

**‘A SPATIALLY SCATTERED BEING’:
IMAGINING SPACE IN BALTIC EXILE LIFE WRITING**

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Abstract. The current article focuses on two works of life writing by Baltic exiles: *Geography and the Art of Life* (2004) by Edmunds Valdemārs Bunkše and *Otsekui tõlkes. Teema variatsioonidega* [As if in translation. A theme with variations] (2005) by Kābi Laretei. In both works the construction of subjectivity relies, to an important extent, on acts of self-emplacement that proceed via an engagement with different places, landscapes and trajectories of movement that include attempts to create spaces of belonging and of being at home. Rather than being anchored in a firm referential basis, such spaces are often envisioned as imaginative textual constructions elaborated, e.g. via reflections around the concept of home or mediation of the continuous process of seeking a(n) ideal) home. In *Otsekui tõlkes*, Laretei explores the position of an exile through a scrutiny of personal and professional relationships unraveling against the backdrop of a multitude of places and trajectories of travel, as well as the role of music in finding her place in life. Bunkše’s *Geography and the Art of Life* that is both a memoir and a theoretical reflection in the field of cultural geography reflects upon ways in which spatial imagination guides the formation of (exilic) identity that is premised on the dichotomy of the home and the road in both the figurative and literal sense.

Keywords: Baltic WWII refugees, exile life writing, space and emplacement in life writing, life-mapping, bio-geo-graphy, geographic witness, transitoriness

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1. Introduction

Taking as its starting point recent interest of the field of life writing studies in the interrelationship of space and subjectivity (see, e.g. Watson 2017/2007, Kilian and Wolf 2016) and the focus on the mobility of memory in contemporary memory studies (see, e.g. Assman and Conrad 2010, Craps et al. 2017, Erll 2011, Radstone 2011) the current article focuses on the role of spatial positioning in the construction of subjectivity in the life writings of two exile Baltic authors,

Edmunds Valdemārs Bunkše and Kābi Laretei. Attesting to the relevance of places and landscapes in Baltic life writing in general, Bunkše's *Geography and the art of life* (2004) and Laretei's *Otsekui tõlkes. Teema variatsioonidega* [As if in translation. A theme with variations], (2005) that are characterized by a continuous process of seeking equilibrium between (both forced and voluntary) mobility and the state of being settled in different manner foreground the spatial dimensions of self-narration that stem from forced dislocation and exile.

2. Life writing, space and exile

In his quintessential essay “Reflections on Exile”, Edward Said defines exile as “the unhealable rift forced between a human being and his native place, between the self and its true home”. Despite having the potential of providing an invigorating ‘plurality of vision’ premised upon an alertness to different cultures contributing to ‘an awareness of simultaneous dimensions’ that Said refers to as ‘contrapuntal’, for him exile is ultimately a condition of loss and deprivation – including the loss of (being settled in) place – that can never be fully overcome or compensated for (Said 2001:173). Yet in particular in the early version of his essay on exile, published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1984, he also underlines the creative and subversive potential of exile, its’ capacity to “break barriers of thought and experience” and to “restore identity, and even life itself, to fuller more meaningful status” (ibid.: 53–54). Complex and often strenuous spatial associations stemming from geographical and physical displacement, confrontation with other cultures, feeling of homelessness and the extended hope of returning home are often listed as significant factors shaping literary and autobiographical modes of representation of exile (see Israel 2000:1–22, Neubauer 2009:398, Suleiman 1996:1–6). Exile life writing can be characterized by a focus on spatial challenges emerging as the result of an uprooting from a native and familiar environment and having to cope with movement and dislocation or, as André Aciman (1999:13) has formulated it, a state of ‘permanent transience’. Exile Latvian anthropologist Vieda Skultans (1998:56) has argued that “social and spatial dislocation demands the plotting of an individual life trajectory in a way that the illusions of permanence and predictability do not”. According to Kilian and Wolfe (2016:4), “movement decenters place, just as it decenters selves and their place-related identities”. Although the condition of exile should not be seamlessly integrated into general conceptualizations of mobility, “a dynamic of (re)creation and decreation of the self” that is premised on movement and harbors a subversive potential can also be traced in exile life writing in a variety of ways. It can range, for instance, from explorations of the “reparative potential” of engagement with landscapes capable of alleviating the sense of displacement of exile (Adams 2012:152) to the gradual abandonment of all hope of “a spatial anchoring” (Jilani 2015:60).

Capitalizing on the centrality of movement of “people, media, mnemonic forms, contents and practices” (Erlil 2011:11), contemporary memory studies have

turned their focus away from questions of place and location, dominantly due to longtime association of place and memory to frameworks of national remembrance. While acknowledging the importance of critical consideration of memory on the move, Susannah Radstone (2011:111) also emphasizes the continuing relevance of “our locatedness in histories, in place, in culture” that is instrumental in “producing the never random associative leaps that constitute the rhetorics of memory”. Relying on Stuart Hall’s understanding of the fundamental role of the sense of place in the formation of cultural identity (see Hall 1995:186), Berberich, Campell and Hudson (2012:18) list “memory, trauma, diaspora, language and history” among key forces that shape the dynamics of “the real and imagined senses of self and place” that play a significant role in the comprehension and conceptualization of the socio-cultural and nature-related contexts of the contemporary world.

In the field of life writing studies, questions of the interrelationship of space and subjectivity have been receiving more systematical critical attention only recently. As Eveline Kilian and Hope Wolf point out in the introduction of the first ever collection on life-writing and space, although

[who] we are, and how we narrate ourselves, depends on our ability ... to locate our identities within space ... life story has traditionally been thought of as a chronological movement, a narrative that unfolds over time and meaningfully connects events, thereby constructing continuity and coherence (Kilian and Wolf 2016:2).

In a similar vein doubting whether “only the temporal dimension ... gives meaning to experiences”, Pauli Tapani Karjalainen (2003:88) sums up the relevance of space in life experience by emphasizing that “human life is a topocentric reality”. Including a section on space in their 2010 edition of a comprehensive overview of life writing studies *Reading Autobiography. A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010:42) introduce the term emplacement “as the juncture [of] location and subject position [---] from which self-articulation rises”. As Smith and Watson (*ibid.*: 42–43) conceptualize it, location entails ‘geographical situatedness’ along the axes of “national, ethnic, racial, gendered, sexual, social and life cycle coordinates to which the narrators are embedded via experiential histories” and subject position refers to “the ideological stances [---] adopted by the narrator toward self and others”. Earlier considerations of the relevance of space in life writing includes the work of Russell West (1999:110) who in his study of Joseph Conrad’s Congo-diaries argues that “the spatial structure implied and indeed necessitated by this temporal structure is generally ignored by critical accounts of the genre. Relying on the work of Gaston Bachelard and Henri Lefebvre, West (*ibid.*: 110) emphasizes “the role of spatial relationships in the production and reception or interpretation of meaning in society [---] from the intimate domain of bodily dynamics through geopolitics”. In her analysis of Walter Benjamin’s *Berlin Chronicles* Griselda Pollock (2007:65) highlights the spatial or even topographical model (bio-geo-graphy) that is elaborated in Benjamin’s text that aims at “setting out the sphere of life – bios –

graphically on a map”. Pollock proposes to view Benjamin’s text as a process of life-mapping (as opposed life-writing) that “supports the creation of social and historical memory as the register of emplacement, cultural space and social worlding” (a phrase that Pollock borrows from Spivak). Such mapping practice is characterized by perceiving experience as a sequence of spatially cued events that “come to inhabit the subject by providing the spatial coordinate by which the formation can be recalled, linked and assembled into the subject-sustaining structure – memory” (ibid.: 66).¹

3. Bunkše’s and Laretei’s contexts of displacement and mobility

Käbi Laretei (b. 1922) left for Stockholm where her father Heinrich Laretei, a well-known Estonian politician and diplomat was the ambassador to Sweden a few days before the Soviet Union occupied Estonia in June 1940. Commenting on her mother’s telegram requesting Käbi to take a boat to Sweden immediately, Laretei (1989:202) writes: “I was in rebellious spirit and all my friends in Tallinn agreed that my departure was ridiculous. This was the last boat that left independent Estonia”. The Estonian embassy in Stockholm had to be handed over to the Swedish authorities and the Lareteis were lucky that Heinrich Laretei was not released to the Soviet authorities who had sentenced him to death; nevertheless, they were left without homeland, citizenship, a place to live or money. Although Käbi Laretei became a world-renowned concert pianist, she attributes the decision to pursue a career in music to necessity rather than personal choice. “I had never dreamed of becoming a concert pianist,” she writes, “now I had to become one quickly [---] driven by a need that was not organic [---] but determined by external circumstances” (Laretei 1989:228). Though Laretei lived in Sweden all her adult life, in her writing she retains a somewhat distanced relationship to the country, seldom admitting to fully feeling at home there. The cosmopolitan stance that she adopts in her work can be partially attributed to the fact that as a person without Swedish citizenship, she was rendered ineligible for the Royal Swedish Academy of Music and had to acquire her musical training with private teachers in various parts of (Western) Europe. However, though she was fluent in seven languages and emphasizes her special relation with her mother tongue, Estonian (see Laretei

¹ In the current article, the concepts of place and space are considered within a dialectic that “associate place with rootedness, security, personal significance and identity” while space is „attribute[d] qualities like openness, freedom and the uprooting of established values” (Kilian and Wolf 2016:3), aiming, however, to avoid overly rigid dichotomies that have been viewed by cultural geographers as embodying a variety of binaries, including gendered ones (see, e.g. Massey 1994:5). Landscape is understood in terms of landscape phenomenology as “a processual, material and perceptual engagement of body and world, enacted in terms of a distinctive temporality” (Wylie 2009:410). As a humanist geographer, Bunkše self-consciously explores such perspective of landscape in his work. Although comparably systematic conceptualization of landscape cannot be found in Laretei’s work, such definition generally also applies to *Otsekui tõlkes*.

2005:64), Laretei's choice to write in Swedish can be related to the possibility of making a home in that culture (Laretei 2002:173).

Edmunds Valdemārs Bunkše (b. 1935) left his hometown of Liepāja in Latvia with his family in the fall of 1941, traveling for weeks on foot through war-torn Latvia and Europe. "There was nothing but mud, wet, and fatigue," Bunkše (2004: xvi) recalls, "we were homeless refugees. Our road only led away from the warmth and security of home, toward danger, foreignness, exile". Bunkše's family found shelter in a DP camp in Lübeck and eventually settled down in the USA in 1950. Bunkše found his calling in humanist geography, a field of study seeking to "articulate the human experience of place and landscape" and adopting "participatory research methodologies and experiment[ing] with writing styles to move away from sterile scientific language" (Sharp 2009:357). Hannes Palang and Helen Sepping-Sooväli (2012:162) regard Bunkše as "one of the most colorful representatives of humanist geography who treads on the boundaries of science and art, skillfully interweaving them". As a professor humanist geography, Bunkše found his academic home at the University of Delaware. Throughout his academic career, Bunkše has emphasized his Latvian origins, embarking on a mission to educate his readers about Latvian culture, history and landscapes that sometimes acquires (self-consciously) patriotic undertones (see *ibid.*: 184–185). As one of the leitmotifs of *Geography and the Art of Life* – "you are where you fall to earth" that Bunkše (2004:16) borrows from Peter Conrad – implies, landscapes of origin define one's being in the world. Yet, the dynamic of Bunkše's relationship to Latvia and Latvian landscapes is far from simple nor does it form the singular core of his self-conception that is as importantly shaped by different landscapes he has experienced over the course of his life.

The recollections of Bunkše and Laretei of leaving their homeland briefly outlined above are elaborated in rather different mode. While Laretei with slight irony laments having to leave behind her lively social scene in Tallinn facilitated by the absence of parental guidance, Bunkše offers a gripping description of the traumatic loss of all familiar surroundings and taken-for-granted contexts of his everyday life. Yet for both, being forced to leave home and homeland mark not only the end of their childhood and youth, but a strongly felt rupture of their basis of identity that will shape their relationship to the world for the rest of their lives. Such mode of self-emplacement is highlighted in the first chapter of *Geography and the Art of Life* where Bunkše (*ibid.*: 5) formulates as one of the aims of his book a wish "to serve as a geographic witness to the Second World War, its aftermath in Europe, and the repercussions of displacement". Although Laretei does not offer a conceptual starting point to her subject position and displacement, she has chosen to represent her life experience in terms of mobility that stems from the displacement of exile and seeks to negotiate the terms of belonging in relation to a wide array of places, landscapes and travel trajectories.

4. *Geography and the art of life: feeling at home in the world*

For Bunkše (ibid.: 13), the process of construction of exilic identity is self-consciously hinged on his experience of various landscapes and their role in facilitating feeling at home in the world. Such perception of the world and of himself lead him to eventually formulate his stance toward landscapes and geographical phenomena as the basis of self-conception in terms of “geographic sensibilities – knowing how to be in a place and how to find one’s way in geographic space”. This seemingly simple concept captures for Bunkše the essence of human existence and provides support for coping with a sense of insecurity and uprootedness of exile as it is “fundamental to our ability to survive – of finding a niche or a place for safety, nourishment, and survival, as well as migrating or propagating to other places”. An understanding of human existence in terms of geographic sensibilities extends it synchronically to connect human beings to “all life – plant, insect, reptile and mammal” and, as “primeval and enduring, dormant, atavistic traits imbedded in our bodies and minds” (ibid.: 13) also diachronically.

Bunkše’s world, even as a child (a child though, who was forced to leave his homeland at an early age) is never limited to his immediate surroundings but always directed outwards toward a larger whole, forming ties between different locations in the world and diverse geographical phenomena. Bunkše (ibid.: 13) recalls as one of his favorite activities, or as he puts it, a way of dreaming about the world in the DP camp in Germany “looking at a world atlas printed on a shabby post-second world war paper,” foregrounding the immensely enriching potential of “knowing the world visually – the shapes of continents, countries, cities or mountain ranges or the courses of the rivers” for his self-conception. Such perception of the world is also echoed in his description of the journey to America from a from the German DP camp in 1950 that is marked by “a sharp sense of everything around me and the vastness and the power of the larger world” (ibid.: 66). Yet embarking on that journey is also shadowed by “the pain of separation and bereavement, not unlike what one feels at the death of a dear one” (ibid.: 66) and linked to Bunkše’s memories of the departure from his hometown Liepaja in October 1941. In spatial terms, Bunkše’s description of his family’s departure to the US capitalizes on the excitement of the forthcoming experience of the ocean – that is repeated twice in the section – as well as the intercontinental scope of their movement. “We were leaving the continent of Europe”, Bunkše (ibid.: 66) writes, “possibly never to return, though we assured each other that our time away will be only temporary”. It is interesting to note that the affective dynamic of the recollection rests on the spatial perspective for optimism and hopefulness and on the temporal perspective – the reference to the departure from Liepaja and retrospective ‘forecasting’ of the immenseness of life change of leaving Europe for conveying a sense of loss and displacement.

The landscapes he describes are diverse, ranging from the idyllic farmscapes of Cēsis in Latvia and the coast of the Baltic Sea to the Great Planes in America and the site of Chief Joseph’s last battle in Northern Montana. Yet none of them

emerges as an independent unit of memory and identity but together these places and landscapes form a web of interconnected sites of memory. This can be illustrated by the way in which Bunkše brings together two nodes of emplacement: the Baltic Sea and the Great Planes of America. Describing his childhood encounters with the Baltic Sea, Bunkše (*ibid.*: 20) writes: “The Baltic Sea was my first teacher. It gave me a powerful sense of both home and road, warm security and life-threatening danger.” When Bunkše moves to the US and becomes a geographer, the Great Planes become one of his favorite destinations of travel with “the expanse of the earth, sky and clouds” connecting to his “deepest being” (*ibid.*: 17). In the early 1990s Bunkše returns to Latvia as a Fulbright scholar, a homeland at that time still occupied by the Soviet Union and the Soviet presence was felt everywhere. Contemplating on “vast, empty seascape [---] [over] the days leading up to summer solstice”, Bunkše is overcome by a feeling of being “connected with all the generations of tribal ancestors who had lived there before me” (*ibid.*: 19). Offering his readers a glimpse of the history of Latvia, Bunkše continues with a brief overview of characteristic activities of people in different regions of the area of current day Latvia, highlighting the richness of folk heritage, as well as suffering as a trait of Latvian history continuing to present-day Soviet Latvia. Yet, as he reflects, “images of the Great Planes were also in [his] consciousness.” In what he calls an ‘epiphanous moment’ he feels the connection between “the vastness of the Baltic Sea and the Great Planes, the vastness of human history in both places” (*ibid.*: 19–20). For him, his first return visit is a journey of great importance that takes him back to a lost world of his homeland that does not cease to be lost for most of his stay there as everything has changed beyond recognition. Bunkše has titled the chapter dedicated to this first return visit “You Cannot Go Back Home Again”, though ultimately, he manages to forge a new connection to his homeland, engaging in what Svetlana Boym (2011:152) has referred to as “the most productive and creative side of nostalgic examination [---] that invites us to explore lateral moves, zigzags, conjectural histories and paradoxes of homecoming”. Bunkše’s account of his first return visit repeatedly highlights the impossibility going back home, partially due to the extent to which familiar places and landscapes, among them his former home town Liepāja – now “a Soviet submarine base and isolated from the world within the Forbidden Zone of Western Latvia” (*ibid.*: 55–56) – have changed. As importantly, however, Bunkše realizes that his conception of Latvia has been based on isolated idealized and mythologized images of Latvian culture, landscape and national character that eventually fall short of constituting home for him, even after partially successful process of demythologization of Latvia and Latvians. As importantly, he realizes that though he still considers himself Latvian, he has also become American. “Like anyone in exile, the links to my past often kept me from developing emotional ties with people and landscapes in my new homeland”, Bunkše (*ibid.*: 41) writes, admitting that “[n]ot until my return to Latvia [---] did I realize that along the way I had learned to form emotional ties not only with places such as the great Planes but also with the cities of Berkeley, London and New York”.

Even though in his work Bunkše (ibid.: 29) demonstrates an awareness of the nostalgic essence of his perception of his homeland and its incompatibility with any aspect of reality he might experience there, he is unwilling to entirely abandon an organic sense of belonging to archetypal Latvian rural landscapes that he views as the very core of his identity. Bunkše's memories of the "sensory landscapes" of the summers spent on his grandmother's farm "in the hilly uplands of north-eastern Latvia" (ibid.: 26) shape his conception of home and guide his search for a(n ideal) home in his adult life. The high relevance as well as the complexity of the questions of feeling at home and creating a home are visible already on the contents page of *Geography and the Art of Life* as the titles of three chapters out of six include the word 'home' from different perspectives, confirming Andre Aciman's (1999:13) definition of an exile as one "continuously prospecting for a future home", a process distinctive in its permanence. Bunkše's bio-geo-graphy engages with questions of home on many levels that range from memory pictures of his childhood featuring moments of complete harmony and deep engagement with his surroundings as well as the bleakness and insecurity of the feeling of homelessness, to linguistic means of conveying a sense of being at home in Latvian and philosophical scrutiny of the meaning of home in the work of Gaston Bachelard. *Poetics of Space* that serves as the imaginative foundation of Bunkše's homemaking process, foregrounds as a vital component of harmonious existence a particular kind of self-emplacement that relies on the security of home. As Bunkše (ibid.: 87) contemplates, for Bachelard, home "becom[es] inscribed in the memory of one's muscles, joints and mind if one lives long enough in that home". As an exile whose life is characterized by movement and displacement, Bunkše does not have the privilege of the temporal continuity of home and views himself as 'a spatially scattered being'. However, he does not view such mode of emplacement as (only) a shortcoming but also as possibility for a different kind of perception of the world in spatial terms that is an essential part of his self-conception. Although Bunkše (ibid.: 102) describes in detail designing and eventually building his ideal home that is based on Bachelard's conception of "home as an intimate space in the universe" in Pennsylvania, he also retains an open and inquisitive stance toward different landscapes he encounters throughout his life and positions himself also in the role of a traveler. Though he admits that given the context of the beginnings of his travels – the (Second World) War and its aftermath – he had to become a 'serious traveler' at an early age, having to cope "as best one could", he nevertheless admits to "gain[ing] a great deal of worldly knowledge from the wonders that [he] encountered along the way", emphasizing, that "self-knowledge came from the ordinary in people and in landscapes" (ibid.: 59–60).

5. *Otsekui tõlkes: contested emplacements*

Käbi Laretei's perception of her identity in relation to either her homeland – Estonia or her country of settlement – Sweden, as well as her pursuit of a(n ideal)

home can be best described as a series of complex negotiations characterized as much by avoidance and refusal of attachment to place and landscape than by affirmations of a sense of belonging. Similarly to the life writings of Eva Hoffmann and Edward Said, Laretei's *Otsekui tõlkes* makes visible "a life of constant adjustments and re-orientations of the self, where the anchoring concept of 'home' cannot denote a center against which [the] multiple displacements can be tethered" (Jilani 2015:60). Reluctant to accept the cultural and political matrix that being a Baltic refugee in post-World-War Sweden involves, Laretei, finding moral support in her international childhood (as the daughter of a diplomat, Laretei spent much of her childhood and adolescence abroad), cultivates a certain cosmopolitan stance. The life-world that emerges in her life writings can be characterized by a volatile mix of elements of various cultures and languages that she seems to be able to balance with relative ease, attesting to Susan Rubin Suleiman's (1996:1) definition of the cosmopolitan as "a term of self-affirmation, straight or post-modernly ironic [---] that designates[s] a state of being 'not home' (or being 'everywhere at home', the flip of the same coin)". Similarly to *Geography and the Art of Life*, *Otsekui tõlkes* focuses on a multitude of different places and trajectories of travel. However, while some similarities can be found in the manner in which Bunkše and Laretei convey a feeling at home on various landscapes of the world, *Otsekui tõlkes* frequently foregrounds transitoriness and mobility as the perspective through which landscapes and places are perceived. An example that demonstrates Laretei's awareness of the role of (restless) movement in her life narrative can be found in the following excerpt that sums up events mediated in her *Peotäis mulda, lapike maad* [A Handful of Soil, A Patch of Land]: "After papa died I fled, not knowing what I was running away from, to Stuttgart and Bayreuth and finally via Munich to Tunisia" (Laretei 1989:70). During her stay in *Le Centre Culturel International* in Hammamet, Laretei starts writing *Peotäis mulda*, an autobiographical work that helps her to come to terms with her parents' passing. During the process of writing, Laretei's memory work helps her to renew her ties with the Estonian diaspora community that she had earlier self-consciously avoided, gradually recognizing that the price of being free was "becom[ing] homeless, unattached and lonely" and that "the glorious-sounding concept of cosmopolitanism was merely an abstraction" (Laretei 2005:149). In Hammamet, her spatial sensory experience of the empty cultural center where she was the only guest interweaves with memories of her childhood in Estonia. Thus, "the dogs yipping in Hammamet's gardens a night" brings back memories of "sledging to school on a kick-sledge" on dark winter mornings where local dogs, "half asleep, would jump out of their kennels and rush to the fences to bark [at us]" (ibid.: 71). The gardener sweeping the leaves of lemon trees by the pool at night sounds to Laretei like her "grandfather's broom sweeping snow on the front steps of the Nõmme house" (ibid.: 71). Although these of interconnected sites of memory seem to resemble those of Bunkše's work, they serve a different purpose, foregrounding the scarcity and fleetingness of "permanence and predictability"

(Skultans 1998:56) of spatial affiliation and highlighting temporariness and unforeseeability.

In Laretei's work, the interrelationship of space and subjectivity is importantly marked by negations and refusal of identification and belonging. The importance of landscape is revealed in Laretei's (ibid.: 70) words (that are in slightly different wording repeated in several of her works): "one of my enduring phrases in exile has been 'this is not my landscape', no matter how beautiful the place where I was at the moment". Foregrounding her status as an exile, the 'not-my landscape' in Laretei's life writing relates to the author's determination to resist pre-packaged versions of identity and to discover landscapes and create mindscapes of her own that support her complex and contested processes of self-emplacement. Although *Otselui tõlkes* that focuses on Laretei's relationship with the world-renowned film director Ingmar Bergman features a variety of memories of spatial contentment and aesthetic gratification, a sense of spatial resentment, discomfort and confusion are of at least equal importance. A strained relationship with even familiar and intimate spaces is foregrounded already at the beginning of the memoir, where Laretei describes a series of sleepwalking episodes that take place in the Dämba house on the island of Farö where she has spent numerous summers of her life. Discovering that her kitchen has been rummaged during the night and finding several small things, e.g. her breakfast tray missing and fearing that "someone must have been in the house" (ibid.: 10), changes Laretei's perception of the Dämba house as an intimate and secure place in her life where she feels at home. When inexplicable incidents that now also involve Laretei's movements in the house at night continue, she realizes that she must have been sleepwalking. Such conclusion, however, does not change her perception of Dämba but further complicates it, as she has become incomprehensible (or untranslatable) for herself. As I have argued in my earlier work focusing on the question of translatability in Laretei's work, it is as if "the author's body betrays to the reader the illusoriness" of the possibility of spatial belonging, not only with regard to the Dämba house, "but as a crucial aspect of the author's embodied exile situation in general" (Kurvet-Käosaar 2009:157). The sudden transformation of an intimate space of contentment and peace of mind into one imbued with fear, panic and confusion is in direct contrast with Bunkše's description of his grubby one-room apartment in Riga in a block of flats that he inhabits during his first return visit to Latvia. In spite of the run-down condition of the apartment, a view evoking for Bunkše "parallels with the wooden barracks of the labor camp in Szczecin" and his well-sustained fear that a listening device might be implanted in a tasteless wall decoration above the doorway leading into the living room, his experience of the flat is one of "protected intimacy, warmth, domesticity, security and homeyness" (Bunkše 2004:9–92).

In Laretei's life writing emplacement is often relational; it is through landscapes that different sides of intimate relationships in her life are often tackled, both in terms of discord and harmony. Reminiscing about a friendly conversation with Ingmar Bergman many decades after the end of their marriage, Laretei

highlights the radically contrasting nature of memories of landscapes they had experienced together.

Do you remember Torö? asked Ingmar [---] “Torö was beautiful” Ingmar said longingly, “the house was in a marvelous spot, right by the sea” [---] “I will die if he purchases this place”, I had thought. Withered trees with broken-off branches [---] no flowers except for the very smallest that barely dare to spring upwards from among the rocks [---] no broad-leaved trees, no birds. “This is not my landscape, I thought in desperation (Laretei 2005:277).

Differences in perception of space extending from the landscapes around Ingmar’s and Käbi’s different holiday houses to preferences concerning furnishing and decorating their home in Djursholm form a distinct thematic thread in Laretei’s account of their life together and partly serve as an explanation of the failure of their short-lived marriage. For Laretei, the structuring of processes of remembrance can be compared to the experience of landscapes, where differences in mode and content of perception imply an impasse of communication. ““Do you remember’ people often say to each other”, Laretei (ibid.: 80) contemplates, “while for one of them a memory picture opens doors to landscapes of memory that have never been accessible for the other”. Yet the process of remembering, despite differences in what and in which manner is retrieved, can also maintain and strengthen intersubjective bonds. It is in this vein that Laretei describes her joint explorations of Tallinn with her sister Maimu that can be also viewed as the process of dialogical or relational life-mapping. Maimu’s childhood memory of sledging down the hill along Toompea street leading to a dangerous crossing with busy traffic that the author does not remember makes her rejoice on the variety of memories their walks invoke as this helps them to “recreate [their] childhood anew together” (ibid.: 49). Furthermore, the process of re-experiencing familiar places and reminiscing together creates a bond between the sisters that “had never been so deep neither in our childhood nor adulthood” (ibid.: 49). Laretei’s mediation of sisters’ joint walks ‘down the memory lane’ can be interpreted as part of the process of “stitching together the ripped mesh of transnational kinship ties” (Khanenko-Friesen 2015:108), a role commonly attributed to migrant correspondences.

6. Conclusion

Geography and the Art of Life and *Otsekui tölkes* attest to the central importance of spatially based processes of the construction of subjectivity in exile life writing that emerges from displacement and the loss of homeland. In his work, Bunkše (ibid.: 29) highlights intimate ties with Latvia that are for him to a great extent premised on archetypal rural landscapes that he views as the very core of ‘mystical Latvian-ness’ and he traces back the beginnings of his own identity-formation processes to “a culture in which people still treasured traditions bound to nature that developed over some four thousand years of life on the eastern

shores of the Baltic Sea” (ibid.: 15). Yet *Geography and the Art of Life* also maps an interconnected web of journeys that help the author to move beyond a mythic and nostalgic perception of his homeland and to develop a new sense of belonging that includes contemporary (late Soviet and Post-Soviet) Latvia. At the same time, Bunkše’s inner journey of self-emplacement makes visible the gradual development of a new sense of spatial awareness that weaves together in harmonious manner different landscapes and modes of emplacement that come to characterize his way of being in the world.

Though in her work, Laretei does not elaborate the ties to Estonia and Estonian identity as solid, she does lament the loss of homeland and her paternal grandparents’ house in the district of Nõmme in Tallinn that for her mobile family, created “an illusion of security that lasted throughout [her] childhood and was brought to an end by the violence” (Laretei 2005:23) of WW II and Soviet deportations. For Laretei, her first return visit to Estonia marks a turning point that on the one hand, initiates the process of re-forging ties with her homeland and an acknowledgment of a sense of feeling at home (that she rarely mentions in her work) and, on the other, problematizes her modes of affiliation with Sweden. “Will I be ever able to restore my balance”, she asks, “[a]fter a sense of being at home I felt in Estonia, driving along Estonian roads, after nature, houses, the skies, Tallinn – where do I really belong?” (ibid.: 58). In Laretei’s work, communal identification with family or with the nation is extremely rare. Where present, it frequently unfolds via strong narrative shifts along temporal and spatial axes adding a quality of fragmentariness to her life writing, therefore, similarly to Tiina Kirss problematizing clear structure and narrative coherence as criteria for a “‘successful’ narrative of exile” (Kirss 2014:20).

Despite the affiliation dynamics with homeland that emerges in both works as an important thematic thread, the dominating mode of self-emplacement in both *Geography and the Art of Life* and *As if in Translation* is transitory – for both Bunkše and Laretei, the construction of identity relies primarily on near-continuous movement from one location to another. Assuming the role of a traveler in his work, Bunkše takes his time to position himself in the world through a multitude of landscapes and encounters with different people. In a more restless manner and at far greater textual pace, Laretei’s work guides the reader through an array of different places and landscapes that make visible her contested relationship with space and a struggle with a sense of belonging, yet offering occasional, often intensely intersubjective glimpses of being settled in a place.

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