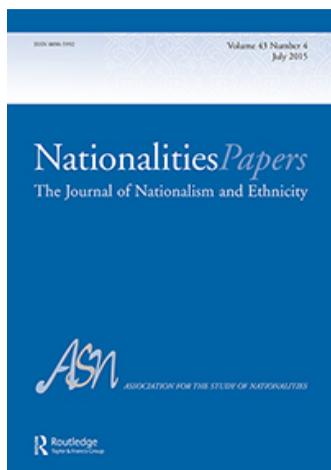


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### The ghost of essentialism and the trap of binarism: six theses on the Soviet empire

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## The ghost of essentialism and the trap of binarism: six theses on the Soviet empire

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This article endeavors to open a new critical space for Soviet studies and for nationalities studies more generally. Through analyses of recent trends in Soviet studies, the article dismantles the frequently used opposition between subjective and objective approaches to Soviet empire and suggests instead that truths and categories, whether considered “subjective” or “objective,” are constructed discursively, through legitimizing certain interpretive models over the others. The article also argues against disciplinary avoidance of “what is” questions (e.g. “what is a nation?”) and claims that an excessive concern for (re)producing essentialism should not hinder scholarly inquiry. Several new lines of inquiry for the study of the Soviet empire are suggested and also applicable in nationalities studies more generally: research on the role of symbolic violence in manufacturing consent and research concerning the role of affect in producing linkages between the performative life of a singular human being and the pedagogical discourse of a nation or empire. The article also offers an analysis of the Soviet Union as an empire in becoming and it advocates for postcolonial approaches within Soviet studies. The practical dimensions of Soviet rule are exemplified with data from the Baltic borderlands in the postwar years.

**Keywords:** Soviet Union; postcolonial studies; empire; nation; the Baltic states

In recent decades, scholars in the diverse field of Soviet and post-Soviet studies have passionately investigated the Soviet nationalities question. Different sets of approaches and opinions have emerged, conflicted with each other, created dialogs, and, in some cases, vanished from contemporary discourse. Sometimes these queries have been posed with an emphasis on the question of the Soviet Union as an empire. In 2000, for example, an editorial for *Russian Review* stressed how “scholarship on nationalities and nationality policy reveals fundamental characteristics of the Soviet system” and how a crucial part of the nationality policy question is the question of colonialism:

Was the Soviet Union a modern colonial empire? If indeed it was, then we need to ask how this colonialism influenced Soviet rule of national minorities and forged the Soviet system as a whole. If it was not, then we should delineate characteristics that distinguished the Soviet Union from European colonial empires. (Hoffman 2000, vi)

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These and similar questions, posed in the 1990s and 2000s, have inspired much discussion and have generated a stream of supplementary questions. How should we understand and interpret the situation of different nationalities and ethnic groups under Soviet rule? Was the Soviet Union indeed an empire? Historians tend to pose questions about the general buildup of the Soviet Union; cultural theorists prefer to consider the particularities of texts and are disinclined to pronounce forceful general conclusions. Discussion has also touched upon the cornerstones of historical research: what kinds of questions are most productive to pose and pursue? And, we might add, how might one make one's way through all these perplexities while avoiding the pitfalls of essentialism and cultural relativism?

This article endeavors to open a new critical space for discussions of the Soviet Union as an empire and thereby to broaden the scope of empire and nationalities studies. Some new lines are suggested for the study of the Soviet empire that may be applicable also in nationalities studies more generally: research on the role of systemic violence in manufacturing consent; research into the role of affect in linking the life of a singular human being with the pedagogical aims of a nation or empire. This article also points to a double hazard in thinking critically about history: the danger of excessive concern about essentialism and the risk of falling into the trap of binary thinking. Critical caution around essentialism, that is, the view that "categories have an underlying reality or true nature" (Gelman 2003, 3) and that categories (such as an empire or nation, in this context) can be revealed in their true essence, has in some recent scholarship taken exaggerated forms. The shunning of binary opposites, generally seen as simplifying constructions, and the condemnation of these in earlier scholarship, has been another major interdisciplinary trend. This article points to ways in which an overly vigilant avoidance of essentialism has closed off some promising directions of scholarship, and also to ways in which binary "either-or" thinking (as in the opposition between "objective" and "subjective" categories) in fact still continues to shape important parts of contemporary scholarship.

Whereas the main body of research on Soviet rule has focused on the early decades of the Soviet Union, this article will consider the practical dimensions of postwar Soviet rule as exemplified with data from the Baltic borderlands. The study of Soviet nationalities has emphasized nation-building processes of the early Soviet years; the focus on the Baltics, by contrast, highlights the World War II era as crucial for the maturation of imperial ambitions in the Soviet Union. The annexation of the independent Baltic states and the subsequent restructuring of their political, economic, and cultural resources – while neglecting their local interests – clearly point, as I shall argue, to colonial mechanisms of power in the Soviet Union. In the Baltic states, the arrival of the Soviet regime was experienced in light of the preceding two decades of Baltic sovereignty. In the small republics of Estonia (1,134,000 inhabitants in 1939) and Latvia (almost 2 million by 1939), the nearly overwhelming influx of Soviet settlers and the pro-Russian language politics of the new Moscow-centered Soviet regime were felt as a direct threat to the Baltic states' national survival. In 1945, titular ethnic groups formed 94% of the Estonian population and 80% of the Latvian population; in 1989, titular ethnic groups formed only 62% of the Estonian population and 52% of the Latvian population (Kasekamp 2010, 154–155).<sup>1</sup> In these particularities, the Baltic chapter forms an important part of the narrative of the Soviet empire.

This article proceeds through a succession of methodological theses, theses that are drawn from the Soviet empire but which will be applicable to imperial situations elsewhere. An empire is here understood as a great world power that employs authoritarian, discriminatory control over its ethnically dissimilar borderlands or colonies.

### An empire is neither a category of subjective perception nor a substantial entity

The 2004 review article *Interpreting Russia's Imperial Dimension* by Serhy Yekelchuk gives a succinct summary of some general developments in the field of Soviet studies: early scholars of the Soviet Union such as Walter Kolarz and Richard Pipes saw the Soviet Union as suppressing the “natural nationalism” of non-Russian nationalities. The 1980s witnessed the constructivist turn in nationalism studies (inspired by scholars such as Karl Deutsch, Ernest Gellner, Miroslav Hroch, and Benedict Anderson) and consequently the emergence of a new understanding of nation-building as a modern phenomenon. In the early 1990s, scholars with a postcolonial orientation (notably Dipesh Chakrabarty) started to draw attention to the ways that modern empires encouraged ethnic differentiation to gain colonialist advantage. “With the notions of ‘nationality’ and ‘empire’ both problematized, the field of Russian Studies was poised for paradigm change,” argues Yekelchuk (2004, 475–476).

In concluding his survey, Yekelchuk foregrounds Terry Martin’s approach to empire as a subjective category of practice. “Overall, the new understanding of ‘empire’ as a subjective category of practice and analysis holds a clear promise of reuniting within a single conceptual framework modern scholarship on Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union, and present-day Russia,” suggests Yekelchuk (2004, 485).

A closer look at Terry Martin’s lucid and engaging article “The Soviet Union as Empire: Salvaging a dubious analytical category” (2002) can serve here as an introduction to some conceptual questions raised in response to the notion of a Soviet empire – especially since we find echoes of Martin’s approach in other critical writings (for example, Beissinger 2008). First of all, Martin’s resistance to notions of the Soviet Union as being *objectively* an empire deserves critical analysis. Just as importantly, Martin’s preferred emphasis on empire as a *subjective* category, together with its fundamental opposition of subjective and objective categories, will be here subjected to a closer consideration, in order to address the subjective–objective dichotomy in scholarship about the Soviet empire (Raffass 2012, 201–215, also outlines this dichotomy<sup>2</sup>). Here, the “objective” approach most typically declares that according to “objective” categories the Soviet Union was not an empire (of recent writings, Cohen 2013, for example, refers to a presumed lack of economic exploitation of the borderlands as an evidence). The “subjective” approach, by contrast, claims that the Soviet Union can be called an empire not in the sense of having practiced actual exploitation of the borderlands, but in the sense of being interpreted, perhaps in retrospect and in light of its later collapse, as having been an empire. Graham Smith extends this approach to questions of postcoloniality: “Post-coloniality does not need to follow from an actual ‘colonial situation.’ [...] Thus the borderland post-Soviet states can be considered as post-colonial in the sense that they are constructed and labeled as such by their nation-builders” (1998, 8). This article proceeds from an analysis of Terry Martin’s argumentation toward dismantling the unproductive objective–subjective dichotomy. It is very true, of course, that not all contemporary scholarship on Soviet empire relies on such a dichotomy. Yet the interests of methodological clarity argue for laying out the potential dangers of scholarly binarisms.

Terry Martin registers his dissatisfaction with common scholarly notions of the “Soviet empire.” From his perspective, according to “objective categories,” the Soviet Union was not an empire. “Pragmatically,” Martin wrote, “definitions of empire have to be stretched to the breaking point to include the Soviet Union” (2002, 98). According to Martin, peripheral non-Russian subjects

were not subjected to legal discrimination, nor indeed to different laws; they were not discriminated against economically due to their “peripheral” status; they were ruled like “core”

subjects. ... In other words, the core/periphery distinction does not work well in a unitary state like the Soviet Union. (2002, 98)

Yet, we might ask, how is one to understand “legal discrimination?” And what if a state or an empire discriminates against its peripheral ethnic groups *in contravention of its own laws*? We might recall that the father of the Russian *pravozashchitniki* movement, Aleksandr Vol’pin, built his project of resistance precisely upon the demand that the Soviet government *obey its own laws* – a position daring enough to grant him the status of a dissident. Vladimir Bukovskii remembers Vol’pin as “the first person in our life who spoke seriously about Soviet laws. [...] We laughed at him: ‘what kind of laws can there be in this country?’” (Nathans 2007, 631). Can we seriously support arguments about the Soviet Union with references to its legal system, when it was common wisdom that official Soviet law had a merely approximate, evidently “laughable,” relation to actual Soviet practices?

We might refer here to Martin’s earlier highly illuminating work describing ethnically based oppressive strategies in the Soviet Union, in which official progressive “soft-line” resolutions of the Soviet of Nationalities coexisted with “hard-line” practices of ethnic cleansing and the mass arrest of diaspora nationalities (Martin 2001, 22). Martin writes, for example, about the ambivalent treatment of Korean nationalities in the Soviet Far East in 1926:

On the one hand, smaller Korean national territories were authorized: one Korean national region and 171 Korean village soviets. Korean-language schools and newspapers were established. A Far Eastern national minorities bureaucracy was formed with a plenipotentiary on Korean affairs. Koreans were systematically promoted into the Far Eastern bureaucracy. This policy line presented Koreans as a model Soviet national minority to be poignantly and publicly contrasted with the wretched Koreans living under Japanese colonial occupation.

On the other hand, at the exact same time this policy line was being implemented, the central government issued a December 6, 1926 secret decree confirming a plan to resettle most Koreans north of the 48.5th parallel (north of Khabarovsk). (2001, 318)

Martin provides a rather detailed description of different aspects of ethnic cleansing in the 1930s, when, he calculates, “approximately 800,000 individuals were arrested, deported, or executed *in the ethnic cleansing and mass national operations* from 1935 to 1938” (2001, 340; emphasis added). At the same time, he adds, “there was also a revival of a rather virulent state-sponsored Russian nationalist rhetoric” and an ever greater identification of the state with its “Russian core” (2001, 342–343).

It is rather surprising, then, to read Martin’s claim, the following year, about the commendable lack of discrimination against non-Russians in the Soviet Union. But, having resisted the applicability of imperial core/periphery distinctions to the Soviet Union, Martin goes on to acknowledge that “from the mid-1930s forward, Soviet propaganda did indeed increasingly identify the Soviet state with its Russian core, and Russians gradually did become over-represented in the state’s most powerful institutions.” Martin attempts to finesse this acknowledgment by stressing that one is dealing here with only *interpretations* (2002, 99). Yet, Martin’s own monograph indicates that these interpretations are based on solid facts. The imperial character of the national situation in the Soviet Union might not have been visible in all levels of its legal system; however, in actual practice, accompanied by legal decrees (not all of them made public), we can clearly perceive imperial, or at least empire-like, discrimination against peripheral ethnicities.

Terry Martin does, however, support the important turn toward constructivist theories of nationalism as a source of inspiration for empire studies – yet one can hardly agree with Martin’s effort to use constructivist ideas to build up an opposition between *objective*

and *subjective* understandings of empire. Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities finds a rather one-sided interpretation here; presumably, nationalism studies have "long since" moved on to subjectivism; so, in Martin's rendering of Anderson's concept, "a nation is a group of people who subjectively believe they are a nation, an 'imagined community'" (2002, 102).

But, in fact, Anderson does not speak about subjectivity or beliefs. A nation, according to Anderson, is indeed imagined – no one can "see" a whole nation; "the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (2006, 6). Imagining a nation, however, is neither a purely subjective act nor simply a belief: it is a mixture of beliefs, understandings, and feelings experienced personally as these stand in relation to the body of national knowledge elaborated in textbooks, artworks, museums, and monuments. The constructivist turn in nationalism studies indeed signified a paradigm shift, a dramatic change in understanding the functioning of national categories. However, neither a nation nor an empire can be limited to subjective experience only. We can, of course, speak about the subjective experience of belonging to a nation or being part of an empire and analyze nations and empires as categories of practice. Yet, as Anderson has stressed, the nation also belongs to a public domain and is constructed through rituals, national artifacts, museums, and public discourse in newspapers and politics. Consider the complex building-work elaborated in poems, monuments, songs, and schoolday recitations of a pledge of allegiance – to call this often programmatic, sometimes ridiculous, sometimes heroic construction work "subjective" would seriously underestimate its scope and perhaps also its danger. Correspondingly, research into the personal experiences of different Soviet subjects under the Soviet regime is no doubt an important direction of research, as are investigations of Soviet imperial practices which do not strictly correspond to the Soviet legal system. Yet it is also important to keep in mind the artificiality of efforts to separate objective and subjective categories as distinct fields of inquiries. Nations and empires are complex systems where subjective and objective categories are thoroughly intertwined; they need to be analyzed in the complexity of these entanglements.

The constructivist turn in nationalism studies, like the cultural turn more generally, conveys a message which is much harder to accommodate than a simple foregrounding of subjective perception: truths and categories, whether "subjective" or "objective," are constructed discursively, through legitimizing certain interpretive models over the others. Once a nation is constructed, it is an existing (though not substantial) community with both objective and subjective features. Instead of opposing subjective approaches to objective approaches, it might be more fruitful to overcome the binarism of objective *versus* subjective. Here, it is crucial to understand how discursive constructions work: one cannot separate discourses from reality. Reality is shaped into existence by ways of legitimizing certain modes of talking about it. Democratic governance can serve as an example: a new law is born out of public discussion and with the help of expert opinion. Ideas written down on paper turn into law after an act of voting: a combination of subjective positions and opinions has changed into a form of objective reality called the legal system – until perhaps the next government, that is, a new combination of different subject positions, changes the law. Empires and nations carry both objective and subjective features, and the boundaries between the two sets are constantly in flux.

It would seem that Terry Martin is misled by Rogers Brubaker, who mistakenly attributes to all constructivist theories an understanding of the nation as a substantial category (1996, 13–22). Brubaker claims:

Countless discussions of nationhood and nationalism begin with the question: what is a nation? This question is not as theoretically innocent as it seems: the very terms in which it is framed presuppose the existence of the entity that is to be defined. The question itself reflects the realist, substantialist belief that ‘a nation’ is a real entity of some kind, though perhaps one that is elusive and difficult to define. (1996, 14)

Brubaker is surely correct that “what is?” questions presuppose that something exists, but this does not necessarily mean that such questions lead us to essentialism. “what is” questions are ways to map the world and to form scholarly disciplines; “what is” questions help to shape surroundings for a growing child. In literary studies, one starts with a question “what is literature?” A literary scholar might answer that literature is a mode of writing legitimized as such by a community of readers and critics of a certain era – one can hardly trace essentialism here. We ask important questions such as “what is ethical behavior?” or “what are feelings?” and even “what is love?” or “what is happiness?” without presuming in the least that “love” and “happiness” are real, substantial entities. At the same time, we cannot ask the question “how can I behave ethically?” if we don’t have at least an intuitive answer to the question “what is ethical behavior?” It is crucial, therefore, to keep asking “what is ... ?” questions – but with the concession that the answers we give are relative and conditional, and dependent on the position of the respondent. The specter of essentialism and its ideological excesses should not inhibit us from asking “what is?” questions.

### **An empire is not a fixed entity but a developing formation, which includes inconsistent strategies and technologies of rule**

An empire, like a nation, should be understood non-substantially, not as a fixed entity, but as a developing formation that is continuously reshaped by internally inconsistent and self-contradictory technologies of rule. Jane Burbank and Mark von Hagen describe this process in both the Tsarist and the Soviet empires as an interplay between local conditions and imperial technologies of rule: “The never-ending adaptation of governance to local conditions *created* imperial technologies of rule, and these were in their essence inconsistent with each other” (2007, 17). We might also add that empire is a term whose application is built upon a family resemblance, in Wittgenstein’s sense, of “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing” (2009, 36e) and without the fixed limits of a “clearly bounded transhistorical model” (Beissinger 2006, 303). Ann Stoler even claims that exceptionality lies at the very heart of imperial projects:

Ambiguous zones, partial sovereignty, temporary suspensions of what Hannah Arendt was to call ‘the right to have rights,’ provisional impositions of states of emergency, promissory notes for elections, deferred or contingent independence, and ‘temporary’ occupations – these are conditions at the heart of imperial projects and present in a broad range of them. (2009, 42)

This was clearly also the case in the Soviet Union, where, according to Douglas Northrop, “a colonial state aimed at anticolonial and emancipatory legitimacy” and “created a dizzyingly complex web of multiple context-dependent subalternities” (2004, 29). Here, a mixture of colonial strategies, modernizing efforts, and emancipatory Communist aspirations created a complex and internally inconsistent network of ideologies and technologies of rule, a “kaleidoscope moving in space and time” (Lieven 2001, xvi).

One problem in pinning the “empire” label on a multiethnic state is related precisely to the question of becoming: empires do not start out as empires. One might argue that the Soviet Union started out as a multiethnic state which inherited and employed a number of imperial features and practices (such as possessing widespread territories, annexing

neighboring territories, holding direct administrative control, and pursuing an enlightening mission in the peripheries), yet until the ascension of Stalin, the strategies of Soviet state- and nation-building aimed toward what seemed at the time a necessary modernization of its borderlands in the Communist spirit (see Hirsch 2005 on Soviet nation-building strategies). However, one must concede that strategies of modernization, imposed upon ethnically distinct borderlands and carried out under a conviction of the superiority of the modernizers, might easily be regarded as colonialist (Douglas Northrop provides ample evidence of this in his *Veiled Empire*). Here, one can separate different aspects of colonialism: a colonial imagination may well evolve without actual colonial strategies [see Susanne Zantop's (1997) *Colonial Fantasies*]; and colonial-type strategies of domination can be used also in weak multiethnic states – that is to say, in states which are not (or not yet) powerful and oppressive enough in themselves to be considered empires.

At length, however, the Soviet Union did indeed develop into a fully formed empire, where the central powers started to experience an emerging non-Russian national consciousness as threatening. Certainly by the end of World War II, the Soviet Union had become a developed empire in the sense of attaining its status as an international superpower, conscious of its international role, possessing widespread territories acquired through military force, and employing authoritarian policies with direct administrative supervision over its borderlands. There is no substantial difference between an empire and a multiethnic state: a multiethnic state can become an empire if it starts to function as a great world power and employs authoritarian, discriminatory control over its ethnically dissimilar borderlands or distant colonies. By changing its strategies and policies through a process of democratization and by losing its international role, an empire can develop into *just* an ordinary multiethnic state. History permits us to perceive the processes of a multiethnic state developing into an empire and *vice versa*.

When did the Soviet Union become a developed empire? We should stress the continuing process of becoming, rather than striving to fix dates. Nevertheless, several dates seem potentially relevant: 1932, when Ukrainian nationalism was blamed for the failure of grain requisitions, leading to the 1933 Ukrainian terror and to the deportations of entire Kuban Cossack towns; or perhaps already 1927, when the Comintern excommunicated the entire leadership of the West Ukrainian Communist Party? Or perhaps as late as 1937, when the 11 August decree, “On the Liquidation of the Polish Sabotage-Espionage Group and the Organization POV (*Pol'skoi organizatsii voiskovoi*),” created a model that subsequently served as a basis to found a series of “national operations” that targeted the Soviet Union's diaspora nationalities? In any case, the imperial ambitions of the Soviet leadership had fully emerged by 1940, when the Baltic states were annexed. The annexation of neighboring states and the subsequent reorganization of the political, economic, and cultural life in the well-developed Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian republics clearly belong to the sphere of imperial strategies.

### **Empires manufacture consent through systemic violence**

So far, we have stated that (a) research on empires must transcend the binarism of subjective–objective categories and that (b) an empire is a developing formation, which always includes inconsistent strategies and technologies of rule. Together with Terry Martin, we have considered Soviet strategies of ethnic discrimination. Yet we need to also consider the question of the *legitimacy* of the imposed regime. Michael Hechter argues that if the conquering regime “fails to become legitimate over the long run,” this type of domination should be called “imperial expansion” (1975, 60). Hechter distinguishes two levels of

legitimation: first, local administrations must accept the legitimacy of a central authority, and, second, local subjects must accept the authority of their local administration. So, for Hechter, legitimacy is achieved through a double procedure of giving consent. In Soviet studies, we commonly find examinations of this problem from the obverse perspective, from the aspect of the state and its policies, rather than from the aspect of local consent. Mark Beissinger, for example, takes the position that empire can be defined through its nonconsensual mode of governing and identifies the “root issue raised by most theories of empire” as “nonconsensual control over culturally distinct populations” (2005, 17). According to Beissinger, the internal organization of the Soviet Union “cloaked nonconsensual control in the language of self-determination” (2005, 29).

One could argue, however, that the Soviet Union could not have survived through the decades by nonconsensual control only. Any empire (and any state order) will use complex strategies to *manufacture consent*. Instead of describing the imperial strategies in the Soviet Union as nonconsensual control in disguise, we might investigate the ways consent was produced. In the Baltic borderlands, the initial consent – following military annexation and the destruction of existing political, economic, and cultural structures – was produced through coercive means, through a massive scale of arrests and deportations, and through the eradication of the former elites. Altogether, the deportations between 1940 and 1952 involved the removal of about 200,000 Baltic inhabitants,<sup>3</sup> of these 95,000 people were deported during the well-documented operation *Priboi* (Surf), on 24–25 March 1949 (Kasekamp 2010, 146; Zubkova 2008, 181). Following these waves of deportations, those who remained “consented” to live according to the rules of the new regime, to surrender their livestock to the kolkhoz barn [perhaps formerly the property of a now-deported relative (Oras 2013, 12)], to present a newly manufactured version of their national history in exams, and to write poems glorifying Soviet heroes. Here, violence and terror functioned not only as a substitute for consent and as a symptom of the lack of general consent to the regime, but they *also* grounded the possibilities for manufacturing consent. As Nicos Poulantzas observed, monopolization of violence by the state

induces forms of domination in which the numerous methods of establishing consent play the key role [...] *State-monopolized physical violence permanently underlies the techniques of power and mechanisms of consent: it is inscribed in the web of disciplinary and ideological devices; and even when not directly exercised, it shapes the materiality of the social body upon which domination is brought to bear.* (2000, 80, 81, emphasis in original)

One can perhaps contest the universal validity of Poulantzas’s claim, yet it is surely valid in the context of the Stalinist and post-Stalinist Soviet Union. In Estonia, the major waves of deportations took place in 1941 and 1949, but they were not soon forgotten, and in Estonian cultural imaginaries, one finds the recurring theme of suitcases prepared and ready for sudden departure, even many years after the terror. Saat (1990, 11) gives a fictional account of how these suitcases were opened several times each year, outgrown children’s clothes were taken out and replaced with better-fitting clothes.<sup>4</sup> In her personal correspondence of 26 June 2014, Mari Saat confirmed that such preparations for deportations were made both in her and her husband’s family, as well as by many of their acquaintances. The very visible presence of the Soviet army, which was perceived as an unambiguously foreign presence, functioned in the Baltic borderlands as a ubiquitous reminder of coercive power. As late as the first half of the 1980s, decades after the death of Stalin, one could still be expelled from university for lighting a candle by the grave of Julius Kuperjanov, a hero of the Estonian War of Independence (1918–1920); and in 1980, unrest of high school students in Estonia once again provoked shocking state violence in the form of beatings, investigations, and arrests (Kiin, Ruutsoo, and Tarand 1990). In such contexts, we should

understand consent not in opposition to violence, but rather as belonging to the framework of *systemic violence*, which Žižek likens to the “dark matter” of physics (2009, 2). State-monopolized, systemic violence functions as a generally imperceptible background that grounds consent but that sometimes surfaces in a visible exercise or expression of power. In the period after the Stalinist terror regime, when direct violence mostly disappeared from everyday popular consciousness, this dark matter of systemic violence exerted its influence upon Baltic subjects by bending their hopes and expectations toward a prescribed field of possibilities. Systemic violence also includes *epistemic violence*<sup>5</sup>: the “violence of knowledge, or more properly, the violence of ‘discourse,’ which includes the complete apparatus of knowledge-production” (Nanda 2005, 575). Once we understand consent as manufactured by different (Soviet imperial) strategies, consent becomes, paraphrasing Homi Bhabha, “consent but not quite,” consent with a difference – consent until dissent becomes a possibility. To summarize: systemic violence in the Soviet Union functioned as a ground for manufacturing consent for the regime.

### The imperial situation generates a distinction between “us” and “them”

Manufactured consent to the regime and acceptance of the Soviet regime at the everyday level did not close or significantly conceal the gulf in national identification between the local non-Russian populations and the new, predominantly Russian-speaking settlers in the Baltics. Consider these opening lines of a poem *Me peame ju väga tasa käima, silmad maas* [We need to walk very quietly, eyes on ground], published in 1967 by the Estonian poet Jaan Kaplinski (1967, 13):<sup>6</sup>

We need to walk very quietly, eyes on ground. You  
don't need to ask, what are we looking for. A long time ago  
our land became yours and our state fell down in shards  
into the big and empty world.

These lines were widely read in reference to the annexation of independent Estonia by the Soviet Union. The poem later introduces the theme of Native Americans, yet the reader is left without a clear historical reference point until the nineteenth line in the poem. The poem's impression of Estonianness is further supported by the previous poem *Ei jõua Sakala nõtkub variseb Nurmekund* [Sakala exhausted; Nurmekund gives way and collapses], printed on the left side of the same open page, which depicts, in the violent language of collapse and disappearance, the military invasion of pre-modern Estonian-speaking areas (including lines “if you forget a song and language, do you remember yourself?” 12).<sup>7</sup>

Kaplinski's lines exemplify the specificity of the Soviet experience for the Baltic states, the sense of non-belonging, and even the conditional consent to the regime, as expressed in the lines “We need to walk very quietly, eyes on ground.” The poem is shaped around the juxtaposition of “us,” the natives, who walk quietly, without being able to express one's thoughts and desires, and “you,” who have taken over “our” land, whereas “our” state was destroyed.

The poem illustrates succinctly how consent to the Soviet regime was, in the Baltic borderlands, accompanied with a cultural division of “us” and “them.” Elena Zubkova (2008, 116) points to the selective vision behind the cultural value judgments in postwar Baltic societies:

Harassed sense of national pride assigned, both consciously and unconsciously, markers of a ‘foreign’ national identity [to Russians] and shaped the local image of Russians as if with

predetermined negative properties. As a result of this selection, bag people [*meshochnik*] and drunk military officers, instead of highly qualified engineers, were adopted as symbol of Russianness. The widespread trope of Russians as an uneducated and uncultured nation, who are dishonest besides, developed from here.<sup>8</sup>

The “us” and “them” binarism extended from simplified ethnic stereotypes to everyday materialities and encounters with different aspects of the Soviet rule: in everyday situations, while repairing malfunctioning *Made in U.S.S.R* machinery (Hvostov 2011, 137–138), or while struggling to make oneself understood to Russian-speaking officials,<sup>9</sup> a prosaic and distancing gesture toward “Russian power” (the typical shorthand for the Soviet regime) or “Russian stuff” (*vene värk*, as Estonians would say) was often expressed. To dismissively apply the label “Russian stuff” to anything dysfunctional or disagreeable in the realm of Soviet everydayness – from the lack of toilet paper, to the obligation to preorder Communist journals, to the necessity of attending the May Day parade – this dismissal asserted a convenient disclaimer of responsibility for deficiencies in Soviet society. But it was also a marker of persistent core/periphery alienation: it is not “our” culture – “they” are to blame. If something did not function, this was only to be expected, since it was all only “Russian stuff.” Did this convenient disavowal of responsibility include consent to the regime? According to Beissinger, such differentiation between “our” needs and “their” state structures is a distinguishing feature of an empire:

Ultimately, the fundamental difference between a large multinational state and a multinational empire is not the presence or absence of objective structures of control or even policies of inequality and discrimination, but rather whether politics and policies are accepted as “ours” or rejected as “theirs.” (2005, 34)

Whereas this article avoids foregrounding one single feature as *the* defining condition of an empire, the presence of the “ours”–“theirs” dichotomy clearly manifests the alienation from state power typical of imperial borderlands.

Binarisms of “ours” and “theirs” operate in this context differently from ordinary externalization of unfavorable political moves. If one takes the example of the clash between neoliberal policies and the position of critical intellectuals in several European states of the twenty-first century (including the Baltics), one sees that democratic nation-states not only manufacture consent, but also produce strictly internal oppositions of “ours” and “theirs:” in a democratic society, some voices always express dissent. In the borderlands of the Soviet empire, by contrast, the binarism of “ours” and “theirs” was deeply rooted in a popular consciousness that framed the perception of the Russian “they” through ethnic and cultural difference, with the clear sense of a geographical violation at stake.<sup>10</sup> The carriers of difference, the “they,” could not be safely externalized, since “they” had taken control over what was “ours.”

In fact, the separation of “ours” and “theirs” had become quite hopeless. Expressions such as “Russian stuff” reacted not only against politics and policies, but also against the unavoidable internalization of “them” in all spheres of “our” life, up to intimacies of “our” homes (which reflected the material conditions of “their” Soviet regime). The dichotomy of “ours” and “theirs” was grounded on the visible presence of a “them,” that is, on those who did not show any desire to belong to “our” local cultural sphere, and on the experiences of nonlocal, centrally dictated guidelines in various areas of society. Yet this dichotomy, like any other, was a cultural construct, an effort to define and sustain local identity in opposition to any displeasing (thus “not our”) aspect of everyday life.

## Empires use colonial strategies of rule, perceivable across politics, economics, and culture

It is rather easy to classify the Soviet regime in the Baltic states as a colonial regime (see articles in Kelertas 2006 and in Annus forthcoming; Kalnačs 2013; Annus 2012, 2014). The demographic perspective serves well for an introduction: the massive influx of Russian-speaking settlers completely changed the demographic situation of Latvia and Estonia. An acute sense for the threat posed by Russification is testified in the protest letters of 17 Latvian Communists from 1972 and *The Letter of 40*, a letter of 40 Estonian intellectuals from 1980, both of which express concern about the Russification processes in the area (Riekstiņš 2009; Kiin, Ruutsoo, and Tarand 1990). Estonia was severely shaken, in 1980, by the violent suppression of high school student protests, which paraded slogans such as “Freedom for Estonia” and “Occupiers Out!,” and jokes about the new, ethnically Russian, minister of education (Kiin, Ruutsoo, and Tarand 1990). By the late 1970s and especially by the 1980s, the local cultural intelligentsia interpreted the massive Russification of these areas as a direct threat to national existence. The Estonian painter Jüri Arrak famously represented this situation in his reworking of a mythical theme: in his painting “Võitlus lohega” (1979, *Fight with a dragon*), the hero has been swallowed up by a bright red dragon, yet is still struggling from within the dragon’s belly (Figure 1). Cultural colonialism in the Baltics was most experienced as a dire threat to national survival, especially for the small Estonian and Latvian nations.

In the context of Soviet studies, the topic of Soviet colonialism asks for further elaboration. Is every empire a colonial empire? In postcolonial studies, empires are generally understood as colonial empires. One sees this, for example, in the easy moves between questions of empire and colonialism in Ann Stoler’s “Considerations on imperial comparisons,” or in the traditional concept of empire as described by Dominic Lieven: “The more usual definition sees empire as the political and cultural domination, and the economic exploitation, of the colonial periphery by the metropolitan state and nation” (2001, xiv).

The term *colonialism* can be defined as

[t]he extension of a nation’s power over territory beyond its borders by the establishment of either settler colonies and/or administrative control through which the indigenous populations



Figure 1. Jüri Arrak. *Võitlus lohega* [Fight with a dragon]. 1979.

are directly or indirectly ruled or displaced. Colonizers not only take control of the resources, trade and labor in the territories they occupy, but also generally impose, to varying degrees, cultural, religious and linguistic structures on the conquered population. (Nagai 2007, 234)<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, in the East European context, Martha Lampland (2000, 211) has defined colonialism as “the project of dominating a nation or a region through the concerted effort of transforming cultural forms as well as political institutions,” and Gayatri Spivak has proposed to Slavic scholars that “when an alien nation-state establishes itself as ruler, impressing its own laws and systems of education and rearranging the mode of production for its own economic benefit, ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized’ can be used” (2006, 828). To admirers of Soviet nationalities politics in the early years of the USSR, Ronald Suny’s description of nation-building as a typical colonial activity provides an important reminder: “The Soviet system, like the great European empires, formalized boundaries, defined ethnicities and nationalities, and in its educational projects provided the basic elements to future nation-building” (2006, 282).

Obviously, colonial strategies in different borderlands of the Soviet Union had to differ according to differing local circumstance and were likewise in constant development. Here we can distinguish at least three overlapping areas of colonial practice: political, economic, and cultural.

*Political* strategies involved controlling the local government, centralizing decision-making in the metropolis, and restructuring educational systems to produce subjects amenable to the dominant rule. Political power was guaranteed by a strong military presence, with nonlocal uniformed soldiers belonging to the everydayness of the Baltic borderlands. It is undoubtedly true that local governments had some power over local issues (their power differed in different periods and in different parts of the Soviet Union), but their decision-making was always conditioned by the threat of systemic violence and overshadowed by the prehistory of the purges: local leaders were conscious of the fragility of their position and its dependency on their conformity to metropolitan expectations and demands. According to Zubkova’s data, during the period 1944–1952, the Orgburo and Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party made 871 decisions about the Baltic republics, across very different fields of Baltic life (2008, 12). While many of these decisions were responses to local initiatives, Zubkova’s research also testifies to the wide reach of central supervision and to the fact that local decision-making had to comply with central expectations, in order to receive the necessary approval.

*Economic* colonialism does not necessarily signify ruthless exploitation of the borderlands. As Dominic Lieven and many others have pointed out, colonies often turned out to be financial burdens instead of sources of revenue (Lieven 1995, 614). The economic system in the Soviet Union involved typical colonial strategies: the central regulation of economic activities, the rerouting of economic ties and trade flows within and beyond the empire, as well as the often careless exploitation of natural resources with resultant ecological damage. Massive phosphate and oil-shale mining industries in Virumaa, in northeastern Estonia, under the direct control of the central ministries in Moscow, destroyed landscapes, polluted the air, and provided an excuse to import new settlers to work in these industries; indeed, the gas pipeline from Virumaa was first built toward Leningrad (completed 1948) and reached Tallinn only five years later, in 1953 (Smurr 2003, 400). In Lithuania by the 1980s, only about 15% of enterprises were under the full control of the Lithuanian government: five-sixths of industries were either under direct control of Moscow (classified as “All-Union”) or were “Union-Republic” enterprises where Moscow played the dominant role (Lane 2014, 78). With the arrival of the Soviet rule, centuries-long commercial relationships in the Baltic Sea region were terminated as economic trade became possible

only through central institutions. Local populations, witnessing the new scarcity of basic agricultural produce in the stores, and hearing frequent announcements of successful agricultural developments in the region, were quick to draw the conclusion that local products were being shipped to the centers of the Soviet state in an exploitative manner.

The pressure of economic colonialism becomes explicit in the decolonization process: in September 1987, four leading Estonian economists came up with a program of “Self-Managing Estonia” (*Isemajandav Eesti* or, IME, an acronym that translates as “miracle”). “The economy will be reorganized to guarantee the primary development of those areas that are based principally on local resources and that are, for us, economically viable, culturally acceptable, and in tune with our economic traditions” (reprinted in Kaljuvee 2007), state the authors of the program, which quickly became one of the cornerstones of the popular national movement (over the next months, about a hundred articles were published in support of the program – Sepp 1995). The IME document is written in opposition to the colonial organization of the Baltic economies under the Soviet rule: subjecting the local economy to the all-Soviet authority and structuring the economy for the interests of the Soviet empire, in neglect of local traditions and cultural priorities.

*Cultural* colonialism in the Soviet empire involved efforts to rewrite the collective memory of subordinate nations (for example, destroying formerly important cultural artifacts or isolating these from general access) and to reshape the value systems of the borderlands’ cultures in order to conform to the value systems of the colonizing power. The production of knowledge through state institutions was now required to serve the interests of the empire. The cultural sphere was reshaped according to the models prescribed by Moscow, but it became a complex site of mimicry, critical appropriation, and fusion, where, at moments of relative liberalism, different voices emerged to crisscross and overlap. Here, colonial ambitions to change the local culture according to nonlocal standards offer clear examples of epistemic violence; cultural colonialism worked to overwrite local modes of thought and sensibility in the newly annexed nations. Thus, the *History of the Estonian SSR* (1952, republished in 1957) opened with the following sentence: “The territory of the Estonian SSR became inhabited significantly later than other, southerly parts of the territory of the Soviet Union” (Naan 1957, 5). We see here an interesting combination of an acceptable truth-claim – indeed it is true that the territory of Soviet Estonia emerged from the receding Ice Age later than the southern parts of the Soviet Union – and a perplexing question of selection: How to start a history? This Soviet history chooses to posit Estonian beginnings as already late, even before they began. As Jaan Undusk comments,

the idea behind this kind of a beginning to a history was to accustom Estonian readers to the notion that, as a human type, but especially as (Soviet) citizens newly arrived at the apex of human social development, they were chronic latecomers of birth. (2003, 54)

This, according to Undusk, was both the main tenor of this specific volume and the prevailing tone of the more orthodox writers of the Estonian Soviet science of history (2003, 54). Estonians arrived belatedly; they were refused a position of leadership in their own history.

### **Empires fail to link pedagogical narratives and performative singularities**

In analyzing the Soviet colonial empire, we might find inspiration in one of the basic distinctions in postcolonial studies, the nonbinary, supplementary coupling of pedagogical and performative aspects of national narratives. According to Bhabha,

The people are the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*; the people are also the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence

of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the *present* through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process. (1994, 145)

This double positioning of a nation or a people between (a) the authority of history and (b) the experience of a singular human being becomes especially complicated in the presence of an imperial power.

*National pedagogy* gathers the nation together by reinforcing the narratives of its historical experience, with the important role of sustaining national identity through the Grand Myth of the nation's homogeneity, strength, and excellence. This is achieved through national rituals, such as official celebrations of nationally significant dates (e.g. Independence Day) and singing the national anthem at important festivities (e.g. at graduation ceremonies or at sporting award ceremonies); through historical fiction, film, and monumental art; and, most fundamentally, through educating children to become citizens of their nation. In the same way, the Soviet empire kept reproducing, disseminating, and updating different versions of the great pedagogical narrative about the glory of the Soviet Union. Stalinist-era Soviet ideals were disseminated among children through songs with catchy melodies and patriotic themes. Among the fictionalized "historical objects" of Soviet pedagogy, we find the story of handsome and diligent little Volodia, later to become a great leader of nations, the story of Pavlik Morozov, and many others about the Great Patriotic War. Soviet rituals were rather less successful than the children's songs and storybooks. For example, the May Day parade, from the Baltic perspective, involved waiting for hours on a chill May-first morning in order to walk for five minutes across the central square. Meetings with rhetorically illiterate war veterans could hardly hold the interest of school children, and school lessons about the history of the Communist Party and the succession of different five-year plans were among the most detested subjects at school. From the borderlands' perspective, this was perhaps the key failure of the Soviet empire: the pedagogical narrative did not perform its necessary function. Earlier Western European empires supported their authority by teaching in colonial schools the great literary texts of earlier centuries – famously, the teaching of English literature in the British colonies. By contrast, the great figures of prerevolutionary Russian culture had been largely detached from the descriptions that Soviet culture gave of itself in the borderlands. Links were proposed, of course, but these often malfunctioned. Take, for example, *Vene kirjandus: õpik IX klassile* (Lotman 1982, reprinted in 1986), the Estonian high school textbook for Russian literature in the late Soviet era. This was written by Juri Lotman, a scholar far too serious to force linkages between the great Russian literary classics and the Soviet era. Prerevolutionary Russian literature was experienced, in the borderlands, through a split, as if coming from a different Russianness, something unhappily lost in official Soviet Russian culture.

At the same time, a nation, and all the more an empire, is a *performative complex*, the sum of its people in their differences, a creative plurality that resists homogenization and strives toward difference. The performative aspect guarantees the vitality of the nation. We see this in the boy who says "vodka" instead of "voda"<sup>12</sup> in his military education classroom, and we see it in the girl who runs off to buy ice-cream just before it is finally time to walk across the central square and so misses her place in the parade – we see it in any child or adult, in other words, who is living his or her everyday life, soaked in pedagogical narratives, yet is still leading a singular life, notwithstanding the influence of national and imperial pedagogies.

Here, it is crucial to consider links between the performative and the pedagogical-historical, the moments that connect national and imperial subjects to the unfolding of the pedagogical narrative. When a student sings or listens to the national anthem in a graduation

ceremony, his or her personal achievement is linked to the destiny of the nation, and the personal becomes national. A striking example of this linkage was the “Baltic way” on 23 August 1989, when a chain of approximately two million people held hands across Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, demonstrating for freedom and marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact in 1939. This was nation-building in its perfection, where a significant portion of each participating nation joined together, holding hands, into one body of a nation and even made connection at the same time to another nation of similar aspirations. Here the dream of nation-building was quite perfectly realized, and it has, in its turn, become an important page in the national pedagogical narratives of the Baltic countries twenty years later. The performative does not easily survive over time; it will be either forgotten or else be subsumed into the pedagogical–historical. Yet even in its pedagogic mode, the story of the Estonian Singing Revolution and the “Baltic way” still expresses the linkage between the performative and the pedagogical; it is still told both as a national manifestation of the will to self-determination and as a sublime personal experience, something never to be forgotten.<sup>13</sup> Writing about the era of the Estonian Singing Revolution, the historian Kasekamp (2010, 163) noted “The only word to describe the intense feelings of this time is euphoria.” In such an evocative description we see an affirmation of the affective link between the national and the personal.<sup>14</sup>

Would the categories of performative and pedagogical help us to understand an empire, or even the Soviet empire, apart from the strategies of anticolonial nation-building in the late Soviet era? The situation is rather complicated here, especially in the borderlands, where efforts to create a common Soviet identity and the sense of a vast Soviet homeland shared by all Soviet people were understood as a danger for national survival. Keeping the focus on the “Pribaltika” or on the Baltic states, we face an entangled network of different positions and ideologies: the official pedagogical narrative about the great and peace-loving Soviet Union and about the liberty brought to the nation within the friendly family of Soviet nations; the nonofficial, yet commonly shared pedagogical narrative about the better times of the nation prior to the Soviet takeover; and, the performative life of the singular human being, as a *locus* of different and conflicting narratives, a site of resistance, appropriation, collaboration, mimicry, irony, sincerity, and inauthenticity – all mixed together in a Soviet melting pot.

Here, one of the key questions involves the affective response to national or Soviet pedagogy: What do I, a Soviet citizen, care about? The linkage between the performative and the pedagogical is effectively established through affect. The Baltic chain was successful as a manifestation of the will for the rule of law, and later for national self-determination. It addressed international politics and was fully aware of the international viewership of the spectacle. At the same time, however, the chain also functioned as an affective act of national reassertion through the linkage between the pedagogical and the performative. When a student reads an account of national or imperial history as a source of required information, but without a personal response to the text, then the text remains a distinct body of theoretical knowledge without personal urgency. National identity is created through affective chains linking the personal and the national, through the sometimes sublime feeling of singing a national song together, through identification with heroes of the past or present, and through feeling gratification and pride in belonging to a nation. In the Baltics, and surely in some other non-Russian nationalities and ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, this personal emotional commitment to the empire was rather difficult, if not impossible to achieve and sustain. This has been a persistent difficulty for all empires in the management of their borderlands: how to productively mobilize a population that lacks an emotional tie to the state.

## Conclusion

Soviet imperial practices in the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania thus suggest the following theses about empires more generally: (a) an empire is neither a category of subjective perception nor a substantial entity: the research on empires must transcend the binarism of subjective–objective categories; (b) an empire is not a fixed entity but instead a developing formation, which includes internally inconsistent strategies and technologies of rule; (c) an empire is not characterized strictly by nonconsensual control over different ethnicities; rather, an empire manufactures consent through systemic violence; (d) the imperial situation creates a distinction between “us” and “them,” a cultural construction of “our” identity as opposed to “their” flawed social structures and “their” disturbing presence in “our” land; (e) an empire uses colonial strategies of rule, perceivable across politics, economics, and culture; (f) an empire fails to link national pedagogy and performative singularity, causing a situation where the population can be held under surveillance through the manufacture of consent and through the help of systemic violence, yet the population lacks a sense of belonging, an emotional link to the state. However, categories such as performative singularity, emotional belonging, or differentiation between “us” and “them” do not yet on their own define an imperial situation, but have to be analyzed in the material grounding of the specific geopolitical situation.

This article has proposed some new methodological frameworks for research into the Soviet empire. The Baltic experience of the Soviet rule enables one to look at the Soviet nationalities question from outside the most commonly employed Soviet nation-building schemata. In the Baltic borderlands, the primary framework for the Soviet regime was the loss of pre-Soviet independence: the Soviet experience was experienced in relation to previous years, still part of living memory and oral tradition, of the independent Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian republics.

At the same time, this article has stressed the necessity of being precise in our methodological decisions. The everyday cultural sphere constantly reproduces binary structures, marking some as “ours” and others as “not ours.” In thinking about the Soviet past, the methodological task of a scholar, looking at cultural binaries, is at least twofold: first, we should draw attention to the cultural binaries of the past era and investigate its archeologies, its ways of production. Second, we should make an effort to avoid simplifying binary oppositions (such as objective *versus* subjective or coercion *versus* consent) in our scholarly work.

Similarly, national cultures (and especially colonized and decolonizing cultures) often incline toward essentialism; Spivak (1987) has even outlined the necessity of *strategic essentialism* as a decolonizing method. The scholarly task here is to unfold the construction of cultural essentialism while, of course, avoiding recreation of essentialist discourse. At the same time, we should not unduly limit scholarly methodologies out of the officious fear of (re)producing essentialism.

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## Notes

1. In Lithuania, the demographic situation was somewhat different. Lithuanians composed 78% of the 1939 population of just under 2,900,000. During and after World War II, Lithuania’s Jewish

and Polish populations were destroyed or displaced, and then proportionally replaced by an influx of Soviet-era settlers, reestablishing the same 78–80% proportion of Lithuanian-speakers. Lithuania went through a rapid urbanization period in the 25 years following the end of the war, during which its urban population exploded from 10–15% to over 50% of the total population (Davoliūtė 2014, 2).

2. Tania Raffass distinguishes between an objectivist, subjectivist, and “policy theory” of empire.
3. The Estonian scholar Tannberg (2005, 274) puts the number at more than 204,000; Zubkova (256) provides similar numbers from Soviet government documents available in Russian archives. According to Zubkova’s data, which she does not consider exhaustive and which do not cover the 1941 deportations, almost 200,000 Balts were deported from 1944 to 1952.
4. Mari Saat’s fictional account, told from a child’s perspective, adds an intriguing romantic touch to the weighty topic of deportations: for the child in her novel, deportation might hold the promise of an adventure. Similarly, but from the realm of real life, the anthropologist Skultans provides the biographical narrative of a Latvian, who, as a 13-year-old boy in search of adventure, escaped home and stowed away upon a series of trains, until he managed to reach Siberia and his deported godmother (2000, 59).
5. Gayatri Spivak introduced this notion to postcolonial studies in her articles “The Rani of Sirmur” (1985, 250, 258) and “Can the subaltern speak?” (1988, 280–281), yet did not elaborate on this topic.
6. All translations from Estonian are mine – E.A. The collection *Tolmust ja värvidest* [Of Dust and Colours] was published in a popular monthly preordered book series in 17,000 copies. Censors understood their mistake very quickly: the collection was completely silenced in the official press, no critical reviews were allowed for publication.
7. Appropriations of Native American themes to address Baltic dilemmas were already in use in the nineteenth century, by authors such as Lydia Koidula and Mats Kirsell. See Peiker’s (2006) analysis of *Periama wiimne Inka* [The Last Inka of Peru, 1866] by Lydia Koidula.
8. While Zubkova is surely correct about the biased Baltic perspective, we should also add that the postwar Baltic experience included plentiful encounters with bag people and Soviet militaries, and significantly fewer encounters with highly educated Soviet engineers. As Mertelsmann (2010, 26) has shown in the case of Estonia, the vast majority of the 1946–1948 migrants were hunger refugees and only less than 4% were recruited by the Soviet state for work in Estonia. We would assume, then, that highly educated engineers formed less than 4% of immigrants. We should also note that during the following decades, the image of Russianness became more complex and included also a widespread belief that “real” Russians in Russia were kind and cultured people, whereas the migrants would be predominantly a “lower kind” of Russians with no cultural interests (see, e.g. Toivo’s opinion in Tammer 2004, 72).
9. Take, for example, interactions in the health-care system, where doctors did not necessarily speak local languages (Anne in Tammer 76 recalls the necessity of finding somebody who could translate between a patient and a doctor).
10. The distancing gesture toward “them” was common also among Russian populations of the Soviet Union, for whom “them” referred to the government and to “all those external forces that put one’s own life out of one’s control” (Fitzpatrick 1999, 219). It is important to stress that in the borderlands the opposition between “us” and “them” had a clearly national character.
11. Compare to definitions of colonialism in (McClintock 1992, 88; Bolaffi 2003, 39; Rogers, Castree, and Kitchin 2013, 65).
12. “Water” in Russian.
13. Personal conversation with one of the participants in the Baltic chain, 12 December 2013; testimonies of the very special feeling in the chain are commonly heard in the Estonian cultural sphere.
14. It is worth noting that affective links need not rely on *positive* emotion. Paperno (2011, 145) claims that the Soviet regime’s postwar legitimacy in Soviet Russia relied upon mobilizing fears of a future nuclear war:

fear of a future nuclear war may well have been the dominant emotion of the postwar period [ ... ] For political purposes, the Soviet regime encouraged memories of the war in the population; projected into the future, these memories intensified the fear of a possible nuclear war, serving as a foundation for loyalty to the state and to the leader.

See Massumi 2010 for an excellent analysis of the media production of fear as an “affective fact” (54).

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