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## Between arts and politics: A postcolonial view on Baltic cultures of the Soviet era

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In October 1953, the Estonian literary magazine *Looming* published a poem by Vladimir Beekman entitled *The Russian Language* [Vene keel]:

We met. We soon forgot the speeches,  
in our hearts it's with us anyway,  
but our first words in Russian  
sounded warm and welcoming.

In Kaunas or in any other city  
you meet a comrade from a distant place  
in Russian you'll hold a conversation  
about your country and your friendship.

Homeland is vast, but in its every path  
in every far away, yet friendly road,  
you don't need a more comforting friend  
than the great language of a great nation.  
(Beekman 1953, 1219)<sup>1</sup>

This poem, so typical of Baltic literatures of the early 1950s, celebrates the greatness of the Russian language, which is, according to the poem, warm and friendly, yet also grand and important at the same time. This poem, we might say, is not primarily an artifact, but is rather *politics in verse*. The Stalinist era, with a highly circumscribed model for acceptable art, Socialist Realism, repositioned the art sphere inside the sphere of politics. Art became a political tool to serve the Socialist worldview, under the direct oversight of the Communist Party. According to Evgenii Dobrenko, Socialist Realism was “an institution for the production of socialism,” and its basic function was “to create socialism – Soviet reality, and not an artifact” (2007, xii). In the 1950s, the direct connection between the Communist Party and the arts was openly declared as official policy. Under the name of Johannes Käbin, the first secretary of Estonian Communist Party, the following statement was published in an Estonian literary magazine:

Experience has shown that Socialist culture develops successfully only when party organizations work steadily with questions of literature, arts, science, and mass education, everywhere showing vigilance and zero tolerance for the incursions of bourgeois ideology within one or

another cultural field. Guiding activities in the fields of art, literature and science, the Estonian Communist Party seeks the creation of works which correspond to the tasks posed by Communist Party of the Soviet Union. (Käbin 1953, 1417)

The post-Stalin years significantly eased the strict subordination of art to politics and enabled the art sphere to gain back some measure of its autonomy, yet the relationship between art and politics retained much of its complexity. The articles collected in the present special issue *Between Arts and Politics: A Postcolonial View on Baltic Cultures of the Soviet Era* address different aspects of this complex relationship between art and politics, with each article focusing on a particular situation and bringing in additional terms and problems. The articles offer “a postcolonial perspective” – that is, a perspective sensitive to the effects of Soviet colonialism to Baltic societies and cultures.<sup>2</sup>

## Colonialism

The central topic in this special issue is the question of the colonial aspects of the Soviet regime and its impact on the Baltic art sphere. *Colonialism* can be defined as

[t]he extension of a nation’s power over territory beyond its borders by the establishment of either settler colonies and/or administrative control through which the indigenous populations are directly or indirectly ruled or displaced. Colonizers not only take control of the resources, trade and labor in the territories they occupy, but also generally impose, to varying degrees, cultural, religious and linguistic structures on the conquered population. (Nagai 2007, 234)<sup>3</sup>

From the perspective of the colonised culture, colonialism refers to a political, economic and cultural control over a territory by a foreign power.

Strategies of Soviet colonialism are formed and expressed by *colonial discourse* – that is, by a network of interconnected statements, ideas, beliefs and subject positions that are institutionally grounded and find expression in different colonial practices. Modern colonial discourse enunciates and continuously (re)creates the colonial situation through the pathos of progress and civilization, whereas the latter are (re)defined through value systems of the colonizing culture. In Soviet colonial discourse, the pathos of progress was presented in terms of a communist value system, which included not only a modification of the Marxist rejection of capitalism but also selected principles of the European Enlightenment embedded in Marxist values and rearticulated by Soviet ideologists.

Another terminological distinction has also proved useful in thinking about the Baltics: Jürgen Osterhammel distinguishes between “colonisation” as “a process of territorial acquisition” and “colonialism” as “a system of domination” (Osterhammel [1995] 2009, 23; Kangilaski, this issue). This distinction, though relatively recent in postcolonial criticism, allows one to conceptualize separately the initial process of territorial colonization and the subsequent period of colonial rule. Here, one can argue that the Baltic states were not precisely “colonized” by the Soviet Union, but were instead “occupied,” since the term “colonization” is not quite apt for describing the process of annexing modern nation states, as the Baltic states had been by the end of the 1930s. Yet the authors here nonetheless share a conviction that the Soviet period in the Baltic states can be characterized as a colonial situation, wherein colonial strategies were deployed. So one might say that the “occupation” of the Baltic states by a foreign power (the Soviet Union) was followed by the gradual institution of a colonial matrix of power.<sup>4</sup>

However, colonial situations are always heterogeneous and they will shift and evolve over the colonial period. Thus, the early Soviet years in the Baltic states were

years of discursive confusion, where two different value systems, Soviet and pre-Soviet, clashed unhappily.<sup>5</sup> Gradually, Soviet discourse established its hegemonic position in the sphere of public authority – people learned “to speak the right way” – while at the same time also adapting patterns from pre-Soviet local discourses. Yet different social spheres adopted different modalities of Soviet discourse. While in official parlance the dominant discourse remained the unreserved expression of Soviet values, the art sphere, though imbued with Soviet discourse, also established a certain distance from it. The gradual divergence of national and Soviet colonial discourses turned into a clear separation of the two discourses in the mid-1980s, and the radical opposition between the two value systems resurfaced in distinct and radically opposing interpretations of the past. This painful discursive clash persists today in opposing accounts of the events of the 1940s, interpreted as the discourse of liberation (declarations of the type “we liberated you from capitalist oppression”) or the discourse of occupation (accusations of the type “you illegally occupied our country for half a century”), and still fuels ethnic tension in the post-Soviet Baltic states.

Certainly, the Soviet period in the Baltic states can also be characterised in several different ways – as a period of occupation, Sovietization, totalitarianism or statism. “Sovietization” is a term that was used by the Soviet authorities to describe not only the economic or administrative changes in society but also the “deep inculcation of a new Socialist way of life” (Kotkin 1995, 34). Violeta Kelertas observes of the term “totalitarianism” that “The label seems to imply that those occupied are merely dissatisfied with the *form* of government” (Kelertas 2006a, 2); this comment might equally apply to “Sovietization.” Sovietization, if used as a single dominant term in Soviet-era research, involves the danger of foregrounding the *form* of the Soviet regime and thus flattening out fundamental differences between the Soviet experience in Russia and Soviet experience in the Baltic states. The term “colonialism” enables us to stress the fact that the regime was, in the Baltic states, forced from the outside and brought with it, in addition to economic imbalance and long-distance political supervision, also specific ethnic and cultural tensions, related to the effort to privilege a non-local cultural tradition.

One finds ample evidence of the foregrounding of Russian culture with its presumably “enlightening” role in “uplifting” Baltic cultures, especially in the newspapers and journals of the first Soviet decade. For example, in the Estonian journal *Looming*, one finds declarations like:

It is impossible to overestimate the immensely formative and educational role that has been given to us by the literature of the brotherly republics, especially the immensely rich contemporary and classical literature of the Russian nation. The questions of our offspring in literary cadres are directly related to how thoroughly they learn to know and are able to adopt this literature as their own. (Schmuul 1953, 1430)

The concept of Sovietization is not quite apt for these kinds of emblematic expressions of the Soviet colonial discourse. The notion of Soviet colonialism does not aim to categorically replace concepts like “Sovietization,” but rather to open up an additional conceptual sphere, while at the same time acknowledging work that has been done by investigating Soviet rule without drawing special attention to its colonial aspects.

## Soviet coloniality and its relation to Soviet modernity

While referring to Soviet colonialism, one should keep in mind the great complexity of the processes described. What makes history interesting is the impossibility of disentangling historical processes into straight, thematic lines of development. Many recent works have researched the mutual embeddedness of discourses of coloniality and modernity, with the focus of interest ranging from Latin America, Africa, and eastern Europe to the all-encompassing global coloniality. “Coloniality” refers here to a conceptual and ideological “matrix of power” (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2008, 109)<sup>6</sup>: Soviet colonialism as a complex of strategies brought with it Soviet coloniality as a general state of affairs or cultural logic.

The Sovietized part of the world figures in this context as a distinctive kind of modernity: “we should remember that modernity in the twentieth century was implemented in two forms – the liberal/capitalist and the socialist/statist one. Each of them had a sunny side and a darker side, each of them had its own form of coloniality,” writes Madina Tlostanova (2012, 137). The modernity–coloniality perspective is especially timely for scholars studying the Soviet era, given the great interest toward Soviet modernity in recent Soviet scholarship.<sup>7</sup> Soviet modernity will remain a controversial term, yet there is no doubt about the discursive continuity between the Soviet ideals and Enlightenment values. Even though many Soviet efforts turned into large-scale waste of productive potential, one can still conceptualize Soviet modernity as an effort to establish welfare, general education, culturedness (*kul’turnost’*), and large-scale industrialization.

When one takes a closer look into recent scholarship on Soviet modernity, one is struck by how central efforts of Soviet modernity are understood as civilizing efforts, much as in typical colonial discourse. Sheila Fitzpatrick writes about the “Soviet regime’s self-conception as an enlightened vanguard carrying out a civilizing mission” (1999, 227); Michael David-Fox repeatedly characterizes Soviet modernity as both “mission civilizatrice,” and an “enlightenment crusade” (David-Fox 2015); David Hoffmann stresses the Stalin era effort to civilize its population: “Marxism and socialism more generally drew upon Enlightenment notions of progress, improvement, and civilization, so it was natural that the Soviet government sought to civilize its population with regard to hygienic habits and orderly living” (2003, 18).<sup>8</sup>

Here, we can discern a coloniality–modernity paradigm without epistemological difference. The colonialist, no less than the Soviet modernist, strives toward what it considers progress and thus assumes a mission to enlighten, educate, and modernize “wild savages,” that is, populations in need of uplift in order to fit into the value systems established and legalized by the hegemonic power. The Soviet discourse of modernity *is* the discourse of Enlightenment and civilizing mission; it supports an effort to enforce value systems that are progressive according to the standards of its era. True, the geographical question helps to distinguish the exclusively colonialist orientation: the effort of “civilizing” another culture in another geographical area is understood as colonialism, accompanied, as it is, by a *de facto* privileging of the “civilizing” nationality and by a disregard for local interests. Here, coloniality appears as not a product of modernity but as an ideology co-constituted with modernity. Coloniality and modernity have become constitutive of each other.

Soviet modernity did not develop in isolation. Recent scholarship (David-Fox 2015) has outlined the continuity between Soviet modernity and modern ideas in pre-

revolutionary Russia. The Soviet regime had a complex and changing relationship with the earlier tsarist empire: by the time of the Baltic annexations, the restoration of the tsarist empire had become a discursive topos lending support to Soviet expansionism (Zubkova 2008, 93–94). Moreover, both the tsarist and the Soviet empires were situated in the context of global modernity–coloniality and were influenced by and reacting to other modern colonial power centers. This effort to mimic and compete with the economically and culturally more developed West positioned both Tsarist Russia and later the Soviet Union as “paradigmatic second-class empires” (Tlostanova 2012, 135).<sup>9</sup>

## Nationality question

While the interrelatedness of coloniality and modernity is a cornerstone of this special issue, we also need to stress the unavoidably *national* character of many of the specific tensions in the Soviet Union and especially in the Soviet-era Baltic states. The loss of national self-determination and the colonial overwriting of national histories defined the tenor of the Baltic experience of the Soviet regime; also, in decolonization processes, national remobilization was a crucial factor. How did Baltic national thought relate to the colonial matrix of power? How did Soviet colonialism transform national feelings in the Baltic states? How did national aspirations, colonial pressures, and the influence of Western modernist movements together shape the Baltic cultural sphere? And what happened to the nationality question in the process of decolonization? National feelings and attitudes lie at the heart of many central topics of Baltic development.

Nationalism is generally understood as one of the discourses of modernity. Thus, in the Baltic states, one can observe the emergence of nineteenth-century national thought out of the Enlightenment tradition, its popular spread made possible by modern print capitalism. In the Soviet era, however, national thought (with the exception of dissident thinking) lost not only its power of self-determination but also part of its modern sensibility. The aim of national discourse turned toward survival; national attitudes were sustained by valuing tradition and by an effort to keep alive the values of the past. The easiest way to nurture national values in the Soviet era was through reference to “acceptable” periods of the national past in historical fiction, by relying on mythical topics in painting or by rearranging folk tunes in music. Here, a new discursive turn took place: such artistic reworkings carried a strongly modern tone, thus effectively relinking the national discourse to modernity. The music scholar Kerri Kotta has written how the folk tunes in the compositions by Ester Mägi become individualized: “It is quite strange indeed how a folk tune, which is a kind of musical generalization, the concentrated blend of many individual melodies, has, in Mägi’s music, again become individual” (Kotta 2012). One sees in this reprocessing of traditional values into modern aspirations a method of the modernization of tradition as well as a deconstruction of the frequent opposition between the modern and the traditional. Yet the values of modernist national culture were different from Soviet modernity: instead of Soviet “ethos of progressive social intervention” (Hoffmann 2000b, 246), nationalist modernism stressed alternative values of a modern era – individuality and creativity.

In the late 1980s, it became again possible to imagine a national future. Soviet modernity had collapsed and national modernity re-emerged as a legitimate political

force. As in a typical decolonization process, the discourse of nationality became a dominant voice in a changing society. This in turn led to the emergence of different, opposing divisions within Baltic societies, based to a great extent on different conceptualizations of the past.

### Different directions for research in Soviet colonialism

As one might expect, the deeper one delves into these topics, the more complicated the situation becomes. Our general framework can and should be further broken down into smaller units, stretching back in time, ranging across geographical and social mappings, revealing different aspects for different social classes, gender roles, and cultural movements. To articulate these issues in relation to the Soviet era in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, one can outline several areas of interest or clusters of problems.

First, the *historical layers* of colonial rule in the Baltic states involve relationships between different colonial orders. This includes, for Latvians and Estonians, the experience of a both tsarist and Baltic German colonialism in the era of nation formation during the second half of the nineteenth century; it also includes the role of the early nineteenth-century Enlightenment ideas in the Baltic provinces (see Kalnačs, this issue; Kangilaski, this issue).<sup>10</sup> Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian national thought developed under colonial conditions, inspired by the dissemination of Enlightenment ideas in the Baltic German and Polish communities (sometimes in support of, sometimes in opposition to tsarist colonialism), as well as by the occasional waves of modern aspiration rippling through the tsarist empire more broadly.

Second, the *entanglement of different discourses* during the Soviet era produced a complex texture of Soviet modernity–coloniality discourse, discourses of Western modernity, and the subdued but persistent presence of national discourse. In the Baltic states, Soviet modernity and coloniality were inevitably situated in relation to Western modernity, to what was perceived as the “free” world, so close to the Baltic states both historically and geographically. These and similar cultural connections, as well as memories of pre-Soviet independence, formed a commonly shared interpretational matrix for the Soviet era. In the late Soviet era, Finnish television with its Western programming (Dallas, The Benny Hill Show) and Western music videos dominated the home life of northern Estonians. Mesmerizing images of Western modernity with its everyday seductions (jeans, t-shirts, and colorful plastic bags) constantly contaminated official efforts to systematically establish Soviet values.

Third, *different regimes of arts* emerged within the colonial matrix of power. Modernism and postmodernism in the arts stand in relation to the patterns of the grand sociopolitical narratives of modernity, yet developments in the art sphere will also follow its own logic, as soon as political pressure will allow it. Stalinist-era Socialist realism did not offer creative space for a complex cultural logic to develop, yet, in the post-Stalinism period, the art sphere became quickly more diverse. At the same time, and especially in the sphere of the visual arts, Soviet modernist and postmodernist trends emerged under the heavy influence of Western avant-garde and pop art. In literature of the late 1960s and 1970s, Baltic literary canons took up complex questions of existentialist discourse, which arose both from local alienation from the Soviet state and through the literary influence of the widely read Albert Camus and (to a lesser extent) Jean-Paul Sartre. The late 1980s produce rather curious discursive mixtures,

where artistic postmodernism with its ironic positioning merges with high-spirited sincere nationalism of the decolonization period (Annus and Hughes 2004).

Fourth, one must consider links, connections, and interactions *within the Soviet sphere*. Benedikts Kalnačs (this issue) refers to a development of a “pattern of mutual understanding” – a topic still very much open to further research.

Fifth, one should not forget a critical consideration of *differential developments in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania*. Soviet colonialism looked different in the city and in the countryside, as well as in different Soviet republics. The essays in this issue also reflect cultural differences among the three Baltic countries. Soviet Lithuania is analyzed in its post-WWII general enthusiasm over the “return” of Vilnius (Davoliute, this issue); the Latvian perspective brings in heightened national tensions in the post-Soviet era (Hanovs, this issue). The contributions about Estonia also shed light on the particular dynamics in the visual arts and folk dance (Kangilaski, this issue; Kapper, this issue).

The areas of interest outlined here definitely do not exhaust the research interests in the cultural situation under the Soviet colonial regime, nor do the articles collected in this issue offer exhaustive views of any of these subjects. The articles analyze some patterns of Soviet colonial rule in the Baltic states, together with its pre- and post-history; also, several case studies of specific problems and phenomena are provided.

*Benedikts Kalnačs* (“Comparing Colonial Differences: Baltic Literary Cultures as Agencies of Europe’s Internal Others”) situates the question of Soviet colonialism within the framework of earlier layers of colonial rule in the Baltic states. He outlines historical parallels between developments in East-Central Europe and refers to patterns of mutual understanding between different parts of the Soviet Union. In the Baltic context, Kalnačs points out how the period of Enlightenment, though opening doors for peasant emancipation, aimed to limit the *Volksaufklärung* to constructing “an ideal peasant aspiring toward economic prosperity” while not challenging the social order and colonial relationships of the era.

Kalnačs positions Soviet colonialism in the Baltic states in the context of the global power race between capitalism and socialism, as well as in the framework of historical developments of Russian colonialism. He stresses how Soviet policies “followed the path earlier established by other imperial powers (including the Russian empire).” As a difference from earlier Baltic colonial periods, which initiated a move toward more complex cultural forms, Kalnačs points how socialist realism “led to an extreme oversimplification of creative practices.” The later move of critical appropriation and aesthetic recovery first involved a turn to realistic description of everyday realities and then the bolder move toward modernist poetics and a renewed interest in history and mythology. Kalnačs points to realistic descriptions of daily lives in the Baltic communities as acquiring the potential of “anti-systemic movement,” and he interprets the turns of Baltic literature to modernist poetics and to the topics of history and mythology as deconstruction and inversion of the existing patterns of representation in the Soviet literary canon.

*Jaak Kangilaski* (“Postcolonial Theory as a Means to Understand Estonian Art History”) provides another introductory approach to wider questions of postcolonial terms and research perspectives. He analyzes vocabulary used in descriptions of the Soviet takeover of the Baltic states and looks at the changes in the legal vocabulary in the first half of the twentieth century. Of postcolonial approaches, Kangilaski relies on Jürgen Osterhammel’s clear and precise conceptual framework and draws attention to

Homi Bhabha's anti-essentialist approach to colonialism as giving rise to ambivalent and ambiguous cultural phenomena.

Kangilaski also looks into the continuities between Tsarist and Soviet rhetoric. He outlines different periods of both Tsarist and Soviet regimes and draws attention to interaction between Tsarist and Baltic German colonial powers, which sometimes worked in unison, sometimes in disagreement. Thus, Kangilaski points to Enlightenment impulses of the tsar Alexander I, which contradicted the interests of Baltic German nobility.

Similarly, Kangilaski envisages the Soviet era as a "mix of different ideologies and principles," which resulted in different responses from local populations. According to Kangilaski, three different discourses dominated the post-Stalinist Estonian art sphere: pro-authority, Western avant-garde-oriented, and national-conservative discourse, whereas "[t]he character and complex interrelationship between these discourses changed significantly over the years." Kangilaski also outlines a highly hierarchical model of the Soviet art sphere, where the status of an artist was achieved through belonging to a professional association, whereas the admittance of new members was controlled at the all-union level.

The next three essays turn the focus from visual arts toward Baltic literature. *Violeta Davoliute* ("The Sovietization of Lithuania after WWII: Modernization, Transculturation and the Lettered City") explores the relationship between modernity and coloniality in Soviet Lithuania, focusing on developments in Lithuanian literature of the era. If "the Baltic condition" seems broadly similar in many respects, Davoliute outlines some particularities of the Lithuanian post-war situation: the merging of discourses of modernization, urbanization, and Sovietization, and also the joyful re-emergence of Lithuanian national feeling. Davoliute draws attention to the processes of urbanization in post-war Lithuania, where, in 1946, the urban proportion of the population was just 10–15%. Less than 25 years later, the urban population rose to over 50%. Here, with reference to the work of Katerina Clark, a fascinating link is drawn between the construction of cities and social identities.

Davoliute adds an additional conceptual twist to her discussion of Baltic literature: her use of the term "narrative transculturation," coined by Latin-American critic Angel Rama, refers to "a process of adaptation, appropriation, selection, and reinvention that gives rise to new cultural forms that affirm the meanings and continuity of a culture marginalized by the colonial power" (Davoliute, this issue). Transculturation is thus not simply a relationship of dominance and subordination; rather, it refers to a heterogeneous relationship of two cultures and to the active role played by the colonized culture.

*Rasa Baločkaitė* ("Bourgeoisie as Internal Orient in the Soviet Lithuanian Literature: *Roses Are Red* by A. Bieliauskas, 1959") reveals another facet of the Soviet colonial situation: the way the Soviet cultural sphere employed colonial models of representation. In the typical colonial novel of the nineteenth century, white colonizers dominated the discourse of modernity. While the discourse of the colonizers was understood as the voice of rationality, equated with culture and civilization, the natives were positioned on the dark side of civilization and were depicted as irrational, backward, exotic, and erotic. Baločkaitė points to similar structures in the Soviet Lithuanian novel *Roses are Red* (1959) by Alfonsas Bieliauskas: Soviet activists are the missionaries of civilization; they present rationality and moral sensitivity and they stand for the values of modernity and progress. The representatives of the former

pre-Soviet elites are presented as inferior in all respects: they are lazy and bored, infantile, and corrupt; their home-life is static, ritualized, and eroticized; they follow impulses and emotions and lack discipline. "The typical gender roles among the haute bourgeoisie follow the traditional patterns of Oriental imagination – weak, effeminate males and exotic, mysterious, erotic females," writes Baločkaitė (this issue). The opposition between the high (communist) and the low (former bourgeoisie) is consolidated into the familiar colonial pattern of light *versus* darkness: the perpetual twilight of bourgeois homes is opposed to the sunny and enthusiastic environment of the "Soviet activists" apartments. "Soviet" in the novel is synonymous with progress, humanity, and modernity, and it constitutes the only correct value system. In Baločkaitė's phrasing, "The Soviet system is equated with culture and civilization itself, in contrast to the alleged 'barbarism' and 'brutality' of bourgeoisie" (this issue). Baločkaitė's essay, written about a Soviet Lithuanian author who reproduces colonial stereotypes, points to the paradox of Socialist realism, the only officially acceptable art form in the Stalinist era: under the surveillance of the Communist Party, Soviet colonial hierarchies are reproduced by Baltic authors.

*Maija Burima* ("Orientalism, Otherness and the Soviet Empire: Travelogues by Latvian Writers of the Soviet Period") addresses the role of Latvian travelogues in shaping Latvian subjects under the Soviet empire. Over the Soviet decades, many cultural delegations of Baltic writers visited other parts of the Soviet Union and later published their travel impressions. This strategy was intended to cement the integration of the Baltic nations into the Soviet sphere, yet Burima points to some unexpected results: the travelogues of the post-Stalin years familiarized readers with huge and unsuccessful Soviet construction projects and with the resulting ecological devastation in other parts of the empire. In addition, these travelogues provided Latvian readers with images of exotic others specifically contrasting their scenes with more familiar Latvian cultural landscapes: Armenian, Uzbek, Tajik, and Kyrgyz cultures were painted with an orientalist touch, thus exemplifying the peculiar orientalist tendencies among culturally different borderlands of the Soviet empire. Burima's article thus points to the complex relationships subsisting between different Soviet borderlands, where feelings of a shared destiny and a common ground emerged through a "shared negative experience of the destructive nature of the Soviet regime" (this issue); at the same time, a nationalist Latvian identity found subtle support through its juxtapositions with different, "exotic" cultures elsewhere in the Soviet Union.

*Sille Kapper* ("Post-Colonial Folk Dancing: Reflections on the Impact of Stage Folk Dance Style on Traditional Folk Dance Variation in Socialist and Post-Socialist Estonia") moves discussion from literary and visual arts to artistic body politics: she investigates changes in the bodily behavior of dancers on the Estonian national dance stage. Again, we meet the familiar trope of the "civilizing mission": in the case of traditional folk dance, it needed to be "ennobled" with elements from classical ballet, according to the example of the Soviet Moiseyev Ballet. The new, Soviet "ennobled" national stage dance included "technical and artistic peculiarities of classical ballet, (...) extreme synchronicity in performance and choreographic symphonism in composition." (Kapper, this issue). Improvisation disappeared; new compositions like *Collective Farm Dance* or *Foreman's Polka* were staged. In the Baltic literary scene, works of Socialist realism (by authors such as Bieliauskas, Rudolf Sirge, and others) represented a clear rupture with earlier national literary traditions and later became a topic for ridicule. In the national dance stage, however, Soviet values were fully integrated and

came to be perceived as part of the Baltic national cultures. The new Soviet hybrid stage dance, despite losing some characteristics of traditional folk dance, still functioned as a carrier of national values and a source of national pride; indeed, it actually functioned as an act of resistance to Soviet values. What is most striking, however, is the way the new Soviet “national” tradition became perceived as “better” and “more beautiful” than traditional folk dance. Out of Sovietization, a “new authenticity” was born, and traditional ways of folk dancing became perceived as less valuable, less beautiful, and finally just “incorrect.” And this new tradition was culturally internalized to foster national pride.

Sille Kapper’s essay reveals another striking feature of the newly Sovietized culture: the continuance of Soviet aesthetics in post-Soviet Estonia. The new Soviet-style stage dance “that has come into being through mimicking a colonialist culture now continues its existence, representing and reinforcing national feelings of decolonized subjects.” (Kapper, this issue).

The last two essays in this issue turn toward questions of nationalism across the Baltic states in the post-Soviet era. Piret Peiker (“Estonian Nationalism Through Postcolonial Lens”) claims that a postcolonial perspective enables one to better understand developments of Baltic nationalisms. Peiker outlines relationships between colonialism and nationalism, stressing the importance of nationalism in the Baltic decolonization processes of the 1980s and 1990s. Peiker relies on Bernard Yack’s social psychological understanding of nationhood as a version of generic communities and she considers especially Pheng Cheah’s view of nationalism as both liberating and sometimes morally problematic.

Piret Peiker then turns toward closer analysis of present-day Estonian nationalism as conditioned by its post-imperial situation. Peiker claims that, in a postcolonial situation:

The values, power mechanisms and even boundaries of the nation are typically under fierce contestation by a variety of stakeholders who have different social and cultural backgrounds, whose experience of the former empire was very different, and whose historical world-picture and political aspirations may be strongly at odds with one another. (Peiker, this issue)

Peiker identifies five interconnected strands in attitudes towards nationhood in present-day Estonia: *constitutional* nationhood refers to “the symbolic weight of laws as an essential part of being the legitimate ‘masters of one’s home’.” *Popular* nationhood bases nationhood on popular activism and thus produces a creative relationship between individuals and community. *Top-down* nationhood implies general trust in the reforms set forth by the ruling elite. *Nativism* is understood as an effort to build a postcolonial nation on the (rather problematic) restitution of pre-colonial cultural practices, together with an effort to “erase” or to neglect the period of colonial rule. *Finally, cosmopolitanism* relies on the sense of enlightened and unrestricted value systems. The combination of constitutional, popular, and cosmopolitan nationalisms can be understood as *civic nationalism*, the most productive combination to be found in the twenty-first century Estonian society. Peiker relates questions of nationality to a reading of the Estonian novel, *The Man Who Spoke Snakish* by Andrus Kivirähk.

Finally, Deniss Hanovs’ article “Can Post-Colonial Theory Help in Explaining Latvian Politics of Integration? Reflections on Contemporary Latvia as a Post-Colonial Society” turns toward the question of the (lacking) politics of reconciliation. Hanovs points to the danger of a postcolonial community that continues the colonial discourse, only

reversing its terms. His article raises the important question: “What if post-colonial societies and their elites respond to the modernizing project of a colonial power with similar discursive practices and concepts of society? What if the long-lasting experience of being colonized simply dominates the liberated elites of a re-established state?” According to Hanovs, this kind of reversal has taken place in postcolonial Latvian society, where a strong anti-Soviet reaction in an ethnically conceived Latvian nationhood has alienated ethnic minorities from the state. These minorities continue to be associated with the colonial past of the nation. In the subsequent twist of the same continuing discourse, the minorities respond with a new mirror structure, opposing themselves to the politics of the postcolonial Latvian state. The attempts of ethnic minorities in Latvia to create structures like the Congress of Latvian Non-citizens can be seen as a product of the continuing chain, where the colonial situation triggers a reaction against it and leads to the establishment of a postcolonial state grounded in a reaction against its colonial past. This situation elicits, in effect, a replication of (post)colonial discourse and a predictable reaction against it, and a lost opportunity for reconciliation.

It is important to read Deniss Hanovs’s article not simply as a political attack or accusation, but rather as a diagnosis. Are the Baltic states now, more than 20 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, still repeating the same discursive patterns with colonial roots? Could constitutional, popular, and cosmopolitan nationalisms merge into a productive combination in future Baltic societies? Recognizing and acknowledging colonial patterns in Soviet-era Baltic societies will bring us closer to understanding the role that the Soviet past will continue to play in the Baltic societies.

## Notes

1. All translations from Estonian are mine.
2. See also an explanation of postcolonialism provided in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*: “Post-colonialism (or often postcolonialism) deals with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2007, 168).
3. Compare to definitions of colonialism in Rogers, Castree, and Kitchin (2013, 65), Bolaffi et al. (2003, 39), and McClintock (1992, 88) and to Osterhammel’s definition provided in Kangilaski (this issue). Also, see a (widely used) simpler version of McClintock’s definition in Peiker (this issue).
4. This process is analyzed in Annus (2012). About the Baltics states and the Soviet empire, see also Annus (2015).
5. The general insecurity and the discursive confusion of this period was later addressed in many fictional works – see, for example, novels by Leelo Tungal and Madis Kõiv (Tungal 2008; Kõiv 2010).
6. The term “coloniality” has in recent years also been used to express the continuation of a colonial heritage: in many countries of the world, the colonial period is officially over, yet coloniality refers “to the longstanding patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism but that transcended colonialism.” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 30). This seems not to be the main issue in the Baltic states of the twenty-first century. The present-day Baltics – especially Latvia – can rather be characterized by a strong decolonial reaction, with attendant dangers of repeating previous colonial patterns and hierarchies, albeit with the terms of ethnic and linguistic privilege reversed. See Deniss Hanovs (this issue).
7. Holquist (1997), Hoffmann and Kotsonis (2000), Volkov (2000), Hoffmann (2003, 2011), Kotkin (1995, 2001), and David-Fox (2006, 2015) give a detailed overview of different trends.
8. Again, we should keep some reservations here. Freedom of thought was one of the fundamental values of Enlightenment – see Immanuel Kant’s seminal essay “Beantwortung der

Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?“ (1784). Stalinist modernity was rather selective in making use of Enlightenment values.

9. This topic is widely researched in Russian studies (see Etkind 2011; Gerasimov, Glebov, and Mogilner 2013; Moore 2001; David-Fox 2006).
10. More detailed analyses can be found in Annus (2014); Baltic German coloniality is analyzed in Plath (2011) and Whelan (1999).

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