

SITUATING NARRATIVES OF MIGRATION AND DIASPORA: AN INTRODUCTION

Leena Kurvet-Käosaar, Triinu Ojamaa, and Aija Sakova

Estonian Literary Museum

Abstract. The idea of the special issue “Narrating Migration and Diaspora” grew out of the current situation in the world: the word ‘migration’ often accompanied by the word ‘crises’, reaches us every day via various media channels. During the last decades the world has been increasingly defined by mobility and transnationality. To interpret and analyze these processes, international scholars from different fields focus on the aspects such as sources and methods of migration and diaspora research, history of migration and remigration, memory processes, social and cultural adoption in host countries, representation of migration and diasporic life in literature as well as the rise of xenophobic populism. The introductory article provides an outline of some central perspectives and current directions of the development of research on migration and mobility, also touching upon the ways in which theoretical argumentation in the field resonates with political initiatives of the highest international level.

Keywords: mobility, transnationality, migration waves, migration crisis, (traveling) memory

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1. Introduction

Inspired by the current situation in the world, the special issue “Narrating Migration and Diaspora” focuses on questions of belonging and non-belonging in the conditions of both forced and voluntary mobility in the context of the second half of the 20th and the 21st centuries. Taking place at a historical moment in the world when the Global Compact of Migration sparked heated debates and was received in highly contested and diverging manner by different countries of the world, the conference made visible the adherence of key principles and underlying paradigms of migration and diaspora studies to the guiding principles of the

Compact.¹ The current article provides an outline of some central perspectives and current directions of the development of research on migration and mobility, also touching upon the ways in which theoretical argumentation in the field resonates with political initiatives of the highest international level. In turn, the urgency of ethical imperatives of the theoretical conceptualizations and world-scale political initiatives is convincingly illustrated in the articles by Stroińska and Cecchetto, and Saresma, highlighting the complex realities of lived experience of migrants. As one focus of the special issue concerns outmigration from the Baltic countries in the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, an overview of the causes and characteristic features of different migration waves is included in the introduction to provide historical background to questions and issues discussed in the articles from specific angles. These include migration trajectories, mobile self-emplacements and processes of remembering (Garda-Rozenberga, Kurvet-Käosaar), and adaptation difficulties and problems caused by cultural differences (Ojamaa, Lāms, and Dimiņš).

2. Some implications of mobility

The contemporary world is increasingly defined by mobility. From large-scale processes of both forced and voluntary migration and pursuing continuously mobile life styles to the quality of movement that is increasingly common to cultural and social practices and memorial processes, mobility has to an important extent redefined and keeps redefining and reshaping dominating modes of affiliation in the contemporary world. Not only does mobility characterize the life style of an increasing number of people in the contemporary world but it frequently also emerges as a desirable mode of contemporary life and an important requirement of professional engagements, including academic work. Rather than solid identification with spatially and linguistically embedded ethnic or national entities, more fluid and volatile transnational affiliation trajectories and identification frameworks that remodel premises of identity for example, by “blurr[ing] and even dissolv[ing] of territorial and spatial coordinates” (Huysssein 1994:7) and “unhinging citizenship from nationality, or language from territory (Karpinski 2013:43) are becoming more common.

As Marie-Aude Baronian, Stephan Besser and Yolande Jansen (2007:9) remind us, “the experiences of migration and dwelling-in-displacement [that] impinge upon the lives of an ever-increasing number of people worldwide, [may proceed] with business class comfort or, more often, unrelenting violence”. It is important to point out that the nature of migration experience cannot be exclusively deducted from its voluntary or non-voluntary nature and that, furthermore, definitive distinctions between forced and voluntary forms of mobility are not possible

¹ The debates proceeded to the Intergovernmental Conference that took place on December 10, 2018 in Marrakech with the goal of adapting the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The compact was signed by the representatives of 164 countries.

(Marschall 2018:1–2, Van Hear 2010:36). It is, nevertheless, essential to retain an awareness of the flexible and fluid identification frameworks often hailed as emblematic of the contemporary world at large as a privilege that is premised upon citizenship rights, access to economic and educational frameworks, and affinities in socio-cultural contexts. These rights and affinities cannot be extended to the current migration crises involving millions of people of different nationalities and ethnic backgrounds forced to leave their homelands. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the current estimated number of forcibly displaced people in the world is 68.5 million, including nearly 25.4 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18 (UNHCR 2018). The contemporary world is facing an unprecedented displacement crisis. During the second decade of the 2000s, millions of immigrants from Middle Eastern and African countries have made their way to the European Union either escaping violent military conflicts in their countries or seeking better economic prospects. This is the most numerous migration flow since World War II; societal problems connected with the current migration crisis and the stories of the individual refugees have been widely reflected in the media, documentaries as well as fiction.

International response to the extensive increase of mobility and migration in the world, including current political debates concerning the UN Global Compact for Migration that seeks to “cover all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner” (Compact 2018) is directly related to the way we perceive the world in terms of identity and globalization. The idea of the Compact and the planned scope of its implementation testifies to the viability of the idea of global citizenship, as membership of the wider community of all humanity, according to the definition provided by Nigel Dower and John Williams (2002:1) involving “significant identity, loyalty or commitment beyond the nation state” (See also Cohen 2010:73). Yet an inquiry concerning today’s answers to the question that was formulated by Arif Dirlik in his *Global Modernity* (2006) more than a decade ago, merits a critical reconsideration also with regard to questions of mobility, migration and diasporas: “Is the world unifying”, Dirlik asked, “creating a common organizational structure and a new culture to bolster it, or is it fragmenting into units of various kinds and sizes that are at odds with one another and themselves fractured in many ways internally” (Dirlik 2006:1). A need for ‘new imagined communities’, including those formed through various artistic practices is articulated by many scholars working on questions on mobility, migration and diasporas; at the same time, it is considered equally important to attend to “the continuing importance of borders: the points of articulation ... where differences meet, hybridize, or refuse to engage” (Craps et al. 184–185).

3. Memory on the move

Current discourses of globalization centrally concern and are shaped by questions of memory. In turn, due to the increasing focus on different aspects of

globalization and mobility in memory studies, the nature and modes to operation of memory have undergone a major conceptual shift to the extent that “it has become impossible to understand the trajectories of memory outside a global frame of reference” (Assmann and Conrad 2010:2). As several memory scholars have pointed out, memory is no longer viewed as being attached to specific places, elaborated via specific sites or viewed as belonging to specific (national) communities but rather “travel along and across the migratory paths of world citizens” (Bond et al 2016:1). In turn, this has brought along a shift in the perception of memory that is no longer viewed “as a stable space of identity but as a process of displacement itself,” as something “that is always in flux and notoriously unreliable” (Baronian et al. 2007:12). “Should we not, given our mobility, begin to ask different questions of memory, ones that do not attend only to the content of memory, but to the travels that have invoked it?” asks Julia Creet (2011:6) in the foreword to the volume *Memory and Migration* and continues: “What if, instead, we studied the quality of movement that shapes memory, [showing] that the manner in which memory travels is a quality of memory itself, not a flaw, [---] not a shift in category, but constitutional, of memory, a constant constantly on the move, archiving itself rhizomatically”.

The current focus of the mobility of memory underlines the outdatedness of earlier models of the study of cultural memory, shaped by Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de memoire* (the sites of memory) (1989) as well as Maurice Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory (1992) and Jan Assmann’s paradigm of cultural memory (see, e.g. Assmann 2008:109–88) that is viewed as limiting the study of cultural memory to what can be referred to as national remembrance within the boundaries of the nation state. Binding memory, ethnicity, territory, and the nation-state together, Nora’s framework of *lieu de memoire* has been instrumental in making the notion of cultural memory synonymous with national remembrance or, at best, with a perception of cultures “constructed upon the assumption of an isomorphy between territory, social formation, mentalities” (Erl 2011b:7).

Transculturality, the new leading paradigm of memory studies, is concerned with cultural phenomena that reach across as well as beyond cultures, focusing on questions of mobility and migration, mediation of memory in contemporary social media as well as the travel of theories of memory (see, e.g. Assman and Conrad 2010, Bond et al 2016, Erl 2011b, Radstone 2011, Rothberg 2009, Törnquist-Plewa and Andersen 2017). Such focus, however, does not mean that national dimensions of memory processes have shifted entirely out of focus; rather, they are now analyzed within a different frame of reference that places emphasis on “the ways in which diverse media and forms of memory may circulate between and beyond the borders of the nation state” (Bond et al 2016:5, see also Bond and Rapson 2014, De Cesari and Rigney 2014, Levy and Sznajder 2005, Müller 2010:25–37, Rothberg 2009). Research on memory on a global or other kind of supranational (e.g. European) level has highlighted the need to delineate “a framework of wider shared morality, a way of identifying with ‘distant others’” (Sundholm 2011:1), a recognition of the entangled nature of histories and

memories that “require shared and potentially conflicting efforts at historical and (moral) reconstruction” (Müller: 2010:30) as well as the possibility of “recognizing of small-scale trajectories and memory practices beyond the framework of the nation“ (Sundholm 2011:1). From the perspective of diaspora studies, Anita Janassary (2015:155) has argued that the diasporic individual, who is frequently neglected in “diaspora concepts which put emphasis on territorialities” forms and produces a transnational social space, sometimes also referred to “diaspora space” (Brah 1996:181), “diasporic space” (Bruneau 2010:37) or “third space” (Bhabha 1994:55–56 quoted in Janassary 2015:155). Inhabiting such social spaces, the diasporic individuals “negotiate and translate values, ideas, practices which bear meanings inherited from their communities of origin and settlement” (ibid.). According to Janassary (ibid.), in peace building initiatives, the members of the communities belonging to such social spaces have an outstanding capacity to “function as bridge builders between ‘the local’ and the ‘international’”.

Though the focus on movement, transnationality and transculturality is largely based on the demands of the current globalizing age, such vantage point can be productively engaged also from a historical perspective. Astrid Erll who has convincingly argued for the need on the focus on traveling memory in cultural memory studies has pointed out that “current discourses of globalization [---] tend to overlook [---] what a decidedly historical perspective on memory will quickly bring to light is that transcultural remembering has a long genealogy” (Erll 2011a:4). As she argues, the “transcultural” [---] is therefore [also] not only a category for studying memory in our current globalizing age, but a perspective [---] on memory that can in principle be chosen with respect to all historical periods and with a view to both the synchronic circulation of representations [---] as well as to the diachronic dimension of memory (ibid.: 5).

Yet the shifting emphasis from the ‘roots of memory’ to ‘the routes of memory’ (Erll 2011b:11) has also posed a range of new questions about the located nature of diverse processes, acts and events of memory and forgetting (Radstone 2011:114). Emphasizing that migration literally ‘takes place’, Tabea Linhard and Timothy H. Parsons (2019:3–4) argue for the need to explore how “movements of people across physical, political, internal, and cultural boundaries shape identities that are inexorably linked to the geographical space that individuals on the move cross, inhabit, and exit”. Barbara Tönquist-Pleva, Tea Sindbæk Andersen and Astrid Erll (2017:3) underline the importance ‘localizing reception’ of ‘the deterritorialized transmission’ of transcultural memory as a key factor behind its very existence. In theories of trauma that can be viewed as occupying a central position in the transnational memory studies, the problematic of locatedness, including the (in)compatibility of universalizing claims of trauma theory and specific cultural repertoires and dynamics of outspokenness continue to play an important role. Asserting that “contemporary cultural theory has disrupted any straightforward association between location and place” Susannah Radstone (2012:353) goes on to argue that there nonetheless remain, in the „intersecting fields of location studies and memory/trauma studies ... issues that render these

questions particularly pressing”, demonstrating that in certain cases “specificities of located identities do continue to matter at the levels of political, academic and cultural commitment, study, and activity”. In her afterword to a special issue of *Travesia: Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* dedicated to contemporary landscapes of cultural memory in Latin America, Radstone (ibid.) problematizes the universality of the paradigm of deterritorialized memory, drawing attention to cases of “deep engagement *with* what might have been called, in less reconstructed times and terms, their authors’ homes and homelands”. In a similar vein, Florian Kläger and Klaus Stierstorfer (2015:1) have convincingly argued that despite the discernible presence of the conceptual frameworks and paradigms of globalization and deterritorialization in diaspora studies, “diasporic meaning of home and diasporic constructions of belonging” continue to resonate in the field in dynamic and complex ways.

4. World War II migration wave

Migration processes concerning the Baltic countries, tackled from various critical perspectives and thematic foci, receive a fair amount of critical attention in the current special issue. The following two sections provide background information on migration processes that have been connected to the Baltic region and have taken place in Europe since World War II.

World War II pushed to move human masses the size of which was measurable in hundreds of thousands of individuals. In the Baltic countries the war also resulted in the destruction of independence. In the 1940s three successive occupation regimes followed: the Soviet Union in 1940–1941, Nazi Germany in 1941–1944, and the Soviet Union again from 1944. During the first occupation, rapid sovietization began: banks, industrial enterprises, and larger private homes were nationalized. Goods disappeared from shop shelves and the standard of living fell precipitously. Several voluntary organizations, e.g. Girl Guides and YMCA were disbanded; the press, radio, literature and arts were heavily censored. The former civil society was destroyed. In June 1941, mass deportations were carried out by the Soviet authorities in all three Baltic States that included 42,900 people from all Baltic States of whom less than 40% survived (Davoliūtė and Balkelis 2018:6–7, Mertelsmann and Rahi-Tamm 2009:309).²

In summer and autumn 1941 the German troops entered Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia which gave hope for relief from Soviet terror and restoration of statehood. German regime allowed the religious instruction to be reinstated, the national symbols to be used etc. In reality the German authorities had no intention to respect local cultures in the long term – their aim was to exploit the resources of the Baltic countries for the benefit of their war effort. Nevertheless, in the eyes of many Baltic people this regime seemed to be better than the previous one. In 1944,

² The current article does not address mass deportation to Siberia nor the Holocaust that took place on Estonian ground.

the situation changed in favor of the Red Army. Fearing a new wave of Soviet terror, the Baltic citizens were eager to escape to the West (Kasekamp 2010:124–139). The out-migration peaked in autumn 1944; the flow of the refugees that moved to the West both by sea and overland was very intensive. To emphasize the deep changes the migration caused in the Baltic countries, this flow is often referred to as the great flight, great escape or the great exodus.

It is difficult to estimate the total number of those who left during that great flight, because there is little certainty about the number who died during the journey, the number of children, the effect of the manipulation of personal identification documents etc. (Tammara et al 2010:1162). According to different sources approximately 140,000–240,000 Latvians, 75,000–80,000 Estonians, and 63,000–65,000 Lithuanians left their homelands during World War II. They moved to the West using various routes and ended up in different countries as displaced persons and asylum seekers. Due to the geopolitical situation of Lithuania, the Lithuanians mainly fled straight to Germany, but also to Austria, Denmark and Italy. Approximately 200,000 Latvians ended up in Germany and roughly 4000 in Sweden. About 25,000–28,000 Estonians arrived in Sweden, 1,010 in Denmark, 1,500 in Austria and 40,000–45,000 in Germany (Bela 2011:14, Kumer-Haukanõmm 2011:95, Kasekamp 2010:139, Saldukas 2006:52). After the end of the war there was also quite numerous onward migration from European continent to Great Britain, Australia, Canada, and the United States.

As it is known, there are many similarities in the migration history of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. In the academic literature dealing with World War II and its aftermath, some authors also have treated Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians as a unitary group (the Balts) (See e.g. Lane 2004). In the current paper we will use Estonian case as an example to give a brief review about the social background of the war migrants, the reasons which influenced their decisions to leave homelands and developing a diasporic community.

The social background of the migrants of World War II was varied; it can be characterized as a cross section of the Estonian pre-war society. Among those who migrated were men and woman as well as children of different age, rural and urban dwellers from various geographical regions of Estonia – mainly from the coastal areas as the largest part of the refugees left by sea to Sweden (Raag 2004:181). The professional composition of Estonian refugee group shows the same structure that was characteristic to the society in the period of independence. Yet according to Andres Kasekamp (2010:139) the intellectual elite was disproportionately represented: there were a larger number of writers, artists, musicians, and scientists among the migrants. Exact data about the creative intellectuals who left homeland in different periods of the war is not available. Approximately one-third of visual artists escaped into the free world (Kangilaski 2005:113). The number of musicians was about two hundred and it included composers, conductors, and various performers (Horm 1960:7). It is estimated that no more than 20 writers who had made their career before the war fled Estonia (Uibopuu 2012:101). The refugee group who arrived in Sweden also included 110

university teachers, 40 clergymen, about 500 medically trained persons, 550 engineers and qualified technicians and more than 1,000 persons who had occupied leading positions in economic life, along with numerous political leaders: members of parliament and leading figures of the political parties (Horm 1961:4–5); no data is available with regards to other destination countries.

Hundreds and thousands of people left their homes during the war for various reasons and via a variety of different means. According to Kaja Kumer-Haukanõmm (2011:109) many of them used the possibilities of leaving the country with the organized resettlement of the Baltic Germans and Estonian Swedes. Some Estonians had been recruited to Germany as university students or teachers; 10,000–30,000 Estonians were taken to Germany to work there; about 1000 Estonians were recruited to Germany as *Reichsarbeitsdienst*. In addition to that 3,500–5,000 Estonians escaped to Finland to serve in the Finnish army.

World War II migration was mainly forced migration like any other migration caused by war and violence. In academic literature, the push-factors or reasons of migration are often discussed in the terms of its forced and/or voluntary nature (See e.g. EASO November 2016). It may seem relatively easy to place those types of migration on the opposite ends of an imagined scale. However, in several cases it becomes evident that the borderline between the voluntary and forced migration is, in fact, quite vague. Some researchers (e.g. Van Hear 2005) also speak about ‘mixed migration’ which means that migrants can move for various reasons (economic, political) at the same time, or they can join to the migratory flow containing both political (forced) and economic (voluntary or less forced) migrants.

There is no doubt that being forced to act played an important role in the war-time migration processes but in addition to that, individual and organizational decisions also directed and influenced people’s choices. As for as the intellectuals or the cultural and political elite one can say that many of them decided to leave because of probable arrest and they were also afraid of ideological pressure and restrictions to free creativity under the Soviet regime. Several studies demonstrate that the decision to leave homeland could be made on personal or family level, but also organizational level. E.g. in Latvia, the Central Council (LCP) helped refugees to escape to Sweden. The criteria were based on an individual’s importance to national culture, politics or science (Baiba 2011:15). Similar principle was also valid in Estonia and this at least partly explains the relatively high number of intellectuals among the refugees. According to Kārlis Kangeris (2006:48), it is not possible to determine the degree to which the motive for each individual was fear of war or the Soviet regime and to what degree other kinds of motivations led people to leave their homeland. However, after the capitulation of Nazi Germany, the means by which the individuals had reached abroad were no longer relevant and at that stage, they all felt as refugees from communism.

In the first half of the 1940s the immigration laws were strict in the countries which committed themselves to receiving political refugees. Restrictions were eased considerably in the second half of the 1940s but the general migration policy stayed assimilative for decades and the concept of multiculturalism was not popular

at all, especially in European countries. This was the situation the refugees had to adjust to.

During the early post-war decades the refugees believed that as the Soviet regime suppressed Estonian cultural activities, only the Estonians abroad had the freedom, and therefore the obligation, to carry on and develop their culture of origin. As there was a sufficient number of educated people in various host countries they were able to form Estonian associations and launch cultural and clerical activities as soon as sufficient amount of Estonians arrived in a host country (Raag 2011:204–205). Those activities helped the refugees to maintain their ethno-cultural identity and overcome the acculturative stress in their new homelands. Karl Aun (1985:41) argues that the determination to remain Estonian also had a strong messianic element in it. By the end of the 1950s, a kind of ‘Mini-Estonia’ (Raag 2004:182) had been established in exile with all its political and cultural associations, print media, and publishing houses. More than sixty books in Estonian language were published per year (Kangro 1966:3). Altogether 270 novels, 200 collections of poems, 155 autobiographical books, 70 collections of short stories, and 50 children’s books reached Estonian readers in exile before the 1990s (Kangur et al 1991:5–6). What was the refugee literature like? In his essay a literature scholar in exile Prof. Ants Oras characterizes it as follows:

In its beginnings, it was in approximately equal proportions a literature of political struggle and a literature of elegiac or indignant reminiscences. Isolated from their new surroundings by their language and their past, these dispossessed writers at first were able to concentrate on little else than thoughts of their home country. [---] As the years passed and some modus vivendi had been established, these motives began to recede. [---] The refugee writers realized the need to [---] reassess the new situation, to explore their present environment, to achieve a new emotional and intellectual balance (Oras 1967:10).

In addition to their literary value one can regard the books published by exile writers as the excellent sources for the researchers on migration history and diasporic cultures. In 1994 the last Estonian publishing house in Sweden *Eesti Kirjanike Kooperatiiv* finished its activity; the period of exile was over.

5. The Post-Socialist migration wave

The next and ongoing wave of out-migration from the Baltic countries began at the beginning of the 1990s and peaked at the first decade of the 2000s. In 1991, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia regained independence and became the member states of the European Union in 2004. The Western world, including its large and manifold labor market was opened for new migrants from the collapsed Eastern Bloc countries. Unlike World War II migration wave, the new migrants left their homes voluntarily as free citizens of sovereign republics. Thus, the strongest push factor was not a fear of political violence as in the case of war migrants. The

emergence and rapid spread of internet era friendship-based networks has played an important role in the individuals' decisions to migrate and has also helped them choose the most suitable destination countries. Perceived cultural similarities between sending and receiving countries have also played an important role in migrants' decision making (Daukšas 2013:55).

From the beginning of the 1990s, Finland, which is close to Estonia both linguistically and geographically and which is also well known by its liberal immigration policy, has been the main destination country for Estonians. Several other economically highly developed countries like Germany, the USA, Sweden and UK can be listed among preferred destinations in the post-Soviet migration processes as well (Jürgenson et al. 2011:11).

Voluntary out-migration from the Baltic and other post-socialist countries is usually viewed as a process related to improving the standard of living (Daukšas 2013, Telve 2016) and this prospect is undoubtedly one of the strongest motivators. The opinion that money plays an important role in decision making for today's immigrants from different sending countries all over the world is widespread in media and frequently discussed in academic literature (e.g. Akhtar 2014:48–49). Inspired by rumors about fantastically high salaries and the benefits all guest workers can enjoy abroad, the notion 'convenience migrant' began to spread in Estonian media (Eesti Ekspress 2014). The term that bears negative connotations was introduced at the time when seventy years had passed from the great escape to the West in the autumn of 1944 and ten years from joining with the European Union in 2004. The notion 'convenience migrant' was born in the course of a discussion targeted at discovering effective pull factors that would intensify the return migration. However, instead of having a positive impact, the expression was considered offensive among the migrants (Siim 2018:70). One can also ask whether the current out-migration can be always regarded as voluntary as the decision to migrate can be related to elements of no choice such as, for example, high unemployment rates in villages and small towns that make it impossible for people to manage financially. In addition to looking for a better job there are many other reasons for migration: studies, improving one's professional skills, marriage, or just desire to experience the other cultures and learn the other languages. For a certain group, migration has become a life style – they feel themselves to be global citizens who are free to go and come wherever and whenever they would like to.

As Thomas Faist has argued, “[o]ver the past decades, the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism have served as prominent research lenses through which to view the aftermath of international migration and the shifting of state borders across populations” (2010:9). In the analysis of World War II immigration to the Western world, the concepts of 'diaspora' and 'diasporic culture' have been used in scientific literature. According to Cohen (2018:19), common features of diaspora include the dispersal, often traumatically, from an original homeland to two or more foreign regions, collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, and achievements, idealization of ancestral home and a collective commitment to its restoration and a strong ethnic group

consciousness. Because of the circumstances of their departure and their attitudes to homelands and culture of origin, World War II migration flow from the Baltic countries to the West suits well with the characteristics listed by Cohen. Unlike World War II wave, the migrants and cross-border commuters of the post-socialist wave are studied and understood through the concept of 'transnationalism'. Linda Basch et al. (1994:7) define transnationalism as a range of processes by which immigrants sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. They build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. On the individual level 'transnationalism' refers to a set of everyday activities and practices connected simultaneously with multiple spaces and encompassing various aspects of social interaction. Thus, research of nowadays migration processes does not revolve around the idea of linear and completed migration processes from homeland to host country that was relevant in connection with World War II migration wave. Now the focus has shifted to the processes that transcend national borders and on transnational relationships between individuals, their communication networks, and organizations (ibid.: 22).

Although diasporic and transnational migration situations are often viewed as inhabiting more differences than similarities, in her work that is based on the study of Estonian immigrants of two waves in UK, Lea Kreinin has sought to identify common traits of the life style and world view of Estonian immigrants of two waves in UK. She explains the essence of transnationalism as a set of socio-cultural, economic, and political activities which include at least two countries in their scope. These activities can be more or less frequent and intensive.

For example, cooking Estonian foods and watching Estonian films and TV-programs are definitely transnational activities, although they can occur perhaps once or twice a year in the case of one migrant, while another migrant may do the same activities many times a week. While some activities may be called 'diasporic', as transnationalism is a wider term, such diasporic activities fit perfectly into a framework of transnationalism and therefore I cannot see any need to divide them into two different groups: 'diasporic' and 'transnational' (Kreinin 2017:57).

During World War II the refugees tried to escape with the whole family if it was possible. Modern migration often starts with one (usually male) family member, whose task is to find out about opportunities abroad and set the conditions for the rest of the family so that they could follow after some time. Younger people dominate in the current wave. Older people who do not speak the local language find it too difficult to adapt to new surroundings and create new social networks there (ibid.: 51). Although the younger migrants' language skills can be insufficient, they are much eager to learn. The Russian language often serves as a bridging-language, at least among middle-aged migrants from the Baltic and some other post-socialist countries. It is not only the instrumentality of the language which plays a decisive role but also the sense that 'these people are like us', as many informants stress in cases of positive encounters (Lulle and Jurkane-Hobein 2016:10).

After the Great Escape to the West, refugee groups from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania who reached Sweden and Germany established cultural contacts right at the beginning of their temporary refugee camp period. They participated in fellow refugees' cultural events and sports competitions, they made friends, and some of them got married. These contacts were maintained after onward migration to other continents at the end of the 1940s. The *lingua franca* or bridging language of the migrants was German that was the most common second language in the Baltic region until the end of World War II. This language served first and foremost as a communication tool among the refugees; it didn't signify the speakers' sense of togetherness. There were, however, many other common traits that united the war refugees: homesickness, the feeling of being despised as aliens by local people and hope of secure life sometime in the future. It is remarkable that the migrants with different ethnic backgrounds can create personal contacts quite easily. An important reason is that migrants – no matter which wave they belong to – share similar fate and migrant identity.

6. Getting a (new) life? Introduction to the articles

The articles included in the current special issue titled “Narrating Migration and Diaspora” takes as its focus the lived experience of the migrants as it is mediated in oral and written life narratives, fictional representations or weighed *vis-à-vis* political ideologies and discourses of intolerance. In her article “Mapping Life Stories of Exiled Latvians”, Ieva Garda-Rozenberga emphasizes the high relevance of the capacity of story-telling in diaspora for establishing a united perspective of the past and supporting and strengthening group identity. As Garda-Rozenberga argues, while telling stories, the narrators also confirm their values and voice their hopes and desires. The story telling capacity has comparable traits with the peace building or bridge building capacity of diasporic individuals (Jannasary 2015:145) that is often underestimated. Garda-Rozenberga's research combines methods from oral history studies with those of digital humanities, mapping the routes of Latvians who escaped Latvia during World War II. Her work thus underlines not only the rootedness of memory but also the transforming nature of remembering. The mapping of places according to information provided in oral life-stories demonstrates significant differences in the ways in which places connected to one's identity appear. Whereas event and episodic places refer to real visited or inhabited places, projected places refer to real existing places that are known to the narrators only via the stories of their family members and can be perceived as places of longing.

The article “Latvians Down and Out in England and Ireland: Contemporary Migration Tales” by Ojārs Lāms and Dens Dimiņš, also connected to Latvian heritage is based on the work of two contemporary Latvian authors. Lāms' and Dimiņš' research that focuses on diasporic individuals who are part of the post-socialist migration wave illuminates the capacity of such individuals to act as

translators between the culture of origin and the culture of settlement. The article demonstrates the capacity of literature to act as a bridge builder, as a translator between different groups. By addressing the life and problems of *Gastarbeiter* as people of low social status in literary fiction, the authors analyzed – Laima Muktupāvela and Vilis Lācītis / William B. Forignerski – bring topical issues concerning such status to wider audiences. The two novels that are the focus of the article were originally written in Latvian but are now available also in English (Forignerski 2018, Muktupāvela 2002b) and German translations (Muktupāvela 2008) and thus can possibly engage in dialogue also with similar experiences of people of different cultural origin and places of settlement. Furthermore, the possibility of dialogue is potentially possible across different migration waves and migration reasons that can be considered in comparative perspective, possibly also providing insights into differences and similarities of the experience of different migration waves and of voluntary and forced migration. One can argue that in an ideal world the experiences articulated in the novels by Muktupāvelas and Lācītis/Forignerskis novels contribute also to the change of social attitudes both within the country of origin and the country of settlement.

The high relevance of the articulation of the experiences of diasporic individuals is addressed from yet another perspective in the article “In this social media dominated world can there be a “safe haven” for trauma survivors?” by Magda Stroińska and Vikki Cecchetto. As Stroińska and Cecchetto emphasize, in the current era of refugees and exiles where the number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide amounted to nearly 70 million in 2017 and the rise of xenophobic populism, hate speech and hate crimes is an acute worldwide issue, understanding the effect of these ideologies and phenomena on diasporic experience is crucial. The authors underline the traumatic impact of hate speech towards refugees that may be extremely difficult or altogether impossible to recover from due to its recurrent nature. Moreover, Stroińska and Cecchetto warn about the possible future crimes hate speech can lead to. Analyzing the refugee-hostile slogans from Poland and the way fear of the other is in Poland used by the government to legitimize anti-immigration policies, they see a very dangerous tendency and historic parallels with similar strategies. These include the *ad hominem* argumentation by government representatives that was used in communist Russia and Nazi Germany. According to Stroińska and Cecchetto, the dehumanizing language use has been also an important factor in the Kosovo war.

The questions of otherness and non-belonging also form the core of articles by Triinu Ojamaa and Tuija Saesma, albeit in a rather different vein. Ojamaa’s article “How to Get Involved? About the Integration Strategies of World War II Refugees” focuses on the Estonian conductor and composer Juhan Aavik who fled Estonia during World War II and became a war refugee in Sweden. Ojamaa addresses the difficulties of cultural communication and highlights the circumstances that either supported or hindered the integration of highly-skilled refugees. Aavik who was a well-known composer in Estonia tried to get into contact with his Swedish colleagues in the Royal Swedish Academy of Music and

State Broadcasting. Ojamaa's article demonstrates that Aavik's cultural integration to Swedish musical circles failed because of different cultural backgrounds and interpretation of political processes that were connected to World War II. Unlike the music career of Kābi Laretei that started already in exile and provided foundation for cosmopolitan disposition (see Kurvet-Käosaar in this volume), for Aavik, professional and ethnic identity were inseparably connected and the breakdown of professional identity strongly intensified his feeling of loss of homeland and culture of origin.

Whereas Ojamaa's article shows the difficulties of adaptation to the host country, Tuija Saresma's article "Mohsen Emadi – A Poet of Exile" focuses on non-belonging as a conscious choice. Mohsen Emadi, a poet of Iranian origin who was born and raised in Iran but due to his political views and conflicts with his father was forced to leave the country. Emadi had experienced great success in Iran when writing traditional religious poetry but when he started writing secular poetry he was banned and excluded from the circles he was previously accepted. Having understood that the way he wants to write can and will not be recognized in Iranian literary circles, Emadi chooses to write for international communities. His refusal to affiliate his work with his national poetry community is backed up by his choice to not identify himself with only one (or, in fact, with any) country. Having lived longer periods in Spain and Finland he does not want to settle down and identify himself with a concrete host country. Instead, he prefers to maintain transnational identity and to refer to himself as poet of exile. Saresma presents Emadi as a global citizen whose reasons for mobility are both of voluntary and non-voluntary nature and whose identity is not exclusively attached to his home country, native heritage or new countries of settlement. Since Emadi had experienced exclusion from different communities – the Iranian literary community, the religious circle of his father – he chooses 'autoexile' and builds a community of his own, an imagined community of transcultural poets like himself.

Leena Kurvet-Käosaar's article "'A Spatially Scattered Being': Imagining Space in Baltic Exile Life Writing" offers a discussion of the interconnectedness of the 'roots of memory' to 'routes of memory', partially arguing against the current trend in memory studies to focus only on the latter (Erl 2011:11). Analyzing the memoirs of Edmunds Valdemārs Bunkše and Kābi Laretei – a renowned humanist geographer and world-famous concert pianist – Kurvet-Käosaar makes visible the connectedness of Bunkše's and Laretei's identity to both the landscapes of their homeland and to multiple others they have experienced during their course of life. Although a certain mode of longing is traceable in their textual self-emplacement, neither Bunkše's nor Laretei's connection to Latvian and Estonian landscapes could be understood as relationship to a 'projected place' in the manner it is elaborated by Garda-Rozenberga. The landscapes that are depicted as having formational effect on Bunkše's and Laretei's identity are for them actual lived places ('event places'). As Kurvet-Käosaar demonstrates, despite the traumatic implications of the displacement of exile, mobility plays an important role in the processes of recall and identity-formation in the work of Bunkše and Laretei

where a multitude of different places are incorporated into their identity geography.

Articles in the current special issue concern different migration contexts and a range of different individual migration situations. Yet they are all brought together by a focus on the ways in which mobility – be it of voluntary or forced in nature – inevitably complicates intersubjective relations and communal identification along the lines of ethnic, professional, artistic, location-related etc. identity. The contributions to the current issue highlight the diverse and resourceful ways in which mobile individuals keep scrutinizing their lives in search of gratifying models of self-conception and modes of sociality. This also demonstrates the continuing importance of different narrative mediations of mobile life experience for the individuals involved and highlights the importance of narrative research with a focus on mediations of individual life experience in migration and diaspora studies.

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Addresses:

Leena Kurvet-Käosaar
Estonian Literary Museum
Vanemuise 42
51003 Tartu, Estonia
Phone: (+372) 53 40 67 65
E-mail: leena.kurvet-kaosaar@kirmus.ee

Triinu Ojamaa
Estonian Literary Museum
Vanemuise 42
51003 Tartu, Estonia
Phone: (+372) 55 99 02 66
E-mail: triinu.ojamaa@kirmus.ee

Aija Sakova
Estonian Literary Museum
Vanemuise 42
51003 Tartu, Estonia
Phone: (+372) 529 1159
E-mail: aija.sakova@kirmus.ee

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