

# PLACES REVISITED: TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES AND STORIES OF BELONGING

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on fieldwork material, the following article seeks to explore the ways members of transnational families create, maintain and negotiate relations to multiple places. People are not only shaped by the places in their lives, but they also employ different strategies to make a place feel like home. This repositioning is a constant process, affected also by the surrounding societal and cultural context. The choices to stay or to move have to be justified not only to oneself, but also to others (relatives and wider society). While doing this, people have to be more explicit about their relations to different locations, to put into words the feelings they have towards certain places. In this article, I concentrate on the emotional and social side of peoples' place-related experiences.

The article is based on interview material I have collected for my PhD dissertation in folklore. Interviews were made with immigrants from the former Soviet Union living in Finland and their family members living in the country of origin (in Russian Karelia and Estonia). The aim is to capture the experiences of both family members relocating and those staying put, and to discuss the meaning of place in the identity formation of people living mobile or transnational lives.

KEYWORDS: transnational families • storytelling • place-relations • identity • belonging

## INTRODUCTION

We have an apple tree mother grew from a seed. It is a very interesting apple tree, gave such huge apples. But when [mother and father] moved away, the apple tree also ceased to bear apples, it was longing, you see. (Woman, lives in the Republic of Karelia, H33: 156)<sup>1</sup>

The following article\* explores how home and belonging are negotiated in relationship to individual migration or migration of family members. I aim to discuss different,

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mostly discursive strategies that members of transnational families<sup>2</sup> use in order to (re) position themselves in relation to different places. People are not only shaped by places in their lives, they also work on this relationship to make a place feel 'their own' or 'home', to narrate and also to justify the importance of certain places in their lives.

A transnational way of life may entail different possibilities to feel at home, and in many places simultaneously. The relations to different places can be (re)created, for example by using personal experience stories as well as narratives of the family. A transnational way of life does not entail rootlessness, although themes of homelessness and feelings of estrangement are present in my material. Home and movement are not neatly opposed; people's relationships to place are rather more complex and context bound than either "rooted belonging" or "rootless mobility". (Ahmed et al. 2003: 3) In this article, I wish to explore belonging from different positions, analysing the stories of both those family members who have moved and of those who stayed in their homeland. As Rebecca Golbert (2001) has written, the research on transnationalism tends to concentrate on diasporic communities, thus ignoring the transnational experiences and practices of people who have not left their homes. The lives of such people are still structured by the tension between mobility and different local cultural practices.

This article is based on material I have collected for my PhD dissertation, which deals with storytelling in transnational families. The research material consists of field diaries and forty relatively open interviews I made during the years 2001–2004. The interviewees are former Soviet immigrants living in Finland and their family members living in the country of origin (I have conducted interviews in Russian Karelia and Estonia). Most of the interviewees who now live in Finland have moved from Baltic countries and Russian Karelia, only some individual interviewees have arrived from other areas of Russia, mostly from bigger towns. Where possible I have interviewed more than one person in the same family. Eight of the interviews are group interviews, where at least two of the family members were present.<sup>3</sup> Interviewees were able to choose whether they would like to talk in Finnish, Estonian or Russian. During many of the interviews two languages were used interchangeably.

As the research crosses different kinds of border, my position as a researcher in relation to the interviewees and the material is equivocal. When asking myself which culture or group I represent for the interviewees, I cannot give a straightforward answer. Being originally from Finland, but living in Estonia while doing fieldwork, my own family could also be characterised as transnational. When carrying out interviews in Finland I felt that I still represented the majority of society for the interviewees, while in Russia I was also generally taken as a representative of the new homeland of the relatives who had moved to Finland. My position in Estonia was slightly different, and with some of the interviewees in Finland a kind of changed position occurred: they left Estonia to live in Finland, while I had gone in the opposite direction.

Almost 40 per cent of all immigrants in Finland have come from Russia, Estonia or from the (former) Soviet Union<sup>4</sup> and 60 per cent of them are women.<sup>5</sup> The number of immigrants increased sharply during the 1990s when former Soviet citizens of Finnish background were given the opportunity to apply for the status of a returning migrant and for permission to move to Finland with their families.<sup>6</sup> Some of the immigrants I interviewed moved to Finland to study, or for work or marriage.

A significant number of immigrants from the former Soviet Union and of my interviewees are so-called return migrants and their family members, although it has to be kept in mind that these categories and reasons to move overlap.<sup>7</sup> Return migrants from the former Soviet Union generally have Ingrian Finnish roots – they are descendants of people who migrated from the territory of present-day Finland to the easternmost part of the Swedish Empire starting in the 17th century. Today, this area lies in North-West Russia, in the vicinity of St. Petersburg. As a result of wars, deportations and persecutions during the 20th century, many people of Ingrian Finnish background ended up living in Estonia and in Russian Karelia. Other groups of Finnish origin in the area of the former Soviet Union are descendants of Finns who moved there between the years 1918 and 1939 and after World War II. Finns who moved before World War II were either so-called ‘Red’ emigrants, illegal immigrants during the great depression in Finland, or Finns who moved to the United States and Canada and from there to the Soviet Union in the 1930s (see *Maahanmuutto- ja pakolaispoliittinen toimikunta* 1996). During the Soviet period keeping up Finnish identity and language was not easy, and in fact many of these families are multilingual and with mixed ethnic backgrounds.

For this article, I have analysed the interviews looking for things that attach people to different places, allowing a location to be transformed into a meaningful place for them (cf. Tuan 2011: 6). I am interested in how people conceive home(s) and other significant places in their lives, and what kind of meanings and feelings people attach to these places. In the first section of the article, I will present in more detail the direction from which I study the place-relations of members of transnational families. The discussion of the meaning of agency, routines and certain kind of nature for the interviewees is followed by the analysis of sometimes-necessary processes of distancing oneself (emotionally) from the former homeland. The focus of this article is on the social aspect of places – and on the importance of people connected with them – and discursive processes by which something ‘foreign’ is made one’s ‘own’ and how something that is one’s ‘own’ becomes ‘foreign’. In the last section I will concentrate on identity negotiations in multicultural and transnational contexts. The understanding I take on identity comes from cultural studies (Hall, du Gay 1996), emphasising the situated, contingent and constructed nature of identity and identification, set against intrinsic, essentialistic notions. As Stuart Hall (2000: 234) has written, all identity terms depend on marking their limits – we define ourselves in terms of what we are not as much as in terms of what we are. In the context of migration, identities are given greater attention and negotiated anew in relation to different others and in relation to different spatial formations and multiple histories. The migrant identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed through memory, fantasy, and narratives, in relation to (imaginary) homelands and communities, as well as to the places where people currently reside (see Hall 1990). Narratives of migration and settlement can also be seen as narratives in which (possibly) settled and stable senses of self are unsettled and challenged (Baynham 2007: 376).

#### PLACE AS A MEANINGFUL LOCATION

Space is often understood to be transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning. What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place – a meaningful loca-

tion – as people get to know it better and endow it with value (see Cresswell 2004: 7; Tuan 2011: 6, 136). If we are interested in the sense of place, the subjective and emotional attachment people have to place, we see places not only as concrete, tangible worlds of matter but rather as intangible worlds of meaning, with stress on the sensual-emotional and social-cultural aspects (see Cresswell 2004; Karjalainen 1997: 41; Tuan 2011).

Contemporary ties of belonging are more spatially diverse than before (Kuusisto-Arponen 2011: 1) – increasingly, people are required to create, maintain and negotiate a range of relations to multiple places. The growing mobility and lack of simple place-related identities both questions the stable sense of place, and makes people long for this familiar and safe place (see Harvey 1989). One's relationship with one's place of residence does not get too much attention in the midst of everyday life, but in the case of relocation, the relationships with both old and new place of residence have to be contemplated more consciously (cf. Karjalainen 1997: 41). People often maintain relations with different places, thus creating a transnational social space that has the potential to both connect and change places of both departure and arrival (see Hynynen 2004: 212).

In this article, I am especially interested in the emotional and social side of peoples' place-related experiences, the subjective and emotional attachments people have to places. As Sara Ahmed (2000: 89) has written, the question of home or of a certain place feeling like home can only be approached through the emotions that a person has or does not have towards a certain place. For interviewees living in Finland, the explicit reasons for moving there have often been social or economic, but still an emotional connection to a new place of residence has to be established. This repositioning is a constant process that takes place in a certain societal and cultural context. Indeed, it should be kept in mind that although feelings people have towards certain places may be very personal, they are shaped to a large extent by the social, cultural and economic circumstances in which individuals find themselves (see Rose 1995: 89). In addition, the choices to stay or to move have to be justified not only to oneself, but also to others – to left-behind relatives, and to the surrounding people in the host country. When hoping to establish a relationship with a new place of residence, to make it feel like 'home', people employ different strategies: they use the past, look for connections with people and places, turn to familiar routines, try to find a common rhythm, work to produce a certain kind of homeliness. They might also have to challenge the prevailing discourses or identity positions given to them by others.

Different societal changes or the migration of family members, relatives or neighbours might lead people to reflect upon the meaning of place for them. When family members who remain discuss the meaning of place and the factors binding them to different locations, the emphasis is on other aspects as compared to their relocated family members. Their story of transnational (family) life is different. However, I would refrain from opposing rootless mobility and rooted belonging. Being grounded does not necessarily mean being fixed; and being mobile is not necessarily about being detached. The work of making home is an on-going process. Movement does not always take place "away from home", and staying put also includes movement. (Ahmed et al. 2003: 1, 10)

The prospects for a person to feel at home in a certain place, to feel attached to it, are affected by a number of things. On the basis of my interviews, one of the most important factors is a certain kind of nature, and the (special) relationship people claim to have with nature. Many of the interviewees, especially people who are from Russian Karelia, spoke a lot about moving in nature, vividly describing the environment surrounding them and different places in it (cf. also Hynynen 2004: 217). Some of the interviewees also stressed the particular quality of their relationship with nature as compared to the Finns. As described by one woman on her twenties, the relationship Finns have with nature seems to lack a certain genuine touch:

[I]n my mind, people in Finland don't have that real, authentic touch with nature, that they go to their summer cottages and to the forest and so on, but when they go to the forest they put on Nike trainers and an Adidas hoodie and then they go and walk a little in the forest and come back. (Woman, from the Baltic States, H35: 16)

In some families, stories about moving in nature form the core of their family story corpus. Nature might also have formed important surroundings for storytelling. In some of the interviews, the significance of moving in nature as well as the salience of stories and storytelling in people's identification processes are explicitly stressed – as is the repetitive nature of these activities. When thinking about a person's spatial identity and relationship with certain places, his/her experiences and activities are also important: places also come into being through praxis, not just through narratives (Rodman 1992: 642). Routines, cycles and repetition are ways of making and strengthening socio-spatial ties (see Kuusisto-Arponen 2011: 4).

Pihla: How have you felt when you think about your ethnic identity, who have you felt you are?

Ilona: Well, the first time I thought about it when, when the time came to apply for a passport. There was this nationality. I thought this way: my mother is Ingrian, and father is Karelian. What do I know about Ingrians? Very little about the relatives, I don't know the language, I have always lived here in Karelia, in the midst of Karelians and Karelian culture and spoken Karelian. And I think I'm more Karelian and wrote there I'm Karelian. Also now I think and feel I'm Karelian. It's probably because I've spent a lot of time with my grandfather [...]. We always went to forest with him and he told [stories], it always happened in Karelian. [...] He talked and told different stories and told about the woods and we went fishing, he taught me how to row and check the nets and [...] all the things like that. We were together and he spun the nets, I was always with him, spend a lot of time and surely something has kind of, I don't know, like a child soaks up all of this. And then comes that kind of understanding that, and a feeling. (Woman, lives in the Republic of Karelia, H29: 18)

The importance of a certain kind of nature has also been mentioned, when people talk about their adaptation to Finland. The place is more likely to feel like home if nature is somehow similar to the nature of the former place of residence. The importance of the water element in a new place of residence, for example, has been stressed by the daugh-

ter of a man who was not eager to move in the first place, but eventually followed his children and wife to Finland:

Dad had to [move], although moving was hard to him. He [had] built a summer cottage and a boat was so old that it was not used and [it was] gone, it had served 13 years this boat. And he didn't have that strength anymore. Well then he was glad when he moved and realised that there is a lake here and they bought a boat and (P: yes). And then daily fishing started. He liked it a lot here, walked in the town. When he settled in the new place, sometimes nostalgia of course festered. I always tried to ease his feelings, [saying] that yes we do remember how we boated, the wonderful scenery and how lovely it was with you. I could see he was pleased and [laughs], it is true. It all is true. Also my sister remembers it all. (Woman, from the Republic of Karelia, H21: 45)

Both the statements asserting that the daughters remember their common trips in the natural surroundings, and how similar nature was in the former and current places of residence (making it possible to continue familiar activities in the new location), help to create continuity on their parts and thus help them adjust to the new environment more easily. Natural (and religious) places can be understood to have a kind of metaphysical dimension: they can be experienced as extensions of the sphere of human existence, providing consolation and safety, as Ari Hynynen has written. He has interpreted the making of natural or religious places as an attempt to appropriate absolute space, basically originating from nature (see Lefebvre 1991). The great world religions, like nature, are global and may help to create a sense of communion in one's life. (Hynynen 2004: 217–218)

On the other hand, my interviewees' relationships with nature are usually neither only symbolic nor aesthetic, they also have a practical side in the form of fishing, hunting, collecting berries, mushrooms and herbs. People also want to pass skills and the tradition of moving in nature on to future generations.

The same goes for gardening (and making preserves), which is important for many of the interviewees, and also for those who have moved to Finland. In their countries of birth, gardening had and still has a greater financial significance for many people. For immigrants it can be – apart from being a productive hobby – a way to make friends with locals who have the same interests:

Since in summer there is nothing else to do so (P: okay), to be without work here, it's just therapy [gives a laugh] (P: yes). And that kind of, productive hobby [gives a laugh] (P: yes). And there I immediately did find friends [laughs] (P: okay). There all the people are Finns and. There is no difference as they are, most of them are – have told us that they have moved from that area, before the war and their parents are from there (P: okay). (Woman, from the Republic of Karelia, H16: 19)

It is also worth noticing that according to this woman, there are no big differences among the people working on their vegetable allotments: most of them – including Finns – have their roots in the same area, the area that is now part of Russian Karelia.<sup>8</sup> In addition, other interviewees have assumed that the warm reception they or their family experienced could be due to the similar experiences in the family histories of local people: "And that [town] is also that kind where is lot of those evacuees from Karelia,

they were especially kind. They have come there almost the same way, had nothing [with them].” (H36A: 50)

With these practices, an important part of the former lives of the immigrants has been brought to the new environment. As Barbro Klein (1993: 46) has written, for people who have migrated, gardening both maintains links to the past and plants new roots. In gardening, taking a place into one’s possession by being active is emphasised. Routines (moving in nature, making preserves, other hobbies, etc.) that can be continued in the new place of residence help the feeling of home to emerge.<sup>9</sup>

The aspect of agency is of great importance when talking about feeling at home in a certain place. There must be the possibility to do something meaningful. On the other hand, life in Finland can also be seen as positive in the sense that there is no need to *do* something all the time: a person’s energy is not needed just to cope with everyday chores, s/he also has time for other activities (which are seen as more recreational or part of personal development). For example, according to one interviewee, her parents did not have enough time in Russia to meet relatives and friends, everyone was busy doing household tasks and working in their vegetable patches (H33: 150).

Finding a job is naturally a factor that makes people more easily adjust to their new environment, to regard the place as their own. If employed, people also more easily feel they are accepted by the majority. Some of the interviewees have said that they have a bad conscience because they have not found a job; they would prefer not to be seen as ‘freeloaders’. As one of the ageing women formulated it: “There are enough people to be taken care of in Finland. On the other hand, when I think that my children and grandchildren also came, I feel a bit better” (H24). An important aspect of belonging is indeed to be accepted as part of the community, as a full member, and to feel safe within it; belonging is not a question of identification only. There is, indeed, a range of places, locales and identities people feel they do not and cannot belong to, even if they want to. Concern about belonging is indeed strongly activated precisely at the moments when there is a sense of exclusion, of non-belonging (Anthias 2006: 21).

#### RESHAPING THE TIES TO THE LAND OF ORIGIN

In some interviews, the former place of residence is described in beautiful colours. There are signs of some kind of nostalgia for previous times and places: people might, for example, wish that their children could have the same kind of childhood as they had. Some people have also praised the active cultural life of their land of origin. As one interviewee said, her new hometown in Finland was so quiet that at first she thought there was nothing happening. However, it seems that she changed her mind later on. As Yi-Fu Tuan has written, it often takes time to know a place, to acquire the feel of a place. “It is made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years. [...] The feel of place is registered in one’s muscles and bones.” (Tuan 2011: 179–184)

There are interviewees who are not exactly happy with their lives in Finland and are considering moving back to their former homelands. In their descriptions, the land of origin is naturally depicted differently, in colours that are more positive, although not necessarily glowing.

I have really a simple life, this is a painful thing for me. [...] I think I had a better life in Russia. Perhaps my stomach wasn't always that full, but it wasn't important for me. But life was normal, I had a good job, and I don't know, maybe it was a mistake that I came to Finland. I don't know, it's difficult to say. At this point I sometimes think it was a mistake. There was a time in the 90s that was difficult [...] we didn't get our salaries on time and everything, and I had two children. There was something I think, I wanted to find a better life and I moved. Now I think, maybe I just should have borne it and tried to live there. Maybe it would have been better. I don't know, difficult to say. But I can't say I'm happy to live in Finland, no. (Woman, from the Republic of Karelia, H25: 30)

There were no people who had returned among my interviewees, but some of their family members (children, ex-spouses) have, for example after a divorce in Finland. Some people have stated that for them it seems that society in Russia or in Estonia has changed so much that they cannot consider moving back there: they would not feel at home there anymore, after living in Finland for, for example, ten years. One of the interviewees who said this, however, owned an apartment in his former homeland until recently, which suggests that he might have wanted to keep the backdoor open, just in case he or his family wanted to return at some point ( H36A: 22; H39: 108).

Often people who have moved or are planning to move to Finland seem to be rather critical of their former homeland and the living conditions they used to have there. People have in these cases grown apart from their former lives as well as their former places of residence. Especially in the narratives of the younger generation the native land is often depicted as 'the other', since the interviewees have lived most of their lives in Finland. As one 14-year-old girl who moved to Finland at the age of three said: "I wouldn't go to live in Russia at any cost, because I feel that I would be as much an outsider there as any other foreigners" (H27: 38). Some of the younger interviewees have felt that they have a hometown in their country of origin, even if they do not refer to the land as their homeland. Usually some close relatives live there, and thus they feel can move around there without problems (see H20: 62). The representatives of the younger generation (people who moved to Finland when they were 15 years old or younger: the so-called generation one-and-a-half) might feel quite irritated about being connected to the former homeland of their parents, and about the need to always be ready to explain their roots and reasons for being in Finland to others, even to strangers (cf. Rastas 2013: 50). They might also be tired of hearing about the advantages of their multicultural background and knowing several languages.

Somewhat surprisingly, older generation immigrants have also distanced themselves from their former places of residence. For example, one woman told me that when visiting Russia for the first time after moving to Finland, it was difficult for her to confront the past. Food served in the native land also seemed so dubious that she had taken food with her from Finland (H16: 77). A female interviewee in her thirties described how difficult it was to let her daughter visit Russia with her grandmother. "At first it was a shock for me [and] I didn't let her go [gives a laugh], then I thought, goodness, with my mother, – I think [it is] safe, yes, I do trust my mother" (H21: 76). The hesitation might be partly because of the difficulty of letting her daughter travel with someone else, on the other hand I understand this hesitation also to be related to the travel destination, even if this is her former homeland.

Among the things that distance people from their former homelands and motivate them to move away, a feeling of insecurity has often been the most important thing. One of the interviewees mentioned repeated burglaries, thefts from the vegetable patch, and boats that were stolen – repeated penetrations into the family’s private sphere (H16: 52). In addition, other interviewees have mentioned that the uncertainty of tomorrow and of fulfilling basic needs made them move, although living in another country might have been a shocking experience to begin with. The rhythm of life in Finland has often been experienced as very different from what they were used to.

Experiencing the former native land as something foreign and unsafe can also be part of the necessary emotional distancing that is needed when building bonds with a new homeland. One might have to break loose from one place, at least to some extent, to be able to build a relationship with another place. When carrying out interviews in Petrozavodsk with people planning to move to Finland, Olga Davydova has recognised that people try to cut loose from their homeland by attaching different negative qualities to it. In the new homeland, however, the majority there might continue to attach these people to their former homelands, which might feel like a forced return to the state from which they have been trying to cut loose through a long and emotional process (Davydova 2004: 254–255).

#### PEOPLE MAKING PLACES, PLACES MAKING PEOPLE

In my material, a relationship with geographical places is often narrated via important people. As Marjatta Marin has argued, the concept of a place is very much social in its nature: by “living a place” people make it meaningful (Marin 2003: 23). The family commonly becomes the focal point through, or with which, people live places. Some scholars even claim that places offer little outside the human bond: in the absence of the right people, things and places are quickly drained of meaning (see Tuan 2011: 140).

What comes to interviewees who have moved is that the new place of residence in Finland has often been chosen because there are relatives or other acquaintances living nearby. It is quite common that people have at first lived with some of their relatives or friends. People moving from Russian Karelia often prefer to live near the border, which makes it possible to visit Russia more often, and to bring groceries and preserves made by relatives back to Finland. Realising the importance of relative distance is also important: for example, Petrozavodsk is closer and more easily accessible to Joensuu (in Eastern Finland) than to some other localities in Russian Karelia, although Joensuu is on the other side of a national border. Many of the interviewees from Russia have also not applied for Finnish citizenship, in order to make it easier to visit their country of birth more frequently.

For the older generation, leaving their country of birth in order to move to Finland is often not what they have been dreaming of. Many of the older people I interviewed feel that migration is more suitable for young people and that they are too firmly rooted in their home country. They might visit other countries, but: “Then back home, home [is] better. There’s no place like home”.<sup>10</sup> Dwelling, country house, friends, relatives, working place and the possibility for an active life are usually mentioned as reasons for not moving. “There is nothing to do there” (H31D: 32), as one interviewee living in Russian

Karelia put it, referring to the importance of being able to continue an active life after crossing the border. Life in Finland is considered to be “good” (good referring here first and foremost to the economic situation and personal safety), but people’s *hearts* are said to belong to their home countries.

One older interviewee, Ira, talks about her dear aunt who had moved to Finland about ten years before the interview and who persuaded the interviewee to move. She says that before the family split up life was better. “All of us, we were here together, [...] all helping each other and everything was so nice. And now, all who died, who went away. Just like being alone [gives a laugh]; it feels like I’ve been left all alone.” (H32: 19) Despite this, she does not want to move from her homeland and explains that this is mainly because of the importance of people close to her, and because of the closeness between people in general.

It is beautiful to live there, but another thing is longing. I don’t know how, maybe you don’t understand but I know we don’t have a kind of life we’d like to have. But we do have people around us, people to talk to and to be with, we always meet each other and visit each other, say supporting words to each other. It’s different but nice at your place. But the way it is, let it be, why change. Of course, she invites me, persuades me to come to her, she lives alone and is in low spirits. But where would I put the children: grandchildren were still little and one has to stick with one’s own. She has children and a lot of grandchildren there. (Woman, lives in the Republic of Karelia, H32: 20)

Homeland and its meaning is defined here first and foremost through social relations. Interviewees have by and large stressed the importance of close relations and a wide network of relatives. Compared to their families, the family lives of Finns seem to be centred more around the nuclear family. My interviewees also often stress that in their families the close connection between children and parents does not disappear when the children grow up. The meaning of family support is usually emphasised during different crises, and (part of the family) moving to another country may be experienced as such. Close relations with family, relatives and neighbours help the feeling of home to emerge. If newcomers do not manage to make friends with locals, the role of their family is even more essential. Home can also be found in the relationship with one’s partner. One younger interviewee, in her twenties, said that she does not really relish either Finnish society surrounding her or that of her parents-in-law. Home for her equates to her husband:

I have that kind of theory again, that with Riku we have our own world, we live together, we have built our own world in this apartment and live here with each other, and live extremely well. Because I couldn’t claim for example that I like Finnish society. I don’t particularly like Finnish people and I haven’t taken to Finnish society. But this is not to say I couldn’t live here, of course I can live here. But [pauses], but I like living with Riku here rather than dealing too actively with Finnish society. So in that way I think our life kind of has our look. (Woman, from the Baltic States, H35: 15)

Relatives who remain in the native country might feel more strongly (or speak more openly) about networks of relatives weakening when family members move abroad.

The relatives who move away can be, in the course of time, counted out from the immediate family circle, at least on an emotional level. Many interviewees who have stayed in the country of origin while their family members moved to Finland, have described how their relatives and family members turned into foreigners. Those who left for Finland are starting to think and act like Finns. People sometimes feel that their relatives in Finland do not understand contemporary lives in their former home countries. In addition to which Finland, with its different customs, nature, towns, rhythm of life and mentality in general often appears foreign to them. However, as people age they might consider moving because of the foreseeable need for (more intensive) care and a fear that nobody will be there to help them then. Another concern is about who will take care of the graves of the family, if relatives have relocated.

When it comes to making friends in Finland, many of my informants have felt that it is easier to befriend other Russians or Estonians, or other people from the former Soviet Union. Somehow they feel more familiar. Interviewees have naturally also made friends with Finns (in the allotments, for example, as described earlier). Some people tend to stress how “people are people everywhere”, some of them more open and happier than others (H16: 75). I would say that there are two (seemingly) contradictory discourses present all the time, even within one interview. On the one hand people emphasise differences, and on the other similarity. Whether the practices and people are conceived as foreign or not depends on situation. In one context a person can say there are no differences between people and cultures in Europe, while in another context s/he can feel them very clearly, which – it depends on the argument s/he wants to make.

Many of my interviewees have also said that it is easier to make friends with other foreigners than with Finns. However, it is interesting to note that there are clear hierarchies between different immigrant groups in Finland, and between different groups from the area of the former Soviet Union. An illustration of this is how not all of my informants agree to be called immigrant, and try to separate themselves from other people from the same area. For example, young interviewees talked with a condescending tone about those of their schoolmates who do not try to socialise with Finnish pupils and talk in Russian with each other (H27: 11). One of the girls stated:

But, I don't feel that I'm Russian myself, and well, yes [...] I'm half Finnish, 'cause my mum is half Finnish and mother's father and mother's grandmother are Finnish. But I don't feel that I'm any different in the company of my friends and so. And I'm also calling other Russians “those Russian girls” [...] (H27A: 14)

When I asked an older interviewee how people have treated her in Finland, she told me about a conflict with another woman from Russia. In a way, this incident also reflects older contradictions and attitudes that people in the Soviet Union had towards Finns:

Pihla: Have people generally regarded [you] well here, in Finland?

Helmi: Well the treatment here, there has not been any that kind of, contradictions [gives a laugh] [...] Well, I was seriously offended in one of the lectures in the My Profession in Finland course, when a Russian woman told me something. She had married a Finnish man and maybe they had talked about it in the family circle because she said, “well these Ingrians”, and she herself was half Greek and half Russian, from Moscow. I was always really annoyed when [gives a laugh] [she] spoke like that and in the end I said, what do you know about these people [to]

... speak like that, who are you yourself here? Then she fell silent. Didn't talk anymore [gives a laugh]. Speaks like that. And many Russians have the same kind of attitude, and also in Russia, calling us *чухонцы*<sup>11</sup> [gives a laugh], yes. (Woman, from the Republic of Karelia, H16: 59)

When talking about immigrants from the former Soviet Union (or Russian and/or Estonian speaking minority people) in Finland, it is not possible to speak about a homogeneous group or community.<sup>12</sup> As the preceding examples also show, there are sometimes quite a few tensions among people who are grouped together by outsiders, or by the majority. Members of minority groups seem to have adopted the public discourses on desirable and undesirable immigrants, and sometimes work hard to separate themselves from the latter group. Thus, there is grouping and labelling similar to that exercised by the majority among immigrants themselves. For example, the status of the first re-migrants was generally quite different as compared to the later arrivals, although the special position of these people has also been passionately discussed in some interviews. According to the immigrant advisor I interviewed, the first Soviet immigrants knew nothing about social security and other benefits in Finland; the first Ingrians came only because they felt they had roots in Finland: they retained a sense of Finnish identity, a feeling of that Finland was their ethnic homeland (H19: 28). On the other hand, another interviewee claims quite the opposite, while talking about her mother and other relatives staying in Baltic States. In her opinion, the first arrivals were active persons, like her own husband, thanks to whose initiative they moved to Finland. "But those *real* Ingrians, who should be here, they are still there [...] and probably will never get here. Those that would maybe not been needed at all, they are all here already." (H8A: 23)

#### IDENTITIES AND FAMILIES IN MAKING

Home can also be found in religion or in language, which are not necessarily place-bounded things. Indeed, religion can either bind people to place or free them from it, universal religions rather tend to give freedom (see Tuan 2011: 152). As mentioned earlier, the relation to the nature and religion can create continuity in people's lives, when other things are changing. Some of the interviewees have described religious continuity through generations, as grandparents have been passing the religious knowledge to grandchildren.

Pihla: Well, what kind of meaning religion holds for you, for yourself?  
Alma: Well, it is [gives a laugh]. Grandmother taught us mostly when we were little. I remember when we were still little kids, we were just listening to grandmother saying evening prayers, the Lord's Prayer. We didn't learn it by heart, but we did understand the meaning, because grandmother had an icon there, a picture of Jesus there at the corner. And on the bedroom wall there was a lovely picture, Jesus knocking on the door and that kind of good, that kind of warm picture it was I think, at least it lived on in my memories. Well she always told that there is a Jesus knocking and then she told the whole Bible to us, I remember everything, now of course afterwards I studied it, during the studies, but from those days I knew it, the whole story how it happened: How he shared bread [...] and I can't remember all

the details but he cured the people and was then crucified, she told like, we understood everything since I remember everything.

Pihla: She was an Orthodox?

Alma: No, Lutheran (P: Lutheran, yes.) And we have also been baptised. My younger sister has not been baptised. But me, my brother and I have been baptised (P: yes). When we were little. But we were not supposed to talk about it at school, otherwise we would have been expelled from school. Or someone said, father or mother said that don't talk, at school. Atheist, it was an atheistic country back then. (H21: 57–58)

The recurrent theme in the interviews of re-migrants is how both the ethnic background and the religious affiliation had to be concealed during the Soviet time. In the case of Ingrian re-migrants, the relation to Lutheran church is often stressed. Being Lutheran rather than Orthodox has been one of the central elements in making of Ingrian identity, although it has also been contested. Many of the Ingrian background families I have interviewed are Lutheran, but in the families of my informants, it is at the same time not exceptional that multiculturalism has reached also the religious sphere. People take peacefully or even playfully the fact that one of the children of the family may be Orthodox, another Lutheran and third atheist (H31: 24–25). Interviewees have also described peaceful co-existence of religions in the small locality in Russia Karelia: Lutheran and Orthodox congregations are using the same rooms one after another, and many older women are attending services of both congregations. (H9: 49; H38: 69–70) On the other hand, religion might also be found after moving to Finland, when its meaning can be emphasised because of the difficulties people have faced. "It helped that I was in a church. It might be that because I'm living through such a difficult period, it helps." (H3: 19)

Some of the re-migrants with Ingrian Finnish background have learned or at least heard Finnish language already in childhood. One of my informants stated: "Finland was not foreign, Finnish language was like own to heart" (H24). Also another interviewee, living in Russian Karelia, has described the first time she visited Finland. She was quite nervous, but after seeing a little girl playing with a dog, hearing her speaking Finnish, also she calmed down, felt more like home. "[T]hat kind of familiar, native, felt like it was the same as in our childhood, the same language, all the words were understandable." (H31A: 35)

The very same language, together with Finnish background, might have caused people to feel "otherness" while they were living in their country of origin. One woman in her thirties described how she felt different in Russia, since other Russian (speaking) girls did not understand her interest in Finnish language and culture. "But it was my own", she says. (H21: 14) While talking about ethnic identity of people with Finnish background coming from the former Soviet Union area, the concept of forced or doubled otherness has sometimes been used, referring to contradiction between the ways a person him/herself defines his/her identity, and how others perceive it. In former Soviet Union, these people have been called Finns and many have been teased because of that. When they have moved to Finland as returning migrants, they often considered themselves as Finns in spite of possible language problems and possibly mixed ethnic background. Nevertheless, in the eyes of majority of Finns these people are Russians or Estonians (see Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind 2000: 126). Like one interviewee put it:

I have acquaintances who live in [Finland] and tell: in Russia we are not Russians since in passport we were Finns, but in Finland we are also not Finns, because we returned from Russia. In Finland we are not Finns but Russians. In Russia we are not Russians, we are Finns, very complicated. There we are not the same as we are here. Here we are actually nobody, only foreigners. (Woman, from the Republic of Karelia, H25: 5)

People who have moved to Finland with a status of a re-migrant have a pronounced need to stress their Finnishness. Re-migrants strive to legitimise their life in a new country (in the eyes of other people) by proving their Finnishness and Finnish roots. One of themes used to argument their Finnishness is a (strong) relationship with the homeland of (grand)parents – to Finland or to Ingria – and consciousness of own roots (Davydova 2002: 164). This has influenced also which parts of family history and what kind of family stories are actively remembered and told. In the interviews people have shortly mentioned for example Russian or Jewish background of their forefathers, and then concentrated on telling about Finnish branch of their family.

Those interviewees, who have not relocated, also have to describe their belonging in the context of migration of family members or neighbours. When some members of the family or community move, others might have to verbalise the reasons for staying put, and also negotiate their relations to other people with same ethnic background. Also younger people in the sending countries may be quite critical about the so-called return migration to Finland. This citation is from a person, whose cousins, aunt and some other relatives live in Finland, while she herself and her parents have stayed in Russia.

Pihla: Well how about you or you and your parents, when came this, this possibility that to Finland, it is possible to move to Finland as a return migrant, did you ever consider it?

Ilona: What return migrant? [gives a laugh]

Pihla: Yes [I also laugh]

Ilona: What return migrant? I always think like this, what return migrant? Because my mother was born here, her homeland is Russia, she has lived all her life here in Karelia. What return migrant? [We laugh] And I have also always lived here, I'm Karelian. (Woman, lives in the Republic of Karelia, H29: 36)

Earlier during the interview Ilona has told about her feelings of estrangement among the Finnish people in Russian Karelia.

[Y]es they were a bit like, they had an own kind of circle, where were only own [people]. I think also now it's like this. And I can say I'm also Finnish, because my mother is a Finn, but when I went to different kind of feasts where there were Finns, I felt myself a little foreign there. (Woman, lives in the Republic of Karelia, H29: 21)

Later in the interview she also describes in detail how important it is for a person to know about their family and family history. One has to be able to answer, who s/he is and where s/he is from. One also has to decide, which part of the family history s/he wants to emphasise. Ilona has decided to highlight her Karelian roots, and gives less attention to her mother's Ingrianess.

I am sure that I am Karelian. I know my relative up to sixth generation and I know that my homeland is my Karelia, North-Karelia.<sup>13</sup> I know those customs and I am always interested about this. And I am sure in life, who I am. And I, I know what for this, what I [will] do [...] what for I will do it. And I think that it is important for a person to know about his/her own roots. It kind of gives confidence in life for a person. And gives understanding about the goals, goals of life. (Woman, lives in the Republic of Karelia, H29: 53)

The importance given to roots and ethnical background can also change in time. Sometimes the societal situation needs to change or one has to go further away from home to recognise the importance and speciality of home and one's own roots. Travelling away can thus form a spatial practice that can further root back home (see Baker 2012: 29). Questions related to identity need to be pondered more consciously when compared to new environment and to "others".

When family members do not stay in the same country, family relations and responsibilities have to be negotiated anew. Because of the often sporadic meetings with other family members, the notion of a family and its emotional and economic utility has to be constructed more deliberately, rather than taking it for granted through continuous day-to-day interaction (Bryceson, Vuorela 2002: 15). When a family does not live together, other signals are needed to show that the people in question do form a family and feel that they belong together (Jallinoja 2000: 207). In a situation like this, the family is increasingly constructed and maintained through discourse. Two of the most important things binding family members together are shared roots and a common past, both of which are repeated and constructed in stories about the words and deeds of family members. Family stories are passed, along with family photographs, films and other items, from one generation to another. Family stories can help to increase self-understanding and self-respect. In a marginalising situation, a strong positive identity might provide people a place from which to 'push' and strength to cope with difficult situations (Huttunen 1999). As Sara Ahmed has written, feelings of otherness and displacement can be a question of memory: to feel at home in a certain place, one might have to reconnect with the past. Stories of dislocation can also help one to relocate by giving a shape to the past. (Ahmed 2000: 84, 90–91)

Through photographs and stories, it is possible to build a relationship with Finland and with the everyday lives of relatives now living there. With the help of photographs people can feel they are part of their relatives' everyday lives in Finland, almost as if they see and experience what is depicted in the photographs. When one of my interviewees was telling me about the life of her son and his family in Finland, while showing me photographs they had sent her, it felt as if she was telling me about events, and a land, she had seen and experienced herself. Finland as a country was brought closer to her heart through these pictures and stories.

On the other hand, it is not always possible to talk about the family as a discursively produced unit, since some aspects of family life – for example caregiving – call for the immediate presence of family members and thus bind people to places in a very concrete fashion. In certain cases it is possible to talk about "caring from a distance", but caregiving generally involves activities that demand face-to-face interaction, physical contact, time and presence (see Zechner 2008: 36–37). Bearing in mind the tradition and continuous importance of intergenerational care chains in Russia and Estonia, organis-

ing transnational care in a way that would be acceptable to all family members provides a challenging task, which often has to be solved by women. Decisions to relocate are often justified by referring to what is best for the children,<sup>14</sup> but at the same time migrants have to decide how to take care of their aging parents (or in some cases also children who have been left behind), who might not be interested in relocation. Caring transnationally means that migrants have to act simultaneously within two sets of cultures of care and immediate and extended family needs may create conflicting demands (*ibid.*: 37–42).

## CONCLUSION

People's place-related narratives reflect the different, sometimes contradictory feelings associated with multiple places in people's lives. Even in the space of one interview, the relationship with significant places for the person in question can be constructed in different ways, reflecting the situationality of that relationship. There is a need to (re) define a relationship with a place according to context, explaining the substance as well as the feelings of belonging to that place and non-belonging to another. The narrative can be seen to be constructed as a kind of answer or even as a backlash to the way family and relatives, on one hand, and the surrounding society and different others on the other, are understood to define this relationship. In similar way, narratives are used to construct us and them, what is our own and what is foreign.

In migration studies, the stress has often been put on a certain kind of detachment or placelessness of a mobile subject. However, as Baker has stated, despite increasing mobility, our physical situatedness in time and space places us. Our bodies remain, though mobile, situated in one place or another, and this localises at least some aspects of our lives and identities. (Baker 2012: 23–26). Indeed, as Sara Ahmed et al. (2003: 3) have noted, rootless mobility should not be understood to stand against rooted belonging. In addition, people living mobile or transnational lives do have feelings of belonging and create relations to places important to them. On the other hand, being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed (*ibid.*: 1). As identities and belonging are understood to be processual in nature, they are negotiated when people themselves ostensibly seem to stay put.

Places and the personal – physical, sensual and emotional – experiences related to them continue to be of essential importance in identity formation. The feeling of belonging to a certain place is also important for members of transnational families, and people use different strategies to construct this attachment. According to my study, common language, nature, continuing routines, family history and relationships, among other factors, have made members of transnational families feel at home in certain places. People can feel they belong to many places simultaneously, although sometimes attachment to a new home or homeland would appear to call for detachment from the former homeland.

## NOTES

1 I use pseudonyms when talking about the interviewees. In the text, the combination of letter H and a number refers to a certain numbered interview and the number after the colon to a cer-

tain part of this interview. The list of the interviewees cited in the text can be found at the end of the article. The main reason for moving, as stated by the interviewees, has also been mentioned.

2 According to Bryceson and Vuorela (2002: 3), “[t]ransnational families’ are defined here as families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely ‘familyhood’, even across national borders.”

3 In total I have interviewed 31 women and 14 men. Fifteen of the interviewees were under 30 years old, twelve of them were 30–49 years old and eighteen of them were older than 50 years old. I have met some of the interviewees several times, either to make additional interviews, or informally, just for a chat or a cup of coffee. However, the plan of making repeated interviews with the same people – this was done with six people – did not work out quite as well as I had hoped. When asking to meet for another interview, people were often hesitant and said that they had already told me “everything”. Sometimes family members of people already interviewed reacted the same way. For example, the partner of a woman I had already interviewed said: “I think everything about me has already been told”.

4 According to Statistics Finland, in 2012 35.8 per cent of foreign nationals permanently living in Finland had Russian or Estonian citizenship and 37.8 per cent were Russian- or Estonian-speaking. Of foreign-born inhabitants 34.1 per cent were born in Estonia, Russia or the former Soviet Union. (Statistics Finland 2012a; 2012b; 2012c)

5 This can be explained by the fact that the foreign spouses of Finnish men are likely to hail from Thailand, Russia, and Estonia, while for Finnish women there is no particular concentration of spouses’ countries of origin (Lainiala, Säävälä 2012: 12).

6 For the moment, the right to apply for the status of returning migrant has ceased. The system of return migration for Ingrian Finns will be abolished after a transition period. However, those who registered before July 1, 2010, have the right to move to Finland with the status of remigrant. This right also remains for those people who were evacuated from Ingria to Finland and returned to the Soviet Union after the war, and to those who served in the Finnish army during the 1939–1945 period. (Act on the amendment of the Aliens Act 57/2011, confirmed on 25 March 2011 [Laki ulkomaalaislain 48 §:n muuttamisesta 57/2011].)

7 For example, a person might have come because of his/her studies or work in the first place, and later on decided to stay after finding a spouse in Finland or using the status of returning migrant.

8 I assume she refers to the Finnish Karelians that have been evacuated before and after Winter War (1939–1940) from the area that used to be Finnish Karelia. In the peace treaty of Paris (1947), Finland had to cede areas to the Soviet Union and a total of 430,000 evacuees, of whom 407,000 were Karelians, were resettled in different parts of Finland (see Fingerroos 2008, also about Karelia as a place of memories and utopias).

9 Elsewhere I have focused on the importance of following traditional gender roles in creating a feeling of continuity in the context of migration. There is something permanent regardless of the changes taking place (Siim 2007: 229; cf. Rotkirch 2000: 131–132). Unaltered everyday routines can thus form a kind of safe haven during other changes in life.

10 «А потом обратно домой, дома лучше. В гостях хорошо, а дома лучше.» (H31A: 33)

11 This is a derogatory term that has been used for Finns as well as other Finno-Ugric peoples. Many of my informants say that they have been called *tsukhna* when speaking Finnish in public places, for example.

12 Lisa Wiklund has used the term “reversed diaspora” when referring to people of the same ethnic origin avoiding each other rather than forming a group. When researching this sort of group it is possible that a researcher creates a community where there is none. (Wiklund 2012: 122)

13 She refers here to Viena, alias Dvina Karelia.

14 It is widely agreed that children are often the main ‘rationale’ for parental migration and

are very much affected by transnational migration, whether they relocate or remain at home when their parents migrate. However, transnational migration has rarely been studied from the children's viewpoint, which the ongoing project *Families on the Move Across Borders: Children's Perspectives on Labour Migration in Europe* seeks to remedy; see Lulle, Assmuth 2013.

## SOURCES

The research material consists of field diaries and forty relatively open interviews. If possible, more than one person from the same family has been interviewed. Eight of the interviews were group interviews in which at least two of the family members were present. In total I have interviewed 31 women and 14 men. Fifteen of the interviewees were under 30 years old, twelve were 30–49 years old and eighteen were older than 50 years old. The interview material and field diaries are in the possession of the author. Interviewees cited in this article:

- H3            Woman, 40–49 years old, from Russia. Marriage.
- H8A        Woman, 40–49 years old, from Russia (/Baltic States). Return migrant.
- H9            Man, 20–29 years old, from the Republic of Karelia. Study/Return migrant.
- H12B        Man, 30–49 years old, from the Republic of Karelia. Return migrant.
- H16/ H24    Woman, 50–59 years old, from the Republic of Karelia. Return migrant.
- H19        Immigrant worker, living in Finland.
- H20        Woman, under 20 years old, from Russia (/Baltic States). Return migrant.
- H21        Woman, 30–39 years old, from the Republic of Karelia. Study/Marriage, also Ingrian background.
- H25        Woman, 50–59 years old, from the Republic of Karelia. Return migrant.
- H27A        Woman, under 20 years old, from Russia (/Baltic States). Return migrant.
- H27B        Woman, under 20 years old, from Russia. Return migrant.
- H29/H31G    Woman, 20–29 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Ingrian background.
- H31A        Woman, 50–59 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Ingrian background.
- H31B        Woman, 50–59 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Ingrian background.
- H31C        Woman, 50–59 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Ingrian background.
- H31D        Man, over 50 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Ingrian background.
- H31E        Man, over 50 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Karelian.
- H31F        Woman, over 60 years old, lives in Russia. Ingrian background.
- H32        Woman, over 60 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. (Partly) Ingrian background.
- H33        Woman, 30–39 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia. Ingrian background.
- H35        Woman, 20–29 years old, from the Baltic States. Studies/Marriage.
- H36A        Man, over 50 years old, from the Baltic States. Return migrant.
- H38A        Man, over 50 years old, lives in the Republic of Karelia, Ingrian background.

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