Chapter 8
Manoeuvring in Between: Mapping Out the Transnational Identity of Russian-Speaking Latvians in Sweden and Great Britain

Iveta Jurkane-Hobein and Evija Kļave

8.1   Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a number of new independent states appeared and re-appeared on the world political map. The emergence of new state borders created novel challenges for the ethnic minorities in Soviet republics. Russians were the largest ethnic group in the Soviet Union and constituted a significant ethnic minority in most Soviet republics, especially in the two Baltic republics of Estonia and Latvia. In Latvia, the proportion of ethnic Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians – the Russian-speaking population (Laitin 1998) – increased dramatically during the Soviet period from 12% in 1935 to 42% in 1990 (Ivlevs and Kings 2012). Russian speakers were not motivated or encouraged to learn Latvian, resulting in two co-existing linguistic groups. Although most migration within the Soviet Union was as a result of state-regulated labour mobility, to this day Russian speakers in Latvia are sometimes considered as intruders with individual responsibility for migration decisions.

In the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the question was whether the Russian speakers in Latvia would return to their home countries (Laitin 1998). Back then, around 10% of Russian speakers from Latvia moved to Russia (Ivlevs and Kings 2012) but, to the knowledge of the authors, information about other countries of 'return' is unknown. However, since the end of the 1990s, following a general emigration wave from Latvia, Russian speakers have mostly migrated to Western countries. Although the scope of emigration from Latvia is large in both linguistic groups, Russian speakers emigrate more than ethnic Latvians (CSB Latvia 2015).

I. Jurkane-Hobein (✉)
Independent researcher, Copenhagen, Denmark

E. Kļave
Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, University of Latvia, Riga, Latvia
e-mail: evija.klave@biss.soc.lv

Great Britain and Sweden are two of the most popular migration destinations from Latvia (Mieriņa and Koroļeva 2015). By examining 30 life histories of Russian-speaking Latvian migrants with children in Sweden and Great Britain, this study aims to analyse the formation and maintenance of the transnational identity of Russian-speaking Latvians. The analysis argues for the inclusion of an intergenerational aspect in migration studies and illustrates how the migrants' own migration patterns in addition to the migration history of their parents or grandparents create interlinked and sometimes conflicting layers of transnational identity. Epistemologically speaking, the paper uses a social constructivist approach. It examines how informants have discursively interpreted and appropriated some policies and practices which they have experienced in the processes of forming and building their identity. These include factors such as language, ethnicity, citizenship and migration.

For the theoretical framework we first use Levitt and Glick Schiller's (2004) distinction between transnational practices (or ways of 'being') and transnational identity (or ways of 'belonging'). Second, we use Hall's (1996) argument that identity is about finding similarities with the reference group and drawing boundaries from the others. In the section after, we introduce the reader to the specifics of the Latvian case in relation to its main socio-linguistic minority, the Russian speakers. We then discuss the data and methods used for this study. In the analysis, we distinguish the three main processes of identity formation:

1. Aspiring to a Latvian identity;
2. Claiming an unrecognised Russian-speaking Latvian identity; and
3. Developing transnational non-belonging.

8.2 Literature Review

8.2.1 Transnational Identity: Being and Belonging, Being Similar and Being Different

The current study contributes to the literature of transnationalism (Basch et al. 1994), as well as the literature of the transnational social field (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Glick Schiller 2005) and of identity formation.

The transnationality approach to migration studies allows shifting away from bipolar identities where identifying with one group excludes belonging to the other, such as Latvians and Russians, those who stayed and those who emigrated. Instead, transnationalism offers a wider perspective where one place is not opposed to the other but linked in multiple ways (Bradatan et al. 2010). Personal experiences, individual practices and intergenerational narratives link places and spaces at different times and to geographical scales creating transnational social fields. Hall (1996,

p. 4) argues that 'identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions'.

Given that the inflow of people from the Soviet Union to Soviet Latvia started in 1941 and peaked in the post-war period from 1945 to 1959 (Heleniak 2004), these Russian-speaking families have lived in Latvia for not more than one to three generations. Hence, there are several countries and territories involved in forming the identity of Russian-speaking Latvian emigrants. First, there is Latvia as their home country where, for example, their relatives and friends live, and which is possibly their place of birth. Russia also contributes to the identity formation – it is the country of what could be called 'linguistic origin' yet ethnic Latvians often uncritically call all Russian speakers 'Russians'. Third, the countries of ethnic origin such as, for instance, Russia, Ukraine or Belarus, may also play a role in their identity formation. Then, for older migrants, the ex-Soviet space in general as a memory of the former Soviet Union may also play a role in identity formation. Finally, there is the new host country, their new country of residence and a place where their children may have been born and are being raised.

However, due to increased globalisation and mobility trends, we should not strictly speak only of national belonging. Migrants may not feel rooted or have a sense of belonging to any national territory, but create certain locational and situational time-space forms of belonging. Thus, the main question that this study deals with is: where do Russian-speaking Latvians feel they belong?

Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) distinguish between transnational practices or 'ways of being' and transnational identity or 'ways of belonging', where the latter 'refers to practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group' (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004, p. 1010). For example, if one eats grey peas with bacon and onions for Christmas because that is what one has always eaten for Christmas, that would translate into a way of being. But if one eats the same dish for Christmas because that is what Latvians eat for Christmas, it is a way of belonging.

Furthermore, the identities emerge and form within specific power relations and discourses (Hall 1996, p. 5). Hence, the notion of belonging or identity also implies being different from something else (Hall 1996). Social identities are both self-assigned and assigned by others – the others within and outside the boundaries of the group one claims to belong to. Drawing on the case of Russian speakers in newly established post-Soviet republics, Laitin (1998) argues that social identities are contested especially when social groups become incoherent. Then, according to Laitin (1998, p. 16), 'self-appointed boundary-keepers arise to redefine these categories so that rules of inclusion and exclusion, as well as the behavioural implications of belonging to this or that category, can be clarified'. Due to the scheme that granted citizenship to the descendants of the citizens of interwar Latvia, it was mostly ethnic Latvians who, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, gained decision-

making power. By studying the transnational sense of belonging of Russian-speaking Latvian migrants in Sweden and Great Britain, this study will analyse the transnational identity of a migrant group who were part of an ethnic minority group in their home country and who, after migration, are again part of a minority group in their new host country.

While some research has been conducted on the national identities of Russian-speakers in post-Soviet states (e.g., Laitin 1998; Poppe and Hagendoorn 2001), very little is known about the identities of Russian-speaking migrants from post-Soviet countries – including Latvia – who chose to migrate to Western Europe. Results from the few studies on Russian-speaking Latvian emigrants are somewhat contradictory. Ivlevs (2013) and Ivlevs and Kings (2012) showed that Russian speakers have higher emigration intentions compared to ethnic Latvians. Explaining the higher percentage of Russian-speaking emigrants, Ivlevs (2013) and Ivlevs and Kings (2012) made reference to language and citizenship policies in Latvia.

A forward-thinking article by Hughes (2005) uses a similar argument. However, Aptekar (2009) in her study based on in-depth interviews with Russian speakers from Estonia and Latvia in Ireland argued that socio-economic conditions and not the ethnic, language or citizenship situation are the emigration drivers for Russian speakers from Latvia. Furthermore, the study of Lulle and Jurkane-Hobein (2016) illustrates how Russian speakers from Latvia strategically mobilise their unique social and cultural capital of having a European passport and speaking one of the very 'marketable' languages, i.e. Russian. Apart from the research mentioned above, this is, to the best knowledge of the authors, one of the first studies focusing on this linguistic group, namely Russian speakers from post-Soviet countries in Western Europe, and to study the group's sense of national belonging.

8.2.2 Russian Speakers in Latvia Explained

Smith (1991 in Bradatan et al. 2010) argued that the prevalent model of nation in Eastern Europe is the ethnic model; that is, the nation as a 'community of common descent.' In the ethnic model of 'nation', it is hardly possible to become a new member of the nation. Latvia could be seen as an example of an ethnic nation (Gruzina 2011). Already at the end of the 1980s, but especially after the collapse of the USSR, legal rights and the legal status of Russian-speaking residents and the Russian language were re-framed in Latvia. In 1995, the status of 'non-citizen of Latvia' was introduced and given to those who could not acquire Latvian citizenship granted through descent. Most of these people were Soviet immigrants to Latvia and most were Russian speakers. Although the status was meant to be temporary, Rozenvalds (2010) argues that the nearly non-existent and inefficient integration policy towards non-citizens indicates the political expectation that Russian speakers would

emigrate. Although the position of non-citizens is considered closer to that of citizens than of other foreign nationals or stateless persons (Brands Kehris 2010), non-citizens have no voting rights and face restrictions with regard to a number of professional occupations, mostly in the public sector. As non-citizens are not citizens of the European Union, their free movement within the EU is limited. For example, non-citizens are required to apply for a visa for travel to the UK.

Today, about 36% of the Latvian population has Russian as their mother tongue and about 14% of Latvians remain non-citizens (CSB Latvia 2012). Although Russians among Russian speakers form the biggest ethnic group, there are also Ukrainians, Poles and Byelorussians among them. The interpretation of twentieth century history and recognition of the Soviet occupation continues to be problematic between Latvian and Russian speakers (Gruzina 2011; Tabuns 2010), although Cheskin (2012) argues that younger Russian-speakers have a more nuanced view on history by being exposed to both discourses.

Media consumption and voting behaviour in Latvia still depends to a large extent on the individual's linguistic background, that is, either Latvian or Russian (Šulmane 2010), while the political leadership is mostly ethnically Latvian. For example Harmony Centre, a political party drawing support mostly from a Russian-speaking electorate, has never held power in the government due to the fear of Russia's potential influence over the party: an alliance of so-called 'Latvian parties' keeps Harmony out of power. Harmony Centre gained the most votes in the last three parliamentary elections (CVK 2011, 2014), and holds 23 out of the 100 seats in the Latvian parliament, or Saeima, which is not enough to form a majority. Its alliance with the United Russia party of Vladimir Putin (The Baltic Times 2015) causes political concern in Latvia.

To conclude, Russian speakers from Latvia may have a less pronounced sense of belonging to Latvia as their home country. This study will seek to understand if the above-mentioned additional push-factors to emigrate, e.g. the lack of an effective integration policy in Latvia, make the Russian-speaking Latvians abroad develop a sense of transnational belonging to their countries of ethnic origin. Do they, for instance, aim at prompt integration in the new host country, identify themselves with their country of ethnic origin (e.g. Russia, Ukraine, Belarus), or still identify themselves with Latvia? Before exploring this question, we will describe the methods and data used for the analysis.

8.3 Methodology

As information about Russian-speaking migrants from Latvia is scarce, an explorative qualitative research design was used involving collecting the life histories (Miller 2000) of the migrants. The method of life histories intends to cover the

informant's whole life rather than focus just on the present situation. Thus, this approach allows for analysing how Latvia's complicated recent history including Soviet occupation, national revival, independence, Latvia's accession to the EU, waves of immigration and emigration, personal migration experience etc., has been experienced and narrated by Russian-speaking Latvians.

The study draws on 30 in-depth interviews with Russian-speaking Latvians in Sweden and Great Britain. Eighteen interviewees were from Sweden and 12 were from the UK. All interviewees, 7 of them men and 23 of them women, were parents to at least one minor. The age of the study participants varied between 28 and 42 years, with the median being 35. The time that the interviewees had lived in Sweden or the UK varied between half a year and 22 years, the median being 8 years.

The interviews were collected during summer 2014 and were conducted by the first author of this chapter. The length of the interviews was on average between 60 and 90 min. The interviewee could choose the language of the interview. Thus, five interviews were conducted in Latvian and 25 in Russian. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. Typically, the interview started with questions about the place and year of birth, ethnicity of parents, memories from childhood, schooling and adolescence then slowly moving towards the decision to emigrate, with questions about the social integration experiences in Sweden and Great Britain, new social networks and links with Latvia.

For the recruitment of the interviewees, a wide range of channels were used, including the use of networks of friends and acquaintances, social networks, Facebook groups and forums for Russians in Sweden and the UK and in some cases also snowball sampling.

Despite the recruiting efforts, the interviewer experienced difficulties in the recruiting process. There might be three main reasons for this difficulty. Firstly, many emigrants from Latvia distrust the Latvian state (Mieriņa 2015; Lulle 2014, p. 129) regardless of their ethnicity. Secondly, the interviewer herself is an ethnic Latvian, and non-Latvians from Latvia may not trust a Latvian who is searching for Russian speakers in particular. Thirdly, the fieldwork was conducted during the time when the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine started and the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation had just happened. Thus, at the time of the fieldwork, the questions of ethnicity and language were especially sensitised.

Distrust as the main explanation of complications in collecting data is also confirmed by the fact that half the informants were recruited through the snowball sampling method and with the help of friends and acquaintances. Furthermore, only one non-citizen of Latvia was recruited. Contact was established with another non-citizen, but after several attempts to re-schedule the interview, the potential interviewee did not respond to phone calls or text messages on the agreed day of the interview. In addition to the trust issues mentioned above, there may be other reasons for the low number of non-citizens in the sample. As they are not EU citizens it is more difficult for non-citizens to migrate for work to other EU countries. If they do get work abroad, according to other interviewees, they often work illegally and thus may not trust people outside their social circles.

Self-selection of the sample could be considered as one of the limitations of the research design applied for this study. There were only two informants in the sample who quite clearly and openly identified themselves with Russia and what could be called 'Russianness': Russian culture (music, films, literature) or Russian events (for example, interest in attending Russian balls). On the one hand this could indicate that sentiments of 'relating to Russia' are rather marginal among Russian-speaking Latvians. One of them emigrated in 1992 and, thus, has hardly lived in the Latvian state following the restoration of independence. On the other hand it could mean that those who identify themselves with Russia were not willing to take part in interviews conducted by an ethnic Latvian. There is therefore a necessity for further research to make, contest or strengthen the claims of this study. Future studies could diversify recruitment channels further and involve Russian speakers as interviewers or use local interviewers who could be perceived as being more neutral than ethnic Latvian interviewers.

The main interview questions analysed for the purpose of this article were as follows:

- How do you self-identify; where do you belong; how do you feel – who are you?
- Do you feel at home in your host country? Did you feel at home in Latvia? Who are your friends in the host country?
- Do you take part in Latvian or Russian diaspora activities, and why? Is there something that you miss about Latvia and why? Do you follow news about Latvia and why?
- Would you consider taking the citizenship of your host country and why? Would you keep Latvian citizenship and why?

In the analysis procedure, several transcribed interviews were inductively and thematically coded and then the remaining interviews were coded using the established code frame. Throughout the interview analysis attention was paid to the national identities the interviewees ascribed to themselves and the identities they felt were ascribed to them by others.

8.4 Findings

8.4.1 Transnational Identity of Russian-Speaking Latvian Emigrants

What one 'does' does not necessarily translate into who one 'is'. Many of the activities that the interviewees described could be translated into ways of being 'Swedish' or 'British' but that does not make them feel like they belong to Sweden or the UK. In many ways they are integrated in the host society yet they feel that as first generation immigrants they will never be fully 'Swedish' or 'British' even if, with time, they start to take part in Swedish or British traditions, such as observing local

holidays or including local food in their diet. Nevertheless, their attitudes towards Sweden or the UK as the new host country are positive as it provides them with a platform to start a new life, with economic stability and with a place to raise their children. Not identifying as Swedish or British can also be explained by the fact that, with the exception of one, all of them had lived longer in Latvia than in their new host country. Thus, their identity claims may change with time.

The new host countries, however, are considered to be the homeland of their children who, in the opinion of the interviewees, will grow up being Swedish and British. Hence, the sense of national belonging is experienced as being innate: while they themselves do not feel the entitlement of being Swedish or British, their children should and would. Likewise, because they are born and raised in Latvia, they belong to Latvia – but their children do not. This argument demonstrates the importance of one's own individual experiences in claiming identity, rather than the experiences of parents.

However, when it comes to language choices for the children of Russian-speaking Latvian emigres living abroad, the local language and Russian are considered the most important; strategically as well as for their identity (Jurkane-Hobein 2015). Language is a strong attribute of one's identity claims. Preservation of the Latvian language and the Latvian language being something that defines who a Latvian 'is', have been and remain vivid in Latvian discourse in Latvia. The Russian language on the other hand, as the name suggests, is what defines Russian speakers.

Thus, in the following sections we will focus mostly on how these emigrants balance and negotiate between their Latvian and Russian identities.

8.4.2   Aspiring to a Latvian Identity

Like their peers in Latvia (SKDS 2015), the vast majority of the Russian-speaking Latvian emigrants interviewed did identify themselves with Latvia. Latvia remains their homeland; their parents, relatives and friends may still live there and they have mostly sweet memories from their childhood, adolescence or adulthood in Latvia with its places, tastes and mentality. These are common feelings shared with their fellow Latvian emigrants. However, their belonging to Latvia is not 'obvious' by such identifiers as their given name – which tends to have Russian origins. Nor can they easily be identified as Latvian by their language, as their mother tongue is Russian. This identity dilemma is brought into focus with relation to an ice hockey game by Alexander, a man in his 30s who has lived in the UK for 10 years: 'Deep in my heart, of course, I feel Latvian. Yes. Because when the ice hockey championships take place, I support the Latvian team even if they play against Russia. Even though everyone considers me Russian.'

For Alexander it is clear that he is cheering for Latvia, yet it is not so obvious for others. Even though the Russian speakers may identify themselves with Latvia and

Latvians, the 'pure Latvians' – a term used by one of the next interviewees to describe ethnic Latvians – draw a boundary between ethnic Latvians and Russian-speaking Latvians. Moreover, around half of the interviewees could recall situations in which they or their close relatives were accused of belonging to the Russian-speaking minority. Yana, who migrated to Sweden in 1997, describes here how the Latvian language became the main marker of being accepted by Latvian society, or isolated from it.

> Let's be frank, it [Latvia] is my homeland. I was born there; I don't have anything against it. I understand it all, but the attitude [there] was not the best. I understand that, yes, they wanted me to speak Latvian but unfortunately my friends were all Russians. [I went to] Russian school. I couldn't do anything about it. At work, all the Latvians spoke Russian to me. Yes, they spoke Russian. So how was I to learn [Latvian]?

In the extract above, Yana is sympathetic to the expectation for her to speak Latvian, but she also stresses her limited opportunities to learn the language. The clash of expectation versus possibility is especially well illustrated in relation to the situation in Sweden where all immigrants are given the chance to have free Swedish language classes. While a number of other interviewees also identified language as being the main barrier to being accepted as Latvian, this next interviewee – Svetlana, a Russian-Ukrainian – has very vivid memories of being 'othered' during her study years in the mid-1990s, despite being proficient in Latvian:

> For instance, at university I was the only Russian. There were girls who were half-Russian – they related to me. The pure Latvians didn't. They were afraid. In fact, I had problems with that because in the last year [of study] those who related to me were told to choose: either relate to me or to get the study certificate.

Svetlana indicates the degrees of 'otherness' apparent in the context of the 1990s towards those considered 'Russian' or 'half-Russian' as opposed to 'pure Latvian' where the 'half-Russians' could capitalize on their mixed identities by choosing which side to take. Although Svetlana's story brings us to the 1990s, a time that could be described as the most tense time ethnically in the recent history of Latvia (Laitin 1998) because of the temporal proximity of the Soviet years in Latvia, those who grew up in later years could also recollect unpleasant memories. Karina, who has Latvian and Russian-speaking parents and a Russian-speaking husband, recounts an episode from her own family setting:

> My Grandpa is Latgalian [Latgale is the eastern region of Latvia]. In the last year before emigrating we were at his place for Christmas. Grandpa and my husband had an argument, and he called him [my husband] 'the Russian pig'. My own grandpa! When I explained to Grandpa that he is wrong; that I have been married to him [my husband] for 11 years, my Grandpa's attitude was that all Russians were occupants.

These and other examples from the interviews exemplify why 'pure' or ethnic Latvians are suspicious of Russian-speaking Latvians who are second generation immigrants and do not internalize a Latvian identity as their ethnic and linguistic background or as the focus of their national loyalty. But equally the Russian-

speaking Latvians do not look back at their inherited ethnicity as something that ties them to Russia, Ukraine or any other countries from which their parents come.

For that reason the Russian speakers identify themselves with a distinct ethno-linguistic group and not as a part of a unified Latvian community or diaspora. Another example of the lack of perceived reciprocity in building a sense of belonging and acceptance between the Latvian state, 'pure Latvians' and Russian-speakers is the fact that Latvians and Russian-speakers abroad form parallel communities – one of which is more organised, institutionalised and recognised and the other which hardly extends one's friendship networks. Most of the interviewees did not have Latvian friends or acquaintances abroad and that was explained not by an unwillingness to befriend Latvians, but by the fact that they have never met Latvians in their new host country. Moreover, even if some of the interviewees expressed interest in events and activities organised by the Latvian diaspora or embassy, the majority did not have any information about them. For instance, the Latvian embassy in Sweden takes an active role in co-operating with Latvian diaspora organisations in hosting and co-organising diaspora events. However, the Russian-speaking Latvians interviewed for this study were mostly unaware of them.

Likewise, when dealing with the Latvian embassy in Sweden as a private individual, the first author of this article was asked a number of times if she was included on the embassy-organised e-mail list which shares diaspora-related news and information about events. However the interviewee quoted next was unaware of such a list or events despite having been to the embassy:

> Resp.: I don't know anything. One probably has to sign up somewhere. I haven't been informed about it. Nobody has told me anything, so I don't know anything. I just know that during elections, you can vote at the embassy and that's what I do. [..]Int.: But would you have the interest…?
>
> Resp.: If there was a Russian … Latvian organisation, like there is in Russia, Canada, Toronto with many events, with the school and other things, I would, of course, attend. I would like to. I would definitely bring my children to Latvian dancing and singing [classes]. I have done that in my childhood, my relatives as well. Latvian folk dances are my favourite and no other country in the world has them alike. At least I think so. I am not indifferent to that.

Irina moved to Sweden 4 years ago: her second episode of migration. She is one of the few Latvian migrants to have used her voting rights while living abroad. Only 23,116 Latvian citizens abroad voted in the last parliamentary elections in 2014 (CVK 2014). She is also interested in Latvian folk dances that with Latvian choirs are among the most popular activities for the Latvian diaspora. Yet she does not seem to be recognised by the gatekeepers of the Latvian diaspora community as someone who may be interested.

Like many others, Irina merely acknowledged that she did not know anything about Latvian diaspora events, although she believed they were being held. As a Russian-speaking Latvian in Sweden however, Yolanda knew very well that the Latvian community was active but felt explicitly that – as a Russian speaker – she would not be welcome at Latvian diaspora events:

I don't take offence. There is the Latvian Association not far away from here. Russians from Latvia don't have anything [like that]. But we are not welcome at the Latvian Association. Such a question is out of the question! (*laughing*) (…) A Latvian friend of mine is an active member of that association, but she has never invited me to those events.

Yolanda expresses bitterness that even her Latvian friend is drawing a boundary between herself as belonging to the Latvian diaspora community and Yolanda, who does not. Furthermore, by saying 'Russians from Latvia don't have anything', it seems that the bitterness is not only about the non-acceptance of Russian-speaking Latvians by ethnic Latvians but also about the unrecognised ethno-linguistic group 'Latvian Russians'. The examples brought up by Irina and Yolanda demonstrate that their interest in Latvian diaspora activities contest the stereotype framed by 'pure Latvians' who see Russian speakers as disloyal and disinterested in Latvian culture.

However, even if a Russian-speaking Latvian is aware of diaspora events and attends them, they may not fit into the official Latvian discourse and collective memory of the history of the twentieth century that seems to be reproduced in the diaspora community. The interpretation of twentieth century history has been one of the battlefields between official Latvian and Russian state relationships, leaving little room for plurality of historical narrative. The family history of Russian speakers and official Latvian social memory may conflict – and this serves as another aspect that prevents the maintenance of an identity associated with Latvia as a mutual process. The case of Katarina, who has a Latvian mother and is fluent in Latvian but who has grandparents who were Volga Germans, illustrates this:

When you look at those [diaspora] activities: there is a church service… but we are not Catholics. We don't go to church at all. So we are not interested in the church. Or there are many activities that are repressions, commemoration days, blah, blah, blah. And that is not interesting for us either, as in my family there have been repressions as well. The only problem is that [the deportations] were in the other direction. Not *from* Latvia, but we fled *to* Latvia (laughing); from the other side.[1] As for other activities, if there is something interesting, when there are some meetings, some theatre evenings, then we go. But there are not many of those.

Katarina's comments imply that Latvian diaspora policies that aim to keep contact with Latvian nationals abroad can be of little relevance to the Russian-speaking emigrants. Even if the language were not a barrier and they were willing to take part in diaspora activities – as is the case with Karina or Irina – the Russian-speaking minority is not addressed by the religion, the maintained culture or the shared historic memory represented through diaspora community events. Although the two ethno-linguistic groups of ethnic Latvians and Russian-speakers share the same national identity, their access to diaspora activities is limited. As a consequence, without many shared touchpoints, the two internal communities that co-exist in Latvia also continue to co-exist abroad. However, to make stronger claims, more research is

---

[1] At the beginning of the 1940s, Volga Germans were relocated to other parts of Russia. Trying to escape forced relocation, the interviewee's grandmother fled to Soviet Latvia.

necessary to understand whether this perception has objective grounds, i.e., if the diaspora activities are based on preservation of ethnic rather than national identity.

8.4.3   Claiming an Unrecognised Identity

We have illustrated examples showing that the identification of Russian-speaking Latvian migrants with Latvia as a nation and with the concept of 'Latvian-ness' is contested.

Firstly, the identity of Russian-speaking Latvians is contested by ethnic Latvians who consider them 'less legitimate' Latvians. Secondly, locals and other migrants in the host country who do not understand their origins contest their identity because, to paraphrase the informants, 'if you speak Russian, you are from Russia'. These contested identities lead to Russian-speaking Latvians tending to form network groups that are separate from the groups of ethnic Latvians abroad.

Not being able to be 'pure Latvians', the interviewees have developed an identity as 'Russian speakers from Latvia', thus distinguishing themselves from ethnic Latvians and 'Russians from Russia' (Laitin 1998). Drawing on the interviews, there are two reasons to stress the distinction: firstly, the linguistic identity that distinguishes them from Latvians and secondly, the national identity and perceived mentality that distinguishes them from Russians from Russia. The Russian-speaking Latvians interviewed are proud to be from Latvia and proud to be Russians and/or Russian speakers. They often consume popular and classical Russian culture but do not relate themselves to Russia as a state. Yana and Galina, who both currently live in Sweden, explain:

> Yana: I say that I am from Latvia and that I am Russian. I am not ashamed of that. I say that with pride.
>   Galina: I have nothing in common with Russia. I cannot say I am a Russian from Russia. I am a Russian from Latvia; a Russian speaker, let's say. [..] And it would be silly to deny it. I am even proud that I am from the Baltic States because firstly, it sounds more Western, and now it is Europe. Now we are from the EU. We say that we are Russians from Latvia. [..] Latvia is my homeland. From Russia, I only have the language.

As Galina indicates, the only thing that connects the Russian-speaking Latvians to Russia is the language. Their knowledge of Russian, one of the major world languages, gives them access to Russian culture and access to large Russian-speaking online and offline networks for other Russian-speaking immigrants in their host country. Yet Russian-speaking Latvians clearly distinguish themselves from Russians from Russia. Their depiction of this group however was done in rather stereotypical terms, and described mostly in terms of behavioural differences. 'Russian Russians' are described as rude, bossy and something to be ashamed of. 'Russians from Latvia and the Baltic States', on the other hand, are depicted as more polite and considerate. Irina from Sweden:

> I don't have any special desire to go to Russia because it is not my homeland, even if we go there sometimes. We have everything there: somewhere to live and everything, but it is dif-

ficult for me there. I am a Russian speaker, but one could say I do not fit in Russian society. Not to Russian society, but to the society in Russia.

Yana also from Sweden:

I don't like Russians. When I go to a resort, they behave horribly. I feel disgusted and ashamed.

By 'othering' themselves from 'Russian Russians' the interviewees form a distinct identity of 'Russian-speaking Latvians'. Moreover, the next quote confirms Laitin's (1998) findings regarding Russian speakers in Estonia who find themselves more similar to Estonians than to Russians, hence making it possible to apply the results to Russian speakers from Latvia as well. This interview extract is from Ekaterina from Sweden:

Resp.: [..] they have different attitude, different culture.
    Int. How does it differ?
    Resp.: People in Latvia do not reply as rudely, but that's how it still is there. Also, on the street, nobody will harass you [in Latvia]. At least less often than in Russia. Russia's problem is rudeness (*laughing*) that the Baltic countries don't have. That's why I have always liked Latvian people, Latvians, because they are Western-like and calm.

By stressing their Latvian origins, Russian-speaking Latvian migrants emphasise being Western European and qualitatively different from 'Russians from Russia'. Furthermore, stressing their Latvian origin as being different from Russian origins can also be beneficial in interaction with locals or fellow immigrants. Some interviewees in Sweden said that, in the hierarchy of immigrants, coming from a European and EU country is considered as being a higher position than coming from Russia, especially in the context of the escalation in tensions between Western Europe and Russia. Galina from Sweden:

It is a different question now. Because of all the events in Ukraine, here they look askew at the Russians. That's why we say that we are from Latvia. And please don't mix us up! Because they immediately think: if you are Russian, then you are from Russia, but Russia is bad. Now there are such politics here. I say, 'No, we are from the EU, like you are.' And to many that is a [convincing] argument, because then they look at you with respect. Finally!

Ekaterina from Sweden:

It is better to say that I am from Latvia, rather than from Russia. Because they don't know that Russians can be from Latvia. Latvia for them [the Swedes] is just a neighbour that [historically] was and then was not under their [Swedish] rule.[2] But Russia has always been their enemy.

Once again, self-identifying with a group and being accepted by that group may not go hand in hand. As Ekaterina's quote suggests, there is a lack of awareness of the existence of Russian-speaking Latvians in Western Europe. Having a clear social identity may therefore become complicated. Nastya from the UK has a similar opinion:

---

[2] The interviewee refers to the history of Latvia where a part of present Latvia used to be under Swedish rule from 1629 to 1721.

> The problem is that if you live abroad and your mother tongue is Russian, then people automatically think that you are a Russian from Russia. They don't understand the difference if I say that I speak Russian but grew up in Latvia, and that I am from an [ethnically] mixed Catholic family.

The lack of awareness of one's identity group can be experienced as problematic, especially in the context of international conflicts where people tend to take sides. Irina from Sweden previously lived in Canada. While living there she was mistakenly blamed for the military conflict breaking out between Russia and Georgia in 2008:

> I say that I am from Latvia. People don't understand. In Canada, when there was the conflict in Georgia, everyone was coming to me. At that time I was managing a clinic. The patients were horrified: 'How is this possible!? Your Putin [President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin] has attacked Georgia!' I had to explain to everyone that I am not from there and that I have nothing to do with it! Why did they [even] ascribe it to me?

The quotes illustrate the complexity of contemporary identity formation where the national, ethnic and linguistic dimensions of identity are all intertwined. These identity dimensions, already contested in the home country, become re-defined and re-contested in the new host country when one's identity is placed and defined among new sets of categories.

8.4.4   Developing Transnational Non-belonging

Analysis of the sense of belonging and transnational identity of Russian-speaking Latvians abroad showed that some of them experience ways of belonging that we have conceptualised here as *transnational non-belonging*. Transnational non-belonging is a situation in which one cannot identify with, or is not recognised as, a full member of a nation or state. Again, while some of the interviewees were consciously not developing a sense of belonging to a certain nation or state, others talked about the non-belonging that was imposed on them as they do not feel accepted by any of the national groups (Latvian, Russian, British or Swedish). The first is *being cosmopolitan*, the latter is what we define as 'involuntary non-belonging'.

The 'cosmopolitans' consciously do not develop a primary attachment to any state, territory or nation. They may have been born in Latvia, come from ethnically mixed families and now live in another country. They do not deny their ethnic or national origins, but they have realised that nationalism can be a destructive notion, and thus prefer not to develop an attachment to a single country or nation. Here, Irina from Sweden outlines her complex background:

> I was born in a family where my mother is Latvian and my father is Armenian. My mum is a teacher of Latvian and German. I was sent to a Russian school, and since then, I am a cosmopolitan. [..] It's hard to say what my nationality is. I went to my Grandma's, and she always had Latvian cuisine. She made rye-bread kvass, potato pancakes and things like that. When I came home, I ate Caucasus food. My dad is Armenian and that was dominant of

course. I don't speak Armenian but we had Armenian traditions at home. Our upbringing was more in the Armenian style. Where do I belong? I am simply a cosmopolitan. At home I have Russian traditions and the Russian language. I don't know where I belong! My homeland is Latvia. I like Armenian cuisine and I like Latvian cuisine. I have been to Russia, but that's not my country.

Irina explains her cosmopolitan identity through her upbringing in an ethnically-mixed Russian-speaking family in Latvia and her previous migration experience. All these experiences have blended her ways of being and ways of belonging. On the other hand, Nikolay, who lives in the UK, sees cosmopolitanism as something 'modern and contemporary' that a new world citizen has to acquire in order to succeed:

With all the aeroplanes, the world has become small. It is the problem of post-Soviet people – because we were born, lived and died in the same city. But people live in Australia today and tomorrow they may work in New York; and they will work somewhere else after that. It is a cosmopolitan world today. That's why it doesn't matter what passport you have. I am not attached to any country. In fact, many in my contact groups don't care what passport they have.

Cosmopolitans take advantage of having a passport from a country in the Schengen Area that allows them to travel without passport controls, or an EU passport that allows them to work in the whole European Economic Zone without any problems. Having left their home country they do not develop attachments to their new host country. They see the world in transnational terms, where they and the people around them enjoy the benefits of geographical mobility.

A second group of non-belongers – all living in Sweden – are those who are *involuntarily* not able to identify themselves with a certain national group. We have discussed previously the Russian-speaking Latvians who do not feel accepted by ethnic Latvians. The identity often ascribed to them by others is that of 'belonging to Russia'. However, they neither want to be associated with Russia, nor believe that they are accepted by Russians in Russia. Alexander from the UK:

They [Russians from Russia] do not consider us as Russians. It's the same situation as here [in the UK] with people of mixed race. That is, when a mixed race man is with black people, they don't consider him as one of them. And when he is with white people [..] they don't consider him as one of them either! (*laughing*). Probably it's the same with Russian speakers in Latvia.

Nikolay from the UK:

That's the funny thing. In Russia they don't consider us Russians. When you go to Russia, they consider you a Latvian. But at home you are considered a Russian! (*laughing*).

Transnational non-belonging, as with belonging, is a matter of degree. While some, like Alexander and Nikolay, accept this as matter of fact, others experience a sense of alienation that began in Latvia and continues to be experienced in the new host country. Ekaterina from Sweden is an example of this continuous transnational non-belonging. She represents a generation of people who were prepared for an adult life in the Soviet Union but were faced with tremendous structural changes

during their adolescence that changed their status from full citizens in the Soviet Union to immigrants in their homeland:

> From 1991 to 1999 [her first emigration attempt was living in Germany for 6 months in 1999], I was [like] a person overboard. (..) We, our generation, were in some kind of turbine that broke our destinies. It wasn't just me: it was everyone from the same [study] year. Unemployment, changes of conditions, the change of conditions for education, getting an apartment; everything [changed]. Everything that we were prepared for in our teenage years … none of that happened.

Ekaterina does not feel accepted fully by the host society in Sweden either. She is aware of a glass ceiling in professional development opportunities for immigrants and has experienced it herself:

> They [potential employers] refer to my [lack of] experience, but I think that the real reason is the [Russian] name. Many acquaintances say that once they change their name [this reason disappears]. … For example, one girl changed her name from Elena to Helena and immediately she received more replies to her job applications. [..] That would be the only reason for me to go back to Latvia. But that would almost be like jumping from the frying pan into the fire. You understand? I am a foreigner here, and I am a foreigner there.

Svetlana from Sweden expresses her experiences in almost exactly the same words exchanging the notion of being 'a foreigner' to being 'an immigrant': 'I was an immigrant there, and I am an immigrant here. If I have to choose where I am an immigrant, I'd rather choose a country that I like.'

Another example of complex identity contestation caused by the migration history of his family, both voluntary and forced, is that of Pavel, another Latvian migrant living in Sweden.

Pavel is in his thirties and was born to two ethnic Latvian parents in a distant Soviet Republic. His grandparents and parents were deported there during Soviet repressions. His parents returned to Latvia after independence in 1991. Both parents are ethnic Latvians but Pavel's mother tongue is Russian. In Latvia, Pavel attended a school with teaching in Russian and after graduation could not speak Latvian. The only way to pursue a university degree in his chosen profession was to move to study in Russia. After university he moved to the country where he was born and married a local woman. When it was not possible for him to sustain his family, he moved to Latvia. After the birth of their son and the economic crisis, he moved with his family to Sweden, where he now works as a manual labourer.

While he is the child of ethnic Latvian parents, and his parents' forced migration history – deportation – fits the Latvian collective memory of the Soviet period, Pavel speaks the 'wrong' language to be considered a 'pure Latvian'. That language – and his inability to speak Latvian – has influenced the life decisions he has made. Coupled with this language issue, his whole migration, re-migration and re-emigration path has led him to a profound sense of non-belonging:

> I feel I have fallen out with myself – do you understand? I don't feel that I'm fully Latvian because when I'm with my relatives I sense some kind of distance. I am an ethnic Latvian but I speak Russian without an accent. I don't feel that I'm Russian because … I don't know why. I don't feel that I'm a Swede either, even though I'm here. So I don't know where I fit in.

To some extent it could be said that those who experienced this sense of non-belonging to Latvia most severely also carried this experience of non-belonging to their host country as well. Yet despite the feeling of not belonging to Sweden, these informants experience the status of 'immigrant' in Sweden as more legitimate because the decision to migrate there was their own. Immigrant status in Latvia was experienced as externally imposed on them, although it was not them but their parents or even grandparents who migrated to the territory that was then Soviet Latvia.

The feeling that your home country does not accept you creates rootlessness where emotional connections with the home country start to wane but an emotional attachment to the host country has not yet developed. In addition, this sense of non-belonging is heightened by Russian speakers not feeling welcomed by the Latvian diaspora community, and the lack of any institutionalised diaspora communities for Russian-speaking Latvians.

8.5   Conclusions

Due to the history of migration in the families of Russian-speaking Latvian migrants, each generation of the same extended family builds their own transnational identity – and in many cases that does not fully overlap with the previous generation's identity. In the case of Russian-speaking Latvian migrants different generations of the same family may have been born and raised in different countries and under different political configurations, for instance in a former Soviet Republic (providing the ethnic origin and the homeland of parents), in Soviet Latvia or Latvia as a sovereign state (the homeland of the individual); in a third country (the new host country after migration and now the homeland of the migrant's children), or a country in or outside the European Union. This chapter has demonstrated that including intergenerational angles in the identity research of migrants facilitates a deeper understanding of how they form their national identities. The study sought to illustrate the complexities in the formation and maintenance of the transnational identity of Russian-speaking migrants from Latvia who are an ethnic and linguistic minority both in their home country and in their new host country.

The analysis relied on the emigrants' point of view and showed that the migrants' own migration patterns – in addition to the migration history of their parents and sometimes even their grandparents – create interlinked and occasionally conflicting layers of transnational identity. The multi-layered intergenerational origins which include the country associated with the name of their ethnic origin (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland or some other), Russia as the country associated with the language they speak, added to their home country Latvia, and their host country of immigration – Great Britain or Sweden – all include additional identity layers and, thus, complicate the migrant's identity claims.

The interview analysis provided three identity claims: aspiring to a Latvian identity, claiming an un-recognised Russian-speaking Latvian identity and developing transnational non-belonging. Identity is about doing and belonging, about being

similar and about being different. 'Belonging to Latvians' is not recognised by ethnic Latvians. 'Belonging to Russian-speaking Latvians' is not recognised by the new host society. The Russian-speaking Latvian migrants feel they have to defend their self-ascribed identities constantly and differentiate themselves from the identities ascribed to them by others, which is that of being labelled as Russians. This negotiation had already taken place in Latvia, but had to be re-contested in the fresh setting of their new host country. The ethnic (e.g., Russian or Ukrainian) and national (i.e., Latvian) identity is experienced as misunderstood by others. Thus, the strongest identity claim of Russian-speaking Latvians is linguistic; that is, belonging to the Russian-speaking community that empowers them. Being both Russian-speaking and from Latvia gives access to the Russian-speaking cultural space and to 'European-ness'. Being from Europe distinguishes them from 'Russians from Russia' on the level of identity claims as well as giving them concrete rights of intra-European mobility.

However, sometimes the clash of self-ascribed and ascribed identities results in the development of what we have defined as 'involuntary transnational non-belonging' when one does not feel accepted either by the home country or the host country. To some extent, this experience is amplified by the very fact that the sense of belonging to the home country is fading because of the time spent abroad, but the feeling of belonging to the host country is not developed yet and may change after more years in the host country. However, all respondents agreed that while non-acceptance by the host society is perceived as legitimate, non-acceptance by the home country is perceived as unfair.

As a result of the conflict between the identities that are given by others and those that are self-ascribed, the Russian-speakers interviewed for this study need to emphasise the nuanced nature of transnational identity that is more than just the dual notion of home and host country. They emphasise each generation's own accountability for their migration decisions and circumstances. Hence, in the identity claims of these Russian-speaking Latvian migrants, there is a clear tendency to distinguish between one's own migration paths and those of previous generations, which were shaped by the history around them.

References

Aptekar, S. (2009). Contexts of exit in the migration of Russian speakers from the Baltic countries to Ireland. *Ethnicities, 9*(4), 507–526.

Basch, L., Glick Schiller, N., & Szanton Blanc, C. (1994). *Nations unbound: Transnational projects, postcolonial predicaments and de-territorialized nation-states*. London: Routledge.

Bradatan, C., Popan, A., & Melton, R. (2010). Transnationality as a fluid social identity. *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture, 16*(2), 169–178.

Brands Kehris, I. (2010). Citizenship, participation and representation. In N. Muiznieks (Ed.), *How integrated is Latvian society? An audit of achievements, failures and challenges* (pp. 93–123). Riga: University of Latvia Press.

Cheskin, A. (2012). History, conflicting collective memories, and national identities: How Latvia's Russian-speakers are learning to remember. *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity, 40*(4), 561–584.

CSB Latvia. (2012). *2011. gada tautas skaitīšanas rezultāti īsumā [Census 2011 in brief].* http://www.csb.gov.lv/sites/default/files/publikacijas/nr_13_2011gada_tautas_skaitisanas_rezultati_isuma_12_00_lv.pdf. Accessed 28 Feb 2014.

CSB Latvia. (2015). *Table IBG041. International long-term migration by ethnicity of migrants.* https://data1.csb.gov.lv/pxweb/lv/iedz/iedz__migr/IBG041.px. Accessed 28 Feb 2014.

CVK, Centrālā vēlēšanu komisija. (2011). *11. Saeimas vēlēšanas. Rezultāti [Elections of 11th Saeima: Results].* http://www.velesanas2011.cvk.lv/. Accessed 5 Aug 2015.

CVK, Centrālā vēlēšanu komisija. (2014). *12. Saeimas vēlēšanas [Elections of the 12th Saeima].* http://sv2014.cvk.lv/index_rez.html. Accessed 5 Aug 2015.

Glick Schiller, N. (2005). Transnational social fields and imperialism. *Anthropological Theory, 5*(4), 439–461.

Gruzina, I. (2011). Relationship between history and a sense of belonging – Russian speaking minority integration in Latvia. *CEU Political Science Journal, 3*, 397–432.

Hall, S. (1996). Who needs identity. In S. Hall & P. Du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. 1–17). London: Sage.

Heleniak, T. (2004). Migration of the Russian diaspora after the breakup of the Soviet Union. *Journal of International Affairs, 57*(2), 99–117.

Hughes, J. (2005). Exit' in deeply divided societies: Regimes of discrimination in Estonia and Latvia and the potential for Russophone migration. *Journal of Common Market Studies, 43*(4), 739–762.

Ivlevs, A. (2013). Minorities on the move? Assessing post-enlargement emigration intentions of Latvia's Russian speaking minority. *The Annals of Regional Science, 51*(1), 33–52.

Ivlevs, A., & Kings, R. M. (2012). Family migration capital and migration intentions. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues, 33*(1), 118–129.

Jurkane-Hobein, I. (2015). Krievvalodīgo emigrantu bērnu transnacionālās saites ar Latviju [Ties to Latvia among children of Russian-speaking emigrants]. In A. Lulle & E. Kļave (Eds.), *Radot iespējas attīstībai: diasporas bērnu un jauniešu izglītība* [Providing opportunities for development: Education of children and youth] (pp. 259–272). Riga: University of Latvia Press.

Laitin, D. (1998). *Identity in formation: The Russian-speaking populations in the near abroad.* New York: Cornell University Press.

Levitt, P., & Glich Schiller, N. (2004). Conceptualizing simultaneity: A transnational social field perspective on society. *International Migration Review, 38*(3), 1002–1039.

Lulle, A. (2014). Spaces of encounter-displacement: Contemporary labour migrants' return to Latvia. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography, 96*(2), 127–140.

Lulle, A., & Jurkane-Hobein, I. (2016). Strangers within? Russian-speakers' migration from Latvia to London: A study in power geometry and intersectionality. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 43*, 596–612.

Mieriņa, I. (2015). Prom no mājām, tuvāk sirdij? Kā ilgstoša atrašanās ārpus Latvijas ietekmē politiskās attieksmes un politisko procesu vērtējumu Latvijā [Away from home, closer to heart? The impact of long-term residence outside Latvia on political attitudes and the evaluation of political processes]. *Akadēmiskā Dzīve, 51*, 24–38.

Mieriņa, I., & Koroļeva, I. (2015). Metodoloģiskie risinājumi emigrantu viedokļu izzināšanai pētījumā «Latvijas emigrantu kopienas». In I. Mieriņa (Ed.), *Latvijas emigrantu kopienas: cerību diaspora.* Riga: LU Filozofijas un Socioloģijas Institūts.

Miller, R. L. (2000). *Researching life stories and family histories.* London: Sage.

Poppe, E., & Hagendoorn, L. (2001). Types of identification among Russians in the 'near abroad. *Europe-Asia Studies, 53*(1), 57–71.

Rozenvalds, J. (2010). The Soviet heritage and integration policy development since the restoration of independence. In N. Muiznieks (Ed.), *How integrated is Latvian society? An audit of achievements, failures and challenges* (pp. 33–60). Riga: University of Latvia Press.

SKDS. (2015). *Piederības sajūta Latvijai. Mazākumtautību Latvijas iedzīvotāju aptauja* [Belonging to Latvia: A survey of minorities]. http://providus.lv/article_files/2682/original/atskaite_piederiba_08_2014.pdf?1409734400. Accessed 5 Sept 2015.

Šulmane, I. (2010). The media and integration. In N. Muiznieks (Ed.), *How integrated is Latvian society? An audit of achievements, failures and challenges* (pp. 223–252). Riga: University of Latvia Press.

Tabuns, A. (2010). Identity, ethnic relations, language and culture. In N. Muiznieks (Ed.), *How integrated is Latvian society? An audit of achievements, failures and challenges* (pp. 253–278). Riga: University of Latvia Press.

The Baltic Times. (2015). *Latvia's Harmony party: No plans to end agreement with Putin's United Russia*. http://www.baltictimes.com/latvia_s_harmony_party__no_plans_to_end_agreement_with_putin_s_united_russia/. Accessed 5 Aug 2015.