

Maps of Memory

Trauma, Identity and Exile
in Deportation Memoirs from the Baltic States



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Tomas Balkelis

Ethnicity and Identity in the Memoirs of Lithuanian Children Deported to the Gulag

In exile, my friends from the deportation train and I are sitting not on class benches – we are digging salt in Siberian Usol. The salt melts in the water, but not in our memory. It will never melt in the memory.... The memory is stronger than a stone. Our memory is made of diamonds.

From memoirs of Antanina Garmutė¹

Introduction

The displacement of children is a theme rarely examined in scholarly works on Soviet deportations. This can be partly explained by the fact that children, other than the homeless and those considered inveterately delinquent, were seldom a discrete target group for the Soviet repressive apparatus.² Most often they were deported just because they were members of the families of ‘enemies of the socialist state’. Yet one of key premises of this chapter is that deported children should not be viewed as ‘secondary’ victims of a totalitarian regime, nor merely as another voiceless sub-group, but as active and articulate social agents in their own right. My principal aim in this chapter, that investigates the fate of Lithuanian children in Soviet deportations, is not to present a ‘children’s martyrology,’ but to try to understand the complex specificities of children’s perceptions, experiences and actions by paying attention to their own voices.

But why study the forcibly displaced children separately from the parents with whom they were dispatched into exile? Can we understand the Soviet deportations in some different way by focusing on the experiences, actions and testimonies of children instead of those of adults? For one thing, the experiences of children in exile were often different from those of their parents. While adults were subject to brutal collective labour

¹ Parts of an earlier draft of this chapter have been published as ‘Lithuanian Children in the Gulag. Deportations, Ethnicity and Identity, Memoirs of Children Deportees, 1941–1952’ in *Lituanus. Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences*, Vol. 51, Nr.3 (Fall 2005). Published in Aldona Žemaitytė, ed., *Amžinojo įšalo žemėje* [In the Frozen Land] (Vilnius: Vyturys, 1989), pp. 73–74.

² Rosaria Franco, ‘Social Order and Social Policies towards Displaced Children: the Soviet Case, 1917–1953’, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Manchester, 2006).

obligations, their children – while most were also required to undertake forced labour – were sometimes afforded access to schools where they were to receive basic education and to undergo re-socialization as future citizens. The Soviet regime’s treatment of deported children throws light on its perceptions of the collective ‘other’ and the capacities of individuals at different life-stages to undergo reform and rehabilitation. Stalinist attitudes and policies towards deported children also starkly highlight points of confrontation between the regime’s pro-family discourse and its practices of social intervention, as well as between its welfare and penal policies.

In reality, when adult exiles became debilitated by the deportation transports and harsh conditions of exile, their children were often obliged to provide and care for them. In such circumstances, as many sources demonstrate, the children assumed ‘grown-up’ roles in the family. Secondly, therefore, the study of displaced children focuses attention on these subjects’ specific responses to deportation and the disciplinary structures of life in exile. Wittingly or not, children often tested the limits of the Soviet system by adopting behavioural strategies that circumvented, subverted and exposed its ideological fallacies and administrative contradictions. Children’s accounts of life in exile show complex processes of identity-building that need to be studied along experiences of other marginal groups. To paraphrase Katherine Jolluck, who wrote about women in Soviet exile, the testimonies of children can be read as stories of how they strove to create their private and familiar world under conditions of displacement.³ Significantly, unlike their adult relatives, displaced children had little or no experience of normal sedentary life. Their experience is made unique by the fact that their notions of themselves, homeland and society were formed in exile. Examining how the Soviet repressive system treated child deportees, as well as investigating their responses, can be an informative means of shedding light generally on the political system.

In the interwar period, Lithuania as an independent state had developed a strong political and ethnic identity of its own. After the Soviet Union’s invasion and occupation of the Baltic States in 1940, Moscow expended much energy trying to integrate the western non-Russian areas into its territory. Mass deportations were central to this policy of borderland integration. According to one estimate, the arrests and deportations that took place in the Baltic States, eastern regions of Poland, Moldova, and Bukovina, from April 1940 to June 1941, swept into the Soviet interior about 438,000

³ Katherine R. Jolluck, *Exile and Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002), p. 20.

individuals.⁴ The second wave of displacement that continued between 1945 and 1953 forced into exile and camps another 256,000 people from the Baltics alone.⁵ In Lithuania, about 17,500 people were deported in 1941 and about 132,000 during 1945–1953.⁶ Among them there were about 39,000 children.⁷

With reference to the Lithuanian children in exile, this study is particularly concerned to explore the relationship between displacement and ethnicity. If ethnic identity, as many social scientists claim, is socially constructed and culturally transmitted through the interaction between the individual and the wider co-ethnic community, how then does displacement affect the construction of identity?⁸ Uprooted from their ethnic social environment early in their lives, how did the Lithuanian children interpret the motives and experiences of their exile? How did displacement shape their perceptions of homeland? What role did ethnicity play in their strategies of survival and the formation of their identities in exile?

This chapter is also concerned to examine children's subjective experiences of displacement as represented in their exile diaries and memoirs. In 1989, the Lithuanian Archive of Exile [Lietuvių tremties archyvas] published a collection of memoirs by seven people who as children or teenagers had been deported between 1941 and 1953 from Lithuania to Soviet Russia.⁹ This anthology, as well as writings by other former Lithuanian child deportees published during the 1990s and most recently, served as principal sources for this study.¹⁰ To be sure, most of

⁴ Terry Martin, 'Stalinist Forced Relocation Policies: Patterns, Causes, Consequences', in Myron Weiner, ed., *Demography and National Security* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), p. 323.

⁵ Vladimir N. Zemskov, 'Prinuditelnye migratsii iz Pribaltiki v 1940–1950 godakh', *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, Nr. 1, 1993, pp. 4–19. Also quoted in Martin, 'Stalinist Forced Relocation Policies', p. 324.

⁶ Arvydas Anušauskas, *Lietuvių tautos sovietinis naikinimas, 1940–1958 metais* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1996), p. 403.

⁷ This figure is based on the estimates of V. N. Zemskov (the data for 1945–1951) and L. Kerulis (the data for 1941). See, Vladimir N. Zemskov, 'Masovoe osvobodzenie spetsposelentsev i ssilnykh, 1954–1960', *Sociologicheskie issledovania*, 1991, Nr. 1, 1991, pp. 5–26; Leonardas Kerulis, *A Registry of Deported Lithuanians* (Chicago: Pasaulio lietuvių archyvas, 1981), p. 518. See also most recent data provided in Arvydas Anušauskas, *Teroras: 1940–1958* (Vilnius: Versus Aureus, 2012), p. 279.

⁸ Arash Abizadeh, 'Ethnicity, Race, and a Possible Humanity', *World Order*, Vol. 33, Nr. 1 (2001), pp. 23–34; Joan Ferrante, Prince Browne, eds, *The Social Construction of Race and Ethnicity in the United States* (New York: Longman, 1998); Franke Wilmer, 'Identity, Culture and Historicity: the Social Construction of Ethnicity in the Balkans', *World Affairs*, Vol. 160, Nr. 1 (Summer 1997), pp. 3–14; Fredrick Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1969).

⁹ Žemaitytė (ed.), *Amžinojo įsalo žemėje*.

¹⁰ Irena Kurtinaitytė, (ed.), *Sibiro vaikai: Lietuvos vaikų tremtinių atsiminimai* (Kaunas: Naujasis Lankas, 2011); Stanislovas Abromavičius, *Tremties vaikai*, (Kaunas: Lietuvos politinių kalinių ir tremtinių sąjunga, 2012); Elena Stulgienė (ed.), *Tremties dienoraščiai: Bliūdžių šeimos tragedija* (Vilnius: LGGTC, 2011).

these testimonies were written from the perspective of adulthood, having been composed in the decades following return from exile, although some contain entries in diary style, suggesting that their authors referred to, or directly incorporated, material from their own childhood journals. The retrospective adult standpoint naturally imposes specific narrative tropes on the representation of early experiences, in particular, an emphasis on the collective suffering of the ethnic community, which imparts a wider meaning to the child's more inchoate, more personalised impressions. I discuss this later in this chapter, with reference to Dalia Grinkevičiūtė's memoirs, which exist in two versions, one written immediately during her displacement, the other from the perspective of mature adulthood.

In addition, the reader should be aware that most of these exile accounts were written in the post-1990 political context of independent Lithuania which imposed on them certain generic features. Principal among these is an emphasis on ethnicity and on collective above individual suffering. In their accounts, the personal injustices suffered by Lithuanian deportees are greatly reinforced, and sometimes overshadowed, by the communal hostility they felt towards the Soviet regime and their loyalty towards independent Lithuania. At the same time the new Lithuanian political elite used these narratives as political tools in their struggle to re-establish and consolidate national independence.

Nevertheless, my contention here is that all these works, which recount childhood perceptions and experiences in often minute detail, are able to convey an intense immediacy to events described, as well as vividly to communicate the psychological, emotional and material dislocations, dilemmas and challenges that their subjects faced during the years of the deportation. Reading them as a *corpus*, it is also possible, to some extent, to identify the principal elements of the retrospective framework, and to 'see through' the adult apparatus into the child's own cognition of their world of displacement. It would be a great misconception to treat these accounts purely as a product of the political context of the 1990s when they were written.

The first part of this essay briefly examines the scale, motives, and character of the two major Soviet deportations from Lithuania in 1941 and 1945–1953, and the place of children in them. The next two sections discuss children's experiences in the Gulag with an emphasis on their survival strategies and the meanings of ethnicity for their identities.¹¹

¹¹ In this chapter the use of the term 'Gulag' does not follow the narrow definition of the GULAG as a Soviet system of labour camps and prisons (*Gosudarstvenoe Upravlenie Lagerei*). It follows the modern usage of the 'Gulag' as the whole Soviet system of forced labour including all types of camps, prisons and

Children in Soviet Deportations from Lithuania, 1941–1953

In Lithuania, the first Soviet mass deportation that started in the early hours of Saturday, 14 June 1941 and continued until 17 June, swept into exile about 17,500 people.¹² Among the deported, 70 percent were Lithuanians, 17.7 percent Poles, 9.2 percent Jews and 2 percent Russians. Social groups targeted most severely were farmers (29%), former state officials (16.8%), workers (14.2%), housewives (10.7%), and teachers (8.7%).¹³

There were about 5,500 children among the first contingent of Lithuanian deportees (see Table 1). According to Leonardas Kerulis, these included 965 children under four years of age; 1,918 between five and ten; and 2,276 between eleven and eighteen. Almost all of them were deported as family members of 'enemies of the Soviet state,' as defined by Soviet juridical and administrative classifications of the new borderland populations. The Soviet regime was in fact concerned principally to integrate the newly acquired East European territories into state territory by cleansing them of all population groups potentially harmful to the Soviet regime: security and Sovietization were the primary motives for the forced resettlements.¹⁴ Criteria for selecting those to be deported were loose – social status and political views obviously were important, but many were expelled on the basis of their ethnicity alone, their religious affiliation, or simply family ties.¹⁵ The sweeping, pre-emptive nature of this borderlands purge dictated the logic of including minors among the so-called 'dangerous elements.'

special exile settlements for men, women and children (*spetsposeleniia*). The majority of the Lithuanian child deportees found themselves in these special settlements. Political prisoners were kept mostly in camps and prisons, while deportees were placed in special settlements.

¹² Arvydas Anušauskas, '1998 m. duomenys', in Ignatavičius I., I., ed., *Lietuvos naikinimas ir tautos kova* (Vilnius: Vaga, 1999), p. 577; Kerulis, *A Registry of Deported Lithuanians*, p. 517; Eugenijus Grunskis, *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai, 1940–1941 ir 1945–1953 metais* [Deportations of the Population in Lithuania, 1940–1941 and 1945–1953] (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 1996), p. 141; Anušauskas, *Teroras, 1940–1953*, p. 65.

¹³ Birutė Burauskaitė (ed.), *Lietuvos gyventojų genocidas*, vol. 1 (Vilnius: Spauda, 1992), pp. 782–784.

¹⁴ Martin, 'Stalinist Forced Relocation Policies: Patterns, Causes, Consequences', p. 322; Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), pp. 421–22; Grunskis, *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai, 1940–1941 ir 1945–1953 metais*, pp. 22–30.

¹⁵ Terry Martin claimed that after 1941 'there was not only a trend towards ethnic deportations, but also an increasing ethnicization of the existing special settler population'. See, Martin, 'Stalinist Forced Relocation Policies: Patterns, Causes, Consequences', p. 329.

Table 1. Children Deported from Lithuania, 1940–1941

Age	Boys	Girls	TOTAL
Younger than 1	166	150	316
1–4	506	443	949
5–10	1,003	915	1,918
11–18	1,159	1,117	2,276
TOTAL	2,834	2,625	5,459

Source: Kerulis, Leonardas, *A Registry of Deported Lithuanians* (Chicago: Lithuanian World Archives, 1981) p. 518. According to Kerulis, the total number deported from Lithuania in 1940–1941 was 19,285 (p. 517).

The second wave of Soviet deportations from Lithuania started in 1945 and continued until 1953. According to Eugenijus Grunskis, there were thirty-four separate deportations in Lithuania between 1945 and 1953, which forced into exile about 111,400 people.¹⁶ Data of the Soviet Ministry of the Interior of 1 January 1953 shows that there were 80,189 registered 'special exiles' from Lithuania who had been deported between 1945 and 1949, including 20,074 children. In addition, there were 5,167 children among the 18,097 Lithuanians deported in a further operation in 1951.¹⁷

Although many victims described the 1941 deportation as the most brutal, the post-1945 deportations were larger in scale and more selective in targeted groups. Children again figured as 'members of families' of deportees, although the two main categories of Soviet 'state enemies' to be deported now became 'Lithuanian bandits' and the so-called 'traitors of the fatherland'.¹⁸ The armed resistance of Lithuanian forest partisans, which continued from 1944 until the early fifties, provided a continuous fresh intake of deportees for the Soviet forced labour system. The authorities comfortably stretched 'traitors' category to include all other potentially unreliable groups as well as their family members. This post-war pattern of deportations was briefly interrupted by collectivization and the ensuing 1947 mass deportation of Lithuanian 'kulaks' to Siberia, when about 33,000 farmers and their family members were deported.¹⁹

¹⁶ Grunskis, *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai, 1940–1941 ir 1945–1953 metais*, p. 189.

¹⁷ Vladimir N. Zemskov, 'Massovoe osvobozhdenie spetsposelentsev i ssylnykh, 1954–1960', *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, Nr. 1 (1991), pp. 6–7.

¹⁸ Grunskis, *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai, 1940–1941 ir 1945–1953 metais*, p. 74.

¹⁹ Martin, 'Stalinist Forced Relocation Policies: Patterns, Causes, Consequences', p. 324. These numbers are included in the total figures for deportees given earlier.

One of the most striking features of the Soviet deportations in Lithuania was the Soviet authorities' deliberate policy of targeting entire family groups. A 1941 order issued by the Soviet People's Commissariat of the Interior (NKVD, the political police) set out detailed instructions for detaining the families of selected individuals, and providing for their transportation, distribution, and employment in the Soviet interior. The underlying motive was to ensure that families of victims were no longer able to remain cohesive social units presenting a potential risk to the new structures of political power. These instructions, signed by NKVD Chief I. Serov 'with regard to the Baltic deportations,' included a paragraph 'How to separate the deportee's family from a head of the family':²⁰

Although according to these instructions the deportees' family were meant to be given 'no longer than two hours for preparation' and each member was allowed to take up to 100 kg of food, clothing, and personal belongings, in reality the NKVD and local militia who conducted the arrests rarely followed these directives. Looting, drinking, intimidation, and beating were common as entire families were arrested and deported as they were found, without adequate clothing and provisions. One former Lithuanian child deportee recalled the arrival of soldiers at her family house after her father was sentenced as the former head of a regional government in independent Lithuania (the memoir writer was four at the time):

Our entire family was deported in the early morning of 13 June 1941. Seven soldiers came, forced us from our sleep; they seated father on a stool, ordered him to raise his hands and pointed a pistol at him. They seated us four children at the table, we were crying and screaming, afraid for father. [...] After they finished the search, they piled all our books in the yard and set them on fire telling us that they were bourgeois literature. My youngest sister was only two years old.²¹

The Kitkauskai family were deported for their sixteen-year-old son's alleged involvement in an anti-Soviet organisation. He and his classmates were arrested in their school classroom and taken to a local NKVD headquarters for interrogation.²² In Kaunas, during the arrest of eight-year-old Jokūbas Baronas, he was shot through his shoulder – shooting into the ceiling was a common practice among the security forces to intimidate the

²⁰ 'Peoples' Commissar I. Serov's instructions regarding a deportation of the dangerous population from Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, May 19, 1941', in Antanas Tyla, ed., *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai 1940–1941, 1944–1953 metais: dokumentų rinkinys* (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 1995), pp. 152–58.

²¹ Žemaitytė (ed.), *Amžinojo įšalo žemėje*, pp. 188–89.

²² Žemaitytė (ed.), *Amžinojo įšalo žemėje*, p. 154.

victims.²³ Thirteen-year-old Antanina Garmutė was seized separately from her family since her parents were not at home at the time of the arrest; she was ordered to gather her belongings in five minutes. After an attempted escape, she was beaten into unconsciousness. She later offered to buy herself out with money or gold:

I had nothing and could not buy myself out. But there were some means to do that: Radevičius [one of the militiamen] started rummaging in our things, emptied the bags made from bed covers, and then started putting in them everything that seemed to him of value: my mother's home made linens and threads of linen ... He put inside the bags different small things, even a bunch of long wax candles. I was horrified.²⁴

After the seizure of their belongings, Antanina and her family were still deported.

There were also cases of mistaken arrest. In one instance, the Širkos family (wife and four children) were mistakenly deported instead of the Šurkos family. After Mr. Širka was released on 18 July 1941, he tried to stop the deportation of his wife and children. Unfortunately his efforts came too late: his entire family was already in Trofimov, Iakutia (in the Russian Far North), where all except one sixteen-year-old daughter starved to death in 1943.²⁵

The arrest of a deportee's family generally occurred in their home. The first encounter with the state's repressive power shattered conceptions of private comfort and domestic security. Further encounters escalated in brutality and intensified their alienation from habitual places and norms. After their arrest, families were loaded into cattle carriages (on average 30–40 people per carriage) together with their personal belongings and transported to the Soviet interior.²⁶ As a rule, women, children and the elderly were deported separately from heads of households.²⁷ This amplified their suffering: the deportees' diaries are full of references to the early deaths of small children, pregnant women, and elderly people from suffocation, congestion, heat and dehydration inside the train carriages. In one set of memoirs, a former child deportee recalls the death of woman named Žeglienė, who died after giving birth in a train carriage near Omsk:

²³ Grunskis, *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai, 1940–1941 ir 1945–1953 metais*, p. 132.

²⁴ Žemaitytė (ed.), *Amžinojo įšalo žemėje*, pp. 48–49.

²⁵ 'Bolševikų klaidų aukos', *Lietuvos Raudonojo kryžiaus žinios*, Nr. 9 (16 October 1941), p. 1.

²⁶ Also there were numerous cases when 70–80 people were crammed into one carriage. See, Grunskis, *Lietuvos gyventojų trėmimai, 1940–1941 ir 1945–1953 metais*, p. 36.

²⁷ There were some deportations, for example in 1948, when all members of the family were deported together. See, Vladimir Bashkuev, 'Lithuanian Deportees in Buryat-Mongolia, 1948–1950', in R. Butner (ed.), *Russia and the Baltic States* (Samara: Zaria, 2001), p. 252.

Žeglienė was lifted from the train and laid on the ground. But she had lost blood and died, and the baby was screaming next to her. We don't know whether anyone took him because our train moved ahead after letting a military transport pass by. The dead mother and her newborn remained on the ground.²⁸

Armed convoys were given responsibility for clearing deportees' corpses from the rail carriages; often the bodies were simply dumped on the track or in a nearby forest.²⁹ Despite the cruelties, the rate of children's death during transportation was relatively low; in many instances the deportees were provided with medical care.³⁰

How did the deported children try to make sense of their arrest and the ensuing journey to the East? It is impossible to offer a generalised answer to this question. All shared confusion, fear, and shock of the experience, but different individuals explained their ordeal in different ways. The fact that most of them described their exile experiences when they were adults, however, did impose a specific narrative framework on their accounts, most commonly that of the collective suffering of their entire ethnic group. Antanina Garmutė, deported at the age of thirteen without her parents, described her journey into exile as a collective experience:

... Our transport was again and again passed by other deportation trains that had left after ours. 'People', someone said, 'the whole of Lithuania is travelling!' My fading consciousness was suddenly penetrated by a thought: 'If the whole of Lithuania, then all the trains will be full of my relatives! ... It is then worth living. I'm not afraid even being shot with my people!'³¹

If the suffering was understood as an ordeal that had befallen the entire community, it could give some individuals a meaning and the motivation to survive. For some, personal misery became less significant in the context of the suffering of their entire people.

The deportations represented a break in childhood time, while physical displacement also meant forced abandonment of traditional places of comfort – home and the native social and cultural milieu. Dalia Grinkevičiūtė, deported at the age of fourteen, eight years later wrote an account in which she vividly characterised her journey to Siberia as the end of her childhood:

²⁸ A. Andriukaitis, 'Pasmertieji' in Eugenijus Ignatavičius (ed.), *Kryžius šiaurėje* (Vilnius: Vyturys, 1992), p. 252.

²⁹ Juzefa Lupeikytė, *Karlagas* (Vilnius: Valstybinis leidybos centras, 1993), p. 17.

³⁰ Bashkuev, 'Lithuanian Deportees in Buryat-Mongolia, 1948–1950', p. 253.

³¹ Žemaitytė (ed.), *Amžinojo įsalo žemėje*, p. 57.

I can feel that one stage of my life is over. Period. From now on there will start a new one, unclear and frightening ... The struggle for life is starting, Dalia. Gymnasium, childhood, fun, jokes, theatre and girlfriends – all are the past. You are already an adult. You are already fourteen. ... The first act of my life struggle is on.³²

For Grinkevičiūtė and others who chose to interpret this ordeal from an individual rather than collective perspective, their journey into exile served as a 'right of passage' into adulthood. But the transition had to take place swiftly, those who were still too young had to grow up or perish. Nevertheless, the abandonment of childhood space and time did not by itself provide the children with a basis for developing new identities. Their exile identity, in other words, was not only formed by loss, but shaped, hardened, and tested by their everyday life in the Gulag.

Strategies of Survival

What do the children's memoirs tell about their survival strategies in exile? How did they manage to adjust to forced labour and the Soviet administrative system in the Gulag?

After her arrest in 1941 at the age of fourteen, Dalia Grinkevičiūtė was deported to a forced labour settlement in eastern Siberia. In 1949 she managed to escape to Lithuania and wrote a memoir of her displacement. She was caught in 1951 and sent back to Siberia again. Before her second arrest, she buried the manuscript of her memoir in a garden. Thinking it lost, she wrote a second version thirty years later. However in 1991, three years after Grinkevičiūtė's death, the early memoir was fortuitously unearthed. This find, which coincided with the nationalist revival that led to Lithuania's independence the previous year, produced a shock in society and opened a public debate on the Gulag's victims. As a result, numerous other deportees' memoirs came to light. Vytautas Landsbergis, a political leader of the Lithuanian national movement, described Grinkevičiūtė's memoir as fulfilling 'a duty ... to testify in the court of humanity, a court to judge Communism'.³³ Extracts of her writings were included in educational programmes for Lithuanian secondary schools.

At the same time some former deportees asserted publicly that Grinkevičiūtė's memoir did not accurately reflect their own

³² Dalia Grinkevičiūtė, *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros* (Vilnius: Lietuvos rašytojų sąjungos leidykla, 1997), p. 37.

³³ Vytautas Landsbergis, 'A Piercing Light' in Dalia Grinkevičiūtė, *A Stolen Youth, A Stolen Homeland* (Vilnius: Vilsa, 2002), p. 5.

experiences. Arvydas Vilkaitis, who was interned at the same Gulag camp, claimed that her narrative was inaccurate and even unethical. He stated that 'her early memoir was written hurriedly' and that 'her teen imagination processed secondary things in a peculiar way'.³⁴ He was most upset by her critical judgement of other Lithuanian deportees, her depictions of their moral degradation, corruption, and egoism. He claimed that her perspective was egotistical and failed to convey the shared experience of the deportees. Other former deportees, however, defended Grinkevičiūtė's memoir, arguing that it was precisely the subjective and self-expressive nature of her work that made it uniquely capable of communicating what they had undergone and how they had survived in the Gulag.³⁵

Indeed, Grinkevičiūtė's testimony is exceptional because she vividly and without patriotic pathos describes the dehumanizing effect that the Gulag had both on the perpetrators and its victims. In her youth Grinkevičiūtė evidently did not feel constrained by the need to tell her personal story from the perspective of collective suffering of the entire ethnic community of deportees. Instead, she described it from a perspective of a displaced teenage girl with a strong individual voice, a child whose childhood has been stolen.

Ethnicity in her early memoir serves as a unifying bond among the deportees mostly in situations where at least some semblance of normal social life is still possible. For example, Dalia is deeply moved by the collective singing of Lithuanian deportees on the shores of the River Angara. ('A song would unite us, would make us stronger, as if telling us that we will have to suffer much, but Lithuania's children must endure'.³⁶) But she discovers that the ethnic, cultural, and even religious bonds that unite the Lithuanians may dissolve under the extreme conditions of the Gulag's inferno. Thus she is ironic about those Lithuanian women deportees who try to save themselves from starvation by entering into sexual relations with Soviet administrators, guards, and workers:

... I pretend that I sleep as I watch how Štarienė is flirting with a soldier. She is a very pious woman, or at least wants to make such an impression, a true patriot. If she hears anywhere how a child sings a Russian song, she smiles contemptuously and reproaches the parents.

³⁴ Arvydas Vilkaitis, *Gyvensim* (Vilnius: LGGRTC, 1999), pp. 412–13.

³⁵ Violeta Davoliūtė, *Testimony: from the Poetics of Place to the Politics of Memory*. Unpublished Ph. D. thesis (University of Toronto, 2005), pp. 45–65; Marius Ivaškevičius, 'Meno Pauzė', *Šiaurės Atėnai*, Nr. 643 (8 March 2003), p. 37.

³⁶ Grinkevičiūtė, *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros*, p. 43.

Meanwhile, she is making out with NKVD men and Russians. ... She is beautiful, but absolutely mischievous. She smiles to a Russian, and he is touching her and laying her down. When she talks about her husband Bronius who is in camps, it seems real tears are running from her blue eyes. She is a Jesuit.³⁷

Grinkevičiūtė ridicules deportees' hypocrisy and their attempts to moralize others. At the same time she is aware that their unethical behaviour is produced by the extreme circumstances ('they could not be accused of depravity, because all instincts had been already atrophied by hunger'.³⁸). The plight of women forces her to rethink her childhood notions of ethical behaviour in the middle of the complex social network of the adults' world of camps. In the face of this ordeal, collective notions of suffering are being replaced by the individual's will to survive and to preserve ethical integrity. This ethical dimension is strongly present in the first, youthful and most immediate version of Grinkevičiūtė's memoir, which she wrote in her early twenties. It is less apparent in the second memoir, which she wrote in her early fifties.³⁹

According to her first memoir, Grinkevičiūtė is already aware in her early teens that it is the camp system that is primarily responsible for this dehumanization of deportees. She is appalled that her name is replaced by a number in a camp. In this anonymity, camp rules and orders of behaviour deserve no respect and must be circumvented and subverted in every situation, as long as it does not threaten her survival. Grinkevičiūtė is proud of the fact that she is sentenced in a camp trial for stealing wood for her dying mother. Standing in front of the camp prosecutor, she observes how four other detainees are lying to defend themselves ('... The whole brigade lies. The Soviet Union lied and will lie forever. They stole, they steal and they will steal'.⁴⁰). She refuses to lie herself and openly confesses that she stole deliberately and with no shame, to save the life of her sick mother. The scene reaches its culmination as the four accused who denied their guilt are sentenced to two years, while Grinkevičiūtė is absolved on the basis of her young age and confession.

Memoirs of other Lithuanian child deportees are also full of references to their ability to survive the Gulag by finding holes in a system built on the notion of collective property. Jūratė Bičiūnaitė, deported

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³⁹ Both versions of her memoirs can be compared in Grinkevičiūtė, *A Stolen Youth, A Stolen Homeland*.

⁴⁰ Grinkevičiūtė, *A Stolen Youth, A Stolen Homeland*, p. 74.

at the age of seventeen, steals wood from a local Soviet collective farm and aluminium plates from her camp's canteen.⁴¹ A younger brother of Paulina Motiečienė, deported in her early teens, steals raw dough from a camp bakery for his family. Child prisoners in Trovimosk steal frozen fish from a local fishing factory. In the evening in their barrack, they laugh at each other's stories about how they smuggled out still-wriggling fish by squeezing them into their jacket sleeves and sneaking them out under the careful gaze of the camp guard. This enables their families to withstand scurvy through the harsh Russian winter. Thanks to their childish ingenuity and skills, children in exile often replace their parents as principle guardians for their younger brothers and sisters, as well as looking after their parents. Grinkevičiūtė nurtures her dying mother for several months ('you have to take care of your mother, to replace your father'⁴²). She is even able to escape with her to Lithuania where her mother dies and has to be buried secretly. The seventeen year-old Bičiūnaitė takes care of her paralysed brother who is unable to walk.⁴³ This early entrance into the adulthood toughens children's identities and earns them the respect and even admiration of adults in their common pursuit of survival.

The Soviet Gulag was built as a system of forced labour, and the large numbers of deported children were an integral part of it. Occasionally, the children were organized in special 'children brigades,' but more usually they were forced to work alongside adult deportees. Fifteen-year-old Grinkevičiūtė worked along adult prisoners for eighteen hour days in a collective farm.⁴⁴ Thirteen-year-old Garmutė, as a member of the children's brigade, was assigned to the task of filling sacks with salt in a salt factory.⁴⁵ Antanas Abromaitis, deported at the age of ten, was sent to fish with nets in the Lena River and the Laptev Sea. Bičiūnaitė had to work in a stone quarry.⁴⁶ These children were often expected to fulfil the same work quotas as adults. Those who failed received only a small portion of their daily amount of bread, which was the usual means of punishing ineffective workers. Grinkevičiūtė describes her experience of being forced to carry flour sacks and food boxes together with adult male deportees:

⁴¹ Jūratė Bičiūnaitė, *Jaunystė prie Laptevų jūros* (Vilnius: Mintis, 1990), pp. 34–35.

⁴² Grinkevičiūtė, *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros*, p. 37.

⁴³ Bičiūnaitė, *Jaunystė prie Laptevų jūros*, p. 45.

⁴⁴ Grinkevičiūtė, *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros*, p. 40.

⁴⁵ Žemaitytė (ed.), *Amžinojo įsalo žemėje*, p. 63.

⁴⁶ Bičiūnaitė, *Jaunystė prie Laptevų jūros*, p. 33.

Men are carrying two sacks at a time. They load one sack on my shoulders. One step, and it becomes dark in my eyes ... I feel how I'm swinging to both sides. I wake up on the deck. The falling sack has dislocated my shoulder. 'How old are you?' 'Fifteen.' 'Strange, fifteen and you cannot lift a sack. In our places twelve year olds are already loading. What a rotten people!' – a brigadier says ...⁴⁷

Eventually, Grinkevičiūtė feels proud that she is able to fulfil the daily workload of an adult deportee; this earns her camp's respect.

In Garmutė's exile settlement, children were asked to produce 500 bags of salt per day: 'we would not make it; there would be only about 200 at the end of the day. Then all of us who were still able to hold a spade would be sent out to dig salt.'⁴⁸ In such circumstances, only the toughest of them, or those who had adult guardians or protectors, were able to survive. In her memoir, Garmutė recalls how on Trovimosk Island (on the Arctic shore of Yakutia), after the death of the family head Baranauskas, the man's wife and five children died of starvation:

... Their eight-year-old daughter Birutė was still around people. She was asking everyone to take her into their family promising, 'I'm not going to eat much' ... After several days she was found dead on her bed.⁴⁹

Some children fared better by taking advantage of limited opportunities to obtain physically less demanding jobs and positions in exile settlements. Some, such as Motiečienė, found employment as baby-sitters and house cleaners with local party functionaries.⁵⁰ Seven-year old Laima Viburytė was able to improve her food ration by cleaning houses of Russian officers.⁵¹ Others, such as Garmutė, who later found work as a trainee geologist, were lucky to find employment outside their exile settlements. This type of work strengthened their human dignity and provided them at least with a temporary illusion of 'normal life'. Garmutė writes, 'An exile who works among free and cultured people gradually starts to think about themselves as a human being.'⁵²

Those who managed to establish at least minimal social contacts with local people outside also fared better than those whose social world remained isolated within a deportee community. In this respect the

⁴⁷ Grinkevičiūtė, *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros*, p. 57.

⁴⁸ Žemaitytė (ed.), *Amžinojo įsalo žemėje*, p. 53.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵¹ Stanislovas Abromavičius, *Tremties vaikai* (Kaunas: Lietuvos politinių kalinių ir tremtinių sąjunga, 2012), p. 151.

⁵² Žemaitytė (ed.), *Amžinojo įsalo žemėje*, p. 77.



Lithuanian Children Born in Siberia, Taljan, 1955



Lithuanian Deportees at Child's Funeral, Igarka, 1948

so-called 'special deportees', who had some freedom of movement, were in a more advantageous position than camp prisoners. Seventeen year-old Bičiūnaitė, for example, was able to establish some business contacts with a local Russian peasant family, trading her hand made tools for milk products. This helped her relatives to survive a harsh Siberian winter.

Despite the extraordinarily ruthless character of the Gulag system, deported children were able to benefit from its educational and welfare provisions. In Buryatia, Lithuanian children who had lost their parents were placed in special shelters and orphanages.⁵³ Grinkevičiūtė, deported to Trofimovsk, one of the most brutal Far Northern camps on the shore of the Laptev Sea, where the annual mortality rate of the deportees was about thirty percent, recalled how happy she was to attend camp school; it shortened her long workday by four hours.⁵⁴ A few years after her deportation, Motiečienė was allowed to study in a medical school in Syktyvkar, the only Lithuanian student in the entire school. Bičiūnaitė was able to attend art and music lessons in a local art studio.⁵⁵ Algirdas Marcinkevičius, deported at the age of six, wrote that classes in his camp school contained 25–30 pupils. Since there was no paper, they used newspapers and wrote between the printed lines. Teachers in camp schools often did not have any pedagogical education and experience, and physical punishment was common. Sometimes this took extreme forms. One child deportee described how:

once they shut me in a special room with a small baby bear. And the angry beast started fighting and raving. I was able to beat him back with frozen fish that filled the room. ... As long as the bear ate his fish, he would not touch me, but when he finished, he would tumble onto me again.⁵⁶

Often children were able to adapt to the Soviet repressive system more effectively than adult deportees. Despite heavy labour requirements, they still had limited access to the educational system, while their abilities to develop private social networks outside deportee communities helped them, and their families, to survive in the most adverse circumstances. Although ethnic communities of deportees offered some protection to these children, they also demanded the children's rapid integration as labourers and providers. Children's strategies of survival, their learned or instinctive autonomy, took them outside and beyond the ethnic

⁵³ Bashkuev, 'Lithuanian Deportees in Buryat-Mongolia, 1948–1950', p. 260.

⁵⁴ Grinkevičiūtė, *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros*, p. 63.

⁵⁵ Bičiūnaitė, *Saunystė prie Laptevų jūros*, p. 33.

⁵⁶ Žemaitytė (ed.), *Amžinojo įšalo žemėje*, p. 192.

communities to which they 'belonged'. Survival was also a function of their ability to circumvent the rules of the Gulag system. As a result, the Soviet repressive system created an entire generation of young people who harboured no illusions about life in the Soviet state. One former child deportee chose to describe her entire deportation experience as 'the Golgotha of my life':

Oh Golgotha! ... You were the first that shaped my character. This is where my determination was born. ... This Golgotha was my first life teacher, brutal and uncompassionate. It taught me to fight and to win. And here ... I started to feel a silent hatred and [need for] revenge against all who humiliate human beings and make them into animals.⁵⁷

Ethnicity and Perspectives on Homeland

If children's life stories reveal their personal strategies of survival in Soviet exile, they also speak about the significance of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds for their evolving identities. Did their ethnicity solidify their identities by shielding them from the brutality of the Gulag? Or was it something that created problems for integration and, consequently, for their survival? To what extent could children rely on their pre-exile links with homeland, and to what extent did this homeland have to be re-imagined?

There is no doubt that the ethnicity of the deportees (including the children among them) played a key role in shaping their personal and collective identities during exile. This holds true for most of the Soviet deported nationalities in the Gulag system, and is vindicated by their own testimonies. Anne Applebaum has noted how, starting from 1939, the Soviet repressive system was flooded by a huge wave of so-called 'foreigners' – deportees and prisoners from recently occupied ethnic borderlands of the Soviet Union.⁵⁸ As a result, entire ethnic communities were literally embedded into the Gulag's social structure. The new exiles were drawn to each other not only by their common cultural, social, religious, political or kinship links, as entire families were deported together, but also by a shared feeling of hostility to the Soviet state that occupied their homelands.

⁵⁷ Grinkevičiūtė, *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros*, p. 116.

⁵⁸ One of the Russian camp prisoners, Lev Razgon, described them: 'having been swept from their own country to the far north of Russia by an alien and hostile historical force which they could not comprehend, they were instantly recognizable by the quality of their possessions. We were always alerted by their arrival in Ustvymlag by the appearance of exotic items of clothing among our criminal inmates.' Razgon quoted in Applebaum, *A History of the Gulag*, p. 421.

The Lithuanian deportees were no exception. Their memoirs often drew a sharp distinction between the freedom and hopes of 'normal' life before the Soviet occupation and the oppression and fear afterwards. The majority of the Lithuanian population regarded the Soviet occupation of their country in the summer of 1940 with anger and resentment. A few days after the Stalinist authorities in Lithuania commenced the mass deportation of 14–17 June 1941, Lithuanian nationalist activists launched an armed rebellion against the occupiers with the aim of re-establishing an independent state.⁵⁹ Five days after the Lithuanian deportation ended, the Soviet Union found itself at war with Hitler's invading army. These factors contributed to the particular suspicion and hostility which Lithuanian deportees encountered from the very start of their exile.

The first encounters of the Lithuanian child deportees with local populations in the Soviet interior reveal the hostility and anger that the locals felt toward these 'fascist prisoners', as they were most commonly labelled. This is how one of them, deported at the age of eighteen in 1941, describes a deportees' train stop in Russia:

Once we stopped in a big city station. Nearby there was a military transport with wounded soldiers. There were crowds of people everywhere. At that moment our train doors were opened to give us food. The people ... started questioning the guards who we were and where we were from. [The guards] told them that we were fascists from the Baltics. The crowd attacked us with stones and demanded the guards hand us over to be tried, to allow us to be killed. After displaying us for a while like beasts, the guards closed the train doors.⁶⁰

Another child deportee notes that 'local people mocked the deported 'fascists' who deserved no mercy and had to be beaten up'. He recalls that 'teenagers used to surround our clubhouse and break the windows and doors; they would not let anybody out. Once young Lithuanians had to defend themselves with bricks taken from an oven'.⁶¹

Other deportees did not show any compassion to the ethnic deportees either. The latter's ethnicity was a sufficient reason to consider them as political enemies. In one case, a group of Lithuanian children, having spent a full night queuing for bread, are kicked out of the line by other deportees ('But you are *banditka* [bandits]! You are fascists; even your children are killing people! You don't deserve the bread, get out

⁵⁹ For an account of the rebellion see, Valentinas Brandišauskas (ed.), *1941 metų birželio sukilimas: dokumentų rinkinys* (Kaunas: Aušra, 2000).

⁶⁰ Lupeikytė, *Karlagas*, p. 18.

⁶¹ Žemaitytė, ed., *Amžinojo įsalo žemėje*, p. 190.

of the line!⁶²). Some Lithuanian exiles later recalled how after Stalin's death some of the Russians among the deported populations mourned for the Soviet leader, while the Balts, Poles, and Ukrainians rejoiced at the fact.

In such an adverse setting, besides their immediate relatives, children were forced to rely largely on deportees of the same ethnic group. Thus in one of the Soviet camps in Central Asia, a Lithuanian deportee, Antanas Skučas, attacked two local men who tried to rape two Lithuanian teenage female prisoners. He was shut up in a special jail for two weeks, but 'earn[ed] the respect of all the camp women of all nationalities'.⁶³ In another camp, Lithuanian women prisoners expressed their solidarity with and compassion for a group of Lithuanian men who had been stripped naked by camp guards and walked around the women's quarters as a form of humiliation and punishment.⁶⁴ Yet there were remarkable cases when civic ties and the experience of shared past became as important as ethnic belonging. Eight year old Algirdas Laskevičius recalled how in Karasiuk Jewish deportees from Lithuania gave food to starving Lithuanian families during wartime.⁶⁵

Often deportees' survival also depended on their ability to organize themselves in tight ethnic exile communities that would not only fend for its weaker members (children, elderly, young women), secure better jobs, and food rations, but also resist attacks by the most powerful and organized group of prisoners, the mainly Russian criminals (*urki*). In response to these attacks, different ethnic groups of deportees were also forced to cooperate with each other. Napalys Kitkauskas, arrested at the age of sixteen, notes that in his camp 'Baltic prisoners (Lithuanians and Estonians) would usually try to sit at the same table or close to each other'.⁶⁶ According to Applebaum, the Balts were well-organised but because of their smaller numbers had difficulties establishing themselves as a collective force in the brutal hierarchy of the camps.⁶⁷ Consequently, the Balts often combined forces with the second largest group of deportees, the Ukrainians, to fend off the attacks of the *urki*.⁶⁸ Among the Lithuanian and Ukrainian deportees there were a large number of hardened anti-Soviet activists and former

⁶² Ibid., p. 67.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 66.

⁶⁴ Bičiūnaitė, *Jaunystė prie Laptevų jūros*, p. 55.

⁶⁵ Memoir of Algirdas Laskevičius, in Irena Kurtinaitytė (ed.), *Sibiro vaikai: Lietuvos vaikų tremtinių atsiminimai* (Kaunas: Naujasis Lankas, 2011), p. 49.

⁶⁶ Žemaitytė (ed.), *Amžinojo įsalo žemėje*, p. 166.

⁶⁷ Applebaum, *A History of the Gulag*, p. 485.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 487.



Orphanage, Eljgen, Berlag, Magadan Region, 1954

underground fighters who eagerly assumed leadership of the ethnic camp communities. The criminals, who were unchallenged leaders in the Soviet camps before the Second World War, looked at these groups of 'foreigners' with hatred, suspicion, but also fear. Sometimes the ethnic deportees together were able to seize the dominant position in a camp's power hierarchy due to their superior discipline, organization, and self-support. The criminals labelled them *zlye frajera* [evil persons] and *zapadniki* [Westerners]. Camp administrations, which customarily maintained a network of criminal informers among prisoners, at times felt helpless in the face of these ethnic politicals. In Gorlag, after the arrival of 1,200 Baltic and Ukrainian prisoners, four camp informers were murdered within a few days.⁶⁹

The hostility with which the 'strangers' were treated in the Soviet repressive system and their resulting social isolation and need for self-reliance in exile were one dimension of the forces shaping the deportee children's identities. Deportees' shared ethnicity functioned as a unifying focus in the face of these pressures, and their common culture, religion and language strengthened their spirits and provided moral support. One child deportee describes his personal motivation to survive the Gulag, which

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 487.



Holy Communion, Igarka, 1957

arose from the ethnic community of exiles: 'and still I had hope! ... For me, who entered the Gulag very young, the example of the older deportees was extremely important. Especially, the example of the more educated ones among them'.⁷⁰ Another child deportee recalls how a prayer in Lithuanian ('God, save all Lithuanians who suffer in Siberia and Lithuania...') became a daily ritual that kept her spirit.⁷¹

In many exile settlements, Lithuanian deportees managed to organize cultural and social activities and even religious festivals. According to one former child deportee, he was saved from losing his Lithuanian identity by attending Sunday meetings of Lithuanian young people who used to gather from all the special settlements in and around the city of Yakutsk.⁷² In these meetings, Lithuanians socialized and entertained each other by dancing and singing. Those who had sewn national costumes for themselves were especially prominent. Making new acquaintances and flirting were common: in fact, many young families were started as a result of these community activities.⁷³ Garmutė remembers that at such gatherings many experienced nostalgia for their homeland, which often found voice in

⁷⁰ Žemaitytė (ed.), *Amžinojo įsalo žemėje*, p. 171.

⁷¹ Memoir of Marija Beleckaitė-Rimkevičienė, in Irena Kurtinaitytė (ed.), *Sibiro vaikai*, p. 62.

⁷² Žemaitytė (ed.), *Amžinojo įsalo žemėje*, p. 194.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

poetry and songs.⁷⁴ Many of the child survivors' memoirs contain verses that romanticize their struggle for survival in exile. A Soviet writer V. Azhaev and his patriotic novel *Far From Moscow* inspired Kitkauskas to write patriotic poetry: 'I was trying to relate Azhaev's pathos to my own homeland that remained on the Baltic sea shore,' he later wrote, 'to my duty to help it, to take care of it' Paradoxically, Kitkauskas' youthful poems transform Azhaev's Soviet patriotism into Lithuanian nationalism:

But you [Lithuania] remained alive in your children's breasts,
You shined like the sun in their hardships,
Who can forget the first lullabies?
Who does not feel worried with your fate and misery?

You are a princess of my dreams.
You are the only mother that I have today.
I carry to you as a gift my youth,
And the steel of my hands, and new songs of my heart.⁷⁵

Lithuanian child deportees' memoirs also reveal their attempts to imagine their 'homeland'. Their 'homeland' was utopian not only because they had had only brief physical contact with Lithuania – or in the case of the very young and those born in exile, none at all – so that memories or imaginings of home were often kept alive only by their parents' narratives, but also because this contact stood in such a sharp contrast to their life in exile. As Grinkevičiūtė noted in her memoir, in her first rainy summer on the shore of the Laptev Sea:

It was difficult to imagine that in Lithuania people walked without coats, that there was sunshine, summer, warmth, that there were no stormy waves of the Arctic Ocean ..., that somewhere was the life.⁷⁶

The 'homeland' was associated with freedom and the normality of a civilian life. She also recalls how the Lithuanian girls entertained each other in Trofimovsk by recounting over and over again recipes of the meals that they used to enjoy back in Lithuania. In a letter to her sister ten year old Petrutė Bliūdžiūtė wished her to spend Easter

⁷⁴ 'When are they going to release us to Lithuania? We have nothing more sacred and dear than homeland. ... We have our own homeland. Like birds ejected from their nests, we cannot live without it.' See, *ibid.*, p. 69.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁷⁶ Grinkevičiūtė, *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros*, p. 135.

by staying at least in her dream in homeland and having a good meal.⁷⁷ Although from the perspective of the deportee's current physical hardship, these stories conjured a time of wasteful abundance and abnormality, from an emotional standpoint they served as a collective framework through which their feelings of belonging and nostalgia could be expressed. The 'homeland' was utopian not only because it became a certain state of mind or a mental therapy, but also because through the years spent in exile it was stripped of specific details and drifted into the realm of imagination and fantasy.

In the end, it was not the only utopia in which the deportees believed. Some thought that the only way to escape exile was to flee to America across icy waters.⁷⁸ The dream of escape and foreign refuge helped to keep alive their spirits. Yet the 'homeland' vision was the key element in their exile identities. As collective utopias often originate in social dilemmas, so the deportees' vision of 'homeland' was born as a result of their displacement from their native social, ethnic, and cultural environment and the resulting crisis of communal identity.⁷⁹

The constant references to graves and burial in the testimonies of former Lithuanian child deportees represent a pervasive and powerful evocation of their sense of kinship, nationhood, and territorial belonging. Most of the memoirs are highly commemorative, elegiac, and replete with the names of Lithuanians who perished. They articulate an explicit need to witness and preserve the memory of those who died in exile. Garmutė, deported at the age of thirteen, writes in her memoir:

In exile, my friends from the deportation train and I are sitting not on class benches – we are digging salt in Siberian Usol [location of major salt mines]. The salt melts in the water, but not in our memory. It will never melt in the memory. ... The memory is stronger than a stone. Our memory is made of diamonds.⁸⁰

Children's ethnic identities were also kept alive by communal celebrations of different Christian holidays. On Easter day in Trovimovsk, Lithuanians and Finns all refused to go to work against the orders of Soviet administration.⁸¹ One child deportee recalls how all ten Lithuanians in his exile settlement celebrated Easter together by sharing one

⁷⁷ Elena Stulgienė (ed.), *Tremties dienoraščiai. Bliūdžių šeimos tragedija* (Vilnius: LGGRTC, 2011), p. 388.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 146–147.

⁷⁹ Luisa Del Giudice, ed., *Imagined States, Utopia and Longing in Oral Cultures* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2001), p. 4.

⁸⁰ Žemaitytė (ed.), *Amžinojo įsalo žemėje*, pp. 73–74.

⁸¹ Grinkevičiūtė, *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros*, p. 120.

egg that one of them was lucky to receive from his relatives in Lithuania.⁸² The parcels and packages from their families, which those deportees who resided in exile settlements were entitled to receive regularly, served as another important bridge between them and their homeland. Political prisoners in special camps, however, were allowed to receive only one package per year. After Stalin's death, there was a general relaxation of camp discipline, permitting an expansion of the ethnic deportees' cultural activities. Algis Geniušas, deported in his teens, remembered that in his exile settlement Lithuanians organised several basketball teams for a competition.⁸³

The fact that Lithuanian child deportees continued to hold to some forms of national consciousness did not mean that their individual ethnic identities remained unchallenged by their exile experience. Marcinkevičius recalled in his memoir that those Lithuanian youngsters who refused to attend Sunday community meetings lost their ethnic identities very quickly.⁸⁴ After ten or more years in exile, many felt more comfortable speaking and writing in Russian than in Lithuanian. Five-year old Aušra Juškaitė deported in 1941 was able to learn to write and read in Lithuanian only during her 1947–1949 escape to Lithuania.⁸⁵ Even Grinkevičiūtė, who after her release maintained a position of opposition to Soviet power in her homeland, wrote the second version of her memoir in Russian. Although she felt herself part of the Lithuanian ethnic community, her education in exile made her self-identify at this time with Soviet Russian historical rebel archetypes such as the Decembrists and *Narodnaia Volia* (People's Will) rather than Lithuanian heroes of the anti-Soviet resistance. A friend of Grinkevičiūtė noted that among her favorite books was a well-known Soviet anthology of Russian juridical oratory *Sudebnye rechi izvestnykh russkikh iuristov* (The Pleadings of Famous Russian Lawyers).⁸⁶ Perhaps Grinkevičiūtė's case illustrates the specificity of individual identity, and her particular personal search for freedom, but, as we have seen, her exile experience had already demonstrated the fragility of collective ethnic identities in the Gulag. Additionally, an unknown number of Lithuanian deportees who had lost their relatives in exile chose to remain in their places of displacement in the Soviet interior and never came back to Lithuania.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁸⁵ Memoir of Aušra Juškaitė, in Irena Kurtinaitytė (ed.), *Sibiro vaikai*, p. 27.

⁸⁶ Aldona Šulskytė, 'Daktarė Dalytė' *Metai* (5 May 1995), p. 125. Referring to M. M. Vydria, E. M. Vorozheikin (eds), *Sudebnye rechi izvestnykh russkikh iuristov: sbornik* (Moskva: Gos. izd-vo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1956).

Conclusions

On 27 March 1953, three weeks after Stalin's burial, the Chief of the Soviet political police Lavrentii Beria, who had been involved in the mass deportations for more than two decades, issued an amnesty to non-political prisoners and all prisoners with sentences of five years or less.⁸⁷ Of about 2.5 million Gulag inmates at this time, more than a million people were now liberated.⁸⁸ Yet the large-scale return of Baltic deportees was a long-term process that intensified only as late as 1956–1957 with an order of MVD Nr. 00597 dated on 16 July 1954.⁸⁹ By 1970 about 80,000 people returned to Lithuania (20,000 from prisons and camps and about 60,000 from special settlements).⁹⁰ For thousands of the deported Lithuanian children it meant that now they could enact their exile utopia – to return to their homeland.

Although the amnesty signified an official end of exile, their displacement continued in other forms. Many even after their release felt unable to integrate into normal life due to Soviet society's continuing demonstration of suspicion and fear towards the former deportees. For instance, Grinkevičiūtė was forced out of her medical jobs several times and condemned by local party organisations.⁹¹ Former exiles found it extremely difficult to register in the places of their former residence, to enter universities, and to find good jobs, new homes, or social security. They were discriminated not only by the state authorities, but also often by local population who viewed them with mistrust because they could claim back their properties. The psychological consequences of displacement and their manifestations (the inability to integrate into 'normal' civilian life, feelings of guilt, attempts to forget what happened, mistrust toward all state institutions, political radicalism) were much more serious and perhaps cannot be adequately measured.

The experience of displacement of an entire generation of Lithuanian youth, indeed the fate of all Lithuanian deportees, only fully came to light after the reestablishment in 1990 of an independent state. It is now inscribed in the collective memory of Lithuanian society and as

⁸⁷ Amy Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 185.

⁸⁸ Applebaum, *A History of the Gulag*, p. 479.

⁸⁹ Iveta Skinke, 'Latvijos piliečių trėmimas 1949 m. kovo 25 d. Struktūrinė analizė' in *Genocidas ir Rezistencija*, Nr. 2 (24), 2008, p. 143.

⁹⁰ Kristina Burinskaitė, 'KGB prieš buvusius politinius kalinius ir tremtinius' in *Genocidas ir Rezistencija*, Nr. 2 (24), 2008, p. 121.

⁹¹ Grinkevičiūtė, *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros*, p. 45.

such is one of the core elements shaping Lithuanian national identity today. If the narratives of survival of the former deportee children testify to the brutality of Soviet crimes, they also reveal that their ethnicity, early social and cultural links with ethnic communities of exiles, and their memories and imaginings of homeland played a key role in the formation of their identities. Yet the memoirs of children also show that their ethnicity was not something 'organic,' taken for granted, simply inherited from their adult relatives, or native environment. Their ethnic identities were also inscribed on them as a result of displacement.

The children's sense of ethnic belonging was generally reinforced by the social world of the Gulag where the line between 'us' and 'them' was drawn sharply. Despite its defects, and the need for children often to operate outside its bounds, the ethnic community was a key guarantor of the children's survival. For the many who lost their relatives, the community served as a social safety net that could provide at least minimal protection in the ruthless Gulag hierarchy. But perhaps more importantly the community could also offer a certain common goal and motivation to survive 'spiritually' until the dreamed-of return to the homeland. It could become a venue and medium through which to satisfy their personal needs of rootedness and belonging. In the ethnic community they could relive and share a common nostalgia for their homeland. Yet, in the extreme circumstances of deprivation, the isolated community could also become a trap that would decrease their chances of physical survival.

As utopias typically involve a displacement in both space and time, so the Lithuanian exiles' 'homeland' became a temporal symbol of their early childhood and an ideal space of harmonious social and political order.⁹² Many have interpreted their displacement from the child's normative 'places' of comfort – home, family, and childhood itself, as an initiation into the adult world. Although in these narratives the 'homeland' is often devoid of any specific details, their personal stories provide the conceptual framework in which they were able to interpret their experience of displacement. Perhaps it was this homeland nostalgia, not the reality of displacement, which lent to their exile identities a degree of 'rootedness,' otherwise hardly conceivable in the Gulag. Their refusal to accept various identities of homeless refugees or Soviet citizens, stripped of ethnic background, is indeed remarkable.

⁹² Del Giudice (ed.), *Imagined States, Utopia and Longing in Oral Cultures*, p. 4.