On semiotics of monument removal: Hypersecuritization as a deproblematization strategy in the Baltics

Andreas Ventsel,[1] Dāvis Kaspars Sproģis[2]

Abstract. History interpretations have long shaped national identities, yet they also serve to legitimize (geo)political agendas and deepen societal divisions. This article investigates the cases of Estonia and Latvia, where Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has rekindled contestations over Soviet-era symbols (monuments, symbolic decoration, etc.) in public spaces. Through a semiotic analysis of the removal of Soviet, or so-called "red" monuments, we explore the discursive mechanisms of re-signification and the dominant meanings that emerge. Central to our inquiry is how the replacement or transformation of these monuments interacts with political contexts – particularly how such changes resonate with diverse audiences and redefine symbolic functions of these monuments. We analyse political statements both supporting and opposing the dismantling of Soviet monuments, focusing on how national security has been mobilized as a central legitimizing discourse in 2022. Drawing on the Copenhagen School's securitization theory, we incorporate insights from cultural semiotics and semiotic cultural psychology, emphasizing the affective dimensions that drive re-signification and hypersecuritization. Finally, by employing the concept of deproblematization, we examine how these affective strategies serve political ends, which allows us to uncover the political aims embedded within these securitization discourses, as well as the semiotic mechanisms of meaning-making through which these discourses were constructed.

Keywords: Soviet symbols; affective semiosis; semiotics of fear; securitization; de-problematization

[1]   Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu, Estonia; e-mail: andreas.ventsel@ut.ee.
[2]   Department of Philosophy and Ethics, Faculty of Humanities, University of Latvia; e-mail: davis_kaspars.sprogis@lu.lv.

1. Introduction

History narratives have always played a crucial role in shaping national identities; however, they are also employed to justify (geo)political agendas and to exacerbate existing societal divides. This article examines cases in Estonia and Latvia, where Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine reignited debates over Soviet symbols in public spaces. In Estonia, the most intense public debate following the full-scale invasion centred on the Soviet-era T-34 tank (the so-called "Narva tank") installed near the city of Narva in 1970 to commemorate the city's "liberation" from Nazi forces by the Soviet army, as well as the Maarjamäe memorial, which was opened in 1975 and was dedicated to those who fell fighting for Soviet rule. In Latvia, the discussion centred on a Soviet-era monument complex in Riga's Victory Park, opened in 1985 and dedicated to Red Army soldiers who recaptured Riga and Latvia from Nazi Germany. In both countries the monuments functioned as focal points for public gatherings. As such, they were perceived as possessing significant potential for exploitation in Kremlin-led influence operations. Accordingly, the political stances examined in the article predominantly address these particular symbols.

Previously, semiotic analysis of politically charged monuments has been undertaken in the context of Germany (Krzyżanowska 2015). Earlier academic research on conflicts involving Soviet-era symbols in Estonia has primarily focused on the case of the so-called Bronze Soldier in 2007, when the government relocated the Soviet monument from central Tallinn, triggering protests and the unrest known as the Bronze Night (see Tamm 2012; Bellentani 2021; Selg, Ventsel 2008 employ a semiotic perspective). In Latvia, symbols of Soviet power have been examined mainly through historical analyses (Mintaurs 2016; Cerūzis 2015), as well as from a semiotic viewpoint (Kruks 2011). However, the so-called "Monuments War", which reignited in 2022, has received significantly less scholarly attention. Notable exceptions include the study by Aleksandra Yatsyk and Vladimir Sazonov (2024) regarding Estonia, and the work of Maija Rudovska (2024) on Latvia.

The aim of this article is not to provide a legal assessment of monument removals or a semiotic analysis of their visual aspects, but rather to offer a novel perspective by analysing the public debate as a political and communicative strategy. We analyse public statements made by politicians who either supported or opposed the removal of Soviet monuments, focusing in particular on how national security was invoked as the primary justification – and how this discourse was constructed and articulated. To this end, we employ the Copenhagen School's concept of 'securitization' (see Section 2 below), supplementing our analysis

with perspectives from cultural semiotics and semiotic cultural psychology – particularly regarding the role of affect and fear in re-signification of monuments and shaping securitization strategies, with an emphasis on hypersecuritization as a hegemonic discourse. In the discussion, we examine the political objectives underpinning these affective strategies through the lens of political semiotics, with particular emphasis on the concept of deproblematization, which allows us to uncover the political aims embedded within these securitization discourses, as well as the semiotic mechanisms of meaning-making through which these discourses were constructed.

In the semiotic analysis of the removal of "red" symbols (Soviet monuments), it is essential to acknowledge that a symbol's capacity to generate meaning always exceeds its immediate manifestation. As key mechanisms of cultural memory, symbols transmit texts, narrative schemas, and other semiotic formations across diverse cultural strata (Lotman 2019a). The monument – as a manifestation of *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 1992) – constitutes a vital element of memory politics. Two aspects are particularly relevant here: on the one hand, a symbol retains an invariant core over time; on the other hand, "a symbol actively aligns with its cultural context and is transformed by it while simultaneously transforming that context" (Lotman 2019a: 163–164). This invariant core is expressed through various transformations (Lotman 2019a: 164). The removal of a monument representing Soviet authority is itself a symbolic act – one that simultaneously articulates a position regarding the ideological discourse the monument embodies. In the cases examined in this article, however, it is crucial to recognize that beyond their primary meaning – commemorating the victory over fascism in WWII – these monuments also signified, for Estonians and Latvians, the beginning of Soviet occupation. It is worth adding that the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022 – during which red Soviet flags could be seen on Russian tanks – also introduced the possibility of drawing historical parallels with the events in Estonia and Latvia during WWII. At the same time, for Russian-speaking population the monuments had become sites for manifesting Russian identity: in addition to commemorating Victory Day on 9 May, they were sites where various events of personal or everyday significance such as school graduations or weddings were celebrated as well. This raises questions about the semiotic-discursive means through which re-signification practices are enacted and the dominant meanings thereby produced. What is equally important is how replacement and re-signification affects the political context – for instance, how it resonates with different audience segments and what function the symbol assumes in its new context: whether is is commemorative, mobilizing, artistic, etc (see Bellentani 2022).

2. Theoretical framework

Lotman's observation that a symbol's capacity for generating meaning always exceeds its current manifestation resonates with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's (1985: 11) claim that this is "nothing other than the defining characteristic of the symbol: the overflowing of the signifier by the signified". Furthermore, the stabilization of a symbol's meaning within a specific political context invariably constitutes a hegemonic political act (Selg, Ventsel 2021). Securitization is one discursive strategy through which such hegemonic articulations are legitimized.

The Copenhagen School views securitization as a discursive act that frames referent objects as existentially threatened, and a successful securitizing actor can persuade their audience to adopt extraordinary measures that would otherwise be inconceivable outside an emergency context (Buzan *et al.* 1998: 5; Buzan 2004). According to Danish security researchers Lene Hansen and Helen Nissenbaum (2009: 1163), securitization occurs when threatened objects are identified and different areas requiring protection are integrated into a unified narrative. The core claim of securitization discourse is that failure to take certain measures will result in serious incidents in near future (Hansen, Nissenbaum 2009: 1161). Mapping these threat scenarios and the referent areas invoked by various Estonian and Latvian political actors, whether in support of or opposition to the removal of Soviet symbols, constitutes one of the key research focuses of this article.

Securitization is inherently linked to fear and the construction of threat scenarios, making emotions and affect integral to this process. This article proceeds from the premise that affect is an inseparable component of political discourse. For the purposes of analysis, the framework of affective semiosis within semiotic cultural psychology is considered particularly productive, as it treats affect as an inseparable component of discourse and thus enables its examination through the study of meaning-making processes. Semiotic cultural psychology defines affect (or affective phenomena) as a general descriptive term encompassing both feelings – for instance the personal experience of discomfort as an affective state of unpleasantness – and emotions, for example fear as expressed, perceived, described through linguistic terms and as collectively shared and socially constructed (Valsiner 2007). Feelings are inherently ambiguous and fluid, whereas emotions are discrete, punctuated categories accessible through labelling, discursive operations, and processes of abstraction and generalization. While affective semiosis permeates all meaning-making processes, it primarily operates in an unbounded and abstract manner, enabling the associative linking of phenomena without rigid categorical constraints. Rather than confining meaning within fixed frameworks, affect fosters open-ended and continuously

evolving interpretative possibilities (Valsiner 2014; Valsiner, De Luca Picione 2017). This process is characterized by hypergeneralization, where distinctions (the identification of signs) become blurred or difficult to establish.

According to semiotic cultural psychology, semiotic mediation follows two parallel and mutually reinforcing (feed-forwarding) trajectories: schematization and pleromatization. Schematization facilitates the formation, categorization, and stabilization of meanings through signs, ensuring a degree of experiential continuity. As a cognitive strategy, such reduction of complexity is fundamental to everyday reasoning. Conversely, pleromatization counterbalances the reductionist abstraction of linguistic symbols by employing a signifying strategy that represents a complex event through another, even broader conceptual framework, thereby allowing for expansive and fluid generalization (Valsiner 2014**,** 2021**).**

This process of semiotic mediation can also be understood as a movement from differentiation-based argumentation toward increasing abstraction and generalization – a dynamic that also characterizes the cultural semiotic approach to fear. In cultural semiotics, meaning-making related to fear follows a signifying logic rooted in resemblance and the construction of analogies. Analogical reasoning often entails describing one object through the metaphorical substitution of another, requiring the audience to infer the precise connections between the referenced elements. These associations are not explicitly marked beyond the mere act of pointing to or naming an analogy (Lotman 2007). Securitization is the most likely catalyst for a discourse of fear, which is shaped by affective semiosis and the construction of indeterminate chains of association (Ventsel, Madisson 2019; Ventsel *et al*. 2021). In this article, an affect-based semiotics of fear serves as a framework for conceptualizing the signifying logic underlying securitization discourses.

In addition to identifying the referent objects of securitization and its underlying mechanism of meaning-making, the second focus of this article is analysing the political nature of these securitizing discursive acts. In the discussion section, we explore this through the lens of deproblematization and hegemony, situated within the framework of political semiotics. Similarly to the securitization approach, we assume that politics, institutions, and identities are constructed, negotiated, or transformed through discursive acts of persuasion (Selg, Ventsel 2021). Hegemonic relations represent a specific articulation of meanings (Laclau 2005: 114–115). This articulation occurs when the meaning of a particular signifier – whether a symbol, political demand, or slogan – transcends its specificity and comes to represent the entire signifying system. In terms of cultural psychology and political semiotics, this corresponds to a process dominated by pleromatic mediation, which gives rise to hegemonic discourse. This framework

enables an understanding of a particular mode of political meaning-making and a specific strategy of securitization: hyper-securitization – namely, the construction of large-scale, instantaneous, cascading disaster scenarios that link a wide array of severe threats into a singular, overwhelming chain of risk, even though none of these scenarios have yet materialized (Hansen, Nissenbaum 2009: 1157). In this context, the affectivity of the signifier functions not through clearly defined meaning but through emotional engagement, with its role shifting from a semantic to a pragmatic-political one (Ventsel, Selg 2025). We approach hyper-securitization as a strategy of deproblematization, in which "deproblematized" issues are "resolved" by displacing them through pre-packaged ideological responses that are presented as universal solutions to diverse social problems. As we have argued elsewhere, the dominance of such political communication inherently depends on emotional appeals, which reinforce the 'us' versus 'them' antagonism in public discourse. The phatic aspect of communication – involving the establishment, maintenance, or reinforcement of social contact – comes to overshadow the semantic dimension of messages, being realized through stereotypical linguistic and cultural forms characteristic of the audience (Selg, Ventsel 2021, 2023). By analysing the securitized referent objects emphasized in securitization discourse – particularly within the strategy of hypersecuritization – and examining how the removal or preservation of Soviet monuments is framed as mitigating such threats, the underlying political objectives of these discourses become discernible.

3. Data and methodology

In the first phase of data collection, we used search engines to locate stories from Estonia's largest news portal Delfi, the website of Estonia's largest daily newspaper Postimees, and the online portal of the Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR) published from spring 2022 to the end of the 2023 and containing the keywords 'red monument', 'red symbols', 'Soviet monument', 'Soviet symbols', 'Narva tank', 'Soviet street names', and 'Maarjamäe Memorial'. In total, we retrieved 301 articles that included the specified keywords from Delfi, 270 from Postimees, and 160 from the ERR.

Considering the linguistic differences and the conventional ways of denotation of Soviet monuments, the keywords were slightly adjusted for data collection in Latvian media. The following key words were used in the case of Latvia: 'Soviet monument', 'monument in Pārdaugava', 'monument in Uzvara park', '*okupeklis*' (a new portmanteau coinage that merges the Latvian words for 'monument' and

'occupation'), '9th of May celebrations'. To maintain methodological consistency, we relied on the interconnectedness of media platforms between Latvia and Estonia, thus collecting the data in the same way from the Latvian version of Delfi, the Postimees-owned TVNET, and the LSM (Latvian public media service). The initial search yielded 445 articles in Latvia (130, 209 and 106 respectively).

The next phase of empirical research involved close reading of the articles. We identified texts by Estonian and Latvian politicians that featured statements or extended opinion pieces on the removal of Soviet monuments. However, many of these contained significant overlaps, as the same politicians' statements were often reported across multiple media outlets, or else they were short, two- to three-sentence quotes that media outlets used as illustrations. In our analysis we included longer comments and selected 45 articles in Estonian and 56 articles in Latvian for the sample.

In the public debate, a variety of positions was expressed regarding the potential dangers associated with monuments, some of which appeared only once or twice in political statements. It is not feasible to cover all of these in the analysis, nor would such an overview carry significant heuristic value. In our analysis, we focus on the two main securitization discourses that dominated the removal of Soviet symbols – discourses that were central in both Estonia and Latvia:

(1) The continued presence of Soviet symbols in public spaces is perceived as a security threat, justifying their removal.

(2) The removal itself is seen as a potential risk, as it may escalate interethnic tensions and spark conflicts.

Each of these, in turn, comprised two subordinate narratives, each with its own referent object of securitization. That said, there were minor differences in emphasis between the two countries. It should be noted that in the analysed materials, a single speech by a politician could contain multiple interrelated referent objects of securitization. Therefore, the distinction between the four primary referent objects of securitization is analytical in nature. For illustrative purposes, we have selected quotations that were most prominent within the speeches. Moreover, it is not feasible to present excerpts from every speech in the sample; instead, we include those that were particularly striking and that were also cited or re-circulated in other media outlets.

In the analytical section, we first map out the primary referent objects within securitization discourses and subsequently conceptualize the meaning-making mechanisms characteristic of these discourses through the frameworks of fear semiotics and affective semiosis.

4. Analysis of securitization strategies: The security threat discourse associated with the Soviet monuments

In Estonia and Latvia Soviet monuments were increasingly perceived as security risks, reinforcing legislative efforts to permit their removal. The renewed urgency stemmed from concerns that Russia could instrumentalize WWII-related symbols to deepen societal divisions. A key concern stems from the demographic makeup of Estonia and Latvia, where Russian speakers make up about 29% and 33% of the population, respectively. Their integration has long been a political issue, which Russia has sought to exploit through the ideology of the so-called "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*) – a strategy aimed at creating a cohesive sphere of influence to destabilize its neighbouring states (Van Herpen 2015).

Securitization always concerns the future in some sense, but it also articulates strong connections to the past (Nissenbaum, Hansen 2009). In the public debate that erupted in 2022 over the removal of Soviet symbols, the main argumentation centred on the problematic relationship between different historical narratives – those of the Soviet Union and present-day Russia, contrasted with Estonia's and Latvia's official historical perspectives. Broadly speaking, two interconnected emphases emerged: (1) the issue of the distorted interpretation of Soviet history that these monuments reinforce, and (2) the negative emotions that such monuments and symbols in public spaces might provoke among Estonians and Latvians. Although the removal of Soviet symbols has been a topic of public discourse in Estonia and Latvia before – particularly in connection with the events of April 2007 – the main catalyst for the current debate was Russia's war in Ukraine

4.1. The Soviet and Kremlin interpretations of history as a security threat

Let us begin by presenting some extended quotes from representatives of the main political parties in Estonia:

> Soviet monuments symbolize the tragedy that befell Estonia in the 20th century, and therefore they have no place in public spaces in Estonia. – Marek Reinaas, Chairman of the Eesti 200 [Estonia 200] parliamentary faction (19 May 2022)

> The arrival of the Red Army in Estonia was followed by bloody repressions, deportations, the destruction of Estonian culture, and half a century of occupation. Removing these monuments is not about fighting against history or the shadows of the past. On the contrary, it is a matter of ensuring an accurate historical narrative and protecting Estonia's dignity and self-respect. – Tarmo Kruusimäe, member of the political party Isamaa [Fatherland] (11 May 2022)

The emotional tone of these quotations may vary, but the primary reason for the removal of Soviet monuments from public spaces remains the same: monuments serve to (re)affirm Soviet-era interpretations of history and undermine the Estonian interpretation of the history of the Soviet period (1940–1991).

We can see this also in the case of Latvia where the significance of the historical interpretation connected to the monument complex is especially prevalent in the political argumentation. Let us examine the following statement made by the Riga City Council member Rita Našeniece from the Jaunā Vienotība [New Unity] alliance just after the 9th of May celebrations:

> We will never know the extent to which we have become collaborators here. It is clear for us that our society has not threatened anyone in any way, unlike those on the other side of history. [..] It is evident what takes place on the 9th of May! It is not a matter of commemoration. It is a matter of imperial religious preaching. (Sproģis 2022)

The core issue is the function of the monuments in their relation to the historical interpretation upheld by Russia. The point is evident in this statement (from 13 May 2022) by the Riga City Council member Ivars Drulle (Par! [For]):

> I would like to emphasize that all wars are fought twice. First time on the field of battle and then in the memory. Currently we are experiencing a painful war of memory. (Trenča 2022).

The same historical events are often framed in different ways, and the context of conflicting official narratives of WWII has even given rise to the metaphor of a "European memory war" (Mälksoo 2012; Kattago 2012; Tamm 2012). In the Estonian and Latvian context, the primary focus of this "war" concerns the interpretation of the events of 1940 and their aftermath. Russia's narrative suggests that Estonia and Latvia voluntarily joined the Soviet Union in 1940 and emphasizes its own role as the principal victor in overcoming Nazi Germany and the liberator of Europe, including Estonia and Latvia, from Nazism. For Estonia's and Latvia's historical narrative, it is crucial to acknowledge that following the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939, Hitler and Stalin criminally divided Europe into spheres of influence, and that the Nazi occupation of 1941–1944 was followed by a Soviet occupation. Since political history is an integral part of national identity politics, the public display of Soviet symbols reinforces Russia's current interpretation of history, which contradicts Estonia's and Latvia's own political historical narrative, as it effectively denies the Soviet occupation of Estonia and

Latvia. The Soviet symbols that legitimize the historical narratives of the Kremlin securitize Estonia's and Latvia's national history narrative as a referent object.

Political history related to identity formation is also reflected in the strategic choices made in defining the referent object of historical interpretation. Most notably, it has been emphasized that such Soviet monuments evoke negative emotions in contemporary Estonians and Latvians and are perceived as offensive. Thierry Balzacq, a representative of the Securitization School, has highlighted that the success of securitization depends on the actor's ability to define the feelings, needs, and interests of the audience. The speaker must adapt their language to meet the audience's expectations (Balzacq 2005: 184). Audiences "do not exist somewhere in isolation" but are constituted within discourse. Security discourses delineate the boundaries between 'us' (on whose behalf the speaker speaks) and 'you' (whose fears and emotions are being addressed) (Hansen, Nissenbaum 2009: 1165). Let us provide a few examples to illustrate this:

> The removal of symbols of the occupying power is a matter of dignity for the Estonian state. Freedom and independence are non-negotiable. To compromise on these principles is simply immoral and degrading, not only for the Estonian state but also for those residents of Narva who are still, in spirit, living in the Soviet Union and glorifying the Red Army's conquests. – Helir-Valdor Seeder, Isamaa (4 August 2022)

> Russia's brutal assault on Ukraine has reopened old wounds for the Estonian people and drawn attention to the Soviet monuments in our surroundings, creating the imperative to remove them from our public spaces. – Government Office of Estonia (3 January 2023) (Riik ootab Narvalt… 2023)

The quotations centre around the emotions and values of Estonians, highlighting feelings of being "immoral and degrading" and referencing "old wounds" that are provoked by Soviet symbols. It is assumed that such symbols reawaken cultural traumas embedded in the collective memory of Estonians, caused by the Soviet occupation, and that this emotional disturbance constitutes a clear threat to the local population. However, the specific nature of this emotional impact, and why it should constitute a security threat rather than merely a conflict of interpretations, is often left unexplained.

Likewise, in the case of Latvia we can find similar metaphorical expressions appearing in the argumentation connected to the monument complex. The "straightening of our backs" and "lifting up our heads", appearing, for instance, in the rhetoric of the Prime Minister of Latvia at the time Krišjānis Kariņš (Jaunā Vienotība) on 25 August, are a case in point (Kariņš 2022a). Let us provide more examples:

> The monument reminded of the fate of those who were deported to Siberia and repressed. We do not need such a monument. All over the world the respect is decreasing toward monuments and memorial sites for colonizers and different types of repressors – Egils Levits, President of Latvia, 2019–2023 (25 August 2022) (Levits 2022a).

> In my eyes, the so-called Victory monument has always been rather like a pillar of shame from the times of [feudal] socage. [..] This pole continues to remind, day-after-day, [..] of the long occupation by a foreign power and all the distress and humiliation connected to it. – Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga, President of Latvia, 1999–2007 (25 August 2022).

Different meanings are condensed into the same object and the central piece of the monument complex – an obelisk – is metaphorically tied, in addition, to the feudal history of Latvians, commonly associated with the negative experience of serfdom. The diverse meanings presuppose a specific standpoint – that of Latvians – in a specific narration of the historical events stretching beyond the past century. Although a direct historical link between the period of universal serfdom and the formal occupation of Latvia by the Soviet Union could be disputed, such disparate events can be associated through the negative emotional states they invoke. Taking the standpoint of such a historically cumulative threat, the securitization strategy can rely on it as a certain given, invoking the image of a victim of historical, transgenerational trauma as a referent object.

The securitized referent object linked to the Kremlin's historical narratives is clear: they undermine the official historical interpretations of Estonia and Latvia. Soviet symbols in public space serve as markers of recognition of Russia's version of history. However, the precise nature of the threat they pose often remains ambiguous. In the context of memory politics, Maria Mälksoo (2021) has emphasized that safeguarding a state's historical narrative is essential for ensuring a stable national identity and international recognition, as this narrative shapes the country's position within the international system. From this perspective, Kremlin narratives that deny the Soviet occupation of Estonia and Latvia between 1940 and 1991 threaten their continuity of statehood with the interwar republics (1918–1940) and provide discursive justification for Russia's aggressive foreign policy.

In the discourse surrounding Soviet symbolic heritage, there were few, if any, explicit references to the Kremlin's historical narrative as a direct and overt threat in the sense described by Mälksoo. Instead, the discourse of threat was primarily articulated through a negative emotional framing, which can be understood as the perceived endangerment of the 'people' as an emotional community (Anderson 2006: 6–7). The referent object was constructed through meaning-making which

is common for affective semiosis and fear semiotics, characterized by *pleromatic* mediation – where threats were defined via collective historical traumas inflicted by Russia, such as deportations, labour camps, and other forms of repression that the people have experienced throughout history at the hands of various conquerors. Monument removal was also compared to decolonization processes elsewhere in the world. This gave rise to a cascading threat narrative that blurred distinctions between specific historical events, unifying them under a single, emotionally charged signifier: the removal of Soviet symbols. According to many authors the affective dimension is particularly pronounced in themes evoking negative feelings – especially when tied to the loss of happiness (Ahmed 2014), experiences of mourning (Valsiner 2021), and anxieties about the future (Grusin 2010: 46). Such external-threat-driven negative emotion holds powerful potential to foster communal cohesion and political mobilization (Assmann 2021: 82).

4.2. The ideological influence of Soviet monuments as a security threat

Another significant securitization strategy focused on the evolving security environment resulting from the war in Ukraine. In this context, Soviet symbols were primarily viewed as potential tools for escalation within Russia's hybrid warfare and the associated consequences. There was a fear that Russia could exploit these symbols, which glorify the Soviet past, to incite ethnic conflicts within Estonia and provoke negative reactions among certain segments of society against Estonia's pro-Ukraine policies. This concern was succinctly articulated by the Minister of Justice Lea Danilson-Järg (Isamaa), whose institution was one of the key proponents of the legislative initiative to remove Soviet symbols:

> Since 24 February, when the Russian Federation began its war against the sovereign state of Ukraine, the display of occupation monuments has taken on a more negative connotation than before, as they are perceived as symbols supporting aggression and inciting hostility. […] The removal of Soviet monuments, however, allows Estonia finally to free itself from the ideological influence of its criminal conqueror. (Lomp 2022a)

> Now is the last moment to disarm Russia of its ideological weapons. There is always a security aspect involved here. (Kiisler 2022)

A similarly vague reference to Soviet symbols as amplifiers of Russian ideological influence can be observed among representatives of various political parties. These symbols are seen as tools for "reinforcing the influence of the Russian world within the Estonian state", which hinders the integration of the Russian-speaking

community into Estonia's cultural sphere and system of values (Solman 2022). Similar views can be found in the case of Latvia: consider the following statement:

> With Russia's aggression against Ukraine in the background, it suddenly became clear for the majority of the society that these monuments and other signs are not just "innocent" historical heritage but rather purposefully installed ideological objects. – Egils Levits (19 June 2023)

A distinctive feature of this threat discourse is that Soviet symbols and monuments were depicted as if they possessed agency themselves, being capable of negatively influencing Estonia's or Latvia's population ("Russian world's sphere of influence", "an obstacle" to the integration process, "not just 'innocent' historical heritage"). Meanwhile, the affected segment of the population was often portrayed as a passive entity, vulnerable to this influence.

Indeed, in addition to vague references to ideological influence, more concrete threat scenarios were outlined, in which Soviet monuments were not seen as active sources of conflict themselves but rather as tools that could be exploited in Russia's hybrid warfare efforts. In Estonia, the Minister of the Interior Lauri Läänemets (Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond [Social Democratic Party]) justified the selection of monuments for removal based on their significance, noting that certain monuments could likely be used to escalate tensions: "The selection is based on a threat assessment, analysis, and previous actions," he explained (Länts 2022b). Thus, Soviet symbols were framed not merely as remnants of the past but as potential instruments to be manipulated by external actors in creating division or unrest within Estonia.

A few months earlier Kristjan Jaani, the Minister of the Interior prior to Läänemets (Jaani left office on 3 June 2022), had explained that the prohibition of Soviet-related paraphernalia – such as the St George's ribbon, the 'Z' symbol, or red flags – at public gatherings, as well as the removal of Soviet symbols, was a preventive measure.

> Russia is constantly seeking ways to divide society, both in Estonia and more broadly around the world. This is undoubtedly one of their goals, and it must be taken into account. The threshold of sensitivity is certainly different when we talk about symbols that have now become associated with the Russian army in Ukraine – these symbols are stained with the blood of innocent Ukrainian victims. (Länts 2022a)

A similar form of securitization – with a more clearly defined referent object – also emerged in Latvia. Notably, a key difference between the Estonian and

Latvian cases lies in the strategic role of the 9th of May celebrations in Latvia's securitization discourse. These celebrations, held just months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, were especially charged. By then, legal grounds already existed to link Soviet military symbols to Russia's actions in Ukraine. In 2022, the commemorations were met with heightened restrictions and police presence. However, it was the removal of flowers from the monument on 10 May – perceived as a provocation – that sparked more chaotic and emotionally charged gatherings, this time with less policing. The incident triggered a broader public reaction and acted as a catalyst for the monument's removal. From that point onward, political discourse increasingly emphasized a clearly defined 'them' – those who had gathered at the site on 10 May. The events also echoed in political rhetoric. Commenting on her experience after having spent three hours by the monument during that day, the Vice-Mayor of Riga Linda Ozola from Kods Rīgai [Code for Riga] wrote:

> What did I see there? People who had sound amplifying devices and were energetically singing Soviet army songs [..]; I heard expressions like "*my pobedili*" ["we won" in Russian] being yelled out, loud [Russian] swear words [...]; I saw members of the Saeima [the Parliament of Latvia], who were certainly in support of the events taking place there, policemen, who reprimanded some of those present, albeit not all of them; and I saw a very (!) aggressive reaction directed at the guys who had come there with the flags of Latvia and Ukraine, but also the police who were protecting them. (Ozola, 19 May 2022)

We can thus see how this turn of events opened doors to a significantly different approach to securitization. The referent object had become apparent – those who displayed aggressive behaviour during the gatherings on 10 May, particularly, against those arriving by the monument with flags of Latvia and Ukraine as a response to the gatherings. The specific case, in addition to the prior solidification of the equivalence between the USSR and Putin's regime, was treated as a concern for the general safety of "those living in Latvia":

> [..] this decisive moment has revealed threats and collective tasks [..]. Those living in Latvia, patriots of Latvia, those who defend the statehood of Latvia must feel safe and be certain that their democratic rights will be fully respected and ensured. – Krišjānis Kariņš (Jaunā Vienotība) (11 May 2022) (Kariņš 2022b)

In the cited quotations from Estonian and Latvian politicians, the referent object is more clearly defined and primarily linked to Russia's military actions in Ukraine as well as the associated threat of military aggression toward Estonia

and Latvia. The broader context of framing Soviet symbols as instruments of the Kremlin's ideological influence is based on the assumption that (at least part of) the Russian-speaking population in both Baltic states is inclined toward the Kremlin and prefers a mental affiliation with the "Russian world". Due to this ideological influence, the securitized referent objects are the value systems of Estonian and Latvian cultures and their constitutional order. It was presumed that some members of Estonia's and Latvia's Russian-speaking population may support Russia's aggression in Ukraine and, in the event of a similar scenario in both countries, could potentially act as collaborators and support the Kremlin's idea of the "Russian world".

In conclusion, the case of justification of the removal of Soviet monuments reveals two distinct securitization strategies, each constructing its referent object in a different way. Two societal groups emerge as influenced: for Estonians and Latvians, the monuments serve as triggers of negative and traumatic emotions; for the Russian-speaking population, they are framed as amplifiers of pro-Kremlin sentiment.

Securitization is inherently tied to fear, which complicates its precise definition, as the recipients of fear are often mystified and semiotically constructed (Lotman 2007: 51). This affective semiotic logic is particularly pronounced in political discourse, where the ideological threat posed by the monuments remains abstract and ambiguously articulated, offering little clarity about its nature. Given the difficulty of clearly defining the ideological influence of Soviet symbols, pleromatic analogies and emotional parallels have frequently been drawn between the Red Army and Russia's current aggression in Ukraine, Soviet deportations and the action of the Kremlin today, as well past events such as the April 2007 riots. These comparisons, charged with negative affect, established a link to Estonian and Latvian cultural memory, thereby helping to legitimize the need for securitization. For the Russian-speaking population, however, monuments are construed as inherently capable of shaping individuals' dispositions toward supporting Kremlin policies.

According to studies in cultural semiotics, this type of fear semiotics – marked by vague or indeterminate referents – is characteristic of *unmotivated fear*, which does not arise from a concrete event or object, but rather from the interpretation of certain elements of reality as ominous signs or warnings (Lotman 2019b). Such articulations of unmotivated fear rely on *pleromatic mediation*, where the causal links between fear and its object are loosely constructed, based more on diffuse associations than on direct threats. Monuments are thus imagined as inherently capable of influencing individuals to support Kremlin policies, or of amplifying historical trauma, thereby overlooking the fact that the meaning of symbols is

not intrinsic, but constructed through communicative and interpretive practices. These meanings depend heavily on the interpretive horizons of recipients – horizons that are far from homogeneous among Estonians, Latvians, or Russian-speaking communities. At the height of the Monument War in the autumn of 2022, surveys showed that 27 percent of Russian-speaking people of Estonia considered Vladimir Putin's aggression justified, whilst in Latvia the supporting percentage was 12 (with 19 percent refusing an answer) at the peak of monument removals in the summer of 2022.

The second securitization strategy involved a more clearly defined referent object, emphasizing that Russia could exploit Soviet symbols to incite tensions and foster ethnic hostility. This approach was particularly evident within institutions concerned with internal security, and in Latvia it became prominent following the concrete events in Riga on 9 May, which served to materialize the object of fear. In this case, the fear was *motivated*, as the threat was perceived as clear and immediate by those experiencing it (see Lotman 2019b: 202–203).[3] Here, a *schematic mediation* prevails, establishing causal links between threat objects and their potential consequences.

5. Analysis of securitization strategies: The security threat discourse associated with the removal of Soviet monuments

A significant strand of the public discourse has focused on the security threats potentially arising from the removal of Soviet monuments. Within this framework, two main areas of concern can be identified. The definition of both referent objects bore similarities to the aforementioned threat discourses, which regarded Soviet symbols as security risks: the dangers associated with their removal were also linked to historical memory in a broader sense and the potential for escalation as a result of hostile influence operations. In both cases, the discourse emphasized that removing these symbols might provoke negative reactions that could be exploited by external actors, especially in efforts to destabilize Latvia's and Estonia's social cohesion or incite tensions. Therefore, the perceived threat was not only the presence of Soviet symbols but also the act of their removal, which could become a flashpoint for further conflict.

---

[3] In real fear situations, unmotivated and motivated fear often appear intertwined (Lotman 2019b).

5.1. The removal of monuments
as a threat to cultural and historical memory

The primary argument, put forward mainly by representatives of the Estonian Ministry of Culture and various creative unions, focused on the abstract threat that the removal of Soviet symbols could pose to the preservation of historical memory in Estonia. The argument underscored the importance of these symbols as historical artefacts, suggesting that their removal might erase significant parts of Estonia's complex past. The discussion centred not only on the immediate political and security concerns but also on the longer-term implications for how future generations engage with Estonia's historical memory, including the traumatic periods of Soviet occupation and repression. This debate reflects the tension between addressing contemporary security needs and safeguarding the integrity of national historical narratives. The Ministry of Culture echoed this position, emphasizing the need to distinguish between monuments that incite or romanticize war and those symbols that hold cultural value. According to the then Minister of Culture Piret Hartmann, indiscriminate removal could lead to:

> [...] undesirable consequences and significant harm to Estonian culture [...] the preservation of historical and cultural heritage is both an opportunity and an obligation of the current generation towards the next – so that they, too, may have a diverse and memory-rich living environment [...]. Once historical and cultural heritage is destroyed, it is irreversibly lost, and cannot be restored. (Eesmaa 2022)

In this securitization discourse, monuments are positioned as central material objects of memory which, despite their association with painful historical events, serve to uphold a sense of cultural continuity – framed as "the opportunity and obligation of the current generation towards the next" to preserve monuments as witnesses of history. Their indiscriminate removal risks transforming the memory politics surrounding Estonian history and culture into a securitized referent object. This perspective was shared by the Minister of Culture and echoed by representatives of Estonia's Creative Persons and Artistic Associations, who, in an open letter (Loomeliidud valitsusele 2022), acknowledged the ideological charge of Soviet monuments but warned that their removal could significantly shape the ways in which Estonian history is remembered and interpreted.

At the same time, this characterization of the referent object closely resembles the threat scenarios associated with the Kremlin's historical narratives. It remains unclear what specific danger is posed to Estonians' historical consciousness – what are the lessons these monuments are said to convey, and how exactly are they threatened? Rather than identifying a concrete threat, the discourse constructs

a more abstract fear: the potential future loss of a collective sense of the past. This is rhetorically amplified through terms such as '*destruction*', suggesting undesirable consequences and significant harm ("irreversibly lost") to Estonian culture. However, it remains ambiguous whether the removal of the monuments from public space would indeed erase the entire discourse surrounding the Soviet period, or whether other discursive tools – such as textbooks, literature, or film – could effectively fulfil the role of historical transmission.

In the case of Latvia the attention was rather directed at reconsidering the ethos of commemoration. Efforts from politicians to equalize the differences between the Russian- and Latvian-speaking populations took the form of announcements and relied on exemplarity, taking both the form of prodding as well as reconciliatory substitution of monuments for war cemeteries (Spalvēns 2022; Sproģis 2022; Fedotova 2023). The historical dimension was thus treated as a matter of substitution, whilst the material continuity, albeit not disregarded completely, was relegated to museums, as the notion of potential harm to cultural heritage remained peripheral and was accorded less significance altogether (Levits 2022b; Vība 2022; Puķe 2023).

5.2. Threat to social cohesion posed by the removal of Soviet monuments

The second discourse surrounding the risks associated with the removal of Soviet monuments and other "red symbols" highlighted the potential for creating divisive (primarily ethnic) conflicts within Estonian and Latvian societies, which would undermine existing integration policies.

Since the last major integration-related issues arose in Estonia during the April 2007 unrest, references to those events were frequently made in public statements. Indeed, the government also recognized the potential for escalation. Minister of the Interior Lauri Läänemets pointed out that the removal could generate a new source of threat:

> This [removal of "red" symbols; A.V., D.K.S.] will certainly have consequences, and it will leave a mark on Narva. This is also why the government should not focus solely on the removal of monuments; we must ensure that Narva remains mentally connected to Estonia. (Põlluste 2022)

A similar stance, but more strongly directed against removal of the monuments, was taken by Jaak Allik (Social Democratic Party), who argued on 20 September that the war in Ukraine provided an opportunity to explain to Estonia's Russian-speaking population what Putin's "Russian World" truly represents for them.

He warned that the removal of symbols important to the Russian-speaking community, without considering their perspectives, is a dangerous strategy, where "we further polarize Estonians and non-Estonians living in Estonia with each new threat" (Allik 2022). The removal of the monuments itself becomes a source of threat, where the securitized referent object is social cohesion between different ethnic groups in Estonia.

The aforementioned concerns were well-founded, as this threat scenario was reflected in the statements of Russian-speaking politicians, particularly by representatives of regional authorities who were directly involved in major removal actions. Personal trauma and the negative emotional impact of monument removal on the Russian-speaking population were frequently highlighted as a referent object, with efforts to distance themselves from equating Putin's Russia with the Red Army. One of the most vocal opponents of the removal, Narva City Council member Mihhail Stalnuhhin (Keskerakond [Estonian Centre Party]), stated in mid-August, "In that war, my uncle and one of my grandfathers died fighting, and about ten other family members were simply killed. That's why I have always had a very personal relationship with Narva's monuments – they have always meant a great deal to me and most of Narva's residents, on a personal level, not an ideological one" (Lomp 2022b). Aleksei Jevgrafov (Keskerakond [Estonian Centre Party]), Member of the Narva City Council echoed this after the removal of the tank-monument on 16 August:

> That tank is not a symbol of occupation for us, the people of Narva. It is a symbol of the fight against fascists, and this is what we constantly emphasize. There were major battles in these places during the war, many lost their lives, and these places remain in our hearts. (Anvelt 2022)

We can observe that historical interpretation plays a central role in arguments against monument removal, with particular emphasis on the emotional harm it may cause to a segment of Estonia's population – expressed through sentiments such as "these places remain in our hearts" and assertions that the connection to Narva's monuments is personal rather than ideological. This form of meaning-making reflects *pleromatic mediation*, where affective engagement becomes pragmatically and politically more significant than conceptual or argumentative clarity. This also highlights a key difference between the discourses of Estonian and Russian-speaking politicians: while the latter acknowledge that the removal of monuments may hinder the integration process, their statements lack recognition of the Soviet occupation of Estonia, asserting instead that these monuments are "not symbols of occupation for us". Rather, they emphasize the Kremlin's narrative

of victory over fascism, without acknowledging that this victory narrative – framed as an ongoing struggle against fascism (Stone 2014: 34) – constitutes one of the central pillars of Russian state propaganda and serves as part of the legitimation for the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The trajectory in Latvia, however, follows a somewhat divergent course, as the events of the 10 May, as previously noted, significantly reshaped securitization strategies, culminating with the resignation of Minister of Internal Affairs Marija Golubeva (Attīstībai/Par! [Development/For!]). The dominant line of reasoning favoured the removal of monuments as a means of minimizing the risk of escalation instigated by the Kremlin within Latvia, although it was acknowledged that such actions could provoke internal tensions. Kristaps Eklons [Development/For!], who succeeded Golubeva as the Minister of Internal Affairs, argued on 31 May that "virtually any incident can cause an avalanche effect" and that "the times of comfort" had ended (Eklons 2022).

On the issue of political threats, however, politicians representing the Russian-speaking population, especially those from (in this regard) the most persistent political party, Latvijas Krievu savienība [Latvia's Russian Union], highlighted the possibility of the removal being seen as a provocation. For example, three members of the Riga City Council pointed toward risks of military escalation, with Jakovs Pliners (Latvia's Russian Union) referring to unspecified "talks going around" and claiming that the removal would lead to Russia's invasion into Latvia, Vladimirs Buzajevs (Latvia's Russian Union) claiming that the removal would provoke Russia to "extend the scope of its special [military] operation", and Inna Djeri (Latvia's Russian Union) arguing that "currently we are as close to a civil war as we have ever been and we have to use all means available to prevent this" (Trenča 2022; Kalaus 2022).

The threat associated with the removal of the monument complex was framed in terms of specific risk scenarios – namely, a foreign invasion (linked to the notion of provocation) and social unrest (linked to the notion of civil war) – where in both cases the securitized referent object is the constitutional order. However, the basis of these threat assessments remains unclear, as they are vaguely supported by rumours ("talks going around") and a self-assessed threat of civil war.

In conclusion, the securitization strategies surrounding the removal of Soviet symbolic elements reveal meaning-making mechanisms similar to those found in discourses that legitimize their removal: the more long-term the perceived threat, the more vaguely it is articulated. For instance, the removal of monuments is said to impoverish Estonians' sense of historical continuity or alienate the Russian-speaking population mentally, causing emotional trauma that could lead to ethnic conflict or, in the worst case, civil war. In both scenarios, the threat is primarily

invoked rather than substantiated, with pleromatic mediation dominating the discourse – connections between different elements of threat narratives remain loosely articulated. According to cultural semiotician Mihhail Lotman, the logic of fear semiosis is grounded in participationality, where meaning arises from perceived resemblance or association. Here, iconic similarity (a sign resembling its object through form, appearance, or structure) and metaphorical substitution become dominant modes of signification (Lotman, M. 2009: 1239). This logic helps explain how securitization discourses form through analogy: monuments were once destroyed by the Soviet regime – we must not repeat those mistakes or risk becoming like the Soviets ourselves; destroying monuments makes one resemble a fascist (Stalnuhhin in Lomp 2022b), etc.

When a threat is represented as immediate and framed in a short-term perspective, schematic mediation tends to dominate the relationship between elements constructing the threat scenario. In this form of fear semiosis, participation unfolds in concentric circles – greater intensity of contact implies stronger influence (Lotman, M. 2009: 1238). This semiotic mode is oriented toward indexicality (where signs point to their object through causal or physical connection) and metonymy (Lotman, M. 2009: 1239). Such dynamics are evident in securitization discourses suggesting that tensions surrounding monument removal may be exploited by the Kremlin to advance its foreign policy objectives in the Baltic states.

6. Discussion

Fear narratives affect the ways in which policy issues – including questions of national security – are debated in the public sphere. Threats can be described either concretely or abstractly. In concrete depiction of threats, where causal links are explicated, the precise source of threat is described (e.g. specific persons or their activities), and it is explained whom it can put in danger and how. It is the case of motivated fear. Such a manner of depiction facilitates rational debates over the severity of the threat at hand, as well as the possible ways of reducing or avoiding it. This was evident in securitization strategies where the threat to the referent object was clearly delineated as stemming from hostile action by the Kremlin, with schematic mediation and metonymic meaning-making prevailing in such cases.

If the threat is described abstractly, perhaps just as a general (and inevitable) context in which people find themselves, without showing the specific connections between the source of the threat and those (allegedly) affected, then reasonable

discussion will be hindered. When examining the public discourse surrounding the removal of Soviet symbols, we observe the emergence of both pro- and anti-removal threat discourses, which combine various, often vaguely articulated, security concerns. This is the case that we call *hypersecuritization*. Dorothy E. Denning (1999: xiii) highlights the urgency and the effect of mutually reinforcing concerns in hypersecuritization. Hypersecuritization arises particularly when multiple – often incommensurable – referent objects and sectors are introduced. In our analysis, this incommensurability is evident in the incorporation of historical interpretations, emotional trauma, and arguments related to information warfare to justify the removal of Soviet monuments. The urgency of removing Soviet monuments was presented to the audience with arguments emphasizing the potential threats of ideological influence and escalation, appealing to emotional involvement in the legitimization process ('the old wounds of the Estonian people', 'dignity', etc.). Here, pleromatic mediation and metaphorical substitution prevailed.

The present case, especially the hypersecuritization strategy, reflects Lotman's idea that a symbol's capacity for signification always exceeds its immediate realization while also pointing to the mobilizing and political function of the public discourse surrounding the removal of Soviet symbols. The demand to remove Soviet symbols became one such central nodal point in the political debates of the time in both Baltic states. When the referent objects are the foundational values of society – such as statehood or collective trauma – the threat is primarily imagined through pleromatic mediation, which relies on approximate resemblance and the sketching of analogies. This kind of hegemonic logic of meaning-making erases the specific distinctions between signifiers within the discourse, resembling the dynamics of hyper-securitization, which progressively obscures meaning. The affective force of the signifier operates less through semantic clarity than through emotional engagement (Ventsel, Selg 2025). The aim of such meaning-making is to construct an antagonistic 'us–them' opposition and to offer a fertile ground for processes of political identification.

At the same time, when securitization is presented as the only viable course of action, its inherently political character is simultaneously obscured, as the very possibility of alternatives is effectively erased. This dynamic is particularly evident in strategies of hyper-securitization, which may thus be understood as instances of *deproblematization*. Deproblematization constitutes one of the key strategies of depoliticizing political discourse – conceived as a set of processes, including various tactics, mechanisms, and instruments, aimed at eliminating or displacing the potential for choice, collective agency, and democratic deliberation on contested issues (Fawcett *et al.* 2017: 5).

In Peeter Selg and Andreas Ventsel's semiotic approach to politics, deproblematization is marked by the dominance of political communication that is heavily reliant on emotional appeals and *phatic* messaging such as the use of stereotypes, conventional assumptions, and ritualized formulas – that is, pleromatic mediation is dominant. This strategy reinforces binary oppositions and the antagonistic logic of 'us' versus 'them' in public discourse (Selg, Ventsel 2021, 2023). Policy issues are thus framed through broad, often abstract threats to the public, wherein the enemy is depicted as identifiable yet uncontrollable – an obstructive force whose malevolent actions threaten the very foundations of the public sphere, whether conceptualized as a nation, state, or collective group. Sometimes, the removal efforts were perceived as a media-driven political campaign aimed at gaining attention before elections (as in 2007, when the relocation of the Bronze Soldier was an important issue in the parliamentary election campaigns held in March), and once again as securatizing the "Russian card" (Kovalenko-Kõlvart 2022).

One of the intended outcomes of such a strategy is the creation of a context in which affective meaning-making, rooted in fear, begins to direct and control the audience's decision-making processes (Valsiner 2014). Several scholars argue that fear is among the most powerful emotions for mobilizing populations (Castells 2009; Ahmed 2014). In an atmosphere culturally shaped by fear, emotion functions as a mediating force that guides the ways in which audiences construct meaning and orient themselves toward future decisions. The more intense the emotional tension, the stronger the pressure to cope by producing simplified explanations of the crisis (Valsiner 2014; Valsiner, De Luca Picione 2017). Under such conditions, individuals are led to interpret everyday situations through a sharpened, antagonistic 'us–them' value framework, rather than seeking constructive solutions to the underlying problem.

7. Final remarks

Hypersecuritization is one of the strategies employed in the discourse of threats. It often results in the creation of all-encompassing cascades of danger, which may hinder effective engagement with specific, problematic risks. Admittedly, this strategy is not inherently unwarranted in all cases. It is not difficult to envision situations in which the imperative to mobilize the public immediately outweighs the careful weighing of arguments for and against addressing particular issues in detail. A genuine wartime scenario could serve as such a case.

Since 2022, the removal of Soviet symbols from public space has emerged as an increasingly prevalent phenomenon, observable not only in the Baltic states

but also in Ukraine and various Central European countries situated further from Russia. This process reflects broader efforts to renegotiate collective memory and reshape public historical narratives. Importantly, engagement with a traumatic past and with Soviet-era symbolism need not always take the form of erasure. Alternative approaches – such as artistic reinterpretation – have sought to reimagine Soviet monuments, transforming them into new cultural artefacts. Similarly, practices of re-signification offer compelling examples of how symbols of Soviet authority can be recontextualized: former KGB buildings repurposed as museums of repression or Soviet industrial sites converted into cultural centres illustrate such attempts to assign new meanings to contentious spaces.

Within the framework of securitization, a promising direction for further research lies in a comparative analysis of the discursive strategies employed to legitimize such removals or investigate the extent to which these alternative strategies have succeeded, as well as how they have been received by the public. As a preliminary hypothesis, one might propose that differences in geographical position, historical experience, and demographic composition contribute to marked variations in political discourse and, more broadly, in the political cultures of the countries in question. Such an inquiry would significantly enhance our understanding of how societies confront and reconfigure their pasts.

References

Ahmed, Sara 2014. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780748691142

Anderson, Benedict 2006. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (Rev. ed.) London, New York: Verso.

Assmann, Aleida 2021. *Mineviku pikk vari. Mäletamiskultuur ja ajaloopoliitika*. Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikooli Kirjastus.

Balzacq, Thierry 2005. The three faces of securitization: Political agency, audience and context. *European Journal of International Relations* 11(2): 171–201. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066105052960

Bellentani, Federico 2021. *The Meanings of the Built Environment: A Semiotic and Geographical Approach to Monuments in the Post-Soviet Era*. Berlin: De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110617276

Bellentani, Federico 2022. Relocating the past: The case of the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn. *Translation: A Transdisciplinary Journal* 7(1): 131–149.

Buzan, Barry 2004. *The United States and the Great Powers: World Politics in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge: Polity.

Buzan, Barry; Waever, Ole; De Wilde, Jaap 1998. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781685853808

Castells, Manuel 2009. *Communication Power*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Cerūzis, Raimonds 2015. Latvieši un vācbaltieši starpkaru periodā: no kopīgas kultūras identitātes kuni "piemineklu karam". *Latvijas Vēstures institūta Žurnāls* 3: 96.

Denning, Dorothy E. 1999. *Information Warfare and Security*. Reading: Addison-Wesley.

Fawcett, Paul; Flinders, Matthew; Hay, Colin; Wood, Matthew 2017. Anti-politics, depoliticization, and governance. In: Fawcett, Paul; Flinders, Matthew; Hay, Colin; Wood, Matthew (eds.), *Anti-Politics, Depoliticization, and Governance.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3–37. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198748977.003.0001

Grusin, Richard 2010. *Premediation: Affect and Materiality after 9/11*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230275270

Hansen, Lene; Nissenbaum, Helen 2009. Digital disaster, cyber security, and the Copenhagen School. *International Studies Quarterly* 53(4): 1155–1175. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2009.00572.x

Herpen, Marcel H. van 2015. *Putin's Propaganda Machine*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Kattago, Siobhan 2012. *Memory and Representation in Contemporary Europe: The Persistence of the Past*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Kruks, Sergejs 2011. Ārtelpas skulptūras semiotika, ekonomika un politika. Pieminekļu celtniecība un demontāža Latvijā. Riga: Neputns.

Krzyżanowska, Natalia 2015. The discourse of counter-monuments: Semiotics of material commemoration in contemporary urban spaces. *Social Semiotics* 26(5): 465–485. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2015.1096132

Laclau, Ernesto 2005. *On Populist Reason*. London, New York: Verso.

Laclau, Ernesto; Mouffe, Chantal 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.

Lotman, Juri 2007. Nõiajaht. Hirmusemiootika. In: *Hirm ja segadus: Esseid kultuuri-semiootikast*. (Lotman, Mihhail, ed.) Tallinn: Varrak, 50–68.

Lotman, Juri 2019a. The symbol in the system. In: *Culture, Memory and History: Essays in Cultural Semiotics.* (Tamm, Marek, ed.) Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 161–173. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-14710-5_12

Lotman, Juri 2019b. Technological progress as a culturological problem. In: *Culture, Memory and History: Essays in Cultural Semiotics*. (Tamm, Marek, ed.) Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 201–224. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-14710-5_15

Lotman, Mihhail 2009. Hirmusemiootika ja vene kultuuri tüpoloogia V. *Akadeemia* 6: 1219–1248.

Mälksoo, Maria 2012. Nesting orientalisms at war: World War II and the 'memory war' in Eastern Europe. In: Barkawi, Tarak; Stanski, Keith (eds.), *Orientalism and War*. New York: Columbia University Press, 177–195. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199327782.003.0009

Mälksoo, Maria 2015. Memory must be defended: Beyond the politics of mnemonical security. *Security Dialogue* 46(3): 221–237. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010614552549

Mälksoo, Maria 2021. A ritual approach to deterrence: I am, therefore I deter. *European Journal of International Relations* 27(1): 53–78. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066120966039

Mintaurs, Mārtiņš 2016. Pieminekļi un atmiņa: padomju perioda kultūras mantojums Latvijā. In: Kaprāns, Mārtiņš; Strenga, Gustavs; Bekmans-Dīrkess, Norberts (eds.), *Atmiņu kopienas: Atceres un aizmiršanas kultūra Latvijā*. Riga: Apgāds Zelta grauds. 106–129.

Nora, Pierre 1992. *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Rudovska, Maija 2024. History cannot be finished!: Dismantling and demolishing Soviet monuments in Latvia since 2022. *kunsttexte.de – Journal für Kunst- und Bildgeschichte* 1: 1–12.

Selg, Peeter; Ventsel, Andreas 2008. Towards a semiotic theory of hegemony: Naming as hegemonic operation in Lotman and Laclau. *Sign Systems Studies* 36(1): 167–183. https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2008.36.1.09

Selg, Peeter; Ventsel, Andreas 2021. *Introducing Relational Political Analysis: Political Semiotics as a Theory and Method*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-48780-5

Selg, Peeter; Ventsel, Andreas 2023. Cultural semiotics as the foundation of political semiotics. *Social Semiotics* 32: 671–688. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2022.2158619

Stone, Dan 2014. *Goodbye to All That? The Story of Europe since 1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tamm, Marek 2012. Conflicting communities of memory: War monuments and monument wars in contemporary Estonia. In: Vetik, Raivo (ed.), *Nation-Building in the Context of Post-Communist Transformation and Globalization: The Case of Estonia*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 43–72.

Valsiner, Jaan 2007. *Culture in Minds and Societies: Foundations of Cultural Psychology*. New Delhi: SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9788132108504

Valsiner, Jaan 2014. *An Invitation to Cultural Psychology*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473905986

Valsiner, Jaan 2021. *Hyper-Generalization by the Human Mind: The Role of Sign Hierarchies in Meaning-Making Processes*. Giessen: Psychosozial-Verlag. https://doi.org/10.30820/9783837974973

Valsiner, Jaan; De Luca Picione, Raffaele 2017. La regolazione dinamica dei processi affettivi attraverso la mediazione semiotica. *Rivista internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia* 8(1): 80–109. https://doi.org/10.4453/rifp.2017.0006

Van Herpen, Marcel H. 2015. *Putin's Propaganda Machine*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Ventsel, Andreas; Hansson, Sten; Madisson, Mari-Liis; Sazonov, Vladimir 2021. Discourse of fear in strategic narratives: The case of Russia's Zapad war games. *Media, War & Conflict* 14(1): 21–39. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635219856552

Ventsel, Andreas; Madisson, Mari-Liis 2019. Semiotics of threats: Discourse on the vulnerability of the Estonian identity card. *Sign Systems Studies* 47(1/2): 108–133. https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2019.47.1-2.05

Ventsel, Andreas; Selg, Peeter 2025. Affective securitization of emotions in Putin's WWII narrative. In: Ventsel, Andreas; Selg, Peeter (eds.), *Power of Emotions: On the Affective Constitution of Political Struggle*. Cham: Springer, 169–192. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-89741-2

Yatsyk, Alexandra; Sazonov, Vladimir 2024. Mnemonic security and post-Soviet aphasia: Soviet monuments in Estonian media after Russian invasion of Ukraine. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 31(1): 20–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2024.2343820

Analysed materials

Allik, Jaak 2022. Isamaa püüab praeguse venevastasusega EKRE ultrarahvuslaste hääli. – *Eesti Päevaleht*, 20 September. https://epl.delfi.ee/artikkel/120070440/paeva-teema-jaak-allik-isamaa-puuab-praeguse-venevastasusega-ekre-ultrarahvuslaste-haali

Anvelt, Kärt 2022. Yana Toom: protestipotentsiaali Narvas ei ole. – *Eesti Päevaleht*, 18 August. https://epl.delfi.ee/artikkel/120052128/yana-toom-protestipotentsiaali-narvas-ei-ole

Eesmaa, Mari 2022. Kultuuriminister punamonumentide eemaldamisest: ajalugu ei saa ümber kirjutada. – *Delfi*, 19 September. https://www.delfi.ee/artikkel/120069202/kultuuriminister-punamonumentide-eemaldamisest-ajalugu-ei-saa-umber-kirjutada

Eklons, Kristaps 2022. Iekšlietu ministrs: Šajā laikā dienestiem jābūt ar saasinātu uztveri. – *LSM*, 31 May. https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/iekslietu-ministrs-saja-laika-dienestiem-jabut-ar-saasinatu-uztveri.a459451/

Fedotova, Laine 2023. Pie nojauktā pieminekļa 'nav, ko darīt'. Ko 9. maija svinētāji ieplānojuši šogad. – *Delfi*, 27 April. https://www.delfi.lv/193/politics/55468146/pie-nojaukta-pieminekla-nav-ko-darit-ko-9-maija-svinetaji-ieplanojusi-sogad

Kalaus, Mārtiņš 2022. Aicina izvērtēt Rīgas domnieka izteikumus par "specoperācijas mērķu paplašināšanu". – *TVNET/LETA*, 30 August. https://www.tvnet.lv/7594738/aicina-izvertet-rigas-domnieka-izteikumus-par-specoperacijas-merku-paplasinasanu

Kariņš, Krišjānis 2022a. "Noslēdzas vesels laikmets Latvijas vēsturē" - valsts augstākās amatpersonas par pieminekļa demontāžu Pārdaugavā. – *TVNET/LETA*, 25 August. https://www.tvnet.lv/7591799/nosledzas-vesels-laikmets-latvijas-vesture-valsts-augstakas-amatpersonas-par-pieminekla-demontazu-pardaugava

Kariņš, Krišjānis 2022b. "Iedzīvotājiem tiesības justies drošiem", saka Kariņš un prasa Golubevai plānu. – *Delfi*, 11 May. https://www.delfi.lv/193/politics/54337046/iedzivotajiem-tiesibas-justies-drosiem-saka-karins-un-prasa-golubevai-planu

Kiisler, Vilja 2022. Lea Danilson-Järg: ei saa välistada, et keegi tahab Putini bareljeefi majaseinale panna. – *Delfi*, 18 November. https://www.delfi.ee/artikkel/120100648/vilja-kusib-lea-danilson-jarg-ei-saa-valistada-et-keegi-tahab-putini-bareljeefi-majaseinale-panna

Kovalenko-Kõlvart, Anastassia 2022. Miks otsustavad julgeolekuekspredid punamonumentide üle? Nii lammutatakse ka Stockmanni vastas asuv maja. – *Eesti Päevaleht*, 12 December. https://epl.delfi.ee/artikkel/120112910/anastassia-kovalenko-kolvart-miks-otsustavad-julgeolekuekspredid-punamonumentide-ule-nii-lammutatakse-ka-stockmanni-vastas-asuv-maja

Kruusimäe, Tarmo 2022. Sõda Ukrainas on andnud võimaluse viimanegi punamonument Eestis teisaldada. – *Eesti Päevaleht*, 11 May. https://epl.delfi.ee/artikkel/96615459/paeva-teema-tarmo-kruusimae-soda-ukrainas-on-andnud-voimaluse-viimanegi-punamonument-eestis-teisaldada

Levits, Egils 2022a. Šī diena emocionāla arī Latvijas prezidentam. – *LSM*, 25 August. https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/valsts-prezidents-uzvaras-parka-piemineklis-pastavigi-atgadinaja-sabiedribai-par-latvijas-okupaciju.a470905/

Levits, Egils 2022b. Šis ir demokrātijas pašaizsardzības laiks. – *Delfi*, 9 May. https://www.delfi.lv/898102/versijas/54316944/egils-levits-sis-ir-demokratijas-pasaizsardzibas-laiks

Levits, Egils 2023. Atbrīvoties no krievu un padomju koloniālisma ietekmes. – *Delfi*, 19 June. https://www.delfi.lv/898102/versijas/55674958/egils-levits-atbrivoties-no-krievu-un-padomju-kolonialisma-ietekmes

Loomeliidud valitsusele 2022. Punamärkide eemaldamist arutlegem demokraatlikult! – *Postimees*, 10 November. https://kultuur.postimees.ee/7645306/loomeliidud-valitsusele-punamarkide-eemaldamist-arutlegem-demokraatlikult

Lomp, Loora-Elisabet 2022a. Kultuuriminister tegi justiitsministri punamonumentide teisaldamise eelnõu maatasa. – *Postimees*, 19 September. https://www.postimees.ee/7608377/kultuuriminister-tegi-justiitsministri-punamonumentide-teisaldamise-eelnou-maatasa

Lomp, Loora-Elisabet 2022b. Stalnuhhin: hoidsin ennast veel tagasi. – *Postimees*, 5 September. https://www.postimees.ee/7598345/stalnuhhin-hoidsin-ennast-veel-tagasi

Länts, Ulla 2022a. OTSE POSTIMEHEST 〉 Kristian Jaani: 9. mail tuleks igasugune sümboolika koju jätta. – *Postimees*, 19 April. https://www.postimees.ee/7503246/otse-postimehest-kristian-jaani-9-mail-tuleks-igasugune-sumboolika-koju-jatta

Länts, Ulla 2022b. Lauri Läänemets: algusest peale oli selge, et tanki peab teisaldama valitsus. – *Postimees*, 16 August. https://www.postimees.ee/7585839/intervjuu-laanemets-algusest-peale-oli-selge-et-tanki-peab-teisaldama-valitsus

Ozola, Linda 2022. 'Spēka struktūru' loma un atbildība kara kontekstā: hronoloģiskas pārdomas. – *Delfi*, 19 May. https://www.delfi.lv/898102/versijas/54363780/linda-ozola-speka-strukturu-loma-un-atbildiba-kara-konteksta-hronologiskas-pardomas

Põlluste, Grete 2022. Siseminister Lauri Läänemets: valitsus kutsutakse tankiküsimuse arutamiseks kokku enne neljapäeva. – *Delfi*, 15 August. https://www.delfi.ee/artikkel/120051586/siseminister-lauri-laanemets-valitsus-kutsutakse-tankikusimuse-arutamiseks-kokku-enne-neljapaeva

Puķe, Ieva 2023. 9. maijs bez pieminekļa Uzvaras parkā. Kā tas ietekmē svinēt gribētājus? – *LSM*, 9 May. https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/09.05.2023-9-maijs-bez-pieminek-la-uzvaras-parka-ka-tas-ietekme-svinet-gribetajus.a507852/

Reinaas, Marek 2022. Tallinna opositsioon soovib punamonumentide teisaldamist. – *Postimees*, 19 May. https://www.postimees.ee/7526659/tallinna-opositsioon-soovib-punamonumentide-teisaldamist

Riik ootab Narvalt punamonumentide eemaldamiseks luba 2023. – *Postimees*, 3 January. https://www.postimees.ee/7683569/riik-ootab-narvalt-punamonumentide-eemaldamiseks-luba

Seeder, Helir-Valdor 2022. Narva vajab tõtt rohkem kui raha. – *Postimees*, 4 August. https://arvamus.postimees.ee/7577974/helir-valdor-seeder-narva-vajab-tott-rohkem-kui-raha

Solman, Riina 2022. Narva tank ja tänavanimed kui väärtuste konflikt. – *Põhjarannik*, 6 August. https://pohjarannik.postimees.ee/7578595/narva-tank-ja-tanavanimed-kui-vaartuste-konflikt

Spalvēns, Raivis 2022. Častušku nebūs – 9. maijā Latvijā pieminēs Ukrainas kara upurus. – *Delfi*, 07 April. https://www.delfi.lv/193/politics/54224198/castusku-nebus-9-maija-latvija-piemines-ukrainas-kara-upurus

Sproģis, Dāvis Kaspars 2022. 'Pašcieņas jautājums' – Rīgas dome lemj nojaukt pieminekli Uzvaras parkā. – *Delfi*, 13 May. https://www.delfi.lv/193/politics/54343658/pascienas-jautajums-rigas-dome-lemj-nojaukt-pieminekli-uzvaras-parka

Trenča, Inese 2022. Rīgas vicemērs: Piemineklis Pārdaugavā slavina arī kara noziegumus Ukrainā. – *TVNET/LETA*, 13 May. https://www.tvnet.lv/7522419/rigas-vicemers-piemineklis-pardaugava-slavina-ari-kara-noziegumus-ukraina

Vība, Solvita 2022. Eksperti vērtējuši ap 300 potenciāli demontējamu padomju režīmu slavinošu objektu; visvairāk darba Rīgā. – *LSM*, 30 June. https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/eksperti-vertejusi-ap-300-potenciali-demontejamu-padomju-rezimu-slavinosu-objektu-visvairak-darba-riga.a463513/

Vīķe-Freiberga, Vaira 2022. Vīķe-Freiberga: tā sauktais Uzvaras piemineklis vienmēr bijis kā klaušu laika kauna stabs. – *TVNET*, 25 August. https://www.tvnet.lv/7591510/vike-freiberga-ta-sauktais-uzvaras-piemineklis-vienmer-bijis-ka-klausu-laika-kauna-stabs

Par pieminekļu demontāžas semiotiku: Hiperdrošībošana kā deproblematizācijas stratēģija Baltijā

Vēstures notikumu interpretācijas caurauž nacionālās identitātes, tās paļaujas politiskai instrumentalizācijai un arī nosprauž sabiedrībā pastāvošo nošķīrumu robežpunktus. Šis raksts pievēršas konkrēti Igaunijas un Latvijas gadījumiem, kur līdz ar Krievijas pilna mēroga iebrukumu Ukrainā politiskajā dienaskārtībā atkal ienāca jautājums par publiskajā telpā izvietoto padomju pieminekļu demontāžu. Atbrīvošanās no padomju simboliem rakstā pētīta, veicot semiotisku analīzi un sekojot nozīmju izmaiņām, kā arī veidiem, kā konkrētas nozīmes nostiprinās. Mūsu izpētes pamatā ir jautājums par šādu izmaiņu – pārveidošanas vai aizvietošanas – pārmiju ar politisko situāciju, it sevišķi plašākā kontekstā, ciktāl tas atstāj ietekmi arī uz auditoriju izpratni un to simbolisko lomu. Koncentrējoties uz nacionālās drošības dimensiju, kas šajā procesā kļuva par centrālo ievirzi, rakstā analizēti politiski izteikumi – gan tādi, kuros pausts atbalsts, gan arī tādi, kur iebilsts padomju pieminekļu demontāžai. Izejot no Kopenhāgenas skolas drošībošanas teorijas, kultūras semiotikas un kultūras psiholoģijas (semiotiskā teoretizācijā) stūrakmeņiem, rakstā analizēti afektīvie aspekti un to ietekme uz nozīmju pārveidošanu, kā arī drošības dimensijas saasinājumu (atbilstoši hiperdrošībošanas jēdzienam). Rakstā šie aspekti skatīti attiecībā pret politisko motivāciju, skaidrojot to nozīmi stratēģijas un problēmu risināšanas (balstoties deproblematizēšanas jēdzienā) kontekstā, kā arī nozīmju un tās konstituējošo pieeju perspektīvā.

Mälestusmärkide eemaldamise semiootikast:
hüperjulgeolekustamine kui deproblematiseerimisstrateegia
Balti riikides

Ajaloonarratiividel on oluline osa rahvuslike identiteetide kujundamisel, kuid neid saab kasutada ka (geo)poliitiliste eesmärkide legitiimseks muutmisel ning ühiskondlike lõhede süvendamisel. Käesolev artikkel uurib Eesti ja Läti avalikus ruumis asuvate Nõukogude sümbolite staatust puudutavat poliitilist diskursust, mis kerkis teravalt esile pärast Venemaa täiemahulist sissetungi Ukrainasse 2022. aastal. Artikli keskmes on küsimus, kuidas punasümbolite asendamine või ümberkujundamine suhestub poliitilise kontekstiga, eriti see, kuidas need muutused kõnetavad erinevaid sihtrühmi ning muudavad sümbolite tähenduslikke funktsioone. Analüüsime poliitilisi avaldusi, mis kas toetasid või vastustasid Nõukogude monumentide eemaldamist, keskendudes sellele, kuidas on keskse legitiimse diskursusena mobiliseeritud riiklikku julgeolekut. Artiklis tugineme Kopenhaageni koolkonna julgeolekustamise teooriale, kultuurisemiootika hirmukäsitlusele ja semiootilise kultuuripsühholoogia afektiivse semioosi mõistele, mis aitavad selgitada hüperjulgeolekustamise kui ühe julgeolekustamisstrateegia afektiivseid aspekte. Kasutades deproblematiseerimise kontseptsiooni, näitame, kuidas afektiivsed tekstistrateegiad teenivad poliitilisi eesmärke, mille keskmes pole niivõrd probleemi lahendamine, kuivõrd valijaskonna mobiliseerimine.