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Representation“

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List of Abbreviations

KGB- Komitet Goudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti / Committee for State Security

Latvian SSR- the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic

LSP- Latvian State Police

OMB- Latvijas Okupācijas Muzeja Biedrības / Occupation Museum Association of
Latvia

USSR- the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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Introduction

With the disintegration of the USSR the new post-Soviet states have faced the multiple challenge of re-building state institutions, integrating heterogeneous populations and consolidating new national identities. Public interest in history, which had been heavily censored by the Soviet regime, met the nation building agenda of the new political elites. Collective memories and historical narratives thus have played an important role in political and social transformations. This has made the post-Soviet countries a laboratory for social scientists interested in the political use of the past.

The interpretation of the key events in Latvia's 20th century, in particular the Second World War, and the loss of national independence to Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, play a central role in the contemporary nation building process. The controversy between different narratives addressing the Soviet past eventually escalated to memory wars. The post-Soviet Latvian elites consider the two incorporations of Latvia into the USSR in 1940 and 1945 as occupations, and equate them with the Nazi occupation (1941 – 1945). The narrative of the “Three Occupations”, which implies sufferings of the Latvian nation under the foreign rule of the Soviet Union, serves as a cornerstone of the new Latvian identity. At the same time, the Russian-speakers, who constitute the second largest group within the Latvian state, do not share the above-mentioned narratives and do not accept the official discourse on the country's occupation by the Soviet Union. The Russophones' commitment to the narrative of Latvia's liberation from the Nazis by the Red Army is one of the main pillars of their self-identification. They stick to the positive interpretation of the Red Army's role in Latvian history despite Riga's efforts to marginalize it. The conflict of the two narratives testifies for a cleavage in Latvian society, which has its roots in the past and is based on deep differences in the perception of pivotal historical developments.

Some authors (Kolstø 1999, Brubaker 2011,) identify a controversial situation in which the Russian-speaking population finds itself after the break-up of the USSR. In many countries of the post-Soviet space, Russophones remain a numerous group, and in some cases, they face difficulties in the integration in the newly emerged states. As some authors (Laitin 1998, Cheskin 2016) underline, this process was complicated by the Latvian state measures that alienated Russophones from the rest of the population through citizenship and language legislation. The painful process of transitional

justice, which was a full-fledged practice in Latvia, might also have negatively affected the level of society's cohesion (Pettai/Pettai 2015). The division of the population into perpetrators and victims is prone to polarize any fractured society. In addition to decisions taken by the new political elite after independence, the Latvian society has been evolving under the burden of the Soviet past. The legacy of Communist authorities' national policy is manifested in the fact that many processes in the former socialist republics, including the studied one, are distinctly different from other regions (Rokkan 1999, Gellner 2008). While most Western countries were gradually moving towards a welfare state where everyone has equal rights and privileges, the post-Soviet countries experienced different processes under socialist leadership. The Soviet state apparatus, despite its mottos, in practice was clearly very far from providing equal welfare to all, and, on the opposite suppressed the expression of national consciousness that goes beyond the permissible limits. The legacy of such policies has shaped the nation-building practices of the countries since independence.

One of the most striking socio-political consequences of the aforementioned phenomena is the trauma caused by the feeling of inferiority of the Latvian ethnos during Soviet times. Combined with the three-occupations narrative, such sentiments have affected post-Soviet nation-building practices. Ethnic Latvians, as the fundamental part of the population for which and because of which the Latvian state exists according to the ethnical democracy postulates, have found themselves at the centre of the new elite's national policy. At the same time, the status of the Russian-speaking population became low, since it was not granted ethnic minority status. Russian-speakers, starting from the late USSR, were gradually assigned the role of the occupants' descendants and became associated with the sufferings inflicted on ethnic Latvians under Soviet rule. The contemporary Russians and their narrative do not fit in Latvian nation building, since they see their role in Latvian history in a positive way.

In the case of Latvia, the memory about central historical moments is very important since history is used to justify present politics. While memory is a multi-layered phenomenon in itself, its implementation in the construction of the nation's identity is a complex process as well. Memory has a lot of dimensions, such as top-down and bottom-up memory, collective and personal memory (Halbwachs 1950, Bell 2003, Cheskin 2012). Collective memory is of particular importance for this paper because it is closely linked to the so-called national mythscape, which is

detached from real historical events and is usually constructed by elites in order to unite a nation on the base of a heroic or, on the contrary, martyrdom narrative (Bell 2003). In Latvia, the construction of a monolith national mythscape has faced obstacles, as the large Russian-speaking minority has its own mythscape, which goes against the official one. These aspects were addressed by a number of scholars as interest in the specifics of memory in the post-Soviet space arose (Bernhard/Kubik 2014; Pettai 2016). In the Latvian case, the two groups of actors represent two very different narratives of the past, namely the Latvian martyrdom narrative shared by most part of the ethnic Latvians, and the liberation narrative supported by the Russian-speakers. A growing body of research addresses these two main groups and their narratives' transmission and promotion in the socio-political sphere. Some studies (Kaprāns/Mieriņa 2019) focused on the inner heterogeneity of the Russian-speaking minority and tackled the feeling of alienation and other negative tendencies among Russophones of different age cohorts and social status. Other works aimed at assessing the struggle between the two ethnic groups and addressed the most acute aspects of the conflict between them (Cheskin 2012), as well as included in their analyses the influence of external factors, such as contemporary Russia, on the Russophones' narrative in Latvia (Cheskin 2016). The Latvian official narrative has been analysed, too. Its evolution throughout the years of independence until nowadays was approached from different perspectives: some researchers identify methods of institutionalization of the newly established narratives through transitional justice (Pettai 2017), while others look at the justification and explanation of the contemporary constructed mythscape for the general public based on current aims within the nation building program of today's Latvia, such as creating a homogeneous memory field, where the favourable official memory of the past is not contested. (Lazda 1991, Nollendorfs 2005).

Another of the most productive ways to study the characteristics of narratives is to analyse the activities of institutions of memory politics, since they are usually the centres of formation and spread narrative's core tenets. Museums are rather effective institutions of memory politics since they possess authority among the general public and are perceived as neutral educational platforms. Many studies dealt with the museums' role in forming new national mythscapes and constructing a nation-wide perception of the past (e.g. Styliany-Lambert/ Bounia 2016). Museums as a tool of memory politics have some specifics in the post-Soviet space, since their socialist

heritage often makes them ideologically biased. Narrative representation in museums, as well as the influence of the museum's stakeholders often become a topic of study as well (Radonić 2016; 2018). In the Latvian case, the Occupation Museum is an example of an institution of memory politics that is highly engaged in socio-political life (Velmet 2011). The Museum is a prime example of how a formally non-governmental organization can serve interests of state memory politics.

Many scholars, who do research on the Russian-speaking community in Latvia, focus on the Victory Day celebration on May 9, which is the most popular mass event for this minority since independence. Commemorations as institutions of memory are important for producing shared mnemonic schemas and in some cases can facilitate the depersonalization of memory and consequently, smooth out the clashes between representatives of different narratives. This institution of memory is less structured in comparison to the Museum. It has, however, an important role in the socio-cultural life of contemporary Russophones (Gabovich 2015). The commemoration remains to be one of the few strongholds of self-identification for the Russian speakers of Latvia despite the fact that the state was trying to outlaw the gatherings on 9th of May for several years in a row. The Victory Day commemoration as a crystallized version of the Russophones' narrative, allows studying the influence exerted on the narrative from the outside of Latvia. The sizeable influence from the Kremlin is hard to deny when it comes to the collective memory and mass commemorative traditions of the Latvian Russophones' (Onken 2007). The relations between Latvia, the Russian-speaking minority and Russia are quite complicated and play an essential role in the memory wars since the collapse of the USSR.

All in all, the above-mentioned developments within the Latvian mnemonic field are inherent traits of the divided memory (Wezel 2008), which manifests itself in conflicting narratives about the Soviet history of Latvia. Besides the previously mentioned research, the issue was analysed through the perspective of collective identities and the correlation between memory and politics (Onken 2010), as well as through addressing actions taken in the context of transitional justice and their consequences (Pettai/Pettai 2015, Pettai 2017). However, the existing publications rarely show how the conflicting narratives are presented in the public space. That is why my aim is to focus on the analyses of the above-mentioned institutions - the Occupation Museum and the Victory Day commemoration - and their activities aimed at a wider audience. The study will include an analysis of the institutions' background

and transformations, as well as how they spread narratives of the two groups in the contemporary mnemonic wars. The comparison of the two institutions, which are of high importance for the self-identification of the two mentioned groups represent my contribution to the study of the divided memory in Latvia.

Taken into account the above-mentioned specifics, the goal of the present paper is to answer the following question:

- **How are the two competing historical narratives, central for the collective identities of both the ethnic Latvians and the Russian speakers, i.e. the narrative of the Soviet occupation and the narrative of the liberation of Latvia from Nazi Germany, represented in the public space?**

In order to answer the main question, three sub-questions have been considered:

- **How are these narratives reflected in the Museum of the Occupation and in the Victory Day commemoration on May 9?**
- **How do the Occupation Museum and the Victory Day commemoration promote and develop these narratives?**
- **How can both institutions - the Museum and the Victory Day - contribute to mnemonic pluralism and thus help to overcome the memory wars in Latvia?**

My research draws on the theoretical framework developed by Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik (2014). It helps to understand the correlation between mnemonic actors, the narratives constructed by them and the respective memory regimes in the Latvian case of divided memory. While I have no intention to follow the authors' typology of mnemonic regimes in detail, this concept nevertheless helps to navigate the analysis when addressing the way certain actors behave. Memory regimes do not occur in a vacuum, they are created by actions of particular actors within the memory field. The present study shows how the intertwined activities of several actors representing the two main opposing narratives within the Latvian memory field shape specific memory regimes. In order to trace the diverse strategies of the mnemonic actors, I apply the conceptual framework developed by Eva-Clarita Onken (2010) based on a bottom-up approach to memory politics. It allows differentiating between types of societal actors seeking to gain access to the political world and influence processes of public decision-making.

The above-mentioned theoretical models are mostly focused on inner developments of the memory field. However, in the Latvian case also external factors are relevant, namely Russia's soft power and the influence of Russian commemorative culture. To analyse the influence of these external factors on the Latvian memory field I use the concept of the triadic nexus between the domestic nationalizing state, the national minority and its external homeland as developed by Rogers Brubaker's (1996). This allows me to tackle the relationship between the Latvian state, the Russian-speaking minority and the Russian Federation. This frame expands the horizon of the research and provides an opportunity to explore the complex processes between Latvia, its Russophones and Russia, which are affecting the narratives formed by the two studied institutions of memory politics.

The relationship between Latvians and the Russophone community is not only rooted in the past but also reflects the current socio-political situation in the country. Therefore, the collective memories of these two groups play an important role in the formation of their respective identities. Both groups were subject to the top-down ideological memory policy practiced by the Soviet authorities. However, with the collapse of USSR the new Latvian elite developed an opposing stance towards the communist past, while the Latvian Russophones found their identity in the already existing Soviet narrative. In the present thesis the memory politics of the two groups and their respective narratives are addressed from a bottom-up as well as a top-down perspective (Kolstø 1999, Onken 2010, Cheskin 2012). The combination of these two approaches provides an opportunity to analyse the roots and evolution of these narratives.

For both case studies, participant observation provided important information. The Occupation Museum's temporary building hosting a permanent exhibition was visited in August 2019. As for the Victory Day commemoration, which traditionally takes place on the 9th of May in Riga's Victory Park, I attended this event in 2018. In both cases the same aspects were studied: the institution itself, its background, location and involved actors. Comparing a museum with a public commemorative event of course poses some difficulties as the above-mentioned aspects matter in different ways. For instance, during my observations in the museum I paid most attention to the way how the exhibits were presented and how the accents of the exposition were set; the Museum's visitors were not given much attention. In contrast, the role of the participants of the Victory Day commemoration was more significant and therefore

given more attention. Access to both sites was unproblematic. The Museum has no entrance fee and is open from 11:00 to 15:00 daily with the exception of Sunday and Monday. The Victory Day commemoration is an open space event, which also provides a great opportunity to conduct participant observation. While the commemoration event starts approximately at 10:00 o'clock in the morning and lasts till 10:00 o'clock in the evening, the data was gathered during the morning hours, as most of the visitors come to lay down flowers, and in the evening, when the event reaches its climax. While the main amount of the information was gathered on May 9, 2018, I had attended the event in previous years as well. This experience serves as an additional source of additional materials, including videos and photos, which allow reflecting on the changes in the Victory Day commemoration over a longer period of time. Apart from information gathered on the 9th of May in 2018 and personal archival data, secondary materials from web sources were used as well. The most prominent news portals, such as *sputnik.lv/ru*, were studied in order to analyze the way in which the event was covered by pro-Russian media. The websites of the NGOs, involved in the organization of the commemoration, such as *9may.lv* and *polk.lv*, were also thoroughly examined. The available social media, mostly Facebook, where top actors share their thoughts on relevant topics with public, were taken into account as well.

In the case study of the Occupation Museum the same methods were used. Most data were acquired during my visit in August 2019, as well as collected from sources, such as the official website of the Museum, related official pages of state bodies like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Culture, as well as personal postings on Facebook by key figures representing the studied institution.

The collected data are primarily in Russian language in case of the Victory Day commemoration, and in English and Latvian in the case of the Occupation Museum. In both cases the preference was given to materials in the original language of the publication. When working with the primary materials, the goal was to examine carefully the data in order to identify the most prominent themes and patterns, which constitute the narrative presented by the institution. Additionally, my observation reports, composed on the basis of notes I had taken, were instrumental for the analyses.

In addition to all the above, the study also pays special attention to the symbols and vocabulary used in the written materials published on official websites and public

pages of actors. Both groups of actors, which stand behind the narratives, have their own style of presenting facts. The styling alongside with the word choice of the official online platforms related to the Museum and Victory Day serve as a supplementary source of the information, which allows seeing how both institutions of memory address crucial topics and to what kind of audience they aim to address.

While the ethnic Latvians and the Russian-speaking communities are both addressed in my research, it is the institutions of memory politics and their practice that are in the centre of my study. Therefore I refrain from using methods like individual interviews and focus groups. Both communities are quite heterogeneous and in order to conduct representative interviews it would require a multi-step selection. Besides, the question who belongs to which group is not an easy one. Can bilingual people, for whom Russian and Latvian are mother tongues, be considered to be ethnically Latvian, or do they belong to the Russian speakers? . However, a number of authors writing on this topic have based their research on interviews and sociological surveys (Zelče/Ardava 2017, Cheskin/Kachuyevski 2019, Kaprāns/Mieriņa 2019), of which I made use when needed.

My thesis is structured as follows. It consists of an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion. Chapter I elaborates the theoretical framework drawing on theories of nation building and memory politics in the post-Soviet space. Here, the authors and their concepts that I use in my research are introduced. In Chapter II I address the historical background of the current developments. I briefly present the key events of Latvia's 20th century history, which until today affect the nation building process and keep dividing the country. This chapter also addresses changes in the collective identities of both the ethnic Latvian and the Russian-speakers, as well as Russia's contemporary memory politics. The two following chapters, namely Chapters III and IV, present the results of my empirical research based on two case studies, namely the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia and the Victory Day commemoration. Both chapters deal with the narratives, involved actors and practices of these two institutions. The theoretical and practical parts of the paper include the most relevant information to answer the research question, however, it should be stressed that some aspects could not be fully explored in this format of the paper. For the clarity of the research, the focus is made on the Victory Day commemoration and the Museum, while several side issues, such as language issue, the topic of educational reforms

have been deliberately side-lined. It is also necessary to mention that in both studied cases the thesis focuses on Riga rather than on other regions of the country.

Chapter I

Theoretical Framework

1.1. Nation building in the post-Soviet space

Latvia is a young state that is in the process of nation building and faces a range of various challenges that are connected to its ethnical heterogeneity and historical past. Hence, in order to track the path, which Latvia has chosen in its nation-building practices, the origin of the concept of nation building must be highlighted.

At the origins of the modern concept were Karl Deutsch and Charles Tilly. Most importantly for the current research, the introduction of this concept aimed to describe the process of national integration and consolidation that ends up in the construction of a new type of state, namely a nation state, which differs from previously existing feudal and dynastic states. The idea of belonging to a nation is one of the most important for this work.

Deutschian tradition originally implies assimilation into a broader group and abolition of ethnic features. With the development of the nation-building concept, the lack of emphasis on the ethnic component was pointed out and criticized by Walker Connor, who urged not to "underestimate the emotional depth of ethnonational identity" (Connor 1993, p.204). In this regard, the author draws attention to the fact that concepts of "nation" and "state" should be separated. Analyzing the commonly used term "nation state" he describes it as "confusing" since "it implies that citizens share a sense of common national identity" and in reality, it is not always the case (Connor 1978, p.305). Taking into account that most of the countries are multiethnic, ethnic diversity has to be taken into consideration, maintains Connor. The elements such as a common language, religion, and other objective cultural markers are considered as features of common nationhood. These features are the most crucial elements of nation building processes since the character and specifics of the nation formation depend on them.

As may be seen, the concept of nation building is developed through supporting concepts. Aside from the nation state, the most crucial among them are nation, nationalism, and national identity. Primordialists, constructivists, and neo-primordialists tackle these phenomena from different viewpoints.

Primordialists believe that nation is a pristine community of people with deep-rooted connections. In such a case, a nation is based on a common origin, which includes anthropological, linguistic, territorial, and cultural markers. This approach implies that any individual can have a historically assigned nationality, which suggests that nations should be viewed as a natural and original social phenomenon. The primordialist tradition goes back to Johann Gottfried Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Reden an die Deutsche Nation* (1808). Herder draws parallels between the family and the state, highlighting the so-called undying national genetic spirit. In this case, language is considered to be the most relevant marker of a nation, since every nation speaks a different language and, consequently, thinks differently. Fichte also pays a great deal of attention to certain linguistic attributes of nations by pointing out that knowledge of a common language defines the natural boundaries of a nation. The primordialist approach found its followers in more recent times as well, namely in the person of Lev Nikolaevich Gumilev in the 20th century, who used such notions as "ethnic history and ethnogenesis" when addressing the history of particular nations (Gumilev 1990, p. 24). Being a Soviet-time ethnographer, he developed a provocative concept that addressed ethnic characteristics through the geographical specifics of a group's area of habitation. Such geographic determinism implies that every nation is formed under the influence of landscape and climate of the territory (ibid., p. 35). Despite the fact, that Gumilev's works were mostly banned during his lifetime due to their controversial scientific value, when former Soviet republics gained their independence and inherited their territories, the geographical primordialism enjoyed a renaissance among them. Gumilev's main postulates' interpretation was biased and simplified, as the territory of habitation was considered as an area for the indigenous population only and where representatives of other cultures were seen as a "non-belonging" element.

Supporters of the constructivist paradigm dispute the idea of ethnicity as an originally given, organic, and unchanging marker. The constructivist approach sees a nation as a community, which was artificially constructed by historians and other writers and contributors. Thus, a nation is based on the common cultural image, which is outlined by certain elites. The artificial nature of this process is also highlighted by Eric Hobsbawm (1983, pp 4-7) as he fosters the concept of "invented tradition". The key message of *The Invention of Traditions* (1983) is that many traditions, which

seem old or claim to be old, are often of recent origin and quite commonly invented by the elites. Its purpose is to introduce and establish certain values and norms of behaviour by the means of repetition. These ideas are closely intertwined with the concept by another prominent scientist of this paradigm, Benedict Anderson. In the work *Imagined Communities* (1983) he argues that members of large communities are physically unable to communicate and meet everyone. Hence, a nation is seen as an imaginary political community and each member of it has an image of belonging to it. Language, in this case, is also a crucial factor but it is viewed from a different perspective in comparison with primordialists. Anderson underlines the importance of transition from printing in Latin into national languages of Europe since the idea of common national history is born through the publication of books in national languages, emergence of national literature, and newspapers. Such development leads people to the perception that they belong to a certain imaginary community that speaks and reads the same language and participates in the same events. While constructivists deny the crucial significance of the ethnic component in nation building, neo-primordialists have developed a more inclusive approach, taking into account claims opinions from both scientific approaches. The most crucial author within this framework for the current study among others is David Laitin, who fuses primordialistic traits with constructivist ones to come up with an all-encompassing attitude towards nation and nationalism. Importantly, Laitin also does not fully deny the primordial view, while still tends to be more of a constructivist, stating that "cultures are not given to people by nature, but rather are constructed through collective action and reinforced through manipulation of collective consciousness" (Laitin 2007, p. 3;). His approach towards language, diasporas and assimilation is of pivotal importance for the current paper.

This paper gives preference of the neo-primordialist approach due to the fact that in the studied region in historical retrospective and more recently public institutions have been keen in their attempts to create a homogenous nation and culture. Hence, the idea of the construction of a nation from above is acute. However, one cannot ignore the fact that in the process of that construction the idea of a nation as a group of people who originally shares the same culture and beliefs is very prominent, which will be addressed in the coming parts.

The current work focuses on a former Soviet republic, which leads to the question, whether the nation building approach is relevant for the non-Western

societies. Western societies in their process of nation building go through four main stages, which starts with the unification of the elite and ends up with the emergence of a welfare state, where the state apparatus is well designed and functions so that all members of the nation enjoy social equality and economical freedom (Rokkan 1999, p.8). However, in case of many countries in the Eastern European region, these processes may differ and go in reverse. Most importantly, a different attitude towards "nation" in Eastern Europe is quite blatant. Here nations are considered to be more of the ethnic origin, which is manifested in the promotion by national elites originally primordialist standpoints, while civic nations' approach of the Western world is being not much applicable. Ivan T. Berend explains such difference by historical developments, which took place in the area that is being referred to as Central and Eastern Europe. Due to the "800-year delay in development" (Berend 2005, p. 402) and bloody events of the 20th century, in particular, this area is falling behind the western part of the continent and therefore nation-building practices here have different patterns.

Even Eastern Europe as a region is too broad to be addressed as a monolith area and trends there are very complicated. The studied area has experienced various political regimes that still affect contemporary independent states. Since for the purposes of the present paper the 20th century is of a particular importance, the USSR is considered to be the main political and social phenomenon, which exercised the greatest influence on region.

Taking into account the specific features of the area, Rogers Brubaker has developed a particular approach to nation building (Brubaker 2011, p.2). The author draws attention to the fact that the countries emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union seem to be in their post-multinational era. The Soviet nation building, if this process may be addressed so, aimed at building a supranational entity – the Soviet identity - among the very heterogeneous population. As the republics started gaining their independence with the break up of the USSR, they were going back from the Communist identity to the nation-state in the vast majority of cases, claims Brubaker, which also resembles the aforementioned Stein Rokkan's assumption on the different stages of nation building in the West and the East of Europe.

In order to create a model, which would be adapted to the realities in most of the post-Soviet countries, Brubaker comes up with the tripartite typology of the states. Three main groups can be identified, where the first one is characterized by being

dominated by the civic nation. Consequently, in this group a nation or "nationality" in all the possible meanings has no decisive role. The second group is more ethnic oriented and is defined as a state for two or more core nations, namely a binational or multinational state. In contrast with the first type, in such a state, the main emphasis is made not on individuals, but rather on their ethnic affiliation. Hence, two major ethnic groups usually but not always enjoy the status of a core nation. Importantly, ethnic affiliation is of crucial public significance. As Brubaker puts it, "the constituent units of the polity are individuals in the first case, ethnonational groups in the second" (Brubaker, 1996, p.105). The third model is a mixture of the two above-mentioned models. The hybrid model implies that the state provides national minorities with all necessary ethnic rights in addition to the equal civil status with the national majority. The author sees the hybrid model as the most suitable for the states in the post-Soviet space

Brubaker's typology evolves around the concept of so-called "nationalizing states" (Brubaker 1996, p.63). According to the author, there are seven presumptions for the existence of a nationalizing state. The first motive to conduct a nationalizing policy would be a belief that the state has its core nation as an ethnic entity, which differs from the rest of the permanent population. Secondly, the state is understood as a second model within the aforementioned tripartite typology, which implies the existence of the state because of and for the core nation. Rogers Brubaker labels this phenomenon as "ownership of primacy". This leads to the next reason, according to which the state should be in charge of taking care of the core nation by fostering its language, culture, and welfare in general. Such policy is positioned as compensatory for humiliation and indignity the core nation underwent in the past. Consequently, the core nation is mobilized on the basis of a remedial and compensatory polity in a variety of settings, namely mass media, electoral campaigns, universities, and other occasions. The final motive manifests in the adoption of "formal and informal policies and practices" which are developed throughout the above-mentioned phases by state agencies, officials, and NGOs (Brubaker 1996, p. 84).

Brubaker underlines, that most of the post- Soviet countries have a vast number of "non-indigenous" population – people, who migrated to a republic during Soviet times and settled there as permanent residents. Despite the fact, that some civic orientated proclamations are embedded in official documents and expression of top politicians, they do not have much internal meaning. The declarative nature of

proclamations by political elites disguises the "ethnic" attitude under the "civic" cover. Therefore, according to Rogers Brubaker, such an "ethnic" perception of a nation state causes a set of complex processes due to the existence of a core nation and a "foreign" minority. However, Brubaker maintains that different paths of the nationalizing states in the post-Soviet space nevertheless lead to the civic understanding of a nation, once democratic institutions are well established (Brubaker 1996, p.63). Hence, the "nationalizing state" notion is intended to attract attention to the on-going character of the nation building processes in the post-Soviet space.

1.2 Ethnic minorities as a challenge for nation building

Another aspect that is worth mentioning as a separate point in the context of nation building is the issue of ethnic minorities. The tripartite typology puts an emphasis on minorities and a state of residence while Brubaker's conception includes the third salient component.

According to this concept, nationalizing states, national minorities, and external national homelands are the actors, whose engagements are mutually intertwined. National minorities are seen as a "family of related yet mutually competing stances" that implies the complexity of their interaction not only with nationalizing states but also within themselves. The author maintains that a national minority usually proclaims its ethnic differentiation from the majority of the population of their resident state, demands from the state to acknowledge its national diversity and secure certain political and cultural guarantees. National minorities within nationalizing states often might not be fully cropped from external national homelands. Such minorities are in constant relation not only with the current state they are living in but also with their external national homelands. In this connection, Brubaker draws attention to the vitality of mutual perception of these three elements. The fact that national minority perceives a state of current residence as a nationalizing one might be of greater importance rather than self-proclamations of the nationalizing state. The nationalizing state in the triadic nexus is also seen not as a static element, but as a field of interactions of competitive stances between various actors, such as NGOs, political parties, and individuals (Brubaker 1996, p. 68).

The third "field" of the nexus is an external national homeland, which is defined through its attitude towards the minority living in another state. Brubaker addresses

this element of the concept through the feeling of "shared nationhood across the boundaries of state and citizenship", which implies that the homeland seeks to protect interests and rights of their "co-nationals" as the interest of its citizens. Such a claim cannot be legitimately justified and hence adds more complexity to the interaction within the triadic nexus. The minority and the homeland constantly monitor the state of residence. When the state pursues a policy, which, in the opinion of either actors or one of them, oppresses the rights of the minority, the homeland expresses its discontent and can provide various types of assistance to the minority, both material and moral. As a result of this interaction, the minority may be accused of disloyalty and the homeland - of attempting to interfere in affairs of an independent state. Most importantly, the nationalizing state's policy is not likely to be distorted by such actions, but on the contrary, might be tightened. All three components of the nexus can hardly be unambiguously defined, since their characteristics and features are interconnected and the actors' decisions depend on relationships between and within these fields.

The most numerous group of people aside of national majorities in this region is Russian-speakers. To begin with, it is quite challenging to come up with the right term that would fully reflect all the peculiarities of Russians living in the countries in the post-Soviet space. The term "beached diaspora" coined by Laitin is the one that seems to be the most accurate. The author addresses beached diasporas, referring to the process when a state withdrew from its previous borders leaving this group of population behind (Laitin 1998, p. 30). By using this term Laitin draws attention to the process of how Russians in the former Soviet republics started to be a diaspora. In contrast with diasporas in other countries, Russians, in that case, became a "diaspora" unconsciously since it was not them who changed the territory of residence, but their former homeland. Moreover, the author refers to the term "Russian-speakers" and, hence, puts an emphasis on language issues (ibid., 1998, p. 23). In this connection, the author makes a point, that language becomes an identifying factor for the "Russians", a so-called "proxy" of national identity with the help of which they are distinguished from the titular nation. Hence, the choice of language determines identity. The current paper sticks to the terms used by Laitin, as well as to the notion of "minority", which is used in the sense that Brubaker defines it in the above-mentioned triadic nexus concept.

Taking into account the heteroethnic character of the Soviet republics population, the question of how to address the issue of minorities has become one of the most prominent issues for many of them after the gain of independence. Laitin operates with the notion of assimilation, which he defines as "the process of adoption of the ever-changing cultural practices of dominant society with the goal of crossing a fluid cultural boundary separating [minorities] from dominant society" (Laitin 1998, p. 35). He approaches diasporas from within, trying to understand a member's motivation to assimilate. It is maintained that minority representatives tend to assimilate under certain circumstances. Such phenomenon as "assimilation cascades" addresses the case when people make a decision based on other people's actions within their ethnic group. As a result, such behavior leads to the situation when a choice is conditioned by a set of terms, namely three main factors that have the biggest influence on the will to assimilate (ibid., p.29). The first factor, i.e. expected economic returns, implies that young people are much likely to be willing to assimilate when their potential earnings are higher because of the knowledge of the official language of the state they live in. The second one, in-group status, suggests easier assimilation when the minority community is scattered and does not promote the idea of non-assimilation. In the event the status of a person in a united minority community is negatively affected if he shifts towards the dominant culture, assimilation is less likely to occur. The third factor, namely out-group status, underlines the role of the majority. When the majority is open to accept the assimilation of the minority's representative, the process is much likely to be smooth and rapid. The more favourable these three factors are, the higher is the probability of assimilation. Laitin provides an example of assimilation of native Russians in Estonia based on language by claiming that even after they finally were granted Estonian citizenship as they successfully passed all the necessary language examinations, their identity might not have become "Estonian", but more likely to be an identity of a "Russian who has accommodated to the realities of Estonian sovereignty" (ibid., p.23). However, he simultaneously highlights that this process is likely to lead to the emergence of the constructed Estonian identity in the next generation of Russian-speakers due to the created conditions for assimilation. Language as a marker of affiliation to the particular group or "nation" becomes especially prominent in situations when the state draws a distinct line between titular language speakers and the most widespread minority language. Simultaneously, the introduction of laws, which formally promote the dominance of the titular nation

language, may on the contrary contribute to the increased value of the minority language. Laitin even argues, that such an increase in the importance of the language may lead to the emergence of the "Russian-speaking nationality" since language is considered as one of the most salient markers for identity maintenance (Laitin 1998, p.285).

Brubaker addresses Baltic countries' specifics from another angle, which is more focused on the institutional side of assimilation. He tackles four main domains in analyzing the Latvian nation building and Russian-speaking minority. Among polity, economy, ethnopolitical demography, and language repertoire, the author pays the most attention to the two latter domains (Brubaker 2011, p. 12). As concerns the language repertoire domain, Brubaker highlights the most common instruments that have been used by the authorities in the process of assimilation in more detail. Traditionally, school teaching in the national language is the most efficient way to integrate people from a very young age. The introduction of education in the language of the titular nation leads to an inevitable rise in the ratio of Latvian-speakers percentage. The vivid nationalization of the school system is manifested in the laws that secure 60% of the curriculum in grades 10-12 to be taught in Latvian (Amendments to the Education Law, 2004). Such language policy also affects work life, where regular language tests and assessments are carried out. Importantly, Brubaker maintains that the aim of the assimilation policy in the case of Latvia is to shift the burden of bilingualism in favour of the core nation. In other words, while in the Soviet Union national minorities usually tended to speak both the Russian and their native languages, now the Russians have to be bilingual in that sense. The minority is not perceived as a proper and true minority due to the fact that its members are believed to have their own national states and territories, where they belong to and therefore are treated in Latvia as temporary foreigners.

Aside from the language repertoire, Brubaker's research in *Frontier Theses: Exit, Voice, and Loyalty in East Germany* (1990) is also useful for the current study since it provides a possibility to assess manifestations of protest behaviour among the Russian minority in the context of the nation-building practices. The author uses notions, which were originally introduced to analyze economic developments in the migration context, where citizens are consumers and the state is a producer of goods, the quality of which is questioned by the population. The exit is considered to be a form of protest, which ends up in emigration, while voice is manifested in an in-state form of

discontent, namely protests movements of varying degrees of brutality. The range of protests varies from a relatively peaceful protest to the blatant brutality (Hirschman 1970, p. 16). Both phenomena - voice and exit - can be tackled as a way of interaction between the state and the part of population, including national minority. Particularly the voice type of protest might be applicable for the analysis of the Russian minority activities, which are studied in the upcoming chapters.

All in all, it is possible to stress the ambiguity of nation-building processes in the post-Soviet space. The perception of a nation as an ethnic entity combined with highly controversial Soviet political heritage, make Latvia's path bumpy. The core nation approach of Latvia as of the nationalizing state and Russophones' positioning within the triadic nexus also contribute to the complexity of the situation.

1.3 Nation building and politics of memory

Reckon with the sizeable differentiation between majority and minority, memory about key events in the history of a country within one nation is one of the most important tools of nation building. Lack of united memory is a challenge for new elites in the post-Soviet space.

One of the first scholars who drew attention to collective memory was Maurice Halbwachs. According to his concept, a person is only able to recreate the past in his consciousness through communication as a member of a certain social group. The author argues that collective memory unites the group and maintains its identity. Hence, an individual's social environment and social belonging, which constitute social framework, are of the crucial importance (Halbwachs 1950, p. 102). The author distinguishes between collective memory and historical memory, arguing that the latter captures abstract facts objectively and impartially, describes global processes and remains indifferent to the living memory of individuals and communities. However, it is collective memory, which is more biased and fixed by means of material objects, namely commemoration practices, that unites a nation (Coser 1993, p.29). Such differentiation between memory types reveals sophisticated character of interactions between the past and its interpretation.

The ideas of memory complexity and interconnections between individual and collective memory were developed by Duncan S.A. Bell. As well as Halbwachs, Bell underlines the crucial role of commemorative practices, highlighting such rituals as a

remembrance of war dead and services conducted around memorials. According to the author interpretation, collective memory is the memory of individuals, which is expressed in the society in the form of "commemoration of lost relatives, protest and dissent" (Bell 2003, p. 72). Most importantly, by emphasizing a relatively small community, which can hold more or less resembling memory of the same event, Bell comes to the problem of misalignment of concepts such as myth and memory as the memory group expands. It is maintained that a nationalist myth is a simplified version of the story of a nation's past, which aims to dramatize the specifically chosen glorious events to identify the nation's place in the world. In order to address this phenomenon, the author uses the term "national mythscape" (ibid., p.76). So, despite the importance of collective memory, Bell emphasizes its comprehensiveness by separating a constructed myth from memory. He argues that collective memory cannot be transmitted from people who live hundreds of years after the event, since poems, artefacts, and archives do not actually remember the event, they only symbolize it. Moreover, every person who experienced the event has his or her own memory of it, which brings up a question of interpretation. However, due to heterogeneity of the countries' population, the formation of collective memory experiences a range of difficulties. Hence, the need for common myths and symbols, that would be widely accepted in the society and associated with the shared past is understandable.

After gaining independence, the new democracies started the process of history reshaping to form the needed national mythscape. The most problematic area for the post-Soviet space turned out to be the Communist past. During nation building, the contemporary Baltic States' elites began to develop special measures to overcome the repressive legacy of the authoritarian regime. These practices are addressed as transitional justice. In the course of "the politics of truth and justice" through archival declassification, reparation programs, and trials of perpetrators, Communist crimes were exposed and the former state grounding myths were debunked (Pettai et al 2015, pp. 4-5). The dichotomies of "perpetrator/ victim" and "criminal/non-criminal" are one of the cornerstones in transitional justice practices. If the first pair tackles issues of finding the ones guilty of suppression and hardships, the second pair is concerned with the tools, which chastise the perpetrator and make amend to the victim. In order to systemize the tools and parameters of transitional justice, Eva-Clarita and Velo Pettai come up with the matrix, which includes criminal-judicial, political-

administrative, and symbolic-representational dimensions. Perpetrators and victims experience different punitive and compensatory measures. The criminal-judicial parameter implies trial for perpetrators and rehabilitation for victims, political-administrative dimension includes vetting of the one side and compensations for the other, while the third parameter suggests that wrongdoers self-report about their deeds and sufferers tell their truth (Pettai et al 2015, p.21).

The Baltic states, especially Latvia and Estonia, can be considered as champions of transitional justice due to the comprehensiveness of the measures taken (Pettai 2017, p.53). The TJ politics were pursued through the prism of the aforementioned dominant core nation discourse about the suffering of the indigenous population under the Soviet occupation. In Latvia, in addition to the law on lustration and disclosure of archives of the local KGB administration, a number of respective measures have been developed since independence.

Since 1991, a range of laws on the election of representative authorities was implemented, which by 1995 completely eliminated the ones "who were regular employees of the State Security, Intelligence or Counterintelligence Services of the USSR" as well as those "who after January 13, 1991 were members of the CPSU" (The Seimas Election Law 1995, 5.4, 5.6) from passive suffrage. Another step in the process of justice restoration was rehabilitation of victims of repressions of totalitarian regimes. The Law "On Denationalization of Households in the Republic of Latvia" (1991) granted a certain status to a repressed person, confirmed by a document, as well as the return of nationalized real property. The Law "On Restitution of Property to Religious Organizations" (1992) regulated the return of religious buildings to their original owners. Hence, the laws regulated both Nazi and Soviet invasions' consequences.

Besides, respective commissions were established at the same time. Among them was the Scientific and Research Commission on the Activities of the KGB of the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, which studied materials, instructions, and references left on the territory of the country. The Latvian Centre for Documentation of Totalitarian Consequences (1992) operated in tandem with it. At the end of the Commission's work in 2018, one of the most important decisions was taken, namely the declassification of the KGB archives, which resulted in the publication of lists of KGB informants, recruited citizens, as well as geographic data on the location of safe houses and addresses of agents (Archives KGB, LPSR VDK dokumentu arhīvs).

Furthermore, Latvia was developing cultural education nationwide: museums, monuments and new memorial days, devoted to homage to fighters against the Soviet regime and its victims were being established. Among those are The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (1993), The Monument to the Defenders of Bauska (2012), the Occupation of the Latvian Republic Day (national holiday, June 17) and others. However, despite the originally well-intentioned aim of transitional justice practices to punish perpetrators and give justice to victims, they can often lead to further fragmentation of society, if it is already very heterogeneous in terms of historical background of groups within it, and one part of it is associated with perpetrators. Thus, justice does not always bring peace to a post-totalitarian society.

Given the multi-faceted nature of the processes, by the mid-2000s, the theme of memory politics was raised in the Eastern European scientific discourse as a paradigm that can provide analytic tools for comprehensive research of the processes occurring in post-Soviet states.

Jan Kubik and Michael Bernhard introduce and outline such notions as mnemonic regimes and mnemonic actors, as well as draw a link between mnemonic conflicts and democracy. As the two authors develop the framework of the memory of politics in their joint book, they emphasize the official memory regimes and memory actors. Under the official memory regime, the authors understand the regime established with wide participation of state institutions and state actors, namely the most prominent representatives of political elite, including parties and politicians. According to the classification of the authors, there are four types of actors depending on their attitude towards the past, namely warriors, pluralists, abnegators and prospectives (Kubik & Bernhard 2014, p.12). Abnegators are much less common due to the fact that for post-socialist states, the re-examination of past traumas is one of the key elements in nation building, while for this type of actors the politics of memory is not an attractive sphere of political activity. Prospectives are the rarest type in the post-Soviet space, as they emphasize the crucial importance of the future, while the past must remain in the past and be let go. Hence, in the case of post-Soviet states, warriors and pluralists are believed to be the most relevant types. Warriors accept the only true version of the past represented by them, while pluralists accept the existence of differing views and are usually more open for dialogue between different groups. Rhetoric and behaviour of these actors are expressed in their narratives. The official narrative, as well as a contradictory narrative, can represent

the beliefs shared only by a certain section of the group, which is taken for the most dominant.

Most importantly, it is mnemonic actors who form mnemonic regimes. The mnemonic regime in a country depends on the dominance of particular actors in the political arena since they construct narratives. After analyzing the attitude towards the crucial events that took place on the edge of the two epochs in 1989-1991, when the Soviet system was exposed and many former republics were undergoing the turbulent times of re-identification, Bernhard and Kubik come to the conclusion, that in most cases with a couple of exceptions the so-called fractured regimes were established. That means that the political field contains mnemonic warriors, which fight for the hegemonic "right" perception of the Soviet memory. Hence, mnemonic conflicts periodically erupt over most traumatic historical issues. The conflict of such origin may be rooted in a different interpretation of symbols, titles, names, heroes, and villains. Such social turbulence fosters the polarization of the political field in a country, which in the long run is damaging for newly emerged democracies. This is crucial in terms that it makes evident the fact that the process of nation building in many new states, that declared their devotion to democratic western values, undergoes with the major violation of these very principles.

While Bernhard and Kubik put an emphasis on the top-down approach by investigating the official memory regime, Eva-Clarita Onken highlights memory actors who act in a bottom-up manner. In the work *Memory and Democratic Pluralism in the Baltic States – Rethinking the Relationship* (2010), she presents a classification of actors using the concepts of recognition, representation, participation and complicity. The author analyses two dimensions, namely the societal world, in which the studied actors primarily exist, and the political world, which they are trying to reach. Through this classification, Eva-Clarita Onken demonstrates that, depending on their organizational degree, different groups of "memory actors" strive for different formats of interaction with the political world in new democracies (Onken 2010, p. 283).

The first group is nostalgic for the Soviet past and belongs to the least organized type. Representatives of this group have a memory that goes against the institutionalized memory at the national level but do not have the capacity to mobilize their forces and directly participate in the existing memory order change. Hence, it is argued that their ultimate goal is to be recognized by other actors from the political

world, which happens only when a member from above stretches to the very edge of the societal world. The second group embraces not only abstractly nostalgic for the Soviet Union people, but also more organized social groups, including ethnic minorities. Their memory consciousness is supported by special magazines, theme clubs, and centres that create a sense of belonging to a particular group. Participants in this group take on the role of mnemonic actors and seek representation. However, Onken stresses that this representation is about finding an actor from the political world who would serve as a courier of their interests at the highest level. The ultimate goal is to incorporate their experience and memory into the national collective memory. The third group aims not only to be represented but also to create a memorable landscape. Members of this group strive to run for public office and to participate in decision making on the highest level. The fourth group, which as a rule is represented by the intellectual and creative layer of society, plays a direct role in the "reification" of memory and its formation in the political and social dimensions. It is important to note that even the fourth, most organized group is still considered as a part of the societal world, while the political world is only the object of their actions. For this work, the second and third types of groups are the most relevant.

1.4 Museums and commemorations as institutions of memory politics

Aside of the policies and actors, who formulate and transmit them, museums and commemorative practices are the institutions of memory politics, which have a crucial political and social function within the process of nation building. They can be considered as cornerstones in forming, maintaining or changing the mythscape. Both institutions can have a different background of origin, which is explained by circumstances and periods of their establishment. A museum and a commemorative tradition might originate from a grass roots initiative as well as be imposed from the top. Therefore, the bottom-up and top-down memory formations are both of great importance for the further case studies.

Amon Cheskin demonstrates the crucial differences between the memory constructed on the "top" and transmitted to the "bottom" and the one that originated under opposite circumstances. As the author states, the memory, which is being constructed by combined efforts of state institutions and being conveyed from high echelons of political elites to the population, is a manifestation of the top-down way

of memory formation. Bottom-up memory, on the contrary, spreads among individuals and is created by them (Cheskin 2012, p. 564). However, Cheskin also draws attention to the fact that bottom-up memory is influenced from the "top" in the process of constructing collective memory. In this regard, a closer look at the specifics of these two institutions - a museum and a commemorative practice - is needed.

As Theopisti Styliany-Lambert and Alexandra Bounia (2016) put in their work on museums in Cyprus, museums are an indispensable part of political culture. They present and transmit certain ideas and viewpoints in the context of time and framework they are functioning in. Hence, despite the common perception of a museum as an area of objective representation of certain events, the reality is often different. The authors emphasize the inevitability of partly subjective interpretations. Different stakeholders of a museum in a country with divided memory might have different perceptions of certain events. In this connection, the unique role of museums is underlined. They can transmit narratives of different ethnic and other minority groups, therefore being in the centre of the formation of a common identity. Moreover, museums' role is of high importance since in the eyes of the population they combine both authority and power. Museums have enough power to influence the behaviour of others since they are perceived as an objective source of information and knowledge, which simultaneously grant them "the right to control, articulate, and present narratives of the past, present, and future" (Styliany-Lambert & Bounia 2016, p. 24).

On the one hand, museums may become a neutral territory where museum professionals construct a relatively balanced interpretation of crucial events of the past. On the other hand, the influence of other museum's stakeholders, including war veterans and state institutions, may contribute to the establishment of a museum as a mnemonic battlefield. The second scenario is more likely to take place in a country with divided memory. Thus, in order to be able to analyze the role of museums in all aspects, Styliany-Lambert and Bounia suggest to examine not only what is exhibited in a museum, who have studied the chosen objects and how they are presented, but also to take into consideration the background and backstage of museums. In this case, the origins of a museum should also be studied, namely who established it and when, and what is the role and goal of a particular museum in a particular society. The approach, which allows studying a museum not in a vacuum but in a context, is

applicable to the case of the Baltic states. All these countries have their own paths in constructing museums that narrate the Soviet history. These narrations reflect the legacy of resettlement policy, the existence of a powerful neighbour with a contradictory narrative such as contemporary Russia, and the perceived threat to the indigenous culture coming from sizeable ethnic minorities.

In this connection, the standpoint of Ljiljana Radonič on the so-called political museum is to be mentioned. On the contrary to the aforementioned authors, Radonič claims that a political museum in a studied area can never be a neutral zone since the stakeholders in most cases act like mnemonic warriors. The important point in this approach is the issues of externalization of guilt. In her works the author emphasizes the problems of representation of Communist and Nazi occupation and the positioning of victims of their terror in exhibitions, which are heavily affected by the above-mentioned phenomenon.

In addition to the aforementioned authors, Aro Velmet analyses the occupation museums in the Baltic states through a two-dimensional approach. On the one hand, the analysis is focused on the representation of the material, the usage of space of the exhibitions, and the selection of presented artefacts. On the other hand, a museum is seen as a "practice". Here Velmet underlines the creative role of a museum that not only displays already existing narratives but also is able to create a discourse by taking part in political engagement and application of declared policies (Velmet 2011, p. 195). Such an all-encompassing approach makes it possible to trace the construction of the "other". The stances of the listed authors are intertwined and complementary. Combined they allowed studying profoundly a museum as a tool of nation building.

Alongside with museums, public commemorative practices have a distinct role in collective memory formation. As Onken puts it, days of commemoration, which originally served as days of remembrance for individuals, inevitably become a ritual of collective memory-evoking (Onken 2007, p.23). The author highlights the possible smoothing of differences in the perception of the past due to the lack of individual grief. Hence, commemoration events together with museums are tools of social exclusion and inclusion of certain groups within the population, since they influence the perception of the traumatic past. In addition to that, by introducing a three-dimensional link between memory and politics, Onken adds an international aspect to the analysis (Onken 2007, p. 24). The author points out the need to analyse memory

politics on the domestic level, on the bilateral level and the international level when addressing commemorations. The role of international relations and their influence on domestic commemorations practices is of high importance for the Baltic states, where their turn towards Europe is always contested by the Russian neighbor and its perception of the Soviet past.

When addressing commemorations, it is also necessary to take into account memorial complexes. In the article *The Victory of the image: identification risks of commemorative practices* (2017) Oksana Golovashina tackles the specifics of the Great Victory commemoration in contemporary Russia and its influence on former Soviet republics. The author claims that the Soviet war monuments as part of the memory landscape help to construct the image of the glorious victory while the martyrdom of fallen war heroes was turned into a vague image of sacrifice for the Motherland (Golovashina 2017, 4). In this regard, the attention is drawn to the phenomenon of the "victorious people" (narod-pobeditel') narrative, which was typical for the late USSR and exists nowadays in the Russian Federation. This narrative is partly built around the specific stylistics of the war monuments, which transmit the glory and feat of arms of the Soviet nation. Hence, sufferings of veteran relatives tend to be in a way depersonalized for the sake of the triumphant narrative, which also has something in common with Onken's approach towards depersonalization of memory. Such deformation is of great importance for the analysis of the specifics of commemorative practices in contemporary Latvia since the memorial complex in the Victory Park plays a great role in local traditions.

Commemorative practices and museums shape the identity of a group and therefore can be seen as a tool for potential reconciliation. In order to have an insight into the current developments in Latvia in the context of the Soviet heritage, the pivotal historical developments and its effects are studied in the following chapter.

Chapter II

Latvia and Russia: a complicated neighbourhood

Contemporary Latvia can be considered as an example battlefield of mnemonic conflicts, which can be explained by its past. During the 20th century the country became an object of USSR's geopolitical ambition twice. The first incorporation took place in 1940, while the second one followed Nazi Germany retreat from the Baltic states and reestablishment of the Soviet administration in 1944/1945. To trace problematic issues, which impede the nation building processes in the country now, it is necessary to clarify some of the abovementioned developments, as well as their implications for Latvia, with more scrutiny. Moreover, this chapter includes the time period after the breakup of the USSR and also addresses respective processes in the Russian Federation, which influence Latvian realities.

2.1. Occupation vs. liberation: the clash of narratives about the Soviet past

After gaining its independence in 1917, by the outbreak of World War II Latvia eventually remained in the Soviet Union's sphere of interest. A Non-Aggression Pact was signed between the two countries on October 5, 1939. Taking into account that Latvia was already bonded with Nazi Germany by signing an alike pact on June 7, 1939 one can conclude, such agreements were usual for foreign policy in the late 1930s. However, the link with both the USSR and Nazi Germany did not help to preserve Latvia's independence. The Non-Aggression Pact with the USSR became one of the main elements in the process of Latvia's incorporation into the Soviet Union. After several Soviet provocations on the Soviet-Latvian border points, which were claimed by the Kremlin to be a breach of the Pact, Riga was faced with the ultimatum on the government's dissolution and early elections. Failure to comply with the conditions of the ultimatum led to the unlimited Soviet troops' deployment to Latvia. Even though the actions on the border were clearly orchestrated by the Soviet authorities, the Red Army entered Latvia on June 17, 1940, and on the 5th of August a special decree on the establishment of the Latvian SSR within the USSR was adopted. The official version of the Soviet Union concerning the legitimacy of this inclusion was questioned already after World War II, as the Secret Additional Protocol to the Non-Aggression Treaty between Germany and the Soviet Union, which was signed on

August 23, 1939, and, among other matters, meant the division of the Baltic states into spheres of influence between Moscow and Berlin, was promulgated in the USA (Sontag/Beddie 1948, p. 79). Although the official publication of this Protocol in Russia took place only in 1992, the information published in the West severely undermined the Soviet Union discourse and caused many difficulties to the Soviet authorities in the years to come.

However, during the existence of Latvia as a Soviet republic a number of other developments contributed to the creation of the contemporary Gordian knot. The mass deportation in June 1941, as well as its second wave in March 1949 remain to be one of the most tragic events in the Latvian history, as more than 100 000 Latvia's inhabitants were forcibly displaced to Siberia. These mass deportations can be explained by several reasons, one of which is the collaboration of a part of Latvian population with the Nazi administration during WWII. Throughout that time, a range of punitive organizations was established in Latvia. The first one in 1941 was the so-called Arajs Kommando, which included Latvian students with far right views that reportedly were engaged directly in the Holocaust and served as Salaspils concentration camp guards (Birns 1997, p. 207). While the Arajs Kommando had a relatively voluntary basis, the Latvian Legion organized in 1943 can hardly receive the same description. The Latvians who were drafted there had the only choice either to join punitive units or go to a concentration camp. When the Soviet Union regained control over Latvian territories in 1944, those suspected of collaborating with the Nazi regime were subjected to mass deportation. Another main reason for the deportations were difficulties experienced by the Soviet authorities with collectivisation practices in the region. Collectivization, which aimed at the incorporation of individual households in cooperative households under collective and state control, was carried out in several stages on an increasing scale. While the first agricultural reform in 1940 was rather general and aimed at poorest farmers, the following stages in 1944 and especially in 1947-1948 were different. In 1948 the speed of collectivization rocketed and the number of collective farms increased dramatically as well, which was achieved through high pressure from Moscow and repressive measures towards people, who seemed to be not fitting in the new program, which manifested in the second wave of forced relocation.

Taking into account how challenging and problematic was this period for Latvia, the guerrilla movement became vigorous since part of the population strongly

opposed the repressive policies of the new Communist rule. The rise of the so-called Forest Brothers, who acted as a guerrilla liberation organization for more than a decade, can be seen as a symbol of resistance against the Soviet regime. The widespread support of the Forest Brothers by locals, who provided them with food and shelter, is understandable. Attempts of the Soviet government to suppress that quite chaotic but rather malicious guerrilla hotbed were only partly successful until the 1950s when the units almost ceased to exist (Abelnieks 2011, p.102).

Despite the fact that in the 1950s a great part of the deported persons were able to come back, the demographic situation in Latvia was changing dramatically. After the second incorporation into the USSR, a lot of people of different professions and social backgrounds migrated to the republic. Most of them happened to be from the Ukrainian and Russian Soviet Republics. Vita Zelče claims that the largest part of the contemporary Russian-speaking community in Latvia formed exactly after the Second World War since only about 8% of Russophones are able to trace their roots in Latvia before 1945 (Zelče 2018, p. 400). Another crucial point is the qualitative feature of the in-migration. Renald Simonyan states, that the biggest group in numbers migrated into Latvia was Soviet army officers, who were dislocated there in the course of their obligatory service. Most importantly, the second biggest group, around 30%, consisted of labourers with lower education. Newcomers with specialized education, mostly engineers, made a group of 5-6%, while a group of intellectuals, or "intelligentsia" as it is referred to in the article, – of only 1-2% (Simonyan 2005, p. 114). Such low numbers in migrants whose occupation was connected primarily with intellectual work are explained not by the fact that this segment of the population was deliberately prevented from entering the country under study, but rather by the fact that there was a very small percentage of people with this kind of occupation in the USSR in general after the Great Terror of the 1930s, during which this social layer was mostly exterminated. Such specifics of the migrants' occupation and background may have provoked some difficulties in their assimilation. However, violent conflicts based on national affiliation are absent, the percentage of Latvian-speaking Russophones has been rising and the level of Latvian-Russian marriage has been growing as well, which proves that presumably a low level of education has minimal negative effect in this case.

Nevertheless, the inflow of Russians after the incorporation to the USSR turned out to be so high, that by the late 1980s the ethnic ratio has changed quite

dramatically: while in 1935 there were 77% of ethnic Latvians and 8% of Russians by 1989 the percentage of Latvians decreased down to 52%, while the Russian group made up 34% of the population according to the official data (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, 2015). As a consequence, the language issue became very salient. In Latvian case even during the Soviet times, the Latvian language was a permanent part of private life and remained in the public sector to some extent as well. For instance, school education was available in both languages. However, the Russian language still enjoyed a much more privileged position and was compulsory for learning in contrast with the Latvian language. Therefore, a feeling of ethnic suppression by "Russian colonizers" grew rapidly by the time of independence gaining. Hence, contemporary national elites view the large group of Russophones as a potential threat to the indigenous Latvian culture, as Kolstø maintains, which is manifested in an exclusive citizenship law (Kolstø 1999, p. 615). The political exclusion of the Russian-speaking minority has been gradually institutionalised since 1994, when the new citizenship law was adopted. Within one population a new socio-political category was introduced, namely the so-called "non citizens" category. The citizenship policy visibly has divided the population into native Latvians, whose predecessors lived in the country before the incorporation into the USSR, and the "others", who came as a "foreign" element after 1940. Hence, the "others" have to go through extra bureaucratic procedures, including language examination, to prove their right to be a Latvian citizen. In this context, the nationalizing policies are aimed at securing the Latvian language prevalence within the public sphere. This has been achieved by the exclusion of monolingual Russian speakers from taking public office, voting and standing for elections. Today more than 65% out of 216 682 of "non-citizens" are ethnic Russians according to the official data of the Department for citizenship and migration affairs (PMLP 2016). As mentioned above, the status of a non-citizen implies many discriminating practices, one of the most important one being the absence of active and passive suffrage.

The alienation of Russophones was justified by their connection to the Communist past and the post-Soviet Russian state as the successor to the USSR. Thus, the territory became another significant element of minority perception and its alienation. In the Latvian case, Russophones were considered "foreign" in the new nation-state, since they were regarded as belonging to another territory, e.g. Russia. Such connection was viewed as if this group of inhabitants are politically loyal to

another state, where they believed to belong. In this context, Kolstø draws attention to Gumiliev's paradigm. The author maintains that geographical determinism by Gumiliev was used by nationalist activists who claimed that the Russian minority was a "migrant community located out of place" and consequently had fewer rights on the soil that did not belong to it (Koltsø 1999, pp. 613-617).

In addition to the abovementioned factors, Latvia was affected by the unified system of political and ideological education of different forms, which followed the same sample in all republics of the USSR. For the current paper, the form and character of culture of mass holidays, traditional for the Soviet period, is of high importance, since the roots of the modern clash also partly lie in the customs created by the Communist rule. In her work, Zelče analyses the evolution of mass holidays in the Soviet Union and its republics, particularly in Latvia. The author stresses the important social role of mass holidays, which can, on the one hand, ensure social unity, while, on the other hand, emphasize alienation of a certain group of people from the others (Zelče 2018, p. 389). In this regard, Zelče elaborates on peculiarities of mass holidays in different epochs, starting with Joseph Stalin, simultaneously taking into account the evolution of practices on the territory of contemporary Latvia.

Reckon with the "didactic mission" of mass festivals in the Soviet Union, one should address them as a tool, which was aimed at constructing pan-Soviet behavioural norms to foster a "new Soviet man" (Zelče 2018, p.390). In this context the so-called Victory Day can be considered as one of the most successful projects of the Soviet establishment. The holiday, which symbolizes the end of the Second World War, has gone through a range of changes during different Soviet eras. However, during all these periods the concept was used by Soviet rulers as a tool within national politics and merely became a cornerstone of identity and of group affiliation, which is addressed below. Importantly, Victory Day is an extensive construct, which includes some sub-constructs, such as the "Great Patriotic War". Being coined almost immediately after the end of the war, the term emphasizes its defensive nature, as well as its importance for the country. Taking into account, that this term in Soviet historiography, as well as now is used as a synonym for World War II, the role of the Soviets are automatically lifted to the top as it is presumed that a Soviet man liberated the motherland and the whole Europe. The Victory Day concept goes in hand with the Great Patriotic War, and together they represent a backbone of contemporary Russian mythscape.

The base for the present image of Victory Day was created during the Brezhnev era. The challenging inner and international political situation made authorities look for some ways to raise their prestige. The unsuccessful war in Afghanistan and the so-called Stagnation Period on both inner and international arenas were the main reasons for such turn. Heroic rhetoric became one of the main pillars of the mythscape's reformation, while some controversial events of the Great Patriotic War were not being discussed. Collective memory was built around heroic deeds of the Soviet people, which were raised to the mythical rank. As the 9th of May was gradually becoming one of the main holidays in the late USSR, the position of the Russians was becoming more and more prominent in the context of formation the narrative of exploits. Zelče points out that such a narrative subsequently contributed to alienation of the Russian-speaking population in the post-Soviet Latvia since Brezhnev's administration stance invigorated the idea that Russians were "first among equals", which could not have become an applicable pattern in independent Latvia (Zelče 2018, p.400).

However, the essence of such mass holiday as Victory day has changed over more than two decades of Latvia's independence. The contemporary landscape of national holidays in the country is quite compound, since, on the one hand, it includes newly established or re-established from the time of first independence state celebrations, while, on the other hand, preserves some relicts of Soviet traditions. The soviet-style Women's day/ the 8th of March, when females are gifted flowers, is one of those. It is underlined, that this practice is widely popular not only among Russian-speakers but nationwide while being clearly the late USSR's legacy. The most popular national holiday according to respondents' answers in 2014 was Women's Day, which was celebrated by 80,2% of participants. It is followed by Independence Day on the 18th of November with 71, 3% and Lāčplēsis Day on the 11th of November with 52.9% (Zelče/ Ardava 2017, p. 83). The two latter belong to re-established commemoration practices of the independence of Latvia and honouring Latvian freedom fighters back in 1919 during the First World War respectively. Simultaneously, the list of the most popular holidays completes Victory Day/the 9th of May with 38, 9% of respondents claiming they celebrate this date. In addition to that, the survey shows that there is no united opinion on the most important commemoration day for the current administration, namely the 18th of November/Independence Day. According to the survey, two relatively numerous

groups of 46% and 34% of respondents gave opposite estimates of the above-mentioned holiday, namely stating that it is a "very important" and "not particularly important" holiday respectively. Zelče explains such heterogeneity by the specifics of historical developments on the territory of contemporary Latvia in the 20th century. Previously addressed events, which are assessed by Russian-speakers and most Latvians oppositely due to historical and societal conditions in which these two groups were in given time periods, still influence on the perception of the same events by different groups. Hence, the authors come to a crucial conclusion, that "here are continuing inconsistencies in the country's memory policies and value system" (Zelče 2018, p.399).

Such phenomenon was addressed by Katja Wezel in her work on Latvian memory regime as she referred to it as "divided memory". The author explains the specific characteristics by the existence of two parallel assessments of the same events within one state. The term "occupation" is in the centre of the widespread narrative about endured sufferings of the Latvian nation. At the same time, native Russian-speakers in Latvia view actions of the Red Army as protection and, later, liberation of Latvia from Nazi Germany (Wezel 2008, p.150). The divide leads to the situation when "Latvians" predominantly share the perception that Russophones are successors of "occupants" and "colonizers", while many people within the Russian-speaking minority see themselves as successors of "liberators". Simultaneously, attempts of some Latvian guerrilla organizations and individuals to oust Soviet authorities through cooperating with the Nazi administration, are interpreted by Russians as collaborationism, which has a very negative connotation. In the Latvian case, the liberation discourse justifies the existence of Russian-speakers on this territory and therefore, remains to be crucial for their self-perception. Most importantly, with the change of generations, the attitude towards the issue of occupation does not seem to change dramatically, as the data shows. For instance, the younger cohort of Russophones still show strong aversion of the word "occupation" used in the context of Latvia's incorporation into the USSR (Cheskin 2012, p.567). In other words, this issue is crucial for both "Latvians" and "Russians" but in the opposite sense. So, the fact that the symbol of occupation for the first group is the biggest celebration for the latter one makes the situation even more dramatic. In some other countries, where the mythscape is being changed as well, as it is happening in today's Ukraine, the 9th of May is also a reason for narrative clash. However, since this particular date does not have an establishment

symbolic link to the most important event for the new identity, the level of memory war in this particular dimension is very visible, though not the main one to focus at when addressing the Soviet past, since some other dates are of more importance.

Reckon the conceptual framework created by Bernhard and Kubik, it becomes evident, that such heterogeneous landscape of holidays, social and political exclusion of the part of the population, as well as profound differences in assessing the past can be considered as signs of deeply fractured memory regime in contemporary Latvia. The “strong ethnic dimensions” within country’s mnemonic field also proves such tendencies (Pettai 2016, p. 171). The two numerous groups, namely Russian-speakers and Latvians, within one state defend opposite viewpoints on the pivotal historical events. However, Latvia, though an independent state, is subjected to the influence from outside, particularly from its biggest neighbor in the face of Russian Federation. Hence, its influence on the processes in Latvia should be taken into account.

2.2. Russia's memory politics and its soft power in Latvia

Since the independence gain, the holiday landscape has been undergoing many changes in Latvia, as stated above. Contemporary Russia, as an external homeland, does not stand aside. Television and non-governmental funds remain one of the greatest tools of influence by now: the Kremlin exercises its soft power on Russian-speakers mostly through NGOs and particularly through television channels broadcasted in Latvia. The provided statistics show that 38,2% of Latvia's inhabitants watched Russian channels in 2015 (Zelče 2018, p.401). Hence, the Latvian holiday landscape is also partly impacted by “traditional” values broadcasted from Russia.

In this regard, processes that were taking place already after the USSR’s break-up should be addressed separately. Simonyan promotes the idea that aside from debatable events occurred during the Soviet rule, the contemporary narrative around Russian-speakers in the Baltic states and their social positioning were predetermined by the fact that the first President of the Russian Federation did not created a document that would have ensured rights of Russophones residing in the former Soviet republics in general, and in Latvia in particular. It is underlined that Boris Yeltsin could have put forward "demands for the guarantee of civil rights to Russians as a condition of recognition of the independence of these countries" (Simonyan 2008, p.5). The author sticks to the idea that the Baltic states were more interested in the

process of independence gaining, so any conditions, which could have been set by the Russian government, would have been accepted as a cost for liberation. Hence, the post-Soviet Russia is included when analysing the roots of the conflict between "Russians" remained in Latvia and the titular nation. The author goes further in his reasoning and argues that the inner state status of the Russian-speaking population suffers since until nowadays the Kremlin has no clear vision of how to build relations with the Baltic states due to the mutually exclusive interpretation of the past on the one hand, and the necessity to conduct relations with the former Socialist countries, which are considered to be traditionally in the sphere of Moscow's influence, on the other hand. It is maintained that "Russian diplomacy has failed in this region" and was not able to maintain a stable leverage of influence in Latvia (Simonyan 2008, p.9). The standpoint of Simonyan and the vagueness of Russia's political line can be confirmed by the fact that not a single ambassador of the Russian Federation to Latvia has had specialization in the Baltic countries so far. This can be explained by the fact that such professionals simply do not exist at the highest political level. Hence, Latvia's "return to Europe" which was promoted on the domestic level by local authorities, was not contested by the Russian diplomatic service, since it did not possess enough guidelines and capacity to deter it. Therefore, the interaction between the states in the political sphere has been evolving mostly around two remaining issues, namely the infringement of the Russian-speaking minority rights that Moscow has imputed to Riga and the debatable Soviet past that Riga wanted to discuss openly. However, Simonyan seems to focus mostly on the events taking place after the disintegration of the USSR, while disregarding problematic issues accumulating between Riga and Moscow for more than forty years under the Soviet rule. He seems to highlight merely the perestroika and 1990s period, while not including more recent developments, which has its point, but cannot be fully accepted for the analysis of the current trends.

However, absence of strong doctrine in that context, which was highlighted above, may also be a political reflection of the vagueness of the "Russian" identity by itself. Kolstø argues that as a result of nationality politics in the Soviet Union at the level of republics, Russians were considered as a dominant ethnic and cultural group though at the same time they did not have a clear perception of their own identity (Kolstø 1999, p. 610). While other ethnicities ended up having a dual sense of identity – at the local and all-Soviet level, Russians were the only ethnic group with no tight

connection to the territory but spread among all the republics. As a result, Russians felt themselves "at home" in every corner of the USSR, where their language was spoken and did not see themselves as a minority, even when their percentage in this or other republic was tiny. After the collapse of the USSR Russians turned out to be in a less favourable position, as the post-Soviet states started to form their national identity based on titular nationality, while Russians/Russian-speakers might not have changed their self-determination as first among equals. The fact that contemporary Russia does not perceive Latvia as something more than a territory, which contains the Russian-speaking population, might also originate from these preconditions.

All in all, despite some unchanging moments, Russia has been experiencing some shifts in representing the past, which is quite visible on the example of the World War II commemoration. Olga Malinova focuses on the Second World War narrative and its role in self-identification in contemporary Russia. The author traces and analyses how the Great Patriotic War narrative has been evolving during the first decade of the 21st century as the Kremlin's speechwriters and spin doctors were trying to craft a contemporary main national idea by incorporating a number of well-established frames and introducing some new ones. Since the Victory Day and the GPW narrative is directly connected to the Soviet past, this is an important issue, which affects bilateral relations between Russia and the states in the near abroad.

The author underlines, that Russian Presidents' speeches on Victory Day reflect which countries are included in the category of "Us" and which are considered to be "Others", which is based on the way these countries interpret the Soviet past in general, but mostly World War II (Malinova 2015, p. 13). The change in collective memory is traced by analysing conceptual frames, which have been used by Boris Yeltsin, Dmitriy Medvedev, and Vladimir Putin in their speeches during state holidays. It is argued that the "critical narrative", formed by Boris Yeltsin, who gave a negative assessment to the Soviet authorities but positively treated "heroic deeds of the Soviet people" in the GPW, has been modified as soon as Vladimir Putin came to power. Attempts of the new administration to separate the "old" Soviet Russia from the "new" democratic one were replaced with the narrative of a "Thousand-year-old Russia", successor to the great power that the USSR had become after the "glorious victory" in World War II. Tatiana Zhurzhenko also points out, that the triumph and heroic sacrifice are of high importance in interpreting the victory in the Great Patriotic

War as the most vital symbolic legacy of Russia as a successor to the USSR (Zurzhenko 2017, p.90).

Although the Communist rule has not been completely rehabilitated under Vladimir Putin, it is not given such a negative connotation as under Boris Yeltsin. As Malinova maintains, Putin's and, consequently Medvedev's administrations, resorted to the principle of "collective amnesia" addressing mostly victorious and successful parts of the victory, which made it quite a flat but easy to use tool for constructing collective memory (Malinova 2015, p. 18). Such an approach has its roots in the before-mentioned Brezhnev's era, which has been mastered by the present administration. Under the rule of Vladimir Putin the Second World War and "the heroic sacrifice of the Soviet nation in the fight against fascism", which ended as "liberation of Europe from the "brown plague", without discussion of the problematic side including Soviet aggression, become a cornerstone of today's Russian national idea and soft power (Malinova 2017, p.46). The political agenda of defending the one and only true narrative about World War II is heavily promoted by contemporary Russian elites and transmitted to the "near abroad", while Victory Day plays one of the most crucial parts in that process. These terms together with the "compatriot politics" were coined to refer to the post-Soviet republics aside from Russia, which still were seen as a traditional sphere of the Kremlin's influence.

One of the most prominent attempts to "protect" the memory of the "great victory" from the "distortions" and "misstatements" was the establishment of the Presidential Commission to Counter Attempts of History Falsification in 2009. While the already existing Committee on CIS Affairs dealt with more routine and practical issues, the Commission had a task to supervise the preservation of "true" memory in the former Soviet republics. Even though the work of the Commission was not truly successful, the attempts to institutionalize memory not only within Russia but also to influence memory politics in other independent countries are crucial to the self-understanding of Russia as the only bearer of true narrative. The desire to teach the «refractory» neighbours is embedded in Russia's role as a protector of its formerly beached diasporas (Laruelle 2011, p. 235). Hence, while being of great symbolic importance for the inner politics, the Victory over Nazi Germany still shapes the foreign policy as well, since it makes the post-Soviet Russia equal to the big "Other" which can be also addressed as "the West".

Even though the contemporary narrative includes some redemption of Soviet times' phenomena, the contemporary regime managed to create new official symbols of the Victory. In this connection, Malinova also addresses the development of the main symbols used during the contemporary commemorative practice since they are the most vivid way of showing support for certain traditions or events. The author concludes that the political mechanisms chosen by Putin's administration were successful in terms of supporting the Saint George's Ribbon initiative after 2005 and making it an essential symbol for Victory Day. The ribbon, coloured in yellow-brown stripes, which had been firstly introduced in Russian Empire as a military award, enjoyed support countrywide in today's Russia and, most importantly, were used in most of the CIS countries until 2014, as the Russian-Ukrainian conflict erupted. Another initiative, which nowadays can be counted as one of the symbols of the 9th of May, namely the Immortal Regiment, was originally coined by the group of journalists in Tomsk in 2012 and then was lifted to the Russian-wide practice. Both St George's Ribbon and the Immortal Regiment enjoyed state support and were in a way exported to the near abroad, which contributed to the creation of a united spectrum of traditions in many of the former USSR countries. These two elements are crucial parts of today's "Russian" Victory Day.

Another crucial point is the character of the event. Despite being a commemorative event in its essence, the form of it is rather celebrative. As it was made evident, starting from the Soviet times, the event had a triumphant character, which, except rare and rather short periods, only increased its jubilant appeal over time. Contemporary Russia has raised this approach to Victory Day to the absolute level. Despite the existence of the aforementioned Immortal Regiment, which has a mourning connotation, May the 9th turned out to be a commemorative holiday with strong celebration tone, which is visible not only in Russia, but in the near abroad as well. Hence, we can talk about the dichotomy within Victory Day, which again goes back to the highly institutionalised nature of commemorative practices of the USSR. While the backbone of the holiday is an example of the top-down mythscape construction of a heroic past, some rare embeddings of bottom-up initiatives such as the originally sorrowful Immortal Regiment, add personal motives to the celebration. Therefore, while the triumphant narrative of the 9th of May is deeply integrated within Russophones in the post-Soviet space, the private side of the commemoration, which is traditionally more of a mourning character, together with local tradition and

specifics, is still inherited in this event (Gabovich 2015, p.104). Nevertheless, specifics and character of the commemoration in every particular country of the post-Soviet space is still quite different and should not be totally generalised.

2.3. Ethnic democracy and memory wars in post-Soviet Latvia

Contemporary Latvia has also been going through self-determination in the context of the Communist rule and the role of Russia in the country's past. The key periods in this context are the late 1980s and Perestroika. Amon Cheskin in *Russian Speakers in Post-Soviet Latvia* tackles the issue of discursive tropes that became visible and salient in the last years of the USSR's existence (Cheskin 2016, p. 41). This period is considered to be crucial in the establishment of "Latvia's new hegemonic order" since the old Soviet discourses were discredited. Cheskin argues that the rhetoric composed by the Popular Front of Latvia (PFL), the political organization that was the most prominent actor in the independence movement, was promoting the image of the Russian minority as the "Other". While at the beginning of the independence movement in the late 1980s the USSR was seen as the "Other", with the Soviet Union gradually eroding the emphasis was shifted from it to the Russian minority on the Latvian territory (Cheskin 2016, p. 64). The author exemplifies his stance by addressing *Atmoda*, the newspaper of the PFL, which was printed in both Russian and Latvian languages, usually with identical articles. However, the author provides several extractions from articles published exclusively in the Russian version, which contained a kind of definition of the status of Russians in Latvia. The definition implies that the Russian minority should be aware of its unnatural presence in the country because the Russian nation is "a guest in this land". This illustrates a clear division into "Latvian people" and "Russian people" within the population of the country. Hence, the author concludes that the "Latvian nation" is the only purely "Latvian" construct while the "Russian nation" is perceived as a different construct, whose members "have no inherent right to interfere" (Cheskin 2018, p. 44).

As a result of such alienation, Latvian Russophones were feeling sentimental about the USSR, where they enjoyed the leading role. It found its manifestation in the form of Victory Day, as it became the litmus paper of the Russophones identity. Having no certain ideology, finding themselves in a new "hostile" state, the 9th of May became the ultimate event, which gathered around itself the greatest part of the

Russophones. In the first years of independence and in early 2000s, the event used to have quite a distinctive anti-Latvian connotation and used to be a hyperbolic version of the holiday taking place in contemporary Russia. Zelče and Ardava claim that until 2009 Victory Day, when the event used to have quite a radical narrative, it summoned a great number of people; once the maximum reached more than 250 000 visitors. It is underlined that many Soviet symbols together with the pro-Russian narrative were integral parts of the commemoration practice. Its anti-Latvian narrative was manifested in the absence of any Latvia-related symbols and Latvian language as well. The event was heavily dominated by, in a way, exaggerated Soviet mottos, and Stalin's portraits. Importantly, it was also very politicized due to the events, happening in the political life of the country at that time. The bilateral negotiations between Latvia and the USA amid the symbolic visit of George Bush to Riga in 2005, when the American president maintained that Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union (CNN 2005), contributed to the rise of hostility towards today's Latvia among local Russophones. Aside from that, Latvian politicians themselves were quite unapologetic in their comments on the Victory Day tradition in Riga. The most prominent and viral statement belongs to Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, President of Latvia in 1999-2007, who addressed the event as the day when "older Russians who on the 9th of May put vobla [dried fish] on newspapers, drink vodka and sing chastushkas [humorous folk songs] while also remembering how they heroically conquered the Baltic states" (The Baltic Times 2005). With such an unambiguous statement regarding the holiday, the former President of Latvia underlined both the erroneous and clearly jubilant character of it, which supposes to symbolize the national tragedy for contemporary Latvia. Hence, while the wide spread of the customs of the 9th of May's commemoration from Russia to near abroad can be considered a success for contemporary Russia's soft power, such an expansion negatively affects the attitude towards the minority, since its representatives are deeply connected to their external national homeland in their perception of the greater part of the titular nation. The spread of symbols, similar to the ones used in the Russian Federation, contributes to the strengthening of the feeling that Russophones are not loyal to the state of residence. This is especially prominent in the countries, where the disputable past is being an acute issue and where the current political elite forms a new historical landscape. In Latvia, where the past is rethought, the attitude towards the Russian-speaking minority is negatively affected

by this, since these symbols and customs symbolise the event which takes place in the external homeland.

However, such distinct rhetoric of separation of Russian-speakers in Latvia from other parts of the population started to become a little less prominent as soon as inner Latvian political actors stepped in the game. In 2005 as the centrist political party *Saskana*, further addressed to as the Concord Party, was established, Russophones started to be perceived as a large part of population with great electoral potential. Before the Concord Party, this group of population was not addressed in this context, since all the parties represented in the Saeima (Latvian Parliament) were almost exclusively orientated at the "Latvian" population. If before 2006 the used symbols and mottos, the structure of the event, even the repertoire of the concert were almost a copy of those in the Russian Federation, after the Party started, in a way, to take patronage over the holiday through its affiliate platforms, the character and content of the holiday changed. The work, conducted by the Party, firstly became evident in 2009, as the narrative associated with the holiday was milder and more reserved than years before. Zelče argues, that since that time the idea of incompatibility of the Russian and Latvian versions of WWII is no longer the center of Victory Day, at least officially. Furthermore, high-ranking foreign representatives, in particular the ambassadors of Russia and Belarus, have ceased to be regular visitors of the festival, and the field of symbolic signs used during the event has been partly cleared of Soviet symbols (Zelče 2018, p 405).

Additionally to the work conducted by the Party, the self-determination of Russians in Latvia has also evolved over time. The study by Martinš Kaprāns and Inta Mierina, which addresses to what degree the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia shares the attitude of the external national homeland towards them as objects of its influence, should be mentioned in this regard. The authors point out the dichotomy when addressing the new Russophones identity. Kaprāns and Mierina highlight the relatively high level of assimilation tendencies into Latvian/European culture on the one hand, and remaining ties to the Russian Federation in the sense of symbolic homeland, as the authors refer to it, on the other hand (Kaprāns & Mierina 2019, p. 42). The survey conducted in 2017 supports this idea by showing that 20.5% of Russophones felt close to Russia, while 25.5% had close bonds with Europe. At the same time, when questioned whether Russia should be seen as a threat to Latvia, 80% of participants gave a negative answer. When underlying the heterogeneity of the

Russophones minority, Kaprāns and Mierina draw attention to the fact that Russian-speakers manage to combine two identities. They tend to have a warm attitude towards their symbolic homeland while having a strong feeling of attachment to their state of residence. Under more detailed consideration it becomes evident, that the more alienated a Russophone feels in Latvia, the higher is his or her attachment to Russia. For instance, Russophones of a younger cohort with higher education and job tend to be less enthusiastic in their Russian sentiments. Consequently, one can see a partial mismatch between the monolith approach of the Russian authorities when addressing Russophones living in Latvia, and their own feelings of attachment.

All in all, the liberation of Latvia from the Nazis, myths built around heroic deeds of the Soviet army in World War II and contemporary Russia's attitude towards it still remain one of the main pillars of Russophones' self-identification in Latvia. Simultaneously, self-identification of contemporary Latvians is, on the contrary, affiliated with the occupations and, hence, suppression. Therefore, it can be defined through the "victim" concept. Ljiljana Radonić studies how the martyrdom attitude is defining the narrative about the Soviet rule in some post-socialist countries, including Latvia. The quintessence of this narrative in these countries can be found in the museums, which are devoted to the history of the country under the Soviet rule. In the Latvian case, this is the Occupation Museum located in the center of Riga. The existence of such commemorative institutions excludes the idea of liberation by the Red Army in 1945 (Radonić 2018, p, 510).

Hence, the topic of the Great Patriotic War and the heroic collective feat of the Soviet people are categorically declined by official Riga that always puts an emphasis on problematic matters that are unacceptable for the Latvian Russophones. Oxana Shevel elaborates on that issue in her analysis of memory conflicts in contemporary Ukraine in *No Way Out? Post-Soviet Ukraine's Memory Wars in Comparative Perspective* (2012). Despite the difference in the nature of divided memory, the Ukrainian and Latvian cases are alike at some point due to the shared Soviet-past. In order to overcome the difference in assessments of the most prominent historical events over which the mnemonic wars are fought, the author proposes to tackle history as a set of histories of different ethnic groups who had their motivation in acting in a certain way (Shevel 2012, p. 35). To promote such attitude mnemonic actors, namely pluralists who are ready to

accept other viewpoints, should lead the political elite of the country. Such practices in the long run may result in the establishment of a pillarized mnemonic regime. For Latvia, where currently the regime can be characterized as fractured, this path might be right for overcoming mnemonic conflicts. The two diverging stances towards the same events were entrenched by the interpretation of Latvia's history of the 20th century, especially the WWII events as the history of the monolith Latvian ethnos. The study of the instruments of memory politics, namely commemoration practices and museums in the face of Victory Day and the Museum of the Occupation respectively, might help find a way for contemporary Latvia to gradually evolve from a nationalizing state of a core nation to a hybrid model, which eventually will lead to a civic state.

Chapter III

Museum of the Occupation: a mouthpiece of the Latvian narrative

The Museum of the Occupation in Riga was chosen for the present case study due to its crucial role in the Latvian post-Soviet national building. This institution can be considered a mouthpiece of illustrative example of the most important standpoints of nation building for the contemporary Latvian state, which have largely been developed by the Museum stakeholders.

3.1. Museum and its exhibition

The exhibition and the Museum's activities are tackled within Aro Velvet's two-dimensional approach. Hence, this part is concentrated on the exhibition itself while the Museum as a "practice" is addressed in parts 3.2. and 3.3.

The Occupation Museum in Latvia was established in 1993 and is located in the heart of Riga's old town. The Museum was originally grounded as an initiative supported by private investors in the face of the Occupation Museum Association of Latvia (OMB). Noteworthy, the proposal of its establishment was made by Paulis Lozda, Professor of the US-based University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, whose family fled from Latvia in 1940. Even though it is the Ministry of Culture and Education of Latvia, which endorsed the founding of the Museum, the OMB members are the ones who grant financial support for the Museum, since the association is claimed to be the legal owner. The OMB charter, provided in the Latvian language, emphasizes the private character of the Museum and defines the structure of its organization, its financial background alongside with duties of its executives (*Latvijas Okupācijas Muzeja Biedrības Statūti*, 2012). Importantly, the charter underlines, that the Museum receives only 10% of financial support from the state, while the rest of the funding comes from sponsors, mostly from the international Latvian community. Several large monetary donations are known to have been made by individuals, namely by Latvians living in North America. The Latvian-American community as a whole is actively involved in the financial and cultural support of the Museum and the association, judging by the list of its members. Hence, the Museum stakeholders have a great influence on the narrative promoted by the museum's exhibitions.

Despite the fact that the OMB is officially the main actor within the Museum's structure, the ties between the state institution of Latvia and the Museum are quite explicit. Such public bodies as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the Ministry of Culture that are crucial for nation building processes openly support the Museum, which is evident after the analysis of the supportive materials published by the Museum. In addition to that, many of the people involved in the work of the Museum are also involved in the work of government bodies. Hence, the narrative promoted by the Museum is widely accepted by officials. One can go further and assume that the current official Latvian narrative of the country's past was largely formed by the Museum's stakeholders. Therefore, it is quite tricky to trace, whether the state bodies have influenced the Museum or vice versa. It is clear, however, that the stakeholders of the Museum and Latvian officials work on the same side.

The official motto of the Museum is "Remember. Commemorate. Remind". The Museum's purpose is to "remember" what was happening in Latvia in 1940-1991, "commemorate" those who fell victim to repressive regimes of Communists and Nazis and "remind" other countries of "offences" that have been inflicted on the Latvian people. In addition to the Museum motto, its official symbol is also worth mentioning, which can be seen on all booklets and other accompanying materials, as well as on the Museum building in the form of a vertical poster. The symbol consists of two black lines with white space between them, which is conceived as a ray of light between the two totalitarian regimes. The official explanation is available on the Museum website (okupacijasmuseum.lv).

When addressing the 'house' of the Museum, its origin should also be taken into account. The building where the Museum was originally located was designed in 1970 for the subsequent opening of an exhibition dedicated to the Latvian Riflemen. Thus, from 1971 to 1991, the Museum was one of the branches of the Latvian Revolutionary Museum and was focused on the history of the emergence and formation of the Latvian Riflemen movement as one of the important elements of the All-Soviet revolutionary momentum. Since in 1993 the old Museum was liquidated, the building was given to the newly established Occupation Museum. This decision can be characterized not only as a result of practical considerations but also as a symbolic gesture that marked the shift from the former Soviet-imposed ideological guidelines to free and independent Latvia. It is noteworthy that the monument to the Latvian Riflemen itself in the form of three thirteen-meter uniformed soldiers was not

destroyed, and still can be found on the square in front of the Museum building. Now, the building on Red Riflemen Square is not only being renovated but is being expanded. The famous American architect of Latvian origin Gunars Birkerts donated the architectural project to Riga back in 2003. The so-called "House of the Future" project was facing difficulties for many years as it was carried out. The city authorities, as well as the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development (VARAM), which is responsible for the project, declared its readiness for grand opening by the end of summer 2020 (LSM.LV, 2017). However, it has not happened yet. So at the time of this paper's writing, the exhibition was temporarily located at another address, 7 Rains Boulevard, which is not far from the original building. Because of the inaccessibility of the original exhibition, an exposition located in the temporary hall was visited in order to obtain more detailed information from the original source. The temporary exposition hall does not reflect the entirety of the original stylistic design since the space seems to be much smaller, but it is still enough for the analysis of the promoted narrative by the four main sections of the exposition.

The Museum's historical fund is quite extensive and, according to the official data available on the Museum website, includes about 30 000 artefacts. Most of the Museum's collection consists of exhibits dating back to 1940-1991. Many of them are things of private origin, donated to the Museum personally or received because of declassification of the KGB archives. Besides, the Museum's fund receives some exhibits through cooperation with other states' historical collections. A part of the artefacts used to belong to the propaganda materials of Soviet and Nazi regimes, e.g. some displayed photos and broadsheets, which may create ambiguity.

The Museum's permanent exhibition is divided into four main parts, which are presented in chronological order. The first part of the exhibition is dedicated to Latvia's first incorporation into the USSR and is referred to as "The first year of the Soviet occupation (1940-1941)". The second part, according to the plan of the founders, should give visitors an idea of the occupation of Latvia by Nazi Germany. It is implied, that the same section "Occupation by Nazi Germany (1941-1944)" mentions the Holocaust. The third and most spacious part of the exhibition, due to the much longer period covered - "The post-war Soviet occupation (1944-1991)" – addresses the life of Latvia under the Communist rule. The final part is the smallest one and concentrated

on the implications of the Soviet occupation. It concludes the permanent exhibition of the Museum. All the Museum's sections are designed in the same style. As may be seen from *Figure 1*, it is a rather poorly lit area, where the only bright spots are red- and black stands with exhibits. The stands display



historical documents, photos, newspaper clippings, and posters of the periods covered by a particular part of the exhibition.

Figure 1: The styling of one of the Museum's halls ("The post-war Soviet occupation 1944-1991) (21.08.19)

The section of the exhibition dedicated to the "first occupation" covers not only the period 1940-1941 but also goes back to 1939. It was the year when the Non-Aggression Treaty between Germany and the Soviet Union was signed, including a secret protocol, which implied the division of Eastern Europe, with the Baltic States, into spheres of interest. Therefore, the first spot that catches the eye at the entrance to

the exhibition is the large photos of Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler placed above the stand, which is dedicated to the Treaty and the Protocol. As *Figure 2* provide, photos of the Soviet and Nazi leaders are fixed above the stand, and the photos of marching soldiers, as well as the map, showing split spheres of influence in the region, are presented in an enlarged format. Under it, the Treaty and the Protocol are presented in the original languages. The explanatory tablets in English and Latvian are provided underneath. Due to the brevity of the presented period, it does not take much time to study the materials. Aside from information related to the Protocol and the enforced invasion of the Red Army, this area offers some propaganda posters, which refers to the Soviet promotion of Latvia's first incorporation into the USSR. It is noteworthy that

almost all exhibits of the Museum have explanatory captions in Latvian, while the second



Figure 2: Portraits of Hitler and Stalin above the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (21.08.2019)

most frequently used language is English. Explanations in Russian are extremely rare. That is understandable since many of the displayed exhibits are originally in Russian and do not require translation. However, the explanatory captions, which aim to clarify a certain phenomenon or an event, are also extremely rare in Russian. Such a state of affairs shows how the language is used to emphasize the orientation of the museum to the West.

The part of the exhibition covering the period 1941-1944 is styled in the same manner, as *Figure 3* shows. One of the most distinguished elements of exposition in this section is the photographs and posters showing the positive attitude of the Latvian

population towards the invasion by the Wehrmacht in July 1941. From explanatory captions to the photographs of Latvian citizens greeting German soldiers, it can be understood that the Nazi invasion was perceived as a possible escape from the Soviet occupation. In support of this explanation, propaganda posters of the Nazis, who promised liberation from the Soviet oppression, are provided. Moreover, the stands also contain information about the Ajas Kommando, which took part in punitive operations in Latvia. On other stands, posters of 1941-1943 with Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda can be observed as well, which supposedly should provide an all-inclusive overview of the events of that time. However, in comparison with the total amount of material presented, the coverage of the Latvian participation in the Holocaust does not seem comprehensive and does not play a significant role in the



Figure 3: Representation of Nazi Occupation: photos of Riga's occupation administration with description on English and Latvian (21.08.2019)

exhibition.

Alongside photos of unnamed dead bodies of Jewish background, another stand provides portraits and short bibliographic data about the Latvians who helped to cover Jews from the Nazis.

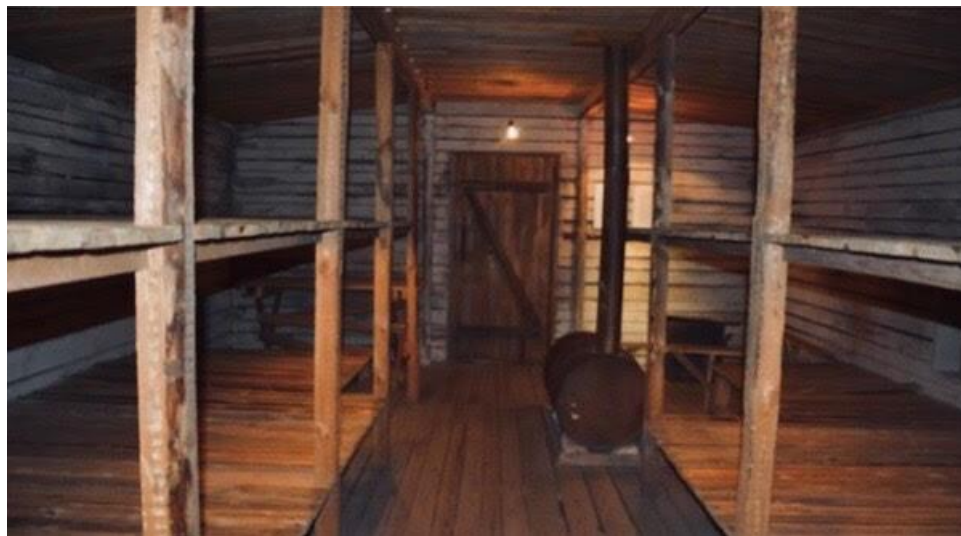
It should be noted that a certain amount

of information could be obtained from the tour guide, whose services can be used both in a group format and individually. An employee of the Museum complements written notes to some of the exhibits, however, it still does not compensate for some superficiality of the part of the Holocaust representation in Latvia, which simultaneously means the underrepresentation of the debatable role of the Latvians in it. The emphasis in this part of the exhibition is made on the hopeless situation for the Latvian people, who were between two totalitarian regimes and were forced to look for ways to survive.

The third part of the exhibition covers the period from 1944 to 1991, i.e. from the moment of Latvia's secondary incorporation into the USSR until the collapse of the Socialist Bloc. This part raises the issue of repression, exile, and terror against the Latvian population during this period in more detail. One of the most striking exhibits in this part is the reconstructed barracks, pictured in *Figure 4*, where political prisoners were kept in special places of exile, particularly in Siberia. In addition to a description of what exactly that wooden structure is, it presents postcards in Latvian and English from the memoirs of one of the prisoners, Martin Bishers, about the specific concept of "parasha" and its features, which supposed to show how inhumane the conditions of detention of prisoners were. This selected object creates a certain atmosphere during the passage through this piece of exposition.

Besides, among the exhibits shown, there are many personal belongings of

victims
of
repression,
as well
as
archive
photographs
of a
disturbin



g nature.

Figure 4: Reconstruction of Gulag's barracks (21.08.2019)

A4-

format photographs provide visitors with an opportunity to see victims of shootings and gallows without any clothes lying on the ground lumped together, which raises moral and ethical concerns about representation of those suffered. As Radonič highlights, the questions of how the photos are represented and by whom they were taken are of great importance for the post-communist museums. In the Latvian case, their origin is unclear for unprepared visitors.

The largest number of stands is dedicated to political terror, repression, and persecution of collaborators, so-called "dissidents" as well as other "undesirable elements" to the communist regime. In addition to numerous graphical photographs of victims, the Museum also displays documents used at the time of the arrests, namely

their fingerprints and brief guilty verdicts, as well as personal belongings that were in the possession of prisoners and exiles at the moment of arrest and during their confinement, which makes it very personal. At the end of this section numerous bright and life-affirming propaganda posters in the socialistic realism style, which was typical to the Soviet Union, are provided. They worship the life in the Latvian SSR and against the background of the dark-coloured decoration of the exhibition as well as the depressing facts presented earlier, these bright posters make a strong impression, underlying the duplicity of the communist rule.

Despite it's relatively little space, the fourth section carries an important meaning for a visitor, as it is dedicated to Latvia's restoration as an independent state. Here visitors can observe photos taken already in 1991 when hundreds of black balloons were launched in Riga as a symbol of liberation from oppression and in honour of fallen victims, as well as photo reports from demonstrations for independence in 1991. It is noteworthy that the final exhibit is a series of diagrams representing demographic changes in Latvia. The diagrams are intended to demonstrate a sharp decline in the Latvian population and the increased Russian population during the Soviet period, as well as the gradual restoration of the Latvian ethnos domination after 1991.

Although the exposition covers some complex phenomena of the WWII period, the undoubted emphasis is placed on the crimes of the Soviet regime towards the population of Latvia. It is the centre of the narrative, through which everything else is explained. The nature of the exhibition cannot be characterized as exclusively descriptive, which purpose would be to present facts of the past, to give visitors the freedom of choice in their assessments. The selection of items and stylistics of the exposition creates a certain mood that leaves no doubt about the roles assigned to the main actors of the narration. For example, the exposition not only reproduces a detainee's cell in Soviet labour camps but also adds a description of daily life during imprisonment on the example of a specific object, which helps to arouse precise feelings among visitors. The description of certain phenomena inherent in the Soviet regime after 1940 is not limited to a basic statement of facts but again has a more "personalized" character, unlike, for example, the controversial participation of the Latvians in the Holocaust. Here, actions by the core nation are explained and justified through the Soviet regime's atrocities, which remove the blame from the Latvians.

Talking about the stylistic, the aforementioned black and red with a touch of white creates an oppressive atmosphere. Light is practically absent in the entire exposition space. Understandably, the temporary area for the exhibition was not originally designed in gloomy tones, that is why white walls and brown parquet do not fully allow curators to recreate a very dark atmosphere of hopelessness. However, space is still quite gloomy. In the vast majority of cases, local light is fixed directly on items and explanatory signatures, which on the one hand allows supervisors of the exhibition to set the desired accents and attract attention of visitors to a particular object, but on the other hand, creates certain pressure. It can be assumed that the organizers sought to convey the fear and depression experienced by the population during the occupation, which explains the choice of colours and type of lighting.

After reviewing the exhibition, the motto - Remember. Commemorate. Remind. – seems to be an excellent choice, because the Museum reflects it clearly enough. The Museum can be called "national" because its narrative covers the history of Latvian suffering from a foreign and invasive Soviet/Russian element. The above-mentioned set from the demographic diagrams confirms this. The Museum, although a private organization, not only enjoys state accreditation but is also fully incorporated into the state process of nation-building, which seems to support the constructivist approach in regard of a nation since the Museum through the exhibition unapologetically claims that Latvia is a state of the ethnic Latvians, who used to be oppressed by "colonizers". Perception of the state as an area of legal habitation of the one core nation lies within the tripartite typology of Rogers Brubaker, namely within the second model of nationalizing states, where the core nation constitutes the state. The Museum divides the population of Latvia into the "Russians", who brought both occupation and suffering, and the Latvians, who had to endure deprivation and live under oppression of the imposed Soviet culture. Since, as was mentioned in the previous chapters, contemporary Russophones are perceived as descendants of these „colonizers", such a narrative might be destructive for the young Latvian democracy.

The exposition is not aimed at the Russian-speaking audience or the Russian-speaking inhabitants of Latvia, since they are not considered as part of it; rather, as reflected in the slogan of the Museum, it focuses on foreign and English-speaking visitors, who do not have enough knowledge about Latvia's martyrdom. However, the focus on Western European visitors also poses several challenges. In this context, it is necessary to mention a certain criticism of the composition of the exhibition, which

was addressed by Ljiljana Radonič and Eva-Clarita Onken. The Museum of the Occupation focuses on the suffering of the Latvian people under the Soviet occupation by placing an equal sign between the Soviet and Nazi regimes. Therefore, Latvia not only draws attention to the Kremlin's crimes from 1940 to 1991 but also undermines the socio-cultural core of the Pan-European consciousness, namely the Holocaust. Latvian interpretation of the Soviet occupation challenges the notion of the Holocaust as absolute evil in the history of Europe. A certain level of criticism of the Museum was observed in connection with the lack of coverage of extermination of the Jews during the Second World War in Latvia, as well as the mal-representation of the Holocaust victims in the Museum in general (Radonič 2018, p. 517; Radonič 2016, p.179; Velmet 2011, p. 190;). Insufficient respect for the representation of victims through the use of derogatory archival photographs from shooting places was also questioned. Although this is not a key point for this work in the context of the Russian-speaking minority, it demonstrates a certain bias in the narrative of the Occupation Museum.

3.2. Stakeholders and the formation of the Museum's narrative

The main exhibition, which was tackled above, is a product of the narrative fostered by the Museum's stakeholders. According to the principle used by Theopisti Styliani-Lambert and Alexandra Bounia, background actors and the history of the Museum's establishment can provide a full picture of the Museum's goals and role in the society.

As mentioned in the previous part, the Museum is supervised by the OMB board, which includes a number of the most influential actors within the studied area. The lists of active and non-active members of OMB, as well as members of the five main commissions within it, are available on the official website of the Museum, namely okupacijasmuzejs.lv. The OMB Board consists of four main commissions, specifically the Financial, Nomination, Auditing, History and Research Commissions. The History and Research Commission Councillors, whose role is to provide consultation on historical accuracy, seem to be quite prominent in terms of narrative formation. While previously mentioned Paulis Lazda was the founder of the Museum and currently chairs the History and Research Commission, other key persons should be mentioned as well since their occupation, professional and personal background may also be of great importance. Usually, members of each commission are

specialists in respective fields. For instance, all the representatives of the History and Research Commission are historians in leading Latvian and European institutions.

The OMB has thirty members, who are directly involved in the work of the association, while five of them are the so-called OMB Governors. The Board members serve as supervisors and curators who are set to navigate the general developments within the Museum. The charter claims that the OMB Board has several basic duties, i.e it determines the annual budget of the Museum, recruits staff as well as approves committee projects in accordance with the Museum's guidelines. The Chairman of the Board is Dr. Valters Nollendorfs, a Riga-born German language and literature Professor of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, which is based in the USA. His family fled first to Westphalia in 1944, and then to the United States, where he still lives today. With the beginning of "glasnost" and "perestroika" at the end of the 1980s, along with Paulis Lazda, Valters Nollendorfs was actively involved in the cultural life of Latvia and was awarded The Order of the Three Stars, which is the highest accolade for civilians. He has published a number of books dedicated to the occupation of Latvia, among which *Museum of the Occupation of Latvia: Latvia Under the Rule of the Soviet Union and National Socialist Germany, 1940-1991* (2002) and *The Hidden and Forbidden History of Latvia under Soviet and Nazi Occupation* (2005) and nowadays can be considered one of the most influential figures in the Museum structures.

While the two aforementioned academics belong to the group of involuntary migrants who fled the country and returned in the status of honoured scientists, the other part of the Board members are representatives of the modern political and scientific elite of Latvia. Most of the OMB Governors are also a part of the specialized Commission and all of them are respected scientists or public servants. Dzintra Bungs is a Senior Research Fellow at the Latvian Institute of International Affairs and specializes in European integration. Ilze Gehe is a research advisor at the University of Oslo at the Institute of Political Science, while historian Kārlis Kangeris is the current Head of the Government Commission for KGB Research in Latvia. Within this Commission Board, Edvīns Šnore is to be mentioned as well. As a member of the right-wing party *Nacionālā apvienība* [National Alliance], he received The Order of Three Stars after *The Soviet Story* (2008) was released. The film is a slice of documentary footage from the times before the Second World War, as well as directly from the events of 1939-1945, combined with interviews with several

scientific figures. The film implies the similarity of the Nazi and Soviet regimes and crimes, supporting the narration with the highly disturbing documentary footage and background music. Furthermore, Ritvars Jansons is a historian and also a member of the aforementioned National Alliance. As a historian, his specialization was the study of consequences of totalitarianism, which enabled him to take up a post of the Head of the Centre for Documenting the Consequences of Totalitarianism from 1996 to 2007. Since 2013, he has been actively involved in the political life of the party, and in 2020 was appointed to the position of the Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Culture. Another prominent member of the Board is Guntars Krasts, who is in charge of the Financial Commission. Being a career politician, he held various high positions in independent Latvia, both as Prime Minister and Minister of Economy. During his active political career, he was a member of the centre-right party *Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK* [For Fatherland and Freedom], which later merged with the above-mentioned National Alliance. Since 2018, he has been a member of the centrist party *Latvijas Reģionu apvienība* [Latvian Association of Regions].

Thus, there are several groups of people with certain historical past and certain political stances in the management of the museum. The stakeholders are mostly represented by researchers and political figures, which are being part of Latvian state institutions, including governing, administrative, and scientific bodies. Therefore, it is possible to assume that the main stakeholders of the Museum represent a viewpoint, shared by the contemporary Latvian political elite.

3.3. Museum as a practice

The Occupation Museum is not only a permanent exhibition but also a certain number of side projects in the same thematic area. While the exhibition itself can be considered as a static cornerstone of the promoted narrative, affiliate initiatives aim to further endorse the main points of the narrative among broader groups of people aside from voluntary museum visitors.

Many projects are directed at the younger generation, some initiatives are presented on online platforms or with the help of embassies of other countries, which show how wide the spectrum of "practice" of the Museum of the Occupation actually is.

3.3.1 The brochure: a guide to the “Three Occupations” narrative

The Museum of the Occupation works closely with many of Latvia's state bodies that deal with cultural, historical, and social issues in the inner and international political arena. One of the most significant and illustrative works of the Museum is the cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, as a result of which the eponymous brochure *The Three Occupation of Latvia 1940-1991: Soviet and Nazi Take-Overs And Their Consequences* (Nollendorfs et al, 2005) was developed. This introductory booklet consists of 50 pages, including an appendix, and is done in traditional for the Museum red, black and white colours. Semantically, it includes a detailed and chronological overview of the four main parts, which are represented in the Museum. While this booklet reflects the historical events highlighted below in part 4.1., the style it is written in and the way the materials are presented, give an even more profound insight into the political narrative promoted by the Museum. Essentially, this brochure can be used as a printed guide for the visitors of the exhibition.

The booklet, the cover of which includes a photograph of Joseph Stalin and Joachim von Ribbentrop shaking hands, begins with an explanation of the importance of the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the USSR. The foreword defines "occupation" in accordance with the Hague Convention and provides a brief overview of the nature of the three occupations. From the beginning, a distinct parallel is drawn between the Nazi and Soviet regimes. The parts of the text that, according to the authors, carry the main semantic load are highlighted in bold. One of such excerpts in the preface is a paragraph addressed to post-Soviet Russia. The authors stress that Russia's "commitment to this communist myth" that Latvia was legally joined to the USSR and that Sovietisation took place voluntarily, carries threats to the international community. This is followed by a chapter on the collusion between Moscow and Berlin and the subsequent loss of Latvia's independence, which culminated in the first Soviet occupation. The first chapter dedicated to the first occupation includes 18 pages with illustrations on each page. The narrative in the booklet in this part is introductory and provides concisely presented facts. However, even in such format, its appeal demonstrates the highly politicized nature of the brochure.

It is also noteworthy to highlight separately the six pages that are dedicated to the German occupation and the Holocaust. In the beginning, it is emphasized that the Latvian people would "most unlikely" warmly welcome German soldiers if they came as "occupiers of independent Latvia". Such an assumption emphasizes that Latvia, which was occupied by the Soviets, sought to get rid of oppression and accepted the Nazis as "liberators" (Nollendorfs 2004, p. 27). A small excerpt, intended to explain the situation with extermination of the Jews in occupied Latvia, states that the Nazi propaganda managed to "redirect" the rage against the Communists to the Jews, as they were portrayed as true Bolsheviks. Despite the fact that, in general, the explanatory rhetoric is understandable and is based on statistical data, confirming that, for example, Nazi punitive units on the territory of Latvia had only a formally "voluntary" nature, this approach to explaining the committed crimes seems to be relatively ambiguous. Responsibility for participation of ethnical Latvians in crimes against the Jewish population is partially transferred onto the Soviet Union, which is noticeable at the exhibition as well. This can be addressed as externalization of guilt according to Radonič. Despite representation of Nazi crimes and some mere representation of the Holocaust, communist atrocities are still given the spotlight because they considered being crucial for the nation-building of the young Latvian state, according to the main stakeholders of the Museum (Lazda 2008, p.12).

In the following chapter on the second Soviet occupation, the terminology used by the authors is of particular interest. Describing crucial events for the Latvian identity, such terms as "mass deportations" and "dissident" are used in relation to condemnation and exile of ethnic Latvians accused of collaboration with the Nazis, while, understandably, the Forest Brothers' activities are referred to as "Guerrilla War". However, in addition to these terms, standard for the narration and often found in the exhibition of the Occupation Museum itself, this brochure operates with such notions as "ethnic engineering" and "colonization" (Nollendorfs 2005, p. 34). Both of these concepts are related to implanting the Soviet unified culture with the dominating Russian component on the territory of Latvia. While "ethnic engineering" is used in the context of major losses during World War II and the Soviet Union's resettlement policy, as a result of which many servicemen and other specialists of Russian origin were stationed in Latvia, the term "colonization" is closely linked to this policy, which included the use of Russian as the main language of office work and education.

Even though this part is followed by a segment devoted to mass protests, the Singing Revolution in Latvia and gaining independence in 1991, the booklet ends on a pessimistic note, re-evaluating the consequences of communist occupation. If the Museum exhibition provides diagrams of changes in the ethnic composition of the population, in the booklet the consequences of the occupation are divided into two subgroups, namely "Consequences in the human and social realm" and "Economic and physical consequences". In the first category, the items referring to the "potentially disruptive or disloyal immigrant groups", which, among other things, demand "automatic citizenship without naturalization for all Soviet-era immigrants" and most importantly insist on "giving official status to the Russian language", are the most eye-catching (Nollendorfs 2005, pp 42-43). This phrase quite unambiguously refers to the rhetoric of the Russian-speaking community. At the same time, another semantic part is devoted to the Latvian language, the danger of its "russification" and its "secondary status" during the Soviet times. Thus, a specific group of people, which is perceived as a potential danger within the modern Latvian society, is clearly singled out.

3.3.2 Okupacijasmuzejs.lv: the Museum's official website and its functions

It would be reasonable to cover the previously mentioned website okupacijasmuzejs.lv, as it is directly linked to the Museum and the exhibition, and contains a lot of information about projects supported by the Museum association. The site, the original version of which is presented in Latvian, also has Russian, English and German versions. Each language version is almost identical, except for the adaptation of some details. The smallest number of differences is noticeable between the English and Latvian versions, while the Russian version lacks a couple of sections. The German version is the most compact one, yet includes all the basic information.

Unlike the exhibition and booklet, the Museum's website is designed in neutral light tones, which makes navigation easy and clear. In English and Latvian, the website is divided into seven sub-sections, which tell about the Museum itself, the association managing the Museum, news related to the life of the Museum and the association, educational programs on the Museum platform, ways of providing financial support for the exhibition, as well as includes a section on Latvian history

and a section on the future of the Museum after the reconstruction of its original building on Riflemen square.

It is noteworthy that unlike the Latvian and English versions, in the Russian version, the historical section is called "The History of the Occupation of Latvia", while in other languages it is called simply "History", which is further divided into three occupations' periods. Moreover, in the Russian version there is no section on how the exposition will look after renovation. Below some sections of the site are reviewed in more detail to highlight differences in the representation of the narrative for speakers of different languages. The way the Museum presents information in the core nation's language, the language of "occupants" and the language of western democracies sheds the light on the self-determination of today's Latvia.

The first section, which is dedicated to the Museum's exhibition, consists of two parts. The first part is devoted to the Museum of the Occupation, while the second part allows getting acquainted with another project on the basis of the Museum, namely the "KGB operations history". The website is very interactively equipped and offers a "virtual excursion" through the so-called Corner House in the centre of Riga, where the central office of the Latvian KGB unit was located throughout the Soviet period. Moreover, there are several letters from personal correspondence of those who were shot on charges of treason against the Soviet state. The House not only exhibits real personal items but also keeps the detention cells and shooting walls, where the accused were executed. Though this exhibition is not a branch of the Occupation Museum, it is related to it and enjoys its patronage. A separate section on the Museum website highlights the importance of the Corner House for the narrative promoted by the Museum since it represents the suppression of the population. The available materials about the exhibition in the Corner House also suggest that it resonates with the first part of the exhibition in the Occupation Museum, which is dedicated to the period 1940-1941.

The news section, where the social activity of the Occupation Museum is highlighted, should also be mentioned separately. Here one can find a schedule of excursions in different languages for both of the aforementioned exhibitions, as well as news about temporary exhibitions held in the Museum's building. Thus, in autumn 2019 there was an exhibition of drawings of the "Ukrainian journalist and political prisoner of the Kremlin" Roman Sushchenko. Such activity on the Museum's platforms can be explained by cooperation with various public bodies, particularly

Latvian embassies in other countries. The above-mentioned exhibition was organized at the initiative of the Latvian Embassy to Ukraine. Moreover, in the spring of 2019, the Museum organized an exhibition dedicated to ten Crimean Tatars whose parents were persecuted for political reasons. The exhibition was arranged in cooperation with representatives of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar people public organization. The website separately emphasized that, among other things, the exhibition was aimed at drawing attention to the problem of illegal actions of Russia on the territory of Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimean peninsula. It can be concluded that the Museum's space is highly politically engaged not only in the history of Latvia's occupation but also in the contemporary political agenda. In this way, the museum continues the official political line of Latvia. More information on the functioning of the Museum as a political platform can be obtained from this section in other languages, in English and German in particular. A visit to the Museum is known to be part of the protocol procedures for foreign dignitaries. Among the most recent cases were visits of ambassadors and senior officials from countries such as Germany, Ukraine, Slovakia and Turkey.

Aside from the direct political engagement of the Museum, it is also involved in educational process on the school and higher education levels as well. The section called "Education" addresses regular excursions for pupils on different topics, all of which are somehow connected to the issue of occupations and World War II. Information about eight guided tours for pupils of different grades, from 6th to 12 grades is available in all languages. Excursions include such everyday topics as life in Soviet Latvia, as well as more typical museum topics, such as deportations, the Holocaust, and the 1991 struggle for independence. It is worth noticing, that the website does a much more noticeable emphasis on the Holocaust by providing a separate article on the issue in different subsections. This might hint at changes in its representation in the Museum after the reopening of the exhibition in the original building as a reaction to previously mentioned criticism.

In addition to tours of the permanent exhibition on given topics, the Museum also provides a video project about personal stories related to the historical period of 1940-1991. Two of the five stories, which are dedicated to refugees from World War II and the Holocaust, are available on the website. Both stories are about Latvians who helped others to avoid death or getting into a concentration camp during the Second World War. Life of the heroes after the war is also highlighted, stressing that

some were sent to the Gulag, for example, for "helping refugees by transporting them across the Baltic Sea to Sweden". Here, the emphasis is on the Latvian martyrdom and heroism is noticeable as well.

It is noteworthy that the Latvian-language version of the site also includes a section "Relevant Information", which publishes ad hoc initiatives of the Museum. At the time of writing, this section presented a range of materials for distance learning of schoolchildren. It is indicated that these recommendations were compiled by the Education Department of the Museum and may be further updated. The project was established in April 2020 as a result of the state of emergency caused by the Coronavirus pandemic and the conversion of schools and other educational institutions to distance learning. The site offers five thematic sections, predictably reflecting the main semantic elements of the Museum's permanent exposition. The site contains not only books and articles but also training materials of different nature, namely presentations, worksheets and methodological materials on historical topics. It is noteworthy, that this "Educational Materials" subsection is available in every language but Russian. The Latvian version of the site provides the fullest coverage, while the versions in English and German offer more concise information. The absence of the Russian version may be explained by the current educational politics of official Riga, which aims at the gradual reduction of the Russian language usage at every educational level (Deutsche Welle, 2018), which once again proves the high political involvement of the Museum's stakeholders.

The last of the sections reviewed separately is the "History of The Occupation of Latvia". Interestingly, despite the difference in the title of this section in Russian and three other languages, the semantic content of it remains the same. In this corner of the website, "visitors" may familiarize themselves with a short digitalized version of the exhibition that takes place in the Museum. Four subsections are identical to the permanent exhibition's parts. Each subsection is clickable and consists of a short written explanation of the historical period, be it the "First Soviet Occupation", the "Second Soviet Occupation" or the "Nazi Occupation". The two out of three texts in the latter subsection deal with the concentration camp and the Holocaust in Latvia. The stylistics of the texts is the same as of the explanatory signs to the exhibits in the Museum. One of the most crucial texts can be found in the "Second Soviet Occupation" subsection since it is there that one can get acquainted with a fairly brief, but very succinct explanation of the origin of the Victory Day commemorative

practice in the USSR and its features on the respective territory according to the official "Latvian" interpretation. The text in Russian in a simple language lucid to readers of any age contains reasoning that "the celebration of the day of Nazism defeat on the 8th of May" has objective and legitimate grounds in connection with the pan-European tradition. Along with clear "turn to the West" polemics, this article also contains a famous quote from former Latvian President Vaira Vike Freiberga, in which she emphasizes that despite the victory over fascism, "her country was subjected to the brutal occupation of another foreign Empire – the Soviet Union".

Another significant text is dedicated to war monuments of the socialist era on the territory of contemporary Latvia, in particular the Monument to the Soldiers-Liberators in Victory Park in Riga. The article delves into details of the historical development of the area where the memorial complex and the Park are located, emphasizing the manipulative nature of the Soviet government's policy towards this space. However, the most notable is the characterization of this place, as well as events around the monument as "a catalyst for post-Soviet nostalgia, which is sympathetic to a part of the population of Latvia, who live under the influence of Russian media". The article also repeatedly substantiates the ambiguity of perception of the monument between "Latvians" and another "part of the population" through the active imperial memory policy of Russia under Vladimir Putin.

Remarkably, the last part in this subsection in Russian is called "Facts and Deceit" and not "Future" as in other languages. This section contains publications devoted to exposing fake news on the Russian Internet in general and the Russian-language media in particular. Most of the texts are focused on exposing state-supported Russian media that distort facts about World War II, the Legionnaires' Day and the 9th of May in contemporary Latvia. Articles exposing "fake" publications are written with the support of state authorities; most often it is the Ministry of Culture of Latvia.

Thus, the Museum's website and its materials on the subject under study demonstrate the "alienation" of the Russian-speaking minority. While contemporary Russia is viewed as the main hotbed for the support of the "Soviet nostalgic" part of the population, English- and German-speaking partners are perceived as equals, which is mirrored in the website contents.

3.3.3 Facebook page: the Museum's social media activity

In addition to the official website, the Museum also has an actively maintained Facebook page where one can follow up on smaller daily updates in the life of the Museum. For example, one can find publications marking such symbolically significant dates as the Maslenki Border Incident, which started the Soviet Army invasion of Latvia in 1940. Besides, Lithuania and Estonia receive congratulatory posts on their Independence Days regularly. Aside from that, the page also promotes books on related themes. For instance, a couple of posts are dedicated to the book *With Dance Shoes in Siberian Snow* (2009) written by the Member of the European Parliament, former Ambassador and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia Sandra Kalniete. The book tells about the horror of exile in Siberia through the prism of the author's family history. On this page, one can find information about the so-called "traveling" exhibitions organized on the Museum platform base, but which may take place in various locations, for instance, near certain memorial places or other areas. One of the most recent initiatives of the kind, supported by a number of Ukrainian commemorative organizations, was an exhibition „Ukraine 1932-1933: Genocide by Famine". The exhibition took place in the winter of 2018 and lasted for half a year.

Facebook page also provides an opportunity to be acquainted with one of the freshest initiatives of the Museum, namely the video project called "Survivors tell". The Museum publishes a series of short video reports, about three minutes long, in which victims of Soviet repressions tell their life stories during and after the repressions. The first posted episode tells the story of Jānis Zemtautis, who as a school student was arrested by representatives of the so-called Cheka for dissident activities to undermine Soviet power in 1950 in Latvia. The hero of the video says that "he did not like the Soviet Union and the occupation regime" and with friends he "made anti-Soviet propaganda posters" before "making plans and looking for weapons" to join the Forest Brothers after school. Jānis Zemtautis was sentenced to 15 years of camps and could return to Latvia as a free man only in 1965. Although this very project was created quite recently, other short videos containing interviews with people who were exiled in Siberia are posted on the page regularly. As a rule, they are also timed to a certain event or time of year. Thus, in spring 2020, a video was posted in which Inta Krūmiņa, a victim of repression, speaks about Easter

festivities in Siberia in exile. The Museum emphasizes the need to make history more personal and these videos successfully fit into the concept.

In addition to posts on topics such as occupation, exile and repression, the Museum's Facebook page also publishes videos and texts on the Soviet Union as a socio-political phenomenon. For instance, there is a note on the treatment of people with disabilities in the USSR. A small article, which tells about the rejection and shaming of physical and mental ailments in the Soviet Union, even in the context of World War II Veterans, is supported by a painting of the Soviet artist Tatiana Glebova. In another post, there is a video clip, in which with the help of archival photos and posters the fact of consumer attitude of the Soviet power to nature is stated. It is emphasized that nature was perceived as an "economic commodity". The examples of the tragedy in Chernobyl, the accident at the chemical plant in Lithuania, the drying up of the Aral Sea as a result of the inexpedient use of its water resources, and other listed cases demonstrate how unsustainable was the policy of the USSR in this area. On the one hand, these notes can be interpreted as an attempt by the museum to provide "visitors" with the most complete information about the subject of its study, but on the other hand, during the period described, the raised topics were problematic in other post-war and industrial societies as well, which make it look far-fetched.

3.4 Interim Conclusion

The analysis of the contents of the Museum's main exhibition, as well as of the contents affiliated to it, fits into the nationalizing state conception, which was introduced earlier. Brubaker's seven presumptions are almost perfectly fit into the narrative, which is promoted by the Museum in Riga. The exposition itself supports the nationalizing policy of the country by forcing the idea, that the Latvian nation is the one that constitutes the Latvian state and was undergoing suppressions and humiliations by another "foreign" group of people. The emphasis is made on both sufferings of the Latvian people and good deeds of them even when it comes to the Holocaust representation. Moreover, side projects, namely initiatives in the educational field as well as cultural projects strongly resemble Smith's postulates on ethnic democracies, which tend to construct the "colonizing other". The Russian-

speaking minority is represented as a disloyal group of the population, potentially being a subject of external national homeland's media propaganda.

The social and political activity of the Museum of the Occupation is quite dynamic. The Museum's stakeholders are at the origins of the "Three Occupations" narrative for mass consumers both in Latvia and abroad, where Russian speakers in Latvia are equated with descendants of Soviet invaders. This narrative is promoted by the Museum through various educational initiatives on its platform, side exhibitions and activity on social networks. The Museum also reacts very flexibly to various social phenomena or events, which allows it to be in trend despite its "historical" orientation. The area of the Museum's activity includes the organization of both general educational initiatives for the younger generation and politically oriented activities in the framework of international relations. In the international arena, the Museum acts as a mouthpiece for the truth about actions of the Soviet government in the territories of former Soviet republics in order to educate western colleagues, who recognized the crimes of the Nazis but were mostly unaware of the crimes of the Communists. Hence, the stakeholders of the Museum are acting in line with their role of mnemonic warriors.

In spite of the fact that the Museum is under the aegis of an independent private association, it is a politically engaged structure, which, along with other public bodies, performs a role in nation building and shaping the perception of the past and present among the inhabitants of Latvia. One can conclude that the Museum makes a significant contribution to the formation and then the maintenance of the fractured memory regime in the country. As Jan Kubik and Michael Bernhard suggested, mnemonic warriors fight for the only right perception of the past, which should be accepted by everyone, which pretty much resembles with the stance of the Museum's administration and its purpose to remember, commemorate and remind the world about sufferings of the Latvians.

By now the Museum's activities are within the second group of Brubaker's classification. Observation of the museum's main exhibition shows no noticeable signs of the hybrid model since, as mentioned before, the tragedy of the Latvian ethnos is in the centre of the narrative. The Russian-speaking population is tackled not as a minority but as a burdening legacy of the Soviet Union's occupation. However, the original building on Riflemen Square with the supposedly renewed exhibition has not been opened yet. While some changes in the narrative can be traced on the

website of the Museum, mostly in regard of the Holocaust, the representation of the Russian minority in the Occupation Museum might have been also changed. However, the most likely change will be a more educational approach to presentation of deeds of the Soviet Army on the territory of Latvia, as some of the subsections on the website do. The shift in the Museum's narrative towards perception of the Latvian Russophones as a legitimate minority, which should enjoy respective rights in contemporary Latvia nowadays seems unlikely.

Chapter IV

Victory Day commemorations: a cornerstone of the Russophones' identity

As well as the Occupation Museum, Victory Day is a key component in the transmission of the Russian-speaking minority narrative in contemporary Latvia. The present chapter addresses the memory institution from different angles in order to see its role in the Russophones' narrative about the most significant events of the 20th century such as the Second World War, Latvia's incorporation in the USSR.

4.1. The Soviet War Memorial complex in Victory Park: a politically contested space

Before turning to the theme of the event itself, it is necessary to analyse in some detail the area where the event takes place.

Victory Day traditionally takes place in Riga in Victory Park, which is located on the left side of the capital's main river - the Daugava. This area used to have various names during different periods. The park was originally called Petrovsky Park, as it was founded in 1909 to commemorate the anniversary of Riga as the capital of the Livonian province of the Russian Empire. Later in 1925, it was renamed into Victory Park in honour of the victory over the West Russian Volunteer Army during the struggle for Latvia's independence in 1919. During the Soviet era, this green space experienced several changes. In the period between 1950s-1960s the area, which was back then called the Park of the XXII Congress of the CPSU, was filled with green spaces, water fountains, and entertainment areas. Finally, a monument, the full name of which sounds as The Monument to The Soldiers of The Soviet Army Who Liberated Soviet Latvia and Riga From The Nazi Invaders, was established on the square near the park in 1985. In the same year, the park was renamed to Victory Park, although such renaming was not referring to the events of the year 1909, but rather 1945.

The way this area looks now goes back to that late Soviet period. The territory of the park is the largest park area in Riga and is almost 37 hectares. The memorial complex consists of the Motherland monument, on which pedestal the dates of the Great Patriotic War are engraved, the Column and the Soldier-Liberator itself. The

highest monument is a Column of 79 meters high, which is topped with three golden stars at different heights. This monument, according to the idea of the concept's author Alexander Bugaev, symbolizes a salute in honour of the Victory. The monument to Soldier-Liberator, as well as the two aforementioned monuments, were designed and brought to life as we know it today by a team of architects, artists, and design engineers of Latvian origin, including Lev Bukovsky, Aivars Gulbis, Ermen Balinš and Gunārs Beitinš (Gaponenko et al 2010, p.600). Hence, the memorial is designed in accordance with the Soviet tradition of glorious victory over "brown plague", as the Nazi regime is often tackled in the Soviet literature. All three monuments worship either heroism or the victory itself, leaving no space for grief. The complex in Riga clearly was established not to mourn, but to worship the fortitude of the Soviet people and courage of Soviet soldiers, which falls within the framework addressed by Golovashina.

After the collapse of the Soviet regime, the authorities of independent Latvia regained the park's name from 1925. In spite of the fact that no surveys among the Russian-speaking population and "Latvians" about whether they know the origins of the park's name and what they personally associate it with, were conducted, it can be suggested that different population groups of Latvia may have a non-identical understanding of it due to the complex history of its naming.

Victory Park has recently become a symbolic site for the Russian-speaking population of Riga, whose representatives attend concerts and lay flowers on the square every year on the 9th of May. Even during the late Soviet times, when Victory Day was quite prominent, the studied area was not the most central location. Traditionally, until 1991 the main part of the event was held on the Komsomolskaya embankment, which is now called the embankment of the 11th of November, and only in contemporary Latvia Victory Park became a popular gathering place.

Perhaps the policy of official Riga also gives this place a sacral character. After gaining independence, Latvian politicians and cultural activists developed a discourse about the need to change this memorial complex due to the liberation from the Communist narrative about the past, which was implanted from Moscow. There have also been active discussions about dismantling the monument and erecting an occupation museum in the square in front of it. Against the background of the already existing resonance around this area, the representatives of the extreme right radical organization "Perconcrust" attempted to detonate the monument in 1997 (Latvijas

Okuācijas Museums: Uzvaras vai okupācijas simbols? Uzvaras piemineklis Rīgā: vēsture un politika). This action had a wide response in society and drew attention not only to the monument itself but also to what it symbolizes. After the attempted blow-up, which caused minor damage to the memorial complex, discussions on reforming the space continued. However, it is extremely problematic to make any changes to the existing space due to the bilateral treaty between Moscow and Riga On the Protection of Memorial Sites, Memorial Structures, and Mass Graves of Soviet Soldiers signed in 1994 (Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Republic of Latvia, section VI, article 13, 1994).

While Victory Park and the Monument to the Soldier-Liberator have been gradually becoming a symbolic place for the studied commemorative practice, the discussion around this place has only intensified. Despite the deterrent effect of the aforementioned agreement, the petitions to demolish the monument have been filed regularly. The Saeima adopted one of the last petitions in June 2019. More than 10,000 people signed the petition, which suggested the demolition of the memorial and severance of the treaty on memorials between Russia and Latvia. This petition was considered and approved by the MPs and later submitted to a special parliamentary commission. Precisely in response to this resolution, Tatiana Zhadnoka, a prominent pro-Russian politician in Latvia, organized the petition against the destruction of the monument, which also gathered the same number of signatures (lv.sputniknews.ru, 2019). This case can be considered illustrative because it clearly demonstrates the split in Latvian society on certain resonant topics.

Thus, the Victory Monument and the area around it have become not only a place of events for the Russian-speaking population on May 9th but also a symbol of unresolved disputes and underestimated issues of the past, which still affect Latvian society. Memorial wars continue to be an integral part of the political and social field of the country as a part of the discussion about the Soviet era's legacy. Taking into account the resonance around the monument complex in Riga one can assume it also has a special and significant character for the local Russian-speaking minority. Hence, the following part presents an overview of the 9th of May commemorative practice itself.

4.2. Victory Day as a commemorative practice

Based on the observation it is possible to make a more detailed analysis of what message the event has and how it builds and expresses the narrative of the Russian-speaking population of Latvia in relation to both World War II and the Soviet past. During this day quite a large number of people, who are not indifferent to the theme, gathers in the park and on the square, while the actors coordinate the event. According to the organizers' data, more than 150 000 people visited Victory Park in 2019 (delfi.lv, 2019).

It is necessary to start with the description of the changes, which the space undergoes annually for a fairly large holiday to be held there. Most of the festive events are held near the square next to the three main monuments. The square in front of the memorial is usually filled with flowers that visitors bring



with them gradually during the day, which *Figure 5: Carnations on the square in front of the monument to the Soviet Soldier the Liberator (9.05.2017)*

is demonstrated in *Figure 5*. As a rule, the square in front of the monuments is paved with traditional for this holiday red carnations and other flowers. Red carnations became a symbolic gesture of commemoration of fallen soldiers on Victory Day back in the USSR since it was the most affordable for everyone type of flowers. Nowadays it can be considered as another sign, that the institutionalized roots of the holiday are in the Soviet past. Aside from the monument, there is a stage of quite a large size, on

which during the day the performances of both Russian bands and Latvian folklore ensembles are taking place.

The stage is one of the centres of the event, but it is not the only one. The more informal centre is located directly in the central part of the park, where visitors gather in small groups. Usually, they drink and eat. Alongside with that, the landscape of the park is noticeably changed by so-called field kitchens. People in military costumes resembling the Great Patriotic War uniform, often with fake propeller's automatic rifles, cook and give away food in military-style from military vehicles. Hence, the space of the event includes both commemorative practices and elements of



Figure 6: Field kitchen in the Victory Park (9.05.2018)

entertainment actions, what illustrates *Figure 6*.

Witnessing the event itself, it is necessary to note that it is quite well organized. Laying flowers on the above-mentioned traditional square begins at 10:00, by the time of the day's apogee of the holiday impressive colourful flower meadow appears before visitors. It undoubtedly makes a strong impression and usually emerges in most of the photographs on

various news platforms, which reflect on the holiday with a positive connotation (Xinhua, 2018).

At 15:00 the so-called march of the Immortal Regiment begins, which is supported and organized by the voluntary organization polk.lv. People with photos of their relatives, who took part in military actions, walk in the column. All-day before 18:00, both before and after the Immortal Regiment march, which is pictured in *Figure 7*, one can observe various entertainment programs in the park, which usually

include actors and volunteers dressed militarily. Volunteers hand out carnations to the visitors, who came without any flowers. By 18:00 the concert program starts, which is led by professional bilingual hosts - Latvian and Russian, and can be watched on Facebook, as well as on polk.lv and 9may.lv websites. The



Figure 7: Immortal Regiment in Riga (9.05.2018)

concert program symbolizes a certain

sympiosis between Latvian and Russian culture. In addition to children's groups and veterans, the concert features performances by famous Russian-speaking artists and folk ensembles. It is noteworthy that quite famous Russian bands, which became famous during the late Soviet Union or the first years after the collapse of the Socialist bloc, are invited to the concert as main headliners regularly. For example, in 2017 the rock band Chaif began their performance at 21:30, which finished at 22:45 and was followed by ceremonial fireworks.

It should be noted separately that before the performance of the main headliners, Nils Ušakovs traditionally addresses the audience. Even though, for example, in 2019 no major Russian performer was present, the concert still lasted until 10:45 pm, and the former mayor of Riga addressed the audience at around 21:00. His speech was duplicated on his personal Facebook page. The speech was delivered in Russian, and its message was unifying (Facebook: Nils Ušakovs). He often resorts to the pronoun "we", calling on both Latvians and non-Latvians inside the country for peaceful coexistence, despite differences in attitudes towards certain events in the past. It is noteworthy that the speech also includes the topic of the separation of Latvia from the

USSR, however, without mentioning the particular notion. He touches on an event when all Latvians "fought for freedom" (peaceful mass protests also called Singing Revolution 1987-1991) and urges not to allow limiting their freedom in celebrating Victory Day and preserving the great legacy of the monument to the Soviet Soldier-Liberator. Even though the speech is delivered in Russian and is aimed at the Russian-speaking audience, its message does not include negative statements towards "Latvians" both in the past and in the present.

It is also worth paying attention to the types of visitors who come to Victory Park on Victory Day in Riga. From the observation, it can be concluded that, as a rule, people come as families as well as small groups of friends. A large number of people can be referred to as the age group of 40-60 years old. However, a fairly large group of young people and adolescents is also sizeable. There is also a great number of volunteers, all of whom are young people. They are actively involved in the event's organization,



namely, help visitors by answering questions

Figure 8: An actor dressed in Soviet military uniform with a prop gun and two children pose for a photo (9.05.2018)

about the logistics of the event. They wear red uniform, which attracts attention to them as well since their outfits make their age group noticeable. There are also veterans and just elderly people, but this group is the most numerous mainly in the morning and daytime, while closer to the evening and night the average age of visitors decreases.

As mentioned earlier, among the people in the square and the park there are also thematically dressed people, as *Figure 8* illustrates. In addition to those involved in

the organizational and entertainment process, namely preparing the field kitchen, there are also several visitors who, in addition to Saint George Ribbon, wear some more specific military attributes, such as military caps. There are also children dressed in military uniforms and people wearing clothes with a particular design. For instance, some visitors wear specifically styled t-shirts with photo applications of President Putin or soviet-type mottos, namely "For the Fatherland!" or "Thank the grandfather for the Victory" in Russian. Nevertheless, such visitors drew attention because there are not so many of them since the vast majority of people are wearing less extravagant clothing. It is noteworthy that despite the appeal of volunteer organizations not to use any political symbols and to bring only personal thematic belongings, one can still see waving red Soviet flags. They are mostly seen during the concert program in the crowd and the Immortal Regiment march. It must be noted that the events in the east of Ukraine and particularly in Crimea, have in a way affected the variety of symbols used in Riga. It manifested in the partial refusal of organizers to distribute St. George's ribbons, which has become an essential symbol of Victory Day in contemporary Russia. Such a decision might be linked with an attempt to distinguish itself from the aggression of the Kremlin and does not provoke any controversy with Latvian authorities. However, that did not affect the landscape of used symbols of the holiday in general when the observation was made in 2018. A vast majority of attendees were having George Ribbon pinned on their clothes at the chest level. It may resemble Kolstø's dual cultural and political attachment to the historical fatherland, as the author refers to it. The fact that a vast majority despite everything still wears symbols which are directly connected to the traditions established in the Russian Federation shows affection to the cultural tradition of the country, which simultaneously does not eliminate the fact that Russian-speakers in Latvia are loyal subjects to the Latvian state and does not feel politically connected to Russia, according to the finding by Mierina and Kaprans mentioned in the previous chapter.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were no official mass events on Victory Day in Riga on the 9th of May in 2020. However, on the YouTube channel of delfi.lv, as well as on 9may.lv there was retransmission of last year's concerts, which was followed by an online concert at 20:00, where various local artists delivered their performances. There was a minute of silence at 22:00, but no festive fireworks took place because of safety measures due to COVID-19. Nevertheless, Victory Park and the memorial complex remained an attraction for people who wanted to

commemorate and pay tribute to the fallen in WWII. There was no complete ban on individual movement in Latvia, so people were able to come and lay flowers on the square. Such a massive gathering as during previous years was impossible, but the area was still partially covered with carnations, judging by the available photo materials (lv.sputniknews.ru, 2020). In the same place on the steps, the Star of David was laid out from candles as a symbol of the Jews who fell in the Holocaust in Latvia.

Based on the observation and gathered material, it is possible to claim that this commemorative practice is highly institutionalized and cleared of the disputable declaration and rethinking of the past, while visitors still show some connection to the Russian Federations judging by the used symbols.

4.3. The Russophone community and transformation of the Victory Day narrative

As may be seen in the previous part, a number of actors are involved in the organisation of the studied commemorative practice. Some of the actors have a decisive role in the narrative adaptation, while others are assigned to organisational and technical roles. In order to address all the involved actors, this part relies on Eva-Clarita Onken's conception highlighted previously. Hence, this chapter, on the one hand, tackles actors within the political world reaching out to the actors in the societal world, who seek representation, while, on the other hand, deals with actors from the societal world, who can achieve desirable representation only after finding a "courier of their interests" in the political world.

One of the most prominent "couriers" in the case of Latvian Russophones is Nils Ušakovs. As a well-known member of *Saskaņa* [Concord Party], which to this day is one of the largest and most successful parties in the country, he served as the Mayor of Riga and currently holds a seat in the European Parliament. Throughout his political career, the politician represented the moderate position of the Russian-speaking population concerning the end of World War II and Latvia's Soviet past. Ušakovs formulates narrative's cornerstones most distinctly in relation to Victory Day, focusing on the family character of the event when mourning for relatives fallen in the Great Patriotic War is taking place (Press.lv, 2019). Such moderate rhetoric allows him, despite being periodically criticized, to maintain a rather high political position and at the same time to remain accepted as a transmitter of a "true" narrative among a wide segment of Russophones. However, being in the political field, he is

primarily a political figure, despite his role as a defender of the "Russian" narrative. This becomes most evident in 2011 when Ušakovs publicly refers to the entry of Soviet troops in 1940 as "occupation" during his election campaign for the Latvian Saeima. It was the public recognition of the occupation that allowed the Concord Party to take seats in the Saeima. As noted in Chapters I and II, this term causes the most negative response among the Russian-speaking minority and is an obstacle for the interaction between the Latvians and the Russians in the process of nation building. However, alongside this statement, Nils Ušakovs separately specifies that the occupants do not currently reside in Latvia (Delfi.lv., 2011). By underlining this, he gives an unequivocal message to the Russian-speaking population about his support. Nevertheless, his political position regarding occupation remains unchanged, as evidenced by endorsement of the resolution "On the importance of European historical memory for the future of Europe" adopted by the European Parliament on 19 September 2019.

Along with the recognition of occupation, Ušakovs continues to support actively the "family" format of the Victory Day holiday and participates in its organization. It is largely due to his support as a member of the Concord Party that the 9may.lv foundation was established in 2009, which is directly involved in organizing the event. Moreover, the politician delivers a speech at a concert almost every year, which indicates his constant support of the holiday concept. His figure in the political arena remains very prominent even after he resigned from the position of the Mayor of Riga.

To express his standpoint and promote the narrative, the politician actively uses social networks, in particular his Facebook page. It is on the personal page that he posts written duplicates of his speeches, particularly those delivered at the concert stage on May the 9th. Due to circumstances caused by the COVID-19 epidemics, the festivities did not take place in 2020, which is reflected in retrospective reposts on Ušakovs page. Notably, in his posts regarding Victory Day, the politician does not draw a dividing line between the Russophones and Latvian population, but still focuses on veteran relatives and the importance of this holiday as a family commemorative tradition. Moreover, among his publications for May 9, 2020, one can find a post with two pictures, one of which congratulates on Victory Day and the other on Europe Day. Thus, the politician also seeks to demonstrate the absence of the mutually exclusive nature between the Latvian narrative with its "return to Europe" and the Russian narrative, for which the 9th of May is vital for self-identification.

Ušakovs and the Concord party occupy a very specific niche in Latvian politics. Therefore, the Party activities in the context of Victory Day should be addressed too. The party has been actively involved in the life of the Russian-speakers in a way as an actor from the political world would be involved in the life of its electorate. It must be highlighted that the Concord party did play a great role in the narrative reshaping of Victory Day in Latvia, mainly in Riga. As was mentioned in Chapter II, before the turn, the narrative promoted by Victory Day in Riga was vividly anti- Latvian and pro-Russian. The outlook of the holiday very much resembled the way a minority positions itself in Brubaker's triadic nexus. The Russians strongly differentiated themselves from the Latvian majority by using the symbols that were considered to be part of their external national motherland, e.g. the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation as its ultimate successor. Moreover, the total absence of the Latvian language and openly showed negativity towards speeches delivered in Latvian showed the great importance of the Russian language for the self-identification of the minority, while simultaneously demonstrated that Latvian state is perceived as a nationalizing one. Russia, in its turn, sees the Latvian Russophones in the sphere of its influence and believes that they should be protected. Some things have remained unchanged but the fact that nowadays the Victory Day holiday in Riga is different from what it used to be before 2009, demonstrates the level of influence the Concord party has on the narrative, supported and shared by the great part of the Russophones' community since the attendance and popularity of this event in Victory Park are still high.

In the context of the narrative formed and promoted by the Concord Party regarding Victory Day, it is also necessary to include the previously mentioned project 9may.lv in the analysis. The platform is a public foundation on a volunteer basis. On its website, which is styled in deep red colours, one can be acquainted with its written appeals, where the organization encourages citizens to fulfil their "duty" to elderly veterans and to assist them both financially and ethically. The emphasis in the written message on the website is made on the generation succession as another attempt to reduce the political degree of the event. Aside from the home page, where one can find respective data for donations, the website has three other sections identical in both the Russian and the Latvian languages. The section "to-do list" includes three subsections, namely the aforementioned support to veterans, followed by the initiative to have a Saturday clean-up day at mass graves, military burials, war

monuments, and memorials. Finally, the third subsection offers to celebrate the 9th of May together and provides retrospective video materials from previous years. It is noteworthy, that all these subsections' titles are made in a manner of enthusiastic appeals, which resembles the style of Soviet time propaganda posters. Furthermore, the website has the section "about us" where one can be acquainted with the aims of the project, namely "to help veterans who live in Latvia" and "to preserve and enhance the memory of Victory Day in Latvia". The concluding section "Historical Materials" has only one subsection named "Read and Remember!", the title of which is also made in the style typical for the website. This subsection provides nine photo-booklets and books. Eight of them are focused on the tragedies of the Second World War, such as Salaspils Concentration camp. Interestingly, aside from the books on the horrors of war, this section includes the book called *Interesting History of Latvian Russians* (2007) written by Igor Zorin. The real name of the author is Igor Gusev, who is a Latvian historian specialized in historical relations between the ancient Slavs and the population of the Baltic states. In one of his rare interviews, he claimed that he published a book under the pseudonym because it is a "people's book" and "a huge amount of material is taken from the Internet, press articles, scientific publications and forgotten fundamental works" (shtab.lv, 2007), which raises a question of its historical accuracy and reliability. However, it is illustrative for the Russophones' narrative, that the website includes a book that in a way justifies historical presence of Russians in Latvia alongside with the articles on WWII.

Another volunteer program, information about which can be found at polk.lv, also seeks to emphasize its non-political nature and indicates that the event they help to organize is solely symbolic support of the existing family tradition of commemoration. This stance is emphasized by a separate accent on the fact that during the Immortal Regiment march, which is organized by polk.lv, the use of any political symbols of certain countries and organizations is not allowed. However, from the previous part one can conclude that this appeal has no support among the Russophones. The website of this volunteer organization does not have any additional information aside from the Immortal Regiment itself. While in the FAQ section "visitors" can find answers to basic questions on the essence of the movement, the "History" subsection provides photo retrospective and related news articles of the respective years starting from 2015.

Interestingly, 9may.lv has both the Russian and the Latvian versions of the site. Even though all the provided books are in Russian, summaries to them are still available in Latvian, which demonstrates an inclusive approach. However, polk.lv has no Latvian version, which implies that only Russophones might have an interest in such initiative. Such language preference of the platform shows the importance of its usage in contemporary Latvia.

Financial connection of the abovementioned actors to Russia cannot be ignored. The controversy around the Concord party and Nils Ušakovs emerge from time to time in the context of the alleged connection to the Kremlin, as critics claim (Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2019). Even though the party does not openly enjoy financial support from Russia, it has a partnership agreement with the United Russia party since 2009. United Russia is the largest pro-government party in power, whose members hold all high-ranking political positions in the country and unconditionally support the domestic and foreign policy pursued by President Putin.

The largest financial sponsor for 9may.lv and polk.lv is the Baltic Media Alliance, headed by Olegs Solodovs. Being a Latvian citizen of Russian origin, he has not been spotted in any public relations with any Russian organization of controversial nature. However, periodically the issue of the Russian financial support to the actors connected to Victory Day becomes a hot topic. Although officially, 9may.lv is funded mostly through the aforementioned Alliance in coordination with some prominent Latvian newspapers, namely MK Latvia and Media Nams Vesti, the Latvian State Police (LSP) published numerous proves demonstrating quite an extensive financial support provided by the Russian Embassy and Russian NGOs, among which the "Russian World" Foundation, Rossotrudnichestvo and the Gorchakov Foundation for Public Diplomacy are the most prominent ones (Rebaltica.lv, 2015). According to the data published by the LSP, the Russian NGOs and Embassy financially supported more than 100 organizations in Latvia intending to promote Russian national interests. Starting from 2012 the LSP has been tracing the support from the aforementioned influential Russia-based organizations. For instance, in 2012 "Russian World" Foundation spent 170,000 Euro in Latvia in the framework of the Kremlin's compatriot policy. In the year 2017 9may.lv received a gift from the Russian Embassy in the amount of 14,000 Euro for the organization of events related to Victory Day. Hence, one cannot claim that Victory Day in Riga is being sponsored by Latvian organizations only (Annual Security Police 2017). Financial support from

the organizations having direct connection to the Russian Federation can be considered as a performance of Russia as an external national homeland. The fact that the Kremlin saw the need for such support of the event in Latvia shows its essential interest in maintaining the format of the 9th of May commemoration. Moreover, the fact that such indirect financial intervention is accepted may mean that inner Latvian actors involved also consider contemporary Russia as an external national homeland, which is entitled to support the event.

Speaking of key actors, it is also necessary to address a group with less moderate stances. Despite the fact that they take a rather radical position without compromising with the existing ruling elite, some of their protest actions are resonant among both the Latvian and Russian populations. Tatiana Zhdanoka and Vyacheslavs Mitrofanovs from the party *Latvijas Krievu savienība* [Russian Union] can be attributed to this group of actors. The party is in opposition to the existing authorities and views itself as the only party, which truly represents the Russian-speaking population of Latvia. The specifics of the party's rhetoric can also be traced on the official Facebook page, where videos and other digitized materials are posted (Facebook: Tatjana Ždanoka; Facebook: Latvijas Krievu Svienība/Русский Союз Латвии). Nowadays Tatjana Ždanoka is a deputy in the European Parliament, and most of her Facebook posts, all written in Russian, are devoted to resonant issues of international politics connected to Russia. For instance, in autumn 2020, she actively covered the resolution on Alexey Navalny poisoning, which was proposed by the EU Parliament. The politician opposed the resolution and condemned it to harsh criticism. With such posts, Tatjana Ždanoka clearly shows her supportive position towards contemporary Russia.

The peculiarity of Tatiana Zhdanoka's appeal in the context of the Latvian Russophones lies in her very clear division between "those who make laws" and "us", i.e. Russian-speakers. Such a detached position is presented by the Russian Union since the party is not represented in the Latvian Saeima. The party actively uses high-profile political agendas to gain potential support among the affluent population. Thus, in 2019 the Russian Union organized a petition against the resolution adopted by the MPs on the demolition of the monument to the Soldier-Liberator in Victory Park. The party collected 10 thousand signatures (rus.DELFI.lv, 2019). In addition to its off-line activities, articles which are posted on the Party Facebook page are also almost exclusively of a critical character. For instance, one can find an article criticising the parliamentary project to prohibit officially Saint George Ribbon, or

covering protests regarding rights of residents of denationalized buildings in Latvia. All in all, many of the party's activities are in response to decisions taken by the authorities in the course of transitional justice.

Generally, the voice type of protest might be applicable to the party's actions. It is one of the actors in Latvia "responsible" for protests since the party as an actor is in between the societal and political worlds, which makes it eligible to organize questionable protest actions without being afraid of being excluded from the political world. Hence, through the Russian Union, the protest sentiment regarding the most prominent issues in the context of the Russian-speaking minority is possible. Although the protests were never violent, they still are taking place from time to time under the leadership of the Russian Union. On the 9th of May 2019, the party organized a picket outside the Saeima building in Old Riga to draw attention to the aforementioned demolition petition. The picket was not numerous but still brought the party's actions to the local press. Additionally, rallies against the ban of the Russian language usage in school, which usually take place in the Riga city center, are also supported and logistically organized by representatives of the party (sputniknews, 2019). Despite their contrast to the above-mentioned actors, representatives of the Russian Union still take part in the Victory Day commemoration practices in Riga, however, exclusively as visitors. Nevertheless, it proves the fact that contemporary Victory Day in Riga is widely accepted by all types of actors within the Russophones community.

Talking into account the role and level of influence of the actors one can conclude that despite being presented as a bottom-up initiative, Victory Day is a institution of memory politics that goes along political interests of certain actors, namely the Concord party and the Russian Union party. Moreover, it is impossible to ignore some degree of indirect influence that Russia has on the event. The NGOs located in Latvia that have been receiving financial support, as well as the organizers of the holiday in the face of 9may.lv that were gifted money grants from the Russian embassy in the past are the evidence to it.

4.4. Interim Conclusion

Although Victory Day may be perceived as a bottom-up initiative of the Russian-speaking minority, that through it strives to express its narrative of the Soviet past and World War II, after analysing the actors, involved in the holiday organization, the

events that take place in Victory Park can hardly be assessed as a chaotically erupted initiative of volunteers. Especially nowadays, as the event has become more systematized and is supervised by the previously mentioned several organizations. Despite their "volunteer" façade, they receive a great amount of financial support and are well-established platforms that organize and monitor the event. Cheskin draws attention to such a phenomenon when a constructed collective memory is perceived as a bottom-up memory, which very much resembles the studied case. It may be explained by the originally protest character of the 9th of May holiday, since it was not welcomed by independent Latvia's authorities from the very beginning. Thus, the inner political situation in the country contributed to the perception of the holiday as a grass-roots initiative, while the fact that the holiday was mostly shaped as it is now by the Soviet authorities, and then transformed under the Concord Party's patronage is being ignored.

The background and organization of the event prove that Victory Day in Riga requires a lot of planning, both logistical and political. Being clearly one of the high-profile events in Latvia for the Russians, the 9th of May has evolved from a political rally with the clear pro-Kremlin narrative, which endorsed both Soviet and contemporary Russia's attitudes towards the past, into the event adjusted to the political situation in today's Latvia and has experienced a change in the promoted narrative. Actors involved in the adaptation of this commemorative practice have come up with a constructed myth of family honouring of fallen relatives and veterans of World War II and moved away from a more sophisticated version of the collective memory. Hence, the Latvian pattern falls within the framework of Bell's simplified myth. It would be much more problematic for the actors who organize the event and who control the narrative to maintain such a big holiday while taking into account the complex character of some events of the Soviet past in general, and World War II in particular. The peaceful and non-political narrative, very much wanted and promoted by the Concord party and its affiliates implies a generalized and therefore simplified perception of the past, which is also very useful in the case of the Latvian Russophones. The Russian-speakers in Latvia may be united by the same experience in the country and by the spoken Russian language but still might have various personal issues regarding WWII on the base of their ethnic origin, e.g. Ukrainian or Jewish background is frequent among Russian-speakers. The Russian language is undoubtedly a "proxy" of the Russophones identity, as Laitin (1998, p, 23) referred to

it, though under the framework of the current research it is impossible to claim the emergence of a new identity within it is possible in the near future.

Though still staying within the outline of the Russian Federation's vision of the Great Patriotic War and "Victory over Fascism", under the supervision of the Concord Party, the Russophones in Latvia distanced themselves from the glorious and in a way imperial narrative and opted for a more reserved stance. It can be concluded that the "family" narrative, which lies in the promotion of Victory Day as a traditional family event with the homage to fallen relatives, does not contradict Putin's administration principles but at the same time does not fully coincide with them. Hence, the celebration cannot be considered as a bulwark of Russian soft power. Simultaneously, after the reformation made by the Concord party, the voice protest within Victory Day was minimized. If in the early days of Latvia's independence it was not clear whether the holiday could be assessed as a form of a voice protest, nowadays it has no such appeal, at least officially.

The narrative promoted by the holiday has become more moderate which still does not exclude its political component, because its current format still contradicts the values promoted by the official Riga. The unending political debates, which accompany the holiday annually, prove that the 9th of May still has its prominent political component. Reckon Brubaker's triadic nexus, it is possible to claim that the relations between Latvia, the Latvian Russophones and today's Russia have not exited the triadic nexus framework. Elements of Latvian folk culture are represented during the celebrative part of the event, and the Latvia language is not a taboo anymore. At the same time, as mentioned, Russia-related symbols are still present, as well as the domination of Russian language is still there. Additionally, the Russian financial support also still prevails, which make it impossible to claim.

One can assume, that the narrative, which was fostered by the event in the last decade, is one of the greatest wins for the Concord Party with one major drawback. The holiday still resembles the triumphant narrative promoted in contemporary Russia. Despite the attempts to make the holiday more private and sorrowing, it is still a "celebration". As Golovashina remarks, the glorious victory cannot be overshadowed by death and grief, which is applicable to the mood the event in Riga has. Therefore, the promoted narrative of this commemoration practice and the actual character of it are not in close agreement.

One can assume that the contemporary 9th of May indeed smoothed the individual grief, as Onken maintained when addressing commemorative practices, but only within the Russian-speaking community, members of which attend the event. However, this commemorative practices, on the contrary, contributed even more to the alienation of one group from another, the possibility of what was assumed by Zelče. Even the Concord party, which acts as a multiculturalist actor, gently emphasizes that the Russians living in Latvia are not enemies like the Soviet regime, which oppressed everyone regardless of nationality, does not overweight the tendency. Such an appeal is not prominent during the event, as the observation has shown. Supposedly, the 9th of May commemoration in Riga cannot be considered a unifying holiday for the whole of Latvia until participants don't pay tribute to the occupation of Latvia by the Soviets, since the acknowledgment by the Concord Party is perceived as a strategic move.

Conclusion

This master thesis presents a qualitative research based on two case studies, which were conducted in order to answer the question, how two opposing historical narratives that coexist in Latvian society are reflected in the public space. The institutions of memory that were under examination are the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia located in Riga and the Victory Day commemoration on the 9th of May. The thesis demonstrates how these two institutions present, develop and promote the above mentioned narratives. It also addresses the question of how both institutions could potentially help to overcome the mnemonic wars in the country.

According to Brubaker's triadic nexus (Brubaker 1996), I approach post-Soviet Latvia as a nationalizing state with the Russophone community as a minority with a link to its external homeland, namely the Russian Federation. In order to analyse the interactions within these fields, the memory regime (Bernhard/ Kubik 2014) classification was used. Actors themselves, as well as their objectives were studied according to the respective classification. The division of actors into four groups allowed examining developments within mnemonic field with more accuracy. This conceptual approach was used when studying the main figures, who stand behind the current developments within two narratives. Another conception, namely the four-level classification of actors based on their objectives and their level of inner organization, which serve as a base for the analyses of these actors' behaviour, *inter alia*, can be implemented to less organized groups (Onken 2010). Such approach provides with an opportunity to include in the analyses important actors who do not constitute a part of the Latvian political establishment but still remain to be rather prominent. This method was applied mostly when dealing with the commemoration practices and actors in the Russophone minority.

Another crucial element within the theoretical framework was memory. The conception of the national mythscape (Bell 2003) was in the focus when tackling the perception of the past, which was constructed by the main actors within the two studied groups. The mythscape formed by the political elites was applied together with the collective memory phenomenon when addressing the commemoration practices. Additionally, the conception of a political museum was implied in examining the Occupation Museum and its exhibition. Importantly, the chosen framework addresses the Museum as a potentially neutral space (Styliany-Lambert/

Bounia 2016). However, it does not ignore the conception when the space is seen as an ultimate politicized space used by the elites (Radonič 2018). Such approach allowed addressing the Museum without prejudice towards it as of a propaganda tool, while simultaneously provides an opportunity to assess critically its narrative.

Throughout the two conducted case studies a certain amount of information was gathered that allowed elaborating on the research question, which addresses the representation of the memory institution in public space. The Museum of the Occupation and its activities in the related public fields, such as education and politics, revealed the major role of this institution in memory politics. The Museum is deeply involved in formulating and promoting the official Latvian narrative about the Soviet past, which delivers the main message, in the first place, through its permanent exhibition. The analyses of the related brochure and materials, developed with support of parliamentary groups and, among others, one of the most prominent actors within this institution - Valters Nollendorfs, shows the high level of its influence on the interpretation of the Latvian history of 20th century. The repeating postulates on the official website of the Museum and in the Brochure on The Three Occupations also demonstrate the well-established harmony between the Museum and the respective state institutions. Hence, the Museum, the main goal of which is to remember, commemorate and remind, is achieving it in a politicised manner. The narrative of the Museum mirrors official Riga's narrative and it is hard to tell, who actually formed the current narrative about sufferings of the Latvian nation under the Soviet occupation – the state institutions or the Museum's actors.

Additionally, the study of the Museum's initiatives, such as cooperation with embassies of other countries and organization of thematic exhibition about the Soviet past, as well as about contemporary Russia's activities on the international arena, demonstrates the wish of the institution to be involved in the political agenda of Latvia. Engagements of the Museum in the educational area, including excursions, as well as educational historical materials available on the official website, signal that the institution is willing to bring the right version of the past to the wider public, especially to its young responsive part. Reckon that museums in general are authoritative institutions that the public does not associate with the governmental bodies and state propaganda, it has good chances to be a successful tool of soft power on the inner political arena as well. Such attitude towards museums thus plays into the hands of the Occupation Museum, since despite the fact that it is not officially

affiliated with the public authorities and exists under the supervision of the OMB, it is a clear product of the post-Soviet Latvian political elite.

The institution is not limited in its activities since its main goals correspond with the state ideas of promoting the truth about Latvian history of the 20th century. The Museum channels of the narrative transmission are very well established and continue to expand. In addition to the above-mentioned involvement in the educational process, its website covers a great spectrum of other activities on the side projects which are related to the symbolic representation of the martyrdom narrative, such as the Corner House Museum. Moreover, several Facebook pages are focused on video and other digital materials, which have more of emotional appeal. The Museum's active involvement in making the digital content, which is a mixture of personal stories and historical facts, draws attention to the most crucial element of the narrative- sufferings of ordinary people- in a modern and visually attractive way. It can be concluded that the Occupation Museum's narrative has developed several channels through which the narrative is conveyed to the public. Successful combination of the educational activities and online platforms allows suggesting that the way, chosen in order to distribute and promote the narrative, might have a great impact on the society in its perception of the past in the long run. A diverse approach covers a wide spectrum of topics related to Soviet authorities, and potentially attracts people of different age.

Such an advantageous position of the Occupation Museum's narrative and its successful promotion is a credit to the main actors, involved in the institution's life. The examination of the actor's occupation clearly shows that they represent a certain political line and share the promoted idea of indigenous Latvian population's miseries inflicted by the Soviet regime. These suppressive deeds are now represented in the country in the form of the Russophones' community. Professional life of many of the OMB members is linked to the Latvian highest political echelons, while personal tragic past connected to the forced migration, also cannot but naturally influence promoted ideas. The Latvian martyrdom narrative was gradually evolving in the late USSR. However, it was institutionalized when the country gained its independence. The main actors who are now connected to the Occupation Museum were in some degree the constructors of the modern Latvian mythscape, which granted them the opportunity to form the narrative. Clearly, such specifics of the narrative formation facilitate its consistency and ensure that the actors can almost completely control it. All in all, combined factors led to the situation when the Occupation Museum's

narrative is a very consistent version of the past, which enjoys great support by the state, since it is an officially approved interpretation of history, with the developed net of channels to spread and promote ideas.

While the homogeneity of the occupation narrative and its overwhelming acceptance can be credited to the Museums' actors, the analyses of the Victory Day commemoration shows a different balance of powers. The study of the actors, involved in organizing the contemporary commemoration on May 9, reveals that they do not possess a similar overwhelming grip on it. Reckon that the contemporary narrative accepted by the Russophones community is a slightly changed product of a top-down memory construction of Soviet authorities, today's actors were not at its origin. Some changes were introduced in the Victory Day image, making it look less anti-Latvian, however, declarations about an exclusively family format of fallen relatives commemoration contradict the reality. Contemporary actors do not possess the authority and influence to change the essence of the commemoration, which still very much resembles traditional practices of glorious and festive character of mass celebration in Russia. While the main actor in the form of the Concord Party is clearly putting emphasis on the non-political appeal of Victory Day in Latvia, the patterns observed during the event, such as the presence of positively interpreted Soviet military symbols and sometimes flags, as well as entertaining activities in a Soviet style, suggest otherwise.

The existence of such radical actors as the Latvian Russian Union and Tatiana Ždanoka should be mentioned as well. The Union activity is based on protest sentiments and Soviet-time melancholy and can be interpreted as a counter power to the restrained and fairly progressive stance of the Concord Party. Despite the absence of open confrontation between the Union and the Concord Party, most probably because of their different political weight, which, according to Onken's conception, put them into societal and political worlds respectively, the very fact that there is such a force as the Russian Union shows that there is no monopoly on the narrative of the country's past among Russian-speakers. The classical triumphant liberation narrative is still very prominent in comparison with the mild attempts to integrate the occupation narrative, which aims to make the Victory Day commemoration an event devoted to personal tragedy.

The efforts to modify the very well established depersonalized collective memory of heroic deeds into collective memory of mass perpetrations are clearly unsuccessful.

In addition to domestic factors, the imaginary homeland in the form of contemporary Russia is also not ready to yield its area of cultural influence. Besides studied reports of Latvian state institutions, including the police, which provided evidence of financial support to activities related to Victory Day, the character of the event mirrors today's Russia tradition, such as Immortal Regiment or performance of wartime songs. This reveals clear connection between the imaginary homeland and the minority. While the Occupation Museum on top of their self-made channels, such as its website and social network pages, can use platforms provided by state institutions, Victory Day indirectly profits from Russian soft power, including TV programs that are transmitted to Latvia and fancied by an overwhelming amount of the Russophones. Soft power coming from the Kremlin remains to be one of the most influential sources of the existing narrative in Latvia, and local channels created around the Victory Day commemoration are echoing the narrative established in Russia. The on-going memory war only aggravates because of such active involvement of the imaginary homeland in domestic matters.

The studied websites of the non-governmental organizations, involved in the management of May 9, showed the remaining strong influence of old patterns. Online platforms such as *9may.lv* and *polk.lv* stylistically copy the Soviet-style of presenting materials, and are clearly orientated on the Russian-speakers. Moreover, the educational component of these channels is not so prominent compared with the Occupation Museum. Though there is some information about historical materials provided online, they do not seem to enjoy a lot of spotlight, being rather a decorative rudiment. The websites in that case are fulfilling more of an informative task, giving information about how, when and who will be taking part in Victory Day. However, there is little information on other events related to the Victory Day commemoration aside May 9. The rest of the year is left out, since almost no related events are organized. Such difference in the scope of activities between the two institutions of memory can be explained by their unequal positions within the Latvian state system. Victory Day as an institution does not have such a privileged place because it is opposed by the state and clearly not welcomed due to its direct connection to the communist rule, which is equalized to Nazi and outlawed. This can justify the fact, that being one of the most important events for the overwhelming part of the Russophone community, the 9th of May commemoration as a memory institution failed to develop a greater net of creative channels that could have promoted its

narrative. Taking into account that a lot of young people work for the NGOs, which websites were studied, attempts to involve younger generations are made, but still they do not in any way include non-Russian speakers. The Occupation Museum, which hosts excursion for school children, including everyone regardless of their mother tongue and ethnic affiliation, is in a more favourable position. Educational elements within the studied narratives can positively contribute to de-escalation of mnemonic wars. Mutually exclusive attitude towards occupation, namely the reluctance of the Russian-speakers to use this term to describe the events of 1940 and 1944/1945, and the fundamental role of the occupation in the official Latvian martyrdom narrative, is, in general, the biggest stumbling point in relations between the two groups. Hence, the narrative, which manages to promote successfully its standpoint on this particular topic, might gain an advantage and dramatically weaken the opposing narrative.

By now, however, the abovementioned main hinderance proves that actors on both sides continue to act as mnemonic warriors and are not ready to compromise. Importantly, the study of both the primary and secondary data revealed that despite the unwillingness to give in, there is no violence in the interaction between the two ethnic groups. There are no physical clashes between the Latvians and the Russian-speakers. Even on Victory Day itself, despite a large scale of commemoration practices and some protest actions near the Parliament under the patronage of the Russian Union, no major provocations have ever happened.

Such rather peaceful coexistence against the sharp contrast in interpretations of key historical events demonstrates the highly politicized nature of confrontation between the two narratives, which eventually takes place almost exclusively in the political field and does not affect directly relations between representatives of the two groups in daily life. Another reason might be the unwillingness or inability of the Russian-speakers to express physically their discontent about their social and political status in public. The data covered in the analyses showed that the vast majority of initiatives of even relatively radical actors as the Russian Union emerge as a response to certain legislative proposals from above and are somehow connected to the Soviet legacy. Protests against the demolition of the memorial, as well as the so-called de-russification of schools take place occasionally, and then are peacefully resolved until the next draft law appears. Thus, the organizational level of the Russian-speaking

community is quite low, since it does not generate any independent activity but rather react to legislative initiatives, taken by the Latvian government.

Such relatively calm interaction between the minority and majority most of the time except for some occasional eruptions related to laws that, in the opinion of the minority, deprive them of their rights, might also be interpreted as the high level of assimilation of the Russians in Latvia. When analyzing the tendencies within Laitin's assimilation cascades framework, one can maintain that at least two factors out of three might be applied to the case of the Latvian Russophones. The absence of violent clashes between the two groups can be explained by the fact that the in-group status of minority representatives is not negatively affected when a person is a full-fledged member of the Latvian society. Additionally, the protests are not aimed at the Latvian population as an ethnic group, but mostly at the government, which "infringe" the Russian-speakers. Moreover, the absence of violent clashes on Victory Day demonstrates, that the Latvians are not hostile towards the Russians as an ethnic minority. All the above-mentioned features signal that while the dichotomies of perpetrator/victim and criminal/non criminal typical for the transitional justice seem to dominate the highly politicized official memory, the absence of open confrontation between representatives of the two narratives demonstrate the Latvian society's readiness to accept representatives of the Russian minority in their assimilation process.

To sum it up, one can maintain that by the time of writing this thesis, while the contemporary Victory Day commemoration in Riga is presented by its coordinators as a neutral ground for commemorating fallen relatives thanks to the efforts of the Concord Party, it still does not cease to symbolize the victory of the Soviet Union, and thus the occupation of Latvia for the vast majority of ethnic Latvians. The narrative promoted by Victory Day lacks modern and well-established channels to promote the main postulates of the narrative supported by the Concord Party, while the Occupation Museum not only enjoys wide state support, but has developed accessible, multilingual online platforms that provide comprehensive information about their interpretation of the past. Initiatives around the 9th of May commemoration are not aimed at winning new followers of the narrative, and are implemented within the patterns, mostly constructed under the Soviet rule and still supported by contemporary Russia. On the contrary, the Museum of the Occupation as an institution of memory has a very clear vision of how to promote the official Latvian

narrative of the past since the Museum possesses a wide spectrum of channels to spread the narrative in the public domain, which might help to remove gradually the traditional Russophone narrative and solve the problem of the “occupation” term. The acceptance of interpretation of the events of 1940 and 1944/1945 as an occupation of Latvia by the Red Army might eventually lead to complete assimilation of the Russophones, full marginalization of the traditional Russian narrative about the past and its gradual disappearance for lack of demand. Russian Federation’s influence may prolong this process but is unlikely to prevent it due to a natural change of generations in Latvia, when young people, as the secondary data proves, tend to distance from the Kremlin.

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Appendix

Abstract (ENG)

This master thesis addresses the “memory wars” in contemporary Latvia that arise from conflicting narratives about the Soviet past among ethnic Latvians and the Russian-speaking minority. The complicated Communist legacy and the choices made by the post-Soviet political elites in the course of nation-building have led to a situation when the perception of the formative events of the 20th century are interpreted differently by today’s Latvian majority and Russian minority. The thesis seeks to answer the question of how the Latvian narrative of Soviet occupation and the Russian narrative of Latvia’s liberation from the Nazis are represented in the public space. Central elements of the theoretical framework include Rogers Brubaker’s triadic nexus, Michael Bernhard’s and Jan Kubik’s study of memory regimes in the post-Soviet space, as well as the concept of “national mythscape” introduced by Duncan S.A. Bell. In order to answer the research question two case studies have been conducted exploring the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia located in Riga and the Victory Day commemoration on May 9. The choice of these institutions of memory is justified by their crucial role in the propagation of the aforementioned narratives. Methodologically, the study is carried out by empirical observation as well as collection and interpretation of primary and secondary sources. The research has found out that the narratives promoted by the two institutions enjoy varying degrees of success due to their unequal position in the socio-political space. The Occupation Museum has managed to develop multiple channels for promoting its narrative in different areas, including education. In contrast to the Victory Day commemoration, the Museum shapes, promotes and popularizes the Latvian narrative among all segments of the population and is supported by the state. The Russophones’ narrative, which is endorsed by today’s Russia, is aimed exclusively at the Russian-speaking population and, despite the efforts of its actors, fails to overcome the triumphalist discourse inherited from Soviet times.

Abstract (DE)

Die vorliegende Masterarbeit befasst sich mit den „Erinnerungskriegen“ im heutigen Lettland, die den widersprüchlichen Narrativen über die sowjetische Vergangenheit entspringen, wie sie von den Letten und der russischsprachigen Minderheit vertreten werden. Das komplexe Erbe des Kommunismus und die post-sowjetische Politik der Nationsbildung haben dazu geführt, dass die für Lettland entscheidenden Ereignisse des Zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts von den beiden oben genannten Gruppen unterschiedlich interpretiert werden. Die Arbeit versucht, die folgende Forschungsfrage zu beantworten: Wie werden das lettische Besatzungsnarrativ und das russische Befreiungsnarrativ im öffentlichen Raum repräsentiert? Für den theoretischen Rahmen wurden vor allem Rogers Brubakers Konzept des „triadic nexus“, Michael Bernhards & Jan Kubiks Studie über Erinnerungsregime im postsowjetischen Raum sowie Duncan S.A. Bells Konzept der nationalen Mythenlandschaft benutzt. Die Forschungsfrage wird anhand von zwei Fallstudien beantwortet, die das Lettische Okkupationsmuseum in Riga sowie die Gedenkfeier zum Tag des Sieges am 9. Mai zum Gegenstand haben. Die Wahl dieser Gedächtnisinstitutionen erklärt sich aus ihrer entscheidenden Rolle für die Propagierung der beiden genannten Narrative. Methodologisch beruht die Untersuchung auf empirischer Beobachtung und auf der Sammlung und Interpretation primärer und sekundärer Quellen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die beiden Narrative im sozio-politischen Raum unterschiedlich erfolgreich sind, was auf die ungleiche Verankerung der oben genannten Institutionen zurückzuführen ist. Das Museum hat ein breites Spektrum an Kommunikationskanälen entwickelt, die in viele Lebensbereiche reichen, einschließlich des Bildungsbereichs. Im Gegensatz zu den Gedenkfeiern am Tag des Sieges trägt das Museum das lettische Narrativ in alle Bevölkerungsschichten und wird außerdem vom Staat unterstützt. Das Narrativ der Russophonen, das den Beistand des heutigen Russland hat, richtet sich ausschließlich an die russischsprachige Bevölkerung und hat es bisher nicht vermocht, sich von dem aus der Sowjetzeit ererbten triumphalistischen Diskurs zu verabschieden.