

## **Liminality and Contested Europeanness: Conflicting Memory Politics in the Baltic Space**

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### **Introduction**

Recent years have witnessed intensified action on the ‘memory front’ in the Russian-Baltic relations, be they debates over ‘occupation’ or ‘liberation’ of the Baltics in World War II (WWII) in the context of the Estonian-Russian and Latvian-Russian border treaties, the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Victory Day in Moscow in May 2005, controversies over WWII monuments in Estonia, or the writing of history. This chapter sets these ‘memory wars’ between the Baltic states and Russia against the backdrop of their struggles over the contents of a common European remembrance of WWII. I argue that both the Baltic and Russian attempts to seek pan-European recognition of the ‘Europeanness’ of their narrative of WWII and their ‘self’ thereof, whilst denying the Europeanness of the other, are indicative of their concurrent attempts to wrench apart their traditionally liminal position in Europe.

For after all, both Russia and the Baltic Three have historically occupied an ambiguous liminal space in the European setting. Since its introduction in the era of Enlightenment, ‘Eastern Europe’ as such has been the embodiment of liminality, of the state “betwixt and between” in Europe’s self-image (cf. Turner, 1969). Notions like ‘*Zwischeneuropa*’, or ‘lands between’ describing the countries between Germany and Russia speak volumes in this context (cf. Palmer, 1970; Malia, 1999). By all its different designations, Eastern Europe has traditionally been positioned within geographical Europe but simultaneously put in the loop of being ‘less European’ than its Western counterpart and therefore destined to unceasingly attempt to close the gap of ‘full Europeanness’ (Wolff, 1994; Neumann, 1999). *Mitteleuropa* as an area between Russia and the West proper has further had a dually liminal character: neither Western nor Eastern enough to be considered as wholly part of one or the other. Whilst Russia has occupied a more traditional position of a clearly carved-out Eastern ‘other’ in the European predicament (cf. Neumann, 1999), its own ambivalent relation to the West, combining recognition-seeking from the latter with advances for autonomy, nonetheless places it in the comparative scale of ‘borderline Europeans’ (cf. Lotman, 1999: 359; Kuus, 2007). Both Russia and the Baltics’ relative peripherality in relation to Western Europe has created a curious case of ‘nested liminalities’ in the region, where both sides use the other as a negative point of reference in order to veil their own sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the West (cf. Prizel, 1998). The Baltics’ depiction of Russia as a country of lower civilisation and as an economic, political and military threat to them that inhabits an even lower stratum down in the depths of ‘Europe but not quite Europe’ serves as a compensation mechanism for their own relative weakness in relation to the broadly defined West (cf. Zarycki, 2004: 597). Building on their experience and historical ties to Western Europe and Russia, and their respective position on the semiotic border of the two semiospheres, the Baltic states also aim

to function as bilingual ‘interpretative filters’ for ‘translating’ Russia to Western Europe (cf. Lotman, 1999: 12). Russia’s frequent ‘counter-depictions’ of the Baltic Three as ‘troublemakers in the European Union’ similarly try to rescale their own sense of liminality towards the West (cf. Joenniemi, 2005).

This chapter unfolds these competitive claims for Europeanness in the context of the acrimonious diplomatic confrontation between Russia and Estonia over the relocation of a Soviet war memorial (the so-called ‘Bronze Soldier’) in Tallinn in the spring of 2007. I argue the ‘Bronze Soldier’-controversy to be, on the one hand, emblematic of the post-communist Baltic states’ re-appropriation of their suppressed pasts, and their consequent attempts to seek Western support for influencing Russia to acknowledge the troubled legacy of communism in the region. Russia’s painful reaction to Estonia’s decision to relocate the war memorial commemorating the country’s ‘liberation’ by the Soviet Union is, on the other hand, indicative of its difficulties in coming to terms with the mnemo-political emancipation of its former dependents as well as of its agonising identity-building struggles in the post-Soviet era more generally.

The argument is developed in three parts. First, the concept of liminality as an ambiguous borderline condition between different formations and subject positions is introduced. I claim ‘liminality’ to be an especially appropriate notion for examining the historically peripheral Baltic states’ self-positioning in Europe. Furthermore, the notion of liminality is instrumental for a more nuanced understanding of the self/other relationship, enabling differentiation to be made between shades of otherness in the scale between difference and outright threat to self’s identity, as well as locating the space for negotiations between the self and other. Following the layout of the theoretical scaffolding of the argument, the chapter turns to the case in focus – the ‘Bronze Soldier’ controversy of 2007, that is critically examined as an exemplary clash of competitive Russian and Baltic claims for ‘proper European remembrance’ of the meaning and legacy of WWII, and their respective identities’ ‘Europeanness’ thereof. The chapter concludes with a critical discussion of the perspectives for a dialogue of different mnemonic visions of the legacy of WWII under the complex post-colonial predicament of the Baltic states.

### **The dreadful and vulnerable liminal character**

While the notion of liminality originates from the field of ritual anthropology, it has recently become a staple of critically informed social and political studies as well. Outlining his theory of liminality in the first context, Arnold van Gennep (1960: 10-14) regarded all social and cultural transitions as marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen*, standing for ‘threshold’ in Latin), and aggregation. The first, pre-liminal phase of separation signifies the detachment of the subject from its former attributes and identities, disconnecting it from an “earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a ‘state’), or from both” (see Turner, 1969: 80). The intermediate, yet central, “liminal” period marks the passage of the ritual subject through “a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state” (ibid.). The liminal phase is thus a situation of great ambiguity, since the “liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (ibid.: 81). The ambiguous state in-between different classifications is only consummated in the third phase of the ritual passage (i.e. reaggregation or reincorporation) where the relative stability of the subject in transition is regained, along with the restoration of the fairly stable order. The end of the liminal state is marked by the ritual subject’s acquisition of new rights and obligations vis-à-

vis others in this clearly defined new structure where the former outsider, then half-insider-half-outsider, is now expected to follow the customary norms and ethical standards of the position in the system it has ultimately become part of. Liminality as an in-between stage between two stable orders is curious as its ambivalence determines the non-objectification of the liminal subjects, their lack of definite identity (cf. Szokolczai, 2000: 193). As a state outside of order, in and out of time, and in and out of social structure, indeed, as a state of statuslessness and defiance of categories, liminality always borders on the transgressive (ibid.: 194; cf. Turner, 1969: 83; Norton, 1988: 67).

In the context of international communities, liminal entities likewise include subjects whose belonging to the community is contested and ambiguous. While the Baltic states have been formally incorporated to the Euro-Atlantic security community, their borderline self-identification as ‘Europe but not quite Europe’ lingers on. This is so in spite of their completion of passage through the formal liminal phase of becoming part of institutionalised Europe, i.e. crossing the threshold from candidate countries to full-fledged members of the European Union (EU). Positioned in the fluctuating borderlines between Russia and the West, and embodying the consequently shifting conceptualisations of ‘European’, the Baltics constitute an exemplary liminal space where Europe’s ‘high and low’, or ‘sacred and profane’ have historically met.

Importantly, liminal characters are essential for the successful constitution of the content and limits of a given political community, as it is precisely the liminal cases, not quite ‘this’ nor ‘that’, vis-à-vis which the political identity of a community is presumed to emerge with the greatest clarity (see Norton, 1988: 4). Since liminal figures are simultaneously alike and yet different from the self, they serve as mirrors for political communities, providing “an object with which the subject can identify even as it differentiates itself” (ibid.: 53-54, 7; cf. Rumelili, 2003: 220-23, 241). Western Europeans have indeed been historically disposed to depict Eastern Europe as a rudimentary and rustic version of the rational ‘self’ of the West (cf. Wolff, 1994: 13; Böröcz, 2000: 869). In Derrida’s terms, ‘Eastern Europe’ has historically been a supplement to ‘Western Europe’: secondary to the privileged ‘West’ but simultaneously necessary for the latter’s self-completion and appraisal (Derrida, 1976: 141-64; cf. Said, 2003). Hence, at once other and like, Eastern Europe has traditionally been indispensable to Western Europe’s self-image, serving, *inter alia*, as a mirror for the EU’s self-conceptualisation as a political actor of a new and innovative kind.

Liminal character’s borderline condition thus inevitably engenders its sense of fragility and vulnerability. On the other hand, liminal entities can also be threatening to the ‘self’s identity boundaries since liminal subjects, by definition, subvert any clear distinction between self and other (see Rumelili, 2003: 219-21; cf. Hopf, 2002: 130-31; Douglas, 2002: 119). Indeed, as Bahar Rumelili has shown, the categories of ‘self’ and ‘other’ emerge with greatest clarity in relation to the liminal subject as it is at positions of “partly self and partly other” that the self feels the greatest need to differentiate itself (cf. Rumelili, *ibid.*). The likeness of the liminal subject to the self thus increases the latter’s fears of dissolving in the other, and therefore could give rise to the identification of the liminal entity as wholly unlike and threatening by those who cannot recognise the liminal character as simultaneously other and like (see Norton, 1988: 55). The ‘other’ closest to the ‘self’ could therefore be the most threatening ‘other’, as an ‘alike alter’ could potentially replace the ‘self’ more easily than any other alternative (see Hopf, 2002: 8). As a zone of heightened semiotic activity, the liminal figure, (or the boundary of a semiosphere, if one were to adopt Yuri Lotman’s terminology here) thus inherently threatens the self it identifies with (or, in Lotman’s words, the cultural structures of

its core). Its more intense and faster semiotic processes tend not to remain contained in the periphery but also burst out into the cultural centre, thus eventually pushing the latter's thought-structures aside and replacing them with the originally marginal ones (cf. Lotman, 1999: 16).

The liminal figure is itself well aware of its critical boundary function vis-à-vis the semiotic space it identifies with. According to Lotman, the boundary of a semiosphere indeed represents its most important functional and structural position, essentially determining the character of its semiotic mechanism (see Lotman, 1999: 14). As a bilingual setting that transmits information for the internal semiotic space from its surroundings, the boundary of a semiosphere is not as much a clear demarcation line as a contact zone between a semiosphere and the 'other' spaces remaining outside of it. Nonetheless, it is also a marker for distinguishing one's own specificity in relation to other semiotic spheres (cf. *ibid.*: 14-16).

The upshot of this is that collective identities should be altogether regarded as triadic, rather than dyadic structures, where between self and other, lies the liminal character; between inside and outside, the boundary; between left and right, the centre; and between past and future, the present (see Eisenstadt and Giesen, 1995: 75; cf. Wydra, 2007: 256). The curious European predicament of the Baltic states and Russia therefore questions the validity of the traditional binary understanding of the self/other relationship, suggesting instead to conceive identity as a triadic structure where in between a self and an other there is space for different liminal figures that cannot be affirmatively characterised as either one or the other. Accordingly, collective identifications, such as 'European', are understood here as continuums along which several shades of 'selfhood' and 'otherness' are possible with varying degrees of difference, rather than clear dichotomies. Instead of assuming a static state of *being* European, then, we should rather seek to capture the nuances of different politics of *becoming* European at the Eastern rim of the continent – which is arguably just an arbitrary geopolitical construction itself (see Lewis and Wigen, 1997). While the politics of becoming European<sup>1</sup> has taken diverging forms in the Baltic and Russian cases, both have nevertheless struggled for gaining Western recognition of their 'European subjectivity' over the past decade – whether in the broader civilisational or stricter institutional meaning of the term (such as the membership in the EU and NATO in the Baltics' case).

Against that backdrop, the Baltics and Russia's increasingly vocal and fiercely competitive claims of their respective narratives of WWII to be accepted as part of the mainstream European remembrance of the war also signify their respective quests to be recognised as 'clean' parts of 'Europe proper'. Casting the other concurrently into the category of 'unclean', or 'false' Europe, is aimed at expelling it from the 'true European' semiotic space and consequently bound to enhance the relative position of one's own 'self' in the European setting (cf. Kristeva, 2006: 105). In the context of the so-called 'Bronze Soldier' crisis in particular, both Russia and Estonia attempted to claim themselves the structural assets of a key boundary figure of the European mnemonic community. By seeking to restrain the intervention of the other and thus to filter out the 'alien', or 'wrong', material to what was conceived to be the 'common European understanding' of WWII, the respective mnemonic offensives of Estonia and Russia touched a tender spot in the broader European self-conceptualisation. As a clash between nested liminalities in Europe, the 'Bronze Soldier'-affair was emblematic of liminal figures' simultaneous sense of vulnerability and ability to emanate danger vis-à-vis the centre of their constitutive community. Estonia's pointing to the

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<sup>1</sup> On the politics of becoming, see Connolly (1999).

dubious outcome of WWII for the Baltic states essentially endangered the defence mechanisms of Western Europeans' self-congratulating narrative of WWII as the 'good war' (cf. Davies, 2007). Exposing with its 'counter-history' Western Europeans' compliance with Stalin's regime and the kidnapping of Eastern European states' sovereignty for their own post-war security predicament, Estonia appeared in the 'Bronze Soldier'-controversy as the 'bruised skin' of Europe – not quite an entirely internalised part of the 'European self' with its problematic East European understanding of the ramifications of the war, and yet potentially destabilising, if not destructive, for the conventional patterns of relating to the implications of WWII in Western Europe (cf. Kristeva, 2006: 193; Douglas, 2002: 117).

### **The 'Bronze Soldier' and the conflicting memory politics of WWII**

The debates surrounding the removal of this Soviet war memorial from central Tallinn, that had originally commemorated the Red Army soldiers who had fallen while 'liberating' the city from the Nazi occupation in September 1944, and that now simply states in its inscription "To the fallen of the Second World War," have demonstrated the existential dimension of commemorative practices in the post-Soviet space.<sup>2</sup> The freedom to choose forms through which to express one's memory has a heightened acuteness for the small nations in particular. As Latvian historian Aivars Stranga argues, "the collective memory of collective history...is an inviolable component in national identity," the loss of which "can be a true tragedy for a small nation" (see Stranga, 2006). Furthermore, since both Latvia and Estonia have large Russian-speaking minorities (in Estonia's case, the Russian-speakers make up approximately one-third of the country's 1.3 million population), they also face a serious challenge in accommodating the conflicting mnemonic visions of the respective nations' immediate past to their *national* collective memory in order to foster social integration (cf. Stranga, 2006). The debates over the semiotic connotations of the 'Bronze Soldier' have therefore also revealed the inner fragmentation of 'Estonian subjecthood', exposing the persistent insecurity of the Estonian 'national self' towards the local Russians' 'minority histories', or, indeed, the 'other in oneself'. Having exposed the subnationally divided memories about WWII within Estonia, the 'Bronze Soldier'-episode has confronted the governing elites with the unenviable task of getting 'the Estonian narrative' across at the national and international levels concurrently, navigating between the different pressures from both the side of Russia and the Western European members of the EU.

For the Russians living in Estonia, the 'Bronze Soldier' represents a key *lieu de mémoire*, a focal point of their national identity as well as their sub-group identity in Estonia that provides cultural support for their memory of a heroic role in WWII as well as a venue for commemorating their war dead (cf. Nora, 1995; Carrier, 2000: 39; Karusoo, 2007). The "cult of the war dead" is indeed intimately linked to the self-representation of the nation (Mosse, 1990: 105). This monument, depicting a mourning soldier in Soviet uniform, was initially erected in 1947 as a *voin-osvoboditel* (i.e. a monument for honouring the Soviet 'liberators' of Tallinn from the Nazi occupation) after the destruction of its predecessor by the Estonian resistance fighters in 1946. In the mid-1990s, an attempt was made to enlarge the semiotic field of the monument by exchanging its old inscription for a new one dedicated to all the casualties of WWII. The majority of Estonians have not, however, come to see it from this perspective, just as they never quite accepted the first inscription (see Soosaar, 2007). The Russians of Estonia, in their turn, tend to still view the legacy of WWII through the narrow lens of their victorious Great Patriotic War, disregarding its more problematic and complex

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<sup>2</sup> For the historical background of the 'Bronze Soldier' monument, see Kaasik (2006).

outcomes for a country like Estonia. Altogether, Russia and the Baltic Three have clashing contradictory narratives of WWII. What was glory for Russia, was humiliation for the Baltic states; what Russia as the legal successor of the Soviet Union celebrates as its victory in the Great Patriotic War, the Baltic Three execrate as a loss of independence, identity, and thus their meaningful existence. The collective memories of WWII in Russia and the Baltic Three have thus proved to be incommensurable to date, and the end of the war is an event still seen in completely different lights.

Against that backdrop, the ‘Bronze Soldier’ has been a seemingly poly-referential realm of memory that has symbolised for the Estonians and Russians their different experiences of WWII, leading to the monument’s appropriation for different ideological and political purposes respectively (cf. Kritzman, 1995: x). What for Russia, as well as for the considerable Russian-speaking community in Estonia, had signified Estonia’s liberation from Nazism in 1944, symbolised for the Estonians the return of the Soviet oppression for more than four decades. The trope of ‘liberation’, however, also suggests the respective monument’s imperially significant symbolism, implying the ‘liberators’ inherent right to the land that had to be ‘liberated’ from an enemy that had been essentially contesting that right. Consequently, the fact of Estonia’s and other Baltic states’ illegal occupation and annexation by the Soviet Union in the course of WWII is generally denied among the Russian community in Estonia, reflecting thus the respective political position of Russia proper. Russia’s critical self-reflection against the backdrop of WWII has been hamstrung by the fact that for Russians – perhaps more than for any other nation in Europe – the crimes and acts of heroism in WWII were embedded in the very same historical moment (see Wolfe, 2006: 279; cf. Zarakhovich, 2007). Russia’s difficulties with critically engaging with its communist legacy are all the more amplified because the Soviet era marked the period of unprecedented international power for the country and a critical assessment of this period is therefore seen as potentially undermining of its position in the international arena at the time. Against this backdrop, Stalin’s role tends to be viewed in Russia first and foremost as a “saviour from the Nazi plague” rather than repudiated for his regime’s mass repressions (cf. Satter, 2005; Berezovsky, 2007). This has, however, led to the cunning pick-and-choose approach to Russia’s communist inheritance: when useful to today’s Russia, the country’s direct legal succession from the Soviet Union is emphasised; when harmful, however, such as in case of admitting to the criminal acts of the forbearing regime (e.g. the occupation and annexation of the Baltic states), Russia’s direct succession from the Soviet Union is refuted.

The selective Russian remembrance of WWII exemplifies vividly how present concerns determine which past is remembered and how. History is always viewed from a particular vantage point of the present as present problems tend to determine what is considered worth remembering and what destined to oblivion (cf. Kratochwil, 2006: 14-21). For today’s Russia that is resolutely seeking to re-establish its international position amongst the ‘great powers’, the role of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in sowing the seeds of WWII as well as leading to the ultimate subjugation of Eastern Europe to the Soviet yoke is largely irrelevant for it conflicts with Russia’s ‘usable remembrance’ of the war. Focusing on its hugely costly victory over Nazism instead enables Russia to position itself firmly amongst the ‘normal’ European countries, as the very victory is, after all, the only victory of the Russian people that is celebrated throughout the world today, containing thus something universal in its Russian specificity (cf. Minaudier, 2007). The attempts to institutionally monopolise and fix certain meanings of the past further demonstrate that the ‘interpretation wars’ over the past events are substantially struggles over power – as the control over the narratives of the past enables to gain control over the construction of further narratives for an imagined future. Hence, the

Russian political elites' maintenance of the narrative of the Baltic states' voluntary joining with the Soviet Union consequently allows it to shed its responsibility for the communist crimes in the region as well as to demand full citizenship and political rights for the Russians living there since the Soviet period. The culpability of the official Russian stance vis-à-vis the record of WWII does not then really lie in selecting those parts of the past that it wishes to preserve (which is, after all, human, all too human), but in granting itself a 'natural' right to decide what would be available to others (i.e. the victims of the Soviet regime) (cf. Todorov, 2003: 127). In a manner characteristic of a great power, the Soviet Union used a method of organised forgetting in the Baltic states and Poland over the communist period in order to try to deprive them of their national consciousnesses (cf. Connerton, 1989: 14). In a similar fashion, as we will see below, when Russia encounters interpretations of history that diverge from its own, it tends to react with a hurt outrage that the Baltic states, in their turn, generally interpret as a propaganda campaign of disinformation, if not outright lies (see, e.g. Stranga, 2006).

While the 'Bronze Soldier'-controversy became a full-blown 'memory war' between Russia and Estonia over their diverging interpretations of the meaning and legacy of WWII in the Baltic region in the spring of 2007, the two mnemonical visions of a conquering great nation and a colonised small one had clashed already a year before. Indeed, on 9 May 2006 about a thousand Russian-speaking people gathered at the 'Bronze Soldier' to commemorate the end of WWII. But not merely that occurred – as the 'counter-meeting' of the Estonians at the same spot witnessed: instead of a quiet mourning ceremony, arguably a "bellicose school of the Great Russian chauvinism" was on display with Russians' waving Soviet flags clashing with Estonian nationalists (see Arujärv, 2006, 2007a). For the latter, the police's reaction to the Russian demonstrators' attack on the Estonian flag simply added more fuel to the fire: the police shooed away the bearers of the Estonian flag instead of restraining those waving the red Soviet flags. The commemoration ceremony took the dimensions of a protest rally against Estonia's current political course, with arguably "considerable support, assistance and encouragement" from the Russian Embassy in Estonia (cf. Ilves in Myers, 2007). In the eyes of most Estonians, extremist pro-Soviet demonstrators essentially hijacked the 'Bronze Soldier' from its regular visitors, the majority of which had probably just been honouring their war dead. The 9<sup>th</sup> of May at the 'Bronze Soldier' therefore became to be seen as a celebration of Estonia's occupation and a denial of the suffering of the Estonian nation as a result of that (see Ilves, 2007a). Whilst ritual is generally meant to "enliven" the memory and thereby "aid perception," it can also change perception of a past event by its choice of the selective principles of remembering and modification of original experience. Hence, ritual can actually come first in formulating experience and knowledge about an historic event (see Douglas, 2002: 79). The meeting of 9 May 2006 thus also demonstrated the significance of the collective identity-bearing and educational role of this kind of commemorative practice: not only had war veterans and their relatives gathered at the monument, but classes of young Russian students had been brought along to attend the ceremony as well, as if part of a mnemonic socialisation ritual into the Russian-speaking mnemonic community in Estonia (cf. Zerubavel, 1996; Tulviste, 2007).

Against the backdrop of the events of 9 May 2006, Estonian intellectuals and politicians began to ponder with a renewed intensity what the strategy and tactics of 'Estonianhood' should be in that context. Suggestions ranged from calls to finally end the typically Estonian "sneaking along the walls," the "endless objectification, denial and self-negation," the quieting of one's own historical consciousness, to the enlarging of the semiotic field of the monument in order to encapsulate the liberation of Europe from all wars (see e.g., Arujärv,

2006, and Taagepera, 2006, respectively). In general, however, one's right to collective memories, to losses and sufferings, one's own stories, heroes and myths was emphasised along with the right to "call those who doubt our stories to their senses" (see Arujärv, 2007a; cf. Toode, 2007). Indeed, everyone should have the right to celebrate their victories and commemorate their losses, as president Ilves has powerfully argued (2007a).

Yet, successful community-building would probably require not only a quest for a more consistent understanding of the legacy of WWII between the Estonian majority and largely Russian-speaking minority of the country, or, as a theoretical alternative, mutual recognition of different viewpoints alongside a mutually shared awareness that setting out for a new start under the existing national predicament might, at some point, require drawing a deliberate line under the legacy of the past. Besides respecting each others' losses building up an identity that is more coherently shared between the national majority and minorities of Estonia presupposes the capacity for forgetting, or overcoming, certain parts of the respective pasts. For indeed, we are not only the past that we (can) remember, but also the past that we can forget (Wydra, 2007: 226; cf. Ankersmit, 2001: 308). Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether any singular, fully reconciled version of the immediate past could actually emerge amongst the Estonians and Estonian Russians, for institutionalised collective memory is inevitably political, subordinating some narratives rather than others. Due to the tendency to interpret historical data in a strongly affect-oriented manner, the memories of victors and losers alike tend to be immune to alternative versions of history (see Wydra, 2007: 231).

Estonian radicals' threats to blow up the Bronze Soldier, which by the 9 of May outburst of emotions had come to represent the remains of the Soviet occupation for most Estonians led to constant police surveillance of the monument area in the spring of 2006. After heated debates, the Estonian parliament passed the Military Graves Protection Act on January 10, 2007 that laid the legal foundation for the relocation of the monument from its current place in the centre of the capital city to a military cemetery (see Riigikogu, 2007a).<sup>3</sup> Yet again, the Russian propaganda machine went into rapid action, accusing Estonia of revisionism, re-writing of history, blasphemy against the soldiers who defeated Nazi Germany; even in representing Nazism in a heroic light, and taking steps towards legalising fascism and neo-Nazism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, displaying thus the Manichean logic of distinguishing an enemy using the rationale that "who is anti-Sovietist, is by definition a Fascist, or Nazi" (see Kosachev, 2007; cf. Soosaar, 2007; Myers, 2007). Even threats about applying economic sanctions and calling off diplomatic relations with Estonia in relation to the removing of the 'Bronze Soldier' from Tõnismägi were made by Russia.<sup>4</sup> Since WWII has almost a sacred role in the historical consciousness of the Russian people, any attempts to undermine this understanding or to touch the 'untouchables' related to it, is bound to meet an angry, and often violent, response (i.e. Russian youngsters rallying at the Estonian embassy in Moscow; several occasions of staining the embassy building with paint etc.). This seems to be the case because WWII having become a sort of moral solution and salvation for the Russians enabled them to purge the rest of the Soviet history in their minds, as well as to provide some sense of stability and coherence throughout the tumultuous years from 1945 to today (see Goble, 2006;

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<sup>3</sup> Before the parliamentary elections of March 2007, another law was passed by the Estonian Riigikogu in order to accelerate the dislocation of the 'Bronze Soldier' monument. Due to the law's contradictions with the Constitution, and arguably opportunistic timing, however, the President of Estonia refused to promulgate the "Law on the Removal of an Unlawful Structure" (see Ilves 2007b; Riigikogu, 2007b).

<sup>4</sup> During the diplomatic nadir of the Estonian-Russian relations in connection with the 'Bronze Soldier'-crisis in May 2007, Russia indeed took steps disrupting oil product and coal shipments through Estonia, albeit denying their politically inspired nature (see Wagstyl and Parker, 2007).

cf. Wolfe, 2006: 280; Masso, 2007). Yet, Russia's accusations of sacrilege, aimed at those who question the integrity of its core historical narratives, also bring to mind Tzvetan Todorov's sharp observation that the sacralisation of the past tends to serve the particular interests of its defenders rather than their moral edification (see Todorov, 2001: 21).<sup>5</sup>

For the majority of Estonians, however, the painful Russian reaction to the relocation of the 'Bronze Soldier' monument from the centre of Tallinn to a military cemetery bespoke of the questioning of Estonia's current constitutional order and glorification of the Soviet Union than of the genuinely wounded memory. It further illustrated the agony of a previous 'empire master' in coming to terms with the irreversibility of its former colony's emancipation (cf. Mutt, 2007b; Laar, 2007b).<sup>6</sup> The public response of the majority of Estonians to the calls for enlarging the connotative field of the 'Bronze Soldier' have, therefore, been rather mild from the beginning as the new interpretations of key historical symbols are seemingly difficult to "domesticate" (see Mutt, 2007a; but cf. Tamm, 2007b). Against the Russian propaganda campaign, it has been argued that Estonia does not fight a war against monuments, at least not against the war dead, but that it is simply defending its own conceptualisation of what Estonian state and society is really about, and refuting the institutionalisation of a collective memory that is quintessentially at odds with its own. The contestations over the 'Bronze Soldier' have therefore simultaneously been the debates about Estonian identity; about its relationship to its immediate past, and its self-establishment against the contradictory narratives of Russia as well as the generally lukewarm Western willingness to take trouble with the 'actual' course of historical events in the Baltic states.<sup>7</sup> Indeed,

Estonia's historical gaze is trained to see suffering rather than achievements, losses rather than victories. Fear and preconceptions rather than pride and openness dominate in our views. It is as if in our minds we are still fighting the Second World War, we continue fighting the occupation. Just like another country, not very far from here, finds it necessary to justify its actions during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, Russia does not want to recognise the words of its first president Boris Yeltsin, in Hungary in November 1992, when he said that after the destruction of fascism, another ideology of

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<sup>5</sup> Todorov moreover aptly reminds us that it is human values, rather than monuments, that should be the objects of sacralisation in today's world (ibid.). On the hazards of the sacralisation of memories, see Misztal (2004). For a call for the desacralisation of the Russian messianistic remembrance practices, see Arujärv (2007b).

<sup>6</sup> On the deep-seated links between Russian identity and empire, and its consequently marred post-imperial self-definition, see Prizel (1998: 151-79).

<sup>7</sup> While the Baltics' constitutive historical narrative enjoys general tacit recognition from the West, explicit support in situations directly contesting Estonia's 'story' tends to be usually confined to the immediate neighbours of the country (i.e. Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland hurrying to express their solidarity with Estonia during the most recent 'Bronze Soldier'-crisis of late April-May 2007). See also the statement by the Katyn Committee in Poland that urged the removal of Soviet monuments from Poland as well (see Kommersant, 2007). Notoriously, however, the most recent 'Bronze Soldier'-triggered confrontation between Russia and Estonia also brought the EU's foreign policy coordinator Javier Solana, as well as the US foreign minister Condoleezza Rice to express their understanding and support to Estonia under this agitated predicament. See also the US Senate Resolution condemning violence in Estonia and attacks on Estonia's embassies in 2007, and expressing solidarity with the Government and the people of Estonia (2007). Moreover, the timing of George W. Bush's announcement of the Estonian president's visit to the US in June 2007 was also interpreted as an act of the US implicit support to Estonia in Estonian diplomatic circles.

For a typical adoption of the Russian rhetoric vis-à-vis the 'Bronze Soldier'-case, however, see former German chancellor's Gerhard Schröder's comments in relation to which the Estonian prime minister and president cancelled their previously scheduled meeting with Schröder that was planned for discussing the German-Russian gas pipeline implications for Estonia (see EUX.TV, 2007).

For media accounts sympathetic to the Estonian 'narrative', see, for instance, *The Wall Street Journal* (2007b) and Macomber (2007), invoking rhetorical analogies of the unimaginability of a memorial to Nazi occupation in France and a monument in Washington, D.C. to a government that murdered eight of ten U.S. first presidents, respectively. Cf. *The Independent* (2007), *The Economist* (2007a, 2007b, 2007c), Hiatt (2007), *The Financial Times* (2007), Theyssen (2007), and *The Daily Telegraph* (2007).

violence descended on Eastern Europe. President Yeltsin, who apologised for the violence caused by the Soviet Union, said that one must know one's own history, because without the complete truth, justice cannot be restored, and without the complete truth, there can be neither remorse nor forgiveness (Ilves, 2007a).

Just as the questioning of the absolute purity of the role of Russians in WWII invokes painful reactions from the Russian side, the active expression of nostalgia for the Soviet Union – the arch enemy in the collective historical consciousness of Estonians – on Estonian soil is bound to do the same. The ‘changing of the meaning’ of the ‘Bronze Soldier’ has thus been viewed rather sceptically by the Estonians, for “re-naming dirt as ‘cake’ does not make it any more edible,” as an Estonian activist who made a promise to blow the monument apart succinctly put the point (see Liim, 2006).

Pondering on the line of Julia Kristeva's thought we could thus conceive the ‘Bronze Soldier’ as a symbolic *abject* in the main post-Soviet self-conceptualisation of Estonians (cf. Kristeva, 2006). As a symbol of Soviet victory in WWII, with all its regrettable implications for the independence of the Baltic states, it is inevitably embedded in the history of the collective Estonian subject, reflecting its complex post-colonial predicament (*vae victis!*). As a prominent signifier of this part of the past that today's Estonia would prefer to forget about, the abjective nature of the monument was bound to engender (with a little help of the political elites' respective engineering) an intense desire among Estonians to have it cast out of the ‘Estonian symbolic system’.

In the mnemo-political context, then, an abject refers to that part of a subject's past that is, willingly or not, deeply interwoven with one's own selfhood, and somewhat alluring for that, but nevertheless repulsive and despicable for the subject as it hamstringing its normal and successful functioning in the present. As an abject is situated outside of the subject's accepted symbolic order, being forced to face it is an inherently traumatic experience for the subject, as Kristeva (2006) argues. For Estonians and Russians living in Estonia alike (and perhaps also to Russia proper) confronting the ‘Bronze Soldier’ was essentially an act of facing one's abject (i.e. the oppressive Soviet past for the Estonians, symbolised by the monument) and one's own abjecthood (i.e. the self-acknowledgement of the Russian-speaking community of its relatively marginalised position in the Estonian society). What the majority of Estonians regarded as vital self-purification from the remnants of the generally despised Soviet past, the local Russian community conceived of as an act of defilement vis-à-vis themselves; indeed, an attempt to cast out an essential part of their self. As we know from Kristeva (2006: 85), castration is inherently perceived to be more dangerous for the liminal characters as they are not only in danger of thus losing a part of themselves, but their life as they know it altogether. The Bronze Soldier crisis hence emerged as a ritual clarification of boundaries between the ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the Estonian and Russian-Estonian ‘selfhood’ – an event that both parties interpreted as essentially an offence by the other.

Facing one's mnemonical abject is similar to becoming aware of, or acknowledging the gaps in one's own collective memory, or the politically endorsed and publicly shared remembrance of the past. The ‘holes’ in the official Russian version of WWII (that is also largely shared by the Russian community in Estonia) bespeak of a rather noticeable ineptitude to reconcile the narratives of a liberator, conqueror and sufferer-nation within a comprehensive Russian self-image. Accordingly, the inconsistency between these antagonistic versions of the past does not leave sufficient space for empathising with other nations' sufferings that might have resulted from contacts with these conflicting segments of the past. As Anne Applebaum writes in *Gulag* (2003), the foreigners' pointing to the criminality of the Soviet regime usually

evokes in a common Russian a reaction in the vein of “But we ourselves suffered the most!” – just as if suffering oneself and causing it to others were necessarily mutually exclusive phenomena. The politically endorsed Russian WWII-narrative of today has destined the darker side of Russia’s war experience to official oblivion as the country’s central understanding of its role in WWII as Europe’s liberator from Nazism would hardly profit from being relativised with, say, the ‘liberators’ behaviour in the occupied areas. Altogether, if the central lens for viewing the past is self-congratulating on one’s own national greatness and bravery, it is difficult to mould it in order to become more comprehensive vis-à-vis the experiences of those this very greatness has historically touched ‘from the other side’. Any remembering is therefore inevitably also forgetting. Furthermore, symbolic commemoration rituals might create a mere illusion of remembering and thus actually conceal forgetting (see Assmann, 1999: 335; cf. Zehfuss, 2007: 39).

The most recent act of the ‘Bronze Soldier’ saga was opened with a diplomatic protest note presented to Estonia by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in April 2007, expressing Russia’s profound discontent with the Estonian government’s plans to exhume the Soviet soldiers buried under the monument, thereby issuing a warning about the “most serious consequences” for Russian-Estonian relations should Estonia persist in transferring the ‘Bronze Soldier’ from central Tallinn to a military cemetery (see *Eesti Päevaleht*, 2007a, 2007b). Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov further cautioned that such a “sacrilegious” move would have “negative implications” not only for Russian-Estonian relations, but for “all of postwar Europe” (see *Interfax*, 2007). A pro-Kremlin Russian youth association Nashi (i.e. “Ours”) promised to send its representatives to guard the monument once its relocation operations began (see Gorondi et al., 2007). The “ticking semiotic bomb” of the ‘Bronze Soldier’ finally exploded into an actual confrontation between young Russian street protesters and the police on the night of April 26, 2007 when the preparations for the dislocation of the monument began, creating for several nights and days massive public unrest in central Tallinn, with a thousand rioters breaking windows, lighting fires and fighting with the police, whilst chanting “Rossija, Rossija” (i.e. “Russia, Russia”) and unfurling banners reading “USSR forever” (sic!).<sup>8</sup>

What had started off as an ideological confrontation between the society’s majority and main minority mnemonical visions turned into a marauding of downtown Tallinn, bluntly exposing the dubious success of Estonia’s social integration strategy towards its Russian-speaking community, and consequently, the country’s noticeable inner division (cf. *The Economist*, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). The ‘semiotic bomb’ of the ‘Bronze Soldier’ therefore detonated another set of social tensions looming in Estonian society, exposing an apparent mismatch between the ‘authoritative’ Estonian national mnemonic vision and the one the local Russian community had found to be ‘internally persuasive’ (cf. Bakhtin, 1981: 342-46; Helme, 2007). As a result of the mediation of the German EU Council presidency of the time, the Russian State Duma delegation visited Estonia during the crisis, animating with its demand of the resignation of the Estonian government the bitter memory of the Soviet “Red Emissaries” visit of 1940 (cf. Laar, 2007a; *The Economist*, 2007c). Apparently, then, in Russian eyes Estonia’s culpability in the ‘Bronze Soldier’ affair lay not so much in its arguably disrespectful handling of Russia’s WWII memories as in its nerve to become independent from Russia in the first place (Helme, 2007; Penttila, 2007).

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<sup>8</sup> On the explosive semiotic nature of the ‘Bronze Soldier’, see Mikita (2007).

Already tense diplomatic relations between Estonia and Russia were further exacerbated by the Russian youth unions Nashi and Molodoja Gvardija (i.e. “Young Guard”) encircling the Estonian embassy in Moscow for several days following the relocation of the monument in Tallinn. Hundreds of young Russians held the embassy under constant siege, essentially keeping the embassy staff hostage; throwing stones at the embassy building, painting on its walls slogans such as “We made it to Berlin once, we will make it to Tallinn as well,” tearing down the Estonian flag, attacking the Estonian ambassador Marina Kaljurand, as well as the car of the Swedish ambassador on his way to meet the Estonian ambassador. In relation to the Russian authorities’ lack of effort in restoring order around the embassy and their subsequent failure to fulfil their obligations to ensure the security and freedom of movement of Estonian diplomats accredited to the Russian Federation in accordance to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, the Estonian Foreign Ministry presented Russia with a note, protesting at the situation (see the Estonian Foreign Ministry, 2007). The Estonian foreign minister Urmas Paet issued a strong statement the following day, arguing that the “virtual, psychological and real attacks” of Russia against Estonia constitute a problem for the whole of the EU, thus calling for the Union’s reaction “in full strength” (see Paet, 2007b; cf. Paet, 2007c). The EU Council Presidency statement on the situation of the Estonian embassy in Moscow strongly urged the Russian Federation to comply with its international obligations under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, calling for a “dispassionate dialogue” on the matter of the Soviet war graves in Estonia and addressing the problem “in a spirit of understanding and mutual respect” (see the EU Council Presidency statement of 2 May 2007).<sup>9</sup>

### **From the ‘memory carnival’ to a dialogue of memories**

Instead of a *dialogue*, however, the whole ‘Bronze Soldier’ saga was more reminiscent of a *carnival* in the Bakhtinian understanding of the term. For Bakhtin, carnival marks temporary suspension and reversal of the existing hierarchic distinctions, barriers, norms and prohibitions (see Bakhtin, 1968: 109). As such, ‘carnival’ serves as a succinct metaphorical depiction for broader social processes that would come into play in the overthrow of established authority, entertaining thus considerable potential as an epistemological category for the study of the liminal condition in international relations.

The spectacle, the pillage and looting by young Russian rioters of downtown Tallinn could indeed be seen as a direct challenge to those in authority in the country, suspending temporarily the perceived hierarchic distinctions among and barriers between the two communities in Estonia. The episode could also be understood in the light of the alleged marginalisation of the Russian-speaking minority’s voice in Estonian society (cf. Bakhtin, 1968, 1984; Holquist, 1990: 89; Lotman, Mihhail, 2007). Lending from the thought of Kristeva again, it was a vivid exemplification of how the telling of one’s story is also essentially an articulation of one’s pain: the shrieking out of fear, disgust and abjection in an attempt to solidify one’s constitutive self-narration (cf. Kristeva, 2006: 208). As we know from the anthropological works of Arnold van Gennep (1960) and Mary Douglas (2002), anti-social behaviour is the common expression of those in marginal condition. For indeed,

To have been in the margins is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power. It is consistent with the ideas about form and formlessness to treat initiands coming out of

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<sup>9</sup> The European Commission delivered a similar statement (see Lobjakas, 2007). See also NATO statement on Estonia (2007), and the respective resolution by the European Parliament (2007).

seclusion as if they were themselves charged with power, hot, dangerous, requiring insulation and a time for cooling down (Douglas, 2002: 120).

Furthermore, the ‘Bronze Soldier’ crisis revealed not only a deep scar carefully hidden under the surface of the past fifteen years’ integration-rhetoric in Estonian society, but a renewed fault-line in European politics, over the essence of ‘European values’ and who has the power to define them (cf. Beeston, 2007). According to the Russian foreign minister Lavrov, the monument dispute was really about Estonia challenging (i.e. “spitting on”) the “European values” (see Lavrov cited in Halpin, 2007; cf. Harding, 2007). In a similar vein, German ex-chancellor Gerhard Schröder described Estonia’s handling of the monument as contradicting “every form of civilised behaviour” (see Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 2007). Estonian president Ilves, in his turn, called Russia in an otherwise conciliatory statement to “try to remain civilised” as “it is not customary in Europe to demand resignation of a democratically elected government of another sovereign country,” or “organise cyber attacks from the governmental offices’ computers against other country’s governmental offices,” or “think that the Vienna Convention can be breached when a small enough country’s embassy is in question” (Ilves, 2007c). Symptomatically, a key trope of the Estonian ‘afterthought’ has also been the calling upon Marcus Aurelius’ famous dictum of “the best kind of revenge is, not to become like them” (see, for instance, Maiste, 2007).

Nevertheless, the Bakhtinian understanding of carnival carries the promise of new space for dialogue, for mutual enrichment and renewal through different voices coming together in free and frank communication (see Bakhtin, 1984: 176-77; cf. Bakhtin, 1968; Wall and Thomson, 1993: 58-59). It is of critical importance to clarify the precise connotation of ‘dialogue’ in this particular predicament, since calls for dialogue in public politics generally tend to disguise a quest for specific procedures and pre-meditated solutions behind the veil of this seemingly open abstract principle (cf. Hirschkop, 1999: 9). Liberal democracies indeed overburden dialogue with expectations of resolution to conflicts through debate; emphasising the significance of interlocutors’ mutual readiness to take on board others’ ideas and positions and the consequent acknowledgement of the inevitability of compromise solutions (see Hirschkop, 1998: 184-85).

The ethos of a Bakhtinian dialogue generally only pertains to the question of what to do in the presence of another’s responsive consciousness, or how to act creatively in a world of differentiated value orientations, without necessarily seeking or even foreseeing an agreement or reconciliation between different subjects/consciousnesses (cf. Emerson, 2002: xiv; Nielsen, 2002: 2).<sup>10</sup> At the interpersonal level, however, both Bakhtinian and Habermasian understandings of dialogue emerge as the only ethical form of conflict resolution (see Nielsen, 2002: 145). Hence, Bakhtin does not just advocate “putting up with” different forms of alterity, but his dialogism also aims at “mutual recognition and co-understanding in a manner that opens up each such form of life to a diversity of reciprocal influences and points of view” (Gardiner and Mayerfeld Bell, 1998: 6). At the interpersonal level, then, Bakhtinian dialogue’s distinction from a Habermasian one could ultimately be a very fine one. Indeed, Bakhtin maintains that the act of understanding potentially entails changing one’s previously held positions that should ideally result in mutual enrichment (see Bakhtin, 1986: 42). Like

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Andrew Linklater’s more dialectical understanding of dialogue according to which a “true dialogue exists when moral agents accept that there is no *a priori* certainty about who will learn from whom and when they are willing to engage in a process of reciprocal critique. Dialogue, whereby the participants adapt their own understandings and grow as a result of interaction, is thus a more open and fluid process of communication than, for example, negotiation” (cited in Fierke, 1999: 27; cf. Linklater, 1996).

Habermas, Bakhtin, especially with his notion of carnivalesque, also envisages the widening and deepening of the public sphere, based on his understanding of ‘truth’ as being constituted dialogically and intersubjectively (see Gardiner and Mayerfeld Bell, 1998: 6). The maintenance of difference, or one’s alterity to the other, does not preclude the possibility of solidarity or consensus for Bakhtin, as both a dogmatic monologism and the ultimate postmodernist relativism in their different ways would. Essentially for Bakhtin, then, a “unified truth” can be expressed through a plurality of overlapping perspectives and viewpoints, without falling into the trap of the monocular perspective or taking the position of a disembodied observer, presuming the *a priori* incommensurability of different viewpoints (see Gardiner, 1998: 139; cf. Emerson, 1996: 118). It is indeed worth keeping in mind that the process of furthering mutual acquaintance and moving towards a more common cultural world does not only engender the closing of distance between different mnemonic communities, but inevitably also encourages their self-specification (cf. Lotman, 1999: 32-33).

Against this background, the president of Estonia suggested that the “history debate” in Estonia should be taken beyond the case of the ‘Bronze Soldier’, where in an Augustinian vein “all are equally right because all are equally wrong.” He has therefore called for an honest and thorough examination of Estonia’s history, so that it could be regarded as a teacher, as a potentially transformative, forward-looking power, not as a tool for understanding the present (see Ilves, 2007a; cf. Ilves, 2006a; 2007d; Todorov, 2003: 160-61; cf. Wydra, 2007: 238-239). Ilves has moreover strongly condemned the attempts to trivialise WWII by the Estonian politicians trying to increase their chances of getting elected as acts of “distributing ammunition” to Estonia’s critics to fire at it, and has called for a focus on the future instead, for, ultimately, “we are the victors, in defiance of all our losses and tribulations” (Ilves, 2007a). Similar calls for a pragmatic shift of focus to the “realities of the present” instead of being permanently bogged down in the past are becoming more commonplace among the political scientists and public intellectuals of the other two Baltic states as well (see, e.g., Mölder, 2005; Osica, 2002; Tamm, 2007a; Kodres, 2007).<sup>11</sup> We are thus currently witnessing a curious balancing act between sanctifying and trivialising the past in perpetual motion along with the Baltics’ politics of becoming European.

The potential of Estonians and Russians, whether in Estonia or Russia proper, to actually begin to talk with one another has yet to be enacted upon the carnival freedom involuntarily created by the relocation of the ‘Bronze Soldier’ monument. Nevertheless, it remains an open question as to whether dialogue in circumstances where one party has difficulties in coming to terms with the historical facts that undermine the mnemonic narrative constitutive of its glorifying self-image (i.e. the illegal occupation and annexation of the Baltic states) is really a contradiction in terms, especially if one were to follow its commonsensical, compromise-seeking, dialectic definition prevalent in the liberal democratic political space. Such a dialogue would, after all, presume its parties’ readiness to encounter each other on the same plane (cf. Morson and Emerson, 1990: 241). Both parties’ preoccupation with their respective sufferings is not a particularly conducive backdrop for the creation of a more amicable communicative space either (cf. Raag, 2007). Without that space, however, and the emergence of mutual creative understanding it presumes, any message of the other, no matter how peacefully communicated, would continue to constitute a semiotic offence to the other

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<sup>11</sup> See also a public letter to the Estonian defence minister by twelve Estonian university professors opposing the displacement of the monument on the grounds of damaging Estonia’s “long-term interests of internal stability and international credibility” a few days before the ‘Bronze Soldier’s relocation (see *Eesti Päevaleht*, 2007c; cf. Berg, 2007).

party (cf. Lotman, Mihhail, 2007). What seems to be needed, then, is for each party to come to see itself as one among others, or an ‘other among others’, always keeping in mind that not only are we all different, but we are “*differently* different” from each other. The reactions towards others committing evil acts should thus be distinguished from our behaviour towards those who are simply different from ourselves (Emerson, 2002: xvii).

The Baltic states’ increasingly vocal claims to fix their memory of WWII as part of the ‘common European remembrance’ of the war indicate their quest for an equal subjectivity in the European mnemo-political field as well as signify their growing sense of confidence about the density of their ties to the Euro-Atlantic security community. This, in turn, enables them to remind their Western European counterparts openly about the need to remember the European history in all its complexity as well as to discover the ‘other in oneself’ (see, e.g., Ilves, 2006b). As they are situated in the interstices between Western Europe and Russia, the Baltic Three have historically constituted a focal point of overlapping dialogues between various European ‘selves’ and ‘others’ (cf. Gardiner and Mayerfeld Bell, 1998: 5). Accordingly, in their most recent mnemo-political moves, such as Estonia’s clarification of its position regarding WWII in the context of the ‘Bronze Soldier’, and former Latvian president Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga’s similar mission against the backdrop of the WWII sixtieth anniversary celebrations in Moscow, the Baltic states have tried to act as sensual receptors or interpretative blocks of and for Europe – in order to translate “external interruptions” (i.e. Russia) into the language of Europe’s own nervous system (cf. Lotman, 1999: 12-13).

Yet, it remains an open question to what extent Western Europeans are actually receptive to the agonising past politics of their Eastern counterparts. In any way, similarly to the European debates about Russia, the Western construction Eastern Europe has essentially been a European heterologue *about* Eastern Europe, rather than a dialogue *with* it – if only for the latter’s traditional function as a counter-point to, or a surrogate version of the largely West European-dominated ‘European self’ (cf. Neumann, 1996: 206; Nandy, 1987: 12-15; Said, 2003). Altogether, it seems futile to try to ‘fix’ the agonising ‘memory problem’ of Europe once and for all by tying the conflicting narratives nicely into some coherent common vision shared by all the counterparts of WWII. What to remember and how to do it will always be a contentious issue. All WWII memories are inescapably partial, as also a British historian Norman Davies so eloquently demonstrates in his recent *Europe at War 1939-1945: No Simple Victory* (2007). Furthermore, as memory changes already at the moment of its articulation, “there will never be *a* memory for us to know” (Zehfuss, 2007: 227). The quest for a common European remembrance of WWII thus remains as gargantuan a task as building a commonly shared emotive, and not only political, identity for Europe.

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