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## Stigmatized cohabitation in the Latvian region of the eastern Baltic littoral: nineteenth and twentieth centuries

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The social history of coresidence arrangements in the Latvian region suggests that forms of cohabitation without marriage were present in the Latvian population since the eighteenth century when empirical evidence became available. Before the twentieth century, however, these forms remained marginal and seldom involved choice. The subject of severe criticism until the 1960s–1970s, such forms become more widespread thereafter as the Latvian population began to exhibit many key features of a second demographic revolution. Post-Soviet censuses now suggest that such coresidence patterns in the Latvian population approach the levels of those in most western European states, including the Scandinavian countries.

**Keywords:** cohabitation; Latvia; illegitimacy; population censuses; marriage

### 1. Introduction

A series of earlier publications based on microdata and focusing on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has already analyzed in some detail the coresidential patterns and other socio-demographic characteristics of the Latvian-speaking population of the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire (Plakans, 1975; Plakans & Wetherell, 1992, 1995, 1998). In these centuries, virtually all Latvian-speakers – estimated in 1800 at about 873,000 persons – lived in the adjacent provinces of Livland and Courland (two of the so-called Baltic Provinces) as well as in the western districts of of Vitebsk province (Dunsdorfs, 1973, p. 282). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the vast majority of them were enserfed peasants on landed estates owned primarily (in Livland and Courland) by members of the Baltic German minority (about 6.5% of the total population), and, in the Vitebsk districts, primarily by Russian, Polish, and polonized German landholders. The dominant form of rural settlement in Livland and Courland was the isolated farmstead, and in the western districts of Vitebsk differing kinds of farmstead clusters. In most localities, the proportion of farmsteads with complex families of the heads was relatively high, but these complex groupings coresided with married and unmarried male farmhands and unmarried female farmhands. If farmhands had families, these families were usually simple in structure. Mean *farmstead* size therefore tended to be high, in the range of 15–16 persons (Plakans, 1983, p.180).

Among the privileges landowners possessed were patronage rights (Ger. *Patronat*), which included the right to appoint pastors of the local congregations – Lutheran in Livland and Courland and Roman Catholic in the Vitebsk districts. As a consequence, most of the local clergymen, who were also the record-keepers for their congregants, had

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had to learn the Latvian language used by members of their flocks. When Imperial Russia acquired the eastern Baltic littoral from Sweden in the early eighteenth century, Tsar Peter I ('the Great') had agreed that the political class of the Baltic provinces – the titled Baltic German aristocracy – would retain a substantial amount of autonomy in matters of local governance. As a consequence, until late in the nineteenth century, the historical records containing population microdata were prepared in the German language rather than in Russian, as might have been expected. The Latvian language began to appear in local records only in the second half of the nineteenth century, and then only sporadically.

Counting from 1795 when the last fragment of Baltic territory passed to the Russian Empire as part of the last partition of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Latvian territories of the eastern Baltic littoral experienced six regime changes in the next two centuries: 1795 (Russian Empire), 1918 (first independence), 1940 (annexation to the USSR), 1941 (inclusion in the Third Reich), 1944–45 (re-occupation by USSR), 1991 (second independence). Each change in governing systems brought with it new ways of enumerating the general population, and though there was always a degree of continuity between the records of contiguous regimes, there are no demographic and social-structural variables for which there are continuous documentary records over the entire two centuries. Consequently, when in the late 1960s innovative approaches to quantitative social-structural history and in historical demography came to the fore in western historical scholarship, the social-structural data from Latvian territories that could be used for comparisons was by necessity fragmentary. During the decades when the Latvian territory was part of the USSR, detailed information about the population was in any case surrounded by secrecy, and published results of the Soviet censuses (as carried out in the Latvian SSR) remained very general. As far as information about periods of time in the distant past were concerned, historical demography has never developed as a distinct specialty among Latvian historians, and Soviet-period Latvian demographers generally focused on the post-1945 decades, occasionally glancing backward to the so-called interwar period of 'bourgeois dominance' and to the aggregate population figures of the 1897 Russian Imperial census. Western historical inquiry focusing on such questions as family and household structure, family formation, the demographic revolution, marriage age, fertility, mortality and related matters found little resonance in Latvian-language scholarship (an exception is Efremova, 1982); moreover, interest in such themes has remained minimal even in the two decades since the re-establishment of Latvian independence in 1991. The difficult task of extracting comparable information from archival sources for a time series for any social-structural and demographic variable remains to be started, though a few exceptions do exist to this general observation as far localities are concerned (Auns, 2004; 2006; 2007; 2009). The task of identifying the approximate beginning of long-term trends of any kind has therefore remained difficult, particularly so in the case of the social practices that produced different forms of the domestic group.

## **2. Coresidence and cohabitation: pre-modern era**

As of this writing, coresidence in households in the Latvian-speaking territory (i.e. who lived with whom) is the only micro-social-structural variable about which there is fairly reliable information for the long term, but even this evidence remains fragmentary and localized. Moreover, information about household composition in the distant past does not offer systematic empirical data about the coresidence of *unmarried* persons (cohabitation) who might have been living together *as if* they were married. Most of these eighteenth- and nineteenth-century microdata about coresidence come from fiscal censuses called

‘revisions of souls,’ and the enumerators who prepared the revision had little interest in probing the subtleties of personal relationships within a coresidential unit. The relational language used in the soul revisions is restricted to terms reflecting the formal marriage bond (husband, wife), kinship (son, brother-in-law), employer–employee relations (head, farmhand, herder), and temporary coresidential arrangements (lodger, retiree). The aggregate counts obtained from the soul revisions for localities and larger administrative units were used to calculate payments of a head-tax to the Crown, and practices used in local enumerations varied. Social descriptions using the soul revisions in any case have dealt almost exclusively with rural areas, so that coresidence/cohabitation patterns in small towns or cities of the Latvian territory in the distant past remain almost entirely unknown at this time.

One institution that did have an interest in the deeper probing of the personal relationships among coresidents of domestic groups was the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Baltic region. The ‘chronicles’ kept by local clergy about events in their own parishes and the reports sent by them to the Consistory have been shown to be useful for information about irregular personal relationships and about how local clergy dealt with infractions of Church regulations concerning married life. Unfortunately, these archival collections have not been used by historians extensively, and as of this writing only one Latvian historian – Gvido Straube – has recognized their potential for on-the-ground social history and has begun to use them systematically (Straube, 2013). Fortunately, Straube’s current research bears on the central topic of concern to us and his findings deserve a brief description. He investigated these ecclesiastical sources for the centuries before the twentieth for evidence about ‘civil marriage,’ i.e. cohabitation without formal marriage, and discovered repeated mention of punishments for irregular sexual and/or marital relationships. These violations of the ‘rules’ of everyday social life were common enough not to surprise the local clergy. Embedded in these Church-stigmatized activities there may have been longer-term arrangements among the involved individuals that could conceivably resemble what much later on would be termed ‘cohabitation.’

Straube’s interpretation of these incidents is that in the cases where a couple did coreside this was most likely because of the Church’s own internal rule. Thus, for example, the Church required of communicants a minimum of demonstrable knowledge of its teachings contained in the catechism, prayers, reading, and hymns. Those who had not learned these things by the normal confirmation age (mid-teens) and, at the moment of wanting to be married still did not know them, could not be accepted into the congregation – a prerequisite for official marriage. One outcome was cohabitation until the required examination was passed. Another example concerns widow- or widowerhood and the desire of the surviving partner to be remarried before the official one year of mourning had expired. Straube has uncovered appeals – mostly unsuccessful – to the Consistory for permission to shorten the mourning period for such ‘unmarried’ couples since there was already a child in the offing. How complicated such localized infractions of official marriage rules could become can be illustrated by one story dealing with ‘illegitimate’ children (here presented with detail not in the cited source):

In 1767 it was shown that Anna, the daughter of a peasant in Dole, then aged about 26 years, had had a son with Indrikis from Bēči farmstead, the two having met frequently since Easter of 1763. The parents of the child did not deny their sexual relationship, and in fact Indrikis proudly admitted that he had fathered the child. Yet since the parents had not formed an official and Christian marriage and therefore had produced an ‘illegitimate’ child, each of them received punishment of approximately fifty kopeks and corporal punishment (to be delivered in front of the local church) – Indikis ten and Anna five strokes of the switch (rod) (Straube, 2013, pp. 70–71).

The account does not make absolutely clear how cohabitation (living together) in the modern sense was managed by the two young people: their everyday lives, after all, unfolded in a very open social context (the farmstead or farmsteads where they lived) and therefore their coresidents must have been accepting of their relationship to some extent. Judging by the punishment meted out by the Church, however, outright flouting of custom and church regulations could result in relatively harsh sanctions. On the other hand, lack of remorse by the man in the story also suggests that existing ‘rules’ – customary or religious – were insufficient for fully controlling the behavior of sexually active young people, with the result that various forms of sexual congress outside of marriage were interpreted by some of the laity as not ‘sinful,’ even if they produced out-of-wedlock children.

Straube ended his findings with the following observation:

Summarizing the discussion, we can say that the conclusion has to be that peasants disliked living in ‘civil marriage,’ and that most often such a situation developed through circumstances beyond their control. Frequently, the blame rested with the estate owners, who at times refused to give permission for ‘their’ peasants to marry for reasons that can hardly be called rational. In other cases, the blame rests with the overly conscientious clergy who sought to strictly obey all church rules and regulations. It is also true that some peasants did not view cohabitation without the blessing of the church as sinful. At times, ‘civil marriage’ was exploited by those who did not wish to burden themselves with the responsibilities of marriage and were disposed to change their female partners frequently. Thus one can say with considerable certainty that in the nineteenth century, and even in the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries, in Vidzeme (Livland) one can find instances of ‘civil marriage’ and that these were brought about by external forces. The rural inhabitants themselves did not engender such forms of coresidence as a norm of their everyday life (Straube, 2013, p.75).

The extent to which Straube’s findings can be accepted as characteristic for the whole of the Latvian territory remains an open question. Vidzeme (Livland; Livonia) was only one of the adjacent provinces in which Latvians lived: Kurzeme (Kurland; Courland) was another, as were the western districts of Vitebsk, to the east of Vidzeme. Also remaining open is the question of whether Lutheranism dealt with these matters in the same fashion as did Roman Catholic congregations or, for that matter, other denominations of the Baltic region that even in the eighteenth and nineteenth century was already multi-confessional and multi-cultural. And Straube’s painstaking research also highlights another important fact about the pre-twentieth century era, namely, that unless enumerators of these populations deliberately chose to ask respondents about non-marital cohabitation (and few did), one is unlikely to find hard information about it in the census-like surveys that these enumerators produced. An accurate mapping of the phenomenon for the whole territory therefore remains a distant and perhaps unreachable goal.

### **3. Out-of-wedlock birth as an indicator**

As Straube’s research indicates, in the Latvian territories of the nineteenth century out-of-wedlock births may or may not be a good indicator of the co-residential arrangements of the partners that produced them. It is quite true, however, that the Latvian provinces were hardly immune to sexual activity outside marriage. The available archival sources seldom chronicle such activity systematically, perhaps assuming that they were merely localized and relatively rare. Out-of-wedlock births are mentioned in the ecclesiastical records (parish registers) but other descriptive sources barely speak of them. Only in the second half of the century did contemporary Baltic researchers who were exploring the new domain of public health begin an effort to measure the extent of the problem. Thus, for example, such publications as the 1867 *Land und Leute der Mitauischen*

*Oberhauptmannschaft* by Baron Alfons von Heyking (the scientific secretary of the Kurland Statistical Committee) began to analyze ‘births’ in the birth register of Sessau parish in terms of ‘legitimate’ (Ger. *ehelich*) and ‘illegitimate’ (Ger. *unehelich*) children, reporting in several paragraphs that in the period from 1859 to 1865 of the 2075 children born in Sessau 4.6% were in the latter category (Heyking, 1867, pp. 18–19). These social statistics were meant to be descriptive and the Baron analyzed them sparingly, leaving the impression that he was only interested in out-of-wedlock births as an indicator of the existence of a social problem of which authorities should take note. Another similar kind of contemporary publication frequently contained the term *Biostatik* in the title and went a few steps farther in analysis. Such monographs were frequently dissertations, or studies based on dissertations, written for doctor-of-medicine degrees at the University of Dorpat in Livland, and as a genre of scholarship appear to have grasped the larger significance of such data. Thus, for example, Ewald Kaspar in 1883 published *Biostatik der Stadt Libau und ihrer Landgemeinde in the Jahren 1834–1882*, in which he devoted a whole chapter to the ‘legitimacy standing of children born alive’ (Kaspar, 1883). Here statistics about ‘legitimately’ and ‘illegitimately’ born infants were presented as percentages of all births (not in absolute numbers, as is frequently the case with these early analyses) so that they could be compared with findings in other areas of the Baltic region as well as with those from German lands and other European countries. Kaspar was thus interested in diagnosing the extent of the ‘problem’ and not just reporting its presence. One interesting aspect of the Kaspar figures is the much lower illegitimacy rate for the rural (ethnically Latvian) congregation of the city of Libau (a city in western Courland) – 4.06% – in comparison with the urban congregations (German, Russian Orthodox) for which the percentages range from 13.5% to 12.3% (Kaspar, 1883, p. 24). Only the urban Jewish congregation in Libau had a rate lower than the Latvian – 0.93%.

Neither Heyking nor Kaspar pursued in their publications the familial circumstances that might have led to ‘illegitimate’ births nor did they explore the living arrangements of the partners that produced them. There was no reason to expect such deeper analysis, of course, given the fact that indigenous Baltic-area socio-demographic fact-gathering was clearly in its infancy, even in the second half of the nineteenth century. Any attempt to relate the clumsily presented and generally sparse illegitimacy statistics from particular localities to underlying marital or non-marital relationships would have needed a higher order of awareness than these proto-statisticians had at their disposal. Findings were too often reported not as simply social facts about a population group but as an indicator of the level of its ‘moral education’ (Ger. *sittlichen Bildungstand*, e.g. Jung-Stilling, 1874, p. 46). Moreover, the entire subject of ‘coresidence’ still remained somewhat mysterious to these gatherers of social statistics, as was evident from the discussions accompanying the first region-wide Baltic provincial census, which occurred in 1881. Enumerators had to devise questions that would clearly delineate a *household*, distinguish the place of residence where a respondent was *registered* from that where he or she was actually residing, solve the problem of family members actually living in different places, and sort out unrelated people living together as lodgers and as families with servants. The question of ‘family status’ (Ger. *Familienstand*) was similarly problematic and the enumerators finally settled on providing only four possible variants – single, married, widowed or separated (Stieda, 1881, pp. 150–151; Wittschewsky, 1881; Plakans & Wetherell, 2004). Disagreements over basic definitions, the decentralization of the published results and their tabulation by different people in different provinces, and the lack of good models to follow rendered the census results difficult to interpret. By settling on a restrictive definition of ‘family status,’ moreover, family-like formations not sanctioned by custom, religion, and the law were

effectively excluded from any social portraiture based on the census results. Extreme subjectivity in the understanding of what constituted a micro-social structure continued in the sole Imperial Russian census of 1897 and into those taken after the Russian Revolution. As Anderson observed:

Who was considered a married person or a divorced person... varied among censuses. In 1897, enumerators were only supposed to record as married those who were legally (officially) married. In later censuses, people were to be recorded as married who considered themselves so, whether the marriage was registered or not (Anderson, 1986, p. 144).

#### **4. Public media to World War I**

The deeper interest in social phenomena during the nineteenth century in these semi-scholarly writings materialized also in the proliferation in the Latvian regions of periodical publications and newspapers, primarily in German and Latvian (Zelče, 2009). This was the beginning of the Latvian information age in print form, but it did not yet include the appearance of modern journalism as a profession. Writing for newspapers and periodicals tended to be an adjunct activity to a person's real livelihood. Also, the print media directly reflected the views and interests of specialized groupings such as the 'enlightened' clergy who positioned themselves as educators of the peasantry, the Baltic German so-called *Literatenstand* which struggled with the Baltic German landed aristocracy for power and influence, Latvian nationalists who saw as their target the entire Baltic German population, and, toward the end of the century, radicals of various kinds who sought between the lines of their writings to criticize Russian autocracy. This welter of print publications from the 1820s onward seldom simply reported events and analyzed situations: the writing in them was didactic, unapologetically opinionated, unsystematic, and heavily reliant on uncollaborated stories that for one reason or another had come to the writers' attention. Licenses to publish had to be sought from St. Petersburg, and the institution of the government censor was omnipresent. Even in the least combative of these publications there was already a taste for sensational stories, such as reports about the murder of an abandoned female farmworker by her lover, and, from local communities, stories about births outside wedlock (Anonymous, 1822, March 23; W-r., 1824, May 29; -e, 1850, March 23; S...c, 1850, March 23). Such elements of everyday social life were reported less to keep readers informed than to create the opportunity for moralizing conclusions about proper behavior. In this vein, newspapers reported the presence in the Latvian countryside of an evidently widespread practice of 'going to the girls' (Latv. *meitās iešana*, also known as 'night courting' or 'night running'), which consisted of a small group of young men organizing night visits to one or another farmstead where unmarried young women were known to be living, and spending with them the whole night or part of the night (Reinsons, 2009, p. 22–29; Bērziņš, 2009, p. 93; Lapinš, 1936, p. 149; Gr., 1873, December 8; Kln., 1875, August 9; Krastin, 1867, July 30; Lindenberg, 1871, June 16; T. M., 1864, October 5; T. S., 1864, March 30; W. A.S. W., 1859, May 28). Such reports suggested that the adults of the targeted farmstead were complicit in the visits or at least tolerated them. Moralizers condemned the practice in no uncertain terms, even though it may have been a semi-ritualistic custom of long standing meant to allow some contact among young people. No serious efforts were launched to investigate how widespread the practice was and what its consequences may have been, with descriptions of the practice being placed under the rubric of 'immoral behavior.' There were suggestions that the practice symbolized the spread of 'urban immorality' to the countryside, insofar as the second half of the nineteenth century experienced a rapid expansion in the population of

the largest cities of the Baltic provinces such as Riga, Tallinn (Ger. *Reval*), Jelgava (Ger. *Mitau*), and Liepāja (Ger. *Libau*). Latvian-language authors such as Jēkabs Apsītis in the 1880s did much in his stories to juxtapose the ‘immoral city’ with the ‘moral countryside,’ thus further popularizing this already widespread stereotype (Hausmanis, 1998/2001, I/III, p. 153). It is of some interest that in this ménage of stigmatized behaviors cohabitation without marriage (in the modern sense) is mentioned seldom, this fact paralleling its near-absence from the statistical tables of more ‘scientific’ writings such as census publications and ‘serious’ journals such as the *Baltische Monatschrift*. If mentioned at all or even hinted at, illegitimate births and cohabitation without marriage continued to be seen as issues pertaining to ‘public health.’ Generally speaking, both Baltic German and Latvian authors in the second half of the nineteenth century reflected the Victorian-era puritanical avoidance of direct public discussion of matters involving sexual relations. The general belief was widespread that the public exposition of the reasons that lay behind various forms of ‘immoral behavior’ would have the effect of encouraging more of it. Occasionally, newspapers stories hinted at the existence of a sub-surface world of illicit behaviors: in 1904, a local meeting of clergymen called by the pastor of Skujene, V. Kasparsons, discussed the issue of whether a pastor should permit young girls who were known to have ‘fallen’ (Latv. *kritušām jaunavām*) to wear the traditional myrtle wreath at their wedding, since the wreath symbolized virginity (Anonymous, 1904, January 14; Anonymous, 1904, January 15). Kasparsons argued that girls have to be allowed to decide for themselves, but the discussion suggested that a large number of clergy wanted to issue such denials.

Public discussion in the print media of ‘immoral’ behaviors increased exponentially during the late 1880s and 1890s, forced into greater openness by literary influences from western Europe that resulted in the Baltic setting in young authors deliberately using controversial subjects such as the status and rights of women, ‘free love,’ and ‘free marriages’ to provoke their seniors and their audiences. Thus in 1894 the young playwright Aspazija (pseudonym for Elza Rozenberga) caused something of a press sensation with her play entitled *Zaudētās tiesības* (Engl. *Lost Rights*) with its critical view of marriage; and in 1910 the popular clergyman and novelist Andrievs Niedra gave a conservatively phrased lecture on the consequences of male–female relationships outside traditional marriage (R., 1910a, February 10; R., 1910b, February 11; M., 1910, February 10). Public discussion of these themes continued at a high pitch until the eve of World War I, as, for example, in the controversy centering on the 1913 book *Iedzimtais grēks* (Engl. *Original Sin*) by Ivande Kaija, in which the author portrays gender relationships and women’s experience within marriage and raises the possibility of unregistered cohabitation. Latvian literary historians later observed that ‘the [public] discussion of this novel was conducted entirely in the social, ethical, and moral realms, and scarcely touched on the book’s aesthetic qualities’ (Hausmanis, 1998/2001, I/III, p. 310).

## 5. First period of independence (1918–1940)

Even though in 1920 the new Latvian state initiated quinquennial national censuses, the census categories used did not bring social statistics any closer to reliable microdata about the ‘cohabitation’ phenomenon than had pre-independence enumerations. The original census forms for individuals in 1935, for example, did require an entry in a column headed ‘relation to family head’ (Latv. *attiecība pret ģimenes galvu*), but it does not seem that enumerators ever took note of a ‘relation’ that was irregular. From the entries in use, analysts could infer marital status – unmarried, married, widowed, divorced – but not

a long-term partnership outside of formal marriage. Similarly, the census language in the case of an out-of-wedlock child appears to have been indirect, and perhaps analysts had to rely on specialized surveys. Thus, for example, the annual publication of the National Statistical Bureau (Latv. *Valsts statistiskā pārvalde*) – the *Statistical Annual for Latvia* – for 1930, which contained some 353 detailed tables for the whole country, contained only two that signaled knowledge of birth out of wedlock (Latv. *ārlaulībā dzimušie bērni*) (Tables 13 and 15); both dealt with birth data, one with births and death crosstabulated with months of the year, the other with births crosstabulated with months and religion (Gada Grāmata, 1931, pp. 17,18–19). The interwar government statistical publications were in any case preoccupied with documenting other subjects of significance to the new state – the consequences of the huge population losses the Latvian territory had undergone during WWI, the economic development of industry and agriculture, the ethnic composition of the country. Many attractively produced government statistical publications aimed toward the outside world (usually with text and tables in both Latvian and French) did not mention out-of-wedlock births or any other social phenomena that might be understood by contemporaries as examples of social pathologies (e.g. Skujenieks, 1938). Especially after May 1934, when the Prime Minister, Kārlis Ulmanis, carried out his *coup d'état* and established an authoritarian regime, ‘the times,’ as later observed a contemporary of these events, ‘required writing only in superlatives’ (Šilde, 1982, p. 326).

At the same time, the non-quantitative Latvian writing of the interwar years demonstrated repeatedly that public consciousness was aware of the existence of familial and personal relationships that fell outside traditional categories (Lipša, 2014, p. 380–395). Continuing from pre-WWI years, the discussion of ‘free love’ remained a staple among social commentators and was normally accompanied by moral disapproval. Even so the language of these discussions suggested that unregistered cohabitation lay behind the phenomena being stigmatized. Publicists on the right wing of the political spectrum even went so far as to depict ‘free love’ as a Jewish plot to destroy the traditional family. At the same time, even among Latvian social democrats – the Social Democratic Workers’ Party having become in Latvia one of the two dominant pre-1934 parliamentary parties – there was clearly an unease over the public’s association of irregular sexual relations with the culture of the left. Writings about acceptable morality found resonance in governmental circles and this impulse expressed itself in the formation during the 1920s of government commissions for the prevention of immorality in popular literature (Lipša, 2012, p. 86–103; Lipša, 2013, p. 175–179). By the end of the 1920s, the language used in these controversies began to shift its vocabulary, importing and translating from western Europe such terms as ‘trial marriage’ and ‘friendship marriage.’ Critics of non-traditional marital arrangements went out of their way to point out how disadvantageous they were for the women involved, and sought to tie the alleged growth of ‘immorality’ to the human destruction of WWI that in younger age cohorts had produced sex ratios in which the number of women substantially exceeded that of men. Unfortunately, public attitudes and targeted behaviors were seldom quantified or, if quantified, drew on imprecise statistics, and therefore it is impossible to gauge whether public alarm – as reflected in media commentary – resulted from a growing popularity of irregular marital arrangements or from the need of an expanding media sector to have sensational subjects to write about. Discussions of one aspect of the ‘problem’ – out-of-wedlock births – could be grounded in some empirical evidence since the five-year censuses occasionally did include such information. But the interwar levels of ‘illegitimacy’ did not suggest a radical break with pre-WWI levels. Measures of the *national* level of illegitimacy placed the numbers

at about 4.6% in the early 1920s and at about 9.7% in the mid-1930s, with the urban–rural differences coming close to achieving parity in 1939 (9.4% for rural, 10.1% for urban) ('Gada Grāmata', 1923, p. 8–9; 1924, p. 8–9; 1925, p. 8–9; 1926, p. 6–7; 1927, p. 6–7; 1928, p. 23; 1933, p. 15; 'Statistikas tabulas', 1940, p. 19). The increase of the rural level of illegitimacy from 7.5% in 1934 to 9.5% in 1938 coincided with the growth of the number of foreign itinerant farmhands (mainly from Lithuania, Poland and Estonia) from 28.2 thousand in 1934 to 46.3 thousand in 1938 (Aizsilnieks, 1968, p. 398, 520, 736). Opinion leaders were convinced that exactly itinerant farmhands had driven illegitimacy rates (Lipša, 2014, p. 393). At the same time, analyses of 'illegitimacy' in the longer term – in comparison, say, with nineteenth-century rates – were non-existent as were attempts to disentangle the interwar levels from the period effects of WWI and the economic turmoil of the early 1930s. For the most part, 'illegitimacy' was dealt with under the rubric of 'sexual ethics' and discussed in terms of what the government could do to minimize levels. Since the presence of out-of-wedlock children in the population was clear, and since many of them were uncared for, the problem brought into focus the questions of public funding for foundling, orphan, and children's homes and state supplementary payments to unwed mothers. Often the charge that the state (i.e. taxpayers) were being obliged to subsidize 'immorality' was predictably nearly always part of the discussion.

The large volume of critical comment on various form of 'immorality' during the interwar period makes it unlikely that the numbers for such behaviors were all unnecessarily inflated. A much more productive hypothesis would be that, as part of the various complex processes of modernization and cultural change, traditional marital norms that were still practiced widely and probably endorsed by vast majority of Latvians were being joined by other forms of cohabitation, perhaps, in these decades, still only on the margins of society. Numerical evidence to support or reject the hypothesis remains unavailable, especially such evidence as would connect the pre- and post-independence periods. It is unlikely that the founding of the new Latvian state in 1918 – a political event – would have radically altered long-term marital habits among Latvians, but evidence one way or another remains sparse at this writing.

## 6. The Soviet period 1945–1991

From 1945 onward Latvia – now officially the Latvian SSR – was part of the Soviet Union, and therefore the main lines of population analysis in Latvia correlated with the conceptual equipment of Marxist-Leninist ideology, as formulated by the periodic congresses of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The USSR had altogether four censuses in the post-WWII years – in 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989 – and the date of the first meant that the population of Latvia was being counted twenty-three years after the last national census of 1935. As earlier between 1897 (only Imperial census) and 1920 (first Latvian census), the interim decades contained a destructive world war (Latvia lost about a fifth of its population (Zvidriņš & Vanovska, 1992, p. 46), and in the post-WWII period also a major deportation (1949) of about 42,000 persons and the beginnings of a long-term shift in the ethnic composition of Latvian territory with the in-migration of Slavic-language populations from other parts of the USSR. As evidenced by the infrequent monographs of the Soviet period (Mežgailis & Zvidriņš, 1973; Mežgailis, 1985; Zvidriņš, 1989), published aggregate statistics about marital life continued to use the tripartite formula 'not married/married/widowed,' occasionally adding columns for 'divorced' and 'separated.' Although these descriptive monographs all refer to various kinds of non-census surveys and specialized 'sociological' inquiries, these were adduced to serve the

dominant main subjects: total population growth/decline, fertility, mortality, migration, ethnic composition, labor force size. As a result, the Soviet-era censuses in Latvia did not bring analysis any closer to the subject of unregistered cohabitation, and even 'illegitimate' births are referred to only tangentially as part of the discussion of birth rates. Interestingly, the first direct mention of illegitimacy in such monographs occurred only after 1991 and the breakup of the Soviet Union (Zvidriņš & Vanovska, 1992, p. 42), where it is folded into a brief discussion of infant mortality rates. The observation that 'in Latvia as in other countries infant mortality was the highest among illegitimately born children' was used in this instance to characterize the situation 'in the second half of the 1920s' (i.e. in 'bourgeois' Latvia), and illegitimacy was not mentioned again as a aspect of social life for any later period. The general impression left is that the demographers of the Soviet period again skirted the subject of out-of-wedlock children, possibly because the Party's ideology associated the phenomenon with capitalist countries.

In Soviet-era publications in the Latvian SSR, circumlocutions concerning unorthodox family arrangements and the results of those arrangements (e.g. 'illegitimate' children) should come as no surprise, since there were large areas of everyday social reality toward which the Party exhibited avoidance behavior. Early western research by Geiger in the later 1960s on families and divorce in Soviet *Russia* observed that 'millions of Soviet couples have lived and are living in a state of unregistered or *de facto* marriage. No one knows, of course, exactly how many there are' (Geiger, 1968, p. 258–259). He surmised that this form of unregistered marriage (or cohabitation) was somehow tied to the high levels of 'illegitimate' childbirth. In sum, '*de facto* marriage has become so common that by sheer force of numbers and mutual sympathy it has won a measure of social acceptance, though there are still traces of a deprecatory attitude toward it' (Geiger, 1968, p. 261). How and whether the general situation in the Russian Socialist Republic was reflected in all the smaller Union republics remains uncertain at this juncture. But post-Soviet comparative research on this question for all three *Baltic* republics, using life-event data and cohort analysis, confirms Geiger's speculative observations and unequivocally states that unregistered cohabitation began to be a significant presence in Latvian family life *precisely* during the Soviet period:

Starting with the cohorts born in the 1940s, who formed their first partnerships mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, the proportion [of direct marriages] began to decrease rapidly. In the 1944–53 birth cohort it dropped below 50 percent, which means that for the first time consensual unions had replaced direct marriage as the mainstream route to family building. In the following generations entry, into partnership through direct marriage gradually became an exception than a rule: in the 1969–73 cohort 11.2 percent of men and only 5.9 percent of women started their first conjugal union without preceding cohabitation (Katus, Puur, Põldma, & Sakkeus, 2007, p. 268).

The Party's stance toward unregistered liaisons and cohabitation when these phenomena were expanding was one of disapproval. For Party members to remain in good standing, 'socialist morality' dictated regular familial behavior. An individual's involvement in irregular family arrangements was likely to come to the attention of other members who were then obliged to carry the matter to the Party's primary-level organization – the 'cell' that guided personal behavior of Party members in each institution, factory, and any other large organization.<sup>1</sup> It was at this level that the 'problem' was identified and solutions to it sought, with the sanctions against individuals ranging from reprimands to expulsion. The charge used was 'lowered morality' (Latv. *morālais pagrimums*). The largely unresearched archived files of primary Party organizations are replete with individual complaints in the form of separate cases: a married person has

abandoned family to live with another partner; a man refuses to marry the woman with whom he is living and with whom he has had children; a person who changes one partner for another but in the end marries neither. The Party could order such persons to 'regularize his or her family relationships' so that change would eliminate a quasi-familial tie that did not fall into the category of an officially registered marriage. Though for most of the Soviet period complaints about unregistered liaisons remained below the level of official published statistics, occasionally these matters would surface in policy discussions. Thus, for example, in 1980 the Executive Committee of the Workers' Deputies Council of Riga City decided to improve the demographic profile of the capital city and in a policy statement directed lower Party committees and other agencies to work to reduce the level of irregular marital, familial, and sexual behaviors.<sup>2</sup> The wording of these documents made very clear that unregistered cohabitation was one of the forms of irregularity that the Party expected to be reduced if demographic improvement – i.e. moderate population growth – was to be the result. The Party was worried about the impact on the labor force of late marriages, small families, one-person households, and an excess of deaths over births. It is possible that future oral histories of persons who lived through this period might yet yield information about this phenomenon because currently available written and oral sources contain no usable information.

## 7. The contemporary situation

The 1989 Soviet census was the last one Latvia participated in as a Republic of the USSR. Subsequent national-level population counts took place in 2000 and 2011 in a newly independent Latvia that in most matters, including the gathering of social statistics, saw itself as 'returning to the west' and therefore embraced the idea of the free flow of information. The Soviet regime's phobias about population statistics and their availability did not continue into the post-1991 era, and published results have been formulated in terms of subjects of international interest, including 'cohabitation' that in the 2000 census is designated in Latvian 'unregistered marriage' and translated in English as 'cohabitation'; in the 2011 census the phenomenon is described in Latvian as 'family of cohabitation partners' (Latv. *kopdzīves partneru gīmenes*) and translated into English as 'consensual union couple' (Census, 2000, pp. 207–208; Census, 2011, Tables 28–29, 31–32). Information culled from the two post-1991 censuses and numerous surveys and studies suggests that the population of Latvia was taking on several of the characteristics of what in western Europe has been called 'the second demographic revolution' (Lesthaeghe, 2010, p. 4–6). Single-person (the Census, 2011 uses the description 'one-person households') households grew from 24.9% of all households in the year 2000 to 34% in 2011, childless couples (married or unmarried) increased from 24% of all couples in 2000 to 26% in 2011, and one-child couples (married or unmarried) grew from 45% of all couples in 2000 to 47% in 2011. In regard to couples with or without children who were cohabiting without marriage, the proportion more than doubled from 6% of all couples in 2000 to 13% in 2011. Of the unregistered cohabiting couples, 29% in 2000 had one child, but in 2011 35% had one child; of these same couples, 45% had no children in 2000 and 40% were without children in 2011. The 2011 census provides data for 275,265 persons in age cohort 15–24, with the cohabitation of 5% based on a registered marriage, but there are no data on the cohabitation that was based on personal decisions that did not involve marriage (Census, 2011, Table 10). At the same time, of all births, those out-of-wedlock rose from 12.5% in 1980, to 39.1 in 1999, to 40.3% in 2000 and to 44.6% in 2011 (Annual, 2011b). Marriage as such could not be considered stable, with divorces per 1000 marriages

rising from 496 in 1991 to 770 in 1992 but decreasing from 772 in 2011 to 650 in 2012 (Annual, 2011a). At this writing, descriptive demography in Latvia continues to develop a 'portraiture' of the post-Soviet era population, but the findings of the 2011 census have not yet been fully absorbed. Confounding the creation of a reliable cross-sectional characterization in recent years has been the steady outflow – estimated in the aggregate at 250,000–300,000 persons – who have emigrated from the country in search of economic betterment (Zepa & Klava, 2011, pp. 70–91). In a total national population that now numbers around two million, a large and continuing departure of persons from the age cohorts aged 20–40 (the same cohorts that involve 'first-union formation' and childbearing) render calculations impermanent. It must be observed, however, that current research on this subject in Latvia generally has not been placed within the context of the theory association with the concept of a 'second demographic revolution.' The link between values and behaviors remains to be explored.

With respect to cohabitation, the published results of the 2000 census of Latvia made no effort to disguise the fact that of the 624,305 family units in the country, altogether 205,696 or 32.9% had as their base an unregistered marriage. The enumerators in 2000 defined the 'family' as 'two or more persons within a private or institutional household who are related as husband or wife, as cohabiting partners, or as parent and child.' (Census, 2000, p. 283). The definition 'consensual union couple' was used in the 2011 census, indicating that cohabitation without official marriage has been normalized as a census category. The published table on this form of coresidence classified couples into those whose cohabitation is 'registered' as a marriage and those whose cohabitation is based on partnership. The latter grouping – the 32.9% of all family units in 2000 – has grown to 46% in 2011 (13% of consensual union families and 33% lone parent families [Census, 2011, Table 32]); this leaves open the questions of how precisely they were formed, the relative ages of the cohabiting partners, and what kind of a union the partners themselves believe they have formed. With such questions, of course, we enter the differences between the 'data' that satisfy demographers and the 'evidence' social historians of the family would like to have, i.e. the differences between demography and social history. Some of these open questions could be answered by further cross-tabulation of census data, but the answers to others would need further inquiry (perhaps in-depth interviews) to establish their nature. The observation made by Straube about pre-modern Latvian peasants – that they appear not have 'engendered irregular forms of coresidence as a norm of their everyday lives' – can be reformulated as a question for the population of Latvia in 2011 as well, but the published census information does not provide us with an unambiguous answer. What proportion of these 'unregistered' couples had arrived to the decision to form such unions as a 'life-style' choice and what proportion was living as 'unregistered' because of unavoidable circumstance still remains illusive. What is fairly obvious from the descriptive discourse surrounding the quantitative information about them, however, is that the avoidance techniques in the presentation of data, so characteristic of earlier censuses, have disappeared, and the presence of the 'unregistered' couple in the population is now reported as just another socio-demographic fact with no moral connotations. This neutral style of presentation and analysis is clearly a step forward in obtaining clarity about different ways of living together. The habit of mind that understood non-traditional cohabitation forms as symptoms of impaired 'public health' appears now to have dissolved.

Unless and until the census microdata for all the pre-1991 periods of Latvian social history are unearthed and analyzed, however, we will have no usable time series about cohabitation and related matters that would enable us to place the post-1991 in the

long-term context. The hypothesis that unregistered cohabitation after 1991 was a continuation of existing Soviet-era trends is plausible at this writing, particularly in light of the findings of Katus and his colleagues (2007). Looking farther backward, it is more than likely that cohabitation without ‘official’ marriage was primarily a twentieth-century phenomenon. Even if complaints about it can be found in pre-modern sources, religious and community pressures (at least in the rural areas where most Latvians lived) would no doubt have kept the phenomenon to a minimum. Such cohabitation gradually lost its social stigma in the generally loosening of ‘traditional’ moral rules after WWI, permitting alternative forms of living together especially in urban areas. The proportions of the population involved in such arrangement remains unknown, however. Even if the Communist Party in the Soviet period espoused a ‘traditional’ view of marriage and had more than adequate resources to coerce people into line, there is evidence that the Party’s control over how people chose to live together was relatively weak and that its fiery strictures about ‘socialist morality’ remained mainly at the level of ideological discourse. The renewal of Latvian independence and the withdrawal of the state from heavy-handed and punitive social engineering created room for alternative forms of living together, as reflected in the post-1991 Latvian censuses.

## Notes

1. The National Archives of Latvia, The State Archives of Latvia, Records of the Primary Party Organization’s Office of the Militia Administration at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 7265. fonds, 1. apraksts, 6. lieta, p. 5, The Record of the Meeting of the Primary Party Organization’s Office of the Militia Administration at the Ministry of Internal Affairs on 7 January, 1952.
2. The National Archives of Latvia, the State Archives of Latvia, Records of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia, PA-102. fonds, 39.apraksts, 8.lieta, pp. 34–35, The Plan on the Demographic Situation of the Riga City Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia to the Resolution on 24 October, 1980.

## Archival sources

The National Archives of Latvia, the State Archives of Latvia, Records of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia, PA-102. fonds, 39.apraksts, 8.lieta, pp. 34–35, The Plan on the Demographic Situation of the Riga City Committee of the Communist Party of Latvia to the Resolution on 24 October, 1980.

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