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## **Sexuality, masculinity and homophobia in Latvia<sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

Events following Riga Pride 2005<sup>2</sup> surprised and shocked Latvian society. Until then Latvian society was thought to have a calm “Nordic” mentality permissive of societal diversity. The last big protest actions had happened in the late 1980s during the “singing revolution”<sup>3</sup> that was a peaceful event. Pride 2005 mobilized hundreds of people: watching, shouting and trying to attack and stop the demonstration. Left and right wing radicals stood shoulder to shoulder having found a common enemy. Latvian media picked up on the theme provoking intensive public debates, and society was divided by the issue of homosexuality. Homophobic arguments were used in Parliament and in the general election campaign in the summer of 2006<sup>4</sup>. The next Riga Pride of 2006 was banned and a series of educational events called the “Friendship Days”<sup>5</sup> were held instead. However, representatives of the “no-pride movement”<sup>6</sup> attacked the participants of the educational events throwing human excrement and splashing holy water<sup>7</sup>. The police did not intervene.

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<sup>1</sup> The text has been prepared with support of the international project “Homophobia and discrimination of gays and lesbians in enlarged Europe”, Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania.

<sup>2</sup> The First Pride March was staged 23 July 2005. The Church, politicians, high government officials and radical nongovernmental organisations expressed their protest against the Pride. Riga city council banned the Pride but the Administrative court overruled this decision. Thousands of protesters gathered to prevent the demonstration. Despite the police protection the demonstration had to change its route and demonstrators had to be evacuated. 8 demonstrators were detained. Later the debate continued in media space continuing to provoke hatred against sexual minorities.

<sup>3</sup> The relatively peaceful overturn of the Soviet regime in the Baltic states began in 1989 and was named “singing revolution” referring both to the pacific nature of the revolution and the actual role of singing in the process of change. The major event starting the revolution was the action “Baltic Way” commemorating Molotov-Ribbentrop pact leading to the occupation of the Baltic States. The inhabitants of the Baltic States held their hands creating a single chain passing through the three countries.

<sup>4</sup> The Latvian First Party used the protection of the family as one of their key slogans. They saw sexual minorities threatening the family values. The party worked out the suggestions for banning the homosexuality propaganda in the schools and the media during the pre-election period in summer 2006 but these propositions were not accepted by the majority of the Parliament.

<sup>5</sup> The LGBT organisation “Mozaika” organised the days of friendship around the Pride 2006 believing that the information campaign would be beneficial both for the LGBT community and the society in large. The events were organised in collaboration with several local and foreign NGOs and was run a series of seminars on discrimination, sexuality, art and communication events (see <http://www.mozaika.lv/index.php?lng=lv&part=10&us=1001048068>; (29.11.2006))

<sup>6</sup> Association NoPride is a nongovernmental organisation with the goal “to maintain traditional family values and emphasize their importance in society of Latvia. We think that traditional family, which is a union between a man and a woman, is the basic value of each society, because it ensures the existence of the country and its long term development.” An elaborated English web page of the organisation can be found <http://www.noprider.lv/en/> (29.11.2006.)

<sup>7</sup> An English description of the events can be found in <http://ukgaynews.org.uk/Archive/2006july/2201.htm> (29.11.2006.)

This paper attempts to explain the hostile and violent reaction of Latvian society, from an anthropological perspective, remote from the actual events. There are several levels of analysis. Firstly, we can critically describe the social construction of homophobia linking it with masculinity and sexuality. Patriarchy and heteronormativity, operating at this level, can help to understand the process of social construction of homophobia. Secondly, we can ask the question of how this social construction is taken for granted by looking at how principles of social order become self evident, lived and enacted. At this level we look at categories of thought and their interrelatedness creating an “objective” social world.

Bourdieu in his last book “Masculine domination” declares his interest in the naturalisation process of socially constructed gender categories. In this rather theoretical work he outlines the principles of symbolic masculine domination locating its sources in the naturalised, institutionalised and embodied principles of social order<sup>8</sup>. In this context homophobia can be interpreted as a form of symbolic domination that is inscribed in instituted divisions and internalised in bodily perceptions like feelings of shame. According to Bourdieu from the perspective of possible social transformation of the existing symbolic domination, analysis of homosexuality “can lead to a *politics* (or a *utopia*) of *sexuality* aimed at differentiating the sexual relation from the power relation” (Bourdieu 2001: 120), as it permits the deconstruction of sexuality and family, revealing the principles they are built upon.

Another interest I share with Bourdieu’s short outline on homosexuality is social change. According to Bourdieu the change in the order of symbolic domination can be brought about in two ways. First, the meaning of categories imposed by symbolic domination can be inverted: thus stigma can be turned into an emblem, an object of pride. Of course, the ultimate problem of such a transformation is that the dominated construct themselves within the categories of the dominant. These categories are constructed to make the dominated invisible

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<sup>8</sup> Feminism and masculinity have also dealt with the naturalisation of gender roles, however, from a different perspective than Bourdieu does it. Bourdieu’s work stems from the post-structuralist tradition in anthropology dealing with the internalisation of the classification systems in a more broad conceptual and cross-cultural level while sociologists start from the critique of the naturalisation of masculinity and femininity in Western society (e.g. Kimmel 1994, Kaufman and Brod 1994, Butler 1990). The homophobic reaction of Latvian society thus is embedded in the categories of the world and the position of truth. Looking from the post-structuralist positions (Leach 1976; Douglas 1966; Turner 1967) homosexuality both blurs and marks the borders between male and female categories and as a border-zone is invested with ambiguity, danger and repulsion and is tabooed. Therefore the reaction of the Latvian society was impulsive and genuine enactment of their basic categories of thinking and the use of human excrement (another border zone of the human body) was not that surprising. Due to the ethnographic scope of the article I do not engage in a broader debate over these issues and refer to Bourdieu to illustrate my theoretical perspective.

and stigmatized. When the dominated articulate them, they simultaneously reaffirm the act of their symbolic domination. Second, the internalised categories (producing gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals along with other categories) can be changed themselves. The category of LGBT dissolves, for example, when we consider partnerships in terms of mutual love and recognition of equal relationships between the partners. Looking from this perspective, the sex of each partner does not play an important role. Bourdieu sees the strength of the gay and lesbian movement in “visible invisibility”, the ability to combine both strategies for change: on the one hand, by using the means of non-discrimination and the rights of “the” homosexuals (making “the” homosexuals a category) and, on the other hand, their rights to be full citizens (blurring the same category).

Moreover, the Latvian case provides yet a further ground for analysis. Despite the similarities of the patriarchal order, other factors like the history and perceptions of sexuality, traditions of public and private divisions, the skills of public discussion as well as the expression of agency<sup>9</sup> in the Soviet period and afterwards are different in the “old” and the “new” Europe. I argue that the main difference between both “Europes” lies in the relationship of the dominant discourse towards the dominated. State-socialism with its hegemonic tradition of truth established a different relationship between the dominant and dominated discourses. So, not only the categories of division but also their interrelation determined the outcome of how homosexuality was perceived, lived and institutionalized.

I propose to outline the Latvian Pride March events through the perspective of symbolic domination. I briefly sketch out the articulation and categorisation of homosexuality in the public space trying to find the cause of what moved Latvian society to violent reaction. I take the sexuality aspect of the public debate as an example, and explore its construction and naturalization in more detail. Both the traditions of the articulation of sexuality and its contents are important considering the ways sexuality is embodied and expressed. The perceptions of family roles naturalised by biologically determined sexual roles (using the chain: biology-sexuality-family based on the same system of classification of male female difference) have also played a considerable part in debating homosexuality, since family

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<sup>9</sup> I see agency as the ability to produce and reproduce practice and interaction. I discuss the issue in Putnina (1999: 23-24).

seems to be “a polite language” in which to articulate sexuality<sup>10</sup>. Finally, hegemonic traditions of truth along with discursive trends on religion, science, medicine and legal issues provide space and form for the homosexuality debate.

For this analysis I draw on my notes regarding a number of public debates staged by the Latvian Association of Anthropologists, the Ministry of Social Integration and the “Mozaīka”, an organisation for LGBT people and their friends. I have taken two texts from the intensive debate to examine closely: a session of the internet forum of “Diena”, the largest Latvian daily newspaper on 1 August 2005 (including 56 comments) and the parliamentary debate of 15 June 2006 on the amendment of the Employment Law prohibiting discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation<sup>11</sup>. Additionally I used the results of a survey on Latvian social attitudes towards homosexuals<sup>12</sup> (Makarovs 2006) as well as my own research findings<sup>13</sup> on youth sex education in Latvia conducted at the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006.

### **Homosexuality and the public space**

According to the findings of a social attitude survey (Makarovs 2006) the majority of the Latvian population has negative attitudes towards homosexuality and homosexuals. 26% of respondents condemned both homosexuals and their lifestyle, 37% condemned the homosexual lifestyle but did not despise homosexual people, while only 25% condemned neither homosexual people nor their lifestyle. Even though social scientific arguments have become part of a discursive line in the debate on homosexuality, the significance of these figures in itself is subject to interpretation, since homosexuality is a relational category and gradations of attitude can be linked both to the meaning of and the relation with that category the respondent has established in the context of the “correct” Latvian social rhetoric on homosexuality.

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<sup>10</sup> A distinction between the different schemas of perception should be made. Most of the texts analysed do not use a critical look to biology, sexuality and family established with the theories of gender and the critique of sex roles. “Gender” is a new category in Latvian language and has not been appropriated by the general public. “Gender equality” is translated as “sex equality” and as Caune et al (2005) demonstrate is also conceptualised as sex equality. I see gender as a system of classification that produces male-female difference along the fields of biology, sexuality, family and others; family being considered a more “polite” and “appropriate” language than that of physiology or sexual behaviour to express the same male-female difference in the bodily, sexual and family practices.

<sup>11</sup> See the full text of debate in Latvian in [http://www.saeima.lv/steno/2002\\_8/st\\_060615/st1506.htm](http://www.saeima.lv/steno/2002_8/st_060615/st1506.htm) (29.11.2006)

<sup>12</sup> The representative survey of Latvian population was carried spring and summer 2006 involving 1060 respondents.

<sup>13</sup> See Putnina 2006.

The formulation of this “correct” rhetoric arose gradually. A few major cases can be mentioned prior to the summer of 2005 when the homosexuality debate appeared in the Latvian media. The first case was a scandal in 1999, followed by court proceedings alleging paedophilia in 2000<sup>14</sup>. This scandal tied homosexuality to paedophilia and provoked enormous public interest. Another case concerned the Latvian right-wing nationalist Aivars Garda<sup>15</sup> who organized an essay competition and published a book “Homosexuality – shame and disaster for humanity”<sup>16</sup>. Since the Latvian head of the Catholic Church and several MPs contributed articles to this book, the media paid great attention. Meanwhile the bill on the registration of same-sex partnerships put forward by the Latvian Human Rights Office in 1999 was rejected without much public discussion<sup>17</sup>.

However, homosexuality only became a really hot issue in Latvia in the summer of 2005, when the first Pride March was staged. Since then homosexuality has been increasingly exploited in politics, leading to an amendment of the Constitution’s clause on marriage defining it specifically as a “union between a man and a woman”<sup>18</sup>, and the rejection of suggestions to include the prohibition of discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation in the Employment Law. However, a bill seeking to prohibit “popularizing homosexuality” in schools and media was thrown out in the summer of 2006. All these events preceded the general election in the autumn of 2006. Given that only 3% of respondents admitted that politicians might influence their views on homosexuality (Makarovs 2006), the extreme public reaction against the Pride March can scarcely be explained by the effects of political agitation alone.

As politicians tend to play on existing social and moral attitudes, at most exacerbate, rather than establishing them, we can assume that latent heteronormativity deeply embedded in

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<sup>14</sup> The scandal started when two persons were arrested in August 1999 for organising a paedophile network. With the involvement of media the network was extended to the persons well known in society. When the scandal developed further several high governmental officials and public figures were named and accused of being homosexuals and paedophiles in February 2000. A Parliament Commission was organised to investigate the case but it ended with the initiator of the scandal being tried for slander. See the descriptions in Latvian in <http://www.delfi.lv/archive/article.php?id=9444>; <http://www.delfi.lv/archive/article.php?id=1274725>; <http://www.delfi.lv/archive/article.php?id=15494644> (29.11.2006)

<sup>15</sup> Aivars Garda is a politician representing a small Latvian party, the head of the right wing organisation Latvian National Front and a publisher.

<sup>16</sup> See the description of the event in Latvian in <http://www.delfi.lv/archive/article.php?id=2731214> (29.11.2006)

<sup>17</sup> See Waitt 2005, 168.

<sup>18</sup> See the description of the event in Latvian in <http://www.delfi.lv/archive/article.php?id=13050254> (29.11.2006)

Latvian society was activated by the public manifestations of gay and lesbian interest groups. They provoked the explicit formulation of the attitude towards homosexuality which reached further than the previously visible ultra-nationalist propaganda and expert comments on the subject. Gays and lesbians in the process of organising themselves inevitable became a “minority”, while mobilizing the “majority”. This gave rise to the homophobic movement that tried to reassert heteronormative values as if those had been lost under the pressure of homosexuals.

Gordon Waitt (2005), one of the few researchers of homosexuality in Latvia, discusses heteronormative construction of Latvian citizenship finding its expression in political media statements and spaces in Riga. He also concludes that despite the de-criminalisation of homosexuality<sup>19</sup>, the overall political setting discriminates social minorities by using ethnic, sexed and gendered nationalism to sustain the unstable political, economic and social systems characteristic of post-soviet nations.

### **The naturalness of sexual acts**

The repertoire used in discussing homosexuality does not only accommodate homosexuality within the public discourse but also reveals the experience of people articulating these discourses as well as defining the borders and the rules of “normal” sexuality, citizenship and family.

A public seminar on tolerance against the sexual minorities organised by the Secretariat for Societal Integration 21 April 2006 in Riga brought together the representatives of the Church, sexual minorities and experts. One of the debates in this seminar offers an example of the link between heteronormativity and embodied experience. The Catholic Cardinal linked female sexuality to the function of procreation arguing that female sexuality is located inside a woman’s body for procreative reasons. An LGBT community representative and a psychologist asked the cardinal whether he knows where the clitoris is located and why God placed the source of female pleasure on the outside of the body. In the same discussion the Cardinal was accidentally addressed as a “heterosexual male” that did not provoke any reaction.

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<sup>19</sup> The homosexuality was decriminalised in 5 February 1992 when the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia passed the law “On Changes and Amendments of the Latvian Criminal Codex. See Lavrikovs, 1999.

Gay sexuality takes a central part in public discussions of homosexuality. The details of a gay homosexual act are imagined as an inversion of “normal” sexual behaviour. As most of the participants of the analysed Internet debate over homosexuality have, probably, never had any homosexual experience, they construct its image from personal heterosexual experience. When we translate the perceived “perversity” of homosexual practice into the language of “normal” sexual behaviour, we can see the traditional male-female model of sexuality with men dominating and women subjecting. There are several reasons for taking such sexuality for granted, ranging from the traditional roles in the family to the whole cosmology of world being constructed on male-female difference (Bourdieu 2001).

The homosexual act has become the emblem of the *no-pride movement* in Latvia which stresses the “unnaturalness” of gay sexuality by drawing attention to the “indecent” position of men in the sexual act. The paradox of the movement lies in its rather explicit sexual argumentation, while simultaneously claiming morality. In fact this morality is built upon the sexual act: [www.nopride.lv](http://www.nopride.lv) has become a portal where one can find freely available erotic photos and a full footage of a Belarusian TV news reportage containing the explicit homosexual act of a Latvian diplomat filmed with a hidden camera.

Following Foucault and Bourdieu, sexuality and its explicit description in its “inverse” form play a crucial role in the definition of social order. This allowed Jānis Šmits, MP of the Latvian First party<sup>20</sup> and a priest, to describe a sexual act in the Latvian Parliament:

*I apologise. I will quote the text of that book [Conversation Dictionary, printed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century] what is this thing [homosexuality] and what it does. So: “Pederasty is the satisfaction of the sexual urge, inserting the male sexual organ into the anus of another man.” Therefore this action [is subject] to thorough condemnation. Secondly, it is done by alcoholics and degenerates. This is in our Conversation Dictionary. This means that our Conversation Dictionary is “against” it. (Parliament Debates on Employment Law amendments, stenography 15 June 2006)*

Later in the debate Andrejs Naglis, an MP of the same party, asserted twice that the very word combination of “sexual orientation” should be excluded from the law because its use is unacceptable to a Christian.

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<sup>20</sup> The Latvian First Party is a right wing party based on Christian values. Creating an alliance with a liberal party “Latvijas Ceļš” it managed to get 8,58% of vote in the last Parliament elections Fall 2006.

## Articulation of sexuality

The experience of sexuality of the Soviet period has influenced its public perception nowadays. Looking at the historical particularities of the articulation of sexuality in the Soviet era, Rotkirch (2002) gives an account of the attitude towards sexuality in the autobiographies of three generations of Soviet citizens. She outlines a gradual change of articulation of sexuality through the generation of silenced sexuality (1940-1950s), the change in sexual behaviour making sex life more variable (1960-1970s) and the appearance of sexuality in public speech (1980-1990s). Rotkirch remarks that the formulation of the public discourse on sexuality in Russia got under way in the late 1990s. However, the homosexuality debate reached Latvia without a history of public discussions on sexuality, and became anchored in the silenced sexual practice rather than in a critical discourse on it.

Latvian research on sex education confirms that sexuality is silenced in families, and formal sex education in schools is inadequate (Krecele 2006, Putnina 2004, 2006). Public articulation of sexuality, according to the findings of a homosexuality attitude survey (Makarovs 2006), is largely unacceptable: more than half of the respondents (54%) supported the claim that they did not like any public expressions of intimacy (hugging and kissing in public), 66% admitted that they found two women kissing repulsive, while 78% found two men kissing repulsive.

The long tradition of silencing sexuality in the public space has had its impact on perceived “natural” sexual roles. Looking at the experience of sexuality of the young Latvian generation one can see a strict gender division determining both the perceived sex roles and sexual behaviour (Putnina 2006). Masculine sexuality is constructed as a short-term presentation of sexual potency and the satisfaction of sexual needs. Partner choice and the sustainability of a relationship are not important. For example, Kārlis, a 16 year old boy from a rural area, described occasional sex as a natural component of youth entertainment. The knowledge on sexuality is gained through these occasional encounters. Sexual behaviour is gendered:

*Those [sexual acts] took place in houses, staircases, cars, basements, toilets, parks, everywhere. <...> Men don't give a damn where to f\*\*\* her. Women are more picky. But a man doesn't give a damn. Actually a few agree somewhere else... more often at home. That is linked to alcoholic drinks. That is drunk, and people become indifferent. A drunken lady does not command her c\*\*\*. [laughs] (Genādijs)*

Later gender asymmetry is sustained by financial means and providing for the family. It can be argued that the naturalisation of gender roles is linked to the position of authority in the family. This authority is grounded in gendered properties: for example, one of the informants, Genādijs believes that breadwinning gives a man the right to live a more relaxed sexual life while women are deemed to be devoted to their husbands in exchange for material security.

Feminine sexuality is constructed differently putting the responsibility for the consequences onto women. If boyish sexuality demands a quick subjection of his sex partner then young women are expected to demonstrate a stable moral position and the ability to form long-term relationships.

*Interviewer: Is it right for two young people to have sexual relations straight away on their first date?*

*Vita, 16 year old girl: That is bad. I don't know how to say it... it is rude.*

*Interviewer: What is rude?*

*Vita: That boys can later talk badly about that girl.*

*Interviewer: So, is that bad only for a girl? And a boy can do it?*

*Vita: ... it is different for guys. They can boast about it.*

*Interviewer: And girls cannot boast about it?*

*Vita: No there is nothing to boast about when you sleep with a stranger.*

Kaspars, a 17 year old boy, tells of the consequences of breaching the gendered models of sexuality: he takes his responsibility in his relationship and receives social condemnation for buying condoms or a pregnancy test. Sexuality, therefore, is not linked to the sex *per se* but to the right model of sexuality. Society does not criticize the masculine model of sexuality when men perform it. Young men having sex without condoms are not condemned and they are freed from the consequences of their sexual acts even if it leads to the pregnancy of their partner. The naturalness of this behaviour is supported by theories about instincts and physiology of sexes where the female instincts are imagined to be stronger and directed towards maternity and stability. Naturalness objectifies the gendered experience of sexuality, making other orders unnatural and to some extent unimaginable. Reciting abnormality thus delineates and confirms sexual normality.

### **Shame and sexuality**

Shame is an important component of sexuality allowing control of sexual behaviour both publicly and personally. Bourdieu (2001) points to the significance of shame in the construction of sexuality, seeing it as an internalized relation of symbolic domination.

Latvian Internet comments suggest that their authors experience bodily repulsion towards shameful expressions of sexuality. Shame is linked both to the “dishonourable” kind of sexual activity and its public demonstration. Texts often evoke the shared feelings of bodily repulsion towards homosexuality:

*It took a rather short time period to make a revolution in my consciousness. I was completely indifferent [towards homosexuals] until the [Pride] march. Now I have only negative emotions and that is irreversible. (rinkī apkārt, 01.08.2005 08:16:43)*

The image of homosexuality in Internet comments – just like in the parliamentary debates on the amendments on the Employment Law – is consistently contradictory. On the one hand, homosexuality is associated with shame and such shameful sexual practice as anal and oral sex. On the other hand, despite its shamefulness, homosexuality is considered attractive and seductive especially for those who are not capable of dealing with and controlling their sexual behaviour:

*They often attract immature youth to their orientation – this is the main reason society objects to homosexuality. Not all 18 year olds can be viewed as having a mature mind. Let homosexuals fall in love, create relationships and have sex with equal partners but let's not allow them to search for young people. (Zīle, 01.08.2005 11:34:09)*

The control of sexuality is enacted by means that are paradoxical at first sight. Homophobic speakers – and not homosexual interest group members – publicly read a document called “Gay manifesto”<sup>21</sup>: it was read several times in Parliament, cited by the head of the Catholic Church in public meetings, and it was quoted in almost every Internet debate concerning homosexuality. It was cited frequently in order to combat “homosexual ideology” and thereby express the need to have control over sexuality.

Homosexuality allows mobilizing and sharing moral concerns through the common sharing of shame which, according to Foucault (1978), allows a moral community to be sustained. Looking at the discursive aspects of voicing the moral community reference to the “principle of democracy” – democracy being a new principle and usually evoked by the supporters of civil society and state officials – is persistent:

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<sup>21</sup> Originating in satiric text by Michael Swift and first published in *Gay Community News*, Feb. 15-21, 1987, the text became to be used by right wing Christians in the USA. The text of the manifest and its context can be found in <http://rainbowallianceopenfaith.homestead.com/GayAgendaSwiftText.html>.

*Sexual orientation is a choice and if somebody has chosen something abnormal or crazy (for example, eating shit), then I have the right in a democratic society to express my condemnation and repulsion to such activities. (haris, 01.08.2005 06:02:58)*

The majority argument justifying the discrimination of homosexuals was used in the Parliamentary debate on the amendments of Employment Law as well, coining new ways of articulating democracy.

### **The tradition of thinking**

Finally, the quality of the dialogue on sexuality is influenced by tradition of the discursive practice. As I mentioned earlier, silencing sexuality and putting it in the realm of practice did not allow the development of a critical discourse on sexuality. Silenced expression of sexuality is preferred over its discussion aloud.

Another difference between “old” Europe and Latvia lies in the position of “truth”. The Soviet legacy has contributed to the hegemonic perception of truth. If the relationship between the dominant and dominated discourses allows the articulation of the subjected discourses, then a hegemonic relationship requires the articulation of one hegemonic discourse. A dominant discourse accepts other positions but the hegemonic discourse denies them on the grounds that there is only one “truth”. The similarity between the dominant and the hegemonic discourses lies in the need for dominated and subjected discourses.

The relationship of hegemony contributes to the great fixation on words which once spelled out become truth. Sensitivity to voicing social reality is obvious in the efforts to amend laws and the belief that the written word simultaneously becomes a social reality.

The hegemonic position one allocates to one’s own views forces a perception of other discourses to comply:

*For me, too, homosexuals were indifferent until the pride march – let these people do as they wish. After the march (actually shortly before it) I felt that my rights and views as a heterosexual female are violated <...> I feel that I should participate in the anti-pride movement next summer because there are no other ways I can show that I feel oppressed and discriminated. (Arī man, 01.08.2005 08:37:22)*

There are several sources of discourses used in speaking of homosexuality. Medical discourse on disease is used to ground the “abnormality” and “normality” of homosexuality alongside normality and abnormality of homophobia. Reference to science, religious texts and legal rights has the same dual use and cannot be taken as sources of an ultimate authority insofar as other interpretations are not given the right to existence.

All these discursive fields can be used in constructing homosexuality as a category. On the one hand, hegemonic discourse needs to make homosexuality visible (since it is the only criterion of classification) to be able to control it. On the other hand, it needs to stay invisible to keep the social moral pure. The controversy is partly resolved by allocating homosexuality different semi-public and public fields:

*If the husband beats his wife at home and she accepts it – this is a matter for their family. If he starts beating his wife in Riga city centre – it becomes a social matter and society expresses its opinion by putting that man into jail. Society has spoken on the gay demonstration, and it is accepted that in democracies the minority submits to the will of the majority. (Kurmītis, 01.08.2005 09:54:18)*

However, the ambiguity of “invisible visibility” cannot be completely resolved within the existing categories of sexuality, but it can be diminished by the elimination of the hegemonic relationship between the discourses and a critical reflection on the established categories.

## **Conclusion**

The homophobic reaction of Latvian society is embedded both in the position of truth and the perceptions and practice of male-female difference. I explored only one aspect of this difference looking at the sexual construction and use of the sexed body but this difference is important in many more fields of everyday life. Homosexuality happened to challenge the basic premises of the social order which had been taken for granted and been invisible. Latvians missed the opportunity to debate sexuality in the 1960s. Debates around homosexuality emerged in the virtual absence of a critical discursive tradition dealing with sexuality and gender. However, the good thing about the categories is that they are learnt and changing.

As Bourdieu (2001) suggested, the strength of the LGBT community stems from its ability to combine visibility and invisibility strategies in promoting their interests. Using the strategies directed at the “visibilisation” of the

community, however, will meet resistance until the hegemonic perception of truth dominates. Combining visibility and invisibility strategies has its weakness as well. The gendered perceptions of sexuality create the LGBT community as a category, while giving rise not only to LGBT politics but also to the use of the body and “objective” bodily perceptions of LGBT people.

Reflexivity and verbal articulation of sexuality help to establish the idea that sexuality is primarily an individual entity. The ultimate end of the individualisation effort would lead to the dissolution of homo- and heterosexuality as the crucial aspects of one's sexuality when the stress is put on the quality of relationships, and not on positions of authority. As gender equality, egalitarian family roles and fatherhood issues have been increasingly articulated and campaigned for, Latvian society seems to be on its way towards a more liberal categorization of sexuality not only because of more awareness of sexuality but also because of a greater flexibility to move between the different discourses.

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