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**EXILE AND IDENTITY IN
AGATE NESAULE'S NOVELS**

**TRIMDA UN IDENTITĀTE
AGATES NESAULES ROMĀNOS**

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ANOTĀCIJA

Šis pētnieciskais darbs aplūko identitātes un trimdas jēdzienus Agates Nesaules romānos *Sieviete dzintarā* un *Zudušie saulgrieži*. Pētnieciskā darba mērķis ir aplūkot veidus, kādos Agate Nesaule pauž identitātes un trimdas jēdzienus attiecībā uz Amerikas latviešu biedrību vēsturi un piedzīvoto pēc 1944. gada. Pētījums tika veikts, izmantojot literārās analīzes metodi trimdas literatūras studiju kontekstā. Agates Nesaules romāni atspoguļo savstarpējo saikni starp trimdu, atmiņu un identitāti, parādot, ka pārvietošanās trauma ir trimdinieku neatņemama sastāvdaļa. Romānos atklātie trimdas piedzīvojumi rāda pēckara latviešu trimdinieku integrācijas psiholoģiskos aspektus amerikāņu sabiedrībā. Risinot identitātes problēmas trimdas pārdzīvojumos, Agate Nesaule mēģina pārdomāt savu - trimdas sievietes dzīvi Amerikā un no jauna savienot to ar vietu, kur viņa piederēja un no kuras tika izsūtīta. Latviešu trimdas pārdzīvojumu un memuāru tēma, kas pausta Agates Nesaules romānos, sniedz būtisku ieguldījumu plašākā vēsturiskā 20. gadsimta kontekstā, kā arī literāro formu pētījumos, tādos, kā autobiogrāfiju romānos, kuri stāsta saviem lasītājiem par atmiņām un traumām, kuras gūtas trimdas pārvietošanās un pārdzīvojumu rezultātā.

Atslēgvārdi: Agate Nesaule, trimda, identitāte, pārvietošana, atmiņa, literārā analīze, Latvijas-Amerikas vēsture, sieviešu atmiņas.

ABSTRACT

The present paper examines the concepts of exile and identity in the novels *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile* and *Lost Midsummers: A Novel of Exile and Friendship* by Agate Nesaule. The goal of the study is to discuss the ways in which the notions of exile and identity are addressed by Agate Nesaule with regard to the history and experiences of Latvian-American communities after 1944. The study is carried out with the method of close literary analysis of two novels in the context of exile literature studies. Novels of Agate Nesaule reflect the interconnection between exile, memory and identity, showing the trauma of displacement as an integral part of the exiles. Exile experiences revealed in the novels show the psychological complexities of integration of the postwar Latvian exiles in the American society. By addressing the issue of identity in exile experiences Agate Nesaule attempts to re-think her life of a Latvian exile woman in America and to reconnect it with the memory of the place to which she belonged and from which she was exiled. The theme of the Latvian exile experiences and memories discussed in the novels by Agate Nesaule significantly contributes to the understanding of exile experiences in the wider historical contexts of the 20th century and to the studies of the literary forms, such as semi-autobiographical novel, that tell their readers about the memories and traumas of exile displacements and experiences.

Key words: Agate Nesaule, exile, identity, displacement, memory, literary analysis, Latvian-American history, women's memories.

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INTRODUCTION

Exile, due to its various types and contexts, has always been a topical issue in Latvia as well as beyond its borders. Importantly, it has obtained a certain emotional value for many countries and societies in the history of the 20th century. The notion ‘exile’ can mean labour exile, political exile, economic exile and many other types of exile, leading to the thought that the present-day world offers quite a number of different perceptions of exile origins, routes and understandings, going far beyond the perceptions of exile experiences in the contexts of political catastrophes, war conflicts and their consequences. Explorations of different exile experiences, memories and writings on exile, have proved to be important to the understandings of contemporary identity, its transformations and its continuities in the early 21st century.

The present paper addresses the concepts of exile and identity in the novels *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile* (1995) and *Lost Midsummers: A Novel of Exile and Friendship* (2018) by Latvian-American author Agate Nesaule. The novels of Nesaule have been studied by scholars, such as Leena Kurvet- Käosaar (2019), and a recent PhD study in Latvia by Birzniece (2013) also included the research on Nesaule’s novels. The focus of the present study is to reflect on the issue of exile in relation to identity and memory in the novels by Agate Nesaule.

Therefore, the **goal** of the present study is to discuss the ways in which the notions of exile and identity are addressed by Agate Nesaule in the context of Latvian-American communities after 1944.

The **research questions** set for the research:

1. How are the concepts of exile and identity addressed in the novels by Agate Nesaule?
2. What role does the exile experience play in the lives of the central characters and the process of becoming Latvian-Americans in the novels?

The enabling **objectives** of the present paper are the following:

1. to provide the literature review of the studies on the figure and experience of exile and on exile literature, in terms of their importance and relevance to the theme of the bachelor thesis;
2. to argue about the ways in which exiles’ experiences and identities are negotiated in the novels by Agate Nesaule;
3. to analyse the critical ways in which Agate Nesaule reflects on America as a new home in the protagonists’ lives and the process of becoming Latvian-American;

4. to scrutinize the importance of exile in re-establishing the identities of the dislocated characters;
5. to draw relevant conclusions.

This present research is carried out by applying close literary analysis of the novels by Agate Nesaule, within the framework of exile literature studies. It is also combined with an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis and the discussion of larger historical and political contexts, important for arguing about the specific aspects of the theme of exile and identity in Nesaule's novels.

1. THE GENERAL CONCEPT OF EXILE

The present chapter aims to address the concept of exile in literature and some approaches to its definition, relevant for the studies in exile literature. It reviews the major works written on exile and identity that contribute to the theoretical basis of the present study. Also, the chapter provides the basis for the further discussion in which the concepts of exile and identity are analysed in various contexts such as transcultural and transnational mobilities and memory-writings.

1.1 Behind the concepts of exile and identity

Kirk Denton notes that the literature of exile is ‘based on a paradox: the longing for freedom from one's past and the psychological need to define one's self in terms of the past’ (Denton, 1989, quoted in Elliott and Stokes, 2013: 314). Exile writings are efforts to deal with exiles’ psychological condition of rifts between native places and new homes, between irreparable losses and continuing acculturation, between the bondage of painful memories and the power of storytelling as ‘healing trauma’ (McCormack, 2008: 137).

Edward William Said’s book *Reflections on exile and other essays* (2000) has been of paramount importance to the literary and cultural studies of exile and identity since the moment of its publication. Said explores the fact of his own exile and reflects on the complexity of the theme of exile, describing exiles as those who

are cut off from their roots, their land, their past. They generally do not have armies or states, although they are often in search of them. Exiles feel, therefore, an urgent need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or a restored people (Said, 2000: 183).

Indeed, the crucial point Said is making concerns the statement that exiles are ‘in search’ and, namely, because they are ‘cut off’ from their land and their roots. Subsequently, the only way of coping with the complex state of exiles is through the attachment to the past ideology. Said argues that exile and nationalism are very much linked to each other and cannot be discussed neutrally, without any interconnection. However, it has to be taken into account that exile, in comparison to nationalism, is a discontinuous state of being and, moreover, the state where the exile is free from the past ideology and broken history which is reassembled into a new is, by fact, impossible.

Said marks an important point arguing that the pain of exiles is often expressed through different writings, including sensitive poems (ibid.: 185). Darwish, in one of his poems on exile, shares his emotional state as an exile that is full of homelessness; moreover, the poem

highlights the power of the emotional state of homelessness affecting even the physical state of the exile (ibid.). In his work Said highlights the feeling of agony and unsuccessful attempts to reach satisfaction in different works in literature around the topic of exile: ‘Exiles look at non-exiles with resentment. They belong in their surroundings, you feel, whereas an exile is always out of place (ibid.: 186).’ Such a statement might sound deeply strong; however, as the state can never be truly tolerated, it only confirms its importance in history.

Salman Akhtar in the book *Performing Exile: Foreign Bodies* (2017) shares the fact that there are numerous ways in which the experiences of an immigrant and exile differ from each other: voluntary or involuntary, time given for planning and preparing, the degree of the traumatic event, possibility or no possibility of revisiting the home country and, undoubtedly, the way one is accepted by the host population (Rudakoff, 2017: 123). Importantly, an immigrant, when forced to leave the native country, because of unbearable poverty causing a psychological trauma, can be also compared to the exile, who is forced to live somewhere else either having a choice or vice versa. Akhtar’s crucial point of differentiation between the two figures of immigrant and exile, undoubtedly, concerns the way in which the exiles are welcomed by the host population. Namely, that

Despite the younger generation’s education or birth in the United States, they are all too often faced with discrimination based on stereotypes constructed by mainstream American culture. The use of hyphenated categories, like Asian-American, reinforces the formulaic racist stereotypes, such as “model minority” and marginalizes the 1.5 and second generations to the periphery of American society (ibid.).

Another aspect examined by Akhtar concerning the experience of exiles discusses the younger generation that have no choice but to deal with the remaining cultural memories of their parents, because they have adopted the new land as their native one. Accordingly, crucial is the fact that self-identification as a child of immigrant parents can develop parallel with a ‘sense of guilt and obligation’ that is strongly and vividly caused by the parents’ continuous sacrifices and inner monologues tied to their past (ibid.). Therefore, it only marks the ongoing and unstoppable psychological trauma felt by exiles through many generations and is connected to the aspect of family and community memory which will also be discussed in the following analysis of Latvian exile experiences and their representation in Nesaule’s novels.

It is important to discuss the psychological aspect of exile experiences which certainly differentiates the experiences of exiles from other human experiences. The Russian-American Poet Laureate and a Nobel Prize winner Joseph Brodsky emphasizes an exile experience ‘as a psychological, philosophical, and existential condition that defines this experience of migration as displacement, loss and homelessness’ (Rudakoff, 2017: 19). In his readings

Brodsky put an emphasis on the concepts such as responsibility and personal significance that should be properly perceived by exilic writers, namely, stating that an exilic artist needs to rethink and reestablish such concepts as

An intellectual, an artist, or a writer in exile has an obligation to speak on behalf of literature and arts, and their ability to appeal to humanity. Literature, like poverty, is known for taking care of its own kind and is the greatest [...] teacher of human subtlety, a cure to the distracting force of progress that leads civilizations to wars, social and economic disasters, humanitarian and environmental catastrophes [...] the function of exilic literature and arts is to provide a perspective, retrospectively and retroactively, on the history of mankind and its current moment, as on of history's variables [...] the gaze of an exilic artist is simultaneously turned into one's past and one's future (Rudakoff, 2017: 19).

Brodsky, through such statements, significantly examines the sensibility of exilic artists and their importance in developing the cultural reflexivity and understanding of experiences of exile, which only reminds that artists and writers can turn exile experiences into memories and images, valuable not only in the context of the past but also the present and future. In addition, it can be done through sharing the experiences, which was, undoubtedly, practiced by many exilic artists and still is, such as Agate Nesaule. Nesaule's novels significantly contribute to the histories and memories shared by and for the Latvian exile community, utilizing the memories as something valuable in a wider historical context.

In the present paper, it is equally important to look at the concept of identity that is further developed into the discussion of the identity in the context of exile. The general concept of identity has been widely discussed throughout the times, and the notion 'identity' has been described and defined in different ways and various social, psychological and cultural-anthropological theories (Hall and Gay, 2011; Sulyman, 2014). It has been used in different social and political analyses and practices. It has been widely discussed and examined further at the intersection with such notions as 'gender, class, race, immigration, sexuality, religion, ethnicities, nationalism, culture, new social movements' (ibid.).

However, if the concept of identity is to be examined in a wider historical context, it can be marked that the terms such as *personal identity* and *self-identity* can be traced to the times of ancient Greece (Jackson, 2010: 545). Accordingly, both of the terms examine the nature of humans and 'their broad nature allowing them to be engaged through a variety of perspectives that include psychological, philosophical, psychosocial and narrative' (ibid.). Although both notions are often used interchangeably, the term *personal identity* refers to the 'identity of persons other than ourselves', whereas self-identity can be defined as someone 'being aware of one's own identity' (ibid.). What is more

At the most basic level, personal identity can be defined as a self-description of highly specific details and experiences. *Personal identity* can also be defined as a set of traits

and characteristics that are assigned to a particular person. Conventional definitions of personal identity, such as those offered by scholar Erving Goffman, suggest that personal identity is concerned with what makes an individual distinct from other individuals [...] A more philosophical rendering is offered by Peter Unger, who defines personal identity as the philosophy of our own strict survival (Jackson, 2010: 545).

The idea of personal identity is connected with the notions of collective identity such as national identity and cultural identity (Taylor, 1994), and they are in a complex relationship, as the studies of Habermas, Smith and other scholars have been demonstrating (Smith, 1991; Habermas, 1995). For example, Benedict Anderson argues that national identity is conceived 'in language, rather than blood and nations and national identities are socially constructed imagined communities (Anderson, 1983: 133). Anthony Smith's well-known definition is that 'National identity involves some sense of political community, history, territory, patria, citizenship, common values and traditions' (Smith, 1991: 9). Developing Smith's views, Montserrat Guibernau argues about a need to rethink national identity in the 21st century and singles out national identity having five dimensions: psychological, cultural, territorial, historical, and political (Guibernau, 2007: 11). The argument about the cultural dimension of national identity has informed the analysis of Nesaule's novels in the present study:

The process of identification with a specific culture implies a strong emotional investment able to foster solidarity bonds among the members of a given community who come to recognize one another as fellow nationals [...] a shared culture favours the creation of solidarity bonds among the members of a given community by allowing them to recognize each other as fellow nationals and to imagine their community as separate and distinct from others (ibid.: 13).

Secondly, the scholar's argument about the territorial dimension of national identity is very important for analyzing the intersection of exile and identity in Nesaule's literary reflections on her displacement experiences:

Globalization conveys visibility and awareness of the 'other', but for the large majority of peoples, the territorial boundaries of the nation signal the limits of their homeland and fellow nationals are usually portrayed as if they were more 'human' than outsiders, as deserving our support, concern and nurture. Filial sentiments toward fellow nationals are not matched by feelings for 'foreigners', 'unknown peoples', 'strangers', maybe potential 'enemies' (ibid.: 22).

The present chapter has aimed to provide an overview of some concepts of exile and identity and introduces several understandings of the definition of the experience and figure of exile. The next chapter discusses some aspects of exile literature studies and, secondly, navigates the discussion towards the historical and regional contextualization of exile experiences and their contemporary studies.

2. THE CONCEPT OF EXILE AND IDENTITY IN LITERARY STUDIES

Scholars such as Said present the concept of exile in a very clear and general way, helping to differentiate the experiences of immigrants from exiles and defining the general concept of exile to a wider audience. However, in order to perceive the exile in its varying contexts, it is very important to examine the concept of exile offered by different researchers within the context of interdisciplinary approach. Moreover, it contributes to the understanding of identity in the context of exile. Therefore, the present chapter will examine the concepts of exile and identity in literary studies with the focus on establishing an approach towards the notion of identity from the perspective of exile.

2.1 Notions of exile and identity in contexts

If the concept of identity is to be further scrutinized, it has to be taken into account that there are different scholars offering a wider perspective of exile. First of all, Pamela Ballinger (2003) offers to explore the concept of exile in a specific regional historical as well as social context. Her long-term and pathbreaking study of the figure of exile in the East-Central European and post socialist contexts is published in her book *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (2003) about the historical events, the historical memory and cultural identity of the ethnic Italians, displaced from their homeland after the end of the World War II. She draws our attention to the following:

At the technical or legal level, individuals who left Istria between 1945 and 1955 were recognized by the Italian state as *profughi*, or refugees [...] One man, an adolescent when his family left the Istrian port of Pola, noted Istrians' common practice of taking the keys to their houses with them when they parted from Istria. 'I remember too, the day we left. He (his father) went to close the door of the house with the key, and he put the key in his pocket as a token.' Indicating that many refugees hoped for an eventual return to their homes, such practices also embody a view of Italians as the rightful owners of the land, and property. After 1954, however, Istrians such as this man's father realized that their loss had become permanent [...] The physical degradation of the family's house thus rendered 'homeland' something to be preserved only in memory (Ballinger, 2003: 168-69).

This only proves the author's point stating that by attending to different forms of memory such as poetry, memoirs, life stories, traditions the exiles construct their memories forming their 'lost world' (ibid.). Their 'lost word', which is important to mention, even created by the memories of their parents, means more and proves more than the actual landscape (ibid.: 172). Her study is particularly important for the discussion of Nesaule's novels because Pamela Ballinger demonstrates how the analysis of a specific exile experience can be

expanded into the argument about profound dimensions of humanitarian concern in modern European politics and history.

Allatson and McCormack in *Exile Cultures, Misplaced Identities* (2008) discuss important themes, framing the study of Nesaule's novel. Its authors demonstrate another approach when looking at place and identity in the context of exile, where the authors take the issues from the transcultural perspective (Allatson and McCormack, 2008). The book addresses the problematic location of exile, the importance of the homeland, the strong necessity to have an exilic voice, memory and identity: individual, national, communal and transnational identity (ibid.: 23). The authors convincingly bring the perspective of exile across different continents. First of all, the issue regarding the language and its impact on the exile experiences is addressed. Tibetan exile is one of the cultures involved in the discussion of exile and identity and its connection to language; therefore, it shows the language as one of the meaningful elements in the experiences of exile:

It is clear that language has an important place in the experience of exile. In the first place, exiled individuals may be linguistic outsiders in the exile space, and may experience exclusions in discourse, or may agonize over being forced by circumstance to give up the languages they have always used in constructing their national or ethnic identities [...] Being an exile, therefore, is not just a removal from a cherished geographical space, but a removal from a context of culture within which language plays an important role [...] (ibid.: 82).

In this way is the complexity of the exile experiences shown, as language significantly problematizes and recreates the values and the identity of the exiles. What is more, the author makes a reference to Halliday's (1978) definition of language and its three levels, where one of them is interpersonal, involving the expression of social roles and attitudes; therefore, leading to the understanding of language and how it shapes our experiences, including the one of exile (ibid.).

Accordingly, exiled writers, through writing, manage to capture the harshness of exile as well as reach some purification of emotion; writing reawakens the survival instinct and exiles manage to rewrite the stories and put their bitterness into lasting and valuable images (ibid.: 86). The present examples show the distinct connection between the language and national identity, referring to the exile experiences discussed by Nesaule in her novels. That is, the characters in the novels are forced to be removed 'from a context of culture' which in the context of Nesaule's novels is their homeland Latvia. In addition, they are shown as 'linguistic outsiders', and Nesaule in her novels explicitly addresses the language barrier being the central aspect in the process of becoming 'accepted' by the host population.

2.2 The theme of Baltic exile experiences in contemporary studies of Baltic history

Another especially important perspective of exile that needs to be examined for the present study of the novels by Agate Nesaule, concerns the studies on the Baltic exile histories. Baltic experiences of the war had been widely discussed in numerous literary studies. Vieda Skultans (1997) writes about Baltic exiles and examines the concept of displacement. Skultans in the article 'Theorizing Latvian lives: The Quest for Identity' includes different narratives of exiles, showing the chaos and emptiness experienced by exiles from the moment they were arrested until the moment of returning back to their homeland (Skultans, 1997). Skultans aims to depict the separate exile stories of the past as ones creating coherent cultural meanings and contributing to the understanding of personal identity as well as national loyalties. She marks the engagement of the authors in a search for meaning in lives that are disrupted. Therefore, it will serve as another parallel when examining the novels of exile by Agate Nesaule.

One of the stories introduced by Skultans analyses the experience of arrestment in the context of post-war deportations of the Balts. Ilze, one of the arrested, recalls that 'I lived in a student residence and they came in the evening. Two men came', adding that the men pushed a note across demanding her to follow and that her beautiful gold watch was immediately taken off from her wrist (ibid.: 770). On the contrary, physiology lecture notes that stood on the table were taken with Ilze: 'I picked up my brief case with the lecture notes. I wanted to study very much. I remember they were physiology lectures. And I went out of the door with them. That was all' (ibid.). Skultans addresses the account of the arrest symbolising Ilze's distinct moral and social portrait. Moreover, the portrait is telling about Ilze's identity where the disrupted life is only the mirror reflecting her inner values.

Another account concerns Milda, a Latvian country woman, and her narration of the journey to Siberia where she explains: 'We travelled forty days and nights in cattle trucks. At night we were guarded by Alsatian dogs. There were benches in two tiers for sleeping like salted herrings one next to the other. I had nothing with me to eat' (ibid.: 771). Forty days, as noted by Skultans, notably refers to the Bible, holding the narrative together and bringing the suffering of the exiled in sharper focus. Skultans emphasizes the exile stories contributing to the concept of identity: 'Through such interplay imprisonment and enforced relocation are represented as a quest, and prisoners and deportees recast themselves as heroes and heroines. When life is recast as a quest, identities are transformed from the personal to the collective' (ibid.: 777).

Skultans summarises her in-depth study, saying that the narratives represent exiles' feeling of hopelessness, and the conditions in which they were supposed to exist were harsh, taking into account that they were starving, the dwellings had to be built by themselves and those being ill were not able to reach for medical help. Therefore, death rates were very high, and Maiga, one of the reported, states that 'we were in swamps, jungles, with insects biting [...] Where we lived, the Russians told us that people would go hunting, there is a great emptiness... (ibid.).' Most importantly, when exiles describe their homecoming, they, in great detail, describe the nature close to every Latvian, including the avenues of trees they remember last, or the river Daugava (ibid.: 774). As the author states, these narratives point out the problem of a constant change of physical, social and moral landscape of exiles. Moreover, Skultans puts forward that 'As the Holocaust has become central to Jewish identity, so deportation has come to constitute a central feature of Latvian identity' (ibid.: 765). The present paper questions the concepts of exile and identity; therefore, these accounts collected by Vieda Skultans are of great importance for the discussion how the characters in the novels by Agate Nesaule manage to cope with the past events and establish a place for themselves.

Another significant article by Rein Taagepera (2009) investigates the complex aspects of the Baltic exile history after 1944. Namely, he discusses the conditions the exile communities in the West had to cope with

Socially, the exiles had to gain respect for their ethnic communities, in order to be listened to. The Baltic exiles achieved it quickly thanks to their solid working habits. Making their cultures known was easiest at the level of folk dancing, but language difficulties made themselves felt when it came to translating Baltic literary works (Taagepera, 2009: 453).

The article informs about the unpreparedness of the Baltic states for a democratic society at the political level since

Democratic experience in all Baltic countries had been interrupted by the early 1930s. Totalitarian occupations had affected the Baltics more than they noticed or admitted. In their anticommunist zeal the Baltic exiles at times confused sociologists with socialists and political scientists with politruk, the political instructors of the Soviet army (ibid.).

Accordingly, the Baltic exile communities had to deal with numerous issues such as varying political attitudes, translation problems causing misinterpretations etc. Taagepera informs about such issues affecting the perception of the Baltic history, and general struggle for any books, articles to be published stating about the history of the Baltic states at that time. Therefore, by comprehending the way Baltic states were perceived by the West, it is easier to analyse the exile theme and Americanness addressed in the novels by Agate Nesaule.

Another important contribution to the studies of Baltic exile history is Irene Elksnis-Geisler's dissertation 'The Gendered Plight of Terror: Annexation and Exile in Latvia 1940-1950' (2011) in which she has collected numerous stories of exile by women, pointing out to the immensely brutal environment for women: 'Life for the citizens in Latvia during the period of 1944 and 1945 had deteriorated to the point that there was violence and danger at every turn. The decision to emigrate was for many no longer a choice' (Elksnis-Geisler, 2011: 209). She also points to the gender asymmetries of exile experiences and the issues of violence and sexuality for women's survival during the deportations stating that

Female refugees were frequently vulnerable to sexual assault. The extent of wartime rape of Latvian women is difficult to measure. Women's feelings of shame and dishonor associated with these acts of violence discourage disclosing the assaults (ibid.: 224).

The study touches upon the stories and memories shared by women in particular through this complex period in the history as well as its consequences. Elksnis-Geisler expands on the theme of exile in post-war life, informing about the ways how women in particular managed to cope with such traumatic past and complicated present. Namely, she states that it was done through painting folk symbols on kitchen utensils, through songs and singing, sharing food and others (ibid.: 2). The author highlights the importance of folk songs during such times: '[...] my dear girl, for every place or every job there is a folk song; and it is really so. I think that is the main educator - the folk song, and nature' (ibid.: 48). For the exiles the reminiscences serve as a way of reimagining the past.

2.3 Types of memory and their connection to identity

The notion of identity is closely related to the process of memory and its practices and forms. Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad in *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (2010) define an important notion that will serve as one of the crucial points of the present study: memory. The concept of memory not only refers to its deep connection to exile, but to the literary genre of the novel *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile* that will be further analysed. The book by Assmann and Conrad comprises different essays that are from an international as well as interdisciplinary perspective, showing what memory means in a global age. Accordingly, its discussions of the notions of memory, identity, mobility have been instrumental in developing the analysis of the novels in the empirical part, for highlighting the genre of memory and its meaning in the present context.

Globalization, as such, is defined as 'a shift from stability to motion', and the authors highlight the concept of collective memories, claiming that

Collective memories of nations, for the most part, relate to events of either glory or victimhood. They depict the national self as triumphantly victorious or tragically defeated hero respectively – but nevertheless as hero. There are other kinds of memories, however, that undermine heroic narratives and the self-stylization of nations: painful memories of perpetration and guilt' (Assmann and Conrad, 2010: 19).

It has been prevalent to refuse to accept such memories and giving writers a chance to rewrite their national histories. Moreover, it has led to the acknowledgement of historical untruths and injustices as well as political advancement towards a more civilized and developed world (ibid.). Sandra Meškova, while proposing the topic on 'Daughter Figures in Latvian Women's Autobiographical Writing of the 1990s' (2010), states that memoir writings, especially those of 1970-90s, imply 'political imperative' (Meškova, 2010: 167). Meškova explains the meaning behind concept of the 'imperative' and authors' wish to be heard within the literary genre:

This "political imperative" is manifested in the testimonial mode of autobiographical and memoir writing, both as an urge to tell or get to the "historical truth," and in terms of identity (re)construction by dealing with personal and collective traumas, feelings of guilt, compensation for loss, etc. (ibid.).

The author informs about the issues behind autobiographical and memoir writings, helping to form the relevant approach for the present analysis of Nesaule's novels.

It is also important to look at the concept of human memory and acknowledge that different types of memory have their own specific time-range. If this is the memory of an individual it is equivalent to the time-range of a person's consciousness, however

communicative memory is typically limited to the time span of three interacting generations or 80–100 years; political memory lasts as long as the correspondent political institution, which may be as short as 12 years as in the case of Nazi Germany, or over 200 years as in the case of the French Republic or the US (ibid.: 122).

However, there is much overlap in terms of different forms of memory as there is a noticeable relationship between concepts of memory and identity. Accordingly, memory is knowledge about oneself that has developed and can be named as 'diachronic', regardless whether it is an individual or as a member of family, community, nation or a tradition of a particular religion. Although distancing from all the relatively abstract definitions, one must keep in mind that memory functions in the direction of identity that, despite its indistinctness, always comprises a notion of difference (ibid.: 123).

Such aspect of memory can be investigated further, from another perspective, namely, as something that connects the past and the present bringing progressiveness and change into the future. Nesaule, as a professor in the field of Women's Studies, showed her interest and passion in analyzing gender identity and representation, particularly, in her representation of mother-daughter relationship, of women' war and exile experiences, of women's memory

practices in the novel. From this perspective, *Women Mobilizing Memory (2019)* is a great representation of different stories told by women as a basis for creating possibilities for progressive futures (Altýnay et al, 2019). The book consists of honest stories and violent histories told by different women all over the globe, contributing to contemporary exile-memory writing in world literature.

First of all, women, through mobilizing memory, wish to document and put an emphasis on daily injustice and its necessity to be slowed down (ibid.: 53). Twenty first century has proved there to be many ways of dealing with violence and one of them is digitization; however, most importantly, is it through videos spreading worldwide or documentation on paper – all produce ideological connectivity and unity across time and space (Altýnay et al, 2019: 68). Indeed, such sources and recollections, significantly shared in the book, prove the importance for them to be re-told, as many of them have been misinterpreted and silenced; they give a possibility for change and meaning in a wider range of time

Giving voice to silenced memories or reclaiming and reframing collective memories that have been deliberately misrepresented in official narratives, this volume seeks to support the calls for justice embodied in collective action, whether they address state, patriarchal, academic, or domestic regimes. It seeks to affirm the possibility of change (ibid.: 69).

One of the stories shared by women concerns the ‘stadium story’ told by Katherine and Marita. It remarkably helps in generating the understanding of the vastness of the issue only proving its topicality in the modern times. It concerns the Estadio Nacional in Santiago, Chile or, in other words, the place of several rows of empty wooden benches above which there is a sign that states ‘a people without memory is people without future’, signifying the importance of the interconnection between the past and the present (ibid. :82). To be more detailed, it commemorates those people who were tortured and killed in that exact place in 1973. Accordingly, the seats symbolize the brutal times in the history and remind that the stadium of today was once nothing but the place of brutal repression.

The reason of terror in 1973 lies in the military coup and the beginning of dictatorship resulting in countless deaths, state of terror, murder, forced disappearance of Chileans and huge numbers of exiles. The stadium was a place for detention and, significantly, women were the victims of abuse and cruelty, as were suppressed and held in the grounds of the stadium. What is crucial, the women and their stories were kept silent and were rendered during and after the detention but the space itself made them become closer and more supportive, as one of the former prisoners’ states that ‘I learned what solidarity is’ (ibid.: 93).

The stories shared by the former women prisoners were severe, as the electric shock, force and even broken glass were used as means for torture (ibid.: 96). Through such

circumstances, women were forced to come up with different strategies to resist different kinds of infection and maintain strength. One of the prisoners states that she felt very supported by other women and that ‘in that dark place you could find the best of what it means to be human’ (ibid.: 99). Most importantly, after the stories were told, the memory projects only proved to make a change, since it attracted younger generations to become guides, participate as artists, event organizers and many more. Similarly, for some it gave an opportunity to gain knowledge about their family members or close relatives. One of the activists explained her reason behind the involvement in different projects; namely, that it was a way of honoring her grandmother, who, as she found out, had visited the imprisoned women in jail every Sunday (ibid.: 115).

The ‘stadium’ story and its discussion go in parallel with the issues discussed in Nesaule’s novels such as violence during the war, women being victims of rape, silenced memories of exile and many more. Moreover, such women’s memory projects and testimonies show the memory not only as a reminder of the traumatic past but as something providing a way for change. Since the memory projects demonstrate the connection between the memory and contemporary life, it leads to the discussions such as contemporary injustices, social injustice, inequality and many other. While approaching the exile from the transcultural perspective, it is essential to evaluate the transcultural paradigm and cultural differences that were taken into account by Nesaule while writing the memories of her life into the form of the semi-autobiographical novel.

2.4 Exile and displaced identities

Using the transcultural approach to exile experiences and memories, the study *Exile Cultures, Misplaced Identities* (2008) discusses the Cuban exile discussing how ‘shame and nostalgia have worked in many ways to influence cultural citizenship, identity, and ethnic separatism among South Florida Cubans (Allatson and McCormack, 2008). The cultural identity, as noted, is shifted; however, such uncertainties and difficulties lead to numerous questions about identity which involves shame, as the transformations and the shifts in cultural identity do not bring peace but form in-between identity (ibid.: 246).

Concerning one of the exile writings, Dominican-American Julia Alvarez answers to the question concerning the ‘moving backwards in time’ in her novel, and the author replies that ‘this is how memory functions,’ adding that is characteristic to those who leave their country irreversibly (ibid.: 250). She adds that this involved idealizing the past, where, in fact, there was dictatorship and terror; yet

The landscapes of the past can be idealized through nostalgia as a means of shoring up a floundering self, a self-besieged by the demands of the new land. Narcissism leads to a defense of the shamed self so that the past reality—even as brutal a reality as an abominable dictatorship—is made over. The lost land is idealized in the mirror reflection of the lost self. The lost land was honey and roses, and the old self dwelt in this paradise of perfection as the first man and woman did in Eden, before the shame of the fall (ibid.: 251).

The exile's idealized past is, in other words, idealized self-being or 'idealized self', which only supports the author's claim that nostalgia helps in strengthening the 'lost self'.

Performing Exile: Foreign Bodies (2017) includes a story of Sashar Zarif, an exile, who shares his 'moving memories' and connects them to his 'grandmotherland':

Moving/flowing memories were introduced to me by my grandmother. Every time she revisited memories of her father's home in Azerbaijan, she remembered something different. This gave her a perspective that allowed for creativity and enquiry (Rudakoff, 2017: 127).

Sashar tells how memories shared by his grandmother taught him his history and his ancestral homeland, proving that memories are the basis for who he is: 'Many of her stories would start with this carpet. I remember her saying, My dear child this carpet has layers of stories from so many lives: human lives, animal life, and nature. We are not sitting on a carpet, we are sitting on history' (ibid.: 128). Moreover, the author further notes that he, as an exile, came into the world which was already based on his grandmother's displaced reality; she was trying to reimagine her home by transforming her exile experience.

Sashar presents the stories told by his grandmother as something that has helped him with his exile and attempts in creating his own place where he 'might' belong. Therefore, his exile experience was transformed through preserving his grandmother's legacy and, namely, through singing, dancing, being actively involved in politics etc. (ibid.: 129) This included Sashar's enrollment in the Cultural Studies Program where he could collaborate with other artists and be involved in the world of arts. In the course 'Performance and Identity' he, through the collective and personal memory, explored its impact on exilic beings (ibid.: 131). With the help of the program the author Sashar began to express himself through the dance and, specifically, his established style of dance allowed him to access his memories and emotions, as this gave him the opportunity to conclude that this style of dance was a way of carrying his grandmother's drum and identity inside his body:

My dance works had begun to reflect both aspects of my being in productions such as Choreographies of Migration [...] I positioned myself as an exile and a citizen simultaneously, letting the audience experience and consider their own origins and the notion of exile in a new way (ibid.: 137).

The present events and reminiscences one more time prove the importance of memory and the meaning behind the statement 'a people without memory is people without future', earlier

referring to the *stadium story*. What is more, physical objects, such as carpet in this case, prove the connection between the memory and the objects; that is, the objects create emotional links and contribute to the history of the exiled. Referring to the story, exile memories are nothing but the preserved legacy in the lives of the exiles, helping in recreation of their own.

Leena Kurvet- Käosaar in her article ‘A Spatially scattered being imagining space in Baltic exile life writing’ (2019) discusses two works of life writing by Baltic exiles and their self-emplacement through engagement with different places or something that is moving and changing the landscape. She touches upon the matter of displacement and the opportunity to create spaces of belonging. The author defines exile life writings where the focus is placed on the challenges that appear by the continuous feeling of being dislocated or a state in which one is in a ‘permanent transience.’ Kurvet- Käosaar in her article mentions Said’s significant and deep point saying that there is a potential in exile and to, namely, break visible and feelable barriers of thought as well as to restore life and identity, becoming somebody even more meaningful. Another important aspect noticeable in exile writings is the creation as well as decreation of the self (Kurvet- Käosaar 2019: 160). The author significantly refers to the life writings of Eveline Kilian and Hope Wolf that highlight the importance of space in relation to identity:

[Who] we are, and how we narrate ourselves, depends on our ability ... to locate our identities within space ... life story has traditionally been thought of as a chronological movement a narrative that unfolds over time and meaningfully connects events, thereby constructing continuity and coherence. (ibid.: 161)

Kurvet- Käosaar introduces other life writings shared by exiles in the Baltic context – relevant for the present study. Käbi Laretei, Estonian by her nationality, shares her experience and points out to her career of a remarkable pianist as something characterised as necessity rather than ambition. This only relates to the unpredictable obstacles forming the future of the exile rather than the person’s inner calling. In addition, Latvian exile Edmunds Valdemārs Bunkše shares his memories stating that ‘there was nothing but mud, wet and fatigue,’ when he recalls his period of travelling through the war-torn country. Edmunds Bunkše has settled in the United States of America and found his profession in the sphere of humanist geography, which one more time proves the necessity and essential need to understand the importance of space and landscape in the life of an exile. He found his calling in educating readers about his Latvian origins, history and meaning behind it; therefore, it let him connect to his inner self and acknowledge the meaning of one’s belonging to a certain place and landscape. In addition, Bunkše quotes Peter Conrad supporting the argument that ‘you are

where you fall in life', and that the landscapes of origins define one's being on the planet (ibid.: 163).

To summarize, the chapter questions the matter of displacement experienced by exiles; the physical space as a determining factor in one's life. While facing the demands of the new land, exiles question the physical place of their homeland as something integral. Nesaule analogically examines the concept of displacement, proving it to be the ruling aspect in the life of an exile.

2.5 Identity and displacement

The concept of identity can be approached in numerous ways and, without a doubt, is a very broad and complicated notion; however, it should be discussed from another, more specific perspective. Latvian exile Edmunds Valdemārs Bunkše states that the process of creation of *exilic* identity depends on different landscapes and their importance in creating the feeling of home in the world of the exile (Kurvet- Käosaar, 2019: 164). Therefore, the exilic identity is closely related to the geographical aspect as the basis of self-evaluation and perception. Not knowing how to be in a new place can, therefore, cause insecurity and as knowing how to exist physically and, most importantly, emotionally 'is fundamental to our ability to survive – of finding a niche or a place for safety, nourishment, and survival, as well as migrating or propagating to other places' (ibid.).

The comprehension of human experience linked with geographic receptivity connects human beings to insects, plants, reptiles and many others, but, most importantly, to our primeval and atavistic traits (ibid.). According to Bunkše, his life never stopped at one location or to his immediate surroundings but was always guided toward a larger space and perception of the world. Moreover, he has *always* formed invisible ties between various locations and multiple geographical occurrences. He adds that such separation and the pain it brings and maintains is resembling the similar pain one feels at the death of a close person, and 'The Great Planes become one of his favorite destinations of travel with "the expanse of the earth, sky and clouds" connecting to his "deepest being"' (ibid.).

Another important point is the reference to 'moving memory' as it is significantly connected to exilic identity. Moving memory and the strong links to a person's past keep exiles from developing deep and valuable connections with people in the present environment and present landscapes. Although Bunkše admits that he shows his awareness in relation to nostalgic memories and the disharmony between the past and the present reality, he is not willing to fully abandon his natural longing for Latvia and 'the very core of his identity' that

was formed through Latvian countryside landscapes and are nothing else but quintessential and fundamental (ibid.: 166). Bunkše has spent his summers at his grandmother's farm and such memories have shaped his perception of home and has guided him towards finding his 'perfect' home. The author of the article Leena Kurvet- Käosaar successfully draws attention to the essential questions regarding the feeling of home and finding the sense of affiliation that are noticeable in Bunkše's book *Geography and the Art of Life* due to the frequency of the word 'home' appearing in the contents page. However, Bunkše, similarly as the protagonists in the Nesaule's novels, eventually finds his 'academic home', as he becomes a professor in the University of Delaware (Kurvet- Käosaar 2019: 163).

Another significant chapter covers Kābi Laretei's perception of her identity; however, in relation to both her home country Estonia and her new country of settlement – Sweden in regard to her purpose of finding a perfect home. Laretei's book *Otsekui tõlkes* or *The Situation of Translation*, as the author mentions, 'makes visible a life of constant adjustments and re-orientations of the self, where the anchoring concept of 'home' cannot denote a center against which [the] multiple displacements can be tethered' (ibid.: 167). Adjustments and reluctance in accepting cultural and political differences were characteristic to Laretei, being in post-World-War Sweden.

The author mentions Laretei's experience of writing an autobiographical work as means for helping her to cope with the fact of her parents' passing. In addition, the ongoing perception of her identity is indeed tied to both her homeland and her new 'home', as she, same as Bunkše, creates an 'academic home' and is involved in the process of writing as well. Laretei's autobiographical work helps her to not only cope with the passing of her parents, but gives her a way to connect with the Estonian diaspora community that, as author mentions, 'she had earlier self-consciously avoided, gradually recognizing that the price of being free was becoming homeless, unattached and lonely' (ibid.). Important to note that the point of being 'unattached' still sounds as a paradox. Similarly, to Bunkše, Laretei remembers her childhood memories; the barking dogs, the gardeners sweeping the leaves at night at the same time reminding her of her grandfather sweeping the snow. This also refers back to Sashar's bright memories of his grandmother that served as a stable basis for his perception of the life, and it, without a doubt, creates a clear link between the similarly created and 'kept' memories of two exiles.

The most important point of Laretei's perception of identity is expressed through her understanding of it: resisting the pre-destined versions of identity, as she sees it through the discovery of new landscapes and the creation of her own mindscapes that only actualize her not so easy processes of self-emplacement (ibid.: 168). This can be supported by the fact that

she, unlike Bunkše, shares her perception of 'home' that is filled with fear, confusion and panic, as Laretei shares her moments of sleepwalking and discovering that some things from her house had disappeared, therefore, making her think that there has been somebody inside of her seemingly 'safe' place. It only deeply shows the crucial aspect of the person's exile, creating the feeling of continuous discord. Whereas Bunkše's story seems slightly different, for example, taking into account the aspect of finding himself at 'home' that indeed comprises security, warmth and domesticity (Kurvet- Käosaar, 2019: 168).

For both Laretei and Bunkše, the concept of identity depends mainly on almost never-ending movement from one location to another. Bunkše places himself between and somewhere moving through the multiple landscapes and different encounters with people he meets. Laretei, on the contrary, vividly proves her deep struggle of finding a place where she actually belongs, as she states: 'Will I be ever able to restore my balance?' (ibid.:170). This crucially points out to the sensitivity and complexity of the exile experience, as each experience cannot be generalized, simplified and put into certain categories. Additionally, one might notice that through the immensely complex experiences the authors and their kept stories seem as very valuable not only for certain groups of people but history in general, accordingly, able to create coherent marks in the history.

Through acknowledging the complexity of the accounts and the topicality of the concepts of exile and identity, it is necessary to scrutinize their value in literary works. Importantly, Nesaule serves as a great example expressing the complexities of the exile and identity. Namely, it is done through the authentic language and voice of the narrator, that is first marginalized but later dominant. For this reason, it is certainly valuable to look at the exile experiences and the displacement addressed in the novels by Nesaule in the context of Latvian-American communities after 1944. Moreover, Nesaule questions the complexity of displacement, proving there to be numerous ways of coping with displacement.

Given the above, it should be emphasized that Nesaule's novels and the topics discussed undoubtedly speak to the Baltic readers. However, through acknowledging different transnational literature dedicated to the themes of exile, identity and memory, it is crucial to note that Nesaule's text not only belongs to Latvian, American or Latvian-American literary histories, but can be seen in a wider context. Nesaule's novels will be further analysed, examining the different layers of exile and identity.

3. AGATE NESAULE'S NOVELS IN MULTICULTURAL CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN LITERATURE

Since different studies on exile chosen for the present paper cover different geographies, it is important to place Nesaule's novels within the context of contemporary exile-memory writing in world literature. The present chapter will give an insight into Nesaule's biography later on showing the correlation between the biography and the author's novels. Accordingly, it will lead to a better understanding of the novels and fully address the concepts of exile and identity from the perspective of multicultural contemporary American literature. The two works chosen for the analysis cover similar topics; however, when analysed in detail, it is noticeable, how the author aims to focus the reader's attention to different matters in each of the works.

3.1 Agate Nesaule and her creative biography

Agate Nesaule is known as Latvian – American writer and is mostly recognized as the author of her remarkable novel *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile* (1995). Agate Nesaule's novel is a semi-autobiographical story of war, post-war life and exile - all very sensitive and important topics for the writer. The novel has given Nesaule a voice to speak about her cultural heritage to a wider audience, as the novel was an American Book Award winner, was in the New York Times bestseller list as well as won the Pulitzer Prize. Patricia Hampl (1996) in her article 'The Tenacity of Pain' published in the *New York Times* soon after the book was published, shares her perspective on the novel saying that it 'carries her story forward into the complacency of postwar America, through a ruinous youthful marriage and a hard-won divorce, on into middle age.' Patricia Hampl analyses and brings out the most crucial topics discussed in the book, namely, the brutal camp in the Nazi Germany, terrors of the World War II, complicated family relationships tied together with the painful memories and eternal search for integrity seen as a cure.

3.2 Nesaule's biography reflected in her novels

Agate Nesaule was born in 1938, Latvia, in Nitaure and a Lutheran pastor's family (Sūrmane, 1997). In Nitaure Agate lived until she and her family were forced to leave, and, in her latest interview, which was given when Agate was in her native country, she says that 'it was my childhood's paradise' (Košeļeva, 2018). She adds that everything in Riga was completely transformed, starting with the fact that no one could find a place to buy a cup of coffee in the

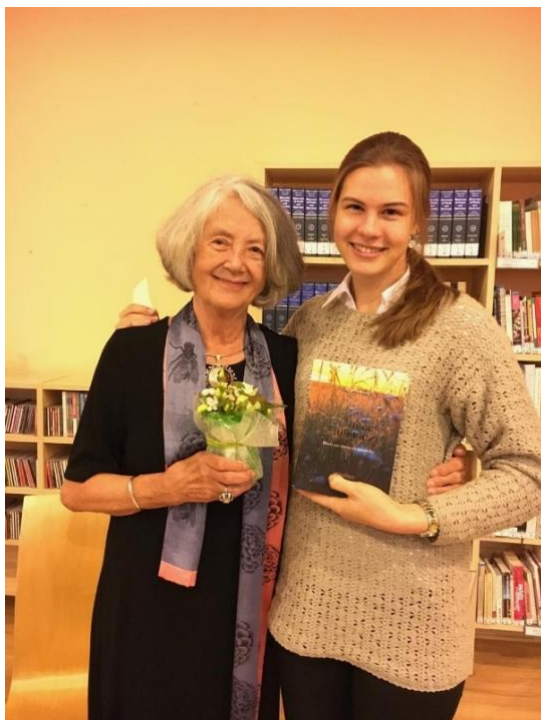
past, but now there are enough cafes with their witty and charming names (Košeļeva, 2018). When Agate was only 7 years old, she and her family were forced to leave Latvia in 1944 and join refugees to enter Germany, the foreseeable safer place; yet in Germany, Agate and her family were first interned by Nazis and later by Soviets (Sūrmane, 1997). Since she was a seven-year-old girl, she had no choice but to see female cruelty, rape, extreme conditions and endless famine, when one potato had to be secretly stolen and shared with the whole family (Nesaule, 1995). Such conditions and a very harsh fate made Agate and her mother's relationship transform and leave traces in their mutual relationship that later followed her throughout the whole life (ibid.). Agate herself confesses that *A Woman in Amber* focuses on mother-daughter relationship, and this tie can be noticed throughout the whole novel; accordingly, her violent experiences, deeply rooted in the memories of the past, prove to be reflected in her memory-writings (Košeļeva, 2018).

After their constant moving from one refugee camp to another, Agate's family moves to America where the new, post-war chapter and the process of acquiring the new language, culture and their belonging to the country as immigrants was about to start (Nesaule, 1995.). It is 1950, when Nesaule finds herself in America and, being a distinguished, hard-working student, receives several scholarships, automatically giving her an excellent opportunity to get a good education (ibid.). Indeed, the hard work pays off when Nesaule becomes a professor of the English language and gender studies in the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Online 1). Initially, one of her scholarships was given for her studies in medicine; however, it was unusual for women in those times to become doctors as mostly these were only men teaching this subject. Agate, despite being the only girl in the classroom chooses to take the literature course instead (Košeļeva, 2018).

When Agate was 47 years old and had visited psychotherapist Ingeborg, who played a huge role in her long process of healing the wounds and trauma of the past war experience, finally decides to write her part autobiographical and part fictional novel *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile*. (ibid.) This novel received American Book Award and was later translated to Latvian, Russian, German, Swedish, Danish languages (ibid.). The novel reflects Nesaule's biography; it discusses the life during the Second World War and the process of immigrating to America as well as Nesaule's endless searching for affiliation and identity (Nesaule, 1995).

3.3 Experiences of war and exile as main themes in Agate Nesaule's novels

Apart from Agate Nesaule's most acclaimed and well-known novel *A Woman in Amber*, Agate is the author of two more novels: *In Love with Jerzy Kosinski* (2009) and *Lost Midsummers: A Novel of Exile and Friendship* (2018). The most recent novel *Lost Midsummers* or *Zudušie saulgrieži* in Latvian, was launched in her homeland Latvia, 2018 (see picture 3.1.) All three books discuss and cover the themes of war and, undoubtedly, had been influenced by Agate's personal memories of the war and childhood.



Picture 3.1 *Lost Midsummers: A Novel of Exile and Friendship* presentation in 2018

In Love with Jerzy Kosinski is her second novel which has also been appreciated by writers such as Tim O'Brien and Doris Lessing (Books, 2010). In this novel Agate discusses important themes that had made the reader of her first novel curious; however, here she continues to expand on them in the fiction genre. The novel, according to Books (2010) is a novel where the main character Anna experiences war and, after having escaped from displaced persons camps, finds herself in a completely unknown and, at first, not so welcoming environment – America. Books claims the novel to be very powerful, as the main character learns how to slip away from her manipulative husband, forgive and find her way out after her traumatic past. Alison Townsend, the author of *Persephone in America* addresses the book stating that it is 'A praise-song to truths of mind, heart, and body' (ibid.). 'This book is about sunless, sad, even tragic days in human lives (our own included) but it is also about radiance

and joy', says a Latvian literary scholar, also a member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences Janina Kursite (ibid.).

The third novel *Lost Midsummers: A Novel of Exile and Friendship* that was published quite recently, includes the themes covered in Nesaule's previous works, but in this particular novel the reader is invited to pay attention to the aspect of friendship between two women and its significance in the lives of the characters. What is more, Nesaule, when asked about whether the story told comes from her personal experience, states that it is a fictional story, not something referring to her biography, and it is a story about those living in Latvia as well as those who had gone through exile (Piešiņa, 2018). Considering the fact that this novel was published in September in 2018, the work has not received many reviews from literary critics; however, the presentation of the book, which took place in Latvia, gathered many people, including Indra Burkovska - an actress in Latvian National Theatre. Indra Burkovska read some excerpts from the book and shared her wonderful feelings for the book and its content (Burkovska, 2018, 4:51). Inguna Daukste-Silasproge, who is an expert in literature, was also present for the release of the book and gave her speech on Agate Nesaule's creative work. She pointed out that, while scrutinizing Nesaule's works and biography, one could mark her purposeful way to fill herself with different knowledge, which is a very characteristic edge of her personality paving the way to her successful academic life. However, she added that Agate never forgot about her other side, always longing to write and share her experience and knowledge not only as a professor but also as the author (Silasproge, 2018, 7:56).

As to Agate's own comments, she, on the day of its publication, describes *Lost Midsummers* as a novel where the central story is built around two young girls who first meet in America where their friendship starts. Accordingly, in the past, each of them had experienced war and both of them are Latvians speaking in their native tongue with each other. Agate Nesaule expresses her opinion saying that friendship is very important to her, which could be the reason for including the topic in her novel. Also, she adds that usually friendship between men is discussed a lot more in literature, and she very much believes that one is born in one family but with time finds another one. In addition, Agate continues saying that when she was married, she had always valued friends who would support her no matter what complexities she might have within her family, in this way supporting the importance of friendship in her life and the necessity for it to be shared in her novel (Piešiņa, 2018).

Regardless of the fact that all of the novels deserve recognition due to their authenticity and sensitive topics discussed, it is, undoubtedly, important to investigate the most appraised novel of Nesaule *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile*, which after the day of its release begins to receive numerous awards. Those include

Wisconsin Librarians Outstanding Achievement Award in 1995, an American Book Award comprising an outstanding literary achievement, Wisconsin Institute of Peace Distinguished Scholar Award received in 1999, Regional Literary Award in 2010 and others (Online 1). The book has received many reviews, and Mary Lowenthal Felstiner in *The Women's Review of Books* (1996) states that Agate has chosen to retell her past in a psychological way and is playing with time, moving between the past, present, the post-war period and the war itself. The author says that people with the past such as Nesaule's 'are all haunted by trains' (Felstiner, 1996: 4). Felstiner adds that such turns in time are used to give clues, to go back and dig deeper into the core and the very center of those times, exposing the Nazi regime in which women with their children were expelled from where they actually belonged (ibid.). She adds that Nesaule's intention was to talk about the period in her country's history because it had been submerged for a very long time, and she deliberately tells it from the woman's perspective and agrees to her mother saying that women went through harder times than men (ibid.).

Leena Kurvet-Käosaar in her analysis 'Other things happened to women' (2003), where one of the works analysed was Nesaule's novel *A Woman in Amber*, focuses on presenting the way how Nesaule's relatively complex experience of war and exile has influenced her *gendered* national identity and impacted her position in the exile communities. First of all, the scientific article addresses the perspective of women and their way of breaking silence and avoiding taboos. The author states that the genuine wish to investigate the memoirs of exile stories lies in the fact that many of those, written by women with different social, education backgrounds, had considerable similarities such as a light and humoristic tone noticeable in their stories (Kurvet-Käosaar, 2003: 314). As to gendered differentiation in the experiences of war as being one of the crucial points of the people's lives, Kurvet-Käosaar marks the sexual vulnerability of women and their fears, resulting in men using their power and manipulating women. Kurvet-Käosaar marks the issues between genders, emphasizing how such traumatic experience of sexual harassment and the danger of being raped affects further lives of exiled women (ibid.).

Kurvet-Käosaar emphasizes Nesaule's method of writing that works as means of therapy; she deliberately puts her memories into words in order to transform them. The critic notes that the events shared in the novel appear in a chronological order, retaining their cruelty and at the same time being therapeutic (ibid.: 329). The critic summarizes Nesaule's intentions to give women a voice and show their experienced war-time sexual violence, emphasizing to what results such past can lead, especially, from a psychological point of view (ibid.: 329).

One of the Nesaule's novels used for the present analysis is *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile*, first published in 1995. The novel is semi-autobiographical, and the title of the book speaks itself: for the author it was a process of healing, as the inspiring memoir has been told after many years. Nesaule expresses that 'almost fifty years later I am finally able to feel' (Nesaule, 1995: 33). Moreover, it is important to highlight that the author uses present tense when recalling and retelling the events, making the author herself experience the events as something happening in the present rather than in the past: 'But that seems long ago. Now the women and children watch quietly while the soldiers eat and drink, then slowly walk long distances back to the Institution' (ibid.: 29-30). All the reminiscences help to recreate the past events, but most importantly these are, undoubtedly, influenced by the author's gender role, knowledge, intensiveness of the past trauma as well as the age of the author.

First and foremost, the central character of the novel is a young girl Agate, who has experienced a severe past: Second World War and displaced-persons camps in Germany. The novel begins with a very emotional topic for the character, namely, her reminiscing about her childhood in Latvia, the topic she manages to avoid. Agate is a daughter of a Lutheran pastor and a mother who always wants her to belong to the country's intelligentsia. When the war draws near, Agate and her family are forced to join refugees, and, eventually, find themselves in a cruel camp near Berlin, as they are detained by Nazis. The cruel scenes of execution during the war, rape and never-ending violence become nothing but an integral part of her life (Nesaule, 1995).

Regardless of the richly textured past, the novel tells about Agate's life in America – finding herself in the new environment, learning the language, culture, marrying an American and deeply suffering. Suffering refers to the deeply rooted past and such vivid memories keep appearing in the character's everyday life as well as through complex relationships. Nesaule's mother appears as very dominant and puts clear expectations for the daughter's future; nevertheless, Agate marries an American which can be seen as a protest towards such dominant control of the mother. Through different protests and complex relationships Agate learns how to listen to her inner voice and creates a place of her own (Nesaule, 1995).

Another important work by Nesaule chosen for the present analysis is her most recent work *Lost Midsummers: A Novel of Exile and Friendship* that was published in 2018. 2018 is the year when her mother land celebrated 100 years and where she herself was there to proudly present the book to Latvians. Judging from the title of the book, it is very much revealing one of the most important aspects of the book – friendship. In comparison to the first novel which is semi-autobiographical, this work written by Nesaule is fiction, and the

author, even though being an exile herself, has chosen to distance herself from the characters with the help of the third-person narration (Nesaule, 2018).

The central characters of the book are Maija and Kaija – two exiles that have experienced war and happen to meet in America – a new and completely unknown place. Both girls share the same fears that lie behind the traumatic past. Friendship between the girls plays an important role in the characters' life due to the fact that they are in search of affiliation and belonging. At first, the sense of belonging is made through sharing the same Latvian language, being nearly the same age and having the same concerns. However, the aspect of different perceptions of the country and their contrasting ways of coping with the new culture and reality cannot be left unnoticed. To be more precise, Alma is not satisfied with the present reality and expresses clear preconceptions about Americans whereas Kaija sees America as a place of opportunities and proudly appreciates the present environment (Nesaule, 2018).

Nesaule in her novel highlights the differences between the two girls and, namely, their two contrasting purposes which follow each of the girls: marriage and education. Through such comparison, the author argues about two ways of identities and how the girls choose or, to be more accurate, manage to identify themselves until the rest of their lives. One has successfully managed to perceive the new country as a part of her new-built life whereas the other character is not able to accept the new culture and sees the purpose of life in maintaining the previous culture, traditions and deep affiliation to the elusive past. Nesaule makes contrasts in order to expand on the theme of exile and identity, giving the reader a wider perspective of the life of post-war exile.

The present chapter provides an insight into the author's biography as well as establishes the basis for the further analysis carried out from a literary perspective. The introduction of the novels leads to the understanding of the issues addressed by Nesaule. Although Nesaule presents various perspectives of exile in her novels, it is crucial to acknowledge the main themes traced and of great importance, according to Nesaule. Through different perspectives of exile, Nesaule offers a wider perspective for the analysis of exile and identity. Therefore, the following chapter is devoted to the analysis of these concepts.

4. LATVIAN EXILES, THEIR MEMORIES IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY IN THE NOVELS BY AGATE NESAULE

The present chapter is devoted to the discussion of the theme of exile addressed in the novels *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile* and *Lost Midsummers: A Novel of Exile and Friendship* by Agate Nesaule. Due to the fact that exile is the central theme in both novels, it is crucial to discuss it, providing a deeper insight into the concept of exile from the perspective of diasporic memories. Moreover, it is deeply connected to the understanding of the identity of the characters which will be further examined.

4.1 Exile mobilities: from the Displaced Persons' camps to America

As Edward William Said (2000) asserts, the core thing when imagining exiles is the understanding that 'the exiles are cut off from their roots', namely, the central issue is being away from the homeland, someone's roots and the actual home. Therefore, the most important role in the life of an exile is the transition from one place to another; from roots to something uncertain and unknown. Accordingly, the new place plays the central role in the life of an exile. In the novels by Agate Nesaule America is the place for the new beginning and new findings for the characters; findings that are not always positive or negative but rather realistic.

Both novels *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile* and *Lost Midsummers: A Novel of Exile and Friendship* by Agate Nesaule depict the exile that is told as means for the author to rewrite and retell the past events that were silenced and deeply sensitive. When looking at the events such as deportations and exile from the perspective of the memory genre, it only proves the author's psychological trauma and the necessity to be heard, leading to the concept of 'progressiveness' earlier addressed by Altýnay (2019).

Agate, the central character in the novel *A Woman in Amber*, recalls her first memories in the 'new land' America:

I remember her in the dark damp cubicle, once the laundry room behind the kitchen, of the tiny house where we lived after coming to the United States in 1950 [...] I was twelve when we came to Indianapolis, expecting an easier life than in the Displaced Persons' camps in Germany [...] On weekdays I would return from school as my mother was silently getting ready to go to dishwasher at LaRue's Supper Club. We would exchange a few words, mostly directions about things to be done, dinner to be made for my father, clothes to be ironed. On Saturday nights I too worked at the supper club. I scraped cigarette butts and bloodied mashed potatoes off plates [...] As I lifted the heavy trays of streaming plates from the conveyor belt, I kept my eye on the door for the policeman I expected to arrest me. To work at all, one had to be fourteen; to work till one in the morning, eighteen. Later I would run breathless from

the bus stop, expecting to be murdered, beaten, raped. [...] (Nesaule, 1995: 13).

First of all, Nesaule in a very detailed way depicts the memories of a child in another country, who is surrounded by pain and desperation; however, despite the obstacles there seems to be a hope: 'I was very much alone. My sister did not get home from her house cleaning job until after dark. Both of us were grateful that the other children at school did not beat us' (ibid.). Nesaule addresses the level of complexity and the reasons behind the continuous pain, as the several lines from the novel is a clear representation of both physical and, most importantly, mental suffering. The fear and the expected cruelty at school refers to the psychologically painful memories of exiles. Nesaule informs about the daily injustices experienced by exiles, emphasized by already doomed complex relationships in the exile communities.

The second novel *Lost Midsummers* introduces a similar perspective of the life that is about to start for the two girls in the new country America; the two central characters Alma and Kaija face the harsh reality that create their first impression of the life in America for exiles

When Alma and her father, Valdis, arrived in this slum neighborhood in Indianapolis, Indiana, from the displaced persons' camps in Germany a month ago, she had done her best to change that. By making sweeping and raking motions to overcome language barrier, she had managed to borrow tools from the landlord, who would be astonished by such a request from anyone, let alone a fourteen-year-old girl. She had gathered piles of trash, pulled-up stubborn thistles struggling for light near the alley, and raked away years of debris. She was thrilled as she watched fire consume filth (Nesaule, 2018: 63).

The beginning of life in America is described as something dark, dirty and heavy in both novels. The detailed description involves different senses and the memories are, therefore, strongly rooted in the memory. Similarly, dark and hopeless are the lives of immigrants portrayed in the novel. Agate sister's husband dies from alcoholism despite 'trying to switch from vodka to beer and wine' (ibid.: 255). The harsh consequences mark the new place as nothing but the symbol of Uldis' hopelessness and 'lost self' – all referring to the psychological trauma of exile. 'He used to take a shower every night, no matter how drunk he was. He would always put on clean clothes' (ibid.: 256). Uldis represents the 'exile' to be the determining aspect in his identity, emphasizing the complacency of post-war America. Nesaule conveys the agony of a life frozen in the lasting destruction of exile and war.

Agate wishes to get to the core of life that has been affected by different aspects of exile, bringing into the light numerous ways how she perceives America – positively as well as realistically. She prefers to compare different experiences, showing the reader something that perhaps would have been submerged and left somewhere in between. In this way,

Nesaule addresses the cultural issues contributing to the understanding of the exile in a wider, transcultural context.

In fact, *Women Mobilizing Memory* (2019), when compared to the diasporic memories addressed by Nesaule, in a very similar way reminds of the importance of mobilizing memories, its purpose to initiate social change, remind of the social injustice and, most importantly, help in the appreciation of the present-day world (Altýnay et al, 2019). Accordingly, the excerpts from the novels show the harsh obstacles the exiles had to deal with, reminding of the ‘appreciation’ of the present-day world and as well as signifying the existential unfairness felt by Latvian-American exile communities in the new country.

4.2 Exile condition: to be chosen or to be excluded

Did everyone have the same opportunities in terms of emigration and not only? The present subchapter is devoted to the analysis of the process of ‘being chosen’ in the novels by Nesaule. First of all, in order to be able to move to America the requirements were set, and England, Canada and Australia in particular desired young single workers who would take the jobs their own people were not willing to take (Nesaule, 1995:134).

America, without a doubt, plays a huge role in the main characters’ lives and this can be supported by the fact that it is a place where the characters eventually find their homes and settle. Firstly, Agate Nesaule in *The Woman in Amber* introduces America through addressing the process of being ‘chosen’. This is done from a very authentic perspective. Accordingly, United States, when opening their doors to people such as Agate wishing to escape the Displaced Persons’ camps, were willing to open their borders to potential workers, that fall under the category of being young, without illnesses, unencumbered by neither children nor old people (ibid.: 135). Everyone had to be tested for tuberculosis and that was one of the criteria for being excluded. X-rays were done as well which results were never shown, and Agate lived in fear to be guilty if her family would be forced to stay in the camps: ‘At night I dreamt that they had abandoned me, as Vilma’s grandmother did her’ (ibid.). Agate shows her deep concerns about the situation that could be their great escape; however, showing the psychological burden she is not able to control as her dreams control her. Moreover, the chapter titled *America for Women* clearly points out to the fact of ‘being chosen’ rather than welcomed, creating an immediate feeling of estrangement felt by exiles.

The chapter *America for Women* expands on the matter of existential unfairness as there were prerequisites for being ‘chosen’ where the potential workers were asked if they approved of democracy, and whether they were homosexual, insane, criminal or immoral

(ibid.). The chapter clearly points out to the current injustice and Akhtar's differentiation between the experience of exiles in comparison to that of immigrants, namely, the way one is accepted by the host population (Akhtar, 1999: 123). Moreover, Nesaule makes a clear distinction showing the alienation felt by the protagonist Agate in the new country while remembering the times during the war as something where she felt less estranged: 'Displaced Persons' camps in Germany, where at least I was among people like myself, rather than among strangers from whom I will always be different, as I now am in America' (Nesaule, 1995: 19).

It is important to note that the chapter, specifically entitled as 'America for Women' in *The Woman in Amber*, tells about the obstacles in which women were put in particular. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, the author aims to finally verbalize the always-present sorrow, leading to the understanding of 'healing' behind it. Nesaule frankly recalls the dangerous and careless side of the country while comparing it to Germany, where police will 'drive right over you, they'll flatten you like you were made of wet clay' (ibid.: 142). Also, the importance of the language is stressed in the novel, marking the language to be one of the central things in the process of becoming Latvian-American. Therefore, the language only proves to be one of the major 'barriers', isolating one from the feeling of actual affiliation and feeling 'accepted'. 'If she can't speak English, she shouldn't speak at all' (ibid.: 163). The importance of knowing the language is an emotionally daunting aspect as little Agate says that 'The other children will despise me [...] The other children will despise me for having long braids and funny clothes, they will torture me for not knowing the language' (ibid.: 145). At the same time, it encourages young Agate for action and change, in this way giving a way to re-establish the character's identity and re-imagine the past.

The continuous feeling of being chosen not only refers to the initial process of choosing potential workers for America, but is felt in schools, universities and with friends. Nesaule points out the eternal struggle and quest for acceptance experienced by characters in the context of studies

Kaija knew that she could not have gotten through the previous four years without Alma's loyalty and friendship. Alma alone understood how frightening and humiliating America could be; only with Alma could she share her constant longing to be in Latvia [...] Her American girlfriends treated her now as if she belonged, and new friends, only more intellectual, would include her at the university' (Nesaule, 2018: 126).

The concept of acceptance is seen as something depending on the 'intellect', as Kaija states that 'more intellectual would include her'. When knowledge and studies become the main legacy for Kaija, she is surprised and appreciative when receives her pre-med scholarship

Such pettiness could not touch her, even had she heard it. How wonderful America was! How lucky she was to be there! Where else in the world would an immigrant be given such opportunities, which would be reserved for native-born citizens in other countries? [...] She loved her teachers, the intellectual single women and the few married men who had taught her so patiently and so well. And they had chosen her to receive this largesse (ibid.: 135).

On the other hand, this particular example proves the concept of ‘being chosen’ as means for not only being excluded in many of the cases shared by exiles but being worthy enough to receive something that was considered to be for somebody else. Therefore, the opportunities given to the exile certainly affect the exilic identity, proving it to go beyond the attachment to Latvia and the issue of general hopelessness. Accordingly, the concept of the ‘lost word’, previously stated by Ballinger, can be seen as something that can be outdone by education.

The feeling of being excluded or included certainly depends on the concept of Americanness that is expressed through eating habits or the way one is dressed:

Near 30th Street, another Latvian girl joined the trio from Park Avenue. Brigita was fat and flouncy, with eyeglasses thick as milk bottles, but her brown and white saddle shoes and tiny zippered white purse announced that she was more American than anyone (Nesaule, 2018: 83).

The present narrative only signifies that the exiles are aware of the understanding of what it means to be American. Moreover, they are reminded about the ‘opportunity’, and Agate recalls the serious lady addressing her while driving in the bus:

She should learn. She should be grateful that she is in America. If she can’t speak English, she shouldn’t speak at all. She should go right back where she came from. We have enough foreigners in this country already, we don’t need any more (ibid.: 163).

The present subchapter has discussed the ways in which Nesaule reveals the painful and traumatising sense of estrangement and displacement of exiles, marking clear borders between somebody belonging or on the margins. Numerous instances of being chosen or the excluded immediately lead to the barrier created and seeming as doomed for the exiles. Accordingly, it, in the same way, leads to exiles questioning their unprivileged positions and being initially chosen by existentially unfair factors – all contributing to the overall psychological feeling of hopelessness and displacement.

4.3 Harmed relationships

The previous chapter was devoted to the discussion of ‘being chosen’ in the context of America. The present chapter focuses on discussing the harmed relationships in the lives of exiles addressed in the novels *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile* and *Lost Midsummers: A Novel of Exile and Friendship* by Agate Nesaule. Nesaule touches upon the issue of relationships that remarkably symbolise the consequences of the past. For this

reason, the present aspect should be examined, revealing the continuous disharmony as one of the consequences seen in relationships.

The disharmony of the exiles is delicately portrayed in the novels by Nesaule. It certainly refers to the statement by Bunkše, one of the Latvian exiles, stating that ‘strong links to a person’s past keep exiles from developing deep and valuable connections with people in the present environment’ (Kurvet- Kāosaar, 2019: 166). Important to note that ‘the present environment’ plays an important role in the statement as the physical place and how the person is able to narrate himself depends on the person’s ability to locate himself within the present environment (ibid.: 161). The disharmony felt by the Nesaule’s exile characters, eternally floating between the past and the present, is something that very noticeably characterises the inner state of the exiles. They are examples of the broken past and their broken perception of split life can be seen and read through every action and every relationship. Indeed, Bunkše only confirms that his longing for homeland Latvia and everything related to his roots is ‘the very core of his identity’ (ibid.: 166).

First of all, Nesaule, in her semi-autobiographical novel *A Woman in Amber* in a very honest way shows the complex mother-daughter relationship. Accordingly, she highlights the lack of mother’s love in the process of becoming Latvian-American:

Mrs. Čigāns might be able to tell me what to do. I do not look for much help from my mother’ [...] The *th* is hard to pronounce, there is no such sound in Latvian, but Mrs. Čigāns assures me that I am pronouncing it almost right [...] Only Mrs. Čigāns asks me occasionally how I am doing,’ says Agate (Nesaule, 1995: 147-149).

Such statements only show Agate’s feeling of not only being excluded and forgotten outside of the house but inside as well, by her mother. Moreover, another scene where the little Agate is almost attacked in the movie theater but is luckily saved by the policeman, shows the mother’s harsh attitude towards her daughter: ‘How could you get us mixed up with the police? [...] How could you do this to us?’ (ibid.: 170-171). The scene vividly depicts the mother’s hopelessness and fear of bad reputation rather than fear of her daughter being attacked.

The sense of guilt works as a steppingstone in Agate’s life, helping her to re-establish her identity against the demands set by her mother. It is specifically noticeable when Agate is planning to go to another city for studies: ‘I believe that finally this time, by going to yet another new place, I will leave behind the grey fog that I expected to lift when I arrived in America. I will escape the guilt that suffocates me the moment I see the thin strip of light under my mother’s closed door’ (ibid: 185.). The ‘guilt’ is what little Agate associates with her mother and that marks the strong barrier between both America and her mother. The same

concept of 'guilt' is portrayed through Agate getting ready for the University and through the emotions of her mother

Just imagine, only a few months from now you'll be at the university with intelligent people, who love books and ideas and music and art, who talk about something besides making money and accumulating possessions. You'll have a wonderful exciting life [...] How fortunate for you [...] I always wanted to go to the university too,' she is saying. 'I would certainly have gone, if only the war hadn't come, if only I had not been driven away from dear Mother Russia, if only my father had not died (ibid.: 186).

The present narrative by mother only intensifies the guilt felt by Agate as the little girl feels 'privileged' and, perhaps, is even questioning why she has the opportunity to study and has a father.

Another important point is Agate's complex relationship with her husband which introduces the chapter *Talking in Bed*. In this way, Nesaule keeps showing the layers behind the traumatic past:

We are talking in bed, friends again instead of lovers. Apricot-colored fern fronds wave against the pearl grey background of my flannel sheets. Both of us are surprised to hear thunder in February, in Wisconsin, over frozen ground and dirty snow [...] Soon we will turn away from each other, but our backs will touch, close enough to stay warm. We will dream different dreams. He will walk in the Sangre de Cristo mountains of New Mexico or drive over a wooded Wisconsin road towards Birch Island Lake. I will carry a baby away from a burning Latvian village, evade Nazi guards, catch the last train (Nesaule, 1995: 3).

Significant is the fact that 'talking in bed' and the barrier between two 'lovers' is retold from a married woman's perspective, marking the ongoing alienation between all the surroundings. Thunder over the 'frozen ground and dirty snow' emphasizes the chaos and hopelessness felt by Agate. The dreams of 'burning Latvia' tell about the present sorrow and longing for Latvia, despite many years spent in America. Sharp memories and reminiscences only explain the reason behind the characters speaking two different languages. Burning homeland lies at the core of Agate's identity which cannot be said about her husband. If examined thoroughly, one can mark another parallel how the experience of longing is sharpened, that is, through her dreams. In this way Agate gives the experiences of exile numerous dimensions.

Alma, in the second novel *Lost Midsummers*, similarly portrays the hopelessness of the marriage. Her genuine wish to be married turns out to be nothing but sorrow. After announcing that Alma is pregnant, her husband Ivars demands 'Damn you, Alma, how could you [...] You can't expect to copulate and birth a brood [...] You are not an animal in heat, Alma. We're civilized people. We're Latvians' (Nesaule, 2018: 290). 'Alma and Ivars had agreed that two children were enough for people of their position in Latvian society', however, the position in which Ivars wished to be in Latvian society was now ruined (ibid.). Ivars, through the strong necessity to be 'appropriate' and 'fit in' in the Latvian community,

ruins the life for both him and Alma. The unwanted child Jautrite becomes the representation of their misery and unhappiness, despite the fact that the meaning behind the child's name is something merry and cheerful. Only the name is something that remains positive in contrast to Jautrite's doomed childhood. However, despite the miserable childhood, Jautrite is eventually raised and 'saved' by Alma's old friend Kaija:

She had slept in cars and abandoned houses, stood in line in churches for free food, and mowed lawns and cleaned houses. [...] Finding words for painful events had healed Kaija and helped her forgive her mother, and it would do the same for Jautrite (ibid.: 355).

Nesaule one more time touches upon the issue of mother-daughter relationship that is complex and damaged. The child becomes the symbol of unhappiness and guilt, and eventually feels alienated and unwanted. Indeed, the lack of love and the inability to give it is one of the consequences of its core definer – exile. Although, the damaged souls' ability to overcome the misery show the incomprehensible strength of all the characters: 'But other unloved children, Kaija and Alma and Jautrite among them, found the willpower and courage to shape their lives. Everyone who did so was a small miracle' (ibid.).

The present chapter clearly represents the damaged relationships as consequences of the war and exile, where the deep and meaningful relationships cannot be developed due to the deep attachment to the idealized past. 'The lost land is idealized in the mirror reflection of the lost self', where one's nostalgia works as means of strengthening oneself against the present demands set by the country (Allatson and McCormack, 2008: 251). For this reason, Nesaule, through verbalizing pain and complex relationships, gives a deeper insight into the diasporic memories shared by Latvian-American communities. Such memories not only prove to be generalised accounts marked in history, but are able to question existential unfairness, social injustice, cultural differences and the present-day world.

5. APPROACHING IDENTITY THROUGH EXILE AND EDUCATION

The voice of the narrator is first of a child later developing into the voice of a woman. The identity is, therefore, re-established and progressive. This chapter examines the concept of identity from the transcultural approach within the context of exile. It indicates the process of successful assimilation that is achieved through education and hard work. However, not for all of the characters is the acculturation a story of success; for this reason, it will be further scrutinized in the present section.

5.1 Education as main legacy and imperative

The significance of education in the novels by Nesaule cannot be left unnoticed. It is nothing but the leading force in the lives of the protagonists. The exile defined by Joseph Brodsky as ‘an experience of displacement, loss and homelessness’ is transformed into something valuable and healing (Rudakoff, 2017). Therefore, the present chapter brings into the light the unquestionable importance of education in the lives of the protagonists showing education as something able to transform the lives of exiles into something meaningful.

The novel *A Woman in Amber* from the very beginning shows America as a place providing opportunities for education: ‘We three are going to America, where women can be educated’, she said. ‘That’s the place we choose to live’, says the mother of little Agate (Nesaule, 1995: 138). The present example illustrates the initial expectations set for America which becomes the main vector in the life of the young girl. Similarly, Kaija in *Lost Midsommers* understands the directing force that lies in education and hard work: ‘She knows that you need hard work and courage to restore damage caused by war’, says Kaija (Nesaule, 2018: 103). Kaija passionately asserts that ‘we’ll study for three hours every night during the week and if we need to do more, we’ll get up early on Sundays. We’ll get good grades, graduate with big honors, and get scholarships to Indiana University’ (ibid.: 98). Being a young girl, Kaija already sets a purpose that lies in education, subconsciously giving her a sense of belonging, that is, belonging to America. She genuinely proves to be a good student and is surprised that regardless of her sex, race or ethnic background she has managed to receive \$1,000 pre-med scholarship: ‘How wonderful America was! How lucky she was to be here! Where else in the world would an immigrant be given such opportunities, which would be reserved for native-born citizens in other countries?’ (ibid.: 135)

Kaija understands that her hard work, regardless of her immigrant status, proves to bear fruit. Accordingly, this shows another way of coping with exile, and Kaija being able to leave the burden of the past towards the creation of her 'American' life. In this way Nesaule manages to show on what their present life is built, and how they are finding their identity in exile, though not rejecting the past. In the same way, Agate illustrates the education being the main legacy and achievement:

I studied hard. My parents had both excelled in school, winning prizes and honors, and they expected Beate and me to do well as a matter of course. When we got fives, that is, the highest grades, we received no comment, but fours were cause of dismay and disappointment. A three was a disgrace. A two, a failing grade, would mean being kept back a year, study with smaller children. Even death would be preferable. It was unthinkable not to do an assignment (Nesaule, 1995: 121)

It is clear how the concept of education, since childhood, becomes the matter of life and death, shaping and reshaping the rest of the lives of the characters. Agate, through making herself aware of the importance of language excellence, through gradual understanding of the culture and history, learns to see excitement in the present process of learning: 'Movies is the best source of information about America,' Agate says confidently, as she considers this to be one of the best ways of becoming closer to the culture (ibid.: 162). Through language she learns America and expresses her happiness that she has learned it: 'Yes. I am glad I did. Learning English was thrilling, the most wonderful part of learning America' (ibid.: 175).

The involvement in something and the contribution to America plants the growing hope in the life of the women characters in the same way as it is done by others in the novels, maintaining their deep affiliation to Latvia through the involvement in the Latvian communities and preservation of the language and traditions. Nesaule's delicate perspective of showing the contrasting ways of coping with exile confirms the layers of enduring sorrow and the complexities behind the concept of 'identity' and 'exilic identity'. At the same time not trying to reject the past, Kaija and Agate are creating their own identities where the aspect of exile and unmeasurable depth of the suffering is nothing else but a call for the story to be re-imagined and re-told.

5.2 Reflecting on Latvianness in exile

The questioning of Latvianness as identity is persistently addressed in the novels by Nesaule, reflecting the emotional state of the exiles and continuous attachment to the lost land. It only highlights the statement concerning exiles that the state where the exile is unattached to the past ideology which is reassembled into a new is certainly impossible, as the concepts of nationalism and exile cannot be discussed separately (Said, 2000).

First of all, Nesaule, as discussed previously, aims to illustrate the story of success for the protagonists, where the prioritized goal of obtaining education leads to a relatively happy future in America. However, the Latvianness as the uniting memory and the idea of national identity in a flow of community (dis)placements from Europe to the United States is important for Nesaule as the narrator as well as for the characters in the novels. ‘God will protect us and give us strength to preserve the language of our fathers,’ Pastor Saulcere said confidently. ‘The Godless Russians occupying our dear homeland will not triumph. But since they’ve forbidden Latvian language in the schools, it is the duty of those of us in exile to preserve our language and our culture’ (Nesaule, 2018: 79). The present instance only supports the interconnection between nostalgia, national belonging and exile. ‘The language of our fathers’ signifies the emotional state of the exiles facing injustice at the same time indicating the absence of something very important in their lives.

Nesaule considers the story of success in terms of acculturation for the protagonists but shows not so positive but rather realistic state of the displaced. For this reason, Nesaule brings into view the contrasting lives of Alma and Kaija, having two different leading vectors: *marriage* and *education*. Namely, Alma in *Lost Midsummers* eventually finds her purpose in marriage as she marries a Latvian boy Ivars. Significantly, Nesaule mirrors their connection and shared longing when both Ivars and Alma are celebrating Midsummer in Chicago, while singing Latvian folk songs during Midsummer celebrations (ibid.: 226) Although, Kaija is not celebrating Midsummer, and, according to Alma, is perhaps ‘at some American cocktail party right now’ (ibid.). This predetermines Alma’s contempt, as she cannot accept the fact that she, while being in America, has forgotten about the significant cultural celebrations for every Latvian. Accordingly, Ivars and Alma show the way the culture and cultural identity is preserved, providing meaning to their lives in exile. Ivars highlights that Alma has *tikums*, that refers to Latvian folklore and is praised in *dainas* – the ancient four-line Latvian verses (ibid.). ‘They named the little boy Janis, in honor of Ivars’ father and of Jani to celebrate Midsummer,’ which only indicates the never absent Latvianness in their lives (ibid.: 285).

Both novels by Nesaule signify Latvian folklore, *Dainas*, traditions, food culture and main values, accentuating and reminding of the significance of the mother country. The obsessiveness with the broken history is a way through which characters maintain strength and affiliation. Exiles feel obliged to preserve the culture and traditions, and it is realistically addressed through the comparison of the two cultures: ‘We Latvians really know how to set a table,’ says Alma on Latvian Independence Day [...] Apple cakes, beautifully decorated *tortes*, and platters of small colourful open-faced sandwiches competed for space on a narrow table, and the fragrance of good coffee wafted up to the two girls on the dark staircase’

(Nesaule, 2018: 113). Alma, in contrast to Kaija, is not able to see America as a place for opportunities, but only as something reminding her of where she actually belongs: ‘Only the broken beer bottles, used condoms, and disintegrating cigarette butts reminded everyone that the green meadows, pure rivers, and white birches of Latvia were far away’ (ibid.: 229). Alma sees America through the perspective of Latvia: ‘[...] the wedding was set for Saturday on Labour Day weekend so that it could be celebrated for three days and three nights, as it would have been in Latvia’ (ibid.: 231). These excerpts from Alma’s life show the contrasting ways of seeing America and coping with the psychological burden.

The novel has plenty of folk songs, all depicting the essence of Latvian culture and values. When both Alma and Ivars meet, they exchange folk songs and are happily united in something very dear to them:

‘Kur tu augi, daila meita,
Ka es tevi neredzeju?
Where did you grow up, you lovely girl,
That I didn’t see you?
Vai tu augi pie maminas,
Vai maminas purina?
Did you grow up with your mother,
Or inside her hope chest’ (ibid.: 227).

The mention of *dainas* and *Latvianness* makes Alma and Ivars affiliated, not marginalized; they feel happy to be ‘different’ as they understand their actual belonging and are deeply attached to their feeling of ‘Latvianness’. It serves as a way of coping with the continuous guilt of broken history and the feeling of being peripheral in the present environment, giving the characters the sense of significance and belonging. The concept of being different and the feelings of estrangement the characters share immediately highlight the Americanness as something privileged, making them feel disadvantageous. However, this is one way of coping shared by Nesaule in comparison to Kaija in *Lost Midsummers* and Agate in *A Woman in Amber*, who manage to step out of the vicious circle of exile and find strength in accepting the present obstacles and present opportunities America can offer.

Latvian identity is continuously addressed in the novels, one more time highlighting the previously discussed complex mother-daughter relationship. In addition, Nesaule, through folk songs, addresses the concept of Latvian identity and values kept in the lines.

Moreover, Alma chooses the lines expressing her longing for mother:

‘The sun moved unrelentingly,
I was left in half-shade.
I do not have my dear mother
To lift me into the sun’ (ibid.: 111).

The longing and references to 'dear mother' show her inner pain. 'Mother' symbolised as somebody who would lift her 'into the sun', only puts an emphasis on the history of Latvia and history that is rooted in the Latvian folk songs. Namely, this relates to Latvia that had once been full of orphans due to the reason that a huge number of fathers were not able to return back from wars and mothers that died in childbirth. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge that folklore introduced in the novels functions as one of the ways preserving the broken history of Latvian-American communities.

Not only the Latvianness as the cultural identity from the perspective of exiles is shown in the novel *Lost Midsummers* (Nesaule, 2018). What is remarkable, Nesaule shows the Latvian identity through the perspective of Latvia. It is shown when Alma returns to Latvia, after many years, in order to visit her cousin Dalija who is triggered to meet Alma: 'The three girls were looking forward to the visit of their rich aunt' (Nesaule, 2018: 368). The mentioning concerning 'rich aunt' only marks the issue of 'deficit' and something characteristic for the country at that time:

Irisa had used the word too when asked Alma to bring the winter coat for her twelve-year-old daughter 'because currently we have a deficit of those.' *Deficit*. The three syllables drummed in Alma's head as she moved around in the Latvian Community House kitchen, slamming cupboards and clattering pans [...] Russians had forced Latvian women to wear men's underpants and drive tractors, but Alma would demonstrate that coercion could not change the fact that men were men, and women were women. [...] Alma shopped like a crazy woman. She bought everything she heard was in short supply (ibid.: 369).

In view of all these instances, Nesaule, similarly to the 'Stadium story' told by Katherine and Marita (2019) marks the injustice between the two worlds that, most importantly, vividly interconnect to each other. Nesaule not only addresses the injustice but at the same time examines the concept of being privileged, as she mentions that 'If she could only smuggle in a computer so that her cousin Dalija and her husband could rejoin the world' (ibid.: 370). This considerably marks the issue of misinterpretations and mistranslations topical between both the Baltic countries and the West addressed by Rein Taagepera (2019). What is more, Latvia is one more time shown as the one outside 'the world' as through the technologies and computer the characters would be able to 'rejoin the world'.

Nesaule authentically reveals the contrasting cultures and views on exile during the homecoming: 'Blood was trickling down Alma's leg from a cut made by a door handle with a knob missing. But the pain was nothing compared to being called a foreigner. A foreigner in her own country. A stranger in the land where she belonged (ibid.: 378). While examining the contrasting views, it can be marked that the displacement, no matter what, is seen as an immediate estrangement by Alma's relatives, regardless of the shared language and roots.

Moreover, the cousin Dalija expresses resentment while opening the 'American' presents: 'This is Revlon lipstick, but I only use Christian Dior,' (ibid.: 380) that only marks the soreness and hopelessness felt by the relatives. At the same time, it makes Alma feel guilty for the so called 'opportunities' and seemingly 'easy life' in America, aiming to question it: 'But then all of you Americans look young because you've had such easy lives, not like us who stayed in Latvia, where we belong, doing our sacred duty to our homeland' (ibid.: 380).

In this way, Nesaule expands on the theme of the lack of proper knowledge between the two worlds, and the wrong assumptions made by the natives, based on television. Accordingly, when Alma is asked from where or whom they heard such information, replies: 'On television. The men stir the Campbell's soup, and the women put their feet on the table and chatter on the phone' (ibid.) Through the understanding developed in the first part of the present study, it becomes easier to acknowledge Nesaule's wish to re-write the history and re-think the collective memories of Latvians. The present example only proves the contradictory views on exile by both 'worlds'.

In like manner, Agate in *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile*, despite representing the good side of acculturation, is not able to submerge the longing for Latvia in the face of many years of life in America. 'What I would really like is a hand full of Latvian soil,' Agate replies to her colleague who has offered to bring her something from Latvia (Nesaule, 1995: 242). It significantly refers back to Latvian nature praised in *dainas*, symbolizing the value of hard work and the importance of nature – all defining the Latvian identity, where folk songs are only the proof kept in lines.

In conclusion, through comprehending the complexity of exile experiences put forward by scholars, it is clear, how Nesaule manages to examine a wide range of issues: exile, identity, displacement and its consequences, existential unfairness, social injustice, education as leading force in the life of exiles and many more. By verbalized pain, the reminiscences of the exiled obtain a significant emotional value in the context of history. Displacement addressed in the novels lead to the understanding of the importance of homeland and strong links created in the memory. The homeland and Latvian identity questioned in the novels only prove the ever-lasting affiliation to homeland as a result of forced immigration. Nesaule, as a diasporic writer, reawakens the painful memories and convincingly puts the submerged past into lasting and precious images. By developing cultural reflexivity, Nesaule turns exile experiences into valuable and authentic images. Nesaule's recent work *Lost Midsummers* is only another proof of the lost history that is still continuing to be reclaimed.

Conclusions

The present paper addresses the concepts of exile and identity in the novels *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile* (1995) and *Lost Midsummers: A Novel of Exile and Friendship* (2018) by Agate Nesaule.

The goal of the paper is to create an understanding of the concepts of exile and identity, discussed from the perspective of Latvian-American communities after 1944. Accordingly, after conducting literature review and examining significant theories by scholars, the goal of the research has been achieved. Firstly, exile proves to be widely discussed and from various perspectives and theories, such as transcultural and transnational, proving its importance in a wider historical context. The theme of exile results into the analysis of identity, its deep connection to memory and place.

The ideas regarding exile, approached from the perspectives by Edward Said and Joseph Brodsky lead to the understanding that exiles are united in terms of their hopelessness and continuous search for meaning. The concepts of exile and identity, when analysed in more specific contexts such as transcultural and transnational, prove to be full of new findings. Namely, that memory plays a huge role in the lives of exiles, fostering exile's necessity for the memories to be reawakened in the times of exile. Other significant findings for the study based on the study by Vieda Skultans, include the narrations by Baltic exiles that stress the importance of geographical location in the lives of exiles. Skultans highlights the fact that, while looking for meaning, exiles realize the broken history as one of the most important values in their lives.

The present study argues about Nesaule's novels and the painful memories as means for both understanding and actualizing the memories of Latvian-American exile communities after 1944. Therefore, Nesaule, through addressing the concepts of exile and identity, not only speaks to Baltic exiles, but is utilizing memories as something immensely valuable in a wider historical context. Women characters in the novels represent the search for voice as well as justice. While comprehending unmeasurable cruelty experienced by exiles, novels create and strengthen valuable images that were once kept voiceless. The protagonists in both novels of Nesaule only prove Skultans' statement where the search for meaning only results in exile, being the core determiner of their identity. Nesaule's novels inform about the complexity of exile, proving there to be numerous ways of coping with the displacement.

Nesaule, through memory-writing, manages to re-think and reclaim the past. Latvianness, repeatedly addressed in the novels, symbolizes the way how identity is (re)constructed, and it is done through dealing with personal as well as collective traumas.

Memory-writing and the figure of exile discussed in the novels, shape valuable images in a wider historical context.

The limits of the present research refer to the fact that not all theories of identity, memory and exile in literary and cultural studies have been examined, but most of the part only those in the context of exile. A better understanding of identity in a wider context would be relevant for the present study and the understanding of the characters in the novels.

For this reason, further research on Nesaule's novels as well as other memory writings within the context of exile (political, labour etc.) could enrich our understanding of historical and contemporary identity developments and memory practices in human beings and communities in different political circumstances.

THESES

- 1) The present paper explores the concepts of exile and identity in Agate Nesaule's novels *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile* (1995) and *Lost Midsummers: A Novel of Exile and Friendship* (2018).
- 2) The novels address exile experiences and questions of identity from the perspective of Latvian-American communities after 1944, contributing to the contemporary exile memory-writing in literature.
- 3) Literature review discusses a range of studies on the ways in which contemporary authors with different exile contexts and experiences argue about exilic cultural reflexivity, collective memory practices and issues of identification.
- 4) Scholars such as Akhtar (1999), Said (2000) and Ballinger (2003) highlight the fact that exile has proved to reestablish its definition through times. Namely, its meaning has expanded from notions 'immigrant' and 'refugee' that were initially associated with exiles.
- 5) Contemporary exile literature has been reflecting on the interconnection between exile experiences, memory and identity transformation. Collective and individual memories, as well as displacement, have proved to affect the identity of a person throughout the whole life.
- 6) Numerous exile experiences belonging to exile-writing in world literature have led to the understanding of the identity that is, undoubtedly, affected by the memories of the exiles. Agate Nesaule's novels confirm the paradox of the state of exiles, namely, where certain achievements in America are not freeing the characters from their affiliation to homeland.
- 7) The novels by Agate Nesaule stress the phenomena of a transnational exile, and Nesaule herself becomes a part of transnational memory writing on the exile experiences in the 20th century.
- 8) Agate Nesaule's novels address the concept of exile, showing how the identity of the exiles is re-imagined in the process of becoming Latvian-American. Nesaule aims to verbalize the painful emotions of Latvian exile communities as a way of healing, reimagining and reclaiming the history.
- 9) Importantly, Nesaule brings into the light the importance of women's memories contributing to women's histories in a wider literary context. She addresses gender issues that are brought forward in women's memory writing, and through which Nesaule aims to argue about social injustice and inequality between the genders.

- 10) *Lost Midsummers: A Novel of Exile and Friendship* addresses the complexity of the major two experiences of coping with the post-war trauma and exile and their importance in the women characters' self-identifications in American society: through marriage and education. Accordingly, such experiences imply a certain emotional value obtained within the context of the broken history.
- 11) The stories in the novel *A Woman in Amber: Healing the Trauma of War and Exile* deal with the critical ways of seeing America. They highlight the process of becoming Latvian-American, suggesting about existential unfairness seen behind the concept of being 'chosen'. Moreover, Americanness described in the novel only emphasizes the broken history being the core determiner in the lives of exiles.
- 12) The experiences, described in the novels, manifest the complex process of acculturation for exile individuals and communities. Therefore, the relationships described in the novels function as means of symbolizing the complex history. The novels show the unbreakable link to the 'lost history' only leading to harmed and 'lost' relationships in the present.
- 13) The novels emphasize the importance of memory-writings in world literature where the valuable images strengthen the historical accounts, leading to a deepened understanding of exile experiences.

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