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Past and national trauma:

The reflection of Latvian film *The Long Way in Dunes* (1981) today

Pasado y trauma nacional: El reflejo de la película de Letonia El largo camino de dunas (1981)

La película de hoy es un texto cultural con un alto potencial de visualizar, fragmentizing glorificando y mitificar el pasado. cine letón siempre acaban volviendo a los temas del pasado: hay momentos históricos que no están claramente interpretadas en la historia y en público. Como uno de estos hechos tenemos que reconocer la ocupación de Letonia y la expulsión de Letonia a Siberia. . En mi artículo me voy a centrar en estas modernas reflexiones duales, y los detalles que crean narrativa en la película de Letonia El largo camino de dunas (1981); y mi hipótesis de investigación es: la explicación de la existencia de la doble reflexión se encuentra directamente en los aspectos específicos de trauma nacional en Letonia.

As you know, the national and cultural as well trauma occurs when public members feel or learn that they have endured an event which left traces in public consciousness, and which affects its identity in the present and in the future. National trauma is a concept we can compare to analogy of psychological trauma: it needs treatment. And we cannot deny that one of the healing ways is narrative creation.

As eminent researcher Jeffrey. C. Alexander says, “cultural trauma is first of all an empirical, scientific concept, suggesting new meaningful and casual relationships between previously unrelated vents, structures, perceptions, and actions. But this new scientific concept also illuminates an emerging domain of social responsibility and political action.” [1, P. 1] Therefore, this concept can be used in the search for problem solutions that are associated with socially, politically determined complex processes and – in particular – events in the past in the framework of various sciences (especially in history, anthropology, sociology and cultural studies) and interdisciplinary studies, which often occur in cognitive and/or discursive direction.

J. Alexander distinguishes four representative dimensions, which allow you to look at the cultural trauma genesis: 1) pain characteristics: what really happened with that particular group? 2) victim's characteristics: exactly what group was affected by traumatic pain? Were they specific individuals or groups, or in general – people? 3) Traumatized victim's relationship with a wider audience: at what level public members can identify with victimized group? 4) Attribution of responsibility: who is to blame? Such dimensions can be successfully applied in both cognitive and discursive analysis.

It would not be productive if we look at the concept of national and cultural trauma separately from the representation mechanism of more universal past – *the collective memory*, meaning other descriptive concepts of joint remembrance phenomenon too. Moris Halbwachs, the founder of collective memory theory, claimed that the person does not have an individual memory in pure form, because it is always being pervaded by current social framework, which creates memories about past.

Mediators play an important role in identifying the national and cultural trauma; its typical representative is mass media. J. Alexander quite comprehensively described the role of mass media in cultural trauma studies. “While trauma refers necessarily to something experienced in psychoanalytic accounts, calling this experience “traumatic” requires interpretation. National or cultural trauma (the difference is minimal at the theoretical level) is also rooted in an event or series of events, but not necessarily in their direct experience. Such experience is usually mediated, through newspapers, radio, or television, for example, which involves a spatial as well as temporal distance between the event and its experience. Massmediated experience always involves selective construction and representation, since what is seen is the result of the actions and decisions of professionals as to what is significant and how it should be presented. [1, P. 4] One of the affirmations of mass media's important role is linked to cultural trauma for United States' culture regarding events of September 11, 2001: mass media in particular, can be a powerful tool in the creation and distribution of myth into collective perception and memory. “A longitudinal investigation of psychological responses to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks was conducted on a U.S. national probability sample. Results suggest that the requirement of direct and proximal exposure to the attacks and the expectation of a dose-response relationship between exposure and traumatic stress response are myths”. [6, P. 130]

Many scientists indicate that the trauma tends to be random, unpredictable and uncontrollable, thus, psychological and behavioral consequences of many cultural traumas are quite distinctive from psychological point of view. "There are many possible psychological and behavioral consequences of traumatic events, including generalized distress, intrusive ruminations, physical symptoms, increased health care utilization, disruptions in functioning, decreased subjective well-being, meaning-making, construal of personal benefits, and positive community effects. One of the most widely researched domains is the extent to which trauma results in a psychopathological stress response, such as Acute Stress Disorder (ASD) or Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). [6, P. 131] And such narrative, overcoming cultural trauma, as cultural text, thanks to combination of rational and emotional aspects, visualization and fragmentation (accentuation), typologization and mythologization, as well as its clear message and value system, is one of the most effective means of healing in modern culture, compared to other – means of scientific discourse (studies, knowledge), journalistic discourse (articles, essays), political discourse (directions, guidelines).

The film is a cultural text with high potential of visualizing, fragmentizing, glorifying and mythologizing the past. Latvian films keep returning to the themes of the past: there are historical moments that are not clearly interpreted in history and in public (1918, 1938, 1946, 1950-60 events). As one of these facts we have to acknowledge the occupation of Latvia and the Latvian deportation to Siberia. Most often these facts were interpreted in Latvian documentaries ("Children of Siberia", "Agapitova and the Rescued", "Remember Siberia", "The Station Latvians 1937", "The Balance of Siberia", "Gvido Zvaigzne", "The Route: Kekava-Omsk region 1949", "Siberia: The Land of the Childhood", "God's Birds", "Where Have Fathers Gone?", "Fathers Out There", "Greetings from Siberia", "... and Igarka, Hope and Butterfly", "The occupation of Latvia") and rarely – Latvian fiction.

As the centenary approaches, funds will be issued in 2018 for creation of new films, most of which will be dedicated to the interpretation of history facts. I have to say that previous Latvian films are highly reflected. And one of those films raises quite a controversial context; The Long Way in Dunes – a 1981 Latvian S.S.R. television series (positioned as melodrama), which shows Latvia occupation and deportation to Siberia. The film director is Aloizs Brenčs. It was filmed at Riga Film-Studio. In 1983 film creators received award USSR State Prize – the director Aloizs Brenčs,

screenwriters Oleg Rudnev and Dmitry Vasiliu, the operator Janis Murnieks, artist Gunars Balodis, actors Jozus Kisels, Eduards Pavuls and Lilita Ozolina. It was one of the most popular films in Latvia.

The series is based on a love story of fisherman's son Arthur Banga and Master's daughter Martha Ozola, which runs from the end of the 1930s until the 1980s. The film is one of the first narratives of Latvian cinematography on one of the most painful fragments of collective memory that affected Latvian cultural trauma, thus, launching its healing: the main character, Master's daughter and the German's ex-wife was dispatched to Siberia with other Latvians.



Picture 1. DVD covers of cinema novel and the movie, as a marketing communication, reflect main positive factors of film discourse: the actors' images and popular names, a geo-cultural context. Source: Google Picture.

The film made in Soviet times may be reviewed in a positive light in modern Latvia (the term “legendary movie” is still used in publicity; a lullaby from this movie is still one of the symbols of Christmas; comments on the Internet: “thanks to director! Awesome! I watch it every year!”), and also there can be negative reviews (e.g. publicity, essays show that the movie twists historical events very heavily; Latvia’s independence period was presented worse than it was and Soviet regime was embellished; as Internet comments say: *the Communist propaganda; Shame!*). Movie appearance on TV raises both audience’s outrage and sympathy. In my paper I am going to focus on these modern dual reflections, and specifics creating narrative on this Latvian film; and my research hypothesis is: the explanation of existence of dual reflection lies directly in the specifics of national and cultural trauma in Latvia. The film and Latvian media discourses are the research material; study methods:

discursively cognitive film analysis and the clipping of mass media (cultural and tourism discourses of year 2010-2016) to detect film reflections and reveal its reflection types.

In 2012, Latvian sociologist Aivars Tabuns recognizes that the situation of creation and existence of national identity in Latvia is more difficult than in many other countries; just as deep problems occurred only in Israel and Russia. [3, 13. lpp.] It should be also noted that there is a factor of rapid change that people have to stand against, and there were lots of them in last 30 years. Cultural trauma in such conditions is obvious in both individual and group identification levels. "The enlightenment understanding suggests that trauma is a kind of rational response to abrupt change, whether at the individual or social level". [1, P. 3]

In recent years researchers of social processes have identified other essential identity problems affecting Latvian people and country's development. They are mainly associated with different view of different ethnic groups (whether it's past, present or future aspect), just as different are opinions on geopolitical identity; as ethnic stereotypes, self-separate adversity being very strong, there are ethnic segregation in political parties. The identity of Latvian population is better studied in the aspect of social integration and the identity of national minorities, thus, studying very important phenomenon of post-Soviet society. [3, 13. lpp.] Also Latvian titled nation's – Latvians – identity holds several problems. More than 10 years ago, there was a flashing headline on the discussion about the human identity, where sociologist Talis Tisenkopfs assumed that Latvian identity experiencing an unprecedented crisis. Latvian identity in the post-Soviet period has experienced a major transformation of the content and meaning. [3, 14. lpp.] The protection of Latvian cultural identity during Soviet period, in disadvantaged political and social conditions, meant the saving of ethnic status, the resistance to open and hidden russification. [3, 14. lpp.] While researchers of integration process point out that the social memory is one of the most important factors, which separates Latvian society. [3, 17. lpp.]

Such national narrative elements as arrests, deportations, exiles and returns are considered in studies as sort of nodes, where national culture keep coming back to. Even more, anthropologist Roberts Kilis writes that deportation belongs to events that have the greatest impact on Latvian consciousness. So, there is a reason why difficulties of the past are not a popular subject in Latvia's public space. There are constant truths, their argument and strict denials. A survey of public opinion in 2008

indicates that 48% of Latvians and 60% of Russian respondents support the claim that it would be better if historical events lacking single opinion would be discussed less. [3, 17. lpp.] Thus, both the researchers and the Latvian discourse observations show that *forgetting* and *concealment* were chosen as tactics to overcome the trauma. Unfortunately, I have to say that in Latvia there are no detailed studies on Soviet period and its effect on today, the so-called Soviet and post-Soviet generations and their collective and individual identity. However, this period, it's daily life at some point weaves through society. One of the most common traumatic effects of the past is the lack of mutual trust. [3, 21. lpp.] We can find a lot of confirmations for such lack of trust in modern discourses: the existence and popularization of Latvian and Russian communities, which survived mutual past, identification of the elements of nationalism, etc. Therefore, I think that Latvia is still on its way to manage such cultural trauma by using *rationalization*.

A true national identity is important for rationalization tactics. It means "a part of personal identity, which connects itself to other persons with similar characteristics of national culture. Language, values, behavioral models, set of cultural symbols, mutual unity of nation's people; social memory is the foundation on which a person's loyalty to nation is built and raised. National identity involves the idea of the uniqueness of each nation, but not superiority, the difference from other nations, the idea of nations' people connection with each other and idea of nations' continuity". [4, 5. lpp.] Another important concept of rationalization tactics is the concept of Latvian cultural environment, which includes "Latvian language, environment, material and intangible culture, social memory and lifestyle (traditions, symbols, historical events, historical characters, mutual opinions, holidays, artistic heritage and creativity, communication, nature and attitude to the nature, cultural environment created for centuries, geographic names, construction traditions, color, etc.). Latvian culture environment for different centuries have been affected and enriched by culture of other nations. The unique cultural environment contributes to the strengthening of national identity, maintains and strengthens the sense of belonging to Latvia on global environment". [4, 6. lpp.] National identity in Latvian culture environment's discourse can be created and revealed in cultural texts, where also cinematic text belongs to.

"The long way in dunes" is a cinematic text which is described by quite interesting factors touching the concept of national identity and reflects Latvian culture environment in quite specific way. Let us look closer to positive and negative factors

in specified order. *The positive perception factors* most often arise from aspects concerning the conflict of the film and film's unhistorical layer (love, the classic archetypal triangle, motivation of actions of characters involved in the triangle and evaluation of other characters), namely, not national, but the level of universal concepts. Film's art also belongs to positive factors, including geographical and musical factors; actors as well are a separate aspect, namely, remarkable elements of Latvian culture environment.

Film geography. The film was shot in Latvia and Russia. First episodes were shot in significant places of Latvian culture environment: graveyard near church in Kaltene, fishermen's life – coast of Apsuciems and Lapmezciems, city – Old city of Tukums, Arthur's garrison of Latvian army was shot in Krustpil's castle, Martha's and her German husband Richard's life in Germany – Mezaparks (Hunting Villa), Jaunkemeri and Ligatne, partisan life – Ogre's forests. Siberian village in last two episodes is Jalguba (Яльгуба) village in Karelia, but Irkutsk mentioned in scenario was shot in Irkutsk. [5, 348. lpp.] Landscapes of Latvian culture environment are filled with important messages (motherland, home, history, and mutual past) in significant rituals for Latvian culture, events and activities (first scene of the film – funeral; fishing and after-fishing activities, housekeeping in yard and house, meals, remarkable sea, amber, wind and dune concepts); landscapes where Latvian rituals take place, events and activities are common, recognized, they don't lie. Have to say that some places belong to active positively created modern tourism discourse, which offers reflecting a positive and romantic atmosphere on the history of film's shooting, for example, *ekskursija Kino Tukumā un apkārtnē stāstīts, ka viena no ilgu laiku iecienītākajām latviešu filmām joprojām ir daudzsēriju mākslas filma „Ilgais ceļš kāpās” (1981.). Par vienu no romantiskākajām epizodēm tajā tiek uzskatīta Martas (Lilita Ozoliņa) un Artūra (Jozas Kiselijs) satikšanās aptiekā. Šī epizode filmēta kādreizējā Tukuma Vecajā aptiekā (Lielā iela 7.) (Latvian – excursion in Tukums' cinema and neighborhood tells us that one of the most favorite Latvian films still is “Long way in dunes” (1981). One of the most romantic moments is Martha's (Lilita Ozolina) and Arthur's (Jozas Kiselijs) meeting in drugstore. This episode was shot in Tukums' old drugstore (Liela st. 7)).* (<http://www.turisms.tukums.lv/index/vietas/marsruti/marsruti/kino>) Scenes filmed in Russia are related to places where deported Latvians stayed, they temporary home, for

some – permanent home, because in Siberia there are still Latvian communities not only near Irkutsk.

Film casting. Characters in the film were not only Latvian actors, but also Lithuanians and Russians: protagonist and antagonistic roles were performed by Lithuanian actors, Siberian village residents – Russian actors. Lithuania is a country, which unites with Latvia in type of trauma (mutual past in USSR period, and the post-Soviet period). But in modern film's reflections these actors also perform the function of separation (not belonging to Latvian culture environment) and actualization of historical context by cinema: they are not mentioned as often as the name of main character or actress, they associate with USSR cultural discourse: film starring representatives of few countries. While women's role belongs to actress' Lilita Ozolina, whose role as Martha is considered most popular one, for example, it is mentioned in Latvian Wikipedia; it is also described in Russian websites related to cinema. They hold a typical phrase - *для миллионов зрителей бывшего СССР Лилита Озолина ассоциируется с Мартой, героиней любимой мелодрамы "Долгая дорога в дюнах"* (Russian – *for millions of former USSR people Lilita Ozolina associates with Martha, the beloved character of melodrama "Long way in dunes"*). I have to say the visual image has no significant changes since the series were filmed, thus, keeping the canonic Latvian woman's pattern features: bright hair color, verbal behavior and tone illustration. The canonic expression is also supported by the fact that Lilita Ozolina is an actress who makes declamations on today's Latvian national holiday events, besides; she has a rich patriotic message. A certain canonical message occurs in new Latvian film "Chronicles of Melany", shot in 2016: it holds the character of actress Lilita Ozolina (Latvian, which was dispatched to Siberia – identical to twists and turns to "Long way in dunes"), which can be perceived symbolically, as it seems, for example, to Latvian historian Kaspars Zellis. Film director Kristine Zelve also says, "how was it with Lilita Ozolina and Martha [from Long way in dunes]? I also thought of that – is it my interpretations or it is a deliberate plan? Martha, who goes into the taiga...". The film producer Gints Grube points out the canonic nature that stays inside the character and its creator regardless of circumstances: " Her image has a completely different idea, but any actor, of course, has his marks of previous characters, there's nothing we can do, it is simply as it is". [7]



Picture 2. Movies' Martha and the great Latvian actress Lilita Ozoliņa today. Source: a scene from the *Long way in dunes* un delfi.lv

The soundtrack, especially main theme of the movie and remarkable song – a lullaby, belongs to the positive factors that have many acknowledgments in recent past and today. For example, 35 years ago the main theme's melody composed by a supreme Latvian composer Raimonds Pauls, was used in 1981 to create a song with lyrics from well-known Russian poet Andrey Voznesensky, and which was performed significant USSR's and Russia's singer Alla Pugachova. Today, the melody in Latvia may be perceived separately from the film, individually from film discourse and from USSR popular cultural discourse. For example, a review of the final concert of musical event Riga: *Mūsu dārgakmeņi ir spodri: Teicams papildinājums uz bis bija Raimonda Paula smeldzīgā melodija no filmas Ilgais ceļš kāpās orķestrim un saksofonam solo, ko Oskars Petrauskis katru reizi improvizē atšķirīgi.* (Latvian – *Our precious are glossy: an excellent complement to everything was the searing melody of Raimonds Pauls from "Long way in dunes" for orchestra and saxophone solo, which Oskars Petrauskis improvise differently each time.*) (http://www.diena.lv/raksts/kd/recenzijas/puteju-orkestra-_riga_-sezonas-nosleguma-koncerta-recenzija.-musu-dargakmeni-ir-spodri-14008087) Another example, where movie theme is included in the list of positive musical works: *Šīs nedēļas karstākais jaunums latviešu mūzikā – otrdien, [2016.gada] 25. oktobrī, klajā nākušais ģitārista Mārča Auziņa albums "Viens", kurā ierakstītas divpadsmit Raimonda Paula melodijas, kas aranžētas vienam instrumentam – ģitārai. Albumā iekļautas kompozīcijas "Baltā saule", "Viss nāk un aiziet tālumā", "Kad saule aiziet", "Tāpēc jau, ka nevar zināt kāpēc", "Lai tik līst", "Negribas vairāk nekā", "Dāvāja Māriņa meitiņai mūžiņu", "Jel pažēlo", "Tik tā viena", "Sikspārņa Fledermausa šūpuļdziesma", tēma no kinofilmas "Ilgais ceļš kāpās" un "Circenīša Ziemassvētki".*

*(This week's hottest news in Latvian music – Tuesday, October 25th 2016, guitarist Marcis Auzinsh releases an album "One", which holds twelve Raimonds Pauls's melodies, arranged for one instrument – guitar. The album includes compositions like "White sun", "Everything comes and goes", "When the Sun leaves", "Because we don't know why", "Let it rain", "I don't need anything", "Fairy gave her life", "Oh, mercy me", "She's the one", "The song of Fledermouse the Bat", **the theme from "Long way in dunes"** and "Cricket's Christmas".)*
(<http://nra.lv/izklaide/muzika/189130-recenzija-marcis-auzins-viens.htm>)

The negative perception factors are closely associated with the concept of collective memory. Mainly both professional and viewer's critics are drawn upon the film due to interpretation of historical events, which at that time were adjusted to ideology requirements (i.e. sponsor's requirements – nothing new in the world of cinema) and which today reminds me of cultural trauma. One of the most symbolic events: after broadcasting this film on television one of the newspaper "Latvijas Avize" readers demanded to ban this film, saying it's lying, seeing a crime against Latvia and its people. In reader's words, after the film, what will children ask their parents, what are guards, legionnaires, terrible partisans; and it will create the impression that we are still living in Russia without ever getting out. The letter caused a wide resonance in public, and known journalist Elita Veidemane suddenly defended the film, by using arguments which criticizes the concealment of cultural trauma. She reminded that the movie ended in 1981 – when public talks on deportation and partisans were forbidden, and this film may be considered as the first step to the truth. In E. Veidemane's words, we will soon be talking that "films" which interpret the history, lowers our national self-confidence and Latvian's nature, destroy patriotism and advocates a series of horrible things. Then it is time to talk about how weak the Latvian self-esteem is and how sickly weak the Latvian's nature is, if art can ruin it in one moment.

Negative reflection on the film appears on the interpretation of historical facts: historical events, individual character, social and professional groups and other interpretations of creators of cultural discourse in 1980's. I have to mention that these negative reflection appear periodically, namely after the television broadcast (there is nothing similar to talks on significant elements of film discourse, for example, if the melody and/or the song is mentioned, if actress Lilita Ozolina is honored, etc.).

Latvian historian Juris Ciganovs marks some vulnerabilities in the film [2], which becomes the foundations of negative reflections: the “*bad bourgeois life*”: the period of independent Latvia presented in the film must be understood by viewer as the worst that people ever had: massive debt growth for people, forced recruitment of politically unwanted people, wealthy citizens' involvement in different extreme pro-German organizations, arbitrariness of guards; as a result, the return of Soviet power presented as the salvation of this whole “bourgeois discreet charm”; *To Siberia as guest*: even if the deportation appeared in a film for the first time in the history of Latvian cinema, the film displayed the trip to Siberia as a visit – no chekists with trucks near home, no cattle wagons, no camps, no barbed wire, no guard towers... Martha with her son are welcomed in Russian village to stay in the house, they are fed and clothed; they receive empathy and later sympathy. *Guards as bandits*: guards that stayed home and ran to forests were displayed as common store thieves and bandits; *the Soviet fishermen path to Sweden*: movie shows that, shortly after the end of the war, the Soviet Latvian fishermen accidentally end up in Sweden and then return back. In fact, it would be “normal” if all of them were deported to Siberia in best case, worst – shot in Riga’s central prison; *German in Soviet Irkutsk*: in a Soviet Siberian city Irkutsk a citizen of the Federative Republic of Germany just wondering around all by himself and untended by KGB, enters a usual Soviet “Hruscsovka” (a standard Soviet 5 store flat building) and simply rings at the door, behind which Martha and her grown up son lived.





Picture 3. Reflections of different indefinitely evaluated social, national, professional groups in “Long way in dunes”: Latvian pre-war guards; Siberian village residents and exiled Latvian; Latvian pre-war and post-war fishermen. Sources: a scenes from the *Long way in dunes*.

Thus, it can be concluded that film’s negative factors touches all four J. Alexander's distinguished dimensions of cultural trauma: 1) pain characteristics: Latvian exile to Siberia; 2) the victim's description: relatives of exiled bonded with direct and indirect familial and social bonds – both particular individuals and groups 3) traumatized victim’s relations with a wider audience: the audience can still identify itself with victimized group, 4): Attribution of responsibility: USSR policy and partly – the author of series. The film simultaneously fulfils both healing narrative’s function and the function of cultural trauma’s actualization. The interpretation of historical facts, for example, “exile as visit, national partisans as bandits”, “idealized display of exile” – broadcasting of these and other scenes of the film raises and will raise indignation. Certainly, new films also will play their role in trauma’s healing process. Films which interpret and will interpret history from post-soviet history aspects, e.g., a 2016 film “Melanie’s chronicles” from the director Viesturs Kairish, which is based on the biography of Melany Vanaga, deported to Siberia in 1941. Memories of deportation are traumatic, and the creation of new films may and can help rationalization processes, especially in conditions where there are very few films on this subject. The reflection of the film “Long way in dunes” show how tactics of forgetting and concealment become rationalization – also due to a popular mediator – creating a cultural healing narrative.

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