

# Swedish space, “Western magic,” and Baltic Ambitions: The making of a Business Elite in Riga, Latvia<sup>1</sup>

*Anja Timm, London School of Economics/Aberdeen University*

Within the growing number of anthropological studies on the ongoing processes of “transition” and transformation in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the critical examination of international development aid policies and their delivery has resulted in the formation of a research sub-area (Bruno 1998; Sampson 1996; Wedel 2001). This paper is part of this growing literature that considers the “collision and collusion” between powerful donors, brokers, and aid recipients. In this paper, transnational encounters are investigated within a Swedish business school that is intended to benefit Baltic economies and societies. Drawing on Bourdieu’s “rites of institution,” the present work looks at the organizational processes of this educational establishment and focuses on the lives and studies of a small group of privileged youth who are actively involved in forging transnational connections. The ethnography of everyday activities serves to examine the school’s contribution to the formation of an elite in the Baltic states of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. School building forms the background and arena for these transnational negotiations. I am concerned with real, imagined, and symbolic encounters between students, faculty, Swedish benefactors, future employers, and the world of business.<sup>2</sup>

The school, REA, opened in 1994 with the aim to break with the socialist past in a deliberate manner. It is financed by the Swedish state and supported by Swedish-based corporate sponsors. The Riga establishment is managed by the prestigious (and private) Stockholm School of Economics. The school brings together students who are either citizens or permanent residents of all three Baltic states, local Latvian staff, and primarily Swedish faculty. Each year, 100 carefully selected young people embark on a two-year program in Economics and Business Administration. The school provides generously for its students: they all receive a monthly scholarship equivalent to the average Latvian salary. According to the school’s director, the objective of the school is to produce “catalysts of transition.”<sup>3</sup>

REA business school represents a major social engineering effort on the part of the Swedish government. The school’s space is critical to the way in which the students negotiate their everyday life in Riga. By seeking out the architect in Stockholm, I wanted to explore the translation of that vision into the built

environment. In response to my question, "How did you go about designing the business school in Riga?", he replied:

Well, there is nothing special about it, really. It is pretty much like any other Swedish business school...That was the idea, we were supposed to build a Swedish school in Riga. So we did.

This paper begins by investigating the implications and nature of the *Swedish space* in which the students undergo their training and transformation. This analysis serves as a prologue to the paper and, more importantly, to the transnational corporate futures of the students.

### **Swedish Space**

A firm of Swedish architects who had an established relationship with the Swedish ("mother") school handled the renovation of the grand art nouveau building. A Swedish-based multi-national company completed the construction. At the time, it cost \$2 Million US dollars.<sup>4</sup> The outcome was unlike any other kind of space that young people from the Baltic region might have encountered during the previous eleven years of their education in the former Soviet Union. The school was initially built in 1908, and while there are many buildings of similar architectural significance nearby, none were restored to such a splendid condition as early as 1993. Underlining the special character of the establishment are four flagpoles, boldly heralding the schools' many international connections. On the outside, the business school exudes a respectable and conservative charisma.

Inside, there is a smooth modern interior. Past the corridor, one enters the wide open-plan space of the extension—the "democratic heart," according to the architect, but to all others merely known as the canteen. Two long glass walls face each other, while all others are painted in shiny glossy white. Scandinavian style pervades throughout the ground floor area. The floor is a dark granite-like stone. The tables, benches, and partitions are made of blonde colored wood. The shapes are functional and Spartan in a decidedly understated manner. Far from imposing, the school is impressive because of its restraint, which is both studied and expensive. The overall mood is empty, yet friendly; it is austere, yet opulent. The school turns local notions of hierarchical academic space and authority upside down. Unlike its local counterparts, it is neither dark, nor cold.

Pervasive use of glass walls, open doors, and windows signal that inside this school there is "nothing to hide." This statement of transparency intentionally counters local expectations of public institutions as forbidding, impersonal places, riddled with corruption and so unintelligible that one is daunted (if not doomed) without the proper personal connections.<sup>5</sup> The business school's environment constantly signals that it is unlike other local higher education establishments in the

Baltic states. On the first day, students are told that the school “belongs to us all.” Doors to classrooms and offices remain open whenever practical. In the communal areas, partitioning gently channels the flow of students. The space facilitates mingling and socializing. There is direct access to the peaceful cobble-stoned yard. Benches, located throughout, are a constant invitation to linger. This networking friendly environment is common to Western business schools, which Nesper perceptively characterized as a “space that mimic[s] the spatial form of the corporate workplace” (1994:111).

But perhaps the most significant element of the school is its entrance. Having pushed open the heavy wooden doors, one finds a long, tiled corridor. The reception area is located at the end and just before a set of glass doors, which frame and exhibit the light-flooded interior. Full-time on-duty guards operate the buzzer to the interior as well as the surveillance equipment. The architect explained:

The school had to have security. It was designed around that single, guarded access point. Well, at the time, we didn’t know what to expect – fighting perhaps – and people didn’t have anything to eat.... Otherwise, anyone could have just walked in there, ... anyone! Perhaps it was excessive. We know that now. But at the time, it seemed like a war zone.

In my attempt to theorize what is going on at the business school, this guarded entrance plays an important role, for it circumscribes those who are to become the subjects of a “magical” transformation.

### **Western Magic**

Swedish space and “Western magic” produce a new Baltic business elite. The magic originates in the processes of production and consumption of cultural forms in which students participate while they are at the business school. Through transformative processes, students become the next best thing to a Western businessperson. This section considers the institutional processes that lead to the magical transformation of bright Baltic students into quasi-Western executives.

In treating Western magic, I draw on Bourdieu’s work on state nobility (1996) to illuminate the processes and outcomes of attending the Swedish business school.<sup>6</sup> By attending elite higher education establishments, students undergo what Bourdieu terms a “rite of institution,” which differentiates and elevates those who are destined for eminent social positions. The concept is borrowed from Van Gennep’s work on “rites of passage” (1909/1960). Bourdieu explains how he understands the process that occurs in the French schools: “the process of transformation accomplished at elite schools, through *the magical operations of segregation and aggregation*...tends to

produce a consecrated elite...that is not only distinct and separate, but also recognized by others and by itself as worthy of being so" (1996:102, emphasis added).<sup>7</sup>

Transformative "rites of institution" are brought about by the actual and metaphorical segregation of the students. As the section on Swedish space showed, students are literally segregated into this very special environment. While students are not locked up (or boarding), their timetable is intense and punishing. The curriculum is similar to that taught at most American and European business schools. As Swedish faculty have full-time commitments in Stockholm, courses are compressed and taught intensely over a short period of time. At the expense of holidays and reflection, students undergo the three-year programme in a little under two years. They are rushed from one subject to another. Four weeks of statistics are chased by three weeks of business law, followed by two weeks of business ethics and two weeks of accounting. The curriculum unfolds like a roller coaster ride from one exam to the next,<sup>8</sup> causing one student to note on a course evaluation form: "I feel there is a lot of knowledge in me but it is in such disorder."

Bourdieu remarks on the great urgency, high productivity, and intense pressure with which learning is commonly undertaken at elite schools. In Riga, the high degree of competitiveness and the great speed with which new material must be processed commonly lead to improvisation, cramming, and other evasive behaviors, both before and during examinations.<sup>9</sup> "The art of being able to mobilize instantly all available resources, and to get the most out of them,...and the statutory confidence that goes hand in hand with this mastery are undoubtedly among the primary 'leadership qualities'" (Bourdieu 1996:88) associated with elite schooling.

In Riga, there is very little integration between the different subjects and, as lecturers return to Stockholm, there is little chance of clarification, even prior to exams. There is almost no reexamination of the neo-classical economics tenor within the postsocialist context. A prospective clash of imported theory and local practice is contained by the frantic timetable. This is particularly ironic, as the Stockholm ("mother") school is proud of its Center for the Study of Transition Economics.<sup>10</sup> No effort is made, however, to communicate current research findings back into the former Soviet Union, which seriously undermines the schools' claims that it wishes to aid the regional development of Baltic states.

The program starts off with an intense grooming period. During the ten-week summer program, students undergo intensive study skill and methodological preparation in business and economics, math and computing.<sup>11</sup> Most importantly, the students are taught the course, *Communication in English*. English language proficiency is a prerequisite at the business school, for all lectures, class work, and report writing take place in English. Theoretically, English works as the lingua franca within the school.<sup>12</sup> From the beginning, students are taught to read the *Economist*,

the *Financial Times*, and *Fortune* with the help of a dictionary and they are tested on the definition and meaning of new words. As their vocabulary grows, students come to understand the international financial media as their "natural reading matter." This type of teaching also extends to watching movies, such as *Wall Street*, *The Firm*, and *Working Girl*. Students are to engage these media as an ideal (Western) model of a businessperson's behavior.

The emphasis on the proper use of economic and legal terminology runs alongside the teaching of presentation skills. Students learn the formulaic opening of a presentation by heart, as well as how to criticize without being offensive. Public speaking becomes a highly valued asset. In the first year of studies, most students wear formal clothing when they present their work in front of fellow students and make expert use of visual aids. When the "opposition" arrives, similarly dressed, the whole matter becomes increasingly staged. The students are rehearsing for their future role; they are play-acting the smooth Western businessperson. Clean and professional attire forms an unspecified part of the curriculum, which emphasizes the importance of self-confidence, ideally carried forth with a certain glibness. The success of this process of grooming is ensured, for *Communication in English* is the only course that is taught throughout an entire year of studies.

Most students say they attend the Swedish business school because it offers the best local education. As students see it, the alternative is to leave the country.<sup>13</sup> Most students would prefer to study a different subject if they had a choice. But as things are, they study economics and business, Swedish style. More importantly, they acquire and practice the (interactive) style and assured manner of "Western" businesspeople. In this respect, their training resembles a finishing school. Ostensibly, students attend school for the purpose of achieving academic competency and credentials, but alongside technical expertise, cultural capital and all important internationally relevant social skills are distributed.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the Swedish business school "magically assigns social destinies" to its students (Bourdieu 1996:102).

But, needless to say, the students are not passive recipients. The built environment of the school and its institutional processes powerfully separate and instruct the students. It is within these parameters that they develop their ideas and aspirations about the future, individually and collectively. This need not be a particularly "conscious" effort on their part. And neither is there coherence nor unity in the way in which students appropriate and consume the business school context. The making of this business elite, quite literally, is a work in progress.

### **Baltic Ambitions**

This section on Baltic ambitions looks at the way in which the students "creatively occupy the space of education" (Levinson and Holland 1996) through their

appropriation of institutional opportunities and their consumption practices. In the conclusions, I consider national and transnational connections as those which the students develop and those which they elude by attending the Swedish business school.

Apart from segregation, Bourdieu identifies one other element of the “rites of institution”—aggregation. He explains that through the selection process, elite schools choose and concentrate homogenous groups of young people. In Riga, too, the student body of the business school is fairly homogenous: the majority of students come from the capitals of the Baltic countries and the majority have attended well-known elite secondary schools.<sup>15</sup> An age limit ensures that students have received most of their schooling during *perestroika*. Bourdieu states that upon entering elite schools in France, young people enter “a *social paradise* where everyone has every chance of recognizing in everyone else a *like-minded person*, a neighbor so socially similar that he is able to love himself in him” (Bourdieu 1996:182, emphasis in original).

The business school brings together students who are either citizens or permanent residents of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania. Perceived differences between students exist in terms of their ethnic background and these are further elaborated through the dual school system (which has remained in operation during the post-Soviet period).<sup>16</sup> Pupils attend school either in the titular language or Russian. In Latvia and Estonia, young people grow up with very few contexts in which these populations would meet and interact prior to higher education. Hence, few students perceive their new peers as a homogenous group. Far from it, at the beginning of each year, some students find that the unusual ethnic mix makes them feel distinctly uneasy. Unlike their French counterparts, the students in Riga do *not recognize each other* as similar.

At the business school, there is little open discussion of Baltic nationalism and national minority politics, although it is clearly implied in the delicacy with which these issues are sidestepped.<sup>17</sup> In practice, the school forces all students to work together in small groups. Ostensibly, this practice of “teamwork” is due to Western methods, which closely resemble “real life” situations in the business world. To equip new recruits, the first compulsory course teaches group dynamics. To what extent the school entertains a secondary and subdued political motive of bringing about integration is unclear. In any case, the methods prescribed set up an important pattern of interaction between students. After a few weeks of being intimately involved in the school routine, students come to understand that they have more in common with each other than with many other people “on the outside,” irrespective of nationality or ethnic background. That slow process of realization, I believe, is the beginning of the formation of a new multi-ethnic Baltic business elite.<sup>18</sup>

With so much time spent together (formally and informally), peers rather than staff or faculty are the ultimate audience and arbitrator of students' development into Western business people. In order to remain at the school, students have to pass exams with fierce competition for the top grades. But the majority of students settle into a minimum-effort maximum-output routine and eventually concentrate on embracing extracurricular opportunities (almost all of which originate within the school context). It is the school which originally facilitates the *esprit de corps*, but the institution itself eventually becomes secondary.<sup>19</sup>

At the business school and in the post-Soviet context, *esprit de corps* is primarily forged through shared consumption, which acts as an arena of negotiation. Together the students laugh about the silly films they have to watch for *Communication in English*. To them, *Wall Street* does not seem appropriate, but outdated and a bit "too Hollywood." Students go shopping together and read the ubiquitous style magazines that get passed around and borrowed endlessly. The most ambitious students become avid readers of the biographies of famous businesspeople. Determined fashion experts use the Internet to scout for their graduation dress, later to be copied by the local dressmaker. Male and female students constantly discuss style and behavior for its appropriateness. But they also mock the way in which almost all fellow students attempt periodic reinvention: proud announcements, such as "I changed my image!" are always followed by the doubtful "What do you think?" I understand this as a process of fine-tuning, where the students rely on each other for advice and inspiration in their quest for appropriateness.

While much shaping takes place via new media and is facilitated by the access opportunities provided by the Swedish business school, students do sometimes engage in more low-key activities, much like other young people from the region. They go away together to camps organized by the student association. They enjoy sports competitions (again, organized through the school). At night, they go out dancing and drinking. As an outcome of this ongoing process of integration, even midsummer celebrations can become multicultural events. Students also discover the other Baltic states as they go on skiing and boating trips in small groups. Through their association and friendships, Lithuanian, Estonian, Russian, and Latvian students, by proxy, become Baltic cosmopolitans. They frequently and knowledgeably discuss the economy, political developments, and nightlife opportunities of neighboring countries. In their ongoing conversations about cafes and clubs, students together identify the latest place-to-be. It is in these carefully selected hip and trendy bars that students exercise their "deep and lasting affective ties of fraternity" (Bourdieu 1996:182). However, students' involvement in such "normal" (outside) activities is only partial. Their hectic schedule of report deadlines, constant assessment, and intense (primarily school-based) social life rarely accommodates family meals and activities with high school friends. For the duration of their studies, they are part-time locals.

The school and its built-environment set a particular tone for a particular kind of consumption. Through the wider focus of their training, the students look well beyond national horizons. In Riga, the students learn to perceive a common future of privilege within an international arena. Throughout their studies at the business school, students consistently engage intellectually and emotionally with places, issues, concepts, trends, and promises from elsewhere. In most cases, the “origin” or chief mediator is located in one of the major Western capitals. It is through the group that students negotiate this constant transnational presence and opportunity that results from the extreme mixture of their curriculum and ambition. Within the school context, students speak English, are taught how Western companies (apparently) function, and learn how to look the part of a Western businessperson. While their environment is “Swedish,” the companies they visit on their prescribed quest to understand real-life business practices are transnational, and the students’ ultimate destination is transnational too, of course.

But within the local context—when it does eventually catch up—there are no easy solutions to the drama of being newly privileged and transnational in outlook. Students must somehow bridge the discontinuities between their own advantageous situation and the difficult circumstances that remain the struggle of “normal people,” who have not been the subject of “Western magic.” While they are at the business school, the contrast between their daily routine and the national context (and its conflicts), to some extent, recede. And after two years at the business school, joining a transnational corporation is mostly a smooth transition; after all, this is what the students are trained for. But with old friends and at home, students almost always downplay their new glamorous existence. Occasionally, outsiders, and even friends and family, tend to view the students’ existence and lifestyle as spoiled. Worse even, students might be accused of being “star-sick,” the Latvian diagnosis of someone who is arrogant and self-possessed. Hence, more often than not, students stick with students: who else could understand the intense pressures and pleasures of the business school routine and be able to afford their pastimes?

To varying degrees, business school students in Riga come to trust and rely on each other. Bourdieu maintains that an academically based corps is “the group most closely related to the family,” for “the aggregative segregation operated by the educational institution is undoubtedly the strongest operator of the *social structuring of affects*” (1996:182).<sup>20</sup> It is no surprise then that the business school, apart from everything else, is also a hotbed of intrigue, flirtation, flings, and even marriage.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I describe the space, circumstances, and activities that facilitate the production of a multiethnic Baltic business elite. In the section on Swedish space, I described the long narrow entrance and security corridor of the school building. I then went on to explain the “rites of institution” that unfold at the business school,

where students are temporarily suspended in between a national background and a transnational destiny. While they are at school, they are neither here nor there. The guarded entrance seems a perfect symbol of the birth canal: students are channeled from an exterior national past towards a transnational future (and beyond) on the inside. Meanwhile, they are hermetically sealed from others.

I have also shown how a group of privileged students is channeled into an ever more transnational and corporate arena that is extremely beneficial to their professional careers. After graduation, many earn three to five times the combined salaries of their parents. Graduates are considered a great asset to the transnational companies that operate in the Baltic States. They are hired partly for their competence, but more importantly for their understated way of being appropriate in the different cultural contexts related to the processes of transition. These business school graduates are the ideal employees: young and bright, multi-lingual yet finely attuned to local history and circumstances. Foreign companies need young people like these as diplomats and go-betweens. It is no surprise, then, that companies with a keen interest in the Baltics cultivate links with the business school. They orchestrate lavish company presentations, sponsor the student association newspaper and arrive eager for the new crop at the annual career fair. Upon their graduation, these young people become the "friendly face" of capitalism and facilitate the penetration of emerging markets by major transnational corporations.

According to Bourdieu, studying at an elite establishment is all about segregation, aggregation, and fostering the *esprit de corps*. Elite schooling in Riga is not simply about incubation and indoctrination. In times of "transition" the role of the *esprit de corps* becomes ever more vital. It is this group that becomes chief audience and arbitrator of the processes of transformation. Elite schooling in Riga leads to students being *consecrated*. Once new differences are created, students are equipped to become the new elite.

In terms of the processes of social change, the fact that a new multi-ethnic Baltic business elite network is established and financed by the Swedish state and Swedish-based transnational companies is important. The Swedish business school is an actual and symbolic site of various kinds of production, reproduction, and consumption. Swedish involvement facilitates the production of a new elite to serve transnational corporations and at the same time, it provides a group of relatively wealthy and "knowing" consumers who are both willing and capable of consuming the products (and lifestyles) that are to be sold on the global market. It re-produces a Swedish model of elite schooling. Implicit in this concerted effort to establish an elite surely lies the hope that the more reluctant participants might be persuaded to follow the select few and their involvement in the global market place. But Sweden also revisits its own glory: it consumes the Baltic area, its recovered colony.

And of course, there is reproduction. In this effort to affect social and economic change in the Baltic States, the school draws on categories that existed under socialism, albeit unacknowledged. The vast majority of the students originate from intelligentsia families. They are being re-packaged and re-branded. They leave with an international credential of great efficacy, thus conforming to local and foreign ideas of what it means to be educated and cultured. But other, perhaps less intentional, outcomes could occur. Speaking from an entirely different context of development projects, Ferguson reminds us that “resultant systems have an intelligibility of their own” (Ferguson 1990:256). In Riga, bringing together different sets of privileged youngsters has given rise to a multi-ethnic Baltic business elite. While this group is initially created from institutional processes, it eventually leaves the school context behind. What I have shown is that this group has also forged itself *collectively*. For its self-understanding, it does not solely rely on the business school. Crucially, the students also educate and train themselves. They need each other to make sense of their unusual circumstances. This is most noteworthy in terms of their consumption patterns, which act as a key arena for negotiating and unifying the group.

This paper outlined some of the conflicting agendas and expectations that Latvian business students must negotiate while they are at school. As they enter the corporate workplace and start to draw substantial salaries, these pressures are unlikely to weaken. The group of graduates might possibly continue to function as a locus for exploring fashions, objects, ideas, positionings, and ambivalences and what it means to be part of a new business elite. As far as the graduates are concerned, their membership within a group with a shared training and understanding might be the most positive social outcome of the Swedish engineering effort in the Baltics.

But what about the vision of Swedish philanthropists? The stated aim was to produce “agents of change” for the economies of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. However, as this paper has shown, the schooling process ultimately channels the students into a transnational career track, one that makes little difference to the Baltic economies.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of this paper was given at the Annual Symposium of Soyuz, Berkeley (February 2001) in the anthropology seminar at Aberdeen University (April 2001) and at the Annual Workshop of the Anthropology Group for the Study of Socialist and Post Socialist Societies, University College London (June 2001). I would like to thank Keith Hart, Gillian Munro and Suman Prinhja for their comments.

<sup>2</sup>This paper is based on fieldwork conducted between 1996-98. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Economic and Social Research Council from 1995 to 1999 (award: R00429534333).

<sup>3</sup>By setting up a brand new establishment, the Swedish government avoided getting involved in ongoing Higher Education reforms. However, it is instructive to consider alternatives. The Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) has devised and organized the Eurofaculty scheme based on temporary faculty exchanges within established departments and which provides a less drastic (or invasive) method of knowledge transfer. Sweden's decision to channel aid into a highly visible and prominent showcase rather than through the multilateral co-operative model must be considered in this context. See also Neumann (1999) and Straeth (1996) for more detail on the post-cold-war shifts in international relations around the Baltic Sea area.

<sup>4</sup>Skanska, the building contractor, met more than one third of the building cost. Rather than spending this money on an expensive advertising campaign, it used the business school as a prestigious shop window advertising company wares to prospective customers in the Baltic states.

<sup>5</sup>Ledeneva's work on the economy of favors describes these practices as an important aspect of social life in the socialist period (Ledeneva 1998). Architecturally, the school poses an antithesis to such social relations.

<sup>6</sup>In his foreword, Wacquant summarizes: "The state, Pierre Bourdieu intimates, is first and foremost the 'central bank of symbolic credit' which endorses all acts of *nomination* whereby social division and dignities are assigned and proclaimed, that is, promulgated as universally valid within the purview of a given territory and population. And the academic title is the paradigmatic manifestation of this "state magic" whereby social identities and destinies are manufactured under cover of being recorded, social and technical competency fused, and exorbitant privileges transmuted into rightful dues" (Wacquant 1996:xviif).

<sup>7</sup>Bourdieu's original treatment of the rites of institution can be found in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1982:117-27).

<sup>8</sup>Bourdieu terms these circumstances *symbolic confinement* (1996:90)

<sup>9</sup>For its lack of engagement and reflection, I class cramming together with other practices that ultimately avoid engagement, i.e. "cheating." Elsewhere, I address cheating as a tacit form of collaboration / resistance in more detail (Timm 2001).

<sup>10</sup>The center advocates the reconsideration of established theory and the importance of cutting edge empirical research of the "transition" economies. However, the school teaches the very standard curriculum it seeks to revise, and in the very place that throws the spanner in the works.

<sup>11</sup>The business school in Riga exhibits all the hallmarks of a new established school claiming credentials. There is the "forced modernism" of the cutting edge

technological equipment commonly exhibited by new educational establishments implemented there (Bourdieu 1996:225). There is not much difference in the way in which schools strive for acceptance and status. For example, the business school was the first Latvian higher education institution to seek (and achieve) international recognition and accreditation. Over the past two years, it has lengthened the program, which is apparently another classic claim for respectability (1996:197-200). Recently, symbolic forms have become increasingly important: the ceremonial hanging of the school flag and the first performance of a school ode were part of the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in Riga.

<sup>12</sup>Outside of the classroom, languages are used both to include and exclude others. On the whole students tend to constantly switch, pick and mix languages according to the varied preferences and proficiencies of the multi-national student body.

<sup>13</sup>Some of the students have been abroad on a one-year scholarship or exchange program to the United States, Britain, or the Nordic countries.

<sup>14</sup>Or, as Bourdieu puts it: “the educational system...contributes to reproducing and legitimating *the ensemble of distances* that, at an given time, constitute social structure” (1996:141, emphasis added).

<sup>15</sup>The link between prestige schooling and high status in the former Soviet Union is well established (see Matthews 1978; Tomiak 1986).

<sup>16</sup>On the dual school system, see Laitin (1998) and Wanner (1998).

<sup>17</sup>The school adamantly affirms that its selection policy operates purely on merit (and without a quota system). But the school must follow Latvian laws regarding higher education: students who have not undergone schooling in the Latvian track must prove their proficiency in the state language prior to being accepted. Students from Lithuania and Estonia are exempt from this language test.

<sup>18</sup>Within the nationalizing climate of post-soviet Latvia, much is made of perceived cultural differences, and ethnicity (see Karklins 1994; Laitin 1998; Smith *et al.* 1998). Differences are stressed and often exaggerated. Students bring that context and their experiences into the school environment. But petty nationalist propaganda is somehow relegated to the backburner while the students engage this project of the future.

<sup>19</sup>Esprit de corps refers to “this feeling of group solidarity...[that] lies in the community of schemata of perception, appreciation, thought and action that grounds the reflex complicity of well-orchestrated unconsciousness”(Bourdieu 1996:84).

<sup>20</sup>He continues, "friendships or love relationships among classmates are one of the surest and most dissimulated forms taken by the constitution of that particularly valuable kind of social capital—school acquaintances—a lasting basis for solidarities and exchanges of every kind among members of the same age group academically instituted as "graduating class." Love, like academic "brotherhood" or "sisterhood," is always in part the manifestation of a particular form of "esprit de corps" (Bourdieu 1996:182).

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