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## Another Baltic Postcolonialism: Young Latvians, Baltic Germans, and the emergence of Latvian National Movement

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This article looks at the emergence of Latvian nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century from the intercultural perspective of postcolonial theory. The writings of early Young Latvians, and the reaction to them from the dominant Baltic German elite, show that the emergence of a modern Latvian nationalism is to a large extent due to postcolonial mimicry, as described by Homi Bhabha. Attempts to imitate German cultural models and to develop a Latvian high culture lead to hostile reactions from the German side, which, in their turn, lead to increasing consolidation of Latvian nationalism. Since the Baltic German elite increasingly legitimized its rule in terms of cultural superiority, the Young Latvians' alliance with the Russian Slavophiles led it to treat the Latvian nationalists as culturally inferior and partly Asiatic, like the Russians.

**Keywords:** Nationalism; Young Latvians; Baltic Germans; nineteenth century; Postcolonialism

### Introduction

The history of national movements has usually been a subject of great interest for political elites. This particularly concerns those undemocratic regimes that are trying to impose the one “official” narrative about the origins of a nation. Eastern European nations, which during most of the twentieth century were subjected to authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, could develop only a limited amount of research on nationalism outside of these ideological narratives. Hence these cases provide still unexplored opportunities for investigating the development of national movements in these countries. When dealing with the birth of Latvian nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century, the previous research seems to be dominated by two broad approaches: the primordialist approach and the modernization approach. Both of them provide important insights about this example of Eastern European nationalism. Nevertheless, other, more culture-oriented approaches can provide additional knowledge about it, especially regarding the ideological context of the emergent Latvian nationalism. In this article, I will show the fruitfulness of the post-colonialist perspective for exploring early Latvian nationalism. In particular, I will use Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry and hybridity in order to illustrate the historically crucial relationship between the emergent group of Young Latvians and the dominant Baltic Germans.

The primordialist perspective has been commonly chosen by nationalist writers, who tend to see the emergence of the Latvian nationalist movement as a quasi-natural phenomenon based on the pre-given existence of a nation. This fundamental reality of a nation

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must be apprehended by its members in the process of the national revival or “awakening”, as well as defended against all un-national forces. The primordialist perspective can be interesting, since it tries to explain national phenomena out of the logic of its own internal development. This approach is represented by the historiography of the Latvian “national idea”, most of it stemming from the interwar period (Blanks 1927; Goba 1929a, 1929b; Dopkewitsch 1936; Dribins 1997). It usually chooses a teleological perspective, whereby the nationalist activities are interpreted from the perspective of the establishment of an independent Latvian nation-state, which eventually happened in 1918. A similar approach is used also by several German authors who deal with the emergence of Latvian nationalism in the context of the role of Baltic Germans in the region (von Tobien 1930; Wittram 1934; von Hehn 1938). For them, Latvian nationalism appears as a primordial, quasi-natural force, which tears apart the traditional order of things in the Baltic provinces.

The modernization perspective is more complicated. It generally sees the emergence of Latvian nationalism as an element of social modernization in the Baltic provinces. Scholars using this approach link the nascence of nationalism with demographic changes, educational and communication improvements, emergence of capitalist relations of production, mass communication, as well as with the gradual democratization of political life. In the Baltic case, the main topic is Latvian nationalists’ struggle against the economic, political, and cultural privileges of the traditional Baltic German elite. Soviet Marxist historiography used to overstate the dimension of the economic struggle as the main driving force behind the national movement (Libermanis 1957; Dukhanov 1970).

Among contemporary writers, the most profound elaboration of the modernization perspective can be found in the work of Plakans (1974, 1981). He links the emergence of Latvian nationalism to the rise of the urban, self-consciously Latvian intelligentsia in the mid-nineteenth century. Due to growing social mobility this group was subjected to increasing Germanization, which, in turn, provoked calls for the development of a new, Latvian “high” culture. However, Plakans doubts the significance of the ideological dimension of the early nationalists, stating that “the personal experience of each member of the movement, as he wrestled with the problems of upward mobility, dictated in the end the goals he envisaged for the movement as a whole” (1974, 459). As this article will show, Plakans’ statement is not fully justified. Early writings of the Young Latvians cannot be traced back to the problems of social mobility; moreover, they contain important evidence of how Latvian nationalism was born in an intercultural context.

To the modernist tradition also belong those works which, following Benedict Anderson, link the emergence of the nationalist movement with the establishment of modern public communication in Latvian society, especially the press (Apals 1993, 2011; Zelče 2009). Scholars using Miroslav Hroch’s three-stage scheme for comparative analysis of Latvian nationalism in the regional context (Plakans and Raun 1990; Wohlfart 2006) also belong to this tradition.

By concentrating on nationalism’s internal development and its social preconditions, most researchers have disregarded the intercultural context of the emergence of nationalist phenomena.

This context, however, can be very important, especially in cases like the Latvian one. The national movement was born here in a distinctly multi-ethnic setting, opposing itself to and borrowing cultural resources from other ethnic groups. Latvian nationalism of the 1850s and 1860s cannot be fully understood without a proper analysis of the Young Latvians’ interaction with other national cultures in the Baltic Provinces – first of all, with Baltic German culture.

In recent years, a few studies have appeared that devote more attention to the mutual interaction and enrichment of different cultures. von Hirschhausen's monograph on intercultural relations in Riga (2006) is important here; the Latvian national movement, however, plays only a secondary role in it. Zaķe (2007, 2008) has presented the early Latvian nationalism as a doctrine of cultural egalitarianism in a multi-cultural context, however, without analyzing in depth the relation of Latvian nationalists to German and Russian cultural inventories. This study will use postcolonial theory to clarify the intercultural context of the birth of Latvian nationalism. In recent years, the postcolonialist perspective has been applied to the Baltic states (Kelertas 2006; Annus 2012). However, it has been done mainly in the post-Soviet context, without seriously considering earlier the colonial experiences.

Nevertheless, when dealing with the birth of Estonian and Latvian nationalisms, colonialist dimension can be highly relevant. Certainly, the colonialism of Baltic Germans, who represented the political class in the Baltics for centuries, cannot be fully identified with that of the modern, for example, British or French, empires. However, in the nineteenth century the Baltic Germans referred to themselves as "colonizers" (e.g. Eckardt 1869; Seraphim 1912), emphasized their own cultural and civilizatory missions in the region, and, at the same time, engaged in maintaining the difference between themselves and ethnically different subordinate populations. Emergent local nationalisms to a large extent defined themselves in opposition to this colonial group. However, like most post-colonial nationalisms, they also extensively borrowed from the dominant German culture. The aggressive opposition to Latvian nationalism from the Baltic German elites cannot be treated only as their struggle for economic and political privileges, as was usually done in the previous research. This was also an expression of their own cultural self-understanding of colonial superiority. Young Latvians, who, living in a German-dominated cultural environment, were introduced to the basics of German romantic nationalism, at the same time were not willing to accept their inferior role. Therefore, they started to develop their own anti-German nationalism, which, on the one hand, often imitated German models, but on the other – challenged the supposed universalism of German culture. These attempts to build a German-type high culture on the basis of an "inferior", colonized culture provoked loud complaints about hybridity and harmfulness, voiced by Baltic Germans, who increasingly asserted their colonizer identity and cultural superiority. This aversion of the Baltic German elite made Young Latvians natural allies of another group of anti-German nationalists in the Tsarist Empire, namely, Russian Slavophiles. Since their program was also based on resistance to German colonialist claims, Young Latvians saw in Slavophilism a real political alternative to the almost total hegemony of Germans in the Baltic provinces. Unlike Slavophiles, most Young Latvians were by no means anti-Western. Nevertheless, this alliance made Baltic German conservatives see Latvian nationalists just as they saw Russians – as uncultured barbarians prone to revolutionary subversion.

This intercultural dimension of interaction between the colonizers and colonized must be taken into account if we want to understand the further development of Latvian nationalism, especially regarding the question suggested by Thaden: Was a long-term cooperation between Latvians and Baltic Germans possible (1981, 6)? A useful toolkit for analyzing this situation is provided by postcolonial theory, in particular by Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and hybridity. According to Bhabha, a colonial subject is involved in a dialectic relationship with colonial culture. On the one hand, it must be integrated into the existing, supposedly universal and progressive culture of the colonizer. That is, the mimetic, imitating activities of the colonized must be encouraged, integrating

them into the colonial culture. On the other hand, the difference and radical inequality between the colonized and colonizers must also be sustained by demonstrating the inherent “otherness” of the colonized. Bhabha writes:

... colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*, in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. (1992, 86)

Bhabha can be important in the Latvian case because he shows that mimicry, in fact, is not just mimesis or imitation, but, at the same time, a form of resistance. For the colonizer, “mimicry is at once resemblance and menace” (1992, 86). It is menacing, since, being “almost the same, but not quite”, it challenges the authority of the colonial discourse. The reformed, that is, partly assimilated colonial subject, poses a threat to the existing power relations by developing a new, emancipatory identity – in this case, the Latvian identity.

In order to demonstrate this, I will turn to the writings of the early Young Latvian (*Jaunlatvieši*) movement and the reactions to them in the Baltic German public opinion. By Young Latvians I mean here the first generation of the Latvian nationalist intelligentsia, who in the period from 1856 to 1865 started to separate themselves from the patronage of Baltic German nobility and clergy.<sup>1</sup> Although the emergence of national consciousness among Latvians can be traced back to an earlier period, the writings of Juris Alunāns (1832–1864), Krišjānis Valdemārs (1825–1891), Krišjānis Barons (1835–1923), and Kaspars Biezbārdis (1806–1886) represent its first clearly formulated public expression. Special attention will be devoted to the seminal newspaper *Pēterburgas Avīzes* (*St. Petersburg Review*, 1862–1865). This polemical weekly, widely regarded as the first beacon of the Latvian nation, set the tone for later relations between the emergent Latvian national movement and the dominant Baltic German minority. These relations, in turn, to a large extent defined the nature of Latvian nationalism well into the twentieth century. In the final chapters I will discuss also the role of Russian Slavophilism in these processes and the so-called Russophilism of early Latvian nationalists.

### **The context: Baltic autonomy, pastors, and patriarchalism**

Before approaching the Young Latvian – Baltic German debates of the 1850s and 1860s, one has to shortly describe the historical and intellectual background. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Baltic provinces, Livland, Estland, and Kurland, represented a very special social and political order, the so-called *Landesstaat*. Being parts of the Russian empire, these provinces were in fact ruled by the local German-speaking nobilities, claiming historical rights to these territories dating back to the thirteenth century. Political, administrative, and judiciary powers of the three provinces were vested in the *Landtāge*. These were local nobility diets, highly exclusive and representing only large landowners with titles of nobility, who belonged to the local nobility associations or *Ritterschaften* (“Knighthoods”). Cities, also ruled by predominantly German patricians, enjoyed only limited influence on provincial politics. Politically, Baltic German elites were guided by two distinct principles that, until the 1850s, did not contradict each other. First, they had an unwavering loyalty to the house of Russian Tsars, to which Baltic Germans traditionally supplied well-educated administrative and military personnel. From the Northern War up until the reign of Alexander II (1854–1882), Russian monarchs regarded as their obligation to preserve the historical privileges of Baltic German nobility in exchange for their loyalty and services for the empire. Second, they had a

deeply felt attachment to the Baltic provinces, to their centuries-old tradition of autonomy, as well as to their specific way of life (Eckardt 1869).

The fact that Baltic German nobles ruled over ethnically different peasants making up around nine-tenths of the total population of the provinces hardly played any role in provincial politics up until the end of the Napoleonic wars. After the abolition of serfdom (1815 in Estland, 1816 in Kurland, 1819 in Livland) Latvian and Estonian peasants gained personal liberty and, albeit limited, freedom of movement. The land, however, remained in the hands of German nobility and had to be rented, mainly for labor rents. At this point of time, the relationship of the German landlords toward Latvian and Estonian peasants had already been questioned on humanitarian grounds by several publicists of the German enlightenment, most notably by Merkel (1797). They castigated the agrarian conditions and common heartlessness of landlords toward their virtually enslaved Latvian peasantry. Now, when the peasants had acquired personal freedom but no land, the ethnic dimension started to play a role. Questions were asked about the future of the peasantry: whether Latvians have to be assimilated, what is the future of the Latvian language, and how the peasant education system has to be organized (“Sieben Vorträge” 1905).

Baltic nobles themselves dealt very little with these questions. Spiritual and cultural care for the peasantry was mainly delegated to Lutheran pastors, who, mainly German by origin and personally dependent on their noble landlords, dealt with the peasant issues *ex officio*. The Lutheran clergy was the main organizer of the peasant school system, as well as of two higher teachers’ seminaries (in Wolmar/Walk and Irlau). These institutions gave peasant children an opportunity to get at least a rudimentary education in their native language. Pastors also created literary societies for research on Latvian language and folklore. These were the Kurland Society for Literature and Arts (1815) and, most notably, the Latvian Literary Society (1824), which later, under the name “Friends of Latvians” (*Lettenfreunde*), became the main German-supported center of Latvian culture (Ārons 1929; von Hehn 1938).

The political outlook of these German enthusiasts of Latvian culture was undoubtedly conservative. They all supported the society of orders and the distinguished role of nobility. This role also implied responsibility toward lower orders and care for society as an organic whole (see Walter 1891, 1–18). The democratic principles of the Western European revolutions of 1789 and 1848 were explicitly denied. The same also applied to the principles of economic liberalism and peasant property of land, which supposedly endangered the organic wholeness of the society. The main virtues needed by a peasant were piety, respect for authority, modesty, and diligence, and, if necessary, they could also be instilled by coercive means. At the same time, Lutheran pastors were also affected by Herderian conceptions of nationality.<sup>2</sup> This led them to emphasize the uniqueness of each cultural nationality. The enlightenment ideals of *Bildung* and progress were also supported, at the same time stressing the child-like and immature nature of the Latvian peasant *Volk*. For now, infantile Latvian peasants must be guided and protected by their “organically” superior German patrons, in order to let them achieve full humanity sometime in the distant future.

Baltic German pastors had a specific, ambiguous position toward Latvians, which, emphasizing their quasi-natural inferiority, at the same time had an expressed interest in preserving Latvian language and promoting the education of peasants in that language. This education was by no means considered a tool for the collective social mobility of Latvians, which would make them equal with Germans. The social mobility option was reserved only to a distinguished few of exceptional talent, who could enter a higher

social order. A good peasant education, on the contrary, must make a peasant's life more pious, prosperous, and happy, thus keeping him at his social position.

Nevertheless, there was no consensus about whether such education should include knowledge of the "superior" German language, which might eventually lead to assimilation. The majority of the pastors denied assimilation, because it might lead not only to the extinction of a valuable language, but also to an emergence of a class of socially uprooted, hybridized individuals, who have lost their social position. Conservative nobility also opposed all assimilation proposals, since it might erase social distinctions and invoke unfounded expectations among peasantry. So in 1844, Baron Nolcken, a leading Livland conservative, accused the teachers' seminary of the following: "instead of apples, they are cultivating peaches" (Thimme 1939, 48). However, when the first Russification attempts began in the 1840s, the idea of preventive Germanization slowly acquired more supporters. These proposals, however, were never put into practice. When the Baltic German elite started to apprehend the full extent of the danger to their colonial hegemony, it was already too late. In the 1860s, emergent Latvian nationalism had joined hands with anti-German forces in Russia to combat this hegemony.

### **The Russian reform era and emerging Latvian intelligentsia**

The liberal reforms of Alexander II, which opened to Russian citizens new opportunities for public activism, also contributed to the emergence of a new type of Latvian intelligentsia. Unlike the earlier, pro-German intellectuals, the Young Latvians wanted to extricate themselves from the Baltic German tutelage. An important turning point was the year 1856, when the newspaper *Mājas Viesis* (Home Visitor) appeared. This was the first Latvian-language newspaper edited by a native Latvian, Ansis Leitāns (earlier Latvian-language periodicals were edited by German pastors). That same year, Juris Alunāns published his *Little Songs*, a collection of poems, both translated and original, with the aim to demonstrate the beauty and maturity of the Latvian language.

Earlier historiography has often understated the extent to which education and cultural achievement in the Baltic provinces during most of the nineteenth century has been associated with Germanism. A writer and one of the later Latvian activists, Matīss Kaudzīte, states in his memoirs that, at the middle of the century, being Latvian and being a peasant was still to a large extent synonymous. Even as late as the 1870s, "no house or family of educated Latvians existed which, being German-educated and knowing the German language, at the same time would speak Latvian at home" (Kaudzīte 1994, 242). Also, the ever-increasing amount of educated Latvians, who with improving agrarian conditions started to enter professions, prepared themselves to be assimilated in German culture. The same also applies to Young Latvians. Typically, they had to depend on wealthy German patrons for their education. They participated in the Baltic German public sphere, like Valdemārs, who wrote for the Dorpat German newspaper *Das Inland* in his youth (1857), or Alunāns, who was excited about the folkloristic and linguistic achievements of the "Friends of Latvians" (Goba 1929a, 36). Most of them had German wives and often corresponded with each other in the German language (Alunāns 1937; Valdemārs 1997). In other words, German language and culture functioned as the colonial normality. Being educated, early Latvian nationalists were deeply integrated into it and used its resources, also when turning against the colonial hegemony.

Baltic German writers, who thought of themselves as defenders of universal values of humanism and progress against the provincial and selfish local nationalisms, liked to emphasize the "openness" of their culture: by immersing oneself into the German

culture, anyone can become “one of us” (Brasche 1861, 460; cf. von Tobien 1930, 141). In fact, this openness was limited, and Germanized Latvians were seldom treated as equals by German “good society”. Politically influential Baltic German conservatives openly declared their dislike of “hybridized” Latvian parvenus (Thimme 1939, 59), and in practice there were strict limits on their upward mobility. The most telling testimony is provided by the fact that, during 1860–1900, the majority of ethnic Latvian university graduates had to seek employment outside the Baltic provinces (Raun 1986, 77).

However, the explicitly German nature of Baltic culture and education was not emphasized until the 1850s, when the repertoire of German romantic nationalism became increasingly popular in the provinces – possibly as a reaction to early attempts of Russification (Bielenstein 1904, 403). In particular, Dorpat University and its student fraternities (*Landsmannschaften* or *Burschenschaften*) have played a distinguished role in disseminating German romanticist ideas and practices. Praising love of the fatherland, the beauty of nature, and heroic patriotism, German nationalism was attractive not just to Germans, but also to many educated and half-educated Latvians, who wanted to identify themselves with the German culture. Kaudzīte (1994, 127) recalls a gathering of the Vietalva Latvian singing society in 1872, where the choir sang the old German nationalist song *Die Wacht am Rhein* to the great excitement of the audience, although the Rhine could hardly serve as a symbol of Latvian nationalism.

However, in the late 1850s another group of Dorpat students appeared who, instead of joining the patriotic movement of German *Landsmannschaften*, started to emphasize a separate Latvian identity and denied its identification with peasantry. This group, originating from the informal “Latvian evenings” in Dorpat, included Valdemārs, Alunāns, Barons, and others, who later became the first Young Latvians and founded *Pēterburgas Avīzes*. Although reliable information about the “Latvian evenings” is scarce (Goba 1929a; Becker 1934; Barons 1985, 24), it is quite probable that the idea to promote a separate, anti-German Latvian nationalism was first born in the context of the Dorpat *Burschenschaften*. Growing German nationalism seems to have provoked an opposition from non-German student associations, for example, Polish and Russian fraternities. Latvians, who initially belonged to Baltic German fraternities (e.g. Valdemārs was a member of *Curonia*), may have switched sides and joined the anti-German opposition. The famous episode about Valdemārs, who demonstratively put a card with his nationality marked as “Latvian” on the door of his student room in Dorpat (Barons 1985, 24), seems to support this hypothesis. It was a usual practice among students to put one’s fraternity affiliation on the door, and Valdemārs, by emphasizing his ethnic identity, may have instead challenged the colonial hegemony of Germanism, promoted by German *Burschenschaften*.

### ***Junglettentum* and mimicry**

For a long time, the identification of Latvian ethnicity with peasantry, typical for the colonial thinking of Baltic Germans, remained influential also among Young Latvians. In the 1850s and 1860s, the emancipation of Latvians often meant the improvement of peasant conditions. This included the transition of labor rents to money rents, legal fixation of rental rates, the selling of peasant land in private property for affordable prices, and the abolition of corporal punishment rights by the landlord. A number of Young Latvians, Valdemārs among them, understood the emancipation of Latvians primarily as an economic enterprise, which, first improving the conditions and education of peasants, in the future should lead to an improvement in their collective position *vis-à-vis* the Baltic Germans. This was the idea behind the Young Latvian critiques of agrarian conditions, written in



German, following the spirit of Merkel and intended for an international audience (Spāģis 1860; Valdemārs 1862).

However, in the context of postcolonial nationalism, more interesting are contributions that dealt with the cultural dimension of emancipation. Therefore, one must turn to the debates between Young Latvians and Baltic Germans concerning Latvian culture, its future and relation to the colonial normality of Germandom. In 1856, Alunāns published his collection of both original and translated poems, *Little Songs (Dziesmiņas)*, whose declared aim was “to show how forceful and nice the Latvian language is, [...] to clean the Latvian language from all alien trash as much as possible” ([1856] 1981, 7). This edition can be regarded as the starting point of a lengthy discussion, which eventually led to an irreconcilable opposition between the colonial hegemony and emergent postcolonial nationalism. In the course of this discussion, Latvian ethnic identity was for the first time seen from the perspective of a modern nation, comparable to German, French, and other European nations.

The book provoked an immediate response in the form of a review from a Baltic German pastor and a prominent “friend of Latvians”, Georg Brasche. His reaction to Alunāns’s book was seminal for later Baltic German attitudes. First, he greeted Alunāns as “one of us”, of the educated, German-speaking people who wanted to work for the benefit of Latvian peasants. Further, however, comes his critique:

For whom writes Mr. Allunan? Not for Latvians, of course. For them these beauties of poetry and language are not yet accessible; moreover, the attached philological remarks are of no use for them. [...] But, if Mr. Allunan wrote for the Germans, why are the introduction and commentaries not written in the German language? (*Inland*, 10 September 1856, 603)

Those trying to write serious poetry for Latvians are simply misguided, since there is no qualified audience for such a product. However, soon afterward comes a clear attitude toward colonial mimicry. It deals with Alunāns’s translation of Heine’s poem “Lorelei”:

However, if there are people for whom something like Young Latvia as “the loveliest maiden is sitting up there”, we would like to warn them cordially from this Lorelei. (*Inland*, 10 September 1856, 603)

This episode in Brasche’s text, from which the term “Young Latvians” originates, is telling in several aspects. First, Brasche uses the well-known theme of German culture to ironically dismiss those who want to mimic Germandom. Heine’s dangerously attractive and, at the same time, inaccessible mermaid Lorelei serves as a metaphor for dangerous aspirations of “inferior” national cultures to equal the German culture. Secondly, by invoking the “Young Latvia” (*Junges Lettland*), it indirectly hints at the “Young Germany” (*Junges Deutschland*), the group of young liberal nationalists around Heine in the 1830s. This, however, suggests a fundamental comparability of both German and Latvian national movements. According to Bhabha, exactly this ambivalence between inclusion and exclusion is characteristic for colonial discourses.

In 1856, the same group of Dorpat Latvian students, Valdemārs, Alunāns, and Barons, started to contribute to the newspaper *Mājas Viesis*. For them, the newspaper opened up regular access to Latvian public opinion. Generally, *Mājas Viesis* was not an oppositional newspaper in a strict sense. Edited by Ansis Leitāns, a Latvian sentimental writer, it tried to follow the official line of piety, patriarchalism, and “love of the fatherland” without political and ethnic distinctions. However, when Alunāns, Valdemārs, and Barons started to contribute to it, *Mājas Viesis* acquired more polemical edge. One can agree with Šillers that their publications can be compared with those of the French enlighteners of the eighteenth century (1928, 4). They were marked by expressed rationalism and secularism,

excitement about social and industrial progress, and popularization of scientific knowledge about all spheres of life, from astronomy to ethnography and economic theory. Most prominently, they emphasized Latvian nationality as not being inferior to all civilized European nations. Being university students, Young Latvians saw public activism in the Latvian language as a productive field for intellectual and lexicologic experiments. Until 1861, when *Mājas Viesis* was forced to adopt a more conservative line, it provided them with such opportunities.

Being “not worse than” was the main leitmotif in the publications of Young Latvians. In *Mājas Viesis*, the first attempts were made to provide the Latvian nation with the standard equipment of modern nationalism, whereby German examples mainly served as models. National histories of the pre-Christian period were written (*Mājas Viesis*, 31 December 1856). Lexicologic articles challenged the Baltic German monopoly on research of the Latvian language. Also, scientific and pseudo-scientific accounts about the ancient Latvian religion and its “pantheon” were to be found in *Mājas Viesis*. In the beginning, the Baltic German public opinion did not devote much attention to these developments. Only a few Lutheran pastors paid notice to them; the majority of the Baltic German elite regarded this embryonic nation-building as a curiosity, which still can be integrated into the universal, humanist colonial culture. Indeed, some educated Baltic Germans hailed the writings of Valdemārs, Barons, and Alunāns in *Mājas Viesis*. They saw in them a continuation of their own efforts to promote the “people’s education” and scientific interest into Latvianness (cf. von Hagemester 1859).

However, with the growing resonance of Young Latvians’ writings in *Mājas Viesis*, discussions of hybridity, futility, and the dangerousness of their efforts grew louder. In trying to mimic the German national culture in the Latvian language, Young Latvians are supposedly losing their Latvianness, isolating themselves both from the German culture of the educated and from the peasant culture of their Latvian forefathers. For an educated person, to refuse to assimilate oneself to the “normal” colonial culture is *hubris*. Young Latvians are “not anymore what they wanted to be, and are what they did not want to be” (Brasche 1861, 461). Moreover, if this *hubris* becomes more widespread among the Latvians, it might lead to futile expectations and social unrest. By promoting a separate national identity, Young Latvians are pushing their brothers into sinful ungratefulness toward those who have cared for their education and well-being, that is, the Germans. To quote Brasche again:

.. can we wonder that in many of these youngsters of our people, or, to be more exact, of our Latvian peasant order, the *burgeons of impatience*, the *folly* was born, that they conquer something that was previously *denied* and *begrudged* to them by those who initially held the people’s destiny in their hands and guarded it from them? [...] It [*Mājas Viesis*] presents itself, together with booklets written by Latvians, as the representative of the *real, practical*, and *free* orientation of the people’s education to oppose the other side, which ostensibly represents only the *nominal*, the *clerical* orientation, forgetting that the newspaper itself is placed on a completely different level of education, which can never be achieved by the people. (1861, 460–463)

### A newspaper for adults: *Pēterburgas Avīzes*

Until 1862, the Latvian question played only a limited role in the German-dominated Baltic public sphere. Although sporadic voices about the shamelessness and hybridity of Young Latvians were heard, the traditional patriarchalism and benevolent ignorance were still prevalent among the Baltic German elites. The situation changed when in July 1862 a new Latvian-language weekly appeared. Due to more liberal censorship, it

was published not in the Baltics, but in St. Petersburg, the metropolis, and was called *Pēterburgas Avīzes*. The core of its editorial staff was formed by the same group of Young Latvians, former Dorpat students: Valdemārs, who in the meantime had become a government official and a rather well-known person in Russian liberal circles; Barons, now a student at St. Petersburg University, and Alunāns, a student at the St. Petersburg Forest Academy (he soon fell ill and died prematurely in 1864). *Pēterburgas Avīzes* was the first Latvian newspaper that consciously distanced itself from the patronage of Baltic Germans. It supported the secularist and reformist line in Russian imperial politics, linking the Latvian question with the broader agenda of social emancipation in Russia. The program of the newspaper stated that it “is not going to let national quarrels to appear, and, animated by the spirit of peaceful unity, will be trying to promote the humane orientation of our times” (*Rigasche Zeitung*, 14 August 1862a).

Unlike earlier Latvian-language newspapers, the clerical *Latviešu Avīzes* and, to lesser extent, *Mājas Viesis*, *Pēterburgas Avīzes* treated their readers as adults, and not as infantilized “dear peasants” who have to receive some primitive information. This was probably the reason for newspaper’s popularity (Zelče 2009, 425–435). It described scientific discoveries and technological improvements; it praised secular education and urged Latvians to acquire it for their own practical benefit and general intelligence. An article “What a peasant has to know” states:

Now, when a peasant has truly turned into a human being, the first aim of the education is to educate him as a human being, as a rational being, which is able to use all his corporal and spiritual faculties. And this is the first aim of the education for all orders. Everyone is firstly a human being, and only secondly an artisan, a high or low ruler, like a judge, a landlord, etc. That is why the first aim of the education for all orders is to give them what they need as humans, and only the second aim – to give what is useful for their professions and orders. (*Pēterburgas Avīzes*, 7 August 1862)

*Pēterburgas Avīzes* was distinctly loyal to the tsar Alexander II and optimistic about his reforms. Albeit not always openly, it demanded their extension also to the Baltic provinces – particularly concerning land distribution and the justice system. However, it is misguided to think that the indignation caused by the newspaper among Baltic Germans was due only to its political program. This program, as expressed in the newspaper, was embryonic, and the national opposition between Latvians and Germans was hardly even mentioned in the newspaper. It was the very form of the newspaper that upset the Baltic elite: *Pēterburgas Avīzes* was not a “people’s paper”, or *Volksblatt*, anymore. It was a Latvian-language modern newspaper, and discussed modern problems, just like German newspapers. As such, it was an instance of mimicry, so familiar and, at the same time, so upsetting for the colonial elite.

An interesting illustration is provided by the satiric supplement of *Pēterburgas Avīzes* called *Dzirkstele* (“Spark”), later known as *Zobugals* (“Scoffer”). The supplement published ironic dialogues, short stories, parodies, and caricatures. Most of them dealt with the opposition “modern – traditional”, ridiculed conservative peasants and Latvians denying their ethnic identity. It also made fun of backward traditionalists (implicitly – Baltic German nobles). Probably the most well-known character of sketches was Bizmanis (literally – the man with a braid), an extremely reactionary landlord. Bizmanis wears a braid, a symbol of medieval backwardness, saying in one of the sketches:

Everything that moves, perishes. Eternal is only what is rigid. A tree grows, an animal moves forward – what do they get for it? Only a rapid death. The cliffs, on the contrary, stand as frozen from the beginning of the world, and will stand until its end. I beg you, dear people: think well and stick with the old. Why do you need to employ your intellect, your reason?

Let me rule over you, and you will live so softly and peacefully as in the ear of a mouse.  
(*Pēterburgas Avīzes*, 14 July 1862)

Like many activities of the Young Latvians, *Zobugals* also had a role model in contemporary German culture. This was the Berlin satirical weekly *Kladderadatsch* (1848–1944), then already famous far beyond Prussia. *Kladderadatsch* followed a democratic political line, made fun of the European elite politics, and amused its readers with sketches, parodies, and poems. Because of freer censorship in Prussia, *Kladderadatsch* was much more openly political than *Zobugals*; it also had more visual material, that is, caricatures. *Zobugals* not only took over the visual organization of the newspaper and many of its genres, like regular satyric dialogues between Brencis and Žvingulis (in *Kladderadatsch* – Schultze and Müller), or pamphlets in local dialects. It also adopted the democratic, anti-elitist tone of the Berlin newspaper. The braid as a symbol of reactionary backwardness is also present in both newspapers. Hence it is not surprising that the “Latvian *Kladderadatsch*,” as some Baltic Germans contemptuously called it, caused a widespread protest among them.

### Baltic German liberals and political satire

The debate between Young Latvian and Baltic German publicists caused by *Pēterburgas Avīzes* is regarded as one of the turning points in the development of Latvian nationalism. Hence it is surprising that the previous research on *Pēterburgas Avīzes* has devoted so little attention to the details of this discussion. This especially regards arguments directed against *Pēterburgas Avīzes*: how did the Baltic German elite see the emergent Latvian nationalism, and why was their attitude so uncompromisingly negative? After all, most of this elite traditionally regarded themselves as educators and protectors of the Latvian people, and its first modern newspaper might have deserved a more balanced attitude.

The answer usually given to this question says that the Baltic German elite felt their privileges endangered by the upcoming Latvian movement, and therefore wanted to suppress it by all means (Švābe 1958, 393). This, however, is only partially true. In the early 1860s, the Baltic German public sphere was no longer dominated by aristocratic traditionalists and Lutheran pastors. A new liberal group of *literati* had appeared, which, forming an opposition to the conservative *Ritterschaften*, lobbied for liberal reforms. These reforms included selling the land of big manors to peasants in private property (Bulmerincq 1860), as well as broadening suffrage in the election of *Landtäge* (see Wittram 1931). Some of these liberals even proposed to adopt in the Baltic provinces something like the multi-lingual political nationalism of the Swiss type (Berkholz 1864). In this model, German would be still used as an elite language, at the same time providing all citizens with equal opportunities of social mobility, independently of their birth and mother tongue. The main organ of this group was the liberal journal *Baltische Monatsschrift*; among its most prominent members were the influential publicists Georg Berkholz (1817–1886) and Julius Eckardt (1836–1908).

Nevertheless, precisely Eckardt who later emigrated to Germany and became the leading Baltic German voice against the Russification of the provinces, was the most influential critic of *Pēterburgas Avīzes*. His accusations against Young Latvians for their supposedly disruptive nationalism later started to dominate the German Baltic public sphere. Actually, Eckardt’s argument against *Pēterburgas Avīzes* suggests that he was upset by the mimic element in the publications. What made him argue that Young Latvians were “fanatical nationalists” was not the explicit content of their writings, where the national question didn’t play the central role. Rather, it was the tendency of the Young Latvians to imitate

German models, at the same time self-consciously retaining an ineradicably Latvian element. The development of Latvian language and culture was perceived as harmless, until it started to mimic German models and to produce hybridious expressions. When that happened, Eckardt as a representative of the colonial culture emphatically rejected the legitimacy of autonomous Latvian culture.

Eckardt's accusations, later often repeated in complaints to the tsarist authorities about *Pēterburgas Avīzes*, are as follows. In one of the first issues of the newspaper, one of its regular contributors, Kaspars Biezbārdis, published a popular article on a philosophical topic, "What a Soul can Apprehend" (*Pēterburgas Avīzes*, 28 June 1862b). The article did not have any political content and described in the Latvian language the basic ideas of German idealist philosophy, in particular Kant's and Hegel's. Biezbārdis also discussed the possibilities of developing a philosophical terminology in the Latvian language. This article attracted Eckardt's attention, and he reacted in *Rigasche Zeitung*:

In our opinion, the richness of the Latvian language can be demonstrated by a hundred other means than philosophical fragments, from which wrong conclusions are drawn. Therefore we insist that Kant and Hegel are relevant neither for a Latvian, nor for any other *people's paper* (*Volksblatt*), and when the Latvian people are led to disdain German education by means of misunderstood philosophemas, it doesn't show a programmatic drive to promote the humanistic education of modernity. (*Rigasche Zeitung*, 28 August 1862b)

What he is speaking here is the challenged identity of the colonialist culture, as a Latvian newspaper tries to discuss German philosophy. To mimic its intellectual achievements in the peasant language means, for Eckardt, to provoke a national discord between Latvians and Germans.

However, the most aggressive reaction turned against *Zobugals*. In fact, the satiric supplement was separately closed down by the tsarist censorship in early 1864, due to incessant complaints from the Baltic German elite. A pastor and leading Baltic intellectual, Rudolf Schultz, confessed that *Pēterburgas Avīzes* in general would not have deserved such repressions, if there had not been *Zobugals* (Ārons 1929, 197).

The jokes in the satiric supplement were not ethnic in their nature. *Zobugals*, just like *Kladderadatsch*, made fun of the upper-class politics and elite institutions, promoting a democratic sentiment among the population. For example, when in Riga the German "good society" formed an animal protection society, *Zobugals* commented:

The animal protection society now has pity for dogs, horses, and bulls. If a dog, whose master has forgotten to feed him, now will have a passport, it may go to the society's president to complain about it. I anticipate that crowds of dogs and bulls will come, howling and bellowing, and they will tell their complaints and get their justice. Isn't this a golden age? Aren't there merciful hearts *towards dogs*? (We are not talking about humans here). (*Pēterburgas Avīzes*, 14 July 1862)

Eckardt regarded this pamphlet as proof of the morally degrading and nationalist character of the paper:

In our opinion, a Latvian *Kladderadatsch* is premature. Taking into account the low educational level of the Latvian people, no such premises for a humorously ironical worldview are present, that would not be harmful. . . . A people's spirit in the first stages of its development has a very sensitive and subtle, a child-like nature, and therefore demands a subtle, cautious attitude. Seeds that would be harmless for a mature organism, grow here into most dangerous weeds. Seeds sown by *Pēterburgas Avīzes* are little useful to produce fruits of peaceful unification and of a really humane education. (*Rigasche Zeitung*, 14 August 1862a)

The debate on *Pēterburgas Avīzes* shows the causes of the split between Young Latvians and liberal Baltic Germans. Eckardt and others regarded Young Latvians as subversive

nationalists neither because they wanted to develop Latvian language, nor because they directly threatened the status of traditional elite. What worried them was their ambition to create a modern culture of their own, largely based on the imitation of German models. This ambition led to mimicry and created hybrid forms of culture, upsetting for the colonial elite. Aggressive denial from the Baltic Germans, however, led to further separation of the two cultures, and Latvian nationalists increasingly consolidated themselves around the anti-German identity.

### The third force: Slavophilism

The further development of Latvian postcolonial nationalism in the 1860s cannot be understood without taking into account the third factor: Russian Slavophilism and its attitude toward the Baltic provinces. Although politically the provinces were a part of the Russian empire from the eighteenth century, Russian language and culture played a rather marginal role here.<sup>3</sup> The status of the Baltic provinces played only a marginal role in Russian public debates until the 1850s. At this time, broader Russian circles became interested in this part of the empire, and it coincided with the birth of Latvian nationalism. Russian Slavophilism appeared as an important external factor, and as such, it left an imprint on the further development of the Latvian national movement. The foundation of the later “Russophilism” of Latvian nationalists (Lazda 1985) was laid precisely in the period of *Pēterburgas Avīzes*.

Despite the considerable political weight of the Baltic German nobility in St. Petersburg government circles, the autonomous status of the Baltic provinces had been occasionally criticized in Russia at least from the 1840s. The most prominent example here is Iurii Samarin, a Russian noble and later a prominent Slavophile, who, after spending a year in Riga as a government official, wrote his “Letters from Riga”, which were extremely critical about the German rule there (Nolde 1926; Pipes 2011). The Russian democratic press, like Alexander Herzen’s *Kolokol* and Nikolai Nekrasov’s *Sovremennik*, also criticized the medieval conditions of the provinces (Isakov 1961). After Alexander II came to power in 1855, autonomy increasingly attracted the criticism of Russian Slavophiles. The first generation of the Slavophiles, Aleksei Khomiakov and Ivan Kireevsky, had already in the 1840s developed their teaching about Russian exceptionalism. In the late 1850s, Slavophilism acquired a considerable amount of supporters. Some of them were very high-standing, like the Grand Prince Konstantin Nikolaevich, the younger brother of the tsar, and Minister of Defence Dmitrii Miljutin. In the 1860s, Slavophiles also acquired influence on the Russian public opinion due to gifted publicists, like Ivan Aksakov, and publishers, such as Mikhail Katkov. What Slavophiles wanted instead of Baltic autonomy was a centralized, absolutist monarchy, based on Russian nationality, the orthodox faith, and broad peasant masses, rather than on aristocratic privileges. As for Slavophile ideology, it was marked by what Greenfeld aptly calls *ressentiment* (1992, 222–234), a desperate awareness of Russia’s own backwardness, and, at the same time, attempts ideologically to turn this inferiority into a virtue. Hence the Slavophiles emphasized Russia’s non-Western way of development, based on the spiritual and communal values of the ancient Rus’, rather than on Western “egoistic” materialism. Slavophilism can hardly be treated in the framework of postcolonial nationalism, since it more often presented itself in a colonial and expansive, rather than colonized and oppressed form. Nevertheless, its attitude towards the West has much in common with the postcolonial ambiguity: Like Young Latvians, Slavophiles, on the one hand,

admired Western models, while, on the other, they were emphatically opposed to the German cultural hegemony in their own country.

The Slavophile position gained a new power after the Polish uprising of 1863. Events in Poland demonstrated the danger inherent in all borderland autonomies and their self-ruling nobilities, like the Polish *szlachta*. However, until around 1870 these critics of conditions in the Baltic provinces got very little support from the tsars. The autocrats remained loyal to the Baltic nobility and to the treaties of 1710, whereby Peter the Great had undertaken the obligation to preserve the autonomy of the provinces. Baltic Germans, both liberal *literati* and conservative nobles, had to defend themselves against accusations of separatism, imposition of German culture, and mistreatment of the Baltic peasants. The famous discussion between Slavophiles and Baltic Germans has been extensively covered elsewhere (von Tobien 1899–1911; Isakov 1961; Dukhanov 1970). For the present purposes, however, it is important to consider the shifts in political thinking provoked by this discussion. Until these debates, Baltic Germans legitimized their dominating position by referring to the historical rights of the conquerors, as well as to their loyalty to the Russian emperors. This loyalty, in the perception of most Baltic Germans, was symmetrical and involved mutual obligations, whereby the provinces, that is, their nobilities, offered their allegiance and services to the tsar in exchange for the preservation of their autonomy. The loyalty was directed neither toward Russia as a nation-state nor to its people. As for domestic politics of the provinces, the medieval corporatism was still vivid among the Baltic Germans. Society was for them an organic and hierarchic whole, and the nobility as the “political order” has an obligation to preserve this organism. The most popular political thinkers among the Baltic Germans in the mid-1850s were the ultra-conservative defender of the Prussian *Junkertum* Friedrich Julius Stahl, and Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, a conservative ethnographer who defended the “organic” vision of society with the landed nobility on top (von Tobien 1899–1911, vol. 2, 141; Seraphim 1912, 302).

The situation changed when attacks against Baltic Germanism began in the Russian public sphere. In the atmosphere of liberalism and modernization, provoked by the reforms of Alexander II, it was not sufficient anymore to refer to historical rights. In order to fend off the accusations of Slavophiles, Baltic German publicists increasingly used the argument about the cultural mission of the Germans in the provinces – very much in vein with the Western, for example, British imperialism. This argument was often expressed in the distinction between race (*Rasse*) and culture (*Kultur*), whereby Germans defended culture and individual achievement against the Russo-Asiatic collectivism of race. The autonomy and noble privileges were no longer justified by historical conquest, feudal “ownership”, or treaties with the monarch, but by the civilizatory mission of the German colonists. This mission, which brought Christendom, enlightenment, and culture to this region, began in the thirteenth century and must now be completed. As *Rigasche Zeitung* states in 1865 in response to the accusations of the Russian newspaper *Golos*:

It is not about the estate privileges; it is about the continuation of the cultural work which despite all its deficiencies has created a cultural base, and which is much more easy to destroy than to create anew ... If we are given an opportunity to help ourselves, if we are blessed with a self-government, if we are not ordered to throw out the baby with the cradle, so that along with the so-called privileges the inherited cultural goods are also eliminated – education, rights, freedom of religion, language, which are guaranteed by these privileges – then the question of privileges is redundant. (*Rigasche Zeitung*, 30 November 1865).

It is important to see that this “cultural” argument is implicitly anti-Russian. It presupposes the cultural inferiority of the rest of the Russian empire, since in order to preserve the

cultural achievements; the Baltic provinces must be kept isolated from it. Russian society is unruly, chaotic, and basically Asiatic. Also, Russian nationalism is only an expression of race and instinct, not of culture. The insistence on German national identity is actually an expression of a higher cultural mission. The “orientalizing” attitude towards Russia, present in many Baltic German writings of the period, was clearly perceived by the Slavophiles, who in compliance with their anti-Westernism, harshly reacted to these declarations of supremacy. To quote Aksakov:

Messrs. Kulturträgers or bearers of culture, bearers of education in this uneducated Russia, these governmental councilors and editors of German newspapers in the Baltic governorships, are screaming all together with a really classical temperament of the ancient Greeks and Romans against the offensive of the barbarians – Scythians to their blessed and peaceful Kur-, Liv-, and Estland, to this putative little corner of Germany, this incubator of a higher European culture, that manufactures intelligentsia, morality, and abilities for the dark, immoral, and unable Russia. (1887, 16)

The debate reached its culmination in 1868–1869, when the Slavophile Iurii Samarin published his extremely anti-Baltic German “Borderlands of Russia” (Samarin 1868), and Dorpat historian Carl Schirren responded with his “Livland Answer”. The latter clearly stated that “The race wars, in domestic politics, mean Russification; when built on the instincts of masses, it means chaos” (Schirren 1869, 110). After this publication, Schirren had to leave his professorship in Dorpat and emigrated to Germany. In 1870, Alexander II refused to accept from the Livland diet a memorandum about its rights. This meant that the fate of the Baltic autonomy was decided, and the tsar had sided with the Slavophiles.

### With allies like these

Latvians were objects rather than subjects of this debate. Both sides acted as their self-professed guardians: Slavophiles as defenders of the oppressed Baltic peasant nationalities; Baltic Germans as their cultural patrons. Nevertheless, this debate deeply influenced the development of Latvian nationalism. The Young Latvian movement initially pursued a rather broad emancipatory agenda, emphasizing the values of education and rationalism more than ethnic identity, which was only one of the points on the program of social improvement. During the 1860s, however, the movement acquired a distinctly anti-German bias and started to emphasize its ethnically distinct character. When even liberal Baltic Germans started to emphasize their colonial superiority during the debate with the Slavophiles, Young Latvians, who wanted to achieve a cultural equality with Germans, became increasingly alienated from the Germandom. Particularly when some Baltic Germans, in compliance with their self-professed cultural mission, started to call for the Germanization of Latvians and Estonians. The most famous example here is the 1864 Livland *Landtag* sermon by Walter, where he called for the Germanization of Latvians and Estonians, “belated because of the obscure reverence to these potsherds of national tribes, already vanishing from history” (1891, 93).

This attitude of colonial superiority made Young Latvians natural allies of the Russian Slavophiles. In their opposition to the Baltic German autonomies, prominent Slavophiles and people close to them started to defend Young Latvians against persecution by the local Baltic elite, both in the press and in the St. Petersburg government circles. Politically, Young Latvians sided with reform-minded Russians and Slavophiles rather early, when Valdemārs appeared in St. Petersburg in 1858 and attracted the attention of the Grand Duke Konstantin with his articles about seamanship (Ārons 1892, 20–21). The early political program of Young Latvians called for the extension of Russian legislation to the



Baltic provinces, especially concerning the agrarian legislation of 1861, the limitation of the use of the German language, and the extension of the use of Russian and local languages, that is, of Latvian and Estonian (Valdemārs 1939). This program largely corresponded to the political views of Slavophiles, who defended the centralization of the empire and demanded social absolutist monarchy, where the tsar would rule in alliance with the peasant masses and not with the nobility. Also, Young Latvians supported absolute monarchy and rejected constitutionalist order in Russia. Since a constitution in the present situation would legally recognize the political rights of the nobility, Young Latvians were anti-constitutionalists (Goba 1929a, 103; Alunāns 1937, 5). As for Latvian language and culture, it was quite natural for Young Latvians to support Slavophiles, who at least rhetorically favored the rights of Baltic nationalities to free cultural development under the Russian scepter. It was seen as a much better option than the patronage of Baltic Germans, who increasingly emphasized their cultural superiority and planned for Germanization.

Baltic German relations to Russia, which during the 1860s entered the defensive phase, also influenced their attitude toward Latvian nationalism. Some Young Latvians, like Kaspars Biezbārdis, openly spoke about the ancient proximity of Baltic and Slav tribes, in *Pēterburgas Avīzes* (*Pēterburgas Avīzes*, 26 June 1862a). Others, like Valdemārs, published critical articles about the Baltic conditions in the Slavophile press. This urged their opponents to call Young Latvians “Latvian Slavophiles” and to “orientalize” them. They, like their Russian counterparts, were seen as culturally inferior, collectivistic, inherently revolutionary, and violent – in other words, half-Asiatic, like Russians. One of the earliest representations of this image of Young Latvians can be found in the novel *Georg Stein, or Germans and Latvians*, by the Baltic German author Conradi (1864). Young Latvians are shown here as anti-cultural, murderous revolutionaries. This image of Latvian nationalism, reinforced by the 1905 revolution, dominated in the Baltic German community until the very end of its presence in the Baltics.

These cultural perceptions, first formulated in the 1850s and 1860s, had a long-lasting effect on the development of Latvian nationalism. First, opposition to the Baltic German colonial elite and alliance with the Slavophiles explains why Latvian nationalists, at least until early 1900s, did not demand anything like territorial autonomy. Moreover, they often called for emigration of Latvians from the Baltic provinces to inner Russia (*Mājas Viesis*, 11 May 1859; *Pēterburgas Avīzes*, 7 November 1863). In fact, real or imaginary separatism was one of the Slavophiles’ main accusations against the Baltic German autonomy. To defend an analogous Latvian autonomy would mean to lose the support of the Latvian-friendly Russian press. For Young Latvians, the struggle against the colonial power was more important than territorial autonomy. The proximity of Baltic and Slavic nations was emphasized to such an extent that prominent Latvian nationalists called for the replacement of the (inherently German) Gothic letters with the Cyrillic alphabet, and even demanded the Russification of the educational system (Lazda 1985). Second, developments in the early period of Latvian nationalism set the tone for later relations between Latvians and Baltic Germans. These relations were never simple until the very exodus of the Baltic German community in 1939 (Hiden and Housden 2008), especially when, after World War I, this community suddenly found itself in an independent, democratic Latvian nation-state. Latvian nationalists constantly oscillated between the appropriation of the Baltic German cultural legacy into their own nation-building, on one side, and aggressive, vengeful opposition, on the other. The foundations for this problematic relationship were laid in the specific, postcolonial context of the emergence of Latvian nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century. The political alliance between Young Latvians

and Slavophiles contributed to the fact that many Baltic Germans started to see Latvian nationalism as anti-cultural, barbarian, and revolutionary. Latvians, to quote the influential Baltic German historian Theodor Schiemann, were increasingly seen as a “disloyal, treacherous, and brutish race” (Hiden and Housden 2008, 71), in other words, as a people with whom no alliance is possible.

### **Conclusion: the need for intercultural perspective**

When explaining the birth of nineteenth century Latvian nationalism, one cannot be fully satisfied neither with the primordialist perspective of the national awakening nor with the modernization perspective of the struggle against privileges. No less important were the mutual perceptions of cultural communities: how did they see each other, and how did these images affect their self-understanding? The postcolonialist perspective can be relevant here. Relations with the dominant German culture were of great importance for the emerging Latvian nationalism, since this culture not only represented colonial domination in the provinces, but also provided the framework for opposition. This can best be described in the framework of postcolonial mimicry, when mimetic activities of the colonized subjects challenge the colonial normality. What Young Latvians achieved with their writings in *Mājas Viesis* and especially *Pēterburgas Avīzes* was an important challenge to the Baltic German cultural hegemony, provoked by the hybrid expressions of Latvian identity. They were disturbingly similar and, at the same time, different from the dominant culture. The aggressive Baltic German reactions to them provoked a further separation of both communities and the development of an anti-German Latvian nationalism.

This is not to say that cultural arguments are fully exhaustive in explaining the development of Latvian nationalism. However, there are questions that cannot be answered without taking into account cultural perceptions and self-perceptions of different ethnic groups, living together in the Baltic space. It concerns also the above-mentioned question: Was an alliance between liberal Baltic Germans and Young Latvians possible, which could eventually lead to an emergence of a multi-ethnic Baltic nation? When we try to answer this question by referring to the “objective” interests of social groups in the process of modernization, we would probably miss the crucial point that both communities saw each other in terms of postcolonial relations. Baltic Germans saw themselves as representing universal humanity and progress; Young Latvians contested this identity by developing their own culture, largely based on postcolonial mimicry. Latvians and Baltic Germans started to see the opposite group as one’s own cultural Other, especially when Young Latvians joined hands with Russian nationalists, perceived by most Baltic Germans as culturally inferior and half-Asiatic. This made further co-operation difficult and caused the dominant anti-German orientation of Latvian nationalism.

Perhaps a more general conclusion can also be made about the historiography of the Latvian national idea. The prevailing ethnocentric approach to Latvian nationalism has often ignored the intercultural context of its development, and other cultural groups appear here only as external adversaries that nationalists have to combat. It conceals the fact that the cultural context of emergent Latvian nationalism was more complex, and the presence of other ethnocultural groups in the Baltics influenced the movement and its ideology. Instead of concentrating exclusively upon the ethnocultural self-determination of Latvians, it is more fruitful to look at the genesis of the Latvian nation as a dialogical process with other cultural groups. Initially, it is the dialogue with the

colonial rulers, the Baltic Germans; in the last decades of the nineteenth century, however, the Russian factor starts to play a role.

This perspective would also allow for an explanation of the internal heterogeneity of the Latvian nationalism, which due to the concentration on a single, seemingly continuous national narrative is often disregarded by the previous research. This especially concerns the developments in the 1870s and 1880s, when, after the initial period of *Pēterburgas Avīzes*, different strains of nationalist thought emerged: the distinctly anti-German romantic nationalism of Auseklis and Andrejs Pumpurs; the pragmatic pro-Russian conservatism of Frīdrihs Veinbergs; the pro-German orientation of Jānis Cimze, as well as the later, emphatically anti-Russian socialist nationalism of Ernests Rolavs and Miķelis Valters. All these diverse phenomena cannot be explained without taking into account the co-existence and mutual interaction of different ethnic groups, struggling for the recognition of their cultural worth and political rights.

## Notes

1. The notion Young Latvians itself does not have clear borders. It is generally used to refer to the activists of the first Latvian awakening (Plakans 2008, 129–130), sometimes including such diverse people as pro-German Ansis Leitāns and Juris Neikens, as well as Latvian romantic nationalists – Atis Kronvalds, Auseklis, and Andrejs Pumpurs. In this article, the notion of Young Latvians will refer to the smaller group to which it was originally attributed – to the group of Dorpat University students, who eventually founded *Pēterburgas Avīzes*.
2. Herder himself lived in Rīga in his youth and was interested in the Baltic peasant cultures. On the role of his legacy in the context of Baltic enlightenment and the emergence of the “Latvian question”, see Stavenhagen (1925).
3. In the 1840s, in accordance with imperial minister Uvarov’s doctrine of “orthodoxy, autocracy, and nationality”, peasant conversion into orthodoxy was promoted in Livland. Expecting from this conversion an improvement in their material conditions, some portion of peasants responded to it (Švābe 1958, 204–216).

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