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Publication Date

2020

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Crooked Children: The Morality and Aesthetics of Managing Latvian Bodies

by

Karina Vasilevska-Das

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Medical Anthropology

in the

GRADUATE DIVISION

of the

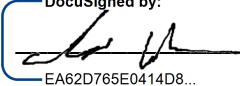
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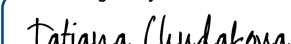
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Crooked Children

***The Morality and Aesthetics of Managing Latvian
Bodies***

Karīna Vasīļevska-Das

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Dedication

To Ume, who taught me both to trust science and intuition from an early age and, upon learning that I have been accepted into this PhD program, said “Now I have to live for another five years to see that.” It has taken almost exactly six years, but here it is - my dissertation, the subject of so many of our phone conversations over the years. Thank you for keeping your promise!

Umei, kas jau no agra vecuma mani iemācija uzticēties zinātnei un intuīcijai un kas, uzzinot, ka esmu uzņemta šajā Doktorantūras programmā, sacīja: “Tagad man jānodzīvo vēl pieci gadi, lai to sagaidītu!” Ir pagājuši gandrīz seši gadi, bet šeit tā ir - mana disertācija, mūsu daudzo telefona sarunu tēma. Paldies, ka pildīji savu solījumu!

Acknowledgments

First and foremost my deepest thanks go to my immediate household—my husband Sherwin, for every compound noun he de-hyphenated and all the other small things that make up the whole, but especially for being willing to include Latvia as one of the locations of our transnational lifestyle, and our two children who, despite learning early on that a doctoral track was not the fastest path towards self-enrichment, bore patiently and reverently with the process, including clearing away dinner dishes without much complaining every night. I solemnly promise that if there is any money to be gained from this, I will share with the two of you gladly.

I am grateful to all of my interlocutors, who generously shared their stories and opinions, especially those I call Ieva, Liene and Laura. These women have been a constant presence in my research life and have shaped my understanding of how things are in Latvia.

I could not have written this dissertation without my cohort, the Revolutionary Writing Group—Shannon Satterwhite, whose calmly delivered reflection allowed me to pause and reconsider my own ideas; Melina Salvador, whose inner flame kept burning bright despite difficulties and who served as an inspiration for me as an anthropologist, mother and daughter; and Naomi Schoenfeld, who never let me lose touch with real life and shared my passion for Russian *banya* and solitary writing retreats.

I am deeply grateful to my dissertation committee: Ian Whitmarsh for every time he wrote “awkward wording” in the countless versions of these chapters he read over the years, his insightful and open analysis that helped me to write a dissertation that is my own, but, most importantly, for assuring me that everybody cries at least once prior to submitting a dissertation; Alexei Yurchak for reminding that there was always another angle from which to look at Latvia, but most significantly—that this vantage point offers a novel way to look at the US as well; Vincanne Adams

for generously sharing her way of structuring a razor-sharp argument and the incredible speed with which she responds to emails; Tatiana Chudakova for thorough feedback and her expertise in medical anthropology of the former USSR; and Lawrence Cohen for his erudition and for inspiring me to trust myself as a writer.

I am indebted to my two sisters whose formal training in visual arts and film offer a great counterbalance to the ways of an academic and upon whose creativity I have relied for inspiration when I felt depleted. Thank you, Andra, for inviting me to be part of the documentary film on Latvian teenage girls. Thank you, Marta, for moving to the US to be with me and my children during the first year of graduate school.

To those who have departed: my paternal grandmother who spent most of my childhood summers telling me to go outside (and preferably not to read while I was there), my paternal grandfather who could read 5 (or was it 6?) books per day and to Tāte, who left us in the midst of the pandemic. You are my history. I am who I am for having known you.

My mother-in-law, Violet Beatrice Das, who left us some years ago, I thank for her courage to leave India as a skilled worker (nurse) in 1973 to start a life in San Francisco. I have felt your support throughout this whole process from wherever you are now. My father-in-law, Solomon Das, for sharing Violet's vision, which included buying a house in San Francisco within a year of immigrating, without which completing a PhD in the Bay area in the midst of a tech-boom would not have been possible. I thank you for your unfailing support for all my endeavors.

To Hallie Wells for always reading everything and offering the most useful and encouraging comments; Lori Weekes for her lawyer-like attention to the argument; Lisa Min for conversations (loosely on the subject of anthropology) over ramen; Rima Praspaliauskiene for all those times I did not have to explain because the Lithuanian case was similar, your insights and

encouragement were invaluable; and Rota Stone, who along with her family fed me and allowed me to fall asleep constantly in their living room over the first years of my PhD studies, and who eventually restarted her own doctoral journey.

To Jill Bakehorn for whose course “Sexual Cultures” I was a Graduate Student Instructor. This was a learning experience that solidified my attitude towards queer theory. Galen Joseph for an inspirational second-year reading course in Medical Anthropology that allowed me to tease out what kind of writer I wanted to be. Aimee Medeiros for historic perspective on pediatric illness. Laura Nelson for theorizing childhood in terms of politics. Kathy Jackson for emotional and administrative support.

My San Francisco community, in particular, Amy Baird Schlegel, Yana Meydbray, Yulia Patsay, Marlis Harris, Claudia Schmitz, Gulnara Khalitova and Jeff Olsen for concern, conversations and constant corporeal care.

The Bay area Latvian community for support and company and, of course, singing. I thank Māra Lewis, the director of the San Francisco New [Latvian] Theater for allowing me to act out my PhD frustrations as a tween boy in interwar Berlin and a murderous sister in the 19th century English moors, and Džoanna Pāvuliņa whose last-minute miracle-work saved the three hastily copied Soviet baby massage images in the dissertation.

The vibrant commune of Latvian anthropologists, but in particular, Ieva Puzo for her leadership, Artūrs Pokšāns for his work on violence and institutionalized youth, Dace Dzenovska for collegial friendship, Agita Lūse and Aivita Putniņa for guidance (but all the mistakes are my own, of course), and Anna Žabicka for an opinion that I always treasure.

I am grateful to the Institute of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies (ISEEES) at UC Berkeley and Wenner-Gren Foundation for providing much needed financial support for research. The Institute for European Studies (IES) Berkeley-Viadrina/Berlin Pre-Dissertation and Dissertation Fellowship too allowed me to reflect on this dissertation from the East German vantage point while being mentored by Anika Keinz, who provided valuable insights on living the East-West division in Europe.

In Latvia, Zane Dāvidsone welcomed me into the BKUS choir that contributed greatly to my emotional wellness while doing fieldwork. Elīna Ligere I thank for her willingness to talk medicine any time of the day, as well as her never-ending curiosity and eternal friendship.

My mom who survived birthing me in a Soviet hospital and all that followed through changing times, which I now realize that she lived through at an age younger than I am now. I thank you for the many months you have spent with us in San Francisco, taking care of the house, the garden and the children. Without your help this dissertation would not have been written.

And the Pacific Ocean. I could not have done it without you.

Crooked Children
The Morality and Aesthetics of Managing Latvian Bodies
Karīna Vasiļevska-Das

Abstract

Through an ethnographic study of the practices surrounding pediatric health in post-Cold War Latvia, a unique site at the intersection between Russia and the European Union, this dissertation argues that Latvians measure the moral rectitude of their nation by the straightness of their children's spines. By attending to parents and medical professionals who are actively shaping young children's bodies to collective standards and, at the same time, engaging in individualized haptic early childhood care, the dissertation draws connections between medicine, parenting and nationhood. This study explores the health practices enacted by a fringe group of parents involved in body-intensive parenting, as I refer to it, and implemented through a state-mandated physical exam for young athletes. I pay particular attention to the corporeal aspect of caring for young children, or "managed corporeality," which is aimed at transforming them into healthy adults.

The dissertation traces Latvia's larger healthcare goals for children in the context of a mass fainting event during the 2015 Youth Song and Dance Festival and ensuing perceptions that the fragile nature of Latvian children threatens the future of the nation. I further highlight the specific attention to musculoskeletal issues in the public health sector and among parents. In particular, I describe how fears of physiological asymmetry influence early childhood care in the case of a condition referred to as a "baby tonuss" and learning the proper way of caring for an infant, known as "hendlings." I trace the origins of these practices to the Soviet period, but demonstrate how despite parenting attitudes that seek to counter the Soviet past outright, concerns regarding bodily

straightness are widely incorporated into the way body-intensive parents raise their children. This is significant because in other areas of pediatric health, the Soviet legacy is seen as an obstacle to be overcome. Nursing newborns in Latvia, for example, can be viewed in the context of “intergenerational lactation trauma,” while Latvian women’s resistance to liberal feminism is rooted in the Soviet period, which deprived the previous generation of intimacy with their children. The unique geopolitical location and history of Latvia allows for the exploration of a particularly Latvian morality and aesthetics that I refer to as “straight-back morality” or the physiological and metaphorical value of the “straight-spine,” allowing the dissertation to contribute to conceptualizing global fascination with moral straightness, normativity and nationalism.

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INTRODUCTION

I could prevaricate and say that my whole dissertation was written with this story in mind. Perhaps it would not even be a lie, because somewhere in the back of my consciousness this tale has been cooking, and now amidst a pandemic and across time-zones and oceans, my 90 year-old maternal grandmother Ume and I are trying to reconstruct the story while speaking on the phone.

I tell Ume: “I am going to ask you about when I was little and did not grow and the masseuse came to our home. The story you have told me many times before.”

Ume: “I am afraid you might remember more than me. My memory is not what it used to be. I wish I could sit down and prepare.”

I speak to her consolingly but with determination: “Just tell me what you remember now and if you remember anything else, you can tell me the next time we speak.”

Our conversation is like a windy mountain trail with an occasional side-track into the realm of milking cows (and the correct way of doing so), two presumed scarlet fever misdiagnoses by my anxious childhood pediatrician that caused me to miss weeks of school in the second and fourth grade, and her own career as a chemistry professor at the local university. Here is Ume's story reconstructed:

When you were just born, you did not grow. Your mother said that she had no milk, so she had to make gruel out of grain for you. Maybe it was because of that. Back then even though we lived in the same apartment [a communal house shared with four other families], I did not want to interfere too much. You know in those days we were told that a child should not be spoiled by taking them into our arms. But you were so little and you did not gain any weight. In fact, you were losing it.

Then your mom's cousin was getting married, and everyone went to the wedding, your parents and your grandfather, but I stayed behind with you. You need to check when that wedding was to know the precise date, but it was about a month after you were born. That was the first time I took care of you.

It must have been at that wedding that your great-aunt Dzidra, the mother of the bride, (You know she worked as a pharmacologist?) advised your mother that we should have a masseuse visit you. Yes, as I recall, aunt Dzidra even brought her over. How else would the masseuse have found us?

I remember us all in your parents' room as you were lying on their big bed. You were so tiny, like a little worm! The masseuse could fit you into the palm of her hand. She was supposed to teach us how to do the massage ourselves. She gently put the hand underneath

you and stroked your back and your little shoulders, not firmly but gently like a caress. Then she turned you around and caressed your stomach. And we all thought that you would cry, but you liked it. She touched your limbs a bit more firmly, in a motion like milking a cow (the correct way). Have you ever milked a cow? [...the detour into the milking of cows].

And after that, I did the same on my own for maybe a week. I got lazy, but you were thriving by then. I don't think it was only the massage that helped or the prescription by the pediatrician of the various newborn milk products that you started taking at the same time. I think it was more that I did not hesitate afterward to pick you up and hold you. It was about showing love that way. I just understood that the most important thing was to care for you. And imagine — your great-aunt Dzidra later told me: “You know, Karīna only started to gain weight when you began taking care of her”!

Even though I did not consciously recall the tale of the masseuse teaching my parents and grandmother to caress me as a baby, when I worked out the topic of my dissertation— the embodied aspect of love towards a young child— it has informed the way I have written about Latvian corporeal care of children. In this dissertation, I argue that such body-intensive management of children is also rooted in certain aesthetics that value symmetry and straightness, hence the title “crooked children” (šķībie bērni), which is a reference to how a family practitioner whom I interviewed called children with posture problems.

The opening vignette is intended to demonstrate my awareness of constantly straddling the divide of being an insider and outsider in my research in Latvia, the country in which I was born and raised and which I left when I was eighteen years old to spend the better part of my adult life reflecting back on from foreign shores. Throughout writing this dissertation I constantly felt a pull on my subjectivity, the response to which was a constant private struggle for the most acceptable interpretation. For the sake of honesty, I would like to acknowledge the fragments of my personal history that had the most impact: my childhood in a country that underwent a drastic transformation, during which I experienced the bliss of belonging to a small nation on the brink of

acquiring its freedom; my higher education, steeped in liberal thought, that sensitized me towards exclusionary behavior of narrowly-defined groups, including sometimes Latvians; my work in the former Yugoslavia in the early 2000s, which allowed me to see the dangers of such behavior when it became state-policy; my marriage to a man who was, by conventional Latvian standards, considered an outsider, and the various ways my friends and relatives (with some exceptions) came to include him and the consequent birth of my two children, whom I parented in ways that felt most natural, even though, as a trained anthropologist, I knew that this feeling was deceptive. My interpretation of Latvian childhood health issues is rooted in my personal experiences as a Latvian woman, my field research in Latvia as an anthropologist and my reflection on the anecdotes like my grandmother's story, and the biggest challenge of writing the chapters you are about to read has been to acquire the physical, temporal and theoretical distance from my subject matter. Self-reflexivity, in this sense, has been an ongoing and fundamental example of what I study— forms of “managed corporeality.”

By “managed corporeality” I mean ways of handling children's bodies with the end goal of crafting healthy adults. It can involve both the state-mandated care, for example, child athletes who receive posture-strengthening physical therapy, and private touch-based, i.e., haptic, actions by parents who are engaged in body-intensive practices, similar to those that my grandmother had learned were beneficial for me as a baby: cradling a tiny infant in one's arms and gently caressing them in a massage. This approach now includes skin-to-skin bonding after birth, attaching newborns to the parental body through a sling or an ergonomic carrier as well as extended and on-demand breastfeeding, all components of Attachment Theory, which evolved in the West in the 1950s under the auspices of John Bowlby, a child-psychologist. I argue that current interpretations of this theory in Latvia focus on privileging dyadic child-adult relationships as the ideal child-care

intervention and are imagined to be countering the effect of the institutionalized and oppressive care associated with the Soviet period. “Managed corporeality” is about intensive engagement with children’s bodies by using surveillance and tactile interventions in the context of Latvians’ relationship to their past, present and future.

Throughout the dissertation I approach the child’s body as a prism through which to look at Latvia today. I am especially focusing on how the national narrative of childhood is informed by the omnipresent “history,” the subject that shapes every discussion in the former socialist countries, as many authors before me have pointed out (Katagoo 2009; Skultans 2007; Verdery 1996; Wanner 2014). I introduce the principle of “straight spine morality,” by which I mean the privileging of straight posture physiologically and morally. Following Sara Ahmed, I think of verticalness as the equivalent to normativity or straightness in Ahmed’s terms. Throughout the dissertation, I search for what the normative Latvian child is imagined to be and what role the aesthetics of the “straight back,” a preference that is widely popularized in Latvia, play in constituting a “krietns un kārtīgs” (decent and proper/solid) child. I ask how children become constituted today as national subjects, recipients of health care and as future perpetrators of the Latvians tradition in the context of Latvians’ vigilant attention to history—and how they are constituted in these ways by an extraordinary attentiveness to their corporeal lives.

Pathological Past and Latvians

Attentiveness to history informs many Latvians’ self-perception. At the Sports Medicine congress, for example, a Latvian doctor explaining lumbo-sacral fracture in young athletes joked in English that it was important to know the fracture history because: “It’s the Baltic way. When you know the history, you know [the] future.” In this dissertation, I treat Latvia as a post-Cold War space (Verdery 1996), where history plays a role of disciplining and dividing inhabitants depending on

how they interpret their past, as is common in the former Soviet bloc. I have strung together my version of history,¹ that is relevant for understanding the arguments about national aspects of pediatric health in Latvia that I put forth in this dissertation.

Latvia declared its independence toward the end of the World War I on November 18th, 1918. As there had never existed a state bearing the name of Latvia as in the case of Lithuania, it is important to note that Latvian national consciousness had been shaped over several centuries during which the majority of Latvian speakers had been indentured servants of a small Baltic German or Polish speaking class of land-owners. Calling the indentured serfs who were descendants of a Livonian² and several Baltic tribes Latvian speakers is to apply a post-19th century national awakening framework to what existed as an oppressed group of peoples who lived in the current territory. The Latvian dialects from the eastern and western parts were as different as some of modern day languages are (Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian come to mind), while some speakers near the border of the current day Lithuania were speaking a language that bore traces of Lithuanian, the only other still-existent Baltic language.

What united these people by the time that the Russian Empire had conquered the whole territory at the end of the 18th century was that they were landless peasants who were mostly indentured and as such considered/imagined in opposition to whatever the ruling class was - the Poles in the east and Baltic Germans in most of the territory, which was then joined with the current

¹ This knowledge is rooted in my own attentiveness to history that began in high school in Latvia when I took Advanced History for three years (taught in ways that contradicted a lot that I had learned in the Soviet times), followed by several BA-level history and politics courses, including training in the history of the former Soviet block countries and a BA dissertation that I wrote on the German language influences on the 19th century Latvian poet Aspazija, as well as my continuous awareness of historical circumstances of world events that has never left me since. I have crosschecked the dates and statistics at *Latvijas Nacionālā enciklopēdija* [Latvian National Encyclopedia] online.

² A group belonging to the Finno-Ugric language tree that has been mostly assimilated by Latvian language speakers who belong to the Baltic branch of the Indo-European language tree.

day Estonia. In the Baltic German speaking literature of the 19th century these peoples were referred to as non-German (undeutsch). Their ancestors had belonged to several Baltic and one Livonian tribe that inhabited the current-day territory in the 12th century when the first German speaking Teutonic knight had arrived to turn the pagans away from their animistic pursuits. Similarly to many other crusades, the cross-bearing outsiders were strongly in favor of applying violence to achieve their goals.

Over the next several centuries, parts of the current-day Latvian territory was subjected to Christian and Rome-oriented land management, as well as had undergone Polish-Lithuanian, semi-independent Baltic-German and Swedish rules prior to the full-Russian control at the end of the 18th century. The neighboring lands to the north populated by Estonian speakers came to share the Latvian lot in being plagued by foreign powers persistent on conquest, as well as being settled by German speaking nobles. It was through the German language medium that a Latvian national consciousness first emerged. An influential feat was accomplished by translating the bible from German into Latvian (1685), which was undertaken under the auspices of the newly Lutheran fraction of the land-owners. Lutheranism with its commitment to spreading the word through basic education of the masses in their own language became the dominant religion in Estonia, while parts of today's Latvia remained Catholic. The Enlightenment era brought people such as Johann Gottfried von Herder³ and along them a teaching that emphasized the importance of plurality of

³ Johann Gottfried von Herder was born in 1744 in what is today Poland, but was then the Kingdom of Prussia under the rule of the self-appointed leader of the German Enlightenment (Aufklaerung) Friedrich the Great. Herder lived and worked in Rīga from 1764 to 1769. In line with his German romanticism inspired leaning, in his later writings Herder treated Latvians as a nation (Volk) worthy of scientific study (including the collection of their oral history and songs) and published a book that included Latvian folk-songs translated into German (Stimmen der Völker in Liedern, 1778). Similar work was undertaken by other educated German-speaking adherents of the Enlightenment, most notably, the local pastor's son Garlieb Merkel (1769 - 1850) who published an account of the lives of the indentured servants in Vidzeme region titled "The Latvians" (Die Letten) in 1796.

cultures. While during the 18th century an emancipated non-German would quickly become assimilated, in the 19th century as the Latvian speaking peasants were released from servitude (1817, 1819 and 1861 in various parts of the country) more and more stubborn farmer's sons (eventually joined by daughters as well) committed themselves to an ideal of a Latvian nation. There were two main national awakening movements in the 19th century, the later more sympathetic to the socialist cause. The national poet Rainis who will appear in these pages participated in it. The first Latvian song festival, which will figure as an important foundational event in this dissertation, was organized in 1864. Towards the end of the 19th century Russification of the current day Latvian territory was underway, as the Russian language was to become the preferred language of education instead of German along with the Eastern orthodox religion of the Tsar being touted as the surest way to acceptance. Amidst industrialization and as a consequential port Rīga, the over eight hundred old capital of today's Latvia, swelled in numbers⁴ and importance during the 19th century to remain the largest of the three Baltic capitals even today.

In 1905 a socialist revolution took place in the whole of the Russian empire, which was brutally suppressed and particularly severely in the Latvian provinces. Rainis, whose poem about this time period "The Broken Pines" will play a role in this dissertation was exiled to Switzerland along with his back-then-more-famous wife Elza Rozenberga, pseudonym Aspazija. The dedication to the socialist cause, however, remained strong among the Latvian speakers until after the

⁴ Until mid 19th century Rīga was predominantly a Baltic German city. For instance, in 1867 Rīga had 102 thousand inhabitants, of whom 43% were counted as German, while 25% as Russian, 24% as Latvian, and 5% as Jewish. Thirty year later the number of inhabitants had almost tripled to 282 thousand with a much larger share of Latvians counted as residing there (45%) (Krastiņš 2001). Yet, the countryside was still where the majority of Latvian speaking people lived (and farmed). In 1920 about 10% of Latvian identified people lived in Rīga, the capital of the newly established state. Rīga now hosts about 1/3 of the country's population, which consists of 47% Latvians and 37% Russians, and it is fair to assume that the remaining 16% are predominantly Russian speaking (CSB n.d.). Last accessed on July 31st, 2020). I am noting this here, as the city (especially the capital) versus the country side is a consistent motif in the way children's health is narrated in Latvia.

establishment of the Latvian state in 1918, and many of them perished as high-ranking Soviet officials in Russia in the 1938 Stalinist purges.

What is often referred to as winning of independence came through a combination of auspicious circumstances, most notably the 1917 Bolshevik revolution that for a short moment loosened Russian hold on the western provinces, and spilling of blood of Latvian men, many of whom returned from fighting the German armies after the newly formed Soviet Union with Russia at its head withdrew from World War I. In a chaotic fashion typical of the region and the times, these men were fighting against a combination of Bolshevik-supporting Latvians and vagabonds who were the remnants of a demoralized German army. About one third of the population had been expelled from what was then a newly established country and lived as refugees in Russia and elsewhere. By mid-1920, when the fighting had stopped Rainis along with his by then subordinate-in-terms- of-fame-wife⁵ returned to Latvia, the country had 1.6 million inhabitants, nearly half of the pre-World War I which had been 2.5 million.

The interwar Latvia consolidated the idea of an ethnic Latvian state, while the reality for quite a few “ethnic Latvians” was similar to that of my paternal grandfather who was born to a Polish and Russian speaking father and a mother who primarily spoke the Latgalian dialect of Latvian. This great grandfather of mine is responsible for the upper-class Polish last-name that I still bear and that raised the eyebrows of the Polish border-guards in the 1990s when I crossed Poland by bus many times. His son, my grandfather, was born in 1925 and was most probably

⁵ I wrote my BA thesis on the national identity of Elza Rozenberga or Aspazija, who grew up learning in German, until the end of her life made notes in a mixture of German and Latvian, and wrote many of her letters to her husband Rainis in German, so I could not here refrain from making a reference to the part of her biography that has always fascinated me--the damaging impact of a bit over 14 years of exile in combination of the rising stardom of her poet-husband on her writing career, but, no, this dissertation will not tell more of her story, while it will analyze her husband's famous poem in Chapter 5. Yet, my knowledge of Aspazija's story has certainly influenced my thinking on gender in Latvia (Chapter 4).

recorded as being Latvian on the 1935 census, which noted that 75.5% of the counted were Latvians, 10.6% - Russians, 4.8% Jews, 3.2% Germans, 2.5% Poles (1935. gada tautas skaitīšana. n.d.). The interwar period was marred by the same difficulties as the rest of Europe--the newly established parliamentary democracy suffered from in-fighting, which resulted in an authoritarian takeover of an avuncular agronomist Kārlis Ulmanis in 1934. His rule allowed the Soviets later to class the whole of the Latvian “bourgeois” interwar experiment as a fascist failure.

A little less than a year after the European powers had appeased Nazi Germany in Munich upon its annexation of part of Czechoslovakia, Hitler was flexing his war-muscle and forming new alliances, most notably in the form of Molotov-Ribbentrop pact signed on August 23rd, 1939 with the USSR. Its secret additional protocol detailed the division of Europe between those two powers along the border, at which Nazi Germany notoriously halted its invasion after it began the World War II on September 1st, 1939. After occupying the rest of Poland two weeks afterwards, the USSR allowed barely enough time for the remaining Baltic Germans to leave Latvia as per the not-so-secret⁶ agreement and then staged events that are predominantly interpreted as occupation, even though petition to enter the “friendly” union of Soviet states was handed in on July 21st, 1940. In the presence of a substantial number of Soviet troops that had been stationed in the territory upon “amicable” agreement since October 1939 and joined by more on June 17th, 1940. Ulmanis' government decided to not resist the takeover, which they hoped would lessen violence. Any pretense of peace was eschewed over the following year, which bears the name of the Terrible Year (Baigais gads) in Latvian, a year during which about 30,000 of population was either killed

⁶ That the Baltic Germans had to leave was widely known in Latvia. My grandmother Ume (born 1929) recalls that her mother who was a German teacher at a Russian school in a small town was told by her Baltic German friend and fellow-teacher that there had been a secret meeting of Baltic Germans and that the Russians were taking over, so they had to leave everything back (in the friend's case it meant leaving her beloved dog) and leave.

or imprisoned, half of them on the night of June 14th, 1941, when more than 15 thousand people were deported to Siberia.

This period was followed by four years of Nazi occupation, which were marked by attempts to re-establish some independent governance, including forming Latvian Nazi troops, initially comprised of volunteers alight in passion to defeat the Soviets, relative indifference towards the plight the Jewish population, which was essentially annihilated during the Nazi rule, and the usual disadvantages of being deprived of resources due to front-line needs, as well as several periods of heavy person-to-person combat that left the country ravaged. The Soviet army recaptured Latvian territory over a period of three years (1944 - 1946), the last resistance still holding out for Western assistance. However, the Yalta conference in February 1945 had already decided that the occupation of the Baltics would remain unchallenged by the European powers and the Cold War had by then sealed off the socialist countries from their former allies. The post-war period until the death of Stalin in 1953 is remembered by many Latvian speakers as a period of immense hardship, marked by inability to trust your neighbor and forced collectivization, that was precipitated by deportations of 42 thousand property-owning Latvians to Siberia on March 25th, 1949.

It is of significance that due to concerted Soviet resettlement policy, the territory of Latvia during this time opened up to a large number of non-Latvian speaking immigrants whose memories of the period are often radically different from the dominant state narrative today. According to them instead of re-occupation, the Soviet Union liberated Latvian territory suffering under the Nazi regime. The USSR successfully continued the early 20th century politics of taking note of the ethnic identity (*tautība* in Latvian, *национальность* /*nacionalnost'* in Russian)⁷ and making it

⁷ I will illustrate the concepts of *tautība* (or *национальность* /*nacionalnost'* in Russian) with a following story. My husband is born in India, but grew up in the US and only has an American passport (and nationality as conceived in English). When he filled out the residency documents in Latvia some years back, he wrote American for “*tautība*”,

a determining factor in policy-making. Ethnic belonging (*tautība*) was never erased by the Soviet regime and played an important role in how the economy was planned—i.e. which part of the population were moved around, which parts of the population were denied education in their native language or at a university level.

The death of Stalin in 1953 was eventually followed by a period of USSR-wide easing of political control or the “thaw,” that facilitated a campaign by local communists for more Latvian-agenda based politics. This resulted in a 1959 exile and fall from grace for many and intensified Russification of the area. What followed was almost 20 years of increasingly more stagnant Brezhnev era, which towards the end produced what Alexei Yurchak has termed “the last Soviet generation” (Yurchak 2006), who will appear in this story in the form of the grandmothers of the children of today’s Latvia. This generation of Latvians who had grown up in the Soviet system similarly to Yurchak’s interlocutors had developed a way of “belonging while not belonging” to the Soviet state. In the case of Latvian speakers, however, their access to a counter-Soviet narrative was enabled by the presence of people who had lived before 1940. As Latvians continued to learn in their native language, they also had access to part of their cultural heritage that strengthened their Latvianness. Their ethnic belonging or *tautība* was also printed into their passports as Latvian. The Soviet agenda also allowed for appropriate ways to celebrate cultural differences, for example, by continuing the local Latvian song festival tradition, to which a Soviet version on School Children festival was added, a feat that I will reflect on in Chapter 1.

and was corrected by the immigration official: “No, you should write Indian, as that is where you were born.” That he looked “Indian” according to the Latvian conception, undeniably played a role. “*Tautība*” hence, is about a biologized perception of belonging, and in some renderings leads to theories that rate people hierarchically based on this belonging, the most extreme version of which calls for elimination of less worthy groups. “*Tautība*” has been translated as ethnic group, but even this translation is inaccurate, as I hope my example of my paternal grandfather above has showed. *Tautība* or *nationalinost* had to be noted in the Soviet passport and played an important role in how movements of populations were planned.

Emboldened by the USSR-wide movements of perestroika and glasnost that took off in 1986, the independence movement in the Baltics gathered speed and came to fruition in what is widely referred to as a singing revolution of the late 1980s, followed by a declaration of independence on May 4th, 1990. De facto independence was granted to Latvia after the unsuccessful Coup d'état in Moscow in August 1991. Overnight this event turned the Russian speaking Soviet ethnic majority into a minority in the territory of Latvia and many of them non-citizens, as the Latvian state decided to return to the prewar legal provisions that excluded from an automatic citizenship anyone who had arrived in the country after 1940 and their descendants. Due to its large size, the recently minted minority presented a challenge to the post-Cold War Latvia and remained strictly on the agenda in the political talks with Russia, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Union (EU) and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), the joining of the latter two being the stated desire of the newly independent Latvian state. According to the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 25.8 % of the population of Latvia was ethnically Russian in 2015 (by adding the Ukrainians and Belarusians, who are mostly Russian speaking, this number increased to 31.8 %), while 61.6 % were Latvian. This dissertation was researched as the Latvian state was celebrating its centennial in 2018 and had been an EU member since 2003 and a NATO member since 2004. Thus, exists Latvia with an always suspicious eye on the neighboring Russia to the east, and an increasing feeling of unease that Europe on the west does not always have its best interest at heart.

In the context of the growing body of literature of the medical anthropology in the former Soviet Union and the Baltics (Bazylevych 2011; Bernstein 2013; Chudakova 2017; Honey 2014; Lūse 2010; Petryna 2003; Praspaliauskiene 2016; Rivkin-Fish 2000; Skultans 2007; Uibu 2016) this dissertation asks how pediatric health is shaped by the historically and geographically situated

concerns of Latvians. Matza (2012) has demonstrated that in Russia history can be used as a form of care and involves projecting a pathologized view of the Soviet past and critiquing the post-Soviet present, which as an ideological opposite to the Soviet past, has enabled the elitism of the student's parents (Matza 2012, 808). Given how tumultuous the past had been in the region and that it had played out along the lines of ethnic belonging, questions of what it meant to raise a future citizen of a former Soviet republic, became essential to governance of a new nation. In Latvia too, I found that children's health was narrated in reference to a version of the Soviet past that is intended to pinpoint Latvia's place on the global world map today. Skultans (2007) has documented how history in Latvia has been used as a form of health practice. This attitude is present among my interlocutors, especially when they interpret the current conditions in terms of well-known historic events, such as two World wars, Soviet occupation which was accompanied by several mass deportations and the general change of the social structure over the 50 years that Latvia was incorporated into the USSR since 1940. Investment into children became an important goal of much of the 20th century politics and especially so in the former USSR, with its widespread slogan "Children are our future." Similarly to what Castaneda (2002) has argued about the tendency to treat the children as "a potentiality rather than an actuality... an entity in making" (1), all pre-adults⁸ are valued for their potential for change in situations where a drastic transformation is underway. In the case of the topic of this dissertation this means that researching children's health is steeped in adult aspirations. The state of children's health is treated as an indicator of the future of the Latvian nation in times when the future seems increasingly unclear.

⁸ Complex work has been conducted by anthropologists (Lancy 2008; Montgomery 2009) on challenging the taken for granted category of "children" into which "pre-adults" mostly get assigned. In the Dissertation I use the term "children" for pre-adults who are under 18 years old, as per Latvian legislature, but I also sometimes write "pre-adults" in order to challenge some of the notions around the rigidity of the category of "childhood."

Childhood and Temporalization of History

The post-Enlightenment scientific regime has a novel way of relating to the future as an “unknown quality” (Koselleck 2004) that is relevant to my thinking about pediatric health. Koselleck (2004) called the sense that the future were approaching at an always increasing speed Koselleck (2004) the “temporalization (Verzeitlichung) of history” (Koselleck 2004, 11). He dates this occurrence around the same time that Foucault (2014) argued the increasing medicalization of family along with the privileged status of children had taken root, around the onset of the Enlightenment. This is the historic moment when the notion of the future and children become tied together into a powerful metaphor representing the taken-for-universal moral values of humanity. Political decisions are undertaken in the name of the future of the children, which queer scholars and anthropologists critique (Berlant 1997; Edelman 2004, Malkki 2010) as promoting a particular heteronormative engagement with the present. In the current moment in Latvia the fast approaching future is increasingly anticipated and planned with a specific post-Cold War childhood⁹ as a referent. In this temporal version the investment for the sake of a distant future has become tightly-bound to the present¹⁰ or the presentism according to Hartog (2003) (for anthropological variation

⁹ I use “post-Cold war” as a descriptor to refer to the millennial moment that encompasses more than the former Soviet realm to argue that a global childhood that been shaped by ending of the Cold War. It is possible to refer to this post-Cold War interpretation of childhood as “late-modern childhood” as a way to highlight the historical significance of the 18th century developments in Europe, documented by Ariès (1962) and Foucault (2014), for the emergence of the category of childhood. The prefix “late-” refers to my interpretation of what Comaroff and Comaroff (2000) have termed the “millennial moment,” the moment at the turn of the centuries, which is marked by the end of the Cold War and the perceived subsequent “victory” or “second coming” of capitalism. (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, 330). They write: “Life, under millennial capitalism, is neither a game nor a repertoire of rational choices” (355). This is the world where the disillusioned youth partake in the irrationality of the present by engaging in gang-violence, for example. The present and the future become intertwined through precarity, which characterizes the present moment and the uncertain future. I argue that this politicized version of childhood is steeped in a version of post-Enlightenment temporalities, which view childhood as a potentiality (Castaneda 2002). What is more, there has been a post-Cold War shift towards intensive management of children (Fass 2016) in the way children are viewed globally, as reflected in the dominant legal frameworks, for example, the UN Convention on the Rights of the child, as well as popular interest in notions of intensive parenting.

¹⁰ I view the present as the early 21st century scholars (Guyer 2007, Hartog 2003) have done denoting the shifting temporal frameworks that engage the future through a newly found fixation on the present. The present in this model is perceived as fraught with uncertainty.

see Guyer (2007)). In this present a novel non-normative child emerges, marked by what Stockton (2012) has called the “fetishization of delay.”

According to Stockton (2013), the normative child who is expected to be on a linear trajectory that consists of marriage, work, reproduction and would result in the loss of childishness is disappearing in the post-Cold War United States (Stockton 2013, 4). Instead a child who is entangled in an expectation of a fetishized version of delay—delayed sexuality, delayed danger and harm, delayed adulthood – is emerging. Growing up with the expectation of this delay, Stockton proposes, should be called “growing side-ways,” rather than following any linear path and results in the replacement of the normative child with the “queer child” (Stockton 2013, 7).¹¹ I suggest, that the “queer child” could be seen as a complex representation of multiple temporalities of post-Cold War childhood,¹² “growing side-ways” in the present, that is increasingly extended into the indefinite future, as Koselleck (2004) and Hartog (2003) have argued. Such representation is still rooted in an interpretation of childhood that looks at it as a potentiality (Castaneda 2002), only a child in this version is no longer driven by the future, but instead is tied to a dangerous present.

I explore fears of spoiled (*izlutināti*) and wimpy (*vārgi*)¹³ Latvian children in Chapter 1 and suggest that some of the Latvian preoccupations around this subject echo “growing sideways” line

¹¹ The child is both endangered (Stockton 2013 37), echoing ideas about the “care model” and attitudes towards children’s rights I discussed in the Introduction, and dangerous (Stockton 2013, 38), which can be linked to privileging children’s agency in the “liberalist model” of children’s rights.

¹² I use this term instead of post-social, while remaining mindful of the debates (Berdahl 2010, Humphrey 2002) about the usefulness of post-social as a category in the light of the many experiences that are appropriated under this umbrella. I proceed with using post-Cold war with the same goal that Berdahl (2010) describes for using “post-social” as a means of “assessing and critiquing global capitalism” (187). I contend, however, that post-Cold war with its capacity to encompass both sides of the “war” — the “winner” (capitalism) and the “loser” (socialism) — provides a more relevant way of thinking about the profound, world-wide change that the end of the USSR and many of the socialist states brought about. Verdery on the use of the same term.

¹³ “Vārgs” can also be translated as “feeble” or “weak,” but the imperfect translation of “wimpy” seemed to encompass better the complicity of the children themselves in their own feebleness that calling them “vārguļi” or the wimpy ones evokes in Latvian.

of thinking. While doing so I introduce the ideas around wimpination,¹⁴ a compound of wimpy and nation, that encompasses the national concerns over lack of hardiness of Latvian children. Throughout the dissertation, I ask how pediatric concerns of Latvians are impacted by fixation on the present, considering that the past is still widely believed to have a key to the future in Latvia. While nation-states still translate a threat to their citizen-children as a threat to their national futures, it is increasingly clear that a globally at-risk child, one not contained within state borders, is also being crafted through politics of childhood uncertainty. In this dissertation I ask what happens when these global ideas are implemented locally, as is the case of Latvian emergent novel parenting movements, that are steeped in Western psychological ideas of attachment, but also impacted by Soviet pediatric practices such as the medical baby-massage I was subject to as a tiny baby. I also inquire into the ways the state is involved in shaping and creating the future citizens of Latvia in a global world, in which the body of a child is becoming increasingly more medicalized and quantifiable, as Latvians rely on aesthetics of symmetry to corporeally manage the children into physiological straightness.

Research Methods

My fieldwork was based on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Latvia. It was a home-coming of a kind, as I was a person who had grown up in Latvia, my Ume's granddaughter who had been massaged into gaining weight as a baby. I also relied on my capital as a mother of two school-aged children, who accompanied me in the field and their daily experiences of being in Latvia profoundly shaped my understanding of managing children there. I primarily conducted research at two sites: firstly, among professionals and parents involved in the state's efforts to monitor young

¹⁴ I have Rima Praspaliauskiene to thank for this term

athlete's health and secondly, among parents engaged in a novel way of early childhood child-rearing and professionals who advised them. To both of these sites I had personal connection--as a mother of two athletically active¹⁵ children who had been parented in some of the novel and corporeal ways that I was exploring. I had chosen both of these sites for the insight they would give me into the haptic ways Latvian children's bodies were cared for and managed in a country that had a complex present. After legally restoring its pre-1940 political system Latvia was building upon the left-overs of a Soviet system, while simultaneously resisting them and living as a member of the European Union since 2004 with its new demands and challenges. In my analysis, I also relied on my access to publicly available parenting and popular medical literature, as well as news articles in Latvian and in Russian.

Young Athletes' Health Monitoring

I chose the state program that monitored the health of around 14,000 children¹⁶ a year because it was one of the most comprehensive efforts of pediatric surveillance topped by preventive corporeal treatment in the form of manual therapy, strengthening exercises and medical massage. When I arrived in the field in the fall of 2017, the State Sport Medicine Center was undergoing a profound restructuring. In response to the doping scandal in Russia that marred the upcoming 2018 Winter Olympics, a new anti-doping agency was being founded, which meant that part of the functions of the Center was transferred elsewhere and the Center itself moved under the aegis of the country's main pediatric hospital. This transition took almost the whole length of my fieldwork, and while the work of the Center never ceased, these circumstances hampered my access to the site from the

¹⁵ In Latvia this category is called "children with increased physical load" (bērni ar paaugstinātu fizisko slodzi). I will explain it in more detail in Chapter 5.

¹⁶ This number represents an impressive 8.4% of the overall population of children in the age group (10–17) that the Center targeted.

top down. To compensate I conducted several field-visits to the four main geographic regions to interview the professionals involved in day-to-day ensuring young athlete's health—coaches, doctors, parents and children themselves. This part of the field-work fed my ever-increasing awareness of the role that Soviet attitudes towards preventative health, in particular the field of *Healing Physical Culture*, had on the way children's bodies were managed (and in many cases massaged like I was as a baby) in Latvia today.

Researching Body-intensiveness

In order to understand how caring for young children was changing in Latvia towards including more corporeal care, I chose to study a group of parents who were parenting in a way that resembled American Attachment parenting movement. In the US, some parents were following the recommendations by Dr. William Sears and kept their young children extremely close to their bodies by wearing them in baby-wraps and sharing sleep with them. I do not call these parents in Latvia Attachment parents, because as I demonstrate in Chapter 2 they, firstly, do not identify with this label and, secondly, their choices are not identical to a transplant from Dr. Sear's system, but rather display a range of influences: some local, some related to the Attachment theory that originated in the mid 1950s England. Because of the intensely corporeal nature of these practices I call them body-intensive. As I wanted to study parents who were consciously doing something different from what they considered to be "the main-stream" parenting, I chose as the selection criteria the three practices, in which I knew Latvian parents engaged, but that were also commonly recommended by Dr. Sears. His work was, after all, representative of the ideology behind the Attachment theory that inspired the movement and hence a useful point of reference, which illuminated a fundamental paradox of this theory—in order to create an independent, self-sufficient adult subject one has to attach the new-born physically close. I included not only parents, but also

professionals (doulas, lactation consultations, midwives, for example) who advised on such practices as baby-wearing or breastfeeding.

The selection criteria included parents who engaged in a combination of the three of the following behaviors: breastfeeding their children on cue and for longer than a year (or intending to do so, if the child was younger); wearing their child in a sling-type baby carrier; sleeping in the same bed as a young child (that is called co-sleeping by Dr. Sears). I have elected to call this style of parenting “body-intensive,” because many of the practices involve a rather intensive bodily interaction between care-takers and children: adults spending most of their sleeping time in close physical contact with a child, infants being carried either in arms or in a baby-carrier and being kept in constant bodily contact during breastfeeding sessions that go beyond the child’s one year mark. The constant physical closeness or being body-intensive makes these parents, according to their own admittance (though they do not use the term “body-intensive”), different from the previous generation and their more main-stream peers. As Chapter 2 will demonstrate, the selected participants did not reify the American approach, but rather presented a complex picture of the local particularities of a body-intensive movement.

The shift towards body-intensive parenting is not limited to this group of parents in Latvia, as there is a general easing of norms taking place around holding and carrying of children in Latvia, nor is it a purely Latvian phenomenon. However, I am fascinated by the complex mechanisms that span the issues of class and educational levels and entice to subscribe to body-intensiveness. As I well know having myself parented this way, the sheer work involved in this type of child-rearing is immense. I had used the sling often when my children were babies, breastfed them without schedule and for over a year and shared my bed with them when they were little. As my son and daughter were born in Latvia, I also knew quite a few people who parented similarly, despite it not

being a main-stream practice. This enabled my access to the group significantly, even though most of the people I interviewed I did not personally know. Latvia being a small country where even when not known personally, people are easily identifiable, I have taken precautions while recounting my interlocutors stories to hide their identities. This involves not only assigning all of them pseudonyms, but also generalizing their occupations and sometimes changing the gender of their children.

My interlocutors in the body-intensive parenting site were mostly women in their thirties,¹⁷ but I also talked to four men, all partners of some of my other interlocutors.¹⁸ All those who shared their point of view as professionals (midwives, doulas, lactation consultants) were also parents. The majority of the women were partnered, some also with men who were not the biological fathers of their children (for example, the oldest child had a different biological father), but I also spoke with several women who raised their children in a single-parent household or shared custody. The ages of the children of my interlocutors varied from 25 years to 6 months, with a considerable number of children who were past the toddler stage, so their parents were no longer actively involved in all the specific body-intensive practices that I was exploring, and were thus able to reflect on their usefulness. A bit less than half lived in the capital of Rīga and some of them owned farm houses in the country-side where they spent their free time, and there were some who lived in the suburbs of Rīga, smaller cities and the countryside.¹⁹ While most contemporary Latvian mothers have two or less biological children (fertility rate of 1.69 in 2016), there were

¹⁷ The average age of the women (n = 26) was 34 at the time of the interview, while their age at the time when their first child was born varied from 21 to 42 with the average being 28.8, which is a bit over the national average (about 27) and below the EU average (29). There were six women who had 3 children, two women who had four children, and one – five.

¹⁸ I had to make a conscious effort to talk to men; none ever responded to a general call for an interview that I posted in various parenting online groups which, while not directly targeted towards mothers, in practice were female-dominated.

¹⁹ This is by no means a representative selection (as there are only 3 Russian speakers included), but it is rather diverse in terms of locality: Rīga - 13, Suburbs of Rīga - 3, Major City - 3, Small town - 5, Country side – 4, Abroad – 2.

women among my interlocutors who had three, four and five children, making the bigger than average number of children or aspiring towards more than two children a noteworthy characteristic of the group.²⁰ Another distinctive feature of this group was the fact that most of them had higher education (BA degree or higher)²¹ and also possessed good knowledge of English, and read extensively online in both Latvian, English and sometimes Russian.²²

As my initial research question was primarily focused on medical practices of my interlocutors, I was not collecting data on household income or consumption that could be used to map out class-related privilege. However, from my interactions with the body-intensive interlocutors I visited in their homes they did not live a luxurious lifestyle. In fact, most of the body-intensive interlocutors lived in two to three-room (one to two bed-rooms by American standards) apartments in either Rīga or smaller cities/towns, while only a few lived in separate houses. Even when they lived in a private house, some shared their households with their parents. During times when no other part of Latvia has grown other than the immediate vicinity of the capital Rīga, only four out of my 30 body-intensive interlocutors lived in such locations.

Over half of the body-intensive female interlocutors (15/26) had had at least one homebirth, a rather marginal practice in Latvia, which costs more than 1,000 euros, per birth. While some data (Ceple 2009) suggests that parents who choose homebirth in Latvia have an income that is above the average, my interlocutors often recounted that their paying for homebirth was enabled by a conscious effort of month-by-month saving. In addition, several of my interlocutors (at least

²⁰ Out of 26 female interlocutors – 7 had two children, 6 had three, 2 - four and 1 – five children, while those who had one child (10) were planning to have more and at least two were later known to be pregnant, thus making the combined fertility rate of the group 2.1.

²¹ All but three of my interlocutors (n=30) had higher education (BA – 14; MA – 10; 2 PhD – 2), which is much more than the 27 % of all Latvians with higher education and or the best educated age-group of 25-34 year-olds, of whom 42 % were tertiary educated in Latvia (Latvia - oecd.org 2019).

²² While most of my interlocutors spoke Latvian at home, some of them read in Russian, which was definitely the case for those who spoke Russian at home.

6) rented modest one-bed room Soviet style apartments and some shared that they were or had been in a tight financial situation since the birth of their children (and had moved in with parents or spent some time living with their parents).

All of the men and most of the women I interviewed for the body-intensive part of the project were in heterosexual partnerships and referred to their partners by the official term for husband or wife. I do not interpret this as necessary feature of body-intensive parenting, because it is possible that women who parented their children without a male in the household were less likely to respond to my inquiries for interviews. Undeniably being in a two-person (of opposite genders) household allows women in Latvia an access to both the cultural capital that being in a heterosexual relationship grants in Latvia and as well as two incomes.

Body-intensive Interlocutors and Class

In the US, the Attachment parenting movement has been analyzed from the point of view of class privilege (Halley 2007). Throughout the dissertation I purposely use the term “privilege” as a way to consider a series of questions that are usually addressed through the lens of “class.” I draw on Fehervary (2011), Helemäe and Saar (2015) and Ost (2015) to argue that the idea of a middle-class or upper-middle class privilege has to be theorized differently in the former socialist states, as the markers of class belonging are less clear cut than, for example, in the American scholarship (Lareau 2003). In Latvia, similarly to Estonia (Helemäe and Saar 2015), the insistence of moving away from Marxism-Leninism towards neoliberalism has resulted in the avoidance of using “class” as an analytical category to understand political and economic differences, giving preference to considering inequality through the lens of ethnic differences between Russians and Latvians.

While the expressions of “working class” and “middle class” are used in colloquial speech and in some sociological literature, such markers as income, profession or the place of residence are not always linked the same way as in the US (Lareau 2003). Take, for example, the profession of a medical doctor in Latvia, which was devalued in terms of monetary compensation in the early 1990s, while still retaining the educational (and to some degree cultural and social) capital that it once contained. Today the remuneration of a doctor is very much dependent on the field that they represent supplemented sometimes by informal payments that similarly to what Praspaliauskiene (2016) has shown in the case of Lithuania are given for varied reasons (gratitude; magical thinking; bribery) which also include a consideration for their “small wages.”

One outstanding characteristic of the body-intensive parents I talked to was their access to the educational capital. They all (but three) had higher education and most of them had a good knowledge of English. This means that they had access to English-language media that focuses on parenting. All of my interlocutors used internet for some, often international (both English and Russian language) parenting advice. In this way they resembled Gapova’s (2014) “new class” women in Russia, who were highly educated and had access to modern technologies that enabled them to resist the state politics. While I did not engage my interlocutors on political topics, I can say that their education had brought about a heightened awareness of the importance of healthy upbringing for their children, which in their case included purposeful body-intensive treatment that prioritized touch, something that was considered uncommon in Latvia.

“Crooked Children” Chapter by Chapter

Chapter 1 examines the state of the Latvian children today, as envisioned through statistics, policy documents and my interlocutors, following the case of the 184 school-children who fainted at the

Song and Dance Festival dress-rehearsal in 2015. The chapter considers childhood in Latvia as both a national and individual project, suspended in desire for recognition by “the world,” Europe in particular, but also in fear of a loss of its statehood and national heritage either through demographic changes or foreign interference. The discourse around episodes of fainting produces a powerful figure of the Endangered Latvian Singing Child, the key to the successful national future of the state of Latvia. Such collective performance that is meant for ascertaining patriotic upbringing is threatened by a perceived lack of hardiness of the young Latvians who are too “wimpy” (*vārguļi*). Certain expressions of modernity such as technological advancement and becoming removed from the idealized farmers' past are being held responsible for the fragility of Latvian children in the public rendering of the faintings. The chapter addresses the role that notions of normativity play in Latvian child-rearing, especially in respect to perceptions of what constitutes a “wimpy child,” a threat to the national future, and the physically rigorous lifestyle that state officials advocate as a remedy.

Chapter 2 poses questions around corporeal practices that are steeped in Attachment Theory. In an echo to my grandmother’s story of massaging me as a baby, I ask - what ideas inform the practices that can be interpreted as giving in to a young child’s whims and spoiling them by carrying young babies in the arms too much. The chapter focuses on fears around overindulging children, to which my body-intensive interlocutors had to respond, while simultaneously encouraging their children to become free (*brīvi*) and self-confident. I argue that the body-intensive parents are parenting in ways that take into account the unique geopolitical and historical situation in Latvia which causes them to engage in “managed corporeality” quite differently from previous generations, who focused on tempering and hardening the body (Kelly 2007) or emotional toughening (Stryker 2012). In doing so, they utilize the Western concept of attachment, but prioritize

the concepts of “security” and “freedom” over that of “attachment.” I suggest that the Latvian version emphasizes the term security over that of attachment, the negative aspect of which (meaning of chaining/tying.) the parents consider when they weigh the importance of the theory in their lives. This serves to illustrate a fundamental paradox of Bowlby’s theory – in order to create an independent, self-sufficient adult subject one has to bind the newborn extremely physically close. This paradox is inherent in the Attachment theory itself, but the Latvian translation (where security becomes paramount to attachment) makes it particularly pronounced, especially with the intergenerational differences in thinking about the importance of “holding/carrying children (nēsāt uz rokām).” My interlocutors’ parenting is influenced by a desire to counter a Soviet past, that is imagined as institutionalized and lacking security. Being Soviet here stands for the old-fashioned ideas that need to be counteracted by a changed behavior in the present, and a Bowlby-derived theory offers one such way.

Chapter 3 explores the Latvia-specific diagnosis of *baby tonuss* as an epistemic object. I tease out the historic circumstance under which the contemporary preoccupation of “symmetrizing” and corporeal treatment such as *hendlings*, physical therapy and medicinal baby-massage of young children came about in Latvia. I track the ways “managed corporeality” as a treatment for *baby tonuss* developed in the Soviet system under the auspices of the field of the *Healing Physical Culture* (ārstnieciskā fizultura), which was heavily invested in the Soviet version of preventative care or prophylaxis. I demonstrate how “an increased muscle tone” in a new-born baby became a culturally accepted diagnosis instead of a mere symptom of disease. If left untreated, *baby tonuss* is imagined to cause bodily asymmetry and crooked back, as well as the condition stands in for pathological relationships and anxiety, to which the young child is exposed. Latvians, both Latvian

and Russian speaking, are guided in their care for a young child by adherence to bodily straightness, the principle of “straight-back” morality that I will explore further in Chapter 5. These sentiments are rooted in the late-Soviet period that prepared a stage to parental openness to “managed corporeality” and even “body-intensive” parenting that, at least in theory, is oriented towards an individual not a collective child-rearing ideal. The normative Latvian baby is one that is not going to become physiologically or morally “crooked” and monitoring and treating *baby tonuss* is one way to achieve it.

Chapter 4 attends to the issues of intimacy, gender and intergenerationality in post-Cold war Latvia. As in the case of my own mother’s inability to produce breast-milk, I follow other lactating daughters who seek to explain to their mothers’ generation that “not having enough milk” was a Soviet construct. I utilize interviews and literary discourse to argue that contemporary Latvian mothers negotiate their relationships to the violent Soviet treatment of birthing when through attending to what I call “an intergenerational lactation trauma.” I link the Soviet fears over the over-fed infant who is uncontrollably succumbing to gluttony and has to be controlled by an institutionalized intervention to the wimpy, undisciplined fainting child of the Latvian present that I examined in Chapter 1. I contextualize Latvian motherhood in terms of popular disavowal of liberal feminism to demonstrate the complexity of Latvian gender issues. Most of my body-intensive interlocutors tacitly support gender roles that are rooted in heteronormativity and emphasize feminine knowledge, similar to the popular self-help book by Blūma that assigns responsibility not only for their own failing health and heteronormative partnerships, but also for the future of the Latvian nation. Such sentiments that emphasize the over-all greater capacity of women to bear responsibility over that of men are rooted in the way many Latvians relate to the brutal and violent past of the country that is interpreted as emasculation of men. I end the chapter by attending to the

changing ideas of expertise that involve private/domestic knowledge in building up professionalism, such as in the case of the newly minted doula movement, which provides a case story for the way feminine and intuitive knowledge is approached in Latvia.

Finally, in Chapter 5 through the lens of such Latvia-specific diagnoses as asymmetric back and flat feet, this chapter sheds light on the moral properties of straightness in children's bodily management. The collective dimensions of "straight back morality" are illuminated through careful ethnographic attention to the importance that is attributed to straight backs during the adult Song and Dance Festival of 2018, especially the lead-conductor's speech about performing an early 20th century revolutionary song 'The Broken Pines', where the upward-stretching pine-trees stand for the unbending backs of the rebels. Throughout the chapter I employed the concept of "straight-back morality"—that is, the moral urgency that gets attributed to bodily normativity, embodied in the form of a straight-back—to argue that the particularly Latvian concerns about bodily management of children or "managed corporeality" presents a way to produce adults who fit the expectations for normative shape and morality. Whoever deviate from this norm, the people with crooked backs or the non-singing Latvians, provide sites of exclusion where the "straight-back morality" simultaneously functions as a guiding principle and a way of questioning the Latvians' relationship to the world. Through readings of Ahmed (2006) and Dzenovska (2018) I attend to how the spatial category of straightness takes on a normative role in Latvia, which can be theorized as a subtle resistance to an imaginary "world stage."

Throughout the dissertation I follow the ways the past intrudes on the present of Latvian parents, children and the professionals who work with them in their awareness of various fears of crookedness of children. The Soviet past for the contemporary Latvian parents is far enough to have

become a metaphor of all that has been wrong in their lives. Simultaneously, they continue using corporeal techniques (medical massage of babies, for example) that are deeply rooted in the history of Soviet preventative medicine and the over-all fascination with combatting asymmetrical body aesthetics that is feared to produce physiologically crooked children. However, such practices are then coached in new terms and evolve more elaborate rendering (for example, the practice of *hendlings* explored in Chapter 3) and do not meet with the same censure as other forms of damaging “Soviet legacy” (padojju mantojums). Corporeal management of children, like in my grandmother’s story, becomes the story of love as opposed to simply mastering the body, as the two become melded as the same.

Chapter 1 Wimpy is this generation: Latvian Children at the Intersection of the Soviet Past and the EU future

The parade is officially not happening. It was cancelled by the Ministry of Education late the previous night. The reason: almost 200 school children, participants in a mega dress rehearsal of some 13,000 singers had fainted. The dress-rehearsal, which doubled as a sold-out concert for about 20,000 onlookers, came on the heels of several days of stringent morning and afternoon rehearsals. Many of the audience members were parents of the performing children. Those who were not present could watch one of the videos shared shortly afterwards. And this is what they would see:²³

The young participants are dressed in national costumes, which in most cases consist of a wool skirt or pants and a linen shirt. Girls are wearing crowns, made of flowers or fabric. While singing a popular song half-heartedly, the children are craning their necks to look at whomever has fainted next. Teams of three persons dressed in Red Cross volunteer suits and neon-green vests are responding to shouts and the waving of hand-held signs with red exclamation marks. Two boys in gray traditional suits are carrying off a girl who is crouching between them and perched on their folded arms. A few children are running off the stage as the organizer, in purple, announces that the dress-rehearsal has ended and entreats the children to descend the bleachers without panic.

The 11th Latvian Youth School Song and Dance Festival had included a total of 37,890 children ages five to eighteen and, as an event of immense national importance, was eagerly followed by the media. (“XI Latvijas skolu jaunatnes dziesmu un deju svētkos piedalīsies rekordliels dalībnieku skaits,” n.d.).

The online news in the late hour after the faintings was flooded with pictures of limp bodies being carried off the stage on orange stretchers or in the arms of the Red Cross volunteers. Several explanations for the mass fainting were put forth on social media immediately, among them, the general tiredness of the participants, the result of an extremely rigid rehearsal schedule, food-poisoning caused by the centralized food allocation, and perhaps willful sabotage of this important event.

The internet was also abuzz with speculation regarding the number of those who had fainted, with estimates ranging from 30 to 400. Sometime later, the news was out that 17 children had been hospitalized while 184 had been examined by medics. That same evening the Minister of Education called for an emergency meeting, which resulted in the cancellation of the parade the following morning. This decision was announced in a tweet sent out close to midnight: “#DzSv [hash-tag for the festival] parade is cancelled. Reasons why

²³ Two videos, shot from the audience, illustrate some of what was happening. The first video shows the announcement that the dress rehearsal is ending prematurely and asks children to descend without panic (Multinews 2015a). The second video shows the rehearsal still taking place with children being carried off the stage, the children are waving exclamation marks on a neon-green background to attract attention (Multinews 2015b).

many children had health problems today are not yet clear. The safety of the children is paramount.”

The parade takes place anyway. There has been an early morning announcement that allows whoever wants to participate. The Latvian president marches, and about 80 % of all the participants do too. The parade has a touch of the chaotic. The marching order is not organized according to the geographic region as it usually is. The students from Rīga are dispersed throughout the long chain of the singing, dancing and instrument-playing children. The head of a small-town dance group explains on the evening news that her district only decided to participate when they saw the live-broadcast of the “cancelled” parade in full-swing on TV and did not want to miss out. The garlands of oak branches and the bouquets of wildflowers that the children are carrying are a telltale sign that somebody has been up all night to make them despite the cancellation. The resignation of the Minister of Education is on the table, at least as far as the media is concerned. She responds by immediately calling for an inquiry into the causes of the faintings.

The fainting of these 184 school children in 2015 was treated as a national and public health emergency. Their bodies dressed in national costumes and laid out on orange stretchers were heavily mediatized and were taken as a powerful reminder of the fragility of Latvian children’s health. Their apparent lack of stamina was perceived by many as a threat to the future of Latvia as a singing and viable nation that a continuous Song Festival tradition was expected to ensure. In this chapter, I will analyze the aftermath of this event in order to consider the links between children’s health, normativity and nationhood in Latvia. Tracing the connections between Latvianness and choral singing, I ask: what does the case of 184 children fainting on a national stage reveal about the ways children’s health is constituted in Latvia, a country situated at the intersection of the Soviet past and the EU present and future? What (and who) is considered to be responsible for the state of Latvians children’s health in the early 21st century? Furthermore, how are Latvian children’s bodies narrated and managed in a world governed by the politicized Figure of the Child to which queer scholars (Berlant 1997; Edelman 2004; Lesnik-Oberstein 2010) have drawn our attention.

The response to the Festival faintings initially seemed to be the classic continuation of the story that emphasizes childhood medicalization (Foucault 2014) and individualization of child-rearing (Fass 2016; Reich 2014; Warner 2004), including management of children's health through selective and individual-child oriented risk-consumption (Kaufman 2010). The Education Ministry reacted immediately by cancelling the much-awaited parade the morning after citing individual children's security as the reason. A commission seeking a biomedical explanation for the faintings was also immediately set up, but it did not identify a clear cause. I suggest that the response to the faintings has to be contextualized outside of a distinctly biomedical sphere, and the body of the Latvian child must be viewed against the background of national anxieties over an intertwined past, present and future for a nation that is currently narrated as being on the verge of extinction. The broader framing of the crisis, belonging in the realm of public health while also incorporating views about Latvian children as the key for ensuring national survival, allows for a complex rendering of the fainting singing child's story.

As the title of this chapter, borrowed from an internet comment posted after the Song Festival faintings, "Wimpy is this generation" suggests, the central question I am asking here has to do with the perceptions of the fragility of the Latvian children and the role that the alleged "wimpiness" plays in conceptualizing pediatric health and the national project in Latvia. I introduce in this Chapter the idea of the figure of the Endangered Latvian Singing Child, which competes for its place within the current global fears around child-rearing, expertise and public health. I begin by presenting the history of the Song Festival to address the links between nationhood, childhood and health, all three concepts central to thinking about child-rearing and pediatric health in Latvia. Through the "everyone is an expert of the Song Festival" paradigm I then address the varied generation-dependent expectations around toughening Latvian children who are perceived to be at risk

of being spoiled by their parents and by a lifestyle that is increasingly removed from “the ideal countryside living.”

I follow with some statistical information on children in Latvia. This is intended not only as background information, but also as a commentary on the politics of metrics. I argue that what data is collected and how it is interpreted is directly related to the perception of Latvia’s position in the world. Children in Latvia are key to ensuring that Latvia is recognized as a viable member on the world stage, a sentiment which, I argue throughout the Dissertation, guides some of the decisions around child rearing, including pediatric health. While nation-states translate a threat to their citizen-children into a threat to their national futures as in this case, it is increasingly clear that a globally at-risk child, one not contained within state borders and one who can be measured in comparative numbers, is also being crafted through politics of childhood uncertainty. I ask - what sort of inbuilt ideologies of temporality does the normative child, as an object of public health attention and of proper parenting, has incorporated in its discursive armature. Finally, through the debate surrounding the appropriate physical and educational load for children, I inquire into how my interlocutors, body-intensive parents and those who attend to youth athletes’ health, envision the future of the children (and their health) and the role that spoiling them might play in this process. Specifically, I ask how the trends of upward and downward “age compression,” the lengthening and shortening of childhood (Lassonde 2012), are reflected in Latvians’ understanding of normativity and wimpiness

I History of the Youth Song and Dance Festival

The Latvian Song and Dance Festival tradition, like that of the other two Baltic states, is a source of national pride and global recognition.²⁴ Latvia became an independent country for the first time following the end of World War I in 1918. It then lost its independence to the USSR in 1940 and to Nazi Germany from 1941 to 1945. Latvia was incorporated into the USSR again at the end of World War II and remained so until 1991 upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Communal singing as a peaceful means of political protest holds a special place in Latvian national awareness, because it was mobilized during the Baltics-wide movement in the 1980s that is often referred to as “the singing revolution,” which was aimed at the reclaiming of independence from the USSR. The VI School Youth Song and Dance Festival, in which I participated as a student in 1989, for example, was the first time the interim war national anthem (outlawed by the Soviets) was performed publicly.

The Youth Festival today plays an important role in ensuring the continuity of the adult festival tradition. The stated goal of the Youth Festival is:

To ensure the participation of children and youth in maintaining and promoting (uzturēšanā un pēctecībā) the tradition of the Latvian School Youth Song and Dance Festival, by strengthening their national self-awareness (pašapziņa)²⁵ and the feeling of patriotism, pride and belonging to Latvia. (Dziedundejo 2015)

This wording that emphasizes “national self-awareness” and “feelings of patriotism” is consistent with the way children’s assumed innocence and openness to moral growth (Aries 1962; Stockton

²⁴ The Baltic song festival tradition has been awarded the status of UNESCO intangible cultural heritage since 2003 (Unesco.org n.d.). Latvia also previously has been branded as “the land that sings” by the Tourism Development Agency (Dzenovska, 2007).

²⁵ It is noteworthy that the Latvian term for self-awareness that is used is the same that many of the body-intensive parents use when they talk about the type of child that they are raising (except that they do not couple it with national, just self-aware, which can also translate as self-confident (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2).

2013; Malkki 2010) have made them an important focus of any modern state-craft be it the Soviet plan of building communism²⁶ or various ways child-citizens are engaged in post-civil war Uganda (Cheney 2007).

Yet, the Youth Festival is not merely a straightforwardly nationalist project. The first Latvian School Youth Song and Dance Festival took place in 1960. The adult version of the Festival, however, dates back to 1873, when speakers of various dialects of what is today the literary Latvian language first attempted to assert national agency within Tsarist Russia. The Festival tradition, which includes adult, youth and countless lesser Festival components, today embodies the strength of the Latvian national state and its history. This is achieved by an act of erasure that renders as less meaningful the non-[ethnic]Latvian²⁷ elements, such as the particularly Soviet way of thinking about children that was responsible for the establishment of the Youth Festival in 1960. Consistent with the communist emphasis on moral development through exercise (O'Mahony 2006; Brownell 1995), a separate dancing concert²⁸ was added to the adult program in 1948 and was always part of the Youth Festival.²⁹ Still, the shorthand for the Festival in Latvian is never “the Dance Festival,” but always “the Song Festival,”³⁰ hence a fainting singing (not dancing) child has a particularly strong grip on the national imagination. Like many public events of ritual importance,

²⁶ The slogan “Children—our future” was ubiquitous in the USSR, as was an almost universal participation in youth organizations such as Komsomol (secondary school), Pioneers (middle school) or Octobrists (elementary school) (Kelly 2007).

²⁷ For an overview of the differences between Latvian as a term that denotes a belonging to the state of Latvia and as an ethnic/national identity that is dependent on history of how otherness (including Russianness) is constituted, see the Introduction of the Dissertation. Because the differences in Latvia are often (though not always) narrated along language lines, I have chosen to sometimes use the term “Latvian-speaking inhabitants” instead of “ethnic Latvians”.

²⁸ The dancing that is performed at the concert today is Latvian folk-dancing, which is performed in a highly stylized manner. Even when contemporary music is used, the dress code is mostly traditional.

²⁹ This was also an outcrop of sort of Soviet ideologies of displaying nationalities (culture/language/performance/material culture) in a sort of standardized way but has been today turned into an event that is purely Latvian.

³⁰ In the ethnic Latvian imagination *the Festival* is more often associated with singing (it is often called just Song Festival) than with dancing. It is possible that the reason for this is the fact that before the Soviet regime, there was no separate dance component to the *Festival*.

the festivals are recurring,³¹ which insures that people across several generations share in the experience. Preparations for the next Festival, both Adult and Youth, are undertaken even before the current Festival is over. These preparations involve not only carefully selected music and choreography, but also a meticulous process of evaluation that is based on competitions between various choirs, folk-ensembles and dance groups. The Youth festival in this scenario is one of the components that ensures a tradition that is close to 150 years old, yet its beginnings are in the Soviet period.

From the early-nation builders on, the festivals enacted the varied political goals of their respective organizers who were of various ideological leanings. In line with what Edelman (2004) has argued about the political fusing of children with the future of the nation, children's bodies in socialist countries were perceived as sites for managing the future of the communist project. Politically, Edelman claims, children were seen as particularly important to the future of the nation. Children's young bodies are best placed to be trained to represent the moral ideologies of their countries (Brownell 1995; Weiss 2002). The program of the Soviet-era Youth Festivals was heavily based on Russian compositions ("Par svētkiem." n.d.)³² and ethnically-varied dances that represented all fifteen Soviet republics, while currently there are only Latvian dances and songs performed at the two main concerts of the Festival. The contemporary version of the Festival is certainly strongly correlated with the so-called ethnic Latvians, who constituted 62.2% of the population in 2018 (CSB n.d.). Ethnic Latvians find it difficult to imagine Russian presence at the

³¹ The adult and youth festivals are spaced 5 years apart. There are several other major festivals that now occur in between, ensuring that the amateur groups that form the core of the participants are always working towards a mass public performance goal, which includes yearly choral and folk-dancing competitions.

³² In comparison, today the only other language that the main Festival event has encompassed ("Pūt, vējiņi!" sang in Livonian at the 2018 Adult Festival) is the highly endangered Livonian language, that is considered an indigenous language according to the State Language Law.

Festival by, for example, including Russian songs in the program, while Russian speakers sometimes associate the Festival with expressions of undesirable Latvian nationalism.³³ Familiarity with the Song Festival can be used to gauge one's loyalty to the Latvian nation. Thus, a Latvian film director of Armenian descent who compared the Adult Festival in 2018 on Twitter to an event under a totalitarian regime was twitter-shamed about his lack of understanding of Latvia despite having lived in the country for many years and even asked to leave the country (Sputniknews.lv 2018). The contemporary event is also much more popular among Latvian-speaking youth than it is among their Russian-speaking counterparts (Tīsenkopfs 2008),³⁴ who constitute about one-third of school children in Latvia.³⁵ Russian-speaking children usually only participate if they attend a

³³ Both of these assumptions are substantiated by the comments for the articles (rus.DELFI.lv 2015; www.DELFI.lv 2015) of the same content in both languages. The Russian comments on the articles were similarly unapproving as the Latvians, but much less favorable towards the *Festival* itself. One commenter expressed relief that Russian children did not participate in this event. While both Latvian and Russian language comments were outraged at mishandling of children and blamed profit crazy government, Russian commentators were more derogative of the ethnic Latvians' need to make such spectacles (показы/pokazuha) at children's expense in general. After reading another article that states that Russian language schools would like to be more involved in the *Festival*, but cannot learn the repertoire of 35 songs in Latvian, several Latvian language comments noted that that they should do so only if they do not add songs in Russian, i.e. if they are part of a Latvian choir or fluent in Latvian. Similar ethnic divisions regarding public celebrations can be observed with the 9th of May Victory celebration for the Russians and March 16th Legionnaire Remembrance day for the Latvians, both of which refer to different interpretations of history. Similar phenomenon has been described by Katagoo (2009) regarding the moving of the Soviet Statue of Solder Alosha in Estonia.

³⁴ The contemporary version of the *Festival* is strongly correlated with the ethnic Latvians. Russian youth participate less (1 % to 20% in 2005 in Vidzeme region) and follow the *Festival* less (35%– 66% in 2005 in Vidzeme region) than the Latvian youth according to a survey (Tīsenkopfs 2008:33).

³⁵ According to the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, 25.8% of the population of Latvia was ethnically Russian in 2015 (by adding the Ukrainians and Belorussians, who are mostly Russian speaking this number increased to 31.8 %), while 61.6% were Latvian. 21.6% of the school age children attend schools in Russian, while it is unknown how many ethnically Russian children attend schools in Latvia. It is noteworthy that in 1989, the year that the last Soviet census was taken, there were 52% ethnic Latvians and 34% ethnic Russians recorded, a statistical knowledge that is often alluded to in the popular discourse on the endangered status of ethnic Latvians in Latvia. (CSB n.d.). Interestingly, the capital of Latvia, Rīga, where *the Festival* takes place, has an almost even percentage of Latvians and Russians (Russians: 39% and Latvians: 43%), with a very low participation rate of Russian youth in the Festival (Tīsenkopfs 2008).

school taught in the Latvian language.³⁶ The singing child's body thus becomes a place-holder in the imagining of a narrowly defined nation, forged by its singing past, present and future. This national temporality is mostly accessible to those who are willing to perform in Latvian, the only state language.³⁷ With its 14,000 singers, most younger than eighteen years of age, the Youth Song Festival is a mega-event that aims to teach children patriotic values, an appreciation for the aesthetics of singing, hard work and discipline. This tradition is a shared ritual among Latvian-speaking inhabitants of Latvia, rendering the choir a paradigm for Latvian nationhood. The Singing Latvian Child is expected to be both individually responsible for its body (including the skill of its singing and the straightness of its posture), but also part of a national performance of 14,000 persons, signifying a triumphant collective collaboration.

In addition, the Festival is organized close to the Midsummer Night (summer solstice), one of the most popular Latvian celebrations, which is traditionally associated with heteronormative mating. The Midsummer connection is usually referenced at the Festival in the choice of singing and dancing material that includes multi-part choral renderings of traditional Midsummer songs. The mating aspect of the Festival, as well as the portrayal of the children as the ensurers of the successful continuation of both the Festival tradition and the Latvian nation are illuminated by a poem, written from the position of an unborn child and performed at the 2018 Adult Festival. As a white stream of light in the shape of a dove floated in the night sky above the 15 thousand adult singers,

³⁶ Russian and Latvian speaking children attended schools in their respective languages during the Soviet period, with children from mixed-language families primarily opting for Russian back then. This has gone in reverse since the re-establishment of independence in 1991: more parents choose the schools in the only state language (Latvian). There has been a consistent campaign among some of the majority Latvian political parties since that time to ensure that publicly funded schooling takes place in the Latvian language only. The common line of argument supporting this move is that Russian language schools provide a breeding ground for pro-Russia indoctrination. The latest changes in the Education Law (2018) envision that by the academic year 2022/23 secondary school will take place in the Latvian language only with a provision that native language and literature of the minority (*mazākumtautība*) can also be learned (Izm.gov.lv 2018).

³⁷ There are certain events (such as the Minority Nation Concert) that display performances that are rooted in non-Latvian language/culture, but those are significantly smaller than the two main events.

the female MC of the Festival spoke the lines³⁸ of the fictional future child who anticipated being part of the Adult Choir in the future. The voice swept breathlessly over the 20 thousand audience members present to prophesize the first meeting of the child’s singing or dancing parents that very evening, and how they would sing or dance their way to a romantic relationship. This relationship would culminate not in a one-night stand, as per Midsummer night mythology (and frankly the Song Festival too), but in a responsible act of breeding and the birth of the protagonist in about five years when the next Adult Song Festival would be held.³⁹ The unborn child of the poem anticipates entering “this world so huge and foreign (svešs)” but is sure a song would serve as a map to the unknown. At the end of the poem, the child urges the audience to expect him or her: “In Latvia. At the Song Festival. Expect me, I will come” (Latvijas Nacionālais kultūras centrs, 146). The reproduction of the Latvian nation in this poem is clearly dependent firmly upon the Festival.

The singing child, the fruit of two heterosexual parent performers, acts as a key to the very existence of Latvia in the future. The unborn child’s voice coupled with the white dove above the choir is reminiscent (but also different, as there is no fetal image) of the superpersonhood which represents the “normative image of idealized citizenship” that Berlant describes for the United

³⁸ The poem is also published in the Book with all the Song festival songs (Latvijas Nacionālais kultūras centrs, 146).

³⁹ This choir I am not yet a part of, but I will be.
 I hear my father singing. I recognize his voice.
 Mommy, do you also hear it?
 You will start singing together right away
 Or maybe you will dance a waltz?
 Perhaps in a circle or in a garland
 Your steps will become happily weaved together.
 Tonight during the Song festival my parents will meet each other.

When will I be born?
 Perhaps in the year two thousand twenty-three?
 A song will be my map to this world so huge and foreign (svešs)
 I will walk to Gaismas pils [a popular song of symbolic meaning] from mommy’s lullaby (no māmiņas aijā-žūžū).
 In Latvia. At the Song Festival. Expect me, I will come. (Latvijas Nacionālais kultūras centrs, 146)

States (1997) as inspiring American politics while obscuring the reproductive woman.⁴⁰ A future singing or dancing child comes to represent the very same superpersonhood that Berlant describes and that is inscribed with publicly mediated, ethnic Latvian-specific and heteronormative understanding of idealized citizenship.

Under such circumstances, the children's real bodies falling during the Festival results in an emergency of national importance in the state of Latvia. During the period following the faintings, expertise regarding children's health became collectivized, based on the shared history of Festival participation that many ethnic Latvians had. This resulted in public performances of the national character that I call "Everybody is an Expert in the Song Festival." So, for example, in the TV appearance following the faintings, Minister of Health Guntis Belēvičs substantiated his views primarily not by his biomedical expertise as a trained doctor but by the fact that he himself had been a Festival participant as a child. During the program, the TV Show host Velta Puriņa and the Health Minister, both born within two decades after World War II, shared an affective solidarity based on the fact that both of them had once participated in the Festival:

Program Host: Is it possible that the concert program was inadequately put together?

Minister: Yes, mistakes add up, but, you know, I used to be a participant [Program Host with a laugh: Me too!]. I was a dancer, and the load (*slodze*) was bigger then. We are constantly aiming at lessening the load, but what I am talking about and I hope the Ministry of Education will listen to the Health Ministry's opinion, is that children need to be [physically] moved in a special way. We need the third sports lesson. We need health education. WHO recommends that children move [*kustās*] intensively for an hour each day, so that they would grow into a developed human and those children, who are not [physically made to move] moved (*iekustināti*) by age 10, they will not [physically] move at all. We need to think very, very seriously about children's health (RīgaTV24 2015).

⁴⁰ Berlant argues that American politics is geared towards obscuring the reliance on the reproductive woman by focusing on an anonymous fetus as the "normative image of ideal citizenship," "a kind of iconic superpersonhood" (Berlant 1997, 87).

While the Health Minister refers to the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines for exercise necessary for children, he also dwells on his own past involvement in the Festival. Both the minister and the TV host have reasonable cause to expect that what they have divulged regarding participation in the Festival is shared by many other ethnic Latvians. Expertise in this case was derived not from formal biomedical training, but rather from past participation in cyclical public rituals such as the Festival, enabling many to be experts on the faintings. In fact, similar opinions were quite popular on Latvian language online forums. For example, a comment posted on a popular online news website echoes the Minister by announcing: “Wimpy (vārga) is this generation!” This was a sentiment that I heard often following the Festival, and it was repeated by my interlocutors involved in monitoring the health of the present generation of young athletes. The possible spoiling of the children (*izlaišana*) was a concern that the family members of the body-intensive parents expressed.

The “everybody is an expert” attitude in combination with a publicly shared image of the physically active “farmer past” of the ethnic Latvians, is consistent with what Skultans (2007) has shown is ethnic Latvians’ utilization of the genre of testimony that concentrates on commonly known historic events as a basis for understanding their lives and illnesses. (Skultans 2007, 130).⁴¹ Regular participation in the Festival, according to this interpretation, made one hardy instead of wimpy. The Health Minister’s testimony also had a touch of the didactic, as his argument could be seen as a subtle reproach aimed at contemporary parents who were raising their children to be

⁴¹ What is more, even the medical professionals, similarly to Belēvičs, often utilized the same folk-theories of illness as in the case of neurasthenia, a medical condition that doctors acknowledged in conversation stemmed from the impossible living conditions. The genre of testimony, Skultans shows, in the case of Latvia consolidates common ethnic identity. She writes: “It is the national character in this genre that ensures survival.” (Skultans 2007, 118)

wimps, as well as the legal structures (such as the Law on Children’s Rights and the Ombudsman)⁴² that protect children’s rights. His most important message, however, was to the Ministry of Education, which had to allow a third sports lesson per week. The Ministry of Education, and hence the teachers, were expected to be devoted to the collective project of shaping the future of the Latvian nation, represented by a healthy and hardy Singing Child. The body of the singing Latvian child became simultaneously a site for heteronormative nation building and a site where social anxieties about the former play out.

II What the Numbers Imply: Children in Latvia

The 2015 Song Festival faintings provide only one of the instances where the condition of the children in Latvia is directly correlated to a national emergency. Dzenovska (2012) describes what she terms the current political climate in Latvia as “neoliberal nationalism” that, according to her, is concerned about the individual as a resource for production and ensures that public anxiety focuses on statistics, population and nation (Dzenovska 2012, 172-173). The fears center around the survival of the nation as a viable economic and national unit (see similar post-Cold war fears around children and the survival of children in Russia in Matza (2018)). Pre-adults⁴³ play a significant role in this discourse. As per widely-distributed statistics, Latvia had close to 2 million inhabitants (1,919,968) in 2019, out of whom 375,015 were no more than 17 years-old,

⁴² This law was passed in 1998 and is heavily steeped in the global tradition of human rights and such international agreements as the UN Convention on Children’s Rights. The law included a section on children’s responsibilities (to parents and the state), which is missing in the UN Convention that only describes the rights. The law also went further than the UN Convention in that it outlawed physical violence, which in the form of spanking, however, was still widely practiced as punishment for children ten years later (Mileiko 2007), a testament that top down approach might take a while to bear fruit. The Republic of Latvia Ombudsman Juris Jansons is known for his support of children’s rights and was also one of the harshest critics of the organizers of the Youth Festival. In the following interview he discusses the amendments to the administrative law that were inspired by the faintings (Rīta Panorāma 2016).

⁴³ See Lancy (2008); Montgomery (2009) for discussion of the complexity of the pre-adult category called “children.” I use the term “children” for pre-adults who are under 18 years old, as per Latvian legislature, but also use “preadults” sometimes to remind not to take the concept of children for granted.

hence considered children (CSB 2019). This in turn means that about 3% of all children (around 13,000) viewed the unfolding fainting events from the stage and 10% of all the children (and about 20% of all the school children) participated in the Festival (37,890).

Statistically speaking, the size of the population of Latvia has been steadily shrinking since the 1990s, when upon the dissolution of the USSR it was 2.67 million (Providus 2005). Out-migration (especially after Latvia's accession to the European Union in 2004) and the oft-touted fact that for most of this time period more people in Latvia died than were born, create a background against which children in Latvia are discursively framed as a way for a small, about-to-die-out nation to survive and have a future. Furthermore, the Latvian countryside (*lauki*), that is both an actual administrative geographic space (often with arbitrary and shifting boundaries) and a mythical representation of the ethnic Latvians' past, is known to be steadily emptying (Dzenovska 2012). What is more, while there has been a slight increase in the overall number of children since 2013, there has been a marked statistical decrease of the number of children in rural areas, with more and more schools closing down in the country-side.⁴⁴ Latvian pre-adults tend to live closer to big cities and most notably in the capital Rīga and its suburbs.⁴⁵ Yet, the mythical importance of country-living⁴⁶ (including children's farm work or just roaming around) surfaces again and again in Latvian childhood discourse.

⁴⁴ An article of a daily newspaper "Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze" laments over a closure of yet another small country-side school in Gulbene municipality with the following title: "The small country-side schools continue going extinct. The heartbeat of Stāmeriena school stops beating." The article mentions that over the last 20 years, 300 schools have been closed with an implication that most of them have been in the country-side, where consolidation or reorganization is undertaken because of the small school sized and dwindling number of students in schools (NRA 2019).

⁴⁵ 31% of all the residents in Mārupe municipality that borders Rīga are children, while pre-adults in Latvia make up 18.7% of the population (Dambe, 2019). The number of inhabitants has grown in the same municipality by 26 % from 2014 - 2018 and the children has grown the most - from 663 in 2000 to 2929 in 2019 (Kuzmina 2019).

⁴⁶ There are several famous literary works based in the writer's own childhood experiences in the country-side Latvia of the 19th and early 20th centuries that were part of the Latvian language education program when I was growing up in the 1980s that are still taught today. The nostalgic and poetic style of these works is celebrated by rewarding students who write in such way in national composition competitions today. For example, a recent story competition "My Childhood" awarded 3 first prizes in various age groups to compositions that mused nostalgically about country-living.

The juxtaposition between urban and technologically-mediated childhoods of many Latvian children and rural idealized childhoods is central to anxieties surrounding the “wimpiness” of contemporary Latvian youth. Thus, in a TV appearance following the faintings, Minister of Health Guntis Belēvičs validated a popular opinion that it was the poor condition of the singing children’s health that was to blame for the faintings, because the dancers, who were used to “physical load (slodze)” did not faint en masse. The lack of physical conditioning had caused some of the singers to faint, he concluded.⁴⁷ Later in the same interview, Belēvičs reminisced about having worked on a farm over the summers as a child when, what he termed “child labor”⁴⁸ was still allowed, suggesting that this labor had ensured his good physical condition at the Festival. The concerns over the lack of “physical load,” as heard in this interview, or “outdoor exercise,” as some of the online comments suggested, linked the current dismal state of contemporary children to what was perceived as an altered (vis-à-vis the farmer past) present of the Latvians today. One such comment blamed technologies while commenting on the poor condition of the fainters: “Computers, computers, and once again computers!!! How much time does a child spend outdoors on a daily basis?” The commenter further elaborated about this perceived abnormality: “[They are] listening to headphones very loudly, the brains are out of norm! We have ourselves weakened our children and these are the consequences. They are not hardy (nenorūdīti)!!!!” (A comment by a poster named “lily.”) Being physically hardy, which can be achieved through toughening of the body, as a value that is simultaneously desired and resisted by those taking care of children or claiming an expertise

⁴⁷ He used the opportunity to point the finger towards the Ministry of Education that, according to him, had been unresponsive to the Health Ministry’s efforts to introduce the third sport lesson (in addition to the two 40 minute lessons per week currently) to the public school lesson plan. He also avowed to invest in the presence of a school nurse, who would “educate” the other teachers and students about how to be healthy, which in Belēvičs’ opinion, meant “eating well” (breakfast, lunch, dinner, preferably warm food, and no candy) and exercising.

⁴⁸ Accusations towards *the Festival* organizers of exploiting child labor for profit were very common among the internet comments that I read, especially in Russian. The Latvians tended to blame the catering companies that were providing the centralized food for appropriating part of the funds and as a result providing food of insufficient quality.

in child-rearing or pediatric health, is a recurring theme where raising children is concerned in Latvia. Those who resist what they perceive as old-fashioned ideas about toughening, for example, my body-intensive parent interlocutors, usually would talk about the emotional well-being of their children. I will explore the ideas around attachment theory and toughening in Chapter 2.

In the online comment above, digitalization and technological advances are perceived as threats. Those are, however, the very same markers of development, on which the Baltic states, especially neighboring Estonia (Weekes 2018), are building much of their national identity. What sort of modernity then does Latvia aspire to and what other “elsewhere” does it reference? The EU, or at the very least the other two Baltic states of Lithuania and Estonia, are eagerly eyed as a comparison for almost any statistical publication (often published simultaneously in English and Latvian). The improvements can be evaluated and measured within the logics of statistics,⁴⁹ which can both predict the low fertility rate that would bring about the demise of the nation and pin-point its place on the world map by comparison to other countries. For example, the yearly statistical report on the number of children in Latvia cited earlier uses the EU as a constant referent in the statistical narrative. The report emphasizes that children in Latvia make up 18.7% of the population, which, it notes, is close to the EU average.⁵⁰

The positive comparisons, for example, the number of children with internet accessibility (98.1% of households with children have internet-access⁵¹ or high literacy, math and language-

⁴⁹ For an overview of the assumptions of neutrality of metrics (transcending political agendas and the nation-state) see Adams (2016).

⁵⁰ In 2018, children aged 17 and younger accounted for 18.5% of the population of Latvia (EU average – 18.7 %). The largest share of children was recorded in Ireland (24.8 %), while the smallest in Italy (16.2%) and Germany (16.4%). The largest share of children in the Baltic states was registered in Estonia (19.1%) and the smallest in Lithuania (17.9 %).

⁵¹ “The share of Latvian households having access to the Internet has increased over the past years. In 2018, 81.6% of households had access to the Internet, compared to 59.8 % in 2010. Internet access is more common in households with children – 98.1% of households with children and 76.4% of households without children had access to the Internet in 2018” (CSB 2019). The main statistical publication on children also reports that “[i]n 2018, 98.6% of young people

competency levels),⁵² promote Latvia's image as a modern, digitized and forward-looking nation. The desirable position in the world is similar to that of Estonia, which is usually more recognized globally in connection to their technological prowess and hence an object of both Latvians' envy and admiration (Aivare 2009).⁵³ Estonians are also sometimes perceived as having "more spine" vis-a-vis their relations to Russia. For example, Aivare (2009) cites in her research a Latvian member of parliament, Ainārs Latkovskis, speaking about Latvians' and Estonians' mutual perceptions of each other: "Estonia has spine and we must express support. Next to Estonia we look very weak." (Aivare 2009, 73). The metrics in this context become a way to publicly chart the course of Latvia's public health - to be as good or better than Estonia.⁵⁴ The negative pediatric health statistics are accompanied by public campaigns to reverse the trend. Such progress is linear (Verdery 2007) and oriented towards belonging to the "civilized" and European (and Nordic in the case of Estonia) world. Under the seemingly unemotional language of metrics, these differences relay Latvians' aspirations on the world stage.

One such negative metric is the incidence of traumatic injuries among children, which ranks as the number 1 cause of death or illness among children less than 5 years old, and places

(aged 16–24) used internet on regular basis (at least once a week), which is almost equal to the European Union (EU) average – 97 %" and adds: " In Latvia, just like in the EU, Internet the most often is used to access social networks (94.2% in Latvia in comparison to 90% in the EU), use e-mail (87.8% to 89%, respectively) and watch video content from sharing services (87.3 % to 87 %, respectively)" (CSB 2019).

⁵² The same Report (CSB 2019) announces: "Literacy skills of Latvian pupils were slightly above the average of the countries of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Latest available data shows that in 2015 only 10.5 % of pupils aged 15 were not able to pass reading, mathematics and science tests of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD average – 13 %). The share of such children in Bulgaria constituted 29.6 %, while in China and Estonia only 4.5 % and 4.7 %. In 2017, one Latvian pupil on average was learning 1.7 foreign languages, which is one of the highest indicators in the EU. Higher indicators were recorded only in Luxembourg (2.4), Finland (2.2), Romania (2) and France (1.8)" (110).

⁵³ Aivare (2009) documents Latvian stereotypes about Estonians, as well as public discourse around the preferential treatment that Estonia has received from the EU in the 1990s. She argues that the stereotypes that Latvians hold about Estonians are stronger and more distinct than those of Estonians about Latvians and explains this with the perception of hierarchy vis-à-vis Estonia (Aivare 2009, 100). Estonia is seen by Latvians as more forward-looking, rational and developed, thus, more of an object of Latvians' envious desires and also the butt of stereotype-loaded jokes. "The nation that is looking up to the other, will have more stereotypes" (Aivare 2009, 100).

⁵⁴ During the early period of COVID-19 pandemic there were a few articles comparing the numbers that hinted that Latvia was doing better than Estonia and Lithuania.

Latvia in the worst standing in the EU in this regard. Similar to the initial cancelation of the 2015 Song Festival parade for “safety” reasons and consistent with the Children’s Rights Model interpretation of adult responsibilities towards children, the public campaign to lessen traumatic injuries in Latvia is geared towards “adhering to safety principles” as outlined in the Mother and Child Health Plan 2018-2020 (Likumi.lv 2018). As most of the traumas happen at home, the government materials blame “insufficient child-care” (Likumi.lv 2018) by parents or their lack of responsibility according to the Health Ministry material.⁵⁵ In such documents the language emphasizes continuous education of new parents about prophylaxis for traumatic injury, thus assigning responsibility to the them and not, for example, the government programs that cannot insure sufficient early child-care.⁵⁶ Ensuring the “safety” of children as a way to counter the dismal statistics for death or illness among children less than 5 years old, where Latvia ranks at the bottom of the EU, becomes a desirable goal that would bring Latvia closer to Europe. Here as in the case of the fainting Youth Song Festival singers, the discourse centers on the tensions around parental responsibility and the importance of security and safety (both terms translate into the Latvian “drošība”) for children.

While striving to ascertain Latvians’ place within Europe, positive statistics sometimes overlap with the negative. For instance, access to the internet and digital technologies also allows for cyber-bullying and bullying in general, which, in turn, is a negative marker where Latvia ranks

⁵⁵ The pamphlet states: “Children are our biggest value, but according to statistical data, Latvia has a high level of childhood traumatism, the cause of which is insecure environment and lack of parental responsibility (VM n.d.).

⁵⁶ There is very little municipality-provided affordable day-care for children under 3 years of age, however, many municipalities partially cover private day-care if they cannot provide it starting with age of a year and a half when the paid child-care leave ends.

number 1 in reported bullying among the 37 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.⁵⁷ There are other negative pediatric health related statistics. For example, life expectancy at birth in Latvia was reported to be the second lowest in the EU in 2017 (74.9 years), while that among boys (69.8 years) was reportedly the lowest in the EU.⁵⁸ Without comparison either to other countries or other years, some metrics carry little meaning, for example, these statistical data: “in 2017 90.9% of the households assessed health of their children (aged 15 and younger) as good or very good, 8% described it as fair, and only 1.2% as bad”⁵⁹ does not by itself contextualize pediatric health in Latvia.

Then again, there are some health issues that, even though they are captured by some statistics, are not prioritized in Latvia. In my experience, such issues are coded into the “mental and behavioral disorders category” in the above-mentioned report, which states:

Since 2010, the number of in-patient children and their length of stay in hospital have dropped...The largest share of all hospitalized children was taken to the hospital because of infections (13.6%), followed by injury, poisoning and other consequences of external causes (8.5%), as well as diseases of the digestive system (8%). The largest share of adolescents was hospitalized due to diseases of the digestive system (13.7%), injury, poisoning and other consequences of external causes (13.2%), mental and behavioral disorders (12%), as well as diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue (10.1%) (CSB 2019, 35).

⁵⁷ Latest available data shows that in 2015 Latvia had the largest share (30.6 %) of pupils aged 15–16 being bullied at school at least few times a month among all OECD countries. The lowest share of such children was recorded in the Netherlands – 9.3 %. Latvia also has one of the greatest number of children killed in road traffic accidents. (CSB 2019)

⁵⁸ The same report notes that “children mortality, including infant mortality, is reducing every year. In 2018, 61 children in Latvia died during the first year of life. There were 3.2 deaths per 1 000 live births, which is the lowest infant mortality rate recorded since the registration of the indicator was started.” The report continues: “Mortality of children aged 17 and younger is declining as well – from 6.1 deaths per 10 000 children of the respective age in 2010 to 3.4 deaths in 2018.”

⁵⁹ Breakdown by age shows that the largest share of high health ratings – good or very good – among children aged 3 and younger – 94.2%, while the lowest share among adolescents aged 11–15 –only 87.4% adolescents health has been assessed as good or very good. Out of the children aged 15 and younger, 87.9% did not have health problems limiting them in activities most children OF their age do because of health problems (for at least the last six months). Moreover, the share among children aged 3 and younger accounted for 91.3%, and among children aged 11–15 for 85.1%. (CSB 2019, 34).

This wording obscures the fact that “external causes” include youth suicides, which is the leading cause of death among 15 – 19 year-olds in Latvia, Latvia being among EU countries with high youth suicides rates (WHO 2012).⁶⁰ Despite “mental and behavioral disorders” as a category accounting for 12% of hospitalizations, adolescents who were undergoing prophylactic care at the family practitioner’s office were more often diagnosed with varied posture problems (dažādi stājas traucējumi (~15%) or “weak eyesight” (~13%) not mental disorders.⁶¹

These conditions are expected to be remediated by a regimen that emphasizes physical activity, medical massage or toughening of the body and bears similarity to the post-Song Festival response to the faintings, while “mental disorders” do not have such a well-developed therapy protocol. While Health ministry policy (Likumi.lv 2018) faults the “lifestyle of limited movement” (mazkustīgs dzīves veids) for eyesight and posture problems, the same is not mentioned as a contributing factor to mental health issues. Combatting the “sedentary lifestyle”⁶² is consistent with new health policies implemented in the EU, which postulate that “not moving is the new smoking” (Sports medicine congress, April 2018), thus once more reaffirming EU-centric aspirations of the Latvian public health sector. What is more, the sedentary and unhealthy child is now feared to be living in the most sacred of geographic locations of Latvia - the countryside - as research links a sedentary lifestyle (SPKC 2016) and childhood obesity (Silova 2018, 232) with

⁶⁰ This information can be found in this WHO e-journal (SPKC 2012), which assures that “Latvia is not the only country where intentional self-harming is the number 1 cause of death in this age group and notes that the same situation can be observed in the UK, Germany, Netherlands, Czechia, Sweden, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, Ireland and Lithuania. The metric (number of suicides per 100,000 inhabitants in the age group (15-19)) varies widely but the 7.5 (2011) and 7.7 (2013) has been Latvia’s rate lately and it is close to South Korea in 2012 – 7.7 (UNICEF 2017).

⁶¹ Both of these markers reportedly have a tendency to increase as the children got older and were diagnosed as early as age seven when the mandatory physical exam was undertaken before joining the first grade. This the report spends time exploring, leaving the mental issues almost untouched.

⁶² Such lifestyle is supposed to include extended time spent in front of the computer or the TV. Several other reports, for example, the Children’s Anthropometric Measurements Report (2015/2016), express concern about children’s “sedentary lifestyle” (sēdošais dzīves veids), i.e., spending more than two hours per day sitting while doing homework or reading a book and/or more than two hours using electronic devices

country living. The Latvian countryside (*lauki*), like choral singing, is part of the national imagination of the ideal Latvian childhood (Silova 2018), which is threatened. The normative Latvian child as an object of attention for public health and of proper parenting is entangled within a network of post-Cold War ideologies of temporality, which allocate particular importance to history (Katagoo 2007; Verdery 1996; Dzenovska 2018) as a source for future planning. What kind of considerations of risk shape the Latvian vision of normative childhood?

III The Endangered Latvian Singing Child: Temporality of Healthy Children as Citizens

While nation-states translate a threat to their citizen-children into a threat to their national futures as in the case of the Latvian Song Festival faintings, it is increasingly clear that a globally at-risk child, one not contained within state borders and one that can be measured in comparative numbers, is also being crafted through the politics of childhood uncertainty. The automatic coupling of futurity with childhood exemplified by an imaginary Figure of the Child, which drives the national and global political agenda, has been critiqued by feminist and queer scholars and anthropologists alike (Berlant 1997; Edelman 2004; Malkki 2010). This child is both an active participant and shaper of his or her future (Greta Thunberg comes to mind) and in need of adult protection because of the precarity of their present situation. Here, I specifically follow Hartog (2015) and Guyer (2007), who have argued that the mid-20th century fascination with the future has been lately replaced by concentration on the present moment and a very distant future. Contrary to the early 20th century utopian approach, this distant future is to be reached in an individualized rather than collective manner.⁶³ This is consistent with the individualized fashion in which children's bodies

⁶³ Greta Thunberg with her calls for a universal strike in the face of the ever-growing climate change danger might present a turning point towards collective thinking, but this occurrence does not change the fact that since the end of

have been increasingly treated in such areas as biomedical risk consumption (Kaufman 2010; Reich 2014). Children's rights discourse emphasizes each individual child's right to protection from harm, including childhood traumas that Latvian children statistically experience more than others in the EU. Parents are called upon to ensure their children's individual safety. Yet, adults themselves might not feel that secure about the future, no matter how much they manage the present. As the 2015 Song Festival faintings reveal, there are competing national and global pressures on Latvian children to simultaneously exercise their rights as children to safety and a carefree life, as well as fulfill their duty as bearers of the future of the Latvian singing nation. Thus, parents in Latvia raise their children against the backdrop of both the fears about national survival and general uncertainty about their children's future in a global world.

Kārlis, a father of three girls and a school teacher, with whom I talked as part of the body-intensive parenting group, tells me that he would like to raise children who are “capable of orienting themselves in the world, while being based in love, being able to differentiate good from bad.” He then reflects on the sense of insecurity about the world that his three daughters will live in:

We are in situations now that neither we, nor our parents could imagine ten, twenty years ago, so we don't know what challenges they will have, but feeling secure in who you are, the sense, that you know how to value things (*spēja izvērtēt lietas*), regardless whether you live in America or China, or who knows where, everything is possible, regardless whether life will be long or short, we are teaching the value of art, the country side, city environment, and hopefully that will help one day to make decisions, give a point of positive reference.

Here, overall global insecurity demands action on the parents' part to teach their children to be “secure in who they are,” and there is no time like the present to invest in achieving this. Later in our conversation, Kārlis talks about physical contact as one such way of expressing his love for his daughters and endowing them with a sense of security about who they are. I will explore this

the Cold War (which coincided with massive advancement in technological development) futures have been approached in an individually tailored fashion.

idea in depth in Chapter 2. The ideal future human that body-intensive parents envision is confident, self-reliant, and happy, they tell me, while weaving together the Latvian past and the future in ways that index Latvia's place in the world.

While I did not specifically ask my Latvian-speaking body-centered interlocutors about the Youth Song and Dance Festival, I have no reason to expect that their children would be more or less likely to participate than the average (Latvian-speaking) child. Prior to its cancellation due to COVID-19, Kārlis's daughters, for example, were planning to take part in the 2020 Youth Song and Dance Festival if they passed the appropriate competitions. His wife Liene told me that she was not concerned about the faintings, because she relied on her daughters awareness of their physical needs (*savu fizisko vajadzību apzināšanās*), e.g. tiredness or thirst.⁶⁴ Having raised a child who was aware of their own body, something that I will dwell upon in more detail in Chapter 2, in this case alleviated concerns over the potential fragility of Latvian children's health.

In terms of fears of national survival and in the context of the 2015 Festival faintings, I propose that an Endangered Latvian Singing Child emerges and competes for its place within the current global temporal frameworks. The response to the mass fainting of the children at the Festival initially seems to be the classic continuation of the story that emphasizes childhood medicalization (Foucault 2014) and individualization of child-rearing (Fass 2016; Reich 2014; Warner 2004), including management of children's health through selective and individual-child

⁶⁴ Considering how dramatic the faintings were, it was surprising to me that the media did not dwell upon these events in the following five years prior to the next Festival that was planned for the summer of 2020. Prior to its cancellation due to COVID-19, there was one article (Runce 2019) that concentrated on the changes made to the program (the final concert was to be no longer than 2 hours), rehearsal schedule (there would be an extra rehearsal day, so the daily rehearsals would be shorter) and the venue (which had been re-build to include up to 13,000 singers instead of the previous 6,000-8,000) of the Festival. The scope of reconstruction of the amphiteater was impressive, and one was left with an impression that even though the faintings did not continue to be sensationalized in the media, they greatly affected the way the next Festival was planned.

oriented risk-consumption (Kaufman 2010). The Education Ministry reacts immediately by canceling the much-awaited parade the morning after and offering the security of the children as the reason for doing so. A commission seeking a biomedical explanation for the faintings is also immediately set up. Over the following year, some general measures aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle among school age children were implemented by the Health Ministry, for example, adding a third physical education lesson every week in some schools. The 2020 Youth Song Festival was cancelled due to COVID-19, therefore it was impossible to evaluate the measures put in place to ensure that such faintings do not happen again, but during the Adult Festival in 2018 more emphasis than ever before was placed on the individual performers' health conditions, with veiled allusions to the Youth Festival.

As the opening vignette reveals, however, in 2015 the parade took place unofficially with an overwhelming participation rate of 80%, including attendance by the President of the country. The Minister of Education was asked to resign because of this scandal but did not. The Commission assembled by the Ministry of Education⁶⁵ later ruled that there was no one biomedical reason, such as food-poisoning or over-heating or hypothermia (as it actually had gotten quite cold towards the evening), that accounted for the faintings. The report was narrated by journalists who blamed the children's lack of a stringent "daily regimen" (*dienas režīms*) and lack of a good "feeding regimen" (*uztura režīms*), as well as the sudden dramatic drop in temperature towards the evening, insufficient standing space and dehydration.⁶⁶ The commission's work was followed up by a day-

⁶⁵ A Commission consisting of twelve professionals (1/3 of whom represented biomedical organizations, but not Ministry of Health) was assembled immediately following the *Festival* by the Ministry of Education, which concluded that the faintings were caused by multiplicity of reasons, none of which were the more far-reaching of the speculations such as the oxygen-less pockets on the stage or chemical poisoning. The final report by the commission stated that 184 children had been tended that evening by the emergency services (IZM 2015).

⁶⁶ Good food is defined as a hot lunch, a commonly shared perception, as opposed to "sausās pakas" that supposedly contained cold food such as sandwiches (Klūga 2015). The title of this article announced that next time there might be half less singers because it was not safe for so many to be on the stage. In January 2020, there were media reports

long conference held at a venue with historic ties to the 19th century national movement⁶⁷ and focused on the development of the Festival and its future. The parents who had been voicing their dissatisfaction with the management of the Festival on social media were not represented at the conference. The organizers pronounced the children to be the biggest riches (*bagātība*) of the Festival and in need of protection. At the same time, children were advised to learn the sense of responsibility for their own health and to free themselves from the clutches of the parents, who kept them on a very “tight leash.”⁶⁸ This sentiment once again gestures towards the tensions that are perceived to exist between the parental (over)care and the interests of the singing Latvian nation.

In an opening address to the conference, read out by her assistant, the Minister of Education defined tradition as a responsibility to the previous generations in a way that is consistent with Katherine Verdery’s (1996) notion of cyclical temporality. She theorized post-Soviet history as

that the stage was completely rebuilt to hold 13,000 instead of 8,000 as before (Runce 2019). The same article announced that the food situation had not been resolved yet. There was no follow-up as the Festival was postponed at a relatively late stage (March 2020) due to COVID-19. Considering the gravity of the situation (and all the other summer events cancelled), this was widely accepted as the right solution.

⁶⁷ The Conference took place about four months after the faintings (on November 6th, 2015) on a stage of a building historically associated with the Latvian national movement of the 19th century. It was supposed to be open to everybody, but the audience seemed to mostly consist of (female) singing and dancing teachers and minor civil servants. The audience was asked not to pose questions during the first part (the presentations) of the conference, but rather write them down and hand them to the organizers. The female MC was dressed in a fashion appropriate for a concert announcer and the whole conference had an aura and gravity of a performance. There were mostly female presenters in the first part of the conference (with an exception of a media specialist who reported on the use of social media, the rector of Rīga Stradins University (a university with an influential medical program) who talked about what the singing festival means to him, but also mentioned that fainting was a physiological and not a pathological occurrence, the head conductor of the main concert and another well-known conductor). It ended with a two hour long discussion with seven people on the stage (two of them male), MCed by a popular male journalist. No written questions were answered, but the discussants focused on the lessons learned and setting tasks for the future. Several questions were taken from the audience. The conference was streamed live and could still be accessed on youtube in August 2020 (*Skolu jaunatnes dziesmu un deju svētki 2015*).

⁶⁸ The parents, who were not officially represented at the Conference, were blamed for interfering with the proceedings, constantly “fixing their children” and not teaching them responsibility for themselves. The parents were also urged to lend their professional knowledge (but only if it was highly-specialized such as medical doctor) as volunteers to ensure the “security” of the participants in a way that would substantiate emphasis on increased medicalization of expertise.

being of either linear or cyclical temporality. The linear temporality views the future as an expression of individual strife “wrapped up more with its economic viability than its demography” (Verdery 1996, 123) much in line with the current biomedical interpretations of time. The cyclical temporality has a more collective character and is governed by “the life-cycle metaphor of birth, growth, decay, and death” (Verdery 1996, 122). According to this letter, the Latvian child singers are tied to the past and the previous generations of Latvians through a sense of responsibility they should feel, a responsibility to ensure that they perpetuate the cyclical tradition of the Festival.

The letter then juxtaposed this past-oriented interpretation to the adult responsibility to children in the present in a manner that is characteristic of children’s rights discourse where children are emotionally priceless, to use Zelizer’s (1994) well-known term, but economically useless. Their present economical uselessness (which some of the parents and other children’s rights activists contested, considering that the sold-out concerts grossed over 200 thousand euros over the course of the Festival) and requirement for present protection, however, does not preclude their future economic potential, which would be more consistent with Verdery’s linear take on temporality. In the end, the tradition-oriented nature of the Festival touted at the conference ensured that it could be interpreted as a continuation of a national memory project. The children could be treated as simultaneously linked to the past through their responsibility to the previous generations of Latvians and to the future through their potential as future citizens of the nation. This could be achieved by adopting what I called earlier the “everybody is an expert in the Song Festival” attitude towards the faintings.

Similar to the Minister of Health views cited earlier in the Chapter, some online commenters blamed the faintings on contemporary living conditions, including fast-food consumption and over-use of digital technologies. One such online commenter mused: “In reality both adults and

children these days are real wimps (vārguļi). A wind blew, did not have a hamburger to eat, so go ahead and faint. Historical Song festival is for a strong nation (tauta) and not INTERNETWIMPS “(internetvārguļi” capitalized).”⁶⁹ Here, as in the opinion cited earlier in the Chapter on the use of computers, outside influences (hamburgers are strongly associated with the United States) are seen as threats to the Latvian nation. On the other hand, there were many (often the parents of the singing and dancing children) who were terrified by the faintings. A person commenting online under the nickname “Līze” asked if children should be subjected to such long and hard programs without a rest and promised that her own children would never again go to these forced-labor camps (katorga) instead of enjoying their summer holidays. The reply to Līze’s comment is fairly typical of the attitudes I have encountered in Latvia regarding the strenuous manner in which the Song Festival is conducted:

Līze, and what are they going to enjoy? That they have come together to send text messages? If there are no rehearsals, there is no concert. And a simple program is a direct route to the Estonian Song Festival – beer drinking and unison singing as if by the midsummer night fire. It’s sad that we have such fragile (trausli) and lame (tizli) children who are not able to overcome the smallest difficulties... our state stems from the Song Festival and with the Song Festival it will end its existence. Do you think that these milksops (nūģīši) who have fainted (gosh, have they never had to face difficulties in their lives) would ever lift even a finger if the state or the nation (tauta) were threatened... This is pathetic! (švaki vai)”

Even though I did not often encounter this sense of threat to national security posed by the perceived fragile state of the fainting children, there are certainly clear links to be drawn between the importance of continuing the Song Festival tradition and the survival of the Latvian nation in this discourse as a whole. Here the Estonian festival stands out for its lack of serious effort – drinking beer and singing in unison as during the midsummer night bonfire. While participating in the Adult

⁶⁹ The internet comments here and further from an online article published on the popular delfi.lv site (Delfi.lv 2015).

Festival in 2018, I heard similar comparisons several times: the Estonians, according to this interpretation, cared less about how they looked on stage (they could for example, wear baseball caps instead of a national headdresses at the final concert) and sang songs that were less complex (the singing in unison that's mentioned in the above comment instead of eight separate vocal parts). I interpret such comments as alluding to the perceived superiority of the Latvian singing tradition, especially in light of perceptions that Estonia outperforms Latvia on many other fronts as I have touched upon in Section II of this chapter.

There are generational nuances in how the threat of raising milksops or spoiled children leads to the potentially desirable toughening or hardening of children in Latvia, which I will investigate more thoroughly in Chapter 2. I do not, however, make a claim that in the case of the Song Festival, the tensions run strictly along generational lines. The cyclical temporality in a patriotic upbringing and the utilization of tradition and memory as guiding factors in child-rearing, are not limited to the older generation in Latvia. For example, even though my body-intensive interlocutors (who could be considered representatives of the younger generation) were parenting differently from the previous generation, they, like the Health Minister after the faintings, often evoked the image of the countryside as the idyllic environment where truly healthy children could be raised. Several city-dwellers among my body-intensive interlocutors spent their summers at former farm-houses in the countryside, which they had either purchased or had in the family possession.

Silova (2018) points out that “[t]he construction of the Latvian child has been historically linked to the rural countryside”(219). Ilona (37), who grew up in the countryside (lauki) but now resides in the capital, moved to her mother's village for part of her maternity leave (one and a half years). She recalls: “At one point, I was walking in Rīga with a stroller, and I understood that it is

terrible. We lived in the very center! That's insane! All she [her daughter] sees are the shop-windows and dusty streets!" Ilona goes on to recall her daughter walking around a park (Vērmanes dārzs) and feeling like everything stinks. The city with its dirt and dog poop seems particularly prohibitive to Ilona: "All these dogs! I thought she would not be able to crawl on the grass, I longed to let her out in the grass, or that she could go and eat berries from bushes." Eating berries directly from the source and crawling in the grass are imagery that is recognizable among my body-intensive interlocutors. Ilona says that enacting this longing was "exactly how we spent the whole summer and only returned to Rīga in January when I needed to start work." Ilona also tells me that she is constantly living while longing for the countryside even though she and her daughter try to live in harmony with the natural rhythm while in the city as well.

Silova (2008) notes that in the Latvian national imagination the rural combined with an image of unspoiled nature serves as a building block for national awareness (220). By tracing the genealogy of Latvian literary tradition, Silova further demonstrates that children play an important role in how this relationship to the countryside and "nature" was imagined before and during the Soviet period. The interwar period textbooks openly glorified the countryside, and, while modernization and urbanization were frequently pictured in textbooks of the Soviet period, there was always a romanticized image that embodied the "primordial closeness to nature" next to such pictures (227). The countryside, Silova shows, did not disappear in the Soviet texts, but was redefined in ways that simultaneously emphasized the pre-Soviet and the Soviet relationship to the countryside and nature. Such depiction served as "a foundation for imagining the future of the Latvian child and nation as linked to a particular Latvian (national) place." (228). What is more, the post-Cold war textbooks and other literature (for example, parenting magazines), Silova argues, bring back the deliberate coupling of "childhood, nature and nation" with an abandon (232) elevating

the mythical importance of the countryside to new heights, especially in response to the ever present sense of the emptying of the countryside (Dzenovska 2012; Dzenovska and Aistara 2014) that I touched upon the beginning of this chapter.

Among my body-centered interlocutors, the love of countryside can also be a conviction that grows stronger with age (and also coincides with the increased romanticization of the countryside of the post-Cold War era). Thus Ivars (51) who grew up in Rīga, but spent his summers in the countryside regrets that his children from his first marriage did not grow up loving the countryside. This he explains by the fact that he never took them there. Now he has purchased his own farm-house, where the family spends every weekend and the whole of summer, which he considers essential for his eight year-old son's health and national belonging. "Countryside (lauki) is a sacred matter for Latvians." He adds that he is perplexed by the current tendency to inhabit suburbs like in the West: "To take a mortgage and live in the suburbs, where a village is built in a former swamp and where you have a neighbor right behind the fence, I have never understood that. When you can live and breathe deeply (pilnu krūti)." Ilona later adds that she likes countryside also because there she can let her daughter out on her own because of the supportive community. The city for her is a space where there is too much care (pāraprūpe): "What happens in playgrounds – don't climb there, you will fall down, don't do this, don't run, you will get dirty. Come on! Let the children be free (Komon - dodiet bērnam brīvu vaļu!").

Ilona links the inability of a six-year old to be ready for school to the faulty parenting. Her comment is meant for the ongoing debate on lowering the mandatory school age from seven to six years of age, which regularly resurfaces in Latvian public discourse. There is pressure from the government to do so, because as Catlaks, a civil servant responsible for educational content argues on a Public TV News: "We lose a lot, when we do not teach children this age, because research

shows that it is this age exactly when children gain knowledge the fastest” (Nakts ziņas 2018). The unnamed research to which he is referring is most likely from other so-called “developed countries” such as the United Kingdom or France, where children are known to start school earlier. In a way that once again indexes Latvia’s aspirations to varied alliances in the world, the opponents of this move usually refer to Finland where the school age is the same or older than in Latvia and where children are perceived to fare well on comparative measures of international education.

The crux of this debate though centers on the perception of maturity, that Ilona reflected on earlier in the chapter and the best ways to achieve it. How intensive should formal schooling be? When should parents back off? The considerations of temporal “downward age compression” (Lassonde 2012) by which children are increasingly expected to mature (for example, to begin formal schooling) at an earlier and easier age underlie these debates that center on questions of the hardiness, health and economic viability of Latvian children and their future potential as adults. Are they going to be at a global professional disadvantage if they do not start first grade at the age of 6 like other European children do? Will they be able to develop the necessary singing and dancing skills to carry on the Song and Dance Festival tradition?

A related article is accompanied by an online discussion about the extension of the school year for quality of education reasons, in which a commenter blames the emphasis schools place on singing and dancing (along with other, what she calls, “non-essential” subjects) for the lack of time on what they term “serious subjects”: “Try to take away the hyper-important singing, drawing and dancing, you will see the devil (redzēsiet velnu). Those should be afterschool education (interēšu izglītība) that should not be part of the schedule, nor should it be graded.” The comment ends by blaming the Latvian system for this: “If you only kept SERIOUS classes in the schedule, you will for sure economize in terms of the length of the semester, but no, NOT IN LATVIA.” (ilze) To

which there is a reply: “Sorry, but physical movement needs to be forced upon students at least in the primary school. That is not “afterschool education” (“interesu izglitiba”) but a medical necessity. (Delfi.lv 2018). Viewing physical movement (including folk-dancing) as a medical necessity is not particularly unique to Latvia (recall the EU-wide slogan “Not moving is the new smoking!). However, as in the case of the fainting singers in 2015, the anxiety around not moving is that it would make pre-adults wimpier and less hardy. Professional sports schools are of a similar opinion, citing the worsening “overall physical readiness” as one of the main threats to their work.⁷⁰ This opinion was echoed by many of my interlocutors in the health program for young athletes, and I will explore these ideas in Chapter 3. In order to address these shortcomings, there are new movements such as “whole class exercises” (sporto visa klase), an initiative of the Olympic committee, that have been instituted, but these are only accessible in cities with larger class sizes (greater than 20).

The opposite of the maturity-quickening “downward age compression” according to Lassonde (2012) is the “upward age compression” which I interpret as the extension of time that is allocated for pre-adults to “be children,” a temporal shift that emphasizes delay over acceleration. It is consistent with what Stockton (2012) has named the “fetishization of delay,” “growing sideways” and “queering of the child” that has come into existence in the US over the 20th century and is certainly also part of the childhood debate in Latvia. According to Stockton (2013), this normative child is expected to be on a linear trajectory that consists of marriage and work, that is,

⁷⁰ For example, one such school in an assessment document names several weakness in their work: 1) Lack of coaching space for the winter period (including inappropriate timing of classes during winter); 2) The location of the coaching locations; 3) Lack of finances; 4) Lack of coaching specialists because of small salaries; 5) lack of government funding for professional sports education; 6) “A big load” that children are under in schools and other activities. And the following threats: 1) Low salaries and burning out syndrome for coaches; 2) The worsening of the overall level of physical readiness among children and youth; 3) Increased influence of the IT on the way free time is spent; 4) families immigrating abroad; 5) low demographic metrics (Valmieras Bēnu sporta skolas attīstības plāns 2018-2020, 2018).

heteronormative reproduction and production, which will result in the loss of childishness. In the case of the Latvian normative child, the process of maturity might also include becoming hardy enough to perform at the Youth Festival. The normative child is in danger of disappearing in the post-Cold War United States (Stockton 2013, 4), and instead a child who is entangled in an expectation of a fetishized version of delay—delayed sexuality, delayed danger and harm, delayed adulthood – is being forged. Growing up with the expectation of this delay, Stockton proposes, should be called “growing side-ways,” rather than following any linear path and results in the replacement of the normative child with the “queer child” (Stockton 2013, 7).⁷¹

I suggest that some of the Latvian preoccupations around wimpy children echo this line of thinking that competes with the imaginary prematurely mature six year-old who is starting the first grade and leaving her childhood behind in order to compete with the French and British first-graders on the world market. The hardy countryside dwelling and inexhaustible singer is the Latvian version of the imaginary normative child, who is threatened both by their own precociousness, as well as their sideways growth and immaturity. The parents and the post-Cold War state are involved in this process by executing and prescribing the correct way of raising the children, one that my body-intensive interlocutors envision involve a lot of haptic engagements with young children and forging of “secure attachment,” as well as being attentive to how their bodies develop. The trials and tribulations of attachment promoting child-rearing constitute the topic of the upcoming chapter.

⁷¹ The child is both endangered (Stockton 2013, 37), echoing ideas about the “care model,” and dangerous (Stockton 2013, 38).

Conclusion

Through the case of the 2015 mass fainting of school-children at the Song and Dance Festival dress-rehearsal, I have in Chapter 1 introduced the state of the Latvian children today, as envisioned through statistics, policy documents and my interlocutors, thus presenting childhood in Latvia as both a national and individual project, suspended in desire for recognition by “the world,” and by Europe in particular, but also revealing a fear of loss of its statehood and national heritage. To illustrate how Latvia’s nationhood is constituted I presented the history of the Song Festival, an event of significant national importance, which is tied up in the way Latvians imagine their future as a nation. This vision gets interrupted when 184 children faint during the Festival, causing not only a public health emergency but also a debate about the future of the Latvian nation, the Singing Latvian Child being a powerful symbol of Latvian futurity. The collective performance that is meant for ascertaining patriotic upbringing is threatened by a perceived lack of hardiness of the young Latvians, the future nation of wimps achieved by weakening of the formerly strong nation of farmers.

Certain expressions of modernity, such as technological advances and becoming removed from the idealized farmers' past, are held responsible for the fragility of Latvian children in the public rendering of the faintings. I argue that a powerful figure of the Endangered Latvian Singing Child surfaces in the discourse around faintings, the key to the successful national future of the state of Latvia. The Latvian Singing Child does not translate comfortably into the Globally Endangered Child, who is marked profoundly by adherence to a version of children’s rights that emphasizes their individuality. The Singing Child’s duty to the Latvian nation is steeped in collective values.

Chapter 2 I Cater to all His Whims: Attachment as Ideology

This chapter commences in an apartment that consists of a living room, a bedroom and a tiny kitchen in a typical box-style Soviet building in Rīga.

Silva, a thirty-year old woman with an open, radiant face opens the door for me. As I enter the apartment, Silva's fifteen month-old son Ralfs is taking a nap in their family bed barricaded off by two cribs that Silva tells me have never been used for sleeping but instead for playing, storage and sitting. A three year-old girl, a daughter of Silva's friend who often stays home from school because of her asthma, is playing in the other room, its wall covered almost entirely by a dark-brown plywood contraption that combines shelves with closet space. This type of furniture is standard-issue in many Latvian homes and familiar to all those who grew up in the USSR. The floor is sprinkled with a variety of colorful toys, the evidence, Silva jokingly tells me, of her obsession with shopping. Towards the end of the interview, Ralfs who has been awake for a while, comes in search of her breasts and wants to pull both of them out. Silva gives me a half-amused look and says: "This is baffling, especially if he does it outside." Later, in her characteristically self-deprecating humor, she tells me: "I cater to all his whims" and adds with a twinkle in her eye, "my husband and I are his professional round-the-clock support team."

When Silva tells me that she caters to her son's every whim, she does so tongue-in-cheek, but her allusion to an intensively child-centered parenting style that requires both herself and her husband as "a round-the-clock support team" is indicative of a novel parenting style in Latvia that demands of the parents hyper-vigilant and corporeal attentiveness towards their children that would have been considered harmful by many in their parents' generation. The body-intensive child-rearing approach is based on psychological suppositions about young infant's necessity for physical and psychological attachment, making the latter a basis for an ideology⁷² that guides the parents. They went out of their way to keep young children close to their bodies by engaging in skin-to-skin bonding immediately after birth, sleeping next to their babies and wearing them in adult-facing

⁷² When I use the term "ideology," I treat it in the Marxian tradition as a process through which the consciousness is translated into material actions (Althusser 2014). In particular my thinking on ideology is inspired by Žižek's (1997) work on dogma, which for him is not grounded in an external truth but rather is subject of manipulation by the elite, while the "ordinary people" follow the illusion of truth. While I would not go as far as to argue that there is a deceiving "elite" in the case of attachment theory, treating it like an ideology allows me to restrain from evaluating the "truth claims" of the theory itself.

baby-carriers. Kārlis, the school teacher in his mid-thirties who is very involved in the care of his three girls and whom we briefly met in Chapter 1, tells me that the body-intensive component of their parenting style, for example, carrying the infant in their arms for longer than accepted time periods or using the sling, has been seen as potentially spoiling by his family and friends.

I talk to Kārlis and his wife Liene at the former farm-house where his family spends summers along with Liene's parents who own the property. The house is surrounded by wheat fields, the property of a distant neighbor, as are the cattle grazing in the nearby meadow. There is an orchard next to the house and a lush forest a little distance off, a source of the chanterelles (gailenes) and boletus (baravikas) that Liene and Kārlis feed me while their three daughters play outside. The couple describes their experience with breastfeeding and using a sling⁷³ which was a novelty when their eldest daughter was born in 2008.

Kārlis explains:

What was a bit tiresome and annoying were those eternal comments that the sling was not good for a child. We had discovered it [the sling] and it was cool... also we had enough justification for why it was normal and not something extraordinary, but with others, like when we had guests, we heard these lectures on how the child will get used to being held too much (bērniņš pieradīs pie rokām par daudz).

When I asked Kārlis what exactly people said, he elaborated that they admonished him to “not let the child get too used to being held (nepieradināt pie rokām), because then the child will want to be held for an eternity.” Kārlis explained that to him this caution was “so illogical!” because, “when a child starts walking, she will only come when she wants to.”

Kārlis here juxtaposes himself, his wife and his daughters to those who are unaware that wearing a baby in a sling was “cool” and “normal” and illogically feared that the child could get

⁷³ A sling is a long scarf used to attach a young child to an adult's body, in Latvian both the term “sling” and scarf (lakats) are used, but the non-Latvian “sling” is more recognizable.

too used to close bodily contact with adults, a fear that was mentioned many times by my interlocutors as one of the main concerns of their parents' generation. Too much bodily attachment, warned their mothers and fathers, and even occasionally their siblings and friends, was seen as spoiling (*pieradināt pie rokām*) back when the generation of my interlocutors was born.

In this chapter, I argue that the body-intensive child-rearing that prioritizes haptic engagements between parents and young children is the manifestation of a shift in post-Cold War subjectivization. Specifically, I demonstrate how some Latvian parents see vigilant attention to a child's bodily and emotional needs not as an indulgent practice that might "spoil" children, but rather as necessary for producing children as independent and self-reliant subjects. Body-intensive Latvian parents are inspired by the Western theory of Attachment that can be traced to the mid 20th century work of the British psychologist John Bowlby, but they follow this approach in ways that take into account the unique geopolitical and historical situation in Latvia. Most notably, they are parenting against what is often referred to as the "Soviet legacy" (*padomju mantojums*), the left-overs from the 50 years of Soviet rule⁷⁴ that is imagined to impact the inhabitants of Latvia today. For example, in their understanding of Western Attachment Theory, my Latvian interlocutors prioritize the concepts of "security" and "freedom" over that of "attachment." I propose that the body-intensive parents imagine their parenting in opposition to the past that they see as too institutionalized and lacking in freedom. Hence, I ask – how are the connections managed, what are the similarities and what are the ruptures? I propose that the parents I interviewed are doing something quite purposeful – a type of intentional corporeality steeped in understanding of the importance of touch and physical proximity that stems from Bowlby-derived writing, however,

⁷⁴ I theorize the Soviet past as a construct that is used as a constant referent in the Latvian public space, similarly to how Dzenovska (2018) has argued that the Soviet legacy has been used as a way to explain the present (for example, corruption, intolerance, lack of entrepreneurial skills) without the need to understand it (Dzenovska 2018, 89).

they also do so in the opposition to the Soviet past that they imagine as constraining, opposed to corporeal engagements (including sex) and heavily reliant on bureaucratic institutions. That Soviet modernization in body and health care that inspired less haptic infant care coincided with similar movements on the other side of the iron curtain does little to dispel the association.

I examine the Latvian mode of attachment parenting in relation to what Stryker (2012) has termed “toughened attachment,” the style of child-rearing associated with the Soviet regime where physical and emotional closeness was purposefully denied to children in order to make them more resilient to the outside world. While Stryker introduces the concept as part of her account of the changing attitudes towards attachment in post-Cold War orphanages (children’s homes) in Russia, I propose that the term “toughened attachment” captures the notions around the lack of corporeal engagement and haptic care of Soviet child-rearing. I draw parallels between the sentiment that underlies such non-cuddling upbringing, which would produce physically and emotionally resilient children, and the fears around producing weak and wimpy children that I explored in Chapter 1. While in Stryker’s case “toughened attachment” pertains to the institutionalized setting, I suggest that this term can be used to describe the way my body-intensive interlocutors recall their own hug-less Soviet childhoods, and “untoughening” is part of their own haptic baby-raising practices. Kārlis and Silva believe that the intensive corporeality of their relationship with their young children contributes to their psychological well-being. This is consistent with Western Attachment theory, which envisions close physical proximity to be producing emotionally secure children, while the form of attachment Stryker describes is expected to contribute to their overall resilience to tough life conditions rather than their emotional well-being.

I then present the visions of the future adults that my body-intensive interlocutors imagine to be raising, focusing especially on the promotion of such traits as self-confidence to demonstrate

that this is a complex post-Cold War subjectivation (Matza 2009; 2012) process, which consists simultaneously of avowal and disavowal of individualistic (neoliberal?) characteristics. I further explore the ideas around the ideal post-Cold war subject who is happy, self-confident and protected through specific early childhood child-rearing devices, most notably carrying the baby in an ergonomic carrier or a sling. I demonstrate that the ergonomic carrier as the right way of protecting one's infant from the world reveals beliefs that prioritize ideas of security as a strategy to counter the threats that "the world" presents to the newborns. Such reasoning is partially informed by the parents' interpretations of Soviet history and used to justify their parenting choices. By portraying my interlocutors' desires around parenting, I highlight the fundamental paradox of Western Attachment Theory – in order to create an independent, self-reliant adult subject, one has to bind the new-born extremely physically close. How this physical connection is expected to impact the child, however, varies from reservations about creating spoiled children to hopes that the generation of future Latvians who are children right now will be more self-confident and self-reliant than their parents. In response to the themes explored in Chapter 1, I consider Latvians' fears around "spoiled" or "wimpy" children as a threat to the national future in the context of the conscious emotional "untoughening" work that the parents in my study undertake. Through examination of the concerns of the baby's grandparents and relatives, I look into the dangers of Latvia being a wimpination as they surface against the caressing hold of Kārlis' arms cradling his daughter. I start my inquest into the untoughening practices by investigating the Latvian approach to Western Attachment Theory.

I Ergonomic Carriers and Translatability of Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory came about in the English-speaking realm and is traceable to the mid-20th century rise of the work British psychologist John Bowlby (Otto and Keller 2014). Its translation⁷⁵ into Latvian bears some of the clumsiness that comes with converting not only words but also ideas into a setting that is rather different from the post-World War II Great Britain. The basic premise of this theory, as articulated by Bowlby and his followers is that “a prolonged deprivation of maternal⁷⁶ care of a young child” would manifest itself in an insecure attachment and in turn would lead to “grave and far reaching effects on his character and his future life” (Bowlby 1950 cited in Otto and Keller 2014). Thus, attachment-theory-inspired movements are structured around the idea of a “natural” and “universal” physical attachment between the infant and the caretaker, most often the mother, which is eventually expected to translate into psychological attachment to the primary caretaker, and through her to the rest of the society.⁷⁷ As a way to keep an infant close, some tying-device made out of fabric, is used, acting as a visible marker of those influenced by

⁷⁵ When I talk about translation in this dissertation, I do so with the term “translatability” in mind. I am informed by Walter Benjamin’s ideas on “Uebersetzbarkeit” or “translatability” as cited in (Crapanzano 1997). Benjamin wrote: “Translation is a mode. To comprehend it as mode one must go back to the original, for that contains the law governing the translation: its translatability” (Uebersetzung ist eine Form. Sie als solche zu erfassen, gilt es zurueckzugehen auf das Original. Denn in ihm liegt deren Gesetz also in dessen Uebersetzbarkeit beschlossen) (as cited in Crapanzano 1997, 47). I have throughout the text always referenced the original, which is especially important in this section.

⁷⁶ This gendered emphasis has somewhat relaxed changed since the 1950s, leaving room for any intimately attached adult, including father to take this role, however, my research and that of others (Bobel 2001; Halley 2007) reveals that the early infant care is still very much delegated to the mothers. In addition, Latvian situation comes with its own baggage where women’s roles are concerned. I will explore some of these ideas in Chapter 4. Today, even though my body-intensive interlocutors, both male and female, said that they valued fatherly involvement in parenting, most of them still thought that the mother should be the primary caretaker of young children. Sedlenieks and Rolle (2016) have shown that this is consistent with the over-all attitudes towards the father’s role in Latvia, which relegates men to the position of mother’s helpers.

⁷⁷ The envisioned intervention is heavily geared towards the early years of the child’s life and can be achieved by such as skin-to-skin bonding after the birth, close physical proximity to an infant at all times, hugging and holding children. In the US, there is an Attachment parenting movement, but the name is not widely used in Latvia. I have opted to name my alternative parenting interlocutors “body-intensive” parents. For an overview of methodology for identifying such parents through three practices (breastfeeding on demand, “baby-wearing” and sharing a bed with a young child) see *Introduction*.

the theory, for example, American attachment parents⁷⁸ and is used among my interlocutors too, despite not being a normative practice in Latvia.

Most of my body-intensive interlocutors had not heard of the English term “attachment parenting.” If they had, it was associated with the English-speaking world. Thus, Zinta, a mother of a seven year-old son, told me: “[w]e have friends who are Australian-Latvian,⁷⁹ who lived that attachment parenting [she uses the English term] here in Latvia. That’s when we understood that we too are living it in practice.” Silva, whom we met at the beginning of this chapter, had also heard of Attachment Theory because she and her husband were both undergoing training to become foster parents. “With the attachment [she used the term in English with a Latvian ending, even though I used the Latvian translation], I have kind of based it on intuition, I have not really given him to anybody [to babysit] yet.” For Silva, then, the idea of attachment is something that both does not translate easily into Latvian, and has to do with what she terms “her intuition.” A new book on the first relationships in infants’ lives has been recently published in Latvia (Kalniņa 2018) that, without calling the parenting style “attachment parenting,” nevertheless promotes many of the same techniques as the American movement: skin-to-skin bonding immediately after birth, wearing a baby in a sling, purposefully sharing sleep with a young child and extended and on-demand breastfeeding. Yet, as we learned from Kārlis, who talked in the beginning of the chapter

⁷⁸ Without directly referencing Bowlby’s work, an American pediatrician-turned parenting expert Williams Sears has championed a movement that is referred to as Attachment parenting in the US. According to Sears, the close physical attachment is expected to create changes in the relational subjectivities and the parent and child pair would achieve a “connected relationship” that will extend in an imaginary connection to the rest of the world. This connected kid would then relate to the rest of the world in a caring, compassionate, communicative, connected, careful, considerate, confident and cuddly way, and would easily stand out in a crowd (Sears and Sears 2002). Dr. Sears envisions the end products of such parenting as follows: “They will be the kind of people who find comfort in feeling close to others. They will have the skills that make relationships last and will be good friends, good spouses, good parents and good citizens” (Sears and Sears 2002, 38). Not all the parents who cary babies in slings/baby carriers are actively pursuing Attachment parenting in the US, however, such devices have certainly been made more popular by the movement.

⁷⁹ Australian Latvian usually refers to people of Latvian decent who grew up in Australia, most likely because their ancestors fled the Latvian territory towards the end of the WWII.

about his experience with using a sling for his daughters, the ways the practices were interpreted revealed specifically Latvian concerns about the spoiling potential of haptic care. Through attention to the experiences with slings or ergonomic carriers by Kārlis and others,⁸⁰ I address the translatability of Western Attachment Theory. I will begin in the store/office of Anda J., a lactation consultant who also advises new parents on using baby-carriers.

On the top floor of a newly renovated historic wooden building, there is a room with three windows and potted plants everywhere, including along the dark, wooden walls. Three baby look-alike weighted demo dolls: a newborn, a four-month-old and an older baby inhabit the space. The newborn in the cradle is what I see first upon entering the room and it is so credibly infant-like, yet still, that it is unsettling. I am here to observe a lesson in baby-wearing that costs each of the adult participant 20 euros.⁸¹ A desk, which like the rest of the furniture is made out of wood, stands next to a shelf with ergonomic baby carriers (made in different geographic locations, including Poland) and a variety of scarfs (to be used for carrying infants) of various lengths for sale. Several beanbags are scattered around a room decorated with hand-made baby toys and floor mats made out of linen fabric, fabric that is associated with both naturalness and Latvianness, as this is what has traditionally been worn by Latvians in the past. A rack with clothing for baby (70 % wool, 30 % silk, made in Germany⁸²) and mom stands across an infant changing table. There are several

⁸⁰ For more on the selection process, see the *Introduction* to the Dissertation.

⁸¹ 20 euros is about the cost of a one on one consultation (one hour) with a lactation consultant (and that is a pretty standard rate for general consultations, while a private doctors' consultation starts at around 30 euros per a visit), or a non-fancy hair-dresser for women, two movie tickets + a popcorn, one ticket to the most popular theater in Rīga or two back-row theater tickets in the two others, two small packs of diapers, the basic food for a family of four for a couple of days, an average monthly electricity bill (for a 62 sq meter flat). It is not a lot, but sufficient that low-income parents would be excluded. There are programs that are free-of charge (paid for by the municipality, for example) that offer this type of education for expecting parents though. In other words, the cost itself does not make this into a luxury experience.

⁸² This type of clothing would be considered quite luxurious in Latvia, because of the materials and also where it is made. It is also rather expensive (11 euros per baby-shirt), even though the price is slightly lower than it would be in Germany for a similar product.

posters and printouts on the walls featuring the right way to tie the scarf-slings, as well as the differences between the sling and the ergonomic carrier known as “*ķengursoma*.”

Ķengursoma (kangaroo carrier) is a type of carrier that to the uninitiated would seem very similar to an ergonomic carrier, as both are industrially-produced baby-carriers.⁸³ Anda J.’s business gives out a printout titled “The features of *ķengursoma*.”⁸⁴ It states that the *ķengursoma* does not provide sufficient support for the child’s back, because the child is not attached tightly enough to the adult carrier and as a result “sits” on [the child’s] bottom. The pamphlet warns that it is especially not to be used for children who do not sit on their own (expected to happen at age of 6-9 months). The printout exhibits various specific fears around subject-formation and physiological dangers to adult and infants’ bodies, especially their backs. While I will explore the latter in more detail in Chapter 3, I turn here to the printout’s list of the dangers associated with a situation where the infant who is being carried with a back attached to the adult is facing out (and away from the adult carrying her). This scenario is imagined as a lot more likely in a *ķengursoma* type of carrier and is described as “insecure” (*nedrošs*): “While the children are attached with their backs to the carrying person, they lose the peaceful connection and the sense of security and don’t have a place to hide or cuddle if they are scared or tired from too many impressions.” In addition, the printout

⁸³ While in the English language baby-carriers are not usually distinguished by this name, the idea of the best attachment-promoting way of carrying a baby is certainly present in the US. Thus for example, the US Attachment Parenting movement is usually associated with a sling-wrap, a mei-tai or an ergonomic Baby-Carrier such as Ergo-baby (which was founded in 2003 and was one of the first, if not the first, of the commercially produced ergonomic carriers).

⁸⁴ In the middle of it there is a picture of a person with a child in a *ķengursoma* type of carrier, surrounded by several blobs with black boundaries filled with the following texts that are linked to various parts of the pictured baby’s body: 1) The carrier’s [person’s] back (title in bold). *Ķengursoma* usually has a simply back support—a cross of thin straps that create great load on the carrier’s back; 2) Child’s spine (title in bold). 3) Blood circulation (title in bold). The lower part of *ķengursoma* presses onto the crotch of the baby and impedes blood circulation. 4) The Connection to the Carrier[person] (title in bold). The construction of *ķengursoma* ensures that the shoulder straps are always between the child and the adult, thus separating the child and the carrying person. 5) Insecurity (*nedrošība*) (title in bold) while the child is attached with their back to the carrying person, they lose the peaceful connection and the sense of security and don’t have where to hide or cuddle if they are scared or tired from too many impressions. Hands and legs move chaotically without finding the desired support. 6) Hip joints (title in bold). The calfs of the baby are facing downwards, without insuring the correct hip joint position.

warns: “[The infant’s] [h]ands and legs move chaotically without finding the desired support.” Anda J. explains this to me: “The adult should be there to provide eye-contact and offer a safe place to hide “from the world” by their chest.” The constant eye-contact that the child and adult share allows the child to filter the world through them and avoid seeing it without the guidance and protection of the adult.

The care-taking adult in this scenario becomes the most important mediator between the infant and the outside world that can overwhelm the baby. Similarly to the poem performed at the Song Festival from the point of view of the unborn child, the world out there contains a threat and the constant parental (mostly imagined as maternal) tactile care is necessary to mitigate it. The correct ways of the vigilant haptic care are narrated as both natural and something that has to be learned. The correct way of carrying a child, including in a sling, for example, could be best mastered by consulting an expert such as a physical therapist experienced in *hendlings* (the physiologically right way of handling a young child that I will talk about in Chapter 3) such as Anda J. who has specific training in *hendlings* and other arts of caring for a young child, some of it from international programs. Let us return to the class I am observing.

Today, Anda J. is teaching two women with two boys, four and five months old, how to use a sling. After having asked them their reasons for wanting to use the sling, she starts in a leveled, instructive voice with what she calls “a theory refresher” (she gives handouts with 5 points to the women afterwards) and explains that a child who is older than 4 months is more physically active and needs more freedom than a newborn (which is a different course). Then she picks up the four-month-old demo doll and shows the first method of tying the sling. The infant should be closely attached in the hip-zone to the care-taker while facing the adult. She expertly wraps the scarf around her and slides the doll into the sling she has fastened around herself, and while doing

so, she says: “[t]his is what I do! Support the neck!” She then walks around adjusting the position of the live babies, while commenting on the importance of the tightness of the sling. “It should be tight, but not too tight. You have the same scarf (lakats) as the child. If it does not hurt you, it won’t hurt him either.” Anda J. then demonstrates the side tying position with the baby-doll using the image of a frog that jumps into a pond. The five months old has fallen asleep in the previous position, the four month-old is wriggling in the side position. His mother says:” Hey bunny, it’s not comfortable. Sorry.” She then turns to Anda J. and reluctantly chuckles: “He is not that into it!” to which Anda J. replies “[h]e is not that into it because of you. Walk around a bit, so he can get used to it, and then we will untie it.”

According to Anda J. here, it is the mother’s responsibility not to project her own uneasiness about carrying her infant in a sling, thus emphasizing once more the adult-infant dyad, that is so crucial to the Bowlby-derived theory. The baby acts as the physical and emotional extension of the adult. Yet, according to Anda J, most Latvians use the slings/ergonomic carriers for convenience not because of some longing for “secure attachment.” Like when they cannot make it with a stroller,” she says matter-of-factly. My body-intensive interlocutors too mentioned that the sling was a lot easier than logging the stroller down steep stairs, onto public transportation or along a country-side path. This can be interpreted as a commentary on the Latvian infrastructure, as even the capital is sometimes difficult to navigate with a stroller or for people in a wheelchair.⁸⁵ While acknowledging that baby-carriers could be used for practical reasons, Anda J., however, prioritizes “secure attachment” when she talks to the mothers attending the class. “The theory” that she teaches alongside “baby-wearing, emphasizes “attachment” that Anda J. in a conversation with me

⁸⁵ The difficulties encountered by people in wheelchairs have been actively reported on, as for example, in this article, in which a journalist reflects on two days spent in a wheelchair in 2010 and in 2019 (Kobizeva 2019).

expertly traces back to Bowlby and respect (cienā) toward the infant, which in turn is associated with Pickler.⁸⁶

My body-intensive interlocutors were aware both of the convenience, but also talked about the importance of keeping the child physically close. Kārlis told me that he had found the sling both convenient (he could work on his country-side property), but also a way to keep his daughter close, which, as the opening vignette shows, also caused them to have to constantly rebuff well-meaning people who were concerned that such an approach would get the child used to always being held (*pieradinās pie rokām*). With some exceptions, my body-intensive interlocutors, just like Silva, had never used the cribs that they had purchased prior to the birth of their child. They cited convenience, easier breastfeeding and not having to get up at night, reasons that coincide with globally circulating theories for so called co-sleeping.⁸⁷ Occasionally, however, like in the case of Darja, mother of a six month-old Masha, whom we will meet more prominently in the next chapter, the need for physical closeness with their children was related to the shifting understanding of “discipline” and “security.”

Darja described her initial expectations that a separate bed (crib) would make Masha feel like she had her own place and would discipline her daughter. Darja explained: “I had heard that children who are disciplined feel more secure.”⁸⁸ Safety in Darja’s initial interpretation was linked to the baby being allocated a space that would have limits and hence be both disciplining and secure. As her ideas about the usefulness of the crib for Masha shifted, and the crib remained virtually unused, so did Darja’s perceptions of what would make Masha feel safe, so much so that

⁸⁶ Emmi Pikler was a Hungarian pediatrician who developed a “respectful” way of caring for young children. Her approach will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

⁸⁷ For an example of co-sleeping supporting theories see the popular breastfeeding support website called *kellymom.com* (Bonyata, 2019).

⁸⁸ I did not ask Darja what she meant by the term “discipline” which is a testimony to my assumption that we shared an interpretation of it as an action that causes one to be limited, which in turn did not have to necessarily be negative.

during our interview Darja revealed that Masha now spends every nap-time sleeping on Darja's lap. Darja tells me that this came about while she was following her child's cues. The sense of security based on outward factors (such as the crib) has been replaced by security that is dependent on parental attentiveness, prioritizing once more the parent-infant dyad where the adult is responding to their children's cues. What does it signify for the translatability of Western Attachment Theory into the Latvian milieu that Darja, like most of my interlocutors, emphasizes the idea of security (*drošība*) over that of attachment?⁸⁹

The translated term "attachment" rarely stands alone in Latvian, but instead is almost always coupled with the adjective "secure" as in "*drošā piesaiste*"⁹⁰ ("secure attachment"). This Latvian expression is long and cumbersome and not applied much beyond a professional circle of (some) child psychologists, doulas, home-birth midwives and lactation/baby-wearing consultants such as Anda J. If my interlocutors knew the Latvian term they either associated it with some psychological coaching, such as doula training or Silva's fostering parenting training in the introductory vignette, or with several authors, including the Canadian child-development psychologist Gordon Neufeld, who has quite a large following on Russian language social media and originates in Israel, Bowlby himself, and very rarely with William Sears, the founder of the American attachment parenting movement.⁹¹

⁸⁹ The term "secure attachment" is at the basis of the Bowlby-derived theories in the English-speaking world as well, however, in the small study I conducted among American Attachment parents asking the same questions, there was not the same kind of emphasis being placed on security as among the Latvians.

⁹⁰ The Latvian term "*piesaiste*" translates into English as "attachment," but it is not used as widely as the English term, for example a part of a mechanical devise or a document attached to an email. Thus, the term is less colloquial and used in more formal settings, such as talking about the theory of attachment.

⁹¹ The book by Vita Kalniņa was published towards the end of my fieldwork in 2018, therefore I cannot gauge how much it had impacted my interlocutors' ideas, but Kalniņa herself was often referenced in my interviews, especially with experts.

The Latvian verb from which the noun “piesaiste” is derived is “piesaistīt” (to attach), and it contains other meanings such as to tie/chain or to attract. I suggest that while promoting Attachment Theory, the professionals tend to couple the noun “attachment” with the adjective “secure” when it is expected to bring about positive benefits. In the professional parlance “secure attachment” is predominantly a positive term, while parents rarely use it, even though they, like in the class conducted by Anda J., have been instructed about it. There is a potential danger of being too physically attached, even for my body-intensive interlocutors, who talk simultaneously about attaching their children securely (*drošā piesaiste*) and making them self-reliant/sufficient (*pašpietiekami*), which generally also means not too attached/tied. While this paradox is inherent in Attachment Theory itself, the Latvian translation (where “security” becomes paramount to “attachment”) makes it particularly pronounced, something the parents I interviewed regularly remarked upon. This tension surfaces especially when parents deal with the intergenerational differences in thinking about the importance of “holding/carrying children (*nēsāt uz rokām*)” and the potential links to spoiling that Kārlis discussed in the beginning of the chapter. Dace, an artist and a mother of two girls, explains this sentiment as follows: “[a] balance is needed in life, an attachment too tight (*pārāk cieša piesaiste*) is also not good. When parents do not know how to let the child go. That is also not good for the child psychologically.” Kārlis muses: “I have never thought of the Latvian translation (*drošā piesaiste*). It is not really like you need to only attach the child, but that they need to be free. Whether she [the child] is with us or with somebody else, the aim is to give to her [the child], so that she is secure and free not to attach.” Upon further reflection, Kārlis continues: “If she feels secure and free in my arms and is not worried about where she is or that the mom is missing, feels the mother’s breast, or sees with her eyes... that’s a zone where she

is free, because all her needs are met, and she is free.” Liene, Kārlis’ wife, adds that perhaps what is meant by “secure attachment” is being “secure with yourself (drošs sevī).”⁹²

Several of the other interlocutors connected “secure attachment” and freedom, more precisely, free child-rearing (brīva audzināšana). Inese, a mother of three who is a trained accountant and a doula, says that a securely attached child is “free, creative, critically thinking, trusting of others.” She, like another of my interlocutors, mentions that this freedom should have some limits/borders (pamatrobežas) or frames (rāmji). Thus, security and freedom are often desired by the parents when they reflect on attaching their children. These ideas [expressed by the interlocutors] of freedom, security and disciplinary practices are not static. Parents of older children talk about borders/limits in the context of their otherwise “free” child-rearing, but it also happens that previously admired disciplining practices, like Darja's changing views on the usefulness of the crib, are no longer considered secure. Security is expected to lead to freedom. With body-intensiveness this security is dependent on a vigorous and one-to-one adult-child corporeal and emotional engagement. A similar shift towards prioritizing a dyadic adult-child connection can be observed around “toughening” practices that have been instituted in the past, especially in the Soviet institutional setting such as the orphanages or preschool (bērnu dārzs). In order to follow this line of reasoning, let me introduce Stryker’s ideas around “toughened attachment.”

⁹² In the small pilot-study I conducted while using the same questions with the American parents, they expressed concern about independence (versus co-dependence, as one mother phrased it) but they did not focus so much on the idea of “security.”

II Post-Cold War Structures and Attachment

The ideas of “secure attachment” are widely used in the currently popular movement of de-institutionalization⁹³ of orphanages in Latvia, which are perceived as leftovers from the Soviet times. Stryker (2012), in her research on the changing perceptions of attachment in post-Cold War Russia, argues that the orphanages or children’s homes⁹⁴ have moved away from what she terms the “toughened attachment,” (жесткая привязанность/zhestokaya privyazonost⁹⁵) to a more Bowlby-style perception of attachment. The toughened attachment is formed when approval and adult [physical and emotional] contact is purposefully withdrawn to toughen underprivileged children in institutionalized settings,⁹⁶ whereas the more Western psychological interpretations would predict that attachment could come to its full-fruit only in a family-style setting. Even though the term “toughened attachment” is not used in Latvian, I would argue that the children (a little bit over 1,200 in 2017) living in Latvian “children’s homes,” popularly hash-tagged as “system’s children” (sistēmas bērni)⁹⁷ are imagined to be suffering from toughened attachment even today. What

⁹³ The de-institutionalization process consists according to Pokšāns, a Latvian anthropologist who studies the soviet-style boarding school, the *internāts*, today (private correspondence March 2020) of three interrelated processes: 1) The EU-wide movement to lessen the number of children who are living in institutions and is based in Western expectations around child-rearing that prioritize the nuclear family; 2) The Latvian state-level politics that is rooted in the neoliberalization of the state apparatus and a desire to be considered more European; 3) Certain “upper middle-class aspirations” around helping out the unfortunates of the society (*sabiedrības grūtdieņi*), that are not directly linked to the first two processes.

⁹⁴ Children’s homes is the term by which out-of-family-care-facilities for children are called in Russian—детдом/detdom or детский дом/detski dom or *bērnu nams* in Latvian. Stryker (2012) uses the transliteration for the plural version or *detdoma* in her writing.

⁹⁵ This is my translation into Russian, as Stryker does not give the term in Russian. There is no compound like that in Latvian (*nežēlīgā* or *norūdītā piesaiste* is not used), but with the Russian term some entries come up on the internet.

⁹⁶ This is reminiscent of Nancy Scheper-Hughes’s work (1989) on infant mortality in Brazil and mothers allowing to form an attachment (mother’s love) towards a child when they were over a year old and more likely to survive. In the case of the former USSR, toughening of love was imagined as necessary in absence of the mother.

⁹⁷ Most children who are in Latvian foster care have parents who are still alive (popularly referred to as orphans of living parents (*dzīvu vecāku bāreņi*)) whose parental rights have been legally suspended or revoked because of alleged abuse (often because of addiction).

is more, “secure attachment” is strongly correlated with family-based care in this popular interpretation.

While preparing for fostering her second son, Silva watched a lot of videos both from Russia (Russian search-phrase: foster care) and from the US (English search phrase: attachment). She thinks that the US is superior to the former Soviet realms in that it has gotten rid of orphanages “centuries” ago, but also admits that because of Latvia’s Soviet past, the Russian examples are more relevant in the Latvian context. In the Russian language documentary⁹⁸ that Silva suggests that I watch, the term attachment (привязанность/*privyazonost’*) is used along the term “deprivation” (депривация/*deprivaciya*). *Deprivaciya* is explained as what takes place in the absence of human contact in the form of a family (as children are exposed to about 60 adults per day, the film explains) and is demonstrated by frantically rocking babies and toddlers who are putting themselves to sleep while in institutionalized care. Such circumstances, the female narrator explains, create “100 control, 0% freedom!” The institutionalized setting in the film becomes associated with zero percent freedom, yet again emphasizing the importance of freedom in child rearing. The film then portrays a psychologist who explains that the “интернатные условия/*internatnye usloviya*” (a soviet-style boarding school conditions) are responsible for all the 100 or so children who reside in her place of work suffering from *deprivaciya*. Against a black-and-white background lighting strikes and the narrator's voice explains: “*Deprivaciya* is similar to radiation (a nuclear mushroom explodes in the background), the words FEAR (СТРАХ/*STRAX* in capital

⁹⁸ The film is called “Блеф, или с Новым годом!”/“Bleff, ili s novym godom!” (2013)—a nonsensical title that is intended to demonstrate the absurd nature of this state-created problem that children are kept in institutions, deprived of their need for attachment that can be achieved by being picking them (взять на руки/*vzyat’ na ruki*). What happens instead is that in the absence of human warmth children are said to lose contact with their “own bodies” and become unable to love or to have compassion, eventually becoming the next generation of criminals in Russia. <https://azbyka.ru/video/blef-ili-s-novym-godom/> (last accessed on November 1st, 2019).

letters⁹⁹) appear, the voice continues: “[t]he constant fear [of abandonment] affects the brain-cells and will leave impact on the next generation.” The nuclear explosion, one of the most notable fears of the Soviet/Cold War childhood (Kelly 2008; Peacock 2014) here becomes associated with the dangers of institutionalized care. The voice goes on to explain that a child with this condition would lose one IQ point per month, as well as weigh one kilogram less per every five months spent in an institution, thus biologizing the condition while also tying it to socially-undesirable outcomes.¹⁰⁰ This film tells the story of current day Russia still suffering under a system created during Soviet times. In her fostering education Silva learns how to disrupt “old fashioned” (which is almost synonymous with Soviet) ideas about attachment. The opposite of this pathologized Soviet institutionalized childhood care is experienced in a dyadic child-adult (mostly imagined as child-mother)¹⁰¹ relationship, ideally in a nuclear family setting. Stryker argues that attachment as an idea was likened during the Soviet times to a reflex that could be stimulated between any adult and child instead of “a vital mutual relationship between infant and a primary caregiver” (Stryker 2012, 88) as in the Western psychological attachment theory. Thus, children in Soviet orphanages were taught to “feel happiness, sadness, trust, and fear always in relationship to their roles as Soviet citizens and to express emotions strategically and ideally in the service of their collective and

⁹⁹ Deprivaciya works like radiation, the constant fear destroying the brain cells of the child and damaging the psyche. It can impact the next generations and it is hard to get rid of its impact. It is responsible for the loss of 1 IQ point per month during the most important time for child's development (21.05 min).

¹⁰⁰ 40% of children who grew up in orphanages end up in prison. (40:00 min), the video show children rocking themselves (16 min) along with terrifying music.

¹⁰¹ The mother-child dyad and nuclear family is powerfully promoted in the attachment-advancing literature (see Kalniņa 2018 for example), advertisements and parenting magazines (“Mans Mazais,” for example, see Chapter 3 for more), but in reality Latvian parents rely on the help of their parents and in-laws. My body-intensive interlocutors mostly represented heteronormative nuclear families that resided in separate households, but it was assumed that most grandparents would be involved in helping the my interlocutors with child-care, but none helped full-time. Several of my interlocutors lived with the wife’s parents. The Russian documentary analyzed here also showed a grandmother as a desirable carer (in absence of a responsible mother). There was a palpable tension though, as the grandparents generation was being talked about as potentially lacking understanding of body-intensiveness (see Kalniņa 2018, 10). Silva had just started leaving Ralfs with her mother when he was almost a year and a half old, because she had not wanted to leave him with anybody before.

country” (Stryker 2012, 89).¹⁰² She explains that instead of Bowlby-style responsive parental care, “toughened attachment”¹⁰³ is created by non-responsive adult care that is expected to train the “children to be resourceful” in order to increase “their chances for survival in bleak times” (Stryker 2012, 89-90). Stryker describes the “toughened attachment” as a strategic tool, “a relationship whereby children from an early age could be taught to best maximize opportunities in resource-lean environments” (90). She further documents how the new ideas around attachment entered some of the orphanages in Russia by the early 2000s, at first as a survival tactic to be taught to children who would be adopted by foreigners, and later as an ideology that most of the orphanage staff believed in, though, similarly as in the film I just analyzed (“Блеф, или с Новым годом!”/“Bleff, ili s novym godom!” (2013)) only envisioned to be possible in family settings, hence inaccessible by the children they were supervising. Stryker conceptualizes this as a shift in the post-Cold war subjectivization. According to this interpretation, “the ‘self’ as a concept had been dogmatically rejected during the Soviet period and resurrected out of necessity “for children to grasp and express in an emerging egocentric capitalist society” (Stryker 2012, 88). Despite the

¹⁰² Stryker touches briefly on the importance of bodily toughening (закаливание/zakalivaniye) practices that were implemented in tandem with the toughened attachment and remain relatively popular in the former Soviet realm (including Latvia) today, but she does not focus on the withdrawal of haptic engagements per se. The caring for the Soviet children of an early age had been focus of anthropological studios in the West. Even though not directly linked to the theories around attachment, Gorer had in the late 1940s/early 1950s argued that the unusually long swaddling of Russian infants play a significant role in how they relate to the external authority as both hateful and essential (as cited in Mead 1954, 395). This demonstrates that the procedures that were considered as restricting have been of interest to social scientists studying the former USSR before and serves as an example of how Western anthropologists have exoticized the relationship of the Soviet citizens to power.

¹⁰³ Stryker (2010) links the toughened attachment to the traditional practice in Soviet-style childcare collectives of ‘toughening’ children’s bodies in institutions. She draws on Bronfenbrenner (1970) and Ispa (2002) to describe the systematic exposing of children to cold air and cold water so they develop resistance to winter weather, or using quartz lamps to purify air in nap rooms, or using humidifiers filled with salt water to create a maritime atmosphere thought to benefit sleep. Orphanage workers believed that just as one could toughen children’s bodies to make them more fit to survive the natural elements and disease, so could toughening children’s understanding and expression of attachment aid them in the challenging and uncertain times after the fall of the Soviet Union. It is interesting to note that *detdoma* workers in the 1990s did not think that toughened attachment was appropriate or necessary for parents to promote with their own biological children. Kelly (2007) too has talked about the importance of “emotional hygiene” that seems similar to “toughened attachment” as one of the guiding child-rearing principles of the Soviet times.

official rejection, in practice the self was not as entirely absent from the Soviet upbringing,¹⁰⁴ but it was stretched and challenged in ways that prioritized multiple relationships at an early age even in non-orphanage setting. A shift towards embracing a dyadic attachment to a limited number of adults in the orphanage came about first as a pragmatic measure, as Stryker shows, until it evolved into a conviction shared by most of the employees. With their emphasis on “security” my body-intensive interlocutors too acknowledge the importance of the self, which needs to be protected and nurtured to grow into a desirable member of the society--independent and self-confident.

For Latvian context to these ideas, let us revisit Silva, the mother whose story you read at the beginning of this Chapter and who was undergoing “attachment training” along with her husband in order to foster a child, one of the “system’s children.”¹⁰⁵ Silva and her husband have been leaving their fifteen-month old son Ralfs with Silva’s mother for the first time ever over the last four weekends in order to participate in a ten-day long training seminar, which will conclude with

¹⁰⁴ While I do not deny that collectivity played an important role in the ideology around the way the Soviet citizen was expected to be raised the concepts of the self, for example, the ideas around psyche, conscious and subconscious did not disappear (even if they were as Stryker argues dogmatically rejected by some ideologues), but rather took on a different form that was consistent with the soviet interpretation of Marxist materialism. Agita Lūse in her dissertation on depression in post-soviet Latvia insists that the sense of the self-promoted by the Soviet mental health approach was initially an “optimistic teleological view ... derived from the Marxist idea that the essence of a human being is an ensemble of social relations.” She explicitly compares Marx to Freud who, according to her, “was concerned with universals of human nature” while “Marx saw human nature as changeable in the course of evolving social practice.” (Lūse 2005, 85) This in turn meant that in the USSR “harmonising social relations was seen as a means of bringing about conditions for the harmonious development of the person” (Lūse 2005, 85) and such branches of psychology as Humanism and Behaviorism were favored over Psychoanalysis (Agita Lūse, private conversation, November 23, 2015). Tomas Matza, referring to Oleg Kharkhordin’s work, has also pointed out that self-rummaging (самокопание) was not encouraged during the soviet times, but rather the importance was placed on self-evaluation (samootsenka) as the first step toward becoming a better communist [subject]. (Matza 2009, 500). The care of the self of the soviet subject in this scenario involves training the will (vol’a) that results in a state of self-control and self-possession (samoobladanie) desirable by the soviet state as a condition for self-sacrifice or erasure (Matza 2009, 501).

¹⁰⁵ The Latvian “system’s children” have to be viewed within the framework of similar changes in the Latvian children’s homes as described by Stryker (2012), including the adoption abroad, which was first encouraged and then curbed, and ever-increasing calls for a move towards a system where all children “have families” through a heavy-emphasis state-wide on fostering children (within Latvia). In 2017, as I was conducting my fieldwork in Latvia, another push to finally get rid of all the orphanages or “deinstitutionalization” gained audience among the general public, as marked by a massive fundraising campaign (that raised close to 400,000 euros) and the subsequent establishment of a support NGO “Plecs” (Shoulder). Silva tells me that she and her husband had been thinking of fostering even before these latest developments, therefore they are slightly ahead of what has now become a bit more common (the number of children in foster care increased from 500 in 2017 to a bit over 600 in the beginning of 2019 according to a TV program, still this is far from eliminating the number of orphanages that is the stated goal of “Plecs”).

an exam. She tells me that, at thirty, she and her husband are the youngest in the training group. She explains that this course has helped quiet her inner doubts about her way of parenting:

I am more confident now. The courses are helping me. They talk about attachment (piesaiste) and the lack of attachment. Then I think, no, everything is going to be all right with Ralfs. They say that even though the attachment is formed over the first year, it is still possible to work on (veidot) the relationship even later. There might be a 50 % secure attachment, but also insecure. For the insecure, there are all kinds of exercises that they recommend, like blowing cotton to one another. What's important is that you should not force anything (nevajag neko uzspiest) and do it slowly. If they don't know how to play, you start playing by yourself, you do it slowly. And they talked about the slings and carriers as well, and that even older children should be taken into the lap, that they become like children even if they are teenagers. And then it felt that, yes, I am doing it all right, pat on the back to me. (laughter) That's the basis so that the child builds a self-confidence (pārlicība par sevi), that they feel good about their decisions.

The expert knowledge imparted during the course, has allowed Silva to be confident that her “biological”¹⁰⁶ child is building his own self-confidence. What is more, it has also provided her with a set of skills that she expects will help her develop a similar relationship with her foster child. The way Attachment Theory is operationalized in this instance demonstrates that it concerns not only a particular kind of emerging human subject that is being created, but a particular kind of parent too. Attachment theory allows Silva to feel like a better mother, because of the connection she has built with her biological child and will be able to forge with her foster child.

Silva explains her reasoning around fostering and how it is directly linked to her having given birth to Ralfs. While admitting to various levels of intimacy with different children she babysat before and to not even being sure if she wanted biological children, the experience of having given birth to her own child is what, she says, inspired her to include a non-biological child into her family:

¹⁰⁶ She herself uses the expression “biological family.”

I used to not be sure if I wanted my own children. Children are so different. One is closer to heart, even the ones you babysit, but others... you won't abuse them (pāri nedarīsi), but... After I gave birth, I started to think a lot about the kids in orphanages. There is nobody there to give them a pacifier, so all I was thinking was – if only they could not be in an orphanage (lai tikai nebūtu bērnu namā).

Silva here anticipates replacing the institutionalized care with a dyadic adult-child relationship that Bowlby style attachment theory prescribes.

When Silva's family fosters a boy Andris who is a month and a half younger than Ralfs, soon after our first meeting, Silva finds out that her foster son does not have problems with "attachment" (piesaiste) which she connects to Andris having lived with his "biological family" (bioloģiskā ģimene)¹⁰⁷ until he was ten months old and the state services intervened and mandated that Andris is taken out of the family. Silva: "That family was probably not that bad, only they had a problem with alcohol." She adds that having seen the father recently because of an upcoming trial about the cessation of his parental rights, she was surprised "how normal the father was." Silva explains: "If you would have to guess in a trolleybus [a mode of public transport], you would not be able to! He has a job and all. I had imagined that he would be ... like a typical alcoholic on the street with a bottle." Any family, even one with "a problem with alcohol" seems to be preferable to institutionalized upbringing when it comes to developing "attachment" and otherwise desirable social skills. Silva anticipated that Andris, her foster-son (audžudēliņš, she uses this term in diminutive about a year after fostering) would be withdrawn which would point toward problems with attachment but they did not materialize.

Silva and her husband nevertheless use some of the attachment-inducing behavior they have used for their biological son. For example, Andris sleeps in the same bed as his foster father. They had to purchase a crib for him first because a bed was required as part of the fostering process.

¹⁰⁷ Silva uses this expression. She also uses the division ordinary children ("parastie bērni") and "foster kids."

Andris slept in it at first but moved in with one of them when he had health problems early on and now sleeps next to Silva's husband, while she sleeps next to Ralfs. Silva mentions that she has been to a recent foster-care gathering, where even big girls (teenagers) were sitting on their parents' laps, which seemed to border on the inappropriate. Her own foster-son Andris was also sitting on her lap, while her biological son Ralfs was roaming around. "With a smaller child it is easier to accept," Silva exclaims and adds that she considered Ralf's roaming a confirmation that her parenting approach was right and that Ralfs was more independent than Andris. The behavior sanctioned by the Attachment Theory thus is desirable with a small child when it is all right, even necessary to be attached, while a "securely attached" child will start separating and roaming around like Ralfs does. The institutionalized care in Latvia is imagined as constraining freedom and binding "the system's children" (*sistēmas bērni*) such as Andris in the children's home to their miserable presents.

As the title "system's children" signals, what is being accomplished by replacing their institutionalized lives with foster care is countering the faulty state system which is not suitable for raising children with an upbringing that is only possible when children can forge dyadic relationships with particular adults. The past experiences of institutionalized care, including the widely utilized state-run preschool/day-care (*bērnu dārzs*, детский сад/*detski sad*¹⁰⁸) that was put in place during the Soviet times color many of my body-intensive interlocutors expectations around child-rearing, leading them to counter "toughened attachment" with their parenting. So, for example,

¹⁰⁸ The Latvian term "bērnu dārzs" has the same meaning as Russian "detski sad," namely, the garden of children, which is the meaning of the German term "Kindergarten" too, refers to a lot longer time-period than the American version of Kindergarten, which is typically a year before the first grade. Hence, "bērnu dārzs" is a combination of day-care and preschool, which also includes the year before the first grade. The principle was borrowed from the 19th century German educator Friedrich Frobel and usually refers to all formal care of children ages 1 to 7 (school-age) (Bodrina and Yudina 2018). Younger children (6 weeks to 3 years) used to be hosted in "silītes" or crèches over the Soviet period but that name is usually not used in Latvian anymore, and any child starting a formal day-care is said to attend "bērnu dārzs." I will be using the term preschool or day-care for the Latvian term "bērnu dārzs" which will include all children up to school age (age 7).

Liene (36), the wife of Kārlis whom we met at the beginning of this chapter reflects: “Sometimes I think that I concentrate on what I did not have, and do it differently. I remember how I hated day-care (*bērnu dārzs*).” And she continues in the present tense, as if she is reliving it as we speak: “How I am being dressed and I cry, and how the teachers are yelling and swearing! Those terrible, cold metal potties, on which everybody had to sit at the same time in a stupid room with tiles! The nap-time when you are being reprimanded for not sleeping.”¹⁰⁹ She adds that she does not recall “really specific events, but feelings.” Liene contrasts these memories to the feelings of vacation, when she could go to her Grammy (*omīte*), revealing the certain nostalgia that several of my interlocutors shared – for the grandmotherly child-care, which similarly to the glorification of the country-side (Chapter 1) has been documented by popular Latvian literature.¹¹⁰ It is noteworthy that my body-intensive interlocutors could be simultaneously nostalgic for the grandmotherly care experienced as children, while resisting similar influence over their own children by their mothers and mothers-in-law (these two groups do not converge directly, but it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore). For Liene, then, her parenting style is geared towards combating her past, the Soviet day-care past, to which many adults who grew up in the Former USSR can relate, and often negatively. She also admits that it is one of the drivers behind her “body-intensive” parenting choices. Liene’s mother is an involved grandmother to her children, especially over the summer,

¹⁰⁹ Incidentally the children being forced to defecate and urinate according to a schedule is also one of the most powerful images that “Блеф, или с Новым годом!”/“Bleff, ili s novym godom!” (2013) (minute 19) propagates against the background of recently filmed episodes in Russian orphanages that portray toddlers collectively sitting on potties against a black-and-white background.

¹¹⁰ Nostalgia for (good) grandmotherly care is present in the contemporary culture (anecdotal evidence) and in the Latvian literary cannon (Jaunsudrabiņš; BRīgadere; Ikstena). Ikstena’s *Soviet Milk* that I analyze in more detail in Chapter 4 portrays a grandmother who by offering pragmatic care of her granddaughter “saves” her from some of the devastating impact of her suicidal mother. Bankovska (doctoral thesis, forthcoming) has pointed towards the role of the Latvian and Russian grandmother in food practices - as the nurturer and also as the “poisoner” of the new “organic child” with her inappropriate and “spoiling” practices around unhealthy food. (170 - 174). Bankovska ties this to the post-independence changes in power relations that have devalued women who are now in their sixties as members of production, but also cites other research Putnina and Zīverte (2008) and Lulle and King (2016) that demonstrates that women of that age (the age of the grandmother) hold influential positions in their social networks, albeit often diminishing their role in them or not being acknowledged for it.

when they live in the summer farm-house that I described in the beginning of this Chapter. Liene tells me that her mother recognizes that some of the advice she was given when her own children were little was faulty, for example, she nursed her eldest son according to the schedule, even though he was screaming his head off from what she now thinks was hunger. The body-intensive-ness of the care in which Kārlis and Liene are engaged is inaccessible to Liene's mother because of her own unfamiliarity with it. She, similarly to the women whose daughters I interviewed, the grandmothers of the contemporary Latvian children, seem to be suspended between her own in-experience with body-intensiveness and regret at what she had not known.

The imposing row of potties where toddlers are all forced to sit at the same time is a recurring theme in “Блеф, или с Новым годом!”/“Bleff, ili s novym godom!” (2013) the documentary about Russian orphanages that I watched on Silva's recommendation. The potty bench is also displayed at the GDR Museum in Berlin with the following accompanying text in English below the slightly different version in German: “**Collective Potty Breaks** (title in bold). A potty bench like this was used for collective potty breaks. Everybody had to sit until the last one was done.” The description goes on: “This was not only aimed at training them to use the toilet, it was also the first step in social education.” An accompanying chart shows the increase in day-care capacity in East Germany from 130 per 1000 children in 1950 to 811 per 1,000 children in 1986 and a request to discuss in writing whether children were better looked after in the East. This is followed by a short mention of criminology professor Christian Pfeiffer and his 1999 article that started the “potty-break” (Toepfen) debate, which blamed the lack of individualistic upbringing for an upsurge in anti-foreigner sentiments in former East Germany (GDR Museum 2019). At the GDR exhibit one is left with a lingering impression that the social education gained during the potty break, despite

the open-ended question regarding the benefits of East German child-care, did not translate into a better care, which is what most of my body-intensive interlocutors, like Liene, also believed.

Kelly (2007) has documented the increasingly negative attitudes in the post-Stalinist era towards institutionalized day-care, especially for children 6 weeks to 3 years old (*silīte* in Latvian, *ясли/yasli* in Russian or *crèche* French/English) that she explains with “new home-centered culture” (353) and lack of space and child-friendly conditions in the Soviet preschools. In Latvia the number of pre-schools increased dramatically during the Soviet period (from 5,700 in 1940 to 26,000 in 1960 and 130,000 in 1985) (Pirmskolas izglītība Latvijā n.d.). Yet, as in the rest of the USSR there were not enough spaces for all preschool-aged children (the 130,000 spaces in 1985 accounted for 61%¹¹¹ of all preschool age children, which is considerably less than the 81% in East Germany mentioned at the GDR exhibit), especially early childcare (Kelly 2007, 343). The overall unfavorable view of the Soviet institutionalized care, be it day-care or orphanages,¹¹² continues to color my interlocutors’ approach to caring for their own children. Similarly to Liene, who admits that her unpalatable preschool memories contribute to her “body-intensive” parenting choices, they parent in opposition to the model that is seen as limiting freedom and

¹¹¹ Year 1985 (and later) is about the time that most of my body-intensive interlocutors referenced. Since most children younger than one were at that time not expected to attend institutionalized child-care, the proportion of older children attending preschool was bigger than 61 % and most of my interlocutors referred to this experience. Even though informal (nanny and often grandparent-based) care had to be sought before, since 1981 mothers could take up to a year long child-care break. This was regulated by Decree 235 in 1981 when those who had formally worked for more than a year were granted up to a year of paid childcare leave (Kelly 2007, 351). Upon my birth (1977) and my sister’s (1979) my mother was granted 3 months of leave, but somehow managed to get it extended for my sister. That in practice some mothers had a year long child-care leave prior to 1981 is worth a historic investigation.

¹¹² Latvian anthropologist Artūrs Pokšāns who works on institutionalized educational care in Latvia has suggested to me (personal communication) that because the idea of children in the outside of home type of institutionalized care (a desirable state at least according to the official discourse during the Soviet times) was met with a severe morally informed disapproval from the 1990s on, this condemnation should not be lumped together with the parental memories of their own suffering under the Soviet preschool care, which is a generally accepted mode of care today. Yet, while I acknowledge this very useful distinction, I also consider the negative framing of personal memories of a much milder negative experiences with the Soviet preschool to stem from the same type of moral privileging of parent-child dyad that is informed by the Attachment ideology which shapes both lines of thinking and is supplemented with a dose of distrust of any institutionalized care as representative of the repressive Soviet past.

choice. The purposeful haptic management of children that includes attaching them close to the adult bodies stands here for a novel parenting style, different from the one produced by “toughening attachment” that was managed, but not corporeal. “Untoughening” attachment is imagined to forge a new future adult, free of the institutionalized Soviet past, but it also creates a new type of parent - engaged, attentive and available in tactile and immediate manner. These parents react to the perceived flaws of Soviet state care with their attachment practices that will make their children free and self-confident, two characteristics that can, if overdone, turn them into “spoiled children,” which threatens making the Latvian nation wimpy and unhardy.

III The Future Latvian: Self-Confident or Spoiled?

When I asked Elīna what kind of adult would she like her sons to grow to be, her first response was “happy” which she followed with a slow “ha, ha, ha” and a laughter and added:

Happy with themselves. I think of school in this context. Sometimes you think – oh, shit (ārprāts), he does not know how to read yet, or oh shit he does not know how to do math, maybe I need to do this or that, but then I have talked with other moms about what is the most important thing that we all want. And it’s that they learn to be... yes, that’s mega-important... to be happy with themselves, that they don’t need anyone to entertain them, that they can be happy by themselves.

While most interlocutors like Elīna reply “happy” at first, they later qualify what they mean and it often has to do with a certain conceptualization of the self (as in being happy with him or herself or having self-worth). For example, when I ask Laura, a mother of five children, the same question, she replies that she would like them to be self-reliant and aware of their self-value (pašvērtība), ideals that are similar to those described by Elīna and most of my interlocutors, and consistent with the expectation set by the Western version of Attachment Theory. Laura would also like her children to be “open minded” and not to have too many prejudices, but she adds: “It is a bit difficult in Latvia, for such families as mine, it is in our blood that feeling/sense (noskaņa) against the

Russians, and I sense that in the contemporary political climate¹¹³ the kids take something away from it. It's hard not to be prejudiced about this particular question.” The capacity for open-mindedness and happiness in this case is directly tied to the specific historic and geopolitical situation of Latvia and the tensions between ethnic Latvians and Russians that fluctuate based on current events. Physical closeness plays a particularly important role in the imagined ideal parental relationship to their child. Laura explains that she is purposefully trying to forge a very close physical relationship with her children, especially as they grow older. Laura: “I am making a very conscious effort to continue having a close relationship with my eldest daughter, because I feel that with my relationship to my mom was very cool (vēss) and distanced. I don't even remember if it ever was as close as my daughters and I have.” I ask what being close means to her, if it's only physical or something more and Laura replies: “Maybe something more, but the physical contact means a lot, because there comes sometimes a moment when I realize that I have not touched her (neesmu viņai piedūrusies) in days.” She adds that such revelations she has had about her mom, but also her eldest daughter, indicating that the older a person gets, the less effortless haptic engagements are. Laura explains the distance from her eldest daughter that she purposefully tries to overcome: “We are each of us in our own trajectory, twirling around and I can sense that my daughter needs it [the physical contact].”

Kārlis imagines what he would have liked to receive from his own parents: the closeness (tuvums) and love (mīļums). He expects that his children will not have to bear the lack (he calls it

¹¹³ The conversation with Laura was recorded about two years after the annexation of Crimea, which was perceived as threatening to Latvian sovereignty by most Latvian speakers. As I have noted in the Introduction, the Latvian and Russian speaking inhabitants of Latvia are known to view certain historic events differently, and may for example, differ in how they interpret the occupation/liberation of Latvia in 1940 and 1945 by the Soviet Union, deportations, the Second World War/Great Patriotic War II. I did not seek to specifically establish these differences among the body-intensive interlocutors I spoke to, but from the limited sample that I had, the language spoken at home did not make a big difference in terms of the haptic parenting choices. There was some cross-over in the sources, for example, an early natural breastfeeding group ККМ (Клуб кормящих мам/Клуб кормявших мам) (ККМ n.d.) was started in Russian around 2006 and was used by Latvian speakers too (and has a Latvian version of the site now).

“the little baggage”) of a [physical] connection, giving of warmth, energy and love, touching, tenderness, picking a child up (*opā ņemšana*).” He connects physical closeness to speaking about love by reflecting that his own parents have never said that they love him “in words” and adds that “it is normal that we would like to hear it from our parents, that’s why we are saying it to our children, so that they can hear us and they don’t need to ask us – ‘why didn’t you ever say it?’” Kārlis telling his children that he loves them thus comes to stand in for hearing it being said by his own parents “in words.” The purposeful corporeality is a way to express love too, and it is different from making sure that the children are well fed, at which Kārlis says his mom was very good.¹¹⁴ While there were some exceptions where my interlocutors said that they essentially parented the same way as their parents did, the majority, like Kārlis, Liene and Dace, were explicitly countering their relationships with their own parents, placing a particular emphasis on the importance of physical closeness. Such physical closeness is expected to forge emotional intimacy and to aid in overcoming certain regimes of silence about such topics as gendered bodies and their functions, sexuality and emotional health.

My interlocutors sometimes explained the lack of conversation about intimate topics by the way that [ethnic] Latvians were by nature (*taciturn*) or the overall problems with communication or lasting relationships in Latvia.¹¹⁵ Forging long-lasting relationships through physical closeness

¹¹⁴ This is not to imply that my interlocutors did not identify food with love. Even though I will not be able to address the complex interaction of feeding practices and love/care (See Bankovska - forthcoming dissertation for more on this topic) here, I definitely encountered many instances of food being used as an expression of love, especially, in the context of breastfeeding, which was always promoted as more than just a meal or ensuring that a child had a healthy meal. In Kārlis’ case, however, the point is that just feeding a child is not enough.

¹¹⁵ Latvia, for example, has been named the most introverted nation in Europe by a 2018 BBC article (Ro 2018), which was translated into Latvian and widely (and appreciatively) commented on. This article mentioned that Latvians often cross the road in order to avoid running into people walking towards them. In a popular campaign by the public transportation agency that started in 2016 in Rīga, the law-abiding passengers were portrayed as sitting facing away from each other with a seat-in between them, while the trouble-makers were sitting close together, touching and hugging (one of them was smoking and had a bottle in hand). Thus, physical closeness in Latvia can be treated as suspect. To further underscore the sense that Latvians enjoy having physical distance, let me end this FTN on a joke - as the social distancing measures of COVID-19 pandemic were implemented (2 meters distance), a widely circulated joke

is a key element in such considerations. Dace, who like Kārlis expects that her two daughters will grow up able to find a balance in themselves (*līdzsvaru sevī*) and able to accept and love themselves without being too self-critical or harming others (*nedara pārī apkārtējiem*), also emphasizes her commitment to bodily expressions of love such as hugs (*samīļošanās, apskaušanās*).

An influential Latvian child psychologist and the author of a recently published book “The First Relationships in a Person’s life. [Subtitle: “To be together from inception throughout the first 6 months of life], Vita Kalniņa, lays out the Latvia-specific reasons for publishing the book as follows: “I have not yet found a book at a book-store that would be useful for Latvian families and simultaneously would present all the globally topical information regarding how to take care of a newborn and how to forge relationships based on the needs of parents and children.” She explains that there are certain Latvian myths that she seeks to counter by posing the following questions: “Why do grandmas threaten you that your child will be spoiled, when in reality that’s all nonsense?” or “Why would some mothers enjoy breastfeeding, while for others it’s a terrible torture they want to forgo?” She goes on: “All around me I see people who were not understood or listened to as babies and who as older children or babies do not find inner peace.” (Kalniņa 2018: 10) These people who remained unheard as babies, Kalniņa cautions the reader, experience “anxiety” that they seek to lessen by unsettled, erratic behavior (*dīdoties, trakojojot*), losing themselves in modern technologies, over-eating and substance abuse. “These people,” she adds, “are also distant, do not trust anybody, cannot forge close relationships, feel lonely and unhappy and do not believe in themselves.” (Kalniņa 2018, 10).¹¹⁶

stated: “As Latvians were told to stand 2 meters apart, they wanted to know if really they had be that close.” (There were similar jokes about Estonia, for example, “Once the two meter restriction was lifted, the Estonians breathed a sigh of relief, finally they can go back to normal--standing 5 meters away.”)

¹¹⁶ While Kalniņa does not cite Williams Sears, the happy adult who is self-confident and good at relationships is similar to what Dr. Sears envisions as the end product of the attachment style parenting, namely, one who who will

Most of my interlocutor parents hope that their way of parenting will make their children exactly the opposite of the morose likeness painted by Kalniņa. They want their children to be more “self-confident” (pārliciecināti par sevi, pašapzinīgi) or independent (neatkarīgi), even “overly-confident” (pašpārliciecināti, which can carry an undesirable meaning). Self-confidence was something that they overwhelmingly imagined was missing in themselves and certainly in their Soviet-raised parents’ generation. The people I spoke to talked about their children, however, as more self-confident, sometimes significantly more so than they were. For example, Dace describes how her nine year-old daughter whom she describes as “bigger” (liela) is getting teased about being fat at school and that she has responded with much more confidence than Dace herself could have. “She dealt with it much better than I would have even at 18 or 20. She talks openly about her problems, she talks to me if she feels bad, but she does not [feel bad]. It seems that she somehow feels better in her body than I ever did... “

Several of my interlocutors described the complicated haptic relationships they have with their relatives, especially mothers. While Laura now makes a conscious effort to hug her mother “good-bye” every time they meet, Dace says her mother and stepfather are very uncomfortable hugging. To this day, her mother has hugged her only a few times. “I remember,” she tells me, “being in the 11th grade and being hysterical, and I am crying and asking her please hug me (samīļo mani), and she cannot. I remember that situation and her face. I am crying and she cannot hug me; there is something so threatening (biedējošs) in me.” Dace then has a purposefully more haptic and intimate relationship with her two daughters (1.5 and 9 years old). For example, we have a 2.5

find comfort in feeling close to others and “have the skills that make relationships last and will be good friends, good spouses, good parents and good citizens” (Sears and Sears 2002, 38). According to Sears the connected child as a child already relates to the rest of the world in a caring, confident and cuddly ways, prefers people to computers, is huggable and comfortable with closeness, communicates needs without being clingy and would easily stand out in the crowd. Kalniņa’s child also does not lose herself in modern-technologies or unhealthy habits.

hour long interview while she is lying next to her youngest daughter and breastfeeding her from time to time, so we can talk. Dace also says that she talks a lot with her daughters whom she is raising in a single-parent household. She tells me in a whisper over the head of her toddler who has started to stir: “I talk openly (a sigh) about complicated topics, even to this one I am trying to explain, what the situation is.” Dace’s daughters emerge from these encounters as better listeners than Dace’s own mother making them more mature than their grandmother and more capable of facing certain issues than her.

Most of my interlocutors, just like Liene earlier, admitted that they parented in response to their own parents whom they often associated with a different generation that had grown up during the Soviet times.¹¹⁷ Even in cases where my interlocutors said that their parents were supportive of their parenting tactics, they had sought to establish independence from their parents.¹¹⁸ Similarly to Liene’s husband Kārlis in the opening vignette, they were cautioned by others (not always only by parents, but also by people their own age, who did not practice “body-intensive” parenting) that they might spoil their children. Some parents were struggling with a feeling that the old-style parenting might have been better. Thus Zane, a 39 year-old mother of three children, who was working part-time as a marketing specialist in her own company, complained to me that she had

¹¹⁷ Soviet times (*padomju laiki*) is the term my interlocutors used a lot in ways that referenced a negative and hampering experience/skillset. Dzenovska (2018) has written about this phenomenon.

¹¹⁸ Even in cases where my interlocutors said that their parents were supportive of their parenting tactics, they had sought to establish independence from their parents. So, for example, Elina (39, media director and a mother of two boys, ages 11 and 3) when her eldest son was 3 weeks old, was attending along with her husband the Song and Dance Festival, an event of national importance in Latvia attended by thousands. Elina recalls: “We were in the car and my mom called. “Where are you? How are you doing?” “Well – we are going to the Song Festival.” And she went: “Really? Are you sure? Why would you want to do that? There are viruses and what not.” And then I replied to her... I really had to gather myself for that: “Listen Mom, you raised (*audzināt*) me, and my grandmother raised you and I am raising Didzis [her son]. Yes and then (laughs)... and so... This is how ... over the phone... And we both remember it. She really remembers it. It was such a knife into the ribs (*nazis ribās*) (laughs). (Karīna: “Did she get offended?) Yes, maybe a little bit, but it was really needed to open the tumor (*uzšķērst to augoni*). And then she really understood that, yes, I decide about my child.” In this example, intergenerational communication regarding child-rearing is mediated through language that is related to bringing relationships into the open, opening up a wound (a tumor). Her mom always reminds her of this conversation, but also has not interfered in Elina’s parenting.

totally overdone it with her first child, whom she had parented in a body-intensive way, a daughter Alma who now at age eight is hard to manage: “She does not mind me at all. As if I am nothing to her (Es esmu tukša vieta).” Zane explains that, “All the breastfeeding on demand. Intuitively I knew that I should not be doing it. My mom was telling me that I was wrong (mamma lamāja no panckām ārā) and it is possible that she was right – a child needs to be fed at two, four, six and ten, the rest of the time—water.” While I am looking at the canvas drawings, that Alma has painted all by herself to be sold, I ask Zane if she changed anything with her subsequent two children, to which she replies: “I did not change anything. I was sorry to do that to such a small baby.” When I ask her when a child becomes a non-baby, she laughs and replies that her two year-old son who is still hanging on the breast at all possible moments, would be a good example of a non-baby. But Zane also explains that her toddler breastfeeding makes it easier for her: “And then he just attaches himself (piesūcas) and is high (ķer kaifu), and I can rest.” A while later Zane’s toddler son does exactly that. Upon waking up from a nap, he stumbles out of the bed-room, all sleepy-head and crawls onto his mother’s lap, took out a breast and attached himself to it.

Zane tells me over his head that she has recently been trying to read a book on French parenting, which is very different from Attachment parenting, but she has had no time to finish it. I ask her what the book is about. Zane: “About the fact that even a new-born needs to be taught some order (jāaudzina pie kārtības). That really they need to learn patience and we should not respond to every baby’s cry and moan. This book has been translated into Latvian.” She goes on to explain that the book teaches parents to not pick up children right away when they wake up, because it might just be a change in the [sleep] phase, which is quite different from what she has done. She adds: “I like it that the book teaches parents to learn to pause, so that the children learn

to be more on their own. I spoiled Alma completely (*Almu es absolūti sabojāju*), all those massages,¹¹⁹ that helped her to crawl, she did not have to work at all, she cannot spend any time on her own and needs me to participate in all of her ideas.” She sighs exasperatedly: “I cannot react to all her quick ideas!” One of those ideas is to sell a small painting on a canvas for 10 euros to me, which causes Zane some distress. Alma and I haggle and I buy the painting for 7 euros, as I explain to Zane that I really like to collect children’s art work: ”What if they become famous one day?” We smile at each other.

When Zane jokingly blames herself for ruining her daughter, she conceptualizes Alma as an unruly subject without clear limits, shaped by her own parenting (and what Zane’s mother was cautioning against) echoing the complains that my interlocutors hear from others. Not being able to deal with Alma’s constant demands on her time and energy, she grasps for possible solutions and explanations that hinge on the idea that perhaps a schedule that the previous generation used was better after all. Unlike Darja who rethought her ideas around discipline, Zane is wondering if less corporeal interaction in infancy would have made her daughter listen to her more. The bodily attachment has not evolved Alma into a self-reliant child in control of herself, who is independent (of Zane). Alma is expected to learn to control herself within a child-rearing system that encouraged an intense physical attachment of an infant and her mother. The dyadic corporeal relationship was predicated, however, upon an expectation, even a requirement, as Alma grew older, to separate. Such separation was expected to evolve into an individual expression and independence. While Alma creates art projects for sale as her creative expression, Zane is frustrated that her daughter needs her to be part of every such project. The critique of her own parenting in Zane’s case, like a lot of my conversations with body-intensive interlocutors, is undertaken in a half-

¹¹⁹ Zane here refers to a massage specialist who visited her at home to exercise Alma when she was an infant. I will explore the Latvians’ openness to specialist baby massages in more detail in Chapter 3.

serious manner. Alma getting spoiled, as Zane's mother had warned, seems to be a mere consequence of the milieu in which Zane lives – her friends parent this way, though she admits that her sister has followed their mother's regime. Zane's milieu, however, associates such regimented child-rearing with ideas of emotional hygiene, "toughening attachment" and institutionalized care.

Just like Zane, other parents I interviewed are aware of the dangers of too much attachment, which, as I showed earlier in the chapter, is considered undesirable. They are carefully balancing on the tightrope between ensuring enough corporeal and emotional connection with their children that would lead to safety and freedom and the fears around spoiling. Kārlis who has three older and two younger siblings talks about how the youngest two were raised in a less strict manner. To this his wife Liene adds in a lightly playful tone that Kārlis' parents "did not raise them much at all (neaudzināja)." Kārlis responds to her in a tongue-in-cheek manner as well: "Spoiled! (izlaida)." He continues to describe how his parents themselves have admitted that they spoiled their younger children, but have defended their own "bad parenting" (sliktā audzināšana). He links this phenomenon to the issue of younger children [in larger (than 3) families] in general: "But that is not only in our family. I have a friend where the youngest (sīkais) is already a grown man (liels vīrs), but his mom is all over him like he's a baby (mans mīļais bērniņš). My friend never had that."¹²⁰ Kārlis also talks about children who are spoiled by being "loved too much (pārmīlētie bērni)," saying that there is such a concept in psychology. "A child who is suffocated by parental love," he explains and adds ominously, "Most likely by his mother's unfulfilled life, probably a failed relationship with her husband. It's like the mother is sacrificing herself for her child, but the child is the victim." The mother according to this interpretation is implicated in the dyadic relationship with her child, in which she risks becoming the violent perpetrator if she does not

¹²⁰ Considering that most families in Latvia these days do not have more than two children, I interpret this commentary as an expectation of constant vigilance and not-relaxing of parenting standards no matter how many children one has.

work out her relationship with men. Her attachment to her child, however, is not secure, but rather based in her own failed life and anxieties. Secure attachment requires a lot of work on the adult's own sense of self, which in this example is heavily gendered.

Whether it is Alma who is not listening to her mother and bargaining with me over the price of her painting or Kārlis' younger siblings, the concept of the spoiled child (*izlaists bērns*) has an important presence in my interviews with body-intensive parenting practitioners, who both have to counter their relatives' concerns over spoiling and try to avoid it themselves. Here I would like to return to Stryker's ideas on "toughening attachment" and ask how toughening may be linked to the inter-generational expectations around spoiled children. I am curious if these concerns are in any way linked to the fears regarding raising wimpy, unfit children I explored in Chapter 1. Toughening of the body (*norūdīšana*), after all, is still commonly accepted as desirable in Latvia (for history see Kelly 2007). It seems that toughening of the psyche/emotions by withdrawing attachment to adults, similarly to Stryker's orphanages, is no longer officially part of any child-development discourse.

A "spoiled child" surfaces in my body-intensive interviews through fears around children who are not listening to their parents (*neklausā vecākus*), especially in public spaces – they need to have more limits and possibly toughness (*stingrība*). Intergenerational disagreements can take place as a passive shaming from grandparents directly to the child as when Grammy (Ome) asks the child who sleeps in the same bed as her parents: "But who is going to sleep in your bed?" There is also the idea among the parents of young children that the previous generation did not know how to raise children, they were somehow damaged by the Soviet period, and they even might admit it. Similarly to Kārlis, who persisted in countering the arguments about spoiling their babies in the sling, several other interlocutors told me about their resistance to pressure. Laura who

is in her early forties, on a child-care leave from her work as a governmental civil servant explained to me that it had become increasingly less important how her children were perceived by what she called “the society”.

Karīna: “ What is considered bad behavior by society?

Laura: If they throw a tantrum in a shop. That has not happened for a while, but when my son was little, he did that all the time. My eldest daughter had tantrums when her sister was born. And I had that feeling that I don’t know how to raise my children. I had expected it to be easier to draw the line, but in real life it is not that simple.

K: Is that line connected to what society expects or no?

L: That has changed now that I have five children. I used to worry about what others expect me to do, but now I don’t even care much what the grandparents (omes un opji) expect, not to even mention strangers. At some point you realize that you are not a bad mom when you side with your child if somebody threatens your child with a police officer in a shop. Or they say: “You are a big boy, why are you screaming like that?” So that’s when you get that contact with your child, when you support/defend them and they hear you (viņš tevi sadzird).

The collective approach to child-rearing (such as shaming a child who is not yours) is presented here as outdated (possibly in the line with “toughening attachment” which is a left-over from the Soviet times). What my body-intensive interlocutors do is specifically positioned as a commentary on the Soviet past of their parents, who either complied with or rejected Soviet collectivist requirements in child-rearing. The self-assurance and security fostering child-rearing of the parents to whom I talked were purposely (albeit not always easily, as the Zane’s example demonstrates) geared towards “untoughening” previous practices that were perceived as creating lack of confidence in my interlocutors themselves. Their haptic body-intensive child-rearing was to enable the future Latvians to forge close relationships and to believe in themselves, creating a generation that did not over-eat or indulge in alcohol consumption, as Kalniņa’s (2018) prophesied. While there

was no purposeful work towards turning these children into hardy Song festival signers, their resistance to being wimps was rooted in their future emotional resilience and the capacity for self-awareness.

Conclusion

Through the examples of ergonomic baby-carriers and adherence to changing ideas around attachment, this chapter documented a shift in post-Cold War subjectivization that is taking place through body-intensive child-rearing and insists on raising more independent and self-reliant progeny. I explored practices that have been decried by some as catering to a young child's whims ("all his whims," as Silva mentions tongue-in-cheek) or carrying young babies in the arms too much, as Kārlis does in the other opening vignette. The chapter focused on fears around spoiling children to which my body-intensive interlocutors had to respond, while simultaneously raising their offsprings to become free (*brīvi*). I argued that body-intensive parents, like Kārlis, Liene and Silva are parenting in ways that take into account the unique geopolitical and historical situation in Latvia, which causes them to engage in "managed corporeality" quite differently from previous generations, who focused on tempering and hardening the body (Kelly 2007) or emotional toughening (Stryker 2012). In doing so, these parents utilize the Western concept of attachment, but prioritize the concepts of "security" and "freedom" over that of "attachment."

The Latvian version of "attachment theory," with its emphasis on security over tying a child to oneself, illustrates a fundamental paradox of Bowlby's theory—in order to create an independent, self-sufficient adult subject one has to bind the newborn extremely physically close. This

paradox is inherent in Attachment Theory itself, but the Latvian translation (where security becomes paramount to attachment) makes it particularly pronounced, especially in the context of the intergenerational disagreement on the importance of “holding/carrying children (nēsāt uz rokām).”

By portraying the desires around parenting of my interlocutors, I highlighted an anxiety about freedom, that they experience in reference to the Soviet past, which was seen as oppressive of individuality and was exemplified by toddlers being coerced to sit together on potty-breaks at day-care. Being Soviet here stands for old-fashioned ideas that need to be counteracted by a changed behavior in the present. A Bowlby-derived theory is one such way, and it is implemented more widely than among the body-intensive parents I interviewed (for example, in the anti-institutionalization movement of orphanages). The future adult that my body-intensive interlocutors imagine to be raising is confident, self-reliant, happy and not confined or controlled by “the system,” in other words desirable, post-Cold War subjects in a dyadic relationship to adults, who are expected to mostly be their mothers.

Chapter 3 Doing Away with the *Baby Tonuss* in Masha’s Arms: A Contemporary Pediatric and Child-Rearing Practice as an Epistemic Object

As this chapter commences, we find ourselves once again in a typical Soviet-style housing district of Rīga in a flat very similar to that of Silva, whom we met in Chapter 2.

Most of the furniture seems to have been acquired after the Soviet period, and there is a widescreen TV on the wall. The computer desk, that extends into a shelf is decorated by two small orthodox icons that share their space with a laptop and a desktop computer. On top of the shelf there sits a doll in crocheted clothes and two rag-dolls in Russian national costumes. Another shelf on the room faces the large window and displays several books on engineering which is Masha’s mother’s Darja’s profession. Masha is a six-month-old baby, alert and wide-eyed. This is my second visit. I came first to interview Masha’s mother Darja and have been interviewing her father Gregory today. We are about to watch a video of Masha. We all, including the baby, are watching the desktop screen, where Masha of two months earlier is hanging out on her belly on a disposable underpad. The specialist on the screen starts by pressing her fingers into Masha’s back, then covers the child with a white bath towel, leaving Masha’s bottom bare and using her knuckles to knead it. Gregory, Darja, and I look alternately at the screen and at Masha of today. The specialist takes off the towel, picks up the child and rests Masha’s back against her own stomach, folding the baby’s legs in so that the two feet touch, with one hand on Masha’s head and the other on the bottom. “This is how you should carry her!” she advises the parents, who are invisible in the video, and then adds: “*Tonuss* becomes more pronounced when a child is three months old.” I am all ears: “What starts at three months? Oh, a *tonuss*? Did she have a *tonuss*?” Darja: “Yes, she had it in her legs and arms, that’s why we were referred to a specialist, especially the arms.” The specialist is massaging Darja’s foot now. Masha on the screen is starting to assume a permanently puzzled expression. The specialist arches Masha back while holding her hands, folds her arms across her chest, twists and turns her while massaging her body. About six minutes into the 14-minute session, Masha of the video starts to cry and never stops, her crying turning into screeching. It is hard for me to watch. I address both of the parents: “How was it for you to watch this? It is difficult even for me.” Gregory: “We left there in such a shock! I should say ran out rather, even forgot to get dressed in our winter jackets.” As past Masha continues screaming in the background, Gregory tells me: “Yes, that was very hard. I felt that I was complicit in torture. I was standing there and filming my own daughter being tortured. And she must have been in shock. Her parents were there and doing nothing when she was being harmed.”

Darja and Gregory are first-time parents in their early thirties, and I am interviewing them for the part of my dissertation that deals with body-intensiveness, a new and “alternative” approach to child-rearing that emphasizes the individuality and emotional well-being of children. Yet, they have just showed me a video that, according to Gregory, was shot under circumstances that he

likens to child torture. What is more, the medical baby massage that they are showing me is quite a common practice in Latvia, as is the condition of the *baby tonuss* that it is supposed to remedy.

In Chapter 3 I inquire into the conditions of the term *baby tonuss* (tonuss in Latvian and тонус/tonus in Russian)¹²¹ and its prescribed remedies in the context of the Latvian medical system. *Baby tonuss* is a condition, of which many Latvian parents are aware, even though it is not an easily definable phenomenon. It is characterized by tightly wound muscles in the infant's body that should be easily identifiable in the asymmetrical bodily positioning of the baby. Such misalignment is used by some pediatric specialists as an indication of a pathology which should be treated with manual therapy. However, other specialists, most notably some physical therapists, do not consider this a proper medical diagnosis, even though they also "treat" it, based on the popular demand. Considering *baby tonuss* in the light of fears over children's bodily misalignment, I explore how the considerations of *baby tonuss* relate to those of the normative Latvian child that I touched upon in the two previous chapters.

Baby tonuss can be viewed as an epistemic object that originates in the Soviet period but has acquired its present rendering under specifically Latvian (and post-Cold War) health-care conditions, for example, the pediatric attention to prophylaxis (profilakse - the Latvian term for preventative medicine that originated in the Soviet times) or the relatively new field of physical therapy that has developed since the 1990s. Along the way, I show how various players are involved in addressing the *tonuss* problem, for example, parents such as Darja and Gregory, the physical therapists, or the variety of professionals who operate under the nebulous umbrella of

¹²¹ Darja and Gregory speak Russian to each other. I interviewed Darja in Latvian and Gregory in Russian. That they are Russian-speakers certainly has a relevance in the framework of this dissertation, which argues examines what I describe as Latvian-specific values (such as the disciplining practice of the Song Festival and the imaginary Endangered Latvian Singing Child) that impact the way children's bodies are considered in Latvia. However, in the case of *baby tonuss* there were to my knowledge no language-related differences, i.e., both Latvian- and Russian- speakers were aware of the diagnosis and the treatments that I will discuss in this chapter, rendering the considerations around bodily symmetry and straightness of the spine an important organizing principle for child-rearing.

“the baby masseuse” such as the woman in the opening vignette and other practitioners who advocate a relatively new kind of “right way” of handling a newborn, called *hendlings*. Both physical therapy as a wider field¹²² and *hendlings* as the prescriptive art of the corporeal caring for a baby have emerged in the post-Cold war period and operate within the same model of thought that emphasizes the individuality of the newborn and the necessity for early intervention. The understanding around *baby tonuss*, however, stems from the Soviet period, but it has been incorporated into the post-Cold war child-rearing scene in new and creative ways.

I begin this chapter with background information on *baby tonuss*, which was the reason Darja and Gregory had taken Masha to several specialists, including the one in the video. They simultaneously referred to the massaging professional as a masseuse (массажистка/masazhistka in Russian) and physical therapist. Physical therapy in theory does not promote baby-massage as the primary way of treating infants who are thought to suffer from the *baby tonuss*. In fact, the condition that physical therapists would treat should bear the medical name of either “increased muscle tone” (hipertonuss) or “decreased muscle tone” (hipotonuss). A more comprehensive rearrangement of the baby’s daily care, including reordering the space around the infant, should be the prescribed therapy, I was told by Anete R., a physical therapist in a small town in Latvia who treated both adults and children in her practice. Other physical therapists might offer massage because it is among the medical expenses that can be billed to the state. Thus, the formal training of physical therapists which does not prioritize massage of young children, can be overridden by informal practices of some physical therapists but also by baby masseuses, such as the professional in the opening vignette, who most probably had received their training during the Soviet period

¹²² Physical therapists are among the younger groups of medical practitioners in Latvia. This is based on my personal observation at an annual Physical therapy conference where many participants visually appeared to be younger than 40 (my age at the time) and data from the Latvian Physiotherapists Association that notes that the average age of a physical therapist in Latvia is 30.

and were re-certified as masseuses after 1991. Anete R. told me that in her town - most parents of small infants expect that a series of massages be routinely administered as treatment for *baby tonuss* by the medical professionals such as the specialist in the video even though Anete R. herself did not considered *tonuss* a medical diagnosis.

I follow discussion of the condition by tracing some of the ways in which *baby tonuss* and its corporeal treatments came about in Latvia. In particular, I argue that *baby tonuss* and its treatment are embedded in the Soviet history of *Healing Physical Culture* (*ārstnieciskā fizikultūra* in Latvian, *лечебная физкультура/lyechebnaya fizkultura* in Russian, sometimes translated into English as physiotherapy¹²³). I begin by investigating the phenomenon of prophylaxis, the ideas around preventative care that originate in the Soviet period, and show how this concept contributed to the continuous development of *baby tonuss*, even when it is not a purely medical diagnosis, but rather a tacit acknowledgment of a cultural phenomenon. In pediatrics preventative care is endowed with a temporal urgency -the consequences of condition that could be prevented by a swift therapy can be dire and possibly impact the person for the rest of their adult lives. Drawing on writings on pediatric medicine (Kaufman 2010; Mattingly 2010; Medeiros 2016) that illustrate the perception that children are malleable, vulnerable, and hence in need of constant vigilance, Chapter 3 explores how the concerns over timely intervention play out in caring for children's asymmetrical bodies in Latvia. *Healing Physical Culture* (HPC) while rooted in understanding of

¹²³ Translating “лечебная физкультура/lyechebnaya fizkultura” (Russian) or “ārstnieciskā fizikultūra” (Latvian) as physiotherapy is the default translation on google translate. However, I argue that it is essential to use the Soviet term “ārstnieciskā fizikultūra” or *Healing Physical Culture* because of the ideological undertones that I have touched upon in this chapter. It is also crucial to note that the term “fizikālā terapija” (Latvian) was also used in the USSR (and to this day in Latvia) for a therapy that included direct or alternated natural resources (*tiešus vai mainītus dabas faktorus*), for example, mud, electricity or ultrasound, magnetic field) (VCA 2017; ViaUnaKlīnika n.d.). Although “fizikālā terapija” translates literally into English as physical therapy, is it not the same field, even though it can be and has been (especially in Soviet resort therapy) used interchangeably. To further add to the confusion, the Russian translation for nature-derived treatment is *физиотерапия/fizioterapija*, which when transliterated into Latin script is the same as the Latvian word for physical therapy (*fizioterapija*) and the Russian version of *fizikālā terapija* or *физикальная терапия* can only be found in contemporary Latvian Russian language sources.

preventative health, also possessed reactive aspects, as in responses to sports injuries. Athletic activity as an ideologically prescribed course of development took a front seat in the way bodies were imagined in the Soviet system, earning the assignation of “Physical Culture” to the lofty field that dealt with sports and movement. This included using bodily movement as medical therapy and constituted a new field of the *Healing Physical Culture* or HPC. HPC dealt not only with sports traumas and injury preventative care, but also with the overall bodily preparedness for what was often termed the “physical load” of non-athletes. The latter included working with infants and attending to such symptoms as “increased infant muscle tone,” which, I will show, was imbued with concerns over physiological asymmetry that could lead to crookedness.

Finally, I examine contemporary ways of addressing the condition of *baby tonuss*. I first explore the history of the field of physical therapy in Latvia that, as a post-Cold war discipline, distinguishes itself from the Soviet origins of the HPC. I then examine a common form of intervention on *baby tonuss* or the art of *hendlings*, the “right” way of corporeal engagement in the daily care of an infant, that is popularized by Claudia Hell and other professionals, including some physical therapists, lactation consultants and doulas. I also attend to how these professionals interpret the ideas of asymmetry and bodily crookedness and in so doing, I ask what these sites of distinction articulate about Latvian body-related morality and the perception of the normative child: symmetrical and with a straight back.

I The *Baby Tonuss*: A Non-medical “Medical Diagnosis”

Darja and Gregory were not the first body-intensive parents who told me that their child suffered from *baby tonuss*. This condition was most often simply called *tonuss* or in the diminutive *tonusiņš*, while some referenced that it was *muskuļu tonuss*¹²⁴ or muscle tone in English. I heard about *tonuss* from a wide range of parents who were and were not engaged in the body-intensive practices I was researching.¹²⁵ Despite the widespread referrals by parents to various medical specialists and the promises to lessen *tonuss* in the advertisements put forth by several health-care institutions (NV5 2012; ARS 2014) a *baby tonuss* is not considered a proper biomedical diagnosis. I was repeatedly told by doctors and physical therapists that this condition should not really be called just a *tonuss*, but rather “increased muscle tone” (*paaugstināts muskuļu tonuss*). As physical therapist Anete R. explained to me, a certain amount of muscle tone (*muskuļu tonuss* in Latvian) is considered necessary and present at all times. According to Anete R., the child is born flexed inwards (*fleksorais tonuss*) and starts extending outward (*ekstensorais tonuss*) after birth.¹²⁶ Some family practitioners use the diagnosis of asymmetrical *tonuss*, which is characterized by tension in one side of the body. I will show later in the chapter how *baby tonuss* has evolved from being considered a symptom of an illness to a diagnosable condition in its own right.

¹²⁴ A similar term “мышечный тонус/*myshchevoi tonus*” is used in Russian (without the diminutive version, which is a peculiarity of the Latvian language that often reverts to the diminutive in order to soften or render less serious certain nouns).

¹²⁵ I had heard of this condition/symptom when both of my children were born in Latvia (in 2008 and 2010), but could never quite understand what physical expression it took on exactly. I did assume that I knew what it meant when I heard the specialist in the video using the term *tonuss*, and only while writing up this analysis realized that I did not really know what how it presented in a baby’s body.

¹²⁶ I have not been able to identify any Latvian language sources, such as a teaching materials, geared toward medical professionals that articulate the idea explained to me by Anete R. The Physical therapy program she studied relied heavily on English language sources. I will attend to the translatability issue of this in Section III of this Chapter, when I consider the development of the field of Physical therapy in Latvia.

Baby tonuss, as it is popularly conceived, appears to be an indicator of a potential impediment to the development of the child. It can for example, hinder breastfeeding, delay crawling or walking. Some parents and alternative childcare professionals interpret it as excess stress that the child is experiencing bodily. Thus, what the physicians or parents are attempting to diagnose when they say *baby tonuss* is a type of bodily indicator that would allow them to prevent a future pathology. To most of the parents and specialists to whom I spoke, the condition of a *tonuss* meant a tension (physiological but also mental) that could be diagnosed based on the way the infant's body appeared to be in one or another way asymmetrical or tense. In line with common temporal concerns in pediatric health that demand swiftness and the right kind of attentiveness on behalf of the parents and medical staff (Kaufman 2010; Medeiros 2016), a *tonuss* requires swift and immediate intervention to avoid creating future problems for the baby in rolling over, crawling and walking. Indeed, the entire corporeal development of a child is in danger, exemplified by later concerns about correct posture (*stāja*) or the position of the feet. The condition could have come about as a side effect of a medical condition, such as a breech position in the womb or be explained as the emotional reaction of a baby to the world.

To Anda J., the lactation and baby-wearing consultant whom we met in Chapter 2, what the *baby tonuss* meant was “increased muscle tone,” to which she added: “But to me it actually means the tension (*spriedze*) of the parents.” Darja explained that because Masha had been in a breech position (*tūpļa guļa*), after the vaginal birth at the maternity hospital, they were told to consult an orthopedist or orthopedic surgeon¹²⁷ (*ortopēds*) when the baby reached the age of two months. This specialist, whom they consulted privately, paying out-of-pocket,¹²⁸ diagnosed the

¹²⁷ The Latvian *ortopēds* does not distinguish between orthopedist and orthopedic surgeon, but most orthopedists in Latvia are also surgeons, and there are not many pediatric orthopedists outside of the capital.

¹²⁸ This is essential because children are expected to receive free health care until they turn 18 years of age in Latvia, but just like in this case, due to the urgency of the required care, parents often end up paying out of pocket.

“increased *tonuss*.” Their family practitioner then referred Masha to five state-paid massages. Later Darja and Gregory supplemented these five visits with an additional visit to the specialist who combined massage with exercises and was featured in the video that opened this chapter. They paid for this service out-of-pocket as well and filmed the process, so that they could perform the exercises at home, which they did faithfully. They consulted the orthopedic surgeon (ortopēds) once more when Masha was four months old, as there had been suspicion of hip dysplasia, but everything was fine. Darja credits the sling wearing for being a good preventative care (profilakse).

Just like Darja and Greogry, parents seek expertise on *baby tonuss* which could be rendered by medical professionals such as pediatricians or physical therapists, but also by doulas or other early child-care specialists such as lactation consultants. Because of the breech position in which Masha was born, Darja has been told that she has a medical reason for the treatment of *tonuss*. The medical and baby-care professionals I interviewed for my study, however, told me that many of the parents rely on more anecdotal reasoning around the treatment for *baby tonuss* such as hearsay of their friends or relatives who claim expertise on the subject. Anda J. told me that many of the parents who fear that their child has *baby tonuss* come to them because somebody (either a neighbor, a friend or in some cases a medical professional) told them that their baby had a *tonuss*. The two family doctors I interviewed and who referred young infants for massages also insisted that it takes place upon the cajoling of the parents, who in turn are convinced that a *baby tonuss* is a medical diagnosis. As the physical therapist Anete R. explained to me: “There are a lot of parents who come to me for *baby tonuss*. You know—somebody told them or they heard somewhere that they should come to a physical therapist. They usually want a massage, but I explain to them that it will be more about restructuring their child’s environment, but also how they hold and interact with them.”

The informal expertise on *baby tonuss* centers on identifying certain physical features, often rooted in the principle of asymmetry, that could be significant for the child's physical development. Silva, whom along with her two sons (biological and foster) we met in Chapter 2, tells me that she took her biological son Ralfs to a physical therapist in a place called "Baby Spa" (in English not Latvian) under the influence of what she termed "herd-mentality" (*bara ietekmē*) because one of his feet was facing in a bit. She explains: "I went because others did. We did not go when Ralfs was very tiny. He was already trying to stand up." Silva goes on to explain that she did not see anything harmful in this visit: "They have a room for children there, where the little ones get exercised in water (*peldina tos mazos*). We went only once, because they told us that we do not need to come again, but they exercised [Ralfs] and observed him."

Silva emphasized the preventative and harmless nature of this type of treatment: "I did not think there were anything bad in only exercising. It was not like they gave [him] antibiotics. I had by then googled through a lot of information [*visu gūgli biju izlasījusi*] and knew that his foot can straighten out on its own, that there might not be any need for a supinator [an arch in the shoe] like in the olden days." Silva does not call her concerns a *baby tonuss*. She is bothered over the angle of her child's feet, in which case a visit to a physical therapist seems like the right solution, because a lot of people she knows have done the same with their young children ("herd-mentality"), and the therapist "only exercises" the child instead of prescribing a potentially more harmful therapy such as antibiotics. Silva also notes that her foster son Andris had extreme tension around his shoulder region when they fostered him: "As if he had been sitting in an office. Also his other condition (psoriasis) is a condition caused by stress. There is all this stress inside. He could not for a long time relax fully." While she is not mentioning the exact diagnosis of *baby tonuss*, she most

clearly looks out for both physiological and emotional manifestations of tension in her children's bodies.

Darja and Gregory are vigilant for signs in their daughter's body that could be indicative of a future pathology. They still feel the tension in Masha's arms as they enact the spaceman (космонавт/kosmonavt) exercise the specialists showed them (an adult arches Masha back while holding her hands). I turn to Darja as we watch the spaceman exercise on the screen: "I have seen you do this one or something similar." Darja: "Right, right, we do that. Most of them turned out to not be scary at all and actually quite useful. I knew that if I did something wrong, my child would let me know." At one point Darja turns to the present-day Masha and asks: "Do you remember? No? Well, all that is bad gets forgotten," while Gregory talks to me: "The therapists really must know what they are doing, because if you don't.... then it seems like you could harm them and actually you can... But when I see what my brother, who is a physical therapist, does with his daughter, then that's much harsher."

During this multi-temporal discussion, in which Darja both addresses the present-day Masha and acknowledges the emotional strain to which the past visit subjected her daughter, Darja explains that the *tonuss* in Masha's arms impeded the baby from stretching them upwards, which earned them a referral to a specialist. Gregory simultaneously insists on the professionalism of the specialist and compares her manipulations to the even harsher bodily interventions that his physical therapist brother enacts on his own children. The lessening of *baby tonuss* seems to conjure a powerful impetus to go on with a massage that is later assessed as "all that is bad" and in need of being forgotten.

It is clear that the condition of *baby tonuss* in Latvia has a powerful impact on the demands that parents place on themselves vis-à-vis their children's development. *Tonuss* can be both a

symptom and a diagnosis of an illness. The indications of how exactly *tonuss* manifests in the body are fluid and depend upon individual interpretations, while the treatment options might seem harsh and leave the recipient screaming as if tortured, unless performed by a loving parent who can listen to their child's needs.

Let's peek in on them once more to observe the ambiguity with which Darja and Gregory approach remedying *baby tonuss* in even more detail than during the opening vignette:

About six minutes into the 14-minute session, Masha of the video starts to cry. The specialist holds Masha, wrapped up in a fetal position with her head up and says that she should like that. (Gregory of the present: "It does not look like she likes it.") Masha on the video turns up the crying volume. (Gregory sarcastically: "She is simply in seventh heaven!" A shared adult laugh in the present). Darja tells me later: "And the masseuse was reprimanding me for not feeding her on schedule, told me to feed her every three hours and give her water." (Gregory: "Yes, she was kind of Soviet in style. She was over 60, the Soviet school, but as a therapist she knew her trade." Darja: "Yes, she was a good masseuse.") As past Masha continues screaming in the background, Darja wonders: "That sounds awful. How did we live through that?"

Darja and Gregory both admit that the whole experience of remedying Masha's *tonuss* left them in shock and feeling like they participated in the torture of their own daughter. Even I felt terrible listening to Masha's on-screen shrieks. Why did Masha's parents feel compelled to go on with the massage despite their obvious discomfort with the procedure? I would like to suggest that one of the reasons has to do with the overall favorable views towards corporeal interventions in Latvia, be it in the form of massage, physical therapy or, for bigger children, corrective and posture-strengthening gymnastics even amidst intense crying as is the case with Masha. What is more, the variety of specialists addressing the concerns over *baby tonuss* simultaneously challenge the biomedical legitimacy of the diagnosis and speak of it as a real condition that calls for corporeal care that will result in the improved health of their charge.

How did the immediacy of these concerns enter the Latvian pediatric and parenting scene despite the commonly held view by medical professionals that *tonuss* was not a real diagnosis or as one physical therapist called it “the myth of *baby tonuss*”? There are several proposed methods of treatment, which is how I will trace it throughout this chapter: medical massage, physical therapy and *hendlings*. They overlap in various ways, as when Darja and Gregory called the specialist in the video both a masseuse and a physical therapist. Attending to the history of Soviet infant care provides valuable insight into how the awareness of *baby tonuss* came about.

II The History of Prophylaxis and Anxiety over Asymmetry

The genesis of *baby tonuss* as a medical diagnosis, can be located in the way preventative care was privileged in the former USSR, and the development of the field of *Healing Physical Culture* (Лечебная физкультура/lyechebnaya fizkultura in Russian, ārstnieciskā fizkultūra in Latvian) in particular. The idea of preventative care under the title of prophylaxis¹²⁹ along with free health care for all formed the ideological backbone of the Soviet medical system. Even though in reality medical care was highly centralized and distributed through a network of polyclinics¹³⁰ that were not always efficient, prophylaxis remained the preferred way that medical care was organized until the dissolution of the USSR. Preventative care as the desired state of primary care was promoted in diplomatic encounters, for example, in the alternatively hot and cold Soviet relations with the

¹²⁹ A recent Latvian TV documentary titled “The Land of Fortune” (Laimes zeme) 2018, about the state of medicine in today’s Latvia, references the Soviet period as the time of mandated *dispanceration* (dispancerēta) of medicine, i.e., people were supposed to be undergoing regular check-ups in special locations (dispancers). This, the film argued, caused the Soviet person (padomju cilvēks) relinquish responsibility for their own health, because the Soviet state was responsible instead. The film also emphasized the long periods of hospitalizations to which people were subjected, for example, 2 weeks in the case of tonsillitis (angīna) (Kronbergs 2017).

¹³⁰ An out-patient clinic that provided multiple medical services known under the title of “polyclinic” in the former USSR.

World Health Organization (WHO). Indeed, it was no coincidence that the first WHO conference dealing with primary care took place in the former USSR in 1978 (Birn and Kremmentsov 2018).

Healing Physical Culture or HPC developed as a Soviet medical field that recommended physical exercises for their healing properties that were “based on stimulating organism’s physiological processes.” (Starkovskaya 1991,15). It originated in the 1920s/30s and became more child-focused in the 1950s/60s (Fonarev 1983). Massage performed by a specifically trained medical professional, or medical massage, a precursor of the treatment that we observed Masha undergo, was developed precisely within this framework and in the case of young children was a corporeal remedy offered for suspected illnesses and developmental delays. Based on research in medical massage and other manual therapies, Soviet pediatric preventative care began to pay close attention to the increased muscle tone (muskulu tonuss in Latvian, мышечный тонус/myschevoi tonus in Russian) which was considered a symptom of various illnesses that could threaten the health and development over the first year of a child’s life. What is more, increased muscle tone in a newborn was to be easily observable in the bodily alignment of the child, its asymmetry in particular.

Healing Physical Culture (HPC) grew out of the Soviet focus on promoting mass physical activity among all citizens as a way to develop both physically and morally. These beliefs were encompassed in the term *Physical Culture* (a compound of two abbreviated words meaning Physical and Culture in Russian (физкультура/fizultura) and in Latvian (fizkultūra)), which is what Soviet sports classes in school were named and which was the official title of the field that dealt with athleticism. This was meant to express the appreciation that Soviet ideological leaders felt was due to physical activity as the basis of [high] culture. Mass athletic activity as a way towards moral development of all Soviet citizens was in line with the 19th century ideology that recognized

sports as a basis of character-building and informed the way the field of *Physical Culture* developed after the Bolshevik revolution (O'Mahony 2006, 23). The ideology was rooted in late 18th century European educational reforms that correlated physical education with character-building, public health and national defense and initially favored non-competitive exercises (Brownwell 1995, 18). Brownwell calls this type of approach that advocates overall development, "gymnastics." She juxtaposes it to the more competitive "athletic sports" that were characteristic of the English approach to sports and eventually prevailed as the international sports organization principle, most notably in the form of the Olympic games. (Brownwell 1995, 18). The field of *Physical Culture* (fizkultura)¹³¹ was supposed to be rooted in the non-competitive exercises, which led to the competitive sports not being officially recognized within Soviet institutions until the 1930s, more than 10 years after the foundation of the USSR (Brownwell 1995, 18-19). The field of Physical Culture had a two-fold aim, to prepare young people for work and for military defense of Soviet power (O'Mahony 2006, 24). This ideological reasoning was accompanied by a mass campaign to entice the population into fitness, healthiness and clean living and eventually developed into a mass movement that could be tailored to the international needs of the USSR—be it fighting a foreign invasion in terms of a military campaign or winning prestigious gold medals in competitive sports. The latter became of increasing importance on the Cold War stage where the

¹³¹ On the difference between the fields of sports and "fizkultura," O'Mahony (2006) writes: "In definition, fizkultura tends to encompass a broader range of activities than its equivalent Western term, thus making its boundaries somewhat difficult to define." He cites the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia of 1936 to elucidate an understanding of the term: "Physical culture (fizkultura) is a network of methods and means applied to the physical development, increased health and improvement of every individual, and of the whole collective. Only the Proletarian Revolution has enabled the necessary development of F.k. (Fizkultura), in its widest sense, in the interests of the working class. In the USSR, the organization of the means of F.k. (Fizkultura) directly addresses issues of communist education and the preparation of the masses for labour and defence. Physical (bodily) development, physical culture and education, better health, and the improvement of the individual, are all achieved by following a strict regime of hygiene, by strengthening the organism through natural means (sun, air, water), and by the practice of physical exercises; gymnastics, sport, games, etc. Physical exercise, and sport in particular, is the most active, effective and interesting aspect of physical culture" (O'Mahony 2006 26) .

competition with the US played out. The Soviets only took part in the Olympics starting in 1952 and organized national sports competitions (спартакиады/spartakiadi) in 1956 (Brownwell 1995). After World War II, the field of Physical Culture evolved, no longer evoking the idea of overall healthy living and “gymnastics” type of exercise (Brownwell 1995, 19), but rather increasingly referring to competitive sports. According to O’Mahony, Physical Culture was consequently made into “a crucial weapon of foreign policy, a means to gain victory on the international stage in an attempt to make explicit, if ultimately metaphorical, claims for the superiority of communism over capitalism. “ (O’Mahony 2006, 17).

Health had been from the outset among the accompanying goals that the newly forged field of Physical Culture was expected to ensure, but in a way that emphasized physical labor and militarism. According to O’Mahony’s interpretation: “By improving the health and strength of the entire population, every individual would become better equipped to contribute first in the field of labour, further developing the nation’s industrial superstructure, and second in the military defense of the Soviet borders,” (O’Mahony 2006, 27) The ideas of Physical Culture flowed into the medical realm rather soon after the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and the new field of *Healing Physical Culture* was inaugurated under the auspices of the first People’s Commissar of Health N. A. Semashko (1874-1949) (Aupam n.d.). The first healing gymnastics university programs were created in the 1920s and new cadres, most notably I. M. Sarkizov-Serazini (1887-1964) (Pub.lib.ru n.d.)¹³² consolidated the field and wrote the first educational texts that were published in 1923 and 1926 (Aupam n.d.). M. Sarkizov-Serazini headed the first department of *Healing Physical Culture* at

¹³² Sarkizov-Serazini graduated from the Medical Faculty of Moscow University (1922). From 1923 he worked at the Institute of Physical Education in Moscow. From 1944-1964 he was the head of the department of *Healing Physical Culture* (HPC) and Sports Massage (заведующий кафедрой лечебной физкультуры и спортивного массажа). The main works include those on the methodology of HPC exercises, sports massage, issues of balneology, HPC, climatology and climatotherapy, hardening (закаливание) and the fight against premature aging. He was the author of textbooks for institutes of physical education (including “The Fundamentals of Hardening”) and was awarded the Order of Lenin twice and a number of other Soviet decorations.

the Moscow Institute of Physical Culture starting in 1926, where future doctors and candidates of sciences in the new field practiced (Aupam n.d.). Around the same time functional therapy and healing physical culture principles were introduced into the ever developing healing resort system of the USSR (Aupam n.d.)¹³³ The rehabilitation of soldiers injured during WWII played a role in how the field was shaped (O'Mahony 2006). Over the 1950s sports medicine clinics (диспансери) were founded all over the USSR. They offered medical support of athletes, but also an organizational and methodological guide for *Healing Physical Culture* in health facilities in general. Their efforts included the prevention of sports injuries and the promotion of physical education among the population at large (Buhovceva and Savelyeva 2015). By the 1950s, departments of *Healing Physical Culture* where one could learn the fundamentals of the field along with the medical massage were established in most medical schools (Aupam n.d.) and the higher education programs in *Physical Culture* and Sports.

Healing Physical Culture provides a systematic approach to using exercise as medicine. Starkovskaya, an author of a Teaching Manual of *Healing Physical Culture* for children defines the field as follows: “*Healing Physical Culture* (HPC) means “dosage of physical (gymnastics) exercises. Their healing properties are based on stimulating organism’s physiological processes. The impact of physical exercises takes root through nerve and humoral (гуморальные/gumoralnye) mechanisms” (Starkovskaya 1991, 15). Contemporary understanding of HPC in Russia is as follows: “Modern medical science that considers exercise therapy as a method of general, non-specific and functional therapy. The most characteristic feature of HPC therapy is the use of physical exercises and the active participation of the patient in the complex process of treatment with

¹³³ The resort healing holidays were immensely popular in the former USSR and spawned an entire industry of Soviet-style resorts. Jūrmala, located in then Soviet Latvia, was one of the most famous of these resorts. I have previously published on this theme, see Laakkonen and Vasilevska (2011).

exercise, dosed training” (Sport-history.ru n.d.). This emphasis on the modernity of the discipline is very much an echo of the 1983 text (Fonarev 1983) that defines HPC as -- “discipline of scientific medicine that studies the means of *Physical Culture* that could be used for healing purposes, i.e. the healing of illnesses and traumatized organisms, as well as rehabilitation of the ill.” (Fonarev 1983, 5). This text goes on: “*Healing Physical Culture* is based on contemporary advances in physiology, morphology, biochemistry, clinical medicine and studies how various means of Physical Culture (physical exercises, movement-based (подвижные/podvizhnye) and sports games, hardening (закаливание/zakalivaniye) and massage) act upon the organism of the sick person.

HPC principles were adopted in the realm of pediatrics too, especially in the area of preventative medicine. Medical personnel were taught to pay attention to the muscle tone (muskuļu tonuss, мышечный тонус/myschevoi tonus) of infants, which could be observed in terms of pathological posture or limb movements and asymmetry of the body (Starkovskaya 1991). The norm in such cases was found in the bodily symmetry, marked by a “straight spine.” Deviation from the norm was considered a symptom of an illness (physiological and emotional) of the first year of life (Starkovskaya 1991; Fonarev 1983). The affected children then were divided into various groups, depending on whether they were diagnosed as ill or as being at risk of becoming ill¹³⁴ (Starkovskaya 1991, 9). A therapy rooted in bodily intervention in terms of medical massage and exercises was to be prescribed. The treatment success was expected to be derived from systematic

¹³⁴ Those “at risk” are imagined to have a borderline condition, which could develop into a noticeable pathology in certain circumstances. The risk group demonstrates “a delay in statistical, motor, mental (психических) and speech functions. As well as a little deviation in muscle tone, a slight hypertension syndrome.” (Starkovskaya 1991, 9). Starkovskaya (1991) cites Solomatina et al (1981) who suggested that the risk group should include, premies, over-term, underdeveloped, asphyxia, birth trauma, plus children with Hemolytic disease of the newborn (erythroblastosis fetalis) and infections, as well as lack of breast-feeding. Besides these also bad social-domestic conditions, those who are always sick and have hypertrophy or paratrophy. [the last two are about insufficient and excessive weight]. To keep such children accounted for there was a Form 30 that needed to be filled out (Starkovskaya 1991, 36).

follow-up by the medical professionals and scrupulous physical child-rearing (воспитание/vospitaniye) by the parents, emphasizing the dangers that this condition poses not only to the physical but also the moral make-up of the new Soviet citizen. As one of the textbooks phrased it: “The key to success—systematic follow-up, scrupulous fulfillment of request of physical child-rearing [воспитание/vospitaniye]. Only under such circumstances can one hope for a complete rehabilitation of the ill and the risk group over their first year of life and forming a worthy/well-rounded personality (полноценная личность/polnocennaya lichnost’)” (Starkovskaya 1991, 75). Thus, discursively at least, the corporeal and the moral were expected to intersect. What is more, a well-rounded Soviet individual could only be formed by the active shaping of a child’s body by the adults. Whether this process is undertaken by intimate relations or state representatives through the office of medical professionals, I call the operationalization of body-centered practices to make children into healthy and productive adults “managed corporeality.”

There are direct links that descend from this corporeally managed Soviet baby to little Masha from the video in the opening vignette. Educational texts such as those cited above are still available to medical students, and medical massage is being requested by parents and prescribed by pediatricians. For example, Starkovskaya’s text titled “*Healing Physical Culture and Rehabilitation of Ill Children and Children in the Risk Group over the First year of Life*” (1991) along with another text titled “*Handbook on Healing Physical Culture for Children*” (1983), published by a USSR-wide publishing company “Medicina” in Russian, are both still found at the actively

used course-related lending library¹³⁵ of one of the two university medical programs in Latvia.¹³⁶ This literature is still available to medical students alongside mostly English language sources that do not recognize the muscle tone as a condition worthy of extensive corporeal treatment. The books operate as manuals for doctors and nurses (the 1991 book is published as part of the series called “The Library of Medium Medical Worker” (Библиотека среднего медработника/Biblioteka srednego medrabotnika) who work in pediatrics, and they detail early child development milestones (capacities and skills to be developed within the first year of life), including the know-how (грамотность/gramotnost’) and preparedness of parents to be devoted to child-rearing. In these texts a pathological muscle tone is taken as one of the symptoms of faulty child development. Starkovskaya (1991) writes: “The condition of muscle tone in children, especially for the first half a year has a big impact on the development of the whole organism. Normal physiological tone is correlated with improvement of motor and mental actions of the child” (Starkovskaya 1991, 15).

What is more, increased muscle tone (often referred to as only “muscle tone” in the text) was expected to manifest among the “risk group” “regardless of the type of illness” (Starkovskaya 1991, 15). “Normalizing” the muscle tone instead of treating the underlying condition became the goal of the HPC treatment in children: “Normalizing tone translates into healing, the over-all strengthening of the ill children, and can be used as prophylaxis to make sure the disease is not worsening,” writes Starkovskaya, and urges later in the book: “HPC needs to be prescribed over the first days of life, no later than at 1-1½ months” (Starkovskaya 1990, 18). There is some slippage

¹³⁵ I have not been able to locate a course syllabus that includes these two books for educational purposes, but as a data base of syllabi does not exist, it does not mean that these books are not used in teaching. That they are both published in the Russian language which many current medical students no longer speak, could be seen as prohibiting factor for using them in the education process. That they are still available at the active lending library of a major medical university, however, is indicative that they are still considered valuable, as most Russian language books have been taken out of active circulation and, in general, there are few books from the early 1990s still at the library.

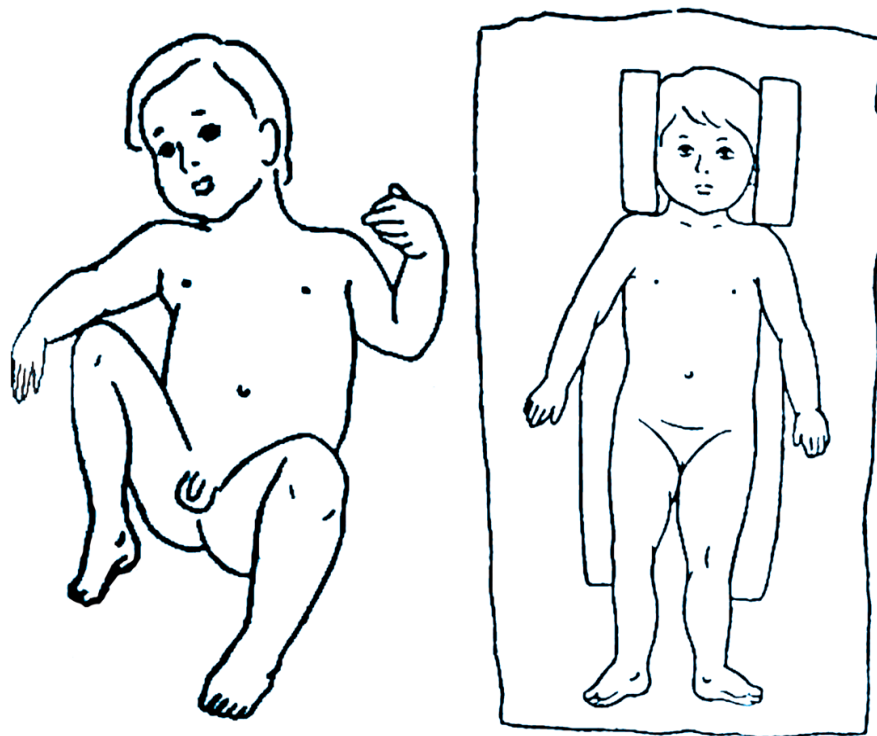
¹³⁶ This was at the institution that had evolved out of the Medical Institute of the Soviet period, which might explain why they still had the texts published in the late Soviet period.

between considering the condition a symptom and an illness in itself in this text. For example, Starkovskaya's manual warns that [i]f healing/treatment of the muscle tone is not successful, deformation can follow (scoliosis, kyphoscoliosis, pathological movement) (Starkovskaya 1991, 75). I consider such ambiguity around whether increased muscle tone may be a symptom or the illness itself indicative of the way *baby tonuss* has come to mean the condition itself in cases such as Masha's in the opening vignette. The idea that massage could be beneficial for the children in the risk group and not only those with a diagnosed illness, contributes to the blurring of the lines between *baby tonuss* as a symptom and the diagnosis itself. The main treatment for "muscle tone," according to the two late Soviet period texts, is a combination of a professionally administered medical massage¹³⁷ and attentive parenting, precisely what Darja and Gregory are enacting in the opening vignette of this chapter. Starkovskaya's 1991 manual has a detailed section titled "Rehabilitation at home" (41) that insists that the biggest effect would be achieved if parents enacted the exercises taught by an HPC specialist at home. The parents in this model should pay attention to their children's bodies and look for signs of pathology that could manifest in delayed development in the future. Muscle tone is assumed to be visible, as it can, according to the two manuals and also my conversations with parents, be observed in the way the body of a baby is positioned. By paying attention to the bodily positioning of the child, an attentiveness towards symmetrical aesthetics is honed, governed by a norm of straightness and a fear of crookedness.

The most visible sign of an outward bodily pathology is bodily asymmetry. Starkovskaya (1991) writes that there could be an asymmetry in the muscle tone of the torso or limbs of a child (see a picture of a child whose pelvis is asymmetrical after this paragraph). The manual notes that

¹³⁷ An educational text mentions three main types of massages 1) a hygienic massage (for strengthening of the whole body), 2) sports massage (for lessening the impact of athletic activity) and 3) medical massage (for clinical environment, such as polyclinics, as part of a complex treatment of illnesses) (Fonarev 1983, 18). The type of massage undertaken to treat *baby tonuss* is of the latter kind (medicinal).

asymmetry can also be observed in the way the skin folds while the infant is on her stomach or back (Starkovskaya 1991, 77). In addition, the movements of limbs on the side that has increased muscle tone could be either more or less pronounced as on the other side. An asymmetrical condition of the child's body, the manual notes, is often diagnosed as a hemisyndrome—the medical condition affecting only one side of the body. This condition, according to Starkovskaya, is to be classified in the category of Disturbed Central Nervous System, and accounts for most of the diagnosed pediatric patients in this category in polyclinics (Starkovskaya 1991, 70). See an example of the visualization of the asymmetry of muscle tone and the treatment in the following picture from Starkovskaya book.



Асимметрия мышечного тонуса туловища и конечностей.
а — вид больного; б — лечение положением.

Figure 3.1. Asymmetry of muscle tone of torso and limbs. On the right--an image of a sick child, on the left--the position of healing (Starkovskaya 1991, 89).

The focus on combatting asymmetry that this text exhibits is indicative of an underlying assumption of the normative child being symmetrical. The two texts surveyed here give detailed instructions to specialists who could be pediatricians specializing in HPC or [massage] instructors and methodologists¹³⁸ in how to perform the massage. One author emphasizes that a massage does not act upon the child's body only mechanically, but the child also responds to human touch (warmth of the hands), the benefits of which are explained in scientific terms (Fonarev 1983). Starkovskaya (1991) too notes that infant massage is to be performed by hand instead of by apparatus (Starkovskaya 1991, 23). Here human touch is considered primarily in terms of "good touch," that is, adult-children touching not fraught with moral complications, which was the way Montagu (1986)¹³⁹ has argued it had become viewed in the West. Because of an increases awareness of sexual abuse of children, touching a child is sanctioned only within a small group as in the contemporary American Attachment Style of Parenting in the US (Halley 2007)¹⁴⁰ where infants and parents are expected to be in dyadic relationships within each other. The late Soviet acceptance of the healing properties of touch as executed by professionals differs from this agenda, but only as long as it is grounded in the highly scientific language used in the excerpts above. Halley traces

¹³⁸ There is a gendered aspect to who is to be this professional. For example, during the Soviet period the position of the *Healing Gymnastics* (ārstnieciskā vingrošana) practitioner (in charge of developing the methodical approach to healing) was primarily held by women. A state exam at the Sports Institute in Rīga in the 1980s awarding qualification in Healing Sports Gymnastics to sports teachers (Instructor of *Physical Culture*) was only taken by women, as one of my interlocutors, a sports teacher in her late 50s named Inta, ascertained.

¹³⁹ Montagu (1986) reintroduced the principle of touch to the anthropological agenda and considered among other subjects how haptic interactions between children and adults had become fraught with moral implications of potential adult abuse of power by the time that he wrote his book in the 1970s. Other scholars (Johnson 2000; Synnott in Classen 2005) have also pointed towards touching children as a realm that has become morally suspect during the previous century.

¹⁴⁰ Halley (2007) investigates child-adult intimacy in this movement, while mostly concentrating on how this movement is constructed by the middle-class mothers and co-opted by the structures of consumption. Angela Beattie (2004) shows similar trend when she explores infant massage in the North Indian town of Dehra Dun. Commodification of touch thus is theorized by both Halley (2007) and Beattie (2004) as a product of global networks of capitalism. Beattie (2004) concludes that infant massage in India is being sold as means to grow babies with healthy minds and bodies into transnational citizens, while simultaneously embodying a particular "modern" understanding of Indian personhood (vii). This particular interpretation of "good touch" can exist in settings that are informed by cultural understanding of subjectivity that are not purely dependent on the Euro-American understanding of child development as, Beattie (2004) demonstrates.

the claims about the beneficial nature of touch to Bowlby, who inspired the Ideology of Attachment that I explored in Chapter 2, indicating that attitudes towards “good touch” are rooted in a particularly Western genealogy geared toward “civilizing” bodily interactions. In the HPC model by using scientific language of efficiency, adult-child touch is presented as unproblematically positive, if enacted in the right way, which the manuals go into in great detail to explain.

Medical massage provides a professional way of enacting the “beneficial touch” onto children directly, while also teaching parents. Lessening muscle tone becomes a way to preserve the scientific way of considering touch. For example, the principal way of massaging a newborn during the first three months should be caressing (поглаживание/poglazhivanie), which is noted as important for lessening increased muscle tone (Fonarev 1983, 23). There are other more vigorous techniques (see picture below).

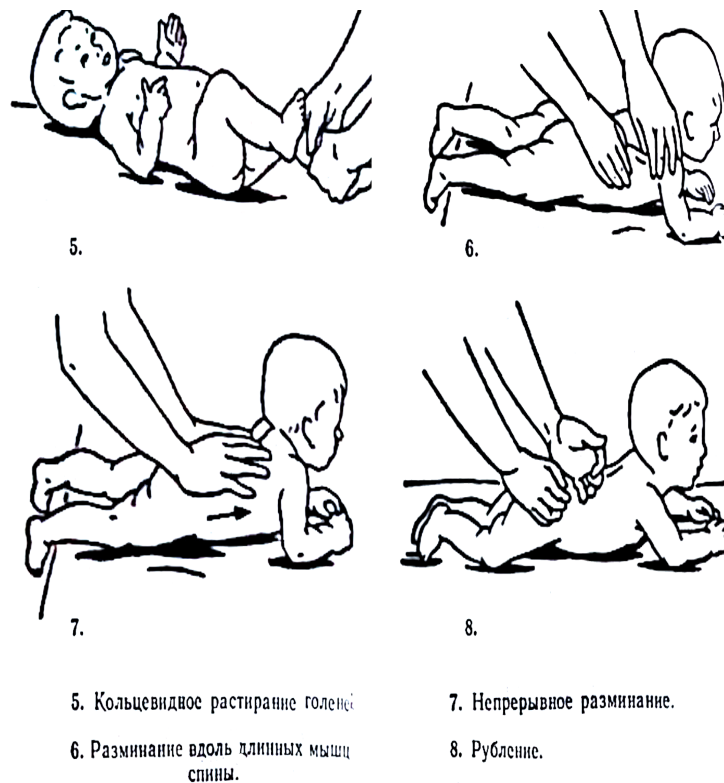


Figure 3.2. Different ways of medical massage: 5) Ring-like rubbing of shins; 6) Kneading along the long muscle of the back; 7) Non-stop kneading; 8) Chopping (Starkovskaya 1990, 26-27).

Starkovskaya gives professionals detailed directions for how to treat children. For instance, an HPC doctor needs to keep the children interested and provide a good emotional experience. While Starkovskaya talks about the technical aspects of a massage, she is also vehement that treating children in need of HPC intervention requires a mind-set that straddles that of an early child-care provider and medical interventionist. Starkovskaya (1991) writes that although the work of the masseuse-instructor requires dedication and is not easy, it can be creative and interesting(37). Even though the language is not obviously gendered, the way this topic is broached and the fact that more women than men trained as specialists in *Healing Physical Culture*, infant care in this manual is imagined as a stereotypically feminine, if not an outright “motherly” task. The specialist under such circumstances is imagined to be more like a [female] preschool teacher than a stern doctor, somebody who has the capacity to become an insider instead of a stranger to the child. The sense that massage specialists operate outside strictly medical boundaries deepens when such authors as Fonarev (1983) insist that massaging infants improves the health and development of not only the ill but all children. For example, the tactile touch is expected by psychologists (the text refers to them in a generic way), according to Fonarev, to contribute to over-all (not only in ill children) speech development (Fonarev 1983, 23). Focusing on the importance of massage for any child, not only those with a diagnosed illness, combines once again the realms of early-childhood care/education and medicine.

Both texts explain in great detail using scientific reasoning how a child should be touched and why. Fonarev, for example, postulates that massage acts on improving blood and lymphatic circulation, but also stimulates various, according to him, much needed biological substances - such as histamine and acetylcholine, as well as changes the muscle tone and increases muscle strength (Fonarev 1983, 17). His manual also explains that early language development is fostered

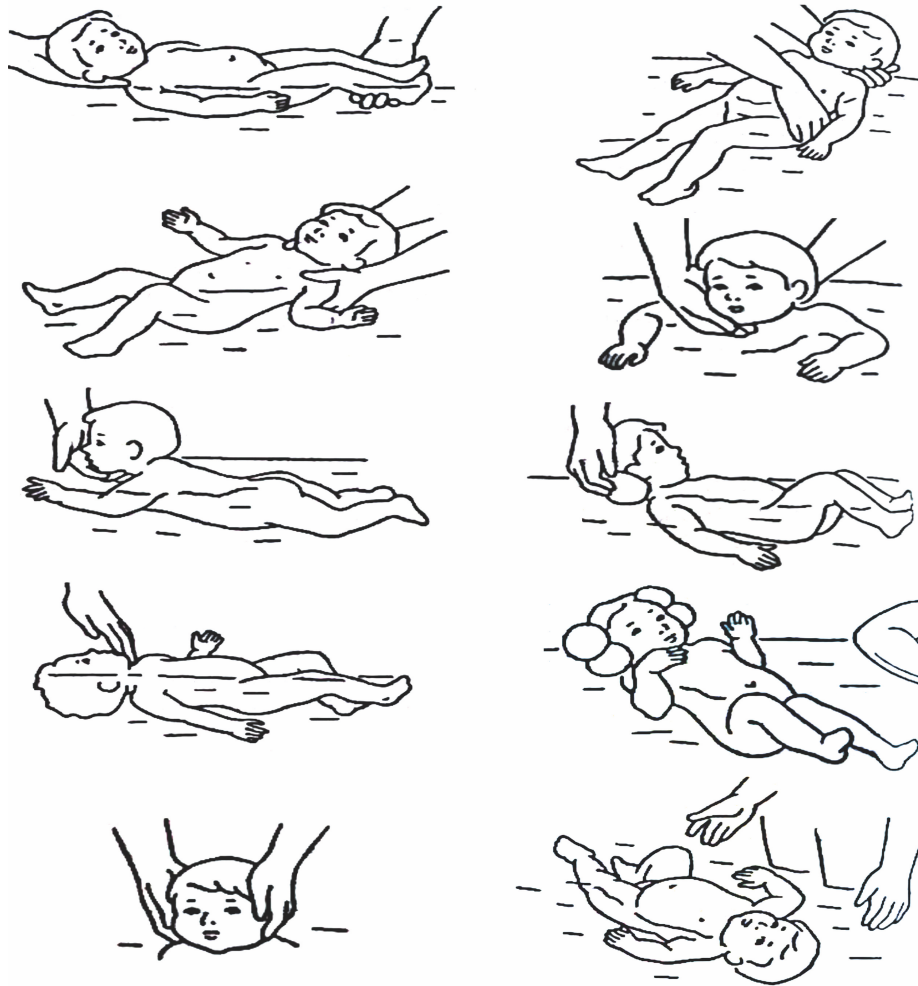
by massage because the “analytic capacity” of skin develops earlier than sight and hearing (Fonarev 1983, 23). Massage, according to Fonarev, can be used at the end of a session of *Healing Physical Culture* exercises for young children, because it assists in rejuvenating muscles and supports vestibular apparatus. Starkovskaya (1991) also discusses various massage types and the research upon which they are predicated, including (acupressure or точечной массаж/tochevoi masazh),¹⁴¹ which can be successfully used in the case of muscle tone (according to Bortfeld S. A 1979, 1987 cited in Starkovskaya).

Despite the scientific jargon used in both texts, the medical massage promoted by the HPC approach for a wide range of infants in the late Soviet period involves the acceptance and promotion of tactile interaction with children, which I have termed “managed corporeality,” to be administered by medical professionals and parents themselves under their guidance. However, the ideas of medical massage, unlike later attachment parenting ideology, were accompanied by a belief in the hardening of the body (закаливание/zakalivaniye). Starkovskaya writes, for example, that thermoregulations should be trained since birth, which means that even young children should be exposed to ever lower temperatures. The book mentions a method developed in Tallinn (the capital of then Soviet Estonia), where one tablespoon of sea salt was dissolved in one liter of water and a soft towel was dipped into cool water (22 degrees C, 71 degree F) and rolled out for a naked infant to be placed upon it for two to three seconds. The goal of this treatment was to lower the temperature of the wet towel over the course of two weeks to a little above freezing, so that a child could hang out on a towel that has been kept in the fridge for the same 2-3 seconds.¹⁴² Swimming

¹⁴¹ By using one-two fingers to rub the child in circular way.

¹⁴² I did not inquire directly into my body-intensive interlocutors’ ideas around physiological hardening, but some of them mentioned the Latvian equivalent of закаливание/zakalivaniye (rūdišanās) and were not all together opposed to some form of physical hardening, i.e., exposure of their children to short periods of cold temperatures (for example, in bath water) but this did not strike me in any way different from an average Latvian parent.

programs for infants in medical care facilities (or in a home bath-tub) became popular (and still are, as several of my body-intensive interlocutors had enrolled their children in one) and are advocated also in Starkovskaya's book (see picture below).



9. Основные приемы погружения в воду и поддержки грудного ребенка (по В. К. Велитченко, 1986).

Figure 3.3. Basic ways of lowering and holding an infant in water (Starkovskaya 1991, 34).

The way of “hardening” children through medically conceived interventions (massage, swimming therapy, etc.) that can also be practiced at home are practices that on the surface do not resemble the attachment parenting strategies I explored in Chapter 2, which are also corporeal and expected

to make children more (emotionally and physically) healthy and safe. Yet, Masha's parents, whom we met at the beginning of this chapter, believed in both, as did other participants, thus allowing the lines between these two ways of managed corporeality to converge.

More archival work would be necessary to establish when medical massage for infants became common practice in the late Soviet period, but it is clear that it prepared a fertile ground for other corporeal interventions, professional and not, including some of the attachment practices I discussed in Chapter 2. While I might not be able to establish exactly how much of the practice outlined above has trickled down to the contemporary Latvian parenting and medical practices, *tonuss* was used as an unofficial diagnosis (instead of just a symptom of pathology) consistently among parents of young children of my interlocutors and among the wider baby-raising Latvian public. The condition was also used as an advertisement technique in countless services that recommended manual therapy for small children. Nor was the condition only typical of Latvia. It certainly is recognized in other former USSR countries as well.¹⁴³

Similar to the late-Soviet period medical material I surveyed previously, attending to *a baby tonuss* today allows to ascertain that small children develop correctly and do not acquire certain bodily asymmetries, incorrect shape of legs or feet, or even a crooked posture, the latter two are prominently on the list of monitored medical conditions of the State Sports Medicine Center's yearly young athletes (ages 10 – 17) exam, which I will discuss in Chapter 5. Bodily

¹⁴³ As evidenced by my participation in two ASEES (Association of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies) conferences (a paper presentation in 2018 and a panel discussion in 2019) on this topic, where I received many appreciative nods of recognition from the audience that was comprised by former Soviet participants. In addition, as recently as last year, the condition of *hypertonuss* was a subject of the Belorussian public TV program "Children's Doctor" (Детский доктор/detski doktor) entitled "Muscle tone in a child" on October 2nd, 2019, during which a female doctor who positioned herself as a voice of modern medicine was addressing the way *baby tonuss* is perceived as an illness itself. She sought to alleviate the fears of parents that most children suffered from this condition, but also medicalized the real condition by insisting that it is something for a doctor to diagnose and treat. Parents were advised not to do anything, but she also instructed what kind of massage they could administer if they were interested (no oil, dry hands) (Telekanal Belarus 1 2019).

asymmetry is also targeted by Inta S., a sports teacher in a small-town school who taught posture-strengthening gymnastics (*stāju stiprinošā vingrošana*) to children in grades 1-4.

Today the programs that teach healing gymnastics (*ārstnieciskā vingrošana*) or medical massage no longer carry the name of “*fizkultūra*,” the Soviet compound that was removed in the Latvian education and sports system shortly after the renewal of independence in 1991. I argue, however, that the late-Soviet acceptance of the positive properties of touch for healing purposes opened a door to a novel corporeal involvement with children. These new engagements include both body-intensive parenting and novel ways of treating *baby tonuss* corporeally, such as the new field of Physical Therapy and the art of the right way of carrying the child or *hendlings*. Medical massage and infant treatment too have been diversified by including international child-development and corporeal development schools, for example, that of Bertha Bobath, a German-born physical therapist, or Emmi Pikler, a Hungarian pediatrician. Let us now look into the ways of eliminating *baby tonuss* in today’s Latvia.

III Eliminating *Baby Tonuss*: Physical Therapy and Hendlings in Latvia Today

As we circle back to little Masha and to Darja and Gregory in the opening to this chapter and their treatment of Masha’s *baby tonuss*, we see them as the parents who are committed to respectful child-rearing, but also allow the specialist to massage their screaming daughter, even though it makes them feel like they are implicit in child torture. For them eliminating *baby tonuss* warrants putting their unease on hold and then following through at home, while listening to their daughter’s needs. I show in this section how the varied fields around the condition of *baby tonuss* in today’s Latvia are sites where conflicting notions of baby-welfare and health converge. Treating *baby tonuss* today not only requires a referral to a baby-masseuse as in the late-Soviet period, but also that

parents remain vigilant and open to changing their way of handling their offspring. The Soviet requirement for parental education appears to have been amplified in today's Latvia, where parents such as Darja and Gregory make a number of conscious parenting choices by getting educated (often through paying the specialist) in the right way of corporeally handling the child, as well as allowing for expert treatment at the hands of "a stranger."

Treatment for *baby tonuss* today comes in various forms and variations, most notably in the form of physical therapy and *hendlings*, a method that promotes the only correct way to conduct the daily corporeal care of a child, which is expected to be undertaken in close communication (eye-contact and talking) with the infant. *Hendlings* is an art that is promoted by a range of specialists. This includes physical therapists and doulas, for example, Claudia Hell (Klaudija Hēla), the German-born physical therapist who has been influential in the Latvian baby-rearing scene, and Anda J., the lactation and baby-wearing consultant whom we met in the Chapter 2.

Baby massage figures prominently and is to be performed by trained infant baby masseuses who are either paid by the state or privately¹⁴⁴ and can be either medically-trained baby-masseuses or physical therapists with additional training in baby massage that is rooted in certain principles (HPC or Bobath, for example). Darja and Gregory's confusion around naming the specialist who massaged Masha is characteristic of a general uncertainty in the field regarding whether or not *baby tonuss* is a real medical diagnosis, how it should be treated and which specialists to consult. Gregory estimated the specialist's age in the video to be over sixty, which lead to a description

¹⁴⁴ According to my observation, privately-paid specialists are more likely to be trained as Bobath specialists, a corporeal art that arrived in Latvia after the renewal of independence. It had been developed for working with children with cerebral palsy or for adult rehabilitation (for example, after stroke), but in Latvia is applied to babies with less severe conditions or for the sake of bettering their development.

that she was “kind of Soviet”¹⁴⁵ in her manner. He justified trusting her because of her professionalism (and despite her Sovietness) and did not openly question her methods.¹⁴⁶ This, in turn, was different from how many other body-intensive parents saw their parenting (as an opposition to the Soviet past) in Chapter 2.

The specialist’s age means that she most probably did not train in a university program called “Physical therapy,” which was first introduced in 1993. According to Anete R., who was trained in this program, a physical therapist should not consider *baby tonuss* alone a proper diagnosis, even though lots of parents come with exactly that concern and some therapists then “treat” it. Formal education in pediatric physical therapy usually does not touch upon the specific subject of *baby tonuss*, but rather concentrates on the use of physical therapy in pediatric rheumatology, gastroenterology and pulmonology, which is consistent with how physical therapy is taught in the US. The realm of neurology touches upon some of the ideas of *tonuss* through treatment for spina bifida, the incomplete closing of the backbone and membranes around the spinal cord, and torticollis, stiffness in the neck, both much more clearly biomedical conditions than *baby tonuss*.¹⁴⁷ Yet, parents talk about *baby tonuss* as a medical diagnosis, and medical professionals refer little children to various specialists (masseuses being the most prominent) for treatment. Inese, whom we met earlier in this chapter explains: “I also thought that I had to take my first child to massages.

¹⁴⁵ Gregory made this comment after Darja told me that the masseuse was advising her to breastfeed Masha “on a schedule,” which is, as I showed in Chapter 2, associated with the Soviet way of doing things. That Gregory judged the professional to be in her 60s probably means that she was not trained in the post-independence Physical therapy program, but rather in the art of *Healing Physical Culture* that medical professionals learned during the Soviet times. Yet, the confusion that Gregory and Darja displayed regarding her professional belonging is in no way atypical of the Latvian medical baby-massaging scene.

¹⁴⁶ Gregory was also quite nostalgic about the Soviet period, especially how he imagined health care to have been during that period. He was also one of the few Russian-speakers among my body-intensive interlocutors.

¹⁴⁷ The biomedical conditions outlined here and their remedies are listed in the following handout to the pediatrics circle (Gasperska 2010): “The aims in applying physical therapy in neurology (in the case of spina bifida and torticollis) include ‘symmetrical pose (poza)’. “

I asked to be referred and was referred. I went, but my daughter did not like it, and then I understood that we don't need to go." Asked why she went, Inese replied: "If everybody was going, then that must be good. I wanted to do what was best for my child. As a prophylaxis (profilaktiski)." Whether the massages are performed by a physical therapist or not is often not clear, because despite some physical therapists such as Anete R. clearly positioning themselves away from the HPC type of baby massage, other physical therapists (especially since massage is one of services that receive monetary support) perform massages with additional training. Anete R. refers parents who expect a massage to a different specialist in her small town, who is more predisposed to massaging instead of developing the child through *hendlings* as Anete R. does. Still others are called physical therapists even if they do not have formal training. For example, Anda J., a lactation and baby-wearing consultant, told me that many parents called her a physical therapist, even though she had no formal qualification, but taught parents kinesthetic *hendlings* instead, which she had learned in a special course, mostly attended by medical specialists.

The differentiation on which Anete R. insists depends on the way Physical Therapy, which is as a relatively new profession in Latvia, positions itself as a field in the country.¹⁴⁸ According to a survey administered by the Latvian Physiotherapists Association (LPA) in 2015 and 2016, the average age of the members was 31.6 years (ranging from 22 to 58 years) (Glāzere 2015).¹⁴⁹ The novelty of the program, as well as its temporal links to the re-establishment of Latvia's

¹⁴⁸ There are currently three university programs that educate physical therapists, far more than, for example, programs that train Sports doctors. There is a sense, at least among some Latvians, that there are almost too many physical therapists. During an interview with a director of a small-town "Sports school" (officially, an after school sports education program for school-aged children), I was told that there were so many physical therapists in her town, which was known for its commitment to athleticism. "Where do they come from?" (Fizioterapeitu gan saradies ka biezs, kur viņi rodas?), the director wondered.

¹⁴⁹ In addition, 28.7% of respondents had worked for less than 3 years, while almost as many (27.5% respondents) had worked for more than 10 years. The rest, 43.7 % of the members, had worked as physical therapists somewhere between 3 and 10 years. Regarding the gender of respondents, 89.4 % (n=386) were female and 10.6% (n=46) were male. A handout on Methods/Analysis: A purposive sample of the Latvian Physiotherapists Association (LPA) members was used to pilot the survey in December 2015 (Glāzere 2015).

independence in 1991, were made obvious when at an opening speech of the Latvian Physiotherapists Association yearly meeting, the head of the university emphasized that the program was 25 years old, just as the hosting institution that had just celebrated its 25th anniversary.¹⁵⁰ This in turn means that the program had been subject to liberalizing influences at its inception, for example by using Western educational sources such as the German physical therapist Claudia Hell, who has worked in Latvia since the 1990s and has been influential in establishing physical therapy programs. Before 1993, similar skills could be learned by nurses specializing in programs with different titles and contents (*fizikālā terapija*¹⁵¹ or *ārstnieciskā fizikultūras metodika*). In the popular understanding, however, baby masseuses and physical therapists overlap, and along with corrective gymnastics and swim-therapy are considered useful techniques for corporeal management. Bodily asymmetry in an infant, including what could be considered as side effects of the infant *tonuss* for which Darja and Gregory sought help, can be perceived as directly impacting the future posture (*stāja*) of the child into adulthood. For example, the posture and shape of feet and legs are common pathological conditions identified by the specialists in the program that monitor the health of young athletes.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ The Physical therapy program today relies heavily on English-language sources (both primary sources and English-language translations). This again means that the dissemination of knowledge related to “muscle tone,” as a non-medical category, favors practice over formal education. Thus, the translatability of muscle tone, or *baby tonuss*, is predicated on cultural practice. The field of “Physical therapy” in Latvia conceives of itself as new. For example, at the conference I attended no translation into Latvian was provided (as opposed to the Sports Medicine conference), even though several presentations were in English. There were several older participants who could not understand and impromptu translation was then facilitated for them by one of the younger conference organizers.

¹⁵¹ This field involves healing with various natural therapies (mud, electricity etc.) and is somewhat confusingly referred to as *физиотерапия/fizioterapija* Russian, which when transliterated into the Latin script is almost the same as the Latvian word for physical therapy (*fizioterapija*). The Russian version of *fizikālā terapija* or *физикальная терапия* can only be found in contemporary Latvian Russian language sources.

¹⁵² Out of 15,407 athletes’ check-ups performed by the Sports Medicine Center in 2016, 14,931 (or 96.5%) were deemed to have incorrect posture (*nepareiza stāja*), 79.22 % of the cases were connected to “asymmetrical posture” (*asimetriska stāja*), 3,846 or 24.88 % were deemed to have incorrect shape of legs (*nepareiza kāju forma*) and 4,884 or 31.6 % incorrect shape of the foot (*nepareiza pēda*), including 1,260 or 8.15 % cases of flat-foot (*plakanā pēda*) (VSMC 2017).

The right way of handling the child, or baby *hendlings* (from English “handling” and German “Handlung”) has become an ubiquitous term over the last 10 years in Latvia among specialists who work with young children and their parents.¹⁵³ For example, the most influential bi-monthly print (and online) baby magazine “Mans mazais” (My Little One) had a two issue spread (4 pages in each) in the section “First year of life” on *hendlings* that defines it as “the right (pareizs) way of carrying, holding, lifting and rolling over (velšana) an infant” or “the baby owner’s manual recommended to all parents in order to avoid increased muscle tone and to help teach the child to feel their body better.” (Kante 2019a, 30). The emphasis is on the daily care of all children, as the article states: “In the daily care of the infant it is important (būtiski) to keep in line with the principles of *hendlings*” (Kante 2019a, 32).

“Mans mazais” embraces alternative parenting choices, such as attachment principles and homebirths along with more mainstream concerns, for example, conventional descriptions of physiological changes in pregnancy, pediatric health advice,¹⁵⁴ and advertisements by international baby-related business. A chubby-cheeked toddler who is holding a strawberry in her hands while sitting up in a round metal tub filled with white liquid, milk presumably, and floating strawberries is on the cover of the glossy 90-page magazine that deals with *hendlings* (Kante 2019a). Johnson and Johnson’s gentle product line occupies a two-page spread right as one opens it. There are eleven more advertisements, almost half of them for over-the-counter child-oriented pharmaceuticals such as Quixx, the saline solution, espumisan (for infant’s digestion), kamistad (for teething), and carbine (activated charcoal.) There is a 25% coupon for Loving Touch diapers printed for the

¹⁵³ When my son was born in Latvia in 2008, it was not yet so established to the degree that I remember using the term “handlings” instead of the clearly Latvianized *hendlings* that is now used widely.

¹⁵⁴ Mans Mazais” is widely read, but has since its beginning (about 15-20 years ago) has been known for addressing controversial topics such as homebirth and doula practices. The issue (2020/4) that features *hendlings* also featured post-partum depression, which is a topic that is only now starting to garner significant public attention in Latvia. This magazine is certainly part of the equation of understanding how some of the latest ideas have trickled down to wider society in Latvia.

Baltic market, and the great fit, cotton-like softness, and anti-leakage properties of the product are touted in three languages of the region - Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian. A physical therapist with a blonde ponytail is featured in several photographs with a flexible baby-like doll twisted in various positions or a real baby who is being transferred to their mother's arms, demonstrating the principles of *hendlings*. Both of the persons pictured are women, and the language is mostly gender-specific, i.e., assumes that this type of care will be performed by a mother.

Baby tonuss here is defined as “unneeded muscle tension” that prevents a child from acquiring age-appropriate “physical skills” and can be remediated by *hendlings*, which needs to engage the baby's attention and consent.¹⁵⁵ The advice to the parents:

In the beginning look into baby's eyes and talk with them, tell them that you will now pick them up, put them in the bed or change their diaper. Tell your little one what you are going to do. Hearing your voice and seeing your peaceful/serene (*mierīgs*) face, your baby will feel good. (Kante 2019a, 32)

Another two side-by-side spread with pictures in the next issue of “Mans mazais” demonstrates that it is wrong to leave the mother's hand in the arm-pit of an infant, which, the feature explains, happened because the mother did not keep her thumb close to the rest of the hand. A similar comparison shows that the right way of lifting the child up is by rotating them into mother's arms like into a cradle. The article shows in pictures the right way of changing diapers as well: it is wrong to lift the child up by their legs; instead that needs to be done by rolling the child on one side and then onto the diaper. Avoiding *baby tonuss* is mentioned several times in this magazine. When

¹⁵⁵For more detail the article explains: *Hendlings* is a method that teaches how to conduct the daily care of a baby by lifting, carrying, dressing the baby in harmony with their physiological development and anatomical peculiarities (*īpatnības*), so that the little one does not develop unneeded (*lieks*) muscle tension (*muskuļu sasprindzinājums*) or *tonuss* and would naturally and successfully learn age-appropriate physical skills. Right the correct *hendlings* supports baby's development, but the incorrect *hendlings* can curb (*kavēt*) it (Kante 2019a, 32).

transferring a child from one arm to another, for example, it is wrong to hold the child by the armpits, because this is how *tonuss* is created (veidojas *tonuss*).

The fear of asymmetry is one of the guiding principles in *hendlings* just as it was in HPC. For example, holding a child in an asymmetrical pose contributes to muscle disbalance, therefore it is important to hold the infant upright and with their arms centered. “Otherwise,” the magazine warns, “one side of the body is in tone (*tonusā*) all the time.” The solution, according to the principles of *hendlings*, is to alternate the position of the child from right to left and back, (Kante 2019b) while ensuring that they have a “straight back” (*taisna mugura*) in these positions. The wrong way would be for the child’s back to be bent while being held. See the picture below:



Figure 3.4. “Keeping To the Center”: the correct and the incorrect way of holding a baby. The picture (on the left) - correct (*pareizi*), on the right - incorrect (*nepareizi*), followed by a description explaining the positions, including that the child in the incorrect position is sitting in the parental arms as if “in a pot” (*podīņā*). (Kante 2019b, 40).

The picture on the right shows the incorrect way of holding the child “as in a pot,” which contributes to harmful curving of the back.¹⁵⁶ The fear of asymmetry is tied to the wrong curvature of the back, emphasizing the ideal of the “straight back.” All kinds of back problems (including medical diagnoses of kifoze (kyphosis), lordoze (lordosis), skolioze (scoliosis)) were also among the key concerns that a small-town sports teacher Inta, who had studied *Healing Physical Culture* as part of her *Physical Culture* Instructor degree during the Soviet times, listed as stemming from increased muscle tone at an infant’s age. *Hendlings*, thus, becomes a way of alleviating the threats to the symmetry and straightness of the back, forging a normative Latvian baby who is handled symmetrically by an intimately-involved adult (who is most often their mother). The deviants or the non-normative children are not straight, but rather crooked (šķībi). While straightness does not have the same association with sexuality in Latvian as it does in English, the Latvian preoccupation with straightness and symmetry allude to the desired “straight” and “symmetrical” normativity, the moral implications of which I will explore in Chapter 5.

The fear of asymmetry is what, I argue, informs the way people understand *baby tonuss*. Some of my body-intensive interlocutors questioned the rigidness of these principles, especially as some physical therapists who promoted *hendlings* were not in favor of carrying a child in a sling, but I did not encounter any physical therapists who were in an outright disagreement with the idea of symmetrical handling of a child. Some, like Anda J., the lactation and baby-wearing consultant we met in Chapter 2, advocated both *hendlings* and baby-wearing. Anda J. told me that most people in Latvia would now recognize the practice of *hendlings* under this name. She traces

¹⁵⁶ The text above the pictures: This way of holding (poza) is suitable for an infant from about 2 months of age or later, when a child knows better how to group-together (sagrupēties), which sounds strange even in Latvian, and hold up their body. Correct: A child is facing the environment. One arm of the mother’s is underneath the bottom (buttocks), while the other arm is underneath the child’s arms. It is important to feel the distribution of weight. 50% of the child’s weight should be supported by the upper arm, while pressing the child closer as if slightly lifting the child up. The child’s back needs to be straight. Incorrect: If there is a curvature (ieliekums mugurā) and the little one sits as if in a pot.

her awareness of the practice to the kinesthetics school or German Trageschule (with English language branches in Ireland and England). According to her, the ideas of kinesthetic handling of adults is where kinesthetic handling for babies evolved from, but it is unclear if this is the origin of the term (she mentions that similar principles are enacted by those following Pikler and Bobath as well).¹⁵⁷ According to Anda J. “Kinesthetics is a way to care and to talk about the body, about the rotations, how to lift according to the natural rotation, and not fight gravity, but cooperate with gravity, how one has to involve the body not sleep like a lung and allow to be handled (nevis gulēt kā plaušai un ļaut, lai ar viņu viskaut ko dara).”

Tonuss provides a way to talk not only about physiological [muscle] tension, but also the emotional impacts of contemporary lives of Latvians. For example, Anda J. links *baby tonuss* to the state of mind of the parents: “I am more and more convinced that *tonuss* is the inner anxiety (satraukums) of the parents.” She alternates between this non-medical explanation and a physiological explanation that *tonuss* reflects increased muscle strain (saspringums). The *tonuss* can be either decreased (hypo), as is the case with those with Down syndrome, or increased (hyper), Anda J. tells me, but it is mostly the latter (hyper) type in Latvia. It appears that the overall increased *tonuss* in Latvia, the way Anda J. views it, is related to the anxiety-producing lifestyle of Latvians.

Anda J. also attributes some of the *tonuss* diagnoses to insensitive pediatric care by medical professionals who stress parents out with questions such as “What are you doing, why are you holding him/her like that? Can’t you see that she has a *tonuss*?” This leads parents, according to Anda J., to sign up (iestājas rindā) for the state [massage] consultations, even if there is no muscle tone at all. Anda J. tells me that doulas often refer stressed-out parents to her to be calmed down.

¹⁵⁷ Both Bobath and Pikler are interpreted as being about respectful communication with a baby, similarly to *handlings*, where adults are expected to continuously verbalize what they are going to do with the baby. This, for example, is what makes the professional in the introductory vignette video quite different because she mostly talked with the parents.

This is a typical conversation between Anda J. and her first-time clients:

Anda: Why [were you referred]?
Hypothetical Parent: Well, we have a bit of a *tonuss* (neliels tonusiņš)
Anda: Where is it?
Hypothetical Parent: Well, it's not there anymore.
Anda: When [were you referred]?
Hypothetical Parent: About a month ago.

In continuation of this imaginary dialogue, Anda J. tells me that she advises most parents to consider the fact that they are consulting an unknown person (iet pie sveša cilvēka), “who is going to manage your child, so you need to understand your aim.” When Anda is asked about massage by such parents, she typically replies: “Just don't go anywhere [to any specialists], look your child in the eye and caress him, because that's when you have contact with him and have touched him in a tactile way (taktīli pieskāries).” Anda references research on “tactile touch” and uses the Latvian word for it (taktīlais pieskāriens) to argue for an infant-adult dyadic relationship without the intervention of a stranger. Outsider (albeit professional) assistance in touching young children is unnecessary and potentially harmful, according to Anda J.. She tells me: “Research shows that tactile touch improves a lot (visu ko tur veicina). I think that an immature muscle massaged by a stranger is pointless (bezmērķīgi), and it is also pointless that state money is being paid for it.”

Baby tonuss, according to Anda J.'s interpretation, can stem from interfering with the mother-child dyad by a stranger, such as a doctor. She explains:

Half of these cases when they are told that it is *tonuss*, is no *tonuss* at all. The mom has gotten up early, has not slept, but she has a visit at 10 am at the physical therapist, she is anxious, the child is anxious, has screamed a bit while waiting and when they get to the specialist, he is so *uzvilcīgs* (tense) that they are both like this [mimes a very worried expression], that's when he has a *tonuss*, because he is tense and the mom is tense.

I ask why parents would go to a specialist, to which Anda J. replies: “To make sure that everything is OK (viss ir kārtībā), here they refer lots of parents to a neurologist and a physical therapist.

Actually if they have a good pediatrician, the doctor would say that they don't have to go anywhere, instead just give your child some physical love (mīļojiet bērniņu).” A good doctor in this interpretation relies on motherly expertise and encourages her towards physical expression of love towards her child. There is a certain ambiguity in the way Anda J. considers *baby tonuss*, that is, it is simultaneously physiological and psychological, transpiring in relations between the parents and child and the parents to the world. Pathological adult relationships and anxiety bear an impact on the condition as it is named and diagnosed in this case, while in general treated as something only corporeal, like Masha's tension in the arms. Parental anxieties about parenting come into expression with *baby tonuss* in ways that reflect Latvian-specific demands for straightness and the parental concerns about psychological well-being. One clear physiological pathology that is feared is that of the “crooked spine,” which I will show in Chapter 5 has profound moral implications for Latvians.

The pathological development of the back underlies Latvian concerns around *baby tonuss*. Anda J., for example, pointed out that in Latvia-specific concerns about wearing babies in a sling including the “crooked spine.” She associates this approach with “outdated thinking” and says that it is being promoted by medical professionals (pediatricians and physical therapists who do not know the right way of handling the infant, which is about 50 % of them, according to Anda J.) and maybe some “grandmothers” who believe the old “Soviet story” of how babies should be wrapped up like logs (*pagalītes*), put down somewhere and not picked up. Anda J. also told me that attachment as a guiding ideology was neither relevant for selecting baby carrying devices nor addressing fears around the straightens of the infants' backs: “I would say they do not think of any of this secure attachment stuff, all they worry about is if the backs of their children will be straight.” Most

of my interlocutors, including Darja, who repeatedly emphasized that she only massaged and exercised Masha as far as their mutual emotional connection allowed, would readily agree that corporeal engagement with a child was a useful tool for enhancing emotional closeness. This would then be consistent with the version promoted by most alternative child-care specialists in Latvia (such as doulas) and one of the principles of *hendlings*. Yet, *hendlings* was also quite rigid in its adherence to symmetry and “straightness of the back.” When Darja and Gregory overrode their disapproval of Masha being tortured by the massage specialist, they were not at that moment acting in reference to the attachment ideology Bowlby style,¹⁵⁸ but rather out of other considerations about health and aesthetics.

Conclusion

Through attending to the Latvian non-medical medical diagnosis of *baby tonuss* as an epistemic object, I explored in this chapter how a contemporary preoccupation of “symmetrizing” (and corporeal) treatment such as *hendlings* and medicinal baby-massage of young children came about in Latvia. I tracked the ways “managed corporeality” as a treatment for *baby tonuss* developed in the Soviet system under the auspices of the field of *Healing Physical Culture* and an overall emphasis on prophylaxis. I demonstrated how in the process an “increased muscle tone” in a newborn developed from a symptom into a culturally-accepted diagnosis of *baby tonuss*, which should be treated in its own right. If left untreated, it is imagined to cause bodily asymmetry and a crooked back, as well as it can stand in for pathological relationships and anxiety, to which the young child

¹⁵⁸ British psychologist John Bowlby first wrote about the importance of attachment in childcare in 1950. Chapter 2 explores the impact of his approach on the body-intensive parents in Latvia.

is exposed. I concluded in this chapter that both body-intensive and other parents, as well as medical professionals, are driven by the aesthetics of the normative Latvian child who is a symmetrical child with a straight back. Thus Latvians (both Latvian- and Russian-speaking) are guided by adherence to bodily straightness, the principle of “straight-back morality” that I will explore later in the Dissertation. These sentiments are rooted in the late-Soviet period that paved the way for parental openness to “managed corporeality” and even “body-intensive” parenting which, at least in theory, is oriented towards an individual rather than collective child-rearing ideal. I documented a shift, however, away from the parental preference for intervention by specialists to a preference that privileges limiting corporeal interventions to parents themselves, and often just mothers who are advised by experts. The normative Latvian baby emerges from my analysis in this chapter as one who is not going to become physiologically or morally “crooked,” and monitoring and treating *baby tonuss* is one way to achieve it.

Chapter 4 “Not enough milk”: Intimacy, Intergenerationality and Gendered Child-rearing

Ieva, a mother of three boys who became a trained doula after the birth of her youngest, tells me that her middle son all of a sudden became restless while breastfeeding when he was three months old. He was crying, arching away from the breast and not latching on. This led to some unsolicited breast-feeding advice from several women of her mother’s generation. Ieva: “All the aunties already managed to tell me that I did not have enough milk”. (Un paspēja visas tantes pateikt: “Tev piena par maz!”) Ieva went on to recount a conversation with her friend’s mother who also could not understand why her daughter, Ieva’s friend, also had to nurse without a schedule and what appeared to her as “all the time.”

This is how Ieva tells the story:

She [Ieva’s friend’s mother] said: “How is it that we nursed once every three hours and now you need to breastfeed this often?” Then I explained to her that it all depends on how good the milk production and supply each mother has by nature. I told her: “You must have had really good milk production (padeve) if you could feed every three hours and there was enough milk, because usually that is not enough. Usually breasts need to be emptied out more often, so that the child grows.” But she said: “Oh no, I only had enough for a month, then the milk ran out.”

Ieva adds:

And that was so cool that she arrived at an understanding through her own experience of why her daughter had to nurse her child every hour instead of how she did it, because it did not end very well. And then I told her about the Soviet times, where it was important that mothers be free of children and breast-feeding, so they could go back to work, to leave the baby at the creche, and that’s how it happened. I think she partly understood it then and at least did not reprimand her daughter for nursing too often. But her first idea was that I did not have enough milk.

Chapter 4 is about “all the aunties” of Ieva’s mother's generation and, more broadly, about gender in Latvia. Ieva's exchange with her friend’s mother on not having enough breastmilk reveals a generational shift in gendered labor that has occurred in post-Cold War Latvia. Similarly to the efforts to counter the toughening attachment of the Soviet period I described in Chapter 2, some

of my body-intensive interlocutors use on-demand and extended nursing to overcome “intergenerational lactation trauma”¹⁵⁹ or the ways that contemporary mothers are impacted by what is widely perceived as their mother’s failure to breastfeed during the Soviet times. Mothering has been viewed in feminist thought (for example, Glenn 1994) as a social construct that is constituted by conflating all women with mothers and then fusing them into a unitary category with children, thus denying individual women and children their personhood and agency (Glenn 1994, 13). Mothering is also often imagined as something that only takes place in the domestic sector of the economy. Bearing in mind that having children is central to the way most Latvians view ideal femininity,¹⁶⁰ the ethnographic data on nursing and body-intensive child-rearing in Latvia allows me to show how the professional and public spheres intertwine in the ways Latvian women parent. Mother’s milk serves as a particularly poignant example of how Latvian child-rearing and expertise are impacted by intergenerational shifts, various interpretations of Soviet history, and state-paid parenting leave.

Breastfeeding has been critiqued by feminists (Avishai 2011; Bobel 2001) as a practice that, despite its capacity to empower women in their relationships to their bodies, also tends to bind them in ways that are rooted in “biological determinism”¹⁶¹ and are often accompanied by unequal access to various privileges, for example, child-care leave or affordable child-care. Most

¹⁵⁹ By this I mean a widely known experience of failure of breastfeeding by the contemporary Latvian mothers’ generation and the ways it has impacted the current attitudes towards nursing a baby. I have Naomi Schoenfeld to thank for this expression.

¹⁶⁰ Less than 1% of women when surveyed at age 20 said that they do not wish to have children, while about 10-12% of women at the end of reproductive age (for various reasons, including a very limited number subscribing to child-free philosophy) have no children in Latvia (Petrova n.d.). For more on Latvian pro-natalist policies and Latvian women who choose to be child-free, see Kursīte (2014).

¹⁶¹ I interpret “biological determinism” here as referring to female biology being used to explain why females are best suited to (and should) care for children in situations that are beyond their physiological capacity to be pregnant and breastfeed. This could include an attitude that because a woman is nursing a child, she should also be the one to get up at night or refrain from working outside of home, or pronouncements that women are more natural at caring for children than men.

of the Latvian mothers I interviewed who were involved in body-intensive practices took care of their children during the first year of their life or longer. This at first glance bears a strong resemblance to the privileged stay-at-home moms who practice attachment style parenting in the US, such as those investigated by Halley (2007). Yet, while my female interlocutors' intimate, corporeal relationships with their young children were enabled by global networks of ties that were impacted in part by Western theories of attachment and "natural parenting," Latvia-specific circumstances embedded in Soviet practices around early child-care played a significant role too. Most notably, I argue that the contemporary mothers I talked to shared a sense that the previous generation of Latvian women had been subjected to reproductive violence. For example, it is widely believed that Soviet mothers were deprived of early contact with their children which negatively impacted their relationships to them, including a failure to breastfeed. I draw on interviews and on Latvian literary discourse, especially Nora Ikstena's book *Soviet Milk*, to explore the relation between mothering and a turn away from Latvia's Soviet past. By doing so, I claim that breastmilk connects generations of Latvian mothers' (non)lactating bodies in an effort to counter a regime that violated birthing women's bodies.

I view lactation as a site of contestation through which Latvian women of reproductive age endeavor to embody distinctively post-Cold War mothering that may be a rejection of all things Soviet, but is also not an uncritical embrace of liberal feminist approach to productivity/work, health, and gender. In light of scholarship on the unique configuration of the public and private in the former Soviet Union (Boym 1995, Shlapentokh 1989, Gal and Kligman 2001), I conceptualize my interlocutors' experiences with their children and professional lives as intimate labor (Boris and Parreñas 2010), a productive activity performed in the private domain. Intimacy here needs to be read in reference to how the official practices are remembered by Latvians today. I suggest that

during the Soviet times the public narrative was strongly focused on empowering women in ideological ways that did not originate with women themselves. For example, many Soviet women did not want to eschew infant-care for the sake of paid work. This is reflected in Ieva's blaming the early return to work that impeded Soviet mothers breastfeeding in the opening vignette. I encountered similar interpretations of the Soviet impact on Latvian breastfeeding several times during my fieldwork. The support for women's rights as a public project hence has been viewed with suspicion ever since the disintegration of the USSR, even while women continue to be an active part of the workforce. The intimate labor (Boris and Parreñas 2010) that it involves is treated as a right that has historically been denied to Latvian women and hence is to be treasured. Such sentiments, I argue, have resulted in resistance to liberal feminism all over the former socialist realm (Binnie 2014; Korolczuk and Graff 2018; Matynia 2003).

In order to provide context to the Latvian refusal of feminism as a political project, I analyze several instances where feminism is seen as a Western import that as a movement fails to grasp the historical reality of Latvia, especially the decimation of the Latvian male population throughout the 20th century. By examining the work of an immensely popular author of women's self-help books, I demonstrate how history is blamed for the too-masculine personal traits that impede women's health and happiness.¹⁶² Through attending to the experiences and expectations of my interlocutors in the context of theory on intimate labor (Boris and Parreñas 2010), I argue that Latvian (re)productive practices are clearly gendered and rely heavily on heteronormative ways of thinking; however, they can also be interpreted as a subtle critique of the patriarchy (and perhaps capitalism) itself, as they weave together the private (home) and the public (work) in the

¹⁶² Latvian women are said to be too strong (masculine) for their own good, which intimidates men and contributes to their failed romantic/sexual relations. This is a variation on the gendered dynamic of the "brave victim" and the "big child" presented by Gal and Kligman (2001).

context of resistance to a violent and oppressive past, where the public is always treated as suspicious.

I end by examining the changing understanding of motherly expertise and its professionalization through the Latvian doula¹⁶³ project, a relatively new phenomenon that blends mothering and professional expertise and focuses on educating parents in attachment theory (which I investigated in Chapter 2). In this regard, I ask how privileged, intimate, corporeal practices intertwine with new forms of expertise that are global but also uniquely Latvian, as the doula movement has emerged as a response to the past treatment of birthing mothers. Breast-feeding in today's Latvia tells a complex story of current mothers' relationships to their own mother's experiences of Sovietness and corporeality, which are marked by a notion of shared "intergenerational lactation trauma."

I Mother's milk: breastfeeding and gendered reassessment of the Soviet past

Nursing children with mother's milk in Latvia is an activity that is geographically and historically situated. For example, the privileging of the act of breastfeeding over other ways of feeding young infants has been critiqued for imposing classed standards of "good mothering" (Bobel 2001) and individualistic approaches to parenting (Avishai 2011; Reich 2014), but in the case of Latvia the privilege cannot be analyzed as pertaining to clearly classed lines.¹⁶⁴ It is true that the women I

¹⁶³ I use the term "doula" to describe both birthing doulas and postpartum doulas that are called PEP mammas in Latvia but essentially do the same as post-partum doula would in the US.

¹⁶⁴ The most distinctive class marker among the body-intensive interlocutors was their education (almost all of them had a BA degree or higher) and their ability to stay home after their children were born (for a year or longer). The latter, while related to their education status, was an outcome of the fact that postpartum child-care leave is recompensed in Latvia in the amount of the official income. While not all employees in Latvia are paid a fully taxed ("official") income, most of the women I talked to in this group had managed to have a child-care leave payment that was close to their previous monthly income (if they took the leave until a child was a year old). There were some creative solutions, that included job change in the midst of pregnancy for the sake of benefits, use of "blue page" (a government-paid sick leave) and taking her husband's leave-money (which amounts to 50% of his salary if he remains working), when most of the woman's pre-child's salary had been "unofficial." They had all made stringent calculations on the best possible solutions vis-a-vis what the state could provide but since this was not the main focus of our conversations I can only suggest that more detailed research would be extremely illuminating.

talked to about their corporeal practices with their young children used breastfeeding as a practice of distinction, but it was a practice of distinction from a past that had been violent towards women (and men). As I have shown in the previous chapters, the body-intensive parents I interviewed were motivated by opposing some forms of collective and institutionalized care, for example, the orphanage or the kindergarten, which could be said to have promoted emotionally-hardening practices or “toughening attachment” (Stryker 2012). Similarly, I treat lactation in Latvia as a site of protest against the collectivized health-care practices that the previous generation of mothers are thought to have encountered.

Women of Ieva's generation used ideas of “natural” and “universal” physical attachment between the infant and the caretaker to understand breastfeeding and the “lack of milk” that their own mothers are widely known to have experienced. My body-intensive interlocutors often spoke in terms of intuition and bodily intimacy with their children that they opposed to an image of the old style of raising children, which included graph or *tabula*-derived breastfeeding practices, where each feeding was scheduled and its success measured according to how much weight a child had gained in a feeding, as compared to a graph (*tabula*). The Soviet past intruded upon them in the form of the advice-giving grandmother in Ieva's story or a Soviet-style doctor who was inflexible and unintuitive. The mothers I interviewed nursed (or intended to nurse) their children for longer than the Latvian average. All the babies in this group were breastfed for more than six months, and this is true for slightly over half (56.6% in 2016) of babies in Latvia.¹⁶⁵ The breastfeeding of children who are about a year old dwindles rapidly in general, but not among my

¹⁶⁵ This metric is one of the highest among the EU countries, an achievement that is touted by the newspaper article cited later in this footnote. According to the data of Latvia's Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (CDPC), 91.7 % of all infants were breastfed until 6 weeks of age, 56.6% were breastfed until they were 6 months old, and 26.4 % for a year. There has been a recent increase in infants who are breastfed until they are one year old; rising steadily from 17.9% in 2006 to 21.7% in 2010. It is noteworthy that the article quoted here also mentions an increase in infants

interlocutors. There were several mothers among them who had nursed their children for more than three years or intended to continue until they were ready to quit themselves, which may well be even longer. Most of them, however, were not sharing this information beyond the most immediate family circle, as they anticipated or had encountered censure. Nursing children past the one-year mark was also not encouraged by most pediatric health-care professionals. The women I interviewed mentioned repeatedly that their family practitioners expected them to introduce other food¹⁶⁶ into the child's diet at the latest by the age of six months and to cease nursing around their offspring's first birthday. Such advice the body-intensive mothers mostly ignored without letting the practitioner know, thus relying on their own motherly knowledge on the topic.

I began this dissertation with a story that focused on perceptions of my own stunted growth caused by what my grandmother narrated as my mother's "lack of milk." The breastfeeding women I interviewed often reported that their own mothers had failed to nurse them.¹⁶⁷ Like Ieva in the opening vignette, my grandmother also blamed the oppressive Soviet system which demanded that women return to the work-force early and destroyed mother-child intimacy in the process. The decline in breastfeeding rates was not a purely Soviet phenomenon, but rather coincided with the global "modernization" of health care. However, the lack of mother's milk, as well as "conveyor-belt like" birthing practices were linked in my interlocutors' minds to Latvia's Soviet past that they were actively countering with their own intuitive parenting.

who are breastfed until they are 6 months old (from 45.8% in 2007 to 52.5% in 2010) and that Estonians have a slightly higher rate at 53.2%, but Lithuanians are only at 35% (SPKC 2018). In addition, a newspaper article titled "Latvian new mothers are four times better at breastfeeding than in other places in Europe" offers the CDPC data quoted above as reinterpreted by the Pediatric Association of Latvia, stating that the rate of almost 60% breastfeeding until babies are 6 months old is much better than in some [unnamed] European countries where it is 15 %. (LETA 2017).

¹⁶⁶ This is often referred to as solid food in English, even though it is usually not solid at all. In Latvian it is usually called additional feeding (*piebarošana*).

¹⁶⁷ There were several women I talked to whose mothers did not have that experience, but the overwhelming narrative among the parents and the professionals I talked to was of the lack of breastmilk during the Soviet times (which was explained with taking the child away right after birth in the Soviet hospital)

My interlocutors recalled stories from their mother's generation of newborn being kept in a separate room only to be brought to the mother swaddled in a white cotton cloth for a 20 minute feeding at regular intervals. Rivkin-Fish (2005) has showed that even in the 1990s Russia mother-child relationship was still almost entirely subordinate to "the medical institution's needs for convenience and professional dominance" (40).¹⁶⁸ Putniņa (2002) has similarly pointed toward the lack of agency and voice of women who had given birth in Latvia during the late Soviet times and in the 1990s. After mulling over such accounts, one day I asked my own mother about her experience with breast-feeding; I had, after all, grown up knowing that I had not been nursed long. Her story was heart-wrenching, as were the echoes that I heard in some of the stories by the women I interviewed. Here is the tale as she told it to me over the telephone as we were both separated by 10-hour time difference and an ocean.

In those days nobody helped with breastfeeding, either it worked out or not. It did not work out for me, because the first three days nobody even brought you to me at all. Well maybe it was two and a half days, but no less. I guess they were trying to figure out if you had jaundice or not and because of my negative blood type. The other mothers got their children at feeding times, not me ... because of the blood type. ... They did not explain at all about where you were and did not allow me to look at you. Only: "Everything is all right, mom, rest while you can, afterwards it's going to be a lot harder. And try to squeeze some milk out by hand."

I tried but I barely got anything. My breasts were hurting, so I think I had something in there but after two days my body decided that there was no point. I have never been one to struggle too much. There was nothing to do. Just wait. I wanted home. I wanted my mom.

All I could do was exercise because I had read that's how you get rid of the baby-belly. I felt abandoned and lonely. It really felt like a prison. When you were finally brought to me

¹⁶⁸ In her ethnography on WHO-led democratization of the Russian maternity care Rivkin-Fish (2005) also points towards some of the processes that are similar to those that have shaped my interlocutors' views on how pathological the Soviet maternity care was. Rivkin-Fish, for example, demonstrates how Western activists who viewed birthing as an individual woman's right clashed with experienced specialists in the 1990s St. Petersburg over the importance and necessity of certain procedures, most notably not allowing a partner in the maternity ward or certain invasive treatments such as enemas, shaving of pubic regions and routine episiotomies. While the Western specialists thought mainly in terms of individual women's birthing experiences, Russian specialists pointed towards the social and economic conditions of the Russian women as an explanation of why certain procedures were necessary. Expecting and birthing mothers had developed various strategies, including avoiding pre-natal care, to resist what they saw as systematic problem with maternity care.

two and a half days later, you were screaming and did not want the breast. That's how it was. I tried to squeeze the breast into your mouth somehow, but they must have given you something. Not milk, probably not even formula, some glucose solution. What else would they have given you? And they had fed you with a bottle, and you did not like my breast. I was so worried, I just wanted as soon as possible to get home and to buy something at [the store called the] "Infant kitchen" (zīdaiņu virtuve). I did have some breastmilk, but you were a bit lazy, you sucked a bit and then started crying. I stayed in the maternity ward for a week, no less. And the whole time I longed to be home.

My mother, like many her age, speaks about this experience from the perspective of having seen the next generation breastfeed their own children a lot more successfully after receiving support. Her story consistently blames the Soviet maternity ward for her lack of breastfeeding success which resulted both in my stunted growth but also in a well-rested and disciplined child who slept through the night. My mother also emphasized that she had to return to work, something that Ieva in the opening vignette connected to the nursing troubles among that generation. The rows of white cocoons (kūniņas) with baby faces, who are treated no better than fire-logs (pagales) about to be stacked on top of each other for safe-keeping, circulate among the general public and in the media as a reminder¹⁶⁹ of what early-child care should not be. For example, a recent publication of Soviet era black-and white pictures at a popular online news site portrays babies, identically wrapped, often asleep, with several women in starched white hats and face masks either posing by the rows of babies or sometimes holding one of them stiffly in their hands (Calis.lv 2019).

¹⁶⁹ One such article on Soviet birth practices describes as "tragic" the way mothers and newborns were treated after birth. "Today it seems almost tragic that 30 years ago nobody informed a woman about how to take care of her newborn. How to swaddle their baby, and how often to [breast]feed them, women learned themselves." The article speculates that Soviet women had a lot of post-partum depression cases because they did not have anybody to talk to about their birth experiences. "In the 1980s a mother saw her child only 2-3 hours after birth, already wrapped in a flannel or gauze cocoon, when they were put in long strollers and brought up for feeding. Mother and child contact was only possible during these feedings which were not adjusted according to the child's needs, but rather a strict regimen. That coincided with the ideology of the Soviet regime, that defined society as the basic value and the societal interest as paramount, and the individual only as a subordinated part of the society. Child and mother's relationships were subordinated to the overall public health aims and strategies" (Calis.lv 2013).

Adherence to a strict feeding schedule and mother-infant separation was certainly not a purely Soviet phenomenon, and birthing practices across the world were subject to increased medicalization all through the 1960s and early 70s. In fact, my own mother blamed the every-three-hour feeding schedule on the American parenting expert Dr. Spock whose book was published in the USSR. However, my interlocutors predominantly linked their mothers' nursing troubles to the overall miserly treatment of birthing women in the Soviet Latvia.¹⁷⁰ Despite breastfeeding being considered "natural" and "instinctual," the Soviet regime in this interpretation was considered pernicious enough to override some of the strongest of mothering instincts.

The complicated relationship of mother's milk to her daughter's survival in the Soviet society has recently received a popular literary re-interpretation in the form of Nora Ikstena's *Mother's Milk* [translated into English as *Soviet Milk*]. This book portrays the Soviet period in Latvia as a time when mother's milk was poisonous, both metaphorically and chemically. A mother, who is born in 1944 along with the return of the Soviet occupation, which in turns imprisons her father and destroys his life, tries to save her daughter from the depression and hopelessness of the Soviet regime by not nursing her by choice. When at a later date a teacher calls the mother to her daughter's school to investigate why her daughter does not drink cow's milk at school, "the most noble of all drinks,"¹⁷¹ the mother, who is also a disillusioned doctor, replies: "Maybe it's

¹⁷⁰ According to Starks (2003) the early post-revolutionary efforts in combatting child mortality were focused on encouraging scientifically motivated breastfeeding under the auspices of a doctor as the ultimate authority and while avoiding "overfeeding" (418). However, by the time the last Soviet generation (Yurchak 2006) which most of these women belong to, were giving birth, breastfeeding (at least the way it is remembered among my body-intensive interlocutors) was extremely fraught, precisely because the mother was no longer trusted to know what's best for her child.

¹⁷¹ Cow's milk as a source of wellness has a special meaning in Latvia, as many Latvian women used to have (or aspire to have) a milking cow, with whom they were known to have developed very close relationships. Hence my maternal grandmother's question to me in the Introduction to this dissertation - if I know how to milk a cow - was not random. The topic of cow's milk and the Latvian countryside has received a thespian-ethnographic rendering in the play "Black Milk" put on by Jaunais Rīgas teātris in 2009/2010. They summed up the main message of the show as follows: "Final Conclusion: When the last Latvian grandmother would have given up her last cow, the real Latvia would have receded to the past. That's why the show is about cows" (JRT n.d.). Recall my grandmother detouring into milking of the cows in the very beginning of the Introduction.

because she did not get mother's milk" (Ikstena 2015, 55). When the startled teacher asks if the mother had been too sick to breastfeed, she elaborates: "Yes, I did not want to live and I did not want her to drink the milk of a mother who does not want to live." (Ikstena 2015, 55).

The mother in Nora Ikstena's book is simultaneously "unnatural" and intuitive. She refuses to breastfeed her daughter in order to protect her from her own suicidal depression. Her condition is directly linked to the mother's sense of hopelessness with the Soviet regime, most notably, her failed professional career as a researcher of reproductive health that she feels would only be possible outside of the USSR. She is not unlike the mothers of my interlocutors, for example, Ieva and her friend's mother, who also did not manage to breastfeed their children (for long), however, she does it out of choice, thus marking this as an obvious act of rebellion towards the Soviet regime. The character in the novel acts out of the desire to protect her child from the poison of the Soviet regime, of which she has become a symptom, marking her as the problem and the solution. "All the aunties" who advised Ieva that she did not have enough milk are being narrated by Ieva not as rebels but victims¹⁷² who were deprived of breastfeeding by the Soviet regime. By implication, an intimate relationship with their children that only current-style parenting, including prolonged breastfeeding, can ensure, was also denied to the Soviet mothers' generation.

Among my body-intensive interlocutors, breastfeeding and mother's milk acted as a powerful substance that could counter the harmful Soviet past and the lack of intimacy they perceive in it. They viewed breast milk as the most natural and self-evident, if not always the easiest, solution for infant nourishment as opposed to cumbersome bottle-feeding, which in the Soviet period also included their own production of gruel or a visit to the "infant's kitchen" (*zīdaiņa virtuve*) to buy baby-friendly milk products such as cottage-cheese or the fermented milk drink known as

¹⁷² My own mother's referral to the maternity ward as a prison is steeped in the same sentiment.

kefir. Body-intensive engagement with a child while nursing and not letting a child out of their sight after birth can be performed in opposition to what they perceive as their own first days of life. Several of the women conjured the image of the cocoons when they wondered about their entrance into this world in a Soviet hospital and being kept away from their mothers. Through nursing and staying close to their newborns they could intervene on their own past.

Their mothers, like “all the aunties” in Ieva’s story, were sometimes incredulous that so much on-demand breastfeeding was necessary. My mother recalled that feeding me every three hours was beneficial to how I had always slept through the night and woken up with a smile.¹⁷³ I heard often that grandmothers told the new parents that babies slept a lot better and through the night before all this around-the-clock-breastfeeding. Darja, whom we met in the previous chapter, was also asked by both her mother and her mother-in-law if her daughter Masha really was hungry so often. Darja recalled how her mother-in-law asked: “Really? She wants to eat already? But she just ate two hours ago.” Darja too explained this with the Soviet heritage.¹⁷⁴ She told me: “Right, during the Soviet times they brought the newborn every three hours and when the mother was not there gave the child a glucose solution.” In addition, her mother-in-law who had had plenty of milk¹⁷⁵ also advised her not to follow some contemporary nursing advice such as to not empty the breast in order to balance the production and to use a pacifier. These Darja ignored.

¹⁷³ She said: “That system was easier for mothers. I went to work when you were 3 months old, a new job. And you slept through the night and did not ask for anything, you were so disciplined, and you woke up with a smile and I was sorry that I needed to go to work, but most mothers had it like that, maybe only in the countryside they breastfed like before.”

¹⁷⁴ The American pediatrician Dr. Spock was translated into 1970s and many people (including my mother in the interview I conducted with her) think of him as the one who promoted the 3-hour feeding schedule, even though that was also the regimen (without the night feeding) promoted in the Soviet maternity wards.

¹⁷⁵ Darja tells me that her mother-in-law remembers having “a lot of milk” on the first day, which Darja discounts as impossible based on what she knows of breastfeeding. Her mother-in-law also told her that her milk ran out after an X-ray when her youngest son was 4 months old. Darja’s mother was nursed until she was a year and a half, which she was told was very long. She had been at a hospital on her first birthday (a respiratory virus) and they had all been very surprised that she was still nursed back then.

Among my other body-intensive interlocutors, the mainstream medical advice on breastfeeding was similarly ignored or actively opposed. Dora N., a doula and a mother of two, noted that there were medical specialists who still “screwed up” (sačakerē) breastfeeding. For example, in the regional center where she works as a birth-doula there was a neonatologist who routinely formula-fed newborns. A baby whose stomach’s capacity, according to Dora N., was only 5-7 ml, was routinely stuffed full with 20 ml of formula per feeding and was typically too full to nurse. Dora N. was not sure how she herself avoided a similar fate at the same hospital. She speculated that it might have been because she had read a lot of “natural parenting” and attachment promoting literature before (especially “Gaidības un radības ar prieku”). Dora N. also supposed that she might have just been lucky that her newborn's weight-loss was not considered bad. In her professional practice about half of the mothers had been subjected to formula-feeding of newborns, a practice that Dora N. linked to the staff’s lack of knowledge. I view the neonatologist who “screws up breastfeeding” in Dora’s town as an extension of the schedule or *tabula*-based care associated with the Soviet period.

In an echo to the intergenerational lactation trauma that I explored earlier in the chapter, Dora N. recounted how some women told her that their mothers had not been able to nurse too. Dora N. interpreted this as her clients already “preprogramming” themselves for a breastfeeding failure. She elaborated to me: “She [her client] thinks that that if her mom stopped at a month or two, she will too.” Dora N. thus saw the nursing troubles of contemporary Latvian mothers as a direct outcome of their mothers’ histories. This trauma resurfaced when the women from the older generation made unsupportive comments about how the babies slept better during the Soviet period or wondered if really so much around the clock breastfeeding was necessary, or as my mother put it years later over the phone: “It was a trauma for me.”

Liene, whom we met in Chapter 2, told me that she recently talked to her mother about how differently she and her mother's mother (Liene's grandmother) were raised. They talked about the impact of World War II and the subsequent Soviet period. Liene explained:

The people simply had to accept that situation, and then they passed it on to the other generation, as simple as that. But our generation, I am not sure if this is connected to the free Latvia (*brīvā Latvija*) or democracy, or the overall global way of thinking, we are trying to do something differently, we are trying to influence and to change if we don't like something, especially in child rearing. My mom often tells me that she did it because my Grammy (*omīte*) told her to do it. She was a pediatric nurse. Regarding nursing, for example, with my elder brother, my Grammy told her that you should not overfeed a baby, so you weigh them before feeding and after, and if it's enough, then you are not allowed to feed no matter if he is screaming, now my mom thinks, gosh (*ārprāts*), I starved my son back then. He screamed so much!

The current generation, be it Liene or Ieva, were able to intervene on history and on the transmission of trauma, while previous generations, that of their mothers and mine, had experienced early childcare as if their bodies had been made into conduits of trauma for their children--and were traumatized in the process.

Liene's husband, Kārlis' account also portrayed his mother's desire to leave the oppressive maternity ward in order to protect her children: "My mother has told us that she could not wait to be out of the hospital where they were weighing the newborns all the time, because her boys, who wanted to eat, calmed down when they were fed, but in the hospital they did not let them be fed out of fear of overfeeding." The over-fed infant here figures as the threat to the Soviet future, a child who is uncontrollably succumbing to gluttony which can be controlled by an institutionalized intervention. This figure bears resemblance to the wimpy, undisciplined fainting child of the Latvian present that I examined in Chapter 1. Kārlis' mother chose to resist such fears. He explained: "There was a graph (*tabuliņa*) on the wall, so they fed the child according to a graph, not how the

mother feels.” The graph represents a medicalized way of approaching health by time-tabularization of it, which is juxtaposed to “how the mother feels” or motherly intuition. In this interpretation, mothering is turned into a measured time-tabled feeding schedule, associated with the Soviet past, that could make the mother’s milk dissipate and eroded mother-child intimacy. Kārlis and Liene chose homebirth, which had been non-existent since the 1950s, but has been revived in the late 1990s in Latvia, partly in order to move away from the medicalized Soviet past and towards intuitive parenting.

Darja, who was a member of some parenting groups that are more mainstream, contemplated how not everyone felt about breastfeeding like she did. For example, she left one of these groups because other mothers had very different views on corporeal attachment. Darja told me: “One mother asks: ‘Hey ladies, am I going to ruin my life if I pick my child up (paņemt bērnu rokās) right now, because he is crying?’ I did not even read any further. That was the last drop, after which I exited the group.” Darja considered the mothers in the “mainstream” group to be replicating the way that they were brought up, and she deemed that insufficient. She recalled how one of the online group participants vehemently tried to convince others (ar putām uz lūpām) that we all have survived (izdzīvot) while being given water (instead of breastmilk) in the first month of life by our parents, a practice that she considered outdated. Darja inquired rhetorically: “But perhaps it is possible to do better than just survive?” This “just” ensuring survival is attributed to the old type of (also mainstream) child-rearing, steeped in similar pragmatic sentiments as “toughening attachment.” The novel type of child-rearing is imagined to be fostered by intuition and the

right type of expertise that took into account the corporeal needs on babies, their need for attachment as per attachment theory. The mainstream, on the other hand, became associated with the old, also Soviet, style of thinking and the lack of intimacy.¹⁷⁶

The contemporary increase in breastfeeding rates can be seen as liberating, but in a different way from what the “natural” parenting movement in the US postulates—the liberation of the female body from sexualized bodily aesthetics. Rather, the lactating women in my study are motivated by similar considerations about resisting power as those that are portrayed in Ikstena’s book and in more mainstream interpretations of the Soviet heritage as totalitarian and harmful. The contemporary body-intensive mothers and the women of the previous generation are marked by an “intergenerational lactation trauma” that still suspends them in webs of mutual misunderstanding, which can also turn into a teaching moment (with the younger women as teachers) as in the case of Ieva and her older neighbor in the opening vignette. Female bodies in this interpretation are constantly negotiated vis-a-vis an outside power—be it the mainstream doctors with insufficient knowledge of breastfeeding or the remnants of the former Soviet regime in the misguided advice given long ago to their mother’s or grandmother’s generation.

¹⁷⁶ The mainstream children are imagined as less connected to their parents physically, corporeally: instead of the breast in their mouth, they have a pacifier. Darja tells me that the first time she put a pacifier in Masha’s mouth, she was standing next to her and was herself crying. The pacifier was one of the recommended items for going to the maternity hospital, so they had bought it. She had also read that it was not good for breastfeeding, so they did not use it in the maternity hospital. Darja: “I had read before giving birth, that in the beginning I should breastfeed on demand and that with the pacifier, there are some newborns who need to suck (*zīst*) a lot, so they might need a pacifier, but that’s a rare exception. If they are sucking their own finger though a pacifier is better, because it is better to get rid of. The midwife too at the maternity hospital lessons (*kursos*) said that we should take the pacifier, and put it deep down in our bag, just to have it, but better not use it.” Darja adds then that intuitively she did not feel like using it and then she heard this online lecture, where the female lecturer said: “Imagine, you are calling your husband: “Sasha, Sasha, Sasha,” but he puts a pacifier in your mouth.” Darja and I both laugh and Darja finishes retelling the lecturer’s point: “Would you stop calling/crying because that? No, you just cannot open your mouth, but you still have that demand inside.” So Darja describes her feelings the first time she put a pacifier in Masha’s mouth and cried: “I thought that there is something that she is asking me, to soothe her, she is crying for me to help her, but I am just putting a piece of plastic in her mouth.” Thus the tactile/corporeal/haptic parenting is seen as fulfilling a genuine desire from the child, of which other forms are only cheap substitutes (especially if they are made out of plastic). Darja is analytical about this: “Of course that was my problem that I had such a negative perception, but then I understood that she was not taking it and calmed down. So that’s that!”

II “I have never felt like a *feministe* (female feminist) and don’t want to feel like that”: the complexity of Latvian disavowal of feminism

The complex perception of what constituted femininity in Latvia was palpable in all of my conversations with body-intensive mothers, but they almost never talked about mothering in terms of women’s rights or the complex concept of “gender.” In this section I provide context to such reticence. After a review of current practices around female empowerment, I suggest that while Latvian (re)productive practices are clearly gendered and rely heavily on heteronormative ways of thinking, they can also be interpreted as a subtle critique of the patriarchy (and perhaps capitalism?) itself, as they redefine the private(home)/public(work) boundaries. The disavowal of feminism is related to the way women’s experiences with (re)productive practices are remembered as traumatizing in the Soviet period, as I just demonstrated above. This has resulted in a reverence for feminine expertise that can be achieved by a reclamation of women’s proximity to nature and home. The association of the feminine with the natural and the domestic, however, is feared by those, who oppose feminism, to be the precise attitude that liberal feminists are dismantling. In general, views on feminism in Latvia are based on superficial knowledge of the first- and second-wave feminist agenda, before it was critiqued for over-reliance on white upper-middle class women’s responses to male domination.

Saba Mahmood (2001) has argued that an analysis of the ability to effect change in the world has been the stumbling block of feminist critique of conservative religious movements. She showed how women in the piety-cultivating Islamic revivalist movement in Egypt acted against their interests, as conceived by liberal feminism, in that they chose to participate in regulations of their feminine body by a male-dominant structure. Mahmood suggests that the commonly applied

“false consciousness” argument — they do not understand that they are perpetuating their own oppression — does not take into account the “discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment” (Mahmood 2001, 217). I interpret this move by Mahmood as keeping an open mind towards how women’s selves are constituted in cultures that appear to be in disagreement with the goals of the liberal feminist movement as a political project. I have taken her plea for paying attention to the historically and culturally specific aspects of women’s lives seriously in the following inquiry.

From a liberal political viewpoint, Latvia (along with other former socialist countries such as Poland, Lithuania, Hungary, or Romania) is failing miserably in terms of female empowerment. For example, during the summer of 2018, Latvia joined a list of former Socialist bloc countries (Poland and Lithuania in particular) in not signing the EC Istanbul Convention for Eradication of Violence Towards Women because of its use of the term “gender,” which was supposed to be dangerous to the morality of Latvian society (see Putniņa (2018) on this event in the context of the how gender is subtly biologized in Latvia and the danger this poses to gender-based violence prevention¹⁷⁷). Any talk of women’s issues in Latvia comes with a dose of anti-feminism that is so peculiarly fervent that it requires additional analysis, because it is not just a story of Latvians’ conservatism but also a commentary on their relationship to history that is fraught with violent

¹⁷⁷More precisely, see Putniņa’s presentation at the AABS Conference at Stanford on June 1st, 2018, “It Will be Difficult for Women to Sit upon a Urinal”: An Anthropological Perspective on Violence Prevention in Latvia. From the abstract: “The quote in the title of the paper comes from the discussion of Istanbul Convention on Latvian Christian Radio. Gender serves as analytical entrance point for understanding power relationships and violence. The naturalization of gender makes power invisible and immanent in Latvia. The paper is based upon the case of debating Istanbul Convention and anti-violence policies in Latvia. The debates around joining international legislation cross-sect the process of violence locally where naturalizing gender not only backs traditional gender relationships but also legitimizes moral norms and violence in other fields. It allows the public to perceive social inequalities and violence as inevitable phenomena constituting social order. Scholarly contribution to the critical understanding of power constitution is important not only in explaining violence and gender definition but also in exposing relationships where these definitions are embedded. I examine the processes of linguistic and cultural translation of gender and violence tackling their influence on building the politics.”

wars and political struggles. Nora Ikstena, the author of *Soviet Milk*, presents a typical example of the Latvian disavowal of feminism in a TV interview. Here the host of a popular TV program (now online) has just asked Ikstena how important gender issues are for her. She answers with a story about an interview with the British newspaper “The Guardian,” in which she was asked if her book was feminist, to which Ikstena had replied that she was trying to write in a “female voice.” She further admitted that male characters are “so to say a bit marginal” in her work, but emphasized that *Soviet Milk* was a story about Latvian history from her point of view, because, “when families were sent to Siberia, when they were divided up, men and women, fathers and daughters, the men ended up in the toughest Gulag camps and perished in a year or two, but women had different conditions and survived.” The host of the TV show, Jānis Domburs, pressed on:

Domburs: Does it contain a feminist message?

Ikstena: No, it’s not feminist.

Domburs: No!

Ikstena: There is a message in a female voice, but it’s not a feminist message, and in general I... well... I have never felt like a *feministe* (female feminist in Latvian) and don’t want to feel like that (DelfiTV 2018).

Here Ikstena referred to the widely known historic events of the Latvian past such as the 1940 deportations to Siberia and the “toughest Gulag camps” where the men were deposited, to justify why she used female characters in her book instead of male. Kārlis too talked about the absence of Latvian men from the lives of the women and their children and the negative impact on those raising children today.¹⁷⁸ Ikstena explained that, rather than identifying as feminist, she was “writing in a female voice,” which was characterized by “intuition and deeper and more powerful

¹⁷⁸ Kārlis: In an average family there is a grandfather who perished in the First World War or the Second World War, then the refugee experience, women stayed alone, I don’t know specifically, but there were women who became pregnant from soldiers or men who were here in passing... The female teachers in schools or female neighbors, that’s the background that follows us. Whoever has grandparents who are still alive, they talk about this, that’s why we cannot really blame our parents, because that’s their experience, what they have received from their parents and we in turn try to pass on the best we can to our children.

emotionality.” She emphasized specifically: “But mostly with intuition.” In this exchange, "feminist" becomes equal to an unwanted stain on Ikstena’s reputation, and clearly the wrong interpretation of her writing from abroad. Feminism according to this interpretation is a foreign import that is alien even to those Latvians who choose to depict females as their main topic, because males have been dealt a lot that was harsher than what women endured in the past.

Jana Kukaine, an art critic, in her analytic work “Beautiful mothers” (“Daiļās mātes”) on the representation of women’s body and subjectivity in Latvian art, notes similar attitudes among artists who work with the woman as a subject. According to her, [Western] feminist reflection in Latvia is still in its infancy (“bērna autiņos”). Kukaine also documents the attitude that I have encountered in Latvia as well—publicly visible women who identify with feminism are accused of doing so because of their “bitter life-experience” with the opposite sex (see for example an art critic Jānis Borgs cited in Kukaine 2016, 66). Kukaine shows that most artwork that would be interpreted as feminist in the West—for example, paintings on the complexity of pregnancy, motherhood or menstruation—when displayed in Latvia are met with silence.¹⁷⁹ She explains the lack of enthusiasm for feminist art with the low status of ‘women’s art’ during the Soviet period. Yet, she also notes that the neighboring Lithuania and Estonia have had more powerful and globally recognizable feminist presence in art since the disintegration of the USSR (Kukaine 2016, 67), which then leaves us with a question, to which Kukaine confesses she does not know the answer to: why is the situation in Latvia so different? While more embracing attitudes towards feminist art do not necessarily translate into more acceptance towards feminism in the country, I would like

¹⁷⁹ Kukaine (2016) documents one such project, when Rasa Jansone (a female artist, then an art student) displayed in 1999 a work titled “Woman, what’s inside you?” that showed menstrual pads arranged by an increasing amount of blood to which no art critic or professor reacted, while only one of her fellow students said that he liked the piece. (156-157). Kukaine also shows how Latvian female artists and art critics have gone out of their way to disassociate themselves from feminism, even if the topics they covered aligned with the movement (64-67, 159).

in this chapter to attempt to sketch some of Latvian particularities when it comes to thinking of women's roles as mothers.

While the “high-art” world in Latvia disassociates itself from “feminine” topics, they do get addressed in online forums that my body-intensive mothers use, and in various parenting, health, and birthing-related books. Some are translations and some, like Kalniņa's (2018) book that I introduced in Chapter 2, are original works in Latvian. One such book is the best-seller titled *The Latvian Woman's Karma (Latvietes karma)* by Inta Blūma,¹⁸⁰ a self-help book for women that, true to its title, offers a Vedic interpretation of Latvian women's plight in life, including various illnesses that can be treated by unblocking certain chakras. To the author's alleged surprise, the book that was self-published in a small batch in 2015 became immensely popular and a year and a half later was in its 7th edition (Blūma 2016). As of 2018, 32,000 copies¹⁸¹ had been published and it had been translated into Lithuanian. This book, along with its successor, was among the most read books for two years running and topped the charts in 2015.¹⁸² As such, I take it as an indicator of certain sentiments around femininity in Latvia that have found significant resonance¹⁸³ and provide a background for understanding the body-intensive mothers I interviewed.

¹⁸⁰ Inta Blūma, the author, holds a BA degree in Economics and a MA degree in Sociology from a state university in Latvia, as well as a degree in color therapy from the International University of Fundamental studies Oxford educational network Sankt Petersburg, and identifies as a spiritual psychologist.

¹⁸¹ This is at times when an average publishing size for Latvian original literature was 900 copies in 2015 (Kultura DELFI 2016). In comparison, *Soviet Milk*, the popular Latvian novel I analyzed earlier that has been translated in several languages (including English) had about 20,000 copies published in Latvian by 2018 (Savitska 2018).

¹⁸² It is allegedly also being translated into Russian and it has been suggested on her webpage that the Russian speaking women in Latvia would respond similarly excitedly to its content (sirdscels mājaslapa un Jāņa Rozes mājaslapa). In addition, Blūma has started publishing Russian language videos on her YouTube channel; this one is a New Year's greeting over an hour long that she starts with greetings in other languages spoken in the former USSR (Georgian, Lithuanian) (Blūma 2020).

¹⁸³ Blūma is not the only specialist in this type of self-help work on femininity (and relationships) who is popular in Latvia. Here are others who propagate that women are almost entirely responsible for the success in heterosexual relationships: Antra Dimanta and her esoteric *Life Art Academy* (DZMA n.d.) and Elvita Rudzāte who has a more Christianity-inspired views on why men are so irresponsible (Rudzāte 2016).

Blūma (2015) claims that her book empowers the readers to deal with several “typical Latvian women’s issues” such as a violent childhood, a hard marriage, and a consequent divorce, accompanied often by the diagnosis of vegetative dystonia.¹⁸⁴ Blūma (2015) blames modern psychology, feminism, and the convergence of gender roles (she uses the Latvian term that denotes sex (*dzimums*) and is often used to denote “gender” as well) for what she sees at the misbalance in feminine and masculine energies (Blūma 2015, 6-9). Latvian women, according to this interpretation, are dominated by male energy that impedes establishing successful heterosexual partnerships. This is also the cause of most of their suffering— the failed marriages and the accompanying health conditions. Such misbalance of the feminine-masculine energies is only experienced in what Blūma refers to as the Western world, which according to her includes the US, Europe, and also Russia (Blūma 2015, 105). Similarly to Ikstena’s interview, Blūma condemns the two 20th century wars that made women stand behind a plow or work in a factory (Blūma 2015, 105). This position is inspired by a binary view on gender that strictly separates the male experiences and duties from those of the female; however, these statements are partially rooted in historically situated interpretations of the impact of violence on the pitiful state of males in Latvia rather than in American bible-belt-style conservatism.

Similarly to Ikstena, Blūma references the violent history of Latvia and its impact on the quality of the male half of the Latvian population, the wars and the deportations that have seriously pummeled Latvian men. In addition, she also reduces the needs of males in general to a Stone Age

¹⁸⁴ Vegetative Dystonia is a diagnosis that Petrynya (2004) has described in connection to Chernobyl and is becoming increasingly common in Latvia for symptoms that might be diagnosed as a panic disorder or anxiety in the US. At least two of my body-centered interlocutors said that she had been diagnosed with this condition, but since the purpose of my interviews was not to identify this condition, there might have been more, as it is allegedly more common among women (5% of Latvian women are supposed to have this condition, twice as many as men). Most likely to suffer from this condition according to one research study are young women (18-34) with good education and high salaries and who reside in the capital Rīga (Egoiste 2020). It is suggested that stress management (including visiting mental health specialists), managing nutrition, sleep and exercise would provide the most beneficial therapy (Veslam.lv2014). One of my body-intensive interlocutors claimed that giving birth had cured her of this condition.

instinct, which according to her, is “to dump a mammoth by his woman’s feet” (Blūma 2016, 107). Males are a lot less complex than females and are tied to women for inspiration and creativity. Their daily needs include only four requirements: a warm space, a plate of soup, peaceful atmosphere, and sex (Blūma 2016, 107), hence they are dependent on the skillful manipulation of the women in their life for having these few needs met. Men are also quite incapable of dealing with the complexity that is a woman, which she insinuates might be one of the reasons they turn to other men for single-sex romantic relationships. Women in this interpretation are solely responsible for the maintenance of family/nation and life itself. For example, women are responsible for the lack of well-balanced (those possessing 50/50 female/male energy) men of marriageable age (Blūma 2015: 31) and hence their own troubles with heteronormative courtship. They have achieved this by raising their sons incorrectly, as well as by dedicating themselves to too much professional advancement. Instead of striving to be a boss, a woman who owns a business should hire men and lead by inspiring them (Blūma 2015, 35). In addition, the cleanliness (nodomu tīrība) of Latvian woman’s intentions protects not only her clan (dzimta), but also her nation (tauta) (Blūma 2015, 10). This rendering of Latvian woman’s lot in life portrays her simultaneously as a victim of Latvia’s violent history and the strongest member of Latvian society. The future of the next generation and the Latvian state are almost completely in the Latvian woman’s hands.

Blūma (2016) claims that children born in Latvia today are very different from the previous generations. She calls them “the indigo or crystal children” and anticipates that they would not be forced into any frame as the system did with “us” (viņus nevarēs piespiest un ielikt rāmišos kā to sistēma izdarīja ar mums) (Blūma 2016, 167). The image of these novel children who behave contrary to societal expectations resembles the fears around raising wimpy and spoiled children that I explored in chapters 1 and 2. What is perceived as children’s bad behavior is in reality their

true sensitivity to the gravity of the present situation, and the mother's task is to raise them "free, creative and happy." This enormous task can only be achieved by those who consciously work on their own emotional state. The biggest problem for most women in Latvia, according to Blūma (2016), is that they have not received unconditional love (*beznosacījuma mīlestība*) as children. The latter sentiment is often echoed (if not in those exact words) by my body-intensive interlocutors.

The contradictory imaginary of Blūma's book is quite typical of the way Latvians perceive women's issues and can be used to shed light onto the fervent disavowal of feminism that opened this section. Feminism is perceived as a Western transplant system that emphasizes that women should be elevated above men, when in fact men are considered by many women to be ineffective and require a lot of feminine assistance in fulfilling the public roles that the patriarchal system demands of them. Parenting that is relegated to the private sphere is often seen as beyond male capacity by both women and men. Even though my body-intensive interlocutors, both male and female, overwhelmingly said that they valued fatherly involvement in parenting, most of them still thought that the mother should be the primary caretaker of young children. Sedlenieks and Rolle (2018) have shown that this is consistent with overall attitudes towards the father's role in Latvia, which relegates men to the position of mothers' helpers. For example, when I told Silva that I knew a few fathers in the US who were the primary care-takers of their children while their wives worked, Silva reacted with a dismayed laugh: "That's when my instinct turns on. I know there is equality and all that, but how am I going to leave my child with my hapless husband, who does not even know how to put..." Here I cut in because Silva had just praised her husband as a good father. Karīna: "But you said that..." Silva in turn interrupted me: "That's for a short while (a laugh), he does not even know how to put on socks. I have to control everything."

The “powerful female” who should be protecting her men is reminiscent of Gal and Kligman’s (2001) work on reconfiguration of the public/private dichotomy in the former socialist countries (55). They argued that the public versus private categories in the former socialist realm were characterized by “a ubiquitous self-embedding or interweaving” (Gal and Kligman 2001, 51). In a retrospective glance at a system that is known to have failed, the language they used represented the intertwining of the public and the private as negative. For example, they wrote: “Everyone was to some extent complicit in the system of patronage, lying, theft, hedging, and duplicity through which the system operated” (Gal and Kligman 2001, 51), thus hinting that perhaps the public and the private should be kept separate after all. The privileging of the public/masculine in the second wave feminist thought has been critiqued by such feminists of color as Patricia Hill Collins with her seminal concept of motherwork (1994) has argued that the boundary between the public and the private never really existed for women of color in the US, who could not adhere to the “rigid distinctions” between family/private and work/public. They also did not possess the distinct individual and collective identities that white, upper middle-class second-wave feminists often assumed. Instead, women of color have always been straddling the boundaries between work/home by, for example, taking care of other mother’s children while minding their own (Nelson 1994; Segura 1994). Similarly to the Soviet mothers of my interlocutors, the North American middle class idea of mothering as full-time activity could never possibly be part of their reality, even though some might desire such a state (Segura 1994).

The Latvian women I interviewed as part of the body-intensive project certainly shared some of the American expectations around good mothering, but few of them expected to give up employment for the sake of their children completely. That women should work outside of the home had become the established *modus operandi* over the Soviet period, and the stay-at-home

moms among my interlocutors expected to return to work eventually. With some exceptions, they relied on the state-paid postpartum child-care leave to be able to be with their children until they were a year to three years old.¹⁸⁵ In 1981 a year-long paid leave had been institutionalized even though women had been arranging staying with their children in various ways before. The 1981 provision was, after the disintegration of the USSR, extended in terms of length and, at least in theory, applies to men as well.¹⁸⁶ The support received is popularly referred to as “māmiņu alga” or a “mothers’ wage.”¹⁸⁷ The colloquial coupling of mothering and wage points to the ways in which mothering is associated with labor in Latvia, thus enabling intimacy that is financially compensated by the state while individually interpreted by the parents, based on their familiarity with various child-rearing ideals and interpretations of heteronormative expectations. That the child-care support is often referred to as a mother’s wage points to the mixture of the professional and the domestic that expects the state to be involved into the domestic sphere, at least as the payment

¹⁸⁵ The length of the state-paid parental leave is similar to that of such social welfare states as Sweden (where it is 480 days at 80% of the salary) <https://sweden.se/society/10-things-that-make-sweden-family-friendly/> (last accessed on November 8th, 2018) and Russia (where it is 18 months at 40% of the salary) <https://men-care.org/2017/04/05/update-parental-leave-russia/> (last accessed on November 8th, 2018). How Latvia, which is nowhere as economically secure as Sweden, has come to adopt a very similar policy that also certainly displays some Soviet legacies is beyond the scope of this paper, but certainly worthy of investigation. Because of how the taxes are calculated, this results in those previously employed being compensated in the amount that is close to the previous salary for the 1st year of the child’s life, but the same sum can be paid over the first 1.5 years of the child’s life. Legally, an employer is supposed to keep a job for the parent (which can be the father as well, but that is a lot less common) until the child reaches age 3, and this time period is incorporated in the way the retirement pension is calculated. A common strategy is to have two children who are less than 3 years apart, which means that the mother does not return to work until the second child is older (up to 3 years of age).

¹⁸⁶ It is noteworthy that such lengthy child-care leave (both paid (up to 1.5 years) and unpaid (up to 3 years)) was not allocated for most of the Soviet period, when only in the early 1980s a year-long leave on reduced pay was institutionalized for women with previous employment history (Kelly 2007, 351). Before that (since 1944), women were entitled to 77 days that was supposed to cover both the pre- and post-birth care. (Kelly 2007, 318). Hence, the generous provisions of Latvian support for working mothers (and also those who had not worked were allocated a nominal amount) is a by-product both of the natalist leaning Latvian state, as well as the admiration that Latvians publicly hold for the Scandinavian welfare states. Most of my interlocutors considered these provisions self-evident and for my benefit sometimes shrugged in horror for what they considered “the inhuman American approach.” Silva, for example, mused about the differences between the child-centered and parent-centered ways of raising children:

¹⁸⁷ No men among my interlocutors were the primary care-takers of their children and the four who talked to me were volunteered by their female partners, which was consistent with the trend described by Sedlenieks, Saulītis, Rolle (2017) that the role of the father in Latvia is that of “mother’s helper.”

mechanism. This particular form of motherwork has taken place as a response to the state-mechanisms governing reproduction and is rooted in the Soviet practice.

Let us for a moment consider the principle of motherwork—that is, blending of the public and private in response to power, as something, in which all Soviet citizens might have participated. After all, regardless of their gender regular Soviet subjects were engaged in one way or another in what liberal thought usually refers to as formal and informal economy. This was interpreted by Gal and Kligman (2001) as leading to the t emasculation of males, which is essentially what Blūma argued in her self-help books as well. I suggest that applying the framework of motherwork allows us to move beyond a binary view of the Soviet gender-relations—one group becoming too masculine at the expense of the other. Women emerge in Gal and Kligman’s interpretation as doubly burdened by the contradictory economic and political system. Gal and Kligman (2001) argue that Soviet women saw themselves as “brave victims” who were succeeding in the public sector (i.e. paid employment) while simultaneously managing the private (unpaid employment). According to Gal and Kligman (2001) the latter was in addition the sphere of resistance toward the regime, and hence masculine in a paradoxical way.¹⁸⁸ Similarly to Blūma's portrayal of Latvian men as wholly dependent on Latvian women for life itself, the males in the former Soviet bloc countries in the narrative exposed by Gal and Kligman were perceived as “big children” in the family who dominate in the official public world, but are “disorganized, needy, dependent, vulnerable, demanding to be taken care of and sheltered, to be humored” if they misbehaved (54).

¹⁸⁸ “Women generally saw themselves as courageously and unselfishly coping with very difficult demands, which brought not only exhaustion but two other and contradictory results. On the one hand, women gained a sense of gratification, moral superiority, and power in the household from their centrality and apparent indispensability. They also gained a somewhat different, more autonomous sense of self-worth and self-esteem from participation in the labor force. Despite discriminatory wages that were considerably below those of men and despite excess hours of labor, many came to take seriously a communist ideal of equality between men and women. On the other hand, the conditions of work, the low wages, and the magnitude of demands on them produced a sense of victimization and perennial guilt at their never being able to do enough of anything, especially mothering” (Gal and Kligman 2001, 53).

While I consider Gal and Kligman's (2001) analysis an accurate one, I propose that reconsideration of the intertwining of the public with the domestic through such concepts as motherwork is a useful approach to challenge a binary way of viewing gender in the former USSR.

While the official or public life of the Soviet period became treated with suspicion by both males and females, the domestic life, especially the part that involved caring for newly-born children became the desirable goal for a finite time period (one to three years). I suggest that being able to retreat to the domestic sphere with young children can be seen as a way for some of the body-intensive mothers to be repaid for the terrible reproductive histories of the previous generation of women that deprived them of breastmilk and pushed them back into workforce against their wills. In the contradictory and cautious attitudes towards Western feminism in Latvia, one can read a subtle criticism of the patriarchal history of the movement itself. According to this interpretation, opposition to liberal feminism in Latvia can also be seen as a critique of the ideas about what constitutes a successful life under patriarchy/capitalism. An interpretation that a priori assumes that a mixture of the private with the public is tainted disregards the reproductive sphere as a way towards a meaningful and productive life. The intimate and private are, after all, exactly those spheres that the Soviet generation of mothers sought to reclaim.

III Intimacy, Intuition and Motherly Expertise.

In the end, the breastfeeding troubles Ieva had with her middle child were resolved by receiving free of charge nursing advice¹⁸⁹ from a volunteer consultant who showed her how to nurse while

¹⁸⁹ As this happened more than five years prior to the interview, lactation consulting was just developing in Latvia at that point. It was not so important that the experts were medical professionals or highly trained, but that they were mothers and could say that children sometimes behave this or that way. It was the kind of womanly knowledge that grandmothers could have offered had they not been "corrupted" by the Soviet system. Ieva, for example, said that all she needed to hear was "Oh, this is what they sometimes do. There is nothing wrong with you. You are not broken, there is nothing fundamentally wrong with you." ("Šitā viņi mēdz darīt! Ar tevi nekas... tu neesi salūzusi, ar tevi viss ir kārtībā, ka man nekas tāds globāls nekaiš.")

rocking the child and change the way he took the breast. In order to investigate the issues of novel motherly expertise in Latvia, such as the breastfeeding help Ieva received, I would like to further build on Patricia Hill Collins' concept of motherwork and the term "intimate labor" by Boris and Parreñas (2010). For Boris and Parreñas (2010) coupling the adjective "intimate" with the term "labor" similarly "denies the separation of home from work and work from labor, and productive from nonproductive labor," and allows one to think through "power relations in the context of global transformations" (Boris and Parreñas 2010, 2) that pertain to the fields of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and class (Boris and Parreñas 2010, 10). In light of scholarship on the unique configuration of the public and private in the former Soviet Union (Boym 1995, Shlapentokh 1989, Gal and Kligman 2001), I conceptualize my interlocutors' experiences with their children and professional lives as post-Cold War intimate labor. Such labor is performed in a way that allows us to think about intimacy in Latvia as a simultaneously individual and collective (re)productive process. The public realm in the post-Cold War period is often treated as tainted by the Soviet past, which, for example, deprived women of early-child-care in their own domestic sphere. The mother-child dyad in the present becomes an active participant in the intimate labor scene supported and encouraged by the state. The intense and gendered corporeality that my body-intensive interlocutors pursue too becomes not necessarily a by-product of American-style classed behavior, but a different kind of post-Cold war privilege which is marked by access to education and employment-related social benefits. What fundamentally sets my interlocutors apart from North American attachment parents is not only that most of them do not identify with the American

parenting label,¹⁹⁰ but also that the constant physical proximity to their children is enabled by the financial support of the Latvian state.

As I have shown earlier in the chapter, some Latvian women would object to the idea that being relegated to the domestic sphere should be considered oppressive, as motherly estrangement from infants during the Soviet times was treated as a burden and one of the reasons why mother's milk dried out. Bobel (2001) too, in her nuanced study of the ideological underpinning of the breastfeeding support group in the US called the La Leche League, argues that the organization's normalizing attitude towards breastfeeding simultaneously encourages women to challenge the patriarchal understanding of bodies, but also pushes them into what she calls "limiting roles rooted in biological determinism." Acknowledging that breastfeeding can work as a liberating practice whereby women can reclaim their breasts as non-sexualized body-parts and reconceptualize their bodies, Bobel asks if attaching infants to their mother's breasts might simply work as trading in sexual exploitation [by men] to exploitation vis-a-vis the demands of breastfeeding. Bobel (2001) notes that the La Leche League assists in validating motherhood as the primary source of occupation of the participants and staying home as the right and radical/revolutionary way of raising their young children. Bobel also traces how, by supporting parents in their trying lives with a newborn, the League subtly discourages out-of-home work and focuses instead on promoting attachment parenting and training mothers as their own experts (for example, avoiding doctors as much as possible). Latvian women as the primary caretakers of children have ample opportunities to develop such expertise.

¹⁹⁰ I showed in Chapter 2 (section on translatability of Attachment Theory) that the label "Attachment parent" does not exist in Latvia and only some people have heard of this North American term in English. The Latvian parents, however, follow ideas (secure attachment, for example) that in my estimation are derived from Bowlby, who also inspired the Attachment parenting movement in the US.

Latvian women are indeed encouraged to remain with their children for at least the first year of their lives, and many do not consider it a choice. The Latvian welfare system provides some child-care benefits even to mothers who have never worked, and the very idea that a woman should work before her child is a year old is almost actively combatted in Latvia. A working mother who raises her child without a partner can financially (if not always professionally) afford not to work for at least a year after that child is born. Thus, the Latvian welfare system is beneficial to body-intensive child-raising, at least for the first year of their lives. Ilona, who moved to the countryside during her child-care leave and whom we met in Chapter 1 briefly, is in her mid-thirties and raises her chatty three year-old daughter in a two-room apartment, which is situated on the top floor of a 5-story Soviet-time building with a view of a frozen river that reflects the evening sun. The apartment walls are decorated with a mural and two sets of dried out crowns from the previous summer solstice that will be burnt on the midsummer night this year. Ilona tell me that she used the sling, co-sleeping, and breastfeeding, but has pretty strict boundaries now that Sofija is older. She took one and a half years of state-paid child-care leave and moved with Sofija to her mother's house in the countryside during that time. When Sofija was 18 months old, Ilona moved back because she had to return to work. The time she spent with her child allowed her to develop what she describes as an "intuitive" connection to her daughter but also a network of medical professionals who supported Ilona in caring for Sofija's health care needs.

The post-Cold War style of intimate labor in Latvia is thus crafted by the state through "mother's wages." These wages render "natural" mothering into a form of recognized labor, one which is expected to be, like other forms of labor, productive. While Ilona's motherly knowledge is very much linked to identifying the correct biomedical expert, which, she says, she does based

on intuition and extensive research, others were critical of biomedical expertise. For them becoming professional at parenting, involved acquiring an ever more “intuitive” insight into child-rearing. This sometimes translated into a perception that they knew their children better than some experts (for example, medical professionals) or could advise some of the experts who lacked this understanding. Others, like Ilona, trusted the mainstream medical establishment but chose professionals carefully. Mainstream doctors were often perceived as lacking information on some of the corporeal practices of my interlocutors, especially breastfeeding. A nursing mother—or better, a certified lactation consultant (who had been a mother) or a doula—were considered more knowledgeable on this topic, professionalizing motherly knowledge in ways that were not available during the Soviet times.

Ieva, whom we met in the opening vignette, talked about what she calls mainstream doctors (*vidusmēra dakteri*) in Latvia as those who impact what mothers may choose to do. As a doula in one of the largest cities in Latvia (which still is relatively small by the standards of bigger countries as it has less than 100 000 people), she hosted several postpartum parental groups. In these groups they closely scrutinized the typical recommendation by a mainstream doctor to stop breastfeeding by one year of age. This is how Ieva described the outcome: “There are very different mothers there, some breastfed, some used the formula, some had C-sections, some – homebirth, very different. But what came out when they talked was that they had wanted to do something their way, but the doctor had said something different.” Ieva added that as a result, some of the women listened and some started avoiding the doctor. She explained it as follows: “A friend says: “But you don’t have to tell the doctor, how is she going to know?” And then this is what happens, the doctor asks: “Is your child eating meat?” And you just nod your head “Yes”! But that you are not even feeding him solid food, that he is only breastfed, the doctor does not find that out.” Exclusive

breastfeeding beyond the 6-month mark was among the practices that mothers did not disclose at the regular wellness visits with the family practitioner. Another such practice was vegetarianism.

Zane, whom we met in Chapter 2, for example, told me that most Latvian doctors assume that their patients eat meat and do not even think to ask, and she had never felt like volunteering this information.¹⁹¹ While extended breastfeeding and not serving meat were choices that could be kept from family practitioners, a modified vaccination schedule that was important to some (but not all) of the body-intensive interlocutors was a subject of negotiation with the doctors. Several of the women I interviewed told me that they had found themselves in the position of advising open-minded family practitioners on subjects required individualized approach to children's health needs, most notably on breastfeeding and modified vaccination schedule. That these mothers were taken seriously, as was sometimes the case, was certainly linked to the fact that most of the women in the body-intensive group were well educated and some quite well versed in the evidence-based medical language. They thought of their mothering as intuitive, but invested quite a lot of time in educating themselves on parenting and health-care.¹⁹² For example, when Darja needed to undergo a surgery when her daughter was six months old, she consulted a medical research data base on anesthetics that would be compatible with breastfeeding. By acquiring motherly expertise, these women engaged in intimate labor in a way that intertwined the public and the domestic.

Dora N.,¹⁹³ who is a doula and a breastfeeding specialist and a mother of a seven year-old and a three year old, provides an excellent example of a novel post-Cold War intimate laborer. She

¹⁹¹ Meat is still the most often used choice of protein in Latvian meals and a requisite in the Latvian public school menu, but there has been some change, as in the case of a private school that had been reprimanded by the state services for only serving vegetarian food and subsequently sued the state and after an interlude where a doctor's note allowing to eat vegetarian food was required, finally won the right not to serve meat in 2018 (Veselam.lv 2018).

¹⁹² Some of the women were quite conscious of this paradox. Darja, for example, with the appropriate dose of sardonic humour recounted that Gregory makes fun of her for having to read so much to be intuitive.

¹⁹³ Laura K., doula/civil servant and a mother of five children, has a similar story, only she has not switched over to being a doula and hence is most likely a lot more protected socially (in terms of her future pension).

describes herself as a mother who integrates her children into her life. “I don’t like to be all mommy-like: ‘We will play now and then sitting down to play.’ We just do everyday stuff together.” When her eldest child was born, Dora N. expected to go back to work after she had been home “the maximal time” (1 year and 9 months); in fact, she considered that her duty—to earn money. She had loved her job, but during her absence, her work had been restructured, and the leadership had changed. Dora N. felt like she was no longer allowed to have self-initiative and she says she lost “self-motivation” to work. She left work and took the unemployment benefits. Over time, she became a doula and describes her life as follows: “I am doing what I like, I don’t have to go to work from nine to six, I can plan everything and we can switch within the family.” When she became pregnant with her second child, she did not look for another job: “I have let go that I need to run and do something for somebody else; that I need to run and do stuff has not ended, only that I am doing it for myself now.”

The doula movement in Latvia can be viewed through the lens of privilege. Surely, not every mother can afford to retrain as a doula, nor can every woman (far from it) afford to hire one, yet, most of my body-intensive interlocutors were either advised by or had trained as one. I interpret the doula movement and its popularity among my interlocutors as another aspect of gendered intimate labor and expertise that Latvian women have taken on, turned to their advantage in an effort to bridge the gap between the professional and the domestic that is characteristic of patriarchy. Doulas, however, also provide a way to counter “all the aunties” that the first section of this chapter was about, the generation-specific fears around mothering that are associated with the Soviet regime and enable the current Latvian mothers to produce the desirable “indigo children,” the resisters of the regime, of Blūma’s self-help book or “the spoiled and wimpy children” according to a different interpretation that I explored in Chapter 2.

Conclusion

Through the prism of the nursing Latvian woman who is receiving inadequate breastfeeding advice from “all the aunties” and “mainstream doctors,” this chapter attended to the issues of intimacy, gender, and intergenerationality in post-Cold War Latvia. Popular literary discourse such as Nora Ikstena’s book shows that mother’s milk as a substance has a strong hold on popular imagination and narrates Latvian women’s bodies’ relationship to power. As the lactating daughters seek to explain to their mother’s generation how their perceived lack of milk was a Soviet construct and work through their intergenerational lactation trauma, contemporary Latvian mothers negotiate their relationships to the Soviet past. Their present is shaped by evolving attitudes towards medical and motherly expertise, attributing importance to trained mothering experts, such as doulas or breastfeeding consultants. The chapter theorized the changing ideas of expertise that involve straddling the private/domestic divide as intimate labor, a productive activity that is performed in the domestic sphere and, in the case of Latvia, compensated as a mother’s wage. Having children is very much part of the general Latvian ethos around womanhood.

The chapter situates the vehement denial of liberal feminism, in which many Latvian men and women are engaged within the unique configurations of the public and private that came about in the former USSR and are reflected in the intimate labor that contemporary mothers undertake. Most of my body-intensive interlocutors tacitly support gender roles that are rooted in heteronormativity and emphasize feminine knowledge, similar to the popular self-help books by Blūma (2015; 2016) that assigns responsibility to women not only for their own failing health and heteronormative partnerships, but also for the future of the Latvian nation. Such sentiments that emphasize the overall greater capacity of women to bear liability over that of men are rooted in

the way many Latvians relate to the brutal and violent past of the country that is interpreted as the emasculation of men. Latvian women are expertly negotiating their children's futures, which, in the case of my body-intensive interlocutors, translates into intense investment in corporeal care. Some of this care, as I showed in Chapter 3, involves widely accepted principles of "straightening out" children that, at first glance, do not conform with their aim of raising self-confident children. In the following chapter I will show how, similar to the attitudes towards breastfeeding that we have just seen, Latvian adults' desires for bodily symmetry and good posture are a product of their relationship to Latvia's past.

Chapter 5 Singing with a straight back and without flat-feet: Straight-Back Morality and Latvian Children

Under the scorching sun, 16,000 people have already been rehearsing for a couple of hours, their heads covered with hats, scarfs, t-shirts. Some women have hiked up their skirts to get some sun or perhaps in hopes of a cooler breeze. A well-respected lead conductor is ending an inspirational introductory talk on how to sing the early 20th century song the “Broken Pines”:

"And when we sing about the ‘unrelenting hatred,’ we do it fiercely, so we make those who have been annoying us all these years tremble. And we come back with pride. The pride is on a higher note, so that’s all well, but pay attention to the small notes. ‘We will reach the far-away lands where happiness resides!’ Here one should not hear any flat feet [plakanā pēda] or deformations, but rather a straight back! ‘You can divide us, you can break us!’ Reach up [izslienamies] not only physically, but also emotionally. Sing this as a demanding anthem until the end. And the last thing I want to beg of you. Perhaps some of you will agree with me. I have had this feeling over the last 20 years, that there are some very high-level Latvian officials who are representing Latvia in the world—I will not name anybody—who have made me personally feel very ashamed [enthusiastic cheering and clapping among the choir]. I have had this feeling: ‘What kind of nonsense are you talking [nu ko tu muldi]?!’ [laughter and louder cheers and clapping].”

The conductor goes on:

“I mentioned in the first rehearsal that this is the only song where we can affirm our will-power, which borders a little on anger and perseverance. I want us to sing it so that our relatives or friends listening would not think ‘What kind of nonsense are they singing!’ Let us sing this so that no grass grows after us. Let’s commence then with the ‘Broken Pines.’”

And the choir of 16,000 stares at the hands of the conductor.

This chapter deals with the collective and simultaneously individual efforts of parents and medical professionals in Latvia to bodily shape children into healthy and straight-spined adults. I use the lead conductor’s passionate plea to the mega-choir in the Song Festival for singing upright and without flat feet to investigate the importance that Latvians attribute to the “straight-back” both in

terms of medical attention and as a moral requirement. Throughout the chapter I employ the concept of “straight-back morality,” that is—the moral urgency that is attributed to the bodily normativity that is embodied in the form of a straight-back. I explore how the shameful behavior of Latvian officials abroad, against which the lead conductor speaks, reflects an overall concern that Latvians have over their country's place in the world, which I showed in Chapter 1 informs Latvia's health politics. Young children's backs come to bear the weight of concerns over the future of the state in a globalized world which threatens the very existence of the Latvian nation. Children's bodies are acted upon by adults in ways that are meant to produce certain Latvia-specific morality and aesthetics that would ensure that physiologically and morally viable healthy Latvian adults are forged, who then in turn, could sing proudly and uprightly for the whole world to see.

In this chapter I trace the links through which the individual concerns of parents, such as Darja and Gregory in Chapter 3, about the symmetrical alignment of their children translate into the lead conductor's requirement for straight-backed, upright-standing adult singers, displayed on a huge amphitheater stage. I propose that there is a moral dimension to the vigilant surveillance by medical professionals and parents of the potential crookedness. Crooked children (*šķībie bērni*) is a term a family practitioner used in one of the interviews I conducted. To further explore this connection, it is helpful to think of the dichotomy of crooked and straight as spatial categories. As Sara Ahmed (2006), writing on queer sexuality in connection to Merleau-Ponty's work on phenomenology, points out - straightness can be viewed as a spatial category that stands in for the normative, which for Ahmed is also the vertical (standing upright). The normative/vertical can then be theorized as being in opposition to that which is bent or crooked, which in her analysis has been interpreted as the queer and the non-normative. In the case of Latvia, where straightness does

not have the same etymological connection to heterosexuality, thinking about the straight back provides a way to consider the spatial normalization of the imaginary normative. The straight back in this case is not directly connected to the physiological formation of the spine, which always has a curve,¹⁹⁴ but rather refers to only a partially physical category with a moral component.

I start the chapter by exploring the various ways posture is being surveilled as a medical condition in Latvia, in particular through the health monitoring system of youth athletes. I then introduce the concept of “straight-back morality” to denote the non-physiological importance that is attributed to the concept of straightness in Latvia. I show that the health concerns around asymmetry and posture problems touch upon the moral by returning to the sun-scorched stage of the adult Song Festival of 2018 in order to analyze the song “Broken Pines.” The lyrics of the early 20th century poem are interpreted as telling a tale of resistance by the lead conductor, and standing upright is treated as an antidote to the oppressive past of the many Latvians, who were serfs until the 19th century. Such considerations are embedded in the complicated web of relations that Latvians have to an imaginary outside world—the hierarchically-placed global stage, where Latvians as a nation need to perform in ways that do not make the lead conductor ashamed. A Latvian child with a good posture and a straight back then becomes a key to a concerted effort to counter the past oppression of foreign powers and to fortify the morality of the nation.

¹⁹⁴ It is sometimes described as such in the case of the new-borns in Latvian media, as the subsequent ethnographic material will show.

I “Crooked Children”: The Problematic Posture as a Danger to a Nation

A family practitioner in Rīga about the markers she looks for in her care for young children in general: “We routinely monitor the posture (stāja) of children. Still, we do have crooked children (šķībie bērni) occasionally, especially if they have not been in my practice from the beginning.”

I have borrowed the term “crooked children” from this interview for the title of this dissertation, because of the casual way it was used, as if everybody in Latvia should be aware of the dangers of crookedness. Indeed, it is expected that a family practitioner or a school nurse would look at children’s bare backs for signs of asymmetry and incorrect posture (nepareiza stāja). The overall assumption here is that an initial diagnosis of a faulty posture would be followed by an early intervention such as a prescription of posture-strengthening gymnastics (stāju stiprinoša vingrošana) and other measures, which would avert the crookedness of the patients. This is expected to require a substantial investment of time in terms of the length of treatment. As one participant in a 50-minute-long radio discussion on the posture of school children warned: “A meaningful result for improving the posture can only be achieved if a child engages in the back-strengthening program once or twice a week for at least 6 months.” Some rearrangement of the child’s daily routines, including lightening the weight of the school bag and adjusting the study desk and chair to the correct height is required as well, per the advice on the same radio program.

People in Latvia generally talk with appreciation about having a good or correct posture (laba vai pareiza stāja) and straight back (taisna mugura), and this principle is recognizable both for men (especially tall men, I was told) and women (especially those who have danced folk-dances, a very common after school activity for school-age children). The views on asymmetry that I explored in Chapter 3 are certainly linked to the nearly universal assumption that bad posture is undesirable and harmful to the quality of life of the person. For example, an article titled “How

a child's back develops from the moment of birth?" starts off by stating that "[a] child is born with a relatively straight back (ar salīdzinoši taisnu muguru). As the young person grows, a spine acquires natural curves that later ensure the correct posture." What follows is an overview prepared by a doctor in physical and rehabilitative medicine (*Fizikālās un rehabilitācijas medicīnas ārste*) Aija Avota. Later a bolded section states "If the posture is wrong, there is an additional load onto the leg joints which can result in deformations. The quality of life of the person suffers [as a result]." The text under a subsection titled "Gymnastics, massages and swimming" states: "Today family doctors refer almost every infant to some kind of child developing activities - medical massage, swimming and later gymnastics (vingrošana)" (Mammamuntetiem 2018a). The article goes on: "You may want to ask if it's not too much and if it does not affect the child in a way that the development gets overstimulated. Here one must understand that most children suffer from some muscle dystonia (muskulu distonija),¹⁹⁵ which results in the movement stereotype being formed a little bit incorrectly or asymmetrically. These are trifles that can be remediated under the auspice of specialists. This will result in fewer problems with the spine in the future" (Mammamuntetiem 2018a).

Such is the power of the principle of the "healthy back" that it serves as a rallying ground for regular social campaigns. "The All-Latvian Championship of the Back" (Vislatvijas Mugurčempionāts), organized by the DHL "GoTeach" initiative in October 2012, provides one example of a spine-health promoting endeavor. The campaign involved popular athletes, singers

¹⁹⁵ In contemporary medicine dystonia is a disorder caused by involuntary muscle contractions (NINDS n.d.), however, in Latvia the understanding also includes the term "veģetatīvā distonija" which is sometimes used for undiagnosable pains and is also gendered (more women than men are perceived to be suffering from this). Petryna (2002) has noted that a diagnosis under the term "vegetative dystonia" has been widely used for the victims of the Chernobyl catastrophe in the Ukraine.

and TV personalities visiting several schools to encourage the students to practice “back-strengthening exercise routines” (muguras veselību spēcinošos vingrojumi), while all the other schools were encouraged to do the same from 10:00 to 12:00 on the last day of campaign. The effort was couched in terms of intra-school competition for the most active participation. The press-release for the campaign explained: “As has been established by medical specialists and pediatricians, three out of five school-age children need posture correction (stājas korekcija), but every fifth one has been diagnosed with a more serious musculoskeletal disease (skeletomuskulārā saslimšana)” (IrLiepāja 2012). Further, the campaign urged that every student exercises for at least 5 minutes every day, because “sitting for many hours has a harmful effect not only on the child’s spine and vertebrae, but the overall normal development of the body” (IrLiepāja 2012).

Attentiveness to problematic posture, often relayed in terms of fears around crookedness, is a constant feature of the public health discourse in Latvia. If one googles “correct posture” (pareiza stāja) a varied array of media information pops up — from research published in local medical journal (doctus.lv) to TV and radio discussions, as well as various articles linking adult, adolescent and children’s health to the “correct posture”. The variety of possible solutions include physical therapy and healing gymnastics, (both explored in more detail in Chapter 3), as well as reorganization of the work-space according to the principles of ergonomics. For example, one Latvian public TV news program (Rīta Panorāma 2018) ended with a physical therapist in tight exercise gear demonstrating exercises to improve posture. The broadcast had begun with the female anchor speaking in a tone of alarm: “Doctors are saying that Latvian society is rather crooked (šķība). Most people have incorrect posture, which might result in serious health problems in the future.” She added that childhood was a particularly important site, where an intervention should

be made by parents monitoring that their children sit and walk with “straight backs” (taisnām mugurām) and by adults leading by example (rādīt labu piemēru).¹⁹⁶

Children’s back health becomes a site of ensuring that the adult nation does not become “crooked.” A segment of a public radio show “Family Studio”¹⁹⁷ entitled “Children’s Posture Problems: what to pay attention to” (Ģimenes Studija 2019) featured a physical therapist, an ergonomic-therapist (ergo-terapeits), a Health Ministry representative, and a school nurse who were all discussing the dangers of “incorrect posture.” The discussants did not spend time on why a faulty posture would be undesirable because it was assumed as a given. The listeners too in their comments dwelled on the particulars of the treatment rather than the danger of the incorrect posture itself. The discussion participants concentrated on the fact that most Latvian children were known to have problematic posture, the host having first shared research information that one in two pre-schoolers (ages 4 - 7) had “posture problems” (stājas novirzes¹⁹⁸) and even more (87%) had “asymmetrical posture.” Furthermore, very few school-age children were perceived to have the correct posture (pareiza stāja)—89% had posture problems (stājas problēmas)—as one of the participants mentioned and warned that gets worse as the children age.

The discussion and its online printed summary connected posture problems among school children with incorrectly used school bags, which were either too heavy or not ergonomic enough

¹⁹⁶ The news program and the associated article details research results of early 2000s by Silvija Umbraško, who concluded that 42% of younger children and 70% of those who are 18 have posture problems (stājas traucējumi). The program adds that increased smartphone, tablet and computer use has likely increased the gravity of the issue. The video shows a female physical therapist in a white coat showing what the correct posture should be (“Normālā poza ir tad, kad mūsu ķermenis ir iztaisnots. Kad pleci ir savā vietā stabili atpakaļ, nevis nolaisti uz priekšu, kad iegurnis ir sakārtots, vēders ir savilkts uz iekšu un tādā pozīcijā mēs noturam savu stāju, nevis visi muskulīši ir atslābuši.”) and advises that if such posture cannot be maintained in daily life, the muscles are too weak. The good news, the video and article announce, is that such muscles can be trained. This is followed by another female physical therapist in tight exercise gear demonstrating the exercises) (Birziņš 2018).

¹⁹⁷ The radio show airs five times per week and offers a reflection on parenting in Latvia.

¹⁹⁸ “Novirzes” translates as deviations, thus the direct translation of the term “stājas novirzes” is posture with deviation.

(it's better to buy a more expensive bag that will last two years than a cheaper one that is bad for the posture¹⁹⁹), the incorrect use of children's furniture (the desks and chairs²⁰⁰ at school or at home are not adjusted to the growing body of the child²⁰¹) and decreased physical activity. The school nurse detailed how they measured and weighed the younger students (grades 1- 4) each autumn to make sure that each of their desks was appropriately suited to the student. The participants discussed the right kind of physical activity that would not promote asymmetrical use of limbs or "symmetrical sports".²⁰² This would mostly include overall strengthening exercises (vispārstiprinošie vingrinājumi), because even swimming, which was generally thought to be a spine-healthy sport, overdeveloped the shoulder area, while leaving the legs weak. Healing physical activity was discussed as the preferred intervention under the supervision of a medical professional. Physical activity should not be too strenuous (unless it is folk-dancing, which is usually assumed to produce "good posture"). The sentiment that no serious competitive sport was good for health was shared by some of the professionals I interviewed for the youth athletes health part of the project, most of whom were involved in exactly the kind of professionalization of competitive sports that they deemed counterproductive for child-development.

While family practitioners, such as the one cited at the beginning of the section, routinely monitor the spinal health of Latvian children, there is no state standard for what exactly needs to

¹⁹⁹ According to the Radio discussion, each child is different, so a different solution needs to be found. The school bag should be a back-pack (not a shoulder bag) and it needs to be no more than 1- - 15 % of the child's body-mass. It is better if the bag is centered towards the middle of the child's back, usually it is placed too high (smaller students), too low (older students). The straps should be at least 3 finger wide or about 5 cm. The discussants also focused on the social inequalities, as the heavy backpacks are often the problem of the less privileged children whose parents do not drive them to the school and back (Gimenes studija 2019).

²⁰⁰ I have read elsewhere that beds that are too narrow for sleeping and overly soft mattresses could also account for faulty posture of the child (Mammamuntetiēm 2018b).

²⁰¹ This is how it should be done according to the discussion participants: "The child's knees need be placed in a 90 degree angle in relation to the floor, if the arms are on the table - the elbows need to be free, so that the shoulders are neither up, nor down (Gimenes studija 2019).

²⁰² Sports that equally engage both sides of the body and do not over-strain one body part.

be addressed. There is also no longer a standard state program for posture-monitoring in schools as there was during the Soviet period.²⁰³ The interventions are de-centralized, so their results are based on uncoordinated efforts in various geographic locations. Many municipalities have budgets that pay specifically trained sports teachers who can teach “posture strengthening gymnastics” upon a referral from the family practitioner. Sports teacher Inta S., whom we met in Chapter 3, teaches such a class to children (grades 1 - 4) in a regional school about 100 km from Rīga. The nurse who participated in the “Family Studio” radio segment also referred to a similar program in her school in Rīga. The host of the segment, however, noted that her children’s school in Rīga had no such program, highlighting the haphazard manner in which spine-monitoring currently takes place in Latvia. Educational institutions are encouraged to purchase adjustable class-room furniture, which is widely regarded as one of the ways to combat posture-problems in school-aged children. As posture-strengthening programs depend on the availability of municipal funding, it is fair to say that Latvian children’s backs get similarly uneven attention. There is a special public school (1st grade to 12th grade) in the capital Rīga, established in 1972 as a school for children diagnosed with scoliosis, which accepts children with orthopedic posture problems and motion difficulties and requires a medical referral (pedagoģiski medicīniskā komisija). There were over 40 such schools for children with scoliosis, most of them boarding schools (internāts in Latvian, интернат/internat in Russian) in the former USSR, the first of which was founded by the orthopedist Izrail Kon in Moscow in 1964 (Kazonov n.d.).²⁰⁴ The school in Rīga today offers standard

²⁰³ This is based on my own memory of spinal testing in school and surveying my former Soviet friends. More archival research is required to confirm how widely this was practiced in the USSR.

²⁰⁴ According to the website of the Moscow’s Therapeutic Association, Izrail Kon was born in 1914 in Odessa, educated in Italy and imprisoned for telling a political joke during the Second World War in the USSR. Kon was freed in 1946 and allowed to work as a doctor. He eventually founded the scoliosis program in the former USSR. Kon is credited with biologizing the condition. For example he allegedly “disputed the myth” that children acquire scoliosis because of the impact of schooling, as he reputedly demonstrated that children at the age of 2-4 already showed signs of this illness. He is also said to have paid attention to the genetic inheritability of scoliosis and had urged for people with scoliosis not to reproduce.

education supplemented by a medical rehabilitation program—healing gymnastics (*ārstnieciskā vingrošana*), individual gymnastics, either rhythmic (ritmika)²⁰⁵ or choreotherapy (*horeoterapija*)²⁰⁶—and swimming. The students are also entitled to receive one or two courses of medical massage per school year with a referral by the school doctor. There is at least one other such school still existent in the former USSR.²⁰⁷

Considering the efforts that Latvian parents and medical professionals invest in combatting their young children’s asymmetry (Chapter 3), as well as the hyper-awareness of posture problems popularized by the media, one might expect a reduction in the number of “crooked children” in Latvia. However, according to widely-publicized statistics (Martinsone-Bērzkalne et al 2018) utilized by the Family Studio segment discussed above, there was an increase in such diagnoses as the children aged. Faulty posture was also among the most diagnosed conditions of active children in the state-sponsored young athletes health program, which comprised about 15 thousand children each year.²⁰⁸ The majority of these children was categorized as “Practically Healthy with a Slight Deviation in Health.” The “slight deviation” was most often related to some bodily “crookedness.”

²⁰⁵ According to the Association of Rhythmics (*ritmika*) of Latvia, Rhythmics is an interactive pedagogical method, which uses the connections between music, movement, singing and language in order to train the sense of rhythm and allow for better perception of music and for the development of the personality (*veicinātu personības attīstību*) (Rudzīte n.d.).

²⁰⁶ Choreotherapy is a classical dance (ballet) based movement therapy that used classical music and ballet elements for exercise (4. dimensija 2010).

²⁰⁷ At least one such school is still in existence in Russia today - Moscow school No 76 (Vasileva 2019). There children learn on their stomach on specially designed “beds,” just as reportedly they did at the Latvian school if their scoliosis was deemed to be stage 2-4. A similar fictional program has been portrayed in the feature film “That happened by the sea” (1989) which portrays the fears of children around their deformities (they refer to themselves as hunchbacks (*gorbatye*)) and the indifference of medical personnel towards the suffering of children who are often treated and examined in nude. The film also portrays the oppressive impacts of a full body corsets that children were obliged to use and portrays a founding-father type of character who could be a fictionalized version of Izrail Kon. I have not found any evidence that corsets were used in Rīga school No 66. It seems that their program, similarly to today, relied mostly on healing exercises, adjusted classroom seating and medical massages.

²⁰⁷ According to the Association of Rhythmics (*ritmika*) of Latvia, Rhythmics is an interactive pedagogical method, which uses the connections between music, movement, singing and language in order to train the sense of rhythm and allow for better perception of music and for the development of the personality (*veicinātu personības attīstību*) (Rudzīte n.d.).

²⁰⁸ The State Center for Sports Medicine, a separate entity, published a report that noted 15,179 thousand children being administered the yearly physical. in 2015, which is the last year any state-wide statistics are available. This

II Practically Healthy Children with a Slight Deviation in Health

I am in a town of some 30 thousand inhabitants. This regional center is relatively large by Latvian standards, i.e., among the ten largest communities by population. After sitting on the floor (there is no chair in the hallway of the sports doctor's office, probably because of the ongoing renovations in the building) I talk with the sports doctor, who is responsible for the whole region. After explaining the yearly visits that athletically active children²⁰⁹ aged 10 years and older are supposed to make to his office, he tells me that 95% of them have slightly problematic posture (nelieli stājas traucējumi), while only 5 - 10% of adults who are actively engaged in sports have the right posture. He shows me a weight hanging from a string and a blue ink pen that he uses for marking the children's bare backs in places where they deviate from the straight course charted by the string with the weight.

As I never see this doctor with a patient, I can only imagine the blue lines on children's backs that demonstrate how far their spines stray from the desirable straight line. Problematic posture was one of the key concerns of most specialists involved in caring for athletically active children, as it was perceived to be threatening to their preparedness for their sport and their results. In the absence of statewide spine-monitoring programs, the young athletes health program provides the most concerted effort in evaluating the back and offers various treatment methods such as physical therapy or healing gymnastics.

The young athletes health program was designed to monitor the cardiovascular and musculoskeletal health of children with "increased physical load," the term used to describe athletically active children who qualify for this program according to state documents (MK Noteikumi Nr. 594). Despite the other areas officially represented in the test,²¹⁰ the assessment process

Center was in the process of being reorganized as of the beginning of my fieldwork in the fall 2017, which culminated in it being made part of the Children's Clinical University Hospital (CCUH) in July 2018. Since then no public reports have been published, even though I know that the program that monitors athletic children's health continues as part of the CCUH system.

²⁰⁹ This group of children in Latvian are called "bērni ar paaugstinātu fizisko slodzi" - children with increased physical load. This usually mean that they practice their sport at the level that involves some competition, however, the degree of seriousness varies, which is why I have elected to describe them as athletically active children.

²¹⁰ According to the Regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers, during the in-depth prophylactic medical examination, the sports doctor:

relied substantially on measurements that evaluated posture (stāja) and various bodily asymmetries. The state standard, as defined by the Cabinet of Ministers regulations, classified the children after the assessment into four “health groups”. Group No 1 includes “healthy, physically developed and functionally prepared” children who “practice [the sport] according to the sport specialist’s [coach's] plan and without restrictions.” Group No 2 is composed of “practically healthy”²¹¹ children with “slight deviation in health (nelielas veselības novirzes), who are functionally prepared” and can “practice [the sport] according to the sport specialist's plan, while taking into account the instructions and recommendations of the sports doctor.”²¹² In an earlier iteration (MK regulation No 195), the “slight deviation in health” was expected to include problematic posture (stājas traucējumi). Group No 3 consists of children with “deviation in health” (veselības novirzes), which in the earlier iteration of the regulation specifically mentioned “scoliosis,” who are “functionally poorly prepared (funkcionāli vāji sagatavoti),” and are experiencing “a long-term interruption in their practice schedule because of illness or other reasons,” and need to “practice [the sport] according to an individual plan under the constant supervision of a sports doctor.”

5.1. assesses physical development, physical and functional condition of the cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, respiratory and other organ systems, adaptation and contraindications to increased physical activity, as well as suitability for the chosen sport, based on:

5.1.1. anthropometric data;

5.1.2. a history and previous assessment of physical fitness (if such information is available);

5.1.3. cardiovascular, respiratory, nervous and musculoskeletal evaluation tests;

5.1.4. an exercise test with a record of the 12 leads of the electrocardiogram before and after exercise and, if necessary, also during exercise;

5.1.5. vision test;

5.1.6. blood and urine test results;

5.1.7. physical and functional ability assessment tests;

5.1.8. if necessary, other opinions provided by medical practitioners and the results of examinations. (“LikumiLV 2006)

²¹¹ This is the term widely used on the family doctor’s notes that are required for children to participate in various summer camps or to enter a new school.

²¹² As the sports specialist (teacher or coach) cannot be officially informed by the sports doctor of the outcome because of recent strengthening of patient data-protection, the wording of this state document reflects expectations that stem from the past (as late as 2011, according to some of my interlocutors) when coaches were directly informed on their child-athlete’s health. It is up to the parents of the children now to share and most do as they know that it is expected, according to my observation.

Group No 4 is comprised of children with “pronounced deviation in health,” who are “functionally poorly prepared,” “do not practice [sport] at the time,” and are “in need of medical rehabilitation, which would include renewal of functional skills along with limited physical activity (dozētas fiziskās slodzes)” (LikumiLV 2006).

According to a report published by the State Sports Medicine Center in 2016 (VSCM 2017), only 0.74% of children were placed in Group No 1, which included completely healthy children, with the majority, or 75.98%, in Group 2 (“practically healthy” children with slight “deviation in health”), 23.14% in Group 3 (children who were on a break from practicing their sport due to an illness or another reason), and only 0.13% in Group 4 (children who required substantial rehabilitation (see the table from the report below).

Table 5.1. Division of the children according to their “health group” and “adaptation to physical load,” part of table No 3, VSMC (2016, 8-9).

3.tabula

**Centra veiktajās padziļinātajās profilaktiski medicīniskajās pārbaudēs iegūtie dati
(2014.-2015.gads)**

Rādītāji	2015.gads		2014.gads		2015.g./ 2014.g.
	skaits	īpatsvars (%)	skaits	īpatsvars (%)	
Apmeklējumi, no tiem:	34 673		43 200		↓
Padziļinātā profilaktiskā medicīniskā pārbaude	15179	43.78%	17789	41.18%	↓
Iedalījums veselības grupās					
I grupa	117	0.74%	127	0.70%	↓
II grupa	11952	75.98%	13755	75.80%	↓
III grupa	3640	23.14%	4237	23.35%	↓
IV grupa	21	0.13%	28	0.15%	↓
Adaptācija fiziskai slodzei					
Adaptēti fiziskai slodzei	14732	98.39%	17183	97.55%	↓
Nav adaptēti fiziskai slodzei	241	1.61%	432	2.45%	↓

Like the sports doctor in the opening vignette of this section, the professionals involved in the care of children with “increased physical load” believed that most of the athletic children had posture problems. Musculoskeletal issues account for the majority of children being allocated to Group 2 (75.98 %) rather than Group 1. In 2015, 97.16 % of children monitored were deemed to have “incorrect posture,” while 1.29% were diagnosed with scoliosis, a medical diagnosis warranting special care that is more prevalent among children monitored outside of the young athletes health program.²¹³

Anxiety around the crookedness of the back influences the metrics collected by the State Center for Sports Medicine.²¹⁴ The majority of incidences of “incorrectness” was related to asymmetry (78.28% were said to have asymmetric posture), while some children had been diagnosed with “round back” (apaļa mugura - 7.11%) or “roundly curved back” (apaļi ieliekta mugura - 6.86%). Some children were also assessed as having feet or legs of an incorrect shape, 32.61% and 26.05% of cases respectively. 9.21%—or almost one-tenth— of children were found to have “flat feet,” the condition that the lead conductor did not want to hear in the song “Broken Pines.” “One should not hear any flat-feet” sounds in Latvian almost equally idiosyncratically as in English, with the exception that Latvians widely recognize the medical diagnosis. By using the flat feet as a metaphor, the conductor connects singing with a bodily deviation, both concepts that are of significance in Latvia. Flat feet could disqualify conscripts from the Soviet army, a fact emphasized several times by social scientists commenting on this data. For more statistical information on the musculoskeletal system, as well the form of the legs (kājas) and feet (pēdas), see the copy of the VSMC table comparing the metrics from 2014 and 2015 on the next page.

²¹³ I do not have the relevant comparison for exactly the same age group of the general population, but according to “Bērni Latvijā 2019” there were 32.7 children in a group of 1000 10-14 year-olds in 2017, which makes it roughly double of that of the athletically active (CSB 2019).

²¹⁴ This is prior to its transfer to the Children’s Hospital in 2018 when no more publicly available date is easily found.

Table 5.2. Assessment of the Musculoskeletal system, comparison between years 2015 and 2014, part of table No 3, VSMC (2016, 9).

Balsta un kustību sistēmas novērtējums					
Pareiza stāja	433	2.84%	471	2.65%	↓
Nepareiza stāja, t.sk.:	14809	97.16%	17314	97.35%	↓
apaļa mugura	1083	7.11%	1554	8.74%	↓
apaļi ieliekta mugura	1046	6.86%	1205	6.78%	↓
asimetriskā stāja	11931	78.28%	13473	75.75%	↓
ieliekta mugura	347	2.28%	527	2.96%	↓
plakana mugura	167	1.10%	291	1.64%	↓
plakani ieliekta mugura	39	0.26%	77	0.43%	↓
skolioze	196	1.29%	187	1.05%	↑
Kāju formas novērtējums					
Pareiza kāju forma	11270	73.95%	13085	73.57%	↓
Nepareiza kāju forma, t.sk.:	3969	26.05%	4700	26.43%	↓
O-veida	1801	11.82%	2080	11.70%	↓
x-veida	2168	14.23%	2620	14.73%	↓
Pēdu novērtējums					
Pareiza pēda	10270	67.39%	11946	67.17%	↓
Nepareiza pēda, t.sk.:	4969	32.61%	5838	32.83%	↓
paaugstināta velve	925	6.07%	1034	5.81%	↓
pazemināta velve	2570	16.86%	3048	17.14%	↓
plakana pēda	1403	9.21%	1693	9.52%	↓
cita pēdas deformācija	71	0.47%	63	0.35%	↑

Youth sports as a threat to posture also figures in the article entitled “Upright Posture” (stalta stāja) is the Foundation of Health” (Liepiņa 2019), which is quite typical of the writing on the topic of “incorrect posture.” The article promotes parental vigilance that includes many of the early childhood practices that I detailed in Chapter 3,²¹⁵ thus emphasizing that parental intervention is necessary to achieve the desired spinal orientation. It states:

Only a rare person can be proud of an ideal posture. Usually there are some deviations in a certain section of the back of the whole spine. However, the spine does not have to be straight as a broomstick. The correct posture is an effortless vertical bodily state of being, which is characterized by the minimal use of energy, a balance between various muscle groups and the gravity of the earth” (Liepiņa 2019).

The article urges the use of “stalts,” a term that translates as “upright or stately,” instead of “taisns” or “straight.” However, most people, be they medical professionals, the general public or the parents with whom I spoke, use the term “straight back” to refer to a desirable way of being in the

²¹⁵ In this case the advice giving physical therapist is against the use of a sling, which many of my body-intensive interlocutors used. I was told that physical therapists were divided on the usefulness (or even potential harmfulness) of the sling, so my body-intensive interlocutors were used to picking and choosing advice on baby-wearing and back health.

world. The upright or stately properties of the adjective “stalts,” however, are certainly present in the positive association that the ideal of the “straight-back” implies. I suggest that correcting children’s posture and making them upright (stalti) is one of the implied goals associated with assigning them to Health Group No 2 in the young athletes’ health program — “[t]he practically healthy children with slight deviation in health.”

Whether or not such straightening of “crooked children” is possible in reality, the attempt to do so constitutes an important aspect of the young athlete’s annual check-up. There is an expectation that the “practically healthy children with a slight deviation in health” will receive some form of treatment to reduce the asymmetry, but it is also understood that the non-athlete’s posture problems will increase with age. In fact, even identifying a minor bodily deviation at an early age does not necessarily translate into a perfect straightening out of the child’s body. For example, I talked to Inga who is parenting her daughter Sabīne on her own. Sabīne was twelve when we spoke. She had finally undergone the first state-paid physical therapy for a condition that her mother had identified around the time she learned to walk at age one and a half. Sabīne’s feet extend outward, the way most ballet dancers are imagined to walk. Inga felt that Sabīne’s feet impeded her physical development. For example, her daughter could not ride a bike and was not an apt runner. She had fallen a few times, one of them quite hard, during the sports lesson at school. Inga told me that in hindsight she should have been more vigilant when her daughter was little. Her regret, however, meant that she should have ignored the advice of a prominent rehabilitation surgeon (*rehabilitologs-ķirurgs*)²¹⁶ and her family doctor, both of whom assured her several times that the condition might correct itself on its own. Inga did not have much money for private consultations, but she did pay the *rehabilitologs* out-of-pocket for a 5-minute consultation. She told

²¹⁶ This is a Soviet nomenclature term that is still used for a doctor, often a surgeon, specializing in rehabilitation medicine, I will use the Latvian term *rehabilitologs* further in the text.

me: “Back then it was fashionable to go to an osteopath, whether it was needed or not. Everyone was taking their children to an osteopath. It was pure fashion, so I did not want to do it. And it was expensive too, so I could not afford it.” The lack of financial resources was one of the reasons Inga opted to use state-provided medical care for Sabīne. She explained to me: “I did not have enough money to experiment with non-traditional methods because I am raising Sabīne on my own. But now I think, I should have done it, so that I would have known that I did absolutely everything.”

When Sabīne was five, her mother took her to another *rehabilitologs*, to whom the family doctor once again had referred her, because she was still worried that her daughter’s movement was inhibited by her outwardly stretching feet. This doctor told Inga that Sabīne’s condition might or might not improve on its own as it was rather complex. The doctor prescribed walking barefooted as much as possible over the summer and sessions of both healing gymnastics and swimming. Healing gymnastics and swimming, if prescribed by a state doctor, was free of charge but required a wait that, in the end, was almost six years long.²¹⁷ While they waited, Inga paid for treatment out-of-pocket (12 to 15 euros per visit) several times, but it did not produce any body-altering results. Inga told me: “Sabīne liked the healing swimming, because she likes water. It was 10 children per coach who stayed outside the water, but it was still fun, even if it was not individually-tailored.” She added: “Even if it did not do any good, at least it did no harm. The healing gymnastics was a huge disappointment. It was cold outdoors and the room was cold, the coach was not that old but Soviet in style, did not manage to form any personal bond with the child and asked her to walk on poky sensory balls. Sabīne cried before the third lesson, and I did not take her back.”

²¹⁷ Inga told me that it was not that the wait-list had been that long, but that several times the state had offered the service during the summer, when Sabīne was staying in the country-side with Inga’s mother for child-care purposes.

Before the state-supported healing gymnastics visit finally materialized²¹⁸ several years later, Inga paid for another round of private consultations. She told me: “I was getting anxious. Sabīne was not stable, she kept falling in the sports lessons, once really seriously. That’s when I took her back to the *rehabilitologs* again, and she diagnosed scoliosis in the shoulder region.” The diagnosis, Inga explained, was caused by the increased sitting time at the school desk and the extremely heavy school bags. Inga also paid for a private physical therapy, but the physical therapist (to whom she refers as *trenere* or coach) did not allow Inga to take pictures of Sabīne exercising in her office in order to facilitate the same at home. Inga said: ”The idea was that 10 visits were not enough. I could not afford any more, so we wanted to learn how to do this at home. I told her that she [the physical therapist] won’t be in the picture. But she said: “Not in my office. You should just write everything down.” I wondered if this specialist was trained during the Soviet period to which Inga replied: “A young woman, a physical therapist. Now they have produced heaps of those. By then I had no trust in her. There are no common guidelines. The physical therapist has to come up with everything on their own based on what the *rehabilitologs* has diagnosed.”

The whole time since Sabīne was a year-an- a-half old, and her “ballerina feet” had caused her mother worry, Inga had followed the appropriate course of action, i.e., she had the feet examined by a family practitioner, signed up for state-sponsored manual therapy and even paid for private consultations out-of-pocket. However, she never felt that Sabine was making progress. The medical professionals confirmed to Inga that Sabine’s feet were outwardly extended but also that they could become “normal” on their own. Yet, Sabīne’s feet never did straighten out to Inga’s

²¹⁸ Inga explains that they were offered the option several times over the summer, when her daughter was in the country-side with Inga’s parents and so they lost their space, she did meet another friend who had two children without posture problems (she had asked her friend about it directly) who had also attended the program (because their mother had arranged it with the doctor). It is possible that a parent who had more professional flexibility could have managed a slot earlier, but not Inga.

satisfaction, even though they finally, after six years of waiting, received the targeted attention of a state-sponsored physical therapist. Recalling those visits Inga told me that she did not expect much: “I went to the state consultations as if it were an experiment, let’s see what would happen (gāju kā eksperimentā, tad jau redzēs).” Both Sabīne and Inga were comfortable with the physical therapist, but there was no over-all change in Sabine’s feet. The therapy was cut short by two visits, because of unexpectedly early maternity leave taken by the specialist, and there was no follow-up. Inga finished her story to me pessimistically: “I have lost the vision that it is possible to change anything with exercises, if it was not done when the child was small. But if it’s not a huge defect, then you do not invest your utmost energy.”

Sabīne emerges from this story as the quintessentially “practically healthy child with a slight deviation in health,” whose case does not concern medical professionals, even though they refer her to manual therapy. The deviation that Inga perceives in her daughter is slight but noticeable, and Inga fears it will impact her quality of life. Inga has been applying to the state for therapy and privately paying for healing sessions and doctor’s visits, but her daughter’s feet remain outwardly extended without having successfully received the benefits of straightening therapy as promised by the optimistic participant of the “Family Studio” discussion. The state and municipal services operate as if the treatment for faulty posture and asymmetry were a combination of parental and state responsibility, when in reality the state services seem to work only for those parents who can arrange them on their own by demonstrating their extra vigilance or whose children do not have very serious musculoskeletal problems. In the end Inga told me that she was afraid of the psychological trauma Sabīne might start experiencing as a result of her quest to making her daughter's feet “normal.” The parents of the young athletes who were allocated to Group No 2 might not

treat their asymmetry with as much concern as did Inga. However, there is certainly an awareness in Latvia that “practically healthy children” can have a deviant back.

Fears over the deviating backs of Latvian children represent more than mere concerns over a physiological condition. I suggest that we can understand Latvian fascination with symmetry and “straight backs” in terms of “straight spine morality.” I use the term to denote a process by which the spatial norm of verticality is used as a referent in Latvia to denote an obligation to be physiologically and morally “upright.” The processual character is important here. Sabīne’s case demonstrates that the outcome of the “straightening” does not have to be a child with a measurably straighter back or a more symmetrical body. Sabīne’s feet after all never “correct themselves.” What matters is that most Latvians, both Russian and Latvian speaking, subscribe to the aesthetics of the straight back and to the continual orientation of their children’s bodies towards a verticality, to borrow Sara Ahmed’s ideas on spatial alignment as an orientation. The “the straight spine morality” affects the way Latvian children’s bodies are imagined in space. In her “Queer Phenomenology” Ahmed wrestles with the idea of the normative or the straight-appearing body being the effect of bodily repetitions over time, which create what she refers to as “a space for action” or “bodily horizon” (Ahmed 2006, 66). Thinking of the body in the space of action that is constantly putting certain object in reach, while hiding others, allows us to see verticality as a “process of alignment” (Ahmed 2006, 66) instead of an objective truth.

I consider the Latvian ideal of straight spines to be a product of such a process where the normative is an imaginary vertical line. Fears of crookedness under these circumstances act as a place-holder for the dangers of becoming non-normative in Latvian society. Ahmed’s interpretation allows us to think of “normal” as something that is constantly re-aligned and renegotiated, and as such carries the danger of making other things to appear “out of line” (Ahmed 2006, 67).

Latvian children's backs thus need to be monitored and straightened, so that the rest of the world does not appear "on a slant" (Ahmed 2006, 67). What is essential here is that straightening out faulty bodies is a process of orientating the body. Even though the Latvian language does not link the term "straight" (*taisns*) with heteronormativity the way English does, thinking of straightening of children as orienting them towards a vertical uprightness, encompasses a moral demand the same way that sexuality does. Yet, the "straight-back morality" is not a purely ethno-national Latvian aspiration. Children who speak Russian at home, like Masha in Chapter 3, are treated with the similar kind of expectation for physiological symmetry as Sabīne. From the point of view of state policy, in Masha's case too, the expectation is that she would grow up with a physiologically straight back and would fit general moral demands around normativity. As a Russian speaker Masha might or might not be part of the future Latvian Singing Chorus, however, the aesthetics around normativity of her upbringing are not that different from her Latvian speaking peers. Viewing Latvian childhood through the lens of "straight-back morality" ties together issues of national character, Latvian surveillance of children's backs and the way Latvians envision themselves facing the world, as when the lead conductor in the opening vignette urges the mega-choir to stand up straightly and proudly: "Here one should not hear any flat-feet [*plakanā pēda*] or deformations, but rather a straight back!"

III "Broken Pines" and Straight-back Morality

The Latvian Association of Anthropologists organize regular meetings for their members to present their work. When I presented the preliminary findings of this chapter during the summer of 2018, it was suggested that the virtues of straightness might be rooted in certain collective understandings of history, where the bent back has been interpreted as bending to the oppressors: most notably German land-owners, to whom most ancestors of ethnic Latvians belonged as serfs until

the mid-19th century, or other foreign powers such as the Czarist Russian Empire or the USSR. In this section, I connect these sentiments around straightness to the opening vignette of the chapter where the lead conductor was urging the 16,000 member choir to sing with a straight back. The song that the choir was singing was based on a famous poem “The Broken Pines,” which a colleague mentioned at the above-mentioned meeting as an example of how resistance to power was equated to not bending backs. The lyrics by Latvian poet Rainis are as follows (my translation):

The wind broke the tallest pine trees
that stood on the dunes at the seaside
Their glances were reaching afar
They did not know how to hide or how to bend their backs:
"You are breaking us, oh hostile power,
But the fight against you is not over yet
In longing for the faraway lands
we let out our last groan
Every branch trembles with relentless hatred!"

And the tall pine trees after being broken
Rose up as ships from the mighty sea
Proudly they raise their breast against the storm
Proudly they struggle against the storm anew:

Send us your waves, you hostile power-
We will go to the faraway lands where the happiness resides!
You can divide us, you can break us,
But we will reach the faraway lands where the sun rises.

Rainis was a social-democrat lawyer and the editor of an influential Latvian-language newspaper of the late 19th century when Latvia was still a province of Imperial Russia. He wrote the lyrics after he was exiled from Latvia in 1897 and it was published in 1904. The themes of the poem reflect the sentiments that led to the 1905 revolution, which is widely considered the only true albeit unsuccessful revolution that Latvians have supported. Rainis was exiled after the revolution once again, this time to Switzerland. While there, he acquired the undisputed title of national poet. The song was composed shortly afterward and was sung during the Soviet period (not the case for

many other pre-Soviet songs, which were prohibited). The poem too was widely recited during those times. That it was not, like many other Latvian literary works outlawed, can be explained by the acceptable status of the 1905 revolution. As a precursor to the Great October Revolution of 1917, the key foundational event celebrated during the Soviet period, the 1905 revolution was not relegated to the dust-bin of history or even to the forever-locked secret chest as were so many other nationally important events.

The pine trees to which the poem refers are usually interpreted as young revolutionaries, who refuse to bend to power and break instead, only to reemerge and carry on with their ideals abroad, where the mystical far-away land stands for all kinds of utopian futures. The breaking of the back is preferable to bending it, which would make it crooked. The wording of the poem is flexible enough so that the hostile power, which acts as a storm against the trees and as waves once the trees have acquired their ship-form, could be easily interpreted as the Soviet regime. The allegorical nature of the poem ensures that the storm stands for various forms of outside power - be it Imperial Russia, the Soviet regime or contemporary external forces that threaten Latvia. This is precisely the interpretation offered by the lead conductor of the 2018 Song and Dance Festival portrayed in the beginning of this chapter. The conductor had emphasized at the rehearsal two days prior to the episode that "Broken Pines" was the only song on the 2018 Song Festival repertoire that was about countering power. In an effort to conduct the song, he addressed the altos and basses: "This line here, 'You are breaking us, oh hostile power (naidīgā pretvara), 'This is a much less comfortable passage for you than for the sopranos and tenors.'" He continued: "When all the voices unite, the boiling over from the ideals to the unrelenting hatred takes only about three measures. Do not start with a full forte here. And look at my hands, so we can all end together." The conductor then urged the mega-choir that was listening attentively—some even filming the

video and later sharing it on YouTube—not to have any flat-footedness [plakanā pēda] or deformations in the way the choir sings, but rather to “sing it with a straight back!” He followed by referring to the instances in which he had felt ashamed of Latvian leaders on the world stage and insisted each individual chorister put resistance into the song while reaching upwards and standing straight (izslienamies taisni). The same conductor later gave an interview to a popular weekly magazine in which he demanded that Latvians hold their posture in music (Burve-Rozīte 2018). This 2018 Song Festival rendition of “Broken Pines” equates Latvian efforts towards ensuring good posture and individual will to resisting outside powers. Such an interpretation is steeped in what I earlier called the “straight back morality” - the understanding that being oriented upwardly is related to taking a moral position.

The straight posture rhetoric during the Song Festival of 2018 was not restricted to this conductor. Several others reminded the singers to hold their backs straight, out of pride for being Latvian and in opposition to outside powers. No one mentioned that an upright posture can be beneficial for singing as well. In addition, a mobile phone company and Song Festival sponsor, engaged in myth-shattering tactics in their support of the Festival, displayed a billboard picturing two young men in folk costumes (presumably dancers) standing what was meant to be proudly, with the following caption: “It is said that Latvians have no posture. Really? #refutemyths.” Following Ahmed (2006), I suggest that particularly spatial Latvian aesthetics that privilege vertical orientation are at play here. Moreover, Latvians expect that their posture be monitored for compliance to this vertical aesthetic.

Ieva, whom we met in Chapter 4, noticed that a friend whose son was growing up in Ireland had noticeable problems due to what appeared to be a severe case of inwardly slanting feet, which would have been of concern to a Latvian family practitioner.

Ieva: I had a conversation with that mom from Ireland, because he has some little orthopedic problems that are visually visible. I once gathered up some courage to ask if she has noticed, because the reason that the child does not like sports (fizkultūra) might be connected to that. (Karīna: Something with the back?) No, he steps so much toward one side of the inner side of the boot, not sure if that is flat feet (plakanā pēda) or the way his foot is angled (pēdas izvērsums) or an angle of the bones. I don't know what it is, but it is clear that the feet are not being placed exactly how they should be. And she said that she has been to a physical therapist once in Ireland, and they had taken it easy (she used a Latvianized the English expression- "tur kaut kā easy"). (K: All OK?) Nobody thought that anything needs to be done, but she herself was concerned that there was something wrong, and that it was having an impact on his hips and the rest of his body. Her Latvian family practitioner has now given them a referral to a physical therapist, and they will see what exercises and all that needs to be done.

I have demonstrated in Chapter 3 that the solution found by Ieva's friend in Latvia, that of physical therapy and exercises, originated in the Soviet period, but is widely viewed as distinctly contemporary. The lack of concern for bodily asymmetry in Ireland here is treated as a sign of Irish backwardness, whereas the Latvian awareness of it points to something that Latvians are doing right. When explaining this part of my dissertation research to Latvians and other former Soviet citizens who reside in the US, I often encountered a similar sentiment, which considered Latvian vigilance over bodily symmetry to be superior to the American lack of attention to the issue. Being guided by the "straight-back morality" allowed Latvians to be uniquely positioned in relation to the US and Ireland, where such important values as symmetrical posture and the straight back were disregarded.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ There were other examples when this orientation towards the outside world was marked by superiority towards it. For example, I participated in a public discussion (on creativity, as each of the discussions had different topics) in connection to a documentary film "Turpinājums" ("To be continued") (2018) that followed five first-graders in Latvia from the first to the last day of school. Even though school was not the focus of the film, during the discussion one of the middle-aged woman who identified herself as a former teacher (izbijusi učene) commented that she would not want her grand-children in the Latvian school system after watching this film. Another younger woman, however, responded that precisely because of the school system her family had moved back to Latvia from Sweden, where she said, "averageness" was being fostered (tiek iemācīta viduvējība). I suspect that there is a link between this sentiment that the Westerners are fostering "averagness" and the vigilance over posture in Latvia as a way to be better than average, but I do not possess enough ethnographic data to make this claim.

My conversation with my grandmother a day after the election of the Latvian president Egils Levits in May 2019 is illustrative of the normalizing power that bodily uprightness holds in Latvia. While Levits' "moral posture" (*morālā stāja*) was praised by some of the media ("Latvijas avīze", for example), for my almost 90 year-old grandmother, his physical uprightness was of significant importance. In fact, it made up for some of his shortcomings. My grandmother feared that Levits was not completely Latvian based on what she perceived as his Jewish last name. "So did you want any of the other two candidates to win then?" I asked after I had delivered a lengthy lecture on inclusivity inspired by my liberal subjectivity.

"Not at all," she replied as we descended down the stairs together, "he was the best one. There is this other (she searched for a while for his name. I asked her if she meant the Ombudsman), yes, Jansons (that is her maiden name, she should remember), they had only ever shown him [on TV] sitting down before, just his upper half and now they showed him standing up and he has no [physical] posture (*viņam nav stājas.*)"

I gasped. This was directly relevant to my research, and I told her so as she was standing at the bottom of the stairs.

"Well, yes," she added solemnly, "the president has to have a good [physical] posture (*prezidentam ir jābūt stājai*).

I am sharing this embarrassing personal conversation²²⁰ that brings forth what I interpreted as antisemitism of my beloved grandmother in the belief that it is directly relevant to the morality of

²²⁰ I realize that the embarrassment that this episode causes me reveals more about me and my relationship to Latvia than my grandmother. My liberal education and life-experiences have taught me to be extremely sensitive towards what I believe to be a general inability of many (if not most) Latvians (both Latvian and Russian speaking) to have an open mind about various "others," i.e. people who do not belong to their narrowly-defined group. These others are often expected to be exhibiting such signs of foreignness as different color (skin, hair etc.), last-names or inability to understand the appeal of the Song and Dance Festival (see Chapter 1). Having encountered a situation in my life where my biological father has not spoken to me for almost 20 years because of my relationship with my now husband because of racist reasons, I know that my grandmother who has never ceased to treat me or my nuclear family with love has been a lot more open than what I imagine to be the average Latvian and their ability to deal with "otherness." I do think Ume is strongly prejudiced in favor of people with good postures (which she herself does not think she possesses), however, as this episode reveals. I have discussed with her incorporating this interchange into the dissertation and she has asked me to include that a year later she values Egils Levits for his intelligence and dedication to Latvia.

straightness argument that I am making in this chapter. The perception of physiological straightness and posture can go a long way in Latvia,²²¹ even absolve one of conditions that are perceived as otherwise disqualifying, for example, being non-Latvian. Such a person can represent Latvia on the world stage, at least according to my grandmother. As she knew almost nothing about Levits at that time and had no opinion about his professional performance, she could not reference his long career as a judge with the European Court of Justice, his role in Latvia's independence movement of the late 1980s or his knowledge of foreign languages. In the end, therefore, his perceived good physical posture was what made him worthy to be president in her eyes.

On the world stage that the lead conductor was concerned about, the physical uprightness is a way of performing Latvianness. The European Union plays a complex role in how Latvian children's futures are constituted, as it simultaneously represents an aspirational project and a threat to national sovereignty. Dace Dzenovska reveals the nuanced ways in which the residents of Latvia have responded to post-Cold War changes and what she terms “an actually existing post-Cold War formation”²²² of political liberalism (Dzenovska 2018, x). In her work on the professionals who were implementing liberal-leaning political programs in post-Cold War Latvia in the beginning of the 21st century, to whom she refers as tolerance workers, Dzenovska points out that “at the precise moment that [her] interlocutors were pushing full speed ahead toward the European present, which they thought was their future, Europe became unsure about itself, its present, and

²²¹ This finding has been confirmed almost by everybody, which whom I have ever shared this in Latvia. And I have come across remarks on politicians where their physical posture is considered an asset and a sign of their trustworthiness. For example, this comment on the handling of COVID-19 by the prime minister Krišjānis Kariņš in a parenting forum that was discussing politics: “As a visually powerful head of the state with an address during the COVID crisis I recall Artūrs Krišjānis Kariņš. Upright posture (staltu stāju), always shaven, well dressed ... A man in his right place and time. Even if he is not the state president, he covered that post with his posture (stāja), speech and deeds” (Calis.lv Forums 2020).

²²² Not as an ideal, but referring to how political liberalism is experienced in Latvia with its specific post-Cold War historical circumstances.

its future” (Dzenovska 2018, xii). Dzenovska emphasizes that there are various modes of organizing inclusion and exclusion within Europe, which designate that at different periods some are seen as more European than others. For example, subscribing to the European value of tolerance would mean to sanction exclusion of those who are not tolerant. Dzenovska demonstrates how those Latvians who are eager to become part of Europe do not necessarily subscribe to such politically liberal categories as tolerance, but endorse these principles instead for the sake of protection from neighboring Russia (Dzenovska 2018, xi).

According to Dzenovska, becoming European after socialism means “to live inclusion and exclusion the European way” (Dzenovska 2018, 3). The Latvian insistence on bodily symmetry, which stands in contrast to the priorities of the “outside” world - for example, the doctors in Ireland, who do not even care about the bodily deformities children are developing – can be viewed as a subtle form of resistance to becoming fully European or possibly a way of feeling superior to an “old” Europe that does not know any better. Latvian émigré children who become physiologically “crooked” while residing abroad then serve as a reminder of the superiority of the Latvian manner of bodily management. Such sentiments need to be contextualized vis-à-vis the concerns over Latvia’s dwindling population, including losing children to out-migration that I explored in chapter 1. From this point of view, the corrupting foreign influences that cause crookedness can be interpreted as being more than just physiological. Latvia in this scenario exists in a perpetual state of negotiation over its role in the hierarchically organized global space, towards which Latvians are orienting themselves while trying to keep to a normative “straight-back morality.” This outside world recognizes the Latvian Song and Dance Festival, with its unique collective singing and dancing rituals, as a UNESCO intangible heritage site. Concurrently, Latvians, along with other Eastern Europeans, are treated as having not quite grasped all the lessons of “the school of

Europeanness,” (Dzenovska 2018) which emphasize the contradictory values of European-style inclusion and exclusion. In this context, the defense of Latvian “straightness,” enacted through managed corporeality of infants and young children, emerges as a defense against the “crookedness” of the outside, European world, in all its threat and promise.

Conclusion

By attending to the diagnoses of asymmetric back and flat feet and the lead conductor’s speech about performing an early 20th century revolutionary song ‘The Broken Pines,’ this chapter situated children’s bodily management in Latvia as a process of spatial orientation towards the Latvian normative and the outside world. The ethnographic material from the adult Song and Dance Festival of 2018, combined with numerous descriptions of vigilance in monitoring the potential crookedness of Latvian children’s backs constitute a “straight back morality,” a process whereby a child’s body in Latvia is oriented towards a vertical norm. This Latvian ideal is evident in the privileging of musculoskeletal issues in the yearly youth athlete’s health monitoring system and in the failure to straighten out Sabīne’s outwardly extended feet. This “straight-back morality” governs pediatric health decisions even in the absence of evidence that straightening of the back actually takes place. As the example of the ignorant Irish doctors who fail to perceive the crookedness of the Latvian émigré children demonstrates, the attentiveness to children’s straight backs in Latvia is a way to relate to a contradictory Europe, which Dzenovska (2018) has described as simultaneously an object of desire and resistance for Latvians.

Epilogue

As I conclude this dissertation on the raising of the normative child in Latvia who speaks Latvian, possesses a straight back and preferably either sings or dances, I ask--who is excluded from this narrative? There are those who are in the process of being re-aligned, such as the babies who are massaged into symmetry in Chapter 3, or the “practically healthy children” with slightly deviating backs in Chapter 5, who could be corrected through healing gymnastics. There are also the fainting singers of Chapter 1, the children who are not physically hardy enough and as such threaten the future of the Latvian nation, for which the communal choral expression of the Song Festival is a symbol of national survival. They can be thought of as wimpy, the outcome of the technologization of the previously healthy farmer lifestyle of Latvians, but also as a product of overly cosseting and body-intensive parental care that some fear produces spoiled children. A tension is expressed here around raising children as a negotiation of Soviet history--contemporary parents are bent on dismantling the Soviet institutional practices, that they think caused emotionally traumatized children and parents. That the same history contributed to the obsession with symmetry that still informs such popular corporeal care practices as medical massage of babies does not seem to be of equal concern. Latvian children emerge from this depiction as subject to contradictory dangers—they can be simultaneously held too much or not enough, massaged too much and not enough. They are concurrently the conduits through which Latvia’s future is both assured and threatened.

This dissertation tells a story of the bits that do not quite fit into a cohesive story of building a healthy Latvian nation through “managed corporeality” of children. The normative child is a combination of contradictory patterns: she or he is tough, but not overly tough, toned and strong, but not overly toned to the point of being tense. This child does not succumb to fainting at the Youth Song Festival, and is attached, but not overly attached to a designated adult. She or he is

also cared for just enough by her or his parents and has a straight “folk-dancer’s back.” The normative child is imagined in relationship to a non-normative child—the wimpy child, the spoiled child, the child with a crooked body. The emphasis on corporeal straightening, however, can mask problems of the psyche which are not prioritized enough in Latvia. I touched briefly in Chapter 1 upon the preference for monitoring musculoskeletal problems over the over-all mental health of children. In the section that dealt with how metrics were deployed in Latvia, I hinted that psychological health problems were obscured by the language of more easily observable corporeal issues. Yet, Latvia ranks first in reported childhood bullying among the 37 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries,²²³ and youth suicide is the leading cause of death among 15 – 19 year olds with Latvia being among the EU countries with the highest youth suicides rates (WHO 2012).²²⁴ These metrics, however, do not translate into consistent public health measures combatting youth suicide. The mentally unstable or suicidal child challenges the normative orientation of the straight-backed and upstanding Latvian child.

I was especially struck by the discrepancy between the amount of attention devoted to musculoskeletal monitoring in comparison to mental health matters while working on a 26 minute documentary film about Latvian teenage girls during the summer of 2019. The film, produced for Channel One of the Latvian Public Television, used semi-structured in-depth interviews, designed by me, as one of its methods. The project documented the lives of contemporary Latvian teenage girls (ages 13 - 16) and depicted how they navigated pressures to look beautiful in an age when

²²³ Latest available data shows that Latvia had the largest share (30.6 %) of pupils aged 15–16 being bullied at school at least few times a month among all OECD countries in 2015. The lowest share of such children was recorded in the Netherlands – 9.3 %.

²²⁴ This information can be found in this WHO e-journal (SPKC 2012) in Latvian, which assures that “Latvia is not the only country where intentional self-harming is the number 1 cause of death in this age group and notes that the same situation can be observed in the UK, Germany, Netherlands, Czech Republic, Sweden, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, Ireland and Lithuania. The metric (number of suicides per 100,000 inhabitants in the age group (15-19)) varies widely but the 7.5 (2011) or 7.7 (2013) has been Latvia’s rate lately and it is close to South Korea in 2012 – 7.7 (UNICEF 2017).

media use both exacerbates typical adolescent growing pains and offers solutions that were not available before. What surprised the director of the film and me was the revelation by about half of the girls interviewed²²⁵ that at some point they had felt either isolated from their classmates or actively bullied. The girls used such terms as teasing (*apsmiešana*) and gossiping behind their backs (*aprunāt*) to describe their experiences. This subject appeared in other areas of my research. A seven year-old girl who had just moved from the United States to a small town in Latvia, where she attended a public school, used the term “*bulīši*” during an interview on the health monitoring of young athletes. “*Bulīši*,” a term I had never previously heard, is a Latvianized version of the English “bullies.” She claimed that Latvian school children were more “*bulīši*” than her classmates in the US.

Being targeted for ridicule by other children was something that, having grown up in the 1980s, the film’s director and me had not been exposed to as much as these girls.²²⁶ Primarily, I was struck that most of the girls did not seem to expect much interference from the adults who were present in their lives--neither parents, nor school-teachers. Bullying or “mobbing” (mobings) to utilize the term coined by a Swedish psychologist Peter-Paul Heinemann that is used in Latvia had recently been problematized by a new non-profit called “*Neklusē!* (“Don’t keep silent”) that amped up its activities during the summer I worked on the film. “*Neklusē!*” became our partner in promoting the film to highlight issues related to mobbing (mobings), self-perception and beauty

²²⁵ The girls were chosen by using the snow-balling method, but also by directly recruiting girls who had specific characteristics, for example, did not use internet or were influencers on the internet. Eventually 7 got portrayed in the film, while another 2 appeared in episodes, that included another girl whom we did not interview. The interview material was rich and covered such topics as self-identity, media use, health, friendship. As the film was not covered by the UCSF Ethics Board, the information I am referring to here is publicly available about the project either in the film itself or in the media materials about the film.

²²⁶ This does not mean that bullying did not exist in Soviet schools. I certainly recall behavior (on occasion my own) that would qualify as such towards some of my classmates. The issue has been addressed in the Soviet movie “The Scarecrow” (*Чучело/Chuchelo* 1984). However, bullying was not an issue that was ever addressed in my school in any public or meaningful way. Today’s children are certainly a lot more aware of and open about the issue, however, they still do not seem to receive enough support from their schools.

standards. I too gave interviews to several media outlets about the film, where I utilized the statistics on bullying to emphasize the pressures that Latvian teenagers experience. Despite my reservations about how numbers were utilized to position Latvia in the world, which I explored in the opening chapter of this dissertation, my argument was undoubtedly made stronger by the grim fact that Latvia ranked first among 37 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in terms of how much children and adolescents felt bullied. I interpreted the extraordinary prevalence of bullying as an indication that the psychological health of Latvian children was not being sufficiently addressed. I knew from my research on body-intensive parenting that there were parents who were engaged in purposeful work on fostering emotional well-being and self-confidence of their children. I wondered if such upbringing would provide tools for countering psychological violence and if being increasingly aware of bullying was a result of the growing self-awareness of Latvian children.

Chapters 2 and 5 of this dissertation showed the efforts of parents and parenting experts to foster psychological resilience of young children in opposition to what they saw as the harmful Soviet past that had been marked by institutionalization of early child-care and the lack of mother's milk. I demonstrated how this was achieved by a select group of body-intensive parents who kept their young children extremely close to their bodies. These bodies most often belonged to women, who breastfed the infants on demand and for longer than a year, cradled them either in the arms or in a baby-carrier and shared their sleep-space with them. The intensive investment in the bodily management of their children was expected to result in self-confidence and psychological well-being, which many of the parents feared they did not get from their own parents, who were hindered by the Soviet system of schedule or *tabula*-based care. The same interlocutors, however, also paid attention to musculoskeletal development of their children, which prioritized the ideal

of symmetry. I showed in Chapters 3 and 5 that even the parents who were basing their child-rearing on fostering the emotional well-being of their children through body-intensive care were taking the threats of bodily crookedness seriously, thus simultaneously challenging the norms and abiding by them. Yet, they added to the Latvians' anxieties about the future of their children in a novel way—it had become clear that the child could become not only physiologically but also emotionally traumatized. The norm of his deviation was shifting, and it was up to the parents to care intensely enough to rectify the situation.

The diagnosis of autism or autism spectrum provides an example where the notions of normativity are reinterpreted, and I would like to introduce it here to further elaborate the point I am making about the discrepancy between the attention paid to the physiological and mental issues in Latvia. Ieva, whom we met in the Chapter 4 as she was receiving unsolicited breastfeeding advice from her friend's mother, experienced the shifting of her own normative, as she pro-actively sought an autism spectrum diagnosis for her middle son. Before I embark on recounting Ieva's experiences, I need to provide a brief context for the complexity of the issue. Establishing a diagnosis of autism spectrum, which is classed among mental health issues in Latvia, is quite difficult, as there are few specialists who possess the expertise. Reliable statistics for the prevalence of autism as a condition are not available in Latvia because of the difficulty of diagnosing it. When I was in Latvia for my fieldwork in 2017 and 2018, a budding publicity campaign to change Latvians' ignorance of the diagnosis was underway. For example, an article stated that society lacks tolerance towards children with autism and urged for a change in such perceptions. The main message of the article was that there was no need to try to break or change autistic children (Balčūte 2017). They, as a TV-feature announced, with their capacity to tell the truth could be valuable to Latvia. The video portrayed a father of an autistic boy Rūdolfis who insisted that Latvia needed

decent (krietni)²²⁷ and proper (kārtīgi) people. He added: “But we don’t need to shape them according to entrenched criteria.” He alleged that the “slightly different outlook” of his son onto life was “even good” for Latvia’s future and added: “I think they [children with autism] will grow into solid Latvian patriots.” The language that the journalist or Rūdolf’s father used emphasized the moral decency of autistic children. Their uprightness in this case was to be found in the idiosyncrasies that simultaneously excluded them from the normative Latvian society.

Ieva recounted how her middle child Māris was diagnosed with childhood autism (bērnības autisms). Her quest for a diagnosis was triggered by a friend’s son’s diagnosis in Ireland and Māris’ acute discomfort in an institutional setting such as preschool (bērnu dārzs) or school. That Māris also prefers to speak English,²²⁸ even though he has never lived outside of Latvia, was another idiosyncrasy. The friend’s child’s diagnosis abroad was crucial for Ieva’s understanding of the condition. “I would have never thought of it by myself, because my children to me seem normal,” Ieva told me. The normalcy she described included Māris displaying emotions and liking being touched, which Ieva considered atypical behaviors for someone with autism. That Māris’s condition had developed unusually Ieva supposed, might have been because of their haptic way of parenting.

Ieva’s son’s inability to fit into an institutionalized setting set him apart from the norm. Before the diagnosis Māris was considered spoiled (izlaists) and badly brought up (neaudzināts) by his teachers. As Ieva was taking him to the Pediatric Hospital for diagnosis, she was not sure if she was more afraid that she was seeing a phantom diagnosis or that they would tell her that her

²²⁷ The adjective “krietns” does not have a direct translation into English. I can also mean “honest” or “upright,” but it does not denote a spatial term like my English translation.

²²⁸ There are children in Latvia who have spent parts of their lives abroad learning in schools with other languages, English most prominently. Even children who have never done so are exposed to a lot of English language through media, as there is a lot more content for children in English than in Latvian. There is anecdotal evidence from speech-therapists (logopēdi) that as more children speak English in Latvia, their native language is impacted, but it’s most pronounced with children with autism, according to what Ieva told me.

child had autism. If it had been the former, Ieva feared that people would tell her to stop imagining and that she “simply had spoiled children.” Ieva later experienced that autism was considered to be of the parent’s own making. She felt that she and her husband were considered to be the strange hippy-parents in the country-side where Ieva lived. She named other reasons that were typically attributed to failure in childrearing— “divorced parents,” “bad family” or “mom works too much.”

Ieva recalled that she had some of the similar anti-social traits as her son when she was young, but she says that nobody thought of her problems as a medical diagnosis: “I was simply the weird child from the country-side who was kept out of the kindergarten too long.” Even today people refer to Māris’ condition as “childhood autism” where she lives. Ieva has been told the following about her son’s diagnosis: “Oh, that’s what the children who are not sent to the preschool have.” Here the institutionalized structure such as preschool (*bērnū dārzs*) is imagined as providing the cure for the anti-social behavior of autistic children who need to be civilized by the institution. This line of reasoning is reminiscent of the fears around spoiling children by too much individualized corporeal care that I explored in Chapter 2. In that case contemporary parents sought specifically to undo an unfeeling type of parenting that was associated with the Soviet period and its institutions, while others, typically those of their parent generation, but also some younger friends and family — feared that such cuddling would lead to children being spoiled.

Given Māris’s condition, fitting him into the institutional settings was Ieva’s biggest challenge. She was scared that upon diagnosis, people would simply give up on them (*ka tas cilvēks mūs vienkārši norakstīs*) and would exclude her son from the regular course of life in Latvia. These fears were directly linked to how Ieva saw her child in relation to Latvian institutions, especially schools. Education in an institutional setting was difficult for Māris. His family doctor told Ieva somewhat flippantly that there was always the possibility of home-schooling, which in general

was not common practice in Latvia. Ieva interpreted this suggestion as the state-institution “giving up on them.” For a child diagnosed with lack of bodily symmetry, treatment, in the form of medical massage or healing gymnastics was fairly available, albeit it did not always result in any noticeable results like in Sabīne’s case in Chapter 5. A child with an autistic spectrum diagnosis like Māris did not have an easily accessible treatment plan. Despite the media campaign that portrayed Rūdolfis as decent and proper, an autistic child does not yet fit into the normative vision of the Latvian nation.

Children with emotional issues, those who are bullied, or those who commit suicide are also excluded from the dominant characterization of the decent Latvian. Both young athletes’ physical exams and children’s wellness exams focus to a significant degree on the external aesthetics of the upwardly oriented body. On the other hand, organizations such as “Neklusē,” which seek to reduce childhood bullying, and campaigns that aim to raise awareness about autism remind Latvians that a child's body, to use Ahmed’s analogy, is constantly realigned in space in reference to a norm which is always a moving target. By focusing exclusively on physiological imperfection, questions related to what encourages a Latvian child to take their own life at age nine are ignored, as are the myriad ways that deviation prevails and is part of life in Latvia.

I conclude this dissertation during a time when a submicroscopic infectious agent, which scientists have named Sars-CoV-2, is wreaking havoc all over the world. Many children have become ever-tighter bound to their homes and technological devices and in dyadic relation with a limited number of adults who may or may not be haptically oriented. At this precarious time, the story of a small post-Cold War European nation’s grappling with ideas about what constitutes normative childhood, seems especially pertinent. The ideas presented in “Crooked children,” like most childhood discourse, contain the potential for change. With uncertainty in Latvia about in-

person classroom instruction and the cancellation of landmark national events such as the 2020 Youth Song and Dance Festival, Latvian children's well-being is in the hands of parents now more than ever. Being aware of the various influences that make up raising a healthy child can, I believe, turn this challenging moment into an opportunity to address the discrepancy I have highlighted in the Epilogue between keeping an ever-eager eye out for physiological crookedness and valuing the emotional well-being of children in Latvia. And somewhere in this story the human touch, which has become fraught in new ways since COVID-19, is a reminder to reflect on the necessity for the kind of corporeal care that my grandmother learned from a Soviet infant massage instructor when I was a tiny baby.

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