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LANGUAGE AND DECOLONIZATION: A LATVIAN PERSPECTIVE

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In this article, I offer a brief genealogical survey of recent developments in Baltic, and more specifically, Latvian, cultural development. Key to this methodology is the Foucauldian notion that Discourse constitutes itself as power, and those who effectively control a society's discourse, also exert power throughout that society. Furthermore, if one applies a Lacanian method, and considers the narcissistic identification with the imperial Other, then it can be demonstrated that a form of cultural self-effacement occurs during a period of occupation. This self-effacement emerges when the occupied for purposes of survival or self-advancement, begin to emulate and identify with the occupier or the imperial Other. One Latvian author who pointed to considerable irony of this pattern of identification was Aleksandrs Pelecis. Within this context, the work of Aleksandrs Pelecis emerges as a fundamental challenge to the dominant Russian-modulated discourse during the past twenty years. Pelecis' writing about his Siberian exile emerged at precisely the same time that the Baltic States were struggling for independence. Much to his dismay, Pelecis' writing recording his 20 year imprisonment in the Siberian Gulag, as published in *Melnais Vejs (The Black Wind)* was openly censored by his Latvian editors and Latvian press. It was not until Pelecis was able to re-publish the work in the United States under the title *Sibirijas Gramata (The Siberia Book)* that numerous uncensored sections were permitted into print. In his forward to *Sibirijas Gramata,* Pelecis explains that this censorship was carried out in an effort to appease both Moscow and a powerful Soviet presence within Latvia at the time (8-10). Pelecis's work is emblematic of the struggle for freedom in the Baltic states just prior to the turn of the decade. Implicit within the short genealogy that I offer here is the systematized socio-political and cultural Russification applied against Latvia through various forms of rejection, exclusion, marginalization, censorship, distortion, and so on. More recently, with Baltic independence, there has been a shift in emphasis from political ideology to economic reality, from culture to business. The modes of oppression used to undermine Baltic identity were often linguistically based, and included social and cultural genocide, the eradication of language and religion, as well as the publication of texts, and conduct of business and government in Russian rather than Latvian. Also, there was a persistent Russification of education, and all major communications systems (including the various media, radio, television, newspapers, publishing houses, etc.). It is common knowledge that during the occupational period, Latvians could choose to attend schools that trained students in Latvian and not Russian. However, only those who attended Russian-speaking schools were permitted to continue studies at the post-secondary school level. All others were prohibited. During the fifty year occupation, the various modes of linguistic oppression resulted in what might be termed a *Samizdat* mind-state where a counter-culture was in constant ferment. Now, with new-found freedom, and a smaller degree of adversity, matters of cultural identity have receded in importance while more immediate questions of economic development are pursued. Attention has shifted from a defense of cultural identity to the necessities of a newly awakened materialism. To a great extent, cultural idealism has been understandably supplanted by economic pragmatism. But, within the context of often difficult economic advances, we should not ignore the importance of the cultural voices that have emerged during this remarkable period. While the Baltic States, including Latvia are currently undergoing an uneasy form of political-economic de-colonization, they have yet to embark on a significant decolonization of the mind. If the various creative arts play an important role in defining a social identity, then now is a suitable time to re-evaluate and re-consider cultural expression in the Baltics. Artists and writers serve as visionaries, or as media guru Marshall McLuhan has put it, the psychic "antennae" of a society indicating an appropriate set of social values that can combine to establish what might be termed a social identity. It is no small irony then, that now, during this period of relative freedom and modest economic stability, that culture, the very thing that can shape a Latvian vision of the future, finds itself being marginalized once again, only this time from within by the very people that it can best serve. Michel Foucault has reminded us that the greatest moment of horror happens when we discover that we are enslaved to ourselves. I conjecture that to find true liberty in the Baltics, it will be necessary to pursue simultaneous courses along political-economic axes, as well as along cultural-artistic axes. Political-economic decolonization is one thing, but a decolonization of the mind is quite another. When I was in Riga in 1996, I was struck by the renewed vigor of the city. Without a doubt the economy was struggling, financial growth difficult, but developments were evident. However, with so much energy invested into economic revitalization, cultural growth not only seemed slow, but in some ways, was waning. Much of the print-media was in Latvian, but to a significant extent was still Russian-influenced. It may be that Latvia has gained a new-found political liberty, but the Latvian mind apparently remains enslaved by fifty years of Russo-Soviet occupation. Like other social groups caught up within what has been termed a "post-colonial" condition, Latvia has experienced a profound shock of the mind that shares some commonalties with

conditions experienced by blacks in South Africa, East Indians under British imperial rule, Tibetans under Chinese rule, East Timorese under Indonesian dominance, Chiapas in Mexico, or the Aboriginal peoples of North America, Wa Thiong'o Ngugi has noted a recurring pattern in colonial oppression in his key study *Decolonising the Mind:*

> The oppressed and the exploited of the earth maintain their defiance: liberty from theft. But the biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples' languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death-wish. Amidst this wasteland which it has created, imperialism presents itself as the cure and demands that the dependent sing hymns of praise with the constant refrain: Theft is holy.' Indeed, this refrain sums up the new creed of the neocolonial bourgeoisie. (3)

The long-term effect of the "culture bomb" in the Baltics has exceeded the period of occupation by the Soviet and is still felt in subtle ways. The notion of "theft" as Ngugi identifies it, is difficult to expunge. On the more obvious economic level, the black-market flourishes in the Baltics and police forces are inadequate to the task. News media regularly identify scandals and corruption among top bank officials or high governmental figures. However, an alternate and less noticeable form of "theft" has occurred. Although the situation differs considerably across the Baltics, in Latvia and Estonia, at least, language itself, has become one of the most contentious issues. In Latvia, for example an extremely small majority of 52% Latvians finds itself confronted with the aftershock of an intense fifty-year agenda of Russification. The reinstitutionalization of the national language is being met with resistance from sectors which include the youth, and 48% of the national populace which is not grounded in the Latvian culture or language. The significance of this loss of an indigenous language extends beyond political and cultural matters.

In his study on linguistic patterns, *Language Thought and Reality,* noted linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf, discusses early conceptions of language which began with the Greeks and persisted to the twentieth century. He suggests that in the classical Greek period, it was believed that a thought in any given language could be grasped by all and that ideas could be readily translated from one language to another. This view persisted over the centuries and even recently it was held that a thought expressed in one language could be translated without loss of meaning into any other language. But, Whorf demonstrated that this view of translation was flawed. He explained that a language actually shapes the *world-view* of a people. There is more to translation than simply finding corresponding words. One must also recognize the cultural differences, and differences in world-view that accompany each language. The conception of time, for example, can be radically different in various cultures. These differences in world-view, are also integral to the language of each people. "A change in language," argues Whorf, "can transform our appreciation of the Cosmos" (vii). If one considers the implications of Whorf's theory within the context of Ngugi's statement regarding psychic colonization, then, the Russo-Soviet agenda of eradication of the native language can also be seen as a frontal attack against a particular world-view. I contend that it is the undermining of this *world-view* that has led to the psychic malaise presently evident in Latvia.

The general sense of despair in Latvia is being addressed currently by a number of artists, writers, and sculptors. Latvian photographers such as Valts Kleins and Gvido Kajons, when visiting Canada, explained that they did not need to search far for subject matter in Latvia. The irony of the Latvian condition confronted them on every street-corner. These artists often offer absurdist or ironic juxtapositions in their photos. Kajons, for example, presents images of circus posters set against slum tenements, or missile carriers passing by piles of rubble in areas scheduled for "reconstruction" *(Rampike* 8/1: 45). Such artists only needed to aim and shoot their cameras in order to capture the psychic trauma so evident around them. Writers have also depicted this sense of dislocation and alienation. A portion of Riga author, Andra Nieburga's text XXX was translated from the Latvian by Banuta Rubess. Nieburga writes:

> Fate. Pain. Indifference.
> Moscow teenagers play inside elevator shafts permitting the cabins to smear them against the walls, in Lima, they ride the train tops ducking electrical wires. Flights of passion, intoxicating falls. Mothers give birth in the attics of abandoned houses, claw holes in sawdust for stillborn....
> You are slain for your nationality, you are slain for your faith, you are slain for a cigarette.
>
> *(Rampike,* 8/1: 44)

An almost catatonic sense of Kierkegaardian shutuppedness typifies the apocalyptic mind-set of the Latvian psyche as a result of the occupation. Among other things, the agenda of colonization included an agenda aimed at the annihilation of Latvian identity. Such agendas have been traced frequently by numerous thinkers including Frantz Fanon, Wa Thiong'o Ngugi, Wole Soyinka, Trinh Minh-ha and Jeanette Armstrong among many others. There are many in Latvia who are already aware of the importance of restoring language, religion, education, and communications, in order to re-assert a cultural identity. However, a restoration of cultural identity is considerably more complex than achieving political independence. I will turn here to a brief genealogy of events during the past ten years.

In an article titled "The Third Awakening Begins: The Birth of the Latvian Popular Front, June 1988 to August 1988" in the *Journal of Baltic Studies* (XXVII 4: Winter 1996), Andrejs Penikis of Columbia University writes of the Popular Front of Latvia winning control of the republican government in March of 1990:

> In the ten months from June 1988 to March 1989 the face of politics in Soviet Latvia changed dramatically. The policy of *perestroika,* espoused by Mikhail Gorbachev took hold and unleashed forces which gave birth to an independent Republic of Latvia. In different ways, various groups and individuals aspired to tinker with, reform, democratize, save, and destroy the Soviet system in Latvia. The coalition which became the Popular Front of Latvia (PFL) included an array of viewpoints, from religious and nationalist dissidents to elite reformers and opportunists. The PFL had its genesis in the June 1988 plenum of creative workers' unions. ... In March 1990 the PFL won control of the republican government in parliamentary elections. (261)

Well aware of the cultural displacement at that time, Penikis, in the same article, identifies the Latvian Writers plenum of June 1-2, 1988 as a key turning point in the struggle for regaining independence. Penikis stressed that the Writers' plenum recognized the importance of writing and discourse in the cultural and political struggle. He suggests that the resolution enacted by the leaders of the writers' and other creative workers' unions was the most important Latvian political document since the independence declaration of November 18, 1918. Dainis Ivans, a crusading journalist, was also the first chairman of the PLF at the time. Penikis comments on the suppression of this event by the Soviet-influenced media:

> Despite the presence of four Latvian Communist Part (CPL) Central Committee (CC) secretaries, including first secretary Boris Pugo, the creative workers' plenum was not broadcast live on Latvian television, although lengthy excerpts were shown. Clearly, someone in authority in the Communist Party believed that the proceedings would be 'too hot' for the masses. (268-69)

The anxiety over the writers plenum was understandable. The resolutions of the Writers' Plenum identified a number of heretofore suppressed historical facts, as well as contemporary conditions including that Stalin forcibly annexed Latvia, that Soviet economic and social politics threatened the very existence of the Latvian people, and that Soviet economic development policy damaged Latvian culture and retarded development of the social infra-structure. (Penikis 269-70)

This fundamental first step by writers not only recognized the psychic trauma that the nation experienced but also insisted on the publication and dissemination of what, until then, had been suppressed under a Soviet-dominated media. The Writer's Plenum argued for the necessary first steps in re-establishing cultural independence as opposed to political independence. Implicit in the writers' argument was a recognition of the link between freedom of expression, language, and a *cultural world-view.* The battle transcended mere political and linguistic differences and addressed the clash between Russo and Lett world-views. The Latvian Diaspora also recognized similar conditions. For example, the importance of language and communications and its connection to a specific world-view was acknowledged by Vineta Goba whose report "Operable Cancer: Why the Soviet Army Must Leave Latvia" was published in the *American Latvian Association Dimensions* bulletin. Goba argued convincingly that the presence of the Soviet military was recognizably altering the collective Latvian psyche. That issue of the bulletin also included the following commentary:

> January 1991. It seems so long ago. [Soviet] Black Berets take over the Latvian Publishing House on the 2nd. Mysterious explosions throughout Riga, even in front of the Communist Party building. Barricades in Vilnius. The January 14th attack on Vilnius' Television Centre. Fourteen dead. Barricades in Riga. The January 21 attack on the Latvian Interior Ministry building. Five dead. The World, shocked out of Gulf War anxiety by televised death in defense of freedom. (5)

It is significant that the battle was not so much over property, or bodies, but over the communications media which shaped the national discourse and hence the national identity. If language is power, as Foucault contends, then the Soviets at this point moved with the precision against the key targets. The struggle was as much over control of language, which could then be used to maintain Latvia's economic and psychic dependence on Russia. In 1991, in an article titled "June 14, 1941 - Fifty Years On: Baltic Communities Remember First Massive Deportations" the *Latvian News Digest* reports the events in Latvia one year after achieving political independence:

> Baltic communities throughout the United States and in the Baltic countries themselves, commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the first mass deportations from the Baltic countries by the USSR... a central event of the June 14 commemoration in Latvia, the extinguishing of the Soviet-installed eternal flame at the Brethren Cemetery in Riga, was canceled as Soviet troops blockaded the cemetery. Other events did go on as scheduled in Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania... The anniversary took on an ominous air in Latvia, where Soviet Army and OMON troops denied access to the eternal flame commemorating Soviet war dead, which was brought to Latvia from Soviet Russia in 1958. Pro-independence activists had wished to extinguish the flame and relight it with one brought from a famous World War I battlefield near Riga, to commemorate fallen Latvian partisans and freedom fighters. Other events included concerts, rallies and academic conferences. (7)

The struggle for the colonization of the mind ensues not so much in terms of open combat, but as a propaganda war. It is a war of culture, of icons, symbols and language struggling over world-views. The action of defending the eternal Soviet flame and the prevention of the lighting of a Latvian eternal flame served a profound psychological purpose. While a degree of political independence had been achieved, the occupation of the Latvian psyche continued. In 1992, Maris Grinblats argues in the *Montreal Latvian Community Bulletin* that the true goal of Russians in Latvia, has not been threatened up to this point in time:

> The goal of neo-colonialism is to place Latvia under non-communist, non-socialist, even Latvian governance. The main tactic at this point, is the strengthening of economic might... They [Soviet interests] understand that: the Saeime (government) may find itself with elected Latvian representatives, but so long as there is no interruption to privatization of business and industry, and so long as governmental structures are unable to divest themselves of connections with functionaries of the former regime as well as former checkists (KGB), and so long as the occupying military force remains as a threat, and so long as there is the presence of powerful and influential military personal (either ex-officio or retired), then there will be sufficient former Soviet followers to suppress the existing Latvian and patriotic movements through the new governmental system in spite of apparent democratization, and so the Saeime will continue to work according to Russian interests. (5)

Grinblats' point is quite clear. Even though there may be a shaky new democratically elected government, the cultural bomb is still taking its toll. Although they offer tacit resistance, former Soviet interests are content to allow limited democracy, provided that financial domination continues under an atmosphere of psychic domination. Such domination includes maintenance of control over the mass media. In the September 1992 *AABS: Baltic Studies Newsletter* Janis Kreslins' "Reflections on the Recent History of the Baltic States and Their New Independent Press" examines the state of the presses in Latvia:

> One of the most important results of the Kremlin's *glasnost* and *perestroika* policies and of the Baltic peoples' drive for independence was the establishment of a completely new structure of the press. Whereas formerly there were only the official Soviet type newspapers and journals, an immense number of new publications appeared when the political control and censorship by the communist party officials was abolished. At first some of the old publications continued to appear with new titles, but very soon hundreds of new newspapers and journals appeared, representing an unbelievable spectrum of political, religious and philosophical views. It was, and is, almost impossible to get a complete overview of the many new publications. Most titles appear highly irregularly and a great number of the new publications has ceased publication because of financial problems caused by the worsening economic situation, the lack of paper and the new technologies required for the printing and distribution of the papers and journals.

> Furthermore, whereas in the period from 1987 to 1990 the price of most publications was very low, now, especially recently, the price of most papers and journals is almost prohibitive. Consequently, some of the leading newspapers, not to mention many smaller newspapers, newsletters and journals are appearing now in a reduced format or have ceased publication. It is also worth mentioning that at the present most successful in publishing their papers and journals have been the writers and journalists who already were professionals in their fields under the communist regime. (9-10)

While there is an *apparently* new and emerging heterogeneity in the presses which circumvents the old hegemony, it is more a case of re-packaging the old Russian party-line. Political change has little influence over economic change, and in many cases, the media have simply changed names, without changing socio-cultural or political positions. All too frequently, the media are still advancing the Russo, not the Lett world-view. Any hopes for cultural independence remain secondary to entrenched systems of communication. Andrejs Plakans arrives at a similar finding in his *Journal of Baltic Studies* (Vol. XXV, No. 1), article "The Tribulations of Independence: Latvia 1991-1993" where he discusses internal resistance to change in Latvia:

> To begin with, the tasks associated with the "elimination" of Soviet "remnants" - the institutions, practices, and habits of mind of the 1945-1991 period - had emerged during the *perestroika* period and achieved even greater urgency after 1991. Chagrined reformers had to admit, however, that these so-called "remnants" had a much greater staying power than the euphoria of the "third awakening" envisioned. In fact, during the 1991-93 period it became difficult to sort out what precisely these "remnants" now were. (64)

Plakans explains that a considerable portion of the non-Latvian populace maintained its influence in key political and cultural sectors in the country. He further explains that even after the August 1991 coup, and the subsequent December 1991 dissolution of the USSR, reforms were difficult to introduce in Latvia, in spite of the fact that Latvia refused to join the Russian Commonwealth:

> Since Latvia early on announced that it was not going to join the Commonwealth of Independent States, the structures of Latvian life created in the Soviet period were no longer protected by any external legitimating source. Yet, ironically, the job of continued dismantling remained in the hands of the principal holdovers from the old regime - the Latvian Supreme Soviet (parliament) and the Council of Ministers -which were not anxious to undo their pre-1991 work. (65)

The reactionary politics evident in Latvia during this period serve to indicate the deep entrenchment of political and cultural values. The decolonization of the mind remains an unfinished task.

By 1997, world interest begins to turn occasionally to the enigmatic Baltic states. Articles begin to sporadically appear in major English-language newspapers such as the *Toronto* Star where Olivia Ward, a non-Bait, writes about economic growth and the Baltic struggle for respect within the context of the international news media:

> In Riga, international investors no longer need to cope with rats, cold showers and sour bureaucrats. When Arthur Krieger first moved to Riga in 1993, he found himself a Western business pioneer in the newly liberated Baltics. "There was nowhere to live, so we moved into a local apartment, rats and all," he said with a shudder. "The water pipes were bursting, the power kept going out and I started every morning with a cold shower because all the hot water was diverted to industry." ... The Riga of 1993, with its poorly stocked shops, sour Soviet-trained office workers and crumbling buildings was worse than anything Krieger had encountered in the Pacific Rim, including China, where he had spent most of his career. But it is a far cry from the Riga of today [1997], where shops and restaurants line the main streets, foreign cars raise no eyebrows and guests in Krieger's now-completed five-star Radisson SAS Daugave Hotel feel closer to the West than the old Soviet empire. When Latvia's new currency stabilized in 1994 and the political system looked to be settling in peacefully, Riga's business life took off for the first time since the 1920's.... But even with economic reforms under way, crime on the decline and a prime minister who is promoting foreign investment, the going is slower than many new entrepreneurs would have hoped in this small market of 2.5 million people. (F-6)

Articles of this sort mark a rather ambivalent entry into the world market with the hope of luring investors through foreign media. Soon, other prominent non-Baits participate in the growing interest and discussion surrounding the Baltic States. Notably, Jack F. Matlock Jr. former U.S. ambassador to the Soviet, speaks at the 1996 AABS conference:

> The Baltic states need to move as rapidly as possible, and I think they are moving rapidly, for more and more integration, both economic and, to the degree possible, political, with the Nordic countries, with the other countries bordering on the Baltic Sea, and particularly with the European Union....
>
> Most of all, though, the Baltic states provide for Russia a window to the west, a window which is important to Russia, even if we do not think of it in the former geopolitical terms. Obviously they cannot be a window to the west if Russia tries to dominate the Baltic states politically. But to the degree that the whole neighborhood can become more democratic, the Baltic states provide a natural avenue for both influences and for goods. It will enhance the role of the Baltic states economically and politically if they can position themselves as part of that east-west highway. (5)

The battle of rhetoric begins to heat up. Juxtaposing past indignities against present realities, Matlock, like Grinblats and others before him identifies the psychic split between idealism and pragmatism. Baits are encouraged to swallow their pride in order to benefit from a potentially rewarding economic position. Enticing metaphors including the notion of a "window to the west" and an "east-west highway" are presented in an effort to sway public opinion away from open confrontation and towards the reality of economic reform. Nonetheless, some doubts remain, and implicit in Matlock's presentation is a Russo-US connection with the Baltic serving a bridging function. The bridge itself might be an economically advantageous position. However, he speaks of benefits from the point of Russia, and not the Baltic, as though the two were equivalent. If indeed, the agenda in Moscow is to permit economic freedom so long as it serves Russian interests, then how much has truly been gained through political independence? Furthermore, however potentially helpful and convincing Matlock's suggestions for economic reform might be, they overlook the question of reestablishing a Latvian cultural identity and world-view in Latvia. It is not entirely surprising to see the representative of one major imperial power (USA), overlooking a struggling democracy and instead finding greater identification with another imperial power (USSR). If economic conditions remain dependent upon links between Moscow and the west, how much progress can there have been in the decolonization of the Latvian mind? Arguably, very little indeed. The struggle for change continues as reported by Geoffrey York in the Toronto *Globe & Mail,* one of Canada's largest and most influential English-language newspapers:

> More than five years after independence, Estonia and Latvia are still consumed by feuds over Russian minority rights. The issue has caused a nasty spat with Moscow and a fierce debate in the republics themselves. The Kremlin has repeatedly accused Estonia and Latvia of 'human rights violations' against the one million stateless Russians who make up nearly a third of their population. Moscow has threatened both countries with economic sanctions if they refuse rights to their Russian minorities. Russian nationalists, such as Vladimir Zhirinovsky, have gone much further, raising the spectre of military intervention to protect the Russians from so-called "apartheid" and "ethnic cleansing." The response from the Baltic side has been equally ferocious. Latvian and Estonian

> nationalists have accused Moscow of bullying and imperialist attitudes. Some have suggested that the Russians are arrogant colonists who should return to their motherland. Others have criticized the Kremlin for its hypocrisy in ignoring Russia's own record of human-rights violations.... Only one of the three Baltic countries - Lithuania - has avoided the citizenship controversy, and only because its Russian minority is relatively small - just 10 per cent of the population. Feeling no threat from this minority, Lithuania has allowed the Russians to obtain citizenship and voting rights. In the other two Baltic states, Russians and such other Russian-speaking people as Ukrainians and Belorussians are 35 to 40 per cent of the population. Latvians, in particular, feel insecure because they are only 51 per cent of the population in their own country.... Government officials in Latvia and Estonia insist that citizenship laws will remain in place, although there might be some minor amendments. They deny that they are deliberately trying to push Russians out of the Baltic states. And they deny that the Russians suffer any serious discrimination or human-rights violations. 'If you want to live here, you have to integrate,' said Aino Lepik, head of the human-rights division in the Estonian foreign ministry. *'Language is part of integration.'*

(A-1 - A-15)

Again, the struggle turns to matters of cultural integration, and more specifically, to language. As Foucault has repeatedly explained, language is power, and those who control the channels of discourse or language, also hold the power. The deeper meaning of this struggle becomes apparent when one overlaps Foucault's theory with Whorf's view of the connections between language and world-view. Consider the extent to which a linguistic environment shapes a culture and national world-view. To be within a linguistic environment that consists of a foreign or alien language places the individual at a decided practical disadvantage, as many members of the Baltic Diaspora know all too well after emigrating to the US, UK, Canada, Australia, etc. Being outside a language stigmatizes the individual and brands them as an outsider. In relatively benevolent cultures such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, or the United States, this stigmatization is less objectionable than it is in a situation where the dominant language is also used to exercise power and oppression over the mind-set of an entire nation. To be displaced, set apart as an "outsider" within the borders of one's own nation is demoralizing, and disheartening. One cannot throw aside the sense of oppression until one can throw aside the language of oppression. To be truly free, one must also be free within one's own language, and the world-view that language embraces. In Latvia the situation has become increasingly strained. Olivia Ward reports in *The Toronto Star,* Canada's second major English-speaking newspaper on the experience of Russians living in Latvia:

> Émigrés from the former colonial master live uneasily at the top and bottom of Latvian society. In the streets of Riga, Dmitri Gurov could be mistaken for any Latvian teenager. With his blond hair, wide blue eyes and quiet manner, he blends easily into the crowds going about their daily business. But there is one big difference. Although Dmitri was born in Riga, he has no Latvian citizenship. He is considered to be Russian, like his parents who have lived in the Baltic state for decades. He is one of Latvia's 700,000 Russian-speakers who have fallen between the cracks of a crumbling empire, disenfranchised by the newly independent country that has emerged from the Soviet Union. 'It doesn't bother me really,' he shrugs. 'I could write a citizenship exam but I don't want to. It's too much of a sweat. You have to know everything about the constitution, as well as the language. I don't want to do that right now. Maybe sometime in the future.'...
>
> Another reason for the lack of interest, says Dmitri's father Vladimir Gurov, is that for the financially secure the reality of non-citizenship is not as bad as the restrictions imply, for those who care little about politics. 'We have 'non-citizen' passports that are recognized anywhere, so we have no travel problems. And as for the rest, if you have money, you can get around just about anything.' Gurov, a media baron who owns the Business in the Baltics newspapers published in two languages, and a bilingual Russian-Latvian radio station, has lived in Riga for most of his life. Like many Russian-speakers, he was brought to Latvia by a military father who preferred to stay and settle here. To them Russia is a homeland, but not a home. 'Russia is a huge and beautiful country,' Gurov says. 'But I'm a resident of Latvia. I love it here. I speak Latvian. I have nothing in common with those Russians in Kazakhstan who are dying to come back to Russia. If I was told to live in Russia, I'd refuse. Gurov identifies mainly with the business community at large. Unlike the more than 100,000 Russian pensioners who barely survive on less than $100 a month, he looks at political issues in terms of new market opportunities. 'What Latvians and Russians need is a stable business environment,' he says. 'I may not be completely satisfied with the situation just now, but I'm not going out to start any revolutions.' From the sketchy statistics that are available, it appears that the majority of business people in Latvia are Russian. According to one survey, they comprise up to 55 per cent of the new private sector. And they are able to make the most of their language, connections and ease of travel to Russia for successful business ties. They are all the more powerful because Latvia is still economically dependent on Russia, especially for vital energy supplies. 'When you see a woman on the street in full-length mink,' says one Latvian university professor, 'she's almost always Russian.' (F-6)

It is clear that in spite of pressures from a newly empowered Latvian government, a majority of Russian residents have chosen to ignore citizenship language requirements. It is equally clear that an unprecedented agenda of linguistic and cultural degradation was conducted in Latvia during its fifty year occupation by the Soviet. Although Latvia was occupied by other nations in the past (notably, Sweden and Germany), none but the Soviet Union insisted on subjugating and eradicating the Latvian language. This genealogical tracing of the sustained attack against the native Latvian language by the occupying Soviet force begs a question. Why is the struggle over language so insistent?

If, as Benjamin Lee Whorf contends, one's linguistic environment can shape one's world-view, and one's identity, then the ramifications of Russification become rather apparent, and the reason for Russians resisting the re-installation of the native Latvian language becomes equally apparent. In order to continue economic domination of the region, it is highly advantageous to Moscow to maintain a psychic mode of colonization, even if the political colonization has technically come to an end with Latvia's independence at the turn of this decade. During the fifty years period of occupation, Latvians were persistently diverted from their self-identity and in Ngugi's words above, pressured into a loss of "belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves." In the after-shock of occupation, the Latvian psyche is highly vulnerable and malleable. It suffers from a collective lack of self-confidence or self-esteem. The former imperial power is still perceived as vital to the well-being of the nation, and the language of the occupying nation still signifies an economic and cultural potency that appears to be lacking in Latvia. Whether this perception is accurate is beside the point. What does matter is the sense that the culture of the former empire as Other is perceived too often as being desirable to the traditional and indigenous culture of Latvia. Language lies at the heart of the matter and currently, at the heart of the heart is the besieged Latvian world-view. This heart is the arena of struggle for Latvia's self-actualization. When one considers the shaping power of language in the form of folk-songs, story-telling, poetry, and mythology, and adds to these the daily impact of street signs, billboards, advertisements, educational materials, maps, history books, newspapers, radio and television reports, then one can see the power of language in shaping and affecting the cultural psyche and world-view of a people. I contend that it is language itself, complete with its extensive and embedded cultural history that ultimately defines a people. While advances have been made in both political and economic directions, a decolonization of the mind will be slow until the Latvian language is convincingly re-established. The political, economic, and cultural reclamation of Latvia is currently enjoying slow but steady progress. However

this progress can be accelerated primarily through a re-assertion of language, and it is largely in this linguistic arena that the de-colonization of the Latvian psyche will occur.

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