

What does it mean to be a Russian-speaker in Latvia?

Sense of belonging in a diverse yet nationalizing state



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Radboud University of Nijmegen
Master thesis
Nijmegen 3 May 2012

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Master thesis

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Human Geography, specialization: 'Europe: Borders, Identities and Governance'

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May 2012

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Preface and acknowledgments

Just as this research project started with a visit to Latvia, this project ended with a visit to Latvia. Before finalizing this thesis I was asked to give a workshop on the topic ‘living together in diversity from a minority perspective’ during a congress of the European Geographers Association (EGEA). The theme of the congress was ‘Quality of Life – Inequality in Europe’. Two things positively surprised me during this congress. First, the pleasant sensation of familiarity when arriving in Latvia once again. Second, various participants – including my co-organizer of the workshop – called me ‘an expert’ of the minority issue in Latvia as well as of Latvia as a country more generally. Considering these two points I apparently came close to succeeding in the primary goal for me to go to Latvia: get a better understanding of the daily lives of persons living in – for me – the other side of Europe and what ‘diversity’ and ‘multiculturalism’ means here. However, considering Latvia’s history of moving state borders and movements of a wide variety of people, Latvia also offers numerous ‘scientific reasons’ for those who are interested in Human Geography, European Studies, History, cross-border issues (administrative and symbolic), migration, governance of diversity to name a few.

Was studying ‘a minority’ then of any relevance according to minority persons themselves? Some respondents said it is very important Europeans know non-citizens (who make up roughly 14 per cent of population of Latvia) and political exclusion still exists in Europe. Others asked me to write about Russian-speakers in Latvia in the university newspaper. When we visited a human rights organization during the above mentioned workshop on a Saturday and the many prominent members of the organization reserved time for us, it was clear ‘being a minority’ is still very relevant for some. However, during the five month period of fieldwork on which this thesis is based, other respondents rejected belonging to a ‘community of Russian-speakers’ and said this doesn’t exist. They refused to be placed in a box. Apparently, sometimes a heightened sense of ‘being a minority’ is felt and sometimes not. Due to this complexity and fluidity, I had to fundamentally change my conceptual framework. However, one thing became clear to me: understanding European countries as clear-cut nation-states is no longer appropriate. I hope the reader of this thesis will gain a better understanding of what it means to live in diversity from another perspective.

I would not have written this thesis without the help of many. First of all, I would like to thank Baiba, for if I had not met her, Latvia would not make up the part of my life as it does now for many years. In the same way I thank my second family.

Second, I would like to thank Krisztina Varro for streamlining my writings in a scientific product and for stimulating me to pursue my own interests.

Third, I would like to thank Liesma Ose for offering me a big eye-opener in a work field that greatly interests me by accepting and involving me as an intern at Soros Foundation Latvia.

Last, I wish to thank all respondents who were willing to reserve time for me and share their experiences with me.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

“Basically, we are being offered a menu by the state; you can either be an immigrant or you can be an ethnic Latvian. I asked the minister: ‘Am I an immigrant?’ I was born in Latvia, my father is born in Latvia but my grandfather isn’t. ... The minister asked me; ‘Are you a citizen?’ Yes, I naturalized, exams and everything! The answer was: ‘Than you can choose an immigrant identity and be a minority or you can choose to become [ethnic] Latvian’. I thought: Can I have just a citizen identity? I don’t want to put out my Russian identity. I just want to be part of this nation” (TB, a teacher)¹.

1.1 Minorities in the age of ‘super-diversity’

Western and Central Eastern European societies can be characterized as becoming increasingly diverse. Migration flows in particular are seen as the leading causes for this transformation, due to the heterogeneous ethno-cultural and religious background of migrants, as well as their legal status and associated rights (Antonsich, 2011; Phillimore, 2010). As a result of international migration (typically in Western European countries) and/or internal migration followed by the disintegration of former confederations (typically in Central Eastern Europe), population movements since the 20th century have led to the formation of minority populations and multicultural societies in almost every European country.

More recently, European societies are said to have entered the age of ‘super-diversity’ (Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah, 2010; Phillimore, 2010; Vertovec, 2006). Super-diversity is a term coined by Vertovec (2006) that approaches diversity no longer in terms of multiculturalism alone (the presence of more than one culture in a society), but points to the fact that *diversity itself is growing more diverse* (Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah, 2010). Today, people have a much wider range of resources available to them to understand themselves (Jørgensen and Juffermans, 2011) and develop multiple affiliations. Innovations in social media (e.g., mobile phones, social network sites, internet calling services and internet television) and diversification of mobility patterns are key factors in this (Castles and Miller, 2009). In other words, in super-diverse societies, people no longer solely feel a sense of belonging towards single groups (e.g. the ‘ethnic group’, ‘the nation’, ‘the minority’ or ‘the citizenry’), nor do they need to feel conflicting allegiances. As the example of the teacher in the passage above suggests, the ‘tick-box approach’, implying pre-defined bounded groups in which members are assumed to be *identical*, seem outdated (Brubaker, 2004). It no longer tells a great deal about the daily lives of ordinary people, who they identify with or what services they need from their government (Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah, 2010).

1.2. Minorities in the face of a ‘backlash against diversity’

By feeling she is offered ‘a menu’ by her government on how to live, the example of TB is a typical example highlighting the growing gap between on the one hand a strong emphasis on

¹ Respondents are referred to by their initials and profession. If no name is known, their profession is mentioned.

binary categories ('us' and 'them') and cultural homogeneity of the national 'core' community (Vasta, 2007); on the other hand, the super-diverse conditions that give persons increasing opportunities to develop multiple, situational and complex affiliations. Among the effects diversity has brought about is an increased challenge and concern by European governments to what constitutes the nation-state (Castles and Miller, 2009). Typically they maintain the idea that the political unit (the state) needs and *can* be spatially congruent with the cultural or ethnical unit (the nation): *One* state for *one* nation (Mungiu-Pippidi and Krastev, 2004). 'Moral panics' (Pijpers, 2006) or 'fears' are expressed when it is believed that 'too many others' residing within national borders can threaten national unity, social cohesion and the national language and culture of the otherwise homogeneous community (Vasta, 2007). Consequently, while European governments traditionally have assumed some sort of responsibility to help minorities integrate they now increasingly see the presence of minorities as a 'problem'. Minorities are said to have not lived up to their 'responsibility to integrate' (*ibid*). For example, Great Britain's Prime Minister David Cameron urged for strengthening liberal values "in order create a stronger national identity". As Cameron argued, at present "different cultures live separate lives from the mainstream culture." "We have failed to provide a vision of society to which [minorities] feel they want to belong", something he believes multiculturalism encouraged (National Post, 2011). Also, German Chancellor Merkel said: 'Multiculturalism failed utterly'. French president Nicolas Sarkozy speaks of strengthening the 'national community': "If you come to France, you accept to melt into a single community, which is the national community, and if you do not want to accept that, you cannot be welcome in France" (*ibid*). Such rhetoric is not unique for Western European leaders. Lithuanian Member of Parliament Karosas responded to demands by the Polish minority for increased linguistic rights: "If members of the Polish minority feel unhappy, they can bugger off. The borders are open" (Volkskrant, 2010). Finally, Hungary provoked the Slovakian government by giving out citizenship to those who identify as ethnic Hungarians and live outside Hungary. Slovakia called it "a security threat to the national unity" (BBC News, 2010; EUObserver, 2011).

By asking questions such as 'Who can consider him or herself part of *the* nation?', 'What defines *the* state's national identity?' and 'How can non-natives participate in *the* national society?' it appears European governments are once again embarking on nation-building (by defining who can belong to the nation) and nation-state building (by defining what constitutes the state). In such 'nationalizing states' – states who follow the 'one state, one nation myth' – nation-building and national identity-building are two sides of the same coin. Such nationalizing discourses essentially say; some groups do and some do not belong here.

1.3. Conceptual focus: from dealing 'with' diversity to living 'in' diversity

Underlying these national narratives are two things. First, in saying multiculturalism has failed, European governments deny the fact that it is their policies or ideas about the multicultural society that failed rather than the societies itself. Societies cannot fail – they are what they are (Verhofstadt, 2011). In denying that European societies are already multicultural, diversity is

wrongly problematized. Second, national narratives are underpinned by a strong concern with dealing *with* diversity, rather than understanding the everyday lives of ordinary persons living *in* diversity². The aim of this thesis is to explore how ‘living in diversity’ is imagined, narrated, experienced, and practiced by minority persons themselves in nationalizing states. In doing so, I would like to move away from the idea that diversity is simply ‘carried’ by ‘minority persons’ with which the ‘majority’ needs to cope with. In line with Castles and Miller (2009) I believe mono-cultural and assimilative models for incorporating minorities are no longer adequate. “Countries of immigration may have to re-examine their understanding of what it means to belong to their societies” (p. 311).

Scholars of political geography and critical geopolitics have been widely criticized for their primary concern with discourses, practices and institutions articulated at the national level, while neglecting ordinary people’s experiences and understandings from the phenomena under question (Jackson, 1998; Megoran, 2006; Müller, 2008). Such criticism advocates for a methodological turn towards ethnography giving increased attention to the everyday lives of ordinary people, while preventing ‘geopolitical remote sensing’, e.g. the trend to deconstruct national discourses from a distance and out of context (Paasi, 2006). Jørgensen and Juffermans capture this criticism well: the super-diverse conditions require scholars “to *study* rather than assume relations between ethnicity, citizenship, residence, origin, profession, legal status, class, religion and language” (2011, p. 1, own emphasis).

This thesis is particularly interested in how belonging is invented and contested in a diverse society as implied by the simple phrase ‘*I/We belong here*’. Accordingly, this thesis will take ‘sense of belonging’ as the central concept to study these relations. Sense of belonging will be analyzed along the two major analytical dimensions Antonsich (2010) has identified: belonging as the personal intimate feeling of feeling at home and ‘in place’ (*sense of place-belongingness*) and belonging as a “discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (p. 644)” (*politics of belonging*). It is important to take both dimensions into account as “to focus only on the personal dimension [place-belongingness] risks treating belonging as an individualist matter, independent from the social context within which it is immersed; to focus only on the social dimension [politics of belonging] risks essentializing belonging as the exclusive product of social(izing) discourses and practices” (Conradson, 2005). For example, sense of nationhood, “while constructed from above, cannot be understood unless *also* analyzed from below, that is in the terms of assumption, hopes, needs, longings, and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist” (Hobsbawn, 1990, p. 10).

In exploring the workings of ‘sense of belonging’, this thesis adds to a relatively new body of literature. As Antonsich put it: “Geographers and social scientists more in general,

² This idea derives from Antonsich (2011) in a call for papers for a conference on ‘Living together ‘in’ diversity; national societies in the multicultural age’, <http://ires.ceu.hu/events/2012-05-21/living-together-in-diversity-national-societies-in-the-multicultural-age>

actually know very little about what belonging stands for and how it is claimed” (2010, p. 644). However, as a dimension of integration, I believe it is a relevant object of study for minority studies and minority policy.

1.4 Empirical focus

1.4.1 Latvia: Russian-speakers living in a national society

Borderland states have been the paradigmatic entry for studying the everyday lives of minority persons in relation to the implementation of, and resistance to, state-sponsored identities (Hurd, 2006). It is “at the margins – geographical as well as metaphorical ones – that [state sponsored identities] are often most intensively recognized, invented and contested” (Rabinowitz, 2003). Kramsch (2007) rightfully describes borderlands as ‘laboratories of integration’; while most things can and do happen in borderlands, “some things can *only* occur in borderlands” (Donnan and Wilson, 1999, p. 4).

This thesis takes the Republic of Latvia – located on the frontier of the former Soviet Union and the European Union – as a case to examine how a sense of belonging to Latvia is felt by the Russian-speaking population of Latvia. The Russian-speaking population of Latvia (or ‘Russian-speakers’) refers to those people with distinct non-Latvian origins living in Latvia for generations but have taken up Russian as their first language over the course of history. Although Russians have been living (in the current territory of) Latvia dating back to the 12th century, they never made up more than 10 per cent of the total population until 1935 (CSB in Muiznieks, 2006). As a result direct result of Soviet policy of state induced immigration of eastern Slavs into Latvia (the Russification process) since the 1940s, Latvia currently has a Russian-speaking minority population making up almost forty per cent of the total population. In addition to ethnic Russians (27%), Latvia’s population consists of Belarusian’s (4%), Ukrainians (2%), Polish (2%), Lithuanians (1%) and others (4%) (CSB, 2012). Similar but relatively smaller Russian-speaking minorities exist in other former Soviet republics. In Latvia, migrants were initially demobilized Red Army soldiers and their families and Communist Party bureaucrats. From 1960-1980 migrants tended to be workers as a result of intensive industrialization (Muisnieks, 2006).

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, most Russians-speakers turned into the minority in the land where they were born overnight and sometimes lived for generations. In 2005, two-thirds of all Russian-speakers in Latvia, aged 15-74, were born in Latvia, while the number for those aged 15-34 is over 90 per cent (Hazans, 2011). Similar to the other newly independent republics, Russian-speakers in Latvia often had not adapted to the local culture, had not learnt the local language and did not identify with the republic of residence nor with the titular population (Laitin, 1998; Poppe and Hagendoorn, 2003). In 1991, the basic configurations of belonging that guided them in the past were eroded (Zepa, 2005). Laitin described this as ‘the nationality question’ or a ‘crisis of identity’.

Nevertheless, Zepa (2005) found that “the restoration of Latvia’s independence strengthened the sense of belonging to Latvia among minorities” (p. 1). Moreover, over a decade later most minorities mentioned feeling (very) close links to their area (two thirds of minority

mentions this), their city (three-quarters) *and* Latvia (three-quarters) (Zepa, 2005). Still a considerable proportion regarded Russia as a place of belonging. Contrary, from the ‘Baltic Barometer Surveys’, taken in-between 1994 and 2004, it shows most Russian-speakers firstly identify themselves as ‘Russian’ or as ‘a local’. The group identifying themselves in the first place as a Latvian was less than 5 per cent (Galbreath, 2006). What have respondents meant when three-quarters of the respondents said they feel (very) close links to Latvia, while less than 5 per cent considers themselves as Latvians? Such quantitative studies apparently are limited in providing deeper understanding of the underlying meanings of national consciousness or citizenship. For example, naturalizations among non-citizens – a legal category for 312 000 Russian-speakers who neither possess Latvian citizenship nor that of any other country (e.g. stateless persons) and roughly making up 15 per cent of the Latvian population (PMLP, 2012) – lowered from 19 000 in 2004 to 2 300 in 2010 (Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, 2010). Is possession of citizenship associated with a sense of nationhood?

In his book *‘Identity in Formation’*, Laitin (1998) makes a valuable yet outdated contribution. He found Russian-speakers in Latvia and Estonia, identified themselves in terms of a conglomerate identity – a common group identity for the non-dominant groups in society sharing a similar feature such as the Russian language – resulting from a collective need for a new identity. Laitin found that ‘Russian’ and ‘Russian-speakers’ are most important. ‘Russian’ as a conglomerate identity refers to the condition that people from the former Soviet-Union (not necessarily contemporary Russia) pass for ‘a Russian’ as they share cultural links with Russians from Russia. ‘Russian-speakers’ seemed to be the most neutral and most commonly used category in daily life, both for the elite and ordinary people (Laitin, 1998). He described this identity as an alternative to assimilation (as becoming ‘a Latvian’) and mobilization (feel belonging to ‘Russia’ or ‘Russians’). Laitin concludes “it is most likely in the Baltic’s [...] that a ‘Russian-speaking population’ will have the memories, the interest, and the *possibility* of emerging as a new [collective] *national* form” (p. 363, original emphasis). Similar findings have been found by Galbreath (2006). Laitin argues that as Russian-speakers follow the actions of others around them closely, national identification among Russian-speakers can tip or cascade *collectively* from one form to another. However, Laitin’s work is essentially a prediction based on fieldwork taken in the first years after Latvian independence. Also, he did not study how Russian-speakers feel a sense of belonging to Latvia(ns).

Finally, Zepa (2005) did study sense of belonging to Latvia. She found Russian-speakers experience a crisis of belonging in two ways. First, views of them have become radically negative in their own country as well as by Russians from Russia, who perceive them as different. Second, “minorities wish to feel a sense of belonging to Latvia, but on the other hand, they do not want an ethnic division in this process - Latvians, Russians, etc. Neither do they want any emphasis on the division between citizens and non-citizens” (p. 14). Crucially, this contradicts Laitin’s finding of a collective or conglomerate Russian-speaking identity. Rather, she identifies ‘a standing apart strategy’ or ‘individualization of identity’, which manifests itself in valuing their belonging to Latvia highest as a private space, as a land and by a person’s

biography (family, friends, years spend in Latvia), while opposing any identity forced upon from above. In sum, I believe there is a need for better understanding of how Russian-speakers feel a sense of belonging to 'Latvia', 'Latvians' and 'Russians', on what elements this is based.

The Latvian state on the other hand, including most ethnic Latvians, perceive the presence of so many 'others' as a threat to the survival of the Latvian culture and language and as a traumatic legacy of Soviet Occupation (Minority Rights Group International, 2005). In maintaining Russian as their first language and demanding increased civic and political rights, the presence of Russian-speakers have posed a great challenge to various Latvian governments considering how to 'deal with' diversity. Generally, their response has been described as having created a narrative of national identity which promoted the exclusion of the non-Latvian population (Kelley, 2004; de Laat, 2010; Poppe and Hagendoorn, 2003; Smith et al., 1998), and as having developed nationalist policies of minority control (Galbreath, 2006). Minority policy in Latvia, of which citizenship, language laws, and education reforms are most important, have been unfavourable for the Russian-speaking minority.

Latvian nation-building practices recently culminated in the '*Action Plan on Integration and National Identity*' introduced in the spring of 2011 by the Ministry of Culture. The Action plan lays out in clear definitions what the state believes is 'a Latvian', '*the* Latvian national identity' and in what ways minority persons can belong to these categories. One of the key assumptions is that policy *cultivating national uniqueness* is necessary to create a persistent *sense of belonging* to Latvia by minority persons, which a considerable proportion of 'the immigrants' is believed to lack. In a speech to the parliament Latvia's former president Valdis Zatlers said is wrong to sort nations in 'good' and 'bad' ones. Rather, "all *citizens* are part of Latvia" (LHRC, 2011a). However, considerable Latvia's non-citizen population, this is a remarkable statement.

Nevertheless, despite exclusionary policies and these predefined 'models of belonging', out-migration of Russian-speakers has been low except for the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union (CSB in Malmlof, 2006). Also, various 'Compatriot Programs' by the Russian-Federation, providing financial and administrative incentives to return to Russia, did not convince Russian-speakers to leave Latvia. One can wonder what it is that makes them want to stay?

1.4.2 Latvia: living together in a mixed society

Before moving on to the main research questions I will address a few points on Latvia's socio-cultural make-up.

When reading up about the minority situation in Latvia (news and scholarly literature), one would most likely imagine Latvian society to be highly segregated, in "geographical as well as social, economic, cultural, educational [terms] and in almost all other spheres of life (Kallas, 2008, p. 2)" where minimal contact exists beyond the boundary with the 'other'. This is also implied by national policies (see the above Action Plan), party politics (roughly speaking right-wing parties are supported by Latvians and left-wing parties by Russian-speakers), and the fact

Latvians and Russian-speakers mostly consume media (television, newspapers, radio) in their own language.

However, at closer inspection this assumption turns out to be incorrect. Contrary to for example Belgium, Cyprus or Switzerland, in Latvia Latvians and non-Latvians have never been separated geographically. There is no clear-cut spatial ethnic segregation in terms of neighborhoods (Tabuns, 2010). Even in regions where a high proportion of Russian-speakers live, such as in the eastern province of Latgale, where Russian-speakers make up 56 per cent of the population, Russian-speakers and Latvians have always lived alongside each other. In fact, 70 per cent of the minority lives in the seven biggest cities (Hazans, 2011) (*Figure*), where they roughly make up half of the population. Only in Latvia's second largest city, Daugavpils (the capital of Latgale), they make up 88 per cent of a population of 100.000 (CSB 2011a). Drawing on five months of ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation focusing on the daily lives of Russian-speakers, I argue in this thesis that the assumption that minimal contact exists beyond the boundary of the 'other' is untenable. Factors that have contributed to this are inter marriages, the bi-lingual school system, and varying levels of knowledge of the Latvian language. However, this does not mean differences do not exist. One of the most dominant topics in Latvian politics in the last year has been the question whether Russian language should be granted the title of (second) official language (see Integration Monitor of the LCHR). In February 2012 the vast majority of Latvians rejected this idea in a referendum (75 per cent of the voters opposed). The mayor of Riga, Nils Usakovs, said: "this referendum is not creating problems" but "it is a reflection of existing problems" (New York Times, 2012).

1.5 Research questions

Against the above-sketched background, the following central research question is formulated:

"In what ways do Russian-speakers feel a sense of belonging to Latvia in nationalizing Latvia?"

In formulating the main question in this way, both dimensions of belonging - sense of place-belongingness and politics of belonging – are taken into account. Also, rather than assuming Russian-speakers are urgently looking for a national identity (as having a 'crisis of national identity'), which already assumes pre-defined categories, this thesis will rather study the *alternative modes of belonging* (as opposed to the national mode of belonging offered/imposed by the state). Is it even necessary to feel a common identification at the national scale to feel a sense of belonging to a country?

Two sub-questions are derived from the main question. The first question addresses the Latvian state's way of dealing with ethno-cultural diversity. More specifically: *"What does 'Latvian' signify for the Latvian state and what 'kind' of belonging to the Latvian state do state practices imply (enable, impose) for minority persons?"*

The second question will address how a sense of belonging to Latvia and Latvians is felt by Russian-speakers. After many years of living together in diversity – of which two decades now in independent Latvia – how and when is a sense of 'Latvianness' (not) expressed among

Russian-speakers and how does this relate to ‘being a Russian-speaker? In other words: *‘What does it mean to be a Russian-speaker in Latvia?’*

These questions will reach the central aim of gaining deeper understanding of how and when sense of belonging to Latvia and group feelings (belonging to the minority, the nation, Latvians, the ethnic group, etc.) are experienced by minority persons. In contrasting the state’s version of belonging to Latvia (the national mode of belonging) with a ‘minority perspective’ (alternative modes of belonging) (see figure 1.2 at the end of this introduction), a secondary aim will be reached: assessing how compatible these two views of belonging are in order to provide a recommendation for minority policy in Latvia. An assessment of how integrated Latvia is, including majority-minority relations, social cohesion and threat perceptions are beyond the scope of this thesis.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

The following chapter will set out the theoretical framework along the two dimensions of belonging. It will elaborate on why I believe belonging as a concept provides a better framework for studying diversity than the often used concept of ‘identity’. In Chapter Three, the methodology will follow. Here the reader will find how triangulation of the qualitative methods – semi to un-structured interviews, participant observation, and discourse analysis – provide an ethnographic account of both belonging constructed from above and from below. Chapter Four will provide a discourse analysis of nation-building practices and national identity-building practices by the various Latvian governments since 1991. In the process ethnic Latvians (the Latvian language, Latvian culture and Latvian interpretation of history) have been structurally given a higher status than to non-Latvians. In that chapter I will argue the Latvian government itself does not ‘practise what it preaches’. Namely, while asking the minority to strengthen their sense of belonging to Latvia and the Latvian nation and adapt the Latvian culture and language (among others), it is exactly divisions along ethnic lines the government puts into place instead. Chapter Five will analyse the multiple meanings of ‘What it means to be a Russian-speaker’ and how Russian-speakers themselves feel a sense of belonging to Latvia. It will explore the ‘alternative models of belonging’ by studying how categories such as ‘the Latvian nation’, ‘ethnic group’, ‘the minority’ and ‘language community’ are given meaning. Here it will become clear that Russian-speakers do feel a sense of belonging to Latvia and ‘as Latvians’ in a variety of ways – most notably in autobiographic, cultural and economic terms – but feel a conflicting sense of belonging in ethnic terms and legal terms. Especially in their ‘public lives’ a mixture of Russian and Latvian values and a willingness to integrate can be observed among Russian-speakers. The final chapter will provide a discussion on how successful belonging as a concept has been in providing an account of ‘being a minority person’ in the face of a state-led nation-building project. It will discuss whether Antonsich’s two dimensional framework of belonging is effective in analyzing narratives of ordinary persons. It finally concludes that the Latvian government slows the process of integration by failing to acknowledge cultural mixture (and by focusing on ethnic categories) and the multiplicity of belonging.

Figure 1.1 Map of Latvia, the provinces and the larger cities



Source: The Latvian Institute (2004)

Chapter 2 Conceptual framework

The Introduction started off with stating that in the age of super-diversity, belonging is back on the agenda (Gilmartin, 2008; Mee and Wright, 2009). This is expressed in socio-spatial practices by European governments that re-create national identities and re-draw social boundaries, but also by public opinion (e.g. moral panics and thread perception). As previously mentioned, this thesis is interested in how ordinary minority persons themselves feel a sense of belonging to the country in which they live, particularly those living in nationalizing societies.

This chapter is structured in two sections. The first section will conceptualize ‘modes of belonging’ (or ‘models of belonging’). In the first two sub-paragraphs the two major dimensions – sense of ‘place-belongingness’ and ‘politics of belonging’ – will be conceptualized. The following sub-paragraph will contextualize ‘alternative modes of belonging’ as in-between ‘place-belongingness’ and ‘politics of belonging’ and explain why I believe belonging is a better concept than ‘identity’ to study minority issues in nationalizing societies. Finally, the conceptual model of this thesis will be presented.

2.1 Conceptualizing ‘modes of belonging’

This section will conceptualize belonging according to its two major dimensions. In line with Antonsich, I agree there is much to discover behind the simple phrase ‘I/We belong here’. Ask a minority person how they understand their relationship with the place they live and an often heard answer is ‘I have worked here all my life’, ‘I pay taxes’, or ‘I was born here, as well as my parents’ and grandparents’. In fact these all mean ‘I belong here’. The notion of belonging to a place or group is so intuitive, common sense (Buonfino and Thomson, 2007: 6) people generally do not ask ‘What do you mean you belong here’ (Antonsich, 2010). However, at the same time belonging is a key element in policy on the national level.

Antonsich (2010) shows in his extensive literature review on the concept of belonging that scholars – whether in geography, cultural studies, or sociology – deal indirectly with belonging and largely leave it undefined. Scholars have associated the term with social cohesion, loyalty, commitment, political order, solidarity and ‘we’ feelings (Crowley, 1999, Skrbis et al., 2007). Galbreath has defined social integration as the product of two factors: ‘thread perception’ of social groups and ‘national-identification’ of members of a population. Basically, both factors include an aspect of belonging, particularly as a degree of ‘closeness’. In doing so, he links belonging to transnational or diasporas communities, hybridization and integration of national minorities. Others too have argued hybridity, multilingualism, difference, and community are areas of new research in a world of heightened mobility across imaginary and physical borders (ECMI, 2011). Basically, they have linked belonging with identification and social boundary drawing, which are essentially two sides of the same coin (Paasi, 2002). In fact, Antonsich argues, in geography belonging is most often more or less used as a synonym for identity or membership, in particularly to ethnic or national identity (2010). If belonging is not directly

associated with identity, belonging often refers to citizenship (*ibid*). Bhimji (2008) argues belonging encompasses all emotional attachments to social categories such as nationhood, citizenship, gender, and ethnicity. Sicakkan and Lithman (2005, 27) capture all these variable conceptions of belonging to places, groups or cultures as ‘modes of belonging’.

It is these ‘modes of belonging’ this thesis is interested in. Just as people normally understand and position themselves along various lines (Brah, 1996), belonging can be understood along various lines: ranging from *individual* conceptions to *group* conceptions (I/we belong to them); from small communities in which interaction among members takes place (village life) to big imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) such as the nation, ethnic groups or minority groups; from the *local scale* as small as the home to the *scale of the nation-state* (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001). On the relationship between socio-spatial identities and social group boundaries, Paasi (2002) makes a strong point: “regions are only one aspect to which people identify themselves with, and their importance differs contextually” (p. 139). Attachment to categories such as the nation, minority, ethnicity, or citizenry “have long time been crucial elements in identification to social groupings and they claim space in public discourse even if they do not always have specific spatial or territorial claims” (p. 139). Similarly, Donnan and Wilson say “while geopolitical territorial boundaries are necessarily always also cultural and symbolic, (...), cultural and symbolic boundaries do not always have a spatial dimension” (1999, p. 26).

In fact, what these authors say is that ‘modes of belonging’ can refer both to emotional *immaterial* understandings (belonging to social groups and self-identifications) and *material* understandings (belonging to demarcated places). It is here I believe that the strength of the concept of belonging lies. Belonging includes the spatial aspect of being *somewhere*; connecting the social and the spatial (‘I/we belong *here*’ or ‘they don’t belong *here*’) as well as it connects the individual with the group (‘I/we belong to *them*’ or ‘*they* don’t belong to *us*’). This helps understand how members of minority societies understand their sense of *place* as well as ‘*being in place*’. Geography with its ‘attraction’ to the ways territory and topology interrelates with the social, political, cultural, and economical elements on social life (Donnan and Wilson 1999) understands “the study of any area involves the *totality of the elements* which, when combined, give meaning to place (Gildersleeve, 1976, p. 19).

Antonsich (2010) distinguishes between two major dimensions of belonging:

- Sense of place-belongingness: the personal, intimate feeling of ‘being at home’;
- Politics of belonging: belonging as discursive resource which claims, justifies, and resists socio-spatial practices of inclusion or exclusion.

This distinction resembles the one proposed by Fenster (2005), who distinguishes between belonging as a private and intimate, feeling of place attachment (‘sense of belonging’), which is built up and grows out of everyday experiences with the place of residence, and belonging as an official, public-oriented ‘formal structure’ of membership, such as citizenship.

2.1.1 Sense of place-belongingness

Sense of place-belongingness refers to attached meaning to place – to be rooted in place. Belonging to place is felt as being ‘in place’ or ‘at home’, a key concept in humanistic geography. A sense of being at home can exist at a range of scales, from a house, the neighborhood, a city, a region or the national homeland (Holloway and Hubbard 2001). “Making a place meaningful makes it belong to use in some ways. Simultaneously, meaningful places become part of who we are, the way we understand ourselves and, literally, our place in the world” (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001, p. 71). According to Loader (2006) the question of ‘Who am I?’ cannot be separated from ‘Where do I belong?’ In this thesis sense of place-belongingness and (self-)identification with a place (from the local to the national scale) or with a group of people is understood as the same thing (however, as paragraph 2.1.3 will explain, these terms are not the same as ‘identity’ or ‘identities’). Antonsich, in his review on the various modes of ‘place-belongingness’ identified five factors which can contribute to feelings of place-belongingness: auto-biographic, relational, cultural, economic, and legal factors. Below I will discuss these in turn.

Autobiographic factors relate to someone’s background and memory – personal memories, experiences, relations with the known environment and culture, and the continued presence of family and friends. Childhood memory is especially important as autobiographic conceptions of belonging are related to a place where one grew up. Emotional attachment and meaning is created through everyday encounters and practices – which need time to develop (Holloway and Hubbard 2001). When considering leaving a place, a sense of internal belonging is reported by people (Zepa, 2005). Autobiographic factors include sense of homeland (where you grew up) and sense of motherland (where your family or forefathers come from).

Relational factors are, following Antonsich, the personal and social ties that enrich people’s lives. They are both the dense relations with friends and family and the looser occasional interactions with strangers with whom they share public life (living alongside each other). Such relations are existential needs of every person; irrespectively of the place they find themselves in (Mellor et al., 2008).

Cultural factors are important as to be among people sharing the same culture (traditions, language, habits, norms and values, history, lifestyles) can make you feel at home. Language plays an especially important role. Although language is often used to separate ‘us’ from ‘them’ (politics of belonging, see below), it also plays a role in a sense of *community belonging* (to the national, minority or ethnic group) and in creating the ‘warm sensation’ when people not only understand what you say, but also know what you mean (Ignatief, 1994). Anderson (1983) captures this well with the ‘imagined community’, which refers to a feeling of group belonging (‘we feelings’) without having ever met the people they imagine to be similar to. Additionally cultural factors include the knowledge of the culture of the majority and the corresponding abilities to switch codes (Musterd and Ostendorf, 2009).

Economic factors are in the first place the stable and secure material condition providing an individual or family to sustain itself by being integrated into the economy. In a study among

Kosovan, Kurdish, and Somali refugees in London by Yuval-Davis and Kaptani (2008), it appeared that a sense of belonging was greater among those refugees that had established a professional life. It offers a future perspective to be developed, which in turn is highly connected to a persons' legal situation (below). However, in addition to a sense of material security and being able to consume goods and services, economic factors also include activities and abilities that reinforce self-respect and dignity (UNDP, 2011) and the feeling that one can make a difference in their own life, while also having a stake in the future of the place where he/she lives (Jayaweera and Choudhury, 2008). Employment for example matters not only because of derived income, but also because it gives a feeling of being a worthy and productive member of society – by paying taxes and contributing to society. Such an understanding is central to the human development paradigm by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The UNDP focuses on increasing the possibilities for people to live the lives they choose, based on personal freedoms and capabilities.

Finally, Antonsich describes legal factors as the legal status defined by citizenship and residence permits. Having legal status – what Loader (2006) described as 'formal structure of belonging' – leads to a feeling of being physically secure (i.e. the right to stay, to work, be protected against violence and discrimination, and have social benefits). This makes it possible for a person to develop a future perspective, improve his/her linguistic skills and other social capital, care about how well his/her children integrate in society, participate in the political process and decision-making, feel as equal and worthy members of society and to develop stronger feelings of national identity and loyalty (Kymlicka, 2003, p. 199). Absence of secure legal status has been linked to low individual sense of place-belonging by various empiric studies (see Antonsich, 2010). While Antonsich does not take into account how citizenship (someone's nationality as written in a passport) relates to self-identification with the 'imagined national community' (nationality felt as a sense of nationhood), Kymlicka (2003) suggests the former strengthens the latter.

These factors help understand how people feel a sense of belonging to place. However, the absence of a sense of place-belonging, Antonsich clarifies, is *not* exclusion, something many scholars often imply and in doing so confuse place-belongingness with politics of belonging. Rather, absence of sense of place-belonging is isolation, alienation, and displacement. This can lead to feeling 'footloose' (as opposed to 'rooted in place') and to emigration.

The next section will discuss belonging on the level of (group) politics of belonging and includes narratives of belonging by wider social and state structures.

2.1.2 Politics of belonging

Sense of belonging or to feel at home in a place is not just a personal matter, but also a social one (Antonsich, 2010). If persons or groups feel unwanted or unwelcome by other people living in the same place, their sense of belonging will inevitably be affected, leading to a spoiled sense of belonging (Jayaweera and Choudhury, 2008). Thus, in order to understand the private feeling of place-belongingness and what Abdelal et al. (2009) call the 'cognitive models' of individual

people one needs to understand the contextual knowledge; where ‘emotions’ of the individual meet ‘structure’ (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). Individual sense of belonging should always come to terms with politics of belonging: belonging as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies and resists forms of socio-spatial in/exclusion (Antonsich, 2010).

This is what Crowley (1999: 30) refers to as the ‘dirty work of boundary maintenance’ or what Van Houtum and Naerssen call the ‘creation of differential spaces in society’ (2001, p. 130). Politics of belonging is about social, imaginary or metaphorical boundary drawing, separating ‘us’ from ‘them’ (Antonsich, 2010). From this perspective “belonging to a place becomes one and the same to belonging to a group of people” (*ibid*, p. 649). To Paasi identifications are basically categorizations; where boundaries are used to distinguish one spatial area *or* social group from others (Paasi, 2001).

Any politics of belonging involves two key issues: membership (to a group, or community) and ownership (claims of possession of place or group) (Crowley, 1999). The concept of ‘home’ for example, is at different scales and levels, understood as a place where only certain people and things belong; a place where someone can retreat; a ‘territory of the self’ (Lupton, 1998) which contrasts sharply with the chaos of the outside world (spatial segregation). There is a tendency for people to (have the desire to) exclude ‘others’ from their home places who are different from the ‘self’. The intimate feeling of being ‘at home’ may derive from the comforting realization of excluding others (Dixon and Durrheim, 2004, Holloway and Hubbard, 2001). A house or flat where a person lives is partly made into a ‘home’ because of *the ability to spatially exclude certain people* (as implied by the sentence ‘there is no place for your kind here’) (social segregation). In a similar way, social segregation can be extended to the neighborhood, city, region and the nation-state or even unions of countries (such as the European Union). In European nation-states, belonging to the country automatically involves issues of belonging the nation, hence it makes no sense to discuss social or geographical exclusion separately. Additionally, socio-spatial identities are written in landscape, reproducing a certain order of sameness, cultural unity and wholeness (Trudeau 2006) made up by people who believe they are identical. Boundaries, whether state borders or neighborhood boundaries are communicators of ownership and mark who or what is ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ (belong here or not). Studies such as Ley and Cybriwski (1974) are a good example showing how different youth gangs living in the city of Philadelphia mark ‘their’ neighborhood and associated group identity by inscribing places with graffiti. The boundaries of the neighborhoods are sights of ongoing rivalry and where most violence occurs.

Similarly any politics of belonging always has two opposite sides; the side that claims belonging and the group that has the power to ‘grant’ belonging. Hence, politics of belonging always involves issues of contestation, negotiation, and violation, either at the individual or group level (Skrbis, 2007).

In his review, Antonsich (2010) argues that claims of belonging usually are claims for a residence or work permit. This may vary from only the right to work to full-citizenship (political belonging). Citizenship as “a category of belonging to a nation-state (Knox and Marston 2007, p.

349),” involves three types of rights (Marshall, 1950); civil rights, political rights and social rights. Civil rights concern justice, freedom of expression and freedom of organization; political rights include the right to participate in the political process such as the right to vote; social rights refer to a certain minimum standard of living and provision of basic human needs and public services such as education, medical care, policing, judiciary and employment opportunities. Central to these rights is the democratic value that a state works towards fulfilling the needs of any substantial group sharing a certain demand, regardless of origins, religion, class, ethnicity etc. According to Antonsich, claims for political belonging from the perspective of the minority are usually centred around three arguments: that migrants or minorities are economically active and pay taxes (economical belonging), they have established social relations and a social network after prolonged living in a country (social belonging), and that basic universal human rights demand equal treatment (universal belonging). Thus, claims of political belonging are centred towards persons’ ‘modes of participation’ in society. Finally, Castles and Miller (2009) add that in today’s world of increased mobility and international migration (what they call ‘the Age of Migration’), cultural and linguistic rights take on increased importance. They argue that in most cases language maintenance by minorities is important only in the first two or three generations, while interests decline rapidly after (see also Laitin, 1998). Cultural needs may last much longer. Nevertheless, Castles and Miller argue maintenance of the minority language and culture is important for minority persons for three reasons. First, minority persons need their own language and culture to develop their identity and self-esteem. Second, it helps to create a secure basis which stimulates integration into the wider society (in a similar way that developing a secure basis stimulates developing a sense of place-belongingness in economic and legal terms). Last, bilingualism brings benefits in learning and intellectual development, for example in school performance. More generally, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Knut Vollebaek (2010, p. 2) describes minority languages as “both a vehicle for communication and an important aspect of culture and identity”. Thus, in today’s world, claims of political belonging or citizenship are not simply only about having legal status anymore. Also cultural and linguistic rights are important aspects of politics of belonging.

Nonetheless, having citizenship (and the associated rights) does not automatically lead to a sense of place-belongingness. Even after having obtained citizenship, minority persons can still be treated as second-class citizens, though various subtle and not-so-subtle forms of exclusion and discrimination (Storey, 2001). Crowley (1999, p. 22) captures this well by saying that belonging is ‘thicker’ than citizenship. In addition to obtaining citizenship, a sense of political belonging depends on having a feeling of being recognized, respected, and accepted in his/her diversity without a felt need to fundamentally reconfigure their personality (Antonsich 2010). Empirical studies on multiculturalism have shown that in order to feel a sense of belonging, a person needs to be able to express its own identity, be recognized as an integral part of society or community where they live, as well as being listened to (see *ibid*).

On the contrary, as was shown in the introduction, the granting narrative offered to minorities by European national governments is often based on compulsive assimilation, often

with the threat of sanctions (Vasta, 2007), into the society where the socio-spatial *identity* of a country has already been formed on a notion of sameness (Newman and Paasi, 1998). In the ‘Age of Migration’ and the ‘Age of Super-Diversity’ (Vertovic, 2006), European states (with the democratic support of members of the majority population) see minority cultures, languages and religion as a threat to the national identity and cultural homogeneity. As a result, European states increasingly assert the boundaries of the national community, as it is perceived that ‘too many others’ can potentially threaten social cohesion, ‘core national values’ and the national identity of the otherwise homogeneous national community (Vasta, 2007).

However, in imagining their states as nation-states (states where only nation can be dominant), while in fact, their societies are ‘super-diverse’ (not the least ethnically or culturally), they resemble what Brubaker calls ‘the nationalizing state’ (Brubaker, 1996). Nation-building is the process of constructing a national identity (a label of ‘Who can belong to the nation’) using the power of the state (Price, 1995). It is a claim made up by “any given set of language practices, myths, stories, and beliefs propagated to justify a dominant group in maintaining power” (*ibid*, p.15). A national educational system, prioritizing one language and culture over another and promoting the demographic and economic position of the ‘core nation’ are often part of nation-building (Anderson, 1991; de Laat, 2010). Essential to the practice of nation-building, or ‘nationalizing states’, is that the state monopolizes “the power to name, to identify, to categorize, and to state what is what and who is who” (Brubaker, 2004, p. 42). Minorities can challenge the state quite extensively and claim belonging to the country governed by the state, but (re)inventing ‘the national identity’ remains foremost a monopoly by the state. Hence, nation-building and constructions of national identity by the state can be seen as mechanisms for “the reproduction of unequal power relations – *exploiting the human desire to belong*” (p. 104, own emphasis).

Such an understanding of ‘the national identity’ of course leaves out entirely the individual, multiple, and contextual modes of belonging of ordinary persons. Sense of belonging expressed by someone’s national identity is *but one* of the many forms of belonging a minority person can feel. Thus, one could say there is *the national mode of belonging*, associated with the state’s perspective on national identity and therefore foremost a matter of politics of belonging, and *alternative modes of belonging* which refer to the wide variety of imaginations of belongings a minority person can have, including a sense of nation-hood. The following paragraph will further elaborate on the alternative models of belonging.

2.1.3 Alternative modes of belonging: beyond ‘identity’

A focus on alternative modes of belonging questions rather than assumes the meaning of belonging to social categories such as ‘the national community’, ‘the country of residence’, ‘the state’, ‘minority group’, ‘ethnic group’, ‘language community’ to name a few. Before presenting the conceptual model, this section will elaborate on three features of this thesis’ approach to alternative modes of belonging. First, the inter-subjective nature of alternative modes of belonging and the structure-agency discussion. Second, variable ‘groupism’ as a critique to the

study of 'identity'. Finally, how alternative modes of belonging as an imaginative framework for boundaries take into account social memory.

First, I will explain the inter-subjective nature of alternative modes of belonging. To the question 'How do you belong here?' a respondent can locate oneself vis-à-vis known others, situate oneself in a narrative, and place oneself in various categories. They make sense of who they are "in terms of a grid of intersecting categories" and in varying degrees of intensity and proximity (Brubaker and Cooper, 2004). Such alternative modes of belonging can be the result of interactions in everyday life, and of more official political interaction (with the state or the majority population for example). They can include various levels of political claims (*ibid*). As individuals grow up in their lives, ideas of belonging and identifications are formed through experiences and interaction among family, school, the mass media, the state and other influences (Zepa, 2005). Within the same society others have adopted other (combinations of) social categories (Laitin, 1998). Of special importance here is the dialectic relationship between external identification and self-identification, especially in the context of a nationalizing state. Erikson's (1968) definition on personal identity formation, one which is widely accepted by many other authors in the field of minority studies (Zepa, 2005), captures this well. "Identity formation is a process ... by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to typology significant to them; while [simultaneously] he judges their way of judging him in the light of what he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him" (Erikson's, 1968, p. 22-23). So too "[e]thnic identity is the result of a dialectical process involving internal and external opinions and processes ... [and questions as] what you think is your ethnicity versus what they think is your ethnicity" (Fought, 2006; Nagel, 1998, p. 83). This is what Antonsich (2010) describes as "one's personal, intimate feeling of belonging to a place should always come to terms with discourses and practices of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion at play in that very place and which inexorably conditions one's sense of place-belongingness" (p. 650).

It is here the structure-agency discussion becomes relevant. Most understandings of structure hold that individuals are constrained in their agency over how they feel place-belongingness by discourses imposed on them (politics of belonging); while at the same time they have the ability to manipulate the structural conditions for their actions (see Müller 2008). The latter refers for example to the ability to change policy by choosing one political party over another in democratic elections. In short, discourses constrain and enable subject positions (O Tuathail, 2002). With respect to the impact of structure on agency, this thesis takes a middle position. Although individuals are always influenced by the national mode of belonging, the impact on alternative modes of belonging should be understood as variable and should not be understood in deterministic ways. Individuals have the agency to dismiss these discourses as 'not interesting' and choose to develop other layers of belonging instead (agency). It depends on the individual to engage these state structures or to dismiss them. Thus, individuals have agency on *how* they 'come to terms' with state structures. However, it cannot be known whether such

alternative modes of belonging are an outcome of structures or free of structures. For example: when a person says 'I am free from structures', that person dismisses structures but at the same time still refers to structures. This is rather a continuous loop without a beginning and an end. With respect to the impact of alternative modes of belonging on the national mode of belonging, as said before, this thesis believes minorities can challenge the state quite intensively, but in the end constructing the national mode of belonging is foremost a power reserved for the state.

Finally, on subject positions and definitions of narratives and discourse more in Chapter Three, section 3.4.

Second, despite over 25 years of critics by constructivist, feminist, post-structuralist, and post-modernist scholars, 'nations', 'ethnic groups', and 'communities' tend to be taken as clear bounded wholes (Brubaker, 2004). 'Groupism' as "the tendency to take bounded groups as fundamental units of analysis and basic constituents of the social world (Brubaker 2004, p. 2)" can still be found in many studies that assume the social world as neatly divided in social groups. Each group is believed to have a distinct and discontinuous culture, which is labelled by their identity (for example: Abdelal, 2009; Laitin, 1998; Zepa, 2004). However such 'hard' conceptions of identity – based on a singular existential and foundational sameness – hardly capture the everyday lives of many minority persons living in ethno-cultural mixed societies for several generations (Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah, 2010; Jørgensen and Juffermans, 2011; Phillimore, 2011; Vertovic, 2006). Constructivists, uncomfortable with such 'groupist' notions, have stressed the fact that people have multiple, complex, fluid, fragmented (sharing some aspects with one group and others not), negotiated, situational (defined by 'Who are we?' and 'How are we different?'), and hybrid (transnational) belongings. They have stressed that individuals can prioritize one identification or belonging depending on the context and people *choose* which layer of identity they put forward (Sen, 2007). Taking ethnicity as an example, constructivists believe ethnic groups are socially constructed, made up by individuals who strategically manipulate their various identities by emphasizing them according to the context. They might cross a group boundary if they find it beneficial to do so (Barth, 1969).

Although I believe these are valid points, such constructivist notions seem to ignore the fluidity of social structures in daily life – such as stereotypes and 'us' 'them' imaginations. Brubaker and Cooper refer to a common problem any researcher in the field of minority or ethnicity studies is likely to experience. Namely, in certain occasions ideas about clear bounded groups *do* play a role in daily life. But such simplifications are quickly taken away in next occasions, when other respondents do not understand themselves in such groupist categories. Brubaker's study on the ethnically mixed town of Cluj Napoca, where the nationalist Romanian mayor has a reputation for his anti-Hungarian statements and his efforts in trying to nationalize the town's public space, is a good example of this. Brubaker (2004) studied the meanings, workings, and variable saliency of ethnicity in everyday life. He looked at "the ways in which such ethnicity is both affected by and insulated from nationalist politics on the local, state-wide, and interstate levels (*ibid*). Brubaker found that "[s]tudying the everyday preoccupations of ordinary Clujeni – to which ethnicity is indeed largely irrelevant – helped make sense of ... in

particular the lack of mobilization in response to, and the considerable popular *indifference* in the face of, intense and intractable elite-level nationalist conflict” (p. 2, original emphasis). Crystallizations of distinct groups (‘us’ and ‘them’) did not occur, other than a few moments of a heightened sense of groupness. In the context of such a mixed society, it is clear ethnicity or minority belonging cannot be approached in a groupist manner, nor is it completely irrelevant.

In his book *‘Ethnicity without groups’* Brubaker and Cooper (2004) clearly explain why ‘identity’ as a concept is highly ambiguous. They argue ‘identity’ is always caught in-between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ conceptions: “between groupist assumptions and constructivist qualifiers, between connotations of unity and multiplicity, sameness and difference, permanence and change. Understood in a strong sense – as implying a singular, abiding, foundational sameness – ‘identity’ tends to mean too much; understood in a weak sense – as multiple, fluid, fragmented, negotiated and so on – it tends to mean too little” (p. 28). Constructivists usually attempt to ‘soften’ the term but run the risk of leaving the term to complex, context related, fluid and multiple to talk about the importance of identity at all. “If identity is everywhere, it is nowhere” (p. 29).

Taking ethnicity as an example again, Brubaker and Cooper overcome this problem in an approach that does not exclude ‘groups’ from ethnicity studies, but rather approaches groupism as a variable – not a constant. Groupism varies within groups, changes over time and it peaks during special events of collective awareness. This makes it possible to find the various attachments to groups – anywhere in between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ conceptions. It makes it possible to distinguish instances of strong binding from more loose forms of associations (*ibid*). Second, they propose to do away with the term ‘identity’ all together and instead propose to use the more processual term ‘identification’ (among others³). Identification as a more active term emphasizes the role of agents – people who do the identifying. Taking national identity as an example, this overcomes the problematic double meaning of national identity as both *the* national identity of a country – ‘Dutchness’, ‘Latvianness’, ‘Britishness’ etc. – versus how individuals identify themselves to one or more nations. It highlights the multiplicity of identifications by various agents – including powerful agents such as the state (*ibid*). To return to the topic of this thesis, the definition of a national minority by the High Commissioner of National Minorities to the OSCE captures these points well: “to belong to a national minority is a matter of a person’s *individual choice*. The existence of a minority does not depend on a decision by the state, determined by objective criteria such as language, ethnicity or religion, but on *self-identification*. It depends on (...) *a sense of belonging to the group*” (2012, own emphasis).

This last section will emphasize how alternative modes of belonging are useful to understand the temporary and imaginary nature of boundaries. Borders in a strict or geographical

³ In fact, Brubaker and Cooper propose to split up the term ‘identity’ in three less ambiguous clusters of terms: ‘identification and categorization’, ‘self-understanding and social location’ and ‘commonality, connectedness and groupness’. However, I see no added value for the purpose of this thesis of conceptualizing all these seven concepts, compared to conceptualizing only ‘identification’ and ‘variable groupness’.

sense – as state borders and lines on a map – can disappear but this does not mean that borders as social constructs in the minds of ordinary people disappear in the same speed (Pelkmans, 2006; de Laat, 2010). Rather, the interrogation of practices of nationalizing elites ‘from below’ shows belonging should be understood in “overlapping territories, intertwined histories” (de Laat, 2006; Said, 1994) or in ‘shared-but different histories’ and ‘shared-but different identities’ (Scott 1989). Especially in the post-socialist space it is important to keep social memory (the interpretation of history) in mind as state borders (and regimes or influence spheres) have changed here more than five times in 100 years. In his book *‘Defending the border’* Pelkmans shows a compelling case of the power of imagination, where the everyday lives of people drastically changed by the placement of the Iron Gate between socialist Georgia and Turkey. As a result of the border, families had been separated for more than 50 years. However, after the collapse of Soviet-Union and the actual border had vanished, the families did not unite. Rather, families resisted transition or reunion with their ‘close ones’; they defended the border. This example, as well as authors such as Kramsch (2010) and Muizneks (2011) plea for taking into account social memory as it are exactly such “*histoire des mentalités*” which subvert any idea of a “total history” in places where boundaries moved more than once (Kramsch, 2011). Similarly, when after colonization considerable numbers of immigrants (others) remain in newly independent republics, there might still be fears of new colonization. Sibley’s (2002) ‘colonization of social life’ captures this well; after independence it might take longer for de-colonization of the mind to occur.

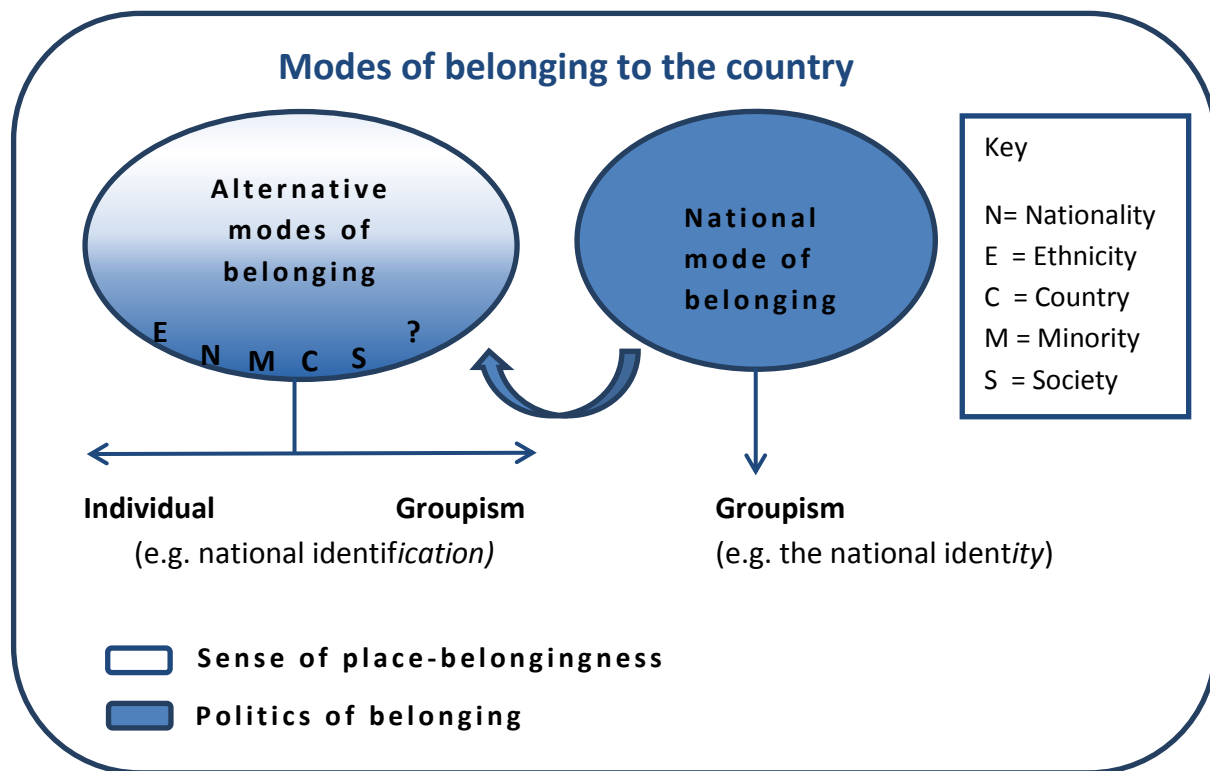
2.1.4 Conceptual model

In this chapter sense of belonging has been conceptualized. Section 2.1.3 conceptualized ‘alternative modes of belonging’ as opposed to the ‘national mode of belonging’. Contrary to the ‘national mode of belonging’, which is a clear practice of politics of belonging by the state, ‘alternative modes of belonging’ are made up by individual minority persons, are multiple and are a mix of both individual sense of place-belongingness *and* politics of belonging by minority persons themselves. However, individuals have agency over how they shape this mix. The blue gradient in Figure 2.1 is a schematic representation of this. The relationship between the two modes of belonging is understood in this thesis as a one-way relationship where the national mode of belonging influences alternative modes of belonging. As ‘alternative modes of belonging’ are multiple they can be build up from a set of dimensions, such as feeling a sense of belonging to the national community, the minority, the ethnic group and/or the country to name a few. What dimensions ‘alternative modes of belonging’ contain and to what extent people identify with them – individual identification or feeling a strong group belonging – cannot be known beforehand. Contrary, the ‘national mode of belonging’ assumes groups.

In sum, Figure 2.1 symbolizes three points by Hobsbawn (1990) which have been explained throughout this chapter. First, official ideologies by states are not guides to what is in the minds of ordinary (loyal) citizens. Second, this distinction is even more relevant as national identification and sense of belonging can change over time. State discourses on how to belong to

a country do influence alternative modes of belonging by minority persons but in what way cannot be predicted in advance (see blue arrow). Last, national identification or a sense of belonging to a nation/state does not exclude other feelings of belonging a person has, nor is it superior to them. Alternative modes of belonging to a country or society are wider than the national mode of belonging. Hence the difference in size of the circles.

Figure 2.1. Conceptual model



Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Ethnography: bridging the individual and the social context

This thesis aims to gain deeper understanding of how ordinary Russian-speakers feel a sense of belonging to Latvia in the context of the state's practice of re-defining the country's geopolitical identity. The previous chapter distinguished between two 'versions' of sense of belonging to Latvia; the national mode of belonging, propagated by the state, and the alternative modes of belonging by minority persons.

This thesis interests in alternative modes of belonging inevitably calls for a qualitative methodology for two reasons. First, any person's view of belonging, geopolitical identity or representation of place are subjective and therefore any individual's actions and goals are always dependent on one's imagination of the spatial and social situation (Reuber 2000; Said, 1978). The ontological consequence is that "there can never be an empirical world, therefore, only a myriad of worlds of meanings: there can be no universal truths" (Johnston, 1997). In the same way, concepts like 'minority' or 'ethnicity' are often the result of claims of 'identities' – "the social inscription of global space by intellectuals of statecraft (Ó Tuathail 1996, p. 61)" – and individual attachments to such groups. Therefore they cannot be taken at face value. Rather, the super-diverse conditions provide individuals with such a wide range of resources to understand themselves in terms of ethnicity, in being a minority *and* a national.

Second, the inter-contextual nature of subject positions requires a methodology that includes two contexts. Müller (2010) distinguishes between 'proximate context' – the context of the everyday life in which people speak and interact – and the 'distal context' – the context of more general aspects of social life such as ethnicity, culture, minority issues, as well as national identification. Müller argues there is a need to include the proximate with the analysis of the social (see also Antonsich, 2010; Hobsbawm, 1990; Conradson, 2005). Others too have criticized political geography and critical geopolitics of their top-down view and their primary concern with aspects of politics of belonging⁴ at the expense of people's everyday experiences and understandings of the phenomena under question (Megoran, 2006; Müller, 2008). Müller (2011) argues "ethnography may go beyond this and form a part of discourse analysis in the analysis of everyday social practices, e.g. ways of dressing or eating, and how these are expressions or contestations of discourse" (p. 6). As Paasi (2006) notes, this overcomes what he calls 'geopolitical remote sensing', i.e. the emerging tendency to observe and deconstruct national discourses from a distance and out of context. Instead, by locating oneself in context it is possible to understand the local social practices and everyday-life issues of belonging 'from below' (termed by Paasi as 'everyday-life geopolitics'), in addition to belonging 'from above'.

⁴ The authors refer to socio-spatial and geopolitical identities. Throughout the thesis I have conceptualized these as more or less synonyms for politics of belonging.

Although geography, sociology, anthropology and other social sciences have different understandings of what ethnographic research entails, the general consensus holds that ethnographic research is the study of any kind of group through frequent interaction of the researcher with the people and that the researcher is situated within the social context for a longer period of time (Adams 2009). In context, the researcher can collect narratives in many different situations and analyzing these narratives “offers a powerful way to connect the intimate details of experiences, attitudes and reflections to the broader social and spatial relations of which they are a part” (Wiles et al., 2005, p. 98).

In order to study belonging in context I have lived for a four month period in a neighbourhood of Riga, Latvia’s capital. Here I acquainted myself with a great number of persons from a wide variety of backgrounds (in terms of geographical residence, ethnicity, profession, generation, gender etc.). Some I got to know better than others⁵. During these four months I observed various public events, daily life routines, symbols of place-belonging, as well as moments of conflict. I have worked as an intern at an NGO (Soros Foundation Latvia, now Open Institute Latvia) active in improving social integration and inclusion in Latvian society and in increasing education and employment opportunities for Russian-speakers. Experiencing living and working in Latvia as well as learning about Latvia’s education and employment situation gave me greater inside view of everyday realities. In addition, working at the Soros Foundation Latvia gave me inside information on political or governmental discourses and the most recent political developments in Latvia, such as on issues of integration, ethno-political party-politics and media coverage.

This thesis applies discourse analysis and narrative analysis as an integral part of the ethnographic research, together with the methods participant observation and interviews. Triangulation of these methods enables me to get the complete picture and prevents treating belonging as an individualist matter or as a purely social issue. I will first discuss participant observation, then interviews including a discussion of the collected information and then discourse analysis.

3.2 Participant observation

In ethnographic research, the researcher generally first gains access to a particular setting and is present mainly as a *participant observer* (Adams, 2009). As the researcher increases its social network, other methods will be carried out as well. As a participant observer, the researcher deliberately becomes involved in the daily activities of the group that is studied, by joining them in their daily routines and activities and develop relationships with them as they can show and tell various points of interest (Cook, 2005). Part of participant observation is observing for place-making activities or artefacts that can be ‘read as text’. This method of ‘iconography’ understands landscapes as outcomes of specific social contexts and power relations. It aims to recover the underlying meanings and messages from objects. Such landscapes “may ... be the

⁵ Three respondents were also one of my closer acquaintances

result of historical and ongoing struggle between different groups, or a struggle of national identity (Holloway and Hubbard, 2001, p. 114).

Upon arrival I already knew a few persons in Latvia, through various earlier visits to the country (ranging from a few days to a few weeks). However, I still had to create a network to reach my target group – Russian-speakers. Therefore, the start of the fieldwork mainly consisted of observations. For example, I observed how bilingualism works at a coffee place, the market or in the bus, how Russian-speakers dress and how they interact with Latvians. Then, as my social network grew, I combined participant observation with interviews. During the four-month stay, I visited various places in order to observe various landscapes; ranging from the three biggest cities (Riga, Daugavpils, and Liepaja) to middle-sized towns (Ventspils, Jurmala, Bauska, Kuldiga, Cesis, Sigulda) and to country-side villages of no more than 500 inhabitants. The choice for these locations was a combination of own initiative and advice given by both Latvian and Russian-speakers I knew. However, as I knew Russian-speakers predominantly live in the bigger cities it was interesting to see the difference between cities and towns of various sizes. In the bigger cities one can find various monuments, such as World War II memorial statues (precious to the Russian-speaking minority) and independence statues (precious to ethnic Latvians). Of special interest were the city (Daugavpils) and neighbourhoods (Moskachka in Riga and Karosta in Liepaja) inhabited almost exclusively by Russian-speakers. However, most places I visited have a mixed population. A special event was the 9th of May celebration (Victory Day), which is the most important day of the year for Russian-speakers to celebrate the victory of the Red Army over the Nazi's. This day is celebrated by very few Latvians, and therefore a good event to observe the shared-but-different histories and a sense of belonging more generally. The 23rd of June, Midsummer (Ligo) is the most important celebration of the year for Latvians. Finally, during my internship I participated at conferences and seminars dealing with my topic of research.

Key to the way I practiced participant observation was noting my impressions down, often first on paper and then in a digital diary. Writing down specific events and small details and reading these before interviews provides crucial anecdotes to encourage respondents to tell more during interviews. Most importantly, it provides thoughts for understanding the broader context and connecting various issues. For example, where interviews were directed at Russian-speakers, participant observation allowed me to speak to various ethnic Latvians (ranging from four different generations).

Reconstructing observations and conversations sometimes proved to be difficult if I had no notebook with me. This was done as soon as I returned home (or in some cases the next day). Making pictures also helped reconstructing situations. Two other issues turned out to be different from the original plan. First, I planned to live together with locals, but instead shared an apartment with international students. Secondly, by working for an organization active in the field of integration and minority rights, I expected to work closely with Russian-speakers and join them in their daily activities. It turned out almost no Russian-speakers worked at Soros

Foundation Latvia. Nevertheless, the organization helped me crucially in introducing me to Russian-speakers for interviews.

3.3 Interviews

As Adams (2009) puts it: “The point of the ethnographic method is to uncover the explicit and implicit cultural knowledge that guides behavior in that group. The ethnographer comes very close to experiencing what is experienced by members of the group she [or he] is studying, thereby gaining deeper understanding of what unspoken rules they might be responding to” (p. 38). *Open-ended and semi-structured interviews* in particular allow individuals and groups to express their ideas of who they are, what matters to them and why, how they understand who belongs to their group and who doesn’t, without using preconceived classifications of the researcher. A persons’ sense of place-belongingness can be territorial, biographic, cultural, ethnic, political, economic and/or legal, and which elements it includes cannot be known beforehand. The collected data is detailed and multi-layered, producing ‘deeper picture’ than a questionnaire (Silverman, 2000). A big advantage of the ethnographic method is that it allows you to be recursive and constantly reflect on your findings. Adams argues ethnographic research does not require hypotheses before going into the field. While being in the field, deductive reasoning provides hypotheses which can be refined almost immediately in subsequent interactions and interviews. In other instances, it is possible to ask people why they do certain things and to check whether their actions match their answers (Abdelal et al., 2009; Adams, 2009).

In the four months period 18 in-depth interviews were done, ranging from 30 minutes to two hours. On average interviews took in between one and 1, 5 hours. Another important source of information was a panel discussion during a one-day conference in Riga on the issue of minority-majority relations, the position of Russian-speakers, and social memory. This panel included a member of the Riga municipality council – Russian-speaker and a leading person in the discussion – who formulated her arguments mostly based on her own experiences (as a former non-citizen and non-citizenship in her family). The minister of culture – Sarmite Elerte – also attended this conference. All respondents except two were Russian-speakers, they were Latvian by ethnicity.

The research sought to find respondents from an as wide variety of backgrounds as possible; in terms of legal status (citizen or not), Latvian language skills, political stance, education level, age and origin (both inside and outside Latvia). The first five interviews (a lawyer and activist, two researchers, a teacher and a political advisor for a political party) can be considered expert interviews. The other respondents where: a student at the University of Latvia born in Russia (and considers herself as Russian-Russian), two co-presidents of the Liepaja Russian Community, my landlord, students from Daugavpils (2x), a representative of the Latvian Human Rights Committee, two teachers of a school in Daugavpils, head of a NGO in Daugavpils, seven salespersons on the food market of Daugavpils, a representative of the Riga based Russian Society of Latvia, the president of the Union for Citizens and Non-Citizens, and a

Member of Parliament for Harmony Centre. I gained access to the first five respondents (experts) through ‘snowballing’, of which my internship supervisor gave me the first (two) contacts. Active in the field of minority issues themselves, they served as an excellent opportunity to try out my interview handout, while also gaining a picture of the broader context of minority issues in Latvian society. The respondents could advise me conceptually and methodologically. However, the downside of ‘snowballing’ – which forced me to diversify the mode of finding respondents – was that most Soros Foundation connected respondents shared similar views – what they called ‘liberal views’. One respondent referred to this group as ‘liberal Russians’, those who have learnt the language, passed examinations, and generally think about the minority issue in a similar way. “Soros [connected persons] are definitely liberals... If you saw the people who went to the monument [on Victory Day] you see there is a whole different group.” To find other respondents, additionally to using the connections I already had (student friends, landlord, and informing others I looked for respondents) I contacted various NGOs, activists, parliamentarians, musicians etc. by email. At one occasion a student was willing to take me along the food market and introduce me to seven respondents holding a big variety of opinions. This was possible as her mother worked on the market, and she would ask her mother which of her colleagues would have interesting opinions. I consider this one of the most important interview session of all.

Interviews took place at the office of Soros Foundation, at the respondents’ location (parliament visitors centre, school for photography, bi-lingual school, a NGO), at my apartment or outdoors (café or in a park). One interview that was taken at the airport was broken off before we had finished because she had to catch her train. This interview was later finished in a questionnaire via email.

Next will follow a discussion of the collected information, which will be structured around two dimensions: ‘researchers bias’ discussing my role as a researcher in the field and ‘respondents bias’ dealing with biases within the results.

3.3.1 Researcher’s bias

As this thesis studies attitudes, feelings and politically sensitive issues as well as inter-subjective issues, it was very important to be aware of how my presence affects the respondent. I will mention four methodological issues. First, the way I understand belonging as well as how I understand respondents answers are biased and shaped by my own interpretations and experiences. Also, as the relationship between researcher and respondent creates a particular socio-spatial context, I can only claim to find the situated knowledge I have generated (Valentine, 2005; Wiles et al., 2004). This as opposed to finding impartial knowledge for others to be found in the same way (Haraway, 1991).

Second, the responses a Russian-speaker puts forward, depend on (how he/she perceives) who I am (of another nationality, educated, young, male etc). As Adams (2009) describes it in her research on Uzbek national identity, it is exactly the sharpest difference between respondent

and researcher – the nationality – that can work beneficial as it causes a performance of national identity and differences between the two countries. Having said that, I tried not to lead during interviews. Rather, I let the respondent choose the topics and terminology on which I would then occasionally ‘point’ to a specific part of their answer and reformulate a new question⁶. Making notes of their answers stimulated the respondent to elaborate. I believe such open interviews give a better representation of the issues that are important for the respondents themselves compared to if I chose the questions and terminology. Nevertheless, topics discussed resembled much of the questions I prepared on the handout. Discussed topics were: party-politics, Russian language and culture preservation, (non)citizenship, biography of respondents, language of education, Europe, ‘being Latvian’ vs. ‘being Russian’, and quality of life.

Third, most interviews were recorded and about half of them were fully transcribed. If the interview was not fully transcribed I wrote down a summary of what had been said and if needed I would look up the actual quotes in the recording. Four interviews were not recorded but written down on paper. The notes I transcribed the same or the following day.

Last, triangulation of interviews, keeping a diary (separately) and participant observation reduced the impact of my personal attitude and interpretations at the time of interviewing. Notes in the diary on the surroundings, my mood and that of the respondent, or any other factor that was of influence at the time of interviewing, were taken into account when analyzing the interviews (see Smeekens, 2010).

3.3.2 Respondents’ bias

Next I will discuss the ‘respondents bias’ which is connected to the generated information. I will discuss ‘political bias’, ‘educational bias’, ‘interpretation bias’ and ‘legal status bias’.

First, ‘political bias’ results from the fact that a majority of respondents have dealt with minority issues in their professional life to some extent. For example, by being active in party-politics or by running a NGO (targeting persons in social isolation, persons with low Latvian language proficiency, elderly persons, and/or persons who want to preserve Russian culture, language and traditions). This means that not only have most of them already formed a political opinion on the minority position; they also pursue their ambitions on the matter. Such an attitude is most likely not fully representative of non-politically active Russian-speakers (see point on ‘liberal Russians above’). One way to minimize the political content of respondent’s answers was to focus during interviews on respondents’ *personal experiences* and what they know of others close to them (friends and family). In most cases this motivated respondents (including respondents what I earlier defined as ‘experts’) to elaborate on private issues of their choosing while speak less for their organization. By having learnt beginner level Russian language, also stimulated respondents in some instances to share more personal experiences. In most cases, I

⁶ After transcribing the first two interviews I realized I was trying to lead the interviews (showing my knowledge on the matter and interrupting the respondent). This left the respondent inclined to answer my questions. These were in fact not semi-structured or open-ended interviews. In other interviews I did not lead anymore.

would shortly introduce my research focus and shortly refer to mandate of the NGO or political party they represent as a means of ‘warming up’ the interview⁷.

Second, an ‘educational bias’ is created by the fact that exempt for three interviews all interviews were done in English. This meant that respondents were often higher educated, which is likely to influence their answers. Similar to the point made in respect to the ‘political’ bias, the ‘education bias’ I tried to reduce by asking for views and opinions of persons close to the respondent. Often respondents had low educated relatives. In some instances I could reach the parents or friends of respondents who did not enjoy higher education. However, I did manage to speak to lower educated respondents and in their own language in three occasions. In one occasion I was able to speak to seven respondents. This makes the ‘educational bias’ less apparent than the ‘political bias’. For the interviews taken in Russian, I asked a friend to translate. In another occasion I interviewed the English teacher of a school together with the head of the school.

Third, during one of the first interviews – a teacher on research methods – warned me that the ethnicity of the interpreter is very important. She said this person has to be a Russian-speaker. She said that certain issues (political, historical and social) will be avoided in case the translator is ethnic Latvian, no matter how fluent that person speaks Russian. In two out of three occasions the translator was from a Russian-speaking family, in one occasion not. However, judging from the kind of activities the latter respondent organizes – outreach activities to Russians *and* Latvians and Latvian language courses – the respondent did not seem much concerned with the ethnicity of the translator.

Finally, most of the respondents were citizens – either through naturalization or by originating from a ‘citizen-family’ (those who received citizenship in 1991 by default). One in-depth and three short interviews were with non-citizens. However, almost all citizen respondents had own experiences of non-citizenship or had a non-citizen in the family. Nevertheless, better understanding on the issue of non-citizenship would be gained in order to speak to a few more non-citizens.

3.4 Discourse, discourse analysis and narrative analysis

This thesis contrasts the discourses by the state of ‘How minority persons can belong to Latvia’ (politics of belonging) with the everyday feelings of belonging by Russian-speakers (sense of place-belongingness and politics of belonging). Therefore, the distinction between narrative and discourse becomes important.

Social constructivists are interested in the ways in which ‘discourses’ establish distinction – or difference – between individuals or groups (Dixon and Jones, 2006). People and objects have no intrinsic meaning until their qualities and boundaries have been framed in discourse (*ibid*). Discourse is used to refer to particular thinking frames, most of which rely upon one or more binary opposition (*ibid*), such as Latvian and non-Latvian, citizen and non-citizen,

⁷ Websites or publications were translated through Google Translate

individual or group, majority or minority. Geopolitical discourse “is drawn upon and used by officials and leaders to constitute and represent world affairs” (O Tuathail, 2002, p. 607). In most cases discourse is understood as written or spoken language (official declarations, politicians speeches, the media). However, the ‘constructivist discourse’ also refers to the *practices* (in the case of government: practices and policy such as nation-building (Müller 2008, Dixon and Jones 2006). Consequently, “discourse *structures* the way we think about things” (Aitken and Craine 2005). “*Through discourse we come to understand where things fit in the world, literally and figuratively*” (Dixon and Jones, 2006, p. 49).

Discourse analysis pays attention to these discourse articulated through practices and institutions (Aitken and Craine, 2005). The critical geopolitical method is to read, expose and deconstruct the prevailing discourses articulated ‘from above’ (usually the state), containing a certain ‘mode of belonging’. This method lies central in Chapter Four where a number of discourses are identified on which the Latvian state has constructed its national identity. The main discourses identified here are based on secondary literature and added with own findings.

This thesis only takes into account national discourses by the Latvian state. However, Brubaker (1996) argues in addition to the minority and the national state, the kinstate (in this case Russian Federation) is also of importance. However, respondents dismissed in three occasions Russian politics or “What Putin says” (KK, student) as an important actor in Latvia. Another respondent asked me: “What authorities have the biggest impact on your life at this very moment? The Dutch government or the Latvian?” (TB, teacher). I said I have nothing to do with the Latvian institutions. “Exactly, but we DO!” She concludes, there are other actors such as the media and foreign governments, but their role is minimal.

Narratives on the other hand are associated with subject agency. Individuals produce narratives (Müller, 2008). Individuals knit assumptions, hopes, needs, longings, experiences, and situations into narratives – as storylines. Following Somers it is through narratives that “all of us come to *be* who we *are*... by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives *rarely of our own making* (Somers, 1994, p. 606, original emphasis). However, respondents might not be aware that it understands him or herself based on second hand narratives, which makes the individual narrative still more or less agency-based from the perspective of the individual.

Narrative analysis then is “the qualitative and interpretative recovery of meaning from the language that actors use to describe and understand social phenomena” (Abdelal et al., 2009, p. 6)⁸. The primary goal is to expose the ‘discursive violence’, imposing identity-markers or ‘modes of belonging’ onto people which they may not wish to adhere to, while also exposing self-understandings that do not fit into the main discourses (Dixon and Jones, 2006, p. 50). Counter-narratives are produced when certain events are interpreted differently at times of institutional change or power relations change (Somers, 1994). Narrative analysis takes into account how respondents understand, frame their experiences, and what relationships they loosely imply (Wiles et al. 2005). Narrative approaches thus hold great potential for geographers

⁸ The authors refer to discourse analysis, but describe narrative analysis

interested in the dynamics of everyday life” (*ibid*, p. 90). This method lies central in Chapter Five.

The narratives collected during interviews were first carefully read a couple of times in order to understand the loose relationships respondents implied. Second, narratives containing sense of place-belongingness and narratives containing politics of belonging were given two different colours. Then, emergent categories and topics were identified from the narratives in order to identify the main dimensions. The main dimensions respondents put forward resembled closely four of the five factors of place-belongingness Antonsich identified: autobiographic, cultural, economic and legal factors. Additionally, ‘language’ is considered as a dimension as it cuts across all above established dimensions and considered the most crucial topic according to respondents. Finally, analysis shows that narratives of Russian-speakers usually contain both elements of individual sense of place-belongingness *and* politics of belonging as a result of state discourses. Therefore Chapter Five will not separately present sense of place-belongingness from politics of belonging but rather keep the implicit relationships between them intact. Rather, when relevant, narratives of politics of belonging were added later.

Chapter 4 The national mode of belonging in nationalizing Latvia

In the introduction I suggested that in many countries there exists incongruence between the idea that the state governs a homogeneous national ‘core’ community (the ‘one-nation-one-state myth’) and the reality of having ethno-diverse societies. Also, I argued that in states who understand themselves as ‘unrealized nation-states’, nation-building and national identity-building are two sides of the same coin.

This chapter will provide a critical discussion of the politics of belonging of Latvia’s nation-building practises. It aims to expose the explicit and implicit claims by the state on what it believes it means to belong to Latvia. According to some authors the Latvian government has created a discourse of national identity which promotes the exclusion of its non-Latvian population since it regained independence (de Laat, 2010; Poppe and Hagendoorn, 2003; Smith et al., 1998). Along this discourse the state not only legitimizes its actual practices, it also marks the major structural force of external identification for minority persons in Latvia. The central questions of this chapter are:

How does the Latvian state address the ethno-cultural diversity of Latvian society? More specifically, what does ‘Latvian’ signify for the Latvian state? And what ‘kind’ of belonging to the Latvian state do state practices imply (enable, impose) for minority persons?

Thus, it is this chapter’s aim not to deconstruct national identity as evidence of other sorts of practice. Rather it analyses the actual practices of national identity-building by the various Latvian governments since 1991 and what this implies for minority persons.

The analysis will be structured in three sections. The first section will provide a short historic overview contextualizing the presence of Latvia’s Russian-speaking population up to Latvia’s re-independence in 1991. The next section will discuss the key discourses and practises on which ‘the Latvian national identity’ has been constructed over the period of 1991-2011. In these two decades Latvia’s ‘one-state-one-nation’ ideology resulted in a series of citizenship laws, language laws and education reforms. Generally these policies are directed to promote the usage of the Latvian language and reduce the usage of Russian and to ‘Latvianize’ the minority. The last section will discuss developments of nation-building since 2011. It will discuss political developments following the parliamentary elections of 2010 and 2011 in which the main party supported by Russian-speakers grew considerably and it will present the outlines of the new Action Plan on National identity and Integration introduced in the spring of 2011 by the Ministry of Culture. This Action Plan lays out in clear definitions what it means to be ‘a Latvian’ and what constitutes ‘Latvia’. The central assumption of the Action Plan is that *in addition to* ‘Latvianization’ policies since 1991, the government now stresses minority persons’ self-identifications (their ethnicity).

4.1 Historic overview: the interwar republic (1918-1940) and re-independence

Different state authorities ruling the territory of Latvia have viewed the position of minorities in Latvia differently. The government of the Latvian Republic (1918-1940) granted the Russians, just as all other minorities in Latvia, the title of national minority, accepting a considerable degree of Russian national and cultural consciousness (Latvian Institute, 1999). This resulted in various forms of Russian political organization, Russian language schools, Russian-language media, democratic participation and cultural development (*ibid*). On the contrary, during the Soviet period, these possibilities were regarded unacceptable. Nationalities policy in the Soviet Union was based on a system of national-territorial autonomy of nations. Originally, Lenin envisioned a federal system where the dominant nations would get their own federal unit. Within these units, the different nationalities were recognized and given a considerable degree of cultural independence. In this way it was thought to maintain unity in the Union while in time the various nations would be transformed into Soviet people (Knox and Marston, 2007). But, as the Latvian Institute argues, this left room for only one nation – Latvians. All other groups within Soviet Latvia were considered Latvian. Consequently, Russians living in Soviet Latvia were not recognized as a national minority and thus not given cultural or national freedoms. However, following Latvia's incorporation into the Union in 1940, Stalin's policy left little room for such freedoms; national policy had to be based on a Russian ideology, including Russian culture and language, while Latvian cultural expressions were minimized (Latvian Institute 1999). Gorbachev believed when he put his reforms of 'perestroika' (economic reforms) and 'glasnost' (openness) in practice, nationalistic aspirations by Latvians would have already been replaced by Soviet identities. Instead, his reforms sparked nationalistic sentiments in the various Soviet republics leading to Latvia's regaining of independence in 1991 (Knox and Marston, 2007).

However, also after 1991 the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union (or the lack of it), had important impacts on integration and inter-ethnic relations in Latvia (Kallas, 2008). In 1991, Russian-speakers made up 48% of the total population (Minority Rights Group International, 2005). Latvians perceived the presence of such a considerable minority as a threat to the future survival of the Latvian nation and language and as a traumatic legacy of Soviet Occupation (*ibid*). In fact, one of the key ethno-political conflicts in contemporary Latvia are crystallized around the one question – was Latvia occupied by the Soviet Union or was it part of it? From the interviews conducted, it appeared that ethnic Latvian respondents tend to argue that the time under Soviet rule was an occupation which 'small Latvia' was unable to prevent and which was no different from the occupation of Latvia by Nazi Germany in 1941-1944, with reference to oppression and deportations. Many Russian-speakers on the other have learnt the Soviet version of history, which was a part of a greater ideology. They often do not recognize the period as an occupation and rather say the Baltic States never resisted incorporation nor did they try to separate from the Soviet Union. Instead they say Latvians willingly cooperated, joined the Communist Party and that the Soviet Union contributed a lot to the development of Latvia's economy and culture (Zepa, 2005). Even discussions about who was wrong or right in World

War Two still occur in Latvia as Latvians were incorporated in both the Red Army and the German army. Therefore many Latvians believe the War only ended in 1991 for Latvia.

In relation to these ‘shared-but-different’ social memories, Latvians are clear that the disintegration of the Soviet-Union in 1991 should not just be understood as independence but rather as *re*-independence of the Republic of Latvia of 1918-1940. Latvian independence was merely interrupted by The Communists. In 1991, the newly established Latvian government restored its interwar constitution, institutions and citizenry (Muiznieks, 2006). Although Latvia had experienced a rather small period of independence up to 1991, this period has been crucial for the way the state constructed its national identity since 1991 (Manioteite, 2002), not the least because it forms a basis for contrast with Soviet rule (Ginkel, 2002). The following paragraphs will go deeper into the main discourses on which the Latvian government has aimed to (re)create its national-identity since 1991. Ironically enough, having the tolerant treatment of the earlier republic in mind, it is estimated that 26 per cent of the Russian-speaking population voted in favour of re-independence in 1991 (Zepa, 1992). This however turned out to be based on false expectations, as the new demographic situation and fresh memories of occupation resulted in complete different way of viewing its ‘other’.

4.2 The national identity of Latvia by the Latvian state since 1991

According to Smith et al. (1998), a number of discourses can be identified on which Latvian identity is constructed: ‘titular core nation status and the standardizing state’, ‘de-Sovietisation’ and ‘the return to Europe’. Following Smith et al. these discourses will be examined.

4.2.1 Titular core nation status and the standardizing state

Briefly, after independence two discourses were possible in dealing with Latvia’s culturally diverse population. A multicultural discourse, one which would be based on universal values; i.e. all people who live in Latvia’s territory would equally qualify for citizenship, political rights or be equally included in the national society. This would mean that although the grievances over the Soviet Occupation are understandable, creating another wrong would not right the first one. This means Latvia accepts the new situation, rather than wish for turning back the clock (Tamir, 1993). This position is taken by the Lithuanian government although Lithuania experienced lower levels of ‘sovietification’ – both in relation to the number of Soviet-migrants (6 per cent of the population) and institutional influences – than Latvia (Smith et al., 1998). The other option is following a ‘core nation status’ discourse, which holds that after Latvia’s decolonisation neither the colonists nor their descendants should have any legitimate voice or political rights in the new sovereign country (Buchanan, 1991). Additionally, it is a separate matter whether the non-Latvians who had no part in the occupation – who were not part of the Communist Party nor the Soviet regime – should be compensated for their loss of being excluded rights from the newly independent Latvia, no matter whether they are currently Latvian citizens or not (*ibid*). At independence, the Latvian government, just as the Estonian government, seem to have opted for this second option.

This becomes clear from how the state has formulated its minority policy. Minority policy has up to 2011 revolved around three aspects; citizenship policy, language policy and education policy.

Citizenship policy

For the Latvian government, one of the central issues is the question whether those as labelled as the ‘colonizing other’ should enjoy the same entitlements of membership as the ‘titular’ community who claim a privileged relationship with the sovereign homeland (Smith et al., 1998). Citizenship policy has been a main instrument in institutionalizing and reproducing such ethnic and linguistic divides in Latvia (Pabrics, 2003). In 1991, the state granted Latvian citizenship only to those citizens of the interwar republic and their direct descendants (Muiznieks, 2006). As most Russian-speakers migrated to the Latvian territory after 1940, this was an effective way to exclude Russian-speakers from the citizenry. As a result, 740 000 Russian-speakers were not granted Latvian citizenship, while less than 90% also did not possess citizenship of the Russian Federation (Kallas, 2008). Technically they were ‘state-less’, ‘non-citizens’ or ‘aliens’ within Latvia (Muiznieks, 2006). Naturalization institutions had not yet been developed.

The Law on Citizenship in 1994 marked the first citizenship law. Its highly contested ‘windows system’ provided that non-citizens who applied for naturalization were further divided into categories, depending on the year of entrance to Latvia: direct family of citizens could apply in 1995, those who were born in Latvia in 1996 and those born outside Latvia only in 2001. Moreover, these categories were limited by quotas which limited the amount of naturalizations each year. Even the well-integrated Russian-speakers had to wait their turn to apply for citizenship, even if they would most likely pass the exams. New-borns from non-citizens were also given the non-citizen status, until policy changed in 1998 (Galbreath, 2006).

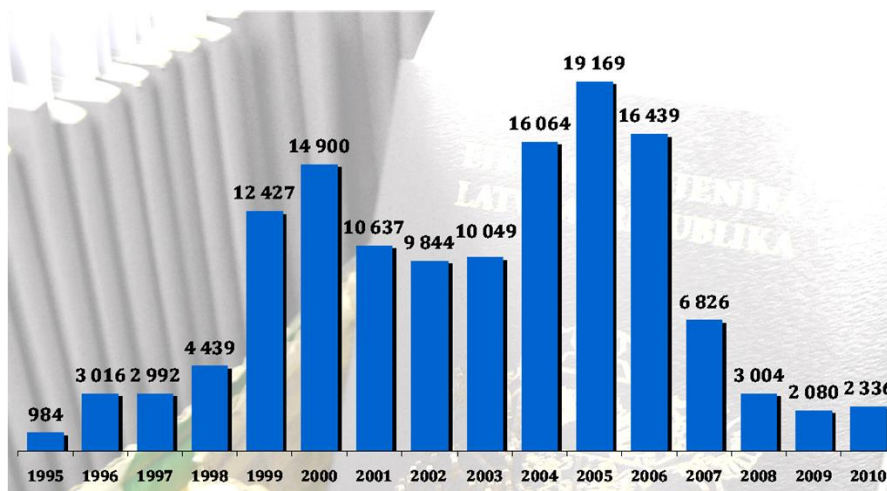
Then, a law passed in 1995 on “The Status of Those Former USSR Citizens Who Do Not Have Citizenship of Latvia or Any Other State” holds that non-citizens are granted a residence permit and a travel document (the non-citizen passport), but also holds that non-citizens are excluded from voting and elections for parliamentary elections, party politics, working for the local and national government, as well as most civil service jobs, given limited pension rights and are exempt from military service. Furthermore, any person who worked or retired from Soviet military service, KGB or who had been evicted a pro-Soviet activist is excluded from applications for citizenship (Galbreath, 2006). Finally, other than in Estonia, Lithuania, Denmark, and CIS countries (such as Russia, Ukraine and Belarus) non-citizens needed travel visas if they wished to go abroad up to 2007 when Latvia joined Schengen (MFA, 2007).

In 1998, the ‘windows system’ was abolished, which made it possible for many non-citizens to naturalize (Muiznieks, 2006). Figure 4.1 shows a rapid increase in naturalizations, showing many non-citizens’ interest to become citizen. The Latvian government was pushed to further reform their citizenship laws by the EU in order to become a member state, especially the language requirements in naturalization exams (Kallas, 2008) (more on this in 3.2.2). Figure 4.1

shows that naturalization levels reached its highest peak right after accession to the EU. However, optimism seemed to have lasted shortly and in 2010, resulting from not being able or not willing to fulfil citizenship demands 312 000 people – roughly 40% of the Russian-speaking population or 15% of the Latvian population of 2.1 million – are non-citizens (PMLP, 2012). Interestingly, the head of the Naturalization Board, Igors Gorbunovs, said that according to a survey among non-citizens, the mean motive for naturalization was the feeling of belonging to Latvia (LHRC, 2011b). Chapter Five will discuss attitudes towards (non-)citizenship.

In sum, by imposing such collective rules on belonging to Latvia, a ‘core nation status’ discourse becomes visible, which resultantly slows the process of integration (the ‘windows system’ and high language requirements in naturalization exams) (Galbreath, 2006), stimulates alienation by potentially loyal citizens (*ibid*), and keeps an open door for Russians to return to Russia (Smith et al., 1998). Having said that, non-citizen status in Latvia (and Estonia) is different to non-citizenship in most other countries. A non-citizen in Latvia has various rights such as a right to stay, to work, to travel freely in Europe, and access to basically all social services. Other than being deprived of voting rights, certain jobs, and pension rights depending on their country of origin, their legal rights are similar to that of Latvians.⁹

Figure 4.1 Number of persons that acquired Latvian citizenship through naturalization, 1995-2010



Source: Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (2011)

Education and language policy

Promoting titular core nation status is also revealed in education and language policy. Particularly language in education, as language has a direct impact on an individual’s social and professional opportunities, has been a good example of nation-building in Latvia. This can even

⁹ In Lebanon for example, non-citizenship means exclusion from all basic human rights and social services, the possibility to obtain a basic school diploma, a job, and even to move from one neighbourhood to another as a result of passport checkpoints.

be considered the backbone of contemporary social integration (Galbreath, 2006). Latvian political elites in the first years after re-independence maintained that minority language education could be continued, but only as a transitional mechanism. In the end all state-financed schools would be in Latvian. This while the constitution of 1992 holds that all minority persons “have the right to preserve and develop their language and their ethnic and cultural identity” (in Galbreath, 2006, p. 339). However, as a result of Soviet heritage, the education system in Latvia early was highly segregated in the 90s: almost all Latvians went to Latvian speaking schools (or simply: Latvian schools) and minority people went to Russian-speaking schools (Russian schools) (Muisnieks, 2006). As a result, in 1989, 69 per cent of all Latvians said to speak Russian, while only 22 per cent of Russians said to master Latvian fluently. The relevant number for Ukrainians, Belarusian’s, or Polish even lower (*ibid*). As a response, the government passed education reforms in 1995, 1996, and 1998 that increased the number of subjects to be thought in Latvian and stipulated that all teachers had to speak Latvian at the highest level proficiency. Finally the 2004 education reform – the most controversial one so far – was passed. All schools – including Russian schools – have to teach 60% of their classes in Latvian, regardless of the Latvian proficiency of the teachers or students (see Figure 4.2). Support for the 2004 education reforms by Russian-speaking teachers, parents and students and teaching of classes in Latvian have decreased drastically (Zepa, 2004). Initially they supported bi-lingual education, but as reforms were being forced upon minority people and implemented hastily, the reforms have created resistance among the minority persons (*ibid*). Problematic too has been that students and parents mention that they feel Russian-speaking students understand less of the classes than the Latvians which results in students falling behind. Zepa concludes that if people do not understand such reforms, it will not work as the target group is unwilling to participate. Latvian language in state funded institutes of higher education, including all universities, is already the only allowed language of instruction since re-independence. At present, only a few private institutes of higher education offer the possibility for Russian-speakers to study in their own language.

Finally, examples of (non-education related) language regulations are the 1992 Law on Language which made the Latvian language a prerequisite for governmental positions and many private sector jobs and the 2000 Law on Language, which further enhanced the role of Latvian language (Muisnieks, 2006). Additionally, there exists a law in Latvia that so called ‘foreign languages’, including Russian, are not allowed in public spaces (street signs, advertising, shop windows, and museums although Russian language is allowed in the media and in restaurant menus). In contrast, during the Soviet period, street signs were bilingual.

As a result of these laws however, the proportion of Russian-speakers (aged 15-74) that claim good knowledge of Latvian (intermediate or fluent) went up from one-third in 1996 to almost half in 2008. The proportion of Russian-speakers that speak no Latvian at all diminished from 22% to 7% over the same period (Zepa et al., 2008). In 2006 three-quarters of younger persons (aged 15-24) claimed good Latvian language skills (*ibid*). This is a national average however and the situation in for example the city of Daugavpils, the second largest city in the

Figure 4.2 Latvian language materials in the library of a ‘Russian school’ in Daugavpils.

Left: ‘Mana milaka pasaka’ (my favorite fairy-tails) in Latvian and Russian language

Right: ‘*Latvia; country nation state*’, an English language book about ‘nation-state Latvia’



Figure 4.3 Russian language is not allowed in the street view in Daugavpils



Eastern region of Latgale and considered ‘a Russian city’, is very different. 88 per cent of the population here is Russian-speaker and because they are so numerous they speak little Latvian (CSB, 2011b). While Russian is the main language here (on the streets, in cinema’s, in restaurants, around the university, even on the Daugavpils platform in Riga) written language – as required by law – is in Latvian language (Figure 4.3).

4.2.2 De-Sovietisation and the ‘return to Europe’

In Latvia, de-Sovietisation holds according to Smith et al. (1998) that a real political decolonization of the territory of Latvia needs a full retreat of all individuals, institutions and organizations responsible for their oppression, and replace them with new ones. To do this, the first thing the Latvian government decided was to ban the Communist Party. Second, as mentioned above, the state denied citizenship to all people who could not prove ties with Latvia dating back to 1939, and to ex-Soviet military officials or Soviet affiliated persons per definition. Second, in referring to non-citizens as ‘aliens’ the state has not only excluded many Russian-speakers rights, it also created a social category of people who not really belong to Latvia. In calling non-citizens ‘aliens’ the state is not clear in what sort of relationship this category implies between the occupying forces (the Soviet regime) and ordinary people (are they occupants?). Ambiguity on this matter is not reduced when former president Valdis Zatlers said it is wrong to sort nations in ‘good’ and ‘bad’ ones. Rather, “all *citizens* are part of Latvia” (Latvian Human Rights Centre, 2011). Third, the Latvian government has provided official decolonization projects in the early 90s – called ‘repatriation programs’ – to facilitate the emigration of minority persons out of Latvia. The Latvian government has created bilateral agreements with Belarus and Ukraine and has provided financial means to emigrate to Russia. However, except a peak of out-migration in 1992, migration out of Latvia has been low (Office of Citizenship and Migration, 2010). Fourth, a discourse of de-Sovietisation is also given by the term ‘re-independence’ as it marks a contrast with the Soviet experience (Ginkel, 2002).

The best example of ‘de-sovietisation’ is the ‘Museum of the Occupation of Latvia 1940-1991’, which is supported financially by the government (Figure 4.4). This museum is located in the most central place possible on the main square of the old centre of Riga, Latvia’s capital, and shows the life of Latvians under occupation including deportations and the life in Gulags. The left photo of Figure 4.4 resembles Riga’s most common postcard. Placing the museum on such a central location stresses the government’s interpretation of the Soviet period – a period of occupation. Another interesting detail is the usage of English language in Figure 4.4 (right picture). The usage of English on the Occupation Museum is not an exception; in fact, English language is found throughout the whole city-centre of Riga – mostly for the purpose of tourism. Nevertheless, since the Law on Language bans to *all* foreign languages in public while increasingly allowing English language, the ban actually says it bans only Russian or other minority languages. Enforcement of this law is not equally strong everywhere in Latvia. Where the left picture in Figure 4.5 shows a street sign close to the Latvian Parliament (The Saima), the middle and right pictures show respectively street signs in a suburb of Riga and a suburb in

Figure 4.4 The state-sponsored Occupation Museum on the most central square of Riga



Figure 4.5 Street signs at the Latvian parliament, a neighbourhood in Riga and in Daugavpils



Daugavpils. Here the signs from before 1991 are still in place. Where in Riga the state still attempts to cover Russian language inscriptions, certain streets in Daugavpils Russian language is fully visible (left). The Daugavpils municipality apparently follows a *laissez-faire* policy. In addition to street signs, also busses, churches, monuments and memorials portray Russian language.

The discourse of the ‘return to Europe’ according to Smith et al (1998) is present in all three Baltic States. It means that EU and NATO membership ensures economic modernization, geopolitical security and general well-being (Smith et al., 1998), and that the Baltic States have always belonged to Europe (MC, 2011). Economically, it is thought that distancing oneself from Russia would lead to a short-term cost of decolonisation, but this would be easily recovered in the long-term by European benefits. Indeed, more nationalistic Latvians often mention that during Soviet times, the Baltic’s have always been richer and net contributors to the Soviet Union. They suggest that if there had been no occupation their economic development would much more resemble Scandinavian standards (Smith et al. 1998, own interviews). In general, Latvia has been easy to accept any legal standard of the EU if Latvia’s European direction was at

risk (Smith et al 1998). In order to comply with EU requirements, language laws, citizenship laws and other policies have been relaxed. Some say this has been the only reason the Baltic States haven't completely slipped into authoritarian rule of minority control (Norgaard et al., 1996, in Smith et al 1998). However, it seems Latvia did manage to keep a foot down in their ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) by the Council for Europe. When Latvia ratified in

1995, it only did so including a special clause that national minority status is *only* given to those who have Latvian citizenship (Kallas, 2008). In 2008, the European Parliament tried to stimulate the Latvian government to provide more rights to non-citizens – such as voting rights in local elections. The Latvian government however responded that it will not give such additional rights because uplifting restrictions to those without citizenship would reduce the incentive to naturalize and blur the distinction between citizen and non-citizen (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 3). The response of the Council has been rather reluctant in this respect. Even if the Council wishes “the same political approach, the same level of protection of minorities and the same level of inter-ethnic integration in all Council of Europe member states,” it also says that “while ‘double standards’ are to be rejected and human rights are to be guaranteed in a uniform manner throughout the continent, there is no rigid ‘one-size-fits-all model’ for the protection of national minorities (*ibid*).”

The next paragraph will provide a discussion of recent developments. First party-politics of the last two years will be discussed, illuminating conflicting issues connected to discourses identified above. Following will be an outline of the Action Plan on National Identity and Integration by the Ministry of Culture.

4.3 Developments since 2011

4.3.1 National politics during parliamentary elections

‘Core nation’ and ‘Latvia’s return to Europe’ are highly actual in national politics. The recent parliamentary elections in 2010 and 2011 (after the parliament was dissolved in July 2011), showed that despite Latvia’s economic hardship since 2008, the political discourse is still centred on ethno-political issues. The party mainly supported by Russian-speakers – Harmony Centre – ended second in the 2010 elections with 26% of the votes versus 31% to the winning party – Unity (Baltic Times, 2010). In September 2011, Harmony Centre actually won the new elections with 29% of the votes (BBC News, 2011). Nonetheless, the party has never been included in the government since 1991 as the other parties refuse to work with Harmony Centre. Instead, it will continue to be an opposition party with 29% of the votes.

There are three main conflicting issues in national politics. First, the fact that Russian language is not entitled to the status of official language – despite widespread use in public and private spheres. The same discussion goes on in relation to language in education. Second, analysts say other parties distrust Harmony Centre because of too close ties with politicians in Russia. It reflects a fear of ‘occupation of Latvia all over again’. This distrust is not only found towards Harmony Centre but also concerning political participation in the government by

Russian-speakers more generally. Interviews by Lauristin and Vihalemm (2008) show that quite often Latvian state officials openly admit that one of the reasons minority persons are excluded is that their political orientation and loyalty is questioned. They say one has to be careful with employing them in high state official positions. Thirdly and most importantly, Harmony Center does not acknowledge occupation, which is a key issue for all ethnic Latvian supported parties (Baltic Times, 2010).

From this it follows that in the ‘decolonization of the mind’ Latvia has a considerable way to go.

4.3.2 The Action Plan for ‘National Identity and Social Integration’

In March 2011 the Minister of Culture, Sarmite Elerte, presented in an Action Plan elaborated by the Advisory Board of National Identity and Social Integration the guidelines on which Latvian national identity and integration should be based. By providing definitions for terms as ‘the Latvian cultural space’, ‘the Latvian nation’, and on what minority participation has to be based, the Action Plan provides not only the clearest articulation of the exact elements of a Latvian national identity, it also provides a ‘roadmap’ to strengthen ‘sense of belonging’ to Latvia. The Action Plan is a confirmation and continuation of the more implicit discourses identified above. Below I briefly discuss the Action Plan.

- **The need for active policy on national identity in times of globalization**

Throughout the Action Plan it becomes clear that for the government “*cultivating national uniqueness* is necessary to create a persistent *sense of belonging*: democracy cannot function without people who feel that they belong to the country and feel responsibility for it” (own emphasis, p. 2)¹⁰. “Sense of belonging to the state is integrally linked to the democratic identity of the country” (p. 2). Cultivating national uniqueness is necessary because “immigrant groups [who] sometimes live for generations in an enclosed ‘parallel world’” (p. 3). “It is the government's responsibility to reduce this isolation by providing opportunities and skills to participate in the democratic nation-state community” (p. 2). However, from the document it becomes clear a secondary reason for cultivating ‘national uniqueness’ is that Latvia is the only place in the world where you can fully develop the Latvian language and culture. The next bullet point will show how the minister aims to accomplish this.

- **The definition of ‘a Latvian’, strengthening ‘the Latvian cultural space’ and ‘open-Latvianness’**

In the Action Plan the government is quite explicit on what elements strengthening a sense of belonging should be based: the Latvian cultural space, Latvian Valsts nācija (Latvian ‘county-nation’), ‘open-Latvianness’ and minority identity preservation.

¹⁰ All citation marks refer to the Action Plan (Ministry of Culture 2011)

‘The Latvian cultural space’ is defined as: “the Latvian language, tangible and intangible culture, social memory and Latvian way of life” (p. 8). This includes Latvian “traditions, symbols, historical events, historical characters, common ideas, holidays... geographical names, building traditions, etc.” (p. 8). Related to social memory, the Action Plan calls the Soviet ideological interpretations on the topics of the Occupation of Latvia, Latvia’s fate during World War II and life in the Soviet regime, as an ‘injury’.

‘A Latvian’ then is defined as a person who has fulfilled the (in her words objective) criteria of knowing the Latvian language, the culture, who has ‘Latvian roots’ and who “identifies him or herself as belonging to the Latvian nation” (p. 8). However, the definition of ‘*Valstsnācija* (literally country-nation), a term introduced for the first time in Latvian policy, shows the real status of being ‘a Latvian’: “*a nation which determines the country's national and cultural identity, and also that of ethnic minorities and immigrants*” (p. 7, own emphasis). “The identity of Latvia – based on Latvian language, culture and Latvian social memory - is common for the whole Latvian nation” (p. 7). Latvians are the *valstsnācija* of Latvia. “Latvian *valstsnācija* with minorities form the Latvian nation” (p. 7). Contrary, Belgium has two *valstsnācija*’s and Switzerland three. The role for minorities in the Latvian nation is that they “take part in supplementing the input and diversifying the Latvian nation [not the *valstsnācija*!] and the Latvian cultural space” (p. 7).

Crucially, minorities can become part of the Latvian *valstsnācija* true the instrument of ‘Open Latvianness’. The Action Plan says “it is required to strengthen [the *valstsnācija*’s] identity and at the same time be open to those who wish to join” (p. 6). Open Latvianness means that a person cannot only be born as an ethnic Latvian, but also “*become ethnic Latvian*: every human can choose whether their next ethnic identity is the [Latvian ethnic identity]. Additionally he or she can keep its national minority identity” (p. 6, own emphasis).

What she minister is saying here is that sense of belonging to the Latvian core nation has now become an ethnic matter. *Valstsnācija* is a title reserved for ethnic Latvians. In other words, integration has to take place along ethnic lines and not someone’s mode of participation, such as passing the naturalization exams, speaking the language and participating in the economy or political process. In fact, the Action Plans says that “being a citizen may not be the same as belonging to the Latvian nation” (p. 8). In saying this, the guidelines mark a distinct new direction of integration policy where naturalization is not understood anymore as a prove of loyalty, but instead sense of belonging and ethnicity is given priority.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the way in which the various Latvian governments since 1991 have been active in nation-building and the creation of a Latvian national identity. Special attention is given to the way governments dealt with its minority population, since its re-independence. Shortly after re-independence the Latvian governments has put into place nationalist policies of minority control (Galbreath, 2006) labelling the country’s population in simple binary categories: Latvians and non-Latvians, citizens and non-citizens, Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, ‘us’ and

‘them’ etc. The following two decades of national identity and minority policy, of which some say the sharp edges have been removed (Kallas, 2008), can be described as a continuation of this. The state has been very clear that in their citizenship, education, language policy as well as the recent national identity policy, it follows a ‘core nation’ and a ‘standardizing state’ discourse - a wish to create a Latvian nation-state. These mechanisms are obvious instruments of integration and assimilation which tries to loosen the bond between members of Russian minority and generally weaken their identity as a separate group. This is shown by openly stimulating a ‘de-sovietisation discourse’ and replacing it with a ‘return to Europe’ discourse. Ironically, as the new Action Plan on Integration and National Identity shows, it is exactly new ethnic boundaries and categorizations which are forced upon Russian-speakers would they like to ‘officially belong’ to the Latvian ‘core nation’. If a Russian-speaker wishes to become an uncategorized ‘Latvian’ he or she first needs to identify him- or herself as an ethnic Latvian. That person’s ‘mode of participation’ (employment, political participation, use of Latvian language) seems to be secondary to this. Thus, according to the minister the common ground for integration and a stronger sense of belonging to the Latvian nation and the national identity is defined by the Latvian language, Latvian culture, and Latvian interpretation of history *and* Latvian ethnic identity. Russian-speakers can however belong to the Latvian nation (consisting of the ‘core nation’ *and* minorities) without identifying as an ethnic Latvian but then they cannot have any say about the Latvian national identity and culture and remain second class citizens. It might be questioned whether this is helpful in trying to achieve higher naturalization levels. Although out-migration to Russia has been low and willingness to naturalize has been high since the windows system was abolished in 1998 and the first years after accession to the EU in 2004, naturalizations practically stopped since 2007.

The next chapters will focus on how Russian-speakers in Latvia themselves understand their own sense of belonging to Latvia, the Latvian nation, the Latvian cultural space, in this pre-defined space. Are the assumptions of fears, protection narratives, and ethnic boundaries really necessary? How do Russian-speakers understand a sense of belonging to Latvia and Latvians and what are their interests in the matter?

Chapter 5 Alternative modes of belonging to Latvia by Russian-speakers

The previous chapter offered a critical discussion of the politics of belonging of the nation-building practices by the Latvian State. It showed the government believes the minority lacks a (strong enough) sense of belonging to Latvia and to ‘the Latvian nation’. In this empirical chapter the major topics of belonging to Latvia expressed by Russian-speakers will be presented. What is it that makes them feel at home in Latvia and on what elements is this feeling based? The central question in this chapter is:

“What does it mean to be a Russian-speaker in Latvia?”

The results show this question is often answered with narratives that include both a personal emotional sense of feeling at home in Latvia (and among Latvians/Russian-speakers) (sense of place-belongingness), and claims that resist various forms of in/exclusion (politics of belonging). The latter often includes negative sentiments that resist the ‘discursive violence’ by state discourses. Similarly, Zepa found that minority self-identifications are “based on what the individual says about his or her belonging to Latvia and what his or her statements repeat from things that “others” have said about Latvia” (Zepa, 2004, p 4). Therefore the two dimensions of belonging cannot be discussed in two separate sections. Doing so would fail to capture the implicit content of alternative modes of belonging.

For this reason this chapter is structured around the four major dimensions of place-belongingness narrative analyses identified: a sense of belonging to ‘the Russian-speaking community’, belonging to Latvia in ‘autobiographic’, ‘cultural’ and ‘economic and legal’ terms. These paragraphs are added with narratives of politics of belonging whenever respondents mentioned these.

5.1 The role of language and belonging to ‘the Russian-speaking community’

In Latvia, language is the main marker dividing the majority ethnic Latvians from the minority – Russian-speakers. In fact, after a media analysis of five months I found no week goes by without various reports on language-related issues¹¹. For example, at the time of the research there were various political parties collecting signatures in order to hold a referendum to abolish bilingual education and have all education in Latvian only instead. Contrary, left-wing parties urged for a referendum on granting Russian the status of second official language. At the same time there was a petition on Facebook as a counter reaction where you could say ‘I reject both the granting of Russian as a second official language and abolishment of bilingual education’. The result was that the first referendum never took place as the initiators never collected enough signatures to

¹¹ Analysis derived from the Latvian Centre for Human Rights Integration Monitor. A daily news digest on all social integration related topics of all Latvian newspapers – both in Latvian and Russian language – translated into English and with reference to the relevant newspaper: www.humanrights.org.lv

bring to bill to parliament. The second logically failed because in order to change the constitution a majority of persons eligible to vote (more than 770.000) need to support the initiative, which is more than there are Russian-speaking citizens. Nevertheless, discussions continue.

These are examples of typical ‘trending topics’ in popular public discourse and moreover, they imply Latvian society can be roughly be divided in two separate communities: an ethnic Latvian community and a Russian-speaking community. However, in asking respondents what they think of these language-politics they all dismissed them as ‘political games’ or said: ‘yes, that’s Latvia!’ Respondents were not concerned with the referenda. Yet, in many other ways, analysis from interviews reveals language is *the* central topic in the way belonging to Latvia is understood. Basically, in order to understand how Russian-speakers sense belonging to Latvia, one needs to ask the question: ‘How does language matter in the everyday lives of a Russian-speaker in Latvia?’ Results show that the answer to this question is highly contextual and holds different meanings for different people, at different times. This recalls Brubaker’s criticism on ‘groupism’ and underlines belonging is something very flexible and should be approached as a variable.

Analysis of interviews reveals that group boundaries (or community belonging) are understood differently by respondents. In fact, a key finding of the research is that many decades of living alongside each other lead to a high degree of inter-marriages, bilingualism (in schools and daily life), and differences between generations. Therefore a variety of self-identifications and self-associations can be discerned. Yet, broadly speaking two understandings can be identified from respondents’ narratives. Feeling that:

- Confirm a (strong) sense of belonging to a Russian-speaking community
- Reject a sense of belonging to a Russian-speaking community

First, the following answers belong to respondents saying they belong to the Russian-speaking community:

"Riga is a Russian city – two thirds are Russian here! Not in terms of ethnicity because ethnicity is nothing – but in terms of identity and language. Actually, ‘our’ base of identity here is language” (AR, activist).

“My wife is Azerbaijani. “She is born in Latvia, speaks Latvian but Russian is her mother language. She speaks Azerbaijan as well, better than my Latvian (...). They [persons like his wife] are Latvian citizen but they understand themselves as having Russian identities. In Russian there is a word game; (...) nationality means not your citizenship but ‘What is your mother language’” (SJ, engineer).

Moreover, respondents were clear that ‘Russians’ should not be understood in ethnic terms, but rather as an acronym for ‘Russian-speakers’. In a panel discussion on social memory and social integration IV (Riga municipality councillor) said after listening to the other speakers:

“I hear others speakers [in the panel] speaking of ‘Russians’ all the time. I could go on and on about my identities: I am Ukrainian, Russian, Latvian, Latvian-Russian and more! What we are speaking about is Russian-speakers!”

“‘Russians’ means Russian-speaking minority” (MS, politician).

There are however other explanations, such as the one given by AK, who gives another explanation for feeling a sense of belonging to a Russian-speaking community:

“It is a result of the state policy. IF there were not so many obstacles created for language use in public life, ..., than it would not have been such an active part of my identity” (AK, lawyer).

Second, respondents that said to feel no or only a low sense of belonging to the group Russian-speakers said that although the Russian-language is a layer of their identity, they, (deliberately) distance themselves from belonging to ‘a Russian language community’:

“There is no Russian-speaking community; there is a large group of people who have Russian as their first language and they have common interests. But there will be lots of people, like me, who will not associate themselves with a particular political party because they protect Russian speakers. Russian is my first language – no doubt about that, but it does not define me. [...] I almost never listen or watch the Latvian or Russian radio or media. It’s my private choice. You can describe and choose one [‘identity’], but this will misrepresent the reality” (VM, scholar).

In his opinion, Russian-speakers in Latvia have *a choice* in the way they interpret themselves in a country that he thinks is profoundly multicultural and bilingual. He describes a Russian-speaker has two options. One option, similar to the first group identified above, is to have a very strong identity of a ‘Russian-speaker; Latvian you only use because you have to in communication with the state or in ‘official life’. You shut out the Latvian part of your cultural sphere, while still being a law abiding citizens. This person will have mostly Russian friends and all communication in the private sphere will be in Russian. It includes the Russian elements of culture, perception and interpretation of history (social memory). This view is represented by AR, an activist for the Russian community of Latvia.

“We prefer to speak about ethnic pluralism. Where Latvians exists, Russians exist and they don’t bother each other. In Riga two-thirds is Russian in terms of identity and language. So who should be integrated here? Our answer is no one, because we all live here and neither Latvians nor Russians are newcomers” (AR, activist).

The second option Russian-speakers have, VM explains, is an understanding you live in the multicultural society and that within the family someone will sooner or later get married to a Latvian; allowing Latvian culture in your private sphere. Families are free to send their children to a Latvian school as this is thought to be better for the future career of the child. Other respondents too referred to this as a ‘liberal approach’ to the meaning of being a Russian-speaker. Being a Russian-speaker is something which everyone is free to decide the meaning of individually, while in public life it is not important whether you are Russian or Latvian. In other words: identity questions or social categories are not important. Such persons do not always have a special position towards the place of Russian culture in the public space. These are Russian-speakers that according to VM are persons who might call themselves Russian, Polish, Ukrainian and Latvian, and are used to hopping from one identity to another their whole lives. “Many persons think this way” (EK, Lawyer).

This second group shows similarities with the way OV and KK – both students in Riga, but raised in Daugavpils – regard themselves. Although they identify themselves as Russian-speakers, they do not see any social boundaries between Russian-speakers and Latvians.

“You should not divide! There is no difference in my opinion. It’s artificial. I think Russian-speakers identify themselves as Latvians. They are just people who live in Latvia” (OV, student).

“I feel I belong to the Russian group, but I will survive if this group disappears. Others might answer differently” (K, student).

Where these respondents have either a higher education, high bilingual language skills and were in between 20 and 30 years of age, similar answers were given by Katya’s mother and a colleague, both middle-aged and working at the food market in Daugavpils:

“Sometimes you can see separation [between Latvians and Russians], than they are Russian. But there are no fights with the majority [of the customers]. Only small groups fight” (market lady).

“Separation only exists for people who do not speak both languages. Otherwise there is no problem” (market lady).

In fact, what these respondents reveal is that it might not be so much an equal choice for everyone for being a Russian-speaker or not, but highly dependent of having stepped over the language barrier. This enables individuals to cross social boundaries or even make them disappear. Scholar VM explains two points connected to the possibility to belong to the group ‘Latvians’. First, if a Russian-speaker wants to be counted as ‘one of the Latvians’, that person has to speak Latvian. *“It’s a prerequisite to be accepted. Whether you speak Latvian with an accent or not, you are probably going to be ‘in’”* (VM). He said there will remain issues with acknowledgement of the occupation and other things, but *“language is the first thing that people check on”* (VM). ‘What does this mean for the identities of Russian-speakers?’ he asked rhetorically:

“For many people having two languages is the norm. Usually they speak one language better than the other, but the substantial part is absolutely bilingual – because of family reasons and mixture. However, mixing has been going on for centuries. If you go back three generations of a Latvian, in almost every family you will find someone with a distinct non-Latvian origin. This means that ‘Latvianness’ is in reality (although not always acknowledged) a very flexible thing itself. Having Latvian as a profound first language is the main marker of being Latvian. There are always some crazy people who will say, your parents are not 100% Latvian because your surname is Russian because of your great great grandfather’. Yet, a Latvian nationalist politician has a Russian last name; it’s a flexible concept” (VM, scholar).

Bottom-line, just like Latvianness – who can call himself Latvian – is a flexible concept, also ‘Russianness’ – feeling a strong sense of belonging to a Russian-speaking community – is essentially an individual choice. Moreover, respondents said this choice is most dependent on a person’s Latvian language proficiency. Age and profession then are of importance then in so far they influence the likeliness of speaking both languages.

A final issue I will explain here connected to ‘a Russian community feeling’ is the perceived *need* to use Latvian language in daily life. Analysis of interviews and observations shows Russian-speakers have become quite comfortable using their mother-tongue practically anywhere in public life, such as in shops, public services, and restaurants. VM and other respondents explain that over the last 5 to 10 years the need to use Latvian language in public life has somewhat diminished. This while knowledge of Latvian language over the same period increased substantially (Chapter Five). The chair of the Liepaja Russian Community says that in the 90s Russian-speakers were inclined to ‘forget Russian’ and instead interested in re-joining Europe. In the 2000s however, more Russian can be heard on streets and this is more accepted now. *“This is because Latvia is a small facility and Russia is a big facility”* (GI, chair of an NGO) (more on ‘big Russia’ in ‘economic and legal factors of belonging to Latvia’). Nowadays it is quite normal for a Russian-speaker to go to any lunchroom in Riga and order in Russian, even if the waitress is Latvian and the costumers before him/her ordered in Latvian. VM explains it is a matter of pride; even if they speak Latvian, they want to be served in Russian. In some occasions this was in turn responded by the Latvian waitress – out of sight of the costumer – by clear signs of irritation. In asking ND about what it means to be a Russian-speaker in Latvia she answered:

“Most people around me see ‘Russian’ as something special in Latvia. We can speak freely, there are newspapers and television channels in Russian language, but on official events we choose what language to speak. It makes life more interesting, not boring at all” (ND, chair of an NGO).

VM explains the ‘rules and practice’ of language laws in everyday life in Latvia. In a company with mainly Russian speaking employees, no one can forbid a person to speak Russian inside. In dealing with clients in a company; no one can forbid anyone to talk Russian with clients who obviously want this. But, if a client walks in and the first thing the shop keeper does is to switch to Russian, that would be a violation. In Latvia there exists a language inspection which is able to give fines should this happen. VM explains this is done because in the 90s the inability of a large proportion of the population to speak Latvian was a big problem. Then Latvians could not always communicate their needs in Latvian in a supermarket or to a doctor for example. The asymmetrical language situation of the time, VM understands was offensive for Latvians as they could not always speak their own language in their own country. At present, VM and other respondents stress, the proportion of Russian-speakers who speak no Latvian at all is growing very small. Personally, VM boycotts places where the personnel don’t respond in Latvian if that is what the customer wants.

What this shows is that Russian-speakers make a clear distinction between the private and the public sphere. In the private life they can use their own mother tongue, in public sphere they are (to various degrees) able to switch languages. One does however has to take into account regional differences; the role of Russian-language in Latgale is different.

“Go to Daugavpils; are they Russian? Daugavpils is completely Russian city! They don’t need to speak Latvian there. (...) In Latgale they feel very comfortable because they can speak Russian; it’s like their own world” (OV, student).

"I speak Russian with everybody [Russians and Latvians] and it works just fine" (Market worker).

However, in a country of 2.2 million inhabitants, persons are bound to meet in other regions than where they live. When OV's mother signed up for a 'woman camp weekend' near Riga, it became clear OV's parents are much more uncertain about boundaries between Russian-speakers and Latvians:

"Ok I will tell you a real live story. My mom went yesterday to a camp for woman who had breast cancer. I wrote the motivation letter for her and she got accepted. [Nevertheless], she was nervous all the time because the organizers didn't give her any information. My father said to me; 'call this agency to ask if she really is accepted'. Of course she is, I said. My dad insisted to still call them ... and ask them if she is declined because she is from Latgale or Daugavpils. I told them, 'come on' what a nonsense! People are the same [everywhere in Latvia]. If you have the same problem it doesn't matter whether you are Latvian or Russian. They [her parents] still have this fear. "Of course she is accepted" (OV, student).

Differences between the two communities seem to be very real for some while for others not. In the same way a sense of belonging to a 'Russian-speaking community' has different meanings for different persons. Perception of differences depends on the region and knowledge of Latvian language. The remark of a Latvian lady working on the food market – "separation only exists for people who do not speak both languages" – seems to capture an important aspect of belonging to a minority community. However, the need to use Latvian seems to be low for some while at the same time one needs to speak Latvian in order to belong to both communities. This is contradicting. Another interesting finding is that the two students from Daugavpils don't seem to give much meaning to their 'Russian' identity, while they are from a region dominated by Russian-speakers. Apparently you have choice and language abilities are crucial for being flexible. By distinguishing between those who are able to shift identities (who are in-between Latvians and Russian-speakers) and those who can't, importance is given to the fact that a Russian community feeling is activated only at certain moments, while at other moments this is less relevant. This position is represented by AR– a representative of the 'Russian Community of Latvia'. After earlier in an interview having said he feels he belongs to a Russian-speaking community he says:

"Well, our identity, for us, when we speak about 'us' Russians, you should watch in context. When I speak about European problems – I speak about 'us' European Russians. When I speak about Latvian problems I speak about Latvians who live in Latvia. When I speak about local problems, I speak about Russians meaning all 'Russians'. 'Russian' has so many meanings; Russian can be ethnic, linguistic, or belonging to Russian civilization. People in usual life, they do not care; so many meanings; sometimes we do not even realize" (AR, activist).

5.1.1 Victory Day: the 9th of May celebration

Without a doubt, the moment when a sense of 'Russian-speakingness' in Latvia reaches its peak is on the 9th of May Celebration, or 'Victory Day'. On this day Russian-speakers all over the Post-Soviet world celebrate the victory of the Red Army over Nazi Germany in all of the bigger

cities. On this day Russian-speakers gather around the 'Victory Monument' and pay respect to those who lost their lives in WWII by laying flowers on the monument. However, throughout the day the monument is also the centre of all kinds of festivities such as music performances, a poetry program, folk-dancing and a speech of the mayor of Riga (a Russian-speaker) on a big stage. There are various stalls selling Russian food and drinks while many others bring their own dishes to pick nicks on the grass. The event is finished with a firework show. Respondents' answers on how they describe the meaning of 'Victory Day' are various. One respondent saw the celebration as a social and historical day rather than a political one, on which day you say 'thank you' to the grandparents and other family who fought the war. Other respondents said it is an expression of a shared feeling of belonging to a Russian community, to show their identity and that *"our roots are not lost in this world"* (KK, student). Where the celebration was most popular during the Soviet Union and lost popularity in the 90s, respondents agree that it is becoming more popular over the last few years:

"Yesterday I spoke to my friend who is ethnic Latvian. And she is like 'Oh my god, I had a cultural shock'. She was there by chance and was trapped by the people and never saw it before. She was like 'what are all these people doing here, I didn't know there were all these Russians'. I asked: 'have you ever met a Russian who doesn't go there?' My friend said to me 'don't tell me you were there?' 'Of course I was there!'" (TB, teacher).

One respondent said Latvians also go to the monument but the reality is that it is rare to hear any Latvian language throughout the day. Most Latvians I have spoken about the 'Victory Day' are negative towards it. In the first place because Latvians interpret the end of WWII very differently. From a Latvian perspective this day was the start of an equally bad occupation by the Soviet Union which lasted for 50 years. For Latvians it is hard to understand Russian-speakers are celebrating this day in their country. Some Latvians even believe Russian-speakers celebrate the occupation of Latvia on this day. Although this last reason is invalid, the misunderstanding is understandable as there are Russian-speakers who show a strong connection to Russia on this day (Figure 5.3). Some Russian-speakers portray Russian flags (four Russian and two Soviet-Union flags were observed) and wear clothing (shirts or sweaters) with 'Russia' imprinted on it. At the climax of the festivities, right after the fireworks there were many (mostly younger persons) chanting 'Russia, Russia, Russiaaja!' For Latvians this could be a reason to presume Russian-speakers in Latvia do not feel a sense of belonging to Latvia. It is however important to note this behaviour seems not to be representative for the majority of visitors of the celebration as only a minority shouts for Russia. Also TB (a teacher) said she rejects *'those youth who get drunk and yell for Russia'* and therefore she pays her visit during the morning *"when everything is still civilized"*.

Having observed various ways of celebrating the 9th of May and various respondents give different opinions on the meaning of the celebration, it raises more questions than answers to 'How Russian-speakers feel belonging to Latvia' and 'What it means to be a Russian-speaker in Latvia'. Moreover, other than a few days after the 9th of May celebration, it is hard to spot a person wearing clothing with 'Russia' imprinted on it or any other way belonging to Russia is

Figure 5.1 Russian-speakers at the 9th of May Celebration at the Victory Monument



Figure 5.2 Russian-speakers showing Russian flags at the 9th of May Celebration



expressed. The following paragraphs will take this variable, situational and multiple representations of belonging into account by discussing autobiographic, cultural, economic and legal factors of belonging.

5.2 Autobiographic factors: Latvia as a private space

Analysis of interviews shows that one of the key mechanisms for Russian-speakers to explain their belonging to Latvia is in terms of autobiographic factors. Questions such as ‘how do you identify yourself in/with Latvia?’ or ‘what does it mean to be a Russian-speaker in Latvia?’ are frequently answered in terms of personal experiences or ‘life-paths’. They give a comparison of their ‘past’ with the ‘present’ (own memory), and ‘a look inside’. Topics such as ‘I grew up here (years spend in Latvia)’, ‘Latvia; my homeland’, ‘Latvia vs. Russia (or Soviet-Union)’ are frequent. Such a look inside also often contains factors that go beyond someone’s own biography. Then a respondents biography is extended to that of the family (parents, grand-parents), of which ‘my roots’, ‘my historical motherland’, ‘my ethnicity’, and ‘my nationality’ are most important. These narratives of personal and ‘family biographies’ together explain an important aspect of how they represent place-belongingness to Latvia. Narratives can be divided broadly in two topics. First, when comparisons are made between belonging to ‘this country Latvia’ or ‘the land Latvia’ and the country of their origins (Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Belarus etc.). This often appears when respondents imagine themselves to be abroad. Second, if belonging is represented inside Latvia. This takes into account social dynamics *in* Latvian society.

5.2.1 National identification: the country of origins and belonging to ‘the country Latvia’

There are broadly three kinds of origins Russian-speakers can have in Latvia. First there is a group descending from the group ‘Old Believers’- a group of Russians living in Latvia well before WWII. They came to Latvia as religious refugees as they were prosecuted by the church when they split off from the Orthodox Church in Russia in the 16th century. They are the granted the title of ‘historical minority’ as they have ‘historical ties to Latvia before 1939’. For this reason they were granted Latvian citizenship automatically in 1991 (Chapter Four). Second, those born in the territory of Latvia (whether in the Latvian SSR or independent Latvia). Last, ‘migrants’ include those who moved to Latvia. ‘Migrants’ in brackets because when they moved they did so within the same country; the Soviet Union. As Table 5.1 shows, in 2005, two-thirds of the minority aged 15-75 was born and raised in Latvia. This varies from 90%, for those aged 15-34, 60% for those aged 35-64 to 31% for elderly persons. Only 1% arrived to Latvia in the

Table 5.2 Minority population by age and origin (2005) (in percentages)

Age	15 – 24	25 – 34	35 – 44	45 – 54	55 – 64	65 – 74	15 – 74
Born in Latvia	94.5	90.0	71.7	56.6	46.9	31.1	65.9
Arrived within the last ten years	0.9	0.8	2.1	1.2	1.6	0.8	1.3

Source: Hazans (2011), (N = 6831 for 2005; N=11716 for 2009).

last 10 years (Hazans, 2011).

However, one has to take into account that migration to and from Latvia was a constant factor for Latvians as Russian-speakers alike during the Soviet period. For example, from 1951-1961, immigration into Latvia was 640 thousand (1951-1960) while emigration reached 460 thousand. From 1981-1990, 507 thousand immigrated while 424 thousand emigrated (CSB, 2012). Thus even if net migration remained positive throughout the Soviet Era, it hides the large number of people that entered Latvia at the same time as others left for elsewhere in the Union for a period of time, usually for reasons of employment. Often persons would later return again to Latvia as employment was often temporary (Muiznieks, 2006, interviews). As a result of the high mobility levels within the Soviet-Union, many Russian-speakers in Latvia today have started families somewhere along the trajectories, leading to the establishment of family members and friends in different regions of the former Soviet-Union or family members who were born elsewhere. AR's own biography:

"I am born in Riga. My mother is from the Kalingrad region and her parents are from Moscow region. My father was born in Russia and his parents are from Saint Petersburg and Belgorod region. My grandfather worked in the railways and lived in the Komi republic, so they moved a lot. When my father was born my grandfather was working here [in Latvia]. Later my grandfather worked in the Komi republic again, but my father was here from two years of age. In the Soviet Union we were very mobile; some working in railways, construction, or industry" (AR, activist).

Having stressed the various trajectories in terms of origins, how do respondents express place-belongingness? Results show, many mentioned a sense of belonging to 'the land Latvia':

"After 20 years in this country, the most important things are issues of the country itself – topics such as democracy, taxes, and that life and things are good in this country. Many people think this way" (EK, lawyer).

"I am a bit afraid to go [emigrate to Greece for work], I want to stay, because here, I have friends, family, 'everything' and I am going to somewhere where I don't know anyone" (OV, student).

"My grandfather moved to Latvia. I did naturalization exams because for me Latvia is my motherland country. I'm born here in Latvia, so Latvia is my home. My roots are Ukrainian. So I'm a Ukrainian belonging to Latvia" (GI, chair of an NGO).

In an interview with ND (chairwoman of an NGO, 25-30 years old) explicitly mentions attraction to the land Latvia (which does not necessarily mean belonging to the state or society). She is born in Russia and moved to Latvia as a young girl. Latvian-citizenship:

"For me it means belonging to my place where I live. And I love Latvia because it's small, with beautiful nature. You can work in the city and in 10 minutes enjoy swimming in the lake or go to your countryside house [in Latvia many people have relatives in the countryside]. It's just a wonderful place to live and to raise your children."

Thus, for her citizenship has little to do with nationality (belonging to the Latvian nation) or signifying the relationship with the state (see Storey, 2001, p. 45 for this definition of citizenship).

Where the previous narratives concern belonging to the ‘land Latvia’, respondents also mention they feel different from ‘Russian-Russians’. A heightened sense belonging to Latvia is expressed when they are abroad or when relatives from abroad visit Latvia.

“Russia is a foreign country, not so much as other countries, but still” (KK, student).

“Long term we thought we were the same. But Russians in Russia say we are different. We have a Baltic accent and we teach an old version of Russia and Russian language. Modern Russia is different. When teachers from Russia visited our school they said ‘You are missing the old times’”. Also, “my husband is from Russia: when I visit his family in Russia I feel different” (N, director of a school).

“Russian-Russians often say we have a Baltic accent. They create a thought Russian is not our native language: ‘oh you have a special language and behaviour (...) you are not locals’. We do not feel it. So we are Russians from the Baltic’s. Differences are not crucial for us” (AR, activist).

“I have relatives in Siberia, Vladivostok, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moscow. I discovered that some phrases are used with different meanings. Sometimes when I joke or tell stories they miss the meaning. Separation is quite big already” (SJ, engineer).

In countries other than Russia, respondents have no difficulties introducing themselves.

“In English it’s easy; [abroad]; I am Latvian and have a Latvian passport; that’s simple enough. What I otherwise have in my luggage (culture and language) is another thing” (VM, scholar).

“When I attended courses in the UK, I presented myself as ‘I am from Latvia but I have Russian mother language’, because in Europe, the Russian language is quite useful; Bulgarians, Rumanians, Slovaks. We can talk in Russian and we studied in Russian” (SJ, engineer).

As people in other countries do not have much knowledge on what role origins, language, and nationality or ethnicity plays *inside* Latvia, they can introduce themselves as ‘I am Latvian’ or ‘I am from Latvia’. However, the way respondents understand belonging to Latvia or Latvians seems to change when it concerns belonging *inside* Latvia.

5.2.2 ‘National identification’: ‘from Latvia, but not a Latvian by ethnicity’

Inside Latvia, respondents are fond in stressing they are ‘from Latvia, but not a Latvian’:

“Abroad I will say ‘ich bin aus Lettland’ but not in ethnic terms. [Foreigners] do not care who lives in Latvia. It’s far away. But [in Latvia], it is very important for us; we do not want to be Latvians in terms of ethnicity. We are Latvians because we belong to this territory, as well as to Europe, as well as to Russians because we belong to the Russian culture. That’s not a problem, to have multi-level identities. [In fact], Russians living in Riga mostly associate themselves with Riga, not to Latvia. Riga is urban culture, big city life, and Latvians who have long roots here in Riga, they must feel closer to us than to Latvians who came from countryside” (AR, activist).

Analysis of interviews shows place-belongingness for Russian-speakers in Latvia is multiple. In geographical terms belonging to ‘the land Latvia’, Riga, and Europe is often mentioned, while belonging to Latvia as a country or state is not articulated. In terms of group association, Latvian ethnicity is actively rejected. While the previous respondent mentioned a sense of belonging to

the urban culture and Russian culture and values, various respondents said also to feel belonging to ‘Latvians’ and ‘closeness to Latvian culture’.

“We grew up here and our way of living is also Latvian”. Do you consider yourself part of a Latvian nation then? “Yes! For example, in sports, we don’t know what to choose if Latvia plays against Russia. If Latvia doesn’t play against Russia it’s easy. We support Latvian sportsmen, artists, researchers, and famous people. We are proud of representatives of Latvia.”. “The Latvian culture is also close to us”. One teacher asks rhetorically: “Is it the same as Estonian-Russians, Lithuanian-Russians or American-Russians? We don’t know; it’s too philosophical” (N, director of a school).

Also a rather fanatic pro-Russia activist respondent said:

“Our national teams are both the Latvian and the Russian teams. When they meet, it’s a win-win situation. We say the final was one round before already. Every winner is our winner” (AR, activist).

Concerning the question how respondents identify themselves to Latvia, ND (25-30, born in Russia) selected ‘Latvian values’, ‘Latvian language’ and ‘I grew up here’ from a list which also included ‘European values’, ‘Russian values’, ‘Russian language’ or ‘country of origin’. Still, just like the three other respondents, she said despite feeling close to Latvia and Latvians she is not an ethnic Latvian. Thus, it is possible to belong to Latvia and Latvians in terms of the home country, motherland, citizenship, ‘ancestors are from Latvia’, ‘Latvian culture and way of living’, but not in terms of ethnicity.

In fact, from interviews it shows that the most popular strategy for respondents to explain themselves *inside* Latvia is in terms of what they call ‘nationality’, but at the same time have difficulties explaining their sense of nationhood or sense of feeling belonging to the imagined national community. On questions such as ‘How do you identify yourself in Latvia?’, ‘are you Latvian?’ KK responded for example:

“Yes, but it’s difficult. Nationality means what kind of roots are behind you. I am a mix of five: Polish, Latvian, Russian, Belarusian, and Lithuanian. Lots of people are like that” (KK, student).

This difficulty is derived from the fact that in Latvia the term ‘nationality’ refers to their ethnicity. ‘Nationality’ does not give information on emotional attachment to (the dominant) nation in a nation-state (the national imagined community) or the nationality listed in people’s passports (their citizenship). At the core of the ‘nationality question’ of Russian-speakers in Latvia is an issue of terminology:

“There is no specific term in Latvian language referring to a person belonging to the Latvian nation. There is belonging to ethnicity but not nation” (AK, lawyer).

“A Rossiyanin Latviyets [a Russian-Latvian] means; ‘an ethnic Russian belonging to Latvian society [and country]”. “What ethnicity it concerns – Russian, Tartar, Ukrainian – doesn’t matter” (ibid).

Thus, a ‘Russian-Latvian’ is a Russian member of the Latvian population/society. In contrast:

“‘Ruski’ means Russian ethnicity – which Russian-speakers call ‘nationality’,

A Ruski Latviyets means an ethnic Russian living in Latvia” [a Latvian-Russian] (ibid).

However, as a result of the absence of a term for a sense of ‘Latvian nationhood’, and the fact ‘nationality’ is a synonym for ethnicity, Russian-speakers will answer with their ethnicity (‘Russian’, ‘Ukrainian’, ‘Polish’, ‘Lithuanian’, ‘Jew’ etc.) when they are asked to give their national identity. In doing so they do not necessarily reject emotional attachment to the nation of Latvians. MS (26) said it is crucial to understand ‘identity and ideas’ in order to understand integration in Latvia, shortly after I explained my interest in integration of Latvian society:

“My Grandfather is Ukrainian and moved to Latvia 20 years ago and my Grandmother is Belarusian. I have a Latvian mother, a Ukrainian father. My mother tongue is Russian and I live in Latvia. Still, my nationality is Ukrainian, which has a ‘historical status’. I don’t know Ukrainian, I have never been there but I am Ukrainian. There are many others like me” (MS, politician).

“We allow ourselves to be called ‘Russians’. Even if we are from Kazakhstan. It’s not only language ‘life behaviour’. My mother language and all my roots are from Russia. My mother is Russian.. My father-in-law is Jewish. He lives in Israel. If we collect everything based on ‘Russian rules’ – and nationality comes from the father – I have to be Jewish. But your motherland depends on the mother so I am Russian. I am born in Kazakhstan and live in Latvia” (SJ, mechanic).

Also OV on the question ‘How do understand yourself in Latvia?’ said: “No”. She misunderstood me and heard me say ‘do you understand yourself as a Latvian:

“How? Oh if you ask for my nationality I will say ‘Lithuanian’, but I don’t speak Lithuanian. My father is Lithuanian and mother is Russian”. During the census, when I was 8, the [interrogator] asked ‘What is your nationality’; I said ‘Lithuanian’. My mother was shocked because she is Russian. My dad was like; ‘that’s my girl!’ When you are small, it’s just where your father is from. To friends I say I am Lithuanian. Then they say ‘Oh you are from Lithuania’. No I am not from Lithuania. I am born in Latvia but I am Lithuanian.”

Rather OV said that ‘nationality’ (ethnicity) means ‘how a person feels inside’ and ‘What kind of roots are behind you’. Thus, ethnicity is a private and in-born matter and (following ‘Russian rules’) children chose the ethnicity of the father. Interestingly, earlier in the interview in the context of social boundaries between Russian-speakers and Latvians OV said to identify herself as ‘just people who live in Latvia’ and she did not think about her ethnicity. What becomes clear is that respondents separate between sense of belonging to Latvia(ns) and their ethnicity (which is not Latvian). Thus, from a Russian-speakers perspective (‘ideas and identities’), if you ask ‘do you understand yourself as part of the Latvian nation?’ is a different question than ‘What is your ‘national identity’ or ‘nationality’. In other words, national identity and ‘nationality’ or ethnicity, are a private family matter and has no connection with the citizenship that is listed in their passports nor with how close they feel to the Latvian nation. Thus, when Russian-speakers reject a Latvian ‘nationality’ they rejecting Latvian ethnicity as a result of having distinct non-Latvian origins. This does not mean they reject a sense of belonging to Latvia or Latvians. Such an understanding of nationality however lacks a clear external understanding:

“In Europe they do not understand this. Ethnic Latvians, they understand but do not want to follow it, because they have this idea that everybody who lives in Latvia is Latvian and everyone must be ethnic Latvian” (AR, activist).

This corresponds well with what many Latvians said about Russian-speakers. On top of the fact that for many (not all) Latvians it is bad that Russian-speakers don't always speak Latvian in the public space, some Latvians claim that Russian-speakers 'do not even identify with Latvia'. 'Go ask a Russian and he will say his national identity is Russian, not Latvian'.

Do respondents then say they feel as part of the Latvian nation? When it concerns associating with the term 'Latvian nation' not one respondents clearly expressed ideas or arguments for distancing, repulsion or 'difference from Latvian nation' (on 'Latvian culture' it is a different story, see 'economic and legal factors in belonging to Latvia'). Opposite, quite a few respondents did say they are part of the Latvian nation:

"'Russian' I am only when speak of culture and language. If I speak about nationality with people from Moscow, than I am Ukrainian. If I speak about nationality in Latvia, than background is not important. It's similar to the United States. There are Mexicans, Greeks, Italians, etc. They all are in the first place Americans. Thus in Latvia, we are all Latvians" (MS, politician).

"I am not Russian and not not Latvian. I am all of these. I am Greek, Ukrainian, Danish, Russian and Latvian. I speak fluent Latvian and most of the work I do is in Latvian if not in English" (VM, scholar).

IP, a parliamentarian provides an excellent example of a local Russian – born in Soviet-Riga – and understands himself both as Russian *and* Latvian. As he is born in the Soviet Union, the way he perceives his *motherland* and *hometown* becomes clear in how he describes a historical-geographic perspective of 'the Russian cultural space':

*"Our identity is the result of the very fact of being located outside the motherland on the west of it. So it is Russia; for me; I was born here as a Russian, I am a local Russian. I am a Latvian Russian. I am born from those who came to Latvia. I still do not regard Latvia something as outside Russia. Russia [Soviet Union] is the country I was born into. I do understand Latvia is a different country [now]; it is outside Russia, a different state with a different culture. I live close to Latvians and Latvia is imminent to my *heimat*. ... But please take into account that in the Soviet Union there was a mixture – it was a melting pot like New York. In fact, my generation who resided in Riga, were educated by the three largest cities. Leningrad [Saint-Petersburg], Moscow and Riga. This triangle made the bulk of our culture. Not ethnic origin. We read books published in Moscow, we saw movies and theatre set in Leningrad and Moscow. However, we resided here and knew the history of Riga better than the history of Leningrad. We had Latvian colleagues and friends. That is my identity."*

In the way IP explains his 'identity', it becomes clear that he rejects ethnicity as a communicator of his sense of belonging to Latvia. Instead he speaks of Latvia as his *motherland* although it was called different when he was born. Moreover, the culture he feels he belongs to (identifies with) is a mix of local Latvian elements – local history and culture of Riga – and from elements further away. Thus sense of belonging to the Latvian culture, *motherland*, *hometown*, is a product of both Latvian and Russian elements. The one does not (possibly even can't) exclude the other.

In sum, the analysis of interviews shows Russian-speakers do feel closeness to Latvia and the Latvian nation – namely as a Latvian with Russian origins; as a Russian-Latvian and not as an ethnic Russian who just happens to live in Latvia – a Latvian-Russian. In terms of feeling a

sense of nationhood towards the Latvian nation – the common imagined community – respondents reject ethnicity to be of primary importance. Rather, belonging is multiple depending on the context. When they are *in* Latvia, ethnicity (what they call ‘nationality’) is a private in-born aspect and not connected to sense of belonging to Latvia. As for territorial belonging, their homeland is both Latvia and the Soviet-Union and therefore includes cultural elements from both. Their Riga-based identity is strongest while identification with the republic Latvia or the Russian federation is rather absent from respondents answers. Last, they reject to be the same as Russians from Russia as well as having a Russian homeland.

5.3 Cultural factors: the meaning of being a Latvian-Russian

Cultural factors are factors such as ‘to be among people sharing the same culture (traditions, habits, norms and values, history, lifestyles) of which especially language can provide a ‘warm sensation’ of being at home. It gives a feeling that people not only understand what you say but also know what you mean. In the paragraph ‘language and the Russian-speaking community’ it became clear that for most respondents the mother tongue is the first layer that defines their minority identity in Latvian society. However, association to a ‘Russian community’ is a private choice; some do and so refuse this association. In the following paragraph it was shown that difference with Russian Russians is already apparent. From a historical-geographical perspective Russian-speakers perceive the Russian culture in Latvia as a mix of local elements, originating from Riga, and elements from Moscow and Leningrad. Together these findings already touched upon cultural factors. However, in addition to saying language and culture are layers of identity, respondents were also clear in how and when culture –Latvian and Russian elements – matter in their everyday lives. This paragraph will go deeper into the meaning of ‘Russianness’ (belonging to Russian cultural values) and ‘Latvianness’ (belonging to Latvian cultural values) and the position of Russian culture in Latvian society.

5.3.1 Balancing Latvian and Russian elements of culture

There exists a constant duality between Russian and Latvian elements in the way Russian-speakers shape their cultural belonging. Rather than choosing Latvian values or Russian values, respondents are looking for ways to balance the two. They are multiple and not mutually exclusive. Secondly, Russian-speakers make a distinction between the public and the private sphere. Some issues are fully a private choice while on certain topics respondents demand formal institutionalization and acceptance of ‘Russianness’ in Latvia. How Russian-speakers balance ‘Russianness’ (belonging to Russian culture) with ‘Latvianness’ (belonging to Latvian culture, both in the private and the public, is an important question in relation to the Ministry of Culture’s definition of the ‘Latvian Cultural Space’, ‘claiming Russianness’ should stay in the private sphere while in the public sphere ‘Russianness’ is in addition to ‘Latvianess’.

Respondents mentioned that in terms of personal (private) ‘cultural orientation’ Russia is often ‘more interesting’ to follow than the Latvian culture. Technological developments in communication and media enables many Russian-speakers living abroad to consume Russian news, television, books and other forms of entertainment originating from Russia. Though social

media and telecommunication (Skype) they also maintain social relations with friends and family in Russia and other countries. Respondents refer to Russian orientation as an important source for - in their terms - 'cultural knowledge', 'a source to understand the world', 'mentality', and 'cultural background'.

"We are Russian culture. We are periphery. The main new ideas, things and culture come from Moscow and we borrow it from Moscow" (AR, activist).

"I collect my knowledge since I was a child through the Russian language. Later, I started studying Latvian and English. These are a source for possibilities to talk to other 'speakers' but they are not 'a source to understand the world'. I choose Russian for the cinema, books, television, and to discuss things with friends. It's quite different from Latvian language – even arguing in Russian is different. In Russian there are many rude words they many Latvians also use nowadays" (SJ, mechanic).

"In official situations [in the public sphere] it's easy to speak Latvian. Among friends it is difficult to change language. Russian humour cannot be translated. The difference between Latvians and Russians is more about cultural background: movies, humour, literature, traditions, music, etc." (GI, chair of an NGO).

However, respondents also mention it is not *only* the Russian culture that matters in their everyday life. First, Latvian values are part of respondents' cultural belonging:

"When you live in another culture and you live with people from that culture; 70 to 80 per cent of that culture will be yours. Here it's Latvian so we are Latvian culture" (VS, politician).

Secondly, European norms and values are mentioned. In the previous paragraph it was shown respondents display 'European behaviour' compared to Russians from Russia. ND explains for her Europeanness is in a same way as Russianness, based on 'cultural background', 'ideas I am acquainted with', 'the terms I am speaking in and thinking in', and 'my dictionary how I think about social problems'. OV (student) described European values as something 'more international', 'some rules that work in every country' and 'some attitudes like to be polite and to respect others'. Another respondent (MS, a politician) described them as liberal values, democracy and freedom.

From this it follows that the Russian language is 'a source to understand the world' while Latvian and European values are also part of their cultural repertoire. However, Latvian and European values are more a 'vehicle for communication' (term by Vollenbaek, 2010) which are 'used' or portrayed in the public space if needed. It is also implied that ethnic Latvians also use Russian language in some instances over Latvian, in order to give the Russian language some positive values in Latvian society.

Respondents mention Russian linguistic and cultural identities are important issues to teach those Russian-speakers who are born in Latvia – both students and adults. Two teachers in a lyceum, a combined primary and high school, in Daugavpils say:

"We are not typical [identical] to Russia, what we keep and maintain is a question. It is to keep their identity, to learn the Russian language very well and to know where they are from" (N, director of a school).

To teach students ‘Where they are from’ the school has various extra-curricular activities: students learn classical Russian literature, they can take optional courses in Russian history, in handicraft and in folk dancing (Russian and Latvian). By teaching Russian cultural heritage they believe they give a lot to students. They hold typical Russian celebrations such as ‘saying bye to winter and hello to spring’, Ded Moroz (Father Frost, similar to Santa Claus) and Saint Tatjana ‘Day of Students’. There are two competitions this school joins – one organized by the Russian Consulate and the other by the House of Moscow – where the winner can earn a trip to Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Smolensk or a trip to ‘the house of Ded Moroz’ in the north of Russia. These trips are usually the only time students will go to Russia, because often if students have a choice to travel they usually go to Europe and not to Russia. During these trips, one teacher says:

“Then they see how different they are from Russian-Russian” (English teacher).

‘To maintain Russian traditions’ is also the main aim of the Russian Community of Liepāja, on western end of the country. Their aim is to reach out to those Russian-speakers who are born in Latvia and do not know Russian very good or have not heard Russian language so often. A secondary aim is to help integrate Russian-speakers in Latvian society by organizing activities to stimulate social inclusion. They do this by offering Latvian language courses for a low price, computer classes and by holding ‘woman meetings’ and ‘war-veteran meetings’ to provide the opportunity for people sharing similar problems to discuss these together. Also, by bringing together Latvians with Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusian’s, and others in various events, they wish to break their Russian-only social network and to create a more socially connected individual.

In fact, rather than only teaching Russian values – which the name ‘Russian Community’ implies – they are also working towards the emancipation of Russian-speakers by teaching them Latvian values and language and to participate in the public sphere.

“In these meetings, politics is not interesting. History is also not interesting. We focus on more positive things and ideas. It is about making Russians visible, to see who they are; ‘not them, but these people’” (GI, chair of an NGO).

Also the teachers from the Lyceum say that in addition to teach students ‘Where they are from’, knowledge of Latvian values is important. It is about giving opportunities’ in live and increasing their ability to integrate in the public space.

“We teach Latvian and also English because unfortunately many go abroad.” “Latvian language is gradually introduced in primary school, even more than is required by law. We created our own model in this. It is important to integrate. The older generation – like us - knows this better and we do not speak so good Latvian. Students are interested in learning Latvian – they see their parents and the limitations they have in communicating in society”. “We are not so much obsessed with the 2004 language reforms, we are more obsessed with how to make education better and give opportunities” (English teacher).

Additionally, they mention students are very much interested in learning Latvian as most students plan to go to the University in which only Latvian is spoken.

“The more languages, the better. The main thing is to create positive attitude towards languages, also Latvian. To create a feeling that it is good to come together. The older generation who speaks no Latvian at all is literally ‘dying out’” (English teacher).

From this it shows that the private and the public sphere are never really separated in respondents’ everyday lives. However, from various respondents it seems that for a big part of the Russian-speaking population, a good balance of Russian and Latvian values has yet to be developed. By asking respondents what they know of the social network of their friends and family it turns out there is a considerable group Russian-speakers who has a complete Russian-only social network. For example, KK grandmother has only Russian friends. About her mother KK is not sure, but most of her friends are Russian too. Also MS (politician) said his friends and family are completely submerged in a Russian-only social environment. SJ (mechanic) says he has some Latvian colleagues with whom he speaks Latvian (although with frequent mistakes) but all of his closest friends (20-30) are ‘Russian’; *“but of course we can sit together with Latvians and drink and joke, it’s not a problem haha.”* Finally, despite exposing visitors at the Liepāja Russian Community as much as they can to Latvian values - all employees speak Latvian language most of the time on the work floor and on the telephone – the reality is that inter-ethnic contact is rare in the centre and its activities. According to the chairwoman only 2% of their participants is ethnic Latvian (although she stresses those Latvian participants who do join always come back). In fact, from observing the activities they organize their main role seems to be to facilitate different cultural needs Russian-speakers might have in Latvia and to reduce social isolation. For example, in the centre there are meetings for WWII veterans where they meet fellow Russian-speakers, who otherwise would remain alone at home. The same goes for woman meetings.

5.3.2 When the private sphere interconnects with the public sphere

As said before, Russian-speakers separate between ‘Russianness’ in the private lives and ‘Latvianness’ as somewhere in-between the private and the public. However, there are situations when respondents mention they believe they should be granted certain rights in Latvian society (or the public space) that provide the opportunity to maintain their Russian culture and language. According to respondents it is natural and a very reasonable thing that where there is a *demand by a considerable proportion of the population* for certain cultural needs this should be provided. What respondents mention is that they look for ways of participating in Latvian society based on a mixture of Russian elements and Latvian elements. In relation to ethnic strife and ‘moral panics’ expressed by the Latvian government based on a perceived threat to the Latvian culture and language, the question is ‘to what degree do Russian-speakers claim ‘Russianness’ in Latvian public space’ – or what the Ministry of Culture defines as the Latvian Cultural Space? How should this be facilitated and on what rhetoric is this based?

IP earlier explained that the way he perceives Russian culture in Latvia is a mix of local Riga-based elements and elements from Moscow and Leningrad. However, he also mentioned it is very important to maintain and regenerate Russian culture and language *in* Latvia today. He

explains this does not conflict with a sense of ‘living close to Latvians’, seeing Latvia as immanent to his homeland, and knowing and respecting Latvian culture and language very well:

“Our cultural platform originates in the Russian language. This is the cultural platform not for Russians as a whole but the culture for the people residing here. Therefore, when (...) our opponents from our Latvian nationalistic political parties say ‘go away, go to your Russia’ or ‘if you want your children to learn your native language, you have the opportunity in Russia’ [we dislike this]. I argue that language is defined by a person who speaks that language. I stand for the protection of this particular language, in this state, in the place where I was born and where I reside. I conclude that my Russian identity comprises the fact of being very close to Latvia. If I wanted to go to Russia I would have left Latvia, but I still reside here. The identity of Latvian-Russians – I argue – is an opportunity to keep and regenerate the Russian culture – that is language, knowledge of history, knowledge of geography of Russia, Russian culture while still residing here in the Latvian environment – knowing and respecting traditions, customs, and the language of Latvians as well, no doubt!” (Parliamentarian).

Other demands centre around two topics: language in correspondence with state and other services and on language of instruction in schools. First, respondents believe they should be given the choice to receive correspondence with state agencies in the mother tongue. When respondents make an international comparison, they are surprised that in Finland for example it is possible to receive correspondence with the government in Swedish language as it is a second official language, even though the minority is much smaller. Respondents say to understand Latvian language is the only allowed language in national bodies, but in correspondence with local bodies Russian-speakers should be able to choose language:

In Daugavpils mainly Russians live. Why can they not use their Russian language? If we speak of common values and respect of human rights; all we need is equality. But Latvian Nationalists do not need equality, because they are afraid to lose their culture. But ‘come on’, Latvians didn’t lose their identity in the Soviet Union or in the German times. Why do you think now, when Latvian language is official and there are a lot of books, television, radio, websites in Latvian; you will lose it. And why do you think all Russians will refuse Latvian?” (AR, activist).

“The Latvian language is not threatened. Everyone understands that. When a language is spoken by more than one million people, the language will be reproduced” (TB, teacher).

In a similar way, the Latvianization of names listed in passports creates friction. In Latvian language, the letter ‘s’ is placed behind the first and last name of all males. For example, a fictive Russian-speaker called Igor Petronov would be listed as Igors Petronovs in a Latvian passport. This is problematic when a person wishes to visit family in for example Russia, as the border security will see two different names in the passport and other documentation. In Russia, Petronov and Petronovs are two different persons and consequently a Latvian-Russian needs to show a fair amount of documents to prove he is the same person as is listed in the passport.

“I am not against having Latvian words, but in my documents I want the language that I want! How I want it, not state, not Latvian nationalist, but me!” (AR, activist).

Unsurprisingly this respondent was critical to Latvians in the government. Instead of describing them as ‘democrats’ he described them as ‘ethnocrats’.

The second problematic issue is the language of instruction in schools. Here it becomes clear just how closely the private life is connected to the public life. This is because various respondents say the school is most important in shaping the ethnic and cultural identity of children. The school is where the private and public sphere come together. Unsurprisingly, there exists much discussion in Latvia on language of instruction and how much Russian language is allowed in schools (Figure 5.4). The following section will look at respondents’ answers on how they believe the education system should look like and at the experiences of those respondents who experienced the 2004 education reforms first hand.

As Chapter Four explained, some schools are in Latvian language only and other schools are bilingual where a maximum of 40% of all classes can be taught in Russian in high school years. In primary school the amount of classes taught in Russian language can be higher. In reality, VM explains, most education will be in Russian in the beginning of primary school with a gradual emersion into Latvian. As a result, persons leaving the high school are almost always bilingual. Some speak Latvian with an accent and others will be fluent. In the latter case they will not be recognized as Russian. For Russian-speaking parents who have to choose which school their child will go to, VK describes there are three considerations. First, if a Russian-speaker does not live in one of the bigger cities where there is no considerable Russian-speaking minority, there will be no Russian school. Secondly, in case a child comes from a mixed marriage (where one of the parents is a Latvian-speaker) the parents usually decide it is natural for the child to go to a Latvian school. Third; parents who do not speak Latvian at home, can decide to send their child to a Latvian school because they believe this is the best way to give better life opportunities. However, he knows many people who do this and people who do not. In fact, analysis of respondents show that for some it is a good strategy to send their children to a Latvian school, while others have their reservations about this. The main reservations are that parents believe their child will have difficulties following classes in Latvian language and therefore will miss the content of the (sometimes already difficult) subject at matter (for example physics), and more importantly that student run the risk they will forget their Russian origins.

OV represents an example of someone from a Russian-speaking family that was sent to a Latvian school and in retrospective is positive about it:

“Russian is my first language. When I was seven my parents send me to a Latvian school. “One day my parents told me ‘Ok my dear, you are going to Latvian school’. I didn’t know anything in Latvian, nothing, complete zero! Oh my god, they are speaking so fast and I couldn’t get the meaning of the words. But I learnt it. When I went to the third class, I was participating in a spelling competition and I got the first place. Strange? “It’s not strange” (student).

I asked her why her parents send her to a Latvian school?

“Because the political situation was changing; the Soviet Union had just collapsed and Latvia became independent, and if you are living in Latvia, maybe you should learn the language! That’s a good reason, even in Daugavpils! I went to Latvian high school and later to University of Latvia. That’s pretty Latvian!

Figure 5.3 Русской школе быть, meaning ‘Russian schools should stay’.



And actually I want to say ‘thank you’ to my parent, because now, it’s great to know another language!”

Other respondents mentioned they are less optimistic towards Latvian schools. Reasons for not sending children to a Latvian school are concerns that too much emulsion of Latvian values and language in school does not necessarily guarantee that the Russian layer will be retained. IP, parliamentarian and chairman of an NGO, explains why it is important to maintain bilingual education in Latvia and the opportunity to bring up children within the family language:

“We perceive language as the product of ethnic culture and bearer of the culture, and also the means for regenerating the culture. If you like to see your children and grandchildren to have the same culture, same upbringing, same virtues, it’s very important to keep the command of family language.”

For IP, this is crucial because cultural identity of the parents – in terms of knowledge of Russian language - and a student’s self-respect is closely connected. Therefore he believes primary and secondary education should remain in student’s mother tongue. He makes a comparison where children from Canadian-indigenous families who were placed in Canadian families. Here, children were disconnected from their native culture and as a result stopped respecting their own families, their traditions and culture. For him, this ‘lack of self-respect’ is caused by a lack of cultural identity. This is confirmed by TB, a university teacher. She describes the role of the history books and the image of the enemy that is created of Russians in these books in relation to a child’s self-respect. TB explains that having learnt the Latvian perspective of history together with a Latvian-only environment in school, Russian-speaking students stopped respecting their own culture:

“If you are a Russian-speaker and you are in class with a sometimes xenophobic or Russophobe teacher and you read this book in class, how do you feel? I know parents who had problems with this and took their children out of those schools. Their children stopped speaking Russian to them and

they started to become ashamed of their culture. It was a break of the generation. ... It's not only about switching the language, it's about switching the paradigm, the cultural, to self-evident perception of what it means to be Russian and everything that is hidden in yourself. This happened to more families. These are real life stories. If you read the history books you will understand."

A lack of self-respect is also connected to malfunctioning bilingual education in Russian schools. According to IP, this is a result of that students are thought 'double-standards' in class. PM describes a situation of a school where all students in a class are from Russian-speaking families and are thought by a teacher who is Russian-speaker as well, but speaks very basic Latvian. IP explains that as the teacher struggles with Latvian, the students gradually stop respecting the teacher. Secondly, behind closed doors teachers sometimes still teach class in Russian. The result is that according to IP, students are brought up in the atmosphere of hypocrisy. It is a message that it is not necessary to follow government law and Latvian language should be displayed only when needed, for example, when language inspectors visit class.

Although IP stands for education in the mother tongue for those who want this, the optimal situation is becoming fluent in two languages, not assimilation.

"We live in a multi-cultural environment so it is very important to acquire the knowledge of other languages too, such as the Latvian language. It's the language of the largest ethnic group here."

A way to stimulate bilingualism, respondents mention is to send children to a Latvian kindergarten. Here they are exposed to Latvian language at an early age while after kindergarten they will be sent to a Russian primary and high school:

"I don't like to change my mother language. But my children also have to learn Latvian, and English and probably French. Now it's quite common to send your children to a Latvian kindergarten. This is a possibility to hear and study Latvian. But primary and secondary school has to be Russian. There is quite a big difference in mentality between Latvians and Russians" (SJ, mechanic).

The presented perspectives are from adults and their position towards bilingual education. The following perspectives are from graduated students providing actual experiences with the bilingual school system.

ND: *"I liked it. Youth gain information in two languages and languages open different doors"* (chair of an NGO).

KK: *"Before I spoke Russian all the time, it was difficult to speak Latvian. In school there are two groups: Latvians hang out with Latvians and Russians with Russians. They just look who is who and then they join their group. For me luckily students from the Russian group were stupid so I joined the Latvian group. I'm pretty proud now of having good Latvian"* (student).

On the question 'Do you have mixed friends?' AK answered:

"I do not have many friends at all, but the friends I have are Russian. It's natural, I gained them in school" (lawyer).

This shows students have various options over what friends they make and no difficulties with following class or a lack of self-esteem or double standards. Rather they are *interested* in the

benefits and opportunities. These former students do not seem to be much concerned with cultural identities. This means that on the Latvianization of Russian-speaking students, respondents have different opinions, and propose different strategies on how to deal with it.

In sum, this paragraph has shown that respondents agree they need Russian in the private sphere, while in the public sphere they are interested and willing to add Latvian values and language to their cultural repertoire. Russianness in Latvia, or to be Russian-speaker in Latvia, is understood as belonging to the Latvian *and* Russian culture and the government should provide opportunities to learn both language *in* Latvia. In response to Latvianization of the education system, respondents who are parents express concerns that too much Latvian influence by going to a Latvian school could negatively influence a student's self-respect; students themselves are more interested in the benefits of knowing more languages. In general, demands for 'Russianness' in the public space are mostly related to equality and freedom of choice. However, such claims are understood as reasonable in a democratic country, especially because they form a large enough proportion of the Latvian population to have those demands granted. Important as well is that respondents clearly reject the rhetoric of the state that Russian-speakers are a potential threat to the Latvian language. Rather, they claim belonging to the Latvian cultural space and Latvian territory:

"I still think that Latvian-Russians are a reserve or a resource for the protection and maintenance of the Latvian culture. We as Latvian-Russians know who Latvians are and what language they speak. Better than those Moroccans [or any other immigrant] who would come here without any Latvian language command who simply regard Latvia as a patch of territory on the Baltic Sea shore" (IP, parliamentarian).

Thus, culture and feeling a sense of belonging to Latvia is clearly something multiple and respondents do not feel the need to choose between Latvian and Russian elements of culture and language. The following quote by EK on the meaning of Latvian culture captures a common struggle for many Russian-speakers and a problem the Latvian state.

"The Latvian culture 'is' a base for integration. It's our common value. We need to care about Latvian culture and language. But no Latvian-Russian will help preserving Latvian language if that means to give up your own language" (EK, lawyer).

5.4 Economic and legal factors

The last paragraph of this empirical chapter will discuss economic and legal factors of place-belongingness. In interviews various respondents were clear that in their daily lives, economic and legal issues are often more important factors influencing their sense of place-belongingness than linguistic, ethnic, or cultural factors. For example, on integration:

"For many Russian-speakers the cultural issue is not obligatory to integrate; the welfare of the state and democracy is enough to integrate into society" (EK, lawyer).

Additionally, answers on economic and legal factors of belonging are similar and often connected. Often they relate to a person's 'mode of participation' or 'what someone does' in

society, rather than their various personal ethnic identities. Therefore economic and legal factors will both be discussed in this paragraph.

Following Antonsich, economical and legal factors for developing a sense of belonging are issues that can create opportunities for self-realization, a feeling to be free and to live according to their own capabilities. Having professional skills and the status of ‘a legal’ can generate a feeling of being an equal and worthy member of society. This can lead to a stronger sense loyalty or national-identification to Latvia (Kymlicka, 2003). Ultimately, such factors can develop a sense of belonging that will stimulate a person to invest in their social life, career, education, future life of children, linguistic skills and other cultural capital.

In Latvia, currently 14, 6% of the population (over one-third of the minority population) is non-citizen. However, as Chapter Four explained the ‘legal situation’ of non-citizens is other than being deprived voting rights and certain jobs, not much different to Latvian citizens. Secondly, concerning integration in the labour market, Hazans (2011) reports the unemployment gap between Latvians and Russian-speakers almost completely disappeared in 2007, while there exists a modes occupational segregation (*ibid*)¹². Although for some it is a discussion whether Russian-speakers are newcomers or not, the fact remains that Russian-speakers are fully integrated in Latvia’s economy.

5.4.1 “I’m born here, I pay taxes and I speak Latvian; what’s the problem?”

Analysis of interviews reveals the degree of integration in the economy is a central component in many respondents’ answers in the way they describe their situation in Latvia, and that it is not popular to speak of ethnic-politics, while Latvia is in a economic crisis.

“After 20 years in a country, the most important things are issues of the country itself – topics such as democracy, taxes, and that life and things are good in this country” (EK, lawyer).

“Everything is bad in this country, the economy is very bad. We work here every day and we are older than 60. Look at grandma over there; she is older than 80. We will work in your country and be free the rest of the week” (a market woman).

“When you have a full stomach you can start thinking about ethnic things” (a market woman).

“[Russians] think about job, family life, and income. This is 80 per cent of the Russian-speakers. They don’t care about referenda’s of abolishing Russian language in schools. It is the problem of a Post-Soviet mentality. This is not only the case for Latvia, but also Estonia, Ukraine, Russia, or the whole Post-Soviet world. There do not think about public life [civil society]. For them it is normal the communist government did everything: ‘we must just work, eat, study etc.’” (MS, politician).

Central in respondents answers on their ‘mode of participation’ in society – whether legal or economic factors – is that their sense of place-belongingness is defined in pragmatic terms and

¹² Russian-speakers are overrepresented compared to Latvians in industry, construction and market services, while underrepresented in agriculture, forestry and fishery and managerial senior functions (Hazans 2010). One-quarter of minority persons are employed in public administration, NGOs, or in publicly owned enterprises, which is almost half the number of their share in the population (Kallas 2008, Hazans 2011).

personal ‘opportunities’, ‘less problems’ or ‘comparative advantages’ of knowing more languages in relation to people who know only one language.

“I speak both languages and I am citizen, so I have no problems” (a market woman).

“Latvian is important; in many jobs you need both languages If you want a good job you need to speak Latvian. Everybody knows this” (KK, student).

In asking ‘do you feel a choice is necessary between identification to the Latvian and Russian language in Latvia as a Russian-speaker?’ ND answered:

“No, but Russian is added value, if you know Russian language and cultural background. Especially abroad. Not everybody in Latvia knows Russian language” (chair of an NGO).

Similarly, the issue of citizenship is also often put together with comparative advantages and in terms of knowing Latvian language. Citizenship is defined for many in terms of (lacking) opportunities that come with naturalizations. Rather Latvian language skills are important.

“I am citizen. But it is up to them [non-citizens] to get it or not. Still you need Latvian language and all in all it’s not very good to be non-citizen. But you don’t speak about it. [Basically] you just need to learn the language” (VS, chair of an NGO).

In fact, attitudes towards the issue of non-citizenship differ widely, ranging from ‘feeling surprised’, ‘feeling humiliated’, ‘feeling certain economical constraints’, ‘indifference’, to ‘political and social alienation’. These attitudes will be presented in the following six quotes.

“In 1992, I, my mother, my grandmother and my father in law received alien passports. My grandmother lives here since 1944. It has been already 67 years, and she is still ‘alien’. She worked all her live here in Latvia. [Still], ‘aliens’ pay the same tax but can’t attend elections and there are about 60 professions prohibited for ‘aliens’. Not only government positions, there are a lot” [of restrictions] (SJ, engineer).

“It’s humiliating to pass naturalization tests if they are born here. They are not seen as equals in the first place” (EK, lawyer).

“My friends all had to prove they were Latvian” (KK, student).

“I paid taxes to this country but do not receive pension money from the time I served in the army [because of the non-citizen status]” (market man).

“At the moment it is ok [to be non-citizen], it has been ok too. I am indifferent. I don’t care whether I have [citizenship] or not. I don’t mind if I can’t vote. I can naturalize if I want but I don’t feel different from others. I don’t know about restrictions, I just don’t bother. I know I can’t vote and for the rest there are some jobs I can’t have but I don’t know about them” (English teacher).

The English teacher was not bitter or frustrated but rather totally indifferent to her ‘alien’ status. She believes she has a good job and a stable social life where she is not limited by her non-citizen status. As she speaks reasonable Latvian, she is also not constraint in her daily life by language. Another respondent pointed out it is problematic that citizenship to those who are born in Latvia is not granted by default. Now the young parents have to go to the municipality and

apply for Latvian citizenship. Many parents do not do this and the result is that there are still non-citizen born in Latvia. Finally, a non-citizen on the market in Daugavpils said that she understands, reads and writes correspondence with the state in Latvian language, but refuses to speak any Latvian because of her non-citizenship status.

“If they don’t make me citizen I will not speak Latvian and will never speak it.”

From this it follows respondents are to various levels receptive to the policies (of politics of belonging) imposed on the minority. For some their non-citizen status affects their economic life negatively, some stress they are surprised to find out they are not accepted as equals in the first place because from their point of view they feel already part of Latvia. Still others believe non-citizenship is even unproblematic and unrelated to their sense of place-belongingness to Latvia. They rather ignore politics of belonging by the state all together.

To understand the attitudes towards non-citizenship better, it is interesting to see what respondents’ experiences with naturalization are. Analysis of interviews shows that attitudes are different now compared to 10-20 years ago. In the 90s, attitudes were associated with ‘a feeling of pride of personal accomplishment’ and with interests in the benefits:

“I am proud I was one of the first who did the citizenship tests. I obtained it faster than my brother. I needed it for my job for the municipality” (GI, chair of an NGO).

“I obtained it because I needed it for work; it’s up to the others if they want it” (SJ, mechanic).

However, corresponding with much lowered naturalization levels shortly after 2004s EU accession (Chapter Four), respondents’ answers on the willingness to naturalize went from an initial interest in ‘increased economic benefits and opportunities that come with naturalization to low interest in the benefits. In all answers the practicality of citizenship is central:

“Naturalizations are decreasing: who wanted already has it. People who wanted to leave to Russia have already left. Or the ones who wanted to go to Europe got citizenship already. It’s a closed question now. People decide for themselves now” (KK, student).

“Now there are not so many advantages to be Latvian. Latvia is in crisis and people emigrate. Before joining the EU ... there was optimism of the opportunities given by the EU and people wanted to participate in the benefits. [Now], the EU did not give what we hoped for and also the travelling issue is solved now, so the clear benefits and optimism of getting citizenship are a bit gone. No hopes for a better live [economically] with Latvian citizenship” (EK, lawyer).

“Now there are less people interested. It’s not about values or patriotism, but just practical, individual and pragmatic reasons. They do not care about identity” (MS, politician).

Interesting to note here is that citizenship or naturalization were not associated by respondents with (official) membership of a Latvian nation (the imagined community), loyalty, patriotism or belonging to the state Latvia. Recent naturalized persons do not see citizenship as a marker of belonging to the group ‘Latvians’ as the undivided imagined community that makes up the Latvian population. Rather, non-citizenship and naturalization are downplayed to merely benefits, opportunities, or limitations in their *own life* and in their daily ‘mode of participation’.

Also language is described as an asset to function in society, rather than membership or belonging to the nation. However, even non-citizens, whether they feel surprised, limited or indifferent to their legal status, did not mention they wish to leave Latvia or to stand apart as a separate group. Looking back to what Natalia said earlier, she still mentions a sense of belonging to Latvia connected to citizenship in terms of ‘Latvia, the land’ as the place where she lives and not ‘Latvia, the state’ or the ‘Latvian nation’:

“For me it’s belonging to my place where I live. And I love Latvia because it’s small with beautiful nature. You can work in the city and in 10 minutes enjoy swimming in the lake or approach your country house. It’s just wonderful place to live and raise kids” (ND, chair of an NGO).

Apparently, it is possible to feel a sense of belonging to the land Latvia while feeling no or a low sense of official belonging at (or identification with) the state level. It shows again that place-belongingness should be understood as multiple; lacking one layer of belonging (belonging to the state) does not exclude another (belonging to the nation). However, just as non-citizens are to various degrees receptive to the politics of belonging by the state, also naturalized respondents mentioned their encounters with the state negatively affects their sense of belonging to Latvia. This will be discussed in the next paragraph.

5.4.2 Encounters with the state; a broader agenda of minority exclusion?

Analysis of interviews reveals two ways in which already naturalized respondents view the state’s minority policy, their relationship with the state and how this negatively affects their sense of belonging to Latvia (which is ironically enough opposite to the aims of the new integration guidelines).

First, respondents point towards what they see as a broader agenda of minority exclusion, in addition to exclusion by stringent citizenship laws. Even after having naturalized and passed several exams, respondents expressed a perceived difficulty to be Russian *and* Latvian at the same time in Latvia. Consequently, this lead to feeling rejected and alienation, which Antonsich described as the opposite of sense of belonging (Chapter Two). For example, above it was shown the director and the English teacher of a Russian lyceum were indifferent to the citizenship issue. Instead they feel strongly for creating a positive attitude towards learning Latvian language in their school as all students (mostly Russian-speakers) will need it in their future lives, especially as most students of the lyceum go to university after they graduate. For this reason they are surprised when the national language inspection visits their school and demands all Russian-speaking staff ‘to have a talk and show your writing skills’. They describe their experience with the language inspection:

“I will speak Latvian [with the inspection] and they will say you speak Latvian with mistakes [although no consequences follow as they pass the minimum requirements]. This is not pleasant. But what’s the point? It doesn’t influence our job or abilities. For example; if I need to fill in a form, I fill it in and ask a Latvian teacher to check it. No problem. Just make us normal! As if there is something wrong with me. Less and less people do not speak Latvian at all. We would like to know why they do

all that. We integrate, we are tolerant, citizens, real, we respect the country and we want respect back as well. "I did pass several tests and I am still not fully accepted" (N, director of a school).

GI is an example of an integrated Russian-speaker who, despite being born in Latvia, naturalized in the 90s in order to work for the municipality. After having worked for several years at the municipality she heard she was regarded as 'not completely a Latvian'. She felt betrayed and described this as 'getting a knife in your back'. Especially as she worked for the country, paid taxes and 'did everything legal'. Now, the most important thing for her is to get respect back from Latvia. TB, a teacher in a school in Riga who previously worked for the parliament for six years, had visited the presentation of the new 'Action Plan for Integration and National Identity' by the minister of Culture, a week before our interview. From this she understands exclusion does not stop after fulfilling naturalizations and passing several tests:

"Basically, we are being offered a menu by the state; you can either be an immigrant or you can be an ethnic Latvian. I asked the minister: 'Am I an immigrant?' I was born in Latvia, my father is born in Latvia but my grandfather isn't.. ... The minister asked me; 'Are you a citizen?' Yes, I naturalized, exams and everything! The answer was: 'Then you can choose an immigrant identity and be a minority or you can choose to become [ethnic] Latvian'. I thought: Can I have just a citizen identity? I don't want to put out my Russian identity. I just want to be part of this nation" (TB, a teacher).

This respondent has in the course of her life passed eight state exams: after finishing a Russian high school, at entry to the university, at finishing the university, for the Latvian language certificate, for naturalization and more. Despite having proven the wish to be part of Latvia she feels she is not given the possibility to have multiple affiliations. SJ (mechanic) answer own the relationship between being a Russian-speaker, a citizen, the economy of Latvia and belonging to 'the country Latvia' shows the same difficulties. On the question 'How do you consider yourself in this country', SJ answered:

"Well, mostly Russian of course. If I can compare my mentality with the Latvian one I am Russian. Of course I work in this country and I would like to see this country strong. And I don't want to join Russia or restore the Soviet Union. Haha, that's not the point at all! I would like to be [recognized as] a Latvian citizen, but I'm Russian; at least by my mother language" (mechanic)

TB argues that the idea that Russians do not naturalize because they do not want to learn Latvian is a myth. Rather, Russian-speakers are very much aware that Latvian language since the political transformations in 1991 is a crucial asset to learn in Latvian society. She knows many people who did try to naturalize and learn the language and were disappointed because they could not pass the exams. Consequently they stopped trying. *"It created alienation."* These answers correspond with recent figures by the Latvian Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs (January 2011). Almost half of the naturalization applicants fail naturalization exams (44%). Regarding the reasons why non-citizens do not naturalize, one-third said they cannot pass the naturalization test while one-fourth believes citizenship should be granted to them automatically. 17% is waiting for easier naturalization procedures. From this it shows most problematic is the inability to pass the test and second the unwillingness to pass a naturalization test in the country they are born.

In this respect TB says that in her experience, knowledge of Latvian by Russian-speakers improves all the time, but developments could have been much faster. She says optimism to learn Latvian was much higher in the 90s. For her this is the result of a feeling of rejection. *“When you feel rejected than... [you will not do what you are told]. It’s the same everywhere.”* Also two other respondents said that in fact the biggest promoter of belonging to a ‘Russian community’ or ‘identification with Russian-speakers’ are not Russian-speakers themselves, but the Latvian government and various Latvians they consider nationalistic. On the question ‘do you feel part of a Russian-community?’ two respondents said:

“Yes I do consider myself belonging to that and it is a result of the state policy. If there were no obstacles created for language in public life – to get public services in Russian language – than it would not be such an active part of my identity. I mean, a discriminating attitude works to create self-consciousness as a group by the features that are discriminated against. The question is ‘which effect will be stronger’: the effect of compliance or the effect of provoking resistance and self-understanding as being different?” (AK, lawyer).

“There is no such thing at ethnic groups; rather it is a process of ethnicization and making of groupness. If it is language or ethnicity that is made important and based on that you get some rights or privileges, of course it becomes important to you. I will become part of your identity. It’s institutional; if you invest heavily in such constructs it works” (TB, teacher).

Thus, where the minister of integration believes Russian-speakers lack a sense of belonging to Latvia which needs active policy to be strengthened, respondents mention to already have a sense of belonging to Latvia and the ‘people of Latvia’, which does not need to be proven through naturalization. Moreover, those who did comply perceive new ways of exclusion and are surprised to find out they apparently do not belong in Latvia the way they are now. The following quotes captures very well how respondents perceive governments minority policy.

“What do we want as Russians?” That [the government] leaves us alone basically. That we stop proving every day and every month that we have the right to be in this nation-state. We are growing tired of this. We as ‘liberal Russians’ who do speak the language and did pass the tests. Why do we not think about welfare, economy and more non-cultural integration issues and the problem will solve itself? The 200 000 emigrants who left the country to stay forever in Ireland and the United Kingdom; they don’t care about Latvian values (...). They are fine being Irish as well and create a future for their children there?” (TB, teacher).

The government has to pay attention to the people who live and work for the country. It should not depend on language. It should be the people” (SJ, an engineer).

The second way respondents describe their relationship with the state is ignoring the state altogether and ‘skip’ Latvia as a marker of belonging. To this approach includes self-identifications and a sense of belonging to Latvia such as ‘I am Cosmopolitan’, ‘I am a European Russian’, or ‘I can live anywhere’. For them place-belongingness is something flexible and not bounded to only Latvia. It is a kind of non-belonging:

“All it’s bad to be non-citizen. But I am cosmopolitan – I can live everywhere, I am flexible. You just need to learn the language” (VS, chair of an NGO).

“We are Latvian culture”. It’s natural; I can live anywhere; I live in the EU, the world, and Latvia” (IP, parliamentarian)

“What are the Latvian rules? I am skipping them. I am trying to quite, the closer I feel to Friday [as she will immigrate to Greece]. [However], I am a bit afraid to go. I want to stay, because here are all my friends, my family, everything and I am going to a place where I don’t know anyone” (OV, student).

Interesting enough this last respondent mentioned earlier she feels positive towards the Latvian nation but as becomes clear from this quote, rather in terms of biographic and relational factors. Sense of place-belongingness to Latvia as a state such as patriotism or loyalty seems rather low. AR (activist) gives a historical perspective;

“Latvia was part of the USSR and now the EU. [It is] the art of [living in a] big multi ethnic empire. We should not be afraid of this word. Empire means ‘multi ethnic big state’. For Russians to live in an empire, it’s ok! Because we lived in the Russian empire, the Soviet-Union, and now the European empire. For us it is very good when a state is very big, because you have much more possibilities to make your career, to earn money and to travel etc.”

“We can live in a big empire and keep our identity, it’s even better. Just take out all national borders in Europe. I will remain a Riga dweller. I will still be Latvian because historical it will be Latvia, but it will be not so important. My Russian identity is more important than my Latvian. I live in the EU, I live in Latvia, but tomorrow I can live in England or Germany; who cares?” (ibid).

However, attitudes expressed by AR and his friends towards Europe, are not the same at all times and moreover, they can be positive and negative at the same time:

Many of my friends have different opinions towards Europe. We can like Europe because of no borders but at the same time we can hate it because of communal taxes are increasing. We do not even have the same attitudes to the same thing at the same moment” (ibid).

AR believes Latvia is not an independent state anymore since it joined the EU, and therefore does not need to identify himself anymore to it. For this reason he is very critical to Latvian nationalism:

“I can’t understand what the base of their nationalism is! Economically they are nothing. They have their own culture but it is nothing compared to the Russian, German, Swedish or Polish. Russians were the first in space; we had nuclear weapons and developed science. The reality is that we are a big nation and they are a small nation. And nationalism of small nations is always ridiculous. They even want to assimilate us? Russians? ‘Come on’, that’s impossible! You can’t make it artificial as they want. The vast majority of Russians is born here and it’s our territory, it’s our land. We don’t want to be integrated!” (ibid).

“Of course we need to stimulate Russians to learn Latvian, but only because it gives economic benefits. But we are no fanatics; Latvian is a tiny language useful only ‘in’ Latvia” (ibid).

In sum, AR believes Latvia is not entirely an independent nation-state, nationalism by a small nations like Latvia is ‘ridiculous’ and sees national borders as barriers to economic opportunities (as opposed to empires). In doing so, he expresses a very low sense of belonging to Latvia in legal terms. Instead, he identifies to Riga first and second Europe. However, he still expresses a sense to ‘Latvia, our land’ and ‘Latvia; our territory’ and the Latvian language as it gives economic benefits.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter set out to identify the major topics of belonging to Latvia expressed by Russian-speakers in order to understand what it means to be a Russian-speaker in Latvia. The results show that minority persons feel a sense of place-belongingness to Latvia in terms of autobiographic factors, cultural factors and economic factors. Respondents say to feel a low sense of belonging to Latvia in legal terms.

Autobiographic factors include feelings such as sense of belonging to ‘the land Latvia’, to the country they grew up in (homeland), were born into (motherland) and share the history and culture of. Historically they are all part of or ‘the Latvian people’. This becomes clear in their rejection of feeling a sense of belonging to Russia or Russians from Russia, to which substantial differences are experienced. When they are in Russia or elsewhere outside Latvia, they are Baltic-Russians, ‘from Latvia’ or ‘Latvians with a Russian mother tongue’. However, *in* Latvia, belonging to ‘Latvians’ is more complicated. This has to do with the fact that ‘Latvians’ is a very ambiguous term; it refers both to nationhood (a sense of belonging to the imagined community) and to ethnicity. First, respondents are very clear in that they are neither ‘Latvian’ by ethnicity nor will they become ethnic Latvian in the close future. Ethnicity is passed on though the father, similar to a person’s last name, and therefore understood as an inborn aspect. Second, respondents use the term ‘ethnicity’ synonymously with ‘nationality’ or ‘national-identity’. However, all imply origins of the family and not a sense of national consciousness. Contrary, respondents did mention identification to ‘local Russian-speakers’ who’s ‘way of living is also Latvian’, pride towards both Latvia’s and Russia’s national sports teams, and a clear repulsion from the category ‘immigrants’ as just ‘ethnic Russians who happen to live in the territory of Latvia’ (as Latvian-Russians). Rather, the category ‘Russian-Latvians’, signifying they are in the *first* place ‘Latvians’ and only secondary Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Polish, Jewish etc. is expressed to be a suitable category by respondents. Often a comparison to the United States’ ‘melting pot’ is made where, despite the many different ethnicities that live there, all people are ‘Americans’. Thus, in a profound multicultural country such as Latvia, ethnicity is not considered an important issue.

The results show that cultural factors, most notable their Russian mother tongue, are equally important in their sense of place-belongingness. However, respondents separate between ‘Russianness’ in their private lives and in their public lives. For some, the Russian culture and language is an important aspect of their personal identity and a ‘way to understand the world’, but they do not need to be recognized as belonging to the group Russian-speakers in the public sphere. They are able to be Latvian and Russian at the same time and have no difficulty to switch

cultural codes. For others, 'Russianness' is both a private and a public matter and feel a strong sense of belonging to 'the Russian Community'. They have a rather strong opinion towards maintaining Russian as a language of instruction in schools and to the language of correspondence with the state. A key conclusion is that after many years of living alongside each other in a multi-cultural society, full integration in the economy, a high degree of intermarrying, differing knowledge of the Latvian language and having a bilingual education system, a Russian-speaker has a broad range of possibilities to interpret him or herself today in Latvia. Respondents explain cultural belonging in terms of a *mixture of Latvian and Russian elements, as well as European*. 'Russianness' is explained as a product of Latvian and Russian elements, originating from Riga and other cities in Russia. Similarly, Latvianness is seen as a mixture of many cultures. Respondents understand themselves as *a resource* for regenerating Latvian language and culture rather than being a tread to it. A sense of belonging to Latvians is implied, only in so far being 'Latvian' does not mean having to drop their Russian values and language in their private lives.

Sense of belonging to Latvia in economic terms include issues of the country itself – such as welfare, democracy, the economy and their 'mode of participation' by paying taxes through employment, having naturalized, and respect the country. Respondent mention this is often more important than cultural factors. Knowledge of Latvian language and Russian language is defined in benefits and opportunities. However, Latvia's economy is also criticized as it is hard to find a place in Latvian economy. Respondents were critical to the government and politicians that the debate is too much focused on ethno-political and cultural issues.

In a similar way, legal factors are explained in benefits, opportunities, and in pragmatic terms. Reasons mentioned for obtaining citizenship are 'I just needed it for my job' or 'I am non-citizen but I don't need citizenship for my job'. Also, opinions of naturalization shows that as expectations of increased benefits lowered after 2004 (EU accession) and 2007 (entering Schengen). In all cases, citizenship is not related to a sense of official belonging to the country, patriotism or equality. Instead, non-citizens and already naturalized persons are surprised to find out they are not accepted as equals in the first place by the state, despite being born in Latvia. This can be described as a 'spoiled sense of belonging' and alienation from the state. A low sense of belonging to Latvia in legal terms is also expressed by feeling in the first place a strong sense of belonging to their hometown (Riga) and secondly to Europe. In stating 'they can live anywhere', they bypass belonging to the state Latvia. Respondents perceive this negative judgment by the state as a barrier to be 'a Latvian (citizen)' and to be a Russian-speaker at the same time.

In sum, the results show that not only is it possible to feel a sense of belonging to Latvia or the Latvian nation in autobiographic, economic and cultural terms, without feeling a sense of belonging at the official or state level, the results also show that sense of belonging should be approached as made up by multiple layers. One layer does not exclude another.

Chapter 6 Conclusion: ‘Do Russian-speakers belong to Latvia?’

By feeling she is offered a menu on how to belong to Latvia, TB’s experience mentioned at the very beginning of this thesis is typical for highlighting the growing gap between on the one hand, a strong concern on binary categories (‘us’ and ‘them’) by European governments in the way they ‘deal with diversity’ and on the other hand the multiple workings of diversity as it is experienced in the everyday lives of ordinary people. Instead of recognizing European societies are multicultural, European states understand themselves as nation-states where the (core)nation and the state can and should be spatially congruent and where the socio-spatial ‘identity’ has already been formed. In failing to recognize the ‘super-diverse’ conditions, governments and makers of minority policy show there is a need to better understand the multiple workings of diversity on the ground.

This thesis has taken Latvia as a borderland at the periphery of the EU and the former Soviet Union to study diversity. The aim has been to explore how a sense of belonging to Latvia is imagined, narrated, experienced, and practiced by ordinary Russian-speakers living in nationalizing Latvia. More specifically, it studied how sense of belonging by minority persons – alternative modes of belonging – is shaped by the dynamic interplay between sense of individual place-belongingness and the politics of belonging by the state. The central research question has been: *“In what ways do Russian-speakers feel a sense of belonging to Latvia in nationalizing Latvia?”*

This concluding chapter will first provide an overview of the main findings and insights gained along the two sub-questions formulated in the introduction. Second, a discussion of how the results contribute to existing scholarship will follow together with how this thesis’ conceptual ‘lens’ has brought new insights for understanding ‘sense of belonging’ by minority persons in contemporary European societies. Then a recommendation for minority policy in Latvia will follow, identifying a common ground or common language for integration, based on an analysis of what signifies ‘a Latvian’ by the Latvian state and by the minority. Finally, a critical reflection on the limits, shortcomings and biases of the research will follow. To what extent has the planning, conducting and reporting of the research been successful and how can these shortcomings be overcome?

6.1 Politics of belonging by the state: What constitutes ‘Latvia’ and ‘a Latvian’?

Chapter Four provided a critical deconstruction of the prevailing discourses of belonging articulated ‘from above’ by the Latvian state since 1991 (the national mode of belonging). What can be concluded is that two decades following Latvia’s re-independence, Latvian nation-building and national identity-building practices by the way various Latvian governments is underpinned by a ‘core nation discourse’ and ‘a standardizing state discourse’. Ethnic Latvians, including the Latvian language, Latvian culture, and Latvian interpretation of history, have structurally been given a higher status, compared to non-Latvians. Additionally, a discourse of

‘de-Sovietisation’ and a discourse of ‘a return to Europe’ has been identified, which basically justifies a negative image of everything connected to the Soviet-Union or Russia, including the minority, the Russian culture and most importantly: the Russian language. The government’s aim to assimilate – or ‘Latvianize’ – the minority has up to 2011 been focused on restrictive citizenship policy (in 2011 still 312.000 non-citizens live in Latvia, while 44% of applicants fail naturalization exams, PMLP, 2012), language policy and education reforms allowing less classes to be taught in Russian. These policies make it clear that the central aim is to strengthen the bond between Latvia and ethnic Latvians while loosening the bond amongst members of Russian-speaking minority. Speeding up the process of integration of the minority seems to be secondary to that. Underlying this is a perceived fear that the presence of such a considerable Russian-speaking minority holds a threat to the future survival of the Latvian (core)nation, culture and language. Latvia understands itself as an incomplete nation-state which like any other European country has the legitimacy to protect itself. In a way, Latvia has positioned itself as the minority itself, showing that in the ‘decolonization of the mind’ Latvia still has a considerable way to go.

The guidelines of the *‘Action Plan on Integration and National Identity’* presented in spring 2011 by the Minister of Culture, mark a continuation of the previous two decades of nation-building but also a new direction. The Action plan provides the clearest articulation to date on what ‘a Latvian’ signifies for the Latvian state and how a minority person can belong to this category and Latvia more generally. The main new assumptions are that first, many ‘immigrants’ lack a strong enough ‘sense of belonging to Latvia’ and second, ‘Latvian ethnic identity’ is chosen as the new main criteria for integration. Ironically, in trying to lower a sense of community belonging among Russian-speakers and the feeling of ‘otherness’, it are exactly new ethnic boundaries and binary categorizations which are forced upon Russian-speakers. Would they like to ‘officially belong’ to the Latvian ‘core nation’ and become an uncategorized, they first need to identify themselves as ethnic Latvians. ‘Open-Latvianness’ is the inclusive instrument in this respect. While former policy – policy on citizenship, language and education – direct a person’s actual skills and ‘mode of participation’ in the public life (employment, political participation, use of Latvian language etc.), ethnicity is foremost a private matter. By interfering with the private lives of minority persons, this policy marks a new step of minority policy. In doing so, it continues the strategy of labelling Russian-speakers collectively under one category – as a group of ‘others’ or ‘unwanted’ – if they reject Latvian ethnicity. This becomes observable by the continuous reference to ‘immigrants’ without distinguishing the actual legal status, language proficiency or years spend in Latvia of individual Russian-speakers.

6.2 What does it mean to be a Russian-speaker?

Chapter Four identified the major dimensions along which belonging to Latvia is expressed by ordinary Russian-speakers themselves; the alternative modes of belonging. The results indicate that a sense of belonging to Latvia is felt in autobiographic, cultural and economic terms, while legal factors negatively influence sense of belonging to Latvia.

Belonging to Latvia in autobiographic terms is expressed in terms of territorial belonging to ‘their city’, ‘the land Latvia’, ‘the territory of Latvia’ as Latvia is the country they grew up in

(homeland), were born in (motherland), and share the history and culture of (similar findings by Zepa, 2005). They believe they are historically members of 'the population of Latvia' and not of Russians living in Russia. In fact, in contrast to Russian-Russians, respondents feel various linguistic and behavioural differences. Rather, respondents feel their 'way of doing' is also Latvian and much of the Latvian culture is also theirs.

Crucially, to understanding the relationship between autobiographic and cultural factors in the context of Latvian society are two issues. First, as respondents explain both Latvian *and* Russian culture in terms of a (historical) *mixture* of Latvian, Russian, Riga-based *and* European elements, it shows just how connected and overlapping cultural and autobiographic imaginaries of place-belongingness are. Respondents perceive to make a choice between 'a Latvian cultural space' and 'a Russian cultural space'. Second, in their sense of cultural belonging, respondents separate between their private lives and their public lives. Respondents reject Latvian ethnicity in their private lives. First, because ethnicity (what they call 'nationality') comes from the origins of the (grand)father and thus is an inborn (unchangeable) aspect. Therefore a Russian speaker's 'nationality' can be for example Ukrainian, Polish, Latvian *and* Russian. Hence, the statement 'I am Ukrainian but I don't speak Ukrainian and I have never been there'. Such understandings of ethnicities (or 'nationalities') have little to nothing to do with a sense of belonging to the Latvian nation (the identification to the national 'imagined community' as 'a Latvian national'). Second, Latvian ethnicity is rejected as it is connected with having Latvian as a mother language. In fact, the main social boundary in Latvia is mother tongue and not ethnicity. Hence, the terms 'Russians' has by no means lost value, also for those with a non-Russian ethnicity (Laitin, 1998). A Latvian mother tongue/ethnicity is rejected by respondents because Russian language is not just a 'vehicle for communication' but also a 'way to understand the world' and 'where you are from' which in turn is connected by respondents to individual self-esteem. However, in the public sphere it is easy to switch language codes for some (although Latvian is not always used in public) dependent on how proficient they are in Latvian. Latvian language proficiency is not only the key conditionality to be able to belong to both Latvian and Russian communities; it also is key for *not* feeling any sense of belonging to 'a Russian-speaking community' at all and making social boundaries disappear. In 2008, three-quarters of the younger generation claimed good Latvian skills compared to two-thirds of those aged 15-74 (Zepa et al., 2008). As the older generation that speaks little Latvian is disappearing – also the wish and the degree of feeling a strong sense of belonging to 'the Russian-speaking community' might be disappearing. With regard to feeling as 'a national', regardless of language or ethnicity, respondents mention pride towards both Latvia's and Russia's national sports teams, and a clear repulsion from the category 'immigrants' as just 'ethnic Russians who consider Latvia just as a patch of territory on the Baltic Sea shore' (Latvian-Russians). Rather, the category 'Russian-Latvians', signifying they are in the *first* place 'Latvians' and only secondary Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Polish, Jewish etc is considered appropriate. In addition to a self-identification as Latvian-Russians in the public sphere, respondents are very much aware of the fact that bilingualism gives important comparative advantages and that Latvian language is a crucial asset to learn. What can be

concluded then is that Russian-speakers have a wide range of choices and opportunities to interpret themselves. Some prefer to mainly watch and listen to Russian media, have a profoundly Russian-speaking social network, while others married a Latvian, send their child to a Latvian school allowing cultural mixing in the private lives. Some do and some don't have a special opinion towards the position of Russian language in Latvia.

In fact, respondents mentioned cultural, ethnic or linguistic factors are not always important. Rather, as they participate in the economy, pay taxes, 'want to see Latvia strong', 'respect democracy', 'work for the country', learnt the language, and naturalized, respondents express a sense of economic belonging and a legal sense of place-belongingness as equal members of society, based on their 'mode of participation'. In fact, legal issues such as the non-citizen status and the reason for naturalizing were not associated with a sense of official belonging to the country, patriotism or being equal to Latvians. Instead, they are associated with 'opportunities', 'less problems' while other Russian-speakers (citizens and non-citizens) are surprised to find out they are not accepted as equals in the first place by the state, despite being born in Latvia (autobiographic belonging), having worked for the country, paid taxes (economic belonging), and respect the country (universal or civic belonging) (see Antonsich, 2010). This rejection by the state can be described as a 'spoiled sense of belonging' and as alienation from the state (similar findings Zepa, 2004). The result of this 'discursive violence' by the state, imposing social categories of belonging on Russian-speakers, is a perceived barrier to be 'a Latvian (citizen)' and a Russian-speaker at the same time. Rather, it strengthens a sense of belonging to a Russian-speaking community as a community of 'others'. Differently, other respondents mentioned statements such as 'I can live anywhere', 'I am cosmopolitan' or 'I am a European-Russian'. They expressed feeling a sense of belonging in the first place to their hometown (Riga) and secondly to Europe. In doing so, they disregard or de-legitimize the state as a marker of belonging. Nevertheless, these respondents still had various claims (politics of belonging), ranging from granting citizenship at birth, to being treated as equal, to demands for cultural and linguistic rights (see Castles and Miller, 2009)

In sum, the results show that after many decades of living together in a mixed society, and given the number of inter-marriages, bilingualism (in schools and daily life), and differences between generations and ethnic backgrounds (consisting of 'multiple nationalities'), a sense of belonging to Latvia and Latvians should be understood as multiple, overlapping and highly contextual. Respondents have a choice and opinions can be positive and negative simultaneously.

6.3 Discussion of the results and contribution

The results contribute in several ways to existing literature on national self-identification and sense of belonging to Latvia by Russian-speakers. First, resulting from a perceived negative judgment of them by the state and its (exclusionary) minority policies, respondents seem to have found a sense of belonging to Latvia as a private space, as a land and as the place connected to a person's biography (family, friends, years spend in Latvia) (Zepa, 2004). The perceived difference from Russians in Russia when they are abroad, adds to this. Looking for different markers of belonging to Latvia which have not been spoiled by external identifiers is what Zepa

calls a ‘standing apart strategy’ or ‘individualization of belonging’ as opposed to a sense of civic belonging or belonging to the state or to a separate ‘conglomerate’ group Russian-speakers (see below). Second, as Zepa concludes, Russian-speakers wish to feel a sense of belonging to Latvia but do not want an ethnic division in this process. Neither do they want there to be a division between citizens and non-citizens. The results of this thesis found Russian-speakers instead claim membership of the Latvian nation as ‘Russian-Latvians’. Such an understanding of belonging is best captured by what Zepa describes as ‘opposing any sense of belonging forced upon them (assimilation)’, while openly seeking ways for compromises and co-existence’ (similar findings by Laitin 1998; Zepa and Šūpuli 2006). This manifests itself in emphasizing things Latvians and Russian-speakers have in common such as shared culture, Latvian language, the land, history, economy/unified strength, etc. (Zepa, 2004). However, in addition to such willingness to integrate the opposite also happens: identification as a ‘Russian-speaker’ as a replacement of feeling as ‘a Latvian national’ as a direct result of the nation-building project by the state (Laitin, 1998). In line with Poppe and Hagendoorn (2003), increased Latvian language proficiency among Russian-speakers, Russian-language proficiency among Latvians and long-term residency in the country (in great numbers) are factors for feeling a stronger sense of titular identification, while the results do not correspond with the notion that higher education lowers a sense of titular identification.

Differently from Laitin (1998), Galbreath (2006) and Smeekens (2011 on the Estonian case), and here I believe lies this thesis’ greatest contribution, the results indicate quite clearly mobilization or ‘crystallization of a conglomerate identity’ as ‘Russian-speakers’ or Russian-Latvians in-between ‘Russians’ and ‘Latvians’ as a new national form does not take place. Contrary to Laitin’s assumption that Russian-speakers base their actions on what other Russian-speakers do and resultantly a ‘Russian-speaking identity’ can collectively tip or cascade from one form to another, this thesis found they rather mention to have an individual choice. Assuming such categorizations is dangerous for four reasons. First, this is blind to the fact Russian-speakers *separate between their sense of belonging in the private and the public sphere and the dynamic interplay between them*. In the private sphere, Russian-speakers feel a sense of belonging to the Russian culture, ‘their Russian worlds’, Russian language, Russian roots/ethnicity, as well as the land Latvia and its culture. In the public sphere, they feel variable group belonging and public identification with the Latvian nation and/or the Russian-speaking community. Feeling ‘Russian’ in their private lives does not mean they wish to be recognized as ‘a Russian-speaker’ in their public lives. ‘Russianness’ has little to do with a feeling a sense of belonging to ‘the Latvian nation’ or ‘Latvia’. Second, the notion of a ‘formation of a conglomerate identity’ overestimates the role of *ethnicity, language or national matters more generally, which are rejected as important issues in their daily lives because economic, democratic and non-cultural issues are often more important*. It unjustly categorizes Russian-speakers and all their variable affiliations, belongings, and identifications they might have according to one single category (Sen, 2007). Third, ‘Latvian-Russian’ implies a hierarchy in which one layer of belonging is more important than another. Rather, belonging is multiple and

complementary. Even those who do speak in terms of hierarchy say they are in the first place 'Latvians' with a non-Latvian ethnicity or mother tongue; 'Russian-Latvians'. Fourth, belonging to the 'group' or 'a Russian-speaking community' is highly variable. For example during Victory Day a heightened sense of belonging to a Russian-speaking community is felt.

Rather, Brubaker's notion of 'variable groupism' and 'ethnicity without groups' best captures the multiplicity, layeredness and contextuality of sense of belonging by Russian-speakers. In fact, '*ethnicity without groups*' has been recommended to me by two respondents. Variable groupism and multiple layers of belonging address the ambiguity of talking about 'identity', let alone 'measuring identity' (Abdelal et al., 2009). Some respondents say they identify themselves with the Russian-language and ethnicity but 'there are no (ethnic) groups, there is only ethnicalization and making of groupness', while others say they do feel they belong to the group Russian-speakers or 'Us – Russians'. Grouping all affiliations of Russian-speakers and assuming they are identical along a 'Russian-speaking identity' becomes a very ambiguous undertaking. Even if 'my identity' is used by respondents themselves. The same goes for the acculturation strategies (assimilation, separation, marginalization, conglomeration) Zepa and Šūpuli (2006) identified; *not one single acculturation strategy can be identified as all strategies are represented to some degree. A great variety of senses of belonging can be identified* and persons have can decide for themselves. Rather, 'identification with' or 'sense of belonging to' takes into account both hard and soft understandings of group belonging.

For this reason, studies such as Galbreath (2006), stating only 5 per cent of Russian-speakers consider themselves as 'Latvian', while most consider themselves as 'Russian', does not nearly give the complete picture. Scholars who wish to quantify statements such as 'I feel close ties in the first place to [group category I] and secondary [group category II] – which can be found abundantly in literature on the Latvian case – can do so but should be aware of isolating one such statement as a matter of 'this or that' but rather as a matter of 'this and that'.

Moreover, such tick-box-approaches alone will not allow scholars to capture the diversity of people's lifestyles and affiliations in today's world (Fanshawe and Sriskandarajah, 2010). More knowledge is needed of the balance between individual and group feelings and when we are answering questions related to them (*ibid*). Answering 'What does it mean to be minority?' should be understood as foremost an individual (sense of place-belongingness) but in some cases also a public one (politics of belonging, group feelings) when people stand up for certain rights. Put simply: 'you can't put me in a box' (*ibid*, p. 34).

In sum, this research is a response to calls for deeper understanding of multi-layered, hybrid, situational, dynamic and ever-changing nature of self-identifications (Bhabha, 1990), particularly in the context of vast political and social transformations which have taken place in post-Soviet societies (Rodgers, 2006). When one layer of belonging is 'missing', this might not lead to a feeling on non-belonging or worst, emigration. Rather, other layers can become strengthened. For example, one can feel a low sense of belonging at the national level (to the state or the national community) while feeling a strong sense of belonging to the land Latvia in biographic terms. In fact, respondents said belonging at the national level is to 'philosophical',

‘difficult’, ‘unclear’ and ‘uninteresting’). Such an approach amplifies not the ‘push or repel factors’, but the ‘keep factors’ (Naerssen and van der Velde, 2007). As much literature on borders and boundaries, migration, nationalism, multiculturalism and ethnic conflict, depart from ‘groupist’ assumptions separating ‘us’ from ‘them’ and a focus on ‘dealing *with* diversity’, this study has additionally emphasized individual sense of place-belongingness and the meaning of ‘living *in* diversity’. Finally, this thesis adds to the body of work regarding the importance of borderlands as sites of contestation of collective identities and national institutions which acknowledge the social construction of boundaries (Donnan and Wilson, 1994). By gaining deeper understanding on ‘What it means to be a minority person’, this thesis serves as a response to the recently more frequently heard populist rhetoric’s of ‘blame imagination’ as a result of group aggregation of ‘non-native’ persons living and working alongside the majority in increasingly diverse societies in Europe. It also gives a response to the ‘popular’ question by certain (nationalistic) Latvians “Why don’t those Russians go back to Russia?”

6.4 Policy recommendation

In this section I would like to come back to the key assumptions of the new Action Plan on Integration and National Identity by the Ministry of Culture. A quick glance at the public debate on integration shows there is little attention given to the common ground for integration. Rather it is focused on conflicting interpretations of history, monolingual education and whether Russian should be an official language. In the similar way the new Action Plan with its focus on Latvian ethnic identity and ‘open-Latvianness’ will not unite people. The crucial friction point is that Russianness (or sense of belonging to the Russian culture, Russian language and Russian ethnicity) is a private matter while Latvian language, culture, sense of membership of the Latvian nation and other groupisms are public matters, just as social integration is. In asking a sense of belonging to Latvia *based on ethnicity*, the Minister of Culture mixes up private issues with public issues, which are according to Russian-speakers essentially multiple and complementary in the first place. The minister fails to recognize that belonging is build up from a dynamic interplay between private and public spheres. Nevertheless, as a result of state policy Russian-speakers do mention their Russian ethnicity conflicts with a Latvian sense of nationhood, as they perceive they are asked to choose between them. Respondents perceive the identity issue as just another way of minority exclusion. “Which effect will be stronger; compliance (ranging from integration to assimilation) or developing an identity as a separate ‘other’” (AK, lawyer). On the other hand, the state perceives rejection of Latvian ethnicity as a rejection of sense of belonging to the nation and of willingness to integrate as it understands itself as a nation-state. However, the results show no such unwillingness but rather the opposite. Rather, Russian-speakers do not perceive the rather complicated distinction between ‘the Valstnacia’ and the ‘normal nation’ as interesting categories. As a result of this miscommunication (intentional or not) between the state and the minority the debate is more negatively and ethno-political than is necessary. Sense of belonging to Latvia is not strengthened. In asking which layer of belonging should be superior over another, the discussion seems to overlook that for the purpose of integration this question is irrelevant; rather:

The Latvian culture ... is our common value. We need to care about Latvian culture and language. It's not so big compared to Russian and English. But no Latvian-Russian will help preserving Latvian language if that means to give up your own language" (EK, Lawyer).

In fact, the results show Russian-speakers are interested in being granted certain human rights in addition to integration that give *increased individual benefits, opportunities and 'having less problems'*. Such statements, similar to the key values of the UNDP, I believe open the door for a more liberal approach to integration. Hazans (2010) found that as a result of less strict language laws following EU membership in 2004 "*more liberal hiring standards resulted in improved Latvian language skills of the minority population and an increased number of non-Latvians actively using the Latvian language on a daily basis* (p. 132)". Working in a Latvian language-intensive environment enabled minority persons to reach a required level of Latvian often within one year, something that is hard to achieve in class (*ibid*). Liberal language laws did not threaten Latvian language. This way, Russian-speakers themselves are 'doing the integration' or driving forces of integration, which could give them stronger feelings of belonging to Latvia. In a similar way, Latvian policy makers could learn from the Canadian model of citizenship where the requirements for naturalizing are not set at a high level. Here people pass the language test with a modest 'good-faith effort' (Kymlicka, 2003). Old people are exempt from the test. Rather, citizenship is seen as a mid-point in the integration process rather than the end state (*ibid*).

However, with the fresh memory of occupation and colonization in mind among ethnic Latvians, liberal policy is a highly sensitive issue and difficult for politicians to get support for. Maybe it is up to Russian-speaking elites (most notable from Harmony Centres) to recognize the Soviet Era as an occupation, which I believe, will be a milestone for social integration in Latvia. I share Mr. Berzins, the new Latvian president, opinion when he says: "Those who wish to live in this country under an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding must immediately begin a discussion and dialogue on how to overcome suspicions, offenses or misunderstandings" (New York Times, 2012).

6.5 Reflection, limitations and recommendation for research

In this last paragraph, I will reflect briefly on how successful this thesis has been in gaining deeper understanding of sense of belonging among Russian-speakers in Latvia and on the limitations of the research.

First, in taking ethnography as the central methodology and triangulation of open-ended interviews, four months of participant observation, and *in context* discourse analysis of the state's nation-building practices, the research has generally been successful in gaining better understanding on a broad variety of topics connected to sense of belonging. For example, it enabled me to identify various layers of belonging which are not always political in nature, separate popular ethno-politics in the media from daily live experiences, hear opinions from both members of the majority and the minority, hear and speak to elite, expert and ordinary persons, and hear Russian-speakers from a wide variety of backgrounds (in terms of age, education, city of residence, ethnic origins, political engagement etc.). Second, in narrowing down the focus of this research on (predominantly) domestic issues in the borderland of Latvia, while focusing less

on cross-border factors, this thesis successfully came closer to understanding the relationship between the state's practises of nation-building and the working of multiculturalism in a diverse society. However, even if respondents mentioned other actors such as the European Union, Russian Federation and the media (Latvian and Russian) do play a role in sense of belonging, they also said their role is minimal. Nevertheless, more results on the influence of these actors would give a stronger picture of (politics of) belonging.

In relation to the conceptual lens of the study, I found the analytical distinction between sense of place-belongingness and politics of belonging a helpful tool to analyze how minorities challenge the politics of belonging by the state in addition to what minority persons find normal. Conceptualizing the agency-structure relationship turned out to be challenging. For example, does a narrative such as 'my family and I lived here all our lives so we should be granted citizenship' signify agency-narratives or structure-narratives (micro-geopolitics)? However, I believe this is more a question for sociologists or social-psychologists and not a relevant question for answering the central research question of this thesis.

In relation to the collection of the data I will stress to issues. First and most importantly, it became clear already after the first few interviews the original conceptual framework (assuming groupism and aimed at 'measuring identity') did not 'fit' with the results I gathered. As explained above, this is where most of my criticism is directed towards. As a result, I felt the need to fundamentally reformulate the conceptual framework, despite already having done the fieldwork. Not only, did 'sense of belonging' turned out to be one of the central issues of the new integration policy, it also fitted the results better. Changing the conceptual or analytical lens after the fieldwork I believe was possible as the results were collected very open-ended without pre-assumed categories. I did not impose concepts on respondents but rather used answers and concepts respondents put forward.

Finally, the study could have been more successful if I collected more data from respondents who are not politically active, who are lower educated, and do not speak English. Nevertheless, in finding more educated, politically active and English-speaking respondents and in finding various respondents who described themselves as 'Liberal Russians', 'European Russians' and 'Cosmopolitan Russians' I did find Latvia is an interesting borderland for scholars interested in the growing field of study of cosmopolitan and European identification (see Delanty and Rumford, 2005). Although beyond the scope of this thesis, such topologies reveal the fact that European identification is not in competition with national identities. Moreover, as Delanty and Rumford describe it: "it is arguably the case national identities are becoming more cosmopolitan, as are personal identities ... in European societies in which new forms of self-understanding are emerging" (2005, p. 68). As nineteenth-century practises of nation-state building increasingly seem to have little connections with the daily lives of European citizens, I invite other scholars to study 'what it means to be a European' in Latvia.

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Summary

Recently, European societies are said to have entered the ‘age of super-diversity’. Migration flows are seen as the leading causes for this transformation, considering the heterogeneous ethno-cultural and religious backgrounds of migrants. Whilst societies are growing more diverse, European governments on the other hand have responded to this trend by strengthening the boundaries of the national ‘core community’. They share a renewed interest in nation-building and defending the ‘national identity’. In doing so, they increasingly understand their societies in simply binary categories (‘us’ and ‘them’). Scholars have pointed out that such ‘tick-box-models’ for incorporating minorities based on homogeneity are ineffective and that European governments should reconsider what it means to belong to their societies.

Based on a five month period of ethnographic fieldwork in the republic of Latvia – situated in-between the periphery of the EU and the former Soviet Union – this thesis studies the alternative workings of sense of belonging from the perspective of the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia. The central research question is “In what ways do Russian-speakers feel a sense of belonging to Latvia in nationalizing Latvia?” The Russian-speaking population makes up roughly forty per cent of the Latvian population. Crucially, around half of the minority population currently neither possesses Latvian citizenship nor citizenship of any other country; they are legal non-citizens or stateless.

Following the introduction, which sets out the conceptual and empirical focus and why there is a need for more empirical research on sense of belonging, Chapter Two conceptualizes sense of belonging. Modes of belonging are conceptualized along two dimensions: the individual sense of feeling at home (sense of place-belongingness) and belonging as a discursive resource that claims or resists socio-spatial in- or exclusion (politics of belonging). The ‘national mode of belonging’ is associated with how the state perceives how minorities can belong to Latvia (a practice of politics of belonging). ‘Alternative modes of belonging’ are associated with the various ways in which minorities feel sense of place-belongingness in Latvia and how this is shaped by the politics of belonging by the state.

After the methodological chapter, explaining how semi- to open-ended interviews, participant observation and analysis of discourse and narratives is done, Chapter Four will provide a critical discussion of the national mode of belonging. Due to their sheer size and common usage of the Russian language in public, the presence of the minority is considered a threat to the existence of the Latvian culture and language according to the Latvian state. As a result the state has through means of citizenship policy, education policy and language policy and more recently ‘ethnic policy’ followed a titular ‘core nation’ status, a standardizing state discourse, a ‘de-sovietization’ discourse and a ‘return to Europe’ discourse. The current government believes such policy helps strengthen a sense of belonging to Latvia by minority persons.

Russian-speakers on the other hand are surprised to find out they apparently do not belong to the core nation of Latvia if they wish to maintain their Russian mother tongue, culture and their Russian ‘way of seeing the world’. Chapter Five shows that Russian-speakers reject Latvian ethnicity, but as the majority of them is born in Latvia, Russian-speakers in fact already feel a sense of belonging to Latvia and the Latvian nation in a variety of ways. Key dimensions of sense of place-belongingness are autobiographic factors, cultural factors and economic factors. In terms of legal factors, Russian-speakers mention low levels of belonging. Russian-speaking citizens as well as non-citizens feel they are forced to choose between self-identification as a Latvian or a Russian-speaker. As a result, patriotism associated with Latvian citizenship or a sense of Latvian nationhood is lacking. Nevertheless, various respondents mention that in their daily lives, they experience no difficulties in separating between Russianness in their private lives while they are able mix Latvianness with Russianness in their public lives. Moreover, ethnic or cultural issues are not often considered important in their daily participation in society. Latvian language and employment are.

A key conclusion then is that after many decades of living together in diversity – which have led to a high degree of intermarrying, bilingualism (in schools and daily life), cultural mixing, and differences between generations – Russian-speakers have a wide variety of resources to feel a sense of belonging to Latvia. A ‘collective Russian-speaking identity’ has not been found. The final chapter concludes that belonging to a country from the perspective of the minority should be understood as highly fluid, multiple and depending on the context. This stands in sharp contrast to the way many European governments deal with diversity. This chapter concludes there is a need for better understanding of the dynamics between issues that matter for the individual and that matter for the group (‘we-feelings’). This thesis adds to the body of work regarding the importance of borderlands as sites of contestation of collective identities and national institutions and is a response to populist rhetoric of ‘blame imagination’ through group aggregation of ‘non-natives’ living and working alongside the majority. Finally, an advice for more liberal minority policy is given as well as a recommendation for further research.