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***Babushka* in Riga – age and power in Russian-speaking translocal contexts**

(Rygos *bobulės*. Amžiaus ir galios veiksniai translokalinėse rusakalbių aplinkose)

Santrauka. Šiame straipsnyje analizuojami socialiniai senyvo amžiaus moterų, vadinamųjų „bobulių“, tarpusavio santykiai ir jų ryšiai su aplinka, kurią apibūdina įvairiopo sąveikos tarp lyties, amžiaus, galios veiksmų ir privačių, intymų, artimų gyvenamojo pasaulio sričių. Straipsnio autorės tikslas – suprasti būdus, kuriais remdamosi moterys užima tam tikrą padėtį socialinėje organizacijoje. Pagrindinis tyrimo dalykas – medžiaginių ir simbolinių išteklių, siejamų su „kilmės“ ir „vietos“ ženklais, mainai tarp senyvo amžiaus moterų, tradiciškai atliepančių „dirbančios moters“ ir „geros motinos“ įvaizdžius. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad vyraujanti lyčių ideologija, be įprastų kultūros reprezentacijų, niekada tinkamai nenagrinėjo moterų laiko problematikos.

Media representations of a *babushka* tell us about quite stereotypical, sometimes biased and opinionated visions of old women in shawls, toothless, impoverished, somewhere “in Russia”, “in Ukraine”, “in Byelorussia”. The TV audience worldwide has been consistently trained to see angry old women’s faces in the media reports on procommunist rallies, or poverty and decline in Russia, or in the programs with political-ethnographic interest – about “roots survival” in villages. Another telling example of a clichéd image is a silent *babushka* in a Hollywood film in which the protagonist played by famous ballet-dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov struggles against KGB. An anonymous granny sees how Baryshnikov’s character flees KGB agents. She, of course, looks very supportive of his actions and does not let him down when asked by the agents.

Another widespread representation is produced in Soviet films - a group of elderly women

sitting on a bench near a house entrance or in the yard. Often such episodes are humorous similarly to newspaper anecdotes and humouristic pictures, making fun of the “power of *babushkas*”. However, this representation was not very far from reality - grannies, sitting on the benches in the yards, in groups, a “neighbourhood watch in the shawls”. However, instead of a “neighbourhood watch”, a really funny phrase, I would prefer calling them as “granny clubs” as they definitely had their own “membership”, “rituals”, “inclusion/exclusion” procedures, power relations etc. “Granny clubs” are taken in this paper as an example of different and complex, very often, “invisible”, ways in which group identities and women’s identities as gender identities in terms of age, ethnicity and positioning are formed.

What is common to all these stereotyping images, “*babushka*” was supposed to know “secrets” beyond others’ knowledge.

For my analysis I use the ideas and methodologies proposed by Ulla Vuorela in her research on women, age and power in transnational families (Bryceson, Vuorela 2002) and Nina Glick Schiller (1997) who argues: “Underneath the growing interest in Transnational Studies stand two simple and significant facts: (1) while processes that cross the borders of states are as old as states themselves, the current restructuring of capitalism is knitting the world together in ways that reconfigure the contemporary organization of power and identities; and (2) scholars are currently reflecting the current saliency of transnational processes by shifting their analytical paradigms and rethinking their conceptualizations of the local, national, regional, and global.” (Schiller 1997; 155) In the context of transnational migration, family anthropology and cultural studies (Hannerz 1996; Canclini 1995; Ong 1995; Nadjie Al-Ali, Khalid Koser 2002), the 1990s reconfigurations of space and polity in the Baltic countries are the underresearched foci for (inter)disciplinary analysis in terms of “(1) the specification and location of agency; (2) the relationships between transnational processes and states; and (3) the historical simultaneity of and interaction between global, transnational, national, and local social fields”. (Schiller 1997; 156)

From this perspective of historicizing and localising global and transnational processes to avoid reification of binary thinking about past and present, and framing possible venues into socialist/postsocialist urban analysis, the very factor of the Soviet and post-Soviet transnational flows and processes is highly interesting, as viewed in the wider context of the global migration, diaspora movements, cultural change, cultural hybridisation, and the development of new cultural forms (Appadurai 1997; Escobar 1994). We can assume that transnationalism was evolving as a *modus operandi* within the framework of the Soviet economic model of socialist proto-globalisation (cf. the Caucasus, Byelorussian, Ukrainian, Siberian, and other migrations), with a

number of differences. For example, an important difference consists in the Soviet “nomadic” mindset that having crossed a border and living in a different republic or society, and having shaped what is called “ethnic economies”, did not constitute a standpoint for identifying someone as ‘migrant’, permanent or temporary, and, incidentally, the category of a migrant in the Soviet context was not attributed the same connotations characteristic to it as in the world economic scene today.

The collapse of the socialist statist economy and Soviet political system was accompanied with emergence of new political borders, or their restoration, and (re)claimed emotional boundaries. This complex process of Soviet migration embedded in the socialist economic model, and post-Soviet cleft diasporisation, affected by the economic marketization in the diversity of re-bordering and re-imagining contexts, asks for further elaboration of applied analytical tools. In this article I will use the notion of translocal/transnational for my argument. The process of globalization revolves around the process of international migration of people that has been generating new multi-localized and partially de-territorialized social realities and transnational place-making. Transnational families, both nuclear as well as extended families, are dispersed across international borders. As part of this process, transnational families create their space across international borders for different reasons, for a variety of personal and financial events and circumstances. But the constitution of cultural identity and its maintenance within transnational families is perhaps decisive for shaping up commitments and values in making personal and employment decisions. Similar features could be identified in the constitution of cultural identities of millions of families cross-generationally drawn into the orbit of the Soviet globalising politics of enforced socialist extensive modernisation across the huge country in which, however, political nation-borders did not exist. To avoid

the methodological trap, so typical of post-Soviet researches in imposing concepts and categories of postcolonial transnational studies upon the migration processes of the socialist economic space, I use the notion of translocality comes in handy as an analytical tool for the families that found themselves dispersed in migrations across the Soviet labour market, in a variety of diverse territories but under the same citizenship regime and legislation. These territories as Soviet republics became independent nation-states after the collapse of the USSR, or restored their independence, like the three Baltic states, thus, placing translocal families into post-Soviet transnational contexts and different citizenship/welfare regimes.

People moving across huge Soviet labour market, into its Baltic littoral, were definitely forming a heterogeneous formation. It consisted of people with very different cultural norms, social practices, and socioeconomic profiles, but the analysis of men's and women's experiences of adaptation and integration as gendered experiences is still rather scarce. How relationships were sustained sustain across time and space? How household ties and women-centered networks were created and maintained for conducting productive/reproductive duties and entitlements for women as family members of different ages? As Wong (2000; 45) argues, feminist analysis of intra-household hierarchies of power, gender ideologies, and struggles over decisions and access to resources significantly enriches understandings of transnational practices of women in migratory flows. Georges Fournon and Nina Glick Schiller emphasize that over the years, "feminist scholarship has illuminated the ways in which genders are differentiated and gender hierarchies are constituted as path of the way women and men learn to identify with a nation-state. Much less has been said about the social reproduction of

gender in transnational spaces. These spaces are created as people emigrate, settle far from their motherlands, and yet develop networks of connection that maintain familia, economic, religious, and political ties to those homelands." (Fournon, Schiller 2001; 539)

My research was based on in-depth semi-structured interviews of Russian-speaking women in different age groups who either were born in Latvia or brought in childhood together with their family. The condition of being far away from 'home', facing the challenges of a new place was the common ground on which their networks, families, structures of individual and collective feeling of belonging developed. I considered using interviews and oral narratives to understand the transformation of our individual identities during the dramatic shift from one economic model into the other, both based on migrations, and both entailing respective transnational experiences and transformations in cultural, ethnic and gender identities. Exploring the processes of belonging and identity formation also included my own observations and experience, thus, autobiographical element as part of the research methodology is considered by me as appropriate - 'like ethnography, it has a commitment to the actual' (Fischer 1986: 198).¹

The interviews focused on women's memories and stories about their "babushkas" and "granny clubs" in their urban neighbourhoods, in different boroughs of Riga - Kengarags, Sarkandaugava, Purvciems, and a small satellite town of Saulkrasty. All these districts are characterised with a sizeable Russian-speaking population. All women respondents are Russian-speaking. All of them moved into the newly-built block houses, built either instead of workers' barracks, or in Riga outskirts, instead of private houses. Grandparents of most of the respondents (rather characteristic for Russian-speaking dwell-

¹ Sutama Ghosh and Lu Wang point to Fischer's (1986) argument that biography and autobiographical fiction can perhaps serve as key forms for the exploration of ethnic identity in the current pluralist, postindustrial society.

lers of Riga) either lived in the countryside, or moved from countryside to a city in their young years – either in the 1930s, or in the 1950s. All families moved to Latvia in the mid-1950s-early 1960s.

Latvia of the 1960s-1990s was subjected to expansion of the Soviet urban economy. Soviet urbanisation in the Baltic region went hand-in-hand with its forced industrial modernization, although Latvia (similarly to Lithuania and Estonia) was a typically agrarian country before its annexation into the USSR in 1940. So, the territory was subjected to a considerable migration from the territories other than Latvia – Byelorussia, Ukraine, Russia, etc. Neighbourhoods in the growing cities were part of a bigger construction plan including infrastructure of shops, daycare centers, schools etc. Families, teachers, children, retired men and women even shared workplaces (like the military or workers of a factory in the vicinity of the neighbourhood). This process also included the formation of a specific social, gender, age, ethnicity group in an urban environment – elderly retired Russian-speaking women from migrant families. Non-formal neighborhood networks developed that derived their basis from the immediate spatial proximity of neighbors in the same building or block and the resulting inevitably daily contacts, relationships, and conflicts. Their social space was mainly urban neighbourhood in "bedroom" districts, mainly built in Riga and other cities of Latvia since the 1960s until even nowadays. Here I use the category "migrant" posteriori, and it was not used in the Soviet language of employment and labour market in the way as it is used derogatively in the Latvian mainstream press of today.

The families of the respondents belonged to a translocal type of families whose relatives lived and migrated all over the USSR. After the collapse of the USSR, some of them have tried to retain strong links with their relatives across the borders but these links, as all respondents acknowledged have been nevertheless weakening

in the span of the 1990s. My questions were mainly about how a respondent remembers a babushka network in her Russian-speaking social micro-community, how a respondent's sense of belonging to the place where she now lives was negotiated into her, and of course, what kind of assets and social capital did women employ when "anchoring" in new places and in the processes of social identity transformation into "granny".

There was something that really impressed me during these long interviews that in all cases finally transformed into "talking about life and us". The first response to my question about "babushka" figure in a woman-respondent's family was either ironical or rather indifferent. As soon as a respondent started telling her childhood and youth experiences, episodes in the neighbourhood, her relationship with her granny or grannies in a yard, the spontaneous memory-work brought her into telling me flows of stories, memories and lively discussions. It was one of my most interesting times two years ago, and recently, that I spent with these women, looking at their smiling, laughing faces, and joyful eyes. Together we remembered the lives of those who had already been dead, who had lived lives full of hardships and fears, love and joy. Together we remembered those beyond history at large and its contemporary revisions for current geopolitical causes.

"GRANNY CLUBS"

I have tried to contextualise "granny clubs" existence within the logics of the postwar Soviet economy that shaped up social conditions for developing three-generational translocal urban migrant families to share one apartment and to form a shared "family basket" and care practices of children and elderly people

A grandmother in such families either moved to her "children" to help them (caring of grandchildren or getting a bigger apartment), or getting retired, she kept the home economy running (going to shopping queues, working in a ve-

getable garden, getting food when family is at work, cooking meals, cleaning, taking care of grandchildren, etc.) All these home functions were central to the family welfare as they secured her “children”’s full-time work, and this made a granny figure into an indispensable and essential to the social landscape of a Soviet city. It is noteworthy that a care resource central to the family welfare - child care (for free) – was central to granny’s social worth in the families with both full-time workers for the Soviet low-productivity and low-pay economy.

Irina M. Actually, my mother in a way sacrificed her last years of paid full-time work before retirement to secure my career advancement until my pay increased. But then the economy restructuring started in the early 1990s, and I had to have three jobs to provide the family consisting of my son and two retired elderly parents. They became “parents” for my child while I earned money for family welfare turning into the only breadwinner of the family.

Lena M.: My mother-in-law is very special. She knows everything, she watches everybody, takes care of everybody around. “Where have you been? Why did you come so late? Have you had a meal?” A sort of grand matriarch. We still live in the same neighbourhood although so many around moved house. We still have barracks in the yard, from older times, before the houses were built. Our “babul’ki” who had once lived in these “barracks” adore looking after children in the yard. “Don’t worry, Lenchka, I will look after your girl. Nothing will happen to her”. [...] Or they call a child into their circle. The child who just plays in the sandbed. They will ask the child all questions, how is his mom, how is his/her family. [...] There is a hierarchy in this club, and the president is “Sobachka”. She knows everything about everybody.

Irina M. For my mother, going for a walk with my son was a ritual shared by all other grannies. They had their unwritten times when to meet in the inner yard, on the bench about which everybody knew that it was their bench. If a stranger took a seat on it, they slowly, one by one, were fleeing to other benches in the yard. The reason why they liked this particular bench was its strategic position – they could observe the whole yard. The only obstacles were some tree groups and bushes behind which grandchildren tended to hide themselves with the sense of collective freedom from their grannies.

Such groups of grannies became an unalienable part of a house neighbourhood “landscap-

pe”, in particular, in those places where houses were built in a circle or quadrangle so that there was an inner yard, with the sand-bed, benches, and other possible places for coming together. Grannies formed visible social collectives in lots and lots of these yards. When I say – “grannies” - I should say that it is a highly conditional descriptive notion as these groups included women of different ages, and the rules of selection into these yard elite clubs is still something to think about. These groups were composed in different ways. They could be women of the same “origin” if an apartment-block is built instead of former so-called worker barracks. Or grannies could be women mainly belonging to the same neighbourhood. “Granny clubs” could be formed by retired women living not far from each other, and having worked at the same enterprise. Of course, the most visible group was grandmothers taking care of grandchildren if the parents didn’t want to give a child to a kindergarten. They could be accompanied by younger women walking with the children in the same yard. Different genealogies can be reclaimed from their past experiences here – either “gossiping women” near a village water-well, or women (of course, gossiping) in the kitchen of a communal flat. Different genealogies of women’s communal experiences and negotiations were definitely in the memories of these women about cherished or hated collective spaces of women’s knowledge, news, opinions, attitudes, negotiations, microsocial mindsets, etc.

Exclusion rules could be very rigid in such “clubs”. So, what could have happened if a woman – a potential “member” by virtue of age – ignored such “granny club”? The situation with Lena’s mother was really a spectacular demonstration of an exclusion rhetoric and attitude. In the 1960s, after moving to a new apartment and neighbourhood, she once demonstrated the women of her age in the yard that she did not even intend to belong to their “club”. Thus, as a “punishment”, they did not greet her, kept silence when she passed by their group sitting on the

bench, and one could be sure about their gossiping tail behind her back in the neighbourhood.

Family pets became poor victims of revenge and inferences in another case of “exclusion” and negative marking. Irina L.’s mother who tried to avoid “inclusion” in her neighbourhood’s “granny club”, once received the following comment from them: *“You have such a wonderful family. Your daughters are very polite, your husband is so good, only your dog is so nastily wretched – who has she taken after?”* Having a dog in the 1970s was a marker of a well-off status and social difference which received negative connotations in this “anti-dog” comment (you are not “us”). It was also a hint about her home as a woman’s responsibility in which she, either mother or wife, does not – as they tried to infer – create the atmosphere of love and care, and this clearly shows in the dog’s “evil” behaviour!!! Irina M. remembered forever how “babushkas” “attacked” a woman in her forties as her kitten accidentally pissed into the sand-bed where their grandchildren used to play. The moment was used to express their attitudes and evaluation toward the whole family’s women who were “too independent” and “too self-assured” in their behaviour towards grannies, thus, the whole neighbourhood. Such behaviour was definitely part of their demands on their symbolic recognition in a neighbourhood. Symbolic recognition was expressed in how one must greet them reverently enough. Otherwise, the question could follow “what’s wrong with you, sweetie?” Or the question could be referred to a young woman’s mother: “Does your daughter have troubles at work? She somehow did not want to talk with us”. Thus, experienced dwellers of the community preferred greeting a granny from such “club” immediately and with a dosage of reverence that never looked sufficient in the eyes of the grannies.

This social behaviour of old women who took care of their children’s families, definitely manifested the cultural knowledge they brought along to the urban communities – the knowled-

ge of the woman’s value accumulation process in the traditional agrarian culture. A woman acquires a symbolical capital of becoming a “matriarch” only in compliance with evaluation scale of the village community on her maternal performances. The “evaluation scale” curiously was reclaimed into a tool of collective construction of their agency in the neighbourhood. Significantly, this way to perform the value-acquisition with age and to find possible spaces for such collective performances upon others was undertaken in the circumstances of old women’s devalorisation in the Soviet modernist constructed “identity” of a woman - mother-worker - in terms of their age beyond a mother-worker performance, on the one hand, and on the other, in the contexts of their relative alienation from a homeland and close relatives.

There was something else and very important in these manifestations of woman in age and in public. Going to the yard in the morning and in the evening was an important public event for an elderly retired woman identified as *babka*. Taking care of oneself – hairdresser, neat clothes – “neat good grandmother” – was part of rituals creating a parapublic space by old women for themselves and by themselves. The Soviet public space – very marginal anyway - somehow did not “see” old women, “grannies”, and did not offer them “free-time” public spaces of as cafes or restaurants for getting together. And of course they would not go there anyway, keeping faith to the code of being “thrifty” and “economical” as well as in the absence of traditions for elderly women to come together (for a cup of tea, for example) in urban public spaces. But the tradition of going to church, as the symbolical space of their confessional-ethnic belonging (putting candles for their mothers, going to services) was treasured and maintained.

Buying for somebody in the “club” was a very important token of mutual trust, even to the level of friendliness. The level of friendliness, however, had its different sublevels of the private,

obviously depending on the social status of women in the group. In a house of military families (a sort of middle-classish), the communication was mainly in the yard, with extremely rare visits to each other's homes. In a working-class house, doors were open to the extent of borrow-lend system (a loaf of bread, a pickled cucumber, etc.)

Storytelling as a collective identity-maintenance ritual was central to these women's finally settled life as grannies. By sharing memories in story-telling hours – weaving the experiences of the present into memories about the past – they were performing a function of symbolical cohesion, in being go-between figures between mainland and a new living place. Relatives' networks functioned through them – they knew the kinship networks, addresses, social capital of their extended family, dispersed over the territory of the USSR. They cared for family correspondence, guest trips, even matchmaking, etc. – in one word, keeping family ties. With these “intermediary” functions they operated as go-between figures in the symbolic link between mainland and new living place – the imaginary space of “Russia” or “Ukraine, or “Siberia” interspaced with the present neighbourhood identity in Riga. Part of this, absence of socialising places for elderly women in urban spaces retrieved something from their memories – existence of such women's networks in rural areas of their origin.

“Five minutes in the yard, and you know the secrets of CIA”!

I never forget a couple of episodes in my life. Some 15 years ago I was walking in the center of the legendary city Odessa, now in Ukraine. Tired, I sat down on the bench, next to two elderly women and accidentally overheard a speck of their conversation: “My Vova again meets with this girl whom I don't like, and tell me, please, what these Americans have found in Reagan?” A couple of years ago, walking this time in the center of Padova in Italy, I came across two el-

derly women standing in the midst of the sidewalk, and again a speck of their conversation in Russian: “Can you imagine – this neighbour of ours – again she has a new boyfriend!”. How at home I was – this was also my experience in the yard of our neighbourhood, as soon as I came out to see my mother, surrounded by other grannies. She, a retired elderly woman, who helped me to grow up my son, had no way out, but to allow being included in our local “granny club” and “exchanging news” in the nearby street. Knowledge about the world turned such groups into fervent newspaper/TV discussion clubs. Granddaddies, as some of my respondents told me, tried to join such “news discussions” – from Masha's new boyfriend to CIA secrets – but for them it was usually hard to compete with “granny knowledge” because it was the public space in which it was women to women who expressed their views, who negotiated them, who listened to each other, who were interested in each other, and the least interested in what men might say to them. (*“Go home and watch your TV”*)

Neighbourhood and “telling news”, or gossip, cannot be alienated from each other in such context: “granny clubs” were a “conversational blanket” of neighbourhood, and very importantly, their favourite genre was definitely “an expressive device that mediates social contradictions, the most important source of which in his case was the conflict between the ideals of family privacy on the one hand, and the maintenance of friendship networks through gossip, on the other. For example, one of my respondents Anya told me her friend Ruslan's story. She interviewed him as she was very enthusiastic about learning more of how others in her yard remember these invisible presences in childhood:

“In the middle of the yard always grannies were sitting. We could leave the apartment doors opened because grannies – like our yard guards – were sitting always, and when my mother comes home, they inform her that I am not at home. <...> When my mother went for a trip, they told me: You are matu-

ring. Three weeks as your mother has been away, but you have not brought any girls. We have not heard any music. What's wrong? <...> Everything was reported to my mother: Today your Ruslan has brought two girls. What kind of the girls? Short one, the other – ah, don't remember <...>”.

Memory of these episodes excellently testifies to what everyone might have unconsciously experienced in her or his young years. Nuanced “controlling” strategies of young people’s social habits were exerted through their mothers’ concern about the neighbourhood’s opinions in the gossips (Tebbutt 1995) of the family moral profile. (“What would everybody say?”) For example, Anya’s mother used to say to her older sister in childhood: *What will everybody say in the house?* Lena’s mother-in-law kept repeating to Lena: *What will the neighbours say? Or They told me ...* Ira M. mother used to say: *They in the yard ... They say in the yard...* What, for example, Ruslan did not do for his mother to feel OK was signalled to his mother when she came home crossing the yard and being informed by grannies en route. Gossip as a way of controlling strategies for the “meaning” of matching the norms further sipped into private spaces – *“The doors to my room had to be always opened”* – a typical utterance in Irina M., Anya, Lena M. interviews)

Apart from moral evaluation, not necessarily valued by youngsters, but utterly significant for their moms (!), the “conversational blanket” of *babushkas* was significant for other practical reasons in their “care package”. For example, in Irina M’s apartment the windows looked out at the local shop, and the family could see when the truck with meat products and bread was driving up – the telephone system was used to inform the own network. But these extended connections went rarely beyond the boundaries of the neighbourhood yard (“a community”, “a village”). This “spacing” created Us and Them, images of stable micro-communities – our sandbed, for our children and grandchildren, not for strangers; our benches, etc. This emotional boun-

dary-construction never allowed children from other yards to play in “our” sandbeds. Paths through the yard could easily become objects of the later grannies’ observations what kind of strangers go through “their” territory,

“Who is who in the neighbourhood” was accompanied with grannies’ strategic skills in gardening, shopping, caring for children – *needed skills and strategic knowledge* in the periods of the late 1970s and the stagnant impoverished 1980s. Grandparents occupied central places in the “garden-maintenance” part of the home economy. Gardening was a very important cohering – but so routine, so boring (all grandchildren say it) - practice in the family that evokes traditional habits of canning, conserving, drying, preparing for winter – in other words, “having keys to a larder”. Quite a number of families have maintained this tradition of gardening for home through generations, let them be businessmen of today Mushrooming, berry-picking - all rituals as part of family traditions have even now retained the value of family “knowledge”, but they were specially respected and valued *in the economy of scarcity of the late 1970s-1980s*. Shopping was no less crucial to the continuity of family economy. In the collapsing economy of the late Soviet period, free time became an important resource - wasting hours, in lines for food, would be a load upon working people, and this time-consuming practice became a “prerogative” of grandparents, particularly, grandmothers.

Irina M.: In the morning my father used to come up to the window in my bedroom and look out. If there was a truck next to the shop’s back entrance, this meant that fresh bread, sausages, meat had been transported. He went to the shop immediately to join the growing line. Then my mother dressed my son and went together with him to the shop – to join my father. Rather often, products were given to a number of family units in the line, thus, if all of them were in the line, they got a triple portion. Then my mother came home like from the war front-line, and then hurried up to the yard to boast her grannies what an excellent “bread-grasper” she was.

Pleasure of shared (grand)mothering

The center of such “granny club” usually were grannies with grandchildren – a symbol of their power in the family and grown children’s dependency upon them. They were rather powerless to influence their children’s occupational and marital decisions. So, firstly, they had to bargain for care through the claims on reciprocity. And secondly, they maintained a good family image in the eyes of the community for own self-identification as “matriarchs” – a legacy of their rural belongings and traditional knowledge of what is included in the meaning of an identity of an elderly woman. Lena M. told me about her neighbour on the second floor:

“The whole house was afraid of her. I know that she worked at the registration department of our local clinic. Thus, she had access to knowledge of who is who in the family, a very detailed information on illnesses in the family, family problems. I think that sometimes in our family some “directing” moments were told to my elder sister about her dress, about her outlook, about coming late at home. My mother used to tell: “If Vera Ivanovna finds out, I will feel ashamed in front of everybody”. ... Mother worked at the factory and her colleagues also lived in the same house. So, nothing wrong could have come out of the boundaries of the family, for example, if my elder sister came later than usual.”

How to be a good daughter to your mother in this situation included considering grannies’ presence and their attitudes as it was more important for a mother than for a daughter. But to be good in the eyes of one’s mother meant to be good for the sake of her relationship with such “granny club”. To be a disciplined, accurately and modestly dressed girl gave more symbolical value to her mother as “mother” in the eyes of the house, or neighborhood, thus, perpetuating the respectability and good opinions of the family for all in the neighbourhood, and wider, at work (typically, if colleagues live in the same neighbourhood). Lena, for example, was obviously stressed in her childhood about her dresses. Any dress innovations were of course a source of continuous discussion and criticism with her mot-

her. There was no opposition between traditional and innovative in grannies’ rhetoric - as such it was substituted for “too modern, something modest, shapeless is better” in her mother’s words. Lena’s mother – not untypically – was used to performing normative functions as to what kind of the girl her daughter must be in the eyes of the public and its immediate evaluators as soon as her daughter goes out of the house entrance. Social control of good young women sipped into mothers’ worries – What would everybody say? – influencing mother-daughter relationship – a good girl, thus, a good mother.

All respondents testified as to how extremely important were rituals in this context. When a woman comes up to such group sitting in the yard, on the bench next to the entrance, she would be polite, and her mother could also give her all instructions before her daughter leaves the group – what to do at home, what to buy at the local store, and how it was at work. In such highly symbolical performance of power irrespective of your age and professional position, husbands of their daughters tried to avoid such situations. Less care was exposed about boys as they are future men. (If something is wrong with a boy, what is wrong with his mother? Her full-time work? Her divorce, or single motherhood?)

Divorce was always a highly discussed issue in granny clubs. Irina M.’s tells that her mother hid the fact of the daughter’s divorce as her mother had a highly respected status of a wise and good mother in grannies’ community. The guilt was shifted upon her daughter as she had a PhD – a too much knowing woman, and this is too bad for keeping a full family. After many divorces happened to the daughters of these grannies, Irina M. was re-imagined as a really strong woman who just threw away her “muzhik” (bloke), brought up her son by herself and because she – the reciprocity principle – took care of both elderly parents until their deaths. It is really interesting that, reciprocally, the care of old people was demanded from a daughter, which marked

a significant shift in tradition. In traditional agrarian cultures of Russia the eldest brother's family takes care of the elderly. This shift also reflects the socialist labour market segregation and inequality of man's and woman's values in the sphere of work. A husband was not expected to share care of his parents, and usually mother, and his career whereas it is a daughter's expected role at the expense of her career expectations.

Conclusion: "Away from this nasty yard"

I have tried to track - through memories of daughters and granddaughters - a microsocial world of neighbourhoods in Riga outskirts, in which its actors - grannies - performed a certain integrative capacity in producing certain stabilizing orientation in collective neighbourhood/house behaviour. In this world their daughters became go-between mother-figures between these actors and younger generations although the latter supposedly "never took any notice of these grannies", or "no influence whatsoever". They produced "common meanings" of belonging either through the workplace of husbands, or through belonging to the "same place and roots", the same origins ("zemlyachka" - "from the same land" e.g. from the Smolensk region, or Saratov region, etc.). These "common roots" between women might even have outweighed any other differences, like social, economic, etc. in producing a dominant "dimension" of this social "space", even the opinion majority in the granny group. In a story of one of my respondents, for example, an issue of divorce and single motherhood was changing from conservative and judgemental to emphatic and valued due to the presence of the three women from the Smolensk region, with their daughters as professionals, with good careers, divorced and with children.

Such "granny clubs" were indispensable in shaping the structures of feeling (Williams 1997; 132) as gendered patterns, particularly, in constructing the feeling of (trans)local belonging -

what it means to be a "Russian woman", for example, on (1) a translocal level of (2) personal identification with a locality (3) within an extended-family mapping across the Soviet Union. On the other hand, this translocal level was clearly linked up to a localised sense of "common place". Belonging to such "club" would legitimise a woman or her relatives to obtain from a "granny club", sitting in the sun, an overwhelming information of her family members - if they went shopping, dating, walking, etc.. These levels also included the construction of local "fused" collective memory - rural childhoods, experiences of war, cross-generational memory of a neighbourhood. Focal to all these levels of belonging, identification, memory was a family cohesion, stabilisation, finding decisions or understanding of problems the children and grandchildren.

The private and para-public spaces should be seen as spaces inflecting women's gender identification with traditional knowledge and values of what it means to be a woman. We see, on the one hand, the reproduction of elderly women's cultural habits. On the other hand, the lack of elder women's public spaces so obviously unveiled the following - the socialist city economy did not produce spaces for certain groups of people in terms of their age and gender. To give an example, already in the mid-1990s, in Riga, in my former neighbourhood that used to have such "granny club" I was highly amazed when I met my old acquaintances - two *babushkas* rushing to a nearby tiny café. They used to be the ones from our 'granny club'. They of course stopped me. And of course they were quite informed about my life (though I had not seen them for ages). And of course one of them told me again to put on a warm scarf not to catch a cold. And of course they told me about those who have already grown in the yard, who have already moved to Russia or America, who had already married and had children, and so on, and so on. However, they told me that they were not going to sit any longer in "this nasty yard" and that they "can afford

each other's company, with a cup of coffee and a piece of cake in a nearby cafe!"

The phrase "this nasty yard" was a perfect verbal micro-reflection of complex transformations in the cities of Latvia that previously had been a well-integrated part of the Soviet industrial circuit. With its collapse, and with a dramatic change in the economic model of postsocialist societies, the relations within communities of origin and migration have significantly been changing in terms of identity formation and belonging in multiple sites. I tried to show the significance of gender, age and power in spatialisation and memorialisation practices for social capitalisation process in the 1980s and even early 1990s. But by the mid-1990s, the new persistent ideologies of ethnicity, identity and gender have definitely presented obstacles to keeping the prior micro-spaces of translocal communities running on.

In dominant re-inventions of dominant definitions of ethnic, gender and cultural belongings and identities, women's roles and relationships with men have been re-imagined and women's access to cultural identity restricted and even devalued. This process has been interfaced with (1) the landsliding social downward mobility in the families, (2) overall impoverishment process, (3) dominant political ideology of ethnic mono-identity and belonging, (4) changes in family relations and family ideologies and (5) sizeable obstacles for crossing the emerging borders and boundaries – both geographic, political, psychological and financial. Furthermore, the processes of separation and disconnection from what had been "a place of attachment in a contrapuntal modernity" (Clifford 1994) in the past, were simultaneously the processes of new sociocultural adaptations and allegiances formed across borders as well as new transnational patterns of mobility to affect the habitual lives of those involved.

The phrase "this nasty yard" signaled social dissociation of those who formerly "belonged" to this place, metonymic of a larger, translocal

Soviet space, on the one hand. On the other, elderly women – if they can afford – have found and make use of now available diversities of public spaces, proper for their age and (if) financially available. Why? They definitely don't feel at ease and secured when sitting in the yard, a space of possible rudeness, aggression and violence. This formerly public space of theirs turned into a non-place, with no "yard" borders and symbolic boundaries to protect from "strangers".

Today these elderly women sometimes travel – now abroad, to the places of origin, emotional attachment, etc., but they keep living with their children and grandchildren who have made their determined choices to live in Latvia, even in the political status of "alien", even in the russophobic climate of dominant political power-trenders. Statements of their granddaughters, Russian-speaking students of University of Latvia, in numerous interviews, are really telling in terms of re-imagining the space, time and figures of social capitalisation in urban Russian-speaking families. Let me quote just a couple of very recent examples:

(1) "We, here, are really SO different from them in Russia."

(2) "No, but they in Russia – they are so different from us, here, in Europe".

(3) "No, we Russians here, are so different from them in Russia – we talk differently, we behave different – we are Baltic Russians".

(It is a pity that one cannot render here the intonation with which they make a stress for difference with "those in Russia").

Feelings of respect and care structured across generations, gender, family and public spaces, have also been eroded due to the current overwhelming social and political devalorisation of people's lives in the Soviet period. Most of Russian-speaking people, in particular, elderly and middle-aged, have to deal with the identities "alien", "occupant", "fifth column", "a hand of Moscow", etc. propagated by dominant political discourses. The younger, thus, in their claims for citizen status, either choose the "difference/

distance from” their ancestors’ imagined homeland or gradually follow the radicalisation of minority nationalist discourse in Latvia. The changes in the ethnic composition of Latvia’s population and the taking of the citizenship of, for instance, Byelorussia and the Ukraine was and is taking place largely on account of a conscious shift on the part of individuals and families alike in their ethnic identification towards ‘non-Russian’. This is a process occurring at the juncture of a complicated maze of political, economic, social, gender, and psychological pressures emanating both from the past and the present and forcing individuals to ‘cast their choice’.

By the same token, ethnic transnational changes taking place as a rule on professional or family grounds often lead to increases in the emotional distance in regards to the perception of belonging to Russia (as the historical homeland where one’s parents and grandparents were born) as well as gradual changes in the scenarios of individual and collective ethnicity such as ‘being Russian in Latvia’ seen as an indicator of a ‘Russian-ness’ different from that of Russia. Meanwhile, the terms “Russian-speaking,” “we Russians,” and “us non-Latvians” as a particular collective identification keep surfacing during the interviews of young women. It is very likely that those phrases reflect the linguistic, cultural, and cognitive outlook in which generations of the interviewed families were raised and educated.

It has recurrently been noted in the recent batch of interviews that the European dimension itself is a parameter of belonging and of difference. Europe is considered to be much more attractive as an image and a destination point of the desire to belong, or a much ‘friendlier’ version of the parameter of ‘one’s own place’ than the ‘national’ or ‘Latvian’ dimensions. The ‘Euro-identity’ is dominantly entering a transnational dimension in the formation of individual and family attitudes favourable to remaining in Latvia and acquiring Latvian citizenship. Meanwhile the ‘European imagination’ draws around Eu-

rope its own ‘boundary’, which was evidenced recently in a city advocacy advertisement poster calling people to vote for acceding to the EU: “Do not exclude yourself from Europe!” Exclusion from Europe, defined in line with familiar orientalist implications, has not attained its equilibrium in the collective consciousness of the people (including Russian speakers) haphazardly, thus echoing the words of an important European official according to whom the process of eastern enlargement of the EU at the same time represented its completion.

In today’s ‘multi-space’ those that find themselves again in the frames of a ‘subaltern’ condition may, unlike the previously imposed community-determined choice of ethnicity that was based on a symbolic unity of the territory of the denomination or ethnicity (like “granny clubs”), also opt for an individual, informed one situated outside of the traditional community and institutional ties. In this way the individual ethnic and gender consciousness prefers the private sphere, the sphere of the family, or newly constructed or reclaimed certain para-private ones (such as the sphere of a religious sect, for instance) – away ‘from this nasty yard’.

However, in the private spaces of their families elderly women confront new and previously unknown experiences and knowledges. They can hardly use their pedagogical urge for their grandchildren as the latter sit next to the computers and talk in the incomprehensible language of “юзер” (user), “дилитнуть” (to delete), “сделать сейв” (to save). What was in old women’s past, is totally devalorised as a form of knowledge, experience, social capital, memory, identity, belonging, and is gradually being re-claimed by their grandchildren already in a different experiential and identitarian framework of Russian-speaking minority in Latvia.

In their families, elderly women are at a loss when their granddaughters and even grandsons politely refuse to eat what they have always cooked for them when they had been small children.

A family fridge can in some cases be a sample of several diets. A number of my young women respondents give me a typical reply: "I respect what my granny cooks but I can't eat it – it is too fat for me. I can't take so many calories, but she keeps saying to me that I am as thin as a fishbone." Availability of public fastfood places or cafeterias also distracts young people from their grannies' kitchens in the evenings and the related rituals of granny pedagogy.

In their vegetable patches, elderly women are not sure who now needs what they grow, can and preserve for winter seasons. "I can buy everything in our market or in the shop, but of course it is always nice to get occasionally a fresh cucumber from my granny's garden. But she should not make the garden into a family industry", – another respondent told me.

However, no less importantly for our future studies, elderly women as *babushkas* are re-imagined in the memories of their grandchildren for constituting their "key circuits of communicative action" (Smith 2001: 4) when the memories of past translocal experiences come together – in diverse and controversial ways – with acquisition of cultural capital and its gender normatives in the social construction of their ethnic identities today. The connections between the domestic domain and the public arena have been analysed to argue for the mutually constitutive process of gender formation and national/ethnic identity in the families embedded in more than one "homeland"/nation-state, for the reconstitution of gender and ethnicity in Soviet/post-Soviet place-making experiences and political implications of such reconstitutions.

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SUMMARY

Using a transnational perspective, this article analyzes a web of relations forged by, around and among women in the age of babushka in the Russian-speaking families of Riga, Latvia, and the ways in which gender, age and power interface the relations in the sphere of the private, intimate, familial. My interest is in looking into how these relations position women of age in certain social formations, in the exchanges of material and intangible resources and symbols between their “origins”

and their “place”. The object of my fieldwork, analysis and argument is elderly women, or babushkas, in the age (Pearsall 1997; Rosow 1965) by which a Soviet woman had already fulfilled her duties and identities of “a working woman” and “a good mother”. It is a woman’s time that actually was never explicitly addressed by Soviet dominant gender ideology behind well-known cultural representations.

Įteikta 2005 06 01

Pateikta spaudai 2005 06 28

Latvijos universitetas,

Lyčių studijų centras