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Broadcasting and national imagination in postcommunist Latvia: defining the nation, defining public television, by Jānis Juzefovičs, Bristol & Chicago, Intellect, 2017, 172 pp., \$50.00, ISBN 978-1-78320-691-9

Ever since the Ukraine crisis seized international news headlines in 2013, Latvian anxieties around the loyalty of its Russian-speaking population and Russia's intentions in the region reached new heights. The preceding years of internal dynamics did little to elevate mistrust. As the opening pages of the book remind us (9–13), the results of the parliamentary elections in 2011 and the preparation for the language referendum of 2012 contributed to public elevation of existing ethno-linguistic (media) cleavages. In this context of 'deep-seated rifts in the society and the polarized media preferences of both ethno-linguistic communities,' the task before Jānis Juzefovičs was to identify the 'attitudes and actions Latvian-speaking majority and Russian-speaking minority publics have taken as a response to the Latvian public television LTV as a nation-building project' (11, 131).

The focus on both publics allows the book to address a twofold challenge – the under-researched literature on media practices among Russian-speakers in the Baltic states and the dominance of macro-structural analyses of media transformations in central and eastern Europe (3–4). The claim to novelty of the present study, then, lies in its methodological approach. In this respect, the interested reader will be able to find a concise and reflexive description of Jānis Juzefovičs's focus groups and ethnographic family observations in the introductory chapter and appendices.

The proceeding chapter builds upon the works of authors such as Benedict Anderson and Philip Schlesinger to demonstrate the role of public broadcasters in the creation and demarcation of national unit(y). While Michael Billig's seminal work on 'banal nationalism' is discussed here, wider engagement with the scholarship on 'everyday nationhood' would have provided a valuable addition, considering the focus on audience agency. The second half of the chapter aptly surveys the Latvian media landscape and sketches a history of the Latvian public broadcaster Latvian Television (LTV) as a nation-building project based on the institutionalized 'raw material of national imagination' (that is, the Latvian language and culture) (27). Saliently, the concluding pages of this first chapter outline Albert Hirschman's theory of 'exit, voice and loyalty' (37–39). The framework

provides theoretical glue for the rest of the book, whereby Juzefovičs's notion of 'exit as voice' becomes particularly notable throughout. However, while the author makes a good case for the use of Hirschman's model, the discussion could have benefited from a more exhaustive consideration of its limitations and importantly, its rich alternatives in the study of consumer/citizen agency. Overall, while the model provides a useful heuristic tool, it sits somewhat uncomfortably in the context of a largely ethnographic study.

The remaining four chapters of the book unpack data collected by Jānis Juzefovičs during his time at the University of Westminster. The internal logic bringing together the diverse material lies with the LTV as 'national television' (Chapters 2 and 3) and 'festive television' (Chapters 4 and 5). While Chapter 1 outlined the largely theoretical–historical case for public broadcasters' role in shaping national communities, Chapter 2 provides an empirical glimpse into the workings of this relationship. Unsurprisingly, behind the common conception of LTV as 'national television,' the author finds 'completely reversed connotations' among the two ethno-linguistic groups of informants (43). Nonetheless, what unites the two audiences, contends Juzefovičs, is that through exit from LTV as 'a channel of communication for the government,' both can actively register their distrust toward political elites and the socio-economic reality over which they preside (52). Concurrently, he solidifies his notion that exit from the public broadcaster does not imply abandonment of the role of a citizen or disinterest toward national politics/news, noting the migratory tendencies toward commercial alternatives as well as other sources of information (58, 77). However, while Juzefovičs speaks of the 'citizen role' or 'exercise of citizenship' throughout the book (especially in the conclusion), the discussion would have been strengthened by a more explicit unpacking of the underlying criteria of citizenship in this context that otherwise remain largely indeterminate or scattered in the analysis.

Chapter 3 focuses on two prime-time news programs – *Panorāma* aired on LTV and *Vremya* on Pervyi (Baltiskii) Kanāl. Locating the roots of the two in the Soviet past, Juzefovičs notes the strong generational links Latvian-speakers have to *Panorāma* and Russian-speakers have to *Vremya*. However, the strong interest in local events across Russian-speaking generations (for instance, the popularity of *Latviiskoe Vremya*), leads Juzefovičs to conclude that Russian-speakers 'found ways to exercise citizenship outside the public television' (84). In the end, Juzefovičs notes that 'while language divides Latvian-speaking and Russian-speaking audiences in their viewing choices, it is their interest in the national life they have in common' (137). This civic interest appears to be strong enough to facilitate meeting points (such as on Latvian Independent Television, LNT) or to transform *Panorāma* into a symbolic resource even for Russian-speaking audiences (66–68). Unfortunately, as

one can observe in the country, the unifying interest around living room screens does not translate perfectly into meaningful everyday interactions outside the comforts of one's language.

Chapter 4 opens with an exploration of LTV as 'festive television,' looking specifically at the 'television-viewing rituals during New Year's Eve celebrations' and national celebrations more broadly (91). In respect to the observed popularity of New Year's Eve entertainment and long-running festive programming of transnational Russian television among both groups of respondents, the author asserts that 'it is also that part of the Soviet heritage that unites Latvian-speakers and Russian-speakers, and older generations in particular, in their shared search for nostalgic pleasures on television' (98). Thus, touching upon ever-expanding research on memories of socialism in the Baltic states, recently covered in a special issue of this journal (see *Journal of Baltic Studies* 47 (4)). Irrespective, Juzefovičs observes the re-entry into LTV of its non-loyal audiences, joining the midnight ritual of televised festive speeches by the Latvian political leadership. While Russian-speakers tend to enjoy the ritual twice – in line with Moscow time and later Latvian time – in the eyes of the author, their midnight return reaffirms their attachment to Latvia (91, 94–96). Overall, Juzefovičs shows that while the above festive ritual remains 'one of those rare moments when the nation comes together around television,' it is no longer exclusively around public television that it does so (91).

Chapter 5 continues with the exploration of LTV as 'festive television.' Juzefovičs shows that for many of his respondents hockey broadcasts and the *Eurovision Song Contest* become 'keywords' through which LTV7 and LTV1 are defined (121–122, 125–126). He shows how audiences that otherwise have little interest in the offerings of the public broadcaster rejoin it during the above moments, helping to smooth (albeit temporarily) the otherwise existing generational and ethno-linguistic divisions. In respect to the hockey team, *Dinamo Riga*, Juzefovičs even makes a bold statement that it 'has turned out to be one of the most successful national integration projects over the past 20 years' (124). With the fading success of the team over the last few years, however, we have seen the above achievement dwindling as well. Despite that, in postcommunist Latvia (as well as elsewhere), it appears that 'sports and music, contrary to news and politics, make national "we" around it [public television] possible' (14). At the same time, and rightfully so, Juzefovičs in the closing remarks of the study cautions us '[to] be careful not to mix the fact of togetherness with the fact of unity' (137).

While the author does retrospectively situate his study within the context of the Ukraine crisis throughout the book, the empirical data was collected between 2011 and 2012, and the direct

impact of the crisis on Latvian audiences and society can only be tacitly extrapolated from this work. Nevertheless, at the time of political preoccupation with hybrid and information warfare, the present book offers insights into postcommunist audiences on which interested reader can draw. The book is full of rich ethnographic data substantiating findings. It is what makes this book so interesting, even if at times fragmented in structure. The above review considered only some of the findings and I would encourage those interested in Latvian nation-building efforts as well as ethno-linguistic dynamics to take notice of Jānis Juzefovičs's contribution.

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