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Rakstu krājums



**UNIVERSITY
OF LATVIA**

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Preface

The University of Latvia, continuing its long-standing tradition, convened the 80th international scientific conference, encompassing various scientific sections in all branches of science. Researchers from UL and other higher education institutions of Latvia, as well as 27 other countries presented their reports at this event.

The current proceedings represent the collection of reports in two sections of the media and communication science. The first section was organized under the auspices of the research project “Risks to Democracy Caused by Disinformation and Conspiracy: Reviewing the Latvian Experience” (lzp-2019/1-0278). This project is implemented with the support of the Fundamental and Applied Project Programme by Latvian Council of Science. The focus of the section was the analysis of current and past information processes, the spread of disinformation, communication ethics, as well as the role of social networks in the spread of information and disinformation.

The collection also includes the research presented in the section of young researchers and doctoral students of media and communication science. Their thematic spectrum is wide; however, the focus remains on the analysis of diverse information processes, examples of the information space control by non-democratic regimes, digitization and new media.

These proceedings contain 18 articles authored by experienced scientists, as well as representatives of the younger generation of researchers. Thus, this collection is a good example of the synergy of different generations of scientists, and the regeneration of scientists.

All the articles included in the collection are double-blind peer-reviewed, thereby ensuring their scientific quality and merit. We would like to thank all the reviewers for their work, substantive consideration of the manuscripts, and helpful advice.

We hope that these proceedings will bring a valuable contribution to the field of media and communication publications and stimulate further research, as well as participation with valuable research results in future conferences.

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Television-Commissioned Films in the History of the Riga Film Studio. Cinematic Language and Genesis of Stylistics

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Abstract. The research is focused on the development of the means of artistic expression applied in the cinema of a specific time period (1966–1989), analysing the films made at the Riga Film Studio (*Rīgas Kinostudija*), commissioned by the Central Television of the USSR. Both innovative and formal solutions can be found in the films of that era, especially considering the creation of the two-part format. The current publication focuses on the genesis of the artistic and production processes of the film “*Lielais dzintars*” (“The Great Amber”, “*Dziesma par Rīgu*” / “A Song About Riga”, 1972), in the context of the cinema development of that time, based on the documents of the Latvian State Archives of the Latvian National Archives. The inclusion of humorous elements in the film’s narrative, the use of music, visually impressive Latvian landscapes on the screen, an international cast corresponding to the scale of the USSR, was a way to *sell* the film to the customer. Riga Film Studio and its authors agreed to modify the script and film several times, subjecting themselves to artistic compromises. Censorship in the USSR realized its ideological goals by idealizing the Soviet man’s way of life, destroying the narrative and aesthetics of the film “*Lielais dzintars*”.

Keywords: Aloizis Brenčs, the film “*Lielais dzintars*”, the Central Television of the USSR, censorship, Latvian cinema, musical film, the 20th century

Introduction

The beginning of the 1960s in the last century marked a significant advancement in the development of Latvian cinema. The state joint-stock company the Riga Film Studio (*Rīgas Kinostudija*, RFS) as a film production centre had acquired a new complex in Riga, Šmerļa iela 3. Representatives of particular types of film were brought together under one roof, obtaining spacious shooting pavilions and other Soviet-era amenities, and moreover – combining creative

resources. Estimated production capacity was 8–10 feature films, 40–50 dubbings, 20–25 documentary films. Film processing departments were planned to serve not only Riga Film Studio, but also the orders of TV studio and the studios from other republics.¹

In the ideological space of the USSR, the state structures governed the art-related processes both by financing the creativity and by monitoring this process, censoring it and organizing a distribution network of cinematic art within the country or abroad. On 23 March 1963, the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR issued an order on the establishment of the Cinematography Committee of the USSR (an abbreviation rendered in Latvian transcription and accepted in Soviet bureaucracy – *Goskino*). On 11 November 1963, the Supreme Council of the LSSR issued the decision on the establishment of the State Cinematography Committee of the Council of Ministers in the republic.² Both institutions were structurally part of the same chain, because only those films that had been approved and financed by *Goskino* could be produced in Latvia. Film production gained the status of a growing industry, and it had both positive and negative implications, presented by the author on the basis of particular examples in the current publication.

Historically, the films of the Riga Film Studio are associated with the mechanism of unified state supervision of the film industry, but since 1966, the Riga Film Studio started producing full-length feature films, which at that time were called actor films or art films (also called feature films), produced pursuant to the order of the USSR TV and Radio Broadcasting Committee (*Gosteleradio*), which ensured content for Central Television (hereinafter – CT). Several years ago, CT had started commissioning short-format films, documentaries and feature films from the Riga Film Studio. These films were intended for the small screen, and for a wide multinational audience. Although the creation of the USSR was a colonial process, the people continued to live, adapting to the political conditions to which they were subjected. Artists tried to express themselves within the limits that were permitted ideologically, politically and morally. During the period examined within the current research, 41 full-length feature films were shot under commission of CT, which made up the third part of all the films that were filmed at the Riga Film Studio during the period under research.

The first feature film commissioned by CT was a 43-minute-long film – the opera “Mozart and Salieri” (1962), which was created by Vladimir Gorikker, a guest director from the USSR, in the hope of establishing opera adaptations at the Riga Film Studio. The creative staff members of RFS were also involved in the team shooting this film – cameraman Vadims Mass and artist Uldis Pauzers. The work was largely filmed in the “*Mosfilm*” studio, with leading Russian actors of the time playing the main roles: Mozart – Innokenty Smoktunovsky, Salieri – Pyotr Glebov. Neither of them was a vocalist. Opera arias were voice overs.

The film was shot in twenty-seven days, and completed eleven days ahead of schedule.³

Vladimir Gorikker made two more films at RFS – the operas “Iolanta” (1963) and “The Tsar’s Bride” (1964), however, the opera genre found no successors in Latvia.

In the autumn of 1957, a film group was established at Latvian Television, known in the history of cinema as the Creative Association “*Telefilma-Rīga*.” Describing the relationships prevailing at the time, the director Rodrigo Rikards wrote in his book: “Our people stood out – whether in exile in the West or in slavery in the East – it is the expediency at times compounded with a spirit of rebellion” (Rikards 1994, 7–8). Documentary films, concert films, animated films and short feature films were shot at “*Telefilma-Rīga*.” These were commissioned by Latvian Television and were watched throughout Latvia. These films were also shown on CT and foreign television channels. In the statistics of cinema history, the first completed short feature film was “*Brīnumdare māmiņa*” (“Wizard Mother”, 1961) (Pērkone 2011, 476). “*Telefilma-Rīga*” worked only for the small screen and during its existence never made even a single full-length feature film.

In 1972, RFS editor-in-chief Jāzeps Osmanis reported to the LSSR Cinema Committee: “The studio started releasing Telefilms [...] now the question has arisen about the need to plan production, this year 2 units [two full-length feature films – *D. Ā.*] are planned, the commissioning entity – Central Television. [...] Orders arrive very late, but it is not possible to plan without a script and an order”.⁴

The filmography of RFS already included four completed feature films commissioned by CT and for one of them – “*Lielais dzintars*” (“The Great Amber”, 1972), he himself was the co-author of the original script together with the director of this film, Aloizs Brenčs. Together, they had gone through the very complicated process of making the film, receiving the approval, and handing the completed film over to the commissioning entity.

In the documents preserved in the Latvian State Archives of the Latvian National Archives, the descriptions of RFS films clearly state – a television film, which means that it was made pursuant to the order of CT Creative Association “Screen” (“*Ekran*”), which was a separate department in the structure of CT, responsible for about cooperation with the film studios of the USSR, this is evidenced by the position of each responsible official, signing the film production and coordination protocols and opinions.

In her research, the author would like to emphasize that from the end of the 1960s, the RFS produced two types of films, which were financed by the USSR and were commissioned by two different entities, and the film formats also differed. In the history of cinema, television filmmaking in the RFS has never been studied as a separate phenomenon, isolated from the total supply and spectrum of films.

The aim of the study is to reveal the peculiar characteristics of the artistic process and the specifics of the creative process pertaining to the films commissioned by the USSR CT at the Riga Film Studio. It seeks an answer to the following research questions:

1. What methods did the creative and administrative staff of the Riga Film Studio use to realize their cinematic ideas?
2. Did the films commissioned by the USSR CT result in artistically valuable cinema, taking into account the format of the television screen and the complicated coordination of the creative process with the commissioning entity?

Methodology

The research is conducted on the basis of the documents preserved in the Latvian State Archives of the Latvian National Archives, as well as the memoirs of filmmakers and personal interviews with the Riga Film Studio makers of the CT films. The research employs the genesis method in order to reconstruct the shooting and approval process of the analysed film, which reveals the operational mechanisms of censorship in the USSR.

Results

RFS produced films for the big screen, which were primarily shown in cinemas and were shot in the new widescreen format, as well as films for the small screen, which were intended to be shown on TV screens. All the films created in RFS were shot on 35 mm film, however, they were not only technologically different, for example, in the proportions of the film frame, but also in terms of the means of artistic expression. In the 1960s and 1970s, the films for the big screen were shot in the new widescreen format (Eglītis 2003, 35), whose frame proportions resembled a quadrangle, which was expanded sideways (2 : 1), while the frame for small screen films was square-shaped (3 : 4). 41 films commissioned by the USSR CT were made under the RFS trademark in the period from 1969 to 1989, – it was a third of the total number of films (comprising 122) made during this period. The commissions by CT continued until 1992, when RFS had already lost its monopoly on film production in Latvia, and several small studios began to operate in its stead, although remaining under the RFS umbrella. The last six films commissioned by CT were completed by the newly established studio “ALKO” (Āboliņa 2022a).

The original language of CT-commissioned films was Russian. After submitting the films, RFS could make a decision whether or not to dub them in Latvian. Observing the movements of the actors' lips, the differences in language



Figure 1. A scene from the film “*Liela dzintars*” (director Aloizis Brenčs). 1972. Riga Film Museum Collection. Photo by Jānis Pilskalns.

articulation can be discerned in the Latvian-dubbed films. The films had a distinctly international cast, especially in the first years of cooperation, which was requested by CT, therefore communication on the set and documentation was done in Russian.

Although making the films for TV was never considered prestigious or a top priority for RFS, as time went on, this segment gained an ever-greater proportion in the film production spectrum. “The last ones in line for work got TV films”, admitted Rihards Pīks, cameraman, director, former director of the Riga Film Studio (1987–1990) (Āboliņa 2022b), director and screenwriter Jānis Streičs noted that TV films were almost never reviewed in the All-Union press (Āboliņa 2022c). TV film production times were shorter and budgets were about half the cost of feature films of the time. Initially, due to purely financial considerations, the making of two-part films was commenced in order to obtain the budget which was twice the size, which approached the average cost of the Riga Film Studio at that time: 300 000–350 000 roubles (Āboliņa 2022c).

In 1973, a publication in the newspaper “*Cīņa*” reflected the round table discussion of cinematographers on the problems of Latvian cinema. The opinion of film critic Valentina Freimane:



Figure 2. A scene from the film “*Lielais dzintars*” (director Aloizis Brenčs). 1972. Riga Film Museum Collection. Photo by Jānis Pilskalns.



Figure 3. A scene from the film “*Lielais dzintars*” (director Aloizis Brenčs). 1972. Riga Film Museum Collection. Photo by Jānis Pilskalns.

The practice of state commissions, which can really bring very good results, was mentioned several times today. Let's remember that Sergei Eisenstein's films "Battleship "Potemkin"" and "October" were also commissioned films. Likewise, Herz Frank's "Mūžs" ["The Trace of the Soul"] shows how good a result a smart and creative approach to a commissioned film gives. At the same time, however, there is another type of commission in our film studio, which causes very strong concerns about this part of our film production – these are films ordered by Central Television. Such have already been created, for example, "Lielais dzintars", and two more are being created presently. The authors of the film excuse their mistakes with the approval of the commissioners or even a thoughtlessly given praise, their tastes and requirements" (Purene 1973, 4).

The film "*Lielais dzintars*" (1972), mentioned by film critic Valentīna Freimane, appears in the documentation of the film's production with a title which was specified three times. The initial title of the work version was "*Būt vai nebūt*" ("To be or not to be"), then – "*Dziesma par Rīgu*" ("A Song about Riga"). In the history of Latvian cinema, it is a film *non grata*. A film which has been banished from the cinema process. The contemporary film researchers hardly ever mention it in their monographs.

The author of this article believes that it is an artistically ambiguous, unusual experiment in film genre and style, commissioned by CT. It is the first two-part film in the history of the Riga Film Studio. In the application to the USSR CT commissioner, the filmmakers define the genre of the film: 'film revue'. The designation of the genre was created by deriving it from the genre found on the theatre stage – revue, which is a magnificent production with music, songs and dances, and dramaturgically made up of individual acts.

The example of the film "*Lielais dzintars*" in this publication will serve as a model that reveals multiple facets – the complexity of the process in the film production scene of that time, the hierarchy of subordination and the ability of filmmakers to make creative compromises.

Admittedly, there was a single goal – to create an eccentric musical film for the widest possible TV audience. The official correspondence between RFS and CT on the principles of the film's structure and the system of characters shows an intense fight concerning the content expressed on the screen, in which the dominant motif was the myth of a man's happy life in the great country. The inner void was replaced by external signs (Barthes 1987, 7–11).

Socialist realism in the 1960s–1970s was officially the only ideologically accepted creative method in the USSR. An Estonian literary scholar and researcher of aesthetics of the Soviet era wrote: "Socialist realism was not defined either at the level of content motifs or stylistic choices, it was all the artists' own fantasy, in which they diligently copied each other in the name of survival or preservation of opportunities to work" (Undusks 2016, 83).



Figure 4. A scene from the film “*Liels dzintars*” (director Aloizis Brenčs). 1972. Riga Film Museum Collection. Photo by Jānis Pilskalns.

The Riga Film Studio already had the experience of making feature films with songs and dances. The most vivid example, where the conditionality of realism was achieved by retreating back in the history, is the film “*Vella kalpi*” (“The Devil’s Servants”, 1970). The genre of the film was defined as a historical costume film and was followed by a second film (a sort of second episode) “*Vella kalpi Vella dzirnavās*” (“The Devil’s Servants at the Devil’s Mill”, 1973) where musical acts were incorporated into the adventure narrative. In the early 1970s, this film became a token of recognition of the Riga Film Studio throughout the USSR and was watched by more than 30 million viewers in cinemas: “*Vella kalpi*” had attracted 36.6 million viewers and “*Vella kalpi Vella dzirnavās*” – 30.5 million viewers (Pērkone 2011, 217). Both of these films have been made under the supervision of *Goskino* and are not related to the commissions and funding of CT, but they were also shown on television throughout the territory of the USSR. The ability of RFS to work in the field of musical films was endorsed by millions of viewers. The composer Raimonds Pauls was the author of the film’s songs.

At the end of the 1960s, Director Rolands Kalniņš shot the film “*Elpojiet dziļi*” (“Breathe Deeply”, also known as “*Četri balti kreklī*” – “Four White Shirts”) with

a socially poignant context. The presented narrative was very contemporary at that time, young people who are passionate about music, write songs, and are judged by a stern, rigid commission. The screening of the film was suspended by censorship: the officials of RFS, the Film Committee of the LSSR, the Communist Party and *Goskino*. In the Soviet Union, the concept “to put on the shelf” had become established, and the film was not shown for 30 years. The films previously mentioned by the author mark the context of cinema in the period selected for the study of RFS.

The application for the film “*Dziesma par Rīgu*” appeared in RFS in January 1971.

Aloizis Brenčs, who at that time already had authored several documentaries and three full-length feature films, was recommended as the director and co-author of the script of that musical film. Recommending Aloizis Brenčs for approval as the director of the new film, a particular emphasis was placed on his musical taste, dynamic editing skills and experience in making action films.⁵

The author of the screenplay of the TV film “*Lielais dzintars*”, poet Jāzeps Osmanis in the period of 1967–1982 was the chief editor in the board of script editors of RFS. In addition to being a well-known poet, he was the author of the libretto for the variety operettas “*Annele*” (1964)⁶ and “*Sālsmaize Kartupeļu ielā*” (“Housewarming in Potato Street”, 1971), which were staged at the Riga State Operetta Theatre.

The film commission and planning department of CT production association “*Ekran*” supported attracting new authors to write the script of the musical film “*Dziesma par Rīgu*”, including it in the 1971 plan. The film was offered another title – “*Kurš precēsies ar vēju?*” (“Who will Marry the Wind?”), asking to speed up the preparation of the literary script.⁷ The film’s application reads:

Latvia prides itself in its nature, for a good reason its eastern part, Latgale, is called the land of blue lakes. The middle part is called the Switzerland of Vidzeme and Kurzeme. Ethnographic elements are intertwined with modern beauty. Homesteads are changing and new traditions are being formed. Song and dance festivals have gained immense popularity. Various shows, competitions and festivals stimulate mass involvement in song and dance culture. Along with the well-known dance collectives “Daile”, “Dancis”, “Vektors”, Latvian pop groups are gaining huge popularity, among which REO – Riga Pop Orchestra under the leadership of Raimonds Pauls is especially delightful. For his contribution to music, Raimonds Pauls has been awarded the honorary title of meritorious cultural worker of the Latvian SSR and the Komsomol prize. These are the main reasons why the authors came up with the idea of creating a fun, musical film revue, an original musical on the screen, exposing the splendour of Latvia.”⁸

In the incipient film, 14–15 songs and choreographic numbers were planned, which would be performed by pop soloists and ensembles. The plot of the film was based on the trip of the youth pop ensemble “*Dzintars*” to a show in Riga, but due to weather conditions unsuitable for flying, they miss the performance. The commission scatters all over Latvia, not awarding the first place to anyone. Upon learning this, the group of young people decides to gather the jury back together and ask them to evaluate their song. The script application indicates the places where the characters of the film are supposed to go: cafe “*Sēnīte*”, Riga Central Market, where flowers are to be bought; the following places in the town of Sigulda are included in the trajectory of their journey: the Gauja funicular and cafe “*Sigulda*”, the grave site of Gutman’s Cave and the grave site of Turaida Rose, Fishermen’s festival, the seaside town of Jūrmala, collective farm “*Lāčplēsis*”, which produces good beer, Cēsis choir concert, rural idyll by the lake. The plot of the film also foresees a ballroom dance competition, a car collision with a militsiya car, an episode of drowning of a member of the jury commission, the misplacement of the main prize “Great Amber” by mixing up the boxes, as well as pop dance performances on the street – Brīvības iela, during lively traffic.

Even a condensed recount of the film’s episodes clearly showed that the film was in danger of being overcrowded with events and locations. Too many characters, too many dance and song acts. The artistic calculation of the film was clear and CT viewers would not be disappointed by it – a musical scenic film of Latvia whose genre is amalgamated with plot of chase, pursuit, and road movie elements. The main threat was whether it would all come together dramaturgically: lyrical songs, dynamic comic situations, dialogues that should demonstrate wit.

After getting acquainted with the literary script, the RFS Arts Council already began to talk about a two-part film, that is, a film of two episodes. When sending a script application, they asked about increasing the size of the film. On 26 March 1971, the editor Irina Čerevičņika emphasized the commissioner’s demand to give a greater display to Raimonds Pauls’ music, while the director Leonīds Leimanis invites the authors to consider the examples of other films: “*Russkiy suvenir*” (“Russian Souvenir”, 1960), “*Pēdējais blēdis*” (“The Last Crook”, 1966), “It’s a Mad Mad Mad Mad World” (1963) to avoid replication. Aleksandrs Leimanis, the director of “*Vella kalpi*”, had a pessimistic view, because the film actually had no plot. There was no central anecdote around which the motley dynamic would unfold. Film critic Valentina Freimane described this genre thus: “This is still an unfamiliar specificity to us, but the characters come from old flicks.”⁹

On 28 March 1971, the script editorial board of the Riga Film Studio discussed the literary script written by Brenčs and Osmanis for the first time, called it a variety comedy and revealed confusion in its opinions:

O. Lisovska: The material is too long. Here everything depends on the songs and actors.

A. Brenčs: We also want to shorten this and that.

I. Čerevičņika: Actions are repetitive, boring, the filming depends on Brenčs.

E. Līvs: I don't understand anything in this genre.

L. Purs. We must listen to what Moscow will say.¹⁰

CT production association “*Ekran*” replied to RFS within two days and spoke constructively about a two-episode musical film, but requested to include the following amendments: reduce the number of episodic parts and members of the competition jury in the film, find a suitable motivation for comedy, why the plane was delayed, make the characters of depicted individuals more colourful, as well as demanded a strict selection of comedy lines, situations and details.¹¹

RFS performed the swap of employees. Jāzeps Osmanis submitted a handwritten application and requested to be released from the duties of the editor-in-chief of the Screenplay Board for the duration of the production of the film “*Dziesma par Rīgu*”, while also asking to entrust the functions of the editor-in-chief regarding this film to Egons Līvs. RFS executes a purchase sale deed.

The member of the Screenplay Board, comrade Strazdiņš [Laimonis Purs is the pen name of the author – D. Ā.], Laimonis Janovičs on the one side, and the authors – executors Osmanis Jāzeps Vladislavovičs and Brenčs Aloizs Aloizovičs on the other side agree that the Riga Film Studio buys the literary script “Dziesma par Rīgu”, paying the authors a royalty 6000 roubles. The amount shall be paid equally from the amount indicated in the deed.

The document is also addressed to CT “*Ekran*”. The Cinematography Committee of the LSSR as an exception permitted the purchase of the literary script of the screenplay “*Dziesma par Rīgu*” by J. Osmanis and A. Brenčs. The document was signed by the chairman of the Cinematography Committee of LSSR, Nikolajs Kārklīņš.¹²

A reply letter is received from Moscow, confirming the possibility of starting the production of the film, if the following instructions are introduced: the characters who have been mentioned in the plot but whose role is not further developed in the script, must be abandoned, the situation with the illicit concert organized by the administrator must be clarified [the script contained a commercial concert which took place without a prior approval to enable the band gather money to pay for the hotel – D. Ā.], whereas the cultural events and festivals included in the film should be given an international character.¹³

On 16 July 1971, the RFS Arts Council discusses the auditions and cast of the new film. Russian actors are approved in 9 main roles, Latvian actors – in 5 episodic roles. The biggest episodic role is given to Gunārs Placēns, who plays a young Soviet militsiya officer. Aloizs Brenčs revealed that there were doubts whether to direct the film in an egocentric or rather in lyrical direction, but Raimonds Pauls created a distinctly lyrical music and would mainly elect the singers himself.¹⁴ The film's sets and costumes are accepted unanimously.

Starting from August, when part of the material had already been filmed, the editors of CT “*Ekran*” already gave specific instructions that had to be complied with in order to continue working on the film.

Remove the shots in which the passengers of the plane look unaesthetic. They need to be more personable and natural. They should not distract attention from the main characters. Modern fashion does not have to eclipse the people themselves.

Cut as short as possible (but better re-film) the episode where the musicians and the plane passengers go to the airport, because their merriment is too conspicuous (an-end-in-itself), it resembles debauchery and does not provide aesthetic pleasure.

Lightness must be achieved in comic episodes. The episode where the chairman of the jury eats cabbage unaesthetically and Sirena Markovna takes photos of herself must be removed from the film. Cut from the film the close-up of Sirena, where she goes swimming in the sea and her corpulent body shape is revealed. To achieve greater lyricism and emotionality in the acting of the main characters Dugina and Streleckij.

To use more imagination in the portrayal of comedy episodes. Not to permit stupidity in the actions of comic characters and avoid overacting.¹⁵

In the subsequent correspondence between RFS and CT, the title of the film “*Lielais dzintars*” is already used (adding “*Dziesma par Rīgu*” in parentheses) and the narrator's introductory texts are repeatedly rewritten, the intonations in which people talk to each other are re-recorded several times. All dialogues that touch on prices and money, alcohol, are entirely amputated, the ensemble is allowed to perform only for the purpose of promoting the popularity of its songs. All the close-ups of Gunārs Placēns are cut from the film, because it is not appropriate for a Soviet militsiya officer to smile so much, the close-ups of Sirena – Dzidra Ritenberga are cut and the bathing episode is left only in a very distant shot, while one of the employees of “*Ekran*” points out an existing doctrine that prohibits showing men in shorts on TV. The Monument of Liberty is ordered to be cut from the film because it does not fit the comedy genre. A new song about friendship is requested for the finale of the film. Raimonds Pauls writes an

application stating that he permits to write a new text in Russian and to include his song “*Tik dzintars vien*” (“Just Amber”) in the film.

On 9 December 1971, RFS held an extended editorial meeting of the Screenplay Board, in which 20 people participated, including the chairman of the Cinematography Committee of the LSSR, Nikolajs Kārklīņš. The young writer Aivars Kalve, who participated in discussions about this film for the first time, offered to make one film out of two episodes (series). RFS director Heinrihs Lepeško reacts with a retort – this is impossible. Egons Līvs declares that all the actors are unsuitable for their roles and that disrespect is being shown to Dzidra Ritenberga. The word ‘tasteless’ appears 6 times. Nikolajs Kārklīņš intervenes: it is not about how the film will be taken by the commissioner, but about how the viewer will take it, nevertheless the militsiya cannot be portrayed like that. Aloizs Brenčs summarizes: I have always heeded all the reprimands. By cutting out everything requested in the edits, the eccentricity disappeared. The actors were approved by the commissioner and popular actors were required. The film went into production with a delay of 2.5 months. For the sake of justification, it was pointed out that the film was a comedy and Latvia was not mocked anywhere.¹⁶

The tension between national and international angle of cinema was inevitable (Willemen 1994, 206–207). It was characteristic of RFS films throughout the Soviet era. Experimentation, innovations and games could take place within strict limits, complying with the predetermined playing field – thus wrote Soviet TV researcher and historian Christine E. Evans about the history of CT (Evans 2016, 22).

Correspondence with CT continued regarding further revisions. Noting that the film crew had some track record in making a musical film, another 16 points followed with specific reprimands.

On the official form of “*Ekran*”, the decision was sent from Moscow – on 29 December 1971 regarding the first episode, and on 7 January 1972 regarding the second episode, – the film was accepted without corrections, taking into account that the group had carefully observed the reprimands. And the Riga Film Studio had done a great job in this difficult genre of film – revue.¹⁷

Discussion and conclusions

The RFS film “*Lielais dzintars*” was originally intended to highlight the qualities of Latvia suitable for cultural export, packaging them in an entertainment TV film format. It revealed the dream of a Europe that could be reached within the USSR (Lordanova 2003, 11–12). The differences in Latvian cultural traditions during the Russification era were confirmed by several Latvian elements of the film, including the non-Soviet-style costumes created by Večella Varslavāne. The British film theorist Peter Wollen compares the importance of style on screen to the air you need to breathe, without even knowing what its gaseous composition

might be (Wollen 1969, 206). However, the most convertible art currency in the Soviet era, which was also the most protected from devaluation, was music.

The composer's name appears before the film credits at the beginning of the second episode: Raimonds Pauls' music in the film "*Lielais dzintars*." The songs that Margarita Vilcāne and Valery Obodzinsky sang in Russian in the film were translated into Latvian in the 1980s, and were sung by many Latvian soloists. The film "*Lielais dzintars*" was never dubbed in Latvian. Aloizs Brenčs never worked in the musical film genre again. Meanwhile, he became the first Latvian director who, commissioned by CT, shot a seven-episode Latvian historical story "*Ilgais ceļš kāpās*" ("The Long Road in the Dunes", 1981), – it featured an international ensemble of actors and music by Raimonds Pauls.

The model of the film "*Lielais dzintars*" reveals that the production of RFS films pursuant to the commission by CT of the USSR was subject to massive censorship by CT, but the authors of the Riga Film Studio had no mastery of the revue genre. The authors of the film were not sure of the correctness of their artistic solutions and submitted to the imposed compromises in cooperation with CT editors, experienced the degradation of the artistic conception of the film.

The creation of the two-episode format was stimulated by both the insufficient funding for filming and the specificity of the TV format, creating the dramaturgical structure of the film. The narratives of the TV films were influenced by the commissioner, but RFS enriched them with the local flavour and aestheticized them, however, taking into account that the main audience of the films was outside of Latvia.

The films commissioned by CT at RFS in a certain sense represented a playing field for making a cinema of lighter content and genre, revealing that the filmmakers had learned the rules of the game of Soviet cinema ideology.

Censorship of the USSR realized its ideological goals by idealizing the way of life of the Soviet people, influencing and subverting the narrative and aesthetics of the film "*Lielais dzintars*".

The film "*Lielais dzintars*" reflects the artistic means of the cinema of its time and is a cinematic work worthy of extended research in the history of cinema.

NOTES

- 1 National Archives of Latvia (hereinafter – LNA), State Archives of Latvia (hereinafter – LVA), fund No. 678 (fund of the Ministry of Culture of Latvia), description No. 1, case No. 199 (Ministry's orders on film production, hereinafter – case No. 199), p. 189.
- 2 LNA, LVA, fund No. 1405. (Fund of the Cinematography Committee of the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR), Description No. 1, case No. 329 (Financial and production plans with annexes, approved by the Committee and subordinate authorities), p. 2.

- 3 LNA, LVA, fund No. 416 (The fund of the state joint-stock company Riga Film Studio (Rīgas kinostudija), hereinafter– fund No. 416), Description No. 2, case No. 71 (Documents about the television feature film “Mocarts un Saljēri” (“Mozart and Salieri”) – application, conclusions, copies of orders and protocols), p. 4.
- 4 LNA, LVA, fund No. 1405 (Fund of the Cinematography Committee of the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR), Description No. 1, case No. 317 (Financial and production plans with annexes, approved by the Committee and subordinate authorities), p. 3.
- 5 LNA LVA, fund No. 416, Description No. 4, case No. 98 (Documents about the television feature film “Lielais dzintars” – script, application, opinions, orders and copies of protocols, etc.), p. 253.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., p. 252.
- 8 Ibid., p. 256.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 242–243.
- 10 Ibid., case No. 98, p. 249.
- 11 Ibid., p. 238.
- 12 Ibid., pp. 236–238.
- 13 Ibid., p. 231.
- 14 Ibid., p. 94.
- 15 Ibid., p. 76.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 53–54.
- 17 Ibid., p. 3.

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Censorship and Self-Censorship in the Letters of Salaspils Camp Prisoners

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Abstract. The study of World War II correspondence is relevant to communication science; furthermore, it is an interdisciplinary topic that provides insight into the representation of places of incarceration and related aspects. By studying the letters of people imprisoned in the Salaspils camp, it is possible to establish the depiction of censorship and self-censorship of that time, as well as other categories (for example, relationships, communication, conditions, etc.) from the perspective of the authors of the correspondence. At present, it is possible to observe similarities with the censorship implemented in Russia and the methods of limiting information with the methods how censorship was achieved during World War II and the era of Nazi Germany. The state power strictly controls the information space and restricts freedom of speech. The aim of the work is to analyse the presence of censorship and self-censorship in the correspondence by prisoners of the Salaspils camp. The theoretical part of the paper consists of the study of interpersonal communication with an emphasis on the communication by letters, censorship and self-censorship in the totalitarian regime. The research results have been obtained using qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The censorship stamp appears in 24 of the 123 prisoners' letters, revealing the presence of censorship and self-censorship. The letters employ the technique of self-censorship suppression and interpretation. In the letters with a stamp, self-censorship appears explicitly, substantiated by providing minimal negative information about the conditions and events in the camp. The letters, which do not have a censorship stamp, expressly contain negative information about the events in the Salaspils camp, such as mortality of children, blood sampling, deportations and interrogations. Comparing the correspondence that has been inspected with the correspondence that does not have a censorship stamp, it was concluded that such letters (without a stamp) were delivered to the addressee by unofficial means, for example, by taking these letters out of the camp territory and handing them over during working hours, making arrangements with the guards or other prisoners.

Keywords: suppression technique, censorship, interpretation technique, content analysis, self-censorship, letters

Introduction

The construction of the Salaspils camp commenced in 1941, and from the summer of 1942 it officially functioned as an expanded police prison and labour training camp. The camp was liquidated on 29 September 1944, when the USSR troops approached the territory of Latvia (Kangeris *et al.* 2016, 97, 102, 298). In the camp, prisoners could correspond with their relatives by sending one letter a month, but certain groups of prisoners were forbidden to correspond (for example, imprisoned soldiers). Before being sent out, the letters of the prisoners of the Salaspils camp were subjected to inspection and censorship, and the indication of such review was the censorship stamp on the letter. However, despite the fact that letters were subject to censorship, the writing opportunities and quantity were limited, prisoners found other ways to convey their messages to their friends and relatives, such as making arrangements with other prisoners or guards (Kangeris *et al.* 2016, 180), who worked outside the territory of the camp. The messages that had been carried outside the camp contained information that would have been censored in official correspondence. In this way, it is possible to learn more about the physically and psychologically oppressive life in the camp. Considering the era of Nazi Germany in Latvia, it can be concluded that this power practiced political censorship, which was regulated by government organizations (for example, the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, military and paramilitary propaganda institutions (Zellis 2012, 50–70)). As emphasized by Ahmad (2019), political censorship is carried out in countries that endeavour to hide some information from the public, thus maintaining social control. The historian of Russian censorship Blyum (2000, 14) should also be noted here. He classifies censorship in a growing hierarchy; the first being self-censorship, or, as the historian calls it, author-censorship, which is our internal censor. Self-censorship in a totalitarian regime goes hand-in-hand with the censorship exercised by the existing power, which forces the author of information to censor his own work both consciously and unconsciously.

When studying self-censorship in letters written by prisoners, attention should be paid to two techniques of self-censorship distinguished by Cox (1979, 319) – interpretation and suppression. These particular techniques more frequently appear in the letters of prisoners. By using the suppression technique, letter writers avoid providing important information by simply not including it in their text. Interpretation technique is employed when letter writers choose, for example, figurative means of expression, subtext, allusions, poetry to convey an important message. Taking the text literally, it does not convey anything, but once the reader delves deeper into it and interprets its essence, it is possible to find a hidden meaning that reveals more. Professor Goldberg (2006, 158–159) specifically characterised the letter writing during the reign of Nazi

Germany, – the correspondence was full of self-censorship, where the authors misled the readers or provided false information, but a deeper look revealed hidden information about the lives of the letter writers and the events that they witnessed.

Self-censorship can also be observed in the correspondence by the prisoners of the Salaspils camp, because the prisoners understood that what they wrote would be checked and, in order not to incur punishment upon themselves or put their loved ones at risk, they chose to withhold specific information about the camp or use other ways (figurative means of expression, subtext) to convey a message.

Methodology

For the analysis of letters, it is necessary to obtain qualitative data – to study and assemble correspondence, which involves deciphering manuscripts, rewriting, and also translation. Since the letters have been written about 80 years ago, some of them have faded and there are illegible parts; many letters have been written with a pencil that has smudged, making the correspondence difficult to read. Before the analysis of the text of the letters, the deciphering of the texts to be studied and the preparation of the set of the texts to be analysed in a computer script have been carried out.

The research has drawn upon unpublished materials, – a total of 123 letters written by prisoners of the Salaspils camp have been analysed. The letters were obtained from the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, the Latvian War Museum, the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation and the Latgale Culture and History Museum. The letters included in the research were written by 17 different prisoners – Aleksandrs Strautmanis (the greatest number of letters – 72), Arvīds Ermanis Vaicišs, Arvīds Viksna, Ernests Balodis, Fricis Cīrulis, Jānis Logins, Jānis Zvirbulis, Jūlijs Vaļņins, Kārlis Saulītis, Krišjānis Rubenis, O. Melbiksis, Marija Melbiksis, Pēteris Annens, Pēteris Balalajevs, Vasilijš Boikovs, Jānis Jekals, Lūcija Valters. Using quantitative and qualitative content analysis, the content and character of the letters were studied – how many letters have a censorship stamp and what is the context of the letters for correspondence that does not have such a stamp. An inductive approach was used in the content analysis, distinguishing a total of 14 categories. Some of them are discussed in this article – the categories “Censorship”, “Self-censorship”, “Punishment”, “Means of figurative expression”, “Subtext” and the subcategory “Events taking place in the camp” of the category “Other activities”. I plan to discuss the other categories in greater detail in future publications.

Camp prisoners could write and send one letter a month (other groups of prisoners were forbidden to send letters), but prisoners frequently also used other ways to transmit the information to their next of kin and receive replies.

The letters of the prisoners of the Salaspils camp are currently available in various museums and collections of Latvia, for example, there are more than 70 such letters in the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, more than 30 in the Latvian War Museum, and correspondence of this type is also available in the Latvian State Archives of the Latvian National Archives (Kangeris *et al.* 2016, 43).

The analysed self-censorship in correspondence has been studied under assumption that it is present in all the letters bearing a censorship stamp. The presence of self-censorship in the examined letters is also evidenced by the fact that no negative information about camp conditions (e. g., health, hygiene), punishments, events is disclosed.

Results

In order to better understand the presence of self-censorship and censorship, the thematic category “Punishment” and the subcategory “Events taking place in the camp” of the category “Other activities” were selected for the analysis thereof. Within the framework of content analysis, these particular categories clearly show the presence of self-censorship. Out of the analysed 123 letters, 24 have a censorship stamp, which is physically stamped on the paper of the letter (most often on top of the text); 22 letters bear the inscription “*Gepprüft*” and 2 – “*Caurskatīts*” (“Inspected”).

Amongst the letters of Aleksandrs Strautmanis, which make up the majority of the studied correspondence, only one bears a censorship stamp. Analysing Strautmanis’ communication with his family, it is concluded that it took place both officially – by sending one letter per month, which had been inspected – and also illegally, by delivering messages to the addressee outside the camp territory, for example, during work hours. Two letters written by A. Strautmanis, which do not have a censorship stamp, mention the control of letters: “The letters were brought from the commandant’s office together with the others and went through the censorship, because the stamp “inspected” was affixed on the corner” (Strautmanis 1942e). This information caused anxiety in the author of the letters, who wrote to his wife that it was necessary to wait a few days: “[...] I am a little worried and I want to wait a couple of days, [to see] if they have spotted something bad” (Strautmanis 1942e).

The presence of self-censorship in letters can be analysed by employing the interpretation method, especially if the correspondence includes poetry, figurative means of expression, subtext. For example, Strautmanis’ letters expressly show the use of this technique, as he wrote to his wife about the meeting place and date using subtext: “I would like you to go to Baloži on 25 July” (Strautmanis 1944o), “Aucīt, when you write, mention that you will go to Baloži on such-and-such date, or “getting ready to go any day”” (Strautmanis 1944l). In

correspondence, the authors also use metaphors, comparisons, epithets, personifications, compelling the recipient of the letter to interpret the written text. For example, in the text “[...] the scales are already weighing toward the bad side [...]” (Strautmanis 1943j). Strautmanis writes to his wife that it is impossible to meet. Also, in the lines of poetry, the inner experiences of their authors clearly appear, giving the recipient of the letter the opportunity to draw his or her own conclusions about the situation in the camp. For example, Jekals writes about hopelessness and pain in the following lines: “[...] Whoever has already descended the stairs of hopelessness knows that one must take the pain by the throat [...]” (Jekals 1943a).

In the category of self-censorship, two more letters must be singled out, which lack the censorship stamp, however, their authors created the content of the letter in a way that indicates self-censorship: “[...] I would like to write to you so much, but how can I do it” (Valtere 1943a), “[...] Of course, I cannot say everything” (Rubenis [S. n.]). This confirms what Bar-Tal (2017, 37) has said about the emergence of self-censorship in interpersonal communication, when the true information can be hidden even from one’s family and next of kin. Strautmanis’ letter, which has passed the censorship inspection, does not mention any negative information about the conditions in the camp or the events there, mostly there is information about relationships and lack of communication. This letter contains the following text – “Send me Valdis’ address, I want to write to him next month, if we are still here” (Strautmanis 1944k), which suggests that only the official way is used for transmitting the letters. Such correspondence presents evidence that the authors have tried to use the technique of suppression, avoiding the mention of negative information.

Most of the messages written by the authors of the letters were about the need for food and clothing (with a request to send specific things), requests to write longer and more frequently, about work in the camp and gratitude, however, in general, the content of these letters does not reveal negatively intoned information about the camp itself. A few negative messages cautiously appear (nothing negative is said openly about the camp), for example, in the words written by L. Valtere: “My eyes are much more weakened now because the sewing happens during the day and at night by electric light” (Valtere 1943b). In this letter, it is mentioned that she has become accustomed to the conditions of the camp: “Otherwise everything is not [too bad], I am completely used to the order of the camp.” (Valtere 1943b).

The presence of self-censorship in letters can be observed by examining those that do not bear a censorship stamp and comparing them with each other. These letters tend to contain more open information about conditions in the camp and the events there, as well as mentioning negative information. Expressly, such information appears in the letters of A. Strautmanis lacking the censorship stamp,

for example, regarding punishments: “[...] for stealing they hang by the pillory, but death does not scare either. If someone runs for it, 5 are shot along with him” (Strautmanis 1942b). A. Strautmanis also wrote about his punishment (it was not mentioned what the punishment had been): “[...] the punishment for writing has ended” (Strautmanis 1942d); it could be concluded that punishments were also imposed in the camp for consuming alcohol: “Then for that sin of drinking, I have escaped with my skin intact and I have not received any punishment” (Strautmanis 1944n). In this letter, A. Strautmanis mentions the punishment of another prisoner and assistance: “[...] help will be needed again. See, Steins, he got a punishment 3 months product ban [...]” (Strautmanis 1944n). In the letters, information emerges about the duration of the punishments: “[...] smoking in the barracks are not allowed, one got a punishment 2 days in the bunker and 2 weeks in the punishment group, this is a very severe punishment” (Strautmanis 1943h), “those punished for bringing in products with 4 weeks” (Strautmanis 1942c). In total, information about punishments appears in 10 letters.

Negative information about the camp appears not only when mentioning punishments. Correspondence also reveals other types of content showing various events. For example, the letters of A. Strautmanis and J. Jekals mention taking of blood from prisoners: “We will have to give blood this spring as well, the day before yesterday they took about 20 for a sample [...]” (Jekals 1944b), “last month we gave blood for wounded soldiers” (Jekals S. n.), “also had to enlist as blood donors [...]” (Strautmanis 1943f). The correspondence of the authors of these letters reveals information about the disinfection of the barracks and the mortality of children: “all our barracks have been gassed with prussic acid [...]. 2 children died from poisoning and 20 are still in the hospital” (Strautmanis 1943i). In a letter of A. Strautmanis, information about the lists of people and their deportation appears: “Today they are going to take the children away, probably to Germany” (Strautmanis 1944m), “[...] on the agenda 2 lists one 105 the other 80 persons. [...] I haven’t appeared in the lists yet” (Strautmanis 1943g). In his letters, A. Strautmanis also wrote about the interrogation: “From our midst are picked out to Reimersa iela [...]” (Strautmanis 1943i), as well as about new prisoners: “Jews are taken away, but in their stead prisoners of war are said to be coming” (Strautmanis 1942a).

Analysing the correspondence of Salaspils camp prisoners, it is concluded that the letters bearing the censorship stamp show a high level of self-censorship. These letters contain minimal negative information about the camp, rather communicating about the topics such as work, requests for clothing and products, urging to write more often, and questions about the well-being of the relatives. Here appears the use of suppression technique, whilst the letter, which is written in the form of poetry displays the interpretation technique. The authors of the letters restrain themselves while writing the text, so it can be argued that

self-censorship has been practiced deliberately. In the letters without a censorship stamp, information of a negative nature appears expressly – about punishments in the camp, the deportation of prisoners, the mortality of children, blood sampling, etc. It should be noted that most frequently such information appears in the letters of A. Strautmanis in particular, and in order to ascertain more precise information, it would be necessary to analyse a larger number of letters.

Conclusions

After conducting the content analysis, it is concluded that the smallest part of the correspondence bears a censorship stamp, which suggests other methods of sending messages from the Salaspils camp to external recipients (for example, during the work outside the camp territory). Out of 123 letters, only 20% (24 letters) have been stamped. Although the number of such letters among those reviewed is small, it yields a notion of the level of self-censorship. Looking at the content of the censored letters, it is concluded that minimal or no negative information appears about the conditions of the camp or events taking place there. The level of self-censorship can be compared by looking at letters that do not bear a censorship stamp. Such letters expressly reveal information that would not be passed through official censorship, such as punishments (shooting, hanging), child mortality (disinfection of barracks with prussic acid), drawing blood from prisoners, interrogations and deportations of prisoners. It should be noted that such information mostly appears in the letters of Aleksandrs Strautmanis, therefore, in order to ascertain more precise information and check the facts, a larger number of letters is needed, using also the correspondence of other authors.

Analysing the content of the correspondence, it is concluded that the suppression technique was mostly used, where the authors of the letters deliberately self-censored themselves, not disclosing specific information to the exterior world; the inability to express themselves also appears in the written letters, where the authors write that they do not know how to do it. The interpretation technique employed by the authors appears in the correspondence in the form of poetry, figurative means of expression and subtext, thus compelling the recipient of the letter to make his or her own judgment about the context of the letter. This technique enables the writer of the letter to express his inner feelings and trials, conveying this information to his loved ones in a safe way without violating the censorship rules.

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Impact of Personality Traits on Information Literacy During Crisis

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Abstract. Information from multiple sources can lead to information overload, provoking negative psychological and behavioural reactions. During crisis situations, questions about information behaviour become particularly relevant, as the changes in people's behaviour are explored. When analysing the issue of people's informational behaviour in crisis situations, attention is also paid to the influence of personality traits on the choice of information search strategy and trajectory. The purpose of the study was to identify and appraise studies investigating the relationship between the Big Five personality traits (BFPT) and information-seeking behaviour (ISB). The systematic review of foreign literature revealed that neurotics deliberately avoided information that 'threatens' their feelings of happiness and well-being. High levels of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness predict greater achievement when working with information. Unfortunately, none of the recent researches take an in-depth look at the issue regarding ISB during crises and its potential conjunction with BFPT. The literature review would potentially help to develop further studies and fill the gap.

Keywords: information seeking behaviour, Covid-19, personality traits, Big Five personality traits, decision-making, disinformation

Introduction

Crises and disasters disrupt our routines, thereby determining our informational behaviour, which becomes more dynamic, sometimes even chaotic, while focusing on fixing the problem in order to withstand and overcome the crisis. The Covid-19 crisis introduced uncertainty and lack of stability, which was the reason for various activities revolving around information. Information-seeking is one of the most important proactive behaviours that can be used in order to reduce uncertainty and create space for decision-making. People's information-related activity becomes more complex in case of high-risk or crisis

situations: some actively seek and process information, while others deliberately avoid it. The traditional research paradigm has been limited by focusing on variables rather than on individuals.

Only few theoretical models help to understand people's information activities in high-risk or crises conditions. There are several studies that use person-centred approach to detect individual differences in changing trajectories of information-seeking behaviour (ISB) and decision-making. For the analysis of the research level, systematic searches of four databases (*Web of Science*, *Scopus*, *Taylor & Francis*, *Science Direct*) were conducted. Studies conducted from 2018 to 2022 involving mixed-type methods, analysing the impact of Big Five personality traits BFPT on ISB and decision-making have been included in preparation of the current report. Relationships between personality traits and ISB have long occupied many scholars. BFPT model is also known as OCEAN model, containing five major components: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extroversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Each of these groups combines the features of a smaller scale – primary factors:

- Conscientiousness includes prominent level of thoughtfulness. Conscientious individuals are good at impulse control and are goal-oriented;
- Extraversion includes sociability, talkativeness and considerable amount of emotional expressiveness;
- Openness refers to one's intention to strive for society and admission of abstract concepts;
- Neuroticism refers to emotional stability/instability, sensitivity, nervousness, anxiety, irritability;
- Agreeableness is related to prosocial behaviour. Individuals with a high agreeableness level tend to cooperate and have great deal of interest in other people (Barman, Conlan 2021, 2).

Results

Researchers from Peking University, Beijing, China, observed how BFPT correlated with the individual information seeking trajectories (Zhang *et al.* 2021). It was the first study with person-centred perspective to investigate BFPT with information-seeking trajectories. By applying latent growth mixture model, four major information-seeking behaviour trajectories were viewed: high or low maintaining, downward or upward. The study results show that only openness and agreeableness are the personality traits that have an impact on high maintaining trajectories. When following downward trajectories, a strong association with extraversion was revealed. According to the study, agreeableness at initial stage helps to maintain a high level of information seeking, however, openness is associated with consistent information seeking (Zhang *et al.* 2021).

Another study identified those individual BFPT, which had a significant effect on ISB. It was conducted by researchers from King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok, Thailand. The study showed that openness to experience followed by conscientiousness had a significant effect on ISB. High levels of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness predicted higher achievement, thus positively correlating with academic achievement. Neuroticism negatively correlated with ISB. BFPT combined with gender also had an effect on ISB. Data analysis indicated that females with any of the five BFPT had higher ISB mean scores than males (Charoenkul, Chanchalor 2021).

Scholars have done much to chart the landscape of fake news, less is known about how much people believe this news and why. With the rise of fake news and fast-paced spread thereof during Covid-19 pandemic, BFPT was also used to investigate the information users creating and sharing fake news via social networks (Coates *et al.* 2021). It has been specified that whether a news item is true or fake is not the only factor in a user's decision to share it. For instance, personality traits cause an increase in the number of views per share, irrespective of whether the news item is true or not. However, when implementing a fact-checker, the personality traits of people work against the countermeasures. It was concluded that individuals with a high level of consciousness cope well with information overload and are able to gather the large amount of information (Coates *et al.* 2021). Overall, the researchers admit that the minimal statistically significant effect of BFPT on the spread of fake news exists. It was concluded that there may also be hidden effects of personality traits that do not directly affect the spread of fake news, but that may interfere constructively or destructively with other mechanisms or phenomena.

Another research from the University of California has been developed to understand the role of news source cues and the individual characteristics and traits that shape the trustworthiness of news. It was hypothesized that users' personalities affect the ways and reasons why fake news spread. The study results showed that openness and low level of consciousness positively correlated to the intention to believe fake news, while a high extraversion provoked sharing significantly more information and people with this personality type had more followers than other personality types. The data analysis revealed that the only significant BFPT trait to positively influence trustworthiness of fake news was conscientiousness. Those who have a lower conscientiousness level are more likely to believe in fake news articles (Coe 2018). The results paint a picture of the type of person that would be likely to believe in fake news, taking into account their political knowledge and status, social media user habits, trust in media, etc.

Exploring the relationship between BFPT and online rumour spread during Covid-19 pandemic, the researchers from Guangxi University, Nanning, China

established that individuals who had a high level of extraversion and conscientiousness were more likely to experience fears associated with Covid-19. All of the aforementioned personality traits were found to have an impact on the fear of Covid-19 and decision-making, while agreeableness helped to experience less fear (Li *et al.* 2022).

Conclusions

Crisis situations create restlessness and anxiety, which encourage imminent information gathering, while correct search strategies are not always chosen for that purpose. Neurotics deliberately avoid information that ‘threatens’ their feelings of happiness and well-being. High levels of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness predict greater achievement when working with information. Conscientiousness and openness to experience contribute to significantly better information search results. Openness to experience positively correlates with successful information management, while neuroticism contributes to negative experiences. The main ‘producers’ of fake news are neurotics, while the ‘benevolent types’ are those who are most affected by misleading content, especially if it evokes empathy. In the majority of the reviewed studies, it was admitted that future research should take into account more situational factors (education, political views, social support, parenting styles). Unfortunately, none of the recent researches take in depth look at the issue regarding ISB during crises and its potential conjunction with BFPT.

Considering future research, the factor of well-being also could have an impact on information seeking trajectories and ISB. Likewise, ISB may be motivated by multiple psychological factors and differences. The gained insights further the previous understanding of how BFPT impacts the ISB, especially during disinformation, and shed light on the important roles of personality traits in decision making. In particular, the results can be potentially used for public awareness campaigns during infodemic.

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The Image of Latvia in the Eyes of Children Born in Displacement: The Example of Mass Deportations of 1941 and 1949

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Abstract. When studying the mass deportations, which have directly affected more than 57,000 inhabitants of Latvia, a lot of attention is paid to the implementation of the deportations and the deported population. To date, less attention has been dedicated to those born in displacement, which is an important aspect of deportation research. The purpose of the current article is to uncover the impressions of the children born in displacement about the Latvian SSR before they moved to their parents' homeland and the factors that influenced their thoughts about it. The article examines the origin of these children's families and its influence on them as they grew up, whether Latvian language was taught in the families and the assessment of knowledge after moving to Latvia, and their attitude towards Latvia. The article is based on case analysis reviewing the video testimonies of children born in displacement and, in some cases, of their parents. These video testimonies are available in the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia Audiovisual Archive repository. The examples used in the current study show the different experiences of different families, both in their attitude towards teaching the Latvian language while the family is still in forced settlement, and after moving to live in Latvia, and in various other aspects. The quality which unites all the examined examples is the silence prevailing in the family and also in the society about the experienced repressions and the origin of these people, which has had an impact on their subsequent lives, for example, not being able to enter the chosen educational institutions or not obtaining a permission to leave the Latvian SSR even in cases of athletic success.

Keywords: children, childhood, Latvia, mass deportation, displacement, forced settlement, language

Introduction

During the 20th century, the inhabitants of occupied Latvia experienced two mass deportations, as a result of which 57,549 people of different nationalities and ages were deported from Latvia in 1941 and 1949 (Pelkaus 2001, 14; Šķiņķe 2007, 23). The conditions in which the displaced people lived varied, however, the long years spent in forced settlement (from at least seven years in case of those deported in 1949 to 14 years or more for those deported in 1941), the loss of hope to return to the homeland, which was explained by the fact that the power of the regime led people to believe that people were displaced for life, encouraged the desire of the deported people to live as normal a life as possible, which encouraged the formation of relationships and families even being away from homeland. Families were formed not only among the deportees of different nationalities, but also among local residents. The first children were born in the families that had been formed in the locations of forced settlement until the liberation took place and the decision was made to return to the Latvian SSR. The providers of all the video testimonies used in the current article were born in displacement as the first children in their families, with the exception of Tamāra Vilerte. In the deportation of 25 March 1949, the parents of Tamāra Vilerte were deported along with their five children, of whom daughter Vaiva (b. 1938) died in displacement in 1955 (Šķiņķe 2007, 223). Tamāra was the only one who was born in displacement and she already had brothers and sisters who were born before the family's deportation. So far, the population deported on 14 June 1941 and 25 March 1949 has been studied in various aspects, however, less attention has been dedicated to those people who were born in the locations of their parents' forced settlement.

The aim of the study is to uncover the knowledge and opinions of the children born in displacement about the Latvian SSR before they moved to their parents' homeland and the factors that influenced their thoughts about it. The research question of the report is whether the children born in displacement successfully integrated into society after moving to the Latvian SSR, despite their origin and upbringing outside of Latvia during their first years of life.

Methodology

The article has been prepared on the basis of the video evidence obtained from the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia (LOM) Audiovisual Archive repository, using the method of case analysis. From the total collection of 2,432 video testimonies, nine video testimonies contain interviews with those born in displacement, however, other video testimonies of deportees also include stories about children born in displacement. Deportations and the victims thereof are commemorated every year, with special attention at the anniversaries of

the events. Formerly, more attention could be devoted to those who experienced deportation, whereas today, due to their age, more vigorous studies could involve those born in the places of forced settlement to examine their experiences. Video testimonies have been recorded in the LOM Audiovisual Archive repository since October 1996. Initially, the focus was upon the repressed people – those deported in 1941 and 1949, and the testimonies of their children, who were born in displacement, were recorded in addition to the testimonies of their parents, including the aforementioned video testimony of Tamāra Vilerte, which was made in 2004. Only since 2012, the video testimonies of children born in displacement have been recorded as separate units, which are not an addition to their parents' narratives, and accordingly these testimonies are broader and more informative. The article draws upon the video testimonies of two women who grew up in the places of forced settlement, established relationships and gave birth to the children born in displacement, which have been discussed in the report – Margarita Kumizova (b. 1931) and Irina Holma (b. 1924). Both women gave their video testimony to LOM – Margarita in 2008, when she was already 77 years old, while Irina gave her video testimony in 2016 at the age of 92. At the time of giving the video testimony, both women remembered their youth and the repressions they experienced. Tamāra Vilerte (b. 1954) gave her video testimony at the age of 50 – the recording of her testimony was made in 2004. Aija Freiberga (b. 1950) gave her video testimony in 2012 at the age of 62, Dzintra Hirša (b. 1947) and Alvis Jansons (b. 1948) were over 70 at the time of the video testimony, giving their video testimony respectively at the age of 73 in 2020 and in 2021. All the witnesses in their video testimonies talk about a time 40 or more years ago.

The current report provides an insight into the characterisation of the families of the children born in displacement as reflected in the video testimonies, their attitude towards moving to their parents' homeland – Latvian SSR, the attitude towards learning the Latvian language in the family while living in displacement, and the characterisation of language proficiency after arriving in Latvia and the influence of the place of birth on the subsequent life.

Results

1. Family

The video evidence used in the report shows that the deported young people formed families in the places of forced settlement. Thus, the parents of Dzintra Hirša (b. 1947, Librehte, OMF 2300/3421e) – mother Vera Jancova (b. 1919) and father Voldemārs Librehts (b. 1919) – were deported with their families to the Krasnoyarsk region on 14 June 1941, there they met, got married and their daughter was born. Likewise, the parents of Alvis Jansons (b. 1948,

OMF 2300/3448e) – father Harijs Jansons (b. 1925) and mother Tamāra Austruma (b. 1925) met in displacement, after each of them with their families were deported to Krasnoyarsk region in 1941. Astrida Holma's (OMF 2300/3175, 3176) parents had a similar fate – her mother Irina Fetlere (b. 1924, OMF 2300/3174, 3175) was also deported with her family in 1941, but her father Vilis Holms (b. 1915) met Irina in displacement, started a family and in 1954 Astrida was born. The mother of Aija Freiberga (b. 1950, Letko, Skrambovska, OMF 2300/2733, 2734), a Polish agricultural worker Sofija Letko (b. 1915), was deported in 1949, got pregnant by an unknown man in the place of forced settlement, and raised her daughter with her partner Antons Skrambovskis (b. 1904) (Vīksne 1999, 695), who joined her in forced settlement after being released from Minlag. After his release, reuniting with Sofija and her daughter, and then being released from the record and returning to the Latvian SSR, Antons married Sofija and adopted Aija. Tamāra Vilerte was born in forced settlement in the Omsk region, where the Vilerts family had been deported on 25 March 1949. In addition to parents Indriķis (b. 1910) and Lidija (b. 1913), there were also children of different ages – two daughters Vaiva (b. 1938) and Benita (b. 1948) and three sons – Modris (b. 1939), Ivars (b. 1941) and Jānis (b. 1943) (Šķiņķe 2007, 223). Regarding those families that were formed in displacement, the children born there were most often the first children in their families until the time when the families returned to live in the Latvian SSR, whereas in the families that had already been formed in Latvia before the deportations, the children born in displacement joined the children that the families already had.

2. Moving to the parents' homeland in the Latvian SSR

After the parents were released from forced settlement, a decision was made to return to their homeland, along with their children, who had been born in displacement. The children had no say in this matter, however, their inner feelings were diverse, for example, Dzintra Hirša (OMF 2300/3421e) mentions that she knew from what her parents told her that she should return somewhere, but at that time she called only Russia her homeland. Aija Freiberga knew that her mother always longed to return to Latvia, therefore she had no objections to go with her, but the children did not always feel supportive of the implementation of this decision, – for example, Alvis Jansons (OMF 2300/3448e) remembered that he much better liked it at the place of his birth, even after moving to the Latvian SSR and starting school here, he had asked his parents to return to the location of their forced settlement and his own place of birth. Likewise, Astrida Holma (OMF/3175, 3176) remembers that she did not want to leave her birthplace at all, she even cried when she heard about such decision of her parents. Alvis Jansons also informed that he had already been to Latvia once before moving, because his parents had gone on a scouting trip with him to find out whether there was

a place to live in case of moving. This trip did not alter his dismissive attitude towards the fact of moving. Notably, not everyone made the decision to return to Latvia after being released from forced settlement, so Irina Holma's (OMF 2300/3174, 3175) sister Margarita Kumizova (OMF 2300/1921, 1922, 1923) with her husband, a local Russian, and their sons who were born in the place of Margarita's forced settlement did not return to Latvia because there was no place to live. The opinions of the children born in displacement about returning to their parents' homeland were not asked, hence, their thoughts about it did not matter in the decision-making process, however, the feelings of the children born in displacement regarding this decision vastly differed. There were children who empathised with their parents, were aware of where their parents came from and accepted this decision without objection, while other children felt better in a familiar environment, so they showed resistance to such changes in their lives.

3. Importance of nationality in displacement and attitude towards language learning

Although at times the hopes of returning to the homeland were lost, the nationality of the parents played a role also when parents had to choose a name for their children born in the camp. The choice was also influenced by the aim to hinder the easy transformation of that name, as it was customary among Russians, Irina Holma (1924–2018, Fetlere, OMF 2300/3174, 3175) admitted, explaining the reason why she named her daughter Astrīda (b. 1954). The parents of Tamāra Vilerte (b. 1954, OMF 2300/758) had a similar consideration, indicating that the name was acceptable when living in Russia, but it was possible to Latvianise it and call their daughter Mārīte if they managed to return to Latvia. Of course, there were also cases when only the subjective choice of the parents played a role in selecting the name, without any considerations of the euphony of that name upon the potential return to Latvia. Alvis Jansons (OMF 2300/3448e) got his name because it was the name of a friend of his father.

Certain tendencies in the video testimonies reveal the attitude of these families towards teaching the Latvian language to the children born in displacement – since some people had lost hope of returning and worked long hours, they did not teach their children Latvian language. These children were looked after by the older women, also relatives, for example, grandmothers, who did teach these children the basics of the Latvian language after all, according to Alvis Jansons (OMF 2300/3448e), as well as Dzintra Hirša (OMF 2300/3421e). Nevertheless, here, too, the fact that Latvian was not used as the language of communication within the displaced family played a certain role. Thus, Alvis Jansons (OMF 2300/3448e) admitted that he himself did not want to learn Latvian, but he had learned songs in Latvian that were sung at various gatherings, although he did not understand their true meaning and significance. The desire to learn Latvian

failed to appear after his relatives from Latvia sent him the Latvian primer. Dzintra Hirša (OMF 2300/3421e) pointed out that the family tried to celebrate the festivities even in forced settlement, saying that Christmas was celebrated in the family and she learned to recite Christmas poems in Latvian. The most appropriate situation for teaching the Latvian language in the family was in the Vilerts family, where daughter Tamāra (OMF 2300/758) was under the care of her brothers and sisters who spoke Latvian, thus making sure that she learned Latvian at home.

The situation changed after these children arrived in Latvia, and in order to continue the schooling in Latvia and in Latvian language, additional efforts became necessary to master this language at the required level. Not only parents, relatives, but also teachers from the respective schools came to help. The continuation of education in Latvia was influenced by parents, as well as the school staff, who in some cases encouraged parents to send their children to classes with the Latvian language as the language of instruction, even though they could have made a choice in favour of a class with the Russian language of instruction, but also in a school that was geographically closer to home. The geographically closest school was chosen by the parents of Astrīda Holma (OMF 2300/3175, 3176), and thus, she continued her education in Latvia in Russian, went on to Russian-language higher education, and worked in collectives where everyday communication was in Russian. Quite opposite choice was made by the parents of Dzintra Hirša (OMF 2300/3421e) – following the advice given by the director of the nearest school, and at the encouragement of the school administration, they decided to send their daughter to a class with Latvian language of instruction. Within the short period until the beginning of the school year and also in the first years when Dzintra studied in Latvian, the teachers helped her in various ways. After returning to Latvia, the parents of Alvis Jansons (OMF 2300/3448e) decided to use only Latvian as the language of communication in the family and also to send their son to school with Latvian language of instruction, thus, his further education took place in Latvian. The fact that the children were not taught Latvian in the locations of forced settlement, or that the people around them helped them learn only the basics of the Latvian language, in most cases did not have a great role as to which language was chosen for education after returning to the Latvian SSR. After returning to their homeland, the parents chose to send their children to schools with the Latvian language of instruction, the parents themselves and other relatives, as well as teachers helped these children to acquire the Latvian language at the required level, so that they would continue to receive education in Latvian language, regardless of what the children themselves initially thought about it. In exceptional cases, as in the case of Astrīda Holma included in the report, the education in Latvia continued in Russian, substantiating this choice with the school geographically closest to the place of residence.

4. The impact of being born in displacement upon the subsequent life

The children born in forced settlement adapted to their families, following the example of their family members and did not talk about the repressions they experienced, pointing out that such were the times and everyone knew what and where they could talk about and what they could not talk about, even without a prior warning (Aija Freiberga OMF 2300/2733, 2734, Alvis Jansons OMF 2300/3448e, Dzintra Hirša OMF 2300/3421e). The same adaptation took place in the society as well, indicating that families most often, including the family of Astrīda Holma (OMF 2300/3175, 3176), preferred to live a secluded life and stick together only with their closest relatives. Although no one spoke publicly about the experienced repressions, both the school administration and the authorities knew people's biographies, consequently, the origin of the children born in displacement affected their life course. Not only Alvis Jansons (OMF 2300/3448e), but also Dzintra Hirša (OMF 2300/3421e) notes about the influence of the place of birth upon their subsequent life, stating that, despite success in sports, they were not allowed to join training camps and competitions outside of Latvian SSR and had not been given an official justification for that. Likewise, Astrīda Holma (OMF 2300/3175, 3176) recalled that she was not permitted to go on a recreational trip to North Korea in the 1970s precisely because of her origin. Despite the prevailing 'silence' in the society concerning the experienced repressions, the regime was informed about the biographies of its citizens and used this information to influence the lives of the people not only by limiting the opportunities to achieve success in sports beyond the Latvian SSR, but also in their future lives. Particular individuals born in displacement in their video testimonies did not directly disclose anything about how their origin had affected their future life, however, the narration itself reveals fragmentary insights into these consequences.

Conclusions

The video testimonies of the children born in displacement talk about their early lives and the origin of their families – most often, they came into the world as the first children in families that were formed in the locations of forced settlement, as their parents, who were repressed during the mass deportations carried out in Latvia, met under these conditions. The fact that Aija Freiberga (OMF 2300/2733, 2744), who was born to a Polish mother, is among those born in displacement illustrates the fact that people of various nationalities were repressed in Latvia.

The narratives of the children born in displacement show that their parents had told them that it was not their homeland even before they were released from forced settlement and returned to live in the Latvian SSR. This confirms

that children had access to information about Latvia and the repressions experienced by their parents from an early age, however, the understanding of it was different for each child, to a large extent – related to their age. Furthermore, the fact that the children born in displacement expressed their attitude regarding the parents' decision to return to their homeland was related to their age and individual comprehension of the available information about the place to which they should go, opinions varied from total denial to acceptance of the parents' decision.

The Latvian language proficiency of the children born in displacement was directly related to the decision made by their parents – whether to purposefully teach or not to teach Latvian language to their children. Since some of the younger people who had established their families in forced settlement had lost hope of returning to their homeland and already used Russian as the language of conversation in the family, the children were deliberately not taught Latvian, except in cases where a family with children already established in Latvia had undergone forced settlement, and Latvian had been used as the language of conversation in the family from the very beginning.

The children born in displacement were looked after by other people who lived in forced settlement, most often – elderly women, relatives, who communicated with these children in Latvian, thus providing the necessary basic knowledge. After returning to Latvia, lack of Latvian language proficiency at the required level in most cases did not play a decisive role in parents' choice to send their children to schools with the Latvian language of instruction. Not only parents and other relatives, but also teachers helped children to acquire the Latvian language at the required level. Of course, there were some cases when children born in displacement in Russia continued their education, which had been started in Russian, in the same language also after their return to Latvia.

The children who had been born in displacement, became integrated in the Latvian SSR together with their families, they blended into the general society. Likewise, these children knew about their origin and the repressions experienced by their parents, but they did not speak about it loudly and publicly, they maintained the 'silence' prevailing in the family and society regarding the repression they had experienced, however, the ruling power did not permit to forget this aspect and reminded of it in various ways, limiting the opportunities of these people, for example, to travel outside the USSR, to obtain the desired education or to build a career.

In continuing the research on this topic, it would be important to expand the number of video testimonies of children born in displacement, as well as the range of topics they bring up, such as communication and attitude shown by local residents and other people in forced settlement, settling in Latvia, membership in youth organizations, biography issues and other topics. This should be

explored in a more in-depth study of the topic launched by the current article. Moreover, not all those deported from Latvia and their children did return to Latvia after their release. Their motivation behind this decision should be explained accordingly.

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Fearing the Memory of Father: The Impact of Biological Origins on the Life Course of Latvian ‘Third Reich’ Children Born of War

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Abstract. Based on an extensive review of scholarly works on WWII Children Born of War (CBOW) in Western Europe, in contrast to a content analysis of the interviews of 38 Latvian CBOW subjects, this proceeding argues that the primary stimulus driving the hiding and augmenting of CBOW memories in post-war Soviet-occupied Latvia differed from that in the West. It argues that, while there existed a fear of social reprisals in the West, a fear primarily focused on social discrimination and its impact on the well-being of CBOW and their families. In contrast, in Soviet-occupied Latvia there existed a mortal fear of institutional repressions, a fear primarily focused on individual and family survival. Moreover, utilizing examples and statements from said Latvian WWII CBOW subjects, as well as from academic literature on the Soviet Union and Soviet-occupied Latvia, this proceeding illustrates how a societal fear, and the resulting ‘silence,’ permeated all of society. Thus, this proceeding identifies that the practice of hiding and augmenting memoirs for fear of the Soviet regime was widespread in post-war Latvia, that Third Reich (TR) CBOW were just one cohort group trying to hide their past from the Soviet regime and that the resulting atmosphere of societal ‘silence’ may have been conducive to these ends. Finally, after having illustrated the fear which existed in society and among such CBOW, this proceeding shows how that fear in many cases came to dictate the life course of TR CBOW in Latvia.

Keywords: Children Born of War, fear, Latvia, memory, repressions, Soviet Union, totalitarianism

Introduction

Children born of war (CBOW) are those children born to a local parent and a member of a foreign military force (Lee 2017, 24). Such children and their families are often stigmatized for traits related to their biological origins. As a result of discrimination, CBOW often suffer from adverse effects, yet another important

source of such effects, especially the often-cited crises of identity, was the ways in which the caregivers of CBOW, and often the children themselves, attempt to avoid stigma by hiding 'discreditable' traits (Lee 2017, 7–8). In trying to better understand how the experiences of Latvian CBOW were unique to other such children in Europe, the research question of this study was 'do the experiences of avoidance differ for CBOW in Latvia, in comparison to those in Western Europe?' Thus, the goal of the current study was to look at acts and experiences of avoidance, as recounted by Latvian CBOW, and compare them to those documented by scholarly studies of Western European CBOW. In doing so, this proceeding argues that, while the ways in which such facts of the past were hidden from society, and often even from the child, may seem the same, and while their adverse effects may be similar, the primary stimulus behind these deceptions in Soviet-occupied Latvia fundamentally differs from the cases documented in post-war Western Europe. In essence, based on a content analysis of oral history interviews related to 38 Latvian CBOW subjects, 23 fathered by 'Third Reich' (TR) soldiers and 15 by Soviet (USSR) soldiers,¹ this proceeding argues that, while the primary stimulus in hiding the origins of CBOW in Western Europe was a fear of social stigma, and social reprisals, in Soviet-occupied Latvia the principal stimulus was a mortal fear of institutional stigma, and institutionalized reprisals.

Methodology

In attempting to answer the aforementioned research question, the study involved the coding of the interview transcripts of Latvian CBOW subjects and isolating those segments which recounted acts of avoidance, acts of silencing, acts of erasing and those of lying about the past. In utilizing such a content analysis approach, the study proceeded to look at the ways in which those subjects came to explain the cause(s) of those isolated instances of avoidance. Finally, the findings of the study were compared to the findings of scholarly studies of CBOW in Western Europe. The current study's findings are illustrated with *in vivo* examples from said interviews and those instances are contextualised by referring to other studies of life under Soviet totalitarianism, in general, and of Soviet-occupied Latvia, specifically.

Results

1. CBOW avoidance, as observed in Western Europe

In the post-war atmosphere of Western Europe, TR CBOW and their mothers were often socially stigmatized; they frequently endured bullying and ostracization; they were often victimized and shunned by their local communities (Lee 2017, 64–67; 89–91). Ericsson and Simonsen (2006, 10) have labelled this

environment in Western Europe as a “conspiracy of silence.” It was an atmosphere where, as they argued, there prevailed “a convergence of interests, private and public.” It was an atmosphere where, as they explained, nations and people were eager to silence taboo topics, such as fraternization, and where families and mothers of CBOW were eager to hide ‘discreditable traits’ for fear of social stigmatization. In this way, they argue that the interests of these parties converged and, consequently, CBOW families ‘conspired’ by bringing ‘silence’ into their homes. Yet, it must be noted that, when CBOW identities were hidden, families did not use only ‘silence,’ but also augmented memoirs with erasures and lies to conform to social norms (Brähler *et al.* 2012, 323; Larsen, Mochmann 2005; Lee 2017, 65; 68–69; Stelzl-Marx 2017, 347–348). Additionally, in this context, it should be noted that while studies of Western European TR CBOW often discuss how ‘discreditable’ traits were hidden from local communities for fear of social reprisals, few such studies ever note families hiding such traits from the post-war state. That is, Western European CBOW studies rarely discuss a fear of institutional reprisals² and practically never mention a mortal fear of the post-war state. Consequently, it may be said that in Western European nations WWII CBOW and their families had a fear that was primarily focused on social reprisals, and this fear caused them to hide and/or augment their memories in a way that would conform to social expectations.

2. General avoidance, as observed under the Soviet regime

In Latvia, the post-war environment was, however, fundamentally different; in Soviet-occupied Latvia there existed a widespread mortal fear of institutional repressions. During the mass deportation of 25 March 1949 alone, nearly 43,000 Latvian citizens were deported to Siberia (~2.28% of the population) (Bergmanis, Jansons, Zālīte 2005, 277). Moreover, in Soviet-occupied Latvia some 150,000 were repressed for political reasons (~7.5% of the population) and as many as 600 000 people (~30% of the population) were subject to other forms of regime-led harassments, such as being dismissed from jobs, being prohibited from attaining a higher education and/or from pursuing a career of their choice (Strods 2005, 217).

Figes (2007), as well as other scholars who have focused on the Soviet Union (for examples, see Bertaux *et al.* 2004; Duprat-Kushtanina 2013; Tumarkin 2011) have documented how average people augmented their life stories in an attempt to avoid Soviet institutionalized repressions. Figes (2007, 652) has detailed the augmentation or destruction of documents and photographs, the changing of places of residence to break ties with the past, the adoption of different names and biographies, the ways in which life stories were withheld from family members and, crucial for this study, how family histories were edited for the sake of children. Consequently, in this context, it should be recognized that a mortal fear of

the state and the ensuing mnemonic augmentations not only affected Latvian TR CBOW families, but also constituted a factor that permeated all of the society.

In fact, of both TR and USSR CBOW subjects in Latvia, 71%, or 27 respondents reported Soviet regime-led repressions targeted at their families (73.9% of the TR CBOW testimonies, and 66.6% of the USSR CBOW recounted how family members fell victim to, or escaped from Soviet state-orchestrated repressions, including murders). Furthermore, the vast majority of the subjects interviewed describe a broad societal 'silence.' That is, nearly all the interviewed subjects indicated that certain aspects of the past, such as the 1941 and 1949 mass deportations, for example, were not publicly discussed due to a societal fear of the Soviet regime. Furthermore, nearly all CBOW subjects recall that a fear of regime-led reprisals existed in their homes and often resulted in 'silence.' This environment can be better illustrated by the fact that the testimonies of USSR CBOW subjects also recount aspects of family 'silence,' usually surrounding different facets of family history, such as deportations, family history prior to the war, the service of family members in the *Waffen-SS* and their religious affiliation. One subject – the daughter of an NKVD officer and a Latvian school teacher – explained that her mother hid from her the fact that her extended family had been deported to Siberia (Female 6, 2018). "About repressions, it's strange but in our home, we never spoke of them. Most of it I learned much later", she explained. Another TR CBOW subject recalled: "One time he [grandfather] had drunk and was scolding the government and Stalin, and then Grandma was worried. We had neighbours and the wall was quite thin. Although that neighbour told everyone that she was deaf, she could hear very well. Then Grandma quieted him: 'don't speak, don't speak, you know where it will take you [Siberia]'" (Male 2, 2017). And, as one USSR CBOW subject (Female 18, 2018) described the atmosphere: "After the war you were not allowed to open your mouth. What you think, that is not known. Otherwise, you will be immediately sent to Siberia. You were not allowed to say anything. When we spoke about the governments, [we spoke] null. That was all endured quietly, that which we thought. I remember the silence. Especially [among] the farmers, who had not been caught and sent to Siberia, when everyone around them had been deported."

3. CBOW avoidance, as observed in Soviet-occupied Latvia

This societal experience of mortal fear, and the resulting societal 'silence', is a factor that should be kept in mind when exploring the experiences of Latvian CBOW, TR and Soviet. In this context, while the evaluation of social stigma and social discrimination of CBOW in occupied Latvia is beyond the scope of this proceeding, the reader should be reminded of the common idiom "you don't throw stones if you live in a glass house". Consequently, this societal fear and the resulting 'silence' may account for why reports of social stigmatization are

practically non-existent in Latvian CBOW testimonies, USSR and TR (see Gruziņš 2022).³ Moreover, the testimonies of TR CBOW subjects show that this general atmosphere of ‘silence’ was utilized by families to conceal the child’s origins. In other words, even if some TR CBOW testimonies do not recall overt acts of concealment, such as lies in the public sphere, they do show the use of this societal ‘silence’ to conceal origins. As one subject put it: “It cannot be said that I was branded [a TR CBOW], as also no one asked me [about my father]. No one ever asked me; I was never asked by anyone – ‘where is your father?’ or something like that. Nobody ever asked me that” (Female 22, 2018). Another TR CBOW recalled: “They didn’t know and also no one ever asked. If I can remember now, then I remember that no one asked me; not about my father or about anything. The war was over, everyone was happy to have survived” (Male 11, 2018).

While it can be said that, in this environment, 100% of the Latvian USSR CBOW subjects recall that their origins were broadly known by their local communities, on the other hand, it is much harder to distinguish how many TR CBOW were, in fact, successfully hidden from society and/or the state. Nevertheless, it is observed that most TR CBOW subjects recount very direct attempts made by the family to conceal their origins from the Soviet regime. Examples include grandparents registered as parents, mothers’ first husbands registered as fathers, fake names on birth certificates, stepfathers posing and being registered as the real fathers, families relocating from place to place to avoid the authorities and the changing of CBOW birth dates on documents. Furthermore, it should be noted that, for fear of being targeted by the Soviet regime, these TR ‘children,’ as they progressed into adulthood, often continued to hide the truths of their origins, some from their closest friends and even spouses. Additionally, as a direct result of a fear of being exposed to the regime, some TR CBOW in Latvia recount how they avoided traveling abroad, refrained from taking up certain vocations and joining the Communist Party. As one TR CBOW subject, who was invited to join the Party, noted: “It’s better not to worm one’s way into such things. It’s better to keep quiet and not tell [anything about] what you, yourself, really don’t know” (Male 16, 2018). Another TR CBOW subject illustrated the fear that had kept him from sharing the story of his origins for the vast majority of his life: “Just try and open your mouth, you could get put in that same building where the windows point to the East [the KGB house]” (Male 3, 2018).

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be argued that, in order to understand the experiences of Latvian TR CBOW, and their experiences concerning avoidance, it is essential to recognize how different the post-war environment in Soviet-occupied Latvia was from that in the West; in order to understand how and why CBOW

origins and memoirs were hidden in post-war Latvia, it is essential to recognize the different nature and acuteness of the fear that existed. In Soviet-occupied Latvia, the impetus to hide facts about TR CBOW originated from a fear that stemmed primarily, not from society as can be said for the West, but from the Soviet regime. Moreover, at least until the death of Stalin, it was a fear that focused not only on the well-being of TR CBOW and their families, as can be said for the West, but on their survival. Thus, it can be concluded that this mortal fear of the regime led Latvian CBOW to hide and/or augment their memories in a way that would conform to the expectations of that regime. It was primarily a fear of regime-led reprisals, not those apportioned by society, that often came to dictate the life course and memory of Latvian CBOW.

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NOTES

- 1 LOM: Museum of the Occupation of Latvia Audiovisual Material Archive. CBOW interview collection (LOM 2300/3237–3239; 3250–3253; 3288–3290; 3350e; 3351e; 3352e; 3353e; 3354e; 3355e.; 3356e; 3357e; 3358e; 3359e; 3360e; 3361e; 3362e; 3363e; 3364e; 3365e; 3366e; 3368e; 3369e; 3370e; 3371e; 3372e; 3373e; 3374e; 3375e; 3376e; 3381e; 3387e; 3388e; 3389e; 3390e; 3391e; 3392e; 3394e; 3396e; 3405e; 3406e; 3407e). Interviews recorded by Oskars Gruziņš and Aivars Reinholds 2016–2019 in accordance with European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 642571.
- 2 Nonetheless, it is true that some Western European nations did, to varying degrees, institutionally discriminate against TR CBOW and/or their families. Arguably, the Western European nation that carried out the harshest policies of this type was Norway (see Borgersrud 2005).
- 3 None of the USSR CBOW recall experiences of social discrimination, while two TR CBOW recall mild harassment (name calling) and another two experienced physical bullying by their peers.

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Oncological Disease Narrative: Analysis of Masculinity Aspect in Men's Experience Stories

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Abstract. The aim of the paper is to clarify the narrative of oncological disease in men's experience stories and to analyse the masculinity aspect in them. The theoretical part of the work consists of the study of the sociological and anthropological aspects of the illness, the definition of the illness narrative, contextualizing all of this with theories of masculinities. The data has been collected through narrative interviews with men who have an experience of oncological disease. A narrative approach and psychoanalytic criticism were used for the analysis of the collected data. The men constructed their illness-related experiences through the prism of masculinity, with a particular focus on changes in the body and masculine identity.

Keywords: narrative oncology, illness narrative, masculinity, psychoanalysis

Introduction

Man is always expected to be strong, and to be able to overcome all life's challenges and remain tough. As a result, every man must constantly demonstrate these qualities and prove them to others. Society expects that a man will be the one to overcome any challenges in life and be able to cope with any kind of difficulties. Men are subject to specific requirements which they must accept and perform 'by default'. This leads to the formation of misconceptions and misperceptions of gender roles. This is particularly evident when it comes to men's health. Oncology itself is considered a taboo subject in society and public discourse. Consequently, there is very little open communication on this topic in the public domain. In the context of a growing number of campaigns to promote public awareness of oncological diseases and their potential risks, it can be argued that the topics, which are not openly discussed in public, and which are considered sensitive, are being highlighted and attempts are being made to actively communicate about them.

Statistics also show that only one in four men in Latvia who should have had PSA tests last year for health monitoring and early diagnosis of prostate cancer have had these tests. Experts point out that this is often due to misunderstood masculinity (Zvirbulis, Eglīte 2022). This is also well demonstrated in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic: a recent study confirms that men are less likely to wear masks and take precautions. The reason for this is that men are more likely to feel a stigma from wearing a mask, as it tends to be interpreted as weakness (Mahalik *et al.* 2022).

At the global level, there is a fair amount of research on gender and disease, trying to explain the experience of illness from a sociological and anthropological perspective. Gender research is also quite active in this aspect, offering alternative perspectives on both people's experience of illness and the lived experience of illness. However, it has to be stated that the narrative approach has rarely been used on this perspective. It can be argued that there is a need for empirical data that can reflect the current situation in society and explain the social aspect of illness through subjective narratives. There are several sources of statistics regarding the current situation in society, i. e., how many are ill, and how many are dying. However, there is almost no data on the ways how everyone – in the context of this work, a man in Latvia – experiences and copes with this challenge. Only through the stories it is possible to gain an understanding of life events, as statistics only offer aggregated data, which primarily give a generalized understanding of the problem.

Even though theorists have largely focused on the interaction between masculinity and disability and the ways how, for example, a disability or chronic diseases affect masculinity, it is possible to argue that the situation tends to be similar regarding cancer. Thus, men could operate with similar patterns, as cancer tends to radically change the course of life and a person's well-being in a short period (Miller 2004, 349–351). Other sources also argue that the threat to masculinity associated with cancer is amplified for those who occupy a traditional and restrictive masculine gender role. Cancer-related masculinity risk can be characterized by feelings of loss, diminished significance, or hopelessness (Wei-Ting Wang *et al.* 2020).

Hence, the aim of the study is to clarify the narrative of oncological disease in men's experience stories and to analyse the masculinity aspect in these narratives.

For this purpose, three research questions have been formulated, to which answers are sought during the study:

- How is the narrative of oncological illness constructed in men's accounts of their experiences?
- How does the disease affect men's perceptions of their masculinity?
- How is masculinity represented in the stories?

Methodology

The methodology has been devised with the view to achieving the aim of the study, i. e., clarifying the narrative of oncological disease in men's private stories and analysing the aspect of masculinity in them. Meanwhile, the study aims to provide clear answers to the research questions: how oncological disease is communicated in men's experience stories and how does the disease affect men's perceptions of their masculinity, as well as how is it reflected in the stories. For this purpose, a qualitative approach was chosen for the implementation of the research. Consequently, 8 narrative interviews were conducted with men currently experiencing any oncological disease or being in remission, because, after studying the theory, it was found that these men could not be considered 'completely cured' (Frank 1997, 10). To reach the target group, the author communicated with support groups, societies, and associations assisting and supporting cancer patients. Almost all the informants were recruited through support group leaders, for example, 6 participants were recruited from 3 different support groups, organizations, and associations.

At the same time, the author of the study wrote an online invitation to participate in a study about a person's experience with cancer, guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity. This communication tool was used to obtain two more informants. Later, the data collection process followed the principles of narrative interviews, asking the men to share their experiences of the disease from the beginning, and inviting them to say anything that came to mind, even if they felt it was unrelated to the topic. During the interviews, the researcher listens carefully and follows the informant's story, asking clarifying questions if necessary. Additionally, questions were asked about defining and experiencing masculinity during illness. During the interviewing process, the author of the study conducts the informants' observations. The author traced the occasions when the interviewees were silent, as well as recorded non-verbal expressions of the body; the transcripts of the interviews also represent any over-statements and repetitions of words and sentences. Once the necessary data was collected and transcribed, the narrative themes were identified to understand what constitutes a narrative of oncological disease. In addition to the thematic analysis, a performative analysis was carried out to understand how masculine identity was constructed and expressed in the narratives.

To analyse narratives, A. Frank's approach was used, which is based on the types of illness narratives defined by himself, which are common in chronically ill people. These are the restitution narrative, the chaos narrative, and the quest narrative (Frank 1997, 73). Frank's typology of narratives has been used in studies of adults' experiences of cancer, HIV/AIDS, and chronic illness. These studies reveal the complex ways in which social and cultural narratives shape

the meaning of illness for patients. Although a single narrative is primarily dominant in accounts of patients' experiences, a single individual may draw on different elements of each narrative simultaneously or over time (Roher *et al.* 2017).

After the narrative analysis, Lacan's structuralist psychoanalytic approach was used to analyse the texts. He broadened the focus of psychoanalytic criticism, which sought to define the literary text simply as a simulacrum of the unconscious for diagnostic evaluation. In his view, the literary text is a conscious articulation, an artifact and a fictional product, and it cannot represent the unconscious without mediation. The literary text acts as a field where the unconscious desire is reframed. Desire lies in the text as a motivating force that is the whole of literary creation process, its aesthetics and even its reading (Azari 2008). In his theory, the psychoanalyst has defined 3 main stages: the real (*réel*), the symbolic (*symbolique*), the imaginary (*imaginaire*). The *imaginary* refers to the world of sensory impressions, images (dreaming, fantasizing, identifying), which strongly attracts and are not real. It is based on sensuality, it is organized in a dual and imaginative way, determines narcissism, identification and thus the ego formation. It manifests itself in the seduction, vanity, alienation and deception of the subject. The *symbolic* includes everything that, in the broadest sense, refers to language; the symbolic refers to the signifying order, the signifiers in language that defines the subject; it refers to the unconscious and the intellectual. The *real* is Lacan's dimension that is the most difficult to identify, because it is "that which cannot be said or thought of and which seems alien and threatening precisely because it has no relation; the real manifests itself, for example, as trauma, panic, sexuality and death" (List 2014, 159). The Lacanian approach involves the analyst – in this case, the researcher – listening and following the informant's story and pays attention to the use of language, especially the signifiers which are defined as words that are devoid of direct meaning. This helps to define and reveal their duality, which is the carrier of unconscious meaning. As it has already been pointed out, dreams, mistakes, and misstatements, as well as the choice of the 'wrong' words are of interest to psychoanalysis (List 2014, 162).

This methodology enabled the author to identify the ways how masculinity and the related identity are manifested. In addition to this, the author also drew attention to atypical language use: overstatements, metaphors, and silences. Here, the author points out the fact that he does not claim to be a psychoanalyst, but the literary research approaches were used to analyse the text.

Results

To summarize the data from the men's narratives, it can first be argued that men construct a narrative of both their experience of oncology or illness and, in parallel, men construct a narrative of their masculine identity that is

threatened, reclaimed, lost, and reformulated during illness. Thus, in men's stories, the construction of the experience of illness and the construction of the challenges of masculine identity are parallel. Therefore, 2 major thematic categories of narrative can be crystallized: the aspect of the illness experience and the aspect of masculinity.

1. Themes permeating the oncological narrative

Overall, it is possible to recognize themes that run through several of the stories and that can be seen as central and constitutive of oncological disease. These themes are information-seeking, treatment, fear, reframing the relationship with the body, alternative treatments, criticizing doctors, changes in the body, regaining masculinity, threatening/losing masculinity, self-realization, and remission. Clearly, the analysis revealed several other themes, but the author identified them as pervading – occurring in almost all of the stories.

Oncology becomes a daily practice that men must accept, and cope with specific things – examinations, treatments, and trying to share experiences. It should be noted that for men currently in remission, the story also ends with self-identification in this condition. However, remission does not mean recovery for almost any of the participants of the study, because of the fear associated with the possible return of disease. At the same time, the treatment narrative is shaped by the informants' experience of chemotherapy or radiation, to which the men themselves attribute a symbolic meaning, because it is related to the changes in the body and hence, masculinity. These aspects of the story are more narrative than, for example, the aspects pertaining to surgery or medicine they took. Thus, the surgery and the story about it remain untold, and this can be linked to the routinization of experience in the narratives. It means that aspects such as doctor's appointments, medication, or surgery lose their importance in the men's stories, being replaced by those things that are more threatening to the identity and especially – masculine identity. Those aspects the research participants themselves try to tell in a very unemotional way permitting to distance themselves from the experience.

The second important point revealed by the narratives is masculinity. Men both understand and construct the experience of illness by emphasizing what happens to their masculinity and especially to their bodies. Sociology professor Arthur Frank has asserted that the narrative of illness is not only a man's story, but also the body's story of what is happening to it. It is possible to point out that the body is another narrator, but its story is told by a man. Men hardly focus on the emotional aspect and do not talk about it. Men reflect on their experiences, but the emotional and sensual aspect remains untold. Even when men construct stories about vulnerability and their inability to perform masculinity according to their beliefs about it, they do so in a highly masculinized way and accentuate

other obstacles of the experience. On the one hand, this could be interpreted as a desire to perform the masculine identity, as nearly in every story the men emphasized it, even if that masculinity was threatened or the men constructed the experience of illness through the loss of masculinity. In every story, however, masculinity – and especially the bodily aspect – constituted a pervasive motif.

It is significant that the participants of the research do not include private space in their narratives of experience, i. e., they do not describe how, for example, their closest ones felt, how their relationships with friends, relatives, or children developed in general. This is an important point, because each informant in the study has a family. From the acquired data, it can be concluded that close people are not even participants in the story, as they are hardly ever mentioned or serve as attributes of the narrative rather than as characters. Even though the private space remains outside the story, the informants' narratives are very personal, and therein it is possible to trace both the ways how their identity has changed and how the crisis of masculinity is developing.

Importantly, the men were open about their sexual dysfunction caused by the disease. The key point is that each man's story is not only about changing his identity and accepting oncology as a social practice, but it is also a story about his own body. Each informant emphasized the bodily aspect of the narrative. As already mentioned, the construction of experience is linked to the physical changes of the body. The informants' narratives were the field in which masculinities were constructed, reframed, and reformulated. Consequently, it can be established that the narrative of oncological illness merged with the narrative of masculinity, mostly with its alteration. The body is the most important aspect of masculinity, and the body has been given a symbolic significance, as the body helps to maintain and affirm masculinity. The explicitly constructed experience of illness is also influenced by the state of the man's health or the social context in which the story is told. Men who are currently in remission construct a quest narrative, trying to emphasize what the experience has given them and what they have gotten out of it. However, for those who have an undetermined oncological status or are going through the disease now, the stories are different because the narrative shows the chaos aspect; the story is about what they are going through here and now. Men currently in remission, on the other hand, tend to look back on their experiences.

2. Psychoanalytical view on the men's narratives

Using Lacan's psychoanalytic approach, it was also possible to identify how the men's narratives, i. e., their language, express unconscious desires and fears. The author proposes that the real, or what cannot be expressed in language at all and exists outside it, is the masculine identity of men, or the core, which also influences the ways how the symbolic and the imaginary function. This is

the basis for identification and the means how the story was shaped and taken forward. The real is expressed in the fear of losing the normativity of the body. The imaginary for the men is mostly expressed in the episodes in which they talk about their masculinity before the illness, as well as in constructing a narrative about their bodies.

It could be argued that the men in the story form an opposition: me-before-illness/me-now. Consequently, the narratives construct an image or a discursive field that is free from illness and that serves as an affirmation of masculinity. This juxtaposition helps to structure the understanding of masculinity and serves as a kind of anchor that also helps to structure the narrative and to emphasize the bodily aspect and the changes in it. Here it can be further inferred that men are no longer narrating about themselves but making references to their symbolically constructed image. The story of oneself before the illness is no longer a story about oneself, it is a symbolic representation of one's own image that helps the narrator to affirm what he has been. The "I" in the stories becomes a subject that only expresses and sublimates what is currently unavailable to the narrator. The narrator probably derives pleasure from this, creating a masculine image that is currently unavailable because of the disease.

The last point, which is structured in language, is the symbolic concept. It can be argued that this concept is related to both how men construct their image in the story, or how they express the identity that currently prevails, and how they want to see themselves, as well as how they try to reclaim masculinity, or, on the contrary, how they reformulate it to fit those concepts. The symbolic aspect is mostly linked to men's desire to regain the masculine identity they had before the illness. This is manifested in the episodes where men construct a masculine post-illness identity, either by reformulating it or symbolically reclaiming it.

Conclusions

Oncology is a major challenge to male masculinity: the experience of cancer is closely linked to it. Men's stories deal with moments of threat to masculinity. Men try to reformulate their masculinity when they realize that they will no longer be able to perform it or no longer meet the demands they have placed upon themselves. Masculinity for men is closely linked to the normative body, consequently, the greater the changes, the greater the perceived threat to masculine identity. The men in the story also construct a masculine image of themselves that they had before the illness, which they also contrast in the story with the one they had during the illness. It can be stated that men strive to maintain masculinity, which becomes a central aspect in the narratives of oncological disease. Thus, even in narrating their experiences, men attempt to reframe that masculinity through language. This is evident both in the topics chosen, i. e., what is being narrated,

and in the way the topics are narrated. The symbolic loss of sexual power is clearly a traumatic and difficult moment for men, which affects the understanding of masculinity. Hence, men need to reformulate their understandings of this, otherwise they may feel the stigma that they impose on themselves. Men make up a highly masculinized story of oncology. That is, they include only those aspects that could stereotypically be considered masculine. The psychoanalytic approach suggests that men's understanding of illness is based on masculinity and that men's narratives of illness are mostly about the desire to reclaim masculine identity. The participants of the study continuously referred to a symbolically constructed masculine image of themselves before the illness, which they wanted to regain or realized that they would never recover. It can be hypothesized that the masculine identity is what determines how the story will be told.

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'Intensive Mothering' Discourse in Narratives Pro and Against 'Daddy Quota' in Latvia

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Abstract. Motherhood in Western civilization bows to the dominant discourse of 'intensive mothering', coined by Hays. The burden (and privilege) of childcare and domestic duties, prominently placed in its 'natural' position – on the woman's shoulders – is slowly shifting towards a more liberal and equal division between partners, also engaging the father in taking care of the household and children. However, despite benefits for the child and woman from the father/partner participating in childrearing and menial household tasks, there is still resistance and a strong position towards 'traditional' gender roles in the family – upheld both by men and women. Therefore, in light of the new EU directive (Directive (EU) 2019/1158) otherwise known as the 'daddy quota', the aim of this research is to explore the evidence and influence of the 'intensive mothering' discourse on the argumentation in favour and against fathers/partners taking the non-transferrable parental leave to stay at home with their children for 2 months. A thematic analysis of comments in the most popular *Facebook* group for parents in Latvia regarding parental leave for the partner shows both support and resentment towards the directive, appealing to loss of income for the family, loss of a 'special-bond' between mother and child, woman's decision rights and fear of increased 'double shift' for the mother. The article provides an insight into the ways how the main arguments against the shift towards a more liberal and gender equality-oriented division of household tasks and childcare are rooted in the 'intensive mothering' discourse.

Keywords: daddy quota, *Facebook*, intensive mothering, motherhood, social media

Introduction

The burden (and privilege) of childcare and domestic duties in Western civilization, including Latvia, is still prominently placed in its 'natural' position – on the woman's shoulders. Even though society is slowly shifting towards a more liberal and equal division between partners, also engaging the father in taking

care of the household and children, the dominant discourse of motherhood is still anchored in 'intensive mothering' (Hays 1996; Hallstein 2006). The ideology insists that parents, especially mothers, invest "more than usual amounts of physical and emotional energy into specific activities and practices with children", as well as put their own needs and interests last, or undertake "enormous risks" while maximizing their potential for success (Das 2019, 499; Steiner, Bronstein 2017, 3). The mother is "entirely responsible for the social, psychological and cognitive well-being of her children" (Feasey 2017; Budds, Hogg *et al.* 2017). 'Intensive mothering' also reinforces traditional gender norms, where the father is seen as the 'bread winner' and sole earner of family's income, while the mother concentrates on household tasks and childrearing (Schoppe-Sullivan *et al.* 2017, 277), it also supports the 'pro-natalist' position and medicalization or motherhood experience (Tiidenber, Baym 2017, 2). Moreover, the joy of giving birth and raising children is seen as the woman's ultimate fulfilment and any sharing of experiences of dissatisfaction with the transition to motherhood is considered taboo, as it is essential to maintain a good mother's image of oneself (Cronin-Fisher, Sahlstein 2019).

Even though the perfect image of a 'traditional family' portrayed in the discourse of 'intensive mothering' is based on a very narrow group of society, it has created a benchmark against whom all mothers and families are being measured (Cronin-Fisher, Sahlstein 2019, 158). The reality in many European countries, including Latvia, differs from this idealized norm and it echoes in diminishing birth rates, small number of children in a family, high divorce rates, etc. The number of childless couples has increased and the number of families with 3 children has decreased over the period of last 50 years (Trapezņikova 2019, 26–33). Ties between generations are weakening as, for instance, only 14% of respondents with children under 14 have received regular support in childcare from relatives, friends or people living outside their household. during a 12-month period (Trapezņikova 2019, 50). The most typical form of family in Latvia in 2021, out of 503.1 thousand families, is a solo parent with one or more underage children (24%), followed by couples without children (22.4%), whereas only 8.1% were married couples with children; moreover, Latvia has the leading position in divorce rates in EU (CSB 2021, 2–15; Trapezņikova *et al.* 2019, 65–68). Furthermore, even though in Latvia there are signs of improvement in gender equality, 68% of respondents in Latvia feel that women can take care of children better than men (Trapezņikova *et al.* 2019, 47). The distribution of household chores also is also uneven as on average (in EU) the women who work full time, devote additional 19 hours per week, taking care of the common home, compared to men who usually spare 10 hours a week; thus, the 'second-shift' at home, followed by burnout and exhaustion, is a still topical problem of the modern-day mother (Belle 2016, 11; Hirschfeld, Machung 1989). Lastly,

in Latvia on average every third woman has suffered from abuse and violence at home, and the number had even increased during the pandemic (CSB 2022). The discourse of 'intensive mothering' does not deal with these or other 'abnormalities' and deviations from the idealized version of a family.

To sum up, despite benefits for the child and woman from the father or life-partner participating in childrearing and menial household tasks (Bergman, Hobson 2002; Dunatchik *et al.* 2021), there is still resistance and a strong position towards 'traditional' gender roles in the family – perpetuated both by men and women. Therefore, in light of the new EU directive (European Parliament 2019) otherwise known as the 'daddy quota', the aim of this research is to explore the evidence and influence of the 'intensive mothering' discourse on the argumentation in favour and against fathers/partners taking the non-transferable parental leave to stay at home with their children for 2 months. There are two research questions:

1. What are the main arguments against or reservations about the new directive and individual entitlement towards parental leave in comments in *Atsaucīgo māmiņu forums* ("Responsive Mums' Club" from September 2021 to June 2022)?
2. In what forms does the 'intensive mothering' discourse emerge in the arguments in these comments against the 'daddy quota'?

Research design

A thematic analysis of comments to posts in the most popular *Facebook* group for parents in Latvia (*Atsaucīgo māmiņu forums*) regarding the parental leave for fathers was carried out, concentrating on the posts from September 2021 to June 2022. In the period of 9 months (bearing in mind that the deadline for incorporating the EU directive was already established) there were 77 posts in total that appeared in search using keyword 'parental leave' and 197 posts appeared with the keyword 'father', most of which dealt with problems the mothers faced with parental leave or relationships with their partners. After removing duplicates from both these searches, only 5 addressed the question of non-transferable parental leave, of which 4 had comments. These 4 posts were included in the sample. Then, a quantitative content analysis was carried out to articles in the most popular news portal in Latvia – *Delfi.lv*, and one of the leading portals dedicated to the family theme – *Mammamunteti.lv*, focusing on the same period of 9 months. The articles were found by carrying out a search by keyword in both portals, filtering out the precise date and then going through all articles one by one. The results of both these samples were analysed and compared.

Results

1. Thematic analysis of comments

As illustrated in Figure 1, the sentiment, expressed in the sample of *Facebook* comments regarding the non-transferrable parental leave, ranges from positive to negative, and, except the comments below *Post 2*, approximately a half of the expressed views are neutral or pose a question, as technical details about changes in the parental leave had not been fully disclosed to the society at the time. It is, however, obvious that regarding views in favour or against the non-transferrable parental leave for fathers, the respondents are leaning towards negative views. An important aspect is that the absolute majority of the users which are commenting in the posts bear female names.

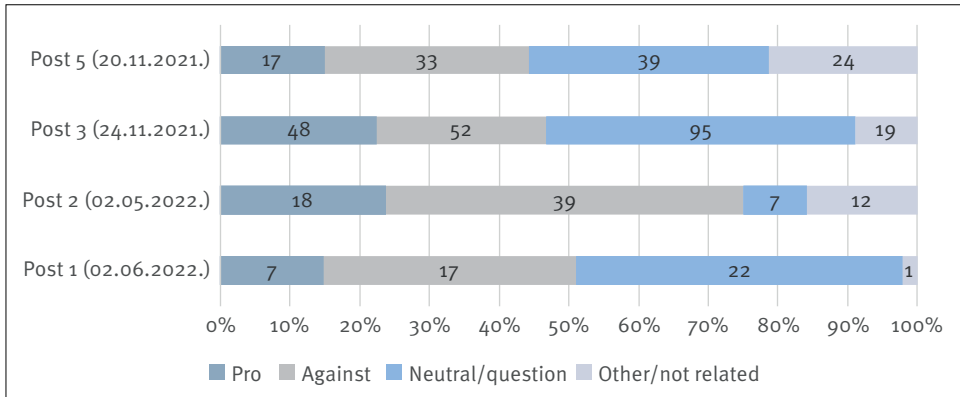


Figure 1. Sentiment expressed in *Facebook* comments regarding non-transferrable leave

Analysing the comments in detail, several themes emerge concerning opportunities or problems for 1) the mother, 2) the father, 3) the child, 4) the employer and government. First of all, regarding the changes brought by the proposed directive to mothers, there are several threads of thought. There is a lot of anxiety regarding the position of single mothers and how the changes will affect their livelihood, expressing fear that the mother will simply lose 2 months of paid leave. However, the main arguments form around the dominant position of mother as a ‘natural’ caregiver in contrast to fathers, complying with the ideology of ‘intensive mothering’. As illustrated in Figure 2, there are three main arguments: 1) breastfeeding and how the new directive will deprive the mother of the chance to breastfeed the baby, 2) mother’s instinct and bond with the child (as opposed to the lack of that instinct in the father), 3) the choice of mother to do as she wishes with her child (superiority of mother and ‘natural’ position at home).

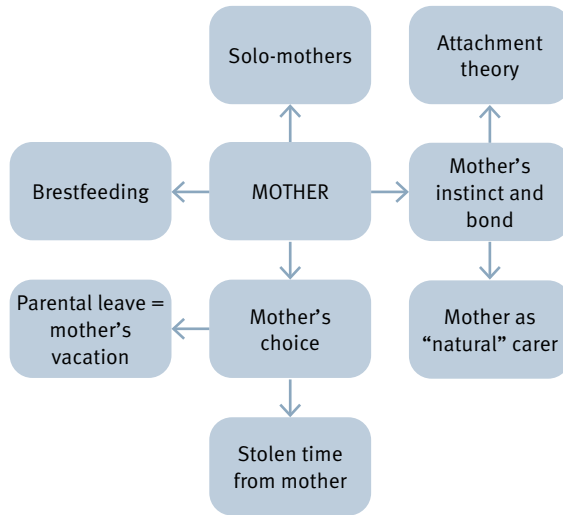


Figure 2. Thematic analysis of Facebook comments: arguments regarding the position of mother

Comments feature detailed descriptions of ‘attachment theory’, – how mother has ‘figured out’ the child and how the ‘clueless’ father would simply be overwhelmed by the new and unfamiliar responsibilities that are not suited to his abilities. The parental leave is also referred to as ‘mother’s vacation’; some responses even show outrage at the thought that the mother would have to return to work, or at the fact that this new regulation would ‘steal’ from the mother the time with her child, which is rightfully hers. Thus, the ideology of ‘intensive mothering’ can be observed especially in arguments against the new regulation, showing support of the woman being the primary caregiver. The limited number of comments supporting the directive speak mainly of mothers’ careers and workload at home that could be eased with the help of father, thereby differing from the ideology of ‘intensive mothering’.

Similar arguments have been presented in comments, expressing concern about the new changes to the role of father, illustrated in Figure 3.

Some comments simply state that the already existing paternal leave is sufficient, and no changes are necessary. Then, there is fear of fathers’ incompetence and untrustworthiness, portraying fathers as violent, prone to alcoholism or simply lacking any parenting or nurturing skills. There are also comments supporting the view that fathers are simply ‘not interested’ in childcare or unavailable because of responsibilities at work. The ‘intensive mothering’ discourse also emerges in these comments, especially in arguments against the new directive, as the father is seen as the ‘breadwinner’ of the family and two months at home would cause immense damage to the family’s financial stability. Some comments

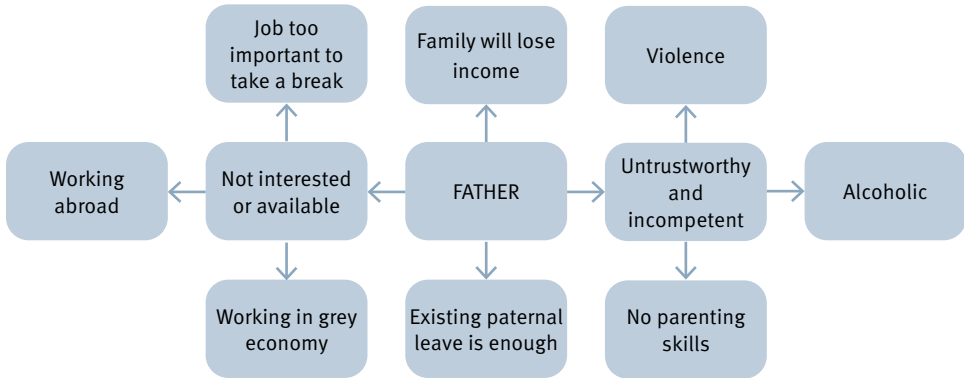


Figure 3. Thematic analysis of Facebook comments: arguments regarding the position of father

also feature doubt whether the father would be able to devote time to parental leave because of employment abroad. Arguments that support the directive accentuate the positive features of fathers staying at home with the child, a growing bond and strengthening of relationship; however, they are in minority.

Next, there are comments concentrating on the needs of the child and proposing arguments about 1) depriving the child of the mother’s love; and 2) being left in unsuitable (father’s) care, thus, experiencing stress. Then there are some comments expressing fear that the child would experience double stress because of a ‘new’ caretaker (father) and adaptation to kindergarten which could coincide with the leave the father would take.

Lastly, there is a relatively smaller string of comments, expressing preoccupation with the problems for employers that the new directive will cause. There is a concern regarding the nuisance caused by change in regulation and how the substitution of an employee for up to 2 months is ‘unmanageable’. However, some comments express fear of fathers losing their job or the employers making excuses not to grant the leave, mentioning fathers working in grey economy or abroad. Some commentators also express distrust in government, hinting that these new regulations may be part of some conspiracy or simply a demonstration of incompetence. Therefore, the ‘intensive mothering’ discourse is also imminent in all comments expressing doubt or distrust towards the new regulation, accentuating the prospective negative effects of changes upon the child’s wellbeing (father as an unsuitable caretaker, mother – deprived of her ‘rightful’ position at home etc.), the family’s overall financial situation (losing money due to father taking paid leave etc.), as well as overall uneasiness with change to the system that would encourage the father spend time with his child at home, while the mother could return to the workforce. Arguments that rather uphold a positive view of the directive lean towards a more liberal and less traditional

view regarding mothering and division of household tasks, thereby differing from the 'intensive mothering' discourse.

2. Content analysis of articles

In addition to thematic analysis of comments on *Facebook* posts in the group *Atsaucīgo māmiņu forums*, a quantitative assessment aiming to establish whether the theme of changes in regulation regarding parental leave and, particularly, the non-transferable two months had appeared in mass media was carried out through content analysis. The analysis focused on articles from the same period (from September 2021 to June 2022) on two media outlets: *Delfi*, one of the most popular portals in Latvia (Gemius 2022), and *Mammāuntētiem.lv*, also among Top20 of the most popular portals in Latvia, which mainly deals with family-related topics (Gemius 2022).

In the period of 9 months, the keyword 'father' (*tēvs*) appears in 25 articles, which focus on a variety of themes from single parenthood to the role of father in the family, as well as child custody debates and abuse; only 2 articles mention paternity leave. Meanwhile, in *Delfi* during this period the search by keyword 'father' yielded 26 articles, none of which were solely dedicated to the changes in parental leave, but instead mainly discussed the issues with child custody, alcoholism or tabloid scandals. The keyword 'parental leave' (*bērna kopšanas atvaļinājums*) appears in 51 items in *Mammāuntētiem.lv* and 35 items in *Delfi* in total, of which 9 in *Mammāuntētiem.lv* and 5 in *Delfi* mention the changes in regulation regarding the non-transferable parental leave months.

To sum up, during this period, there were more articles in total focusing on parental leave than on fathers, however, most of these articles were dedicated to the troubles faced by mothers. Although the number of articles regarding changes in the regulation is relatively small, all the articles are either neutral or concentrate on the benefits of non-transferrable leave and extra time for the father to spend bonding with the child and engaging in family life. Thus, even though the majority of articles containing the keyword 'father' focus on various problems from impertinence to abuse, and while articles regarding 'parental leave' predominantly view the problems encountered by mothers, the articles informing about parental leave tend to focus on either technical details and uncertainties, or on the fact that change will bring positive results for the family.

Discussion and conclusions

After conducting a thematic analysis of comments in the most popular *Facebook* group among parents in Latvia (*Atsaucīgo māmiņu forums*) regarding the changes in parental leave from September 2021 to June 2022, it is evident that approximately half of the comments expressed a neutral opinion or posed a lot of

questions regarding the 'daddy quota'. Even though the EU directive regulating a non-transferrable part of paid leave for both parents was passed in 2019 and was supposed to be set into action by August 2022, parents were not informed about the technical details and the effects on their livelihood; this also coincides with the results from the quantitative content analysis that shows a limited number of articles explaining the benefits of the directive in one of the most popular news sites in Latvia *Delfi* and *Mammāmundētiem.lv*. Negative comments in *Atsaucīgo māmiņu forums* outweigh the positive ones, complying to the dominant discourse of 'intensive mothering' – positioning the mother as the 'natural' carer for the child, and the father – as the 'bread winner' of the family, unable or unwilling to tear himself away from work, or being unsuitable as a primary caregiver due to lack of 'mother's instinct', absence of nurturing capabilities or character flaws. The benefits to the child, more positive work-life balance for both parents, equality and other issues were recognized only in a handful of comments. Negative comments display confusion, fear, distrust and anger, some even spread disinformation and conspiracy theories about the Latvian government. Therefore, in light of the existing dominance of the 'intensive mothering' discourse, it would have been beneficial for the institutions in charge of introducing the changes in parental leave to have invested more time and resources in starting the dialogue with the society and proactively addressing the questions from parents, stressing the benefits to be brought by the changes. Further research is needed, exploring whether the tone of conversation in *Atsaucīgo māmiņu forums* shifts as more information is disclosed about the changes yielded by the new directive, as well as the differences observed in other, less popular forums or social media platforms. The research would also benefit from a more extensive and longitudinal quantitative content analysis of media articles, as the deadline for passing of the directive approaches, exploring the reactions of media and society when the directive will finally be implemented, and whether the dominance of 'intensive mothering' discourse will be challenged by a more liberal narrative, as the society gets accustomed to the changes.

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The Ambiguity of Public Cynicism in Democracy

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Abstract. In terms of the media, there are various means of influencing the audience by informing and conditioning its attitude or forming its mood. Amongst these means, attention should be paid to scepticism and cynicism, leading to destructive, critical attitude, doubt or denial. Cynicism is the questioning or denial of what is generally accepted or accepted by the majority and some particular group. The text emphasizes the dual possible moral evaluation of cynicism: on the one hand, the justifiability and usefulness of cynicism in one situation, on the other hand, its destructive and misleading effect in another, weakening support for social and moral order. The representation of the unveiling of the monument of Gunārs Astra in the media on 20 January 2022 is analysed here as a case of misleading strategic communication.

Keywords: cynicism, ethics, Gunārs Astra, strategic communication, deception

Introduction

The influence of the media extends far beyond neutrally informing the audience about a particular current event. Depending on how the event or process is strategically represented, it resonates reflexively, emotionally, and analytically in the audience. This is how the respective mood of society or its part is formed, both by expressing support, recognition, promoting participation and cooperation in a democratic society, and by instigating non-acceptance, denial, disfavour, doubt and disbelief. Cynicism is one of the means of instigating criticism, disbelief, denial, expressing a destructive attitude towards a topical event or towards the generally accepted social or moral order. Its assessment can be recognized as situationally ambivalent. In certain cases, cynicism is morally justified – when it is used for weakening a dogmatic or outdated assumption, habit, unfounded belief, when the time has come for replacement and “reevaluation of values” (Nietzsche). At times, cynical attitude helps to effectively reveal the true nature of hidden political interests. The destructive role of cynicism, which manifests itself in

particular situations of risk, crisis or threat to democratic and reasonable values, where consensus, unity and joint action is needed, should be evaluated differently. A cynical attitude can then mislead and cause harm by discouraging participation, strong shared beliefs and action, thereby unjustifiably dividing society. The current article considers a particular case – the unveiling of the monument to the freedom fighter of Soviet-era Gunārs Astra, which took place in the crisis situation of the pandemic caused by Covid-19 on 20 January 2022.

The study employs case analysis, as well as direct observation of the event and its interpretation.

Results

Although the concept of cynicism has been known since ancient culture, the attention dedicated to its manifestations in the media and its research has increased since the end of the 20th century, when the research conducted by Joseph N. Cappella and Kathleen H. Jamieson on the spiral of cynicism was published in 1996–1997. The authors considered this phenomenon in the field of media in connection with the US election campaign, evaluation of the performance of Congress, and media cynicism in the attitude towards politicians, political advertising, as well as health care reform (Capella, Jamieson 1997). The authors describe a spiral of cynicism that starts in the media and affects the audience in its attitude towards politics and the media. Attention is drawn to the media's strategic framings of politics, which are mainly directed against the selfish interests of politicians, critically evaluating them: "When the motivations of each side in a campaign or debate are coloured by accusations of self-interested action, one response may be to dismiss both sides and eventually to dis-miss the process itself. Cynicism may be a rational response to the flow of strategic message" (Capella, Jamieson 1996, 81). Cynicism spreads and appears in the attitude of the audience towards politics and is also directed towards the media themselves, fostering distrust of the audience in state institutes and their decisions as such.

Mediated cynicism challenges and aggressively insults what is recognized as valuable by society or any of its groups, hence, its diagnosis is important for investigating the public mood, and especially in studies of audience trust. The reference to and connection with cynicism clarifies the reasons for mistrust in politics, law, morality, art and other social spheres. A distinction is made between reasonable and unreasonable reliability. Unreasonable and unsubstantiated trust, which frequently, especially in politics, is the result of misleading campaigns and political advertising, is characteristic of credulity and gullibility, while democracy without support, positive attitude and trust is unthinkable. A cynical attitude undermines reliability and trust, alienates, distances, – by protecting against credulity, and in other cases, by discouraging from supporting

joint and solidary solutions. Irony, ridicule, farce, sarcasm, comism are rhetorical tools of a cynical attitude.

Manifestations of cynicism can be observed in the Latvian media and these can be evaluated in different ways. During election campaigns, when the public space is flooded with excesses of political advertising, irony and sarcasm regarding the populist promises of certain parties or the praise and self-aggrandizement of candidates is an effective way to discourage potential voters from misleading positivity. The popular comments of Aivars Ozoliņš of the periodical “*Ir*” or the programmes of the Latvian public television channel “*Aizliegtais paņēmiens*” (“Forbidden Method”), “*Kas notiek Latvijā*” (“What is Happening in Latvia”) and others help the audience to perceive the true interests of some political or business players, which are hidden from the public, and this is achieved most effectively through the means of cynical rhetoric. Cynicism can be recognized as a particularly effective way to reveal lies, deception and falsehood in the environment perpetrated by the supporters of contemporary Russia’s imperial goals and the unjust war in Ukraine, and present these revelations to the audience. The exposure of bureaucratic thinking, stupid decisions, exaggeration, credulity and other inappropriate and harmful activities in democracy should be recognized as worthy of a clearly cynical attitude.

However, sometimes media cynicism represents a serious damage to democracy. To substantiate the aforementioned assumption, let us consider a recent case of the manifestation of cynicism. We will use a real and mediated event that enables us to observe open destructive negativity directed against the government and its decisions during the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and against positively unifying values, as manifested in the attitude towards the member of the Latvian resistance movement and freedom fighter under the Soviet occupation – Gunārs Astra (1931–1988) at his 90th birthday commemorations. As the pivotal event, this article views the unveiling of the monument designed by the artist Gļebs Panteļejevs in Riga on 20 January 2022 in front of the former Supreme Court of the Latvian SSR. In this building, on 15 December 1983, Gunārs Astra gave the momentous final statement in the trial, in which he was repeatedly sentenced to seven years of imprisonment in a strict regime correctional labour colony in the Perm region of Russia and five years of exile (Astra 2021, 8). The statement of Gunārs Astra given in the court is a document of international consequence, exposing the Soviet totalitarian regime. Its global importance is precisely described in the introductory words of Egils Levits, published in five languages (Latvian, English, German, French, Russian) in the book “*Pēdējais vārds*” (“Final Statement”) released at the end of 2021:

Today, Astra’s “Final statement” retains its significance. in Latvia as the eloquent allocution of a courageous patriot who was ready to sacrifice his life for his

country. From European and broader international perspective, Astra's impassioned defence of free speech, human rights, democracy and people's right to self determination will be sure to strike a resonant chord with freedom loving individuals all across the world, regardless of where they live and regardless of what language they speak (Astra 2021, 35).

The remarkable role of Gunārs Astra in bringing to light the fact of the occupation and russification of Latvia and in the open analytical substantiation revealing the totalitarian crimes is evidenced by the gratitude and appreciation of the people: on 19 April 1988, his grave was filled up by pouring the earth by hands (Astra 2021, 9). The media followed and reported on the commemorative events of Gunārs Astra in 2021–2022 which were organised to mark his 90th anniversary (Gunārs Astra was born on 22 October 1931). Among these were several events organized by the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia, conferences, films, the publication of the book “*Pēdējais vārds*” (“Final Statement”) proposed by Arnis Šablovskis and other organized events. The film by Lauris Gundars “*Drosmes diena*” (“The Day of Courage”) was made about Gunārs Astra and his consequential and courageous speech in the Supreme Court Hall. The creator of the film, Lauris Gundars, has connected it with the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The media is also following the making of the next film, produced by Sandijs Semjonovs, about the importance of resistance to undemocratic power and its decisions.

The central event of the commemoration should have been unveiling of the already mentioned monument “*Nebaidies!*” (“Do Not Fear!”) created by sculptor Gļebs Panteļejevs. The unveiling had been repeatedly postponed and finally set to take place on the Remembrance Day of Barricades on 20 October 2022. However, there were brutal attempts to disrupt the solemn unveiling event by a group of politically recruited people, who whistled and shouted “Freedom!”, and with hostile shouts directed against the Latvian government burst into the monument's space at the moment of the unveiling, under the pretext of protesting against vaccination and the restrictions imposed due to the pandemic, loudly and furiously disturbing the speeches of the President Egils Levits and the Minister of Justice Jānis Bordāns. The group's destructive presence at the commemorative event can be seen as cynical brutality, to which the Minister of Justice Jānis Bordāns, trying hard to overcome the chaos caused by the protesters, responded with the words: “In a sense, I am ashamed and it is humiliating to stand here and hear that a part of the nation, which is obsessed, and evidently represents the minions of the occupiers, wants to disrupt this event, for which Gunārs Astra has fallen and died” (LSM.lv ziņu redakcija, Kozins 2022).

The cynical intrusion into the memorial event dedicated to Gunārs Astra did not receive unanimous condemnation from the wider media and society.

The destructive event attempting to undermine the unveiling of the monument was not covered up in the media, however, neither did it receive an appropriate emotional assessment or a deeper critical examination. Its connection with a similar political protest that took place in Lithuania at about the same time was noted only in the short article by “Re:Check”, which on the portal LSM.lv was combined under one heading with a fact check dedicated to the mayor of the city of Riga (Puriņa 2022). In the Latvian public television news programme “*Panorāma*”, which is available and given account of on LSM.lv, the chaos which was caused has been touched upon in few lines: “During the speeches of Egils Levits and Minister of Justice Jānis Bordāns (New Conservative Party), some anti-government protest participants and opponents of vaccination tried to disrupt the solemn event with loud whistling” (LSM.lv News editorial, Kozins 2022). The same news item also contains the ambiguous statement of an interviewee regarding freedom, which is more in line with the strategy of ‘whistlers’, as the media call it, rather than with the historical understanding of freedom in the context of Soviet totalitarianism and the struggle against oppression in the life of Gunārs Astra.

Very soon after, the public media portal LSM.lv published the text of the poet and journalist Rvīns Varde, written together with the portal’s journalist Māra Uzuliņa. The text is also available in an abbreviated reading by Guntis Suharevskis, accompanying the voice with visual animation. In the publication, in the form of a naive fairy tale purportedly addressed to children (the genre was named “*asaciņa*” by authors (this can be literally translated as “fishbone”) – in a word play with “*pasaciņa*”, meaning a little fairy tale), the details of the life of Gunārs Astra are ironically reproduced in nine sentences along with the story of the protracted and unsuccessful creation of the monument, its complicated unveiling process, while in passing mentioning the murder of the fighter’s brother in 2019. The text omits everything related to courage of Gunārs Astra which transcended the limits of prosaic everyday life, his belief in freedom and Latvia’s sovereignty, the power of righteous protest, everything that can be recognized as admirable and heroic, as it was confirmed in life, interrogation, court cases and two arrests. The freedom fighter was made into a simple prisoner who did not like the Soviet government, stating that the dislike was mutual, so what followed was an apparently random deportation ‘somewhere’. The relationship of mutual dislike with power has been emphasized, thus substantiating the ensuing punishment – isolation and passive ‘doing time’ in prisons. Ordinarity and commonplaceness are underlined not only by flower cultivation mentioned in the text as being done between arrests, but also by the naturalistic emphasis of corporeal and mortal existence, which concludes the short biography: “after his death, his entrails were taken out and they were hidden somewhere” (Varde, Uzuliņa 2022). As is known, the mention of entrails is one of the classic rhetorical manifestations of a comic attitude in the work “Gargantua and Pantagruel” by the French Renaissance writer

François Rabelais (Rabelais, 1483/4–1555). The vocabulary of the comic genre is chosen to render the outstanding and admirable as mundane and commonplace to the greatest possible extent, thus debasing and erasing any value, deconstructing the highly honourable stand, and mockingly or contemptuously abnegating it. The deconstruction ostensibly questions the construction of the monument, noting that it was done reluctantly and with extensive delays. Reading George Orwell's "1984", a book banned during the Soviet era, which has been put forward as a justification for the second arrest, draws a mundane analogy for the average reader, likening it to the availability of popular literature in Internet comments today. A very naturalistic expression of the corporeal existence of a mortal man by means of death in mysterious circumstances is given, ending with the phrase "his entrails were taken out" (Varde, Uzuliņa 2022). In the text, the verb 'disliked' is repeated six times in the past form, which fulfils the dominant structuring function of the short text. This is applied both to the aforementioned relations with power and to the monument's protracted creation, its postponement and to the setbacks besieging its unveiling, which is the second thematic strain of the little fairy tale. Thus, this piece ironically and cynically deconstructs a quality transcending the mundane, – the admirable, the positive, the honourable and the democratically valuable. The cynical downgrading and misleading deletion of the hero's consequence is accomplished in a narrative characterised by ridicule, depicting an ordinary, randomly chosen person with a failed monument, its unfortunate opening, a failed life and its equally accidental and unpleasant ending.

Conclusions

The attempt to cynically impede the positive impact of the heroic record in the situation of the Covid-19 pandemic epidemic, which was followed a month later by a new, much more severe crisis of the Ukrainian war caused by Russia, can be cited as an example where cynical attitude suppresses the opportunity to lead society to a unifying experience of courage, endurance and strength. The exceptional life story of Gunārs Astra helps to comprehend the inhuman and violent nature of Soviet totalitarianism, which still serves as an explanation of the imperial policy of the Russian Empire, which enables us to understand the causes of the Ukrainian war, its barbaric course and consequences. The cynical intervention against the restrictions of the pandemic and the government in the commemorative event and the publication by Rvīns Varde spread doubts, alienate, express indifference, which precludes contributing to the demand for positive emotions in society that is so acutely necessary and irreplaceable. This can be recognized as a deliberate misleading which prevents the formation of a positively cohesive social memory. At the same time, cynical misleading becomes a dangerous alienation, a deterrent from active involvement in the united participation of the whole society in a crisis process which involves risks.

Undoubtedly, laughter, irony, comedy, different opinions, criticism are suitable and supported in the democratic landscape of public space. All this serves the diversity of opinions involved in decision-making, balances them, forestalling pomposity, dogmatism, promotes critical thinking and pluralism, prevents one-sided thinking by using the democratic right to freedom of speech. However, ridicule and ironic, like freedom of speech, have limits. They are indicated in the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, Article 116, which allows restrictions on freedom of expression “in circumstances provided for by law in order to protect the rights of other people, the democratic structure of the State, and public safety, welfare and morals” (Latvijas Republikas Satversme). One does not even have to go as far as directly undermining security, prosperity and virtue, this can be effectuated by turning the worthy of genuine respect into something naively ridiculous and using it for amusement, responding to the demand for entertainment of the crisis-weary part of society.

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Attitudes and Opinions of Veterinary Professionals About Covid-19 Infection and Vaccination Against It

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Abstract. Veterinarians are well trained to recognize and control infectious diseases and use vaccination as a routine procedure for preventing infectious diseases in animals. This role of veterinarians has become more emphasized since acceptance of concept “One world – one health” by health professions in medical and veterinary fields. It would be expected that veterinarians are well-prepared to form a scientifically based opinion on Covid-19 and on value of vaccination against it at individual and society level. The goal of this study was to determine whether and to what extent veterinary medical knowledge and experience influences beliefs, attitudes and actions towards Covid-19 and vaccination at individual and society levels. To address this goal, structured, anonymous interviews were conducted in March 2022 with volunteers representing veterinary professionals ($n = 14$). Results showed that veterinary professionals represented a divided community of people. While majority (almost 80%) of veterinary professionals voluntarily chose to be vaccinated and believed that Covid-19 is dangerous to their health and society as a whole, there were 2 respondents that believed in conspiracy theories, 2 that did not think that Covid-19 was substantial threat to them or society, and 3 that refused or were reluctant to get vaccinated. There was a direct correlation between believing in conspiracy theories and vaccine-hesitancy. Personal experience having severe illness caused by Covid-19 did not change beliefs. There was no direct correlation between support for animal vaccinations and support for vaccination against Covid-19. Overall, these results show that veterinary professionals in Latvia are not particularly different from Latvian society in general. Presence of supporters of conspiracy theories and vaccine-sceptics among veterinarians indicate that there are factors besides professional public health training and education (university degree and even PhD) that influence establishment of personal beliefs and attitudes.

Keywords: conspiracy theories, Covid-19, one-health, vaccine hesitancy, vaccination, veterinarians

Introduction

Educational process for veterinary professionals provides a solid theoretical background about infectious diseases and their control within animal populations. As part of the professional training, strong emphasis is placed on recognition and prevention of diseases that people can contract from animals or their products (zoonoses). In the last decade, this emphasis has become even more highlighted, since health professions from medical and veterinary fields have embraced the concept of “One world – one health” (often referred to simply as “One Health”) (Iatridou *et al.* 2021). According to this concept, in the world that we live in, there is no strict division between human and animal health, therefore, to achieve health in human population, we also must aim for optimal health and balance in the environment that surrounds people and includes animals and plants.¹

It is expected that, based on their training and professional experience in the control of infectious diseases and use of vaccination as a routine procedure for prevention of infectious diseases, veterinarians would be well-prepared to form a scientifically based opinion on the infection caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus (coronavirus disease, Covid-19). Furthermore, it would be expected that veterinarians would be proponents of vaccination against Covid-19 because they would understand the importance of vaccination in providing protection at individual and more importantly, society level. On the other hand, veterinary professionals may represent a diverse group of specialists with various experiences and opinions, and their attitude may not be as uniform as expected. Such diversity was seen in Latvian medical society with incidental reports of some doctors not advising their patients to be vaccinated and some nurses even participating in schemes of providing fake vaccination certificates (Feldmanis, Kozins 2021; Krenberga 2021). The goal of this study was to determine whether and to what extent veterinary medical knowledge and experience influences beliefs, attitudes and actions towards Covid-19 and vaccination at individual and society levels. Indirectly we wanted to identify arguments that have (or have not) convinced veterinary professionals about seriousness of Covid-19. With these goals in mind, we conducted interviews with volunteers who agreed to participate in the study.

Methodology

Structured interviews were conducted in *Zoom* platform at the beginning of March 2022 by a professional sociologist also trained in psychology. Interviews consisted of 7 questions with estimated interview time of 10 minutes. Following questions were asked:

Question No. 1 (Q1): How, in your opinion, did Covid-19 emerge?

Question No. 2 (Q2): In your opinion, is vaccination of animals useful? Why yes or why not?

Question No. 3 (Q3): In your opinion, is vaccination of people against Covid-19 useful? Why yes or why not?

Question No. 4 (Q4): In your opinion, is Covid-19 dangerous to you personally? Why yes or why not?

Question No. 5 (Q5): In your opinion, is Covid-19 dangerous to society? Why yes or why not?

Question No. 6 (Q6): Have you been sick with Covid-19? When and how severely, in your estimate?

Question No. 7 (Q7): Are you vaccinated against Covid-19? When?

Interviews also included personal questions about age, professional education, type of work and work experience. Interviews were anonymous and the interviewer was a person unknown to study participants. Study participants were volunteers that agreed to be interviewed. Invitation to participate in the study was sent out by e-mail to Latvian veterinarians from several sources: Latvian Veterinary Association (includes more than 800 members), Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (includes teaching staff and students, more than 250 people; some overlap with Latvian Veterinary Association members). Invitation to study was also promoted on social networks used by Latvian veterinary professionals, such as *Facebook* page *vetiem.lv* and small animal practitioner site. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and given to the researcher (IMV) for analysis as an Excel file. For quantitative analysis, the responses were categorized as ‘agree’, ‘mostly agree’, ‘mostly disagree’ and ‘disagree.’

Results

Fourteen veterinarians had volunteered to participate in the interviews. All participants were women, median age bracket was 31–40 years old (range 20–30 to 61–70). Among participants there was one student. All the others had the 2nd level professional degree (six years of university studies with degree of veterinary doctor) and among them 3 were professionals with PhD degree (Dr. med. vet.) and 2 were enrolled in PhD studies. Majority of the participants ($n = 6$) had more than 20 years of experience in the field (range <1 to >20 years). Participants were employed in a broad array of jobs in veterinary profession including veterinary assistant ($n = 1$), practitioner ($n = 3$), practitioner/teaching staff/professor ($n = 3$), consultant in a veterinary wholesale company ($n = 2$), and specialist in a veterinary laboratory ($n = 2$). Three participants were not on active duty (retired or on temporary leave).

Answers to Q1 (“How, in your opinion, did Covid-19 emerge?”) were quite varied. In general, most veterinary professionals admitted that it was not known

for sure how SARS-CoV-2 emerged and ten of them mentioned that they believed it was a viral mutation associated with increased virulence and/or likely jump of the virus from an animal species (possibly bats) to humans. Several of these 10 veterinarians discussed some other possibilities along with these, including two that mentioned a possibility of the virus being released (accidentally or not) from a laboratory. These opinions are along the lines of the current state of scientific knowledge published in peer reviewed publications (Keni *et al.* 2020; Muralidar *et al.* 2020; Worobey *et al.* 2020). One veterinarian said that it was “a virus from China” without further elaboration. Another veterinarian discussed possibility of a viral transmission from animals to humans as equally possible as the virus being artificially produced.

Respondent Nr. 10 (R10): *“It is such a question that one can only guess. I do not rule out that it [the virus] is artificially formed. I am not convinced, but I don’t rule it out either. Well, if it is natural, then it has already been stated many times that [it jumped] from species to species overcoming species barriers. But in this case, I really do not rule out that the whole event was artificially created”.*

Two veterinarians strongly favoured conspiracy theories that included specially designed campaign that would benefit those involved in vaccine production or sales of medical supplies.

Respondent Nr. 5 (R5): *“Well, I mean...it might not be popular, but I don’t believe it is from one mouse that was eaten by a Chinese and taken around the world. I think it’s some kind of specially organized event for people to profit from selling masks, gloves, vaccines, etc. I don’t believe that such a strong potential for that virus [exists to spread] from one mouse all over the world”.*

Respondent Nr. 14 (R14): *“I think that it is man-made, because the place of origin... Because it was known for a very long time that such studies were taking place. Maybe they didn’t have such a goal as it turned out now, maybe not at all... The fact is that it all started when the big fights about vaccines started... Nowadays you can find a lot, everything that is written cannot be believed. You have to search for yourself”.*

Answers to Q2 and Q3 were coded and analysed in relation to each other to determine if there was correlation between personal beliefs about usefulness of vaccination for prevention of diseases in animals and usefulness of vaccination against Covid-19 (Table 1). All veterinarians agreed or mostly agreed that vaccination of animals was useful; however, the attitude towards vaccination of people against Covid-19 was less uniform. Two respondents who did not think

that vaccination against Covid-19 was useful were the same two respondents who favoured conspiracy theories in Q1 (R5 and R14). Interestingly, one of them was a strong proponent of animal vaccination but opposed vaccination against Covid-19 because of not seeing the benefit of the latter. This respondent commented that vaccination against Covid-19 possibly decreased severity of illness with delta strain of SARS-CoV-2; however, that was not sufficient evidence to change her mind about usefulness of Covid-19 vaccines. The other respondent who did not support vaccination against Covid-19 discussed at length the lack of specificity of vaccines – that they did not protect against infection with Covid-19 but, instead, “mess up immune system” and therefore vaccinated people got sick more often. At the end, she believes, everything is politics.

Table 1. Personal attitude of veterinary professionals towards vaccinations

Vaccination of animals is useful	Vaccination of humans against Covid-19 is useful			
	Agree N (%)	Mostly agree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Total N (%)
Strongly agree	9 (64%)	2 (14%)	1 (7%)	12 (86%)
Mostly agree	0	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	2 (14%)
Total	9 (64%)	3 (21%)	2 (14%)	14 (100%)

Answers to Q4 and Q5 were coded and analysed in correlation with each other to determine if the perceived individual threat presented by Covid-19 and its perceived threat at the society level were correlated (Table 2). Results showed that the majority of the respondents (11/14; 79%) perceived Covid-19 as a threat to their own health and even more (12/14; 86%) perceived it as a threat to the society. Of 3 respondents who expressed a low perceived individual threat level presented by Covid-19, two did not think that Covid-19 was dangerous to the society. These were the same two respondents (R5, R14) that expressed Covid-19 vaccine scepticism and inclination for conspiracy theories. Arguments that were mentioned in substantiating these opinions included statements that Covid-19 was similar in its severity to flu and pointing out that research should be more focused on the factors that would explain why some people did not contract Covid-19. These results indicate that the perceived individual threat level is directly correlated with the perceived threat at the level of society.

Table 2. Personal opinion of veterinary professionals about the threat of Covid-19 at personal and society level

Covid-19 is dangerous to me personally	Covid-19 is dangerous to the society			
	Agree N (%)	Mostly agree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	Total N (%)
Agree	6 (43%)	1 (7%)	0	7 (50%)
Mostly agree	3 (21%)	1 (7%)	0	4 (29%)
Mostly disagree	0	1 (7%)	1 (7%)	2 (14%)
Disagree	0	0	1 (7%)	1 (7%)
Total	9 (64%)	3 (21%)	2 (14%)	14 (100%)

The last two questions (Q6 and Q7) were about personal actions (getting vaccinated against Covid-19 and when) and experience with Covid-19 infection (Table 3). The goal was to see if personal experience may influence answers to the questions 1–5.

Table 3. Covid-19 infection in veterinary professionals depending on their vaccination status

I am vaccinated against Covid-19	I have been sick with Covid-19		
	Yes N (%)	No N (%)	Total N (%)
Yes, according to my own will	5 (36%)	6 (43%)	11 (79%)
Yes, after it was mandatory	2 (14%)	0	2 (14%)
No	1 (7%)	0	1 (7%)
Total	8 (57%)	6 (43%)	14 (100%)

Most of the respondents (8/14; 57%) experienced Covid-19 disease as it would be expected in the early spring of 2022 after almost two years of Covid-19 pandemic in Latvia including widespread infections with omicron variant of Covid-19 in January and February of 2022. Almost 80% (11/14) of veterinarians chose to be vaccinated voluntarily against Covid-19 soon after it was available. This was a higher proportion than in general public where this level of vaccination was attained in early 2022, only after mandatory Covid-19 vaccination was instituted for large proportion of work force (teachers, medical workers and government employees) (Valsts kanceleja 2022). Only those respondents who were vaccinated and had done so on their own and as early as possible appeared to be able to avoid disease; however, the number of participants in other categories was too small to draw conclusions about correlation between vaccination status, time of vaccination, and the disease. There were several interesting

observations that were not impacted by the limited number of participants. This study revealed that veterinarians were not 'immune' to vaccine-hesitancy and that some of these professionals get vaccinated only after being compelled to do so. Two veterinarians that got vaccinated only after it became a mandatory requirement were R5 and R14, who had scepticism towards Covid-19 vaccines and did not think that Covid-19 was a significant threat to their health or society. The only veterinarian that did not get vaccinated against Covid-19 was a retired veterinarian (age group 61–70) with PhD and previous jobs at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and State Veterinary Department. Although she recognized importance of public to be vaccinated because it decreased the number of lost lives, and while she experienced quite severe Covid-19 illness herself, she still was more inclined to avoid vaccination for herself because of concerns for 'over-stimulating' immune system. Overall, it appeared that respondents who were ill with Covid-19, used this experience to substantiate the beliefs they already had.

It is important to mention some of the comments voiced by respondents who were Covid-19 vaccine sceptics. In general, it was quite clear that these respondents were aware of their opinion not being aligned with 'mainstream or correct' opinion. Furthermore, it was apparent that they had felt marginalized but this experience did not change their views and opinions. Another comment was made about mandatory vaccination being a bad policy decision that actually did more harm than good in the eyes of those who were vaccine-hesitant.

Conclusions

Veterinary professionals represent a divided, possibly polarized community of people. While the majority (almost 80%) of veterinary professionals voluntarily chose to be vaccinated and believed that Covid-19 represented a danger to their health and society as a whole, there were a few (2–3) respondents who believed in conspiracy theories, did not think that Covid-19 was a substantial threat to themselves or society, and refused or were reluctant to get vaccinated.

Overall, 80% of veterinary professionals elected to get vaccinated as early as possible in 2021. This proportion is higher than in general public, indicating that most veterinary professionals can be relied upon and used as a supportive community in case of another emerging disease that requires control measures similar to Covid-19.

There was a direct correlation between believing in conspiracy theories and vaccine-hesitancy. Personal experience of having a severe illness caused by Covid-19 did not change these beliefs. There was no direct correlation between support for animal vaccinations and support for vaccination against Covid-19. Vaccine sceptics were aware of their views being different from the 'official

opinion'. Criticism that they may have received did not change their attitudes towards Covid-19.

Overall, these results show that veterinary professionals in Latvia are not particularly different from Latvian society in general (Spundiņa 2021). Presence of supporters of conspiracy theories and vaccine-sceptics among veterinarians indicate that there are factors besides professional public health training and education (university degree and even PhD) that influence establishment of personal beliefs and attitudes. We conclude that professional training and university education do not automatically instil critical thinking skills, nor do they grant the ability to navigate successfully within the abundance of information available in current times.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 CDC (USA Center for Disease Control) definition of One Health: "One Health is a collaborative, multisectoral, and transdisciplinary approach – working at the local, regional, national, and global levels – with the goal of achieving optimal health outcomes recognizing the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment."

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The Course of Life of Those Deported on 14 June 1941 Until Their Release from Forced Settlement. Examples of Disinformation, Misleading Information

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Abstract. Totalitarian state regimes use disinformation and misleading information in the form of propaganda to influence, control and reduce the possibility of critical thinking in their citizens. It still continues in several countries around the world. In order to facilitate recognising disinformation, to understand its manipulation methods, to promote critical thinking in a democratic environment, it has been valuable to analyse the country's own lived experience through the prism of its inhabitants. The article reflects examples of the experience of the population displaced from Latvia during the mass deportation carried out by the Soviet totalitarian regime on 14 June 1941, from the moment when the echelons full of deported people crossed the border of Latvia and arrived at the deportation camps, until liberation, the opportunities for return and life in Latvia after the experience of deportation. Oral history, represented by interviews in video format from the video testimony collection of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia are the basic historical sources of the current study, predominantly focusing on the memories of people who were adults at the time of deportation. Several accounts of the memories are compared with the documents in the criminal case files of the deportees stored in the State Archives of Latvia. In the article, the insights into the main findings are grouped into eight key points of the historical context: 1) the beginning of the German-USSR war; 2) information obtained at the site of displacement (deportee status, information about the men); 3) the end of the German-USSR war; 4) communication with relatives, friends in Latvia; 5) efforts to return to Latvia in 1946–1948 (illegally/legally); 6) deportation of 25 March 1949 (informed/uninformed); 7) Stalin's death on 5 March 1953; 8) discharge in 1956–1957 and return to Latvia. Through examples, the article, reveals the disinformation of the Soviet regime in the form of silence, not responding to people's questions, absence of any explanation either regarding the status of the displaced person, or any aspects of rights. Replies to written submissions to the state authorities of the USSR were rejected without explanation. At times, the repressive regime also used partial disclosure of information, for instance, regarding relatives who were shot and killed in imprisonment. Not only the very harsh physical conditions

in the detention made the deportation inhumane, but the victims were also morally destroyed by this reigning ignorance, fear about their status, loved ones and fate.

Keywords: deportation, disinformation, information, deception, oral history, concealment, video testimony

Introduction

To control the society and the information flows therein is the basis of totalitarian regimes (Brzezinski, Friedrich 1965, 22). Thus, one of the pillars of state administration is disinformation in the form of propaganda to keep society under constant control and prevent the involvement of critical thinking. With repressions as an aid, the ruling power instilled fear in people and endeavoured to stifle the preservation of true information, driving people toward adapting it to the needs of the regime, or aiming to conceal it altogether and confine it to oblivion.

With the occupation of Latvia by the Soviet Union on 17 June 1940, the system of total control was introduced in the country, within one year transforming the state administration according to the Soviet requirements (Bleiere 2022). One of the first steps was to eliminate public participation in the life of the state, closing practically all types of public organizations, banning freedom of association and speech. The culmination of those repressions which took place during the first year of Soviet occupation was the mass deportation of Latvian residents on 14 June 1941. What made this action particularly tragic for the victims was that two types of repression were carried out simultaneously – the arrests of the heads of families and the deportation of their families to forced settlement sites (Pelkaus 2001, 17).

In 2020/2021, the author started research exploring the existence and impact of information, disinformation and misleading information during the mass deportation of 14 June 1941 in Latvia. On the basis of its first part, mainly consisting of eyewitness accounts' analysis, seven key points were marked regarding the information circulation and context of the deportation process until the departure of the echelons of the deported from the territory of Latvia (Neimane 2021). The purpose of this article is to highlight the influence of information, disinformation, misleading information through the examples of deportees' destinies and their memories. This is done in the following eight key points of the historical context.

Methodology

The base of the research in terms of sources consists of the video testimony collection of the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia.¹ These are oral history sources, where the interview method is characterized by the fact that it is guided by historical events in which the researcher is interested (Bela, Zirnīte 2014, 19).

The collection includes 241 life stories of Latvian residents deported on 14 June 1941. The examples of the study are the materials reflecting events from the point of view of the victims of the second type of repression – the deportation of family members to forced settlement locations. In order to better understand particularly the informative aspects during the course of deportation, 30 out of 38 video testimonies of people who were adults at the time of deportation were studied.² The basic method – quantitative content analysis, which allows to highlight the main trends of circulating information, disinformation and misleading information.

Results

1. The beginning of the German-USSR war

Deported people were placed in barred railway wagons, whose destination was unknown. The information that the German-USSR war had started on 22 June was not officially given to those in the wagons. Those victims who knew the Russian language learned this message indirectly, for example, by listening in to occasional conversations of railway employees, seeing army echelons on other tracks, which were carrying soldiers and weapons, – they could convey the message to the rest of the people sharing the fate in the carriage. This news about the beginning of the war had a significant meaning for a large part of the deportees. A characteristic feature revealed in the video testimonies was that upon learning of the beginning of the war emerged a hope that the front would stop the echelons and release the people detained therein. “War is war, maybe we’ll get home sooner – that was the thought!” (OMF2300/212).

2. Information obtained at the location of forced settlement (deportee status, information about the men)

Typically, when the deportees arrived at the location of forced settlement, they did not receive any clearer explanation regarding the length of prospective deportation period, the reasons for the repressions, nor were they informed about any rights they had or did not have. Studying the spoken testimonies of the deportees, as well as the criminal case files of these persons in the Latvian State Archives of the Latvian National Archives (fund No. 1987 “Case files of persons deported from Latvia on 14 June 1941”), a conclusion emerges that a lot, especially in the first years of the forced settlement, depended on the employees of the local department of security institutions, – what information, to what extent, and at what moment to give or withhold from the victims. Likewise, the registration data in these institutions could be carelessly recorded, therefore some of the documents have not been preserved to this day. The deportees testified about several single deportees or the ones lacking any relatives who had died in the first

years of the displacement (1941–1944) and no information about them can be found in any records (OMF 2300/379),³ thus the list of deportees published today (Pelkaus 2001) is definitely missing the records of some persons. Representatives of the authorities quite often deliberately lied to the deportees and even ridiculed them when they sought some information or justice (OMF2300/172). Russian language skills were very important for the deportees in communication with the responsible local persons in forced settlement. Those deportees who knew the Russian language, to some extent became mediators or leaders in the forced settlement camp. They had access to slightly more information that they may or may not have been able to unravel from lies and concealment. Meanwhile, these people were also subjected to a greater scrutiny by the security authorities, were arrested and tried for anti-Soviet agitation (OMF2300/172; OMF2300/1676). Only from 1948 did the security authorities begin to inform the displaced about deportation for 20 years or for life (Bleiere 2021).

From the very first day in forced settlement, the wives sought their husbands, attempted to find out where they were and why the family was not together. In relatively rare cases, but there were very persistent women with Russian language knowledge who learned about the system of gulag camps and started writing letters to different camps, in this way learning not only about the imprisonment of their respective husbands, but also about other Latvian men imprisoned there, passing on the news to the women in forced settlement who then had the opportunity to correspond with their loved ones (OMF2300/83). However, the wives in forced settlement were predominantly left in the dark. L. Vanhanena testifies: “We ask where the men are – if they were alive, they would be here with you! We asked and asked, and they already knew that they were dead, just didn’t tell...” (OMF2300/185). It was a deliberate form of disinformation by the totalitarian regime – deliberate concealment of men’s deaths in prison and/or disclosure of incomplete information.⁴

3. The end of the German-USSR war

Since uncertainty prevailed among the displaced people regarding their fate, the most important role of the information about the end of the war was the hope of being discharged and returning to Latvia. Mirdza Lāce testifies: “People on the shore holler, sing, shout: “Vojna konchilas!” [The war is over!] We hugged with Mirdza and thought that we would get home! We had high hopes that we would get home, but life went on, and nothing improved.” (OMF2300/684)

4. Communication with relatives, friends in Latvia

With the second Soviet occupation of Latvia (Bleiere 2022), the deportees had the opportunity to correspond with their relatives and friends who remained in Latvia. This was a significant turning point in the lives of the deportees in terms

of information, because it opened up an opportunity to find out, of course, conditionally or as much as censorship (Daukšts 2011) and self-censorship permitted, about the situation in Latvia, as well as to convey information about their fate in the forced settlement. It also gave an impetus to some of the deportees to write requests for release to the responsible authorities of the USSR and LSSR,⁵ but without success. Mirdza Tomsone testifies: “He [A. Kirhenšteins⁶] answered me even to Siberia, which was a great risk on his part, and it was written by hand – Dear Mrs. Tomson! And sent 400 roubles. He said I had to apologize, knowing you, that’s all I can do for you! And you can believe it! [...] Mom had gone to Vilis Lācis⁷, but the secretary said that he did not receive such [people]” (OMF2300/678).

Although partly, often in a symbolic text, with concealment, these received fragments of information significantly raised the morale of the deportees. Of course, in parallel with information, a very important part of communication was also the material part, lucky were those whose relatives could help by sending food, clothing, things that could not be obtained in forced settlement.

5. Efforts to return to Latvia in 1946–1948 by illegal or legal means

With the end of the German-USSR war and communication with Latvian relatives/friends, some of the displaced people had real thoughts about returning to Latvia. In 1946 and 1947, thanks to enterprising people from Latvia, it was possible to legally send children to Latvia to relatives/friends (Riekstiņš 1996). However, it was very difficult for mothers to part with their children, and soon after they were sent to Latvia, several women also dared to return, although without the permission of the authorities’ documents (OMF2300/270). There were quite a few cases when women travelled from the locations of forced settlement to Latvia individually, – with their children, as well as those without children (OMF2300/1676; OMF2300/296). Rarely, there were cases when women were intercepted on the way, and accordingly the woman herself was sentenced to a certain period of imprisonment in the camps and the child was sent back to the location of forced settlement (OMF2300/724). Just as seldom, there were cases when women were issued documents and permission to return to Latvia (OMF2300/852), however, as it turned out later, pursuant to the decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the USSR of 26 November 1948 (Riekstiņš 2004), this type of return also was considered illegal. The presented situation regarding the return from 1946 to 1948 indicates that, until the aforementioned decree,⁸ the status of the displaced was not entirely strictly formulated by the authorities, therefore, quite a lot of the displaced used this conditional “absence without leave”. Of course, the deportees who arrived in Latvia had no information about the intensification of repressions and the decisions of the USSR adopted in 1948, they often had legalized and lived an apparently peaceful life.

In 1949, the state security authorities commenced a stricter arrest, trials and forced resettlement of the people who had escaped the first forced settlement (OMF2300/270, OMF2300/1676; OMF2300/296). Some were arrested, but some still managed to avoid repeated repressions, for example: changed surname, changed region of residence in Latvia, concealed biographical information, and other types of concealment (OMF2300/380).

6. Deportation of 25 March 1949

In terms of information, this date was important for the part of the deportees who had returned to Latvia. In them, these news incited and intensified the fear of being deported once more, fear for their loved ones, several of them, driven by dread, had already packed their bags in case of possible deportation. It was rare for this second mass deportation to open a new deportation case, and those who had already been victims were deported again (OMF2300/938). For the most part, those who were deported in 1941 still were individually tried a second time and deported, while this fact mostly remained unknown to those who were still in forced settlement, unless it concerned close friends, relatives, for example, L. Vanhanena testifies: “In the summer of 1949, I received one line in a letter: “Father, mother, sister Valija and grandmother are coming to visit you!” And that was all. I didn’t understand at that moment. I was so stunned. I can’t say anything. Nothing more. No signature, nor anything. I knew from the handwriting that it was the middle sister. Nothing more at all.” (OMF2300/185). This quote illustrates the use of symbolic language mentioned above in the fourth point regarding the communication of information in correspondence.

7. Stalin’s death on 5 March 1953

The historical fact itself and its reflection in the memories of the victims regarding Stalin’s death is essential because at that time a hope for change arose once again, an anticipation that their status would change, that something more would be learned about the separated and missing loved ones. It is truly worth listening to the testimonies of the deportees about the announcement of the fact and the reaction to this news. It also reflects how much these people were influenced by Soviet propaganda, the instilled fear, the inner feeling often contradicted the outer behaviour demanded by the society. Mostly the deportees reacted to this news outwardly neutrally, but inwardly, hiding it from others, they rejoiced (OMF2300/1006). Sometimes, in the company of trusted people, even openly exulted (OMF2300/1676). There were also a few cases when the outward expression of emotions was crying, not about the demise of Stalin, but about what was lost during this totalitarian regime (OMF2300/218).

8. Discharge in 1956–1957 and opportunity to return to Latvia

After Stalin's death, the deportees again began to write requests to the state security authorities of the USSR to be released from displacement and allowed to return to Latvia. Unfortunately, until 1956, when the deportation cases began to be examined more widely (Bleiere 2021), they were mostly rejected. In this respect, the question arises as to whether the particular individual could have done something to speed up his or her release. Among the deported women there were reports that if a woman married a free man, the status of the displaced was removed. In the examples identified in the study, there are testimonies where deported women believe that this hastened their return in 1955 and 1956 (OMF2300/1006; OMF2300/270), but in another case this did not serve as an argument, despite applications to the supervisory authorities, the woman had to wait until general delisting in 1956 (OMF2300/185). Equally controversial is the question of whether the applications written to the state administration and security authorities of the USSR did help or not, because both those who wrote and those who did not write requests for release ultimately were discharged. Those who wrote requests for release in their memories contended that this hastened their discharge, but the documentation shows⁹ that only through a general review of cases after certain decisions were the deportees removed from the list of special settlement.

The return to Latvia practically took place individually, the deportees themselves saving up enough money for the journey, finding opportunities to settle down in Latvia. At that time, Latvian society as a whole received these people in fear of their own status and place in society, thus showing caution, mistrust, avoidance, even arrogance. In several deportees, this created a desire to return to the location of former displacement (OMF2300/1922). Psychologically and socially, they had to find an opportunity to somehow adapt to the environment of occupied Latvia at that time. Marta Zeime testifies: "I wasn't initially really happy. Mother [husband's mother] was, though – she wanted that Latvia, but I wasn't all that excited about Latvia. I had more respect in Siberia than in Latvia. *Latishka* [from Russian – the Latvian woman] – was something more – already the status – a higher nation in Siberia! In Latvia, I was Russian and Siberyachka [Siberian]..." (OMF2300/1636). Of course, there were people who preserved their humanity and tried to help the deportees to find a place to live, a job, and assist with some material household matters, but this was not the norm of society. The moment of return to Latvia clearly marks emergence of the trend of memory adaptation and reveals the examples of misleading information in the lives of the repressed, which includes the emergence of a double biography in society, workplaces, and families. The repressed people mostly hid their biography, the fact of deportation. If this fact was known, the individual, true experience of a person was not explained or told. In the families of former deportees, children were mostly not

told about the fate of their parents, thus creating a steep generational information barrier (OMF2300/1006). Children in schools learned the information or disinformation interpreted by the totalitarian regime in the form of propaganda, and without finding a chance of an alternative point of view, it was accepted as the norm and truth. Of course, there were also exceptions, where the experience of deportations was to a greater or lesser extent told in families, but it was also conveyed through the prism of self-censorship, in the form internally adjusted or permitted by the victim. This was the case until the period of awakening and the regaining of Latvia's independence, when the withheld information could be expressed more freely and stories of experiences could be heard.

Discussion and conclusions

In general, reviewing the experience of those deported on 14 June 1941 discussed in the article, it can be observed that the Soviet totalitarian regime kept the repressed in the dark about the reasons for the deportation, the course of the deportation, the status and rights of the deportee, and the fate of the separated relatives – which is a form of disinformation in the form of concealment. This concealment at times alternated with open disinformation, for example, in the case of family separation at the beginning of deportation (Neimane 2021), partial and/or misleading information, both in the explanation of the status of the displaced, and in the news about the causes of death of separated relatives in prison. Clearer information about the reasons for the deportation and the fate of the relatives could be obtained only during the awakening and after the regaining of Latvia's independence. Therefore, people attached great, even vital importance to every opportunity to learn and understand something – it was done purely psychologically, in the conditions of uncertainty. These conditions of being kept in the dark were a fertile ground for interpretations of various thoughts, fear, audacity, rumours, hopes, perception of the mystical world, interpretation of dreams, fortune-telling. Depending on the person's character and the coincidence of external circumstances, this type of information either strengthened the person, for example, the faith in God, or engendered depression, pessimism, for instance, disbelief in one's own strength, incredulity that circumstances can change, thus reducing the deportee's chances of survival. Considering that the research has been based on the stories of survivors and also psychologically resilient deportees, we can only partially understand the perception of information, ignorance, disinformation and misleading information by those who died in forced settlement or those who passed away after discharge.

Today, all the witnesses, whose memories form the basis of the research reflected in this article, have already passed away, but the recorded and recorded video materials enable the researchers and all those interested to listen to them

and acquaint themselves with these testimonies. The researched video testimonies revealed the influence of disinformation, false information and information vacuum of the Soviet totalitarian regime on the chances of survival for adults in displacement, who had grown up and formed their fundamental beliefs in independent Latvia (1918–1940) with the ability to make independent decisions, employ critical thinking, consider the existence of different opinions and information both in public life, in workplaces, and in the family. Since the Museum of the Occupation of Latvia continues to record video testimonies, the topic would be complemented by the testimonies of deported children, children born in the displacement, as well as children born into the families that were once again subjected to forced resettlement, which would enable the studies of the traumatic experience of deportation in the family and the influence of the propaganda of the Soviet totalitarian regime on the lives of the aforementioned groups of people, their perception and beliefs, discovering the consequences that these events have brought upon today.

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NOTES

- 1 The Museum of the Occupation of Latvia Audiovisual Archive repository contains 2444 video testimonies recorded from October 1996 to 1 December 2022, in which the memories or life stories of victims of the Soviet and/or Nazi occupation regimes and eyewitnesses of significant events in Latvian history are documented in video format.
- 2 These are persons who at the time of deportation had reached the age of 18–40 years.
- 3 For example, there is no information about Viesturs Kalniņš (deceased in 1944) and Katrina Rusberga (deceased in 1943).
- 4 From 1955 to 1963, the instruction of the KGB of the USSR No. 108-ps was in force, stipulating that the family members of the shot person must be notified that the relative has been sentenced to 10 years in a prison camp without the right to correspond. The document stated that, if necessary, the fact of death should be registered in civil status act registration institutions and certificates should be issued, in which the date of death should be indicated within 10 years from the date of arrest, and some illness should be indicated as the cause of death (Pelkaus 2001, 15).
- 5 The Latvian National Archives (hereinafter – LNA), Latvian State Archives (hereinafter – LVA), fund No. 1987 “Case files of persons deported from Latvia on 14 June 1941”, Description – Madona, case file No. 16269.
- 6 Augusts Kirhenšteins (1872–1963) – chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Latvia (26.08.1940–10.06.1952).
- 7 Vilis Lācis (1904–1966) – chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Latvian SSR (25.08.1940–27.11.1959).

- 8 With this decree, it was stipulated that the deportees should remain in the camps of Siberia and other remote regions of the USSR “forever”, but for escaping from the locations of forced settlement they should be sentenced to 20 years of hard labour. (Riekstiņš 2004).
- 9 See LNA, LVA, fund No.1987.

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Misinformation and Information Manipulation in Pre-Election Messages of Candidates from Latvian Political Parties

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Abstract. Separating truth from lies has become the defining issue of our time. It has become a problem that affects the quality of our democracy, life, way of thinking. Such circumstances raise the bar of responsibility for communicators, but as a result of mistakes or deliberate deception, the reputation of political actors, institutions or media organizations may be negatively affected. The aim of the report is to describe examples of manipulation of information by candidates of Latvian political parties. The research question of the study is: what types of information manipulation can be found in Latvian political communication practice and what has influenced the spread of examples of information manipulation? More and more studies show that democracy is threatened not only by disinformation, but also by systematic manipulation of information by political actors. Efforts to influence the attitudes of voters, journalists or political opponents in order to achieve political goals are recorded. Information manipulation utilizes various types of content to influence, disrupt or distort the information ecosystem. The work uses the multiple case study approach, with the help of which the manipulation of information by political actors in the practice of political communication in recent years is characterized. The results of the study show that in the reviewed time period, the cases are mostly related to the malicious activity of social media users and the insufficient media literacy of society, including media professionals and politicians. Considering the development of technology, it can be predicted that more complex information manipulations may also appear in Latvia, therefore it would be necessary to offer wider, comprehensive media literacy training to the public, as well as to raise the average level of political knowledge, which can be promoted with a broader media content about political processes and political actors, participants of political communication wider justification for their actions and decisions.

Keywords: information manipulation, misinformation, political communication, political candidates, social media

Introduction

There are different classifications of fake or false information. The scientific literature explains the role of fake news, false news, disinformation, rumour and other concepts in the field of inaccurate, false or partially true information. The main problem of misleading information is closely related to the development of digital media, where political actors, media and society are involved – as individuals or groups (European Commission 2018, 5).

The concepts of misleading information and disinformation lies in the intention of the distributor – whether the information is designed to cause harm on purpose. Mostly, disinformation describes the intentional spread of false information, while misinformation describes the unintentional spread. Wu, Morstatter, Carley and Liu (2019, 81–82) pointed out that the term ‘misinformation’ combines all the false and inaccurate information presented on social media platforms, as they all have a common characteristic – they can cause any kind of harm on social media, especially if there is no timely intervention to prevent it.

The National Democratic Institute explains information manipulation as a set of tactics that includes gathering and disseminating information to influence or disrupt democratic decision-making. The following are distinguished: digital vectors, different actors, tactics and content. Since the focus of the study is on representatives of political parties and election candidates, information manipulation related to this level is examined in greater detail. Political parties and their candidates can use information manipulation to discredit political opponents by using false reinforcements (exaggerations) to reach a wider audience; or manipulate the political discourse in such a way as to serve their campaign agenda. Political campaigns can be used to manipulate information both in and out of election cycles. Information manipulation can use different types of content to influence public attitudes and beliefs or persuade individuals to act in a particular way (National Democratic Institute 2021, 5–8).

The consequences of information manipulation are also the emotional changes of society and social media users. Emotions play a vital role in the social transmission of news and information. Interest, happiness, disgust, surprise, sadness, anger, fear, contempt influence how some stories ‘catch on’ and spread much more widely than others (Hermida 2014, 48). It means that information manipulation can affect not only public attitudes and beliefs, but also the emotional state.

Methodology

The case study approach was used in this research. The time period of research is January 2020–March 2022. During the considered time period, examples were selected that characterise the types of information manipulation. It helps to

describe and explain the context of examples of communication. The research question of the study is: what types of information manipulation can be found in Latvian political communication practice and what has influenced the spread of examples of information manipulation? It is stated that “the case study approach works well to identify best practices for risk communication because individual situations are defined or isolated, relevant data are collected about the situation, and the findings are presented in such a way that a more complete understanding is reached regarding how messages shape perceptions and serve to prompt particular responses from those hearing the messages” (Sellnow *et al.* 2009, 53).

Results

The results of the research show that in the field of political communication in Latvia, various small-scale information manipulations have been conducted from various social media accounts, mainly anonymous ones, as a result of which the victims of the manipulations mostly had an insignificant or small negative impact on their reputation. These social media accounts and their content can exist without attracting any attention until their content is noticed and shared by a real, perhaps even recognizable, social media user, as a result of which the digital vector takes a new direction, and the created manipulation gains wider resonance. In some situations, the media also do not contribute to the solution of the problems – sometimes they omit to ask for the comment of the victim of the information. In order to gain an insight, some examples are given in the text that describe a particular type of manipulation.

As part of the work, several video and photo manipulations were recorded. For example, manipulation happened with the then Minister of Justice (2018–2022) Jānis Bordāns, slowing down one of the video recordings of his speeches. It did not gain much popularity in the social media *TikTok* – the video was viewed only a little more than 800 times, but it had a different effect on the social networking site *Facebook*, where it was republished by a member of the board of the party Union of Greens and Farmers (*Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība*). In two days, 2,700 users shared it, 37000 saw it in total (Dimants 2021). Some *Facebook* users have pointed out that the video has been obviously altered. However, most of the comments showed that people believed what they saw, that the minister was drunk or had used something – this was also pointed out by well-known people in the society.

Another example of visual manipulation concerned the member of the 13th *Saeima*, Artuss Kaimiņš. In the photo of the television screen, containing a screenshot from the LTV1 news program “*Panorāma*”, the outline of the MP’s body had been changed and the inscriptions on the screen had been altered (Kas notiks Latvijā? 2020). The way the image spread was similar to the pathway

described above – it was published on a *Facebook* page without gaining as much attention as on other social media platforms, where users reacted to the image as if it were real. The direct impact of this image on the official can be seen in the reactions of *Twitter* users to his subsequent posts. It should be noted that some people pointed to their media literacy skills, explaining that users were misled.

Simpler information manipulations should be discussed in the context of political party members. Before the municipal elections of 2021, the media offered various polls of citizens concerning the support of political forces. Election candidates tried to interpret the survey data in their favour. For example, comparing not party ratings, but the possible outcome of the election with a 5% barrier, where those voters who do not plan to vote in the election or who have not yet decided are not counted – in May 2021 they comprised 20.9% and 22.8%, respectively (Stirāne 2021). Usually, the second case has a higher percentage of support, so it is mentioned, but it is not correct when making a comparison.

Another approach is the manipulation of information by appealing to emotions based on culture, traditions, and the structure of society. This type of manipulation was clearly used not only by the political forces, which defended the rights of Russian-speakers, the poor, the unvaccinated, etc., but also, for example, by the coalition parties of the parliament at that time, which appealed to unfair social protection for women with children: “Why does the state punish mothers with smaller pensions?” (Latvijas attīstībai 2020).

In the autumn of 2021, a video from Riga Castle gained wider attention on several social media platforms, where the Prime Minister of Latvia Krišjānis Kariņš sang, the Minister of Health Daniels Pavļuts played the piano, while several recognizable politicians, officials and other guests stood around the room. The two-year-old video regained relevance after the news that the Office of the President planned to buy a new concert grand piano. Notably, the video did not indicate the date of the video, resulting in a context shift, and most of the audience, perceiving it as a recent video, blamed politicians for not following strict measures to contain the coronavirus and ridiculed the actions captured in the video. The video was shared by several members of the parliament and local governments, contrasting the persons seen in the video with unvaccinated individuals, low-income residents and other socially vulnerable groups.

In recent years, the activity of fake social media accounts imitating or caricaturing a specific politician has become less relevant. The situation has improved over the last 5–10 years, especially in the context of the last few years, when national governments demand specific actions from social media platforms to combat disinformation and misleading information. For example, it is possible to verify accounts, but the content of the platforms is constantly monitored in response to deception, misinformation, hate speech, etc. for message expressions.

Discussion and conclusions

It must be concluded that direct deception is a rare phenomenon in the examined time period, it mainly refers to self-promotion or interpreting the support ratings of political parties or candidates for one's own benefit. In the analysed examples, the content is often presented without the context, omitting the time of its occurrence, which opens up free interpretation by the audience – the users who believe it spread the content further, while after that, the trust of the communicators in the information distributor becomes an important factor.

Fixed information manipulations have a low technological capacity, which does not pose a significant threat to the environment of political communication. However, the informational attacks on Latvian politicians and media experienced in March 2021 to discredit the opposition of Russia and undermine the support given to it by the politicians of the Baltic states, showed the vulnerability of information environment in Latvia.

It can be predicted that in Latvia more complex manipulations of information may appear, therefore it would be necessary to offer broader, comprehensive media literacy training to the public, as well as to raise the average level of political knowledge, which can be promoted with wider media content about political processes and a more extensive range of political actors' justification of their actions and decisions.

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'Alternative Knowledge' in Latvian Culture: Roots and Contexts

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Abstract. The aim of the current research is to establish how alternative knowledge is represented in the latest Latvian cultural texts, how this representation compares with the texts written in previous cultural eras, and what structure of reality is characteristic of the texts. The research explores popular cultural texts in which distributors of 'alternative knowledge' operate (wizards, witches, servants of the devil, etc.), and the historical texts are compared with the latest yield of Latvian culture – director Uģis Olte's film "*Upurga*" (2021) and Linda Nemiera's novel "*Rīgas Raganas*" (2021). The research methodology is based on Richard Schechner's understanding of social and aesthetic drama, as well as post-structural text analysis, analysing texts according to pairs of dichotomies. The research found that in the oldest texts, the alternative reality is not considered real, but represented metaphorically. The individual who is given the imagined supernatural status aspires to fit into the group. The 'supernatural' is most frequently associated with knowledge that an individual gradually imparts to a group. Recent texts affirm the belief in parallel realities as real, physically existing. Criticism of contemporary culture ('reality') is pronounced, the alternative reality gives it what it lacks (the opposition of nature vs civilization, the basis for social processes in the real world, etc.). The contrast between the individual and the group can be clearly observed, besides, the individual does not fit into the group after all, remaining isolated.

Keywords: alternative knowledge, cultural text, aesthetic performance

Introduction

The research exploring alternative knowledge in Latvian culture outlines the tradition of cultural texts, examining the representation of alternative sources of knowledge (witches, wizards, healers), comparing and particularly focusing on the latest cultural texts. The purpose of the study is to establish how alternative knowledge is represented in the latest Latvian cultural texts, how this

representation compares with the texts created in previous cultural eras, what structure of reality is characteristic of the texts. Research questions: how are the carriers of alternative knowledge depicted and evaluated in Latvian cultural texts; what structure of social reality underlies the texts.

Methodology

The research methodology is based on Richard Schechner's understanding of social and aesthetic drama, as well as post-structural analysis of texts. Schechner describes the concepts of social drama and aesthetic performance, characterizing their mutual relations as reciprocally effectual (feedback loop) – the structure of social drama is aesthetic, but its functions are social, while aesthetic performances on a virtual plane are based in social and political reality, primarily implementing aesthetic functions (Schechner 2002, 77) This model enables the researcher to analyse aesthetic performances by drawing conclusions about the social structure to which the aesthetic performance corresponds, since the model of social reality can be deduced from the elements of the aesthetic performance. The analysis has been carried out by detecting the pairs of dichotomies – 'good – bad', 'individual – group', 'insider – stranger', 'freedom – restrictions of power', 'nature – civilization', 'religion – science', 'a single reality – multiple realities'.

Results

Historically, the most famous examples among the distributors of 'alternative knowledge' in Latvian culture are represented in the works of Rainis ("*Uguns un nakts*" ("Fire and Night"), "*Indulis un Ārija*" ("Indulis and Ārija")), Aspazija ("*Ragana*" ("The Witch"), "*Sidraba šķidrums*" ("The Silver Veil"), Rutku Tēvs ("*Vēlā kalpi*" ("Devil's Servants")), Ilona Leimane ("*Vilkaču mantinieci*" ("The Heiress of Werewolves")), as well as in the oeuvre of Māris Čaklais and Māra Zālīte. For this research, popular works have been deliberately selected, compiled with a purpose to record features that can be considered traditional to Latvian text culture until the 21st century and thus serve as a basis for comparison with the latest cultural texts. The contrast between the individual and the group is highlighted in all the works, besides, the individual is evaluated positively, while the group is coded negatively or neutrally. Witches, sorcerers, healers are strangers, newcomers, but they are the title characters –it is with them that the reader is supposed to identify. In realistic works, there is a pronounced opposition of knowledge – ignorance, using the names of alternative knowledge bearers as a demeaning designation for those who know, due to community prejudices or ideological reasons. The designations wizards, witches, servants of devil, etc. are affixed to the most skilled and successful, as well as those who base

their activity on the principles of science, are European-oriented, as opposed to the community mired in prejudices. Pointedly, as the characters finally integrate into the community and lose their outsider status, the projected connection to the supernatural also disappears. In symbolic works, the designation functions as a metaphor, the characters' abilities are treated ambivalently, but they make a moral choice to become positive characters. In the works in which the heroines are women, emerges a distinctive theme – the breaking of the traditional female role, female sexuality as a problem. In general, traditionally, one of the central themes is the conflict between the individual and power (interpreting it in the broadest sense – from political power to the structure and rules of society), in which the individual who rebels is marked from the outside as a sorcerer, witch, etc., but this identity is assumed only as a metaphorical sign of his or her otherness. With the exception of symbolic works, reality is traditionally treated as unified, that is, the supernatural is imagined, not real.

Of the latest texts, two have been selected for analysis – the film “*Upurga*” (2021) by director Uģis Olte and the novel “*Rīgas raganas*” (“Witches of Riga”, 2021) by Linda Nemiera.

“*Upurga*” tells the story of a commercial film crew's boat trip to a remote place, which is seemingly untouched by civilization. The main character, guide Andrejs, whose progress the film basically follows, is already ‘marked by death’ at the very beginning of the plot – the viewer is shown how he was an accomplice in the drowning of a woman before the events actually shown in the film. This gives him a special point of view compared to his friends – he is the only one who identifies the river and the adjacent valley as dangerous. In the dichotomies ‘insider – stranger,’ and ‘individual – group,’ the hero even fits into several schemes, but in one position – he is a stranger and therefore alone both in the film crew and later in the film when he encounters a mysterious group of inhabitants of the valley. The hero does not overcome his being a stranger in the course of the film, although he encounters the supernatural, to which, it must be understood, the other characters of the film belong.

The main dichotomy of the film is ‘nature – civilization.’ At the beginning of the film, the characters literally enter from civilization into nature, arriving in a woodland area where modern technology does not work. At the same time, in the course of the film, nature is awakened in man, as well – violence, gluttony, sexuality arouse in the characters of the film under the influence of natural processes – all functions derived from the body, which completely take over the characters of the film, turning off their consciousness as if in a trance. In this case, nature is equated with absolute freedom, Dionysian liberation from the shackles of civilization. In the film, religion and science are not contrasted, nor is there a clearly expressed dichotomy ‘good – bad,’ but it transforms into

a dichotomy 'safe – threatening,' linking threats to such concepts as the stranger and nature.

The film strongly depicts the physical coexistence of multiple realities. Using a system of images close to Jungian psychoanalysis (water, mirror, double, old man, etc.), Olte marks the parallel reality as the real one. In the film's system of signs, the symbolic hero's death/descent into the underwater world can be interpreted as a meeting with himself and nature within himself. At the same time, the film also shows 'objective' events – other images related to healing practices, shamanism, supernatural resurrection, etc., thus affirming the belief in the existence of an alternative world.

Linda Nemiera's novel "*Rīgas raganas*" also conceptually confirms the belief in the existence of several parallel worlds. The novel begins with a broad, programmatic introduction that describes Riga at the beginning of the 20th century, or Riga in the era of the industrial revolution: "... a new society had also emerged – a manufacturing society. Its idol and object of worship was the factory conveyor belt [...]. Contracts for the production and sale of goods had replaced the Scriptures. [...] What was that force, that energy that breathed life into objects, set them in motion and made them work? Who could be further from God than Satan? There were people who could not come to terms and were looking for a way out of a godless existence [...]. They brought to light the wisdom of the ancestors from the times when craft was valued more than the ability to produce as much as possible" (Nemiera 2021, 11–12).

The novel is created by connecting data about the real Riga – its history, geography, current events – with the author's imagined story about the supernatural world – ghosts, spirits, witches. Events in the real world are explained by the influence of the hidden, supernatural world. The supernatural world is described as the most powerful and threatening, it can only be fought with supernatural means. At the same time, it is interesting that the supernatural world is pronouncedly ethnically coloured – the witches in it are of German and Russian origin, emphasizing the negative influences on Latvian culture from the outside. The dichotomies 'nature – civilization,' 'religion – science' are replaced by the opposition of 'insider – stranger.'

The main character in the novel is between the real and the supernatural world – she is marked (appearance, deformity, abilities), thus, she does not fit into either world, but is able to function in both. In the dichotomy 'individual – group' the separation of the individual from the group clearly appears, the heroine does not blend into any group, but some of the groups portrayed in the novel are threatening. The dichotomy 'freedom – restriction of power' is obvious, demonstrating that only alone can the heroine achieve her goals.

Discussion and conclusions

By using Schechner's model, it is possible to draw conclusions from the aforementioned descriptions about social reality as a construct entered in cultural texts and making them understandable in the cultural context. Summing up the latest texts dedicated to alternative knowledge, we must conclude that they affirm the belief in parallel realities as real, physically existing ones. The nature of these realities may be different, however, in both cases criticism of contemporary culture ('reality') is conspicuous. It is represented as fake, somehow corrupted. Therefore, in the 'good – bad' dichotomy, the alternative reality emerges as a more positive, albeit threatening and initially foreign to the hero. Interestingly, religion or science does not appear as a topic when talking about alternative knowledge. The contrast between the individual and the group is clearly observable, furthermore, the individual ultimately does not become a part of any group, remaining isolated. In comparison with the cultural texts of previous eras, it can be concluded that in them the alternative reality is not considered real, but instead – metaphorical; the individual aspires to fit into the group and to lose his imagined supernatural status; the imagined supernatural status most frequently is associated with knowledge that an individual gradually transfers to a group.

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Political Communication Culture of Political Journalists Representing the Press in Unstable Democracy of Latvia. 2021–2022

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Abstract. As a state of democratic parties and a flawed democracy, the Republic of Latvia is characterized by political communication processes that do not contribute to the process of constructing a participatory political culture. The current paper offers the analysis of publications of the political journalists of the private printed weekly magazines “*Ir*” and “*Sestdiena*” about the work of political parties, the government and the parliament in 2021 and the beginning of 2022 in order to understand the meaning of the publications and the connections between the meanings with the help of hermeneutic analysis as a qualitative research method of communication science, as well as explain the participation of political journalists in political communication by constructing or reconstructing subcultures of Latvian political culture. Journalists of both aforementioned legacy or traditional media criticize the work of the government and parties as ineffective, but do not appeal to representatives of civic citizens and political subcultures of critical citizens, calling for civil and political activity, reducing everything to the behind-the-scenes and open activities of political parties and members of parliament as they prepare for the next parliamentary elections. The editorial lines of both periodicals differ; however, their political journalists accept the model of elite democracy prevailing in RL and the traditional role of private media in it, without serious objections. Both “*Ir*”, representing the pro-European, pro-Atlantic orientation, and “*Sestdiena*”, whose editorial line mainly has centrist populist, pro-business accents, are unable to satisfy the demand of some of their readers, as evidenced by the rather steady trend of decrease in their readership. There are no publications in these periodicals that would attempt to analyse the causes of the decrease in the number of readers and subscribers, not to mention the concretization of this process in connection with the four subcultures of Latvian political culture.

Keywords: hermeneutics, communication, parties, political communication culture, system, magazines

Introduction

In the “Democracy Index 2021. The China challenge” created by the British research and analytical “The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited” (EIU), the democratic state system of the Republic of Latvia along with the political systems of Estonia and Lithuania is ranked in the group of unstable (flawed) democracies consisting of 53 countries of the world. The Baltic states are included in the group of 28 Eastern European countries, which “as a whole continues to be held back by a weak political culture, difficulties in creating institutions aimed at safeguarding the rule of law and persistent issues with corruption” (DI 2021, 11). Estonia, Czech Republic and Slovenia “come closest to qualifying as a “full democracy”,” however “the absence of a single “full democracy” in eastern Europe is striking and demands an explanation that takes account of the region’s unique experience under the domination of the Soviet Union after 1945 and during its post-Communist transition after 1989”, furthermore, “the region continues to struggle with core weaknesses in institutions and political culture” (DI 2021, 38). In addition to the 16 unstable democracies, the group of Eastern European countries, according to the EIU classification, in 2021 included four more hybrid and eight authoritarian regimes.

The diversity of measurements of democracy (Pickel, Pickel 2022, 128–129) suggests that “democracy is not, and has never been a single, coherent ideal” and therefore “consequently the roles assigned to the media, and the particular demands placed on them, vary according to the democratic ideal at hand”, which, in turn, prompted Håkansson and Mayerhöffer to seek solution to this normative problem in media research using “three broad democratic ideals that share core values”, which includes attachment “to three specific functions of the media in a democratic society: 1) an elitist model of democracy in which the power is delegated to the elites and in which the most important function of the media is transparency; 2) an electoral-representative model of a pluralist democracy that corresponds to the media function of group representation; 3) a democracy that favours the participatory ideal, in which the empowerment of the citizens is the prime function” (Håkansson, Mayerhöffer 2014, 128).

No less diversity characterises the range of theoretical explanations and approaches of political communication and political culture. Donges and Jarren (Donges, Jarren 2022, 57), for instance, point out that the political system, according to “the theory of self-referential systems, is not the centre of society”, but exists alongside other systems, therefore “politics cannot “lead” society as a whole and even individual subsystems, because for this purpose it would have to interfere with the self-referentiality of other systems and thus be destroyed.”

On the question of the place of political communication in the political system, Pfetsch represents “idea of political communication as a system”, corresponding

to Parsons' structural functionalism systems theory, because the system of political communication "emerges through the interaction, interdependences and continuous exchange between the media and politics" "vis-à-vis a common public audience", including political system's and media system's "structural contexts" and "cultural dimension" or "orientations, attitudes and norms of actors in political communication roles on both sides of the exchange", which in turn is a sufficient basis for "aggregated attitudinal patterns" to be "termed as "political communication culture" of a specific country" (Pfetsch 2014, 15). Pfetsch sees the picture of political culture as incomplete "unless it covers communication aspects", because "from a communication science perspective, it is key to know how political communication constructs and reconstructs political culture" (Pfetsch 2014, 19). "...journalists in leading positions of the national media and political actors at the national level" are to be studied according to this approach, however, political actors should be distinguished into "politicians in parties, parliament or government", on the one hand, and "their political spokespersons or communication advisors or pundits", on the other (Pfetsch 2014, 20).

Swedish researchers Duvold, Berglund and Ekman in the introduction of their book dedicated to the political culture of the Baltic conclude that "it is a moot question whether integrated national community can be established when the groups [linguistically cultural – O. S.] fail to agree on basic issues related to identity and belonging" (Duvold *et al.* 2020, 10–11). The authors use the definition of political culture in their study, which "seems to have gained common recognition" is based in publications by Almond and Verba: "Political culture is the set of attitudes, beliefs, and feelings about politics current in a nation at a given time. This political culture has been shaped by the nation's history and by the ongoing processes of social, economic, and political activity" (Duvold *et al.* 2020, 96). Accordingly, a typology of political subcultures is proposed, based on two more 'politically' formulated dimensions "satisfaction with politics (orientations related to the political system) and individual political competence (orientations related to role of the self within the political system", thus obtaining four political subcultures of Baltic respondents based on survey data: "informed and satisfied respondents [...] as civic citizens or civic-minded respondents" (8%); "combination of negative orientations towards the political system and high political competence [...] as critical citizens" (11%); "with critical orientations towards the political system and low political competence" or "group of respondents as disillusioned" (61%); "a combination of positive orientations towards the political system and low political competence", therefore "rather be close to political indifference" (21%) (Duvold *et al.* 2020, 117–118). The researchers note that "in Latvia, the civic citizen-oriented respondents are almost non-existent" (Duvold *et al.* 2020, 119). At the end of the book, its authors formulate a thesis that is no less relevant today "populists in the Baltic states", who "have more

often than not been centrist and compliant” and consequently “a new brand of populism is about to take a hold of the voters: anti-elitist, anti-liberal and anti-EU are some of the words that characterise the latest incarnation of Baltic populism” (Duvold *et al.* 2020, 211–212).

The German political scientist Heinemann-Grüder writes about the “erosion of democratic regimes” and finds that the paradigm of the global victory march of democracy is being questioned in a considerable number of countries, dissatisfaction with democracy is high in Eastern, Western and Southern Europe, – the exception are the Scandinavian countries like Sweden. Perceptions of the actual actions by governments are more important to satisfaction with democracy than election opportunities every four or five years (Heinemann-Grüder 2022, 125). In terms of academic and political discussions, the problem of regime erosion is also related to prejudices about the functioning of party democracy and the party state. The German political scientist Decker, for example, believes that although it “cannot not be precisely determined” from which point party democracy turns into a party state, it must be recognized that there are “four areas” in which to talk about the ‘intertwining’ of the party and the state, namely, 1) ‘personal intertwining’ (*personelle Verflechtung* – parliament, government, head of state, constitutional court); 2) “funding of parties by the state;” 3) ‘involvement of parties in the state by means of legislation’ (*rechtliche Einbindung*) and 4) in addition, ‘linking the party state with the idea of the formation of political cartels’ by some authors, which is happening, for instance, in Italy and Austria. Decker also points out that Leibholz, a judge of the Federal Constitutional Court and a teacher of state law in Göttingen, with his “party state theory” persistently attempted to ‘legitimize the claim of party-comprehensive rule,’ considering the party state as a ‘rationalized form of expression of plebiscitary democracy’ (Decker 2018, 89–96).

Methodology

In connection with hermeneutics as one of the basic methods of understanding in the qualitative studies of communication science, it should be emphasized that with its assistance, following the hermeneutic circle of understanding and explanation by Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005) (Wagner 2021, 174) or cycles of spiral, based on the qualitative analysis of political journalists’ texts and the presented theoretical approaches to Latvia’s political democracy, political culture and political communication, one can try to understand or examine the symbols of meaning and contexts of meaning contained in the messages of political journalists, as well as aspire to explain the features of political communication culture offered or constructed in the messages of political journalists of the selected weekly magazines – “*Ir*” (“It is”) and “*Sestdiena*” (“Saturday”).

Understanding is an act of insight, and the insight must be focused on forms of meaning (*Sinngebilde*) and contexts of meaning. Two axioms also apply to understanding: “interchangeability of opinions”, which means “the same experience in the common world” of fellow human beings, and “conformity of actuality systems” as the ‘empirically’ ‘identical’ interpretation of actual or potentially common objects and events. Therefore, concludes Wagner, “to understand therefore means to explain the meaning (*Sinn*) of something given as an expression of assigning a meaning on the part of the doer” (Wagner 2021, 158). The one who aims to understand the text must take into account the overcoming of the so-called hermeneutic difference that exists between the text and the interpreter, which can be overcome or reduced by the tendency of rapprochement, which is also called the “fusion of horizons.” Overcoming the hermeneutic difference, which takes place in the cycle of repeated cognitive recognition and acceptance of knowledge, has acquired the designation of the “hermeneutic circle”. There are different understandings of the nature of the hermeneutic circle. In the explanation of the hermeneutic circle proposed by Ricoeur, understanding is linked to explanation, which means that the analyst of texts explains them by attributing the meaning of texts to causes or reasons. The hermeneutic circle is then a condition of the structure of knowledge, “because in the field of meaningful action we can ultimately explain if we have previously understood”, but “adequate explanation therefore promotes further understanding as a basis for ever more precise explanation” (Wagner 2021, 175). A significant problem in working with journalists’ texts is the fact that the political journalists of “*Ir*” and “*Sestdiena*” practically do not write about the culture of political communication directly and unequivocally, – neither in connection with their professional work, nor in a broader perspective. Therefore, it is mainly about the attitudes, opinions and beliefs of political journalists, which are included in the process of constructing and reconstructing political culture through political communication.

Results

The ‘procedure’ of hermeneutic understanding and explanation will be subjected to the abundant range of publications of magazine “*Ir*” commentator Aivars Ozoliņš, trying to establish ‘forms of meaning’ (*Sinngebilde*) and ‘interconnections of meaning’ (*Sinnzusammenhänge*). The time period covered by the current study encompasses all the issues of 2021 and the first ten issues of 2022. The commentaries by Ozoliņš are contained practically in every issue of the magazine, and therefore the author can be considered a kind of ‘tuning-fork’ of the magazine’s political communication. As the first in terms of importance, the ‘forms of meaning’ of Ozoliņš should be formulated using the thesis regarding “the government of crises and crises in the government”. Ozoliņš began 2021

with the observation that “Kariņš’ government has two years and a **permanent political crisis** [this and the following emphases are mine – O. S.]” or “the usual aggregate state of instability”, in order to conclude that K. Kariņš’ government “does not really have an alternative” (Ozoliņš 2021a). In his commentaries, Ozoliņš quite regularly criticizes the activities of the party “Harmony” (*Saskaņa*) and “Union of Greens and Farmers” (*Zaļo un zemnieku savienība, ZZS*), which represent the parliamentary opposition, as well as the “National Union” (*Nacionālā apvienība, NA*) operating in the government, which is suspected of ousting “New Unity” (*Jaunā Vienotība, JV*) from the government.

In his commentary “Covid-19 test”, Pauls Raudseps expresses much sharper and more conceptual opinion about the Latvian political party system. In his opinion, “the **weakness of Latvian parties threatens the country’s ability** to overcome both this and other crises.” Raudseps described the manifestations of ‘party weakness’: firstly, “the desire of the actual leaders of the parties to avoid responsibility for any potentially unpopular decisions”, citing as an example NA ministers, “who fulfil the party’s task, but do not determine its course”; secondly, “the parties have a microscopic number of members and a habit of communicating with voters only through the lenses of TV cameras”; thirdly, “funding of parties from the budget has given an opportunity to get rid of the illegitimate interests of sponsors, but has not created any impetus for parties to take deeper roots in society”, and therefore, “mechanisms must be found to link funding with the number of active members”, because otherwise “in a parliamentary republic, **the weakness of parties can soon turn into the weakness of the state**” (Raudseps 2021a).

At the end of October, in the commentary “Lists of culprits”, Ozoliņš, on the one hand, concludes that “the search for the culprits for the Covid-19 disaster is gaining momentum”, but on the other hand, he himself creates his own list, which includes “first of all, the government”, secondly, “the lobby machine of traders and businessmen, which pushed experts aside and began to dictate government decisions”, thirdly, “the local and Russian “political technologists”” who had started to structure the “chaos of the “information space”” for their own purposes with the usual basic message – Latvia is a failed country”, as well as NA, “which of all parties in the *Saeima* has the greatest merit in achieving the current crisis”. However, Ozoliņš concludes, “**the main reason for the current crisis is the inability of politicians to be leaders**” (Ozoliņš 2021b).

The interviews with the leader of the People’s Front and publicist Dainis Īvāns and journalist Jānis Domburs, working for LTV, published in the double issue of “*Ir*” on 18 November are considered to be the characterization of the context of the ‘forms of meaning’ of the activities of the Latvian government and political parties proposed by Ozoliņš. Īvāns “does not have a feeling of depression and hopelessness or aggressiveness regarding the events around him.” He is proud

of the fact that “Latvian nation” after the Third Awakening, irreversibly consolidates us as a part of Western civilization.” However, “each generation must vote anew for independence, for Latvianness and whether we want to live in a free and democratic country.” Īvāns concedes that it is possible that “all societies have a rather short memory if there is **an absence of spiritual elite** that urges and reminds us that “somehow we have lost touch with the power of Awakening.” The interview, which is permeated with a pronounced note of national romanticism, ends with Īvāns’ caution to everyone that “there are many people, authorities and systems that want to tell us that we are not worthy of our country and that we do not have a right to it” (Miķelsons 2021a).

Domburs, as a professional of analytical political journalism, asserts in a “brief answer” given within an interview, that his “goal has been democracy and remains democracy”, but with a significant remark about not holding “a high opinion about the level of development of our democracy.” The level follows from the question “why are we muddling along in the last places in Europe in all aspects?” Domburs himself offers several answers. As the first formulated thesis, – “it is important for **the public to understand** that the **political struggle is not amongst the politicians**. In that fight, everyone is together in the arena. Everyone is there.” This is in clear contradiction with the conclusion of Swedish researchers about the virtually non-existing political subculture of “civic citizens” in Latvia.

Domburs believes that “the critical mass of people is not 50% of the population, not even 5%, they comprise maybe 0.5% – a few hundred, a thousand. But they are **the elite who say** – we are aware that we are the ones who have to do something more here, apart from what we do professionally every day. And very importantly – we don’t know the right answer, but we have to think about it.” A model of elitist democracy, but with a weak elite. Domburs “is concerned that the party system moves in a circle, if not a downward spiral” because “overall, **parties have remained at the level of groups**.” Even after the 14th *Saeima* elections on 1 October 2022, it may be that “systemically, **the monopoly of power** is held in the hands of 2/3 of the parliament, which means that **there is no competition**. Because there is no other government, there is no alternative offer.” Therefore, “as a result – backwoods.” Normal backwoods of Europe.” Domburs does not see any guides to the “catch-up modernization” of Latvia.

And finally, “in general, it is historically an immense problem – that the media is not stronger”, hence, LTV and Latvian Radio should become “an incubator where, under better conditions, a greater number of people develop journalistically,” thus preserving the possibility of escaping “deep shit with the concept of the fourth power”. The interview concludes with Domburs’ appeal to the readers not only to realize “that we have a state”, but to think more about “where is the country going?” (Ločmele 2021).

The first issue of “*Ir*” of 2022 contained an interview of Ločmele and Ozoliņš with the Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš, from which, in the aspect of ‘inter-connections of meaning’ of political communication and political culture, three thoughts expressed by Kariņš can be singled out: firstly, even though there is no “reliable data”, “most people, who end up in hospitals are Russian speakers” and “this roughly coincides with people who have not yet become citizens in our country and **do not believe in the state as such**”, which “is a **huge social problem**.” Covid brings this problem into light, but it is 50 years old, for 30 years little addressed. Our society is not homogenous”. Kariņš emphasizes that “we live in a country where the press and the public have the opportunity to change the course of the government, not the other way around. And the government is self-elected.” The third thought was about the elections and Europe or the EU: “Nothing much has changed in the elections over 30 years – there is always at least one force in the *Saeima*, and probably in the next one there will be several who **do not agree with the basic course oriented towards Europe, towards the open market**”, but for Latvia to be “part of the European Union”, “the state needs two things – time and peace” (Ločmele, Ozoliņš 2022).

The emphases are placed in a different way by Raudseps in a comment about ten years since the referendum on the national language, and poetess, writer, playwright Māra Zālīte in an interview with Laura Dumbere. Raudseps accuses the “**political elite** of Latvia” and politicians in general of fear, the inability to “predict the possible reaction of people to various decisions”, which is vitally important, because “if the citizens do not want to defend the state of Latvia and its values, neither the introduction nor the core of the Constitution will be able to protect it” (Raudseps 2022b).

Zālīte rejects criticism for “supporting Kariņš” on *Facebook* “a year ago” and condemns the “insistent defamation of the president” as a “deliberate campaign” with the aim of “leading the public to the position that everything is bad, the prime minister and the president are useless”, that Latvia is “a failed state”, because “it is to someone’s advantage that **our ethnic and national community** becomes weak.” When asked about the “threatening war in Ukraine” which was the case at that time, Zālīte answered without hesitation and very directly: “We clearly know who today’s Molotov is. But who will turn out to be today’s Ribbentrop – Macron, Scholz or someone else. Europe is in trouble because its material interests involving gas and oil, and moral values collide” (Dumbere 2022).

With the beginning of the Russia’s war in Ukraine, every issue of “*Ir*” carries the topics concerning war, both in materials from and about Ukraine, and in connection with the activities of Latvian political parties. Public media ombud Anda Rožukalne in an interview with Māra Miķelsone warns that “mutual lack of understanding and non-cooperation can contribute to what has taken place in

Latvia in the last seven years [2015–2022. – O.S.] – **deterioration of the quality of democracy**, because “if there is no conversation, then part of the media, which depends on gathering an audience of the moment, turns into **populist media** that very promptly labels the good ones and the bad ones.” Rožukalne implicitly agrees with Domburs’ idea about public media, saying that “we jump all the time in a short exchange of information and opinions, and do not go further” “promoting coverage of various political processes” because “**smart and analytical political journalism** is lacking” (Miķelsone 2022b). On the other hand, Swiss and German media researchers point out that the demand for high-quality journalism is decreasing in a part of the society, or it chooses not to consume its products.

The weekly magazine “*Sestdiena*” does not have an author who would systematically search for the ‘forms of meaning’ in the internal political activities of Latvian political parties, the government and the parliament with the same systematicity as Ozoliņš. According to the number of publications, Sarmīte Kolāte should be considered the leading political journalist, the author of newspaper “*Diena*” Atis Rozentāls also writes about the topics pertaining to *Saeima* election, while Egils Zirnis, “*Diena*” commentator Agnese Margēviča, Jolanta Plauka and editor-in-chief Lauma Spridzāne write about other current affairs of politics. A defining feature of the editorial line in 2021 was the survey data of the Internet survey panel “Snapshots” in almost every issue on political or politicized issues. Another typical feature is that all authors who write about topics of Latvian political life quite regularly refer to the co-owner and co-founder of the public relations company “*Mediju Tilts*”, political scientist and political sales or political marketing specialist in one person, Filips Rajeviskis. The interview of Zirnis with Rajeviskis in March 2021, on the one hand, provides the readers with the characterisation of the political parties and the state of the government, but on the other hand, outlines the editorial line of “*Sestdiena*”, which essentially means constructing political subcultures of indifference and disappointment in Latvia by means of political communication as the problem of the government and the parties forming it.

Rajeviskis’ scheme of the political situation is based on a series of conclusions about the “instability of the government” because “the signals from there are very chaotic.” The “prime minister’s personality” is to blame for the government’s “fidgeting” and therefore “of course, the prime minister’s party suffers the most.” Responding to Zirnis question about whether it would not be better to “allow only those who give one cent more to the state than they receive from it to vote”, which would mean a property qualification, Rajeviskis answered that “**elections should be made an obligation**” and “**people should be compelled to delve deeper** and exercise their voting rights” (Zirnis 2021a).

The activities of the Minister of Health, Daniels Pavļuts, attracted special attention of the editorial board and Kolāte. The topic of the minister is especially broached at the end of 2021, when on the eve of the 18 November, not only the cover of the magazine was adorned with the inscription “Pavļuts’ *salto mortale*” with the accompanying question whether the minister “has remained in his chair” and “the government crisis is also over”, but in the column of the editor-in-chief Spridzāne, bearing the title “*Zolīte* [a card game] *mortale* in the style of Latvian politicians” one could read a statement full of accusations that “currently instead of important and necessary decisions for the state, one’s own **career and political interests are being placed in the foreground**, the inability to admit mistakes and/or learn from them [in case of] the responsible **state leaders** is not only unforgivable, but downright **criminal**” (Spridzāne 2021).

The main contribution to the undermining of the reputation of Minister Pavļuts and by his own hand “carefully groomed public image and CV with a Harvard diploma” was made by “*Diena*” commentator Margēviča with the article “Tangled in the score”, which was based on “a dozen respondents’ and eight references to the statements of anonymous persons. The ‘forms of meaning’ of the article can be found in the statement of an anonymous “former colleague who is connected to the sphere of public relations” that Pavļuts was not a “successful manager of the process” because “the understanding possessed by **the entire elite in power for a long time** was lacking – the inability to understand how the people in the countryside live and think, how does the so-called common man think, and this is a very important point, which does not apply only to Pavļuts, but also to a great extent to **the prime minister, who does not understand at all how people live**” (Margēviča 2021).

Another important topic discussed by “*Sestdiena*” is the Latvian political party system and the role of political parties in the functioning of Latvian party democracy. Kolāte before the municipal elections tries to ascertain “what’s the point of the party” by questioning the professor of the University of Latvia, the dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences Jānis Ikstens and the director of SKDS Arnis Kaktiņš as experts. Kaktiņš believes that “historically in Latvia, due to their personal traits, a large number of politicians are rather petty and vengeful”, because “**the political culture**, which largely derives from the level of the culture of individuals, is rather harsh already” and this also manifests itself in the way that “the position tries to humiliate the opposition in every way – it is rather a norm.” Furthermore, “**Riga’s political culture**” is said to be such that “if you are in the opposition, then you are dung, no one will talk to you at all” and “since the nineties, at least in this sense, **degradation in the political culture is observed.**” Kolāte limits herself to hearing opinions without trying to establish whether there is also research that supports and explains these observations (Kolāte 2021a).

Cardiologist, Professor Andrejs Ērglis, in an interview with Zirnis, categorically declares – “I believe that **parties are impossible in Latvia** until there is a mixed electoral system in which people can carry out their functions without being subject to party discipline or group discipline in general”, even though, arriving at a certain contradiction with himself, he had previously established that “the language” in which politicians speak “is actually a foreign language”, therefore he “has slightly come to the point” that he does not pay any attention to politicians, but “it just should not be said that someone is to blame, because **the nation itself has created these politicians**” (Zirnis 2021b).

Surveys are a tool for influencing public opinion, as they offer observations of current reality constructions, or reactions to current reality constructions. “*Sestdiena*” regularly did this with the help of “Snapshots” in 2021. At the end of September, the magazine published the results of a survey, in which an unspecified number of respondents answered the question “how do you generally assess the current offer of political forces and the day-to-day functioning of parties?”

Table. Assessment of the offer of current political powers and the day-to-day activities of the parties ([Ed.] 2021)

Very good	I give a positive assessment to the activity of only one party	I give a positive assessment only to the work of certain politicians	Negatively, no one can offer what the country currently needs	Other	I have no opinion; I am not interested in politics
1%	3%	24%	52%	2%	18%

The editorial comment states that “it is about a year until the next *Saeima* elections, but it is already clear that the choice will not be easy for a large part of the public, because how can they vote if it seems that there is simply no suitable offer” ([Ed.] 2021). Broadly speaking, the results of the survey show the dominance of disappointed and indifferent representatives of the political subculture among the respondents, who are generally characterized by low political competence. The distinction between ‘political forces’ and ‘parties’ is misleading to readers, as is the assumption that respondents regularly and consistently follow the ‘day-to-day activities’ of parties.

Kolāte, however, avoids excessive dramatization and at the beginning of November, in her first article of the series about “how does the political hippodrome look now less than a year before the grand horse race”, she again quotes Rajevskis, sociologist Kaktiņš and Ģirts Dimdiņš, a professor of political psychology at the University of Latvia. The survey data published by SKDS at the end of August showed that at that time 64% of the population were ready to vote “for

an entirely new political force”. However, at the end of the article, the opinion of the “spiritual “queen” Šmaragdu Magda”, better known to the “users of the social network *Twitter*”, about A. Gobzems and A. Šlesers as “interesting leaders”, her observations about the coalition and the inability to repeat the success of the KPV LV in the elections are presented in detail. Kolāte herself does emphasize that **“this is the era of populism in Western democracies”**, because, as Dimdiņš tells the author, “people are attracted to the antagonistic idea of populism: bad politicians as opposed to good, uncorrupted nation” (Kolāte 2021b).

In the national holiday issue of “*Sestdiena*”, Kolāte addresses the “eternal national question” in order to find out “what content domestic politicians bring to nationalism” and why “nationalism in Latvia”, which is “more often called by some other name”, unlike in Western Europe, “is perceived calmly”. Dainis Īvāns, UL Assistant Professor Valts Kalniņš, Minister of Foreign Affairs Edgars Rinkēvičs (JV), chairman of NA and member of the *Saeima* Raivis Dzintars, Riga City Council member Agnese Logina of the party “Progressives” (“*Progresīvie*”) give their explanations, which are different, but more or less revolve around language, education, culture, understanding of history and Latvian identity. Kalniņš points out that **“there are attempts to raise the language** from a classical cultural factor that integrates the nation and – in fact, this has already happened – **to declare it a political principle”**, including in the actions of the President. Kolāte also notes that “the Latvian language in Latvia is the language of democratic participation” (Kolāte 2021c). The topic of the political nation became relevant in 2022, mainly in connection with the war of Russia in Ukraine and the legislatively resolved removal of monuments glorifying the occupation regime of the USSR.

Amongst the publications of the first months of the year, the interview of Zirnīs with epidemiologist Nikita Trojanskis is worth to note. The epidemiologist says about “vaccine sceptics” that “most of them are disinformed”, even though “today there is too much information available (smiles) and people have not learned to distinguish quality information from that of a poor quality” (Zirnīs 2022c).

Discussion and conclusions

Taking into account the small number of members of Latvian political parties, as well as the low trust ratings, which are only slightly higher for the government and the parliament, it is clear that even the political journalists of the print media do not try to analyse most of these complex problems at all, moreover, they avoid doing so deliberately. Instead of analysis, descriptive findings and forecasts of invited experts are offered. The editorial line of “*Ir*” magazine can be described as supporting democracy, European values and Euro-Atlantic orientation, which

simultaneously includes a very large dose of criticism addressed to political parties, the government and the parliament.

A hermeneutic understanding of the texts of the political journalists of the magazines “*Ir*” and “*Sestdiena*” suggests that the journalists with their political communication mostly construct a political subculture of disappointment. “*Ir*” rather appeals to the politically competent and personally active, but very small portion of the electorate, which is becoming even smaller, as evidenced by the magazine’s consistent decline in circulation. It is important that the context of “*Sestdiena*” publications is formed as a story about the unsuccessful or even harmful activities of the government and the political parties and party associations constituting the government. The content of the publications gives the impression of a relatively large consensus based on populism in the condemnation of the “ruling political elite” and contrasting it against the “ordinary person”, especially in the publications of “*Sestdiena*”.

A democratic political culture is critical to the legitimacy, resilience and successful functioning of democracy. Passivity and apathy are not consistent with a democracy in which the electoral process periodically divides the population into winners and losers. The differences in the topics, analyses and conclusions of the journalists are not significant or fundamental. The characteristics of elite democracy and party state political communication culture unite rather than differentiate the texts published by the political journalists of the two magazines.

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Dual Minorities: Narratives of Russian-Speaking Youth of the Latvian LGBTQ+ Community

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Abstract. The aim of the research is to identify the main narratives about the identities of the Russian-speaking youth of the LGBTQ+ community, and whether these identities influence youngsters' sense of belonging to Latvia, where they comprise both a linguistic and a sexual minority group. The theoretical part of the current paper examines the theoretical aspects of national, ethnic, linguistic, sexual, and homosexual identities, as well as provides a deeper understanding about the young people as a research audience and the studies of the Russian-speaking community in Latvia. In the practical part of the work, three methods were used: semi-structured interview, thematic narrative analysis and content analysis. Based on the results obtained, conclusions were made about youngsters' identity conflict, the impact of youngsters' identities on their sense of belonging to Latvia, youngsters' experiences with stereotypes and discrimination in Latvia, and their participation in the Russian-speaking and LGBTQ+ communities. The results of the research enabled identification of 7 main narratives: the Russian-speaking community and a sense of belonging to Latvia; the Russian-speaking community and the influence of Russia; the LGBTQ+ community and hiding; the LGBTQ+ community and heterosexual privilege; the LGBTQ+ community and attitudes towards homosexual orientation; the LGBTQ+ community and hope for the future, as well as the dual minorities.

Keywords: content analysis, identity, LGBTQ+, narratives, queer theory, Russian-speaking, thematic narrative analysis, youth

Introduction

Both historical background and political situation have profoundly impacted the challenges faced by different minority groups in Latvia. This includes human right policies and safety, as well as the controversial attitudes that are widespread in the society. In 2022, the findings of the study of the association "Rainbow Europe" indicated that in the field of LGBTQ+ rights protection, out of 27 countries of the European Union, Latvia ranks 24th, and out of 44 European countries,

Latvia ranks 36th (ILGA-Europe 2022). According to the data of the Eurobarometer study, the attitude towards the LGBTQ+ community varies by age, “and young people have more positive attitudes towards LGBTQ+ people than older respondents. Recognition of legal partnerships can also influence a change in attitudes in a more positive direction” (Eiropas Savienības Pamattiesību aģentūra 2009). At the same time, a study conducted in 2021 proved that Russian-speaking young people supported the values of liberalism and were also more Euro-optimistic, however, “only 10% of respondents in the age group of 18 to 30 accept homosexuality” (Kugel, Lysenkov 2021). The aforementioned researches clearly indicate that both the situation with LGBTQ+ community and the identities of dual minorities need to be analysed to a greater extent, and there is a necessity for more extensive data in the field of queer studies in Latvia in order to understand what are the main issues that LGBTQ+ community faces in daily life. Thus, it can be concluded that the LGBTQ+ community in Latvia is currently experiencing changes, hence, it is important to learn about the personal experiences of the younger generations.

The main objective of the current research has been to identify the main narratives about the identities of Russian-speaking youth in LGBTQ+ community, and to find out whether they affect the sense of belonging to Latvia, while living in a country where youngsters belong both to linguistic and sexual minority. It is important to add, that the research on the history of the Latvian LGBTQ+ community has commenced very recently, the papers focus on the *perestroika* era (Lapsa *et al.* 2008–2009), the problem of homophobia (Mole 2011, 540–560) and “coming out of the closet” (Waitt 2005, 161–181), as well as activism (Vērđiņš, Ozoliņš 2013, 111–128), the normative legal framework of the USSR (Lipša 2016) and post-Soviet narratives (Ruduša, 2014). It must be highlighted that until now no research has been directly focussed on the identity of Russian-speaking young people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community.

This research focused on four questions:

1. How does homosexual identity and the linguistic identity of Russian speakers conflict with each other? In what way is it possible to reduce this internal conflict?
2. How does the identity of young people relate to their sense of belonging to Latvia?
3. Are the identities of linguistic and sexual minorities a threat or a challenge to tradition and normality, according to young people? How do they experience it on a daily basis?
4. How do the homosexual and linguistic identities of young people affect their participation in the LGBTQ+ community and the Russian-speaking community?

The paper has considered the theoretical concepts of a queer theory (Spargo 1999), Richard Troiden's homosexual identity development model (Troiden 1988, 105–113), Thomas Eriksen's concept of 'ethnicity,' Richard Mole's research on the history of homophobia in Latvia (Mole 2011, 540–560), as well as the term 'dual minorities' (Sue 2013). For instance, 'queer' is a term used to describe all individuals who are not heterosexual or cisgender. According to homosexual identity development model, there are 6 stages of the development of homosexual identity: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride and identity synthesis (Cass, 1979). It should be highlighted that in Troiden's model, "coming out of the closet" is a culmination moment and the "sign of maturity" in the process of identity formation: this the term is used to describe the process of an individual openly declaring their homosexual orientation, it should be noted that this is not just a single event, but a process that is never fully completed (Troiden 1988, 105–113). In the current paper, the results have been compared to the stages of this homosexual identity development model (1979) and the conclusions made about the identity development of Russian-speaking queer youngsters.

Methodology

The study is based on 15 interviews with Russian-speaking young people who identify as a part of LGBTQ+ community. Two sampling methods were used to create a representative sample: key informant (Latvian LGBTQ+ organizations *Skapis*, *Mozaika*, *Active Rainbow*, newspaper *Kvīri Runā*) and snowball sampling. It should be mentioned that the results of this study will apply only to this defined social group: Russian-speaking young people aged 18–25 belonging to the LGBTQ+ community.

In comparison with the Russian-speaking community, it should be noted that the representatives of the LGBTQ+ community usually question and even deny their identity, hide it and avoid conversations on this topic. When homosexual people reach the culmination of the identity development process and "come out of the closet", they may face other risks, such as conflicts in the family and the workplace. This stress and stigma can be reduced by the availability of information, involvement in activism, positive role models and an accepting environment (Greene 1994).

Notably, there are some similarities between the identities of Russian-speaking and homosexual people. For example, both groups have their own folklore, traditions, history and subculture. At the same time, both communities have faced a discourse of 'majority-minority relationships,' in which their minority group is placed against the majority group. In Latvia, both groups have faced stigmatization, prejudice and discrimination on a daily basis, and in the context of

ethno-nationalism, both groups can be considered a threat to “being Latvian” or *latviskums* (Mole 2011). Finally, for both groups, legitimizing discourse, political support and policies that ensure the protection of the rights of these groups are very important.



Figure 1. Similarities and differences between the identities of the Russian-speaking and LGBTQ+ community

Two research methods have been employed in data processing: thematic narrative analysis and qualitative content analysis, using a deductive approach: qualitative content analysis categories and a coding scheme were developed prior to the study. The content analysis enabled to establish common trends in the narratives of young people, and it also helped to identify the evaluation given by the young people to certain topics: identity, sense of belonging, culture, society. The thematic narrative analysis helped to organize the transcription of the interview in a way to emphasize the content of the narrative and to find common features in the narratives.

Results

As a result of the thematic analysis of the narratives, 7 main narratives were identified: the Russian-speaking community and a sense of belonging to Latvia; the Russian-speaking community and the influence of Russia; the LGBTQ+ community and hiding; the LGBTQ+ community and heterosexual privilege; the LGBTQ+ community and attitudes toward homosexual orientation; the LGBTQ+ community and a hope for the future; and the dual minorities. Each narrative includes several themes, and each topic includes several codes.



Figure 2. 7 main narratives of the Russian-speaking and LGBTQ+ communities

It should be noted that the narratives are interconnected, for example, the Latvian language is essential for both integration into Latvian society and integration into the LGBTQ+ community. The main reason is that LGBTQ+ community events, communication and activities of organizations are mainly organized in Latvian, hence, knowledge of Latvian language is necessary for active involvement in this community. The influence of Russia is also crucial for both communities: in Russian-speaking communities, the older generation is characterized by stereotypical thinking and prejudices about the representatives of various minorities. This is the reason why sexism, racism and homophobia

are often noticed in the conversations with youngsters' parents, which leads to physical and mental violence against the LGBTQ+ community, as well as to conflicts in the family, especially if the children adhere to more liberal views. The ideology and the new laws that ban materials about LGBTQ+ community have an external influence on Russian-speaking communities outside Russia, as well.

The results of the study revealed that dual minorities in Latvia face problems that are typical for both the Russian-speaking community and the LGBTQ+ community in Latvia: stereotypes and prejudices, discrimination, and lack of information. LGBTQ+ community in Latvia comes up against the problems related to the aspect of hiding, that is, the community lacks visibility; on the other hand, young people have too little information about LGBTQ+ terminology, events, and it is also difficult to find like-minded people, because LGBTQ+ organizations are only located in Riga, moreover, Riga residents are more open to diversity and Riga Pride is regularly organized in the capital city. At the regional level, especially in the Russian-speaking community, there is a greater risk of homophobia, which is based on stereotypes and results in discrimination – physical and mental violence, hate speech and crimes.

When it comes to safety, young people highlighted two factors: firstly, hiding their sexual identity, lying and 'selecting' their circle of friends, and secondly, hopes for a new generation to be more open-minded to diversity, better informed about the LGBTQ+ community and more educated, as well as new policies that would provide equal rights and safety for the LGBTQ+ community in Latvia. The majority of respondents admitted that they felt inner conflict, shame and fear when accepting their homosexual identity. When it comes to the factors that have helped young people reduce this cognitive dissonance, three aspects mentioned in the theoretical framework should be highlighted: access to information, accepting environment and positive role models. First of all, all young people looked for answers to their questions on the Internet, mostly in English. The information helped them learn more about sexuality, gender, puberty, relationships, LGBTQ+ terminology and to find pen pals. Secondly, an accepting environment in most cases helped young people feel safe and reveal their orientation to close friends. Young people admit that currently their circle of friends includes only those people who accept them and are more open to diversity in general. Thirdly, all young people actively consume cultural products about the LGBTQ+ community or created by queer artists.

As a result of the study, it was discovered that there are four other aspects important to dual minorities that were not identified with the help of the theoretical framework.

1. According to the data acquired in the spring of 2022, the Russian-speaking community is still dependent on the influence of Russia – this influence

is formed by such aspects as the stereotypical thinking of the older generations, the Russian information bubble and the situation of LGBTQ+ communities in Russia.

2. LGBTQ+ community has a hope for a better future, especially a hope for the younger generation, which could be more open-minded to diversity, including the LGBTQ+ community.
3. The sense of unity created by festivals and events, including the Latvian Song and Dance Festival and Riga Pride, is important to both communities. Interestingly, the majority of respondents have not attended any of these events, yet they actively consume information about these events on social media. Young people would gladly attend these events if they had a better command of the Latvian language and felt safe during the event.
4. Both communities believe that Riga is more open to diversity, and a large number of events dedicated to the communities take place in Riga. Therefore, it is also necessary to hold educational and informative events in the regions, including other cities and towns of Latvia, which would promote openness to diversity.

It can be concluded that this study provided an in-depth insight into the narratives of both communities, as well as helped to reveal the problems and manifestations of discrimination that Russian-speaking queers face in their everyday lives.

Discussion

It is important to discuss the limitations of the present study. For the further research it would be recommended to increase the sample, thus increasing the representation of the study. To obtain the most detailed results, it is recommended to study separately how sexual orientation affects the narratives and how the gender of young people affects their narratives. It is important to highlight the fact that the transgender identities and non-binary identities have not been analysed in the theoretical part of this study and not taken into account when analysing the narratives of young people.

When studying the topic of dual minorities, the researcher should also remember that the respondents may belong to more than two minorities, for example, to ethnic, religious minorities, as well as to social and economic risk groups. These aspects of intersectionalism are also important to consider when analysing the young people's responses.

The future studies could explore how the experiences of homosexual people differ in cities and regions of Latvia, as well as growing up in religious and conservative families. Also, if the civic partnerships become legally recognized in Latvia, it is useful to study how the respondents' lives have changed after it.

At the conclusion of the current study, the guidelines for conducting interviews with members of the LGBTQ+ community in Latvia were developed. There are three aspects that require particular attention:

- Confidentiality – the voices of the interviewees were changed in audio recordings, and the real names of the interviewees were replaced by the pseudonyms in the quotes;
- Safety – all participants were informed about their rights to cancel the participation in the interview and they had a possibility to choose the time and place of the interview. Some interviewees chose online interview format because they no longer lived with their family and felt safe at their own place. On the other hand, there were young people who wanted to meet in person because they did not feel safe talking about their sexual orientation while being at home. Therefore, the choice of the interview venue is essential for the respondent to feel safe;
- Trust – it is important that the researchers themselves have no prejudice against any of the minorities, as it may affect the course of the interview and also the results. It is essential for the researcher to talk about the research purpose, themselves, their views even before the interview, in order to mitigate the respondent's feelings of unsafety and vulnerability, and to provide support.

It is clear that there is a need of developing more extensive guidelines on conducting research about minority groups, because of vulnerability of respondents.

Conclusions

This paper has examined the narratives of Russian-speaking queer youth in Latvia. The findings indicated that the majority of young people experienced an internal conflict between their identities: all of them were raised in Russian-speaking families where the attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community were very controversial. Furthermore, the youngsters had rarely seen any representation of LGBTQ+ community in Latvia and because of that had struggled with the acceptance of their homosexual identity. It is important to highlight the influence of Russia on the negative attitudes towards queer community in the Russian-speaking communities abroad. However, the availability of information online and in English, positive role models in queer movies and TV series and an accepting environment such as close friends have helped to reduce this cognitive dissonance.

Comparing the results of the study with the homosexual identity development model, it can be concluded that the identity of young people is characterized by the stage 4 – **identity acceptance**, and in most cases, the respondents feel

belonging to the LGBTQ+ community and privately identify themselves with the community. However, only a few are lucky enough to reach stage 6, or **identity synthesis** – this is because the majority of respondents still hide their homosexual identity.

The other important insight is that Russian-speaking queers, despite their dual minority status, feel a sense of belonging to Latvia: they identify themselves with this country, they are motivated to learn the Latvian language and protect the Russian language and their memories about their unique culture, and they also actively attend local events and celebrate Latvian national holidays. All the participants noted that they had an essential sense of unity that they experienced at the festivals and events such as Latvian Song and Dance Festival, as well as Riga Pride.

According to Richard Mole, Russian-speaking and sexual minorities are considered “a threat to Latvian nation” (*latviskums*), and young people do experience discrimination in their everyday life, which manifests itself as mental and physical violence, as well as hate speech. Consequently, young people support the idea of a new policies that would protect them from hate speech motivated by homophobia and transphobia. Another proposal for solving this problem is the introduction of sexuality education in schools to normalize the relations of same-sex couples and promote openness to the diversity in Latvian society. It should be emphasized that the legal recognition of the civic partnership was mentioned by all 15 respondents.

The data of this study proved that dual minorities in Latvia feel comfortable, but not safe. The topic of dual minorities in Latvia is worth researching despite the complexity of the topic. This is substantiated by the fact that the amount of available information still remains quite scarce. This research topic combines important questions concerning human rights, safety and identity in the modern world.

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Impact of the Type of a Post on the Engagement Rate of It

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Abstract. Within the last six years, influencer marketing market has grown by 700%, and within the last two years sales have doubled. Absolute majority of marketing professionals consider it effective. The main target audience of marketers using influencer marketing in Europe is youth, since 90% of them are actively using social networks. A steady growth can also be observed among those who use it as a news outlet and source to find out more about products and services. At the same time, not many digital content creators are honest with their audience, openly labelling collaboration. There are still the ones hiding it. The situation with influencers mainly followed by adolescents is especially dangerous, as the level of advertising literacy is not yet sufficiently advanced, and they are more easily impressed than adults. One of the possible reasons for hiding the fact that the content is actually an advertisement, is the fact that influencers are afraid that their engagement rate will decrease, which is detrimental, since the engagement rate is one of the criteria demonstrating the success of cooperation. The purpose of this study is to analyse whether advertorial posts really cause fewer reactions than regular posts. For this purpose, Latvian influencers who had more than 1500 followers and whose followers at the time of the performance of study were mostly adolescents (11–18 years old) from Latvia were selected. During 2021, the posts on the social media platform *Instagram* mentioning brands and/or having the relevant labelling regarding cooperation with the brand were selected. The engagement rate for 654 posts was compared with the engagement rate for regular posts. As a result, it was found that the difference varies from 1% to 2%. Since the difference is considered insignificant, we can conclude that there is no reason to hide paid collaboration from the audience.

Keywords: advertising literacy, artificial intelligence, children and adolescents, disinformation, social media, social media influencer

Introduction

During the recent years, influencer marketing has become an integral part of the communication for most European brands. More than 50% of European companies use it in their communication but in specific countries this part comprises almost 3/4 of all the companies. It is related to the fact that majority of European Union (EU) residents are using social media, while amongst people who are 16 to 24 years of age almost 90% are active users (Social Media Examiner 2021).

Since adolescents and young people are very active on social media, they have become the target audience for the marketing professionals involving digital content creators in their communication. At the same time, data show that not many users in EU possess a high level of media and advertising literacy and it is difficult for many to distinguish an advertisement from the regular post, in which influencer expresses his/her opinion, even with the precondition that relevant hashtags or even a direct indication of cooperation was used (European Commission 2018).

Some influencers consciously hide collaboration with brands. Experienced and critical users of social media can successfully distinguish an ad from the regular content, even without the respective paid promotion tag indicating cooperation, but adolescents and children frequently lack the experience and sufficient level of critical perception (Zarouali *et al.* 2019, 208), therefore, to hide this information is not only illegal and unethical but also dangerous for the end user of the content.

One of the possible reasons for the influencers to hide cooperation is the wish to avoid a risk of possible decrease in engagement, that is, a decrease in the number of likes and comments. The aim of this study is to find out whether the number of reactions is really decreasing in case of advertorial posts comparing to regular posts. The research question of the current paper is whether there is a need to hide paid collaboration to reach a better engagement rate of a promotional publication.

Methodology

In order to select relevant influencers followed by Latvian adolescents, a huge data massive should be analysed. Such data cannot be collected and analysed manually, and the *Instagram* app itself does not provide such information. However, there is a number of data analysis agencies around the world which work with *Instagram* and other social media and offer audience analysis, as well as auditing of content creators. In the framework of this study, an international agency that also operates on the Latvian market, *Hypeauditor*, was used to obtain data for audience analysis. *Hypeauditor* uses the following parameters:

- The age and gender of the audience is defined, using ‘computer vision’ technology, which analyses the audience recordings of the author of the content in question;
- The geographical location of the audience is determined by algorithms that analyse the content author’s audience entries on geotags, the language used in the entries’ descriptions and comments, and the corresponding subject headings;
- Comparison algorithms are used to overlay the audience.

Hypeauditor also measures the authenticity of the audience and their comments using machine learning, Natural Language Processing algorithms and other mechanisms powered by artificial intelligence. This algorithm is used to run a syntactic and semantic analysis to derive meaning from human languages, which helps to analyse comment authenticity. The algorithm also checks the accounts for suspicious patterns and behaviour that it has witnessed on bots (artificial followers) and other low-quality accounts. To detect a low-quality audience, *Hypeauditor* uses a specially trained ML-model, which is based on the ensemble of machine learning algorithms and uses more than 53 patterns to oust suspicious accounts. As a result, it detects 95.5% of all known fraud activity, with a mean error rate of 0.73%.

Based on this, *Hypeauditor* has developed the Audience Quality Score (AQS), which measures how authentic and engaged a given content author’s audience is with the content author’s recordings. *Hypeauditor*’s artificial intelligence analyses publicly available data. In general, the error rate is 3–5%.

The *Hypeauditor* services were used in order to:

1. Make a list of several social media content creators for *Instagram* that have the largest scope of adolescent subscribers from Latvia; it was crucial that the influencers themselves were also from Latvia.
2. Analyse in what percentage of publications the brand is mentioned, and what proportion thereof contains a mention of the cooperation. To make such analysis, hashtags defined by Consumer Rights Protection Centre were used: #reklāma #reklama #apmaksātāsadarbība #apmaksatasadarbiba #davana #dāvana #sadarbība #sadarbiba #paidpartnership #sponsorship #sponsorets #sponsorēts #ad.

The posts made in 2021 were taken for conducting the analysis. The aim was to selected social media content creators registered in Latvia, the majority of whose audience was from Latvia and who had the greatest share of adolescent followers (those who are 11–17 years old) and were themselves from Latvia. The total number of their followers was not less than 1500 persons, so they could be regarded as influencers/opinion leaders.

Results

1. Influencer marketing

International data show that within the last six years the market of influencer marketing has increased by 700%: from 1.7 billion USD in 2016 to 13.8 billion USD in 2021. Rapidly growing sales of the industry are closely connected to the financial results opinion leaders of the social media generate for the business (Statista 2021). A global study has revealed that 88% of the surveyed marketing professionals admit – their cooperation with the digital content creators has increased the popularity of their business, almost 80% emphasized the growing number of visitors to the site or app of their brand, whilst 69% reported an increase of the number of generated leads, meaning the increase in users' interest regarding the product or service with the potential to turn this interest into purchases (Social Media Examiner 2021).

More than 50% residents of EU are using social media but among people 16–24 years of age the part of active users is almost 90%. More than 50% European companies are using this in their communication but in certain countries this proportion comprises almost 3/4 of all the companies. As the data for 2022 are not yet available, the data for 2020 and 2021 have been explored, showing that an exponential growth of this marketing segment could be observed all around the world. The following trend in other EU countries was observed (Michaelsen *et al.* 2022, 2733):

- Finland: turnover of influencer marketing in 2020 in this country is estimated to amount to 27.9 million euro. More than half (58%) of advertisers in Finland in 2020 used influencer marketing, but in 2021 the growth in this category was 17%. Therefore, influencer marketing has become the most important field with the trends having a broad social and economic impact.
- Sweden: in 2021, Sweden had 17 multi-channel media agencies working with influencers, for a comparison – few years ago there were only 10–12 of these media agencies.
- Germany: in 2020, the market of influencer marketing in *DACH* (Germany, Austria and Switzerland) region was estimated in the amount of 990 million euro, it is almost two times more than in 2017. Report for November 2021 states that the total 'market value' of 25 leading German influencers was estimated in the amount of 80.7 million euro (from 10.9 million euro for an influencer with the highest rating up to 0.1 million euro for an influencer holding the 25th place). The data of the survey performed by the German Association for the Digital Economy in 2021 indicate that 45% surveyed companies have increased the annual budget allocated for the influencer marketing, but 23% – retained the budget within the level of the previous year. Only 4% replied that they will reduce the budget.

- Italy: in 2021, around 450,000 people were employed in the influencer marketing sphere. Amongst them, more than 350,000 were influencers and digital content creators, while others – intermediaries, for example, social media platforms, managers, talent agencies, marketing agencies or media centres. The value of the Italian influencer market reached 280 million euro in 2021, whilst the increase in comparison to previous year reached 15%. The most important segments are fashion and beauty care which take up almost one third of the entire market (31%), followed by travel, food and lifestyle (18%), that was significantly impacted by the pandemics, as well as fitness and healthy lifestyle (15%).

There is yet one trend to be observed – young people of the age from 18 to 24 mostly consume information in social media. For example, 39% of ‘digital natives’ – as the young people are described – use social media as their main news outlet, in comparison to 34% who read news on websites or in apps. Within the period of the last 7 years this proportion has grown by 10% (Reuters Institute 2022).

The social media landscape continues to evolve dramatically, with new social media like *TikTok* entering the field, as well as the existing platforms like *Instagram* and *Telegram* gaining markedly in popularity among young audiences. As social natives shift their attention away from *Facebook* or in many cases never really start using it, more visually focused platforms such as *Instagram*, *TikTok*, and *YouTube* have become increasingly popular as the news outlets among this group. Use of *TikTok* as the news outlet has increased fivefold among the 18–24-year-olds across all markets over just three years, from 3% in 2020 to 15% in 2022 (Reuters Institute 2022). It is noticed that users consume content not only from the official accounts of news portals but also, to a large extent, from the accounts of influencers.

Considering the immense popularity of influencers among young people, as well as the proven effectiveness of their involvement in advertising and PR campaigns, it is not a surprise that these data show that during the pandemics period the advertising content created by influencers increased by 72% (Michaelsen, Collini *et al.* 2022, 29).

Advertising content has to be labelled in a certain way; it is required not only on the EU level, but also on a national level, and there are clear instructions from the Latvian Consumer Rights Protection Centre as to what content should be labelled. Relevant hashtags (as a minimum requirement, if the description of the collaboration is not indicated in the text of the post or video) must be used if the collaboration includes financial payment, barter trade or the product or service is provided for testing (PTAC 2022). There are no regulations in Latvia governing the placement of hashtags and in many posts they are placed as the first comment, therefore they remain unnoticed, whereas in Germany

the paid promotion tag regarding the advertorial content has to be placed at the very beginning of the advertising text (Knitter, Sobottka 2020).

Studies show that advertising literacy amongst Europeans is not ideal, whilst the demand for the open and honest communication exists. If the advertising content is openly labelled, consumers can see it: the 2021 survey by *Telia Company* with the participation of children from 11 to 17 years of age indicated that 31% of Latvian respondents, when looking at the videos and posts published by the influencers and bloggers, verified the accuracy of information, whereas 45% Latvian respondents indicate that they used paid promotion tags seen in websites and platforms to identify whether the information came from a trusted source, and 83% considered this labelling useful (Telia Company 2021).

Nevertheless, the study of the communication of Latvian influencers popular amongst Latvian adolescents and youth showed that around 2/3 of advertorial posts had not been labelled in compliance with the laws and regulations and ethical requirements. We can assume that these influencers hide the ads, as they are afraid that in this case the engagement level would be lower than the engagement with regular posts.

Regarding the advertised product categories, the following products were promoted most frequently:

1. Fashion and cosmetics – 32% posts,
2. Services (23%) and technologies/devices (23%),
3. One of the ten advertising posts or 11% was devoted to food and drinks.

The least labelled category is fashion and cosmetics – only almost one fourth of advertorial posts (22%) are marked with paid promotion tags or described as an ad or barter. In the field of technologies/devices 25% of advertising posts were clearly labelled, but in food and drinks category 29% of posts were labelled (Vorkule 2022).

In order to understand whether it makes sense to hide advertising from youth by omitting indication of cooperation, this study analysed how the engagement rate of influencers changed when they were communicating about the products and services in comparison to the instances when they were posting the regular content. Engagement rate does not permit to establish whether the user has performed the desirable action, – purchased advertised product, but it is possible to infer whether the post has caused the willingness of the audience to engage with it, judging by the posted comments or the pressed ‘likes’.

2. Analysis of posts

In total, 654 posts in which a brand is tagged or mentioned were analysed. In 251 posts, cooperation was mentioned – either in the text or using an appropriate hashtag. To find out whether the engagement changes if it is an advertorial post,

the author analysed the average engagement rate of advertorial posts (the posts in which the brand or brands are mentioned), and regular posts.

The engagement rate is calculated according to this formula: the total number of reactions under the post, divided by the number of followers and multiplied by 100%. After the respective calculations, it is evident that the average level of engagement of the *Instagram* users in the advertorial post comprise 6%. A similar rate was observed with regular posts – 8%.

However, the arithmetical average does not constitute a perfect indicator, since it does not reflect extreme situations and the most common trend, meaning fashion. To understand the situation better, it was explored in what proportion of cases the engagement with the advertorial posts was higher or lower than the engagement with the regular posts. The study revealed that in 82% cases the engagement rate of advertorial posts was higher than that of the regular posts. In 9% it was lower and in another 9% – the same. Still, there is a simple explanation – participants of the contests are active, leaving many reactions and comments by the posts, in order to win a prize.

In case of the regular posts, the maximum engagement rate comprised 86%, while in case of advertorial posts – 31%. The minimum indicator of advertorial posts is higher than that of the regular posts – 1% versus 0.4% respectively.

Analysing the median values, the analysis of more than 650 posts showed a 6% engagement rate for the regular posts, and 5% – for advertorial posts. Fashion is equivalent to 4% of the regular posts and 1% of the advertorial posts.

Discussion and conclusions

An analysis of secondary data, including international studies, show that young people are spending more and more time in social networks, consuming content, which has been created not only by private users and official companies but also by the so-called influencers. Influencers are the users of social media who might not necessarily be famous outside these networks, but who nevertheless have a wide pool of followers and are opinion leaders for their audience, influencing their viewpoints, attitudes, as well as buyer behaviour of their followers. It is especially true for young people and adolescents, whose advertisement literacy skills are not as developed as that of the adults.

Since in recent years the share of young users for whom social media serve as a window to the world has increased, and they are the majority who use social media as the news outlet and source of the entertainment content, the brands are increasingly using them in their communication. There are European countries where more than a half of companies involve the digital content creators in their communication, and in general within the last 6 years the turnover of the influencer marketing has increased by 700%.

Unfortunately, not all influencers appropriately tag the advertising content, although the situation during the recent years has improved and the number of labelled posts in Latvia has grown by 107% (Vorkule 2021). Despite the efforts of the Latvian Consumer Rights Protection Centre, there are still problems with the content for which influencers receive an in-kind benefit – a barter trade or a product, or service to be tested, or a gift instead of the financial remuneration. Some are consciously hiding even the financially paid advertising. It is not only unethical; such practice also entails negative consequences, as this type of content has an unfavourable influence on the audience.

A survey of adolescents conducted by *Telia Company* demonstrated that the adolescents demanded clear labelling of advertising. Audience wants honesty from the influencers. One possible reason why influencers hide ads, risking the trust of their followers, is that they are afraid of the declining engagement rate for the paid content, since the engagement is one of the criteria how the brands assess the success of cooperation.

The analysis of 654 posts, created by Latvian influencers popular amongst the audience of 11–17-year-olds from Latvia, showed that the average engagement rate does not differ significantly between advertorial and regular posts – the difference is only 2%. Likewise, the medium value did not reveal significant differences, as the difference was less than 1%.

These results permit to conclude that regarding communication with adolescents, the presentation of information, attractiveness of the form are more important aspects than whether the content is of advertorial or regular character, because the engagement rate in the case of advertorial and regular posts differs only slightly.

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Soviet Disinformation and Latvian Diaspora after World War II

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Abstract. The topicality of the study is determined by the fact that the currently widespread Russian disinformation policy is rooted in the experience amassed during the Soviet period, including the attempts to influence the Latvian diaspora living outside Latvia. Until now, research has highlighted the public political activities of diaspora organizations, neglecting the publications they produced. However, the documents available in the memory institutions of Latvia permit the researchers to reveal in sufficient detail the process of preparation and dissemination of these publications, as well as the frequently contradictory assessment of these publications. The aim of the research is, by using a range of unpublished documents and press publications of Latvians in exile community, which have not previously been included in the scientific circulation, to ascertain the experience of the Latvian exile society in the context of spreading true information about the history of Latvia and the situation in occupied Latvia, as well as evaluating the risks that could be caused by the uncritical use of Soviet publications sent to Latvians in the diaspora. The Latvian National Foundation (LNF, founded in Stockholm in 1947) can be considered the most consistent producer of such publications over a longer period of time. The materials released by LNF include publications that use sources of information available in the free world, as well as texts and images received from Latvia, which are published under cover names. A fair part of LNF's publications was released in foreign languages (English, Swedish, German, etc.), as their target audience was the policy makers of Western countries. Some of the publications of LNF predominantly display the characteristics of representative gifts, but in general they form a significant part of Latvian publishing, – a contribution to maintaining the idea of the continuity of Latvian statehood. Relatively intensive sending of printed materials of occupied Latvia to Latvians in exile, starting from the second half of the 1950s, raises discussions about the value and place of these publications on the bookshelves of Latvians in exile. The findings of the research yield new insights into the role of certain organizations (in this case, the Latvian National Foundation) in Latvian book publishing in exile and the experience of the diaspora in dealing with Soviet disinformation.

Keywords: Latvian National Foundation, publications of Soviet Latvia, Per Olov Enquist, publications regarding the history of Latvia, Latvian society in exile, Uldis Ģermanis

Introduction

The most recent studies dedicated to the activities of the Latvian exile organizations and Latvian diplomats after the World War II mostly analyse various political actions (Beķere 2022, 149–240). Less frequently mentioned are the publications produced during this time in various host countries (Beķere 2022, 109–119), the purpose of which, among other things, was to neutralize the influence of Soviet propaganda and disinformation publications. However, even then, the documents found in Latvian libraries and archives practically have not been used, although they permit for quite a complete restoration of the background, publication process and assessment of these publications. These are the main considerations substantiating the need to ascertain and evaluate the experience regarding the actions of the socially active part of exiled Latvians when dealing with the disinformation policy implemented by the Soviet Union.

Results

The Latvian National Foundation (hereinafter LNF), founded in Stockholm in 1947, operated most consistently and for the longest time in the field of collecting and disseminating correct information. The Foundation's history and resonance of publications in the free world, as well as in Soviet-occupied Latvia, has so far been considered insufficiently. For the purpose of researching the topic, the most important Swedish Latvian press publications ("*Latvju Vārds*", "*Latvju Ziņas*"), newspapers released in several other host countries ("*Laiks*", "*Latvija*", "*Latvija Amerikā*", etc.), as well as the materials of the Latvian National Foundation, which have not entered the scientific circulation, and which can be found in the Academic Library of the University of Latvia, were studied in detail.

For the Latvian National Foundation, the task of collecting and distributing true information about the history of Latvia and the situation in occupied Latvia was a priority. The first publication of the list of people deported by Soviets "These Names Accuse" ("*Šie vārdi apsūdz*") in 1951 became one of the most significant and widely noticed publications of LNF. Its preparation caused an extensive discussion in the press about the necessity and timeliness of such a publication. Representatives of particular Latvian exile organizations had different opinions about it, while there were attempts to prevent publication of the list by anonymous circulars distributed in the exile society, which attest to the diversionary activities of the Soviet security institutions ([S. n.] 1951, 5).

At the end of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s, the LNF was intensively involved in public discussions about the extradition of Baltic soldiers interned in Sweden to the Soviet Union in January 1946. The novel "The Legionaries" by Per Olov Enquist (1934–2020), published in 1968, which received the Nordic Council Literature Prize (1969) and was translated into several languages, gave a new

impetus to discussions about the events of the recent past and their interpretations. Protesting against the tendentious depiction of Baltic soldiers in the novel, LNF publishes its opinion about it in the Swedish press soon after the novel was published. The book *“De misstolkade legionärerna”* (“The Misunderstood Legionaries”) written by Arturs Landsmanis (1913–1992) and translated by Pāvils Šadurskis (1924–1994) (LNF PG 1962–1974, 77) was intended to refute Enquist’s version and it was published by LNF in 1970. This book was sent by LNF to all members of the Riksdag, to about 1,000 libraries in Sweden and elsewhere in Scandinavia, and distributed to Swedish bookshops (LNF PG 1962–1974, 92).

The depiction of occupied Latvia in the Soviet propaganda publications contrasts noticeably with the reflection of the reality of Latvia, including the degradation of the cultural landscape, as shown in the texts and images received from Latvia, which LNF published under assumed names. These published materials included the poem *“Rusiāde”* (“Russiade”, 1956, published under the pseudonym Ints Baltarājs) by the actor Ēvalds Valters (1894–1994) and the book *“Vēl tā gribējās dzīvot”* (“Did Want to Live So Much Yet”), which described the experiences in Siberia of Rūta Upīte (1927–1957), who was deported on 14 June 1941 in German translation (1978), and the book by the writer Žanis Skudra (1924–1994) *“Okupētās Latvijas dienas grāmata”* (“The Diary of Occupied Latvia”, 1976, 1980, published under the pseudonym J. Dzintars). Ž. Skudra and the Swedish citizen Laimonis Niedra, who took the pictures and manuscripts out of Latvia (LNF PG 1974–1980, 65), were arrested by the Soviet security authorities in Tallinn in June 1978 and convicted in the same year, both accused of espionage on behalf of the LNF leadership.

Soviet disinformation, including the selective use and interpretation of exile publications beneficial to the occupation regime, affected not only the degree of openness in the exile press, but also in publications devoted to the history of Latvia. The publication *“Pa aizputinātām pēdām”* (“Tracing Snow-Covered Tracks”, 1956) prepared by the historian and publicist Uldis Ģērmanis (1915–1997), which was a commentary on the reflection of Colonel Jukums Vācietis (1873–1938) *“Latviešu strēlnieku vēsturiskā nozīme”* (“Historical Significance of the Latvian Riflemen”) caused a wide resonance. It confirmed the diverse ideas of exiled Latvians of different generations and adherents of different political persuasions about the degree of openness of published information (self-censorship), as well as the opportunity to question authorities and discuss controversial topics of Latvia’s recent history. U. Ģērmanis was one of the exile historians who defended a proactive approach to the study of Latvian history, with his publications creating an alternative to the often highly ideological publications on Latvian history that were released in occupied Latvia.

Certain politically active representatives of Latvian society in exile (Baptist pastor Osvalds Blūmītis (1903–1961), Seattle Latvians), especially in

the 1950s–60s tried to reduce the spread of Soviet propaganda publications in the public libraries of host countries (V. L.1956, 6; [S. n.] 1961, 6).

Partly as gratitude for the humanitarian aid packages received from the West, Latvians in exile were sent a relatively extensive range of printed works from occupied Latvia in the second half of the 1950s and in 1960s. In the exile press, it was discussed several times what effect this might have on exile Latvian literature and publishing in general (Jēgens 1957, 38) and whether textbooks published in Soviet Latvia could be used in exile schools (Akmentiņš 1979, 2; Kronlins 1973, 2, 21). This exchange of thoughts attested to different approaches in the attitude of the Latvian exile society towards intellectual values created in occupied Latvia, which resonated with changes in the position regarding the possibility and necessity of visiting the occupied homeland.

Conclusions

The politically active part of Latvian society in exile mostly understood the disinformation policy implemented by the Soviet Union and tried to at least partially reduce its impact by preparing publications about the history of Latvia and the situation in occupied Latvia. Amongst the public organizations in this field, the Latvian National Foundation operated most consistently and successfully. The discussion in the press regarding the place of books originating from the occupied Latvia in the exiled Latvian society sheds light on an aspect of Latvian publishing that thus far has been seldom studied.

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Information Warfare and Disinformation: The Example of the Occupation of Latvia in June of 1940

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Abstract. Applying the concept of information warfare, the study examines the influence of the USSR on the information space of Latvia during its occupation in June 1940 and taking over power. Using memoir literature, the article presents the characteristics of media activity. The research analyses the contents of the 17–19 June issues of the most influential newspapers “*Jaunākās Ziņas*”, “*Brīvā Zeme*” and “*Rīts*” in order to detect disinformation published therein and information available to people. It was concluded that the USSR successfully implemented the information warfare, achieving complete control of Latvia’s information space. The main information materials provided to the audience of the Latvian media contained blatant misinformation, as they defined the relations between Latvia and the USSR as friendly and the Red Army as a friendly army.

Keywords: Occupation of Latvia, information warfare, misinformation, Latvian newspapers “*Jaunākās Ziņas*”, “*Brīvā Zeme*”, “*Rīts*”

Introduction

In recent years, the term “information warfare” has been extensively used in academic and public space. There are several explanations of this concept, however, one of the most frequently used definitions is the one provided in the NATO brochure addressed to the general public: “Information warfare is an operation conducted in order to gain an information advantage over the opponent. It consists in controlling one’s own information space, protecting access to one’s own information, while acquiring and using the opponent’s information, destroying their information systems and disrupting the information flow” (NATO 2020). During the last decades, the rapid development of information and communication technologies and their importance in all spheres of life has increased the knowledge about the meaning of information warfare.

This phenomenon is not new in itself. Information wars have always been a part of warfare, as well as deliberate creation and maintenance of political and social crises. The explanation of war by Carl von Clausewitz, a theory of war classic, is suitable for the description of its essence: "... war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means" (Clausewitz 2007, 28). These other means also include manipulation of information, closing down or taking over of mass media, spreading disinformation, propaganda, blocking communication channels. In this context, historical accounts highlight Napoleon Bonaparte's skill to use information to seize power in France, George Washington's successful use of false anti-British propaganda in the American Revolutionary War, and propaganda in the World War I. Information warfare played an important role in the Vietnam War, it was also present in the US military operations in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan (see Farwell 2020; Rid 2020; Seib 2021). The concept of 'information warfare' in the politics and defence of Western countries is mostly designated by the concept 'strategic communication.' This means the use of messages, words, actions, symbols, images to influence the opinion of the target audience, which in turn would contribute to achieving the intended goals. In the Russian military sphere and politics, the use of the concept of information warfare is typical (Fridman 2020). The "Military Encyclopaedic Dictionary" published on the website of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation states:

An open and violent collision between states in which the enemy's resistance is suppressed by the use of means of harmful influence on his information sphere, destruction or disruption of the normal functioning of his information and telecommunication systems, [undermining] the security of his information resources [and] obtaining unauthorised access to them, as well as [employing] massive informational and psychological influence on the Armed Forces' personal and the population of the enemy in order to destabilise society and the state (Quoted in Fridman 2020, 47).

This definition shows that the Russian military considers information a part of war, even prioritizing it over conventional military operations. The information warfare here is defined in two formats: information-technical and information-psychological. The first is related to information technology, communication channels and infrastructure, technical creation and use of data, as well as programming. The second is focused on influencing the minds of population, elite and military personnel, working with people's knowledge and emotions. Despite the fact that these spheres are different, they overlap and interact, as, for example, psychological influence is achieved through information technology (Jonsson

2019, 95–96). The activities of the Russian Federation in the spread of disinformation and manipulation of information have prompted and still compel to pay ever increasing attention to the phenomenon of information warfare specifically in the interpretation perpetuated by Russia, which allows for a more effective analysis of the information operations carried out by this state (Freedman 2020; Seib 2021, Ch. 5). The Baltic states, especially after their accession to NATO, have been and still remain among the targets of Russia's information warfare (Seib 2021, Ch. 5; Fabian, Berzins 2021; Chakars, Ekmanis 2022).

This study examines the situation in the field of information in the first days of the occupation of Latvia in 1940. The Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has prompted the analysis of historical events – the previous occupations of neighbouring countries executed by Russia and the comparison of present and past military actions. The aim of the research is to uncover the information provided by Latvian mass media on 17–19 June 1940 and assess the information available to the population about the occupation taking place in those days and the demise of the state of Latvia. In order to achieve this, the following research questions have been proposed: 1) can the activity of the Latvian media and the information provided by them be evaluated as an information warfare operation of the USSR; and 2) did the available information enable the population of Latvia to understand the unfolding events?

Methodology

The study examines the information that appeared in the most widely read Latvian daily newspapers “*Jaunākās Ziņas*” (“Latest News”; hereinafter – JZ), “*Brīvā Zeme*” (“Free Land”; BZ) and “*Rīts*” (“Morning”; Ri) during the first days of the occupation, during which the control was seized over the entire territory of the state, the most important administrative and communication institutions and the army. During the pre-occupation of Latvia, the circulation of JZ reached 250 000, BZ – 180 000 and Ri – 100 000–110 000 copies (Butulis 2017, 178–179).

The research analyses the newspaper issues published on 17, 18 and 19 June. On 20 June, the newly formed government of Latvia, which was essentially a Soviet puppet government, began its work. This measure was followed by the complete takeover of Latvian institutions and their placement under Soviet control. By changing editors and journalists, the media also were appropriated. I have discussed the depiction of the events of the summer of 1940, mainly July and early August, in the press in an earlier published article (see Zelče 2011). The research was conducted using the qualitative content analysis method, analysing the text of newspaper issues and discussing thematic categories: priorities of agenda; sources of information and the normality of media routines.

A compilation of data found in memoir literature regarding the work of media in the first days of the occupation of Latvia has been created in order to characterize the context of the situation.

Results

1. Characterisation of the information space

In the historical literature dedicated to the occupation of Latvia, the main attention is directed at its political, diplomatic and military dimensions (for example, see Gore, Stranga 1992; Strods, Bleiere *et al.* 2007, 166–243; Stranga 2022; Bleiere, Kangeris 2022, 55–87). Less consideration has been given to Soviet information and disinformation dissemination measures, although it is recognized that the Soviet occupation regime quickly gained control over Latvia's information space (Zellis 2018, 103). This was facilitated by the situation that had developed during the authoritarian regime of Kārlis Ulmanis, when a comprehensive and complex censorship system had been created for the media. The Ministry of Public Affairs, established in 1937, was in charge of media activities. This institution also produced the major articles on the functioning of state power, politics, international relations, which were sent to the editorial offices of periodicals with a mandatory request of publication in newspapers or magazines. During the authoritarian regime, the press was completely unified, it only provided information flattering to the government and the authoritarian leader Ulmanis (Butulis 2017, 176–177). In his memoirs, JZ editor Jānis Kārklīņš ironically wrote that the editor-in-chief of the newspaper received orders from officials also over the phone or a game of cards and a glass of cognac (Kārklīņš 1990, 203). In 1939, an unequivocally positive image of the USSR was constructed in the public space of Latvia, pursuant to the course imposed by the government, which was the one of neutrality and maintaining good relations with the USSR. The media no longer included any critical information about this country in their content. After the signing of the mutual aid agreement between Latvia and the USSR on 5 October 1939, which determined the placement of Soviet military bases on the territory of Latvia, a wide range of USSR propaganda materials also entered the public space (Strods 2007).

Likewise, on 17 June, when the Red Army entered the territory of Latvia, the media operated in the previous regime. They published only the statements prepared by the authorities. 17 June was Monday, the Latgale Song Festival had taken place in Daugavpils over the weekend, which, among others, was observed by many media workers. BZ and Radiophone of Latvia journalist Konstantīns Karulis in his memoirs wrote that during the song festival there was anxiety among journalists about the entry of the USSR military forces into Lithuania and the attack on the Mašleniki border post in the Abrene district and they had

discussed these events with each other, while waiting for the information to be provided to the media from the minister of public affairs, Alfrēds Bērziņš. Karulis also recounts the story of Alberts Liepa, the foreign editor of the newspaper Rī, that on 15 June he had received a message about the occupation of Lithuania from the German branch of “United Press.” Liepa did not dare to publish it on his own initiative and tried to coordinate it with the Office of the President. Ulmanis forbade its publication, stating that it was false and could not be distributed further. Similarly, on 17 June, newspaper editors were waiting for the government to provide information for publication in the press about the current events in Latvia (Karulis 2000a, 15).

Neither on the evening of 16 June nor on the morning of 17 June did the Latvian government inform the population about the entry of the USSR troops into the state. Information was provided only at 12:00. The appearance of Soviet military equipment and soldiers on Latvian roads and city streets came as a surprise for many (Gore, Stranga 1992, 128–129). Soviet troops reached Riga at 13:30. Their first actions were the capture of the post office building, where the telegraph, telephone exchange and radio broadcasting centre were located. Radiophone broadcasts were interrupted. Alfrēds Bērziņš protested this by telephone to the USSR envoy Vladimir Derevyanski and received an answer that from then on, the Red Army would govern Radiophone “in the common interest of all.” Broadcasting of music was permitted, but creation of the spoken word could only take place with the permission of Soviet representatives (Dunsdorfs 1992, 374). The USSR envoy also demanded that each day’s radio program be coordinated with the embassy of USSR (Komplektov 1990, 401). The first secretary of the embassy of France, Jean de Beausse, also emphasized the termination of telephone communications in his memoirs (Boss 1997, 59). Karulis remembered that Radiophone received a phone call from the USSR embassy, demanding that “no information other than what comes from the embassy should be given about the arrival and movement of Soviet troops in Latvia” (Karulis 2000a, 16). Juris Zīverts, at that time – a very young journalist of BZ, in his memoirs expressed the assumption that people who listened to Moscow radio were better informed about the course of the occupation of Latvia. According to him, it was they who greeted the Red Army in the streets of Riga (Zīverts 2011, 140–141).

Several memoirs describe the situation in newspaper editorial offices. The writer Alfrēds Dziļums came to the editorial office of JZ on 17 June. He recalled that agitation reigned there. Jūlijs Lācis, who later became a member of the Soviet puppet governments, told him: “What formerly was, is done with, friend! But let’s try to live!” (Dziļums 1991, 238). Zīverts recounted that that already on 17 June, representatives of the Red Army, dressed in military uniforms without insignia, came to the editorial office of BZ. Their task was to ensure that “only true and correct articles” appeared in the newspaper (Zīverts

2011, 144). Zīverts also recollected that the pieces written by himself and his colleagues were altered beyond recognition. Many articles, especially the texts of politicians' speeches, came directly from the USSR embassy. He, being an eyewitness of the events, reckoned that the newspaper published "fabricated news that was completely contrary to the events and speeches that we observed, saw and heard. It was no longer journalism. It was a conscious lie" (Zīverts 2011, 148). Karulis noted that on 20 June, when unofficial information about Latvia's new government began to circulate among journalists, he managed to interview its potential head, Augusts Kirhenšteins, and obtain valuable information, but it was not allowed to be published in the newspaper, because only official materials about the government were permitted for publication (Karulis 2000b, 15).

Memoir literature contain repeated admissions that there was a hunger for information in those days of June. People from the countryside used to go to Riga to see what was happening with their own eyes and evaluate it, because they could not obtain clarity about the current situation from the media content. Agronomist and politician Jānis Lejiņš wrote in his memoirs that on 17 June in Riga, "I saw people on the street in large crowds standing near shops and listening to radio news" (Lejiņš 1971, 179). During this time, rumours grew, facilitated by the lack of information in the media. This is completely understandable, as people sought an explanation for what was happening and tried to understand what the change of power and the presence of the Red Army promised for their future (see Bergmanis 2003; Dūra, Gundare 2004, 101–105).

The most important events in public space of the days of occupation were Ulmanis' drive around Riga on the afternoon of 17 June and his radio address in the evening of that day. The president's drive around the city can be evaluated as a form of direct communication, the purpose of which was to calm the population by announcing that everything that is happening was approved by the Latvian government and that Ulmanis has not fled abroad in this situation (Stranga 2022, 410). Ulmanis addressed the nation on the radio at 22:15, the next day his speech was published by the press. The speech took place in the presence of a representative of the USSR. It contained the legendary words: "I will remain in my place, you remain in yours." The President also stated that everything that was happening was for the future of the nation and its "peace and prosperity" (Dunsdorfs 1992, 374–377). This speech, too, although not really giving a true designation of what was happening, served to reduce the anxiety of the residents and to implement the occupation measures. The data reflecting the situation in Latvia's information field and shaping thereof are fragmentary, however, they lead to the conclusion that already in the middle of the day of 17 June, all communication channels were managed by the USSR and thus only the content created by it or the content accepted by the occupation institutions could be distributed.

2. Priorities of media agenda

The priorities of the newspapers' agenda are clearly demonstrated by the placement of articles on the front page and the size of the letters of their headlines. It must be said that the agenda priorities of the examined newspapers JZ, BZ and Rī were not completely identical. On 17 June, the central topic of JZ was the Latgale Song Festival and the 16 June statement submitted by the USSR to the governments of Latvia and Estonia with the request for the establishment of a new government and the conditions for permitting the entry of Soviet troops. JZ also informed its readers about the arrival of parts of Soviet troops across the border of Latvia early in the morning and the ongoing meeting of the Latvian government. At the forefront of international news were the events in Lithuania, whose territory the Soviet troops had already taken over and where the formation of a new government was taking place.

Rī focussed on the Latgale Song Festival. The 17 June issue of the newspaper gave the impression that it had been delayed and still reflected the previous day. BZ, on the other hand, concentrated most directly on the decisive events for Latvia on 16 and 17 June, leaving the Latgale Song Festival in the background.

The next day, all newspapers published Ulmanis' radio speech on the front page, but it was given a different title in each. In BZ, its title was "State President K. Ulmanis' address to the nation", in Rī – "State President's address to the nation", whereas in JZ – "I will remain in my place, you remain in yours. President's call to the nation". Rī also placed on its front page the announcement of the USSR to the Latvian government, information about the 17 June government meeting. All the newspapers published the order on the ban on gatherings signed by the Minister of Internal Affairs, K. Vedenieks. On the front pages of JZ and BZ there was also a short message about Ulmanis' drive around Riga and the greetings "Long live the President!" being called out. See Figure 1–3.

In terms of newspaper agenda priorities, on 19 June the events in Latvia share the place with international developments. The newspapers published information on the Latvian government's work on their front pages, especially regarding the establishment of a communications headquarters for cooperation with the Red Army. Among the priorities of news disseminated by newspapers there were also the arrival of the Deputy Chairman of the People's Commissars of the USSR Andrei Vyshinsky in Riga by high-speed train, the statement of the USSR embassy that it had not appealed to the Latvian government with a request to limit the gathering of people and that the Soviet troops were satisfied with the warm attitude and congratulations of the local population.

On 19 June, news about the situation on the French fronts, the German bombing of England, the reactions of Japan and the United States to the events in Western Europe, the plans of the United States to create a labour service, and the meeting between Hitler and Mussolini in Munich also appeared on the front



Figure 1. The “Jaunākās Ziņas” front page. 19 June, 1940. Collection of Misiņš’ Library, University of Latvia Academic Library.



Figure 2. The “Brīvā Zeme” front page. 19 June, 1940. Collection of Misiņš’ Library, University of Latvia Academic Library.



Figure 3. The “Rīts” front page. 19 June, 1940. Collection of Misiņš’s Library, University of Latvia Academic Library.

pages of newspapers. JZ, BZ and Rī offered different international news on their front pages. The issues of 19 June left the impression that the editorial offices of newspapers were trying to catch up with the coverage of world events. They had also reported these events in the previous days, however, the news about the dramatic events in Europe had receded to the second position in terms of importance. Even the demise of France acquired this secondary status.

In Latvia, the occupation of the country was on the agenda of the major newspapers, but it was marked by other words. The press, publishing the texts proposed by the government, gave this event the discourse of successful cooperation between the Latvian government, the USSR embassy and the Red Army, despite some disagreements and minor misunderstandings.

3. Information sources

Latvia’s largest newspapers created their content based on several sources of information. The main source of news about international events and political events in Latvia was the Latvian telegraph agency “Leta” (LTA). It was founded as a state information institution, but in 1922 it became an autonomous commercial enterprise under the supervision of the State Chancellery. LTA had contracts with

the world's most influential news agencies and an extensive network of its own foreign correspondents (Švābe 1950–1951, 1456).

After the *coup d'état* instigated by Ulmanis, LTA became a consistent pillar of the authoritarian regime. The official announcements of the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union (TASS), such as the 16 June announcement of the USSR to the Latvian government, were also presented under the name of LTA. On 17 June, along with this announcement, JZ on its front page published the 15 June statement of LTA, stating that the TASS report on the conflict between the USSR and Lithuania contained a deviation from truth, because there was never a Baltic military entente, since Lithuania never joined the military level of Latvia–Estonia of 1 November 1923. It should be noted that BZ published this news on the fifth page. In subsequent issues of newspapers, however, there was no longer any difference between LTA and TASS messages. Regarding the events in Lithuania, JZ and RZ offered LTA news, references of Moscow Radiophone programs and TASS news. Regardless of the fact that JZ was informed about Germany's success in the war against France and the situation in Germany by its special correspondent from Berlin, along with these reports, JZ also published Moscow's perspective on these events, referring to the newspapers "Krasnaya Zvezda", "Izvestiya" and Moscow Radiophone. As to the events in other parts of the world, such as Japan, India, Turkey, Egypt, newspapers offered LTA news. Compared to JZ, BZ contained relatively fewer references to the information provided by TASS and the Moscow Radiophone. Very rarely did references to TASS appear in the pages of Rī.

Special correspondents of newspapers were also an important source of information. They mostly reported the news by telephone. In 17–19 June, JZ published the messages of the newspaper's correspondents in Berlin, London, Stockholm, Tallinn and Kaunas. BZ made use of the information received from Berlin, Tallinn and Kaunas correspondents, while Rī received special messages from Berlin, Tallinn, Kaunas and Rome. BZ and Rī also posted brief information about the key events in Europe that were reported by the newspapers there.

News and articles published in newspapers about the events in Latvia were prepared by their editorial offices. The author's name was indicated only for larger publications. In most cases, they were authors who were not employed in editorial offices and whose articles were devoted to specific scientific and cultural topics, as well as travelogues.

To sum up, it should be said that factually the newspapers contained abundant information, which was provided from all the aforementioned sources. However, the publications lacked editorials and politicians' comments, opinions of persons respected in society and public discussions, which could help the users of the press to navigate in the bevy of events, to form an idea of the overall picture and the future.

4. Normality of media routine

In the first days of the occupation, Latvian newspapers retained their usual image and format. Next to its title, BZ used its long-standing motto: “For Latvia, national, beautiful, powerful.” The content of the newspapers in general showed that they tried to work in their customary rhythm. This is clearly evidenced by the publication of the novels in sequels. BZ continued to publish the novel by Jānis Sārts “*Zilie krasti*” (“Blue Coasts”) and “Hotel Shanghai” by Vicki Baum, JZ – “*Atriebības laulība*” (“Revenge Marriage”) by Julia Mowbray (in Latvian transcription – Džulija Mobreja) and Vilis Lācis’ “*Pazudušā dzimtene*” (“Lost Homeland”), while and Rī – “*Svešās asinis*” (“Foreign Blood”) by Margerita Mekki (in Latvian transcription – Margerita Mekija). Newspapers published the reviews of theatre life, book news, sports news, anecdotes, weather reports and other materials regularly included in newspaper issues. On 17 and 18 June, newspapers continued to post descriptions of the Latgale Song Festival, which had an enthusiastic discourse. Newspapers devoted several pages to commercials and personal advertisements. As before, people were looking for work or offering themselves as workforce, companies were promoting their products, service providers were advertising their services. The obituaries, as usual, took up half a page or an entire page of the newspaper issue. Newspapers also featured the current repertoire of Riga’s theatres and cinemas. For example, JZ and BZ advertised the screening of the film “Stepan Razin” by “*Mosfilm*” in the cinema “Spendid Palace”.

The newspapers looked at topics pertaining to the ordinary life in Latvia – school graduations, preparation of peat, production of drain pipes, involvement of urban dwellers in agricultural work, hay making, application to various educational institutions for the new academic year, Latvianization of surnames, preparation for Midsummer celebrations. The customary routine was disrupted only by individual publications, for example, on 19 June, JZ posted an instructive article “Do not buy excessive bulk of goods”, in which it was pointed out that the desire of many people to acquire stocks of food and various things was a mistake. The newspaper emphasized that food soon went bad and was perishable, therefore, large stocks of it could turn into a loss, whereas there was no need to worry about the lack of manufactured goods, because it was said that the shops had large stocks thereof. Newspapers continued to publish materials with positive content about the USSR. For example, on 18 June, JZ posted an article by Professor Arvīds Kalniņš about scientific achievements in the Soviet Union. BZ published the articles of the writer and director of the National Theatre Jānis Grīns about his visit to Moscow. They were worded in the form of a favourable but restrained message. Grīns pointed out that there were many shops and there was no shortage of goods in them, only they were mostly cheap and simple. He also pointed out that there were no private companies in Moscow, there were many tourists in the city, there was a means of transport that he had never seen

before – a trolleybus. Simplicity prevailed everywhere, while luxury and chic were lacking. Grīns mentioned that it was difficult to buy postcards and newspapers. He summarized: “Many educated and intelligent Latvians still see Russia as it was in 1919 or 1922, as they personally saw it last time. No, Russia has completely changed, it has a new, very vigorous state system” (Grīns 1940, 7).

In general, the content of the press routine imparted a discourse of normality to people’s lives in Latvia. Despite the dramatic events in Western Europe and in the country itself, the newspapers created an illusory impression that people’s lives in Latvia continued in their usual rhythm and that practically nothing had changed.

Conclusions

In conclusion, in response to the proposed research questions, it can be said that the USSR implemented information warfare during the occupation of Latvia in June 1940. As the Red Army entered the capital of the state, the main communication channels of the time were taken over – telegraph and telephone. This meant complete isolation of communication and introduction of control over information received from foreign countries. This also meant control over materials received by LTA from the outside world and materials sent out. The representatives of the Soviet occupation also had complete command over the Riga Radiophone, with less direct control over the work of newspapers’ editorial offices. Materials prepared by the newspaper editorial offices about the occupation of Latvia did not appear in the newspapers themselves. Instead, they published only official materials that were coordinated with the USSR embassy or created by its employees. Thus, it can be said that the USSR controlled all the main information flows and thus the entire information space of Latvia.

The main informative materials provided to the Latvian media audience contained blatant disinformation. Therein, the relations between Latvia and the USSR were defined as friendly and the Red Army depicted as a friendly army. President Ulmanis and Latvian media leaders directly participated in the spread of this disinformation. Disinformation was thus successfully applied in the implementation of the occupation. The people of Latvia did not have true information about the unfolding events. They had to make personal attempts to distinguish between disinformation and truth. Presumably, at first many did not succeed in this endeavour. It was difficult for people to navigate the events of that time – both local and international – and to comprehend the overall picture of the world, as well as to develop effective scenarios for their actions and behaviour. By occupying Latvia, the USSR successfully used information warfare in addition to diplomatic and military operations.

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Gender Equality Topics on the Social Media Platform *Twitter* in 2021

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Abstract. Social media has become an important part of the agenda-setting process. Digital platforms have reduced the role of traditional media in agenda-setting and have also expanded the range of agenda-setting actors. Social media provides a platform for public debate about social norms, creates a platform for further revision of norms, promoting awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of current laws and rights. Statistical data on the usage habits of social network platforms in Latvia show that the society is active in using social networks. In Latvia, social media platforms and blogs are the third most popular source of news. Social media offers a rich source of data for insight into public perceptions of certain issues, particularly sensitive or controversial. Social media debates on gender equality can promote comprehension of gender equality, as well as awareness of the consequences of gender inequality. The study evaluates the topics pertaining to gender equality discussed in the social medium *Twitter* in 2021, using the facilities offered by network analysis. By entering the key phrase ‘gender equality’ into the Twitter search engine, those posts that developed into further discussion and/or resonated in terms of reposts and likes were obtained and selected. The analysis of posts reveals that, albeit indirectly, the discussions on the social medium *Twitter* address those gender equality areas that have already come into the media’s attention – gender equality initiatives, employment and gender-based violence. The various discussion topics include a theme which depicts gender equality as a rebuke directed at men, rejecting and questioning research-based manifestations of gender inequality. The rejection of gender equality issues raises concerns about the spread of disinformation and false information in the discussion of the issue. Latvia’s *Twitter* debate on gender equality does not reach the level of influencing policy, but reflects concerns, prejudices and anxiety regarding gender equality in Latvian society.

Keywords: agenda, gender equality, social media, network analysis, *Twitter*

Introduction

Clearly, social media plays an important and constantly growing role in promoting equality issues. However, as emphasized in European Parliament's report, women's interests are often not reflected in mainstream political debates (European Parliament 2013). This means that non-formal political activities, such as the use of online social media debates, can potentially provide active proponents of gender equality with the opportunity to influence the political agenda.

The importance of social media has been promoted by their ability to convey information in real time and discuss a variety of issues, including those topics that are considered controversial. The way various issues are discussed in social networks can influence the perception and further discussion of these issues in wider society (Kim *et al.* 2012).

In Latvia, social media platforms and blogs are the third most popular source of news, used by 41% of the population on a daily basis (Nulle, Brikmane 2022). There were 1.38 million social media users in Latvia in January 2021. In 2021, the *Facebook* platform was the most frequently used one by the residents of Latvia. According to the data provided by the company *NapoleonCat*, in August 2021, the number of *Facebook* users in Latvia reached approximately 1.24 million, which is approximately 66.9% of the total population of the country. By collecting statistical data on the usage habits of social network platforms in Latvia, it can be concluded that the society is active in using social networks. An increasing number of people choose to spend their time using social networks to communicate with friends, find out news, fill their spare time by sharing the content they create (Brikmane 2021). Evaluating the situation of gender equality in Latvia, it must be concluded that the existing regulatory and policy framework does not indicate a strong will and advancement toward implementation of gender equality. The issues of gender equality in the existing political framework, for example, in the fields of education, employment, social insurance and social security are fragmented. Consequently, Latvia can be assessed as relatively weak in its political and ideological support for gender equality initiatives, moreover, the presence of traditionally conservative or religious values periodically asserts itself. As a result, there is a gap between the society's value system and the understanding of the political power in matters of gender equality (Zitmane, Broka 2023).

The aim of the current study is to conduct an analysis of *Twitter* debates to capture specific discussions on the topic of gender equality. The author has also aspired to establish how and whether the discussions about gender equality taking place in the social medium *Twitter* reflect the news about gender equality initiatives and achievements reported in the traditional media.

Existing research on the social medium *Twitter* indicates that "*Twitter* is a good source of information about public opinion because of its speed of use:

users express ideas and share information. *Twitter*, therefore, represents a rich data source which can offer keen insight about public opinion on particular issues, especially sensitive or controversial ones” (Gurman *et al.* 2018, 328). Importantly, the conversations about gender equality that are formed in social media, for example, *Twitter*, can raise awareness of gender inequality. The nature of social media provides a window of opportunity for like-minded individuals, who, by joining others can achieve more than they can as individuals. Despite the aforementioned positive aspects, it should be taken into account that social media simultaneously has a potential for attacking human rights and preventing progress (Gurman *et al.* 2018, 327).

Of course, the current average *Twitter* user may not correspond to the average citizen, however, in general, social media usage trends indicate that the reach of social media will continue to diversify. As a result, *Twitter* and other social media are likely to play a growing role in promoting awareness of gender inequality. Therefore, it is beneficial to explore the ways in which gender equality is discussed on *Twitter*, to gain an insight into how the public debate on gender equality issues develops (Gurman *et al.* 2018, 328).

Social media are relevant not only for political communication, but specifically for agenda setting: “the rapid rise of social media, including the microblogging platform *Twitter*, has provided new avenues for political agenda setting that have increasingly discernible impact” (Lewandowsky *et al.* 2020, 2). In the media environment, digital platforms have reduced the gatekeeping power of traditional media and, simultaneously, they, particularly the social media, have increased the capacity of various kinds of actors to shape the agenda (Gilardi *et al.* 2022, 39–40). The advantage of social media over traditional media is their ability to provide a platform for people to discuss a range of contemporary social issues, including terror attacks, institutional sexism, right-wing extremism, domestic violence, online misogyny, and more. Thus, in recent years, the issues of gender equality have entered the agenda of public discussion worldwide, serving as a platform for discussing further news events, such as the revelation of sexual abuse in journalism, politics, and the movie industry, high-profile stories of sexual harassment, and many more examples of male privilege, toxic masculinity, and sexual violence against women (Wallaschek *et al.* 2022, 147–148). To a great extent, the social network activism has evolved around such stories, which have formed the backdrop of online discussions about gender equality, “leading to the emergence of viral hashtags like #metoo, which was used to highlight issues of sexual abuse, assault, and harassment faced by women” (Lutzky, Lawson 2019, 1).

To sum up, “social media change political agenda setting dynamics for three reasons: first, they are a relevant channel for political communication; second, they expand the number and types of actors who can potentially shape the agenda; third, using social media, political actors can potentially reach

the broader public via traditional media” (Gilardi *et al.* 2022, 43). Furthermore, by “providing a platform for public debate about social norms present in popular and news media, social media also provides a platform to push for further legal reforms, by raising awareness about the shortcomings of current laws and legal and judicial institutions” (Gurman *et al.* 2018, 329). The discussion concerning gender is becoming more volatile and socially fraught, especially in contemporary online contexts (Lutzky, Lawson 2019, 12).

Methodology

The social medium *Twitter* has been chosen as the research object. The advantage of *Twitter* as a material for analysis is that as the platform it is best suited for public engagement in political debates where pro-gender equality campaigning is likely to converge (e. g., around hashtags), and opposing views are also likely to find expression. The audience of the social medium *Twitter* in 2021 reached 103.2 thousand users, of which 23% were female and 77% – male (Kemp 2021). *Twitter* has been chosen as a source of analysis also because, although *Twitter* can be considered a relatively elite social media network, the public debates of women’s rights taking place there might affect the political sphere, because, according to research, politicians, civil society actors, and other key stakeholders actively follow and engage in these debates (Wallaschek *et al.* 2022, 147).

In order to evaluate the topics related to gender equality discussed on the social medium *Twitter* in 2021, a social media search tool was used. By entering the key phrase ‘gender equality’ into the *Twitter* search engine, those posts that developed into further discussion and/or resonated in terms of reposts and likes were obtained and selected.

The research is carried out by the means of network analysis. Network analysis is a multi-disciplinary method that features structural intuition, systematic empirical data, graphical imagery, and the use of mathematical or computational models. network analysis enables researchers to map out the interrelationships among objects and attributes both in the media agenda and the public agenda. The advantage of the network analysis approach is that it moves beyond mere hierarchical rankings, allowing for analyses of social processes in the network (Guo 2012).

Results

Gender equality and antidiscrimination policies remain one of the most heavily contested policy areas all over European Union (Kuhar, Paternotte, 2018). If full democratization is to be realized, then equality of access, including gender equality, must be recognized across societal spheres, institutionalized, and

nurtured culturally. As emphasised by researchers, Latvia has made significant progress, but that progress is deterred rather than realized by democratization processes that have sidelined the women and have failed to recognize and remediate gender inequalities in the economy and politics. The political processes confirm, that Latvia as a democratic state has leaned toward traditional understanding of gender roles (Eglitis *et al.* 2021, 263–264). As a consequence, a situation arises that the presence Latvian women in the public sphere, including politics, is not sufficient for the development of an inclusive and gender-equal democratic state and society (Eglitis *et al.* 2021, 257).

In order to evaluate the discussions on the relevance and importance of gender equality in agenda-setting processes in the social medium *Twitter* in 2021, it is important to determine which topics related to gender equality have gained attention in the agenda of traditional media in 2021. In 2021, the following topics can be highlighted in the media:

- “The difference between men’s and women’s wages last year, compared to 2019, exceeded 22%” (Boša 2021);
- “The ranks of VUGD [State fire and Rescue Service] will be supplemented by a firefighter rescuer – a woman” (lvportals 2021a);
- “Constitutional Court: Istanbul Convention complies with the Constitution” (Soņeca 2021);
- “Latvia ranks 16th in the European Gender Equality Index” (lvportals 2021b);
- “Theatre producer: ‘I was held back by fear, shame’; several women share their experience about a violent art critic” (Lastovskis 2021);
- “Patients accuse doctor of sexual violence; the doctor continues to practice” (Feldmanis 2021).

The headlines of the news published in the media confirm that the media have highlighted events related to policy initiatives, gender equality in the field of employment, and gender-based violence.

Upon evaluation of the acquired data material, several blocks forming the thematic discussion can be distinguished. It should be emphasized that the actualities of gender equality reflected in the media headlines do not become the object of discussion and debate in the social medium *Twitter*. In *Twitter* discussions, gender equality and the issues thereof have not been amongst the top themes, which are discussed the most. It must be taken into account that the entries selected for analysis were obtained by using the search engine – entering the phrase ‘gender equality’, hence, some entries and discussions might not have made it into the analysed material.

Summarizing the discussed topics, they can be grouped into several themes: (Im)possibility of equality; “F” word; But men!; We have no problem with gender equality. Although implicitly, these discussion groups debate the areas of gender

equality that have received media attention – gender equality initiatives, employment and gender-based violence.

1. (Im)possibility of equality

As noted above, the media agenda concerning gender equality issues is not directly reflected in *Twitter* discussions. However, @inesevoika posted on *Twitter*: “The pay gap between men and women in Latvia has been growing over the last 10 years. For women, already 21% less than for men. 21.2 euros for every 100” (Voika 2021). See Figure 1. Most of the posts that are published under this post, question the statistics and also indicate that incomparable things are being talked about, also concerning the male and female tasks.

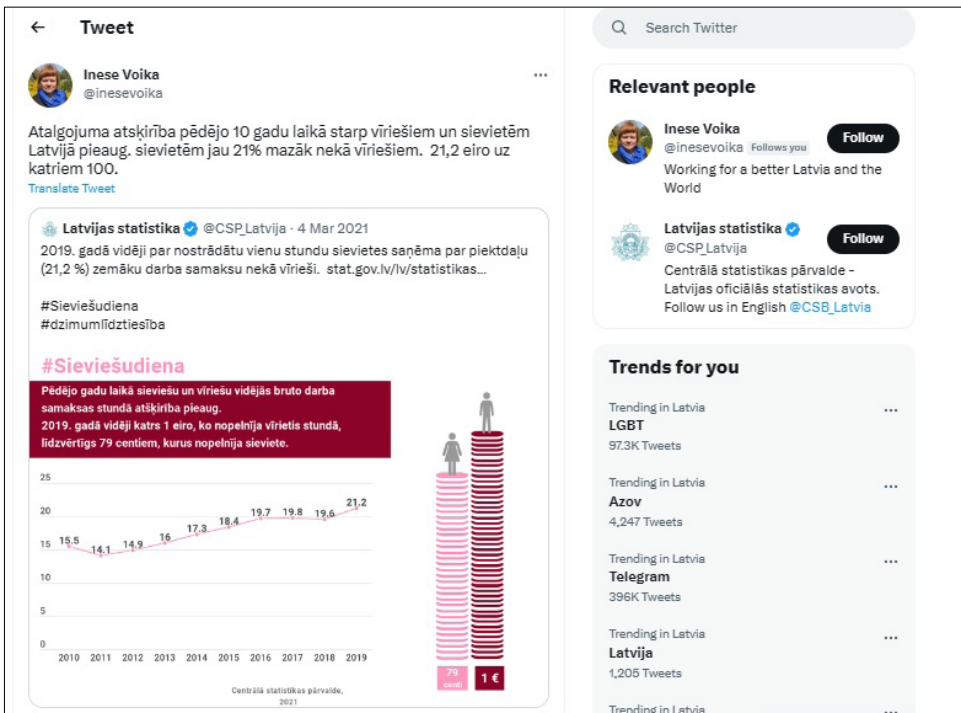


Figure 1. @inesevoika: “The pay gap between men and women”

A discussion about a man’s involvement in the performance of family responsibilities developed around the post published in the *Twitter* profile of newspaper Diena @DienaLV – “Mūrniece: During Covid-19, women around the world deserve gratitude for their tireless care for their families” (DienaLV 2021). This discussion is also a vivid example of how the exchange of opinions regarding

the division of household duties takes place on the social medium *Twitter*, as it sheds light upon the idea of women’s and men’s tasks both in the household and in employment in general. See Figure 2. This and similar discussions elucidate the view that gender equality is impossible because men and women are fundamentally different and gender-based division of labour both in the household and in the professional environment is inevitable and normal.



Figure 2. @sievieteiveicas: “One must hope that the woman will get lucky”

2. “F” word

During the analysed period, there were discussions that evolved around the topics of feminism, the nature of that movement, militancy and necessity. The post of *Twitter* user @EdijsKlaisis provoked a very heated debate: “I will add oil to the fire! In Latvia, feminism is just as crooked, askew and wrong as nationalism. Both of these things manifest, in our case, not in self-love, but in hatred and contempt for others. That’s it! I’m going to go take a dip [for a swim]!” (Klaisis 2021). See Figure 3. This discussion continued both next to the original post, mostly refuting what is asserted in that post, and branched out into further detailed debates about the feminist movement and its more radical manifestations. The main accusations made in this and similar discussions regard feminism as an idea that denigrates men, is radical and breeds discord and hatred.



Figure 3. @EdijsKlaisis: “I will add oil to the fire!”

3. But men!

The previous discussion themes already shed light on the ‘male problem’ in discussing gender equality. Latvia’s *Twitter* statistics confirm that the majority of *Twitter* users are men, consequently, men will always be involved in discussions about gender equality. Discussions confirm that, for the most part, men will rather perceive the issue of gender equality as a kind of attack upon a man’s social position in society, or even a personal attack on the specific individual. In particular, such discussions arise when talking about gender-based violence, necessarily indicating that men also suffer from violence and that it is unfair to focus the discussion only on the violence experienced by women. Notably, the topic of gender-based violence was also on the agenda of traditional media in 2021. The published materials cast light on specific cases of gender-based and sexual violence against women. On the other hand, gender-based violence against men is brought up in discussions of the topic on *Twitter*, although without highlighting specific experiences or cases.

4. We have no problem with gender equality!

Quite interestingly, positive news about Latvia’s success in ensuring gender equality, or areas and indicators of gender equality in which Latvia’s situation shows good results, are used as an argument for the futility of further discussion. It should be noted that such opinions and posts are predominantly authored by male users of the social medium. For example, *Twitter* user @dzimmijs13 responded to the news posted by @DelfiLV about the number of women working in high positions in science in Latvia: “Very well, let them work! Only, why are then the leftists of various degrees shouting on the portals again, “everything is bad in Latvia in terms of gender equality, gender quotas must be urgently introduced in all sectors” – interestingly, in concreting crews as well? – we are

the backward mossbacks! It turns out, even better than in – Europe!” (Kore 2021). See Figure 4. The discussion of this topic also provides an insight into a trend observed in other discussions – the positioning of gender equality as a threat to men’s social position. Latvia’s achievements in the field of gender equality are used as an excuse and justification for the fact that no further initiatives or any initiatives at all are necessary.

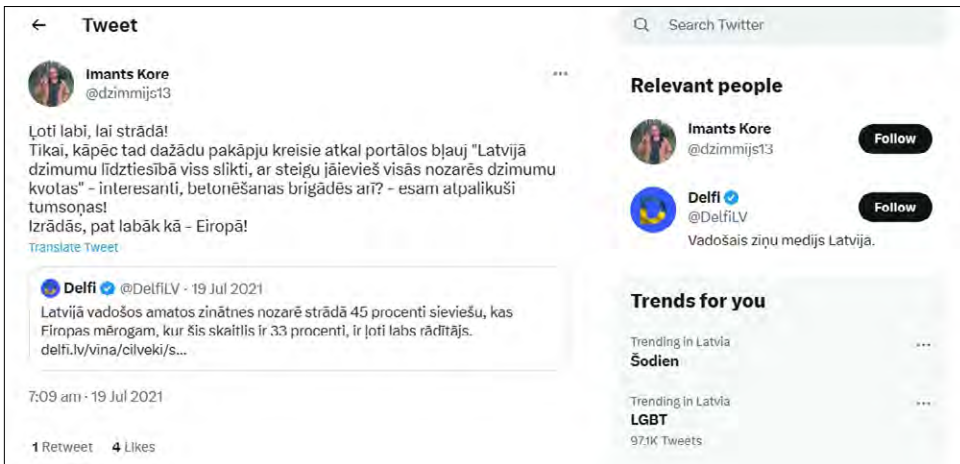


Figure 4. @dzimmij13: “Very well, let them work!”

Conclusions

The analysis carried out in this study provides an insight into the discussion of the topic of gender equality in the social medium *Twitter*. As noted previously, the selection of material, including a search for a specific phrase, limits the posts that are selected for research. The analysed material is formed around the agenda created by the *Twitter* users themselves, highlighting issues pertaining to gender equality, which reflect the interests of the users themselves. Latvia’s *Twitter* debates confirm the broader trend that the discussion on the issue of gender equality tends to become socially tense and sharp, highlighting diametrically opposed opinions.

Summarizing the various themes of discussion, surprisingly, they are united by the fact that gender equality in *Twitter* discussions and posts is understood as a reproach directed at men. The discussions in one way or another involve direct or indirect irritation expressed by male *Twitter* users. Even research-based manifestations of gender inequality are questioned, framed as anti-male. Thus, the discussion of gender equality issues grows into a mutual battle between

supporters and opponents, as a result of which none of the participants change their opinion. It should be noted that the repudiation of gender equality issues raises concerns about the spread of disinformation and false information in the discussion of this issue.

Clearly, social media can promote the inclusion of various issues in the political agenda, the diversity and availability of information, as well as provide tools and opportunities for various social groups to represent and defend their interests. As emphasised before, given *Twitter's* worldwide influence, *Twitter* can engage the public and spark debate on highly controversial topics. Furthermore, public discussions on gender equality and women's rights on *Twitter* may have the potential to influence the political sphere. However, the conducted research confirms that the Latvian *Twitter* debate on gender equality does not reach the level of influencing policy, but rather reflects concerns, prejudices and anxiety regarding gender equality prevailing in Latvian society.

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