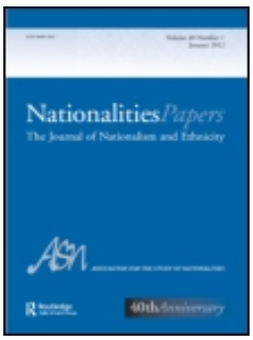

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Unruly actors: Latvian women of the Red Army in post-war historical memory

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This work highlights the case of Latvian women volunteers of the Red Army who worked and fought on the eastern fronts of World War II. An estimated 70,000–85,000 Latvians served in the Red Army, some as conscripts, others as volunteers. At least several hundred of those who volunteered were women. How are Latvian women volunteers of the Red Army represented and remembered in Soviet and post-Soviet historical accounts of World War II? Why have they not been remembered in most historical accounts of this period? How are ethnicity, gender, and associated social roles implicated in their historical marginality? These questions are situated in the context of literature on collective memory and microsociological literature on social roles, and used to develop the analytical concept of the unruly actor – historical actors who are challenges to dominant memory narratives because they fail to conform to normative social roles ascribed on the basis of, among others, gender and ethnicity. We use the case of Latvian women volunteers to articulate the argument that the marginality of some groups in dominant historical narratives can be understood in terms of their disruption of the historical "scene", which is configured to reflect a desired social order.

Keywords: Latvia; gender; World War II; historical narratives; social roles

Introduction

Latvian Red Army medic and sniper Ērika Hermīne Gaile died in a hospital behind the lines of battle in Maksatih, in the Tver Oblast of Central Russia, in December 1942. The memoirs of comrades in arms who survived the brutality of the first years on the Eastern Front indicate that she died of gangrene from poorly treated battle wounds. She was a recognized markswoman, earning, according to the frontline Latvian-language newspaper *Latvijas Strēlnieks* (*Latvian Rifleman*) a top ranking among snipers in the Latvian division in which she served.[1]

Gaile was a determined fighter, writing to a friend from a hospital bed in 1942,

> Soon I will be on my feet again. But if someday I had to fall in battle, I don't fear death, because I know – in our place will come a million [fighters], who will achieve what we did not. You don't know how much strength I have. It seems to me, that I am only now beginning to live. (Ūdre 1975, 209–210)

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After her death, she received the posthumous Soviet military medal "For Bravery". Born in the small Latvian city of Cēsis shortly before the establishment of an independent Latvian state in 1918, Ērika Hermīne Gaile was in her mid-20s when she volunteered for service and was killed in action (Vanags 1944, 85–86). Gaile was one of over 800,000 women who served in the Soviet Red Army in World War II (Campbell 1993, 302–323).[2] She was also one of a small contingent of ethnically Latvian women from Latvia – most very young, many from the working class or peasantry, few with much knowledge of the USSR or the Russian language, none with military experience – who volunteered for service in the Red Army early in World War II. These women, together with ethnically Latvian women living in the USSR before the war, as well as Russian and Jewish women from Latvia, formed a group which occupied a variety of positions, often within the Latvian divisions of the Red Army: a few, like Gaile, were snipers, others were trained as machine gunners, combat engineers (sappers), and radio operators. Many served in more traditionally female positions like nurses, doctors, medics, cooks, and laundresses.

Commenting on the seeming improbability of the large number of women in the Red Army, journalist Vera Kacena (*Padomju Latvijas Sieviete*, 1984, 4), who spent time at the front, noted that,

> Often I have heard people who cannot understand and are quite amazed about the fact that women were on the front lines in the first place. Why? Perhaps there is the impression that a woman on the front lines was something exceptional or extraordinary. The truth is that there were lots of girls wearing army uniforms. Each military unit, including the Latvian riflemen's brigade, which had thousands of troops, had a complicated "household structure", as they put it on the front lines.

Kacena goes on to describe the need for women's labor in a variety of roles, and notes that,

> If a long-distance artillery blast hit the laundry or the enemy's airplane dropped a bomb on it, the women who did this very peaceful work could perish just like the female doctors, nurses, medics, and radio operators who were closer to the front line. (p. 4)

This work highlights the case of Latvian women volunteers of the Red Army like Gaile and Kacena, who worked, fought, lived, and died on eastern battlefronts like Moscow and Staraya Rusa. The article examines the following questions: How are Latvian women volunteers of the Red Army represented and remembered in Soviet and post-Soviet historical accounts of World War II? Why have they *not* been remembered in most historical accounts of this period? How are ethnicity, gender, and social roles ascribed on the basis of these categories implicated in their historical marginality? These questions are situated in the context of academic literature on collective memory, as well as microsociological literature on social roles, and used to develop the key analytical concept of the *unruly actor*.

Dominant historical accounts of World War II from both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods shed little light on the motivations and experiences of this group of social actors. Soviet accounts long pushed female combatants to the margins of history, though, as this article will show, local institutional memory in the Soviet republic of Latvia elevated women veterans in a way that the overarching Soviet narrative of history did not. Importantly in either case, motives, when considered, were articulated in general, undifferentiated and ideologically driven categories that cast actors as moved to action by "hatred of fascists" or "Soviet patriotism" (Tumarkin 1994).

The dominant post-Soviet Latvian narrative of history, while restoring events and actors wiped from history by Soviet censors and ideological demands, has marginalized

the Latvian women volunteers of the Red Army as well. This inconvenient cadre of actors fails to fit the historically normative roles of both Latvians and women in World War II. Post-communist accounts of history have tended to dismiss them as traitors to the nation or ignore them entirely, erasing the imperative to seek motivations or examine experiences.

The micro-historical case of Latvian women volunteers in the Red Army in World War II is significant to the scholarly body of history on World War II, as well as more recent social science concerns with history and collective memory. While there is a small, but growing body of academic literature on the motivations and experiences of Russian women in the Red Army (see Cottam 1983; Pennington 1997, 2000, 2001; Conze and Fieseler 2000; Jahn 2002; Krylova 2010; Marwick and Cardona 2012), scholars have paid little attention in the post-Soviet period to non-Russian women volunteers in the Soviet military. This omission in the literature is significant because, as our findings suggest, motivations and experiences of non-Russian actors have not been fully captured in the Soviet or post-Soviet histories published to date.

This work also seeks to contribute to the academic conversation on collective memory. From the ocean of events both dramatic and banal that comprise the past, states, ethnic communities, and other powerful actors construct a narrative of national memory that is comprised of both "mentions" and "silences" (Trouillot 1995). In any society, the dominant narrative of history functions as an instrument of state legitimacy and historical rootedness. While collective memory should not be seen in exclusively instrumentalist terms, a sociological analysis cannot be ignorant of the function of hegemonic narratives in polities and societies (Levi-Strauss 1979; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Lowenthal 1985; Halbwachs 1992; Trouillot 1995). Commenting on a collection of case studies of collective memory, Olick (2003, 8) suggests that societies produce "ideas of what a normal past should look like, and [use] those images as ideals to strive for or denied rights to long for". This "normalization" of history can be achieved through the constitution of a narrative that selects actors and events consistent with contemporary needs and norms and excludes that which fails to fit. As Misztal (2003, 14) notes, "... the reconstruction of the past always depends on present day identities and contexts".

In most instrumentalist accounts of collective memory, a key function of collective memory is understood to be the legitimation of the state and, often by extension, its ruling class. In this work, we recognize this function, but seek to reach beyond it. We suggest that dominant narratives of history also function on a *microsociological* level, reflecting and reproducing normative social roles that are ascribed on the basis of, among others, gender and ethnicity.

We posit that *unruly actors* are *historical actors who are challenges to dominant memory narratives because they fail to conform to socially ascribed roles and norms*. Burke (1992, 45–50) writes that "One of sociology's most central concepts is that of 'social role', defined in terms of the patterns or norms of behavior expected from the occupant of a particular position in the social structure." Historians, he suggests, have made limited use of microsociological perspectives on social roles, like those offered by Erving Goffman. Briefly, in his elaboration of a "dramaturgy of everyday life", Goffman (1959) posits that social interaction can be likened to a stage performance in which individuals, or actors, seek to "define the situation" in a way favorable to themselves. In these performances, individuals enact roles, choosing an established "front" that lends itself to socially normative impression management. While Burke highlights the utility of a social role oriented perspective for understanding the actions of actors who have been given a prominent role in historical narratives (ranging from "royal favourites" in European courts to Churchill and Mussolini), we take this idea in an alternative

direction and draw on the social role concept to examine and explain the *marginality* of actors in dominant historical narratives.

We suggest that the marginality of some groups in dominant narratives of history can be understood in terms of their disruption of the historical "scene", which is configured to reflect and reproduce a social order that benefits politically and socially powerful groups or institutions in society. That is, expanding from Goffman's perspective, actors who fail to play their "fronts" in ways which conform to normative aspirations or expectations (such as those linked to gender or ethnicity) threaten the historical "impression management" of the state or nation. This position of threat underpins the marginality or absence of these unruly actors in hegemonic accounts of history.

Historical actors are, we suggest, selected by more powerful agents to participate in the dominant narrative of history, taking roles as "heroes", "victims", "collaborators", or the like. Those who have not played their social roles according to the normative script are left out of the scene. Latvian women of the Red Army are unruly actors in both the Soviet and post-Soviet narratives of history, failing to conform to the socially ascribed roles of women, of Latvians, and, even more fully, to the nexus of the two roles.

Unruly actors exercise agency in the events of the past, but their appearance in mainstream historical accounts is undermined by the lack of access to positions that would enable them to effectively create knowledge about themselves and their actions. This work is an effort to contribute to a fuller understanding of the silences of history using the case of one group of unruly actors who inhabit these marginal spaces in dominant narratives of history.

The article proceeds as follows. We begin with a brief overview of the sources used in this study and an outline of the historical case. Second, we discuss in three subsections the dominant historical narratives of the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, examining in particular the ways that they treat the case of Latvian women in the Red Army and considering the agency that these actors were able to exercise in the construction of a localized narrative of history in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Latvia. We conclude with a consideration of the significance of the concept of the unruly actor and the historical case.

Sources

The case of Latvian women's participation in the Red Army in World War II is an opportunity to examine a group of "unruly actors" whose place in mainstream history is marginal because it is a poor fit with the story told by the dominant historical narratives embraced, elevated, and reproduced by the USSR and, later, the post-Soviet Latvian state and institutions. In articulating this historical case, we draw on a wide range of source materials.

There exists a range of primary sources about the participation of Latvians on the side of the Soviet Union during World War II, few of which have been published. In the Latvian National Archive, materials filed in the "Historical Commission of the Great War of the Fatherland"[3] include documents or copies of documents related to Latvian military structures in the Red Army (orders, field reports, lists of personnel and participants in battles, lists of those who perished, were injured or were lost, information about the presentation of awards or the implementation of punishments), transcripts of interviews with soldiers, and a spectrum of diaries, drawings, photographs, and letters from across the ranks. There is ample evidence of women at war – portraits of women who received orders and medals, images of sniper training, pictures of nurses and doctors working in field hospitals, and scenes of soldiers dancing, playing sports, or attending concerts.[4]

We have made use these archival documents to assemble a historical portrait of our case study's subjects.

More specifically, our historical case relies on material from the Latvian National Archives that offers detailed information about the Latvian-language medical training school established for women in 1941 in the village of Tirlyany in the Bashkir ASSR (Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic).[5] This material contains information on many of the approximately 360 young women (18–30 years of age) who passed through this school in 1942–1943 and includes 70 autobiographical statements of various length and detail written, because of an acute shortage of paper, in ink in the narrow margins of Bashkir books that the women were able to acquire in their village. These writings offer a unique insight into the situations, motivations, and expectations of this group of actors, far from home and preparing for war. The genesis of the autobiographies is unclear; they may have been written in response to a demand by school or security authorities. While some of the expected rhetoric of a Soviet political vocabulary is present, it is secondary to the detailed life stories.

The project also draws on articles published in the news media, biographies, biographical chapters, and autobiographical fiction published by Latvian women during the Soviet period,[6] videotaped oral histories of male and female veterans collected in the post-Soviet period by the Museum of the Occupation in Riga,[7] and interviews with and the personal archive of a Latvian woman veteran of the Red Army collected in 2009–2012.[8] In addition to the case study in this article, the assembled material will form the basis for a broader historical monograph on Latvian women volunteers of the Red Army.

In gathering and reading material for this work, we follow Trouillot (1995) in attending to the content of dominant historical accounts and how it is presented and, as well, to the "silences" of history. This work is an attempt to further theorize and recognize the sources of those silences, with a particular focus on how expected "social roles" may influence the appearance or disappearance of groups of actors on the historical stage.

The case of Latvian women volunteers in the Red Army

When World War II broke out with the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939, Latvia was still an independent state. By the time war came to the USSR in the summer of 1941, Soviet forces had occupied Latvia. The first year of occupation, which began in June 1940, was brutal for many Latvians, particularly the intelligentsia, many of whom were arrested, deported, and killed by the new regime. The Nazi push into the USSR in mid-1941 replaced Soviet with German occupation, which lasted from July 1941 until October 1944. When Germans retreated, Soviet occupation returned. Broadly speaking, many Latvians saw the USSR as an enemy and occupier and welcomed, at least initially, the German army as liberators, though this "liberation" soon manifested itself as another brutal regime with no intention of restoring autonomy to Latvia.[9]

Latvians fought on both sides of the conflict: some volunteered, while others were pressed into service. Latvian soldiers fought one another in the service of conflicting imperial powers: on the Soviet side were those who saw the Germans, a "historical enemy" of Latvia, as the greater threat, while on the German side were those who saw the USSR as the more dire threat to Latvia and its independence (Vārpa 2006). In the Soviet period, the former were recognized as being on the "right" side of history and the latter were dismissed as fascists and criminals. In the post-Soviet period, the latter have been rehabilitated in mainstream history as anti-Soviet (not pro-German) fighters for the cause of independence and the former have been cast into the historical void as

traitors to the nation and collaborators with the Soviet occupation. It is the case of a segment of this group, Latvian women volunteers in the Red Army, which is the focus of this work.

By some estimates, 70,000–85,000 ethnic Latvians served in the Red Army in World War II.[10] Latvian units suffered enormous losses over the course of the war: for example, approximately 36% of the 130th Latvian Rifle Corps perished in battle (Bleiere et al. 2006, 329).[11] Latvians in the Red Army included those who had lived in independent interwar Latvia (1918–1940), as well as ethnic Latvians from the Soviet Union, many of whom were children of individuals who stayed in the USSR after World War I.

Existing descriptions of Latvian military units of the Red Army include the ethnicity, age, and social origins of soldiers. The breakdown of men and women in this group is not available, though the estimate of women in the Red Army as a whole is about 8% (Merridale 2006, 3). Data support the widely held assumption that there were at least several hundred women in Latvian military units. Literature and articles about the war that were published during the Soviet era presented an "army of women" as an inviolable component of the Latvian division (Grigulis 1945; Lācis 1947–48). The first post-war film made in Latvia, *Mājup ar uzvaru* (*Homeward with Victory*, 1947) told a story of Latvians fighting for the Red Army; one of the central characters in the film was a woman.

In the absence of comprehensive data, some demographic characteristics about Latvian women volunteers in the Red Army can be inferred from the detailed information available about students from the Latvian Republic who attended the only Latvian-language medical program in the USSR that trained nurses for battleground work during the war. The backgrounds and experiences of the 360 women who trained at Tirlyany in the Bashkir region of Russia proper are detailed in the Latvian National Archives. Women studied for four months at the school in Tirlyany. They received training in more than nursing, however; women also prepared for assignments as typists and even machine gunners. Most of the students at Tirlyany were ethnically Latvian (61%), while 17% were Jewish, 16% were Russian, and the rest were Polish, Belarusian, and Lithuanian. About 37% had finished six grades of schooling, 26% were high school graduates, and 26% had an incomplete high school education. Fully 11% of the future nurses had not completed elementary school, and fewer than 1% held a university degree.[12]

Research by a former front-line medic from Latvia highlights the broad spectrum of roles that women played in the Latvian divisions. According to data collected by Eva (Ieva) Vater, at least 111 Jewish women from Latvia served in the Soviet Army during World War II: of these, 12 were killed or disappeared, and another 11 suffered injury. Among the women, 67 had medical roles, 13 served in a company of machine gunners, 12 were on the front line as rank-and-file soldiers, 5 were radio operators, and 4 were translators. One of the women was a sniper, one a telephone operator, one a communications specialist, one a journalist, and one a typist. Six of the women were sent to enemy-occupied territory to join units of Soviet partisans (Vater 1998, 10, 33).

Women in the Latvian divisions can be split into two key categories. First, there were women who had evacuated to the territory of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) when the war began – ethnically Latvian women, as well as Jewish and Russian women from Latvia. Many of those who left the Latvian republic when the Nazis invaded feared German wrath and retribution: among those who fled were Jews, as well as those who had been a part of the nascent communist structures, whether highly placed or locally involved, of the occupied republic.[13] They may not have been the only ones who feared German occupation: Vārpa (2006, 461) writes that

> In the pre-war history school books, a notable chunk of disdain was reserved for the Latvian nation's historical enemy – Germany, which, up to the Second World War was enemy number one . . . Almost no one knew about the USSR gulags, about genocide against Latvians and other nationals living there. And in 1941, with little hesitation about the righteousness of their choice and its necessity, many Latvian young people and men took up arms to fight the Germans – the Hitlerites.

Latvians who evacuated from Soviet Latvia have written that everyday life and wartime conditions in Soviet Russia were shocking. The stories recorded by young women at the school in Tirlyany speak to the savagely difficult work they did on collective farms, repairing railroad tracks, or felling trees in the forests. The women wrote about being hungry and cold, their inability to find winter clothing, and their weakened health. The gravity of the situation is further highlighted by the stories told by women who were pregnant when they left Latvia. Many children were stillborn or died as infants.[14]

Upon learning of the establishment of the Latvian division, many of the evacuated women sought to join, believing, the historical record suggests, that being and fighting together with other Latvians was better than the struggles of daily life in Soviet Russia. The first commander of the 201st Latvian Riflemen's Division, Colonel Veikins (1965, 105–106), wrote in his memoirs,

> Women created much concern for us. Many more women wanted to join the division than we had room for. There were middle-aged women and very young girls. We hired them as medics, typists and bookkeepers, but we had to turn many of them down. Lots of women wept bitterly when it turned out that we were unable to do what they wanted us to do.

The presence of women in the Latvian division was legalized in September 1942 by the Council of People's Commissars of the Latvian SSR, which decreed that in order to free up men for battle, they should be replaced with women who were healthy, aged 18–35, and were "specialists" such as bookkeepers, seamstresses, cooks, kitchen workers, warehouse directors, hairdressers, radio operators, telegraph operators, draughtswomen, or printers.[15]

The second group was made up of Latvian women who had already been living in the RSFSR. The motivation of ethnic Latvians who had been living in Soviet Russia is notable for their link to ethnicity rather than Soviet patriotism. Latvians who were living in the Soviet Union before the war fell victim to Stalin's purges in great numbers in the late 1930s. Between December 1937 and November 1938, some 25,000 Latvians were arrested, and about three-quarters were immediately sentenced to death (Riekstiņš 2009, 61–62). Most adult Latvian men who were living in the Soviet Union were killed. Young Latvians who were mobilized for war had grown up in families that were repressed or in orphanages designated for "enemies of the people" and many hid their ethnicity. The establishment of the Latvian division was an indicator that Latvians in Soviet Russia no longer needed to fear that their ethnicity would make them a target of the Soviet state. Some of Soviet Russia's ethnic Latvians saw the military unit as a vehicle for forging new links with Latvia and other Latvians.[16]

News of the Latvian division was positively received among Latvians who found themselves in the Russian Republic at the beginning of the war. Some volunteers characterized it as an extension of their ethnic homeland, not just a military unit. Volunteer Zenta Ozola wrote in a letter to a friend,

> The division is my home . . . It is here that I have my only friends – people with whom I've slept in sandy trenches when German fire raged all around us. We rose up together to go into battle with the yell "For the Fatherland!" Just don't think that I'm being a romantic here. It's the absolute truth. (*Bērnība* 1962, 12)

On the occasion of the Summer Solstice of June 1942, Kacena (1951, 143) wrote,

> Last night I went to the river to wash myself and to pick some flowers . . . A group of soldiers came along the shoreline with wreaths of oak branches on their heads, quietly singing the Latvian Summer Solstice songs – I could not help but feel that we were at home.

Among the aspects of this divisional cohesion which appeared primarily in interviews and writings after 1991 is also the articulation of motivation: veterans of the Latvian division, both men and women, have suggested in written and oral histories that their division was "different" from other Red Army divisions. That is, in contrast to "Russian divisions", veterans indicated that there was good discipline, soldiers did not engage in plunder, and the motivation for fighting was to return to a Latvia freed from German occupation.

At the same time, individual interviews reveal a more personal side of the wartime experience, which also reflects some of the traumas of women's lives at the front. In these interviews, many of which are unpublished, veterans like Eva (Ieva) Vater recount chronic struggles with stomach maladies and lice, as well as stress-induced amenorrhea (lack of menstrual periods), though that condition at least enabled the women to avoid the search for hygienic products or even paper, which were in short supply. They talk about feelings of helplessness in the face of not only German army attacks, but also capricious accusations, arrests, and violence by Soviet authorities. Some women suggest that because they were very young when they volunteered (many were just 16–18 years old at the beginning of the war), they survived because they lived by instinct rather than analyzing the devastating situation around them. These stories have yet to find a place in the mainstream historical record.[17]

In the three sections that follow, we describe dominant narratives of the post-war USSR and the post-communist Latvian state and use them to examine the representation and marginality of Latvian women volunteers of the Red Army in historical accounts, highlighting their status as unruly actors who fail to conform to normative roles ascribed on the basis of gender and ethnicity. We also look at the post-war republic of Soviet Latvia and both the agency and limitations experienced by Latvian women veterans who sought to write their own historical narratives of the war experience.

The dominant Soviet narrative of history

The dominant Soviet narrative of World War II, told in countless books, films, television serials, classrooms, and commemorative events over nearly five decades of Soviet life, tells the story of Soviet sacrifice, courage, endurance, and triumph (Tumarkin 1994; Merridale 2006). Lehti, Jutila, and Jokisipila (2008, 403) characterize this narrative as follows:

> According to the heroic narrative of the war the Soviet Union rescued European civilization from the scourge of Nazism. After becoming a victim of unprovoked aggression by Hitler and his allies the Soviet Union came back from the brink of destruction and not only defeated the *Wehrmacht* but also liberated occupied Eastern and Central Europe. The Allied victory would not have been possible without the ultimate sacrifices of Soviet soldiers and citizens. The Great Patriotic War gave the world a shining example of the true Russian national character, a character that showed its best qualities under the extreme pressures of crisis, war and catastrophe.

The dominant narrative shaped a story of victory that was central to Soviet collective memory and identified a consistent cast of heroes, victims, leaders, and collaborators.

Soviet historical accounts long marginalized the women warriors of World War II. Arguably, the women of the front were pushed aside so that images of battlefront (male) heroism in the battle against Nazism would remain untainted, a process consistent

with a general tendency in wartime historical narratives to cast women as victims of events rather than autonomous actors (Scott 1999, 39). Paradoxically, while women's equality was a touchstone of Soviet ideology, women's battlefield presence was simultaneously an object of pride and shame. Women's participation at the front was an object of scorn in German propaganda, which suggested that Stalin had so little strength that he was even sending women to the front. Nazi occupation-era periodicals (among other cultural products) in Latvia drew sharp contrasts between family-oriented, traditional, maternal women and Soviet women, who were likened (unfavorably) to men, their womanly functions unfulfilled (Lazda 2006; Zellis 2007, 110–111).

Public accounts of women's battlefront activities during war were few and far between. Conze and Fieseler (2000, 211) note that

> *Rabotnica* [a magazine targeted to urban women] carried many articles on female soldiers and prominent heroines, but they always concentrated on outstanding individuals . . . At the same time the journal carefully avoided publishing a comprehensive account of women's activities in the front line, not to mention their actual experience.

In contrast to the (apparently anomalous) heroism of the woman warrior, women's victimhood in war, particularly their suffering at the hands of the demonized enemy, was a characteristic readily attributed to the group. Higgonet et al. (1987, 11) note that ". . . the victimization of women revealed their defenselessness and thus emphasized the importance of the male protective role . . ." In this respect, post-war history followed the themes of the propaganda disseminated during the war: an examination of the images of women in wartime posters reveal a tendency toward depictions like those of "a mother who had sent off her son to the front . . . defenseless women accompanied by children, or . . . victims of the German aggressors" (Conze and Fieseler 2000, 218).

Russian historian Nikonova (2005, 563–566) notes that immediately after the war, women's memories about the war were excluded from the official Soviet culture of commemoration. In July 1945, the deputy chairman of the Presidium of the Soviet Supreme Council, Mikhail Kalinin, recommended that demobilized women not start to brag about their achievements during the war (Fieseler 2002, 13). According to historian Elena Senyavskaya, attitudes toward women who served at the front lines were hostile in many parts of Soviet society. This particularly applied to snipers, whose function it was to kill others (*Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 4 May 2010).

Latvian historian Valdis Kuzmins suggests that women were marginal in dominant historical accounts of the front in part because "it was more difficult to make the stories ideal and attractive", not least because women's status in the military rendered them vulnerable to harassment and other forms of humiliation: as Merridale (2006, 7) remarks, ". . . no Soviet book on the war ever mentioned panic, self-mutilation, cowardice, or rape". Kuzmins notes that it was not uncommon for women to be bought, sold, and traded between officers at the front.[18] These included the "second wives" that some officers took at the front (317).

Some women sought to hide the fact that they fought in the war because of the pursuit of post-war normalization. This was facilitated by a new family law approved in July 1944 to elevate the institution of legally registered marriages and to launch a campaign favoring more conservative traditional roles for women. From this perspective, the key function for women was to take care of men who were coming home from war. Women were evaluated on the basis of femininity, beauty, and personal morality. The things women had done or seen on the front lines could not be reconciled with this discourse. Notably, women who had been to war were sometimes accused of fostering a decline in public moral norms (Chuikina 2002, 112–115; Fieseler 2002, 17).

Commenting on the post-war social climate, Tumarkin (1994, 100) points out that:

> *Kulturnost*, a phalanx of assumptions and rules about proper social conduct that in the twenties and thirties has applied mostly to physical hygiene and the most elementary kind of courtesy, was expanded after the war into a far more inclusive program designed to replace the disorder of wartime with proscribed social norms.

While her argument is not directly tied to the post-war gender regime, it points to the Soviet state's construction of public narratives – including, we suggest, the historical narrative – to condition normative social roles. Indeed, commenting on the relative modesty of post-war commemorations, Tumarkin (1994, 101) adds that "... the idea was not turn the war into a nonevent but rather to shape its public memory to suit the needs of the regime". While "needs of the regime" could be interpreted as relating to macrolevel legitimacy of "the socialist systems and its Supreme Leader" (Tumarkin 1994, 101), we suggest that the dominant historical narrative was also purged of the unruly actors who failed to conform to normative social roles ascribed to them by the state on the basis of characteristics like gender and ethnicity.

The elevation of traditionally feminine roles for women represented a return to the conservative roles of women that dominated state initiatives in regulating family life in the 1930s. Pennington (2000, 153) notes that "what was stressed in the post-war years were the new crucial roles for women ... motherhood and the labor force". Citing the work of McDonald, she adds that, "because war is traditionally defined as masculine, women in combat disrupt the social order by their very existence". The women warriors at the front did not fit the post-war narrative about women's social roles; their status as unruly actors, violating normative gender expectations, pushed them to the margins of history. While individual heroines or Soviet women as an undifferentiated mass might still be lauded, it would be decades before women's battlefront stories were integrated into the dominant narrative of history in the Soviet story of World War II.

Discussions about women on the front lines began anew during the Brezhnev era. In this period, the Soviet victory in the Great War of the Fatherland became a celebration of national importance, highlighting a culture of honoring veterans. The discourse of Women's Day on March 8 also was changed to include respect for women who had been on the front lines (Nikonova 2005, 571). Praise for the heroism of women, while still circumscribed, became a part of the carefully ordered depiction of the war. The discourse about the heroism of women at war that emerged during the Brezhnev era was encapsulated in historical monographs written by Vera Murmantseva (1971, 1979) in which women were shown as making fundamentally important contributions to the economy that underpinned the war, on the front lines, and in partisan activities.

The image of women on the front lines became more prominent in literature and film, albeit in a way that made those characters explicitly feminine and humane. In the 1970s, the film *At Dawn, It's Quiet Here* (1972), based on a story released in 1969 by the writer Boris Vasiliev, told the tale of a group of young women who serve in an artillery battalion and perish at the beginning of the war in an unequal match with German soldiers. The film offered a poetically sad image of a woman who is both a hero and a victim of war (Nikonova 2005, 572; Youngblood 2007, 165–166).

Notably, while ethnically Russian women slowly returned to the central Soviet narrative of World War II's battlefronts, reaching a pinnacle in the 1980s, there was limited space available in this narrative for the heroism of the USSR's ethnic minorities. Individual warriors of non-Russian ethnicity were occasionally present in the dominant Soviet narrative, but heroism was clearly a socially ascribed characteristic of Russians rather

than Latvians, Georgians, Armenians, or other small nationalities, though ethnic units were not uncommon in the Red Army's war effort.[19]

Arguably, then, Latvian women warriors' *ethnicity* also disqualified them from heroic recognition. Just as women were positioned by historical accounts in the role of victims to be rescued by the heroic Red Army, the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were positioned as the grateful recipients of Soviet liberation from fascism. In a study of the "cult of World War II in Russia", historian Tumarkin (1994, 41) quotes a song chosen for inclusion in the 1985 anniversary commemoration of World War II in Moscow: "The earth of many countries in Europe is drenched with the blood of the soldier-liberators, and a grateful humanity bows its head before them."

Heroism was not among the characteristics ascribed to the "grateful" humanity of Soviet republics "liberated" by the Red Army in a narrative that articulated categories of heroes, collaborators, and victims along lines that were ethnic as well as class-based (Tabuns 2001). A 2009 book on the "Latvian Riflemen" (Briežkalns 2009, 7), as Latvian fighters in the Red Army were known, laments the "disappearance" of these actors in post-Soviet Latvian history, though the author, a Latvian veteran of the Red Army, recognizes as well the marginality of their position in Soviet-era accounts of the war. Offering an overview of Soviet-era publications on the Latvian Riflemen, he notes that the single major work "not permeated by propaganda" encountered obstacles to publication, not least due to its title. Briežkalns (2009, 9) writes that, "[the author] had to travel to Moscow multiple times to fight for permission to include in the title of his book [*Latvian Formations of the Soviet Army at the Fronts of the Great Fatherland War*] the designation *Latvian* formations."[20]

Briežkalns relates in great detail the movements and exploits of the Latvian divisions of the Red Army, but fails to mention women in the divisions. A single photograph that features Latvian sniper Monika Meikšāne is included.

The dominant Soviet narrative of World War II history cannot be easily characterized, as its content and parameters were dynamic over time (Tumarkin 1994). We have sought to add to the scholarly conversation by attending to the silences of this narrative. The marginality of the actors highlighted in our case study can, we suggest, be articulated in terms of their position as unruly actors, that is, historical actors who fail to fit the social roles ascribed to them by the Soviet state, which exercised a monopoly on the public narrative of the past. If women's battlefront exploits were anathema to post-war "normalization" of gender roles and non-Russian Soviet nationalities were cast in the drama of Soviet history as grateful recipients of "liberation", then Latvian women volunteers, at the intersection of these marginalized categories of historical recognition, were set back in the silences of a dominant historical narrative that constructed and reinforced social roles within a larger structure of social control that emanated from the powerful center of the Soviet state.

In the next section of the paper, we look at the ways in which Latvian women veterans of the Red Army were represented in the republic-level historical narrative. While they exercised some agency in writing their experiences into historical accounts, the section will show that their stories were used by Soviet authorities to legitimate the larger narrative of "liberation" of the Baltics.

Women warriors in the historical narrative of Soviet Latvia

In contrast to the post-war Soviet narrative of World War II, in which the battlefront efforts of women and minority ethnic groups were pushed to the margins of history, Latvian women veterans acted as agents in the construction of a republic-level historical narrative

that offered them roles on the stage of historical remembrance. A number of women in Soviet Latvia who had served in the Red Army moved into the structures of the republic-level Communist Party after the war ended.

In post-war Soviet Latvia, historical accounts and commemorative articles on Latvian women's frontline experiences could be found in the local press. For instance, the women's magazine *Padomju Latvijas Sieviete* (*Soviet Latvian Woman*) and children's magazines such as *Bērnība* (*Childhood*), *Zīlīte* (*Little Bird*) and *Draugs* (*Friend*) were edited by women who had a connection to the Soviet war effort.[21] A number of women from the battlefronts established positions of prominence in the narrative of heroism that was in part constructed by women veterans in Soviet Latvia. For example, a 19-year-old Latvian volunteer, Zenta Ozola, who perished in battle in December 1942, became a symbol of Latvian women at war. According to published accounts, fellow soldiers admired her for her courage in treating injured men on the front lines during fierce battles. She was killed while serving as a war journalist for the frontline newspaper *Latvian Rifleman*.

After the war, Ozola's name appeared in articles about the war.[22] In a letter to a friend, dated 28 November 1942 and later printed in the children's magazine *Bērnība*, Ozola wrote,

> From the first day [of my service] I went into battle with the riflemen … In just a flash of time, I got used to everything – death all around me, the explosion of land mines and cannonballs … Medics who were my comrades were mowed down right next to me. I didn't raise my head, crawled from one to the next and bandaged up both strangers and those whom I knew .... (1962, 12)

A high school in Rīga, several Pioneer groups, and a ship were named after her, elevating her as something of an iconic local figure, at least among those who had sympathy for the communist regime. In 1958, members of her military unit found her grave in Russia and transported her remains to the Cemetery of the Brethren in Rīga (*Bērnība*, 1958).

Veteran Velta Spāre established a position from which to build a narrative of women's frontline exploits as a journalist at the daily newspaper *Padomju Jaunatne* (*Soviet Youth*) and a writer of autobiographical fiction. In *Zilā roze* (*The Blue Rose*), one of her books, the author's alter ego, Ilga Eglīte, joins the *Komsomol* (Communist Youth) and fervently hopes to join the war effort, only to spend the first two years far behind the lines in medical training. She relates the tale of her desperate wish to get to the front:

> How have I spent these years? Sixteen hours a day I listened to lectures. [Then] I ran away from the … hospital. I wandered lost for tens of kilometers until I found Gorohovets,[23] where I was at first turned away; [but] I deceived the young and, by the looks of him, angry, captain at an assignment point. I said that I have been separated from an echelon … The captain examined my documents (they were in order), waved me on, and that's how I got to the front. It was not fully right, but I'll account for that with the romantic notions of youth. (Spāre 1962, 100–101)

In another work, *Tirleānas meitenes* [*The Girls of Tirlyany*], Spāre's young female narrator exclaims: "The front – that is a holy word!" (1968, 119).

What accounts for the agency exercised by Latvian women veterans in the construction of a local narrative of World War II history? Why were Latvian women volunteers of the Red Army, who were unruly actors in the larger Soviet narrative of history, permitted more prominent roles on the stage of the republic-level historical story? The answer to these questions lies in the political priorities of the Soviet regime, which, arguably, trumped the social priorities that foresaw more conservative traditional roles for women in the post-war Soviet Union. The Soviet regime made active use of these women in the

Sovietization of Latvia, entrusting them with the leadership of the party cells of districts, parishes, institutions, schools, or organizations. Their stories were embedded in a larger political narrative of the Soviet "liberation" of Latvia from both the independent interwar "bourgeois" government that was replaced by a Soviet Latvian regime in mid-1940 and the scourge of German fascist occupation in 1945.

The depiction of Latvian women veterans in Soviet Latvian publications was homogenous and predictable: women were presented as heroines, their motivations articulated in the vocabulary of Soviet patriotism and pathos that defined the dominant Soviet narrative of history. For example, in *Zilā roze* (*The Blue Rose*), a work of autobiographical fiction, the narrator develops sympathy for a communist ideology that she believes offers an alternative for her poor rural family's struggles with landlessness and exploitation by bourgeois landowners:

> And what do I hear? From this day forward there will be equality between people . . . Everyone will have a job. Everyone will have land. There will be neither masters nor servants! ... Schoolchildren will study for free! That is hard to imagine, unbelievable as a dream . . . (Spāre 1960, 71)

When Eglīte goes to war as part of the powerful Red Army, she is fighting for the Soviet Latvian homeland, a place of refuge for those oppressed by the bourgeois politics and economics of the independent interwar Latvian state.

These stories share a style with the works studied by Marwick (2008, 405): writing on post-Stalinist memoirs of Russian women veterans, he notes that the memoir anthologies were "representative of a peculiarly Soviet form of autobiography designated in 1934 by N.K. Krupskaya . . . as 'collective memoirs' or 'sources of mass origin' . . ." Arguably, this memoir form marries two of Halbwachs' (1925) categories, autobiographical and collective memories, into a form that manifests as a personal story consciously embedded in the dominant narrative of history.[24]

Interestingly, there is a second discernible stream in the narrative about Latvian women veterans, this one a story that revolves around more stereotypically "womanly" concerns – that is, a woman's desire for love and a happy family. Veteran medic Olga Musina became a symbol in this regard. She was a member of the 43rd Guard Division and in 1943 she suffered injuries that led to the amputation of her hands and one of her feet. After the war, Musina was in a home for the disabled in Riga, when a fellow soldier looked her up. Later they got married and had two children (Kļava 1958; *Draugs*, 1965). A similar story is told by Ingrīda Sokolova (1973): of key importance in her autobiography is that her husband found her and took her home after she became disabled. While the romantic line in the narrative of female Soviet war veterans was not central, this narrative stream was a seamless fit with the larger post-war Soviet social narrative that foresaw the re-establishment of more "traditional" roles for women and men.

Women veterans in Soviet Latvia exercised agency in contributing to a historical narrative that offered them recognition. At the same time, the roles they played in the stories were consistent with the historical story of Soviet "liberation" of Latvia that the Soviet government constructed as a legitimating frame for its incorporation of Latvia into the USSR in August of 1940 and the re-establishment of Soviet Latvia in 1944. While Latvian women veterans participated in writing their own history in this local context, the Soviet state ultimately exercised control over the narrative content and purpose. As well, the vehicles of their historical presence were primarily women's and children's magazines and a small number of Latvian-language books, which were unlikely to represent a significant threat to the Soviet exercise of control over the telling of the past.

In the section below, we look at the shift from recognition to marginalization that takes place with the re-establishment of independence and the revision of dominant accounts of history.

The dominant post-Soviet Latvian narrative of history

With the end of the Soviet Union and the re-establishment of an independent Latvian state in 1991 came the fundamental transformation of the social order. The "normalization" (Eglitis 2002) of the present has entailed a "normalization" of the past that redraws history with a new calculus of remembering and forgetting.

The widely accepted idea that Soviet history was a false story – indeed, there was a powerful disjuncture between official discourse and lived experiences – has created a context in which there is a desire to purge Soviet historical narratives in Latvia, erasing that past and writing a new authentic history in its place. Rather than elevating the World War II past as one of triumph and liberation, post-Soviet history recasts the story in a powerfully contrasting light. Considering post-Soviet Baltic historical narratives more generally, Lehti, Jutila, and Jokisipila (2008, 407) suggest that the "whole history of this period is exclusively interpreted in terms of suffering and resistance."

Writing on the post-Soviet Estonian national narrative, which mirrors the Latvian narrative, Lehti, Jutila, and Jokisipila (2008, 407) note that

> In this ethnicized narrative, resistance is the only true Estonian virtue and everything else represents alien Russian culture. The active role of Estonians in [Soviet occupation] politics and culture is silenced, as well as the fact that ethnic Russians too were deported during the first [1940–41] occupation.

Ochman, who looks at the process of constructing a post-communist Polish narrative of history, has noted a comparable process. She writes that the "nationalization" of the past was achieved by "utilizing traditions of independence, referring to military victories and endorsing national martyrology, with the identity of the victim, collaborator, or oppressor defined along strict ethno-national lines" (2009, 393). Ochman's point is notable for its pertinence to the concept of unruly actors in post-communist narratives of history: if the identities of "victim, collaborator, or oppressor" are defined by ethnic group membership, then those who fail to play their historical roles according to the narrative script are shifted to the "silences" of history so that they do not disrupt the scene in ways that complicate and challenge the dominant narrative of history as told by more powerful agents.

Soviet-era historical accounts of the period of 1940–1941 were of one voice in the claim that "the working people offered the [Soviet Latvian] government unanimous support" (quoted in Žagars 1978; Buholcs 2003, 198). Historical evidence, however, suggests a carefully staged occupation scenario engineered by Soviet authorities rather than a spontaneous burst of revolutionary fervor on the part of Latvia's working people (Lumans 2006, 86–88). As such, the contemporary dominant narrative of Latvian history in the period of 1940–1941 is the story of the Soviet (more specifically, Russian) occupation of Latvia, which included the replacement of the independent national government of Latvia with a puppet regime installed by the Soviet authorities, the illegal incorporation of Latvia in to the Soviet Union, and the arrest, deportation, and political murder of thousands of Latvians, and the tragic loss of life as World War II came to Latvian territory (Pabriks and Purs 2001; Tabuns 2001, 82–87; Nollendorfs and Oberlander 2005). The roles of perpetrators and victims are rigidly sorted by ethnicity

and, as Lehti et al. point out, actions and events that fail to fit with ascribed positions in history are left aside.

The dominant post-Soviet Latvian narrative of World War history has largely taken a derisive position on the possibility of Latvian sympathies toward the Soviet Union, Soviet communism, or the Red Army, essentially marginalizing them as an invention of Soviet propaganda or categorizing such sympathies as anomalous, traitorous, or both.[25] The narrative has left little room for the calculus of risk that existed as Latvia's inhabitants, standing between the great powers of the USSR and Nazi Germany at the beginning of the war on the Eastern Front, had to choose which side to take: those who had reason to fear the Germans more than the Soviets, including but not limited to Jews and those who had links to Soviet Latvian structures, may or may not have had sympathy for the communist regime in Moscow, but they could not tolerate Nazi occupation. Latvians' service in the Red Army has tended to be seen as the outcome of forced mobilization: while many Latvians were, in fact, pressed into service against their wishes, the narrative leaves little room for telling the story of those who volunteered for the army, the front, and the battle with Nazi Germany.[26]

Clearly, ethnicity is central to the distribution of historical social roles in post-communism. Gender is pertinent to the story as well. One of the aspects of post-communist "normalization", particularly in the immediate aftermath of the failure of the Soviet order, was the widespread articulation of the idea that "Soviet-era asexualization of norms, roles, and behaviors was abnormal" (Eglitis 2002, 202). The *National Report on the Situation of Women* (1995, 10), produced in Latvia for the United Nations Conference on Women, for example, suggested that "destruction of individuality brought on by socialism generally led to the asexualization of behavioral norms, disdain for women and traditionally 'feminine' work, and ignorance of female characteristics." Arguably, the perceived post-communist imperative of sweeping into the dustbin of history the politics and practices of the Soviet period also entailed the rejection of associated gender norms and the embrace of more traditional gender roles, which were seen as closer to the norms and values of pre-occupation independent Latvia (Lazda 2006, 133). If dominant historical narratives reflect and reaffirm the normative social order of the present, then here too, the unruly Latvian women of the Red Army remain in the shadows, remembered, if at all, as deviants from gender and ethnic norms.

The position of women in the World War II narrative stands out more for its "silences" than its "mentions" and the quiet around Latvians (male or female) who volunteered for the Red Army ensures that female volunteers are marginal in the discourse. The few remaining Latvian female Red Army veterans were pensioners when Latvia regained its independence in the early 1990s. Given the economic situation that prevailed at that time, many were poor and the pension that they received from the state was not always enough to make ends meet.[27] Because of their age, poverty, and deeply diminished social status, there was little opportunity for them to contribute to the creation of a new narrative about the wartime era.

As the Soviet narrative of history was clearly and *overtly* harnessed to state power, there was a widespread assumption that history was propagandized. An important characteristic of the dominant post-Soviet historical narrative in Latvia is its veneration as authentic history. Corney (2004) identifies in early post-Soviet Russia a similar attempt to search out the "authentic" history repressed by the previous regime and to foster the "historical return of memory". We thus come back to the idea that historical narratives are built on the foundation of "mentions" and "silences", so what is treated as authentic history continues to silence those actors and events that cannot be reconciled to national self-understanding and, we suggest, normative social roles of different groups in society.

It is only very recently that the publication (*Divas*) *puses* [(*Two) Sides*] (2011) and a pair of edited wartime journals kept by a female volunteer, *Kājāmgājējs kara* [*A Foot Soldier at War*] (Kacena 2012) and *Balle beidzās pusnaktī* [*The Ball Ended at Midnight*] (Kacena 2013), have begun to introduce newly nuanced narratives of World War II into the mainstream historical canon in Latvia. These works suggests that a more complex historical narrative, which opens space to explore the silences of the past – including the experiences and complex motivations of Latvian volunteers in the Soviet army, is developing. Our goal in this work is to contribute to that narrative – and to an understanding of its slow and uneven evolution.

Conclusion

Hundreds of Latvian women – perhaps more – went to the front and many never returned. Just as there are few available figures on their deaths, injuries, or even numbers, there have been no comprehensive historical accounts of their lives, motivations, or experiences. They remain actors little unacknowledged in history's drama of war, complex figures reduced to anonymous places in Soviet mass history or labeled and cast aside as actors on the "wrong" side of history in the post-Soviet narrative. While ethnicity plays a central role in their marginality, gender is relevant as well: the nexus of the two renders them unruly actors who cannot be reconciled to the social roles ascribed to them by dominant historical narratives and whose social actions remain etched into the narrow margins of the story of World War II.

In the Soviet period, the ideological constitution of the dominant historical narrative was more apparent and transparent to both historians and consumers of history: historical narratives were overt servants to the legitimation of Soviet power. In the post-Soviet period, history purged of its "Soviet" elements is elevated largely as an authentic description of events that transpired. Alas, it too is a conscious rearrangement of actors and events that offers rootedness and legitimacy to a new historical and political order.

While Soviet and post-Soviet accounts of World War II history are dramatically different, they share a common cast of unruly actors: Latvian women of the Red Army are on the margins in both accounts. Their marginality deprives them, importantly, of agency: while the localized narrative of Soviet Latvia enabled this group of historical actors to claim representation in the story of World War II and the battle fronts, their stories were manipulated to legitimate Soviet occupation and the story of "liberation" of Latvia and emplotted in a larger Soviet narrative that smoothed details and disturbing information into a homogenized narrative of heroic history. In the dominant post-Soviet historical narrative, they are "invisible" (Briežkalns 2009), a threat to a revised and rewritten history that reclaims the mantle of truth, but silences the unruly actors who problematize neatly drawn categories that treat gender and ethnicity as categories predictive of social actions and dispositions in this historical period.

This work seeks to develop the foundation for a history that restores agency to these unruly actors who have inhabited the "silences" of the past and to position them back in the "mentions" of World War II history, not in spite of, but precisely because of their failure to conform to the expectations of gender and ethnicity imposed by dominant historical narratives.

The case is used as well to develop the broader analytical concept of *unruly actors*, defined as historical actors who are challenges to dominant memory narratives because they fail to conform to socially ascribed roles and norms. We suggest that this concept has the potential to stretch beyond the Latvian case to the discussion of cases in and beyond the post-communist region.

Within the region, Latvia's neighbor, Estonia, offers an example of the utility of the concept. Recent events surrounding the Bronze Soldier monument in Tallinn, the Estonian capital, highlight the problematic of the unruly actor on a smaller scale. The incident in question stemmed from the Estonian parliament's 2007 passage of legislation permitting the reburial of remains of soldiers killed in World War II. The legislation enabled the disinterment of 13 Red Army soldiers buried alongside the Bronze Soldier monument, which was erected to commemorate Soviet victory in World War II. The relocation of the monument in particular became a point of contention between the state and many Estonians on the one hand and some members of the Estonian Russian community on the other, with the former suggesting that the monument was an artifact of Soviet oppression and the latter arguing that the monument commemorated not only Red Army soldiers, but also Russian suffering in the war (Brüggemann and Kasekamp 2008).

Lehti, Jutila, and Jokisipila (2008, 398) note that the Bronze Soldier monument has clearly been interpreted by most Estonians as a symbol of the national tragedy of Soviet occupation. They add that it is widely believed that the model for the soldier was an Estonian Olympian and, as well, the sculptor and supervising architect were Estonians. The association of a sculpture symbolizing suffering with Estonians presents a problem they identify as follows:

> [If] previously the monument symbolized for many the Estonian genocide . . .[then] the situation would change drastically if the soldier were to be seen as an Estonian soldier in a Soviet uniform. This would fundamentally clash with the new heroic Estonian drama that identifies Estonian patriotism solely with the Estonian soldiers in the German Army and presents the Red Army as an inhuman and markedly non-Estonian occupier. Then, the Bronze Soldier would symbolize a traitor to his nation, and this kind of friction is just not allowed in the simplified national trajectory. (Lehti, Jutila, and Jokisipila 2008, 409)

As the quote above suggests, dominant historical accounts may assume and assign particular roles and actions on the basis of ethnicity (among other characteristics). Violation of ascribed characteristics disrupts the scene, creating "friction" in the telling of the past.

If we treat dominant historical narratives as stages with roles, settings, and scripts articulated by powerful agents in society, we can identify the historical actors selected to populate the stage, the roles they play, and the function of those roles in politics and society. We can also identify, with close scrutiny of the historical record, unruly actors who have exercised agency in history, but whose actions fail to fit with social roles ascribed on the basis of gender, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, or other factors. The concept of the unruly actor encourages researchers to examine how normative social roles are reflected and reproduced in dominant historical narratives and how actors who fail to conform to ascribed roles, like the Latvian women of the Red Army, are relegated to the silences of history.

Notes

1. According to *Latvijas Strēlnieks* (1942, January 1), women occupied three of the top five positions in the Latvian division in "snuffing out fascists".
2. Krylova (2010, 3) writes that over the course of the war, "520,000 Soviet women had served in the Red Army's regular troops and another 300,000 in combat and home front antiaircraft formations – a level of female participation far surpassing that in the British, American and German armed forces."
3. National Archives of Latvia, State Archives of Latvia, f. PA-301.
4. National Archives of Latvia, State Archives of Latvia, f. PA-301, Latvian State Archives of Audiovisual Documents, Special Collections of the 130th Latvian Riflemen Corpus.

5. National Archives of Latvia, State Archives of Latvia, f. PA-301, Latvian State Archives of Audiovisual Documents, Special Collections of the 130th Latvian Riflemen Corpus, State Archives of Latvia, f. 301, apr. 1, l. 122.
6. For example, see Sāre (1960), Avēkse (1960), Strautmane (1975), Sokolova (1977), Kūlis (1985), Zīle (1985) and Rukšāns (1985).
7. Museum of the Occupation in Riga, 2300/599-603 (Interview with Mirdza Austriņa, 13 January 2004), 2300/822-825 (Interview with Inese Spura, 18 March 2005), 2300-899 (Interview with Aleksandra Andreeva, 30 June 2005), 2300/1339, 1343 (Interview with Lidija Andersone, 9 March 2006).
8. Interview with Inese Spura, 12, 19, 26 January 2009, 18 July 2010, 24 August 2012. Interview with Irma Leščinska, 5 November 2010. Interview with Ieva (Eva) Vatere, 7 August 2012. See also Meimane (2012).
9. For a comprehensive treatment of this period, see Lumans (2006) and Bleiere et al. (2008).
10. On estimates of Latvian participation, see Bleiere et al. (2006), Briežkalns (2009), Neiburgs and Zelče (2011), Eglīte, Zelče, and Zellis (2012) and Žvinklis (2005).
11. The devastating losses were characteristic of the Soviet Army. Merridale (2006, 3) writes that, "[by] December 1941, six months into the conflict, the Red Army had lost four and a half million men [*sic*]."
12. National Archives of Latvia, State Archives of Latvia, f. 270, apr. 1, l. 390, 43–44.
13. Among Latvians were those who welcomed the end of the "bourgeois" interwar era and what they believed to be the beginning of a more socioeconomically just order: as a Latvian historian points out, "workers and those who had gotten land had no particular hatred toward the new power [holders]" (Vārpa 2006, 461). While the new Soviet Latvian regime would bloody its hands destroying political enemies, the bourgeoisie, and the kulaks [the rural bourgeoisie], the initial transfer of power and establishment of a new order was focused on the transformation of structures of power and instruments of socialization, such as schools and the press. Many of those who sympathized with the new order – or did not have any particular animus toward it – were still largely ignorant of its crimes (Briežkalns 2009, 8–9).
14. National Archives of Latvia, State Archives of Latvia, f. PA-301, apr. 1, l, p. 122.
15. National Archives of Latvia, State Archives of Latvia, f. PA-301, apr. 1, l, p. 122, apr. 4, l. 4, p. 48.
16. For example, see the oral life history recorded by Red Army veteran Russian Latvian Valdis Oldbergs for the Latvian Museum of the Occupation. OMF 2300/438-440 and a collection of memoirs by Latvians living in the Bashkir Republic (Rukšāns and Auns-Urālietis 1996).
17. Interview with Inese Spura, Riga, 26 January 2009; Interview with Ieva (Eva) Vater, 7 August 2012; Interview with Irma Leščinska, 5 November 2010; See also Ineta Meimane (2012).
18. Interview with Valdis Kuzmins, Latvian War Museum, Riga, May 2008.
19. Savchenko (1975, 10–11) writes that in November 1941, when the Soviet Union was facing an onerous military situation, the National Defence Committee created ethnic military units as part of the Red Army. Together, fully 5 riflemen's brigades and 20 cavalry divisions were established. The Red Army had 21 national riflemen's divisions, including 8 from Georgia, 5 from Armenia, 4 from Azerbaijan, 2 from Latvia, 2 from Estonia, and 1 from Lithuania.
20. The book to which Briežkalns (2009) refers was written by Savchenko and published in 1975.
21. It is worth noting that the majority of press outlets available to women veterans were at women's or children's magazines, which may have been seen by Soviet authorities as marginal cultural products.
22. See *Bērnība* (1947, nr. 3 (March), 9–10), Lašuka and Spura (1964, 443–455), *Draugs*, 1973, nr. 12 (December), 2–4, Eiduss (1973, 7–9) and *Padomju Latvijas Sieviete*, 1973, nr. 12 (December), 7.
23. Gorohovets was the home of the 201st Latvian Riflemen Division, later of the 43rd Guard Latvian Riflemen Division.
24. For example, see Kacena (1951); Rozentāls (1975); Ūdre (1982); Spura (1985); Grods (1985).
25. This narrative of historical events informs the exhibits on this period in the Latvian Museum of the Occupation in Riga.
26. By contrast, the dominant Russian-language narrative in Latvia has, particularly in the last decade, taken up the historical mantle of the Soviet period. The dominant historical account in the Russophone community, actively disseminated in publications and the press, closely reflects the account of history that highlighted Soviet "liberation" of the Baltics in World War II and marginalized both national formations and women of the Red Army (Zelče 2009).

27. Vera Kacena's diary [1960s–90s]. Museum of Literature and Music (Riga). Vera Kacena collection, Kac R 5/3.

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