

## DISPLACEMENT AND IDENTITY. THE MEMOIRS OF A JUVENILE DEPORTEE UNDER SOVIET OCCUPATION

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In the introduction to a recent conference on the sociology of exile, displacement and belonging, Maggie O'Neil and Tony Spybey (2003) speak of how:

[...] war, ethnic cleansing, economic migration, natural disasters and environmental catastrophes have shaped the contours of what has come to be known as the 'refugee problem' or 'refugee crisis' (6). Indeed, the steady increase in population movements across the globe has drawn attention to the various types of migration, including the specific character of forced migration. For Stephen Castles, "forced migration – including refugee flows, asylum seekers, internal displacement and development-induced displacement – has increased considerably in volume and political significance since the end of the Cold War (13).

Of course, forced migration was not born with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the study of earlier manifestations could prove instructive in addressing current concerns. The forcible displacement of entire populations that took place in the Soviet Union is an important historical case of forced migration, though it is not always recognized or remembered as such. Beginning with the forced exile of Poles in 1934 from their historic homelands in Belarus and Ukraine to Kazakhstan, the policy of forcibly transferring "disloyal" or "troublesome" ethnic populations intensified greatly with the transfer of Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians in 1940–1941, Germans in 1941, Chechens in 1945 and Crimean Tatars in 1945. Most of those displaced were settled into a system of work camps known as the Gulag (*Glavnoe upravlenie ispravitelno-trudovykh lagerei*), notorious in the West even during Soviet times thanks to the heroic efforts of such Russian writers such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

Russians suffered by the tens of millions in the Stalinist Gulag, but the ordeal of the non-Russian inmates was somewhat different, in that it took on many of the cross-cultural dimensions we now associate with the plight of the refugee. While it would be grossly inaccurate to call the victims of Stalinist population transfers "asylum seekers," their experience of forced migration is in many ways analogous, and thus a comparison of the two may be instructive. Individual and collective identity, cultural and moral values, and attitudes towards the homeland – all suffered profound changes as the displaced persons and communities struggled to adapt to the new host environment, to a

different society and culture, under the most difficult of circumstances. The effects of migration upon identity became only more apparent as these displaced persons gradually made their way back to their respective homelands in the post-Stalin period; for some, like the Crimean Tatars, only after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The experience of exile and return, in most cases, fostered a strong and rather rigid sense of national identity. In the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, for example, the repatriated deportees were among the most resolute anti-Soviet dissidents who formed the core of the nationalist popular movements of the late 1980s.

Indeed, the publication of banned deportee memoirs, possible only under conditions of *glasnost*, contributed to the resurgence of “collective memory” that fueled a genuinely popular movement that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> The mass recollection of trauma imbued Lithuanians and other non-Russian peoples with a sense of collective martyrdom, rallied them to reject Soviet rule and assert an independent voice. Ironically, such testimonies now appear to hold little interest to the broad public.<sup>2</sup> Given the tasks of modernization and integration into Europe, the affective power of traumatic testimony is thought to detract from the demands of “objective” historical research and pragmatic policy development. Invoked from time to time by marginalized politicians, the testimonies of recent suffering seem scarcely relevant to the current agenda of national consolidation.<sup>3</sup> Deportee memoirs are widely thought to express an irredentist, ethnocentric historical consciousness fundamentally at odds with the demands of modern, multicultural nationhood.

To make their work more responsive to current needs, scholars of deportee testimony in the Baltics have taken their cue from the more recent approaches to Holocaust testimony, especially those which try to differentiate how the historical trauma was experienced by different groups of people: the particularity of women’s experience, or the manner in which different “generations”

- 1 My ascription of “memory” to a collective refers to the process by which questions of the past are made the focus of public discussion as an integral part of a political strategy that challenges an established political regime. The “counter-narrative” of “authentic” memory is presented as a challenge to the “official historiography” supporting the claims to legitimacy of the current regime. Similar processes played out in all of the former Soviet republics during the late eighties. Ana Douglas and Thomas Vogler (2003) provide an authoritative review of recent works in this field in the introduction to their edited volume *Witness & Memory: The Discourse of Trauma*.
- 2 Jūra Avižienis (2004) charts the sharp decline in publication runs of deportee memoirs in Lithuania since 1994. If a 100,000 copies of Valentinas Gustainis’ *Be kalties* sold out almost immediately upon publication in 1989, the print-run of such memoirs after 1994 has rarely exceeded 2000 copies.
- 3 Avižienis notes how the International Congress and Public Tribunal to Assess the Crimes of Communism held in Vilnius on June 2000 had little public resonance, since “it was perceived as a political ploy by the conservatives to humiliate the President of Lithuania and disrupt friendly relations between Lithuania and its major trading partner, Russia.”

of the Holocaust experienced and remember the trauma, and how they transmit the experience through memory from one generation to the next.<sup>4</sup> The focus on the particularity of children's and, by the same token, women's experience promises to re-invigorate and lend new relevance to the study of this literature by bringing to light stories and experiences that have yet to be fully incorporated into the received narrative of national oppression.<sup>5</sup> This paper continues along this path by focusing on the example of Dalia Grinkevičiūtė, who wrote what is perhaps the best-known Lithuanian testimony to the mass deportations of the Baltic peoples during WWII. As discussed below, her work retains an enduring significance because it represents the unique experience of a girl whose self-expression embodies the tension between particularist and universalist conceptions of community brought into play by the experience of migration.

### Grinkevičiūtė's life and work

Born to a middle-class family in Kaunas, Dalia Grinkevičiūtė's (1927–1987) childhood was brought to an early end by war and deportation. The Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 gave the Baltic states to Stalin, who extinguished the short-lived political independence of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. The Red Army occupied these states in the summer of 1940, while the NKVD (Soviet secret police, a precursor to the KGB) began to deport potential opposition leaders: politicians, trade unionists, intellectuals, teachers, and wealthy landowners. All businesses and all but the smallest landholdings were nationalized and a growing number of Russian officials and immigrants began to settle in the Baltics. A week before the German invasion, on the night of June 14–15, 1941, Grinkevičiūtė, her mother, and brother, along with tens of thousands of Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians, were arrested by the NKVD and loaded onto cattle-cars bound for Siberia. Her father, a member of the conservative party *Tautininkai* and a former high-ranking official in the independent Lithuanian government, was arrested the same night by the Soviet secret police and separated from the family.<sup>6</sup>

Grinkevičiūtė was destined for Trofimovsk, a virtually uninhabited "settlement" in northeastern Siberia. She and her fellow deportees, mostly Lithuanians, were shipped north by riverboat to the mouth of the Lena River where it flows into the Laptev Sea. With inadequate shelter, miserly rations, and a murderous work-regime, most inmates died during the first winter. Dalia and

4 The literature on these topics is enormous and cannot be summarized here. For a short, insightful overview of the generational approach to Holocaust memoirs, see Suleiman. For a recent example of this new approach to the study of deportee memoirs see Kirss 2000.

5 Kirss 2004: 14.

6 Juozas Grinkevičius died of starvation in October of 1943 in a prison in the Ural Mountains.



her mother survived and managed to relocate further south. In 1949, Dalia's mother was close to death, and the two risked their relative security and returned illegally to Kaunas by plane from Yakutsk. They lived in hiding with friends and family, often changing location. Now on the verge of death, Dalia's mother asked to go to their former house, even though this increased the risk of discovery. They did, and when Dalia's mother died, she had no alternative but to bury her in the cellar of their home, again, to avoid detection and arrest. Shortly thereafter she was discovered, retried, sent to prison, and then back into exile.

After Stalin's death, Grinkevičiūtė was released but still forbidden to travel west of the Ural Mountains. In 1954 she started her medical education in Omsk, and after Khrushchev's amnesty of 1956 was allowed to return to Lithuania. She obtained a medical degree from Kaunas University, and took up a job in the hospital of the small provincial town of Laukuva. Grinkevičiūtė was bitter but not broken by the experience of exile and was outspoken in her criticism of the regime. She became an active participant in the Soviet dissident movement, which meant that she was subject to regular police surveillance and harassment by the authorities for the rest of her life.

When Dalia had first escaped to her homeland in 1949, she wrote a memoir of her ordeal. Shortly before she was caught and sent back into exile, she sealed the manuscript in a glass jar and buried it in the garden of her former home in Kaunas. When she returned to Lithuania in 1956, she was unable to retrieve her memoirs, and so wrote a second version in 1976. This text, written in Russian, was published in 1979 by the underground Moscow-based journal *Pamiat'*. It was further circulated through the underground dissident publishing network known as *samizdat*, and was eventually smuggled abroad and published in French and English. Some time in the early eighties, Grinkevičiūtė rewrote the 1976 version in Lithuanian.

Since she was prominent in the independence movement during the late eighties, Grinkevičiūtė's life and testimony made a sensation when her 1949–50 memoirs were discovered in 1991; shortly after her death and the year Lithuania regained its independence. The manuscript, composed of dozens of individual sheets of paper, had badly decomposed, and it took several researchers at the War Museum in Kaunas to restore the manuscript to a legible state and decipher the contents. This early testimony was first published in serial format from 1996–1997. Grinkevičiūtė's complete works, including her early and mature testimonies, fragments from several notebooks, dialogues, and sketches for short stories were published in a book entitled *Lietuviai prie Laptevų jūros* (Lithuanians at the Laptev Sea) in 1997.<sup>7</sup>

7 For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the 1988 (1990 in English translation) publication as Grinkevičiūtė's "mature" testimony, and the 1997 (2002 in English translation) as the "early" testimony. Page numbers following citations in English refer to the 1990 and 2002 English translations of the "mature" and "early" testimony, respectively. Citations of the original Lithuanian are provided in foot-



## Grinkevičiūtė's early testimony

Grinkevičiūtė's early testimony is focused on the traumatic experience of deportation and forced labor that provoked a premature "coming of age," a point made in the title given posthumously to the English translation of this work: *A Stolen Youth, a Stolen Homeland*. In her analysis of childhood testimonies to the Holocaust, Susan Suleiman says that cognitive psychology distinguishes three discrete groups of children who have suffered from a traumatic experience. First, there are those from infancy to around three years of age who were "too young to remember" the events; those from four to ten who are "old enough to remember but too young to understand;" and those from approximately age eleven to fourteen, who are "old enough to understand but too young to be responsible" (283). At 14 years of age, Dalia was at the cusp of adulthood, which Suleiman defines as the state "where one is both capable of naming one's predicament and responsible for acting on it in some considered way" (283). On the one hand, she possesses the capacity to think hypothetically, to employ abstract concepts to reason and the vocabulary to name her experience, and in this respect differs from pre-adolescent children. On the other hand, she is still far from fully formed as an individual, and her memoirs reflect an intensely thoughtful period of coming to terms with a truly bewildering experience.

Perhaps it is precisely because of the rudimentary nature of the concepts at Grinkevičiūtė's disposal that the early testimony contrasts so sharply with the standard hagiographic representations found in other deportee memoirs of the Lithuanian deportee as a "saint" devoid of "base" human characteristics, and disturbs the normative view of the deportees as a homogenous group of Lithuanians (Avižienis).<sup>8</sup> The majority of deportee testimonies draw a sharp line between the representation of deported non-Russian peoples, who are seen as the victims, and the Russian camp administrators, workers, and even prisoners who are explicitly or implicitly blamed for creating and supporting Stalin's system. In these works, the distinction between the victim and perpetrator is made along national lines. Instead, the young Grinkevičiūtė's emphasis is on conveying her personal experience in the greatest possible detail, and events are framed in a quasi-tragic narrative of personal development and coming of age under the direst circumstances. Events are narrated in the first-person singular in the present tense, lending the work an expressive immediacy that lets the reader "re-live" the main stages of the deportation: the journey from Lithuania through Russia to Trofimovsk, the terrible first winter, and work at the fish factory during the summer.

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notes, with page numbers referring to the 1997 publication of Grinkevičiūtė's complete works.

8 Avižienis 2004.

As Dalia and her fellow deportees are taken away from Kaunas in a transport train, she writes of her impressions as she and her compatriots were taken by train from her home town Kaunas:

"I feel I shall never see all of this again," said my mother. Her words were like a knife piercing my brain. A fight for life is beginning, Dalia. School, your childhood, fun, jokes, theatre and friends: all these things now belong to the past. You are a grown-up already. You are fourteen. You have to look after your mother and take the place of your father. The first part of your fight for life is starting (14).<sup>9</sup>

At the last stop before the train crosses Lithuania's border, Dalia saw another train full of men. She got out of the car and walked along the other train, asking if anyone had seen her father. After she returned to the car with her mother, she thinks: "I wanted to and could have run away, but I realized immediately that I had a helpless mother to take care of. I felt as if I were 20 years old" (15).

After several days of travel, the deportees arrived in eastern Siberia, where they spent some time before being shipped by riverboat down the Lena river to Trofimovsk in the Far North. Living conditions here were quite good, and at this time the Lithuanian deportees are seen united in their longing for their homeland, the memory of which remained very close. Here, Dalia draws upon their shared folklore and traditions to represent the strength of their community.

Living in the forest, we used to gather wood to keep the fires going till the morning. Old and young people sat together around them. A huge area was covered with the dots of glimmering fires, around which thousands of Lithuanians tried to drown their sorrows in song. [...] The songs united us, gave us strength, and seemed to warn us that we would still have lots to endure; but the children of Lithuania had to survive. For a moment the songs brought us closer to our homeland, encouraging us not to lose hope of returning (22).

Although Grinkevičiūtė clearly identifies with her fellow Lithuanian deportees in terms of a common longing for home, she shows how precarious national solidarity can be once conditions become desperate. As their common ordeal continues, Grinkevičiūtė expresses her disillusionment in highly critical portraits that break down the categories of class and nation to which the deportee community still clings. She ridicules the attempt of some deportees to maintain bourgeois standards of culture and to maintain their former status in exile: "Madame Žukienė, dressed in long Japanese silk mantel, is swishing along the deck of the barge like some noblewoman. Even at the most critical times she does not forget her manicure and massage to preserve the skin on her face.

9 "Prasideda gyvenimo kova, Dalia. Gimnazija, vaikystė, išdykavimai, fokusai, teatras ir draugės – praieityje. Tu jau suaugusi. Tau jau suėjo keturiolika metų. Tu turi globoti motiną, pavaduoti jai tėvą. Prasideda pirmas mano gyvenimo kovos aktas" (36–37).

She looks down upon everyone because she was the wife of a colonel.”<sup>10</sup> Later, step-by-step, Grinkevičiūtė shows how Lithuanians begin to steal food from each other, how a pious Catholic steals and then prays, how a “devoted husband” urges his wife not to give up hope for survival and then eats her bread when she is not looking.

Given the extreme conditions suffered by the deportees, Grinkevičiūtė’s harsh critique of her compatriots’ behavior seems excessive; however, the real object of her contempt is not human weakness but hypocrisy and bad faith. This becomes clearer in passages describing sexual relations between Lithuanian women inmates and Russian administrators and workers. Although she herself was still a teenager and not yet in the “market,” Dalia witnesses a range of sexual encounters, and is indirectly drawn into discussions. Grinkevičiūtė judges their “shameful” conduct as acceptable under the circumstances: “There’s no cause to be indignant. Each of those women was saving her life the only way she could. They could not be accused of depravity because all their instincts had already atrophied from hunger. And even if they enjoyed what they were doing, there was nothing wrong with that. Human life is short, and it is only normal to do what nature demands.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Dalia reserves her criticism for the hypocrisy of the moralists:

I am sitting on my bunk and pretending that I am sleeping because I am watching how Štariene is flirting with a soldier. This woman is very pious or at least wants to create such an impression, a big patriot. If some child somewhere learns a Russian song and starts singing it, she smiles ironically and reproaches the parents. Meanwhile she is making out with Russians and Chekists [secret police agents who ran the Gulag] [...]. She smiles to a Russian and he pushes her down and makes out with her. When she talks about her husband Bronius who is in the camps, it seems that real tears are running from her blue eyes. The Jesuit!<sup>12</sup>

Grinkevičiūtė’s early testimony presents life in the north as a trial, a test of strength, will, and principle that all deportees must face. Her account is very judgmental, dividing deportees among the fallen, whom she despises, and the heroic, whom she strives to emulate. The primacy of ethical action is pre-

10 “Ponia Žukienė su japonišku, ilgu raudono šilko apsiaustu tarsi kilminga didikė šlama po baržos denį. Ji net kritiškiausiomis minutėmis nepamiršta manikiūro, masažo veido odai išlaikyti. Į visus žiūri iš aukšto, kadangi ji buvo pulkininko žmona” (52).

11 “Piktintis nėra ko. Kiekviena daro daro taip, kaip nori, gelbsti gyvybę kaip kas gali. Ištvirkimu apkaltinti negalima, nes temperamento liaukos nuo bado atrofavęsi. O jeigu ir taip, argi baisu, žmogaus gyvenimas trumpas, ir tai visai natūralu, jei pati gamta liepia” (99).

12 “Sėdžiu savo guolyje ir apsimetu, kad miegu, nes stebiu, kaip Štarienė flirtuoja su kareiviu. Tai labai pamaldi moteris, ar bent stengiasi tokia atrodyti, didelė patriotė. Jeigu kuris vaikas kur užgirdęs uždainuoja rusišką dainą, ji pajuokiamai šypsosi ir iškalba tėvams, o su čekistais ir rusais tai lardosi [...] Šypsosi rusui, o tas ją verčia ir glamonėja. Kai ji kalba apie savo Bronių, kuris lageriuose, tai, rodos, tikros ašaros rieda jai iš mėlynų akių. Jėzuitė” (51).



sented as a lesson which she has learned in the camps, and which forces a revision of the prejudices of her childhood. If the plight of the women has forced her to revise earlier notions of sexual morality, the heroism of the doctor Samodurov forces Grinkevičiūtė to rethink her concept of beauty. Grinkevičiūtė describes her initial impression of doctor Samodurov in racial stereotypes: she calls him “bowlegged” with a “typically Jewish nose.” The young Grinkevičiūtė contrasts Samodurov to Borisas Charašas, a handsome Jewish boy who lost an arm to frostbite due to the cruel punishment for stealing some bread. However, when Dalia sees Borisas smiling and ingratiating himself with the man responsible for his punishment, she is repelled, and wonders how can he help but spit in the face of his oppressor: “Borisas did not look so handsome to me anymore. He’s just a disgusting brownnoser, a human being who does not respect himself, who humiliates himself before the others, and deserves only pity and antipathy, in my opinion.”<sup>13</sup> This extremely harsh criticism of Borisas is developed into a reflection on the relationship of beauty and goodness, in which the bowlegged Samodurov comes out looking much better: “The beauty of Apollo, devoid of any spiritual qualities, was repellent [...]. Borisas was a plain failure. Samodurov, who in the opinion of the majority was a monster because of his abnormally huge and distorted figure, seemed handsome to me because he was very humane.”<sup>14</sup>

In her early testimony, Grinkevičiūtė romanticizes her own ethical strength in living to tell the truth, no matter what punishment is threatened. In a detailed narrative of how she was put on trial for stealing wood, she makes it clear that she stands apart from most prisoners. She, along with five Lithuanians, is on trial for stealing boards from the storehouse. Stealing firewood was the only way to heat their barracks, to dry out their clothing and bring a brief, inadequate respite from the deadly cold. All prisoners stole constantly as a matter of survival and the response from the authorities was harsh punishment. In line with the “camp mentality,” all the defendants denied having stolen: “[...] the whole brigade lies. The Soviet Union lied and will lie forever. They stole, they steal, and they will steal. All four detainees protest their innocence. Behind me I hear an approving rumble from the crowd. Soon it will be my turn.”<sup>15</sup> At this point the narrative flashes back, to when Grinkevičiūtė stole the boards, fired up the stove, and made some tea for her dying mother. When the guards entered the barracks and asked who stole the boards,

13 “Borisas man jau nėra gražus. Jis tik šlykštus padlaižys. Žmogus, kuris negerbia savęs, būdamas teisus žeminasi prieš nieką, yra tik pasigailėjimo ir pasišlykštėjimo vertas” (114).

14 “[...] neįdvasintas, apoloniškas grožis man šlykštus. [...] Borisas Charašas man negražus, nevykęs jaunuolis. Samodurovas, kuris, daugumos nuomone, yra pabaisa dėl nenormaliai didelės kreivos figūros, man gražus, nes jis humaniškas” (114).

15 “[...] meluoja visa brigada, melavo ir meluos per amžius visa Tarybų Sąjunga, vogė, vagia ir vogs. Visi keturi užsigynė. Už savęs girdžiu pritariantį minios šurmulį. Tuoj mano eilė” (74).

Grinkevičiūtė immediately confessed. Now, facing the judge's questioning, Grinkevičiūtė again proclaims that she stole the boards. The climax of the scene is when the judge asks if she is not ashamed to be sitting on the bench of the accused: "I feel everyone's curious eyes boring into me. Is she ashamed? Ashamed? Because I gave water to my dying mother? [...] You want to see repentance in my eyes? Shame? You should be ashamed, you murderers, not me."<sup>16</sup> The four accused who denied their guilt are sentenced to two years, while Grinkevičiūtė is found not guilty on the basis of her age and confession. Grinkevičiūtė represents herself as having emerged with her dignity intact: she may have stolen to secure resources to survive, but she never debased herself by compromising her higher ideals.

The moral dilemmas involved in surviving under an unjust and murderous regime are expressed in an extreme form in Grinkevičiūtė's overall positive appraisal of two female tramps, Lidia Vorobyova and Yulia Yudina. These two Russian women were caught up in the Gulag by chance and are seen by Dalia as utterly degraded, and yet somehow fascinating: "They were creatures whose sex and age were very hard to determine. They were extremely shabby. Gorky's tramps would have looked like lords in comparison with those two women" (164). Vorobyova and Yudina represent an extreme form of Soviet mentality: stealing openly, procrastinating, and ignoring authority. Vorobyova refuses to work, dresses in rags, and sleeps all day. She responds to the threats of the administrator by emptying her bowels in front of his office. Expressing their philosophy of survival, Yudina claims: "Here, stealing is a matter of honor, nobility and heroism. And a necessity, if you don't want to croak."<sup>17</sup> For Grinkevičiūtė, these women embody the true principle upon which the Soviet system worked: "As I learned later, almost all Soviet citizens share this psychology, only their ways of stealing are different. They all steal, grab and use whoever gets a chance to get a hold of something."<sup>18</sup> The lack of shame demonstrated by the "tramps" seems to repulse and fascinate Grinkevičiūtė at the same time. On the whole, her portrayal of Yudina is sympathetic, if not positive, insofar as she is "living the truth" of the Soviet system. Dalia's mixed feeling towards their behavior reflects her process of adaptation and simultaneous resistance to the demands of living under the brutal Soviet system.

16 "Jaučiu, kad visi įsmeigė į mane smalsias akis, įdėmiai stebi. Ar man gėda? Gėda? Ar dėl to, kad mirštančiai motinai vandens padaviau? Jūs žiūrit į mane, sotūs Mavrinai, Sventickai ir Travkinai, norit pamatyti atgailą mano akyse? Gėda? Jums gėda, žmogžudžiai, o ne man! Girdžiu kartojant klausimą. 'Ne, man visiškai negėda'" (79).

17 "Vogimas pas mus yra garbės, šlovės ir herojiškumo reikalas [...]. Būtinybė, jei nenori dvėsti" (153).

18 "Kaip paskui įsitikinau, kone visų tarybinių žmonių šitokia psichologija, skiriasi tik glemžimo būdai. Vagia, džiauna, naudojami visi, kas kur ir kaip prieina" (153).

The memoir ends shortly after a scene that could be interpreted as the enactment of Dalia's self-assertive adaptation to the demands of her environment. Dalia and Maryte, a 15-year-old girl, were working in a group of Finns and Lithuanians collecting logs from the riverbank and placing them into piles. They were paid by volume, so the crew as a whole was working at a pace that neither Dalia nor Maryte could sustain: "We were not old enough for such hard work. We did not want to eat, we felt sick, and we flopped down to our beds immediately. I started wondering what we should do to avoid the pain. Life and hard work made me think" (172).

Dalia assumes a leadership role, telling Maryte that she has figured out a way for them to survive, provided Maryte follows Dalia's orders: "I am the head of the team. It is my duty to deliver the work, and it will be I who decides when we have to work and when we can rest. If you want to work with me and not with them, be so kind, please, as to do what I say" (173). Here Dalia's actions reflect the influence of the Yudina and Vorobyova's philosophy. She explains to Maryte how and why they should cheat, building hollow piles of logs and deceiving their supervisor.

I explained to her that we should not work too hard, that work never made anyone rich, it only made him grow a hump, that I did not want to give my youthful strength to the state as a present, that we were both still going to need our strength, and that the government had already robbed us of everything. They had robbed us of our youth and our homes, they had turned us into slaves, and had pushed us into the dirt. If we had to work, after all, it was better to work with the head and not with the hands. Shocked by the audacity of my reasoning, Maryte stared at me with her surprised, wide open eyes. Once during my long oration she even burst out crying (173).

Dalia's lecture to Maryte shows how she has adapted to the culture of the camps.

By the end of the memoir, under the sheer pressure of the brutal daily regime, Dalia's memory of her homeland had become extremely faint. After the brief reprieve of the polar summer, when "for two days we could even take off our quilted jackets" the winter winds again began to blow, signaling the onset of another brutal, deadly winter: "Our yurt was very close to the water's edge. Foaming waves would roll right up to our doorstep: the sound of the sea would send us to sleep, the sound of the sea would wake us up." With this evocation of her remote location in the wild north, Dalia comments: "Not even for a minute could we forget where we were. Lithuania seemed to be only a dream, created by our imaginations. We would talk about it as if we ourselves could not believe any more that the country existed and that we had ever lived there" (176). In such primitive conditions of survival existence, Dalia began to equate the notion of "homeland" with that of civilization and culture. In the very last scene of the book, the sound of "Swan Lake" playing on a radio was the first music that she had heard since the beginning of her ordeal. Just to hear this music provoked an outburst of emotion and memory of her homeland.



## Grinkevičiūtė's mature testimony

Grinkevičiūtė's mature testimony reflects her development into a committed dissident. Unlike the early testimony, with its expressive and romanticized narrative, the mature testimony is focused on making concise judgments about the nature of the regime, marshalling historical events as evidence of its criminality. It is much shorter and less expressive than the early version: the same events are retold in summary, analytical form, with precise dates and political context. Grinkevičiūtė recounts her experience in the historical past this time, and dramatizes very little, only occasionally switching to narrating in the present tense to convey her immediate impressions of the time.<sup>19</sup>

This forensic style of Grinkevičiūtė's mature testimony may reflect her self-declared identification with the Decembrists and *Narodnaya vol'ya* (People's Will), a pre-revolutionary Russian terrorist organization. Šulskytė, Grinkevičiūtė's friend and roommate, writes that among Grinkevičiūtė's favorite books was *Sudebniye rechi russkikh yuristov* (*The Pleadings of Russian Barristers*), and that she cherished the speeches of the pre-revolutionary Russian lawyers Kon', Plevak, and Aleksandrov as much as the classics of literature, if not more. She had memorized the summation of Aleksandrov's defense of Vera Zasulich, a People's Will terrorist, and was especially moved by its closing words: "she may leave this room convicted, but she will not leave it in shame."<sup>20</sup> The climax of the mature testimony occurs in the third part, in her reported dialogue with the interrogators at the time of her second arrest:

I refused to sign the verdict. When they asked me why, I answered that the verdict has no legal basis. Exile is a punishment. For committing a crime one can only be exiled by a court. I was exiled as a child without having committed any crime or having any trial, only because I was born into this family and not some other. Therefore, I do not consider my leaving Yakutsk either an escape or a crime. I do not recognize the verdict.<sup>21</sup>

19 In this respect the manner in which the English version renders the early testimony in the historical past tense is completely unacceptable. It robs the work of its immediacy, and evens out the young Grinkevičiūtė's choppy, hard-hitting syntax. This editorial decision may reflect a certain anxiety with respect to the emotional impact of the work, particularly those sections which do not portray the deportees in heroic terms. The historical past tense de-fictionalizes the work in the sense of minimizing the dramatic mode. Intentional or not, it focuses the reader's attention on the events reported, rather than the perspective of the author.

20 "ona mozet otsyuda viyti osuzhdyonnoju, no ona ne viydet opozorennoyu" (quoted in Šulskytė 1995: 125).

21 "Po nuosprendžio pasirašyti atsisakiau. Į klausimą – kodėl? – atsakiau, kad šis nuosprendis neturi jokio juridinio pagrindo. Ištrėmimas yra bausmė. Ištrėmti gali tik teismas už nusikaltimą. Mane ištrėmė vaiką be jokios kaltės ir teismo, vien dėl to, kad gimiau toj, o ne kitoj šeimoj. Todėl ir išvykimo iš Jakutijos nelaikau nei pabėgimu, nei nusikaltimu. Nuosprendžio nepripažįstu" (187).

This passage expresses Grinkevičiūtė's self-identification as a dissident and outspoken critic of the regime. Given the limited sphere of criticism allowed by the more liberal regime in the sixties and seventies, the dissidents focused on questions of individual morality, honor and dignity, and resistance to the degradation of the Soviet citizen. Dissent was expressed in a legal vocabulary that sought to unmask the bad faith on which actual policy decisions were based. Written in the typical style of the dissident text, Grinkevičiūtė's mature testimony is ostentatiously directed as an accusation against the Soviet regime.

As noted above, Grinkevičiūtė's mature testimony was written in Russian and first published in Moscow for a Soviet-wide audience. It could be described as "politically correct": though devastating in her criticism of the camp regime and of the secret police, she carefully avoids any suggestion that "Russians" are to bear collective responsibility for the suffering of her compatriots. Indeed, "Russians" are not mentioned at all, only "Chekists" and the "NKVD." The only time someone is identified by ethnicity is when she again testifies to the heroism of Samodurov. Grinkevičiūtė does not explicitly identify him as a Jew, but takes care to mention his patronymic, Solomonovich, on two occasions, which clearly identifies him as Jewish. His courage and self-sacrifice are amplified, moreover, by a report that he was killed at the front during the war. Grinkevičiūtė's sense of community with the dissidents is expressed by her description of all the "wonderful intellectual people" she met in prison: "It seemed that Stalin had locked up the country's mind, its honor, and its conscience here. Scientists, film and theater actors, lecturers, doctors, students and others were jailed here."<sup>22</sup> Categorical in her condemnation of the Soviet system and specific individuals, Grinkevičiūtė shows how Russians too have suffered, and takes care to avoid any suggestion that Russians as a whole bear any form of collective guilt.

The mature testimony is also, at first glance, focused on events witnessed and experienced by Grinkevičiūtė the individual. However, unlike the early testimony, which tends at times to romanticize Grinkevičiūtė's *individual* conduct and experience, the mature testimony is focused on a *collective* narrative of deportation as a catastrophic exile threatening the Lithuanian nation as a whole. In her account of how Lithuanian teachers were singled out for punishment by the regime, Grinkevičiūtė calls them the "educators of the nation," and represents them as carriers of culture and of the nation's historical memory: "From them children learned about Lithuania's heroic past, about their forefathers who for hundreds of years protected Lithuania from conquerors from the East and from the West. They taught children to love their native tongue, one of the oldest languages in the world, which had been forbidden by the Tsar for four decades."<sup>23</sup> By referring to how Lithuanians suffered under

22 "Atrodė, kad Stalinas čia uždarė šalies protą, garbę ir sąžinę. Kalėjo mokslininkai, kino ir teatro aktoriai, dėstytojai, gydytojai, studentai ir kt (188).

23 "Iš jų vaikai sužinodavo apie didvyrišką Lietuvos praeitį, apie protėvius, kurie šimtmečiais gynė Tėvynę nuo užkariautojų iš Rytų ir iš Vakarų. Jie mokė vaikus

the Tsarist Empire, the time frame of Grinkevičiūtė's testimony suddenly stretches back for hundreds of years. By evoking the memory of past oppression, her narrative of modern oppression taps into the ancient, mythological history of the nation: "They were the first to tell children about the revolts of 1831 and 1863 which were brutally suppressed, after which entire villages were exiled to Siberia."<sup>24</sup> The commonality of fate between Grinkevičiūtė's generation and prior generations of Lithuanian exiles brings the collective dimension of the experience to the fore.

Moreover, the constant reference to graves and burial in Grinkevičiūtė's mature testimony evokes of her sense of kinship, nationhood, and territorial belonging. Katherine Verdery shows how the ideological vacuum left in the wake of the collapse of socialism has been filled by a renewed sense of community based on a religious association of kinship and territory, reinforced by what she calls the "politics of dead bodies." Throughout Eastern Europe, the remains of persons persecuted by the communist regimes have been disinterred and reburied with elaborate ceremony as a means of "giving new contours to the past through revising genealogies and rewriting history" (40). Classifying modern nationalism as a derivation of kinship and religion, she traces its origins to the practices of ancestor worship in traditional societies: "Ancestors were buried in the soil around the dwelling; their presence consecrated that soil, and continuous rituals connecting them with their heirs created a single community consisting of the dead, their heirs and the soil they shared" (104). For Verdery, the ancient notion of kinship as being rooted in particular soils is the basis for nationalist political movements. Likewise, in Grinkevičiūtė's mature testimony, the pervasive reference to and description of burials invoke an apocalyptic perspective on the deportation, establishing a spiritual bond between the nation and its territory.

Part One of this testimony is highly commemorative, elegiac and, for extended passages, the names of individuals and families who perished are simply listed with no narration or explanation, creating the sense that we are reading a series of epitaphs. Indeed, Grinkevičiūtė presents her testimony as the only gravestone that most victims of the deportation will ever have: "I breathe easier knowing that I – as much as my strength, intelligence and abilities allowed me – built a kind of monument for the victims of the North. The world learned about the thousands of nameless victims of torture buried in the icy graves. This cannot be destroyed or erased. It is now history. It is also a monument for my parents."<sup>25</sup> The presentation of her testimony as a monu-

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mylėti gimtąją kalbą, vieną seniausių pasaulio kalbų, kuri keturis dešimtmečius buvo caro draudžiama" (177).

24 "Jie pirmieji pasakojo vaikams apie žiauriai numalšintus 1831 ir 1863 metų sukilimus, po kurių ištisi kaimai buvo ištremti į Sibirą" (177).

25 "Man labai lengva kvėpuoti nuo minties, kad aš, kiek leido mano jėgos, protas, sugebėjimai, pastačiau šioji tokį paminklą Šiaurės aukoms, pasaulis sužinojo apie tūkstančius bevardžių kankinių broliškuose lediniuose kapuose. To



ment is no mere rhetorical flourish. It literally stands in for the lack of a proper burial for her compatriots, who died in Trofimovsk without a trace: "In 1949, when they took the last of the exiles to other places to fish, the waves had already begun to destroy the edge of the common grave and it had started to crumble. It is absolutely certain that the waves have long since washed away all the corpses."<sup>26</sup> Siberia is a land of forgetting, because even those cemeteries created are destroyed by the shifting course of the river Lena.

At times, the testimony reads like an ethnographic account of burial practices in the Gulag, detailed yet concise, and objective in tone:

The corpse bearers themselves were starved and weak; therefore they would tie a rope to the corpse's feet and together drag it out of the barrack. They would then put the dead on sleds, and harnessing themselves into the ropes pull them several hundred meters beyond the barracks. There they would unload the corpses into a common pile. The dead people's hair would remain frozen to the barrack walls.<sup>27</sup>

Improper burial is presented not only as undignified for the dead, but as a tortuous and harmful process for the living as well.

The extensive description of improper burials is juxtaposed to the principal event of Part Two, namely the burial of Grinkevičiūtė's mother in the cellar of their former home in Kaunas. The contrast between the brutal, anonymous deaths in the Gulag and this different death is conveyed in detail: "She lies laid out among flowers. Her face is peaceful and blissful. The end of her suffering has come. I open the window so the soft Lithuanian breeze can stroke her face for the last time [...]. Your greatest final wish has been fulfilled. You died in Lithuania, and your native land will shelter you."<sup>28</sup> Part One ends with Grinkevičiūtė's evocation of the ghosts of Trofimovsk that wander endlessly searching for the road to their homeland. In Part Two, Grinkevičiūtė shows us a proper burial, the main characteristic of which is the territory in which it takes place. By burying her mother, not only in her homeland, but in the cellar of her former home, Grinkevičiūtė evokes powerful associations between death, burial, kinship, and territorial belonging. She entrenches her individual and collective sense of belonging to the territory of

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nebegalima nei sunaikinti, nei ištrinti. Tai istorija. Tai paminklas ir mano Tėvams" (5).

26 "Kai 1949 m. paskutinius tremtinius išvežė žvejoti į kitas vietas, bangos jau pradėjo griauti broliško kapo kraštą, ir jis ėmė irti. Nėra jokios abejonės, kad visus lavonus bangos seniai išplovė" (178).

27 "Patys vežiotojai buvo labai išbadę ir nusilpę, todėl pririšdavo pie lavonų kojų virvę ir bendromis jėgomis traukdavo iš barako. Paskui mirusiųsiu dėdavo ant rogių ir, įsikinkę į virves, veždavo keletą šimtų metrų toliau nuo barako. Ten lavonus išversdavo į bendrą krūvą. Sienų leduose likdavo prišalę mirusiųjų plaukai" (170).

28 "Guli ji lovoje pašarvota tarp gėlių. O veide – palaima ir ramybė. Galas kančioms. Atidarau langą. Tegul Lietuvos vėjelis paskutinį kartą paglosto jos veidą. [...] Išsipildė tavo didžiausias paskutinis noras. Tu numirei Lietuvoj. Tave priglaus gimtoji žemė" (183).

Lithuania through the burial of her mother in Kaunas, and contrasts this proper burial with the improper burials of her compatriots in a foreign, inhospitable land. The spiritual dimension of this contrast is apparent in that those who died in Trofimovsk are represented as ghosts, cursed to wander forever in search of their homeland.

From this perspective, the deportation as a whole is portrayed as a catastrophe. The collective loss of homeland is dramatized by this improper burial of the deportees in a foreign land where they leave no trace or tangible presence for their descendants to see and remember. The travesty of the senseless suffering and death is compounded by the fact that nobody will commemorate their death. Grinkevičiūtė's discourse of collective memory seeks to commemorate the dead and thus resist the tide of forgetting. In burying her mother, Grinkevičiūtė enacts a ritual of profound significance on a biographical, national, and religious level. Burial is a core ritual of kinship, expressive of community based on common descent. The sense of what constitutes a proper burial is profoundly communal, and touches the core of what makes for a community in a traditional sense.

In view of Verdery's argument, the focus on burial, commemoration, and kinship in Grinkevičiūtė's mature work could support a nationalist interpretation of her testimony. However, having witnessed the perversion of socialist ideals and the collapse of ethnic solidarity in the face of extreme oppression and deprivation, Grinkevičiūtė's testimony also reflects a cautious, anti-heroic stance towards notions of collective identity and belonging. In this respect, Grinkevičiūtė's testimony supports the argument of Edith Wyschogrod, for whom the cataclysms of the twentieth century have resulted in a displacement, not the reinforcement, of territoriality as the foundation of identity in the myth of autochthony, whereby the nation is understood to have been born from the earth. Wyschogrod (1998: 220) writes: "the idea of place persists, but locales have become sites of mourning, not of life but of death. Burial places are the fragments of vast memory palaces, reminders less of the events awaiting historical remembering, than of the historian's responsibility to remember". She argues that this displacement of autochthony establishes the possibility of narratives of collective memory that are not *exclusive*, but *inclusive* of otherness, based on claims of *ethical citizenship*, rather than *kinship* and *territoriality*. While the narrative of autochthony "must be heroic history [...] an incessant remythologization of the divine origin [of the community from the land]," she insists that the "reverse autochthony of burial places cannot generate such a recalling [...]. To speak from the burial place is to inhabit a terrain that is not a terrain, an exteriority that is the non-place of ethics, the 'space' of authorization of historical narrative" (225).

Even in death, Grinkevičiūtė's sense of ethical community transcends national boundaries. A third cemetery appears in Part Three, as Grinkevičiūtė commemorates the death of prisoners summarily executed in a prison in the Gorky (now Nizhny Novgorod) region:

One of my favorite places in the prison zone was a corner where beautiful luxuriant grass grew like nowhere else. Here it was quiet and peaceful and birds alighted sometimes. I was amazed at why the grass was so lovely here. Then an old prisoner explained to me that between 1941 and 1945 this plot had not yet been prison territory, and prisoners who had been shot or killed were buried here.<sup>29</sup>

Her reverence for this territory (“This place – each blade of grass, each flower – appeared holy to me [...]”)<sup>30</sup> is set in the context of her discovery of the “wonderful community” of dissidents of all nationalities, and follows a hagiographic description of the Muscovite Boris Vorobjov, a dissident who lost his eye during his brutal interrogation but nevertheless refused to bear false witness to incriminate his colleagues, an act of martyrdom that testifies, among other things, to the fact that Russians too were victims of the Soviet regime.

## Conclusion

In the early testimony, the young Grinkevičiūtė struggles to make sense of a bewildering experience that forces to accept responsibility and act in a role beyond her years. Not surprisingly, the narrative is structured on a “coming of age” motif and highlights the difficult choices involved in adapting to the demands of an exceptionally harsh regime. Her preconceptions concerning nation and class are steadily broken down by her analysis of everyday events. The harsh conditions of life in the camps is portrayed as a trial which levels all differences except for moral rectitude.

In the mature testimony, the politically mature dissident writer still highlights the importance of moral integrity, but takes care to articulate the heroism of others more than her own. In addressing questions of ethnic and cultural difference, she now has the tools to articulate a dialectical internationalist perspective: she shows how people who stand up to the Soviet system are honorable, but does not fail to testify passionately to the specific, collective claims of the Lithuanian nation. Grinkevičiūtė’s work offers enough material to support a wide variety of interpretations: as the testimony of ethnic community, based on ties of kinship, and as the testimony of an ethical community, founded on ties of citizenship. While the first envisages common descent as the basis for belonging, the second envisages community as the reciprocity of legal and ethical obligation. The continuities between the early with the mature testimonies show the evolution of Grinkevičiūtė’s ethical develop-

29 “Lagerio zonos pakraštyje buvo viena mano labai mėgstama vieta – nedidelis plotelis, kuriame kaip niekur kitur augo nepaprastai vešli ir graži žolė. Čia ir paukščių kartais atskrisdavo, buvo tylu ir ramu. Mane stebino, kodėl čia tokia graži žolė. Vienas senas kalinys kartą man paaiškino, kad 1941–1945 m. čia buvo dar ne lagerio teritorija ir toje vietoje buvo laidojami mirę, sušaudyti ir nušauti kaliniai” (188).

30 “Ši vieta – kiekviena žolytė, kiekviena gėlytė – man atrodo šventa [...]”



ment, and yet the differences in accent and form reveal the particularity of a child's experience.

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