, he began reflecting about why he, a Belorussian, spoke only Russian. Soon thereafter Ceļešs started reading about Belorussian history and learning the Belorussian language. During the Soviet period, he organized and cultivated a Belorussian artistic community in his penthouse apartment—a Belorussian *hatka* (little hut), as Ceļešs called it. His place was frequented by Belorussian and Latvian artists and intellectuals who found solidarity not only in artistic endeavors, but also in their orientation towards a proper national consciousness.

If for Ceļešs Latvians were exemplary national subjects, for the Latvian state too, Ceļešs had become an exemplary national subject even though he was Belorussian rather than Latvian. While Ceļešs was not of the Latvian *tauta*, he was made of the same material, as it were, insofar as he saw himself as a person who possesses a consciousness of oneself as a being embedded in a particular national culture and strove towards cultural self-realization. The state recognized this by sponsoring Ceļešs's trip to Brussels to accompany the exhibit on the flourishing life of national minorities in Latvia. Given that Ceļešs understood the value of being a nationally-oriented person, he could not possibly object to the concept of a national state in which the collective life of "state people" (Arendt 1979) culminates in political self-realization, yet collective life for minorities manifests itself as cultural self-realization. All in all, Ceļešs came on the right side of the epistemological divide between non-ethnic Soviet people and ethnic—therefore proper—subjects of the national Latvian state.

⁵¹ I am using the Latvian language rendering of his name, as it appears in the publications I cite. In Belorussian and Russian, however, his name would be spelled without an "s" at the end. Transcription of Russian and foreign names in Latvian remains a contested practice. Some people claim that the Latvianized name is no longer their name. The Latvian state, however, insists on rendering all foreign names in Latvian. The state has established a special office which issues certificates on how foreign names are to be spelled in Latvian. If, for example, a person of foreign nationality wants to get married to a Latvian citizen in Latvia, they have to obtain a certificate from this office, so that their name would appear in Latvian on all the official documents. If one is especially insistent, it is possible to retain the original name in parenthesis.

Plugged into the circles of intellectuals, Ceļešs was on the frontlines when the Latvian independence movement, known as “the third awakening,” began in the late 1980s.⁵² As part of the movement, minorities were invited to awaken along with Latvians from the slumber of de-ethnicization and / or Russification pursued by the Soviet state. And thus Latvia’s Popular Front—a moderate political organization at the forefront of independence struggles—organized the first People’s Forum (*Tautu Forums*) in 1988 where minority representatives were invited by way of word of mouth and newspaper ads to come and express their grievances towards the Soviet state and to collectively think about the ways in which they would like to cultivate their collective identities within the framework of a national and a Latvian state. While congruent with Latvians’ understanding of proper personhood as a national personhood, as well as with aspirations of a fair number of individuals who claimed minority identity, this move was also strategic. As Baiba Pētersone explains in an interview with Iveta Silova:

The idea of restoring cultural autonomy for minority education... was a strategic move. I can openly say now that the politics were geared toward splitting the opposition and distinguishing among the Russified minorities—Lithuanians, Estonians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Jews—all of whom were studying in Russian schools and did not even think of their own identity. There was no tradition to openly talk about ethnic identity during the Soviet times. Therefore, it was necessary to use education, particularly minority education and culture, as an instrument of returning minorities to their ethnic identity and reversing the effects of Russification. This was the primary motive why the minority education issue was raised at the time. (Silova 2006: 53)

The other side of the “opposition” consisted of the internationalist movement *Interfronte* which did not embrace the move for independence or a national conception of the state, but rather worked to maintain the Soviet Union. *Interfronte* was thought to consist of Soviet subjects *par excellence* who had not only lost their sense of belonging to a particular cultural community and history, but did not care about it either. Ceļešs, therefore, was a good subject of the national state in the making: he embodied the kind of awakening that the national political forces considered as strategically desirable (and, moreover, he had awoken early). Today Ceļešs continues to be a proponent of the state’s minority politics. He was actively involved in establishing a Belorussian school and still serves as its director. He speaks poorly of those he sees as lacking proper national consciousness and marks them by the derogatory term *sovki* (from the word combination “Soviet Union,” but also meaning “dustpan” in Russian). In Ceļešs’s view, *sovki* are international and economic in orientation, that is, disembedded from national tradition and concerned with *living well*. Importantly, Ceļešs’ use of the notion of *sovki* marks a behavioral Soviet type—that is, an internationalist citizen of the past rather than a cosmopolitan citizen of present.⁵³ In contrast, Ceļešs speaks of himself as national and ethical in orientation, that is, embedded in a national tradition and concerned with the *higher good*. Remade as a nationally-oriented person, Ceļešs has found his place in the Latvian national state not because he has assimilated into the Latvian nation (he still feels more comfortable speaking Russian than Latvian), but because he is a nationally-oriented person—a colleague characterized him as being Belorussian in soul and respectful and loving of Latvia (Tērvetes svētki Rīgā 2003). He says he is satisfied with the

⁵² The period between 1850 and 1890, when Young Latvians embarked upon nation-building efforts (see Introduction), is thought of as the first awakening; the years leading up to the establishment of the Latvian state in 1918 as the second awakening.

⁵³ Alexei Yurhak, personal communication, 2008.

kind of recognition granted to him as a national minority subject concerned with cultural self-determination. Cultural self-determination is thus a project of overcoming the Soviet legacy rather than that of making political claims against the Latvian state. For Ceļešs, it is a project which one undertakes together with Latvians rather than against them.

Arguably, this subject position is more readily available for non-Russian ethnic groups, which can be construed as victims of Soviet Russification practices and thus recuperated from the Russian-speaking milieu through practices of re-ethnicization. Russians are more likely to be conflated with Sovietness, though those who inhabit an orientation similar to that of Ceļešs' can also become fellow travelers in the national project. In turn, those who exhibit different orientations tend to be relegated to the category of migrants.⁵⁴

To bring this distinction into sharper focus, I return to the exhibit on national minorities. The opening image of the poster exhibit entails a contour map of Latvia dotted with figures dressed in traditional dress suggesting their ethnic belonging—Polish, Lithuanian, Russian, Ukrainian and so forth. A ribbon in the colors of the Latvian national flag encloses the image. On the one hand, the image implies a history of multiple ethnic groups residing within the geographical territory and the political community of the national Latvian state. On the other hand, it fixes contemporary subjects in ethnographic time and space—the minority subjects are rendered as historical and cultural rather than contemporary and political subjects (Cilevich 2006).

Through chronologically arranged images, the poster exhibit tells the story of the flourishing of national minorities in cultural and political life during the first Latvian republic from 1918 until 1940. The poster of the interwar years focuses on accomplished minority politicians and civil servants, such as the Jewish politician Mordehajs Dubins, the Baltic German politician Pauls Šimans, and the Russian Old Believer politician Meletijs Kaļistratovs (Image 2).



Image 2: Mordehajs Dubins, Pauls Šimans and Meletijs Kaļistratovs. From the exhibit “National Minorities in Latvia: Then and Now.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See also Volkov 2007 for an elaboration of the concept of “ethnic minority.” Volkov argues that in Latvian political and scientific discourses the notion “ethnic” is opposed, firstly, to the mentality of Russians and, secondly, to Russian imperial aspirations. Thus, the concept “ethnic minority” is not opposed to the concept “Latvian nation,” but rather to that of the “migrant mentality” characteristic of Russians who “care about their home, payment, and job, but not an ecological situation in the place of residence” (2007: 100).

⁵⁵ Images from the exhibit have been included with permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The impression is one of the active participation of minorities—and their recognition—in the governance of the Latvian state. Skipping over the authoritarian nationalist period of Kārlis Ulmanis, characterized by the closure of minority schools and an emphasis on national unity, the exhibit turns to World War II and the Soviet occupation.⁵⁶ With the Soviet occupation came the migrants, the exhibit suggests. The masses of migrants—distinct from people in traditional dress on the cover poster and from the distinguished minority intellectuals and politicians of the interwar years—are said to have arrived in Latvia following World War II in search for a better life. The narrative emphasizes that national embeddedness was not important to them. The accompanying images depict women dressed in recognizably Russian attire standing by a recently arrived train in the Rīga train station (Image 3). Their cloth bags, which lent them the name *meshochniki* (sackers in Russian), are on the ground next to them. The narrative explains:

Migrants from the Soviet Union—“sackers” at the Rīga Railway Station. This class of people, whose main aim for coming to Latvia was shopping and seeking better living conditions, constituted a significant part of the half-million foreigners who settled in Latvia after World War II (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006).



Image 3: “Sackers” at the Rīga Railway Station. From the exhibit “National Minorities in Latvia: Then and Now.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005.

⁵⁶ The term “occupation” remains contested. The official state version endorses the occupation narrative, thus pointing to the illegal and forceful incorporation of Latvia into the Soviet Union in 1940. Others prefer to use the more neutral term “annexation,” while many in the Russian-speaking community speak of “liberation” of the Latvian people from the Nazi regime, thus privileging 1945 over 1940 as the beginning of Soviet power in Latvia.

The next image shows allegedly the same people storming Latvia's shops (Image 4).



Image 4: "Line at the food store, Rīga, the 1960s." From the exhibit "National Minorities in Latvia: Then and Now." Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005.

While people arrived from many different places during the Soviet period, for various reasons, and with various orientations, it was important for the purposes of the exhibit to highlight the difference between culturally and economically determined modes of life which were mapped onto particular population groups. While one constituted proper existence, the other was meaningless, even threatening, from the national perspective.

Following a narrative about the substantial ethnic reconfiguration of Latvia effected by Soviet policies—bringing in a new labor force and deporting previous residents—the exhibit turns to contemporary life. The difference between the interwar and contemporary presentation of minority life is striking: images of the contemporary life of national minorities as groups are exclusively ethnographic—rendered as a variety of individuals singing and dancing while dressed in their national costumes (Images 5, 6, 7 and 8). Next to images of ethnographic minority life the exhibit organizers placed an image of a naturalization ritual where new Latvian citizens, flowers in hand, are gathered for a group photo (Image 9).



Images 5 and 6: Minority cultural life in contemporary Latvia. From the exhibit "National Minorities in Latvia: Then and Now." Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005.



Images 7 and 8: Minority cultural life in contemporary Latvia. From the exhibit “National Minorities in Latvia: Then and Now.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005.



Image 9: Naturalization ceremony. From the exhibit “National Minorities in Latvia: Then and Now.” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005

Thus, within the conception of the national state, to be a national minority means to conduct political life as individuals, while relegating collective existence to the realm of culture. Even though national minorities as groups are expected to stay out of politics once they have been granted “the right to culture”—and many do—(with the understanding that individuals of minority groups can participate in politics as Latvian citizens and are subject to non-discrimination laws), there are quite a few unruly subjects who do not properly inhabit the designation “national minority.” Thus, a group of social scientists observed that: “there are often cases when some organization that is explicitly political and whose activities are not directed towards the development of cultural life tries to represent a minority. Such organizations usually politicize the idea of cultural autonomy with the aim to divide Latvian cultural space into ethnocentric segments” (Apine et. al. 2001: 33). For example, some organizations representing the Russian-speaking population demand public recognition of the Russian language as a legitimate language of communication between the state and its citizens through the discourse of national minorities (Cālīte 2006a, Cuianova 2005). The Latvian state, in turn, labors to argue that many of those who make such claims are not minorities at all, but rather former Soviet subjects who do not aim to cultivate their ethnic identity within the confines of the national minority framework, but rather to institute a bi-national state. Some of my interviewees explained to me that many of those who claim that Russian-language schools should be protected as minority schools are not proper minority

subjects at all—that is, they are either de-ethnicized Russians, Belorussians, and Ukrainians or they are Soviet Jews who have over the years become better Soviets than the Russians themselves (Slezkine 2006, Eksteins 2000).⁵⁷ The social scientists too concluded that such organizations are not nationally oriented and tend to consist of people who have “difficulties with ethnic consciousness.” It is in such moments that the state and the public tend to make a distinction between minorities and migrants. This distinction is otherwise difficult to see, because Russian-speakers, citizens and non-citizens alike, may fall into either one of the categories and often the only way to mark the difference is by marking how they inhabit the subject position of a minority—that is, whether they conduct themselves as national minorities which value a national way of life or attempt to politicize their difference and make claims against the state.

For example, Russians tend to be divided into Old Believers who trace their links with the territory of current day Latvia to tsarist times and immigrants who came to Latvia during the Soviet era. Whereas those Russians who could prove their kinship-based connection with the pre-war body of citizenry became citizens of the re-newed Latvian state and thus are considered to be members of a national minority, the Soviet era immigrants were initially non-citizens and thus could not be considered to be part of a national minority, though could officially become such upon obtaining citizenship. During a conference “Practice of Implementing the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention on Protection of National Minorities” held in Rīga in 2005, Anti Korkeakivi, representative of the Secretariat of the Framework Convention, noted that “Citizenship is not always a sufficient criteria for determining whether someone belongs to a particular state’s national minority or not. There was such a stance earlier, but now we have to recognize that citizenship should not be tied to minority rights” (fieldnotes, see also Cālīte 2005).⁵⁸ According to such a position, Soviet era immigrants, many of whom are non-citizens, should be formally considered members of a national minority. In the same conference, Ilmārs Mežs identified the double-standard in this position, because such a principle is not observed in older European Union member states—namely, Germany does not recognize Turks as a national minority (Cālīte 2005). On

⁵⁷ This claim countered the Latvian state’s attempt to introduce a greater percentage of subjects taught in Latvian in the Russian language schools. See Silova 2006.

⁵⁸ The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities was launched by the Council of Europe in the early 1990s. Latvia signed the Convention in 1995, though the Parliament ratified it only in 2005 after lengthy research and discussion about how to define national minorities. Due to the impossibility to agree on a Europe-wide definition of national minorities, states were allowed to come up with their own definition of national minorities. Latvia ratified the Convention with the following definition of national minorities: “Within the framework of the Convention, national minorities are citizens of Latvia who are culturally, religiously, or linguistically different from Latvians and have lived in the territory of Latvia in many generations; who consider themselves as belonging to the Latvian state and society, wish to preserve and cultivate their culture, religion, or language. Persons who are not citizens of Latvia or any other country, but who permanently and legally reside in Latvia, do not belong to national minorities in the sense of the Convention, but they can avail themselves to the rights stipulated in the Convention if they identify with a national minority and if the law does not stipulate exceptions.” (See www.integracija.gov.lv/doc_upl/Konv%20Lat%20buklet.pdf). It should be noted here that most European state have adopted very restrictive definitions of national minorities to which rights are granted within the framework of this treaty. For example, Denmark has stipulated that only the German minority in South Joutland constitute a national minority in the sense of the Treaty. According to the information provided to me by a government source, with regard to the Roma population, Denmark argues that the Roma who came before the 1960s have assimilated and therefore do not require special collective rights, while the Roma who came after the 1960s are not-citizens and therefore not subject to the Treaty. France and Greece, in turn, claim that there are no national minorities in their countries in the sense of the Treaty.

the same occasion, Igor Vatolin noted how the distinction between national minorities and immigrants is different in the case of Latvia because it carves lines within ethnic groups rather than between them—for example, 42% of Russians would fall into the category of traditional national minorities, whereas about 58% would fall into the category of immigrants—namely, those who arrived recently during the Soviet period. However, the provision of the Convention whereby non-citizens who identify with a historical minority can avail themselves to the rights accorded to this minority enables a degree of fluidity insofar as one can inhabit the position of a national minority on some occasions, while that of an immigrant on others.

There are other groups which are divided into historical minorities and immigrants. For example, the majority of the contemporary Jewish community in Latvia came to Latvia from Russia during the Soviet period after the pre-War Jewish community was destroyed. Most pre-World War II Latvian Jews were executed, deported, or fled (see Eksteins 2000). Those who remained alive and residing in Latvia, as well as their descendents, are today thought of as Latvian Jews who have a good understanding of the historical situation, whereas Russian Jews are thought to lack such an understanding. This manifests itself in debates about the use of the word *žīds* (the Yid, on which see Chapter 3). Similarly, the Roma also tend to be divided into Latvian Gypsies and Russian Gypsies, mostly according to the place of residence (Latgale or other parts of Latvia) and the second language of communication—either Latvian or Russian. While there are historical references for determining which parts of which groups may be thought of as migrants and which as minorities, this distinction nevertheless appears most forcefully through political and ethical orientations rather than criteria such as citizenship and ethnicity.

While so far I have emphasized how the subject position of national minority is juxtaposed to a subject position of migrant, the Soviet socialist project also significantly shaped the way in which being a national minority is imagined and practiced by various government institutions and their non-governmental partners. Consequently, it is possible to make even finer distinctions between those who inhabit the subject position of national minorities. Thus, while Ceļešs associates himself with not only national, but also “high culture” or “intellectual” organizations (such as artists’ associations, for example), other subjects—such as the Tatar women and the minority organizations celebrating the Roma festival I will shortly describe—who seemingly comply with the state’s requirements to be ethnic, nevertheless exhibit Soviet sensibilities. That said, the boundaries are not always stable, though the distinctions help to orient further discussion. First, however, I turn to the emergence of the spectacle of the form as a specifically Soviet mode of being national.

The Spectacle of National Form

Within the Soviet socialist context, the emergence of a standardized performative national form for the public life of national difference can be traced back to the early 1920s when various institutions tried to come up with ways to raise awareness about the promises and achievements of socialism among its diverse Soviet subjects. As Francine Hirsch describes, the Ethnographic Department of the Russian State Museum organized exhibits of the various peoples of the Soviet Union and their progressive development from backward peoples to socialist persons. These exhibits borrowed generously from practices, such as world fairs, where racialized others were exhibited as backward and primitive. One could argue for a resonance with Western imperial and colonial projects, though the Soviet practice was not simply a copy, but rather a temporally different formation, given that the success of the Soviet socialist project depended on all Soviet citizens arriving at a socialist future together.

The problem of backward and primitive peoples was thus the problem of all Soviet people. Their progress, in turn, was an indication of the achievements of the socialist project. Exhibits of progress of Soviet peoples organized by the Ethnographic Department of the Russian State Museum in the late 1920s and early 1930s aimed to trace this development in such a way that, for example, the previously backward Uzbek could still be identified as Uzbek even when working in the factory and taking up the modern life of socialism (Hirsch 2005: 202). Thus, in exhibits one would follow images that depicted Central Asians in recognizably national costumes kneeling in front of traditional authorities, then these same people, still in national costumes, sitting by the school desk, and later working in the factory, carrying forward socialist construction. The content of their activities was altered, but their national form—the clothing and visual difference—remained intact. The visibility of the national form was key for this narrative to emphasize the fact that socialist modernization did not amount to assimilation and erasure of national difference—a message aimed to counter the possible transposition of the resentment towards the Russification policies of the Russian Empire to resentment towards the modernization practices of the Soviet state.

If representing the national form was easier in the case of Central Asians who indeed could be found to wear distinctive clothing (Northrop 2004), the task became more difficult with, for example, Belorussians. Soviet ethnographer Nina Gagen-Torn published a critique of an exhibit opened in 1936 entitled “Belorussia and the BSSR” where she pointed out that there was nothing particularly Belorussian about the pioneers and medical workers depicted in the exhibit and that national markers—such as national clothing—were needed to make Soviet Belorussia Belorussian (Hirsch 2005: 225).

It is these kind of dilemmas that contributed to the emergence of the spectacle of national form in the Soviet Union. The national form was made visible by parading national folk costumes and performing folk songs and dances in various exhibits and in Party congresses. So much so that the art of national republics could only be shown in an ethnic, that is folkloric, form. Moreover, the explicit attempts to value the artistic expressions and contributions of the *nacmensinstva* (national minorities, as the non-Russian peoples were referred to in Russian) created resentment within the Russian population. Sheila Fitzpatrick describes an NKVD (later to become KGB) report on what Leningrad artists were saying about a Ukrainian week held in Moscow in 1936: “The whole Leningrad artistic community [the informant reported] was saying that the Ukrainian Theater of Opera and Ballet had got awards not for merit but for political reasons, as part of a campaign to exalt non-Russian artists at the Russians’ expense. ‘The Ukrainians presented folk songs and dances and they had no high, serious, art, the respected conductor Samuil Samosoud was quoted as saying. ‘Now in general they [the regime] are praising and rewarding ethnics,’ said Distinguished Artist Rostovtsev less diplomatically. ‘They give medals to Georgians, Armenians, Ukrainians—everyone except Russians’” (1999: 168).⁵⁹

⁵⁹ This distinction between ethnic art and high serious art as features of nationals and Russians respectively, appeared in an interview a colleague of mine conducted with an activist of a Russian cultural organization in Latvia in 2005. The interviewee had this to say: “Latvian language is a language in which neither business nor science is developing, nor culture, because Latvian culture is so provincial that it is of no interest to me. Folklore, excuse me, I have ... folklore. Nothing higher than folklore they are not capable of offering. It is even funny (Russian: *smeshno*) – Eurovision was won by a Russian for Latvia. Those who participated before could not win anything for Latvia, and here comes a Russian and she wins. After that, what’s the point of talking about the attractiveness of Latvian culture. Also, they take culture exclusively to be folklore – dances, folk costumes who are no longer folk costumes, excuse me, we do not dress like that. Yes, it may have been a folk costume 200 years ago, but now – see we sit here dressed like this – this is my folk costume. Russian culture,

Early Soviet attempts to find a proper relationship between and representation of the national form and the socialist content meant that there was serious effort to come up with a national difference that could be visible, but would also correspond to the Soviet socialist project. In Latvia, where the Soviet state encountered a lively national tradition previously cultivated by 19th century nation-builders and the interwar Latvian state, the Party considered ways in which to use the national form and fill it with socialist content. On the one hand, the Latvian folk songs—four line poems collected during the 18th and 19th centuries and in a Herderian tradition considered to be the cultural canon of the Latvian people—aligned with the socialist project insofar as many of them described the gruesome conditions of indentured servitude under German landlords. The material conditions of their production were ones of exploitation and oppression, as described by the Baltic German Enlightenment writer Garlībs Merķelis in his 1797 work “The Latvians.”⁶⁰ That said, the Party was, however, concerned that the people had stopped producing and that the tradition of folkloristics was bourgeois in nature and thus focused on collecting and preserving the wrong kind of folk songs rather than emphasized the socialist elements in the existing folk songs and engaged in new production of socialist folk art. Given that creative work was supposed to reflect the material conditions of production, the people had to produce new folk art that would correspond to contemporary conditions. Thus, in a working plan for promoting folk art in the early Soviet period, the Institute of Ethnography of the Latvian Academy of Science reported:

Our amateur artists exhibit a great flaw: they are performers, but not producers, thus creating the impression that Latvian folk art is not productive. Since our poets and composers produce works of national importance, it is only natural that they should be mobilized to produce works about the labor of our local Stakhanovites. We should also mobilize amateur song and dance collectives, literary circles, the leaders of the new Soviet art and the scholars of the old art similar to how it was done in the old Soviet republics in the 1930s. (LVA 1363/1/127)

It is further reported that the Institute of Folklore began to help those who knew traditional folklore to come up with new folklore. Decades later, in the late 1990s, the website of the Latvian Folklore Collection (*Latviešu Folkloras krātuve*) describes the phenomenon of Soviet folklore as having existed for about 10 years following World War II.⁶¹ The website includes recordings of two examples of Soviet folklore where a famous folklore group “*Suitu sievas*” (The Women of Sui) —known for a particular type of singing (*burdons* or bourdon) widespread in the Northwest of Latvia—are singing songs about collective farms and the Communist party while dressed in their folk costumes. The melodies and the style of singing are those of the folkloric form they cultivated, yet the texts differ. In another example of Soviet folklore, a young girl’s ensemble is recorded singing Sovietized folk songs. Again, the melody or the rhythm remain the same, but the text is changed (I include the Soviet version of the folk song alongside a regular one to illustrate the similarities in rhythm and construction):

excuse me, is for us much broader than folklore. For us, culture is also Gagarin who was the first in space.”

⁶⁰ In a Soviet edition of the book, Jānis Niedre provides a commentary in which he points to Merķelis’ astute sense of injustice towards Latvian serfs and suggests that Merķelis may have been inspired by Radischev’s work on the dire conditions of the Russian peasantry, but critiques him for a misguided humanist appeal to German idealism and for hope in reformism.

⁶¹ http://www.lfk.lv/lfk_lv.html

Meži skan, meži skan,
Kas tos mežus skandināja?
Dziedot gāja pionieri,
Novadiņu pētīdami.

The forests resound, the forests resound,
Who was filling the forests with sound?
Singing walked the pioneers
Researching their district.

Meži dūc, meži skan,
Kas tos mežus dūcināja?
Tur bitītes cauri skrēja
Vakarēju nesumiņu.⁶²

The forests are buzzing, the forests resound,
Who was filling the forests with buzzing?
It was the bees running through,
Carrying yesterday's harvest.

Over the following decades, however, a new national form emerged. Folk songs and dances were increasingly performed in a stylized manner in party congresses and all-Union festivals alongside performances by military orchestras and pioneer choirs. The Latvian folkloric traditions were selectively adapted, cultivating some elements, while eventually banning others, such as the midsummer celebration and attempts to approximate ethnographically precise renditions of folkloric songs and dances. This resulted in folklore-based, yet stylized and choreographed spectacles of national difference. For example, by the 1950s, there was a lively folk dance collective (*tautas deju ansamblī*) tradition that attracted many young people. These collectives were usually institutionally attached to socialist work collectives, such as the State Electronics Factory (VEF) or the Railway Workers' Association. Instead of cultivating regionally specific ethnographic traditions and striving for authenticity, they created and performed new Latvian folk dances, as well as dances of other Soviet peoples. Rather than derived from ethnographic recordings, they were choreographed on the basis of folkloric elements, such as folk costumes or traditional steps.⁶³ In the early years, the collectives performed shows that were explicitly politically and internationally oriented, though later they focused on cultivating national difference within the spirit of the “friendship of the peoples.” Thus, for example, “*Rotaļa*”—a folk dance collective attached to VEF—was established in 1946 and among its initial performances were “The Resistance of the Basques” and “Salaspils,” the latter referencing the memorial of the Nazi concentration camp in Latvia.⁶⁴ Wearing stylized national costumes and performing folk dancing infused with ballet elements, these collectives—along with Laima chocolates and *Rīgas Melnais Balzāms* (Riga Black Balsam)—became the hallmark of Latvian national difference across the Soviet Union.⁶⁵ It is important to note that there were only Latvian folk dance collectives established during the Soviet period. The military orchestras attached to the Soviet army units would on occasion play Russian songs and perform Russian dances, but they were never allowed to gain a similar kind of prominence in Latvia or to represent Latvia in all-Union events. Similarly, there were no dance or song collectives for other nationalities residing in Latvia, while in “the center”—in

⁶² <http://valoda.aialab.lv/latval/vispareji/tautasdz/mezs.htm>

⁶³ Though ethnographic recording continued by activists under the radar screen of the state and thus self-proclaimed authentic folkloric groups quickly emerged at the first sign of regime change.

⁶⁴ See www.rotala.lv

⁶⁵ It should be noted that both Laima chocolates and Rīga Black Balsam have a rather varied history. Both factories were established by Jewish residents of Rīga at the end of the 19th century and were later nationalized by the Latvian government in the 1930s. Nationalization involved compensating the owners in foreign currency, facilitating their departure to another state, if they so wanted, and allowing them to take along some of the equipment. While it is not known what happened to the owner of Rīga Black Balsam, the owner of Laima chocolates moved to Israel and established the Elite chocolate factory (Stranga 2008). During Soviet times, these factories were taken over by the Soviet state and continued production.

Moscow and Leningrad—one would encounter cultural centers and associations, such as the Gypsy Theater (Lemon 2000) or the Ukrainian cultural association.⁶⁶ In Latvia, the spectacular form was thus also aligned with the approach that in national republics there was place only for the titular nationality and the Soviet people.

The form of national difference that these collectives cultivated was one of spectacle that could entertain the diverse peoples of the Soviet Union and make them proud to be citizens of the multi-national Soviet state. The standardization of the spectacular form ensured that the national dance and song collectives shared an all-Union orientation towards a re-worked folkloric tradition that was intelligible throughout the Soviet Union rather than a local or a regional orientation aiming at cultivating singular difference.

In the late 1980s, the stylized folk dance collectives with the fake long braids that women used became objects of ridicule from the suddenly exploding self-described authentic folklore movement (the conditions for which had been cultivated alongside the national form). They were loudly critiqued for creating an image of national difference that had nothing to do with the ethnographic traditions of particular localities. The new folkloric groups made sure that each member wore an ethnographically correct folk costume from their region of origin (if members of the folk group were not all from the same region), and that they performed songs and dances that were as ethnographically correct as possible. And yet, while there was tension, there was no strict opposition between the types of groups. The Soviet era dance collectives dropped the fake braids, moved towards less spectacular, but nevertheless still performance-oriented dances. Some of their members left to join folklore groups or to form their own, but mostly the collectives survived and continue to flourish alongside folkloric groups. They have adjusted their repertoire towards a more popular content—that is, dancing to versions of folk music or to *ziņģes* (popular ballads composed during the first republic or by the popular composer Raimonds Pauls)—though they still retain focus on physical ability in their performances. Both kinds of groups have found their niche—if the dance collectives participate in the national song and dance festivals, the folkloric groups have their own folklore festival called *Baltica*.

Besides the continued physical presence of Soviet era dance collectives, the spectacular form that they cultivated within the framework of the Soviet “friendship of the peoples” paradigm has left deep traces in the present. Collective national or ethnic difference within the national minority discourse is imagined as a performance. The similarities of visual representation are indeed quite striking. When one enters the offices of the Secretariat for the Special Tasks Minister for the Integration of Society, one notices the photographs on the wall of the waiting hall: they depict groups of individuals in folk costumes. In the “national minority” version, each ethnic group is depicted in a separate photograph (see Images 5, 6, 7 and 8)—as a self-sufficient unit, a value in itself, as it were—thus suggesting difference with regard to Soviet representations where national differences only made sense as integral elements of the Soviet people and thus were usually depicted together (Image 10).

⁶⁶ Alexei Yurchak, personal communication, 2008.



Image 10: Caption reads: “Soviet Latvia flourishes among brotherly peoples.” Latvia State Archives.

As explained to me by Irina Vinnik, the Head of the Department for National Minorities of the Special Tasks Ministry for the Integration of Society, in a contentious political environment where minorities are unable to concretely formulate their desires, the only thing that is sure is that there are minority groups who need support for their dancing, singing, and folkloric celebration. To the accusations of ethnographization and attempting to “drive everyone under the *samovar*” emanating from politically oriented minority representatives, Vinnik says that there is nothing concrete and politically acceptable that they are putting forth instead (see also Malahovskii 2006).⁶⁷ “Many of the demands they put forth would not even go over in Russia itself,” she explained, referring here to the desire for establishing Russian as the second state language. In other words, some, if not most, of the demands of the politicized minority organizations challenge the foundations of the national state which therefore constitutes the limit which Vinnik as a government official and a member of the *Pirmā Partija* (First Party) was not willing to cross. During one of our conversations, Vinnik presented me with a narrative about how she came to understand that national belonging can be of great importance. She began by saying that during the Soviet times she had not thought much about who she is:

What I knew for certain was that I belonged more to the Russian-speakers rather than Latvians. Latvians were the only ethnic group that existed; the rest of us were non-Latvians and together we were all Soviet people (*padomju tauta*). My mother was upset that I am not, that I do not have inside me this sense of belonging to Ukrainians. She was a very vivid Ukrainian, and she was distraught that I was not a carrier of language, nothing. She gave me a lot of knowledge about Ukrainian culture; I know a lot. More than I know about Belorussians and so forth. My father was a Soviet person; he did not care where he came from; the main thing for him was to know his place in society. He was a construction worker, worked in the administration, was an organizer. But there were people for whom ethnic identity was so important that they were willing to break the law. It was the Jews with whom I was friends, because my first husband was a Jewish musician and he introduced me to a circle of musicians. That is when I

⁶⁷ The continuities, thus, derive not only from sensibilities cultivated during the Soviet times, but also due to government practices, some of which remained largely unchanged after Latvia regained independence. In many spheres of life, new statehood did not necessarily amount to a radical change.

first found out about Judaism, about the Jewish tradition, about Zionism (philosophically speaking). It was in 1973. It was a shock for me; I had never thought that a people would preserve their ethnic foundation so strongly while at the same time being afraid from those around them. ... I understood that there were people who had not lost their identity. Small nationalities or discriminated nationalities preserved this identity—when there is pressure, there is resistance. I had a Tatar acquaintance, producer of documentary films. He was an intelligent man without any tatarisms [sic], but he was deeply upset about the deportation of Tatars from Crimea. It was important for him. Armenians—it was very, very, very deep in them... they were grateful to the Russians for saving them from the Turks, but they longed for Ararat. It was strange for me that each group had its own painful issue. My concern, as a Soviet person, was the number of victims during the war [World War II], also the 1930s. I cared about that, but I did not separate out issues that were of concern to specific ethnic groups. ... It was through relations with these people that I understood that ethnic identity is not a light issue.

To be sure, Vinnik made a distinction between a Soviet orientation inhabited by her father and a national orientation whereby people consider their ethnic identity important. And yet the kind of being national that she promotes resembles the Soviet spectacularization of national difference.⁶⁸ Vinnik is the mastermind and patroness of “*Zelta Kamoliņš*”—a minority children’s song and dance festival. During my fieldwork, I attended numerous celebrations of national minority culture that were organized by or with the support of the Ministry for the Integration of Society.⁶⁹ These events usually took place in the spirit of elevated festivity that invoked sensory memories of the Soviet period. At these events, Vinnik played a leading role, welcoming and greeting participants, always smiling and ready for a photo opportunity together with the participants, preferably dressed in their folk costumes. The events were usually formally opened by congratulatory speeches by municipal authorities, ambassadors (where relevant), and national minority representatives. Thus, for example, the Polish days in Rīga—an event organized by the Ministry in 2006—were opened by the Polish Ambassador and leaders of the Polish community. The participants watched a video of a performance by a Polish folk dance group from Daugavpils, viewed an exhibit of Polish folk costumes, listened to a Polish choir—also from Latgale—and socialized while consuming coffee and pastries.

The annual Roma fall festival *Šarad* sponsored by the Ministry which I attended in 2005 was an event of greater grandeur. Representatives of other minority organizations were invited to participate with performances and to partake in festivities following the concert. The Ministry organized a bus for those traveling from Rīga, for the event took place in Tukums. Rekindled in 2003, the celebration had so far taken place by the so-called *Čigānu ezers* (The Gypsy lake), but in 2005 it was moved to the House of Culture (though since then it has again been moved back to *Čigānu ezers*, at least the 2007 and 2008 celebrations), and, according to the plan, was to spill into city streets. The festivities began with a procession through the streets of Tukums led by a horse-pulled carriage from which the local Roma song ensemble performed gypsy romances. Those participants and guests who had arrived early

⁶⁸ The Ministry also supports the tolerance programme, the integration programme, and the Roma programme which, arguably, are of a different orientation, though they are not conceived in terms of support to national minorities.

⁶⁹ Many of these events were reported in the Russian language press accompanied by photographs of dancers and singers in folk costumes. Irina Vinnik often appeared in the photographs together with the costumed national minorities (see Liepina 2006a, 2006b, Zvingule 2005, Galkina 2006, Gržibovska 2006, Gribovskaia 2006a, 2006b, Karpovich 2005, Malnach 2006, Gartovanova 2006).

were encouraged to walk a couple of blocks from the House of Culture to join the procession and to formally arrive at the House of Culture as part of the Roma caravan. Some of the participants looked a little puzzled as to the need for the short walk, but nevertheless continued onward. A local woman walking next to me uttered quietly: “I don’t really understand why we need such a spectacle.” Once inside, the guests filled the large auditorium of the House of Culture, and the event was officially opened by representatives of the Tukums municipality. Following collective greetings from representatives of minority organizations, a line of song and dance performances began and culminated with the performance of the Roma musical ensemble (Images 11 and 12). Thereafter, the guests were treated to a traditional Roma sheep’s head stew and various other foods. The festivities hit a high note when impromptu dancing began in the adjacent hallway where some of the performers had pulled out their musical instruments (Images 13 and 14).



Images 11 and 12: Roma and Latvian folk groups performing. Photo by author.



Images 13 and 14: Post-performance socializing. Photo by author.

Once it was dark enough, the participants were ushered to the nearby town square where Roma ensembles sang around bonfires. The gathering in the town square attracted

attention of the passersby. Two women—a mother and a daughter—came up behind me and one of them asked the other in Latvian: “is this for everyone or is it just for them”? “If it were only for them,” the other replied, “there would be a fence around.” Evidently, not used to seeing displays of Roma-ness in the town square, the women were not sure whether it was acceptable for them to stop and join the onlookers. Since, however, there were no clear signs of separation, the women joined in.

What needs to be noted here that while spectacular in form and national in content, this event was also very much Soviet in its sensibility: the solidarity that the various national groups exhibited culminated in joint consumption and merriment where all distinctions, if there were any, disappeared. In fact, most of the participants could join in and sing along with famous Russian romances, which someone initiated from time to time during the course of the evening. This sensibility is quite distinct from the kind that would be cultivated in settings of ethnographic festivals or intellectual gatherings, where the focus would be on authenticity and art as the defining features of national cultures rather than their ability to melt into togetherness, which not only broke down boundaries, but came with very particular, usually Russian, content. And yet, it is impossible to definitively establish where one kind of sensibility ends and the other begins.

“We are not Russians, we are *svoi*” or Soviet ways of being ethnic

The Tatar-Bashkir Association was established in 1988, along with a number of other cultural organizations of minorities that were awakening or being awakened at the time. Most of the organizations formed in the late 1980s claimed to be heirs of interwar minority cultural organizations and thus representative of historical minorities rather than re-ethnicized Soviet era migrants, though such a distinction was difficult, if impossible, to make with regard to their membership and even leadership. The father of the current leader of the Tatar-Bashkir Association, who was also its founder, was a Soviet military officer who, by all accounts, was an ardent defender of Latvian independence. As his son told me, in the late 1980s his father dared to publicly argue that Latvian should be made the official state language lest it be lost forever. The Association is closely connected with the Rīga Muslim Religious Center led by an Imam who hails from Sudan. In fact, it is there that I first encountered the women who regularly gathered on the premises of the Tatar-Bashkir Cultural Association.

Having gone to the Muslim Religious Center to interview the Imam, I was led into a room segregated by curtains from the larger space where men gathered and from where the Imam led the service. After our conversation, which occurred in the women’s section, the Imam invited me to stay for the service. I waited a while until the women began to arrive. First came a middle-aged woman who, upon finding out that I was there to learn about the Muslim community, began to tell me about her own conversion from the Russian Orthodox faith to Islam. She said there were several women converts—both Latvian and Russian—who attended the Center and that most of them had found their way to Islam through their husbands who were either “ethnic Muslims” or earlier converts. Several of these women arrived at the Center shortly thereafter. They were young and wore elaborate tunic-style Islamic dresses and hijabs. They all greeted me with kindness and almost instantly began to tell me fragments of their conversion stories. A little while later, a group of elderly women began to gather in the small space. They all seemed to be around 60 or above. They wore regular clothing and a small headscarf tied in the back underneath their hair. These headscarves were usually dark green, blue, or black with prints of brightly colored flowers of the kind that I recall seeing on the streets when I was growing up in Soviet Latvia. Back then, I did not associate such headscarves with religion or ethnicity, but

rather with Sovietness. When the service began, the younger women sat very close to the curtain separating the gendered spaces and listened diligently. The elderly women propped themselves on pillows in the back of the room and once in a while whispered something to each other, following which they were reprimanded by the younger women with a fairly loud: “shhh.” After the service, the woman who had arrived first explained to me over communal tea that the elderly women were “ethnic Muslims” of Tatar origin who do not really know how to practice Islam due to the fact that religious practice was severely curtailed during the Soviet times. “They do not wear proper headscarves,” she said, “they do not bend their bodies in prayer in the appropriate way, and they don’t really know all the rituals or their purpose.” I became intrigued by the designation “ethnic Muslims” and arranged to visit the women at the Tatar-Bashkir Center. On my first visit, Taina, who seemed to be a publicly active member of the group, launched into telling me the story of Tatar ethnogenesis and the subsequent cultural and political history of Tatars in relation to the Russian state. Her story was organized so as to counter what she suggested were Soviet era perceptions of Tatars as related to Mongolians. Several times, backed by other women in the room, she emphasized that “we are Bulgars”—a semi-nomadic people of Turkic descent who lived to the North of the Caucasus and in the Volga river region and are said to have given rise to the Bulgarian Empire. “It was Ivan Grozny,” she noted, “who named these people Tatars.” In fact, the women emphasized, the word “Tatar” is a denigrating term and “we call each other *svoi chelovek*.” As Alexei Yurchak has argued, the term *svoi* does not have an equivalent in English (2005:103). It can be understood as “ours,” “one of us,” or “someone who belongs to our circles.” In the late socialist context analyzed by Yurchak, the term *svoi* designated “a kind of sociality that differed from those represented in authoritative discourse as ‘the Soviet people,’ ‘Soviet toilers,’ and so forth.” (2005:103). It is noteworthy that the women I spoke with used it to designate an ethnically inflected sociality in terms other than those offered by the Russian imperial and Soviet socialist authorities. Taina, who had lived in the Kazan region with about a 40% Tatar population recounted how she would be called *tatarskaja morda* (ugly Tatar mug in Russian) by the resident Russians. The other women who hailed from Central Asia, where many Tatars were moved by the Soviet state, were surprised to hear that, since nobody in Central Asia had called them that.

The women proceeded to explain how Russians would call Tatars black or yellow, but, they argued: “we are like Bulgars—light, blue eyes.” “The Bulgar state,” they continued, “was very developed and civilized—they invented windows.” “We took on Islam and thus monotheism in 922 AD when Russians were still pagans,” Taina added. Continuing to emphasize a fundamental difference from Russians, the women argued that “Tatars usually do not drink, while Russians drink a lot, though it is becoming more difficult to distinguish one from the other since now everybody drinks in the countryside.” “But,” they added, “one can still differentiate on the basis of cleanliness. If Tatar women are clean, decorate their homes with flowers, take their shoes off in the house and wash the floor with brushes, Russian women do not take care of themselves, wear boots in the house, and their farm animals are all over the place inside the house.” Moreover, someone else added, “We are great cooks, whereas the Russians only made cabbage. Sour cabbage and dirty floors, that’s how we remember them.” The narrative the women crafted for me that afternoon invoked their past cohabitation with Russians in Kazan, where the distinction between Russians and Tatars was most operative for them. So much so that the narrative might lead one to think that the women valued ethnic difference. Further conversations we had complicated the picture.

As it turned out, the women had not known each other during the Soviet times, though most of them had lived in Latvia for quite a while. Some of the women had responded to an ad placed in the paper by the founder of the organization in the late 1980s, while others had

found the Association by accidentally encountering *svoi*—for example, in a dentist’s office. During the several times that I met with these women, there were always about 10-16 of them that came and went. They gathered mostly to socialize, but the times that I was there they were also practicing their songs for an upcoming performance in a minority cultural event. They did so with the help of a karaoke machine gifted to them by the Kazan city authorities. As I talked with one or two women at a time, others were busy discussing other matters in a mix of Russian and Tatar. Sometimes they wanted me to hear and they spoke Russian, other times they switched to Tatar. When I entered their gathering space on one of my later visits, I found myself amidst an aggravated discussion. One woman said: “They all think we are occupants!” Another exclaimed: “So many people without homes! Was it like this during the Soviet times?!” The conversation that unfolded that day was not so much about the history of Tatars, as about their own life histories and challenges. Several of them had watched a show on Russian television the night before which showed images of beggars in the streets of Moscow. The women were visibly irritated about the socio-economic conditions that these images communicated. “It was not like this before,” they exclaimed, “but now nobody cares about you.” Someone pointed to one of the women saying that she had spent all her life working on construction sites, building houses for Latvians, and now? The woman who had worked on construction sites said: “We were a good team. There were different people there, different nationalities. Nobody cared. I spoke to my husband in Russian. I did not care.” Speaking over each other, the women explained that they were making good money back then, going on trips, buying things, but now? Now they were all “occupants“ in the eyes of the Latvians. Commentary on the deterioration of the socio-economic situation had transformed into a commentary on their changed position in the public and political life of contemporary Latvia. Even though they were ethnic in the eyes of the contemporary Latvian state and had found each other through a minority cultural association, they were viscerally interpellated by the designation “occupants,” which radical nationalist organizations, as well as some Latvians use to refer not only to Soviet military forces, but also to Soviet era migrants. The Tatar-Bashkir Association, however, makes life easier, they all agreed: “We get to come here and talk. It makes life easier. We have what we have. We buy second hand clothing since women need a new outfit once in a while.” Everyone laughed. The women slowly settled around the karaoke machine, the talking fizzled out, and their singing, not quite in sync with the machine, filled the room.

If our first conversation was characterized by drawing distinctions between *svoi* and Russians, our last conversation centered on a temporal distinction between then and now, recalling the abundance and solidarity of the past and decrying the poverty and divisions in the present. It is noteworthy that many of the women watched Russian television and that the sight of beggars in the streets of Moscow incited a comparison between now and then rather than, for example, here and there. In many ways, they lived the poverty of the present via the mediation of Russian television. The images they saw seemed to adequately capture the difficulties of the present both here and there. Thus, on the one hand, the women asserted their differences with Russians in their recollection of rural village life back in Kazan (“that’s how we remember them”). On the other hand, their experiences in Latvia resembled what many Latvians would unwaveringly recognize as Soviet: they came to Latvia as Soviet era migrants, they praised the solidarity of the Soviet years, they spoke Russian in the family, and they did not know other people of their ethnic origin. The women themselves were well aware of such perceptions when they exclaimed: “now we are all occupants!” Though they had come together under the auspices of the Tatar-Bashkir Cultural Association, it was far from clear that they all were equally invested in the cultural mission of the organization or that they were aware of how they were therefore plugged into the Latvian state’s minority politics. Most of them were non-citizens, thus technically they could

not be counted as part of a national minority as stipulated by the Latvian definition of national minorities attached to the Framework Convention for National Minorities which the Government of Latvia ratified in 2005. Yet, according to the same definition, they could use the benefits of national minorities if they self-identified with a national minority. Somewhat ethnic, but not fully national, these women practiced ethnicity through their affiliation with the association and through performances, but it was not at all evident that they therefore exhibited “national consciousness” of the sort desired by the Latvian state. Ethnic differences were emphasized in relation to Kazan and the history of Russian imperialism, whereas Soviet similitude was emphasized in relation to their experiences in Soviet Latvia.

It is precisely these kinds of individuals that the state aims to target through its minority politics. It might be said that the Tatar-Bashkir Association is an indication that the plan has worked to some extent. The women are gathering among people they consider *svoi*. In a way, for the state it does not matter whether they are *svoi* because they are Tatar or whether they are *svoi* vis-à-vis their experience as Soviet people in Latvia. Moreover, it matters less for the national state whether they are citizens or not than whether they fold into the state’s minority politics. In other words, what matters here is the distinction between persons who inhabit a national mode of being and persons who do not inhabit such an orientation. With regard to Soviet era migrants, I have suggested in this chapter that the Soviet state indeed managed to produce a particular Soviet orientation in people which may have had ethnic elements, but which was not based on a collective national (or ethnic) orientation. Given the ambiguous articulation of Sovietness and Russianness, such people are perceived by many in Latvia as Russian, Russified, Soviet, or a combination thereof. While the designation is not that important, what matters is that they share a non-ethnic orientation and use of Russian as the primary language of communication. In scholarly discourse, this is often talked about as language-based rather than ethnic identity unique to the post-Soviet Baltic states (Laitin 1998). For many in Latvia, this is an indication of the unnerving success of Soviet Russification policies:

What shocked most people [ethnic Latvians] over the course of the first few years [after independence] was that ethnicity was not so important for many people and that language was the key thing. People were a little surprised about a lack of demand for minority education and languages other than Russian, except with the countrywide exception of the Poles. They were hoping for what Latvians would consider to be Ukrainian or Belorussian “awakening”, but the Ukrainians and Belorussians did not oblige. They were too asleep.” (Muižnieks in Silova 2006: 54)

The description of this identification as language-based is derivative from identity discourses that try to delineate the criteria by which a group identifies itself as a group. However, I find it more enabling to think about this identification as related to national and non-national modes of being. Describing the difficulties of the citizenship legislation, a national minority activist that was an active participant of the independence struggles noted that the people to whom Latvian citizenship could not be restituted belonged to no state in an extra-legal sense (perhaps even ontological sense), because many were truly Soviet citizens and Russia was not heir to the Soviet Union, but rather also to a national state. They did not think of Russia as the home of their ethnos (for they did not think of themselves as members of any ethnos in particular), and they did not have other strong orientations to establish links with other national states. And yet the territory within which they had lived for many years or within which they were born was suddenly governed by a state that in its being—as a national state—did not match their mode of being. For all purposes, they had to become national (or ethnic) in order to become proper objects of the post-Soviet Latvian state. The political

institution of non-citizenship is thus also to some extent a space of non-ethnicity, though it is also inhabited by people who have embraced a national mode of being as Belorussians or as something else, but may not be able to pass the Latvian language exam in order to become citizens. Insofar as they can imagine themselves as nationally-oriented persons, they do not in spirit inhabit the space of non-ethnicity, though in practice they inhabit the space of non-citizenship. Similarly, there are other kinds of subjects who claim a non-national but rather a purely political identification—for example, a fellow colleague of mine of Russian background who speaks Latvian is a citizen and a public policy researcher, claims that she thinks of herself as belonging to political communities of association. She does so, however, from the liberally inclined position of individual rights to join groups rather than through discourses of group or minority rights which many of the Russian-speakers invoke.

It is important to emphasize again, however, that the only sure way to distinguish between proper national and non-national subjects is by examining how they relate to their national tradition and, through it, how they relate to the Latvian *tauta*. That is, do they or do they not recognize the national hierarchy that governs the political and public space in Latvia and thus do they or do they not recognize the historical injury the Soviet state inflicted on Latvians? The criteria of citizenship alone does not suffice, because a citizen might fail to conduct herself as a proper national minority subject, whereas a non-citizen can be respectful of the Latvian *tauta* and the hierarchy that governs the political and public domain. It should also be noted here that the issue is not one of inclusion or exclusion in the Latvian *tauta*, but rather one of likeness—that is, a national minority subject does not aspire to be included in the *tauta*. Rather, what matters is whether a person is nationally oriented and thus accepts the concept of a national state and folds into its constitutive hierarchies. Moreover, from the perspective of the state, a person with proper national consciousness can find a means for self-realization through the provisions afforded to national minorities even if they are not citizens (by definition, national minorities can only be citizens) because, according to the Latvian state's interpretation of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, those who are not citizens, but identify with one of the national minorities, can take full advantage of the rights afforded to national minorities.

From Soviet People to a National Minority

Likening the Soviet nationality policy to cohabitation in the infamous communal apartment, Yuri Slezkine has argued that whereas each major nationality had its room in this apartment—namely a republic or an autonomous republic—“in the center of the Soviet apartment, there was a large and amorphous space not clearly defined as a room, unmarked by national paraphernalia, unclaimed by ‘its own’ nation and inhabited by a very large number of austere but increasingly sensitive proletarians” (1994:434). This amorphous space, I would add, was not confined to the center of the apartment, but rather distributed throughout its various rooms as well. Identifying the proletariat and the Soviet *narod* with Russians, Tatiana Zhdanok—the leader of ZAPCEL, a Russian political party in Latvia—told me in an interview conducted in 2006 that the Russians were a kind of glue that held all the nationalities together.⁷⁰ The position of Russians within the communal apartment is ambiguous and variously perceived, depending which room one is looking from. Inhabitants of some rooms—for example, many Latvians—unwaveringly identified Soviet

⁷⁰ The parties in Latvia tend to be ethnically divided into Latvian and Russian parties. This division seems to cut across other political differences, so that, for example, a Latvian will rarely vote for a Russian party even its economic policies might make sense.

policies with Russification, whereas others may indeed have perceived the Russians not as a nation pursuing policies of cultural domination, but rather, due to their self-ascribed historical orientation towards pan-humanism, as a people especially well-suited for inhabiting and facilitating a non-national socialist form of life (Pesmen 2000).

I'd like to suggest here that it was important indeed for the Soviet socialist project to have Russian-speaking Soviet people within national republics, but that it was not necessarily ethnic Russians who fulfilled this role. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, the Soviet socialist project did produce political and ethical orientations that have become most visible as Soviet in the interstices of the post-Soviet national states. During the Soviet time, these Soviet people-in-the-making who resided in national republics represented the future-in-the-making, that is, movement towards communism rather than stagnation in national self-determination. It was essential that there were proletariat of other nationalities within the individual rooms, so to speak, with which to form solidarity and to strive for self-determination as members of the working people rather than of a particular nationality. Consequently, within the Soviet republics—the rooms of the communal apartment—there was little or no room for official recognition of nationalities other than the presumably temporary recognition of the titular nationality—a policy that emerged from the initial necessity to acknowledge the national aspirations of Soviet citizens. The Russian-speaking proletarians did not constitute a nationality and thus did not require separate national recognition.

The conceptual framework of majority / minority relations did not make sense in the national republics of the Soviet Union because it would have meant that Russians / Soviet people would have been considered a minority in relation to the titular nation. This was not a political possibility. Taken to its logical conclusion, this political impossibility also meant that non-titular and non-Russian nationalities residing in republics could neither be designated as national minorities in relation to the titular nation nor in relation to the Russians / Soviets, for it would have resulted in a strange triad: Russians / Soviets, the titular nation, and national / ethnic minorities (the latter in a somewhat muddy relationship to both). Within national republics, the more appropriate solution then was to distinguish only between Soviet people and the titular nation, requiring that other ethnic / national groups assimilate into one or the other. In such a scenario, the titular nation was in a peculiar situation whereby it was the titular nation (but not the majority) in its republic and yet it was also a national minority in relation to Soviet people. In this scenario, everybody had their place in relation to the socialist telos. All nationalities were equal and equally capable of melting into the Soviet *narod*. Minority / majority discourse would have gestured towards a form of sovereignty of the titular nation which was impossible, for it was the Soviet people who were ultimately the bearers of sovereignty and the carriers of history.

For many Latvians, the project of the making of the Soviet people remains a dreadful project of total social transformation, which conjures up a strong sense of historical injury. This sense of historical injury remains important for navigating the present and imagining the future. It also figures prominently in the way in which Latvians perceive the contemporary discourses and practices of tolerance to which I now turn.

Chapter 3: Injunction to Reflect on Language

Language Sacred, Language Injurious

Latviešu valodā derdzīgu vārdu nav; tādēļ pārņemam tos no citām valodām.

(There are no repulsive words in the Latvian language; we take them from other languages)

—Advertisement from the series “*Domā, kā runā*” (Think how you speak), State Language Agency, 2008.

During the last several years, in the context of arguments about tolerance, Latvians have been asked to reflect on the potentially injurious nature of words such as *žīds* (Yid), *nēģeris* (negro), and *okupants* (occupant—used to refer to Soviet-era immigrants) among others. A closer look at Latvians’ reactions to such invitations suggests that the very possibility of these words to be posited as objects of reflection from within the discourses of tolerance is itself thought of as either an effect of earlier historical injury, such as that of Soviet rule and the influence of the Russian language, or of a misguided cultural and linguistic translation from English. For example, if the Russian language is blamed for tainting the proper Latvian word *žīds* by equating it to the derogatory Russian *zhid*, then the fact of Soviet occupation is blamed for producing the category of “occupant” in the first place, as well as for the immigration of Russian Jews who cannot distinguish between the Latvian *žīds* and the Russian *zhid* (I elaborate on this later in the chapter). The fate of the Latvian word *nēģeris*, however, is much more akin to its Russian equivalent *negr*, for both are claimed to be acceptable words in Russian and Latvian, and thus it is the influence of English-language contexts that are seen to render these words problematic (see Gullestad 2005).

In the midst of such arguments about tolerance in relation to language, some Latvians have pointed out that Russian language words or Russian-speakers rarely come under critique in discussions about intolerance as prevalent in “society in general.” For example, Jānis Šmits, then Head of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commission, rhetorically asked during a roundtable discussion on intolerance organized by the European Committee Against Racism and Intolerance in 2008, whether calling the Latvian language *sobachii jazik* (in Russian, dogs’ language) does not amount to injurious or hateful speech. The example invoked by Šmits is not exactly equivalent to the use of the words *žīds* and *nēģeris*. In contemporary public discourse, it is not common for Russian-speakers to refer to Latvian as “dogs’ language,” though there is record of such terms having been used in the past (I discuss this in greater detail in the following section). In addition to a lack of contemporaneous usage, the slippage in analogy is noteworthy in another way. In referring to Latvian as “dogs’ language,” the speaker uses an epithet, or rather a slur, to denigrate the object of reference. There is little possibility for the speaker to suggest otherwise, since neither in Latvian nor in Russian could it be claimed that associating a language with animals rather than humans is a neutral form of speech. In contrast, many Latvians can and do claim that, in using the words *žīds* and *nēģeris*, they are using proper Latvian language terms for particular groups of people. While contested, these words continue to be used in public discourse. In that sense, the term *okupants* would come closest to the way in which the epithet “dogs’ language” was used, however, the word *okupants* is also not widely used in public life, except for in discourses of radical organizations and media outlets, which I discuss later in the chapter.

The issue here, however, is not so much the lack of analogy between the Russian slur and the contested Latvian words, but rather by whom and under what conditions is one asked to reflect on their linguistic conduct. By invoking the example of the Russian derogatory epithet for the Latvian language, Šmits’ intention was not to suggest that Russians as a group

should also be subjected to scrutiny by international observers, but rather to point out that Latvians have suffered an injury under Soviet rule and that this injury gets overlooked in contemporary discourses of tolerance. The lack of contemporaneity and analogy between the two speech acts—that is, using the word *žīds* in Latvian and calling the Latvian language “dog’s language” in Russian—brings historical injury to the forefront in arguments about tolerance. Moreover, it also suggests that it is language more broadly rather than speech that is at stake in arguments about linguistic conduct and tolerance in Latvia. In other words, the notion of injury in relation to language is here expanded from a focus on injurious words to a much more broadly conceived linguistic injury. While Šmits’ position was somewhat exaggerated, and he has on numerous occasions made statements that have discredited him not only in the eyes of tolerance activists but also in the eyes of a much broader public, his historically situated utterance nevertheless brings into focus the fact that intersecting claims of injury are not properly addressed in contemporary public and political life.

It is these intersecting claims of injury that make the Latvian context different from those addressed in such seminal works on injurious speech as that of Judith Butler (1997, see also Matsuda et. al. 1993, MacKinnon 1993). Much discussion in Butler’s “Excitable Speech” unfolds in relation to the Austinian framework of illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts, namely the distinction between words as doing things and thus constituting an injury and words as expressing viewpoints that may have injurious consequences, but that in themselves do not injure (and thus are subject to protection under freedom of speech provisions). The Austinian distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts runs through Butler’s analysis of a United States Supreme Court case regarding a white teenager who burned a cross in front of a black family’s home, her analysis of Catharine MacKinnon’s argument about the injurious nature of pornography, as well as her analysis of the utterance “I am homosexual” in relation to the United States’ military’s ban on its use in the context of self-definition. In undertaking an analysis of these diverse yet nevertheless linked cases, Butler is concerned with the question of where speech derives its power, as well as how the speaker is implicated in webs of accountability and responsibility in conditions where language precedes the speaking subject (1997: 27, 50). Butler also draws on Derridian analytics of performativity and Althusser’s interpellation to put forth a rich analysis of how injurious utterances not only subordinate, but also constitute agentful subjects. There are, however, important limits in transposing her analysis to the Latvian context because the central questions animating arguments about injurious speech are different.

To be sure, the distinction between words doing things and words expressing viewpoints becomes important in Latvia as well, especially in legal contexts, as I will discuss later in this chapter. However, the arguments about injurious language in Latvia primarily pertain to the conditions that have enabled the question of injury to be raised with regard to certain words in the first place. In other words, the question is this: if conditions that have contributed to the possibility that a particular word might be perceived as injurious are themselves injurious, who and how is to reflect and act upon injury?

What follows, then, is an ethnographic and historical analysis of the injunctions to reflect on language that emerge in a multilingual context shaped by multiple claims of injury. While the question of how language functions in relation to speaking and interpellated subjects remains important, the main focus is on the way in which Latvians’ linguistic relationship to the past bears upon the discourses and practices of tolerance in the present. This allows me not only to illuminate the particular dynamics of arguments about tolerance in Latvia, but also to bring into focus the politically and analytically specific contexts from which much of the scholarship on injurious speech arises.

Towards a “Normal Language Hierarchy”

The post-Soviet present in Latvia has demanded that Latvia’s residents—Latvian and Russian-speakers both—reflect on language. These post-Soviet injunctions to reflect on language pertain to language use in every day situations and public encounters, as well as to the linguistic skills of the population, namely the fact that many Russians do not speak Latvian, whereas most Latvians speak Russian and Latvian.

The situation whereby in the early post-Soviet years most Latvians were bilingual and many Russians monolingual was made possible by Soviet language and nationality policies. As numerous scholars have shown, despite early Soviet attempts at cultivating and supporting local languages, Russian eventually became the internationalist language *par excellence* across the Soviet Union, even as it was not the official language of the Soviet Union until it was made such in 1989 in response to the adoption of language laws in national republics—for example, Ukraine and Latvia (Bilaniuk 2005, Northrop 2004, Edgars 2005, Pabriks 2003). In Soviet Latvia, Russian was the language of public affairs, though Latvian was used in cultural and intellectual life and as the language of instruction in Latvian schools where students were also obliged to learn Russian. In schools with Russian as the language of instruction students were required to take Latvian language classes, but the number of lessons per week was small, and there was little incentive to learn the language since it was not necessary for public life. Thus, the large number of Russian-speaking residents who arrived in Latvia following the establishment of Soviet rule in 1945 were not particularly encouraged or required to learn and use Latvian. More emphasis was put on ensuring that Latvians mastered Russian. As Iveta Silova has noted, Russian language teachers in Latvian schools received higher salaries and incentives than their colleagues teaching other subjects (Silova 2006: 37).

It has also been documented that Soviet era newcomers often exhibited disdain towards local languages. Laada Bilaniuk describes this elaborately in the context of Ukraine where it was not uncommon to hear Ukrainian called a “dog’s language” in contrast to Russian which was elevated to the status of “human language” (2005: 91). Similar examples abound in Latvia as well. For example, the 1956 archive of the Central Committee of the Latvian Communist Party contains a letter from a resident of Jūrmala to the editorial office of the Latvian language newspaper *Cīņa* (the Struggle) in which he complains that people in management and public service positions do not speak Latvian. He reports phoning the Dubulti wood-processing facility and inquiring in Latvian about obtaining wood for the winter and receiving the following response: “*čto vy po sobachie, govorite po russki!*” (in Russian, “why do you speak the dogs’ language, speak Russian”).⁷¹

Bilaniuk describes the language situation in Soviet Ukraine as diglossia whereby Russian occupied the role of “high language” and Ukrainian was assigned a lowly status as a backward peasant language (2005: 15). The situation in Latvia, however, was different insofar as there was not such a strict rural / urban divide that could be mapped onto Latvian and Russian. During the interwar years, the Latvian state had cultivated Latvian as a language of education, statecraft, and intellectual life, thus it could not easily be relegated to a status of a language used by backward and uneducated rural peoples. In fact, Latvians often perceived Soviet era newcomers themselves as less educated and less sophisticated, especially since they did not represent the intelligentsia, which had either been purged by the Soviet government or had remained in Russia’s urban centers of cultural and intellectual life, namely Leningrad or Moscow. As I have shown in Chapters 1 and 2, the Soviet era newcomers were

⁷¹ LVA, Fund Nr. 101, Description Nr. 19, Case Nr.108.

and continue to be perceived as rather unsophisticated Russian-speaking administrators and members of the proletariat who arrived in Latvia in search of better economic conditions. Thus, the struggle that ensued in the terrain of language was structured by a sense that Russian had arrived backed by an army rather than by promises of progress and civilization.

While the political shifts within the Soviet Union introduced certain inflections in how the Party handled the nationality question over the years, a steady directionality towards *slianie* (merging) of peoples could be traced throughout the Soviet period. Even Khrushchev's stated commitment to correcting Stalin's "distortion of the nationality policy" backfired when Latvia's national communists tried to strengthen the position of the Latvian language following the 1953 Central Committee resolution which stated that "(1), all Party and state organs shall radically improve conditions in the national republics and end the distortions in Soviet nationality policy; (2), they shall organize the education, advancement, and promotion of as many locals as possible to leadership positions. The replaced nomenclature functionaries, who do not speak the local language, are to be recalled to the disposal of the CPSU's CC; and (3), in the national republics, correspondence is to be conducted in the local vernacular" (Simon in Pabriks 2003: 51). Artis Pabriks describes how, following the changes in the political doctrine in Moscow, the Latvian Communist Party's (CP) Central Committee initiated a comprehensive promotion of Latvian cadres to executive positions in the party (2003: 51). Eduards Berklavs, the new Vice Chairman of the Latvian Council of Ministers, attempted to strengthen the position of the Latvian language by demanding that executives of the Party, the soviets and the economy become proficient in both Latvian and Russian. Such a policy shift was substantiated by the assertion that "the level of party work would be raised significantly if communists would communicate with workers in their native language" (Smith in Pabriks 2003: 52). Similarly, the Latvian CP's Central Committee demanded that teaching of Latvian in Russian schools be intensified and announced a 2-year grace period for the acquisition of second language skills, following which an employee could be dismissed if he or she did not meet the bilingual requirement. Finally, Latvian officials attempted to restrict further in-migration of the labor force from other parts of the Soviet Union, which had reached enormous numbers during the preceding 15 years (Pabriks 2003: 52). These demands, however, were never implemented, for Eduards Berklavs was purged soon thereafter and spent a good number of years in Siberia. Along with Berklavs, about 2,000 national communists lost their positions and subsequently very few Latvians found their way into the administration (Pabriks 2003: 53).

Soviet policies and practices did have powerful effects, even as Latvians labored to cultivate their language while conducting public life in Russian. Due to an overwhelming exposure to Russian in all domains of life, not least of which was entertainment, Latvians quickly found themselves speaking Russian and switching to Russian in their encounters with new residents of Latvia. Yet, many simultaneously resented the fact that newcomers did not make any effort to learn Latvian. During the late Soviet and early post-Soviet years, one could often hear Latvians lamenting that "the Russians have lived here for more than 50 years and have not learned a word of Latvian." Most Latvians took this to be a sign of utter disrespect arising from a combination of Russians' imperial sensibilities and the migrants' intellectual and ethical shortcomings. It is important to note here that not all Russians or Russian-speakers exhibited or inhabited that kind of "disrespect." As the cases of Vjačeslavs Ceļešs and even Irina Vinnik indicate (see Chapter 2), some questioned their previously indifferent relationship to national identity and language. Some others, especially Russians who traveled to Latvia or other Baltic countries for work or pleasure, even felt embarrassed and, when in the Baltics, tried not to speak Russian, but rather English.⁷² Some others yet

⁷² Alexei Yurchak, personal communication, 2003.

came to Latvia for their honeymoons and vacations, spent most of their time on some seaside resort in Jūrmala and, somewhat oblivious to the local struggles, carried good memories with them for years thereafter. Thus, in 2001, when my mother visited me in New York and I took her to Brighton Beach—an area with a large concentration of former Soviet citizens, an elderly woman approached us in a grocery shop. She was very excited to meet someone from Latvia. She called over her husband and demanded that he produce the one Latvian sentence he had learned while they were on their honeymoon in Jūrmala decades ago. “*Es tevi mīlu*” (I love you), he happily complied.

It is also the case that many Latvians, especially those of the late Soviet generation, did not necessarily acquire a unanimously resentful attitude towards all things Russian. They inhabited a space between a happy childhood filled with endearing cartoons in the Russian language and a sense that the presence of Russian somehow constituted an injury that implicated them and their fellow Latvians. The tendency of this generation to reminisce in their childhood memories through cultural references in the Russian language is on occasion perceived by more patriotically oriented Latvians, especially of the older generation, as a rewriting of the injurious past as delightful and innocent (see Grünberg 2009 for a related discussion on Estonia). The older generations’ childhood coincided with traumatic events, such as World War II and the deportations that followed the establishment of Soviet rule, thus their childhood memories align with the prevailing sense of injury. However, the younger generation’s childhood memories are much more benign and thus risk becoming incongruent with the sense of injury and the politics that it requires.

It is this ambiguous mode of relating to the Soviet past—as injurious, on the one hand, and as having provided a happy childhood and a repertoire of cultural references, on the other—that presents a challenge for the post-Soviet state’s language regulation attempts. This is so because a significant number of Latvians will continue switching to Russian if it is easier for their conversation partner to converse in Russian. It is not uncommon to observe such scenarios in everyday life. For example, as I was riding a bus to the State Archives in Rīga, a ticket controller got on the bus to check everyone’s tickets. The city municipality had just introduced a new electronic ticketing system, and many people were confused about how it worked. A Latvian-speaking woman proceeded to question the controller about how the system functioned. Two other women, who sat across from her, listened to the conversation attentively. However, they did not join in the conversation, but rather commented upon it to each other in Russian. When the controller left, not having satisfied the Latvian-speaking woman’s inquiry, she proceeded to share her anger with the two Russian-speaking women. She quickly realized, however, that they could not share in her frustration, because they did not speak Latvian. In mid-sentence, the Latvian-speaking woman switched to Russian and a lively conversation ensued.

This and similar kinds of situations are often lamented by language authorities and Latvians themselves, including those who switch to the Russian language. This is variously attributed to the Latvians’ “serf mentality” (see Chapter 1), adaptability for the purposes of survival (Matīsa 2007), or simply habit developed as a result of trying to survive amidst changing political regimes.⁷³ Juris Dreifelds has observed that in the 1990s, “64% of Latvians

⁷³ The following occurrence described by Imants Ziedonis in his book “*Kurzemīte*” (1979) is exemplary of such survival skills: in this travels through Kurzeme—the northwest region of Latvia—Ziedonis visited many old rural homes. In one such home, he encountered an elderly woman and asked her whether there were any old magazines or books in the attic, since the old homes often carried such forgotten treasures. In response, the woman said: “Old magazines? In the fire! Here we had army after army come through. Never could understand which books were good and which were bad. All were burnt, by one army or the other. At the end, we burned [them] ourselves. So as not to have problems (*nepatikšanas*)” (1979: 40).

still used the Russian language to address strangers in their own country” (Pabriks 2003:48). In 1997, Ina Druviete, one of the most prominent language and education experts in Latvia and a former Minister of Education, argued that placing children in mixed Russian and Latvian language classrooms is not “an optimal solution” because the Latvian children will switch to Russian before the Russian children will learn Latvian (in Silova 2006:114).⁷⁴ Thus Latvians too have become targets of the state’s injunction to reflect on the use of Latvian in public space. For example, in 2008, the State Language Center launched a campaign entitled *Runāsim latviski!* (Let’s speak Latvian) which targets mostly Latvians who readily switch to Russian in everyday encounters. One of the television advertisements produced by the State Language Center shows a woman in a button shop speaking in broken Russian with the seller who is having equal trouble with Russian. Both women struggle for a while until they realize that they could also use Latvian, which is their first language.⁷⁵

At the same time as Latvians labor to revert the effects of the historical injury under Soviet rule, the demand to master Latvian and to use it in public life is itself experienced as an injury by Russian-speakers, many of whom consider that their long-term residence and employment history in Latvia imbues them with rights that supercede the desire of Latvians to revert their historical injury. Again, there are also Russian-speakers who consider that one must speak Latvian if one lives in Latvia and thus have learned the language. Most young people speak fluent Latvian, but many of them also carry an inherited sense of injury and resentment (BSZI 2008). This is especially so, because many of Latvia’s Russian speaking residents supported the independence movement in the late 1980s, only later to be disappointed, offended, and injured by the policies of the Latvian state, especially with regard to citizenship (see the Introduction). Like Latvians of the late Soviet generation, young Russians in Latvia also divide their present between, on the one hand, conducting public life in Latvian, and, on the other hand, inhabiting a sense of injury that implicates them and their fellow Russian-speakers.

The need to reflect on language, while most forcefully articulated in relation to the Soviet past, has also been constitutive of the Latvian tradition in previous historical moments. Throughout the various periods of nation-building, cultivation of the Latvian language has been central to the life of the Latvian *tauta*, which, in the spirit of Johann Gottfried Herder’s thought, posits language as the expression of a people’s soul and creative spirit and as the means for their further cultivation (Herder 2002 [1771]). Herder spent five years teaching in Rīga in the 1760s during the period of Russian Imperial rule (1710–1918), also characterized by the socio-economic and cultural domination of Baltic Germans in the region. 19th century Latvian intellectuals, as well as contemporary intellectuals and civil servants alike, depict Herder as having been influenced by the folk traditions of Latvian indentured serfs and paint these influences as formative of Herder’s thinking (Slenccka 2005: 30).⁷⁶ Whatever the direction of influence, it is evident that 19th century and early 20th century Latvian nation-

⁷⁴ The language of instruction in schools has been a highly contested issue during the last decade. The Ministry of Education has attempted a school reform whereby the percentage of subjects taught in Latvian in Russian-language schools is to be gradually increased. This reform generated considerable resentment and resistance. See Silova 2006 for a more elaborate discussion.

⁷⁵ See www.valoda.lv

⁷⁶ See also information provided on the website of the Latvian Institute: “It was in Rīga that Herder began his literary and scientific activity. During his five-year stay in the city, he wrote his earliest works on literary theory and developed his concept of folklore based on the Latvian folklore (folksong) tradition. Under the influence of the rich Latvian oral tradition, Herder developed the novel concept of the ‘folksong’ (*Volkslied*).” It should also be noted that similar claims are made by Estonians, which were also subject to Russian and Baltic German domination. http://www.li.lv/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=67&Itemid=425

builders did indeed put forth ideas that resonated with those of Herder (Brastiņš 2007, Bērziņš 2003, see also Bula 2005, 2000). If early Latvian intellectuals labored to develop a Latvian literary language on the basis of the vernacular language and folk tradition to compensate for the historical injury of Baltic German domination, contemporary language stewards labor to cultivate and protect the public life of the Latvian language to compensate for the historical injury of the Soviet past, as well as to prevent further injury in the globalized European present.

However, if 18th and 19th century language stewards did not have an army behind them, contemporary language stewards wield the considerable authority bestowed upon them by the Latvian state and the law. In the 18th century, it was sympathetically inclined Baltic Germans who began cultivation of Latvian cultural forms in the spirit of national romanticism, which recognized the right of even the smallest ethnic groups (or classes, as the two significantly overlapped in the Baltic context) to cultivate their mode of being and language (Zelče 2009: 141). Thus, for example, the first newspaper published in Latvian—“*Latviešu Avīzes*”—was published by a Baltic German Lutheran priest. This cultural work was overtaken by Latvian intellectuals during what is known as the “first national awakening” in the 1860s. Many of these intellectuals—such as Krišjānis Valdemārs and Juris Alunāns—were educated and worked in the intellectual centers of the Russian Empire, such as St. Petersburg and Tartu. They came together in the so-called Young Latvians movement and criticized the work of Baltic Germans in their own periodicals, such as “*Mājas Viesis*” and “*Pēterburgas Avīzes*” (published in St. Petersburg). For example, they argued that “even though “*Latviešu Avīzes*” played a significant role in establishing the tradition of a reading Latvian press ... a press that is qualitative and useful for Latvians can only be established by Latvians” (Zelče 2009: 27).

While initially the cultural work was not articulated with aspirations for political independence (see the Introduction), the historical conditions following World War I propelled Latvians into the international political arena and thereafter political and cultural sovereignty became deeply entangled. On January 4, 1918, Latvian was declared an official state language alongside Russian and German in the territory that now constitutes Latvia. An independent Latvian republic was proclaimed on November 18, 1918, following which language regulation policies were implemented in public institutions. For example, the University of Latvia, established in 1919 with the purpose of creating educated Latvian elites, instituted strict Latvian language requirements for its faculty and students (Horts 2004, Stranga 2008). All entering students had to pass a Latvian language examination, and most faculty, with a few exceptions, were given anywhere from 3 to 5 years to switch to instruction in Latvian from either Russian or German. However, it was only in 1935 that the first Language Law was signed into effect. Alongside solidifying the status of the Latvian language, it simultaneously addressed the rights of minority languages, which now included German and Russian. Contrary to the current Language Law adopted in 2000, the 1935 Language Law stipulated that in municipalities with 50% and more minority population, government affairs could be conducted in the minority language with the permission of the Minister of Interior.⁷⁷

Today, in the absence of the possibility to wish away “the Russian question” or to use methods similar to those of the Soviet state to reverse the effects of the Soviet injury manifest in the form of a large percentage of non-Latvian speaking Soviet / Russian residents, the Latvian state has opted for a combination of punitive and encouraging measures to make the Russian-speaking population loyal and respectful towards the Latvian state and the Latvian language. However, it is not only the ratio between punitive and encouraging measures that is

⁷⁷ Language Law, 1935. <http://www.vvk.lv/index.php?sadala=135&id=166>

subject to scrutiny by Russian politicians, human rights activists, as well as international monitoring bodies, but also the very fact that public and political affairs are to be conducted in Latvian and not simply in one's preferred language of communication, that is, either Russian or Latvian. International conventions, such as the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, seem to favor the position of Russian-speakers—that is, to be able to use Russian in communication with the state, but ultimately leaves it up to the state to decide which measures get implemented and which do not. Thus the Convention states that national minorities should be able to use their native language in public affairs in areas of numeric concentration, as well as have street signs in their native language, yet the Latvian state has refused to abide by such a stipulation, partly because this could mean that Russian would be legitimated as a language of public affairs in all of the largest cities, including the capital city of Rīga. The government of Latvia ratified the Convention in 2005 (10 years after signing it in 1995) with an addendum, which spelled out Latvia's definition of national minorities (see Chapter 2) and stipulated the clauses that will not be binding for Latvia, including the clause about bilingual street signs. In the public debates and surveys that preceded the ratification of the Convention, it was argued that having street signs in two languages—in Russian and in Latvian—in major urban centers would most certainly amount to continued infliction of injury, thus undermining any sense of sovereignty and self-determination that Latvians may have acquired (Tabuns 2005).

Thus, in 2006 in response to an unruly staff member's suggestion that the students' song and dance festival should also include non-Latvian songs in its repertoire, Minister of Education Ina Druviete stated: "it is time, once and for all, to establish a normal language hierarchy in Latvia," therefore suggesting that the public linguistic environment should be definitively Latvian (Krauja 2005). "The main task," she continued, "is to preserve a national state and a national public space." With that, she expressed the sentiment of many Latvians, as well as the official state policy. And yet, such an explicit striving for something called "a normal language hierarchy" is likely to make many of those with self-ascribed progressive sensibilities pause, if not rush to condemn it. Fierce critique of and resistance to the post-Soviet Latvian state's language policies has come forth from Latvia's Russian-speaking residents, especially the elderly, many of whom find their employment and educational possibilities limited due to insufficient or altogether non-existent knowledge of the Latvian language. Russian-speaking politicians, activists, and organizations suggest that the Latvian state's language policies discriminate against a minority language—that is, Russian—in ways much harsher than the Soviet state's Russification policies and practices worked against the Latvian language. For many Latvians, however, an emphasis on the Soviet state's tolerance and even facilitation of education in the Latvian language overlooks the effects of the rapid transfer of a large Russian-speaking population to Soviet Latvia, a population that was not required to master Latvian for the purposes of education or employment, and which often exhibited indifference, if not contempt, towards the Latvian language. For these Latvians, the struggle continues due to the continued Soviet presence in the form of Latvia's Russian-speaking residents, as well as due to the fact that other languages, such as English, are competing for audibility in the public space.

Historical Injury and Contemporary Practices of State-Building

Early one July morning several years ago, I arranged to meet two language inspectors to accompany them on a visit to a large public-service company (which I will refer to as the Company) to check Latvian language proficiency of the Company's employees, most of whom were Russian-language speakers around and above 50 to 60 years of age. Their work

was part of the language cultivation, protection, and regulation machinery established by the post-Soviet Latvian state to mitigate the effects of the Soviet linguistic, population, and nationalities policies and practices. These policies and practices, which had required that public and political life in Soviet Latvia be conducted in Russian, effectively resulted in bilingual Latvians and monolingual Russian-speakers. The post-Soviet Latvian state thus set out to mark and re-establish public space as Latvian. This meant that Russian-speakers had to learn to speak Latvian and to conduct public life in Latvian. In 1989, the government of what was still Soviet Latvia adopted a language law aimed at the protection of the Latvian language. The same Language Law was operative throughout the following decade. An updated version was adopted in 2000. While the status of Latvian as the state language is enshrined in the Constitution (*Satversme*), the Language Law stipulates that public sector employees (this includes employees of private companies which perform public functions) are required to know and use the Latvian language to the extent that is necessary for fulfilling their duties. It is language inspectors who police this work requirement at the most pedestrian level, going on random visits to workplaces according to a monthly plan developed by the State Language Center or responding to citizens' complaints, which range from not being served in Latvian in a store to noticing signs that are only in English. According to the statistical data provided by the State Language Center, in the time period between 2000 and 2007, 78% of all identified violations (out of a total of 3,922) pertained to individuals not using the state language at the level necessary for fulfilling their professional functions.

It was just such questions that had led the language inspectors to the Company in the first place back in November of 2007 and today, eight months after and with me alongside, they were going back for a follow-up inspection. On that first visit, they had gone through the lists of employees, checked the language proficiency certificates in personnel files to see whether they were real or fake, as well as interviewed employees to see whether their actual language proficiency levels corresponded to those listed in their language proficiency certificates and to those required for their particular occupation. During the first visit, the inspectors had determined that there were at least 67 fake language certificates in the human resource files, and that many people's language proficiency levels did not actually correspond to those required for their profession or to those listed on their certificates.⁷⁸ Since that first visit, the Company had begun to provide Latvian language training courses for its employees, because it was in dire need of employees and could not afford to lay off those who did not speak sufficient Latvian.

When I arrived at the bus stop that was our agreed upon meeting place, one of the language inspectors was already there. We proceeded to discuss the previous night's *Kas notiek Latvijā?* (What is happening in Latvia?)—a popular television show dedicated to debates about pressing political issues. It so happened that the previous night's show had been dedicated to language issues and posed the question of “what is happening with the state language in higher education and the job market?” The invited guests—politicians, civil servants, NGO and trade union representatives—discussed two legislative acts: the draft Law on Higher Education, which stipulated the ratio of Latvian vs. foreign languages to be used in higher education, and a set of proposed changes to the Cabinet of Ministers' regulations attached to the Language Law, which listed the professions for which Latvian language proficiency level was to be regulated by the state. The discussion revolved around two

⁷⁸ By all accounts, it was fairly common to obtain fake language proficiency certificates in the mid-1990s, though it is not clear whether people bought them knowing that they were buying fake certificates or whether people buying them were fooled by some company who claimed to be able to provide them with the necessary certificate on the basis of minimal language training. It seemed that at least in a couple of cases the latter may have been true.

positions: one, that regulation of language use needs to be increased in order to secure the use of Latvian in both institutions of higher education and in workplaces; and, two, that there has to be less language regulation in order to ensure the competitiveness of Latvia's higher education system by facilitating student access to materials in foreign languages. Speaking as we waited for her coworker and the bus, the language inspector—whom I will call Anna—was outraged by Elīna Egle's suggestion that both spheres—higher education and the job market—needed to operate according to free market principles, and that there was a great need for cosmopolitanism in what she characterized as the current provincialism of the higher education system in Latvia. Anna said that Elīna Egle, then the Head of the Employers Association, “spoke as if she had nothing to do with this country; as if she had come from the moon or something.” Instead, Anna agreed with her boss—Antons Kursītis—who also participated in the show. Kursītis substantiated his defense of increased regulation of language use by turning to the “Russian question” and suggesting that the ratio of Latvians and Russians in Latvia is too close, even unfavorable for Latvians, and that there is a need therefore to defend the rights of non-Russian speakers (that is, of people who do not speak Russian but only Latvian or Latvian and other foreign languages) of which there are more and more, as the new generation of Latvians grows up without much knowledge of the Russian language. Even though the show's discussion questions were posed as pertaining to the Latvian language in relation to foreign languages in general (such as, for example, English), time and again the discussion was brought back to the Russian language and the Russian question.

We boarded our bus after the second language inspector, whom I will call Raita, met up with us. As we set out on the long bus ride that morning in July, our conversation turned to the skills and dispositions required to do the job of a language inspector. Anna, who had worked as a language inspector for several years, said: “The job is not great. It is stressful and does not pay much, but we do it because we are people of the idea (*idejas cilvēki*).” In other words, for Anna it was commitment to something beyond the material conditions of her job that made her work worthwhile. Raita confirmed that the job is indeed a difficult one. Raita was younger than Anna and had been working as a language inspector for a little over a year. Continuing our discussion about the work of language inspectors, Anna noted that one needs to be psychologically strong and tolerant to do the job of a language inspector: “You need to be able to stay calm and polite even if everything inside is boiling. If you lose your calm, that is a trump on their [the inspectees] side. There are times when you raise your voice, when people are especially shameless.” Raita agreed and noted that the older inspectors have “worked out their system,” meaning that they have developed their ways to stay calm. She says she has lost her cool before. It seemed they both said this with a premonition that this was not going to be an easy work day, and they were right.

Upon arrival at the Company, the personnel director brought us to a large hall on the third floor with a long table in the middle. The room had huge windows along one of the walls and there was scarcely any other furniture in the room. The setting created a formal atmosphere, a sense that something consequential was bound to happen. While escorting us through entrances that separated the publicly accessible area from staff quarters, the personnel director was very accommodating. She acknowledged the importance of the work of the inspectors and gestured towards her agreement with its ideological aspects, yet also remarked upon the difficulty of the task in conditions where labor force was scarce and so many people did not speak the Latvian language.⁷⁹ The inspectors took their seats on one side of the table, leaving one chair in front of them for “the inspectees” to sit on. A line of employees to be examined was already forming outside. Some of them had been summoned

⁷⁹ The economic crisis had not yet set in at the time and unemployment rates were low.

to appear before their shifts, while others were brought to the examination room right after they had finished their shift. As we settled in behind the table, we could hear nervous chatter in the corridor. One of the first to come in was a man I will call Vadim. He sat down in front of Raita. The papers Raita had in front of her—reports from the previous visit—indicated that Vadim did not have the right language proficiency level for his occupation. While explaining the purpose of the visit to Vadim, Raita continued to leaf through the papers. The tone of her voice added to the bureaucratic feel of the opening scene. Raita proceeded to assess Vadim’s language skills on the basis of a brief conversation in order to see whether he had made any progress. “Can you try to speak Latvian?” Raita asked Vadim in Latvian. Vadim could not respond in kind. He slouched back in his chair and did not rush with his answers. It seemed that he had resigned himself to an outcome that could not but be unfavorable to him, thus he did not even attempt to impress the inspectors. He slowly said, in Russian: “*eto po rabote, ja ponimaiu*” (this is about work, I understand). The personnel director—still in the room—intervened in an attempt to support Vadim, as well as to assure the inspectors that the Company had been doing everything they could to facilitate Latvian language learning of their employees. She said that Vadim has been attending language courses held on the premises of the Company for 3 months and that he does understand the questions.

Raita: (*In Latvian*)

Are you going to take the Latvian language exam in Russian?

Vadim: (*In Latvian*)

All is clear ... (sighs) ... there is no time. Every day from 13 until 20. I work. (*Switches to Russian*) I was not born here, I was born in Siberia. Worked at the radar [*a Soviet military radar that was located in Skrunða*], there was no language environment there. Now I work here for 10 years. There were no conditions for learning. I will retire in July. I do not have any problems at work.

Raita: (*In Latvian*)

Do you agree that your knowledge of state language is insufficient?

At this point Anna intervened and began to read from the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers to inform Vadim about the required language proficiency level. Raita added that his knowledge of Latvian evidently does not correspond to the required level, and that the inspectors therefore will have to prepare a protocol of penalty. They asked Vadim whether he is a citizen. He said he is not.

While Raita wrote the protocol, Anna interviewed a man who said he did very badly in all languages in school, and that he could not write at all, even in Russian. Somewhat surprised, Anna whispered to me in Latvian: “The man cannot write. How can he take the language test?” At a loss of what else to say, she instructed the man to study. She had no other answer for him. Once the man left, Anna turned to me again and said that she feels very sorry for him: “I even want to cry.” In the meantime, a woman had sat down in front of Raita. She was very nervous, her voice was trembling. Raita tried to calm her down by saying that there is no reason to panic. “I am very, very nervous,” responded the inspectee.

As the employees continued to come through, they exhibited not only a range of language proficiency levels, but also a wide range of responses to the inspectors and the scene of inspection itself. A woman who had recently passed her language exam brought along all of her study materials and proudly began to decline verbs in order to show what she had learned. Anna told her that she was very pleased to see her progress. There was something very unsettling about this scene. As I sat next to the inspectors and looked across the table at the woman declining the verbs, I felt deeply embarrassed about how at that moment I too inhabited the articulation of state power and the Latvians’ sense of historical injury. The inspectors were clearly treating me as *savējā* (one of ours). They did not think they needed to explain to me how and why this scene was unfolding. Rather, they shared with me their sense of hopelessness in relation to the insurmountable task to “get all these people

to speak Latvian.” Caught between both personal and professional commitment to a linguistically Latvian public space and the near-impossibility of their task, in our conversations the language inspectors never reflected on the scene of inspection itself, though evidently they were often deeply frustrated by it. Thus, throughout the day, Anna kept revisiting her interview with the man, who could not write, and reiterating that she felt very, very sorry for him.

Having realized that the language inspectors were not only checking certificates, but also inflicting penalties, the men and women in the line outside were becoming increasingly agitated. Their voices were becoming louder and, as the door opened for someone to come in or out, the language inspectors were also becoming aware of the increasingly tense atmosphere. The man for whom Anna wrote the next penalty protocol threatened to go to court. Having regained composure after the initial surprise, Anna responded by saying that she would gladly lose the case if he proved he can speak Latvian.

Commenting on the heated atmosphere, Raita noted in nervous jest: “we will get beat up, when we leave.” Half-jokingly, the inspectors discussed how they need to get home with honor (*ar godu mājās jātiek*), but the joking stopped when they recounted how one of their colleagues was beaten up after conducting a language inspection at the railway company. Anna recalled how she herself had once been threatened, though the person had later apologized. The highest number of penalty protocols she has written is 5 a day, she said, and after such a busy day, “when you go home, you feel such repulsion towards life that you cannot regain your composure the whole evening.”⁸⁰

With many people still out in the hallway, the day was far from over and people kept coming. A man sitting across from Raita—whom I will call Anatols—aggressively and tauntingly asserted that if he gets fired from this job he would and could find other work as a janitor.

Anatols (*in Russian*): I have worked for 30 years, and I will work for 30 more.

Raita (*in Latvian*): Even janitors need language certificates.

Anatols (*in Russian*): You live on my tax money. I will put a green light on my car and will drive throughout the city [*that is, he will work as an illegal cab driver*].

Anatols left the room clinching his fists and screaming: “*Suka tam sidjit, bladj!*” (in Russian, “the whore just sits there, fuck!”). Raita complained about falling blood sugar levels and asked the personnel director to bring her some candy. Sitting across from Anna, another man—whom I will call Kolja—decided not to speak at all. As time went on and Anna kept asking questions in an increasingly tired voice, he changed his mind and told Anna in Russian that he does not remember anything, and what difference does it make anyways, because one needs to work, and he gets up every day and does his job.

Anna (*in Russian*): Each state has its requirements. In our state, one needs to know the language.

Kolja (*in Russian*): You cannot punish me twice [*he had already been penalized once before*]. I have a good lawyer. What do you want from me?

Anna (*In Russian*): I want you to learn the language.

Kolja (*in Russian*): What does it do for anyone?

Anna (*in Latvian*): Why such an attitude?

⁸⁰ The penalty consists of a monetary fee. A person can be penalized three times before the State Language Center requests that the employer consider firing them. The fees are calculating according to the salary of the employee and are increased with every subsequent penalty.

- Kolja (*in Latvian*): Like you with us, we with you. (*Switches to Russian*). Do we get shot after the third penalty? I will walk out of here and resign. Will not even finish my shift.
- Raita (*in Russian*): Oh, you are so important!
- Kolja (*in Russian*): I live where I want. I do not need to study. I have lived here for 30 years and will live for 30 more. I will not remain without work. What can the state do? I will earn my LVL 700 one way or another. Such is the law ... eight years ago they fired me, because I did not have a certificate, and then, after 8 years, they hired me back still without the certificate. My lawyer says that we can blow this up [legally]. In 1995 everyone passed the exam and got a certificate. How could I know that it was fake?
- Anna (*in Latvian*): He sits here and mocks us. He is not conscientious (*viņam nav godaprāta*).
- Kolja (*in Russian*): I will abandon everything and will sit and study? Will you pay me?
- Anna (*in Russian*): What will you do? Study or pay?
- Kolja (*in Russian*): Let's stop this mockery. Let's do it humanely (*po chelovecheski*).
- Anna (*in Russian*): You are mocking us. You think that the world will stop turning without you.

It was evident that language inspection practices—most often represented through statistical reports and protocols—were in fact profoundly shaped by conflicting sensibilities about the past and the present most evident in those moments when the conversation touched upon mutual respect or the lack thereof: “You are mocking us. You think that the world will stop turning without you” or “Let’s stop this mockery. Let’s do it *po chelovecheski*.” Whereas the language inspectors were suggesting that Kolja lacked respect towards Latvian sensibilities and the ensuing public and political environment, including the law, Kolja suggested, in turn, that insisting on the need to recognize such sensibilities and to conduct oneself accordingly was itself mockery. Instead, he asked for the encounter to occur in a different modality—*po chelovecheski*. While literally meaning “humanely,” the term *po chelovecheski* also suggests a recognizably Soviet form of humanism: not an overarching set of abstract humanist principles, but rather a kind of informal sociality within which individuals relate to each other as fellow travelers regardless of the formal requirements of the situation they face. At the end of the day, Anna and Raita unwound by smoking a cigarette or two. Not much was said. We all got on our respective buses to go home.

What unfolded on the premises of the Company that day was not merely a routine language inspection visit, but rather an episode in an extended struggle for recognition of the ways in which the Soviet past placed demands upon the present. The inspectors’ and inspectees’ views on how it did so differed significantly. If the inspectors considered that the Russian-speakers were obliged to conscientiously learn the Latvian language in order to correct the skewed linguistic situation of the Soviet period, the inspectees considered that their long-term socio-economic activity in Latvia should override Latvians’ sense of injury translated into the new state’s requirements of language use. If several of the Company’s employees invoked their own individual histories of living and working in Latvia as the personal and particular grounding that entitled them to unhindered working and living in the present, the language inspectors insisted that each state has its requirements and that in this state one is required to know the Latvian language. All parties involved, however, were aware of that the nature of the encounter exceeded the contours of the state and pertained to the relationship between two historical communities—“like you with us, we with you.” Even though the language inspectors formally occupied the position of power (that is, as state employees with authority to inspect and punish), the encounters suggested that they did not feel this relationship of hierarchy reflected in the dispositions and conduct of the Russian-speakers. Thus, the language inspectors were not convinced that they will ever “get them to speak Latvian” and they felt mocked in moments when inspectees challenged not only their

authority, but also refused to recognize how the historical injury of the Soviet past bore upon the present.

It is this unresolved tension between Latvians and Russians that also structures the ways in which discourses and practices of tolerance are perceived and received. Some Latvians consider that the problem of intolerance does not merit sustained public reflection either because they are not convinced about its magnitude or because they think that other questions are more urgent in the current historical moment. Thus, when a foreigner residing in Latvia gave an interview to the journal “Nedēļa” (The Week) about the negative attitudes and discrimination he has experienced in Latvia due to the fact that he was visually identifiable as different, one of the commentators to the online version of the article suggested that David—as the journal had identified him—should leave Latvia and come back in 50 years when Latvians have sorted out their own issues and can turn their attention to David’s injuries (Daine 2006). Evidently, the commentator thought that there was a clear priority to claims of injury and that in conditions where Latvians were struggling to obtain recognition of their historical injury in the eyes of the international community and many of their own minorities, they simply could not afford to grant political recognition to David’s demands. Rather than a matter of empathy, the intersecting claims of injury were a matter of political positioning in relation to the contemporary “moral economy” which imbued the subject position of victim with political potential (Fassin and Rechtman 2009).

Reflecting on Tolerance and Injury

In April 2009, I attended a lecture by the historian Aivars Stranga, the Chair of the Department of History, University of Latvia, delivered at the Stanford University. The lecture was part of a three-lecture series and was entitled “Battles Around History: Latvia and Russia.” The previous lecture—several days earlier—had been on the topic of the Holocaust research in Latvia, which was Stranga’s specialization. When I arrived, the lavish Stanford seminar room was filling with middle-aged and elderly members of the Latvian diaspora and the odd non-Latvian attendee. It was clear that many of the attendees knew each other—they conversed with great familiarity and shared stories about their children’s current whereabouts. Personal conversations were intermingled with comments about the lecturer and his topics. A woman in her fifties turned to the man next to her and asked: “what do we say now? *Žīds* or *ebrejs*?” The man replied: “*Ebrejs*, now we say *ebrejs*. You know ... the last 60 years ...”

Whatever other factors there may be for considering using either the word *žīds* or the word *ebrejs* to refer to the Jewish community or Jewish persons in the Latvian language, conversations or arguments about it never fail to bring up the role of the Russian language in tainting the word *žīds* and the role of Russian imperial and Soviet socialist regimes in introducing the use of the word *ebrejs*. Such narratives usually suggest that the Latvian word *žīds*—which was widely used prior to the Soviet rule in both official and popular discourse—did not have any negative connotations, but that it was its association with the derogatory Russian word *zhid* that has rendered it contestable in the present (see Reinsch Campbell 2004). Moreover, such narratives—on occasion put forth even by representatives of Latvia’s Jewish community—suggest that the contemporary Jewish community in Latvia consists mostly of Russian or Soviet Jews and that it is they—contrary to the few remaining Latvian Jews who have historically resided in Latvia—who do not understand the difference between the Latvian *žīds* and the Russian *zhid*.

While Catherine II’s decree legislating the use of the word *evrei* (Hebrew in Russian) instead of the word *zhid* (Jew or Yid in Russian), as well as Soviet practices of regulation

without a doubt influenced linguistic practices in the current territory of Latvia, the social meaning of the word *žīds*, as well as discussions about its use have also been shaped by the specific conditions of Jewish life in Latvia. As Stranga has demonstrated, while 18th and 19th century references to *žīds* in literature and folk songs might well be described as benign, if othering, at the beginning of the 20th century the word *žīds* was almost exclusively used with negative connotations, exhibiting a range of economically, racially, and religiously inflected sensibilities (2008:338). So much so that there is good reason to argue that such extensive reiteration of the word in derogatory contexts conjures up associations that the Jewish community finds objectionable.

In that context, it is striking indeed that legal, popular, and even scholarly arguments—both historical and contemporary—about the use of the word *žīds* tend not to consider the social life of the word. Moreover, the European present has introduced yet another layer to the already contested linguistic terrain by generating new meanings and associations through the process of cultural and linguistic translation from and to English. Thus, for example, the use of the word *nēģeris* is on occasion contested, because the word *negro* in English is unacceptable (see Gullestad 2005). In response, people usually turn to historical documents, folk songs, literature, etymology, and their own historically generated sense to argue that neither of the words carries negative meaning within the Latvian historical tradition.

It should be noted that the current discussion about the word *žīds* (*nēģeris* has a different history) is not unique, insofar as the question has been raised in other historical moments. For example, the Rīga Jewish journal *Evreiskie zapisi*, which was published only for one year in 1881 broached the topic in the context of similar debates in Russia. During the first couple of years of independent Latvia, when the country was run by a socialist government under Pēteris Stučka, the Russian-speaking segment of the Jewish community had apparently complained about Latvian nationalism, which manifested through the use of the word *žīds* (Stranga 2008:396). Stučka reports that he responded by explaining that the word does not carry negative meaning in the Latvian language. A similar view was expressed by linguists Jānis Endzelīns and Jānis Šmits during a meeting of the Organizational Council of the University of Latvia in 1920, when the rector Edgars Felsbergs proposed substituting the word *žīds* with the word *ebrejs* in official University correspondence (Horts 2004:62-63).⁸¹

It seems that in previous historical instances, as well as in other contexts characterized by overlapping yet distinct linguistic domains (Klier 1982), the discussion has revolved around two sets of questions: on the one hand, how does a word come to mean something and whether and how its meaning changes; and, on the other hand, how injurious meaning gets

⁸¹ It should be noted that historian John Klier (1982) describes an especially resonant debate with regard to the use of the word *zhid* between Ukrainian and Russian intellectuals, which occurred in the 1880s. A student had written to a Ukrainian language publication, asking to discontinue the use of the word *zhid*, because the Jewish community found it offensive. The publication responded by saying that the word does not have any negative connotations in the Ukrainian language, and the editors used folklore to substantiate their claims. The editors of the Ukrainian publication were supported by a Russian Jewish journal which expressed the view that the meaning of the word is contextual and shifting [presumably referring here also to different linguistic contexts] and that one therefore cannot demand that Ukrainians stop using it: “Even in Russian one can’t always take the term *zhid* to be insulting: the term *zhid* is more popular and the term *evrey* is more official, and he who uses the first term from habit, as a custom from childhood, should not be ordered to change it because it offends us” (Klier 1982: 11). It is interesting to note that the contextual and shifting meaning of the word serves here to argue for its continued use, rather than, say, bolster claims that the word can and does have negative connotations and that its use therefore should be discontinued.

transposed from one language to another and what are the implications of such transposition. It is noteworthy that similar kinds of arguments appear today. It suggests that at least some of the participants see this discussion—whenever it erupts in the public space—as paradigmatic of the Latvian struggle against domination and for sovereignty rather than as a matter of ethical engagement with cohabitants in conditions of human plurality (Connolly 2005). Or rather, perhaps, it suggests that consideration of engagement with “others” in Latvia is always already structured by historically shaped struggles for recognition.

Arguments about intolerant speech in Latvia thus take place in a multiple and contested linguistic and historical terrain. The social life of contested words is viewed in the context of relations of domination that have shaped contemporary linguistic environments in Latvia. In Latvia, the scrutiny of specific speech acts—for example, the use of the word *žīds* or *nēģeris*—cannot be separated from the language in which they are articulated, as well as from the history of language politics and relations of domination.

Despite the fact that many Latvians will remark that the question of whether these concrete terms are injurious or not is provocative and political and therefore somehow “not real,” their forceful and often visceral reactions suggest that it nevertheless activates deeply sedimented and consequential narratives about collective life in the past, the present, and the future. Therefore, it is not perhaps arbitrary that tolerance activists—a network of human rights and minority organizations, policy analysts, and government officials brought together under the auspices of the National Program for Promotion of Tolerance—often used precisely this question to illustrate the problem of intolerance during a wide variety of seminars and discussions that took place during my fieldwork. In the process, the way people reflected upon their use of words and the way they argued about the appropriate linguistic conduct was constituted as paradigmatic of the Latvians’ collective ability (or the lack thereof, as the activists often thought) to critically reflect upon themselves and to therefore embrace liberal political culture.

Cultivating Tolerant Conduct

In an attempt to exemplify tolerant conduct in a seminar on multiculturalism organized by the Latvian Language Program Unit for Latvian language teachers working in minority schools, Vita, a member of the Jewish community in Latvia, explained that she likes to know how to call people without offending them.⁸² Turning to her fellow panelist from a prominent Roma organization, she theatrically stated that she does not know how to call gypsies these days—do they want to be called Roma, and will they be offended if they are called gypsies? She recounted an encounter with another one of her fellow panelists—John, a representative of the African Latvian Association:

John and I have known each other for years now, and we love each other, and I thought I could do pretty much everything. He is such a tolerant and nice person and he always explains everything. And then one time at some conference, I was

⁸² The Latvian Language Program Unit is an institution established through a joint effort of the Latvian government and foreign donors for the purposes of implementation of the National Program for Latvian Language Learning. The objective of the Programme is to develop methodology for teaching Latvian as a second language, and to train teachers to teach Latvian as a second language in minority schools. The Latvian Language Program Unit is also a member of the working group of the National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance launched by the Special Tasks Ministry for Integration of Society in 2004. The seminar on multiculturalism took place under the auspices of this Program and was moderated by a staff member of the Ministry of Integration.

talking about something, perhaps telling a joke, I do not remember, and I said the word *nēģeris* (negro) and John's eyes get big and he tells me that I cannot say that word in front of people. And you know that in Latvian and Russian language the word *nēģeris* is not a bad word, it has no negative connotations. It is rather the word "black" that has negative connotations. He says, I will understand, but my friends will not understand. I was terrified and was afraid to speak from being all shook up.

Vita's narrative pointed to the complicated histories that exceed her specific encounter with John. Thus, she explained that historically it is the word *melnais* (the black in Latvian) rather than *nēģeris* that carries negative connotations for both Latvians and Russians. During Soviet times, the word *melnais* (and *cherny* in Russian) racialized the Roma and the Caucasians, while within Latvian folklore, *melns* (black) is the opposite of virtuous, as in the following folk song which is often invoked to make just this point:

Melna čūska miltus mala,
Vidū jūras uz akmeņa;
To būs ēst(i) tiem kungiem(i)
Kas bez saules strādināja.

A black snake milled flour
On a rock in the midst of the sea.
Those masters will eat it
Who worked the serfs late into the night.

In relation to these historical articulations, the word *nēģeris* seems quite benign in the Latvian imaginary. Influenced by Soviet articulations of racialized class oppression, many associate *nēģeris* with suffering and victimhood familiar to the Latvian self-narrative of serfdom and foreign domination (see Chapters 1 and 4). During such arguments, rarely anyone considers the narratives of Africans residing in Latvia who claim that in their experience, the word *nēģeris* is used as both "negro" and "nigger." Whenever Africans residing in Latvia have been addressed as *nēģeris*, publicly or privately, the message has been negative, explicitly derogatory, or violent.⁸³ More often than not, if such claims are acknowledged, they tend to be dismissed by attributing misrecognition of the speaker's intentions and excessive sensitivity to the Africans.

Minutes later, Vita received a question from the audience, asking whether the word *žīds* can be used in Latvia without offending the Jews. Her response is noteworthy in its affirmation of the historical conditions that have shaped contemporary public and political life and justification of tolerance on the grounds of a particular ethical orientation—respect towards the wishes of a minority group:

⁸³ For example, a nationalist activist Jānis Iesalnieks commented the visit of Dudu Dien, the Special UN Rapporteur on Racism and Xenophobia, during which Dien suggested that Russian should be made an official state language alongside Latvian, as follows: "All we needed was all sorts of *nēģeri* coming here and telling us which should be the state language! As if he knows anything about the history of the Baltic states and about occupation. The likes of him should be sent back to Africa where they came from" (<http://iesalnieks.blogiem.lv/2007/09/29/9709.html>). Both the sentiment and language resonated widely throughout the internet. The word *nēģeris* was used even on the webpage of a mainstream paper, but was later changed to *melnādains* (black skinned), as if the color of the skin was an important aspect of Dudu Dien's visit.

A very good question. Thank you! First, it is not the word that determines, but the context. And if my beloved man or woman—let’s be tolerant here [*laughter in the audience*—calls me *mulķīte* [little fool], it depends on why this is being said to me—you are a fool, or is it something else. About the word *žīds*. Jewish society has two parts, as it were. One is small, to which I also belong, which thinks that in normal contexts there is not a big problem with this word. But, really, this group is very small. But the other group, which is larger, considers this word to be bad and does not want to be called in that name. Why is it so? The majority of the Jewish community, unfortunately it has worked out that way, has come here from Russia where this word has not been used since the times of Catherine II when it was forbidden by her decree and had a radically negative meaning. And all Latvians know that very well, but Latvian linguists and cultural specialists seem to have no other problem to solve, especially when we consider that in internet discussions people announce that they will say the word *žīds* and then add in parenthesis that in Latvian it is a normal word. Why are they justifying themselves? Apparently, the person has a sense that it is not a good word—why do you justify yourself, if you think it is not a bad word? ... I will say this—the Jewish community has asked numerous times not to call *ebreji žīdi*. I think if some person turns to you, for example Baiba, and says, please do not call me Baibiņa or Bucītis, or something else, then I think that you would probably not, unless you want to be on bad terms with that person, call her that. Whatever the reason, the Jewish community asks not to call them *žīdi*. Is it really such a big deal? I do not understand why the Latvian community insists... why it has to be insisted that this word be used, if this is not in the context of *dainas* [folk songs], or history books, or something [meaning, outside of these contexts]. Of course, what will you do? Throw it out? No. It’s good that it is there. But, please, do not call Jews *žīdi*.

In her reply to the question, Vita pointed to the insistence of the “Latvian linguists and cultural specialists” that the word *žīds* carries no negative meaning as it is part of the Latvian linguistic tradition and wondered about the merits of such insistence in the face of evidence to the contrary in the social life of the word. She suggested that people do have an awareness that the word *žīds* has the potential to injure, therefore it is not clear to her, at least rhetorically, why there is such widespread resistance to requests from the Jewish community not to use it. At the same time, Vita conceded that, yes, the word has been historically used and, as a *Latvian Jew*, she understands the importance of this historical usage. The request for change, therefore, was first externalized through an association with Russia, subsequently the Latvian historical tradition and the use of *žīds* was affirmed, yet, given contemporary social conditions, the plea for change was reasserted on the basis of an ethical orientation towards a particular group of people residing in Latvia.

Inspired by Vita’s answer and determined to settle the issue once and for all, the moderator of the discussion—Daniel, a representative of the Ministry for Integration—asked the Roma representative Aleksandrs and John from Afrolat both to clarify for the audience how they would like to be referred to. While John satisfied Daniel’s request and explained that instead of the derogatory *nēģeris*, he would prefer to be called African, Aleksandrs proceeded to deliver somewhat of a winding answer which ended inconclusively by him stating: “Call us what you want, just don’t throw us over the fence.” Aleksandrs himself frequently used the word *čigāns* (gypsy), only occasionally replacing it with Roma. It seemed that he was not quite sure what his stance should be even as it is hardly denied by anyone that *čigāni* have consistently been depicted if not in explicitly negative, then certainly in othering and exoticized light both within the Latvian and Soviet articulations of difference (Lemon 2000).

Daniel, unsatisfied with Aleksandr's answer, suggested that the Roma themselves had articulated a concrete position on this in one of their recent publications, therefore he repeatedly asked Aleksandr to deliver a conclusive answer. "*Aleksandr, čigāni vai romi?!?*" (Aleksandr, gypsies or Roma?!), Daniel impatiently exclaimed. Feeling pressed, Aleksandr replied: "You know, I will stick to the ... what we have from May of 2004 when we joined the European Union ... in Europe, for more than 30 years, these people are called Roma". Contrary to Vita and John, Aleksandr avoided the interpellation as a self-naming subject, which seemed unacceptable to the liberally inclined Daniel, who was determined to make the subaltern speak by naming himself. Aleksandr's reluctance to definitively choose between *gypsies* and *Roma* suggests, perhaps, some differences between how he, on the one hand, and Daniel, Vita, and John, on the other hand, perceived the significance of the naming process. The proverb Aleksandr invoked seemed to suggest that his concern pertained to being able to live without much concern for recognition. In other words, his ability to live a full life did not necessarily depend on the recognition of the state or "the state people," that is Latvians, as manifest in language. He did not necessarily see the connection between the word Latvians used to refer to the Roma, the negative attitudes and stereotypes about Roma in the Latvian society, and the living conditions of the Roma, though, it seemed, he was learning to see the connections through his involvement with the National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance.⁸⁴ At the same time, in Daniel's, Vita's, and John's view, the way the Jewish, African, and Roma communities were named—that is, brought into public life—directly affected their ability to live full lives. Moreover, whereas Daniel's, Vita's, and John's request for recognition offered sovereignty to the liberal-democratic state as the arbiter in a struggle for recognition, Aleksandr seemed reluctant to engage in such a dynamic by not rendering himself knowable and namable.⁸⁵

In response to the above exchange that took place on the stage, a member of the audience noted that she was not aware of the problematic nature of the words discussed:

I myself did not know it for a long time and then I heard a rabbi ask people not to use the word *žīds*. But about gypsies, we did not know, and about *nēģeris* as well. I did not know, for me the word *nēģeris* was not derogatory. I learned it today.

The teachers repeatedly conjured up child-like innocence to argue that most Latvians do not know that these words might be perceived as derogatory, do not mean anything bad by them, and therefore are not deserving of the label of racists or of being intolerant. Justifying the use of the word *nēģeris*, teachers recalled children's stories about *desmit mazi nēģerēni* (ten little negroes), cakes that used to be called *nēģera buča* (the kiss of a negro), and their own childhood associations, all of which were meant to ascertain the benign nature of the term.

Throughout the seminar and the panel discussion, the words that were contested were reiterated over and over again. Vita's citations of the words *žīds* and *nēģeris* constituted a

⁸⁴ The Special Tasks Ministry for Integration of Society has also launched a program for the integration of the Roma, which targets various Roma communities through education and employment campaigns. The program was subject to a great deal of argument among various Roma elders and the Ministry, as some of the elders resisted the state's efforts to make Roma life intelligible and transparent to the state.

⁸⁵ Patchen Markell has argued that the "multiculturalist project creates incentives for people to frame claims about justice as claims for recognition on behalf of identifiable groups. That mode of address, after all, furthers the state's project of rendering the social world 'legible' and governable: to appeal to the state for the recognition of one's own identity—to present oneself as knowable—is already to offer the state the reciprocal recognition of its sovereignty that it demands" (2003:31).

subject that, while distancing from them, did not fully sever its relationship with the tradition from which they emerge. She did, after all, claim to be a Latvian Jew who understands the historical deployment of these words, yet who also does not feel fully at home within this context. Her distancing from the problematic words involved mocking and humor rather than the objectifying and pedagogical distancing performed by Daniel who pronounced the words in a voice seemingly freed of affective orientations as if to emphasize that he was not using the words, but rather talking *about* them (see Butler 1997: 38). The teachers, in turn, spoke from a troubled space of innocence, projecting an ambiguous relationship to the words they spoke—they were using them, yet they were also beginning to talk about them.

The teachers kept invoking the historic and literary uses of both words—*žīds* and *nēģeris*, asked for home-grown proof that these words are unacceptable, and expressed puzzlement about how to conduct themselves. Some noted that perhaps they could continue using the literary works that use the contested words while telling children that today these words are no longer acceptable. Others suggested that “we” might use the word *nēģeris* when talking “amongst ourselves,” yet use some other word when talking with “them.” Yet, when and where one talks with “them” and when and where one talks “amongst ourselves” is somewhat ambiguous and, as I will show in the next section, this ambiguity is at the heart of arguments about linguistic conduct and tolerance.

In Defense of the People’s Public

As Vita noted in her reply to the question about the use of the word *žīds*, there is an increasing number of people who use the word while simultaneously producing a commentary about their right to use it. Those who insist on continued use of contested words commonly invoke history, semantics, as well as question the legitimacy of their opponents. For example, an online discussion in the popular policy portal “Politika.lv” following an article on cultural activities of the African Latvian Association quickly turned into an argument about the word *nēģeris* (Bulle 2004). The first posted comment used the word to suggest that people of African descent do not belong in Latvia. The next two posts, overlooking, as it were, the question of belonging, pointed out that the use of the word is offensive and suggested that those in doubt should ask the people it addresses. In response to this initial exchange, someone who called himself Aleksis produced an elaborate narrative where he argued that, first, the number of Africans in Latvia is thankfully insignificant and therefore the demand not to use the word is a matter of “individual taste” rather than “public thought,” the former understood as significantly less consequential (or even inconsequential) for public conduct than the latter. Second, Aleksis argued that it is the intention of the speaking subject that gives meaning to the utterance rather than the interpretation of the addressee. Finally, he argued that even though he may take care not to use the word *nēģeris* in a specific encounter with an individual of African descent, he considers it ridiculous that Latvians discipline each other on the grounds of demands from illegitimate public persons: “It is not the incomers of yesterday that will teach us how to correctly use the Latvian language. We, the masters of this language, determine it ourselves. We take responsibility for our words. And to use the word *nēģeris* is generally normal and safe” (Bulle 2004). To emphasize his argument and to ground it in a particular vision of conduct appropriate to Latvians, he invoked the following folk song:

Tā dziedāju, tā runāju
Kā es biju ieraduse;
Es nebiju lakstīgala,

Grozīt savu valodiņu.

Thus I sang, thus I spoke,
The way I was used to;
I was no nightingale,
To alter my language.

In yet another instance, within the context of a public argument between two journalists about words used to refer to gays, Viktors Avotiņš, a commentator for the conservative center-right newspaper *Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze* (NRA), wrote a response to Kārlis Streips, a writer for the liberally inclined newspaper *Diena*:

...I will take into account your views with regard to *homīši* and *zilie*, but in the future will continue to choose words with mine rather than your head.⁸⁶ In the concrete instance, I use these words to mark a group of people from whose public expressions I distance myself. I do not like aggressive heterosexuality or aggressive homosexuality, or aggressive atheism. Therefore—individually I will have gays and lesbians; together—it will be what it will be [i.e. *homīši* and *zilie*]. And I will mark this distance as long as those people who do not instantly applaud the views of homosexuals will be as a whole marked homophobic and intolerant instead of viewing each case separately. I understand that there may be a few cases with which to substantiate the assumption that in Latvia there is a “generally discriminatory attitude towards gays.” But—if this is my problem, then I should after all understand why I am a homophobe. Is it because I hold onto my views, but a couple of hundred or million demand me to think otherwise? It won’t happen so cheaply. (Streips & Avotiņš 2007)

One particular aspect of the lengthy quote from Viktors Avotiņš’ commentary deserves special attention—namely, his statement that in individual encounters he “will have gays and lesbians,” whereas collectively this may not, in fact very likely will not, be the case. Such a stance resonates with Aleksis’ comment where he also emphasized that in personal encounters he will refrain from using certain words in case the person might be offended, whereas he thinks it is ridiculous that Latvians publicly discipline each other on the grounds of demands from illegitimate public persons.

The question to ask here is when and how is one thought of talking to “one’s own” and when with “them.” Indeed, much of the argument about contested words revolves around different conceptions of the work that particular utterances do in relation to the public as a modern formation through which a modern people have a sense of itself as a people (Warner 2005, Tamir 1995). In the Latvian context, the articulation of the *tauta* as a public helps to point to the fact that the *tauta* eludes attempts to be captured by any other means except by the circulation of public discourse.

According to Michael Warner, this is the defining feature of a public in the modern political imaginary:

the assumptions that enable the bourgeois public sphere allow us to think of a discourse public as a people and therefore as a really existing set of potentially numerable humans. A public, in practice, therefore appears as the public. It is easy to be misled by this appearance. Even in the blurred usage of the public sphere, a public is never just a congeries of people, never just the sum of persons

⁸⁶ Both terms used to designate gay men in a derogatory way. *Homīši* is a shortened version of homosexuals and *zilie* literally means “the blue ones.”

who happen to exist. It must first of all have some way of organizing itself as a body and of being addressed in discourse. And not just any way of defining the totality will do. It must be organized by something other than the state. (2005: 68)

In the case of Latvia, the *tauta* has a sense of itself through the circulation of public discourse in a way that is entangled with the state, but can never be entirely captured by it. Evidently, state-based practices of constituting a people, such as the institution of citizenship, are important in Latvia, but they do not capture that entity—the *tauta*—that is constituted through public discourse. Depending on circumstances, citizenship either exceeds the *tauta*, because some members of the polity, such as the Russian-speaking citizens, are not part of the *tauta*, or fails to capture all of the *tauta*, as in the case of members of the Latvian diaspora who are not citizens of the Latvian state, but who would recognize themselves in an address to the *tauta*. Moreover, there are no other means by which the *tauta* could be captured as “the sum of persons who happen to exist” (Warner 2005: 68). While the Latvian state has attempted to estimate the number of Latvians or *tautieši* (literally, those of the people) living abroad, it can use no other criteria, but one’s self-recognition in an address to the *tauta*. Moreover, while kinship plays a role in the identification of *tautieši*, it is not central in the Latvian self-narrative (see Schwartz 2006). Rather, if belonging is being measured, it is a particular relationship to the elements central to the Latvian notion of the good life, such as work, nature, and land, which count more. In other words, what matters is not solely whether one possesses a set of criteria, such as language and citizenship, but rather whether one conducts oneself in a way that upholds the tradition. Those who might be traced as Latvian through kin may not heed the call of the *tauta*. Thus, it could be argued that the *tauta* largely exists “as the end for which books are published, shows broadcast, Web sites posted, speeches delivered, opinions, produced. It exists by virtue of being addressed” (Warner 2005: 67).

Michael Warner argues that the modern imaginary of a public as a pure form of self-organized stranger sociality is misleading, because it is nevertheless enabled by positive content, such as language, and thus circulates “in struggle with its own conditions” (2005: 106). However, the *tauta* as a public does not cover up its particularity. In Latvia, the public is not imagined as universal, but it is also not exhausted by quantifiable “positive content.” It is constituted through an articulation of elements, which may, but doesn’t always include language and citizenship, but which most certainly always includes somewhat intangible references to ethical orientations and sensibilities that are best approximated through Slavoj Žižek’s notion of *the Thing*:

The elements which hold together a given community cannot be reduced to the point of symbolic identification: the bond linking together its members always implies a shared relationship toward a Thing... National identification is by definition sustained by a relationship toward the Nation *qua* Thing. This Nation Thing is determined by a series of contradictory properties. It appears to us as “our Thing” (perhaps we could say *cosa nostra*), as something accessible only to us, as something “they,” the others, cannot grasp; nonetheless it is something constantly menaced by “them.” It appears as what gives plenitude and vivacity to our life, and then the only way we can determine it is by resorting to different versions of the same empty tautology. All we can ultimately say about it is that the Thing is “itself,” “the real Thing,” “what it really is about,” etc. If we are asked about how we can recognize the presence of this Thing, the only consistent answer is that the Thing is present in that elusive entity called “our way of life.” (1993: 201)

The modern Latvian *tauta* imagines itself as existing independently of the state and as

having developed a consciousness of itself in conditions of indentured serfdom vis-à-vis German landlords, while also being subjects of the Russian tsar, and as having cultivated this consciousness throughout the Soviet period. In the last century, the *tauta* has become increasingly entangled with the state and state-based thinking, however public discourses about the *tauta* continue to constitute it as an independent entity. Thus, while the state partly gains its legitimacy by claiming to work towards the self-realization of the *tauta*, Latvians occasionally question its ability to do so due to the liberal democratic nation-state form enforced by the European Union. For modern individuals in Latvia, their sense of being part of the *tauta* as a public is entangled with a notion that they exist in an ambiguous relationship with the Latvian state, which is supposed to ensure their self-realization as both members of a collective and as individuals.

My use of the notion of *the public* thus pertains to a different modern imaginary than that explicated by Michael Warner who engages with the modern *liberal* imaginary. In the modern liberal imaginary, public discourse promises to address anybody, it “commits itself in principle to the possible participation of strangers,” but is always-already entangled with “a particular culture, its embodied ways of life, its reading practices, its ethical conventions, its geography, its class and gender dispositions, and its economic organization” (Warner 2005: 107, 113). By emphasizing the simultaneous universality and particularity of public discourse and therefore of publics, Warner points to a constitutive tension in the modern liberal imaginary of the public, which gives rise to very particular and widespread critical practices. He argues: “Many critiques of the idea of the public in modern thought rest on this covert content. It is one of the things people have in mind when they say, for example, that the public is essentially male or essentially white” (2005: 108). In the case of the public discourses I examine in this chapter and elsewhere in the dissertation, they rarely if ever address a particular culture masked as unmarked humanity, therefore inciting a critique that renders visible the particularity of allegedly universal forms. Rather, they address humanity, but in a Herderian spirit, as humanity framed in the only way they can imagine it: a particular people to whom humanity is accessible only through being themselves (Herder 2002 [1771]). This is not to say that no public statements address a universal humanity in Latvia, but to point out that there is no clear hegemony of the modern liberal imaginary of the public.

Within this tradition, it is not only the public that is differently configured, but also the self. If in the modern liberal imaginary the self is a an abstracted bourgeois individual who chooses to leave particular attachments aside and to participate in a reasoned public debate, the self that constitutes the Latvian public is a deeply embedded self which does not distance itself from its attachments when entering the public sphere. Rather, the public is an ontological extension of the particular self.⁸⁷ From the liberal perspective, such a configuration often looks like an incomplete transition to a liberal democracy or its perverted or immature form. Not surprisingly, tolerance activists and liberally inclined observers often lament Latvian’s inability to distance themselves from a passionate attachment to the tradition and the associated transposition of this attachment to allegedly liberal political forms, such as the public sphere. It is important, however, to look at this configuration not as a mistaken relationship with entities intelligible within the liberal discourse, but rather as a different formation constituted by different relationships between persons and space (see Chapter 4).

I suggest, therefore, that it is the nature of the public and self that are at stake in contestations over linguistic conduct. It is because Aleksis and Viktors Avotiņš participate in a circulation of discourse that takes place within the purview of the public and is consequential for the public that their stance on public uses of contested words is so rigid,

⁸⁷ See Chapter 4 for a more extensive discussion of this aspect.

whereas it is more relaxed in personal encounters with individual gays, lesbians, or racialized others. What matters in arguments about tolerance, then, is not so much an individual encounter with a gay person or an African, but rather the public encounter, where the nature of the public and the self must be defended.

This phenomenon seems to present challenges to Latvian researchers and tolerance activists alike, as they try to figure out where exactly intolerance dwells. It is often noted in sociological surveys, which have become a popular mode of research that generates quick results for policy purposes, that respondents tend to say that everything is fine in everyday life—Latvians get along with Russians, nobody hates gay people as such, someone has a black neighbor—and that they do not understand what the big fuss is about. This is often interpreted to mean that there is really no problem in Latvia, and that attempts to suggest otherwise are nothing more but political manipulations. What remains overlooked is that it is indeed the same people who are friendly with the neighbor whom they know to be gay, but who will relate to him differently when they encounter him as a stranger who makes claims in relation to the public. Rather than a contradiction or an inconsistency in the behavior of particular individuals, this should be seen as conduct generated by differently consequential encounters, which are telling about the particular modern configurations of self and the public in Latvia.

Between Law and Ethics

In the concluding section, I turn to a brief consideration of how injurious speech is handled in legal contexts that are informative of how historically specific circumstances inform legal adjudication of injurious speech. Over the last several years, there has been a small, but steady trickle of cases where individuals or groups of individuals have been tried under the “incitement to racial or national hatred” clause of the Latvian Criminal Code (Paragraph 78, Part I). Following a common European practice legitimated by collective historical memory and the European Convention of Human Rights, this clause is meant to limit activities, including speech, which might create strife between ethnic or national groups. What makes some of these cases especially interesting is that they have attempted to determine when a particular term becomes injurious—for example, when does using the word *žīds* transform from simply speaking Latvian to an incitement to racial or national hatred?

In 2006, on the basis of expert opinions solicited by the State Security Police, the General Prosecutor’s office brought a criminal case against the editor and a couple of journalists of an ultra-right wing newspaper *DDD*, a mouth-piece of the Latvian National Front, an organization dedicated to eliminating the legacy of the Soviet occupation, which they pursue under the slogan of “decolonization and deoccupation.” The case rested on the argument that the paper systematically used offensive language and an aggressive tone, and that the cumulative effect of their writings was an incitement to national hatred. It is important to note here that the question of whether or not particular statements can incite national hatred is different from the question of whether uttering certain words constitutes an injury (see Butler 1997). Whereas injury pertains to the violation of the subject’s integrity or his or her subordination through injurious speech, the “incitement to hatred” clause arises from a concern that particular acts may create strife between groups that could lead to open conflict and violence.

The limited amount of case materials available (at the time I concluded my research in 2008 the case had been appealed and therefore could not yet be fully disclosed for research purposes), conversations with some of the experts, as well as the press coverage, indicate that the questions of the defense and therefore witness testimonies, as well as additionally

solicited expert opinions, largely focused on the use of particular words, such as *žīds* (Jew or Yid), *okupants* (occupant), and *deportācija* (deportation). It was the systematic use of these words in an aggressive and tendentious way that was said to push the discourse of the paper from the realm of ordinary, if ethically questionable, conduct into the realm of the illegal. In court proceedings, the words constituted concrete linguistic units that could be fixed and analyzed in relation to the speaking subject's intentions. At the same time, metaphorical references to "weeds that had to be removed from strawberry fields"—regardless of how much they reminded of Nazi rhetoric—were deemed just that—metaphors—and therefore could not incite hatred.

In response to the prosecution's argument that systematic use of the words *žīds*, *okupants* and *deportācija* in negative and hateful contexts constitutes incitement to national hatred, the defense pushed witnesses to speak to the established meaning of individual words. The human rights experts that gave testimonies on behalf of the prosecution were unable to argue on these terms, therefore they sounded defensive in producing statements, such as: "I am not saying that the word is in itself offensive, I am saying that the context, it is the context that matters." The prosecution's linguistic expert did not testify due to an illness, and when I consulted him later about the court proceedings, he noted that he does not think his testimony would have changed anything, because he and the court adhere to different language ideologies, and therefore the court would not have understood him anyways. As he noted, "the judges and the defense lawyers do not see how words do things outside the meanings confined to dictionaries."

More specifically, the defense argued that the word *žīds* is a proper marker of an ethnic group. It was used prior to Soviet occupation, they maintained, has no derogatory connotations and therefore is not considered offensive by most Latvians and many Jews. All they have been doing, therefore, is simply speaking Latvian. With regard to the word *okupants*, the defense argued that it is a juridical term and does not refer to any national group. Even their own acknowledgment that people tend to associate the word *okupants* with Russians could not undermine their and the court's commitment to its formal meaning.

Moreover, the defense argued that the editor and journalists were simply expressing their opinion and had no direct intention to incite national hatred. Given the assumed transparent relationship between the speaking subject and her intentions that the defense and the court operated with, it was nearly impossible to prove direct intention short of the subject actually articulating it. The additional linguistic expertise solicited upon request of the defense (from experts suggested by the defense) did recognize the overall negative, even hateful content and tone of the publication, yet argued that the confusing, inconsistent, and inadequate use of terms that in themselves are not offensive cannot be considered to incite national hatred. They scolded the defendants for improper use of language and argued that the words *žīds*, *okupants*, and *deportācija* could not possibly offend people of any nationality who are linguistically and historically educated. It is noteworthy, of course, that people who are linguistically and historically educated in their view are not just people who are in general educated, but rather people who are educated in Latvian linguistics and history and who therefore would undoubtedly understand the proper meaning of words, as well as the previous historical contexts of their use. People who are offended were therefore identified as not properly Latvian and their responses as arguably less legitimate. It is no wonder, then, that Vita made sure she identified herself as a properly linguistically and historically educated person who nevertheless asked to change some of the accepted linguistic practices out of respect for the Jewish community.

Let us also briefly consider a case described by the human rights expert Artūrs Kučš (2004) in his analysis of the law and freedom of speech. Similar to the *DDD* case, the Landmanis case he describes pertains to the circulation of public discourse not directed at any

single individual, but rather at groups in general. Mr. Landmanis was prosecuted under Paragraph 78, Part I of the Criminal Code (for committing acts intentionally directed at inciting national hatred and discord) for publishing a monthly circular called "*Patriots*" (the Patriot). The court concluded that: "During the time period from October 1999 until January 2000, G. Landmanis distributed the first three issues of a monthly newsletter for Latvians entitled "*Patriots*," as well as a satire magazine called "*Holokausta izjokošanas stāstiņi*" (Funny Stories of the Holocaust). Both publications, especially the article "On Ticks, Jews, and Abolishment of Death Penalty in Latvia" (*Patriots*, No. 3) contain negative, offensive, and contemptuous attitude towards the Jewish people" (Kučas 2004:76). In this case, circulation of public discourse was not thought of as just speaking Latvian, but rather as a harmful activity prosecutable under the Criminal Code. As Kučas' description of the case suggests, despite Landmanis' insistence that the newsletter was simply an exchange of opinions between friends and acquaintances, the court deemed it to be a public address. Thus, the judgment in the case rested on, first, the assessment that this was indeed the circulation of public discourse rather than an exchange of opinions between private individuals and, second, that the accused circulated such discourse consciously and intentionally, that is, in a pre-conceived and planned manner, as well as with an awareness of the possible consequences of such actions.

In Landmanis' case, as in the case of *DDD*, deciphering intention was central to determining the criminal content (or the lack thereof) of the case. However, in Landmanis' case it seemed to have been easier for the court to identify an intention to incite hatred. Landmanis was not prosecuted for ambiguous use of contested words, but rather for mocking the Holocaust and for using recognizably Nazi rhetoric, such as in the articulation of Jews and ticks. The *DDD* case presented more difficulties, for the paper did not explicitly mock any particular group, but rather, for example, used the word *žīds* in suggesting that "certain *žīdi* want to create hatred between Latvians and Russians," referring here to the leaders of political organizations claiming to represent Russian-speakers.⁸⁸ They were able to argue that they were simply marking the nationality of the people they were criticizing. While this may be ethically questionable, it was not clear to the court or even to the prosecution whether this amounted to an incitement of national hatred and therefore constituted an illegal activity.

On the one hand, the focus on intention can be taken to be indicative of a specific language ideology operative in the Latvian courtroom. On the other hand, the focus on intention can be read as indicative of a tension between historically shaped collective agency and intention-based (perhaps voluntarist) individual agency that underlies arguments about the use of contested words. If the use of the word *žīds* can be construed as simply speaking Latvian, then, in the legal context, the defendant is protected, because it would not be possible to prosecute him or her as an ordinary carrier of the Latvian tradition. If, however, the use of the word *žīds* could be construed as part of an intentional act to create tension between two social or ethnic groups, the defendant becomes more criminally prosecutable as a deviant member of the collective.

Arguments about whether a speech act is to be seen as simply speaking Latvian or as constituting an injury are also arguments about whether the demand to publicly reflect on collective linguistic conduct misrecognizes tradition for intolerant speech or whether it correctly identifies problematic collective sensibilities. Even as people draw on multiple frames of reference to make sense of the contemporary injunctions to reflect on language, a sense of historical injury is never far from the surface. The tolerance activists and those who sympathize with their work are often frustrated that struggles for recognition of historical

⁸⁸ See the transcripts of witness testimonies on the *DDD* website:
<http://www.dddlnf.com/content/view/268/29/>

injury dominate public life and marginalize reflections on conduct that might derive from other frames of reference, such as an ethical engagement across difference. Sometimes, invocations of historical injury come across as political tactics, yet sometimes they also stem from deeply sedimented sensibilities. As such, they are difficult to dismiss or ignore. Demands to “get over it” or to compartmentalize life so that the past injury does not bear upon present life tend to create the opposite reaction and lend legitimacy to those who claim that relationships of subordination unfavorable to Latvians continue to structure the European present. Similar dynamics permeate the discussions of racism and homophobia to which I turn in the following chapters.

Chapter 4: Losing Racial Innocence

The Public Gaze

Walking the streets of Rīga, Michael encounters looks and comments which racialize him. For a black man who grew up in the United States, the news that he is black is no news at all. Michael says: “Every morning, I wake up, and look in the mirror—I know I am black. Why should I find out from you?” These looks—or stares, as Michael calls them—do not tell him something about himself that he does not know, but they do mark him as an anomaly in Latvia’s public space. “I can tell the difference,” he says, “I know when someone looks at me—here you are, I see you, fine, I am on my way. The stares take much longer. They mark you.” Some of the stares are accompanied by words—“go home, nigger!”

Being one of a small number of people of African descent in Rīga, Michael has become somewhat of a celebrity. The occasional interview is a regular part of his life, especially since Michael has actively tried to integrate into Latvian society by learning the Latvian language and even singing in a Latvian choir. His continuously improving Latvian language skills are often used as an example that people who come to live in Latvia can indeed learn the language and thus that Russians’ lack of such skills after 40 to 50 years of residing in Latvia is a sign of disrespect. However, year after year, living in Rīga with his Latvian-born wife and family, speaking Latvian, singing in a Latvian choir and publicly praising the beauty of Latvian nature, Michael went home and shared with his wife the not so pleasant aspects of being a black man in Rīga. Until one day, encouraged by his wife, he decided to speak out. In the interviews he gave thereafter, he said “there is racism in Latvia.” Through this utterance, addressed to the interviewers, but also to the reading, watching, or listening public, Michael shifted the terms on which he had previously participated in public life. Instead of discussing what he unwaveringly identified as racism solely with his wife and immediate friends, Michael addressed and therefore also constituted a public which should concern itself with the problem of racism in Latvia (Warner 2005).⁸⁹ In doing so, he became a racially marked public subject who called upon the public to reflect on its exclusionary and injurious conduct.

Since then, Michael has become an almost iconic figure due to his relentless insistence that racism is a problem in Latvia and, moreover, that it requires not only urgent attention to individual incidents of hate crime, but also a more sustained public reflection on the attitudes prevalent in society. While there are people who welcome Michael’s public statements, his claims have mostly generated puzzlement and resentment. In written responses to interviews with Michael in the media, in Internet commentaries accompanying the increasing number of articles on racism, in everyday conversations and during interviews I conducted, people often expressed surprise about how mundane and seemingly innocent practices, such as looking, could be construed as racist. Thus, one government official, who also happened to be a member of the working group which developed the National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance, questioned whether the kind of racism that Michael claims to experience in Latvia is conscious racism and thus racism at all. Perhaps, she suggested, it is rather the case that human beings tend to react cautiously, even defensively, when they

⁸⁹ In his seminal work “Publics and Counterpublics,” Michael Warner (2005) outlines the way a public figure in the modern imaginary, namely as a stranger sociality conjured up by the circulation of public discourse. It exists only by virtue of being addressed. Warner also argues that public discourse circulates in struggle with its own conditions, because it does so within the framework of a particular language, culture, and style of address.

encounter something new and unfamiliar for the first time. “All of a sudden, we read that we are all racists,” she continued, “but what does it mean?” Similarly, during a discussion on tolerance organized by the Christian Academy of Latvia (*Latvijas Kristīgā Akadēmija*), a pastor and a former Head of the Human Rights Office in Latvia, Olafs Brūveris, expressed outrage that saying what you think is construed as racism these days. “If I am afraid, can I not say it?” he asked, “If I do not want my daughter to marry a black man, can I not say it?” He posited such fears and desires as either natural dispositions or personal preferences, which therefore should not be subject to public scrutiny and condemnation.

Others raised the question of how racism could be a problem of public concern if the population in Latvia is largely homogenous. This question implied that there simply are not that many people in the country who could be targets of racism, and thus racism cannot be a problem on the scale that requires broad public reflection. While the recorded number of incidents is low (see the Introduction), in numerous conversations throughout my fieldwork, human rights experts noted that many incidents remain unreported, for people do not know how to report them or are reluctant to do so for one reason or another. This was corroborated by my own conversations with members of the African Latvian Association (Afrolat).⁹⁰ There was not a single time we met that someone would not recount an instance of discrimination or physical or verbal abuse on the street, most of which went unreported and unrecorded. During my last visit in 2008, one of the Afrolat members told me that two “Afrolat children” in their early teens had recently been threatened and assaulted on the street on separate occasions, but that their parents decided against reporting the incidents for they did not want to expose their children to media attention. A student from Pakistan who studies at Rīga Stradiņa University told me of continuous verbal and physical abuse on the street and in the dormitories, as well as of differential treatment by the teachers. “But,” he said, “we do not report it, because nothing will come of it anyways.” He also told me about two Sri Lankan women who were verbally assaulted and physically threatened on the street and did not leave their dorm room for 3 days thereafter. He himself claimed not to go out after 10pm.

The few voices that appeared alongside Michael’s and urged the public to pay attention to racist attitudes and incidents never failed to generate heated reactions to what was perceived as an accusation that Latvians were racists. In response, people usually argued that they are simply not used to seeing black people on the street—they are interested and sometimes frightened. Many claimed that since Latvians as a historical community have not participated in racialized oppression as part of colonial projects, their contemporary expressions of interest cannot be construed as racist (see Chapter 1). On the contrary, the argument went, Latvians themselves have shared in the fate of being downtrodden, as indentured servants to German landlords, as imperial subjects of the Russian tsar, and as unwilling citizens of the Soviet state. Thus they claimed a historically shaped subject position of victims rather than perpetrators. The unsettling feeling that people experience in response to claims that racism is a problem in Latvia also derives from the fact that, on the one hand, people recognize themselves in the practices that are being questioned, yet, on the other hand, they did not recognize themselves in these practices once they were marked as racist. They experienced an alienation against which they rebelled, almost instinctively. Many understood racism to be an intentional and explicit assertion of racial superiority, which they did not

⁹⁰ Though Afrolat appeared in Chapter 3, I will remind readers here that the African Latvian Association is a non-governmental organization established for the purpose of providing a social forum for residents from or with connections to Africa, as well as for the purpose of facilitating the integration of Africans in Latvian society. The organization has about 30 members. During the last 5 years, due to the active role played by two of its leaders, the organization has become very visible in discussions about racism and tolerance.

share and which, they thought, was not congruent with the Latvian worldview shaped by experiences of victimhood and thus innocence.⁹¹

Many of those who, in one forum or another, felt compelled or were invited to respond to the statement that racism is a problem in Latvia suggested that Michael projects his own heightened sensitivity onto society at large. Even some members of the minority and human rights organizations who had themselves begun to raise the question of whether and how racism is a problem in Latvia considered Michael's claims too accusatory to be productive. Instead, while urging society to remove the blemish of racism, they reiterated the general goodness of the people or the soundness of Latvia's basic political and social formations.⁹² As I noted in chapter 1, some suggested that Latvians are in this regard average, not more or less racist than the rest of Europe, therefore there is no need for heightened attention to racist incidents and their elevation to the level of a general social problem. Others argued that racism is an isolated problem of marginalized groups, such as the skinheads, which can be contained and dealt with through law enforcement. While perhaps agreeing with Michael that the issue merits public reflection, others considered it more productive to tone down public statements so as not to aggravate the population whose cooperation was necessary in the public cultivation of anti-racism. Evidently, the argument was not only about whether there is racism in Latvia, but also about *how* and *where one ought to talk about race and racism* in this particular historical moment. What kind of a problem was it? Did it require a broad public discussion, or could it be dealt with by other means, such as law enforcement? Moreover, the claim that "there is racism in Latvia" was continuously taken by many Latvians to suggest that "all Latvians are racists" and thus as a personal offense. Such a transposition of a problem articulated as existing in society in general to oneself suggests that Latvians not only recognize themselves in the contested practices, but also intimately identify with the "general public." Arguments about race and racism thus are also intricately linked to considerations of what kind of public and reflecting subjects Latvians are and ought be and how public reflection on racism affects collective life of Latvians.

If imaginaries of race are not entirely new to Latvia, as I will illustrate shortly, the way in which race appears in public discourse today is new. For example, it was precisely the

⁹¹ Such an understanding of racism is different from that which animates Michael's critique of the seemingly innocent looks which nevertheless suggest that racialized imaginations and practices of othering are deeply constitutive of the ways people orient themselves in a world they take for granted. The definition of racism as intentional expression of superiority has been challenged by a multitude of theorists of race, racialization, and racism, arguing instead that modern ways of organizing the world are deeply racialized and that therefore racism manifests itself in myriad micropractices through which people make sense of themselves in the world (Baker 2002, Gilroy 2002, Omi and Winant 2002). Thus for example, Martin Baker has suggested in an influential essay "The Problem of Racism" that the idea that it is natural for human beings to live in separate communities and therefore to fear outsiders is racist (2002: 82). For these scholars, racism is not limited to an explicit and intentional expression of superiority, but includes the idea that national or racial separation is natural and inevitable. There are many other works that one could invoke to discuss understandings of race and racism. For the purposes of this chapter, I want to mark the distinction between racism understood as an expression of superiority, and racialization understood as a deeply sedimented way of structuring the world vis-à-vis human difference. Whether the latter is an example of racism remains an ethnographic question, though many would argue that it is. In this chapter, I will use the term "racialized" to mark the presence of racial imaginaries without instantly designating such practices as racist.

⁹² This resonates with Paul Gilroy's critique of anti-racism in Britain. He argues that the problem with the anti-racist perspective is that they think of racism as a blemish on the face of an otherwise sound polity (2002: 253).

shift in how and where Michael talked about race and racism that introduced a rupture in the usual flow of things. Similarly, in response to my question about how things have changed or stayed the same since the early 1990s, another member of the African Latvian Association responded that he remembers always being subjected to verbal and physical abuse in public, but that in the last few years Africans in Latvia have begun to express themselves, that is, they have begun to publicly talk about Latvia's African presence.⁹³

Abusive and discriminatory practices do take place in Latvia. Members of Aftrolat and other residents, such as the Roma, live the possibility of being their target on a daily basis. My aim here, however, is not to therefore join those calling for the recognition of the problem of racism, but rather to look at the historical and political conditions that have produced the situation whereby some claim to experience racism on a daily basis while others are puzzled at the suggestion that racism might be a problem in Latvia. How is it that some groups and individuals consider that public reflection on racism is necessary in Latvia, while others argue that race and racism are not proper objects of public reflection in the current historical moment?

In this chapter, I suggest that the dominant Latvian practices and discourses on race and racism are best described by invoking what I term *racial innocence*. In using the term *racial innocence*, my aim is not ultimately to move towards unmasking racist overtones in explicit and implicit assertions of innocence, but rather to illuminate the historical contingencies that shape contemporary ambivalence and resentment with regard to liberal discourses of tolerance and anti-racism.⁹⁴ What are the conditions that produce racial innocence in a world profoundly structured by the racialized differentiation of people, places, and histories?

Given that in the European context, race and racism are often talked about in terms of exclusion and inclusion in political or cultural bodies, such as the nation, and thus attributed to the problem of nationalism (Stolcke 1995, Gingrich and Banks 2006), I want to make some important conceptual distinctions. I suggest that attributing racism and racialization to nationalism is unsatisfactory for several reasons. First, it diverts attention from the fact that racialization is constitutive of modernity well beyond nationalism. Second, explaining racism by turning to nationalism has become a shorthand, which, as I discussed in the Introduction, can obscure more than illuminate. In fact, attributing racialized discourses and practices to nationalism may foreclose further inquiry, for nationalism is often assumed to be a known phenomenon, which merits intervention rather than investigation. At its worst, it tends to be understood as an empty ideology that does not have any real positive content, that is, it is all invented (Gellner 1983). At its best, it is thought of as a complicated question of longing and belonging (Anderson 1991). The prevalent understanding of nationalism in relation to Eastern Europe, however, especially in liberal policy circles, remains one of a set of undesirable practices of inclusion and exclusion that are state-based, yet also deeply rooted in the population. I suggest, however, that arguments about race and racism in Latvia not only pertain to inclusion and exclusion in relation to fixed political or cultural entities, such as the

⁹³ There is another important shift that he did not explicitly mention in the interview, but that he explained to me another time, namely, the shift from being a student at the Rīga Civil Aviation Institute and living on campus to becoming a regular resident of Rīga. This was, as he put it, when he first faced the music of racism in Rīga. I discuss this in greater detail later on in the chapter.

⁹⁴ It often seems that the language of racism is inadequate for describing the tensions that one can observe in arguments about race in Latvia. To be sure, race is operational in the discourses and practices of self- and world-making in Latvia, yet the term "racism" carries heavy historical baggage, which, if not used carefully, can serve as a closure rather than an opening for the purpose of understanding how race works in Latvia.

citizenry or the *tauta*, but also entail arguments about the kind of public conduct that is conducive to the flourishing of collective life in the current historical moment.

Moreover, the post-Soviet practices of racialization in Latvia are neither entirely unique nor the same as elsewhere. They draw on a translocal toolkit of categories and imaginations, yet they are also products of historically and culturally specific articulations of self and other which have unfolded within the framework and in the aftermath of particular modernization projects. In this chapter, I show the translocal and historical trajectories which contribute to the emergence of Latvian understandings of race and their resentment towards a particular form of anti-racism.

Soviet Practices of Race and Their Aftermath

As many Africans across the Soviet and later former Soviet spaces, Robert, who hails from an African country, came to Latvia to study on a scholarship from his government (many others came on scholarships from the Soviet government). He had spent some time in Russia before enrolling in the Rīga Civil Aviation Institute in the early 1990s. He thus joined a considerable group of students from countries in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East who were already studying there. The Institute had a reputation of hosting students from countries friendly to the Soviet Union, and, in the 1980s, it was a pretty safe guess that if you saw a visually different foreign person on the street, he (and it was almost exclusively always a he) probably was a student at the Institute. In the local imagination, the Institute represented (often ironically) the Soviet “friendship of the peoples” paradigm, though on a different register than relations with the Russian-speaking residents of Latvia or with other nationalities of the Soviet Union (see Chapter 2). If the foreign subjects of the “friendship of the peoples” project provided the possibility to ironically reflect about the socialist project without feeling threatened, the migrants from Russia and other parts of the Soviet Union who, together with Latvians, were eventually supposed to form the Soviet *narod* (people in Russian), were considered a great threat to the *tauta* since their arrival was seen as part of Soviet Russification practices, especially due to the number of migrants in relation to the number of Latvians deported or forced to emigrate.⁹⁵ While this new labor force was integrated with the Latvian population throughout the various institutions of the state, foreign students were effectively segregated inside the campus hostel of the Civil Aviation Institute (see Allina-Pisano, et. al. 2007 about similar practices in post-Soviet Russia). As Robert told me in an interview conducted in 2005, pretty much everything that one might need was available in the hostel, thus the students rarely left it. There were cafés, shops, and discos. Women from the outside world attended the discos and other social events. The students had

⁹⁵ See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of this. Contemporary policies with regard to the Russian-speaking residents in Latvia, including the initial restrictions of naturalization, are often said to be justified by the radical demographic shift that occurred as a result of Soviet Russification policies which now have to be corrected. It is a widespread element of the Latvian self-narrative to point to the rapid shift in the proportion of ethnic Latvians in Latvia over the years of Soviet rule. For example, the website of the Latvian Institute—an institution established to popularize information about Latvia abroad—states that “as a result of foreign immigration the proportion of Latvians in the country had begun to catastrophically decline. In 1935 Latvians made up 75.5% of the population, but according to official Soviet statistics, in 1959 Latvians comprised only 62% of the population, and the proportion of Russians in the population had increased most radically. At this time the total population of Latvia was a little more than two million (for comparison – in 1914 the population was more than 2.5 million, and in 2000 – just short of 2.4 million).”

(<http://www.li.lv/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=27&Itemid=450>)

no good reason to leave the hostel, unless they had to go to the train station or to the airport. The hostel was better provisioned, especially during the Soviet years, than anything they may find out in the street. Thus, Robert and his colleagues were not a constant presence on the streets of Rīga until well into the 1990s when he graduated and the Institute was closed down. As Robert told me, it was only once he left the hostel that he encountered racism on the street. Yet, he no longer had the possibility to retreat to the safety and isolation of the hostel. He “had to face the music,” as he put it, and what he heard was “a people singing a racist song.”

While the students of the Institute were not prevented from leaving the hostel and, as numerous accounts indicate, locals, especially women, were not prevented from attending its discos and cafés, the fact that the students mostly stayed within the confines of the hostel was not necessarily accidental. Providing students with services and products so that there was no need to leave the grounds of the Institute suggests that the Soviet state did not especially encourage mixing between the students and the local population.⁹⁶ As with most Soviet dividing practices, one was never sure who was being effectively segregated from whom. Some of the people I spoke to about the Civil Aviation Institute suggested that the foreign students who could afford to attend the Institute were kept separate from the generally poor Soviet population so that Soviet citizens would not be tempted by the items and money in the foreigners’ possession. From this perspective, it makes sense that the Soviet state provided them with shops, discos, and cafés in which to spend their money, while at the same time wanting to limit Soviet citizens’ exposure to such luxuries. It is highly possible that the students’ life was structured through this differential provisioning so as to concentrate their consumption and lifestyle patterns within the hostel rather than throughout the local landscape. They did after all have access to foreign products and their ways of life were much more capitalist than the Soviet state would have liked.

Even as the exact motivations behind what was effectively segregation are hard to discern today, the effect was such that neither the students—most of whom were visually different from the local population—nor the local population were used to seeing each other on a regular basis. One cannot but wonder whether and how this particular kind of separation articulates with other practices of spatial segregation of the Soviet period (such as the institutionalization of the visually impaired in sanatoriums in the midst of woods, orphans in orphanages, and the mentally ill in hospitals or special care centers) to create a particular kind of invisibility of difference. In other words, it was not only racialized difference that was not visible on the street in Latvia during the Soviet period, but other forms of difference as well. For example, during a discussion on tolerance and cultural understandings of the family organized by the Latvian Anthropology Association in 2006, Raimonds Strazdiņš, a visually impaired priest and lawyer emphasized that, as a result of the Soviet legacy, in contemporary Latvia people do not want to see difference in the streets. He described the prevalent attitude as follows: “you stay at home and we will bring you what you need, but do not go out”. Once, when getting on public transportation with his white cane, which identified him as visually impaired, Raimonds heard a comment: “What is he doing here? Shouldn’t he be in Jugla?” Jugla is the location of a social care center for the visually impaired, which traces its history back to 1893, but most people associate it with Soviet type of sanatoriums. People who required assistance due to visual disability were channeled towards such special educational or residential institutions often located on the outskirts of cities in forested areas, therefore contributing to their representation as sanatoriums, that is, places of comfort and rehabilitation. The existence of a special service space for the visually impaired was

⁹⁶ See Quist-Adade (2007) for an account of how the Soviet state tried to manage romantic relationships between local Russian women and African students in Moscow.

accompanied by a lack of visible effort to integrate its clients into society, thus effectively segregating the clients of the centre from the rest of the population.

While during the Soviet period it was common to think of racism as a foreign phenomenon, this overlooks the everyday racialization of the peoples that were supposed to constitute the Soviet people, such as the Roma or the Caucasians. Nevertheless, while Africans were not the only racialized subjects during the Soviet period, they did constitute the proper objects of racism as a feature of Western capitalism (Matusevich 2007, Blakely 1986)—a perception that continues to be prevalent in the post-Soviet period when it is often argued that racism cannot possibly be a problem, because of the small number of visibly different “foreigners” in Latvia. The problem of racism is largely seen as emerging only in relation to such newcomers. Moreover, many Latvians see racism as a problem not necessarily because racist practices have become more prevalent, but rather because they think that the newcomers do not understand the local ways and thus are guided by heightened sensibilities and skewed perceptions. Such a lack of understanding is thought to manifest in the newcomers’ public and political claims. For example, commenting on recent skinhead activities in the Old City of Rīga, a female staff member of the Institute of History told me that “all this race stuff is exaggerated. Anybody can get beat up. Those skinheads simply found some reason to fight, otherwise they would attack old people or someone else.” Further into our conversation, the woman recalled how local people looked at Africans who studied at the Rīga Civil Aviation Institute as if they were a miracle. “Girls thought they were privileged and went there all the time,” she said. She also commented somewhat resentfully that the increasingly audible complaints of the former students of the Civil Aviation Institute about racism they encounter in the streets of Rīga suggest that “it is not easy to descend from a higher status to a lower one,” meaning that their complaints about racism stem from dissatisfaction with life associated with losing their privileged status. Namely, they are no longer isolated within a well provisioned hostel and looked at as privileged, but are rather walking the streets where “anybody can get beat up” and thus are “facing the same music” as anybody else. She emphasized her point by saying that “*guculi* too have married into Latvia, but you don’t hear anything from them, do you?” *Guculi* are a Transcarpathian ethnic group and many came or were brought to Latvia to work during the Soviet times. *Guculi* are often lumped together with other visually distinct people from further East or South and referred to as “all those blacks.” With this last sentence, she alluded to the fact that there are and have been other racialized subjects in Latvia that do not, however, demand that Latvians publicly reflect on their racializing practices. These racialized and silent former Soviet subjects fold into the contemporary Latvian understanding of the national hierarchy which governs public and political space, but they are also products of the Soviet “titular nationality” policy whereby each national territory—an autonomous or semi-autonomous Soviet republic—was matched with a single nationality, thus denying public presence to other ethnic groups (distinct from Soviet people—see Chapter 2) which might reside in their territories.

Within the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts, histories of racialization can thus be traced, one, in relation to people of African descent who were the central figures in the Soviet imagination of what racial difference is and thus were thought of as the proper objects of racism (thought of as a profoundly foreign phenomenon), and, two, in relation to a diverse group of Soviet citizens subsumed under the category of “blacks” (*melnie* in Latvian or *chernyie* in Russian) which, depending on circumstances, included Caucasians, Chechens, Roma, or Central Asians (Lemon 2000). Within the Soviet self-narrative, the practices and discourses that marked this latter group as variously criminal, backward, stupid, deceitful, aggressive, or else, were not thought of as racializing or racist. As Alaina Lemon notes in her research on Roma in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, Russians would argue that the category of race is not operative in the USSR and that instead people were grouped in accordance to

nationality (2000). Yet, as many have argued, including Lemon, the absence of explicitly racial categories does not preclude racialization. Nationalities were often endowed with either inherent biological or metaphorically racial characteristics (Hirsch 2005, Lemon 2000) and, as Kate Baldwin (2002) argues, Russians asserted their whiteness and thus their privileged position within the “friendship of peoples” scheme. At the same time, it should be noted that members of the same nationality could be simultaneously romanticized and denigrated, such as in Lemon’s account of the romantization of Gypsy art and repulsion towards Gypsy street traders. Or, as in the case of Latvia, through a strong identification with the Caucasian, especially Georgian, resistance to Soviet power and their intellectual tradition and the simultaneous racialization of Caucasians as suspect and less than hygienic *melnie* (the blacks) who sell watermelons in the Rīga markets. In the latter case, it seems, racialization was articulated with class insofar as the Georgian intelligentsia was exempt from the label *melnais* (the black one). It was rather the traders that were deemed black and lesser. This racialized class distinction can be traced to both Soviet and Latvian imaginaries. On the one hand, the fact that traders were looked down upon resonates with Soviet understandings of work as a productive endeavor and therefore of traders as subjects who do not work, but rather benefit from other people’s work (Verdery 1996, Humphrey 2002: 59). On the other hand, within the context of Latvian repugnance towards migrants and a certain privileging of what Lisa Malkki calls “sedentarist metaphysics” (1995, see also Schwartz 2006), people who travel and trade rather than stay put and work the land are always-already suspect. Indeed, the human relationship to place is an important criterion for differentiating between people within the Latvian self-narrative and public discourse more generally. As Katrina Schwartz argues in her book “Nature and National Identity After Communism:”

If the Latvian farmer, with his inherited sensitivity to landscape, exemplified the proper relationship between people and nature, then his opposite was the “migrant”: the Soviet-era arrival from another Soviet republic, lacking a sense of place and of beauty because he lacked national identity. “This great country,” wrote Ziedonis of the Soviet Union, “evolves slowly because the word *fatherland* has been destroyed in its people. Having once in revolutionary hatred rejected heritability, the tending of father’s work, it now suffers in its own stupidity.” Migrants were voracious consumers and destroyers with no sensitivity to nature, the antithesis of the *saimnieks*: “They have gnawed it all away! ... They don’t see, don’t look, don’t notice, don’t hear the cries of the trees they have tortured.” It should be noted that Ziedonis attributed the migrants’ insensitivity to landscape to their rootlessness, not their ethnicity. Migrants were destructive not because they had the wrong national identity, but because they seemingly had *no* national identity—because they lacked a sense of place, not because they had bad “blood” (2006:66-67).

Representations of migrants as rootless and therefore lacking in ethical terms (that is, as not having a proper relationship to place, a proper ability to hear, to look, to notice), are operative today as well—for example, in attempts to draw distinctions between national minorities and former Soviet persons (see Chapter 2). It is within this distinction—as in a distinction between being able to properly see, hear, and notice and the lack of such an ability—that the ethical orientation of Latvianness becomes especially salient. It is this ethical orientation that is also operative in contemporary narratives about human mobility and the associated imaginations of “the new migrants” as seekers of an economically conceived good living rather than the ethically oriented good life. It is also operative in the ways in which Latvians argue about race and racism as objects of public reflection and concern.

Webs of racialization are in complex ways articulated with class, nationality, particular visions of the good life, and local histories. The physical presence of visually different bodies is not a necessary condition for racialized practices and discourses to be operative in the way that people orient themselves in the world. Various bodies—geobodies, collective bodies, and symbolic bodies, that is, figures such as the immigrant—or even material objects can and do get racialized through myriad practices. In Latvia in 2004, a television advertisement against accession to the European Union sponsored by the Freedom Party (*Brīvības partija*) warned of the threat of immigration by using an image of a black man kissing a Latvian maiden dressed in a folk costume accompanied by the voice commentary: “Would you like him to marry your daughter?” Underneath the image, a running caption suggested that with membership in the European Union more and more migrants from Africa and Asia will come to Latvia in search of a better life. In 2008, a computer advertisement incited a reaction from the Office of the Ombudsman when a photo of two computers—one black and one white—was accompanied by a caption “while the whites are relaxing, the blacks are working” (*kamēr baltie atpūšas, melnie strādā*).⁹⁷

In both cases, there was considerable debate about whether racism was constitutive of and constituted by the message conveyed. In the latter case, the Ombudsman argued that the ad plays on racial stereotypes about black people being enslaved and/or exploited by whites, because the verb *strādā* (are working) can only pertain to human beings, therefore the association is clear. The Ombudsman further suggested that the ad portrays the stereotype that black people work while white people enjoy luxuries at their expense. In the absence of Soviet ideology that would enable a reading of such an ad as a commentary on capitalist exploitation, no one was quite sure how exactly to read it. If it was not a critique of capitalism, which, it seemed clear to everyone, it could not possibly be, what was it?

In response to the Ombudsman’s somewhat vague argument that the association between black people and hard work was problematic, the company argued that the verb “to work” can be used in relation to machinery, substantiating their claim with various examples from everyday speech situations. Moreover, they argued that in the Latvian tradition work is virtue, therefore it is not clear why anyone should be offended even if the advertisement did gesture towards an association between black persons and hard work (Zālīte-Kļaviņa 2008). The company’s response illustrates the discursive strategies through which something like racial innocence is conjured up. Moreover—and importantly—the response of the company performed a historical continuity in the face of the rupture introduced by the collapse of the Soviet state and its official ideology. Namely, even if Soviet discourses of the critique of capitalism no longer provided the possibility to publicly argue that the advertisement was innocent in terms race—that is to argue that the association between blacks and work is a critique of capitalism—company officials had another repertoire at their disposal—that of the Latvian tradition—to claim a similarly inflected innocence with regard to any accusations of racism. Thus in the context of debates about the computer ad, the company—via the metaphor of work—drew on the Latvian tradition rather than Soviet ideology to conjure up racial innocence. In other situations, however, the two are not always kept apart. Thus, during the discussion with teachers about the use of the word *nēģeris* that I described in Chapter 1, the teachers drew on both the Latvian work virtue and the Soviet depictions of racialized working bodies as victims of capitalist exploitation to conjure up an identification with Africans that, they hoped, would absolve them from accusations of racism. The teachers were thus partly claiming socialist subjectivities even as they firmly located themselves within national narratives. While not identifying with the Soviet socialist project, they nevertheless claimed it had a constitutive role in the way they orient themselves in the world. Thus both

⁹⁷ <http://www.bada.lv/2008/02/11/baltiemelnie/>

the Soviet past and the Latvian tradition shape what might be called the Latvians' *racial innocence* which I elaborate in the following section.

Racial Innocence

The many participants of seminars which I attended or was invited to conduct within the framework of the National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance argued that Latvians do not *mean* anything bad when they look or stare at visually different bodies or when they use the word *nēģeris*, and that therefore they are not deserving of the label of racists so easily attached to them. Michael was among those who argued that the use of the word *nēģeris* amounts to racism. His opponents, in turn, claimed that the word does not have any negative connotations in the Latvian language, literature, or common usage, and that therefore there is no need to stop using it.⁹⁸ During one of our frequent conversations, Michael recounted a story about how a mother of a friend had become offended when she heard a televised interview with Michael where he claimed that using the word *nēģeris* was racist. She had become very upset and had invoked the familiar argument that she has used this word for as long as she can remember without any negative connotations, and that Michael should therefore understand that in the Latvian language the word does not mean anything bad. After recounting her reaction, Michael noted: "Well, I do think she is a racist, then."

What is noteworthy here is that past usage of the word is thought of as a justification for its continued use in the present. The invocation of the past can only serve such a purpose if the past is itself thought of as innocent, that is, if there are no shameful events in the past—such as colonialism, for example—which might require shedding the past or at least re-evaluating it in order to retain a certain integrity in the present. In such conditions, the present is a culmination of the past rather than a surpassing or an overcoming of it, as is the case in the context of liberal multiculturalism in Australia, which I briefly discussed in Chapter 1 (Povinelli 2002). If in the context of Australian liberal multiculturalism, an establishment of the unintentional nature of historical misdeeds was crucial for the Australian nation to maintain integrity in the present, in the context of arguments about tolerance in Latvia, it seems crucial to emphasize the innocence of the past, which is hoped to protect the Latvian *tauta* from accusations of racism in the present. Thus, the mother of Michael's friend insisted that she has never meant anything bad by the word *nēģeris*, because she has simply been speaking Latvian when using it, and thus cannot be accused of being racist. Yet, it was precisely her claim to innocence on the basis of past practices and her refusal to re-evaluate the past and the present on the basis of Michael's argument that using the word *nēģeris* does amount to racism that rendered her racist in Michael's eyes.

Throughout my fieldwork, racial innocence was also occasionally conjured up through invocations of child-like innocence, which usually followed one of two trajectories of argument. The first drew on an imaginary of gradual development culminating in political maturity, which the West had achieved, yet which was delayed in the case of Latvia due to the interruption caused by the Soviet occupation. Latvians, thus, were like children whose political development was hindered for many years and who therefore should be given a grace period rather than instantly labeled racist. While cleansing Latvians of adult responsibilities, this narrative also posited Latvians as children available for tutoring and guidance—a familiar articulation of liberal trajectories in colonial contexts. The second trajectory posited child-like innocence as a purer and thus better state of humanity, therefore defending the Latvians' right to name everything that comes their way in a way they see fit.

⁹⁸ See Chapter 3 for a more elaborate discussion on tolerance and linguistic conduct.

Thus, in a review of a new edition of “*Baltā Grāmata*” (The White Book)—a collection of short stories by Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš (2006 [1927]), which depicts childhood in a typical rural setting of single farmsteads—Pauls Bankovskis (2006), a writer and a frequent contributor to the major daily “Diena” noted that the new edition includes all 100 stories, compared to the 90 published in the censored Soviet edition. Therefore, upon purchasing the book, he first turned to the previously omitted stories to see what the Soviet censorship machinery had considered dangerous. Most of the omitted stories, he concluded, entailed characterizations of particular ethnic groups and were edited out despite the fact that, “Jaunsudrabiņš writes from the perspective of a child, with kind-hearted curiosity” (Bankovskis 2006). Bankovskis’ article, mockingly entitled “Jaunsudrabiņš un ž...,” therefore marking the problematic word *žīds* by erasing it, critiqued contemporary manifestations of political correctness by comparing the conditions that force him to adopt such an approach in public discourse to the “idiocy” of Soviet censorship.⁹⁹ He praised the literary work of Jaunsudrabiņš for providing insight “into the age of innocence when children talked children’s talk and everything that came into one’s way could be named.”

In Bankovskis’ article, the children’s talk was a feature of both the boy who was the main hero of Jaunsudrabiņš’ stories, but also of Latvians as a people who innocently try to describe what they see without intent to offend someone. Bankovskis’ article points to the important role that childhood narratives play in the Latvian self-narrative. Some of the more revered and cherished Latvian literary works are childhood narratives. Thus, Jaunsudrabiņš’ “*Baltā Grāmata*” was recently placed on a list of candidates for the Latvian literary canon—an attempt to codify a fragmentary tradition.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, works like Anna Brigadere’s “*Dievs. Daba. Darbs*” (God. Nature. Work.) and Vizma Belševica’s “*Bille*” (Bille) depict the world through the eyes of a child and, in doing so, aim to put forth a narrative that is somehow more profoundly human than the over-stimulated and the ideologically inflected world of adults.

It is not necessarily the mere prevalence of childhood narratives in Latvian literature that suggests that child-like innocence is formative of the Latvian worldview, however, but also their appearance in contemporary commentaries, such as that of Pauls Bankovskis. In arguments about tolerance, childhood innocence becomes entangled with the innocent past. Here too literary works are often invoked as reflecting some deeper truths about collective Latvian existence. Thus Rūdolfs Blaumanis’ “*Skroderdienas Silmačos*” (Sewing Days in Silmači) or Margarita Stāraste’s “*Ieviņa Āfrikā*” (Little Ieva in Africa) were often invoked during my fieldwork to illustrate that words such as *žīds* (Jew) or *nēģeris* (negro) have been historically used without any intent to offend. In Blaumanis’ work, *žīdi* (the Jews) appear as traveling traders with whom one quibbles, but who are nevertheless considered to be members of the *saimē* (household). In Stāraste’s children’s book, African children are lovingly called *nēģerēni* (little negroes) and depicted dancing around with loin cloths, red lips, and wooly hair. As one of the teachers noted, “it was such an endearing little book.” And, indeed, how was she to know that the images of Africans used in the book resonate with the images of Africans used in various world fairs deeply embedded in racialized and colonial imaginaries and practices and, moreover, that such representations have been critiqued by postcolonial theory for at least the last three decades (Svece 2008). In the stories that Latvians tell about themselves, Latvians never organized world fairs, never brought colonial subjects to colonial metropolises, never owned slaves or exploited colonial subjects, never took away native land or native children and thus have never been called upon to reflect on history in the

⁹⁹ See Chapter 3 for a discussion on tolerance and linguistic conduct.

¹⁰⁰ See http://www.diena.lv/lat/izklaide/literatura/gramatu_zinas/latvijas-kulturas-kanonam-izvirzitas-kulturas-vertibas-literatura

same way as, for example, Australians or other colonial-cum-liberal nations or subjects. One might argue, however, that the recent history of the independent Latvian state has produced incidents that already require cleansing and distancing, such as the initial promise of citizenship to all those who were residents of Latvia at the time of independence and the subsequent limitations to that citizenship with the effect of the exclusion of a large segment of the Russian-speaking population.¹⁰¹

Childhood innocence and the innocent past work together to conjure up racial innocence in conditions where invitations to reflect upon one's conduct in the context of tolerance promotion activities are perceived as accusatory, even personally offensive. While narratives of childhood innocence gesture towards the ultimate goodness of Latvians as a people, narratives of the innocent past suggest that the lack of a history of racialized oppression in the Latvian *tauta's* past somehow absolves Latvians from accusations of racism in the present. People repeatedly suggest that, historically, Latvians belong to the category of victims rather than oppressors, and that therefore racism cannot be a feature of collective life in the present.

Yet, the prevalence of narratives of innocence that counter perceived accusations of racism does not yet explain how suggestions that "there is racism in Latvia" are transposed to amount to accusations of Latvians as a people. When claims of racism pertain to situations where people could presumably imagine or recognize themselves as engaging in a contested practice—for example, through a particular gaze—it is indeed possible that they might take it personally. However, people also take personal offense when claims of racism pertain to violent racial incidents where most cannot imagine themselves as perpetrators and, moreover, where the perpetrators are easily identifiable, therefore presumably enabling people to distance themselves from the racist crime and say—"yes, there is racism in Latvia, I am concerned, but not personally accused." In other words, public reflection on violent racist crime seems to offer the possibility for people to constitute themselves as properly concerned subjects in relation to a clearly delineated problem without feeling themselves implicated. Yet, most responses to the demand to reflect on racism do not take up this offer. In fact, they strongly reject it. During my fieldwork, I observed how, on numerous occasions, members of minority or human rights organizations encountered strong resistance to their suggestion that racism is a problem in Latvia, even as they backed up their claims through examples of concrete incidents of racialized assault. In what follows, I turn to an ethnographic analysis of these encounters, which will show how particular understandings of the practice of public reflection inform arguments about racism and tolerance.

The Self, the Public and the Practice of Public Reflection

In May 2008, I attended a round-table discussion on racism organized by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in Rīga.¹⁰² As part of the discussion, minority representatives, policy researchers, activists, and government officials were invited to report on the state of affairs to ECRI functionaries. One of the issues discussed was the

¹⁰¹ See the Introduction and Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion.

¹⁰² "The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) is the Council of Europe's monitoring body, combating racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance in greater Europe, from the perspective of the protection of human rights. ECRI's action covers all the measures needed to combat violence, discrimination and prejudice against persons or groups of persons on grounds of race, color, language, religion, nationality or national or ethnic origin."

See: http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/ecri/1-ECRI/1-Presentation_of_ECRI/Default.asp#TopOfPage

reluctance of the police to classify racially motivated attacks as hate crimes under Paragraph 78 of the Criminal Code and instead to treat them as incidents of hooliganism, which could be prosecuted under the Administrative Code. (It should be noted that hooliganism can be prosecuted either under the Administrative Code or under the Criminal Code.) As explained to me by the Chief of Rīga's Criminal Police, in order to be prosecuted under the Criminal Code, an act of hooliganism has to be deemed as harmful to society as a whole, whereas anything less than that is prosecuted under the Administrative Code. The line between an act that is harmful to society as a whole and an act that is harmful to concrete parties is key in understanding why police officers are reluctant to classify individual incidents—such as attacks on concrete persons—as hate crimes. Police do not always see them as amounting to an incitement to racial or ethnic hatred, which is thought of as a matter of group relations rather than as incidents that involve concrete persons. Thus, as I describe in Chapter 3, the circulation of public discourse lends itself better to prosecution under Paragraph 78 than individual incidents, because public statements address a public rather than concrete individuals and thus can be construed as pertaining to relations between groups. During the last several years, however, police practices have shifted and more incidents involving individual persons are classified under Paragraph 78. Nevertheless, the police still struggle with inadequacies in the legal framework, including the need to prove intention, which is a central element in prosecution.

The complaints of minority organizations during the ECRI discussion reflected these difficulties and their associated frustrations. The head of the Roma organization “Nevodrom” brought up an incident in which two teenage Roma girls were beat up in the stairwell of their house by young men in attire that suggested their identification with skinheads. While assaulting the girls, they had called them black (*melnās*) and had not taken any of their belongings. To most of those present at the round-table discussion, this suggested that the assault was racially motivated, yet the Security Police—the institution charged with responsibility to investigate incidents that could be classified as incitement to racial or ethnic hatred under Paragraph 78 of the Criminal Code—had refused to classify the incident as hate crime and had sent it back to the State Police as a case of hooliganism.

Amidst heated discussions on the increased frequency of racially motivated incidents and the difficulties with regard to obtaining legal and public recognition of the problem, Jānis Šmits, a pastor and a parliamentary deputy, member of the *Pirmā Partija*, and the head of the Parliamentary Human Rights Commission, joined the discussion.¹⁰³ Addressing Jānis Šmits, a representative of the African Latvian Association pointed out that we should not think that all is fine in Latvia just because there are more racially motivated incidents in other countries. As mentioned in Chapter 3, he said that one racially motivated incident is already one too many and that therefore racism is a problem in Latvia. In response, Šmits argued that Latvians are and historically have been very tolerant, and that, contrary to what the Afrolat representative was saying, racism is not a problem in Latvia. Several participants questioned his response, pointed to the increasingly frequent occurrence of racially motivated assaults, and asked Šmits to explain the difference, as he sees it, between hooliganism and racism. In response to every question, he continued to reiterate that racism is not a problem in Latvia. His refusal or inability to engage with these concrete incidents and questions and his assertion of the general position that there is no racism in Latvia was, perhaps, somewhat extreme, but

¹⁰³ Šmits is a controversial person, best known for his staunch anti-LGBT views and his unique interpretation of human rights as mostly pertaining to the Latvians' right to cultivate and defend their cultural practices, but which also includes the right of parents to spank their children and the right of the majority to deny freedom of assembly and expression to disliked minorities, such as gays and lesbians.

it is also paradigmatic of the kind of responses that demands to reflect on racism generate in Latvia. Instead of writing off his response to extreme nationalism, misguided communication techniques, or stupidity, as some would have it, I would like to offer another possibility, namely to consider this exchange as indicative of a clash between different understandings of the relationship between self, public space, and public reflection.

To outline this relationship, I offer another example of a discussion of racism I observed during one of the many teachers' seminars organized under the auspices of the National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance. The moderator of the discussion invoked a recent incident where two Sri Lankan students were assaulted on the street. The epithets the attackers used did not leave anyone in doubt that the attack was indeed racially motivated, yet some participants of the discussion expressed resentment that such incidents are used to suggest that Latvians should publicly reflect on the problem of racism. Trying both to explain such a stance and to find a resolution, one of the participants noted that Latvians, as a people, feel accountable when it is suggested that racism is a problem in Latvia. She further explained that Latvians think of themselves, and are thought of by others, as standing in for the public space.

While I have already argued that it is through the circulation of public discourse that the Latvian *tauta* has a sense of itself as a people, and thus that Latvians are particularly invested in the nature of the public conjured up and assumed in public discourse, here I would like to offer another trajectory for tracing the culturally and historically specific understanding of publics and public reflection in Latvia that will help to unpack the resentment towards contemporary invitations to reflect on racism. I suggest that the articulation of Latvians and the public space put forth by the teacher is animated not only by the modern existence of the *tauta* as a public, but is also grounded in a culturally and historically specific understanding of the relationship between people and place exemplified by *viensēta* (single farmsteads)—a socio-spatial arrangement of rural living that is continuously invoked as paradigmatic of a specifically Latvian understanding of the good life and thus as deeply constitutive of Latvian subjectivities. My argument is that imaginaries of this socio-spatial arrangement get articulated with modern forms, such as the public, and subsequently inform arguments about tolerance and public reflection.

To be sure, other forms of rural cohabitation have historically existed in the territory now known as Latvia. Importantly, thus, the prevalence of the single farmstead in the imaginary of the nation as a polity has required a remembering that is also a forgetting. As Aldis Purs has noted with regard to the full-scale dwelling exhibits of the Latvian Ethnographic Museum:

The museum had only Latvian homesteads, as if there were only Latvian peasants, and only Latvians in the state. Roughly one quarter of the population, however, was not ethnically Latvian, and in Latgale the share approached forty percent. Although most minorities lived in the cities (particularly Rīga), in Latgale most lived in the countryside. The inter-war museum [1918-1939] had no Russian farm (communal or not), no Polish homestead, no gypsy compound, no Jewish *stetl*, no Baltic German manor house, no Byelorussians, Lithuanians, Estonians, or Livs. Instead the museum displayed a slice of ethnic agricultural life as if Latvian peasants existed in a world of their own, a world self-enclosed by the borders of the state. (in Schwartz 2006: 44)

What I am concerned with here, however, is not the selectively derived prevalence of the single farmstead mode of rural living in the imagination of the nation as a polity, but rather its role in shaping the self-understanding of the *tauta* as a public. As already suggested in the quote above, single farmsteads are thought to distinguish a specifically Latvian way of

life from that of their neighbors, especially from the Russians who are said to favor communal type of rural dwellings. Historically, Latvia's single farmsteads were located at a sufficient distance from each other, interspersed by fields and natural landmarks. They consisted of an ensemble of buildings—for example, living quarters, a barn, animal barn and so forth—with common open spaces between them, and were occupied by a master family (*saimnieki*) and their farmhands. Within the Latvian tradition, the farmsteads represent the kind of living where people are in a hierarchical, yet symbiotic and harmonious relationship with nature, work, and each other (see also Schwartz 2006). Narratives of single farmstead living are central to how Latvians think of themselves in space and place and therefore also in relation to others. On the one hand, they provide guidance for conduct and, on the other hand, they serve to explain conduct. Thus, a single farmstead mode of life is frequently invoked to explain why Latvians are reluctant to live in close proximity not only to foreigners, but also to each other. It is also used to explain the strong resistance to the appearance of visible difference in public space. For example, a government official explained to me that the intense resistance to attempts to organize gay and lesbian Pride parades in Rīga is related to Latvians' inclination to guard their homestead, their *sēta*, that is, their way of life.¹⁰⁴

It is therefore important to trace how people's understanding of the single farmstead mode of life might infuse the way they navigate public space and therefore also participate in debates about whether and how to reflect on racism. Turning to literature is once again helpful here, for most of the literary works centering on childhood experiences described earlier in this chapter take place in single farmstead settings. Reading Jaunsudrabiņš' "*Baltā Grāmata*," Katrina Schwartz describes how in single farmsteads "the land, people, and buildings are seamlessly intertwined" (2006: 44). Similarly, Brigadere's "*Dievs. Daba. Darbs*" takes place in a single farmstead setting and focuses on a little girl's coming of age through discovering her place in the world—that is, the single farmstead—and thus also crafting proper relations with others. One of the most revered literary works in Latvia—Edvarts Virza's "*Straumēni*" (the name of the farmstead)¹⁰⁵—is a narrative that poetically depicts life in a single farmstead.¹⁰⁶ It lingers on the cyclical changes in nature introduced by the change of seasons, as well as the changing human tasks and practices that go along with them. Rather than progress and unsettlement, however, these changes gesture towards repetition and stability. In an afterward to the 2007 edition of the book, Imants Ziedonis writes that each people have at least two big songs—one about heroes and the other about home (Virza 2007: 201). If the Hero Song is a dramatic narrative of hope and tragedy, the Home Song does not have a hero:

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 5 for a discussion of gay and lesbian politics.

¹⁰⁵ Each farmstead is known by a name which serves as a place-name and is marked in maps. Throughout the 19th century and into the 20th, people, especially members of the master's family, were known as, for example, Jānis from *Straumēni* or, more commonly, *Straumēnu Jānis*.

¹⁰⁶ It is interesting to note that Garlībs Merķelis, writing about the condition of Latvian serfs in the 18th century, describes Latvian dwelling spaces as follows: "still, the peasant dwellings in Vidzeme [a region in Latvia] are scattered, often entirely isolated in deep forests. Usually those are thrashing barns or hay enclosed huts without chimneys or windows and with doors so low that one can enter them only bent over. In the room, so filled with smoke that one could suffocate, there is great activity—the master (*saimnieks*) and his family are busying about in the light of burning wood, farmhands are there too, as are chickens, pigs, and dogs; the adults in worn out clothing, kids in the same shirts in winter or summer, all barefoot" (2005 [1797]: 35). By the early 20th century, the condition of the farmsteads had improved and they were idealized. The pigs, chickens and dogs were expelled from human living-spaces; the practice itself erased from memory and attributed to the Russians (see Chapter 2).

The Home Song does not have such a hero. It does not have anyone who excels, there is no superhuman element to it, there is nothing that is unique and irreplaceable. Yet—what is the main element of it? Guarantee. That something is, was, and will be. That it will exist. Warm and self-centered life. A place through which time flows and does not take anything away, only sediments more of the same. Heroes come and go, get lost and do not return; heroes do not guarantee anything. They embody our hopes, but it is this place, the hearth, the invincibility of a home, belief in a calm and consistent rhythm of home that guarantee our existence (Ziedonis in Virza 2007:202).

Whereas the hero encounters strangers and fights for freedom, the home epic provides guidance for everyday conduct. The single farmstead, then, becomes an embodiment of ethics, which many other writers have idealized as paradigmatic of a Latvian way of life, and is juxtaposed to city life, which is often depicted as foreign. Nevertheless, even if in cities, Latvians continue to draw on the single farmstead mode of life to orient and explain social practice and their place in the world. Thus, the mode of single farmstead living becomes transposed to other types of spaces and places, such as the public space of the nation. In fact, Virza's "*Straumēni*" is often read as a metaphor about the nation. Consequently, alienation from the farmstead, argues Schwartz (2006), means alienation from the nation and the self.

Many Latvians narrate their experience of exile following World War II and later return (either after deportation or after the collapse of the Soviet Union) through descriptions of their interrupted, severed, and never fully restored relationships to single farmsteads. These relationships are never entirely symbolic, for each family, even if city dwellers, is likely to have some extended family connection to a single farmstead in which they spent summers or where they took refuge from the front line crossing Latvia during World War II. For example, many life stories collected by the Oral History Project of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology narrate how German and Soviet soldiers went through farmsteads—some respectfully asked for water, while others urinated in the middle of the yard.¹⁰⁷ The inhabitants looked on in horror, so the stories go, as the harmonious relationship between people, land, and buildings was interrupted and often severed completely. Returning to Latvia for the first time in the late 1980s after decades in exile, geographer Edmunds Bunkše describes how he rode the train from Leningrad to Rīga longing to see the typical single farmstead landscape once he crossed the border into Latvia (2007). While wanting to confirm the continued existence of the *tauta* by seeking the landscape of single farmsteads, Bunkše also set out to visit the single farmstead which had been his childhood refuge in times of war and where the extended family of his grandmother had resided. I quote from him at length:

When after several months in Latvia I asked to be taken to my grandmother's home, I experienced a shattering that has influenced my whole life. I knew that I would encounter a landscape that will deeply hurt me. Driving on the Rīga-Pleskava highway—it was as empty as I remembered it; only once in a while punctuated by some truck with large, white plates with Cyrillic letters in the back—I was very anxious. I was afraid that my memory could deceive me, that I would not longer recognize my grandmother's farmstead and thus will not find it. When we got closer to the area, the landscape became hilly and the road wove up and down. The view included pine and birch trees, as well as some single farmsteads. When we came to the right place, I slowly recognized the contours of the landscape. That's how you feel when you meet a person whom you have known as a healthy and whole being, but who has been seriously crippled by

¹⁰⁷ See www.dzivesstasts.lv for more information on the archive.

some accident or hard life.

The road leading up to the house over a hill was no longer straight; it now hugged a large pond, which had developed from a dirty and over-grown irrigation ditch stretching along the highway. When we reached the muddy and uneven road, I saw that the animal barn and the thrashing barn no longer stood in their place. The horse barn was still standing, its stone walls like before, but the roof had many holes in it. The residential building was in its place, but its long roofline had bent inward on both ends. The house was surrounded by chaotically demarcated vegetable gardens (though it was still winter). On the other side of the hill, there were a few two-storey residential buildings, which reminded me of Cape Cod bungalows; they were white brick buildings that were characteristic of smaller collective farms. The other road that led to the house from the west was still preserved as before; it wove up the hill passing an old oak with a stork nest.

A bony, yellow-brown dog with low hanging ears barked at us viciously. An older man and a woman, both in worn out clothing, came out the door to meet us. They were both Russian. My companions, who spoke Russian, decided that we should ask to be let in. I objected, but they asked nevertheless. And we were invited into the room, which once was the main living room (the house was now divided into four family apartments). The walls and the ceiling were covered with soot and smelled like soot too. There was a bucket in the middle of the room to collect the rainwater, which was seeping through the roof. (Later I was told that migrants have a characteristically indifferent attitude towards up-keeping homes.) It was painful to see it, but the biggest shock came when my companions told the Russian couple that I belong to the former owner's family. The woman began to weep and, gesticulating with her arms, circled the room. She thought I had come to reclaim the house and to put her out; weeping endlessly, she tried to show me how they had improved the house. Her screams and the bucket of water was more than I could take. I ran outside, behind the home, and bent over to throw up. But I only gagged. (2007: 53-54)¹⁰⁸

The patterns of living and cohabitation that the single farmstead represents, as well as the interruptions in these patterns—in this case, the arrival of the Russians and the splitting up of the space in multi-family housing—are often transposed to public space. For example, when discussing the results of research conducted by the Baltic Social Sciences Institute which included a standardized social distance question widespread within the European Union about whether the residents of Latvia would want to live next door to variously defined others—homosexuals, Muslims, Gypsies, and so forth—participants of the aforementioned teacher seminar argued that if Latvians responded that they do not want to live next door to these others, this is because Latvians are after all *viensētnieki* (single farmsteaders or homesteaders) and therefore they do not want to live next to anyone, not just Muslims or Africans (BSZI 2004:65). By invoking the paradigmatic mode of living, the participants argued that the responses to this survey should not be read as indicative of a high degree of intolerance in Latvia, but that they should rather be considered in light of Latvians' culturally and historically specific way of life. Clearly, it would be grossly misguided to argue that a *viensētnieki* disposition accounts for the fact that 45% of Latvians do not want to live next door to Muslims or that 38% of Latvians do not want to live next door to homosexuals, if only because the results are similar for residents who do not identify as Latvian (BSZI 2004:65). Nevertheless, the repeated invocation of *viensēta* to explain or guide social practice suggests that it is in important ways operative in the way people think of themselves in relation to space / place and others.

¹⁰⁸ Translation mine.

If understood as shaped by a striving to approximate a seamless intertwining between people and place thought to be characteristic of a specifically Latvian mode of living, the positive content of public space is deeply consequential for many Latvians' sense of self. Subsequently, claims that there is racism within the public space of Latvia become inseparable from claims that Latvians are also, in a way, racists. Having marked this existentially entangled articulation of Latvians and the public space, the teacher who attempted to explain why Latvians are so reluctant to publicly talk about race further suggested that in order to enable a discussion of racism that would not be taken as a personal offense, some sort of distancing was in order. She argued that Latvians should keep in mind that it is mostly Russians who are aggressive and therefore more prone to commit a racist crime.¹⁰⁹ This move absolved Latvians from the need to question themselves in the process of talking about racism, and instead propelled them to ask how to handle the blemish that was in their public space, but not of it. The kind of distancing the teacher proposed entailed collective *alienation* of the Latvian *tauta* from public space by way of severing the seamless relationship between Latvians and public space. In her suggestion, Latvians could not seamlessly identify with public space due to the presence of Russians, who were rendered accountable for the presence of racism. While ultimately undesirable, such collective alienation was nevertheless seen as necessary, if racism was to be acknowledged as part of the local landscape.

The teacher's response suggested that in the current historical moment public reflection on racism *is not* necessary to cultivate oneself as a proper Latvian subject. Rather, public reflection on racism might enable one to point to Latvians' alienation from public space via the presence of Russians in it. In contrast, some minority and human rights organizations and a handful of policy researchers and experts suggest that public reflection on race *is* necessary today in order to cultivate oneself as a properly tolerant Latvian and European subject. They too consider that some distancing is needed to enable public reflection on racism. However, the mode of distancing they propose is different: rather than collective alienation of the Latvian *tauta* from public space, it entails a distancing mechanism that can be thought of in terms of liberal *abstraction* whereby the self enters the public sphere as an individual in a critical and distanced relationship with the community and its past.¹¹⁰ Thus, instead of collectively distancing from public space, in this view, Latvians as individuals should distance from too passionate of an attachment to the *tauta* in order to reflect on the problem of racism, which affects them as citizens of a liberal democratic state and not as Latvians. As a result of such an abstraction, talking about racism does not amount to acknowledging that one is racist, because one is actively attempting to address the problem of racism which exists in society, yet which neither characterizes society as a whole nor the self as its member. Such a maneuver also constitutes the categories of the civic public sphere and of a cultural community that did not necessarily figure as separate entities in the discourse of the teacher. In the narrative of the teacher, when distancing occurs, it involves recognition that the approximation of the seamless intertwining between public space and the *tauta* has been interrupted by the presence of those not of the *tauta*. Not unlike the white license plates with Cyrillic letters that interrupted the flow of the Rīga-Pleskava highway in Bunkše's narrative above, or the lack of proper care for his grandmother's home at the hands of its new Russian residents, the presence of racism is here talked about as an interruption

¹⁰⁹ As it later turned out, it was a Latvian girl from a good family that was the perpetrator in the incident that was being discussed. This did not matter as much, because it was important to assert that in general the Russians are more prone to commit such acts.

¹¹⁰ Karl Marx's critique of such a liberal distancing mechanism in his "On the Jewish Question" remains poignant (1972 [1843]).

that is external to the public of the *tauta*.

It is important to emphasize here that I do not suggest that public discourses marked as Latvian—such as the narrative of the teacher—cannot accommodate critical reflection, though some of the tolerance activists would subscribe to such a view. Rather, I am pointing out that arguments about racism entail critical reflection on a number of different objects—racism, as well as how and where racism is talked about. In other words, there are simultaneously two, if not more, trajectories of reflection that constitute public discourse on race and racism in Latvia. Here I am especially interested in what might be thought of as a metadiscourse about public reflection that can be discerned in the argument about whether there is racism in Latvia or not. Statements that make up this metadiscourse are grounded in a historically and politically constituted understanding about what public reflection does in contemporary Latvia, therefore demanding it in some situations and shunning it with regard to others. For example, in the context of the Black History Month that the United States Embassy celebrated in Latvia in February 2006, an internet commentator suggested that there is no need for the kind of reflection that this celebration invites and offers. First, it does not solve any concrete problems in Latvia, and, second, given that victimhood and innocence characterize collective Latvian past, there is no moral imperative that would require such reflection. From this perspective, public reflection on something is merited on two accounts: one, to solve concrete problems that *most* Latvians encounter in their daily lives, and, two, to reflect on collective virtue as part of the ongoing project of self-making. From this perspective, racism in Latvia does not merit broad public reflection.¹¹¹

Diverging from a Habermasian understanding of the public sphere as involving critical scrutiny of public authorities (1991: 27), as well as from Elizabeth Povinelli's description of Australian law as being subject to public reason, the metadiscourse on public reflection in Latvia suggests that the object of public reflection is first and foremost the *tauta*, its conduct, its well-being, and its virtue.¹¹² Inviting public reflection with regard to a particular racist incident, then, means that the ensuing discussion is not just about resolving that particular incident, but also about constituting a public that, by reflecting upon the incident, cultivates itself as a particular kind of a public.¹¹³

By way of concluding the discussion on race, publics, and public reflection, I offer another example of a public encounter that entailed reflection on race and conduct. This public encounter differs from the others described above insofar as it happened on public transportation and thus fell somewhere in-between the circulation of public discourse that addresses a public as a stranger sociality and an act of public disciplining reminiscent of the Soviet period when citizens—especially elderly ladies—felt they had the authority to publicly discipline their co-citizens and public authorities.¹¹⁴ And thus Michael told me that one day,

¹¹¹ On this point, see also Charles Hirschkind's discussion of what is worthy of public attention in the context of Islamic counterpublics (2006: 112).

¹¹² Habermas argues that "The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people who come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules of governing relations in a basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people's public use of their reason" (1991: 27).

¹¹³ See Michel Foucault's argument about the shift in criminal punishment from a private settling of the score to a public spectacle that was meant to reassert the power of the sovereign (1995). Here, I am arguing that public reflection in Latvia functions in a similar way to cultivate a particular kind of a public.

¹¹⁴ In an article about violence and Pan-African community in post-Soviet Moscow, Jessica Allina-Pisano and Eric Allina-Pisano recount how African students distinguish between Soviet persons and

he and his young son were waiting for a tram. Upon entering the tram, a group of Russian-speaking teenagers gave Michael and his son a seat. An older man sat next to Michael and soon thereafter initiated a conversation in Latvian by asking Michael whether he is the same Michael who gives interviews to the press and publicly talks about racism. Upon confirming that this was indeed so, the man proceeded to elaborate that he disagrees with Michael's assessment of the problem of racism in Latvia. He thinks that it does not exist. Moreover, the man added, "if it is so difficult for you to live in Latvia, why don't you just leave?" In response, Michael explained that his family is Latvian and that he sees no reason why they all should leave. Michael continued by suggesting that he will leave when all the Latvians who are living abroad come back to Latvia, thus pointing out the inconsistencies in the argument that Latvians often use whereby each people should live in their own country or territory rather than migrate elsewhere. The man responded that it would be impossible to arrange. Michael ended the conversation by saying that he lives the street reality, while the man must create reality in his head.

This encounter seemed to be a strange amalgamation of a public discussion and an intervention in a public scene on the basis of a provocation or disturbance. The old man must have found Michael's presence disturbing, not necessarily because he, a black man, was riding a tram, but rather because this particular black man had made public statements, which the old man found misguided. While the old man's statements could be considered as interventions in an ongoing argument, they could also be seen as a kind of policing of the public space, especially considering the suggestion that Michael should leave if he does not like the treatment he receives instead of making people think about such a non-problem as racism.

This conversation may not have occurred if the man and Michael were simply passing each other on the street. Moreover, the elderly man may not have taken the time to write to a newspaper or call a TV or radio show to express his view. But here, in a tram, they were brought together and suspended, as it were, in common space at least until the next stop. The possibility for a conversation arose. In a sense, the tram became an instantiation of the public sphere where an argument unfolded. While most people remained silent, some, mostly those who disagreed with the elderly man, were compelled to articulate a stance. Michael recounted how some younger Latvian woman had told the old man that he is completely wrong and, upon exiting the tram, had said to Michael "*turies*" (hang in there). The Russian-speaking teenagers had said that there is in fact racism in their generation, thus opposing the old man's statement that there is no racism in Latvia. Of course, given the distancing tactics deployed by the teacher described earlier, the old man could have argued in this case that the presence

"new persons," the latter being dangerous, while the former are sympathetic and helpful. They write: "Those students described how people who had grown up under Soviet rule had shielded them from official harassment. In the early 1990s, for instance, police officers stopped and harassed one of our interlocutors near a Moscow metro station. An elderly Russian woman approached, excoriated the police officer for bothering the African student, and, in a fashion not atypical for the time, hit one of the officers with her handbag. It is important to note that this type of policing from below depended not only on the elderly woman's socialization to Soviet norms, but the officer's as well" (2007: 185). In a footnote, the authors further explain: "It also should be noted that such a scene is imaginable only before the mid-1990s. As the decade progressed, young men replaced older women as the arbiters of (what became quite a different) social order" (Allina-Pisano, et. al. 2007: 196). The authors are referring here to the increasing visibility of nationalist and/or skinhead youth groups who frequently attacked visually different minorities, often resulting in severe beatings and deaths. This incident urges one to ask what kind of socialization enabled an elderly lady to practice such "handbag discipline?"

of racism among Russian speaking youth still does not mean that racism is a problem of public concern for Latvians.

When the old man got off the tram, an older woman sat next to Michael and also initiated a conversation in Latvian. Michael told me that he had thought to himself, “oh no, here we go again,” but was subsequently pleasantly surprised by what she had to say. She said that she is 88 years old and that the older man “does not represent us.” In other words, in the name of Latvians, she apologized to Michael for how the old man had conducted himself. She expressed joy about the fact that Michael speaks Latvian and sings in the choir (a fact that was publicly known by now and widely discussed). She said that all her friends think it is positive. Importantly, in contesting the old man’s conduct, the woman emphasized certain features of Michael’s conduct which she, and presumably the “we” she claimed to represent, found positive, namely his mastery of the Latvian language and his singing in a Latvian choir. In other words, she did not engage the question of whether there is racism in Latvia or not with which the man had initiated the conversation, but rather, it seems, the old man’s comment that Michael should leave the country if he does not like it here. She conveyed the message that Michael’s conduct folds into the Latvian understanding of the good life and that she and others appreciated it. The old man’s conduct, namely his hostility towards Michael, did not fit within her understanding of proper conduct. What began as a conversation about racism, transformed into a commentary on proper conduct.

The examples that I have described above illustrate that the practice of public reflection—in this case on racism—is differently consequential for differently constituted and positioned subjects in Latvia. For example, public reflection on racism enables some minority organizations to constitute themselves as victims and some of the human rights organizations to constitute themselves as properly concerned, but not existentially unsettled subjects. For many others in Latvia, participating in public reflection on racism means acknowledging that they are directly implicated in these practices, to acknowledge that they too, by virtue of being constituted as particular kinds of subjects through a deeply consequential relationship with public space, are possibly racist.

In conditions where many experience the demand to reflect on racism as existentially unsettling, it is particularly important to ask what work distancing—whether as alienation or as abstraction—performs. Interestingly, both of these discourses—that of the teacher and that of tolerance activists—converge in positing racism as a blemish that can be removed, albeit in different ways, while leaving either the *tauta* or the basic social and political formations of the state intact. And yet, what would it mean to push for reflection on race *and* take it seriously that public reflection on race, racialization, and racism might be deeply unsettling? Is it necessary to embrace the kind of public scrutiny that might lead to unsettlement, which, as this chapter has shown, is not thought of as a good in this particular historical moment in Latvia? Is it necessary to force a distancing—whether as alienation or as abstraction—between the *tauta* and reflection on race?

It seems that pedestrian public encounters, such as in the example of Michael’s tram ride, offer a possibility to reflect on conduct from within the tradition without demanding radical unsettlement and I attempt to push this discussion further in Chapter 6. Another possibility for losing racial innocence—one that does not demand recognizing oneself as a subject directly guilty of racism, but rather as a profoundly modern racialized and racializing subject—would be to reflect on the relational constitution of the tradition. For those working to constitute anti-racist publics in Latvia, this would mean asking what liberal anti-racism actually does in conditions where, as many argue, the liberal project itself is deeply entangled in a racialized organization of the world? It would mean reflecting on the conditions of possibility of liberal anti-racism and the effects of attempting to transpose the kind of reflection that it entails to a context where a people claim racial innocence on the grounds of

the lack of a shameful past of racialized colonial domination. It would also therefore mean considering how the racialized and colonial histories of Western liberal democracies contribute to conditions that allow contemporary Latvians to inhabit victimhood and innocence. Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, it would mean shifting the focus from Latvians as especially nationalistic and reactionary postsocialist subjects to Latvians as subjects constituted at the intersection of translocal racial formations and histories.

Chapter 5: Provoking Tolerance Through Gay and Lesbian Politics

Introduction

In the summer of 2005, as I was preparing to begin my fieldwork, news of the events surrounding the first gay and lesbian Pride parade preceded my arrival. The parade was planned for July 23rd, and on July 8th the Rīga City Council issued a permit for the parade. However, on July 20th, the Council rescinded its initial permit, invoking several paragraphs of the Law on Meetings, Demonstrations, and Pickets, which stipulated that public demonstrations cannot entail activities which are “in contradiction with the morals of society” (*pretrunā ar sabiedrības tikumību*), as well as conduct which might endanger participants of the demonstration or the health and safety of others.¹¹⁵

Taking their case to the city’s administrative court, organizers of the Pride parade argued that the purpose of the parade is to inform the society about the rights of homosexually oriented people and about the legal and social discrimination that gays and lesbians face, such as lack of legal means for registering partnerships and the associated differences in rights, the inability to be open about same-sex relationships at the workplace, and the lack of social recognition of homosexuality as a valid form of sexuality despite the decriminalization of male homosexuality in 1992 following the collapse of the Soviet Union (Lavrikovs 1999). Therefore, they emphasized, the Pride parade is meant to inform society about human rights issues which cannot be considered to be in contradiction with morals in a liberal democratic society.

The City Council, in turn, substantiated its decision to annul the initial permit by saying that many of the city’s residents, representatives of various religious organizations, as well as the Prime Minister had publicly expressed negative attitudes towards the Pride parade widely perceived as an exhibition of sexuality and thus as violation of the moral norms of society. In the courtroom, representatives of the City Council argued that society’s reaction to the planned Pride parade was unexpectedly negative, and that therefore the event undermined the organizers’ announced goal to promote tolerance. Instead, it generated conflict and confrontation. The City Council claimed that it could not ignore the changed social and political conditions and therefore had to rescind the initial permit.

The court, invoking the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia (*Satversme*) and the European Convention on Human Rights, deemed the decision to rescind the initial permit unfounded and satisfied the petition of the organizers of Rīga Pride 2005. The Pride parade took place as initially planned, on July 23, at 16:00. It circled a small loop in the Old City. It was met by about 500 aggressive protesters, who carried banners decrying the “sins of Gomorrah,” shouted verbal assaults at the 100 or so participants, and even managed to block the route of the parade by creating a human chain (Schwartz 2005). After the parade, the short-lived Gay and Lesbian Youth Support Group issued a statement in which it described how “100 brave souls” marched the streets of the Old City of Rīga surrounded by unsanctioned protest actions, posters proclaiming that “gays can only be cured by gas chambers,” and a roaring crowd of protesters. The police, the statement went on to say, created a protective wall around the Pride participants who eventually found safe asylum in the nearby Anglican Church, which in the subsequent years became a contested site of conflict between gay and lesbian activists and their opponents.

The conflict not only unfolded in and around the city in sites where the Pride was held, but reverberated through the media, internet news sites and discussion forums, and

¹¹⁵ Rīga Center District Administrative Court, Case No. A42349805A3498-05/19

casual conversations. In a seminar on the relationship between freedom and security organized in August 2005 by the Soros Foundation Latvia, Sergejs Kruks reported on his analysis of internet commentaries around the day Pride 2005 was organized. In addition to outlining the overwhelmingly negative content of the commentaries, he expressed surprise about the unusually high internet activity on such a sunny and warm weekend day. He speculated that people had to make an extra effort to be on the internet that morning—they were not in their workplace from where internet comments are usually posted, and, instead of going to the beach (the usual weekend activity on sunny and warm summer days), they chose instead to participate in internet discussions on homosexuality and Pride.

Following the aggressive reactions to Pride 2005 by politicians, intellectuals, public persons, and the general public, a handful of activists formed a non-governmental organization—the LGBT (lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender persons) and their friends association “Mozaika.” Mozaika became the organizer of subsequent Pride parades and the locomotive of gay and lesbian politics in Latvia. Throughout the years of my fieldwork, as I spent time with Mozaika activists, the story of Pride 2005 that emerged in retrospect was that the controversy over Pride 2005, as well as the event itself, was a result of somewhat contingent circumstances. The organization of the event was initiated by two very young and by all accounts inexperienced men who allegedly obtained funding from some sympathetic Swedish organization. In the midst of organizational efforts, it became apparent that the young men were not capable of pulling it off on their own, thus some of the folks who later established Mozaika came to the rescue. Rather than a coordinated and targeted effort on the part of anything that might be called the gay and lesbian community, the first Pride was an undertaking of a few less than organized individuals.¹¹⁶ The stakes, however, quickly became high, as the reaction to the event was unexpectedly violent across the political and social spectrum. Many of the current Mozaika activists mobilized only after Pride 2005 when what became termed as homophobia erupted into the public arena.¹¹⁷ For example, Ieva told me in an interview that prior to 2005, she thought there were other more important questions to address. On other occasions too, she mentioned that before 2005, she was busy at work, and that she and her partner from a European Union member state (where they are officially registered) lived without any major problems. She thought things were eventually going to get better, as they had in other European countries. She and her partner had considered turning to the courts and trying to get her partner a residence permit on the basis of their partnership status, but then that issue was resolved with Latvia’s accession to the European Union, for her partner no longer required a visa to reside in Latvia.

¹¹⁶ At that time, the gay and lesbian community—if it is at all possible to speak of one—mostly manifested itself in online networks, bar clientele, and informal groups of friends and like-minded individuals. There was only one gay and lesbian organization—the Homosexuality Information Center—that was operational in Latvia in the 1990s (Lavrikovs 1999). This organization was actively involved in lobbying for legislative changes, such as decriminalization of male homosexuality (which was approved by the Parliament in March of 1992), partnership legislation, and criminalization of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Many of these efforts were not only unsuccessful, but were also subject to ridicule on the part of parliamentary deputies (Lavrikovs 1999). Once Mozaika was established in 2005, the greatest challenge they faced was to mobilize gays and lesbians to join the organization and / or to support its activities. The association, as well as its attempts to organize annual Pride parades remained contentious within the gay and lesbian networks throughout my fieldwork.

¹¹⁷ At least one of the founders of Mozaika had been previously active in the Homosexuality Information Center. Though the Homosexuality Information Center is still listed in the register of non-governmental organizations, their activities have been effectively overtaken by Mozaika.

Pride 2005 not only mobilized gay and lesbian activists, but also created uncanny bedfellows amidst their active opponents (Schwartz 2005). Latvian and Russian nationalist organizations, Russian evangelical Christians, and *Pirmā Partija*—a Latvian party with explicit religious commitments—were all there. In popular discourse, it was often commented that gay and lesbian politics will finally bring Latvians and Russians together. And yet, in 2009, in an international conference in New York, a scholar presenting on “homophobia in Latvia,” focused specifically on Latvian nationalist sensibilities that animated the protests surrounding the Pride parades. The effect was one of reproducing Latvians as the paradigmatic group of the political entity called Latvia and nationalism as the paradigmatic sensibility of the terrain of intolerance, even as statistics on homophobia produced by the standardized questionnaires that proliferated since 2005 indicated that there are no significant differences between how Latvian and Russian-speaking residents relate to gay and lesbian politics (Makarovs 2006, 2007). Mozaīka’s (2007) analysis of intolerant speech targeted at gays and lesbians showed that negative statements sprang forth from multiple discursive frames, such as morality, Christianity, nationalism, and more. Single statements often drew upon multiple frames, thus making it difficult, if not impossible, to characterize the negative attitudes as products of any single position, such as Latvian nationalism. At the same time, Mozaīka’s own interventions often appealed specifically to the Latvian *tauta*. “We were there too,” read the caption of a postcard Mozaīka designed to advertise the 2007 LGBT Friendship Days. On the black and white postcard depicting a crowded 1989 Popular Front demonstration on the Riverbank of November 11—an important site in the collective memory of independence struggles—some figures were marked in rainbow colors (Image 15). The postcard worked on a number of registers: it suggested that, save for their sexual orientation, gays and lesbians are indistinguishable from the crowds, and it suggested that gays and lesbians were an integral part of the *tauta* in its struggle for independence.



Image 15: The postcard “We were there too” reproduced as a poster and displayed in a bus stop. Photo by author.

“We sing too,” exclaimed another postcard, again, marking colorful rainbow figures in the midst of choir singers during one of the Song and Dance festivals thought to be especially characteristic of the spirit of the Latvian *tauta*. Emphasizing diversity and aiming for inclusion, the postcards reinscribed the *tauta* as the basis of the polity and as its positive content. Thus, at the same time as *Mozaika* drew on the transnational discourse of human rights, they enacted historically formed national narratives. They performed belonging to the *tauta* through simultaneously invoking its most injurious history and its most glorious moments, namely, suffering under Soviet rule and independence struggles and collective singing.

Their opponents, in turn, while declaring adherence to “our” moral codes and “our” politics, took many of their arguments from translocal discourses of homophobia. For example, the website of the organization “No Pride” regularly republished articles from various English language websites and international publications to substantiate their campaign against Pride parades, as well as against the public and political visibility of homosexuality.¹¹⁸ Some parliamentary deputies invoked elusive “international scientific research” that proved homosexuality to be an illness and warned the *tauta* of the dangers of homosexuality with references to something called “the Gay Manifesto” in which American gays had allegedly threatened to take over the world. Reminiscent of the circulation of the infamous “Protocols of Zion,” some members of the Latvian parliament evidently borrowed from the religious right in the United States their misrepresentation of a satirical article written by Michael Swift in 1987.¹¹⁹

Neither local nor foreign, the arguments about gay and lesbian politics thus emerged as historically specific articulations at the intersection of Latvia’s socialist past and European present. They placed demands on the authorities and the general population to reflect on an issue which heretofore had not been subject to public reflection even as it had been the subject of discussion in the legal and political domain. For example, Elīna, a civil servant, told me in an interview that prior to Pride 2005 she had been neutral towards homosexuality—a neutrality that presumably only emerged in retrospect, perhaps even during the course of our interview. Moreover, she specifically emphasized that she had been *tolerant*, but that the polarized and politicized debates that ensued after Pride 2005 literally forced her to become intolerant, that is, to take “an active political position:”

The manipulation led to some sort of an active position. Perhaps there are others whose neutral positions turned into active positions. And I started to become angry. I started from a neutral position—let them walk and let the society see that there are such people, but then my tolerance was turned into intolerance. Regardless of whether one has a positive or negative attitude towards Pride, that’s an active position. Why are those who support them tolerant and those who don’t intolerant? No, both are intolerant. ‘I go to fight those who think differently’—this is not tolerance.

Evidently, it was not necessarily the Pride parade itself, which caused Elīna to become intolerant, but rather the rendering of the opposition to Pride as intolerance and homophobia. Elīna added that she was unhappy about such a turn of events. She noted that many other people too felt provoked and thus formulated strong positions, whereas otherwise they might not have cared; that is, they would have remained tolerant. In her narrative, tolerance was not

¹¹⁸ See www.noprider.lv

¹¹⁹ For an explanation of the context for writing the satirical article, as well as the ways in which it has been misrepresented see: <http://rainbowallianceopenfaith.homestead.com/GayAgenda.html>

an active political stance, but rather a “passive, relaxed, benignly indifferent [attitude] to difference” (Walzer 1997: 10). Contrary to Mozaika’s claims that Pride parades aimed to promote tolerance by rendering homosexuality publicly visible and by exposing the unreflective discriminatory practices prevalent in society, Elīna claimed that Pride parades provoked tolerance, here understood as unreflective indifference, into becoming intolerance, here understood as an active and oppositional political position.

Indeed, numerous people with diverging positions articulated their participation in the argument as animated by a provocation that crossed their threshold of tolerance. For example, Igors Mašļakovs, the leader of the organization “No Pride,” established as a direct response to Pride 2005, claimed that “radical homosexuality”—that is, public visibility of homosexuality and the political claims of gays and lesbians—was simply too much for him and he felt that he had to do something (Ischuk 2006). In an interview with me, he expressed concern about someone close to him who had entertained the “idea of homosexuality” as a result of being exposed to liberal sexual education as a student in a foreign educational establishment. Mašļakovs feared that the “radical homosexuals” will attempt to “spread the propaganda of homosexuality” in Latvia’s schools. In his view, this could not be allowed. In a taping of a TV show, which I describe later in this chapter, he even promised to take a stick and stand next to school entrances if gays and lesbians tried to enter them. In turn, Pēteris Jankavs (2005) said in an interview published in the liberal newspaper “*Diena*” that the “aggressive homophobia” that erupted into public space following Pride 2005 made him and his partner decide to come out of the closet again—that is, to repeatedly and publicly announce their homosexuality.

Despite the articulation of principled public and political agency on the part of Pride proponents and opponents, some observers offered other types of explanation for the escalation of the conflict. A journalist and filmmaker who had closely followed Pride-related events since 2005 in his professional capacity, suggested to me that both sides of the conflict, whether directly or indirectly, have been financially stimulated by and benefited from support of the same political forces. He somewhat obscurely suggested that “certain political forces” have great interest to reignite the Pride affair every year so that public attention would be diverted away from shady business dealings—such as privatization—that are being pursued in the shadow of the conflict.

The view that the problem of homophobia is an artificial problem created by political manipulations was widespread in Latvia. As it became clear through the many conversations I had during my fieldwork, quite a few people refused to engage in the argument or to formulate their position within the terms of the argument, because they said they did not want to become pawns in political games of power and money. This group included heterosexually as well homosexually oriented people. The skeptics of principled political agency often questioned the motives of both gay and lesbian activists and their opponents and expressed disbelief that anyone could be acting out of principle in the midst of such a politicized struggle. “Who is behind all this?” remained an important question in attempts to understand how power works two decades after collapse of the Soviet Union.

The story I want to tell, however, is not one of crude political manipulation or of reasoned agency facing irrational prejudice (as the notion of *homophobia* suggests). What interests me more than the roaring protesters or the money / power undercurrents that many claim underlie the conflict are the ways in which particular understandings of proper public and political life emerge through arguments about gay and lesbian politics. People’s understandings of homosexuality and their attitudes towards it, as well as the different ways in which Latvia’s residents inhabit homosexuality inform my analysis, yet I focus in particular on how arguments over gay and lesbian visibility and politics were also vehicles for arguments about democracy, the relationship between the *tauta*, a particular minority

group, and the state, as well as the placement of all three in relation to international discourses of tolerance and human rights.

As in other contexts of difference in Latvia, gay and lesbian politics too are characterized by an intersection of multiple experiences and claims of injury and domination. Moreover, both gay and lesbian activists and their opponents are simultaneously positioned as dominant and marginal and thus as participants in a struggle for hegemony. On the one hand, gay and lesbian activists closely associate with international human rights organizations and heavily rely on the backing of the international community and thus are perceived as a dominating force by many in Latvia. On the other hand, gays and lesbians are marginalized in public and political life in Latvia, as well as denied social recognition and a number of legal rights (Lavrikovs 1999). These translocal articulations render gay and lesbian politics in Latvia an especially contested issue, which extends well beyond people's attitudes towards homosexuality. All involved parties have at one point or another compared the struggles around gay and lesbian politics to the independence struggles of the late 1980s. While in doing so people sought legitimacy by locating themselves in relation to the defining moments of the *tauta* as a polity, they also gestured towards the imagined gravity of the matter. Finally, appeals to the independence struggles attested to the fact that state-based politics dominates the contested terrain of gay and lesbian politics, which risks foreclosing other possibilities for crafting individual or collective life.

From Barricade Sociality to Fenced Statehood¹²⁰

“This morning I had a barricade feeling,” said Aina on a July morning in 2007 as she stood inside a mesh fence enclosure surrounded by a police cordon, waiting for the beginning of the gay and lesbian Pride parade in Rīga, this year officially renamed “March for Equality” (Image 16).



Image 16: View from the inside of the enclosed park. Pride parade 2007. Photo by author.

That morning Aina was referring to the barricades of 1991, which people of all walks of life constructed to protect key sites in the city from the Soviet special military units

¹²⁰ Parts of this section were written for a co-authored paper with Iván Arenas entitled “Don’t Fence Me In: Barricade Sociality and Struggles of Democracy in Mexico and Latvia” (Arenas and Dzenovska 2009).

“OMON,” which were mobilized to prevent the dissolution of the USSR. The reference to the barricades, more specifically to “a barricade feeling,” served to mark what she saw as the profound political and existential consequentiality of the Pride parade that made her attend it despite the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty surrounding it.¹²¹

This was to be the third annual Pride parade, and its preparation had required lengthy and contentious negotiations with the City Council, the police, and the security forces due to the “threat of violence” that prompted the City Council to ban the parade in 2006. If in 2005 the court overturned the City’s attempt to ban the Pride parade, in 2006, the Rīga City Council managed to ban it at the 11th hour. This time their decision was supported by the administrative court, though it was overturned in a higher instance after the scheduled date of the parade. The events that did take place in 2006 as part of the broader LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) Friendship Days of which the parade was to be an integral element—several press conferences, a church service, and a Pride celebration in a private hotel (in lieu of the parade)—were subject to protests that took the form of verbal and physical assault. Groups, or rather perhaps gangs of protesters—mostly young men and women from ethnically diverse nationalist organizations, as well as organized and less-organized clusters of self-proclaimed Christians—moved through the city from one location to another, carrying bags of food and human excrement to be thrown at participants of the Friendship Days and wearing t-shirts with the now infamous design of two crossed out stick figures engaging in anal sex produced and distributed free of charge by an NGO set up to counter gay and lesbian political activities (Image 17 and 18).



Images 17 and 18: Protests outside Reval Hotel where a Pride celebration was held in 2006. Photos courtesy of Apollo.lv.

After the 2006 Friendship Days, one of the participants described his experience on Mozaika’s website as follows:

Walking on Brīvības street, I was afraid about what was happening to my friends. I did not want to call them, because I knew that they had enough to worry about besides my phone call. The feelings I had that Saturday reminded me of the 1989 demonstrations in Rīga when the People’s Front¹²² had invited people to peaceful protests against the Soviet forces. People’s minds and bodies vibrated from the

¹²¹ In response to the widespread perception of Pride parades as carnivalesque events Mozaika activists officially renamed the Pride parades as Marches for Equality to emphasize their political nature. However, the name “Pride” (*Praids*) had stuck in popular discourses and was also used by activists in their daily discourse. Thus I stick to the term Pride throughout the chapter.

¹²² The People’s Front was a political organization and later a political party that played a central role in the independence struggles and in forming the independent state.

tension; nobody knew what was going to happen—will Soviet soldiers surround us, will the tanks come, the special police forces, or KGB agents? Helicopters were flying above our heads on the riverside. In the Dome Square, people were quietly handing out small red-white-red flags, suspicious-looking men were taking photographs. On July 22, 2006 in Rīga I felt similar to how I felt during the times of the People’s Front. How many years did we have to live in a free and democratic state to come to the conclusion that this society is very far from truly understanding democracy?¹²³

The result was that in 2007 the Pride parade took place in an enclosed park to which access was controlled by Mozaika members and police officers in combat gear, rendering attendance a loud political statement rather than an anonymous blending into a celebration spilling through the streets of the city (Image 19 and 20). Indeed, some potential participants did not attend, for they did not want to pass the crowd of roaring protestors and enter the fenced enclosure through police checkpoints. A good number of those who attended felt apprehensive and, though they felt it important that they be there, some expressed relief that soon the anxiously anticipated event would be “done and over with.”



Images 19 and 20: People arriving for the 2007 Pride parade through checkpoints manned by riot police and Mozaika members. Photos by author.

Although the fear and uncertainty people felt was viscerally similar, during the time of the barricades in 1991, the confrontation occurred between the *tauta*—that is, the people—as an inclusive and liberating lifeforce and Soviet military units representing an imposed and oppressive totalitarian state. In 2006 and 2007, in turn, the fear and uncertainty felt by Pride participants resulted from the threat of a confrontation between differentiated groups that had emerged out of the same *tauta*. Many in Latvia considered the fracturing of what should have been a united *tauta* as the most unfortunate effect of the confrontation over Pride. The state, however, was claimed by all parties as theirs and all were at times pleased that the state could either represent or protect them, and at other times distressed that it could not or did not do so.

Thus, Pride participants invoked the barricades and independence struggles not only to convey a sense of uncertainty and fear, but also to conjure up a past sense of future possibilities that had not materialized in the subsequent years of independence. Linking Pride to the independence struggles of the late 1980s, Rīta Ruduša, then-editor of the online policy portal “Politika.lv,” explained in a newspaper interview: “We all stood there together on the riverbanks and said—for your and our freedom. It seemed that people really believed this slogan of the Awakening, which was a simple sentence. But suddenly, 15 years later, it turns

¹²³ www.mozaika.lv, translation mine.

out that this simple sentence has all sorts of supplements. For your and our freedom, but only if you are just like us” (Nagle 2007) (Image 21).



Image 21: Demonstration on the Riverbanks.

Photo from “Barricades: The Love Book of Latvia” (Daugmalis 2001).

The Riverbank of November 11 became an especially contested site in 2008 when the Pride parade was moved there from Vērmanes Dārzs, a leafy park in the centre of the city where the parade took place in 2007. The Security Police claimed that this was necessary because it was easier to ensure security in the open spaces of the Riverbank. Some days prior to the parade, the Deputy Mayor of Rīga, Almers Ludviks, expressed his view in the national media that the location of the parade was a denigration of the Riverbank in the memory of freedom struggles. In turn, standing on the Riverbank and addressing the international crowd of participants of the 2008 Pride parade, Linda Freimane, Chair of the Executive Board of Mozaika, noted what she called the sad irony that the freedom gained years ago was limited today by a fence which protects the participants of the parade from those with whom they stood side by side in this same place in the late 1980s. It was the relocation of the parade to the Riverbank that made independence struggles a central motif of the 2008 debates about gay and lesbian politics. It was the Riverbank that enabled Freimane to conjure up a people who were once part of the same struggles, but who now stood on different sides of the fence.

Today it is often recalled—and not only in the context of gay and lesbian politics—that during the cold January days of 1991 people of all walks of life, of different ethnic groups and different orientations, sexual and otherwise, came together to construct barricades in the streets of Rīga. In response to reports that Soviet military forces were preparing an assault, people from all over Latvia made their way to the capital in tractors, trucks, and buses, carrying logs and farm equipment with them. They constructed barricades around key sites of the city, such as the radio and television stations, as well as key government buildings in the Old City. The barricades enclosed those sites that were deemed important for a new nation-state in-the-making (Images 22, 23, and 24). Reports of the

barricades produced shortly thereafter, as well as in retrospect, all emphasize the unprecedented solidarity that characterized the moment:

That's why we won. Everybody was on the barricades—stocky country tractorists, rangers who had been through the war in Afghanistan, karate and bobsled champions, punks and metallists, the disabled and convicted criminals, university professors, joint venture accountants, kindergarten teachers and hard currency prostitutes, actors with swords and former legionaries... (BPA 2001)



Images 22, 23, and 24: A man bringing logs to the barricade sites in Rīga. Barricades in Rīga. January 1991. Photos from “Barricades: The Love Book of Latvia” (Daugmalis 2001) and “January of 1991 in Latvia” (LKF 1991).

One eyewitness noted how the streets of Rīga had not seen such hospitality and politeness (Valters 2005). People joked, sang, and danced, all the while retaining the awareness that any minute they may have to take their positions on the barricades to mount non-violent resistance to Soviet military units (Images 25, 26, and 27). A book dedicated to the barricade days issued shortly after the actual events conveyed the undifferentiated unity of Latvians and Russians that characterized the barricades with a language and sense of immediacy not yet layered over by years of official commemorative events and state-building:

Today [in 1991] Latvians are a minority in Rīga, only 36.5 % from the total number of Rigans. However, the days of the barricades attested that in Latvia one people do not stand against another (*tauta nestāv pret tautu*), but rather that supporters of the future and democracy stand against the forces of empire and totalitarianism. ... During those days, Rīga lived in other, irrational dimensions. ... There was something cosmic in the air—the cold winter sky, silhouettes around bonfires, wood, trucks, singing of men’s choirs, folklore of the barricades, political cartoons on the wooden walls—all merged in unity, and that was Rīga. (LKF 2001)



Image 25: Barricade sociality. Rīga, January 1991.



Images 25, 26, and 27: Barricade sociality. Rīga, January 1991. Photos from “Barricades: The Love Book of Latvia” (Daugmalis 2001).

Drawing on Michel de Certeau’s (1988) notion of pedestrian practices and the bewitching world of the city, this barricade sociality can be thought of as a *pedestrian* kind of sociality. It is both concrete and imagined, for not all barricade participants were together in the same time and place. However, unlike the imagined communities that Benedict Anderson (1991) writes of, this togetherness and sense of community was imagined through the immediacy of the concrete practices of building, guarding, fetching food, huddling, singing, and so forth. The sociality of the barricades also involved strangers, and can be compared to the stranger sociality that Michael Warner (2005) writes of as a public, yet barricade sociality depended upon the actual or potential transformation of strangers into comrades. In sum, barricade sociality is conjured up through the immediacy of experience and word-of-mouth knowledge of the existence of other such experiences and dynamics. It is this dynamic—the force generated by people’s pedestrian solidarity in extraordinary conditions—that also conjured up the *tauta* as a cosmic life force rather than as a concrete political entity.

As Latvians’ recollections of the barricade and barricade sociality show, these provide a sense of past solidarity as well as sense of future possibilities against which the present,

including the state of the polity and the life of the people, are assessed. The sociality produced by the barricades and by the independence struggles more broadly, or rather perhaps the promises that are attributed to them, are today invoked by those who feel excluded from the *tauta*-cum-political nation that was the subject and object of politics during the days of the barricades. It is common to hear stories about how many Russian or Russian-speaking residents of Latvia are today offended because they were part of the people of the barricades only later to be designated as non-citizens, as non-members of the polity whose foundations were being laid during those nights on the barricades.¹²⁴

Today, through books, films, coins, monuments, and in the Museum of the Barricades, Latvia's barricades have become part of the commemorative landscape of the Latvian state. These public and commemorative recollections of the barricades not only posit the barricades as a glorious event on the road to political independence, however, but also invite reflection on the barricade sociality that the event engendered. Thus, upon entering the Museum of the Barricades, visitors find themselves in a dimly lit room set up like a bonfire site. Visitors can sit on a cement block or a wooden log and listen to radio broadcasts from 1991 that play in the background or watch amateur video footage of the events. In the corner of the room, there is a large model of the Old City slanted against the wall. It is filled with people huddled at bonfire sites that glow amidst barricade constructions (Images 28 and 29).



Images 28 and 29: Model of the barricades at the Museum of the Barricades. Photos by Iván Arenas.

While the set up of the room interpellates the visitor as a participant of the barricades, the model conjures up the sociality of togetherness by providing an all-encompassing viewpoint that visually produces and concretizes the imagination of what the barricade experience might have been like at the scale of the city—an imagination of all those other warm bodies doing exactly the same thing at the same moment. While the exhibit conjures up the sense of togetherness of the barricades, as well as the political possibilities engendered by such togetherness, it also reminds the visitor of the spectral presence of the state during the barricade days by folding the event into the political history of the Latvian state. For

¹²⁴ The Latvian state created the political institution of non-citizenship, whereby residents of Latvia who were not granted Latvian citizenship following independence, because they could not trace it back to the first independent Latvian republic between 1918 and 1939, and who themselves have not applied for naturalization, are designated as non-citizens of the Latvian state. They are also not citizens of any other country, thus constituting a political mode of not belonging to a particular nation-state, which is quite different from the condition of statelessness. See Introduction and Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion.

example, the barricade set up is interspersed with images of independence demonstrations of the late 1980s with people waving the Latvian flag, thus making the barricade event one of many in a series of events leading up to the establishment of the Latvian state. This suggests that the cosmic life force of the *tauta* is now viewed almost as a necessary precursor of the current Latvian state, which has fixed the *tauta* through a variety of dividing lines whether between citizens and non-citizens, or between migrants and national minorities, or between a heterosexual majority and a homosexual minority. While the particular configuration of these dividing lines is the result of historical contingency, the fact of the division itself is, however, worked into the form of the nation-state. Given the presence of state-based imaginaries during the barricades and in their contemporary recollection, it is important to ask whether and what kind of imaginaries of otherwise did Latvia's barricade sociality entail? In other words, is a more inclusive state or a differently inclusive state the limit of such imaginaries?

Rather than the barricades of the independence struggles, and the barricade sociality and cosmic life force of the *tauta*, gay and lesbian politics in contemporary Latvia are characterized by state-provided fences and by the differentiation of the *tauta* in accordance with the political framework of majority / minority relations. The fences are less sturdy than the barricades, perhaps, but they gain force and power via their articulation with the state in the form of the professional police force that patrols them, as well as via the state's legal machinery that can regulate (or deny) parade routes. The leap from the barricades to the mesh fence enclosures quickly compresses time and brings into sharp focus the state-building that has occurred in the years between the two events.

In fact, a lot of state-building occurred in the very short time-period between the summer of 2006 and the summer of 2007. In 2006, when the City Council banned the parade itself, some police officers explicitly refused to protect the participants of the Friendship Days. This mostly manifested itself through the micropractices of police officers who refused to escort participants from event venues to their cars, thus allowing them to become targets of men throwing eggs and human excrement. Other police officers did not prevent people being slapped in the face and even openly claimed that "it is the fault of the homosexuals themselves." The Independent Police Trade Union issued a statement calling for a broad police refusal to protect gays and lesbians. The police leadership condemned this call for disobedience, yet it nevertheless affected the way police officers conducted themselves in 2006. After long contentious discussions and the replacement of the Minister of Interior (though with someone from the same party and not for this reason), police practices significantly changed in 2007. The police had brought out units in combat gear suggesting the grave risk posed by the parade. Yet, the police patrolling the fence nevertheless fulfilled their task, if reluctantly. Many of them chatted with the protesters, received "No Pride" t-shirts, assured passersby that they have to be there or otherwise they would not be, and interrogated those who wanted to enter the enclosed space where the parade was to take place by asking about their sexual orientation. The police thus openly demonstrated that their personal views aligned them with the protesters rather than gay and lesbian activists, yet stated that their professional duties require them to protect a minority's right to assembly.

The fence, then, was a marker of the state, one which imposed dividing lines between the *tauta* and one in relation to which individuals were interpellated as either belonging to the majority or to a minority. With folks on both sides of the fence making claims against the state to fulfill its duties, the articulation of the *tauta* with a nation-state that adhered to liberal democratic principles further produced a tension between majority rule and minority rights. While regretting that they had to assemble within an enclosure, gay and lesbian activists expressed pride and satisfaction that in 2007 the state had fulfilled its commitment to minority protection, contrary to 2006 when it failed to do so by refusing police protection to Pride participants. Opponents of gay and lesbian politics, on the other hand, insisted that the

state had taken liberalism too far, and that it should not spend its resources in order to enable a minority group to assemble in a way that was unacceptable to the majority.

Arguments over gay and lesbian visibility and politics thus emerged as platforms for arguments about diverging understandings of democracy, the relationship between the majority, a minority, and the state, as well as about the relationship of all three with European human rights discourses. Gay and lesbian activists often lamented that Latvian society is not yet sufficiently democratic, while assuring themselves and others that it will eventually “catch up” with the world’s liberal democracies; measured by these standards, although Latvia has a way to go before becoming a proper democratic nation, it is well on its way and progress will come quickly. Thus, one activist told me that what is happening in Latvia today very much reminds her of her childhood in another European country: “Whether with regard to emancipation, paternity rights, or security belts in cars, or helmets for bikers, all environmental issues, all these things were not present when I was a child, but they had been implemented by the time I was an adult. And when I read the papers here, I have a *déjà vu* of sorts. And then I know where all these discussions will end up, with the exception that here it all happens so much faster.”

There seems to be little if any uncertainty for gay and lesbian activists about the necessary path of liberalization and democratization. While it is fairly easy to ally with the activists against the violent protesters, the story becomes more complicated if one understands the widespread opposition to Pride parades and gay and lesbian politics also as a critique of specific conceptions of the relationship between sexual practice, identity, and associated political forms and subjectivities that underly gay and lesbian activism in Latvia. In other words, it is far from clear that the life and politics advocated by gay and lesbian activists in Latvia should be the prevalent mode of modern gay or lesbian existence. In the following sections, I point out how positing a Western middle class notion of gay and lesbian identity and politics as an indicator of democracy and resistance to it as backward nationalism constitutes political state-based liberalism as the only progressive political horizon. The important question to raise here is how such politics might therefore foreclose the possibility to imagine collective life otherwise.

Between Sexuality and Politics

Following the ban of the Pride parade in 2006 and the controversy surrounding the passivity of the police force when it came to protecting the participants of the Friendship Days, in 2007 gay and lesbian activists and their supporters were inclined to say that the state had proved itself through defending and enforcing the rights of a minority group to public assembly and freedom of expression. For them, the fence surrounding the participants of Pride 2007, and subsequently of Pride 2008, meant that the state had lived up to its responsibility to protect minority rights. However small, this was a victory in relation to the state, yet the largest task still lay ahead. As one member of Mozaika put it in a strategic planning session, “the people do not understand why gays and lesbians need to take to the streets.” The conflict, then, was not only between the state and a minority, but also between the majority and a minority, though it was often difficult to distinguish where one conflict ended and the other started, for the majority and the state were often intricately linked. Self-ascribed representatives of the majority opinion considered that the state should serve the majority rather than act as a mediating force between the conflicting parties. One internet commentator, identifying himself with the majority, claimed the right to judge what kind of assembly is desirable in the capital city and what kind is not. In his view, if a considerable part of society has serious objections to some public event in the centre of the capital, then such an event should not be

allowed to take place. Democracy, he continued, is the power of the people (*tauta*), and the *tauta* has struggled for it. It has also struggled for freedom of assembly, the essence of which, our commentator explained, is to have the right to assemble in relation to potential objections from the servants of the people, that is, the government. In his view, it is a mistake, then, to understand this freedom of assembly as some general thing regardless of objections from the people who are the subject and object of democracy, thus also the guardian of rights. He critiqued *Mozaika* for thinking that anyone can assemble anywhere and that the state and the police are obliged to serve them in conditions where the majority of society finds such assembly disagreeable.

While the unfavorable sentiment of the majority was regularly invoked by those who took an active position against gay and lesbian politics, political scientist Viktors Makarovs argued that the majority of the population actually “sits on the fence,” namely that they are not against homosexually oriented individuals, but are rather ambivalent about the current form of gay and lesbian politics. Makarovs claimed that his research, in which he set out to measure the “temperature of society” with regard to gay and lesbian issues, suggested that it is important to differentiate between attitudes towards people and attitudes towards their practices (2006, 2007). From a survey conducted in 2006, Makarovs concluded that about 37% of people have negative attitudes towards a “homosexual lifestyle,” but not towards “homosexual people,” whereas 25% do not have negative attitudes towards “homosexual people” or a “homosexual lifestyle.” Makarov’s decision to include questions that differentiated between a “homosexual lifestyle” and “homosexual people” was interrogated during the presentation of the survey results at a special forum organized by the Soros Foundation Latvia. Some of the human rights experts and gay and lesbian activists ironized about “homosexual lifestyle” as waking up in the morning, having a cup of coffee, watering plants and so forth. In 2007, Makarovs slightly reformulated the questions, producing data on the basis of a distinction between homosexual persons and homosexual practices. It was still not clear whether homosexual practices referred to sexual acts, cohabitation, political activities or a combination thereof. Makarovs’ elaboration of the problem in the beginning pages of the report suggests that he was struggling to draw a distinction between different conceptions of the subject, namely between an understanding of the subject’s identity as saturated by its sexual practices, on the one hand, and an understanding of sexual practice as simply something that a person does rather than is, on the other (Brown 1995, Foucault 1990, Massad 2007: 161). Makarovs writes: “It is necessary to differentiate between an attitude towards people and an attitude towards their lifestyle. Even if a lifestyle or a social practice is considered wrong or undesirable, it does not mean that they always affect the moral evaluation of the person. For example, data shows that there are more respondents who consider that homosexuality does not make someone a bad person than there are respondents who think that it does” (2006: 5). In making this distinction, Makarovs aimed to alleviate the fears that deeply rooted dislike of concrete persons was prevalent in society, while nevertheless pointing to prejudice towards non-normative sexuality and thus aversion to gay and lesbian politics. Akin to the way in which tolerance activists are attempting to reframe the issue of racism in Latvia’s public space, this also amounted to shifting the focus from the nature of persons—that is, from characterizing people as homophobes—to social prejudices, which influence people’s conduct, but do not necessarily render them bad people.

In what follows, I will take up a related yet slightly differently inflected distinction that was central to arguments about gay and lesbian politics, namely the distinction between homosexually oriented people who lead their lives under the radar screen of the public, and homosexually oriented people who live their lives publicly and politically as gays and lesbians. Given the focus on gay and lesbian subjectivities as first and foremost political subjectivities that emerged during arguments about Pride parades, the distinction I make is

bound to overlap somewhat with the distinction made by Makarovs between “homosexual people” and “homosexual practices.” In other words, many of Makarovs’ respondents are likely to have thought of gays and lesbians who do not make public and political claims as simply “homosexual people,” as opposed to the gay and lesbian activists who made public and political claims, thus representing a particular kind of “homosexual practice.” It should be noted that this is not necessarily a distinction between “being out” and “being in the closet,” for in order to recognize someone as a “homosexual person” not necessarily engaged in “homosexual practice” there has to be some degree of public recognition of homosexuality. Contrary to scholarship that engages with how sexual or other types of practice relate to identity (Brown 1995, Foucault 1990, Essig 1999), I ask here how public and political conduct rather than sexual practice animate the distinction between “homosexual people” and “homosexual practices.”

A common perception in Latvia, including within some segments of the gay and lesbian community, was that Pride parades were part of a misguided political strategy for improving the specific conditions of life for gays and lesbians.¹²⁵ Even if Pride emerged as a somewhat arbitrary political strategy, it became a central element in gay and lesbian politics, following the violent reactions to Pride 2005, which propelled a number of gay and lesbian activists into political and public life. From conversations with these newly emerged activists, it seemed that they thought of themselves as stepping up to catch a runaway train that was about to derail itself. In the process, however, the activists took a strong stand that Pride parades were a necessary means for bringing society’s attention to the problems that LGBT persons were facing in everyday life, as well as in political and legal domains. Mozaika worked to cultivate an image of Pride parades as political manifestations rather than as carnivalesque exhibits of sexuality, which is how the general public thought of them. Every time televised media reported on the upcoming Pride parades, they began their broadcasts with the most sensational images of Pride parades in Western Europe, the USA, Canada, Brazil or elsewhere. Mozaika activists, in turn, argued that Pride parades have different manifestations in different places, and that, for example, in Sweden, it is a parade where many average people participate—namely, police officers, parliamentarians, nurses, clerks, and the military all have gays and lesbians among them and all of them, as well as their relatives, friends, and supporters, participate in the parades. Mozaika’s strong emphasis on Pride as a political manifestation, however, also worked against them, because many in Latvia did not think that the gay and lesbian situation in Latvia was so dire as to require taking to the streets. As Sandra Kalniete pointed out in a discussion of politicians held as part of the 2008 Friendship Days, LGBT Pride parades have a long and bloody history in the West. They emerged out of struggles against police repression. Such a history is lacking in Latvia:

This is a slow and gradual process. We are still a post-totalitarian society and that heritage is with us, our consciousness has been affected. We adapted some legislative norms [referring here to the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1992], but they were not painfully fought for (*izcīnītas un izsāpētas*) in Latvia. If anyone here knows about the European movements, then they know how bloody these conflicts were. We have not lived through that, and it explains why we react so strongly to the political forms generated by them. It is an ideology—what is different, is not acceptable. Such things cannot be administratively solved.

¹²⁵ Though Mozaika presented itself as an organization of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender people, it was mostly gays and lesbians that were explicitly subjects and objects of politics.

Mozaika activists agree that homosexually oriented people in Latvia are not repressed and that therefore the object of their politics is not sexual freedom, but rather the politics of sexuality in the social, legal, and political domains. During the course of my fieldwork, Mozaika activists continuously emphasized that “everyone can do what they want in their bedrooms and other private spaces,” but that the public and political life is normatively heterosexual and that this constitutes an injury insofar as gays and lesbians are unable to lead full and meaningful lives. It was precisely this aim to provocatively assert their public and political presence and to remake Latvia’s public and political life that was seen as radical by Mozaika’s opponents. During the same discussion for politicians in 2008, Dzintars Ābiķis from *Tautas Partija* (People’s Party) responded to Linda Freimane’s question of whether he would walk in the Pride parade by saying that he would participate in protest actions if the parade was banned by the state, but otherwise he thinks it is a misguided political strategy. In lieu of the parade, Ābiķis suggested that gays and lesbians might generate more acceptance if they were to engage in cultural rather than confrontational activities. Such a sentiment was echoed in reader commentaries published in the newspaper “*Latvijas Avīze*” in July of 2006 where someone by the name of Pēteris Bolšteins suggested that it would be much more appropriate for “our mentality” if gays and lesbians showed their “pride” by engaging in charity work or some cultural activity. In Bolšteins view, this would be a much more effective way for informing the *tauta* about their existence.

That the parade as a political form was inappropriate in Latvia also became the subject of discussion in a television show, “*Tāda ir Dzīve*,” in which I was invited to participate some weeks before the 2007 Friendship Days. Among the invitees was Māris Sants, a Mozaika activist and a pastor, Džemma Skulme, a well-known painter, Igors Mašļakovs, leader of “No Pride,” and Dzintris Kolāts, a journalist. The composition of the group suggested that Sants was going to have to be on the defensive. And indeed, throughout the recording of the show Sants was on trial. He had been invited to justify himself in the eyes of the majority, while I was supposed to provide a running commentary on the argument between the majority represented by Skulme, Kolāts, and Mašļakovs, and the minority—Sants. Commenting on the upcoming Pride parade, Skulme suggested that “Latvians do not organize public demonstrations; it is not part of our mentality.” “Should anybody decide to take to the streets,” she continued, “it should be the pensioners whose socio-economic problems are much more pressing than the claims of sexual minorities.” She thus opposed Pride on two accounts: first, she claimed that the form of the event was unacceptable to the Latvian mentality, and, second, she claimed that, much as teachers had invoked with regards to racism, within the existing hierarchy of Latvia’s problems the issues of sexual minorities were far down the list and that therefore calling public attention to them in conditions where pensioners were struggling to survive was inappropriate. Sants opposed by suggesting that Latvians do have a tradition of public gatherings and offered the Song and Dance Festival parades as an example. Skulme quickly dismissed the example, saying that it is a different thing altogether. Their exchange escalated into a struggle for legitimacy of their different viewpoints by appealing to the sources of authority upon which they draw. Skulme challenged Sants by asking him to name his “big love.” “*Tauta*,” he said, “and God.”

The second objection that Skulme had with regard to Pride parades, namely that it aggressively publicized problems that were not the most pressing, assumed a unified social and political space within which various problems could be arranged hierarchically. It assumed that Latvians, perhaps even all of Latvia’s residents, should be able to evaluate claims of various social groups through the same interpretive frame, therefore making it possible to rank them in the correct order of urgency. Skulme’s statements resonated with a widespread view that harmony and unity is a good that needs to be cultivated. Similar to the City Council’s argument that Pride 2005 did not promote tolerance, but rather conflict,

numerous people continuously expressed concern that gay and lesbian politics were divisive. For many, Mozaika's persistence to go ahead with the parade arose suspicion that the whole ordeal was a result of political manipulations, though people did not necessarily think that Mozaika activists themselves had some alternative motives. As the journalist and filmmaker I mentioned earlier told me, he thought that Mozaika activists were pawns in a political game within which the big players shifted the conditions once new figures appeared on the playing field, so that the result would be favorable to them and their business interests. He concluded that Mozaika members did not think in such categories, and that they could not therefore see how they were being played. His main point was that while not all people are bought and become politically active because of money rather than principles, everyone's agency is limited due to the fact that the playing field is structured by concrete political forces and their business interests. There was little contingency; the game was determined by big business interests. On occasion, people went as far as to trace the divisive agency specifically to Russian business and imperial interests in Latvia. In the course of these arguments, good politics emerged as a harmony producing practice or at least as a practice that should not jeopardize the unity of the *tauta*.

In 2006, in a broadcast of a weekly television show entitled "*Kas Notiek Latvijā*" (What is Happening in Latvia?) dedicated to Pride, one of the participants noted that Pride is a kind of revolutionary practice and that it therefore cannot be allowed to divide the society. The Minister of Integration at the time, Kārīna Pētersone, publicly called for constructive and reasoned discussion rather than emotionally saturated protest actions. She appealed to Mozaika by saying that people cannot be forced to be tolerant and asked to not hold the parade, which would only create tension and intolerance.

This concern with the effects of Pride-centered politics on the social fabric was also discussed by gay and lesbian activists and within the online gay and lesbian portal *gay.lv*. One of the more interesting discussions unfolded in the portal preceding Pride 2008. In response to the announcement about when and where the Pride parade was to be held, some forum participants commented on the nature of Pride to shock, to assert one's existence without much consideration for the public at large, which in their view was contradictory to the aim of promoting tolerance and understanding. Some of the commentators noted that Latvian society is already "on the edge" due to increasing poverty, and that it therefore "does not have much reserve for understanding what the gays want." Quite a few participants thought that this should be taken into account when organizing Pride either to sharpen its message beyond "we are queer, we are here, get used to it" or for the purpose of devising different political strategies, such as lobbying, discussions, seminars and so forth. While all of the latter were also planned as part of the 2008 Friendship Days—and had been ongoing before gay and lesbian politics erupted into the public domain with Pride 2005— one Mozaika member appealed to feminist struggles and the civil rights movement to emphasize the need to struggle and to ask for rights. "Nobody would have given them anything, had they not asked for it," she said. On other occasions too Mozaika activists appealed to the struggles of African Americans, to Martin Luther King's speeches, and to the suffering of Jews in Nazi Germany as resonant with Latvia's contemporary anti-homophobic sentiment, thus imbuing their struggles both with global significance and also a degree of revolutionary romanticism. Other forum commentators argued that the notion of struggle is too aggressive for them and that they preferred individual work with friends and acquaintances, so that they would understand that "we are not monsters." The discussion oscillated between views that rights cannot just be demanded, but struggled over even as one has to be strategic and careful not to create negative effects, and with views that emphasized the need for Pride parades as a loud statement. *mistiq* [sic], among other commentators, wanted the gay and lesbian claims to make sense for the rest of society. *Maikls* objected to *mistiq*: "I don't agree that one's rights

should be used in a way that makes sense to other people. You may not be able to make any sense out of what I am doing, but if I do, then I will act accordingly. If one's rights could only be realized when other people would find them reasonable or be able to make sense out of them, then there would be no democracy, no freedom of speech, and human rights would not be observed." Many responded by inviting everyone to look at the situation "from the perspective of the regular society." As the forum participants were engaged in juxtaposing themselves to "regular society," someone produced the following metadiscourse about Latvians and political strategies:

Overall, the problem of our *tauta* is that Latvians are meek defenders of their rights. While in Paris the blacks are demolishing micro-districts, *mūsejie* (ours) sway their heads and say—oh, how difficult. We organized one demonstration, when the [economic] situation was more or less tolerable, but now when inflation is 16.7%, nobody is organizing anything. Instead, *tauta* buys tickets to the song festival and goes and sings its heart out. And the same with the gay and lesbian community: there are no problems all year long, then suddenly once a year we walk around in order to remind people about ourselves and after that crawl back into our room until next time.

Yet, there was one historical moment when the *tauta* was not meek and Mozaika made use of it to appeal to the *tauta* in order to generate recognition of the gay and lesbian predicament and the ensuing politics. In a meeting held in September 2006, following that year's Pride, Mozaika members discussed political strategies, especially the widespread view that Pride was too radical for the Latvian mentality. One participant read an anonymous quote in which the speaker warned that the Latvian people are not yet ready for such a radical step as taking to the streets, and that this will only end in unhelpful provocation and confrontation. After a pause pregnant with anticipation, the speaker revealed that these words were said by the Swedish Foreign Minister in 1989 in response to the pending independence demonstrations in the Baltics. Once again, the gay and lesbian struggles were compared to independence struggles. Moreover, it was emphasized that important political struggles are never widely accepted and supported, but rather provocative and risky.

This quote has been used publicly by Mozaika to incite recognition of Latvians' own difficult struggles for independence and to simultaneously invoke association with the gay and lesbian struggle as a similar kind of struggle for democracy and freedom. The struggling gay and lesbian activist is just like the person struggling for independence in the late 1980s. This is even more so, because the gay or the lesbian activist actually was part of the struggle for independence in the late 1980s and therefore gains legitimacy as a political subject and as a good Latvian from this historical moment.

It is interesting to note that resonant political and rhetorical tactics emerge in other contexts. For example, Adi Kuntsman (2008) describes the analogies between the victimhood of Jews and gays drawn by anti-homophobic Russian Israeli organizers in a newspaper exchange where the audience is asked to recognize the shared Jewish victimhood of the past and then invited to realize that the same kind of persecution is directed at gays and lesbians in the present. Similar kinds of rhetoric appeared in Latvia as well. Homophobic language was often explicitly compared with anti-Semitic language (Kuntsman 2008, Mozaika 2007). Yet, Latvians did not necessarily respond by developing an identification with the suffering of the Jews and gays and lesbians; in fact, many thought that such emphasis on Jewish suffering in legitimating gay and lesbian politics once again overlooked Latvians' own past injuries and

their unique condition of victimhood.¹²⁶ Appeals to independence struggles therefore were bound to be more recognizable and effective. Though there is another distinction: while the analogy drawn between the injury of anti-Semitism and the injury of homophobia was meant to suggest the ways in which gays and lesbians were deemed less than human, the analogy between Latvian independence struggles and contemporary gay and lesbian politics pertained to its political form. Should politics be provocative or should it produce harmony? Is democracy something that is extended by the state to its subjects or something that is otherwise negotiated between different segments of the population?¹²⁷

In the process of laboring to draw analogies between national struggles and gay and lesbian politics, as well as to depict Pride parades as “normal and average” events rather than subversive and unsettling gatherings, *Mozaika* activists also played into the dominant frames of the nation and middle-class living. They tried to make Pride about the inclusion of a minority group which was in all aspects except for one, similar to the majority. They also tried to build alliances with other minority groups, all of which were struggling to be recognized by the *tauta* and the polity, thus positing sexual orientation as an equivalent form of difference to that of race or ethnicity. They attempted to establish relationships with other minority organizations such as the African Latvian Association I describe in Chapter 4 and even participated in some of the tolerance-building events organized by the Ministry of Integration. They were not, however, always welcome by these organizations, many of which thought of sexual difference as an epistemologically different form of difference than their own. It seemed that *Mozaika* was caught in a tension between valuing provocative political activities insofar as they equated their struggle with that of the civil rights movement in the United States and the independence struggles in Latvia, and attempting to normalize Pride parades as a political form insofar as they compared Pride parades to those in Sweden and argued that they were simply peaceful political manifestations aimed at raising awareness of the public presence and the needs of the gay and lesbian community. It was necessary to see homosexuality as just another form of difference within a recognizable framework of liberal multiculturalism for Pride to lose its provocative meaning and to become an acceptable political form that was just provocative enough, but not too much. In the process, gay and lesbian activists in Latvia helped to consolidate the authority of the church, the state, and the nation even as they were denied public and political life by them.¹²⁸ The kind of politics that the gay and lesbian activists in Latvia crafted at the intersection between inclusion and provocation were certainly not queer. Rather, they emerged as a peculiar articulation between

¹²⁶ See Mark Rothberg’s “Multidirectional Memory” (2009) in which he examines how multiple memories of injury bump against each other and emerge as parallel in the public sphere. See also my discussion in the Introduction.

¹²⁷ In her book “Democracy and the Foreigner,” Bonnie Honig uses the figure of the foreigner to rethink democracy as an agentful practice that is transgressive of the existing order. The figure of the immigrant helps Honig to articulate democracy as an agentful practice – a politics that precedes the political – and to develop a particular vision of the democratic subject: “not all takings are performed by immigrants or foreigners, but they are all performed by subjects who are not fully included in the system of rights and privileges in which they live. The practice of taking rights and privileges rather than waiting for them to be granted by a sovereign power is ... a quintessentially democratic practice” (2001: 99).

¹²⁸ See Michael Warner’s “The Trouble with Normal” (1999) for a critique of normative gay and lesbian politics in the United States. Historically, queer politics have been about disturbing sedimented normativities. For example, Warner argues against gay marriage on the grounds that it is a deeply normalizing and normative move that undermines queer politics because it reifies the institution of marriage.

middle-class liberalism and an acknowledgment of the centrality of the *tauta* in public and political life in Latvia.

Negotiating Ways of Being Homosexual

While Mozaika's most visible activities were directed at the politicians and the general population, the organization also worked to build up their membership and to offer services to people who might seek assistance and information. Mozaika activists considered that the socio-political milieu in Latvia was not favorable for "coming out," and that therefore many homosexually oriented people needed assistance to cope with their situations, and to find some community where they could feel comfortable. With time, it became apparent, however, that not all ways of inhabiting homosexuality were equally valued by the activists, and that their work was guided by a particular understanding of the good life that reinforced many of the normative parameters within which Mozaika sought acceptance. Some activists were, if not outright critical, then at least somewhat dismissive of certain queer practices and sensibilities. For example, some sneered at the fact that there was going to be a drag queen during the gala party of the 2008 Friendship Days at a newly opened gay nightclub. On another occasion, the activists were approached by a Russian media outlet asking to recommend a gay or a lesbian couple for an interview with the aim to show that "they" are normal people too. There was considerable concern that an appropriate gay couple could not be found. Two gay and two lesbian couples had already been interviewed several times, and new faces were needed, though most of the gays within the activist circle were single. Some other couples that did come to mind were untrustworthy to present a favorable picture of gayness. As one activist put it, "they need to look right and say the right things."

The lack of broad and active membership is not a problem that is unique to Mozaika. Many NGOs in Latvia constituted as part of the targeted effort to build a civil society in post-Soviet Latvia face a similar problem, thus suggesting that forms of social and political engagement may be shifting. And, yet, for Mozaika this was also a slightly differently inflected problem. Many homosexually oriented people in Latvia either did not share their commitment to gay and lesbian politics and / or lived their homosexuality differently. To be sure, many wished they could come out and did not like leading a clandestine existence, but there was also a significant number of those who are gay who did not want to be publicly gay, who wanted to be known, as one of my interviewees put it, as "good gardeners" rather than gays. While they may have also disliked the fact that they had to keep quiet about their homosexual practices, they did not want their sexuality to saturate their public identity.

Yet, Mozaika's politics did not merely posit a distinction between closeted and open homosexuality, but also introduced a distinction between different modes of public homosexuality. For example, while sitting in an empty parking lot, smoking cigarettes, and discussing political manipulations, the journalist and filmmaker I introduced earlier noted how it is widely known that certain public intellectuals, artists, actors, singers or even politicians—usually men—are gay, and that it does not seem to affect the way people relate to them. He recalled how some years ago an evening paper had attempted to "out" five publicly known figures as gay. Their attempt failed insofar as the public did not seem to be outraged by the fact that these men should be gay. Moreover, for many this was not news at all. None of the men had publicly talked about their sexuality, but none had also concealed it in ways to make it completely unknown. Yet, it was precisely this disconnect between being publicly known to be gay, yet not narrating oneself as gay through public speech acts or in public practices that the gay and lesbian activists and their supporters thought to be detrimental to gay and lesbian politics. In their eyes, they risked losing support and

momentum if the gay and lesbian community did not mobilize itself. As one well-known public intellectual—a heterosexually oriented woman—told me, she no longer participates in Pride parades because the gay and lesbian society (*sabiedrība*) is not itself ready for such a move. She participated in the first Pride parade and has publicly spoken out for gay and lesbian politics, but when, she said, she looked behind herself, “there was nobody there.” The gays and lesbians she knew had not mobilized themselves. Some had been willing to attach their names to open letters and petitions circulated online, but most were not willing to speak out publicly and “address the public face-to-face.” “If they were not ready,” she concluded, “then there was no point to push the issue. Resistance and politics have to be organic.” In her view, as well as in the view of Mozaika, the semi-public gays had to become public, that is, to step onto the politically charged stage of the public in Latvia for things to begin to change. Gayness thus had emerged as a thoroughly political subjectivity. To be recognized as properly political and thus as properly gay, gayness had to be continuously and publicly reiterated. And it is precisely this articulation of gay and lesbian subjectivities as profoundly public and political that also prevented many homosexually oriented people from joining the ranks.

Gay and lesbian activists thought that a reluctance to embrace such public and political gayness was the result of fear. A lengthy interview with Linda Freimane in the newspaper “*Latvijas Avīze*” offers a case in point. Explaining the predicament of gays and lesbians in Latvia, Freimane noted that many publicly known people cannot say: “I am homosexual,” because they are afraid. The journalist—Aija Cālīte—responded by saying that many of them realize that the society already knows it. Freimane, in turn, insisted that they are still afraid (Cālīte 2006b). Evidently, if they do not address the public by saying: “I am homosexual, here I stand,” they are not seen as being fully out or properly public. Being out, in Freimane’s view, then, entailed producing public statements about being gay, a stance that many gays and lesbians in Latvia rejected. For example, Pēteris and Karstens’ move to come out again in response to the increased homophobia by giving an interview in a weekend supplement of a major daily newspaper amounted to being properly out from this perspective (Jankavs 2005). Freimane seemed to suggest that not only would this amount to being really out, but that such public statements were almost a duty that public persons should fulfill for both the good of gays and lesbians in Latvia, as well as for the good of Latvian society in general.

Overall, Mozaika’s members and their ensuing politics constituted a particular kind of understanding of gay and lesbian life. A number of the founders of Mozaika had either grown up in the West or had spent significant amounts of time in Western Europe or North America. On numerous occasions, they explicitly claimed liberal sensibilities and lamented the lack of liberal sensibilities in the Latvian context. And yet they also performed themselves as national subjects insofar as they appealed to the *tauta* and independence struggles, sang Latvian folk songs during Pride parades, and insofar as there were very few Russian-speaking gays and lesbians in their midst. So, while substantiating their political claims by references to European Union directives and human rights conventions, they also legitimated themselves, often inadvertently, by identifying with the *tauta* and putting faith in the Latvian state as the state of the Latvian people. Their imaginary was intricately linked with the state as both the vehicle for self-realization of the Latvian *tauta* and with the state as the guarantor of the rights of minorities. In fact, their thinking and politics was thoroughly state-based (Warner 2005); they did not seem to recognize other forms of existence as political at all.

Not all of the local gays and lesbians identified with the *tauta* in similar ways. There were at least a few who explicitly stated that their allegiance was solely to political communities and liberal democratic principles. For example, Maya—who is of Russian background but speaks perfect Latvian and works in a largely Latvian milieu—told me that

she participates in the Pride parade because she thinks of it as an instance of freedom of expression, and that she does not want to and will not sing Latvian folk songs. Sergejs Kruks, a researcher at the University of Latvia who works with discourse analysis, has suggested that gay and lesbian activism is largely a Latvian problem. He argued that activists had refused to affiliate with any kind of support expressed by Russian political parties (which, granted, would have amounted to further discrediting in the eyes of a large part of the population).

The Russian-Latvian axis was not the only one along which gay and lesbian politics were divided. In an article in the Russian language newspaper “*Chas*,” Marahovskijs (2007) suggested that within gay and lesbian politics, one can observe a clash between local and foreign Latvians. He argued that the foreign Latvians (thus referring to individuals who were born and raised abroad and had returned to Latvia after the collapse of the Soviet Union) have the Soros Foundation and the European Union behind them, inhabit “radical homosexuality,” and pursue activism that demands visibility. Marahovskijs juxtaposed the “radical homosexuality” of foreign Latvians to a local variant of “moderate homosexuality,” which does not support Pride because it only cultivates intolerance. This part of the gay and lesbian milieu was difficult to access, because they valued invisibility for a number of different reasons, though I did gather their views through anonymous arguments about Pride parades on *gay.lv*, as well as through several interviews. One of the men I interviewed had practiced same-sex relations while remaining married with children for more than 30 years. The other was in his 40s, had a girlfriend, but enjoyed same-sex relations and had a long history of what he referred to as “bohemian living.” While the first man, whom I will refer to as Vitālijs—claimed he had responded to my invitation to talk in the gay portal because he wanted someone who would listen, the other man—whom I will refer to as Kaspars—said he did not remember why he responded; he had probably been drunk. Indeed, during our two and a half hour conversation in his apartment, he refilled his glass with an orange colored beverage about five times. It seemed to me it was not orange juice. He offered me coffee instead.

Vitālijs opposed Mozaika politics, because, in his view, they could only see one correct way of being gay—open, public, and political. He had spent his whole life trying to be normal, but could not suppress his desire for men. It’s not that he did not like women at all, he said, but “it just was not the same.” He married, had two children, but continued to search out homosexual relations. He claimed to value family and critiqued Mozaika for trying to place homosexuality on the same register as heterosexuality—“place it on the same level,” as he put it. In his view, that was misguided and unnecessary. At the same time, he was also highly critical of the discourse of religious leaders that designated homosexuality a sin. He said that “juridical rights should be pursued, why not, but organizing Pride parades was misguided.” In any case, that was not for him, he concluded, he was not going to change anything. He did not want to come out. He claimed his homosexuality was about sexuality rather than about the politics of sexuality. He shared with me a number of erotic stories he had written in order to explore his sexuality and to record the history of its emergence and development. The stories covered his first sexual encounters, as well as his experiences in the Soviet army. He shared with me his family photos and stories of his travels and encounters with famous people. He liked opera and the arts. He did not like his wife very much. He said she was a bitter woman. When he had lost all sexual desire for his wife, he told her he could not perform, and she allegedly accepted it as part of aging. Asked if his wife ever suspected that he has sexual relations with men, he replied he did not know. She may have, he said, but they never talked about: “I never tried to get inside her soul.”

Kaspars did not think of himself as gay. Not on a regular day anyways. His first encounter with homosexuality was through a relationship with his University professor whom he found infatuating because of his intelligence. The professor, however, was in love with

Kaspars and tried to have sex with him one day as Kaspars was visiting his summer house. While Kaspars escaped that day, he did not turn down other similar offers from men he found to be interesting conversation partners. He began to enjoy spending time with them, drinking with them. Later in his life, he moved to Moscow, worked in a casino, and led a life of partying and drinking. He also had many girlfriends and was even married right after graduating from the University. That was a mistake, however, and they soon divorced. Right now he lives in a small town not far from Rīga. He has a girlfriend, but he occasionally goes to Rīga's nightclubs to seek out sexual relations with men. When he wants to have sex with a man, he said, "that's when I feel gay." Same-sex relations for him are part of his experimental and bohemian sexuality. He enjoys multiple partners and risky sexual relations. He does not like the contemporary emphasis on safe sex when one, as he said, "almost has to wear a body condom to get to a girl." He forms his own community around him and does not see a need to engage in the politics of sexuality. He did, however, exhibit interest about how the Pride parade had gone and said he would go if it were not such a politicized event where in lieu of anonymity one gained visibility. When asked about people who may not be able to lead such bohemian life and thus may not be able to find same-sex partners easily, he recalled an occasion where, as he claimed, he had helped a woman realize she was a lesbian. His girlfriend worked in a cafe and one of her co-workers—"an angry and a bitter woman," as he described her—always hit on other women working at the cafe when she had been drinking. One day Kaspars explained to her that she actually might be a lesbian and pointed her to the various nightclubs in Rīga where she could go and find partners. Apparently, the woman was grateful, went to the clubs right away, and is now living with a partner, though reportedly the relationships is far from agreeable.

By telling me about this woman, Kaspars wanted to point out that, indeed, people who do not lead cosmopolitan lifestyles not only have difficulties finding a partner, but often are not themselves aware of the meaning of their desires. Can gay and lesbian activists help such people, and do they? Over dinner one day, a couple of friends who happened to be publicly out as gay were telling me about the difficulties that many gays and lesbians in Latvia face. They noted that "some of their lives are so entangled that it is difficult to relate to them or even understand them." They recounted a story of a woman—whom I will call Alla—who had turned to them for help. Alla's girlfriend, whom she had met accidentally, had died of cancer, and Alla was looking to meet other women. As described by my friends, Alla was not very educated or well situated. She lacked some of her front teeth and was not very pretty. They had helped her by pointing her to some of the internet sites and gay / lesbian bars, but they did not feel they could do more; they "could not make her into a charity case." Moreover, Alla's life and relationships were puzzling, even repulsive. After some time, Alla had found another partner, as well as decided to participate in the 2008 Pride parade. During the parade, while Alla herself walked with Mozaika members and supporters inside the fenced enclosure, her partner—apparently a zealous Christian who aggressively opposed Pride—was standing on the other side of the fence with the protesters and yelling obscenities. It was incomprehensible to my friends how such a life was possible.

Alla's example illuminates the extremely fraught conditions within which many homosexually oriented people craft their lives in Latvia. While I did not talk with Alla myself, it is not difficult to imagine that she may have aspired to a different kind of life, but it is also not certain what her vision of that life may have been. There seems to be a wide variety of conceptions of what a good life entails among homosexually oriented people in Latvia. It is generally assumed by most gay and lesbian activists today—and is corroborated by my conversations with some gay and lesbian individuals who grew up during Soviet times—that the Soviet period was one of repression, of treatment in mental hospitals, and of dehumanizing loitering in public toilets looking for sexual encounters (the latter more for

men more than for women) (see also Franeta 2004, Essig 1999, Lavrikovs 1999, Waitt 2005). While male homosexuality was criminalized, women were often subject to ruthless treatment in mental hospitals.¹²⁹ Some men recount being followed and approached by secret service agents who tried to recruit them (see Lavrikovs 1999). Refusing such offers presented the risk of being prosecuted but, as one of my informants noted, rarely anyone was prosecuted on the basis of homosexuality alone. There had to be something else that the Soviet state did not like to which homosexuality could be attached or for which it could be used as a cover. Indeed, within the Soviet Union, it was known that many prominent intellectuals and cultural figures were gay, and it was difficult to tell why some did get prosecuted while others did not. Some of the women I talked to via the *gay.lv* portal (some of them had emigrated abroad) told me of the treatment they were subjected to as young girls during Soviet times. Female homosexuality was thought of as a mental disorder, and young girls were often subjected to treatment in mental clinics, which entailed the administration of drugs and other kinds of procedures. One of the women who now lives abroad recounted being administered drugs while tied to her bed with leather straps. Most Mozaika members had never experienced such practices; they were either too young during Soviet times, or had grown up elsewhere. The Soviet past was like a horror story to them—a story of repression and degradation. It was no wonder, in their view, that people who had undergone such experiences did not want to bring attention to themselves and were happy that repression had ended even if contemporary social and political conditions still required that they live their lives in secret. “Hiding and lies,” that’s how many Mozaika members saw the lives of gays and lesbians who had not come out. Living truthfully and openly was inevitably better. Truth and openness were goods in and of themselves, even if at a very real cost.

Yet Gordon Waitt’s (2005) research—otherwise an indictment of the climate of homophobia in Latvia—suggests that there are also people who lament the passing of the Soviet times when “silence over sexuality guaranteed invisibility.” One of his respondents put it as follows:

In Soviet times you could have your boyfriend over and he could share your bed without any concerns about being labeled gay or being monitored by neighbors. It was accepted that men shared an apartment and even slept together in a bed as friends. This is no longer possible. I am now aware of my neighbors’ constantly watching eyes. (Waitt 2005:174)

Those homosexually oriented people who want to remain invisible through an idiom other than unwanted suffering in the closet constitute a challenge for Latvia’s gay and lesbian activists who want to bring gays and lesbians out into the open. To be sure, there are also people who wish to come out and lead the kind of life that Mozaika offers, yet are frightened to do so. The Mozaika project, however, gains sufficient legitimacy only if they can claim that the majority of all gays and lesbians wish to live the kind of life they offer. It is thus

¹²⁹ It has been very difficult to obtain information on how many men were actually prosecuted in Soviet times under Paragraph 124, Part I of the Criminal Code (for having consensual sexual relations with other men). In his thorough report on the rights of gays and lesbians in Latvia, Juris Lavrikovs (1999) describes how cumbersome the effort has been and that he has only managed to obtain information that 2 men were prosecuted in 1988. Lavrikovs describes some vague indications that more may have been imprisoned at the time male homosexuality was decriminalized in 1992. He also writes that while male homosexuality was criminalized under Russian imperial rule, as well as during the first independent Latvian state, it appears that the criminalization was not thoroughly enforced and that gays and lesbians led a fairly rich cultural and intellectual life. See Franeta 2004 for interviews with men and women who talk about being homosexual during the Soviet period.

essential that they be able to interpret the existence of other ways of inhabiting homosexuality as the effect of fear, false consciousness, Soviet legacy, or as something else. Does Mozaika activism then amount to a liberal project of total social transformation or is it progressive politics?

Eastern and Western Liberalisms and Their Critics

Nanette Funk has argued that the Western feminist critique of Anglo-American liberalism does not travel to Eastern Europe where different aspects of liberal thought prevail. Defining liberal thought broadly as thought that values individual rights, freedom of speech and conscience, academic freedom, rule of law, separation of powers, constitutional state, parliamentary system, and some form of private property, Funk argues that a variety of liberalisms have historically proliferated in Eastern Europe—romantic liberalism, absolutist, radical, and conservative liberalism, Slavophile liberalism and so forth (2004: 696). Engaging with such aspects of the liberal tradition of thought as autonomous conceptions of the person, theories of social contract, and an individual's relationship with the state, Funk argues that there is too little rather than too much of Anglo-American style liberalism in Eastern Europe and therefore that the basic tenets of liberalism need to be defended and cultivated there rather than critiqued. For example, Funk argues that liberal thought in Eastern Europe has historically emphasized a relational conception of personhood, which has translated into valuing collective goods over and above individual rights (2004: 701). She also points out that Eastern European thinkers have emphasized national autonomy and independence in relation to the international community over individual autonomy and independence in relation to the nation and the state (2004: 707). Funk writes: "Under such conditions, a critique of individualism risks reinforcing conservative criticisms of individual rights and hampers the entrenchment of women's rights. An adoption of the Anglo-American feminist argument for an ethics of care, however legitimate its intent, also runs a risk, greater than in the United States, of reinforcing strongly gendered views of sacrifice" (2004: 706).

For gay and lesbian activists and their supporters, the widespread dislike of Mozaika politics animated by an emphasis on collective good and proper public conduct in the idioms of the *tauta* or morality seems to suggest just that—that there is too little of Anglo-American liberalism in Latvia to afford one to be critical of it. However, such a stance is misguided, because it assumes that liberalism remains the only tradition of thought and political rationality within which proper social, legal, and political recognition of non-normative sexualities is possible and that therefore, despite the need for adjustments required by specific contexts, liberalism remains the only guarantor of the possibility to craft a contemporary progressive politics of sexuality.

However, as I have argued throughout the dissertation, the object of reflection and critique in Latvia should not only be "indigenous thought and practice," but also attempts to remake it, which often derive specifically from Euro-American versions of the liberal tradition. How should we therefore read Mozaika's politics and responses to it? It cannot and should not be overlooked that many of those who aspire to a Western-style gay and lesbian middle-class life—to be able to live publicly in a monogamous same-sex relationship, to raise children and so forth—are indeed discriminated against and feel uncomfortable in the current conditions of public heteronormativity in Latvia. Therefore Mozaika is making a difference in their lives, and they welcome its politics. It is also the case that Mozaika, by aligning with an international middle-class politics of human rights and sexuality, engages political forms and puts forth visions of gay and lesbian life that even many homosexually oriented people in

Latvia find unappealing or problematic.¹³⁰ It is also the case that while valuing individual freedom and other basic tenets of liberalism as described by Nanette Funk, Mozaika's politics exhibit a sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit commitment to the *tauta* and thus to the nature of the state as a national state.¹³¹ Thus, Mozaika's activities seem to be complicit with dominant formations, such as the nation, even as they find themselves marginal in relation to it (see Kuntsman 2008, see also Kuntsman 2009).

The political direction of gay and lesbian politics in Latvia has largely been overdetermined by the almost instantaneous plugging of Mozaika into various international networks, such as ILGA Europe and Amnesty International, which shapes Mozaika's political objectives, means of intervention, discursive strategies, and horizons for imagining the future. As Michael Warner (1999) has argued in "The Trouble with Normal," such politics demonizes other forms of sexuality, as well as reinforces marriage, the state and / or the church as authoritative institutions that legitimate intimate relationships between people. Or, as Joseph Massad (2007) has pointed out in his analysis of gay and lesbian politics in Egypt, such conceptions of normative gay and lesbian life and politics are complicit with orientaling and colonial discourses and practices. Glimpses of a similarly inflected critique of the normativity of gay and lesbian life and politics appears in Latvia too, though it is not very audible and is overshadowed by the heated public arguments over Pride parades. As one person told me—for him, to be gay is to lead a subversive and underground existence. In his mind, Mozaika's activities overwrote the value and even the possibility of such existence.

At the same time, members of Mozaika are not solely subjects of translocal networks of gay and lesbian activism, but also profoundly national subjects, many with long histories of involvement in political activities against Soviet rule as children of émigré parents in foreign countries. Thus, many of the Mozaika activists share in the sense of historical injury with the rest of the historical community of Latvians rather than subscribe to an explicitly ideological articulation of the collective good. Raised at the intersection of liberal and nationalist imaginaries, these individuals have emerged as uniquely positioned political subjects in contemporary Latvia. Following Pride 2005, many of them could not remain silent and, as several of them narrated, became public persons despite the fact that it also meant putting up with a fair amount of personal attacks. Once again, drawing parallels with the independence struggles, in one of the many interviews she has given, Linda Freimane said that she too is afraid to participate in Pride parades. She says she feels similar to how she felt in 1988 when she was coming to what was then still Soviet Latvia to celebrate Latvian Independence Day: "Then we had to deal with the Soviet power. But the feeling is similar—I feel as if I am doing the right thing, and there is no alternative. I cannot step back and walk away. But I am very afraid" (Gailītis 2006). The dual operation of liberal and national sensibilities and the contingency of the 2005 Pride parade pushed these individuals into the public arena, yet also presented them with often unbearable existential difficulties. They had a particular tool kit at their disposal to mount a political struggle, and they grappled for ways of dealing with the personal attacks that this generated. Their political lives were often short-lived, with the exception of a few, because of the toll that the situation took on them. Some have left Latvia for good, while others remain in the frontline.

Thus, paraphrasing Joseph Massad's words, Mozaika politics does not necessarily exhibit straightforward political domination, but rather strives towards ethical and epistemic

¹³⁰ See Massad 2007 for a discussion of "gay international" in the context of Egypt.

¹³¹ It should be noted that some Mozaika members have begun to articulate dissatisfaction with the overwhelming emphasis on Latvianness in the public domain. Thus one of the Mozaika activist who writes blog entries on the Mozaika website recently wrote an entry in which she expressed frustration with regard to the proliferating discourses of Latvianness (see www.mozaika.lv).

normalization that draws on international middle-class visions of gay and lesbian life and politics (2007: 39). These conceptions are based on a particular understanding of the universal existence of homosexuality, often manifest in arguments that each society has about 7-10% of homosexually oriented people, and the psychological approach to explaining the reluctance of Latvia's homosexually oriented people to heed the call of international gay and lesbian rights movements. *Mozaika* thus has contributed to setting the terms of current arguments about homosexuality in Latvia within a particular translocal epistemology and ontology of gayness (Massad 2007: 174). As such, gay and lesbian politics in Latvia is also a terrain of struggle between those who consider that the problem can only be discussed within the language of liberalism and those who may want to introduce a different kind of language.¹³²

The Latvian context thus invites consideration of the kind of questions that William Spurlin has posed in relation to South Africa in the recent volume "Postcolonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections." Namely, "how might a study of queer cultural and political practices among Africans in southern Africa help (re)articulate a critique of nationalist claims in the region that read homosexuality as alien to Africa, and, at the same time, lead to a more self-reflexive critique of the colonizing gestures of queer identity politics in the West that rely on Euro American models of gay liberation as paradigmatic for claiming queer identity and reclaiming a queer past?" (2001: 187). This question might be especially pertinent since gay and lesbian activists in Latvia exhibit a clear sense of future directionality. Thus, reflecting on how tough it had been for gays and lesbians in London years ago in a film made by British film-makers comparing the history of LGBT struggles in London with the contemporary situation in Latvia, one of the *Mozaika* activists said on camera that it is somewhat easier for Latvian gay and lesbian activists than it was for gays and lesbians in London years ago, because they know what is waiting for them—namely, the achievements in London are an indication of the direction in which the Latvian LGBT situation will develop. "We know it is possible," she said, "and that's what keeps us afloat." And yet it is precisely this desire to move towards "there" in conditions that are significantly different from the ones in the past and present London that is problematic. To some extent, this desire forecloses the possibility to imagine different ways of political organization and practice, as well as different ways of inhabiting homosexuality.

One of the ways in which we might approximate a serious engagement with the possibilities that are opened and foreclosed at the intersection of the multiple trajectories of injury and domination that characterize arguments about tolerance in Latvia is to be attentive to the micro-practices of critical reflection through which particular objects, subjects, and modes of critique emerge over and above others. In the concluding chapter, I thus turn to an engagement with the specific critical practices of the tolerance activists.

¹³² In his article "Reflections on Blasphemy and Secular Criticism," Talal Asad says this about the liberal tradition: "I am aware that liberalism is a complex historical tradition, that Locke is not Constant and Constant is not Mill and Mill is not Rawls, that the history of liberalism in North America is not the same as that in Europe – or, for that matter, in parts of the Third World where it can be said to have a substantial purchase. But as a value-space, liberalism today provides its advocates with a common political and moral language in which to identify problems and to dispute. Such ideas as individual autonomy, freedom, national self-determination, limitation of state power, rule of law, and religious toleration belong to that space, not least when they are debated. It is precisely the contradictions and aporias in the language of liberalism that make the public debates among liberals possible, in a space that is vigorously defended against those who would introduce a radically different language" (2008a: 584).

Chapter 6: The Cultural Politics of Critique

The Problem of An Uncritical Attitude

In the fall of 2005, at the very outset of my fieldwork, the director of a well-known human rights organization told me that “our [Latvian] core problem is the inability to recognize the problem.” Explaining to me the bottlenecks in the process of developing and approving the National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance, she noted that “the state took great care not to say that there is a problem of intolerance in Latvia; promotion of tolerance was a more acceptable title for a government program.” This, she thought, was characteristic of a broader trend, namely one of avoiding a public discussion of problems for fear of projecting a negative image of Latvia to the outside world. During subsequent months of fieldwork, I came to see that the people and organizations the Program brought together shared a sense that not only politicians and civil servants, but also Latvians as a historical community were for one reason or another presently incapable of inhabiting a critical attitude towards themselves and their way of life.

Alongside identifying a lack of critical ethos among Latvians, tolerance activists frequently discussed how people also lack any kind of internalized mechanisms for censoring their public speech and conduct. They often commented on how people are not habituated to restrict their conduct since the socio-political environment around them does not require that they do so. It was commonly assumed that in other “more civilized” places people police their public conduct even if they retain their ultimately intolerant attitudes, because it is not socially and politically acceptable to be or do otherwise. While not considering it an ideal solution, tolerance activists tended to endorse political correctness because they thought it made public space “cleaner” even if intolerance persisted in latent or hidden forms (Stroja 2007).

The lack of self-censorship was both a horror and an opportunity for tolerance activists: it allowed them to easily point to the problem (to those who would already be predisposed to recognize particular utterances as problematic); it allowed them to form an ethical sociality among themselves by circulating certain utterances as repugnant examples of the general ethos of intolerance; and it allowed them to use these statements as sites of intervention.¹³³ During the same interview with which I began this chapter, the leader of the human rights organization noted that “the advantage that we have is that when you get access to people [get an audience with a politician, for example, or an official of the Border Guard], they say incredible things; they are not used to being monitored and they don’t recognize that they are making problematic statements.” On another occasion, Daina, a staff member of the same human rights organization, told me about her visit to the detention center for illegal immigrants where she was to provide legal counsel to asylum seekers from an African country who were detained there. Ieva told me how the guard at the gate had attempted to strike up a conversation by saying that “all those blacks are lazy and there is no place for them here.” “They do not censor themselves, they do not censor themselves at all,” she exclaimed as she completed her story.

If the border guard did not censor himself at all, Daina and I, by virtue of her sharing this story with me, constituted ourselves as subjects who conduct themselves otherwise and who inhabit differently oriented ethical sensibilities. Such a discursive constitution of an ethical bond was a frequent occurrence in my relations with tolerance activists. During my

¹³³ See Povinelli 2002 and Mahmood 2005 for the use of the term “repugnant” to discuss liberal sensibilities in relation to certain illiberal forms of life.

first interview with Daniel, a civil servant working on questions of tolerance, he told me how a participant in a recent seminar for teachers he had organized expressed concern that “if Latvians and Russians cannot get along as it is, what are we going to do when all those blacks start coming?” After reciting the statement, Daniel took a pause during which we both remained silent. Nothing needed to be said; the silence assumed and constituted a shared ethical orientation, which deemed such statements unacceptable, even repugnant; thus, an ethical bond was brought into existence. While partly formed on the basis of a visceral appraisal of troubling discourses and practices (Connolly 1999), the network of tolerance activists, which also took the form of an ethical community, was committed to the idea of critical reflection as a virtuous practice that leads to such goods as individual moral autonomy, tolerance, and an inclusive public sphere. It was this virtue that the population at large seemed to lack in the eyes of tolerance activists and their liberally inclined supporters.

For example, Vita Matīsa, an American-born Latvian political scientist who has spent most of her life in Switzerland, took up such a theme in an article published shortly before Latvian Independence Day in 2007. She argued that as a result of a historically formed lack of independent thinking, Latvians tend to exhibit loyalty to power rather than to principles and this is so regardless of the quality or legitimacy of that power. She suggested that this might be attributed to people’s cultivation of survival strategies under various regimes, but, in her view, it was also effect of a historically formed servile attitude. Matīsa further argued that Latvians think that there is power in unity, but not in solitary reflection, therefore they are prone to be brave participants of mass demonstrations, but are not likely to be able to adhere to ethical principles when confronted in private. Matīsa drew on a semi-autobiographic novel by Vizma Belševica (2004)—specifically a section entitled “The Day of the State” (*Valsts svētki*)—to illustrate an exceptional case against which the contemporary situation was to be evaluated. In the story, the author’s grandmother yells at a participant of a mass parade commemorating state independence in the 1930s: “Fool! What has God given you? What has Ulmanis [authoritarian president of Latvia at the time]? All you have is the result of your own work!” As a result, the author’s grandmother has to flee, because the crowd wants to hand her over to the police. “A typical scenario,” Matīsa concluded—independent thinking and adherence to intangible principles rather than tangible authorities have always been unpopular and dangerous in Latvia. Rather than the unity loudly advocated by politicians, she further argued, Latvians need to cultivate the ability to distance (*norobežoties*) themselves from power in order to reflect in solitude on their ethical and political principles.

As I have pointed out in other chapters, while the National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance does not explicitly posit the problem of intolerance as a Latvian problem, many Latvians take it to be a commentary on their virtue rather than as the identification of a social and political problem. Moreover, since most of the government posts are occupied by Latvians and since the public sphere is widely conceived as Latvian, the public and political refusal to fully embrace the tolerance promotion agenda does render the problem of an uncritical attitude as a specifically Latvian problem.¹³⁴ Even as the data seems to indicate that there are no major differences between Latvians and Russian-speakers in how they relate to variously defined others, the tendency within the circles of tolerance activists is to consider the problem as more challenging in relation to Latvians since here it is seen as aggravated by nationalist sensibilities and a historically generated sense of victimhood, whereas in the case of non-Latvians it might simply be a matter of Soviet legacy—that is, of a lack of experience and proper education.

¹³⁴ As Viktors Makarovs has noted, “Russians look at Latvians and in some metaphysical sense see the state” (Ose 2006).

If intolerant attitudes are difficult to measure, as I described in the Introduction, changing them presents as great if not greater challenges for tolerance activists. The perceived lack of a critical attitude seriously complicates the task of tolerance promotion in the eyes of tolerance activists, for they take a critical attitude to be crucial for changing the intolerant dispositions that afflict Latvians. In this chapter, through an ethnographic analysis of some of the micro-practices of tolerance activists and responses to them, I examine the claim that Latvians as a historical community lack a critical ethos. I suggest that the silences and moments of non-comprehension that often characterize encounters between tolerance activists and their target audiences do not emerge as a result of a failure of reason on the part of Latvians, but rather as a result of an ethical refusal to render oneself transparent on the terms set by tolerance activists. This refusal to take up the kind of critical reflection that tolerance activists see as necessary for cultivating tolerance thus does not mark an absence of critical reflection, but rather suggests the presence of different reflective practices and different forms of public reason. In other words, in contrast to the tendency among tolerance activists and liberally inclined intellectuals to attribute the refusal of particular reflective practices to an exaggerated attachment or submission to the community, the past, the nation or authority (e.g. Matīsa 2007), I reframe the question and ask how the current historical moment gives rise to particular forms of public reason in Latvia. In what follows, then, I turn to a closer examination of the moral purchase and political traction of different reflective practices and modes of public reason that come into focus through arguments about tolerance. First, however, a few words about critique as a historical and cultural artifact are in order.

Critique as a Cultural and Historical Artifact

In the much-discussed essay, “What is Enlightenment,” Michel Foucault—as a genealogist of modernity—equates critique with the Enlightenment and argues that “the critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them” (1994a: 56, see also Foucault 1994b). For scholars and thinkers who struggle with their formative conditions within the Enlightenment tradition, Foucault has thus provided inspiration to inhabit the Enlightenment ethos of a critical attitude and to strive to practice the virtue of critique even as one remains formed by the Enlightenment doctrines which one would like to dismantle. Thinking of modernity as an ethos has enabled a rich imagination of analytical and political possibilities, of ways of thinking and being otherwise from within particular formations even as these are simultaneously objects of critique (Butler 2002, Scott 2004, Markell 2003, Connolly 1999, Gilroy 2006).

And yet, as Talal Asad notes, a genealogy of the practice of critique is yet to be written (2008a, 2008b). Thus, we must distinguish between critique as a diverse set of historical practices and critique as a general ethos of Enlightenment modernity (Mahmood 2008, Asad 2008a, 2008b). While the latter formulation might indeed be inspiring as an ethical horizon towards which one aspires, it only comes into focus through the concrete practices of critique it produces:

It is not entirely correct to say that criticism is the expression of modern Enlightenment. It is more accurate to say that modern Enlightenment has produced a particular concept of critique: an abstract universalized concept. Every critical discourse has conditions of existence that define what it is, what it

recognizes, what it aims at, what it is destroying. There is no such thing as a trans-historical attitude of worldly criticism that is “open to its own failings,” or that is distinctive of the last five centuries of secular modernity. It matters greatly whether critique presupposes a republic of letters (where open-ended questions are exchanged) or a court of reason (by which conviction is authoritatively secured), it matters by what criteria “its own failings” are recognized as such, and who sets them. Finally, it matters whether critique is directed against others or against oneself (the confession of sins, auto-critique, speech under analysis). But always, the person who practices critique is a specific kind of subject—a scandal monger, a satirist, a critical philosopher, an experimental scientist, a religious preacher, a literary critic, a psychoanalyst, a pope. His formation and the form of society in which he can flourish, are essential pre-conditions of the many ways critique is performed. (Asad 2008a: 605)

There are, of course, important differences between the various practices of critique entangled with and within the Enlightenment tradition. For example, both postcolonial critique and secular critique can be traced to the Enlightenment tradition. The latter is Enlightenment’s normative project par excellence, whereas the former can perhaps be conceived as emanating from what David Scott has called a tragic sensibility which has “a respectful attitude to the contingencies of the past in the present, to the uncanny ways in which its remains come back to usurp our hopes and subvert our ambition” (2004: 220, see also Scott 2006b). While postcolonial critique might be brought to bear upon secular critique, it is not necessarily located outside it—something that it recognizes through the tragic sensibility of the postcolonial present. Thus, on the one hand, it can be said that postcolonial critique is shaped by the understanding that critique—as a questioning of norms, assumptions, and authority—aids human flourishing rather than hinders it. On the other hand, when engaged in historically situated discussions, it has produced the insight that “no regular life...can be practiced if it is continually subjected to doubt, questioning and even confusion” (Asad 1993: 265).¹³⁵ Importantly, critical postcolonial scholarship has also generated the analytically and politically consequential insight that questioning in the spirit of secular critique is far from being the only mode of reasoned reflection and transformation (Hirschkind 2006, Mahmood 2005, Asad in Scott 2006a, Scott 2000).

While some argue that today modern has come to mean liberal (White 2009, Rose 1999), other historical and equally modern traditions have also shaped contemporary reflective practices and modes of public reason in Latvia. For example, critical reflection as both a public and private practice was also a constitutive, if shifting, element of the Soviet socialist project. The early Soviet practices of critique took the form of purges, self-criticism, or a combination thereof (Fitzpatrick 1999, Kharkhordin 1999). Contrary to contemporary liberal democracies with colonial pasts, the socialist collective did not have a collective past or a present that needed to be cleansed to maintain the integrity of socialist principles, though it did labor to disassociate the Russian-lead socialism of the future from the Russian imperialism of the past (Slezkine 1996, Hirsch 2005). The aim of the purges that began in the

¹³⁵ At the same time, there are circumstances in which postcolonial critical practices can be articulated with liberal sensibilities in a way that foments liberalism’s civilizational project directed at the illiberal other. As I show in my analysis of the poem discussed in Chapter 1, a postcolonial critical toolkit for rendering visible practices of othering (such as Orientalist representations) can be and is picked up in liberalizing contexts where cultivating the ability to see, hear, and read in a particular way is part of becoming civilized and mature. In the context of introducing the liberal European politics of tolerance in postsocialist Latvia, learning to see particular practices of representation as problematic thus becomes part of the civilizational discourse of liberalism which itself largely remains intact despite the racialization that continues to be constitutive of it.

1920s was to consolidate the socialist collective by eliminating foreign elements and class enemies that undermined its present and its future (Kharkhordin 1999: 136). The individuals targeted by the early purges were those whose socialist credentials were tainted by their social origins (*kulak* or nobility), past occupations, or past membership in oppositional organizations (Fitzpatrick 1999, Kharkhordin 1999). As Sheila Fitzpatrick argues, the purge “was a special kind of a ritual, one in which there was no absolution” (1999: 21). People confessed their sins endlessly without the possibility to relieve the burden. The errors were always there to haunt you: the party was not interested “in your subjective attitude toward your sins, but only in the existence of a record of past sins in your file” (Fitzpatrick 1999: 21).

Rather than identifying foreign elements within, the self-criticism campaigns that followed the initial cycle of purges took the socialist collective itself as the object of critique. With the aim to find faults, correct errors, and improve socialist construction, self-criticism campaigns invited reports of abuses of power and socialist principles wherever they occurred and regardless of who committed them. Apparently, Soviet citizens were so active in reporting on various violations of socialist principles that Maxim Gorky questioned whether so much grass-roots criticism was a good idea since it “undermined people’s sense of accomplishment and spoiled the country’s reputation in [the] outside world” (Fitzpatrick 1999: 166). Stalin, however, dismissed Gorky’s concern, “saying that criticism was an essential control over local officials and their habits of arbitrariness and incompetence” (Fitzpatrick 1999: 166).

Nevertheless, the zeal with which Soviet citizens engaged in criticism in the form of reporting on the abuses of managers to the Party leadership continued to present a problem. Aaron Solts, one of the first chairmen of the Central Control Commission suggested that a worker should imagine that he is kicking himself rather than somebody else before saying something critical of a manager since “in the Party view he was assaulting a corporate body of which he was a part” (Kharkhordin 1999: 153).¹³⁶ This points to shifts and tensions in the Soviet understanding of the subject and object of critique. If in the early purges the subject of critique was the vanguard of the socialist collective imbued with the proper class-consciousness, then during self-criticism campaigns the subject and object of critique were to be one. The workers, however, seemed to overstep the boundary of the subject-object unity and thus had to be reminded that the body they were kicking was in fact their own. It is important to note here that criticism—whether in the form of self-criticism or the purge—could not occur from a position that was too far removed from the socialist collective. Autonomy from the collective was not a good that was required for the Soviet practice of critique. Rather, it was proper identification with the socialist collective that guaranteed its success.

For both Western and Soviet modern projects, critique was and continues to be a way to improve human flourishing—for the former, it takes the form of a full mastery of reason through which human freedom manifests itself, while for the latter it entailed the achievement

¹³⁶ According to Kharkhordin, the Central Control Commission was “created in November 1920 to offset dangerous status differentiation within the Party, [and] was not specifically intended to fight crimes. The creation of the CCC was one among many efforts attempting to democratize Party life, including more frequent meetings and rotation of Party officials, their criticism by the Party rank and file, and so on. [...]The CCC was an independent Party body, equal in status only to the Central Committee. In practical terms, it functioned as the Party’s judicial branch, separate from the executive power vested in the Central Committee. Members of the CCC could not serve on Party committees at any level or on its administrative bodies. They were recruited from the ‘most honorable,’ ‘trusted,’ and ‘conscientious’ workers whose reputation stood unblemished from pre-revolutionary days” (1999: 37).

of communism through socialist construction. Yet, there are important differences. For the Western project critique is an end in itself—engaging in critique as a virtuous practice of reasoning contains its legitimating element within. The legitimacy of the Soviet project, however, was located in external legitimating signs and figures (Yurchak 2009). Here critique was a practice that had to contribute to the achievement of socialism (and subsequently communism) as a particular socio-economic and political formation, which was not necessarily manifest in the practice of critique itself.

In work in progress on Lenin as the external master signifier of socialism, Alexei Yurchak (2009) shows how what might be called a crisis of critique produced a concentration of discourse on Lenin's physical body, either as the location of the authentic Lenin or as the place where dark secrets about the leader are to be found. Yurchak argues that, throughout the Soviet period, it was assumed that there was a true and authentic Lenin and critique usually pointed out that some period or people in Soviet history had distorted his ideas (for example, NEP, Stalin, and so forth). The 1990s, however, unleashed a critique that suggested that all Soviet history had been a distortion of Lenin's ideas: there was an attempt to look for the true and authentic Lenin, but the true and authentic Lenin was unknown, could not be found (2009: 27). The critique of the 1990s identified various reasons for the distortions, including the canonization of Lenin rather than the cultivation of his critical capacity "to change his opinions in new historical circumstances" (2009: 5). The unknowability of the authentic Lenin—the legitimating principle of Soviet socialism—thus contributed to the implosion of the Soviet project (2009: 29).

What I would like to emphasize from this brief review of critique as a cultural and historical artifact in relation to the two modern projects that have shaped and continue to shape contemporary Latvian discourses and practices of tolerance is the way in which the constitutive elements of the practice of critique—such as objects, subjects, sources of authority, modes, and ends—can become articulated together (and thus constituted anew) in diverse ways in specific historical moments, therefore giving form to significantly different reflective practices, as well as modes of public reason.¹³⁷ Historicizing reflective practices that have to date occupied the place of modern critique par excellence clears space for considering the different articulations of practices of reflection and modes of public reason that emerge in relation to arguments about tolerance in Latvia.

Pedagogy, Critical Reflection, and Conduct

In October 2005, three months after the first attempt at a gay and lesbian Pride parade, which led to unexpected aggression directed at the participants, a staff member began the meeting of the Working Group of the National Program for the Promotion of Tolerance by saying that "nobody should have any doubt anymore about the fact that the society is intolerant." And yet, of course, many did. Residents of Latvia—Latvians and non-Latvians alike—continued to have doubts about whether the problem was indeed intolerance as a negative attitude towards homosexual people or whether the Pride parade had crossed the limits within which tolerance was possible. "I am tolerant," insisted many of the people I encountered in seminar rooms, interviews, and casual conversations during subsequent months of fieldwork, "unless I am provoked."

In a context where popular sentiment was not favorable for broad public reflection on intolerance, tolerance activists struggled to obtain public recognition of the problem of intolerance. In order to achieve such recognition, they thought, critical reflection was crucial.

¹³⁷ On the analytic of articulation, see Hall 2002 and Gramsci 1971.

Many meetings within and outside the framework of the Program were thus spent discussing various strategies for putting the problem of intolerance on the policy agenda of government institutions and non-governmental organizations and the ethical agenda of the population more generally. Thus, after the initial collective acknowledgement of the social fact of intolerance, the October 2005 meeting of the Working Group continued with a discussion on what is to be done. One NGO leader noted that “the fish rots from its head” and that therefore we should focus on the speech and conduct of Latvia’s politicians. The director of an education-oriented government agency suggested that some of the teachers she works with had identified examples of intolerance in classical Latvian literature and that these could be discussed in special seminars. “Indeed,” agreed Daniel, a civil servant. He had recently seen the well-known play by Rūdolfs Blaumanis “*Skroderdienas Silmačos*” written in 1902, which humorously depicts wedding and summer solstice (*Jāņi*) preparations in a typical Latvian farmstead. Daniel said that he simply “could not watch it, because there was anti-Semitism everywhere.” While Daniel found it difficult to enjoy or even watch the play, other viewers did not seem to mind or notice the stereotypical depictions of Jews as overly frugal traveling traders and seamstresses which during the play are teased, yet nevertheless loved and cared for by the farmhands and masters of the household. Daniel could not watch the play (though he presumably did), but what was to be done if others lacked such sensibilities?

Marika, a staff member of a policy research and advocacy institution shared her idea: since some of the members of the African Latvian Association were concerned about the hostile or overly attentive looks, hails, and gestures they encountered on a daily basis in the streets of Rīga, we could, she suggested, hire a camera man and a journalist or a social scientist to accompany a member of the African Latvian Association on their daily routine and to film and record the kind of reactions and gestures the person received on city streets. In her suggestion, the filming and broadcasting of acts of intolerance would amount to a useful pedagogical exercise through which the public could be successfully made to recognize their injurious conduct and thus the existence of the problem of intolerance. On the one hand, the suggestion was based on the tactic of rendering visible, namely on the assumption that what was needed was a mirror to be held up to the face of the public so that it could see for itself how its conduct affected others and subsequently begin to work on changing its conduct and dispositions. On the other hand, Marika exhibited a degree of doubt that the public possessed the necessary critical sensibilities and skills to properly evaluate the audio-visual material, thus she suggested that an informed commentary—by a social scientist or a journalist—may be necessary to guide the public’s interpretation of what it was seeing. In this case, the audio-visual material could not simply be followed by a silence of the kind that followed when Daniel recited the exemplary intolerant statement during our first interview. The space of silence would need to be filled with explicit guidance on how certain situations were to be read and reflected upon; that is, an explicit demonstration of the kind of critical reflection that should guide one’s experience of the reflective reproduction of the scene of intolerance.

In considering the potential effects of such an exercise, Working Group members discussed whether it would be ethical to expose some casual pedestrians as intolerant on national television without their knowledge. Someone suggested that they might ask for permission of the subjects of this exercise to televise them, as well as give them the possibility to comment on the situation and their conduct. It was at this point that the initial excitement about the idea subsided and the discussion moved onto to something else. It seemed that the members of the Working Group were suddenly overwhelmed by the multiple layers of commentary necessary for the exercise to reach its objective. While the idea was thereafter abandoned, I find the brief discussion telling insofar as the meeting participants began with an excitement about the idea which seemed to suggest that they had finally found

a way to render their superior critical insights visible to the rest of the population through a participatory and pedagogical reflective exercise. They did, however, quickly realize that a simple rendering visible could not be trusted, as well as that their attempt at exposure could be decoded and widely resented not only because people did not think the object of reflection—intolerance—was worth their time, but also because some might find the pedagogical tone of the exercise itself offensive.

On another occasion, in the summer of 2006, I helped Mozaika to carry out a project monitoring hate speech. The organization wanted to develop a long-term methodology for monitoring hate speech, but most immediately to compile an inventory of hateful speech uttered by politicians and to release some brief version of the results prior to the 2006 parliamentary elections in October. In a meeting held some weeks before the election, most everyone agreed that in the long-term there was a need for further thinking, research, and discussion on what constituted hate speech and what its relationship to law and ethics was, yet some board members shared a sense of urgency to publicize the most outrageous statements of politicians prior to the elections in hopes of influencing the outcome. The assumption, or rather perhaps the hope, was that the statements, once rendered audible, would be recognized as problematic and therefore influence the way people voted.

During the meeting, a question arose about how many statements there were that were likely to be recognized as problematic by the general public. Assessing the statements based on his good sense of how the so-called general public might react, one of the meeting participants concluded that there were not that many statements which were clearly beyond the pale of social acceptability.¹³⁸ Most of the statements fell into the category of unacceptable to gay and lesbian activists and their supporters, but one could not be sure if these same statements would be seen as problematic by the rest of the population. Nevertheless, one of Mozaika's board members was committed to the idea of releasing something before the election. She continued to insist that some statements should be publicized, because there was the possibility that some politicians could be discredited not necessarily on the basis of their views about homosexuality, but rather due to their use of excessive language. The board member conveyed an example of her relatives in the countryside whose views she often used as an indicator of public opinion. On a recent visit, she had told them about the kind of epithets and expressions one especially verbose politician on the theme of gay and lesbian rights had used in a recent parliamentary debate on amendments to the Labor Code (Saeima 2006).¹³⁹ The relatives had said: "Well, we cannot vote for him then, if he talks like this." In this particular case, it was the politician's excessive language that became an indicator of his worthiness rather than his views about gay and lesbian rights and politics.

While this was clearly a strategic move on the part of the Mozaika board member, it also indicated that her relatives practiced a mode of public reason whereby the object of reflection was the conduct of the politician rather than his argument in relation to gay and lesbian politics. The conclusion that the country relatives presumably made was that the politician's language was indicative of faults that were not limited to the context of gay and lesbian politics.¹⁴⁰ Such a focus on conduct occurs on a different register than the focus on an

¹³⁸ See Antonio Gramsci's distinction between "common sense" and "good sense" in "Selections from the Prison Notebooks" (1971:326).

¹³⁹ The issue debated was whether it was necessary to specifically mention sexual minorities in the anti-discrimination clause of the Labor Code or whether a general formulation was sufficient.

¹⁴⁰ See Alasdair MacIntyre's (1981) definition of virtue as disposition and conduct that does not only pertain to a particular situation, but cuts across contexts.

argument—the ideal object of reasoned reflection from the perspective of tolerance activists.¹⁴¹

And yet, while the board member suggested during that meeting that we might explore the possibilities offered by this alternative mode of public reason, neither she nor anybody else present thought of it as an equitable alternative to an engagement with arguments towards which all should aspire. Indeed, on other occasions gay and lesbian activists labored to prove that those who opposed or disfavored the public and political visibility of gays and lesbians (which the country relatives might also do regardless of the fact that they had deemed the verbose politician unworthy of their vote) were not able to articulate their positions through reasoned discourse, but were rather guided by irrational prejudice, that is, by homophobia. This often manifested itself in attempts to pin down the precise moment of provocation in relation to a widespread stance with regard to gay and lesbian politics: “I do not have a problem with them (or I am tolerant), until they provoke me.” Regardless of how hard the activists pushed for an explicit articulation of the moment of provocation, the threshold of tolerance remained elusive and thus, in their view, proof of the irrational and unreflective state from which it emanated.

When I returned to Rīga in 2007 to attend the now annual gay and lesbian Friendship Days, I came across precisely this kind of a situation. As part of preparations for the 2007 Friendship Days, gay and lesbian activists held a two-day seminar for 12 to 15 regional journalists. The seminar was meant to educate the journalists by giving them an opportunity to ask questions and to prepare them to cover the upcoming Friendship Days in an informed manner. The general conclusion of the activists who ran the seminar was that the attendees did not want to understand the situation better, as was proven by their continuous insistence that they and the rest of society were being provoked by these events. The activists recounted how three of the participants—all women—had insisted that they are tolerant persons, but only up to a point. Their tolerance ends, they claimed, in the face of a provocation. In response, the activists had proceeded to tease out the precise conditions of the provocation by inviting reflection on a particular incident that took place during the previous year’s events. Janīna pushed the women to clarify what exactly it was that could have provoked young men to collect and throw human excrement at people walking out of a church after a service held as part of the 2006 Friendships Days.¹⁴² Janīna said that she herself had walked out of the church dressed in regular clothes rather than in some skimpy costume—an image often conjured up in popular imaginaries of Pride parades around the world. Moreover, Maira added, the people had walked out of the church through the back door. Refusing, as it were, to play out the provocation to the example provided by activists, the women had responded by simply stating: “you know what we are talking about.” Their refusal to analyze the provocation in the example provided by the activists or to offer another example to illustrate

¹⁴¹ See Cowan (2003) for an interesting analysis of how the criteria of “violent language” was used to determine the eligibility of minority petitions to be reviewed by the League of Nations.

¹⁴² In 2006, as I recount in Chapter 5, the Pride Parade was banned by the City Council, but various other events took place as part of the Friendship Days: press conferences, seminars, film screenings, social gatherings, a church service, and a gala event in a hotel in lieu of the Parade. Though all events occurred in closed and private spaces, protestors had gathered outside the facilities and assaulted those who were entering and exiting the premises. After the church service, 10-15 young men (an assistant to a parliamentarian among them) waited for service participants to exit in order to hurl insults and throw bags of human feces and food items at them. Service participants had been alerted about their presence and thus exited the church through the back door. The protestors caught on and ran after them, raining bags of excrement upon the churchgoers. The incident was widely condemned across the political spectrum, though the police (in)action became a controversial topic in the days that followed.

what they meant by provocation allowed the activists to confirm that attempts to capture the precise instance of provocation through reasoned argument continue to be unsuccessful.

And yet it might be worth to carefully consider the tactics used in this exercise of critical reflection, their underlying assumptions, and their effects. As Janīna recounted the story, her tone indicated that she had asked the journalists rhetorical questions, well understanding that they were not among the people attacking the church-goers and that they too are likely to consider it unreasonable to suggest that people walking out of a church dressed in conservative clothing could somehow provoke the throwing of human feces at them. And, as I later reconsidered what Janīna and Maira had told me, I started to wonder whether they did perhaps “know” or at least have a sense of what the journalists were talking about, but were not able to engage with it on that register, since it was not conducive for a pedagogical exercise of critical reflection, which required that all arguments be rendered visible. Perhaps Janīna and Maira did know that they were going to have the upper hand in using the example they did; that the journalists could not possibly disagree with them when they rhetorically asked whether people peacefully leaving a church could provoke such violence. The journalists may have known that too. They too may have known that were they to engage in the conversation the way it was framed by the activists, they could not come out of it sounding reasonable. This was not a conversation meant to allow them to explain themselves, but rather one which was to expose their prejudice and irrationality. Perhaps the statement, “you know what we are talking about,” was also a commentary upon the framing of the conversation and a refusal to engage in a type of thought exercise characteristic of liberal reason (e.g. Landes 2008).

Irony and the Limits of Tolerance

Towards the end of 2006, I agreed to conduct a Latvian language focus group discussion on questions of tolerance for a policy think-tank that aimed to produce research-based policy recommendations for promoting tolerance.¹⁴³ I was given research questions, yet the discussions were to be open and generative of ideas and examples of “best practice.” We began with a round of introductions and a discussion of whether the people present thought of themselves as tolerant or not and what that meant. One of the participants noted: “I think of myself as generally tolerant, but then I read Bankovskis’ recent article and thought to myself: well, perhaps I am not so tolerant after all.” In the context where most invitations to rethink one’s self-ascribed virtue of tolerance are met with resentment or resistance, what the participant said was intriguing. Not only did she mark a shift in the way she thought about herself in relation to tolerance, she also identified a specific reflective moment which had prompted her to reconsider whether she was tolerant.

Following the discussion, I looked up the article she mentioned. It was published in “*Diena*,” one of the Latvian language dailies, as a commentary by Pauls Bankovskis (2006b)—a writer and frequent contributor to “*Diena*.” The article was entitled “*A tu neliecies*” (Don’t get into my face) and could be described as an ironic reflection on collective virtue. Given the importance of the article for the purpose of this discussion, I quote it at length:

¹⁴³ As a result of this research, the Soros Foundation published a lengthy report “Research-based Strategies for Tolerance Promotion.” (Osis and Ose 2006).

Don't get into my face!

What are you looking for? Why are you staring? You think you will read this crappy little article, leaf through this little newspaper and will become smarter? That you will be the cool intellectual and the cultured individual? That you will be able to think that you are better than others? I should beat you up, you damn' snob. No, I am not aggressive; in fact, I am utterly unfamiliar with aggressiveness. You simply should not provoke me. There is no need to ask for it yourself.

Like those girls in the summertime. Walking the streets nearly naked. You can see their boobs, their belly buttons, even some butt cracks, the pants are so low. But when someone fucks these prostitutes, they complain that they've been raped. But they asked for it themselves! That's probably what they wanted. They should not have been so provocative.

Well, at least it's pleasant to look at the girls. But all those mobs of pensioners, who walk around in the summer with shorts and short-sleeve shirts! They should be shot or at least deported. No, I have nothing against old people in general; let them walk around naked at home. But when they—spotty and varicose—wander around the city center, I cannot stand it. All I want to do is slap them across their face.

...

No, but I am generally calm and peace loving; it's just that it drives me crazy from time to time. For example, all those shops in Rīga. Everything is so expensive there; no normal person can afford anything! And then they wonder that people steal—they are provoked!

...

I am quite tolerant indeed. For example, I have no prejudice against people with different skin color. Only if all those blacks and coloreds did not come to live here. Let them live in their own land. But when I see someone like that on the streets of Rīga, I want to show them where their place is. Just don't misunderstand me, I am not a racist; it's just that they ask for it. The same with the Jews. I am not an anti-Semite, but I know that they are to blame for all their misfortunes. They have provoked it all. But I do not have any hatred towards the Jews—I even studied with one of them. The main thing is—don't get into my face! The same with the Russians. I know some of them, so it's not that I don't know what I am talking about. It's just that they should not be here in Latvia provoking me and talking about their rights.

I don't have any prejudice towards all those gays and lesbians. Let them do what they want in their own circles, but leave me alone. One thing I cannot stand, however, is when I see them on the street. Let's say, two pederasts are walking down the street, holding hands. I want to kick their ass!

Truth be told, I am very tolerant. I just get really mad if I am being provoked all the time. No need to stare at me. Didn't like the article? Go take a nap or eat something, or do something else. I have nothing personal against you, just don't... (Bankovskis 2006b)

The object of reflection in this short piece is the speaking subject and her virtue rather than a single act of intolerance. The author traces a particular disposition through various contexts and relationships, beginning with a direct address to the reader and subsequently covering contexts of gender and sexuality, generational differences, ethnicity, and race. What this performative and exaggerated reiteration calls into question is the very existence or possibility of the virtue of tolerance in conditions where most everything seems to be a provocation. What form does the virtue of tolerance take if it only comes into focus through a provocation, which is its negation?

Let's compare this briefly to the pedagogical exercise in reflection I described in the previous section where two activists recounted their attempt to tease out the precise conditions of provocation in a conversation with two journalists in the framework of a seminar organized by gay and lesbian activists. If the activists urged the application of reason to particular instances of alleged provocation, the author of the above article seems to invite a different kind of reflection on at least two accounts: with regard to the object of reflection (act of intolerance vs. the virtue of tolerance), and with regard to "the kind of authority through which a subject comes to recognize the truth about herself, and the relationship she establishes between herself and those who are deemed to hold the truth" (Rose in Mahmood 2005: 30). It is noteworthy that Bankovskis' article contains no explicit reference to authority—such as reason, the European Union, civilized Europe, God, or the state—through which the reflecting subject would be invited "to recognize the truth about herself." Importantly, the article does not require that the reflecting subject *establish* a relationship between "herself and those who are deemed to hold the truth." Rather, the subject herself already holds the truth. Yet there is a discrepancy between what she thinks the truth to be and what her conduct indicates. This discrepancy, however, is not brought into focus through the kind of distancing that requires the reflecting subject to relocate to some more neutral realm, but rather through an ironic exaggeration of the subject's conduct. Instead of forging an ethical bond as in the case of the circulation of repugnant statements described earlier, the article conjures up a community of understanding—a public that recognizes itself in both the conduct described and in the reflecting subject. In other words, one could recognize oneself as both the subject and object of reflection, as the participant of the focus group did.

It might be possible to read this article through the prism of the well-known argument by Teun van Dijk, which posits the discursive form of "I am not a racist, but..." as a strategy for denying racism (2002). However, such a reading would be reductive, because van Dijk's interrogation of discursive strategies does not take into account the historical and cultural contexts within which they occur, but rather treats them as universally identifiable markers of masked racism. Bankovskis' ironic depiction of the constantly irritated subject who thinks of herself as a victim of provocation does not ask whether there is a problem of intolerance in Latvia. And yet, by exaggerating the defensive aggressiveness with which the protagonist of his short essay relates to the world around her, he managed, at least in one instance, to incite reflection about the virtue of tolerance regardless of whether it was manifest in relation to someone with different skin color or in relation to one's mother in law whose insistent requests for something or other could be perceived as provocations that merit an outburst of anger.

In his work on the legacy of the Romantic tradition, Charles Larmore suggests that Romantics consider that "standing back entirely from our way of life is to basically find ourselves without any guidance, yet they do not contest the necessity or possibility to stand back. They are contesting the easy and absolute notion of standing back – they do not want to let the Enlightenment object off the hook of its own history" (Larmore 1991: 45). Reason, then, as conceived through a Romantic lens, does not mean that we detach ourselves entirely, but rather that we think about how we are to go on with our way of life (Larmore 1991: 58). While the liberal subject claims autonomy and a capacity to choose as instruments of self-reflection (that is, the ability to distance oneself through the application of reason), the Romantic subject relies on the tool of irony which entails a two-mindedness that posits neither radical distancing nor radical identification with a tradition: "if two-mindedness of irony makes it an expression of individuality, it also keeps this sense of self from swelling into a posture of sovereign, unlimited power. Ironic subjectivity, whatever its intimations of the infinite, is essentially a finite subjectivity" (Larmore 1991: 79). I find Larmore's emphasis on reflection without transcending good to think with. Moreover, locating reflection

in a particular tradition seems especially important to be able to engage with concrete practices of reflection and transformation (see also Hirschkind 2006). From this perspective, Bankovskis' article does not gesture towards a new future, some elevated sense of revolutionary possibility, a radical overcoming, or a utopian aesthetic, but rather an engagement with the self whereby the subject of reflection remains accountable to the historical and cultural context in which she is embedded. It does not call for a radical distancing, but rather asks us to consider whether we actually are what we say we are, whether we possess the virtues we claim we possess.

The article thus succeeds in creating the effect that reflection emerges from *within* a community of understanding (or a historical tradition), that one could be both the subject and object of reflection. Through irony, Bankovskis invited reflection that did not require that one accepts external sources of authority or radically re-orient's relationship to self and tradition, but rather reflects from within it. It is possible also that this kind of reflection can push tradition onto new terrain. Talal Asad has argued that

a tradition is in part concerned with the way limits are constructed in response to problems encountered and conceptualized. There is always a tension between this construction of limits and the forces that push the tradition onto new terrain, where part or all of the tradition ceases to make sense and so needs a new beginning. And looked another way: with each new beginning, there is the possibility of a new (or revived) tradition, a new story about the past and future, new virtues to be developed, new projects to be addressed." (in Scott 2006a, 289)

Indeed, in conditions where the virtue of tolerance can only come into focus through its limits, which, as the article indicates, are everywhere, perhaps it is not tolerance that one should be talking about. In fact, it could well be the case that Bankovskis renders not only tradition, but also the liberal discourses of tolerance suspect, thus pushing for an altogether different language for talking about what has to date been conceived as a problem of intolerance.

Articulating Tradition

In the following section, I would like to consider some attempts to draw on resources that can be thought of as "the authoritative point of departure" (MacIntyre 1981) of the Latvian tradition, such as folk wisdom, to guide ethical conduct and critical reflection in the present. To begin with, this requires some thinking about the different relationships that a tradition may have with its "authoritative points of departure." As scholars engaging with MacIntyre's work have suggested, the concept of tradition entails a dynamic relationship with the past, whereby the past is a resource for the present and the future rather than a burden to be shed (Asad in Scott 2006a, Mahmood 2005, Pandian 2008, Scott 2000). Born into particular socio-cultural milieus, we find ourselves in the midst of ongoing arguments. We form ourselves as subjects in relation to these arguments, which constitute the tradition, but which do not exhaust us—they give us direction, but they do not determine us (MacIntyre 1981). We can also treat some parts of our past as a canon to which we refer in our arguments and which we protect from undesirable influences, such as globalization (MacIntyre 1981, Pandian 2008, Asad 1986, Mahmood 2005). These are all constitutive elements of a tradition, though in different traditions they can be articulated differently. Traditions, therefore, are always *articulated traditions*.¹⁴⁴ What counts as a canon in one—an authoritative text, for

¹⁴⁴ I derive the concept of articulation from Stuart Hall for whom it connotes a a non-necessary, yet

example—may not exist in the same form in another.¹⁴⁵ I'd like to argue here that within the Latvian tradition, the authoritative point of departure is not a canonical text or a set of texts, but rather an articulation between people (*Volk*), language, and folk wisdom which, in its idealized state, is lived and thus operative in everyday practice.¹⁴⁶ To be sure, there have been attempts to canonize some or all elements of the “authoritative point of departure” at various points in history: through the collection of folk songs in the 18th and 19th centuries and their subsequent storage into the famous *Dainu skapis* (song cupboard); through conscription of the *Volk* into the nation and its constitution through nationalist movements in the 19th and throughout the 20th century; and through strict language protection laws and language policing practices in the late 20th and early 21st century (see Chapter 3).¹⁴⁷ So much so that today it has become nearly impossible to separate the constitutive elements of such articulations. It is important to recognize, however, that these are historically contingent articulations rather than necessary stages in the life of the Latvian tradition. Most importantly, an exclusive focus on the moments of canonization and their effects—for example, on folk songs as a museum item or on exclusive conceptions of the nation—overshadows the ways in which tradition—as a historically and culturally specific set of arguments about collective life—remains dynamic and operative in forming subjects, guiding and explaining conduct, as well as making sense of the world.

As I have attempted to show in other chapters, these ways are diverse and entail both possibilities and limitations. As talked about in Chapter 4, for example, some of the teachers I spoke with during one of the many tolerance seminars invoked the “single farmstead mentality” (*viensētnieka mentalitāte*) of Latvians to explain their overwhelmingly negative responses to questions posed by a standardized EU questionnaire on whether one would like to live next door to variously defined others (thus disregarding the fact that the responses of

also nonarbitrary joining together of multiple trajectories that produce specific effects (Hall 2002).

¹⁴⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre has argued that “to flourish, a tradition must take as its “authoritative point of departure” a set of canonical texts that “remain as essential points of reference for enquiry and activity, for argument, debate, and conflict within that tradition” (MacIntyre in Pandian 2008: 471).

¹⁴⁶ See the Introduction for a more elaborate discussion on this in relation to Herderian influences.

¹⁴⁷ As the Latvian Institute describes, a *daina* or a *tautasdziesma* (a folk song) is “classically defined as a song in quatrain form that is specifically Latvian in its structure, sentiments and worldview. Dating back well over a thousand years, more than 1.2 million texts and 30,000 melodies have been identified ... Documentation of the tradition remained in the hands of cultured non-Latvians up until the middle of the 19th century. Among these individuals was the German philosopher J.G.Herder who developed an interest in folk poetry during his Rīga period (1765-1769) and also aroused an interest among the local Baltic German intelligentsia. ... As higher education became more widespread in the 1850s and 1860s the Latvians themselves revealed more interest in their traditional culture. Collecting and publishing folk songs became an essential activity during the period of national awakening. In 1868 Jānis Sproģis was the first Latvian to publish a collection of folk songs. However, in the 1870s these folk-song collections had reached such proportions that it was necessary to compile them in a publication of several volumes. This job was entrusted to Krišjānis Barons (1835-1923), who dedicated the rest of his life to working with folk songs. Up to this day the most complete anthology of Latvian folk songs is considered ‘*Latvju dainas*’ (Latvian Folk Songs), which was compiled by Krišjānis Barons and published between 1895 and 1915 in six volumes and eight books, and contains 217,996 folk-song texts” (Latvijas Institūts 2008). The former president of the Republic of Latvia, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, herself a scholar of the Latvian folk tradition, has said that: “To the Latvian the *dainas* are more than a literary tradition. They are the very embodiment of his cultural heritage, left by forefathers whom history had denied other, more tangible forms of expression. These songs thus form the very core of the Latvian identity and singing becomes one of the identifying qualities of a Latvian” (Latvijas Institūts 2008).

non-Latvian respondents were similar). During a methodological seminar, one teacher explained this in a pedagogical mode:

If we talk about neighbors, people we do not want to live next to, perhaps this kind of a factor can also influence it. It was 1990 or 1991 when we had started to conduct these methodology courses. One entailed a discussion about interviews with Latvians who had lived in communal apartments and had gotten new ones and interviews with Russians who had lived in communal apartments and had gotten new ones. And the Latvians all, all wanted their own apartment, regardless of where. We have many families who actually lived together quite happily in communal apartments ... There were Latvians who lived with Russians and who got along great, and still get together, and all was ideal. But don't we forget one condition—the Latvian is used to live in [*her tone escalates here as if in a question to which the audience should provide an answer...someone else says "viensētā"]... "viensētā" [she concludes the sentence with an answer]. And those kilometers that separate the homes, windows do not face each other, nobody is looking inside, nobody smells the cabbage, nobody looks inside the window. I think this condition could have influenced the answers, this mentality still functions in some way.*

During my fieldwork, I also came across several explicit attempts to make the “authoritative points of departure” of the tradition relevant for guiding conduct, mounting critique, and generating possibilities for reflection on gender equality, anti-gay and lesbian politics, and virtue more generally. For example, it was not uncommon to hear people recite a couple of lines of a well-known folk song: “*Ne sunīša kājām spert, ne guntiņas pagalītes*” (Neither to kick the dog nor the fire-giving wood) to suggest that Latvians historically have cultivated tolerance and kindness. It was less common to hear folk songs re-worked to formulate positions with regard to contemporary politics, though I did encounter these few written by one of the two gay men whose summer solstice celebration I attended in 2006:¹⁴⁸

Puķu dobēs raibi auga
Visvisādi krāšņi ziedi.
Auga, plauka, sadzīvoja,
Mūsu sētu dažādoja!

In flower beds diverse they grew
Various magnificent flowers.
They grew, they bloomed, and they lived together
They made our farmstead diverse!

Nenāc priester, politiķi –
Aizspriedumus nesludini.
Lai palika aizspriedumi
Mūsu sētas ārpusē!

Don't come priest, don't come politician—
Do not preach prejudice.
Leave your prejudice
Outside of our homestead!

Pirmā partij' stāvās briesmās –
Mūsu mājās netiklība!
Sadzīvoja mājās mūsu
Neparasta ģimenīte.

The First Party is all concerned—
There is no virtue in our homestead!
There lived in our house
An unusual family.

¹⁴⁸ The Jāņi, or summer solstice, celebration is a widely celebrated event. It is a fertility rite which is also an occasion to spend a night awake by the bonfire singing, talking, and drinking beer. Traditional Jāņi celebrations entail various rituals, including walking from one end of the property to another singing songs about the buildings, the animals, and the landmarks to secure good harvest, prosperity, and fertility all around for the coming year. Walking is accompanied by songs about the well-being and flourishing of the object, animal, or person in question. It is during this ritual that we sang the songs I quote here.

Iztur, iztur mūsmājiņa,
Visvisādus naidiniekus –
Baznīc' ķērcā, fašist' brēca;
Nevar saimi izpostīt!

Withold, withold, our house,
All sorts of enemies—
The church screamed, the fascists yelled;
Cannot destroy our household!

These re-worked folk songs sung during the celebration I attended worked somewhat similarly to the circulation of repugnant statements described earlier insofar as they constituted an ethical bond between those who sang them, only now in the register of folk tradition. In that sense, they articulated a critique of anti-gay and lesbian sentiment through the Latvian tradition and constituted a particularly ethically inflected community of Latvians. Yet, some human rights activists find a public turn to the canon (or “cultural codes” as they are often referred to) potentially confusing, perhaps even reactionary and dangerous. In an conversation on contemporary Latvia published in the online portal *Dialogi.lv* (Ose 2006), a social anthropologist argued that “traditional cultural codes” offer beautiful possibilities for cultivating relationships with, for example, death—“*balta puķe nokrīt kapa dibenā*” (a white flower falls to the bottom of the grave), she quoted from a folk song, or for talking to children about gender equality. A participant in the conversation responded with a line from another folk song, “*Pati māku sienu pļaut, pati 'skapti asināt*” (I know myself how to trim the grass, know myself how to sharpen the trimmer), thus perhaps ironizing about the kind of equality manifest in heavy labor loads for women.¹⁴⁹ For a moment, the conversation unfolded through the lines of folk songs. It quickly turned, however, to the question of how to navigate the multiplicity of traditions through which Latvians might be constituted, as well as to the question of who should know and utilize particular cultural codes in the context of the contemporary nation-state. Another participant of the discussion said she understands how the living content of traditional culture may be useful if a person is looking for ways to make sense of the world around them—death, sexual relations, and so forth. However, she continued, “I have certain dialectical difficulties understanding how it might be applied in a situation when we are also products of the universal Western culture ... where alienation from death exists since the 15th century. ... Facts of life and death that appear in traditional culture have become strange. Will we not make schizophrenics out of ourselves? Living in parallel traditions?” In response, the social anthropologist invited her to “look at the *kapu svētki* (cemetery festivals)” where “people go the cemetery and then they go to a dance. It is all there and we do it, but we do not see it and do not appreciate it.” Yet another participant interjected and asked whether all those who live in Latvia should know these codes? The anthropologist, now articulating cultural codes with nation-building, responded: “yes, people who live here should know these codes if we want to form a united group of people.” Inevitably, a voice resounded “but what if I do not want to learn this code?”

The multiplicity of moral and cultural injunctions that characterize the present, as well as the contemporary articulation of tradition via the nation-state form, presented challenges to the participants of the conversation. Whereas some thought that the multiplicity of traditions could be handled by ensuring the proper functioning of the mechanism of choice, the articulation of Latvian tradition with the nation-state was thought to push the tradition onto the dangerous terrain of nationalism, which foreclosed the possibility of critical distance. Thus, when I asked in an interview with a scholar of religion who was a participant of the tolerance promotion network whether he thinks there are any resources internal to the Latvian tradition for reflection on living with difference in a plural world, he responded that “our internal resources of reflection are weak. The individual is subordinated to the group and thus

¹⁴⁹ This is how the Soviet conception of equality was understood and mocked: women were equal at the workplace on top of being the prime caretakers of the household.

resources for reflection are to be artificially constructed. We do not have such a tradition; praise to the nation has been more important. We have to begin at zero level.”

The examples I have described above are not incommensurable. That is, they are not located in such different discursive regimes so as to be unintelligible to each other. Or so it would seem. Some of the same people were involved in more than one of the situations described, but they did not necessarily relate to them in the same way. While tolerance activists identified with the attempts to subject acts of intolerance or moments of provocation to the scrutiny of (liberal) reason, their relationship to the kind of reflection on conduct undertaken by the country relatives of the *Mozaika* board member was not one of identification. They were able to read the latter as a particular kind of cause-and-effect relationship that might be useful for their purposes, but whose logic they did not inhabit. The country relative’s object of reflection—the public conduct of the politician—was not their own. As one of the activists noted, “in order to ride a horse, you need to learn how a horse thinks.” Similarly, while tolerance activists would have found Bankovskis’ article palatable, even commendable, it is not a genre they identified with. Neither is the author’s location in relation to the subject at hand one that tolerance activists would think of occupying. They felt most comfortable with the language of human rights, liberalism, democracy, and, on occasion, that of the nation.

Similarly, Bankovskis—the author of the ironic essay—does not always look favorably on the activities of tolerance activists. He has compared the debates about intolerant language (more specifically, about the use of words such as *žīds* (the Yid)) to Soviet censorship practices (Bankovskis 2006a, see also Chapter 3). It is likely therefore that his mode of public reason is not the same as that of tolerance activists. He might not feel at home during a discussion on how to educate the public by televising its acts of intolerance accompanied by expert commentary. And yet there are moments when these different modes of public reason and different reflective practices brush against each other, contemplate the same situation, enter into each other’s orbit, or even bear upon one another.

To be sure, even if not always finding their place in a particular narrative, people draw on a multiplicity of traditions and critical practices and re-articulate their elements in novel ways to navigate an often uncertain and plural ethical terrain. It is hardly possible to live unselfconsciously in conditions when most people are aware of there being different viewpoints with regard to conceptions of the good life and that theirs might be subject to questioning from within or without the tradition. Paul Rabinow (2008) has therefore argued that attention to coherence and integrity of any one ethical or moral tradition is misguided, though he does acknowledge that there are attempts to solidify particular moral or ethical trajectories. My work, however, shows that different ways of articulating the constitutive elements of critique become consequential for each other in particular historical moments not only because someone—perhaps a populist politician—is trying to instill coherence where there is none, but rather because these articulations make a difference for the way people imagine and go about their collective life. On occasion, the constitutive elements of critique can become articulated together in such a way that people cannot locate themselves in these articulations, they find them unintelligible or oppressive, and thus find themselves opposed to them.

I have thus outlined some examples of the way in which liberal sensibilities guide the conduct of tolerance activists, including their understandings of proper reflective practices and modes of public reason. I have also suggested that other reflective practices and modes of public reason are present in the public and political domain in Latvia, even if I have only managed to conjure up some glimpses of them. Neither pure nor entirely outside the modern ethos of critique or liberal politics, they nevertheless provide the possibility for people to reflect without embracing the kind of unsettlement offered by the liberal politics of tolerance

and the associated feeling that their life to date has been a mistake and that they have to begin at “zero level.”

Modern Deficiencies and Their Limits

By arguing that Latvians lack the ability to critically reflect upon themselves, tolerance activists suggest that Latvians are not fully modern and liberal subjects. Such deficiency is often attributed to the historical legacy of Soviet socialism with its own distinctive—that is limited—understandings and practices of critique, as well as to the historically formed preference of Latvians for collective good rather than individual autonomy.

If, however, we expand our understanding of reflection and reason beyond their liberal incarnations, it becomes possible to rework the question of modern deficiencies into one about their limits: instead of asking whether Latvians—that is, those who are engaged in arguments constitutive of the Latvian tradition—can or cannot critically engage with their tradition on the subject of living with difference, it becomes possible to ask how the very question itself is historically constituted. That is, it becomes possible to suggest that the claim that Latvians are not sufficient modern and liberal subjects is underwritten by historically specific modes of public reason and informed by particular reflective practices. Therefore it also becomes possible to ask how it is that particular modes of public reason and particular reflective practices have traction in the contemporary historical moment, while others generate puzzlement, resentment, and even hostility?

Within the circles of tolerance activists, a negative reaction towards demands for public reflection on collective intolerance usually was explained by invoking one of the following registers: (1) Latvians as a people have a historically malformed self-confidence that hinders various modern state-based projects from economic growth to national self-determination. Too much questioning of the self was not thought to be conducive to rebuilding or constituting the self-confidence required for the modern life of the historical tradition; (2) Latvians thought that public reflection on the problem of intolerance was thought to project a negative image of Latvia to the outside world and thus should be curtailed; and (3) Latvians thought that the problem of intolerance was either not among the priority problems of the society as a whole or it did not need to be addressed in order to achieve the flourishing of collective life.

The focus on both internal and external factors—that is, on the image projected to the outside world and on the internal condition of a lack of self-confidence—in assessing whether critique (as a particular cultural and historical formation) is a virtuous practice from the perspective of the Latvian tradition suggests that, like nations or communities, traditions are not self-contained entities, but rather relational formations. In other words, the goods internal to the tradition and the arguments about them are produced in conversation with or through a consideration of other historical traditions and political formations. From this perspective, a reluctance to publicly discuss the problem of intolerance is not necessarily or not only a feature of the tradition itself, but also a commentary on the historical conditions and power relations within which the tradition finds itself. Similar to the minority problem, which for historical reasons has become a defining feature of the renewed Latvian state in the eyes of the international community, the problem of intolerance has the potential to become another defining feature of both the Latvian state and the Latvian historical community in the international arena.¹⁵⁰ While tolerance activists and the European Union institutions that back them suggest that public reflection on the problem of intolerance and a strong political

¹⁵⁰ See Chapter 1 on the condition of being average, as, well as Chapter 2 on minority politics.

commitment to the promotion of tolerance would send a signal to the international community that the Latvian state is a sufficiently mature liberal democracy and that Latvians as a people are sufficiently mature liberal democratic subjects, many politicians and many Latvians do not seem to agree. Their conduct exhibits a deep-seated suspicion that broad-based public acknowledgment of the problem of intolerance has the potential to stain the historical community of Latvians to the extent that even genuine political commitment to the promotion of tolerance would not be able to cleanse it.

In her astute engagement with the Euro-American practices and discourses of tolerance, Wendy Brown argues that the hegemony of discourses of liberal tolerance in the international arena has produced an ideological discourse within which “‘we’ have culture while culture has ‘them,’ or we have culture while they are a culture” (2006: 151). To elaborate briefly, Wendy Brown argues that:

The governmentality of tolerance as it circulates through civilizational discourse has, as part of its work, the containment of the (organicist, non-Western, nonliberal) Other. As pointed out earlier, within contemporary civilizational discourse, the liberal individual is uniquely identified with the capacity for tolerance and tolerance itself is identified with civilization. Nonliberal societies and practices, especially those designated as fundamentalist, are depicted not only as relentlessly and inherently intolerant but as potentially intolerable for their putative role by culture or religion and their concomitant devaluation of the autonomous individual—in short, their thwarting of individual autonomy with religious or cultural commandments. Out of this equation, liberalism emerges as the only political rationality that can produce the individual, societal, and governmental practice of tolerance, and, at the same time, liberal societies become the broker of what’s tolerable and what’s intolerable. Liberalism’s promotion of tolerance is equated with the valorization of individual autonomy; the intolerance associated with fundamentalism is equated with the valorization of culture and religion at the expense of the individual, an expense that makes such orders intolerable from a liberal vantage point (2006: 166).

In the civilizational discourse of tolerance, collective good is often understood to be a problem—that is, the Other is mired in culture or in collective good conceived as a set of problematic injunctions. Though largely aimed as a commentary on the West’s view of the Muslim world, Brown’s argument could be brought to bear upon the relationship between the problem of intolerance and Latvian tradition. Whereas the West may have a problem of intolerance, it is thought of as capable of dealing with it because it is endowed with the capacity to overcome its limits through secular critique (Asad 2008a). Not unlike the European Muslims who, viewed from the liberal vantage point, seek to impose limits on free speech by accusing Danish newspapers of blasphemy (Asad 2008a), Latvians seem to foolishly emphasize the salience of limits (as in the often cited example of intolerance in the statement: “I am tolerant, but up to a certain point”) at the expense of critique.¹⁵¹ Moreover, it

¹⁵¹ It is noteworthy that during the Danish cartoon affair the language of liberalism was used by those who vehemently opposed it on other occasions in both Denmark and Latvia. The value of freedom of speech and critique was asserted by those who in other contexts would suggest that certain issues—such as the problem of intolerance—are not proper objects of public reflection. This is to say that there can be no discussion of a stable set of limits, but rather that one must engage with an ever shifting and contextual terrain of limits. Moreover, people do not adhere to fixed traditions—liberal or otherwise—but continuously articulate traditions as part of ongoing arguments. Of course, it also mattered here that the limits of free speech and critique were asserted by a group that was not thought to belong organically in Christian Europe (i.e. Muslims), whereas in the case of Latvians, the limits of

is not at all certain that were Latvians to embrace liberal-secular critique, they could finally become truly European. In other words, for those who have voiced this as a concern, it is not certain that by publicly and politically acknowledging the problem of intolerance Latvians will emerge as proper liberal democratic subjects dealing with problems in a mature way, or whether such acknowledgment would only confirm that which the world already knows, that is, that Latvia is, for example, “the land that hates gays.”¹⁵²

To put another way, the reluctance to embrace the invitation to public reflection on the problem of intolerance—whatever else it may be—can also be thought of as a historically formed suspicion that international politics does not recognize nuance and complexity, but that it rather wants to place peoples and places in clearly delineated political categories. For example, in the fraught mess that was World War II in the border regions between Germany and the Soviet Union, including Latvia, people struggled to navigate between the categories of collaborators, liberators, innocents, and victims.¹⁵³ The historical contingencies of individual and collective war trajectories and the irresolvable tension between inflicting and experiencing suffering that the Canadian Latvian historian Modris Eksteins (2000) describes in his historical-autobiographical treatment of Eastern Europe and World War II are difficult to illuminate in contemporary political language. Instead, the tendency is to attempt to stabilize ambiguities and to resolve tensions. Thus, for example, in the face of the not uncommon discourses of Latvian fascism emanating from Russia and a segment of the Russian-speaking population in Latvia, Latvians tend to assert victimhood (and simultaneously also civilizational superiority as described in Chapter 1). This has become one of the structuring factors of contemporary arguments about tolerance whereby the limits of questioning must be carefully policed: one must remain a victim lest one becomes a perpetrator.

Thus the sense of historical injury under Soviet rule, as well as the contemporary moral economy within which it emerges, remains a structuring factor for arguments about tolerance. This is due not only to tactical reasons generated by international politics, but also, as I have attempted to show throughout the dissertation, because a sense of injury is deeply constitutive of Latvians’ sense of self. It is often the case that when Latvians are invited to reflect on how they might inflict injury upon others through practices deemed racist, homophobic, or more generally intolerant, they read it as misrecognition of their own historical injury.¹⁵⁴ Most importantly, such retreat to one’s own sense of injury in the face of the demand to reflect upon another’s does not necessarily derive from deep-seated and uncritical attachments to the past and to the nation, but rather from an ethical and political rejection of the specific form that reflection on cohabitation with difference takes in the European present.

tolerance are asserted by “the state people” (Arendt 1979). In yet another instance of fluid and ambiguous identifications, through debates about the Danish cartoon scandal, the previously illiberal and limit-imposing Latvians became carriers of the European tradition of Christianity and therefore of the liberal values of critique and free speech.

¹⁵² Daniel, a civil servant at the Ministry of Integration, told me that this was the response he received on one of his foreign trips after his conversation partner found out that he was from Latvia.

¹⁵³ See Chapter 1.

¹⁵⁴ See Rothberg 2009 for a resonant discussion in relation to the memory of Holocaust.

Epilogue: Time of the Now

Whether with regard to the minority question, injurious language, the racializing gaze, or gay and lesbian politics, arguments about tolerance in Latvia are entangled with Latvians' sense of historical injury that emerges at the intersection of the Soviet past and the European present. As a structure of feeling (Williams 1997) that animates embodied sensibilities, everyday practices, and common-sense understandings and discourses, this sense of historical injury demands a particular politicization of the present. In the current historical moment, the present variously appears as either a continuation of past injuries—as in the form of Russian-speaking residents—or as potential reinstatement of conditions of injury—as in the form of various European Union directives and injunctions coming forth from international monitoring bodies. In such conditions, the discourses and practices of tolerance also appear as either a civilizational injunction or as a direct transposition of European public and political life to Latvia, one which demands that Latvians reflect upon the kind of problems that Europeans reflect upon and that they come to inhabit particular understandings of ethnic, racial, or sexual identities and associated forms of public and political life. Such a transposition is often seen to include the problem of intolerance itself, not just its solution. In other words, what's contested is the very fact that the problem of intolerance—as articulated by tolerance activists—exists at all, or that it exists in such proportions that require broad-based public reflection.

In turn, it is precisely these discourses and practices of tolerance that also call into question the politicization of the present that springs forth from Latvians' sense of historical injury. In other words, tolerance activists posit the politicization of the present in the name of an injurious past as part of the problem of intolerance—that is, as something that prevents Latvians from looking at the world more openly and from critically reflecting upon collective life, including the problem of intolerance. Many in Latvia, however, consider that the discourses and practices of tolerance misrecognize the demands that the injurious past, as well as the power relations that structure the process of European integration, place upon the present. Latvians' relationship with the past in the European present thus emerges as an object of recognition and misrecognition in arguments about tolerance. The specificity of this relationship between the past and the present—the nature of the constellation which the current era has formed with an earlier one, or the “time of the now,” as Walter Benjamin would call it—has emerged as an important question throughout my dissertation. In the concluding remarks, therefore, I will outline some ways of thinking about the life of the past in Latvia and in Europe more generally; however, the aim here is to open further research questions rather than to provide definitive conclusions.

The Injunction to Secularize the Past

The framework of history and memory has been central to making sense of moderns' relationship with the past. Contrasted to History as the official recording of past events, memory often works as an all encompassing term that designates various practices of remembering and forgetting that work against the grain of History. However, Pierra Nora (1989) has argued that rather than thinking of history and memory as juxtaposed to each other, we need to be attentive to the ways in which the emergence of History as a matter of a critical self-knowledge of society has also brought into existence particular forms of memory he calls *lieux de memoire*, or sites of memory. Nora posits a distinction between *sites of memory* and *milieus of memory*, the latter understood as “real environments of memory,” whereby memory is not a matter of remembering, but of living through an unmediated

repetition of traditional practices and narratives. The “sites of memory,” in turn, take us to archives, museums, libraries, and commemorative sites. In the historicized present, remembering takes the form of labor aimed at inscribing the past into fixed sites that mediate between past and present. According to Nora, with the “appearance of trace, of mediation, of distance, we are not in the realm of true memory, but history” (1989: 8). It is as if the emergence of history transforms lived memory from an all encompassing and everyday experiential practice to a set of rites of commemoration. History does not therefore erase memory, but rather reconfigures memory as a particular set of practices of remembering and forgetting. As such, Nora’s argument is somewhat resonant with recent anthropological engagements with the secular and the religious whereby

the religious and the secular are not so much immutable essences or opposed ideologies as they are concepts that gain a particular salience with the emergence of the modern state and attendant politics—concepts that are furthermore interdependent and necessarily linked in their mutual transformation and historical emergence. Viewed from this perspective, as a secular rationality has come to define law, state-craft, knowledge production and economic relations in the modern world, it has simultaneously transformed the conceptions, ideals, practices, and institutions of religious life. Secularism here is understood not simply as the doctrinal separation of the church and the state but the rearticulation of religion in a manner that is commensurate with modern sensibilities and modes of governance. To rethink the religious is also to rethink the secular and its truth-claims, its promises of internal and external goods. (Mahmood 2009: 836-837, see also Asad 2003)

The analogy with Saba Mahmood’s argument about secular reason holds insofar as the emergence of historical reason does not destroy memory, but rather constitutes a very specific understanding of memory as a matter of public commemoration and private remembering. Nora explicitly uses this analogy; however, despite his own distinction between “sites of memory” and “milieus of memory,” he seems to think of the historicization and thus the secularization of the world as a progressive annihilation of a more holistic relationship with memory. Sites of memory, therefore, appear as temporary incarnations of memory on the road to its total consumption by history.¹⁵⁵ He writes:

At the horizon of historical societies, at the limits of a completely historicized world, there would occur a permanent secularization. History’s goal and ambition is not to exalt, but to annihilate what has in reality taken place. A generalized critical history would no doubt preserve some museums, some medallions and monuments—that is the materials necessary for its work, but it would empty them of what, to us, would make them *lieux de memoire*. In the end, a society living wholly under the sign of history could not, any more than could a traditional society, conceive such sites for anchoring its memory. ... The moment of *lieux de memoire* occurs at the same time that an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears, surviving only as a reconstituted object beneath the gaze of critical history. (1989: 12)

¹⁵⁵ It should be noted that in an essay written in 2002, Nora has expressed concern that memory as commemoration actually threatens to overtake history, insofar as the “upsurge of memory” within minority groups set into motion during the last two decades makes excessive demands upon the present. I engage with this argument in the Introduction.

The way that Latvians inhabit the past in the present is not exhausted by the modern relationship between memory and history described by Nora. Neither does it correspond to the somewhat romantic “milieu of memory” conjured up by Nora. To be sure, the past in Latvia does figure in the writing of history and in commemorative practices. The following questions continuously animate the practice of historical writing in Latvia, as well as the public and political life of history for Latvians: what exactly did happen during World War II? Did Latvia end up as part of the Soviet Union as a result of unlawful occupation, liberation, consentful annexation, or joyful accession? Moreover, specific injurious or glorious events, such as the deportations of the 1940s and 1950s or the barricades of 1991, are commemorated and recorded in sites of memory and in the form of oral history.¹⁵⁶ And yet, neither one of these analytical relationships between the past and the present are by themselves helpful in making sense of how the injurious past emerges as a central element in contemporary public and political life in Latvia, including in the context of arguments about tolerance. This constellation dwells in a different temporality than a progressive recording of past events or in cyclical practices of commemoration. It dwells in Walter Benjamin’s now-time.

In a much cited paragraph, Walter Benjamin writes that “to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was.” It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (1968: 255). The danger that Benjamin is speaking of is the danger that the ruling classes, that is, the victorious classes, will overtake the past and erase the history of the vanquished. In that moment of danger, the past flashes up and, as Stéphane Mosès has put it, does not demand to be preserved in memory, but rather demands a politicization of the present (2009: 109). In Latvia, depending on how one positions oneself or how one is positioned, different collectivities occupy the subject positions of the vanquished and the victorious. On the one hand, the continued presence of the Soviet past in the form of a population divided along a distinction between national groups and a Soviet people articulates with the demands of the European present to craft public and political life in accordance with universal principles rather than particular histories. This articulation of the Soviet past and the European present produces a moment of danger that conjures up the past of the historical community of Latvians as a past of suffering. On the other hand, the Soviet past articulates with the Latvian present, which demands that public and political life be national. The articulation of the Soviet past with the Latvian present, in turn, produces a moment of danger that conjures up the historical community of Latvians as victors who are attempting to erase the history of others, such as Russian-speakers or other new or old “minorities.”

The OSCE resolution, which I described in Chapter 1, can be seen as an awkward compromise that attempts to strike a balance between demands of the past to politicize the present and attempts to contain such demands in the form of commemorative measures. However, as the heated reactions in Russia suggested, the line between commemorating and politicizing the past is not clear. On the one hand, the resolution was a culmination of Baltic efforts to get Europe to recognize its status as victims in relation to the Soviet past. To that end, the resolution entailed elements of commemoration insofar as it established August 23rd

¹⁵⁶ For example, the 1991 barricades are commemorated in multiple photo albums, as well as within the Museum of the Barricades, which not only recounts the events of the day, but also tries to capture the sociality of the barricades by exhibiting a large model of the Old City in which bonfires burn and people sit huddled together around the bonfires (See Chapter 5). In fact, one of the rooms of the museum is itself set up as a bonfire area. Similarly, the Institute of Philosophy and History of the Latvian Academy of Science runs an oral history project *Dzīvesstāsti* (Life Narratives), which puts great emphasis on recording the memories of the older generation that lived through the World War II and the early years of Sovietization, including deportations in Siberia.

as a date of remembrance of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. On the other hand, the resolution politicized the present insofar as it lent legitimacy to Latvians' claims that the historical injury of the Soviet past demands particular political practices in the present, such as strict language regulation policies. In Russia, negative reactions came forth because the resolution was thought to rewrite history, as well as to position Russia as the heir of a totalitarian regime. Many in Russia found this unfair, in turn demanding the politicization of the European colonial past, as evidenced by invocations of the famine in the Belgian Congo (see Chapter 1).

This suggests that struggles of recognition are important elements of the European present in Latvia and in Europe more generally. Moreover, as the public and political life of the past indicates, the object of recognition and misrecognition is not identity (Taylor 1994), but rather the way in which one inhabits the past in relation to the present. In other words, what matters is not whether or not Latvians are recognized in the international arena for who they really are, but rather whether the international community grants public and political recognition to the ways in which the past(s) of the historical community of Latvians comes to bear upon the present(s).

In making a case for a politics of acknowledgement instead of a politics of recognition, Patchen Markell has argued that

there is a loss of control in being attached by history (or skin color, or by political membership) to a church (or a social system, or a state) with at least some of whose past or present operations you do not wish to be identified, but from which you cannot easily detach yourself. Neither disavowal nor guilt will do: both postures reassert the ideal of the sovereign agent, one by inventing a world in which the injustice does not exist; the other by pretending to have been its cause. Acknowledgment, here, means accepting these attachments, not in a spirit of resignation, but as one's points of departure in this world, which is the world where justice must be made, or avoided. (2003: 182)

In Latvia, public and political life seems to be characterized by the kind of politics of recognition that, in Patchen Markell's words, exhibits "an admirable awareness of vulnerability and finitude," yet nevertheless "advances an understanding of justice and injustice that ultimately denies those phenomena in the name of an attractive, but impossible vision of sovereign agency" (2003: 49). Under this dynamic, the politics of recognition sets in motion the social subordination and injustice which it claims to undo or to transcend. The ability of one actor to ascertain his or her sovereignty—an impossible project to begin with—takes place at the expense of the other actor who is forced, as it were, to submit to the contingent nature of action and intersubjectivity of identity (Markell 2003: 23). The actor who manages to assert sovereignty fails not in recognizing the independence and sovereignty of the other, but rather the indeterminacy of the self. Instead, Markell calls for a politics of acknowledgment whose object is not the identity of the other or of oneself, but rather "one's own basic ontological condition or circumstances, particularly one's own finitude" which is to be "understood as a matter of one's practical limits in the face of an unpredictable and contingent future" (2003: 38).

It could be said that the public and political life of the historical community of Latvians straddles Markell's distinction between acknowledgment of human finitude and striving for sovereignty through recognition. It entails a partial acknowledgment of finitude insofar as Latvians recognize that their actions are not fully of their own making, but are guided by historical conditions. Moreover, Latvians are critical of those who claim that public and political life should be conducted on the basis of universal principles rather than particular histories. However, there seems to be little acknowledgment of the kind of finitude

that stems from the intersubjective nature of action. In other words, in Latvia there is public and political acknowledgment of the ways in which agency in the present is shaped by historical conditions, so much so that many with liberal sensibilities consider such acknowledgment to be a manifestation of an irrational and passionate attachment to the past of the kind that requires critical reflection and distance. Thus, this acknowledgment of finitude with regard to the past and the ways in which the past places demands upon the present is precisely what leads to sovereign aspirations, which, in turn, subordinate others, such as old and new minorities. What are the historical and political conditions that enable such a turn from a politics of acknowledgment to a politics of recognition in Latvia? To suggest some ways of thinking about it, I conclude by turning to Benjamin's "Critique of Violence."

Violence and the Modern Nation-State

In Chapter 1, I described the fluid shifting between the position of the victim and that of a civilized European. In Latvia, emphasis on victimization at the hands of feudal German landlords or the Soviet government coexists with civilizational aspirations, which are manifest through an identification with Europeanness, including its colonial pursuits. This shifting is as much a product of specific historical conditions in Latvia as of the "moral economy" of the present where the category of victim has become widely recognized and is even a lucrative, if stigmatized, position (Fassin and Rechtman 2009). Baltic scholars too have attempted to claim a postcolonial status for the Baltics in order to garner recognition for past suffering and its traces in the present, all the while emphasizing the Europeanness of the Baltic peoples (Kelertas 2006, Jirgens 2006, Chioni Moore 2006).

The possibility of Latvians' relationship to the past to be seen at once as the prerogative of the vanquished and that of the victors similarly derives from the articulation of specific historical conditions and more general modern forms. More specifically, it derives from the contingent articulation of the historical community of Latvians and the modern nation state, even as it is currently difficult, if not impossible, to tell the two apart. As I described in the Introduction, the establishment of the Latvian state in 1918 was a result of historical contingencies rather than the outcome of a purposeful struggle for independence, though the independence struggles of the late 1980s, which culminated in a declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1990, were imbued with the determination to achieve political self-realization. As I showed in Chapter 5, the unprecedented solidarity that characterized the independence movement of the 1990s, including the barricades of 1991, was always-already entangled with state-based imaginations of the future. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, the state was established more as a result of the disintegration of empires rather than as a clear and widely shared idea that the historical and cultural community of Latvians must realize itself through an independent nation-state. Importantly, the first Latvian state came into being as a national state with a minority problem—namely its founding reorganized the previously feudally and imperially stratified population in accordance with the modern majority / minority distinction.

The founding moment of the polity, as Walter Benjamin has argued, is a profoundly violent one. In his essay "Critique of Violence," Benjamin develops an argument about violence as that which forms the foundation of the modern European state. He argues that at the moment of founding a polity, the law—that is, the state—usurps a monopoly over violence vis-à-vis individuals in the interest of preserving itself (1978: 239). As Judith Butler has put it in her commentary on Benjamin's essay, "law is posited as something that is done when a polity comes into being," and this something is violent (2006: 202). Violence, in

Benjamin's understanding, is thus not just physical force. In this essay in particular, he is concerned with violence as an expression of "legal or executive force," namely with violence as the kind of subjectivation that makes legal subjects out of persons (1978: 241, see also Butler 2006: 201). Benjamin writes:

The function of violence in lawmaking is twofold, in the sense that lawmaking pursues as its end, with violence as its means, *what* is to be established as law, but at the moment of instatement does not dismiss violence; rather, at this very moment of lawmaking, it specifically establishes as law not an end unalloyed by violence but one necessarily and intimately bound to it, under the title of power. (1978: 248)

As Butler points out, Benjamin's essay has come under critique for "failing to anticipate the assault of fascism on the rule of law and parliamentary institutions" (2006: 206). The events that unfolded after Benjamin wrote his essay in 1921 led Hannah Arendt to claim that Benjamin did not "understand the importance of law in binding a community together," as well as failed to "understand that the founding of a state can and should be an uncoerced beginning, and in that sense nonviolent in its origins" (Butler 2006: 207). Contrary to Benjamin, who considers the kind of violence that does away with coercive legal force to be divine or revolutionary violence, Arendt considers lawmaking itself to be a progressive outcome of revolutionary action. For Arendt, the stripping of the law which imbues persons with rights—that is, in reverting legal subjects into bare humanity—is at the foundation of the concept of statelessness and thus also of radical vulnerability.

Nevertheless, Benjamin's argument that lawmaking and the establishing of a polity are acts of violence that are generative of more violence remains important to think with. It makes the important point that law is not opposed to violence, but is rather productive of it. It places demands on communities to draw boundaries, rendering the act of inclusion always already an act of exclusion. Thinking of the polity in this way renders suspect those trajectories of argument which claim that exclusionary practices derive from collective attachments that corrupt the law. Thus, for example, it becomes more difficult to argue that it is the historical community of Latvians that imbues the otherwise neutral liberal democratic nation-state with nationalistic tendencies and that therefore it is the historical community of Latvians that should be subject to the injunction to reflect upon itself and remake its conduct accordingly. Instead, it enables one to ask how the historically specific *articulation* of the historical community of Latvians and the political rationality of the modern nation-state generates particular kinds of violence, including that which occasionally is glossed as intolerance.

While Benjamin notes in his essay that he will be concerned with specific historical conditions in Europe, the essay unfolds without engaging with any state in particular. In her discussion of the essay, Butler continues in that vein by discussing a "metapolity" of sorts—that is, no state in particular, but rather the state in general. The Latvian context, however, suggests that it is imperative to consider what kind of violence is entailed in the founding of a polity in conditions where such a founding act emulates similar existing entities; it also suggests that one must be attentive to the particular historical conditions of its founding, and not just to the ways in which it might be part of a broader entity glossed over as the state. In a way, such a founding amounts to a re-iteration of lawmaking violence, which is at the same time law-preserving violence insofar as it protects the law—that is, the state—by reinscribing it as the hegemonic mode of organizing collective public and political life. It is possible, of course, to engage in the practice of state-craft in a number of different ways. Boundaries that distinguish between citizens and non-citizens, as well as between the

majority and minorities, can be drawn in a number of different ways, but the question itself—namely, of who is a citizen and who is not, of who is a national minority and who is not—is a question that is enabled by the violence lodged at the foundation of the state. Therefore it is misguided to suggest that the exclusionary practices and associated attitudes that one can observe in Latvia are solely the products of specifically Latvian nationalist sensibilities. Rather, they are products of the contingent articulation of historical conditions and modern political forms. This trajectory of argument does not aim to divert accountability and responsibility away from the historical community of Latvians, but rather suggests that the problem itself demands rethinking. Thus, rather than attributing intolerance to backward nationalist sensibilities, it enables one to ask instead what is the nature of the constellation of the past and the present in Latvia such that it perpetuates a sense of historical injury which, in turn, demands a particular politicization of the present?

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