Chapter 6
Latvian Migrants in Great Britain: 'The Great Departure', Transnational Identity and Long Distance Belonging

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6.1 Introduction

> *Only here did I come to understand that I love Latvia. Oh, yes! I live in Latvia, I am a Latvian, I have the sea, the forest, mushrooms and berries, and here I knew that it is my motherland, and the motherland is not to blame for what is happening there, because my motherland will always be my motherland. I can live anywhere.* [Māra, 60, living in Peterborough]

The analysis, argument and search for reasons generated by the issue of emigration over the past decade in Latvia has produced a series of competing explanations for this phenomenon in the public discourse, and they have replaced each other as time has passed. Initial accusations of betrayal and cowardice toward emigrants have changed into a pragmatic 'exit strategy' and claims that Latvian migrants were 'shameful losers' have turned into the belief that in fact, these people went to seek and create their own fortune. Along with this discursive shift however, the 'Great Departure', as it has been dubbed in the parlance of the Latvian media, has constantly signalled a perceptible level of national anxiety, as reflected in the political, media and scholarly agendas. This concern has echoed Johansen's (1997, p. 171) idea that at the subjective level, 'the nation is experienced as a magnified version of the family and the circle of close friends. Its territory is our 'home'; its people marked by a common 'character' much like the members of a family; its past is a 'heritage' passed down by our 'forefathers''. At this metaphorical and affective level, Latvian anxiety about emigrants seems quite natural, as emigration endangers the 'family hearth'. At the same time however, emigration also creates similarly

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upsetting emotions in the migrants themselves, because their symbolic baggage often contains nothing but uncertainty about their future – and whatever they have carried with them from their past.

Great Britain has become the main destination for new Latvian migrants, with some estimates suggesting that as many as 100,000 people from Latvia are living there (Beriņa-Apsīte 2013; Goldmanis 2015; Hazans 2011). Most moved to Britain during the past decade, particularly during the economic recession between 2008 and 2010. There are substantial groups of Latvian migrants concentrated in UK towns like Bradford, Peterborough, Northampton and Leicester but the community is nevertheless rather scattered and socially stratified along socio-economic lines (see McCollum et al. 2017).

Acknowledging significant differences between various segments of Latvian migrants in the UK, it is important not to ignore the unifying role of a kin state. In fact, the will to practice different forms of 'belonging to Latvia' rather than adaptation prospects to a host country binds Latvian migrants in the UK together as an imagined community. That is, Latvian migrants unintentionally stick together as a community of diasporic practices vis-à-vis their kin state. In other words, such a community of practice has a joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire. However, as Wenger (1998, p. 77) argues, not just unity, but also disagreements, challenges and competition may be an essential component of such communities; therefore 'a community of practice is neither a haven of togetherness nor an island insulated from political and social relations'. Moreover, the Brexit vote – while increasing ontological anxiety among Latvian migrants – has laid the ground for practices strengthening rather weakening the awareness of community.

Researchers have so far focused on structural analysis of Latvian migrants in Great Britain (Beriņa-Apsīte 2013), their contacts with friends and family members (King and Lulle 2015) and relations with their homeland and new host country within specific groups, such as highly qualified migrants (King et al. 2014), Russian-speaking migrants (Lulle and Hobeina 2017) and older female Latvian migrants (Lulle and King 2016). These studies have focused on the transnational, assimilation-related and return migration dimensions, often leaving aside more comprehensive descriptions and explanations of how rank and file Latvian migrants identify with their country of origin. To fill the empirical gap, this article sets out to explore migrant practices and the discourses of belonging. In particular, the author puts forward the argument that whilst living in Great Britain, migrants from Latvia have created a new meaning for the concept of ethno-cultural belonging. At the same time however, satisfaction with their living conditions and the process of embedding in the multi-cultural British environment, together with their progress along that journey, have simultaneously facilitated an identification with their homeland as well, thus strengthening alternative forms of long distance belonging.

6.2 Long Distance Belonging to Kin State

Belonging to a group is an analytical category that social scientists often translate into essentialist language. This creates a tendency to treat groups as substantial entities, or what Brubaker (2004) has called 'groupism'. This constructivist perspective challenges research that defines categories of 'nation' or 'diaspora' as *sui generis* or specific realities, and overlooks practices and discourses which actually elicit a sense of 'group' and 'belonging' to a group.

Certainly, the sense of long distance belonging to the country of origin manifests as a set of politically idiomatic claims and practices that strengthen ideas among migrants about the nation as the central axis of their identity. Students of nationhood usually contrast two prototypes: ethno-cultural and civic-territorial nationhood. The ethno-cultural approach is based on the idea that a nation is made of ethnic bloodlines, while the civic approach believes that the main foundation for identification is belonging to a specific territory and embracing a shared set of values rather than being part of an ethnic group. There are many possible ideological variations in these prototypes of nationhood, but the primary focus is on justifying solidarity and a sense of collective belonging, as well as defining the nation's symbolic boundaries. In this process of definition, ethno-cultural and civic interpretations of nationhood can be both exclusive and inclusive.

The diaspora as a framework for long distance belonging is first and foremost also a category of practice that is used so that migrants, members of the political elite and other groups in society can 'make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilise energies, to appeal to loyalties' (Brubaker 2006, p. 12). A decisive component of diasporic practices is orientation to a kin state that, among other things, prompts and reinforces the sense of long distance belonging. This sense can be triggered through a discourse which frames the migrants' intentions vis-à-vis the kin state and through a chosen acculturation strategy toward a host society (see van Oudenhoven et al. 2001). Likewise, the policies of the country of residence and country of origin also play a crucial role in shaping long distance belonging (Waterbury 2010).

Politically, belonging to a kin state often boils down to the long distance nationalism that became a mass phenomenon in the late nineteenth century, when the United States received a flood of European migrants (Anderson 1992; Glick Schiller 2005). The behaviour of the new immigrants was manifested not just as a sense of losing one's motherland and nostalgia, but also as a desire to maintain links with the country of origin and its culture. Long distance nationalism presumes that political motivations are the main reason why migrants maintain relationships with their countries of origin. Categorical and radical positions often creep into such relationships, because when individuals are away from their country, they do not have to accept the everyday compromises that are important for the residents of the country of origin. Anderson (1992, p. 12) has argued that there are even certain parallels between long distance nationalists and extremists, because 'they live their real politics long distance, without accountability'.

However, many manifestations of long distance belonging can be spotted only if we look at the migrants' practices beyond political relationships with a kin state and explore other socially demarcating and interactive fields where, in Bourdieuian terms (Bourdieu 1990), new stratification and power relations vis-à-vis a kin state are produced. In fact, the traditions and cultural artefacts of the country of origin often become more important practices of identification than political participation. Conversi (2012, p. 1366) argues that the most radical migrants tend to represent specifically that part of the diaspora that is de-traditionalised, alienated from its motherland and assimilated in the country of residence. The sense of a common culture does not always mean ethnic self-isolation of the diaspora. That is, diasporic cultural practices ultimately often mean a dialogue with the values, behavioural patterns and historical heritage of the land of residence. This places long distance belonging into the web of transnational relations.

Arguably, the transnational dimension of long distance belonging is more pronounced among the first generation of immigrants who are more likely to maintain strong ties with the country of origin but simultaneously feel an attachment to their host country. However, transnationalism is a conditional phenomenon that may appear in one practice of long distance belonging but be absent in another. By exploring the relation between mobility and local anchorage, Dahinden (2010) has outlined various ideal types of transnational relations that help illustrate the multifaceted nature of the migrants' transnational identity. Furthermore, through the example of Armenian migrants in Switzerland, Dahinden (2010, pp. 69–67) shows that those who nominally identify with the same ethno-cultural group can be associated with different types of transnational identity, e.g. localised diasporic transnationals or transnational outsiders.

In Latvian history, the most vivid example of politically motivated long distance belonging is the emigrant community established in Western countries after World War II. According to Appadurai (1996, p. 6), this community can be described as a 'diaspora of terror' because it emerged under dramatic and insecure circumstances. Emigrant Latvians used lobbying, picketing and publications to influence the political elite in their countries of residence and to remind the international community about the Soviet occupation of their homeland. The emigrant Latvians though were a fairly structured community, in which, over a longer period of time, differences in attitudes toward the homeland and the host country became more apparent. This also changed the nature of long distance belonging (Muižnieks 2009). Namely, after the collapse of the USSR Latvia experienced different migration practices, with political motivations being replaced by economic ones. After the restoration of Latvia's independence, the 'diaspora of terror' lost its legitimacy while new emigrants learned a different solidarity, that is described by Appadurai as a 'diaspora of hope' – of those seeking work and better socio-economic conditions in their lives. For Latvians living abroad, this changed the relationship with their country of origin. Relationships with the symbolic 'family' and 'home' not only changed but became branched, echoing Morley's (2000, p. 44) reflection that 'the issue of who can (literally) afford to sentimentalise the idea of the home, and the extent to which this can be done, will vary depending on socio-cultural and economic circumstances'.

During the transition period in Latvia in the 1990s, nationalism maintained an important ideological role in the formation of the Latvian nation. The definition of national consciousness and identity was based also on the ideas and considerations of emigrant Latvians who lived in exile before the collapse of the USSR. In post-Soviet Latvia, ethno-cultural nationalism helped to mobilise those residents who identified themselves with the indigenous nation of Latvians, simultaneously creating obstacles of identification for Russians and other ethnic minorities who were assimilated into the Russian-speaking environment during the Soviet era. Although Latvia's constitution speaks to a concept of *nation* ('tauta'), post-Soviet nationalism in Latvia was based on ethno-cultural rather than civic-territorial practices and discourses of nationhood, and these, albeit to a lesser extent, still dominate among Latvians.

This ethno-cultural belonging to the nation on the one hand, and the typically low level of trust of government institutions, low level of civic activity and declining political participation among Latvians on the other (see Ijabs 2014; Miezaine and Sīmane 2005) have served to create controversial pre-requisites for long distance belonging among young migrants. In other words, it has generated what seem to be two equally powerful emotions among young migrants: a strong sense of belonging and yet also a desire to distance themselves from their country of origin.

6.3 Methodology

The empirical material of this article is based on two data sets: *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey (see Mieriņa in this volume), and 20 semi-structured qualitative interviews. There were 4928 respondents from Great Britain who took part in *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey. This chapter, however, only focuses on the data subset that applies to Latvian migrants who travelled to Great Britain after 1991 (n = 4287). Descriptive analysis of the survey data is based on the SPSS data analysis programme.

The interviews with Latvian migrants in Great Britain were conducted in 2014, 2015 and 2018. The author interviewed migrants of various generations who had lived in the UK for no less than 3 years. The respondents lived in southern and central parts of Great Britain – Brighton, London, Huntingdon, Peterborough and Nottingham. The average length of interview was 90 min. Analysis of transcripts from the interviews was based on the NVivo qualitative analysis programme. The names of all interviewees in this chapter have been changed to protect their anonymity, though their true ages and places of residence at the time of the interview are stated.

Contextual information for the chapter also includes participant observation of the celebration of Latvian Independence Day on November 15, 2014 in Peterborough and on November 18 in London. It should however be emphasised that at the qualitative level the article focuses mostly on ethnic Latvian migrants in

Great Britain, without analysing the long distance belonging of Latvia's Russian-speaking migrants.[1]

The multifaceted data reveal structural parameters that define overlapping social fields or contexts where long distance belonging is meaningfully practiced in various ways. The further analysis of empirical data is organised so as to discuss the three most salient analytical contexts of long distance belonging among Latvian migrants: the ethno-cultural, political and social dimensions.

6.4 The Ethno-cultural Context

Cultural resources are a part of everyday consciousness, and people do not usually try to reflect that in discursive terms. As Morley (2000, p. 39) aptly puts it, 'the sense of national belonging is often inscribed in the taken-for-granted practices of everyday life – how you buy stamps in France as opposed to Poland; how you order a burger in Amsterdam as opposed to New York'. These self-evident routines cultivate a sense of national belonging and allow people to trust one another, thus making the activities of others more predictable. Giddens (1991, pp. 35–69) has argued that when such routines disappear or are threatened by other cultures, the individual's sense of ontological insecurity increases. That means that the influence of an alien or competing culture on this everyday level is of existential importance for migrants and for people in the nation-state migrants move to.

Latvian culture is an attractive factor that often makes Latvian emigrants in the UK view their country of origin in a positive light. For the purposes of this paper, the concept of culture includes explicit traditions and artefacts, as well as a certain set of values and behaviours which emigrants associate with Latvia and Latvians. References to Latvian culture as an important resource for identity are made quite often by Latvian emigrants in the stories they tell. In interviews, they admit that after a longer period of time living abroad, they have found additional motivation for being interested in Latvian culture and history. As one Latvian emigrant in Ireland admitted in previous research, only in Ireland did she 'become a Latvian' (Ķešāne 2011, p. 68). There are various reasons why the salience of Latvian culture increases. On one hand, the awareness of Latvian culture becomes a part of everyday lives, with Latvian migrants in Great Britain becoming involved in organised and co-ordinated cultural practices. This means taking part in folk dance groups, choirs and other ethno-cultural activities, where women are found more often than men. For instance, 37 year old Baiba is active in the social life of Latvians in Peterborough, and says this has deepened her interest in Latvian ornaments and ethnographic traditions, because 'here you cannot touch such things'.

[1] For more about Russian-speaking migrants from Latvia in Great Britain, see the chapter by Jurkāne-Hobein in this book, as well as King et al. (2014, pp. 29–31) and Lulle and Jurkane-Hobeina (2017).

> In Latvia you have everything – folk dance groups, choirs and everything else, but then you come here, and there is nothing. (..) In truth, this culture is very important to me, and when I lived in Latvia … well, it was not as important for me as when I lived abroad. Look [pointing to her bracelet] – here are all of these ornaments, and now I know what they mean.

Involvement in amateur groups helps form closer links to cultural events in Latvia, particularly ones such as the Latvian Song and Dance Festival, which mobilises a very large section of society. Māris, 43, has lived in London since 1997 and sings in a Latvian choir, and he believes the Song Festival helps otherwise passive choir members 'come together':

> When the Song Festival is approaching the choir gains new members; many people join up. Now [after the 2013 Song and Dance Festival] the choir is still on the same wave, because not many people have left, and that is lovely. It seemed that a year after the Song Festival, the desire of people to sing would disappear, but that hasn't happened.

Of course, when living outside Latvia such amateur work requires additional effort, but the benefits from such efforts include diasporic solidarity and opportunities for self-realisation. Nonetheless, amateur groups attract only a small segment of Latvian emigrants. Only 1.7% of respondents from the UK said in *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey that they were part of an amateur arts collective, which was far fewer than those taking part in other interest groups (such as sports teams, handicraft groups and others) or religious organisations, in which respectively 3.7% and 4.1% of respondents were involved. The desire among Latvian emigrants to maintain links to Latvia's cultural milieu is also seen in the comparatively high level of desire to attend Latvian theatrical performances in the UK (42.7%), as well as to see Latvian films (42.5%). The point is that it is much more likely that emigrants who have a strong sense of belonging will want to see Latvian theatrical productions, movies and art exhibitions.

Another practice of long distance belonging is the celebration of Latvian holidays. Summer Solstice on 23 June is a substantial tradition which is widely celebrated in Latvia as well as among Latvian migrants in the UK. This tradition marks Midsummer time by combining ancient folk traditions with contemporary rituals. *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey in 2014 found that during the previous 2 years, the majority of migrants (64.5%) in Great Britain had taken part in Summer Solstice celebrations. This was more common among ethnic Latvians (72.3%) than ethnic Russians (55.5%). Many emigrants do not have the chance to celebrate the holiday because it is often on a weekday, but despite these problems, interviewees spoke of visiting friends or lighting a Summer Solstice campfire. Photographs from respondents' family archives indicate that the Summer Solstice is celebrated with richly-set tables and a merry atmosphere, very much reminiscent of the way the holiday is celebrated in Latvia.

Arnis, a man in his early 50s, in Huntingdon, said:

> We celebrate the Solstice here in my garden. We have a flag, and we raise it. Look [pointing to a photograph], here I'm still wearing the Summer Solstice crown. My daughter took

> another picture that can be seen on Draugiem.lv.[2] Our neighbour Ramona was here with her family. I have to say that it was rather exotic for her. We put a crown on the head of Haldo [Ramona's son-in-law who is of Portuguese origin].

Anna, 31 and from London, said:

> We have a couple of guys called Jānis in our neighbourhood [the Summer Solstice in Latvia is also known as the Festival of Jānis]. One of them lives in Zone 3 or 4 [the areas of the city far from the centre] in London, but he has a fairly large garden, so we had a campfire and a table. All kinds of Latvians whom I did not know and their friends came together. Latvian music was played. It was an event.

Many respondents had heard of the traditional celebrations of the Summer Solstice at the Latvian property *Straumēni*, which is near Leicester and is owned by the *Daugavas Vanagi Foundation*, an NGO of the old Latvian emigrant diaspora who fled as refugees after World War II.[3] In recent years however, the largest event has been organised by the non-profit organization *Bērze Strazdi*, an NGO established by contemporary Latvians migrants living in Corby.[4] Still, most people in Great Britain celebrate the Summer Solstice with friends and family members, and only one-fifth have taken part in public events.

Celebrating the establishment of the Republic of Latvia on November 18, 1918, and other important historical events is also part of the ethno-cultural context of long distance belonging and, occasionally, it interacts with the rules pertaining to political context. In recent years, there have been many public celebrations in the UK marking Latvia's Independence Day on November 18. These have been organised by the Latvian Embassy in the UK and by emigrant communities. Guest artists from Latvia have been invited to take part. Observations in 2014 indicate that November 18 celebrations in a small town consolidate Latvian emigrants to a far greater extent than is the case, for instance, in London, where people know less about one another and are more alienated. In smaller, more compact towns, it is also easier for emigrants to recognise unifying cultural codes and behavioural patterns. Despite public events throughout Great Britain, however, November 18 celebrations mobilise only a small segment of emigrants. *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey reveals that one-quarter of respondents from the UK have celebrated the event in the past 2 years. November 18 is celebrated by 40.4% of Latvians and 3% of Russian-speaking respondents. An identical question in a survey in 2012 in Latvia found that 72% of respondents celebrated November 18 (Kaprāns and Saulītis 2017, p. 50) in the kin state. That points to the potential of Latvian Independence Day as a foundation around which migrants in the UK can consolidate their social networks in the future.

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[2] One of the most popular social networking sites in Latvia.

[3] Data from E. Apse-Beriņa (2013, p. 80) show that as many as 9% of surveyed respondents in Great Britain had at one point celebrated the Summer Solstice at *Straumēni*.

[4] The Summer Solstice celebration in 2012 at *Straumēni* was cancelled because of an insufficient response (Delfi 2012). In 2015, a major Summer Solstice celebration was organised in the Great Park of Rockingham Palace, with organisers claiming an attendance of 3782 people (Latviesiem 2015).

New traditions have begun to emerge in recent years, and the Latvian Embassy in Great Britain and representatives of the diaspora have worked together successfully in organising them. On May 3, 2015, for instance, Latvian Culture Days were held for the third time. Many amateur groups performed, and there was a crafts market. The event is organised to celebrate the date when the Supreme Council of Soviet Latvia voted to restore the country's independence on May 4, 1990, and that imbues the tradition with political as well as ethno-cultural importance. These events and others demonstrate the important role played by motivated people with good organisational abilities who want to celebrate significant national moments in places in the UK which are home to larger communities of Latvians.

Attitudes toward the Latvian language also reveal the role of long distance belonging among Latvian migrants, and this often brings together the ethno-cultural and political contexts. *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey of 2014 shows that only one-half of respondents in Great Britain speak Latvian at home. This sheds light on the transnational circumstances under which Latvian emigrants live, and it also points to the fairly high potential for assimilation. The survey, however, does not indicate a strong association between the emigrants' Latvian language skills and the amount of time they have spent in the UK. In general terms the Latvian language is still a powerful link between Latvian migrants and Latvia and its cultural space.[5]

The issue of language skills is rather different when it comes to the children of emigrants. For them assimilation is not merely possible, but almost certain. The survey shows that nearly one-third of respondents do not care whether their children speak Latvian. One finding is that the desire to teach the language to children so that they speak it freely is largely linked to the extent to which the parents have a sense of belonging to Latvia and its residents. There are also ethno-linguistic differences when it comes to this issue. It is far more important to ethnic Latvians to ensure that their children speak Latvian than it is to ethnic Russians from Latvia.

In interviews, Latvian emigrants say that their children adapt to the Anglophone world very quickly and sometimes even speak English in the family context, even if both parents are Latvians and speak Latvian to the children. The Latvian language, however, is of great importance to emigrants, and they are more likely to be critical about voluntary assimilation. At the same time, many parents do not try to force their children to learn Latvian. This is seen more as a symbolic link for this specific generation or as an individual choice, rather than a collective obligation toward the Latvian nation. It may also be that many Latvian emigrants who live in small towns and meet regularly with other Latvians in the UK are less worried about the language skills of their children, because they see no threat in this regard. *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey of 2014 reveals that those Latvian migrants indicating little concern over whether their children will be able to speak the language are

[5] Only 6.8% of Latvian parents surveyed sent their children to Latvian Saturday or Sunday schools where classes were taught in Latvian. Far more often, as far as parents are concerned, the language is taught through audio-visual materials (66.3%), teaching at home (40.5%) and reading books (56.6%).

also likely to have at least three close friends from Latvia living in the UK. Inta, who is 45, from Huntingdon, said:

> I had a Latvian friend from Boston who, for some reason or other, just detested Latvia. Everything for her was in English; she spoke to her son in English. I said to her: 'Sintija, why don't you speak Latvian to your son. You can teach the language to your child for free.' She replied: 'No, what has Latvia given to me?' [..] When she meets me, she mixes up Latvian and English words.

Arnis, in his late 20s and from London, said:

> I want to hear the Latvian language. Whenever I'm in Latvia, in Rīga, I hear the Latvian language, and that makes me happy. Perhaps I don't hear Latvian all the time, but when I do, it makes me happy, because that is a sense of home. That is my home, even though I am here.

Emigrants see Latvian culture not just as an important pillar for national identity or a link to Latvia, but also as a source of self-confidence and a positive identity that is occasionally involved in symbolic boundary-making. Māris, 43, who lives in London, says that this positive identity is manifested as respect *'toward those people whom I know in Latvia, whether they be artists, politicians or writers. [At such moments] I am proud to be a Latvian.'* At the same time, it is not just traditional or elite culture that inspires people. The same is true of ideas about the typical behaviour and work morality of Latvians, which emigrants mention as another positive element of Latvian identity and contrast themselves with British people in their vicinity, whom they critique on these grounds.

Pēteris, a 32 year old living in London, emphasises the professional characteristics of Latvians:

> In truth, Latvians are very hard-working and capable, because they have language skills. [..] I have only encountered positive people who say to me: 'You're from Latvia. Great! I want you to work for my team, because I know that you people do a lot of work'.

Traditions, recognisable behavioural patterns and the Latvian language are the 'anchors' that ensure that Latvian migrants see Latvia as their home. A substantial proportion of respondents in the UK (44.6%) say that a retained understanding of the Latvian language is of importance in terms of encouraging people to return to Latvia. Yet there are significant differences ($p < .001$) from the ethno-linguistic perspective. This is a very important or fairly important factor for 50.7% of Latvian respondents, but only 33.6% of Russian respondents. 'Home' also refers to an area that is filled with nostalgic memories and the desire to maintain clear and specific links with Latvia. This sentimental mood often appears in interviews, reminding us of the nation as a magnified version of the family. Simultaneously, this mood usually does not conflict with a sense of belonging to the UK.

Jana, 26 and living in London said:

> When I am here [in Latvia], I feel that I have come home. The truth is that before flights to other countries I do not feel very excited, but when I am travelling to Latvia, I am so excited that I can't even sleep. I don't know why. Perhaps it's because I know who is waiting for me. I always want to go to Latvia very, very much. When you go home for a two week holiday, the two weeks are super. It's a holiday: you simply know the country, and you have friends of some kind or other. It's great.

Māra, 60, in Peterborough:

> Only here did I come to understand that I love Latvia. Oh, yes! I live in Latvia, I am a Latvian, I have the sea, the forest, mushrooms and berries, and here I knew that it is my motherland, and the motherland is not to blame for what is happening there, because my motherland will always be my motherland. I can live anywhere.

Overall, this analysis suggests that the ethno-cultural context of long distance belonging emanates from the will of a specific group of Latvian migrants to preserve the relevant markers of their national identity while not closing themselves off to the social arena and values of their country of residence. Migrants in the UK often frame the strengthening of links with Latvian culture as an individual strategy, which may reduce the motivation to become involved in more organised and shared forms of ethno-cultural belonging. This individualised approach to Latvian culture enables a flexible balance between the solidarities of the UK and the national identity templates and affectivities inherited from Latvia. Moreover, a close and ever clearer link to the Latvian cultural space does not indicate that emigrants are eager to return to Latvia or protect their cultural heritage. Instead, it indicates the desire to strengthen their diasporic identity after they have decided to stay abroad for a longer period of time. Arguably, diverse participation in ethno-cultural practices allows a noticeable part of the Latvian migrants to adapt more easily to life in the UK, and simultaneously it is also an indicator of successful adaptation.

6.5 The Political Context

Practices related to the ideological convictions and political participation of Latvian migrants establish a foundation for the political context of long distance belonging, which helps form the political identity of migrants as well as their ideas about the kin state as a political entity. The political context is often embedded in the ethno-cultural context of long distance belonging yet analytically it is important to delineate this field, as it accumulates the migrants' intentions towards power relations and political hierarchies in the kin state.

Ķešāne (2011, p. 71) has argued that stories told by Latvian migrants 'include an explicit discourse of distrust. This is seen in contacts with fellow residents and civil servants in Latvia, as well as in terms of attitudes toward Latvia as such'.

Emigrants in the UK are indeed very critical of Latvia's government. In *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey more than half the respondents (61%) said they did not trust the government at all, rating it at the level of zero on a 10-point scale. The overwhelming majority of the UK respondents (84.5%) believe that Latvia's government is not interested in people like them, i.e., those who have migrated to Great Britain. Only 9.2% said they felt that politicians in Latvia are truly concerned about the situation of Latvians who live abroad. It is important to note that this critical attitude remains, irrespective of how long the respondent has lived in the UK, and that is an indication of the profound and fundamental nature of

the dissatisfaction. It must also be noted, however, that people who actually live in Latvia are also very critical of the government; as shown by an opinion survey in February 2016, where 75% were totally or mostly dissatisfied with the government's work (DNB Latvian Barometer 2016, p. 7).

From an ethno-linguistic perspective, negative attitudes toward the Latvian government vary significantly. Russian-speaking emigrants are much more critical than Latvian ones (Fig. 6.1). It must also be emphasised that a stronger sense of belonging among emigrants can be associated with lower levels of trust in the government: both those who feel a close link to Latvia and those who do not feel that link rate their trust in the government at zero (64.2% and 57% respectively). While acknowledging this common critical mood, it is nevertheless important to emphasise that attitudes toward the country as such – not just as a political but also an ethno-cultural and social entity – are far more positive among those respondents who feel closer links to Latvia and a stronger sense of belonging to the people of Latvia. Notably, according to *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey, 66% of

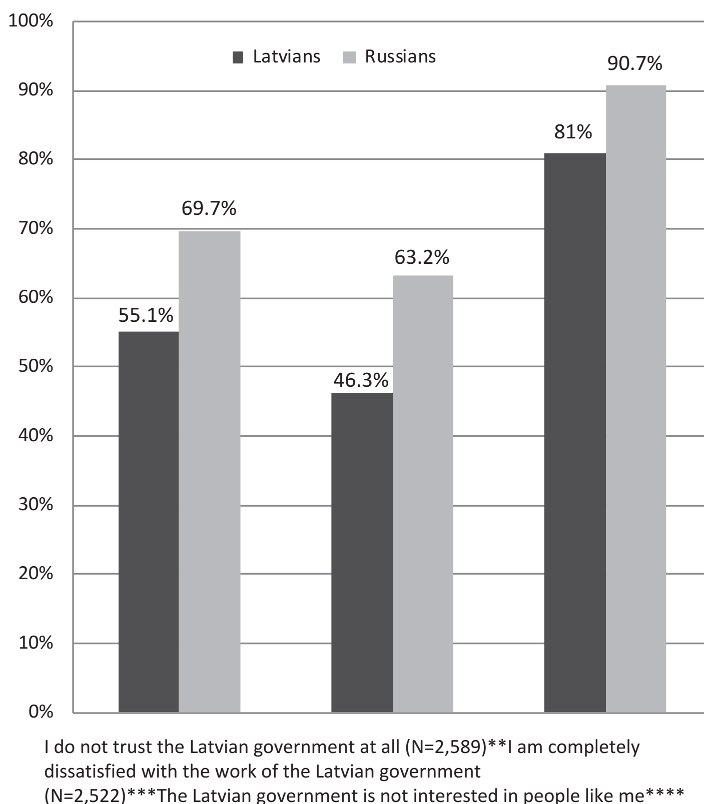

Fig. 6.1 Attitude towards the Latvian government. (Source: The author, based on *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey. Note: In all graphs the answers 'fully agree' and 'mostly agree' are merged together)

Latvian and 42% of Russian-speaking migrants in UK feel closely attached to Latvia. This alludes to significant differences on a generic level of long distance belonging between migrants from the two ethno-linguistic groups.

At the discourse level distrust of Latvian politics in general and in the government in particular makes emigrants who live in the UK similar to the majority of the kin state society. Many emigrants explain their negative attitude by making statements that are reflected in the Latvian media and in public opinion criticizing Latvian politicians.

According to the Central Elections Commission (CEC) of the Republic of Latvia, political participation among emigrants in Great Britain has increased over the past 10 years when it comes to parliamentary (Saeima) elections, reaching the highest level in the 2018 election (Fig. 6.2). Unfortunately, a difference between the number of registered and actual voters limits the possibility of calculating the level of political participation in the UK precisely. Data from *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey show that 22.5% (n = 2237) of respondents voted in the 2011 parliamentary election. Other evidence and methods of evaluation indicate that these

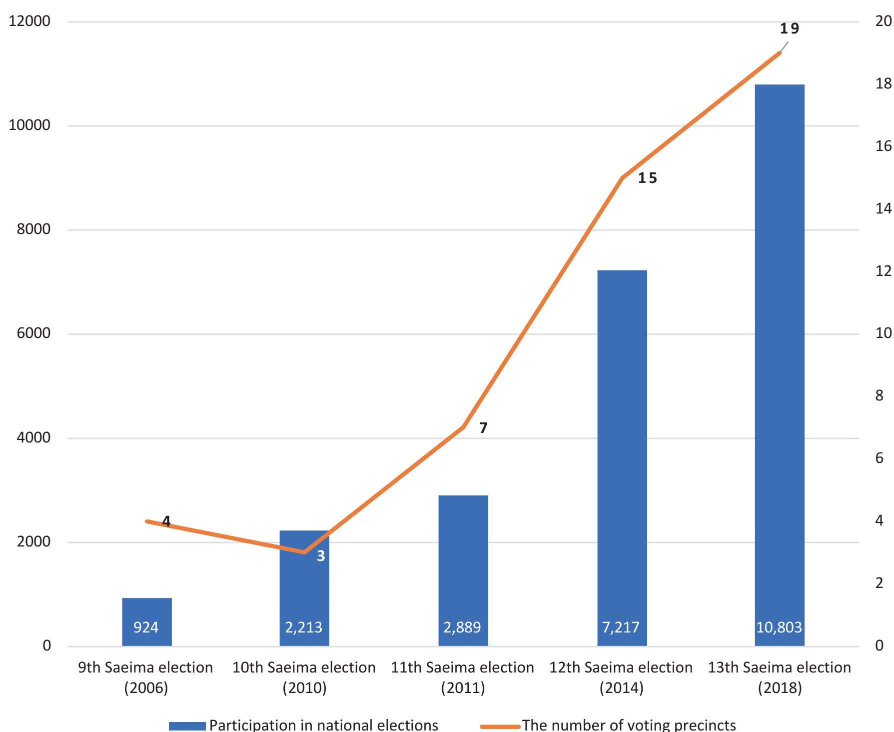

Fig. 6.2 The activity of voters in parliamentary elections registered in Great Britain and the number of voting precincts (Source: The author, based on the information provided by the Central Election Commission of Latvia 2018)

results might be a fairly accurate reflection of participation rates of Latvian migrants in parliamentary elections to date (see Lulle et al. 2015a, b, pp. 80–86).

Respondents who feel a greater sense of belonging to Latvia and its residents were more active in voting in parliamentary elections. Latvian and Russian respondents voted at more or less equal levels: 23.2% and 19.9% respectively. Although emigrants who were not satisfied with life in the UK were more active in voting in Latvian parliamentary elections, this factor was unlikely to prompt higher electoral activity. This is because, on average, there is a good level of satisfaction among emigrants with their living conditions in the UK.

Political apathy was among the reasons given when respondents reflected as to why they felt no motivation to vote in elections. Underlying factors explaining the political behaviour of the emigrants could be an objective or conscious distancing from events in Latvia, possibly affected by the distrust and critical attitudes mentioned earlier.

Eight new voting precincts for the 2014 parliament election increased voter participation in Great Britain by 37% (Fig. 6.2). It must be noted that voter activity also increased in previously established precincts (London, Bradford, *Straumēni*), which indicates not just a structural effect (more election precincts), but also increased political participation among Latvian migrants. In advance of parliamentary elections, there are often complaints that Latvian politicians do not do enough to mobilise voters who live abroad, and that is why turnout is so low. *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey found that only 9.2% of respondents in the UK thought that politicians in Latvia really cared about the situation of Latvia's citizens living abroad. Similar thoughts were expressed in several interviews in which emigrants also said they felt political parties showed very low levels of interest in them. At the same time, only 21.7% of respondents said they wanted to meet with Latvian politicians in the UK. Notably, those who wanted more political communication were twice as active in the 2014 election to the Saeima (the national parliament of Latvia) as those who did not. Hence one may argue that even if Latvian party campaigns were more focused on emigrants, the highest participation would still be observed among the most politically active emigrants.

If we analyse the choices of voters in Great Britain (Table 6.1), then we see that the most support during the last five Saeima elections was received by new parties or opposition parties. This shows that emigrants in the UK transform their criticisms of Latvia's government into real political activities, supporting parties for which the *modus operandi* is to criticise the governing parties for mistakes, including the mass emigration of Latvia's residents. The results of these political choices can be interpreted in terms of a certain segment of migrants as a vicious cycle of hopes and disappointments which, in the long term, have established frustration as the foundation of their thoughts and attitudes. The logic of disappointment and hope can be seen very well in terms of the political party *KPV LV*, which received the most votes in Great Britain during the Saeima election in 2018. The party's most vivid representative was the actor Artuss Kaimiņš, who for a long time has actively and purposefully worked with Latvian migrants, particularly in Great Britain. His political image was original and his campaign message constantly critical of the governing

Table 6.1 Political choices among voters in Great Britain

	9th Saeima election (2006)	10th Saeima election (2010)	11th Saeima election (2011)	12th Saeima election (2014)	13th Saeima election (2018)	Status before election
New Era	**186**					Opposition party
For the Fatherland and Freedom/ LNNK	132	268				Coalition party
People's Party	116					Coalition party
Green/Farmer Alliance	90	212	155	787	244	Coalition party
For Human Rights in a United Latvia	86					Opposition party
Harmony Centre/ Harmony	71	441	564	825	612	New party/ opposition party
First Party of Latvia/Latvia's Way	70					New party
For a Good Latvia		127				New party
Unity		**1047**	615	1916		New party/ coalition party
Zatlers Reform Party			**846**			New party
Everything for Latvia/For Fatherland & Freedom/LNNK			533	1253	517	New party/ coalition party
From the Heart for Latvia				289		New party
Latvian Alliance of Regions				**1990**		New party
KPV LV					**5681**	New party
For the Development					1112	New party
New Conservative Party					1005	New party
New Unity					415	Coalition party

Source: The author, based on the information provided by the Central Election Commission of Latvia (2018)
Note: This table shows the results of those parties that actually won seats in the Saeima

parties, perhaps chiming with the dominant mood among migrant voters and encouraging those who had not been politically active before to vote. Voters in the UK see Kaimiņš as a channel for their dissatisfaction with the political elite and their pessimism about Latvia's future. He was also seen as an opportunity to mock the political elite, as when emigrants admitted in interviews that they had voted for Kaimiņš, they often laughed. Yet, in the election, among all politicians Kaimiņš received the highest support from migrant voters.

Māra, 60, living in Peterborough:

> Guess who I voted for? Artuss! (laughs) [..] I simply don't understand why such people still work there [the Saeima]. Why are they there? I don't know. [..] But Artuss is like a thorn in the side of those people, I believe.

Among the UK respondents who feel close links to Latvia, one most often encounters migrants who left the country to improve their standard of living (50.6%), deal with financial difficulties (48.2%) or earn much more money (43.2%). Respondents who were encouraged to leave by social pessimism or uncertainty about Latvia's future (e.g. 'I see no future for myself and my children', or 'I don't like the processes and the political environment in Latvia' or 'I want to live in a stable and orderly country') were much less likely to demonstrate a sense of belonging to Latvia or its residents. Although both groups of respondents present the quintessence of 'push' factors for crisis migrants who left Latvia during the economic recession (McCollum et al. 2017), the survey data do suggest that closer links to Latvia are more often found among profoundly economic migrants, but less often among those who are inclined to see Latvia as a socially insecure and unpredictable country. This also indicates implicit dividing lines between moderate scepticism and fundamental pessimism with respect to the kin state, which helps better describe the contrasting electoral behaviour among Latvian migrants in the UK.

It is also important to take ethno-linguistic factors into account in voter choices. Latvians and Russian-speakers in the UK, as in Latvia, are likely to vote for different parties.

Overall, there are two competing strategies of long distance belonging when it comes to voters in Great Britain: one is revolutionary, the other is evolutionary. The former group wants cardinal changes to the political *status quo*, while the latter supports the existing political order even if critical of the governing political elite. There is a possible parallel to the types of political attitudes in relation to long distance nationalism defined by Glick-Schiller (2005, pp. 574–576), that the discourse of revolutionary migrants leans towards the idea of changing the political order, while evolutionary ones are more open to a discourse of participation. The revolutionaries see the existing political order as kleptocracy and a rule of injustice that is detrimental to Latvia. However, supporters of the revolutionary strategy are split on the ethno-linguistic basis. That is, dissatisfied ethnic Latvian migrants are more likely to identify with revolutionaries who represent the Latvian cultural space, while Russian speakers prefer those who identify themselves with Latvia's Russian-speaking community. This conclusion is in line with previous research that has ana-

lysed political splits among immigrants and the relevant and different manifestations of long distance nationalism (e.g., Jones 2014; Senay 2013).

Because of the low turnout of voters abroad, this chapter does not focus on the local government and European Parliament elections as manifestations of the political context of long distance belonging (Lulle et al. 2015a, b). It is important, however, to focus on referenda as an area of political activity. Emigrants from Latvia demonstrated unprecedented participation in the so-called 'language referendum' of February 18, 2012, with involvement equally high among Latvian and Russian-speaking voters.[6] From those who participated in this referendum, 12,020 voters in the UK voted against a proposal to make Russian a second official language in Latvia while 3972 voted in favour. The vote in Britain was at almost exactly the same proportions as in Latvia itself. The highest support for the proposal in terms of total votes in each precinct was registered in London (44.5%) and Bradford (41.8%) (Central Elections Commission 2018). The language referendum and its results in Great Britain clearly showed the powerful mobilising potential of Latvian ethno-cultural nationalism. Many emigrants vividly remember the referendum, talking about long queues and a particularly electrified atmosphere. Years after the referendum, many still speak with great emotion about this experience, like 32 year old Kristiāna, living in London:

> The queue at the precinct in London really was very, very long, and Dainis [the respondent's husband] and I thought about leaving it. Then we heard a few Russian-speaking citizens from Latvia yelling 'Down with the language of dogs, down with the language of dogs!' We were in that queue, and I said to Dainis: 'You know, no matter how cold it is and how long the queue is, I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to stand in the queue, and I'm going to cast my vote. [..] If that guy hadn't said what he said… well, something clicked in me to say 'No' to what he was saying.

Another emigrant in London was 42 year-old Māris:

> Something had to be done. It would have been impermissible for us not to participate, allowing someone else to make the decision in our place. In London, we had to stand in a very long queue for several hours, and it was very cold. [..] In a certain sense it was very moving though, in terms of such a large crowd of Latvians and Russians. There were emotions there, but for the most part people were very cosy, friendly and talkative.

Another aspect of the political context of long distance belonging is the desire to maintain citizenship in the country of origin which has become a pivotal issue for many Latvian migrants after the Brexit vote. Especially, as Lulle et al. (2017, p. 8) argue, this issue is relevant 'for those in stable jobs and/or relationships'. Amendments to Latvian citizenship law adopted in 2013 allowed dual citizenship for exiles forced to leave Latvia between June 17, 1940 and May 4, 1990 due to foreign occupation, and descendants born prior to October 1, 2014; ethnic Latvians or Livs, or emigrants living in Australia, Brazil, New Zealand, NATO, European Free Trade Association or European Union countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017). These citizenship amendments reflect the flight of Latvians to 'the West' at

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[6] For the political implications of the language referendum see Ijabs (2016).

the end of World War II as well as to recognize the reality of contemporary Latvian migration.

In interviews, Latvian emigrants said that the possibility of dual citizenship is another factor motivating them to apply for British citizenship after 5 years in Great Britain. It is not possible to determine the true proportion of dual citizens and trends in this area, because Latvian and British government institutions do not collect such data. Those in favour of dual citizenship mention factors such as social benefits in the country of residence, ease of travel, etc. Respondents also said that British citizenship would give them a greater sense of security when abroad. The introduction of dual citizenship has largely reduced the psychological tensions that existed when emigrants from Latvia had to choose between the instrumental and emotional forms of belonging (see Ķešāne 2011, p. 68). Some interviewees discussed obstacles that reduce their desire to apply for dual citizenship such as the relatively high cost and their insufficient English language skills. Yet, it is expected that as the proportion of people from Latvia who have lived in Great Britain for more than 5 years increases in the near future, there will also be greater interest in dual citizenship. This suggests that in the foreseeable future, a definite transnational identity will emerge among Latvian migrants based on dual citizenship, which is particularly strong among the Latvian diaspora in the UK. Moreover, a favourable socio-economic situation and personal achievements in the host country strengthen the transnational identity, i.e. satisfaction with living conditions is strongly associated with the sense of belonging not just to Latvia, but also the UK. Yet, according to *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey, the proportion of transnational migrants is comparatively small, with 24% of respondents feeling close links both to Latvia and Great Britain, and 21% feeling close links to the residents of both countries. Many respondents have apparently not yet developed sufficiently strong ties to their new country of residence and its society. Interview data collected in 2014 also show that Latvians still feel like immigrants even after many years in the UK and notice the growing negative mood about immigrants in the British political and media discourse partly triggered by the then-upcoming Brexit vote.

6.6 The Social Context

Alongside the ethno-cultural and political contexts that establish or strengthen links between Latvian migrants in Great Britain and their kin state, there are also practices that make sense from a mere social perspective in the context of long distance belonging. These are practices and discourses that assign social importance to the country of origin, as opposed to ethno-cultural or political significance.

An everyday practice in the social context is the desire of emigrants to be informed about events in Latvia, to maintain involvement in Latvia's information space and to use Latvian media outlets. An interest in what is happening in Latvia first and foremost confirms that emigrants do not want to break their social links to their country of origin and its residents. These links are equally strong among

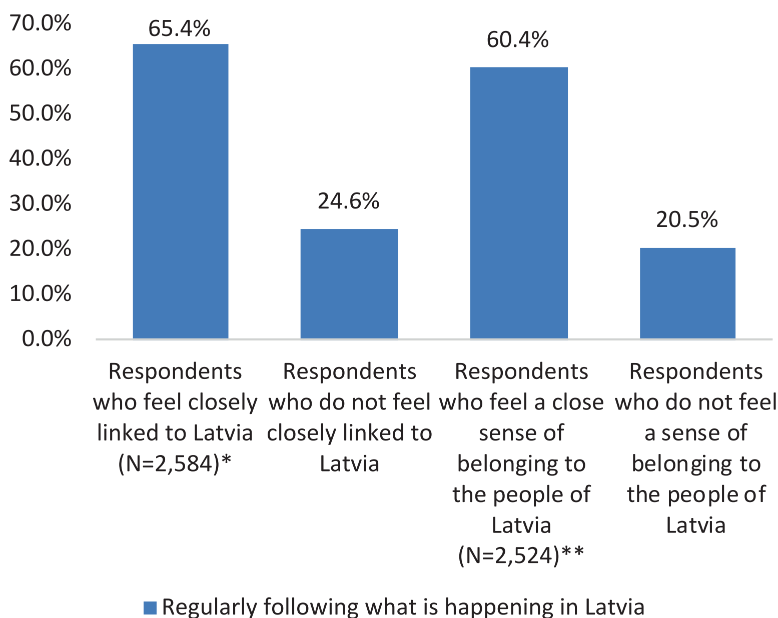

Fig. 6.3 Sense of belonging to Latvia among those who follow events in Latvia regularly (Source: The author, based on *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey)

Latvian and Russian-speaking migrants who regularly monitor what is happening back home (63.7% and 65.6% respectively). Remarkably, the amount of time spent in the UK does not generate significant differences in their willingness to follow events in Latvia. But data from *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey show that respondents who feel closely linked to Latvia and its residents are more likely ($p < .001$) to be regularly interested in what is happening in Latvia (Fig. 6.3). In terms of specific events, 23.5% of respondents regularly monitor cultural events in Latvia, though these are more likely to be Latvians (31.6%) and not Russian-speakers (12.7%). When it comes to sport, 79.8% of Latvians and 58.3% of Russophones are proud of their kin state if a Latvian athlete does well at international level. This suggests that the less *ethnicised* segments of Latvia's information space – sport and popular culture – appeal to both ethno-linguistic groups.

The availability of information is pivotal when it comes to Internet sites and other media that are the main source of information for Latvian migrants in Great Britain. Migrants who are regularly interested in things that are happening in Latvia most often use the largest Latvian Internet portals (Delfi, Tvnet) and social networking sites (Facebook, Draugiem.lv). The traditional and specialised media are thus more like peripheral sources of information, which is important in the context of regional identities or lifestyles. That by no means suggests, however, that emigrants do not use the content of the traditional media, as presented on the Internet. Interviews with emigrants show that media usage habits are based on the desire to maintain links with the country of origin, as well as on ideological beliefs.

Respondents in the UK do not express high levels of support for the idea of establishing a television channel addressed specifically to the diaspora. According to *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey, 39.3% would like to see a channel like this, while 32.7% feel that it is not necessary. The Latvian diaspora media which creates content for a dispersed emigrant segment in Great Britain also intends to increase availability, as it is a prerequisite for the sustainability of these media. For example, *Anglo-Baltic News*, one of the most visible Latvian press outlets published and distributed in the UK, admits that lack of proper IT solutions hamper its ambitions to be the largest and most prominent Latvian diaspora medium in Great Britain (Lulle et al. 2015a, b, p. 18).

Notably, regular mediated or direct interactions with a kin state in a broader perspective might strengthen the awareness of transnational identity. The 2014 survey data showed that 30% of the UK respondents had visited Latvia every half a year, but 50% did it more frequently. Regardless of the regularity with which one travels to the kin state, the emigrants keep in close contact with family or friends in Latvia: 72.6% call relatives or friends almost every day or at least once per week. In addition, 36.4% of respondents answered that they regularly – at least four times a year – provide financial support (remittances) to their relatives or friends in Latvia. This suggests that the transnational identity formation of Latvian emigrants oscillates between two ideal types, as proposed by Dahinden (2010): localised diasporic transnationals and localised mobile transnationals. While the former type is characterised by rather low physical mobility to Latvia but high anchorage in British everyday life, then the latter is based on high mobility but also high anchorage – both in the country of residence as well as in the country of origin. In line with these data though, the localised mobile transnational type remains more prominent among Latvian migrants.

A less common manifestation of the social context relates to charitable projects which Latvian emigrants in Great Britain have been using most actively in recent years. Kings and Lulle (Kings et al. 2014, pp. 27–29) have pointed to this in the past when studying young, highly qualified Latvian emigrants living in London. Philanthropic initiatives, however, are also seen in other socio-demographic groups, thus becoming a new social fact that describes Latvian migrants as a community. *The Emigrant Communities of Latvia* survey data show that charitable ideas gain much engagement among migrants in the UK: 45.4% of respondents in 2014 said that during the previous 12 months they had donated money in Latvia or in their country of residence to support an organisation or a specific goal. The data do not directly show the proportion of respondents who donated money specifically in Latvia, but they do show that the most active donors are those respondents who feel closely linked to Latvia and its residents. Those more likely to donate money are emigrants who have settled in Great Britain and lived there for many years.

Latvian migrants in Great Britain are involved in long-lasting and one-off charitable events. More durable projects include the ‘Giving for Latvia’ organization, which was established in 2009 by young Latvian professionals who were working in London. The aim of the project was to support children and adults in Latvia who had suffered emotional and physical violence, as well as those with problems of

age, disability or financial status.[7] The organisation's fundraising is based mostly on charitable parties and auctions. The 'Assistance Bank' that was established in 2014 in the UK is aimed at supporting residents of Latvia both in Latvia and in Great Britain with food, clothing, household items and furniture, as well as advice and consultations on handling documents.[8] The experience of *Ziedot.lv*, the largest charity organisation in Latvia, also shows that residents of Latvia who live in the United Kingdom are active donors, particularly when it comes to major charitable projects such as *Angels over Latvia*, *Charity Day* and *Schoolbag*. Donors from the UK and Ireland were also particularly responsive when funds were being collected to help the victims of the collapse of a supermarket in the Riga neighbourhood of Zolitūde in 2013.[9]

Apart from these co-ordinated initiatives, emigrants also donate money to specific people or locations in Latvia. In 2015, for instance, *Blackbirds of Bērze* organised a Summer Solstice party at Rockingham Castle to collect donations for Mareks Odumiņš (LA 2015), a disabled man living Latvia. Emigrants have also been increasingly involved in the internationally recognized *Shoebox* initiative each November when thousands of churches, groups and individual donors prepare and collect shoeboxes filled with toys, school supplies, personal items and other small gifts and send them to children. Inta and Māra from Peterborough, for instance, have been preparing Christmas gifts for poor families in the Ķekava Administrative District in Latvia for several years. Māra, who is 60 and lives in Peterborough, says:

> We do these charitable things, and we send gifts in shoeboxes. I have a box from Spain that I can't even lift. It's still at home. I know of a family with seven children – one a year old, one who is four, one five, 12, 15, 17. You take the gifts to Latvia and then at the Ķekava City Council [..] you look at what you can buy for a one year-old girl or a 12 year-old boy. If you can't think of anything, then you buy candy. Everyone eats candy, and the children will be happy. If they have nothing, then I think that they will be happy with anything. Last year we had 70 families. I offered everyone at work a chance to donate. The year before last there was great support.

The survey shows that both Latvians (45.3%) and Russian-speakers (45.5%) have been equally involved in donations, which shows that in the social context, the motivations of the two ethno-linguistic groups are similar; that is, helping people in Latvia. Respondents who have donated money have significant differences ($p < .001$) when it comes to other contexts of long distance belonging. For instance, donors are more likely to have voted in Saeima elections and taken part in November 18 celebrations. Arguably, the social context of long distance belonging among Latvian emigrants in Great Britain has closer interaction with a political context than with an ethno-cultural one.

While philanthropic initiatives involve various groups of Latvian migrants, highly qualified Latvians in the UK also seek more specific civic forms of supporting the development of Latvia. In particular, this applies to non-governmental

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[7] See www.givingforlatvia.com

[8] See 'Palīdzības banka' (n.d.) at www.draugiem.lv

[9] A telephone interview with Ziedot.lv communications director Ilze Ošāne, 23 July 2015.

efforts to advance Latvian investment projects and share professional experience with those who represent the Latvian business environment. The UK's Latvian Business Network is one example of socially motivated rather than politically or ethno-culturally motivated practices of long distance belonging. The network was formalised in 2015, and its goal, among others, is to help Latvian enterprises entering the UK market.[10] Yet another example of similar activity is the Latvian-British Chamber of Commerce. The chamber takes a more institutionalised approach to accomplish its mission to "encourage, promote and foster business interests and commercial relations between Latvia and the UK within the core fields of technology, innovation and SMEs" (Latvian-British Chamber of Commerce 2018).

6.7 Conclusions

In studying Pakistani communities in northern England, social anthropologist Pnina Werbner (2002) has argued that when it comes to the diaspora, there should be a conceptual split between an 'aesthetic community' and a 'moral community.' In an aesthetic community, the diasporic imagination is focused on popular culture and nostalgic rituals and ceremonies that relate to the country of origin. A de-politicised transnational diaspora embodies these in performative terms, demanding only that its members experience nothing but enjoyment and consumption of the flow of popular culture. In this identity project, as Werbner (2002, p. 12) notes, 'there is no sense [..] of a moral or politically grounded transnational subjectivity, of responsibility for another'.

As a moral community, in contrast, a diaspora accents co-responsibility and political attitudes toward events in the country of origin. Werbner's perspective can also be applied to Latvian emigrants in the UK, particularly focusing on the way in which emigrants express long distance belonging in the ethno-cultural, political and social contexts. Some diasporic practices are likely to be more prone to intertwine different contexts. For example, maintaining the symbolic value of the Latvian language or marking historical dates might be relevant both in terms of ethno-cultural and political relations. However, data analysed in this chapter indicate that it is important to keep these contexts apart, because they include different and often mutually exclusive motives of long distance belonging.

In the ethno-cultural context, ethnic Latvian migrants rediscover and strengthen links to the Latvian cultural space, its traditions and its collective schemes of self-understanding. Interaction with the Latvian cultural milieu in a direct or indirect way helps to maintain ideas about one's belonging to a broader and precisely limited collectivity. Explicit belonging to Latvian culture allows emigrants to emphasise the specificity and uniqueness of their identity, as opposed to the cosmopolitan and hybrid British cultural space. Participation in the practices of the Latvian cultural space such as teaching the Latvian language to children and upholding tradi-

[10] See the network's Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/UKLBusiness/?ref=br_rs

tions is mostly seen as another way to present oneself in everyday life in Great Britain, but not as a moral duty. For that reason, when it comes to the ethno-cultural context, Latvian emigrants see the diaspora first as an 'aesthetic community' that is brought together by individual and idiosyncratic choices to remain part of the Latvian cultural space while at the same time maintaining openness to transnational relationships and influences. Perhaps this also means that Latvian migrants want to distance themselves from the ethno-cultural nationalism that dominates in Latvia – nationalism that emphasises a collective duty toward culture, thus placing individual activities in a stricter normative framework. Simultaneously, however, the idea of belonging to a unique cultural world also represents symbolic capital (e.g. traditions, behavioural patterns) that allows Latvian emigrants to overcome the ontological insecurity that emerges when people spend a longer period of time and become embedded in British multi-culturalism. Among Russian-speaking emigrants, links to the Latvian cultural world are much weaker even though their sense of belonging to Latvia is still at a sufficiently high level. The absence of this symbolic capital and a naturally existing hybrid identity reduces barriers much more easily among Russian-speaking emigrants when it comes to becoming assimilated into British society.

The political context of long distance belonging reveals simmering distrust of the work of Latvia's government and overall disappointment among emigrants with Latvia's political elite, as well as political apathy. In a certain group of emigrants, this disappointment is so dramatic and durable that it facilitates an ongoing desire for revolutionary changes in Latvia's political system. Still, the critical attitude held by emigrants in the UK toward the kin state is a complex phenomenon that makes possible fairly diverse political manifestations of long distance nationalism. This is based both on different socio-economic experiences in the past, on differing understandings about the most appropriate political strategy to deal with problems in Latvia and differing relationships with the Latvian cultural space. It is also true that in terms of the political context, emigrants who live in the United Kingdom have new opportunities to influence the political reality in Latvia, as has been seen in the language referendum and in the regular successes of parties that are not part of the governing elite in parliamentary elections.

Finally, the social context of long distance belonging facilitates the emergence of new forms of allegiance towards Latvia. These are manifested in philanthropic initiatives, in participation in various interest groups and in regular interest about what is happening in Latvia. It is precisely the social context and, in part, the political context that are most open to Russian-speaking emigrants from Latvia who are otherwise isolated from the practices of the Latvian migrants. In recent years, Latvian migrants in the UK who have taken deeper root in that country have used the social context specifically to find new motivation to preserve and strengthen their links to their kin state. This form of belonging and interaction does not put the activities of emigrants into ethno-cultural or political frameworks but it does encourage moral responsibility toward the people of Latvia.

Belonging to various cultural milieus and political realities is becoming inevitable for migrants if they decide to stay in Great Britain for a longer period of time and

if they want to be satisfied with their quality of life, social relationships and self-realisation in their country of residence. Because the community of Latvian emigrants in the UK is still in formation, a transnational identity cannot yet be seen as the most common form of belonging, but this paper has emphasised evidence that speaks in favour of the increasing openness of emigrants toward transnational relationships, as opposed to conscious self-isolation.

This means that in future – perhaps over the next 10 years – the transnational identity of Latvian migrants will become a far more important factor, and that will re-define the contexts of long distance belonging analysed in this paper, instead creating new discourses and practices of belonging. To be sure, the political and social consequences of the Brexit vote will contribute to these transformative processes. Yet this turning point increases rather than decreases uncertainty as to which direction these changes will take in the particular context of long distance belonging.

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