

**ORAL HISTORY:
MIGRATION AND
LOCAL IDENTITIES**

*Edited by:
Ieva Garda Rozenberga,
Mara Zirnite*



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ORAL HISTORY:
MIGRATION AND LOCAL IDENTITIES

Online proceedings of papers presented at the Conference at the
University of Latvia in Riga, June 27-29, 2008

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PREFACE

Migration—whether collective, individual, voluntary, or involuntary—has been a significant aspect of the Latvian historical experience and of historical experience worldwide. Migration creates a watershed between life as hitherto lived and the new life. Migration affects tradition, life-style, and identities and sets up a mutual exchange in customs and behaviour between the host community and the immigrants. The identity of the new country shapes the new immigrants even as they shape the new country.

The conference and this online proceedings have been dedicated in memory of Prof. Augusts Milts (1928-2008), the scientific director of the National Oral History Project and an important figure in the development of Latvian oral history research.

Augusts Milts, a philosopher and professor of ethics, was invited to organize the People's Archive (*Cilvēkarhīvs*) memoirs collection at the Latvian Culture Foundation (*Latvijas Kultūras fonds*) at the end of the 1980s. When Latvia regained its independence, the People's Archive was transferred to the National Oral History project at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology. The project now contains more than 3000 life stories.

The focus of this online proceedings is oral history research, life-histories, and biographies through which we gained insight into the collective and individual consequences of migration. The online proceedings consists of papers presented at the Conference by Ilze Akerberga, Baiba Bela, Inta Gale Carpenter, Ieva Garda Rozenberga, Riina Haanpää & Outi Fingerroos, Maija Hinkle, Rutt Hinrikus, Tiiu Jaago, Aivar Jürgenson, Anu Korb, Marta Kurkowska-Budzan, Amy Niang, Maruta Pranka, Anu Printsman, Edmunds Supulis, Mara Zirnite.

Papers by Arta Ankrava and Aija Lulle have also been added to the online proceedings, and these papers reflect the newest research in the field and convey the on-going relevance of the issue.



Conference at the University of Latvia in Riga,
June 27-29, 2008

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Baiba Bela
*Institute of Philosophy and Sociology,
University of Latvia*

EXILE AS A CATALYST FOR VALUES

8

The Soviet occupation and World War II radically changed the lives of people living in the Baltics and created a wave of emigration to the West. By 1945 more than 100.000 people from Latvia alone had fled to the Western occupied zones in Germany in order to escape the advancing battlefield and a second Soviet occupation.¹ In a very short time, these people lost many things that up until then had been considered self-evident and seemingly secure: their homes, native country, social status and place in society, property and belongings, and often also their relatives and friends. Exile became a turning point in the lives of these people, an event that forced them to completely change their daily lives,

¹ Gāle-Kārpentere (Carpenter), I. Trimda kā dzīves attīstības modelis. *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*. 1994, Part A, No. 4 (561), pp. 19-24.

their identities, and their notions of the future. They had to build both their individual and collective lives anew.²

The restoration of Latvia's independence in 1991 became a new turning point. This gradually changed the exile community's status and goals and forced it to rethink its vision of itself. Independence finally allowed the people in Latvia, on the other hand, to interpret the events of the 20th century for themselves and to form their own story. Latvians could now freely discuss not only events in Latvia, but also the activities and fates of Latvians living outside of Latvia. The National Oral History Project (Nacionālās mutvārdu vēstures projekts, henceforth NMV) of the University of Latvia's Institute of Philosophy and Sociology has over 600 life stories in its collection that document the experiences of Latvian exiles in England, the United States, Canada, Germany, Sweden, and Norway. However, only the life stories from Norway and Sweden have been studied in depth.³ The national research programme "Letonika" is currently supporting the study of the Swedish diaspora; this research encompasses the examination of topics such as adaptation in exile, formation of community, polyphonic identity, and the maintenance and passing on of identity. Research has uncovered the importance of shared values in the lives of exiles, but values in the context of the exile community have not been further studied. Augusts Milts, the long-time director of the NMV project, always stressed the need to study values as an element that unites the individual and society, the separate and the shared.⁴ Therefore, it seemed

² *Ibid.*

³ For information about Latvians in Sweden see: Bela-Krūmiņa, Baiba (2004). Kultūras nozīme latviskās identitātes uzturēšanā un pārmantošanā trimdā. In: Kļaviņa, D. & Brancis, M. (eds.). *Trimda. Kultūra. Nacionālā identitāte. Konferenču rakstu krājums*. Rīga: Nordik. pp. 528-541. A larger summary of publications can be found in *LETONIKA. Nacionālā mutvārdu vēsture. Reliģiskās idejas Latvijā 1. Raksti. Otrā grāmata*. Rīga: FSI, 2008, which contains publications by B. Bela, D. Beitnere, I. Garda-Rozenberga, E. Šūpulis, and M. Zirnīte. For Latvians in Norway, see Zirnīte, M. (ed.). *Savdona Arta. Norvēģijas latvieši dzīvesstāstos. Spogulis*. Rīga: LU FSI, NMV, 2001, pp. 75-85.

⁴ Augusts Milts (1928-2008) was the scientific director of the NMV project from its inception in 1992 until 2001 and again from 2006 to 2008. For more regarding the research on values see Milts' publications: Mūžīgais laicīgajā: vēsture cilvēkā un tautā. *LZA Vēstis*. 1993, No. 6/93, pp. 1-7.; Garīgās vērtības cilvēku dzīvesstāstos. *LZA Vēstis*. 1996, No. 50. pp. 143-149.; Tautas izziņa mutvārdu vēsturē. *Spogulis*. Zirnīte, M. (ed.). Rīga: LU FSI, NMV, 2001, pp. 33-39.

imperative to me to continue Milts' work, focusing on the relationship between values and the exile community in the life stories of Swedish Latvians. I will explain how a values system and emigration influence each other on the individual and collective scale. What values can we find expressed in the Latvian life stories? How did heavy losses and radical changes influence the refugees' notions of values? What values have promoted the preservation of their community and prevented its assimilation into the Swedish environment?

The analysis of values is based on 24 interviews of older generation Latvians recorded in Stockholm in 1996. Some of the interviews were supplemented in 2007. Interviewers did not ask specific questions about values, and the analysis presumes that expressions of values are evident in (1) stories about specific actions, because personal values are associated with daily choices and decision making, (2) judgments about the self, others, and events, because values shape the criteria for those opinions, and (3) the structure of the life story and selection of narrated events, which are also based on specific shared values. Noteworthy American folklore and personal story researcher Sandra Dolby maintains that personal stories (which also include life stories) definitely express important shared values as well, through which the narrators reveal their own view of the world.⁵

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This paper publishes the initial results of a study of values and does not claim to be a comprehensive and exhaustive examination of the topic. It first examines the notion of "values" and clarifies the analytical approach used in values analysis in life stories. Next, the paper addresses the connection between life and values in making the decision to leave one's native country, as well as their roles during the journey and while creating a new life in exile.

⁵ Dolby, S. K. *Literary folkloristics and the personal narrative*. Bloomington, Indiana: Trickster Press, 1989, 2008. p.ix-xxi, 195. See p. xx

Values

Both philosophy and ethics, as well as the social sciences, have dealt with the issue of values. Philosophers use the term “values” to describe an ideal goal and the virtues to which one should aspire. Philosophy and ethics are more focused on the general analysis of values and the formation of a theory of values. Several differing and even mutually conflicting concepts of values existed in the 19th and 20th centuries, such as subjectivism, objectivism, rationalism, and others, for example, Jeremy Bentham’s hedonistic utilitarianism or Max Scheler’s search for objective values. Philosophy and ethics distinguish subjective values from objective values, instrumental values from final values, and intrinsic (or, essential) values from extrinsic (inessential) values. Various types of values, such as aesthetic and ethical, are also defined.⁶

The social sciences (more precisely, sociology and social and cultural anthropology), on the other hand, study values as core ideas of culture that perform certain functions within society.⁷ They associate values with cultural norms, but nevertheless consider them to be more abstract and general than norms. If norms regulate behaviour in certain situations, then values determine what is valued as good or bad. According to the influential sociologist Emile Durkheim, values and norms determine social integration, which allows individuals to function as a society and offers coherence, credibility, and stability. More contemporary social scientists have focused on the functions of values in power relationships. Thus, French thinker Michel Foucault began examining values as a part of the system of social power and believed values provide an ideological frame that creates a public discourse about how the social world works and how it should work.⁸

I would also like to make special mention of Prof. Augusts Milts’ theory of values, which has been essential in his study of life stories and has also influenced the way in which the group of researchers at

⁶ Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Volume 9. London and New York: Routledge, 1998, p. 582.

⁷ International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 2nd edition. Volume 8. William A. Darity Jr. (ed.). Detroit, NY, London et al: Thomson Gale, 2008, pp. 581.

⁸ *Ibid.*

the NMV project conduct their research. Milts distinguished three levels in his research of life stories, in which the third level associates facts and concepts with universal principles of life, standards of plenty or abundance, and the link with the eternal. Milts represented the objectivist tradition in values theory and developed a hierarchy of values comprised of basic values, social values, cultural values, and higher spiritual values, which set “an example for a higher moral obligation, for humankind’s maximum programme of action, without which a society’s minimum demands cannot be optimally realized” (see Table 1).⁹ The influence of Scheler’s values theory can be seen in the model. Milts encountered the entire spectrum of values in Latvian life stories, from basic, natural values to family, responsibility, and work values to the highest spiritual values, such as the experience of sacredness, freedom, and conscience.¹⁰ Milts also focused on the issue of paradox and contrast, considering all events in a lifetime as a unit of contrasts—there is no good without bad, no beautiful without ugly, no justness without unjustness, no nobleness without baseness.¹¹

Nature, basic life	Life, vitality, health, quality of environment
Social life	Prosperity, order, solidarity, social security, justice, responsibility
Culture	Unity, individuality, qualitative action, humane way of life, care for higher values
Higher values	Goodness, virtue, truth, beauty, freedom, meaning of life, faith, hope, love

Table 1. Values in a person’s life, according to Milts’ classification

The author of this paper assumes the accepted point of view of the social sciences, in which values are considered essential core ideas of a culture and that members of one group will in large part share

⁹ Milts, A. Garīgās vērtības cilvēku dzīvesstāstos. *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*. Part A. 1996. No. 50. Pp. 143-149. See p. 145.

¹⁰ Bela Baiba. Cilvēka dzīves izpēte un praktiskā filozofija. Kūle, M. et. al. (eds.). *Augusts Milts: patība un ētika*. Riga: RaKa, 2008, pp. 102-107.

¹¹ Milts, A. Identitātes paradoksi. *Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis*. Part A. 2005, No. 59. pp. 49-52.

similar values. Values fulfil functions that are important for both social integration and the existing power relationships (in other words, the regulation of human relationships and the relationship between social groups). Our personal opinions do not exist in a vacuum but evolve instead in the context of the culture in which we have grown up and live. Each person's world view and values system is intrinsically connected with the values and world view of the society and social group to which the person feels he or she belongs. When telling about their lives and arranging their experiences into a story, people rely on a frame of shared ideas and values.

I shall also use the hierarchical model of values developed by NMV director Augusts Milts, which is based on the main ideas of the objectivism tradition of 19th and 20th century Western European theories of ethics and values and also corresponds to a certain extent with accepted ideas about values in 20th century Latvian society.

Exile and forced migration reveal a society's values just as well as they reveal personal values orientations and convictions. Values are vital in making the decision about leaving one's home, as well as during the process of leaving and subsequent life in exile. They are important in the decision making process, in the evaluation of one's own actions and those of others, and in the building of interpersonal relationships. Values are also present during life story interviews insofar as they have influenced the narrator's decision to take part in the interview, as well as his or her choice of topics, selection of events, and their presentation in the story.

Values that supported the decision to leave Latvia

As World War II was drawing to a close, Latvians' decisions to leave their homes were associated with a wider historical and cultural context. Fleeing into exile is an accepted form of behaviour during war-time or during times of political or religious persecution. Thus, about 400.000 people fled or were evacuated from Latvia during World War I,

only that time the movement was towards the East and Russia, away from the long-time enemy, the Germans.¹² The majority of the World War I refugees eventually returned to Latvia. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that approximately 200.000 people fled as refugees during World War II, this time towards the West and Germany.¹³ A comparatively smaller number of refugees—roughly 4000—fled across the sea to Sweden.¹⁴

Regarding the values involved in the decision to flee their homes, we can discern several hierarchically different types of values and observe that a certain values orientation is associated with interpretations of power relationships. First, we must note the so-called basic values, of which life is the most important. Many people felt that their lives were in danger after experiencing arrests and disappearances during the year of Soviet rule, and especially after the deportations of 1941. Members of social groups that the Soviets considered untrustworthy felt particularly afraid. People also did not want to lose certain social values (security, justice, independence) and higher values (freedom). Here we must note that these were not just vague and abstract social values, but rather nationalistic values that had been publicly declared during Latvia's years of independence. These values had been discussed and acknowledged in speeches, publications, and actions, for example, the discussions about justice and truthfulness after the Ulmanis coup d'état on May 15, 1934. Remaining in a Soviet occupied Latvia meant losing these values both on a personal and national level; security would be threatened, justice would be distorted, and independence and freedom would be impossible. These values formed the Latvian national self-image, which stood in contrast to the image of the Russians and Soviets as aggressive strangers characterized by a completely different values system. In addition, the values that these

¹² Mangulis, V. *Latvia in the Wars of the 20th Century*. Princeton Junction: Cognition Books, 1983, pp. xxi, 207. See p. 10 Retrieved: <http://www.historia.lv/>, 04.08.2009.

¹³ Various authors, however, cite various numbers. The differences may possibly have resulted from the fact that some of the refugees ended up in the Soviet occupied zone of Germany and were forcibly sent back to Latvia, others returned to Latvia voluntarily, and approximately 120.000 refugees remained in the Western occupied zones of Germany.

¹⁴ Lasmane, V. *Pāri jūrai*. Stockholm: Memento, 1990, pp. iv, 294. See p. 3.

strangers publicly declared did not correspond with the values that were actually practised. It is possible that for many refugees the need to save one's own life was the dominating factor in the beginning, but over time the other values took on an ever growing importance, because only those values were able to offer a deeper ideological validation of the need to become refugees and ensured the preservation of national identity and survival as an ethnic group.

The decision to leave Latvia was made on a personal or familial level, but also on an organizational level, whereby special note should be made of the largest and most influential underground resistance movement of the time, the Latvian Central Council [Latvijas centrālā padome, henceforth LCP], which was established in 1943. The LCP helped refugees flee to Sweden in order to escape both occupying forces. Thanks to boats organized by the LCP, about 1500 refugees made it to Sweden.¹⁵ The LCP did not charge refugees for passage on their boats, as opposed to private fishermen, who often demanded inappropriately high payments, which they sometimes raised even higher once the boat was in the middle of the sea. Nevertheless, both methods of refugee transfer had very strict criteria regarding who was accepted onto the boats or not. The private fishermen's criteria was the refugees' ability to pay (material values), whereas the LCP criteria were based on an individual's importance to Latvian culture, politics, or science (national cultural values). Of course, the LCP allowed whole families to flee together (family values). In addition, eyewitnesses have indicated that LCP boats often also accepted people who had no connection to the LCP, but were just on the Kurzeme coast looking for a way to flee to Sweden. It must be remembered that, as opposed to refugee transport to Germany, fleeing to Sweden was considered illegal, and refugees to Sweden actually risked arrest.

It must also be noted that at the time of flight, many people did not realize what the further consequences could be, because many of them believed that the Soviets would not occupy Latvia for long. They thought the Allied forces would not tolerate such injustice and they would be able to return home soon. So, faith and hope were also

¹⁵ Lasmane, V. *Pāri jūrai*. Stockholm: Memento, 1990, p. 272. The author mentions the number 1450-1600.

important values upon which the decision to leave and the hope of return was based.

The journey—values and instincts

Turning to stories of the actual journey to Sweden, I will first examine the connection between objects and values. Then I will focus on the interaction between behaviour and values.

The decision about what belongings to take along were also based on values and interests. First of all, this decision was made based on basic values—people took along those things that were necessary for life and survival, namely, clothing, bedding, food, personal documents, and valuables, if they had any. Rural people often left their homes by horse and wagon and therefore took quite a few belongings along, even cows, which were a source of fresh milk along the way and particularly important if there were small children in the family. Many refugees had to make decisions regarding belongings several times along the way, at various points in the journey, leaving behind things that were less valuable or too large or heavy to take along on the next leg of the journey.

Secondly, the decision about what belongings to take along was also based on cultural values. Several life stories mention that a few books or paintings or other symbolically significant things that represented Latvian culture were taken along. For example, “We left with only what we could carry, but that had to include two books. I took a collection of Zinaīda Lazda’s poems and Rainis’ “Jāzeps un viņa brāļi”. [...] The hope was to return, of course. To maintain Latvia’s culture and Latvia’s intelligentsia abroad.” (NMV 455)

Yet it is just as important to mention that many refugees had no personal belongings, for example, the legionnaires who managed to get to Sweden by boat after the German surrender. Three women’s stories also describe arriving in Sweden without any belongings (although only in one case was this meant literally; the other two meant only

having no valuables along). All of the stories note that the people were just happy to be alive.

Next, I will examine the interaction between values and actions, because behaviour during the refugees' journey reveals people's deepest ideas about values. When confronted with critical and life-threatening situations, superficial values lose their importance as reference-points for action and behaviour. Social and higher values played a large role in guiding actions during the refugees' journeys—solidarity, as opposed to egotism, radically manifested itself during crisis, for example, in the decision whether to help or not help others by sharing food or clothing. Two stories mention that many men did not help women and children climb from smaller boats onto larger boats, but instead they tried to get on board first; some of the men were simply confused and in shock. On the other hand, those people who did help others risked losing a place on the boat for themselves, because sometimes there was not enough room on the boats for all those who wished to get on. In those cases the last in line didn't get on board (NMV 454; NMV 450). Solidarity as opposed to egotism was also manifested in other ways: a boat that held twice as many people as it was meant to hold settled so deeply into the water that in order to lessen its weight and save the people, all of the suitcases and even soaked overcoats had to be thrown overboard. But such altruistic behaviour, in which life is valued higher than property, could only be achieved through force and weapons (NMV 446). Nevertheless, some people in similar situations managed to save not only their own suitcases, but even a sack of potatoes. The refugees' stories show how easy it is to observe norms of courtesy and behave in an altruistic manner in peaceful everyday situations, but in critical situations a person's survival instinct is turned on, and many people then think only of themselves. At the same time, the inclusion of such episodes in a life story in and of itself reveals the narrator's values, because both memory and life stories are always selective, and the principles of this selection are often based on strong emotions and collective ideas regarding good and bad and what is worth remembering.

It must also be noted that all the people involved in organizing the LCP boats—not only the actual boat crews—risked their lives.

Why did they do it? The NMV collection contains two interviews with people who were involved in the movement of boats between Sweden and Latvia, in the organization of boats, and in the actual transport of refugees. Youth, excitement, adventure, ideals, a capacity for risk, and faith (faith in oneself, faith in one's own survival, faith in the fact that this work was necessary in order to save other people's lives) are definitely some of the factors that motivated their decision to become involved in this work. In addition, this was not work that one could later take pride in, because the Swedish institutions that supported these illegal actions demanded that the people involved (at least the boat captains) sign an oath that they would not speak about it afterwards. The boat captain's story does not mention national ideals, but instead the feeling of heroism, which remains as a subjective internal experience: "Many times were so awful that the rest of the boys became completely apathetic and frozen; their fingers could not move the motor, nothing. Are we going to cross over to Latvia to pick up people, or not? We had no clothes to wear. We were freezing and cold. We experienced so much trauma. But I forged ahead like a hero." (NMV 446).

Life in exile—values, ideology, and identity

Beginning life anew in a strange land was difficult, no matter whether a person's only suitcase had sunk to the bottom of the Baltic Sea or not. The refugees did not know the language, nor did they have any money or social status. But, despite the material hardships, Latvians began organizing an active community life soon after their arrival in Sweden. As opposed to Latvians in Germany, the refugees in Sweden were required to spend only a few months in displaced person camps and afterwards had to begin living and working independently. Therefore, camp life was only able to provide an initial impulse; subsequent organizational and business networks were formed outside the confines of the camps. As Maija Hinkle, the director of the American Latvian Association's Oral History Project, has written, several factors motivated the Latvians to stick together and maintain their

Latvian identity: (1) a feeling of responsibility towards occupied Latvia, (2) mutual assistance, (3) the need for a culture in which to feel at home, (4) leadership opportunities.¹⁶ Some of these factors are associated with material values (assistance) or the opportunity to achieve higher self-value and relative status (leadership). The majority of the factors, however, are based on shared values of national culture, a common ideology (cultural values and higher values) and identity, and the need to be with people similar to oneself and feel at home (social values: social security, a sense of belonging, friendship). Folklore researcher Inta Gale-Carpenter draws attention to the mission statement of the displaced persons in Germany in the late 1940s, which defined the exile community's goals and tasks: "As exiles, we have a moral responsibility to preserve our language and culture and to raise subsequent generations who will join us in our struggle to achieve the restoration of independence." This declaration defined the exile community as a scenario for a new life and offered a lifeline to help refugees handle this crisis in their lives.¹⁷ The ideology of preserving the language, culture, and idea of independence formed the common foundation that united and helped the refugees survive as a community and preserve the Latvian identity. As Uldis Germanis, an influential publicist and history expert in the Latvian community, wrote: "We have many and varied opportunities to work for and support the ideal goals outlined by our history. It is not sacrifice, but rather a sensible way for us to make use of our situation; it is able to give us spiritual satisfaction and increase our dignity and self-confidence. Acting in this way, we are no longer servants and fertilizers of others' fields, but we are fulfilling our historical mission and task."¹⁸

However, these values were not only the catalyst for an active social life and the idea of preserving and transferring to the next generation of an identity. Rather, the exile experience in and of itself most

¹⁶ Hinkle, M. *Latviskā identitāte un trimdas kultūra Amerikas latviešu dzīvesstāstos. Trimda. Kultūra. Nacionālā identitāte. Konferences rakstu krājums.* Kļaviņa, D. & Brancis, M. (eds.). Rīga: Nordik, 2004, pp. 510-527.

¹⁷ Gāle-Kārpentere (Carpenter), I. *Trimda kā dzīves attīstības modelis. Latvijas Zinātņu Akadēmijas Vēstis. Part A.* 1994, No. 4 (561), pp. 19-24.

¹⁸ Ģermanis, U. *Zināšanai. Raksti par mūsu un padomju lietām.* Stockholm: Ziemeļzvaigzne, 1985, pp. vii, 241. See p. 9.

likely moved these values and this awareness of a mission into the foreground.

Ethnic identity—so important in Latvian exile communities—can survive and thrive only in a cultivated environment created by essential elements of culture: language, traditions, symbols, history, ideology, art, and values. But living in two cultures is neither easy, nor simple, and for many refugees the Latvian language, culture, and nation became ideal values, which existed too far from actual, daily life. It is possible that for some people simple survival was enough of a value; material values occupied the forefront of their lives, so that anything beyond them seemed excessive or unimportant. In these cases assimilation became the strategy for their subsequent lives. As one of our narrators admitted, there were many people in the exile community who cared mostly about survival and didn't give any thought to higher goals or national ideals: "We Latvians are a small nation. At the time, it seemed sort of instinctual and organically correct that we hold on to life as if it were an idea, that life should almost take the place of God. But, on the other hand, a life that has no spirituality is no longer a true life. It becomes purely biological, like the life of a plant or animal. We have spent so much energy preserving only this animal aspect of life." (NMV 464)

Only those people whose values were associated with Latvia and Latvianness not only as an ideal goal, but also as a motivation for their actions and way of life, were able to preserve and pass on to the next generations their national identity and awareness of their exile's mission.

Here one must remember that loud and patriotic slogans do not necessarily indicate a consistent national attitude or stand. As Ģērmanis noted acerbically: "At meetings they shout worn out patriotic phrases, but at home they babble in a foreign language, sometimes even complaining that the young generation doesn't understand Latvian. Nothing reveals the true lack of national awareness as well as this deplorable situation."¹⁹ Ģērmanis' statement demonstrates the tragedy of exile and the tension between ideal goals and actual life, in which one's own declared values are not always put into practice.

¹⁹ Ģērmanis, U. *Zināšanai. Raksti par mūsu un padomju lietām*. Stockholm: Ziemeļzvaigzne, 1985, pp. vii, 241.. p. 27.

It must also be noted that not only did the consistent implementation of the declared values into everyday life cause difficulties, but these shared values were also interpreted differently on an individual level. The exile community is not a monolithic, ideally united community. Like every other community, theirs also comprises diverse groupings. This characteristic is not confined to the Latvian community; segmentation is a normal situation that has also been described in studies of other ethnic groups and diasporas.²⁰ Each generation and each social group sees its road to a common goal slightly differently, and they each also measure Latvianness according to their own criteria.

The most evident examples of diversity were the various groups' opinions and visions regarding the issue of a future independent Latvia (as well as interpretations of history, such as the significance of the Ulmanis regime), the issue of the legionnaires, the issue of Soviet Latvia, or the schism in the definition of true Latvianness. The right-leaning supporters of Ulmanis did not get along with the Social-Democrats; each saw both the past and the future in differing ways. For some, the most important issue was prosperity, while for others it was democracy. The legionnaires and supporters of the Latvian Legion's ideas did not get along with those who considered the Legion as political near-sightedness that ill-wishers could interpret as cooperation with the Nazis. For some, the fight for Latvia and against Communism—even if done under a foreign flag—was a very important issue, while others thought on an international level of policy and respected political correctness. Contact with Latvia was interpreted differently—either as acknowledgement of Soviet power or as an opportunity to gain understanding about the actual situation in occupied Latvia. A principled dissociation from the Soviet regime was important to one group, while another group placed higher value on information about the situation in Latvia, meetings with relatives, friends, and colleagues. For some, true Latvianness comprised a “pickled” vision of Latvia in the year 1939 and unabated and intensive participation in the Latvian community, while the more liberal position envisaged more room for individuality, a contemporary interpretation, and fluid participation.

²⁰ Bauman, G. & Sunier, T. Introduction. De-essentializing ethnicity. In: Bauman, G. & Sunier, T. (eds.). *Post Migration Ethnicity*. Netherlands: HET SPINHUIS Publishers, 1995, pp. 1-9.

In any case, the acuteness of the passions testified to the exceptional importance of the issues to the participants, as well as to the vital role of world views and values to the development of the various social groups and their interaction with each other.

Interaction between the exile community and values

The analysis of the refugees' experiences and their lives in exile exposes significant relationships between values and people's actions and between collective and individual values systems. First of all, values are involved in making the decision to leave the homeland; the historical meaning of the refugee experience in Latvia is of importance, as are various levels of basic survival and physical values in conjunction with social and higher values, such as social security, justice, independence, Latvian culture, and freedom. Secondly, values are manifested in the established exile community, in which commonly accepted basic values—Latvian language, traditions, history, art and culture, religion, and notions of independence and freedom—supported the cohesion of the community. The loss of the native country and living between two cultures strengthened the feeling of individual moral duty and responsibility against the backdrop of shared values.

Aija Lulle
*Faculty of Humanities,
University of Latvia*

HOME REDEFINED: LATVIANS IN GUERNSEY

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Let me begin with an excerpt from my conversation with Aina, a 66-year-old woman in an internet-based social portal, a virtual space between Liepaja and Guernsey:

Latvia is my real home, and I feel it most intensely while I am in Guernsey. I had a chance to work in Guernsey and I am very happy for that. I work hard indeed, but I am endlessly happy all the time, because for the first time in my life I feel like a human being. I felt cheated and humiliated all the time in Latvia. Right now I am thinking that there is no greater place of employment than the one I am currently working for, and I would never want to live in another place, in another country. When I am in Guernsey, I feel wonderful in any situation. When having a walk in picturesque places,

I want to take pictures and record these moments in my diary. I feel as if it were my home, as if I had never arrived from somewhere else. And then my thoughts wonder about my real home; I understand that I would never want to exchange Latvia for any other place—never, ever! When the plane touches the Latvian ground, I feel like a mother when she takes her first-born and nurses.

Ambivalence and puzzlement of belonging to and longing for spaces and places, real home, joy and pain, and emancipation of personhood.... Aina and nearly 30 other men and women whom I interviewed in Guernsey¹ do not experience international migration as emigration, as a linear process of no return. Instead, they are developing ties to both countries as found in the Basch et al (1994) seminal research on transnationalism.

I use the transnationalism approach to study current geographical mobility since it allows the main focus to be shifted from motivations of migration to complex processes of evolution and change in feelings of belonging and loyalties to places and spaces stretching beyond national borders. However, motivations to migrate are important as they do determine to what extent migrants develop their transnational identity. Nevertheless, motivations are not more important factors for analysis than others, such as gender and class. By focusing on processes that evolve during transnational migration, I analyse feelings of belonging and practices conjoined by the notion of “home” and the process of motivations, changes, and consequences. Generations, ideologies, stage of migration, and different rural and urban sending contexts of specific places in Latvia—all these factors strongly mediate the development of transnational social practices and constructions of home and identity. “National” is the key element in the term “transnational” as it allows us to regard social changes within the specific contexts in Latvia. Homeland is an important notion of home for my informants and they attribute intimate yet ambivalent feelings to it.

¹ The first phase of the fieldwork in Guernsey was carried out in January 2010.

Sending context

The sending context in the last 20 years has been particularly dense: Latvia regained its independence in 1991 and joined the European Union in 2004. During the past 20 years it has experienced profound changes in the political, economic, and social landscapes as well as the labour market. The turn towards neo-liberal economics, privatization, and changes in income structure and sources are important causes of increasing inequality in Latvia.

Liberalism, which can be found in post-socialism countries, discredited the “working class” and emphasised individual success and, as Woolfson (2010) puts it, these “new realities generate dialogical “tension” between idealised “non-class” representations and the lived experience of the excluded majority.” Significant out-migration streams, most notably around the time of joining the EU and the current ongoing economic crisis are closely linked to various contexts of post-socialist Latvia.

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The research site

Guernsey’s image internationally is that of a tax paradise and a backyard of the United Kingdom; it is not a part of either the European Union or the European Economic Zone, and the island’s physical and geopolitical location certainly has specific implications. The island is inhabited by around 62 thousand people as of 2009 (Policy Council, 2010), and its public image camouflages complex multi layers of society. Recruitment of Latvians started in the mid 1990s, and initially only women were recruited to work in the horticulture sector while others, such as the hospitality and service sectors, were gradually opened for both men and women around 2000. Latvians along with Portuguese form possibly the largest ethnic groups of migrants in Guernsey. It should be noted, however, that ethnic data are sensitive and more data could be available from the census scheduled for 2011. It is believed, and often stressed by the Latvians themselves, that there could have

been around five to eight thousand Latvians there in 2007, although the numbers have declined in the past few years.² Although these figures should be treated cautiously in demographic terms, the Latvians nevertheless attribute symbolic power to them.

Housing, and thus the meaning of home, is of paramount importance on the island. Guernsey's housing law is the fundamental formal vehicle of controlling migration and defining who is an indigenous inhabitant, who has the right to become a local and how, and who is considered only a guest and expected to leave. In order to qualify for the same rights as locals, one has to live on the island for more than 15 years. A guest worker basically stays nine months and is stipulated to leave the island for at least three months, although the law has changed during the past decade and according to sophisticated categorisation some guests may stay for a period of one to five years on Guernsey without leaving. The law aims to benefit from migrants, who are economically active and are included in the formal or informal economic systems, but who are not accepted socially and politically and are discouraged to settle either with their families or because of old age. "Not suitable for smokers and families with children" reads a typical classified advertisement for rental accommodations in a local paper.

Everyday life in Guernsey

In everyday life, home and housing in Guernsey is organised by a complicated hierarchic division of the local and open market, where the former makes up 92% and the latter is approximately 8% of all housing. The price for rent in the local market is considerably cheaper and often the choice of migrant workers. In practical terms, this means that migrants live in either so-called hotels, sharing rooms with up to six and seven other people, or in a single room in a hotel or separate rooms rented from a local person, which is considered a relative luxury. However, those who live there for a longer period try to get

² I did not obtain official numbers in the first phase of my research, which was mainly based on qualitative methods. The length of a stay in Guernsey varies considerably; some migrants come for fixed periods, repeatedly travelling back and forth, some come for only one to three months.

a rental agreement in the open market because it not only provides more private space, but also enables access to better jobs; certain jobs, e.g. shops, require an open market housing licence. The open market is also a choice for families, yet living together with under-age children can be practically possible only if a migrant is married or in cohabitation with a local person.

The law, local attitudes, and dwelling in “hotels” all discursively position migrants as only guests who are there temporarily, despite the fact that many have lived there in “permanent temporariness” (Bailey, 2001) for already close to ten years.

Heavy physical labour, having several jobs and long working hours are common for most of the migrants. Work is their main motivation for going to Guernsey, and they are willing to live up to the expectations of hard-working Latvians. When I visited five women who pack goods for internet shops, they admitted that what would be considered as a normal working day feels like a lack of work to them: *We have almost nothing to do here; we are not used to working only 8 hours a day.* “Working hard” as a practice has both a very concrete and a moral value: the longer hours you work, the more you earn, and you can thus prove not only to an employer but also to yourself that fortune can and should be earned by diligence, something that was not highly valued in post-socialist Latvia.

Social acceptance of work abroad

Although I do not cast aside my critical view of Portes’ (1999) rigid quantitative definition about transnationalism as a process in which many people get involved in transnational activities over a considerably long period, quantity of people can be an important factor in securing and justifying one’s position socially. The rumours that there could be five to eight thousand Latvians in Guernsey are an important source of confidence and justification of one’s personal transnational choice.

Connections to various physical and symbolic spaces are often narrated in terms of imagined life scenarios, which are represented through dreams. Like Salih (2002), who in her research on consumption and transnational practices among Moroccan women in Italy focuses her analytical lens on a dream told by an informant, I found it significant that many of my informants referred to their dreams. Normunds told me that he had recently reread his diary, and while still back in Latvia he used to record significant dreams and interpret them as signals and explanations of change in his life: *The entry dates back to 2002; I did not have the slightest wish to go anywhere at that time. So, I reread what I wrote then, it is about an island. "...and everyone is talking about how to get there. I am followed and welcomed by kind looks." I was surprised to reread it; it means that already in 2002 my dreams told me that I should go.*

Normunds' dream serves not only as a source justifying his individual decision; it also has the social meaning that the decision to leave is accompanied by "kind looks" saying goodbye and those who kindly welcome. Normunds says his friends in Latvia support his decision to work abroad: *My friend stayed, he owns a company and has a fixed salary at another job. Barely existing, he says: I respect you, kid, that you left.*

Yet individual narratives of belonging in work and home that are divided between two countries encourage us to look at possibly useful conceptual categories from refugee studies, such as ambivalent and even forced transnationalism (Al-Ali and Koser, 2001). It also echoes McDowell's (2005) study on Latvian women who worked in Great Britain after the Second World War. The present issue is ambivalent from the perspective that not all Latvians in Guernsey were willing to live a transnational life. These forms of transnationalism can be interpreted in sedentary preferences and what is perceived as "a decent life". It has strong generational variable and ideological roots in the socialism experience, even if they are not consciously expressed. As part of a decent life, "one should work," repeatedly stressed 45-year-old Juris from Aluksne region, and he ironically yet very practically reminded the listener that in Soviet times one could be imprisoned for not being willing to work. *I had to have a job, he said. I had my company and then some jobs on the side [halturas] now and then. I was able to live in a house*

[*homestead*]. But what was needed was an everyday job, which is the fulfilment of the conviction that a man should work. Indeed, this leads us to ask about a deeper meaning which Latvian migrants attach to work.

Traditional paradigms would stress the four-fold model of home: physical dwelling, family, community, and homeland in both physical places or relationships and also symbolic spaces (Al-Ali and Koser, 2001). But as Blunt and Varley (2004) put it: "Home invokes a sense of place, belonging, or alienation that is intimately tied to a *sense of self*."

Questions about some groups of current Latvian transnational migrants as a new (or old) form of guest workers (Foner, 2005) can be further developed if we consider traditional meanings of home together with its meaning as a place where the sense of self and social meaning are embedded. A sociological survey carried out in 2006 showed that 62% of working people in Latvia agree that work plays a very important role in life, and 33% agree that work plays an important role. At the same time, leisure time was very important only for 29% of respondents (Zobena, 2007). Against the sending country's background, this leads to my core question: how are the relationships between home and work redefined during the migration experience?

For most, the whole way of life in Guernsey is complementary to repeated returns, as it is found in several other studies of transnational communities (e.g., Al-Ali and Koser, 2002). And it is also similar for those who live for longer periods in Guernsey and/or are married there and visit Latvia only for holidays. The length and frequency of the visit cannot be used as a rigid indicator of defining one's transnationalism or discontinuation of it.

Homecoming

During the typical nine month assignment in Guernsey, the people embrace home in Latvia in terms of growing longing, expectation, and difficulty which ends with their departure. In the last months before my departure for home, the longing became more intense every day. *I could not wait to be at home; it was so difficult, and if somebody started to whine loudly with longing, it was almost unbearable* (Sanita). Indeed, this longing for the homeland, expressed by many informants, tempts a comparison to pregnancy (*grūtniecība* in Latvian), and the physical match point *when the plane touches the Latvian ground, I feel like a mother when she takes her first-born and nurses*, as Aina eloquently described it to me, is like a birth and a meeting with someone who until then was present but not visible.

However, being “back home” often sharpens the sense of rupture. “Not only does arranging and organizing the return often cause anxiety, but the return itself involves stress and tension” (Salih, 2002). Border guards at the Riga airport meet a thrilled *home-comer* with *stone faces*, and *mom and sister are just simply unable to understand that I cannot earn the mortgage loan back in a couple of years*. These experiences are later reflected regarding their social identity: do I want to belong to this community; do I want to be governed in this way? It should also be stressed that over time and under conditions of strong attachment to various social spaces in Guernsey, for some a “homecoming” to Latvia becomes transformed into a “holiday” to Latvia.

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Empowered by “out of place”

Although for the majority “a real home” is anchored in Latvia, everyday transnationalism is also accompanied by ontological insecurity, which is closely linked to and influenced by economic, social, and political insecurity in Latvia. Sometimes belonging to a place is described as “neither here nor there” or as living in limbo. On the other hand, this “neither here nor there” is valued higher than “exclusively in

Latvia". The ability to manage life in two places, even if not articulated consciously as such, is felt as empowering transnationalism.

Yet, transnational life also empowers and emancipates. For example, consumption is just one of the signifiers of the subjectivities of belonging to a certain social class, and people develop habits and tastes thanks to transnational living. Most migrants recall happy feelings of being able to give presents instead of only receiving them. The ability to give, similar to the virtue of diligence, also has deep roots in the believed personal and social values of a prototypical Latvian. Many display lifestyles (or enable their family members to do so) they otherwise could not afford: travelling, studying, repairing houses, and escaping from poverty in old age. Migration studies confirm that migrants often belong to different social classes within the two countries (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002). This is also the case for many Latvians in Guernsey, and a desirable practice seen by most is to reach an upward mobility in both places.

Liberating and empowering transnationalism is represented as the joy of transcending previously unquestioned beliefs of one's belonging exclusively to a single territory and nation state. Getting out of Latvia is a chance to look from a different point of view and to critically redefine what was previously believed to be the only proper life choice.

Transnational practices allow people to contest hegemonic discourses on where one should belong and those of ethnic nationalism and the exclusion of the former "working class". Being on the margin also allows them to voice critical opinions about the homeland and the state, as Irina puts it: *As long as they [politicians] live in the past, I do not want to live in such a country.* Or as Andis similarly expressed it: *You have to leave in order to see the contrasts. Otherwise, while you're inside, you don't see the degradation [of power and society in Latvia].*

Politics is often narrated emotionally and in terms of morality and accusation; informants themselves felt surprised at the critical voice they have developed. However, the voices are fragmented and as of yet do not mobilize the identities to challenge and influence a political space in Latvia. *It will take a generation to have real change in Latvia* (Irina). This passive attitude and disbelief in one's agency to influence

Latvia's future is typical. At the same time, it should be pointed out that a discourse of the lost generation evolves not primarily due to individual difficulties caused by migration, but as a discourse judging Latvia's current affairs and vague future.

Conclusion

Home is a dynamic process, and all traditional meanings of home are subject to changes during migration. What is often stressed in research is the fact that socially homogeneous, peaceful, safe, and secure homes belong to the past, whether imagined or real (Rapport and Dawson, 1998). However, my findings in Guernsey lead me to think that complex processes of social transformations and fast, profound, and overwhelming changes in post-socialist society have swept away stable notions about the past. There is no nostalgia that life could once again return to how it was some time ago.

It is not only national, cultural, and social belonging, but also a sense of self which corresponds to various concepts of home and the redefinition of them during migration (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002). For the majority of Latvians in Guernsey, the sense of a *valued self* is achieved through work, and life is structured by work. Personal and social meanings of work redefine other meanings of home. Duties and even guilt towards family left in Latvia, the community, and the homeland are redefined. Inga's description of her ambivalent in-betweenness encapsulate the fragmented feeling about home between two countries:

Frankly speaking, I was slap-happy when I went home, because I was finally going home. But I was also crying when I left Guernsey; and when I flew back and landed here, I cried as well, because I was happy. Actually I am unhappy that I don't have children here, but I am happy that I have work. I'm living here. I just feel that I'm living here.

* All names of informants are pseudonyms

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Ina Gale Carpenter

*Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology,
Indiana University, USA*

STAGED HISTORY
IN A SIBERIAN VILLAGE

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At the core of my presentation are the questions, “What do ordinary people themselves do with life stories? How are they active subjects in their own right as well as valued eye-witnesses to history?” We are well familiar with what we as scholars do with the words we record from others or the written words we motivate others to produce. In publications, exhibits, films, theatre, and conferences, scholar-collaborators bring in the voices of people they deem under-represented in the historical or cultural record. In many post-Soviet countries, the collection of life stories has been framed as deeply relevant to filling in the gaps of national history, has elicited witnessing through traumatic memory, and, in a more minor key, has celebrated the ingenuity of individual survival strategies. Oral history work is primarily about autobiographical

authority, the articulation of one's life in the first-person singular "I", even though that articulation relies upon, and reaches toward, collective representation. The particular is a variant of possible others.

My interest today shifts to another perspective—to the first-person plural "we." Second, I shift from texts produced in private contemplation (albeit in response to or in collaboration with scholarly prompting) to textual representation on stage as an indigenous form of life review. From individual witnessing about relatively recent history, I shift to life stories from long ago transformed into tradition—more specifically, into a second use of tradition on stage.

I will compare two versions of a staged performance of history called *Mūsu stāsts* (Our Story). I compare them as ethnotexts—as the community's changing discourse about itself to diverse audiences. *Mūsu stāsts* combines historical narrative and song to represent the 100 (approx.) year history of Latvian settlers in a village in Siberia. The "we" who claims *Mūsu stāsts* as "our story" is multi-vocal. First, it represents the transnational collaboration of a small group of village activists with culture brokers in or visiting from Latvia. Second, it is a response to cultural policy-makers in the Omsk region and to audiences, as part of a post-Soviet agenda of multiculturalism and opportunities to perform ethnic identity. Finally, in the course of the decade since its first performance in the 1990s, shared experiences connected to *Mūsu stāsts* (scripting, rehearsal, performance, travel, and post-performance re-play during socializing) have intensified a local ideoculture (Appadurai, 1990).

Drawing upon historical documents, field-observation, and interviews, I explore history conveyed through folklore—that is, through the expressive forms of folk history and song. Folklore here is conceived not as a primordial given, but as an informal, socially-situated, emergent communicative process (common to all humans) and intertwined with such large-scale ideologies as nationalism and multiculturalism. What follows is preliminary. Interviews in Latvian are not yet fully transcribed, nor have those in Russian been translated. I hope as well to engage my colleague Dace Bula, whom I accompanied on this journey, as co-author of an expanded rendition of what I report here.

Let me begin with some background. In the last fifteen years, ethnographies about indigenous peoples in Siberia and the Russian North have proliferated (Balzer, 1999). But scholars have also called for increased attention to the late-nineteenth century peasant emigration, which was spurred by the completion of the Trans-Siberian Railway and government policies that offered otherwise unattainable free land and the hope of prosperity. Emigrants from the Baltic provinces of the Russian empire were among such settlers to Siberia from 1894-1914. Anu Korb and Astrid Tuisk have published on the Estonian migration, primarily in Estonian. Aleksey Andronov and Lidija Leikuma have presented conference reports on Siberian Latvians. Roberts Ķīlis has written a dissertation as well as published about Latvians in Siberia. Several field expeditions carried out by researchers at the Latvian Folklore Archive and University of Latvia Philology Institute faculty have resulted in videos (Lielbārdis and Zāļīte, 2004) and reports (Balcare, 2006).

I won't dwell on historical detail, except to say that an estimated 200,000 Latvian emigrants established some 200 isolated, compact settlements. In the 1920s and 1930s they prospered. But harsh repressions in the late 1930s resulted in the closing of Latvian schools, the purging of local leaders, and the collectivization of private property. The Soviet era is gone today, but often remembered, especially by those over age fifty. The new market economy and entrepreneurial opportunities preoccupy younger generations.

In the summer of 2006, with nine colleagues from Latvia, I traveled to Siberia to visit some of the villages founded by Latvians in the nineteenth century. Bula and I headed to Augšbebri, a village located North of Omsk, which dates its founding to 1897. Many of its nearly 200 residents are fourth- and fifth-generation descendants of the fifty-plus founding families, the majority of whom were Latvians, but included also Germans and Estonians. Latvian was the common social language until the mid 1970s. At some point in time the village was named Bobrovka and it is this name the villagers themselves most commonly use. In Latvia and in the Latvian diaspora, on the other hand, Bobrovka is called Augšbebri. For the most part, I will use Augšbebri because much of what concerns me here connects to the efforts of Latvians from Latvia as *culture brokers*, that is, as

self-proclaimed facilitators, coaches, and curators of national culture and modes of public representation (Kurin, 1997).

Several of the sixty or so houses in Augšbebri are abandoned, but others are being remodeled and expanded and are inhabited by sons and daughters. At its height, the village had 400 inhabitants. Today there is continued out-migration, but also a few signs of in-migration. Some young cultural activists (one of them trained in theatre production in Latvia) dream of developing Augšbebri as a tourist destination. Visitors could walk the fields and woods, swim in the pond, pick seasonal bounty (from berries to nuts), enjoy local fare (eggs, milk products, potatoes, beef, lamb, chicken), and savor countless varieties of home brew (at 40-50 percent alcohol). They could sleep in the log homes, take saunas, and be entertained in the new club.

Augšbebri has become a poster child for Latvian identity preservation and a pilgrimage destination for Latvians the world over. Bula and I were particularly drawn to the folksong ensemble *Varavīksne*¹ and the village club as mediating structures (fig. 1). Mediating structures are voluntary associations that bring diverse individuals into interaction, requiring them to negotiate the values learned from family and friends and the ideals professed by the state (Mechling, 1997). The large-scale ideals that influence the performative decisions of those



Fig. 1: Varavīksne ensemble rehearsal, summer 2006.

¹ Rehearsal of *Varavīksne* members, including on this occasion a male guest who is no longer active in the group. Several members were absent because they were participating in *3x3*, a cultural immersion camp in Latvia, sponsored by diaspora Latvian organizations.

in Augšbebri stem from the Russian Federation's constitutionally professed multiculturalism and newly independent Latvia's nationalism. Local ideals that value multi-ethnic coexistence also come into play.

Founded in the 1980s, both the club and the folksong ensemble date from the Soviet era. They are directed by two women described as the movers and shakers of village life. Both energetically seek funds for projects, secure visas for travel to perform in Latvia, themselves perform, host guests, etc. Olga Benke, director of *Varavīksne*, is in her late thirties; Olga Vakengut, in her mid-fifties, directs the club. In 2008, she was awarded a medal in Riga for her efforts on behalf of Latvian identity preservation in Augšbebri. The folksong ensemble's name, *Varavīksne* (the Latvian word for rainbow), foregrounds the differential identities of its members and its mixed repertoire of songs. When we attended a rehearsal, Olga Benke introduced the members to us with a loving possessiveness and embrace of their diversity: "This girl," she said, "is our Russian. She studied in Latvia and probably understands a bit. Then there's our Estonian. Lida speaks Latvian and is a Latvian. Nadija is half Russian, half Latvian. But she doesn't speak Latvian. And Lina is my sister." Over the years 100 villagers are said to have participated in *Varavīksne*, a few men among them in the early years. In Soviet times, performing ethnicity on stage had a certain exchange value. It still does today, providing those active in *Varavīksne* and the club with opportunities to display individual and group talent, to travel, to advance careers and businesses, to seek education, adventure, and to sustain social and family ties."

Since the 1970s journalists, photographers, and filmmakers from Latvia have extensively documented life in Augšbebri. An award-winning film was produced in 1997: *Viens ciems Sibīrijā* (A Village in Siberia). Interest in the villagers' preservation of Latvian folk songs put this distant place on the mental map of those in Latvia and ushered in an on-going period of back-and-forth visitation and cultural instruction. A relatively large number of Latvians now visit Augšbebri. Young children—as if on cue—greet them with "Sveiki!" (hello), thus creating the impression that Augšbebri is a Latvian village. Children can say little more than *sveiki* and *paldies* (thank you), though a few understand Latvian. It is as if Augšbebri itself has been turned into

a performance stage for the pleasure of visitors. Dignitaries from Latvia are commonplace enough to have generated the local quip that political success in *Latvia* depends upon making a well-publicized appearance in Augšbebri. Dace Bula and I were received as part of this diverse procession of outsiders who simultaneously are also insiders because they identify themselves as Latvians and speak Latvian. When we arrived with our duffel bags in hand, an elderly man relaxing on a bench outside the village club looked up and by way of greeting said nonchalantly, “I see, visitors from Riga.” He then picked up our bags, knowing before we did where to take them.

Visiting Latvians kick back and have a good time in the liminality of Augšbebri. But they also report feeling a disconnect between the ethnoscape they have imagined and the reality they encounter. A sign that identifies the village as Augšbebri (fig. 2) is deceptive but indicative. Latvian artists from Latvia carved the lettering in an old-time script in 2003 and fastened it to a post at one end of the village.



Fig. 2: Augšbebri sign

When we saw it in 2006, it had fallen to the ground. It was nailed back up in 2007 in time for the 110th anniversary festivities. Augšbebri/Bobrovka presents a fusion of vernacular Latvian and Russian cultural symbols. Latvian-style traditional log homes are nearly camouflaged behind tall fences and gates characteristic of Russian folk style (fig. 3).



Fig. 3: Fusion Latvian and Russian vernacular architecture style.

Most houses are decorated with intricately carved, often blue, window frames. Gates are often adorned with Latvian symbols, but occasionally also with Disney figures. Bodies and interiors are dizzy with bright primary colors and floral patterns. Traditional Latvian and Russian needlework dresses up bedsteads (fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Needlework on bedsteads

Cemeteries both conform to and differ from those in Latvia. Small tables with the occasional shot glass and withered candies suggest past sociability (fig.5).



Fig. 5: Cemetery

When visiting Latvians seek to establish relatedness through signs of Latvian material folk culture, their efforts often backfire. Dignitaries proudly bring gifts of Latvian dark bread, *rupjmaize*, only to learn that a soft, lightly brown loaf has been a local staple for decades. The white birches that Latvians claim as a prevalent symbol of identity turn out to be a contested identifier (“The birches in Siberia are much more white and more grand than those in Latvia,” we were told by those who had seen both). Midsummer’s Eve celebrations (*Jāņi*) welcome all nationalities and intermingle Latvian and Russian traditional and popular music, dance, food, and customs. Visitors note that Latvian folk songs are performed with what they consider unfamiliar rhythms, distinctive intonations, or odd juxtapositions: “It’s strange to see women in Latvian folk costumes singing Russian *čaštuškas*,” noted a visiting choir member.

We first encountered *Mūsu stāsts* among a collection of videos. The day after arriving, when we asked Olga Benke for an interview

about *Varavīksne*, she responded: “It’s all there in your house.” Initially this answer seemed to be her way of refusing “yet another” time-consuming request by Latvians from Riga, during the busy haying season no less. But when we began watching the tapes, we realized we had access to the village’s autoethnography, thanks to the video camera they had received from visiting Latvians. Dozens of VHS cassettes and hours of raw footage shot by film crews from Latvia dating from the late 1980s extensively enlarged and deepened our brief two-week glimpse of village life. Villagers were at ease in front of the camera, partly because it was home video, partly perhaps from knowing that later they would gather at the club to enjoy a replay of the event—laughing and pointing to each other on the screen.

As I understand it, *Mūsu stāsts* was first scripted, rehearsed, and staged with considerable input from two visitors from Latvia: a Latvian-language teacher who taught Latvian folks songs and culture in the club, school, and to the ensemble, and anthropologist Roberts Ķīlis, who, in the course of his doctoral research, unearthed historical documents and discovered that 1997 would mark the 100th anniversary of the settlers’ arrival in Siberia. *Mūsu stāsts* seems also to have been motivated by the need to perform in the regional competition for status as a Latvian heritage village (*nacionālais ciems*), which provides a paid position for the director of *Varavīksne* and plentiful opportunities to perform on festival stages throughout Siberia. The video performance we saw was presented in the late 1990s in the club to an audience of villagers and visitors from Cēsis, Latvia, whose choir also performed that evening. The video did not acknowledge authorship or provide closing credits. It was simply home video.

The narrator framed this early version of *Mūsu stāsts* as a composite text: as a “story we all hold sacred, even as we have our own individual hurts and memories.” The evocative and emotive power of the concise script relies on what folklorists term kernel stories (Kalčík, 1975), that is, referential allusions in the form of key words, phrases, and images, each of which has the potential to trigger myriad insider stories, known from family and community. We heard both kernel stories and elaborated life stories during our interviews. *Mūsu stāsts*, in this early version, is an emigrant saga in dramatic and sung form. Such

stories condense events and articulate feelings about the past—the reasons for departure, memories of the Old Country, life in the New Land (Degh, 1972).

The hour-long performance we viewed was a fairly fleshed-out play with a large cast, costumes, props, and scene changes. It interspersed an eclectic mixture of eighteen songs among the chronologically ordered historical passages. Songs included locally beloved popular songs from the nineteenth century, folk songs (*dainas*), Soviet-era popular songs, songs composed in the West by exile Latvians, contemporary songs from Latvia, songs in Latgalian, Russian, and Estonian, and translations from Russian and Lithuanian. Music is circulatory. A song originating in a particular place and time can be adapted elsewhere, thus creating a rich intertextual space as it takes its early meaning along, to a greater or lesser extent. In *Mūsu stāsts* recontextualized songs reinforce the historical narration and can themselves be regarded as condensations of past life stories and as worthy of full analysis in relation to those still being told.

Thematically, *Mūsu stāsts* begins with the framing question, “Can you be a true Latvian without your own parcel of land?” This theme—of owning one’s own land and escaping the German baron’s whip—displaces Latvia as the land of one’s dreams (a view often assumed and verbalized by visiting Latvians). Instead, Siberia itself was the land of one’s dreams for the nineteenth-century settlers. The question implicitly recasts the Latvian emigrant from tenant/servant to homesteader/master. Scene by scene, the performance depicts characteristics claimed by Latvians as self-descriptive: Latvians as hard workers, Latvian determination (*spīts*) to prevail against outsiders who oppress them, their striving for education. An early scene depicts the emigrant families (dressed in folk costumes) still in the Old Country. They sing a song called “Zeme, zeme” (Land, land), which was written in the late 1980s in Germany by Uldis Grasis, a popular Latvian exile composer and vocalist. The word *zeme* can be understood as soil and as nation. The melody is a Jewish folk song. “Zeme, zeme” was a staple of cultural immersion camps for young Latvians in North America, symbolizing their yearnings for political freedom for Latvia. In *Mūsu stāsts*, the song is shortened to a couple of verses so that its story line better adapts

to economic migration—to escape from that baron’s whip. This fore-shortening intensifies its powerful refrain, which projects the shared experience of similar yearnings for land and freedom in other times.

<i>Vēlos redzēt svešas zemes,</i>	<i>I wish to see foreign lands</i>
<i>Tur, kur saule spožāk mirdz,</i>	<i>Where the sun shines more brightly</i>
<i>Tur, kur nekad netumst debess,</i>	<i>Where the skies are never dark</i>
<i>Tur, kur brīva var būt sirds.</i>	<i>Where my heart can live in freedom</i>

Refrain(s):	Refrain(s):
<i>Zeme, zeme, kas tā zeme,</i>	<i>Land, land, what is land</i>
<i>Ja tev īstas brīves nav?</i>	<i>If you don’t have freedom?</i>
<i>Brīve, brīve, kas tā brīve,</i>	<i>Freedom, freedom, what is freedom</i>
<i>Ja tev īstas brīves nav?</i>	<i>If you don’t have true freedom?</i>
<i>Zeme, zeme, kas tā zeme,</i>	<i>Land, land, what is land</i>
<i>Ja tev īstas brīves nav?</i>	<i>If you don’t have true freedom?</i>
<i>Brīve, brīve, kas tā brīve,</i>	<i>Freedom, freedom, what is freedom</i>
<i>Ja tev savas zemes nav?</i>	<i>If you don’t have your own land?</i>

History in this version of *Mūsu stāsts* is structured in the continuity-and-rupture mode familiar in life stories recorded in the Baltics in recent decades (see Kirss, 2004). The initial flowering of life is represented by a series of first-person pronouns (delivered in an attention-getting staccato voice) that denote self-identity, individual ownership, and life in community—“one’s own farmstead, one’s own children, one’s own horse, one’s own, ours, we.” Folk history is captured in key themes and images that constitute a tightly-packed tour de force demonstration of Latvian cultural heritage: an abundant pastoral life in “a foreign but free land,” a crowd celebrating *Jāņi*, references to bonfires, laughter, courting, food and drink, rituals, beliefs, superstitions, the singing of folksongs about domesticity, striving for education, love of singing, nature, shepherding, fertility, and the bawdy folk songs of women.

The scene concludes with a song that enables villagers to claim identity as *latvieši* (Latvians) while simultaneously embracing their rootedness in Siberia. Called “Šeit ir Latvija” (Here is Latvia), this song originated among Latvian soldiers (*strēlnieki*) in Russia during the 1917

Revolution. This lyrical tribute to a beloved homeland circulates easily in time and space by virtue of a simple substitution in the refrain:

Šeit ir Latvija, šeit ir Bobrovka *Here is Latvia; here is Bobrovka*²
Šeit ir mūsu tēvu zeme. *Here is our father's land.*

By substituting “Bobrovka” for “Gaujmalā” (a locality in Latvia), villagers locate their Latvia—their fatherland—in a place they name in Russian.

The historical narration in the next scene touches lightly upon rupture: the forced collectivization and purges of 1937-39.³ Songs index the growing diversity of the village population, especially the influx of ethnic Russians. On stage, women for the first time converse in Latvian *and* Russian and sing Estonian, Russian, and Latgalian songs. The scene ends with “Nāk rudentiņš” (a song by an exile Latvian musical group from Boston) about an uncertain future.

The concluding scene sums up the past 100 years and anticipates the future as a kind of return to the past. To paraphrase the script, which contains numerous references to kernel stories, “It’s a new time, with new perspectives. Some hurts have healed; tears have washed others away; some wounds still ooze. But someone is said to be building a new house a bit farther from the village, again calling the land one’s own.” On stage a woman is speaking on the telephone, sending greetings to those in Cēsis. *Mūsu stāsts* ends on a universalizing note,

² In this song, I have personally heard the location adapted to post-World War II refugee camps (see Carpenter, 2006), Brazil, Germany, and countless specific sites in North America, from cities with sizable Latvian populations to Latvian summer camps.

³ My translated transcript from the video production: “Came the times that changed everything, that disrupted life. Latvian language could no longer be taught. Latvian teachers were arrested. 1939 brought the news that all the homesteads had to be moved to one site. Again, the Latvian must take his belongings, now also his house and go! Go live with others, go live elsewhere. Begin to live anew and to wait again. And then—war. Which brought pain to everyone. Changed life in Augšbebri. Men left for the war. Though it seemed life had just started, it was time to say goodbye. Men left and didn’t return. Women, wives wait, wait.” The scene ends with a woman receiving a letter and the group singing a folk song, “Es karā aiziedams” (As I went off to war).

using a contemporary song from Latvia about the purifying effects of snow on the world and on people's hearts.

Let me now jump forward about ten years. (I can do so, thanks to Aigars Lielbārdis and Sandis Laime, who were in Augšbebri in 2007 and who shared their video recordings with me.) For the village's 110th anniversary, *Mūsu stāsts* was rekeyed from commemorative history to jocular pastiche. It resembles the farcical and richly joyous play world of folk drama, with its repertoire of eclectic symbolic objects, clowning, bombastic speeches, and roles played by local residents that depart from everyday life. It was performed before a mixed audience of locals, a few dignitaries from Russia and Latvia, and a visiting Russian folk song ensemble. Shortened by half to 27 minutes, this version of *Mūsu stāsts* was staged on a relatively bare outdoor platform. The script starts out in alternating Latvian and Russian, before it switches entirely to Russian. Members of *Varavīksne*, plus one man and a dozen children and teens are the core cast.

It begins with the narrator asking the audience to welcome the czar. The czar strides grandly upon the stage in a white tunic and sash embroidered in red, a gold paper crown on his head. He subsequently introduces his czarina, saying, "My czarina is shy."⁴ With giggles and exaggerated movements, the czarina floats onto the stage, dressed in a long midnight-blue robe embossed with gold stars and green leaves. On her head she wears a *Jāņi* wreath of leaves and a paper crown, one on top of the other. Their joint narration aligns the czar and czarina as authoritative village insiders. It also pokes a bit of fun at self—at the locals as backward rural folk, who nonetheless have achieved a measure of fame in the world:

"Hello friends. What? You did not recognize me? It is I. I have observed you and have dressed in your style. Living in the forest, I am behind in fashion, but now I transform before your very eyes. Why in the world have I come here? Oh, now I remember: to tell you a fairy tale. Well, not, not a fairy tale, but a story with a lesson, in which you

⁴ The roles are played by two central activists in the community. The czar is played by a Latvian speaker of Latvian-German ancestry, a former director of the club. The czarina is played by a member of *Varavīksne*, an ethnic Estonian and a Russian speaker, who uses her everyday performative flare and sense of humor to full effect in the role.

will find truth. The czarina and I and our children will tell you what has happened over the last 110 years in Bobrovka.”

The czar’s introduction assigns historical knowledge not to the village descendants but to the royal couple—to outsider authority figures, to patrons, who endow local history with wide significance by suggesting that Bobrovka’s achievements are famous throughout the czar’s realm and beyond. After a bit of squabbling about hen-pecked husbands and shrewish wives, the royal couple characterizes the story they are about to tell in a playful tone as “a fairy tale meant for children as well as adults, for the tall and the grown-up, for the old and young, the fat and thin.” They thus effect a generic shift from emigrant history to fanciful tale. Cast as entertainment “for all without distinction,” the narrative aligns with both local and regional ideals of ethnic co-existence. The czar concludes: “We will start our tale with those distant times when our ancestors began to settle our land.” In one stroke, he transforms himself into a Latvian ancestor—or, alternately, embraces Latvians as his Slavic ancestors.

The next couple of scenes are straightforward renditions of history and song, narrated in Latvian by a member of *Varavīksne*. Like the others in the group, she wears a Latvian folk costume received from benefactors in Latvia. Her text closely resembles the original version of *Mūsu stāsts*. She describes the moment of migrating, lists the founding families, touches upon farmsteading (“in a place on the edge of the world in the distant taiga that reminded them of home”), and richly describes Siberia’s distinctive landscape and bounty.

The rest of the script, all in Russian, abandons the emigrant saga. It foregoes the convention of rupture entirely, does not fret about the future, and rather elliptically concludes with the czar’s promised lesson. That lesson asserts that cultural continuity rests not so much on canons of authenticity or heritage as on the energy of individuals working in the community. The narrator calls out the names of former teachers in the village school, directors of the club, and then invites past members of *Varavīksne* who are in the audience to come on stage for the final song, “Par dzimteni dziesma.” From the way it is performed, it is clear that the ensemble knows and likes this song. It seems to be *theirs*, yet it is also a song well-known and liked throughout

the Latvian diaspora, for its lyrics touch upon the sadness of separation from the homeland and from relatives, the homeland's beauty, and it calls upon those in distant lands to return.

Only five songs are included in this reprise of *Mūsu stāsts*, but each underscores the key themes of the condensed folk history: “Zeme, zeme” (about yearning for land), “Migla, migla” (about place), “Tur man tika” (about sociability across difference), “Ābelīte” (about generational continuity), and “Par dzimteni dziesma” (about love for the homeland).

Conclusion

For twenty years visitors from Latvia have injected into village life a persistent vocality about the kind of Latvians Augšbebrians are, should be, and should want to be. They proffered them a Latvia they themselves imagined for those living outside its territory and projected that image in the media, personal accounts, and cultural instruction. Speaking in the collective voice, village leaders often joined in—in letters they sent to diaspora and Latvian newspapers, in speeches they gave when honored for their efforts to represent Latvian culture, in cultural performances and in the preparations they made for hosting guests. In this transnational discourse, those in and outside of Latvia jointly perceived Augšbebri as yet another version of “mazā Latvija” (little Latvia), a term that is a movable descriptor applied to diaspora colonies (Vakengut, 2008⁵; Carpenter, 1996, pp. 107-8; Carpenter, 2007, pp. 321, 332). Viewed through the lens of agrarian nationalism, Augšbebri, with its lush fields, tasty food, and isolated setting,

⁵ Olga Vakengut, in response to receiving a “three-star” honorary award for her cultural efforts in Augšbebri, writes a letter to *Laiks*, the Latvian American newspaper, which opens with these words: “Sveiki, dear friends! Good day, dear fellow countrymen throughout the world! I write this letter to express my great gratitude from “little Latvia” to our beloved and dear mother—our ancestral land of Latvia.” She concludes with recognition for both names of the village: “With honor and hope for continued collaboration, in the name of the community of Augšbebri (Bobrovka)” (my translation).

becomes the bucolic equivalent of the homeland as rural ethnoscape and font of authentic national identity (Schwartz, 2006; Abele, 2005). The distant Siberian taiga is perceived as a nostalgic space where values being obliterated at home are said to be in the process of revitalization thanks to a bit of cultural infusion from culture brokers.

These projections of Augšbebri as a distant locale of Latvia assume that ethnographic heritage persists in the blood, the spirit, and the land, even as they create the rather misleading impression that after 110 years Augšbebrians live “Latvian” lives and still yearn to return to the ancestral homeland. Yet, in practice, Latvia was not an unattainable land (as it was for post-WWII Latvian exiles). It was a place often visited, full of relatives, useful for high quality goods and services. It was the Soviet Europe. Flights were cheap and no visas were required.

In *Mūsu stāsts*, the details encapsulated in life stories told several generations ago have been distilled into a distinct but generalized, locally-anchored, and locally-oriented folk history. This encapsulation far outlives the original tellers yet connects them to their fourth- and fifth-generation descendants because attitudes toward and episodes from the past (some element of shock, surprise, heroics, humor, or terror) have captivated narrators (Dorson, 1971, p. 150). In scripts *Mūsu stāsts* can be varied in form, style, mood, and length. Depending on context, its performers can emphasize or deemphasize a core of traditional tropes about Latvian identity: work-worn hands, love of soil, yearning for freedom, reliance on self, determination to survive in the face of oppression. They can add or subtract songs from their now expanded song repertoire. Like well-narrated life stories, *Mūsu stāsts* produces aesthetic emotion in tellers and listeners (Abrahams, 1971), and thus both enables and motivates next generations to remember and to narrate across time and space. In addition, the rich images and songs compensate for lost details and combine to project what Paredes has termed the lyric emotional core of history.

The first version of *Mūsu stāsts*, with its commemorative tone, chronological overview, and profusion of Latvian folk songs and stereotypical characterizations, has about it something of the enthusiasm of recent converts and the feel of a rite of passage that demonstrates cultural competence and thus the right also to belong to national life.

The original version is a conventional immigrant epic—about risk, hard work, suffering, accomplishment in foreign lands, and claimed cultural continuity. It is a cultural check-list that invites evaluation, by self and other, and relies on an expansive repertoire that can be selectively adapted to specific audiences and their differing notions of what constitutes “Latvian”: Are the performers on stage Latvian enough? Do they sing as we would sing? (Do we sing as they would sing?) So, that’s what Latvian songs are like: kind of dreary, no? Or, so that’s what Latvian songs are like: quite lively and catchy, no? (By the same token: So that’s what Russian songs are like. Or, that’s how Estonian songs sound. Or, so this is what *we* are like.) Whether performed on stages in Siberia or Latvia, this version is an apt construction by the residents of a designated heritage village. It serves both national imaginings and regional ideals of multiculturalism.

In contrast, the 2007 reprise is backyard tomfoolery, by and for friends and relations, though a few dignitaries seem also to be having a rousing good time. The performance has been re-keyed to integrate farce into commemoration. Hence, the paper crowns, magical robes, domestic squabbling, and fused identity characterizations. It is unlikely that this version is a versatile candidate for recontextualization elsewhere. It is most at home exactly where it was performed: in the schoolyard of Bobrovka. In it, the ludic impulse trumps the master narratives at the heart of solemn national and regional idealizations and agendas. The text’s mood seems to take its cue from a phrase we often heard ourselves as well as saw on film and video to describe Latvian identity display: “Kā mēs varam, tā mēs daram” (We do the best we can). This pragmatism suggests that authority is self-determined and authenticity is perceived as relative (at least in part) to access to knowledge and local circumstance.⁶

What the villagers learned for the stage, in the subjunctive “as if” of dramatic performance (Schechner, 1985), served also to enrich

⁶ The ensemble’s first Latvian folk costumes were improvised from available materials (mostly cotton rather than the more traditional linen and wool) and on the basis of general notions about “Latvian costumes having a lot of plaids.” These costumes, as I remember, drew considerable negative attention in Latvia. In due course, villagers began to receive Latvian folk costumes as gifts from Latvia.

everyday life. For example, when people gather to celebrate or to mourn or simply to socialize, a core group serves a local common good because they now know more words and melodies and customs learned from interactions with those in Latvia. By the same token, what is valued in local social life seems to have found its way onto the stage. Staged life and lived life seem to have become mutually reinforcing. For example, on video we watched the villagers perform the beloved comedy *Škroderdienas Silmačos*. The production demanded a large cast, and perhaps for that reason, everyone had been invited to participate, regardless of ethnicity or language competency. Those who couldn't speak Latvian delivered their lines in Russian; they were answered in Latvian by those who could speak Latvian. Performers also took license to ham it up on stage, ad-lib, and joke around with each other's performed selves. This feeling of free-wheeling local fun characterizes the 2007 version.

Both versions of *Mūsu stāsts* suggest that Augšbēbrians have produced themselves as locally valuable people in the course of demonstrating that they are culturally valuable people transnationally and regionally. Locality itself becomes contextual, depending upon the perspective from which it is viewed and for which its performance is intended: Augšbēbri/Bobrovka, Omsk Region, or Latvia. Both texts show distinct signs of "fresh contact," a term that Karl Mannheim coined to describe the cross-generational appropriation of ancestral culture for one's own uses. The old was indeed rediscovered and strengthened rather than lost, but it also was amplified from transnational sources for singing Latvian identity and by incorporating songs from other ethnicities. Fresh contact was accomplished in the mediating structures of village life (the club, the ensemble, the school). The script, the range of songs performed, and the home videos showing teachers and folk artists from Latvia at work in the village, all suggest that the original script for *Mūsu stāsts* was a joint production of villagers and visitors-in-residence from Latvia and was intended to serve canonical national ends. But in performing later variations of *Mūsu stāsts*, villagers express their loyalty to Siberia. Like others before us, we also were told, "I am Siberia's Latvian, not Latvia's Latvian" (*Es esmu Sibīrijas latviets, ne Latvijas latviets*) (see *Viens ciems*, 2000; Balcare, 2006). In their own back yard, they reassert boundaries even as

they embrace cultural forms that blur simple categorizations of identity. They climb on stage always open to the option of projecting the complex social selves they are in everyday life.

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Maija Hinkle

American Latvian Association Oral History Project, USA

CREATING A COLLECTIVE
LATVIAN-AMERICAN NARRATIVE
FROM GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL LIFE
STORY INTERVIEWS

55

In this paper I will focus 1) on first, second and third generation Latvian-Americans, who came to the United States as refugees after World War II and 2) on their recent efforts to create a collective narrative of their experiences using individual life stories and in focused group discussions of their exile experiences. As Inta Carpenter has extensively documented, the refugees started to contextualize their experiences and forge their émigré identity already in the DP camps in Germany right after the war (Carpenter, 1990, 1996). The efforts have intensified as the first generation is leaving the stage and émigrés have had to readjust to the new situation after Latvia gained independence

in 1991. They have had to create a collective narrative not only for the next generations, but also for their compatriots „back home” in Latvia, who have had very different life experiences and societal structures.

In her latest paper Professor Carpenter takes psychology Professor Erik Erikson’s concept of generativity (Erikson, 1959; Kotre, 1984) „which he describes as the midlife stage of the human life cycle during which individuals seek to create a legacy that will outlive the self,” (Carpenter, 2007, p. 318) and extends it beyond the individual „to the socially valued work of creative individuals who seek to instill cultural knowledge and values” (Carpenter, 2007, p. 318) in a receptive community, thus helping it to reimagine and recontextualize its story. She calls it cultural generativity. The subject of her paper and a prime example of memory-theater as cultural generativity is a play on the DP camps in Germany, *Eslingena: a Musical*, created and performed by émigré professionals and amateurs, both in Toronto and in Riga.

In reading her descriptions of the emotions, reactions and reevaluations seen both in the audience and among the performers of *Eslingena*, I was struck by the similarity between the events and the behavior of the participants in our focused discussion groups on exile history at the cultural immersion camps, called „3x3”¹, our interviewees in the ALA oral history project (Hinkle, 2001, 2005, pp. 122-124), and the participants involved in *Eslingena*. Thus I would like to extend the concept of cultural generativity to include not only the „socially valued work” of „officially” creative individuals, but of everyone, who fosters the reevaluation and recontextualization of memory and the collective

¹ The camps are called „3x3” to indicate that they are meant for all three generations, parents, grandparents and children, and that they cover the basics in Latvian traditions, history, crafts, etc. under the guidance of experts in their fields. In a typical year 10 different daily workshops may be offered in parallel sessions, each at least 1 ½ hours long, some crafts workshops lasting the whole day. In any one year some 150-250 people participate in the Catskills camp. Most come from the East Coast of the USA or Canada and are repeat campers. Since the language of lecture-style workshops is Latvian, most are Latvian-speakers of the middle and especially the older generation, although increasingly efforts are being made to accommodate non-speakers and attract children. Thus camp participants form a rather homogeneous group of emigre Latvians, who might live apart, yet form a community of individuals, interested in their Latvian heritage.

narrative among community members, including oral historians and folklorists, if their work helps community members reshape their identity.

In this paper I will describe the two approaches that we have used to document the Latvian-American exile experience: 1) individual life story narratives and 2) group interviews on specific topics. In the second half of the paper I will focus on the question of ethnic identity and try to account for some of the differences between the individual life story narratives and our focused discussion groups, concentrating in particular on the role of group interviews in shifting oral history from the focus on individual experiences into dealing with the „broader cultural meanings of oral history narratives.” (Hamilton & Shopes, 2008, p. xiv).

But first some basic history and statistics. During the last months of World War II, about a tenth of Latvia’s population, some 200.000 thousand people fled or were forced to leave Latvia for the west² (Baltais, 1999). After two to six years in United Nations Displaced Persons (DP) camps in Germany, most emigrated to host countries, including 40.000 to the United States (Plakans, 1995). They formed still active national, transnational and local communities-in-exile, whose two primary goals were to remind the world about Latvia’s occupation and preserve prewar Latvian culture, language, values and traditions. In 2006 the USA Census Bureau lists 94.341 Americans of Latvian ancestry (www.census.gov/compendia/statab/tables/09s0051.xls—2008-12-16)³.

² Of the 200.000 about 30.000 were soldiers, several thousand were mobilized or volunteered to work in Germany, and most of the rest were refugees. Only about 100.000 eventually reached Germany. Mirdza Baltais proposes that during the war about 217.000 Latvians had reached Germany, but only about 140.000 remained as émigrés.

³ The numbers of Latvian-Americans active in Latvian affairs in the USA, however, is much, much smaller. For example, the weekly Latvian newspaper in the USA, *Laiks*, has a run of 9.000.

Documenting the emigré experience in individual interviews⁴

Methods. To document the émigré experience the American Latvian Association undertook an Oral History project, using trained volunteers as interviewers and a mixture of the folklorist and oral history approaches. Although we allow the narrator to lead the story, we do have certain topics which we urge all interviewers to cover, such as the narrators' self-identification, reasons for leaving Latvia, attitude toward return migration, evaluation of present-day Latvia, and relationship to American society.

Results—summary. To date we have recorded more than 300 life narratives mostly in analog audio format from 1-20 hours in length, for a total of about 650 hours mostly from people who have been active members of their community or profession. Most narratives are from first generation refugees of World War II (85%), or from their second generation descendents (12%). A great majority (3/4) of the narrators were over 70 years old. Two thirds are men.

The narrative recordings are available at the University of Latvia, and will be deposited in digital format at the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, MN. Many interviews have been transcribed. A book of selected interviews and excerpts has been published (Zirnite and Hinkle, 2003, 2005) and a number of excerpts are available on the Latvian National Oral History web site, www.dzivesstasts.lv as part of an electronic book.

Evaluation. The individual interviews have been most valuable in recording first-hand accounts of various émigré cultural, educational and sometimes political endeavors by individuals who often were among the central players in those events.

One of the major problems with interviewing on a limited budget, however, has always been the shortage of good interviewers and quality control. Although we have trained 164 potential interviewers

⁴ For a more complete description of the American Latvian Association Oral History project and its methods see Hinkle, 2006, pp. 50-51 (in English), and Hinkle, 2007, pp. 53-54 (in Latvian).

and 34 people have carried out interviews, in the last few years only three people have continued interviewing and that only sporadically.

To try to remedy the situation and still meet the urgent need to record the life stories of the surviving Latvian-Americans of the World War II generation, we have published a manual on how to write autobiographies (Abuls, 2007), and we have tried to devise other ways of interviewing, namely group interviews. Although we started using group interviews mainly to obtain information, their value has extended far beyond the documentation aspect. They have been most valuable in stimulating discussion, reflection and reexamination not only during the discussion sessions, but beyond them and in the general community, thus making those sessions a forum for the creation of a collective narrative and cultural generativity.

Group interviews on specific topics

In interviewer training sessions.⁵ Starting in 1998 I ended most training sessions with a focused discussion, where I asked participants to talk about their own ethnic identity, their relationship to Latvia and their possible return migration. The discussions were recorded and transcribed. The questions and following discussions aroused much introspection and wide-ranging, sometimes painful, always lively discussions, just as Tina Kirss (2007, pp. 284-288) had found with the writing groups in the Toronto Estonian community, and Pilar Riano-Alcala had documented in her memory workshops with internally displaced persons in Colombia (2008, pp. 269-292).

The discussions were limited, however, to a few specific questions. In order to use group interviews to document the whole émigré experience, I needed to find another method of forming a discussion group. Fortunately, Latvians abroad and in Latvia hold several annual,

⁵ From 1990 to 2004 six one day oral history workshops were held in various cities in the US and 14 week long training workshops at 3x3 cultural immersion camps in the Catskills, NY, Three Rivers, MI and Latvia.

week-long cultural immersion camps⁶ which attract participants from all generations and have provided a rich source of interviewees in a group setting, especially in the USA, because most of their participants are first and second generation WWII refugee Latvian-Americans, who have first hand experience with the topics that I wanted to discuss.

Group interviews in cultural immersion camp workshops on émigré history. In the 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009 cultural immersion camps in the Catskills, NY, I offered a workshop called „Exile History in Life Stories.” We met five consecutive days for 2 ½ hours (in 2005, 2007 and 2009) or 1 ½ hours (in 2006) each day for a total of 42 hours. Each day was dedicated to a different topic. The emphasis was on two types of questions—„What?” and „Why?”⁷

The sessions started with a lecture-style presentation either by a guest expert or by me, followed by the participants telling their own experiences during the period under discussion, with me as moderator. The sessions were audio taped and transcribed.

Each year the workshop was attended by 24-40 people, the number varying depending on the topic for the session and the overall attendance at the camp. The group was even more homogeneous than the participants in the camp as a whole, because the overwhelming majority was first generation, Latvian-speaking émigrés or their descendents. Many were graduates of oral history training sessions in previous years and knew each other either from their home

⁶ See reference 1 for an explanation of cultural immersion camps.

⁷ For example, in the first two years the topic for the first day was leaving Latvia—why people left, what happened, what they took with them and why, what they did with the things that they left behind. The topic for the second day was refugee (DP) camps (Displaced Persons Camps, administered by the UN) in Germany—the everyday specifics of the camps and an evaluation of their role in later life. Other large topics were the experiences of the WWII veterans, the formation and maintenance of a Latvian identity in the USA, relationships with newly independent Latvia, and the future of Latvian-American communities in the USA. In 2007 we concentrated on the role of music and religion in the maintenance of ethnic identity. In 2009 we examined the efforts of the community to educate and retain the next generations with schools, summer camps, dance groups, song festivals, and participation in the greater community in political actions.

communities or from previous camps. There were no recent emigrants from Latvia.

Results and discussion. The group setting proved to be very successful for the gathering of remembrances about specific events and even for discussions on controversial topics. As many researchers have found, a group setting can have profound effects on a person's behavior and utterances, either facilitating or inhibiting responses.⁸ In all cases, we have to take into account the issue of addressivity, that the text that a person articulates is modulated by the presence of an audience and the character of the audience.

In our case the group setting seemed to facilitate the telling of most remembrances and spurring discussion even of sensitive or controversial topics. We observed what Wertsch (2001, p. 23) has described as the „fish-scale” pattern of remembrances, seen in close-knit, homogeneous, traditional societies, „in which everyone remembers something about an event from the past, and the overlap of knowledge is quite extensive.” The story of one group member served as memory aid for the others and the similarity of personal histories seemed to facilitate sharing them.

Some group members also seemed to keep in mind the goal of gathering as complete a mosaic of experiences as possible. If the experience of one group had not been discussed yet, someone would bring it up and describe it.⁹ Participants seemed to be cognizant that they were creating a collective narrative of the DP experience, a „complementary distributed collective memory”, in Wertsch's terminology (2001, p. 23), where various partial representations from different people form a more general pattern.

⁸ See Gladwell, (2002, pp. 28-29, 171, 274-275) for a summary by an educated layman of studies in which changes in the environment affect people's behavior. See Wertsch (2002, pp. 13-29) for a presentation about environmental influences on a person's utterances.

⁹ For example, when we were talking about the DP camps, one member described his experiences at the Baltic University in Pinneberg, Germany, because „I was part of a unique institution that functioned as a full-fledged university for a few years, and that experience should be described to give the full scope of the DP camps” (Avens, 3x3, 2005).

Some couples exhibited what Wegner, Erber, and Paula (1991) have called „transactive memories,” where one spouse completes the other’s remembrances or reminds their partner about other, similar occurrences that they had not mentioned yet.

Occasionally the presence of family members made the telling of one’s story more difficult for a group member, or in some cases, may have inhibited it altogether. For example, one participant started her comments with „I have been sitting here all afternoon, biting my tongue, because my mother is sitting here, next to me, and I know that she will disagree with everything that I say” (3x3, 2006). But then she proceeded to say at least part of what she had wanted to express.

Her case illustrates one of the limits of group interviews, especially when the group consists of people from one’s community.¹⁰

In addition, an open forum, such as a group interview, is not conducive to an intimate type of conversation, where the narrator may even forget that his story is being audio taped. The group interview, just as a video recording, fosters the perception of the narrative as a performance with a „conscious presentation of self” (Portelli, 1997, p. 14) and a stiffer, more thought-out narration.

In our case, however, the group setting elicited a deeper, more varied, and more critical discussion of certain controversial or significant issues than had been voiced in individual narratives. The group discussion facilitated the creation of a multifaceted collective narrative in which „instances of negotiation, disagreement and consensus make the reconstruction and resignification of experience and the elaboration of meaning possible.” (Riano-Alcala, 2008, p. 282) In the rest of the paper I will deal with one example of this.

¹⁰ I encountered similar experiences as an outside interviewer in the field work project in Latvia (Hinkle, 2001, 2003). In several cases authors asked that their testimonies not be made available to the local historians. In one case where I was accompanied by a local interviewer-trainee, the author refused to tell me about a painful episode during the war, which had been described to me by her relative in the USA (Astra Murniece, Viesite, Latvia, June, 2000. Interviewed by Majja Hinkle).

Latvian-American ethnic identity in group & individual interviews

In individual interviews. (Hinkle, 2006, pp. 48-67) The interviewer usually asked the narrator: „Why did you personally remain Latvian while living in the United States?” Most often the question elicited an exasperated response similar to, „because I couldn’t do otherwise.”

Upon closer probing narrators gave various positive reasons— 1) the feeling of responsibility toward Latvia to remain Latvian, 2) feeling more at home and comfortable in Latvian society than in American, 3) being able to assume leadership positions among Latvian-Americans, 4) the society offering aid to its members, and 5) as the émigré period lengthened, the feeling among the most active émigrés that the culture that they had created „belonged” to them, that it was „theirs”.

Nobody mentioned negative reasons, such as rejection by American society or strong pressure from family or society to remain Latvian.

In group setting. In the 2005 3x3 workshops the guest lecturer, psychology professor Solveiga Mieziņa, asked the question in a slightly different way: „Why did you remain Latvian? What enticed you to remain connected to Latvian society? What stimulated your interest? Were you one of those „automatic Latvians” who started out Latvian and remained put for all time, or did something else happens?”

Prof. Mieziņa posed this question after she had described her research on the Latvian identity of second and third generation Latvian-Canadians, where she had found specific personality and life-style differences between those people who remained within the confines of their parents’ society and those who rebelled against it and then came back. Most respondents in our group interview emphasized the role of family in determining their Latvian identity, while several mentioned a „born again” experience either with an emotion-arousing experience with Latvian culture, or with a forceful, inspiring mentors.

After one person recounted her painful exit from Latvian-American society, however, when her peers and elders rejected her sister because she married a non-Latvian English-speaker, the conversation fairly soon became a sharp critique of the rigidity and exclusivity of Latvian-American society. Her story seemed to give permission to several other group members to recount their own experiences with rejection by émigré society, sometimes bringing the narrator to tears.

Why was there a difference in tone between the individual interviews and the group forum? Why did the group setting elicit negative responses and perceptions, while the individual stories had been mostly positive?

In the first place, professor Mieziņa posed the question slightly differently in the group interviews than it was done in the individual settings. The term „automatic Latvian,” used in the group interview situation, is especially „loaded.” To some participants it could have implied a value judgment, a subtle criticism of those émigrés who stayed within Latvian society without self-examination and awareness of other possibilities. Secondly, individual interviews generally had more of a time constraint, since often the person had to cover events from his or her whole life in several hours, whereas in the group interview we dealt with a small aspect at great length. But thirdly, and I think most importantly, these differences demonstrate the power of the group context and the profound influence that even seemingly small factors in the social or physical environment can have on an individual’s utterances and actions. The question in the group setting was preceded by a lecture and discussion about different types of responses among Latvian-Americans to their ethnic identity and a critical evaluation of émigré society. These could have triggered negative memories and given permission to members to articulate them in this forum, again emphasizing the power of the interviewer and the audience, whether implicit or explicit, to influence what is being said. Fourthly, the negative stories might have been motivated to some degree by the narrators’ desire to create a complete portrait of the „émigré experience,” to show to their compatriots in Latvia that émigré society is not some idealized (or vilified), unreal entity, but has its own complex history and ugly episodes.

Another factor may have been age differences between individual narrators and group responders. Many of the individual interviews were with older people, who looked back on their whole life, synthesizing it into a generally positive life review narrative¹¹, whereas in the group discussion the critical respondents were active society members in their sixties, who were having a vigorous, open discussion about their society, which continued beyond the workshop and its participants.

The focused group discussions achieved a result similar to some of the results of the Latvian-American musical *Eslingena*, the memory workshops with internally displaced persons in Colombia (Riano-Alcala, *op.cit.*) and the reminiscence plays by older people in England¹² (Bornat, 2006, p. 463). They stimulated the reexamination and recontextualization of individual memories among the members of the group and the wider community and contributed to the creation of a collective narrative of the community. Some members even expressed the hope that portions of the recorded discussions on video will be made available to future generations so they will know „who they are and where they come from.”

¹¹ In her article “Reminiscence and Oral History” Joanna Bornat explores, among other things, the nature of memory and remembering in later life (Bornat, 2006, pp. 456-473). She points to Coleman, who „identifies the four characteristics of a “successful life story”: coherence, assimilation, and structure and truth value. These are the psychological tasks facing older people.” (Coleman, 1999, pp. 133-139) In our life story interviews authors wanted to leave information on what they have experienced and how they perceived it, but they also didn’t want to complain. They seemed to have „assimilated” the experiences of their life and were at peace with them.

¹² A group of London-based older women and one man devised a play „Our Century and Us” with Pam Schweitzer, an experienced reminiscence project producer. The play dramatizes their memories using their own words and thus presents „a history of the 20th century which is both personal and public.” (Bornat, 2006, p. 463). The play was usually presented to audiences of older people and received lively responses and participation. Somewhat surprisingly it evoked similar, wildly supportive responses from a group of academics when it was presented at an international conference. That „performance ended with a standing ovation and lively discussion between the audience and the ten performers.” (Bornat, 2006, p. 464) Clearly the sharing of experiences communicated across classes, ages, and national and international boundaries.

Conclusions

Both individual life story and group interviews on specific topics provided information about how historical events impacted individual, ordinary people, the motivations behind actions, and the evaluation of events and in questions of identities. The group interviews, however, were a much better means of stimulating cultural generativity and the formation of a collective narrative.

Individual interviews were the preferred method of recording in cases 1) where the main point of interest lay in the author's personal achievements or 2) in their story telling skills, 3) if the author did not want to tell his or her story in a public forum, 4) if the information was sensitive and 5) if the story called for introspection, trust and self-perception from the narrator.

The group interviews were most useful 1) in getting many different slices of information about a situation in the shortest time, where any one individual story and personality is of secondary importance, or 2) on topics that respondents in individual interviews rarely touch, 3) in getting differing opinions on controversial topics or 4) in confronting collective myths, although the group setting might inhibit some people who would be more candid in a more private setting.

In our case the group setting reinforced the goal of the project: to create a collective narrative of the exile experience for compatriots in Latvia and for future generations of Latvian-Americans. The vigorous discussions fostered the reevaluation and recontextualization of memory and the collective narrative among the workshop participants and sometimes in the wider community members. Thus they are another example of cultural generativity as defined by Professor Carpenter (Carpenter, 2007).

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Tiiu Jaago

*Institute of Culture Studies and Arts,
University of Tartu, Estonia*

MIGRATION:
STEREOTYPES AND EXPERIENCE FROM
A FOLKLORISTIC VIEWPOINT

69

In this article I will observe the opportunities of studying migration from the viewpoint of folkloristics and oral history.¹ My question is how migration is being talked about in the intensive yet rapidly changing migration experience: what are the opinions regarding this and what is the basis to rely on while verbalising one's relevant experience; what kind of reinforced—stereotypical—opinions have taken

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shape and to what extent are these being questioned or corrected. Although the subject matters and motifs regarding migration can be observed from the context of folkloristic research, the historic-social interpretation of these texts is supported by the research method of oral history.

Popular discussion of migration-related themes in Estonia has been topical after World War II due to the resettlement of family members and acquaintances to different regions of the world. Likewise, there is experience of extensive immigration from Eastern areas.² Contacts with loved ones and specific political circumstances in the Soviet Union moulded certain fixed imaginations of migration. Migration-related discussion in Estonian society of the 1990s proceeded from the alteration of the political situation, bringing about shifts in the possibilities and attitudes with regard to migration.

The source material of the treatment comprises migration-related short narratives and assertions originating from discussions in a web-based course from 2002, 2006, and 2007 (the total number of students participating in the discussion was 74 and the amount of archived messages is 318 as well as a recording of a four-and-a-half hour long simultaneous discussion). Field work material on Swedish Estonians from 2007 and 2008 has been used comparatively. Both source materials (printouts of the web-course discussions and written reports of fieldwork and interviews) are located in the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore at the University of Tartu.

² In 1939 approximately 12.000 Baltic Germans left Estonia; during 1940-44 more than 70.000 inhabitants of Estonia fled to the West and 7.500 Estonian Swedes resettled in Sweden. According to approximate estimations, there were 809.000 inhabitants in Estonia in 1945. Within 15 years, the population grew by nearly 400.000 and continued to increase later, mainly due to immigration (Palli, 1998, p. 34).

Adaptation themes: everyday life and the existence (or non-existence) of language skills

The web-course “Dialogue Between Private and Public Life” was built around five themes, where each theme consists of two scientific articles, tasks actuating the discussion of the articles, theme-related narration, and discussion in the forum. One of the subject matters was “Migration and Hopes”, analysing Aivar Jürgenson’s article about the experience of people who emigrated from Estonia to Russia at the beginning of the 20th century (see Jürgenson, 2002) and Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich’s article on the migration-related narratives of emigrants from Germany to New Zealand during the period of 1936-1996 (see Bönisch-Brednich, 2002). The first article directs thoughts to economic migration, the second to the refugee-theme and also to migration shaping one’s life history and the search for alternative lifestyles. All course participants were of local origin, thus, it is the mediated stories that to a large extent serve as the basis of their presented viewpoints. These are stories which they have heard directly from people who changed their country of residence or, instead, such narratives stem from the general migration-related communication process. General migration-related communication contains stereotypical imaginations (e.g. statements such as “Estonians have coped everywhere in the world” or references to Hemingway: “you can find an Estonian in every port of the world”) that can be used to talk about things without having well-reasoned standpoints of one’s own.

Provided that the basis for the course participants’ short narratives or opinions is indeed their own immediate experience, this would still express the attitudes of local people towards those who have immigrated into Estonia or what the locals expect from those who have immigrated into Estonia. This is even the case when migration is presented in one’s story from the viewpoint of the person who has changed his or her homeland. (Such an exchange of viewpoint or transfer between the narrator and the character of the story is possible upon narrating.) Themes related to immediate experience comprise,

for example, adaptation difficulties in the new country of settlement, which are associated by the narrators primarily with local culture and language skills, or, to be more precise, the lack of language skills. However, participants in the discussion did not present (or were unable to present) details regarding minute circumstances of daily life, which is indeed done by people with personal migration experience. For instance, the participants in the discussion spoke about the command of language in general, or about the expectation that incomers would learn the local language. On the other hand, the Estonians who escaped to Sweden during World War II really talk about the misfortunes associated with the lack of language skills and such stories form a customary part of migration narratives (c.f. Bönisch-Brednich, 2002, p. 71). For example, a woman who went to a shop and asked the salesperson for a lamp bulb, translating the word literally from Estonian into Swedish (Est. “lambipirn”, literally “lamp pear” in English). She was not understood because in the Estonian language this word is formed of two elements—“lamp” and the metaphoric affix “pirn” (Eng. “pear”)—but in Swedish such a metaphor is unknown. Likewise, everyday situations associated with adaptation abroad were never highlighted during the students’ discussion. However, in the case of Estonians in Sweden, the topic of, for example, the taste of familiar foods and the attempts to obtain them was discussed over and over again.

Migration: an evaluative or neutral phenomenon

In Estonian scientific language, “ränne” (the Estonian word for “migration”) means a permanent change of residence. Such a definition brings forward the frames of the time and place related to migration. Time (including both historic-political periods as well as the time measured by personal life and generations) and space (including territory, perception of boundaries, and particularly the notion of home) constitute the base frame for narrating about migration on which one’s own identity or that of a group of inhabitants is built. For instance, in Sweden a distinction is made between *refugees* and *foreign Estonians*,

or those who have simply migrated to Western countries. During the existence of the Soviet Union, Estonians who had escaped to Sweden during World War II referred to themselves as refugees; however, when Estonia became free again, the question of how to refer to themselves arose, since the border of their homeland was once again open and in this regard they had ceased to be refugees. On the other hand, the state border established between Estonia and Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union generated confusion in those who had come to Estonia from the East—they became migrants without ever having determined themselves as such.

In the following I will present an example of a stereotypical opinion and an interpretation thereof that depends on time and space. The example originates from a discussion between students of literature and folklore during a seminar taking place in the middle of the 1990s. One of the young writers claimed that Anton Hansen Tammsaare was not a writer who genuinely grasped the Estonian life “because just think how his novel, “Tõde ja õigus” (Eng. “Truth and Justice”), begins”. This novel, belonging into the Estonian literary canon, starts with the arrival of two young people—a man and a woman—to their new place of residence in the 1870s. The young writer reasoned her statement with the fact that it is not in the nature of Estonians to migrate to a new place of residence. Tammsaare had thereby depicted a non-Estonian behaviour, a non-Estonian mentality, since “Estonians are not nomadic people”. Her standpoint is understandable in the 1990s by way of the Soviet-era migration experience, yet it is not acceptable in the context of the era depicted by Tammsaare. Namely, the Soviet era was a period when the number of Estonians within the entire population of Estonia decreased by nearly 40% and the Estonian culture and language were jeopardised. In this context, the ideology of the student’s statement (i.e. Estonians do not migrate) is understandable as an opposition to the Soviet Union’s policy of mixing peoples. Nevertheless, Tammsaare is right in the historical context: during the 1870s there was remarkable local migration within Estonia due to the alteration of the demographic situation and in connection with the purchasing of farms in full ownership. This was also the period when, during the process of the disintegration of extended families, younger sons found themselves new homes, either by buying new farms,

moving to towns, or by joining the soon-to-happen large-scale emigration to other provinces of Russia.³

As a result of different time layers, the general attitude in Estonia indeed favours a sedentary lifestyle, as becomes evident also in the currently analysed web-course materials. This concerns local migration and also the migration between states, and it is expressed in the use of words. For instance, in the following sentence the word “harsh” conveys the speaker’s assessment of a person with a wandering lifestyle: “Maybe I am harsh, but such a person is never going to be a true local”. She adds that only a local person would keep his or her home place tidy and respect it, and that the home place preconditions a certain territorial togetherness in the course of several generations.

Further, some examples referring to how a sedentary lifestyle is valued and given preference in comparison with a mobile lifestyle. During the students’ communication circle in 2007 it was also claimed that a *hiidlane* (Eng. “indigenous inhabitant of Hiiumaa island”; Hiiumaa is the second largest island in Estonia) becomes a local once he or she has been living on Hiiumaa for three generations: “Not that locals are hostile, but the psyche and specificities of *hiidlane* become intrinsic during this period of time, I think.” This is a statement I have come across in different situations. For example, during a training course a couple of years ago, the trainer asked the company managers of Hiiumaa what they would expect most from a young job-seeker during a job interview. The answer: “That he or she is a *hiidlane*.” Well, yes, but beside this? The answer: “That his or her parents would also be *hiidlased*...” (Eng. “indigenous inhabitants of Hiiumaa”). And this is how it remained to be.

Another example I present about giving preference to a sedentary lifestyle concerns the characterisation of those who have come to live in Estonia. Two groups of such incomers have acquired a rather negative evaluation and the third can be perceived as neutral: “those from Russia who are looking for a better way of life” (i.e. those who have come from the Easternmost areas of the Soviet Union); “businessmen who have come here to make big money and phonies from Western

³ Regarding the demographic situation in Estonia see, in detail, Palli, 1998, pp. 27-30.

Europe”; and “adventurers”. “Adventurers” interested in culture are expected to come, but “adventurer” missionaries are not much respected.

The third example of preferring a sedentary lifestyle proceeds from a statement expressed during the discussion: people who had changed their homeland were also considered to be traitors. This seems to originate from official-state rhetoric. The difference between popular and state rhetoric lies in the fact that these “traitors” do not coincide: according to the popular understanding of people, political refugees are not seen as traitors but the ones who have disavowed their own culture (At the same time, repudiation from the so-called *own* culture is expected to happen with those who have immigrated into Estonia, although it is not always worded this way. This becomes evident in imaginations of how the immigrant should have Estonian language skills, know Estonian history, and perceive the values of Estonian culture. However, these imaginations lack a liaison between the immigrant’s new home and his or her original culture).

When comparing the standpoints presented during the 2002 web-course with the later ones, it is possible to note changes in the attitudes regarding migration. In 2002 there was fear in the forefront concerning the opening of the border by Western states, as it was presumed that more educated and entrepreneurial people would leave Estonia. This issue ceased to be topical in 2006 and 2007, and there were certain statements made that it is actually not an issue at all. Migration-related negativity (caused by Soviet-era immigration and the growing dominance of the Russian language in Estonia) is fading away and the positive aspects of migration (e.g. interest in other cultures, migration related to a certain lifestyle or life history events, etc.) are noted more and more frequently. It turns out that the migration theme becomes more neutral due to the balancing of positive and negative attitudes.

As a new feature during the observed period (2002-2007), it is possible to note awareness and acknowledgement of multi-locality identity. Multi-locality identity is a theme where the understandings and narratives of locals and Swedish Estonians coincide. Multi-locality identity contains different territorial connections and different social networks (e.g. childhood and relatives are connected with one

territory, children with another territory, and the obtaining of work and education with a third territory, etc.). Different memories and different expectations are expressed with regard to both of these—territories as well as social networks.

The reasons for such trends of change can be seen on one hand in the Soviet migration experience (i.e. political shaping of migration by the alien power under the circumstances of occupation and annexation) and the withdrawal thereof in today's globalised world where Estonia is an independent state and also a member of the European Union.

Vocabulary of the discussion: “ränne” (estonian for “migration”) or “migration”

What are the semantic fields of the words used for speaking about migration and, particularly, the attitudinal shades of meaning? Upon answering this question I rely on the folk theory used in linguistics (Öim, 1997, p. 256), according to which words in a language aggregate around certain themes, forming an internally structured semantic field. The internal structuring of the semantic field reflects the culturally intrinsic understanding of the described phenomenon. In order to understand the reciprocal semantic connection between the use of words and understandings within the migration-related discussion, I observe what kind of words were used in the articles and work instructions (this might have affected the use of words by the participants in the course), what kind of words were spontaneously used by students during the discussion, and when the need for defining concepts emerged in the course of the debate.

The terms and concepts used in the work instructions and articles were preferably “ränne” (Estonian for “migration”), “sisseränne” (Estonian for “immigration”) and “väljaränne” (Estonian for “emigration”), or also the foreign loan words “migratsioon” (Eng. “migration”) and “emigrant” which were used as scientific terms. It turned out during

the discussions that in spontaneous speech the most general and neutral concept is the Estonian word “ränne”, which encompasses all kinds of movement (local migration, changing of one’s homeland, temporary staying away, the mobile lifestyle of adventurers, etc.). Interestingly, there are also notions in the Estonian language such as “rändhõimud” (Eng. “nomadic tribes”), “rändlinnud” (Eng. “birds of passage”), and “rändrahnud” (Eng. “erratic boulders”), in case of which it is not possible to use the loan word “migratsioon” (Eng. “migration”).

The foreign word “migratsioon” (Eng. “migration”) was preferred in cases where the coming back or returning to one’s homeland was excluded. Likewise, this notion is also related to mass-scale migratory processes and not to the movement of an individual or a family. However, when the topic involves a change of the country of residence at an individual or family level, neutral concepts such as “elama asumaa” (Eng. “settle”), “minema” (Eng. “go”, as in “went to Sweden”, “went to America”), or “kolima” (Eng. “move”) are used. The latter means establishing one’s home somewhere else, for example, “moves to Greece” means to create his or her home there. The word “move” is not used to denote permanent change of homeland. Thus, “settle” and “go” are somewhat more general concepts than “move”.

The term “rändrahvas” (Eng. “nomadic people”) is negative in migration-related discussion, when used as a metaphor: “they do not have a steady living place, no boundaries; a better pasture land would provide the direction” (c.f. the earlier example: “Estonians are not nomadic people”). The use of this term expresses an attitude which lacks home feeling and the need to care for one’s home place. If a “world citizen” is a person with a mobile lifestyle in general, then a “migrant” lives on European benefits”. “Migrant” is a very bad word for Estonians, associated with hordes of Russians and the singing revolution and “stop Lasnamäe”⁴. At the same time, “those who have temporarily

⁴ “Stop Lasnamäe” refers to the song “Let’s go up the hills”, composed by Alo Mattiisen at the end of the 1980s, during the Soviet era. The message is associated with the opposition to the construction of new urban sections in Tallinn to accommodate immigrants during the Soviet era: “Look, everything is completely strange and alien / Is this our home place? / In the drafty streets / aimlessly strolls the migrant.”

worked elsewhere, and come back after the end of that work, they are not migrants”.

The students worked in different groups. In the groups where the participants described migration based on their own imaginations and self-reflexively (for example, they asked each other as to where would they agree to emigrate, on what conditions, how migration would affect family life, etc.), it was lifestyle-related migration that was highlighted. On one hand, the discussion in these groups became thematically divergent, however, on the other hand, more in-depth layers of the problems were reached. It became evident how situations and assessments can be extremely different for each specific person. Similarly, the use of words in these groups was much richer in nuances. Yet when the speakers tried to follow the terms during the discussion (“migration”, “integration”, “own and foreign culture”) they became trapped in the media texts and allegations (integration is necessary, but who should be integrated?; is migration nowadays deplorable from the standpoint of Estonian society; and other such rhetoric generalisations without answers).

Going abroad: one or many choices

Stereotypical opinions are expressed in statement-like sentences or episodes, for example, “I believe that emigrants feel a growing nostalgia towards their country of origin, even in the case when they do not admit it themselves, due to one or another reason. I think so because I believe in roots.” In folklore there are narratives that reinforce and also repudiate stereotypic opinions, and this shows that we are dealing with discussion (not presentational) genres. These stories belong within the everyday communication field, subject to the lifestyle of people. Since these narratives (statements) have a definite structure that evolved over the course of time, it means that such stories are intra-personal (Schmidt, 1996, p. 66), similar to the above-given statement regarding emigrants. In the given web-course discussion, migration-related opinions were presented from time to time in

a dialogue of arguments and counter-arguments. For example, there was an imagination that Nordic countries are associated with indigenous culture and valuation thereof, whereas southern countries would satisfy one's yearning for adventure ("I wouldn't stay in Sweden for adventure-seeking"). A co-student presented the counter-statement "but some would indeed go and stay in Sweden for adventure...". When the subject matter was taken on a personal level, it was presumed that the imagination with regard to migration would change (e.g. the statement that the attitude towards migration "would change abruptly" once you happen to be in the circle yourself).

Longing and nostalgia are the emotions associated with emigrants. This is, however, not evident in the case of immigrants, as they are mostly depicted as the ones looking for a better life. Between these two extremes (longing and seekers of a better life) is a compromise created by the standpoint on contradictions between imagination and reality. As a relevant example there was a story of a woman who wanted to go to a lonely island because she liked the view of the sea. "She simply couldn't take into account the fact that if there is no other view at all, this view (to the sea) might not be so enjoyable any more...". This is an explanation, by way of figurative imagery, that people believe that elsewhere is better than where they are living at the moment.

In 2002 a lot was talked about the fact that when a person has an opportunity to be in two places, he or she would yearn to be there where he or she is not at the moment. This was interpreted as the fragmentation of reality: an ideal world is put together of several places, however, the only way to be there is in one's imagination, not in reality (the popular expression "it is good there where we are not" was also used). This opinion field retreated by 2007 when the understanding of multi-locality identity came to the forefront (and the need to be connected solely with one place was not emphasised any more as otherwise life would proceed in an idealised world).

Likewise, if in 2002 the people leaving their homeland were presumed to be particularly bold, then in 2006 and 2007 it was stated that although going away needed courage, staying (i.e. giving up the idea of going) demanded just as much courage.

There was more and more discussion about migration as an escape from oneself, rather than a consequence of political circumstances or other such external coercion. This trend refers to changes in Estonian society: in a totalitarian society an individual is more likely to speak about the controversies between him/herself and society or the state (and even more so in the Soviet Union, where it was not possible to freely move about and settle in another country), whereas in a democratic society it is the internal controversies of the individual that come forth, since mobility-related constraints tend to be shaped by factors of more personal nature in comparison with the experiences of the Soviet era.

Summary

The source in question (migration-related short narratives and statements during the web-course) provides a view of imaginary immigrants or emigrants yet is based on the experience of local people, i.e. those with a sedentary lifestyle. The way local people interpret immigration is usually not a customary part of real life narratives. Yet when offering the discussion topic “migration” and observing the imaginations of people with a sedentary lifestyle with regard to the value attitudes of those moving across national borders, we can note the emergence of the themes and attitudes of this party that usually does not actively participate in the movement, but is rather the receiver of immigration. In addition, subject matters and attitudes are disclosed that would otherwise remain in the shade when speaking about one’s own experience. Consequently, such a method offers an opportunity to study how people have experienced immigration, which is one facet of migration.

When comparing the understandings of students living in Estonia with those of Estonians in Sweden, the former are more ideologically charged and the latter are carried by everyday life. In the first case, the students talk about learning the language and culture of the new country of residence, yet only in a generalised manner. For instance, “When you go to live in a new country, it is as if you are

deprived of your history; you have to adopt the new, both history as well as culture”. I did not hear such expressions of thoughts from Swedish Estonians. They have memories and associations with different territories and cultures, and they narrate episodes experienced in real life, highlighting significant details which tend to be practical rather than ideological. When I asked one of the interviewees about the language skills of her grandchildren, she perceived my question as ideological and replied that she is embarrassed that they cannot speak Estonian. When I asked why she was embarrassed because of this, she said that she had presumed from my question that her children should be able to speak Estonian. (Personally, I had not perceived that my question contained a prejudice in itself.) Within the family this is not seen as a problem to be embarrassed about, because “these things simply are the way they are”. Thus, the problems that locals assume to attribute to those who have changed their country of residence are not actually issues for the latter—different experiences condition a different structure of narratives and stereotypical statements. By 2007 the Estonians in Estonia and in Sweden (within the scope of the material in question) have reached unanimity with regard to understanding and explaining multi-locality identity.

Translated by Mall Leman.

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Ilze Akerberga

*Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology,
Indiana University, USA*

INTERPRETING THE PAST IN TWO LIFE
STORY DOCUMENTARIES:
DZĪVESSTĀSTS IN LATVIA AND
MUSEU DA PESSOA IN BRAZIL

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A barber's chair and scissors and the ruins from the bunkers of World War I on the shores of the Baltic Sea — these are the two settings that serve as the backdrops for two documentaries created and produced using life stories as their foundation. This paper examines the stories about the stories that these two documentaries present. The World War I bunkers are located near the port city of *Liepāja*, Latvia, and the barbershop and scissors are located in the bustling business hub of Brazil that is *São Paulo*.

The physical settings themselves are an indication of what messages each of the documentaries wants to relay to the world. Though each documentary is based on life stories, each portrays the past in a different way. Māra Zirņīte, who is founder of *Dzīvesstāsts* in Riga, an organization that records the life stories of Latvians throughout the world, produced and created in 2002, together with a team from *Dzīvesstāsts*, the documentary “Ordinary Lives in Extraordinary History.”

From the very beginning the documentary gives central importance to “history” and an emphasis on the role that World War II played in peoples’ lives, because the “scars” of history continue to affect them. The narrator explains: “War did not damage the fortifications of Liepāja, but it did scar the generation born between the two world wars.” This statement affirms that the wounds of war have not yet healed and are still entrenched in common memory. It is the main premise of the documentary and one that assigns responsibility for peoples’ present-day “scars” and situations to events that happened in the past.

A sense of place constitutes one of the troublesome “scars” from the past: leaving and entering, fleeing and hiding, being forced to abandon one place to look for another. A chain of circumstances led each of the storytellers to make up his or her mind whether to pick up roots and place them elsewhere, or to keep roots where they are and endure the consequences of a changing political climate.

A change of place is often preceded by a crucial moment of decision. A number of stories hang around this moment of decision that steers the storyteller down one path rather than another. Māra emphasizes this as well in her proposal for this documentary where she intends to “understand the complexity of Latvia’s 20th century history by revealing how individuals made decisions in complicated situations.” Australian immigrant Kārlis creates this decisive moment in time in his story that finds himself sailing on a boat in the Baltic Sea very close to the Swedish coast in the early 1950s:

When we crossed the Baltic Sea, we were looking for the right weather conditions to get closer to the Swedish coast. It was very dangerous—Soviet patrol boats watched very carefully because this was

the state border. It was foggy as we approached the coast of Sweden. The man who was at the helm asked us: “Boys, make a decision what to do—stay in Sweden or turn back!” We all decided to stay.

Kārlis has felt the consequences of this decision all of his life, ending up in Australia, exiled from his homeland, never crossing the Latvian border again until Latvia had regained its independence.

Borders are important in marking these separations in life. When Kārlis crossed the border from Soviet Latvia into Sweden, separating one way of life from another, the split moment of decision embodied a border existing in time, rather than geographical location. An imaginary border can also separate two modes of life, as is noted by the printed text in the documentary: “World War II divided Latvia’s population into winners and losers.” Though she started out as a “loser”, she later adapted to the new regime by working in the local communist government. The so-called “winners” and “losers” are crossing paths in opposite directions in this excerpt of a story told by Olga, a Ukrainian-Latvian living in the Ukraine. She traveled as a young girl with her mother to Latvia in order to visit her relatives at a critical decisive time in 1941, and found herself stranded in Latvia:

And so we came here on June 16, 1941. We had come for a short visit. We arrived at a very tragic moment, because right on the border stood the cattle cars that were deporting people. We heard them call from the cars—water, water! We saw those cattle cars with our own eyes.

In this dramatic story, two parties are entering and leaving simultaneously, marking the transition for Olga from the Ukraine to a new life in Latvia, while for the “losers” in the cattle car, it was a transition from their normal lives in Latvia to one of exile and suffering in Siberia.

Another story portrays the feeling of instability and fear when crossing an imaginary border from the familiar into the unfamiliar. Biruta, a forest brother supporter, exemplifies this fear of instability when she describes her interrogation after being arrested. The camera at one point chooses to linger on her fidgeting fingers, emphasizing her inner agitation, despite her calm demeanor:

Then they left me in a room with an iron bed. When I sat down, the bed sank. I could not understand — the bed was sinking into the ground. I shouted,

got scared, looked through the little window and saw a guard observing me. That was the first scare tactic—this bed's legs were made of rubber.

The fear depicted in this story by Biruta was not provoked by the inevitability of pain or torture, but of the instability created by a familiar home object, a bed, suddenly losing its familiarity and sinking into the ground, embodying the fear and uncertainty of wartime—the familiar becoming the unfamiliar.

In this final Latvian example, one can see Māra and her team attempting to penetrate the border that divides the two opposing sides of World War II—the winners and the losers. For fifty years, the image of Soviet officers with chests covered by war medals had been symbolic to Latvians for the hated Soviet regime—the embodiment of Māra's anger that came through in her own life story, when she objected to “everything Russian dominating everything that's Latvian.” Māra's and *Dzīvesstāsts*' story of Vasilijs' story shows their acknowledgment and efforts at reconciliation with the “enemy,” yet the sparse messages and information shown of Vasilijs' life story falls short of the richness when portraying the life stories of the other storytellers in the documentary. The story in the documentary goes beyond words when, to the accompaniment of his own accordion, Vasilijs, a retired Soviet officer, shows off his Soviet military medals with sincere and unabashed pride.

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All the stories mentioned above show the long-term effects left by the decisions made during the war and its aftermath. That decisive moment one is faced with while teetering on the brink of war has decided the course for each person for the rest of his/her life. The crossing of the border between Latvia and exile in Australia, Latvia and deportations to Siberia, The Ukraine and Soviet Latvia, the winners and the losers, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the enemy transformed into civilian. Like the crumbling remains of war bunkers on the coastal border of Liepāja, these decisions have remained in everyone's lives as “scars” that are always visible and never healed.

The barber's chair and scissors that are the themes of *Museu da Pessoa*'s “The Whole World Fits into a Barber's Chair,” create quite a different image and atmosphere for the Brazilian life story documentary. The mission of the Museum of the Person is to record the life stories of **every** person in the world. Co-produced by the Museum's founder,

Karen Worcman, also in 2002, this documentary centers on the role of the immigrant in Brazil.

Karen and *Museu da Pessoa* selected the metaphor of hair to represent human diversity. People, like hair, are all basically made up of the same chemicals. Yet there are as many different hairstyles as there are people. The wig is a metaphor for the roots that immigrants have to put down in a new place. “But, just as a wig could look artificial or look like real hair,” the documentary’s narrator explains, “an immigrant can feel at home in his adopted country or like a fish out of water. However, there is one huge difference. While the strands of hair on a wig will never put down roots, people can.”

This premise of this documentary holds a happy, positive message for the immigrants who had endured war and hardship in their home countries. The six life storytellers from Portugal, Spain, Italy, Bolivia, Syria, and Japan, left the misery of their home countries, came to Brazil, settled down, found jobs, raised families, and “felt like Brazilians” in their new country. They could put down roots in a new country and leave their difficult past behind them. The image of the barber’s chair conjures up the everyday, of swapping stories with the barber, of a routine “ordinary” day within a modern Brazilian life. The only reminders of the past are the memories that escape from the minds and lips of the storytellers responding to the questions of the interviewers.

Instead of emphasizing the difficult long-lasting effects that the past has inflicted on the storytellers, Karen uses the past to serve her own purposes, bringing attention to the inequalities and problems of present-day Brazilian society. The documentary accomplishes this by combining several layers of meaning and content. For example, when describing the immigrants’ arrival to Brazil, the printed text, which serves as the narrator, tells a completely different story from the storytellers’ stories. The printed text notes the cold, bare statistics of poverty and unemployment in *São Paulo*, while the superimposed audio from the storytellers mentions only of the beauty and grandeur of the city.

During the printed text: “The average unemployment is around 19%,” Lucy talks about being impressed when she first caught sight of *São Paulo*. She had never seen a place so big.

Guimbra told how *São Paulo* amazed him at first when he arrived, while printed text flashes on the screen: “The top 10% of earners take home 40 times more than the income of the poorest 10%.”

Yamaguchi talks about the beauty of *São Paulo*'s most famous buildings, while the printed text flashes, “More than 3 million people live in slums.”

There is silence while the printed text on the screen notifies that, “The city has 612 slums.”

During this exchange, one sees the skyline of *São Paulo* moving across the screen. The effect of this exchange between printed text and oral life story is one of intentional post-modernist irony, illustrating the economic problems and extensive poverty that lie beneath the awe-inspiring surface size of *São Paulo*. Karen and her team created an unexpected collage of juxtapositions that projects messages beyond what the storytellers had intended. The documentary tells a story with an agenda much bigger than that of the individual life stories, about issues important to present-day Brazilian society. Karen, who is the new owner of the story about the story, has traveled quite far from the original owners of the life stories, attaching new meanings that go beyond what the immigrants had intended in their stories.

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Some stories deal with the journey from the home country to Brazil. The journey is depicted as an important rite of passage, crossing the border from one way of life to another, marked by crying, hardships, long days, little food, and deaths on board ship.

Yamaguchi: *They played a special song for the farewell of the immigrants. Everybody was crying.*

Consolato: *The food was really bad. One just gulped down warm water.*

Guimbra: *I brought a boy with me. The boy died the following day.*

Yamaguchi: *[The corpse] was thrown into the sea. That's mighty sad. It grabs you.*

The fact that these images and movie clips of the journey to Brazil from the immigrants' home country are all archival constructs a border between the past and the present, putting the past in what one could call, the **"archival past"**. Though the archival footage portrays the evils of dictatorships in the immigrants' home countries, nobody mentions the Brazilian dictatorship and its "scars," a subject that would interest Māra and *Dzīvesstāsts*. The Brazilian rightist dictatorship during the 60s and 70s brutally repressed any opposition to its rule, and was especially merciless with the torture of liberal-minded intelligentsia. But instead of focusing on the political "scars" left in society from a repressive dictatorship, Karen focuses on the positive economic effects of industrialization and immigrant entrepreneurship.

As an explanation for this, Karen suggests that Brazilians have a notoriously short memory and "are not in the habit of discussing their own history." Perhaps it is simply a short memory that allows Brazilians to **free themselves from the past**, even though the "scars" from the dictatorship are still felt, as Karen noted, in the form of an inferior education system, corrupt police force, and everyday violence. In her documentary, Karen ignores Brazil's former dictatorship while Māra and *Dzīvesstāsts* dwell on the scars that war has left on Latvia's inhabitants to this present day.

Yamaguchi's comment about the correlation between Japanese and Brazilian language and their philosophies of life shows his interpretation of this flexibility in Brazilian lifestyle and philosophy:

The Japanese philosophy was yes or no! It was all strict. So you could put things right or make huge errors. Yes or no! But western habits in Brazil are a bit different. There's more flexibility. "If it's God's wish." "More or less!" These words express the freedom of thought, it's not as strict.

This quote may be an indication of Karen's light-hearted and flexible approach to her documentary. The Latvian documentary, on the other hand, is burdened by Latvia's troubled past. This comment on the *Dzīvesstāsts* blog page illustrates this sadness: "The *Dzīvesstāsts* website is a bit heavy-hearted, as is everything that is connected to our [Latvian] history. I would like to see less heaviness and more brightness. My family history, to tell you the truth, has also had a lot of

suffering. But I'd like to perceive in my history also joy and humor, although I'm sure that wouldn't be easy."

Karen's story about the stories frees herself from the past by portraying an "archival past" which stayed in the archives, and didn't meddle in present-day Brazilian society. In her documentary, the whole cast of characters had to pull out its roots from the home country and re-root in a completely foreign place. Yet, all of the Syrian, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, Portuguese, and Bolivian immigrants affirmed that they "felt more Brazilian," an indication that they had succeeded in cutting their bonds with the past and had acquired a sense of place in their new home. However, the Brazilian documentary made no indication of how, or if, the six immigrants kept their ethnic identity and culture alive in Brazil. *Dzīvesstāsts*, by contrast, is constantly struggling with the weight of the past and the need to affirm and re-affirm nation, identity and a sense of place in the shadow of a larger overbearing entity, examining and re-examining the past in light of the present.

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Anu Korb

Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonia

THE ADAPTATION OF RUSSIAN-BORN
ESTONIANS AND THE SHARING OF
REMIGRATION STORIES

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In this article, I analyse the remigration stories of Russian-born Estonians (see also Korb, 2008, pp. 39-62), focussing on their adaptation to life in Estonia. The interviewees and correspondents had returned to their native country from Russian village communities after the annexation of the Republic of Estonia in 1940. Therefore, they did not cross international borders at the time, but they did face an environment with a different climate, conditions, and traditions.

The interviews were conducted and the written stories collected between 2003-2008. Two thirds of both the interviewees and the correspondents were women, and the majority had been born in Estonian settlements in Russia between 1923-1952.

Immigration to Estonia and Estonian repatriates

Demographers have divided the waves of migration within the former Soviet Union into three main types: directly guided, indirectly guided, and unorganized migration. To a certain extent, voluntary migration can be associated with guided migration, e.g. when following one's spouse or parents (Tammaru 1999, pp. 27, 43).

The tentative periods of immigration to Estonia can be described as follows:

I 1945 to mid-1960s

The migration was at its peak immediately after World War II. In 1946-1947 over 77.000 people moved to Estonia (Tepp, 1994). The reasons guiding the migration during those years were often political and ideological (Katus & Sakkeus, 1993).

II Mid-1960s to late 1970s

Due to the industrialisation of the country, there was an increasing demand for extra labour. Migration during this period was often at the initiative of companies, i.e. indirectly guided migration.

III Late 1970s to late 1980s

Migration during this period was for the most part due to personal reasons (Mängel, 1989).

IV Late 1980s to...

Migration decreased as Estonia became independent (Tammaru, 1999, pp. 17-18).

Broadly, the remigration of Estonians matches the periods of immigration to Estonia, with the exception of civilians evacuated from the areas behind Lake Peipsi in the autumn of 1943 (Arens, 1966, p. 28).

Several researchers have claimed that the desire to return to one's ethnic country is characteristic of all diasporal communities and thus,

several countries have attempted to alleviate their shortage of labour by facilitating repatriation, e.g. Japan in the 1980s (Tsuda, 2001, pp. 60-61). The return to Estonia was considerably easier during the period in question, as it did not involve crossing borders. Still, an attempt to slow the wave of Russian-speaking immigrants by facilitating the repatriation of ethnic Estonians is to be detected behind the 1960s-1970s “Estonians back to Estonia” campaign:

/-/ The Estonian side went campaigning in Verkhniy Suetuk for Estonians to return in '67. Leontina and Aleks will know more about that, they came here. /-/ For starters, they all went down to Kanama¹ and then started to spread out. /-/ I think it was all on a government level, too. Now I, I don't know that much about it, I could be telling you tales here. But they all got apartments here at first and more or less jobs at collective farms, say, the women as milkmaids and the men in the fields or working some machine. But it really, that project, it kind of failed a little. Still people drifted off and.../-/ (Woman, born 1952, interview by author, Harju County, Laagri < Siberia, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Verkhniy Suetuk V, October 2003, audio recording ERA, MD 245 (9), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

The following key issues have been cited in relation to immigrant adaptation in Estonia today: conflict of identity, poor knowledge of Estonian, reticence of the natives, and uncertainty about the future (Tammaru, 1999, p. 21). Similar problems were faced by postwar and later arrivals as well. For returned Estonians, though mostly fluent in Estonian, adaptation to life in the country was no easier than for non-Estonian immigrants, and many failed.

For some, the main reason for returning was the conscious wish to remain Estonian. They feared that in Russia their children would be Russified, and a return to the motherland was perceived as the only option to prevent that. Unfortunately, many repatriates were disappointed: after growing up in mixed Russian-Estonian villages and being schooled in Russian, not all of the children would live up to their parents' dreams:

Well, we feared Estonian would disappear. And children get all Russified and... We figured they'd come here, marry Estonian girls and, but it didn't work out that way. They still married Russian girls. /-/ See, that

¹ Kanama—a village in Harju County, North Estonia.

Russian spirit's in them and they got Russian wives. (Woman, born 1929, interview by author, Tartu < Siberia, Kemerovo Oblast, Koltsovo V, January 2005, audio recording ERA, MD 257 (43), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

In addition to an individual's desire to belong to a certain group, it is the group that must also accept the individual (Gellner, 1995). Mostly, however, homeland Estonians tend to exclude Estonian repatriates from their circles just as they exclude immigrants of any other nationality. The same can be observed with regard to the re-immigration experience of several other countries. For example, the actual meeting of the Japanese of Japan and those returning from Brazil served only to damage national unity instead of improving it. The two groups reacted negatively to each other's cultural differences (Takeyuki, 2001, p. 56).

Characteristically, minorities in Estonia do not get to experience a sense of oneness with Estonians, so instead they associate with other ethnic minorities (Ojamaa & Valk 2008, p. 60), including Russians.

Subjects and storytelling

When analysing the migration stories of German immigrants in New Zealand, Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich (2003, pp. 117-119) found the act of migration—a turning point in one's life—to become a personal narrative, parts of which may need constant repeating or even recreation. At the same time, the structure of biographies remains closely linked to a person's social and cultural environment.

For example, the stories of those recruited for jobs in Estonia by Soviet authorities stand out among Estonian tales of repatriation and adaptation. Significantly, most of the recruits still prefer not to discuss it, or they block questions about their migration with a brief "we were under orders". It is hardly surprising if such episodes in one's biography are preferably forgotten, particularly since Estonia regained its independence. Instead of failures and misfortunes, people wish to speak of successes, but according to the standards prevalent in Estonia

today, a military career in the Soviet army will not pass for a success story. To add a positive touch to his tale, here the narrator emphasizes sharing a school with the esteemed general Laidoner², a historical figure well-known to Estonians:

The end of the war was coming already. But then on May 5th, so, four days before the war officially ended, there was a line-up: you all go study. Estonia needs cadres and you'll go study. /-/ And that's how it was for me, military school made one a soldier for life. "Course at first some older men, they went: "Hang on, the war's over, I can go home now, how can I go study?" But I had no way out, had no profession, so I stayed, good and proper. /-/ But the thing is, we ended up in, the school was transferred to Vilnius before it ended. The old Tsar-era school that Laidoner graduated from. So me, I'm schoolmates with Laidoner. (Man, born 1926, interview by author, Tallinn < Siberia, Altai Krai, Estonia V, December 2007, audio recording ERA, DH 31 (14), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

The collective experience being conveyed is important (Kaivola-Bregenhøj, 1999, p. 59). Thus, Russian-born Estonians often mix their personal experiences with the stories of their acquaintances and kin.

The newcomers' first contacts with local authorities occupy a central place in immigration stories. That first meeting is largely the basis for deciding if one is wanted in the country or not. The tales of Estonians who remigrated from Russia describe Soviet officials in Estonia abusing their power, e.g. when registering one's place of residence:

K.V.: /-/ Said you all go and register in Elva³ now.

A.V.: Yes. Said to go and register in Elva then. We went there, got yelled at.

K.V.: There was a Russian head of the passport bureau, a woman.

² Johan Laidoner, born in Viiratsi Parish, Viljandi County, Estonia, on February 12, 1884. Died in the Vladimir Prison Camp, Russia, on March 13, 1953. Laidoner was one of the seminal figures of Estonian history between the World Wars. His highest position was Commander-in-chief of the Estonian Army in 1918-1920, 1924-1925, and 1934-1940.

³ Elva—a small town in Estonia, near Tartu.

- A.V.: *She said what you—well, she knew Estonian, too—she said: wat cha come here for, Estonia ain't made of rubber, you all crowdin' in here like that.*
- A.K.: *She did? And she was Russian herself?*
- A.V.: *She sure was Russian. She said what you come here for? We said we came to live, we wanted to come and here we are. In the home of our grandparents. No, she didn't want to sign us in. /-/ And then she says: how'd you get an apartment? There's still people living in basements in Estonia, no apartments. /-/*
- K.V.: *I came to Tartu MEK⁴ and got from the elder foreman, Toomet Urmas was the elder foreman, /-/ he wrote me a paper, well, that he has a job, has an apartment and all. We came to Tartu, started speaking Estonian.—Why did they not sign you in, that man started cussin'.*
- A.V.: *Yeah. He said why won't they register you. That you speak Estonian and all. And they must sign you in, what'd you go to Elva for, why didn't you go to the village council, we have a deal with the village council to register Estonians. /-/ Well, and then he phoned Puhja⁵ village council and we got registered. /-/*

(Woman, born 1929, and man, born 1928, interview by author, Tartu < Siberia, Kemerovo Oblast, Koltsovo V, January 2005, audio recording ERA, MD 257 (43), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

There was a problem with registration. A militia major asked me why I came to Estonia in the first place. I said I came back to the country where my mother and father were born, but what are you doing here? And I was fined five rubles by the committee. (Woman, age 60, written story, East-Viru County, Purtse V, arrived in Estonia in 1961 from Siberia, Tomsk Oblast, Berezovka V, manuscript EFA, Korb II, 284 the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

Problems were often solved by relying on acquaintances:

⁴ MEK (Mehhaniseeritud Ehituskolonn)—Mechanised Construction Group, a Soviet-era construction company.

⁵ Puhja—a village in Tartu County, South Estonia.

They wouldn't register us in Estonia, for they hadn't signed us out in Russia. We hadn't paid the state the 2 kg of churned butter required in Siberia. The Kaagjärve⁶ village council would grant us a residence permit three months at a time. After a while Jaan started pulling some strings to get Estonian passports, he knew people. /-/ It took time, but he eventually got us Estonian passports and they registered us in Kaagjärve. (Woman, born 1925, written story, Valga County, Taheva Parish < Leningrad district, Krasnye Strugi V, manuscript EFA, Korb II, 225 the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

While living in Russia, Estonians had grown accustomed to the collective lifestyle. We must not forget that with the establishment of collective farms in Russia in the 1930's, most people were forced off their farms and into villages, living side by side with their neighbours. The living quarters in towns tended to be small; apartments were often communal. (Sergejeva, 2007, pp. 33-47). When trying to find lodgings in Estonia, people looked for the familiar:

A person who's used to having one's own field and allotment and cattle, he won't take to city life. /-/ And no one would go live on a solitary farm. Say, at first my mother and father, too, got a farmhouse, an abandoned farmhouse away from the centre. It didn't suit them. Then in the centre, they were given, they finally got an apartment. That suited them better, but there was no allotment. And when they came here to Saduküla⁷, then they got themselves a row house with a garden. Now that was somethin' else, and that suited them fine. (Woman, born 1952, interview by author, Harju County, Laagri < Siberia, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Verkhniy Suetuk V, October 2003, audio recording ERA, MD 245 (10), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

The dominant migration models favour fast assimilation. If the newcomers are received well, they are welcomed to blend into the native group, probably at the cost of their own ethnic identities. If the newcomers are not welcome, however, that is a signal to change ethnicity: it is preferable to shed one's ethnic characteristics as quickly as possible to stop standing out from the crowd (Roos, 2000, p. 91).

⁶ Kaagjärve—a village in Tartu County, South Estonia.

⁷ Saduküla—a village in Jõgeva Parish.

Russian-born Estonians tried to identify with local Estonians as much as possible to hide their origins. We must not forget that newcomers from Russia were viewed with suspicion and taken for Communists, who were often sent to Estonia in those years. Attempts by local Estonians to demonstrate their superiority were commonplace, as witnessed by the story below. A better life is given as the reason for moving to Estonia:

/-/ In Taheva parish the girl they had got married and I got the job. Well, tending to animals and, of course, working in the fields in the spring. But I hadn't worked in fields before, with the horse I was so stiff and scared and thought the horse must be fed every other while, like in Russia. But them Russian horses were starving, they couldn't do no work if you didn't let them feed every other while. They sometimes fell down and plain died, too. Well, and then they laughed at me for that, of course, but they wouldn't laugh out loud either, for they figured I was from Russia and a Communist or something. I had a good life there, never had it so good before, to be honest. There was everything to eat and you could eat whenever you wanted to and you didn't get yelled at none, maybe because they were scared of them Russian Estonians.

One time the farmer, he always sat facing the window, a big table they had, I was sitting across from him, and he looks out the window like he's thinking and says what were sheep like in Russia. I say in earnest that they're the same as here. He says, but they tell me that bees are the size of sheep there. I said no, bees are the same too. But when I got older, I got the point, of course, that he was just kinda mocking me. But I didn't know it then, so I didn't care. /-/ (Woman, born 1933, interview by author, Harju County, Kose < Kirov Oblast, Oparino Region, October 2004, audio recording ERA, MD 404 (1), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

At the same time, newcomers from Russia, e.g. Siberian Estonians, used stories that allowed them to laugh at local Estonians in order to reinforce their group identity. In Estonia, the idea of Siberia is often quite narrow; it is imagined as a wild place and/or a land of criminals:

I got room and board in Estonia. I was taking a streetcar and a young man comes aboard, starts talking. I told him I'm from Siberia. Oh, his eyes

got so big: “How do you live out there? Do you have bears there?” I answered that they walk the streets, shake your paw and say hello. He thought we were living underground. You know, the first person from Siberia he’d ever seen. (Man, born 1935, interview by author, Siberia, Omsk Oblast, Tsvetnopol’ye V, January 1997, audio recording ERA, CD 16 (90), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

One of the most exploited subjects is mistaking an Estonian from Russia for a Russian when he or she starts a conversation in Russian:

To get registered in Estonia, I went to the army. It was funny one time: the villagers in Saaremaa⁸ where the troops were stationed didn’t know I was Estonian. I went to a farm to get milk, we spoke Russian. But there were guests, two women from next door, and they at once started saying bad things about us girls. The mistress of the farm did tell them to shut up—you can’t know if this girl understands Estonian or not. They carried on worse than before, gossiping at full speed. When I got the milk, I thanked her in Estonian, and thanked the neighbours for the info, too, of course. They jumped up and went out the door so fast, they almost knocked me over. (Woman, age 60, written story, East-Viru County, Purtsu V, arrived in Estonia in 1961 from Siberia, Tomsk Oblast, Berezovka V, manuscript EFA, Korb II, 284/5 the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

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Similar stories still circulate among Estonians living in Russia today. They have come into touch with homeland Estonians through relatives or in the course of their own visits to the country.

Among Russian-born Estonians, the knowledge that they are likened to Russians or considered even worse is prominent and has occasionally prevented them from returning to Estonia:

My husband wouldn’t come to Estonia. He had served here in the war and seen how Estonians hate those Russian soldiers. /-/ (Woman, born 1923, interview by author, Rāpina < Siberia, Tomsk province, Berezovka village, October 2003, audio recording ERA, MD 232 (2), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

As could be expected, migration and adaptation stories center around group differences between “us” and “them”. Therefore, the stories of those returning from Russia also focus on feeling different and

⁸ Saaremaa—the largest island in Estonia.

feeling like an alien, which could be triggered by a slight but visible difference in clothing:

Well, what we came, got a place in a village kind of. I remember I had some kind of boots on. I thought how can I see what folks are wearing round here. We had Russian clothes, it sure looked weird. /-/ When we came here to live, we stayed there above the station and I had a coat made there, well, I had a coat, well, made in Russia, and it had these lapels or something, still with a collar though, but I didn't see a coat like that here. Oh my god, wear whatever, but I don't dare walk into a shop in that coat, but there's nothing else to wear. /-/ (Woman, born 1936, interview by author, Harju County, Keila < Siberia, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Verkhniy Suetuk V, October 2003, audio recording ERA, MD 243 (17), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

Linguistic and vocabulary differences are also emphasized:

Estonians who remigrated from Russia often relied on Russian because they felt ashamed of the dialect of the village they were born in, which differed from standard Estonian.

At first I didn't dare use that language. I asked in Russian. Went to a shop, we thought they'd laugh, that I make mistakes or say something wrong, so I asked in Russian. /-/ (Woman, born 1936, interview by author, Harju County, Keila < Siberia, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Verkhniy Suetuk V, October 2003, audio recording ERA, MD 242 (2), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

For example, it is known that among Estonians in Sweden, a correct knowledge of Estonian was considered vital by the elder generation (Kõiva, 2003, p. 65).

Misunderstandings also arose from new words that had come into circulation in Estonia only in the preceding decades, or the use of old-fashioned words or expressions by the newcomers:

And then that big boss of ours comes over and introduces himself: "I'm Mihkel Siimisker and the head cattle specialist. Is your husband coming too?" I'd never heard that word—husband. What kind of band does he want from me? He looks at me, says: /-/ "Muzh yest u vas?"⁹ I say: "Yest." —

⁹ Russian for "Have you got a husband?"

“Well is he coming here or what? When’s he due to arrive?” /–/ Now that I never will forget. /–/ (Woman, born 1948, interview by author, Harju County, Loo < Siberia, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Verkhniy Suetuk V, October 2003, audio recording ERA, MD 245 (1), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

/–/ When I already had a job in Keila, I went to the kiosk to get not an envelope, but I asked for a “kuväär”. /laughs/ And to that they said: what is that? /laughs/ And then when I asked for a “konvert”¹⁰, then they, then they gave it to me. /–/ (Woman, born 1952, interview by author, Harju County, Laagri < Siberia, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Verkhniy Suetuk V, October 2003, audio recording ERA, MD 245 (3), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

The contradistinction of “us” and “them” also works through perceived communication differences. Homeland Estonians are perceived as reserved and uncommunicative, lacking the will to socialise:

/–/ It’s funny when you’re talking to someone in the street or in front of the house and ask them in—they won’t come, and won’t invite you over, either. It’s kind of unthinkable that no, well, in Siberia you get invited in and are offered tea or coffee, and you chat, it wasn’t a problem. But here it’s like there’s a wall there. So people don’t communicate. They speak, yes, and ask about your health, but that’s that. To kinda socialize more or friendlier, that ain’t gonna happen. /–/ (Woman, born 1952, interview by author, Harju County, Laagri < Siberia, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Verkhniy Suetuk V, October 2003, audio recording ERA, MD 245 (31), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

Members of one’s own group are naturally perceived as kinder and friendlier:

/–/ She still comes to see me in Rannu, we tend bees together. And she says too one time that listen, Elfriede, doesn’t it seem to you that us Russian Estonians are, well, a lot kinder than local Estonians. I say it’s been carved inside me all along. Especially at first when we arrived. I guess her sister and she, too, she was a full-grown person and there was real hatred going on there then. (Woman, born 1937, interview by author, Tartu County, Elva

¹⁰ конверт—Russian for “envelope”.

< Siberia, Kemerovo Oblast, Jurjevka V, October 2007, audio recording ERA, DH 30 (5), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

Similarly, Japanese repatriates from Brazil consider themselves to be more friendly, warm, and caring than those who never left Japan (Takeyuki, 2001, p. 70).

Tales of different table manners, cuisine, tastes, etc. also belong among traditional migration and adaptation stories: For example, a man born and schooled in the village of Estonia in the Caucasus speaks of how Estonian food seemed tasteless upon his return. Nowadays, he has discovered the charms of the Tartu restaurant “Georgian Embassy”. He also likes to cook at home, making generous use of various spices.

While studying German immigrants in New Zealand, Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich describes settlers’ decision to remain there through taste sensations: *a country that offers me something this good must be good for me in other ways, too* (Bönisch-Brednich, 2003, p. 121). A similar attitude can be detected in later Estonian repatriate stories, where the arrival is associated with pleasant taste sensations:

Well, what I remember most was that chocolate butter. I’ve thought so many times, oh, how I bought it—chocolate butter. And when we came here to Estonia, came here to stay, and were at my brother’s, there was smoked herring. We never had that, you know. Lord, I filled my appetite so good, I haven’t bought it since. We had it then every day. Oh, it seemed delicious. /–/ (Woman, born 1936, interview by author, Harju County, Keila < Siberia, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Verkhniy Suetuk V, October 2003, audio recording ERA, MD 243 (16), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

Returnees from Russia are often characterised by a double identity—belonging to two cultures is considered natural, with people maintaining ties to both their birthplaces in Russia and the land of Estonia:

Honestly, it’s like you’ve got two homes. I really can’t tell. I mean, it feels like, well, where your childhood was and you have those memories, I guess everybody’s childhood memories are clearer and stronger, those places and all. But now it turns out that you know all that there, but home is here. Go back there, start down that Mati hill, /–/ coming from Minussinsk¹¹, from the top of the hill you can see the village, it’s kind of like in a hole there,

¹¹ Minussinsk—a town in Krasnojarsk Krai, East Siberia.

and right away you get a tear in your eye. But, well, there aren't any kin there no more, so you just go see, visit the graveyard and see the places and walk there where you followed the herd as a child /-/ and then you realize you're already in a hurry to get back to your own home in Estonia. /-/ (Woman, born 1936, interview by author, Harju County, Keila < Siberia, Krasnoyarsk Krai, Verkhniy Suetuk V, October 2003, audio recording ERA, MD 242 (7), the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)

Some interviewees have lived in Estonia for nearly half a century now, accepting Estonian customs and traditions over the years. Still, they feel special and wish to meet others from their region again and again. Both family occasions and reunions organised in Estonia are good for that:

In 1977 we got the idea to arrange reunions of Estonians from the Koshki region of Samara province in the capital of the country of our ancestors, Tallinn. It took us two years to look up and write down all the addresses of folks from our corner. We had to send them all invitations to the reunion. So, the first reunion took place in Tallinn in 1979 by the Pirita River. The date for all reunions was the third Saturday in June, at noon. (Man, born 1926, written story, Tallinn < Samaara, Koshki region, manuscript EFA, Korb I, 66 the Estonian Folklore Archives, Tartu, Estonia.)



Reunion of Estonians from Samara province.
Photo provided by Koidula Demidjuk.

Conclusion

Although the repatriation of Estonians did not involve crossing international borders, their stories fit well with traditional re-immigration and adaptation lore. Their stories centre around linguistic, cultural, and other differences between “us” and “them”. These stories have had a somewhat therapeutic function—homeland Estonians are described as intolerant individualists while the members of the “us” group are perceived as more tolerant towards others.

The remigration and adaptation stories of Russian-born Estonians have remained strictly intragroup lore for a long time. In connection with Estonia’s newfound independence, the loosening censorship in Russia, and the rise of the East-European biographic boom, these stories have started to be told more freely. There is a reluctance to discuss episodes that are considered shameful or the moments that might compromise a person. These stories are both individual and collective, expressing the experience of individuals and the whole community. One’s specific location in Russia, as well as the time and reasons for guided or voluntary repatriation further shape the stories and often provide a basic blueprint for one’s tale. It is the person that develops general stories into personal ones.

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Amy Niang

*School of Social and Political Studies,
University of Edinburgh, Scotland*

NARRATING IDENTITY:
ORAL TRADITION BETWEEN MASTER
ACCOUNT AND MARGINAL HISTORIES

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Modern reviewers of the historical past based on oral accounts tend to treat it with utmost suspicion on account of their unreliability (Henige, 1974). The pursuit of absolute accuracy in oral tradition is however a fruitless endeavour. Traditions render, in many and particular ways, the personality of a culture and a society through the reassemblage of their various elements using an array of narrative devices. The problem lies, in most instances, not with the oral nature of tradition but the appropriateness of methodologies and devices used by historians to gauge them. Historians' obsession with *evidence*, along with a systematic rejection of oral archives as an illusion, has had two

unfortunate consequences. Firstly, the serious treatment of written documents at the expense of oral ones has confined history as being a feature of (mainly) societies with written tradition. Secondly, the requirement for *evidence* has been too convenient a device which, whilst giving the impression of a rigid (thus serious) line of enquiry, has in fact been working like a self-fulfilling prophecy that encapsulates historians' line of thought while closing avenues for alternative strategies of reading oral societies. From early on, some historians—certainly the minority now—developed an unjustified aversion for oral history. Lowie, in *Oral Tradition and History* (1917), states that he can't attach the least possible value under any conditions to oral history.

This paper will dwell little on the relevance of oral tradition as historical source. It looks instead at the treatment of oral history with regards to issues of reliability and validity on the one hand and the implications, for history, of the use of oral accounts as history, tales of origin, justification for social charters, power legitimacy, etc. Illustrative examples will be drawn from the Mossi state as well as other West African pre-colonial polities. I will examine the origins of a uniformity of accounts in Mossi historiography and show how historical accounts on common origins and common destiny closely follow various stages of state-building and state consolidation.

In many African societies, oral traditions are an object of continuing controversial debate. If diversity in historical accounts denotes the combination of a rich origin for certain groups, it also reflects the existence of discordances within histories (one different for each and every community) and the impoverishment of oral modes of transmission at times too engagingly put in the service of attempts to distort and reconstruct.¹

In serving a variety of clientele, oral tradition and oral history go through transformations and alterations informed by the power dynamics of contemporary politics.

¹ A century ago, Kikuyu highlanders, Kenya's largest nationality, knew traditions centuries deep. Elders told different histories—covering a wide geographical arena—often at odds with each other in a rather discordant cacophony. See John Lonsdale (2002), *Contests of Time: Kikuyu Historiographies*, Old, New in Axel Harneit-Sievers, *A Place in the World: New Local Historiographies from Africa and South Asia*, Leiden: Brill.

On the one hand, and as opposed to stateless societies where local histories reflect wide diversity, centralised states garner a state view of history which tends to carry a uniform rendering of national history². States jealously preserve national archives as safes of national identity. The latter feeds the repertoire of social and political reenactments of the past in performances that motivate the need for grounded legitimacy, a tale of unifying essence and a sense of collective purpose. Histories also reconstruct the past as much as they suppress it. Gaping silences are the victims of the unknown and the suppressed. As a part of a society's historiography, silence defines the useful past that tells "a unifying tale of ethnic achievement and of a progressive, enabling civilisation" (Lonsdale, 2002, p. 202), hence defining the usable knowledge, that which is likely to contribute to current needs of historical reenactment.

Methodological concerns

The core issue of contention in oral history is the sense of time and its translation into a chronological narrative. Time, whether mythical or historical, is not just a matter of chronological dating; it reflects a cyclical and emotional concern for social structuration based on historicity, ideas of primacy, and the use of history to legitimatise positions.

In areas of the continent where literacy was not introduced before the nineteenth century (that is to say, most of the continent), oral tradition has constituted the primary source of written history from Islamic writings (Ibn Khaldun, Ibn Batuta, etc.) to European missionaries, colonialists, and anthropologists' accounts. A tendency in European anthropological research before decolonisation was to rely on oral tradition to validate theories of "mythical charter"; their uncritical use of oral sources (and informants) was severely questioned by postcolonial historical writings. Anthropology, as the "handmaid of colonialism" indulgently attached face value to oral accounts in its pursuit of symbolic meanings to social practice. Anthropological

² The Diola, the Manding of Casamance, the Basari, the Kikuyu, etc.

refutations of historical criticism point to an approach different from that of history, which is the possibility to read into oral tradition the justification of present day social structures as reflecting a variety of world views (Lentz, 2000, p. 194).³ Moreover, as historical sources expanded to include narratives of less central social strata such as women, nomads, and slaves, historical analysis adopted the anthropological approach of multi-perspectival investigation, which is one that relies on a wider spectrum of historical consciousness and interests for a more complete view of history (Lentz, 2000, p. 196).

Another area of controversy has been the establishment of kinglists. Telescoping is known to be a recurrent pattern, not only in African history but in histories around the world. Henige notes that “oral traditions, in their function of preserving the semblance of stability and continuity, frequently resort to the technique of telescoping” (Henige, 1974, p. 374). But record expungement was not always a result of concern for stability. Rules of filiation changing over time, lineage conflicts, unusually tyrannical or sick kings, the presence of usurpers,⁴ illegitimately imposed kings, periods of unrecorded interregna, dynastic breaks, or merely the faulty memory of transmitters were all reasons why telescoping took place.

Bohannan’s study of Tiv genealogies led her to conclude that genealogies were less a true and accurate rendition of the past than its manipulation in a way that justifies present power relations amongst Tiv families. In her words, genealogies are a “charter...at once a validation and a mnemonic device for present social relationships”(Bohannan, 1952). In a study of one of the Rajput bardic castes, Shah and Shroff point out that the genealogist is “both the preserver and creator of myths.” As many as two hundred generations are added at the beginning of Rajput genealogies in order to please the genealogist’s patron. As a new vahi (genealogy book) was written, old ones were discarded

³ Lentz also discusses leading scholars of oral tradition and their defence of the relevance of the symbolic and cultural dimension of oral traditions: Vansina (1961, note 6; 1994, 40-87); Beidelman (1970); Luig (1984); Moniot (1986).

⁴ Henige remarks that one often became a usurper not necessarily because of lineal illegitimacy but of incapacity to retain the throne.

so that it wasn't any longer possible to detect accretions (in Henige 1974, p. 376, quoting A. M. Shah, and R. G. Shroff (1959).

History and the perception of time: between accounts and performance

Orators of court history, namely the griots, have a stake in the modes of detention of knowledge, in the negotiation of the historical past as instrument of power, reference, and prestige. They also have a stake in their professional status as vehicle and guardian; if not always in a position to make history. They have secured a particular niche in a pool of voice-holders animated with diverse aims. Theirs were multi-stranded and projected within the categorical perceptions of professional possibilities; griots could make and unmake kings by invoking history as *the* source of legitimacy: "to tell the past was to persuade the present" (Lentz, 2000, p. 195; Lonsdale, 2000, p. 205).⁵

The practice of history by academics and performers reveals a striking contrast in aims but also in the use of available tools to recount history. While academics speak to an audience of a timeless period (an audience outside the historical actors); historical narrators are strongly aware of and motivated by the need to elicit an emotional reaction from a historically involved audience, one that "must find its resonance in the collective consciousness". Relevance is therefore for them a vital concept as indifference could mean jeopardy of their means of living (Jewsiewicki, 1986, p. 9-10).

On the other hand, placing history as "a competition in civilisation", performed historical accounts contextualise culture with a view of comparing legacies and achievements on a wider scale, thus expanding both the audience and the thrust of historicity beyond purely historical borders and projecting useable ideas into the future (Lonsdale,

⁵ Anthropological responses to criticism from post-colonial historians—as to their indulgent use of oral accounts as wholly relevant sources—has been that part of the benefit of using these accounts lies in the fact that they provide historical or at least past (conventional) justification to present social structures and politics.

2000, p. 212). In oral histories, therefore, exaggerations and the extolment of the past are part of the methodological requirements of an art and science threatened by the test of time and oblivion. “The enigma of memory and forgetfulness reflected a [African] dilemma before it became a scholarly conundrum. Orators and authors alike found that to tell the past required intellectual labour, both protective and proud” (Lonsdale, 2000, p. 206). The dilemma is reflected in a four-pronged aspect, the “four-part discourse”: first, the civilising use of time was a matter of contest to which stakeholders of history were to take part; not only those endowed with the genius of the word, but also those whose glorifying history granted access to public debate. Second, a circumstantial selection was operated, which was to say what history or what aspects of history needed to be known or not to be told, for the people’s own good; principled oblivion was also a way of servicing generations for the sake of the future. Third, historical time had to be redeemed within a favourable formula. These criteria required the active consent of a public (audience) cast in the same purposeful mould, namely one that could mobilise active ardour and devoted enthusiasm to the contest of time (Lonsdale, 2000, p. 207).

A further element of the dialectic relation between time and performance is inherent in the narrative of oral history; it is a condensed poetic of cognomens and praise names, metaphors, and cross-references not easily amenable to accurate dissection. Not all references about the past reveal history; history is revealed only during key occasions. Historical time is in anastomosis with mythical time (Zahan, 1961, pp. 6-7). Hence a sense of frustration amongst certain Africanists faced with a history difficult to tell with an absolute chronological accuracy. But then chronological accuracy and absolute dating is a concern for rationalists obsessed with fitting and streamlining the world into a linear chronological process. Africa’s past is in many ways resistant to quantitative and statistical analysis. In his seminal work *Children of Woot* (1978), following over two decades of meticulous research into the history of the Kuba people of central Africa, Jan Vansina dampens the ambitious expectations of many Africanists to fully recover, some day, Africa’s unwritten past. In spite of a sophisticated and elaborate process model developed around systems of decoding and analysing the array of narrative styles used in oral history, limited results in the

Kuba case has led Vansina to conclude that “[...] in the end this particular lack of knowledge will remain a weakness in early African history. And we need to be reminded of that whenever we contemplate trends that are the product of ignorance about both a multitude of events and the motives behind the actions” (1978).

Oral history and the Mossi

Politics of knowledge may have been represented in a disunified, often fragmented way in oral histories across West Africa. However, the Mossi instance displays a rather uniform tale of origin, one that encompasses identities later determined, not purely by cultural origins, but rather by professional practices and socio-functional roles. At the onset of society was the particular encounter of a native man and an immigrant, a wanderer carrying his political legacy, or so goes the tradition, a repository of history and tales, signs, and meanings. Oral accounts of Mossi historiography consequently reveal the evolution of moral and ideological concerns of a society steeped in a permanent reconstruction of its own foundational self. Izard states that discourse—the transmission of memories and knowledge—in Mossi society is fragmented according to the rules of a *gestion collective de la parole*; in other words, the observed diversity in ideological perspectives reflects diversity in collective identities (Izard, 1992, p. 125). At the same time, such diversity is structured and enacted in a unified line of narration encompassing all components of the Mossi state. The role of migration accounts in this context is to emphasise the particular contribution of the many groups comprising Mossi society. A short description of the legend of *Yennenga* gives an idea of the interconnection between foundational stories and the dynamics of power and social structuration:

The warrior princess *Poko* (Yennenga)⁶, daughter of the *Dagomba* king, got stranded on an excursion into her territories. She was rescued by a local hunter, *Rialé*, a young Mandé (an ethnic group in Burkina Faso) to whom she got married in spite of her father’s opposition.

⁶ Referred to in some writings as Nyennenga.

They had a son, named *Ouedraogo* (stallion), who later was sent back to his mother's homeland to be raised by his grandfather, *Naba Nedega*. When he grew up, he returned to the North with cavalry from his homeland and conquered his father's people, the *Bisa*, and later created the first *Mossi* kingdom, Tenkodogo (contraction of *Tenga Kodogo*, ancient land). In Ouagadougou, a statue of princess Yennenga on horseback commemorates her legend. Griots celebrate her legendary beauty in evocative terms:

*She [Yennenga] is as distinguished and graceful as an open umbrella,
Slender as a palm-tree; the flow of the dangling hair braided in one
long plait evokes a nonchalant reptile perched on a wall...
Her eyes sparkle like a morning lit by silver meandering negligently
toward the engagement of gold...⁷*

This legend is significant as it explains the subsequent style of governance and social integration adopted by the *Mossi*. The *Mossi* were at first seen as occupants even though *Rialé* is said to have taken up Tenkodogo, then later Ouagadougou and the centre of what was to become Burkina Faso, in a peaceful way. However, the conquerors chose to adjust their customs to those of the autochthonous people. The descendents of the first *Mossi* conquerors are the *nakomsé* who hold political power and the *nyonyonsé* (children of the earth) who hold spiritual and economic power. The *nyonyonsé* are themselves divided into smiths, *saya*; farmers, *nyonyosé*; leather workers, mask users, *sukwaba*, and a number of other professions (Roy, 2005). In practice, the *Dougoutigui* (village chief) is the political leader of the village and he assists the *Dougoukoulotogui* (chief of the land) who is the economic chief who decides in all matters related to agriculture and economic affairs.⁸ At the very onset of the formation of the *Mossi* state, then, the *Mossi* chose to share power, divide it, and distribute it to different centres of power, horizontally and vertically speaking.

One could look at the origin of social formation through a historical evaluation of migration, the formation of ethnic group, household formation and break-up, (patriarchal) power access to spiritual

⁷ Mossi popular song [translated].

⁸ Also called *Tiéfo*, he stands as the link, or the intermediary, having spiritual ties to the land.

forces, or what Lonsdale calls images of social action. Such images of social action are constructed under a cosmic covenant as a basis for a social one and each one of them is a tale of transition from nature to culture. Memory and recollection are thus structured along the lines of the “tellable” history, along myths carried by individuals as the foundational justification of their social self.

In the Mossi context, a quasi-uniform account of origin prevails which provides the basis for socio-political formations diverse in many ways, but similar in the way they relate to a central idea of statehood developed and reinforced (since the fifteenth century) over generations and lodged in the weft of origin like a national mantra. However, tales of origin are not altogether about settlement histories of forefathers; they reflect a need, in a context of competing histories, to insinuate or assert legitimate rights of access to power in various forms.

Ideas about origin and social hierarchies, kinship, and gender inform the delimitation of social boundaries (Lindgren, 2002, pp. 43-48).⁹ They espouse a horizontal trajectory from memories of origin passed down to subsequent generations through “ascendant, collateral, descendant persons” (Rososens, 1994, p. 86 in Lindgren, 2002, p. 48) to normative principles that constitute the foundations of social boundaries. Two trends can be identified where traditions essentially point to ideas of the origin of the world, if not to constitutive ideas of social charters (Mossi, Kikuyu, etc.); they also take up revolutionary dimensions where the past is viewed as a series of new beginnings as new identities are adopted and social charters reformulated and renegotiated. The shift from essentialist interpretations of group formation (based on cultural traits) to notions of social interaction opened up a debate across disciplines; Barth’s original take on the importance of social interaction or the construction of identity (1969) was to be followed by a host of contributions that tend to support the argument of identity-making through negotiated social interactions.

In many parts of the continent, narratives of migration of origin cannot resist the test of historical substantiation. Where narratives of migration coincide with ideal migration stories (see Vansina and

⁹ Lindgren also cites Eriksen, 1991; Burnhow, 1996; and Cohen 2000a, 2000b.

the Kuba history), the historian is faced with both the issue of variety (versions) and ownership (whose history?). In many accounts the past appears as a series of new beginnings as new identities are adopted and new social charters agreed upon. Constitutive ideas such as institutional formation or the origin of the world take resolution and new dimensions. Migrations were at the heart of the Mossi state foundation. But they were also the result of succession disputes once the Mossi state was consolidated. "It would seem then, that what Fortes termed "the dynamics of constant movement" was built into Mossi-Dagomba social structure and that its *raison d'être* at the political level was to drive away from the seat of government certain sections of the population, e.g. supporters of possible competitors or rejected candidates for chiefship (Iliasu, 1971, p. 105)."

Oral history as form, method, and thinking

Oral history is more vulnerable to the process of selection than written history. The demand for particular meaning results from the pursuit of themes (at the expense of narratives) relevant to the present, hence to present listeners (Robert Harms, 1979, p. 70).¹⁰ To what extent is oral history pseudo-history or myth? The idea of oral history feeding social history also evokes the perpetuation of the self-conceptualisation of a society along stylistic articulations of the historical. It also touches upon the appropriation of oral tradition in the conduct of politics past and present, the reconstitution of histories of origin, and the methodological implication of their confrontation (Lentz, 2000, pp. 210-214).

Methodological grids which attempt to read African history in terms of the linear and inexorable process of time, progress, or economic

¹⁰ Harms collected oral histories along the Congo River, mostly short accounts of the little history people could still remember. He noted that parts of stories recounted fading in various versions of stories denoted an adjustment to what the listeners were interested in generally; the relevance of certain bits faded as their importance to listeners ceased to be.

causality often collide with cosmological assumptions and ontological commitments at odds with “empirical evidence” and “common sense” (MacGaffey, 1978). The diachronic interpretation of *meaning* by historians often clashes with anthropological tendencies to view traditions as synchronic models (Harms, 1979, p. 62). In both cases, the assumption of oral tradition as purveyor of history is established although anthropologists of the structuralist orientation would emphasize the discourse-enabling and propensity of oral tradition to serve as a social charter for the legitimation of a present order with a past narrative (Harms, 1979, p. 63). However, ideas of oral tradition as myths do not address an extemporaneous characteristic of traditions refuted by the fact of their social acceptance as contextual history; myth, as historical synthesis, is history subjected to the passage of time (Harms, 1979, p. 64).

The question “which oral history?” is an examination of the methodological tools employed in the selection exercise of historical memory: history is selected because of a sensed, desired, or imagined significance; history reasserts the position of a group, individual, or community of identity in the public space (historical repositioning); the test of time subjects these elements of appreciation to their contemporary relevance by sifting through and selecting, for the present generation, the “usable past” and telling it in the language of the present, in other words “what we’re told about the past is only what’s being said now (the present and immediate version of history)” (Harms, 1979, p. 63; Izard, 2003, p. 21). Historical synthesis is therefore rather a fresh look on the past than its reinvention (resurrection); historical synthesis at a sophisticated level shapes society’s self-construction, one which draws the narrative potential of the myth to perpetuate its echo in the popular psyche while grounding historical meaning in a consolidated form and incorporating descriptive aspects of the myths (metaphorised meaning, the personification of social categories, the consolidation of repetitive processes into clichés, the surreal as fact, etc.). The methodological modifications thus enable the compression of the meaning of the past and its easy remembrance and transmission down generations: the process of synthesis is therefore as much a way of apprehending the past as it is a process of (its) condensation (Harms, 1979, p. 64). A corollary procedure to historical synthesis is the obliteration of the “unusable past” as it ceases to inform current

concerns. What is raised here is the issue of the vulnerability of oral tradition to alteration, manipulation, and distortion. While tales of cosmological origin bear certain continuity in time, tales of origin, migration, and primacy—in supporting or refuting claims to power, wealth, social categorisation, and prestige—tend to reflect differentiated stakes and interests attached to these particular issues. The fluidity and shifting character of identity allows for variations in accounts of ethnic (identity) formations and the ways in which ethnicity spread across boundaries and historical circumstances (accounts of origin and accounts of migration).

It is therefore interesting to note that the quasi-uniformity of accounts of origin in the Mossi case reveals less about the existence of a social consensus than it does about the relative success of the dominant political group to maintain its national and exclusive version of history as a strong source of legitimacy. Although there are two major trends, with a considerable chronological difference of a few centuries, both display convincing historical coherence. On the one hand, the Larhlé Naba favours the dating of the beginning of Mossi kingdoms in the twelfth century, while Fage brings it towards the end of the fifteenth century. The first one is also the one favoured by Delafosse and Tauxier, whilst the second one has been adopted by Michel Izard in subsequent research. Chronology to this day remains a bone of contention. On the other hand, however, genealogies differ very little in both foreign and Mossi accounts. In all of the available lists for the Ouagadougou kingdom, the few discrepancies which have been noted revolve around the inclusion or exclusion of one or two names. Genealogies, unlike the history of states or societies, stand a better chance of being remembered with accuracy, regardless whether particular generations of kings and chiefs choose to falsify the past by introducing or excluding names from the list. Court historians are particularly devoted to preserving intact lists of kings and princes by reciting them frequently. Ki-Zerbo notes, with regards to this, that griots at the palace of Abomey recited the royal genealogy every day from the founder to the last one.

Conclusions: oral traditions as a social charter

In non-literate societies the idea of social charter is built both through tales (historical accounts) and royal (oral) or dynastical records such as genealogies. The latter are subject to manipulation where they buttress claims to legitimacy and channels of power devolution (ascendant, collateral, descendant).

The task of the oral historian as *hermeneus* is to pursue the meaning attached to historical recollection by different social groups while pointing to caveats as to their specificity within particular groups. The diversity of historical accounts is as much a resource as it is a problem to the treatment of oral tradition as history. The requirement for oral historians has been, in studying various African societies, to explore the dynamics of migration, social mobility, power conflicts, the variety of cosmological takes, values attached to symbolic interpretation of social practice, etc., in other words, the historical contexts in which these traditions take place, before placing them in a historical framework whereby meaning can be associated to contexts and people (Hams, 1979, p. 65). In doing so, however, it has emerged that the study of myth as generator of historical facts is unavoidable if one needs to extract the historical from the myth and the myth from the (reported) factual (Steven Feierman, pp. 64-65; Spear, 1974, pp. 67-84.). Still a more insightful take is one which conceives historical reconstruction within broad processes of change on the one hand, and oral tradition and myth as the same thing. The argument is that a tradition which offers a model of society is in itself fact (provided that transmission was done in a consistent way that respects the original form) that provides a datum, and more importantly, a reference for normative (not necessarily factual) behaviour of great value (Harms, 1979, p. 66).

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The background consists of several overlapping geometric shapes. A large, vertical orange rectangle is the central focus. To its left, a light grey rectangle extends from the top to the middle of the page. Below this, a white rectangle is partially visible. To the right of the orange rectangle, a light grey rectangle extends from the top to the middle of the page. Below this, a dark grey rectangle extends from the middle of the page to the bottom. At the bottom left, there is a white square. The overall composition is minimalist and modern.

MIGRATION AND IDENTITY

Arta Ankrava
*Department of Sociology,
University of Minnesota, USA*

NEGOTIATION OF LATVIAN IDENTITY IN LONDON'S LATVIAN COMMUNITY

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This article explores the different institutions, organisations and people that operate in the Latvian community in London and are involved in the preservation and negotiation of Latvian identity, drawing on the author's MA thesis in Social Anthropology at Goldsmiths, University of London. It aims to recognize mechanisms working on the articulation of Latvian identity, a sense of "Latvianness", especially in London, as it has functioned as a Latvian cultural centre in the UK since World War II (WWII). The main goal of the research was to determine to what extent the old and new generations of Latvian émigrés worked together in order to negotiate and generate a common Latvian identity in London's Latvian community.

The subject of this article was seen as significant and topical as no recent studies have been done regarding Latvian immigrants to the UK, and it would thus place the Latvian community in a wider context of other migrant groups in London. It also illuminates the somewhat marginalised cultural identity aspect of Latvian migration to the UK. Unlike the much analysed economic factors, cultural ones are often overlooked or reduced to stereotypes in popular discourse concerning émigré Latvians of the past years, especially since joining the EU.

In previous academic writing this phenomenon seems to be largely disregarded, hence there are no ethnographies about recent Latvian migrants to the UK and just one on Latvian workers in the 1940s (McDowell 2005). There are some other books on the history of Latvians in the UK (Auziņa-Smita 1995; Lipīte and Jablovskā 2008) and an edition concerning the present situation is being put together at the time of writing this article. Some Latvian fiction offers additional insight in Latvian workers' lives in the UK of 1950s and Ireland of the late 1990s (Jankovskis 2007; Muktupāvela 2002).

Though Latvians are the focus of this article, the broader theme of anthropology addressed is the discourse of home and displacement, and the construction of a notion of identity as a constant in a world of political and economic migration (Robertson et al. 1998; Rapport and Dawson 1998; Amit 2000).

For the purpose of research, and subsequently this article, Latvian immigrants to the UK are being broadly divided into two groups—refugees of the WWII period and their descendants in one, and the more recent, economic migrants who left Latvia to find better paying jobs after the country joined the EU in the other. Albeit largely generational, such distinction does not always apply, as it is more so the life trajectory and experiences that set the two groups apart, not age.

Rather, the conditions and motives under which each group or their ancestors arrived to the UK as well as their level of integration (imagined and actual), are to be taken into consideration regarding their level of active involvement with the Latvian community.

Identity and displacement in the discourse of migration

Over the last decade or so, anthropologists have begun to argue that the very state of migration, transition, travel and displacement, and the process of being neither truly at home nor abroad, can be a permanent setting and state of being in itself (Olwig and Hastrup 1997; Amit 2000). Karen Fog Olwig argues that in the modern, deterritorialized world, displacement is indeed an enduring experience for many as they negotiate their identities by balancing between dwelling and travelling, permanence and instability (1997: 34-5).

For many their native country holds symbolic and cultural value. As seen in research on Nevis in the Caribbean, Olwig and Besson write that for Nevisian migrants, their home island remained a locus for “moral obligations and expectations” (2005: 11). It could be argued that this is the main distinction between the concepts of “residence” and “home”. The former refers to a temporary or permanent state of settlement that lacks symbolic and cultural implications.

Thus, expectations from a residence are lower than they are from a home. Arguably, a state of displacement offers less than a state of permanence as it presents less commitment, connections and attachment altogether, and fewer obligations. Stable migrant communities, such as the Latvian community in London, fill in the gap in the cultural link to Latvia. By being active and engaging Latvians in various groups—Sunday school, language courses, folk dance group, church, choir, etc., it reproduces, sustains these symbols of national identity, shared by the community in a geographically remote location, away from the ethnic country of origin.

Transnationalism is another theory that must be mentioned as the practice of living across borders, echoed in McDowell’s section about the worldwide experience of exile and also in the interviews with Latvians living in London. Other scholars define transnationalism as: “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch, Glick Schiller et. al.: 7). They also distinguish between

the terms “immigrant” and “migrant”, the former denoting someone who has come to stay, “having uprooted from their old society” and the latter being “transients who have only come to work” (1994: 4).

The nature of displacement

Although displacement is often seen as disruptive, uprooting and decentralising, migration and movement are also attributed positive qualities of the modern human condition. Modern culture seems to be practiced through wandering. The contemporary world is experienced more through oneself rather than a constant point of reference—the home. Indeed, displacement signals the loss of, rooted locality.

However, creativity is seen to develop from crossing borders, hybridity, adapting, changing one’s identity and challenging one’s origins, be it willingly or not, as in the case of refugees and exiles. Constants are formed, however. Olwig argues that the very detachments themselves develop attachments; they are not flimsy but rather form new loci (1997: 35). Without a more or less geographic point of reference available, the displaced, moving and moved, develop individual systems of reference.

States of seeming volatility and movement become states of stability by migrants developing or maintaining attachments to one another, and creating social networks that have a common base. This can vary greatly from a personal or symbolic link to their country of origin, to an arguably “imagined” community, linked by the Internet or media, to an organised community of migrants, brought together by common language, religion, and tradition (Anderson 2006; McDowell 2005). Chambers writes:

Migrancy, [...], involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation (1993: 5).

Transformation of a community

Latvian Council in Great Britain (LCGB) was created in the years following WWII and set officially as its goals to keep Latvian identity, language, and culture alive in exile (2008: 272). Aivars¹ (57, university lecturer), a Latvian born in the UK to parents who immigrated in the late 1940s, and an active member of the Latvian community in London, explains: “The first 40 years, until the independence of Latvia, that was the major incentive to be part of LCGB—the reinstatement of Latvia’s independence. And, of course, keeping one’s Latvianness alive” (Author’s MA thesis appendix (hereinafter referred to as Appendix): 36).

In the fifty years of Soviet rule in Latvia, the cultural and social role of London’s Latvian community was as significant as its diplomatic status, and the two were tightly intertwined. Over the period of Latvia’s occupation, the upkeep and continuation of Latvian identity was viewed as paramount. After 1991, however, and especially after Latvia joined the EU in 2004, the number of young Latvians in London has increased, but their involvement in the community has not followed suit, with only a small fraction engaging actively. According to Aivars:

Even though the majority of them do not get involved in our community, the fraction that does brings something very positive to the table. In terms of the language alone, they are people that speak excellent Latvian whereas my generation often does not anymore. It introduces a kind of freshness (Appendix: 37).

Why is it then that the recent Latvian migrants, arrived in the UK to study or find a better-paying job, are so hesitant to join the active community here when their addition is seen as this beneficial? Perhaps the different backgrounds of older and newer immigrants hold the key. Aivars believes that his parents’ generation, brought up in 1930s Latvia, an era of great national pride and patriotism, were much more concerned about the preservation of their Latvianness:

They [new Latvians] leave the country because they feel like they have no life there. My parents’ generation saw themselves as political

¹ All informants’ names have been changed.

refugees, perhaps this generation sees themselves as economic refugees and they have a different motivation, it is a matter of survival (*ibid.*).

Historical circumstances also added to the feeling of threatened identity and perhaps a heightened sense of being Latvian. According to Inge Weber-Newth, more than 260.000 Latvians were displaced (exiles, refugees and deportees) during and after WWII (2006: 76), thus considerable effort was put into sustaining a sense of community and national pride in the various places of settlement abroad.

The process of displaced Latvians arriving to the UK was probably only made possible by the critical manpower shortages after the war. Hospitals were understaffed and so were most of the heavy industries. The British government began a recruiting initiative, the European Volunteer Workers' (EVWs) scheme, from refugee camps in its zones in Germany and Austria. This is where most of Latvian refugees were located at the time (McDowell 2005).

Originally these work schemes were supposed to be temporary. After the critical situation in Britain's industries and services was averted, the Displaced Persons (DPs) were to return to the continent. However, the scale of immigration proved to be much greater and the British government decided to allow EVWs to remain in the UK and later apply for naturalisation. This was quite the contrast from the early days of the work schemes, when London's official position stated that the refugees' resettlement in the UK was as likely as their resettlement on the "mountains on the moon" (1958: 22).

Baltic immigrants were described as skilful, diligent, and thirsty for work and expected to assimilate in British society quite easily (2006: 75-6). Insufficient integration mechanisms in context with the traumatising experience of displacement made for little assimilation among the workers.

When asked why they had not become UK citizens, many workers replied that they simply "could not become" a different nationality, they could not change it (2006: 90). Nationality, or ethnicity, was perceived by many as the very essence of identity. Giving it up would be giving up on oneself. Even second generation Latvians, such as Liva

feel strongly: “[Being Latvian] is very important for me. Very central for my identity, what I am. I believe that God has placed me, somehow attached me to the Latvian people and here I am” (Appendix: 45).

Nationality and identity is not seen as a choice here, but more as a given that has to be safeguarded and maintained. For individual migrants this could mean maintaining a house or a property in their native country, and for a larger group it could entail retaining the language, traditions, and even political loyalties throughout time in exile. As Līva tells of her father:

My dad, he had been in *Zemnieku Savienība* (ZS) from the age of sixteen, continued to be in the party also in exile. He was loyal to it also after Latvia’s independence, and he did not much like the way the party turned out, but he fought for it to have the right direction (Appendix: 44).

This illustrates an example of political loyalty to one of Latvia’s oldest parties, despite its many unrecognisable metamorphoses in the years following the state’s independence. It makes the paradoxical point of holding on to *status quo* almost as a mechanism for moving forward.

The two most common elements of building a community in exile for the Eastern Europeans were the maintenance of the native language and culture, which was attained through the organisation of schools and churches. A stress on marriage within the community has also been mentioned in interviews with migrants from the region, especially Ukrainians.

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Latvians in London today

It could be argued that their concerns are much more pragmatic than those of their predecessors that faced dealing with a “threatened identity”. It could also be argued that their ventures to the UK usually involve finding a job that would help them and their families with financial troubles back home. Aivars thinks that these immigrants, born under Soviet rule, do not share the same national pride as his

parents did: “Among the people that immigrate, few care about their Latvian identity, the others are just here to work and earn money and they do not care that much about Latvianness and Latvian identity” (Appendix: 37). Kristīne (25, receptionist), a recent immigrant, holds an administrative post in the LCGB as well as other organisations, expressed a similar observation about recent migrants who arrive for temporary work:

They come here not to establish a permanent residence but to earn. They don’t care about their accommodation or social life. Many of them seem to have run away from something in Latvia—problems or something else. Thus they don’t really want to see that Latvianness, they don’t seek it (Appendix: 49).

This echoes the distinction between “immigrants” and “migrants”, permanent and temporary settlers. However, this distinction cannot be clearly made as some temporary workers decide to become residents, and thus immigrants. Others choose to identify themselves as temporary migrants despite having spent several years abroad. Perhaps this is done consciously to retain a single point of reference, a single, uncompromised “home”, with all the expectations and obligations associated with it, regardless how long the foreign settlement has lasted.

Maija, (35, pastor) has worked in the Latvian congregation in London for seven years, and sees the lack of social activity in Latvia as the reason for the minimal newcomers’ involvement: “A lot of people that have arrived here have not been socially active in Latvia, which is the problem. During the exile period, people who established all these things had been socially active and held responsibilities as middle class in Latvia” (Appendix: 60).

It is still difficult to say exactly why the younger Latvian migrants fail to be attracted by London’s Latvian community, since only a small fraction of them get involved. Perhaps escaping Latvian identity has been a conscious decision for some of the migrants, as they feel it limits them and offers less than an identity of a Londoner. Perhaps it is the fact that the community is still lead predominantly by representatives of the old generation of immigrants and their descendants.

Aivars admits that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Latvian society experienced somewhat of a turning point because its efforts no longer needed to be guided toward the reinstatement of Latvian independence:

Psychologically it was a rather big break that suddenly Latvia is indeed independent once again, the consequences it has. In a sense, there is continuity, we are carrying on the same way, but the stress now is perhaps more on helping Latvia. [...]The political aspect is not as significant anymore, even though we still follow events in Latvia and try to do something to make Latvia more democratic, free. But it is not what it used to be, naturally, that goal [Latvia's independence] has been achieved (Appendix: 36-7).

It could therefore be argued that after regaining independence, Latvian organisations throughout the world lost a major part of their original function—fighting for the reinstatement of Latvia as an independent state. The Latvian community had to reinvent itself, redefine its purpose, role, and agenda. Līva concurs: “A part of the Latvian society almost felt an obligation, and after Latvia became independent they felt that obligation no longer. There was a sort of anticlimax” (Appendix: 43). It is difficult to determine to what extent it did successfully transform, however, its role, as more of a cultural and social hub, involving Latvian Sunday schools and monthly church services is present.

Aivars does not deny that the two groups sometimes fail to connect well, simply because of the radically different backgrounds and life experiences they have (Appendix: 38). Many of the older Latvians that have made a life for themselves in the UK are quite wealthy unlike the Latvian workers that arrive to the country with very limited means. From this point of view, it could be said that economic differences also play a somewhat significant part in this process.

Positionality

Arguably the most challenging aspect of setting out into the field was establishing one's own positionality. Embarking on a mini expedition into one's own culture was not all that straightforward. Being Latvian and having lived in London for a longer period of time, I fit into the very criteria of respondent I was after. However, this was not enough for me to feel that I was going to be easily accepted and granted access into the community. It was feared that my lack of involvement or even contact with the Latvian society in London prior to this research would encourage mistrust. However, I was lucky enough to have some contacts in the community, old family friends that very kindly agreed to guide me into the society, informing about events and introducing me to new people. They were excellent gatekeepers as they were born into the Latvian community and have been very active in it throughout their lives. Had it not been for them, I may have found it much more difficult to show up at various events and introduce myself to strangers. I felt that knowing them added to my credibility as a person but not necessarily as a researcher.

Thus my experience in London's Latvian community was a dual one. On the one hand, it was a homecoming of sorts, connecting with people from the same origin. On the other, a circle of complete strangers was entered; the only common characteristic being speaking language. Therefore the fieldwork was as much of an experience of entering a new reality as it was returning to a familiar one.

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Stability in mobility: imagining belonging

The status of the initial contacts-come-gatekeepers in the community allowed to regard a position in the very core of the various activities taking place in the society. In this active core, it was possible to encounter people of various generations and life histories. Unlike

originally expected, most activities were not just organised by old Latvians, there was significant involvement of new Latvians as well.

Overall, however, their involvement was still disproportionate. There was speculation between everyone interviewed as to why new Latvians are hesitant to actively engage with the Latvian society. It became quite clear rather soon that the majority of Latvians, who have come to London exclusively to work were not a significant part of the active centre, and were mostly not involved in any way.

Statistics show that almost a quarter of Latvians in Britain work in agriculture, thus they are not situated in London but rather in Anglia and the Midlands (Accession Monitoring Report, 2009 (AMR): 17; 21). The people contacted during the research could mostly be described as middle-class, a distinction pointed out earlier by Aivars (Appendix: 38). One is thus drawn to make the conclusion that active involvement in the Latvian community is more important to migrants in a higher education, stable income, and a relative amount of free time to engage with the various voluntary and unpaid activities and duties. There is no evidence for this, however, and it would take a comprehensive quantitative survey to prove any direct correlation.

However, it seems that the financial instability of the recent Latvian migrants is not seen as a viable excuse for not engaging by the older members of the community. Irrefutably, their own experiences of coming to Britain sixty years ago largely shape the view of their younger counterparts. Still, political circumstances have to be considered as well. The dire situation in Latvia at the time served as an incentive to build a permanent, institutionalised representation of the independent state for a community that felt dispossessed and thus de-humanized. They were unable to return to the Latvia they had left because *de facto*, it did not exist anymore politically or ideologically.

Interestingly enough, when a significant Latvian community started forming in Ireland less than ten years ago, a choir was one of the first things established. The example of Ireland is also interesting in that it contradicts the assumption of new Latvian migrants as being unwilling to engage with other Latvians. All of the Latvian institutions in Ireland, including several parishes, a choir, schools and an ice hockey

team have been formed in the last years by Latvians who have come as economic migrants.

Why is it then that new Latvians in London are seemingly more passive? Some clues can possibly be found by looking at the example of Latvians in Ireland. There were no previous Latvian communities in Ireland, every institution, organisation and group, had to be built from scratch and shaped according to current needs. It seems it was easier for new Latvians in Ireland to build something anew than for Latvians in London is to integrate into the sixty-year-old community. Although there is no open antagonism between old and new Latvians, there is still miscommunication and slight frustration from the younger members' point of view.

Kristīne tells that the generational, or rather, experience gap shows in different understandings of Latvian grammar, for example and feels faulted for not keeping up to the standards held by the older migrants.

It is just that we are being indirectly blamed for our schooling during the Soviet times or in the 1990s, that we were not taught Endzelins' system [pre-WWII way of spelling]. Forgive me, but that is not our fault. Latvian language has developed and moved forward, we have been heavily influenced by other languages; that is the destiny of a language. It should not be this exacerbated (Appendix: 50).

Similar disagreements arise over seemingly trivial details, such as whether the Latvian church pastor should wear a white robe, as it is now common in Latvia, or a black one, as it was traditional before the war. Kristīne, having witnessed many LCGB meetings, confides that arguments over such practicalities can sometime last for hours. By and large, these disagreements are among old and new Latvians, but it is not necessarily a generation gap, it is rather a personal history gap. There is a certain inability to relate to one another, sometimes more pronounced than others, sometimes practically non-existent.

Ausma (82, retired pharmacist), a Latvian who came as part of the EVW scheme in the late 1940s, revealed that when she first went back to Latvia in the early 1990s and met with her relatives and long lost friends, no one inquired how she had been all those years. There is

still somewhat of a myth about Latvians in exile as having been lucky, having had it easy and taken the easy way out. Latvia's Latvians are sometimes seen by Latvian refugees as products of the Soviet system, perhaps not even as "Latvian" as they themselves are. Ausma stressed that she very much dislikes the term "émigré" when it is applied to her and her contemporaries. She says she did not choose to leave Latvia. Nevertheless, Latvian refugees are still sometimes seen somewhat as traitors for leaving Latvia at a time of trouble and opting instead for a life abroad. The initial hardships of exile life are overshadowed by the success and wealth of Latvians abroad in comparison to ex-soviet Latvians. This definitely hinders complete trust and mutual understanding.

It would be incorrect to state that there is grave disagreement among old and new Latvians. They do seem to operate in somewhat different systems, however. Not to dwell on the issue of fragmentation, another interesting phenomenon must be mentioned. It was noted that not only were the old Latvians hesitant to hand down their positions and institutions to the more capable and energetic new Latvians, they had been rather unwilling to do so to their descendants as well, as Maija points out (Appendix: 59). Second generation Latvians would have gladly taken over from their parents the various organisations that they had formed in the 1940s and 1950s. However, the older generation, still full of strength and energy, was often unwilling to step down, as they felt they were still up for the job and felt they would continue it properly. They sensed very strong ownership of the various institutions they had built from nothing and with great difficulty. Now the first generation of Latvians are very old and are in essence dying off. Their descendants, once refused of major responsibility in the community, have largely invested their time and energy elsewhere, and their grandchildren have even less interest to get involved, as they are for the most part more comfortable with being British, and most probably have a British parent (*ibid.*). The lack of natural succession has disadvantaged the community, as there has not been a regular process of power transition. Therefore, two seemingly opposite ends of the spectrum now meet and clash, adding to the differences of their statuses as "political" or "economic" migrants.

Today, there are no new Latvian political refugees in the UK; there are only economic migrants. However, they are also sometimes referred to as “economic refugees”. This alludes to the difficult economic situation in Latvia, which seemingly drove people abroad almost involuntarily in search for a better life. Once again, these people are sometimes seen as traitors in Latvia, often choosing to do heavy labour in order to earn money, rather than work in Latvia and pay taxes. There is, undoubtedly, a catch-22 situation here, whereby Latvia’s economic development is suffering from skilled manpower emigration and brain drain, and this migration happens because of the trying economic conditions in the country. In a sense, there are more similarities among the two generations of migrants than is fully recognised. Albeit the political refugees arrived for specific reasons and the economic migrants for different ones, they face many of the very same issues. The biggest difference is perhaps the latter groups’ disappointment in the Latvian state and the former’s regard of this as ungratefulness and greediness. Maija tells that this view might be on the downturn, as exile Latvians could not initially accept the idea that new Latvians sometimes came to the UK permanently, instead of living in the newly independent Latvia:

When I first appeared, any new person appearing in the church was being asked—when are you returning to Latvia? Always, consistently, almost to the same person at every church service. They were expected to return. Now it is not so much the case anymore. The older people realize that if these people will not be here, the community will not be either (Appendix: 59-60).

How has then the community adapted and reinvented itself in the face of the great political and economic changes of the past twenty years? From talking to several respondents and participating in a couple of BC meetings and church services, it seems that the main goal of not only the Latvian, but also Estonian and Lithuanian diasporas in London is to increase awareness about the Baltic States. The spread of information, including using modern technologies is essential, and so is promotion of the countries. The goal is to lessen any misinformation in the media and make people interested in visiting Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania; as proved by the aforementioned collaboration for the Thames Festival.

Putting the data in perspective with theories of migration and displacement, identity reveals another aspect. I wish to touch lightly upon the concept of “obligation” to one’s native country, as it is shared by Latvian migrants from the late 1940s, and similarly by migrants of completely different circumstances, such as the Caribbean. The term obviously has a somewhat negative connotation, as it alludes to a lack of choice in the matter, a binding commitment. Yet, over the course of my research, I never came across anyone speaking about this duty as a burden. It was talked about as something that went without saying, almost sacred, even though large sacrifices were made at the time.

In two separate interviews, Aivars and Līva had expressed almost exactly the same opinion. This also matched the sentiment communicated by another Eastern European migrant of the time their parents arrived to the UK, who admitted that: “We came as political, not economical migrants” (2006: 92). In their narratives Aivars, Līva, and the anonymous Eastern European informant from Weber-Newth’s article, repeat the same word Olwig mentions in relation to migrants from Nevis in the Caribbean and Aivars uses when telling about the beginnings of the LCGB—“obligation”. Establishing a stable social network in exile was seen as a duty by the émigrés and so was helping newcomers to settle in (*ibid.*). Līva’s parents felt they had an obligation to stick together with the rest of the displaced Latvians, partly because that would have been the easiest way to survive in a foreign country and partly because of the very nature of their migration process—being refugees, then DPs and finally EVWs.

In this context it is difficult to speak about exile as a driving force for modernity and breeding creativity. Then again, the accounts of the Latvians and people from mixed families born in the UK, illustrate this aspect clearly. The initial involuntary breakdown marked the demise of the “Latvian” Latvian, uprooted from his/her native land and the tension between two mechanisms—that of encapsulating identity, experience and history and that of adapting, reinvention. However, in the second and third generation it has resulted in identities that share loyalties with both countries, and inner torment about this seems practically non-existent. As Baiba says, each identity offers her something completely different (Appendix: 69-70). Bilingualism is seen as a great

bonus, because not only does it allow fuller access to two different cultures, it also makes the learning of other languages easier.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to ignore the underlying tragedy of this phenomenon. Said's writing on exile sums it up with a surprisingly accurate sensibility: "The achievements of the exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever" (1990: 357). I believe the "something" that is left behind is a point, if not a whole system of reference. It is a way to construct and build lives and relationships, even oneself, and when removed, it has to be reinvented. Hence, the "encapsulating" way of life of the Latvian community in London, the strong traditions and set ways of going about things, the stopping of time in language, rituals, even dress. Change is happening with the gradual involvement of younger Latvians, but it is not easy, as consistency has been the core of the community for sixty years. Recent immigrants do not fall under the same category of displacement as exiles; yet there is some antagonism in their experience of free travel, open job markets, and the ease with which roots can be upped.

The breakdown of the Soviet Union took away one central element of the exiles' reference mechanism—fight for Latvian independence and a uniform political view. This event called for a major reinvention of the community, but the need for a new common goal was much smaller. Latvia was open to travel and information flows. Suddenly, a stable, uniting point of reference was again available. However, by now it was no longer easily relatable to by the exiles, as it had not remained untouched and encapsulated. Thus, old Latvians were caught somewhat in limbo between their loyalty to Latvia as a new independent state and their understanding of what and how it should be like, according to their pre-war recollections. For the young generation, Latvia offers a point of reference, however, they are not always satisfied with it. Thus, they choose to travel abroad, experience other ways of living and working. Their identity is not as bound to Latvia as the refugees' was, because they are often somewhat disappointed in their native country.

Migration can therefore be seen as the search for a point of reference. Sometimes it is voluntary, sometimes forced, but constants are found at home, in diasporas abroad, in oneself or in the move itself.

Constants can be mobile as well, as information and people flow more easily.

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Aivar Jürgenson

Tallinn University, Estonia

EVERLASTING DESIRE FOR
THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD:
THE CREATION OF HOMELAND.
AN EXAMPLE OF SIBERIAN ESTONIANS

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Formation of a local identity requires the fixing of connections between a location and a person inhabiting it. The actual homeland is located where a person feels comfortable. Most of the previous migrations in the world have taken place due to the lack of this feeling in the former homeland, so this means that migration is directly connected to a territory.

Migration from Estonia to Siberia took place at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The socio-historical situation during the second half of the nineteenth century offered too few opportunities in the homeland. During the

conquest of the country by German crusaders in the thirteenth century, Estonians were forced to live in serfdom. The land itself—and this is the main production resource in an agrarian land—belonged to a foreign elite. When serfdom was eliminated in 1819, the land remained as property of landlords. In order to be able to feed themselves and their families, peasants had to continue working for a foreign elite, just as they had had to do before. They were permitted to move only within government borders. Only the peasantry laws of the 1850s and especially the passport law of 1861 liberated peasants permanently and enabled them to become independent during the process of land proprietor acquisition (Vassar, 1975, p. 42). But the peasants lacked money and not everyone had the opportunity to obtain land proprietorship. Living conditions were difficult and opportunities to create active connections between a person and the land were minimal.

Estonia used to belong to the Russian czar-state, which performed active colonisation of its Eastern regions. The state's motivation was multilevelled: firstly, it had a colonial desire to strengthen its positions in new occupancies; secondly, emigration reduced population pressures in more congested areas of country.

Siberia was not the first destination for Estonian emigrants, but it was definitely one of the most important ones. According to data from the first nation-wide census of the population of Russia (1897), there were over 4000 Estonians in Siberia. But emigration had not yet reached its culmination at that point (Maamägi, 1980, pp. 10-11; Kivimäe, 1981, pp. 66). During the period of 1906-1914 about 9000 people moved from Estonia to Siberia, forming the greatest emigration to date (Kivimäe, 1981, pp. 68-69; Kulu, 1997, pp. 99). In 1926 there were about 31.000 Estonian settlers in Siberia (Kulu, 1992, pp. 55).

The purpose of the current paper is to illustrate the mechanism of changing one's homeland: how is the old homeland abandoned and how is the new one created? It is necessary to emphasize that the changing of one's home is a process of creation: on the archetypical level a new world is created, in which only the best components of the former homeland are preserved and selected.

The process of emigration and the creation of a new homeland can be observed in various phases: 1) planning the emigration,

- 2) abandoning the former homeland, 3) creating a new homeland,
- 4) adapting to the new homeland.

Planning the emigration

For Estonian peasants in the nineteenth century, land was a great aim and goal—*Fata Morgana*—so important that it acquired the dimensions of a symbol. The goal of an Estonian peasant was to become a landowner. Land was almost the only source of income at the time, and due to a deficit of land, it became a symbol identified with welfare—land was a symbol of prestige.

As many of the Estonian peasants did not have the opportunity to become landowners in Estonia, they turned their eyes to the East. The hunger for land was so great that people even trusted untrustworthy sources of information concerning emigration, for example, there were rumours about uninhabited land in the East that could be acquired for free (Vassar, 1975, pp. 29, 33; Kruus, 1927, p. 138; Kakk, 1992, p. 618). These were paradise-like visions that people wanted to believe as truths, but which were not controlled.

Some words ought to be said about the image of Siberia that Estonians had in the nineteenth century. This was generally the same image of Siberia held by the rest of Europe at that time. Even though nobody believed in cannibalistic successors of Japheth nor headless people whose mouths were under their hats anymore (former images of Siberians: see Slezkine, 1994, p. 32; Slezkine, 1993b, p. 1), there were still many stereotypes. The Siberian image included three main groups of components: 1) the natural environment: Siberia as a wild and immeasurable land, 2) the past: Siberia as a land of prisons and criminals, 3) the future: Siberia as a land of great opportunities. These elements were also reflected in letters sent to the old homeland by Estonians who had emigrated there, and therefore the canonical facets of Siberia became even stronger in the Estonian public (Jürgenson, 2002, p. 102-107).



Narva village in Krasnoyarsk region. Photo: Aivar Jürgenson, 1999.

Emigrants were most interested in the third component of the Siberian image. Even though the image of Siberia used to be rather negative, it became positive in the eyes of potential emigrants. It was like an attempt to combine all of the positive future perspectives into one specific place: Siberia. Siberia became a land of happiness, a new Canaan, a paradise—it was a classical Eldorado-style utopia.

This was a process during which the homeland had to be changed. The phenomenon of a homeland is generally filled with positive content; imaginary homeland is a phenomenon which is characterized by strong motives of paradise. In reality this kind of a model does not usually materialize.

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Abandoning the former homeland

Emigration was a great event in the lives of people who changed their place of residence and one that had great influence extending further than the duration of a trip itself. The stories of emigration have

been passed down from generation to generation and even nowadays make up a great part of the Siberian Estonians' narrative repertoire. The journey was greatly influenced by the people's desire to obtain better social status and the trip became a ritual through which the creation of a homeland became possible. The Trans-Siberian Railway was built at the end of the nineteenth century, and as a result the number of emigrants from the whole Russian empire to Siberia increased (Stepynin, 1962, p. 113; Goryushkin, 1991, p. 140). But many people travelled to Siberia even decades before the building of the Trans-Siberian Railway. However, then the only possibility was to go by either horse-drawn cart or by foot, and this kind of a journey could last for years.

The journey itself can be divided into three phases on the basis of letters sent back by emigrants: 1) the beginning of the journey: a sad farewell, tears, etc. were often part of the emigration descriptions; 2) situations along the way: it is possible to compare the journey with the course of a whole life, because during this period people found themselves mates, gave birth to babies, and buried the dead; 3) heroic arrival in the promised land: fatigue and curiosity are often mentioned. In one description the leader of the group was compared to Moses who guided the Israelites to the Holy Land (Palu, 1897, p. 17). The initial reactions and emotions of settlers in the new land are described brightly. These phases of the journey represent a classical system of rites of passage: separation, transition, and incorporation.

Creating a new homeland

The creation of a new homeland is a "cosmic" process, an imitation of the creation of the world. At the same time this creation follows a culturally mediated example: the new homeland must be an idealised and selected reflection of the former homeland. Human history is a history of migrations, but there are hardly any migrations in which no examples from the old are taken while creating something new. Rather, it has more to do with "transplanting" familiar institutions, structures, and traditions from the former homeland to a new one.

From the very beginning the people in Estonian villages in Siberia built houses according to the building traditions common in Estonia; villages were potentially built according to familiar village-plans. Whenever possible people used familiar building materials, planted and grew familiar crops, and even cultivated the crops with tools used in Estonia. So, travellers who visited the new Estonian settlements in faraway Siberia “did not see any Russian influence there” (Nigol, 1917, p. 1). Homeland is never abandoned, but taken along—continuity, which preserves the familiar culture. Mobile people take their inventory along, even the furnishings that symbolize the domestic milieu. They have contrary needs taken along in their “suitcases”: on the one hand the need for a stable history and home, but on the other hand the need for a better life.

Familiar natural objects and landscapes and a familiar climate were the factors that became decisive in deciding on a new homeland. Estonia is a flat land and the settlers looked for flat land to create a new settlement. They did not like the obtruded idea of founding villages on the steppe—steppe was unknown to Estonians who came from a forested land.

The creation of a new homeland is a cosmic process. Giving an orientation to a specific place is an act which requires an existential decision—this is the decision of the universe that is turned into something familiar and intimate during the creation process (Eliade, 1992, p. 58). Culture offers behavioural patterns in creation. These patterns must guarantee the success of this specific act. Specific rituals follow cultural examples; they are repetitions of an archetype. In one Estonian village in Siberia (Upper Bulanka) a man described to me the arrival of the first settler and the creation act of the settlement 150 years ago. He put two acts of great symbolic importance into one sentence: “[The first settler] put a stick in the ground and named the village Pulan”. Putting a stick in the ground and giving a name to a village are both mythical cosmogonical acts with great magical power—world creation elements. In this case we are dealing with the transformation of chaos into cosmos: *axis mundi*, the world tree, or a pillar that organizes the surrounding environment (Eliade, 1992, p. 66). On the other hand it is taking control over something unfamiliar by giving it a name—the name, as a holder of magic power, has an important role in this.



Estonians from Upper Bulanka. Krasnoyarsk region, Siberia.
Photo: Aivar Jürgenson, 1999.

These acts are rituals for organizing the world and they have to guarantee that the unfamiliar becomes familiar. The heroic and usually mythologized first inhabitant of a village plays the role of a demiurge who, after leaving his former homeland, has to carry on his shoulders the responsibility of creating a new world. Inhabitants of the Estonian settlements describe in very lively ways how the first inhabitants had to fight the wild natural environment of Siberia. The archetype is followed even here: nature symbolizes the chaos that people fell into after leaving their former homeland. A battle with nature is a battle with chaos. If in myths the gods defeat dragons who symbolize nature and from whose bodies the world is born (Eliade, 1992, pp. 65-66), then the wild natural environment is just like a dragon that has to be defeated.

It is said that settlements were pulled out of the wild landscapes with the help of the culture taken along. Coppices were removed and trees were chopped down—even nowadays the inhabitants of the settlements describe how thick the trees used to be there. People prepared fields and built houses. But it is important that people

continued working just the way they used to work in their former homeland.

Creating a homeland is connected to giving names to new places. Those names are usually lent from the familiar toponymy of the former homeland. There are six villages among the Estonian settlements in Russia that are called Estonia, two villages called New-Estonia, six villages called Liivimaa (Livonia), and one called Baltika. There are even more toponymes which were taken from the former home village or hometown. Giving an orientation to the unknown also includes the translation of toponymes from the foreign language: Kamenitsa < Kivisaare (Stone Island), Telkino < Vasikaküla (Village of a Calf) (Maamägi, 1980, pp. 12-13). Names in their own language were not only given to villages but also to objects in nature, such as mountains, rivers, and so on.

The letters that settlers sent to their former homeland reflect the heroic elevation of the migration era, which is described as a *creatio ex nihilo*. A pattern of an “empty place” (Sack, 1992, p. 50) belongs here as well: *When we arrived, nobody lived in this place*. The new land is described as a place where nobody lived before the arrival of the settlers. The pattern of an “empty land” is used (in the letters, for example) even when it is not historically correct. For example, Chinese people had been living and cultivating the lands in the Russian Far East when the Estonians arrived and established their villages. In spite of this, the settlers—just as some of their descendants do even today—used to describe that this land was empty before the Estonians arrived: we were the first. In the creation of a new homeland this kind of a reaction is understandable as an element of the creation of the world—everything that is not our world is not a world at all (Eliade, 1992, p. 57). Strangers belong to a non-world as a part of a disordered land by merging into an amorphous chaos from which the world has yet to be created.

Thus we can speak of a model of settlements that ignores the former history of those settlements. Time starts only with the creation of the world, and so the history of a settlement is frequently just the history of the settlement itself.

In the history of world migration we can also find a settlement pattern in which the former history of the settlement plays an important

role. In this case we have to talk about a model in which the migrants have created a myth about the origin of the existing settlement in the specific land based on pseudo-scientific constructions. Let's think about the Scandinavian settlers' propagated statements concerning the arrival of the Vikings 1000 years ago to the land where the Scandinavian settlers live today. Let's think about the German archaeologists' searches for Germanic roots in Polish lands or about the former Baltic-Germanic searches for Goths in the Baltic lands. Estonian scientists have also searched for aboriginal Estonian settlements beyond the borders of Estonia (Kurs, 1994, p. 5; Arens, 1958, p. 113; 1970, p. 2; Moora, 1956, p. 111ff; Raag, 1998, pp. 16-17).

Pseudo-historical myths help to legitimize colonization and reinforce the identity of settlers in the specific location. A historical justification is given to the creation of a homeland, and this means that the homeland is not created, but restored in its former location.



Estonian village Upper Suetuk in Krasnoyarsk region, Siberia.
Photo: Aivar Jürgenson, 1999.

Connecting the homeland with artificial settlement-myths is not unknown even to the Estonian settlers. Even in the Estonian villages in Siberia imaginations about the aboriginal existence of Estonians in these places are present. The sources of these opinions are probably various scientific theories—such as the Ural-theory (an ancient home

of the Finno-Ugrian people in the Ural region) and also information presented in Siberian media about archaeological data of *white people* who once inhabited Siberia—that have lost their scientific conditionality and turned into a collective memory of the settlers.

Today's Estonians in Siberia find proof of so-called pristine Estonians in Siberia in toponyms actually of Turkish, Slavonic, and many other origins: the village of Suetuk (Estonian *soe tukk* = *hot char*, actually named after the river Suetuk), the Oja river (Estonian *oja* = *stream*), and the Šušenskoje settlement (Estonian *suss* = *shoe*) being only a few on the toponymes on this list. Thus even today the inhabitants of these settlements claim that their ancestors have inhabited these places long before the others. This kind of a continuity construction helps the descendants of these settlements to legitimize the existence of the settlement and to reinforce the local identity.

Adapting to the new homeland

The motives of paradise or a holy land were very strong in the emigration phases and sometimes even during the phases of establishing the settlements. But even decades later those motives had not disappeared. Even almost half a century later the settlers expressed their thoughts as if they had been freed from hell (Estonia) and gotten into paradise (Siberia). In spite of this, Estonia remained as an identification territory for the first generation of settlers. Connections with Estonia were strong in spite of the great distances; the settlers ordered newspapers and books from Estonia and had an active correspondence with their close relatives. However, the active communication between motherland and settlements ceased after the First World War and the Estonian separation from Russia in 1918. Acculturation processes took place during the second and especially the third generation of settlers, mixed marriages were made, the skill of speaking the Russian language improved, and so on. Today's settlers of the Estonian villages in Siberia identify themselves above all according to their birthplaces.

Conclusion

On the one hand, homeland is something very realistic and empirical in the human consciousness, yet on the other hand it is an ideal image. This two-dimensionality causes an ambivalent attitude: there is an urge to leave the homeland that does not offer protection and safety anymore, but there is also an urge to preserve the old because it offers behavioral patterns which can be trusted. This option is imaginary in reality: a new homeland that offers protection, safety, and everything that the former homeland lacked can emerge only as a selective version of the former homeland. Leaving the homeland that offered identity necessitates a demand for the creation of a new homeland. The alternative for a homeland can only be another homeland: the loss of a homeland can only be compensated by returning to the old homeland or by creating a new one.

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Marta Kurkowska-Budzan

*Institute of History,
Jagiellonian University, Poland*

“FROM WILDERNESS TO POLAND”—
THE FATES AND IDENTITY OF
KURPIE MIGRANTS IN PODLASIE.
CASE STUDY: PRZYTUŁY-LAS

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Poles are a nation of eternal migrants—political as well as economic. The 20th century is probably not very exceptional in this sense, however, we know the most about the 20th century mass migrations. But we certainly do not know everything. Unconventional historical sources, among which oral accounts are still being counted, at least in Poland, provide fascinating new information and, first of all, a possibility of studying how the past shapes the present and how the present gives meaning to the past.

The methodological basis of my research is oral history taught by Alessandro Portelli. Oral history is, most of all, a dialogue. Dialogue is at the heart of the term “encounter” and is the opposite of objectification. The condition of encounter and dialogue is always a horizontal space and not a hierarchical one, which is determined by the relation: subject—object. The individuals who meet during an interview are equal to each other, although different.

“Field work is meaningful as the encounter of two subjects who recognize each other as subjects, and therefore separate, and seek to build their equality upon their difference in order to work together.” (Portelli, 1991, p. 43)

An additional element which was important during my field research, and is also important now, at the stage of interpretation, is the fact that I am a “native intellectual”, which means that I am connected with the people that I talked to by territorial descent ties and even blood ties, but despite that there are many differences between us. (Portelli, 1991, pp. 38-42)

The subject of this paper is the cultural identity of internal migrants in Poland, specifically the people from the Kurpie region in Podlasie and the settlement of Przytuły-Las (Przytuły-Forest). The inspiration to undertake this research was a surprising story that I heard in 2001 from my grandmother’s brother. He told me how in 1932 my grandfather was going a-courting to the young maiden Zalewska. The maiden was from a respectable “noble” family, whereas my grandfather was a Kurp, from the Kurpie region. The village that he was visiting was a “noble” village.

Marta Kurkowska:

And what did it mean that they were “nobility”?

Lucjan Zalewski:

Well, they were Poles. Maybe nobility and maybe not. They used to be talked about in this way, as “nobility”.

M. K.: But why? Did they have any coats of arms?

L. Z.: Nothing of the kind, what coats of arms? Maybe there were coats of arms... some time ago. But then. Just... nobility. Assumed to be

better and richer. But they didn't have to be richer. Peasants were rich, too, if they were on good land and if they managed it wisely. But the nobility assumed themselves to be better."¹

Then my interlocutor told me what difficulties my grandfather had encountered from the “noble” youths when he was seeking a “noble” girl’s hand: the horse that he was riding was unleashed from the rope and chased out of the yard, his bicycle tyres were punctured, a wire was put across the road, the youths stood under the window of Miss Zalewska’s house and shouted “A Kurp, a Kurp!” and “He must be wearing sackcloth trousers and shirt!”. In brief, it seemed like a social misalliance was going to take place, despite the fact that my grandfather was a wealthy bachelor and used to work in Warsaw as a taxi driver. “They were stupid. He was a Kurp, but when he went out in a grey suit, then well well, what a master!” recollected uncle Zalewski. These words—as well as the following: “Until he threatened those roughnecks that were yelling. He went out on the stairs and fired with the Browning that he used to carry with him. In the air, as a warning shot. Beause they were valiant, these Kurpies,”—have intrigued me regarding how very vivid these divisions are, even today, in the recollections of the oldest generation. What divisions exactly? Social? Ethnic? Cultural? It seems that it is rather about the culture, considering that none of my interlocutors was able to define what “nobility” was and is (because this expression is sometimes used even today). A historical justification has no value socially—no one even mentioned the coats of arms or the past. People for whom “nobility” and “peasants” still exist in Podlasie, define it rather on the grounds of culture—the customs of everyday life and, of course, genealogy.

And so, into this landscape a new element appeared—the Kurpies. Several families from a few villages in the nearby region of the Green Wilderness came to this territory in 1931. It was an internal migration with an economic background—exchanging arable lands for better ones, under the condition of clearing the forest which was growing there—and seemingly easy for the migrants. They were not changing their country and they were not changing their social status; as ethnic Poles they were moving in quite a close group for a distance of merely 100 kilometres to the territory inhabited by other ethnic

¹ Lucjan Zalewski, interview by author, Konarzyce, July 2001.

Poles. However, this distance appeared to be much bigger. The migrant Kurpies were double strangers, both as newcomers and, what is more, as representatives of an expressive folkloric group. Their pride and the basis of their identity was the fact that Kurpies had never been serfs. On the other hand, they were seen as a poor and backward population, which the abovementioned short story proves.

Ethnographers have been interested in Kurpies for a long time, and the most meritorious for basic knowledge of Kurpie culture is Adam Chętnik, who in 1924 published a book describing “the people of the Wilderness”, as the Kurpie used to call themselves (from the Green Wilderness). It was Chętnik who wrote: “Kurpies did not know serfdom, therefore they have a well developed personal dignity, you will not see excessive fawning and humility here. Between themselves, they address each other as “you”, while they also often address each other as “brother”. Sometimes they address visitors and newcomers in the same way.” (Chętnik, 1924, p. 14) It should be noted that in Polish culture with noble roots, the basic expression used in everyday communication is “sir” or “madam”.

Starting with my uncle’s story, I began systematic field research in 2003, visiting the village founded by Kurpie hands. It was the only one on this territory—within a radius of at least 60 km—and the centre of the migrants from Kurpie. I interviewed people individually and in groups, recording my interlocutors with audio and video techniques. Heather Weyrick from the USA, a young film school graduate who spoke some (though not much) Polish, helped me in filming the interviews. We attempted to make an experiment: for obvious reasons, Heather aroused the interest of my interlocutors. Nevertheless, as we appeared there together—the “native intellectual” and the “Total Stranger”—people treated her in a very friendly way, rather as an acquaintance from a distant country instead of a “researcher”. I immodestly believe that I myself was a guarantee that she was not an intruder. All of the interlocutors assumed that Heather knew nothing about the Polish countryside or the specific character of their life and work, thus they thought it proper to explain everything to her in detail. That is why we agreed that, from time to time, Heather would ask questions which were not appropriate for me to ask. As a “native”

(both in a local sense because of my grandfather, and in a national sense), I should have known those things. Asking a “naïve” question is sometimes a chance to receive an answer that reaches the deepest layers of the interlocutor’s world outlook and his or her identity. Such questions were: “What are the Kurpie?” or “Are you a Kurp?”

We interviewed two generations of the village’s inhabitants: the first generation (born in Kurpie region), their “non-Kurpie” spouses, and their children.

What does it mean to be *a Kurp*?

Narrators from the oldest generation do not use the term “Kurpie”. Does it indeed have an offensive connotation for them, as the historians and ethnographers claim? (In dialect “Kurpie” means *bast clogs*.) Telling about her youth “in the Wilderness” or “on the Wilderness”, Mrs. Karolin (called “Karulska” by neighbours) never referred to the inhabitants of the Wilderness as “Kurpies”, always only as “the people”. This does not apply only to the people of Kurpie descent; Mr. Turski’s wife, a “noblewoman”, also did not use this term. Telling about her marriage, she emphasized that she is from the same village as my grandmother and this led to the conclusion that thanks to her, the “noble” girls came to like the boys from Przytuły-Las, despite the fact that they were from the Wilderness and not from Podlasie. However, Mrs. Turska did not use the term “Podlasie”. In the next sequence of her story—about how it was difficult for her to understand the dialect of her husband’s grandmother—she began to make comparisons, such as what were the customs “here, in Poland” and “there, in the Wilderness”. A fact described by Chętnik appeared in her memories: she was surprised and, at the same time pleased, that at one of “their” weddings that she was invited to, everyone addressed each other as “you” and there was no distance between them; everyone talked to everyone and everybody asked each other for a dance, even the strangers.² It was important for the narrators to emphasize that people from the Wilderness liked to sing and dance “even if someone played the fence with

² Janina Turska, interview by author, June 2003.

a stick for them”.³ My female interlocutors eagerly agreed to sing. Doing this, they have retained an archaic style of guttural singing, which is very characteristic of Kurpie.

The second generation of interlocutors, born in Przytuły-Las, are people who either stayed in the village to run a farm or are educated people, often graduates of advanced studies who have emigrated from the village. In both groups the definition of a Kurp (as an answer to Heather’s question) represented positive stereotypes and myths functioning in the culture: “A Kurp is brave and valiant”, “Kurpies didn’t know serfdom”, “Kurpies were good shooters”, “Kurpies were good forest beekeepers”. Use of the past tense is evidence of the fact that this is a “borrowed” definition, not one based on individual experience. However, they have also experienced “being a Kurp”. Here Mrs. Kamińska recollects that in the 1950s, when she was attending a nearby elementary school, she was many times “nicknamed “a Kurp””.⁴ Another narrator remembered the linguistic errors that he used to make at school: by instinctively using a dialect, he exposed himself to the reprimands of the teacher (who took care that the students used proper Polish language) and to the derisions of his classmates (who also used a local dialect, but different from the Kurpie dialect). This trauma is still inside him today, along with a regret that he allowed a part of his identity to be taken away from him—the identity that he now wants to nurture by reading ethnographic literature about Kurpie, listening to recordings of folk music, etc.

The second generation grew up under a communist regime, which, as we all know, licensed folk culture. Folkloristic groups and a national cooperative of craftsmanship and folk art were to retain soothed folklore, adjusted to the needs of entertainment. Besides that, all displays of local cultural dissimilarity were destroyed. For quite a long time the Kurpies—like the Podhale highlanders—resisted attempts to be uprooted from their culture. Unfortunately, in the case of a lonely island like Przytuły-Las, there were additional circumstances which caused the children of the migrant “strangers” to want to quickly assimilate with the community. As far as after founding the village standard, the first generation participated in processions

³ Weronika Karolin, interview by author, August 2003.

⁴ Halina Kamińska, personal communication in May 2003.

dressed in traditional Kurpie costumes, e.g. during the celebration of Corpus Christi, but the next generation did not appreciate this value. The thick, checked, woollen skirts were used as floor runners in homes.

The abandoned homeland and the present homeland

The oldest interlocutors have surprised me. I expected to hear nostalgic stories about the Green Wilderness and the “abandoned homeland” (Łukowski, 2002, pp. 73-93). They left this homeland of their own free will, after all, for economic reasons. That is why today they repeat popular sayings about the Kurpie region, probably coined by the neighbours from Podlasie, such as “the Kurpie sands”, “sandy and foresty” (that is, poor arable land), and “even a hare will die of hunger there” to justify their parents’ decision to emigrate. Meanwhile, the second and third generations discover their roots and visit the villages their ancestors came from. There is even one case of someone buying an old hut in a village in Kurpie—a kind of return to the abandoned homeland.

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What kind of “little homeland” (Ossowski, 1967, pp. 201-226) is Przytuły-Las for the two generations of its inhabitants? It is striking that all of them emphasize that the village is untypical due to its spatial structure, where farms are loosely scattered and surrounded by their own fields and meadows (as opposed to the prevailing structure in this region, where villages are concentrated along a main road). Paradoxically, they emphasize that this type of housing arrangement was conducive to being good neighbours: “People don’t fight over fences, don’t gossip, don’t look into each other’s pots.”⁵ Interlocutors of all ages dedicate a lot of space in their biographical narrations to the village’s “golden age”, which is supposed to be during the 1960s. The people I talked to were between the ages of approximately 60 and 80, hence their youths and active, mature years fell precisely during that period and it is therefore easily understood that they eagerly recollected that time. In the 1960s there were many youths in the village who, as stated

⁵ Helena Zapert, interview by author, July 2003.

in the stories, “lived on good terms with each other, liked to work and have fun together”.⁶ The same youths had gone to school together, four kilometres away from the village, where they met children from other towns and villages. As is often common in a rural environment, groups of youths from separate villages stuck together, often against the others. This seems to also have been the case in Przytuły-Las: “We didn’t go to Karwowo for dances. There the “nobility” used to fight” and “One was afraid to go to there, such louts used to live there”.⁷ As a curiosity of Przytuły-Las, attributed to the temperament typical of Kurpie, the interlocutors recalled weekly dances organized at homes, to the accompaniment of an accordion or a neighbourly folk band. Dances together with a group of Gypsies, who might be passing the winter at the home of one of the families, also sometimes took place. One can wonder why the Gypsies chose exactly this village? Why did this very village take them in for a long winter stay?

Kurpies, together with the Podhale highlanders, are one of the most mobile groups in Poland. In Przytuły-Las this “Kurpie spirit” revealed itself already in the 1950s, when the first migrations to the so-called Regained Lands began. The 1970s brought another tide of departures for economic reasons—to Silesia, Pomerania, and the USA. However, despite the fact that the village itself is almost deserted today, the ties that emerged between the inhabitants of Przytuły-Las have survived, maybe as a result of a certain “insular character” of this community. In 1991 Stanisław Niciński and Lucyna Zapert, both from the 1960s youth generation, initiated the first (of three so far) reunion of the inhabitants. The event was organized on one of the local farms. Former inhabitants of the village, of all ages and from all over the world, came to the reunion in great numbers. Some of them emigrated from Przytuły-Las even before World War II, and yet despite the many years they felt the need to meet with their old neighbours. I participated in the reunion of 2003 as an observer. There was a folk band playing traditional Kurpie music and there were national costumes, borrowed from the community centre. Who were these people who once again returned to their village? Migrant Kurpies? Surely not. This was no longer a group of Kurpies in strange territory, although it was just that

⁶ Edward Niciński, interview by author, June 2003.

⁷ *Ibid.*

sort of experience that had shaped them. They were just Przytuły-Las, no matter where they now lived.

Translated by Renata Żmuda



Helena Zapert

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Władysława Kamalska and Janina Turska
Photo: Heather Weyrick

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Mara Zirnite

*Institute of Philosophy and Sociology,
University of Latvia*

CURONIAN LANGUAGE IN SWEDEN:
SAVED BY MIGRATION

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Warning bells regarding endangered cultures ring out and reach us through life stories in the Latvian Oral History collection.

Each language—even those spoken by only a few hundred people, or just a few dozen people—contains some unique aspect of humanness, expresses a specific world view, and preserves certain survival skills. Half of the estimated 6,500 human languages are under threat of extinction within 50 to 100 years¹. The Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project at the University of London was established for documenting as many endangered languages as possible and to encourage the development of relevant skills across the world.

¹ <http://www.hrelp.org/languages>

Just as the safeguarding of biological diversity is a serious task and challenge for humanity, so is the safeguarding of linguistic and cultural diversity. Natural diversity and also cultural diversity ensures a favourable environment and a foundation conducive to the development of civilization. Linguistic diversity represents the value of intangible cultural heritage just as the regional cultural experience is very useful in acquiring global experience. If a fragment is extracted, the entire system is thrown out of balance.

In this article I would like to pay attention to examples in the testimonies of the Latvian Oral History collection which allow one to estimate how cultural heritage, such as the language of a small group, is influenced by migration. However, in some instances the opposite process can be observed, namely, that in some rare cases migration turns out to be a sort of salvation for a culture and language that has died out in its original homeland. The title of this article brings our attention to one such example that we encountered during our life story fieldwork in Sweden.



Photo Martin Sakuth



Verner Sakuth

During the fieldwork within the Baltic-Nordic Network Project in 2006 we met and recorded three brothers from the Sakuth family



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Brothers in Sweden, 1940s. Photo from family archive



The Sakuth family, 1950s. Photos by Ieva Garda-Rozenberga

who spoke in an ancient dialect with each other: the Curonian (Kursenieki²) language, which has close ties to Latvian. The Zakuts brothers were born into a Kursenieki family in Nida³ and managed to escape by boat to Sweden at the end of World War II. “Then we put our things in a small boat and headed for Sweden. I would rather die at sea than in Siberia,” remembers Martin (1930) of their flight.

In Sweden their parents lived long lives (their mother lived until age 93), and the whole family, including the brothers, who continued their traditional work as fishermen, spoke the Curonian language.

“Five or six hundred years ago some people from Kurzeme were fishing in the sea. There was a storm and their boat was wrecked near the Curonian Spit. They could not get home. So they got married and stayed to live on the Curonian Spit. One part of us has descended from these people.” Such is the legend of the brothers’ family history that was told to them in their native language⁴.

The brothers’ former home territory formed the borderland between East Prussia and Lithuania. The Curonian Spit is almost 98 km long and 0.4 to 4 km wide. The Baltic Sea borders it on one side and the Curonian Lagoon (Kurse mar in Curonian) borders it on the other side.



Photo The coast of the Curonian Lagoon, Lithuania. Photo by Mara Zirnite

² Western Baltic people who migrated during the Middle Ages from various Latvian counties to the Curonian Spit, which now belongs to Lithuania.

³ A Curonian fishing village on the Curonian Spit.

⁴ From Aigars Lielbārdis’ video documentary “The Sakuth Brothers”, 2006.

The key word describing this area is “protected”: the dunes, the rare animal and bird species that live in this territory, as well as the fish, flora, and local inhabitants, all need to be protected. (Shifting dunes obliterated 14 villages in the 19th century.)

Until World War II, the Curonian Spit was considered to be the best fishing place in East Prussia. The locals—the Kursenieki—had emigrated to the area around the 16th century. They spoke their own Kursenieki language on the Curonian Spit, and their dune-dweller culture developed through interaction with the conditions on the coast. Their culture was inseparably linked to fishing and the battle with the shifting dunes. Generation after generation formed relationships with the local natural environment and developed techniques for working in the local conditions. The peoples’ ethnic characteristics were an amalgam of many different components, of which language and the world view, skills, and experience associated with it played the most determining role. The Kursenieki language satisfied the needs of the dune-dwellers; the fishermen spoke in it and believed that the fishing was better if they spoke in the Kursenieki language. They were a small, ethnically different cultural island in a sea of Germans and Lithuanians. They attended the Lutheran church, but placed pagan turtle-shaped crosses by the graves of their deceased.

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In Sweden the Sakuth brothers kept alive until the 21st century a language whose number of speakers had steadily declined throughout the 20th century⁵. This attests to the conservative quality of native language in exile if it is supported by a favourable situation, as the Zakuts brothers have in Sweden.

Conversely, the events of World War II led to such great changes in the local social environment on the Curonian Spit that the Curonian language is now no longer spoken there. The previous homeland of the Kursenieki on the Curonian Spit has now been included on the UNESCO list of world cultural and natural heritage sites⁶. In the Lithuanian area, the landscape attests to the conservation of culture:

⁵ “Curonian is still spoken by 3000 persons living in Nida, Preiļi, Pervelka, Juodkrante, Melnrags, and elsewhere,” writes R. Malvess in his 1932 manuscript “Ceļojuma iespaidi Kuršu kāpās”. *Latviešu konversācijas vārdnīca*, Vol. 10, Rīga 1933 – 1934, column 19062.

⁶ J. Bučas. *Kuršiu Nerijos Nacionalinis parkas*. Vilnius, 2001, p. 255.



Photo The Curonian Lagoon in Nida, Lithuania. Photo by Mara Zirnite

well tended and restored vernacular houses and an occasional Curonian descendent, though most of them have moved to Germany and only visit in the summer. Language competency has disappeared, for there are no longer those with whom to converse. Kristel remembers only one hymn that her grandfather sang in the Curonian language.



Photo Kristel Zakut in Nida, the Curonian Spit. Photo by Mara Zirnite

Kristel was born in 1938 in Nida, which was populated by Kuršenieki at the time. Her mother Ģertrude and her mother's parents—her grandfather Fridrihs and grandmother Marija—were all Kuršenieki. When the war began, her father was drafted into the army and her

mother was sent to work in a munitions factory on the Polish-German border. At the end of the war, Kristel and her grandparents fled to the West, but the Soviet army was already ahead of them in Eastern Prussia, and they returned home.

Lithuanians moved into Kursenieki territory on the Curonian Spit after the war. Kristel did not know the Lithuanian language, and after her grandfather died she was looked upon as a German. She married a Lithuanian, and her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are now Lithuanians. She remarried and moved to Germany with her second husband. She now lives in Germany during the winter, but as soon as summer comes, she returns to the Curonian Spit. She is one of those Kursenieki who are working to renew the pre-war culture and collaborates with researchers of Kursenieki language and culture.

The Curonian Spit suffered serious damage during World War II: trees were felled and rare species of animals were killed. After the war, the area was included in the USSR's border zone and much of the territory was occupied by military installations. The situation has not changed much on the Russian side of the Spit, except that an international border (Lithuania—Russia) now divides the Spit in two.



Photo The National Park of the Curonian Spit, Russia. Photo by Mara Zirnite

After World War II, only displaced persons and those who came for work lived in the current Russian area. This is similar to the situation in the former Finnish town of Vyborg. In neither place have

the migrants (those displaced and those seeking jobs) settled permanently. We interviewed several migrants of the older generation. They settled here after the war as a particular category: those with work permits or as voluntary migrants. Now, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, they are isolated, having lost the chance to return to their former home states. This area has weak economic relations with the Russian interior. In their life stories, the migrants reveal nostalgia for their former homes and a lack of understanding about the lifestyle of the earlier residents in this territory—notably, the Germans, who were forcefully evacuated from their homes, which remain as witnesses to their cultural heritage. The largest family of Orthodox Old Believers, whose family members we interviewed, practice their faith isolated from the surrounding environment, landscape, and memory of place.



Photo Orthodox Old Believer in Rasite

In 1987 the Soviet Union established a national park on the Curonian Spit. The core of architectural culture has served as cultural testimony for 50 years, despite the fact that no one extended a caring hand to its preservation and the territory has been a site for Soviet, and now Russian, defence. After the collapse of the USSR, the Curonian Spit was divided between Lithuania (on the East) and Kaliningrad district of Russia (on the west) and was renamed the Russian National Park of the Curonian Spit. Lithuania, which regained its independence from the USSR in 1991, also established a national park on its half of the Curonian Spit. The border between the Lithuanian section and

Kaliningrad district of Russia also marks contrasting territorial development in one and the same environmental circumstances.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, former inhabitants now living in Germany began to visit and to invest in restoring their earlier homes. They have also restored the former Lutheran church in Rasite (Rybachy, in the current Russian area), adapting it to current Orthodox practices.



Photo Lutheran church in Rasite, adapted for Orthodox practices.
Photo by Mara Zirnite

For centuries this territory has served its varying inhabitants: the Germans occupied a former Old Prussian area, as indicated by the old place names. Old Prussian belongs to the Baltic language family and is related to Curonian. Old Prussian has been considered extinct for several centuries now. Even so, enthusiasts are trying to reconstruct Old Prussian and are organizing regular conferences that attest to civilization's unwillingness to accept what has been lost.

The strongest weapon in the extermination of “cultural islands” is war. War is closely followed by the forced relocation of populations or the “voluntary” flight of refugees, in other words, the loss of home and native territory. A whole layer or stratum of culture containing work techniques, traditions, values, customs, and spirituality is thus destroyed.



Photo Street vendors in Königsberg, an Old Prussian city, 2006⁷.
Photo by Mara Zirnite

Similar examples of lost ethnic and linguistic identity can be found along the North-western coast of Latvia, which was the last homeland of the ethnically distinct Livonian people. The Livonian language belongs to the Finno-Ugric language family and is related to Estonian, Finnish, and Hungarian. The Livonians were driven from their homes during both world wars and only a fraction returned afterwards. After World War II many of them were yet again forced to leave their homeland due to the lack of civilian employment opportunities on the geographic margins of the Soviet empire.

In the Latvian Oral History collection there are over 40 life stories from the Livonian older generation and local inhabitants on the Livonian coast, taped in the 1980s and 1990s. Many of them were no longer living in their former local territory. Inhabitants born in the 1930s and afterwards, who migrated from the Livonian coast to other places in Latvia, no longer recognized any need for maintaining their original language. They surrendered to the Latvian language majority around them.

⁷ This photo brings to mind the text written by Arno Surminskis (in the novel *The Summer of 1944*):

The streetvendors in Königsberg – an Old Prussian city. Having cut the stems on these flowers, this woman wrapped them in newspaper. The man handed her five marks, and she handed him the bouquet of flowers.

Today there is a couple of families whose members understand and use the Livonian language, but it is maintained primarily by young academic specialists who have managed to learn the language from its practitioners. Though the language continues to be learned by enthusiasts, the Livonian settlements have changed dramatically. The traditional buildings and houses and other signs of material culture have disappeared. Former fishing villages are changing into settlements of summer homes for people from the city. The sharp changes in the landscape, such as the summer homes of varied size and grandeur, reflect the newcomers' wealth, rather than the locals' cultural heritage.

War is a powerful factor motivating mass migration, but it is not the only factor that tears people from their familiar home places and destroys minority cultures. The descendants of the former inhabitants of the Livonian coastal territory did not return after the departure of the military powers. At most, they established summer homes along the coast, but the number of inhabitants in fishing villages has decreased overall. The few who tried their hand at the traditional occupation of fishing had lost their skills and were also subject to European Union regulations. Other current economic policies also did not motivate the return of native groups to their historic territory.

The pragmatism of modern society and consumerism, together with changes in the style and function of the household, also degrade witnesses to former life styles. When the values of non-material culture have disappeared together with the residents, then festivals and mass displays of culture try to compensate, but they are only able to conjure up superficial exteriors, or, over time, the interest to research and renew the culture. In such cases, the testimony of the Livonians in life stories provides considerable support.

Translated by Amanda M. Jatniece

Interviews

From the Latvian Oral History Archive (NMV):

Kristel Zakut in Nida, Lithuania;

Fjokla Artemjeva in Rasite (Rybachy), Russia;

Martin, Herbert, and Verner Sakuths in Kristinehamn, Sweden.

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Edmunds Supulis
*Institute of Philosophy and Sociology,
University of Latvia*

THE EXILE COMMUNITY
AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT:
LATVIANS IN SWEDEN

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Researchers from the Latvian Oral History project have made several study expeditions to Sweden and have collected about three dozen life story interviews with Latvian people who emigrated from Latvia at the end of World War II. The present study revisits these stories and brings to the forefront narratives depicting individual lives as being part of the community. It will also touch upon the question of how to look (analytically) at such specific emigrant communities—exiled people and their active social position.

In studying the lives of exiled Latvians in Sweden I was primarily interested in the emergence and maintenance of such essential factors

as community ties among emigrants. To preserve lifestyle, identity, and to cope with problems in an alien country everyone needs support in the form of a community of similar people. A feeling of community grows out of regular activities in organizations (or, for instance, in a theatre troupe, which is often mentioned in Latvian life-stories), communal experiences, narratives told to each other, and social distance from the host nation (Swedish society). In the social sciences community is characterized in terms of geographical and social ties, as a localized interaction reproducing shared meanings and symbols which define boundaries and let people become aware of belonging to a community (Cohen, 1985). Keeping community ties is a way for people to deal with personal problems as well as public issues, and the given statement is a starting point for our discussion on how to conceptualize community and its specific aspects in the specific situation called Exile.

A feature of emigration or escape from Soviet expansion is that to a great extent there were people from specific social classes against whom the Soviet regime had special objections. These were largely soldiers who fought on the “wrong” side, wealthy people, entrepreneurs, and intelligentsia. Apart from a few personal belongings, those people also took with them intangible things (skills, social and symbolic capital), which could usually not be immediately employed in a professional field in the destination country, and which were mostly in the creative and socio-political realm. We will turn closely to this realm.

From Sweden we have quite a lot of fascinating life-story interviews with socially active Latvian people. Because some of them took part in significant events of political and cultural life, they actually represent this above-mentioned socio-political realm in alien society. They picture a Latvian community which exists not just because of geographical proximity or shared culture and history. From their stories we see that true proliferating structures of **civil society** were created there—a sphere between private family life and the public life of the state; a system of action which is not market self-interest driven or imposed by the state (Edwards, 2004). These are voluntary groupings, “nongovernmental organizations”, local associations, and more, and they are organized “from below”.

This might be a rather large field for historical work to explore when, how, and under what condition these structures of civic society were established, in what forms they existed (whether these were informal interest groups or formal associations, clubs, or parties), how they related to each other, and many similar questions. In interviews people most of all mentioned the *Central Council of Latvia*, the *Latvian Relief Committee*, and the *Daugavas Vanagi Association*; but various cultural activities around theatre and chorus singing were mentioned as well. Without doubt one can find and count many more.

In fact it all belongs to exterior. It is a big job, but one can count and describe. Of course, we can admit that biographical interviews hardly reveal the full range of activities and motivations. However, they show that a notable part of the diaspora performed actions for the sake of their own culture and country. And these actions could be seen under the particular angle that we are going to present. What I would like to do is to narrow our view on community and civic society, and to see social activism among emigrant Latvians within the concept of “**social movement**”. I suggest that this more precisely describes what happened in the field of civic initiatives during the years of exile. By listening to life stories we realize that the scope and expression of individual activities were so manifold that it is difficult to attach them to tasks of any formal organization that flourished within emigrant society. It was really a social movement that grew out of micro-level, local initiatives aimed to keep the Latvian spirit alive and to do something against the proliferation of Soviet power in the homeland. When general discontent, different struggles, and insurgency are linked together at a regional or even a transnational level to reinforce protest action, they become social movements (SM). It is a collective effort to join in action outside the traditional social institutes in order to fulfil certain aims (even dreams). More specifically, Mario Diani writes that social movements are informal **networks** of individuals and organizations who engage in social **conflict** on the basis of a shared collective identity, while retaining their **autonomy** and specific group and organizational identities (Diani, 1992).

I think a large part of personal and community activities fall under that definition and thus compose a kind of social movement. When

we look through life stories, in almost every one we see quite strong feelings of protest against the occupation of Latvia by Soviet troops—this is the conflict component. Then, many persons tell that they were engaged in more than one organization and they had relations with mass media and people or politicians outside the local community (even outside the country and in Soviet Latvia, too)—so, different networks were employed in their activities. Interviews also revealed some more or less persistent disagreements and frictions within the Latvian diaspora along the lines of leftist and right-wing politics and in their daily lives because of suspicions about collaboration with the secret services of the Soviet state. This shows that participation in organizations and community may be restrictive to one's identity. In that case, to maintain individual autonomy people are likely to be a part of a SM, rather than a particular organization. This is one difference between an organization and a movement—a SM does not require one specific loyalty, as is the case within an organization. So, although migrants might be split due to political or other specific preferences, the need to preserve their collective identity—in this instance, to bring the Latvian independence problem to the international arena—tied them together in an exile social movement. We also have to remark that performing different activities with reference to Latvia is a way of expressing one's own lifestyle and sustaining an identity.

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For understanding and explaining social movements there exist two main approaches in sociology. They are known as the Resource Mobilization Theory and the New Social Movement theories. What follows is a few words about both of these and how they fit to describe the Latvian or any other exile movement.

Resource Mobilization Theory (RM). This school of social movement analysis, developed from the 1960s onward, has been and remains the dominant approach among sociologists. The most remarkable theoreticians in this field are the Americans John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, whose works coined the name of this approach (McCarthy, Zald, 1973). RM theory stresses the ways in which a potential for protest behaviour becomes an actual activity. Researchers look at how groups in that process organize to pursue their ends by mobilizing and managing resources. RM theorists argue that affluence and

prosperity tend to foster SM activity. Prosperous societies generate a number of resources that can aid SM mobilization. Resources can be of a material (money, organizational facilities, manpower, means of communication, etc.) or non-material nature (legitimacy, loyalty, authority, moral commitment, and solidarity). Researchers highlight that when the groups possess dense interpersonal networks, members are readily mobilizable. Networks provide a base for collective incentives. For successful mobilization a movement needs several factors, among them, for instance, leadership and political opportunity. Leaders identify and define grievances, develop a group sense, formulate strategies, and facilitate mobilization by utilizing the above-mentioned resources. Many of our life story tellers remember and notice in their narratives different essential figures within the exile social landscape. The theory says that the challenge for social movements is to identify and seize opportunities for action. This implies a cost-benefit assessment of the likelihood of success, given their evaluation of the possible outcomes of their actions and the responses of their adversaries as well as those of their allies. In life stories this aspect is found as memories about strong trust in and reliance on the help of western democratic governments (British or United States), reminiscences on the attitudes of native Swedes (their open hostility towards refugees), and political “openness” (but also pro-Sovietism to a degree).

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In short, the main point of RM is to look at the process of mobilization to influence political events and, if we collect appropriate data, it could also be used to analyze what (and how) has been done by political entrepreneurs of the Latvian exile community. The given theory is especially interested in direct, measurable impacts of movements on political issues, and less interested in the expressive, ideological, identity-shaping, and consciousness-raising dimensions of movements. RM draws attention to rational factors and instrumental action (to what extent it is successful in achieving defined goals), but a social movement may be an end in and of itself—for, let us say, identity matters because a SM can help to define and express one's identity.

For people in exile the immediate success of their actions might be less important because the establishment of community and the constitution of a collective identity is a goal in itself. This aspect

strongly appears in the latter developed approach, which in the 1980s came to be known as the **New Social Movement** (NSM) theories. What I wish to bring to the forefront with the aid of these theories is the cultural dimension of the social movement process.

NSM studies were developed in Europe as an alternative to the mostly American theories of resource mobilization. Their main task was to explain the rise of new and special kinds of social movements, such as the peace, human rights, feminist, environmental, and similar movements. Traditional movements, whose prototype was the labour movement, have their roots in the sphere of production and have a corresponding class base. It was a conflict between producers and owners. In contrast, contemporary movements are basing their action in the fields of politics, ideology, and culture and have other sources of identity, such as ethnicity, gender, or sexuality (Buechler, 1995).

In this article we can only presume whether it is accidental or not, however the social movement of the Latvian exiles emerged and was active at the same time as the western world experienced a shift and displacement of people and social mobilization moved from the traditional field of economical struggles (labour movements) to the field of culture. Likewise, for Latvians abroad protest was not associated with material needs, but the desire to live in the democracy and cultural environment of one's motherland. As that goal had not yet been achieved, participation in the movement was a way to maintain the Latvian collective identity, and it also served for the rest of the Latvians as a sign or message that stated that oppositional tendencies and modalities were still alive and available. Therefore, in order to study this historical phenomenon of exile action, I suppose the NSM theories are quite an appropriate way to conceptualize the individual and community action of Latvian refugees. And in short we can sum up why. To answer this question, we may use the main characteristics of the NSM theories provided by sociologist Steven Buechler (1995):

- on the whole NSM theories give emphasis to **symbolic action** in civil society and to the **cultural sphere** as a major arena for collective action;

- these theories accent the importance of processes that promote **autonomy and self-determination**, instead of strategies for maximizing influence and power;
- theorists emphasize the role of **post-materialist values** in much contemporary collective action, as opposed to conflicts over material resources;
- they tend to look closer to the often fragile process of **constructing collective identities** and identifying group interests, instead of assuming that conflict groups and their interests are structurally determined;
- within that theory studies recognize a variety of **submerged, latent, and temporary networks** that often keep up collective action, rather than assuming that centralized organizational forms are prerequisites for successful mobilization.

I believe that numerous life stories of Latvian exiles and oral history studies through the lens of social movement theories could support these theses at large.

To summarize, in this article we have brought social activism in exile to the forefront. To cope with problems—but also to express themselves and to pursue common good—the exiles rapidly established various structures of civic society (groups, organizations). The so-called “*in itself*” condition of these structures promoted a process of adaptation and preservation of lifestyle. But many of them also operated “*for itself*” (carrying expressive goals, such as the liberation of Latvia) and were outwardly oriented to the large-scale public arena. That included secret work with the homeland and work with public opinion in Sweden and with agents on an international scale. In order to describe that process, it seems more fitting to use a more narrow term than civic society or community. In my opinion such emigrant social activism could be conceptualized as a social movement in the sociological sense, and in the paper I asked to what extent that might be so. The social movement concept is narrower than civic society, yet it offers a more specific look at what happened in the community during the exile years and how key persons we interviewed had acted. It reveals the broader meaning of exile activism, which often reached

across borders and linked together various efforts in the fields of culture and politics.

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Rutt Hinrikus

Estonian Literature Museum,

Estonia

TWO HOMELANDS

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The Baltic countries have experienced many dramatic periods of exile in their history. During World War II about 70.000 people fled Estonia, amounting to 9% of the republic's population. Many innocent people had already suffered Soviet violence previously, making the need to leave even greater; but everyone who wanted to get away did not do so in time. Many fled believing they would only be away for a short time that they would be back as soon as the war was over. They thought it would only be a temporary absence followed by a quick return to their abandoned homes and everything they had left behind. In the minds of many it was to be only a temporary absence.

28.369 Estonian refugees fled to Sweden in 1944 (Raag 1999, p. 70). After a brief period in refugee camps, they were provided with jobs. The young men worked in the forests and the women in textile

mills or at jobs which did not require extensive training. Jobs were also found for the elderly and educated; they went to work in various archives. Life in post-war Sweden was considered better than in many other countries, but during the first years, many families continued to live “out of suitcases”, expecting to return home forthwith.

The emigrant does not fully grasp the meaning of a permanent home until years later. What does home mean to different people, and how does that meaning change? The answers to these questions can be gleaned from autobiographical accounts that have been gathered during the last ten years by the Estonian Literary Museum and from books by Estonian writers abroad.

The Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum contain about 30 written memoirs by Estonians in Sweden and about 50 life story interviews conducted in Sweden. When Baltic refugees are asked the reason for fleeing their countries, the answer up until 1990 is always the same: we fled ahead of the advancing terror of the Soviets but in the hope that, at the end of the war, the Allies would bring justice and Estonia would be liberated.

On December 6, 2008, during the Finnish Independence Day celebration in Tartu, the opening speaker began her presentation with these words: *I am an Estonian who lives in Finland; Estonia is my “birth-land”, Finland is my homeland. My mother tongue is Estonian; my “home” tongue is Finnish.* For the sake of translation into English I have used the word “tongue” and put emphasis on “birth” and “home” as the primary considerations for every Estonian. Homeland means country, but it is the dual meaning of the word “land” that is important; land is where the home is and home is where the “home” language is spoken.

In the event of a complete change—especially a change that involves leaving one country for another—the primary concerns are the reasons for leaving and the expectations involving the new location. The problems surrounding migration and leaving the country of one’s birth have led to one of the most productive themes gleaned from life story studies, namely the crisis of identity. Life stories became the focus of social studies at the beginning of the 20th century when a group of sociologists in Chicago briefly raised their importance to a significant level of academic eminence. One of the best known stories

to come out of that project involved a Polish emigrant. Studies involving European emigration are older than the first publications on the subject, i.e. Thomas and Znaniecki 1974 (Roos 1987, pp. 17-21) Thus, the continually expanding diaspora of migration is at the base of this theme and the actual backdrop to all the studies.

Georg Simmel has viewed the emigrant as a unique social type and the emigrant community as a specific lifestyle. In his “A Note from Exile”, Czeslaw Milosz speaks of the desperation which occurs at the beginning of exile, caused by the fear of losing one’s name and of failing, as well as the added moral dilemmas that occur (Milosz 2002, p. 29).

Everything fell apart; we had to flee to Sweden. In Sweden—at least in the beginning—we were nothing but poor refugees. As refugees we had no status. We could not speak the language, we had no work, no place to live. [A woman born in 1934]

Milosz also states that our planet is entering an era of unification, with many people living in a foreign country. *Often they feel they are offered the means to embrace places and events from the whole Earth simultaneously.* At the same time they are annihilated and become anonymous members of the mass. *He no longer even exists as a person whose virtues and faults were known to his friends* (Milosz 2002, p. 29).

The Estonian refugees in Sweden organized themselves quickly. Estonians established a cultural life in Sweden: they published Estonian language newspapers; they founded an Estonian publishing house; they formed congregations, schools, and a variety of social committees. Local organizations became part of the Estonian national organizations, which in turn sponsored international events. Estonians adjusted quickly to the economic life of their adopted country. Stockholm and its surroundings became the primary hub of Estonian cultural activities. A secondary centre was Göteborg, and a third centre developed in the southern part of Sweden in the neighbouring towns of Lund and Malmö. A “Little Estonia” was organized in place of the lost Estonia and this becomes a “home” island in a strange sea.

The journeys into exile were as varied as the destinations, but all journeys eventually end and all travellers eventually reach safe

harbour. Is the harbour a hostile place or is it a “home-harbour”, as the language suggests?

Home is a primary term in all the narratives. It is the centre of the spatial world, a place of safety and protection. The national identity is always bound to the language, the territory, and the culture. But what happens when the nation is moved outside its geographical territory?

Territory is an anthropological term, as well as a place. It has an important role both in the individual and group identity of its people, linking the group with a common history, shared memories, and places or “memory sites”. Home is a politically and emotionally loaded word; it is fraught with history and the past. A former life. It is also tied to the future, especially if it is located on the boundary of the old and the new.

Can home replace the homeland?

Exile preserves but also changes the image of the nation. You may ask, therefore, whether the image of the homeland itself is home, or are we speaking only of a physical location? Is being Estonian a connection to the language or a connection to the land? Finally, is home connected to the culture or to the language? For refugees and those who have resettled, these nuances and definitions are not just the stuff of speeches on festive occasions—they are an inseparable part of daily life. Home has identifiable boundaries such as the house, the garden, a nearby forest. The largest of them is the homeland (*kodumaa*) or fatherland (*isamaa*), to which each writer alludes. Aivar Jürgenson has written about the meaning of homeland and the Estonian concept of homeland. For him, home primarily means stability: *...on the one hand a subjective area of safety and, on the other hand, an objective, purely spatial orientation. These are two major characteristics that provide an opportunity to concentrically broaden the boundaries of home* (Jürgenson 2004, p. 109).

While waiting on the island of Kuresaare for transportation into exile, Julia, a mother of five under-age children, made this observation:

they were refugees about to leave their homeland, but they found time for a last-minute prayer in their own church. Here is an example of how the word homeland (kodumaa) becomes synonymous with the word home (kodu). A woman born in 1918 recalls that she proposed to her brother that they flee together, because that way they would be able to help each other: *My brother was offended. Do you really want to leave home? Are you going to abandon your home and leave?* In this example home is equal to homeland, with homeland being the larger boundary of the same concentric sphere. For the exile, a lost home means both the structure and the territory have been violently torn away.

But home is also a portable place, the place where the family gathers. A forestry specialist (born in 1900) working as a surveyor, who was separated from his family for long periods of time, comes home after a month away and recalls: *I call this place home. This is where I am at home. This is where I am welcomed by a warm room and the smell of freshly baked white bread* (KM EKLA reg 1993, 45).

A. Jürgenson states: *For the 70.000 Estonians in exile, their communities became their home land and home place in their new countries of residence /-/ On the other hand, the territory of the Republic of Estonia that they carried in their minds also remained their homeland and home place* (Jürgenson 2004, p. 110).

The first generation of refugees carried their loss with them even while constantly faced with the reality that the road back home was cut off.

The forestry specialist acknowledged: *...the road back home is closed and, at 50, I am too old to emigrate again.* His goal was to build a permanent home in Sweden. He was proud that he had done and made everything himself and often worked 18 hours a day. He managed to do this by living frugally and said in his memoir: *The time passed. After eight years we obtained our citizenship and made headway financially.* His daughter recalls: *The greatest interest my mother and father shared was gardening. Wherever they lived, they cultivated a garden, with flowerbeds and benches.* Their garden became their portable home. Home is not only in the mind, but also physical; real and tangible. The adaptation represented the old in a new environment.

The older 1944 refugees were first generation exiles. Their losses were the greatest, having lost both home and homeland. Refugees who were born between 1900 and 1930 lost their normal lives, as well as their homes and homeland. Many never conquered the acquired language and found little of interest in Swedish life, as it revolved around them, except when absolutely necessary.

The older generation never fully accepted the concept of two homes and two homelands. They did not think in terms of homeland versus Sweden, but rather, as Marie Under puts it, *in [terms of] what was taken from us and what is left!* (Under 1954, p. 38) Here Estonia acquires a double meaning. The “Estonia that was taken from us” is also “what is left”, namely the homeland they brought with them and recreated in exile. Sometimes it’s only a photograph of home, a memoir, or a piece of fictional writing that becomes the symbol of better times and better fortunes.

Among the younger generation, the refugee memories have begun to dim or have been lost altogether. For them, occupied Estonia became just another country, or the place where *the devil himself is in residence* (Nõu 1969, p. 46).

Estonian literature published in exile until the early 1960s exceeded the number of titles and the total number of pages published in Estonia. In addition to original works of fiction, a large number of memoirs were written about life in Estonia as well as the flight into exile.

The life stories of refugees and deportees all begin with the journey, followed by accounts of the various injustices encountered, and they evoke, overall, a nostalgic picture of a lost homeland. In all the memoirs the traumatic and dramatic events are described more vividly than periods of stability. Descriptions of fleeing across the water occupy an important place, even if the sea was calm. Very often accounts of the refugee camps meld into the flight itself, as a critical turning-point in their lives. This can be viewed as a heroic journey into the unknown, ending in “the promised land”, as it were, after overcoming great difficulties.

The life stories usually consist of three segments: life in Estonia, the journey into exile, and, lastly, life in the new homeland. Some parts

of the autobiographical narrative tend to be fictional. Some novels include both: life in the homeland and new beginnings. Seldom are the segments clearly separated.

Those exiles who could not survive the loss of their homeland stayed in the refugee boat forever. Karl Ristikivi writes: *Don't say that all is well so / that such is life / for you cannot grasp / the depths of my fatherland-lessness.* The questions of Marie Under, the most beloved Estonian poet, are even more painful: *Who am I / walking here alone / I am a stranger even to myself.*

Helga Nõu was 10 years old when her family escaped from Pärnu in the autumn of 1944. Estonia has acquired an important place in her novels. In 1994 Helga and Enn Nõu became the owners of an apartment in Tallinn that had belonged to Helga's parents before the war. Her thoughts about home and homeland:

Home is the place where the dog waits for me and wags his tail when I come home. That is its primary function. Homeland is more of an intellectual-theoretical concept and does not necessarily have to be tied to a home at all. Ideally, the home is located in the homeland, but due to circumstances, it may not be. One can also have several homes, nor does one home have to be better than another. One can also have several homelands, although the Estonian word "kodumaa" does not lend itself to that concept, /–/ the meaning of "kodumaa" is somehow sacred.

Indrek (born in 1937) is three years younger than Helga. He speaks about his new home in Sweden: *I think I was 12 when I started going to Swedish school, and I didn't know much Swedish. I had studied Swedish in Estonian school; I knew how to write pretty well, but there was still the language part to overcome. But, of course, that too was quickly accomplished by going to Swedish school, and I did not have any other problems. I eventually made friends with Swedish children, but because there were five or six Estonian boys in the school and we always stuck together, there was no real need to seek Swedish friends, and they were not particularly anxious to get to know us either. I cannot say that the teachers were in any way hostile towards the Estonians. Quite the opposite—the Estonians were looked up to for their good manners, they studied hard, and we had learnt in elementary school to stand up when answering a teacher's questions. He*

concludes: *I had no problems as an Estonian in dividing myself between the two communities—Estonian and Swedish.*

The uprooted-ness of exile is best illustrated in the way people remember the lost homeland. Ilona Laaman, an Estonian poet in Sweden, writes about her past: *There is an imaginary land. I came from there.*

Estonian writer Elin Toona takes a more pessimistic approach in her 1974 novel “Sipelgas sinise kausi all” (The Ant Under the Blue Glass Bowl): *“Estonianism” robbed me of my natural future.* In “Kaleviküla viimne tütar” (Kalev-ville’s Last Daughter, 1988) she flees the Americanization of her culture. The need to regain an original identity crops up again with Ilona Laaman: *I thought my home was in space. It is in time.*

Elin Toona writes: *The difference between an exile and an immigrant is that the former does not leave voluntarily, arrives with foreboding, and exists in a country that will never become “home”. It becomes “paradise lost”. The latter cannot wait to get away, retains almost nothing of the past, and has only hopes and dreams for the future.*

The “paradise lost” legacy is passed on to the children, who have three choices: *honour the responsibility bequeathed to them by their loved ones (promising to right past wrongs), or reject it and carry a burden of guilt for the rest of their lives. The third option is to acquire the skills of a master juggler who can keep several worlds and cultures spinning through the air “with the greatest of ease”, without breaking anyone’s heart!*

Each generation has a different answer. In 2006, when the interview took place, Indrek’s daughters were fully grown: *When I ask them how they see themselves—as being more Estonian or more Swedish—they always reply more Swedish, but in fact, genetically speaking, they are pure Estonians. But it is doubtful whether they will find themselves Estonian husbands; they are few and far between, and the choices on both sides are limited, so I think their generation will inevitably marry Swedes. But I still think the Estonian thing means a lot to them. Maybe like in the past, when you were an Estonian, you were always able to meet other Estonians in other parts of the world. You spoke the same language and had the same culture, something that was yours for free, without paying for it.*

Leida (born in 1918), who fled in 1944 and came to Australia via Germany, ends her memoirs in 1998 with similar ideas: *My husband*

and I have made several trips overseas and have been able to go back to Estonia and visit family and friends. It was wonderful to see them all, but home is now here in Australia.

Similar statements have been made by other 1944 refugees who went to live in Canada, the USA, or closer to their original homeland in Sweden. Helene, born in 1928 and now living in Sweden, explains: *Time has passed, and I will not go back to live in Estonia. My children and grandchildren are here, and—there is no reason to deny it—so is an apartment with all the comforts. If my health permits, I visit my old homeland a few times a year.*

The above statements were taken from a series of life stories whose authors fled Estonia in 1944. Leida wrote her life story in 1992. Helene made her statement during an interview in 2007.

Both segments deal with opposite ends of a time spectrum: in the past is the trauma of fleeing the homeland and then adjusting to a new country. The texts, however, deal with the here and now. In comparing the past to the present, the narrators state that they have no wish to return to the past because the past is over, they have moved on, and they are happy with their new lives and their new homes. This testifies that their entire outlook has changed and they no longer view the past as they used to.

Estonianism is now like a global club or organization—that is Indrek's conclusion. Enn Nõu's view is: *Home marks my nest, my permanent town and shelter, my children and their families, my things, my self-awareness and personal freedom. Definitely many emotions, memories, and warmth.*

Also stability, in some cases throughout history. Sometimes the home is also associated with a certain melancholy (lost parents, past, etc.). In an ideal situation the home is located in the homeland. In such a case, the home and the homeland are one and the same. For us, this changed in the autumn of 1944, when we had to flee.

*For us Estonians, the words **kodumaa**/home, **isamaa**/fatherland and **sünnimaa**/birth'land are synonymous and refer to our origins, identity, nationality, language, culture, and historical past. That is why Sweden never became my homeland, even though I established a home there and Sweden*

is still now my home. Sweden is my country of residence, not my homeland. Estonia remained my homeland even when I was unable to return to it, and it still is my homeland. For our children, it is less of a homeland, but still partly so, because of the language and frequent visits. /-/ A person can have many homes. One may have ties to the homeland, another not."

On the subject of defining the kodumaa/homeland concept, in her book "Three Suitcases and a Three-year-old" (published in Australia in 1999) another Estonian, Anu Mihkelson (born in Sweden in 1945), places her recollections somewhere between a memoir and *belles-lettres* when she writes: *I had spent my lifetime searching for what I was afraid would die with my parents.*

For third-generation writers in exile writing in the language of their adopted countries, the question now is: who am I and where do I belong? Linda Kivi (writing in English) wants to know *if home is a place to run to or from* (Kivi 1995). For refugees, the West—the away-country—was always tied to leaving, submission, losses, and dispossession.

The third generation no longer has to fear someone coming to take their possessions. They have grown up in a new society, in the West, where homes are no longer taken away. K. Linda Kivi's action takes place on two levels: first there is the grandmother, the mother Sofi, and their aunt Helgi in 1943-1944; next is their daughter and grand-daughter, Esther, in 1990. For Esther the homeland is not the romantic, lost paradise that E. Toona describes in her "Kaleviküla viimne tütar", the misty mountain realm of "Udumägi" (an Estonian classic) to which Tiiu wants to return. Esther goes to the land of her grandparents and finds *The house was dark, but which house was this?* Esther wants to know whether her "kodumaa" is tied to her nationality or her home. *Esther had come to believe that it was important not to stand out, not to ask for much, not to inspire the greed and lust of the world's ogres. /-/. Esther's questions were existential questions. She concludes: Home is where you are. Home is the way in which points join.*

"Kodu" is real and concrete; you can take it with you, you can put back together its many parts. "Kodu" isn't only in the mind; it is also a real place. If "kodumaa" is far away, it is a symbolic place, a national emblem.

The Swedish-born generation's identity rests on the idea of a symbolic homeland based mainly on the language. Anna Neuhaus talked to 70 Swedish-Estonians in 1985. The result of her studies suggests that the older the individual was upon arriving in Sweden, the more likely it was that Estonian would remain their dominant language. The subjects under study also exhibited the same cultural awareness. "In which language do you think?" was one of the questions put to the Swedish-Estonians. In both languages, they answered, without being aware of the transition.

It would seem that, for the refugee generation, the understanding of the meaning of kodumaa/homeland will remain forever divided, as evidenced in many of their passionate writings. People who have voluntarily changed one country for another also speak of two homelands and two languages. After Estonia regained its freedom, it took several years before Estonian refugees began a careful dialogue about the two homelands. After spending five years in Sweden and then going on to Canada, Virge feels this way:

Although there were no grandparents living in Estonia any more, we could feel that their spirits lived on in many places and that we are bound there forever. I am like an apple tree, which at one time bore red apples. Then another branch was grafted on which grew green apples. And now two kinds of apples grow there. Both of the red and the green apples are part of the same tree, but what name would you give the tree?

Käbi Laretei, a well-known pianist, writer, and author of several autobiographical novels, concludes: *At certain moments of vertigo I am keenly aware that my double belonging is a privilege to be thankful for. In spite of everything.* She adds: *It is enriching to live in two different cultures, among different temperaments, and with a lasting, unfulfilled longing* (Laretei 2005, p. 370).

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Interviews and manuscripts

KM EKLA (Literary Museum Cultural History archives), f 350 (Life Stories Collection).

R. Hinrikus's interview's with Enn Nõu, Helga Nõu and Elin Toona.

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Riina Haanpää

*University of Turku,
Finland*

Outi Fingerroos

*University of Jyväskylä,
Finland*

STRANGERS FROM THE East—
NARRATIVES OF KARELIAN EXILES
AND RE-IMMIGRANTS FROM
RUSSIA REGARDING THEIR
INTEGRATION IN FINLAND

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Background

The aim of this overview is to examine immigration into Finland from the East and the measures taken by the Finnish authorities during the post-Second-World-War period. The paper is based on the ongoing project *Strangers from the East—Narratives of Karelian Exiles and Re-Immigrants from Russia Regarding Their Integration in Finland*

funded by the Academy of Finland (number 128401)¹. The four-year project will begin in January 2009.

The examination will focus on evacuees from Karelia and re-immigrants from Russia, and specifically on how their narratives open up a perspective of “other knowledge” about the integration process. The project assumes that the measures taken by the authorities were aimed at quickly integrating the immigrant groups, but that there were discrepancies in the treatment of the groups depending on their place of origin. Thus, at their best the official measures promoted the absorption of the immigrants into the main population, but at their worst they could lead to discrimination.

The project seeks to elucidate how the economic, communal, cultural, and religious conditions that were important for the immigrants were taken into account at different times in integrating the immigrant groups: Which groups were treated better than others, and why did this happen? Above all, the project will explain how the immigrants themselves experienced factors affecting their own integration.

Research in the humanities has often been criticised for having little societal and practical significance. The most important general goal of this project is to produce information that will have societal significance and clear applicability. It aims to activate researchers into a mutual dialogue on subjects related to immigration (Karelian evacuees and re-immigrants from Russia) to a strange country (Finland) after the Second World War.

The questions posed by the research can be divided into two entities. First, the project will investigate the narratives constituting the “other knowledge” that opens up concrete perspectives on issues related to the adjustment of immigrant groups (Karelian evacuees and re-immigrants from Russia). The object is to produce information about issues of adjustment relating to immigration that can be used in work with immigrants. The second important part of the project is the

¹ Outi Fingerroos is the leader of the project. The project will employ two post-doctoral researchers and two doctoral students. Riina Haanpää is doing post-doctoral research on the cultural adaptation of Russian youths to the Finnish cultural environment (*Samanlaistumisen, sakkiumisen vai syrjäytymisen trendiä? Venäläisnuorten kulttuurinen sopeutuminen suomalaisen kulttuuriympäristöön*).

hypothesis that “other knowledge” in the form of narratives offers a significant source of information about adjustment in a foreign country. The object of the project is to demonstrate that issues connected with immigration should be solved by using “other knowledge” related to adjustment. “Other knowledge” should also be valued in the same way as “official knowledge” and its significance taken into account in the actions of the authorities.

Other knowledge and narration

At the level of methodology, the research conducted within the project will be unified by the idea that the research data yielded by “other knowledge” are of practical use and societal significance. So-called “official knowledge” is no longer sufficient in itself, and “other knowledge” is needed. Finnish researchers Sakari Hänninen, Jouko Karjalainen, and Tuukka Lahti analyse the nature of “official knowledge” and “other knowledge” in a fruitful way:

“One of the most important characteristics of *official knowledge* is the fact that the authorities formulate both the questions and the problems to be studied. [...] Official knowledge seeks to present a kind of public truth about the matter it happens to be describing at the time. [...] Official knowledge affects the relationship between knowledge and power ...” (Hänninen, Karjalainen & Lahti, 2005, pp. 3-4)

“*[By other knowledge]* we refer to knowledge that is as detailed, experiential, localised, wondering, revealing, and deliberative as possible. Forms of such information include explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge, contrary knowledge, and weak knowledge.” (Hänninen, Karjalainen & Lahti, 2005, pp. 3-4)

“Other knowledge” thus appears in several forms. By the term “tacit knowledge” the above-mentioned scholars refer to the experience that people rely on in practice but which is difficult to explain or interpret. “Contrary knowledge” is by its nature challenging as it questions official knowledge and paves the way for alternative, forgotten, and rejected views. “Weak knowledge” recognises the problematic

nature of history and the present and seriously ponders, concerns itself with, and re-evaluates the human condition in difficult social situations. Weak knowledge is provided, for example, by accounts of personal experiences. To obtain it, one must have the ability to remain quiet and listen to others (Hänninen, Karjalainen & Lahti, 2005, p. 5).

According to the sociologist Matti Hyvärinen, there are numerous different reasons for studying narratives: through them it is possible to understand and control the past; people's identities are to a great extent constructed through narratives; and narratives chart out a course for future actions. A narrative is a form of communication between people. Narratives define our *ethical* place in the world. Narratives are also a tool of interaction, because through them experiences are shared and made comprehensible, trust is created, and group solidarity is maintained. A narrative is an answer to the question: *Who am I?* (Hyvärinen, 2006).

During the 1990s there was considerable discussion in folklore studies about the relationship between experiences and narratives and on the nature of narration as a human and cultural activity. In this project narration is considered to be an interpretation and a typically human way of producing significances and making the world understandable. It will also be regarded as a process in which the narratives appropriate to a particular situation are produced. Narration will thus be considered to be a tool not only for creating meaning but also for constructing the past and an identity, and it will not necessarily be limited by any criteria defining, for example, its form or structure (Koski & Ukkonen, 2007, p. 3).

The question of Karelia, the Karelian evacuees, and the authorities

Karelia has often been described in Finnish history writing with the attributes *borderland*, *battlefield*, *between the East and the west*, and *focal point*. These labels date back to medieval events, when the East and the west, i.e. Novgorod and Sweden, struggled over commercial

and political power among the tribes living in the geographical area of Karelia. At the same time, this area was also the site of a religious struggle resulting in two distinct religious traditions: the Eastern Orthodox and the western Roman Catholic,² which coexisted until the Second World War (Fingerroos, 2004, p. 120; Sihvo, 1994, p. 47). Furthermore, for historical reasons, Karelia should be considered an entity which is culturally connected both to Finland or to Russia. This fact is also shown in the names Finnish Karelia and Russian Karelia³ (Fingerroos, 2004, p. 120; Heikkinen, 1989, p. 16; Hämynen, 1994, pp. 17-19; Kangaspuro, 2000, p. 38; Sallinen-Gimpl, 1994, pp. 16-17).

Karelia is currently divided between the Russian Republic of Karelia, the Russian Leningrad Oblast, and two regions of Finland: South Karelia and North Karelia. There is also a Russian population living in many parts of Karelia. Some western parts of Karelia have never been on the Russian side of the border, whereas some Eastern areas have never been a part of Finland. Therefore, Karelia should be considered a heterogeneous area, parts of which are culturally connected to either Finland or Russia.

In Finland the Winter War of 1939-1940 and the so-called Continuation War (1941-1944) were both followed by the loss of large areas of borderland territory, which were ceded to the Soviet Union in 1944. After this loss, a total of 420.000 evacuees, of whom 407.000 were Karelians, were re-settled in different parts of Finland. The loss of parts of Karelia to the Soviet Union marked the end of over a thousand years of Finnish settlement in the area. The events of the war years also gave birth to the concepts of a *lost Karelia* and *Karelian evacuees* (or *Karelian exiles*) (Lavery, 2006; Nevalainen, 2001).

² The latter was changed to the Evangelical Lutheran Church by order of King Gustav I of Sweden in the 16th century.

³ Both Karelias are divided into several smaller regions depending on the definition. The most common are Aunus, Viena, Karelian Isthmus, Ladoga, and Tver Karelias in Russia and Border and East Karelia in Finland. Altogether there have been over 40 different definitions of Karelia in different periods. The central defining feature in all these definitions has always been the border.



Finnish areas ceded to Russia in 1944

“After the Continuation War, the Karelian evacuees experienced a powerful sense of homesickness and a hope that their homelands had not been lost forever. The fact that peace had not yet finally been concluded between Finland and the Soviet Union encouraged the evacuees and indeed other Finns—some of them in very high positions of authority—to consider the possibility that the border might be revised when the actual peace treaty was negotiated.” (Nevalainen, 1998, p. 251)

Before the Second World War, the debate over Karelia had been dominated by a broken border dividing the Finnish cultural element (Lutheran Finns) and the Russian one (Orthodox or non-Finns), as the historian Markku Kangaspuro has noted. This debate reflected the nationalistic spirit that prevailed in Finland at the time, according to which Finland and Karelia in particular were regarded as the victims of Russian imperialism. On the other hand, the issue of Finland’s East-

ern frontier has in later times too been incorporated into the national identity policy pursued within the state of Finland. In fact, impugning the legitimacy of the Eastern border has continued to influence the definition of the Karelian question right up to the present day (Kangaspuro, 2009 [manuscript]).

The question of Finland's Eastern frontier is present in the long-maintained historical narrative that has reiterated the idea of unanimity over the legitimacy of the Winter War and the Continuation War, in which Soviet acts of aggression against Finland were regarded as wrong in the light of the historical sense of justice. The territorial losses to the Soviet Union ratified in the Paris Peace Treaty gave birth in the national consciousness not only to the concepts of the *Karelian immigrant* and the *evacuee* but also to *ceded Karelia* and *lost Karelia*. The Karelian question came into being as a kind of "new layer" in the debate over Finland's Eastern border (Kangaspuro, 2009 [manuscript]; Lavery, 2006; Nevalainen, 2001).

"The evacuation was a heavy process. The attitude of the government to the position of the Karelian displaced population was a contributory factor. Attempts have later been made in Finland to turn even this refugee issue into a positive matter, something that enriched Finland, but these can probably be regarded as part of the process of Finlandisation." (Seppinen, 2006, p. 115)

With these words Seppinen describes the situation of the Karelians in Finland after the Second World War. The claim is correct to the extent that the integration of the Karelian evacuees in Finland certainly did not take place without some friction.

Since the early 1990s there have appeared several basic studies by Finnish cultural scholars on matters related to the cultural integration of the Karelian evacuees in their new areas of residence. These studies have dealt with the ethnic self-awareness of the evacuees, the situations of encounter between their culture and that of other Finns, and their memorial narrative. The research shows that the Karelian evacuees were integrated into post-war Finnish society, but that there were adjustment problems: they were treated as strangers in their own country.

“And all the people in the world seemed to have died. There was no one to talk to. There was no one to come and talk to you, to help you to do things. There was a lot of snow, muteness, darkness, and like a shadow I trekked after my mother, anxious and tired in that darkness. Despite the fatigue, sleep would not come. And if it did sometimes come in the darkest moments of the night, there came dreams that made me quite frantic with fear; in those dreams I was running away from Russian soldiers.” (Vuohelainen, 1985, p. 122)

However, it can be maintained that the Finnish authorities, the Finnish Karelian League (*Karjalan Liitto*), and the majority of politicians in post-war Finland actively strove to resolve the situation and introduced measures to improve the position of the Karelian evacuees, for example, by guaranteeing them an income and housing (Raninen-Siiskonen, 1999; Sallinen-Gimpl, 1994; Armstrong, 2004; Heikkinen, 1989). The settlement measures were based on *The Emergency Settlement Act* (see Hietanen, 1982, pp. 13-66) passed in June 1940 to deal with the problem of evacuees after the Winter War. On the basis of this law, the state procured areas of land from the original population and redistributed them to the evacuees. The implementation of the law was suspended in June 1941.

A government report issued after the second evacuation in December 1944 provided the guidelines for the settlement of war veterans and the population evacuated from the ceded areas. *The Land Acquisition Act* was passed by Parliament in April 1945. This law authorised the state to appropriate land for war veterans, the families of fallen servicemen, and evacuees from the ceded territories. The land was mainly handed over by the state, local municipalities, parishes, private companies, and other bodies. According to the Land Acquisition Act, almost 55 percent of the Karelian evacuees were entitled to receive land. In total, nearly 150 000 farms were established on the basis of the Land Acquisition Act, and the lost fields that pioneers had energetically cleared on the other side of the border were restored in Finland by the early 1950s. In addition, over 100.000 evacuees were settled in towns and other communities, and the villages of the Karelians and the ex-servicemen became new urban districts and parts of parishes. The compensation measures can be regarded as part of the government’s policy of appeasement (Nevakivi, 2000, pp. 232-233).

The policy and measures of the authorities guaranteed opportunities for the evacuated population to practise their former occupations. The settlement strove as far as possible to take into account the geographical, economic, communal, and religious conditions from which the evacuees had come. Naturally, the settlement process did not pass without some problems (particularly in the distribution of the lands of the main population and in various cultural confrontations), but on the whole the measures taken in Finland after the Second World War showed that the country had carried out the resettlement of large groups of people in a sensible way that paid heed to the needs of the evacuees.

On the basis of the Land Acquisition Act, 38 percent of the Karelian evacuees were able to obtain a livelihood from agriculture; in the towns and cities they quickly made their way to those centres that offered work and a livelihood. Thus the Karelian evacuees did not end up in Finland as a rootless, errant section of the population; rather those who wished to do so were able to get land that they could till or jobs that they knew how to do (Nevalainen, 1994). At the same time, they were able to enjoy a decent human life in their new places of residence. Thanks to the Land Acquisition Act, some were even able to rise in the social hierarchy from being dependent lodgers to landed farmers. According to Keijo K. Kulha, who has studied the public debate relating to the settlement of the Karelian evacuees:

“By moving en masse and voluntarily from the territory ceded to the Soviet Union into Finland proper, the Karelian evacuees demonstrated their desire to live in a Finnish ethnic environment and to adopt in their relations [with the original population] a social order and principles of justice that had been moulded by centuries of history. To some extent, the reactions to this action of those who received them were evident in connection with the settlement measures. All were of one mind regarding the necessity of settling the evacuees, but each group in the original population wanted to do so according to its own principles and in accordance with its own interests. The possibilities of society to solve the evacuee problem in a way that was acceptable to the whole people were also limited by all the other difficulties caused by defeat in the war. On the other hand, the process of rooting

of the evacuees in society took place within one and the same nation, and [their] own representatives were present at all stages to influence the decisions that were made. These were good starting points for dealing with the problem swiftly.” (Kulha, 1969, pp. 278-279)

The loss of Karelia was naturally a heavy blow for Finland. The Soviet Union received about 35.000 square kilometers of land, of which 320.000 hectares were rich arable land. Ten percent of Finland’s timber resources also got left behind the new frontier, as well as 11 percent of its industrial production, 17 percent of its energy production, its major timber-floating waterway, three large cities, two towns, and 17 percent of its rail network. The Saimaa Canal and the port of Uuras (Russian Vysotsk) were so economically important to Finland that negotiations about the right to use them were immediately initiated. Seen in terms of the logic of economics, the return of these areas would have meant quite a victory for Finland (Seppinen, 2006, pp. 117-119).

The Karelia that was ceded after the war became a place that has been the subject of dreams of return among the Karelian exiles for over eighty years. Even up to the present day the Finnish government has repeatedly been compelled to address the question of the return of Karelia because, in addition to the homesickness of the Karelian exiles, political and economic factors have also played a significant role in the debate.

The debt of honour as a justification for the right to settle in Finland

The treatment of re-immigrants to Finland has not always been equal with that of other immigrant groups. Particularly in the case of the Ingrian Finns and former soldiers of related ethnic groups who fought in the Finnish Army in the Second World War, the concept of a debt of honour has been regarded as an important criterion for re-immigration. An important initiative for the re-immigration of Ingrians was a newspaper interview given by the then President of Finland,

Mauno Koivisto, on 11 April 1990, in which he presented an invitation to Ingrian Finns to re-immigrate to Finland, and they were forthwith categorised as Finns resident abroad. In the Finnish Broadcasting Company's web site *Elävä arkisto*, Paavo Rytsä describes what happened as follows:

“According to the President, the Ingrians who had been expatriated during the time when Finland was under the rule of Sweden were Finns, and their cultural similarity was apparent, for example, from the fact that the vast majority of them were Lutherans.

According to Koivisto, the Ingrians satisfied the criteria for re-immigrants, even if their families had lived away from Finland for a long time.

In the President's estimation, it was not a matter of any great magnitude. In actual fact, thousands of families moved over the Eastern border to Finland in the 1990s.” (Rytsä, 1990)

In other words, the Ingrians were made into Finns whose ancestors had been forced to move away from Finland during the period of Swedish rule. In actual fact, the migration of the Ingrians from the territory of Finland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was voluntary; thus no coercion was imposed on the Ingrians before the time of Soviet rule. The beginning of the re-immigration of the Ingrians in the 1990s meant that the question of the immigration rights of other groups living in Russia was shelved (Miettinen, 2006, p. 145).

Two interesting sub-groups among the Ingrian re-immigrants are those who were admitted to Finland under the “debt of honour” criterion on the basis that, being ethnically related, they had fought alongside the Finns in the Second World War, and the Ingrian war refugees who were repatriated to the Soviet Union after the war. They probably ended up in work camps as the timetables show the trains they were transported in went beyond Leningrad. In addition to being a significant criterion of the right to re-immigrate into Finland, the debt of honour has come to be regarded as an aspect of the military history of the Second World War that requires further investigation. As Helena Miettinen has written:

“The concept of a “debt of honour” still awaits its final elucidation. A committee has been established to investigate the surrender of territories at the time of the Continuation War, and it is a good thing if the question of the debt of honour can also be resolved. However, it is understandable that the validity and reasonableness of the decisions that were made and the factors behind them appear in a different light depending on whether they are viewed from the perspective of the time when they were made or that of the present day.” (Miettinen, 2006, p. 158)

The integration policy for re-immigrants

Immigration did not come to Finland on any appreciable scale until the 1990s. Most of those who moved into the country from the East after the Second World War were Karelian evacuees. The immigrant population in Finland is also homogeneous compared with that of many other European countries, and one reason for this is the selective immigration policy that Finland has practised.⁴

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In accordance with the decision of Parliament, the following is enacted in the *Act on the Integration of Immigrants and Reception of Asylum Seekers* (493/1999 / Chapter 1, General provisions / Section 1):

“The objective of this Act is to promote the integration, equality, and freedom of choice of immigrants through measures which help them to acquire the essential knowledge and skills they need to function in society, and to ensure the essential livelihood and welfare of asylum seekers by arranging for their reception. The framework of the integration of refugees and immigrants is defined in the Integration Act.”

According to the Integration Act, an immigrant who seeks work at an employment office or is in receipt of income support is entitled to

⁴ As a concept the Finnish term *maahanmuuttaja* (immigrant) refers to all persons who do not belong to the main population of Finland and who move into the country for whatever reason.

have a personal integration plan drawn up for her or him for a period of three years from her or his registration in her or his first municipality of residence. The income of the immigrant is secured during the period of adjustment with integration support in the form of income support or a labour-market subsidy. The payment of integration support is conditional upon the drawing up of a personal integration plan.

Municipalities that take in immigrants are required to have their own integration programmes, which they draw up together with the employment authorities. By means of these integration programmes, they attempt to identify the needs of the immigrants and to determine the resources available to the authorities and relevant organisations. An individual *integration plan* is also drawn up for each immigrant, in which the different authorities agree on the measures required to promote the process of integration into Finnish society.

The largest group of immigrants into Finland are re-immigrants from the former Soviet Union, totalling approximately 30.000 persons, of whom Finns from Ingria and members of their families constitute about one third. Initially, Finland granted the re-immigrants residence permits on the basis of their being of Finnish extraction, and re-immigration was administered through directions issued by the authorities.⁵ It was not until 1996 that the eligibility of the Ingrian Finns for re-immigration was defined in an amendment to the Foreigners' Act. According to this law, eligibility required that at least one parent or two grandparents be registered as Finnish in a birth certificate or a Soviet internal passport. In 2003 the conditions were made stricter, and today the Finnish language skills of re-immigrants are nearly always tested (see Miettinen, 2006).

On the other hand, research on the integration of immigrants in Finland has without exception claimed that employment difficulties are the major obstacle to the adjustment of immigrants. Certainly, some of them have obtained work, but the jobs are rarely commensurate with their skills. A scheme called *Russian Women as Immigrants in "Norden"* (RWN, 2004-2007) that has been implemented in three Nordic countries provides information about how highly educated Russian

⁵ An immigration permit was granted if at least one grandparent was Finnish by birth.

women immigrants—a group belonging to the highest ranks in the hierarchy of immigrants—are in fact received. The study shows that these women, who may be either professionals or non-professionals, are active in working life or seek to enter it, but that they are categorised as housewives. Aino Saarinen notes that there are numerous grey areas in the employment market.

“Although Russian women might seem to constitute ideal immigrants from the point of view of Nordic regimes, an analysis of their placement in the mainly restricted employment markets of the Nordic countries indicates that many have ended up in some kind of grey area. [...]

“There are also numerous obstacles at the structural level. Because the immigrants’ degrees and professional qualifications are not usually recognised as such, many are employed only part-time, on a monthly basis, or casually. [...] Naturally, local conditions bring their own problems: it is generally difficult for such a well-educated group to find work corresponding to their education and experience in the small or at best medium-sized work markets of the North. And the situation is particularly difficult in Finland.”

(Saarinen, 2008, p. 130)

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On 19 December 2007, a provincial newspaper called *Satakunnan Kansa* ran an article entitled “Russophobia runs deep in the Finnish consciousness”. In it, writer Karmela Liebkind, a professor of social psychology, noted that the eradication of deep-seated prejudices was difficult, and that there existed no deeper source of prejudice than culture.

“Russophobia no longer rages as it did in the early years of the last century, but in the depths of Finnish culture there lies quite a pile of prejudices against the Russians. [...] Many may out of old habit believe that Russians are dishonest. Consequently it is easy to think that a Russian steals because s/he is a Russian; in other words, a person’s behaviour is attributed to her or his origins.” (Satakunnan Kansa, 19.12.2007)

Russians constitute the largest group of immigrants in Finland and in the Satakunta region in particular, and the prejudices they face

there are considerable. Indeed, human rights watchdog organisations have also drawn attention to these prejudices and to Russophobia in general. A particular matter of concern has been the indifference of society to such prejudices.

Thus it is very difficult for Russian immigrants to progress on the work market without supportive measures from the employment authorities. A report in 2006 noted that many measures concerning immigrants aim directly at training and employment. In other words, these measures aim at making the immigrants “normal” clients of the work market in the same way as disabled, partially handicapped, or long-term unemployed persons. However, they do not take into account the immigrants’ situation as a whole, nor do they question the effectiveness of the existing system. Moreover, ordinary Finns’ preconceptions of immigrants can be stereotypical, which means that the culture of the work environment can at its worst become downright racist. Authorities have paid too little attention to campaigns to change attitudes or to provide work communities with multi-cultural education.

Summary

Immigration to Finland has been strongly characterised by issues relating to the settlement of the Karelian evacuees and the integration of re-immigrants of ethnic Finnish origin. The aims of immigration policy were initially directed by the need to root the evacuees permanently in Finnish society. Particularly in the case of the Karelian evacuees, the authorities strove to guarantee a livelihood and places in which to settle. The flood of Ingrian Finnish re-immigrants into the country in the 1990s, for its part, was launched by the idea of permitting immigration as some kind of payment of a debt of honour. The concept of a debt of honour can be interpreted as arising from the fact that the Ingrians had suffered badly in Stalin’s purges on account of their being ethnically Finnish, and consequently the positive attitude to them was an expression of sympathy for their sufferings. However, the re-immigration of the Ingrian Finns has been handled by the

authorities mainly as a matter of manpower policy, because, as they spoke Finnish, it was thought that they would be particularly suitable to fill the shortage of labour in their new native land (Miettinen, 2004, pp. 24-31). Thus immigrants have officially been mentioned as a solution to the population and labour deficiency (Alasuutari & Ruuska, 1999, pp. 199-214). Admittedly, the emphasis in these arguments and measures has been such that only re-immigrants of Finnish extraction have been mentioned, not just any immigrants.

Satisfaction of work market requirements has also to a certain extent dictated present-day immigration policy. The immigrants are no longer exclusively of originally Finnish extraction, but people come to Finland from all over the world for various reasons. At the same time, however, as the sharp difference between this immigration and the preceding type is recognised, the problems created by immigration have been underplayed. Immigrants are always seen as “other”, as different from us, and these attitudes and indeed dubious images of whole ethnic groups have determined the foundations of existence and adjustment in Finland. Consequently, it is necessary by means of research to elucidate questions connected with the ethnicity, languages, cultures, and religions of immigrants that influence their integration into the society of their new country of residence (Martikainen et al., 2006, pp. 9-41). Hopes have also been expressed for improvements in the integration process and for reform of the Integration Act because they should be seen as a resource that without decent support will remain untapped.

The humanistic research to be carried out in the project will have considerable importance in a global world in which people are constantly moving across frontiers. Alongside “official knowledge”, it will bring on the one hand critically and historically oriented information about the measures taken in Finland after the Second World War to deal with the evacuees, and on the other hand so-called “other knowledge” about issues concerning their integration. A comparison with historical problems of integration will provide information for the authorities who work with different immigrant groups.

Today it is no longer enough to study immigration as a mere or pure phenomenon, a kind of social category created from above, or just

in the form of the numerous official measures directed at immigrants. Rather, research also needs to consider the functions and significance of the immigrants' own narrative, in other words, how individuals give meaning to their lives. The narration of one's own story produces not only an interpretation of oneself and one's past and future, but also of the culture of one's immediate living environment, in other words, of the significance of the immigrant's culture on the one hand and of the culture of the main population on the other. Different individuals and communities tell about themselves in many different ways and their experiences are diverse. By narrating them, these experiences are shared and at the same time one comes to reflect on oneself and one's own life in relation to others and to the existing cultural environment (Hyvärinen, 2006; Hänninen, 1999; MacIntyre, 2004).

Both the authorities with their measures ("official knowledge") and the immigrants with their own needs and views ("other knowledge") should—according to the philosophy of narrative philosophy—be regarded as active subjects, both contributing significantly to the concept of immigration. The integration plans of the immigrants form a particular culture and a narrative context, ultimately combining to produce a more complex and multifarious view of immigration. In this way, the results of the research will make it possible to create genuine interaction and dialogue between the authorities and the immigrants.

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MIGRATION AND TOTALITARIAN
REGIME

Ieva Garda Rozenberga
*Institute of Philosophy and Sociology,
University of Latvia*

MIGRATION AND
THE TOTALITARIAN REGIME:
DISCOURSE OF THE SOVIET
TOTALITARIAN SYSTEM IN
LIFE-STORIES OF LATVIANS IN SWEDEN

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One of the main goals of the Latvian National Oral History Collection is to listen to separate individuals speak of their individual experiences and the collective experiences of the nation in the twentieth century, when two totalitarian regimes governed Latvia. The main focus is on the older generation, as they have experienced two world wars, the change of occupation forces, and Latvia as a free state. These people are thus providers of unique evidence. At this point more than

3000 life-stories have been collected: from various regions of Latvia as well as from Latvian communities abroad (Norway, Sweden, USA, Canada, Australia, Germany, and Brazil).

I have recorded life stories since 2000 and I have understood that based on the history of Latvia, a large role is given to the discussion about the totalitarian system. This system, as we already know, includes: the elimination of democracy, the takeover of power, governments with terrorist methods, the control of people's lives, and impairment of their freedom. In that aspect, life stories can be seen as the stories of witnesses—they tell about armies invading, about changes in daily life under a new regime, about deportations to Siberia, about clashes with the government, about escape from prison, about the pursuit of fugitives, about war and exile, etcetera. In all these cases we can see the concept of the ideology of a totalitarian regime and its power in individual's everyday lives. At the same time, stories about the war and the time after the war are primarily social messages necessary to restore the social memory of the people and to form one common view of what happened. Oral history forms a bridge between individual experience and society, changes perspectives on history, and opens fields for new research. The researcher records not only what has happened to an individual but also how a person is aware of what has happened and how he/she understands, tells, and interprets the consequences of an event.

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I have studied the stories of exiled people, because leaving a country without any possibility of return can be seen as one of the consequences of a totalitarian regime. Recording the life stories of these people provides an opportunity to understand why they left their homeland, how this happened, how they established their lives in a new space, and, of course, what kind of relationship they had with Soviet Latvia.

I encountered the collection of life stories of Latvians living in Sweden a number of years ago when I started to work as a laboratory assistant in the Latvian National Oral History Collection. My very first tasks were to make a catalogue, to put records in order, and so on. During that time—in 2002—the collection was already quite large; we had about 2000 life stories, although there were few interviews with

Swedish Latvians. Some of them were recorded in 1992, but the first real fieldwork was organized in 1996. Since then we have travelled to Sweden four times and have so far recorded about 50 life stories.

In order to uncover the discourse of the totalitarian regime, I will look at three life stories. The first story reveals how people felt and their reasons for flight, while the second and third stories reveal the main narratives in Swedish Latvian repertoires: so-called boat stories and stories about visiting Soviet Latvia. These stories demonstrate what life before the totalitarian regime was like and how it changed on several levels, including (1) through control of inhabitants, (2) through the restriction of their freedom, (3) through the restriction of their thoughts and speech, (4) through methods of aggression.

First story

The first story was told by Uldis Germanis, a well-known Latvian historian and writer. The six hour long interview was recorded in 1995 and 1996 by Mara Zirnite and Baiba Bela. His story can be seen as a history of Latvia, as it is a very detailed story. Uldis actually tells very little about himself. Because of this, the next two fragments are important for oral historians, because they demonstrate his individual life and feelings in relation to the totalitarian regime. When in his story he began to approach the year 1940, he first of all remembered the feelings which had overwhelmed him just before dramatic events, and he described these feelings as the breath of the totalitarian regime: *There were arrests all the time, someone was lost, and little by little, everything fell silent. I remember it was really strange; we were accustomed to being free people, but then there was this feeling like constriction in the back of the head, and we started to look around when we met someone and talked to them. We were afraid to be overheard. I called that a psychic terror.* Here we can see how the totalitarian regime affected everyday life and communication with other members of society by inspiring fear to move or speak.

However, Uldis' first real interaction with the regime was at the university, where he studied history (1939—1941). He was always making fun of the Bolsheviks during class and at home until his father hushed him up, saying: *Hold your big and stupid tongue! We don't know if we will survive in these times!* After that he took care. But he couldn't hold his tongue at once. He saw the consequences of this when he did his final exams at the university—there was a committee and the head of the committee was from Moscow. In spite of knowing everything, it wasn't possible for Uldis to get a good mark because the commission already had a reference about him: he was labelled ***ill-disposed towards the Soviet system***. Only later did Uldis find out that the woman from Moscow had determined that he wouldn't get a good mark. In 1941 changes in the education system had already taken place. The constitution and status of the university and other educational institutions were modified, autonomy and academic freedom were abolished, and the board of the university was replaced with people from the Soviet Union who tried to establish the ideas of Stalin (Stradiņš, 2004, p. 132). But the concepts *ill-disposed*, *dangerous for the Soviet system*, *parricide*, and so on became a reason for the mass judging, liquidation, and deportation of people (No NKVD., 1999, p. 10). Uldis immigrated to Sweden in autumn 1944. He lived there for 53 years, gained a Ph.D. degree in history at Stockholm University, and wrote books about Latvian history. Recently one of his well-known books, *The Latvian Saga* (first published in 1959), has been translated into English. This new translation is the first English-language history to tell the full story of the Latvian people in a way that everyone can understand. It presents history, but reads like a novel. The same can be said about Uldis' life story.

Second and third stories

One of the gateways to the success of the totalitarian regime was breaking people's spirits, restricting free speech, and generating fear. Fear also became a reason for doing or not doing things. Because of fear, people fled from their homeland, kept silent, stopped writing,

and so on. Fear was also the main reason why approximately 4000 persons like Uldis fled by boat to Sweden. Escaping by boat demonstrates the lengths to which people will go because of fear; people were so frightened that they were willing to travel by boat in October, when the storm period had already begun in the Baltic Sea and Russian and German ships and submarines were all around. The people travelled by boat to a foreign country, not knowing if they would ever reach the coast. The following example is from the story of a Latvian woman born in 1920, interviewed by Mara Zirnite and Baiba Bela. She remembers this boat trip very clearly. She described her reasons for leaving and commented that anybody on board the boats would not have returned to Latvia. She and her husband had made the decision to kill each other should they have to return to Latvia. She said: *We went to Roja* (a small town on the western coast of Latvia), *where we had to wait more than two weeks for a boat. When the boat came, we couldn't see it because it was dark. And what is more, the boat was too small for everybody who wanted to get on board. I remember I was praying, and eventually we got onto the boat, but we were the last ones. And we were sitting and thinking that we would not go back. Moreover, I was pregnant. And we decided to kill each other if the boat began to sink or turned back.* The passage took 36 hours and was horrible. They had to throw away their suitcases because of the storm, the floor was covered in urine, there was no food, and so on. There were 254 passengers on board a boat intended for 100. In the end, Skaidrite said: *When we landed the next day and saw that illuminated town, when we got warm bread and hot chocolate to drink, we thought we were in paradise.*

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Almost every narrator in this community has a similar story. Unfortunately, we don't have stories of those who didn't reach the coast. So-called boat narratives in this community are told as personal experience stories. They are repeated in various situations and are told again and again for various audiences, each time acquiring a more explicit artistic quality. In this sense, we can look at them as part of immigrant folklore.

Stories about visiting Soviet Latvia are similar to boat narratives and are one of the main narratives in the repertoire of Swedish Latvians. They include not only meeting family, friends, and acquaintances,

but also seeing the new system. These narratives also used terms such as *freedom of movement*, *non-stop surveillance*, and so on to describe these meetings. In the community of Latvian exiles, the evaluation of the Soviet period was (and still is) strongly negative. At the same time, two mutually intolerant groups existed until the 1990s—one was against any visits and contacts with Soviet Latvia, while the other group felt the need to communicate with relatives and especially the world of art in occupied Latvia. The Soviet occupation and its after-effects served as an explanation for all negative things in Latvia. An example from Skaidrite's narrative: *When I returned from Latvia, some friends of mine didn't speak to me for two years because I had visited the communists.*

Skaidrite, born in Riga, was one of the first to visit Soviet Latvia. The first ship docked in 1961. She remembers the welcome: *Yes, it was the very first ship. And the most important thing is that they welcomed us with roses and television. There were a lot of people from the mass media. But my first impression when we drove through Riga was that there were red patches everywhere. It was in honour of Gagarin. Red Riga was a big shock for me.* In this very short example we can observe the Soviet attitude regarding the external image of the state, which was marked by the mass media, flowers, and flags. This welcome was shown on TV throughout the Soviet Union and the world as evidence of the hospitality of the Soviet Union towards foreigners. But the pompous welcome that resembled a demonstration and “Red Riga” shocked our narrator. We also found out that the dialogue with the West was unilateral. Immediately after her arrival, Skaidrite had to pledge an oath that she would be quiet about living conditions in Sweden; Soviet people didn't have to know anything about the capitalist system.

The next event in Skaidrite's story also represents the dual nature of the Soviet Union as well as the relationship between the continuation of the regime—even in the 1960s—and personal life and freedom: *I had to live in one particular hotel that was especially for foreigners. One evening I stayed at my relatives' because we went to the theatre and I couldn't get back to that hotel. And they were following me and they saw that I was not at the hotel. So in the middle of the night there was a knock at the door—they wanted me to go with them. But I had fortitude, and I told*

them that I would come to their office the next morning. But I was lucky—that night they had understood that I would tell the Swedish press about this, and they didn't want me to. So they let me go. But I had to pledge the oath to be quiet again.

The other narrator, Aina, interviewed by me in 2007, remembers this situation in the same way. She told me: *My parents had strict orders as to how far I could go and what I was allowed to do. I was allowed to live in Sloka only because they had a house there. But if I wanted to go, for example, to the Ethnographic Open Air Museum, then Father said, "No. I've given an oath that you won't cross the border." The museum was outside the city borders.* In these very short narratives we can see the mechanism of control: first of all by having a particular hotel or place of residence for foreigners, and secondly, by spying on them. The control of society didn't end in the 1960s, as could be expected. It lasted in the form of surveillance of society.

Until Latvia regained its independence in 1990-1991, the journey to Latvia was not only a trip to the homeland, but also a trip to a completely different living space and life order. Beginning with the unpleasant formalities of customs, then uncomfortable transport, and eventually lines, slogans, messiness, ransacked belongings, exposed film, overheard conversations and surveillance, and various prohibitions—it all belonged to the unusual life order (Bela, 1997, p. 127), especially for those who had spent time in other countries. Today this unusual experience is told as a personal experience story and uncovers the voice of the individual, which gives evidence about the totalitarian regime in Soviet Latvia. Personal experience stories have a special significance for the countries of the former Soviet Union and particularly for Latvia. The official history of the Soviet period provided an incomplete, if not false, version of the past. For a more complete history it was necessary to open up new themes, provide a new interpretation of documentary sources, and make room for personal voices (Skultans, 2003).

The advantage of oral history is that, unlike most documentary sources of history, it proffers various views of the same event, in some cases challenging the established version accepted by the majority. Oral history sees the world as significantly diverse. However, this issue

is even more intricate, because in oral history we have to deal not only with history, but with memory as well. As we know, reality and our perception and experience of it, as well as its recounting, differ according to circumstance (Bruner, 1986; Riessmann, 1993). The oral historian works with evidence—narratives that essentially are interpretations of experience in language and always structured according to some conventions. But the goal is to reveal a truer picture of reality (Bela 2007, p. 26). Swedish Latvians are one of the Latvian communities with their own vision about the experience of the regime and everyday life. Life stories reveal various details and testimonies that all together create a collective memory about time and the regime which impelled them to migrate.

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Maruta Pranka

*Institute of Philosophy and Sociology,
University of Latvia*

MIGRATION AS LOSS OF HOME

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Home is a special kind of value for everybody. Home is something stable and habitual. Home is an expression of identity, shelter, and safety. Home is privacy and everyday life. Home is a space of happiness and loss, obligations and memories. Home is the negation of anonymous space. When you have a home, you are not anonymous, you are not poor, and you have your past and your hopes for the future. Home is a means to create and express identity at different levels: national, social, family, and gender. Home is a part of the discourse of national and community identity.

Human migration denotes any movement by human from one locality to another, sometimes over long distances or in large groups; thereby migration prescribes a change of home or habitation. The social sciences deal with different types of migration:

- Emigration - leaving one's native country to live in another country.
- Immigration - arriving to live in a new country.
- Chain migration - the mechanism by which foreign nationals are allowed to immigrate due to the acquired citizenship of an adult relative.
- Forced migration - the coerced movement of a person or persons away from their home or home region.
- Free migration - a belief that people should be able to migrate to whatever country they choose, free of substantial barriers.
- Illegal immigration - immigration that defies the laws of the arrival country.
- Mass migrations - the movement of a large group of people from one geographical area to another area.
- Political migration - a migration motivated primarily by political interests.
- Rural-urban migration - the moving of people from rural areas into cities.

If the house and home are symbols of stability and shelter, migration is the process of changing the home into something different. People are not always sure about the destination of their migration process.

The objective of this paper is to deal with the migration processes in Latvia, using the material from the research project "The House".

"The House" is realized by researchers of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology within the frame of the Latvian National Oral History project. This research project is based on the biographical approach and aims to build a portrait of the people living in a single apartment building in Riga. Using the building as a research object gives the opportunity to organize relative borders of space and time.

The building of 20 apartments is situated on a quiet street in the center of Riga. It was built by two young lawyers in 1936 with the aim

of having a stable living place for their families and young children and earning some money by renting out the apartments. The idyllic scene remembered by one of the present owners:

We moved into the house in 1936; there was a beautiful yard here, not like now. We also had a skating rink here... We had good relations with all our neighbors—they were of different nations: Germans, Jews, Russians, Poles. Our father was a family man. He had a good voice and he sang for us children. And we sang together at home with our father. On Sundays we went for a walk—the whole family. (NOH)¹.

Both of the owners moved to the city from the countryside, thereby representing the **rural-urban migration process** and the formation of the urban middle class at the beginning of the twentieth century. One of the present owners tells:

My father was born in 1891. After my grandfather's death, my father had to take responsibility for the family—his mother and two younger sisters. Father began to work as a clerk, but in 1914 he was drafted into the army. He received the Lāčplēsis Order medal for the job he did for Latvia. He had studied in the Alexander gymnasium and the theological seminary. Later my father was the chief of the Political department. He defended the peaceful life of Latvia. My father's salary was good enough. As he had fought for the independence of Latvia, he received a plot of land in Saldus district. So he sold the land and began to build the house in Riga. And he built the house together with his colleague, we had loans, we had to economize... He had to work hard to build the house for his children. But in the end—a few days after the beginning of the Soviet occupation—he was killed by the Soviets. (NOH)

The life story of the other owner, told by his daughter (who is the other present owner), is similar:

Father was from the countryside; he was the youngest of two sons. The oldest got the farm, but the youngest had to search for education and a job. He began to study in the Orthodox theological seminary, too, because this kind of education was for free. The Orthodox Church policy was to teach for free and realize assimilation. Many Latvian young men studied there to get a good education and then escaped for other studies later. And so did he. He

¹ NOH—National Oral History archive resources.

escaped from the seminary and went to Warsaw, where he graduated from the Faculty of Law some years later. He was drafted into the army during World War I and then arrived in Riga and worked as a lawyer. In 1936 he began to build the house. (NOH)

In 1939 the House witnessed the **emigration**, or repatriation, of the ethnic Germans. One of the owners remembers the events:

There were 4 apartments with Baltic German families. I remember we played together with their children. The boys wore interesting shorts. It was funny. And then they left in 1939. I did not understand why. (NOH)

The repatriation of the Germans is also mentioned by two other informants, both long-term dwellers of the House, who moved into the apartments left empty by the Baltic Germans. It was the first major migration to affect the House, the first major migration from the House and from Latvia. This migration-repatriation introduced further great changes. The House dwellers remember feeling that for the most part essential changes do not affect Latvia, though some fear was felt.

Forced migration

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The beginning of the 1940s was the borderline separating the peaceful everyday life from further events. The Soviet occupation brought conflicts, the destruction of families, and expulsions from homes. The new political power asserted itself by destroying the former stable reality, the human essence of the home.

As explained in the order “On the Expulsion of Anti-Soviet Elements from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia” signed by Ivan Serov, the official goal of the Soviet deportations in the Baltic States was to rid them of “alien elements”: members of non-Communist organizations, policemen, owners of enterprises, officers, government employees, and their families.” (Budryte, 2003) Such was the official justification of the forced migration, or deportations. Thereby approximately 100.000 persons (including ethnic minorities) were deported from the Baltic States to the far regions of the Soviet Union in the first months (June—July 1940) of the Soviet occupation (Budryte, 2003).

Memories of the forced migration are still alive in the messages expressed by life stories, as is also the case in this study. Both the owners' families were deported. The House became the "lost, ideal past", the lost property. The memories of one present owner of the House: *The apartment of the Krūze family became absolutely empty in 1941. The whole family was taken away. I heard strange noises from the upper floor that night. I stayed with my granny after my mummy and daddy was taken away.* (NOH)

The whole Krūze family experienced forced migration, or deportation, from their home and country. The father was killed by the occupying power during the first days of occupation. The mother was separated from the children and died after two years in exile in Siberia. Three children stayed together and returned to Latvia in 1945, but they were not allowed to live in their House. In 1949 they were deported again; the daughter of the family was deported together with her two month old child.

The subject of deportation—either their own or their relatives' experience—also appears in the stories told by other House dwellers. The separation of families and the forcible displacement from the home and the native country to an alien, very poor place is not only a painful trauma, but it is also a process with further consequences: the destruction of families; the inability to further a family's financial, cultural, and social resources; and the risk of loss of social memory.

At the same time, the Soviet occupying power began an active process of immigration, namely, the relocation of Soviet citizens to Latvia. Radical changes in the composition of the House's dwellers subsequently occurred.

The influx of people from other areas of the former Soviet Union started as early as 1940. A large inflow began in mid-1941, after the first mass deportation of Balts and ethnic minorities residing in the Baltic States. The percentage of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers in Latvia increased significantly, mostly as a result of industrialization after the Second World War,

The peak of the influx occurred in the post-war years. Between 1945 and 1959 about 400.000 ethnic Russians and 100.000 people of

other ethnic minorities immigrated to Latvia. During that same time at least 60.470 Latvians were deported.

Changes in ethnic population division in the Baltic States (%) as the consequence of forced migration (deportation) and mass migration. (Budryte, 2003, p. 208)

Estonia	1934	1959	1989	1990-1999
Estonians	88.2	74.6	61.5	65.2
Russians	8.2	20.1	30.3	28.09
Germans	1.5	0.1	0.2	0.09
Jews	0.4	0.5	0.3	0.16
Other	1.7	4.7	7.7	6.46
Total (thousands)	1.126	1.197	1.566	1.445

Latvia	1935	1959	1989	1999
Latvians	77.0	62.0	52.0	55.7
Russians	8.8	26.6	34.0	32.3
Jews	4.9	1.7	0.9	0.4
Germans	3.3	0.1	0.1	0.1
Other	6.0	9.6	13.0	11.5
Total (thousands)	1.905	2.094	2.667	2.439

Lithuania	1923	1959	1989	1998
Lithuanians	83.88	79.3	79.6	82.3
Russians	2.49	8.5	9.4	8.2
Jews	7.58	0.9	0.3	0.2
Poles	3.23	8.5	7.0	6.8
Other	2.82	2.8	3.7	2.5
Total (thousands)	2.620	2.711	3.675	3.653

Provisions of the 1945 Potsdam Agreement, signed by the victorious Western Allies and the Soviet Union, led to one of the largest European migrations and definitely the largest in the 20th century. It involved the migration and resettlement of close to or over 20 million people. Thousands of Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians were expelled Eastwards from Europe to the Soviet Union.

L.V. remembers the active, post-war immigration process:

You cannot imagine how many people have lived for a shorter or longer time in the House. So many from the Soviet Union searching for a better life...

They were recruited from different places. They filled all the apartments of the people who went away or were deported. Velta (the other owner) has the old house registers. (NOH)

The names of the registered residents who have lived in the House can be found in the house book kept by the present owner V.K. In the post-war period (1945—1949) military or KGB persons with their families and relatives (sisters, brothers, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, etc.) were registered in 14 of the 19 apartments in the House, and in a short time these persons received new apartments in Riga. Persons of different ethnicity are also registered in the house book: Russians, Ukrainians, Tartars, Jews, and representatives of smaller ethnic groups from throughout the Soviet Union. Some of these people still lived in the House during the interviews for “The House” research:

Andrej² was born in 1929 in Sestroretsk near Leningrad. He is Russian. His family lived in Leningrad. After his parents’ death in 1942, he was placed in the orphanage, where he spent two years until his aunt found him and brought him to Moscow. His aunt’s husband was an officer in the MVD. At the end of 1944 his aunt’s family arrived in Riga together with Andrej. Andrej has lived in Riga since 1944. He is a former officer of the Soviet-era Ministry of Interior Affairs and is now a pensioner. He often goes to Moscow to present lectures at the school of the militia. He says: *The best ideology and the best dream is that of the Soviet Communist Party, but this ideology and its dream failed in the process of realization.* (NOH)

Nelliya was born in 1925 in the village of Klenovoje in Zadonsky district, Russia. She was an employee in the Baltic military district and is now a pensioner. She has lived in Riga since 1946 and in the House since 1948. She arrived in Riga together with her brother, Ivan, who was invited to move to Latvia for the reconstruction efforts after the war. Later, their three sisters were also invited to live in Latvia.

Marija was born in 1922 in Novgorod district. She arrived in Latvia in 1951 as a railroad worker. She remembers: “*You could see posters everywhere inviting people to work in Latvia.*” She has lived in Riga since 1962.

² To protect the anonymity of the respondents, their names have been changed.

Lena was born in 1931 in Omsk, and Igor was born in 1932 in Odessa. Lena arrived in Latvia and the House in 1944 together with her family. Her father moved to Latvia to work as an electrical engineer in reconstruction work.

Vladimir was born in Kazan in 1918. He was in the Soviet army in Berlin throughout the whole war and arrived in Riga and the House in 1947. He also moved to Latvia to work as an engineer in reconstruction work. The interview with him took place in Russian, but he said he could also do the interview in English or Japanese.

The migration of Russians out of Latvia began already in 1989-1990 and received the official backing of the Latvian government. Emigration peaked in 1992 and 1993, and the rate of emigration or repatriation began to decline in 1994.

In the narrations of those who lived in the house before the war, the House—which had been left because of forced migration—appeared to become a goal of return, the end of wanderings, and the end of migration. V.K. remembers how she went to the House in 1957 after returning from the second deportation:

I called my son and my goddaughter to look at the House after our return. It was forbidden for us to live there. We were allowed only to look at it from the outside. We went around and I said then, "This is our House. Look at it and remember!" (NOH)

Only after the denationalization process could she return to the House. By then both of her brothers had already died.

The political and economic changes after Latvia regained its independence in 1990 brought with them the processes of denationalization and privatization, causing new migrations and consequently more changes in the composition of the House. The main changes there took place from 1994 to 2000. The people who are not able to pay the high rent are predominantly old people with low incomes.

Families who are able to pay high rent for an apartment in a comfortable house situated in the city center are the new arrivals to the House. These are business people and a new social group in Latvian reality: people who return to their fatherland after long-term

emigration in Western countries initiated by World War II and the Soviet occupation.

Regaining the House and returning to it is on the one hand the regaining of the physical property and living space, but on the other hand it is the reconstruction of a symbol and the reconnection of a life trajectory gap. Although the regaining of the property is complete, the reconstruction of the symbol is not entire due to the very difficult loss: two generations have been physically separated from the House and the families of the storytellers have suffered and perished. The life stories, being testimonies about the Houses as property, are also testimonies about it as a symbol.

The stories about the House—and likewise the life stories in general—are selective and contain gaps due to factors of time and memory, as well as the tellers' subjective inner filters. These subjective personal filters are changing and dynamic, which could be ascertained during the research process by interviewing the same persons repeatedly at different times. Nevertheless, the experience exposed in the life stories and communicated with other experiences, thereby being social in its origin and character, represents information about the tellers' place in the social processes and the impact of social context on an individual life trajectory.

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Anu Printsman

*Estonian Institute of Humanities,
Tallinn University, Estonia*

MORAL GEOGRAPHY AND
LIFE STORIES:
ESTONIAN “SIBERIA” IN
KOHTLA-JÄRVE

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Biographical research as a form of qualitative research seeks to understand in diverse methodological and interpretative ways the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, how individuals reshape their sense of past, present, and future and their social relations (Roberts, 2002) corresponding to socio-economic and cultural changes. In de Certeau's (1988, p. ix) words: “*a science of singularity*; that is to say, a science of the relationship that links everyday pursuits to particular circumstances”.

Biographical research has been much criticized by too often taking a pragmatic stance, which some would identify as a relative lack of methodological and theoretical rigour. Criticism also touches upon problems of memory, truth, validity, reliability, and credibility; the story's telling time and purpose, telling schemes (Cronon, 1999), the researcher's role, etc. being at the same time the strengths of qualitative research (Roberts, 2002).

The aim in this paper is twofold: firstly, to elaborate a little on the recently often referred to notion of "injustice" in life stories and taking first steps in offering a framework of moral geography for more advanced relationships of insightful topic categories under and after totalitarian regimes, and secondly, to illustrate that point with examples of a North-eastern Estonian mining town (Kohtla-Järve) coming to terms with how to read landscape change (Widgren, 2004) and spatial injustice.

Moral geography

Justice and rightfulness are moral categories that are involved in our daily lives. Frequently we do not think that these categories may have a spatial dimension nor be handled in geography. But with the advent of postmodernism, especially with feminism and post-colonialism, moral issues have also been touched upon in cultural geography. Particularly, the relationship between society and the individual is under scrutiny in the "new cultural geography", enabling the exploration of the transitional societies of Eastern Europe.

The border between morality and ethics is quite vague, although there are authors that distinguish between them (Matless, 2000a). On the other hand, Smith (2000) claims that the question of what is a moral or ethical issue still remains a philosophical debate. For example, eating peas with a knife is not amoral, but it is not well-mannered; however, using a knife to kill somebody is amoral (if it is not an execution, which is also considered unethical by some). It has been commonly accepted that morality refers to the customs and traditions of people or groups of people or cultures, as well as the prescriptions

and practices that are shared as common values and not given much thought to. Moral philosophy deals with philosophical and theoretical aspects of morality, while ethics comprises the whole realm of morality and moral philosophy. Smith (2000) distinguishes three levels of ethics: descriptive ethics that is concerned with actual moral beliefs and practices, normative ethics that offers solutions to moral dilemmas, and meta-ethics that is purely theoretical, e.g. what does “good” and “bad” or “right” and “wrong” mean (Pojman, 2002).

One of the (meta)ethical problems is about what is morally correct and should be carried out in real life but is not always done so, and *vice versa*. In other words, we still do things that harm us. This is also known as the problem of *acrasia* (see more in Davidson, 1970).

The other bundle of problems is the universality of moral categories. At this point I would like to draw a parallel with theories of landscape perception (Appleton, 1996; Bourassa, 1991), where three levels are distinguished: genetic, cultural, and individual. Thus, there are universal elements in moral categories as we are all human beings, but on the other hand, moral categories also depend a lot on cultural understanding (being also the meaning of the word in everyday life), not to mention the personal choices we face daily. Therefore, from the pool of “-isms” in (meta)ethics, relativism is epistemologically most suitable for cultural geography.

According to Matless (2000a, b, c), moral geography concentrates on the ways in which certain groups or individuals are valued proper or not to certain places and how the nexus between people and their environment can reflect and produce moral order (Sack, 1997, 2001; Tuan, 1989). For example, how is it appropriate to behave as a landowner or tourist or researcher, what is appropriate to a certain social standing, or how is the relationship between “us” and “them” manifested? As moral orders and landscapes are interlinked then a retrospective historical moral geography is possible, which becomes especially evident in so-called transitions from one socio-economic formation to another (Alumäe, et al., 2003; Cosgrove, 1998; Palang, et al., 2006; Sauer, 1925).

A further aspect to moral geography is more spatial: whether and how distance influences in what manner people are treated. The paradox

is that usually the people we love most are also geographically closer to us, whilst leaning on Enlightenment philosophy we should be impartial (Smith, 2000). Even the so-called first law of geography says that everything is connected; only close-by things are more connected. Sometimes there is another sort of distance at play: a mental distance. In humanistic, phenomenological, and perceptual-behavioural geography a subjective distance (in terms of time or money) can matter more than the “real” one (e.g. kilometres). For example, dear people that are mentally close to us can be far away and *vice versa*.

In the following article I would like to explore these moral categories of “appropriateness to a place” and “likeness of geographically close people” in Kohtla-Järve, Estonia. But first some remarks about Estonian life stories in general.

Biased Estonian life stories

Estonia, as one of the former republics of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), suffered under the totalitarian regime and as such “official” historical documents of that period are biased. This bias can at least in some places be counterweighed by nowadays biographic research. “The coming of the “biographical turn” to the post-communist countries [see also Humphrey, et al., 2003; Passerini, 1992], including Estonia, coincided as a rule with the disintegration of the Soviet Union” (Hinrikus & Kõresaar, 2004, p. 21). The first ever life story written in Estonian was recorded by a forward-looking peasant in 1880 who was conscious of himself as a subject of history. Calls for sending in life stories emerged in February 1988 and were published in newspapers in 1989. Still, in 1997 troubled questions surfaced concerning a writer’s future destiny if and when the “Russians” should ever come back. The first calls for life stories in Russian appeared in 2003 (Hinrikus & Kõresaar, 2004). The heyday of sending in life stories may be over, but research continues (Aarelaid-Tart, 2006; Hinrikus, 2000, 2003; Hinrikus, et al., 2006; Kirss, et al., 2004; and Kõresaar, 2004, to name a few).

But the detail to be kept in mind is that life stories depend on telling time. At first the “voice” (Roberts, 2002; see also Bunkse, 2004; Buttmer, 1993; and Gould & Pitts, 2002) was given to the “betrayed generation” of the 1920s (the 1920s and 1930s are generally perceived as the Estonian “golden era”—first independence and childhood memories) and everybody wrote about how they hated socialism. This was the time of rehabilitation, especially for those who had come back from deportations into Siberia and could not publicly tell about it like the “war heroes”. Alternative histories thus “gave the history back to the nation” or “erased history’s white patches” (Hinrikus & Kõresaar, 2004). Later, moods for nostalgia also set in.

Another question is to whom the story is told (written) and for what purpose (Roberts, 2002). The life story reflects the life retrospective experience put down in not so many words, and if s/he reevaluates his/her life, then the story has to be different, providing invaluable research material (see also Alumäe, et al., 2003). We cannot expect that a few life stories of well-known people from Soviet times (with omissions, earlier endings, intentional lying, and distorted facts) could be similar to those of the society that has the freedom of speech.

Narrations are passed on in language that sets its own limits, also for interpretation. Life stories concerning totalitarian regimes are full of the passive voice: “our lands were taken away” (MK: L 2002¹), etc. Another particularity of the Estonian language is that it lacks a future tense.

What is common to life stories of today in Estonia is a sort of moral irresponsibility, e.g. “I’m a child of my era and got caught in the cogwheels of history” (Tšudesnova, 2000, p. 159). People often felt like chess pieces in a big game, incapable of determining their own fate. Yet inner feelings (understandings, beliefs, principles) about life, the universe, and everything still exist even under totalitarian regimes and find a way through to moral concerns in everyday practices.

Whenever using life stories as research material, the question of truthfulness and validity always arises. Two sources of faults are generally acknowledged (Roberts, 2002): intentional lying and the working

¹ Materials at the Chair of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu, are referred to hereinafter as MK, followed by the ID of the text and the year it was written.

mechanisms of the human brain. The latter is usually overcome by claims that researchers do not look for “objective truth” (many of the researchers even maintain that this is impossible) but rather for how people perceive what happened and how—the (cultural) politics of memory.

The point of departure in this paper is the realistic approach, that there is some objective knowledge of reality, there is one physical place—Kohtla-Järve—with different mental and social spheres, not forgetting the interlinked *etic* and *emic* positions (Apo, 2003; compare Lefebvre, 1991).

For a better understanding of moral issues in Kohtla-Järve I shall start with a brief overview of Kohtla-Järve explaining what socio-cultural, economic, and ecological consequences the political turnovers had in the turmoil of the twentieth century.

Kohtla-Järve—Estonian “Siberia”

The main force driving development in Northeastern Estonia has been oil shale, which has brought both glory and misery to the region. The main Estonian natural resource, oil shale, its early industrial mining since 1916, and the chemical industry has benefited the myth of progress since World War I, e.g. by timely electrification. The fact that many rural villagers lost their land to rapid industrialisation is not so acknowledged. Following the devastation of World War II, small hamlets (like Kohtla and Järve) and workers’ villages were joined together in 1946 under Soviet rule to found the town of Kohtla-Järve, just 60 km west of the Russian border. Exaggerated industrial development brought an immense migration wave, especially from the East (4/5 of the population of Kohtla-Järve is Russian-speaking), resulting in massive urbanisation. Kohtla-Järve was the embodiment of a true prosperous socialist town with up-to-date planning according to the standards of that time (compare Olwig, 2005b). The previous rural pattern was wiped away.

Alongside the historical formation and complex migration situation, the urban fabric is also multi-part: the town consists of six parts,

some of them situated as far as 30 km from each other (figure 1). Some of the parts of town are older, some newer and more mono-functional, thus causing some ethnic segregation leading to further compartmentalisation.

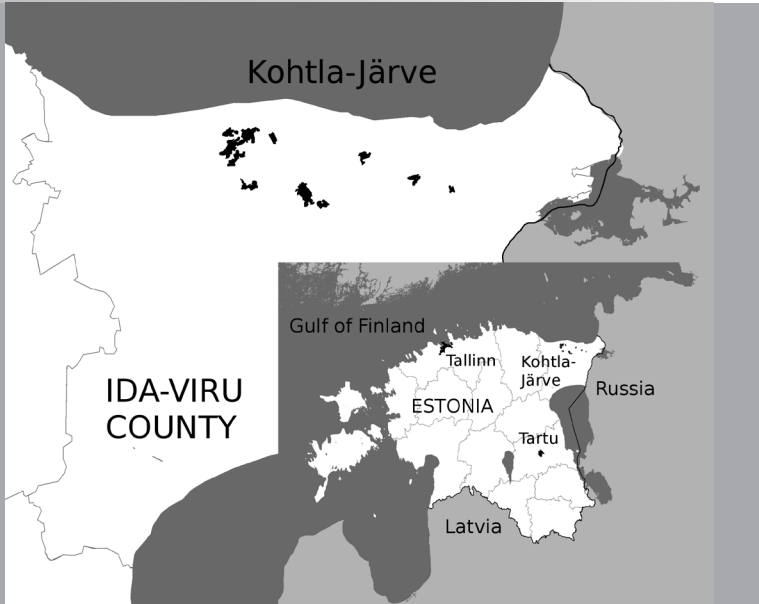


Figure 1. The situation of Kohtla-Järve and its town-parts (map: Anu Printsman).

The embellished industrial prosperity crashed along with the collapse of the USSR. The over-production of Kohtla-Järve's mines and industry were cut back and many people lost their jobs. After the fall of the totalitarian regime, many problems were not kept silenced any more. In the 1950s Kohtla-Järve was known among Estonians as the Estonian "Siberia" (Tšudesnova, 2000), because many people who returned from Siberia were forced to settle there. Kohtla-Järve obtained a negative image based on issues of economic and ecological viability, ethnic tensions, social welfare (15.000 of the less than 50.000 inhabitants are retired, and the unemployment rate in Ida-Viru county was almost 18% in 2004 (Statistics Estonia, 2005)), and security, which the town struggles to face.

Kohtla-Järve is a moral minefield: how have individuals who lived in Kohtla-Järve before World War II (autochthonous rights) and immigrants from the rest of Estonia (similar language) and the USSR (“typical lines of genesis” of Chicago’s sociologist school in Roberts, 2002) adapted to the ever-changing circumstances and places, or how have they appropriated places to become suitable for their needs? Has it had any effect on their relationships to their loved ones? How do the former land owners feel if their land was lost and a town was built on valuable agricultural land (figure 2), and now the houses are demolished as immigrants cannot afford the communal taxes? How do the “immigrants” cope with the idea that the nice town they helped to build on an empty land is now being torn down? Should “ash hills” and residual mining heaps be looked upon with disgust or praise (De Grave, et al., 2006)? What kind of aftermath do these different moral standpoints have for township?



Figure 2. Former agricultural landscape of villages of Kohtla and Järve is now overgrown into industrial landscape (photo: Anu Printsman, 7 September 2004).

Expressions of morality in Kohtla-Järve’s life stories

Moral judgements lie behind all our actions, but from the geographical point of view we will here scrutinize the attitudes towards general upkeep of the town, place names, and differences in social groups.

The town setting is the public arena for everyday practices where everybody carries on as they used to, but as “different patterns of

thinking arise from different [background] social realms and practices” (Häkli & Kaplan, 2001, p. 108), discrepancies in behaviour were noted and cultures clashed.

After the wars, overall morality was under pressure and, as one of the narrators has written: “Wisdom was learned from the immigrants: “rip wherever you can”. People knew how do adapt. Estonia grew stranger. /-/ More and more often two cultures collided, or two lacks of culture, to be more exact, so that sparks flew. One thought that this is our country now, the other, that this is our homeland” (MK: T 2002). Definitely not all the bad things came in with immigrants; the writer of the passage is an immigrant to Kohtla-Järve herself. What matters is that the “Estonians” perceived the “Russians” as opportunistic. Surely, there were also Estonians who made use of opportunities, but somehow the differences within a nation are more silenced. Adaptation is seen here in a negative light, as the new socialist order was seen as something unjust, especially regarding the nationalisation of private property; the town alienated its Estonian inhabitants.

Although at that time general dislikes could only be discussed in the family circle or with trusted friends, not publicly, still minor elements in the town’s maintenance as expressions of world view are remembered. The most obvious and often-revealed tiny detail was that “Russians” scattered sunflower seed shells wherever they went (MK: T 2002). Estonians just do not have that kind of habit and as such it violated their sense of purity and cleanness of the surrounding environment. Another detail worthy of mention were flowerpots on windowsills, mockingly called flowerbeds. To me they seem a quite European phenomenon and not so ugly altogether.

The inhabitants of the former Järve village were allowed to build new houses on the edge of their former pasture lands; the street was named Punane (red) which is ironically the flag colour of the force that drove them out of their centuries-old homes. Additionally, Punane Street was quite green as villagers formed new gardens and kept animals while waiting for a “white ship” (MK: L 2002).

In the 1970s, when many people believe the decline of the town started (Jaago, 2003), a new factory producing nitrogen fertilizers was built, bringing raw materials from the East, workers from the East, and

sending its production back to the East. The immense immigrant wave changed the upkeep to nonexistent. This was the period when many of the small houses were torn down and multi-storied houses built to replace them, also in Punane Street (MK: L 2002). “And all of these, the first wave of Russians who came, they all planted currants and apple trees, everything was very nice, neat, and green in Punane Street, but then the first wave started to build those stone houses, they moved to comfort apartments, then already the drunkards came there and everything grew into grass. [It was] the 1970s” (MK: L 2002).

The perceptual decline has continued to this day. “The former Sotslinn [*sotsgorod*—socialist town; since Estonian independence the official name of that part of town is again Järve] and other new districts leave a rather disconsolate and neglected impression” (MK: L3 2003). In the 1990s “more and more bars on apartment windows, reinforced double doors, combination locks, and what have you” appeared (KM EKLA f. 350: 405 (1997)²). “The stairs are always possessed by faints, dog shit, junkies, and drunks. Some flats are occupied by “businessmen”, some by normal people” (MK: T2 2002; see Jaago, et al., 2008). Characteristics of the 1990s and 2000s are the traces of “not having enough money to colour the entire house” (or as the Estonians call it, the Potjomkin village, i.e. everything is done to make an impression, but not to the full extent, just the front side of the buildings) are still visible in downtown Kohtla-Järve. What has changed since the 1990s is that the town has gained enough finances to tear down those houses whose inhabitants could not pay the communal taxes and which stood in ruins and were used by the homeless, drunkards, and drug addicts (figure 3).

² Collection “Estonian Life Histories” (“Eesti elulood”) by Estonian Literary Museum (Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum—KM) and Society “Estonian Life Histories” (Eesti Elulood), referred to hereinafter as EKLA (Eesti Kultuurilooline Arhiiv—the Estonian Cultural History Archives) and the number of the fund and story.



Figure 3. The demolition of a 5-story house built approximately in the 1970s on 6th of July 2005 on the corner of Vahtra (maple; formerly Varese—not crow but a historical political figure) and Olevi (character from the national epos; formerly Comsomol) Street. Photo: Anu Printsman).

Still, the situation is different in different parts of town. Mono-functional parts of town that accommodated mainly workmen have suffered more severely, one of them being Sompa. Its local acronym is *Самое Опасное Место После Америки*, meaning in Russian: The Most Dangerous Place after America. Evaluations can be easily read into local micro-toponyms like the Siidisuka (silk stocking) district, where directors and upper clerks lived before World War II, but where now nothing remains of its former glory. An old lady from Punane Street always wrote “Järve” in the headings of her letters, never Kohtla-Järve or anything else. Her granddaughter often used the name Grimetown, but never Järve (MK: Letters S1 1957-1964; see Jaago, et al., 2008).

The renaming of towns, parts of towns, or streets has been popular after each socio-economic formation change all over Eastern Europe. But because Kohtla-Järve was founded under Soviet rule, all of the original “Estonian” street names had to be invented in the 1990s (despite the fact that there were also some fairly nationalistic names, as well). Language is definitely a means to get involved in a place, but some of the immigrants from the USSR did not even bother to learn the Latin alphabet—everything in the towns was doubled into Russian and they knew the line numbers of the busses that took them to the berry-picking forests after a certain number of kilometres on the road. In addition, very many Estonian names are hardly pronounceable in Russian.

The Estonian secondary school built on Katse Street was literally an experiment: the land beneath it is mined empty and the school was a test of whether a building built in such a place would collapse or not. At the end of the 1940s the school was meant for both Estonians and Russians, who often had fights, and theft was a problem. Estonian fathers came to meet their children after school because mothers were too afraid. As expected, Estonian-speaking storytellers remember conflicts with Russian children in their childhoods (see Jaago, et al., 2008; compare Häkli & Kaplan, 2001). Others claim: “There were no clashes on an ethnic basis. Russians were preferred, mostly for political reasons. Today there is almost no reluctance and the Russians are more [reluctant to the Estonian power]” (MK: J 2003). “Soon after World War II no distinctions between social classes were made, although children of miners had a little bit better clothes” (MK: L 2002).

Personal viewpoint

To clarify the relation between the researcher and her subjects, as demanded by Apo (2003): the author comes from Kohtla-Järve, her parents moved there in 1958 and 1968. Thus, I have lived in Kohtla-Järve since my birth, almost 20 years before I moved to university. I still visit my parents to this day, being thus “over-informed” concerning some aspects of local life. The 1970s and 1980s were my childhood

years and they always remain golden, although the snow was so black from oil shale ash that I could not eat it. I do remember the fights between Estonian and Russian boys during school parties. The feeling of whether I should feel ashamed of my origin is familiar to me; the first years in university people were amazed that I came from Kohtla-Järve and could speak such perfect Estonian and that I had not been robbed or murdered. Perhaps I have got used to this kind of amazement, but it seems to me that Kohtla-Järve is not so alien to Estonians as it was a decade ago.

Discussion

The topics to discuss here are infinite; I will try to sketch out some major problems.

First, the notion of “typical lines of genesis”—sometimes conflicts appear even within one person (see Jaago, 2004). The moral border between “us” and “them” is not always easy to draw (see Gustafson, 2001) and insiders can be turned into outsiders and *vice versa* during the time—a place becomes space, or *tabula rasa* is filled with meanings (compare to Olwig, 2005a). The existential insider (Relph, 1986) knows micro-toponyms and place metaphors by which space was turned into place, the subject becomes part of the place and *vice versa*, thus causing time and space to collapse in their stories. Usually good times are followed by unpleasant times and so on—a sense of teleology—this is the telling scheme (Cronon, 1999) that applies not only for the twentieth century.

The multitude of “us” and “them” in a rapidly changing environment in Kohtla-Järve has created two amazing abilities to adapt to ever-changing circumstances: (1) the notions of “us” and “them” change according to the telling situation; and (2) the people of Kohtla-Järve can change their insideness rate (Relph, 1986) according to circumstances (McHugh & Mings, 1996) and see the town with the eyes of strangers but still love it. The social problems of today have perhaps joined people even more, but the life stories do not touch upon that

yet (Hinrikus, et al., 2006; Kirss, et al., 2004), although the historical roots of the problems have become more acknowledged.

Second, we should look at who are the narrators or storytellers. The trend in social sciences and in “new cultural geography” is to concentrate on common people, not the elite, and on everyday practices that actually change the landscape (under the influence of dominant power, of course) (Bergmann & Sager, 2008; Birdsall, 1996; Karpiak & Baril, 2008; Setten, 2001; Syse, 2001). Still, the writers tend to be people with more “social nerve” and often of the female gender (more *emic* information). If one looks at narration rules (Cronon, 1999) as predetermined universally by genes and at language as a cultural expression (Bourassa, 1991), then people who share their life stories make individual choices, giving the “right answer”. This is the question of truthfulness of representation.

The narratives are important for adaptation and for remembering who we are and where we came from, in other words, for identity building (Cronon, 1999). The issue of morality seems to be of vital importance of (place) identity (Häkli, 2001), as it helps to orientate oneself in space and time (see Jones, 1991, 1993).

Third, the rates of national/ethnic clashes belong to the realm of distinguishing private and public information that has changed from the totalitarian regime to today, also depending on to whom the story is told and on the researcher’s ethic (Kõresaar, 2004). Estonians do not differentiate immigrants; “Russians” themselves make a big difference. The more proper name to some of the immigrants could be “Soviets” (“rootless people”, MK: L 2002) who were swept from their feet when Estonia became independent again.

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Concluding remarks

Totalitarian life stories are full of rules of behaviour, how to stay out of trouble. Moral thresholds in the urbanscape of Kohtla-Järve have shifted in space as well as in time, dependent on socio-economic formations, although tough to delimit. Everyday moral categories and

practices have a certain inertia (see also Häkli & Kaplan, 2001), but as Jaago (2003) has shown, in complex political situations humanity matters more than world views.

Having moral geography notions of “appropriateness to a place” and “geographic nearness” as background concepts in mind while exploring the general upkeep of the town, place names, and differences in social groups, we discover the interlinkedness of these entities to a value system guiding all of the activities. “Appropriateness to a place” has shifted together with place turning into space and outsiders into insiders (Relph, 1986) and *vice versa*. The “geographic nearness” needs some time to achieve a finely tuned balance between geographical and mental social space (Lefebvre, 1991). Moral geography has proven to come in handy for analysing Estonian “Siberia”, or Kohtla-Järve, coming to the conclusion that the division between “us” and “them” (Davidson, et al., 2005) is one of the most underlying of them all (the “human geodiversity” remains (Häkli, 2003)), through which “injustice” is expressed, for example, in how landscapes are understood or read (Widgren, 2004).

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Authors

Akerberga Ilze

Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology,
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47405, USA
iakerber@indiana.edu

Ankrava Arta

Department of Sociology,
University of Minnesota,
1074 Social Sciences
267 19th Ave S
Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA
ankra004@umn.edu

Bela Baiba

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology,
University of Latvia,
Akademijas laukums 1-509
Riga, Latvia, LV-1940
baiba.bela-krumina@lu.lv

Fingerroos Outi

University of Jyväskylä,
PO Box 35 (H), FI -40014, Finland
outfin@campus.jyu.fi

Gale Carpenter Inta

Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology,
Indiana University,
Bloomington, Indiana 47405, USA
carpente@indiana.edu

Garda Rozenberga Ieva

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology,
University of Latvia,
Akademijas laukums 1-509
Riga, Latvia, LV-1940
ieva.garda@gmail.com

Haanpää Riina

University of Turku,
Henrikinkatu, 20014 Finland
riihaa@utu.fi

Hinkle Maija

American Latvian Association Oral History project, USA
117 Northview Road, Ithaca
NY 14850, USA
majahinkle@verizon.net

Hinrikus Rutt

Estonian Literary Museum
Vanemuise 42 51003 Tartu, Estonia
rutt@kirmus.ee

Jaago Tiiu

Faculty of Philosophy,
Institute of Culture Studies and Arts,
University of Tartu
Ülikooli 18, 50090 Tartu, Estonia
tiiu.jaago@ut.ee

Jürgenson Aivar

Tallinn University
Rütli 6, 10130
Tallinn, Estonia
aivar20@mail.ee

Korb Anu

Estonian Folklore Archives
51003 Vanemuise 42, Tartu, Estonia
korb@folklore.ee

Kurkowska-Budzan Marta

Institute of History,
Jagiellonian University
Ul. Golebia 13
31-007 Krakow, Poland
mart_ka@yahoo.com

Lulle Aija

Department of Human geography,
Faculty of Geography and Earth Sciences;
Faculty of Humanities,
University of Latvia,

Visvalza 4^a, Riga, Latvia, LV-1050
aija.lulle@lu.lv

Niang Amy

School of Social and Political Studies,
University of Edinburgh,
2/1 Upper Gilmore Terrace EH3 9NN
Edinburgh, Scotland
A.Niang@sms.ed.ac.uk

Pranka Maruta

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology,
University of Latvia,
Riga, Latvia, LV-1940
pranka@latnet.lv

Printsmann Anu

Centre for Landscape and Culture,
Estonian Institute of Humanities,
Tallinn University,
Uus-Sadama 5, 10120 Tallinn, Estonia
anu.printsmann@tlu.ee

Supulis Edmunds

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology,
University of Latvia,
Akademijas laukums 1-509
Riga, Latvia, LV-1940
edmunds@lza.lv

Zirnite Mara

Institute of Philosophy and Sociology,
University of Latvia,
Akademijas laukums 1-509
Riga, Latvia, LV-1940
mara.zirnite@gmail.com

National Oral History Archive at the Institute of Philosophy and
Sociology, University of Latvia

Latvian Oral History researchers association Dzivesstasts (*Life Story*)

Akademijas lauk. 1. Rīga, LV 1940, Latvia