

**DEFINING THE NATION, DEFINING PUBLIC TELEVISION:
DISCOURSES OF PUBLICS ON PUBLIC SERVICE TELEVISION
IN POST-COMMUNIST LATVIA**

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Abstract

Institutional and political economy approaches have long dominated the study of post-Communist public broadcasting, as well as the entire body of post-Communist media transformations research, and the enquiry into publics of public broadcasting has traditionally been neglected. Though media scholars like to talk about a deep crisis in the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics in former Communist bloc countries across Central and Eastern Europe, little has been done to understand the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics in these societies drawing on qualitative audience research tradition. Building on Hirschman's influential theory of 'exit, voice and loyalty', which made it possible to see viewing choices audiences make as an act of agency, in combination with theoretical tools developed within the framework of social constructionist approaches to national imagination and broadcasting, my study focuses on the investigation of responses publics of the Latvian public television LTV have developed *vis-à-vis* its role as contributing to the nation-building project in this ex-Soviet Baltic country. With the help of focus groups methodology and family ethnography, the thesis aims to explore the relationship between the way members of the ethno-linguistic majority of Latvian-speakers and the sizeable ethno-linguistic minority of Russian-speakers conceptualize the public broadcaster LTV, as well as understand the concept of public broadcasting more generally, and the way they define the national 'we'.

The study concludes that what I call publics of LTV employ Hirschman's described exit mechanism as a voice-type response. Through their rejection of public television which, for a number of complex reasons they consider to be a state broadcaster serving the interests of those in power they voice their protest against the country's political establishment and in the case of its Russian-speaking publics also against the government's ethno-nationalistic conception of the national 'we'. I also find that though having exited from the public broadcaster LTV, its publics have not abandoned the idea of public broadcasting as such. At least at a normative level the public broadcasting ideals are recognized, accepted and valued, though they are not necessarily associated with the country's *de jure* institutional embodiment of public broadcasting LTV. Rejection of the public television has also not made its non-loyal publics 'less citizens'. The commercial rivals of LTV, be they national or, in the case of Russian-speaking audiences, localized transnational Russian television, have allowed their viewers to exercise citizenship and be loyal nationals day in day out in a way that is more liberal and flexible than the hegemonic form of citizenship and national imagination of the public television LTV can offer.

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List of the names of the Russian-language TV channels and shows in the Cyrillic

Bez tsenzury – Без цензуры – Without Censorship

Bitva ekstrasensov – Битва экстрасенсов – Psychic Challenge

Goluboi ogonek – Голубой огонёк – The Little Blue Light

Ironiya sudby, ili S legkim parom! – Ирония судьбы, или С легким паром! – The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath!

Latviiskoe Vremya – Латвийское Время – Latvia's Time

Minuta slavy – Минута славы – Minute of Fame

Muz TV – Муз-ТВ – Muz TV

Nostalgiya – Ностальгия – Nostalgia

Novaya volna – Новая волна – New Wave

Novosti Estonii – Новости Эстонии – News of Estonia

Olive-shou – Оливье-шоу – Olivier Show

Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal – Первый Балтийский канал – First Baltic Channel

Pervyi Baltiiskii Muzykalnyi – Первый Балтийский Музыкальный – First Baltic Music Channel

Pervyi kanal – Первый канал – First Channel

Pust govoryat – Пусть говорят – Let Them Speak

REN TV – РЕН ТВ – REN TV

Rossiya – Россия – Russia

RTR Planeta – РТР Планета – RTR Planet

Vremya – Время – Time

Zvaniy uzhin – Званый ужин – Come Dine With Me

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Jānis Juzefovičs, hereby declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Introduction

Poor and declining audience figures of the Latvian public service television LTV (in its full name *Latvijas Televīzija*/Latvian Television) for more than 20 years since the restoration of independent statehood after decades of Soviet rule in 1991 initiated my interest in the research of the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics¹ in post-Communist societies. As elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, commercial channels dominate the media scene of the Baltic country of Latvia with public television struggling to gain public support and demand.

Previous studies on post-Communist public broadcasting have identified symptoms of the crisis in the relationship between Central and Eastern European public broadcasters and their publics, namely poor audience figures and high licence fee evasion, and yet little attention has been paid to the investigation of reasons standing behind it. Apart from the analysis of the audience statistics little has been done when it comes to the research of post-Communist public broadcasting from the perspective of publics of the institutions of public radio and television.

Perhaps it should not come as a surprise given the little overall attention the study of media audiences has received in Central and Eastern European media research after the fall of Communism. As recently Reifová and Pavlíčková have concluded, ‘media audiences – people who receive, co-create, interpret, understand and appropriate media messages – were rendered almost invisible in the post-socialist study of media’ (2013:130). For Reifová and Pavlíčková, it is the ‘tyranny of structuralism’, preoccupation with the study of the macromedia structures, that explains ignorance of the research of media audiences in Central and Eastern European media scholarship.

It is mainly institutional and political economy approaches that have hitherto dominated post-Communist public broadcasting studies and, indeed, overall post-Communist media research preferring the exploration of macro(system)-level political and economic factors

¹ Here and throughout the thesis the notion of ‘publics of public broadcasters’ refers to their potential audiences, all members of the national community, while to identify their actual audiences, those who have more or less regular listening/viewing experience with the institutions of public radio and television, the notion of ‘audiences of public broadcasters’ are used. Thus, in the case of the Latvian public television LTV we can distinguish ‘publics of LTV’ (its possible viewership) from ‘audiences of LTV’ (its real viewership). It should be also noted that in this study ‘publics’/‘audiences’ distinction is not used to distinguish the ‘citizen’ and ‘consumer’ roles of viewers/listeners. Instead, the concepts of ‘publics’ and ‘audiences’ are seen as each incorporating both roles conceived as interplaying instead of being in conflict with each other clear-cut categories.

and seeing broadcasting transformations first and foremost as institutional changes – from state to public broadcasters (Sparks with Reading, 1998, Gross, 2002, Jakubowicz, 1996, 2007a, just to name a few), while less attention has been devoted to the analysis of socio-cultural aspects shaping post-Communist broadcasting reforms.

This study aims to shift the focus from the investigation of institutions of post-Communist public broadcasting to the exploration of their publics, situating the close examination of perceptions its publics have of the Latvian public television, and their understanding of the idea of public broadcasting more generally, as well as their experiences with the public television at the heart of the research. Though the empirical research of the study is based solely on the Latvian case, the insights derived from it should be relevant for the understanding of the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics also in other Central and Eastern European countries.

My departure point is Polish media scholar Karol Jakubowicz's identification of a 'lack of social embeddedness of the idea of public service broadcasting and lack of a social constituency willing and able to support public service broadcasters and buttress its autonomy and independence' as the idiosyncrasies of post-Communist public broadcasting systems (2008a:117). Albeit not using such terminology, what Jakubowicz seems to have in mind is that there is a deficit of loyalty towards public broadcasting institutions, as well as the overall idea of public broadcasting, in post-Communist societies.

With Jakubowicz's notion in mind I will utilize Albert Hirschman's influential theory of 'exit, voice and loyalty' (see Hirschman, 1970) to explore the mass exodus of Latvian publics from the country's public television LTV against a backdrop of what at first sight appears to be a lack of loyalty on the part of its publics towards public broadcasting and its *de jure* institutional embodiment LTV.

Through the utilization of the analytical framework of Hirschman's approach this study aims to contribute to the tradition of qualitative audience research. Hirschman's concepts so far have not been applied for the purposes of the examination of responses of publics of public broadcasting institutions, be they within or beyond the post-Communist world. It is Hirschman's approach that allows the study of viewing choices audiences make day in day out as the exercise of agency. As we shall see it throughout the study, it is their exit from the public television that gives its publics voice.

Though I started this research project with a rather broad aim to understand the crisis in the public television and its publics relationship in the ex-Soviet country Latvia, during the course of the research it took another direction. Discourses of my respondents discussing their relationship with the public television made me rethink the focus of the study. Due to the prominence of nation-building discourses in the narratives of my informants it was clear that the investigation of responses of Latvian-speaking majority and large Russian-speaking minority (making nearly 40% of the population) publics towards the public television as a nation-building project should become a central theme of the research.²

The deep crisis in the relationship between the public broadcaster LTV and its publics not only reflects similarly turbulent relationships between public broadcasters and their publics in other former Communist bloc countries in Central and Eastern Europe; it also reveals uneasy nation formation experiences and ethno-linguistic divisions in this post-Communist country. On one hand, public television reflects ethno-linguistic cleavages in the society; on the other hand, it plays a pivotal role in the construction and maintenance of these rifts.

Discussing the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics in relation with problematic nation formation aspirations the study seeks to provide connections between the post-Communist nation-building experiences and equally troubled broadcasting reformations to argue that broadcasting transformations in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as overall changes after the fall of Communism, cannot be understood in isolation from the analysis of their socio-cultural context.

² Here and throughout the text as 'Latvian-speakers' I understand all those Latvians who speak at home predominantly Latvian. Accordingly, all those whose primary language in the family is Russian are identified as 'Russian-speakers'. In line with the official statistics, the overwhelming majority of Latvian-speakers think of themselves as ethnic Latvians, while among Russian-speakers the majority identify themselves as ethnic Russians. Therefore, we can look at the collective labels 'Latvian-speakers'/'Russian-speakers' as ethno-linguistic categories as in the majority of cases they comprise both one's ethnic and linguistic identity. It should be also noted that the majority of both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers are bilingual. Latvian-speakers with the exception of younger generations have good command of Russian. Likewise, except older generations a great part of Russian-speakers has good Latvian language skills. For more statistical data on the ethno-linguistic composition of Latvian society see Chapter 2. Yet, I am well aware that such distinction between Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers is problematic as it may misleadingly suggest an existence of two uniform ethno-linguistic communities, for the purposes of this study recourse to such categorization is merely a practical one and not intended to obscure the heterogeneity of both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers. As we shall see, neither Latvian-speakers, nor Russian-speakers are homogeneous groups.

In Latvia, as in other new post-Communist nation-states, overall transformations following the collapse of the Communist regime, including attempts to reform ex-state radio and television organizations into Western-like public broadcasters, coincided with nation-forming aspirations. Making the nation and the state happened to take place at the same time. Ethno-nationalistic sentiments have so far dominated the official Latvian project of national imagination defining the language and culture of the ethno-linguistic majority as key criteria of membership in the national communion, and in line with the government's national integration (social cohesion) plans it is the language and culture of the ethno-linguistic majority that is also expected to bind the Latvian-speaking majority and the vast Russian-speaking minority together around the public television LTV.

This strategy of making the national 'we' around the institution of public television possible has not been a success story as Russian-speaking audiences, the majority of which are Soviet era settlers and their descendants, instead of gathering around public television opt for transnational television broadcasting from neighbouring Russia. In the mainstream political discourse, because of this little interest of theirs in public (national) broadcasting and a huge appetite for transnational Russian broadcasting, Russian-speaking audiences have often been accused of national disloyalty, and their viewing preferences have been conceived as a threat to the ideals of national integrity, and even national security. Yet, to be true, also its Latvian-speaking publics are not keen viewers of public television and, instead, prefer watching national commercial channels.

Through qualitative audience research, combining methodologies of focus groups and family observations the study aims to explore:

1. What attitudes have the Latvian-speaking majority and Russian-speaking minority publics developed and what actions members of both ethno-linguistic groups have taken as a response to Latvian public service television's role as contributing to the nation-building project in the post-Communist era?
2. What perceptions of the public broadcaster LTV publics of both ethno-linguistic communities have, and how these discourses inform and are informed by their experiences with public television with a special interest in their everyday television viewing practices within a domestic realm?

3. What is the relationship between the way members of the ethno-linguistic majority and minority conceptualize the public broadcaster LTV, as well as understand the concept of public broadcasting more generally, and the way they define the national 'we'? In other words, how do their definitions of the public broadcasting idea and its *de jure* institutional embodiment LTV interact with their definitions of the nation?

The thesis is organised into eight chapters. Chapter 1, 'Public Service Broadcasting and the Construction of National 'We'', outlines the theoretical foundations of the study that are based on two main premises. First, in line with social constructionist approaches to the study of nationalism nations are conceived as social constructs. Here the well-known notion of Benedict Anderson's of nations as imagined communities (see Anderson, 2006) forms a starting point for elaborating the idea of nations as the outcome of the process of social imagination. Second, public broadcasters are seen as one of the key agents of national imagination projects in their societies (or at least they are expected to play such a role) creating and sustaining particular representation(s) of nationhood. With a reference to the writings of Scannell, Cardiff, Morley, Moores, and others the chapter focuses on the analysis of uneasy experiences of Western European public broadcasters, and the British BBC in particular, in their nation-building aspirations situating these historical accounts into wider public broadcasting/citizenship debates. The chapter critically examines the idea of public broadcasting as an institutional embodiment of a modern Habermasian-style public sphere to suggest that there has never existed such thing as one unitary public sphere of the nation in the same way as there has never existed one unproblematic conception of who constitutes the national 'we'. Instead, what is in place are several public spheres, as well as many different definitions, or we can also say imaginations, of national membership, interacting, and also contending, with each other. The chapter also invites to abandon simplistic opposition of the citizen/consumer roles of audiences.

Drawing on the writings of Jakubowicz, Sparks, Gross, and other well-known scholars of post-Communist media Chapter 2, 'Public Service Broadcasters and Their Publics in Post-Communist Societies', provides a context for understanding the tangled post-Communist broadcasting transformations. The chapter identifies connections between broadcasting reforms and nation-building aspirations in new post-Communist nation-states such as Latvia advocating for the analysis of the relationship between public

broadcasters and their publics in these societies within a broader context of post-Communist societal transformations. The chapter also offers an overview of the Latvian public service broadcasting system.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological framework of the study with the next four chapters presenting results of the focus groups and family observations that form the empirical basis for the study. Chapter 4, 'Defining Public Service Broadcasting: Between State, Public, National and Commercial Television', investigates what classificatory schemes its publics apply to make a distinction between the public television LTV, and the public broadcasting idea in general, and other types of broadcasting, and how their conceptions of public broadcasting interact with definitions of the nation they have formulated. The chapter argues that while exiting from public television, its publics do not reject the public broadcasting values and the role of citizen. It also demonstrates how its publics utilize their withdrawal from the public television to voice their protest against the country's political establishment and, in the case of its Russian-speaking publics, also against its hegemonic concept of the national 'we'.

Chapter 5, 'Television News Preferences and a Sense of Belonging: the Case of *Panorāma* and *Vremya*', offers a case study of two long-running prime-time news programmes, one on the ex-state and current Latvian public television and the other on the former Soviet Central TV, which today is Russian state television, to explore connections between news consumption patterns and identity formation processes among Russian-speaking audiences. The chapter demonstrates that, despite their abandoning public (national) broadcasting and what at first sight looks as their immersion into transnational Russian television, Russian-speakers have not lost interest in national affairs. It is through localized transnational television from Russia that Russophone audiences participate in the national life and exercise the role of a citizen no less than Latvian-speakers.

Chapter 6, 'Celebrating the Arrival of New Year Twice: Public TV and National Celebrations', addresses the role of public broadcasting during the national celebrations to demonstrate how national and even transnational commercial rivals of the public television LTV have taken over its long monopoly on the making of national togetherness during the moments of national celebrations further blurring the lines of demarcation not only between public and commercial broadcasting but also between national and transnational broadcasting.

Chapter 7, 'Popular Culture Bringing the Nation Together: the Case of Live Sports Broadcasts and the *Eurovision Song Contest*', focuses on popular culture on public television to show how sports and music, contrary to news and politics, make the national 'we' around public television possible. The chapter also demonstrates how live broadcasts of big international sporting and music events on public television offer its publics of both ethno-linguistic majority and minority a platform for the expression of national sentiments and manifestation of national allegiance. The concluding chapter provides an overview of the key findings of the study, it also demonstrates the originality of the study, as well as outlines its limitations and discusses possible future developments of the research into the relationship between post-Communist public broadcasters and their publics.

Chapter 1

Public Service Broadcasting and the Construction of National 'We'

1.1 Introduction

At the heart of the theoretical framework of this study lie two main arguments. First, in the spirit of social constructionism nations are seen as social constructs, inventions, products of national imagination. In other words, national communities, as well as national identities, are looked at as discursively constructed entities and not fixed and given in their character. From this perspective, collective, as well as individual, identities are thought of as multiple, hybrid, fluid and unsettled instead of being single, pure, stable and free from tensions. Second, public radio and television organizations are seen as playing, or at least as being expected to play, one of the central roles in nation-building projects in their societies. Yet, public broadcasters do not simply reflect the nation as it is but are involved in its construction establishing and maintaining particular image(s) of the national community. Nevertheless, national imagination has been and continues to be central to the mandate of public broadcasting institutions.

Public service broadcasting, from its very inception – at least in its Western European public broadcasting models that I will focus on in this chapter – has been conceived as a national project having close links with the idea of a nation-state. As Roosvall and Salovaara-Moring have summarised, 'the public service remit had an inherent mission to construct, protect, inform and entertain the nation' (2010:13). In the eyes of public broadcasting pioneers and their governments, public radio and television had been one of the most important institutions reproducing the nation day in day out, a view of public broadcasting organizations still much alive also today.

From the very early days of Western European public broadcasting at the heart of its mandate has been a commitment of bringing the nation together around shared mediated experiences of the national life and providing members of the national community with a sense of national unity. To borrow Anderson's influential concept of nations as imagined communities (see Anderson, 2006), in this way public broadcasters were hoped to allow their audiences to imagine themselves as part of the national 'we'. While making the

national public and the construction of a sense of national unity has been, indeed, a significant part of the mandate of public broadcasting organizations, in reality the fulfilment of this task has often been a turbulent one. As we shall see, the issues of national identity formation, as well as of its accompanying processes of self/other boundary-drawing and maintenance, have always been central in the debate of the role of public broadcasting in the construction of that collective body that we call a nation.

1.2 Imagined National Communities

For Anderson, nations are imagined political communities, imagined as limited (having national boundaries) and sovereign (free to govern themselves) communities (comradeships). The central idea of his approach to nationalism is that nations are created through the act of imagination by their members. In the mind of each member of a national communion lives the image of the national 'we', he argues, suggesting that links between people of the same nation are imagined and not given. To quote Anderson,

An American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000,000-odd fellow-Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity (2006:26).

It is the centrality of the role of communication, namely a daily ritual of media consumption (book and newspaper reading), in the production of a sense of national consciousness that is at the heart of Anderson's theory, and that also makes it a highly useful starting point for building the theoretical framework of my own investigation into the responses of Latvian publics towards the country's public television organization as a nation-building resource.

For Anderson, the dailiness of mass simultaneous and anonymous experiences of reading the same copy of a national newspaper, 'one-day best-sellers', as he has put it to describe the novelistic format of a newspaper (2006:35), allow their readership to imagine themselves as part of the national community. In other words, it allows imagining themselves as 'nationals'. As Anderson argues, this 'mass ceremony' of newspaper reading brings the nation's members together day in day out, year in year out, making the national imagined communion possible. Yet, as sceptics of Anderson's theory point out,

his approach tends to romanticise the formation of a national 'we' with a help of the ritual of newspaper consumption obscuring the heterogeneous and full of contradictions nature of an actual collectivity of fellow readers. As Anderson describes, the ritual of newspaper reading

is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life [...] creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations (2006:35-36).

According to Anderson, standardization of vernaculars as print languages in sixteenth century Europe, stimulated by the rising book publishing industry's search for new markets – what Anderson terms 'print-capitalism', provoked the decline of the sacred language of Latin, the language of the church and educated elites and, also, the decay of European religious communities and dynastic monarchies themselves. Along with the decline of the authority of the church, also its conception of temporality was replaced with a novel one seeing time as clocked and calendrical that, in turn, found vivid expression in the imagined world as conjured up by the novel and the newspaper, both products of print capitalism.³ It all made new type, national, communities imaginable with the idea of a nation to rise in the Old Continent at the end of the eighteenth century. To quote Anderson, 'the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation'

³ It was a shift, as Anderson has described it with a reference to Walter Benjamin, from 'a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present' (2006:24), as time has been understood in the medieval Christian world, to the post-medieval conception of simultaneity as 'transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar' (2006:24).

(2006:46).

The product of the standardization of vernacular languages, driven by the commercial needs of the emerging printing business for one language, one national territory and borders around it, became the language of printing. People coming from different territories, who till then spoke each in their own vernacular, started not only to read in the same language but also to use the language of printing to communicate with each other. The process of linguistic standardization allowed new national languages to emerge and so laid foundations to the rise of national consciousness. It was new mass reading publics, created by the fusion of print technology and a capitalist economy, that later formed the bases for new national collectivities. As Anderson explains, print languages

created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars. Speakers of the huge variety of Frenches, Englishes, or Spanishes, who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation, became capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that *only those* hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community (2006:44, original emphasis).

Well before Anderson, Innis (2007) in his account on the importance of various media of communication in the rise and decline of empires had pointed to the impact of the interplay between the advance in communication technologies and the spread of capitalism on the growth of nationalism. Also Innis connects the introduction of the printing press in Europe in the fifteenth century and the later expansion of the printing industry – what for him is the start of the mechanization of communication (it was first the ‘mechanization of the printed word’ what was followed by the ‘mechanization of the spoken word’ with the later arrival of radio) – with the rise of nationalism:

With printing, paper facilitated an effective development of the vernaculars and gave expression to their vitality in the growth of

nationalism. The adaptability of the alphabet to large-scale machine industry became the basis of literacy, advertising, and trade. The book as a specialized product of printing and, in turn, the newspaper strengthened the position of language as a basis of nationalism (2007:196).

As Anderson argues, the flourishing book and newspaper industries of eighteenth century Europe ‘provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation’ (2006:25, original emphasis). While Anderson refers to early capitalism and its needs for reproduction and expansion to explain the emergence of nationalism at the end of the eighteenth century, for Habermas the bourgeois public sphere, a public space for critical debate between the state and the private domain, constituted a result of the very same early capitalism. It was the print language that made the liberal public sphere of the eighteenth century possible – it was the language of printing, the same Anderson is referring to, in which members of the rising early middle class, the core of the bourgeois public sphere, read and which also became the language of the coffee house conversations of these new reading publics.

In his influential *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* study Habermas sees the eighteenth century European press, that itself was born out of the ‘traffic in news’ (1989:21), the newsletter business, created by the needs of the ‘early capitalist long-distance trade’ (1989:15), as a key institution of the bourgeois public sphere. The press, Habermas argues, served as a forum of public critical debate which reflected, as well as informed, face-to-face discussions taking place in urban meeting places such as the salons, clubs and coffee houses. Describing journals devoted to art and cultural criticism of the eighteenth century, Habermas notes that

the periodical articles were not only made the object of discussion by the public of the coffee houses but were viewed as integral parts of this discussion; this was demonstrated by the flood of letters from which the editor each week published a selection (1989:42).

For Habermas, participation in the sessions of public rational-critical reasoning of this kind turned individuals who had gathered at the coffee houses of the European cities, such as London, to read newspapers and discuss with others what they had read into citizens, the public. Initially, matters of a cultural realm but later also political issues became the subject of these conversations. To quote Habermas, it ‘united private people

into a public' (1989:160), described by him as 'a critically debating entity' (1989:162). According to his theory, this form of community acted as

a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion. The *publicum* developed into the public, the *subjectum* into the [reasoning] subject, the receiver of regulations from above into the ruling authorities' adversary (1989:25-26, original emphasis).

1.3 Conceptualizing National Identity

Social constructionist approaches to national identity which also forms the basis for the theoretical and analytical framework of my own investigation question primordialist, essentialist perspectives that see national collectivities as given, authentic, natural and static entities. As social constructionists argue, instead of single homogeneous and harmonious versions of the nation, what is in place is multiplicity of different, and also rival, understandings of national identity in the same way as there are not one but several, and not necessarily in agreement with each other, definitions of national culture and the history of the nation. As Billig has pointed out, 'nations often do not typically have a single history, but there are competing tales to be told' (1995:71), and the same could be as well said about national cultures and national identities.

Social constructionist approaches invite us not only to analyse the mechanisms of production and reproduction of particular constructions of nationhood but also to investigate the ways dominant formulations of the national community, its identity, culture and memory, are resisted and challenged. As social constructionists stress, any conception of the national 'we', no matter how fixed it may appear to be, is subject to dynamic processes of continual negotiation, contestation and reconstruction. From such a perspective the process of nation formation can never be an accomplished project (for a more detailed overview of the social constructionist approaches to nationalism see Özkırımlı, 2005).

In the spirit of social constructionism, Jenkins and Sofos stress, nations are nothing more than social constructs and have nothing to do with an objective social reality. In their discussion of 'civic' and 'ethnic' models of nationhood Jenkins and Sofos point out that 'nations, on whatever principles they are conceived, are indeed 'imagined communities',

social, cultural and political artefacts' (1996:16). Similarly, in their critique of ethnosymbolic approach to nationalism that stresses the centrality of ethnicity in the emergence of modern nations Özkırıklı and Sofos argue that national, as well as ethnic, communities, are 'collections/collations of cultural practices established over time or invented, and forged together often arbitrarily, according to the judgement or needs of nation-builders' (2008:9). Basch et al. also emphasize the socially constructed nature of national communities arguing that 'while at any one time, culturally constructed boundaries – be they those of nations, ethnicities, or races – may seem fixed, timeless, or primordial, dynamic processes of reformulation underlie the apparent fixity' (1994:32). Also Calhoun reminds us that 'nationality is not primordial but constructed' (1994:314). To quote him,

the history which nationalism would write of itself begins with the existence of national identity, continues through acts of heroism and sometimes struggles against oppression, and unites all living members of the nation with the great cultural accomplishments of its past. It is usually not a sociological history, of diversity forged into unity, of oppression of some members of the nation by others, of migration and immigration, and so forth (1994:314).

Making of the national 'we' is problematic at its very essence as the construction of any collective form of identity, including the identity of the nation, inevitably involves drawing of borders between 'us' and 'them'. Paradoxically, when you include someone, you at the same time exclude another. Through making 'we', you also make 'the other'. Whatever the formulation of national membership, someone has to be included and someone has to be left behind; there is no other way to define who 'we' are than positing this 'we' against 'the other'. The nation has to be imagined and membership of the nation has to be formulated, and, as I will demonstrate in the following discussion, it is media, first books and newspapers and later radio and television, that play a crucial role in establishing distinctions between 'us' and 'them' defining who constitutes the national 'we' and who are to be left outside the national communion.

'The imagining of 'our' community involves imagining, either implicitly or explicitly, 'them', from whom 'we' are distinct,' argues Billig in his seminal study of 'banal nationalism' (1995:66). 'The national community can only be imagined by also imagining

communities of foreigners,' Billig adds (1995:78-79).⁴

In line with his approach to nationalism, nations are reproduced daily as nations and their citizenry as nationals with the texts of media and politicians being among the key agents of this process of reproduction of nationhood day in day out. As he writes, "we' are constantly reminded that 'we' live in nations: 'our' identity is continually being flagged' (1995:93), and this is what makes "our' national identity unforgettable' (1995:93). This mundane, continual, omnipresent and so familiar and therefore unnoticed 'flagging', or reminding, of nationhood is the everyday nationalism of the established Western nations – what Billig terms as 'banal nationalism'.

For Billig, national identity is 'more than an inner psychological state or an individual self-definition: it is a form of life, which is daily lived in the world of nation-states' (1995:69). As he explains,

it is a form of reading and watching, of understanding and of taking for granted. It is a form of life in which 'we' are constantly invited to relax, at home, within the homeland's borders. This form of life is the national identity, which is being renewed continually, with its dangerous potentials appearing so harmlessly homely (1995:127).

Morley also reminds us about the interdependence of the binary oppositions of 'us'/'them' images saying that 'the production and definition of a sense of home and Heimat [...] involves the designation of those – foreigners or "strangers" – against whom those within define themselves' (2000:34). For Morley and Robins, the German concept of Heimat, the metaphor of 'home' and 'homeland', is an ominous utopia, mirage, dangerous delusion:

Whether "home" is imagined as the community of Europe or of the national state or of the region, it is drenched in the longing for wholeness, unity, integrity. It is about community centred on shared traditions and memories [...] It is about conserving the "fundamentals" of culture and identity. And, as such, it is about sustaining cultural boundaries and boundedness. To belong in this way is to protect

⁴ For example, as Billig concludes in his analysis of the news items of the British daily newspapers, not only does the press construct the national 'we', but it also allows its readership to imagine 'us' *vis-à-vis* 'them', those being outside the national communion. 'We not only see reminders of 'ourselves', we see reminders of 'them' and foreignness,' Billig argues (1995:175).

exclusive, and therefore, excluding, identities against those who are seen as aliens and “foreigners”. The “other” is always and continuously a threat to the security and integrity of those who share a common home (1996:459).

Also for Schlesinger ‘to talk of national identity requires us to analyse processes of inclusion and exclusion’ (1991:173). It is the (official) national culture, national cultural space that constitutes ‘the boundaries for *versions* of national identity’ (1991:160, emphasis in original), Schlesinger argues, reminding of various collective identities which may be in opposition to the official version of national culture. As he points out,

in principle, the national culture is bounded by the territorial confines of a given nation-state. However, the ‘national’ characteristics are not given. National cultures are not simple repositories of shared symbols to which the entire population stands in identical relation. Rather, they are to be approached as sites of contestation in which competition over definitions takes place (1991:173-174).

For Schlesinger, it is the national culture, ‘a repository, *inter alia*, of classificatory systems’ (1991:174, original emphasis), that

allows ‘us’ to define ourselves against ‘them’ understood as those beyond the boundaries of the nation. It may also reproduce distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ at the intra-national level, in line with the *internal* structure of social divisions and relations of power and domination (1991:173-174, emphasis in original).

With Schlesinger’s proposed conceptualization of national identification in mind we can look also at the media, and public broadcasting institutions in particular, as one of the key producers of the (official) national culture with their power to set demarcation lines between ‘our’ culture and identity, and ‘theirs’ both beyond and, what is important in the case of my own study into responses of publics of the Latvian public television, also within national borders. As Schlesinger, commenting on Anderson’s idea of the communicative community, has rightly pointed out: ‘the boundedness of a given national imagery is one thing; *homogeneity* within those boundaries is quite another’ (1991:165, original emphasis).

In a similar vein, Billig reminds us that the idea of an imagined community of a nation does not necessarily imply the idea of an imagined unity and, instead of unity, the daily ritual of newspaper reading that Anderson sees as the producer of a feeling of the national 'we' can as well reproduce fissures in a reading collectivity (see Billig, 1992, 1995). While in his study of discourses of ordinary Britons discussing royalty Billig agrees that through the newspaper reading ritual 'a sense of a shared world is imagined', he also adds that 'it is not that simple, for the imagined community is not imagined as a harmonious unity' (1992:171).

What Schlesinger and Billig are suggesting is that there is no, and has never existed, such a thing as one unproblematic national 'we' and, instead, we should think of imagined national communion as a sum of different, and often contradictory, versions of the national 'we'. This in turn implies that the process of forming a nation, with the help of broadcasting institutions or not, has never been a smooth one. No matter how nation-builders would like to see their constructions of the national 'we' as part of a national consensus, in no society has there ever existed an agreement among all members of the national community on what the national 'we' actually means. In a similar vein, instead of thinking of national identity as a singular, uniform, fixed and unproblematic category we should think of different, and often conflicting, constructions of what it means to be a member of one or another national community shifting over time. Likewise, instead of aspiring to create a national unitary all-encompassing public sphere (with one national public) we should think of several public spaces interacting, and, at some points, also competing, with each other. I return to this discussion later in the chapter when examining Habermas's theory of the public sphere and its relevance for the study of the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics.

1.4 Broadcasting and National Imagination

'Being national is the condition of our times,' Eley and Suny have once argued (1996:32). As they remind us,

we are "national", when we vote, watch the six o'clock news, follow the national sport, observe (while barely noticing) the repeated iconographies of landscape and history in TV commercials, imbibe the visual archive of reference and citation in the movies, and define the nation day by day in our politics (1996:29).

Schlesinger has noted that in Anderson's approach 'the newspaper is singled out for its insertion of the 'imagined community' into a simultaneous mode of address' (1991:164). 'But that has long been the effect of radio, and latterly of television,' Schlesinger reminds (1991:164). Indeed, as Morley and Robins argue, 'on either side of the Atlantic, broadcasting has been one of the key institutions through which listeners and viewers have come to imagine themselves as members of the national community' (1995:10-11). What is more, as in response to Anderson Hartley points out, 'like newspapers, television may be more than merely a metaphor for imagined communities; it is one of the prime sites upon which a given nation is constructed for its members' (1987:124). Instead of 'merely 'reflecting' the complex make-up of a nation which pre-existed it' television, as well as radio has served as 'an instrument, an apparatus, a 'machine' through which the nation was constituted', to quote Hall describing the nation-forming aspirations of the BBC (1993:32).

As the history of Western European public broadcasting institutions shows it, in the eyes of its pioneers public broadcasting was an ambitious 'bringing-the-nation-together' project with the help of the 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1983) – namely, through the exploitation of invented traditions that Hobsbawm has classified as 'communitarian', 'establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities' (1983:9)⁵ – expected to provide its geographically dispersed national publics with universal access to the collective life of the nation and to promote a sense of national 'we-ness'. European governments, as well as programme-makers themselves, saw as the primary task of recently launched public broadcasting institutions the provision of their publics with symbolic resources that could allow viewers and listeners to imagine themselves as part of the national 'we'. Public radio and television became instruments for the creation and maintenance of a single unitary national public sphere expected to hold the national public together, and though it has remained only a normative goal and has little to do with an empirical reality it is the view on public broadcasting that is much alive also today, as we shall see also in the Latvian

⁵ It is worth noting here that Hobsbawm sees nations themselves as products of the process of the 'invention of tradition'. For him, they are historically novel constructs made with a help of 'social engineering'. 'Whatever the historic or other continuities embedded in the modern concept of 'France' and 'the French' – and which nobody would seek to deny – these very concepts themselves must include a constructed or 'invented' component. And just because so much of what subjectively makes up the modern 'nation' consists of such constructs and is associated with appropriate and, in general, fairly recent symbols or suitably tailored discourse (such as 'national history'), the national phenomenon cannot be adequately investigated without careful attention to the 'invention of tradition',' Hobsbawm argues (1983:14).

case.

Reflecting on the introduction of public broadcasting in Europe, Ellis, who has famously described television as ‘the private life of a nation-state’ (1992:5), notes that European governments ‘realized the potential of broadcasting as a unifying force, pulling together individuals, families and groups into a national whole’ (2000:49). ‘Through the ideal of public service broadcasting, broadcasting became another tool in the construction of the nation state,’ Ellis concludes (2000:49). For him, early television, by bringing national populations together ‘had an important national role, unifying the nation around a common television culture’ (2000:46).

Yet, we should not forget that national imagination projects of early Western European public radio and television sought to achieve ideals of national coherence through standardization (unification) of national cultures creating something like an official culture of the nation, and for that same reason we should keep in mind that national cultures were merely underpinned by an illusion of unity of the nation as their publics not always readily accepted that role of national subjects public broadcasters had reserved for them. Though that version of national culture as created and disseminated by early public broadcasting organizations might be common (available) to all members of the national community, it was not necessarily shared (accepted) by the whole population. In other words, the ‘national whole’ Ellis is referring to has never been a harmonious category – this is something I return to later in the chapter.

Briggs notes that founders of British broadcasting believed that it ‘could enlarge horizons, both artistically and politically’ (1965:37). ‘Artistically [John] Reith [the BBC’s first director general] believed that it could do much to engender new cultural interests – in music and drama, in particular: politically it could serve as an instrument of integration in a divided community,’ writes Briggs (1965:37). Cardiff and Scannell in their analysis of the early years of public radio and television in Britain have demonstrated how enthusiastically the BBC utilized royal rituals and other state ceremonials, public events and national festivals to provide its publics with ‘symbolic images of national unity and identity’ (1987:169). Radio and, later, television, they argue, served as instruments for the creation of that special ‘we-feeling’ of a sense of belonging to the national community. Broadcasting ‘made the nation real and tangible through a whole range of images and symbols, events and ceremonies, relayed to audiences direct and live’ (Scannell, Cardiff, 1991:277). To quote Moores, ‘BBC radio sought to build a sense of collective national

identity by creating an annual calendar of public events and occasions alongside the little ceremonies of everyday consumption' (2000:55), and, just as the BBC, other early Western European radio broadcasters were also engaged in similar projects of national imagination in their own societies. As Löfgren in his study on the role of radio in everyday nation-building concludes, radio in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s 'above all served the task of binding the nation together' (2001:26). It 'created new forms of imagining the nation, novel modes of sharing as well as new frames of reference' (Löfgren, 2001:29).

Through live broadcasting that opened access for all to an array of national events, which have previously been exclusively available only to the few privileged being present at the scene, and thus made national life public, the BBC 'attempted to supply its isolated listeners with a sense of the community,' Cardiff and Scannell point out (1987:162). It created 'a sense of participation in a corporate national life,' they write elsewhere (Scannell, Cardiff, 1991:277). 'The nation as a knowable community became available to all members with access to broadcasting,' Scannell and Cardiff claim seeing it in a rather idealistic manner as a democratization of the public sphere (1991:280).

As many commentators have pointed it out, British public broadcasting sought to offer its publics an image of the national community as a family. The live broadcasted rituals of the monarchy – what Cannadine has described as the 'celebrations of consensus, in which the royal family, individual families and the national family were all conflated' (1983:140) – were of particular importance in the nation formation project as orchestrated by early BBC radio. In the early 1930s, BBC radio established a tradition of the monarch's Christmas speech to the nation, an example of 'invented, constructed and formally instituted' type of traditions (Hobsbawm, 1983:1) where, again, an image of the nation as a family, the King as a head of the family and listening audiences at home as members of this national family, were evoked. 'The King sent the best wishes of his family to the assembled listeners at home, symbolically binding together a united 'national family',' Moores writes (2000:56). As Scannell concludes, 'it set a crowning seal on the role of broadcasting in binding the nation together, giving it a particular form and content: the family audience, the royal family, the nation as family' (1988:19). While the national family might come together around the monarch's Christmas speech, it might not necessarily be a family free from internal divisions, with all its members happy with the representation of the national 'we' conjured up by the public radio. I will shortly

return to this point.

These mediated royal ceremonies, seen by Cardiff and Scannell as moments of 'broadcasting as national integrator' at its best, are what Dayan and Katz have labelled as the genre of 'media events' (see Dayan and Katz, 1992). Just as in Scannell and Cardiff's analysis, for Dayan and Katz, the shared simultaneous viewing experience these broadcasts seem to offer to their mass audiences makes national integration with the help of broadcasting possible. As Dayan and Katz put it, media events '*integrate* societies in a collective heartbeat' (1992:9, emphasis in original). 'All eyes are fixed on the ceremonial center, through which each nuclear cell is connected to all the rest. Social integration of the highest order is thus achieved via mass communication,' Dayan and Katz claim in their discussion of broadcasting as a national integrator (1992:15).

However, as Dayan and Katz's media events approach itself has been highly criticized, most notably in the writings of Couldry who rightly reminds that not necessarily all members of the national community enthusiastically accept that version of the national 'we' as constructed through these mediated national events (Couldry, 2003, Hepp, Couldry, 2010)⁶, so has Scannell and Cardiff's account on the power of broadcasting in binding the nation together. In a similar vein to Couldry's critique of Dayan and Katz's approach, Moores also warns that Cardiff and Scannell 'are in danger of implicitly assuming audiences to have identified unproblematically with those forms of output' as offered by the early British public broadcasting (2000:56). In his oral history research, Moores has observed that while all of his respondents had listened to most of the broadcasts that Cardiff and Scannell have called 'the programmes of national identity' (1987:158), 'by no means all were willing to recognise themselves straightforwardly as patriotic national subjects' (2000:56). Moores provides a telling illustration of his observations: 'there are memories of some families poking fun at the king's voice during his Christmas Day speech' (2000:56).

For Morley, Scannell and Cardiff's approach is premised on an 'over-simplistic model of the media, as producing some indivisible form of sociability, equally inviting and accessible to all' (2000:118). To quote Morley,

⁶ Couldry insists that 'media events' do not necessarily perform an integrative function as responses of audiences to these events are far from being uniform and may produce a variety of readings, including oppositional ones. According to Couldry, as much as these events establish unity they confirm divisions in a particular society. Instead, Couldry proposes to conceptualize these events as 'media rituals' constructing the myth of the mediated centre.

sociability is simply not the indivisible Good which Scannell assumes it to be. By the very way (and to the very extent that) a programme signals to members of some groups that it is designed for them and functions as an effective invitation to their participation in social life, it will necessarily signal to members of other groups that it is not for them and, indeed, that they are not among the invitees to its particular forum (sic) of sociability. [...] Any one form of sociability must have its constitutive outside, some necessary field of exclusions by which the collective identity of those whom it interpellates successfully is defined (2000:111-112).

In his and Brunsdon's 1978 study on the ways BBC current affairs *Nationwide* programme constructed a sense of national unity and provided its audiences with a particular representation of the national community, they identified 'the construction of a particular type of white lower middle class national (ethnic?) identity as Englishness' (Morley, Brunsdon, 1999:12). As Morley and Brunsdon conclude, television programmes such as *Nationwide* are one of the sites on which 'national identity is constructed and reconstituted daily, along with its own patterns of inclusion and exclusion' (1999:13). As Morley argues elsewhere,

if the national media constitute the public sphere which is most central in the mediation of the nation-state to the general public, then whatever is excluded from those media is in effect excluded from the symbolic culture of the nation. When the culture of that public sphere (and thus of the nation) is in effect "racialised" by the naturalisation of one (largely unmarked and undeclared) form of ethnicity, then only some citizens of the nation find it a homely and welcoming place. The imagined community is, in fact, usually constructed in the language of some particular ethnos, membership of which then effectively becomes a prerequisite for the enjoyment of a political citizenship within the nation-state (2000:118).

To be true, in their discussion on the image of the nation as constructed by the early BBC radio Scannell and Cardiff themselves have admitted that it was often a myth of national unity, an imaginary unity of the nation, an idealized representation of the nation that was in place downplaying actual social reality of existing divisions in British society:

Though something like a common national culture and identity was given expression in moments of ritual celebration, it was often at the expense of different cultures and identities within the imposed unity of the United Kingdom and its national broadcasting service (1991:303).

While Morley admits that ‘national broadcasting can [...] create a sense of unity – and of corresponding boundaries around the nation’, he also reminds us that this process has not always been ‘smooth and without tension or resistance’ (2000:107). Indeed, Raboy’s account of the tangled experience of Canadian public broadcasting fulfilling its *raison d’être* of ‘promoting and supporting Canadian national unity against pressures for regional autonomy and threats of fragmentation’ (1985:65) echoes the experience of various turbulent nation formation projects of public broadcasting institutions in Europe and other parts of the world marked by internal societal contradictions and divisions. In Canada, as elsewhere, normative national integration ideals of public broadcasting soon collapsed against the actual reality of having not one but several, and not necessarily in harmony with each other, publics which public radio and television were meant to serve. Different, and opposing, conceptions of the Canadian nation dividing the francophone minority and the dominant English-speaking community have made the relationship between the public broadcaster and its publics in Canada uneasy and challenged tremendously its nation-building mandate. As Raboy reflects on the introduction of public broadcasting in this bilingual country,

having created a system on the basis of nationalist feeling, the architects of Canadian public broadcasting found themselves unable to reconcile competing and conflicting concepts of the Canadian nation. For Canadian broadcasting there would soon be two audiences, two markets, two publics... but one policy, one mandate, and one corporation (1985:68-69).

1.5 The Shifting Relationship between Public Broadcasters and Their Publics

It should be reminded here that public broadcasters, during their formative stage, have often been accused of being elitist, arrogant and complacent producing asymmetrical top-down power relations with their publics. As public broadcasting embraced the project of cultural homogenization attempts were made to create common national culture thus obscuring the actual diversity of identities and internal tensions found within

societies which recently launched public radio and television organizations were supposed to serve. Thus, reflecting on the history of Swedish broadcasting, Löfgren provides an illuminating example on how linguistic standardization was employed by the public radio in this Nordic country to create a homogenized national culture:

In Sweden the first generations of radio announcers were primarily academics, and they created a cultured mode of speaking and tone of language that became known as “high Swedish,” which became the educated standard for the country as a whole. [...] The use of regional dialects by Swedish radio staff was discouraged until the 1960s (2001:27-28).

The introduction of public radio in the 1920s and the advent of public television a few decades later have often been described as paternalistic projects of cultural enlightenment and national cohesion. Not surprisingly then, the actual responses of their publics often did not match with identities premised on national loyalty and the cultural uplifting that in a patronizing manner were imposed upon them by broadcasters, as the example provided by Moores on reactions of British audiences to the King’s Christmas radio speech has already demonstrated. While ‘the audience-as-public was positioned as citizens who must be reformed,’ writes Ang (1991:119), actual audiences turned out to be ‘too intransigent or recalcitrant to submit unproblematically to such reform attempts’ (1991:106).

Initial resistance of the BBC, which during the Reithian years preferred to see itself as an institution of high culture having a mission of the edification of the masses, to address popular tastes of their publics, seen by definition as bad tastes contrary to the tastes of cultural elites the BBC was so eager to impose on the masses, is a good example of often uneasy relationship between public broadcasters and their publics during the early years of public broadcasting. Early definitions of public broadcasting implied a notion of ‘public service as a cultural, moral and educative force for the improvement of knowledge, taste and manners’ (Scannell and Cardiff, 1991:7) – what Ang has described as an objectification of its publics ‘in the name of highminded, national cultural ideals’ (1991:101). The public service ethos of the BBC ‘particularly in the era of its monopoly, was suffused with an assumption of knowing better than its listeners what they wanted or needed,’ Scannell notes (1996:11). As Hendy succinctly puts it, ‘instead of *satisfying* public demand, it was all about *changing* it through the tight control of supply’ (2013:58,

original emphasis).⁷

The wave of liberalization and deregulation of media markets that commenced across Europe in the 1980s broke the longtime monopoly of public broadcasting institutions and paved the way for commercial players to enter the scene (with few exceptions such as the UK where commercial broadcasting first appeared as early as the mid 1950s). Over the same period, technological change allowed the proliferation of new types of broadcasting transcending national frontiers and creating new transnational audio-visual spaces. Inevitably, these changes forced European public broadcasters to revise their relationship with their publics that among other things also required greater responsiveness towards popular tastes in their programming. Something public broadcasters have obscured for many years in the name of their noble ‘making-society-better’ ideals could not be ignored anymore.

Though it may as well be seen as the cultural democratization of public broadcasting, critics noted the commercialization of public broadcasting, echoing the criticism on the part of Habermas of what he saw as the commercialization of the public sphere, and, ultimately, its decline, marked with the arrival of the mass circulation press in the mid nineteenth century and later the advent of radio and television which, as he has in a far too pessimistic tone argued, replaced the citizens of the reading publics with the masses of passive consumers (see Habermas, 1989). Similarly, for those accusing public broadcasters of succumbing to the logic of commercialization, the latter was a threat to the high-minded ideals of public radio and television of visualizing their viewers and listeners as a public (citizens), conceived as the antithesis of the logic of commercial broadcasting, and of addressing viewers and listeners first and foremost as a market (consumers). For critics, commercialization marked a shift from understanding the concept of ‘public service’ as ‘broadcasting in the service of the public sphere’ to ‘broadcasting whose prime purpose is to satisfy the interests and preferences of individual consumers rather than the needs of the collective, the citizenry’, to use the conceptualization introduced by Syvertsen (1999:7; see also Syvertsen, 2004).

The introduction of commercial broadcasting in a number of European countries during the 1980s and the early 1990s and the concomitant end of the monopoly of public

⁷ Such view on its publics has been reflected in resistance among the management of early BBC radio to launch regular large-scale studies into listening habits, tastes and preferences of its listeners. Programme-makers feared that pleasing of interests of their publics could jeopardize that highbrow elitist perspective on public broadcasting broadcasters themselves shared.

broadcasting and arrival of competition was a traumatic experience for public broadcasters. It is what in the literature has often been labelled as the ‘identity crisis’ of institutions of public broadcasting. A ‘captive audience deprived of any choice’ (Jakubowicz, 2007b:118), as it was in the era of public broadcasting monopoly, now could enjoy expanded viewing choices. Newcomers, commercial channels, aiming to please tastes of their viewership prioritized popular programming. This inevitably led to declining audience shares for established public broadcasters as audiences increasingly migrated to their new commercial competitors. In an attempt to win audiences back, public broadcasters became more compliant to the demands of their audiences than ever before – critics often saw this shift as contamination of the principles of public broadcasting. Their shrinking viewership figures in combination with a turn towards more entertainment-oriented programming has ultimately seriously challenged the legitimacy, as well as the viability of European public broadcasting institutions.

Although critics saw in the popular demand for the newly established commercial channels and in the popularization tendencies of public broadcasters (increasing volumes of light programming in their output) a tendency towards giving up their public broadcasting ethos by public broadcasters, as well as by their publics, it is important to note that this shift might just as well have exposed the fragility of the taken for granted nature of the loyalty of publics towards institutions of public broadcasting during the long years of their national monopoly. As Flew has pointed out, ‘greater competition for public service broadcasters from commercial services challenged many of the often implicit assumptions of loyalty that had existed between broadcasters and their publics and underpinned their status and implied contribution to national culture’ (2009:983).

As d’Haenens et al. have recently concluded, ‘the demise of public service broadcasting is far from being as serious as forecast’ (2011:189). Nevertheless, the transition from the era of scarcity with ‘a few channels broadcasting for part of the day only’ to the era of availability with ‘several channels broadcasting continuously jostled for attention’, to borrow the words of Ellis (2000:39), has left behind the epoch of simultaneous mass viewing of the same, and of the single channel of public television, creating extra challenges for public broadcasters in fulfilling their ‘bringing-the-nation-together’ mandate.

In the middle of the 1990s Morley and Robins forecasted that ‘the proliferation of broadcast channels, through cable and satellite television, is likely to move us towards a

more fragmented social world than that of traditional national broadcast television' and 'may well disrupt our assumptions of any 'necessary simultaneity' of social experience' (1995:68), and only a few years later Moores concluded that

today's audiences for multi-channel broadcasting are becoming increasingly diverse and fragmented, no longer restricted to a national audio-visual space. The electronic landscapes of television are transforming, with no prospect of a return to the kind of shared community-in-simultaneity which Scannell and Cardiff described (2000:141).

If in the early 1990s, in the light of a rising era of multi-channel television, Dayan and Katz argued that television as 'the medium of national integration', 'television-as-we-know-it' will disappear (1992:23) then, more recently, Katz has announced that 'the television of "sharedness" – of nation-building and family togetherness – is no longer with us' (2009:7). In the spirit of Scannell and Cardiff, Katz claims that, contrary to modern broadcasting, early radio and television were better at integrating the nation as, in his opinion, they served as national unifiers. Dayan also pessimistically notes that 'as new media technology multiplies the number of channels, television has become a medium of segmentation, and television-as-we-knew-it continues to disappear' (2010:25).

The question, however, is whether television has ever been an effective national integrator and unifier as Dayan and Katz propose, or does their account rather constitute an idealization of an actual reality, in which only some members of the national communion felt addressed and embraced by a national unity project supported by public radio and television, the idealization of the same sort as a myth of public broadcasting as an institutional embodiment of a modern national public sphere of the Habermasian tradition – I discuss this question in more detail later in the chapter.

For ethnic minority audiences the arrival of cable and satellite television often transcending national boundaries offered an escape from the confines of established public (national) broadcasting where they may have rarely found themselves part of that conception of the national family offered by mainstream public (national) channels. For instance, in Moores' study on the introduction of satellite television in British households in the early 1990s the father of a middle-class Asian family compares the mode of address of the long-running public BBC1 and that of the recently launched commercial

Sky News channel:

With the BBC, you always feel as though the structure of society is there – the authority. Their newsreaders speak just like schoolmasters. They're telling you, like schoolmasters telling the kids. I think Sky News has more of a North American approach. It's more relaxed. They treat you like equals and don't take the audience for a bunch of small kids (1993a:635).

For Moores, the negative response towards the public broadcaster of this respondent is 'the consequence of a broader hostility towards establishment values in white British society – and towards the BBC as an institution which, from his perspective, embodies them' (1993a:635). As it has been demonstrated in a number of studies on diasporic media audiences, it is a protest against unequal power relations within public (national) broadcasting, and society more generally, ethnic minority audiences often express silently by their withdrawal from established public (national) channels what is often followed by their migration to transnational broadcasters (Cunningham and Sinclair, 2001, Robins and Aksoy, 2006, Tsagarousianou, 2007, just to name a few).

1.6 Defining the Role of Publics in Public Broadcasting

For defenders of public broadcasting as an institutional embodiment of a modern public sphere, public broadcasting makes a crucial contribution to a democratic process and, therefore, it deserves the status of a public good. In line with this paradigm, public broadcasting institutions have at least the potential to form a modern Habermasian-style public sphere providing a space for shared national public debate turning their publics into citizens, rather than serving individual needs and interests of consumers that, in turn, seen as something that should be left for commercial broadcasting, often accused by its critics of populism because 'it gives audiences what they want'.

In contrast, for those sceptical about the actual performance of public broadcasters in the realization of their public sphere function, the idea of a single unitary national public sphere and public broadcasting as its central element is an idealization, just as the Habermasian public sphere model itself, of what appears to be a more complex and problematic reality – indeed, this is a view I share. The key criticism in this respect is that parts of the citizenry have been excluded from the national public as constructed by public broadcasting institutions in precisely the same way that the eighteenth century

Habermasian public sphere has included only some members of the national population. While some publics, dominant groups in the society, have been addressed by public broadcasters, others, minority publics, have been left outside that public sphere in its mediation through public broadcasting institutions, argue their critics.

What is understood as the universality principle of public broadcasting serves as one of the key arguments in hands of the proponents of the idea of public broadcasters as institutions of a modern public sphere. The universality principle implies the idea of free access to public broadcasting services provided to all citizens and across the entire national territory, as well as needs and interests of all members of the national public are purportedly being addressed in its programming output. In the writings of defenders of the public broadcasting idea the universality ideals of public broadcasting are often equated to the core principles of the eighteenth century liberal public sphere that, in theory, was marked by equality, openness to all, freedom from market and state interests and where consensus was reached through ‘a public rational-critical debate of private people as a public’ (Habermas, 1989:192).

Inspired by the ideals underpinning the Habermasian public sphere concept, supporters of the public broadcasting idea claim that public radio and television have at least a potential to serve as key institutions in creating, sustaining and developing a modern public sphere. They idealize a nationally bound public sphere shared by all members of the national community and mediated through established channels of public (national) broadcasting as a prerequisite for vigorous democracy and successful national integration. Even if an all-embracing national Habermasian-style public sphere mediated through conventional public (national) broadcasting institutions has never been an empirical reality, just as the normative Habermas’s public sphere model itself, in much of the literature it still features as some ideal-type model of the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics.

For instance, Dahlgren in his writings on the role of television in democratic societies stresses that ‘values, norms, and common, shared knowledge and frames of reference’ are necessary for a robust democracy and therefore argues in favour of ‘some minimal, shared public culture to which all citizens, regardless of their background, ethnicity, lifestyle and identity, can relate’ (2000:32). Similarly, in the light of the highly individualized nature of modern societies and increasing social fragmentation, Ellis argues that the social role of television has changed and calls for a new definition of

public broadcasting:

No longer the agent of a standardizing notion of national unity, public service broadcasting can provide the forum within which the emerging culture of multiple identities can negotiate its antagonisms. This is in many ways the opposite of its former role: instead of providing displays of national unity, it deals in displays of national disunity, the better to bring about ways of resolving them [...] The new public service broadcasting is no longer concerned with imposing consensus, but with working through new possibilities of consensus (2000:87).

For Garnham, one of the neo-Habermasian proponents of public service broadcasting, as described by Collins (2004), public broadcasting is ‘an embodiment of the principles of the Public Sphere’ (Garnham, 1986:45), though, as he admits, imperfect in practice. As Garnham believes, public broadcasting should play a crucial role in providing citizens with an arena for a public debate that is built upon the principle of equal access (universalism). ‘The existence of a national focus for political debate and information is important to the national political process,’ he argues (1986:52). The assumed potential of public broadcasting to foster the ideals underpinning the public sphere prompts Garnham to demonstrate the putative superiority of the system of public regulation of broadcasting over the market-driven model of broadcasting (see Garnham, 1983, 1986, 2003). In order to defend the British public service broadcasting model, Garnham opposes it with the market-driven broadcasting system of the United States:

it is empirically demonstrable that the model of public service broadcasting in the United Kingdom [...] has played a more positive role in its relationship to democracy than has the commercially driven system in the United States (2003:197).

From this point of view, public broadcasting is seen as a remedy for what is believed to be a dysfunctional market-oriented commercial broadcasting system. Dahlgren’s argument is typical of the perspective adopted by proponents of the public broadcasting idea: ‘the needs of a democratic society cannot be fully served if its major medium is organized exclusively along the principles of market forces’ (2000:32). The juxtaposition of what is described as a socially valuable mission of public broadcasting to the business-oriented objectives of commercial broadcasting has long served as a basis for the

legitimacy of the former. As d'Haenens et al. have aptly summarized, 'market failure has become the main rationale for public service media' (2011:197).

Habermas's model of the public sphere, which defenders of the public broadcasting idea are operating with, has attracted considerable criticism. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that criticism towards claims of public broadcasting as an institutional embodiment of a modern public sphere often echoes the same critical reviews that the Habermasian conception of the public sphere has received itself, mainly because of the exclusionary character of the bourgeois public sphere. The eighteenth century liberal public sphere was open only to a small fraction of the population, namely educated and propertied middle-class men. In the words of Calhoun, reflecting on the restrictive nature of democracy more generally, "the people" have not all been citizens' (1994:311).⁸ Similarly, Collins questions the contribution of European public broadcasting organizations to a democratic process in their societies, accusing public broadcasters of being elitist in their approach to their publics in the era of their monopoly:

broadcasters' commitment to informing and educating their public too often led them to serve an audience of their imagination rather than the real audience. Rather than a democratic public sphere, in which the actual experience and interest of a real empirical public was represented, monopolistic European public service broadcasters too often addressed the public experience and interests, the public sphere, of elites. 'Bottom up' public services, which gave voice to a real public, (or, to use Reith's term, publics), and represented a demotic and genuinely democratic public sphere were conspicuous by their absence until competition with commercial services compelled public broadcasters to address the real public rather than that of broadcasters' imagination (2004:43).

Critical responses towards the concept of the Habermasian public sphere have triggered new conceptualizations focusing on the interplay of the multiplicity and diversity of public spheres – what Melucci in his discussion of social movements has termed 'public spaces' (see Melucci, 1989) or Cunningham in his writings on transnational diasporic media audiences has called 'public sphericules' (see Cunningham, 2001, Cunningham,

⁸ We should not forget that Habermas himself saw the bourgeois public sphere model as an idealized version of historical reality and, though imperfect in practice, still valuable as a normative ideal, as Thompson (1995) reminds (see also Thompson, 1990).

Sinclair, 2001) – as an alternative to the utopian ideals of a single unitary all-encompassing nationwide public sphere. Morley, also, suggests that, instead of the idealisation of a single Habermasian-style public sphere, ‘we need to pay attention to the role of a variety of alternative public spheres and counterpublics based on divisions of ethnicity, “race”, generation, region, religion or class’ (2000:114).

1.7 The Citizen/Consumer Opposition Revised

According to the normative public broadcasting model, public radio and television are expected to treat members of their publics as citizens, and not (only) as consumers which, on the contrary, is conceived as the domain of commercial broadcasting whose rationale, argue its critics, is constructed around the maximization of audiences and profit-making. The discourse of the defenders of the idea of public broadcasters as servants of a modern public sphere has always been rather hostile towards serving needs and interests of consumers – commonly in their writings termed as ‘audiences’ and, what is more, as a rule, portrayed as passive and uncritical – within public radio and television seeing it as a threat to the assumed democratic mission of public broadcasting. In contrast, such discourses have prioritised addressing viewers and listeners as citizens, usually labelled as ‘publics’. However, as I will argue later, this rather simplistic citizen/consumer distinction itself has always been divorced from empirical reality, and for this reason its value as an ideal-type model for the conceptualization of public and commercial systems of broadcasting is also questionable.

Seeing ‘viewership as a potential moment of citizenship’ Dahlgren argues that the ‘public sphere requires ‘publics’, in the sense of interacting social agents’ (1995:120). For him, the role of a citizen implies production of political talk and action in stark opposition to the role of a recipient of messages that is associated with a passive consumption. As he claims, ‘under the commodity logic of the commercial system, the audience becomes the product, delivered to the advertisers’ (1995:29) and ‘any gains in the identity of citizenship will, to a large extent, have to be won at the expense of consumerist identities’ (1995:148). In his later works (2000, 2001), however, Dahlgren mitigates his critique towards commercial broadcasting admitting that this model of broadcasting also has some democratic potential, although, he hastens to point out, it cannot substitute for the public broadcasting model entirely.

For Splichal, the idea of public broadcasting is linked with the access citizens should have

to the public sphere for the realization of their rights and liberties. To quote him, the ideal of public service media is ‘a “natural” setting for the realization of citizens’ right to communicate since it represents the most indigenous *societal* extension of the *citizen’s* right to public reasoning’ (2006:17-18, original emphasis). The same spirit of the Habermasian public sphere ideals can be found in the writings of Scannell, who, because of its egalitarian character (making national life accessible to all citizens), sees public broadcasting as a common good:

In my view equal access for all to a wide and varied range of common informational, entertainment and cultural services, carried on channels that can be received throughout the country, should be thought of as an important citizenship right in mass democratic societies. It is a crucial means – perhaps the only means at present – whereby common knowledges and pleasures in a shared public life are maintained as a social good for the whole population. As such it should be defended against its enemies (1989:164; see also, for instance, Scannell, 1990, Scannell, Cardiff, 1991).

Many of the arguments of the proponents of the public broadcasting principles are highly normative, conflicting with the empirical reality of actual audiences. It suggests that, instead of being clear-cut categories that are in a constant tension with one another, the citizen and consumer roles attributed to audiences are in fact overlapping and complementary. Audiences are not voiceless, passive and malleable masses, as defenders of the citizen/consumer dichotomy like to argue. Instead, as a number of audience reception studies have demonstrated, viewers and listeners through the act of consumption are involved in the process of active meaning production of media texts (I refer to relevant studies in some detail in Chapter 3). Media consumption does not abolish citizenship. In fact, to consume can be seen as a modality of participating. Instead of seeing the citizen and consumer identities of audiences as fixed binary opposites we should rather think of them as dynamic categories and media, public service as well as commercial, as providing a platform for the interplay between both. Even Dahlgren, a strong supporter of the public broadcasting ideals as we have seen, admits that ‘we are all to various degrees both consumers and citizens and the two roles are not necessarily always in opposition’ (2000:32).

1.8 Hirschman's Exit, Voice and Loyalty

For the purposes of my own analysis of forms of action various publics of the Latvian public television LTV have developed as a response to the imagined national community as conjured up by this institution Hirschman's influential theory of 'exit, voice and loyalty' (see Hirschman, 1970) is a useful starting point. My main interest in utilizing Hirschman's approach is to understand actions taken by those who feel being left behind by the national 'we' created by public television as well as by those who feel at home with its project of national imagination. To use Morley's words, 'who feels included in or excluded from symbolic membership of the nation' (2000:105) as made by the Latvian public television, 'who feels at home in the public sphere of national broadcasting' (2000:127) and who does not 'find it a homely and welcoming place' (2000:118).

According to Hirschman's theory, there are two options for how individuals and groups can respond to a decline in the performance of institutions, be they business firms, other organizations or states, or, in a broader sense, how they can respond to a failure of the system: exit (withdrawal from the failing system) and voice (various forms of protest in hope that the system is able to recover). As Hirschman explains, 'loyalty is a key concept in the battle between exit and voice' (1970:82). For Hirschman, 'loyalty' is an attitude defined as 'a special attachment to an organization' (1970:77) that determines behaviour: exit and/or voice option. The main point of Hirschman's approach is that in the absence of loyalty, exit will be preferred and exit itself will be costless and silent. 'As a rule,' Hirschman argues, 'loyalty holds exit at bay and activates voice' (1970:78).

Yet, it should be stressed that exit and voice options are not mutually exclusive, and may as well substitute or complement each other. What is important in the context of my own investigation is that the exit option itself can be seen as a voice-type response. As we shall see it in the Latvian case, the exit mechanism, namely rejection of public television, can be applied by its publics as a form of protest. They reject public television, seen as having close ties with the power elite, to protest in this way against the country's political establishment and, in the case of its Russian-speaking publics, also against the hegemonic conception of the national 'we'.

Hirschman's theory is useful in exploring discourses of publics of public television discussing their relationship with this institution as a nation-forming project. Such a theoretical framework allows the study of agency. Hirschman's approach invites us to see

the use of the exit mechanism or the voice option, or both, as an act of agency, and from this perspective, to examine the attitudes its publics have developed and actions they have taken towards the public television as an exercise of agency.

Hirschman's approach also enables us to treat the consumer and citizen roles of audiences as interplaying instead of being in conflict with each other. Although at a normative level the consumer/citizen opposition may work, when it comes to the analysis of actual audiences such artificial dichotomies become problematic and pose considerable obstacles in our attempt to make sense of a complex and nuanced empirical reality. Hence, the usefulness of Hirschman's theory lies in its capacity to bring together the disciplines of politics (citizenship/voice) and economics (market/exit), the former often seen as a natural habitat for the citizen while the latter for the consumer – it is worth noting analogies with distinctions made between public broadcasting and commercial broadcasting by advocates of the public broadcasting idea I have discussed earlier in the chapter (for further discussion on Hirschman's theory as providing connections between realms of economics and politics see Flew, 2009, Adelman, 2013).

For instance, consider viewing choices television audiences make day in day out. The decision to watch a particular channel, programme or genre may appear at first as merely an act of consumption, while actually may involve a wide spectrum of actions ranging from exit-type to voice-type responses through which audiences may act as both consumers and citizens. Watching television is, indeed, an act of consumption but at the same time it is also an exercise of citizenship. Through consumption audiences also participate. What may look at first as merely a rejection of one or another channel, programme or genre may actually involve an articulation of voice. To put it another way, viewing choices audiences make may give them voice. As cultural theorists have demonstrated, audiences are active in their uses and interpretations of media texts, and it is Hirschman's approach that makes it possible to investigate audiences as agents who through their media activities make their voice being heard.

Drawing on Hirschman's theory, instead of treating the withdrawal of publics of public television from the offerings of this institution as merely an employment of the exit mechanism we can see it also at the same time as a realization of the voice option. What at first may look as a typical case of the consumer exit accompanied by the absence of loyalty towards the public broadcaster on the part of its publics, may actually signal an employment of the citizen voice, and thus may tell us much more than simply to affirm

the fact of viewers deserting from the public television to its commercial competitors, as ratings data suggest it.

Hirschman's concepts of 'exit, voice and loyalty' have previously been utilised to examine individual and collective reactions to system failures, including public services, for instance, unsatisfactory public school systems. Nevertheless, to date his concepts have not been used to examine actions taken by publics of public broadcasters, though it has been recently advocated for their usefulness in broader media/citizenship debates (Flew, 2009).

Hirschman's theory has been extensively used in marketing research to study consumer behaviour. His approach has, therefore, often been misperceived as market-driven and consumer-oriented. However, his proposed conceptual framework for the analysis of the relationship between consumer/citizen and product/organisation has also been utilised in other fields outside business studies (e.g. psychology, political science, cultural studies, feminist studies), thus demonstrating the applicability of Hirschman's concepts to the analysis of social and political phenomena, the exploration of a citizen realm and a public good. Being a development economist and bringing economic and political theory together, Hirschman himself has argued that his concepts of 'exit, voice and loyalty' should be 'applicable not only to economic operators such as business firms, but to a wide variety of noneconomic organizations and situations' (1970:1).

1.9 Conclusion

The historical examination of inclusion and exclusion strategies applied by public broadcasters in the formation of the national 'we' in Western European societies demonstrates how definitions of the nation have been intertwined with definitions of public (national) broadcasting they and their publics have developed, and also how various definitions of loyalty, that 'special attachment' Hirschman (1970) is talking about, towards both, nation and public (national) broadcasting, do interact with each other.

The production and reproduction of national identity is all about setting the lines of demarcation between those who are included and those who are left out from the national 'we', and, as we have seen, it is institutions of public broadcasting that have long provided, and continue doing so, particular image(s) of what it means to be a member of the national communion. As the history of Western European public broadcasters also

reveals, not all members of the national family have felt at home with versions of the national 'we' visualized and propagated by these organizations.

Exploring the role of public radio and television in the construction of a national self requires a discussion on what has often been an uneasy relationship between public broadcasters and their publics. The study of public broadcasting as a nation-building project also involves the analysis of diverse and shifting conceptualizations of what public service broadcasting is, or should be, about and what role is, or should be, offered to its publics in these contexts. To understand public broadcasting as a nation-forming resource we should seek an answer to the question of how 'the nation' is defined within public (national) broadcasting and, likewise, we should explore definitions of 'the public sphere' and its 'publics' within public (national) broadcasting. In this way we will be able to identify the relationship between formulations of the nation and conceptions of public broadcasting, understood as both public radio and television institutions and values associated with the idea of public broadcasting more generally, broadcasters and, what is more important as regards my own study, their publics have.

A juxtaposition of the rather idealistic view of public broadcasting as an institutional embodiment of a modern nationally bound Habermasian-style public sphere with the empirical reality of the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics suggests that instead of understanding the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics in terms of a single unitary national public sphere and one national 'we' (or one national public) we should think of several public spheres, various publics and different accounts of the national 'we' interacting, and also contending, with each other. Likewise, we should abandon normative dichotomous distinction between audiences as citizens and as consumers and, instead, think of them as intersecting categories.

So far I have mostly referred to the experiences of Western European, and British in particular, public broadcasters in their nation-building aspirations as Western Europe is the historical home of public broadcasting traditions with other countries elsewhere in Europe, as well as beyond its borders, having made more or less successful attempts to transplant BBC-style public broadcasting institutions in their societies. It is thus fair to say that it is Western European public broadcasting systems that have been fundamental to what can be termed as normative ideal-type models of public broadcasting.

In addition, an examination of the relationship between public broadcasters and their

publics in Western European countries is crucial for understanding public broadcasting systems in post-Communist societies across Central and Eastern Europe. Western European public broadcasters have served as role models for media policy makers, media managers and journalists of public radio and television institutions on the Eastern part of Europe in their attempts, even if only on paper, to transform Communist era state broadcasters into Western-style public service radio and television organizations. Also in the Latvian case a BBC-like public broadcasting model has been seen as a source of inspiration, an ideal model to be mimicked. I expand this discussion in the following chapter where I concentrate on the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics in post-Communist societies.

Chapter 2

Public Service Broadcasters and Their Publics in Post-Communist Societies

2.1 Introduction

Following the end of the Communist regimes and break-up of the USSR in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, former republics of the Soviet Union as well as its satellite countries in Central and Eastern Europe underwent transformations in different spheres of life, even if often only formal and incomplete if judged against Western ideal-type models which post-Communist societies have aspired to emulate. These transformations were underpinned by a shift from communism to capitalism and a subsequent arrival of market economy and liberal democracy and included the reformation of their media systems that encompassed the turbulent remaking of former state radio and television organizations into public service broadcasting institutions.

In Latvia, as in other newly formed post-Communist nation-states, the process of change, which, as already noted, included also a comprehensive reformation of the broadcasting system, coincided with the equally turbulent process of nation formation. In Latvia political discourse has prioritized an ethno-nationalistic view, defining the language and culture of the Latvian-speaking majority as a main raw material of the national imagination and national integration. Accordingly, public radio and television has been seen by nation-builders, the local political elite, as a project of national identity and national integrity as based on the language and culture of the ethno-linguistic majority.

Although the thesis focuses on the study of audiences, it is important to provide a background context in order to situate my own empirical research within the broader political, economic and socio-cultural macro-level developments surrounding the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics in post-Communist societies. The aim of this chapter hence is to contextualize my own investigation into the responses publics of the Latvian public television have taken towards it. Some of the issues addressed in the chapter, namely those that are of particular importance for understanding the responses of Latvian publics, will be discussed further in the

subsequent data chapters.

2.2 Reforming Post-Communist Broadcasting Systems

Public service broadcasters in post-Communist societies have fundamentally different origins compared to many of their Western European counterparts. The idea of public broadcasting in Central and Eastern European region has been institutionalized, or at least attempts towards this direction were made, through the reorganization of former Communist-controlled state broadcasters. As Jakubowicz argues, the motive behind the introduction of public broadcasting in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989 (like in West Germany after the Second World War and in Spain, Portugal and Greece in the 1970s) was ‘systemic’ – ‘when change of the broadcasting system was part and parcel of broader political change, typically transition to democracy after an authoritarian or totalitarian system’ (2007b:117).⁹

Despite the fact that post-Communist media reforms, like overall post-Communist transformations, are very often described in terms of profound changes, this view only partially corresponds to what had happened in reality and, since some notable characteristics of former Communist media systems have managed to survive the collapse of the Communist regimes, not all scholars agree that the paradigm of radical and immediate transformation is strong enough to explain the process of media change. As Rantanen in her analysis of the post-Communist media landscape in Russia rightly points out,

the collapse of Communism is sometimes perceived as a total breakdown of the old system. In reality, the transition has been an interplay of the old and the new, where new structures emerge but many of the old structures still remain (2002:16).

Because of the limited nature of changes in Central and Eastern European societies after the fall of Communism, Sparks develops a perspective that focuses on the social continuity of the old Communist systems as an alternative to those approaches stressing the total and complete nature of the transformations (although he also admits some degree of renewal, as well) and argues that what these societies have experienced were political, and not social, revolutions. As he explains, political change in the region has not

⁹ Jakubowicz also identifies ‘paternalistic’ (in the UK) and ‘democratising’ (in France, Italy) motives of introducing public broadcasting.

been matched by substantial change at the level of social structure with the old *nomenklatura* in many cases retaining its power positions (see Sparks with Reading, 1998, Sparks, 2008). As Sparks concludes,

there is singularly little evidence that there was anywhere a complete and total transformation following upon the end of communism. The elements of continuity are too obvious, and too central, to be dismissed. In terms both of structures and personnel, the media show singularly little transformation, and what there has been is best understood as a mechanism for ensuring social continuity in the face of political change (Sparks with Reading, 1998:105-106).¹⁰

Similarly, Balčytienė has recently argued that the changes that took place in Central and Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Communist regimes ‘very rapidly transformed the ways in which the countries were governed’, and yet ‘these were not whole and widespread social transformations, since they did not pose a fundamental challenge to the existing social and cultural orders’ (2013:32). For her, ‘these were partial transformations where social developments did not evolve to the same degree as the changes that took place in other fields of public life, such as politics or the economy’ (2013:36). Just as Sparks, Balčytienė points to the considerable degree of continuity between the old regime and the new one in internal structures of institutions (such as their personnel), including certain media organizations.

Before moving on to a more detailed examination of the transformations of post-Communist broadcasting systems, the usage of some basic terminology has to be explained. In the study I will distinguish ‘transition’ (‘initial breakthrough involved in abolishing the old system’) from ‘transformation’ (‘very long process of continued change’) in line with Jakubowicz’s conceptualization (2007a:59). According to Jakubowicz, it is ‘systemic social transformation’ that came after the relatively brief period of ‘transition’. Accordingly, we can say that the transformation of former state broadcasters into public broadcasting institutions (that is, the implementation of normative public broadcasting ideals into practice) followed the initial formal transition from state to public broadcasting (*de jure* renaming former state radio and television

¹⁰ For Sparks, when it comes to the media reform, post-Communist television systems are best examples of continuity of old systems where ‘large, state-owned broadcasting institutions with essentially the same personnel continued to exist in the period after the transition’ (Sparks with Reading, 1998:187).

organizations as public broadcasters).

As media scholars have argued, the remaking of the Communist media, previously functioning as an ideological state apparatus, into the Western-like media in Latvia and elsewhere in the region turned out to be not as easily achievable as was initially assumed since old practices appeared to be deep-rooted not only among the political leadership but also among media professionals, as well as ordinary citizens (see, *inter alia*, Aumente, et al., 1999, Brikše, et al., 1993, Brikše, et al., 2002, Gross, 2002, 2004, Sparks with Reading, 1998, Sparks, 2008).

While the legal framework within which radio and television operated under the Communist rule was soon changed to a new one echoing Western broadcasting ideals, implementation of these principles in practice was, and continues to be, a turbulent and incomplete one suggesting that it is not possible to sweep the Communist broadcasting legacies away with immediate effect and through merely restructuring former state radio and television organizations – more comprehensive change will take longer time and will demand greater effort.

To quote Gross and Jakubowicz, ‘media transformation is proving to be a long and complex process’ (2013:2) as, indeed, the overall process of post-Communist transformations. Reflecting on the frustration and disillusionment in Estonian society during the first decade after the break-up of the USSR, Lauristin and Heidmets have pointed out that ‘the return to Europe has not been as simple and obvious a journey as was expected in the early 1990s’ (2002:22-23), and the same well describes also Latvian experience.

As part of the broader Westernization project of the post-Communist world (or ‘re-Westernization’, as Lauristin (1997) argues) with former Communist bloc countries in the region aiming to import the Western way of life, whatever its definition, in a hope to overcome Communist legacies¹¹ initial attempts were made to copy Western-style public

¹¹ This is what Stukuls Eglitis in her study on social change in the early years of post-Communist period in Latvia has described as the restoration of ‘normal’ societal order where a widely shared aspirations for ‘normality’ were seen as a move away from ‘abnormality’ of the Soviet order. It was particularly within a narrative of ‘spatial normality’ (focus on Latvia’s ‘place in space’), one of the two dominant narratives of that time Latvian politics as identified by Stukuls Eglitis, that the modern West represented the desired goal of the process of ‘normalization’, and from this perspective a return to a state of ‘normality’ was translated as a return to the West. In contrast, a narrative of ‘temporal normality’ (focus on Latvia’s ‘place in time’), though also interested in ‘joining’ Europe, preferred to see the restoration of the social order of the 1920s

service broadcasting systems, so to say, to create small BBCs across Central and Eastern Europe, including the borrowing of classical mission and value statements of Western European public broadcasters. Also their cultural mission to care for national identity and to promote and protect national culture was transplanted into mandates of new post-Communist public broadcasting institutions; this is an issue I return to later in the chapter when discussing post-Communist nation-building experiences.

As with the entire (re-)Westernization project, the remaking of post-Communist broadcasting systems in line with the Western public broadcasting ethos often remained only on paper. Due to the complexity of political, economic and socio-cultural reasons which I shall specify later in the chapter, borrowed Western European broadcasting ideals, and the importation of Western-type public broadcasting institutional models in particular, were hard to implement in practice.

‘The first year of the existence of public service broadcasting in Poland was not very successful in terms of fully defining its underlying philosophy and obligations, implementing them in practice and winning general understanding and acceptance for them,’ Jakubowicz concludes assessing the early days of public broadcasting in Poland (1996:189). As elsewhere in the region, in Poland, as Jakubowicz notes, the concept of public service broadcasting ‘had been borrowed from Western European practice’ (1996:178) and the mission statement of the Polish public television was ‘a distillation of familiar Western literature on the subject’ (1996:188).

Notwithstanding that media laws were rewritten in the spirit of the ideals of Western European public broadcasting models, the transformation of former state broadcasters into Western-style public broadcasting organizations in reality appeared to be not as quick and smooth as was initially anticipated. It was an ‘attempt to impose a value system upon reality,’ as Sparks with Reading (1998:180) have aptly described the intention to establish independent public broadcasters in Central and Eastern Europe. As they argue, ‘this proved quite impossible in practice, since neither the political nor the economic conditions for such a system existed anywhere in the region’ (1998:180), and, what is important, as Sparks (2012) stresses in one of his recent publications, such conditions today, more than 20 years since the fall of the Communist regimes, still are not in place

and 1930s pre-Soviet interwar period of independence as a key to the restoration of ‘normality’, the sentiment, however, not totally absent from a narrative of ‘spatial normality’ (see Stukuls Eglitis, 2002).

or have a rudimentary character. To the absence of the requisite political and economic conditions one should also add the lack of a necessary socio-cultural milieu for post-Communist public broadcasting institutions to flourish.

For Jakubowicz, the transformation of former Communist state broadcasters into public broadcasting institutions is part of what he has described a ‘mimetic’ media policy-making approach. ‘Copying or transplantation of legal, institutional and societal arrangements from other social contexts’ has so far dominated in the media reforms of Central and Eastern European countries, he argues (2008b:51). It was a mistake, Jakubowicz and Gross now point out, ‘assuming that it is enough to transplant a law or institution copied on Western patterns for it to operate properly’ (2013:11). To quote Jakubowicz, ‘the idea was to ‘test the best of the West’, but the enabling sociopolitical and cultural environment needed for these policies to succeed has largely been absent’ (2012:34).

What has often been emphasized in the previous studies on post-Communist transformations is that political and economic change in the region was not, and could not be expected to be, accompanied with rapid cultural shift. As Balčytienė has described it, transformations on the political and economic scene ‘were not automatically supported with social and cultural reforms’ (2013:36). While adoption of Western European traditions in different spheres of life was a declared destination of the process of transformations, the inherited Communist world-view was still much alive, and implementation of the so-called Western values in everyday practices was not easily attainable.

Besides, adoption of Western broadcasting standards was problematic not only because the post-Communist context was significantly different from the one within which Western broadcasting models have originated but also because of the fact that during the late 1980s and the early 1990s the same Western broadcasting models, which post-Communist countries were hoping to adopt, were themselves under scrutiny and review in Western European societies. It was a time when their public broadcasters underwent what is often termed in the literature as ‘identity crisis’.

What is more, the reform of ex-state broadcasters into institutions of public broadcasting overlapped with the introduction of dual broadcasting systems in the former Communist world when, during the early 1990s, former state monopolistic broadcasting

organizations lost their dominant position soon after the first commercial players appeared on the media landscape, an experience well-established Western European public broadcasters had gone through few years earlier. Having been granted the status of public broadcaster, these institutions were forced to compete for audiences with their newly established commercial counterparts having no experience of what it means, first, to work in a competitive environment and, second, to operate as public service organizations in the way it is understood in Western European societies. It was nearly a mission impossible to compete with the new commercial stations and, meanwhile, to start developing a tradition of public broadcasting in, literally, a void.

In addition to the problem of insufficient funding and political interference, publics were turning away from the recently established public broadcasting institutions and were engaging enthusiastically with novelties such as imported Western fiction offered by new commercial broadcasters, as the experience of Czech public television in the advent of the establishment of the first nationwide private television channel in this country in 1993 clearly demonstrates:

The general public had almost no experience with either the output of private commercial broadcasting or the concept of public service media. Widely accepted commercial programming was seen as evidence of victory of democratic media, especially as people found it hard to see a clear difference between (old) state television and (new) public service television (Jirák, Köpplová, 2013:185).

Therefore, the implementation of normative Western-style notions of public broadcasting into practice, including building a relationship with their publics in line with these principles, was a formidable task newly established post-Communist public broadcasters faced. Public radio and television organizations in post-Communist countries, in contrast to their Western European counterparts, having no glory days of public broadcasting behind them met the very same challenges in terms of the introduction of dual broadcasting systems as their Western role models.

As many commentators have argued, what Central and Eastern European societies have today are rather quasi-public broadcasters, effectively a mixture of public, state and commercial broadcasting institutions, or, according to more critical accounts, unsuccessful replicas of Western European public broadcasting institutions. As Collins

summarized a decade back,

public service broadcasting has not yet been implanted successfully in Central and Eastern Europe [...] PSB¹² has not, it seems, been able to do much more than figure as an ideal to those working to (re)establish democratic and pluralistic societies east of the Elbe (2004:33).

It is true that the transformation of former state broadcasters into public broadcasting institutions was, and continues to be, a complex experience in all post-Communist societies in Central and Eastern Europe, and more than two decades after the collapse of the Communist rule public broadcasters in this part of Europe in their development are still significantly lagging behind their Western European role models, and discrepancies between normative ideals as expressed in broadcasting laws and everyday realities are more than apparent. Nevertheless, it is right to describe post-Communist broadcasting reform as a failure only if judged against some highly idealized view of Western-type public broadcasting and over-optimistic anticipations that ex-Communist broadcasters could be turned into 'true' (i.e., as seen in the West) public service organizations overnight.

Thus, while Jakubowicz concludes that even in the more advanced post-Communist democracies public broadcasting organizations are in reality 'hybrid constructs, combining disparate (public service; political elite mouthpiece; political battlefield; commercial) elements within one organization' (2008b:50), at the same time he rightly adds that 'this is not a feature of post-communist countries alone: many PSB organizations in older democracies are also hybrid constructs, combining these and other elements in various degrees' (2008b:50).

What has happened to public broadcasting models, exported from the West to post-Communist societies, is exactly what Hallin and Mancini seems to have in mind when reminding us that

particular media institutions develop under specific historical conditions. Outside of these conditions, it is not clear that those institutions can be exported to other social and political contexts without substantially changing their meaning. That is something we should always keep in

¹² Here and throughout the text 'PSB' is used as the acronym of 'public service broadcasting'/'public service broadcasters'.

mind whenever particular models are proposed as norms, professional practice, or media policy (2010:xii).

Therefore, when judging the progress of the reform of the broadcasting systems of the former Communist bloc countries in Central and Eastern Europe, we should take into account the peculiarities of the overall process of post-Communist transformations instead of setting the Western-style normative broadcasting ideals as some benchmark post-Communist public broadcasters are expected to live up to. As Jakubowicz rightly concludes, 'it is doubtful whether, realistically, more could have been achieved since 1989, given that the creation of PSB is one of the hardest tests of the success of the general process of change in such circumstances' (2008b:51).

Some scholars have argued, and more vividly at the end of the second decade of post-Communist years, that instead of uncritically mimicking Western media and journalism models former Communist bloc countries should search for distinctive approaches suitable for their specific historical context (for instance, see Brikše, 2010, Voltmer, 2008). Though scholars agree that Western public broadcasting models could not be easily applied to post-Communist societies and only partially such Western public broadcasting giants as the British BBC could serve as role models for their counterparts in Central and Eastern European countries, the existing literature does not provide any alternative public broadcasting models to be future-proof in post-Communist societies.

Similarly, it has been recently argued that instead of attempting to fit post-Communist media systems into existing typologies of Western media systems, namely Hallin and Mancini's influential theory of media systems (see Hallin and Mancini, 2004),¹³ we should

¹³ Some media scholars have classified media developments in the region as more typical of Hallin and Mancini's Polarized Pluralist (the Mediterranean) model (among other characteristics it is also weak public broadcasting institutions that Central and Eastern European media systems have in common with those media landscapes situated in the Southern part of Europe) what Splichal already in the mid-1990s termed as 'Italianization' of Central and Eastern European media systems (see Splichal, 1994). Yet, more recent attempts to classify media systems across the former Communist territories in Central and Eastern Europe warn that this is a rather oversimplification of a far more complex and nuanced reality. Thus, Dobek-Ostrowska and Głowacki argue that 'the media in Central Europe have to maneuver between political pressure on the one side (politicization typical of the polarized pluralist model) and economic pressure on the other, which led to commercialization typical of the Liberal model' (2008:16). In a similar vein, Balčytienė notes that 'not all postcommunist countries can be artificially situated around the Mediterranean Sea' (2012:69). Examining media landscapes of the Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia she concludes that 'they have many significant elements from each of Hallin and Mancini's models' (2012:69). While Hallin and Mancini argue that 'there are many strong parallels between the media systems of Eastern and Southern Europe, and much of the pattern of what we called the Polarized Pluralist model can be found in the East', they also suggest that the media systems of the former Communist countries can also be seen as 'hybrid systems' comprising elements of more than one of their identified three models of media

be searching for alternative conceptualizations taking into account not only peculiarities post-Communist media systems have *vis-à-vis* Western media systems but also particularities post-Communist media systems have *vis-à-vis* each other. Media landscapes across Central and Eastern Europe are far from being homogeneous, and there is no such thing as a single post-Communist media system (in the same way as there had never been ‘single, uniform, and monolithic communist media system,’ to quote Sparks (2000:47)) but instead what is in place are numerous distinct national media systems varying from one country to another and having a certain degree of both commonalities and differences not only beyond but also within national borders.

2.3 Publics of Post-Communist Public Broadcasters

In the current body of literature, the troubled and, some would also say, abortive attempt to transform ex-Communist state broadcasters into Western-style public broadcasting institutions has been mainly explained by reference to the political and economic realm (see, inter alia, Gross, 2002, Jakubowicz, 1996, 2007a, Sparks with Reading, 1998). First, the post-Communist political leadership has been accused of pressuring public broadcasters in order to keep control over the former state radio and television organizations (most often through politicization of nomination and/or appointment of governing and/or regulatory bodies of public broadcasters) that, as we shall see later, has also left its footprint on the way their publics perceive these organizations.¹⁴ Second, politically-motivated allocation of state funding has been detected, with negotiations between public broadcasters and their governments over the amount of the annual state subsidy, the main source of funding for the bulk of the Central and Eastern European public broadcasters, jeopardizing not only their political independence but also their financial viability, and, what is of special importance in the context of my own study, also

systems, Polarized Pluralist, Liberal and Democratic Corporatist (2013:29; see also Hallin and Mancini, 2010).

¹⁴ As an extensive body of literature demonstrates, post-Communist governments have been keen on securing control over the former state broadcasters now officially renamed as public broadcasters. ‘In Poland, the first Solidarity government was not interested in developing public service media, as that would mean loss of control over the state broadcaster,’ Jakubowicz writes (2007a:180) illuminating a similar pattern of the public broadcasters/political elite relationship in other post-Communist countries with the first democratic governments, and also their successors, refusing to give up control over the media, and public broadcasting in particular. As Johnson has described the Slovak case, ‘every Slovak government since 1993 has sought to use Slovak Television, STV, ostensibly a public broadcaster, as a state television network’ (2013:160). A number of recent reports on the media landscapes across Central and Eastern Europe indicate that more than two decades since the end of the Communist regimes political pressuring on public broadcasting organisations has continued, even if in a more subtle manner and not necessarily always successful if compared with the first decade of the post-Communist period (see Bajomi-Lázár, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, Bajomi-Lázár, et al., 2011, Krajewski, Diakite, 2012, Milosavljević, Kerševan Smokvina, 2012, Örnebring, 2011, Preoteasa, et al., 2010, Račas, et al., 2011, Štětka, 2011, Tóth, 2012).

shaping the way their publics look at them – as also my investigation into the responses of the publics of the Latvian public television shows, along side political pressuring it is also state funding that makes their publics think of these institutions as state broadcasters.¹⁵ As Sparks wrote in his account on post-Communist public broadcasting at the end of the 1990s, ‘apart from political instability, the other major problem concerning the possibility of public service broadcasting is the question of financial stability’ (Sparks with Reading, 1998:164), and his observations are as much topical today as they were more than 15 years ago, as also the experience of Latvian public radio and television suggests.

Yet, the fiasco, according to critics, with the introduction of Western-type public broadcasting institutions in post-Communist societies cannot be explained purely through recourse to political or economic factors, and a variety of socio-cultural factors should be taken into account in the same way as broadcasting reforms in Central and Eastern Europe cannot be seen as exclusively institutional transformations (from state to public broadcasters), and much more attention should be paid to the study of the current state of the idea (values) of public broadcasting in the post-Communist world, something this study aims to redress in the current research agenda into post-Communist public broadcasting.

The weakness of institutions of public broadcasting in the region cannot be understood focusing exclusively on the study of political elites and broadcasters, and equal scrutiny should be given to the research of the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics. It is of high importance to introduce the study of audiences in the current debate over post-Communist public broadcasting given the fact that research papers on broadcasting systems on the east side of the Iron Curtain usually report low level of public support for public broadcasting institutions that most vividly manifests in their poor audience ratings and massive difficulties public broadcasters face to collect licence fee payments.

Despite the fact that in some Central and Eastern European countries, notably in Poland, public service television channels fare well in the ratings battles with their commercial

¹⁵ In the literature it has also been argued that the insufficient and unstable financial resources post-Communist public radio and television organizations have to operate with have made them uncompetitive in their battles with commercial market players and led to further marginalization of public broadcasters in their societies. Due to the lack of political will, licence fee funding of public broadcasters has been introduced only in a handful of Central and Eastern European countries and, in some countries, as we shall see later, this model of funding has been later abolished or such attempts have been made.

rivals, in the majority of countries of the region, public channels are not the most watched and commercial stations dominate in the market, as is indeed the case in Latvia. And, although in Poland public television has atypically high viewing figures and strong positions in the market for the region, nevertheless, its publics are reluctant to pay the licence fee (for more detailed account see, for instance, the report of Krajewski and Diakite, 2012). As Klimkiewicz concludes, loyalty of publics of Polish public broadcasters 'did not stretch as far as the willingness to pay licence fees' (2007:317) and 'the financing of PSB solely from license fees appeared unaffordable in Poland' (2007:299).

Due to the high level of the license fee evasion, in 2002 the Hungarian government decided to abolish licence fee payments and replace them with state subsidies (Tóth, 2012). Similarly, faced with the Slovaks' reluctance to finance their public service broadcasters through direct payments, local politicians made attempts to abolish licence fees, albeit not successfully (Kollar and Czwitkowics, 2013, Štětka, 2012a). In the Czech Republic the number of supporters of the licence fee system is also low, giving rise to a failed attempt by some local politicians to abolish licence fees (Rybková, Řiháčková, 2013). Though reluctance to fund public broadcasters directly from their own pocket on the part of their publics may signal their rejection of public broadcasting institutions, it should not be necessarily seen as a sign of them rejecting also the idea of public broadcasting as such, as indeed responses of my informants suggest.

What has often been reported in the previous accounts of Central and Eastern European public broadcasting systems is a lack of understanding of the public broadcasting idea in these societies, including local political circles and in some cases also public broadcasting professionals themselves. Yet, as evidence from my own study indicates, it is not so much lack of understanding of the idea of public broadcasting as classification problems people face struggling to find a right place on a map for public broadcasting institutions that the previous studies in fact seem to have pointed out.

Given that the research on post-Communist media reform has identified politicization and commercialization as key characteristics of the media systems that have emerged in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of Communism (see, inter alia, Dobek-Ostrowska and Głowacki, 2008, Gross, 2002, Hallin and Mancini, 2013, Jakubowicz, 2007a, Mancini, Zielonka, 2012, Sparks with Reading, 1998, Sparks, 2000, 2008, 2012, Splichal, 1994, Vihalemm, et al., 1997, P.Vihalemm, 2002), it should be of no surprise

that in such a politicized and commercialized media environment (and yet, to be true, it is something that is not peculiar to Central and Eastern Europe alone and to various degrees can be found in countries in other parts of Europe as well) in the eyes of their publics, as well as politicians and sometimes also journalists themselves, public broadcasters are still often perceived as state radio and television organizations or as not that distinguishable from their commercial competitors (see, for instance, reports of Antonova, Georgiev, 2013, Lengyel, 2010, Milosavljević, Kerševan Smokvina, 2012, Stepka, 2010), as it is also in the case with Latvian publics, which I shall come back to in the subsequent data chapters. As we shall also see, such a view of public broadcasting institutions on the part of their publics tells us as much about the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics as about the relationship between political elite and society.

Public television channels across Central and Eastern Europe have often been criticised for being too populist in their programming offerings where, as critics say, priority is given to entertainment in order to boost ratings and to compete with their commercial rivals at the expense of the public broadcasting ideals. What is often characterized as the highly commercialized output of post-Communist public broadcasters in the eyes of their critics is seen as a breach of some idealized Western-style public broadcasting ethos, something, in fact, Western European public broadcasters themselves struggle to live up to.

Here, again, the Polish experience is a case in point. As already noted, contrary to other post-Communist societies Polish public television is the most popular channel in the country. However, its critics point out that its success in achieving high ratings should be mainly attributed to the high proportion of entertainment output in its programming (Bajomi-Lázár, et al., 2011). ‘Alongside political dependence, programming commercialization seems to be an equally important factor which undermines the idea of PSB in Polish society,’ Stepka (2010:242) argues. In a similar vein, Krajewski and Diakite claim that the public television in Poland ‘is truly public only in at most one-eighth of its programming. Usually it means the small hours of the overnight schedule’ (2012:39).

Yet, commercialization is not an exclusive pattern of Central and Eastern European public broadcasters as also their Western European role models have been much criticized for giving up the public broadcasting ideals by prioritizing popular programming in order to secure substantial audience figures. Besides, the Polish case

seems to fail to represent the whole picture of post-Communist public broadcasting with public broadcasters in the region varying in their focus on popular versus ‘serious’ programming, though such distinction itself is rather artificial. While replicating some of the strategies more often associated with commercial broadcasting, the output of the Latvian public television LTV hardly can be described as over-popularized. What is more, as we shall see it later, in the eyes of some of its publics popular programming is even insufficient in the offerings of LTV, something that also alienates these publics from public television.

As already noted, the constant political pressure Central and Eastern European public broadcasters have been facing over the post-Communist period, combined with state funding making up the largest part of their budgets, has led to the widespread perception in these societies, including Latvia, of public broadcasters as state radio and television institutions. Besides, due to the Communist era experience with state owned, funded and controlled broadcasters for post-Communist audiences the concept of state broadcasting may be simply more familiar than that of public broadcasting. So, a mixture of historical legacies and the realities of today informs the attitudes of post-Communist publics towards their public broadcasters, a point I shall return to in the following data chapters when exploring the perceptions of the Latvian public television its publics have.

For instance, as Antonova and Georgiev report in the case of Bulgarian public television and radio organizations BNT and BNR, ‘the overall perception (including that of some politicians and media) is that BNT and BNR are still state entities rather than independent broadcasters’ (2013:30). ‘The *raison d’être* of public broadcasting in Bulgaria is still to be defined, as the public at large remains far from recognizing the concept as distinct from state broadcasting,’ Antonova and Georgiev conclude (2013:31). Referring to the same Bulgarian example, Štětka describes the country’s public broadcasters as having a ‘divided institutional identity’ (2011:11) suggesting that it is perhaps the public broadcasters their publics in Bulgaria do not recognize as distinct from the ex-state radio and television and not so much the concept of public broadcasting they mix with the notion of state broadcasting, as Antonova and Georgiev (2013) have proposed it. As Štětka explains,

although they are ‘public service’ media according to the Radio and Television Act, they are largely perceived as ‘state’ media, both by the other media as well as by the public. The reason for this is simply the

system of their financing, as they are both mainly funded directly from the state budget (2011:11).

Antonova and Georgiev add another important aspect, namely the lack of political independence, to explain such an image of the public radio and television organizations in Bulgarian society. No doubt the constant scandals of political interference, even if contested and unsuccessful, that post-Communist public broadcasters have been involved in over the years inevitably have left their imprint on the image of public radio and television institutions in their societies, something that as we shall see later the Latvian case confirms as well. To explain the fact that the news on one of the country's commercial channels is seen by Slovenian audiences as more objective than the news offerings of the public television Milosavljević and Kerševan Smokvina refer to 'a number of reported cases of political pressure on journalists and management interventions in the reporting' (2012:40).

As Jakubowicz reminds us in his account on the reform of post-Communist societies, 'organizational change must be accompanied, or followed, by cultural change' (2007a:78) for the institutions, in our case public broadcasters, to function properly. To quote Jakubowicz, 'the reorganization of post-Communist societies cannot be regarded as successfully completed until the new organizations have been institutionalized – that is, underpinned by the cultural foundations, the mental dispositions, and the spirit of shared public philosophies supporting them' (2007a:78). In other words, what Jakubowicz says is that reform of the legal and institutional frameworks (through the importation of Western models) under which public broadcasters operate in post-Communist countries is not complete or sufficient and remains only on paper as it is not backed up by cultural change.

Jakubowicz speaks about 'lack of social embeddedness of the idea of public service broadcasting and lack of a social constituency willing and able to support public service broadcasters and buttress its autonomy and independence' in the societies across Central and Eastern Europe (2008a:117). 'Transplanted into post-communist countries in the process of "transformation by imitation", they have not, generally speaking, been able to win support and a constituency in civil society,' he explains (2008a:117). As Jakubowicz notes elsewhere, 'civil society perceives PSB as a pawn of the politicians' and 'general awareness of political control over them prevents civil society from identifying with them' (2007a:330), an observation much backed by evidence of my own empirical

research into the discourses of Latvian publics discussing their relationship with the country's public television, as we shall see it later in the data chapters. Yet, as I will also argue, his notion of lack of social embeddedness of the public broadcasting idea in post-Communist societies tends to ignore the actual complexity of the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics in these societies.

2.4 The Public Service Broadcasting System in Latvia

Three stages of evolution can be distinguished in the relationship between the Latvian ex-state and now public television LTV and its audiences. First there was an era of 'ambivalence' (suspicion and pleasure coexisting) during the Soviet rule followed by what could be labelled as a 'romantic' period (a period of unconditional trust and love) during the years of the Awakening, the time of the political breakthrough of the late 1980s and the early 1990s, and, finally, the stage of 'betrayal' (gradual alienation and migration from LTV to its commercial rivals) came during the 1990s onwards.

The television era in Latvia started in early November of 1954, more than 10 years after the 1940 Soviet occupation, when LTV with its then name Riga Television Studio was launched. Under Soviet rule, state owned and funded LTV served as a mouthpiece of the Communist regime. While, on one hand, overall trust in the media was low, on the other hand, as under the totalitarian media system exit as an option for audiences was highly limited (access to alternative, oppositional Western media outlets was restricted), let alone the employment of the voice mechanism within official (institutional) contexts, people managed to select content as offered by the Soviet media. Though being suspicious towards the ideological messages sent to them by television as these were at odds with everyday social realities, television viewers enjoyed watching its culture and arts programmes, as well as popular content such as shows of popular music and other entertainment offerings.

A new media/society relationship emerged in the middle of the 1980s along with the overall media liberalization in line with the *glasnost* (openness) policy that was part of the *perestroika* (restructuring) plans announced by the then leader of the Soviet Union Michael Gorbachev. Instead of reforming the Soviet system as Gorbachev hoped for, journalists in the Baltic countries gradually started to utilize Gorbachev's ideas for different purposes aimed at destroying the system. During the Singing Revolution, the years of political breakthrough at the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s, state radio and

television in Latvia played a crucial role in mobilizing society in support of the struggle for freedom. Radio and television ‘were looked upon as a truly national media’ (Brikše, et al., 1993:240); it was a time later characterized as the glory days of LTV and Radio Latvia. As Brikše and others put it, media and journalists ‘enjoyed enormous trust and even love from the audience’ (2002:69). In January 1991 people even built barricades around the radio and television buildings to guard journalists round the clock against the possible invasion of the Soviet security forces.

After the restoration of independent *de facto* statehood in August 1991, a few months before the collapse of the Soviet Union, restructuring of different spheres of life in line with Western ideals, even if only on paper, became a declared political aim of the first governments of independent Latvia; this included also rewriting the broadcasting law to proclaim LTV and Radio Latvia as public broadcasters. Although the former Communist party-controlled Latvian state broadcasters acquired *de jure* the status of public service radio and television, the *de facto* reform of the ex-state broadcasters into public broadcasting institutions was, and continues to be, highly problematic.

Whereas for post-Communist societies, including Latvian media policy makers and broadcasters themselves, the Western European public broadcasting normative ideals have served as a source of inspiration in their plans to transform former state broadcasters into public broadcasting institutions, neither media policy makers, nor broadcasters or even their publics have had knowledge of, and often also interest in, how to implement these ideals into everyday practice. Over more than 20 years, LTV, like other public broadcasters in the region, has experienced insufficient and unstable funding, political struggles over its control, commercial pressures, weak journalistic professionalization and audiences migrating to its commercial competitors.¹⁶

The introduction of a free market system allowed new entrants, commercial television stations, to emerge on the media scene that with the offerings of imported Western-origin fiction attracted large audiences challenging long taken for granted loyalty of LTV audiences. In 1996, the first nationwide private commercial television channel LNT was launched in Latvia, and, according to the audience measurements of that time, as soon as LNT appeared on the scene LTV, only recently being officially granted the status of

¹⁶ Reflections on the development of public radio and television institutions in other Baltic countries of Lithuania and Estonia bring out similarities with the experiences of Latvian public broadcasters (Lõhmus, 2002, Lõhmus, et al., 2010, Pečiulis, 2010, Shein, 2002).

public broadcaster, experienced a massive and rapid drop in its audience figures. It was American films and series, as well as Latin American telenovelas, offered by LNT that attracted the largest television audiences in the country at that time.

To win audiences back, LTV adopted some of the strategies more often associated with commercial broadcasting, albeit with limited success in bringing audiences back. The trend, however, was not exclusive to the Latvian case as evidence from other former Communist bloc countries indicates the same pattern. As [d'Haenens and Bardoel](#) conclude, 'in Eastern Europe state-controlled media complexes were dismantled and often a shift was made towards highly commercial media landscapes' (2007:92). Ultimately, a non-substantial audience share of LTV, along with its other dysfunctions, has cleared a way for questioning the legitimacy, and viability, of the entire public broadcasting model in Latvia.

Today Latvia's public broadcasting system comprises two public service television channels and five public service radio stations. Alongside a recently launched joint internet news site LTV and Radio Latvia also have their own separate internet platforms. As part of the public broadcasting reform the Electronic Media Council, the national regulatory body of the radio and television industry and also the holder of the state capital shares in LTV and Radio Latvia, has proposed to merge the public television and radio into one multimedia institution, and during this process Latvian media policy makers have again looked at Western European public broadcasters as role models to be replicated. As part of the reform, the Council has also proposed to introduce a media tax on the public radio and television. So far all attempts to introduce license fee payments have failed, and today the main source of income of both public broadcasters is the annual state subsidy combined with some advertising revenue.

Just as in the majority of Central and Eastern European countries so in Latvia public channels are not among the most watched ones in the country. The audience share of LTV has been dropping steadily over the last more than 20 years, and in 2013 LTV1, the main channel of LTV, commanded a meagre 9.4% share, while LTV7, its second channel, 3.2%. The commercial sector dominates the television landscape in Latvia, and the main rivals in the ratings battle for the status of the country's most popular channel are the national, and until 2014 also free-to-air, commercial channels TV3 (13.4% of viewing share in 2013) and LNT (10.5% of viewing share in 2013), both owned by the

Scandinavian media company Modern Times Group.¹⁷

Yet, the audience share of the commercial channels is not exceptionally high either. It is not only the public broadcaster LTV but also its commercial competitors that suffer from the ethno-linguistic split within television audiences in Latvia. While Latvian-speaking viewers prefer national commercial broadcasting, the large Russian-speaking minority audiences primarily gather around transnational television from Russia, something I will discuss in more detail later in the chapter. Second, following the 2010 digital switchover the commercial TV3 and LNT as well as both channels of the public television have experienced a drop in their audience figures as viewers more and more migrate to newly arrived digital niche channels. While the established national commercial channels are also losing their dominance in the market, viewing figures of both public channels are still lagging behind the commercial TV3 and LNT (see more in Juzefovics, 2011).

It is not only the attractive entertainment offerings of these commercial channels that attract audiences away from public television. Along with popular, locally produced entertainment, mainly a variety of localized global reality and talent show formats, both TV3 and LNT have been successful in attracting large audiences also for their news and current affairs.

The country's most popular prime-time news are on TV3 and LNT with *Panorāma* (*Panorama*), long-running evening news programme on LTV1, gathering smaller audiences. While for many years *Panorāma* was the most watched news programme in the country, during recent years for a variety of reasons it has experienced a large-scale exodus of its audiences. Despite the fact that the journalistic output portfolio of the commercial broadcasters is limited, some of their journalistic products are highly popular. Thus, the weekly programme *Nekā personīga* (*Nothing Personal*) on TV3, offering cutting-edge journalistic analysis and investigations, is a regular ratings hit.

As already noted, media audiences in Latvia with its two million population are not only among the smallest ones in Central and Eastern Europe but are also divided along ethno-linguistic lines. Latvian-speakers and members of the large Russian-speaking minority – nearly 40% of the population, the bulk of them Soviet era immigrants who settled in

¹⁷ It also controls Russian-language channels 3+ and TV5, plus TV6 and Kanāls 2 (Channel 2), both aimed at young audiences. All four are pay-TV channels.

Latvia as a workforce from other Soviet republics and their descendants¹⁸ – each has their own favourite radio and television channels, print and online media outlets¹⁹, and, in this respect it is right to describe the Latvian media system as ‘segmented’, to borrow the typology introduced by Mihelj (2012), or divided into two, Latvian-language and Russian-language, media sub-systems, as Šulmane (2010) proposes.

The Latvian media landscape appears to be a classical example of Mihelj’s ‘segmented’ media system model (albeit some elements of Mihelj’s ‘integrated’ media system model are also present such as Russian-language news bulletins on the second channel of the public television LTV) with two ‘parallel, fully fledged media systems, complete with the periodic press, radio and television as well as internet websites, each catering for a particular ethno-cultural group’ (2012:67). As Mihelj concludes, in the case of segmented media system ‘the quantity and range of minority content tends to be relatively large’ (2012:67), and for this reason Šulmane is right saying that

the Russian language press in Latvia is not a typical example of a minority press – one which speaks only to the needs of a specific culture and exists alongside the national press used by a majority of the population and addressed to the whole community of citizens (2010:225).

Šulmane’s observations describe quite well the entire Russian-language media sub-system in Latvia, including the television sector what is the focus of this study. The vast majority of the audiences of the national channels broadcasting in Latvian are Latvian-speakers, while Russian-speakers make the bulk of the audiences of transnational Russian television distributed in Latvia via cable and satellite. Among Russian-speaking audiences the leader is *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal (First Baltic Channel)* who in 2013 with 9.8% of audience share, slightly higher than of LTV1, was the third most watched channel in Latvia. *Pervyi*

¹⁸ Latvia has the largest Russian-speaking community of the three Baltic states. According to the 2011 population census, the Russian-speaking minority in Latvia constitutes 37.2% of the population (this means that they have indicated Russian as their main language at home) with the majority of Russian-speakers living in either the eastern region of Latgale (60.3% of its entire population) or the capital city Riga (55.8% of its all inhabitants). In line with the census data, 62.1% of Latvian population are Latvian-speakers. The overwhelming majority of Latvian-speakers (93.7%) have identified themselves as ethnic Latvians, while among Russian-speakers the majority (65.9%) think of themselves as ethnic Russians. 2.9% of the Latvian-speakers reported that they are ethnic Russians and 12.3% of Russian-speakers have indicated that they are ethnic Latvians. Among Russian-speakers there are also those who think of themselves as ethnic Belarusians (7.7%), ethnic Ukrainians (5.1%) and ethnic Poles (4.3%). Source: The Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia.

¹⁹ Alongside the national Russian-language media (full spectrum of print, online and broadcast media) it is also transnational broadcasting transmitting from neighbouring Russia that makes up the daily media repertoires of many Latvia’s Russian-speakers.

Baltiiskii kanal is a Baltic version of a highly popular in Russia *Pervyi kanal* (*First Channel*), a Kremlin-controlled channel 51% owned by the state, also the successor of the Soviet Central TV. Along with popular Russian-origin entertainment, *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* offers news from Russia, as well as the national news on weekdays produced by journalists based in the Latvian capital Riga. *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* broadcasts also in Lithuania and Estonia, two other Baltic countries, providing the same programming with the exception of the locally produced national news bulletins.

While Russian-speaking viewers have little interest in the offerings of both public channels, the commercial TV3 and LNT have been more successful in addressing the Russian-speaking minority, especially LNT which has good results in attracting the Russophone audiences. Nevertheless, still it is transnational Russian television, namely *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*, that attracts the largest Russian-speaking audiences in the country.

LTV1, the main public television channel, broadcasts solely in Latvian; but its second channel LTV7 offers a limited amount of Russian-language programming, primarily weekday news bulletins. While, following the 2012 language referendum when the proposal of radical Russian-speaking activists to make Russian the second official language in the country was rejected, some extra Russian-language current affairs content appeared on LTV7 as part of the government's plans of national integration, still overall Russian-language output on the public television is scarce and Russian-speakers continue to make up only a tiny fraction of its programme-makers meaning that little has changed after the referendum in terms of ethno-linguistic diversity on or off screen. Contrary to LTV, the public Radio Latvia provides a popular among Russian-speaking audiences 24-hour Russian-language service mixing music and talk that includes also a substantial volume of news and current affairs.

The core audiences of LTV are members of the Latvian-speaking majority, and especially older generations. Young people along with Russian-speaking audiences are the main rejecters of public television, and its main channel LTV1 in particular. As far as regular audience measurements reveal, a typical loyalist of LTV1 is an ethnic Latvian female viewer in the 55 plus age group living outside the capital (except the eastern Latgale region where large number of Russian-speakers live) and of a low socio-economic status.

2.5 Public Broadcasting and Post-Communist Nation-Building

Responses of the Latvian-speaking majority and the vast Russian-speaking minority to the public broadcaster LTV as a nation-building resource should be scrutinized in the light of the overall turbulent Latvian nation formation project, echoing similar experiences of other new post-Communist nation-states across Central and Eastern Europe, and most notably the Estonian case, another Baltic country with not only analogous ethno-linguistic composition to Latvian society but also with much the same chosen nation-building model that includes also similar citizenship, language and national integration (social cohesion) policies (for a comparative overview see, for instance, Muiznieks, et al., 2013).

It is also in Estonia that a sizeable Russian-speaking minority²⁰ has high interest in the Russian media, a pattern inherited from the Soviet era when Russian-speakers did not use the Estonian-language media (Vihalemm, 2006). As already pointed out the Estonian experience is much the same as that of Latvia, with Latvia's Russian-speakers also having had little interest in the local Latvian-language media during the years of the Soviet rule. According to the regular audience statistics, only a small portion of Estonian Russian-speakers today are among the audiences of the Estonian public television ETV, including its second channel ETV2 providing some Russian-language programming. Instead, Estonian Russian-speakers prefer watching the same transnational Russian channels that Russian-speaking audiences watch in Latvia with *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* being the most popular among the Russian-speaking community in Estonia (for a more detailed account see Jõesaar, Rannu, 2014, Loit, Siibak, 2013, Vihalemm, Hogan-Brun, 2013b).²¹

The dissolution of the Soviet empire in 1991 put an end to the union of fifteen republics, and what was once one of the Soviet republics became independent Latvia with the physical state borders being re-drawn and with a need to re-imagine the national community, to quote Billig, through time ('with its own past and own future destiny') and across space ('embracing the inhabitants of a particular territory') (1995:70). The boundaries of the national collectivity had to be re-established setting the rules of the

²⁰ According to the 2011 population census, 29.6% of its 1.3 million population have Russian language as their mother tongue. Source: Statistics Estonia.

²¹ However, it should be stressed already at this point that despite the notable differences in the media preferences among Latvian-speakers/Estonian-speakers and Russian-speaking audiences neither in the Latvian, nor in the Estonian case ethno-linguistic majority or minority are homogeneous in their media consumption patterns as also T.Vihalemm (2002) in her study of the media repertoires of ethnic Estonians and Estonia's Russian-speakers has demonstrated.

game anew of who is to be included and who is 'the other' to be left out from the national 'we' and against which then the national identity could be formed defining what it means to be a Latvian.

Among Latvian-speakers the popular leitmotif of the national re-imagination became the aspiration to re-establish the pre-war Latvian nation-state with the restoration of pre-war citizenship as a logical step towards this goal. It is a process that Vihalemm and Hogan-Brun (2013a) have described as the restarting of the nation-building projects across the Baltics in the early 1990s that had been interrupted by the Second World War and nearly half a century of Soviet occupation. Accordingly, the post-1991 independent Latvia was seen by the official nation-builders, local political elite, as a continuation of pre-war Latvia, established in 1918 and ceasing to exist in 1940 when the Soviet troops occupied it. At the heart of this narrative was, and to a great extent continues to be, the idealization of the pre-war independence period accompanied with the lingering hope that problems could be resolved through the denial of the Soviet legacies and the restoration of the pre-war social order and the country's ethnic composition (see Rozenvalds, 2010). However, the realities of the post-1991 nationhood formation were far more complex than the paradigm of continuity seemed to promise.

Furthermore, the nation formation plans in Latvia and Estonia, as in other new post-Communist nation-states, coincided with the state-building projects in these societies with overall transformations following the collapse of the Communist regimes involving also the reformation of their media systems and attempts, even if only on paper, to turn former state broadcasters into public service organizations. As Mihelj in her account on the nationalism/media interplay in the Eastern European societies in the 1990s reminds us,

the media environment of these recent nation-building efforts has been considerably different from the one accompanying similar historical efforts in Western Europe. Not only has the technological milieu been dramatically different; what is more interesting is that nation-building was happening precisely at a point when the media spaces in the region were subjected to a swift deregulation and reregulation, transnationalization, commercialization, tabloidization and audience segmentation (2011:176).

In the Latvian nation-building project from the outset, public broadcasters have been

envisioned as instruments in constructing and propagating an image of the national ‘we’ that is built on the basis of the language and culture of the ethno-linguistic majority. Already in the 1995 broadcasting law it was stipulated that Latvian public radio and television organizations should ‘ensure the development of the Latvian language and culture promoting the consolidation of a single community state’²² (Radio and Television Law, 1995). Yet, the view of the institutions of public broadcasting as agents of national integration expected to secure national unity has become central in the political agenda, though this was so more in declarative than practical terms, only starting from the second decade of the post-Communist years, perhaps reaching its peak after the 2012 language referendum, though, again, more on paper than in practice. Until then, during the 1990s, the new-born public broadcasters, themselves undergoing a stormy and contradictory reform experience, were expected to provide support for the equally troubled nation-forming aspirations – namely in terms of supporting the official version of the national identity that involved first and foremost the promotion and protection of the national language and culture (that is, the official version of the national culture). Further than that though, their role as contributing to the promotion of social cohesion did not occupy any significant place in the agenda of the local political elite, media policy makers and broadcasters themselves.²³ This should not come as a surprise given that in the first years of the post-Communist period the ruling political elite, thinking that the hoped-for mass departure of the Soviet era immigrants to their places of origin – in the majority of cases Russia – would provide the solution to inter-ethnic relations, showed very little interest in the issues of national integration and for a long time there was no coherent policy of national integration present in Latvia with the first governmental programme addressing these issues being approved only in 2001 after pressure from the West (see Rozenvalds, 2010).

In line with the ethno-nationalistic approach that has so far dominated in the country’s official national integration policy it is the language and culture of the Latvian-speaking

²² The notion of ‘a single community state’ is used to describe societies in juxtaposition to ones comprising two different, divided communities.

²³ For instance, as Šulmane (2010) notes, it was only during the second decade of the post-Communist period that the second channel of the public television providing also some Russian-language programming was positioned as a channel meant for the integration of minorities, though later that focus has been abandoned prioritizing orientation towards sports and entertainment programming and paying less attention to such content that is oriented towards the ethno-linguistic minority audiences. As noted earlier, the idea of the second channel of LTV as serving the purposes of national integration again entered the political agenda following the 2012 language referendum, though little has been done in practical terms as ruling politicians still continue to look at the Russian-language programming on the public television as an instrument of social cohesion with reservation.

majority that are defined as the cement expected to hold the national community together and offering its members all-encompassing identity of the nation. To put it another way, common language and culture (of the ethno-linguistic majority) is seen as a prerequisite for building a cohesive society and making national integrity possible. For the Latvian nation-builders, ‘the Latvian language and cultural space create the foundation for national identity, strengthens feeling of belonging to the nation and the state of Latvia,’ to quote the latest country’s integration policy document *Guidelines on National Identity, Civil Society and Integration Policy (2012–2018)* (Latvian Ministry of Culture, 2011:15). It defines ‘the Latvian language, culture and national identity, European democratic values and the unique cultural space [of Latvia]’ as ‘unifying foundation’ for the creation of a cohesive society (Latvian Ministry of Culture, 2011:9).²⁴ As Kruk, one of the most outspoken critics of the official national integration policy, notes, ‘official language proficiency is treated as the foremost indicator of social cohesion’ (2011:447), and from such a linguistic determinism perspective, as Kruk argues, it is assumed that ‘by acquiring the Latvian language, the local Russophone population would inevitably interiorize the peculiar Latvian worldview and social cohesion (integration) would be achieved’ (2011:450).

As public opinion surveys have demonstrated, the idea that ethno-cultural principles should be at the heart of the nation-building project is highly popular among ethnic Latvians – in line with the 2010 survey, 44% of ethnic Latvians even agreed with the statement ‘I would like it better if only [ethnic] Latvians lived in Latvia’ – contrary to Russians who are more open in their definitions of who constitutes the Latvian nation. In the same survey while 94.4% of Russians said that all Latvian citizens should be seen as belonging to the Latvian nation 81.1% of ethnic Latvians could agree. There were also significantly more Russians than ethnic Latvians who said that all Latvian residents with sense of belonging to the country, or simply all residents of Latvia, as well as all who were born in Latvia or have at least one parent who is ethnic Latvian should be seen as belonging to the Latvian nation (see Zepa, 2011).²⁵

²⁴ According to the document, ‘the common basis for the [social] integration is the Latvian language, the feeling of belonging to the Latvian state and its democratic values, respect for Latvia’s unique cultural space and development of a shared social memory’ (Latvian Ministry of Culture, 2011:6).

²⁵ The majority of ethnic Latvians believed that along with ethnic Latvians (97.9%) it is also all Latvian citizens (81.1%) who constitute the national community. 75.6% said that all who speak Latvian and live in Latvia are also part of the national ‘we’, 72.9% – all Latvian residents with sense of belonging to country, 67.7% – all who were born in Latvia, 65.1% – all who have at least one parent who is ethnic Latvian, and 52.7% – all residents of Latvia. At the same time, majority of Russians argued that along all Latvian citizens

As the official national integration strategy has proved to be of limited success (for a detailed assessment see Muižnieks, 2010), sociologists in Latvia have recently called for the need to re-define the demarcation lines of the national ‘we’ where ethnic and civic elements of national membership could coexist. Instead of focusing primarily on ethnic criteria, the potential of the so-called citizenship model of nationhood should also be considered, sociologists say. As Zepa (2011) argues, while ethnic Latvians and ethnic minorities strongly disagree on the ethnically defined principles of national integration²⁶, it is civic values that could unite the national community as such values are equally important to both the ethnic majority and minority. Zepa reminds that ‘there are many values related to civic nationalism which are very much supported by [ethnic] Latvians, Russians and members of other ethnic minorities – obeying the law, opposing injustice, fighting against corruption, etc.’ (2011:27). As she concludes, ‘presumably these issues, alongside the Latvian language and culture, could serve as equally important principles for the integration of the nation, thus establishing a set of ethnic and civic nationalism values’ (2011:27-28).

Yet, the idea of the formation of the national ‘we’ not primarily in terms of ethno-cultural principles but based on a combination of ethnic and civic values has so far failed to gain any substantial support in the circles of the ruling political elite. Even more than 20 years after the restoration of the country’s independence ethno-linguistic markers are deep-rooted in the political rhetoric of national identity, and the language and culture of the ethno-linguistic majority remains to be conceived as the main raw material of the national imagination and also national integrity.

However, this is by no means to argue that the so-called ‘civic’ nationalism is somehow better than the so-called ‘ethnic’ nationalism. As noted in the literature on nationalism such distinction between two types of nationalism is problematic as it creates stereotypical opposition between ‘good’ Western ‘civic’ nationalisms and ‘bad’ ‘ethnic’ nationalisms beyond the Western world. To quote McCrone, the ‘civic’/‘ethnic’ distinction ‘helps to justify the ‘superiority’ of Western – political – forms of nationalism over Eastern – ethnic – forms’ (1998:7). The ‘civic’/‘ethnic’ nationalism dichotomy also

(94.4%) and ethnic Latvians (93.7%) it is also all Latvian residents with sense of belonging to country (90.6%) and all who were born in Latvia (89.6%) should be seen as belonging to the Latvian nation. 85.9% of Russians said that it is also all residents of Latvia part of the national ‘we’, 83.9% – all who have at least one parent who is ethnic Latvian, 79.9% – all who speak Latvian and live in Latvia (Zepa, 2011).

²⁶ In line with the 2010 survey, 89% of ethnic Latvians and only 46% of Russians supported one of the key postulates of the country’s official national integration policy that unity of the society should be based on the common language and culture (of the Latvian-speaking majority) (Zepa, 2011).

misleadingly presents both categories as mutually exclusive, albeit, in fact, each form of nationalism comprises elements of both, though in different proportions. In the words of Özkırımlı, ‘what is common to all nationalisms’ is ‘that they are both cultural and political phenomena’ (2005:163).

As already noted, in the Latvian project of national imagination so far ethno-cultural components of nationhood have dominated with political elements (citizenship principles) playing a minor role in the official national imaginary. Accordingly, broadcasting policy over the last more than two decades since the restoration of independent statehood has prioritized the promotion and protection of the language and culture of the ethno-linguistic majority, and it is the language and culture of the Latvian-speaking majority that the local media policy makers have also defined as the common denominator expected to hold both ethno-linguistic communities together around the public radio and television. In line with the Latvian broadcasting law, the country’s public broadcasters are expected to ‘promote integration and social cohesion on the basis of the Latvian language’ (Electronic Mass Media Law, 2010). As stipulated in the law, LTV and Radio Latvia should also ensure the preservation and development of the Latvian language and culture, as well as the promotion of respect for the Latvian language, and popularisation of the history and cultural values of Latvia (see Electronic Mass Media Law, 2010).

Media scholars in Latvia have long criticized LTV, as well as its regulatory body the National Electronic Media Council, for ignoring the needs and interests of the Russian-speaking population and neglecting the idea that also Russian-language programming could serve as an instrument of social cohesion (Kruks, 2001, Kruks, Šulmane, 2005, Šulmane, 2006, Šulmane, 2010). As seen by such scholars, the output of original Russian-language programming on the public television is insufficient given the ethno-linguistic make-up of Latvian society. As Kruks has argued,

the large size of the Russian-speaking population and the domination of the Russian language under Soviet rule have created a situation in which the restriction of the Russian language in the public sphere has been perceived by the State authorities as a legitimate mechanism to protect the Latvian language. The priority of preserving the Latvian language has overshadowed any concern for promoting social cohesion, through programming targeted at the Russian-speaking minority (2005:1003).

As a rule, in the eyes of the ruling Latvian political elite media preferences of the Russian-speaking community, namely their high exposure to transnational Russian television, and overall high inflows of Russian-origin television production in the country have been seen as constituting a threat to national integrity. The accessibility and takeup of Russian television in the country and its high popularity among Russian-speaking audiences has been even discussed at governmental level as a matter of national security. Valdis Dombrovskis, then prime minister of Latvia, in his annual national security report of 2013 defined the creation of a single unitary national 'information space', though not providing any definition of what stands behind this rather ambiguous concept, as a way of fighting against 'the pressure of foreign information spaces in the territory of our country' (Valsts kanceleja, 2013).

Despite its rather utopian nature the idea of a unitary 'information space', something that seems to be conceived by politicians as an overarching national public sphere whose language is Latvian and who encompasses members of both ethno-linguistic communities and provides them with shared knowledge and experiences or, to quote the then Latvian culture minister Žaneta Jaunzeme-Grende speaking with the journalists back in 2012, two months after the language referendum, where 'unitary information' is provided (LTV1, 2012), has won much popularity among the circles of the ruling political elite, especially after the referendum. Although the proposal of the Russian-speakers' movement to make Russian the country's second official language has been rejected, the support it attracted in the Russian-speaking community forced the ruling politicians pay more attention to issues of national integration and the support the media can offer in this respect.

The idea of the official nation-builders is to create a common public sphere of the nation not so much by bringing together Latvian-language and Russian-language media sub-systems and their audiences but by integrating Russian-speaking audiences into a public sphere mediated through the Latvian-language media. It is first and foremost the Latvian-language media seen by ruling politicians as key institutions of the national public sphere they aspire to create. During the recent debates on the future of the country's public radio and television organizations the government has announced that it is the task of public broadcasters to provide such a public sphere for the nation.

In the discourse of the ruling political elite what may look as immersion of Russian-speaking audiences in transnational Russian television has often been translated as

evidence of alienation of the Russian-speaking community from their present home country Latvia and a display of a stronger identification with Russia that for many is their country of origin. At the heart of such argumentation lies an assumption that watching more transnational television from Russia than national channels signals a stronger sense of national belonging felt by Russian-speakers towards Russia than Latvia. From such a perspective ‘dangerous’, or at least ‘problematic’, media practices of Russian-speakers, namely their high attraction to Russian television, are seen as a manifestation of at least their unwillingness to integrate into Latvian society if not disloyalty of this community to Latvia, anxieties familiar also for other European societies with large immigrant communities, and not necessarily limited to the Eastern part of Europe (see for an overview of British, French and German responses to ‘peculiar’ viewing preferences of their immigrant communities Morley, 2000).

The National Electronic Media Council in its recent strategy paper on the development of the radio and television industry argues that ‘Russia deliberately utilizes its electronic media to realize soft power by forming the public opinion in Latvia with an aim to promote its geopolitical interests’ (Nacionālā Elektronisko plašsaziņas līdzekļu padome, 2012:5), the view shared by the ruling politicians. Both, media policy makers and politicians, would not mind if not to close Russian channels in Latvia then at least to limit their presence in the country, the sentiments entering the political agenda from time to time as it was also after the recent one-sided coverage of Ukraine crisis on Russian television. Nevertheless, the mood of antipathy and suspiciousness towards Russian television is not exclusive to the Latvian political elite, and it is also Estonian politicians, for instance, arguing that *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* is doing anti-Estonian propaganda financed by the Russian government (Vihalemm, Hogan-Brun, 2013b). As *Latviiskoe Vremya* (*Latvia’s Time*), national evenings news on *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*, also its Estonian look-alike *Novosti Estonii* (*News of Estonia*) has often been blamed for being Moscow-minded (Jõesaar, Rannu, 2014).

In this discourse of what is seen as the dangerous intentions of Russian television, and often also of its audiences, threatening ideals of national integration, and even national security, Russian-speaking viewers are constructed as passive and uncritical audiences susceptible to what is commonly described as pro-Kremlin propaganda and brainwashing of a state controlled Russian television and deprived of any agency to make sense of messages sent to them by Russian channels. As I will demonstrate later in the data

chapters, these rather simplistic arguments conflict with what appears to be a far more complex and nuanced reality in which Russian-speaking audiences interpret, and as much as for one or another reason accept also reject, texts of Russian television. To quote Cheskin, they ‘may subscribe to Russian cable TV channels, but this does not mean that they also subscribe to Russian discourse in its entirety’ (2012a:336).

The existence of two supposedly separate, Latvian-language and Russian-language, media sub-systems (or ‘information spaces’, to use this abstract and ill-defined but still highly popular in Latvia concept) with little interaction between each other, seen as an impediment to social cohesion has become a buzzword in local political, media policy and also academic discourses, though little conceptualized at a theoretical level and little supported by evidence of empirical audience research. This, along with the ethno-linguistically segregated system of political parties and conflicting collective memories of both ethno-linguistic groups, has often been seen as another piece of evidence proving what is believed to be an overall ethno-linguistic split in Latvian society.

In their report Kruks and Šulmane have identified the ‘opposition of two information spaces, lack of dialogue between them, which does not facilitate democratic discussion in the public sphere and the development of an integrated civic society’ as one of the most serious problems of Latvian media ecology (2005:147). In a similar vein, a few years later Šulmane concluded that ‘the parallel media spaces do not promote the integration of various audiences and social groups’ (2010:252). ‘In Soviet times, the media tended to propagandize the same ideas in two languages. Now there is different content in the media system – information in two languages which sometimes interacts, but usually stays apart,’ argued Šulmane (2010:225).

Indeed, numerous comparative media content studies have demonstrated the construction of opposing versions of reality in the Latvian-language and Russian-language media in Latvia (see Kruks, Šulmane, 2002, Muižnieks, Zelče, 2011, Šulmane, Kruks, 2001, Šulmane, Kruks, 2006, Tabuns, 2006, Zepa, 2006, Zepa, 2008, just to name few). Yet, apart from a number of issues – first and foremost the so-called ‘national questions’ as discussions over the citizenship law, language legislation, reformation of the education system (in terms of the language of instruction) and interpretations of the Latvia’s history of the 20th century – where attitudes of Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers are divided, everyday media discourses have similarities and differences equally between the Latvian-language and Russian-language media sub-systems and within each

of them.

In previous studies the media of both ethno-linguistic groups have been much criticized of reinforcing ethno-linguistic rifts in the society instead of searching for a dialogue between the Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking communities and blamed for hindering instead of facilitating the process of national integration. Indeed, contrary to the often heated and intolerant discourse of the media, as well as of the political elite, everyday realities of the inter-ethnic relationships in Latvia can be described as peaceful coexistence of both ethno-linguistic groups. It is worth reminding here of the relatively high rate of ethnically mixed marriages in Latvia both during the Soviet era and in the post-Soviet period (for a more detailed account on the inter-ethnic relations in Latvia see, for instance, Tabuns, 2010).

2.6 Conclusion

The transformation of the former state broadcasters into Western-style public broadcasting institutions in Latvia, as in several other new post-Communist nation-states across Central and Eastern Europe, occurred not only at the same time when overall system change was underway, it also coincided with the stormy nation-(re)building process. Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in Latvia ethno-nationalistic sentiments have dominated in the government's project of (re)building of the nation, and in line with this spirit not only new citizenship and language laws but also new broadcasting legislation has been written.

It is the language and culture of the Latvian-speaking majority that is conceived by nation-builders, ruling politicians, as the cement of national imagination and national integration, and, accordingly, it is the language and culture of the ethno-linguistic majority public broadcasters are expected to 'take care of' as part of their contribution to the official project of national identity and also something that broadcasting policy makers have defined as a core element expected to bind Latvian-speaking viewers and listeners and the large Russian-speaking minority audiences together around the public radio and television.

Although post-Communist public broadcasting institutions have been expected by their governments to provide sufficient investment in the project of (re)imagination of the national community, these organizations themselves have suffered severe political and

commercial pressures that the new era of (distorted) liberal democracy and private capital has brought along. Politicization and commercialization are central features of the new post-Communist media systems in Central and Eastern Europe, and this is a context that has informed the process of reform of the former state broadcasters.

Attempts to remake the ex-Soviet state owned, funded and controlled Latvian radio and television organizations in the image of Western European institutions of public broadcasting can be seen as an aspect of the overall process of the desired restoration of 'normal' social order where 'abnormality' of Soviet regime was to be 'rectified' through a return to the Western world which was set as an overarching goal of the post-Communist transformations (Stukuls Eglitis, 2002).

However, in reality, the rejection of the Communist broadcasting principles, as part of the overall project of the 'return to Europe' and of breaking ties with the legacies of the previous regime, was not easily achievable mainly because the old ways of thinking, and also acting, were still much present in the mindset of the post-Communist power elite who continued to look at the newly established public broadcasters as part of the state apparatus and servants of the government of the day. Political meddling, or at least attempts to exert political pressure, accompanied with insufficient and unstable funding have been some of the key realities faced by Central and Eastern European public broadcasters over more than the past two decades since the collapse of the Communist regimes. These, along with a wide spectrum of other socio-cultural factors have hindered the tradition of public broadcasting, at least in terms of public broadcasting institutions, taking root in post-Communist societies. As Jakubowicz has rightly noted, 'the successful introduction of PSB is so extraordinarily difficult to achieve [...] that it could be regarded as a true test of post-Communist transformation overall' (2004:54).

Chapter 3

Methodology

Through qualitative audience research into responses of its various publics to the Latvian public television LTV in this ex-Soviet Baltic country the study seeks to make a contribution to our understanding of complex relationship between public broadcasters and their publics in post-Communist societies. My main interest is in exploration of discourses of the Latvian-speaking majority and the vast Russian-speaking minority publics of LTV talking about their relationship with public television as a project of nation-building. The focus of the research comprises the perceptions of public television its publics have or develop and their experiences with it. Focus group discussions and family observations form the methodological basis for this investigation addressing the following research questions:

1. What attitudes have the Latvian-speaking majority and Russian-speaking minority publics developed and what actions members of both ethno-linguistic groups have taken as a response to Latvian public service television's role as contributing to the nation-building project in the post-Communist era?
2. What perceptions of the public broadcaster LTV publics of both ethno-linguistic communities have, and how these discourses inform and are informed by their experiences with public television with a special interest in their everyday television viewing practices within a domestic realm?
3. What is the relationship between the way members of the ethno-linguistic majority and minority conceptualize the public broadcaster LTV, as well as understand the concept of public broadcasting more generally, and the way they define the national 'we'? In other words, how do their definitions of the public broadcasting idea and its *de jure* institutional embodiment LTV interact with their definitions of the nation?

With regard to the methodological framework of the study, focus group discussions with members of both ethno-linguistic groups, Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, are combined with participant observations within day to day family environments. To supplement qualitative data with some statistical evidence I have also consulted the

regular television audience measurements data²⁷ and utilized findings of a number of quantitative surveys as secondary sources to my own research.²⁸

Ratings data and other statistics offer a large amount of representative and generalizable data on viewing behaviour, attitudes and beliefs of audiences and, therefore, may be useful for the purposes of methodological triangulation to contrast quantitative data with those acquired with the help of qualitative methodologies. Yet, such statistical information says little about the socio-cultural aspects shaping media experiences and perceptions of audiences this study primarily aims to investigate. To quote Ang, well-known critic of ratings research, audience statistics ‘makes us know the audience in terms of patterns of a limited number of behavioural displays, but it remains silent about the ways in which television becomes meaningful and has an impact in people’s everyday lives and the larger culture’ (1991:151).

Therefore, I have preferred to focus on qualitative methodologies, and it is the focus group discussions in conjunction with the participant observations in family settings that constitute the backbone of the methodological framework of the study.

3.1 Focus Groups

As the study seeks to grasp discourses of ordinary people talking about their relationship with the institution of public television in their country, Latvia, and discussing their understanding of the idea of public broadcasting as a set of values more generally, and it is meaning production practices involved in the formation of these discourses the study is primarily interested in, a qualitative data-gathering technique, focus group interviews, has been chosen as the most appropriate focal method of the enquiry.

Qualitative interviewing, either in-depth one-to-one interviews or focus group discussions, has been a popular methodological choice in qualitative audience research. An examination of some of the classic works in the field of studies of reception and uses of the media by Gray (1992), Hobson (1982), Liebes and Katz (1993), Livingstone and

²⁷ All provided by the ratings company *TNS Latvia*.

²⁸ Two large-scale national quantitative surveys addressing a wide range of questions relating to television viewing preferences, news media habits and use of different types of media more generally, as well as attitudes towards the main television channels in the country, including the public broadcaster LTV, were of special importance. Both surveys were carried out by the research company *TNS Latvia* in 2011 and 2012 with a representative sample of 500 respondents aged 15 to 74. The results of both surveys have been partly published in a report on the news media preferences of Latvian audiences (see Juzefovičs, 2012).

Lunt (1994), Morley (1980, 1986), Radway (1984), Schlesinger et al. (1992) reveals a consensus stressing the active role of audiences in making sense of media texts. While the primary task of my study is not so much to investigate readings and uses audiences make of particular media texts as to explore the way their media experiences and interpretations inform and are informed by their discourses on the public television, what this enquiry has in common with the aforementioned classic texts is the centrality given to the examination of the way audiences exercise their agency, something that also explains the preference for qualitative audience research methodologies in my own study.

The research methods literature provides a list of the pros and cons of group interviews versus individual interviews, and vice versa. Group interaction has been identified as the key advantage and at the same time also the main weakness of the focus group approach. While a group situation may stimulate the production of arguments and interpretations in the same way as it often happens in everyday conversations, group pressure may also silence some participants of the conversation, those holding atypical views, for instance, and their position may remain unvoiced, and though group interviews may be a convenient and cost-efficient method for obtaining information about meaning production processes from a large quantity and a wide range of respondents, these accounts, while diverse, may lack sufficient depth (for further discussion see, for instance, Barbour, 2007, Gunter, 2000, Hansen, et al., 1998, May, 2011, Ruddock, 2001, Schröder, et al., 2003, Wilkinson, 2004).

My decision to opt for focus groups rather than individual interviews was mainly driven by the key goal of the study to explore the reactions of Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking viewers as members of their ethno-linguistic group towards the public broadcaster LTV and the idea of public broadcasting more generally. I was particularly interested to examine to what extent it is their membership of the ethno-linguistic group that determines their experiences with and attitudes towards LTV, as well as their understanding of the public broadcasting idea, and therefore my preference for focus groups. Here I side with the advocates of the focus group method who, seeing the production of meaning as a collective activity, have insisted on the usefulness of this method for the study of the ways individuals as bearers of particular collective identities make sense of the media.

In support of his decision to use group discussions rather than individual interviews for the investigation of decodings audiences from different socio-economic backgrounds make of the BBC television current affairs Morley, in his *The 'Nationwide' Audience* study, argues that 'much individually based interview research is flawed by a focus on individuals as social atoms divorced from their social context' (1980:33). As Morley and other proponents of the focus group method rightly remind us, people form their attitudes and perceptions not in isolation from but, instead, in interaction with other individuals negotiating their opinions against those held by others, and through a group interaction the focus group method makes it possible to investigate meanings as 'collectively constructed through talk and the interchange between respondents in the group situation – rather than to treat individuals as the autonomous repositories of a fixed set of individual 'opinions' isolated from their social context' (Morley, 1980:33; for further discussion see also Morley, 1992:17-18).

In a similar vein, Liebes and Katz advocate the use of group interviews in their study of the responses of members of different ethnic and cultural groups in Israel (and also in the United States and Japan) towards the American *Dallas* series:

We are aware that the method does not give equal weight to every individual's reactions to the program. Nor do we *wish* to give equal weight to every individual. Group dynamics are such that opinion and participation are *not* equally weighted; some people have disproportionate influence. But real life is like that: opinions are not as much the property of individuals as public-opinion polling would have us think. Opinions arise out of interaction, and "opinion leaders" have disproportionate influence (1993:29, original emphasis).

Yet, group settings are not somehow more 'natural' than it is in the case of the more atomized settings of interviewing people individually; both create artificial situations. Individual interviews too are not by definition incapable of grasping interpretations people make as a result of social interaction. Both approaches have their advantages and limitations, and often, as it was also in the case of my study, pragmatic considerations (financial and time restrictions) play an additional yet important role in making the choice between focus groups and individual interviews, or the decision instead of both types of

interview to utilize one, as was, in fact, the experience of Morley with his *Nationwide* project (Morley, 1992:17).

10 focus group discussions were carried out during October and November 2011, plus three pilot focus groups starting late August and finishing early October 2011, each group containing on average 6-7 participants. As the regular audience statistics suggested generational and ethno-linguistic divisions in the overall television viewing patterns in Latvian society, age and ethno-linguistic identity served as key variables when making decisions on the composition of the focus groups. It was gender, socio-economic status (educational background, occupational position, income level) and geography (urban/rural) though not the primary but also among the variables I considered when planning the focus groups.

In the first pilot focus group discussion Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers were mixed together; however, such an approach did not work well and proved to be a rather unproductive strategy as the presence of members of both ethno-linguistic communities made some of the participants think that the focus of the discussion is on inter-ethnic relations in the country instead of their media related practices and perceptions. As a result, the overall atmosphere of the discussion was quite tense and, I felt, prevented respondents to be open in their responses. It perhaps revealed the existing rifts in the society, while, at the same time, it suppressed frank discussion. This was the key reason I decided not to proceed with mixed groups.

Besides, some Russian-speakers found it hard to express themselves fully in Latvian and did not open up. While the majority of Russian-speakers in Latvia has satisfactory Latvian language knowledge and only older Russian-speaking generations have poor command of Latvian, it goes without saying that one feels more comfortable when communicating in his or her mother tongue (or the language he or she uses in the family). Though I am aware that the composition of the focus groups may affect the data generated and interviewing Latvian-speakers in the presence of Russian-speakers, and vice versa, may provide me with information only mixed group situations can offer, for the aforementioned reasons I decided to hold further discussions separately.

Five discussion groups were conducted in Latvian and five were bilingual where Russian-speakers could choose whether to speak in Latvian or Russian with me as the moderator also using both languages. While the majority of Russian-speakers preferred to

communicate in Russian, some, instead, chose to speak in Latvian or used both languages switching from one to another throughout the discussion. In the capital Riga in total six discussion groups were organized: three in Latvian and three bilingual, and participants were split into three age groups (18-24, 25-54, 55 plus). In addition, four discussion groups were held outside the capital city – two in Latvian and two bilingual, and in this case all generations were mixed together. Two locations where Latvian-speakers are in the majority were selected and two where the Russophones constitute a large part or the majority of the total population. Both urban and rural population was included in the sample of the focus groups conducted outside the capital. For details of the composition of the focus groups see Appendix 1.

Quota sampling and snowball sampling methods were combined to recruit participants. In total (including three pilot discussions) 80 respondents aged 18-87 from both ethno-linguistic groups and varied socio-economic backgrounds took part in the focus group discussions. According to the data of the questionnaire all respondents were asked to fill in at the beginning of the session, 22 of them were in the 18-24 age bracket, 33 aged 25-54 and 25 aged over 55. In the sample 54 were female and 26 male informants. Female respondents are overrepresented in the sample for the simple reason that women were more responsive to the invitation to take part in the study. The skewed sex ratio in Latvia with, according to the 2011 population census data, 45.7% of its population being men against 54.3% women also partly explains the imbalance of male and female respondents in the sample. Regarding occupational positions of respondents, 11 had managerial positions, 5 ran their own business, 22 were doing varied specialist jobs, including such occupations as school teacher, civil servant, municipality officer, museum employee, archivist, human resources manager, agronomist, IT specialist, legal adviser, economist, project manager and others, and 7 were low-qualified workers. Around two thirds of economically active participants worked in the public sector. 20 were students, 12 retired persons and 3 unemployed. Leaving students aside, 35 had higher education, 19 had secondary or vocational education and one had basic education. There is no information on education for 5 participants. The sample includes people with different levels of household income.

47 of respondents were Latvian-speakers and 33 Russian-speakers, the overwhelming majority of them citizens of Latvia with only few, mainly older Russian-speakers, either having a status of a non-citizen of Latvia or holding Russian citizenship. The proportion

of Latvian-speakers (59%) and Russian-speakers (41%) in the overall focus group sample is very close to the ethno-linguistic make-up of Latvian society (see Chapter 2 for further statistics on the country's ethno-linguistic composition). All informants who have indicated Russian as their main language in the family in the study are identified as Russian-speakers, and, correspondingly, as Latvian-speakers I have identified all those participants who have indicated that they mainly speak in Latvian at home. The majority of those in the study identified as Russian-speakers have reported that they think of themselves as ethnic Russians, and the majority of Latvian-speakers defined themselves as ethnic Latvians. Some participants preferred not to report their ethnic origin.

Focus group discussions were semi-structured and a series of open-ended questions were applied to explore such issues as television viewing practices of the participants, their experiences with and attitudes towards the main television channels in the country with a special interest in their responses to the public broadcaster LTV and, last but not least, their understanding of the idea of public broadcasting. The discussions were structured so to start with broader questions on the overall viewing habits participants have and then gradually to move towards more specific questions regarding their experiences with and perceptions of LTV. For the full interview guide see Appendix 3.

Several stimulus materials were used in breaking the ice and facilitating the discussion that were also important as tools of information gathering. To explore their overall television viewing habits participants were first asked to make a list of their five most favourite programmes on television, something they watch on a regular basis regardless of genre and format, language and country of origin be it on traditional linear television or on the internet, and then explain their choice. It provided me with a general picture of what kind of programming output participants are searching for on television – for instance, do they prefer watching news and current affairs, films and series, sports, music, etc. – and what motivates their programme choices but more importantly the list of their much-loved programmes on television revealed the position offerings of the public television LTV occupies in their viewing preferences. If LTV plays a rather marginal role in their daily viewing practices, most likely that its offerings will also be absent from the list of their favourite shows on television.

Then participants were invited to comment on their associations with the main six television channels in the country, including both channels of the public television,

writing down few keywords that first spring to their mind when thinking about the particular channel.²⁹ The aim of this exercise was to situate their perceptions of LTV, be they based on their actual viewing experiences or not, in relation with other channels to see what in the eyes of its publics distinguishes LTV from other broadcasters. It also demonstrated the role LTV plays in their daily viewing practices. As a rule, with those channels watched rarely it was harder for participants to formulate their associations with them.

Before starting a detailed discussion on their experiences with and attitudes towards the public broadcaster LTV participants were invited to write a small essay not exceeding a half of A4 sheet of paper offering their own definition of the concept of public television with the question of the essay being formulated as follows: ‘what do you think the idea of public service television is (or should be) about?’. Some referred to their viewing experiences, while others to some broader normative assumptions to provide their interpretation of the concept of public broadcasting that not only revealed their understanding of the idea of public service television but also showed whether they associate this concept with LTV, its current *de jure* institutional embodiment in their country, and what other classifications such as state, national and commercial broadcasting they employ to distinguish one channel from another.

In addition, to facilitate discussion on the news offerings of LTV, a short clip (first 5-10 minutes of the programme) from the latest *Panorāma* (*Panorama*) edition, main evening news bulletin on LTV1, was demonstrated, and in the same way as with the channels participants were asked to provide their associations with *Panorāma*. Their responses to *Panorāma*, including comments on its news selection priorities and sequence of news items, mode of address and other aspects of its presentation style, initiated a further discussion on the performance of LTV.³⁰ See Appendix 4 for the scanned sample copies of all stimulus materials applied.

²⁹ The list included both channels of the public broadcaster LTV, national Latvian-language commercial channels TV3 and LNT, both gathering the largest audiences in the country, plus *Peryi Baltiiskii kanal*, the most popular channel among the Russian-speaking audiences for the most of its airtime offering transmissions of the Russian *Peryi kanal*. It was also the only Russian-language national commercial channel TV5 included in the list.

³⁰ Though it is fair to say that *Panorāma* is a typical product of LTV and its performance is not much different from the overall performance of public television (at least when it comes to its news and current affairs provision), and yet I am aware that showing a clip from some more popular programming of LTV may provoke more positive responses of my respondents towards LTV as, indeed, was the case with much-loved live ice hockey broadcasts on the second channel of LTV praised during the focus group

On average, each discussion lasted 2 hours and 30 minutes. All 13 focus groups have been audio recorded and transcribed in full, and later the interview data have been analysed in line with a thematic coding method involving close examination of the transcripts searching for recurring thematic patterns within and across group sessions and organizing these themes into larger categories, the procedure that was repeated again and again while at the same time supplementing and comparing this material with other data sets (family ethnography data, statistical information, findings of previous studies in the area). In the later stage of data interpretation with a help of a narrative analysis discourses and narratives coming out of the data were discussed in line with the theoretical and analytical framework of the study.

3.2 Family Ethnography

The second stage of the fieldwork involved participant observations with five families that were carried out in the period from November, 2011 to July, 2012. Keeping in mind that ‘the social world of actual audiences only takes shape through the thoroughly situated, context-bound ways in which people encounter, use, interpret, enjoy, think and talk about television’ (Ang, 1991:162), participant observation as a complementary method of investigation has been chosen to situate perceptions of and experiences with the public television members of both ethno-linguistic groups have in the context of their daily family life. The focus on the production of close analysis or, to use well-known metaphor of Geertz which he borrowed from Gilbert Ryle, ‘thick description’ (2000:6) of use of the media as an integral element of the fabric of everyday life is what makes ethnography distinctive among other approaches to media audiences. It places lived media experiences audiences have at the heart of the investigation.

As Bird argues, ‘only ethnography can begin to answer questions about what people *really* do with media’ (2003:191, emphasis in original). It also motivates my decision to introduce ethnography, ‘a method for investigating the social world of actual audiences’, to quote Moores (1993b:3) speaking in the words of Ang (1991), in the search for an in-

discussions by both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers. Nevertheless, I chose to demonstrate a clip from the news programme, and *Panorāma* in particular, instead of some other type of programming of LTV for two main reasons. First, I wanted to focus on the investigation of news consumption patterns as for many it is through news watching on television they most vividly exercise citizenship day in day out; it is the evening news gathering sizeable audiences on all channels. Second, I chose *Panorāma*, and not something else from LTV news and current affairs portfolio, as LTV itself has always positioned long-running *Panorāma* as flagship of its news and current affairs, and, indeed, over those more than 50 years since *Panorāma* is on air it has become a symbol not only of LTV news and current affairs but of LTV itself.

depth account on the connections between the everyday context of media activities, on the one hand, and attitudes and actions its different publics have developed in a response to the public broadcaster LTV and the overall idea of public broadcasting, on the other hand. Contrary to the usual focus of family ethnographies in the studies of media audiences, I was not so much interested in the role that television played within the daily domestic context itself as in the imprint these experiences of day to day viewing have left on the articulations family members make on the institution of public television, as well as on the concept of public broadcasting as such, and, equally, how these discourses shape their viewing practices.

As family observations started shortly after the completion of the focus group discussions it allowed me to utilize family ethnography for the exploration of the key topics that have emerged during the focus groups in more detailed fashion. It was only when the focus group discussions were finalized that it became clear that due to the prominence in the responses of the focus group respondents of the issues of national imagination that the primary focus of the study should shift. Though not totally unanticipated, yet I did not expect that my focus group respondents were to frame so extensively their experiences with and perceptions of LTV within broader discourses on the nation, national identity and their inclusion in or exclusion from the national 'we' as much as within as beyond the public television.

I started the research with a rather broad aim to investigate the relationship between public television and its publics in Latvia in order to understand the crisis in the relationship between the public broadcasters and their publics in post-Communist societies. Yet, the focus group findings made me rethink the focus of the study defining as its primary aim exploration of responses various publics of the Latvian public television have taken towards it as the project of nation formation.

What was initially a general interest in the exploration of the relationship between public television and its publics turned into the examination of the relationship between definitions of the nation people have and their discourses on the public television, as well as their understanding of the concept of public broadcasting more generally. Accordingly, alterations in the initial agenda of the family observations had to be made. I paid more attention to the investigation of discourses of family members on the formation of the nation and its identity, as well as to the exploration of their own identity

formation processes, than it was initially planned. In addition, I also introduced extra stimulus material, namely a questionnaire each family member was asked to complete, among other things addressing those issues of national identity that, according to the public opinion polls, divide Latvian society along ethno-linguistic lines. Inevitably, changes in the focus of the research also required readjustment of its theoretical foundations making the idea of public broadcasting as a nation-building resource central to the theoretical framework of the study.

While the accounts of the participants of the focus group interviews provided me with information on the prevailing discourses of both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers discussing their relationship with the public television, close examination of viewing practices within quotidian domestic settings offered me a more nuanced picture of these discourses situating them within a broader context. It was the combination of focus groups and family observations that offered enough scope to investigate in depth, something that the utilisation of either focus groups or observations with families as the sole method of the research would fail to offer.

Apart from gaining access to the day-to-day media practices of family members with special interest in their use of television, as well as to the rest of the episodes of daily routines of the family life, family ethnography provided me with rich and detailed data on the varied world-views and mental spaces family members have, different family histories, dynamics of home life such as interpersonal interaction and power relations in the family, even a layout of the living room that all to greater or lesser extent contributed to the further understanding of the responses members of both ethno-linguistic communities have taken towards the public broadcaster LTV as the project of nation-building and the idea of public broadcasting more generally. As Morley has once put it to advocate the study of the domestic context of television viewing,

the sitting room is exactly where we need to start from if we finally want to understand the constitutive dynamics of abstractions such as ‘the community’ or ‘the nation’. This is especially so if we are concerned with the role of communications in the continuous formation, sustenance, recreation and transformation of these entities. The central point precisely concerns television’s role in connecting, for example, the ‘familiar’ or domestic and the national and international spheres, and in

sustaining both the image and the reality of the 'national family', and of various trans-national 'communities' (1991:12).

Initially it was planned to finalize the observations as early as in January, 2012, but the research took longer as, first, it was hard to gain access to families and for this reason some families joined the project slightly later than others and, second, it was not always easy to arrange a time for visits. During the period of observations, one of the informants gave birth and in the same family two other family members passed away, while in another family a close relative died, and this inevitably meant that alterations in the schedule of the visits had to be made, extending the overall time spent doing the fieldwork. The observations in the majority of the families were finalised in April, 2012, but in two families, because of the aforementioned reasons, the observations continued till July, 2012.

In total, six visits were made with each family during which informal conversational interviews were mixed with observations and participation in watching television. Families usually were visited during the peak-time television slot (6pm-10pm) both in weekdays and weekends. Where possible, I arranged the visits in such a way so as to be present when their favourite shows on television were on air. On average, I spent two to three hours with a family per session – around 15 hours of total observational time per family. Usually the interval between the visits was three to four weeks.

While for each visit I did some preparatory work jotting down some of the key topics I would like to discuss with the family members, I allowed considerable latitude for the participants and the situations they were involved in to set the agenda of my visits. Many of the topics of our conversations were initiated by the experience of watching television together with my informants. Their viewing decisions, channel and programme preferences, the chatting that accompanied watching their favourite shows, comments on what they had just seen on the screen, and other aspects of the act of viewing, all provided rich material and often raised unanticipated issues that were later discussed in our conversations. Written notes were made during and after the observations, and later all material was analysed using thematic and narrative analysis approaches in the same way as in the case of the focus group data.

While in some families I was invited to enter also the kitchen and other rooms, the key site for the conversations, participation and observational work was the living room. For

all the families it was the place where their main television set in the home was situated and where a considerable part of their television viewing activities took place. The choice of the living room as the primary site for the fieldwork aided the making of my presence in the private space of my informants less intrusive, and, in some cases, the agreement to limit the field site to the living room also helped me to convince potential informants to take part in the study. As in Latvian society a living room has conventionally been that area of a home where guests are received, I did not face huge difficulties in entering it and also my informants seemed to be able to accept my presence in their domestic space as long as I did not break the rule of not moving beyond the living room. I thought of myself as an acquaintance who visited my informants regularly over a particular period of time to spend some few hours together while they watch television and to informally discuss that experience, and I think family members perceived me in the same way. To record information on the physical environment surrounding the field drawings of a layout of the living room, including the location of a television set and a computer, were made, as well as descriptions of the neighbourhood settings were documented.

In addition, family members were asked to keep a television diary for the first week of the observations registering what programmes on which channels (or on the internet) they have watched each day starting from 6 pm till 1 am also noting a brief motivation of their viewing choices. When the end of the observational period approached they were also invited to complete an extended *ad hoc* questionnaire covering a variety of issues, including their media habits, popular culture consumption patterns, attitudes towards Latvian politics and history, questions relating their sense of belonging and their views on the national symbols of Latvia and days of national celebration and commemoration.³¹ The responses family members gave to these questions were discussed during the final session of the observations. The scanned sample copies of a diary and a questionnaire can be accessed in Appendix 4. Some of the stimulus materials applied during the focus group discussions (the list of five the most favourite shows on television, associations with different television channels, small essay on their own definition of the concept of

³¹ Using open questions informants were asked, for instance, to rank their five most loved musicians, actors, sportsmen and television presenters, their most favourite films and series, radio and television channels, print media outlets and internet sites. They were also invited to name what for them are the five most important national days of national celebration and remembrance and what they think are the five most important national symbols of Latvia. In addition they were asked to identify five places – for instance, their city, Latvia, Russia, Baltics or Europe – they feel they belong to. Family members were also asked to indicate what for them are the five greatest and the five worst events in Latvia's 20th century history, as well as to name five politicians in or outside Latvia towards whom their attitude is positive and five who they dislike, and, finally, they were invited to suggest the names of five people Latvia can be proud of.

public television) were also utilized during my informal discussions with the family members.

Again I used quota sampling and snowball sampling methods to recruit participants for the family observations. Five families were selected from both ethno-linguistic communities in order to reflect the ethno-linguistic diversity in the country. Households from both rural and urban locations were included in the sample. Two ethnically mixed families, one with Latvian language dominating and one with Russian as their main language, came from the capital Riga. Two Latvian-speaking families were recruited outside Riga, one living in a provincial town of northern Latvia and one living in the countryside in the western part of Latvia. One Russian-speaking family living in a village in the eastern region of Latgale with the majority of its population being Russian-speakers was also included in the sample. In total, 33 participants took part in the family observations with 22 Latvian-speakers and 11 Russian-speakers. The size of the families ranged from 4 to 10 people with the age of the adult family members spanning from 19 to 81. For further information on the family profiles see Appendix 2.

While a decision to include in the sample only the families of at least three generations living together made practicalities of planning and conducting the observations a highly demanding job, at the same time it allowed me to identify not only ethno-linguistic but also generational aspects of their daily media practices. Being at different life stages – some in their twenties others already in their sixties and seventies – and having different life stories – some have lived in Latvia for generations others have migrated to the country from other Soviet republics with their descendants born in Latvia – provided me with rich material and insights into the way it all informed my informants' choices and attitudes. My informants also have different degrees of experience of the Soviet system and also different, and often conflicting, memories of living under Soviet rule. Some of the younger family members have been born in the late Soviet era or even after the breakup of the Soviet empire in 1991 having little or no direct experience of living the Soviet way of life. In contrast, the experience of having lived in the Soviet Union under the Soviet system constitutes a considerable part of the experience of older generations. This diversity of experience has turned out to be a significant source of information for understanding not only my informants' overall sentiments, attitudes and beliefs but also their media habits and, more importantly, their perceptions of and experiences with the former state and current public broadcaster LTV, as well as their interpretations of the

concept of public broadcasting. As we shall see in the following data chapters, not only deep-seated viewing habits going back to the Soviet epoch continue to shape the choices both Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking viewers make today but also, the long experience of the Soviet-style state owned, funded and controlled media system some of my informants have continues to inform their understanding of the way the media system in the country functions today and, what is also important, how it interacts with the political system.

3.3 The Researcher's Role in the Field

At the time when the focus group discussions and the family observations were carried out, not only was Latvia going through a painful recovery from a deep economic recession that hit the country in late 2008 and was followed by severe austerity measures, but it also experienced months of political turmoil and ethno-linguistically motivated tensions entering the public domain, all inevitably leaving their mark on the sentiments of my informants and also affecting my role in the field.

The focus group discussions took place shortly after the early 2011 parliamentary elections held in September 17 following the dissolution of the parliament after a referendum in the summer of the same year initiated by then country's president Valdis Zatlers. The referendum itself was prompted by a political crisis after lawmakers prevented the country's anti-corruption bureau from searching the home of MP Ainārs Šlesers, an influential local politician and businessmen named by Zatlers as one of the country's oligarchs. The first focus group session was conducted on October 10, a time when political parties were in the middle of long and tense coalition talks on the formation of the next government. The parliament approved the new government on October 25 when the focus groups were still underway with the last sessions held shortly after, in early November.

The Saskaņas centrs (Harmony Centre) alliance, a highly popular political force among the Russian-speaking electorate, won the elections, albeit failing to gain an absolute majority. Despite its return as the largest party, due to a deep mistrust in it, Saskaņas centrs was left outside the ruling coalition – its political opponents reminded of the ties Saskaņas centrs has with Moscow (it has an official agreement of cooperation with the ruling United Russia party) that, as they argued, cast doubt on the party's loyalty to Latvia, although initially Reformu partija (Reform Party), one of the two political parties

leading the coalition talks and formed by ex-president Zatlers after his failure to get re-elected for the second term in office, insisted that *Saskaņas centrs* should be included in the government. Such a move would have made *Saskaņas centrs* the first ever political force supported by Latvia's Russian-speakers to enter the government since the country regained its independence in 1991. *Reformu partija* later changed its mind and, instead of *Saskaņas centrs*, the right-wing nationalist bloc *Nacionālā apvienība* (National Alliance) joined the government as a third coalition partner, making in the process many Russian-speakers angry and disappointed. 'It is not fair that we are disregarded,' said to journalists a young Russian-speaking man, one of the supporters of *Saskaņas centrs*, protesting with hundreds of others in front of the parliament building after the news that *Saskaņas centrs* are left outside the would-be government (Radio Latvia 1, 2011). 'Only fighting for our rights together we will show that we are part of Latvia and that without us decisions should not be made,' addressing protesters said Nil Ushakov, mayor of the capital Riga and leader of *Saskaņas centrs* (LNT, 2011).

The family observations coincided with the language referendum held in February 18, 2012 although it is important to note that preparations for it had already commenced in 2011 when a group of radical Russian-speaking activists, reacting to a failed attempt by *Nacionālā apvienība* earlier the same year to make Latvian the only language of instruction at all state-funded schools replacing the current system of bilingual education in minority schools, launched a petition calling for amendments in the country's constitution giving Russian the status of the second official language alongside Latvian. The activists were successful in collecting the necessary number of signatures to force the national election commission to start a nationwide collection of signatures to initiate changes in the constitution in November, 2011 – this was when the family observations started. The number of citizens supporting the proposal was sufficient for it to be submitted to parliament where, as expected, later in the same year, it was rejected opening up the way for the language referendum which eventually took place in February 2012.

Although the referendum proposal was rejected by an overwhelming majority of voters – 74.8% – who effectively preferred that Latvian remained the sole state language, discussions surrounding the plebiscite made the ethno-linguistic climate in Latvia untypically strained. The referendum provoked societal self-reflection on the issues of national integration and inter-ethnic relations and revealed longstanding ethno-linguistic

divisions in Latvian society. The opponents of change in the status of the Russian language, mostly Latvian-speakers, saw proposed changes in the constitution as a threat to the foundations of independent statehood and national identity and a reminder of the Russification of Latvia during the Soviet era. They saw and called the referendum an anti-Latvian provocation, while supporters of changes in the constitution, many Russian-speakers, though not all supporting the idea of two official languages, used the referendum to register their grievances against the power elite which they blamed for the unequal treatment of the Russian-speaking minority, with the recent exclusion of its favourite *Saskaņas centrs* alliance from the governing coalition still fresh in memory. What for Latvian-speakers was a referendum on the state language, for many Russian-speakers was a protest vote against the political establishment and a call for them to be recognized as equal. ‘To show that we exist,’ to use the words of a young Russian-speaking man quoted in the media (LTV1, 2011), was a popular argument among Russian-speakers. The intensity of the debate made many Latvian-speakers mobilize in response to the demands of the Russian-speaking minority leading to a record high turnout in the referendum – 71.13% of citizens took part in the plebiscite. Weeks before the referendum all media were full of the reports on the upcoming referendum with Latvian- and Russian-language media taking opposing sides that often turned into open agitation against or for the amendments in the constitution. The tense situation was also part of people’s everyday conversations, and, not surprisingly, it was impossible to avoid this topic also during my visits with the families observed. As a rule, my Russian-speaking informants tended to support the amendments, while Latvian-speaking participants opposed them.

Though the political conjuncture made the overall atmosphere tense, in contrast to the customary, peaceful everyday inter-ethnic relations, the political circumstances did nothing more than allow fissures already present in society to emerge in the public domain, turning otherwise rather private grievances of members of both ethno-linguistic communities into a matter of national debate. In other words, the language referendum, the earlier elections and the ensuing exclusion of the most popular among Russian-speakers political force from the ruling coalition did not create new frictions in the society; it just illuminated already existing ones. The sentiments of both ethno-linguistic groups expressed during the debates surrounding the months of political turmoil were not something particularly new; they have always been present in society, yet they took centre stage in the societal agenda only from time to time during moments of political

tensions. Therefore, under other circumstances the issues of the nation and national identification in the responses of my respondents most likely would not have been as pronounced as they were under the current political situation. Though the study reveals patterns of the relationship between Latvian public television and its publics that are valid also outside the political context of the time of the research, still I prefer to see the outcome of the study as a snapshot of the particular moment acknowledging that the direction that the research took might have been different if the political context were different.

The political developments made the pre-existing ethno-linguistic cleavages visible and this offered a valuable context for understanding the relationship between deep-seated rifts in the society and the polarized media preferences of both ethno-linguistic communities. At the same time, the politically charged atmosphere made my role as a researcher more complicated. Due to the heated debates on the political scene and in the media, some of the Russian-speaking participants reacted in a highly sensitive manner to my questions relating such topics as inter-ethnic relations in the country, their preference for Russian channels and their interest in national news versus interest they have in the news from Russia, interpreting it as questioning of their loyalty to Latvia, albeit my intentions were not such. My being a Latvian-speaking (and not Russian-speaking) researcher in the tense political climate at least at the early stages of my interaction with the Russian-speaking participants became an obstacle that I had to overcome. Some of my Russian-speaking informants approached me with suspicion (not as the 'neutral' academic I would like to be seen as, but as first and foremost a Latvian-speaker, the 'other'), and it took longer time than expected to establish a rapport with them and create an atmosphere of trust.

Despite the fact that, in most of the cases I have managed to establish contact with my Russian-speaking respondents and to win their trust, still during my conversations with the Russian-speaking participants I have often been reminded, directly or implicitly, that I am not a member of their ethno-linguistic community. Thus, during one of the focus group discussions with the Russian-speaking viewers one of its participants, in order to argue that Russian-speakers do not have language problems and no difficulty in watching programmes in Latvian and that there is no need for Russian subtitles, speaking in jest addressed me saying 'We now listen to you [speaking in Latvian] and do not need subtitles [to understand]'. Another Russian-speaking informant describing inter-ethnic

relations in Latvia as peaceful, referred to both of us as the representatives of our ethnic group. 'Between me and you,' he said in an effort to stress the good relations we have with each other and to speak of what he thinks are friendly relations between ethnic Russians and ethnic Latvians more generally. On another occasion, when we discussed political life in Latvia and the upcoming referendum he formulated our positions straightforwardly: 'You [are ethnic] Latvian, I [am ethnic] Russian'. However, his intention was not to insist on some deep divisions and conflicts between us as the representatives of our respective ethnic communities, it just served as a reminder of different ethnic identities we inhabit as a context of our interaction.

In one of the Russian-speaking families I have always been invited to share a meal together in an expression of their hospitality. During a visit in early January we marked the arrival of the New Year raising glasses in a toast and few weeks later ate pancakes with three sorts of filling, meat, curd and marmalade, to celebrate Shrovetide, while during Easter we knocked and ate eggs they had coloured. It was also the way the family members, Orthodox and Old-believers, could demonstrate that they celebrate religious festivals also together with Latvian-speakers, the majority of them being either Lutherans or Catholics. At the same time, whenever I initiated a discussion on the referendum and language policy in the country, or on inter-ethnic relations in Latvia, the atmosphere became somehow strained and all their answers were rather abrupt and elusive. It was clear that this was not the favourite topic of the family members and they would prefer to avoid discussing it. During one of our conversations I was questioned as to who was participating in the study, as to whether only Russian-speaking families are participating, as to what I was going to do with the notes I had jotted down during my visits and who would see the questionnaire they had completed, signalling the suspicions of the family regarding my intentions. Not to frighten them away I had to apply a more subtle approach to discuss these topics. On the one hand, I did not want to offend them and to make them feel guilty for taking part in the referendum and voting in favour of the proposal to make Russian the second official language in the country but at the same time I could not avoid discussing this issue.

As I have a good command of Russian to break the ice and to get the conversation going in an unstrained manner I often switched to the Russian language when communicating with my Russian-speaking respondents. In addition, to make myself appear more as an 'impartial' researcher and less as a representative of the Latvian-speaking community in

communication with my Russian-speaking informants I have tried to avoid position-taking when it comes to such 'sensitive' topics as the country's citizenship and language policies or the interpretations of the 20th century history of Latvia, and usually have tried to leave my personal views and preconceptions at the door. Having said that, I am not arguing that I as a researcher while doing the fieldwork have achieved some state of complete objectivity and neutrality and, likewise, that my interpretations of the fieldwork results are completely judgment free.

Although I have applied a number of strategies to minimise my impact on the field, it is impossible, as it has often been pointed out in the methodological literature, for me as an ethnographer to be free from the subjectivity and distance myself from my own biography that is made of my experiences and that, in its turn, forms perspectives I take. In my case, the aspect of my biography playing the most prominent role during the research was my ethno-linguistic background, with other facets of my identity such as gender, age or socio-economic status having relatively little impact on relations in the field, as well as during other stages of the research process.

When studying the attitudes and experiences of my Latvian-speaking respondents I thought of myself as being more part of the culture I was studying than in the case of my Russian-speaking informants. At some point during the fieldwork I discovered that for me the perceptions and experiences of the Russian-speakers were somehow more unknown and unfamiliar, albeit not totally foreign and not at all something that fits into an 'exotic' category, to refer to the origins of ethnography, and therefore more interesting to be explored than those of the Latvian-speakers. To continue in this confessional tone, I have to say that all the time while being in the field I had to remind myself that my research objects are members of both ethno-linguistic groups and that I should not lose my interest in examining also the behaviour and attitudes of the Latvian-speakers. Not to take for granted and perceive as self-evident the phenomena that for me entering the field seemed known and familiar, albeit in reality little problematized and understood, I have applied, or at least have made such an attempt, a strategy of defamiliarizing myself (looking from a position of an outsider in relation to a culture researched) with the attitudes and experiences of my Latvian-speaking participants.

While for some Russian-speakers I was a stranger because of my ethno-linguistic identity and I also perceived myself more as an outsider when communicating with the Russian-

speakers, I did not experience the same difficulties when contacting the Latvian-speakers. Instead, on the part of my Latvian-speaking respondents I was treated as an insider in terms of ethno-linguistic belonging, and yet this is not to say that my experience of interacting with the Latvian-speakers was always smooth and free from tensions.

For the majority of my informants, be they Latvian-speakers or Russian-speakers, their new, albeit temporary, status of being observed did not come easy. In most cases initially I was treated with curiosity and with some degree of suspicion and it usually took first visits to establish a rapport. My experience in one of the Latvian-speaking families illustrates this process of becoming accepted as an ethnographer by those being observed further. As they told me later, one member of the family following my first visit was questioning others whether they could trust me illustrating the anxieties that my intrusion in the family home had triggered; only after a couple of sessions one of the informants noted that their little daughter in my presence acted in a typical manner of romping around in their living room and from time to time joining conversations of the adults, something that usually does not happen when there is a stranger at home. It was a signal that initial anxieties caused by my arrival had, if not disappeared completely, then at least lessened and that I had been more or less accepted as a guest who was welcome in their home.

However, it should not necessarily mean that what I had been observing accurately reflected the natural behaviour of my participants. Although I do not think that my presence in the field had significantly altered typical patterns of viewing behaviour of the family members, as well as their other domestic activities and interpersonal dynamics, it would be an idealization to insist that, while family ethnography takes place in the natural habitat of those under study, it happens with no obtrusiveness to the daily rhythms of the family life. While the environment (domestic space) is natural, the conditions under which the research happens are not such, for, as Moores in his study on the domestic consumption of satellite television rightly reminds us, 'it is an unusual situation for an academic to be sitting in somebody else's living room, talking to them about an aspect of their private lives' (1996:32).

While with some informants it took rather little effort to overcome initial barriers, with others it took much longer time to build a rapport, and in some extreme cases all attempts to do it failed. One informant in one of the families refused to be interviewed

providing little explanation for it and, instead, nominated his wife to speak on his behalf. In another family one of its members during the first sessions was very reticent and most of the time kept silent to announce in one of the next visits that he does not see any sense of the research and does not want to be a guinea pig signalling his uneasiness and discomfort about being subjected to monitoring and questioning what he compared with interrogation. 'You have only 30 minutes', he declared in an unfriendly tone at the beginning of one of the sessions to say that he did not wish to spend more time on this activity. Only after a long effort to persuade him and explain the purpose of the study and the importance of his cooperation, did I manage to convince him not to withdraw from the research. While our further meetings were less tense, this is not to say that his sceptical attitude towards the research had disappeared. On another occasion, due to the exacerbation of the illness one member of the family was unable to be interviewed, and later he, sadly, passed away.

To conclude, I do not see my role in the field as the fly-on-the-wall type researcher who in some disengaged manner looks on the researched from the distance with 'the disinterested eye and ear of the objective observer-reporter', as Lull (1990:179) idealistically has put it in his study on the television viewing and family life. Instead, in the spirit of 'postmodern reflexivity' (Bird, 2003:16) I acknowledge that through my presence in the field I have participated in the construction of reality to the same extent as my informants, and our interactions should be read as jointly constructed meanings. As Clifford rightly points out, the ethnographer is not merely 'scribe and archivist', he/she is also 'interpreting observer' (1986:17).

This project, just as other ethnographic narratives, is the result of a collaborative 'interpretive activity', as Geertz (2000:9) has described anthropological research, by the observer and the observed, and, albeit this is not to deny validity and reliability of the results of the study, this text remains merely an account of particular versions of reality. It is made, partial and incomplete account – 'fiction', to quote Geertz (2000), or 'partial truth', to use Clifford's terminology (1986). To stress the interpretive nature of anthropological writings Geertz reminds us that 'what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to' (2000:9), and Ang puts his argument in the context of audience research. For her, representations of 'audiences' are inventions of audience researchers: 'it is only in and through the descriptions conjured within the discourses produced by researchers that

certain profiles of certain audiences take shape – profiles that do not exist outside or beyond those descriptions but are created by them’ (1996:77). Yet, it is worth not to forget that ‘while we can only know audiences through discourses, audiences do in fact exist outside the terms of these discourses,’ as Morley has argued at the same time not denying constructed nature of audience research (1992:178).

Instead of thinking of descriptions and their interpretations presented in the data chapters that follow in the coming pages as a claim for some ‘whole and objective truth’ mirroring some ‘normality of the real (natural) life’ I would rather prefer to think of them as a snapshot of constantly shifting meaning making processes surrounding the relationship between the media and society, the public broadcaster and its various publics.

Chapter 4

Defining Public Service Broadcasting: Between State, Public, National and Commercial Television

4.1 Introduction

The publics of Latvian public television struggle to find a right place on the map for it and, as I demonstrate in this chapter, the diverse and competing definitions of LTV, the *de jure* public television broadcaster in Latvia, and the concept of public television more generally they have, not only reveal legacies of the Soviet past, namely the long experience with Soviet-style state broadcasting, but also illuminate today's peculiarities of the country's commercialized and politicized media landscape.

For a variety of reasons many of my Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking informants disqualified LTV as a public broadcaster and, instead, discussed it more often in terms of a state and national broadcasting. There is a widespread belief among the audiences of both ethno-linguistic groups that LTV operates as a state channel serving as a one-way top-down communication channel in hands of the government of the day, and through their exit from LTV they register a protest against the distrusted local political elite.

Because of its concern for the official version of a national culture in the eyes of both ethno-linguistic communities, LTV is often conceived as a national television, albeit Russian-speakers, contrary to Latvian-speakers, rarely feel at home with that version of the national 'we' as conjured up by the public television and employ their exit from LTV as a voice mechanism to challenge this hegemonic national imaginary.

Despite the fact that, over the past 20 years, audiences have massively withdrawn from LTV and migrated to its commercial rivals, this migration does not constitute evidence of the rejection of the normative public broadcasting values in Latvian society. While often detached from the public broadcasting institution LTV, nevertheless, at least at a declarative level the Western-style public broadcasting ideals are valued in the society. Instead of the *de jure* public broadcaster LTV, for many it is the national commercial broadcasters that are better at implementing some of the public broadcasting ideals into practice, primarily because of their more popular and, hence in the eyes of audiences,

more democratic approach – this, of course does not mean that these broadcasters are seen as being able to fully serve the role of public broadcasting. In short, poor audience figures of LTV are not so much a manifestation of a denial of the public broadcasting values as a rejection of the public broadcasting institution LTV.

4.2 Searching for a Definition of Public Television

When asked to provide their own definition of what the concept of public service television stands for, my respondents often referred to the same values that are associated with the normative models of Western European public broadcasting. While audiences value these ideals with the regular audience measurements suggesting that these may not be only declarative judgements and that at least partly they follow these ideals also in their everyday television viewing practices (consider, for instance, the high popularity of daily news programmes and weekly analytical and investigative shows, commonly considered as typical genres of the public broadcasting tradition, on all the national channels), they not necessarily associate these values with LTV, the official public service broadcaster. To put it another way, audiences detach the normative public broadcasting ideals from its current *de jure* institutional embodiment in their country, Latvia.

Information, education and entertainment, the well-known trinity of so-called Reithian principles of public broadcasting, were those key words my informants often referred to in order to describe what they thought should be the main rationale of public television. Also for 20-year-old Latvian-speaking student Madara³² (FG1)³³, public television should be television that ‘shows educational, as well as informative and entertaining materials’.

My informants’ definitions of the concept of public television illuminate their perceptions of what they think an ideal, perfect television should be about, something that perhaps has never existed in reality and could be found only in the most optimistic normative writings of defenders of the public broadcasting idea. What their definitions of public broadcasting tell us about are their perceptions of television as a public good. As a good for society ideal television is expected to be free-of-charge, available to all, diverse in its programming output, politically and economically independent, the one you can

³² The names of all participants are fictional.

³³ ‘FG’ stands for ‘Focus group’, ‘PFG’ for ‘Pilot focus group’ and ‘F’ for ‘Family’ followed by the number of the particular (pilot) focus group or family. For the full information on the composition of the focus groups and the family profiles see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.

trust, impartial providing wide spectrum of opinions, it should also be non-commercial having no advertising, and so forth. These are all normative ideals of Western-type public broadcasting my respondents were referring to, even if not being aware of this fact. Here are some common definitions of the concept of public television as formulated by my informants:

Public television should be available to the society free of charge. The second thing is that it should be an independent television not lobbying interests of one or another group of people (Anastasia, 29-year-old Russian-speaking manager working at the bank, FG4),

No advertising. Independence from state officials and advertisers (Tatyana, 61-year-old Russian-speaking woman working with children at the school amateur theatre, FG6),

Public television should be free and democratic, [a place] where censorship is not present (Ināra, 55-year-old Latvian-speaking agronomist, FG9),

[Public service television should be] a television that is available free of charge. It should include programmes that are interesting for all groups of the society (Ilona, 35-year-old Russian-speaking head of the registry office, FG8),

Public television, I think, should be such a television that is available to absolutely all. Television that reflects the opinion of the entire society. It should be free of charge, its programmes should be truthful, without lies, and programmes that everyone finds interesting, exciting (Līga, 27-year-old Latvian-speaking secretary working at the local municipality, FG10).

4.2.1 Public Television as a Public Good

It is the principle of universality that underpins definitions of public broadcasting as offered by my informants. In line with these definitions, the universality principle is understood as technical, geographical and financial availability to watch public television free-of-charge throughout the country. The principle of universality here also includes

the idea of diversity in programming so that public television meets different needs and interests of its various publics. In other words, it is the entire national population that, according to definitions of public broadcasting as provided by my respondents, should benefit from public broadcasting as a common good, irrespective of one's socio-economic background or ethno-linguistic identity. In the words of Jānis, 27-year-old Latvian-speaking worker at the supermarket (FG3), public television should 'embrace all the society'.

For Ingūna, a 59-year-old Latvian-speaking manager at a transport company (FG5), public broadcasting should function in the same way as public transport system does. First, like public transport, public television should be state subsidised. Second, in the same way as public transport, public television should be available to all. As she explained, while many prefer going by car (=watching commercial channels), public transport (=public television) should be a service that the state provides for all people. To quote her,

I do not remember when I went by trolleybus last time. Those who go by car as me... I do not need [public transport], and then what? You cannot close trams, trolleybuses, buses. Our company operates bus line to Olaine [town close to the Latvian capital Riga], the majority who go [there] go by car while, once, it was the bus that was more popular but nevertheless the state should still provide it.

In line with this analogy, it is public television that the state is expected to fund to provide a service for those who for some reason prefer watching public television instead of the commercial channels. Interestingly having your own car and abandoning public transport services here is equated with preference for commercial broadcasting and exiting from the public television signalling the poor image of the public broadcaster LTV in her eyes. For many in Latvia having your own car is a more desirable scenario than using public transport seen as providing service of low quality.

So, at least at a normative level there seems to be an agreement between Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers that public broadcasting should provide a public good that should include offering a service for all members of the society. However, there is no consensus on whether LTV, the country's *de jure* institutional embodiment of public broadcasting, meets these ideals. While Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers agree on the principles

of public broadcasting, differences in their discourses on public broadcasting as a common good appears when it comes to realization of these principles in practice. Many Russian-speakers dismiss LTV as offering such universal service that is aimed at all members of the society, irrespective of their ethno-linguistic identity. As we shall see, various and competing conceptions of the nation LTV is expected to serve members of both ethno-linguistic communities have are central for understanding responses of my Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking informants towards the public broadcaster LTV as a good for the society.

4.2.2 Popular Broadcasting

Many see the country's commercial channels, contrary to LTV, as more successful in providing diverse programming appealing to audiences of all generations and viewers of both ethno-linguistic groups. Here the idea of public broadcasting as serving the public is translated as 'popular broadcasting' with popularity (appeal to large audiences) seen as evidence of a television channel being successful in providing service for the public. No wonder that many of my respondents qualified the commercial broadcasters gathering larger audiences than the public broadcaster LTV as actual public channels. From this perspective they are seen as true public broadcasters as they do provide such a service for which there is public demand. In short, they are seen as better at serving the public.

Because of their more popular and hence, in the eyes of audiences, also more democratic approach, both in terms of programming priorities and mode of address, my informants often identified the commercial channels as better at meeting the universality ideals of public broadcasting than the country's public broadcaster by law LTV. Like LTV, also the national commercial channels are available to all (they cover the entire territory of the country and till 2014, when for economic reasons they left free-to-air terrestrial broadcasting network, the commercial broadcasters LNT and TV3 were also free of charge) but, contrary to LTV, their programming is seen by audiences as more in line with the diversity ideals of public broadcasting offering something for everyone.

Thus, for instance, 39-year-old Latvian-speaking teaching assistant Gunta (PFG3) defined public television as a service that all members of the family can find as being in line with their needs and interests. Drawing on her family's experience, it was the national commercial channels LNT and TV3 she identified as public broadcasters. Both are the most watched channels in her family. "There are [animated] cartoons, there is

news, there are also concerts. All age groups can watch it,' she said describing both channels. For her, LTV1, the main channel of LTV, is serious and old-fashioned devoting too much of its airtime to politics and offering little entertainment. It is something that conflicts with her perceptions of public television as an institution providing diversity in its programming, a view shared by many of my respondents of both ethno-linguistic communities. It is also the mode of address of LTV that she finds rather elitist, contrary to the tone of LNT and TV3 which she characterized as 'closer to the ordinary man'. It is 'the ordinary man' she identifies herself with, who is not properly served by LTV and who finds offerings of its rival commercial channels more relevant.

4.2.3 Old-fashioned and Outdated Project

For many of my respondents the performance of LTV conflicts with their views on how modern television should look like. 'If one looked at archives... let's say from the 1985, it will be the same, the same presenters and the same graphics,' Sergei, a 30-year-old Russian-speaking worker at the railway company (FG8), described LTV1. 'They are today as they used to be in the Soviet times. It has all been the same all the time, no changes,' also complained 32-year-old Latvian-speaking construction worker Intars (F3) to describe LTV as a stagnating institution. They both exaggerate, and yet their arguments reveal the way they think about public television.³⁴ Though the public broadcaster LTV, and particularly its main channel LTV1, is often perceived as an old-fashioned and outdated project, it is not to say that its publics also see the idea of public broadcasting as such. As already noted, people tend to detach the institution of public broadcasting LTV from the normative values they associate with the notion of public broadcasting.

It is the plethora of alternative choices, the national commercial broadcasters, plus the full spectrum of transnational channels both from West and East, that informs perceptions of viewers on how modern television should look like, and LTV in the eyes of many fails to live up to these requirements. In this respect, we can consider the dismissal of LTV (the public broadcasting institution and not the idea of public broadcasting itself) as a rejection of stagnation ('old-school' public broadcaster) and preference for progress ('modern' commercial channels). If so, to express a preference

³⁴ Mungiu-Pippidi, reflecting on the Romanian case, also reports on the poor image of the public television. As in Latvia, also in this former Communist country it is seen by its publics as outdated and non-prestigious project. During the focus groups in Bucharest in the fall of 1999, 'when using car metaphors, public service television was compared to a Renault 4 car series from the 1960s, while its main private competitor was compared to the latest models of the luxury Mercedes automobiles' (2003:58).

for commercial channels may mean for audiences to be on the side of progress, while to express a preference for the public broadcaster may imply a less attractive scenario, i.e., to be backward and resistant to progress. In the eyes of audiences it seems to be a choice between being friends with the ‘losers’ (the public broadcaster) or the ‘winners’ (the commercial channels). As far as we can judge from the perceptions of my respondents, preference for the commercial channels seems to be valued much higher than that preference for the public television LTV. To put it another way, allegiance to the commercial broadcasters seems to offer more benefits (apart from practical benefits of attractive programming it is also symbolic value of being on the side of progress) than loyalty to the public television can promise.

4.2.4 Bilingual Broadcasting

The presence of both Latvian and Russian language on the national commercial channels made many of my Russian-speaking informants think that they – contrary to LTV1, broadcasting exclusively in Latvian with Russian language in the most cases being voiced over or, less often, subtitled in Latvian, and its sister channel LTV7 providing scarce offerings of Russian-language output – are aimed at all members of the national communion regardless of their ethno-linguistic background and, in this respect, are fitting the role of public broadcasting better than the almost entirely monolingual *de jure* public broadcaster LTV.

For my Russian-speaking respondents, bilingual programming, the coexistence of Latvian-language and Russian-language content, serves as evidence of a channel addressing viewers of both ethno-linguistic groups. Here the diversity ideals of public broadcasting are first and foremost interpreted as catering to audiences of both the ethno-linguistic majority and minority. Accordingly, those participants who provided such definition of public broadcasting disqualified monolingual channels, including only Latvian-language LTV1, as public broadcasters.

It is the national commercial channel LNT which, alongside its Latvian-language programming, also offers some entertainment imports from Russia subtitled in Latvian that for 48-year-old Russian-speaking school deputy director Boris (FG4) best qualifies as an ideal public broadcaster since, as he noted, being bilingual channel LNT addresses both ethno-linguistic communities:

They have programmes that both audiences can watch. Of course, programmes for Russian-speakers [on LNT] are few but nevertheless they exist. But, to speak about TV1 [LTV1], there is nothing at all. Like LNT they [LTV] should also be oriented not only to the [ethnic] Latvian audience but should also think about others. If they [both channels of LTV] consider themselves as the main public channels, well, then they should do something so that the Russian-speaking audience also watch them.

It is market logic that makes the national Latvian-language commercial channels to include in their output also Russian-origin popular content (for instance, sitcoms and comedy shows imported from Russia) since, as we shall see later in Chapter 6, it is also Latvian-speaking audiences who enjoy watching these offerings. As audience maximization lies at the heart of their commercial success, commercial broadcasters have been more responsive towards viewer demands, and this market-driven approach has appeared to be more successful in bringing both ethno-linguistic groups together around television and, hence, better in terms of the realization of the public broadcasting ideals of national integration in practice than ethno-nationalistic approach of the public broadcaster LTV with its focus on the language and culture of the ethno-linguistic majority as the cement of social cohesion.

4.2.5 Commercial Channels Copying the Public Broadcaster

Not only the public broadcaster LTV has taken over some of the tactics of commercial broadcasting but also its commercial rivals have mimicked some of the strategies typical to public broadcasting, and these tendencies have further blurred the demarcation line between public and commercial broadcasting creating additional confusion for audiences who cannot readily distinguish the public broadcaster LTV from its commercial competitors. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that in the eyes of audiences the commercial channels are often seen as substitutes of LTV. Many of the participants admitted that if LTV ceased to exist it would be easy to substitute its offerings with the ones provided by the commercial channels with few exceptions such as live sports broadcasting on the second channel of LTV; this I discuss in detail in Chapter 7.

Although many see commercial broadcasters as able to replace the public broadcaster LTV, this is not to say that they necessarily think of these channels as a substitute of the

normative public broadcasting values. As we have seen earlier, for many the concept of public broadcasting involves the idea of some ideal-type television, something neither LTV, nor the commercial broadcasters in the eyes of audiences do fully qualify for. Although commercial broadcasters are often seen as more in line with public broadcasting ideals, just as in the case of LTV, they too are not seen as meeting all the normative principles of public broadcasting as defined by audiences themselves.

Despite aspects of the provision and style of LTV having been replicated by the commercial channels, only a handful of those tactics of LTV have proved to be able to pull in sizeable audiences and hence bring commercial success that the commercial channels have been eager to take over and make part of their schedules. One of those 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1983) of LTV, later taken over by its commercial competitors is special programming during moments of national celebrations, something I discuss further in Chapter 6. What is more, following the example of LTV, national commercial channels, apart from daily news offer some weekly current affairs and journalistic investigations, pre-election debates, as well as provide extra news bulletins during moments of national crisis. Like LTV they also organize charity marathons and similar events. In addition to programme emulation, it should also be noted that, during the recent years some popular shows, as well as faces of LTV, its star journalists, have moved to its commercial rivals.³⁵

In addition, in contrast to some licence fee funded European public broadcasters, the presence of advertising on LTV, albeit, as many viewers have noted it, to a lesser extent if compared to the commercial channels, creates further confusion for audiences when

³⁵ In 2007 following the conflict with then management of LTV, journalists of its popular weekly analytical and investigative programme *De facto* left the public television and moved to TV3 to start a programme of similar format *Nekā personīga* (*Nothing Personal*). Few years later, in 2009 due to the budget cuts, brought on by the financial downturn, LTV axed its popular national soap opera *Neprāta cena* (*Price of Folly*) that was later taken over by TV3 with the new title *UgunsGrēks* (*Fire/Sin*) but with the same storyline and main characters. The cast and much of its production team moved from LTV to TV3. Today *UgunsGrēks* is a regular ratings leader gathering one of the largest television audiences in the country. As *UgunsGrēks* is on air during the same time slot when LTV1 broadcasts its main prime-time news programme *Panorāma* (*Panorama*), the soap opera brings audiences away from *Panorāma*. Many of my informants, once loyal audiences of *Panorāma*, said that they now prefer watching *UgunsGrēks* instead of *Panorāma*. For many years *Panorāma* was the most watched prime-time news programme in the country but today it is the evening news on the commercial channels that are the most popular. During recent years, popular news presenters of LTV have also migrated to TV3. Thus, at the end of 2012 Arnis Krauze, long-serving presenter of *Panorāma*, left public television to appear few weeks later on TV3 hosting its evening news. Before Krauze, a few years earlier another former star journalist of LTV Edijs Bošs also joined TV3 news presenters' team. Finally, in early 2014 LNT, another national commercial channel, announced the launch of a new weekly current affairs show hosted by a household name, journalist Jānis Domburs who after the conflict with the management of the public broadcaster left LTV in 2011 having presented its popular weekly political debates show *Kas notiek Latvijā?* (*What Is Happening In Latvia?*) for ten years.

they are called to draw a clear borderline between the public broadcaster LTV and its commercial competitors. For instance, consider a discussion (FG5) between two retired Latvian-speaking women, 66-year-old Ausma and 83-year-old Gerda, with the first speaker distinguishing both channels of LTV from its commercial rivals that in turn creates a confusion for the second speaker:

Ausma: Well, there are channels that are funded by the state and the ones who earn money themselves through advertising.

Gerda: Well, those adverts are on all [channels] that I watch. I see adverts everywhere, I see them all over. There are no channels that I watch where there would be no advertising at all.

4.2.6 (Not) Paying the Licence Fee

The deficit of a strong public broadcasting tradition (at least in terms of weak public broadcasting institutions) in combination with considerable alternative viewing choices (the national commercial broadcasters, plus a plethora of cable and satellite channels, including a wide choice of Russian television) makes exit from LTV easy and attractive, to refer to Hirschman's (1970) theory.

Older generations remember Soviet times when then state television LTV and the Soviet Central TV transmitting from Moscow were the only choices on offer and, for many years, audiences had no other alternative than to watch one of these two broadcasters. Then employment of the exit option was highly limited and loyalty towards LTV among its Latvian-speaking publics was little challenged by the exit alternative, if not to say that such an option, apart from moving to the Soviet Central TV or not watching television at all, was non-existent and loyalty towards LTV was rather imposed.

In contrast, today when the exit option is all too present, also feelings of loyalty towards LTV look not as strong as they appeared to be during the era of its monopoly. For many LTV today is just another channel on offer and can be easily substituted with other ones that audiences find more successful in addressing their needs and interests and more in line with their perceptions of what modern and interesting television should look like. 'I switch on a TV set, I have 40 channels... watch what you like the most,' says 46-year-old Latvian-speaking blue-collar worker Pēteris (FG10) describing the plenitude of viewing choices he has. As we shall see, viewers exercise this freedom of choice that they have

today and that gives them voice with great enthusiasm.

Given that for many in their everyday media routines LTV plays a minor role, if not to say no role at all, it is no wonder then that there are very few who would be willing to pay a license fee for LTV. In the 2012 *TNS Latvia* survey only 29.4% said that they would be ready to pay a licence fee or media tax for the public radio and television institutions, if such were to be introduced. Many of my informants pointed out that although LTV may provide a public good for others, loyal publics of LTV, and therefore it should not be closed and the government should continue funding it, they do not see LTV as the fulfilment of the public broadcasting ideals as far as it concerns them, and therefore would not be ready to pay for the public television directly from their own pocket. It may be a public good for others but not for me – was their line of argument.

For many the licence fee would be an imposed payment, an unjustified expense. Many of my respondents pointed out that they do not see a need to pay for the products and services they use rarely or do not use at all. As some noted, they do not watch LTV to such an extent to get value back from it. Ieva, a 27-year-old Latvian-speaking legal adviser working in the public sector (FG3), for instance, argued: ‘It is most likely that I would not pay only for those two channels [of LTV]. Because I do not watch them anyway’. ‘It’s simply wrong. For instance, if I do not read some newspaper, I do not pay for it,’ similarly pointed out 22-year-old Russian-speaking student Arina (FG2). Some also claimed that, in the case of the introduction of the licence fee, they could do without LTV. It is such very pragmatic motivations standing behind the reluctance of its publics to fund the public broadcaster LTV directly through licence fee or tax payment.

While in the 2012 *TNS Latvia* survey 36.6% of ethnic Latvians said they would be ready to pay for the public broadcasters, only 19.2% of members of the ethnic minority groups could say the same. This is hardly surprising if one remembers that there is only a small fraction of ethnic minorities who can be found among the regular viewers of LTV, let alone its main channel LTV1. Besides, in line with the same survey, there are many ethnic minority viewers who say that they would not miss LTV, if it ceased to exist.³⁶ 20-year-old Russian-speaking student Nikita (FG2) put it straightforwardly: ‘You can close [LTV]... I do not watch it’. If LTV1 ceased to exist, we would not notice it in our family,

³⁶ Only 31.1% of ethnic minority respondents said that they would miss LTV1, if it disappeared, compared to 56.9% of ethnic Latvians who could say the same. 44% of ethnic minority respondents and 55.8% of ethnic Latvians would miss LTV7, the second channel of LTV, if it stopped its operations.

also said 48-year-old Russian-speaking municipality IT officer Viktor (FG8). While in his family they from time to time watch LTV7, second channel of LTV, they have no regular experience with LTV1.

However, unwillingness to pay the licence fee for LTV should not be automatically interpreted as evidence of its publics not supporting the public broadcasting ideals. Instead, this should be rather seen as a manifestation of strong discontent with the current performance of LTV, the country's *de jure* institutional embodiment of public broadcasting. While they exit from LTV as do not see it as providing a public good at least as far as it concerns them, it does not mean that they reject the overall idea of public broadcasting as a common good.

Though reluctant to pay for LTV, audiences are ready to pay for the products and services they use and value. The overwhelming majority already pay on a monthly basis for their cable or satellite subscription, but the current offerings of the public broadcaster LTV, as many think, are not worth money they would have to pay as the licence fee. One of the rare exceptions, as we shall see in Chapter 7, is sports provision on the second channel of LTV that attracts large audiences and for which viewers would be ready to pay. Though not finding offerings of LTV in line with their needs and interests many in protest have exited from LTV, they still come back to the public television during those moments when there is something on offer they find relevant for them and, equally important, something for what there is no ready substitute on the rival channels of LTV, and one such moment is sports broadcasts.

4.3 Defining the National 'We'

It was common for many of my informants of both ethno-linguistic communities to call LTV 'national television', as well as to talk about it as a symbol of 'Latvianness', and yet Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers attached to this notion completely reversed connotations. For Latvian-speakers, LTV is 'national television' as it represents the official version of the national culture and cares for the national language, as well as supports the official conception of the country's past. In the eyes of Latvian-speakers LTV reflects and sustains 'Latvianness' as many of my Latvian-speaking informants preferred to term cultural identity shared by the Latvian-speaking majority. Also for Russian-speakers LTV is 'national television' as it is oriented towards the ethno-linguistic majority. Yet, here the focus of LTV on the ethno-linguistic majority, its language and

culture, what Latvian-speakers like to describe as care for ‘Latvianness’, is treated as an exclusionary and therefore nationalistic approach ignoring the ethno-linguistic minority, and hence LTV seen as ‘national (=nationalistic) television’.

While Latvian-speakers tend to accept that representation of the national self as constructed by LTV, many Russian-speakers feel excluded from this model of the national communion. Contrary to Russian-speakers, its Latvian-speaking publics do not see LTV’s ethno-nationalistic definition of national membership as problematic. It is also the concept of ‘Latvianness’ as constructed and reproduced by LTV that does not conflict with the vision many Latvian-speakers have of it, contrary to Russian-speakers who do not share this version of ‘Latvianness’. To put it differently, the way LTV defines who constitutes the national ‘we’ (and, accordingly, who ‘they’ to be left out are) corresponds with the dominant nation-building discourse principles many Latvian-speakers share. There is a kind of common-sense among Latvian-speakers that it is the primary task of LTV as ‘national television’ to prioritize (national) culture and language of Latvian-speakers, dominating ethno-linguistic group in the country, something that is taken for granted and rarely questioned by Latvian-speaking viewers.

Sergei, a 30-year-old Russian-speaking worker at the railway company (FG8), pointed out: ‘[When you watch LTV1], there is a feeling that there is no Russian-speaking population in Latvia, all is in the state language, well, the state language [in Latvia] is one’. Consider now how 27-year-old Latvian-speaking music teacher Ansis (FG9) described his association with LTV1: ‘On the first channel [LTV1] the Russian language will never be spoken, we still have Latvian as the state language’. For him, LTV is ‘the basis of nationality’; it is ‘Latvia and patriotism’ that informs his association with LTV1.

Here we can see two opposing views on the absence of Russian language on LTV1, the main channel of LTV. While for 30-year-old Russian-speaker Sergei it is evidence of exclusion of Russian-speakers from the national ‘we’ as formulated by the public television, for 27-year-old Latvian-speaker Ansis it is evidence of LTV fulfilling its mission of catering for Latvian language. While for Sergei the absence of Russian language disqualifies LTV as a public good, for Ansis it is what makes LTV a public good. Interestingly, both see the nation defined in exclusion of the Russian-speaking minority. For Sergei the exclusion of Russian language from LTV1 is unfair but also an undisputed fact, while for Ansis it is unproblematic that the main channel of LTV should exclude the Russian language.

4.3.1 'We are Latvians'

In the eyes of Latvian-speakers it is a mission of LTV to project and preserve the cultural identity of the ethno-linguistic majority with the Latvian language seen as one of its central, if not the most important, elements. Because LTV broadcasts mainly in Latvian it supports the Latvian language, and, if LTV ceased to exist, 'we would face either Russification or Anglicising,' argued Līga, a 27-year-old Latvian-speaking secretary working at the local municipality (FG10), even though it is the commercial channels that constitute the bulk of her own daily viewing experiences. It is important for Latvian-speakers that LTV being 'national television' broadcasts only (or mainly) in Latvian and (more) Russian language on LTV is not welcome and, instead, perceived as constituting a threat to the imagined ideals of 'Latvianness'.

This is how Antonija, a 87-year-old retired Latvian-speaking woman (PFG1), reacted to the idea of introducing Russian-language programming on LTV1 currently broadcasting solely in Latvian:

I'm against it to start speaking in Russian on the first channel [LTV1]. There are already more channels in Russian language than in Latvian, if one looks at all channels we have. I'm against switching to Russian language also on the first channel [LTV1].

Against a backdrop of high presence of transnational Russian television in Latvia, LTV1 for Antonija seems to be the last bastion of television broadcasting in the Latvian language and, if one remembers the central role played by Latvian language in the formula of 'Latvianness', also one of the last bastions of 'Latvianness'. It is a kind of sacred space where it is even unthinkable to imagine introduction of the Russian language.

Anxiety and often even hostility towards the presence of the Russian language on LTV and in the public domain more generally should be seen as a response of Latvian-speakers to the privileged status of Russian language and suppression of Latvian language under Latvia's compulsory Russification during the Soviet era. Even today in independent Latvia with Latvian-speakers having the status of the ethno-linguistic majority it is these historical legacies continuing to shape attitudes of Latvian-speakers towards the Russian language whose presence in the public space, including the media, is

still often seen as an endangerment to Latvian language, and, indeed, also to the entire project of 'Latvianness'.

In the following extract Latvian-speaking students discuss a role of LTV in providing a sense of being (ethnic) Latvian (PFG2). Even if they are not among regular viewers of LTV, and its main channel LTV1 in particular, they still have a strong conviction that LTV should play a crucial role in reflecting and preserving 'Latvianness', conceived as a sum of cultural traditions defining what it means to be (ethnic) Latvian. For them, LTV should serve as a repository for cultural heritage of (ethnic) Latvians reminding them about their roots and allowing them to feel unique among other nations, something that should be handed on from one generation to another. It is a metaphor of an ethnographic museum that best characterizes perceptions of these students of a role LTV should play in the project of national imagination:

21-year-old Krista: LTV1 and LTV7 are those channels where we can watch Latvian [Soviet era] films. Albeit they are old ones, but nevertheless we can watch them. Now also the latest animation films by our film makers are on LTV1 and LTV7. Or, as I said it earlier, it is Christmas time and Easter that makes my associations with LTV. Easter, I think, is quite Latvian celebrations. With all the programmes, live broadcasts they have they [LTV] usually create such a festive mood [during the national celebrations]. Or the [Latvian] Song Festival, is usually broadcast on LTV1. The Song Festival is, indeed, Latvian tradition.

19-year-old Rūta: LTV showcases our identity. It is the same as, let's say, folk songs or something like that. It is something that shows that we are [ethnic] Latvians. [Commercial channels] LNT and TV3, they are more focused on those things that have more to do with foreign countries [more foreign production in their programming output, for instance]. It is LTV1 and LTV7 that shows that we are [ethnic] Latvians.

20-year-old Emīls: I agree. These are those channels [LTV1, LTV7] that show those fundamental values of [ethnic] Latvians. For instance, the Song Festival.

20-year-old Oskars: There should be such a television as LTV to preserve

our Latvian identity. We have our legend stories, our own folk songs, it is our Latvian heritage that we have. It is through broadcasts of the Song and Dance Festival, choral concerts LTV sustains Latvian identity.

20-year-old Matīss: If there would be no such broadcasts, then the youth... well, we, perhaps, will still know it, but our children, they will forget about it.

It is the traditional Latvian Song and Dance Festival at the heart of their definitions of 'Latvianness' that, in turn, LTV is expected to reflect and preserve for next generations. It is through broadcasts of the Song and Dance Festival LTV is most vividly producing that special 'we are [ethnic] Latvians' feeling my young Latvian-speaking informants were referring to. Taking place once every five years the weeklong festival brings together in the capital city of Riga amateur choirs and folk dance groups from all around Latvia and the Latvian diaspora abroad culminating with the Grand Finale concert at an open-air stage of a choir of thousands dressed in national costumes celebrating not so much a tradition of *a cappella* choral singing but more importantly national togetherness watched by large nationwide television audiences at home.

For Latvian-speakers, the Song and Dance Festival has always been one of the core elements of their sense of national belonging that, as they believe, is also an expression of a unique Latvian national character. Throughout its long history³⁷ the Song Festival has functioned as a unifying force making Latvian-speakers feel united and proud of themselves (even if it is only an idealized image of unity and pride about what is at stake and not much more), and this height of the spirit of national consciousness is all present during the live televised festival broadcasts on LTV making it in the eyes of its Latvian-speaking publics during these moments project of national imagination at its best, something its Russian-speaking publics have little interest in.³⁸

³⁷ The tradition of the Song and Dance Festival goes back to 1873 when Latvia was under the rule of Tsarist Russia, almost half a century before Latvia established independent statehood in 1918, and it has been preserved also during the long years of the Soviet occupation when despite the presence of Soviet ideology the Song festival turned into a manifestation of hidden national feelings and an act of symbolic resistance. As Lauristin and Vihalemm explain, the institution of national songfests in the Baltic countries 'was preserved by the Soviets as a demonstration of the multinational character of Soviet culture, but in reality served as a powerful expression of national identity and will for the cultural resistance' (2002:19).

³⁸ The Song Festival, and its representations on LTV, reflects the official government's conception of the nation defining the language and culture of the ethno-linguistic majority as its cementing materials, and while during the weeklong festival special concert with the participation of ethnic minority performers is organized, its overall focus is on preservation and promotion of traditional culture of the Latvian-speaking

Even if LTV is not among their favourite channels, many Latvian-speakers still call it ‘our television’. For 56-year-old Latvian-speaking farmer Dzintra (FG10), LTV is ‘our television’ namely because of its care for ‘Latvianness’. One such moment when LTV provides her with a sense of ‘Latvianness’ is during the annual midsummer festival on June 23 and 24, commonly described as the most loved national celebrations of Latvian-speakers, popular also among Russian-speakers. It is a time when LTV traditionally broadcasts special festive programming, including concerts of popular Latvian music, as well as home-grown film and theatre broadcasts. Because of its special programming it is a time when LTV1 is ‘people’s channel’ also for 46-year-old Latvian-speaking blue-collar worker Pēteris (FG10) who in his daily viewing practices has little interest in the offerings of LTV. As we shall see in Chapter 6, one of those rare moments when many otherwise non-loyal viewers of the public broadcaster LTV search for it is the time of the national celebrations.

Ingūna, a 59-year-old Latvian-speaking manager at the transport company (FG5), described LTV in affectionate terms: ‘20 years ago the first television of Latvia [LTV1] was, it was in my childhood, and somehow, nevertheless, it is our [television]’. It is ‘our’ LTV that has accompanied not only ‘our’ lives but most importantly the life of ‘our’ nation, and thus for many Latvian-speakers the very existence of Latvia is intrinsically linked with the existence of LTV. My older Latvian-speaking informants remembered the 1991 August coup when following the Soviet troops invasion of LTV it stopped its operations for two days. Attack on LTV was then seen as an attack on aspirations for independent statehood. Because it is ‘national (Latvian) television’, it is perceived to be ‘our’ television, and without ‘our’ LTV it is believed that there would be no ‘us’ and ‘our’ Latvia, even if the declared loyalty to LTV by its Latvian-speaking publics does not necessarily stretch to their daily viewing preferences.

4.3.2 Not at Home with the Public Television

As LTV broadcasts predominantly in Latvian and the overall visibility of Russian-speakers on the public television is low, Russian-speakers do not recognize themselves as being part of that image of the national community as conjured up by the public

majority, and therefore it should not come as a surprise that many Russian-speakers do not recognize the festival as part of their cultural identity and have little interest in it. In the 2013 *TNS Latvia* survey 44% of economically active population said they have not been following that year’s Song and Dance Festival events. Among them featured prominently ethnic minorities and those who speak in the family mainly a language other than Latvian. Also audience measurements show that only a small fraction of ethnic minority audiences have watched that year’s festival broadcasts on LTV1.

broadcaster and feel excluded from this version of the national family. It is their (Russian) language and culture³⁹, their favourite political figures⁴⁰, their attitudes, be it view of the Latvia's 20th century past divergent from the one Latvian-speakers share, for instance, and interests Russian-speakers do not find on LTV. In other words, they struggle to identify with that vision of the national communion as offered by the public television.

It is common among Russian-speaking audiences to think that they are not invited to be part of the national 'we' as imagined by LTV or, to paraphrase Morley (2000:118), they do not find LTV a homely and welcoming place. Not surprisingly then that many of my Russian-speaking respondents labelled LTV as 'Television of [ethnic] Latvians' instead of its official name saying that LTV is 'Television of Latvia'. It is a popular view among Russian-speakers to see LTV, and its main channel LTV1 particularly, as oriented towards only or mainly Latvian-speaking audiences. Also 37-year-old Latvian-speaking deputy school director Silvija (FG7) who comes from an ethnically mixed family using both the Latvian and Russian languages in her everyday communication thinks that it is only Latvian-speakers who can find offerings of LTV1 relevant. 'Watching the first television of Latvia [LTV1], I understand that I have to be [ethnic] Latvian to watch this television,' she said. It is a very clear signal of a feeling many Russian-speakers share of being denied membership in the national community as made by LTV, and especially LTV1. They feel not being invited to join the club, to speak metaphorically.

Because of some Russian-language programming on LTV7, second channel of LTV, or, as Nikolai, a 62-year-old retired Russian-speaking man (FG6), put it, because 'you can hear [on LTV7] more Russian language', some Russian-speaking participants argued that it is more in line with the public broadcasting ideals of addressing all members of the national communion than LTV1. Also Sergei, a 30-year-old Russian-speaking worker at the railway company (FG8), identified LTV7, and not LTV1, as a public service channel. It is because, contrary to LTV1 which he described as a state broadcaster, LTV7 'is oriented to a large part of the society, including Russian-speakers, and that is not unimportant in our country'. He explained: 'LTV1 is mainly in Latvian, there is no Russian [language] at all. There is Russian [language], but it is being translated. On LTV7

³⁹ It should be reminded here that Russian-speakers do not see the culture of the Latvian-speaking majority as their culture (see, for instance, Cheskin, 2013).

⁴⁰ The Latvian political scene has often been described as ethno-linguistically divided where Latvian-speakers vote for the so-called 'Latvian' political parties and the Russian-speaking electorate supports the so-called 'Russian' political parties.

there are programmes... even films and series are in Russian language'. It is also its more popular programming, less political information and more entertainment-oriented content, of LTV7 that makes him think that it, instead of LTV1, is a true public service channel in terms of providing diversity in its programming. 'There are a lot of programmes where politics are not present,' he described LTV7 to contrast it with LTV1.

Although in order to resist its hegemonic definition of the national 'we' that makes him feel marginalized Sergei, as many other Russian-speakers, has exited from LTV1, mainstream channel of LTV, he has chosen to stay with its second channel LTV7 to signal that for him the concept of the national community as offered by this channel with its, albeit still scarce, Russian-language output offering more space for the otherness is more acceptable than the one as formulated by LTV1. It is also important for him that the second channel of LTV prioritizing more light programming is less packed with politics. It makes LTV7 in his eyes different from LTV1 that for him is a state channel he associates with the distrusted country's political establishment. Here a distinction between 'the state broadcaster' LTV1 and 'the public (=popular) broadcaster' LTV7 helps him to explain his ignorance of LTV1 and preference for LTV7, viewing choices he makes that allow him to articulate his voice.

Many of my Russian-speaking informants argued that the national communion as constructed by LTV should be open to all members of the national population irrespective of their ethno-linguistic background⁴¹ reminding that 'not only [ethnic] Latvians live in Latvia,' to quote Anastasia, a 29-year-old Russian-speaking manager working at the bank (FG4), and that, as 25-year-old Russian-speaking municipality officer Elizaveta (FG7) put it, 'our country is multilingual'. We can look at these statements as a rejection of the official ethno-nationalistic definition of the national 'we' and a call for more inclusive rules of national membership. It is also a demand for re-imagination of

⁴¹ It is what Russian-speakers call 'latviitsy' (*латвийцы*), translated in Latvian as 'latvijieši', the term proposed by well-known Latvian poet Rainis back in the late 1920s. Russian-speakers utilize 'latviitsy' term as a civic (political) category encompassing all people living in Latvia, and distinguish it from an ethnic (cultural) label 'latishi' (*латиши*), or 'latvieši' in Latvian, used to identify ethnic Latvians. This distinction, while more or less accepted by Russian-speakers, is not popular among Latvian-speakers. For Latvian-speakers there is no one name to identify all Latvian nationals and, instead, different combinations of words such as 'inhabitants of Latvia' or 'people of Latvia', as the national 'we' is formulated in the Latvian Constitution, are utilized. In the everyday language, as well as in the official contexts, the term 'Latvians' is rarely used for the purposes to identify all people living in Latvia as for both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers it is the label excluding all those who do not consider themselves as ethnic Latvians. As such, 'Latvians' is first and foremost an ethnic, and only then, if at all, a national category. In sum, currently there is no agreement on the name of the national 'we' among both ethno-linguistic communities.

the current boundaries of the national communion as set by the public broadcaster LTV not restricting its membership to the ethno-linguistic majority and its language and culture and, instead, respecting ethno-linguistic diversity in the country and recognizing the ethno-linguistic minority and its language and culture as integral part of the fabric of the nation.

‘When you watch it, you have a feeling that there are no Russians in Latvia, no Russian-speakers, they simply do not exist, you simply do not notice them,’ 36-year-old Russian-speaking municipality officer Mikhail (FG7) pointed out to describe LTV1. The same sentiment was also expressed by Vyacheslav, a 32-year-old Russian-speaker working at his own construction company (FG4). For him, it is a presence of both the Latvian and the Russian language that could make him feel being at home within public broadcasting:

It should be as when a man switches [LTV] on [he does not] feel that... it is not for him at all but that he is welcome there as a viewer. Programmes where people speak their own language, some in Russian, some in Latvian. It is enjoyable to watch that kind of programmes; you feel that it unites. That is, it is meant for all. But when it is only [ethnic] Latvians about [ethnic] Latvians... [When watching LTV] you have a feeling that in Latvia only [ethnic] Latvians live, 100 percent [are ethnic Latvians], although it is not so. At least in [the capital city] Riga it is not so for sure.

As he does not feel invited to be part of the national family as imagined by the public television, he responds by not welcoming LTV into his family or we can also say that as he does not feel at home with LTV he responds by not letting LTV enter his home. It is this feeling he shares with many other of my Russian-speaking respondents of being an unwanted and not accepted ‘other’ left outside the national communion as defined by LTV that is at the heart of his rejection of the public television, which for him, as for many other Russian-speakers, is as a symbol of the hegemonic conception of the nation.

It was also 20-year-old Russian-speaking student Dmitry (FG2) who spoke about bilingual programming as bringing the nation together around television. As he put it, ‘common channel broadcasting in both Latvian and Russian could perhaps unite the society as people would see that actually problems for all are the same and there is no war to fight’. This is an important point as, here again, we can see a rejection of the

dominant ethno-nationalistic vision of the national community and a call for re-formulation of its membership rules. As this student suggests, it is not one (Latvian) language that will make national integrity possible but, instead, it is common everyday socio-economic realities affecting both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers equally that will bring the nation together around television. In short, he calls for re-imagination of the nation as bilingual community whose members share common everyday concerns. For him a nation seems to be first and foremost a political (civic) and only then cultural category.

‘It is important to provide subtitles [in Russian] so that members of all ethnic groups could take part [as audiences of LTV] because we all work, pay taxes for the [state] budget. The result is that we are excluded,’ argued Nikolai, a 62-year-old retired Russian-speaking man, Soviet era immigrant (FG6). He disqualified LTV as a public broadcaster since LTV, as he thinks, is oriented only towards Latvian-speaking viewers. ‘We live here, work, pay taxes,’ also pointed out Alla, a 62-year-old retired Russian-speaking woman who moved to Latvia from Russia in the early 1980s to become a school teacher and settled in the country (FG6), to stress her civic belonging to Latvia. It is civic elements (such as obligation to pay taxes) that are at the heart of her definition of the national ‘we’. ‘We are members of this society. We all live in this country,’ she said to argue that LTV should work in the interests of all members of the national communion, all who share a common home of Latvia, including those such as herself who prefer watching television in the Russian language. With a reference to pre-war Latvia she called for a more inclusive conception of the national community respecting the multiethnic and multilingual character of Latvian society: ‘We all live here. Half are Russians, half [ethnic] Latvians, and many other ethnic groups. In Latvia before the war there were three languages, German, Latvian and Russian, [people spoke in]’.

4.3.3 ‘Good’ Latvians and ‘Bad’ Russians

Igor, a 57-year-old unemployed Russian-speaking man (F1), thinks that LTV is oriented towards Latvian-speakers or, to quote him, ‘indigenous Latvians’ (*коренные латыши*), and for this reason, for him, LTV is not a public but a national broadcaster. He defines ‘public television’ as the one oriented towards the entire national population, while according to his definition of ‘national television’ it is such television that is aimed towards only part of the national public, the ethno-linguistic majority. In line with his conception of ‘the public’, it is ‘all people that are living here, in the territory of Latvia’

that constitutes ‘the public’, and for this reason he, as many other of my Russian-speaking informants, does not qualify LTV, especially its main channel LTV1, as a public broadcaster. As Igor thinks, it is only part of the public, Latvian-speakers, that LTV is serving. It is the ethno-nationalistic formulation of ‘the public’ dominating in LTV’s approach that conflicts with more open definition of ‘the public’ Igor has where territorial allegiance (all people living in Latvia) is prioritized over the ethno-linguistic markers of difference.

Igor, as well as other members of his family, watches very little LTV, mostly when live sports broadcasts are on offer on its second channel LTV7. Not surprisingly that both channels of LTV are adjusted as only ninth and tenth in a row on the remote control of their main television set situated in the living room of their flat in one of the standard block of flats in the capital city of Riga. The first channels in terms of Igor’s preference are the Baltic or international versions of all three federal Russian state-controlled channels.

It is the absence of Russian language on LTV that makes Igor think that LTV, and LTV1 in particular, ignores Russian-speakers. ‘40 percent are Russians living [in Latvia]. There [on LTV1] should be something in Russian language, as well. There is no Russian language at all,’ he argued to remind that the Russian-speaking minority is a large one and as such thinks about the rights it deserves – it was a recurrent line of argumentation in the responses of my Russian-speaking respondents. Because of dominance of the Latvian language on LTV1, its bias against Russians and because of ‘nationalism’ prevailing in its approach it is why main channel of LTV is ‘channel of [ethnic] Latvians’ also for his daughter, 27-year-old shop assistant Marina. As her father, she also thinks that LTV is ‘national television’. Her formulation of ‘nationalism’ as something that implies a special care for the ethno-linguistic majority and bad treatment of the ethno-linguistic minority helps to explain the dominant interpretation of the notion of ‘national television’ among my Russian-speaking informants. Many of them identified LTV as ‘national television’ because of it serving, as they believe, only, or mainly, in the interests of Latvian-speakers ignoring the interests of Russian-speakers. In other words, because of perceived dominance of nationalistic sentiments (see definition of ‘nationalism’ as provided by 27-year-old shop assistant Marina above) in its approach in defining the nation it is common for Russian-speaking viewers to label LTV as ‘national (=nationalistic) television’.

For Igor’s wife Anna, a 55-year old Russian-speaking hospital administrator, LTV1 is the

channel offering ‘nationally oriented political programmes’ with ‘nationally oriented’ here understood as ‘pro-Latvian’. Again we can see the same reading of the ‘nationalism’ concept, popular among Russian-speakers, as discussed above. In the eyes of Anna LTV news and current affairs are biased against the Russian-speaking minority, as well as against Russia: ‘Different points of view are not offered, only that all Russians are bad and all [ethnic] Latvians are good. [Vladimir] Putin [then prime minister of Russia] is threatening [Latvia] and the hand of Moscow is all around’.

Just as Anna, also many other of my Russian-speaking informants argued that LTV provides one-sided reporting of the national affairs promoting the position of what they see as the pro-Latvian power elite and neglecting alternative, oppositional voices. For instance, this is how LTV1 is described by 23-year-old Russian-speaking businessman Anton (FG7): ‘The first channel [LTV1], it is the first state channel. It is completely under [the control of] the government and do not say anything against it... There [on LTV1] is only one spectrum of opinion’.

Olga, a 31-year old Russian-speaking worker at the children and youth centre (FG4), explained what she thinks is the difference in reporting national politics on *Panorāma*, prime-time news on LTV1, and *Latviiskoe Vremya* (*Latvia’s Time*), national evening news on the Russian-language *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*, the Baltic version of Russian *Pervyi kanal*, the most popular channel among Russian-speaking audiences in Latvia:

Latvian Television [LTV], still, when looking for comments on some particular news in the first place will ask [ethnic] Latvian politicians to comment and then, if it concerns some Russian question, ethnic question, then they will invite some politician from the so-called ‘Russian’ political parties. Contrary, on Russian news, on *Latviiskoe Vremya*, the people to whom they will go first will be representatives of the Russian party that will comment on all topics. And [ethnic] Latvian politicians will be invited when it comes to a particular ministry, for instance, or some topic... such highly important topic.

As she has regular viewing experiences with both Latvian-language and Russian-language news media we can say that she is thinking across both linguistic news spaces, to borrow Robins and Aksoy’s formulation describing migrant experiences of thinking across cultural spaces (see Aksoy and Robins, 2000, 2003, Robins and Aksoy, 2001, 2006), and it

is this experience of moving across both Latvian-language and Russian-language news spaces that makes her aware of what she thinks are different realities as constructed by *Panorāma* and *Latviiskoe Vremya*. Though at first it may seem that she is making a distinction between *Panorāma* and *Latviiskoe Vremya*, in fact she is pointing to their identical practices of selection of news sources, only vice versa. As she thinks, both *Panorāma* and *Latviiskoe Vremya* prioritize their news sources along ethno-linguistic lines, and in this respect *Panorāma* and *Latviiskoe Vremya* are seen as equal.

4.3.4 'Our' Historical Interpretations Ignored

In one of my conversations with Anna, a 55-year old Russian-speaking hospital administrator (F1), she referred to the recent political debates on LTV1 where journalists and politicians discussed the controversial commemoration of the Latvian Legion on March 16 in the Latvian capital Riga. Each year supporters of the veterans and those condemning the Latvian Legion gather in the city centre in front of the Freedom Monument, a symbol of Latvian independence with the motto 'For the Fatherland and Freedom' inscribed in it, to defend each their own interpretations of the past.

Along with the celebrations of the Victory Day on May 9 each year a march of the veterans of the Latvian Legion on March 16 triggers tensions in the political circles, as well as in the media. Both dates, May 9 and March 16, illustrate conflicting collective memories of Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers each group having its own historical 'truths' (for further discussion on opposing social memories of both ethno-linguistic groups see Cheskin, 2012b, Golubeva, 2010, Kaprāns, Procevska, 2013, Kaprāns, Zelče, 2011, Muižnieks, Zelče, 2011, just to name few).⁴²

Preses klubs (*The Press Club*), a weekly political show on LTV1, was on air on the evening of that year's March 16, and Tatyana Zhdanok, a high-profile Russian-speaking politician in Latvia⁴³, was also invited to participate in it. On the same day Zhdanok was among

⁴² While for many Russian-speakers the veterans are war criminals who fought on the side of Nazi Germany in the Second World War, for many Latvian-speakers they are defenders of Latvia against the Soviet invasion. Similarly, while for many Russian-speakers the end of the Second World War is a victory of the Soviet army in the Great Patriotic War and liberation of Latvia from the Nazi Germany invaders celebrated each year on May 9, for many Latvian-speakers it is a return of the Red Army and a beginning of the second Soviet occupation of Latvia. What for some are liberators, for others are occupiers. Soviet troops invaded Latvia for the first time in 1940 but a year later were driven out by Nazi Germany. The Soviets returned in 1944 to stay for almost half a century till 1991.

⁴³ She is a former leader of the late 1980s International Front of Working People, an antithesis of the pro-independence movement Latvian Popular Front, and today a member of the European Parliament elected from Latvia.

those protesting against the march in front of the Freedom Monument. As expected, during the *Preses klubs* debate she questioned the popular narrative among Latvian-speakers portraying men fighting in the ranks of the Latvian Legion as freedom fighters who joined the Germans in the hope of protecting Latvia against the Soviet re-occupation. The annual march of the veterans is a glorification of Nazi atrocities, Zhdanok claimed and had been immediately interrupted by the host of the programme who argued that Zhdanok is not right in saying so and, instead, preferred to describe the march as a commemorative event. The overall tone of the *Preses klubs* debate was highly critical about the viewpoint expressed by Zhdanok and she, with her version of the past was left alone with her opponents, other politicians, as well as journalists, being in the majority.

‘No one listens to this opinion and takes it into account,’ Anna complained. It is important to note that it is not only the particular opinion of Zhdanok that has been ignored during the particular debate on LTV Anna is referring to. It is the voice of the Russian-speaking population generally that, as she thinks, is not being properly heard and respected in the public domain, including LTV. Because of an ignorant attitude towards the position of Zhdanok that Anna also shares she switched to another channel. In this way Anna protested against what she thinks is LTV’s dominating one-sided discourse of ‘we, good [ethnic] Latvians, they, bad Russians’.

Her exiting from the political show of the public broadcaster LTV is not a signal of Anna’s denial of citizenship, or lack of interest in the national politics. In fact, it was a very straightforward case of an exercise of citizenship. What she rejected was participation within that form of citizenship that she feels to be imposed on her. With ‘our’ interpretations of the national history, which conflicts with the official representations of the past, being dismissed on the *Preses klubs* debate Anna took a decision to walk away from LTV. It is a choice she made to voice her discontent with such form of citizenship as offered by the public broadcaster requiring her to accept the dominant conception of the national past.

Her withdrawal from LTV should be seen as a call for a respect of the historical narrative as shared by the Russian-speaking minority on the public broadcaster and more generally a claim for re-drawing of the lines of demarcation of the national communion as set by LTV. As Anna put it, LTV ‘should accept that here [in Latvia] live not only [ethnic] Latvians... Russians are living here in the third generation’, and added: ‘Otherwise it looks

like that Russians are unwanted [in Latvia]'. Her reference to the rootedness of Russians in Latvia is a very straightforward reminder of Russian-speakers belonging to the national 'we' to the same extent as Latvian-speakers and a call for more inclusive conception of the national community within the public television.

It is this perception, that the public broadcaster LTV reflects the official position of what is often seen among Russian-speakers as the pro-Latvian government and, more generally, that it gives priority to the world-view of the ethno-linguistic majority at the expense of alternative, oppositional views of the ethno-linguistic minority that alienates Russian-speakers from the public television.

Estonian researchers have reached similar conclusions to explain the lack of interest that young Estonian Russian-speakers with good knowledge of Estonian language have in the Estonian-language media (Vihalemm, Hogan-Brun, 2013b) suggesting that it is not so much the absence of Russian language *per se*, albeit crucial part of their cultural identity, as lack of visibility of Russian-speakers in their everyday normality, here and now, and, equally important, ignorance of their world-view on LTV what brings Russian-speaking viewers away from the public broadcaster. Here Russian language serves less as a mean of communication (majority of Russian-speakers do not have problems to understand Latvian) but more as a symbolic resource of representation. In other words, it is not so much Russian language they wish to hear on LTV itself as their voice being represented and respected in the public sphere as made by LTV.

4.4 The Channel of the Government

Although Latvian broadcasting law stipulates that LTV is a public service broadcasting institution, in the eyes of the publics which LTV is expected to serve according to the same law, it is more often seen as a state broadcaster, a servant of those in power. For many of my respondents, both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, LTV is a one-way top-down channel of communication in hands of the government of the day for it to address the society, inform about its decisions and even make the society better as part of broadcasting as an enlightenment project. To quote 45-year-old Latvian-speaking farmer Edgars (FG9), LTV is 'the official channel of information' that serves as a platform for the government to 'address the society' and 'express its official viewpoint'. Here LTV is perceived as the domain of the power elite where for its publics only the role of the object to be addressed, informed and educated by those in power has been allocated

signalling that more than two decades since the breakup of the Soviet empire footsteps of the Soviet era state broadcasting tradition are still much present in the way how its publics think about the ex-state broadcaster LTV.

For Ilona, a 35-year-old Russian-speaking head of the registry office (FG8), LTV1 is the channel ‘through which the government speaks’ with its people and where ‘the president makes his Christmas message’. On LTV1 information comes from the government, she explained. Also for 68-year-old retired Latvian-speaking woman Ilga (FG9) LTV1 is the channel where ‘our president congratulates us with the arrival of New Year’. For both Latvian-speaker Ilga and Russian-speaker Ilona, as for many other of my respondents, LTV1 is the channel where the country’s political leadership most often appears to address its people, express its viewpoint and explain its decisions, and it is what makes their perceptions of LTV as a state television, a broadcaster through which the government communicates with the society, a platform for the political elite to disseminate its messages to people.

4.4.1 The Property of the State

The image of LTV as a state broadcaster is not only a legacy of the Soviet past when the state owned, funded and controlled LTV served as a mouthpiece of the Communist Party; such a view on LTV continues to be sustained by the realities of today’s public broadcasting system with the annual state subsidy serving as a main source of income of LTV allocated by the government in the same way as to other state-funded institutions instead of direct public funding in a form of the licence fee payments or a media tax. In addition, scandals of (in)direct political pressure on the management of LTV to influence its editorial decisions from time to time entering the public domain support such a view. It all inevitably has left its mark on the way LTV’s publics look at the institution.

With reference to its funding model it was common for my informants, both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, to label LTV as ‘a state television’. Their line of argument was that as LTV is funded by the state it is a state broadcaster. In the words of 32-year-old Latvian-speaking construction worker Intars (F3), LTV is ‘the state channel’ (or ‘the state institution’, as he also described LTV) as ‘the state gives money to television... the state subsidizes [LTV]’. As a result, people do not feel as being owners of LTV. Instead, LTV is seen as ‘the property of the state’, to quote Intars. It is the government of the day or the power elite more generally seen as the owner of LTV and therefore often in the

eyes of its publics, and its Russian-speaking publics particularly, also perceived as keeping control over it. Here the argument goes that as it is the government that gives money to LTV it also controls its output.

To quote Tatyana, a 61-year-old Russian-speaking woman working with children at the school amateur theatre (FG6), ‘the boss [of LTV] is the one who pays for it’. ‘The first channel [LTV1] is a state channel, a political one. The political party that comes to power also financially supports this channel,’ she explained. For her, as it is those in power who provide LTV with money they also ‘command’ it, to speak in the words of Tatyana’s friend Valentina, a 76-year-old retired Russian-speaking woman (FG6).

The funding model of LTV also helps its publics to distinguish LTV from its commercial rivals. So, for many there are two types of television. First there is LTV, ‘the state television’, and then all the rest of broadcasters commonly termed as ‘commercial channels’. Public service television is a less familiar concept. ‘I understand that there is a state television, a commercial [television], but what is public television, that is something I do not understand,’ said Heinrihs, a 59-year-old Russian-speaking engineer (F2). ‘Public toilet, that’s what I understand but what is public television, that’s what I do not understand,’ he added jokingly. Although meant as a joke, it illuminates his struggle to comprehend the notion of public broadcasting.

Despite the fact that it is tax-payers money that is allocated to LTV through the annual state subsidy, in people’s minds it is still more often seen as a state-funded instead of tax-payers-funded broadcaster. While some participants of the study argued that since LTV is funded by tax-payers money it ‘should belong to the people’, to quote Sergei, a 30-year-old Russian-speaking worker at the railway company (FG8); however, as it is the government who decides how to spend tax-payers money and it is the government that gives money also to LTV, in their everyday life people do not feel as real owners of LTV. It is because of a deep-seated state/people dichotomy widespread in Latvian society.

It is typical for people in Latvia to make a sharp ‘us’ versus ‘them’ distinction between ‘the state’ and ‘the people’ where ‘the state’ represents the political elite, those in power but ‘the people’ stands for the public, the society. The definition of ‘the state’ as formulated by 23-year-old Russian-speaking businessman Anton (FG7) is a popular interpretation of this concept among my respondents, both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers. It is ‘the government, ministers, prime minister’ that for Anton implies

the notion of 'the state'. In everyday discourse it is common for people to detach themselves from 'the state', exclude themselves from being involved in its governance and thus also responsible for its failures, as well as the future of 'the state'.

Similarly, people do not feel in control over expenditure of their tax payments. As 48-year-old Russian-speaking municipality IT officer Viktor (FG8) concluded, 'we don't know where our taxes go'. It is not only the government deciding how tax-payers' money will be spent it is also tax-payers' money seen as something that in a way belongs to those in power, and this is the reason why in the eyes of its publics LTV, despite being a tax-payers funded organization, is more often perceived as not owned by 'the people', taxpayers, but as the property of 'the state', those in power, those who decide on the allocation of tax-payers' money.

4.4.2 New Parliament, New Director of Television

Over the last more than 20 years since the restoration of the country's independence LTV has experienced seven director generals and a number of acting leaders while a new one has been searched for. The fact that only one of its director generals so far has served his term fully while all others have either resigned or been fired as a result of a scandal serves as a striking evidence of constant political struggles that have surrounded this post. Scandals over the political pressuring of the management of LTV and meddling in its editorial decisions entering the public domain from time to time over all these years have inevitably left its footprint on the image of LTV among its publics. Even if editors and journalists of LTV have most often been successful in securing their editorial autonomy, regular clashes between the television and the power elite have made its publics question the political independence of LTV.

For instance, Daina, a 43-year-old Latvian-speaking director of the animal shelter (FG3), referred to the 2011 case of dismissal of Kārlis Streips, one of the star presenters of LTV, accused of using insulting language during his political debates show *Skats no malas* (*View From the Distance*) to describe one of the local political parties. The journalist himself and his supporters argued that this incident served just as a pretext and the decision of the then management of LTV to fire him was politically motivated. 'One says one word and immediately are sacked,' Daina said to signal her suspicion that this was another case of political pressuring on LTV.

In the same year Jānis Domburs, another big name journalist of LTV, presenter of its flagship weekly political discussion programme *Kas notiek Latvijā?* (*What Is Happening In Latvia?*), also left LTV when he and then LTV management failed to agree on the future conditions of their collaboration. As journalists disappeared, first Domburs and later Streips, so did their political shows.⁴⁴ In the following excerpt Jānis, a 27-year-old Latvian-speaking worker at the supermarket (FG3), reflects on the recent withdrawal of popular and, as he thinks, independent journalists:

In our country when new Saeima [the parliament of Latvia] comes then immediately after a new director of television [LTV] also comes or some other shifts [in posts] occur. Recently it has been very clear that those popular, influential journalists who have achieved something disappear from LTV.

4.4.3 Sit and Read as They Did It in the Soviet Times

It is also because of its perceived official tone LTV is often seen as a state television. Many of my respondents described the programming output and mode of address of LTV, especially its main channel LTV1, as serious, official and conservative contrasting it with what is seen as more relaxed, informal and more entertainment focused approach of its commercial rivals. They have noticed that, for instance, the news anchors on the commercial channels can afford to make jokes, they smile more often, something you will not see so often on *Panorāma*, the main newscast of LTV1. Here is what 39-year-old Latvian-speaking teaching assistant Gunta (PFG3) pointed out discussing the mode of address as employed by *Panorāma* news readers to suggest that being constrained in their on-screen behaviour may imply also limited editorial autonomy behind the screen:

[On *Panorāma*] like during the Soviet times announcers sat at a table, so they still sit there today. It's too dry. They somehow only read that information, those news, and they do not have any emotions, nothing. On other [commercial] channels they are allowed to express their emotions, they usually say something more from themselves. But there [on *Panorāma*] they only sit and read that information, and that's all. They [LTV] perhaps as a state television... they cannot afford to add something

⁴⁴ Following the change of LTV management and the appointment of a new director general in 2013 Streips with his show returned to LTV. Domburs, as noted earlier, started a new project on LNT channel, the commercial rival of LTV, in 2014.

from themselves.

So, the Soviet legacies (highly official, unemotional news reading of that time when radio and television announcers were not allowed to express their emotions and had to carefully follow the text earlier approved by the censors) and the mode of address of *Panorāma* today (more conservative news delivery style if compared with more relaxed approach of the commercial channels) have mixed together to make LTV in the eyes of some of its publics look as an official (state) channel.

4.4.4 To Punish the ‘pro-Latvian’ Government

More suspicious about LTV as a government funded, owned and also controlled broadcaster are its Russophone publics. While the belief that LTV as a state broadcaster offers the official world-view of the government is also common among Latvian-speakers, for Russophones LTV is not merely a state television, it is a television seen as representing the interests of what Russian-speakers like to call the pro-Latvian government.⁴⁵ For many of them LTV is part of the political establishment that in their eyes privilege the ethno-linguistic majority of Latvian-speakers, and for the same reason LTV is seen as an embodiment of what is perceived as unfair governmental policies towards the Russian-speaking community. No wonder then that their resentment against the government in the end turns into their abandonment of LTV.

By ignoring LTV, many Russophones protest against the way the government treats the Russian-speaking community – it is a protest against its perceived marginalization, othering and exclusion over the last more than 20 years (consider, for instance, the citizenship policy what many Russian-speakers believe is discriminatory) what 23-year-old Russian-speaking businessman Anton (FG7) described as ‘Latvia only for [ethnic] Latvians’ or, to quote 25-year-old Russian-speaking municipality officer Elizaveta (FG7), ‘supporting only Latvian language and [ethnic] Latvians’.

To put it another way, through the rejection of LTV, what they see as part of the centre of power, Russian-speakers punish the power elite for its attitudes towards the ethno-

⁴⁵ While the so-called ‘Russian’ political parties, popular among the Russian-speaking electorate, are in power in some municipalities – for instance, the mayor of the capital Riga is Russian-speaker Nil Ushakov, leader of the *Saskaņas centrs* (Harmony Centre) alliance, a highly popular political force among the Russian-speaking electorate; nevertheless, these so-called ‘Russian’ political parties are excluded from the power elite at the national level. Throughout over than two decades since the restoration of Latvia’s independence they have always been left outside the governing coalition and, as a rule, have been the main opposition in the parliament.

linguistic minority. It is dismissal of LTV that gives them voice. Choosing to watch other channels, namely their favourite transnational Russian television, instead of the public broadcaster LTV Russian-speaking audiences communicate their disagreement with the hegemonic concept of the national 'we'. It is an act of resistance and at the same time a call for recognition. In other words, employment of the exit mechanism allows them to realize the voice option. It is a political statement Russian-speakers are making by exiting from LTV.

These sentiments among the Russian-speaking publics of LTV may explain the results of the 2012 *TNS Latvia* survey, according to which members of ethnic minority groups compared to ethnic Latvians were more convinced that LTV is a state television instead of being a public broadcaster. While 15.1% of ethnic Latvians and 9% of ethnic minorities strongly agreed that LTV is a public service television and it operates in the interests of the entire society, 22.8% of ethnic Latvians and 33.2% of ethnic minorities strongly agreed that LTV is a state broadcaster and it operates in the interests of the ruling political forces. Overall, people in Latvia are more convinced that LTV is a state channel than a public broadcaster. 27.1% of all respondents in the same survey strongly agreed that LTV is a state broadcaster and only 12.6% were strongly convinced that it is a public television. Interestingly, some claimed that LTV is both a public channel and a state broadcaster at the same time signalling that in the eyes of some of its publics identity of LTV is blurred and can involve elements of serving both the public and the political leadership at the same time.

4.4.5 The Government Makes PR

For many Russian-speakers, and some Latvian-speakers, as well, it is also their daily experiences with state-controlled Russian television that shapes their perceptions of LTV. As some of them argued, while *Pervyi kanal*, and its Baltic version *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*, is the official channel of Russia reflecting the official world-view of Kremlin, LTV1 is the official channel of Latvia offering the official world-view of the Latvian government. Some have even noticed that logos of LTV1 and *Pervyi kanal* depicting number '1' that symbolizes their status of being historically the country's first channels are similar, and due to the same historical reasons – both LTV and *Pervyi kanal* are the former Soviet state broadcasters – in the eyes of audiences, and not only for Russian-speaking viewers, the status of being the country's first channel is intrinsically linked with their memories of state broadcasting.

It is both *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* and LTV 36-year-old Russian-speaking municipality officer Mikhail (FG7) described as ‘the official mouthpiece of the government’. While *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* is ‘the official channel of Russia’ representing ‘the point of view of [Dmitry] Medvedev [then president of Russia] and [Vladimir] Putin [then prime minister of Russia]’, LTV1 is ‘the official channel of the government [of Latvia]’. To quote Mikhail, ‘the government makes PR for itself. Here, on *Pervyi Baltiiskii* [channel], it is Medvedev and Putin, here [on LTV1], [it is] the government of Latvia’. As many other of my Russian-speaking informants, he also believes that LTV provides ‘the official position of the state’. As he explained,

All the rest of the channels, they, as far as I know, are commercial and their editorial line is set by their owners. That’s normal when the owner sets editorial line of the channel. It is clear that the Latvian state is the owner of these channels [LTV1, LTV7] and therefore they focus on the viewpoint of the state. All the rest of the channels, they have their own position.

Mikhail is not alone holding such a view on the way the media operates in the country. There is a shared sense among both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers that such thing as independent media in Latvia does not exist. Owners of the media, if not all than at least a large part of them, are believed to exercise control over their media outlets with the only difference between LTV and its commercial rivals that in the case of LTV it is the government seen as the owner. Disbelief in the existence of independent media should come as no surprise given the fact that limited editorial autonomy and missing transparency of media ownership, especially when it comes to the daily press, have become the idiosyncrasies of the Latvian media system (for an overview see Juzefovics, 2011, Salovaara and Juzefovics, 2012).

4.5 Protest Against Those in Power

According to regular opinion polls, politicians and political institutions in Latvia are highly distrusted⁴⁶ and people like to say that they have little interest in the country’s

⁴⁶ According to regular *Eurobarometer* surveys, Latvia has one of the lowest levels of trust in the political elite in the European Union. In the 2013 survey only 21% said that they do trust the government, those who said they trust the parliament were 17% and 6% expressed trust in the political parties, and, what is more, opinion polls also show that members of the ethno-linguistic minority tend to trust the government and the parliament less than members of the Latvian-speaking majority (see, for instance, Rozenvalds, 2005).

political life.⁴⁷ It is common for people to speak about politics, understood here as formal politics exercised by the political elite, as a sphere out of their interest and impact – yet, it does not necessarily mean that they do not care about what is happening in the life of the nation. All these sentiments, nevertheless, are reflected in their responses towards LTV. By rejecting what many believe is the state broadcaster LTV, understood as a government funded and owned (and, as many of my respondents would also add, controlled) institution, its publics register their protest against the country's political elite, usually being blamed for all the socio-economic hardships people experience in their everyday lives affecting both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers more or less equally (see, for instance, studies of Hazans, 2010, Rajevska, 2010). In short, publics of LTV protest against the distrusted power elite by exiting from LTV, what they see as part of the same elite or at least having close ties with it.

It was typical for my respondents to claim that LTV's programming, and that of its main channel LTV1 in particular, is overloaded with political information. There were two words – 'politics' and 'politicized' – that my informants repeatedly referred to when describing their associations with LTV1.⁴⁸ Anda, a 47-year-old Latvian-speaking specialist working at the local culture house (FG10), is among those who watch LTV1 hardly ever. It is because, as she argues, 'there [on LTV1] is only politics'. It is with the news from Saeima, the Latvian parliament, LTV1 associates also for 20-year-old Latvian-speaking student Lauma (PFG2): 'All those news always are coming from there, it is full of politicians, all news are with them'.

For many it is only the pre-election period when they have a high interest in the country's political life, and for many of my informants, both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, pre-election political broadcasts are one of the rare experiences they have with the main channel of LTV. It is a time when audiences, even those who otherwise have little interest in politics, search for political information, and as in the eyes of many LTV1 is first and foremost a source of the political news it is LTV1 they most often search for as elections are approaching. However, as soon as elections are over many straight after experience disenchantment with those they have just elected, and for this reason also lose their interest in politics on LTV1. As quickly as they have joined LTV audiences shortly

⁴⁷ In the 2012 *TNS Latvia* survey only 18.1% said that they have high interest in national political affairs.

⁴⁸ It should be explained already at this point that 'politicization' here implies not only perceived high volumes of the political news on the public television but also what is believed to be one-sided perspective (from the positions of the government) on the country's political life dominating on LTV, the view more widespread among Russian-speaking viewers.

before the elections, so quickly they exit from LTV when the elections are over.

23-year-old Russian-speaking businessman Anton (FG7) was among those watching political debates on LTV1 prior to the 2011 early general elections, and it was also for him his latest experience of being among those watching LTV1. He wanted to see how the *Saskaņas centrs* alliance, the political force he supports, will perform on debates. Anton also remembered watching LTV1, and hence being part of the national community as made by LTV, on one of the Saturday nights of May earlier the same year when during a live televised address to the nation then president of Latvia Valdis Zatlers announced a referendum on dissolving the parliament that later became one of the most watched programmes on television that year gathering also sizeable Russian-speaking audiences:

When I saw information on the internet, on *rus.Delfi.lv* [the Russian-language version of *Delfi*, the most popular news site in Latvia] that Zatlers will make a speech on the Latvian channel [LTV1] and most likely will announce dissolving of the Saeima [the parliament of Latvia]... It was the first channel [LTV1] I watched. Because where else will I see it?

Though in his daily viewing experiences he ignores LTV, and its main channel LTV1 in particular, during the crucial moments of the national life he comes back to the public broadcaster. This time it was not only the significance of the event itself but also the fact that only LTV1 broadcasted president's announcement to the nation what made him, otherwise typical non-loyal viewer of LTV1, to re-enter this channel. It also suggests that while being only occasional viewer of the political news on the public television, he has not lost his interest in the national politics. It is *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* his daily source of national news.

Although many of my respondents complained of LTV because of its, as they think, being overloaded with political information, it is not so much high volumes of the political news itself that make its publics reject LTV, and its main channel LTV1 in particular. Instead, it is the problematic relationship, full of suspicion between the country's political elite and the society that alienates its publics from LTV. Many protest against the power elite by exiting from LTV. They ignore political information as offered by LTV, for they distrust the political leadership that, as they think, not only so often appears on LTV but also owns, funds and, as many also believe, controls it. To put it

another way, abandonment of LTV should be seen as an expression of protest on the part of its publics against those in power.

Many of my Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking respondents were highly critical about the country's political elite and spoke about their deep distrust of the power elite and their disillusionment with the ruling politicians. 'Sometimes you cannot stand it. You wish to switch to another channel to watch something positive,' Valentina, a 76-year-old retired Russian-speaking woman (FG6), reflected on her experience of from time to time watching popular weekly political debates show *Kas notiek Latvijā?* (*What Is Happening In Latvia?*) on LTV1. Though many of my informants, including non-loyal publics of LTV, namely young people and Russian-speakers, said that they had watched *Kas notiek Latvijā?* now and then, they also admitted that later they had lost their interest in the show as it did not have any tangible impact on the real life politics. *Kas notiek Latvijā?* was on air on Wednesday nights from 2001 till 2011 with its viewing figures declining steadily over the last years. So, we can conclude that by exiting from *Kas notiek Latvijā?* many voiced their protest against the power elite, whose members over the years have been regular guests of *Kas notiek Latvijā?* debates. To quote Valentina explaining her dislike and distrust of the country's political elite and therefore also the little interest she has in political information as offered by LTV, 'you do not want to see and hear them [politicians]'. Though critical about the political elite, she, as others, is not indifferent to what is happening in Latvia, to borrow the title of the LTV's political debates show. She is a regular viewer of national news on television, most often on her much-loved *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*.

As many distrust those in power they also distrust LTV what is believed to be funded, owned and even controlled by the same political class they distrust so much and blame for all the hardships and wrongdoings. These sentiments are especially widespread among the Russophones, albeit not totally absent from the responses of my Latvian-speaking respondents. As already noted before, its Russian-speaking publics are more convinced that LTV is a state broadcaster operating in the interests of the ruling political elite. In the eyes of many of my Russian-speaking informants LTV is not merely a governmental channel but is seen as part of the political establishment what many Russian-speakers like to describe as pro-Latvian. Therefore, it is no wonder then that their lack of confidence in the government reflects into their distrust of LTV and its dismissal at the end of the day. As 23-year-old Russian-speaking businessman Anton

(FG7) put it, ‘if I do not trust the owner of the shop, then I would not buy anything from him’. Like for many other Russian-speaking viewers, it is also for him the government who is the owner and boss of LTV.

The fact that the daily prime-time news on the commercial channels, also devoting much of their airtime to the coverage of national politics, gather sizeable audiences with their viewing figures outnumbering ratings of LTV1’s *Panorāma* signals that audiences, by rejecting political information on the public broadcaster LTV, do not necessarily exit from politics completely. For the majority of my respondents the evening news on their favourite channel, be it one of the national commercial channels for Latvian-speakers or localized transnational *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* for Russian-speakers, is enough daily dose of the political news, and only small minority is searching for more politics on television, mainly older generations.

Popularity of the news on these commercial channels also suggests that an exercise of citizenship is not necessarily linked with public broadcasting institutions. As viewing practices of my informants indicate, rejection of the political news on the public television does not necessarily imply abandoning of the citizen role on the part of its non-loyal publics. There is not only less politics on the commercial channels (LTV provides more current affairs output offering political information than its commercial competitors), what is more, political information here is presented in less official tone and is squeezed in-between light programming. Besides, though not necessarily seen as politically independent as some owners of the commercial channels have been accused of having close ties with particular local political forces, contrary to LTV these channels are free from those suspicions what the image of a state broadcaster brings along. There is a difference to be seen as serving the interests of a particular political party or serving the interests of the entire power elite. Though they may not be seen as politically independent, nevertheless, these commercial channels contrary to LTV are still seen as independent from the state where ‘the state’ implies the entire political establishment or all those in power more generally. It all makes politics on the public broadcaster LTV in the eyes of its publics look different from politics on its commercial rivals.

4.5.1 Psychic Challenge Wins

If the family of 51-year-old Latvian-speaking dairy farmer Sarmīte (F3), living in the countryside in western Latvia, had to choose between the weekly political debates

Sastrēgumstunda (*Rush Hour*), the successor of *Kas notiek Latvijā?* (*What Is Happening In Latvia?*), on the public broadcaster LTV1 or Russian reality show *Bitva ekstrasensov* (*Psychic Challenge*) on the commercial channel TV3 under the Latvian title *Ekstrasensu cīņas*, both part of the Wednesday night slot and on air almost at the same time, priority will be given to *Ekstrasensu cīņas*. It is the last minutes of *Sastrēgumstunda* they sometimes watch when *Ekstrasensu cīņas* is already over. In addition to TV3 it is also its Russian-language sister channel 3+, as well as Russian REN TV offering *Bitva ekstrasensov*, highly popular show in many families of both ethno-linguistic communities.

Apart from the older generation, especially Sarmīte's 80-year-old father Zigurds, called in the family as 'our politician', no one else has great interest in politics. The older generation is also the most devoted audiences of LTV in this family, and of its main channel LTV1 in particular. During my visits to the family in the main living room where Marta, Sarmīte's 30-year-old daughter, manager of debtors, with her family lives, and often also Sarmīte comes along to watch television throughout an entire evening, they were mostly watching the commercial TV3, their most favourite channel. At the same time next door in the room of Sarmīte's mother, 78-year-old Lidija, LTV1 was usually switched on. It is Lidija's favourite channel or, as she put it, the 'main channel' for her. 'My first channel,' she described LTV1 stressing the central role it plays in her everyday viewing practices and the strong emotional attachment she feels towards it. It is daily news, as well as several weekly political debates among her favourite shows on LTV1.

As a rule, on weekday evenings it is national soap opera *UgunsGrēks* (*FireSin*) on their much-loved TV3 that the majority of the family members are watching in Marta's living room while Lidija alone in her room at the same time is watching *Panorāma* on LTV1. Both programmes are on air during the same time slot. They all are passionate viewers of *UgunsGrēks*, including the family's men. They follow its latest developments carefully and try not to miss any of its episodes. 'Leons starts,' during one of my visits announced Marta's little daughter Elīza. Leons is a name of one of *UgunsGrēks* main characters, and it is Leons, instead of *UgunsGrēks*, she calls the soap opera. It was 8.20 pm and the latest *UgunsGrēks* episode was just started on TV3. Marta's little daughter made herself comfortable in front of their TV set and watched *UgunsGrēks* attentively during the next half an hour.

When her daughter Sarmīte each evening for a few minutes visits Lidija to take her blood pressure, usually it coincides with the time when *Panorāma* is on air, and it is some of the

rare regular experiences Sarmīte has with LTV1. It is a typical situation of Lidija sitting in her bed and Sarmīte next to her doing health checking procedures, and both chatting and watching *Panorāma* at the same time. ‘If there is something interesting [on *Panorāma*], I stay longer,’ explained Sarmīte. If not Lidija’s high interest in LTV1, Sarmīte would have even less experience with the main channel of the public television. Also in other Latvian-speaking families it is the older generation sustaining ties, albeit quite fragile and sporadic, between the public broadcaster LTV, and LTV1 particularly, and its non-loyal publics.

Yet, despite the great appetite of the majority of the family members for entertainment on the commercial channels they have not exited from national politics completely. It is the evening news on their favourite TV3 channel they watch day in day out signalling that their dislike of the political elite and rejection of political information on the public broadcaster does not necessarily signal their total lack of interest in the national politics. On TV3 its daily prime-time newscast is squeezed in-between their favourite infotainment news show *Bez tabu* (*No Taboo*) on one side and their much-loved soap opera *UgunsGrēks* on the other making politics on the commercial TV3 look in a way more tolerable than the same political news on the public broadcaster LTV. Because on the commercial channels politics, presented in more relaxed manner than it is in the case of the public television and squeezed in-between entertainment offerings, are made to look more attractive and hence more accessible to audiences, it is primarily through commercial broadcasting members of this family exercise the role of a citizen. Though dismissing political information on the public broadcaster, they are no ‘less citizens’. It is escapism from the everyday socio-economic hardships commercial broadcasting is so successful in providing the family members with. Nevertheless, escapism has not killed their interest in national politics completely. Besides, apart from television they also have other sources of political information. For instance, Sarmīte has a morning ritual to go over the latest news on internet news sites.

4.5.2 Bread and Circuses

For many of my informants, both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, television is first and foremost a source of entertainment offering pleasure and relaxation and, what is also important, escape from the harsh day-to-day socio-economic realities. Yet, as already noted earlier, escapism from the daily miseries through entertainment on television does not necessarily conflict with an exercise of citizenship in the same way as the consumer

role of audiences does not necessarily oppress the role of a citizen, and popularity of daily news and weekly current affairs on all channels is a case in point. Even if it is the news outside the public television they like more, it does not make audiences 'less citizens'.

What in the eyes of many of my respondents are serious, official and conservative output and mode of address of the public broadcaster LTV conflict with their expectations to escape from the day-to-day realities with a help of television. Instead, it is the commercial channels prioritizing popular content and more relaxed approach that are deemed better at addressing these sentiments of audiences or, to quote Elena, a 45-year-old unemployed Russian-speaking woman (FG7), more successful in providing the 'positive emotions' they are searching for on television. The regular audience ratings show that apart from daily news and weekly current affairs it is all sorts of entertainment offerings attracting the largest television audiences in the country. Even if viewers themselves do not judge such content as something of high value and quality and are quite self-critical about their viewing choices; nevertheless, the fact remains that it is the content their viewing preferences often go for.

Also 36-year-old Russian-speaking municipality officer Mikhail (FG7) thinks that television first of all should provide entertainment and relaxation. 'When you come back from work, you wish to switch on [TV] and leave everything behind,' he said. It is also 31-year-old Latvian-speaking civil servant Agita (FG9) who is searching on television gratification of the same desires: 'Sometimes you just wish to unbend your mind. You come back from work, you don't want to... [watch political programmes], you prefer watching *UgunsGrēks*, something that kind of'.

'You do not wish to strain your brains,' said 48-year-old Russian-speaking municipality IT officer Viktor (FG8) explaining his lack of interest in what he characterised as 'serious' programming of LTV. 'People are not interested in dull television. They are interested in bread and circuses,' he pointed out. Although his description of television audiences is not flattering at all, to say the least, he stresses what seems to be a highly important role television is playing in the everyday lives of many of my informants, namely diverting their attention away from day-to-day hardships they face. Yet, as we have seen, the search for 'bread and circuses' on television, as municipality IT officer Viktor put it, has not made audiences apathetic about the life of the nation. They may dislike the country's ruling politicians but they are not therefore indifferent to the state of

affairs in the country.

4.5.3 'They All Lie'

The public broadcaster LTV is not among the favourite channels also in the family of 54-year-old Latvian-speaker Māra (F2) working as an accountant at the state archive and living in the capital city of Riga. While the main language in their family is Latvian, they also use Russian as her husband, 59-year-old engineer Heinrihs, is a Russian-speaking ethnic German – Heinrihs came to study in Riga in the early 1970s from Kazakhstan, then one of the Soviet republics, where he was born after his parents, German emigrants, were deported there from Ukraine by the Soviet regime in the early 1940s.

As many other Latvian families, they also cope with everyday socio-economic hardships and blame local politicians, and these sentiments also help to understand the abandonment of LTV in their family. They think it is better to ignore political programmes on television as the negative flow of information makes you feel stressed and depressed. It is the reason why they prefer watching their favourite dining show *Zvani uzhin* (*Come Dine With Me*) on one of the Russian channels instead of watching the evening news broadcasted at the same time on the national channels. 'Better not to worry,' Māra said.

'Politics annoys me,' Māra complained. As there are no positive changes on the political scene and to the way things are done in the country, Māra thinks that 'it makes no sense having these [political] debates' on television, and therefore, for Māra and other members of her family, political programmes on LTV are just tootling. 'It's babbling. Hate that kind of programmes,' said their oldest daughter, 26-year-old civil servant Dace working at the ministry. It is their deep distrust of the country's political elite that makes them also highly sceptical about political debates on television. As Heinrihs noted, politicians do not tell the truth on these programmes, so there is no need to watch them. 'Anyway they will tell lies,' he said.

When popular weekly political debates *Kas notiek Latvijā?* (*What Is Happening In Latvia?*) first appeared on LTV in the early 2000s Māra was among its regular viewers but later lost her interest in it, for, as she believes, the programme did not have any influence on the ways things are done in the political circles. Māra thinks programmes such as *Kas notiek Latvijā?* is just 'senseless talking'. Stop watching *Kas notiek Latvijā?*, and abandoning

LTV more generally, Māra, as other members of her family, has employed an exit option as a voice mechanism to register their protest against the power elite.

It is not only those in power it is also journalists of LTV they do not trust. For Heinrihs, LTV is a state broadcaster and its main news programme *Panorāma* 'very official'. As he thinks, journalists of *Panorāma*, like politicians it shows, do not tell the truth. He believes that *Panorāma* continues to serve the interests of the government and that censorship still exists just as during the Soviet times. They show only what the government likes, Heinrihs argued. For him, there is no difference between how LTV and state-controlled Russian television he is watching regularly is operating. As for many other Russian-speakers, keen viewers of Russian television, also for Heinrihs it is not only his some distant memories of the Soviet era state broadcasting but his actual experiences with Russian state-controlled channels what shapes his perceptions of LTV as a state broadcasting organization.

Māra works at the state archive receiving a low salary and, as many employees of state-funded institutions, experiences difficulties to make both ends meet and this has led to her overall resentment and anger towards those in power. Māra and other members of her family are highly critical about the government and power elite in general. During all my visits Māra, her mother, 81-year-old Bronislava, and Māra's husband Heinrihs complained about the wrongdoings of the country's political elite over the past 20 years of independent Latvia. There were no such conversations we had when they would not have criticized those in power. Yet, to be able to criticize the power elite they have to be in touch with the political news. Indeed, despite their dislike of politicians and rejection of political information on television, they still are well informed about national politics. Radio, the internet, colleagues at work constitute important sources of national news for them.

As others, they too are disappointed with the country's path of development since the restoration of independence in 1991 and have a long list of failures Latvia has experienced during these years they blame the political class for. It is politicians, the current political leadership, as well as former prime ministers and presidents of the country, they characterised as incompetent, dishonest, corrupted, liars, squanderers, and so forth. 'While we have to save money, those in power squander it', Māra complained during one of our conversations. 'Our own Latvians have robbed us,' she said. 'Gang of thieves,' added Heinrihs to describe those in power.

To voice their protest against the ruling politicians they have opted to exit from the public broadcaster LTV what for them is a state channel representing interests of the power elite they blame for their daily miseries. At the same time, it is not a denial of citizenship. They have found different ways to participate in the life of the nation outside the public television. Their critical stance itself is a signal of their interest in the national affairs. Whilst being critical they are not indifferent.

4.6 Conclusion

The lack of a strong public broadcasting tradition in Latvia (at least in terms of weak public broadcasting institutions) accompanied with a wide choice of alternative offerings (national commercial channels broadcasting in both Latvian and Russian, plus high presence of transnational Western and Russian television) makes exit from the country's public service television institution LTV easy. The massive exodus of audiences LTV has experienced over the last more than 20 years since the restoration of independent Latvia and arrival of first commercial broadcasters at first glance may look as a fiasco of plans to introduce Western-style public broadcasting in the post-Communist world and a denial of citizenship on the part of post-Communist audiences. However, to judge loyalty of post-Communist audiences towards public broadcasting the idea of public broadcasting (public broadcasting as a set of values) should be detached from the public broadcasting institutions (public broadcasting as an institutional embodiment).

Though many have withdrawn from the public broadcaster LTV, it does not mean that they have also rejected public broadcasting as a common good as such. There is a consensus among various publics of the Latvian public television LTV that the idea of public broadcasting should be about delivering a public good. Yet, they do not necessarily associate these ideals with LTV, the current *de jure* institutional embodiment of public broadcasting in their country. In other words, rejection of the public broadcasting organization does not automatically imply exiting from the normative ideals its publics attach to the idea of public broadcasting. As responses of my respondents suggest it, at least at a normative level these ideals are recognized, accepted and valued.

The crisis of Central and Eastern European public broadcasting institutions should not automatically be linked to the crisis of public broadcasting values in these post-Communist countries. As we have seen in the Latvian case, migration from the public service television to its commercial rivals, be they national or localized transnational

Russian television, does not equate to abandonment of the public broadcasting ideals and a rejection of the role of citizen. As the viewing practices of my informants suggest, citizenship is not necessarily linked with institutions of public broadcasting and can be realized as well within commercial broadcasting organizations.

Given that the commercial broadcasters in Latvia have emulated some of the programming strategies more often associated with the public broadcasting tradition, it came as no surprise to find out that many of my informants mixed the public broadcaster LTV with its commercial competitors and even judged them as more successful in implementing some of the public broadcasting ideals into practice. Yet, this is not to say that they see commercial broadcasting as the fulfilment of the normative public broadcasting principles. It only implies that they see the country's commercial broadcasters being able, to a greater or lesser extent, replace the public television by law LTV but not necessarily the entire idea of public broadcasting.

Despite the fact that rejection of and withdrawal from the public broadcaster LTV at first may look as merely a typical case of an exercise of the consumer exit, in fact it signals an employment of the citizen voice. We can treat exiting from LTV as a voice-type response of its publics with an exit strategy here serving as a voice mechanism for the expression of a protest.

First, exodus from LTV can be seen as a protest against the country's political establishment. In the eyes of its publics, LTV is often seen as a state broadcaster, which serves as a communication channel between the powerful and ordinary people and, what is more, operates in the interests of those in power, the view more popular among its Russian-speaking publics. My informants placed LTV in the domain of the state, understood first and foremost as the realm of the political elite, instead of identifying LTV as constituting the public sphere independent from the power elite. Through their exit from LTV its publics manifest their mistrust and suspicion towards the political establishment whose interests, as many think, LTV represents. In short, it is their dislike towards the ruling politicians what explains their alienation from the public television, and its main channel LTV1 in particular, seen as a symbol of the power elite discourse, and not their lack of interest in the national life and giving up of a citizen role.

Second, for its Russian-speaking publics LTV is not merely a state broadcaster, it is a broadcaster seen as representing the official world-view of what they like to call the pro-

Latvian government, and the world-view of the ethno-linguistic majority more generally. Hence exit from LTV for its Russophone publics is also marking their protest against what they think is their exclusion from that version of the national 'we' as conjured up by LTV, an echo of the hegemonic national imaginary. It is low presence of Russian language and low visibility of Russian-speakers on LTV what makes its Russian-speaking publics to think that they are not invited to join the national communion as made by LTV, the reason why for its Russian-speaking publics LTV is 'national(=nationalistic) television', the concept applied also by its Latvian-speaking publics, though with different connotations attached to it. We can look at the abandonment of public television as a form of resistance employed by Russophones to the way LTV represents the national community contrary to Latvian-speakers who do not find such projection of the national 'we' problematic. It is obvious for Latvian-speakers as members of the ethno-linguistic majority that LTV should prioritize their language and culture. In other words, through their ignorance of LTV its Russian-speaking publics articulate their disagreement with the dominant (=LTV's=the government's) ethno-nationalistic concept of the nation where the language and culture of the ethno-linguistic majority is conceived as the core elements of national imagination and national integration. It is also at the same time a call for a more inclusive conception of the nation where more prominent position would be given to that version of the national identity, culture and past as shared by the ethno-linguistic minority.

Chapter 5

Television News Preferences and a Sense of Belonging: the Case of *Panorāma* and *Vremya*⁴⁹

5.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is the interplay between news media preferences and broader sentiments and identity formation processes among the Russian-speaking minority. Drawing on the case study of two long running prime-time news programmes – Latvian-language *Panorāma* (*Panorama*) and Russian-language *Vremya* (*Time*) – this chapter demonstrates that more than 20 years after the collapse of the Soviet empire the mark of the Soviet era divisions in television news consumption patterns among both ethno-linguistic groups, Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, is still very much in place.

The fact that Latvian-speakers, that is, the ethno-linguistic majority, and the Russian-speaking minority differ in their media consumption habits has often been used as one of the core arguments in favour of the idea of the coexistence of two parallel ‘information spaces’, to use this rather vague but popular among local political circles concept, in Latvia that, in turn, has often been perceived as constituting a threat to national integrity and even national security. From this point of view, the preference of Russian-speaking audiences for news in the Russian language, including those offered by transnational Russian television, is seen as evidence of not only their withdrawal from the national news space but also of their alienation from and even disloyalty to Latvia and identification with, and allegiance to Russia. As I demonstrate later, this view is a simplification of a far more complex and nuanced reality.

Neither the Russian-speaking community itself is homogeneous, nor are its viewing preferences uniform and, as we shall see, different sub-groups of the Russian-speaking audiences with notable variations in their news media practices can be identified. Likewise, Russian-speaking audiences are not passive and vulnerable media users uncritically accepting messages of Russian television as it has often been claimed by the Latvian political elite. Instead, diverse news consumption patterns, as well as diverse readings of news messages of Russian television can be found among different

⁴⁹ Some sections of the chapter have been earlier published in Juzefovičs (2012, 2013).

generations of Russian-speaking audiences. Rejection of news offerings of the public broadcaster LTV and popularity of the news on transnational Russian television among these audiences automatically does lead neither to their lack of interest in the national news flow and alienation of the Russophones from Latvia nor to their uncritical acceptance of the news discourse as offered by Russian state-controlled channels. While older Russian-speakers, the majority of them first-generation Soviet era immigrants, combine their interest in both the national and Russian news agenda, their offspring, young Russian-speakers, have not only little interest in life in Russia but also are highly critical about it and its representations on Russian television.

5.2 Empire Collapsed, *Panorāma* and *Vremya* Survived

During the Soviet era two prime-time television news programmes were on offer in Latvia – Latvian-language *Panorāma* on LTV, which then was a typical state broadcaster of the kind every Soviet republic had, and Russian-language *Vremya* on the Soviet Central Television, available throughout the Soviet Union. Both *Panorāma* and *Vremya* first appeared on television screens during the 1960s. Usually, at 8 pm *Panorāma* was on air followed by all-Union *Vremya* at 9 pm which was broadcast simultaneously on all three available television channels in Latvia at the time, i.e. on both channels of the Soviet Central TV and till the late 1980s also on LTV.

Over several decades the structure of *Panorāma* remained constant. It usually started with the all-Union news from Moscow followed by the national news stories on political and economic life of Latvia. Similar to its pan-Soviet ‘sister’ *Vremya* the tone of *Panorāma* was official and full of positivity and pathos. *Panorāma* regularly reported on the winners of socialistic competition, successful completion of the five-year plan and increase in labour productivity.

At the end of the 1980s along with the disappearance of the colours of the Soviet Latvian flag in the ident of *Panorāma* also its announcers who used to greet their viewers with the address *Good evening, comrades!* were replaced with journalists. Till then only announcers were allowed to read the news. It was a time when *Vremya* continued to serve as a mouthpiece of the Soviet rule while journalists of *Panorāma* became passionate supporters of the Latvian independence struggle. In fact, both *Vremya* and *Panorāma* used the same propaganda tools of the Soviet-style journalism, albeit for diametrically opposed purposes. *Panorāma* and *Vremya* offered two very different pictures of the reality during

the political and economic changes of the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

Throughout the years of Awakening, the period of the political breakthrough at the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s, radio and television journalists in Latvia, including those working for *Panorāma*, enjoyed enormous trust, popularity and, as media scholars say, even love from their audiences (Brikše, et al., 2002). Journalists, along with the leaders of the liberation movement, the Latvian Popular Front, became the heroes of the Singing Revolution.

For older Latvian-speaking generations watching *Panorāma* is not only a deep-seated habit going back to the Soviet times (like for Russian-speaking elderly people watching *Vremya*) it is also a significant part of their memories of a critical historical period in the life of the nation creating strong emotional ties between *Panorāma* and its devoted audiences today, elderly Latvian-speakers who are also the core audiences of LTV, and its main channel LTV1 in particular. In other words, this historical experience is one of the central elements that makes their 'special attachment' to *Panorāma*, to quote Hirschman (1970), so special. As during one of the focus group discussions 62-year-old retired Latvian-speaking woman Brigita (FG5) put it, *Panorāma* 'is connected with all our past when we sat in front of a television set each night 20 years ago'.

This is not an experience that is shared by many Russian-speakers as then instead of *Panorāma* the majority of Russophones preferred watching *Vremya*. Albeit during this period LTV for many of its key political broadcasts introduced simultaneous interpreting in Russian hoping to provide Russian-speaking viewers with alternative information to that they received from the Soviet Central Television, interest of Russian-speaking audiences in LTV remained low, and the Moscow-based Soviet Central Television was their key news source (Brikše, et al., 1993). This should not come as a surprise given that Russian-speakers were never strongly accustomed to watch LTV, and during all the Soviet years it was the Soviet Central Television their viewing preferences were for instead of LTV, although LTV offered substantial volumes of Russian-language programming, mainly production of other Soviet republics such as their films and musical programmes but starting from the mid 1980s also the national news bulletins, and there was even a rule for the continuity announcers of LTV to greet and say goodbye to its viewers in both languages, Latvian and Russian.

While in 1991 the Soviet empire fell apart, both *Panorāma* and *Vremya* survived, and

Vremya today has even preserved the melody of its Soviet era intro; it is their institutional framework that has changed. Today *Panorāma* continues its broadcasts on LTV that after the regaining of independence has been *de jure* renamed as the public broadcaster. More recently, *Panorāma* that for many years had been the country's most popular (and for a long time also the only one) Latvian-language evening news programme on television experienced a significant drop in its audience figures, and today it is prime-time news on the national commercial channels TV3 and LNT that attracts the largest audiences. Both also are the most watched channels in the country.

During the early 1990s the former Soviet Central Television was still available in Latvia as a terrestrial channel and only in 1996 the first nationwide commercial channel LNT replaced it. After disappearance of the ex-Soviet Central Television from the national terrestrial broadcasting network its viewers actively searched for their favourite channel on cable and satellite platforms with the number of cable and satellite subscribers to rise very rapidly (for more detailed account see Brikše, et al., 2002, Kruks, 2005). The successor of the Soviet Central Television has changed its names for several times and currently it is known as *Pervyi kanal*, a state controlled and also partly state-owned channel, whose Baltic version *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* is also available in Latvia and, according to the regular audience statistics, attracts the largest Russian-speaking television audiences in the country.

Today in addition to Moscow-based *Vremya*, the most popular television news in Russia, *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* also offers its national version *Latviiskoe Vremya* (*Latvia's Time*) produced by the local news desk in the Latvian capital Riga and focusing on the national political, economic, social and cultural affairs. It first appeared on air in early 2004. In line with the regular audience measurements, *Latviiskoe Vremya* is the most popular news programme among Russian-speaking viewers bringing the Russophone community together around the evening news on television. The main rivals of *Latviiskoe Vremya*, news offerings either on the national Russian-language commercial channel TV5 or on the second channel of the public broadcaster LTV, do not enjoy such popularity.

The wide choice of the Russian-language news offerings be they on the national channels or localized transnational Russian television creates a strong alternative to the Latvian-language news flow on television, including the one provided by the public television LTV, and makes exiting from *Panorāma*, and the overall Latvian-language news stream on television, for Russian-speaking audiences rather easy one. Observations of 20-year-old

Russian-speaking student Dmitry (FG2) indicate that Russian-speakers easily substitute *Panorāma* with its Russian-language look-alike *Latviiskoe Vremya*: ‘Simply many people watch, for example, *Pervyi Baltiiskii* [channel] not thinking about why do I need to switch to the first channel [LTV1], to *Panorāma*, for instance, if the same, similar [news content] is on *Pervyi Baltiiskii* [channel]’. In a similar vein, 20-year-old Russian-speaking student Sofia (FG2) argued: ‘If there is a choice, why not to choose in your mother tongue’. As for Latvian-speakers it is the Latvian language, for Russian-speakers it is the Russian language that offers all those feelings of comfort, familiarity and proximity that only one’s first language (or the language used in the family) can provide.

5.3 Russian-speakers Watching *Panorāma*

In 2003 during the special programme devoted to the 45th anniversary of *Panorāma* Gundars Rēders, then head of LTV news, idealized *Panorāma* as the national integrator holding the nation together:

That evening ritual, *Panorāma*, when we all come together is one of those moments of togetherness. You run all day, you are on your duties, but then you know that Latvia around half past eight comes together and starts to think the same thoughts on what is happening with us in this country (LTV1, 2003).

As the regular audience statistics show, it is mainly Latvian-speakers, and older generations, the most loyal publics of LTV, in particular, who constitute the collective body of ‘Latvia’ and ‘we’/‘us’ in the national imagery in Rēders quote.

The audience measurements dating back to as early as the mid-1990s reveal the ethno-linguistic divisions in the television consumption patterns within Latvian society. In line with the 1994 *Baltic Media Facts Latvia* survey, the overwhelming majority of LTV1 audiences – 88% – already then were ethnic Latvians with only 12% of ethnic minorities being among its viewers. For ethnic minority audiences, it was Ostankino TV, the former Soviet Central Television and current Russian *Pervyi kanal*, was their mainstream channel. According to the same survey, there were two times more ethnic Latvians watching Ostankino TV than ethnic minorities watching LTV1, and this pattern of Latvian-speakers being more interested in Russian television than Russian-speakers in national channels has preserved also today. Not surprisingly, according to the television ratings of

that time, the vast majority of *Panorāma* audiences already then were ethnic Latvians with ethnic minorities making core audiences of *Vremya*, the ethnic composition of audiences of both news programmes remaining much the same today.

While many Russophones not only have little interest in *Panorāma* but also distrust it, as well as the overall news flow on the public television, Latvian-speakers have little interest in and are suspicious of *Vremya* and *Latviiskoe Vremya*, as well as the overall Russian-language news stream on television.⁵⁰ In the 2011 *TNS Latvia* survey, only 37.7% members of the ethnic minority groups said that they trust the news on LTV1, the main channel of LTV and also the home of *Panorāma*, and an even smaller number – 33% – agreed that LTV1 offers objective and politically neutral news content. To compare, among ethnic Latvians 76.3% of respondents expressed trust in the LTV1 news and 68% judged it as objective and politically neutral news source. In the eyes of ethnic minorities *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* is the most objective and politically neutral news source – 67.6% gave such an assessment. *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* is also the news source trusted most by the ethnic minority respondents (70.8%). Contrary, only a minority of ethnic Latvians trusts the news on *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* (39.4%) and even smaller number of ethnic Latvians regards its news reporting as objective and politically neutral (27.5%).⁵¹

As for many Russian-speakers, and, to be fair, also for many Latvian-speakers, the public broadcaster LTV plays marginal, if not to say no, role in their overall quotidian viewing practices, it should not come as a surprise that Russian-speaking audiences also do not search for its news offerings. While there is some interest among the Russophone audiences in the Russian-language news bulletins on the second channel of LTV, only

⁵⁰ Yet, it does not necessarily conflict with their appetite for Russian-origin entertainment, seen as free from politics, be it part of the offerings of national or transnational Russian television, as we shall see it in Chapter 6. Contrary to news and politics on Russian television that may make some of its Latvian-speaking viewers feel uneasy about their choice because of thinking that ‘it’s not accepted in our society’ to watch such content, to speak in the words of 57-year-old Latvian-speaking chief specialist at the local museum Inta, keen viewer of news and current affairs on Russian channels, there is no social stigma attached to watching Russian-origin entertainment among Latvian-speakers, perceived as a rather innocent activity.

⁵¹ Majority of ethnic Latvians trust the news on LNT (76.7%), LTV1 (76.3%), TV3 (75.1%) followed by lower level of trust expressed to the news on LTV7 (61.7%), *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* (39.4%) and the national Russian-language commercial channel TV5 (35%). Accordingly, for ethnic Latvian audiences the news on LTV1 (68.6%), LNT (68.2%) and TV3 (68.1%) are also the most objective and politically neutral compared to the news on LTV7 (47.3%), *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* (27.5%) and TV5 (27%). Interestingly that, though thinking of LTV as a state broadcaster, ethnic Latvians say that they still trust the news on its main channel LTV1 no less than the news on its commercial rivals LNT and TV3, contrary to ethnic minorities who trust the news on these commercial channels more than those on LTV1. As already noted in Chapter 4, it may signal that ethnic Latvian viewers look at LTV with less suspicion than ethnic minority audiences, albeit both see it as a state broadcaster.

tiny fraction of Russian-speaking viewers are among the regular audiences of *Panorāma*.⁵²

For those Russian-speakers who watch *Panorāma* on a regular basis being part of the national collectivity watching *Panorāma* offers symbolic resources for sustaining interpersonal contacts with their Latvian-speaking friends or colleagues at work. This is a very utilitarian use of *Panorāma* as it provides common points of reference for everyday inter-ethnic communication. It seems that for these Russian-speaking viewers *Panorāma* symbolizes a kind of ‘official’ gateway to the world-view as shared by the Latvian-speaking majority, imagined as different from the one Russian-speakers inhabit, signalling once more that in the eyes of Russian-speakers *Panorāma*, and the public television LTV in general, is one of the key, if not the most important, sites on the media scene for the representation of attitudes and experiences of the ethno-linguistic majority. These quotes from the focus group discussion with Russian-speaking viewers illustrate this further:

I watch this channel [LTV1] only in order to know and understand how [ethnic] Latvians live, what is important for them. Because it is very important especially in our city as here are members of both ethnic groups, we are all mixed together. I have friends both [ethnic] Latvians and Russians, and it is important for me [to know] what [ethnic] Latvians watch [on TV], as well. As we have a common bunch [of friends] we need something to talk about. (Mikhail, a 36-year-old Russian-speaking municipality officer, FG7)

Why exactly [*Panorāma*]... Well, because our [ethnic Latvian] colleagues also watch this first channel [LTV1] and, for this reason, I watch it too. To know what they are talking about and how all this is reported there. (Irina, 52-year-old Russian-speaking senior accountant working at the ministry, FG4)

It is an image of LTV as a state broadcaster disseminating the official agenda of the government that makes 48-year-old Russian-speaking deputy school director Boris (FG4) to watch *Panorāma*. It is ‘the news from those in power’ he is expecting to find on *Panorāma*. He explained:

⁵² In the 2012 *TNS Latvia* survey 52.4% ethnic minority respondents reported that they do not watch *Panorāma* at all, while among ethnic Latvians such were only 19.3%. In the same survey, 52.9% ethnic Latvians, not an exceptionally high number, as well, said that they would miss *Panorāma* if it ceased to exist, while only 26.8% ethnic minority respondents could say the same.

Perhaps it has something to do with my job. Let's say if something happens in Latvia... what is going to happen, what to expect from the powerful. The news from those in power... Let's say, who will be the new minister [of education]. In 20 years, [he is going to be] the twenty fifth, I think. What he is going to do in the education sector, what more we are going to reform, in which direction we are going to go, how much money will be cut. It is important for us as well to know at least something.

5.4 Neutral Zone

While the majority of Russian-speakers, and Latvian-speakers, as well, prefer watching the news in their mother tongue (or the language they use at home), for a significant number of Russian-speakers, and also for many Latvian-speakers, their everyday television news consumption practices are bilingual. In the 2012 *TNS Latvia* survey 41.6% of ethnic minority viewers said that they usually watch the news on television also in Latvian and, in its turn, 29.5% of ethnic Latvians claimed to do the same in Russian. It suggests that at some point both ethno-linguistic communities at their daily news media practices meet and hence it is rightly to say that the Latvian-language and Russian-language media subsystems (at least when it comes to the news media consumption patterns) are not entirely isolated.

Though the majority of Russian-speaking viewers choose to watch the news in Russian with the national news programme *Latviiskoe Vremya* on *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* being the most popular, this is not evidence of Russian-speaking audiences withdrawing from the Latvian-language news stream on television completely. Despite the fact that Russian-speakers have very little interest in the news output of the public broadcaster LTV, and of its main channel LTV1 in particular, they are more interested in the news on the national commercial channels broadcasting in Latvian – indeed it is the news offerings of these channels that are more successful in bringing Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking television news audiences together.

As already noted in Chapter 4, providing more bilingual programming (mainly through entertainment imported from Russia offered in Russian with Latvian subtitles), the national Latvian-language commercial channels, in contrast to the public television, have been more successful in addressing Russian-speaking audiences. Accordingly, it is also their news enjoying greater popularity among Russian-speaking viewers than *Panorāma*.

While *Panorāma* and *Vremya* divide the nation, the evening news on the national Latvian-language commercial channels serves as a kind of neutral zone. The 2011 *TNS Latvia* survey revealed that while ethnic Latvians distrust *Vremya* and ethnic minorities are highly suspicious of *Panorāma*, it is the news on the national commercial channels LNT and TV3 trusted by both ethnic Latvian and ethnic minority viewers. This notwithstanding, the news on these channels are more trusted by ethnic Latvians than ethnic minorities and the portion of ethnic minority audiences expressing trust in the news on LNT and TV3 is not high. Nevertheless, ethnic minority audiences trust the news on these channels more than the news on public television, including even the latter's Russian-language news service on its second channel LTV7⁵³, and it is worth noting that the trust expressed reflects also into viewing preferences. While still the majority of the news audiences of TV3 and LNT are ethnic Latvians, ethnic minority viewers have higher interest in the news offerings of these channels, especially of LNT, in comparison with the public television, and its main channel LTV1 in particular.⁵⁴

5.5 National News, a Sense of Belonging and Old Russian-speakers

While Russian-speakers prefer watching and also trust more the news on their favourite Russian-language channels, including those transmitting from Moscow and offering news flow from Russia, there is no evidence of the Russophones identifying more with, and having stronger feelings of belonging towards Russia instead of Latvia. Interest in life of Russia does not rule out their interest in the national news flow. According to the 2012 *TNS Latvia* survey, ethnic minorities are interested in national news to the same degree as ethnic Latvians. However, in contrast to ethnic Latvians, ethnic minority responses indicate that they perceive themselves as less informed on national affairs.

In many Russian-speaking families watching both *Vremya* and *Latviiskoe Vremya* are quite the same as they celebrate the arrival of New Year twice – first according to Moscow

⁵³ In the 2011 *TNS Latvia* survey 50.4% ethnic minority respondents expressed trust in the news on LNT and 47.2% said they trust the news on TV3 compared to only 37.7% expressing trust in the news on LTV1 and 43.7% who said they trust the news on LTV7. Among Russian-speaking audiences the most trusted news source is *Peryi Baltiiskii kanal* (70.8%) followed by the national Russian-language commercial channel TV5 (60.5%). In the eyes of Russian-speaking audiences the news on the commercial channels LNT (42.1%) and TV3 (41.2%) are also more objective and politically neutral than those of LTV1 (33%) and LTV7 (36.2%). Again it is the news on *Peryi Baltiiskii kanal* (67.6%) and TV5 (54.8%) seen by Russian-speakers as the most objective and politically neutral.

⁵⁴ Though not high, still, according to the regular audience measurements, the number of ethnic minority viewers watching the evening news on LNT has always been about two times more than those watching *Panorāma*. Thus, in line with the *TNS Latvia* data, in 2012 among *Panorāma* audiences only 5% were ethnic minority viewers compared with 13% of ethnic minorities making audiences of the LNT evening news.

time and then few hours later also in line with the local Latvian time. They open a bottle of champagne, make fireworks and listen to the president's address to the nation twice – first it is televised New Year's greetings of the Russian president followed by best wishes sent by the Latvian head of the nation few hours later. I return to these rituals of New Year's Eve celebrations and the centrality of a role of television in them in Chapter 6.

In the same manner as celebrating New Year's Eve in line with both Moscow and Latvian time many Russian-speakers, mainly older generations, organize their quotidian television news consumption practices. The weekday evening news hour on *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* starting 8 pm first with the transmission of *Vremya* from Moscow (it is the same edition of *Vremya* Russians are watching in Russia) followed by its national version *Latviiskoe Vremya* constitutes an integral part of their daily news watching ritual. *Panorāma* on LTV1 is on air at 8.30 pm overlapping with *Latviiskoe Vremya*.

Researchers studying the identities of Russian-speakers in Latvia and Estonia have pointed to the divided affiliations of the Russophone population suggesting that its cultural and political allegiances do not match – something that is at the heart of their specific identity of being a Latvian/Estonian Russian-speaker, an identity that allows them to identify with both ethnic Latvians/Estonians and Russians in Russia and at the same time to see themselves as different from both or, to quote Zepa discussing the case of Russians living in Latvia, 'we are dealing with a group that might be called "Latvia's Russians", these are neither "Russians" nor "Latvians"' (2005:76), and this is of importance in understanding their news preferences.

Thus, Cheskin in his study of identity-formation processes of Latvian Russian-speakers concludes that 'Russian speakers increasingly see themselves as members of the Russian cultural world (*russkii mir*) but not the Russian political world (*rossiskii mir*)' (2013:309, emphasis in original), and, in a similar vein, Vihalemm and Masso in their research on identity development of the younger generation of Russian-speakers in Estonia come to the conclusion that 'the civic-cultural divide is rather clear between the previous (historical) homeland and the present home society – the cultural and civic attachment of Estonian Russian-speakers seems to be oriented towards different poles: the civic attachment towards Estonia and the cultural attachment towards Russia' (2003:103; see

also Vihalemm, Masso, 2002a, 2002b).⁵⁵

Therefore it came as no surprise in the 2012 *TNS Latvia* survey to find out that only 36.9% of ethnic minority audiences said that they have high interest in Russian news. Audience statistics also show that the viewing figures of *Latviiskoe Vremya* offering national news are significantly higher than those of *Vremya* delivering news stories from Russia.⁵⁶ According to the same 2012 *TNS Latvia* survey, those who have high interest in the news flow coming from Moscow are mostly older ethnic minority audiences. Among the older Russian-speaking generations there are also very few who regularly watch the news on the channels broadcasting in Latvian. Yet, as we shall see, they are not out of touch with the national life. Instead of watching the national news in Latvian, they choose to do it in Russian, namely watching *Latviiskoe Vremya* on their much-loved *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*.

5.5.1 Being an Alien

Among older Russian-speakers many are either citizens of Russia or the so-called non-citizens of Latvia (they are neither citizens of Latvia nor any other country) who not having the right to vote are excluded from the political community and participation in the political life of the nation. 'I'm nothing,' said Igor, a 57-year-old unemployed man (F1) who is citizen of neither Latvia, nor of Russia, to stress his political status and a feeling of being disenfranchised that accompanies it. His official status is a non-citizen of Latvia, and he has Alien's passport. There are nearly 300 000 people in Latvia from its two million population holding a non-citizen passport. According to the official statistics,

⁵⁵ Interestingly, while thinking of themselves as culturally more belonging to Russia than Latvia/Estonia, Latvian/Estonian Russian-speakers, as the previous research shows it, also identify cultural differences what they think distinguish them from Russians who live in Russia and in some aspects also make them superior – for instance, in Cara's (2010) study, Russian women in ethnically mixed marriages in Latvia talk about the way they speak in Russian as different from the way Russian is spoken in Russia (in terms of accent, rhythm, pace), they also point out differences in the way they and Russians in Russia dress (saying that they have learned elegance and fashion from ethnic Latvians) and see themselves as being more orderly and cleaner than Russians in Russia (one more thing they think they have taken over from ethnic Latvians).

⁵⁶ The regular audience measurements show that on average 2/3 of *Latviiskoe Vremya* audiences do also watch *Vremya*. Thus, according to the *TNS Latvia* ratings data, in 2012 average viewership of *Vremya* was 73 800 while for *Latviiskoe Vremya* it amounted to 110 700. The same pattern has also been observed in Estonia with *Novosti Estonii* (*News of Estonia*), the national news programme of Estonian *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*, gathering larger audiences than Moscow-based *Vremya* (for more detailed account see Loit, Sübak, 2013). As with *Latviiskoe Vremya* also the overwhelming majority of *Novosti Estonii* audiences are ethnic minorities with ethnic majority viewers having little interest in it, and the same applies to the ethnic composition of *Vremya* audiences in both countries.

majority of them are elderly Russians.⁵⁷

Igor ironically uses self-identification ‘negr’ (*негр/negro*) in Russian that is a short form of ‘negrzhdanin’ (*негражданин/non-citizen*) and has very negative connotations in order to manifest his sense of being left on the margins of the national collectivity. Through such self-conception he communicates his feelings of being an outsider, a stranger, the other in Latvia. Yet, he has made a choice – he could have opted for Russian citizenship and continue living in Latvia but instead of being a citizen of Russia he preferred to be a non-citizen of Latvia, something we can look at as a statement of him belonging to Latvia. Igor is the only one with a non-citizen status in his family; all others – his wife, 55-year-old Anna doing administrative work at a hospital, both their daughters and son and their children, as well as his mother-in-law – are citizens of Latvia. He is also the only Orthodox believer in the family, all the rest are Catholics, and this is the reason why they celebrate Christmas twice, though Orthodox Christmas is not an official holiday in Latvia.⁵⁸

The questions relating to Latvian politics in Igor’s questionnaire that I have asked to fill all members of the family were left unanswered. Igor has only briefly noted that he has no political rights: ‘the right to vote and be elected has been deprived’. He pointed to his disenfranchised status also when I asked him about his stance on the failed 2012 language referendum on the idea to give Russian the status of the second official language in the country. ‘I don’t care about it. I don’t have the right to vote,’ the unemployed man replied all the time when I attempted to start a discussion on this topic.

⁵⁷ Shortly after the restoration of the country’s independence only those who were citizens of the interwar Latvia (before the 1940 Soviet occupation) and their descendants were granted citizenship automatically, all the rest were later required to naturalize and to take a test in Latvian language and history (for an overview of citizenship policy see Brande-Kehre, Pūce, 2005, Muižnieks, 2006, Muižnieks, et al., 2013, Rozenvalds, 2010). For many Latvian Russian-speakers their new socio-political status, allocated to them following the breakup of the Soviet Union, triggered what is often described as traumatic identity crisis, and it inevitably has left its imprint on the collective identity-formation processes of this community. The majority had switched places with the minority, and members of the large Russian-speaking community who enjoyed a status of being a dominant group in the Soviet Union suddenly found themselves in a position of being the ethno-linguistic minority. The account of Lauristin and Heidmets on the realities many Estonian Russian-speakers faced shortly after the restoration of independent Estonia echoes identical processes that took place in Latvia: ‘Due to the legal reforms of the early 1990s, which restored pre-war Estonian citizenship to the historical inhabitants of the country, the majority of the non-Estonians found themselves in the position of being aliens who had to apply for permits for residence and start naturalisation procedures to legally remain in the country. This was not only a change in personal legal status but also a social and psychological drama for thousands of people’ (2002:21) As Vihalemm has concluded, the Russian-speaking minority ‘faced a double challenge of self-determination – in terms of both transition and the new Estonian nation-state’ (2007:479). (For further discussion on a new status of Estonian Russian-speakers after the collapse of the Soviet Union see also Vihalemm, Lauristin, 1997).

⁵⁸ The proposal of the political parties popular among the Russian-speaking electorate to set also Orthodox Christmas as an official state holiday has from year to year been rejected by the ruling political parties.

Yet, it seems to be less a statement of his indifference to the referendum, and the national politics more generally, as of his resentment of being deprived of political rights. As we shall see, while being a non-citizen and left outside the polity he has not lost his interest in the national politics.

With the exception of Anna's mother, a Polish origin Latvian-speaker, other family members voted in favour of the proposal in the referendum. They later argued that they do not support the idea of making Russian an official language but think that its usage should be expanded in encounters of Russian-speakers with the authorities. To make life easier for the father – that was their main argument as Igor has the poorest Latvian language skills in the family.

Unlike other family members, Igor watches only Russian-language news on television and is the only one who carefully follows the news flow coming from Russia. As Igor is not currently working and has some serious health problems, he spends most of his time at home and has lots of spare time to watch television. It is common for him to watch, in addition to the evening news, also day-time newscasts. Igor follows the news on a number of Russian-language channels on a daily basis, most often on those channels transmitting from Moscow but also on the national commercial TV5 and from time to time also on the second channel of the public television LTV especially when its news bulletin is broadcast shortly before or after live ice hockey transmissions Igor likes to watch so much (see Chapter 7).

During my visits with the family when we were watching *Vremya* together he used to comment on it. I got an impression that he has an expert knowledge on Russia's political affairs. During one session, while I was chatting with others Igor was attentively watching the news on one of the Russian channels, and when Vladimir Putin, then prime minister of Russia, appeared on the screen with some statement Igor straight away turned the volume up. Some other time he even moved to the kitchen to watch the news alone as I was talking with others in the living room disturbing him watching the news.

One of the reasons for his preference for the news on Russian-language channels is his poor command of Latvian. While other members of the family speak Latvian fluently, the main language in the family still is Russian. This is mainly because of the father. During my visits in the family I noticed that while because of my presence other members of the family were speaking Latvian Igor did not understand it fully and

someone always had to translate to him what we were talking about so that he could follow our conversation. Not to upset or exclude Igor, other family members usually choose to speak in Russian so that he could also join in. When I spoke with him one-to-one I also turned to Russian. As he says, difficulties to pass the language exam are his main obstacle to gain Latvian citizenship; he finds the exam too complicated. Igor also thinks that anyone who has lived in Latvia prior to 1991 should be granted the status of a citizen automatically without any examination.

With Russian language enjoying the status of being the dominant language in the whole Soviet empire and serving as *lingua franca* in both the public and private spheres also in Latvia during the Soviet period, immigrants from other Soviet republics could easily do without the knowledge of the local language and their proficiency in Latvian at that time in the vast majority of cases was low or even non-existent. Asymmetric bilingualism was a reality of that time when the majority of Latvian-speakers had good Russian language knowledge and only a small fraction of Russian-speakers had a good command of Latvian. And although Latvian language competence (and use) among Russian-speakers has improved significantly since the restoration of independent statehood, the lack of this fundamental resource (poor command of Latvian language especially among older Russian-speaking audiences) has been a significant impediment to access to Latvian-language media for a significant part of the national communion.⁵⁹

5.5.2 (Former) Homeland

The news flow coming from Russia helps Igor, as many other older Russian-speakers, to stay in touch with life in Russia and thus sustain emotional ties with his country of origin. While being geographically located in Latvia, it is through sounds and images that the Russian news space coming to his living room via transnational television from Russia provides that he, so to speak, makes daily journeys back to his original homeland. Yet, their identifications outside the national time/space, to use the words of Clifford (1997), do not make these viewers indifferent to the national life of Latvia as they are traveling back and forth between the Russian and national news spaces day in day out. It is a two-way route, again to use Clifford's vocabulary (1997).

⁵⁹ In the 2009 survey among older Russian-speakers (over the age of 60) those who do not know Latvian were 22%, 30% had basic knowledge and only 26% – good. Contrary, 64% of Russian-speakers aged 17-25 said that they know Latvian good and 30% reported moderate knowledge. According to the same survey, among all respondents whose mother tongue is Russian 48% assessed their command of Latvian language as good, 27% reported moderate knowledge of Latvian, 16% said they have basic knowledge and 8% that they do not know Latvian, and 1% provided no answer (Druviete, 2012).

'I am Russian,' Igor referred to his Russian origins to explain his interest in the Russian news. He was born in Russia, and at the age of 17 in the early 1970s came to Latvia to study, got married and settled there. 'I live here [in Latvia], but my former homeland is over there [in Russia],' he explained. Similarly, Tatyana, a 61-year-old Russian-speaking woman working with children at the school amateur theatre (FG6), explained her interest in the news flow from Russia during one of the focus group discussions: 'I do not lose the ties with my fatherland. I live here [in Latvia], here is my home, but there [in Russia] is my fatherland'. She is a citizen of Russia and referred to herself as 'originally from Russia'. Her husband, also born in Russia, graduated from the maritime school in Latvia in the early 1970s, and they both settled in the country and stayed after the collapse of the USSR. 'He brought me to Riga [the Latvian capital],' she recalled.

Their life stories are typical of those of many Soviet era immigrants in Latvia. During the years of the Soviet rule Latvia faced a large-scale influx of immigrants who moved to Latvia as a workforce from other republics of the Soviet Union and stayed here after the collapse of the empire. While for many of them Latvia has become their home, Russia remains their ethnic homeland, and it is their strong affiliation to both Latvia and Russia that is at the heart of their 'multi-local identities', to use the concept introduced by Rouse (1995a) in his study on the experiences of the Mexican (im)migrants in the United States (see also Rouse, 1995b). Their attachment to Russia, their country of origin, however, is not necessarily in conflict with their allegiance to Latvia, their host country, and their everyday news media consumption rituals are striking evidence of this process of negotiating or, we can also say, harmonizing, their transnational identities of thinking of themselves as belonging at the same time to two national communities, the Latvian and the Russian. Many of my older Russian-speaking informants watch both *Vremya* from Moscow and its national version *Latviiskoe Vremya* every weekday night.

Through a combination of elements of both transnational and national broadcasting connecting its audiences to the life and rhythms of the real world of both Latvia and Russia, to paraphrase Robins and Aksoy (2006), *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* addresses its viewers as bearers of multiple national identities (in other words, it responds to the sense of being 'in-between' Latvia and Russia many of them feel), and because of helping Russian-speakers to hold their multi-local affiliations together it is so popular among these audiences. For instance, this is how her strong attachment to *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* described 45-year-old unemployed Russian-speaker Elena: it is 'my channel, my favourite

one'. *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* is Russian television aimed for pan-Baltic audiences combining Russian entertainment production and some local content – it is local adverts during the commercial breaks they show, national news offerings on weekdays, and even the annual address to the nation by the Latvian president and prime minister on the evening of 31 December.

Apart from maintenance of their 'home ties' (Basch, et al., 1994), watching *Vremya* is also simply a deep-rooted habit for Igor and many other older Russian-speaking viewers – as in other Russian-speaking families their main news source on television during the Soviet period was *Vremya*, instead of *Panorāma*. As Anna, Igor's wife, put it, 'we have been watching *Vremya* for our entire life'. Igor remembered a time when he was doing his compulsory military service, and it was a ritual even in the army to watch *Vremya* every night. Similarly, other older Russian-speaking informants referred to a deep-seated habit going back to the Soviet era to explain their interest in *Vremya*. Here is an excerpt from one of the focus groups (FG4) with 48-year-old Russian-speaking school deputy director Boris and 52-year-old Russian-speaking senior accountant working at the ministry Irina, discussing the habit of watching *Vremya*:

Boris: Probably it is also a force of habit that has formed [over the years].

Irina: And time... In the past it was at eight [o'clock] [starting from the late 1980s when Latvia abandoned Moscow time zone as part of the overall independence aspirations; till then *Vremya* was on air one hour later, at 9 pm] when we watched only *Vremya*, it was on the same time slot [as it is today]. You switch on when it is on air and you also know what time is it.

What for older Russian-speakers is a deep-seated habit – watching *Vremya* – has its equivalent long-standing ritual among older Latvian-speakers – watching *Panorāma*, both having roots in the Soviet times. Indeed, my older Latvian-speaking respondents explained their strong attachment to *Panorāma* in ways echoing the rationalizations provided by older Russophones when discussing the centrality of watching *Vremya* in their daily viewing habits. Here is a typical comment by a loyal *Panorāma* viewer explaining her devotion to it:

I am simply used to it, it is a habit [to watch *Panorāma*]. It's like others

watch *UgunsGrēks* (*FireSin*) [popular national soap opera on the commercial TV3 channel] and know those characters, I know the announcers [of the LTV news]. (Nellija, 58-year-old Latvian-speaking school teacher, FG9)

Most often Igor is watching *Vremya* alone, and other members of the family join him only when *Latviiskoe Vremya* – the programme that the majority of the family members like to watch – is on air. ‘It’s all about Russia. It has nothing to do with me,’ Igor’s wife Anna replied when asked why she does not accompany her husband watching *Vremya* from Moscow. ‘These are their [Russian] internal problems,’ she added. Contrary to her husband, Anna was born in Latvia in an ethnically mixed family with her mother being of Polish origin and her father being an ethnic Latvian.

Marina, their 27-year-old daughter, working as a shop assistant, spends time in front of TV only occasionally. As she has shift work, she now and then joins her father watching *Vremya*. Sometimes, instead, Marina watches the breakfast time news be it on the national LNT channel or the transnational *Peryji Baltiiskii kanal*. However, instead of the news, Marina’s viewing preferences include films and series, as well as sports and music. Most often she follows the news on the internet which constitutes her main news source. Although she also keeps in touch with national affairs, she still finds Russian news on television more interesting. ‘Large territory [of Russia], plenty of events,’ Marina explained.

The argument of big Russia and its big news stories turned out to be very popular among my Russian-speaking informants whenever they tried to explain their interest in Russian television news suggesting that it is not only, or mainly, their wish to sustain ‘home ties’ with their country of origin Russia, if at all, that motivates their news media preferences. It is also a search for more attractive news content than the one offered by national channels, and perhaps also a sense of superiority such content can offer to its viewers, a point I discuss further in Chapter 6. ‘Bigger country, more events,’ said Andrei, a 37-year-old Russian-speaking football coach (F5), and provided an example: ‘In Tyumen [a city in Western Siberia, Russia] a plane crashed. When has something like that happened in Latvia? Here, only [the telecommunications company] *Tele2* can dig the meteorite’s hole’.⁶⁰ In a similar vein, 68-year-old Nadezhda, Andrei’s mother-in-law, argued: ‘We

⁶⁰ In October 2009 the media reported that a meteorite had come down in Latvia that eventually turned out to be a marketing spoof by the telecommunications company *Tele 2*.

have such a small country that there is nothing to be reported in the news’.

Although Igor who we encountered earlier, like many other older Russian-speakers, is keen on watching the news on Russian channels, this is not evidence of his lack of interest in the national affairs. Igor has great interest and is well informed about the Russian, as well as national news. ‘Our politician,’ said his daughter to describe her father’s keen interest in political news, be they Russian or national. It is both *Vremya* and its national version *Latviiskoe Vremya* he is watching regularly. Igor is also a regular viewer of the political debates show *Bez tsenzury* (*Without Censorship*) which, in a grilling manner, questions local politicians – the show was part of the offerings of the national Russian-language commercial channel TV5 during the time of my fieldwork. He also likes to read Latvian Russian-language newspapers that he borrows from their neighbours at their five-storey standard Soviet era block of flats in the capital city Riga. Newspapers are an important source of the national news for him along with television.

While daily use of Russian television news provides older Russian-speakers with proximity to and synchronization with the realities of everyday life and events in Russia, to use the vocabulary employed by Aksoy and Robins (2003, 2006), it does not constitute evidence of estrangement from Latvia. The great appetite many older Russophones have in the Russian news flow does not conflict with their interest in the national life of Latvia. Instead of ignoring the national news, they negotiate their interest in both the national and Russian news agenda in the same way as they negotiate their sense of belonging towards both Latvia and Russia. It is through their day-to-day news consumption they are involved in a complex process of positioning themselves in relation to Russia and Latvia. Although they think of Russia as their fatherland, it is Latvia that they call their home.

To quote Alla, a 62-year-old retired Russian-speaking woman (FG6), who moved to Latvia from Russia in the early 1980s, ‘it is interesting [to know] what is happening both in Latvia and Russia, and especially in Latvia as we live here, we are given a retirement pension here, we have to live here every day’. ‘We live here,’ also said Valentina, a 76-year-old retired Russian-speaking woman (FG6), who identified herself as ‘indigenous Rigan’ (*коренная рижанка*), to stress that Russian-speakers are not less interested in what is happening in Latvia than Latvian-speakers. Referring to her life story and stressing her rootedness in Latvia, she argued that Russians belong to Latvia and are loyal to it to the same extent as ethnic Latvians:

I am pure Russian (*чисто русская*). I have lived all my life in Riga [capital of Latvia], I have been born here. Among my relatives and friends are both Russians and [ethnic] Latvians, all. Latvia is my fatherland. I consider myself a patriot of my fatherland as I have lived here all my life. How can one say that I am an occupier only because I am Russian. I have a lot of [ethnic] Latvian friends with whom we have been together all our life, and when it comes to politics we avoid this topic not to damage our relations. We have the same rights. [Ethnic] Latvian people and we have the same rights.

The high exposure to the news discourse of the state-controlled Russian channels that Igor and other Russian-speakers have does not make them automatically passive and uncritical viewers, susceptible to the allegedly harmful influence of Russian television, as it has often been argued by the Latvian political elite whose reasoning leaves no room for agency and does not recognize the capacity of Russian-speakers to create their own alternative meanings of the messages sent to them by Russian television. Igor, for example, is not taking the news messages of Russian television for granted. It is because television, and the media in general, is not his only source of the news from Russia and he can compare life in Russia as represented by the Kremlin-controlled Russian channels with the experiences of the actual reality of his friends living in Russia. Although his relatives in Russia have died and today he is not visiting Russia as often as previously, he still keeps in contact with his friends living in Russia and their daily experiences serve as a point of reference for verification of the representations of life in Russia as seen on television. His Moscow friends have told Igor not to believe all that has been said on Russian channels: ‘They say – television does not tell the truth, life is different, reality is different’. As 48-year-old Russian-speaking deputy school director Boris (FG4) put it, talking about the relatives his family has in Russia, when you call them, ‘you start already comparing what has been told [on the news on Russian television] and how it is there in reality’.

5.6 Opting Out of National Television

In her family Nadezhda, a Russian-speaking retired school teacher, aged 68 (F5), is the only devoted viewer of the news on Russian television, and equally interested also in the national news. Together with Nadezhda lives her 39-year-old daughter Diana and her 37-year-old husband Andrei, both also teachers, and their 10-year-old daughter Aleksandra,

attending the same local school where her parents work – Diana is a primary school teacher while Andrei is a football coach – and where for many years also Nadezhda worked as a teacher giving Russian language lessons for children studying in Latvian. They live in a village in the eastern region of Latgale around 30-40 kilometres from the Russian border. Alongside the capital city, this is the region where the bulk of Latvia's Russian-speakers live.⁶¹ It is also the poorest region in Latvia.

All members of the family are citizens of Latvia. Nadezhda's family has been living in Latvia already for five generations, and this is the reason why Nadezhda and both her daughters received citizenship automatically in the early 1990s. Nadezhda's grandfather was born in Latgale in the mid 19th century when it was part of the Vitebsk Province of the Russian Empire, she told me during one of our conversations to stress that she is not 'an occupier'. Andrei became a citizen through naturalization only in 2006. Although Andrei and both his parents had been born in Latvia, he did not receive citizenship automatically and had to undergo the naturalization process to get his Latvian citizenship, something he finds unfair. He thinks it was because one of his grandmothers was not a citizen of Latvia in 1940 when Latvia was occupied by the Soviet Union – she came to Latvia from Russia shortly after the Second World War in 1945 at the age of 22.

In the 2012 language referendum Latgale was the only region where the majority voted in favour of the proposal to make Russian language the second official language in the country.⁶² Among those who said 'yes' in the referendum was also Nadezhda's family. Despite the fact that the majority of voters in their village were against the proposal, still a substantial part voted in favour of it. Nadezhda's family has neighbours from both camps. A large portion of the population of their village are Russian-speakers. According to official statistics, one third of its population of around 1300 belong to ethnic minorities. In the school where Diana and Andrei work approximately 10 out of 30 are Russian-speaking teachers, and alongside groups with Latvian as the language of instruction they also have groups with bilingual teaching where some subjects are taught in Latvian and others in Russian. However, according to Nadezhda, both ethno-linguistic

⁶¹ According to the 2011 population census, in Latgale region 60.3% of the local inhabitants reported Russian language as their main language at home. Less than half – 39% – said that it is Latvian language they mostly use at home. Source: The Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia.

⁶² According to the official results of the referendum, 55.57% of voters in Latgale said 'yes' to the proposal to make Russian language the second state language in Latvia with 44.02% voting against. In other regions where Russian-speakers are in the minority the idea of Russian as the second official language has been rejected with around 90% voters saying no to the proposed changes in the constitution. In the capital Riga 63.56% voted against the proposal with 36.03% supporting it. Source: The Central Election Commission of Latvia.

communities in the village are living in peace and friendship. ‘There are no tensions among people, only among politicians,’ she explained. ‘We [Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers] drink vodka at the same table,’ Nadezhda said in a joking tone. ‘Because of the referendum we are not going to stop talking with each other,’ added Diana, her daughter.

Whereas Nadezhda, as other members of her family, understands Latvian, she, unlike others, over the course of my visits consistently spoke with me only in Russian. It is perhaps a matter of generations. Her little granddaughter who goes to the Latvian-language group in the school speaks fluently both Latvian and Russian and, for her, there is no problem to switch from one language to another. Aleksandra once told me that her Latvian-speaking friends have taught her Latvian while she, in turn, has taught them Russian. Alongside Russian and Latvian Aleksandra knows also Latgalian, the regional dialect in Latgale, and uses it to communicate with some of her friends. However, in the family they all speak only in Russian.

After the switchover from analogue to digital terrestrial broadcasting in the summer of 2010 they do not have access to any of the national channels. Although the Latvian government intended the switchover to simply constitute a transition from (national) analogue to (national) digital broadcasting, for the family, as for many of their Russian-speaking neighbours, the occasion turned out to be a switchover away from national to transnational broadcasting. As other neighbours, they also now have a satellite dish offering them access to a plenitude of channels distributed free-of-charge via satellite, and while among them there are none of the national channels, there is a number of Russian channels transmitting from Moscow they now have access to.⁶³

⁶³ This is not to say that there were some technical problems to receive terrestrial signal of the national channels; Nadezhda’s family simply decided to opt out of national television and not to purchase a digital set-top box. As they were not among the regular viewers of the national channels already prior to the digital switchover, it was rather easy for them to quit national broadcasting, contrary to their Latvian-speaking neighbours who purchased a digital set-top box as they were used to watching the national channels and for them it would be a much more painful experience to abandon national broadcasting and live without the offerings of the national channels. As already in the analogue era Nadezhda’s family watched the national channels rarely, they decided not to spend extra money on the purchase of a digital set-top box. They had acquired a satellite dish already some time before analogue broadcasting was cut off. In the analogue era they used a standard aerial to receive the national terrestrial channels, both channels of the public broadcaster LTV, plus the commercial LNT and TV3. While the family liked watching LNT (Diana, for instance, remembered watching the evening news on this channel to find out the weather forecast), they already before the digital switchover had little interest in the public television, and in its main channel LTV1 in particular. Having gained access to plenty of satellite television offerings, they switched to their favourite Russian channels almost completely. When the digital switchover approached the family decided that, as they have not been watching the national channels a lot so far, they can do

They are not the only ones in the village who now have their own satellite dish. The majority of their neighbours, mostly Russian-speakers, have switched from national terrestrial to transnational (Russian) satellite broadcasting. I have counted at least seven satellite dishes on the walls of their small Soviet era three-storey block of flats. When traveling to Latgale to visit Nadezhda's family, I noticed houses, be they private houses or blocks-of-flats, covered by satellite receivers. It has become a typical landscape of Latgale today. The family of teachers is among those 1.4% of the national population that, according to the 2012 *TNS Latvia* survey, do not have access to any of the channels providing regular national news either in Latvian or Russian.⁶⁴

Their most favourite channel is Russian *Pervyi kanal*, and it is also the first one on their remote control. Instead of its Baltic version *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* they are watching one of its international versions that is targeted at Russians living in Germany. Aleksandra once demonstrated me how to find on the internet TV listings for the international versions of all main Russian channels. Contrary to its Baltic version that the majority of Russian-speaking viewers in Latvia have access to, the international version of *Pervyi kanal* that Nadezhda's family is watching does not offer *Latviiskoe Vremya*, the national news programme. Only Moscow-based *Vremya* is available. So, while they have access to plenty of news offerings on a wide variety of satellite stations, including Russian ones, they do not have access to any of the national news programmes, be they in Latvian or Russian. Neither both channels of the public television, nor any of the national commercial channels are available free-of-charge via satellite. Also *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* is available only as a pay-TV channel. Otherwise, the international version of *Pervyi kanal* the family of Nadezhda is watching is not much different from *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*.

Nevertheless, the family of Nadezhda has not lost interest in the national life of Latvia and they are not isolated from the national news flow. Even if having no access to any of

without them. The family seems not to regret abandoning national broadcasting. The satellite dish, they think, provides value for money. First, it offers a wide range of viewing choices, including a number of Russian channels they enjoy watching so much. Second, they have to pay only once when purchasing a satellite receiver without any further monthly subscription payments as it is in the case with pay-TV services.

⁶⁴ In line with the same survey, the majority of them belong to ethnic minorities, are part of the rural population, those living in Latgale region, and people of lower socio-economic background. In Latgale almost 9% said that they do not have access to any of the channels offering regular national news either in Latvian or Russian, including the public broadcaster LTV. The majority of them most likely are those, like Nadezhda's family, who instead of national terrestrial broadcasting have chosen transnational (Russian) satellite broadcasting. In the light of the 2010 digital switchover the media have also reported that in borderland areas many of those who have not obtained a digital set-top box continue watching analogue terrestrial television transmitting from Latvia's neighbouring countries Russia and Belarus.

the national channels with exclusively transnational television from Russia dominating their daily viewing practices, they have managed to find ways of staying in touch with national affairs, through public radio, online news sites, the local newspaper or word-of-mouth. As we shall see later in Chapter 7, they have also employed a number of creative strategies to re-enter national broadcasting to get access to the content of the national channels they miss the most, something that transnational Russian television fails to substitute.

It is the news on Radio Latvia 4, a Russian-language service of the public broadcaster Radio Latvia, popular among Russian-speaking audiences, that constitutes the main source of the national news for Nadezhda. They have a radio placed in their tiny kitchen, and all the time when Nadezhda is doing something there Radio Latvia 4 is switched on. Nadezhda is also a vital source of the national news for other family members – a ‘news carrier’, to quote Andrei, Nadezhda’s son-in-law. She usually informs others about the most important news she has heard on the radio. ‘They will start fighting now,’ Nadezhda ran into the living room during one of my visits to let others know that the pre-referendum radio debates will soon reach a radical turning-point. It was Radio Latvia 4 where she, early in the next morning, also heard the results of the language referendum.

For the younger generation in the family an important source of national news is online news platforms – for instance, news site *Delfi.lv* having both Latvian and Russian language versions, plus e-mail service *Inbox.lv* and local social networking site *Draugiem.lv* both offering also some news headlines. They have even discovered how to find the weather forecast for their village on one of the internet sites offering such services. An important news source for them is also word-of-mouth or ‘OBC,’ as they explained in Russian. It is an acronym of Russian saying ‘одна бабушка сказала’ that can be translated literally as ‘one old lady said’ describing learning the news via word-of-mouth. Thus, when in November 2011 the news that one of the Latvian banks went bankrupt spread over the country, it was their neighbours who let them know about it.

With the exception of Nadezhda, for other members of the family it is first and foremost Russian-origin entertainment such as various talk shows, talent shows, films and series that they are looking for on transnational television from Russia, and that so easily wins the competition with the low-budget home-grown production on the national channels, something I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6. Only Nadezhda has a strong interest in the news flow coming from Russia. For her, watching the news on either *Pervyi kanal* or

Rossiia (Russia), another state-controlled federal Russian channel, is a daily practice. *Vremya* on *Pervyi kanal* is on air after their favourite tabloid talk show *Pust govoryat* (*Let Them Speak*), something all women of three generations in the family like to watch. However, when *Vremya* starts, Nadezhda usually goes to her room and watches it alone. Nadezhda is following the political life of Russia with great enthusiasm. Likewise, she is well informed about the latest news on the Latvian political scene. ‘She lacks stress in her life,’ Diana said in jest to explain her mother’s keen interest in the political news. Contrary to Nadezhda, Diana and Andrei devote little time to the political news, be they national or Russian.

Nadezhda has also been the only one in the family who has carefully followed debates on Russian television prior to the 2012 presidential elections in Russia. ‘What [Dmitry] Medvedev [then president of Russia] will do after [the elections]?’ Nadezhda initiated a conversation on the latest developments on the Russian political scene while we were all watching *Vremya* during one of my visits. ‘I don’t care,’ strictly replied Andrei. ‘It is clear that [Vladimir] Putin [then prime minister of Russia and the front-runner for the presidential post] will win,’ he said to explain his indifference to the Russian presidential elections criticizing Putin for speaking as if he had already won the elections. ‘The outcome [of the elections] is clear,’ in a similar vein added Diana complaining that the news on Russian television is overloaded with reports on the activities of Putin and Medvedev. For her, Russia is just another ‘foreign country’, and she thinks that there is no need for her to be in touch with the political life of Russia.

If she would have the right to vote Nadezhda would support Putin; he was her favourite presidential candidate. ‘He uses his head,’ Nadezhda praised Putin and criticized his opponents, eccentric showman Vladimir Zhirinovskii and Gennadii Zyuganov, leader of the Communist Party. ‘The time of the Communists has passed,’ she added. ‘Putin is in the right place,’ Nadezhda said some other time when we all together were watching *Vremya* a few weeks before the Russian elections. The report on Putin’s proposal for changes in the migration policy was on air. For her, highly admired Putin serves as a kind of role model of the perfect leader of the country and a point of reference against which her much criticized government of Latvia can be judged.⁶⁵ ‘Here in Latvia it has not

⁶⁵ The family subscribes to the Russian-language edition of the local newspaper, and the favourite section of Nadezhda is its editorial because of its typically critical stance on the Latvian government. During my visits she usually quoted the best parts of the recent editorials. Nadezhda herself is highly critical of the power elite blaming it of the current bleak socio-economic conditions in which many people in Latvia have

happened,' Nadezhda commented on another news report of *Vremya*, this time on Putin's plans to cope with the unjustified increase in the tariffs of public utilities.

This suggests that, for Nadezhda, the news from Russia serves more as a comparison with the state of affairs in Latvia and not so much as a self-identification with Russia and the Russian political scene. Besides, to be able to criticize the Latvian government she needs to be in touch with the country's political life, and not to lose her interest in the national news. It is the national news as compared against the news from Russia that feeds her critical attitude towards the Latvian power elite. Yet, her critical stance towards those in power in Latvia signals her care for the national life rather than her indifference to it. Through consumption of the Russian news she, in fact, articulates her feelings of belonging to the national community of Latvia and not alienation from it as it may appear at the first moment. Having exited from national television and opted for transnational broadcasting from Russia, Nadezhda's family has not relinquished participation in the national life of Latvia and an exercise of citizenship.

5.7 The Territory of Criticism

For some Russian-speakers, idealization of life in Russia helps to escape from the harsh day-to-day socio-economic realities in Latvia to what they see as a better life in Russia. It is a feeling of pride that identification with such an idealized image of life in Russia offers them, helping to sustain a positive self-image in the light of everyday struggles of making both ends meet many people in Latvia face, and, what is also important, against a backdrop of what many Russian-speakers perceive as marginalization by what they see as the pro-Latvian political establishment. Yet, as already noted, it does not necessarily signal their indifference to what is happening in Latvia. Through the idealization of life in Russia they actually express their concerns of the state of affairs in Latvia. For instance, 48-year-old Russian-speaking municipality IT officer Viktor (FG8) during one of the focus group discussions explained his interest in the news on Russian television as follows:

Perhaps, you don't want to listen about our harsh reality. That what is happening in Russia... at times you even feel great envy. There [in Russia] something happens, something has been done, here [in Latvia] actually nothing has changed. Here what we only hear is that retirement

to live.

pensions have been cut down, and so on.

This is also true for Igor, the 57-year-old unemployed Russian-speaking man (F1) encountered earlier: the news flow from Russia provides a point of reference, a yardstick against which one can assess the state of affairs in Latvia. During one of our conversations Igor compared that year's New Year's greetings of then Russian president Dmitry Medvedev and the same year's New Year's best wishes of then prime minister of Latvia Valdis Dombrovskis. As he put it, while Medvedev 'wished everyone a good health', 'our Dombrovskis' spoke only about that 'how hard we are coping with [economic] crisis'. Here, the optimistic and inspiring New Year's message by the Russian leader is opposed to the rather bleak address to the nation of the Latvian prime minister who, for Igor, embodies all the hardships of everyday living in Latvia. Though criticized by Igor, Dombrovskis is still 'our' prime minister for him.⁶⁶

To quote Alina, a 29-year-old Russian-speaking organizer of children festivities (PFG1), speaking about her parents:

They watch *PBK* [*Peryi Baltiiskii kanal*] since... first of all, it is a language problem. And the second problem is that they are oriented towards Russia. Both parents and *PBK* that indoctrinates them that in Latvia everything is bad and that in Russia everything is good.

Yet, she is in danger in denying agency of her parents. *Peryi Baltiiskii kanal* may have indoctrination plans, and yet it does not necessarily mean that its audiences take its messages for granted. Likewise, as we have seen in the previous accounts, even if being critical about life in Latvia, and its power elite particularly, it does not make one losing interest in the national affairs and a sense of belonging to the national community. Instead of thinking what Alina wished to say about her parents we should think what she wished to say about herself. Through exaggerating her parents' orientation towards

⁶⁶ Besides, for the last years it is not only Russia against which he can judge his daily living in Latvia, now there is a new point of reference, the United Kingdom where Mariya, his oldest daughter, with her family has moved to. 32-year-old Mariya is among those estimated 200 000 Latvian labour migrants who have left the country searching for a better life in the United Kingdom, Ireland and elsewhere. When Mariya visits Latvia she usually shares her positive experiences of living in the United Kingdom that she and others in the family oppose to what they see as the uneasy mundane socio-economic realities in Latvia. They think that it is because of all the hardships in Latvia many are leaving the country and looking for a better life abroad. Along the established route linking Latvia and Russia now there is a new route connecting Latvia and the United Kingdom what constitutes 'transnational social fields' this family is involved in, to use the concept of Basch et al. (1994) describing the simultaneous involvements of immigrants in the social and political life of more than one nation-state. When the weather forecast is on air, they usually pay attention also to what the temperature near London where Mariya lives is.

Russia and their susceptibility to the influence of Russian television, she rather stresses her own strong national allegiance to Latvia and her own suspicions about the motives of Russian television.

Olga, a 31-year-old Russian-speaker working at the children and youth centre (FG4), comes from an ethnically mixed family with her mother being ethnic Latvian and father Russian. It was both her father and his favourite *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* she labeled as ‘pro-Russian’. According to Olga, he is well informed and has high interest in Russian politics. In the following extract she discussed her father’s news media preferences and what footprint she thinks they leave on his national affiliations. Yet, we should be careful about her assessment. Even if ‘pro-Russian’, he is still interested in the national life of Latvia (note that he reads a *national* Russian-language newspaper, even if his paper takes a critical stance on the Latvian government) as to be able to criticize he needs to know what is happening in Latvia. Besides, a critical attitude towards the government is not something exclusive to the Russian-speaking community – it is a popular sentiment also among Latvian-speakers, as we have seen in Chapter 4, and not necessarily a sign of missing feelings of national allegiance. Again we should look at her comment rather as a statement of her own sense of belonging to Latvia. If so, we can interpret it as a message on her part to stress that she thinks of herself as different from her father. To quote Olga:

My father watches news at 8 pm [*Vremya* on *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*] deliberately, and my father deliberately reads [Latvian Russian-language tabloid-style] daily *Vesti Segodnya* (*Весту Сегодня/Today's News*), and he deliberately lives in... that’s what I call the Great Russian chauvinism here in Latvia. And as far as his sense of belonging is concerned, he considers himself closer to Russia than he considers himself as belonging to Latvia. He is not interested in Latvia, and, for him, it is more a kind of the ‘territory of criticism’. Say, what idiots they all are. Besides, he does not entirely understand Latvian.

5.8 National News, a Sense of Belonging and Young Russian-speakers

In contrast to the older Russian-speaking generations, the young Russophones, many of them already the post-Soviet generation (born and grown up after 1991), have little interest in the news flow from Russia, the country from which for many of them their

parents or grandparents have originated. In the 2012 *TNS Latvia* survey 15-24 year old ethnic minority youngsters were least interested in the Russian affairs if compared to other ethnic minority generations. 'My parents are oriented towards Russia completely, but I have a different view,' generational changes in her family described Lana, a 24-year-old Russian-speaking police officer (PFG1).

It was common for my young Russian-speaking informants to position their little interest in the news on Russian television as opposed to their greater interest in the national life of Latvia as an expression of their strong allegiance to Latvia. 'I'm not interested in Russia, Moscow at all, absolutely. I consider myself a citizen of Latvia, only Russian-speaking. I am much more interested in what is happening in Latvia,' said Ilya, a 20-year-old Russian-speaking student (FG2). It is civic category of self-identification (together with linguistic one as a marker of difference from the entire body of citizens) he utilizes to explain his indifference to life in Russia. It is through thinking of himself as being a citizen of Latvia and therefore having no interest in the news coming from Russia he manifests his national loyalty to Latvia.

The same sentiment was also expressed by Vyacheslav, 32-year-old Russian-speaker working at his own construction company (FG4):

When it comes to me, I don't care what is happening there [in Russia]. Nothing good has ever happened, and it's unlikely that in the near future will happen. But as I know from the people around me... I have mixed family, that is, my mother is [ethnic] Latvian. Those who are completely pro-Russian they all say that they are interested in what is happening in Russia and that it is good there. But the bulk of them have never been there. All who have been there they think differently.

Young Russian-speakers are not only highly critical about life in Russia but also about its representations on Russian television. Thus, 36-year-old municipality officer Mikhail (FG7) described *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* as the official channel of Russia: 'To judge from the news it is a point of view of [Dmitry] Medvedev [then president of Russia] and [Vladimir] Putin [then Russian prime minister]'. Similarly, for 20-year-old student Dmitry (FG2) *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* is the channel where 'lies are being told in the news' and where '[Vladimir] Putin is shown in the news'.

The following discussion between 19-20 year old Russian-speaking students (FG2) offers discourses of young Russian-speakers talking about their own news consumption patterns and those of older generations of their families:

Sofia: When I am with my mum or granny, grandpa, then – yes, [I watch] *Vremya*. But if I'm on my own then I skip it. I like watching our [news] more. If one speaks about the older generation, let's say, granddad... I come home, and when they speak, they speak only about Russia. They are much more interested in it; they simply know all on politics in Russia, thoroughly, in details. Surely, Latvia also interests them, but only about... for example, cutting down retirement pensions interests them. But today the young generation... I don't know about all, but those who are around me, they [are] somehow more [interested]... not in Russia, rather more in Europe.

Kiril: It goes without saying – I live here, in Latvia, so it's obvious that what is happening in Latvia is more interesting to me. When it comes to my parents, they, of course, are interested in the news about Latvia, but probably by habit continue to be also interested in Russia. Most likely for them the Soviet Union has collapsed, but not in their heads. Probably it continues to exist, simply the name has changed from the USSR to Russia, and no matter that 'the USSR' has become significantly smaller and Latvia is not anymore part of the USSR. Perhaps out of inertia they feel being part of Russia. My granddads and grandmas will trust more what is on the Russian news. They trust more since they believe that there [in Russia] it is better.

Dmitry: I often notice that many Russian-speakers, I should admit, are disdainful towards Latvia and consider themselves rather as patriots of Russia than Latvia. And for that reason they rather watch *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* and not [the public broadcaster] Latvian Television [LTV]... simply because of their disdainful attitude towards the state where they live. And in *Pervyi Baltiiskii* [channel] they show all the time how good it is in Russia. People watch it and start thinking that it is really cool there [in Russia] and then they walk around waving the flag [of Russia].

Ilya: I have been there [in Russia] and it is not cool there at all.

Nikita: If I were to speak about my family, we are interested, of course, mainly in the news from Latvia as we live in Latvia. But as we have relatives in other countries... for instance, in Russia... and I have acquaintances also in America and in Japan... therefore their news is interesting for me, as well... to get to know what is happening there.

These accounts perhaps tell us less about their parents and grandparents as more about young Russian-speakers themselves. Many of them stress their high interest in the national news in contrast with their little interest in life in Russia to articulate their strong national allegiance to Latvia. Reference to older Russian-speaking generations helps them to position themselves *vis-à-vis* Russia, as well as Latvia, as feeling different from their parents and grandparents. Yet, they exaggerate the interest older Russian-speaking generations have in the news from Russia contrasting it with what they think is their not as high interest in the national affairs of Latvia. Though young Russian-speakers may have been less interested in Russian news than older Russian-speakers, the interest of young Russian-speakers in the national news is not necessarily higher than that of older Russian-speaking generations. As it came out from my further discussion with the Russian-speaking students quoted above, it is sometimes their parents, keen consumers of the news, be they national or Russian, who let them know what is happening in Latvia.

Young Russian-speakers also tend to deprive older Russian-speaking generations of agency to interpret the news messages of Russian television independently of the intentions of their producers. As we have seen earlier in the chapter, old Russian-speakers are not at all passive and uncritical viewers. We have also seen that even those who seem to accept news messages of Russian television may actually use these messages not so much, if at all, to identify with life in Russia (they may perhaps wish to identify with its idealized representations on television but not necessarily with its actual reality) but, instead, to express their sense of national affiliation to Latvia. Besides, young Russian-speakers themselves are not a uniform group and their varied positionalities in relation to Russian news can be detected. While some claim absolute indifference to what is happening in Russia, others admit that they accompany older generations of the family watching the news from Russia or that as they have relatives in Russia actually it is interesting also for them to know what is happening there.

5.9 Conclusion

While Russian-speakers ignore and distrust *Panorāma* and the overall news flow on the public broadcaster LTV and mainly rely on the Russian-language news offerings, including those on the Russian channels providing news from Russia, there is no evidence of the Russian-speaking community becoming alienated from Latvia and identifying more with Russia instead of Latvia, at least their relationship with the two countries cannot be seen in terms of a binary divide. The popularity of transnational Russian television among Russian-speaking audiences does not rule out their interest in the national life of Latvia. They have found ways to exercise citizenship outside the public television, be it within national commercial broadcasting or most notably within localized transnational broadcasting from Russia.

Despite having exited from the public broadcaster LTV, and its main channel LTV1 in particular, my Russian-speaking informants have not exited from the life of the nation. Their rejection of public television on one hand and what may look as their immersion in transnational television from Russia on the other hand does not make them ‘less citizens’ than Latvian-speakers. Russian-speakers are interested in and follow the national news to the same extent as Latvian-speakers. They do care about the life of the nation no less than Latvian-speakers. Through consumption of national news, even if this is part of content localization strategies of transnational Russian television as in the case of *Latviiskoe Vremya* and even if its reality constructions on such ‘sensitive’ issues as the country’s citizenship and language policies or interpretations of Latvia’s 20th century past may differ from those offered by *Panorāma*, Russian-speakers participate in the life of the nation no less than Latvian-speakers.

It is through localized transnational television broadcasting in their own language and respecting other particularities of their community that Russian-speakers learn about national life. Instead of public television, which they regard with great suspicion because of its perceived close ties with what Russian-speakers see as the pro-Latvian power elite, Russian-speakers have chosen to take part in the life of the nation through their much-loved pan-Baltic *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* which mixing Russian entertainment imports with the news from both Russia and Latvia has turned out to be more successful in addressing the transnational identities of Russian-speaking audiences than the public broadcaster LTV with its ethno-nationalistic project of national integration.

Though language divides Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking news audiences – while Latvian-speakers prefer watching the news on the Latvian-language channels with the news on the national commercial broadcasters gathering the largest Latvian-speaking audiences, Russian-speakers choose to watch the news on the Russian-language channels, and *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* in particular; what they have in common are everyday socio-economic realities and the need to keep up to date with them. This is the reason why the public broadcaster LTV has made so little inroads insofar as its project of national imagination prioritizing a common (Latvian) language as a unifier of the nation is concerned at the expense of the idea of making the national ‘we’ possible based on civic values, although, as we have seen earlier in the chapter, there is a potential for such conception of the national collectivity. The interest in national news that Russian-speakers have clearly signals their sense of civic belonging to the national communion of Latvia.

It is wrong to see Russian-speakers as a homogeneous community having uniform attitudes and experiences. Russian-speaking audiences are diverse as are their news preferences and news readings, and the generational shift serves as evidence of it. Among older Russian-speakers, the majority of them Soviet era settlers calling Latvia their home but Russia their homeland, interest in life in Russia coexists with their interest in the national affairs of Latvia in the same way as their affiliation to Russia does not rule out their allegiance to Latvia. Even if thinking of life in Russia as better than in Latvia and watching the news from Russia to escape from hard everyday realities of life in Latvia, they do not become indifferent to the national life of Latvia.

At the same time, young Russian-speakers, for the most part the offspring of the Soviet period immigrants born in Latvia, are not only less interested in the Russian news agenda but also are highly critical about life in Russia and its representations on Russian television. It is the way they can position themselves *vis-à-vis* Latvia, as well as Russia. Through distancing themselves from Russian news they articulate their strong national affiliation to Latvia. Yet, while not thinking of themselves as part of the Russian political world they do not deny their cultural attachment to Russia. Their civic belonging to Latvia does not exclude their interest in the Russian cultural space. Accordingly, young Russian-speakers do not reject transnational television from Russia completely. Instead of the news from Russia, they enjoy some of the popular culture offerings of Russian television. With the exception of older Russian-speaking generations, for the majority of

Russian-speakers Russian television is first and foremost a source of grand entertainment and only then, if at all, a source of the Russian news.

Chapter 6

Celebrating the Arrival of New Year Twice: Public TV and National Celebrations

6.1 Introduction

Investigation of television viewing rituals during the New Year's Eve celebrations in both Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking families provides a context for understanding the role played by the public broadcaster LTV at times of the national celebrations that is the focus of this chapter. For many non-loyalist publics of public television who have left LTV in their daily viewing practices the moments of national celebrations is that time of the year when they come back to the public broadcaster, though the tradition recently challenged by its commercial rivals.

Because of its grand entertainment offerings during the New Year's Eve celebrations Russian television easily outrivals national broadcasters, including Latvia's public television. It is also many Latvian-speaking viewers who otherwise have little interest in Russian television that search for Russian channels on the evening of 31 December. Nevertheless, a few minutes before 12 o'clock audiences return to the national broadcasters to listen the address to the nation by the country's president and prime minister followed by the clock counting down the final seconds of the year and the national anthem at the stroke of midnight. From year to year televised New Year's greetings of the country's political leadership gather one of the largest television audiences in the country. It is one of those rare moments when the nation comes together around television, though, as we shall see, not necessarily any longer around public television.

The tradition of the country's political leader to address the nation via television in the last few minutes of the year LTV has been inherited from Soviet Central Television and following the break-up of the USSR transformed for the purposes of the new political situation. Invented by Soviet state television and later continued by Latvian public television, during recent years this tradition has been taken over by its national, and even transnational, commercial rivals, to use the vocabulary employed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), and it all has further blurred the lines of demarcation not only between

public and commercial but also between national and transnational broadcasting.

While their parents and grandparents gather around Russian(Soviet)-origin entertainment and find nostalgic (Soviet) pleasures there, it is Western popular culture that brings together young Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers. The English language of Western-origin entertainment has become a kind of *lingua franca* for young people of both ethno-linguistic groups.

6.2 Festive Television

While it is not their ‘everyday television’, for many the public broadcaster LTV is their ‘festive television’, to borrow the idea of the ‘festive viewing of television’ as opposed to the ‘ordinary viewing’ introduced by Dayan and Katz (1992) in their media events study. It is during those moments when LTV airs special broadcasts of the rituals and ceremonials of the national celebrations, what Cardiff and Scannell (1987) in their study on the early days of the British public broadcasting have termed as ‘the programmes of national identity’ that many of my informants, including its non-loyal publics, said they search for LTV.

To quote 68-year-old retired Latvian-speaking woman Ilga (FG9), LTV1 ‘is the most important channel that we watch in all national holidays, we could not do without it’. For her and many others, live broadcasts of the official ceremonies of the national celebrations on the main channel of the public television LTV1 such as the televised New Year’s president’s address to the nation are central to the ritual of celebrating important events in the national life. It is a time when, as Ilga put it, ‘we always watch the first channel [LTV1]’. Also for 56-year-old Latvian-speaking farmer Dzintra (FG10), it is the ‘solemn’ programming of LTV during the national celebrations such as Līgo Day and Jāņi on June 23 and 24 when people in Latvia celebrate summer solstice and Christmas that provides a festive atmosphere. ‘It is LTV1 that shows that holidays are approaching,’ she pointed out.

As others among his peers, also Jānis, 27-year-old Latvian-speaking worker at the supermarket (FG3), has little everyday experience with LTV. While he has some favourite programmes on it, he is not a keen viewer of public television. Nevertheless, it is the special offerings of LTV during the national celebrations that bring him to the public broadcaster. It is a time when he becomes loyal viewer of LTV. One such

occasion when he re-enters the public television is on Independence Day, November 18. As he pointed out, it is a time when the routine schedule of LTV is broken and special programming is introduced: ‘Then you go and switch it to see what’s on [LTV]’.

It is precisely this interruption of the rhythms of daily life, as well as the festive and solemn atmosphere that special programming of LTV during the national celebrations provides that explains why LTV’s festive programming has been so successful for many years, and has made even its otherwise non-loyal publics to return to the public broadcaster during these moments in the life of the nation in contrast to their everyday viewing patterns where the commercial channels otherwise dominate. As we shall see, it is the success of LTV’s established formula of special programming during national celebrations that has made also its commercial rivals, national and even localized transnational, to take over the role of the public television during these moments.

6.3 New Year’s Eve Television Rituals

It has already become a long tradition for many Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers to spend New Year’s Eve at home together with friends and family preparing a special meal and drinks and watching television, and it is also one of those national celebrations that are equally important for members of both ethno-linguistic communities, and along with the celebrations of March 8, International Women’s Day, one of those popular Soviet era traditions Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers are happy to retain after the break-up of the Soviet empire.

As during the years of Soviet rule all religious festivals were banned, including Christmas, it was the evening of 31 December when Father Frost, the Soviet version of Father Christmas, came and children received presents, and over the years it has also become the most important event of the year for those making entertainment programmes on Soviet television. New Year’s Eve celebrations on Soviet television had become one of the most important dates in the broadcast year, to paraphrase Scannell and Cardiff (1991), something that contemporary Russian television with its annual grand musical shows on the New Year’s Eve has preserved. This Soviet era tradition of providing television audiences with special musical shows on the evening of 31 December is still

much alive today also on LTV.⁶⁷ Besides, also its commercial rivals have taken it over.

It is common in many Russian-speaking families to celebrate the arrival of New Year twice – first according to Moscow time and then, a few hours later, once more in line with the local Latvian time. They toast with champagne, light fireworks and listen to the president's address to the nation twice – the Russian president is the first in a row to address them for few minutes interrupting New Year's Eve special musical shows on all main Russian channels, and two hours later it is a turn for the president of Latvia or, to quote some of my Russian-speaking informants, 'our president' to appear on their television screens (it is also the prime minister of Latvia who addresses the nation on New Year's Eve). 'The president of Latvia... that's sacred duty', that is how 55-year-old Russian-speaking school teacher Galina (FG7) expresses her strong commitment not to miss the traditional New Year's best wishes of the head of the nation. Russian-speaking viewers listen twice to the national anthem, first the Russian and then the Latvian one, on the evening of 31 December, as well.

For many years for both Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers New Year's Eve has been one of those rare occasions over the course of the year when they have searched for the public broadcaster LTV. It has been also one of those rare moments when all generations of the family have gathered around LTV1, the main channel of LTV. On December 31 the role of LTV has been vital. It is because for many years since the restoration of the country's independence LTV has been the only broadcaster where in a pre-recorded message the country's political leadership addressed the nation looking back at the outgoing year, outlining what to expect from the next one and sending their New Year's best wishes and where the traditional New Year's clock counting down the final seconds of the year appeared followed by the national anthem at midnight.

It is a tradition LTV has inherited from the Soviet Central Television where starting from the early 1970s each year on the evening of December 31 10 minutes before midnight the General Secretary of the Communist Party, leader of the Soviet Union, sent televised Happy New Year wishes to the Soviet people, or when the health of the General Secretary was too poor to do it himself they were read by a television announcer, followed by twelve rings of the Kremlin Chimes counting down the last seconds of the

⁶⁷ Like the Soviet Central TV also LTV during the Soviet period traditionally offered special programmes of popular music on the evening of 31 December such as the late 1970s and early 1980s *Gadu mijas melodijas* (*Melodies of the New Year's Eve*) show with all the pop stars of that time performing their hit songs.

year and the anthem of the USSR at 12 o'clock. Alongside both channels of Soviet Central Television this was simultaneously broadcast also on LTV with its then name TV Riga – all three were the only available channels in Latvia at the time – as well as on both channels of the Latvian state radio. Then Latvia was at the same time zone as Moscow.

In the late 1980s, shortly before the break-up of the Soviet empire Latvia not only started to celebrate the arrival of the New Year according to the local Latvian time – one hour later than in Moscow, it was also the country's new political elite, then Latvian political leaders, who now sent their New Year's best wishes to their people on radio and television. Though the empire collapsed, the tradition of the country's political leadership to address the nation on the New Year's Eve a few minutes before midnight has been preserved, and it is a tradition happily repeated from year to year not only by the country's political elite and television programme-makers but also by audiences. As audience statistics dating back to as early as the mid-1990s show, New Year's address to the nation from year to year has been among the country's most watched programmes of the year securing sizeable audiences for the public television LTV on the New Year's Eve.

Over the years, it has become for many a deep-seated tradition to watch LTV1 shortly before midnight on the evening of December 31, and yet, as we shall see, during the recent years the national commercial channels, and even the transnational *Peņņi Baltiiskii kanal*, have managed to break this tradition and take a large number of audiences away from the public broadcaster and its New Year's Eve special programming. Nevertheless, still, many by force of habit during their New Year's Eve celebrations continue searching for LTV1 few minutes before midnight. It is one of those moments when those who have exited from the main channel of the public broadcaster LTV1 in their everyday viewing practices re-enter it.

'The only time when all of our family watches LTV1 it is for a couple of seconds on the evening of 31 December when the president addresses the nation and all the bells ring,' 21-year-old Latvian-speaking student Krista (PFG2) said, speaking about her family's rituals of New Year's Eve celebrations. In their everyday lives LTV1 plays rather marginal role and it is mainly sports programming on LTV7, the second channel of LTV, that make their regular experience with the public television. It is the president's New Year's message on the evening of 31 December one of those very few occasions throughout the year when also 25-year-old Russian-speaking municipality officer

Elizaveta (FG7) joins the audiences of LTV1. 'You need to listen what the president will say,' she explained.

6.3.1 Between Moscow and Latvian Time

Among those Russian-speaking families celebrating the arrival of New Year twice is also the family of 55-year old Russian-speaking hospital administrator Anna, her husband Igor, a 57-year-old unemployed Russian-speaking non-citizen of Latvia, and their daughter, 27-year-old shop-assistant Marina and her 4-year-old daughter Yuliya (F1).

As in previous years, it was also this year on December 31 at 10 pm according to Latvian time when it was midnight in Moscow they pop opened a bottle of champagne for the first time and repeated the same procedure once more two hours later at midnight in line with Latvian time, this time to celebrate the arrival of what Anna called 'our New Year'. Although they did not light fireworks themselves, other people in the nearby neighbourhood in the same way as in all previous years had prepared a firework display at midnight in line with both Moscow and Latvian time. Still, the bulk of fireworks were lit at midnight according to Latvian time, and that was also the only time when Anna's family went out to watch others lighting fireworks.

This year, too, they received televised greetings from both heads of the respective nations, Russian and Latvian. First it was Dmitry Medvedev, then president of Russia, who sent them Happy New Year wishes from Moscow followed by greetings of the Latvian president Andris Bērziņš sent from his Riga Castle residence. While Anna complained of what she characterised as uniform New Year's Eve musical shows across Russian channels, still it was Russian television they were watching most of the time during their New Year's Eve celebrations switching from one Russian channel to another instead of, in Igor's words, watching the 'humble' offerings of the national channels, including the public broadcaster LTV. Anna also agreed that on the local channels on December 31 'there is no such cheerfulness and festive mood' as one can find on Russian television.

Nevertheless, a few minutes before 12 o'clock they switched away from Russian television to see the national commercial channel LNT offering a live broadcast from the New Year's celebrations at the Freedom Monument in the centre of the capital Riga gathering together hundreds of people who have come to see a traditional fireworks

display at midnight. It was also on LNT where Anna's family saw the New Year's greetings of the country's president and prime minister. In his less than ten minutes long pre-recorded address to the nation then prime minister Valdis Dombrovskis standing in front of the image of the Freedom Monument among other things called all citizens to take part in the next year's language referendum reminding that Latvian language is the basis of Latvia's national identity.

Given that from the national Latvian-language channels, alongside LTV7 (mainly because of its sports programming) it is mostly LNT they watch on a regular basis – it is only Anna in her family who has some, albeit sporadic, interest and experience with LTV1 with Anna's daughter Marina and husband Igor being among the LTV1 audiences hardly ever with the only exception of the annual *Eurovision Song Contest* when they search for the main channel of the public television, it is therefore not surprising that instead of LTV1 they have opted for LNT also in their non-quotidian viewing practices, on New Year's Eve, especially as during the last years LNT has work hard to emulate LTV1 on the evening of 31 December reproducing the same rituals as LTV1, including the transmission of the New Year's greetings of the country's political leaders.⁶⁸ To put it another way, the commercial LNT channel has made itself a ready substitute of the public broadcaster LTV on New Year's Eve making exit from LTV easy. In the eyes of audiences there is no difference anymore as to whether one should spend the last few minutes of the year together with the public LTV1 or the commercial LNT as both channels look almost the same.

According to that year's audience statistics, it was LNT gathering the largest audiences shortly before midnight when the country's president and prime minister addressed the nation, the same pattern observed over the past few years.⁶⁹ The commercial channel has

⁶⁸ Besides, contrary to the public television, the commercial LNT shortly before midnight provided also New Year's best wishes of the country's ex-presidents, as well as the greetings of Nil Ushakov, mayor of the capital Riga, a highly popular political figure among the Russian-speaking community, something that could also explain the interest of Anna's family in the offerings of LNT.

⁶⁹ As *TNS Latvia* ratings data shows, 358 600 viewers were watching LNT at midnight. The second most popular was *Peryji Baltiiskii kanal* who also offered New Year's greetings of the Latvian president and prime minister. 232 100 viewers were watching *Peryji Baltiiskii kanal* at midnight. At 10 pm *Peryji Baltiiskii kanal* broadcasted greetings of the Russian president transmitted from Moscow and two hours later, at midnight in line with Latvian time, also address to the nation of the Latvian president, and, as the audience statistics show, it was 229 300 watching greetings of Andris Bērziņš, the president of Latvia, and slightly less – 222 700 – watching greetings of then Russian president Dmitry Medvedev. It is the pattern of the recent years with the message of the Latvian president attracting slightly higher number of viewers on *Peryji Baltiiskii kanal* than the one of the Russian president. LNT and *Peryji Baltiiskii kanal* were the most watched channels on December 31 evening, other channels, including LTV1, lagging behind. It was only 80 900 this year watching LTV1 at 12 o'clock.

proved to be more successful in bringing the nation together for the last few minutes of the year leaving the public broadcaster with its official mission of national integration behind. Although it is their much-loved *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* where the majority of Russian-speakers prefer to watch greetings of the country's political leadership, LNT is their second choice and only then follow other national broadcasters, including the public television LTV. It all suggests that in the presence of availability of the exit mechanism (similar offerings of other channels) many have easily abandoned their long-lasting tradition to spend the last minutes of the year in the company of the public television.⁷⁰

Copying the traditional New Year's Eve celebrations formula of LTV during the recent years the commercial rivals of LTV have been successful in breaking what seemed to be an enduring tradition for the whole family to gather around the public channel LTV1 a few minutes before the arrival of New Year. For many years it has been only LTV1 broadcasting the address to the nation by the country's president and prime minister but today due to the high interest of their audiences it is also the national commercial channels, and even the transnational *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* doing the same. Along the greetings of Nil Ushakov, mayor of Riga, *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* just like its national counterparts also airs the New Year's message of the Latvian president and prime minister but subtitled in Russian and it also plays the national anthem of Latvia as the clock strikes midnight, the procedure pan-Baltic *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* performs also in other Baltic countries of Lithuania and Estonia also there alongside Russian ones broadcasting greetings of their own president and playing their own national anthem. In fact, it was *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* that first started to broadcast the Latvian president's New Year's greetings back in the early 2000s with the national commercial channels following suit a couple of years later. Nowadays, shortly before midnight, the president's and prime minister's New Year's message, followed by the countdown clock and the national anthem at 12 o'clock is televised on all the most popular channels in the country.

Similar programming strategies by LTV and its commercial rivals during the New Year's Eve celebrations further blur demarcation lines between public and commercial, and also

⁷⁰ Though in 2013 LTV1 managed to regain its status of being the most popular channel in the country a few minutes before midnight on the evening of 31 December, the New Year's greetings by the country's political leadership gathered sizeable audiences also on its national and transnational commercial rivals LNT and *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*, both also still being much more popular choice among Russian-speaking audiences of where to watch New Year's address to the nation by the country's political leaders than the public television.

national and transnational, broadcasting in the eyes of the publics of the public television making it harder for them to distinguish LTV from its commercial competitors, something I have already discussed in Chapter 4. Emulating some of the strategies of the public broadcaster is part of the audience maximization plans of the commercial broadcasters – over the years special festive programming on LTV during the national celebrations has proved to be a generator of sizeable audiences. It is also the way these channels can justify their status of being national broadcasters but for the transnational *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* it is the way to make itself look more national. Emulating the national broadcasters during the last few minutes of the year helps *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* to domesticate (localize) its Russian-origin offerings (in the same way as producing the national news *Latviiskoe Vremya* along its Russian Moscow-based sister *Vremya*) and to make transnational television from Russia look more familiar for its Latvian Russian-speaking audiences and closer to their daily rhythms.

6.3.2 From the Periphery to the Centre

The family of 68-year-old Russian-speaking retired school teacher Nadezhda (F5) usually celebrates the New Year's arrival twice, first in line with Moscow and then later also according to Latvian time. However, this year they missed Russian celebrations as instead of the usual one hour this year for the first time it was two hours difference between the Latvian and Moscow time zones. We mixed it up, they explained.

Although they are Orthodox and Old-believers, as they celebrate the arrival of New Year twice they also celebrate Christmas and other religious festivals twice. First together with the Lutherans and Catholics who make the majority of the Latvian population and later also in line with the Orthodox calendar. 'We are internationalists,' explained Nadezhda during one of our conversations to stress that in her family different cultures coexist peacefully and Russian and Latvian cultural spaces are not in conflict with each other. 'The more holidays the better,' she said referring to the tradition of her family to celebrate Christmas twice. It is this kind of mix-and-match approach they seem to apply to engage with both Russian and Latvian cultural worlds, albeit it is still their engagement with Russian cultural space that seems to dominate over their experience with Latvian cultural sphere (at least as far as their television viewing practices indicate it).

As many others, it is also Nadezhda's family, her 39-year-old daughter Diana and 37-year-old son-in-law Andrei, both teachers, and their 10-year-old daughter Aleksandra,

watching Russian television on the evening of December 31. While offerings of Russian television for Nadezhda are 'colourful and joyful', watching the national broadcasters during the New Year's Eve is like eating a soup without a salt added. For her, LTV1, the main channel of the public television, is 'greyish and sombre' and not only during the New Year's Eve celebrations but also throughout the rest of the year, a view that is, to be fair, widespread not only among its Russian-speaking but also Latvian-speaking publics.

However, despite their critical views on the New Year's Eve offerings of the national channels still, as Diana put it, 'to know that the New Year has arrived' few minutes before midnight they had used to switch to LTV1. Watching the greetings of the Latvian president and prime minister followed by the traditional New Year's clock counting down the last seconds of the year and, finally, the national anthem at midnight it is an experience Russian television fails to replace, something for what there is no ready substitute available on Russian satellite channels.

As described in Chapter 5, following the 2010 digital switchover Nadezhda's family has not had access to any of the national channels. It is a satellite dish offering access to transnational television from Russia they have chosen instead of purchasing a set-top box to continue watching the national channels. Instead of *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* they watch one of the international versions of *Pervyi kanal* providing only the Russian president's New Year's address to the nation.

The reason they decided to opt out of national television is the high-budget entertainment on Russian television that easily outrivals offerings of the national broadcasters, including the public television LTV, also in their day-to-day viewing practices. As Andrei suggests, the national broadcasters are like the periphery, contrary to the centre, Russian television. 'Where is it more interesting – in Riga [capital city of Latvia] or in the province?' he asked rhetorically and added: 'Russia is fifteen times bigger than Latvia'. It is more generous in funding, Andrei thinks, and that allows Russian television to win in its competition with the national television industry. As he argued, 'Russian television is more spectacular than the Latvian channels,' and, therefore, better qualifies as a great source of entertainment allowing to escape from drabness of daily realities. People are searching entertainment on television, as he put it, 'to colour the life'. Also Sergei, a 30-year-old Russian-speaking worker at the railway company (FG8), during one of the focus group discussions described entertainment offerings of the national channels as modest. He compared the output of Russian channels with the content

provided by the national broadcasters saying that ‘you have not entered an ordinary shop, you have visited a supermarket’, and, to be true, it was also many of my Latvian-speaking respondents who used the same line of argumentation to explain their interest in Russian-origin entertainment on television.

To use Andrei’s terminology, preferring Russian television instead of the national broadcasters they opt for ‘the centre’ instead of ‘the periphery’ or, to use Sergei’s analogy, they choose to do shopping at ‘the supermarket’ instead of some ‘ordinary shop’, the choice that itself on a symbolic level seems to be more attractive, and in combination with a pragmatic logic (grand entertainment offerings in their own language) makes preference for transnational television from Russia and exit from national broadcasting for many Russian-speakers rather effortless and easy.

We can also see it as a strategy employed by Russian-speakers for redressing the balance with Russian television seen as offering an escape from what they see as their subordinate status within national broadcasting. While many of Russian-speakers feel inferior within national broadcasting, and the public broadcaster LTV in particular, watching their much-loved Russian channels provides them with a sense of superiority. There is a difference being a minority with your voice being ignored or, so to speak, to be allocated a peripheral position within national broadcasting or to be part of ‘the centre’ within transnational television from Russia. To put it differently, we can look at Russian-speakers’s assertion of the superiority of Russian television as opposed to the inferiority of the national channels as an expression of resentment they feel over being disregarded within national broadcasting.

6.3.3 *Goluboi Ogonek*, and Other Soviet Rituals

As already noted, it is not only Russian-speakers who prefer watching Russian television during their New Year’s Eve celebrations, also many Latvian-speakers, even those who are not keen viewers of Russian television in their everyday media practices, from year to year migrate to Russian channels during the New Year’s holidays. On December 31 and January 1 Russian channels usually experience untypically high audience figures.⁷¹ Here is

⁷¹ According to the ratings data, it was *Peryi Baltiiskii kanal* that attracted the largest audiences on the 2011 New Year’s Eve, also including many ethnic Latvian viewers. Its *Olive-shou (Olivier Show)* mixing music and comedy outrivaled all New Year’s Eve offerings of the national channels. As *TNS Latvia* ratings data shows, on December 31, 2011 among audiences of *Peryi Baltiiskii kanal* 20.7% were ethnic Latvians and next day on January 1, 2012 the number of ethnic Latvians watching *Peryi Baltiiskii kanal* amounted to 29.5%. To compare, on average in 2011 ethnic Latvian audiences constituted 17.9% of *Peryi Baltiiskii kanal*

a group of older Latvian-speaking female viewers (FG9), 68-year-old retired Ilga, 55-year-old agronomist Ināra and 57-year-old chief specialist at the local museum Inta, discussing offerings of LTV and those of the Russian channels on the evening of 31 December to unanimously agree that Russian television stands head and shoulders above LTV in this respect. Yet, although it is ‘banal’, ‘boring’ and ‘the worst one’, it is still ‘our television’ and it is somehow even hard to criticize ‘our’ LTV indicating that their critique of LTV does not signal their indifference to the public television:

Ilga: New Year’s programmes [on LTV] are so poor.

Ināra: The worst ones.

Inta: You cannot watch it on our television, I’m sorry to say.

Ilga: The worst, the most boring ones you can imagine.

Ināra: It is, indeed... [The president’s] solemn speech ends and that’s it.

Ilga: And after [the speech] there is nothing interesting to watch.

Ināra: It looks banal.

As in past years, also that December 31 the family of 54-year-old Latvian-speaker Māra, an accountant at the state archive (F2), was watching a long-running New Year’s Eve variety show *Goluboi ogonek* (*The Little Blue Light*) on RTR *Planeta* (RTR *Planet*), the international version of the Russian state broadcaster *Rossija* (*Russia*), with Russian pop stars, stand-up comedians and other celebrities taking part in it. The *Goluboi ogonek* show mixing musical performances with comedy sketches and interviews first appeared on Soviet Central Television in the early 1960s when alongside performers of popular music, other well-known artists, poets, television announcers and sportsmen also army officers, cosmonauts and those honoured as heroes of socialist labour were among the guests of *Goluboi ogonek* sending their New Year’s greetings to the millions of those watching the

viewership. Along *Peryi Baltiiskii kanal* it is also RTR *Planeta* (RTR *Planet*), the international version of the Russian state channel *Rossija* (*Russia*), gathering large audiences on New Year’s Eve year in year out, and the year of 2011 was not an exception. Its traditional New Year’s Eve variety show *Goluboi ogonek* (*The Little Blue Light*) with a format similar to the one of *Olive-shou* was among the most watched programmes on the evening of December 31. The ethnic composition of RTR *Planeta* viewership is similar to *Peryi Baltiiskii kanal*. While on average in 2011 ethnic Latvian audiences made 23.4% of its viewership, on that year’s New Year’s Eve the number of ethnic Latvians watching RTR *Planeta* had grown significantly. On December 31, 2011 27.1% of RTR *Planeta* audiences were ethnic Latvians, and on January 1, 2012 this number reached 36.2%.

show at home. For many years the three-hour-long *Goluboi ogonek* has served as the central element of the New Year's celebrations ritual on the Soviet television – it was on air five minutes past midnight straight after the rings of the Kremlin Chimes and the anthem of the USSR, and has retained its central role and popularity also today on Russian television. According to ratings data, *Goluboi ogonek* has many devoted viewers also in Latvia.

On New Year's Eve we have never watched Latvian channels, told me 19-year-old student Liene, Māra's youngest daughter. 'They know how to mark holidays,' Māra praised the offerings of Russian television on the evening of 31 December which she saw as better at providing a festive mood on the New Year's Eve than the national channels. Nevertheless, shortly before 12 o'clock they usually switch from transnational broadcasting from Russia to national broadcasting, and for a few minutes instead of *Goluboi ogonek* watch one of the national channels. 'To check the clock to know when to drink champagne,' explained 26-year-old Dace, Māra's oldest daughter, civil servant working at the ministry. It is also the greetings of the president and prime minister of Latvia they usually watch on one of the national channels.

While it is musical shows on Russian television they enjoy watching on the New Year's Eve, there is a moment during the celebrations when they return to national broadcasting as it is only it that provides that feeling of being part of the national communion, which transnational television from Russia cannot offer (with the exception of the localized transnational *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*), and despite their intense dislike of the local political class, as described in Chapter 4, still on the New Year's Eve they wish to hear its greetings. It is because all these elements (receiving televised greetings from those in power, counting on television minutes and seconds till midnight and toasting with champagne at 12 o'clock) are part of deep-seated traditions of the New Year's Eve celebrations with national broadcasting playing the central role in this ritual of the nation coming together around television during the last minutes of the year, the ritual repeated enthusiastically by broadcasters and their audiences from year to year.

From year to year, during the New Year's holidays, alongside *Goluboi ogonek*, they also watch 1975 Russian romantic comedy *Ironiya sudby, ili S legkim parom!* (*The Irony of Fate, or Enjoy Your Bath!*). *Ironiya sudby* tells a story of a chain of misunderstandings Muscovite Zhenya is involved in on the New Year's Eve mixing up his standard Moscow block of flats apartment with an identical one having the same address in Leningrand, today's St

Petersburg, making the film a subtle satire of the bleak uniformity of the Soviet everyday reality. Indeed, it is not only Māra and her husband, 59-year-old engineer Heinrihs, who enjoy watching this Soviet era classic but also their daughters, Liene and Dace. 'We watch *Ironija sudby* every year. Without it, New Year cannot start in our family,' said 26-year-old Dace. For all members of the family *Ironija sudby* is among their most favourite films.

Popular films of the Soviet epoch are that part of the Soviet legacy even Latvian-speakers, otherwise highly critical about the Soviet rule and legacy it has left in Latvia, are happy to hand on to the next generations, as we can see also in the case of Māra's family. It is also that part of Soviet heritage that unites Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, and older generations in particular, in their shared search for nostalgic (Soviet) pleasures.⁷² The *Ironija sudby* film is so popular among both ethno-linguistic audiences that it is not only Russian channels but also the national commercial broadcasters that have made it a staple of their New Year's holidays schedules year in year out. It is a time when, to quote Māra's daughter Dace, 'almost all channels show' *Ironija sudby*. While on one channel the film has just started, on other it draws to a close. When late December national and transnational Russian channels start to run a promo of *Ironija sudby* it is a very clear signal that the New Year's holidays are approaching.

As we have seen, it is deep seated habits going back to the Soviet era that still continue to shape the way how people in Latvia celebrate the New Year's Eve. Many of them are rituals once invented by Soviet television (such as the country's leader addressing the nation in the last few minutes of the year and special musical shows the whole night through) that not only the ex-Soviet and now public broadcaster LTV but also its commercial rivals are happy to reproduce. While Soviet state television along with the Soviet empire has long been dead, traditions it had once invented, to use the idea of 'invented traditions' as proposed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), are still much alive and enjoy enduring popularity even among Latvian-speakers who so enthusiastically during the first years of independence in the early 1990s wished to become 'normal' and as quickly as possible to return to Europe forgetting about all that associates them with

⁷² Hollywood production that was highly popular shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union today has lost its novelty status, and instead of Western blockbusters large part of audiences, and especially older generations, are happy to go back to the Soviet classics. Hence, we can say that after the initial rapid and massive Westernization of the ex-Soviet television space during the 1990s it is now a time for re-Easternization, and popularity of the Soviet era popular culture in a combination with high demand for the today's Russian-origin television entertainment in Latvia (and, as argued, not limited to the Russian-speaking audiences) as in other former Soviet republics is evidence of this process (for a more detailed account on this pattern see Štětka, 2012b).

the ‘abnormal’ Soviet past (Stukuls Eglitis, 2002). It suggests that today, more than two decades after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, people are not anymore ashamed to see normality in the Soviet past, at least in some aspects of the Soviet way of life.⁷³

6.4 No More Monopoly on the Production of Festivity

As already noted, because of their potential to pull in big audiences and thus bring commercial success, the commercial rivals of LTV have decided to copy the strategies of public television during the national celebrations, and for many it is the commercial broadcasters that today have become also their ‘festive television’. It is not only on the New Year’s Eve but also during the rest of the calendar of the national celebrations when the national commercial broadcasters have recently started to offer special festive programming, something that for many years only the public broadcaster LTV did and something that not only guaranteed its otherwise non-loyal publics coming back to LTV during these moments but also something that allowed its publics to distinguish the public broadcaster from its national and transnational commercial rivals.

Given the weak tradition of watching the public television as part of their every-day viewing rituals, many have easily given up their long-standing tradition to watch LTV during the moments of national celebrations and have migrated to the similar offerings of their favourite commercial broadcasters that during these moments in the eyes of audiences have become ‘close substitutes’ of LTV, to speak in the words of Hirschman (1970). For many of my respondents the commercial channels have long become a substitute of public television in their day-to-day viewing practices but now when they have taken over some of the traditions of the public television it is also during the non-quotidian moments of the national life, to paraphrase Morley (2000), they have found the commercial broadcasters as providing ‘a ready alternative’, again to use terminology of Hirschman (1970), to the public television who for many years enjoyed a monopoly on the production of festivity at times of the national celebrations.

No wonder that for many there is no difference anymore as to whether they should watch the commercial channels or the public broadcaster LTV during the national celebrations as the former, during these moments, have started to provide programming

⁷³ Also a recent public opinion poll has showed that ethnic Latvians over the last few years have become less negative in their attitude towards the Soviet period, still far from being as positive as Russian-speakers are (Kaprāns, Procevska, 2013). Nevertheless, according to the same survey, neither among ethnic Latvians, nor Russian-speakers those who would like to see the Soviet regime being restored is in majority.

similar to that of LTV, including live broadcasts of some of the ritual official ceremonies, challenging what for many years seemed to be the impregnable ‘special attachment’ (Hirschman, 1970) of its publics to the public broadcaster LTV during the moments of national celebrations. In other words, in the eyes of its publics there is no difference anymore as to whether to participate in the crucial moments of the national life through the public television or its commercial competitors. The commercial channels have happily taken over the role of the public broadcaster during these moments of the national life as it allows combining their aspirations as national broadcasters with commercial success.

6.5 The Week of Commemoration and National Pride

As this year’s president’s New Year’s greetings also his National Day’s address to the nation the family of 55-year old Russian-speaking hospital administrator Anna (F1) was watching on the national commercial channel LNT. Like previous years also this year on November 18 when the proclamation of Latvia’s independence in 1918 is celebrated LNT offered live broadcasts of the festive events of Independence Day, including the traditional president’s address to the nation given from the square by the Freedom Monument in the capital Riga, in which the head of the nation sends his National Day’s greetings to those gathered in the city centre in front of the Freedom Monument and thousands of those watching his speech at home on television.

Back in 1999 it was then recently elected Latvian president Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga who introduced this new ritual in the list of the established National Day’s official ceremonials starting a tradition of the president sending Independence Day’s greetings to the nation. From the very beginning alongside public television LTV, it was also LNT who has broadcast the president’s message but, recently, also other national commercial channels have started to do the same, and nowadays, at 8 pm on November 18 almost all national channels air the president’s greetings live from Riga city centre.⁷⁴ There is no difference whether one watches the president’s speech on LTV or on one of its commercial rivals. Switching from channel to channel during those few minutes when the president’s address is on air they all look the same.

According to the audience statistics, the commercial LNT is more successful in

⁷⁴ The transnational *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*, the most popular channel among Russian-speaking audiences, does not provide live broadcasts of the National Day’s official ceremonies.

addressing audiences of the ethno-linguistic minority during the National Day's celebrations than the public LTV. Just as in previous years, also this year there were more Russian-speakers watching the president's Independence Day's address to the nation on LNT than on the public broadcaster. Overall, the president's November 18 broadcast this year turned out to be more popular on LTV1 than on LNT, while the year before it was vice versa. Nevertheless, each year either the president's greetings or the Independence Day's fireworks display over the River Daugava in Riga later the same evening, something LNT started to offer only recently, gather equally large audiences on both channels signalling that substantial part of audiences have abandoned what only few years back seemed to be a deep-rooted tradition to watch live broadcasts of the National Day's official ceremonials on the public channel challenging some of previously taken for granted assumptions of loyalty towards the public television on the part of its publics during the moments of national celebrations. It all also shows not only how recent but also how fragile these broadcasting traditions, in fact, are. Instead of being fixed and stable, they are actually subject to change, re-invention.

On the evening of November 18 LNT looks much the same as the main channel of the public television, LTV1. Both channels provide their audiences with access to the National Day's official ceremonies taking place in the capital city. As LTV1, also LNT offers a live broadcast of the president's address, as well as the festive fireworks display. Both along the Independence Day's military parade, also taking place in the capital, gather the largest television audiences of all televised National Day's ceremonials.⁷⁵ The dramaturgy and scenography of these live broadcasts on both channels are all the same, and also presenters of LTV1 and LNT with their solemn appearance and patriotic texts on November 18 do not look much different from each other. Through their special National Day's programming both the public channel LTV1 and its commercial rival LNT present their claims to the status of a true national broadcaster. Its live broadcasts on November 18 allow also the commercial channel LNT to be part of the annual Independence Day's project of national imagination, something the public broadcaster LTV has previously monopolized.

Its special programming in the week from November 11, Lāčplēsis Day, which honours

⁷⁵ According to the regular audience figures, the traditional ecumenical worship service, as well as the ceremonial meeting of the parliament and the official National Day's concert are less popular, all broadcasted only on LTV1. Though few years back LNT offered also live broadcast of the annual November 18 military parade, later it has removed it from its Independence Day's schedule.

the 1919 Latvian freedom fighters, to November 18 LNT has named as The Week of Patriots. Though LNT has initiated a new tradition calling people to wear Latvian carmine-white-carmine flag ribbon during these days – it was first anchors of LNT who appeared on screen wearing a ribbon in 2009, and later presenters of other national channels, and also news readers of *Latviiskoe Vremya* (*Latvia's Time*) on the transnational *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* – another way for it to make itself look more national, as well as official figures and more and more also ordinary folks followed suit, and yet the scheduling strategy of LNT during its Week of Patriots utilizes the same triad of LTV's long-standing conception of special programming during the national celebrations. It is popular Latvian films, including Soviet classics – or, as my Latvian-speaking respondents would like to instead say, 'Latvian classics', to speak in the words of 46-year-old Latvian-speaking blue-collar worker Pēteris (FG10), as well as concerts of popular music and live transmissions of official ceremonies that is at the heart of the offerings of both LTV and LNT in the week from Remembrance Day, November 11 to Independence Day, November 18.

The week of commemoration and national pride in the national calendar is a time when television traditionally has been full of programming appealing to national sentiments of their audiences. Overall, it is a time of the year when the societal self-reflection on the national identity is at its peak. Besides, in contrast to March 16, which for many Latvian-speakers is a day to pay tribute to the Latvian Legion, and May 9, when many Russian-speakers celebrate the Victory Day, polarizing the nation and reminding of conflicting collective memories among both ethno-linguistic groups (see Chapter 4), November 18 celebrations bring Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers together.⁷⁶

6.6 Searching for Comfort and Pleasure on Russian Television

In the same manner as celebrating the arrival of New Year twice, first in line with Moscow time and then, few hours later, also according to Latvian time, many Russian-speakers, mostly older generations, combine their interest in the news flow from Russia with the national news, first they watch *Vremya* from Moscow and then its national version *Latviiskoe Vremya* that, it is worth to remind it here, translates as *Latvia's Time* (see

⁷⁶ Although among those celebrating November 18 are more Latvian-speakers than Russian-speakers, the National Day celebrations are quite popular among both ethno-linguistic communities – in the 2012 survey 52.5% Russian-speakers reported that they celebrate November 18 compared to 80.3% ethnic Latvians claiming doing the same (Kaprāns, Procevska, 2013). (For more detailed analysis of attitudes of members of both ethno-linguistic groups towards the days of national celebration and commemoration see Zepa, 2008.)

Chapter 5 for a detailed examination of the news preferences of Russian-speaking audiences). It is being in-between Russian and Latvian time, and space, that best characterizes viewing practices of these audiences. However, for the majority of Russian-speakers Russian television is first and foremost a source of large-scale generously funded entertainment and only then, if at all, it is a source of the news from Russia.⁷⁷

Mainly out of comfort (their own language, cultural proximity) and pleasure (attractive, spectacular programming) Russian-speakers enjoy the entertainment offerings of Russian television, and it is also the reason for their dismissal of national broadcasters, including the public channel LTV. It is this comfort and pleasure the majority of Russophones are searching and finding on Russian television and only then, if at all, identification with Russia, and its political world particularly. Some of these motivations also make many Latvian-speaking viewers, and especially older Latvian-speaking audiences, keen consumers of Russian popular culture. It is those ordinary gratifications, namely watching entertainment for pleasure, cross-cutting ethno-linguistic boundaries that attract Latvian-speaking audiences to Russian television and also make Russian-speakers so enthusiastic viewers of Russian channels.

The fact that there are some motivations Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers have in common when choosing to watch Russian television suggests that it is not only, or mainly, the ethno-linguistic identity of Russian-speakers that guides their viewing preferences in the same way as in the case of Latvian-speakers it is not only, or mainly, their ethno-linguistic background what explains their viewing decisions. Yet, it is not to deny that apart from some commonalities there also exist different motivations Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking viewers have in their decision to watch transnational television from Russia. In short, Russian-speakers may have additional reasons to watch Russian television as they have additional reasons to reject public (national) broadcasting.

While motivations of viewers of both ethno-linguistic groups may meet at some point, at the same time the comfort and pleasure gained from watching Russian channels may not always mean the same thing for Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking audiences. Although Russian-speaking audiences are ‘normal’ audiences to the same extent as Latvian-speaking viewers are with all the same ordinary gratifications people seek to find

⁷⁷ The regular audience measurements show that apart from the evening news (with higher ratings for the national news *Latviiskoe Vremya* instead of *Vremya* focusing on the Russian news) it is a wide range of entertainment offerings – different talk, game, talent, reality and comedy shows, many of them adaptations of popular global entertainment formats – attracting the largest audiences on *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*.

on television, we cannot ignore different sociabilities, mental landscapes, habituses, linguistic abilities, family histories and other facets of one's identity what make Russophone audiences different from Latvian-speaking audiences, and even if some of these particularities are not so significant as members of both communities tend to think they still shape viewing decisions and experiences of audiences of both ethno-linguistic groups.

After the 2010 digital switchover when all terrestrial channels in Latvia abandoned analogue broadcasting and the family of 68-year-old retired Russian-speaking school teacher Nadezhda (F5) decided not to purchase a digital set-top box to be able to continue watching national channels, all they have today is a satellite dish offering a wide range of transnational television from Russia, as well as other foreign channels, and no access to any of the national broadcasters, including both public service channels (for more details see Chapter 5). It is Russian state-controlled channels, *Pervyi kanal* and *Rossiya (Russia)*, what Nadezhda calls 'the second channel' (it is the second one on their remote control after *Pervyi kanal* set up as the first one), that are their favourite ones.

The tabloid talk show *Pust govoryat (Let Them Speak)* on *Pervyi kanal* has become central to their viewing ritual on weekday evenings with the exception of Andrei, Nadezhda's 37-year-old son-in-law, who says being less interested in it; however, still sometimes joins others just for the company. It is all three women of the family, Nadezhda, her daughter and granddaughter, that are the most loyal audiences of *Pust govoryat*; they watch the show every evening. They have interesting topics, said Nadezhda, explaining their engagement with *Pust govoryat*. Whenever, during my visits, we were watching the show together they passionately discussed that day's topic, participants, as well as the host of the show. 'There is a rumpus going on,' once commented Nadezhda's 10-year-old granddaughter Aleksandra when a heated debate among the participants of the show begun. 'Women's rumpus,' ironically added Andrei. That evening, at the heart of the show there was a story of a 12-year-old girl who had become a mother and her 43-year-old guardian who had been sentenced for seducing her. 'The father of my child – my father,' was the episode title.

Apart from *Pust govoryat*, a number of other entertainment offerings, most of them adaptations of popular global formats, are among the programmes they like on *Pervyi kanal*. During those months I visited the family on Sunday evenings they were usually watching Russian talent show *Minuta slavy (Minute of Fame)* on *Pervyi kanal*, the Russian

version of *Britain's Got Talent/America's Got Talent*, with ordinary people from all around the country coming to a TV studio to show their talents. No doubt, they enjoyed watching the show; they were laughing while watching it and actively commenting on the performance of the participants. 'It's a nightmare,' Nadezhda commented on one of the numbers. It was a 22-year-old primary school teacher from Moscow participating in the *Minuta slavy* show dressed in a vampire costume and coming out from a coffin to demonstrate what she thinks is her talent for dancing. She was booed by the studio audience and the judges were also highly critical about her performance with all three voting her down. 'Why did they allow her to take a part?' Andrei was wondering.

It is Russian celebrities, singers, actors and television presenters, usually participating in the *Minuta slavy* show either as guests, members of the jury or the studio audience, and from the comments of the family members it was clear that they are highly competent in the Russian show business, and are better informed about the Russian celebrities than Latvian ones. Nadezhda's 39-year-old daughter, school teacher Diana, remembered young Latvian singer Nikolajs Puzikovs having a concert in their village and Diana's Latvian-speaking colleagues at the school being surprised that she had never before heard of him. Puzikovs became popular after taking part in the local *X Factor* type talent show broadcast on the national commercial channel LNT. 'They mentioned his songs but I didn't know any of them,' Diana remembered her conversation with colleagues at work. Because being out of national broadcasting and having no shared knowledge audiences of the national channels have she felt being excluded from the communication.

In the list of the family members' most favourite actors and musicians are only names of Russian celebrities with the exception of Latvian household name composer of popular music Raimonds Pauls and Latvian singer Laima Vaikule with all her Russian language hit songs written by Pauls – both during the 1980s became hugely popular throughout the Soviet Union and today are still well-known in Russia and other former Soviet republics.⁷⁸ It all signals of their strong cultural affiliation to the Russian, or more generally Russian-language, cultural world, something that also helps to understand their keen interest in popular culture on Russian television.

What is more, as Andrei argued, it is the grand scale that makes entertainment on

⁷⁸ It was only little Aleksandra, Diana's daughter, who among her favourite singers has included also Latvian pop star Lauris Reiniks, highly popular among teenagers, that appears to be an influence of Aleksandra's Latvian-speaking friends. As noted earlier, she studies in Latvian at school together with Latvian-speaking children.

Russian television – alongside cultural proximity – not only more relevant but also superior to the offerings of the national channels. Also for Andrei’s wife Diana, shows on the national channels are ‘humble’ compared to the Russian ones what she finds ‘more impressive and more colourful’. ‘Russia is bigger, the choice greater, and only those who are really talented are accepted,’ Andrei compared Russian and local talent shows. The *Minuta slavy* show was on air at the same time slot on Sunday nights when the Latvian version of the same talent show format *Latvijas zelta talanti* (*Latvia’s Golden Talents*) was on air on the national commercial channel LNT. While the family of Nadezhda was watching the *Minuta slavy* show, their Latvian-speaking neighbours were watching *Latvijas zelta talanti*, and in line with the viewing figures of that time both *Minuta slavy* and *Latvijas zelta talanti* were highly popular signalling once more that, though members of both ethno-linguistic groups prefer watching television in their own language, the type of programming they like is much the same.

As suggested earlier, it is this sense of superiority Russian-speakers get when opting for Russian television instead of a feeling of being marginalized within national broadcasting. It is not simply better entertainment providing access to the Russian cultural space they find attractive on Russian channels, it is the different position allocated to them as viewers they find attractive on Russian television. Choosing transnational television from Russia they choose to escape from the minority status allocated to them within national broadcasting, and particularly the public broadcaster LTV. When saying that they like Russian television so much, at the same time they are saying that they do not like national broadcasting. When saying that they find Russian television more in line with their needs and interests, at the same time they are saying that they do not find national broadcasting relevant. Their dismissal of national broadcasting – the decision of Nadezhda’s family not to purchase a digital set-top box – is a manifestation of their discontent. It is an exercise of voice that their choice to watch transnational television from Russia, instead of national broadcasting, and the public television LTV in particular, signifies.

6.7 ‘Sorrowful’ Latvians and ‘Joyful’ Russians

Both national and Russian channels offer their adaptations of international television entertainment formats, and one such example is a dining show *Come Dine with Me* with participants, be they ordinary people or celebrities, competing to be named the greatest dinner party host whose Latvian version called *Gandrīz ideālas vakariņas* is part of the offerings of the national commercial TV3 while its Russian version *Zvanyi uzhin* is offered

by the Russian commercial REN TV whose Baltic version is available in Latvia via cable and satellite. Both, *Gandrīz ideālas vakariņas* and *Zvanyi uzbin*, are part of the weekday peak-time schedules with *Gandrīz ideālas vakariņas* starting at 6 pm on TV3 and *Zvanyi uzbin* few hours later on REN TV.

The family of 54-year-old Latvian-speaker Māra working as an accountant at the state archive (F2) instead of the national version *Gandrīz ideālas vakariņas* prefers Russian *Zvanyi uzbin*. As Māra enjoys cooking and even bakes bread at their apartment in the fourth floor of the nine-storey standard Soviet era block of flats in the capital Riga, it is one of her most favourite shows on television. As other members of the family like to accompany Māra while she is watching *Zvanyi uzbin*, the programme has become a central part of their viewing experiences on the weekday evenings.

Their oldest daughter, 26-year-old civil servant Dace working at the ministry, characterised *Gandrīz ideālas vakariņas*, the Latvian version of *Come Dine With Me*, as ‘insipid’ compared to its Russian version. ‘The emotions and temper [of the participants of the show] are much more colourful,’ she pointed out. Interestingly, some other of my Latvian-speaking informants, for the same reason, instead of the Russian version prefer watching the Latvian adaptation of *Come Dine With Me*. While for the former, the emotionality of Russians makes the show more attractive, for the latter it is rather a deviation of a norm. As 67-year-old retired Latvian-speaking telephone operator Ligita (F4) argued, Russians express their emotions too much or, to quote her, they are ‘more impulsive’ than participants of the Latvian version, and that is something she does not like.

At the heart of these responses to the Latvian and Russian adaptations of the *Come Dine With Me* show are the supposedly different temper and manners of Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, and in this way the Latvian and Russian versions of the same global dinning show format help their viewers to distinguish the supposedly different nature of Latvian-speakers from the one Russian-speakers are believed to have and thus to demarcate boundaries between both ethno-linguistic groups. What is more important, both Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking audiences set these demarcation lines between ‘us’ and ‘them’ to explain and justify their own viewing preferences. Through the construction of difference (*vis-à-vis* ‘their’ group) and commonality (within ‘our’ group) viewing choices of both ethno-linguistic communities are presented as normal and natural.

To explain what may look as their immersion in Russian television my Russian-speaking respondents often referred to the perceived cultural differences between Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers arguing that the mentality of Russian-speakers differs from the one Latvian-speakers have. ‘Russians, nevertheless, are Russians,’ commented Svetlana, a 33-year-old Russian-speaking real estate specialist working at the local municipality (FG8), to explain the high interest Russian-speakers have in transnational television from Russia. It is also Latvian-speakers who believe that members of both ethno-linguistic communities have different mentalities and that it determines also their viewing habits. ‘Perhaps Russian mentality is different, they like something else than [ethnic] Latvians,’ said 24-year-old Latvian-speaking student Mārtiņš (FG1) commenting on his lack of interest in Russian television. According to this logic, supposedly different mentalities of both groups are seen as determining different taste cultures they inhabit that, in its turn, are believed to leave ultimately its mark on their decisions about which channels (national versus transnational Russian) and in which language (Latvian versus Russian) to watch, albeit, as we have seen, in reality Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers in their viewing choices are not as different as imagined by themselves (at least in terms of some of the gratifications they seek to satisfy through the act of viewing).

Besides, the perceptions Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers have about the public broadcaster LTV and all the national channels more generally *vis-à-vis* Russian television reveal identification schemes members of both ethno-linguistic communities apply to construct self-identity and that of the other group. For many, Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers alike, LTV represents some stereotypical image of Latvian-speakers as being sorrowful and sombre compared to Russian channels seen as being more colourful and expressing joy of life, and thus reflecting some imagined Russian mentality. These accounts also reveal a poor image of the public broadcaster LTV in the eyes of its publics of both ethno-linguistic groups, and also a rather poor (self-)image of Latvian-speakers, as well.

26-year-old Latvian-speaking civil servant Dace (F2) is among those who believe that the public broadcaster LTV reflects the nature of Latvian-speakers. She characterised LTV, and Latvian-speakers, as ‘grey and boring’ and contrasted it with Russian television where ‘you feel temperament, colours and spice’. 39-year-old Russian-speaking school teacher Diana (F5) referred to what she thinks are different mentalities of Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking school children to explain differences in output of the national

channels and transnational television from Russia, and at the same time to justify her own great appetite for Russian television. According to her observations, Latvian-speaking children are more placid while their Russian-speaking peers are more restless.

Responses of my informants towards *Panorāma* (*Panorama*), the main prime-time news programme of LTV1, say a lot not only about their overall perceptions of the public broadcaster LTV but also about the way Latvian-speakers see themselves and about how Latvian-speakers are seen by Russian-speakers and, finally, how the identity of Russian-speakers is formed against these judgements. '*Panorāma* usually starts in such a very pessimistic and very conservative tone,' commented Dagmāra, a 51-year-old Latvian-speaking project manager at a state institution (FG3). Similarly, for 39-year-old unemployed Latvian-speaking man Arnis *Panorāma* is 'gloomy' (FG10). Also Vyacheslav, 32-year-old Russian-speaker working at his own construction company (FG4), described *Panorāma* as 'extremely tedious' and 'mournful, boring'.

Consider also the following discussion between Russian-speakers, 48-year-old school deputy director Boris, Anastasia, a 29-year-old manager working at the bank and 26-year-old medical student Vladislav (FG4). Here again the self-perception of some abstract and universal 'Russian man', conceived as different from '(ethnic) Latvian man', is employed to explain why 'Russian man' prefers Russian television instead of the national channels, loved more by '(ethnic) Latvian man':

Boris: Because Russian man..., he is more fidgety.

Anastasia: Cheerful...

Boris: And therefore also their [Russian] programmes are joyful and there is energy... But all those programmes on LTV1, they are such...

Vladislav: Such calm.

Boris: Restful.

Anastasia: With tears.

It is again not only the public television LTV, but through their perceptions of LTV also Latvian-speakers, who are represented as 'calm' and 'with tears' contrary to Russian channels, and Russian-speakers, portrayed as 'fidgety' and 'cheerful'. Through this

process of construction of difference (*vis-à-vis* outsiders) and commonality (within insiders) not only images of ‘self’ and ‘other’ are made but also ‘our’ viewing choices justified. In other words, audiences work through these stereotypical representations of ‘self’ versus ‘other’ in order to draw frontiers on the basis of supposed cultural differences that would explain and make sense of their own viewing habits. To put it in simple terms, with reference to their feeling of being different from Latvian-speakers Russian-speakers explain their different viewing habits. Russian channels are seen as more in line with the needs and interests of ‘Russian man’. Though not necessarily thinking of themselves therefore as somehow superior over Latvian-speakers, still Russian-speakers, and, as we have seen earlier, also Latvian-speakers themselves, speak about ‘mournful’ and ‘grey’ Latvian-speakers, and ‘mournful’ and ‘grey’ LTV, with a note of irony in their voice.

6.8 Russian Television and Nostalgic (Soviet) Pleasures

The high interest in some of the offerings of Russian television illuminates a degree of nostalgia towards the Soviet era popular culture among the older generations of both ethno-linguistic communities. Latvian-speakers have always been highly critical about the Soviet system which has been seen as ‘abnormal’ – in the eyes of Latvian-speakers the Soviet order was ‘illegitimate, illegal, artificially imposed, and contrary to the national “way of life”’, to quote Stukuls Eglitis (2002:13). Yet, today, more than 20 years since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Latvian-speakers are not afraid to admit (at least through their television choices) nostalgic feelings towards the Soviet era popular culture, something that seems to be regarded as non-political and hence harmless side of the Soviet regime. As noted earlier, seeing normality in some aspects of the Soviet past is not anymore such a taboo among Latvian-speakers as it used to be some two decades ago.

However, high interest in popular culture of the Soviet epoch among the older generations, both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, not necessarily implies their longing for the Soviet times; it may simply be their youth what they are missing. To put it another way, the Soviet era popular culture may offer a symbolic journey taking them back to the Soviet years to the same extent as taking them back to the time of their youth that happened to coincide with the Soviet era. For instance, this is how her interest to see the jubilee concert of the Soviet era pop star Ukrainian singer Sofia Rotaru performing all her hit songs on one of the Russian channels explained 54-year-old Latvian-speaking accountant Māra (F2): ‘These are the songs of my youth’. Nevertheless, it is nostalgic

pleasures (yearning for their youth, Soviet times, or both) that older Latvian-speaking, as well as Russian-speaking, audiences often search on Russian television.⁷⁹

As Vihalemm and Masso (2007) have pointed out in their study on the structures of collective identities of the Estonian Russophones, Russian television is an important source of material that feeds Soviet nostalgia, and one of the most prominent projects of post-socialist nostalgia on Russian television is the annual weeklong television contest of young pop singers *Novaya volna* (*New Wave*) taking place at the end of July in the tourist hotspot seaside town of Jurmala about 20 km from the capital Riga and being transmitted live to Russia and a number of other former member countries of the Soviet Union, including the host country of the contest, Latvia.⁸⁰

The *Novaya volna* festival that first took place in 2002 is a revival of the popular late 1980s summertime television contest of young singers *Jurmala*. Even the venue of the festival, the open-air Dzintari concert hall in Jurmala, has remained the same. Back in the 1980s Raimonds Pauls, a well-known Latvian composer of popular music, was among those having the idea to organize in Jurmala the contest of aspiring singers from all around the Soviet Union to be broadcast simultaneously on TV Riga, then name of LTV, and the all-Union Central Television. The presence of Pauls in the *Novaya volna* festival from the outset of the competition in 2002 has become one of the most visible symbols of the *Novaya volna* as the successor of the late Soviet *Jurmala* festival. Till 2012 when Pauls left the *Novaya volna* festival he served as a co-chair of the jury of the contest together with Russian composer Igor Krutoi, both also former members of the jury of *Jurmala* contest.⁸¹

During the 1980s Pauls became highly popular all around the former Soviet Union, and

⁷⁹ Apart from some niche Russian cable and satellite channels showing archives of the Soviet television 24/7 and selling to their audiences feelings of nostalgia (one of them even has such a name, *Nostalgiya* (*Nostalgia*) channel), it is also mainstream Russian channels offering a number of shows inviting their audiences to return to 'the good old days' of the Soviet epoch. Besides, there are quite many products of the Soviet era television that today are reproduced by Russian television where they coexist with global Western television formats.

⁸⁰ During the Soviet years Jurmala was one of the most popular Soviet seaside resorts and has retained its popularity among Russian tourists also today. It has become a status symbol for wealthy Russians to have a posh villa in Jurmala, and many of them also gather in Jurmala for the *Novaya volna* festival turning it into the get-together of the Russian super-rich.

⁸¹ The *Novaya volna* festival is not only the successor of the popular late Soviet era contest, the Soviet past is all too present in the festival today. Each year along young talents taking part in the competition, vast majority of them representatives of the ex-Soviet republics, also stars of popular music of the Soviet epoch perform as guests of the festival. As critics say, the focus on the Soviet era pop stars overshadows the competition of young singers itself. These pop stars are all the same Russian celebrities that make regular appearance on Russian television, including its special New Year's Eve musical shows.

many of his greatest hits have been released in both Latvian and Russian versions. Pauls is one of those rare local artists that both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers like. Many of my Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking informants indeed agreed that Pauls is the artist Latvia can be proud of. The popularity of Pauls also explains the high interest in the *Novaya volna* festival among both ethno-linguistic communities. Live broadcasts of the *Novaya volna* contest from year to year pull in sizeable television audiences in Latvia, close to the number of viewers watching the annual *Eurovision Song Contest*, and, as the ratings data show, both Russian-speakers and Latvian-speakers have equal interest in the *Novaya volna* festival.⁸² During recent years viewing figures of the *Novaya volna* broadcasts have experienced some decline signalling that audiences in Latvia are losing their interest in the festival; nevertheless, still for a significant number of viewers, watching the *Novaya volna* contest is a compulsory part of their summer viewing experiences. ‘It is my hobby,’ Larisa, a 67-year-old retired Russian-speaking woman (FG6) said referring to her interest in the *Novaya volna* festival.

While it is common for Latvian-speakers to take a rather ironic, if not to say sneering, stance on the *Novaya volna* festival describing it as a Soviet relic, decrying it for bad taste and low quality and calling it the anti-Latvian project of Russian cultural imperialism, the *Novaya volna* provides its viewers, both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, and older generations of both groups in particular, with nostalgic (Soviet) pleasures, even if it is ‘an ironically inflected nostalgia project’ (Platt, 2013:449).⁸³

Contrary to the younger generation of this Latvian-speaking family (F4), the list of the favourite artists of 67-year-old retired telephone operator Ligita and her husband, 66-year-old retired music teacher Bruno, also contains some names of popular Soviet era celebrities. It is Ligita who is the greatest fan of Soviet (Russian) popular music in the family.

For her, as for many Latvian-speakers, the years of Awakening, the pro-independence struggle at the late 1980s and the early 1990s, and the following collapse of the Soviet Union and restoration of Latvia’s independence are one of the most positive events Latvia has experienced in its 20th century history, while the Second World War, the Soviet

⁸² It is the national commercial channel LNT and its Russian-language sister channel TV5 offering transmissions of the festival, and with a one day delay it is also available for viewers in Latvia on the international version of the Russian state channel *Rossija* (*Russia*).

⁸³ As Platt rightly points out, ‘a stance of ironic distance makes it possible to take pleasure in the entertainment traditions of “the good old days” without necessarily entertaining the idea that there was anything particularly good about the Soviet era as a whole’ (2013:449).

occupation and the Stalinist repressions the most negative ones, and yet this does not rule out her high appetite for the Soviet era popular culture. When popular music concerts are on offer on Russian television, a crucial part of its weekend schedules, they are something Ligita will definitely not miss on television, especially the jubilee concerts of the Soviet era icons of popular music.

During one of our conversations her telephone rung and she suddenly ran away back to her room upstairs to watch talk show *Pust govoryat* (*Let Them Speak*) on *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*, one of her favourite shows on Russian television. As it came out later, it was her niece calling to let her know that there is a special edition of *Pust govoryat* on air right now devoted to the christening of a new-born baby girl of one of the most popular Russian pop stars Filipp Kirkorov, also known as ‘the king of Russian pop music’. Kirkorov is one of Ligita’s favourite Russian singers, and as all the rest of her much-loved Russian pop and rock stars, many of them also legends of the Soviet popular music, it is also Kirkorov who is among the regular guests of the *Novaya volna* festival, and for this reason almost week long broadcasts of the festival are an indispensable summertime viewing ritual for Ligita year in year out.

As soon as *Pust govoryat* came to an end, I could resume my conversation with Ligita. She spoke about the show with great passion, and it was clear that she was really interested in the topic. A number of notables of Russian show business were present at the christening, including all those popular Russian artists whose concerts Ligita likes to watch on Russian television so much. She recapped the hour-long show:

All [Russian] celebrities have gathered [at the christening of Kirkorov’s baby]... [singer] Lolita, fashion designer [Valentin] Yudashkin, figure skater [Evgenii] Plyushchenko, and [singer, legend of the Soviet popular music] [Alla] Pugacheva was with [her husband, comedian] [Maksim] Galkin... [TV journalist, presenter of *Pust govoryat*] [Andrei] Malahov is a godfather [of the baby]... The baby didn’t cry at all.

6.9 Young People and Western Popular Culture

While their parents and grandparents have equal interest in Russian(Soviet)-origin popular culture, what brings young people with different ethno-linguistic backgrounds together is their common interest in Western-origin entertainment, particularly the recent

releases of American films and series they most often find on the internet. Contrary to the shared interest their parents and grandparents have in Russian-language entertainment coming from East, the English language of entertainment coming from West has become a kind of *lingua franca* for young Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers making a common space of Western popular culture possible – something that has contributed to ‘the homogenization of the mental structures of the ethnic majority and minority youth’ that includes, among other things, also their shared strong Western-oriented supra-national identity, as Vihalemm and Kalmus argue in their study of self-identification patterns and value orientations among different generations of the two main ethno-linguistic groups in Estonia and Latvia (2009:111; see also Kalmus, Vihalemm, 2008, Vihalemm, Kalmus, 2008).

It is Western television and the internet Vihalemm in her study of media repertoires of ethnic Estonians and Estonian Russian-speakers have identified as examples of ‘the new ‘cosmopolitan’ channels of communication’ offering ‘possibilities for the creation of new inter-ethnic contacts and solidarity between different groups’ (T.Vihalemm, 2002:294), and evidence of my investigation into the media consumption patterns of young Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers suggests that this process is underway also in Latvia, or at least that there is a fertile ground for the emergence of new inter-ethnic contacts and solidarity between young people of both ethno-linguistic groups with Western-origin internet-based entertainment here playing a central role.

Young Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers in their twenties and thirties all know very well where and how to download their favourite, mostly American, films and series using the internet torrent services or to stream them live. There is no place for ethno-linguistic divisions when it comes to the consumption patterns of Western popular culture among young Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers. They like the same American films and series and, what is more, prefer watching them online. During the focus group discussions with Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking students some of them even declared that they do not watch conventional television at all.⁸⁴

‘I do not watch [conventional] television at all. Sometimes I can catch some moments while going through the living room when the family is watching. But I myself do not

⁸⁴ Yet, we should treat these statements with some caution as young people tend to overestimate the role of the internet played in their daily lives. Though it is the internet that dominates daily lives of young people, as this study also shows, it should not necessarily mean that they have abandoned conventional television completely.

watch [conventional television] already for a long time,' claimed 20-year-old Russian-speaking student Dmitry (FG2). He is convinced that in the foreseeable future the internet will replace television and traditional television will cease to exist. Instead of traditional TV box he prefers watching his favourite films and series on the internet. American series *Californication* and *Boardwalk Empire* are among the ones he selected as his favourite, the ones he downloads on the internet.

Like their Russian-speaking peers, also young Latvian-speakers prefer watching their favourite American series online. For 24-year-old Latvian-speaking student Mārtiņš and his friend Toms, also 24-year-old Latvian-speaking student, (FG1) it is American series *Breaking Bad*, *Modern Family*, American and Canadian co-production *Fringe*, as well as American and British co-production *Game of Thrones* they download on the internet. 'I don't have a TV set at all. All I watch it is on the internet,' Mārtiņš claimed. As Dmitry, he also believes that traditional television will die out during the next decades.

My young Russian-speaking respondents were well informed about the Russian celebrities and less about the stars of Latvian show business. They enjoy watching Russian music channels such as *Muž TV* and *Pervyi Baltiiskii Muzykalnyi (First Baltic Music Channel)* offering contemporary Russian popular music, something young Latvian-speakers are little interested in. Many of my young Latvian-speaking informants claimed that they do not watch Russian channels at all or do it rarely,⁸⁵ and therefore it should come as no surprise that many of them do not know much about the Russian celebrities and instead are much better informed about the local stars than their Russian-speaking peers. Yet, what they have in common are their much-loved idols of Western popular culture.

While among young Latvian-speakers Russian-origin entertainment is less popular and, similarly, young Russian-speakers are less interested in home-grown entertainment, it is Western popular culture that young people from both ethno-linguistic groups enjoy equally, and it was also the 2006 study of the cultural consumption patterns of ethnic Latvian and ethnic minority university students concluding that what unites young people of all ethnic groups is their common interest in Western popular culture (Tabuns, 2006).

⁸⁵ For many young Latvian-speakers their knowledge of Russian language is not as good as it is among older Latvian-speaking generations. For instance, 20-year-old Latvian-speaking student Zane (FG1) explained her little interest in Russian-language channels saying that 'Russian language doesn't come easy to me'. Yet, it does not mean that they reject Russian-origin production on television completely. Russian entertainment imports with Latvian subtitles on the national commercial channels have also some young Latvian-speaking viewers.

6.10 Conclusion

The celebration of the arrival of the New Year, first in line with Moscow time does not make Russian-speakers less interested in repeating the same procedure of pop opening a bottle of champagne and receiving televised New Year's greetings from the country's political leaders a few hours later according to the local Latvian time. Their attachment to Russia – more to the Russian cultural space and less to the Russian political world – does not rule out their allegiance to Latvia.

For the majority of Russian-speakers Russian television is first and foremost a source of great Russian-origin entertainment and only then, if at all, it is a source of Russian news. It is spectacular entertainment on Russian television that makes Russian-speaking audiences passionate viewers of Russian channels also during the New Year's Eve celebrations, and because of its festive atmosphere also those many Latvian-speakers who otherwise have little interest in Russian television search for it on the evening of 31 December. It is not only, or mainly, some special 'homecoming' stimuli (desire to maintain linkages with or, metaphorically speaking, to return to the lost homeland Russia) but also these ordinary motivations (namely, search for entertainment) what make Russian-speakers avid viewers of Russian television also for the rest of the year, and it is the same ordinary motivations what bring also significant portion of Latvian-speakers, and older generations in particular, to Russian television in their daily viewing practices.

This is not to say that there are no ethno-cultural motivations present – indeed, for many Russian-speakers television from Russia provides access to the Russian cultural sphere they associate themselves with (not necessarily with the culture of Russia but rather with a wider Russian-language cultural space) and especially for older Russian-speaking generations their experience of watching Russian television helps to sustain emotional connections with their original homeland Russia. Yet, these ethno-cultural motivations are not necessarily the only, or the most important, rationale standing behind the viewing choices of the Russian-speaking minority.

While both Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking older generations enjoy watching Russian(Soviet)-origin entertainment offering nostalgic (Soviet) pleasures, it is Western popular culture what brings together young people of both ethno-linguistic communities. English language of Western-origin entertainment has become a kind of *lingua franca* for

young Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers contrary to Russian, a *lingua franca* of their parents and grandparents.

Albeit it is transnational Russian television with its grand entertainment that easily outrivals national broadcasters during the New Year's Eve celebrations, still there is one moment during the celebrations when national channels play a crucial role. It is popular among audiences televised address to the nation by the Latvian president and prime minister in the last few minutes of the year followed by a countdown clock and the national anthem as the clock strikes midnight. It is a ritual once invented by the Soviet television and after the dissolution of the Soviet empire continued by the public broadcaster LTV and recently also taken over by the national commercial channels, and even the transnational *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*, breaking the long-lasting tradition for the (national) family to gather around the public television at midnight on the New Year's Eve.

Apart from commercial motivations taking over and carrying on this tradition allows national commercial channels to show that they are no less true national broadcasters as the public television. For the transnational *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* mimicking of elements of national broadcasting as the clock approaches midnight on the evening of 31 December is a way how to domesticate (localize) its Russian-origin content aimed at pan-Baltic audiences in the same way as running its national news service along provision of the Russian news agenda. It is this mixture of national and transnational broadcasting what makes *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* so successful in addressing multi-local (transnational) identities of its Russian-speaking viewers, namely their simultaneous, and not necessarily conflicting, affiliations to Latvia and Russia.

This amalgamation of public and commercial, and also national and transnational, broadcasting during the New Year's Eve celebrations makes further confusion for publics of the public broadcaster LTV in distinguishing it from its national, and also transnational, commercial rivals, something I have already discussed in Chapter 4. What is more important in the context of the focus of this chapter is that the blending of public and commercial, and also national and transnational, broadcasting also demonstrates that part-taking in those moments of the national life celebrating national togetherness is not necessarily linked with the public broadcasting institutions and that the national, and even localized transnational, commercial broadcasters can also provide its audiences with a membership in the national community during the moments of

national celebrations.

Chapter 7

Popular Culture Bringing the Nation Together: the Case of Live Sports Broadcasts and the *Eurovision Song Contest*

7.1 Introduction

What today brings the nation together around the public broadcaster LTV are products of popular culture such as regular live sports broadcasts and the annual *Eurovision Song Contest*. It is one of those rare moments when young and old audiences, as well as Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking viewers search for the offerings of the public television, and it is only during these moments when LTV truly succeeds in its official mission of national integration. Contrary to the news and politics on LTV dividing the nation along ethno-linguistic lines, it is what audiences seem to qualify as politically neutral popular culture on LTV that is more successful in addressing its publics of both ethno-linguistic communities. It is also a time for the expression of national sentiments and manifestation of one's allegiance to the nation.

Popular cultural forms on the public television not only facilitate the meeting of different audiences over a common space and thus make the national 'we' around the public broadcaster LTV possible, however momentary and precarious this might be, but for otherwise non-loyal publics of LTV, namely the ethno-linguistic minority viewers and young audiences, it is also the only regular experience they have with the public television. Especially sports programming on the second channel of LTV is something these publics find relevant and would miss if LTV ceased to exist, and because of its sports broadcasts also would be ready to pay the licence fee for this channel, if such introduced. This is also the reason why some of my respondents qualified LTV7, the second channel of LTV, as a public broadcaster contrary to LTV1, its main channel, making associations with the distrusted political elite.

7.2 Mass Ceremony of Watching Ice Hockey

Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, the young and the old, all enjoy watching live televised broadcasts of ice hockey games when the national team takes part. Through simultaneous consumption of the same ice hockey game by large national audiences stretching across the generational and ethno-linguistic lines something like a mass

ceremony of watching ice hockey is made, to use vocabulary of Anderson (2006). When hockey is on air, in many families it is a time when all members of the family come together, all generations enjoy watching it. It is also a time when the manifestation of national sentiments or 'flag-waving', to speak in the words of Billig (1995) describing that form of nationalism that is reproduced daily on newspapers sports pages, is at its peak. It is one of those rare moments when a feeling of national 'we-ness' or, as Scannell and Cardiff (1991) have put it, 'we-feeling' is produced around the public television. These hockey broadcasts appear to be a very democratic form of national imagination as they allow each member of the national community to be part of the national family and through their support for the national ice hockey team to express their feelings of national loyalty.

As the regular audience statistics show, during the 2011/2012 season when the study took place live broadcasts on LTV7 of Russia's Kontinental Hockey League tournaments where the Latvian team *Dinamo Rīga* was participating were among the most watched programmes in the country, and though the majority of viewers of these broadcasts were ethnic Latvians, it had also attracted considerable ethnic minority audiences. Already after the completion of the fieldwork starting from the 2012/2013 season Kontinental Hockey League games have moved from LTV7 to a number of pay-TV channels owned by the Swedish media group MTG. The news that MTG company has won the broadcasting rights to show the Kontinental Hockey League matches till 2015 sparked a public row as many complained that their much-loved hockey broadcasts have moved from the free-to-air public broadcaster LTV to privately owned pay-TV channels. LTV7 started broadcasting the Kontinental Hockey League games from 2008 when the league was set up. However, LTV7 still is home to the transmissions of other national and international big sporting events, including Olympic Games, that continue bringing large audiences to LTV7, including non-loyal publics of the public television.

It is sports broadcasts on LTV7 that bring to the public broadcaster also young people who otherwise have little interest and sporadic experience with the public television, and its main channel LTV1 particularly. It is the way how these publics of LTV re-enter the public broadcaster. Besides, many of them say that sports offerings of LTV7 are the only reason why they would miss the public television, if it ceased to exist, and the only reason why they would be ready to pay the licence fee for it, if introduced. Apart from sports broadcasts on LTV7 in the eyes of young viewers LTV is an old-fashioned broadcaster

oriented to old people.⁸⁶

The last time 24-year-old Latvian-speaking student Toms (FG1) watched the public television was the recent transmission of the Kontinental Hockey League game with *Dinamo Riga* playing on LTV7, and it is live sports broadcasts on its second channel he would miss the most, if LTV stopped its operations. ‘There would be no hockey anymore,’ he said. It is sports programming on its second channel that constitutes also 19-year-old Latvian-speaking student Rūta’s (PFG2) regular experience with the public broadcaster. Live hockey transmissions with the participation of *Dinamo Riga* on LTV7 are among her favourite programmes on television, and it is something that she would miss, if LTV disappeared, and it is also something she would be ready to pay for:

I would pay for LTV7 because I watch there hockey, basketball... But for LTV1 – no, I would not pay for it. I don’t watch it at all. Well, maybe once a year I watch the *Eurovision [Song Contest]* there.

Also 31-year-old Latvian-speaking civil servant Agita (FG9) enjoys watching televised hockey matches, though only as long as the national team does well. If the national team fails, she loses her interest in hockey and, therefore, also in hockey broadcasts. So, her attachment to the national ice hockey team goes as long as it succeeds. If *Dinamo Riga* fails, her national sentiments are over and also loyalty to LTV7 lost. It is the success or the failure of hockey players of the national team that also determines whether she will stay with the second channel of the public television or exit it. ‘If it goes well, then we follow it. If it doesn’t go well, then we switch away [to another channel],’ she explained traditions of hockey watching on television in her family.

While a large part of Latvian-speaking viewers, and older generations in particular, along with sports broadcasts on LTV7 also has some more or less regular experience with LTV1, for the majority of Russian-speaking viewers sports programming on LTV7 are the only regular experience they have with public television overall. Many of my Russian-speaking respondents struggled to remember the last time when they were among the LTV1 audiences. It is most often only live sports broadcasts on LTV7 that makes them

⁸⁶ Those young Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers born in the early 1990s have grown up in the era of booming commercial broadcasting and deteriorating public broadcasting with their families spending less and less time with the public television LTV (if at all they have ever had regular experience with it in the case of many Russian-speaking families) and embracing more and more its commercial competitors, be they national or transnational Russian, and therefore little interest in LTV among younger generations of both ethno-linguistic groups should not come as a surprise.

part of the national 'we' as conjured up by the public broadcaster LTV.

'The first channel [LTV1] – I don't watch at all, but the second one [LTV7], it is hockey, sports,' said Vadim, a 37-year-old Russian-speaker working at the travel agency (FG4), and the experience he has with the public television is typical to many Russian-speaking viewers and, to be true, also for some Latvian-speakers. While 46-year-old Latvian-speaking blue-collar worker Pēteris (FG10) is a rather occasional viewer of LTV1, he has more regular experience with sports broadcasts on the second channel of LTV. This is how he described both channels of LTV: 'The first one [LTV1] – indifferent, the seventh [LTV7] – there I watch hockey'.

For 23-year-old Russian-speaking businessman Anton (FG7) LTV qualifies as a public broadcaster only 'two times a week' when LTV7 provides transmissions of the Kontinental Hockey League games. Otherwise, he has little interest in public television, and especially in its main channel LTV1. It is only during those moments when televised hockey matches are on air that he finds offerings of the public broadcaster relevant. There are moments when he, an otherwise typical non-loyal viewer of LTV, re-connects with the public broadcaster.

Although Anton ironically argued that the ice hockey transmissions on LTV7 are 'part of the patriotic education' led by the government, it is something he enjoys watching on the public television. It is this ambivalence that best describes his attitudes towards the hockey broadcasts on LTV. He likes watching hockey on television but does not like LTV much. On one hand, he is suspicious that it is the government that has invented this tradition through LTV, what in his eyes is a state broadcaster controlled by the government, to impose the society patriotic feelings. On the other hand, he is happy to take part in this project, even if he sees it as an imposed inculcation of patriotism.

Anton's experience with the consumption of popular culture on the public television is also a good case in point of not always straightforward character of public broadcasting as the 'bringing-the-nation-together' project. As Morley has pointed out, while public broadcasters can bring the nation together, this process is not necessarily 'smooth and without tension or resistance' (2000:107). Through the national mass ritual of watching live televised hockey matches 'a sense of a shared world is imagined', though it is not necessarily 'a harmonious unity', to quote Billig (1992:171), that is imagined. The response of Anton to the hockey transmissions on LTV shows it clearly that not all

members of the viewing public are ready to accept dominant readings of national integration of these hockey broadcasts. Instead, rather complex, and for some viewers also possibly quite painful, processes of negotiation of the meaning of these broadcasts are in place. This is not to say that what we have to deal with here is nothing more than just a pseudo unity of hockey audiences but just to remind that the experience of togetherness of mass audiences simultaneously watching the same live hockey broadcast does not automatically remove any possible diverse, and even oppositional, readings of the same event, to borrow terminology of Hall's encoding-decoding model (Hall, 1980).

7.2.1 Time to Show National Sentiments

As in many other families also in the family of 39-year-old unemployed Latvian-speaking man Edmunds (F4), living in a provincial town in northern Latvia, ice hockey broadcasts are one of those rare moments when all members of the family come together to watch television. It is his wife, 39-year-old head of the non-governmental organization Laima, their three children, as well as the older generation of the family, parents of Edmunds – 66-year-old retired music teacher Bruno and 67-year-old retired telephone operator Ligita, who are all interested in hockey transmissions on television. 'All are shouting then,' Ligita described an atmosphere at home during the hockey broadcasts when they all are actively supporting Latvian hockey players.

It is regular transmissions of the Kontinental Hockey League games with *Dinamo Riga* playing on the public channel LTV7, as well as annual broadcasts of the Ice Hockey World Championships with the Latvian national team taking part on the commercial channel TV3 they all enjoy watching. So, it is not so much the public LTV7 or the commercial TV3 they are searching for, it is hockey broadcasts as such they enjoy watching regardless of the channel offering them. In other words, it is their support for the national hockey team and love of hockey standing above their allegiance to one or another broadcaster, be it a public service or commercial channel.

Every spring during the world championships the family has a tradition to set up a tent in the garden of their private house and take a TV set out. Then they prepare snacks and drinks, as well as invite their friends, neighbours, classmates of their children and Laima's colleagues at work to come and watch hockey all together making it a special event. It is also through their passion for hockey and enthusiastic support for the national hockey team they can express their national feelings. When the live televised hockey matches are

on air Edmunds' family go to great lengths to look just like hockey fans on television – like those fans who are present at the arena they also have special shirts, trumpets, the flag of Latvia and the flag's colours also painted on their faces.

These hockey broadcasts not only bring Edmunds' family together, they also bring together his family with others watching the same game turning them all into the national 'we' of hockey audiences and making a feeling of national 'we-ness' around the television possible. Edmunds' family knows that along them there are thousands of other hockey fans watching the same game and supporting the same national hockey team, be they part of the spectators at the arena or those many more following the game at home in front of their television screens.

It is only Bruno and Ligita, the older generation of the family, who are among regular viewers of LTV1. While Laima has some, albeit little, interest in LTV1 and is among its audiences sporadically, her husband Edmunds and 20-year-old son Mārcis have almost no interest in the main channel of LTV (it is only special broadcasts during the national celebrations such as the annual live transmission of the army parade on November 18, Latvia's Independence Day, when they search for LTV1) and it is only hockey and other sports transmissions on the second channel of LTV that provide them with their regular experience of public television. During one of our conversations 20-year-old Mārcis even claimed that he does not know what the offerings of LTV1 are. For the majority of the family members commercial broadcasting plays the central role in their everyday viewing practices.

In contrast to the first channel of LTV, because of its sports broadcasts LTV7 is of great value in the eyes of all family members. They all would miss LTV7 more than LTV1, if LTV ceased to exist, and only because of sports offerings of LTV7 they would also be ready to pay the licence fee for the public television. As Ligita argued, it is possible to substitute LTV1 with one of the national commercial channels (Ligita provided an example saying that they could do without *Panorāma* (*Panorama*), the evening news on LTV1, as similar news programmes are also provided by the national commercial broadcasters), while LTV7 provides sports programmes that other channels do not offer (As Mārcis explained, even if broadcasts of some key international sporting events are also available on cable and satellite channels such as *Eurosport*, they still prefer watching them on LTV7 because of its commentary focusing on Latvian athletes), and, therefore, it would be much harder for them to abandon LTV7, contrary to the main channel of the

public broadcaster. 'If LTV ceased to exist, it would not be a tragedy for me, the only thing is hockey,' said Edmunds. It is the absence of 'a ready alternative' (Hirschman, 1970) to LTV7's sports broadcasts that makes the majority of the family members, non-loyalists of LTV, to stay with the public television and not to leave it completely.

7.2.2 The Hockey Channel

In the large family of 51-year-old Latvian-speaking dairy farmer Sarmīte (F3) almost all of them, including both of her grown-up children and their families, as well as 80-year-old Zigurds, father of Sarmīte, are great fans of the Latvian ice hockey team and enjoy watching hockey broadcasts on television. The family of 10 people are all living together in the countryside in the western part of Latvia, and when hockey transmissions are on air it is not only one of those rare moments when almost all their numerous TV sets are switched on the same channel (their farmstead has two dwelling houses), but for many family members it is also one of the rare experiences they have with the public broadcaster LTV.

Along the annual broadcasts of the Ice Hockey World Championships on the commercial TV3 it is regular transmissions of the Kontinental Hockey League games on the public LTV7 they like to watch, and even 4-year-old Elīza, granddaughter of Sarmīte, knows that 'hockey' is a keyword distinguishing a button on the remote control for LTV7 from other channels. It is the hockey channel how Elīza recognizes LTV7.

As in their everyday viewing routines the majority of the family members are not keen viewers of LTV1 (having high interest in the main channel of the public broadcaster only in some special occasions such as when its festive programming is on air during the national celebrations, plus it is also the annual *Eurovision Song Contest* they usually watch on LTV1), it is regular hockey broadcasts on the second channel of LTV that sustain their contact with the public television in the periods between above mentioned special events. Because of its sports broadcasts they would miss LTV7 more than LTV1, if LTV ceased to exist, and for the same reason would be more ready to pay the licence fee for LTV7 and less for LTV1. The commercial TV3 is their favourite channel with the exception of the older generation, Sarmīte's 78-year-old mother Lidija and 80-year-old father Zigurds, who are the only loyal publics of LTV1 in their large family.

In contrast to her husband, 51-year-old Tālis, also farmer who, instead of sports, is more

interested in fishing and hunting programmes on LTV7, Sarmīte is a passionate ice hockey fan and also a devoted viewer of hockey transmissions on television. When hockey broadcasts are on air, she drops all her everyday chores and becomes as stuck to a television set, and it is also a time when all the other offerings of their favourite commercial channels become insignificant. Then Tālis who usually is in charge of a remote control of their TV set steps aside to allow his wife to be in the power positions.

It was early January, 2012. Thursday night. One of my visits in the family had just started. ‘Why is the seventh [channel] [LTV7] not switched on,’ Sarmīte asked entering the room of her daughter Marta, a 30-year-old manager of debtors, and she straightaway switched channels to see LTV7. It was 7.25 pm, 5 minutes before a start of the game of *Dinamo Riga* playing at home with Moscow’s *Spartak*. The live broadcast from the Arena Riga on LTV7 has just begun, and the Russian national anthem was followed by the Latvian one at that moment with the flags of both countries appearing on the screen accordingly, the usual procedure of anthem singing and flag waving repeated before every game. Sarmīte spent all evening attentively watching the almost three hour long hockey transmission on the second channel of LTV; she even went closer to the television screen not to miss important moments of the game. That evening *Dinamo Riga* was defeated 2-1 by *Spartak*.

Sarmīte is very well informed about the latest hockey news. ‘Soon qualification games will start,’ she said during one of our conversations few weeks before a start of the Ice Hockey World Championships that year taking place in Finland and Sweden. Sarmīte has even gone to the capital Riga to watch her favourite *Dinamo Riga* team playing at the arena and to get direct experience instead of the usual televised one. ‘It was worth going,’ Sarmīte said having recently attended the Kontinental Hockey League All-Star game at the Arena Riga. Tickets to the All-Star game were Christmas gift Sarmīte received that year. It is also other big sporting occasions such as the Olympics and the European Football Championships Sarmīte enjoys watching on LTV7.

7.2.3 Latvia as First Priority

In the same manner as celebrating the arrival of New Year twice, first in line with Moscow time and then few hours later according to the local Latvian time (see Chapter 6), and following both the Russian and national news and watching both *Vremya (Time)* from Moscow and its national version *Latviiskoe Vremya (Latvia’s Time)* (see Chapter 5) during big televised sporting events with athletes from Latvia and Russia meeting to

compete against each other Russian-speakers may be engaged in the process of negotiating their transnational affiliations.

Many of my Russian-speaking informants argued that they are patriots of Latvia and spoke about the national ice hockey team of Latvia as 'our team' in the same way as they talked about 'our Latvia' in contrast with 'they' and 'there' when discussing Russia. Yet, it does not necessarily rule out their interest in and support for Russian athletes.⁸⁷ While otherwise their sense of belonging to Latvia can coexist comfortably with their, if not civic then cultural, attachment to Russia, during those sporting competitions such as hockey tournaments with Latvian and Russian sportsmen competing against each other their transnational identities may also force Russian-speakers to make decisions over their priorities of which sportsmen, Latvian or/and Russian, to support. In other words, it may force them to arrange their multiple national allegiances in some order of priority.

For 37-year-old Russian-speaker Andrei, who is a football coach at the local school and a great football fan, it is Latvian sportsmen his first priority with Russians coming as the second one after Latvians he supports. If Latvian and Russian sportsmen compete, it will be Latvians whom he will support. 'Of course, Latvia comes first,' he claimed. After Latvians and Russians it is sportsmen from all the other former Soviet republics his support usually goes to. In the list of his favourite athletes and sports teams are well-known both Latvian and Russian names. Along Russian football club *Zenit* from St Petersburg, Moscow based *CSKA* basketball team and Russian javelin thrower Mariya Abakumova it is also Latvians, skeleton slider Martins Dukurs and long-distance runner Elena Prokopchuk, included in the list.

7.2.4 'Our' Team

In the family of Igor, a 57-year-old unemployed Russian-speaking non-citizen of Latvia (F1), he is the most devoted viewer of the ice hockey transmissions on LTV7. When hockey broadcasts are on air, he even skips his favourite news programme *Vremya* and its national version *Latviiskoe Vremya* on *Peryi Baltiiskii kanal*. Igor is a great fan of *Dinamo Riga* team, and hockey provides a way for him to explicitly display his national loyalty and patriotic feelings towards Latvia. It goes without saying that *Dinamo Riga* is my favourite

⁸⁷ The viewing figures of broadcasts of such big international sporting events as the Ice Hockey World Championships show that, while it is the latter more, though not much, popular among these audiences, games with national team and those with team of Russia playing both gather large Russian-speaking audiences.

team from those playing in the Kontinental Hockey League, he stressed and added: 'It is our team'. During one of my visits the day after the latest *Dinamo Riga* game when the Latvian team playing at home was beaten 4-1 by Russian *Torpedo* from Nizhnii Novgorod, Igor complained about the poor *Dinamo Riga* performance: 'I was almost crying'.

In the Kontinental Hockey League, teams mostly from Russia participate with a few more from other ex-Communist Central and Eastern European countries taking part, and Latvian *Dinamo Riga* club, as many others in the league, is named after the popular Soviet era Latvian national hockey team, and for this reason its critics say that the Kontinental Hockey League, like the *Novaya volna* (*New Wave*) festival I have discussed in Chapter 6, is just another Russia's soft power project aimed at the reanimation of its former imperial power in the region. At the same time, *Dinamo Riga* has turned out to be one of the most successful national integration projects over the last more than 20 years since the restoration of independent Latvia uniting Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers in their shared support for the national hockey team with Russian-speaking hockey players playing in it along Latvian-speakers. As journalists once have put it, *Dinamo Riga* creates a common ground between both ethno-linguistic groups (TV3, 2012).

It was around 7 pm on Friday night of late January, 2012 when I was half way in my fieldwork visit with the family. The evening news bulletin in Russian had just finished on LTV7 and me and Igor were watching the Legends Game of the Kontinental Hockey League on the same channel broadcast live from the Arena Riga when the Latvian and Russian Soviet era hockey legends, captained by Helmuts Balderis and Vyacheslav Fetisov, met on the rink. 'Our Helmuts Balderis against Vyacheslav Fetisov. Legendary team of Latvia against the most famous hockey players of Russia,' was the promo of the game broadcasted on LTV7 earlier the same evening. 'They both [Balderis and Fetisov] once played in the USSR team. Now it is the national team of Latvia and the national team of Russia,' Igor explained to me. During the Soviet era, Balderis for many years played in the *Dinamo Riga* team while Fetisov in the *CSKA Moscow*, both teams with the same names also playing in today's Kontinental Hockey League, and both, Balderis and Fetisov, were also part of the national team of the Soviet Union. When hockey players from both teams, Latvian and Russian, in a friendly manner shook hands, Igor asked rhetorically why politicians of Latvia and Russia could not act in the same way as

sportsmen of both countries.

That evening Russian hockey veterans beat Latvian hockey legends 11-7. It is televised hockey matches such as this that make Igor negotiate his feelings of belonging towards Latvia and Russia. It is the nature of the game itself that forces drawing of lines of demarcation between 'us' and 'them' and positioning of oneself on one or another side. Albeit Russia is his fatherland and Igor is a non-citizen of Latvia, for him it was 'our' Latvian team playing against 'Russians', and we can look at it as a claim of him being a part of the national 'we' of Latvia. It is watching live hockey broadcasts on public television that provides him with a voice to manifest his national loyalty to Latvia. It is a combination of nostalgic (Soviet) pleasures and national sentiments what makes watching hockey broadcasts with *Dinamo Riga* playing for Igor so enjoyable.

It is primarily sports broadcasts on the second channel of LTV that provide an opportunity to have regular experience with the public broadcaster also for other members of Igor's family. As many other Russian-speakers, they have little interest in its main channel LTV1. While Igor's wife, 55-year old hospital administrator Anna, has at least some, albeit rather sporadic, experience with LTV1, Igor, as well as their daughter, 27-year-old shop-assistant Marina, have almost completely exited from this channel, and the only experience they have with LTV1 throughout the year is just the live broadcast of the annual *Eurovision Song Contest*.

As Igor enjoys fishing, it is also Latvian-language fishing programmes he likes watching on LTV7, and even his poor knowledge of Latvian is no an obstacle for him to watch them. It is easy to understand as the language of the fishing programmes, contrary to the news language, is not complex: 'There is nothing to understand, all is clear. For all fishermen the language is the same'. Programmes for the fishermen on LTV7 are more democratic, and hence more accessible for the ethno-linguistic minority audiences, than those of the news and current affairs on LTV1 as not only their language is easier to understand but also because they deal with life outside the political realm. There is no place for ethno-linguistic divisions when it comes to fishing.

7.3 Watching the *Eurovision Song Contest*

The annual *Eurovision Song Contest* on LTV1, back in the mid 1950s created by Western European public broadcasters as a pan-European integration project, is another telling

example of generating mass audiences for the Latvian public television and bringing the nation together around it. Although over the past few years the Latvian entry has failed to qualify for the all-European grand final, the annual singing competition of European nations has preserved its status as one of the most watched programmes of the year in the country. Over the years since the late 1990s when LTV for the first time broadcast the contest and Latvia first entered it a few years later, in 2000, and won the competition already in its third year of participation, the *Eurovision Song Contest* has become an integral part of an image of the public television in the eyes of its publics. As hockey broadcasts on its second channel it is also the *Eurovision Song Contest* on LTV1 bringing families together around the public television.

Along with her husband, 80-year-old retired Zigurds, 78-year-old retired Latvian-speaker Lidija (F3) is the only devoted viewer of LTV1 in her family. Others have little interest in LTV1, and, instead, prefer watching the commercial TV3. During my visits in the family it was a typical situation of Marta, 30-year-old granddaughter of Lidija with her family living next door to Lidija's room, watching their much-loved TV3 while Lidija was next door alone watching her favourite LTV1. Marta's 4-year-old daughter Elīza run back from Lidija's room from time to time to inform us what her great-grandmother was at that same moment watching on LTV1. 'Eņģeļu māja (*House of Angels*) starts,' during one of my visits she notified us returning from Lidija's room. It was 8 pm on a usual weekday evening when the latest episode of the national soap opera *Eņģeļu māja* started on LTV1 while at the same time in Marta's room others were watching the evening news on TV3. The *Eurovision Song Contest* is one of those few moments throughout the year when both 30-year-old Marta and 78-year-old Lidija are watching LTV1. During the study it was that year's national final of the *Eurovision Song Contest* when LTV1 was switched on in both rooms. It was the *Eurovision Song Contest* that brought all generations of the family together around the main channel of the public broadcaster.

Live broadcasts of the *Eurovision Song Contest*, national final followed by all-European final, for many non-loyal publics of LTV1, namely Russian-speakers and young people, serves as a point of re-entry to the main channel of the public broadcaster, even if this coming back to LTV1 happens only once a year and lasts only for few hours. For them it is the *Eurovision Song Contest* on LTV1 and sports broadcasts on LTV7 or, in the words of 22-year-old Russian-speaking student Arina (FG2), keen viewer of the *Eurovision Song Contest* and LTV7's sports broadcasts, 'championships and festivals' what make them

from time to time entering back the public television. It is something they find relevant from the offerings of LTV, and, as in the case of sports programming on LTV7, also to the *Eurovision Song Contest* on LTV1 in the eyes of its audiences there is no ‘ready alternative’ (Hirschman, 1970) on either the national or transnational rivals of LTV.

It is only because of the annual *Eurovision Song Contest* transmissions on LTV1 and Olympic broadcasts once in two years on LTV7 25-year-old Russian-speaking municipality officer Elizaveta (FG7) knows which buttons on her remote control are for both channels of the public broadcaster. Many of my Russian-speaking respondents said that LTV1 and LTV7 are not the first ones on their remote control, some even did not know where to find both channels of LTV on their remote control, signaling of the minor role the public television plays in their daily lives. ‘TV1 [LTV1] and TV7 [LTV7] are those channels where I can watch Olympics and the *Eurovision [Song Contest]*’, something that ‘for instance, on *Peryi Baltiiskii kanal* I will not see,’ Elizaveta explained.⁸⁸

It is also special programming during the national celebrations such as the annual live broadcast of the military parade on November 18, National Day of Latvia, and the televised New Year’s Eve address to the nation of the Latvian president and prime minister that brings Elizaveta, as well as other members of her family, to the public television. Otherwise, she has no regular everyday experience with both public channels. It is only big media events such as the *Eurovision Song Contest* and Olympics, as well as special festive programming during the moments of national celebrations that make her experience with the public broadcaster. ‘Three times or twice a year I watch the first channel [LTV1], it is the [military] parade, [president’s and prime minister’s] greetings... and the *Eurovision [Song Contest]*’, she described her experience with LTV1.

As the audience ratings show it, the all-European final of the *Eurovision Song Contest* gathers significantly larger Russian-speaking audiences than the national final bringing to the main channel of the public television untypically to LTV1 high number of viewers of the ethno-linguistic minority. The popularity of the *Eurovision Song Contest* among Russian-speaking audiences most vividly manifests in the high support televoters in Latvia, as in other ex-Soviet countries, from year to year show for the Russian entrant to the contest.

⁸⁸ While *Peryi Baltiiskii kanal* is not covering the *Eurovision Song Contest*, it is available on another Russian state broadcaster *Rossija (Russia)* but only for those viewers who have access to its national version via satellite television. The international version of the *Rossija* channel what usually providers of cable and satellite television offer to its customers in Latvia does not cover the *Eurovision Song Contest*. So, for the majority of viewers in Latvia it is only LTV1 where they can watch the *Eurovision Song Contest*.

As a rule, it is Russia along Latvia's Baltic neighbours of Estonia and Lithuania receiving the most points from Latvia. It is most likely a signal of strong cultural attachment to Russia many Russian-speaking viewers feel, and yet this should not serve as evidence of their national disloyalty. As it is not allowed to vote for the song representing your own nation, it is Russia Russian-speakers, and no doubt a significant number of Latvian-speakers as well, most likely choose to vote for, albeit this does not rule out their support for the national entry in the competition. For instance, 39-year-old Russian-speaking school teacher Diana (F5) along her favourite ones, the participants she likes that year the most, it is also Latvian performers she usually supports in the *Eurovision Song Contest*. You always hope that Latvia will have good results, she explained.

7.4 Rejoining National Broadcasting

As already prior to the 2010 digital switchover the family of 68-year-old retired Russian-speaking school teacher Nadezhda (F5) had little regular experience with national broadcasting – it was primarily the commercial LNT and because of its sports broadcasts also the public LTV7 they watched from the national channels, albeit still not as often as their favourite Russian channels; now when they have a satellite dish with a long list of foreign channels available with plenty of Russian channels among them and no access to any of the national broadcasters (for detailed account on their decision to withdraw from national broadcasting see Chapter 5) there are only few moments throughout the year when they miss national broadcasters and wish to opt in national broadcasting again.

While transnational satellite television offers a large number of foreign channels to choose from, including a plethora of Russian channels they like so much, it is national broadcasting better at allowing them to recognize themselves as members of the national community of Latvia, something that transnational television from Russia struggles to provide. As we shall see, in order to take a part in the life of the nation, Nadezhda's family applies a number of creative strategies of rejoining national broadcasting.

It was the *Eurovision Song Contest* and special programming during the moments of national celebrations that they had used to watch on LTV1 and otherwise had minimal experience with the main channel of the public broadcaster. Now having no access to the national channels they have to search for alternatives to replace the gap of national broadcasting. This year they skipped the national final of the *Eurovision Song Contest* but the all-European final instead of LTV1 this time they watched on the Russian state

channel *Rossija (Russia)*, available in Latvia via satellite. When it comes to the special broadcasts during the national celebrations, instead of the usual New Year's clock counting down the final seconds of the year on LTV1 this year on the evening of 31 December not to miss the clock striking midnight in Latvia they checked time on their computer, while, for instance, the annual firework display on November 18 when the proclamation of Latvia's independence in 1918 is celebrated this year they found on one of the internet sites. They also searched the internet for the president's Independence Day's message but for some reason were unable to find it.

Prior to the digital switchover from both channels of the public television they watched more its second channel LTV7 mainly because of Nadezhda's 37-year-old son-in-law Andrei who enjoyed watching its sports broadcasts. Today the great variety of satellite sports channels they have, as well as a numerous internet sites providing live streaming of big sporting events, have offered an alternative to Andrei's favourite sports broadcasts that he had used to watch on LTV7.

During one of my visits while I was chatting with other members of the family in the kitchen Andrei, a football coach at the local school and a great football fan, was sitting alone in the living room in darkness in front of the computer attentively following the Champions League match between *CSKA Moscow* and *Real Madrid* streamed live from the Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow on one of the internet sites. Later the same evening he watched live online broadcast of the Eurocup game between the Czech *Nymburk* and the Latvian *VEF Riga* transmitted from Nymburk city, the Czech Republic. While Andrei was watching this basketball match online on one of his favourite sports websites, it was also simultaneously broadcasted on LTV7, access to which they do not have anymore. You can find all on the internet, he argued and demonstrated to me some of the internet addresses he uses to watch live sports broadcasts online. Even having no access to any of the national broadcasters, Andrei has not lost his interest in the national sports. Through the internet and transnational satellite broadcasting, which now serve him as a substitute for the second channel of LTV, he has find ways how to participate in the sports life of the nation. Recently, for instance, on the Italian *Rai Sport* channel he followed skeleton tournament with Latvian brothers Martins Dukurs and Tomass Dukurs taking part.

It was also the annual broadcasts of the *Novaya volna (New Wave)* festival they valued from the offerings of national broadcasting. Along the national commercial channel LNT and its Russian-language sister channel TV5 it is also one of the Russian channels – the state

broadcaster *Rossija* – providing transmissions of the *Novaya volna* contest, however, very late at night. The last time they watched the festival on the internet, but they are not sure whether it still will be available online also next year. Maybe we will need to go to our neighbours and join them watching the *Novaya volna*, they said. This appears to be another of their strategies of re-entering national broadcasting.

It was already in the summer of 2010, shortly after the digital switchover, when they went to their Latvian-speaking neighbours having access to the national channels to watch LTV1 broadcasting live the 10th Latvian Youth Song and Dance Festival events from the capital city of Riga where Aleksandra, 10-year-old Nadezhda's granddaughter, also participated as part of her school's folk dance group. Their desire to see their child taking part in the nationally televised festival made the family again part of the LTV1 audiences, even if their return to the public television was short-lived. They remembered watching the dance gala concert on LTV1 eager to spot Aleksandra's dance group among the thousands of other schoolchildren who from all corners of the country have gathered in the Daugava Stadium in Riga to engage in a mass dance performance.

In the eyes of Latvian-speakers the Song and Dance Festival is one of the key elements in the construction of national consciousness and unity, something many Russian-speakers do not see as part of their cultural space, as already discussed in Chapter 4, and it was because of little Aleksandra and her interest in traditional Latvian folk dancing her family got that experience of not only being part of the national 'we' as made by the public broadcaster LTV but also being part of the celebrations of traditional culture of the Latvian-speaking majority.

7.5 Singing Families

Because the Puncuļi family participating in the show was coming from a nearby city in the eastern region of Latgale, Nadezhda with her granddaughter Aleksandra went watching at their neighbours the final episode of the talent show *Dziedošās ģimenes* (*Singing Families*) in its third season on one of the Sunday nights of early December 2011 on the national commercial channel LNT. Out of 12 families taking part in the singing competition it was the Puncuļi family of three generations that was named that year's winners. It was their city, as well as the Latgale region they represented in the contest, the region being well represented in all seasons of the show. In order to support their favourite finalists in the show Nadezhda's family took part in the national televoting, and

voted even for several times to help their favourite Puncuļi family win. It was one of those rare cases when they did so. The show was so popular that the victory of Puncuļi family next day after the final became a talking point at the local school where Diana and Andrei work and their daughter Aleksandra studies; all were happy of their victory. The Liepiņi family, mother and her three daughters, from the northern region of Vidzeme came second.

Dziedošās ģimenes has been one of the most popular shows in the country over the last few years and has become compulsory Sunday-night viewing for many having among its devoted viewers also some Russian-speakers. To quote 61-year-old Latvian-speaking head of the local culture house Rasma (FG10), *Dziedošās ģimenes* ‘comes on Sundays as something special’. ‘I like the unity of the families, their musicality. It’s a nice atmosphere,’ her interest in the show explained 51-year-old Latvian-speaking dairy farmer Sarmīte (F3). 66-year-old retired Latvian-speaker Ausma (FG5) had even purchased tickets to become a member of the studio audience of the singing contest. ‘Amateurs but they perform like professionals,’ she commented on the show.

Although Puncuļi was a Latvian-speaking family, among their supporters were both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, and especially those viewers as Nadezhda’s family themselves living in or coming from the Latgale region. It was their strong feelings of regional attachment that united members of both ethno-linguistic communities of Latgale in their support for Puncuļi family. Even Nadezhda’s family, keen viewers of talent shows on Russian television and great fans of Russian celebrities, became enthusiastic supporters of the Puncuļi family. It is because of regional closeness that the family of Nadezhda could easily identify with Puncuļi family. They come from a city only some 30 kilometres away from the village where Nadezhda’s family lives. The national talent show appealing to regional sentiments brought together the Puncuļi family with Nadezhda’s family and other families in Latgale region and elsewhere in the country symbolically turning them all into the national family of all those watching *Dziedošās ģimenes*, the contest of singing families.

In the singing competition, talented families from all around Latvia took part, including some ethnic minority families (in the show Russian-speaking, as well as Roma families have participated singing in their own languages), and it was also other respondents, both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, who said they have supported contestants in the show representing their city or their region suggesting that *Dziedošās ģimenes* was so

popular as the show reflected regional diversities in the country (for instance, families from the Latgale region singing folk songs in the Latgalian, regional dialect, dressed in traditional costumes) allowing its viewers easily to identify with the participants of the show and recognize themselves and their culture on national television. In this case subnational regional loyalties cross-cutting ethno-linguistic belongings have turned out to be playing a more prominent role than any over-arching national identifications.

It was Latvian-speaking Uškāni family coming from the southeastern city Daugavpils, the second largest city in Latvia having vast majority of its population Russian-speakers⁸⁹ and the city in the 2012 language referendum overwhelmingly supporting the proposal to make Russian the second official language in the country⁹⁰, 25-year-old Russian-speaking municipality officer Elizaveta (FG7) supported in one of the previous seasons of *Dziedošās ģimenes* contest. Daugavpils is also her hometown. For the same reason she watched another local talent show *Koru kari* (*Clash of the Choirs*) on the national commercial channel TV3 where choirs, each representing its own city and led by a popular musician coming from the same city, competed. Among other contestants there was also a choir representing Daugavpils city. ‘You watch the shows if some of your own people take part. You support your own people and it is interesting for you to watch,’ she explained.

While she otherwise has little interest in the national channels and her viewing preferences are more for Russian television, it is a prominent role of regional identity at work here explaining her interest in the local talent shows. It is because among those taking part in these singing contests were also people representing her city that made also her avid viewer of these shows and also passionate supporter of representatives of her city regardless of their ethno-linguistic identity. Some of my informants even argued that for them it is regional (or, as we shall see in the following extract, city-based) identification more important than any national one. Thus, 23-year-old Russian-speaking businessman Anton (FG7) preferred being identified with the city he is coming from instead of employing some all-embracing national identification: ‘I’m not a big patriot of Latvia... But I’m a patriot of my city, I love Daugavpils very much’.

Among those watching *Dziedošās ģimenes* was also 27-year-old Latvian-speaking music

⁸⁹ According to the data of 2011 population census, 88.9% of people living in Daugavpils reported Russian as their main language in the family. Source: The Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia.

⁹⁰ 85.18% voters in Daugavpils voted in favour of the proposal to make Russian the second state language and only 14.39% said no. Source: The Central Election Commission of Latvia.

teacher Ansis (FG9), and his motivation was the same as for 25-year-old Russian-speaker Elizaveta (FG7). 'I personally know people who participated from our city', he explained. While they come from the cities with highly different ethno-linguistic make-up, one where Latvian-speakers overwhelmingly dominate and another with Russian-speakers being in the vast majority, they both enjoyed watching *Dziedošās ģimenes*. It was their strong feelings of regional allegiance, support for 'your own people' from 'our city', standing above any national level ethno-linguistic divisions that made them both, Latvian-speaker Ansis and Russian-speaker Elizaveta, part of the national audiences of *Dziedošās ģimenes* contest. Celebrating regional particularities the popular talent show format on the national commercial channel has appeared to be successful in representing cultural diversity in the country and bringing audiences of the ethno-linguistic majority and minority together, though still the show, according to the audience statistics, was much more popular among Latvian-speakers than Russian-speakers. The public broadcaster LTV does not provide such talent show type programmes as *Dziedošās ģimenes*.

7.6 Conclusion

It is products of popular culture such as live televised ice hockey matches with the participation of much-loved national hockey team, or other big national and international sporting events, and the annual music competition *Eurovision Song Contest*, first national selection and later all-European final with the Latvian entrant competing with representatives of other nations, what bring its Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking publics together around the public broadcaster LTV.

It is those moments when otherwise along ethno-linguistic and generational lines divided national audiences in Latvia come together. Young and old, Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers all enjoy watching live broadcasts of big events of popular music and sports on LTV. It is these events of popular culture on the public television what most vividly provide its publics of both ethno-linguistic groups with that special 'we-feeling' (Scannell, Cardiff, 1991) of national togetherness. While the news and politics on LTV create cleavages in the national community, it is popular cultural forms perceived among audiences as politically neutral what make the national communion around the public broadcaster possible.

When live ice hockey broadcasts are on air, it is one of those rare moments when all

generations of the family gather around the public television, and it is also both Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers united in their support for the national ice hockey team. The success of 'our' hockey players feeds their sense of national pride. Through this mass ceremonial of watching televised ice hockey matches national sentiments can be expressed. It is a time to make one's strong allegiance to Latvia explicit what seems to be of special importance for audiences of the ethno-linguistic minority often because of their supposedly peculiar viewing preferences, namely their attachment to transnational television from Russia, accused of disloyalty to the nation.

For non-loyal publics of LTV, young people and Russian-speakers, regular sports broadcasts on the second channel of LTV, something for what there is no 'ready alternative' (Hirschman, 1970) on its national and transnational commercial competitors, are the only regular experience they have with the public broadcaster. Though having exited from LTV for much of their daily viewing experiences, they enter back the public television during those moments when they find its offerings relevant and, what is also important, not easily substitutable. It is sports broadcasts something they would miss from the offerings of LTV if it stopped its operations and it is also something they would be ready to pay the licence fee for, if such introduced. Besides, because of its sports programming they like so much some of my informants granted the status of a public broadcaster to the second channel of LTV disqualifying as such its main channel LTV1 more often associated with the disliked country's political leadership.

Conclusion

As in other new post-Communist nation-states also in Latvia the nation-building efforts following the fall of the Communist regime happened to coincide with the state-building project involving an array of reforms in different spheres of life, even if only on paper, including the broadcasting system change. It all has made setting up of public broadcasting in post-Communist societies no easy task. Apart from missing political and economic preconditions also socio-cultural context, equally essential prerequisite for strong public broadcasting systems to emerge, was absent in Central and Eastern European countries only just having said goodbye to long decades of Communist rule and tradition of state broadcasting.

Modest audience figures of Central and Eastern European public broadcasters today in comparison with popular demand for their commercial rivals have made post-Communist media scholars speak of deep crisis in the public broadcasters and their publics relationship in the former Communist block countries. Perhaps the most notable is the notion of Jakubowicz (2008a) proposing to think of public broadcasting in the societies across Central and Eastern Europe as lacking social embeddedness and public broadcasters in the region as not enjoying support from their publics. Though not using such terminology, what Jakubowicz seems to suggest is that there is that 'special attachment' what Hirschman (1970) calls 'loyalty' missing on the part of post-Communist publics towards both their public broadcasters and the public broadcasting idea more generally, something I have sought to explore further in this study with the help of Hirschman's theory of 'exit, voice and loyalty' (Hirschman, 1970).

Through qualitative audience research the study has aimed to identify attitudes and actions Latvian-speaking majority and Russian-speaking minority publics have taken as a response to the Latvian public television LTV as a nation-building project. The primary interest of the research was to explore perceptions of the public broadcaster LTV, and understanding of the idea of public broadcasting more generally, members of both ethno-linguistic communities have, as well as to examine their experiences with the public television with a special interest in their quotidian domestic television viewing practices. The research has sought to identify the relationship between the way its publics conceptualize the public broadcaster LTV, and understand the concept of public broadcasting more generally, and the way they define the national 'we'.

8.1 Key Findings of the Study

Building on the Hirschman's theory the idea that television audiences make viewing choices that give them voice is the central premise of this study. It has been demonstrated throughout the research that audiences utilize the exit mechanism (leaving and ignoring the public broadcaster LTV) as a voice-type response (protesting). Despite the fact that their exit from LTV most often is private and silent – if there are any complaints and protests within official (institutional) contexts, they are negligible and it is mostly airing grievances in mundane what is at stake here, and yet it does not make the act of exiting less vocal. Through their exit from the public television its publics of both the ethno-linguistic majority and minority voice their protest, be it against the country's political establishment or in the case of Russian-speaking viewers also against the hegemonic definition of the national 'we'. In any case it is strong anti-establishment sentiments standing behind the dismissal of the public television.

Both its Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking publics reject the public broadcaster to manifest their discontent with the country's political elite. Though programme-makers of the public television would like to think of themselves as politically independent and taking a critical stance towards the government of the day, because of the complexity of reasons where the Soviet legacies are blended with the realities of today its publics still see the former Soviet era state broadcaster LTV as a governmental institution serving the interests of those in power, the view more widespread among the Russian-speaking minority. Seen as part of the political establishment, its publics abandon LTV to penalize the distrusted power elite. It is withdrawal from LTV that gives them voice to express their ire against the government. All their feelings of bitterness and resentment triggered by the failures that the building of the state and the nation has brought along over the last more than 20 years since the restoration of independent Latvia find their expression in the anger many feel against the power elite blamed for all the socio-economic miseries people have to face in their daily lives. Exit from what is perceived as a state television is a manifestation of these sentiments.

Yet, their criticism of the country's political leadership does not make them indifferent to the national politics. Though many, indeed, like to declare that they are not interested in the formal politics exercised by the political elite, it is rather an expression of their dislike towards the powerful than their apathy to the state of the national affairs. Their criticism of those in power actually is a signal of their care of the way things are done in the

country and not their indifference to it. Though many of my informants have exited from the national politics on the public television, they have found alternative ways to participate in the political life of the nation, namely through the consumption of daily news and weekly current affairs on the commercial channels which are if perhaps not absolutely free from then at least less contaminated with unpleasant associations with the distrusted power elite.

Members of the ethno-linguistic minority ignore the public broadcaster LTV to articulate their disagreement with the definition of national membership as formulated by LTV and the image of the national family it has conjured up, an echo of the government's ethno-nationalistic discourse on the national imagination and national integration, something Latvian-speakers do not find problematic. In other words, for Russian-speakers LTV is not merely a part of the distrusted political establishment, it is also a symbol of the government's hegemonic imaginary of the national 'we', and hence deep suspiciousness among its Russian-speaking publics towards LTV seen as a state channel expressing the official world-view of the Latvian-speaking majority. Many Russian-speakers feel marginalized within that version of the national collectivity as imagined by the government prioritizing the language and culture of the ethno-linguistic majority as a main raw material of the national identification defining what it means to be a Latvian and a loyal national. Therefore it should come as no surprise that Russian-speakers also do not feel at home with that form of sociability as offered by the public television, to speak in the words of Morley (2000), operating in line with the basic postulates of the government's project of the national imagination and national integration.

The exit from the public broadcaster LTV is a way its Russian-speaking publics can punish the government for what is seen by them as unfair treatment of the Russian-speaking population over the last more than two decades since the regaining of independence. It is all their feelings of marginalization, subordination, othering and rejection accumulated over these years that have been fused into their dislike to the political establishment and to what is seen as its mouthpiece the public television LTV. It is the official government's nation-building strategy imposing the language and culture of the ethno-linguistic majority as membership criteria in the national community and the cement of national integrity, as well as its citizenship policy having left around 1/7 of the population out from the citizenry granting them the official status of 'non-citizens' or 'aliens' along what has already become a tradition from elections to elections to leave out

the political parties winning the most votes of the Russophone electorate from the ruling coalition, and disqualification of their historical narrative of the country's 20th century past that is at the heart of the deep resentment many Russian-speakers feel towards the power elite and also what is central to their rejection of the public television.

Apart from being an act of resistance, ignoring the public broadcaster LTV is also a call of Russian-speakers for re-imagination of the national 'we' recognizing and respecting ethno-linguistic plurality in the country. To put it differently, viewing choices Russian-speakers make, namely their preference for transnational Russian television, is a statement of their rights to be recognized and respected as equal members of the national community of Latvia and not a signal of their missing feelings of national affiliation to Latvia, as it has often been stressed in the discourse of the local political elite.

What we can learn from the Latvian case is that disloyalty towards the institution of public broadcasting, its rejection, is not necessarily a manifestation of national disloyalty, as the Latvian nation-builders, political establishment, would like to interpret it. We have also seen that there is not one but several, and rival, definitions of what constitutes 'national loyalty' at play. Though that conception of 'national loyalty' as formulated by the government which invites to measure 'national loyalty' in terms of ones attachment to public (national) broadcasting institutions and, accordingly, sees opting out of these institutions as opting out of the national community seems to be more or less shared by the Latvian-speaking majority, it is not accepted by the Russian-speaking minority, main rejecters of public (national) broadcasting organizations. They have their own definition of what it means to be a loyal national which allows exhibiting feelings of national allegiance also outside the institutions of public (national) broadcasting. To put it another way, Russian-speakers have chosen to be loyal nationals differently, namely within localized transnational Russian television.

Though rejecting the public broadcasting institution LTV, its publics do not reject the idea of public service broadcasting and normative values they associate with this concept – it was typical for my informants to refer to such Western-style public broadcasting ideals as universality, diversity, pluralism, impartiality, political independence and non-commercialism to define the notion of public broadcasting, and for many it is these ideals at the heart of their perceptions of what perfect television should be about. Likewise, while many of my informants, and Russian-speaking respondents in particular, dismissed LTV as providing a public good (they may think of LTV as a public good for

others but not for them), they did not reject the idea of public broadcasting as a good for society as such. It is because they detach normative values of public broadcasting from the current country's *de jure* institutional embodiment of public broadcasting. In other words, they do not see the public television LTV as the fulfilment of those ideals they attach to the notion of public broadcasting. As we have seen, many even do not employ the label 'public television' to talk about LTV.

Many of my respondents see the commercial channels as being able to replace LTV – or, to use Hirschman's conceptualization (1970), they see the commercial broadcasters and the public television as 'close substitutes', something that perhaps should not come as a surprise given that not only LTV copies its commercial rivals, but also the commercial channels mimic some of the strategies of the public broadcaster, namely those bringing commercial success, during both quotidian and sacred moments of the national communion, to speak in the words of Morley (2000). Consider, for instance, special programming during the days of national celebrations on the commercial channels, something for many years provided only the public television.

Yet, this does not necessarily mean that audiences also consider commercial broadcasting as a substitute for the ideals of public broadcasting. In the eyes of audiences, neither the public television LTV, nor the commercial players in the market succeed in fully living up to the ideals they attach to the notion of public broadcasting, and this is also the reason why it is hard to judge to what extent their loyalty to the public broadcasting ideals my respondents referred to in their definitions of the public broadcasting concept is something more than just a declarative statement. Indeed, both the public television and its commercial rivals have limited success in meeting the normative ideals of public broadcasting in practice, and therefore also the analysis of viewing preferences audiences make, though may provide some clue, can offer only a partial answer to the question whether their loyalty to these ideals is not merely on paper. It all makes the task of measuring loyalty to the public broadcasting principles on the part of post-Communist audiences within a context of their day-to-day viewing practices especially complicated and difficult one with no promise for any straightforward answer.

What we have to deal with in the Latvian case, and I would like to believe it is also the case with other post-Communist societies, is not so much the crisis of the public broadcasting idea as the crisis of public broadcasting institutions. As the Latvian case suggests, exiting from the institutions of public broadcasting should not be automatically

equated with rejection of the public broadcasting ideals. Though there may be 'lack of a social constituency willing and able to support public service broadcasters and buttress its autonomy and independence' in Central and Eastern European societies, as Jakubowicz has proposed (2008a:117), another of his conclusions of 'lack of social embeddedness of the idea of public service broadcasting' in these societies (2008a:117) in the light of evidence of my own empirical research should be treated with caution and needs some clarification.

As this study suggests, missing a 'special attachment' to organizations of public broadcasting in post-Communist societies, as Hirschman (1970) defines the concept of 'loyalty', should not be automatically equated with disloyalty to the public broadcasting ideals on the part of the publics of these organizations. To put it differently, absence of attachment to public broadcasting institutions should not necessarily mean that also loyalty towards the public broadcasting values is missing. These ideals may not yet be as deeply rooted in post-Communist societies as they are in 'old' Western European democracies, if that is what Jakubowicz had in mind when arguing of 'lack of social embeddedness of the idea of public service broadcasting' (2008a:117) in societies across Central and Eastern Europe, the argument he unfortunately does not elaborate any further in his numerous writings on post-Communist public broadcasting. Nevertheless, as we have seen from the responses of my informants, at least at a normative level the public broadcasting ideals are recognized, accepted and valued also by Central and Eastern Europeans. So, we can say that at least some degree of embeddedness of the public broadcasting idea is present in post-Communist societies, even if the process of it taking root in these societies is still only at embryonic stage.

As we have seen in the Latvian case, it is not lack of loyalty towards the idea of public broadcasting (even if this loyalty is limited to merely normative statements) as rejection of its institutional form, the country's public television seen as a symbol of the distrusted political establishment, what is at the heart of the crisis in the public television and its publics relationship. For this reason social embeddedness of the idea of public broadcasting in post-Communist societies could not be measured solely on the basis of a degree of support and demand for public broadcasting institutions on the part of their publics, the trap much of the previous research on post-Communist public broadcasting seems to have fallen into. Instead, we should search for different, more nuanced, ways how to explore the current state of the idea of public broadcasting in these societies

beyond the usual institutional prism, the task this study I hope has made a contribution to.

Likewise, widespread audience withdrawal from institutions of public television in societies across Central and Eastern Europe should not be automatically treated as an abandonment of the citizen role of post-Communist audiences. While exiting from the public television LTV and migrating to its commercial competitors, audiences in Latvia do not reject the role of a citizen, in much of the literature pronounced as the antithesis of the role of a consumer where public broadcasting is seen as a natural habitat for the former and commercial broadcasting for the latter. As the Latvian case confirms, the exercise of the citizen role is not necessarily linked with institutions of public broadcasting and as well can be realized outside these organizations, i.e., within commercial broadcasting. This is by no means to argue that commercial broadcasting can, or should, fully take over the role of public broadcasting but just to remind that the exercise of citizenship is not restricted to public broadcasting, reminder that seems to be of special importance in the case of post-Communist societies where weak public broadcasting institutions have become one of the idiosyncrasies of their media landscapes.

Although in the post-Communist media literature it has become an axiom to speak of commercialized (along politicized) Central and Eastern European media systems in a combination of thriving spirit of consumer culture in these societies (as if in other parts of Europe all of these phenomena would have been less pronounced), findings of this research suggest that even against a backdrop of unpopular institutions of public broadcasting and much-loved commercial broadcasters post-Communist audiences have not sacrificed the citizen role for the consumer role, though, as argued throughout the study, the distinction between the citizen/consumer roles of audiences itself is highly problematic. I have argued that the citizen/consumer roles of audiences are interplaying instead of being clear-cut categories conflicting with each other.

Great demand for programming pleasing popular tastes on commercial television has not automatically killed the exercise of citizenship of post-Communist audiences, and, as the Latvian case suggests it, commercial broadcasters seem to have well understood this mixture of the citizen/consumer identities their audiences bear in their daily viewing practices, and as a response commercial channels have taken over quite a bit of the traditional public broadcasting mandate, though only those public broadcasting

obligations that do not conflict with their audience maximization logic.

Many of my informants, non-loyalists of the public broadcaster LTV, exercise the role of citizen within their much-liked commercial channels, be it the quotidian news and weekly current affairs offerings of these channels or their special programming at the moments of national celebrations. Devotion of audiences to popular programming on these channels, a way to escape from the hard everyday living, does not rule out the exercise of citizenship (yet, this is by no means to say that only through 'serious' programming one can exercise citizenship as popular programming should not be necessarily in conflict with citizenship ideals). Though having exited from the public broadcaster, rejecters of LTV are no 'less citizens' as those who have remained loyal to the public television. It is through the national commercial channels, or, as is the case with many of my Russian-speaking respondents, even through the localized transnational television from Russia, exiters from LTV take part in the life of the nation no less than loyalists of the public broadcaster.

It is their more liberal understanding of citizenship mixing popular programming with more traditional public broadcasting services, as well as respecting ethno-linguistic particularities of their audiences what brings to commercial channels, both national and transnational competitors of LTV, those who have rejected that form of citizenship as offered by the public television. The market-driven approach to national imagination of commercial broadcasters have proved to be more successful in reflecting heterogeneity of their audiences and opening for them access to a space allowing the exercise of citizenship than the strategy of the public broadcaster imagining the national 'we' primarily in terms of the language and culture of the ethno-linguistic majority. It is first and foremost their audience maximization plans what have made commercial broadcasters more responsive to different taste cultures, as well as ethno-linguistic differences of their audiences and hence have made them more open in their definition of citizenship.

The high popularity of the daily national news and weekly current affairs on the commercial channels signals that, while having dropped out of the national politics on the public broadcaster LTV, audiences have not exited from the national politics on television totally. Following the political news on the commercial broadcasters, even if their agenda is much the same as on the public television, appears to be something different from doing the same on the public channel LTV which is treated with great

suspicion because of its perceived close ties with the powerful.

Similarly, what may look as immersion of Russian-speaking audiences in transnational Russian television is not evidence of their denial of citizenship. Their, if not civic then cultural, attachment to Russia does not rule out their allegiance to Latvia, and in a similar vein their interest in the life in Russia does not make them indifferent to the national life of Latvia. It is through their much-loved *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*, pan-Baltic version of Russian state channel *Pervyi kanal* along the news from Russia offering also national news squeezed in-between grand scale Russian-origin entertainment, they learn about the national politics. The choice of Russian-speaking audiences to watch national news in their own language does not make them 'less citizens' than Latvian-speakers. Watching national news on transnational Russian-language *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* they participate in the life of the nation no less than Latvian-speakers watching the news on their favourite national channels broadcasting in Latvian. For those who feel left out from the public sphere of public (national) broadcasting transnational *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* offers alternative, and at some points also oppositional, public sphere to exercise the role of a citizen, to use terminology of Hall's encoding-decoding model (Hall, 1980).

Though Russian-speakers have rejected terms and conditions of the exercise of citizenship as set by the Latvian political elite requiring them to leave their differences behind, they have not abandoned part-taking in the life of the nation as such. Instead, they have chosen their own strategy on how to exercise citizenship. In other words, they have chosen to be citizens in their own way – namely, within *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal*, a mixture of transnational and national broadcasting, seen as better at addressing particularities of the Russian-speaking minority, and its transnational affiliations in particular, than national channels, let alone the public television LTV – and not as prescribed to them by the ruling politicians.

The preference of Russian-speaking viewers for *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* is another telling instance of viewing choices providing audiences with voice. Apart from watching transnational *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* to challenge the hegemonic vision of the national 'we' of public (national) broadcasting, it is through their high interest in national news on *Pervyi Baltiiskii kanal* Russophone audiences also articulate their civic belonging to the national community in the same way as Latvian-speakers do it watching the news on the national channels suggesting that there is a potential for a conception of the national 'we' based on civic values (as complementary to ethno-cultural principles), something so far

neglected by the Latvian nation-builders, local politicians.

However some scholars would like to idealize public broadcasting institutions as an embodiment of a modern national Habermasian-style public sphere, or at least having such potential (see writings of Dahlgren, Garnham, Splichal, Scannell), this study clearly demonstrates that, though the nation may momentarily gather around the public broadcaster, apart from those rare moments there is no such thing as one unitary national public sphere as there is no one unproblematic national 'we'. The study invites us instead of thinking of imagined (and, as the history of Western European public broadcasting shows it, often also imposed) homogeneity of the single unitary public sphere of the nation to focus on heterogeneity of several diverse 'public spaces' (Melucci, 1989) or 'public sphericules' (Cunningham, 2001, Cunningham, Sinclair, 2001) interacting with each other.

It is some products of popular culture for what there is no 'ready alternative' (Hirschman, 1970) on the commercial channels what today bring the nation together around the Latvian public television and offer imaginary connections between geographically dispersed members of the national communion. Yet, as soon as either the live televised ice hockey match with the national team playing or the *Eurovision Song Contest* final with the Latvian entry competing with representatives of other nations – those moments when non-loyal publics of LTV, including Russian-speaking viewers who otherwise do not feel being invited to share common national home as constituted by LTV, re-enter the public television – are over, audiences split into a number of public spaces/sphericules.

It is within these various, and at times also competing, public spaces/sphericules, and not necessarily within any all-encompassing public sphere of the nation as advocates of the public broadcasting idea would like to claim idealizing public broadcasting as a conveyor of a shared national culture, audiences participate in the life of the nation day in day out, and it is participation within these public spaces/sphericules what turns them into citizens of the national community. It is within this multiplicity of public spaces/sphericules – with the public sphere of public (national) broadcasting being just one among many others – quotidian citizenship is exercised, and it should not be necessarily conceived as a threat to national integrity. Different public spaces/sphericules does necessarily mean no formation of solidarities among them.

As we have learned from the Latvian case, these different public spaces/sphericules are not completely isolated and do meet at some points. Though coexistence of the Latvian-language and Russian-language media sub-systems have often been seen by local political elite, media policy makers and also academics as threatening national integration, and even national security, ideals, the findings of this study show that, while the language divides Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking audiences in their viewing choices, it is their interest in the national life they have in common. In fact, the agenda of the Latvian-language and Russian-language news media is much the same and what may differ is their interpretation of a number of those issues that also divide both ethno-linguistic groups.

Even during the aforementioned what may at first appear to be true moments of national unity of watching live ice hockey matches or the annual *Eurovision Song Contest*, we should be careful not to mix the fact of togetherness with the fact of unity. As we have seen from the accounts of my respondents, though the mass ceremony of television viewing, to paraphrase Anderson (2006), may offer its audiences an access to ‘a shared public life’ (Scannell, 1989:164), coming together of the nation’s members around television should not necessarily create unproblematic national ‘we’ acceptable to all members of the nation. As Billig rightly reminds us, an imagined community is not necessarily imagined as ‘a harmonious unity’ (1992:171). As evidence in this study suggests, public broadcasting may be as much uniting as divisive force in nation-building aspirations.

8.2 Originality of the Study

Instead of traditional institutional and political economy perspectives on the public service broadcasting systems in post-Communist societies across Central and Eastern Europe this study takes a novel approach focusing on the investigation of the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics. With a reference to the spheres of politics and economics hitherto transformations of broadcasting systems in the region following the fall of the Communist regimes have mainly been explained as institutional reformations – from state broadcasters to public broadcasters (see, inter alia, Gross, 2002, Jakubowicz, 1996, 2007a, Sparks with Reading, 1998), paying less attention to the examination of the socio-cultural factors accompanying this process.

Through qualitative audience research everyday television viewing practices are placed at the heart of this study, yet not ignoring macro-level political and economic aspects shaping perceptions and experiences of television audiences. It is responses of its

different publics towards the Latvian public television as a nation-building resource the study is primarily interested in thus shifting the focus away from researching institutions of post-Communist public broadcasting to investigating their publics. In the current scholarship on public broadcasting in post-Communist countries so far much has been said about publics of public broadcasting organizations in these societies without actually speaking with them. This study has aimed to fill this gap by providing publics with voice.

Although with a reference to poor audience figures of public broadcasters in the region a number of previous research papers on post-Communist public broadcasting have pointed to the low levels of public support and demand for these organizations, little has been done to understand reasons standing behind this pattern with a help of qualitative audience research tradition. To my best knowledge, this is the first study employing ethnographic perspective to investigate publics of post-Communist public broadcasting. Such approach has made it possible to examine broadcasting reformations, and overall post-Communist transformations, as perceived and experienced on the individual level, so far predominantly investigated as macro-level phenomena.

Establishing a link between the troubled project of nation formation in Latvia and equally tangled reformation, even if only formal, of its ex-Soviet state television into a Western-style public broadcaster, the study has invited to see similar broadcasting restructuring experiences in other Central and Eastern European countries within a wider context of societal post-Communist transformations. Focusing on the exploration of intersections of the broadcasting reform and the nation-forming process, the study has thus demonstrated that the investigation of popular sentiments and values, everyday life experiences, collective and individual identity formation processes is as vital as the analysis of macro(system)-level political and economic factors for understanding post-Communist (media) transformations.

The study also makes a contribution to the field of qualitative audience research by applying for the first time Hirschman's influential theory of 'exit, voice and loyalty' (Hirschman, 1970) for the purposes of the examination of responses of publics of the public television. The utilization of Hirschman's concepts has allowed seeing viewing choices audiences make in their day-to-day viewing practices as an act of agency. Choosing to watch commercial channels instead of public, transnational broadcasters instead of national is an exercise of agency. As noted earlier, it is viewing choices audiences make day in day out that give them voice. As we have seen from the responses

of the Latvian-speaking majority and the Russian-speaking minority publics towards the country's public television, it is a political statement members of both ethno-linguistic groups make through their viewing choices, namely through their rejection of the public television.

Providing links between the spheres of politics (citizenship/voice) and economics (market/exit) Hirschman's approach has also made it possible to treat the citizen/consumer roles of audiences as interplaying instead of being in tension with each other. As it has been demonstrated throughout the study, audiences use voice (protesting) through consumption (making viewing choices). To separate both roles of audiences is to create artificial and simplistic distinctions that collapse as soon as confronted with empirical reality. As experiences of my respondents suggest, what may at first sight look as employment of the consumer exit (migration from the deteriorating institution of public television to its national and transnational commercial rivals in search for better products and services) is in fact an exercise of the citizen voice (uttering of protest). In other words, what we have learned from the Latvian case is that the act of exiting as exercised by television audiences of both the ethno-linguistic majority and minority should be seen at the same time as a voice-type reaction. When rejecters of the public television vote with their feet by leaving it, they speak out at the same time, even if their exodus in the vast majority of cases is silent and private.

As we have learned from the Latvian experience, 'desertion' from public television is a signal of discontent its publics send. What is more, it is not merely a rejection of the public broadcasting organization as such that they register through their exit from it (although they are highly critical about its performance), but, what is more important, it is a rejection of public television as an institution, which for them is a symbol of the power elite discourse. In other words, their protest against public television is at the same time a denunciation of the political establishment they associate this organization with. In the case of the ethno-linguistic minority audiences it is also an objection to the government's hegemonic conception of the national 'we' what they articulate through their rejection of the public television.

The experiences of my informants have demonstrated that the employment of the exit mechanism does not rule out the realization of the voice option. Instead of being mutually exclusive the exit/voice reaction mechanisms of audiences, like their roles of being a consumer/citizen, are complementary to each other.

8.3 Limitations of the Study and Its Possible Future Developments

The study opens up new agendas for future research into post-Communist public broadcasting. One possible direction for further research is thorough elaboration of the concept of 'loyalty', 'a key concept in the battle between exit and voice', as Hirschman has argued (1970:82), within the context of the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics. Though this study has provided some revealing insights into the relationship between the way we define 'loyalty' towards public (national) broadcasting (proposing to distinguish loyalty towards institutions of public broadcasting from loyalty towards the public broadcasting values and suggesting that at least when it comes to post-Communist societies they do not necessarily overlap) and different, and also contending, definitions we have of that 'special attachment' (Hirschman, 1970) to the nation we call 'national loyalty', and yet it remains the task of future research to provide more nuanced conceptualization of the way how the notion of 'loyalty' operates in the relationship between public broadcasters and their publics within and beyond the post-Communist world, though no easy task given the intrinsically vague nature of the concept of 'loyalty' itself.

Nevertheless, what we have learned from the Latvian case is that meaning of the concept of 'loyalty' has to be conceived as the outcome of social, political and historical contexts, and if we wish to understand the role of public broadcasting as a resource of nation formation it is of utmost importance to address the questions on who and how defines loyalty towards public (national) broadcasting and, equally important, how and by whom loyalty towards the nation is defined.

There is also a need for more extensive comparative work to be done in the future to establish to what extent broadcasting reformation/nation formation intersections as witnessed in the Latvian case parallel those of other new post-Communist nation-states in Central and Eastern Europe in their nation-building aspirations and attempts to turn former state radio and television organizations into Western-like public broadcasters. It is equally important to search for points of comparison not only within post-Communist countries but also *vis-à-vis* Western European societies. As we have seen, the Latvian experiences have commonalities and particularities with other cases as much as within as beyond the post-Communist world. This study provides a good point of departure for further comparative research to be done on this topic.

It is also crucial to expand the scope of the investigation in future studies on media and national imagination in post-Communist societies addressing in more detail experiences audiences have with other types of media apart from the exploration of their television viewing practices to what I have concentrated on here. Particular attention should be paid to the investigation of online media practices given the increasingly prominent role they play in the everyday lives of many. It is the centrality of television as a medium in Latvian society that has informed my decision to pay more attention to the examination of television audiences; it is television a key site for the media consumption in Latvian households. Yet, as ethnographic perspective allows for a broader approach to the analysis of media practices, the exploration of radio, print and online media consumption could not be ignored in the present study and where relevant was incorporated in the overall analysis.

As it has become clear throughout the study, much of today's relationship between the public broadcaster LTV and its publics continues to be shaped by the Soviet legacies. Even more than 20 years since the disintegration of the Soviet Union patterns of media production and consumption inherited from the Soviet past are still much alive. Therefore, through a combination of archival research and oral history approach, the relationship between broadcasters and their publics under the Communist rule in Latvia, as well as elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe, needs further investigation. Such historical research would also allow expanding the utilization of Hirschman's theory situating the concepts of 'exit, voice and loyalty' against a backdrop of totalitarian system of media and politics.

These are some potential directions for future research into post-Communist public broadcasting. I hope that my own study has shed some light on the tangled relationship between public broadcasters and their publics in former Communist bloc countries across Central and Eastern Europe, something that have been overlooked by the previous research into public broadcasting in this part of Europe. I have argued that to understand post-Communist public broadcasting in its complexity the study of perceptions and experiences of its publics is of the utmost importance.

Appendices

Appendix 1

The Composition of the Focus Groups

Pilot focus group 1 (PFG1) taking place in Riga on August 30, 2011:

24-year-old police officer Lana, female, Russian-speaker,

29-year-old organizer of children festivities Alina, female, Russian-speaker,

87-year-old retired woman Antonija, Latvian-speaker,

57-year-old radiologist assistant Veronika, female, Latvian-speaker,

53-year-old human resources manager in the state institution Zita, female, Latvian-speaker.

Pilot focus group 2 (PFG2) taking place in Valmiera on September 19, 2011:

20-year-old student Emīls, male, Latvian-speaker,

20-year-old student Matīss, male, Latvian-speaker,

20-year-old student Oskars, male, Latvian-speaker,

20-year-old student Roberts, male, Latvian-speaker,

21-year-old student Krista, female, Latvian-speaker,

20-year-old student Lauma, female, Latvian-speaker,

19-year-old student Rūta, female, Latvian-speaker.

Pilot focus group 3 (PFG3) taking place in Valmiera on October 3, 2011:

55-year-old unemployed woman Lilita, Latvian-speaker,

49-year-old factory worker Sandra, female, Latvian-speaker,

59-year-old retired woman Elza, Latvian-speaker,

39-year-old teaching assistant Gunta, female, Latvian-speaker.

Focus group 1 (FG1) taking place in Riga on October 10, 2011:

24-year-old student Mārtiņš, male, Latvian-speaker,

24-year-old student Toms, male, Latvian-speaker,

23-year-old student Sanita, female, Latvian-speaker,

20-year-old student Zane, female, Latvian-speaker,

20-year-old student Madara, female, Latvian-speaker.

Focus group 2 (FG2) taking place in Riga on October 13, 2011:

20-year-old student Ilya, male, Russian-speaker,

22-year-old student Arina, female, Russian-speaker,

19-year-old student Kiril, male, Russian-speaker,

20-year-old student Dmitry, male, Russian-speaker,

20-year-old student Sofia, female, Russian-speaker,

20-year-old student Nikita, male, Russian-speaker.

Focus group 3 (FG3) taking place in Riga on October 17, 2011:

32-year-old manager at the retail company Vita, female, Latvian-speaker,

43-year-old director of the animal shelter Daina, female, Latvian-speaker,

27-year-old worker at the supermarket Jānis, male, Latvian-speaker,

27-year-old legal adviser working in the public sector Ieva, female, Latvian-speaker,

37-year-old economist at the state institution Solveiga, female, Latvian-speaker,

51-year-old project manager at a state institution Dagmāra, female, Latvian-speaker.

Focus group 4 (FG4) taking place in Riga on October 20, 2011:

32-year-old man working at his own construction company Vyacheslav, Russian-speaker,
29-year-old manager working at the bank Anastasia, female, Russian-speaker,
48-year-old deputy school director Boris, male, Russian-speaker,
52-year-old senior accountant working at the ministry Irina, female, Russian-speaker,
37-year-old man working at the travel agency Vadim, Russian-speaker,
31-year-old woman working at the children and youth centre Olga, Russian-speaker,
26-year-old medical student Vladislav, male, Russian-speaker.

Focus group 5 (FG5) taking place in Riga on October 21, 2011:

84-year-old retired woman Laimdota, Latvian-speaker,
59-year-old manager at the transport company Ingūna, female, Latvian-speaker,
62-year-old doctor Mirdza, female, Latvian-speaker,
56-year-old archivist at the municipality institution Inese, female, Latvian-speaker,
62-year-old retired woman Brigita, Latvian-speaker,
83-year-old retired woman Gerda, Latvian-speaker,
66-year-old retired woman Ausma, Latvian-speaker.

Focus group 6 (FG6) taking place in Riga on October 22, 2011:

62-year-old retired man Nikolai, Russian-speaker,
67-year-old retired woman Larisa, Russian-speaker,
76-year-old retired woman Valentina, Russian-speaker,
61-year-old woman working with children at the school amateur theatre Tatyana,
Russian-speaker,
62-year-old retired woman Alla, Russian-speaker,

73-year-old retired man Vladimir, Russian-speaker.

Focus group 7 (FG7) taking place in Daugavpils on October 28, 2011:

36-year-old municipality officer Mikhail, male, Russian-speaker,

37-year-old deputy school director Silvija, female, Latvian-speaker,

23-year-old businessman Anton, male, Russian-speaker,

25-year-old municipality officer Elizaveta, female, Russian-speaker,

45-year-old unemployed woman Elena, Russian-speaker,

55-year-old school teacher Galina, female, Russian-speaker.

Focus group 8 (FG8) taking place in Vilani on October 29, 2011:

18-year-old secondary school student Kristina, female, Russian-speaker,

39-year-old school teacher Inna, female, Russian-speaker,

57-year-old agronomist Ludmila, female, Russian-speaker,

33-year-old real estate specialist working at the local municipality Svetlana, female, Russian-speaker,

35-year-old head of the local registry office Ilona, female, Russian-speaker,

48-year-old municipality IT officer Viktor, male, Russian-speaker,

30-year-old worker at the railway company Sergei, male, Russian-speaker.

Focus group 9 (FG9) taking place in Talsi on November 3, 2011:

68-year-old retired woman Ilga, Latvian-speaker,

45-year-old farmer Edgars, male, Latvian-speaker,

55-year-old agronomist Ināra, female, Latvian-speaker,

27-year-old music teacher Ansis, male, Latvian-speaker,

31-year-old civil servant Agita, female, Latvian-speaker,

58-year-old school teacher Nellija, female, Latvian-speaker,

57-year-old chief specialist at the local museum Inta, female, Latvian-speaker.

Focus group 10 (FG10) taking place in Tirza on November 5, 2011:

28-year-old autograder driver Māris, male, Latvian-speaker,

27-year-old secretary working at the local municipality Līga, female, Latvian-speaker,

47-year-old specialist working at the local culture house Anda, female, Latvian-speaker,

39-year-old unemployed man Arnis, Latvian-speaker,

61-year-old head of the local culture house Rasma, female, Latvian-speaker,

56-year-old farmer Dzintra, female, Latvian-speaker,

46-year-old blue-collar worker Pēteris, male, Latvian-speaker.

Appendix 2

The Family Profiles

Family 1 (F1)

Russian-speakers, 55-year old hospital administrator Anna and her husband 57-year-old unemployed Igor, live in a five-storey 1985 standard Soviet era block of flats in the capital Riga. As the period of observations coincided with the time when their daughter, 27-year-old shop assistant Marina, with her family was searching for a new apartment, she and her 4-year-old daughter Yuliya were living with Anna and Igor, while the mother of Anna, 81-year-old retired Jadviga, often came around to look after Yuliya. During some of the visits their oldest daughter, 32-year-old Mariya, with her daughter, 2-year-old Evelina, was also present. Although Mariya, as many other economic migrants from Latvia, with her family today lives in the United Kingdom, she, from time to time, visits her relatives in Latvia. They also have a 35-year-old son, Stanislav who with his family lives in Riga separately from his parents. All members of the family are born in Latvia and all are also citizens of Latvia with the exception of Igor. He was born in Russia, and at the age of 17 early 1970s came to Latvia to study in Riga Industrial Polytechnical College, after that worked at the factory in Riga, got married here and stayed for living. The current status of Igor is a non-citizen of Latvia meaning that he is neither a citizen of Latvia nor any other country. Igor is also the only Orthodox believer in the family, all the rest are Catholics. Although they all, except Igor, have a good command of Latvian, it is predominantly Russian they use at home. Mainly Russian-speakers constitute their circle of friends; also their three children are all married to Russian-speakers. Anna with her mother, who is of Polish origin, apart from Latvian often speaks also in Polish. Though Anna comes from an ethnically mixed family with her mother being an ethnic Pole and father an ethnic Latvian, she thinks of herself as ethnic Latvian. 'I have lived in Latvia all my life', she explained. Despite not being Russian-speakers, Anna's parents decided to send her to a school with Russian as the language of instruction hoping that the knowledge of Russian will help their daughter in her future studies and career; this is the reason why Anna, alongside Latvian, has also a perfect command of Russian.

Family 2 (F2)

In the Latvian-speaking family of 54-year-old Māra working as an accountant at the state

archive along her husband, 59-year-old engineer Heinrihs, and their two daughters, 19-year-old student Liene and 26-year-old civil servant working at the ministry Dace, lives also Māra's mother, 81-year-old retired Bronislava. They live in the capital Riga and have an apartment in a nine-storey standard Soviet era block of flats. All around their late 1980s block of flats stretches mass of identical grey and shabby massive blocks of flats, also built in the 1980s. While main language in the family is Latvian, they also use Russian as Heinrihs is a Russian-speaker of German origin. Heinrihs came to Latvia to study in Riga Polytechnical Institute early 1970s from Kazakhstan, then one of the republics of the Soviet Union, where he was born after his parents, German emigrants, were deported there from Ukraine in the early 1940s as part of Stalinist mass deportations. Having finished his studies Heinrihs got a job in Latvia, met Māra and settled there. Today they regularly visit relatives of Heinrihs in Germany with whom he speaks in German. Their oldest daughter Dace thinks of herself as ethnic German, while the youngest daughter Liene identified herself as ethnic Latvian. 'The oldest one is her father's daughter but the youngest – my daughter,' Māra explained in jest. All members of the family are citizens of Latvia with Heinrihs obtaining citizenship by naturalization in the 1990s as soon as the naturalization process began.

Family 3 (F3)

The large Latvian-speaking family of 51-year-old dairy farmer Sarmīte lives in the countryside in western Latvia where they have a farmstead with two dwelling houses. Along dairy farming they also have a livestock farming business, both started early 1990s shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Together with Sarmīte and her husband, 51-year-old farmer Tālis, live also Sarmīte's parents, 78-year-old retired Lidija and 80-year-old retired Zigurds, and both of Sarmīte's grown-up children with their families. Sarmīte's daughter Marta, 30-year-old manager of debtors, lives together with her partner, 32-year-old construction worker Intars, and their 4-year-old daughter Elīza. Sarmīte's son Gatis, a 28-year-old farmer, is married to 27-year-old accountant Ilze, both have 3-year-old daughter Klaudija. They all think of themselves as ethnic Latvians, use Latvian at home and all are citizens of Latvia. During the fieldwork period Zigurds passed away and shortly after also Lidija died while Marta gave birth to a baby boy.

Family 4 (F4)

The Latvian-speaking family of 39-year-old unemployed Edmunds and his wife Laima, a

39-year-old head of a non-governmental organization, coming from a provincial town in northern Latvia comprises their three children, 20-year-old unemployed son Mārcis and 15-year-old twins, daughter Sabīne and son Gusts, attending school, as well as Edmunds' parents, 66-year-old retired music teacher Bruno and 67-year-old retired telephone operator Ligita. They have a two-storey private house that during the Soviet period was turned into an apartment house and that the family of Edmunds regained as their property through the process of denationalization early 1990s after the break-up of the Soviet Union. They all have identified themselves as ethnic Latvians, they use Latvian at home and have Latvian citizenship. During the period of observations Laima's father, not living together with them, passed away.

Family 5 (F5)

The Russian-speaking family of retired school teacher Nadezhda, aged 68, lives in a village in the eastern region of Latgale around 30-40 kilometres from the Russian border. The majority of the population of the Latgale region are Russian-speakers. In their Soviet era three-storey block of flats, built in the mid of 1970s, Nadezhda lives together with her daughter, 39-year-old school teacher Diana, and Diana's husband, 37-year-old Andrei who works as a football coach at the same school, and their 10-year-old daughter Aleksandra. In the same local school where Diana and Andrei work and where also their daughter studies, Nadezhda taught Russian-language to children studying in Latvian for many years starting from the early 1960s. Nadezhda's oldest daughter, 48-year-old Ekaterina, with her family lives in the United Kingdom where they moved a few years ago when because of the economic downturn Ekaterina lost her job in Latvia. Nadezhda's husband died several years ago. At home they all, Nadezhda, Diana, Andrei and Aleksandra, speak only in Russian, albeit their proficiency in Latvian is good. It is little Aleksandra who is fluent in both Latvian and Russian as she studies in Latvian at school and has also Latvian-speaking friends. They think of themselves as ethnic Russians. All four are citizens of Latvia. As Nadezhda's family has been living in Latvia for five generations – her grandfather was born in Latgale in 1866 when it was part of the Vitebsk Province of the Russian Empire, Nadezhda and both her daughters had no problems receiving citizenship automatically in the early 1990s. Andrei acquired citizenship by naturalization only in 2006. When asked why he did not obtain citizenship earlier, he said, 'on principle'. He did not have problems passing the Latvian language exam but found it unfair that he had to be naturalized to get citizenship. As both his

parents, Andrei was also born in Latvia but, nevertheless, did not receive citizenship automatically. As he says, it was because one of his grandmothers was not a citizen of Latvia in 1940 when the Soviets occupied Latvia – she came to Latvia from Russia shortly after the Second World War in 1945 when she was 22 years old.

Appendix 3

The Focus Group Interview Guide

Introduction

Participants were first asked to sign an informed consent form and fill in a questionnaire indicating basic socio-demographic information about them: name, family name, age, place of living, the region in Latvia they come from, ethnic origin, citizenship, language used in the family, educational background, occupation and household income. To kick off, moderator outlined aims of the research, explained how the discussion will be organized encouraging all participants to actively participate in it and also provided information on how data will be later utilized in the final report of the study. Moderator then introduced himself and asked participants to do the same saying their name and occupation.

Key topics

1. *Viewing habits*

Stimulus material: Participants were asked to make a list of their five most loved shows on television, including those they watch on the internet, and discuss their choice.

What makes you interested in the programmes you have included in the list?

2. *TV channels*

Stimulus material: Respondents were asked to provide their associations with the main six television channels in Latvia writing down few keywords that first spring to their mind when thinking about the particular channel, and later they were invited to discuss it.

Which two channels from the list you watch more often than others?

Were there any channels you struggled with when thinking of associations you have with them?

3. *Definitions of public television*

Stimulus material: Participants were invited to write a small essay offering their own definition of the concept of public television with the question

of the essay being formulated as follows: ‘what do you think the idea of public service television is (or should be) about?’, and later they were asked to discuss the answers they have provided.

Are you familiar with the term ‘public service television’? Have you heard about it earlier and, if so, in what context?

Is there public service television in Latvia? Are there any particular channel or channels of which you think as public service channels?

4. *Latvian Television*

Do you remember the last time you watched LTV1 or LTV7, the second channel of LTV? If so, what was the programme you watched?

What makes you (not) interested in LTV?

Is there anyone in your family who watches LTV regularly?

What makes, if something at all, LTV different from other channels?

Would you be ready to pay a licence fee for LTV, if introduced?

Would you miss LTV, if it ceased to exist?

Is it important to have such a television as LTV?

Stimulus material: Participants were asked to provide their associations with *Panorāma* (*Panorama*), main prime-time news bulletin on LTV1, while watching a short clip from the latest edition of *Panorāma*, and after that they were invited to discuss their responses to *Panorāma*.

What makes, if something at all, *Panorāma* different from other evening news programmes on television?

On which channel(s) do you usually watch the evening news, if at all?

What are your key sources of news, if to choose from the various offerings of radio and television, print and online media. Or maybe is your key news source word-of-mouth?

What makes you (not) interested in *Panorāma*?

Roundup

The moderator made a summary of the key viewpoints expressed during the discussion asking participants if there is anything else they would like to add.

Appendix 4

Sample Stimulus Materials (in Latvian and Russian)

Stimulus Material 1

A List of Five Most Favourite Shows on Television

Mani piecie iecienītāki TV raidījumi, seriāli, filmas, utt. ir ...







1. Neapņemšana TV3
2. Dr. Facts CW1, PANORĀMA
3. 1000 aizēzes ... TV3 (?)
4. KHL - hokejs ... hokejs LTV7
5. "Doktors HAUN" - seriāls

Vārds:.....

Stimulus Material 2

Associations with the Main Six TV Channels in Latvia

Ierakstiet 5 vārdus – pirmās asociācijas, kas Jums nāk prātā, domājot par šo TV kanālu!

	<p>Valsts pirmais kanāls</p>
	<p>Dinamo Rīga, Olimpiāda, krāvu ziņas</p>
	<p>Svētdienas kauņas, 900 sekundes, degpunktā</p>
	<p>Bez tabu, komu kovri, labas filmas</p>
	<p>Ziņas, izklaide,</p>
	<p>Bez cenzūras, vecie krāvu seriāli</p>

Vārds:.....

Stimulus Material 3

An Essay ‘What Do You Think the Idea of Public Service Television Is (or Should Be) About?’

Uzrakstiet 3-5 teikumus, kas, jūsuprāt, ir sabiedriskā TV!

Sabiedriskā televīzija, manuprāt, ir...

Sabiedriskajai televīzijai, manuprāt, vajadzētu būt...

Общественное телевидение - это телевидение, предназначенное для просмотра всем обществом и доступное каждому по возможности.

Общественному телевидению необходимо быть общественным, проповедать культурные и духовные ценности и образовывать общество, а также предоставлять всю актуальную информацию (например, новости)

Vārds:.....

Stimulus Material 4

Associations with *Panorāma*

Ierakstiet 5 vārdus – pirmās asociācijas, kas Jums nāk prātā, domājot par LTV1 ziņu raidījumu „Panorāma”!

- "pārbāzības" / pārskaidrinātājs
vai politiku

- rīkās detaļas

- diskusorācija

- balansētājs

- mērķi



- komentētāja
garlaicīgā

- melfāšeng

vajadzētu
olīvas
kā LNT

/ārds:.....

Stimulus Material 5

One Week Family Television Diary

DIENASGRĀMATA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā?* 18.00-01.00

Vārds: _____

* Aprakstiet arī tos gadījumus, ja skatījāties TV raidījumus internetā vai ierakstā.

Datums: *sešdiena, 3. decembris*

Laiks	TV kanāls/i	Raidījuma/u, filmas/u, seriāla/u nosaukums	Skatījos šo (šos) raidījumu/s, filmu/s, seriālu/s, jo ...
18.00-19.00	—		
19.00-20.00	—		
20.00-21.00	—		

DIENASGRĀMATA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā? 18.00-01.00

2 DIENASGRĀMATA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā? * 18.00-01.00

24.00-01.00	23.00-24.00	22.00-23.00	21.00-22.00
1	1	1	1

3 DIENASGRĀMATA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā? * 18.00-01.00

* Aprakstiet arī tos gadījumus, ja skatījāties TV raidījumus internetā vai ierakstā.

Datums: 2014.gada 11. septembris

Laiks	TV kanāls/i	Raidījuma/u, filmas/u, seriālu/ nosaukums	Skatījos šo (šos) raidījumu/s, filmas, seriālu/s, jo ...
18.00-19.00	filmas seriāli, u.c.	CSI	Man patīk šis seriāls un kopās arskatīt. Patīk noskaidrot vainīgo un šķīdināt. Un man kopā domājam kārti darīt šīs lietas. Bija galvenā loma un noslēpums kā citi darīt, kāpēc notiek šīs vainīgo nāves. Normāliem apmācību šī seriāls.
19.00-20.00	-/-	-/-	
20.00-21.00	-/-	-/-	

4 DIENASGRĀMĀTA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā? * 18.00-01.00

24.00-01.00	23.00-24.00	22.00-23.00	21.00-22.00
<p>18.00-19.00</p> <p>19.00-20.00</p> <p>20.00-21.00</p>	<p>18.00-19.00</p> <p>19.00-20.00</p> <p>20.00-21.00</p>	<p>18.00-19.00</p> <p>19.00-20.00</p> <p>20.00-21.00</p>	<p>18.00-19.00</p> <p>19.00-20.00</p> <p>20.00-21.00</p>

5 DIENASGRĀMATA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā? * 18.00-01.00

* Aprakstiet arī tos gadījumus, ja skatījāties TV raidījumus internetā vai ierakstā.

Datums:*2014.gada 5. decembris*.....

Laiks	TV kanāls/i	Raidījuma/u, filmas/u, seriālu/u nosaukums	Skatījos šo (šos) raidījumu/s, filmu/s, seriālu/s, jo ...
18.00-19.00	N3	<i>Grūti izstāstīt visu</i>	<i>Skatījos jo varbūt varēšu parādīt ar bērniem.</i>
19.00-20.00	<i>reālā laika</i> TV6	CSI SIMPSONI	<i>Ēstieši un viltotie</i>
20.00-21.00	-11-	-11-	
<i>-11- - CSI šovs</i>			

7 DIENASGRĀMATA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā? * 18.00-01.00

* Aprakstiet arī tos gadījumus, ja skatījāties TV raidījumus internetā vai ierakstā.

Datums: *šodien, 6 decembris*

Laiks	TV kanāls/i	Raidījuma/u, filmas/u, seriāla/u nosaukums	Skatījos šo (šos) raidījumu/s, filmu/s, seriālu/s, jo ...
18.00-19.00	<i>Balkāņu kanāls</i>	<i>muži</i>	<i>skatīju šovā "Pasaule"</i>
19.00-20.00	INT	<i>zīmju</i> DEĢ PUNKTS	<i>redzēju šo raidījumu, kas katrreiz veido un parāda.</i>
20.00-21.00	<i>TUG</i> TUG	<i>SIMPSONI</i> ĢĀZI ĢRĪDA	<i>skatīju šovā "Simpsoni" un šodien.</i>

8 DIENASGRĀMATA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā? * 18.00-01.00

24.00-01.00	23.00-24.00	22.00-23.00	21.00-22.00
		TU3	TU6
		CSI Mainsmni	UEFA Ē. CHELSEA - VALENCIA
			Fakti šodienā

9 DIENASGRĀMATA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā? 18.00-01.00

* Aprakstiet arī tos gadījumus, ja skatījāties TV raidījumus internetā vai ierakstā.

Datums: ... 18.00-01.00 ...

Laiks	TV kanāls/i	Raidījuma/u, filmas/u, seriāla/u nosaukums	Skatījos šo (šos) raidījumu/s, filmu/s, seriālu/s, jo ...
18.00-19.00	Dinamiks	Ikdienas	Ērtā ierīcē, u. citādi internetā vai ierakstā
19.00-20.00	ITV7	Horejs Divainas Rīgas Kameras AK Bars	Ērtā ierīcē, u. citādi internetā vai ierakstā
20.00-21.00			Ērtā ierīcē, u. citādi internetā vai ierakstā

10 DIENASGRĀMATA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā? * 18.00-01.00

21.00-22.00	TU3	Estimāciju ceturksnis	Saņņ tūnā nometnā. Pēc tam informācija, bet šķērķiem vēstēt.
22.00-23.00	TU6	Pārskats Nr 13	Šķērķiem, kāpēc jāpārskatā un kāpēc kāpēc.
23.00-24.00			
24.00-01.00			

11 DIENASGRĀMATA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā? * 18.00-01.00

* Aprakstiet arī tos gadījumus, ja skatījāties TV raidījumus internetā vai ierakstā.

Datums: 2014. gada 20. decembris

Laiks	TV kanāls/	Raidījuma/ filmas/ u, seriālu/ nosaukums	Skatījos šo (šos) raidījumu/s, filmas, seriālu/s, jo ...
18.00-19.00	-		
19.00-20.00	-		
20.00-21.00	-		

12 DIENASGRĀMATA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā? * 18.00-01.00

24.00-01.00	23.00-24.00	22.00-23.00	21.00-22.00

13 DIENASGRĀMATA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā? * 18.00-01.00

* Aprakstiet arī tos gadījumus, ja skatījaties TV raidījumus internetā vai ierakstā.

Datums: 2014. gada 8. jūlijs

Laiks	TV kanāls/i	Raidījumu, filmu/u, seriālu/u nosaukums	Skatījos šo (šos) raidījumu/s, filmu/s, seriālu/s, jo ...
18.00-19.00			
19.00-20.00			
20.00-21.00			

14 DIENASGRĀMATA: Ko es šodien skatījos televīzijā? 18:00-01:00

24.00-01.00	23.00-24.00	22.00-23.00	21.00-22.00
1	1	1	1

Stimulus Material 6

Family Questionnaire

Visos jautājumos atbildes sarakstojiet prioritārā secībā: 1-svarīgākais, nozīmīgākais, biežāk lietotais, bet 5-mazāk svarīgs, mazāk nozīmīgs, retāk lietots!

Ne vienmēr jānosauc piecas lietas, var nosaukt arī mazāku skaitu – pēc nepieciešamības!

ANKETA

Mani pieci mīļākie mūziķi (dziedātāji, mūzikas grupas, komponisti, utt.) ir ...	Mani pieci mīļākie aktieri (kino, teātrī, TV) ir ...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Даймонд Дэйвис 2. Анна Терман 3. Дайма Вайкуне 4. Надежда Бабкина 5. Группа «Лесоповал» 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Наталья Тундарева 2. Чубьянов 3. Увар Камникова 4. Владимир Талкин 5. Владимир Тучи
Manas piecas mīļākās filmas (jebkuras valsts, jebkurā laikā ražotas) ir ...	Mani pieci mīļākie seriāli ir ... (norādiet iekavās arī TV kanālu, ja skatāties šo seriālu TV, vai atzīmējiet – „skatos internetā”) ...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Домашняя дорога в дюнах 2. Мухоморы 3. Офицеры 4. Неурловские истории 5. Операция «И» или «Иван» при участии Шурале 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. «След» 2. «По горячим следам» 3. Маршрут милосердия 4. Рабыня Цыгура 5. Любовь по-русски
Mani pieci mīļākie sportisti, sporta komandas (jebkura disciplīna, jebkura valsts) ir ...	Mani pieci mīļākie TV raidījumu vadītāji (žurnālisti, diktori, šovu vadītāji, 'ētera sejas', utt.) ir ...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Андрей Малахов 2. Марат Башаров 3. Александр Масляков 4. Париса Тугеева 5. Наталья Абелева

Visos jautājumos atbildes sarindojiet prioritārā secībā: 1-svarīgākais, nozīmīgākais, biežāk lietotais, bet 5-mazāk svarīgs, mazāk nozīmīgs, retāk lietots!

Ne vienmēr jānosauc piecas lietas, var nosaukt arī mazāku skaitu – pēc nepieciešamības!

<p>Visvairāk es skumtu, ja tiktu likvidēti (pārtrauktu raidīt, vairs nevarētu redzēt) šādi TV kanāli ...</p> <p>(norādiet konkrētu TV kanālu nosaukumus)</p>	<p>Visgrūtāk man būtu iedomāties dzīvi bez ...</p> <p>(radio, TV, datora un interneta, dienas laikrakstiem kā „Diena”, „Latvijas Avīze”, „Čas”, u.c., reģionālajiem (vietējiem) laikrakstiem, žurnāliem, mp3 atskaņotāja, mobilā telefona, DVD atskaņotāja, iPad, utt.)</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Планета РТР 2. Шансон 3. 1 канал 4. 5. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Радио-Домская 2. Газета ^{информация} 3. Журнал «Народный доктор» 4. Дольный миссдор 5.
<p>Televīzijā parasti skatos ...</p> <p>(piemēram, filmas, seriālus, koncertus, TV spēles, raidījumus par dabu, dzīvniekiem, kulinārijas šovus, raidījumus par politiku, diskusijas par aktuālajiem notikumiem, ziņas, dokumentālās filmas, sarunu šovus (talk-show), sporta programmas, utt.)</p>	<p>Parasti par jaunumiem Latvijā un pasaulē uzzinu no ...</p> <p>(radio, TV, dienas laikrakstiem kā „Diena”, „Latvijas Avīze”, „Čas”, u.c., reģionālajiem (vietējiem) laikrakstiem, žurnāliem, draugiem, radiem, kaimiņiem, kolēģiem darbā, utt.)</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Дискуссии об актуальных событиях 2. Передачи о политике 3. Атлас животного мира 4. Серии 5. Кулинарные шоу 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Слушая радио 2. Читая газету 3. Смотря ТВ. 4. 5.
<p>Mani pieci iecienītākie TV kanāli, tie, ko ikdienā skatos visbiežāk ir ...</p>	<p>Manas piecas iecienītākās radio stacijas, tās, ko ikdienā klausos visbiežāk ir ...</p>

Visos jautājumos atbildes sarindojiet prioritārā secībā: 1-svarīgākais, nozīmīgākais, biežāk lietotais, bet 5-mazāk svarīgs, mazāk nozīmīgs, retāk lietots!

Ne vienmēr jānosauc piecas lietas, var nosaukt arī mazāku skaitu – pēc nepieciešamības!

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Канал 1 2. Планета РТР 3. Мамсон 4. Канал ТВ-Ц 5. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. „Домская площадь“ 2. Авторadio 3. Голос свободы 4. 5.
<p>Mani pieci iecienītākie laikraksti un žurnāli, tie, ko ikdienā lasu visbiežāk ir ...</p>	<p>Manas piecas iecienītākās web lapas ir ...</p> <p>(norādiet konkrētas interneta lapas, kuras ikdienā apmeklējat visbiežāk)</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Рязанские вести 2. Панорама Рязани 3. Народный доктор 4. 5. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

<p>Internetā visbiežāk daru šādas lietas ...</p> <p>(piemēram, sūtu/lasu e-pastu, sarunājos, izmantojot Skype, lietoju internetbanku, meklēju informāciju Google, skatos video YouTube, skatos TV raidījumus, skatos filmas, klausos radio, lasu ziņas, spēlēju spēles, lejuplādēju filmas, mūziku, rakstu komentārus pie ziņām, rakstu savu blogu/dienasgrāmatu, lietoju sociālos tīklus kā Draugiem.lv, Facebook.com, Twitter.com, utt., ievietoju savas bildes, video, iepērkos internetā, čatoju, utt.)</p>	<p>Kad skatos TV, vienlaikus daru šādus darbus ...</p> <p>(piemēram, gatavoju ēst, ēdu, lasu avīzi, žurnālu, grāmatu, sarunājos ar ģimenes locekļiem, sarunājos pa telefonu, lietoju internetu, mācos, daru dažādus mājas darbus, guļu, utt.)</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Много, очень редко, редко 2. редко 3. Разговариваю с семьей

Visos jautājumos atbildes sarindojet prioritārā secībā: 1-svarīgākais, nozīmīgākais, biežāk lietotais, bet 5-mazāk svarīgs, mazāk nozīmīgs, retāk lietots!

Ne vienmēr jānosauc piecas lietas, var nosaukt arī mazāku skaitu – pēc nepieciešamības!

4.	4.
5.	5.

Galvenās lietas, ko daru, izmantojot mobilo telefonu ir šādas...	Kad skatos ziņas televīzijā, klausos ziņas radio, lasu avīzes vai lasu ziņas interneta portālos, visvairāk man interesē šādi temati ...
(piemēram, sazvānos, sūtu sms, klausos mūziku, klausos radio, skatos video, lietoju internetu telefonā, spēlēju spēles, filmēju video, lietoju fotokameru, lasu jaunākās ziņas internetā, lietoju dažādas aplikācijas, utt.)	(piemēram, politika, ekonomika un bizness, lauksaimniecība, notikumi manā pilsētā, novadā, reģionā, kultūra, sports, noziegumi, nelaimes gadījumi, ārzemju ziņas, medicīna, labklājība, izglītība, izklaide, mūzika, slavenību privātā dzīve, visādi jocīgi atgadījumi Latvijā un pasaulē, laika ziņas, horoskopi, TV programma, utt.)

1. Звоню	1. Образование ...
2.	2. Медицина
3.	3. Политика, экономика
4.	4. Зарубежные новости
5.	5. Прогноз погоды

TV raidījumus, filmas un seriālus parasti skatos, izmantojot šādas ierīces ...	Mani pieci nozīmīgākie svētki un atceres dienas ir ...
(TV aparātā, datorā (YouTube, u.c.), mobilajā telefonā, iPad, ierakstu DVD diskā vai video kasetē, interaktīvās TV arhīvā, utt.)	(piemēram, Ziemassvētki, Jaunais gads, 4.maijs, 9.maijs, 18.novembris, 1.maijs, Lāčplēša diena, Lieldienas, Jāņi, 8.marts, 16.marts, Valentīndiena, utt.) ...

1. Смотрю по телевизору и компьютеру	1. Новый год
2.	2. День Татьяны (мой день рож.)
3.	3. Чума (день рож. внука и д.коро-вильямовна)
4.	4. Проща

Visos jautājumos atbildes sarindojet prioritārā secībā: 1-svarīgākais, nozīmīgākais, biežāk lietotais, bet 5-mazāk svarīgs, mazāk nozīmīgs, retāk lietots!

Ne vienmēr jānosauc piecas lietas, var nosaukt arī mazāku skaitu - pēc nepieciešamības!

5.	5. Луго
Manuprāt, pieci labākienotikumi Latvijas 20.gadsimta vēsturē ir...	Manuprāt, pieci sliktākie notikumi Latvijas 20.gadsimta vēsturē ir...
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Праздник песни и танца. 2. 3. 4. 5. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Воступление в Евросоюз 2. Крах банка Балтия 3. Обман денег (решил на мать) 4. 5.
Pieci politiķi (Latvijas, kā arī citu valstu), kuru darbību vērtēju atzinīgi ... (gan tie, kas ir tagad pie varas, gan tie, kas bijuši pie varas iepriekš, tostarp padomju gados, pirmās brīvvalsts laikā)	Pieci politiķi (Latvijas, kā arī citu valstu), kuru darbību vērtēju negatīvi ... (gan tie, kas ir tagad pie varas, gan tie, kas bijuši pie varas iepriekš, tostarp padomju gados, pirmās brīvvalsts laikā)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Андрис Берзинс 2. Раймонд Гагис 3. Королева Виктория - Англия 4. Никита Хрущев - разоб. культ Сталина 5. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Сталин 2. Вайра Фрейберга 3. Евзики - события в Черке 4. Кеннеди - нападение на Аргентина 5. Жанар Ренне
Visvairāk es uzticos ... (piemēram, sev, ģimenei, politiķiem, valdībai, Saeimai, žurnālistiem, armijai, baznīcai, policijai, valsts pārvaldei, tiesām, pašvaldībām, Valsts prezidentam, utt.)	Pirms vēlēšanām lēmumu par to, kādu politisko spēku atbalstīt izlemju ... (piemēram, skatoties vēlēšanu debates TV un radio, lasot, ko par politiķiem raksta avīzēs, internetā, lasot partiju programmas, tiekoties ar politiķiem klātienē, apspriežoties ar ģimenes locekļiem, spriežot pēc politiskajām reklāmām, utt.)

Visos jautājumos atbildes sarindojet prioritārā secībā: 1-svarīgākais, nozīmīgākais, biežāk lietotais, bet 5-mazāk svarīgs, mazāk nozīmīgs, retāk lietots!

Ne vienmēr jānosauc piecas lietas, var nosaukt arī mazāku skaitu – pēc nepieciešamības!

1.	себе	1. Слушаю debates по радио.
2.		2. читаю газетные
3.		3. Встречаюсь с друзьями
4.		4.
5.		5. общаюсь с членами семьи.

Latvijas labākie gadi līdz šim bijuši: (piemēram, cara laikā, pirmajā brīvvalstī, Ulmaņlaikos, padomju gados, Atmodas laikā, 90.gados, 21.gs sākumā)	Latvija var lepoties ar šādiem cilvēkiem (varat minēt gan tādus, kas ir dzīvi, gan tādus, kas jau miruši): ...
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1. Советские годы	1. Раймонд Паулс
2. Начало 21 века	2. Мария Наумова
3.	3. Майя Вайсман
4.	4. Эрис Райнис
5.	5. Александр Чак

Es jūtos piederīgs ... (piemēram, savai pilsētai, savas pilsētas mikrorajonam, savam novadam, savam pagastam, Latvijai, Eiropai, Krievijai, Baltijai, utt.)	Latvijas nozīmīgākie nacionālie simboli ir ... (karogs, himna, latviešu valoda, kultūra, utt.)
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1. своей волости	1. Флаг
2. своему краю	2. Гимн
3. Латвии	3. Крив тура
4.	4.
5.	5.

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