# Public Reason and the Limits of Liberal Anti-Racism in Latvia

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ABSTRACT *My paper is a critical analysis of anti-racist and tolerance promotion initiatives in Latvia. First, I trace the historical and geopolitical conditions that enable the emergence of two discursive positions that are central to arguments about racism – that of liberally inclined tolerance activists and that of Latvians with politically objectionable nationalist sensibilities. Subsequently, I argue that, plagued by developmentalist thinking, anti-racist and tolerance promotion initiatives fail in their analysis of contemporary racism. They posit backward attitudes as the main hindrance to the eradication of racism and displace racism as a constitutive feature of modern political forms onto individual and collective sensibilities. Instead of the fast track diagnosis of racism that animates liberal anti-racism, I suggest that an analysis of racism should integrate attention to the common elements of modern racism across political regimes and the historical particularities that shape public and political subjectivities in concrete places.*

KEYWORDS *Anti-racism, liberal political culture, nationalism, modern state, Latvia, postsocialism*

## Introduction

In the last two decades, scholars, policy-makers, and activists have become increasingly concerned with the rise of anti-immigrant sentiments and the proliferation of practices of exclusion among the European states' majority populations. Anthropologists have been primarily concerned with finding an analytical–political language adequate to describing these exclusionary practices and methodologies appropriate to researching them. Are these emergent exclusions merely new forms of the same old racism or are they more precisely described by terms such as cultural racism, cultural fundamentalism,

xenophobia, neo-nationalism, integralism, or a combination thereof (Stolcke 1995; Holmes 2000; Friedman *et al.* 2003; Gingrich 2004; Gullestad 2004, 2005; Hervik 2004; van Nieuwkerk 2004; Gilroy 2006; Gingrich & Banks 2006)? How does diagnosing or naming these forms of exclusion enable or limit analytical and political interventions (Gingrich 2004)? How are they to be studied without 'going native', that is, without changing anthropologists' own allegedly progressive politics (Friedman *et al.* 2003)?

Various policy and political forums, networks, and institutions too have thrown their weight behind anti-racism and tolerance promotion measures, as public and political interventions with regard to the contemporary forms of exclusion have come to be known. Activities targeting racism and intolerance have become institutionalized in interstate structures such as the Council of Europe's Commission Against Racism and Intolerance, thus making them part of Europe's governmental machinery.[1] Alongside concerns with the exclusionary sentiments and practices of the European states' majority populations, public and political commitment to tolerance has also emerged as an important indicator of and requirement for political and cultural membership in Europe. It is directed at old Europe's 'internal others' when the Dutch, French, or Norwegian majorities express concern that Muslim residents do not abide by the prevailing liberal or republican norms in the Netherlands, France, or Norway (Wikan 2000; van Nieuwkerk 2004; Bowen 2007). It is also directed at new European member states and societies, when popular and scholarly voices express concern about the resurgence of nationalism and the public appearance of xenophobia and intolerance in Eastern Europe.

My paper is a critical analysis of anti-racist and tolerance promotion initiatives in Latvia, which were implemented as part of the European Union-funded National Programme for the Promotion of Tolerance. The Programme was launched by the Special Tasks Ministry for the Integration of Society in 2004 with the aim to tackle intolerance as a problem of negative attitudes toward racial, ethnic, and religious difference (IUMSILS 2004). The Ministry was initially established to promote the integration of Russian-speaking residents into Latvian society in order to avoid a dual-community state, given that during the Soviet period Latvians and Russian speakers (former Soviet citizens of various ethnic backgrounds who settled in Latvia during the Soviet period) were solidified as two historical communities with different understandings of self and therefore also diverging ethics and politics (Dzenovska 2009). However, as civil servants and human rights activists labored to get Latvia's politicians to sign and ratify the European Convention for Human Rights

(ratified in 1997) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ratified in 2005), they became increasingly convinced that the political process was hindered by backward attitudes widespread among politicians and within the Latvian public (LCESC 1999, 2000)[2]. Moreover, stories of racist incidents—often in the form of stares and comments—encountered by Roma and by other people of color residing in or visiting Latvia began to circulate within the network of human rights activists. This created a strong sense that racism – both as a way of thinking about difference and as abuse and discrimination – was indeed a problem in Latvia. At the same time as concern with racism was escalating within activist circles, the recorded numbers were low. The 2007 Annual Report of the Ombudsman's Office indicated that there had been only 12 written complaints about discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity (LRT 2007:36). However, tolerance activists argued, and my research corroborated, that much remained underreported and that 'visible minorities' – that is persons who are visually different from the predominantly white population, such as Roma and Africans – felt uncomfortable, even unsafe, in public space (LRT 2007; ECRI 2008).

That the problem came to be articulated as a problem of intolerance was the effect of reporting practices undertaken by local human rights organizations. The former Special Tasks Minister for the Integration of Society told me that the discourse of tolerance emerged in Latvia in the mid-1990s when he was still Director of the Latvian Center for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies. The Center frequently prepared reports on the situation in Latvia for European human rights monitoring institutions such as the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights. The standardized reports required that they prepare a section on the problem of intolerance. 'The category was ready', as the former minister put it.[3]

The Latvian public, however, was not. Many responded to this increased attention to racism and intolerance with puzzlement and even resentment. For a variety of reasons, many Latvians considered that the problem of racism did not concern them. For example, I often heard it said that there are very few people of color in Latvia who might become victims of racism. Moreover, racism was thought to be the problem of former colonial powers such as France or Britain, rather than of the victims of colonial, imperial, or socialist oppression, which is how Latvians often saw themselves in public and political life. Activists working on tolerance projects – Latvia's residents of various ethnic backgrounds or communities of association – interpreted such a response as a manifestation of passionate attachment to the cultural

nation and the past. This, in their view, prevented Latvians as a 'state people' (Arendt 1979) from hearing the claims of minorities and from critically reflecting upon themselves.[4] As put by the director of a well-known human rights organization right at the outset of my fieldwork in 2005, 'Our core problem is the inability to recognize the problem'.

Consequently, activists brought together by the Programme agreed that their efforts should focus on two tasks: first, tackling intolerance as a negative attitude toward racial, ethnic, religious, and, eventually, sexual difference and, second, obtaining public and political recognition that the problem of intolerance merited reflection and intervention. Tolerance activists 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, civil servants, the Border Guard, and police officers. Articles on tolerance-related issues began to appear in various newspapers and popular magazines. Tolerance was solidified as the desired, though vaguely defined, alternative to a variety of discourses and practices of differencing and exclusion, including those of racism and nationalism.

In the process of tolerance promotion, the practices of differencing and exclusion upon which Latvians were invited to reflect – such as resentful attitudes toward an imagined threat of immigration – were rarely analyzed. Activists often used formulas of discursive analysis to diagnose racism in public statements such as 'I am not a racist, but. . .' (van Dijk 2002; Golubeva 2005).[5] For tolerance activists, racism became a universally recognizable pathology, a moral failure, and one that, once identified, required treatment rather than analysis. Through their claims that racism is not a problem that requires broad public reflection, Latvians were rejecting this diagnosis of widespread racism and the proposed cure of critical reflection. For tolerance activists, in turn, this rejection of the demand for critical reflection on racism became the marker of Latvian nationalist sensibilities.

Though this landscape helps frame the rest of the paper, in what follows I do not place Latvian sensibilities into recognizable political and moral categories such as nationalism and racism. Rather, I am interested in the historical and geopolitical conditions that enable the emergence of particular forms of public reason, including the two discursive positions that are central in arguments about racism in Latvia – that of the liberally inclined tolerance activists and that of the Latvians with politically problematic nationalist sensibilities.[6] Moreover, I argue that diagnosing Latvians as backward nationalists overlooks the everyday practices and the uneven field of power relations through which

many people in Latvia understand and remake themselves as public and political subjects by drawing on overlapping and oppositional historical narratives and experiences, namely those of colonialism, communism, and imperialism. It also problematically overlooks the constitutive role of racism in modern state formations and techniques of power (Goldberg 2002, 2006; Foucault 2003; Lentin 2008a,b; Lentin & Lentin 2008).

While the object of reflection in this paper is public reason, I do not therefore want to marginalize experiences of racism or the multitude of perspectives that might exist on the subject among Latvia's residents. Rather, I aim to understand what arguments about racism tell us about the racialized and racializing political and public subjects in Latvia, as well as about contemporary anti-racism in Europe. I suggest that an analysis of public reason in the context of arguments about racism in Latvia opens the possibility to ask how contemporary anti-racism operates under conditions where racism is an articulation between historically specific understandings of individual and collective selves, political ideologies *and* modern statecraft, and techniques of power (Goldberg 2002, 2006; Foucault 2003; Lentin 2008a,b; Lentin & Lentin 2008)?[7] It allows us to ask what is being refused when people refuse the label of racism or nationalism? What does public reflection on racism do besides allegedly addressing the problem of racism?

I conclude that in Latvia, along with addressing the problem of racism and intolerance, tolerance promotion and anti-racism initiatives function as technologies of modern governance – or, as Wendy Brown (2006) has put it, civilizing discourses – through which a variety of 'others' are folded into 'the West'. Plagued by developmentalist thinking, whereby states and people are continuously constituted as 'not quite there' in terms of adapting liberal political culture, these initiatives fail in their analysis of contemporary racism. They do so by positing backward attitudes and sentiments as the main hindrance to the eradication of racism and intolerance, thus displacing racism – a constitutive feature of modern political forms – onto individual and collective sensibilities. Instead of the fast track diagnosis of racism that seems to dominate liberal anti-racism, I suggest that an analysis of racism should integrate an attention to the common elements of modern racism across political regimes with the historical particularities that shape public and political subjectivities in concrete places.

## The Analytical and Political Lives of Racism and Nationalism

Scholar of race and racism John Wrench has pointed out that in numerous academic conferences in Europe, he has repeatedly encountered denials of

racism of the kind that tolerance activists encountered in Latvia (Banton 2002).[8] Among the examples he lists are the following: 'Sweden has never been a colonial power ruling over non-white peoples', or 'racism is absent from French culture, because the 1789 French revolution institutionalized "liberty, equality, and fraternity" into French society' (Banton 2002:125). Similarly, in her analysis of debates about the use of the word *neger* in Norway, Marianne Gullestad notes how the Norwegian public defended the word as neutral partly because of a perception that Norwegians are innocent with regard to slavery, colonialism, and racism (2005:43). While each such instance of 'denial' invokes a historically specific justification for the conviction that racism is not a widespread problem in their respective context, it is noteworthy that all are articulated within the discursive frame of the nation.

I suggest that these resonant denials, as it were, do not call for comparison of the different contexts of denial, but are rather symptoms of a particular problem that plagues anti-racist measures in Europe. Namely, they point to a fundamental disjuncture between the constitutive elements of modern racism, which cannot be contained within national boundaries, and contemporary practices of anti-racism, which attribute accountability to national subjects. In Latvia, for example, modern racism – as a complex set of practices of differencing and exclusion – is not just a matter of the Soviet legacy, populist politics, or of entrenched or resurgent nationalist sensibilities. It is also an effect of building a modern European nation state. In making such an argument, I combine ethnographically emergent conclusions with Michel Foucault's notion of 'modern racism', which he elaborated in his lectures at the Collège de France in 1975/76. Foucault distinguished 'modern racism' from 'ordinary racism', understood as contempt between races, and from racism as an 'ideological operation', whereby the state displaces hostility upon specific population groups. In Foucault's words, modern racism 'is not bound up with mentalities, ideologies, or the lies of power. It is bound up with the techniques of power, with the technology of power'. (2003:258).

To put another way, Foucault's argument is that modern racism does not manifest itself in motivations that guide people's actions or in political ideologies, but rather in the techniques and micropractices of power of the modern state. This modern power or biopower is shaped by the nineteenth century evolutionary thinking, which classified peoples, groups, and individuals along a hierarchical scale of development. For example, in tracing the emergence of Eadweard Muybridge's photographic grid as a way to capture movement, Tim Cresswell argues that Muybridge borrowed from the

anthropological photography of John Lamprey developed in order to conduct an anthropometric study of Malay men in 1869. In this study, Lamprey used a grid devised out of silk threads attached to a wooden frame to measure his subjects in the interest of science: 'The Malayan man became a generic type framed by a grid of objectivity and universality' (in Cresswell 2006:63). The grid was then used to compare Malayan man with other racial types within the British Empire. Subsequently, the grid became 'one more technique in the state's arsenal of surveillance and regulation, which increasingly allowed for the management of populations from the nineteenth century onwards'. (2006:63).

Modern racism, thus, is the product of the integration of evolutionary thinking into modern forms of government through practices of dividing the population into groups that become objects of regulation. In the process, some groups come to be seen as a threat to others: the abnormal become a threat to the normal, the poor to the rich, one ethnic group to another. It could be said, then, that the very imperative to think in terms of threat is a constitutive feature of modern racism. While finer distinctions need to be made between the various forms of differencing characteristic of biopower, it can nevertheless be concluded that the concept of modern racism complicates attempts to eradicate the blemish of racism while leaving the modern nation state intact. Thus, we can no longer deal with racism without dealing with the nature of the power that underlies the modern state (Goldberg 2002, 2006; Foucault 2003:263; Lentin & Lentin 2008).

Indeed, if modern racism operates in and through the state as a modern political form, it is noteworthy that the tolerance promotion and anti-racist initiatives in Latvia posit racism as a problem of nationalist sensibilities. Though documenting the relationship between modern power and racism is a substantial project well beyond the scope of this paper, the evidence provided by the authors above, supplemented by the ethnographic data in this article, is sufficient to suggest that strategies, discourses, and practices of anti-racism that neglect to consider this relationship should themselves become the subject of critical reflection.[9]

Furthermore, the articulation of racism and nationalism in the discourse of tolerance activists suggests that these concepts have a vibrant public and political life in Latvia. In the context of arguments about minority rights and tolerance, the designation 'nationalist' has acquired explicitly negative connotations, whereas it had positive and liberating overtones during independence struggles in the late 1980s. Moreover, if, with regard to the Latvian state's relationship with the Russian-speaking minority, the designation 'nationalist'

refers to a conservative political stance with regard to questions of citizenship and language, in the context of arguments about tolerance, the designation 'nationalist' refers to individual and collective sensibilities. For example, as deployed by tolerance activists, 'nationalist' marks a backward attachment to the nation as a cultural community and politically objectionable sensibilities toward difference.[10]

It is important, thus, to make a distinction between theories of nationalism and racism and nationalism and racism as ethnographic categories. Both terms perform particular kinds of work in the context of arguments about racism, intolerance, and minority rights in Latvia. Both also serve as analytical markers of particular practices of differencing. In this paper, 'racism' and 'nationalism' operate as ethnographic categories used by tolerance activists. I also use the term 'racism' to designate, at its most general, modern practices that classify and categorize people. However, identifying racism at its most general is not a sufficient analytical goal. Racism needs to be given concrete form through an analysis of the articulation of modern power with historically particular understandings of difference.[11] I proceed, then, toward its historical articulation in Latvia.

## Between the Soviet Past and the European Present

### Public invisibility of race in the Soviet Union

As many Africans across the Soviet and later former Soviet spaces, Robert – a leading member of the African Latvian Association – came to Latvia to study on a scholarship from his government.[12] He had spent some time in Russia before enrolling in the Riga Civil Aviation Institute in the early 1990s. He thus joined students from countries of Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East who were already studying there. The Institute had a reputation for hosting students from countries friendly to the Soviet Union. In the 1980s, it was a pretty safe guess that if one saw a visually different foreign person on the street, he (and it was almost always a 'he') was probably a student at the Institute. In the local imagination, the Institute represented the Soviet 'friendship of the peoples' policy. However, contrary to the Russian-speaking Soviet citizens of various ethnic backgrounds who were supposed to merge with Latvians and form the Soviet people, the foreign subjects of the 'friendship of the peoples' project remained outside the Soviet people proper. While the Soviet citizens were integrated vis-à-vis state institutions and residential arrangements, foreign students were effectively segregated inside the campus

hostel of the Civil Aviation Institute.[13] As Robert told me in an interview conducted in 2005, a wide range of services, including cafés, shops, and discos, were available on campus. The campus was better provisioned than the city, thus the students had no particular reason to leave the campus, unless they had to go to the train station or to the airport. Thus, Robert and his colleagues were not a constant presence in the streets of Riga 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 campus that he encountered racism on the street.

The students of the Institute were not prevented from leaving the campus. Similarly, locals, especially women, were not prevented from attending the discos and cafés in its territory. Thus, it may seem that strict segregation was not enforced. At the same time, the fact that the students mostly stayed within the confines of the campus was not accidental. By enabling students to obtain products, services, and social life without leaving the grounds of the Institute, the Soviet officials did not encourage their public presence.[14] Some of the people I spoke with about the Civil Aviation Institute suggested that the foreign students who could afford to attend the Institute were kept separate from the less well-provisioned Soviet population so that Soviet citizens would not be tempted by the items and money in the foreigners' possession.

Even as the exact motivations behind what was their effective segregation are hard to discern today, the effect was such that neither the students nor the local residents were used to thinking of each other as part of the same public space. To understand the contemporary moment, I find that it is important to ask how this class-based yet nevertheless also racial separation articulated with other practices of spatial segregation during the Soviet period to create a particular kind of invisibility of difference. For example, the Soviet state also institutionalized the visually impaired in sanatoriums in the midst of woods, orphans in orphanages, and homosexuals and the mentally ill in hospitals or prisons. These practices, as Michel Foucault has remarked, implicate the Soviet state in modern racism, if we understand modern racism as manifested in state-based techniques of power through which life is regulated (2003:262).

### The foreignness of racism in Soviet ideological discourses

Along with the public invisibility of race, Soviet ideological discourses posited racism as a foreign phenomenon integral to Western capitalism and contrasted it to the Soviet state, understood to be both anti-colonial and anti-racist (Baldwin 2002). In the Soviet context, it was Africans, especially

African-Americans, who were the paradigmatic objects of Western, capitalist and colonialist racism. As such, many former Soviet citizens identified with the image of downtrodden Africans cultivated during the Soviet period.

For example, during a seminar for teachers organized under the auspices of the National Programme for the Promotion of Tolerance, we discussed the use of the word *nēģeris* (negro) in the Latvian language, which was contested in the context of arguments about tolerance. 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 is that of 'the good guy', that is, of someone who is oppressed. Given the Soviet legacy, the image of oppression conjures up positive connotations of struggle and solidarity, even as the ideology within which this image made sense has been discredited.

For teachers, and for many Latvians, the perception of racism as a foreign phenomenon continues to be prevalent in the post-Soviet context. 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 think that the newcomers do not understand the local ways and are too sensitive toward innocent expressions of interest or simple acts of hooliganism. For example, commenting on recent skinhead activities in the Old City of Riga, 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 [in her view, lost young people without an explicit ideology] simply found some reason to fight, otherwise they would attack old people or someone else'. 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 Riga by saying that 'it is not easy to descend from a higher status to a lower one'. She thus suggested that their complaints about racism derive from losing privileged status rather than from the prevalence of racism on the street. She emphasized her point by saying that 'Hutzuls too have married into Latvia, but you don't hear anything from them, do you?'.[15]

*Soviet nationality policy, everyday racism, and modern statecraft*
By invoking Hutzuls, the staff member of the Institute of History suggested that other visually distinct residents do not claim public presence in Latvia as victims of racism. She thus also gestured toward other historically racialized subjects in

Latvia. Indeed, during the Soviet period, racist discourses and practices also unfolded in relation to a diverse group of Soviet citizens subsumed under the everyday category of 'blacks' (*melnie* in Latvian or *chernyie* in Russian), which, depending on circumstances, included Caucasians, Chechens, Roma, or Central Asians (Blakely 1986; Lemon 2000; Matusevich 2007). In everyday discourses, Soviet citizens marked this latter group as variously criminal, backward, stupid, deceitful, and aggressive, yet did not think of these utterances as racializing or racist. Rather, these utterances were located within the hierarchy of nationalities associated with the ethno-territorial mode of political organization known as the Soviet nationalities policy. Within this scheme, as Kate Baldwin (2002) argues, nationalities were often endowed with either inherent biological or metaphorically racial characteristics.

However, Hutzuls – the racialized and silent former Soviet subjects – were products of the Soviet nationalities policy in more ways than one. Since each national territory – an autonomous or semi-autonomous Soviet republic – was matched with a titular nationality, other nationalities or ethnic groups which might reside in its territory were denied collective public and political presence. The contemporary Latvian understanding of the national hierarchy governing public and political space resonates with the ethno-territorial imaginary cultivated during the Soviet times. Thus, the historian posited the silence of Hutzuls as exemplary of a proper recognition of the national hierarchy that governs the public audibility of minorities in Latvia today.

Importantly, however, this ethno-territorial imaginary is not a unique feature of the Soviet political ideology and regime of government. In various configurations, it underlies modern geopolitical imaginaries and techniques of power (Feldman 2005; Brubaker 2006). Indeed, the Soviet state regulated its population using many of same techniques of power as other modern states. Namely, the Soviet state operated in the 'biopower mode' insofar as it was concerned with the vitality of its populations, with health, migration, and demography (Foucault 2003:261). It was concerned with threats to the population, and it was in the name of the Soviet population that it exercised power over life by 'making live and letting die'.[16]

Taking Foucault seriously, thus, would mean abandoning the entrenched line of argument about whether the Soviet state was similar to or different from racist or colonial regimes.[17] Instead, it would mean asking the following: in what ways was the Soviet state both similar to *and* different from other modern political formations with regard to racist thinking and politics? What was the specificity of racist thinking and practice in the Soviet Union? How

did it bring together the modern racism inherent in state-based techniques of power, the specific ideologies and practices of the Soviet socialist project, and the Soviet citizens' sense of self? How did this articualtion enable racist thinking and practice in both statecraft and the everyday, even as state ideology was explicitly anti-racist? Moreover, how has this historical articulation of Soviet racism contributed to the formation of the problem space of racism in Latvia today?

## The Making of Racist and Anti-Racist Publics

Walking the streets of Riga, Michael encounters racist looks and comments. 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 a stranger 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'!

Since his arrival in Riga, now more than a decade ago, Michael has actively tried to integrate into Latvian society by learning the Latvian language and singing in a Latvian choir. Many Latvians consider this to be a sign of commendable respect, a positive counterexample to the elderly Russian-speaking residents' inability or lack of willingness to learn the Latvian language during decades of residing in Soviet and now independent Latvia.

Being one of a small number of people of African descent in Riga, Michael even became something of a celebrity. The occasional interview was a regular part of his life. However, year after year, living in Riga with his Latvian-born wife and family, speaking Latvian, singing in a Latvian choir, Michael went home and shared with his wife the not-so-pleasant aspects of being a black man in Riga. Until one day, encouraged by his wife, he decided to speak out. In the interviews he gave thereafter, he began to speak of racism in Latvia. Through such statements, 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 while publicly praising the beauty of Latvian nature, Michael addressed and therefore also constituted a public, one which should concern itself with the problem of racism in Latvia.[18] In doing so, he was transformed from a publicly exoticized
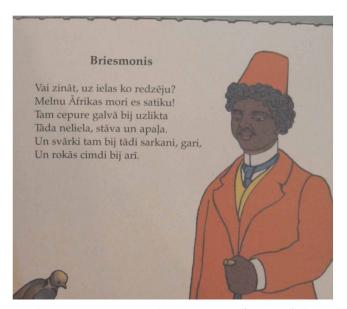
individual – a black man speaking Latvian and singing in a Latvian choir – into a member of a racially marked minority public, which called upon the majority to reflect on its exclusionary and injurious conduct. Through his demand that the Latvian public reflect on the problem of racism, Michael suggested that racist discourses and practices were deeply embedded in social life. In most of his public statements, whether purposefully or inadvertently, he pointed out that the ways people conducted themselves – the ways they talked and looked, heard, and saw – were infused with racism. He insisted that racism is a problem in Latvia and, moreover, that it requires sustained public reflection on the attitudes and conduct prevalent in society.

In the years following his initial appearance as a member of a racially marked public, Michael became a presence in almost any conversation or argument about race. Yet, very few people actively welcomed Michael's public statements. Even among those who worked to cultivate tolerance and liberal democratic values in public and political life, some thought that Michael came across as too sensitive, accusatory, and thus unproductive in his statements. A government official, who also happened to be a member of the working group which developed the National Programme 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 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'? 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 continuously expressed surprise about how mundane and seemingly innocent practices, such as looking, could be construed as racist. Most understood racism to be an intentional and explicit assertion of racial superiority, which they did not share and which, they thought, was not congruent with the Latvian worldview shaped by experiences of oppression.[19] It was therefore also not clear to many why the problem of racism demanded broad public reflection. And it was precisely this seeming 'lack of reflexivity' that entrenched convictions about the prevalence of racism and nationalism in Latvian society among the liberally inclined tolerance activists.

For example, as I was explaining the topic of my research to a small group of people at a friend's birthday party, one of the guests – a Latvian woman working for a liberal think-tank – brought to my attention a children's poem

written in 1908 by the seminal Latvian literary and political figure Jānis Rainis. The poem was republished in 2006 in a volume of Rainis' poems for children (Rainis 2006). 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 six 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 that depicted a very dark-skinned, thick-lipped man (Image 1). The poem was entitled *Briesmonis* (the monster).[20] 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'.

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 Program for the Promotion of Tolerance and asked them to share their thoughts. The teachers set out to explain the odd title, which,



**Image 1**. The poem by Rainis titled '*Briesmonis*' (Monster).[21]

they thought, did not fit the otherwise gentle and friendly tone of the poem. They were of the opinion 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 been perceived as 'frightening others' in Europe, thus she 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. My friend who considered the poem to be troubling similarly did not tackle the conditions of its production, but rather condemned its *uncritical reproduction* in the present. In other words, for her, it was the Latvians' lack of a critical relationship to what may well have been a common European heritage of racism that was indicative of their politically objectionable sensibilities in the present.

As arguments about tolerance intensified in 2005 and 2006, the need for public reflection and critical thinking became central elements of these debates. For example, during another seminar for teachers held in 2006 under the auspices of the National Programme for the Promotion of Tolerance, the topic of discussion was public occurrences of racism. The moderator showed newspaper clippings describing an incident where two Sri Lankan students had been assaulted on the street in Riga nearby the university they attended. The epithets the assailants – two young women – used did not leave anyone in doubt that the attack was indeed racially motivated, yet some teachers expressed resentment that such incidents were used to suggest that Latvians must collectively and publicly reflect on the problem of racism. Trying both to explain such resentment and to find a solution for how to publicly address the problem of racism, one of the seminar participants suggested that Latvians as members of the titular nation intimately identify with the public space of the nation state and thus are personally offended when it is suggested that racism is a problem in Latvia. In other words, Latvians perceive the suggestion that racism is a problem in the public space as an accusation directed at the collective virtue (or the lack thereof) of the cultural nation of Latvians.

There are at least two trajectories for tracing how the suggestion that there is a problem of racism in Latvia comes to be seen as a suggestion that Latvians are racists. One derives from the translocal geopolitical imaginaries that structure the nation-state system, namely the articulation of ethnically defined communities with particular territories and states, which posits a 'state people' as responsible for what occurs in their state's territory and the public space

(Arendt 1979; Feldman 2005; Hirsch 2005). The other derives from a historically specific articulation of Latvians as a cultural community and the national public space in Latvia. It complements the first and would not be possible without it. At the same time, the first would remain an abstract statement without attention to the concrete contours of the latter. It is precisely through an analysis of the articulation of common elements of modern racism and the historically specific ways in which modern political forms are lived that we can approximate a better understanding of how racism operates in the contemporary historical conjuncture.

The teacher associated Latvians with the public space in part because of a historically specific understanding of the relationship between people and place exemplified by the mythology of *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. The imaginary of *viensēta* is mythological insofar as it is no longer and perhaps has never been the prevalent mode of rural life in Latvia (Purs in Schwartz 2006:44). Yet, it shapes the way those who identify with the cultural nation of Latvians think of themselves in relation to space and place. Imaginaries of this socio-spatial arrangement get articulated with modern forms of political life, such as the public, and subsequently inform arguments about tolerance and public reflection. Thus, what I am concerned with here is not the selectively derived prevalence of the single farmstead mode of rural living in the imagination of the nation, but rather its role in shaping public and political subjectivities of Latvians.

*Viensētas* or 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 a communal type of rural dwellings. Historically, Latvia's single farmsteads were located at a sufficient distance from each other, separated by fields and natural landmarks. They consisted of an ensemble of buildings – for example, living quarters, a granary, a barn, and so forth – with common open spaces between them and were occupied by a master family (*saimnieki*) and their farmhands. Within the Latvian social imaginary, the farmsteads represent the kind of living where people are in a hierarchical, yet symbiotic and harmonious, relationship with nature, work, and each other (Schwartz 2006). Narratives of single farmstead living are central to how many 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. For example, when discussing the results of a survey

which included a standardized social distance question about whether the residents of Latvia would want to live next door to variously defined others – e.g. homosexuals, Muslims, and Gypsies – participants of the aforementioned teacher seminar argued that Latvians are after all *viensētnieki* (single farmsteaders or homesteaders) and thus they do not want to live next to anyone, not just Muslims or Africans (Šūpule *et al.* 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 climate 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 (Šūpule 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.

The mythology of *viensēta* is also continuously reproduced in literature and personal narratives. Many works that are thought to constitute the Latvian literary canon taught in school take place in single farmstead settings. For example, one of the most revered literary works in Latvia – Edvarts Virza's (2007) '*Straumēni*' (the name of the farmstead) – is a narrative that poetically depicts life in a single farmstead. 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, these changes gesture toward repetition and stability.

Moreover, many Latvians narrate their experience of World War II, which resulted in the establishment of Soviet power, 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 had 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 Latvia's 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.[22] 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.

I suggest that there is a constitutive relationship between the discourses about patterns of living and cohabitation that the image of the single farmstead invokes and contemporary conceptions of the relationship between public space and the cultural nation of Latvians. In other words, in Latvia, the modern formation that is the public is conceived vis-à-vis the mythology of single farmsteads; this is a powerful social fact that shapes people's sense of self and conduct. Given that within this mythology people and place are seamlessly intertwined, the positive content of the national public space is deeply consequential for many Latvians' sense of self. Subsequently, claims that there is racism within the public space of the nation become inseparable from claims that Latvians are also, in a way, racists.

Having marked this existentially entangled articulation of Latvians and public space, the teacher who attempted to explain why Latvians are so reluctant to publicly talk about racism 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 racist crimes.[23] 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 cultural nation from 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.

In contrast, tolerance activists suggested that public reflection on race requires a different type of distancing. Rather than collective alienation of the Latvian cultural nation from public space, they proposed a distancing mechanism that can be thought of in terms of the practice of liberal *abstraction*, whereby the self enters the public space (and public sphere) as an individual in a critical and distanced relationship with the community and its past. For example, one of the largest non-governmental organizations working toward the promotion of human rights and social cohesion has included the promotion of critical thinking as one of the key elements of an action program aimed at achieving open and tolerant attitudes and conduct in society. It is noteworthy that this program assumes that critical thinking will lead to very particular – that is, liberal democratic – conclusions about modes of cohabitation across difference.

Thus, instead of collectively distancing from public space, in this view, Latvians as individuals should distance themselves from too passionate an attachment to the cultural nation in order to reflect on the problem of racism, which affects them as citizens of a liberal democratic state and not as members of a historical and cultural nation. Such an abstraction distinguishes between two publics – one racist and the other anti-racist, as well as places the reflecting individual in the latter. Such a maneuver also constitutes the categories of the civic public sphere and a private sphere of belonging that did not necessarily figure as separate spheres in the discourse of the teacher. In the narrative of the teacher, when distancing occurs, it involves the recognition that the approximation of the seamless intertwining between public space and the cultural nation has been interrupted by the presence of those not of the nation. The presence of racism is thus understood as an interruption that is external to the public of the nation.

Under conditions in which 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 nation or the basic social and political formations of the nation state intact. The discourse of alienation of the Latvian cultural nation from public space protects the cultural nation from the fragmentation that might result from liberalization. It repositions the nation in relation to public space. The discourse of liberal abstraction reconfigures the individual's relationship with the nation in order to enable critical reflection, yet it retains faith in state-based politics and liberal political culture. However, as Tim Cresswell (2006) has illustrated, abstraction, as a method for carving comparable units – for example, properly reflecting individuals – out of living beings and their messy reality, is itself a practice that is implicated in what Foucault (2003) has termed 'modern racism'. It is therefore questionable that subjecting the cultural nation of Latvians to liberalization is the solution to the problem of racism. At the same time, displacing racism onto 'the Russians', as the teacher did, also falls short in terms of an analysis of racism. What it does help to see, however, is the limits of the juxtaposition between nationalism and liberalism that dominates arguments about racism in Latvia. What would it mean, then, to push for reflection on race *and* take it seriously that public reflection on race and racism might be deeply unsettling for both the cultural nation of Latvians and the liberal anti-racists and tolerance activists?

## Toward an Integrated Analysis of Racism and Anti-Racism

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. 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 cultural nation, 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 from 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. 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 national state that ensures the flourishing of the historical and cultural nation of Latvians.[24] '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 metropoles of Western Europe.

While Kārlis' statement was irritating, even repugnant – if uttered in liberal circles it would undoubtedly be labeled as reactionary, nationalist, xenophobic, or racist – it was not a sole product of Kārlis' nationalist sensibilities. Importantly, it was also grounded in state-based thinking associated with political formations that included, but were not limited to, nationalist

regimes. For example, his concerns pertained to the threat that migration might pose to the vital forces of the 'state people' (Arendt 1979). However, the threat of migration in relation to a base population is not a concern unique to cultural nationalists. As a myriad of scholarly and popular works show, such a concern seems to be widespread in European nation states regardless of the conception of the nation prevalent in each.[25] Kārlis thus used the modern language of biopower to argue that certain exclusionary practices were merited. Similarly, on other occasions during my fieldwork, people attempted to calculate the appropriate threshold for when the titular population would become threatened in its national territory. For example, a Latvian language expert suggested that the threshold is crossed when the percentage of the titular population in its national territory falls below 75% (Veisbergs 2008). In order for such statements to make sense, the public must be versed in modern statecraft and techniques of power, which suggests that racism in Latvia is not merely a product of backward sensibilities but is rather produced through the articulation of a historically formed understanding of collective life, modern statecraft, and contemporary power relations. Thus, Kārlis did not simply police the borders of the nation out of ideological conviction or passionate attachment to the past, but also invited an argument in the register in which modern statecraft and modern racism operate.

This and other moments in arguments about racism and intolerance in Latvia suggest that attributing racism to nationalist sentiment is unsatisfactory for several reasons. First, it diverts attention from the fact that racism is constitutive of the modern state and displaces racism upon collective or individual sensibilities. Second, explaining racism by turning to nationalism has become political shorthand, which obscures the historical circumstances and uneven power relations that shape public and political subjectivities in the context of arguments about racism in Latvia.

Moreover, the tendency to analyze and fight racism within national boundaries – that is, as a problem of France, Britain, Italy, Latvia, and so forth – has significant analytical and political limitations. First, it requires that comparable national units be created by way of abstraction – a practice which itself is entangled with modern racism. Second, locating racism within national boundaries has the effect of attributing accountability to national subjects while positing the liberal democratic state as a universal and therefore somehow neutral feature of modernity.[26] To put another way, it is nations that become culpable for failing to implement the liberal democratic principles which are thought to be enshrined in modern political forms.[27] It is not surpris-

ing, then, that John Wrench encounters numerous denials of racism articulated in the language of the nation. Yet, comparing racism or its denial across national contexts once again diverts attention from the need to dismantle the hegemony of the nation state as part of the analysis of modern racism. In other words, the prison house of the grid of nation states does not allow for an adequate analysis of the ways in which modern racism articulates with political and everyday racisms in specific historical conjunctures and fields of power relations.

Under such conditions, an analysis of arguments about racism in Latvia is particularly useful for bringing the limitations of contemporary anti-racist and tolerance promotion measures into sharper focus. In 1991, Latvia re-entered the international arena as a national state – that is, as a state formed for the purpose of the political self-determination of a particular nation. Adoptation of liberal political culture, along with the implementation of neoliberal economic shock therapy, emerged as preconditions for Latvia to acquire full membership in the international community. This was not a straightforward task, as Latvia re-entered the international arena as a national state with a unique majority-cum-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. Consequently, the so-called transition to a liberal democratic polity and neoliberal economy was supervised and monitored by Western European governments and various international bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Council of Europe, among others.[28]

However, the relationships of supervision that characterized the process of European integration in post-Soviet Latvia were not new. During the interwar period between 1919 and 1939, when new Eastern European states were carved out of collapsing empires, these states, including Latvia, 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). When the reporting and monitoring activities resumed in new forms after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Latvians expressed resentment toward 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 in Western Europe (Cālīte 2005; Mežs 2005).[29]

In the midst of ongoing political and symbolic battles about the minority question, when discourses of tolerance began to suggest that Latvians had to readjust their attitudes, for many Latvians, it signaled that full membership in Europe would be permanently deferred and that more practices of intervention were forthcoming. Tolerance activists, however, remained optimistic even as they frequently lamented how backward Latvians were in contrast to their Western counterparts. As one activist noted in a conversation with her British colleague during my fieldwork, 'We are still far from the goal, but we know it is possible, because you are there'!

The possibility to posit Latvia and Latvians as lagging behind in terms of adopting liberal political culture helps to reinforce the hegemony of state-based anti-racism in Western Europe. Construing Latvia, and perhaps other Eastern European states and peoples, as 'not quite there' establishes a developmental hierarchy which serves as proof that progress is possible and that there is no need to change the course of action. Therefore, it is precisely here – in Latvia, at the intersection of the Soviet past and the European present – that the limits of state-based anti-racism should emerge most clearly through the kind of analysis of racism and anti-racism that, instead of falling into the trap of developmentalist thinking, turns the critical lens back onto modern political forms and techniques of power.

In search of tools to reconceptualize our analysis of racism and anti-racism, we might draw upon Theodore Shanin's (1983) writings on Marx's late engagement with the Russian revolutionary tradition.[30] In analyzing Marx's later works, often drafts of letters and notes, Shanin distinguishes between 'scientific socialism,' and 'vernacular revolutionary tradition'. If 'scientific socialism', characterizes Marx's early works, where the development of capitalism followed a historically predetermined path and revolutionary change could only occur if all societies followed this path of development, the notion of 'vernacular revolutionary traditions', marks Marx's recognition that 'indigenous political traditions', (more specifically, the Russian populist tradition) too had the potential to subvert or overthrow hegemonic, that is, capitalist, orders. However, as pointed out by Shanin, both scientific socialism and pure vernacular revolution have ended in defeat. He suggests that most successul political action springs forth from an *integration* of Marxism – here understood as astute critical analysis of the common elements of capitalist formations – with indigenous

political traditions. Drawing on this notion of integration, I want to suggest that analysis of racism and anti-racism too would benefit from an integration of attention to the shared elements of modern racism *and* vernacular critical practices. Moreover, by way of charting a provocative trajectory for analytical and political work in the future, I want to suggest here that the tradition of argument through which the cultural nation in Latvia has been historically constituted might prove to be a resource rather than an obstacle. The current tendency in politically progressive circles is to attempt to cleanse the institutions and spaces of the nation state of backward nationalism, thus searching for politically progressive possibilities in state-based politics. I want to ask, however, what political possibilities might be opened up by marginalizing state-based anti-racist politics and excavating vernacular critical practices from arguments constitutive of non-state-based forms of collective life?

## Acknowledgements

## Notes

1. Another such institution – the European Monitoring Center for Racism and Xenophobia – was recently transformed into the European Fundamental Rights Agency, thus possibly suggesting a move away from the language of tolerance to the language of rights.
2. It is important to note that while formally tolerance promotion activities did not specify the ethnic affiliation of their target audience, it was a Latvian public that was interpellated through these activities and that subsequently was produced as the depository of nationalist sensibilities.
3. See Wendy Brown's (2006) work for a critical engagement with tolerance as a supplement to liberal political rule, a civilizational discourse, and a mode of governmentality. Brown argues that the discourse of tolerance entails hierarchical power relations between those who are to extend tolerance and those who are to be tolerated. Moreover, the discourse of tolerance has a depoliticizing effect insofar as it posits the question of difference as a matter of sensibilities rather than structural inequalities. Finally, it serves as a civilizational device in the discourses of the West about the rest.
4. Rogers Brubaker (2006) has argued that the convergence of the cultural nation and the territory of the state is the primary goal of nationalist politics in Central

Eastern Europe. Nineteenth century nation-building and early twentieth century nationalization of multinational territories created states whereby one people were identifed as a state people and others were relegated to the status of minorities (Arendt 1979; Weitz 2008).

5. In a conference presentation, Maria Golubeva (2005) outlined how discourse analysis can be helpful in identifying intolerance and racism in public statements. She drew heavily on the work of van Dijk (2002) who pioneered discourse analysis as a mode of diagnosing racism.

6. I do not map these positions onto bounded groups or juxtapose them to each other as *a priori* existing positions. Rather, I treat them as relationally constituted discursive positions that people come to inhabit in particular situations. Due to historical sedimentations, people who consider themselves Latvian are more likely to identify with one rather than the other. Nevertheless, the designation 'Latvian', here serves as what Rogers Brubaker has referred to as a 'category', which has potential for group formation, but is not in itself a group with desires and aspirations (2006:11).

7. Articulation as an analytical construct is borrowed from the work of Antonio Gramsci via Stuart Hall (Hall 2002).

8. I thank the anonymous reviewers of Ethnos for pointing this out.

9. In intervening on this register, my paper resonates with Alana Lentin's analysis of state-based anti-racism in Europe. Lentin argues that race in Europe has been 'stripped of its *politics* and *modernity*', instead relegating it to the realm of backward, un-modern, and pathological attitudes and dispositions, which can be tackled through education and development (2008b:493; see also Lentin 2008a:7).

10. One non-governmental organization used the problem of nationalism as a justification for their program activities in the area of democratization. While a staff member admitted that this is an exaggerated rendering of the situation, he used it, because the problem of nationalism had become an established and recognizable problem for international funders.

11. In this approach, I draw on Karl Marx's insistence to advance from the abstract to the concrete (Marx 1977 [1857]; Hall 2003). In his general introduction to the 'Grundrisse', widely known as the '1857 Introduction, Marx reflects on the notion of 'production in general' to make this methodological point. Marx's argument is that some form of production occurs in all historical periods and places, such that one can therefore say that there is something in common between them. He further suggests that this identification of a common element – 'production in general' – is a mode of abstraction, which should be the starting point for further scientific inquiry that considers the specific mode of production characteristic of a concrete time and place. This entails tracing all the historical determinations – 'the specificities and the connections' – that make up this concrete situation (Hall 2003).

12. The African Latvian Association was established in 2004, and at the time of my research between 2005 and 2008, it consisted of about 30 members. The organization was initially meant as a support group for people experiencing racism on a daily basis. Over the next several years, the organization established a visible presence and participated in tolerance promotion activities. This was largely thanks to determined leadership, for the views of the members differed with regard to

how strong their public anti-racist stance should be. With the departure of their former leader in 2007, the activities of the organization have subsided.

13. See Allina-Pisano and Allina-Pisano (2007) about similar practices in post-Soviet Russia.

14. 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.

15. Hutzuls are a Transcarpathian ethnic group. Many Hutzuls came or were brought to Latvia to work during the Soviet times. Hutzuls are often lumped together with people from further East or South and referred to as 'all those blacks'.

16. By 'killing' Foucault does not mean 'simply murder as such, but also everyday form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on' (2003:256).

17. The Soviet state's record with regard to 'racial politics' was debated some time ago in a special issue of *Slavic Review*. In response to the original article by Eric Weitz (2002a) in which he suggested that the Soviet state also relied on and constituted racialized difference to organize social and political life, some commentators emphasized differences between the Soviet state in relation to other racist regimes such as Hitler's Germany. Francine Hirsch (2002) argued that the Soviet state explicitly countered racial politics and did not incorporate racial differentiation in statecraft and state practices. She emphasized the distinctiveness of the Soviet regime and thus objected to Weitz's argument that the distinction between race and nationality was blurred during the Soviet period. Such a blurring, she noted, lumped distinctive regimes into the same category of racism. Alaine Lemon (2002), in turn, called for attention to race as a discursive practice, which does not require state-based racial politics. On the basis of ethnographic research, she noted how the police could identify people as Gypsies and treat them differently, even as the state did not subscribe to racial politics. Responding to his commentators, Weitz (2002b) argued that racial politics are not necessarily about murder, but they can be about construction of hierarchies of difference that lead to discrimination.

18. In his work 'Publics and Counterpublics, Michael Warner (2005) outlines the way a public figures in the modern imaginary, namely as a stranger sociality conjured up by the circulation of public discourse. The public, thus, exists by virtue of being addressed and recognizing this hailing. 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.

19. Such an understanding of racism is different from the one which animates Michael's critique of the seemingly innocent looks which nevertheless suggest that racist 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 who argue instead that modern ways of organizing the world are deeply racialized and that racism therefore manifests itself in myriad micropractices through which people make sense of themselves in the world and through which people are governed (Baker 2002; Omi & Winant 2002; Gilroy 2006) or, as

Michel Foucault (2003) would have it, through which populations are regularized. 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.

20. 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.

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

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

23. As it later turned out, it was a Latvian girl from a good family that was the main perpetrator in the discussed incident.

24. In 1935, Latvians made up 75.5% of the population. At the end of the Soviet rule in 1989, Latvians comprised 52% of the population (Riekstiņš 2004).

25. As this paper goes through the final revisions, France continues to expel Roma of Romanian and Bulgarian origin. I take this to be yet another instance of modern racism, that is, of racism enabled by and rooted in modern political forms rather than merely French sensibilities or populist politics.

26. See Uday Mehta's work (1999) for an illuminating analysis of the historical relationship between liberalism and racism in the context of British colonialism in India.

27. For example, Alana Lentin notes that mainstream French anti-racist movements criticize the government for their 'failure to uphold the anti-racist fundaments, which, the organization believes, are built into the ideological foundations of the French state' (2008a:314).

28. See Burawoy and Verdery (1999) and Yurchak (2005) for critiques of 'transitology narratives'. See also Gregory Feldman's (2005) work for how similar monitoring activities in Estonia are limited by the diplomats' own commitment to the ethno-territorial mode of political organization that is at the base of the minority problem in Estonia.

29. During his visit to Latvia in 2005, György Frunda was criticized from all ends of the political spectrum for his lack of knowledge and understanding of the historical conditions that have shaped the minority problem in Latvia (Streips 2005).

30. I would like to thank Gustavo Esteva for bringing this text to my attention.

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