

**ACKNOWLEDGING HOME(S) AND BELONGING(S):
BORDER WRITING**

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Abstract

My dissertation is an inquiry into issues of home and belonging. For many people, the struggle to create a home in a "new" country, and the oscillation between a past "there" and present "here" have become ways of existence. Displacement challenges and raises questions regarding one's roots, affiliations, loyalty and belonging. The yearning for a place such as *home* becomes a site of inquiry for communities of displaced people. Destined to live between languages, cultures and national affiliations, im/migrants construct their homes in the particular place of "border." *Acknowledging Home(s) and Belonging(s): Border Writing* is "homeward" journeying through the discursive landscapes of nation, ethnicity, diaspora, and "race." It explores how border interrupts/initiates a discourse of home.

I am an im/migrant researcher. The word "migrant" connotes impermanence, detachment and instability. From this positionality I introduce a slash into the word "immigrant" to transform these connotations into a permanence of migration. As autoethnographic and conversational inquiry, I explore im/migrant experiences from the position of "I," rather than "We." However, "I" is not a position of isolated individual(istic) exclusiveness, but a position of the personal articulation through the relationships with/in community. My research includes conversations with: theorists, colleagues from different disciplinary backgrounds, members of the "ethnic" communities to which I belong, and my daughter. I construct these conversations as borderzone *articulations* where a "third space" emerges.

The word dissertation stems etymologically from Greek *dialogesthai*, to converse, to dialogue; whereby *dia-* means "one with another," and *legesthai* means "to tell, talk." My dissertation endeavors to recognize – to know again, to know anew these deep layers of border as dialogue and conversation. As an im/migrant inquiry, my dissertation intends to create a different, *another* knowing and culture of scholarship that broaden and deepen the space of academic researching/writing.

Journeying homeward
is (not) about homecoming,
is (not) about homesteading,
is (not) about leaving home.
Journeying homeward is being at home in the journey . . .

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2. Jaan Kaplinski, **"The East-West Border,"** translated from Estonian by Jaan Kaplinski with Sam Hamill and Riina Tamm, in The Wandering Border: Poems by Jaan Kaplinski. Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 1987.
3. **"How Can I Recognize My Home"** is an Estonian runo-song adapted by Jaan Kaplinski and translated from the Estonian by Kristin Kuutma. It is published in a booklet accompanying the CD titled Litany to Thunder prepared by the composer Veljo Tormis, Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and Tõnu Kaljuste. The CD was recorded in 1999 by ECM Records GmbH, München, Germany.

"Runo-songs link modern Estonians to the ancient pre-Christian shamanistic culture practiced by the Baltic Finnic peoples around the Gulf of Finland."

This is what Veljo Tormis, a composer who has dedicated his life to the collection and exploration of the legacy of runo-songs, says on the program accompanying the runo-songs.

But how do I establish this link when the modernist master narrative of "nation" and my schoolbooks have disconnected me from my past and my roots, from my connections to my ancestors' home?

This is my underlying concern when quoting and referring to words from "How Can I Recognize My Home" throughout my thesis.

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“[K]nowledge is in the end based on acknowledgement . . .”

– Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty.

My researching/writing dwells with/in relationships.

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Dear Reader,
Armas Lugeja,

Please, allow me to begin with the ancient lines
from an Estonian runo-song

meie meel teeb teele minna
let's set out on the road

teele minna maale saada
set out on the road and begin to go

osata oma koduje
to go towards home

märgata oma majaje
to find our own dwelling

kust ma tunnen oma kodu
how can I recognize my home

millest märkan oma maja
how can I find my house

kus me lähme vastu ööda
where shall we go towards the night

vastu ööda vastu põhja
towards the night towards the north

vastu helgasta ehada
towards the shining twilight

vastu koitu keerulista
towards the brightness of dawn

DWELLING IN THE DISSERTATION

im/migrant inquiring

We are living in the age of “immense spatial upheaval” (Massey, 1992, p. 3) caused by globalization and instantaneous worldwide communication as well as by political and economic diaspora. Even in the last twenty years, changes have been enormous, and the sense of dislocation, fragmentation and disorientation is currently expressed by many. Modern cultural theorists (such as Bammer, Kaplan, Sarup and others) agree that the appearance of “displaced” people – refugees, immigrants, migrants, exiles – has become the defining feature of our time. Julia Kristeva is convinced that “our present age is one of exile” (1986, p. 286). Iain Chambers thinks that “migration, together with the enunciation of cultural borders and crossings, is also deeply inscribed in the itineraries of much contemporary reasoning” (1994, p. 2).

As an im/migrant researcher, I have chosen “im/migrant” among other available scholarly categories to articulate experiences of post/modern displacement such as refugee, exile, expatriate, tourist, nomad (Kaplan, 1998). Although I am ethnically affiliated with Estonian Canadians, historically I do not form part of their diaspora as expatriates of the Second World War. I “came out” from Estonia during the times of the Cold War, not as a political refugee and not as an im/migrant to Canada. Rather, I went to Colombia due to my marriage. I belong to the Colombian diaspora, although I did not arrive in Canada as a refugee but as a “visitor.” I am not ethnically connected to this community of Colombian Canadians.

As a Canadian citizen, I identify with and participate in both the Estonian Canadian and Colombian Canadian communities. However, since my journey between home and away stands apart from collective experiences of these ethnic communities, I do not feel entitled to speak on their behalf or to represent them. Dwelling in the space between belonging and not belonging, I can only position myself within the particularities of this space which forms part of the experiences of displacement of both Estonian Canadian and Colombian Canadian communities. Due to these circumstances, I feel a need to inquire into the experiences of displacement from the position of “I,” rather

than “We,” where “I” is not a position of isolated individual(istic) exclusiveness, but a position of the personal articulation through the relationships with/in community.

“Settling in a country to which one is not a native”¹ makes me an immigrant. However, *I prefer to write this word with the slash “im/migrant” in order to point to the tension that the condition of immigration evokes – the tension between settling in and being on the move, between home and away, between belonging and not belonging.*

[T]o travel implies movement between fixed positions, a site of departure, a point of arrival, the knowledge of an itinerary. It also intimates an eventual return, a potential homecoming. Migrancy, on the contrary, 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. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming – completing the story, domesticating the detour – becomes an impossibility.

(Chambers, 1994, p. 5)

“The word *Migrant* houses connotations of impermanence, instability, detachment,” writes Azade Seyhan in her article “Geographies of Memories: Protocols of Writing in the Borderland” (1997, p. 76). Thus, cutting the “im/migrant” with the slash settles me into permanence of migration. Migrancy and exile, as Edward Said points out, involves a “discontinuous state of being” (1990, p. 365) where “sense of belonging, our language and the myths we carry in us remain, but no longer as ‘origins’ or signs of ‘authenticity’ capable of guaranteeing the sense of our lives” (Chambers, 1994, p.19). Living in the history of border crossings, de-territorializations and re-territorialization, the monolithic national or ethnic identities and the formulations of our “originary” communities now manifest themselves “as traces, memories and murmurs that are mixed with other histories, episodes, encounters” (Chambers, 1994, p. 19).

¹ The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language, 1982, p. 658.

Regardless or because of the condition of “migrancy” and “displacement,” the yearning for a *place* such as *home* becomes essential for the community of dis-placed people. Home is one of the notions that lie in the heart of im/migrant communities. It lies in the heart of the people who live outside of belonging or on the border between belonging and not belonging and for whom national, ethnic, geographical, cultural belonging has ceased to be granted. As one of the central themes in the im/migrant narratives, “home” has caught wide attention from cultural theorists, human geographers, postcolonial and feminist critics (such as Massey, hooks, Bhabha, Sarup, Min-ha, Lavie, Kaplan, and Hall).

The notion of home is closely related and intersects with the notion of “identity” – a key word of “multicultural” living and academic inquiring – however, I have chosen the topic of “home” as the centre of my inquiries. Unlike complex theorizations about “identity,” “home” has a potential to create ties of understanding and conversational links between “academic” and “non-academic” communities. Nigel Rapport and Andrew Dawson discuss the viability of “home” as an analytical construct for their book, Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement. They talk about “the expressive deficiencies of traditional classifications of identity, such as locality, ethnicity, religiosity and nationality” which do not convey the “universally affective power of home” (1998, p. 8). They also refer to Torgovinick who argues that “home” is one of the “few remaining utopian ideals, and does not need to be replaced by more abstract analytical terms” (as quoted in Rapport & Dawson, p. 8).

By choosing “home” as the guiding concept of my inquiring/journeying, I situate myself in the intimacy of im/migrant living, hoping to speak from the position of attached involvement and participation rather than distanced unattached observation. I am aware, however, that while I am living/researching in an academic space, the danger of “academizing” the notion of “home” remains.

border writing

I am living-re-searching-writing at the border between nations, “races,” cultures, languages, disciplines, epistemologies, discourses and wor(l)ds. Destined to live between homes, cultures and national affiliations, im/migrants construct their homes in such particular places as “border.” As the very epitome of the immigrant genre, “border” is an intriguing place of inquiry since it constitutes zones of perpetual motion, confrontation, confusion, and translation where different idioms, intellectual heritages, and cultural memories are engaged. It subverts the overarching themes of modernity: the nation, language and identity and de-stabilizes the homogeneity of dominant metropolitan cultural discourses and ways of knowing. Heather Leach shares her experience of borders:

The place of borders . . . is a place where new things get made – a fertile, yet dangerously volcanic place. Yet it is also no place at all, no kingdom, only language in movement: language so molten that all inscriptions melt, and on which nothing can be finally inscribed. **In academia, to be without a kingdom is to risk sinking without trace or tenure.**

(my bolding, 2001, p. 208)

So be it. I surrender to this risk. As an im/migrant researcher and border writer, I can claim no kingdom, no nation, no discipline. I can intend to dramatize this dominant academic order from the space of border and make it a more hospitable place because, as Heather Leach reminds us, the borders, the boundaries of writing, are at least as temporary and disputable as the walls and lines which divide and surround countries and nations. She asks:

"If . . . we are left with writing that has no proper name, no fixed adobe, then what kind of realms of truth and meaning might such writing create?"

(pp. 207-208)

The notion of "border" has been the focus for more than a decade of those scholars who explore the issues of ethnic, racial, gender identities and differences of those who occupy the margins – the "borderlands" of modern nations – "the colonized," "women," "the coloured," and "the immigrant." There are a variety of ways to inquire into the notion of "border" . . .

"contact zones"

[are] social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination -- like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today.

(Pratt, 1992, p. 4)

"in between"

is a place of enunciation that is not only between two polar positions, it is also in a new place – formed when those two positions somehow ignite, incite and initiate something One of the characteristics of this place "in between" is that there is always that moment of surprise, that moment of interrupting something.

(Bhabha & Burgin, 1994, p. 454)

"creolization"

is a cultural process – material, psychological and spiritual – based upon the stimulus/response of individuals within the society to their [new] environment and to each other (Brathwaite, 1971, p. 11). The term has usually applied particularly to the Caribbean and South American, and more loosely to those post-colonial societies whose presence ethnically or racially mixed populations are a product of European colonization.

(Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998, p. 58)

"métissage"

is a site of creative resistance to the dominant conceptual paradigms . . .
The global *mongrelization* or *métissage* of cultural forms creates complex identities and interrelated, if not overlapping, spaces.

(Lionnet, 1995, pp. 6-7)

"borderland gnosis" (border gnosis for short)

is a unique form of knowledge construction among subaltern communities, in which the peripheral is brought to the centre. It is a knowing from the perspective of an empire's borderlands that counters the tendency of occidental perspectives to dominate, and thus limit, understanding. It is coined by the cultural critic Walter Mignolo in the context of Latin American studies as a new platform for thinking beyond the control of modern/colonial categories of thought.

The question is how knowledge equivalent to European disciplinary knowledges, not only subjugated but placed them [other knowledges] in a subaltern position and justified the colonial effort to discipline (e.g., Christianize, civilize) non-European communities.

(Mignolo, 2001, p. 179)

“hybridity”

has never been a peaceful encounter, a tension-free theme park; it has always been deeply entangled with colonial violence. While, for some, hybridity is lived as just another metaphor within a Derridean freeplay, for others it is alive as pain and visceral memory. Hybridity, in other words, is power-laden and asymmetrical.

(Stam, 1997, p. 1)

“nepantla”

is a Nahuatl word meaning “the land in the middle” and it is used by Chicana women to discuss the living on the border. “Nepantla” is the site of transformation, the place where different perspectives come into conflict and where you question the basic ideas, tenets, and identities inherited from your family, your education, and your different cultures. Nepantla is the zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it.

(Anzaldúa, 2002a, p. 548)

I feel affiliated with the conceptual dwellings that map borderlands writing and generate a space where different idioms, intellectual heritages, colonial legacies and cultural memories engage in the process of exchange, confrontation, and renegotiation. However, since these dwellings are embedded in different historical and cultural experiences, I can't claim them as my theoretical homelands. Thus, the border thinking/writing in my dissertation dwells in articulating and reverberating itself through the poem “The East – West Border,” written by the Estonian poet Jaan Kaplinski (1987)²:

² The Wandering Border: Poems by Jaan Kaplinski, 1987, p. 9. All quotations from and re-workings/modifications of the poem rely on this text.

THE EAST - WEST

BORDER

is always wandering,

sometimes eastward, sometimes west,

and we do not know exactly where it is right now:

in Gaugamela, in the Urals,

or maybe in ourselves,

so that

one ear, one eye, one nostril, one hand, one foot,

one lung and one testicle or one ovary

is on the one, another on the other side.

Only the heart,

only the heart is always on one side:

if we are looking northward, in the West;

if we are looking southward, in the East;

and the mouth doesn't know on behalf of which or both

it has to speak.

theoria

I knew about the etymological connections between the notions of “theory” and “theatre,” but I never imagined that there are affinities between “theory” and “tourism” until I came across Gregory Ulmer’s book Heuretics: The Logic of Invention (1994), that fosters a link between theory and travel/tourism:

The Greeks designated certain individuals to act as legates on certain formal occasions in other city states or in matters of considerable political importance. These individuals bore the title of *theoros*, and collectively constituted a *theoria*. They were summoned on special occasions to attest the occurrence of some event, to witness its happenstance, and to then verbally certify its having taken place.

(Godzich, as quoted in Ulmer, 1994, p. 120)

Does the positioning of “im/migrant” re-searcher allow me to join the ranks of prestigious *theoros/theoria*? I doubt it since, as Gregory Ulmer reminds us, the *theoria* are “the institutionally authorized witnesses” (p. 121). Although the institutional authority might provide one of the privileged positions of looking, there is a danger that one might lose the possibility to see through one’s own eyes.

Rather than taking the position of *theoria*, the over-viewing and looking down on “life” in the university from the top of “institutional heights,” the im/migrant inquirer experiences life walking as a “pedestrian,” mingling and getting lost on the streets of the univerCITY.³ Rather than travelling by academic highways, the im/migrant inquirer

³I am referring to Michel de Certeau’s The Practice of Everyday Life (1984) where he compares two different ways of looking: 1) looking at the city of New York from the top of the World Trade Centre (which is after September 11, 2001 no longer possible) with voyeuristic pleasure as a whole, as a single map and 2) seeing the city from the perspective of the pedestrians when walking on the streets down below as a conglomeration of properties.

wanders on the side-roads and outskirts developing her erratic “trajectories” through the theoretical landscapes and disciplinary (border)zones.

As “im/migrant” researcher, I am a wayfarer dwelling in the journey where knowing emerges through and with/in the process of travelling/journeying:

Caminante, son tus huellas
Wayfarer the only way is your footsteps,

el camino, nada mas,
there is no other

caminante no hay camino,
Wayfarer there is no way;

se hace camino al andar,
you make the way as you go.

al andar se hace camino,
as you go, you make the way,

y al volver la vista atras
stopping to look around

se ve la senda que nunca
you see the path

Se ha de volver a pisar;
That your feet will never travel again.

caminante, no hay camino,
Wayfarer there is no way,

sino estelas en la mar,
only tracks on ocean foam.⁴

⁴ Spanish text is from Antonio Machado. Caminante. In Poesía y Prosa. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe. English translation is from Antonio Machado. (1982). Selected Poems. Trans. A. Trueblood. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 142-143.

To make one's road when walking means giving up the desire to "fit into" *conventional* theoretical (pre)establishment. It means giving up the privilege to dwell in a secure and permanent academic adobe, the pre-fixed theoretical bastion from where one *strategically* over-views battles between different critiquing clans. To make one's road when walking means *tactical*⁵ dwelling in institutional *interstices* and confusing and insecure academic in-between zones. *Such theoretical position/ing is not the question of choice but inevitability of im/migrant dwelling.*

After taking the responsibility for my theoretical journeying/dwelling, I notice a remark in Ulmer's book I had not paid attention to during my previous readings. Ulmer, quoting Burnet, provides the reader with the original sense of *theoria* when it

did not mean the kind of vision that is restricted to the sense of sight. The term implied a **complex but organic mode of active observation – a perceptual system that included asking questions, listening to stories and local myths, and feeling as well as hearing and seeing.** It encouraged an open reception to every kind of emotional, cognitive, symbolic, imaginative, and sensory experience.

(my bolding, Burnet, as quoted in Ulmer, p. 121)

I invite you to dwell with/in my dissertation and to co-journey with me into the issues of home and belonging with that kind of "theoretical" perspective. This journey will evolve on/through the different discursive landscapes of

NATION

DIASPORA

ETHNICITY

"RACE"

⁵ I am referring to Machel de Certeau's notions of strategy and tactics from *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). *Strategy*, according to de Certeau, is an art of the *powerful* – of producers. These "subjects of will and power" operate from their own place (a "proper"), an enclosed institutional space, which they have defined as their base for controlling and managing relations. *Tactics* are arts of the *weak*, by means of which the weak make disciplined spaces "smooth" and "habitable" through forms of occupancy (tricks, maneuvers).

Before we embark on this journey, I offer some metaphorical devices that might (or might not) orient you in the process of this reading/journeying.

You can approach this dissertation as an **anthology**, composed of different essays, co-written dialogues, poetic intermissions written while I was making my road through the Ph. D. program at the university.

You can also approach it as a “**valley of flowers**,” since an *anthology* is a lovely word rooted etymologically in Greek *anthologia* “**flower-gathering**” from *anthos* “a flower” + *logia* “collecting,” from *legein* “gather”⁶. Thus my dissertation gathers together a variety of “colourful” writing pieces articulated in different voices, styles and genres: academic, conversational, in/formal, poetic, comic, dramatic, pathetic, dry, epistolary, fragmented, confusing, and reflective. After all, “the border crosser develops two or more voices” (Gómez-Peña, 1995 p. 149) and the accented language of im/migrant writer carries the styles of “other” times and places and bearing generic traces of “other” heritages, stories and memories. In Estonian the word “to write” is

k i r j u t a m a

kirju in English means “multicoloured, multiple colours”

KIRJUtama: “writing” in Estonian is multicoloured!

As im/migrant inquirer, I am writing in accented academic lingua using un/familiar narrative and generic schemes that mix and mingle with the patterns of orality of my native – Estonian – tongue which only became writing in the middle of the last century. And then, I am sure, there are traces of Spanish with singing Santanderian dialect (a province in the West Cordilleras) I learned to speak in Colombia, and of Russian that I acquired un/willingly during my schooldays.

⁶ The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language, 1982, p. 56.

Or you can approach this dissertation as a **suitcase**, containing an array of items, necessary and unnecessary things, carefully folded and well-arranged pieces, last minute additions – everything that one might need or might not need on the journey.

You can approach this dissertation as a **dwelling**, constructed of diverse epistemological and disciplinary hallways leading into the main floor of awareness, the corridors of confusion, the getting-stuck corners, and many “other” rooms.

By the way, as the im/migrant inquirer, I walk around with dictionaries translating, looking up, and trying to make connections between languages and words. I looked up the word “dissertation”. . .

The dissertation is “a lengthy and formal treatise or discourse, especially one written by a candidate for the doctoral degree at a university; thesis” as The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language (1982, p. 381) confirms. When inquiring into the etymological roots of the word “dissertation” I was guided towards a Latin root-word *dissertāre* (frequentative of *disserere*) composed of *dis -*, **apart** + *serere*, “to connect, join (in speech), discuss” (p. 381).

As an im/migrant re/searcher I note that the roots of the word “dis-sertation” reveal the co-existence of both processes, separating and connecting, which brings the word “dissertation” closer to a borderzone writer.

departing

It seems to me that border writing might present a very partial, one-sided point of view depending on which side of the border you are at.

I acknowledge the importance of the word *partial* in regards to my thesis/writing/home. My thesis conveys/presents *partial* – “not total, incomplete, biased, prejudiced”⁷ – positions, perspectives, knowings in regards to the concept of home. And home is/feels very *particular*.

How can I know what colour the walls of your home are?!

How can I know what flowers are on your table?

How can I know what sounds fill your house?

How can I know what you are talking about around your dinner-table?

How can I know how big your family is?

How can I know if you live with your parents, grandparents, older brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, friends?

How can I know how your home looks? Where is it?

In which country? In which continent?

How does it feel to be forced to leave behind your home?

How does it feel to see the home of your ancestors taken and destroyed?

How can I feel/perceive/know *your* experiences/homes?

Thus, in choosing the topic of home for my dissertation, I acknowledge that I can only convey the very partial knowing through my particular experiencing/writing of home and belonging.

After reminding myself about the partiality and particularity of my writing, I also recall the other meaning of the word “partial,” stemming from the Latin *pars/partis*.

⁷ The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language, 1982, p. 955.

meaning of “part,” offering us new possibilities and ways in perceiving the word “partial” and “particular.”

part *n.*

a portion, division, piece or segment of a whole.⁸

Thus, the notion *part* evokes and is embedded in the notion of *whole*. These two notions, “part” and “whole,” are interdependent; the one does not only make sense, but cannot exist without the other.

When pointing at the partiality of my research approach/perspective and particularity of the topic, I do not intend to imprison the writing of home into exclusionary, isolationist or individualistic frame. Quite to the contrary, I hope that my writing/researching home evokes and generates the particular readerly experiences/homes which become part of shared writing/reading/dwelling in/through this partial dissertational text.

I leave larger spaces here so you can begin writing between my lines and the lines about/of/from your home, if you so desire.

I invite you also to attend to the other words connected to *part* like

participation and *partition*, *particle* and *partner*, *partisan* and *party*, revealing the

amazing interrelatedness between the part and the whole.

The word “departing” also departs from *part*, and so does farewell *party*!

If you are now truly getting amazed, please don’t forget about *maze* in

a m a z e d.

⁸ The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language, 1982, p. 955.

journeying (non-methodologically) homewards

What method/ology would support inquiring into the borderzone?

method *n.*

1. A means or manner of procedure; especially, a regular and systematic way of accomplishing anything.
2. Orderly and systematic arrangement; orderliness; regularity.
3. The procedures and techniques characteristic of a particular discipline or field of knowledge.⁹

Method/ology has served the academy as a way of ordering the disorderly material/lity of our lives by “objectifying” unruly “subject matter(s),” by creating disciplinary territories and boundaries, and by taking control and organizing “knowing” under the fixed categories.

Perhaps the notion appeals to the more “settled” researchers looking for order, discipline, principles, prescriptions, “systematic” thinking and established boundaries. But it does not suit an im/migrant re/searcher who dwells in the geopolitical, cultural, linguistic, and disciplinary borderzones, who changes places, transgresses boundaries, and wanders along unfamiliar territories, who lives in perpetual transition and uncertainties, who is always on the journey. Thus it looks to me that such an inquirer is in a need of a b/orderly method/ology able to deal with the perpetual disorderliness, irregularities, and unsystematic rearrangements taking place in the process of journeying.

Re-writing the definition of method from a b-orderly perspective seems not only to undermine the current academic method/ological *order* but to de-stabilize the meaning of the notion itself. However, inquiring with help of The Houghton Mifflin Canadian

⁹ The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of English Language, 1982, p. 826.

Dictionary of English Language into the etymology of method/ology uncovers the un/expected root meaning of the words:

French *méthode*, from Latin *methodus*, from Greek *methodos*, “a going after,” pursuit (as of knowledge): *met(a)-*, after + *hodos*, journey.

(1982, p. 826)

The etymological roots of the word *method* extend to Greek *hodos*, meaning way, journey. Isn't it a more *meaningful* “method/ology” for the im/migrant re/searcher whose researching/writing is a journey? Isn't it a possibility to rethink/question the purpose and usage of *method/ology* from the perspective of the unstable and unpredictable reality of “search” within the process of academic “re/search”?

The notion of “journey” insinuates a mobile research positioning, an im/migrant positioning, a position that moves between locations, changes perspectives, wanders through and around multiple sites, looks at different sights, and engages with transformative insights. “Homeward” conveys displacement – a condition and state of not being at home. At the same time, it conveys the yearning, the movement towards home, the desire to journey, to move towards. Since any desire is fuelled by unfulfillment, reaching home is an unattainable dream. Thus what matters in “homeward” is not so much stability of home but the movement – “(to)ward.”

Journeying homeward

is (not) about homecoming,

is (not) about homesteading,

is (not) about leaving home.

Journeying homeward is being at home in the journey.

“Homeward” is not about finding home. It is about searching, coming close and leaving behind, turning and re-turning, departing and searching again, re-searching, endlessly moving towards . . . home.

For me, the journey is not romantic, heroic or extraordinary, as the notion of journey is often seen in Western narrative contexts. Journey for me is related to “ordinary,” to “everyday,” to daily learnings, struggles, tensions, mis/understandings, transformative insights.

journey *n.*

Middle English *journey*, *jorne*, period of travel, a day’s traveling, from Old French *jornee*, from Vulgar Latin *diurnāta* (unattested), from Latin *diurnum*, daily portion, neuter of *diurnus*, **daily**, from *diēs*, **day**.¹⁰

And to journey, to move forward from one place to another, does not only mean to move towards a future. To journey, to move forward *is not a unidirectional* movement. The prefix **for(e)** indicates “before” in time. *For(e)-* in *forward* destabilizes the “future” oriented “infront” positioning, the unidirectional advancing/achieving/progressing movement and asks us to look back, towards the past, towards our own previous experiences and towards the wisdom of those who journeyed before us – “beforehand.” In journeying, moving forward, we dwell in the *presence* of the daily interactions between past and future.

In my re-search on home

I am motivated

To approach but/and not define

I am motivated

To approximate but/and not arrive

I am motivated

To search but/and not find

My re-search dwells in the journey . . .

¹⁰ The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of English Language, 1982, pp. 707-708.

Phenomenological researcher Edward Casey traces the word *dwell* back to two apparently antithetical roots: Old Norse *dvelja*, “linger,” “delay,” “tarry,” and Old English *dwalde*, “go astray,” “err,” “wander,” reminds us that “*dwelling is accomplished not by residing but by wandering*” (my italics, Casey, 1993, p. 114).

When approaching method/methodology as journey, remember that every journey is different. Every inquirer/journeyer faces challenges and risks, possibilities of taking a wrong turn, getting lost, not arriving at her or his desired destination.

Doctoral seminar. On educational research methodology.
The instructor asks us to close our eyes and try to visualize,
imagine the thesis each of us is going to write.

I close my eyes but cannot see anything. Different thoughts run restlessly
through my mind:

*Did I tell Iana that I can meet her after the swimming lesson at 7 o'clock so
that we can walk home together? No, I didn't. Oh, why did I forget?! I
love to be with my daughter, she has grown up so quickly. . . what friends
we have become...*

Ah, yes . . . thesis . . . thesis . . .

I am trying to imagine a stack of three hundred pages, every single page filled
with many, many . . . many written lines . . . and, of course, with very clever
ones.

I am so tired; perhaps I shouldn't run every morning. I hate running . . . funny . . . why do

I run then? I like to greet the morning forest . . .

Thesis, thesis . . . I cannot
concentrate . . . stupid thesis . . . stupid me . . .

*Interesting, how can Margo take a plane every Wednesday and
fly to Vancouver from Prince George just for this seminar?
What DEDICATION!*

Yes, yes, thesis . . .

I am trying to imagine its title...

**"Journeying Homewards: Poetics, Politics and
Pedagogies of Belonging"**

"Im/migrant Sites, Sights, Insights: Following La Maestra/The Schoolteacher"

"TOWARD HEART(H)MINDING CURRICULUM: HOW CAN I RE-COGNIZE
HOME?"

There is little to see through the windows of our seminar room. Sterile sites. Grey sights. Concrete buildings. And more concrete buildings. Oh, no, I can see a bit of a sky. The sky is pink. What an unusual color for the autumn sky! Like Sohaila's poetry she recited to me on our way home yesterday: "Autumn is pregnant." Strange. Perhaps seen from a Pakistani perspective? In Western culture autumn is usually related to dying. The autumn sky in my hometown Tartu is normally passionately violet containing grey raining and the burning read-yellow of the maple trees.

Now I am asked to envision my favourite lines from my thesis . . . but

WHERE IS MY THESIS?

I cannot see it!!!

A WOMAN is sitting in front of me right on the table.

She teases me with something.

Yes, I can see, she has got hold of a stack
of papers – all filled with many, many . . . many written lines.

MY THESIS?!

How come? Who is this woman? Why does she have my thesis? How did she get a hold of it?

The woman laughs. Teasingly. I have never seen her before, and yet, I recognize her. It is **La Maestra** – The Schoolteacher – a character from the play of Colombian playwright Enrique Buenaventura, also called *La Maestra* (*The Schoolteacher*).

I have known this play for a long, long time; I am very fond of it. So many events, experiences, memories are related to this play. I have read it hundreds of times, participated in its stagings, presented conference papers on it. One paper I wrote was called "His story, History, Her Story: Whose Story is La Maestra telling?"

And yet, I have never met La Maestra before.

Now, here she is – right in front of me – playing with my thesis. And I do not have a clue what is written there inside my thesis. And then I hear her voice telling me very softly and somewhat sadly,

“Don’t forget about the Red Road.”

WHERENESS OF BELONGING(S):

BETWEEN HERE AND THERE

meie kodu kauge'ella
OUR HOME IS FAR AWAY

viisi versta vaheta
many miles from here

kuusi kuivada jõgeda
with six dry rivers

seitse sooda sitke'eda
seven sloppy swamps

kaheksa kalamereda
eight seas of fish

üheksa hüva ojada
nine beautiful brooks

kümme külma allikada
ten cold springs in between

What do you take with you when you go on a journey?

Do you take many things?

Or just your toothbrush and nightgown?

Depends how long your journey will be!

What would you take when the duration of your journey is unknown?

What would you take if you were allowed to take just a small suitcase of things?

What would you take when you have only an hour . . . a half hour . . . ten minutes to pack before being deported from your homeland?

What would you take when you have to run, run away to a far away land?

What would you take when leaving forever?

between Estonia and Colombia

WHEN I LEFT Leningrad on a huge Finnish cargo-ship with my two-year old daughter to re-meet my husband in Colombia one day in June, 1983 . . .

I took ten big boxes of books in Russian and Estonian; the books on

parasitology,

poultry,

fishery,

pig-farming,

histology,

cellular biology,

veterinary medicine,

beekeeping,

agriculture

that belonged to Jose;

I took my books on

world theatre history,

Russian literature,

literary theory,

aesthetics,

drama theory and criticism,

Spanish-Russian and Estonian-Spanish dictionaries,

Spanish Language textbook published in Poland,

albums from the Hermitage and the Russian Museum,

cookbooks on Estonian food,

photographs with sites of Tallinn, Moscow, Leningrad, Tartu

Проблемы Поэтики Достоевского В. Бахтина,

Lotmani Puškini eluloo,

Garcia Marquez 'e Sada Aastat Üksindust,

Морфологию Сказки В. Пронна,

Энциклопедию Марксистко-Ленинской Философии,
Историю Древней Руси В. Лихачева;

I took

*toys for my daughter,
yellow, green, maroon, orange, blue
stuffed animals,
baby-dolls and lady-dolls;*

I took

*the clothes my grandmother had sewed for me and my
daughter with great care and love;*

I took

*two iron pans and four big pots,
a large collection of forks, knives and spoons because my friend Sarma from Latvia who
had left to live in Mexico a few years before me had told me that kitchenware abroad is
awfully expensive;*

I took

*black-red-green Russian kerchiefs and shawls with flowers,
leather valets and belts,
Estonian ceramic vases,
juniper beer-cups,
candle holders
for my Colombian relatives that I hadn't ever met;*

I took

a Soviet made massage machine that broke after I tried it out for the first time;

I took

*an iron,
the refrigerator that had a tractor motor according to a
mechanic who repaired it in Colombia,
a washing machine that we finally never used,*

*several large and small transformers to be able to make
the Soviet-made machinery work in Colombia;*

I took a lot of

pincers,

pipettes,

*and things that I cannot name but that Jose
supposedly was going to need in his laboratory work;*

I took

Jose's heavy microscope

*and I was seriously thinking of taking a white concert piano, "Estonia," just in
case my daughter wanted to study music in Colombia. . .*

and, I almost forgot

I took

*a green plastic potty which served us well throughout our trip,
especially during our 48-hour bus trip from Cartagena, a seaport where
we arrived, to our new home Málaga, a little village in the Western
Colombian Cordilleras. While other travelers – campesinos with gray
heavy ponchos and señoritas with make up, large hoops and butterfly bows
on their back – had to go outside during requested pee-stops, Iana was
happily making use of her green potty just like at home.*

And one more thing.

On our way from Cartagena to Málaga we stopped in Bucaramanga.

*Jose went to buy some items. He said that we could not begin our home in Colombia
without them. He came back with an object I had never seen before.*

It was a liquadora, a jucemaker.

Without a liquadora, I learned, you cannot begin a home in Colombia.

***All these things I took with me to Colombia are perhaps still there, though turned into
other "things" by tropical rains, unbearable heat, industrious and frenzied mice, and
aggressive termites. . .***

between Colombia and Canada

I felt lost, confused and anxious in the airport of Mexico City. My luggage – two enormous trunks and three smaller suitcases – was beyond my control. Luckily, I had been able to get rid of the bigger baggage, somehow squeezing it into a tiny storage slot/chamber. However, the backpack full of books on Colombian theatre, the handbag with the emergency items and my daughter's toys were still weighing down my shoulders.

My daughter and I visited different food stands and ate in more than four different places, always leaving some food behind on our plates because the Mexican burritos and nachos were unusually “hot” compared to the Colombian food that had never tasted so picante. We had been in every single women’s bathroom and were very familiar with all the banners and posters of the airport’s tourist and financial oficinas. Finally, we did not know what else we could do.

*I had made a decision to spend this night in the airport after I lost hope to find a place to stay. Although I looked like a gringa, I did speak Spanish. I thought that I would not have a problem finding a hotel room in Mexico City for one night on our trip from Cali to Vancouver. However, our plane from Colombia was late. We had arrived at midnight and were given contradictory recommendations regarding hotels. I got dizzy and refused to accept any more advice. And so there we were, exhausted and bewildered, waiting for morning and for our plane to Canada. **We were in the passage from the Third World to the First World.***

I felt so excited when we finally found ourselves on the Japanese airline's plane heading towards Vancouver. All the worries seemed to be over. Soon we would be reunited with Jose who had left Colombia three months before us. He was already immersed in his newly discovered student life in the unfamiliar country, pursuing his second Ph.D. degree, when our daughter and I were still struggling to obtain visas, permissions, certificates for exits and entrances, and finishing, tying up the ends of our life in Jose's homeland. During these three months I had felt the utmost solitude. Or perhaps it was not solitude, since I did not feel isolated from the surrounding people.

Rather, I felt, as my mother used to say in Estonia, "in between earth and sky."

It was a state of anxiety, confusion and dislocation. After Jose had left, the familiar reference points of belonging were suddenly gone. I was disconnected from the country where I had begun to feel at home, where my daughter had grown up, where I had worked, loved and struggled for more than six years. Suddenly, I realized how helpless, alone and far away from home I was.

between here and there

"Where am I?" is, after all, one of the most poignant of human formulations. It speaks for an anxiety that is intense, recurrent, and all but unbearable.

-John Russell

*Here or there
There or here*

*Where is here?
Where is there?*

*Here is here
There is there*

*There is not here
Here is not there*

But where is between? Here? There? Or t/here?

**Not to know where we are is torment,
and not to have a sense of place is
a most sinister deprivation.**

-John Russell

between disciplines:
autofictional dialogues

APPLICATION FORM

Department of Theatre.

APPLICATION FORM

HE: We phoned you because you seem to have a pretty interesting background in theatre...Estonia. Russia. Colombia. Hmmm...

ME: *I would like to continue my theatre studies. I am interested in looking at the pedagogy of the theatre program I was involved in when working in Colombia. It was a very experimental program and before I left we began working on its re-structuring. I would like to...*

APPLICATION FORM

APPLICATION FORM

HE: Well, in this case it might be better for you to contact the Department of Education. You can't buy shoes in a meat shop.

APPLICATION FORM

APPLICATION FORM

Department of Anthropology.

HE: If you want to study in our department you have to start with the undergraduate courses. What? You have a M.A.?

ME: Yes. *In Theatre Studies.*

HE: You see, that's what I mean, you don't have a background required for graduate studies in our department.

Department of Sociology.

HE: I see, you are interested in looking at theatre from a larger sociological perspective. What are you currently reading?

ME: *I am reading Marco De Marinis' The Semiotics of Performance.*

APPLICATION FORM
APPLICATION FORM

HE: This is not our approach. You have to read Becker's Art Worlds. You'll find this book in the library.

APPLICATION FORM

APPLICATION FORM

REGENT COLLEGE.

APPLICATION FORM

APPLICATION FORM

ME: *I am desperate, my soul is dying in this asphyxiating materialistic consumerist world. My background is in theatre and I think that theatre and spirituality are intimately connected.*

HE: **Indeed. What religious congregation do you belong to? Oh, you don't belong to any? I don't know how we can help you, certainly, please keep in touch. With time....**

Department of Hispanic Studies

HE: I understand that you lived and worked in Latin America for five years, but your academic records don't show any evidence of documented academic credits in the discipline of Hispanic Studies. You need to start as an unclassified student taking courses in Spanish Literature.

APPLICATION FORM

APPLICATION FORM

APPLICATION FROM

APPLICATION FROM

The Programme of Comparative Literature.

SHE: **[After four years]. We consider you to be a 'suitable candidate' for our programme because of your diverse cultural and linguistic background. However, you have to repeat the master's degree because your M. A. is not...**

The Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction.

I: *When already writing my Ph.D. thesis in the Programme in Comparative Literature, I transferred to CSCI. After years of struggling, questioning, wandering I had found the community where I was not forced to "fit in" but where my*

knowledge was recognized. It felt as if I had found my
"academic home."

APPLICATION FORM
APPLICATION FORM

APPLICATION FORM
APPLICATION FORM

between Canada and Estonia

My friend Livana was leaving for Greece. She phoned me to say good-by.

"I am so tired of Canada, you can't imagine how much I want to go home . . . I haven't seen my parents for two years. I miss my country, the warmth of my people, the sunshine . . . you know, here, in Canada, people are so cold, money-minding and boring. Aren't you planning to travel to Estonia?"

I said no and that I was expecting my mother to come to Canada. And then I also explained to her that I am in trouble because my mother hoped to spend Christmas with us, but my daughter desired to be in Colombia with my husband's family. I told her how much my daughter misses Colombia and how little she remembers Estonia, where she was born.

And then I announced to Livana that on June 16th we were becoming Canadian citizens.

"So, you are going to swear to the Queen of England," she laughed, and asked, "What took you so long? I got my citizenship a few years ago!"

"Well, it is because you are married to a Canadian," I guessed.

"Yeah, right," she agreed but then she added, "It was easy to get a passport, however, I still get 'stuck' at the Canadian border. The immigration officers always seem to be suspicious of my dark skin and eyes." Then she exclaimed with some resentment in her voice, "You must pass the customs real quickly, even without the Canadian passport. You look so Canadian, so white!"

Feeling uncomfortable, I responded, "Well, sometimes I do get stuck because it happens that some immigration officers have never heard about a country such as Estonia before."

"Could be," she agreed and tried to re-establish the solidarity between us. "I have heard that the people from Great Britain can get Canadian citizenship in a few months, imagine?!"

Afterwards we had a really long discussion regarding the war in Kosovo, and we both expressed our disgust regarding Canada's participation in bombings. "I am afraid about my family. They are so close to the war zone," my friend said.

"Yeah, these pictures of Bosnian refugees on the TV-screen remind me of Estonian refugees of World War II who arrived in Canada under quite similar circumstances," I replied to her.

At the end of the conversation, we talked a bit about our dissertation-related work. By the way, my friend's thesis is about Latin American women poets. And we speak to each other in Spanish.

Where do you come from?

"From Tartu," I would say if I were in Estonia, feeling proud of the connection with this centuries old-university city in which I was born.

Where do you come from?

"From Estonia," I said when studying at the Leningrad Institute of Theatre, Music and Cinematography in Russia (1975-1980), as I perceived the hidden admiration in people's eyes for being from the most disobedient (the most western, capitalist) Soviet Socialist Republic. Very often the admiration intermingled with a note of hurt feelings:

"You Estonians don't like Russians, nobody wanted to talk to me in Russian when I was in Estonia. And I know that you understand Russian perfectly, you study it at school."

"Yes," I had to admit and suggested strongly that they try any other language, like Lithuanian, Moldavian, English, whatever, but not Russian.

"Although the Estonians might not understand a word, you will be treated much friendlier, that's for sure," I added. I never talked about the cause of this hatred, about the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, the pact between Hitler and Stalin annexing Estonia unlawfully to Russia. Until perestroika it was a taboo topic, part of Estonia's erased history which was left out from "Soviet" history books. The relationships between personal, political and national belonging were entangling. I felt tormented by contradictory emotions. On the one hand, I rejected the discriminatory attitudes of Estonians towards Russians – I had many very close Russian friends! On the other, I shared anti-Russian sentiments with other Estonians, questioning and resisting Russia's occupation of Estonia in whatever ways we could.

Where do you come from?

"From Estonia," I said when living in Colombia, South America, from 1984 to 1990. It was obvious that "Estonia" did not make too much sense to Colombians. They could not locate me on their geographical map of the world.

"Where is Estonia?" they asked.

"In Europe," I explained.

"Yes, but where exactly?????"

"On the shores of the Baltic Sea . . ."

"?????"

"Across from Finland."

"Aaahaa, you are from the Soviet Union!" they finally burst out with relief.

This was exactly the conclusion I tried to avoid since it seemed to be nearly impossible to explain to anybody in Colombia that Estonia is culturally and language-wise very different from Russia. Regardless of my "explanatory" efforts, my theatre students in Cali, at the Universidad del Valle, kept calling me "Rusa" and the nacionalidad on my Colombian residency card read "Sovietica."

Where do you come from?

The bureaucrat in the Soviet consulate in Colombia never asked me this question. He knew that although my Russian was not perfect, I must belong to the category of "наши" (ours) like many other representatives of non-Russian ethnic groups in the former Soviet Union. The most difficult times were the perestroika times. These were the times I was preparing to move to Canada. Soviet Estonia had almost ceased to exist, but I needed desperately to renew my Soviet passport. Estonia was breaking away from the Soviet Union but I was still a "Soviet citizen" depending on the U.S.S.R. consulate in Bogotá. Thus, I found myself in the midst of the world's political struggles and major historical changes.

*My fate was in the hands of the Soviet bureaucrats who, finally, agreed to add additional pages to my Soviet passport for a solid amount of money. Indeed, the Soviet Union **has** changed, I thought while leaving the Soviet consulate in the fancy barrio Chicó. The money I had to pay spoke eloquently that the Soviet Union was moving towards a market economy. Earlier, my passport problems would have been resolved with the "help" of long moralistic lines.*

Where do you come from?

"Is Estonia a country?" the US custom officer asks every time I cross the US – Canada border, looking at me with suspicion and slowly turning the pages in my Estonian passport. Customarily it takes him about half an hour to figure out that such an unheard of country indeed exists.

Where do you come from?

*"From Colombia . . ." I said after my arrival in Canada at the airport of Vancouver, while introducing my "Soviet" passport to the immigration officer. "From Colombia," I was repeating this to myself in confusion while trying to understand why I was separated from my Mexican co-traveler. We had become friends during the flight from Mexico City to Vancouver. We were directed to separate lines. Although I learned about Canadian multiculturalism much later, I **did** notice already that this airport line-up, where my Mexican co-traveler ended up in, was definitely "darker" than the one in which I was asked to stand. Her luggage was given a thorough search. Mine wasn't.*

Where do you come from?

"From Colombia . . ." I kept saying for a long time. I couldn't quite understand why people looked at me with misunderstanding eyes. It took me a while to realize that I did not look "Colombian" to Canadian eyes, which reminded me of my "Estonian" background.

Where do you come from?

Nowhere have I heard this question more often than in Canada.

"I am from Canada."

"How come? You have an accent, you can't be from Canada."

"I am a Canadian citizen."

"Well, yes, but where are you from?"

Nowadays, I postpone my response. I feel confused. Living in Canada has made the answering of this question regarding belonging incredibly complex.

Where do YOU come from?

between belonging and not belonging

What is between belonging and not belonging?

What space?

What place?

Is it possible to belong and not to belong at the same time?

“Belonging” is a peculiar word, containing in its womb conspicuous words “being,” “longing,” “long.” The word belonging seems almost too tight, too narrow, too constraining for these notions, which request more infinite and undefined living space. It seems to induce tensions between fixity and ambiguity, between time and space, between hereness and thereness, between leaving to the journey and staying at home.

I remember a Serbian Canadian man stating on television during the Kosovo conflict how proud he is to be Canadian. But when asked on whose side he would “fight” in Kosovo, he responded without a blink of his eyes, “On the Serbian, of course!” “Belonging to” is about a relationship between individual and community/social organization. “Longing” in belonging addresses the desires of those who don’t belong, who don’t meet the requirements, who can’t adapt, who don’t “fit in.”

Longing is about not belonging . . . not belonging is about longing!

long *intr. v.*

1. To yearn, wish earnestly; desire greatly: *He longed to go home*
2. Middle English *longen*, [to suit], Old English *langian*, “to seem long (to some),” to yearn for ¹¹

I am writing and . . . my cat is sleeping
her paw is lying on the word yawn

Yawn – “to open the mouth wide with a deep inspiration”-

that’s what is written in my dictionary right under my cat’s paw.¹²
I am writing and . . .

¹¹ The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language, 1982, p. 768.

¹² The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language, 1982, p. 1482.

my cat's paw is lying on the *yawn*

but she is not yawning

she is lying lazily and idly

on my fat open dictionary

her paw on the word "yawn."

I am writing and . . .

looking at my cat's paw.

She lies graciously and calmly

her back turned without regret to the book I haven't opened yet.

It is called Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile.

I am writing and . . . exploring.

Why is my cat's paw lying on the word "yawn"?

She lies frivolously and freely,

embracing with her curly tail and tummy

Theories of Desire written by Patric Fuery.

This is a book I am now learning,

wanting to know what kind of desire

is described by the word *belonging*.

I am writing . . . wondering and yawning,

my cat is lying quiet and so still.

Suddenly she yawns

and her paw moves from the word *yawn* to another word – *yearn*

yearn *intr.v.*

1. To have a strong or deep desire; be filled with longing. Usually used with *for* or *to*.
2. To feel deep pity, sympathy or tenderness
3. Middle English *yermen*, Old English *gyrman*, *gierman*, to strive, desire
Synonyms: *yearn*, *long*, *pine*, *hanker*, *hunger*, *thirst*. These verbs mean to have a strong desire. *Yearn* and *long* both stress protracted and insistent desire or craving. **Sometimes *yearn* is applied to a wish for the return of something lost, and *long* for the attainment of something unfulfilled (my bolding).** *Pine* implies lingering desire that saps strength or spirit. *Hanker* often refers to a fleeting desire, but it can also apply to an urge to satisfy a physical appetite or to a craving for fame, power or wealth. *Hunger* and *thirst* are applied figuratively to compelling desire for the attainment or possession of something.¹³

I am writing and . . .

and then my cat turns with such strife

that Clarice Lispector's The Stream of Life

falls to the floor.

I am writing and . . . wait . . . how strange,

she finds a comfortable place right in front of me lying down on the white empty page.

That's a sign, I think with inspiration, and yawn,

there is no reason to write any more.

I am not writing . . . for a moment

I am just contemplating living writing by my cat's paw.

¹³ The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language, 1982, p. 1483.

CONVERSATIONAL REAL-I-TIES

“Conversation” is the word that closely addresses the nature and process I have dwelled with/in when writing/researching this dissertation. When spending time midst long lines of books and shelves in the library, I found out that “conversation” has become a notion of interest within the Humanities. Earlier, the concept of conversation belonged mainly to the discipline of linguistics and was approached mostly from the perspective of descriptive structural discourse analysis. More currently, I found books and articles aware of the notion of conversation as a principle, as a way of knowing and learning in the areas of fine arts, psychology, theatre, education, cross-cultural studies. Different scholarly voices were talking about the underlying importance of **conversation**.

Conversation is at once the most ordinary and most profound of human activities. It is ubiquitous, ever present, and all around us. In its many forms – face to face, telephone, among written texts, or in cyberspace -- conversation is a **process of interpreting and understanding human experience**.

(my bolding, Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2002, p. 1)

Conversation is crucial. It is part of the machinery of culture, of society, of the self. It **stretches the imagination and makes it possible to envisage new narrative at the end of a century** in which some of the most controlling master narratives have collapsed. It shapes almost everyone’s notion -- or dream -- of friendship and family.

(my bolding, Brenson, 1998, p. 121)

... conversation is **fundamentally collaborative** (my bolding, Sawyer, 2001, p. 2).

As proponents of experiential learning, we are increasingly aware that much of **learning that occurs through experience emerges out of the interaction among people**, especially through their conversation with each other.

(my bolding, Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2002, p. ix)

Among these scholars who inquire into the intricacies of conversation is Homi K. Bhabha, a renowned postcolonial literary theoretician. His article, “Resonances of

Conversation” (1998), was written in the context of the Arts Festival of Atlanta – Conversation at the Castle – a project seeking to transform the distance between art and its audience, between the viewer of art exhibition and the viewed art object. Bhabha discusses conversation within the framework of this art project. Allow me to share with you some moments from Bhabha’s writing when he journeys, **“from the connoisseurial pedagogies of silence to the contingent and contextual practices of conversation”** (my bolding, p. 46). I leave you to linger in the artful conversational space Homi Bhabha has created in his article:

The spirit of conversational art lies in initiating “unplanned directions” and provoking “multilayered interpretations” (p. 44).

To move towards the act of conversation is to move away from this notion that reality and value lie in “confrontation” with a given object or reality that contains, within itself, a privileged “truth” about its nature and being (p. 41).

“Conversational realities” are not immaculate conceptions or “real” correspondences that satisfy the “eye” of the mind; they are dependent for their authority on the messy, contingent communicability that meshes together a community . . . (p. 42).

It is, in fact, the great gift of conversational art to actively engage in the ambivalences and ambiguities that emerge as contextual contingencies from the ironic and contradictory forces that constitute social reality (p. 42).

If . . . contextual contingency liberates us from a binary and polarized view that opposes reason to passion, the present to the past, it also commits us to living our lives and making our art from experiences that are ambivalent, contradictory, and unresolved.
(p. 42)

For conversation . . . depends for its ethical and aesthetic inquiry on living through contradiction and articulating ambivalent interests and identities (p. 47).

For me it is not easy to feel “at home” in Bhabha’s intricate house of language. It is not easy to engage with him in conversation because his language entangles with its

sophistication. Perhaps it is because of the remnants and echoes of his Parsi background reverberating in his English writing acquired at Bombay and Oxford Universities. At the same time, Bhabha is a kindred soul, a border-dweller like myself. After all, it was Homi Bhabha who proposed a reconceptualization of “border” as “in between” or “third space”:

“[b]etween” is a very interesting place of enunciation, because it’s also the place “in the midst of.” It’s not only between two polar positions, it is also in a new place – formed when those two positions somehow ignite, incite and initiate something that, in my own work, I have called a “third space.”

(Bhabha & Burgin, 1994, p. 454)

Lingering in the midst of intriguing notions and conceptual threads of Homi Bhabha’s “art of conversation,” I find myself actively engaged in the *ambivalences and ambiguities that emerge as contextual contingencies* of the “third space” where his unfathomable English writing with a Parsi accent meets my English with Estonian pronunciation. I begin wondering if Homi Bhabha’s articulation of “conversation” as “contextual contingency” points to the underlying metonymic nature of conversational realities, to the relations based on *contiguity* rather than *metaphoric* similarity.

It seems to me that I get caught by the “spirit of conversational art” which according to Bhabha lies in initiating “unplanned directions” and provoking “multilayered interpretations.” However, this “spirit” leads me also to think that “conversation” after all might be a *bordezone* art where a “third space” emerges and is created in conversations.

The vocabulary related to *conversation as a way of knowing* comes from the scholar of communication studies at the University of New Hampshire, John Shotter. “What we need,” he claims, “is not knowledge in the form of theoretical representations, but of a different, much more *practical* kind” (1994, p. 1). Shotter’s concern is about a very different kind of knowing, “a knowing of the third kind” that he describes as not theoretical knowledge (a “knowing – that”), since it is only present to us in our everyday social practices, nor simply a technical knowledge of a skill or craft (a “knowing – how”) but **a joint kind of knowledge, a knowledge-held-in-common**

with others, and judged by them in the process of its use” (my bolding, p. 1).

Shotter is convinced of the need to focus upon living, embodied, dialogical utterances, since they are relational – things that exist only in the interactive space between speakers and listeners. They do not exist “in the minds” (p. 4). His concern with the nature of conversational realities is driven by the desire

[t]o move away from those forms of talk that divert our attention away from what is important to us, that excludes us (or great number of us) from those moments in which we as ordinary people can participate in the construction of our realities – so that we do not have forms of life constructed by elite – others imposed upon us. **As professional academics, we really must move away from what can only go on within persons, to what goes on within relationships – even if it means giving up the theories we can each get inside our own heads.**

(my bolding, p. 4)

My dissertation is not only *about* conversational inquiry, it *is* conversation. It is indeed risky to engage *with* someone in conversation and to invite them to speak *into* your text. Including the co-authored dialogues in my dissertation is a commitment. These conversations/dialogues came into being through collaborative seminar work and conference presentation as texts of reciprocity. I assume the responsibility for the well-being of these voices in my dissertational text/home. Thus, I approach my dissertation not as solitary isolated individualistic closed space but a place that emerges through relationships, as a home that exists through the conversations between guests, friends, and colleagues. By welcoming my friends and colleagues into my dissertation/home I acknowledge and honour their presence. I express my gratitude to all who generously agreed to engage with me in conversation: my friends and colleagues Maija Heimo and Hartej Gill; and the members of the Estonian community theatre group: Armas Kivisild, Aino Lepp, Leida Nurmsoo, Dagmar Ohman, Helle Sepp, Marje Suurkask. And I give a big hug to my daughter Iana-Veronica who found courage to share with me “publicly” her opinions and thoughts.

I perceive my dissertation not only as conversation, but as collective creation where my author/ial self has an opportunity to become truly **intersubjective**, a “**self-in-relationship**” (Wilber, 1995, p. 183), a “**self-in-communion**” (Jensen & Kolb, 2002, p. 22). Here I recall the Latin meaning *communio*, “mutual participation,” that allows me to learn to listen and become keenly aware of the other. After all:

[w]e are subjects in others’ stories, others are subjects in our stories; others are authors of our stories, we are authors of others’ stories. Our narratives are essentially interwoven with other narratives. We are characters in other narratives – we are our parents’ child, our partner’s partner, our friends’ friend – and they are characters in our narratives. Also, through our discussions and intersections with others we facilitate the articulation and direction of their narratives, and they ours. All this is to say that our identity is never simply our own. It is embedded with relations with others and we do not have ultimate control over the nature of these relationships much less the nature of our identity.

(Vessey, 2002, p. 2)

By giving up the individualistic solitary authoritarian position of my writing, I dissolve my voice in conversation among the other voices, becoming a character rather than the author of my play. When you encounter the possessive noun “my” (which happens very often!) in my text, suspend it in brackets in order to remember and honour (my) self-in-relationship. Also, I recall that in Estonian the word “I” is *ma* which is homonymically very close to the word *maa* meaning “earth,” “land”. . . and I would like to speculate that *ma* was once and becomes again part of *maa*. At least that is what I want to feel when using the word “I”– *ma*.

the road is a slow moving river of red clay . . .

For me, researching/writing differently/alternatively in an academic space is not a question of choice but of responsibility. It is not only my im/migrant dis/location that relates me to “border zone” inquiring/knowing from a “subaltern” perspective. The colonial history of my ancestors connects me to Latin American, including Colombian, colonial legacy and to the position of colonized. If I want to recognize the pre-colonial ways of knowing of my ancestors from a distance of more than 700 years, I need to decolonize not only the colonial history of *my* culture, but also the mechanisms and structures of coloniality inscribed in Western institutions and discourses of power.

Walter Mignolo, a scholar of Latin American studies, argues that the dominant scholarly tradition of Western academia is epistemologically part of the “modern/colonial” design¹⁴ embedded in the foundational myths of the Enlightenment – rationalism, scientism, universalism. Western scholarly knowing, once just a local history among many other local histories, dominates now as the global design over the “other” ways of knowing, holding them in a position of “epistemic dependency” (Mignolo, 2002). Thus, I have found that in order to decolonize Western global scholarly design we need to research, know and write from the positions of local histories, from the perspectives of local truths. I believe that we need to liberate alter/native ways of understanding/writing/knowing from the position of epistemic dependency and resist the “totalizing” stance of Western modernist universalistic epistemology.

My dissertation writing/researching project, as a particular im/migrant story/knowing, participates in creating a space for a different, an-other culture of scholarship . . .

¹⁴ The notions of “global design” and “local histories” come from Mignolo (2001, p. 8), who sees the world in terms of multiple local histories where, however, some local histories are in a position of imagining and implementing global designs. He explains, for example, that at the moment we are living under the control of such global design as the “modern/colonial world,” which came out of certain local histories: Imperial Spain made the implementation of Christian designs for conversion to a global one possible; Imperial England, in complicity with French Enlightenment, displaced Christian global designs into Secular civilizing ones; Imperial U.S. displaced the global design of the civilizing mission by a global design of development and modernization. Currently, the market is becoming the global design of a new form of colonialism, a global coloniality.

At a time when the *grands récits* of the West have been told and retold *ad infinitum*, when a certain postmodernism (Lyotard's) speaks of an "end" to metanarratives and when Fukuyama talks of an "end of history," we must ask: precisely whose narrative and whose history is being declared at an "end"? Dominant Europe may clearly have begun to deplete its strategic repertoire of stories, but Third World people, First World "minorities" . . .¹⁵

S I L E N C E

Then a voice speaks. I am reminded yet again of that which I promised not to forget.

¹⁵ Shohat & Stam, 1994, p. 248.

I am dead. I was born here, in this town. In the little house made of red clay, with a straw roof. By the road, across the school.

The road is a slow moving river of red clay in the winter and a whirlwind of red dust in summer.

When the rains come you lose your sandals in the mud. The mules and horses get their bellies smeared with mud. The saddles and even the faces of the horsemen are spattered with mud. In the months when the sun hangs high and long in the sky, the entire town is covered with red dirt. The sandals go up the road, filled with red dirt and the hooves and legs of the horses, and the snorting nostrils of the mules and horses, and the manes, and saddles, and the sweaty faces, and hats, all become filled with red dirt.

I was born from that mud, and from that red dirt, and now I have returned to it. Here, in the small cemetery that watches over the town below, surrounded by daisies, geraniums, lilies, and thick grass. The acrid smell of red mud mingles with the sweet odour of yaraguá grass, and in the afternoon even the smell of the woods drifts overhead, and rushes down upon the town.¹⁶

It is La Maestra! I promised her I would not forget about the Red Road . . . the road that carries the memories of colonial histories and violence in Colombia.

La Maestra, is this the road towards decolonization, towards home, towards belonging?

¹⁶ Buenaventura, 1974, p. 24.

kust ma tunnen oma kodu
how can I recognize my home

küla kümmene seasta
among ten others in the village

talu seitseme taganta?
behind seven strange farms?

millest märkan oma maja
how can I find my house

kuusi kuivada jõgeda
beyond with six dry rivers

seitse sooda sitke'eda
seven sloppy swamps

kaheksa kalamereda
eight seas of fish

üheksa hüva ojada
nine beautiful brooks

kümme külma allikada?
ten cold springs in between?

I am (re)searching (for) home, *kodu*.

But I have forgotten *koda*, my ancestor's home . . .

If I follow the Red Road can I hope to re-cognize home?

WANDERING BORDER

THE EAST - WEST

BORDER

*is always wandering,
sometimes eastward, sometimes west,
and we do not know exactly where it is right now:
in Gaugamela, in the Urals,
or maybe in ourselves,
so that
one ear, one eye, one nostril, one hand, one foot,
one lung and one testicle or one ovary
is on the one, another on the other side.
Only the heart,
only the heart is always on one side:
if we are looking northward, in the West;
if we are looking southward, in the East;
and the mouth doesn't know on behalf of which or both
it has to speak.*

***ATRAVESANDO* DIASPORIC SPACES**

WITH A FRIEND, MAIJA

contextual FOOTnote

A conversation with my friend Maija Heimo, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Geography at the University of British Columbia, began under the title

Atravesando Diasporic Spaces: From "East" to "South."

It was conceived for the International Symposium: Nations, Pollinations and Dislocations, bringing together Latin American artists living on the different sides of the North South border. The symposium took place in the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, Vancouver, October 29-31, 1999.

Atravesar¹⁷ *is a Spanish verb meaning to put across, to cross, to penetrate, to go through.*

Atravesando *is a gerund, formed from the verb **atravesar**.*

A través (de) *means across, over, through.*

Andar *means to walk, to move, to go.*

(Yo) ando *means in English (I) walk, wander, move.*

*Thus **atravesando** articulates the process of crossing, wandering, moving through.*

Later the conversation continued on the 9th Annual Arts Graduate Student Conference: Articulating Ambivalent Legacies, at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, January 26-28, 2000, and at a Brown Bag Seminar, The Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction, UBC, March 29, 2000, Vancouver, under the title

Diasporic Imagi(nation)s: Re-Locating "Canadian Otherness."

¹⁷ Laurousse Concise Spanish-English/English-Spanish Dictionary, 1993, p. 53

entering into diasporic space

Together:

Dear Reader, our conversation is an invitation to you to join us as we inquire into the diasporic space of im/migrant identities. We would love to share with you some moments of our exploration/journey to different places and spaces such as Finland, Mexico, Estonia, Colombia and Canada.

Maija:

We have known each other quite a while. We are both immigrants and have been in Canada for more than eight years.

Kadi:

I arrived in Canada from Colombia after living and working there in the department of theatre and literature at the University of Valle, Cali for six years . . . however, my native country is Estonia.

Maija:

I arrived in Canada from Finland. However, because of my research on pre-Colombian agriculture, I have spent long periods living in Mexico.

Kadi:

Estonia and Finland are neighboring countries and are culturally and linguistically very close. If we tried hard, we could understand each other in Estonian or in Finnish.

Maija:

We met through a common Estonian friend; paradoxically, she thought that we might relate through our "Latin American" connection. She was right. Latin American culture and Spanish language have not only become a special bond between us but have influenced immensely the formation of our immigrant identities.

Kadi:

We usually speak in Spanish, and very often we reflect upon the “intricacies” of our im/migrant identities. When Maija told me about the Metropolis project . . . our identity discussions became particularly “hot”!

Maija:

The *Metropolis* is one of the largest investigation projects on immigration in Canada, funded by SSHRC and aimed at making suggestions regarding National Immigration Policy.¹⁸

The researchers of the project have already arrived at some conclusions. Their studies underline the centrality of English language as the “most important” factor for the immigrants' success in Canada. Success, in these investigations, is considered mainly in economic terms.

Kadi:

It sounds to me as a very discriminatory position, although close to reality as we both know! How can one measure success solely in economic terms? Don't you really feel depressed, even repressed when you read that the “labor market simply does not value language knowledge and the possibilities such knowledge brings . . . in Canada language knowledge is wasted capital.”¹⁹ As a Vancouver School Board study showed a few years ago – the majority of kids do not speak English at home! Maija, how many languages do you speak . . . “waste”?

¹⁸ http://canada.metropolis.net/index_e.html

¹⁹ Pendakur & Pendakur, *Speak and Ye Shall Receive: Language Knowledge as Human Capital*, 1997, http://riim.metropolis.net/frameset_e.html

Maija:

I use four or five languages every day. I learned Spanish when I started to do my research and now I speak Spanish daily alongside with English and Finnish. Some days I also speak Swedish. For me it is crucial to be able to access daily Finnish and Swedish newspapers. In fact, I am dying to write in Finnish, and English is starting to sicken me.

Kadi:

Maija, watch out, Krishna and Ravi Pendakur (1997), who looked at immigrants' language knowledge in terms of human capital also talk in their article about "accent penalty." Every language you use might leave your English with the traces of different accents, so you might have to pay a high penalty . . .

Maija:

Yes, indeed. I do feel like being penalized, marginalized not exactly as a "visible" but as an "audible minority," as the minority who communicates in different "ethnic" languages and who, in order to succeed, is forced to get rid of "mistakes" and "accents" – subjugate the other cultures and languages under the dominance of "perfect English" . . .

Kadi:

However, as we both know, the formation of immigrant identities is a complicated process, which cannot be so easily subordinated to or coordinated by the "English" centre.

Maija:

There is more . . . The researchers of the *Metropolis* project have pointed out that because of the existence of this "accent penalty," non-native English speakers also receive lower paid jobs and salaries.

Kadi:

Feeling frustrated and confused about the findings of the Metropolis immigration project we decided to embark on our "own exploration" of im/migrant identities! We found that one of the concepts that seem to describe living in such space most closely is the notion of "diaspora."

Of course, the usage of this concept is not an unproblematic task. There is a gap between signifier and signified. We are aware that "diaspora" belongs linguistically to Greek culture and is embedded in Jewish, Armenian and in African history. We face a gap with all the words we are using. All words carry a history. However, in the research focusing on the issues of im/migration, the notion of diaspora has become a popular term.

For better or worse, diaspora discourse is being widely appropriated. It is loose in the world, for reasons having to do with decolonization, increased immigration, global communications and transport -- a whole range of phenomena that encourage multi-locale attachments, dwelling and travelling within and across nations.

(Clifford, 1994, p. 285)

There are a variety of proposals to determine a complex historical and discursive field of diaspora. Some of them center on a teleology of homeland origin/return (Safran, 1991), some around a theme of settling down, putting roots "elsewhere" (Brah, 1996).

However, the majority of current discussions approach diaspora in terms of **constant negotiations, oscillations, fluctuations, tensions, evolving relationships between one's place of origin with that of one's present home, between an earlier "there" and current "here," between "where you're from" and "where you're at"** (Ang, Gilroy, Hall, Radhakrishnan, Venkatasawmy).

Diaspora has been defined as:

- ***dwelling-in-displacement*** (Clifford, 1994, p. 298)
- ***site of hybridity*** (Venkatasawmy, 1996, p. 19)

- *space of the hyphen* (Radhakrishnan, 1996, p. xiii)
- *journey* (Brah, 1996, p. 182)

Diasporic subjectivity is seen as:

double: acknowledging the imperatives of an earlier “elsewhere” in an active and critical relationship with the cultural politics of one’s present home, all within the figurality of a reciprocal displacement.

(Radhakrishnan, 1996, p. xiii)

As an immigrant I live in diasporic space, in between an earlier elsewhere, my place of origin, and my present home. In his book, Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and

Location (1996), Radhakrishnan asks:

Is the diaspora an epiphenomenal condition that recalls and comments on (and is supplementary to) an earlier authentic condition, or is it, as the history of the present, transformative both of itself and its origins?

(p. xiii)

*I would respond to this question that both are. I can identify with these approaches because I **do** live in between nations, languages and cultures. In a way I live in both Canada and Estonia at the same time. Living in diaspora has not only forced me to confront the adaptation problems in the new country – Canada, but has forced me to look differently at the country I come from – Estonia. Living far away from one’s “native” land, struggling to make a home in a “new” country, and oscillating constantly between them, a past “there” and a current “here” where “here” and “there,” “past” and “present” are overlapping, interweaving, interacting . . . constantly.*

Maija:

But what if you are oscillating in between more than two locations, if your “diasporic identity” includes more than two cultures, nations, countries?

Kadi:

In her book, Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities (1996), Avatar Brah claims that "at the heart of the notion of diaspora is the image of journey" (p. 182). She points out that not every journey can be understood as diaspora since diaspora is clearly not the same as casual travel nor temporary sojourns. Diasporic journeys are about settling down, about putting roots "elsewhere."

What is important about diasporic journey is – how and in what ways do these journeys conclude, and intersect in specific places, specific spaces, and specific historical conjunctures?

(Brah, p. 182)

This is the definition we are the most keen about.

Together:

We will embark now on the journey to follow our diasporic roots and routes, to look at where we come from, where we are at, and how we articulate our identities. We are intrigued about why and how we, as immigrants in Canada, construct our shared daily spaces and experiences in/through Spanish language and the Latin American culture.

Kadi:

Although we often wander along our common Finno-Ugrian "home-cultural" language lines looking for similarities and differences between Estonian and Finnish, Latin America and Spanish is a centre where our friendship, informal conversations and scholarly interests intersect and meet.

Maija:

It is really strange to speak English to Kadi because we have known each other through the Spanish language. But of course if we want to communicate with other Canadians, we'll need to translate our Spanish into English . . .

locating: where are we from?

Kadi:

So, Maija, where are you from?

Maija:

What do you mean? From *Finlandia*, of course?!

Kadi:

*Actually, I wanted to ask how, where would you locate Finland on the world map?
Living between here and there makes me think of geopolitics. Would it be . . . Are you
from Eastern Europe?!*

Maija:

Oh, you are looking through the glasses of the Cold War when Finland was seen as the buffer state between the East and the West. Culturally, we think that we belong to the West; after all Finland was under Sweden's occupation for more than 600 years. Geographically, Finland is part of the Eastern European peninsula. Politically, Finland is "neutral" but now it has joined the European Union's common "crisis management policy" and many would like Finland to join NATO.

And what about you? Where are you from? We in Finland feel that Estonia is almost a relative, not just for its language but also for its long history of oppression. And then we feel pity for Estonia because it lost its independence in 1939 and Finland didn't. Where are you from, Kadi?

Kadi:

It is a tricky question.

*During the times of the Iron curtain – Estonia existed under the denominator of Soviet
Block and was clearly part of **Eastern Europe**.*

*In the book Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation (1999), political scientist Iver B. Neumann situates Estonia in **Northern** Europe.*

*Now that the Berlin Wall is gone and Estonia has regained its independence, Estonia exists on the world map under the common denominator of Baltic States. Along with the other former Socialist bloc countries, Estonia is remodeling its economy, politics, and culture, according to "Western" ways and standards. Currently the Estonians want to belong/consider themselves belonging to **Western** Europe!*

Eastern Europe has become for Estonians a contested and humiliating denominator, reminding Estonians about their "underdevelopment" and status of the "Other." "Eastern Europe" was invented by Western Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth century, the age of Enlightenment. Larry Wolff has investigated this process in his book Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment (1994). Also, look how cultural historians are describing the perception of "East" and "West" by the Western mind:

It] should be understood that the very words "West" and "East," in themselves and by definition, are expressions of Western European civilization's culture. They are loaded terms that carry certain specific perceptual implications for all Westerners. To the Western mind, 'East' is synonymous with such expressions as inferior, superstitious, dangerous, threatening, backward, corrupt, mysterious, weak, effeminate, and any number of other negative perceptions regarding humans and their societies. By corollary, 'West' is associated with such opposite terms as superior, scientific, secure, benign, modern, virtuous, rational, strong, masculine, and various other positive individual or collective human attributes.

(my bolding, Hupchick, 1994, p. 72)

Maija:

It sounds like the South and North dichotomy: undeveloped vs. developed; black people vs. white; traditional vs. modern; uncivilized vs. civilized, etc.

Kadi:

Sure, there are correspondences, according to those dichotomies both "East" and "South" denominate the "uncivilized other" that is opposed to "North" and "West" both representing the civilized self.

Maija:

But it is even more complex. Look, following the perspective of the South/North border stereotypes you and I could be seen as being from the North.

Kadi:

Because we both look white?!

Maija:

Not only. In Finland there are the indigenous Sami people who are considered Finland's "Other." Well, according to South/North and West/East stereotypes, they represent "South," however; geographically they live in the far North! Tourism in Lapland has appropriated their culture and ways of living for its own purposes. They are portrayed as "traditional" or "primitive," "living in harmony with nature," and the words from their culture are used as names of restaurants and hotels.

Kadi:

Appropriation of indigenous cultures by tourist industries is such a common "business" happening not only with the Sami in Finland but with indigenous people in Colombia,

*Mexico, Canada, in sum, all over the world! And not only by tourist industries but by all
nationalistic discourses.*

Maija:

I lived among the Sami for three years, working in tourism. I gradually became aware of the status of the Sami people as the “Other” of the Finnish “Self.” However, it was only after journeying to Mexico, to the actual North – South border that I became really aware of/uncomfortable with my positionings as the “colonizer” and the “self.”

from “North” to “South,” from Finland to Mexico

Kadi:

But tell me, Maija, how did your experiences in Mexico change your understanding of these dichotomies of othering and your positionings?

Maija:

I’m awakening to the process of “othering” and learning how, for instance, I myself have been and am part of it.

When I went to Mexico for the first time in 1994, I had the impression, shaped by my Northern culture, that tropical people are lazy because of the climate. We drove from Mexico City to Veracruz and passed through many small towns with the highway in the middle. It was hot and we had the windows open. There was so much “noise” around us: *klings* and *klangs* from the *vulcanizadora*, knockings from a carpenter’s shop, vendors shouting their ads, *burros klopping*, cars and bicycles rattling while delivering this and that. And I remember myself wondering where all the lazy people were.

After several years and postcolonial readings I went to Mexico again. I went to visit *chinampas*, an agricultural system in Mexico City, built originally by the Aztecs and later reworked, expanded and preserved throughout the colonial and contemporary times. At this time I was already suspicious of the preconceptions regarding the notion of “traditional” agriculture understood as ecologically sustainable and, therefore, unchanging; rooted in the indigenous tradition and, therefore, in harmony with the nature. Despite many changes due to urbanization and market economies, within the agriculture of the *chinampas*, the nostalgia for the sustainable and traditional practices (that need to be salvaged) prevails in much of the academic literature, and the image of the “great past” continues to be idealized/exploited by tourism.

We also explored canyons and the traditional agriculture practiced there, so we went down to a village at the bottom of the canyon. The people explained to us their agriculture: they plant and tend to individual trees and bushes; and they create suitable growing conditions and soils on the slopes according to the microenvironment and its subtle variation. Every house had a kitchen garden with some animals. There were no agricultural fields as I had conceived agriculture within my Western education, but there was an **intricate agroforestry** and the forest was all managed. This was a miniature of Amazonia.

The western media gives us the idea that the destruction of the Amazonia happens because of the Indigenous people's "ancient" and "traditional" slash and burn techniques, which destroy the forest and leave the soil bare, vulnerable to erosion and infertility. In the media, however, we don't read about the sophisticated slash and burn agroforestry. If managed ideally, this system leaves the soil bare for only a few month's period of time and mostly during the dry season and, thus, maintains species diversity, imitates the forest composition, and produces tens of edible and other products.

The media is also silent about how the incursion of and integration of capitalist economies has made it impossible to manage slash and burn in the traditional way: how access to enough land is denied, how markets are far away and uninterested in the products, how a shift to commercially viable products disrupts the working cycle of slash and burn, leaving it vulnerable to overgrowth and diminished yields.

The media portrays the natives living an unchanged lifestyle in harmony with the pristine nature; it is a myth. Because of the "traditional" slash and burn agriculture, the forest was never pristine but managed, and in some places, it even ran into disarray due to excessive land use, causing erosion and deforestation.

However, the reality today poorly supports the nostalgic contentions. What is perceived as "traditional" agriculture is changing character. "Traditional" and "modern"

agricultural methods coexist and interact with each other. Complexities, and skewed representation, are issues that I have come to see as “othering” due to my readings in the postcolonial criticism and my Mexican experience.

In my classes I need to make students aware of the complexities, to explain that only in certain socio-economic and political conditions the *chinampas* were sustainable and the basis of a culture. I also want to talk about how colonization continues in the *chinampas* and how we are implicated in this process. We are appropriating the pre-Columbian knowledges and technologies despite our postcolonial awareness. This occurs in a seemingly harmless manner.

“Scientists” from the “North”/“West” have been cruising the “South”/the “Third World” for the last twenty years to collect the “traditional” wisdom about sustainable agriculture. There is now a substantial body of knowledge available so that the discipline of “Agroecology” is an academic field in universities, including the University of British Columbia. This body of knowledge is, in my mind, vital if we want to transform “modern” agriculture into ecologically more sustainable agriculture; much of it, however, is based on the appropriation of indigenous knowledge.

How to deal with this dilemma? The textbooks of agroecology do not describe how the holders of this knowledge are treated by the globalizing forces, nor do they mention local pressures they are under and what discourses are circulating about the “traditional” resource use and users in the Third and the First Worlds. Having said this, I gladly acknowledge that, for instance, in the University of British Columbia the faculty of agriculture has hired an agroecologist with a social science background trained in ethics and critical thinking. These issues are also being inserted into technical courses ranging from agroecology to nutrition and community. Needless to say that I’m delighted.

As a researcher and teacher I feel like a conqueror. But as a Finn with the long national history of oppression, I empathize with the conquered. I feel in between these opposing positions. At the same time, I do not want to feel a victim, nor do I want to victimize

anybody. Now that I am so conscious of these processes of othering, my challenge, for instance, in teaching, is to question, to do something in regard to these tensions and construed positions.

from “East” to “South,” from Estonia to Colombia

Kadi:

I am struggling, fighting with very similar dilemmas.

I journeyed to Colombia for personal reasons – I met and married a Colombian when studying in Russia, in the Institute of Theatre, Music and Cinematography. For me it was not going to the South but to the West – everything beyond the Iron Curtain was West for us then, before perestroika! (I have started locating Colombia in the South from here, from Canada!) That’s why I perhaps may say that my journey to the West . . . the South – to Colombia has been not only challenging but life-changing. It totally transformed my habits, my worldview, changed my previous cultural and political preconceptions and my views of my home country. One of the most transforming experiences was my encounter with the Colombian theatre director, actor and playwright Enrique Buenaventura.

“La vida es dura,” said Enrique Buenaventura when I met him the first time in front of his Teatro Experimental de Cali when coming from Estonia in 1987.

You will locate this building if you walk three or four blocks southwards from the centre of Cali, which is filled with the high buildings of modern banks. Soon you find yourself on old narrow streets with white, two-storied, dubiously crooked clay houses. Among the houses, there is an iron fence where, I am not so sure, I don’t remember, you will find the sign Teatro Experimental de Cali. Peeking through the bars of the gate you might be able to glimpse part of a surprisingly spacious patio sheltered by a wide crowned mighty mango-tree with a long table and benches, a few chairs with broken backs, some papier-mâché “corpses” and a magnificent 4 metre tall puppet in a white wedding dress (it was Mama Grande from a production called El encierro, as I got to know later). This building where Enrique Buenaventura has created his space of decolonization of Latin American self was squeezed in between Spanish colonial architecture and North American industrial dictatorship.

Enrique was glad but not surprised to meet me. He was used to the pilgrimage of countless travellers from the countries of "developed" theatrical traditions who came to refresh/rediscover/recolonize their languished inspiration from the abundant springs of Latin American creativity. Barba, Grotowsky, Brook – which traveller from Europe has not tried to establish contact with the indigenous cultures in order to reconnect with the lost ritualistic realms in hope to "save" the Western Theatre from its decline?

Maija:

That's exactly what has happened with agroecology!

Kadi:

In Cali, I could feel that Latin Americans look at these "new colonizers" with caution and skepticism: what are they after now? And what do they have to offer in exchange?

The obdurate heart and the soul sold to the "God of Money?" In Colombia in theatre couloir's I heard the story about Grotowsky – the group of indigenous people thought of him as being a fake-witch since to the ritual that Grotowsky conducted the "spirits" did not arrive . . .

So much blood and violence has been brought from Europe to Latin America – there is nothing to wonder then that Theatre Gods from Europe are not always greeted with open arms. Enrique's theatre is dedicated to analyzing Colombia's history of violence and colonization.

In an environment where social conflicts are extremely acute, where hunger accompanies great numbers of people on an everyday basis, where police "clean" the city streets by killing homeless kids and throwing them into the river . . . who would not criticize the existing "order?" Who would not search for the ways of resistance? Who would not want to stop the violence?

This is why Enrique's theatre is so critical, this is why the principal characters of his theatre belong to/come from the never-ending round dance of political and social machinations: President, Priest, Colonel, Sergeant, versus prostitutes, beggars, Teacher and the perpetual companion of life – Death . . .

Like you in Mexico, I was in an ambivalent position, although I was not aware of it when living in Colombia. Coming from a country which was part of the Soviet Union, I did not feel like a privileged Westerner. In addition, before perestroika times the artists and intellectuals in Colombia looked sympathetically towards Socialist countries. Of course, I learned pretty quickly about the advantages of being "white" and having "blue eyes."

However, I became aware of my possible "colonizer"/"self" positioning gradually, mostly afterwards, when looking back to my Colombian experience from here, from Canada. In "multicultural" Canada I got confronted and deeply immersed in the issues of racism and colonialism, theoretically and practically, on an everyday basis. In Canada I become acutely aware of Self/Other, centre/margin, white/colour dichotomies.

Now I feel like living on the border – constantly oscillating back and forth between memories and experiences of the cultures and places I have been part of. But to live on the border is so hard, sometimes so illuminating and sometimes so confusing . . .

pedagogical encounters

Kadi:

Maija, I remember that you tried to convey the experience of living on the border in the course you were teaching on The Americas in the university?!

Maija:

Yes, I was teaching a third year course, Geography of the Americas, where I wanted to make thematic links and connections between the “North” and the “South.” One of the topics was *the borders*. However, I felt horrified imagining myself lecturing about the dynamics of the Mexico-US border and the in-between lives of people who have crossed this border. Therefore I decided to “throw” the students into the “border” experience.

I entered the classroom and started to talk about the borders in Spanish. After a couple of sentences a student of Salvadorian background said in English: “Can you speak English, please.” After a few more sentences a white Canadian woman showed me a piece of paper where she had written: “*Habla Inglés, por favor.*” I continued in Spanish until a Canadian man stood up and started to walk towards the back door of the room. When I asked him in English not to leave yet, he turned around and yelled at me: “Why should I stay, I don’t understand a word. Besides this an English speaking university and I expect to hear English in the class!” I asked him to hang on for a few more minutes and promised to explain to him what this was all about.

He came back. I asked the students to write down what they felt, thought, wanted to do during my “experiment;” I waited outside the room. When I returned I lectured “normally” about the borders and, thereafter, asked people to share what they had written down. The reactions ranged from amusement to surprise to feelings of superiority, pity, and helplessness. The man who was going to walk out admitted that he had experienced outright anger.

At the end of the course, many students said that this “lecture” stood out and was the one that provided them with a deeper understanding of the Americas. One male student

wrote about having come to Canada from Romania at the age of twelve and having always felt not fitting in and considering it his fault. The “border experiment” helped him to understand what he had gone through and to come to terms with his experience.

Kadi:

*It is amazing how some events can so radically change our former understandings . . . I remember well how I became aware of colonialism and Eurocentrism when teaching a theatre history class at the University of Valle, in Cali, Colombia. In order to avoid being a typical “colonizer” and not impose my ideas on my students, I decided to use in our class not one but several theatre history text-books. I divided the class into groups and assigned a different book to each group. We had Spanish translations of theatre history books written by Italian, French, Russian and North American authors. I was expecting that in the process of comparing these different descriptions of theatre history, we would learn that history is not something fixed but varies . . . and that there are different interpretations of history. I was sure that this way the students would come to their **own** conclusions.*

Maija:

Did it work?

Kadi:

No, it failed. Completely. Quite to the contrary to my expectations, we could not find anything different in those theatre text-books. All the books were telling the “same hiStory.” All the books were structured the same way – they all started in Greece with “teatro antigua” – passed through all “épocas grandes” of European theatre in France, Great Britain, Germany, Spain, Russia – and ended with the contemporary avant-garde movement in United States. It became so obvious that all the other cultures and continents beyond Europe and North America did not exist! In addition, all the books approached theatre as literary genre – “written dramatic text” – and they did not include or completely undermined the performative events. The only thing that differed in these books was the included data and details.

Now, if you look at Colombian theatre from this perspective you would come to the same paradoxical conclusion, as did the North American theatre historian Leon F. Lyday. Researching pre-1800s Colombian theatre history he could identify only four (!) texts which would qualify as theatre:

- entermés *Laurea crítica* by Fernández de Valenzuela,
- coloquios *La competencia en los nobles* and
- *Paráphrasis panegírica* by Cueto y Mena
- loa in honor of “La jura” of Ferdinand VI by Jacinto de Buenaventura.

(Lyday, 1970, pp. 35-51)

Isn't it obvious that Leon F. Lyday approaches theatre as written text of the Creole élite conceived according to European/Hispanic dramatic canons, imposing the European (colonizer's!) codifying system over the Latin American signifying practices?!

Maija:

How did this experience change what you do now in Canada?

Kadi:

After my “experiment,” I became very conscious that “theatre” is not a transparent neutral notion. It is like m/any other notions used by global theoretical currency today, such as “culture,” “development,” “progress,” etc., firmly embedded in the European cultural history (the West providing the universal models for the non-Western/other cultures to follow).

Bound tightly to the tradition of written dramatic text, the European concept of theatre excludes the vast and rich domain of non-European and popular expressions. That's why I have become keener about the notion “performance” instead of “theatre.” Latin

American theatre historian Diana Taylor, in her opening remarks to the book, Negotiating Performance: Gender, Sexuality, and Theatricality, 1994, comments:

The fact that no exact equivalent for “performance” exists in Spanish did not dissuade us from using the term, primarily because there is a long and very rich tradition of performance in Latin America. Evidence of pre-Hispanic rituals, dances, and plays exist in the codices (indigenous manuscripts), the bas-reliefs on temples and buildings, and the journals of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century explorers and conquerors. In order to be able to appreciate the plethora of spectacles native to our cultures, we have to retrain ourselves to look beyond the term “theatre,” a term that was imposed in the early colonial period along with the obligatory adherence to Spanish models, themes and styles.

(p. 14)

Since my interpretation of the notion of “theatre” has changed, I could not join the Theatre Department at the University of British Columbia. In Canada, I identify myself with community and popular theatre movements. Very soon after arriving in Canada I got involved in community theatre work with a group of Estonian immigrants. Right now we are working on a project based on the exploration of diasporic spaces in our lives in Canada. Also, I learned that the majority of popular theatre work takes place in the Faculty of Education.

My experience in Colombia, the encounter with Enrique Buenaventura and Teatro Experiemental de Cali, and my work in the Theatre and Literature Department at the University of Valle in Cali totally transformed not only my “theatrical” but “political consciousness,” if I may say so. I became aware of the Eurocentric nature not only of the discipline of theatre history but also of my own theatre education/background from Leningrad. Earlier, I had always thought of Russian culture more in terms of Eastern, even Asian influences; I had never perceived Russia in terms of a Western Eurocentric mindset. I realized that the ideology of Socialism, based on theories of the German

philosophers Marx and Engels, is Western ideology! Furthermore, I realized that there is not much difference between Socialism and Capitalism – between these opposing Cold War ideologies, because both of them are embedded in Western Modernist discourse. In

Colombia I changed my Cold War lenses (Socialism versus Capitalism) to different lenses through which I became aware of the domination of the Western Eurocentric view of the world and through which I began to see the world from a different perspective; from the perspective of othering, from the perspective of colonizer and colonized.

Maija:

But how do you view now the country you are coming from – Estonia?

Kadi:

Now, living here in Canada, and looking through the lenses I acquired in Colombia at the events happening in my native country, Estonia, I cannot afford to not be concerned.

Estonia, celebrating its recently gained independence (1991), is dying of a desire to be included into the West.

What worries me is how quickly and easily the Estonians have forgotten about their other colonizers, about 700 hundred years of colonization by the Western European, mainly German powers.

From one side, it is understandable that in order to survive in the complex economic situation of the global world, it is necessary to overcome the position of the victim, but on the other hand, idealizing the West and forgetting completely about the history of colonization can bring about a possibility of RE-colonization. In my point of view, it is already happening. There was an article in a recent Georgia Straight:

“Tallinn – New Prague, new tourist mecca – castles and cheap beer!”

Aren't these the signs that Estonia is becoming a new banana-land of the rich West?

re-locating: where are we at?

Kadi:

I do not feel like belonging to the West, rather, similarly to Latin Americans, I feel like being in the position of European "other." That makes me feel connected to the burning issues of Latin Americans, such as a critique of Eurocentrism and decolonization. These are among my central concerns.

Maija:

This is where I am at also . . . very aware of the processes of othering of the Sami and other culturally distinct groups in Finland.

Kadi:

It appears to me that there is a connection between East-West and North-South conceptual divisions; they seem to intersect . . . at least in our lives.

Maija:

This takes us back to the maps. We already showed how difficult it is to point out on a map where we are from.

Kadi:

Indeed, geographical, historical, cultural, personal locations don't coincide at all!

Maija:

If one goes deeper to the history of cartography it becomes also clear that maps are fictions.

Kadi:

Cartographic twists . . .

Maija:

For instance, the Eastern border of Finland has migrated tremendously over the hundreds of years and so has the Mexican border which once was not far from south of Oregon.

Kadi:

Similarly, the border of Europe has traveled. In the 17th century the Russian tsar Peter I the Great, who has gone down in history as the ruler who Westernized Russia, ordered his court geographers to draw maps where the Ural Mountains were defined as the Eastern border of Europe. That's how Russia became part of Europe.

Maija:

The maps are also part of power discourses!

On Hecateu's schematic map of the world, from medieval times, Jerusalem is in the center, in the middle of the three known continents. On this map, Jerusalem represents the world's ideological center, symbolically reasserting its power and the authority of Christianity.

Kadi:

Maija, have you seen Sebastian Münster's map of Europe from 1588? This map is not an abstract representation but a "real" embodiment of power. It is the map where Europe is embodied with "Hispania" as a head, "Gallia" and "Germania" as an upper body, "Italia" as a right arm, "Livonia" (Livonia was a name for Estonia during medieval times) as a part of the lower left edge of the royal gown.

Maija:

Another interesting characteristic common to medieval maps is that the cardinal directions are positioned according to the power discourses of the time. On these maps East is in the North and South is in the East!

Later, when navigation and exploration increased, these maps became useless and new maps were drawn. This time, England, the most important imperial nation, moved into the center.

Kadi:

A renowned theoretician of nationalism, Craig Calhoun, writes that modern maps reflected a transformation both in how the world was understood and in how power was socially organized. In the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, maps began commonly to represent the world as divided into territories with fixed borders rather than vague frontiers. This reflected the increasing division of the world into the dominion of different European states, the policing and even militarization of borders. Map-making and nationalism reflected both the new internal unity and the clearer borders
(Calhoun, 1997, pp. 13-14).

Maija:

These cartographic twists show that cartographic designs of East/West and South/North are not just contemporary constructions but have been constructed and reconstructed according to the historical discourses of power.

Kadi:

We have been journeying/oscillating in between where we come from and where we are at . . . Shouldn't we then look at/make sense of these realities of "diaspora" through bifocal lenses? As far as I know, bifocal glasses have lenses made in two halves – the top part for looking at distant "there" and the bottom part for looking at nearby "here."

Maija:

Oh no! It is not that simple. I think that we should, instead, look at diasporic spaces through lenses that show multiple perspectives. The so-called progressive or gradual lenses might serve more adequately (as a better metaphor) for this purpose. These progressive or gradual lenses have up to twelve different vertically located zones of optical strength. Additionally these twelve zones of vision somehow merge on the sides.

Kadi:

It seems then that if we want to look at our journeys through “diasporic lenses” we would not see a dichotomous but a much more complex picture of reality. And, it seems to be not only a question of the lenses but also how and what we focus on, plus how we position ourselves. If all these places and spaces are constructed, the diasporic identity can be imagined only in a movement shaped by the dynamics of evolving journeys as a mobile network emerging during these journeys between different re-locations.

Maija:

Kadi, have you noticed something? We have started talking about **looking** at diaspora. Seems that we are stuck in disembodied voyeuristic gaze!

Kadi:

Uh, indeed I start feeling like a monkey from a poem by Krylov, a famous Russian fable writer. I remember his poem “Monkey and Glasses” from my childhood. It was about a monkey who tried on thousand pairs of glasses without finding the right ones.

Maija:

Perhaps it is more appropriate, then, to talk in terms of **in-sights** . . .

Kadi:

*Yes, there is something I have learned while co-journeying – **atravesando** – diasporic spaces. In Canada my im/migrant identity unfolds/happens along the axis of evolving relationship between my Estonian and Latin American related experiences. Of course, in my identity network many other cultures are involved. Living in Canada, we constantly intersect with people, languages and cultures from multiple locations of the world. However, Latin America and Estonia, Spanish and Estonian and the issues of othering and decolonization are the relevant centers around which my identity negotiations occur.*

Maija:

So, instead of an Anglocentric or English language centered model of im/migrant diasporic existence we would like to suggest an existence of different configurations of relationships, where English is just one of the cultures we as individuals are oscillating between.

Kadi:

Thus, in the configurations of im/migrant identities in addition to THE English Center, other linguistic and cultural centers may play an equally central role. Sociologist Craig Calhoun in his book, Nationalism (1997), invites us to look differently at existing modern maps:

[T]he globe has not always been divided into the patchwork quilt of differently coloured countries shown on today's map. Making maps this way, with sharp borders between countries and an attempt at a 'bird's eye' view from above, is a modern practice. Most earlier maps were either local – like city plans or charts of shorelines – or focused on directions for travelers, featuring roads between cities and natural landmarks like mountains, and offering much vaguer representations of who lived where, without the attempt to define boundaries precisely. . . . Maps tended to look outward from the centers of power

(p. 13)

Diasporic journeys challenge us to reconsider modernist cartographic practices and re-imagine the maps, to re-map our locations according to our personal experiences/journeys.

Together:

Please, dear Reader, feel free to mark here your own journey!

MEXICO

FINLAND

ESTONIA

CANADA

COLOMBIA

RUSSIA

SWEDEN

e-mail from Maija: where am I at . . .

Sent: Saturday, April 05, 2003 9:48 AM

Querida Kadi:

Thanks for inviting me to add a paragraph or two to our conversation years ago – I write these lines after just having read the introduction to your dissertation.

Yesterday I participated in a seminar about the conversion of conventional (read industrial, capitalist, colonialist, white, scientific, 'enlightened' (hah!) etc.) agriculture to a more sustainable one. We take models from 'Latin America,' 'Asia,' or 'Africa,' concoct them to what is now 'Agroecology,' and then apply in California, Lower Mainland, Finland, Mexico, perhaps Estonia, too.

Increasingly, however, we include social studies in Agroecology programs, and I hope to soon prepare a course on gender and race in agriculture! Yesterday we also visited UBC Farm (yes, such a thing exists and operates – they sell organic food every Saturday during the season!) and watched grade 7 students from a private school learning to grow food. They are an "explicitly chosen group" because "they most likely will be in positions where they can effect a change." Also underprivileged children come to the farm to learn to grow their own food, understand the food system, its inequities, and unsustainabilities. I hope the students in both types of groups are taught that the soil they cultivate is in the Musqueam territory. I also hope to become part of the 'instructional' team on UBC farm.

Last summer I visited (!) my grandmother's birth place, Hassis, a small farm on the 64th parallel in Finland, near Kokkola where you touched port on your way from Estonia to Colombia! The farm has been in the family for almost 400 years, and my grandma told me shortly before she died that in her dreams she was lying on her stomach in the field, clawing the soil. She left the farm and region in her twenties, and much later, when almost eighty, she moved to Canada. The weeks before her death, she spoke her Swedish language with her dialect to me, Finnish to my mother, and Swefinglish to the staff of the nursing home. She is 'buried' in the Georgia Straight. I find my spiritual home in the soil and with the people of Hassis, and plan to teach agriculture in English to multicultural students on UBC farm.

Now I go 'back' to writing 'my' dissertation on what I encountered, saw, shared, and heard about the lived experiences of farmers in San Luis Tlaxiatalmalco, Mexico City, where they make a living on the *chinampas*. I write about how they negotiate the imposition of a 'participatory' 'conservation plan' on the *chinampas* and their hopes, livelihoods, and community. I aspire to your statement: "We need to liberate alter-native ways of understanding/writings/knowings from the position of epistemic dependency and resist the 'totalising' stance of the Western modernist universalistic epistemology."

Thank you, Kadi, Maija

WANDERING BORDER

THE EAST - WEST

border

*is always wandering,
sometimes eastward, sometimes west,*

THE SOUTH - NORTH

border

*is also wandering
moving forcefully southwards, only southwards
and we know exactly where it is right now*

*"The U.S. - Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates
against the first and bleeds"²⁰*

***Dear Maestra, how can I re-cognize home
if this border divides the world***

so that

*"West" and "North" as superior, scientific, secure, benign, modern, virtuous,
rational, strong, masculine
are on the one*

*"East" and "South" as inferior, superstitious, dangerous, threatening, backward,
corrupt, mysterious, weak, effeminate
on the other side?*

so that

self, colonizer is on the one

colonized, "other" on the other side.

²⁰ Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 3.

AT HOME ON THE BORDER:

ENTANGLING NATIONAL *AFFILIATIONS*

voices from the border

"The West is no longer west. The old binary models have been replaced by a border dialectic of ongoing flux. We now inhabit a social universe in constant motion, a moving cartography with a floating culture and fluctuating sense of self."

Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems & Loqueras for the End of the Century.*

"Home, Esther decides, was not a point, a place, or spot. Home is the way in which points join. It is a grid for references only, not a firm, fixed thing that never alters. Home can grow. And shrink. "

Linda Kivi, *If Home Is a Place*

"I'm not in Canada; I'm not in Argentina.

I'm on the Border. I am Home."

Guillermo Verdecchia, *Fronteras Americanas/American Borders*

"It was mixed. I was mixed. It was Ok. You didn't have to speak English perfectly, you didn't have to speak Spanish perfectly, you could mix both languages."

my daughter, personal conversation

"I had such good Estonian . . . now, writing the letters to Estonia I get embarrassed, I can see how clumsy my writing is. This has influenced my self-esteem, I perceive myself as imperfect, incomplete, a 'half-person'... My life seems to be divided: half of me lives in Canada, half in Estonia."

a friend, personal conversation

"Home is where you are. And sometimes it's where you aren't. Home is the trick of going on. And the trick of going on, Esther thought, is nothing more complex than simply going on."

Linda Kivi, *If Home Is a Place*

letters to Linda Kivi, an Estonian Canadian writer

contextual FOOTnote

The paper "Letters to Linda Kivi, an Estonian Canadian writer" emerged in conversation with the group of graduate students from different departments when preparing for the interactive panel "(Des)borda(r)ndo 'Filiations': 500 Years of Solitude in Nepantlah" for the conference:

Latin America Moving Beyond Neo-liberalism, Canadian Association for Latin American and Caribbean Studies XXVIII Congress, March 19-21, 1998.

The participants and co-presenters of the panel were:

1. **Fresia Sanches** (UBC)

"Borders, Crossroads and Thresholds in Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderland/La frontera: The New Mestiza."

2. **Olga Pizarro** (Université de Québec à Montréal)

"The Chicano Culture: The Other Side, 500 Years of Solitude."

3. **Litsa Chatzivasileiou** (UBC)

"Stitching and Quilting Mam(ac)ita or (Des)borda(r)ndo the Chicana Body."

4. **Kadi Purru** (UBC)

"The Homes on the Border: Two Canadians, Linda Kivi and Guillermo Verdecchia, Rethinking Their 'Filiations'."

5. **Alejandra Medellin** (UBC)

"Towards Nepantlah: From 'La Esperanza' to 'La realidad': Theatre in the Borderlands."

The preparation of this panel was a collective effort and a unique learning experience which evolved over the period of five months. During the process of collaboration my presentation took a form of "letters" intended to question "conventional" and create new ways/forms of possible literary analyses. I read and intersected my "letters" in between the presentations of my colleagues. Presented in such a way, the letters created the spaces of cultural and discursive dis/connections.

February 20, 1998

Tere Linda,

It has been a few months now since we met. You told me that there is not much to do in Nelson during winter. Does it mean that you have time to write, write and write? Although you explained to me that winter means for you hard a time, a lot of physical work, isolation – there is no electric heat, nor telephone, not to speak of television, in your home – it all looks so romantic, so idyllic from here, from Vancouver. . .

I am really happy that we met. I slipped into the seminar room in UBC's German Department a bit late. You were sitting behind a long table reading fragments from your recently published novel If Home Is a Place By good luck I ran into the Estonian professor leading the Baltic studies seminar who told me about your presentation.

I liked you from the first glance. You were sincere, approachable and **homely – kodune**. I listened to your clear and serene voice making every word resonate with uncommon clarity. You know, I have noticed that these people who were born in Canada but whose first (parents') language is not English pronounce every word in English with extraordinary caution, as if words were made of some easily breakable material. No, it is not the perfection of a language teacher, what I mean is that you spoke with the precaution of the person who is still painstakingly conscientious of the newness of her acquisition and cannot imitate the careless joviality of the native tongue.

And then there was something else, something beyond the careful articulation of the words. I did not only understand everything you said, but I felt the existence of intimate and secret ties between us that no other person sitting in this seminar room possibly could feel. This

connection between us did not emerge, it existed there before; we are both tied to each other already before our actual meeting, by the filial bonds with the common denominator called "Estonian."

But don't misunderstand me. I did not like you because you were Estonian; it was precisely this shared denominator – Estonian – that made me skeptical and tense. This linkage – Estonia — does not only unite us but imposes the boundaries on us. The fact that Estonia is a homeland of our parents, both yours and mine, makes us members of the same "imaginary community." But does it immediately unite us and guarantee the common understanding? Are we supposed to think the same, feel the same, act the same?

You were born in Canada. I was born in Estonia. Until a few years ago an insurmountable wall between East and West separated our lives. Now the wall is gone – does it mean that all Estonians have formed a big happy family? Paradoxically, only now when the scattered Estonians from all over the world are able to meet, it has become painstakingly obvious how difficult it is to unite different people with different perceptions, visions, life experiences under the **same** denominator.

The old actual wall between East and West is gone but so many new walls, borders, boundaries have revealed their existence, separating Estonians politically, socially, ideologically, economically, culturally, generationally . . .

You and I are separated by the wall between **väliseestlased** ("foreign" Estonians) and **kodueestlased** ("home" Estonians). Unfortunately, this wall of misunderstandings, interruptions, displacements, disconnections, discontinuities resulted from the historical scars of the Second World War, when thousands of Estonians had to leave their homeland, Estonia — this wall between Eastern and Western Europe is not

disappearing but getting bigger. Your parents, grandparents succeeded in fleeing to Canada, my parents, grandparents could not escape and stayed. Are we, you and I, able to tear down this wall between East and West, erase the dividing scar within Estonian psyche? What unites us?

In Vancouver, when we met, I could not tell you, yet, what I think of your book. I was not sure since my impressions of it were still too fresh. Now I can tell you that your book talks to me, I can closely identify with the problems you are puzzling with in your book. Just like you, I am struggling to liberate myself from the strangling hold of national affiliations in order to explore the relationships between my "many selves."

Most of all, I identify myself with your desire to resist the injustices of the society in which we both actually live. Perhaps when summer comes I will be able to visit you and learn more about how this small "alternative" creative community in Nelson lives.

When I arrived in Canada six years ago, it seemed that people were looking at me with pathetic compassion, their eyes seemed to say: you are very fortunate, you escaped from the strangling hold of a totalitarian system. I remember, I was in shock (I still am!) but it was not the cultural shock every immigrant, according to Canadians, is supposed to have. I was shocked because of the confrontation with the capitalist consumer society! I could not understand how people can be so uncritically complacent with the dehumanizing effects of their commercialized existence! In my opinion **this** (and not the Soviet one) is the most totalitarian system in the world; the system which manipulates people's desires and makes people **voluntarily** collaborate with their own exploitation.

And as you know, I did not arrive in Canada from Estonia but from Colombia. If Estonians of perestroika would have not looked solely into

the "developed West" as a mirror, as a frame of reference, but would have taken a close look at the Third world countries, perhaps they would have been able to avoid the current "thirdworldization." Everything is for sale to the rich West for a cheap price! My elder friend Olav tries to warn Estonians not to sell the land to foreign companies but instead rent it. He has worked here in Canada as a land appraiser and is so concerned that Estonians will sell away their land and become homeless.

In the centre of utopian dreams and populist hopes, both "communism" and "democracy," political buzzwords of our century, have lost their credibility. Haven't they? Did you see the U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright saying on TV on February 19th – oh yeah, you don't have TV in Nelson, lucky you! – Albright said that as a diplomat she feels utterly secure dealing with the Middle East because she is supported, backed up by U.S. Army – by the most powerful army in the world, she underlined. No wonder! This is just a typical example of how U.S. democracy works. I really don't know, honestly, what to "prefer," communism or consumerism?! And there seems to be no other options left in the world!

Of course, I can understand what strangles you most within the hold of your parents' Estonian legacy – your parents' generation cannot free themselves from the ghosts of Russians and communism and have aligned themselves, therefore, with the most conservative right wing politics and stance. Exactly like the community of Cuban exiles in the U.S.

Linda, the most astonishing thing about your book If Home Is a Place, is that it has been able to build connections, bridges between generations: between your parents' generation who has been upholding and obliging their children to uphold the banner of their mission – to free Estonia! – with amazing, yet strangling strength, and your own generation that is struggling to make sense of their Estonianess within their Canadian

self. What an achievement within the community which seems to be like a minefield: wherever you step there is a possibility of explosion!

I heard that the Estonian Cultural Society has invited you to talk about your book. I am so glad, so perhaps I will see you soon!

Tervitades,

Kadi

February 27, 1998

Tere Linda,

How are you? Today I am in a very stupid mood! I started thinking about my research; about what am I doing in my Ph.D. programme. I do not know. I think I am in crisis. I do not trust academic knowledge, academic writing any more: There are suspiciously many "posts" (post-structuralism, post-modernism, post-colonialism, etc.) and academic fashions are changing with such a speed that whatever one does or investigates seems to immediately become post- . . . postponed. It is time to liberate ourselves from these "high" untouchable "great" theories floating indiscriminately above all University departments. Let them float away. And let's search for languages – the ways to get in touch with ourselves and our lives, to make connections between I-YOU-SHE-HE-WE-US-THEY-THEM!

Just read National Identity by Anthony Smith where he points to the **process of self-definition and location** as the key to national identity:

It is through a shared, unique culture that we are enabled to know "who we are" in the contemporary world. By rediscovering that culture we "rediscover" ourselves, the "authentic self," or so it has appeared to many divided and disoriented individuals who have had to contend with the vast changes and uncertainties of the modern world (1991, p. 16).

Aren't you, aren't we all in Canada, those "divided and disoriented individuals" who have had to contend with the vast changes and uncertainties of the modern world A. Smith talks about? But how do I opt for this "prism of collective personality, this shared unique cultur" through

which to define and locate my individual self, which prism should I choose? And where should I locate myself?

Who am I? Estonian? Canadian Estonian? Estonian Canadian? Colombian Estonian? Estonian Colombian Canadian? How confusing, the problem is that I have an Estonian passport, a "Colombian" husband, and I live in Canada. I was born in Soviet Estonia, got my undergraduate degree in Leningrad and had a Soviet passport. I have lived a part of my life – six years – in Colombia and in my Colombian "Cedula de ciudadanía" was written "Rusa." I speak Estonian, Russian, Spanish and English and I think in Esto-span-eng-rus . . . I breath in . . . I eat . . . And oh yes, the things become even more complicated if I tell you that I like Japanese food, the films of Iranian filmmaker Kirostami, the political ideas of Noam Chomsky, Brazilian bossa nova, especially when my Brazilian friend, an electrical engineer called Washington, plays it on his guitar.

One of the Canadian women athletes exclaimed ecstatically to the interviewer in the Olympic games in Nagano, Japan: "Oh, I feel right now so Canadian!" Me too, when I studied in Russia I felt so Estonian, when I lived in Colombia I felt so European, when I came to Canada I felt so Latin American, when I visited Estonia last summer I felt so American. And then there are of course the times when I get confused, when all these feelings of belongings mix up, form coalitions and appear all together . . . so that I am not able to define the borders between my Estonian, Canadian, Colombian and Russian selves anymore . . . and very often I feel myself like a war-zone where my different selves question, dispute and fight with each other . . .

How strange, absolutely unintentionally, I have introduced the new labels "Europe," "Latin America," "America" into my letter! Why do I say that I feel in Colombia "so European," how come?! Why not Estonian, for

God's sake? And how to explain that in Canada I feel so "Latin American"? Where did this "huge" geographical common denominator – Latin America – suddenly appear? My personal experience relates only to Colombia? And it is so bizarre and snobbish to say that I feel "American in Estonia." Have I become as you – "foreign" Estonian?

Would Guatemalans, Peruvians, Mexicans, and the other Latin Americans agree to share this prism of collective personality – their national identity – with me? I doubt. And the Colombians? Ok, mona, you lived some years in our country, ate hundreds of pandebonos, learned few steps of salsa, montaste en una chiva y tomaste agurdiante en la feria de Cali – but does this give you the right to feel "Colombian," they would say, I guess. Even my daughter would laugh and say with skepticism: "you are 'a wannaby Colombian.'" However, she herself is not in a better situation. She has a Colombian passport, yes, and a Colombian father, but she was born in Estonia, learned her first words in the Estonian language and her mother, well, her mother is not so sure about her Estonian identity any more Right now, here in Canada my daughter is desperately trying to fix and defend the borders of her Colombian identity, to stay Colombian and erase the rest of the cultural, legal, geographical attachments she has had during the sixteen years of her life. I wonder whether she will ever succeed.

You see, Linda, I have such a difficulty establishing my national **affiliation** – I simply cannot find my "unique culture," neither do I know with whom to share it. How can I say that I am Estonian? A few days ago I read a very interesting poem, I'll send it to you. I can identify myself very closely with the author. Here it is:

Jose Antonio Burciaga's "Poem in Three Idioms and Caló,"

*Spanish between English
between Nahuatl, between Caló.*

How mad!

*My mind spirals to the clouds
so smooth I feel four tongues in my mouth.*

*Twisted dreams fall
and I feel a flower bud
from four different lives.*

*I distinctively remember
when I was Maya,
when I was a Spaniard,
when Cortéz raped my great great grandmother
when I walked over the Southwest.*

*I remember the sun
in my mouth sleeps
woman, nahuatl
temple my mouth,
killed by the English
and wounding my Spanish,
now I limp walk in fractured Spanish
But there is no problem
for everything is valid
with or without safeties.*

Linda, how about you? How are you dealing with your Estonianess and/or Canadianess? I recall now that in your novel you talk about "a big family secret" – that your grandmother is Russian! You found it out

only recently. I can't imagine that your mother never told you about it before?! Actually, I understand her – she had to hide it or she wouldn't have been able to be part of the Estonian community in Toronto (who equate Russians with communism/invasion of Estonia), that's for sure.

How is your writing going? How far are you with your new novel? I, for sure, want to know more about this relationship between the Estonian young woman and her Congolese stepfather. But I must confess – I AM intrigued: why did you choose to write about racial relationships?

Kalli-kalli,

Kadi

March 12, 1998

Tere jälle, Linda

Congratulations! You wrote that there is a newcomer in your family – Marina Taara Delgado Kivi – your brother's wife got a daughter and brought some Brazilian blood into your family. Interesting how many Latin-Estonians there are in the world? I know of two Colombian Estonian kids: with very Estonian names – Krõõt and Arno. For sure you know that your name Linda means "beautiful" in Spanish? Linda is also such a common name in North America. And Linda is also the name of the well-known mother figure of the Estonian national epic Kalevipoeg. How strange!

The world is becoming border. Cultures get so mixed. Here in Canada. And even in Estonia. During my trip to Estonia this summer – it was so clear the "world had poured in." I saw everywhere new tacky coloured MacDonalds, car companies, fancy banks forcing their way through the centuries old buildings I used to cherish. Familiar looked so unfamiliar! A pretty sad picture, to my eyes at least! Tartu is a very old town where one can still see the traces of the 13th century, but for how long, I wonder?!

The old national filiations get disrupted and new affiliations, perhaps not even national ones but inter-national or should I say, post-national are emerging. Suddenly one finds oneself in the company of "strangers" . . . Right now I am working on my paper for the CALACS conference in Vancouver. It is a huge and very important conference of Latin American Studies. The great thing is that I have been able to work with a group of people – we decided to prepare a panel for CALACS – who all come from different places of the world: Fresia from Chile, Olga from Peru, Laurie from Quebec, Litsa from Greece and Alejandra from Mexico. We have

formed strong affiliations, and not all of us are even Canadians. And you know, I have enjoyed this work in the "company of strangers" and I think that this is exactly where I belong . . .

How long do you have to stay in some foreign land in order to become part of the "imagined community" living in this country? What experiences (eating habits, musical taste, aesthetic preferences, thinking structures) make you transgress the borders of the national community you belong to by birth?

Actually, I wanted to ask you: Do you mind if I take up the analysis of your novel If Home Is a Place in my paper? Oh, I see, you would probably ask – what has a conference of Latin American Studies to do with you, you are Estonian? Oh, don't worry – I got this "great" idea to compare your novel with the work of another Canadian – Guillermo Verdecchia – whose parents came to Canada from Argentina. There are many similarities between him, you and me. We all live on the borders. And we all search for home. Verdecchia's play is called American Borders/ Fronteras Americanas and in this play he says: "I'm not in Canada; I'm not in Argentina. I'm on the Border. I am Home."

Although Latin Americans live on the North – South border and Estonians on the border between East and West, they can connect and share their experiences of the "borderlives." Aren't "undeveloped" Latin Americans looking towards the "developed North"? Aren't Estonians glancing from the "backward East" towards the "exemplary West"? Aren't they, thus, confronted with the same border dividing the world into powerful and powerless, leading the world towards "thirdworldization"? My "favorite bordeologist" Guillermo Gómez-Peña has wittily noticed that:

In the era of computers, faxes, virtual reality, World beat, and 'total television' (*à la* CNN), it has become increasingly difficult for us to

communicate across the borders of culture and language. The smaller and more concentrated the world becomes, the more foreign and incomprehensible it seems to us. We are exposed to many languages, but we lack of the keys to translation. We have the access to an incredible amount of information, but we don't have the codes to decipher it. The seductive virtual universe, with its unlimited options and multidirectional promises, confounds our ability to order information and to act in the world with ethical and political clarity.

(1996, p. 170)

*Linda, I am planning to found the Institute of Bordeology here In Vancouver, would you join me? We need to begin inquiring into/knowing our world from the **border perspective**. We need to take "advantage" of our border lives/knowings. Let's resist the imposed "thirldworldization" and create a space/place to celebrate the encounters between my broken English, your broken Estonian and many other broken tongues!*

Bye for now, and let's talk about it when you come to Vancouver!

Kadi

not my country

Restless anxious night. Silence fulfilled with noise. Waking up. Listening. Listening. Listening. Listening to silence. Searching for signs of possible threat. Listening to what might happen. Listening to where and when . . . it will happen . . . and how . . .

Listening to the heartbeats. So frantic, so frequent, so out of rhythm and tone.

What should I do?

Where should I run?

This was a gunshot!

I heard! I heard it clearly!

And why don't I hear anything else?

No barking of dogs. No voices. No noises.

Oh, My God,

Where is Iana? Where is Jose? I have to find them.

They are asleep, haven't heard a thing. Go back to sleep, don't worry. We are safe.

I'll try to close my eyes. Silence. Again silence. I can see the moonlight through my closed eyes.

When I wake up in the morning in our home in Vancouver I remember my dream of how the security man from the neighboring building shot the ladron at night. And then I realize that I had remixed dream with reality. This incident DID happen when we were still in Cali, Colombia.

I have tried very hard to forget about the turbulent experiences of my Colombian past in order to live in the tranquility of a Canadian present. I have failed. It has not been possible. Since the day I arrived in Canada, I have been living with the memories of the past . . . alucinada por este mundo Macondiano . . . borracha de fiestas tropicales Caleñas . . . envenenada por las ideas de Enrique y Creación Colectiva . . . terrorizada vomitando residuos de sustos y miedos de interminables bodas de sangre en Colombia.

I am dead. I was born here, in this town...in the little house made of red clay, with a straw roof. By the road, across from the school. The road is a slow moving river of red clay in winter, and a whirlwind of red dust in the summer. When the rains come you lose your sandals in the mud, the mules and horses get their bellies smeared with mud, the saddles and even the faces of the horsemen are spattered with mud . . . I was born from that mud, and now I have returned to it.

Since the day I arrived in Canada, I have been living in constant anxiety and guilt. I know that my sensation of tranquility here, in this country, is deceptive and very fragile. I am confronted with an enormous abyss that I cannot afford to overcome. It is this abyss between the social realities of Canada and Colombia, between the so-called "First" and "Third" Worlds,

between here and there . . .

I have tried to tell myself that Colombia *is not my country*.

I have failed. I have not forgotten. It has not been possible.

I am connected to *that country* .

Connected through my blood.

My daughter ties me forever to *that country*.

The road is the slow moving river of red clay . . .

becoming Estonian Canadian:

from theatre to community

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conversation which is also published in Popular Theatre In Political Culture:
Britain And Canada In Focus, 2000.*

RING!!! (a telephone sounds)

This is a call from Aino to Kadi, both are members of the Estonian community theatre group in Vancouver.

AINO arrived in Canada as a young woman after the Second World War. Like many post-war refugees, Aino has had to struggle, economically and culturally, in order to make Canada her home. The war interrupted her studies of medicine in Estonia. However, in Canada Aino has been able somehow to follow her vocation. Selling chemical and biological products to medical research laboratories, Aino has traveled significantly and met a great number of people. Aino also has a curious and explorative attitude towards life; it is hard to find a course she has not taken, especially in the areas of alternative medicine, philosophy, spirituality. Right now, although retired, Aino is learning new skills – her new vocation is quilting. Obviously enjoying her communications across multiple cultures in Canada, she, however, keeps close contact with the culture of her homeland. Aino has been acting on the stage of the Estonian community theatre in Vancouver for several years.

KADI arrived to Vancouver about eight years ago. She grew up in Estonia when it formed part of the Soviet Union. Due to the Cold War and separation between East and West, she knew very little about the Estonians living on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. She has a theatre-related background: she studied theatre history and criticism in Leningrad and taught theatre courses at the University of Valle in Cali, Colombia. After arriving in Canada, Kadi struggled to survive, asked questions, reviewed and transformed her previous understandings and convictions. But there was something Kadi was not ready to give up – her devotion to theatre. She became connected with the Estonian community theatre group in Vancouver.

KADI: *[answering the phone]*

Hello, Aino...yes, yes I can talk, I am not so busy anymore. Oh no, I am not finished yet, I still have to write a dissertation. About what?! Of course I know about what — it is going to be about *HOME* and *DIASPORA*. No, I will not abandon my work with our theatre group, on the contrary. No, no, it's not only the question of time, it's more, I see the work of our theatre group directly related to my thesis. Aren't we all immigrants?!

WHO ARE WE?

Vancouver. A Sunday in June 1998. Comfortable West side home. There are many Estonian national regalia around. Paintings with Estonian motifs – the girls in Estonian national costumes, the peaceful green valleys and the medieval views of the Estonian capital Tallinn hang on the walls. The bookshelves hold books with Estonian language titles, the prominent place belonging undoubtedly to the beautifully edited Estonian national epic, Kalevipoeg. There are also traditional juniper beer cups and candleholders here and there in the room. The Estonian blue-black-white flag is visible.

Seven Estonians are sitting cozily around the dining table, speaking in Estonian. They belong to the Estonian community theatre group in Vancouver. The name of the group is Kalevala and it was established in the late sixties. This name is a little odd because it recalls a title of the epic of the Finnish people. However, the founder of the group named the group "Kalevala" after the place described in the Estonian epic Kalevipoeg. Estonians and Finns have common roots, both belonging to the group of Finno-Ugric people who have lived on the shores of the Baltic Sea for more than three thousand years. Thus, their culture and language are similar.

The group is in the beginning of a new project that is somehow interrupting, changing their former aesthetics and ways of work. They also reflect on the past, present and future of the group. From the window opens the beautiful mountain view to the north of Vancouver.

Karl Aun,

The Political

Refugees: A History of the Estonians in Canada, 1985, 1-51:

The Estonians are one of the smallest ethnic groups in the Canadian multicultural mosaic. The Estonian ethnic group in Canada is essentially a community of recent immigrants, the majority of whom arrived shortly after the Second World War.

It should be remembered that

AINO: [*inquires with insistent curiosity*]

Tell us, Kadi, more about our new project. I have not understood yet what you exactly have in mind?

DAGMAR: [*Dagmar is always optimistic, full of energy, temperamental and straightforward. She recently celebrated her 35th birthday. In Estonia, Dagmar was a volleyball player. She came to Canada eight years ago, marrying a Canadian volleyball coach. Dagmar is not only a hardworking hostess in the Bayshore Westin Hotel but also the Estonian theatre group's "leading lady." She acts, sings, dances with an Estonian folk dancing group, and frequently skis on Cypress Mountain.*]

Don't worry, Aino, just wait until you get a script with your part!!!

AINO: [*impatiently*]

This is precisely what bothers me – the script! How do we get to the script? What kind of script would it be?

KADI: [*Kadi considers herself lucky to have spent a few years in the epicentre of Latin American New Theatre, in the*

these Estonian immigrants fled their homes due to the occupation of their country by foreign forces (Soviet Russia) of which they became victims, losing all they had: material possessions, social and professional standing, close friends and relatives.

The majority of Estonians hoped sooner or later, after settlement of the Big-Power struggle and the freeing of Estonia, to return to their country. Hence, they refused to call themselves immigrants, but rather refugees or exiles.

The hope that Estonia would be freed of Soviet domination was solemnly reaffirmed at most Estonian gatherings.

Teatro Experimental de Cali. She participated in and closely observed how a Colombian playwright, Enrique Buenaventura, and his group used the methods of "collective creation" in their work. Now she is eager to try this approach out with the Estonian theatre group. Kadi is passionate about the Colombian method because she thinks that it could help the group to create collectively their own plays and to address the problems of the Estonian community in Vancouver. At the same time, Kadi worries, she does not know how to communicate the Colombian methods to Estonians. Until now the group has staged mainly the plays written in Estonia dealing with life in Estonia.]

I agree that until now the things have been quite confusing. I know, it is much easier to have a dramatic text and work with it. This is what we have always done. But can't we create the play OURSELVES addressing OUR ISSUES!?

DAGMAR: *[laughing in a carefree tone]*

What kind of theatre would it be? Are we going to take our coffee-table to the stage?!

AINO: *[with worry and suspicion]*

Who would care about our coffee-table talks?

KADI: *[trying to look confident and show that everything is under control]*

Well, all the stories we have been telling to each other have a great dramatic potential! They are compelling and different! It will be so easy to transform them into play!

MARJE: *[Marje arrived in Canada as a child on a boat that the Estonian Second World War refugees had obtained in Sweden. Her family had to flee from Sweden because of closeness to and threats from their former homeland –*

The emphasis among Estonians was on remaining distinguishably Estonian, which meant primarily the preservation of the Estonian language and Estonian culture.

Remaining Estonian also meant socializing the next generation to national cultural matters. This was the root from which the “explosion” of organizations and activities in Canada emerged during the 1950s.

The driving force behind the vigorous cultural organizations and activities

Estonia. By profession Marje is a French language and literature teacher; however, it is not an exaggeration to entitle her also with the honour of being one of the principal hubs of cultural activities of Vancouver's Estonian community. This honour extends to Marje's family: to her husband, children, parents, and sister. She is leader of and participant in different Estonian organizations in Vancouver, such as the Estonian Society, Filia Patria (academic women's organization) and of course the Estonian theatre groups, where she has been active since the 1970s. Marje is also an important intergenerational link; she is not only supporting but also intermediating between both her children's folk dancing group and the gatherings of her parents' generation.]

Yes, I agree. The stories are different. There are stories about Estonians who, although in Canada, live like in Estonia; for example, my mother lives as if still in her native village Raeküla. Another example is my great-aunt, now dead. My aunt's home was here, in beautiful British Columbia, but she seemed to live in Estonia: her house was full of Estonian souvenirs, books, newspapers; she could barely speak English; I had always to accompany her to the doctor, to the lawyer. She did not have any Canadian friends. Isn't it sad?!

AINO:

I know many Estonians in Toronto, who have lived the same way.

KADI:

Why did the people choose to live like that?

AINO:

I would say that for many Estonian Second World War refugees, after being forced to leave their homes

of Estonian refugee communities after the war was basically political. Its aim was not only to preserve Estonian culture but to keep the Estonian patriotic spirit and morale intact for a return to a homeland.

There was a strong feeling that while the Soviet occupied Estonia and suppressed Estonian cultural activities, only the Estonians abroad had the freedom, and therefore the obligation, to carry on fostering the development of Estonian culture.

The way of life, value systems, and standards specifically of pre-war Estonians were idealized and became a measurement of the

behind, time stopped, they refused to accept that they were in Canada and continued living as if still in Estonia.

MARJE:

My great-aunt labored selflessly in order to save some money; she never wanted to spend it, she never bought herself anything "fancy." After her death we found out that she had saved quite a bit of money, which we sent to her older relatives in Estonia. They must be millionaires by now!

KADI:

Do you think that money made her happy, helped her to feel at home?

AINO:

Of course not, but she was comfortable and safe!

KADI:

I can imagine that war caused the people innumerable deep wounds, including psychological and economic ones. Perhaps for refugees who arrived in the new country with their hands in empty pockets, the construction of the economically safe place was one of the ways to overcome the feelings of loss?

MARJE:

Yes, for my aunt the economic stability was very

way of life everywhere. Such ethnocentrism sharpened the cultural shock, provoking rejection and criticism of Canadian society. For many Estonians the image of "primitiveness" of Canada continued to linger for a long time. Of Canadian cities, only Montreal was found to be "pretty European."

The cultural differences, whether real or imaginary, reinforced Estonian ethnocentrism, especially among those to whom the workplace could not afford full satisfaction.

As a result, in many cases Estonian immigrants developed a pattern whereby they lived one life at the workplace in English,

important and she celebrated her accomplishments in her own way – sending photos from Canada to her relatives in "Soviet Estonia;" photos which pictured her standing in front of her wide-open refrigerator full of food, in front of her TV set, in front of her car.

HELLE: *[Helle is among those very few Estonians who immigrated to Canada in the 70s, right at the peak of the Cold War. Although married to a Canadian Estonian, she had to confront the hostility and distrust of the majority of Estonians in Canada. The Cold War situation seriously affected the relationships between the Estonians in Estonia ("home" Estonians) and the Estonians in abroad ("foreign" Estonians). These relationships were almost non-existent, fractured and suppressed. Helle had to swallow many bitter moments of isolation before the suspicion of her being 'a communist spy' was overcome and she was accepted into the Estonian organizations in Canada. Presently Helle does not easily miss attending any of the activities of the Estonian community in Vancouver. Helle, having a background in economics, is an accountant for the West Coast Shipping Company. Helle's contributions to the theatre group are invaluable not only as an actor but also because of her expertise in "money matters" of the group.]*

And we DID look at these photos depicting the details of the "economic wonderland" of the New World in Estonia of Soviet times with jealousy and admiration. Very soon people started sending letters to their relatives abroad asking them to share.

MARJE:
My own life has been definitely more complicated than my mother's because I have not been able to live solely according the Estonian traditions; I have been involved in the life of Canadian society. I feel like I am living in between two countries, one leg in Estonia, another in Canada. I do not know how could we bring these things into the play? I really do not know.

conforming to Canadian social customs and another in their leisure time in their own Estonian society and organizations.

Such dualism was dependent on a number of factors: the older the immigrant and the less proficient in English he was, the more he separated his "Canadian" economic life at work from his social, cultural, "Estonian" life after work and on weekends.

However, "relapses" in "Estonianess" were soon noticed and deplored . . . The young people who grew up in the Canadian environment could not be expected to devote their energies solely to the Estonian cause like

AINO:

What Marje says is very important. This should be included into our play. All Estonian children who grew up here, in Canada, share the experience of living in between two countries.

HELLE:

Living in between cultures is very confusing; I am living at the same time in both places in Estonia and in Canada, but I do not feel that I belong to either of them. I haven't learned to speak English with absolute fluency, and now my Estonian has become pretty rusty.

MARJE:

I am constantly inserting Estonian words into my English!

AINO:

I have lost a lot in terms of literary richness of my Estonian, of my mother tongue. In Canada my language has become so limited, I express myself in what we call – "kitchen Estonian."

HELLE:

I had such good Estonian, now, writing the letters to Estonia I get embarrassed, I can see how clumsy my writing is. This has influenced my self-esteem, I perceive myself as imperfect, incomplete, a "half-person." My life seems to be divided: half of me lives

their elders, or master the Estonian language perfectly, or marry only Estonians.

Moreover, in the 1960s a new element entered the controversy, namely meeting in person with people from Estonia under the Soviet rule.

in Canada, half in Estonia.

KADI:

But what about the third generation? Marje, what about your daughter, Liisa?

MARJE:

Liisa is ready to step into my shoes and participate in the organization of Estonian community events. She has an interest in Estonian cultural legacy, but there are not many people like her around. Right now, Liisa is leaving for Argentina for a month. What happens if she gets married there? If our children forget Estonian traditions, who would carry on? Or has the story of the Estonian ethnic community in Canada come to its conclusion? Should we stop fighting for its survival? Is it time to let our children define themselves as Canadians or Estonians because now they have the option to live permanently in Estonia? I don't really know what will happen but something is certain – we are passing through very critical times. We should bring these concerns into our play!

PROFESSIONAL VS. AMATEUR

Karl Aun, The Political Refugees: A History of The Estonians in Canada, 1985, pp. 94-97:

The theatre has formed the second most important sector of Estonian ethnic culture in Canada.

The most popular activity for Estonians is group and choral singing.

Estonian theatre in Canada is rooted in the traditions of the home country where amateur theatre was as popular as the professional theatre and was pursued actively on a wide scale, not only in the cities but also in small rural communities.

The Estonian immigrant post-war population contained a number of professional actors, actresses, and producers who laid the basis for the Estonian theatre in Canada.

During the 1950s almost every Estonian Association

KADI:

Let me ask something. There are more than 200 Estonian organizations now all over Canada. Each one of us participates in different community groups such as the Lutheran congregation, the Vancouver Estonian Society, the Estonian Cultural Association, the Estonian Supplementary School, men and women's choirs and folk dance groups. What has been the role of theatre among these many activities?

MARJE:

It's fairly important! The Estonian theatre in Vancouver has more than thirty years' history! I had my first role when I was 17 years old.

HELLE:

As far as I know, in its earlier times the theatre was more professional, the professional theatre people used to lead the groups, Asta Willmann, Ain Söödor.

MARJE:

Yes, and it was really interesting to work with them! In the beginning the Estonian theatre in Vancouver was very popular, now the tradition seems to perish gradually. Our community has become older and many leading people have died.

in different Canadian cities had its theatre group and plays were produced several times of the year.

The most stable theatre groups were operating in Montreal and Toronto. In Toronto, for example, three to six plays were produced annually during the twenty-year period from 1952 to 1972.

Unfortunately, the Estonian theatre has largely been limited in its activities to the Estonian communities; it has had scant impact beyond Estonians.

P. Kangur, K. Muru, Ü. Tonts, Väliseesti kirjandus, 1991, p. 70 (translated into English by K. Purru):

The main objectives of Estonian language theatre in Canada have been to maintain the identity of the homeland's culture, to preserve Estonian language and to assure the continuity

DAGMAR:

But it hasn't stopped. Since the day I arrived, eight years ago, I have been on the stage.

MARJE:

Dagmar, before you had your first role in August Kitzberg's The Werewolf, there was a fairly long pause in the activities of our group.

[The Werewolf is one of the most popular and cherished Estonian plays. It was written by playwright August Kitzberg in the beginning of the century. Since then it has been endlessly staged. The story is: an Estonian peasant family takes under their roof an orphan whose mother had been killed at the village square because she was believed to be a witch-werewolf. A tragic love triangle is formed when the orphan becomes a young woman and falls in love with the son of the family, Margus, who is supposed to marry another woman. The peasant family/community does not accept this love because Tiina, the orphan girl, is an outsider who has a different temperament and darker skin color. As a result, Tiina leaves the village. During the stormy night Margus, fighting against hungry wolves, accidentally shoots his beloved Tiina. Because of its tragic plot the play seems to demand 'great dramatic' acting.]

HELLE:

The Werewolf was meant initially for the Estonian West Coast Festival in 1987. We were in the midst of the rehearsal process when the organizing committee

Throughout its earlier period of existence, due to the presence of theatre professionals, the groups were able to preserve and follow the theatrical traditions of their homecountry.

Later, because of lack of 'replacement', the artistic and professional possibilities of the groups became more and more amateurish.

In sum, in exile the Art of theatre became an amateurish pastime activity.

of Estonian authors. It would help to introduce the younger generation to Estonian culture.

MARJE:

The Werewolf is my favourite Estonian play and I have always wanted my children to know it. However, it was somewhat utopic to think that they are going to read it. Theatre facilitated them to appreciate this play. When we finally succeeded to stage The Werewolf in 1991 my children did not only enjoy watching it but they participated in The Werewolf!

DAGMAR:

And the older generation? Aino, why are you doing theatre?

AINO: *[laughing]*

I am participating because there are not many 'actors' any more around. Every time I promise to myself that it would be the last time to help them out, but very soon I receive the next phone call and I'll find myself in a similar situation – helping out.

of national legacy throughout generations. The repertoire of the Estonian exile theatre has been principally composed of the plays by the authors popular in pre-war Estonia. Due to the amateur nature of this theatre, the groups have been making compromises to audiences' preferences for light entertainment over high quality theatre.

Very often the groups have been motivated by particular political inclinations.

P. Kruuspere, Eesti Pagulaskirjandus: Näitekirjandus. Collegium Litterarum 5, 1993, pp. 13 -16 (translated into English by K. Purru):

By its quantity and aesthetic standards the Estonian drama in exile, in comparison to other literary genres such as prose and poetry, is significantly less developed.

sent us the notice that The Werewolf is not a suitable play for the Festival. Some of the members of the committee argued that amateur actors should not touch the Estonian classics! We all had worked so intensely, with such an enthusiasm!

MARJE:

Unfortunately these kinds of conflicts do happen in our small community. These things make me sad and I often ask myself – why I am doing this? Is it all worth it?

KADI:

Hmm, and yet you have been continuing doing theatre despite of all these internal misunderstandings. Why do you participate in the theatre projects of the Estonian community? What motivates you to come to the rehearsals after a long and busy working day?

MARJE:

Theatre plays an important role in the Estonian cultural traditions. We have an audience in the Estonian community that is interested in theatre and enjoys it. Theatre, since it is such a collective event, also keeps us together!

HELLE:

I also like the idea of Estonians getting together and doing something. We should keep working on the texts

“HIGH” VS. “LOW”

HELLE:

After many nerve-racking experiences in my “acting career” in Vancouver’s Estonian community I have been very cautious with my theatre commitments. When Kadi initiated the project The Wedding in Abruca’s Style and invited me to participate in it, I asked for the smallest part.

MARJE:

I loved very much the beginning of The Wedding in Abruca’s Style! It was really impressive to watch how you all gathered with your backpacks, bags, milk cans, beer barrels and with the COW! in the harbour of the small Estonian island Abruca; how you pushed and argued in order to get into the small boat taking you to the city.

HELLE:

It all looked and felt so hilarious and funny because we had an unusual staging strategy. Instead of being compressed on the tiny stage of the Estonian community center, we had plenty of space: the two harbors, Abruca and Roomassaare, were at the different ends of the hall. This changed many things; the audience was not only seated in a weird triangular way

KADI reflects on the work of the Estonian community theatre group:

It was not easy for me to join the Estonian theatre groups in Vancouver (there are two), although I was warmly invited.

Although I tried to be respectful towards local theatrical traditions and artistic trajectories of the groups, I could not compromise myself because I felt that my background and ideas of theatre were so different.

The experience with methods of “collective creation” practised in Colombian theatre had definitely influenced and shaped my ways of thinking and approaching theatre.

It seemed to me that such factors as the tight and stressful rehearsal period, “directorial” interpretation of a play, inflexible rules of “professional” theatre and lack of space for joy sometimes caused unnecessary tensions in the process of work.

These concerns triggered a rethinking of the questions:

-What inspires people to get together after a long working day?

but they had to participate very actively – turning their heads towards the locations where the different episodes took place. As actors we had a feeling of real distance and we could and had to shout – how else can the people in the boat communicate with the people waiting for them in the harbor when there are more than ten meters of ice between them!

KADI:

And because our audience consisted basically of elderly people who frequently have hearing problems and because not all of our actors can effectively use their voice, our “shouting” helped to resolve these problems.

MARJE:

The play was also physically very challenging. Sometimes I wondered while sitting there behind the curtain ready to remind to the actors of their lines – how can they endure sitting, all crammed, in this little boat throughout these long conversations and episodes?!

KADI:

And the text of this play was so complex, hard to follow and memorize. It did not have traditional narrative logic or “normal” dramatic development, it was all so fragmented: people constantly mixing their voices, conversational

-What is the purpose of theatrical activities of the Estonian community in Vancouver?

-What kind of repertory, rehearsal format, and production goals 'suit' the people who do not have particular professional training and who make theatre because they love it?

-What are the differences between so called “professional” and “amateur” models of theatre?

Among all these questions my main concern, of course, was with the refugee community itself. I felt that there were so many misunderstandings, frustrations, conflicts, and tensions around due to the unhealed wounds caused by interrupted careers, broken dreams, left behind mothers, brothers, husbands, friends – in sum, unlived lives.

How to find a common language, build the connections with/between people, create a positive and collaborative spirit within the community which in a way seemed to be like a minefield? Wherever one stepped there was a possibility of explosion . . .

Needless to say, it was not easy to find a play that would possibly

themes, sentences getting interrupted or overlapped – just like the conversations in real life!

LEIDA: *[Leida comes from a tiny Estonian island, Muhu, where people are used to harsh climate, hard work and speak in a slightly singing Estonian dialect. One day in 1944, with her little son and elderly mother, Leida left home. She was forced to cross the sea to a foreign country on a fragile boat due to the dangerous situation her husband was caught in as a young man (similar to the majority of young Estonians), willing to join neither Russian nor German sides in the war. Having never been "afraid of any work," as goes the Estonian saying, Leida is now able to enjoy her retirement years. However, it is hard to imagine Leida not being busy: she is one of those persons who make you feel at home. Although preferring to work backstage, she definitely stole the show in Abruks with her energetic and spontaneous acting as a commanding and scolding countrywoman.]*

Since it was hard to understand where it all went wrong, when it happened I just yelled to my partner "Shut up!" and started the episode all over again!

AINO:

I remember, in the boat scene I had to be very comforting and caring with my cow, who was supposedly very sad because of being sold and forced to leave her native island Abruks. So in

inspire and unite the participants into a common project.

I knew that it would have been wrong to force people right away to work according to the methods they were not familiar with, so the option to create our own play was out of the question.

It was necessary, I felt, to introduce different philosophies and ways of doing theatre gradually, to invite people along in the process of work and also to make sure that there was a need and desire to inquire into the new avenues.

Finally we agreed upon The Wedding in Abruks's Style. Our choice was quite intrepid and unusual because this play, written by Jüri Tuulik in the 1970s, pictures the life of Estonians during the "Soviet times."

A few years ago, during the Cold War, the intent to stage such a play would have probably caused very strong, politically motivated counteraction in the Estonian Canadian community.

Yet, it was the year 1993 and *perestroika* had already produced radical changes in the political map of the world.

In addition, since the play's context is very closely related to

the scene where I console and reach to stroke her body, it resonates with a hollow and booming sound – BOOM! I had forgotten that my dear cow – Leesike – was made of a plastic beer barrel!

MARJE:

Visiting the real Abruksa in Estonia I found that the play has depicted it very realistically; I saw the people carrying their packs and barrels and traveling in the tiny boat from Abruksa to the city. Our play was an accomplishment – we showed to the Estonians in Vancouver how the people live on this tiny Estonian island. The critique and satire regarding the differences between the rural and city people were also among the achievements of the play. I am only sorry that this critique caused misunderstandings.

HELLE:

The play ridiculed the city snobs who think of themselves as “cultured,” “educated” and who look down on the country people. But it depicts these characters of fishermen and countrywomen with such ingenuity and warmth that I think it is impossible to get offended by these coarse words we used. This is exactly how the people in the country talk! I myself come from the Estonian capital Tallinn and as a city

(satirizing/criticizing) the socialist way of life, it also became a possibility for me, Dagmar and Helle (we all grew up in Estonia when it was under Soviet rule) to explain and communicate our experiences to the other members of the project.

It worked as a healing process. Getting to know about each other's lives under different social systems helped to lessen the abyss of distrust dividing the Estonians during the Cold War.

We opted for this play because we found it charming and very human, we all seemed to be receptive to the warm humour of the play.

We considered the play funny but not banal in its depiction of the differences and misunderstandings, between “down to earth” country people and snobbish city people.

The play has also very hilarious plot: the people from the tiny island *Abruksa* undertake the journey across the half-frozen sea.

The trips are, for the islanders, an everyday reality, thus, every person in the boat travels to the city because for a different reason: to get married, to sell the cow, to buy a refrigerator, to visit a daughter and so on.

woman I learned a lot about the Estonian rural ways and traditions through this play.

AINO: *[laughing]*

Oh, I know many Estonians who pretend to be “highly” educated, for them the reality and speech of the characters of Abruka can easily be “obscene or dirty.” These are the people who claim “having left their concert piano in Estonia.”

ARMAS: *[Like Marje, Armas arrived in Canada in his childhood. He grew up in Canada learning English at school and speaking Estonian at home. Earning his everyday bread in a government related job, Armas spends the majority of his evenings, holidays and weekends with the Estonian community in Vancouver. It is impossible to imagine any Estonian event without Armas' presence. Furthermore, Armas is not only present but he is the cornerstone of many events: Santa Claus in the Children's Christmas party, member of the Estonian Church Committee, dancer in the Estonian Folkgroup and singer in the Estonian Choir. Besides, one can hardly find a play where Armas does not have a major role! By the way, Armas in Estonian means “beloved.” Indeed, regardless of difficulties Armas is always smiling and joking, emanating joy and support for others.]*

Yeah, the piano and the maid!

AINO:

Some people always talk with nostalgia about the great culture they left behind in Estonia, in

The comic nerve of the play is inscribed into the interactions of different socio-cultural discourses expressed through a variety of characters and speech styles including for example, the juicy language of the country folk, pseudoscientific talks of the university professor, self-celebrating thoughts of the petty city lady.

In many ways the play was for our group the “neck breaking” undertaking.

We had such trouble with finding participants since Abruka involves so many characters.

We also faced serious staging problems due to the small performance area and due to the fact that Abruka required quite a sophisticated set.

In addition, we were also confronted with other “traditional” problems of “amateur” theatre, like physically and vocally untrained actors, including the shortage of time.

However, falling quickly under the spell of the play, which made us laugh, laugh and laugh in every rehearsal . . . little by little we got drawn into this challenging project.

Canada everything for them is so "tasteless" and "culturally undeveloped."

KADI:

Wouldn't you say then that The Wedding in Abruks's Style became kind of a test of taste?!

[Everybody is laughing.]

DAGMAR:

Armas, I have been wondering where you got so much energy to put into this play? First Jaan got sick and we had such a problem to find someone who could replace him; then Arno refused to play his role in Portland in the Festival and I thought that we'd be never able to find anybody who could play his role. And in order to save the trip to Portland you decided to play Arno's part!

ARMAS:

Well, I never quite succeeded in Arno's role. His Professor role was so wonderfully realistic – a city academic living in the ivory tower of science, alien to life around him. Remember, his research topic was dealing with artificial insemination but he could not differentiate between the cow and the bull! *[laughing from his heart]* Arno played the Professor's part so truthfully because similarly to the Professor, he

Rehearsal periods grew longer and longer until we realized that, without noticing, a whole year had passed by.

Of course this year did not exclude moments of frustrations, tensions, fatigue and loss of hope.

Nevertheless, the year also included joy, artistic explorations, the celebrations of birthdays, discussions and discoveries.

It was wonderful to become aware of a collaborative spirit gradually emerging in the process of work.

Since we had opted for "naturalistic" staging involving a "real" boat, "real" cow and the other "real" stuff found in the "real" harbour, many people ended up participating in our project in very different ways: building a boat, constructing a cow, painting sheets for a "blue sky," finding old beer barrels in dark and dusty basements, searching for music, creating the sound-effects, transporting the props, manufacturing the stage set, designing the program, taking care of finances, and so on.

Inadvertently, a large section of Estonian community – family members, neighbours, friends – had become part of our project.

also did not have any clue about “artificial insemination”!

KADI:

How come!?

MARJE:

Arno was born and grew up in Canada, he feels that his Estonian is not so good and he is a city boy!

HELLE:

Arno is a very disciplined actor, he learns his lines very early because he has to work with his Estonian very hard. I am always happy to work with Arno, he is so committed and experienced.

KADI:

With The Wedding in Abruksa's Style we had so many struggles, complications and FUN! But how do you feel about this project being so long – two years? It took us a year to stage it in Vancouver and then another year to rework it for the Festival in Portland.

AINO:

I feel very positive about our rehearsals; these were great gatherings with coffee and snacks always around.

There were also changes in terms of presenting the work to the audience. I just could not bear the thought that all this work on Abruksa would end with one or two performances as was the tradition, so we performed it at least five times.

Furthermore, after accepting the invitation to the Estonian West Coast Festival in Portland, we kept rehearsing Abruksa still another year.

And although our presentation in Portland in a way “failed” – in addition to many technical difficulties it was very hard to break the chilly official atmosphere of the large hotel conference room designed for business meetings and to reach the audience. However, it is not the night of performance we remember the most about Portland.

Looking back to this trip we cherish the moments of communality, which happened when

-sharing the rooms in the hotel or having a meal together;

-searching for the “cow” who got lost in the huge hotel in downtown Portland;

-having fun carrying dirty beer barrels, pieces of our “boat” and

HELLE:

It was never boring during the rehearsals, the play was full of jokes and we always laughed so much!

MARJE:

Did you always believe that our trip to Portland would take place? During its preparations there was a time when I completely lost my hope! I took the whole process so much into my heart, living through it very intensely. In Portland I got disappointed with the Estonians who were going to MISS our play. Think how much energy and time we all put into this play during these two years!

HELLE:

The presentation of the play in Portland was a disaster! There was not enough space, the lights were blinding to the eyes, we were tired of preparing the stage and the fact that we could not have any rehearsal on the new stage just made it all impossible. The best part of it was the trip back to Vancouver. Remember how we were singing, making jokes and laughing all the time!

other props – so terribly out of place – around in this five or four star hotel;

-traveling together in a little minivan listening to each others' stories about "tragic" and funny incidents during the performance, or singing Estonian popular songs with "indecent" words;

-feeling the sense of belonging to the theatre community in the midst of big crowds of Estonians from all over the world;

-realizing that in spite of differences in our ages, political ideas, professional backgrounds, cultural aspirations, **we enjoy being together.**

The Cold War is over. Many Canadian Estonians have returned to Estonia, their home country, some have stayed, some have come back. The Estonians in Canada are still actively organizing/participating in cultural events.

However, the mission and purpose of events has changed, there is no need anymore to worry about the continuity of Estonian language and preservation of Estonian culture.

What is the purpose of Estonian gatherings in Vancouver?

KADI:

For me theatre is not just the premiere, I value very much different aspects of it, the whole process, rehearsals. Recently I read the comments made by two critics in Estonia about the theatre of the Estonians abroad. Both critics coincided in the opinion that theatre is the aesthetically weakest and the most unprofessional artistic expression among the cultural activities of the expatriate Estonians. I thought – how can one approach the activities of community theatre solely from the aesthetic perspective!? The work we have done here with our group has another purpose, function and meaning. We come together in order to communicate, to share our experiences, stories, to explore the “Estonianess” of our culture abroad. And theatre is a great tool that has helped us to communicate, investigate and express those experiences. I do not think that perfectionism should be our ultimate goal. In addition, even the so-called professional theatre has multiple models, visions, styles.

MARJE:

The next Estonian West Coast Festival will be in Los Angeles and then there will be the Estonian World Festival in Toronto. What do you think, would we have the courage and energy to participate?!

What kind of mission is the Estonian Canadian community currently involved in?

Working two years on the Abruka project we had become a group and there was an eagerness to continue. But we were not sure how. We kept coming together, talking about past events and Abruka related endeavours, searching for new texts to stage.

However, we have not been able to get started with a new project, we have not found a play that would address our issues or inspire us in some other ways.

How to find a script that could speak

-to the Estonians who have made the preservation of the Estonian identity the central mission of their lives;

-to the Estonians who have desired to become Canadians;

-to the Estonians who have felt like living in between cultures;

-to the Estonians who have arrived in Canada in their adulthood;

-to the Estonians who have been born-in Canada;

-to the Estonians who have married non-Estonians;

-to the Estonians who have arrived

AINO:

I am getting anxious! Have we decided . . .

HELLE:

Really, let's decide, I need to run, we have been discussing more than five hours!

DAGMAR:

Wait, wait a little, Leida, there are rumours going around that you always take your burial clothes along to the folk dance rehearsal. Is it true? Leida, tell us about this story!

in Canada just recently;

-to the Estonians who have always dreamed about returning to their home country;

-to the Estonians who have felt in Canada at home . . . ?

In the process of telling each other our stories we came to understand that there is not a universal model but the endless stories of "Canadian Estonianess" each of which is an intriguing journey worthy of theatrical exploration. . .

RING!!! (a telephone sounds)

This is a call from Kadi to Aino.

It is Sunday evening, April 18, 1999. Earlier in the day, the Estonian theatre group had presented their work in progress in the Estonian Church. The meeting was titled: The Journeys . . . from Home to Foreign Land. The idea of the presentation was to share the stories of the group members with a wider public in order to explore the audience's response and to encourage people to tell about their experiences of immigration (to gather more "material" for the future play). After a year of storytelling sessions, the group members felt a need for communication, so we decided to accept the Estonian Cultural Association's invitation to give a presentation during one of their meetings. We organized the event in a discussion form, as the theatrical shape of these stories had not yet emerged. We placed the audience seats in a semicircle and arranged several smaller tables as multiple "sites of enunciation." We used music, slides, quotations from history books, not only to explore the expressive scope of diverse media, but also to inquire into how personal memory and subjective accounts of events interact with the generalized objectivity of history books. In addition, we wanted to tell stories as spontaneously as possible without referring to written remarks, in order to gain self-confidence and to observe what happens when a personal story becomes a public presentation. The audience response was enthusiastic. Numerous comments were made regarding the content of our stories and suggestions were given for possible perspectives. Many people who approached us afterwards were interested in collaborating and sharing their stories with us.

AINO:

No, I don't know. I am still confused, not sure about how it all worked. But that's good that you found the answers to your questions. The audience was large! It is good that many people were interested in coming forward with their stories. What are we going to do next? You know, I am not interested in repeating my story, people already know it. The next step would be to give our stories theatrical form? Oh, I see, that would be interesting. Today telling my story of escape on a little boat

from Estonia to Finland during the war, I felt that something really important was completely missing. **I COULD NOT COMMUNICATE MY FEELINGS TO THE AUDIENCE!** I would like to convey to people the fear, desperation, asphyxiating loneliness I felt when I was left with the group of other Estonian refugees behind the closed doors in the Finnish prison during the heavy bombing. We heard bombs exploding everywhere around us and yet we were unable to run, to run away in order to save our lives. The prison executives were all gone . . . the only thing we could do was to close our ears and eyes and just hope . . . hope . . . hope . . . to stay alive. I think that these feelings could be explored and expressed through theatre.

werewolves among us: a drop of foreign blood

In our clan everybody has blond hair and blue eyes. We have always married among ourselves. There isn't a drop of "foreign" blood in our vessels, our blood is pure.

-Kitzberg

My hometown, Tartu. An introverted and seemingly very quiet university town in Estonia founded at the beginning of the 11th century. It is the year 1985. Some time in March or April.

My four-year old daughter with a not so Estonian name, Iana Veronica, and I are sitting in the darkness of a theatre named after the Estonian god of song and merriment – Vanemuine. We are at a Sunday matinee presentation of The Werewolf, a ballet version of the Estonian drama classic.

On the stage, in the dim light, we witness a scene of punishment: A woman stoned to death by the surrounding villagers. The woman is executed because she is different, she is believed to be a witch-werewolf. Her body twitches and it is hard to say what causes her more pain – the actual rocks or the hatred of surrounding people.

I feel my daughter's tense grip on my hand and I embrace her firmly to protect her from the cruelty of this scene. "Don't worry, it is just theatre. And this story happened a long time ago," I whisper to her.

The next moment I find myself under a heavy burden of guilt-thoughts:

*It's too much to bear for a four-year old,
it's too early to expose her to the violence of the adult world.*

Why am I equating the adult world with violence?

But the adult world is violent that's what the adult world is (all) about!

What we are watching is real, it did happen –

it's part of Estonian history.

To distance oneself historically or geographically is an illusion of safety.

I shouldn't have brought my daughter to see this.

But sooner or later she will see "this."

Why is our world violent?

Isn't this a question I as an adult, as a parent, must be worried about?

Why hadn't I been aware of the cruelty of this scene before?

I know the story very well. Every Estonian knows it. The Werewolf, written by playwright August Kitzberg in the beginning of the century, is an "honorary" text in our "national curriculum," firmly embedded in Estonian national consciousness and identity.

The scene of execution had never caused me such anxiety. It had always passed by unnoticeably and quickly as necessary dramatic exposition departure. My attention had always been on the romantic love story that follows this tragic beginning scene.

The woman beaten to death in the village square has a daughter, Tiina. One of the peasant families witnessing the execution offers the orphan-girl protection under their roof. Tiina, growing up in midst of this family, falls in love with their son, Margus. However, the peasant family/community does not accept this love because Tiina is different – an outsider who has different temperament, behaviour, eyes and skin colour.

Margus is supposed to marry a local woman from within their community. In the play Grandmother explains to Margus:

In our clan everybody has blond hair and blue eyes. We have always married among ourselves. There isn't a drop of 'foreign' blood in our vessels, our blood is pure. . . . We are calm and moderate; we have never had more than three children. We have always worshipped God and slaved for our landlords in fear and obedience; joy and merrymaking have been forbidden to us. Our songs are sorrowful and worrisome. We have never seen brighter days or felt burning passions.

(Kitzberg, 1955, p. 360)

Although Margus' love belongs to Tiina, he obeys and marries the blond hair and blue eyed local woman with the submissive and joyless character.

While recalling the memories and earlier impressions of Tiina's story, the scenery on the stage has changed and the love story between Tiina and Margus is unfolding. My daughter is watching attentively. She loves dancing, that's why I brought her to see this ballet. She has seen Swan Lake so many times that when asked, Who would you like to become in the future?, she answers: A swan!

The dancer who performs Tiina has a graceful and limber body, long dark curly hair and deep brown eyes. Although all the dancers wear similar grayish rough looking clothing, she stands out, she is different from the surrounding villagers. She does not look Estonian. We sit close enough to see that it is not a fake theatrical imitation of difference created with the help of maquillage and a wig.

I know the dancer well. I have seen her dancing on Vanemuise's stage throughout my childhood. She has been my ideal of Beauty, my fairy tale character, my imaginary Snow White, a dreamland character who comes from a far away country where people are warm and tender, refined and spontaneous, happy and passionate, where people do not have a bitter heavy depressing look in their eyes.

However, the dancer who is performing Tiina does not belong to a imaginary world but to the real world. One sees her walking the streets of our small town Tartu: from home to theatre, from theatre to home. When our paths cross, I follow her with an adoring glance as do many of the other habitants of the city. We revere her because she looks so different from us – she is so charming. I envy her for her “unbearable lightness of being!” I feel so heavy carrying my burden of Estonian colonial history and memories of serfdom on my shoulders. Sometimes it is hard even to smile.

The first act is over. It culminates with a passionate scene between Margus and Tiina: they are in love. People calmly leave the dark hall of the 19th century’s imagining and re-enter modern reality. In the spacious sunny foyer with huge glass windows looking over the city, they form a large walking circle. Moving slowly and talking quietly, audience members exchange their opinions about the ballet or listen to the “hot” news in the city. My four-year old daughter interrupts the sacred solemnity of this intermission ritual. I watch her run around, crisscrossing and disordering the orderly walking circle. She dances and sings loudly over the audience’s whispering voices:

“I am Tiina! I am Tiina! I am Tiina!”

I look at her tenderly: she seems so happy in her snow white muslin dress we brought from Colombia, accentuating her difference: her glowing deep brown eyes, darker skin colour and joyous nature.

And then I perceive the silent reproach, irritation, intolerance in the eyes of the moving people. I want to explain to them that my husband is Colombian, that we just arrived from Colombia, that in Colombia the children are brought up differently. That we came because I was yearning for MY home . . .

Suddenly I realize that now I have a responsibility to look at The Werewolf through my daughter's eyes. I realize that somehow I do not belong to my home anymore.

In our clan everybody has blond hair and blue eyes. We have always married among ourselves. There isn't a drop of "foreign" blood in our vessels, our blood is pure.

-Kitzberg

It feels as if I have stepped to the other side of the border . . .

(un)familiar:

mother – daughter kitchen table talks

contextual FOOTnote

I cherish these conversations with my daughter when she shares her difficult journeying in the Canadian "multicultural" landscape of belonging and not belonging. I thank her for her patience in responding to my "silly" adult questions and for her courage to agree to share her opinions with you, dear Reader. Our conversation took place on March 23, 2001 at our home, and evolved as a longer interview which was tape-recorded. It was interesting to observe that although tape-recording distanced us, my daughter and me, it also provided our conversation with a new unexpected quality. In daily family conversations, interactions are often missed and we do not pay attention to the opinions of each other. Tape-recording, thus, provided relevance to daily conversations, and became a device that helped us "really" listen to each other.

Mother:

What did you say when you first arrived at University Hill [Elementary School]? You didn't speak English . . .

Daughter:

Obviously. I came from a Spanish speaking country.

Why obviously?

Because I spoke Spanish!

You were in the situation where people around were speaking a different language. How did you feel? Did you feel like your language was not important? Did you feel bad that you could not speak English?

You want to fit in. As a kid you want to fit in with everyone around you, you don't want to be an outsider.

Did other people ever ask you to speak/teach them some Spanish?

No!

They were not interested?

No!!

There were other children from different countries. I remember Mary was from China?

Well, she spoke English perfectly.

Did all the children from other countries speak English perfectly?

Yeah.

Thus, you were the only one who didn't?

And even though they all had different backgrounds . . . at school they spoke English perfectly.

I remember, I felt that there was a time when you didn't want to go out with your dad, you wanted to go out only with me.

Yes.

Because dad looked dark?

Yes.

And I looked white?

Yeah.

The majority of kids were Caucasian and their parents were Caucasian.

Because of the majority, you felt . . .

When you are a kid, you want to be part of the majority, you don't want to be the minority.

How did you realize this?

That's how it was. Everybody was looking at me. And you want to fit in, you want to blend in. You don't want to stand out, to look different. If you don't speak perfectly, if you have a different background then you stand out. That's why you learn English, you adapt to the society so that you fit in and don't stand out at all.

How did it happen that you became aware of yourself as Latina, as Colombian? I remember when you went to high school . . .

At the beginning of high school I was still more in the "Caucasian phase." It happened in one class when an Iranian girl came into my class and sat right behind me. And the first thing she said to me was: "Are you Spanish?" And at that point I thought: "Should I tell her the truth? Or should I lie?" A very strong part of me wanted to lie and say: "Oh no, not really!" or to say: "Half!" and then I thought what does it matter if I am "half" or "full," I still am Spanish and I said: "Yes." And I wanted to avoid, I didn't want to talk about it anymore, but she said: "Where are you from? What country?" Then again, I had that fear like I was going to be judged. Even though she was a minority, I was still afraid that I was going to be judged. Then I said: "Colombian." She smiled and said: "That's really neat, I have tons of friends that are Colombian, that are Latino." Then I felt good, I was accepted. I thought, Ok, that's Ok to say who I am. Because once again – I fit in!

Did you . . . were you able to overcome your fear of being seen with your dad because he was Latino?

Well, yeah . . . then it was ok.

Then you became comfortable going out with your dad.

Yeah.

I also remember this period of hatred towards "white culture" you had. You began looking at me as "white" . . . for you I became a part of this white culture you seemed to be becoming increasingly uncomfortable with. And then you left Kitsilano High School to go to Charles Tupper High School. I still haven't understood completely why you decided to do this?

Well, in Tupper I was a majority. Whites were a minority. I felt powerful. I felt like
blending in.

But if you already felt . . .

Whites here are said not to have a culture. For example, we were doing the presentation in Anthropology in Langara. We came out from this class, and these two boys in my class, I think they were like Scottish or English or something like that, said among themselves: "I wish I had a culture, I don't have a culture." I found that roles began to change. Even in Tupper, I remember there was that one particular white girl who was Canadian and she was the minority in our school! She hung out with different groups like Filipinos, East Indians and she wanted to adapt to their culture, depending on what group she was with.

I am still thinking back to this time when you decided to leave Kitsilano and go to Tupper. It was when we were moving from Vancouver's East side to live in family housing at UBC on the West side. And exactly at that time you decided to change schools, to leave Kitsilano on the West side in order to go to Tupper on the East side. You didn't mind the long bus trips from West to East. What happened to you during this time? I still don't understand. What was bothering you so much?

I was tired of Kitsilano . . .

I wanted to go to school where we are all Canadians brought up here but born in different countries as opposed to Kitsilano where the majority was born here and their parents were born here and they were Scottish, Irish or something like that.

I remember there was so much pain. Your desire to change the school was so strong that I could not say no, although, I remember I was talking to the Mexican family (well, their father is Guatemalan and their mother is from Mexico) whose kids went to Tupper. I phoned them trying to learn about Tupper school. They told me that they would love to send their boys to Kitsilano, because when you go to Kitsilano you have more opportunities in your future life in terms of where to go to study, who you hang out with, what societal group you belong to. Their mother told me that she couldn't get her boys accepted in Kitsilano because they don't live on the West side. And she was so surprised that you were going from Kitsilano to Tupper, you were voluntarily giving up the

opportunity that she saw like a big social and educational advantage. How do you explain it now? What happened?

I wasn't happy in Kitsilano.

I did not like it there. It was very groupy, clicky, people weren't human.

But you had several friends.

I had friends. I just didn't like it. I wanted to find something new. I wanted to be in a scenario where everyone was a minority as I said before.

But you were already speaking English "perfectly"?

Yeah, but it didn't matter, it felt like I was pretending. I could not talk about my background. When I went to Tupper it was understood, yeah, you are Chinese or you are brown, and although you have been raised here you still speak your other language like Asians, for example, occasionally exchanged one or two words in their language.

So this was understood in Tupper but was not understood in Kitsilano?

Not so much!

But your friends in Kitsilano were from Iranian, Italian, Chinese backgrounds? What about your friend Mary?

She was pretty much like a Canadian; they didn't keep any of their Chinese heritage.

Yeah, they ate Chinese food, so what?!

As I am listening I am starting to realize that you were feeling like faking of not being able to be who you are.

I felt repressed!

In what ways? In terms of environment? Or because of a particular incident?

Did teachers . . .

No, the whole atmosphere!

In terms of your skin colour, your English – it is hard to imagine that someone would ask you ‘what culture do you belong to’? Your cultural difference is not so visible, audible?

It is not just your appearance....It is you, yourself. **Deep down you just know that you are different. I knew that I was different! I knew that I had a “background.”** I remember walking with two friends from Kitsilano school who are both Caucasian along the street in grade 8 or 9, and the girl said to me: “Oh, yeah, your dad is Mexican, isn’t he?!”

All that feels so shallow because white people don’t know about what you know. It would have been different if some East Indian person or some Chinese person would have said that to me because they have their culture as well.

Did it feel offensive?

Yeah, it felt offensive. I felt she was poking fun at me, “You got some Mexican in you!” Not that she meant to be offensive but it felt like she was saying, “You are different!” I couldn’t say to her, “You are Mexican, you have Hindu or you have Chinese or Black in you.” She had nothing in her.

So you had reached like a point where you started to realize that what you felt inside and the role that you had to play at school became so contradictory that you couldn’t bear that conflict anymore . . . like what you felt inside who you are and what you had to be! In order to fit into white mainstream culture?!

Yeah.

And in Tupper school? Did you feel well?

I felt better, I felt well. But then again, it's a torn thing. You know, some or most Spanish people, I guess, looked very Native or very much like Indian Native Americans.

They looked at me and said: "You don't look "that" Spanish! You look more like white!" So it was like I was pushed away from them as well. But they accepted me anyway even though I looked kind of "more white" than them, so it was ok. So it became like a whole skin colour thing for me. The only difference between them and me was our skin colours and where our households were. Their house was more typical than mine.

But as far as remembering and living there, I had lived THERE and I remembered
THERE!

But then it becomes contradiction again because sometimes when I am at work I have my hair curly and I have hoops. We got some Honduras people one time and I said to them that my parents are Colombians. And the guy said to me, "Oh yeah, she looks like she's Latina"!

Do you like such comments?

Yeah, I like them. But then again, I feel torn. It is like the one half of Latinos says that I don't look like them and the other half says that I look like them. So apparently I look it when I have my hair in a certain way, the curls, and a lipstick or hoops. But when I don't have any make-up and my hair is pulled back and I look pale, then I am looked upon as white. So it is a type of look, people judge you by a **look**!

What do you feel inside?

I feel like I am Spanish, it's the only culture I have known . . . truly known.

You feel that you don't know anything about Estonian culture?! Because you left Estonia when you were so young [four years old].

I don't remember anything and there is nothing I can do about it. I can't go back and fake it now. **I might be half, technically, by blood, but not mentally.** How am I supposed to know anything about Estonia? You yourself don't speak Estonian here. You have taken on more like a Spanish personality than being Estonian. When I am going to Estonian church I'm not accepted like that. Oh, yeah, sure, you are that little Estonian, that half Spanish kid . . . or something.

I don't remember anybody ever telling this to you.

Not telling, but it is all in appearance.

You feel this way.

Of course, I do. Bleach blond hair and then there I am right beside them.

But maybe this is just your own feeling?

I don't think so!

No, I am not blaming you for feeling this way.

I am different, I know I am different. Maybe it means something that I was born in Estonia, but that's not part of me.

You know that I have never forced you to "become part of Estonian culture."

I know, but it's not part of me.

I know that culture cannot be imposed.

It's all about where you were brought up . . . what you have inside.

*Sure, but . . . I am from **this** culture, so through me you have been in touch with Estonian culture. Perhaps you just haven't had enough exposure to it?*

I have had exposure . . . but I don't identify with it. I am not like that. My personality is
not like that.

Well, yes, we make our choices, I mean, culture is something constructed, it's not like coming through blood by some "natural" means.

But I still have this guilt when I am in the Estonian church and not feeling Estonian.

You have this guilt?

I have this guilt because you remind me about it all the time. But where I had the most
guilt was the Colombian side, when I was ignoring that.

Why?

Because I felt deep down it really is me and I was hiding this. I mean, like I said earlier,
when people asked me, I could not say – no, that wouldn't be true. But I didn't want
people to ask me where I was from.

I know many people whose parents, grandparents are Estonians, but they have never been exposed to that culture and then suddenly, when they get 40 or 50 years old they begin looking for their roots. Thus, it happens for each of us in very different ways; it varies when and how this question becomes relevant to us. I don't think that you should feel guilty about not feeling connected to Estonian culture right now. I try . . .

I don't think that your blood makes you who you are. I believe that you are what you feel
you are. When people saw me with you they always asked: "Oh, are you adopted? Is that your mom?" I remember when I went to Kitsilano I was on the show boat one day

watching the performance. I was there with dad. A girl came up to me and said: "Oh, is that your dad? Wow! You guys look so much the same!"

And you didn't like it?

No . . . it was ok.

I don't think that anybody should impose the culture but I tried to expose you to Estonian culture when there was an opportunity. But the interest in what this culture is all about has to come from you. Because you have been living in this culture, you have been living in between cultures. Would you feel comfortable being like all of them? Colombian, Estonian, Canadian? Together!

No!!!!

No?

I don't feel that way . . . the closest I have ever felt is Colombian. When in English class we talk about Canada, I mean, I really don't care about Canada.

No?!

I live here – yeah! I speak the language – yeah! But I don't feel Canadian.

Who is Canadian? What does to be "Canadian" mean?

I don't know. But when we were talking about the past history of Canada or geography of Canada at school . . . whatever, I couldn't care less.

Why?

I don't know. I just don't care. It does not feel important!

Did other students care?

Yeah, some people did. There were the discussions in the classes. People do care about Canada when criticizing, comparing it to the United States.

What then feels important to you?

[long silence]

I don't know. Colombia feels important to an extent. I mean, when I went to Colombia a few years ago there were no questions asked. I was from THERE. You know. Unless I opened my mouth and they could tell by my accent. But as far as my appearance I was from THERE.

[laughing] *But you told me that while in Colombia you were missing Canada.*

In Colombia I felt different in a sense that I could not communicate as well as they could in Spanish, you know?! But it was only the shock of the first few days, afterwards I felt comfortable. There were the aspects I liked and I was familiar with, but yes, there was still this other part in me that told me that I am used to Canada.

Could you imagine yourself going back to Colombia? Would you feel happier there?

I don't know. There are certain aspects I would . . .

Would you be able to live there? I remember when you came back you said that in Colombia you felt Canadian. You learned that you are Canadian in Colombia.

Oh yeah, obviously, especially because of the language barrier.

And you felt that Canada was your home. Even Jose said that he would not be able to live in Colombia anymore. That he is already feeling at home in Canada.

It would take time.

Would you go back to Colombia?

You know what I think would be an ideal place?!

Somewhere in the US where there are lots of Hispanics! Like when we were in Miami.

That feels like home!

Really?

Yeah!!! Because in Miami people were all of Hispanic descent, no matter what colour, not just "Indians," but black Hispanics, white Hispanics but every kind of colour of Hispanics. And they all spoke English **and** Spanish!

You felt that they were like you?!

It was mixed. I was mixed. It was OK. You don't have to speak English perfectly, you don't have to speak Spanish perfectly, you could mix both languages.

I asked you if you could live in between cultures. And it looks like you could.

[enthusiastically]

In a mix like that where you live in North America but you are surrounded by the people from your culture. I could. I would live then very well. I would feel very comfortable.

And it's still that the atmosphere was not **so** North American, **so** European, it was relaxed, it was very Latino, mixed . . . Latino and North American at the same time.

Do you know that many Latino people don't like it when they are called Hispanics because they say, "We have never been in Spain, we are Americans!"

Well, they call them Hispanics in the United States.

"They" do call, but people from Latin America who live in North America don't call themselves "Hispanics."

Here in Vancouver are just Salvadorians, Mexicans, Guatemalans, they all have this certain look, there is not much variety here, in Vancouver. That's why labels are put to Spanish people. But down there in Florida there is such a variety . . . regardless what you look like, you are Spanish. And the nice thing is that people mix. Brazilian people speak Portuguese to Spanish people and they speak Spanish back to them. They use both things, both cultures to their advantage!

ethnic²¹

1. Of or pertaining to a social group within a cultural and social system that claims or is accorded special status on the basis of complex, often variable traits including religious, linguistic, ancestral, or physical characteristics.
2. Broadly, characteristic of a religious, racial, national, or cultural group.
3. Pertaining to a people not Christian or Jewish; heathen; pagan
4. Late Latin *ethnicus*, **heathen, foreign**; from Greek *ethnikos*, of a national group, foreign; from *ethnos* people, **nation**.

²¹ The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language, 1982, p. 450.

WANDERING BORDER

The East - West

border

is always wandering,

sometimes eastward, sometimes west,

and we do not know exactly where it is right now:

in Berlin or in the Urals.

The North - South Border

is also wandering

but only southward, only southward.

These borders intersect in me

so that

one ear, one eye, one nostril, one hand, one foot,

one lung and one testicle or one ovary

is on the one, another on the other side;

so that

väliseestlased, "foreign" Estonians, Canadian Estonians

are on the one

kodueestlased, "home" Estonians, "Estonian" Estonians

on the other side.

Which side do I belong to ethnically?

If

ethnic as "nation" is on the one side

ethnic as "foreign, pagan" on the other side?

Do I choose according to my filiations or my affiliations?

*Both words are connected to the Latin root *filia*, "daughter"...*

However,

"filiation refers to lines of descent in nature"

"affiliation refers to a process of identification by culture"²²

My mouth doesn't know on behalf of which or both it has to speak

and my heart . . .

my heart is lost in the gap

between

my past in Colombia and my present in Canada,

here and there.

This gap is widening

while I am trying to make my road through academic

²² Said, quoted in Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1998, p. 105.

"investigation."

How can I overcome this gap between

the academic and personal,

personal memories and academic arguments?

How can I tell the stories of injustice and suffering

from Colombia to Estonians?

How can I tell Colombians the stories of Estonian colonial history?

Would Canadians care to listen to these stories?

NATION:

THE UNCANNY HOME

fairy tales and/on a “civilizing mission”

Did your mom tell you bedtime stories?

Do you remember which stories you were told?

Did your dad tell you fairy tales?

Do you still cherish them?

What was your favourite one?

Do you continue telling them to your children?

Similar to any other child living within the Western cultural hemisphere, I grew up with Red Ridinghood, Hansel and Gretel, Snow White and Seven Dwarfs, Sleeping Beauty, and other tales of the “universal” fairy tale repertoire. However, the tale that left the strongest imprint in my childhood memory belongs to an Estonian author, Oskar Luts, and is called Nukitsamees (The Boy with the Horns). This is how it begins.

It's a beautiful summer day. Kusti and Iti, a brother and a sister, have left their village home to pick wild strawberries. Immersed in their activity they venture deeper and deeper into the forest and further and further from their home. Finally, after getting tired they decide to return home. Finding themselves coming back, again and again, to the same place with a big stone, they realize that they have lost their way home. It is getting darker and darker. Kusti, feeling obliged to protect his younger sister, makes a decision to sleep in the forest. It's very dark. The children are surrounded by unfamiliar and unknown sounds and shadows. Needless to say it all feels very scary. And then, of course, along comes the witch who takes them into her “home” in the forest.

Does the story begin to sound familiar? Isn't it similar to Hansel and Gretel? You have heard this story before, haven't you?!

A literary critic, Jack Zipes, who has dedicated his life to the research of fairy tales, assures that Hansel and Gretel has always been a worldwide favourite. Zipes argues that the story has become fixed in the Western literary canon as one of the great fairy tale classics of all time. He writes:

It is as though we can assume that *Hansel and Gretel* has always been with us, deeply embedded in our Western cultural tradition and collective unconscious (1997, p. 39).

Zipes also argues that having been taught not to question but absorb and appreciate fairy tales, we have lost sight of the fact that this tradition is rooted in a particular time, place and history. He reminds us that to inquire into the historical transformation of the fairy tale means investigating the “struggle over voice, storytelling, and the socialization of children” (1997, p. 3).

Getting more deeply immersed in his book, Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry (1997), I learn that the fairy tale as an oral form was never categorized as a “children’s” genre. Nor was it regarded as a genre for children when appropriated by educated upper-class Italian and French writers in the 16th and 17th centuries. Zipes makes it clear to me that

emerging literary fairy tales became complex symbolic social acts intended to reflect upon mores, norms, and habits organized for the purpose of reinforcing a hierarchically arranged civilizing process in a particular society (p. 3).

Indeed, I think, reflecting upon Red Ridinghood who didn’t listen to her mother and got eaten by the wolf and upon beautiful, trusting and hardworking Snow White who represents a model of “ideal” woman.

I certainly didn't know that at first fairy tales were considered dangerous by the educators, clergymen, publishers, and parents – not “proper” reading material for children in Europe and North America – because they lacked Christian teaching and their “symbols were polymorphously meaningful and stimulating” (p. 4). During the 19th century, fairy tale writers learned to incorporate Christian patriarchal messages into their literary narratives to satisfy aristocratic adults. By the 20th century the fairy tale had become an educational literary genre for families with preadolescent children (pp. 4-5).

Nukitsamees: The boy with horns

Psychologists have repeatedly pointed to the importance of childhood memories, impressions and experiences in the formation of our adult selves. “Individuals acquire consciousness of a national identity at the same time as they acquire a national language, an education and other cultural resources” (Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996, p. 14). Thus, it seems to be hard to overestimate the importance of children's books in the process of national identity formation.

The Estonian children's story Nukitsamees,²³ written by O. Luts²⁴ in 1920, is one of those books which has been successfully drawing Estonian children of different historical times in different socio-political circumstances into the national sphere.

Nukitsamees is claimed by Estonian critics to be one of the most popular works in Estonian children's literature. Since 1920 the story has had eight editions.²⁵ Its

²³ “Nukitsamees” is the title and the main character of Oskar Luts' book. The word translates into English as “the boy with horns.”

²⁴ Luts (07. 01. 1887 – 23. 03. 1953) is one of the most widely read Estonian writers, having written numerous novels, stories and plays. While not all of them have shared the same success among readers, some of his texts, such as Spring (a colourful description of Estonian school-life at the beginning of the 20th century), Cabbage, and Nukitsamees, for example, have come to play a fundamental role in the discourse of Estonian national identity. It is hard to find an Estonian who was not acquainted with these texts during childhood or adolescence. The Estonian literary critical discourse has been uncertain and suspicious in evaluating/classifying Luts' literary achievements. He is generally considered to have been “a good storyteller” but “not so great a writer.” In 1987, the Estonian journal Looming dedicated its January issue (Luts' 100th anniversary) to a revision of Luts' literary legacy. The author of one of the essays, renowned Estonian literary critic, Harald Peep, related Luts' writing to the discourse of popular and mass cultures. I agree with his approach. It seems to me that the discourse of “popular,” rather than aesthetic/literary, is a far more productive context in which to talk about the importance of Luts' legacy in Estonian culture.

dramatizations have been frequently in the repertoire of the Estonian professional and amateur theatres (the last one running in 1997 in Tartu Children's Theatre). In 1960 the animation and in 1982 the feature film versions of Nukitsamees were created. A composition on the motifs of Nukitsamees framed/finalized the Children's Song Festival's program in the summer of 1997. On January 30th, 1999, a musical based on Nukitsamees premiered on the stage of Opera and Ballet Theatre "Estonia."

Nukitsamees has not only established a firm place among the classics but has become a symbol of Estonian children's literature. Every two years since 1992, statues representing the main character, Nukitsamees, are awarded to an author and illustrator of the most successful children's book.

Why has Nukitsamees been so popular? Does it contain meaningful and indispensable messages which unify Estonians regardless of different historical, political and social circumstances into the same "imaginary community?"²⁶ Regardless of the answers, one thing seems to be certain – due to its symbolic status and persistence throughout recent Estonian cultural history, Nukitsamees could be described as revealing some symptomatic features of "Estonian national consciousness". My reading of Nukitsamees will not focus on the literary qualities of Oskar Luts' book. Instead my intention is to address the cultural symbols, imagery and ideologies involved in the pedagogy of building the national consciousness.

Nukitsamees' story is, without doubt, adventurous and entertaining. It resonates with the German fairy tale Hansel and Gretel. The main characters of Estonian Nukitsamees – Kusti and Ita – are, similar to Hansel and Gretel, a brother and sister who become lost in the forest. Like Hansel and Gretel, they also fall into the hands of the old and ugly "witch," in Nukitsamees referred to as the old "crone," who imprisons them in her hut deep in the forest. Cannibalistic connotations are also present, although they are

²⁵ Different Estonian language editions of O. Luts' Nukitsamees, both as fairy tale or play were published in 1920, 1923, 1945, 1955, 1957, 1973, 1986, 1987, 1997.

²⁶ True, different social and ideological systems "read" Nukitsamees differently, sometimes even making changes in the text. For example, all "Soviet" editions of Nukitsamees cut out the critical remarks about socialism and changed the religiously motivated ending of the story. The 1997 edition restored the 1920s version of Nukitsamees. Different literary, theatrical, filmic and musical versions /interpretations of Nukitsamees, without doubt, offer the possibility for intriguing inquiry into the connections/differences between changing social realities and ideologies of "Estonianess."

not as explicitly conveyed as in Hansel and Gretel. Regardless of the fact that the intention of the old crone is not to eat Kusti and Iti, but to make them slaves for her, the danger of being eaten is implicit in their environment – it comes from wild wolves in the forest and from the old crone's sons. Similar to Hansel and Gretel, Nukitsamees bears a happy ending: in both stories the children are able to trick the witch and save their lives. Kusti and Iti escape with the help of a bird whose "language" Kusti is able to understand and who guides them back to their home.

These are not the only similarities of the plot that make the brothers Grimm's and Luts' stories comparable. There is something more important – both *Hansel and Gretel* as well as Nukitsamees play a part in the discourse of nation and nationalism, though at different times and in different ways. Hansel and Gretel participated in the formation of German national consciousness in the 19th century, as the brothers Grimm were, in the words of Thomas Mann, "romantically inspired lovers of German antiquity who listened to their fairy tales from the lips of the people and collected them conscientiously" (Mann, as quoted in Kronenberg, 1953, p. 251). Nukitsamees, on the other hand, belongs to the discourse of nation at the beginning of the 20th century. Luts was one of the most beloved and best-selling authors on the popular level in the newborn, independent Estonian Republic.

There are also differences in focus and issues between these two stories. The brothers Grimm's Hansel and Gretel centers its attention on the depiction of "family" related problems: impoverished parents, maternal malice, and paternal abandonment of children. Luts' Nukitsamees concentrates on the delineation of the realm of "home" with the description of the old crone's home, her household and family, as well as Kusti and Iti's home holding the attention of the reader during the major part of the story. Unlike Hansel and Gretel the depiction of the old crone's house in Nukitsamees is not fantastical but quite *realistic*.

not home

"Come," orders the old crone, "we are at home. Get into the house!"

"How come?" Kusti feels frightened, "it could be your home, dear lady, but certainly it is not ours."

"It could be your home as well," responds the old crone hoarsely, "and stop arguing, naughty boy. Look, you have to listen to me or I'll make you obey with my cane."

Kusti understands now that something has gone wrong, but there is nothing he can do about it. The wicked old crone is threatening him with her cane; he has to step into the house since he does not have any other choice whatsoever.

The crone pushes Kusti and Iti into a half-dark room with a low ceiling. A repulsive odour penetrates towards the children all the way to the doorstep. On the table close to a window among the dirty dishes and leftovers of food, stands a kerosene lamp which emits smoke rather than light. There is a long soiled bench covered with muddy rags by the table. An old man with gray hair, muttering something into his beard, is bowing down from the oven on the other side of the room. This is a sight that catches Kusti's eye at the first moment. After his initial bewilderment Kusti also notices a baby's crib looking like a pig's trough beside the oven.

"Look, Old Man," exclaims the crone putting her cane away, "I found us a babysitter and a boy to feed the pigs in the forest. I don't have to be hard on my old bones anymore."²⁷

In Nukitsamees, Kusti and Iti, picking and searching for the sweetest berries, wander away into the deep forest. Leaving behind the safe and familiar territory of *their home* they end up in a *new home* – the sinister house of the wicked crone. The crone's house in the forest does not look like a dream-house made of candies and cookies, but the house of a peasant family. All the details described in Nukitsamees – the low ceiling,

²⁷ Luts, O. (1973). Nukitsamees. (6th edition). Tallin: Eesti Raamat, p. 13. All quotations are from this edition.

poor lighting, roughly constructed household items, a large stove used as a sleeping place for older people and a wooden baby crib attached to the swinging pole – correspond to the typical image of a peasant homestead in Estonia before the 20th century. The portrayal of the daily activities in the crone's home supports this image. For example, Kusti is obliged by the crone to perform such typical chores of the peasant household as gathering firewood, taking care of domestic animals (pigs, goats), weeding the garden, watering the plants, and Iti is forced to look after a "baby."

The home of the old crone holds still another resemblance – it has a close affinity with Iti and Kusti's *own home*, which also follows the model of a peasant's homestead. However, there is an insurmountable dissimilarity between the descriptions of the two.

The children's home is clean and cozy. The family that lives there - the children's mother, father and grandfather – are loving and caring. The intention of Nukitsamees is to draw a markedly idyllic picture of the children's home. For example, after getting lost in the woods, and in order to overcome the darkness and hostility of an unknown place, Kusti recalls in his mind the following picture of his *lost* home:

*It is a quiet sunny morning and the flowers are blooming. Despite the early hours people of the homestead have gone to make hay. Kusti's mother is preparing the breakfast and Kusti's grandfather is busy in the garden organizing the swarm of bees.*²⁸

Life in the children's home is harmonious, productive and prosperous. Since the whole scene is dominated by the description of the grandfather's work with bees – undoubtedly a symbol of work *par excellence* – the idea of work is particularly accentuated.

The crone's home where she imprisons the children, on the contrary, is portrayed as dark, ugly, unclean and disorderly. Life in this home is ferocious, vicious and detrimental. The people who live there – the old crone, three brothers and the old man – are greedy, lazy, menacing and dangerous. They do not work, but catch what they can (hunting for birds and animals and robbing from strangers) and fight with each other in

²⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

order to survive. Furthermore, the old crone's family is not only characterized negatively but their *human* nature as such is put into question:

"Who are they? Who are they?" asks Iti, tugging Kusti at his sleeve.

"Be quiet, Iti," responds her brother, "I can't understand yet who they really are. But for sure, they are not from our home."

After some hesitation Kusti tries to take another look at those strangers from the night. These are two bull-like corpulent men. They both wear animal-skin coats and rough boat-like shoes; both men are dark-skinned, their faces covered by pimples and warts. Their long red hair is as messy as if it had never seen a comb. And worst of all: in the midst of their messy hair are horns, similar to the old man's.

"Eat!" yell the men together as they sit at the table and start chewing the bones and leftovers. The men's strong jaws make a crackling noise, then they feast upon the smaller bones.

The old crone brings a bucket full of liquid food to the table which the hungry bulls start to eat, taking turns, slurping. While one of them eats, the other opens his jacket and belches in order to be able to stuff more food into his stomach. Very soon the bucket becomes empty, but the voracious appetite of the men does not wane.

"More!" yell both men again in unison..²⁹

Characterizing the appearance, manners and behaviour of these "strangers from the night," without trying at this moment to inquire into the question of their "*real* identity," such a word as "disgusting" probably dominates the evaluation. Picturing the dwelling in the woods as messy and disorderly, its people violent, quarrelsome and threatening, Nukitsamees clearly intends to evoke repugnance and rejection towards the old crone's house and its inhabitants. The *savage* nature is underlined in the description of this home. This is a hostile and unsafe territory, where Kusti and Iti are kept as captives and exploited by beastly beings and where they live in fear for their lives. This is the depiction of something which is *not home*, hence the author of Nukitsamees encloses such a "home" (p. 15) in quotation marks.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

Creating the *negative image* of the old crone's home and contrasting it with the image of the children's home, Nukitsamees aims to establish for young Estonian readers the idea of the *ideal* home. The more the narration stresses the negative features of the old crone's home, the more it *idealizes* the depiction of the children's home. Two radically different images of home emerge producing the following dichotomy:

The old crone's "home"

in the woods

dark

dirty (unclean)

chaos (disorder)

savage (uncivilized)

hostile (unfriendly)

threatening (unfamiliar)

dangerous (unprotective)



NOT HOME

The children's home

outside the woods

light

clean

order

civilized

friendly

familiar

protective



HOME

the “uncanny”

[The] uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar. How this is possible, in what circumstances the familiar can become uncanny and frightening

(Freud, 1955, p. 220)

Rosemary Marangoly George suggests in her book, The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction, that the basic organizing principle around which the notion of the “home” is built is a pattern of select inclusions and exclusions. She insists that homes and nations are defined in the instances of confrontation with what is considered “not-home,” with the foreign, with distance (George, 1996, pp. 2-4). Nukitsamees defines “home” by confronting it with “not home” – with the home of strange foreign beings in the forest. But what exactly is behind this “foreignness” and why does it have to be excluded from “home”?

According to the critical commentary of Eesti Kirjarahva Leksikon (The Lexicon of Estonian Literary People), in Nukitsamees “a truthfully described reality and the motifs of fairy tale are engagingly combined for the young reader” (Nirk, 1995, p. 312). However, the combination of two logics in Nukitsamees – fantastic and realistic – does not result in an indisputable union, but provokes confusion and questions. It is hard, for example, to define Nukitsamees’ genre – it is not precisely a “fairy tale” (the only “fantastic” element in its plot is Kusti’s capability of understanding of the bird’s “language”) nor is it a “realistic story.” At the same time, it is precisely the blurring of these narrative realms that makes the problematics of Nukitsamees intriguing.

Although the author of Nukitsamees intends to situate the story in a fairy tale framework, there is nothing fantastical about the description of the old crone’s home in the woods. Moreover, the old crone herself does not bear any supernatural powers; she is just ill natured, malicious and frightful. The only “magical” part of the old crone is her cane, which can work quite “realistically” on the children’s backs. She is not even labeled a “witch,” but is referred to as an “old crone.” At the same time, the scenes

relating to the old crone and taking place in the forest, despite of all their “realism,” undoubtedly *do* produce *spooky* feelings in the reader. Why and how does this happen?

In a Freudian interpretation, an *uncanny* effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced. A similar mechanism is at work in Nukitsamees. Although the unfavourable depiction of the old crone and her home, in the style of *blatant realism*, is able to evoke in the reader of Nukitsamees repugnance and disgust, it is not able to create the feelings of dread and uncanny. Such effect is only achieved by situating something “familiar” – the image of the Estonian peasant’s household – in an “unfamiliar,” fantastic setting. The confusion between the logic of the real and the logic of fantasy generates a feeling of the *uncanny*.

The same could be said of the depiction of the old crone’s family, her sons and the old man. Although the list of negative characteristics which describe them in Nukitsamees is almost endless – rough and dirty, voracious and without manners, quarrelsome and violent – none of these faculties, including the inclination towards cannibalism, are “unreal” in the world of human reality. The only quality that might point to the fairy tale’s imagination is the fact that all male members of the old crone’s family have horns!

On the one hand, because of the horns, the old crone’s sons could be imagined as some kind of fantastical creatures. On the other hand, however, the description of their habits (hunting and plundering) and appearance (“bull-like,” “dark skin,” “long messy hair,” “the animal skins’ coats,” “rough boat-like shoes,”) come suspiciously close to the stereotypical image of *savages*, *uncivilized* people conceived by the European “civilized” mind. The blurring of borders between fantasy and reality at this point does not only create the feeling of uncanny, but recalls embarrassing memories of colonialism. The inquiry into the “confusing nature” of the beings from the “home in the woods” is obviously similar to the question asked by the European conquerors regarding the “discovered” creatures of the colonies – think of, for example, the intense disputes between the representatives of the Spanish Conquest in the 16th century – *Who are they?*

*Humans? Barbarians? Savages? Or beasts?*³⁰ In his book, Inventing Western Civilization, Thomas C. Patterson explains:

The idea of civilization was forged in the context of European overseas colonial expansion into Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Ireland. It was used by elites of the states that launched these ventures to distinguish themselves from the peoples they encountered. As they moved overseas, the Europeans used customary categories of the time, such as *wild men*, *heathens*, *infidels*, *pagans*, *savages*, and *barbarians*, to describe the peoples they met

(1997, p. 30)

These issues have not lost actuality. In 1992 the Chicano artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña staged the performance Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit Spain, living for three days in a golden cage placed in Columbus Plaza in Madrid (Gómez-Peña, 1993, pp. 136-137). According to Guillermo Gómez-Peña, many people in Madrid could not distinguish “fact” from “fiction” and believed that these artists in a cage were the *real* “undiscovered Amerindians.”³¹

³⁰ For example, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, the king’s chaplain and official historian in Spain, claimed that the Indians were barbarians – pre-social men who were more like a colony of bees than a civil society; a Dominican friar, Bartolomé de Las Casas, and Francisco de Vitoria viewed the native peoples as barbarians because they were not Christian and lacked a written language. In their view, the Indians were men with all the rights and duties of rational human being. A Jesuit missionary, Jose de Acosta, explored the differences between barbarians and savages in the Americas. According to him there were illiterate barbarians, like the Incas and Aztecs, whose converting required a strong Christian ruler. However, conversion of savages – like the peoples of the Amazon basin, he thought, could only be accomplished by military force (Patterson, 1997, pp. 59-61).

³¹ Interview with G. Gómez-Peña in the Department of Fine Arts, The University of British Columbia, September, 1996.

“unheimlich”:

[The] *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, familiar; the prefix ‘un’ [*un-*] is the token of repression.

(Freud, 1955, p. 245)

Estonians are all too familiar with the history of colonization, though not as colonizers but as colonized. Independence and freedom have been short lived. Estonia has existed as a politically sovereign republic – Eesti Vabariik (Estonian “free state”) – less than thirty years: from 1918 to 1940 and from 1991 to the present. However, the fundamental part of Estonian historical consciousness has been formed by the memories of forceful Christianization and subjugation (the Estonians have lived more than seven hundred years under different foreign powers – Germans, Danish, Swedish, Polish, and Russian). Since the *Ärkamisaeg* – Estonian National Awakening (Estonian Enlightenment) – in the middle of the 19th century, the Estonians have been trying to become modern, that is, similar to the dominant Western nations, and to forget about their “non-modern” indigenous past (Eller, 1990, p. 73).

Looming in the realm of the unconscious these memories of “indigenous past” and of “being a serf” – the Other – in one’s own home continue to haunt and torment the forcibly *civilized* Estonian mind. I would like to suggest that Nukitsamees is one of those texts in Estonian cultural history where these hidden and constrained memories become visible.

The journey of Kusti and Iti into the unknown and dangerous forest suggests a psychoanalytical reading since the forest (Biedermann, 1989, p. 141) is one of the most traditional and well-known symbols for the unconscious. In addition, the fairy tale is one of the central sites of psychoanalytical inquiries. Kusti and Iti find the woods a very *unheimlich* place, inhabited by dangerous and threatening creatures. However, although savage and unfriendly, the home in the woods becomes more and more *heimlich* as time passes and Iti and Kusti get used to it. Iti even becomes accustomed to her life and role as babysitter so much that she opposes Kusti’s plans to escape. The fact that Kusti and Iti are able to adapt to the life in their new home means that they *re-cognize* this place as

home regardless of the fear, repulsive feelings and rejection that this “home” evokes in them.

Freud notes in his essay on “The Uncanny” that the meaning of *heimlich* develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich* (1955, p. 226). The home in the forest has become *unheimlich*; since the “Estonian Enlightenment” – the Estonian National Awakening in the middle of the 19th century – the Estonians have been trying to become *civilized*, i.e. *similar* to the other Western nations, and forget about their “non-European” past.

The formation of the modern Estonian nation subscribes to the nation building process described by J. Hutchinson in his book Modern Nationalism:

When nationalism arose later in the “East” (defined as Central and Eastern Europe and Asia), it was in imitative response to the rationalist culture of the ‘West’. These territories were agrarian peasant societies, with only a tiny middle class, dominated by reactionary aristocracy, where, frequently, there was a lack of congruence between ethnic and political boundaries. Unable, therefore, to identify with a concrete territorial polity, and aware of their backwardness compared to the “West,” nationalists turned to the myths and legends to conjure an ideal nation that possessed an ancient historic mission and unique cultural attributes.

(1994, p. 49)

The story of how Estonia became a modern nation resembles perhaps another fairy tale – Sleeping Beauty: Estonia (the princess!) awakening from a long sleep as the NATION by a loving kiss of a handful of German Estophiles/Germanized Estonians (the prince!). Consider for example, an opening passage of the book Estonian History, written in 1992 by a collective of renowned Estonian historians, which is currently used as a textbook in the Estonian schools:

In the middle of the 19th century, staggering events took place in Estonia. Within twenty years, an uneducated, socially undifferentiated peasantry who did not have any perspectives for the future became a socially differentiated nation with its own intelligentsia, culture and organizations.

(my translation, Õispuu, Aarelaid, & Arjakas, 1992, p. 5)

There is not only a significant dose of admiration for the achievements of the Estonian cultural nationalists of the national awakening; there is also the intent to *begin* Estonian history with this nation-building event at the cost of suppressing the non-European past. However, a very different picture of the Estonians and their homes at the end of 19th century was seen through the *European eye*.

According to the German traveler J. G. Kohl in the 1860s, “many a savage in his Wigwam enjoyed more comfort than did the Estonian peasants in their ill-constructed huts, in which humans slept, worked, ate, gave birth and were ill in company of bleating lambs, grunting pigs and barking dogs” (as quoted in Kirby, 1995, p. 64).

Or consider the description of the “Estonian home” by the historian F. Featherman in his Social History of the Races of Mankind, in 1891:

The Esthonians live . . . together in one-storied log cabins constructed of fir trunks, horizontally superimposed and fitted at the corners into each other by deep notch-joints, the interstices being filled up with moss. The logs are unhewn and are left in their natural state without the least artistic embellishment. The roof is slanting and is thatched with straw. There is no chimney in the interior for the escape of smoke, and the windows are simply small holes cut in the logs The brick-stove is the principal furniture of the dwelling, in which the fire is kindled, leaving the door open as long as the wood is smoking, that the smoke may escape through the window-holes, which at other times are closed with a plank. The stove serves not only as hearth where the bread is baked and the cooking is done, but it is also used by the master and mistress of the house as

sleeping-place. The tables, benches and stools are of the rudest workmanship With many notable exceptions the interior is generally filthy and disorderly, and indicates not only savage carelessness, but the utmost poverty and want.

(pp. 474-475)

Needless to say that the above cited descriptions of Estonian homes come suspiciously close to the depiction of the “home in the woods” in Nukitsamees.

Toomas Gross has pointed out in his paper, “Reservoir of Memory: Estonian National Awakening Revisited” (1998) that in many aspects the Estonian “national awakening,” initiated by Baltic Germans, in its interest in the “exotic other” strikingly fits with the motives of Victorian anthropology of that period. He argues that the Estonian case is a lucid example of how the legacy that people consider as if “made by their ancestors,” and with which they seek continuity, can actually be an *invention*, at least to a certain degree, by *foreigners*. Baltic Germans who initiated the Estonian national project (*à la* German Romanticism and J. G. Herder), were among the first to pay attention and to study the “country people’s” folk songs and customs. In addition, the principal nation-builders (F. R. Faehlmann, F. R. Kreutzwald, J. V. Jannsen), although bonded through close family ties with the “country people,” nevertheless affiliated themselves with German language and culture. Taking into account this perspective, exposed by T. Gross in his paper, the Estonian nation-building process looks quite paradoxical. The Estonian nation and its national narratives – national epic, song-festivals, literature – were created following closely German cultural moulds and matrixes. At the same time the Estonian nation came into being through a resistant nationalism as an anti-colonial movement against the ruling Baltic German elite. However, the Estonian model of nation, conceived during the period of national awakening, can be considered a German (West European/Western) and therefore, colonial construct because as B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin explain:

Anti-colonial movements employed their idea of a pre-colonial past to rally their opposition through a sense of difference, but they employed

this past not to reconstruct the pre-colonial social state but to generate support for the construction of post-colonial nation-states based upon the European nationalist model.

(1998, p.154)

The above mentioned paradox suggests **the need to look at the discourse of Estonian nation and nationalism from a different perspective, from a perspective of colonialism.**

In Nukitsamees two images of “home,” although contrasted and opposed, are closely related – both the home in the woods and the children’s home are based on the model of the Estonian peasant household, representing its *modernized* and *backward* versions. Consequently, the *negative* image of home in Nukitsamees could be also understood as the *suppressed* image of “home.”

How far the Estonians were from being included into the category of “civilized” by the European historians at the end of 19th century is shown in the following passage:

As they were and are perhaps virtually yet the slaves of arrogant German masters, and are besides governed by beneficent Russian laws, nothing better could be expected of them. They must be indeed miserable creatures who are constantly crushed between the upper and nether millstone, and are not even allowed to expire and disappear. They were not known to Dante, or else he would have introduced them into his Inferno.

(Featherman, 1891, p. 475)

the Nation as home ³²

Written in 1920, on the threshold of recently achieved Estonian political independence, Nukitsamees undoubtedly subscribes to and co-produces the discourse of “nationalism” and “nation.” Following the tradition of Estonian cultural nationalism based on the ideas of Herder and Romanticism, Nukitsamees too exposes an interest in nature, the primitive and uncivilized way of life, and the idea of the noble savage. In the context of a nationalistic discourse where “modernization” (read: “Westernization”)³³ had become the only possible matrix of identity, emerged the urgent need to reconcile the suppressed memories of the past with the ideals of the present. It became necessary, in order to construct an ideal model of the national home, to assimilate and domesticate the “distant” and “*unheimlich*.”

Escaping from the house in the woods, Kusti and Iti bring with them the youngest son of the old crone – Nukitsamees. Just as the concept – home – in the forest is not the home, but “home” in quotation marks, Nukitsamees is *not the child* but “child” in quotation marks (p. 15). Nukitsamees has hairy dark-brown skin and skinny legs with long, sharp fingernails; he also has pointed pricked up ears and as his name already recalls – horns. And of course, like his brothers, Nukitsamees has a voracious appetite, rough manners and violent behaviour. The fact that adjectives related to “diabolic” dominate in the physical portrayal of Nukitsamees, does not eliminate the colonial connotations of such description since the “savages” were not only equated with “beast” but also with “devil” (consider the essence of Christianizing doctrines adherent to the European “civilizing missions”).

In the children’s home, Nukitsamees undergoes the “civilizing process.” In order to get rid of the “dirt,” i.e., to whiten his dark-coloured skin, Nukitsamees is taken to a

³² According to R. M. George constructs of home and nation overlap. Following her suggestion, “home” in the context of this chapter is enlarged to denote “the affairs of the nation” (1996, p. 63).

³³ Jorge Larraín points out that modernization theories consider the process of modernization and industrialization inevitable and that traditional societies are supposed to follow the same pattern of change undergone earlier by the developed nations (1996, p. 393). Krishan Kumar, commenting on modernity, relates modernity with the West. He writes: “Modern society carried . . . the hallmarks of Western society since the eighteenth century. It was industrial and scientific. Its political form was the nation state, legitimized by some species of popular sovereignty. To modernize was to Westernize” (1996, p. 392).

sauna. His horns are cut off and his sharp and long nails are trimmed. Although the above-mentioned methods are repeated with particular care and effort for a whole year, they do not seem to produce results. Nukitsamees continues to look and behave as a *savage* – his horns grow high, he does not become “cleaner” (read: whiter), he steals and picks fights, wets his pants and uses “uncensored” words.

The most effective tool of this “civilizing process” is, without doubt, a bundle of birch twigs. With the help of this particular tool, positive changes in the behaviour of Nukitsamees begin taking place. He loses his “bad manners” and becomes “well-behaved.” Furthermore, he also transforms physically – turns whiter and loses his horns. The story has a happy ending. Nukitsamees, the domesticated noble savage, gets included into the “national home”:

*Nukitsamees gets a new name – Ants, legally confirmed by the authorities from the city. He goes to school. Becoming a good student, his skin changes the color turning as white as the skin of Kusti and Iti and all the other schoolchildren. His horns disappear and his head now looks as smooth as if he never had had horns.*³⁴

“Civilizing process,” described above, could be understood in the conceptual framework of sociologist Norbert Elias’ work which analyses development of manners, transformations in behavioral codes and ways to control emotions from the Renaissance onwards in European court societies. The “civilizing process” of Nukitsamees encompasses the changes which, according to Elias, “uncivilized” medieval man went through in the process of becoming a “civilized” representative of Europe, such as refinement of manners, internalization of a set of rules of “appropriate behavior” (required in Kusti and Iti’s home), control of anger and violence as means of expression, development of self-control, and constriction of impulses and emotions. At the same time, I also would like to draw attention to the colonial connotations that the “civilizing process” in Nukitsamees involves.

Nukitsamees’ publications had different endings. The ending, quoted above, belongs to the “Soviet” edition, published in 1973. It focuses on the importance of

³⁴ Ibid., p. 63.

formal institutionalized education in a “civilizing process.” In Luts’ original version, published in 1920 (re-published in 1997), Nukitsamees’ transformation is religiously motivated, occurring during *the act of baptizing*. Needless to say, this moment resonates very closely with the memories of the “pagan” past and forcible Christianization in the Estonian historical consciousness. In addition, since the most relevant moment of Nukitsamees’ transformation from “uncivilized” into “civilized” is related with such factors as “the disappearance of horns” and “becoming white,” allusions to colonial and racist connotations become inescapable.

Nukitsamees propagates the “national home” constructed according to the Western model of nation. The “native” – *heimlich* – has become “foreign” and “strange” – *unheimlich* – to this place. In order to assure the monolithic homogeneity of this “home,” the Other had to be excluded or submitted to a “civilizing process.” This “procedure” creates an uncanny feeling since it evokes – paraphrasing the interpretation of Freud by H. Bhabha – **a liminal, uncertain state of Estonian unconscious when the savage emerges in the midst of margins of modern nation as a result of repressed memories of subjugation** (Bhabha, 1994, p. 143).

Responding to the impact of modernization, the cultural nationalists in Estonia have been searching for ways to transform the status of their ancestors as ‘primitive barbarians’ to that of the progenitors of modern progress. Engaged in the task of *civilizing* “Nukitsamees,” the cultural nationalists in Estonia did not even realize how quickly and unnoticeably they changed the position of the “colonized” to that of the “colonizer.”

Suppressing the undesirable memories of colonization and a “savage” past, *Nukitsamees* establishes the ideal of a national home. This ideal resonates with the connotations which, according to R. M. George, the word “home” traditionally evokes, **“[t]he private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection”** (my bolding, 1996, p. 1).

I am worried that the majority of Estonians are trying to suppress undesirable memories of their indigenous/non-Western culture and colonial past. Although the influence of Western Europe on Estonian culture has been decisive, there is no way to forget that the major part of Estonian historical consciousness is formed by the memories

of subjugation. In a present-day Estonia there is the prevailing desire to be considered a "Western nation." Working persistently towards the accomplishment of the "dream" – to be accepted in the European Union, the Estonian "cultural nationalists" argue for a "Western-ness" of Estonian culture. Recently a group of renowned Estonian sociologists in collaboration with their Swedish colleagues published a scholarly investigation Return to the Western World: Cultural and Political Perspectives on the Estonian Post-Communist Transition. This publication contains a table titled "Indicators of Westernization." Among others the following indicators of westernization are named:

- in economy – Western countries prevail in trade and investment
- in cultural relations – Western countries prevail in cultural exchange
- in media – Western agencies prevail as sources of information, entertainment and advertising
- in politics – Western type of political parties and parliamentary institutions
- in education and science – participation in Western educational and research programs

and the following new changes are celebrated:

- changes in values – increasing individualism and hedonism
- changes in language – English as *lingua franca*
- changes in life-style – decreasing cultural activities, more time spent making money, automobilization, gambling, trips abroad, etc.
- changes in patterns of behaviour – more attention to personal success, 'face,' self-expression

(Lauristin, 1997, p. 30)

It is somehow tragic to watch Estonian idealization of Western models of culture when the concept of "Europe," including its connotations of "progress" and "civilization," has become a site of contestation and distrust for many colonized people. Without searching for alternative models of home, Estonia can become "homeless" and be swept aside by the global highway of westernization.

WANDERING BORDER

I presented "The Uncanny Home" at the 16th Conference on Baltic Studies at the University of Indiana, Bloomington, in June 1998. Our panel had just two paper presentations since the discussant from Estonia, a theatre historian from my native town, Tartu, had not arrived. Thus, we had plenty of time for discussion.

The first paper dealt with literary-historical research on for me a relatively unknown Estonian writer. This paper on literary studies by a professor of Estonian background from the University of Toronto seemed to be full of the facts and details that one obtains as a result of conscientious archive-digging.

I don't remember much of its content because I was nervously waiting for my presentation and feeling uncomfortably different in the context of the panel. I had reasons to worry. My paper was going to question the myth (of nation) that the Estonian expatriate scholarly community in North America holds dear. My paper was going to point to racist subtexts in the Estonian mindset. As far as I knew, the issue of racism had never been raised in regards to Estonian literature. I was going to voice my critique at the moment when the new "nationalistic" pathos was forcibly emerging after Estonia had regained its independence in 1991.

I was preoccupied while waiting for my presentation. It felt as if I was committing a sacrilege, although it was not my intention to hurt anybody's feeling. However, I also felt incredibly motivated to express my concerns. After living in Colombia and looking at Estonia from a Latin American perspective, my view of Estonia, its politics and history, had changed. I had become painstakingly aware of connections between westernization and colonization.

When I finished presenting my paper, there was a long silence. Finally people began asking questions. All questions were directed to my co-panellist. There were no questions to me. Soon the Estonian American professor emeritus in Linguistics took the centre-stage engaging in the historico-literary details of the first paper. I was forgotten or ignored. When the moderator asked if someone had questions regarding "The Uncanny Home," the professor, shrugging her shoulders, said something about the impossibility of considering my paper seriously, academically.

And then, unexpectedly, the most heated debate exploded between the nationalistically minded literature/linguistics professors and "different-ly" minded scholars. Still, no questions were asked of me; the audience debated among themselves, some rejecting, criticizing and others feeling related to the ideas of the paper. Furthermore, the participants began sharing their personal stories of repression from lesbian, feminist, Jewish, and other minority perspectives; from the perspectives of those who one way or another identified themselves with Nukitsamees, the boy with horns...

Once again I found that...

*the East-West and South-North Borders
are wandering
splitting me
so that*

*one ear, one eye, one nostril,
one hand, one foot, one lung and
one testicle or one ovary*

is on the one, another on the other side.

so that

nationalist, patriotic, civilized, male, straight

are on the one,

non-nationalist, unpatriotic, uncivilized, feminist, queer

on the other side

How can I re-cognize home if my home is split?

How can re-cognize home if

I am moving away from my home culture, home country...

if I am feeling

more "at home" in the "other" cultures?

UN/ENDING:

**IN CONVERSATION WITH AN EDUCATOR,
COLLEAGUE AND FRIEND, HARTEJ GILL**

contextual FOOTnote:

I met Hartej first during a summer course on hermeneutics in the Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction given by a visiting professor. For three weeks we were intensively close-reading Gadamer's Truth and Method. During the breaks, I found myself talking to a young woman, who I learned, was a part-time Ph.D. student and a French immersion teacher and a school vice-principal. I underline here her professional belongingness because her appearance subverts how a vice-principal and perhaps even a French immersion teacher would "stereotypically" look.

*I also learned that she was thinking about writing her dissertation autobiographically. I don't remember how I learned about her Punjabi background, but I do remember that our conversations revolved around "multiculturalism." Later Hartej and I began looking for opportunities to continue our conversations which have happened through different events such as conferences. After committing to write a chapter-conversation which would be included in both Hartej's and my dissertational texts, we postponed our common writing endeavour. I guess we did not know **where** to begin.*

One day in the middle of December, 2002, in a library, I came upon the following texts/lines:

Racial mixture in one form or another has always been a part of the world's history, as has intertribal mixing. Indian tribes traditionally had mechanisms for dealing with the difference between people with respect before the white man's oppression. Now, those mechanisms flounder in a sea of uncritical multiculturalism.

Africans and Indians are fundamentally tribal people, indigenous to the earth. Their blending only strengthens what they already are, if they remain true to their essence. Blacks and Indians who uncritically persist

in looking at each other through the white man's eyes only undermine themselves.

(Phillips, 2002, pp. 383-384)

The passages came from an article written by Valerie J. Phillips entitled "Seeing Each Other through the White Man's Eye: Reflections and Commentary on the Eating Out of the Same Pot, Black Indian Conference at Dartmouth College." It formed the epilogue of the book Confounding the Color Line: The Indian-Black Experience in North America, 2002.

The text ended with the line:

"Pushing past the white man, I can see it through my own eyes."

(my bolding, p. 383)

Lingering in the midst of the lines communicating the uneasy relationships between Black and Indigenous communities and peoples within the society dominated by "white man's" rulings, I began to wonder, how do Hartej and I look at each other? Through whose eyes do we look at and see each other? I decided to share this question with Hartej.

be placed in the same category as the colonizers. They carry transgenerational colonial wounds that need acknowledging and healing.

Having said all this, I do have to agree with Jose that even these people ("the marginalized/colonized whites") do not know the reality of being a person of colour in Canada. To wake up everyday knowing that you can never "pass" and that everyone sees you as a stranger, an alien, an immigrant, an outsider, the OTHER...

(I'm sure your daughter could relate to this). Racist remarks continuously demanding we go home even when this country is our home. Lack of representation in the media unless it involves the marginalized cultures acting inappropriately, violently, causing problems or creating unrest, becoming dangerous.

I always find it interesting that when one is in the midst of such conversations things arrive your way in a timely manner. I want to share with you a short message that I received by e-mail from someone who has never spoken to me, but saw me once. I believe if you, Jose and I had only been

long colonial histories and who culturally and linguistically are not exactly "European."

I did not even try to explain to him that I could not be seen – I don't want to be seen! – as "white" and "European," that "white and "European," including "Caucasian" and "Indo-European" are cultural constructs that try to force me to become part of the hegemonic geographical, historical, and cultural maps I am not part of. Why should I have to carry the burdening labels that I don't feel connected to?

I did not even try to remind Jose about all these things because I had done it already so many times and on so many occasions.

Although Jose knows that the Finno-Ugrian people have endured long periods of colonialism, he considers this being a part of past history. He is convinced that since I and my friends LOOK white we are not experiencing discrimination and racism presently on a daily basis. Period. End of conversation.

even in its "lesser" forms. We continue to be victims of cognitive colonialism. With the recent focus on whiteness in Critical Multiculturalism Studies, it is hard to believe that there is any interest of the dominant white society to dismantle the unjust status quo. This type of centering of whiteness further decentres those in the margins.

Additionally, the many cries of whites as victims of Affirmative Action further erode trust. Being white continues to be constructed as rational, orderly, pure, and non-white as irrational, disorderly, contaminated and prone to uncivilized behaviour.

Constantly suspect, how do *we* not suspect? And finally trust is impossible because since being white has become synonymous with guilt, there is an on-going trend to attempt to trade in one's white identity for the identity of the marginalized "other" – attempting to steal even our identities to overcome THEIR guilt! Can we be blamed for our mistrust?

"The "easy solution," then, implies a strategy of "becoming minor" or "marginal," a superficial manoeuvre that suggests that nothing is at stake in one's

PERFECT ENGLISH. The company will probably flourish since they have an enormous "clientele" not only among those whose English is VISIBLY IMPURE, but there are plenty of those in Canada, like myself, whose English is AUDIBLY UNCLEAN . . .

"transculturalism is always performed in a power structure, in the tension between hegemony and subalternity" (2001, p. 204).

I have learned from Mignolo how to address the underlying colonialism in the modern world. Instead of using the notion "colonialism" that situates colonialism (easily) in history, Mignolo uses the notion of "coloniality" (borrowed from the Peruvian liberation theologian Anibal Quijano's "coloniality of power") that assumes that "coloniality is constitutive of modernity and as a consequence, we are still living under the same regime" (Mignolo, 2000, p. 71). Isn't this the reason why we have become so concerned with the issues of whiteness and non-whiteness in our conversation?

Having "established" the border and (mis)placed Epstein's and Mignolo's discussions of transculturalisms on the opposite sides, I am drawn to join "Mignolo's side" (Mignolo is not only a "Latinoamericanist," he comes from Latin America, Argentina) since . . .

after living in Colombia I have looked at the world more and more from a "subaltern" perspective which "implies not inferiority but awareness of a subaltern position in a current geopolitical distribution of epistemic power" (Mignolo, 2000, p. 15),

after living in Colombia I have begun to listen more and more to the voices silenced by discourses centering on modernity, postmodernity, and Western civilization,

after living in Colombia I have begun to feel more and more "at home" with/in "border gnosis" offering a space to think "otherwise" from the borders between dominant and subaltern epistemologies (Mignolo, 2001, p. 186).

By the way, Hartej, I forgot to tell you that "transculturalism" is a concept coined by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, in the early 1940s, who located this notion in the context of the history of tobacco. Does it mean that the notion of "transculturalism" is a Latin American term?

Recently my family had a large holiday gathering at my parents' home. There was a very particular moment back to which your writing has taken me. There were about twenty people – family and friends – gathered around in the living room when all of a sudden during a silent moment I realized the potential for everything to go so wrong and I somehow felt most responsible if it did, since I felt as if I was the only host (because of my location at the borders of cultures and classes...) who should have known better. At this gathering there were many people of diverse backgrounds present. My immediate family, my younger sister's British in-laws and their family. My sister's sister-in-law and her husband of Chinese-Canadian (the following are all my simplistic categories. I'm not sure how these individuals would identify themselves) origin and some family friends of various religions, castes and classes. We had everyone from my parents who work in factories to university professors with quite a range in-between (in terms of the traditional social hierarchy of jobs/professions). There was also a close friend of mine who most of the family hadn't met. This woman was born with a degenerative disease and is now in a wheelchair permanently. I remember looking around and feeling a certain "transcultural discomfort."

First, I hoped that no-one would ask why my friend was in a wheelchair. And then I hoped that the topic of Christmas would not come up because there were so many conflicting views on that from various religious and cultural perspectives. And then I hoped that my younger cousins would not make any politically incorrect jokes that I would be put in a place to respond to in front of everyone. And then there were four generational sensitivities to consider and various language barriers between my parents and my sister's British in-laws to deal with. And then of course I hoped that no one would ask about my dissertation because then colonialism would surely be discussed and I would find myself right in the middle of everything trying to negotiate and find some transcultural space of comfort for everyone. As you can imagine, it was a very exhausting evening.

I wondered after that evening about all the transcultural theories and transculturalism. I wondered if the people writing them really knew what it meant to live "transculturally."

If they had ever felt “transcultural tension” in the ways that you and I describe? For if they had, I’m not so sure that their theoretical maps would be so concise, clean and clear.

silence between us. My hope is in the healing power of conversation. Are you willing, can you continue conversation with me?

UNSENT EMAILS:

Unsent: Sunday, January 12, 2003 11:02 AM

Hartej, although you haven't responded to my e-mail I can't stop writing to you... Bringing "these" words, which I cannot repeat any more because now they hurt me so much, into our text I have transgressed the territorial bORDERs of the academic landscape. No, I didn't come across these words in any academic article. I learned them from my daughter when she explained to me the "multicultural" language that students use at school among themselves. The dangerous language of the youth culture created in the interstices of resistance to the "politically correct" multiculturalism of the adult world.

Our daughters, sons, and students live on the minefields of colonialism, genocide, slavery. They might not be fully aware of these legacies that their friends carry with them, so unknowingly they create the "names" for each other that hurt. But they seem fully aware of the unsafety of "safe" labels, places, spaces that their parents and teachers hypocritically provide them with. Because can any label or space be "safe" in our world of continuing and ongoing wars, terrorism and killings?!

I remember reading in the United Nations Development Program Report, 1998, that Military Spending is the world's first (!) priority: \$780 billion dollars are spent for military needs and only \$6 billion for basic education ("Global Gap Is Widening between the Rich and Poor," The Vancouver Sun, September 11, 1998, p. A21). Looking now at the publishing date of this "data" my body shakes and my heartbeat accelerates! And I feel much worse when wondering about what numbers might be included in the United Nations Development Program Report for the years 2001 and 2002.

Hartej, how can we introduce our daughters, sons and students to the ideals of respect,

love and peaceful coexistence when the world we live in is so far from dealing with/ attempting to heal colonial wounds, oppressions, inequalities, and social injustices?

Unsent: Sunday, January 12, 2003 1:54 PM

You haven't answered yet . . . Will we continue our conversation? Can time heal the wounds? How long does it take? How long does it take to heal the colonial wounds that are bleeding ever more deeply?

Today when I was walking in my Burnaby Mountain neighbourhood something very strange and significant happened to me. I was crossing the street and the words emerged from within:

WE NEED TO HELP EACH OTHER TO BECOME BETTER PEOPLE.

The words stunned me.

Hartej, because you responded to my hurtful words you helped me to become more sensitive, more care-ful. And I hope that this becoming will continue in the living conversation with each other in the wor(l)d.

Unsent: Sunday, January 12, 2003 3:14 PM

I keep checking my email in the hopes of hearing from you. There is nothing from you. I have to accept that there is a possibility that you have decided to end our conversation because I have been so insensitive towards you. And yet, I can't stop writing...

How difficult it is to talk across racial, cultural borders, across the abyss of colonial wounds.

I look at the book lying on my table. It is called this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformations edited by Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (2002). This book speaks so loudly to what we are experiencing. The book is a continuation of conversations that began twenty years ago in the book This Bridge Called My Back (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983) among "women of color." This Bridge Called My Back has been recognized as a turning point in the feminist movement:

This Bridge represented an urgent call for new kinds of feminist communities and practices, a call that simultaneously invited women of color to develop a transformative, coalitional consciousness leading to new alliances and challenged "white" middle-class feminists to recognize and rectify their racism, their classism, and other biases.

(Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 6)

*Currently many women of colour are "possessive" of This Bridge Called My Back, viewing it as a safe place, as home (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 3). This is the reason why both the editors of this bridge we call home, Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating, concentrate their introductory articles around the question **how and why they have included white and male voices their new volume**. Needless to say that they both struggle with very uncomfortable and complex dilemmas.*

Unsent: Sunday, January 12, 2003 3:14 PM

"No new messages." I am getting more and more anxious. I am anxious not so much about you not responding to me at all. I am worried about how you are feeling. I want to phone you and ask, but then I think that I need to give you some time and space, I should not pressure or force you back into our conversation. And I keep writing because I want to share with you Gloria Anzaldúa's insights (p. 3):

"Staying 'home' and not venturing out from our own group comes from woundedness, and stagnates our growth."

he eats a lot of garlic at home and doesn't always brush his teeth," (like those "untouchables" – the words ring from my childhood). Shocked! Horrified! I walk away in rage.

or

When an Educator posted the following comment (amongst others) in the Lower Mainland School District's Conference in response to my comment regarding my mother and other immigrant women not being given a plat(form) from which to be heard:

"But in Canada we all have the right to vote, obtain an education, speak in public, etc. There is nothing in Canadian law which prohibits this. We may not want or feel the need to express our opinions, but we have the right. If a Canadian Citizen who comes from another culture feels that she cannot express herself, this is the fault of the country or the culture of origin. It is not Canada that is stopping her, but her own cultural fears or norms. There is nothing in Canadian Law which prohibits this."

or

The little six year old boy I taught in my first year as a teacher, who stuck his tongue out at me behind my back. My students noticed and informed me. When I confronted him, he very matter-of-factly responded with, "My parents told me that I don't have to like coloured people. You're coloured so I don't have to like you!" As a first year teacher, I feared losing my job and therefore I didn't dare tell anyone about this incident. I kept my silence throughout the year wondering what would happen the following year when this boy would be in my class. I must have worried daily for the entire summer holidays before the new school year started. Only to find out in September that the family had moved away.

or

My recent school district colleague who resentfully informed another teacher that the only reason that I received the position of Vice-principal instead of him was because I was a "coloured woman" (completely dishonouring the fact that I had already completed the requirements of a M.A. while he was applying to begin his degree).

Kadi, although I wrote about many of these incidents of marginalization, exclusion, fear,

ignorance, POWER in detail in my Master's Thesis, I write about them here with different emotion. There was so much healing as Dr. Carl Leggo encouraged me in that work to dwell in those spaces and to write about them. And now it seems that that healing continues in an even more relational way because of our writing here. I feel so blessed to have had an advisor who started me in my healing journey and to now be writing with someone who will "listen whol(e)ly" and attempt to "innerstand" my pain.

I am reminded of something that a colleague of ours said yesterday in our discussion group at the Graduate Student retreat, and her words resonate with the wise words that came to you on your walk as well as some of the powerful words of Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating. Our colleague asked: How do we learn to live relationally in an unrelational world?

**Naming the unnameable
rooted in the depths of these emerald waves
vining and re-vining endlessly before me,
I hear also the ocean
of "other" ancestors and of "other" lands,
and I am overcome by a sense of re-connection.
It is the muted whisperings of
another home, another ocean,
HenthMahasagarIndianOcean....
Defiant, unyielding fluidity.
Resisting space, history, time.
Transgressing names, regulations, codes, b/orders
that separate THEIR waters from Theirs.
Trespassing to transgress trespassing.**

I want to swim in these waters.

I want to feel guiltless connections with all of humanity

In order to begin to dismantle racism in our society and our lives we need to look back at our own stories and learn how we have been/are involved in racism, colonialism and difference.

un/ending . . .

January 16, 2003, late afternoon. The University of British Columbia, Hartej and Kadi during a meeting in the graduate student lounge of the Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction.

Hartej, I don't even know where to begin, there are so many uneasy thoughts/feelings in my heart and mind regarding the multicultural/transcultural realities we experienced together yesterday...

I RECALL the gathering of teachers, students, educators, activists, researchers, artists, pedagogues at Magee Secondary School for the screening/discussion of the anti-racist and anti-homophobic videos prepared by the group of high-school students under the aegis of AMES (Access to Media Education Society).

I RECALL the powerful impact of both films on me, the impact of the sincerity of students' voices, the multiplicity of the perspectives, the interweaving of real stories and artistic creativity into the complex and disturbing film text/ure.

I RECALL the images of multiculturalism from the film... a scene of bullying of a young fragile looking fellow by two bull-like heavy lads who humiliate him on the basis of his homosexuality and Jewishness, tying him to the pole of the Canadian flag.

*I RECALL the Finnish expression *tihe tühjus* – approximating (in English) “tense emptiness” — articulating more adequately than any English wording the deep silence in the hall loaded with the utter discomfort after we had watched the first film Racism for Reel: Media for Change.*

Kadi, although I am very grateful to Dr. Graeme Chalmers for creating a rare academic space for uncomfortable multicultural/transcultural discussions, my body was shaking from so many of the troublesome comments:

The white woman behind us:

“But it's not just people of colour who are looked at suspiciously by security guards, it's

about how you dress. I've had security guards look at me too sometimes."

The white male to our right:

"Racism doesn't happen just between whites and students of colour. Students of colour all call each other names as well."

The white male to our left:

"In our school there are more students of colour so the white students are actually a minority."

The white woman in front of us:

"But when you try to help, *they* ask you to leave"

I'm sure people in the audience countered some of these ignorant and destructive comments, but all I remember is the silence inside me
and

a l l a r
o
u n d m e

I RECALL thinking that I have to accept their mistrust. I have the obligation to "innerstand" (as you, Hartej, put it, transforming the verb "understand" in such a meaningful way) the deep pain of the bleeding colonial wound. I have the obligation to try again and again . . . and again . . . endlessly . . . to relate in hope of building connections.

I RECALL myself becoming aware of our (in/direct) ties with the colonial legacies. I RECALL myself feeling the personal responsibility for the racism in our society and our lives.

Kadi, I must admit that my body shook intensely as I heard a white woman in the audience informing us of how upset she was because she was asked to leave a First

Nations gathering. Knowing her and her work, I would have thought that she would have understood.

I heard my inner voice saying: You have not innerstood the colonial wound! You needed to work harder to gain the trust of the community, you needed to go back and let them know how you felt and why you felt that you did not fit into the category of WHITE as they know it in all its violence and exploitation.

You didn't work hard enough, you gave up, you left the conversation.

When the bridge broke, you went back into your safe zone, you didn't let yourself take the risk and plunge into the water under the bridge – into the place of relationality.

I wish I had the courage to plunge into those waters myself that evening, but I stayed silent. I noticed that you spoke to her after the presentation, Kadi, but I stayed silent. I suppose I also took the safe route which I believe in these incidences is not a route at all.

I RECALL my inability to find words to talk about the issues of the film because the students in the film used the words that had hurt you, Hartej, so much.

I RECALL wondering in the midst of the after-film discussion how easily and quickly all multicultural discussions, including those that intend to give space to “other” voices, get dominated by the voices speaking from or about “white” perspectives.

SILENCE inside me
and all
around me.

I RECALL myself feeling overwhelmed by conflicting and confusing thoughts on our way home after a long day of living “multicultural” reality...

I tried to innerstand all those comments differently, Kadi, but my mind could not convince my body.

How did a conversation that was supposed to be about racism turn into a conversation about WHITE defensiveness?

What voices remained silent or silenced and why?

Why am I always expecting this kind of defensiveness not to take place, especially in locations where educators and community people are choosing to learn about social justice issues?

Why am I always surprised each time these discussions play out in this manner?

Why am I always expecting generative discussions toward change?

How do we help ourselves and help each other be better people as your earlier thought suggested?

Hartej, I feel the need to look back at our dialogues, to dwell in the reflective space and ask ourselves: so what? Why do these conversations between us matter? How do they matter? Do they make a difference? To whom?

We both felt intrigued by this trendy notion of "transculturalism" circulating in academia instead of multiculturalism.

We had a hope that "transculturalism" would provide us with a comfortable "theoretical" home.

Instead we ended up dwelling in the discomfort zones in between

"THEM"

"US"

"WHITENESS"

"NON-WHITENESS"

"MULTICULTURALISM"

"TRANSCULTURALISM"

"REALITIES"

"THEORY"

"IDENTITY"

"BRIDGES"

"HOME"

"SAFE SPACE"

and . . .

"WATER BELOW BRIDGES"

he wants to keep me like a prisoner

Familial transgenerational,

The "proper Punjabi daughter" disgracing His name, His family.

transcultural tensions continue

Young teen-age relative in tears.

in-between

Give up your rules! You're losing her!

the oppressive realities

"NO NEVER."

of the outside world

THEY will try to teach my child THEIR values and THEIR morals and make me look

and the divisive fragmentation

like a bad father.

of the inner.

Looking for an Indo-Canadian counsellor before giving up.

Unendable conversations.

His cultural values...

I feel absolutely helpless.

Unendable im/personations.

Once the bridge breaks, I will walk away . . .

Today, Jose and I ended up in a long discussion about whose position is the most disadvantageous in North America?

histories of slavery and genocide Who suffers/has suffered more?

"academic" conversations "personal/family" conversations

intermingle

How to overcome the victimising categorisations?

How to decolonize colonial thinking?

endless conversations between myself, my husband, my daughter, my colleagues and my friends

anytime and anywhere . . .

I am attached to other cultures through personal responsibility.

listen, learn, acknowledge, care, multiple histories, traditions, colonial legacies

suffering need not be a necessity of our society

change can not happen at the level of our texts alone; it has to

happen in and

through the interminglings of our lives as well.

intersecting identities . . . homes . . . re-searching belongings

transculturally

cross-culturally

awareness of the complex “**transculturality**” of our lives – of all our lives

reaching out across difference

How can we ignore our commitment to community just because our institutions can?

our honest safe/unsafe conversations

our complex “relocations”

How did you “after hundreds of years of being colonized

come to be looked at as a colonizer in this country!?”

I have felt your pain and your great sense of responsibility, your commitment to building bridges and to taking risks to immerse yourself in the waters below those bridges.

You may not be WHITE in all its dominance,

but you have taken on all the responsibilities of what that position entails.

living relationally . . .

I have learned about WHITENESS through your non-WHITENESS.

many selves

continuously constructed, deconstructed, reconstructed in spaces of complex

“transcultural” intersectionality un/im-personated in this performance . . .

I am also a woman of privilege in terms of my

“cultural capital” of education and language . . . I can no longer come out pure. I'm not sure anyone can.

Not even my dear grandmother. Although she has come to live with the reality of her grand-daughter's British husband, she desperately hopes that none of her other grandchildren (especially the educated ones) will marry a Black person or a person with a disability. Like so many in our society (whether one is willing to admit it or not), she has been colonized to believe that blackness and disability will lower one's status on the hierarchal scale of our society and truncate one's educational merit. As her grand-daughter, knowing that she only has the best intentions for me – for my upliftment from marginalization, **how do I negotiate with integrity my beliefs in social justice and equity and her cognitive colonization?** Who am I to be in all this troubling complex honest ambiguity?

searching for my selves

un/settling . . . unsettle-able . . . tremulous

January 18, 2003. Vancouver Peace March.

people coming TOGETHER against WAR

"It's not about 'right' or 'left' politics anymore; it's about US AS HUMAN BEINGS!"

moments of communality across the multiple ethnic, racial, class, age, gender, religious and political affiliations

Is WAR the price we need to pay in order to come together in solidarity, to build bridges across difference?

struggling in difference

building bridges through difference

placed in-between **home and identity**

I am beginning to understand why the word home may have been so much more meaningful for you. You have lived in so many different geographical locations...I have lived only in one location since my arrival from India.

Divisions of a psychic, cultural, racial, ethnic space

between the self/non-self or other

*I continue to travel ceaselessly
between THEIR/Their*

LANGUAGES

POWER

RULES

CULTURES

INSTITUTIONS

HOMES

constantly searching for

my mind,

my body,

my soul,

my selves,

*somewhere in the beyond
where I am not, and yet I am*

kithe uther

gahan.

"identity" . . . I haven't grasped its text/ures.

so "foreign" to the Estonian language . . . ident . . . eet . . . dents . . . sus, I don't know

"home" smell colour sound

home, safety, stability

unsettling, unsettle/able foreign space of unbelonging/belongingness

India without citizenship

never felt like home/non-home

Canadian NATION-BUILDING

racial and ethnic

outsider inside Canada

our cyberhome, a place of dis/comfort

an intersectional space, cross-cultural, co-created, co-existing,
living “transculturally”

in another place or in another time we could have been enemies . . .

*I am situated between THEM and US, uncomfortably, as always
a position of ambiguity and duality
and a position of response-ability to build bridges.*

*But the more I “innerstand” the world from the “Third world,” “indigenous,” “non-
white,” “subaltern” perspective the more disconnected I become from my home country.
The more I try to bridge different cultures, identities, positions, homes the more aware I
become of distances and separations.
I don’t understand.*

***Why does the process of building bridges involve the heightened awareness of
separatedness? How can I build the bridge across the Atlantic Ocean between Estonia,
Colombia, Canada?***

The continuous process of **co-creating** implies that bridging is an endless response-
ability which often requires immersing in the unsafe waters below bridges.

Opening

spaces and dislocating, relocating, co-locating positions and silent subtext
of our daily lives through conversation – unfinished conversation...

*Hartej, what is the word for home in Punjabi, in your language? Remember you
mentioned once a word which sounded much like an Estonian word for home*

KODU . . . KODA.

*Yes, please check with your dad... can you look it up in the dictionary? I would be so
grateful.*

Kadi, I do remember that you once asked me how to say home in Punjabi and
somehow our conversation went in another direction. There are actually three words in
Punjabi:

mekan, kur, and koti/kota.

Mekan refers mainly to the actual structure of a residential building. *Kur* is the word most closely connected to the word home in English, although it is very much the dwelling of a large extended family.

Koti/Kota are the words that sound so similar to the word you once referred to as home in Estonian. *Koti/kota* mean both an elegant, spacious home and a house of ill fame or a brothel – a pure/impure home/house.

Hartej, I am . . . ah, I am stunned, astonished! Koti/kota is so similar to the Finno-Ugric word! Look, in Estonian home is kodu/koda, in Voitic koto, in Finnish koti, in Livonian kuo'd, in Karelian and Vepsic kod'I . . . Who would have expected that the Estonian words for home kodu, koda are linguistically closer to Punjabi koti/kota than to Sami goahti – the language from the same Finno-Ugric linguistic family group.

Well, yes, there are differences in meaning, but then the meanings of the words change drastically over the years. For example, the word "conversation" meant originally "having dealings with others" and "manners of conducting oneself in the world," but from the 16th century on "conversation" was used as a synonym for "sexual intercourse."³⁵

Kodu is one of the most heartfelt words in the Estonian language. Koda is its older form. My ancestors' word for home can also be translated as "hearth." Koda is an old word, the name of the modest habitat of the "ancient Finno-Ugric" dwellers:

KODA

is a world in the world, a peculiar model of the mysterious universe, a dwelling place in another one. Through the smoke hole the main pillar of the dwelling place faced the

³⁵ Harper. <<http://www.etymonline.com/c8etym.htm>>

North Star, with black starry skies around it. The small dwelling-place was in a big one whose smoke-hole opened in an unreachable height, whose walls were full of holes burnt by sparks and which was adorned with Sun and the Moon. This enormous miraculous thing rotated noiselessly round its axis which was also the axis of the dwelling place of the ancient dweller.

(Asu-Õunas & Künnap, 1978)

Kadi, I would also like to share another word in Punjabi that has not had the time or space to find itself into our limited academic/non-academic conversations. The word *pechan* means identity or recognition. According to the Barnhart Dictionary of Etymology (Barnhart, 1988) recognition is “borrowed from Middle French and directly from Latin *recognitionem* (nominative *recognitio*) act of recognizing, from *recognit-*, past participle stem of *recognoscere* to acknowledge, know again . . .” (p. 896).

Hartej, we too have the word “recognition” in Estonian that we use when we talk about identity and belonging: ära tundma/ tunnistama/tunnetama. But not only that, recognition in Estonian includes such meanings as “feeling,” “sensing,” “knowing” as well as “witnessing,” “attesting,” “cognizing.”

KODA KOTA

Acknowledging witnessing attesting, cognizing feeling sensing, knowing *each other*
again and again...

You and I, we both come from different cultural narratives. *The Canadian “multicultural” contextual framework is “foreign” to our respective cultural narratives.* And as such, it de-contextualizes other cultural narratives (or as Mignolo would say – “local histories”), including ours, coming together in Canada. *The Canadian multicultural framework as “global design” (to use again Mignolo’s notion) forces our cultural histories to FIT INTO and to have conversations WITHIN its own framework.* As a global design, Canadian multiculturalism is a dominant and imposed context/framework where our struggle becomes a struggle about borders/boundaries;

inclusions/exclusions. *From this perspective I understand why you emphasize the need for DISRUPTIONS. It is so asphyxiating to dwell WITHIN imposed boundaries, thus, the need for the cracks in the boundaries/walls in order to breathe!*

We had hoped that the notion of transculturalism would help us to go beyond the framework of multiculturalism. However, we learned from our conversation that we can take a new theoretical term/notion and we can keep trying other terms/notions as well. But as long as we keep dwelling WITHIN the same "multicultural" global design, respecting its boundaries, nothing changes because the power relationships we are involved with/in this design are still the same, domineering and hierarchical. In this framework one is left with two options: to "FIT IN" or to "STAY/GET OUT," but it is impossible to "FIT IN" and "GO BEYOND" at the same time, unless we take the "universalistic" position . . .

We continue our struggles. We continue NOT TO FIT IN. We continue creating alternative contextual spaces, spaces that undermine dominant global designs and transform existing hierarchical academic and cultural relationships.

We continue imagining new spaces – INTERSPACES – emerging through the process of CO-CREATION where the contextual framework is not a fixed frame but where context comes into being through the reconnection to its Latin roots as "a joining/weaving together." ³⁶

Perhaps we did not succeed in our conversation to feel "at home" nor to identify with/in the context of this fashionable new academic term "transculturalism." Rather we co-created/wove a new cultural space/context. And our home/identities become and continue becoming into being through articulation of our differences in conversation.

³⁶ Harper. <<http://www.etymonline.com/c8etym.htm>>

WANDERING BORDER

THE EAST - WEST

border

is always wandering,

sometimes eastward,

sometimes west,

and we know exactly where it is just now:

in Gaugamela,

not in the Urals

because the Plain of Gaugamela is in northern Iraq

where in 331 BC the forces of Alexander the Great won the battle against

Darius III of Persia bringing Alexander control of South Asia³⁷

where in 2003 the forces of president George Bush, Jr. won the battle against Iraqi

dictator Saddam Hussein bringing . . .

in the land

(what was once called Babylon,

an ancient civilization, a cradle of humanity)

and in ourselves,

dividing deeply

our minds

³⁷ Gaugamela, Battle of. Britannica Concise Encyclopedia.
<http://www.britannica.com/ebc/article?eu=390622>

YOU ARE WITH US

YOU ARE AGAINST US

splitting violently

our bodies

so that

one ear, one eye, one nostril, one hand, one foot,

one lung and one testicle or one ovary

is on the one, another on the other side.

And the heart,

is T-E-A-R-----ed apart:

if we are looking southward, from the North

if we are looking eastward, from the West

we see blood and death entering into our homes

a TV-image of a very old-looking woman in black clothes

sitting in the corner in the midst of the dust and rubbles of her disappeared home

her eyes looking nowhere,

in front of her there is a bright-yellow package of "humanitarian aid"

brought to her by the "liberators"!

Unopened, untouched.

La Maestra:

I am dead. I was born here, in this town. En la casita de barro rojo con techo de paja que está al border del camino, frente a la escuela.

El camino es un río lento de barro rojo en el invierno y un remolino de polvo rojo en el verano. Cuando llegan los meses de sol, el polvo rojo cubre todo el pueblo. Las alpargatas suben llenas de polvo rojo, y los pies y piernas y las patas de los caballos y las crines y los sombreros, todo se impregna de polvo rojo. Nací de este barro y de ese polvo rojo, y ahora he vuelto a ellos.³⁸

DOES OUR MOUTH KNOW HOW

TO SPEAK FROM THE HEART AND TO DWELL IN PEACE?

³⁸ Buenaventura, 1992, p. 113.

HEART(H)MINDING AWARENESS OF BE(LONG)ING

südametunnistus/heart witnessing

Breathe in

Breathe out

Inhale

Exhale

In

Out

Listen

Listen to the moment between your breaths

Breathing in

Breathing out

Inhale

Exhale

Again and again

In

Out

Listen

What do you hear?

What do you hear between your breaths?

Do you hear the silence?

Listen

Listen again

Do you hear your heartbeats?

Do you hear the voice speaking in between your heartbeats?

What does it say?

Can you understand?

s ü d a m e t u n n i s t u s

You don't know this word?

My dark-blue Saagpakk's Eesti-Inglise Sõnaraamat/English-Estonian dictionary

translates it:

"conscience"

The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of English Language say:

conscience n.

1. The faculty of recognizing the distinction between right and wrong in regard to one's own conduct.
2. Conformity to one's own sense of right conduct.
3. *Obsolete.*
 - a. Consciousness.
 - b. Inner thought

*and points to the Latin origin of the word **conscire**,*

com- (intensive) + **scire** (to know)

*asking me to see its Indo-European root word: **skei-***

*I learn that **skei-** means "to cut, split," and the Latin branch of this root **scire** means knowing by "separating one thing from another," "discerning," and that beside conscience, such words like nice, omniscient and science stem from this root. Among the other derivations of **skei-** are:*

Germanic skitan, "to separate, defecate"

Old Norse skita, "to defecate"

Greek skhizein, "to split": schedule, schism, schizo-

"con-science" *n.*

*knowing by mind, knowing by splitting . . . separating one thing from another,
separating right from wrong, beauty from ugliness, life from death,
word from the world, sound from silence, I from We, self from other, white
from colour, mind from heart, people from earth . . .*

Take a deep breath

Breathe in

Breathe out

Listen

Listen again

s ü d a m e t u n n i s t u s

*If I translate this word I cannot ignore the fact that this Estonian word contains
two words:*

südame of heart + **tunnistus** witnessing

witnessing of heart, heart witnessing, knowing/learning with/in heart

*We ask in Estonian "mis sul on südamel?" – "what's in your heart?" In English
it means "what's on your mind?"*

*In English one talks about "unburdening one's mind," in Estonian we "unburden
our heart" – "puistame südant."*

*In English one says "peace of mind," in Estonian one says "peace of heart" –
"südamerahu."*

Take a deep breath

Listen

Listen to your heartbeats

Listen to the silenced voices between your heartbeats

Heart witnessing . . . witnessing with your heart

I heart witness *an uncountable number of voices silenced by colonial history, by "discovery" of America, by the civilizing process, by modernization, by development, by progress, by globalization, by democracy.*

I heart witness *the voices of my ancestors silenced by more than 700 years of colonization, by Christianization, by Teutonic Knights, by Baltic Barons, by German intelligentsia, by Russian rulers, by the Communist regime, by westernization.*

Listen

Listen with your heart

What do you hear?

I hear and honour *the voice of Ochwiay Biano, the chief of the Pueblo people, speaking. Talking to Ochwiay Biano when he visited in 1925 the Taos Pueblo, New Mexico, Carl Jung acknowledged for the first time how deeply colonialism had affected his character and psyche. The chief of the Pueblo people told him that whites were "mad," uneasy and restless, always wanting something. According to the Pueblo chief they were mad because they say "thinking with their heads," which is a sign of illness in his tribe. "Why of course," said Jung, "what do you think with?" Ochwiay Biano indicated his heart.³⁹*

³⁹ Shulman Lorenz & Watkins. <http://www.mythinglinks.org/LorenzWatkins.html>

I hear and honour the voices of Helene Shulman Lorenz and Mary Watkins, two Depth Psychologists, speaking in their article "Silenced Knowings, Forgotten Springs: Paths to Healing in the Wake of Colonialism":

We have each been educated in a system that grew out of, and reflects, 500 years of colonialism, and are struggling for awareness in a new era of globalization that leaves increasing numbers of people hungry and disenfranchised. Our cultural legacy is profoundly imprinted by the often silenced after-effects of the genocidal war against Native Americans, the dislocation and forced slavery of Africans in America, and the oppressive labor conditions of the poor. But how do we carry these kinds of knowing inside ourselves and in our relations to others and the world?⁴⁰

SUDDENLY I hear

a chorus of voices talking at the same time. I hear Enrique Buenaventura

from Colombia, a playwright who conceived

La Maestra/The teacher together with the members of the Teatro Experimental de Cali

Jacqueline, Gladys, Guillermo, Nelly, Aida, Pedro, and Elias.

I hear Alejandra Medellin,

from Mexico, a stage director who produced La Maestra in Vancouver in 1998

with

Rita, Kesten, Luisa, Warren, Steve, Charles, Pryde, Kadi, and Marnie.

I hear the shouting of the Sergeant

SERGEANT: Your name's Peregrino Pasambú, right? Then you're the big leader here.

. . . and I hear the calm and soft voice of La Maestra:

⁴⁰ Shulman Lorenz & Watkins. <http://www.mythinglinks.org/LorenzWatkins2A.html>

THE TEACHER: *Father had been named mayor twice. But he understood so little about politics that he didn't realize that the government had changed.*

SERGEANT: You got this land because of politics, isn't that right?

THE TEACHER: *That wasn't true. My father was one of the founders of the town. And because he was one of the founders he had this house next to the road, with some land. He gave the town its name. He called it "Hope."*

SERGEANT: Aren't you going to talk? Aren't you going to say anything?

THE TEACHER: *My father didn't talk much.*

SERGEANT: [*Pointing at the map of Colombia*] This land isn't divided right. We're gonna divide it all over again. It's gonna have real owners with deeds and everything.

THE TEACHER: *When my father came here, it was all a jungle.*

SERGEANT: Aren't you gonna talk? The jobs haven't been given out too well, neither. Your daughter's the schoolteacher, isn't she?

THE TEACHER: *It wasn't really a job. They seldom paid me salary. But I liked to be the schoolteacher. My mother was the first schoolteacher the school ever had. She taught me, and when she died I became the teacher.*

SERGEANT: Who knows what that bitch teaches.

THE TEACHER: *I taught reading and writing, and I taught catechism and love for our country and our flag. When I refused to eat and drink, I thought about children. It was true that there weren't many of them, but who was going to teach them? And then I thought, why should they learn to love their country and their flag? Country and flag don't mean anything anymore. Maybe it wasn't right, but that's what I thought.*

SERGEANT: Why don't you talk? You see this list? All the big shots and fat cats of the last government are on it. We got orders to get rid of them all so we can set up the elections.

THE TEACHER: *So that's the way it was. They put him against the mud wall behind the house. The sergeant gave the order, and the soldiers shot.*

SERGEANT: I'm not to blame. I'm just following orders.

THE TEACHER: *The sergeant gave the order. Then the sergeant and the soldiers came into my room and, one after another, they raped me. They raped me. Then I wouldn't eat or drink again, and so I died, little by little. Little by little.*

Breathe in

breathe out

Listen

Listen to your heartbeats

Listen to the silenced voices in between your heartbeats

Listen to the silenced meaning of the word "conscience" – inner thought – that the dictionary declares is obsolete:

conscience

from L. *conscientia* "**knowledge within oneself, a moral sense,**" prp. of *conscire* "**be mutually aware.**"⁴¹

Listen to and honor the teachings of the Musqueam people

whose land we and our university, the University of British Columbia, dwell on.

***I listened** to Greg Cajete, a Tewa educator, from Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, when he shared his knowings in the Longhouse, at the University of British Columbia, two years ago:*

"Learning happens from within, from inside out . . ."

Breathe

Breathe deeply

Inhale

Exhale

*Learning is like breathing; it follows the rhythm of taking in and putting out*⁴²

apprehension

comprehension

⁴¹ Harper. <http://www.etymonline.com/c8etym.htm>

⁴² Kolb, Baker, & Jensen, 2001, p. 57.

intension

extension

Listen to the silence within your heart

In

Out

In

Out

Breathing is life's most persistent ritual

Repetition

Inhale

Exhale

Repeating

Repeating

Repeating

Seems endless

Until the last breath

The end.

Death.

And then again birth.

The beginning.

Breath connects birth and death

Breath: Birth-and-Death

Breathe again and listen

Listen to the interconnecting silences of the breathing universe

inter

In-between

Returning to my red English dictionary I learn that

***inter** also means "to place in a grave; bury"*

*Latin: **in**, "in" + **terra**, "earth, ground"⁴³*

⁴³ The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of the English Language, 1982, p. 683.

Breathe in

breathe out

In between within silence

Feel the interconnectedness with earth

Perceive your rootedness in earth

Listen

Earth . . . ear

Listen how the silence gives birth to the word

Listen how the word becomes into being in the heart of earth

Do you hear?

***What word/knowing is it that your heart witnessing brings into being from
within the silence of earth?***

koda:

The song comes into being in my heart from within the silence of earth:

meil on kijas kullasseppa
we have a goldsmith in the house

tares taalrite taguja
a silversmith in the farm

saunas sangavitsutaja
a carpenter in the sauna

kojast tõuseb kulda suitsu
a golden smoke rises from the chimney

tareharjast haljast suitsu
a silvery smoke rises from our farm

saunast sangavitsa suitsu
an alder smoke rises from the sauna

meil on kuu korstenalla
we have the moon on the roof

meil on agu akenassa
we have the dawn on the window

päeva lävepaku päällä
the sun on the door

be(long)ing in the journey:

Dear Maestra, I hoped that the Red Road would lead me home, that it would help me to re-cognize my ancestors' dwelling – koda . . .

*I am not sure where I have arrived, or where I should have arrived,
I have not found out **where** I belong and neither do I know **how** to re-cognize
home.*

*The only thing I know is that I am and have been on the homeward journey
and that this journey continues. Being away from home has made me **aware** of
home . . .*

*The writing lines marking the trajectories of my homeward journeying
while dwelling in the dissertation have been discontinuous, uncertain and
wandering – leading me, perhaps, **no/where**, and, yet,*

*I have arrived **somewhere** . . .*

*I am **now here** . . . breathing in breathing out . . .*

***be(long)ing** in the journey.*

Journeying is learning . . .

*I learned on this journey
that the road towards home does not necessarily lead towards "home country"
that home is not only my home culture, my family, my community
that the road toward – koda – is interweaving, passing through other cultures . . .
until one learns to be at home in between cultures, on the road
that the road might not lead to home but towards learning to re-cognize road as
home.*

Learning is journeying . . .

away from home

into unfamiliar and unknown zones – not to make unfamiliar familiar or unknown known but to learn to dwell in un/familiar and un/known.

Homewards marks an unending journey because in movement we recognize the impossibility of completing the journey.

Dear Maestra, you asked me not to forget the Red Road . . .

I have not forgotten. How could I have?

Journeying towards home I tried to overcome borders – political, geographical, national, cultural, racial, ethnic – that split our selves and divide our worlds. I hoped that the Red Road, as a road towards decolonization, would lead me toward healing of colonial wounds . . .

[because the Red Road carries not only the memories of colonialism, bloodshed and violence, it also bestows the vitalizing life-power, the meaning that red blood has in pre-Colombian indigenous cultures]

*Instead, the Red Road led me towards heightened awareness that this world I am **a part** of is currently torn **apart** more violently than ever.*

I breathe
in out

I heart witness

I hear

I hear a loud howling of uncontained desperation and hopelessness NOT coming out from my mouth. Yesterday, March 19th, 2003 the U.S. armed forces began to bombard Iraq.

And then I hear sergeants shouting again, again, and again:

SERGEANT: [Pointing at the map of Colombia] This land isn't divided right. We're gonna divide it all over again. It's gonna have real owners with deeds and everything.

SERGEANT: [Pointing at the map of Iraq] This land isn't divided right. We're gonna divide it all over again. It's gonna have real owners with deeds and everything.

SERGEANT: [Pointing at the map of the World] This land isn't divided right. We're gonna divide it all over again. It's gonna have real owners with deeds and everything.

On Saturday, March 29th I receive an email message from a Turkish Canadian friend, living in Vancouver:

**Subject: April 12 - The World Unites Against War
Date: SAT, 29 MAR 2003 04:56:55 -0500**

April 12 International Day of Action - Only the People Can Stop the War

On Saturday, April 12, join the tens of thousands of people of conscience who will March on Washington, DC and surround the White House.

I take notice of the message, paying particularly attention to the line:

"the tens of thousands of people of conscience."

On April 1, I read on the internet an article by Michael Moore, "I'd like to Thank the Vatican," from The Los Angeles Times about how he made the decision to speak up against the war in Iraq when he received the Oscar for the film "Bowling for Columbine." Moore wrote:

And, as I walked up to the stage, I was still thinking about the lessons that morning at Mass. About how silence, when you observe wrongs being committed, is the same as committing those wrongs yourself. And so I followed my conscience and my heart.

I pay attention to the words, "I followed my conscience and my heart."

On April 2, a Peruvian friend who lives in San Francisco sends me an article written by the independent journalist Norman Solomon:

Casualties of War – First Truth, Then Conscience⁴⁴

The national media echo chamber is not receptive to **conscience** . . . the human **conscience** is close to a whisper. Easily unheard.

. . . the urgent need for us to get in touch with our **consciences** has never been more acute.

. . . truth is the first casualty of war. But another early casualty is **conscience** . . .

the capacity for conscience is what makes us human.

Darwin wrote, "the moral sense of **conscience** is by far the most important."

Conscience is smaller than a single pixel, and much less visible. You can't see it on a TV screen. Or hear it. Or smell it. Or taste it. You can only feel it. ¶

Half a century ago, Albert Einstein urged: "Never do anything against your **conscience** even if the state demands it."

Conscience is not on the military's radar screen, and it's not on our TV screen. But media messages do not define the limits and possibilities of **conscience**. We do.

"conscience"

The meaning that The Houghton Mifflin Canadian Dictionary of English Language declared "obsolete" has come back to our lives! At what price?!

⁴⁴ Solomon. <http://www.fair.org/media-beat/>

I am writing and reflecting. A bird begins to sing outside. It is, April 4, 2003, 5:13 AM. In Baghdad it is . . . ? How many people die there at this very moment? We keep watching a spectacle of bomb explosions, war planes flying and missiles attacking on our eerie green light TV screens.

*The killings are happening right before our eyes,
we KNOW it and ALLOW it to happen.*

*How have we come to commit **percepticide**?⁴⁵*

When whole populations are forced to not-know what is going on around them, when the media choose to not-name injustice, watching-without-seeing becomes "the most dehumanizing of acts."⁴⁶

How have we come to know the world irresponsibly as unattached observers?

conscire

com- (intensive) + **scire** (to know)

scire - knowing by "separating one thing from another," "discerning"

science

Is it because we have learned to perceive the world from the perspective of "objectivity" and "truth," and forgotten the perspective of our conscience?

⁴⁵ Diana Taylor, a Latin American theatre researcher coined the term "percepticide" for the effects of violence on individuals, **the erasure of one's own perceptions and knowledge** when writing about the "dirty war" in Argentina. When people perceive atrocities and injustices, they renounce their own perception to avoid danger to themselves. This renunciation, according to Taylor, "turns the violence on oneself. Percepticide blinds, maims, kills through the senses" (Taylor, 1997, p. 124).

⁴⁶ Schulman Lorenz, & Watkins. <http://www.mythinglinks.org/LorenzWatkins.html>

Why has our “humanistic” education allowed us to de-humanize the world?

*How do we teach/learn “multiculturally”/“transculturally” in the world
where borders have not disappeared but become stronger?*

*How do we create bridges, build communities and come together in the world
divided by*

*the WEST-EAST and the NORTH-SOUTH
BORDER*

*into
“you are with US” or “you are against US?”*

Breathe in

Breathe out

Listen

Witness your heart

*How can we **re-cognize** our conscience?*

s ü d a m e t u n n i s t u s

*What kind of curriculum comes into being when you heart witness your
conscience?*

*I heart witness **La Maestra's** voice speaking from the space of death between my
heartbeats:*

*It will rain soon, and the red dust will turn to mud. The road will be
a slow moving river of red mud, and the sandals will come up the
road again, and the mud covered feet, and the horses and mules
with their bellies full of mud, and even the faces and the hats go up
the road, splattered with mud.*

I continue walking the Red Road towards home.

Dear Reader, are you coming with me?

meie meel teeb teele minna
let's set out on the road

teele minna maale saada
set out on the road and begin to go

osata oma koduje
to go towards home

märgata oma majaje
to find our own dwelling

kus me lähme vastu ööda
where shall we go towards the night

vastu ööda vastu põhja
towards the night towards the north

vastu helgasta ehada
towards the shining twilight

vastu koitu keerulista?
towards the brightness of dawn?

*I notice that the lines of this old Estonian runo-song bring
all cardinal directions – North, South, West, East – together in a
circle. Before leaving on a journey homeward, I have the honour
and possibility to greet the ancestors living in all four directions.*

*My ancestors offer me their company and support. I don't
have to be alone anymore . . . on the homeward journey.*

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