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Eastern Europe, the Moral Subject of the Migration/Refugee Crisis, and Political Futures[1]

DACE DZENOVSKA

The recent sequence of crisis in/of Europe suggests that every crisis produces Europeanness anew. In the midst of the sovereign debt crisis in Greece in the summer of 2015, now so powerfully overshadowed by the migration/refugee crisis, Greek Europeanness came to be questioned, because Greece refused to behave like a responsible economic subject.[2] Instead of willingly tightening belts, cutting the state budget and restructuring debt, Greece's left-leaning politicians and citizens protested the austerity measures proposed by European and international financial institutions. The measure of Europeanness that emerged in the midst of the crisis was not formal membership in European political institutions, but morally infused economic conduct.

Besides positing a juxtaposition between failed Europeans, exemplified by Greece, and proper Europeans, exemplified by Germany, the Greek sovereign debt crisis also opened the opportunity for not-quite-Europeans, such as Eastern European states and peoples, to assert their Europeanness. For example, following its own financial crisis of 2008, Latvia emerged as an exemplary economic and European subject, because the government led by Valdis Dombrovskis implemented severe austerity measures. Several years later, in the context of the Greek sovereign debt crisis, Latvia reasserted this hard-fought Europeanness, when politicians, civil servants, intellectuals and members of the general public converged in aggressive criticism of Greek irresponsibility and lack of willingness to 'play by the rules.'

However, this hard-fought Europeanness was fragile. It dissipated in the midst of Europe's migration/refugee crisis, when it was Eastern Europeans, including Latvians, who emerged as rogue subjects refusing to "play by the rules." When it was recognized in public and political discourse across Europe that a crisis was afoot and that something had to be done to cope with the large numbers of migrants/refugees trying to enter Europe through Greece, Italy, and Hungary, many of them dying en route, the European Commission proposed refugee quotas to distribute the burden between the European Union member states. Most Eastern European member states opposed refugee quotas. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia agreed to voluntarily take in small numbers of refugees. Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland announced that they would only take Christian refugees, while Hungary mobilized troops, prisoners and the unemployed to rapidly build a fence on its border with Serbia (Koranyi 2015).

After the quota plan was approved in the European Parliament in September 2015, envisaging the resettlement of 120,000 refugees within the next two years, the government of Slovakia threatened to contest the decision in court. Following the terror attacks in Paris in November 2015, Poland, which had ini-

DACE DZENOVSKA is Associate Professor in Anthropology of Migration at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford. She holds a PhD in Social Cultural Anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley. Previously, she has worked at the University of Latvia. Her research interests pertain to modes of power that shape the contemporary political landscape in Europe, especially in relation to Eastern Europe. She has studied and written about the re-bordering of Europe in the context of European Union enlargement, practices and governance of mobility within the European Union and the associated shifts in sovereignty and forms of statehood, as well as tolerance promotion and anti-racism initiatives implemented as part of the post-socialist democratization agenda in Latvia. Her book *The Great Departure: Staying and Leaving After Postsocialism* is forthcoming with Berghahn Books. She has also completed a book manuscript entitled *Complicit Becoming: Tolerance Work and Europeanization After Socialism*.

1. Some of the observations included in this essay were previously published as a blog entry entitled "Refugee Crisis, Compassion and Eastern Europe," COMPAS blog, October 6, 2015. Available here: http://compasoxfordblog.co.uk/2015/10/refugee-crisis-compassion-and-eastern-europe/

2. There is an ongoing debate about the consequences of distinguishing migrants and refugees as two separate categories through which to understand the movement of people seeking livable lives in Europe (e.g. Malone 2015, Carling 2015). I will therefore refer to the crisis as the migration/refugee crisis. At the same time, much of my discussion will concern debates about why or why not European states should take in refugees, all the while recognizing the problematically narrow definition of refugees that these debates assume.

ZONE BOOKS
near futures
ONLINE

tially supported the plan, refused to carry it out. The President of Latvia, in turn, stated that Latvia will not accept any more refugees until Europe's border security can be assured.[3]

In contrast with older European Union member states, Eastern European states did not have significant numbers of residents with Middle Eastern, African or Asian background and were determined to keep it that way. There were protests in many Eastern European cities against accepting refugees. Arguments against accepting refugees that came forth from Eastern European member states voiced concerns about cultural incompatibility, racial and religious difference, security threats, inability to distinguish genuine refugees from economic migrants, negative experience with integration in other European Union member states and localities, lasting socialist legacies of population resettlement that continued to undermine post-socialist polities, poor economies, impoverished populations and imposed solidarity by Europe that invoked memories of directives from Moscow. The left and liberal print and online media on both sides of the Atlantic and within Western and Eastern Europe filled with commentaries that accused Eastern Europeans of lacking compassion and tried to shame them into moral maturity and, by extension, agreeable politics.[4]

Despite historical and political differences between Eastern European member states, Eastern Europe emerged as an ideal type – an unsympathetic not-quite-European subject mired in racialized paranoia about foreigners, exaggerated concerns about self-determination and self-preservation, and timeworn claims of historical suffering. Different pasts and presents were obfuscated by a moralizing discourse. Disagreeable politics and attitudes were traced to moral failures, which amounted to failed Europeanness. The failed Europeanness of Eastern Europe was juxtaposed to Europe proper, once again exemplified and led by Germany, and thus the moral goodness of Europe was reasserted.[5] This goodness was characterized by compassion as a political virtue that demands and legitimates emergency humanitarian measures, which, as Didier Fassin (2001) has argued, go hand-in-hand with the increasingly repressive European migration regimes.

In these preliminary reflections on an emerging situation, I analyze the call for compassion directed at Eastern Europe in relation to public reasoning about the migration/refugee crisis in one Eastern European member state, namely Latvia. I do not take Latvia to stand for the ideal-type subject of Eastern Europe, nor am I interested in tracing its historical difference from this ideal type. Rather, I treat the Latvian case as a dynamic set of arguments through which to analyze the construction of the morally deficient Eastern European subject, as well as the limits of liberal politics of compassion.

I argue – along with other critics of compassion as a political virtue (e.g. Ticktin 2011, Fassin 2001, 2011) – that humanitarian politics enable and reproduce Europe's migration regimes and that the accusation of Eastern Europe as lacking compassion is yet another manifestation of Europe's civilizing mission.[6] However, I attempt to go further and ask whether more subversive articulations of politics as ethics open alternative ways for thinking about the migration/refugee crisis and political futures in Europe.[7]

3. The situation is changing as I write, given the recent events in Cologne, where groups of what appear to be men of migrant/asylum seeker background sexually assaulted and robbed women in the square by the Cologne train station as they came to celebrate New Year's Eve (see, for example, Kroet 2016).

4. For examples, see: Lyman 2015, Gross 2015, Simecka & Tallis 2015, Rupnik 2015, Komorovskis 2015, Krastev 2015, Sabet-Parry 2015, Hockenos 2015, Gressel 2015, Roland 2015. It should be noted that there were also less noticed counter-protests, counter-arguments, and counter-actions, arguing for the need to extend help, as well as pointing to the obligation towards other European Union member states to share the burden. These did not get picked up by the media.

5. See Böröcz 2006 for an early critique of European goodness. See also Dzenovska 2013.

6. See Wendy Brown's (2006) resonant analysis of the liberal political virtue of tolerance. See also Dzenovska n.d.

7. It is beyond the scope of this essay to engage the rich literature on the difference between morality and ethics (see, for example, Fassin 2014 on the ethical turn in anthropology). For the purposes of this essay, I will take ethics to refer to a relational project of self-making, and I will take morality to refer to a normative code that calls upon individuals to conduct themselves in a particular way. I thank Milad Odabaei for urging me to clarify my use of these terms.

ZONE BOOKS
near futures
ONLINE

In this essay, I draw on the articulation of "diasporic ethics" and "ethics of cohabitation" in the work of Judith Butler (2015, 2013). These articulations of politics as ethics question hegemonic forms of power that strive for certainty by embracing the uncertainty of living with others as generative of other futures without giving these futures concrete form. However, it seems that in the current historical moment the certainty that modern political forms, such as the nation-state, strive for is becoming more elusive than ever. For example, Wendy Brown (2010) has argued that political sovereignty is becoming detached from the nation-state even as many nation-states are building walls around or through them. Dimitris Papadapoulos, Niamh Stephenson and Vassilis Tsianos (2008) have suggested that it is not nation-states that govern today, but rather multi-scalar "governing aggregates." Ivan Krastev (2015), in turn, has argued that representative democracy is in crisis and that this is evident when people in squares around the world do not articulate political demands or offer solutions, but rather assert that "the people exists and is angry." In conditions when sovereignty, governance and politics are in an increasingly uncertain relationship with modern political forms, there is a pressing need to link thinking about politics as ethics with thinking about concrete forms that other political futures can take.

BECOMING COMPASSIONATE, BECOMING EUROPEAN

Compassion deployed in the context of the migration/refugee crisis is not a "private sentiment" (Arendt 1990, Canovan 1992). It is a political virtue expected to extend to kin and strangers alike. However, according to Hannah Arendt, the private sentiment of compassion risks turning into pity when brought into the public arena, thus preventing engagement with fellow "men" [sic] as political equals (Arendt 1990). Compassion as a political virtue – not unlike tolerance as a political virtue – does not posit such equality (Brown 2006, Dzenovska n.d.). Instead, it posits a hierarchical relationship between the subjects and objects of compassion. Public compassion is about both proximity and distance. It can be extended to strangers ("they are almost like us!") and to the members of a marginalized group ("they are not really like us!").

Compassion as a political virtue has been widely criticized.[8] In the last decade, scholars such as Miriam Ticktin (2011) and Didier Fassin (2001, 2011), among others, have analyzed compassion as an apolitical sentiment deployed within a humanitarian framework that mitigates, but does not challenge the increasingly repressive state migration regimes. States continue to categorize people on the move as economic migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants with different sets of rights and protections – or lack thereof – attached to each category. The deserving few are allowed to stay, while others are to be deported. Compassion-fueled humanitarianism mitigates this sorting of humans by allowing some of those who would otherwise be deported to stay, because they require medical care (Ticktin 2011), and treating the others humanely and with compassion, as their deportation is arranged (Hall 2012).
Miriam Ticktin (2011) has pointed out that the politics of humanitarian care requires that the deserving subject – the one to be protected rather than

8. For examples see Ticktin 2011; Fassin 2005, 2011; Bornstein 2012. See also Weiss 2015 and Feldman 2013 for counter-arguments.

ZONE BOOKS
near futures
ONLINE

deported – be recognizably vulnerable and suffering. As Ticktin writes, "the imagined suffering body is a victim without a perpetrator – a sufferer, pure and simple, caught in a moment of urgent need. No one is responsible for her suffering; those who act to save her do so from the goodness of their hearts, out of moral obligation" (2011: 11). The centrality of the suffering body for the politics of compassion in the context of the migration/refugee crisis is well evident in the public outrage in both Western and Eastern Europe. The public is scandalized that the refugees coming to Europe have iPhones, that they are not sufficiently grateful for food and clothing, and that they are largely strong young men. Where are the vulnerable women and children, the proper object of European compassion?[9] Insofar as the deserving refugee is supposed to be vulnerable or suffering, he/she remains in the subordinated position of an object of compassion. Overcoming vulnerability and suffering, in this context, risks withdrawal of protection, yet it is necessary if one is to become a political equal rather than remain a human in need.

In the context of the migration/refugee crisis, it is not only refugees, but also the Eastern European subject that is caught up in this dilemma. For example, after the collapse of Soviet socialism, Latvia and other former Soviet republics-cum-European Union member states, demanded recognition that the injury inflicted upon them by the Stalinist regime, such as mass deportations and killings of those deemed suspect by the regime, was equivalent to crimes against humanity committed by the Nazi regime. This injury was thought to have affected not only concrete individuals and their families, but also the nation, insofar as its numbers were depleted and about 1.5 million migrants from other Soviet republics were brought in. In the Latvian national imaginary, this was a deliberate Soviet policy aimed at "mixing populations" in order to create Soviet people out of national subjects. About half of the Soviet-era incomers remained living in Latvia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is often noted that the proportion of Latvians in pre-World War II Latvia was 77%, whereas in 1989, on the cusp of independence, it was only 52%.[10]

Recognition of this injury in the international arena was not sought solely for symbolic purposes, but also to legitimate domestic policies aimed at mitigating it. Latvia, restored in the post-Soviet period as a national state, that is, as a state established for the purpose of ensuring the flourishing of the cultural and historical community of Latvians, has long used this particular argument to justify restrictive language and citizenship policies directed at its Russian-speaking residents, many of whom arrived during the Soviet period and stayed after the collapse of the Soviet state. In the national imaginary, the presence of Russian-speakers in Latvia is a continuous reminder of the historical injury to the nation and a threat to its present and future. It is this sense of embattlement that informs current debates about migration in Latvia, including debates about the migration/refugee crisis.[11]

While this narrative of historical injury has enabled political claims, it has also produced Latvia – and other Eastern European states making resonant, if different claims – as not-yet European. In the context of the migration/refugee crisis, Latvia is expected to show compassion towards the suffering of others – the refugees – rather than claim that it cannot do so because of its own injurious

9. See this point being made by Bridget Anderson in a recent discussion about the migration/refugee crisis held by the Oxford Martin School: http://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/videos/view/511

10. http://www.mfa.gov.lv/arpolitika/sabiedribas-integracija-latvija/integracijas-politika-latvija-daudzpusiga-pieeja/etniskais-sastavs-un-mazakumtautibu-kulturas-identitates-veicinasana

11. In 2015, the ethnic composition was as follows: Latvians – 61%, Russians – 25.8%, Belarusians – 3.4%, Ukrainians – 2.3%, Poles – 2.1%, with the rest made up of Roma, Lithuanians and others. See: http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/skoleniem/iedzivotaji/etniskais_sastavs.pdf

pasts' claim on the present and the future. Insofar as it is unable or refuses to do so, it is perceived as post-socialist and not European. But how is one to become European? Judging from the commentaries directed at Eastern Europe, it means leaving the past behind, while at the same time learning from it. The past has to be left behind in the sense of ceasing to make political claims on the basis of historical injury. At the same time, one must learn from the historical experience of victimhood and/or complicity with crimes against humanity that Europe embraces as its painful heritage.

For example, those commenting on Eastern European reactions to the migration/refugee crisis asked whether Eastern Europeans have no shame, refusing to accept refugees when thousands of their compatriots benefited from the kindness of others during the long 20th century (e.g. Hockenos 2015, Sabet-Parry 2015, Gross 2015). Examples provided of such acts of kindness include states in Europe, North America and Australia taking in post-World War II refugees fleeing the Soviet regime or refugees fleeing the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution, the Prague Spring or the Polish Solidarity movement. Overlooking the fact that some of these acts of kindness were entangled with an often-racialized sorting of people into fit/unfit or deserving/undeserving objects of kindness (e.g. McDowell 2005), these commentators wondered why Eastern Europeans could not see the irony in refusing assistance to those in need when they had received it themselves.

Becoming European in the context of the migration/refugee crisis means properly locating oneself in the post-World War II and post-Cold War terrain of suffering and compassion. A mature European subject is thought to be compassionate and extend assistance towards less fortunate others rather than privilege one's own historical suffering. And yet, regardless of what one thinks of the asylum and immigration politics of Eastern European member states and of the attitudes of their citizens, requiring that they remake themselves from suffering into compassionate subjects is a move that needs to be carefully rethought. It is hardly the case that Eastern Europeans are less human in their capacity for compassion than their Western European counterparts. The difference seems to lie in the fact that they either do not use the sentiment of compassion as a basis for politics or limit its application to a particular nation, race or religion. Perhaps the difference that has emerged between Eastern and Western Europe in the context of the migration/refugee crisis opens an opportunity to understand and address the consequences of the political mobilization of compassion rather than its reassertion.

THE LIMITS OF VIRTUE

In Latvia, arguments against accepting refugees or for accepting a very limited number of refugees follow familiar tropes: Latvia cannot afford to accept many refugees due to continued legacies of the Soviet nationalities policy, poor economy, impoverished population, cultural incompatibility between the potential incomers and local residents, the evident failure of integration elsewhere in Europe, and more. It is these same arguments that, in an endless feedback loop, are taken as indicative of moral failure – of putting exaggerated and parochial

ZONE BOOKS
near futures
ONLINE

concerns with self-preservation ahead of the moral obligation to prevent human suffering. There is one line of argument, however, that seems to fall out of this feedback loop, and it is that those who support intake of refugees do not have an argument. Let me elaborate with the help of an example.

In December 2015, Nicolas Auzanneau, a French-speaking translator of Latvian literature, published an article in which he challenged Alvis Hermanis, a Latvian theatre director, for siding with reactionary forces and against the forces of progress by equating refugees with the threat of terrorism (Ozano 2015). Auzanneau writes that Hermanis' position is regrettable, because "we know that it is incomparably better to live in an open society, where there is risk of attack, rather than be stuck in the regime of endless hatred, foolishness, fanaticism and nationalism." Shortly thereafter, Jānis Buholcs (2015), a lecturer in Vidzemes Augstskola, criticized Auzanneau for uncritically embracing narratives of progress rather than putting forth an argument.[12] Buholcs goes even further and suggests that it is not only Auzanneau, but the whole debate about refugees that lacks arguments and is dominated by moralization or emotion: if the anti-refugee side exhibits unfounded fear, the pro-refugee side turns to moralization. For Buholcs, a moral argument is a non-argument, because it invokes normative imperatives without engaging with the concrete political contours of the situation.

What, then, are some of the arguments deployed by the pro-refugee side in an attempt to convince Latvia's residents that they should support accepting refugees? A review of commentaries published in Latvian and Russian suggests that, indeed, the main arguments for accepting refugees are moral. For example, the politician of the ruling Unity party Dimitrijs Golubevs (2015) appeals to Latvian folk wisdom (*dzīvesziņa*) reflected in folk songs and invoked as the canon of the cultural nation and to Christian values, both of which urge kindness towards strangers. Here, morality that is to lead to acceptance derives from resources internal to cultural and religious traditions dominant in Latvia.[13]

Philosopher Ilmārs Šlāpins (2015) suggests that Latvians cannot survive, if they isolate themselves from the world and not help anyone. He points out that the fact that Germany, France and Great Britain are accepting refugees suggests that they have matured as nations. With civilizing overtones, Šlāpins validates the Latvians' concern with survival, only he suggests that survival is not possible by barricading behind national fences, but requires helping others.

While Golubevs and Šlāpins address a Latvian-speaking audience, Olga Procevska (2015), a Russian and Latvian-speaking entrepreneur with a PhD in Communications Studies, reviews the possibilities open for Latvia's Russian-speaking residents who suddenly find themselves outcompeted by refugees and on the margins of the political problem-space. Procevska writes that the only pro-refugee position available to them is to simply try, but admits that this position is "utterly unfounded and based only on sighing and moralization. This sighing gestures toward hope that refugees will enable Latvian politics to step away from the endless rotation around the Latvian-Russian axis. The presence of refugees might introduce a new variable in the bipolar system, possibly eventually pushing political parties to position themselves not on the basis of

12. See the theatre director's position here: http://www.jrt.lv/alvja-hermana-pazinojums-pec-atteikuma-stradat-thalia-theater-hamburga

13. I have only reviewed some arguments here, but see also Saulītis 2015, Golubeva 2015, Šuvajevs 2015.

ZONE BOOKS
near futures
ONLINE

ethnicity, but also on the basis of their approach to the tax system, resource distribution and international issues. In other words, on the basis of their ideological approach."

The Russian-speaking political scientist Andrei Berdnikov (2015) put forth a rare argument, pushing against the limits of the pro-refugee stance from what he posits to be a more radical political position. While affirming his commitment to progressive thought, which remains undefined, and expressing the view that the refugee question could indeed unite progressive Russians and Latvians, he does not rush to join the activists who support refugees, for he finds their politics limited. He suggests that quite a few of them readily support LGBT rights, refugees and Ukrainian nationalists in Maidan, but dismiss the rights of Russian-speaking residents in Latvia, many of whom remain non-citizens.[14]

The Latvian language pro-refugee commentaries address the nation as misguided in its anti-refugee stance and try to incite positive attitudes towards refugees by drawing on untapped elements of the national tradition or by suggesting that the concern about survival central to the national imaginary cannot be addressed by keeping deserving people out. Berdnikov points to the limits of their politics insofar as it is not consistently applied to all excluded subjects and does not question the national state as a fundamentally exclusive formation. At the same time, Berdnikov does not consider how the minority group he defends – that is, Russian-speakers – might respond to his progressive politics towards refugees. There is sufficient indication that they do not necessarily look favorably towards refugees and that therefore their politics, too, could be deemed limited. This is precisely the site of intervention for Procevska, whose position seems most open for both Russian-speakers and Latvians – the answer is to try without good reason and without guarantees, if only because the "against" positions are unacceptable. She does not delineate traditions from which resources should be drawn or issue a call for inclusion, which would inevitably also be an act of exclusion. She seems to put faith in simply trying.

In a way, Procevska points to an excess within the compassion/repression regime: the people to whom protection is extended or denied, as well as the people in whose name it is extended or denied, are not without agency and do not always follow the script. They craft lives and try to live together, even if under constrained conditions. This presents a variety of challenges of cohabitation. Discussion of these challenges of cohabitation is currently dominated by voices unsympathetic to refugees, as the pro-refugee side seems to distance itself from this discussion out of fear of fueling right-wing sentiments. This is clearly evident in the currently raging debate about the "Cologne assaults" – multiple sexual assaults on and robberies of women by groups of what appear to have been men with immigrant/asylum seeker background on New Year's Eve in front of the Cologne train station. The incident came to public knowledge 4 days after it occurred, allegedly because the authorities did not want to fan anti-migrant/refugee sentiment. Politically liberal voices commenting on the incident from afar have expressed concern that it is "Christmas come a week late" for the right (e.g. Hinsliff 2016), which makes it difficult to discuss the incident beyond urging the public not to succumb to racialized fears of migrants/asylum seekers/refugees at large and therefore to stop accepting refugees.

14. Following the collapse of the Soviet state, Latvian independence was conceived as a restoration of the pre-World War II state. Citizenship policies that followed granted automatic citizenship to the descendants of the pre-World War II multiethnic body of citizenry, but required that the Soviet-era incomers naturalize. Knowledge of the Latvian language required for naturalization was a big obstacle for many of the older residents, as they had lived most of their lives in Soviet Latvia without any need to speak Latvian. They could not pass the citizenship test. Others were offended that they were required to naturalize in a place where they had lived for much of their lives and where they paid taxes and thus did not undergo the naturalization procedure. Those Russian-speaking residents who did not undergo the naturalization procedure were granted a resident non-citizen status, which entitles them to social, but not political rights. In January 2015, there were 262,030 [?] non-citizens in Latvia or 12.1% of the total population.

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near futures
ONLINE

THE POWER OF NUMBERS

It is noteworthy that there seems to be one legitimate argument against accepting refugees – or more refugees – for the liberal side of the political spectrum, and that is the argument of "too many." For example, it has recently resounded in the media that Sweden's ability to cope with refugees has reached a limit: there is a lack of housing and the system cannot cope with processing so many refugees (Kingsley 2015). As a result, Sweden introduced temporary border controls with Denmark.[15] The Swedish limits are thought to be legitimate, because they are not ideological, but material – they are limits of infrastructure. Germany, too, seems to have reached a threshold, with Angela Merkel announcing that Germany will limit the intake of refugees after all, because "the chancellor knows that the ongoing arrival to Germany of up to 10,000 refugees every day is not sustainable."[16]

'Too many," an argument seemingly about numbers, can be measured in a variety of ways that are not necessarily numerical. For example, a local man in Boston, UK, told me that he had nothing against Eastern European migrants, but that there were simply too many of them.[17] For him, it was not necessarily about infrastructure, though I did hear concerns about lack of doctors and nurses in Boston's medical establishments, but rather about daily life. He said that he could no longer go to the shop in the morning, greet someone by saying "Good morning!" and expect to be greeted back in English. I heard a resonant argument from a Latvian woman living in Boston who was concerned about tensions between locals and newcomers ."There are too many of us," she said. In turn, the inhabitants of Mucenieki in Latvia – a locality where the asylum seeker reception center is located – have begun to convey discomfort about being a minority in their locality. "Our children are afraid to go to the stadium, because there are too many refugees there," inhabitants of Mucenieki wrote in a letter to Latvia's Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma.[18]

The argument of "too many" assumes that a baseline form of life or quality of life must be retained, whether for the locals, the incomers or both. Some "too many" arguments can and do get easily dismissed as reactionary from within the liberal political frame. More often than not, those are the ones articulated through the trope of the nation or put forth by local communities, for they are thought to be manifestations of fear and prejudice. The kinds of "too many" arguments that are taken seriously across the political spectrum pertain to the state's capacity to govern, such as the lack of infrastructure faced by Sweden or the lack of policing capacity with regard to the "Cologne assaults" in Germany.

It is worth considering, however, whether positing these different logics of "too many" as qualitatively different is entirely justified. Categories or logics of exclusion come to be mapped onto each other, reference each other and, in practice, tend to produce the same effects, namely keep the same bodies in place or out of place (M'charek et al. 2013). As I was told several years before the current crisis by a staff member of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration in Latvia, "Latvians are afraid because of the past, and Russians are afraid that they [refugees] will come and eat their булочка [pastry, in Russian]." The effect is the same – both produce negative attitudes towards refugees. In other words, the

15. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35218921

16. http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/angela-merkel-changes-her-stance-on-refugee-limits-a-1063773.html

17. I am currently conducting fieldwork on the multi-scalar and transnational governance of Latvian citizens in Boston, UK.

18. See here: http://www.tvnet.lv/zinas/latvija/584842-mucenieku_iedzivotaji_vestule_straujumai_pauz_bazas_par_begliem_sava_ciema

"too many" arguments of the "unenlightened masses" or "not-quite-European" subjects are not radically different from the "too many" arguments of the liberal European state insofar as they converge in keeping the same bodies out.

Moral arguments for accepting refugees remain tied to state-based humanitarian frameworks that sort people into deserving and undeserving subjects, as well as introduce limits to how much humanism can be tolerated before states run out of the capacity to govern. But is it not the case that contemporary political forms, most importantly the nation-state, would have to be fundamentally reconfigured, if one were to take seriously the ethical obligation towards another beyond the reach of kin and nation and regardless of the state's capacity to govern? In conditions when more and more people are fleeing unlivable lives – whether destroyed by war, contemporary forms of capitalism, or the environment, what would it mean for political forms to correspond to an ethical obligation towards another as a foundational aspect of humanity(Butler 2015, 2013)? Finally, how can commitment to such an ethical obligation make sense of the existential concerns of embattled communities – for example, the cultural community of Latvians – without rendering them parochial and thus implicitly reproducing the civilizing mission of the politics of compassion?

ETHICAL OBLIGATIONS, EXISTENTIAL CONCERNS, POLITICAL FUTURES

It has been well established that the politics of compassion reproduces rather than challenges the political order of the day. In conclusion, I would like to put forth some very preliminary thoughts about the relationship between invitations to remake individual and collective selves vis-à-vis ethical obligations towards others, the migration/refugee crisis and existential concerns of historical communities, such as that of Latvians.

From within the "ethics as cohabitation" perspective, concerns with survival and self-determination that animate Latvian politics cannot but be dismissed as reactionary and unethical (Butler 2015: 108). Is there a way, however, that a historical community's wish to exist vis-à-vis a particular substantive tradition, such as, for example, the Latvian way of life, can be reconciled with an ethical obligation towards another? Moreover, is the incompatibility between an ethical or a political problem? Or, to put it another way, how do modern political forms, such as the state, facilitate this incompatibility?

In a recent book, Judith Butler (2013) sets out to rethink conceptions of Jewishness that inform the Israeli polity. Wishing to "depart from communitarian moorings," Butler proposes that Jewishness can be rethought as constituted through an ethical relationship with alterity, which she terms "diasporic ethics" and which derives from unchosen conditions of cohabitation. For Butler, this ethical relation, this self-departure, holds the potential to rethink the Israeli polity. In another essay, building further on this argument and drawing on Emmanuel Levinas and Hannah Arendt, Butler (2015) elaborates the notion of "ethics of cohabitation" as a more general condition of ethical obligation toward another that precedes the self and is not constrained by communitarian commitments and concerns with self-preservation (Butler 2015). Communitarian commitments and concerns with self-preservation are inevitably exclusionary

and therefore both unethical and unfree. Both of these lines of argument – one challenging the polity at the foundation of the Israeli state and the other positing ethical obligation toward another as always already non-communitarian – seem to leave the state intact by not engaging with it.

In a sympathetic critique of Butler's work, Julie E. Cooper (2015) suggests that Butler misunderstands the Jewish Zionist project as based on Jewishness rather than political action against historical forms of anti-Semitism. Cooper further criticizes Butler for not considering how the Zionist project of self-determination that derives from this historical-political motivation could be pursed in a re-territorialized manner, that is, outside the confines of the nation-state. One can conclude from Cooper's argument, it seems, that the problem with the Israeli state is not that it is based on a narrow conception of Jewishness, but rather that it articulates the Zionist project of self-determination with the modern political form of the nation-state. The question that follows is this: if the Zionist project of sovereignty does not require a territorial state, how should one think of organizing life in a particular place? What is remains of the state, if the sovereignty of a historical community is disarticulated from it?

I have become interested in similar questions as a result of my research on Latvian outmigration following accession to the European Union and the emergence of diaspora politics as a way to govern the trans-territorial nation (Dzenovska 2015). I have come to think that Latvian diaspora politics entail pursuit of sovereignty within a framework of recognition (Markell 2003), that is, as a project of knowing oneself as embedded in a substantive tradition in relation to similarly embedded others. Moreover, that this pursuit of sovereignty requires subjects who conduct themselves as Latvians regardless of where they live. Given that a large number of such subjects live outside the territory of the Latvian state, pursuit of sovereignty as knowing oneself among others is increasingly re-territorialized, that is, stretched across the boundaries of different actually existing states. The territorial state still remains crucial for this project, for up until now pursuit of sovereignty has been unimaginable without a state, but it is possible that – at least within the political space of the European Union – the relationship between political sovereignty and the state will come to be reconfigured.

These are preliminary reflections, but they do raise some interesting questions. Julie E. Cooper urges diasporic thinkers to think political agency outside the nationstate. I want to supplement Cooper's invitation by asking what remains of the state when the project of political self-determination of a historical community, whether civic or ethnic, is separated from it? How is the state to be conceived? Moreover, if pursuit of self-determination is re-territorialized in this way, torn away from the state, who is the subject of ethics of cohabitation? Who is called upon to recognize ethical obligations to the other outside communitarian confines – those living in place or those pursuing the re-territorialized project of sovereignty? Or, to put it another way, is the call for ethics of cohabitation entangled with particular territorial imaginaries? If so, how does it shift if concerns with survival and self-determination become re-territorialized?

Finally, how is the subject called upon by ethics of cohabitation related to the actual bodies engaged in a variety of political practices that prefigure futures,

whether on the square, within migrant networks or elsewhere? Contemporary political imaginaries – of the kind that aim to challenge the established order rather than reproduce it – are increasingly turning to prefigurative practices in search of sites and subjects of politics appropriate for the current historical moment, a moment without grand narratives or revolutionary subjects. Political potential tends to be located in a sociality that produces ephemeral collectivities and political hopes, for it is not institutionalized and cannot be institutionalized (e.g. Butler 2015, Dzenovska & Arenas 2012, Harcourt et al. 2013).

And yet, in a situation of crisis, when "the old is dying and the new cannot be born" (Gramsci 1971: 556), is there a need to think not only about subversion and hope, but also about concrete forms of political futures? Can politics as ethics be deployed for the project of giving form to the future?

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