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“How is one to orient in this space ethically and politically, while at the same time maintaining a sense of historical and cultural embeddedness?” (171) This is one of the main questions of The School of Europeanness, which explores the enigma of Europeanness through its partial connections. One can only admire how Dace Dzenovska takes up the uneasy task of criticizing political liberalism, and doing so artfully. She suggests that the crisis of liberalism might also be a crisis of understanding caused by the inability to address shortfallings of neoliberalism and the new world order.

While grounded in Latvia, this book provides invaluable insights into how the contemporary crisis of the institutional forms of political liberalism possibly came about. By looking into Europe’s political and moral landscape and theorizing it from Eastern European point of view, Dzenovska elegantly inverts the usual perspective. She follows activists and state officials who are implementing “The National Program for Promotion of Tolerance.” The book doesn’t discuss methods explicitly, thus readers can only guess about the anthropologist’s challenges encountered in the field. In spite of that, Dzenovska is a careful ethnographer of concepts.

Post-Cold war political liberalism is the main character of the “School of Europeanness,” which unfolds through its main traits: colonial heritage, tolerance, critical thinking, human rights, and civic liberties. Building up this character of political liberalism through its essential traits has been intrinsic for becoming “truly European.” The book examines how Latvia, along with other Eastern European countries that successfully jumped on the track to become members of EU, goes to the school of Europeanness and what lessons it learns.

The highest point of political liberalism, Dzenovska argues, comes after “the collapse of Soviet and Eastern European socialisms that lent new life to Europe’s self-ascribed moral superiority by
opening new spaces to democratization and liberalization initiatives, much criticized in postcolonial literature” (16). Post-Cold war Europeanization initiatives that were carried out in Eastern Europe, according to Dzenovska, set up a paradox of Europeanness, simultaneously asserting postsocialist countries as having returned to Europe and as not-yet-European “due to continuous hold of both socialist legacies and backward nationalisms” (16).

Using relational comparison, the author dwells on the relationship between the two "posts" – post-colonialism and postsocialism. She shows how both “post” perspectives are constituted by each other and by past and present configurations that extend their particularities. Dzenovska’s compelling analysis of how Latvians, who express pride in their colonial heritage, appear out of joint with time to tolerance workers, scholars, and European public at large, conveys how mutually constituted colonialism and modernity are. Relational comparison is also used to explore the relationship between statism and nationalism, minorities and migrants by historicizing nation and state, and by examining the struggles of post-soviet Latvia to become a national state in an international community of self-described liberal democratic states.

The book unravels the process of post-socialist knowledge production reorientation and its unintended consequences. Life experience of Latvians, obtained outside of socialism, translated into expert knowledge that enabled to deal with societal transformations and become European, while their socialist experiences were discounted. The research conducted in Latvia produced metrics of how far from Europe the country was and what needed to be done to catch up. Hence, the knowledge was redirected instead of freed from power (93). In other words, freed from Soviet ideology, the knowledge production didn’t have space to attend to the present and develop its own conceptual apparatus. That was one of the reasons, suggests the author, why the post socialist condition wasn’t analyzed on its own terms. The present was lost between Soviet past and European future.

One of the key features of the political liberalism that the book takes up is tolerance. It examines how the practice of tolerance and its contested meanings unfold in countless seminars and projects. Specifically, Dzenovska shows how intensive learning about the character of political liberalism occurred on the ground through programs like “The National Program for Promotion of
Tolerance.” The goal of these programs was to start a kind of re-education of socialist subjects transforming their soviet mentalities into tolerant and open-minded European subjects.

Dzenovska looks into the newly emerged milieu of what she calls a tolerance worker - “a particular knowing subject, who oversaw the transition from socialism to capitalism” (98). The tolerance worker is a generic term used to describe NGO employees, public officials, and human rights activists. This aggregate of workers formed themselves as tolerant subjects, employed standardized and taken for granted categories, and thus perpetuated “diagnostic mode of knowledge production” (98). Dzenovska rightly observes that the knowledge practices of tolerance workers and standardized discourses on tolerance became a type of “knowledge without knowers” (95) that partially resemble the conditions of late socialism described by Alexey Yurchak in his book *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (2005) (110).

It might seem that the book partially equates the European Union with the Soviet Union. Indeed, the production of standardized discourse has some resemblances. But the crucial difference is that “contrary to Soviet socialists, European liberals – more specifically, the tolerance workers – believed in the institutions and the discourses they were reproducing” (213). Dzenovska demonstrates how while criticizing former socialist subjects for their lack of critical thinking, which was exemplified by the reluctance to embrace political liberalism, European liberals themselves “failed to develop critical understandings of postsocialist power configurations” (213). They were too quick to identify racism and intolerance in local arrangements of inclusion and exclusion, while not applying the similar scrutiny to themselves.

At times it seems that the tolerance workers in the book appear as a culprit of political liberalism. They deny heterogeneity, undervalue local resources and historical specificities. It is possible to assume that perhaps these tolerance workers are also heterogenous and critically reflective. Tolerance workers also evolved through their struggles with institutionalized political liberalism – the guidelines they had to follow to get funding, use the language that was imposed by liberal framework, find compromises, refuse, adapt, and change. Dzenovska explains that tolerance workers didn’t have a discursive space of criticism as they were embattled themselves. She also
doesn’t discuss her own relationship with the milieu of tolerance workers. A more nuanced portrayal of this milieu could have accentuated inner conflicts and stakes of becoming European.

The book ends with a brilliant question - “Could it be that the end of the Cold war was for European liberalism what Stalin’s death was for Soviet socialism?” (213) for the reader interested in political liberalism and the future of Europe to consider. The book is a must read for anthropologists, political scientists, policy makers and activists.