

Dzenovska, Dace. 2018. "Emptiness and Its Futures: Staying and Leaving as Tactics of Life in Latvia", forthcoming in *Focaal: Journal of Anthropology*.

Emptiness and Its Futures: Staying and Leaving as Tactics of Life in Latvia

The proliferation of protest movements around the world in the time period following the global financial crisis of 2007-2009 generated hope among left-leaning scholars and activists that people's discontent was bigger than dissatisfaction with concrete governments in power, concrete policy measures, or corrupt politicians. It began to seem that a future different from the one inherent in the oppressive present was possible (Dzenovska & De Genova, this issue). In the midst of this proliferation of hope for a global spring, Latvia stood out. It stood out because of the depth of crisis—Latvia's GDP fell by 25% and unemployment reached 20% (Eihmanis, forthcoming: 14), the severity of austerity measures implemented in response to the crisis, and the lack of sustained protest with regard to both (Sommers & Hudson 2011, Sommers & Woolfson 2014, Eihmanis 2017). There were some protest activities, which culminated in a demonstration on January 13, 2009. At the outset, discontent pertained to austerity measures, but was quickly appropriated by the Society for Other Politics (a social liberal party that was a member of the party association Unity (*Vienotība*)) that blamed the financial crisis on the corruption of the oligarchs in power, thus diverting attention from economic policies. The protests lead to a change of government, with the incoming prime minister Valdis Dombrovskis (*Vienotība*) implementing an even harsher, if transparent, austerity agenda. As argued by Edgars Eihmanis (forthcoming), the new Latvian government was so eager to overachieve with regard to austerity measures that international institutions, usually thought of as propagators of a neoliberal agenda, urged the government to institute protection measures for the most vulnerable segments of the population.

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Some left-leaning intellectuals and public figures linked the lack of protest to migration. Latvia's residents, they thought, were "protesting with their feet". One told me in a casual conversation that "the only reason we have not had a revolution is because people have been able to leave" (see also Hudson & Summers 2011, Sippola 2013, Sommers & Woolfson 2014). Indeed, many of Latvia's residents were leaving to live and work abroad. Influenced by the post-Soviet liberalization of exit and entry, imaginaries of the West as a space of opportunity, and the poverty, inequality, and corruption that accompanied "postsocialist transition", they had been doing so with varying degrees of intensity ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The financial crisis introduced new dimensions, intensifying outmigration and diversifying reported reasons—in addition to leaving in search of work or higher pay, people also left to escape or repay debts that they had accumulated in the process of becoming proper capitalist subjects (Dzenovska 2018, Hazans 2015, Halawa 2015).

However, positing such a link between migration and politics is speculative and insufficient, as it tends to assume that people would have protested economic policies and austerity measures, had they stayed in Latvia. However, Edgars Eihmanis (forthcoming) argues that economic policies were not at the forefront of public discontent, because they had been marginalized in the Latvian political landscape, dominated by an ethnic divide between Russians and "Russian parties" and Latvians and "Latvian parties": Latvians vote for "Latvian parties", but are split over corruption, whereas Russians fairly uniformly vote for "Russian parties". As Eihmanis writes, "The established divisions over nationalism and corruption effectively distorted the political competition, allowing ethnically Latvian anti-corruption parties to pursue as radical economic policy as they preferred, with hardly any political cost (forthcoming: 27)." There may

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also be historical reasons for Latvian and Russian reluctance to object to neoliberal economic policies, such as the widespread belief in the utter failure of socialist economics and the conviction that there are no plausible alternatives to free-market capitalism.

The territorial logic that shapes the view that migration releases social tension and thus decreases the likelihood of political protest is also popular in scholarship. For example, a number of scholars have turned to adapted versions of Albert Hirschmann's "exit, voice and loyalty" model to explain the relationship between migration and politics in Eastern Europe and beyond (e.g. Sippola 2013, Woolfson 2014, see also Adnanes 2004, Ruget & Usmanalieva 2008, Ma 1993, Woolfson 2010, Woolfson et al. 2008, Pffaf & Kim 2003, Colomer 2000, Moses 2005, Hughes 2005, Meardi 2007).¹ It should be noted that Hirschmann's "simple hydraulic model", whereby "deterioration generates the pressure of discontent, which will be channelled into voice or exit; the more pressure escapes through exit, the less is available to foment voice", has been adapted since it was first formulated, but its heuristic value has been preserved (e.g. Hirschmann 1993: 176). However, the model's heuristic value can only be preserved if one conceives of modes of power in relation to which particular forms of action gain meaning within the territorial logic of the state (Hoffman 2008, see also Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2002). This seems analytically insufficient in conditions when it is widely recognized that people's lives are shaped by multi-territorial and multi-scalar forces, with states serving as connectors of power rather than—or, in addition to being—containers of power (Jessop 2002: 108, Ong 2000, Sassen 1996, Brown 2011, Harvey 2003). While it may well be that people's discontent tends to be oriented towards national governments in conditions when democratic representation is

¹ See, for example, this new project: <https://exitandvoice.com/>

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territorialized within the nation-state model, it should not, however, be reproduced in scholarship that seeks to understand the political as a "wider field of contingency and struggle that exceeds established regimes of "politics"" (Dzenovska & De Genova, this issue, see also Mouffe 2005).

In this article, I analyse the interplay of leaving and staying in contemporary Latvia as tactics of life that have emerged in the context of post-Soviet capitalism. I analyse leaving and staying as actions in relation to multi-scalar and multi-territorial forms of power, and, in doing so, seek to re-territorialize thinking about the political in the context of migration (see also Graw & Schielke 2012, Lucht 2012). For example, I argue that one must allow for the seemingly paradoxical possibility that leaving might be a form of staying: when someone emigrates to find work, this may signify leaving a particular state, yet remaining beholden to contemporary forms of capitalism. Moreover, physical movement in space can also be a temporal practice—for example, pursuit of existential mobility, of a life worth living (Hage 2009). Thus, in addition to rethinking the spatial configurations of power in relation to which staying or leaving gain meaning, I also seek to reflect on the temporal orientations that can be discerned in people's practices of moving or staying.

The focus on both spatial and temporal configurations of power and action enables me to consider the relationship between mobility, politics, and the political in line with the questions posed by the editors of this theme section (Dzenovska & De Genova, this issue). If power is multi-scalar and multi-territorial, then how can one think of objects of protest that different movements or acts of protest assume (e.g. Krastev 2014)? What is that object in relation to which particular forms of action—for example, leaving, staying, or protesting—gain

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political traction? Viewing leaving, staying, or protesting through the territorial logic of the state that underlines conventional notions of politics overlooks their meaning in relation to the logic of capital that is not territorially confined and therefore, I suggest, overlooks their relation to the political. If, however, one reconceives territorialized politics as a re-territorialized political in relation to both economic and political power, another view becomes possible. For example, leaving, which some may perceive as a political action in relation to the territorial state that people leave, may also be seen as an apolitical action that partakes in spatially resolving, if temporarily, capitalism's inherent crisis (Harvey 2003, Jessop 2006). In turn, staying, the least political of actions according to the "exit, voice, and loyalty" framework, might open space for the political in the form of maintaining the future as a little bit more of the present in conditions when capitalism creates favourable conditions for leaving (Ringel 2014).

Emptiness and ruination

As I conducted fieldwork in rural Latvia from 2010 until 2012, many people talked about the emptying countryside.² During this period of post-crisis austerity, talk of emptiness and its

² As stories of emptiness began to circulate in the media space, some media outlets, mainly the mainstream liberal media, tried to counter these "negative stories" with positive ones. The need for positive news was reinforced by arguments that Russian propaganda perpetuates negative stories about Latvia, and that therefore the task of Latvian journalism is to counter them (see Sprinģe 2017). As a result, there began to appear stories about people who were returning, after having realized that they have to take active part in making their own futures. For example, the main Latvian news portal recently ran a story about new families returning to

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futures dominated many conversations and took on special urgency, even a tone of despair.

People across Latvia's cities, towns and villages reported that social life had broken down, that there were less children in schools, that the streets of many of Latvia's cities were notably emptier than they used to be, that it was difficult to find someone to fix your roof. However, the emptying of the countryside was not caused by the crisis alone, or by post-EU accession migration, for that matter. It was a process of long duration shaped by the de-industrialization of the countryside following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent forms of post-Soviet agrarian capitalism that could not absorb the left-over labour, and "fixed" its impending crisis by expelling surplus labour to territories of other states (Jessop 2006, Harvey 2003, Dzenovska n.d.). The majority of those who remained living in the countryside combined a variety of subsistence strategies. Husbands of local school teachers with meagre salaries worked as long-distance truck drivers. Many people engaged in some form of subsistence agriculture, though very few sold their produce for profit, largely due to insufficient access to markets (see Annist 2014). Quite a few received some European Union subsidies, if only for a cleared meadow that they owned as a result of reclaimed property. Many received social support, though local governments continuously claimed that support payments that have degraded people and they no longer want to work. Some received remittances from relatives abroad, but I also encountered cases where it was those who had stayed behind that supported their

the border area (<http://www.lsm.lv/raksts/dzive--stils/cilvekstasti/uz-dzivi-austrumu-pierobeza-atgriezias-jaunas-gimenes.a242854/>). My fieldwork, however, shows that many people attempt to return, but then migrate again, because they cannot make the ends meet.

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children abroad. People got by, but just barely. Most talked about leading an existence instead of living a life.

Rather than the expected well-being, post-Soviet capitalism, exacerbated by the global financial crisis, had created a palpable sense of emptiness. People in the countryside often remarked that "we are slowly dying out." A man in a small town in southeast Latvia said: "Now you only see pupils and pensioners in the street. There are no middle-aged people. I live here since the 70s. Back then, it was busy like a bee hive (*tad te gāja kā bitītes*). Now most people are gone. The feeling that you get walking down the street ... back then you had to squeeze past three people walking on the sidewalk, now you stand in the crossroads alone."³

For rural residents, emptiness was both an observable state of affairs and an affective condition that marked a consequential shift with regard to a particular form of life, a shift that was experienced as a rupture detrimental to one's ability to go on with life. When conveying the sense of emptiness that they experienced, people in the country and the city talked about empty streets and homes, weeds overtaking abandoned buildings, lack of work, disintegrating social relations, crumbling infrastructure, closure of rural schools, and, more generally, extinction. Moreover, there were multiple layers of emptiness and ruins visible in the landscape (Hell et al. 2010). The foundations of farmsteads destroyed by Soviet rural urbanization stood side by side with crumbling Soviet collective farm buildings, as well as recently abandoned rural homes, where, as one international news agency photographer, mused, "the morning cup of coffee is still sitting on the table and the stove is still warm" (personal communication 2011).

³ It was common in the early stages of migration to leave children behind with grandparents while the parents found jobs and settled in the new location.

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Taken together, these were also ruins of the postsocialist dream of an economically productive and heritage-preserving countryside achieved through the restoration of the pre-Soviet property regime and Latvia's integration into European political and economic structures.

If the news photographer romanticized and aestheticized ruins (Hell et al. 2010, Stoler 2013: 9, Szmagalska-Follis 2008: 346), owners of the single farmsteads, rural residents, and local government officials exhibited different affective orientations. For them, the ruins were not only nostalgic objects of the past and the past's futures, but also harbingers of the dystopian futures inherent in the present. They did not observe, but rather actively lived the pasts and futures that these ruins both enabled and foreclosed. Rural residents were part of the multi-layered processes of ruination that condensed the past, reflected the present, and weighed upon the future (Stoler 2013: 9, see also Szmagalska-Follis 2008, Navaro-Yashin 2009).

One of the farmsteads that I regularly visited during my fieldwork belonged to Viesturs who was born on the farmstead in the 1930s and had lived there permanently until he moved to Riga to attend vocational school. Viesturs' mother and father remained in the house throughout the Soviet years, as the land around the house was nationalized, cattle collectivized, additional families settled in the rooms vacated by family members who were deported or who had fled abroad, and new collective farm buildings built on the land adjacent to the house: a cow barn and a residential building to house the milk maids working in the barn. Viesturs regained the land in the process of post-Soviet privatization, but his property was marked by several ruins. The industrial cow barn was disintegrating from lack of use, but it remained on the property, because it was too costly to dismantle it. Viesturs let the local hunting club use the barn for skinning and cutting up the boars they hunted in the adjacent forest. The residential building

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that housed the milk maids was also no longer in use; its roof was leaking, and it was not safe to enter the building. There were other ruins on the property as well: a pre-World War II stone animal barn, several old wells, and a bath house with sinking foundations.

Viesturs and his wife often lamented their inability to keep up the farmstead due to lack of resources and age. They ignored the ruins of socialist collective farming or pointed to them as markers of the violence of socialist modernity. During the Soviet period, they did not work in the collective farm, but as civil engineers in the city, rushing to the farmstead on weekends. In contrast, those who had worked on collective farms viewed such ruins—abandoned collective farm buildings, old mechanical shops, or wood cutting facilities—as markers of a bygone era of employment and, increasingly, social life. "There is no work in the countryside", people told me over and over again, "the only work there is in the post office and the local shop".

The times when there was work and active social life were remembered fondly despite criticism of the Soviet regime. In the summer of 2015, I attended a "collective farm evening" in one of the seaside villages in which I had conducted fieldwork from 2010 to 2012. Most of my interlocutors who back in 2010 had talked about the dying countryside came to life in films and pictures where they were depicted collectively gathering hay and celebrating harvest. They remembered their youth, of course, but their youth was inseparable from collective labour, active social life, and public acknowledgment of their achievements, however formal. Similar to those exhibiting post-Fordist affect in neoliberal Italy or the United States, they exhibited affective attachment to a form of life that had entailed stability, sociality, and a promise of a future despite the violence that it may have also wielded (Berlant 2007, Muehlebach & Shoshan 2012, Shoshan 2012).

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My interlocutors also pointed out that even if there suddenly was work in the countryside, there were hardly any people left who could work (see also Cimdiņa & Raubiško 2012). It was as if ruination of buildings coincided with ruination of people. The head of a municipality in southeast Latvia told me that: "there are 700 people in the municipality. You could not even find 50 workers out of these 700 inhabitants. If you give them money today, there will be nobody tomorrow, because everybody will be drunk. Even students drink. Back in the collective farm days, you also had to walk around and wake up drunks, but generally people pulled themselves together. Everybody worked. But today we have raised a different generation."

Infrastructure was crumbling along with houses, industrial buildings, and people. Public transportation was cut in many places, and some areas were no longer accessible by means other than private cars. If they did not have a private car, people often walked long distances on foot to make it to school or work. Moreover, since 2010, nearly 100 rural schools have been closed all throughout Latvia. The old school buildings stood empty and were at risk of falling apart, because, as I was told, "buildings cannot live long, if they are not inhabited." These would-be ruins mark the times that are gone and gesture towards dystopian futures, but insofar as they are freshly empty and not yet crumbling, they are also crucial for maintaining a sense of life for a little longer. In the midst of emptiness, buildings—even more so than their social function—became central figures in the politics of future as a little bit more of the present, to which I now turn (see also Ringel 2014).

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Maintaining life

Similar to local residents, policy makers and politicians also thought that the countryside was emptying, but instead of an emplaced sense of emptiness they talked about depopulation and economic efficiency. I observed this during development planning that took place in rural districts in 2011, and I became interested in how development planners would engage the sense of emptiness that was widespread among the people who were supposed to participate in development planning and subsequently carry out the development plans. Not unexpectedly, while development planners and rural residents shared a view that the countryside was emptying, they measured it differently and exhibited different understandings of what ought to be done in such circumstances. While continuously talking about the doom and gloom that was about to descend on the Latvian countryside, rural residents laboured to maintain life in hopes that it would go on, if not in the long-term, then at least for a little bit longer. With everything else being elusive, buildings were among the few concrete things that could be worked upon. This shaped the rural residents' vision of the development plan as a list of infrastructure maintenance projects. In turn, development planners did not necessarily think that the future was doomed, but they did think that the future had to be different from the one inherent in how rural residents inhabited the present. Instead of maintaining local schools, school buildings, and public infrastructure, such as transportation, development planners conjured up a future of resource optimization, polycentric development, concentrated populated spaces interspersed with large-scale farming operations and residential rural enclaves. In the view of development planners, this was the only kind of future through which rural residents could participate in and benefit from economic growth that was expected to occur in Latvia after the economy

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recovered from the crisis. Development planners thought that rural residents lacked the understanding, skills, and resources necessary to prepare for the future of economic opportunity and prosperity that would inevitably arrive (see Guyer 2007). As I often heard them say, rural residents did not think about tomorrow, but lived for today.

In the summer of 2011, during one development planning meeting in a municipality in southeast Latvia, a small group of participants discussed the need to change windows in the kindergarten. Although there were not many children in the municipality, and those present reasoned that the number of inhabitants will continue to decline, the participants nevertheless decided to maintain the kindergarten operational a while longer in hopes of keeping some of the young people from leaving. If they could offer childcare services, they reasoned, it was to their advantage. The school had already closed the previous year. Twenty-four local school children were being bused to two other schools in the larger district. "But we should still save the school building," someone said. "Maybe we could establish a recreational centre there? Perhaps we could write a project to put some exercise equipment in there?" The kindergarten also needed central heating, those present concurred. Someone else was of the opinion that it was also important to build a playground, which had been planned long ago, but still had not been built." These buildings and structures were important not only because of their primary functions, but also because they stood as markers of sociality and community. In conditions, when social life around them had dwindled, their materiality became especially important. The buildings had to be maintained, hoping against hope that sociality might return.

The local residents tried to maintain their lives, to keep up futures past whose traces were evident in the landscape and which also shaped the sensibilities and aspirations of the

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rural residents (Koselleck 1985, Muehlebach & Shoshan 2012, Shoshan 2012). The wishes of the rural residents—not only in this municipality, but in others as well—were aimed at maintaining the kind of life where “weeds do not come through the door”, as one of my informants put it, where buildings are cared for, and where every district, if not every municipality, has its own museum that records local history. People devised plans for the maintenance of deteriorating infrastructure so as to postpone what they called “slow extinction”. For them, development did not mean preparing for a radically different distant future, but rather maintaining life in a harsh present with hope, but not certainty, that life would go on.

The situation was similar in other parts of Latvia as well. For example, in a municipality in northwest Latvia local politicians and residents similarly planned how to maintain various public buildings, even as over the last ten years the population had decreased by about 20%. The people gathered at the development planning meeting in the town in northwest Latvia were certain that choosing not to invest in further maintenance of the school building or other communal buildings meant that the municipality would die out. The Head of the District Council tried to argue for maintenance of buildings as a matter of both capital investment and possible futures: “A great deal of money has been invested in [the renovation of] the school. We received two hundred thousand [lats] from the government [via European Union funds]. We can’t simply let these buildings go, because that would be a great loss. If we don’t maintain life (*neuzturam dzīvību*), our town will be crossed off the map.”⁴

⁴ This was a reference to media reports that a number of villages had already lost their village status, because no address was registered there any longer.

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Valdis, the development consultant whose company had won the bid to guide the planning exercise, said to me: "I want to scream—what are you people doing! You are not going to need most of this infrastructure!" He pleaded with those who had come to consider whether it wouldn't be better to concentrate on a "qualitative leap" in one of the district's municipalities rather than maintain infrastructure all across the district. It's not that Valdis did not care for the district or for the people that lived there. He did. It was this care that made him exclaim in anger: "What are you people doing!?" Valdis elaborated his development vision as follows: "The vision of the future is that three-fourths of all people live in cities. The myth that jobs can be created in the countryside is dangerous. The consolidation process will happen, but it is being presently delayed by small property owners". It was also being delayed by the rural residents who wanted to keep up the kindergarten and the school building even though there might not be many people to make use of them in the future. In Valdis' opinion, "a vision of place" (and life) was not appropriate for such circumstances. People needed to think about how and where to increase their incomes, and if it couldn't happen in the place they presently were, they needed to go somewhere else. And if the village or town disappeared from the map as a result, then that was simply part of a normal development process. Valdis was critical of the planning process he himself coordinated. Valdis thought that the development plans that came out of this process were simply lists of infrastructure projects, because nobody dared to reject these projects, as that would amount to a rejection of the will to maintain life. In turn, thinking themselves unable to do much about the departing people and emptying countryside, rural residents worked to maintain life as their contribution to the possibility of the future as a little bit more of the present (Ringel 2014).

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Such a vision crucially depended on what was left of buildings and infrastructure. Buildings and infrastructure emerged as the most concrete things that could establish a link between the past, the present, and the future (see Fennell 2015, Anand 2015, von Schnitzler 2015, Bowker 2015). They were simultaneously markers of a developmental state that was withdrawing from the Latvian countryside and a temporary guarantee for the continuation of the public sociality created by socialist modernity. The region's successful entrepreneurs, of which there were few, could not single-handedly re-create or upkeep this sociality. Having themselves succeeded, they argued that most rural residents kept complaining about lack of jobs and poor living, but "didn't do anything", thus suggesting that people had to author their own economic activity rather than expect "the state or someone else to give them a job". In saying so, they exhibited a radical post-Soviet ideology of individualized success that erased the state altogether, even as they themselves benefited from "state support" in the form of European Union grants and subsidies.

Moving in search of futures past

While some people maintained life in rural localities, others did exactly what Valdis suggested, namely they went somewhere else in search of work.⁵ Many went to small towns in northeast England and took up jobs in the fields and food packing factories. Long-term inhabitants of the

⁵ The question of who left and who stayed, as well as why some people in similar situations left and others stayed, is worthy of a separate discussion, and I address it elsewhere (Dzenovska 2012, n.d.). The purpose of this article is to trace the temporal orientations of leaving and staying as forms of action and imaginaries of future associated with them.

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town in northeast England where I conduct research at the moment say that "things changed when the supermarkets came". Supermarkets needed cheap standardized produce in flexible quantities, which meant that the organization of horticultural production changed. Most notably, there emerged food distribution companies that mediated between growers and supermarkets, as well as a vibrant food packaging and processing industry that supplied supermarkets by using local produce, but also products brought in from other places, such as tomatoes from Spain. This, in turn, created demand for a cheap, flexible, and always available labour force in a place where seasonal farm work used to be carried out by temporary guest workers from within the UK and Ireland, who never settled. The dispossessed rural Latvians—and other Eastern Europeans—fit the bill, and were actively recruited after 2004 under a gang employment structure, where gangmasters keep a flexible labour force on zero-hours contracts that can be supplied to growers at a moment's notice and just as easily dropped (Findlay et al. 2012, Rogaly 2008, Brass 2004).

Ben Rogaly argues that "the buyer-driven structure of the horticultural supply chain has enabled retailers to appropriate ever-greater value from horticultural producers" and has resulted in intensification of horticultural production mainly on the basis of increasing worker vulnerability as a way to ensure a compliant labour force (Rogaly 2008: 499). Foreign nationals have been used "as instruments of the newly intensified workplace regimes in horticulture"—as both zero-hours workers and as supervisors who determine which vulnerable workers should be kept and which dropped from the gangs, that is, de-employed (Rogaly 2008: 502). My own interviews, as well as multiple media and scholarly sources, indicate that growers criticize British workers for not wanting to do this kind of work. Their statements are then used to suggest that,

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rather than taking away jobs, migrant workers are doing the jobs that British workers find too demeaning. Rarely is the British refusal to do the work done by migrants interpreted as legitimate criticism of exploitative agrarian capitalism.

In Latvian migrants moving to northeast England, people that were "left over" after "postsocialist transition" in Latvia, that is, people who could not find a place for themselves in the flexible, entrepreneurial, and debt-financed capital gains economy, encountered spaces and subjects produced by what might be thought of as the capitalist version of "postsocialist transition". As Tom Brass has argued, most "gains made by labour since World War II were stripped away by Thatcherism, and the ending of "actually existing socialisms" increased the size of the industrial [and agricultural] reserve army of labour on which British and European capital could draw" (2014: 232). Moreover, the end of "actually existing socialism" also dismantled the political counterpoint upon which domestic resistance could rely, as well as imaginaries of alternative futures (Dzenovska & De Genova, this issue).

Contrary to the Latvian countryside, where "postsocialist transition" meant deindustrialization and deurbanization, in the English countryside "postsocialist transition" meant intensification of horticultural production in order to meet the buyer's demands and renewed precarization of labour. This is to say that the processes unfolding in the English countryside are connected to the end of "actually existing socialisms", the neoliberalization of life and economy that has ensued, and the evacuation of socialist imaginaries of the future (Dzenovska & De Genova, this issue, see also Harvey 2003). Whereas there was no work in the Latvian countryside for the "left over people", there was work for them in the English countryside, but the nature of this work had changed. It was hard, unstable, and low-paid, the

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kind of work that local inhabitants considered demeaning. Nevertheless, for Latvian migrants, these jobs represented moving somewhere within this precarious employment structure. First, from no job or low-paid job and debt in Latvia to a job, however unstable, in the UK, and, subsequently, from a zero-hours contract with an agency to a fixed contract in a factory. The availability of work and the prospect for upward mobility, however small, was what many Latvian migrants aspired to. Guided by memories of employment and futures inherent in it, instead of making the future as a little bit more of the present in Latvia, they decided to pursue the "near future" (Guyer 2007), where hard work today brings tangible improvements of life tomorrow. As put by Ieva who has lived in the United Kingdom for about 15 years, "In England, you suffer for half a year as a slave, but after that you can move ahead a bit. In Latvia, you work like a slave, but nothing changes." Ieva felt that moving in space had also enabled her to move ahead, to have a sense that she was going somewhere, even if going somewhere entailed only a small rise in salary, a slightly better job, or the ability to go on vacation (Jansen 2014, Hage 2009).

Many Latvia's citizens that I talk to in northeast England articulate their life trajectories precisely in those terms. The hoped for path is moving from a zero-hours contract with an employment agency (after about two years of working on a zero-hours contract) to a fixed contract with a factory, from working on the assembly line to working as a team leader, from living in multi-occupancy housing to being able to rent one's own place, from going to Latvia once a year to going to Latvia and to Spain for holiday. For some, it stops here. As Tanya, a 26-year old woman from Daugavpils, put it, "all cannot be managers". Having become a team leader, Tanya does not aspire for a better position. Instead, she hopes to have a family and to

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move out of shared accommodation into her own apartment. Some others enrol in local schools and move ahead that way. Their movement is predictable, and that's what they want: hard work to lead to a contract, more education to a better job, a better job to a better salary, a better salary to greater mobility.

At the same time, many feel that they may have improved their financial situation, but lost quality of life. Arvis, who lost a job and the family home in Latvia, lived for a while on about EUR 7 per week, moved to Boston and in the first week made £340. He said that made him feel like a human being rather than a bum. But life is difficult here in other ways: "It's very difficult to live here. Everyone back home says: you are living a good life, you have money! But it's not about the money, after all. I want regular *cilvēcīga attieksme* [humane way of relating to each other], I want to go somewhere... Morally, it is very difficult here." Juris, asked whether he would miss something from Boston, if he were to return home, said:

I don't think I would miss anything. Probably the salary, but, otherwise, nothing. That time when I returned for half a year [*Juris tried to return with this family, but had to migrate again, because they could not make ends meet*], when I lived back home, I did not miss anything. I miss things from Latvia—sports, or, now, when I went for a vacation, my brother and I, we went to play sports—basketball, football, went to games. I miss that very much. I miss the so-called social life, when you go, you see, you do something yourself, perhaps see a play. When it is, you know, cool. It's not like that here [in England].

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For both, Arvis and Juris, ensuring livelihood comes at the expense of living life as a particular form of emplacement. They live with a distinct and constant sense of a displacement. They may be moving ahead in terms of being able to secure a living, but they don't feel that they are living a good life.

Beyond Futures Past

"Postsocialist transition" seems to have propelled Eastern Europe from Europe's past to Europe's future. During postsocialism, that is, during the intensive period of transition from centrally planned to free-market economy and from authoritarian government to democracy, "transitology" narratives posited Eastern Europe as lagging behind (Burawoy & Verdery 1999). Now, after postsocialism, when the effects of transition are starkly evident, the former socialist world seems to be ahead rather than behind. For example, some Eastern European states, such as Latvia, are ahead due to implementing radical neoliberal reforms. As Edgars Eihmanis (forthcoming) has noted, Latvian government has implemented radically neoliberal policies, overachieving even in relation to its teachers. It is also in this sense that Andrew Grann (2013), writing in *Anthropology News*, points to the irony of history: it was "transition" in Eastern Europe—"with degrees of abused labour, capitalist license, and shrinking social welfare"—that forecast the neoliberal future of the West.

The people who have left for the West in order to "go somewhere" seem to have misdiagnosed the present. In pursuing the future by moving to northeast England, Latvia's residents may be seeking a future past in a place where its traces are still visible within the

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current forms of precarious labour that nevertheless enable upward mobility and are softened by the still existing welfare provisions of the British state. They carry the belief that it is still possible to "go somewhere" and that all they have to do is find a place where such "going somewhere" is possible. In the tradition of Western temporal and spatial hierarchies, they move West in search of existential mobility.

Leaving Latvia, then, is an action that is shaped by the patterns through which particular places are integrated into structures of state-regulated neoliberal capitalism, by memories of futures inherent in the socialist mode of organizing economic and political life, and by historically shaped and at the same time profoundly postsocialist spatial imaginaries (and material realities), which posit "the West" as the measure of past, present, and future, and as a desirable location. It is generative to compare these affective orientations and spatial imaginaries with what Andrea Muehlebach and Nitzan Shoshan (2012) have called "post-Fordist affect", that is, the longing for the stability, consumption patterns, social relations, and futures promised by the Fordist model of economy. For example, Kath Weston notes that "for emerging economies in which industrial production still constitute a rising rather than a waning force" the changes described as post-Fordism are yet to arrive, and the affective attachment to the good life promised by Fordist structures is a future-oriented rather than a past-oriented nostalgia (2012: 432). The simultaneous occurrence of post-Fordist affect in the West, future-oriented attachment to the good life in "emerging economies", and the postsocialist pursuits of futures past suggests a complex interplay of capitalist temporalities and spatialities, and the imaginaries and affects shaped by and directed at them (see also Ferguson 1999). On the one hand, then, leaving and staying are actions adapted by people to navigate capitalism's "spatio-temporal"

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fixes (Jessop 2006, Harvey 2003). On the other hand, leaving and staying are actions shaped by developmental logics that arrange particular places in relation to each other within a broader frame of the good life promised by modernity. Decline in one place, thus, can be momentarily overcome by moving to another, provided that movement is not hindered, as is the case for many "left over" people who are either rendered immobile (e.g. Li 2009) or who risk their lives for the sake of survival or moving ahead (e.g. Lucht 2012, Schielke & Graw 2013, Gaibazzi 2015).

In the case of Latvians moving from Latvia to northeast England within the framework of European Union granted freedom of movement, leaving—as a form of action that aims to change conditions of life—does not necessarily question the foundations of dominant modes of organizing political and economic life. Rather, it is a short-term "spatial fix". For most Latvians that I have encountered in northeast England, dissatisfaction with life in Latvia has led to "reinvestment in the normative promises of capital and intimacy under capital" (Berlant 2007: 281, see also Neilson & Rossiter 2008: 57). That is, in making use of the freedom of movement granted as a result of European Union accession, they uphold the logic of capital. In contrast, in conditions when movement is hindered and the only way to pursue survival or existential mobility is through clandestine migration, movement itself may become political insofar as it either challenges dominant migration regimes or produces forms of togetherness that are invested with hopes for the political, as in the case of Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vasilis Tsianos' (2008, 2011) analysis of migrant socialities as productive of mobile commons.

Organization of economic life is shaped by translocal forces, which most people affected by them can grasp or influence only marginally. In rural northeast England, for example, the structure of horticultural labour has shifted due to supermarkets pushing down prices, whereas

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in rural Latvia there are no jobs due to postsocialist deindustrialization. But such explanations are merely nodal points in broader processes, momentarily fixed as causes and themselves as effects. Changing the way in which localities are connected to translocal economic processes are not matters of local or even national policy making, but rather entail a series of multi-scalar decisions that are never visible in their entirety. It is therefore not surprising that Latvia's rural inhabitants wish to change windows in a kindergarten rather than embrace visions of a distant future of prosperity offered by development planners or that they wish to leave rather than make a revolution. Those who stay and those who leave generally share the sentiment that "nothing changes" and "nothing will change". They exhibit a pervasive sense—pervasive beyond wanting to remove concrete politicians in office—that time in the place they come from no longer flows in a recognizable manner. Those who stay seem to want to slow down time by extending the present, whereas those who leave seek a recognizable flow of time by moving in space.

How do these insights with regard to leaving and staying bear upon the question about politics and the political? They certainly suggest that viewing leaving and staying within the territorial logic of the state, whether that of Latvia or that of the United Kingdom, overlooks the relational constitution of local economies and people's spatio-temporal imaginaries of the past and the future in relation to which they craft their actions in the present. If viewed in relation to the political as a critique of the dominant ways of organizing political and economic life, neither leaving or staying are necessarily political. In order to evaluate whether these actions are interruptions productive of futures that are not inherent in the present's hegemonies, analysis needs to be attentive to the spatial and temporal orientations in leaving and staying as

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particular forms of action that respond to particular logics of capital and territory. As I have suggested in this article, Latvian migration to northeast England is not currently such an interruption, though its political dimension might change, if conditions shift—for example, if Britain's vote to exit the European Union translates into tangible consequences for intra-European migrants. At the same time, staying and working to maintain life might have a stronger political dimension precisely because it draws on futures past to resist the new futures inherent in contemporary forms of neoliberal capitalism. It does not offer specific articulations of alternatives but the intertemporal conflict between futures past and the distant futures promised by the hegemonic forms of economic and political power might generate futures whose contours cannot yet be grasped.

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