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**Young Missionaries in Latvia:
An Anthropological Research on Female
Mormon Missionaries**

MASTER THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Going on a mission to serve God is an initial part of Mormons life. Missionaries are experiencing something extraordinary and profound, out of their comfort zone, away from their homeland and within a totally new cultural and social context. In return, they experience spiritual development as well as personal development. For missionaries, participating in a mission, with all its characteristics, can be seen as an event in the process of adulthood. During the mission, different aspects of adulthood are influenced. In this thesis work, I have studied female Mormon missionaries' lives in Latvia to examine the impact of the mission on their lives as individuals as well as Mormon believers.

Keywords: Mormon- Missionaries- adulthood- Rites of Passage

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to provide an initial examination into Female Mormon missionaries from an anthropological and ethnographic perspective who are experiencing something extraordinary and profound.

To limit the scope of the study I emphasize on the impacts of the mission as a part of the adulthood process. Besides personal development as an individual, I have tried to briefly study that being on the mission leads to spiritual development for missionaries. I initially studied their private life in relation to their movement to Latvia as a missionary. I examine a series of events, where their status from an ordinary lay member of the church turns to a “sister”, to figure out if they can be understood using the theory of “Rites of Passage”.

Later in this chapter, I describe the methodology, the ethical consideration, and some background on my ethnographic fieldwork. The introduction is followed by some historical and theoretical facts. I explore the missionaries' life in Latvia in two parts, before the mission and during the mission.

1.1. Methodology

To perform this study, I mainly followed a qualitative approach by conducting interviews and my own observations. I have also used some books and published papers to gather historical facts. The main source regarding quantitative data is the Mormon official website.

As of today, April, 2020, there has been a dramatic change in people's lifestyle due to the fast-spreading of the Coronavirus. Many public places are locked down and people are asked to either stay at home or be conscious about their interaction with others in public places and avoid unnecessary social activities. The situation also affected my fieldwork progress as it was not possible to conduct interviews in person and participate in church activities. Therefore, I asked my informant to answer interview questions online. I have also used my own field notes from my previous attendance in church when I was participating in some ceremonies and religious gatherings before the corona time. I have also met some female missionaries out of the church several times, and here in this study, I used my observations from those private visits as well.

1.2. My Informants and field sites

Here is the list of my informants from mission area

- 1- sister M. L, missionary in Latvia for 15 1/2 months.
- 2- sister R.P, missionary in Latvia for 10 months
- 3- sister M.B, missionary in Latvia and Estonia for 15 months (she went back home early because of coronavirus)
- 4- sister A.R, missionary in Latvia for a year.
- 5- sister M.B, missionary in Latvia and Lithuania for 13 months.
- 6- sister K.B, missionary in Latvia for 8 months.

As stated in the topic, my informants were six female missionaries, whom I first met in Riga sometime around April 2019. Out of 6 informants, four are 20 years old, one is 19 and the six-person is 21 years old. All of them are from different states in the USA.

My target group, American female missionaries, are supposed to stay in the baltic area for two years to serve a full-time mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (commonly known as the Mormon or LDS Church). Most of the missionaries that I've met (sisters, elders, leaders) in the LDS church are originally from the USA. Except for one sister from Ukraine and one elder from the UK, I have not yet met any other nationality.

Out of 6 informants, 2 of them are from Utah, and 2 Oregon, one California and one Idaho.

1.3. Theoretical framework

1.3.1. Religious rituals and rites of passage

Anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep was the first to introduce the idea of status passage rituals. In the Rites of Passage, he defines rites of passage as a threefold process with phases of separation, segregation, and reintroduction to the social order, with a new standing (Van Gennep 1969:75). Drawing on initiation rites in Southeast Australian Totem groups, Van Gennep provides a compelling example of a religious ceremony that symbolizes “social puberty”. (Tofani Grava) He explains how individuals are considered dead for the duration of their novitiate but in the final religious act, they are “resurrected and taught how to live, but differently than in childhood, [...] which makes the novice

forever identical to the adult members” (Van Gennep 1960:75). The religious ceremony provokes momentous change in the individual’s life as he is now considered a man, involved in the duties devolved upon him as a member of the adult community (Van Gennep 1960:75).

The term “liminality” was the first time introduced by Arnold Van Gennep (2011), a French ethnologist from the twentieth century. Years after the research of Van Gennep, Victor Turner (1969) has seen the liminality as a form of ritual in everyday situations. When we are going to school or to work, taking an exam, entering into a new building in order to achieve something or even for people who are staying home, we always pass through liminality. Victor Turner introduced in his research “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual” the modern concept of liminality named liminoid. He suggested that the liminoid is the threshold state in modern society and the liminality is only used in the traditional way. Turner has guaranteed that liminality can be seen in every aspect of our life. However, liminoid remained unused by numerous scholars, they preferred to use the Van Gennep’s form even in our current days. (Teodorescu, 2015:820)

Many authors that are dedicated to rites of passage (e.g. Eliade or Turner) stress the latter, the initiation practices, as the most important among all rites of passage. (Jaskulska, 2015: 96)

If we compare the contemporary understanding of liminality/liminoidality with the phase of rites of passage of tribal communities, we will notice that today the participation of the community in this process is different. Young people have to rely on their own strength and strategies. in the rites of maturity and entering adulthood, the liminal threshold phase is very visible.

1.3. Ethical Considerations

After finalizing my research topic, I contacted the mission president, to inform them about the study and I have also asked for their approval to use my own field notes and observations.

Although the interviews have not been done anonymously, I assure the sisters that I will not use their names in my writings and it is quite optional to answer any question.

It should also need to be mentioned that in this study I'm not going to examine Mormonism, Mormon faith, beliefs, or any rituals. Gender study is not also a concern in this work.

1.4. How my ethnography started

In April 2019, I was walking through a park in the wonderful spring weather in Riga with a takeaway coffee and a cigarette in my hand, among parents and kids, lovers and teenagers, elderlies, and grandchildren. I was trying to capture some pictures of blossoms and birds when I saw a group of young people standing in the middle of the park and trying to approach people and talk to them. I was passing by them when one of the girls with a very beautiful pink dress came toward me and asked me if I could speak English. She has the kindest smile on her face, long brown hair, and a strong American accent. she came closer to me and I took my handsfree out and smiled back at her. "hello, do you speak English?" she said. "Actually, this is the only foreign language that I speak," I replied. She pointed out a whiteboard and asked me to write down my ideas on happiness in life, I accepted and got closer to the board. There were lots of words and phrases on their whiteboard, such as God, family, love, mother, father, parents, lover, and so on. I

wrote something and then she introduced herself to me. "I am sister B., I'm from America" then she pointed to her friends and continued, "we are Mormon missionaries". Honestly, I have been introduced to some missionaries before in my life but the name "Mormon" was completely new to me. Although I am not a religious person at all, I wanted to show my respect to them and let them complete their presentation.

"We are here in Latvia to talk to the people about God, Jesus Christ, and happiness," she said. "I was born and raised in a Muslim society and I don't know that much about your religion, but it was nice to meet you here" I replied.

"It doesn't matter if you are Muslim at all, I think happiness is something that all human beings seek for. We would love to know you better. Is it ok if I have your number and invite you to our gatherings in our church? We also sometimes have game nights, where we play, sing, and dance together. Would you like to join us sometimes?" she said.

I could not say no to her because of her warm open arms and her smile. I wanted to know them better, to understand what motivated her to be in the street, convince people to stand by their board, and initiate a conversation with total strangers, especially as a foreigner, when you don't even know the local language. In this modern life, it is not common to socialize in public places, we don't usually talk to strangers, we prefer to wear our headphones and listen to something while walking without anyone as a company. Sometimes we don't even look around and don't notice what is happening in the surroundings. Compared to some years ago, it might be hard to initiate a talk with some strangers in the street, especially in Europe. At the end of our talk, we exchanged our numbers and I passed them by.

After saying goodbye to Mormon, I continued my walk, through the shadows and lights and looking at people in their normal routine life. I kept thinking about happiness and God. After a while, walking in the old Riga, I forgot about Mormon and their missions.

A week later I got a text message from sister Blonder asking me to meet them in their church building. I accepted their invitation and still, I did not know anything about Mormon and missionaries. to be honest, if it was winter and snowy I would not accept their invitation, even though these young missionaries are very kind and sweet, but still, I guess there might be a connection between the season and the mission. No one wants to stand in the street and talk about God and happiness in a windy snowy Riga.

Their church building was somehow close to my place so I took a walk. I met them at the entrance, two girls. One of them with a nude jumper and green skirt and another one, Sister B, with a midi dress, actually I don't remember the exact colors but I am sure it was not black or grey or any other dark color. Their nice and happy outfit was not the same as what I was expected to be a missionaries' outfit. later I realized it was only my preconception.

After I entered the Mormon church that day, my story with missionaries in Latvia started in a very friendly and calm atmosphere. Besides our friendship, I tried to capture their daily routine and religious activities, the ideas and beliefs behind this sisterhood. While I was looking for a topic to do my thesis work, studying Mormon' life, in particular their missionaries in Riga from an anthropological point of view, interested me. It has been more than a year since the day I met Mormon. I have already been in contact with some of them as friends and I knew a little bit about their personal life, but to do my thesis work I started digging more into the idea of being a Mormon and more specifically a missionary.

2. HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

When I entered the Mormon church building for the first time, I saw a huge poster on the wall, a picture of a temple, close to the entrance, the next large painting was an enormous canvas with an elegant wooden frame. In the picture, it was a man with long gray hair sitting under the tree, with a book in his hand. The man was dressed in red, which was the best combination with other colors in the painting. Looking at the picture for the first time, I was sure this man was not Jesus Christ, but who can be that much more important than Jesus Christ? He was Joseph Smith; I did not know that before sisters introduced him to me. Although sisters gave me a long lecture about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, in order to better understand missionaries, I needed to study more about Mormonism and collect information from other sources. I wanted to explore their life from different perspectives and of course on different aspects. As Fiona Bowie argues, the study of religion has been central to anthropology since its inception. As an inclusive, comparative study of human societies, from their prehistoric origins to the present, anthropology has sought to describe, classify and explain religious beliefs and practices. At the same time, the term 'religion' is elusive and problematic. (Bowie, 2008: 862).

2.1. Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon

While I was walking in the church building with sisters, they were representing different parts of the building, the conference room, the meeting rooms, classrooms, etc. In every hallway, walls were covered by pictures, most of them Joseph Smith and the rest of Jesus Christ. One of the sisters had a book in her hand with an elegant cotton cover on it. When I asked her what is this book that you are holding? She said: this is a book of Mormon,

another testament of Jesus Christ. I do not have that much knowledge about religions, but at least I know some cults in Christianity, but the book of Mormon was new for me. After our tour in the church, we sat in one of the rooms and started to talk about Mormon and their duties on the mission.

While they were talking about Joseph Smith, you could easily see how much they have respect for him and the book of Mormon. It does not just love; it is also faith.

"We know this is the truth," the sister said.

"When I started to read this book, I asked God to show me one sign if this is the truth, and the god did," one of the sisters said.

"If you want to know the truth, you should first start to read this book then ask for the truth, if you got your answer, then you can believe in the book of Mormon" she continued and gave me the book of Mormon.

"ask us if you could not understand the language, because it is even hard for us to read old English," they said.

But who was Joseph Smith?

According to the history of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, Jr., and six additional members, established the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1830 upstate New York (Bordelon, 2013: 10).

It (Mormonism) was founded during an era of considerable political, societal, and religious unrest and upheaval (Bordelon, 2013:10). Religious movements during this time period were characterized by a number of themes, namely Christian primitivism and millennial expectations (Bordelon, 2013:10). The faithful and religious began to eschew orthodox beliefs and practices; they displayed a passion for expanding their membership,

and they sought to restore their faith to the purity that they believed existed only in the early Christian church (Bordelon, 2013:10)

Many Americans felt that Christ's return was imminent and that he would establish a New Jerusalem, possibly in the United States (Bordelon, 2013:10). According to American historian Nathan Hatch (1989): "The first generation of United States citizens may have lived in the shadow of Christ's second coming more intensely than any other generation since". (Bordelon, 2013:11). Sociologist Thomas O'Dea (1957) noted that the older Calvinist churches were associated with the burgeoning business class and the university-educated elite, including the professional clergy. (Bordelon, 2013:11). It was clear that the common, uneducated American had been left by the wayside and that these new, popular religious movements offered common people and the impoverished enticing notions of self-respect and an overall sense of self-confidence (Bordelon, 2013:11). Joseph Smith, Jr., the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and his 9th family were among those 1st century Americans who were not able to connect with the educated elite and the upwardly mobile (Bordelon, 2013:11). Smith's father was suspicious of institutional religion, though his wife and children were deeply religious (Bordelon, 2013:11). Joseph Smith, Jr., despite being troubled by the competing religious denominations, persisted in his search for a true and pure church. He read in James 1:5 (King James Bible): "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraided not; and it shall be given him" (p. 1342). (Bordelon, 2013:11). Smith was convinced that he should pray to God directly for guidance on joining a church. After praying intently, Smith reported that "two personages" appeared to him: Smith identified one of the beings as God the Father. (Bordelon, 2013:11) The second being was identified as "the beloved son" Jesus. It was Jesus who instructed Smith not to join any of the denominations, that their creeds were "an abomination." Smith was 14 years old when he received this message. (Bordelon, 2013:11)

In addition, according to adherents of Mormonism, Smith would go on to receive numerous messages from various divine sources, including John the Baptist and an angel

named Moroni. These revelations provided for the foundation and the establishment of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and are the sole source for most of the Church's doctrine and sacred texts (Bordelon, 2013:11).

Scholars cannot agree on the number of Mormon pioneers who migrated westward in 1846; however, at the time of Joseph Smith's death in 1844, there were approximately 26,000 Mormon worldwide (Bordelon, 2013:12).

One of Joseph Smith's tasks as the first prophet after the Restoration of the Church was to retranslate the Bible and correct passages that were unclear or that had been altered. (Pepper, 2014:30)

In addition to that translation, Joseph Smith was responsible for the translation of the Book of Mormon. After a visitation from an angel named Moroni, Joseph Smith was led to the location of a sacred record which was written on golden metal plates. (Pepper, 2014:30)

Once this record was in his possession, God commanded Joseph Smith to translate the ancient text and publish it as the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is the record of God's dealings with some of the original inhabitants of the Americas which includes ancestors of the Native Americans. (Pepper, 2014:30)

It begins 600 years before the birth of Christ in Jerusalem as God commands Lehi, an ancient prophet, to lead his family to the Promised Land before the complete destruction of the city. (Pepper, 2014:30)

Upon arriving in the Western Hemisphere, Lehi's family splits into two groups: the righteous Nephites and the wicked Lamanites. Primarily following the history of the Nephites, the Book of Mormon is another testament of God's dealings with mankind. (Pepper, 2014:30)

The culmination of the book of Mormon is the arrival of Jesus Christ to the American continent after His Resurrection. (Pepper, 2014:30)

He teaches the people His Gospel and establishes His Church; however, 400 years after His departure, the Nephites become wicked and are completely destroyed in a great battle by the Lamanites. (Pepper, 2014:30)

“I study from the Book of Mormon, and often pray before I read it, but I don't pray from it, or from the Bible, although we do believe the Bible to be scripture. Prayers are very simple communication with God, and so we simply start with addressing Heavenly Father and then end in the name of Jesus Christ. Everything in between is up to the person praying, and dependent on their needs, and what they wish to express”.

2.2. LDS church

I was born and raised in a Muslim family but I was never practicing Islam. Even though I was not a true believer in any religion, every now and then, I used to go to a church as a place in which I could pray and meditate, no matter what type of church it was. I go to church, and light some candles and pray. The reason that I choose a church for praying, not a mosque, is personal, I feel more spiritual. I feel calmer and more peaceful in the church with all its physical and spiritual elements. The silence, the lights that are coming from the windows, the paintings, the impressive church music, lights of candles, people's praying poses, the lovely face of holy Mary, wooden chairs, red carpets, all of them make me feel relieved.

When they told me that we could meet in the church, the first picture that came to my mind was those huge typical Christianity churches, but Mormon church doesn't look like

other Christianity churches; they have a temple, this temple is sacred, and it is not open to the public. The church building is available for any programs, rituals, conferences, classes, and other activities.

the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is one of the most rapidly-growing Christian denominations in the United States (Bordelon, 2013: 1)

Citing data that was compiled by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, the Mormon Church's membership increased 45.5% between the years 2000 through 2010 (Stack, 2012). Mormon are also known for certain values, beliefs, and practices that are not held or observed by most, if not all, mainstream Christian denominations. Mormon doctrine includes the belief that a lost tribe of Israel, composed of the Nephites and the Lamanites, settled in Central or South America approximately 600 years before the birth of Christ (Bordelon, 2013: 1)

One of the more controversial practices within Mormonism is that of plural marriage or polygamy, a practice that was abandoned nearly a century ago. (Bordelon, 2013: 13)

In addition, Mormon was the most rapidly expanding group in the United States, and as of 2008, composed 1.8% of the population (Bordelon, 2013: 1)

According to other sources, the Church's membership has doubled since 1985, with much of the growth occurring beyond the boundaries of the United States (Bordelon, 2013: 1) Indeed, by the 1990s, international membership abroad outpaced the Church's growth within the United States. Worldwide membership is now in excess of 14,000,000 (Bordelon, 2013: 1). According to the Church's website, at any given time, a dedicated portion of its membership is actively engaged in proselytizing efforts worldwide. Approximately 53,000 full-time members are working on a full-time basis to "make God known to all nations" (Bordelon, 2013: 2)

While the Church has designated the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price to be official scripture, the organization also has

several extra-canonical works that help clarify doctrine and practice. Since it began in 1830, the LDS Church has held a regular “general” conference—general in that all members are invited to attend but also general in the sense that it is conducted by general leaders over the entire church, as opposed to local leadership. (Van Dyk, 2019:53)

Over the decades this has taken several different forms, but today it is an opportunity twice per year to hear from executive officers of the church who are over the global membership of more than 16,000,000 today. These leaders deliver sermons on a variety of topics related to worship and to live as a Mormon. Practicing members of the church treat these sermons close to, or at the same level as, canonized scripture. (Van Dyk, 2019:53)

A group of Brigham Young University professors maintains a website called the Corpus of General Conference Talks, which allows anyone with Internet access to search across the sermons of these meetings, dating back to 1851.¹⁸ This is a valuable resource for anyone doing research on doctrinal or practical theology as it relates to Mormon. (Van Dyk, 2019:53)

A researcher can get a sense of how the LDS Church understood a particular doctrine, practice, or political issue at any given time since the second half of the 19th century. (Van Dyk, 2019:53)

The Church also publishes online a manual for local lay leadership, *Handbook: Administering in the Church*. The Handbook has official policies on issues such as euthanasia, cremation, and birth control. (Van Dyk, 2019:53)

With regard to its earliest history, for the past two decades, the Church has published the Joseph Smith Papers, an archival project in which it has tried to find and reproduce documents created by Joseph Smith or by staff whose work he directed, including journals, revelations and translations, contemporary reports of discourses, minutes, business and legal records, editorials, and notices.”²⁰ The volumes are still being

published, but researchers can freely access much of the content online at <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/>. (Van Dyk, 2019:54)

2.2.1. LDS church in Latvia

A handful of Estonians and Latvians joined the Church during the mid to late twentieth century in nearby European nations such as Finland and Germany. The Finland Helsinki Mission commenced missionary activity within the Baltic States in 1989 when the first baptisms were performed in Estonia. (Martinich, 2015:1). Missionaries opened Riga, Latvia to missionary activity in mid-1992 and organized a branch shortly thereafter. (Martinich, 2015:1). The Church reassigned the Baltic States to Russia St. Petersburg Mission in July 1992. (Martinich, 2015:1).

The mission is currently called the Baltic Mission but was previously known as the Latvia Riga Mission (1993-1996) and Lithuania Vilnius Mission (1996-2002). (Martinich, 2015:1). Most cities with an LDS presence in the Baltic States opened to missionary work in the 1990s or early 2000s. In Latvia, branches were established in Riga (1994), Liepaja (1997), and Daugavpils (2002). Member groups began functioning in Jelgava (late 2000s) and Bauska (late 2000s/early 2010s). In early 2015, the Church operated official branches in three cities in Latvia, four cities in Estonia, and four cities in Lithuania. (Martinich, 2015:1).

The total number of cities in the Baltic States with an official branch increased from one in 1991 to five in 1994, seven in 1997, 10 in 2002, and 11 in 2007. The Church has permanently discontinued two congregations in Latvia (a second Latvian-speaking

congregation in Riga in 2012 and a second Russian-speaking congregation in Riga in 2014). (Martinich, 2015:1).

The Church currently operates one district in each of the Baltic States. Provided with the date of creation in parentheses, these districts include the Tallinn Estonia District (1997), Riga Latvia District (1998), and the Vilnius Lithuania District (1998). (Martinich, 2015:1).

Church membership in Latvia increased to 200 in 1995, 508 in 2000, 747 in 2004, 1,025 in 2008, and 1,189 in 2014. (Martinich, 2015:1). At year-end 2013, the Church reported 3,230 members in the Baltic States. In early 2015, there were 13 branches within the mission. Most branches had between 20 and 60 active members as of the mid-2010s. (Martinich, 2015:1). as of today, in April 2020, according to the church website, the total amount of church membership in Latvia is 1,272.

The first sisters that I met were actively working as missionaries in Riga. As their person who is new to Mormonism, I was invited to both church buildings in Riga, one at Lacplesa, and another one at Imanta. Unfortunately, they do not have any temples in Latvia. All the programs are operating at church buildings.

3. MORMON CONVERSION

Missionary work has always been an essential part of Christianity and missionaries have been traveling all over the world for many years. of course, their motivation to be a missionary varies as well as their target audience. However, in some countries, for example, my homeland Iran, it is extremely forbidden not only for missionaries but anyone to advertise any other religions than Islam.

Despite the variation in missionaries' denominations as Bordelon describes, their aim is usually to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to non-believers or to people who have fallen away from the faith (Bordelon, 2013: 22)

“I don't look at being a missionary as changing other people's beliefs. We mostly as missionaries want to find out what other people believe, and then explain what we believe and why we believe it! Then they can choose if they want to know more or not. I don't want anyone to ever feel like we're forcing them to change. That being said, I have talked to a LOT of people on my mission. Sometimes it's just on the street and we have a conversation about God that is very uplifting! Sometimes, we meet with them a little bit more and read parts of the Bible and the Book of Mormon and pray together and talk about what they think and learn. And a couple of times, after these kinds of meetings, people are very interested in our church and then decide to join the church because they believe the things we teach and believe. I have had 4 people decide to join the church by being baptized on my mission.”

Missionaries also perform a number of duties, including promoting literacy, assisting in economic development, and providing basic educational services to local inhabitants. (Bordelon, 2013: 22)

Because of differences in various aspects between the home country and host country, Missionaries are facing challenges for example living under stress, while working abroad. The perceived inequalities in the standard of living, climate, pace of life, values, and belief systems will cause the missionary to respond by responding or withdrawing from the host society. (Bordelon, 2013: 23)

They need to adjust themselves to the new situation. Becoming acquainted with a new culture and to a current location not only produces stress, but these processes can also cause the missionary to experience feelings of depression and anxiety. (Bordelon, 2013: 23)

“It’s a lot like going away to school. In the beginning, you miss your family and friends and your old lifestyle a lot!”

I believe the amount of anxiety that you get is directly related to the place of your mission, the missionary character, and also church rules for missionaries.

Researchers have theorized that a missionary's religious affiliation can be predictive of the stress that the missionary expects to experience once deployed into his/her new location (Bordelon, 2013: 23)

“I did miss my family and friends on a mission, a lot, but I skyped them every week, and now I am glad to be back home with them.”

According to Bordelon, when studying missionaries' religious orientations, there are three types or categories: intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest. (Bordelon, 2013: 23)

researchers found that missionaries who identify very strongly with the quest orientation tended to expect lower levels of stress while deployed on their mission; missionaries who

identify strongly with the extrinsic orientation tended to expect higher levels of stress while deployed in the field (Bordelon, 2013: 23)

“I think it is only normal for missionaries to miss their home country for a time while on their missions. I know I did. But I realized that I was here to serve these people here. In whatever way that meant. So, I started to make a list of all the things I liked about Lithuania and then Latvia. As I realized all these things, I saw how much I love it here. There is so much to offer, so after being here for a year, I don’t want to go home. The Baltics are my home. These are my people. I love everything about it.”

3.1. Mormon female missionaries

3.1.1. History

Looking back in history and women engagements, at least as early as the 1870s, Protestant women began journeys to foreign lands to work as missionaries and teach people about Christianity, the spiritual dimension, and the lifestyle. (Lelegren, 2009: iii) These were primarily independent women who sought to enlarge the women's sphere from the confined, domestic life to which they were accustomed. Because of its decline by the 1930s, historians have often labeled these missions as a "feminist movement." (Lelegren, 2009: iii)

The first missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was Samuel Smith (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2007). (Pepper, 2014:33). The younger brother of Joseph Smith, Samuel apparently walked over 4,000 miles delivering copies of the Book of Mormon to the Midwest and New England regions of America in

1831- 1832 (Gaunt and Smith 2008). In 2007, the Church reported that the one-millionth missionary had been called and sent out on a mission (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2007). (Pepper, 2014:34) However, the structure of missionary work has changed dramatically since Samuel first set foot off of the Smith farm in hopes of spreading the Good Word to his New York neighbors. (Pepper, 2014:34)

MORMONISM, America's young and ambitious new religious movement, had not yet reached its tenth birthday when in 1837 the first Mormon missionaries booked passage on ships and took their message of restoration to Great Britain, a country across the sea. Despite the fact that a majority of Mormon now reside outside North America and that the stakes of Zion now dot the globe, the vast majority of Mormon studies focus on Mormonism in North America, usually in the United States. Yet it is also important to note that outstanding work has been done on Mormonism outside North America and that some ambitious and promising projects are underway. (Inouye, 2014, 1)

In 1898, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints also began filling missions, but with a different purpose. (Lelegren, 2009: iv) These women, known as “Lady Missionaries,” did not seek out the new role, but were assigned by Church leaders to share the Mormon message and to show that Mormon women were something other than the stereotypical downtrodden, polygamous wives often portrayed by the media. (Lelegren, 2009: iv)

The greatest evolution of the Lady Missionary program occurred during its first

three decades as the LDS Church defined the role of the Lady Missionary and established guidelines for all to follow. Three women of this period are Inez Knight, Stella Sudweeks, and LaRetta Gibbons. Knight, the first Lady Missionary, labored in England from 1898-1900, where she stood on corners as an example of a “real, live Mormon woman” and faced religious persecution from non-Mormon. Sudweeks filled her mission in the midWest from 1910-1912, where she had been motivated by anti- Mormon

sentiments, but faced less difficulties than Inez while sharing her message and also had more training and established expectations than those previously. (Lelegren, 2009: iv)

Finally, Gibbons worked from 1933-1935, mostly in Colorado, where she spent comparatively more time among new converts teaching them their role within the Church and encouraging them to share their religion with neighbors. Their accounts and experiences show that women have long had a steady and significant role in the LDS Church's missionary program, which has long gone unnoticed and offers a new perspective on Mormon women. (Lelegren, 2009: iv)

Mormon themselves were often viewed as non-Christians and heathens because of LDS belief in living prophets, administering angels, and by the 1850s, the practice of polygamy. Thus, LDS female missionaries had to explain their doctrine and practices to other Christians to argue they were not the heathens they were portrayed to be. (Lelegren, 2009: 4)

4. TODAY’S MISSIONARIES IN LATVIA

My first encounter with Mormon missionaries, as I mentioned, started from Latvia, Riga. The area of mission affects missionaries' lifestyles and the challenges that they have, which started from their detachment of American society. Adapting to the new role in the community is a big part of each missionary challenge. Besides, as I have noticed through my research, the LDS church rules for missionaries are changing time by time, today's missionaries are not experiencing what first missionaries did. Instead, they also have new challenges that former missionaries were not even aware of—especially modernism, which brings so many changes in society, such as technology. Today's missionaries are faced with so many ideas and beliefs, which are the consequences of modernism and its freedom. Nowadays, people are more educated, and they have easier access to all the resources. Missionaries should be updated and modern as well to have a better connection with people of their mission area. Today LDS church might be more flexible about the rules and restrictions for missionaries. Especially the young missionaries who are the symbol of modernism. However, the changes in society bring new challenges but at the same time help them to better interact with people, even virtually. I remember when I was in Sweden for a visit, they recorded a video for me, which was part of the book of Mormon and sent it on my WhatsApp.

4.1. The Latvian settings and Mormonism

“The best of being a missionary is the feeling every single day that you know that whatever you are doing that day is completely in service of God and the people here in Latvia. The true peace that I feel from serving Jesus Christ. I know that I am doing this

not for myself, it is a completely unselfish thing that brings a different kind of happiness in my life that is everlasting Joy”.

I moved to Latvia on August 2018 to study Anthropology and cultural studies at Latvia University, soon after my arrival, I started to work part-time as a bar assistant in Riga. Because of the nature of that job, dealing with customers, I became engaged with Latvian people and Latvian culture. Most of the customers were young, in their twenties with diversities in many ways, background, occupation, passion, life values, etc. (by young in my research I mean ages between 20 to 30). Almost all of them were living on their own, independent from families. After working for eight months in the bar, I found the young Latvians, entirely independent as they don't usually get financial support from governments or their families. The idea of leaving independently from family is great and mature, but to be able to stand on your own feet, it requires some sort of support from both family and society in the beginning, by that I meant not only financially but emotionally as well. In most of the developed European countries, in modern times, youths are leaving home to experience life as an adult, but they also have some support from the state and/or families. According to my discussions with young Latvians, they do not get that much support, which obliges them to work hard and therefore they do not have time to visit their families often. I think detachment could be for two reasons, the lack of time and the contradiction of beliefs between generations.

Talking about the generation gap is quite a complex topic. Although the old values and beliefs practiced by the generation who lived during the Soviet Union time in Latvia are still applicable in the society, even among the new generation, teenagers and youth; Modern society is more open-minded. In a way that there are more alternative ways of thinking and living. Because of the gap between generations, family ties, expectations, and duties in the families are not the same as before, it is more common and accepted for youth to find their own way and make their own decisions. At the same time, social and

economic circumstances have created pressures for adults, who previously played a central role in guiding and mentoring young people, to become less important in their lives. (Plummer and Geofroy, 2010:1)

The approach to new and modern lifestyles is noticeable among teenagers, which makes them more individualistic and not stands for old beliefs. Even if this separation, what I observe more as distancing from the families, make them feel lonelier, they are somehow avoiding conflicts.

In his book Rites of Passage, the French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep explored the fundamental process underlying the change of an individual's status in society: (*Willett, 2001, 2*)

For groups, as well as for individuals, life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and rest, and then to begin acting again, but in a different way. (Willett, 2001, 2)

Considering the critical transition time from adolescence to adulthood, the circumstances in the society are also influential on any decision that has to be taken. For instance, there are new movements in Latvia that encourage youths to break norms and taboos, for example, live like hipsters, become vegetarian, purchase from second-hand stores, have open relationships, etc. moreover, there are communities supporting these new changes. On the other hand, at the same time, American Mormon families with strong family ties, support the children, when they are going abroad, on a mission. Youth missionaries also get support from the LDS church in Latvia, to stay in Latvia and invite Latvians to love and happiness.

When the underlying system structure is not providing enough support for youth to find their way of living, the greater responsibility is on individuals. This could be seen more as a force than a choice. In my opinion, in general, teenagers' difficulties dealing with drugs, alcohol, them acting against the law, often arise from misguided attempts at a Rite

of passage. Teenagers have little choice but to create their own without socially sanctioned and widely recognized Rites of passage. And many of these self-generated initiations could be dangerous and counterproductive. I will support the idea of John Davis that said, some deep intuition tells the adolescent, you must be tested, you must be challenged, and some part of you must die before you can move on. The impulse to test and to prove oneself is right and healthy but without guidance and support it can too easily get beyond healthy limits. the missionaries can stay in the category above. (Davis, 2003,4)

In his book *Circle of life: Rituals from the family album*, David Cohen has described adolescence as a rope bridge of knotted symbols and magic between childhood and maturity, strung across an abyss of danger. It is clearly the most confusing time in our lives and a time deeply misunderstood by Western culture. It is also a period of intense feeling. And of feeling misunderstood. (Cohen, 1991)

I believe society has the most influence on any passage. Both Mormon missionaries and Latvian youth are dealing with the same social structure. Their social interactions take place in the same context. In this society in which there are bars, cafes, and other public places for social activities, churches are considered to do religious activities. At the same time as, Latvian youth are facing their new passages in Latvian society, Mormon missionaries, with their famous black label attached to their dress, are exploring their incorporation with Latvian, changing the position from church member to the church missionary.

“There's a lot of good things about being a missionary, everything from living in a foreign country, to the food, to having time to just focus on God and strengthening a relationship with Him, but my absolute favorite part is meeting the people here, and growing to love them. There are so many amazing people here, I've met some amazing friends, and have grown to love some of the families here like my own. “

In the modern era, I believe it is so complicated to find the exact moment that teenagers move to their adulthood, it is an ongoing process that may contain several events. Each event can be seen as a Rite of passage and not necessary for everyone to experience them all. In addition, Cultures throughout time and in an enormous variety of places have designed Rites of passage to mark life transitions. (Davis,2003,3) modern societies, however, seem to lack meaningful ways of marking transitions. Ask a dozen people, for instance, when a youth becomes an adult and you are likely to get a dozen different answers. Is it when you get your driver's license, vote, become financially independent, live on your own, have intercourse, get drunk (legally or illegally), get arrested, get pregnant or father a child?

Moreover, each culture offers a few ceremonies for identifying passages such as graduation exercises, confirmation or bar mitzvah, weddings, and retirement parties. However, these events have generally lost their deeper connection to the patterns of our lives, to the significance of the transition, and to the larger social context. Too often, they are empty rituals done to please someone else and accomplished by going through the changes. Without clear markers, we are left with incomplete transitions, clinging to the old, confusing the former, and the new, searching for ways to complete the change. (Davis, 2003,3)

As a result, it is not established yet whether the missionary job can be counted as a stage of adulthood with regards to the culture they raised in and the culture in which they do their mission in, as they are not the same processes or series of events in both places. This process is happening psychologically in the missionaries' mind. Especially for those who had or had not college experience before the mission, experiencing this stage can be felt differently. Being a missionary is still part of their journey to adulthood—nevertheless, this time under the religious status, which gives "sisters" a new pattern to follow. In the modern Latvian society, teenagers are moving between social structures; By social structure, Turner means the matrix of roles, statuses, and positions governed by social phenomena such as law, custom, institution, and cultural tradition. Typically, social

structure is hierarchical and characterized by differences in status, while social relationships are mediated by power and statute. (Rubenstein, 1992, 250). ones can be missionary under the church law, and at the same time, one can join Mormon under the sister's shadow.

"We are here to talk about happiness,"

"God and Jesus want us to be happy and enjoy our life, they asked us to stay healthy, this is why we do not drink alcohol, coffee, and black tea, this is why we do not smoke at all. Jesus asked us to take care of our bodies."

Happiness is the most used word in Mormon' missionary glossary. Is it true that people lose their source of joy these days? The message that missionaries have today is the same message that former missionaries had? Can we say the speech of the religions is also related to the cultural phenomenon?

They encourage you to stay happy and healthy. Based on my observations in Riga, I've noticed that happiness and taking care of both body and soul are things that people are seeking for. In my two years of study in Latvia, I can see some pieces of evidence that motivate missionaries to travel to Latvia for bringing happiness, faith, love, hope, commitment, and a healthy lifestyle. The tactics that Mormon missionaries use to share their message today are varied from their ancestors. The success of missionaries in practice is not the concern of this study.

"The best part of being a missionary is meeting so many new people. We meet someone new every day, and regardless of the fact if they want to hear our message or not. We do a lot of free activities for the community, like English clubs, sports nights, and game nights. Meeting these people helped me understand new perspectives and ideas that helped me have an open mindset to opinions."

4.1.1. My experience of personal involvement

I opened the book of Mormon with its dark blue cover the night after our first meeting. I have to mention that it was the most challenging English text ever for me. I could understand one paragraph in three pages. The book of Mormon has been translated into several languages, even Farsi. That day, in the church, they did not have the Farsi version, but they ordered one for me from other LDS churches. The sisters typically have their favorite part in the book of Mormon; sometimes, they read for you the paragraph related to your situation or your questions. In our first meeting at Lāčplēša building, sisters read me one part of the book of Mormon, that was the first time I heard the message of the book of Mormon. Besides the message's concepts, the way they read is particular; maybe it is because of their language skills and rhetoric. Some missionaries but not all of them have rhetoric and charisma. I do not know if the church leaders consider this talent when they choose missionaries or not, but the outcome of missionary charisma was my primary understanding of a great missionary. But if you asked me, can charismatic phenomena account for the popularity that Mormonism is experiencing? I would say yes. In Durkheim's theory of the collective as an entity "sui generis", Durkheim stressed the importance of the communal nature of religion, which is characterized by a "unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things". (Grava, 2011, 24)

Their voice is very calm and peaceful, clearly feels blessed when you listen to them, even if you don't understand what the text is talking about. Durkheim also acknowledges the possibility that the religious community experiences itself through the lens of a specific individual. Durkheim describes the inspirational venerated leader in such terms: (Grava, 2011, 24)

“His language has a grandiloquence that would be ridiculous in ordinary circumstances; his gestures show a certain domination; his very thought is impatient of all rules, and easily falls into all sorts of excesses.” (Grava, 2011, 24)

Although the missionary's vocabulary is not a classical way, but still when it comes to the sacred text, it is something unique and rhetorical.

The reason is the pleasure that they feel in their heart; they genuinely enjoy what they are doing. I could somehow relate this feeling to my own, when I read a poem that touches my heart and speaks my mind truly to my friends. It sounds full of peace and joy. I am not going to compare the book of Mormon with a poetry book; my argument is about the presentation of beliefs, beliefs that give a human identity and the identity that defines your way of living; one could end up becoming a young female missionary in the USA or a dramatic literature graduate like me in Iran. I usually suggest my favorite books, the ones that I feel most connected with to my loved ones for the same reason as missionaries recommend others to read the book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon is a companion scripture to the Bible and is seen by Mormon as equally important in establishing the truthfulness of the Bible and the doctrines that are contained in it. (Pepper, 2014:31) The Book of Mormon, though, contains the fullness of Christ's Gospel because, unlike the Bible, it did not pass through generations of transcriptions before being revealed to humankind. (Pepper, 2014:31) The Book of Mormon is considered to be the keystone of Mormonism. It is another modern book of scripture that demonstrates God's love for His children. (Pepper, 2014:31)

Besides that, they also were curious about my life, my background, and the reason that I have moved to Latvia. I started to talk about joys and happiness in my life in general, my journey as a young adult and how I ended up moving to Latvia, the steps that I took, my ambitions and motivations. We also talked about my concerns, fears, sorrows, ups, and downs, the things that I am missing being away from the country. sisters said: "wow,

awesome, you know life better than everyone; we should learn from you." I smiled at them. Looking back at my own life journey I realized that I was always on a mission. From a much bigger perspective, all human beings are somehow on missions which of course differ in many ways.

4.2. Before the mission

How often do we use "I miss home" when we travel somewhere far? Do we forget our previous place of residency when we get used to our new location? What do we miss exactly? Since I left Iran, my homeland, I am trying to adapt to the new situation, but I can still feel a hole, missing part, in my soul, that is related to separation from my hometown. Nowadays, I miss my country, and I miss my status in Iranian society. After I applied for the University of Latvia and got the admission, I was waiting for my resident permit for a month, on that specific month, I was no longer classified, but not yet classified. I could not start a new job nor study; I could not even start a new relationship. I was nothing more than a person who was waiting for a permit; the only thing that I could do was search for accommodation in Riga. According to the theory of Rites of passage and its three significant sequences, Separation refers to people, in groups or individually, separating from society as a whole. Such Separation can be expressed in symbolic and physical terms. In the missionaries' case, even though they are still church members, when they sign the application form for the mission till their arrival to Latvia, they are passing the separation stage and liminal part. After their acceptance letter from the church is issued, they join the missionary training center, learn the rules and restrictions of the mission, and also, they are excited about their new position that can be seen as a stage in the process of becoming an adult.

To figure out the importance of the start of "The Separation" for Mormon, I asked my informants if they have any ceremonies when the church accepts their registration or when they get the letter from church about the place of the mission. In many cases, they do not have any particular rituals to celebrate this event.

“ It’s not like this anymore, now everything is online, but when I decided to go on a mission, they sent mission calls (that’s what they call the letter that says where you’re going and what language you will be speaking) in paper through the mail. It’s stressful to be waiting for that letter! When it finally came, we just called my grandparents and I opened it with my family. Other people have big parties though to open their call with all their friends and neighbors”

Changes in life that can be considered as Rites of passages are recognized differently in all cultures. A group using a Rite of passage as a coming-of-age Rite may physically and psychologically remove the youth from the community by taking initiates to a select enclosure where rituals are held. Changes in clothing, diet, furnishings, and at times, language reinforce the separation. The separation from the community marks the end of the initiate's former role (i.e., child), and the initiate is thrust into a stage of in-between (i.e., not an adult but no longer a child). (Bell, 2003, 42)

In a religious vision, Mormon missions can perform as liminal states where individuals are separated from their previous lives, join the sacred calling/state of a missionary, and then, after being released, are returned to a secular state every day/real-life. (Pepper, 2014:152) Mormon missionaries do have a profound spiritual boundary that separates them from the general membership of the Church. Despite that boundary being intangible, there is a cultural understanding among Mormon about the mission as sacred space with clearly delineated limits. (Pepper, 2014:152)

Sisters who were students or wanted to go to college in the USA decided to walk into the new stage, new status, by encountering a new life on the mission, serving for the Mormon

church, and spreading out their love for God and Jesus Christ. They want to share the happiness, the message of God, through the book of Mormon and their faith and beliefs. Unconsciously, with this decision, as they are separated from the family and live independently in the other country, they are experiencing adulthood as an ongoing process. How they come to this point in their life, what convinced them to get separated from their past, may vary among individuals. Although they are all Mormon missionaries, with the common goal and vision, the intention behind this decision is different.

While Mormonism places high importance on missionary work, moving from a lay member to a full-time volunteer missionary requires a massive paradigm shift. Beyond that, many missionaries serve in foreign cultures forcing them to deal with the additional burden of culture shock on top of their adjustments to a new lifestyle as a missionary. (Pepper, 2014:7)

There might be several factors involved in an adulthood process which affect each other. In this chapter, I will examine the narrative series, which made the main subject of the story. The story of being a missionary. To better understand the incorporation of missionaries into the Latvian society, we should know the backgrounds of this life event.

4.2.1. Family and hometown

Mormon typically have a large family and relatives. Family relations seem to be extremely valuable to them, and they talk about their families proudly and passionately.

After we got to know each other, once they invited me to the church building at the Imanta area to meet and talk. I went to the church building in the afternoon, and we had cookies with hot chocolate in the church kitchen. We talked about our relationships and

love stories; I told them that I'm seeing someone. We started to share our experiences with love and relationships in a very friendly conversion. Although they are not experienced at a very young age, they try to be a great listener for people and friends. After our discussion, we went to the computer room, searching for some information about the Persian translation of the Mormon book. Afterward, sisters showed me some pictures of their family members on Facebook. Most of the missionaries have many siblings. I have not heard anything about divorce in families or any separation. So, the initial part of Mormonism is family worship.

“I am 20 years old and I am from the state of Oregon, in the United States. I am the oldest of five kids in my family, I have two younger sisters and two younger brothers. My mom and dad met as they were attending college in California, and were later married. I was born in California, and my family has moved across the states of California, Oregon, and Washington. My ancestors on my mother’s side of the family are from Italy and on my father’s from England and Germany. My ancestor on my mother’s side was the first man to be baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day-Saints in Italy. My grandpa on my father’s side was the first of his family to join the Church”

“I am 20 years old. My family is pretty big. I have 4 siblings and a mom and dad, so we have 7 total people in our family. I am half Caucasian, ¼ Hispanic, and ¼ native American. Both of my parents speak Spanish. I live in Boise, Idaho”

Mormon are well educated, social, and live a modern life. There is no significant gap between the parents and children age-wise, so they somehow have the same views and lifestyles. Young parents are more up to date. Based on their sayings, when talking about memories and families, it seems to me that moms are playing a vital role in missionaries' lives. They missed their mom more than their dad and mother for them is like a role model and highly respectful in all aspects of life.

“I’m 20 years old, and I’m from a small town in Oregon in the United States. I’m part Chinese and Hawaiian. I’m the oldest child in a family of 8 children. My parents are

married and my dad works as an electrical engineer and manager of a mid-size engineering firm in the United States. My mom is a stay at home mom, but earlier in her life she graduated with a degree in education and worked as a middle school teacher for several years”

Historically, they are more in Utah. I had a close friendship with my sister from Idaho, and we were always planning about me going to Idaho for a visit after her mission. She was in love with her city, she told me that there is a bridge where we can walk and have ice cream on it. The way she was introducing her town to me was fascinating, and I could feel how much she misses her hometown.

Though the separation from the family is temporary and after two years, sisters still have the same place as they had before to return to, but the separation can be counted as one stage which should be passed if they want to adapt to the new rules and conditions for the mission. It is important to remember that, sisters are not coming to the mission to be independent from the family and work on their strengths, sisters are on the mission to grow their faith and help people and invite them to the gospel.

4.2.2. Hobbies, education and lifestyle

I have heard several stories and exciting memories of the sisters' hobbies and activities in the USA before the mission. They had a joyful life with family and friends. Mostly with

siblings and close relatives. They all do sports, and they have an excellent body appearance.

“I was on the tennis, bowling, and swim team, and also a volunteer for the American Lung Association in high school”

“I play soccer, rock climb, hike, and I like politics and economics.”

Rites of separation symbolically detach the individual from an existing point in the social structure (Willett, 2001, 2). But, Attending the mission does not end their former identity for example they do not need to quit their interests, it seems more like a pause in their personal life. They might have unfinished plans like their studies. Going on a mission usually happens within a two-year gap after school, before they move on with their private life such as attending or graduating university.

It is not clear if they are going to live the same life after the mission. Later on in this study, I will examine the consequences of the mission on their personal life. Of course, they might have some plans and expectations before going on a mission but the question is what would change their decisions later on.

“I loved school. I was an honor student and in the top 10% of my class. I am also very social, so I had a lot of friend groups”

Mormon believe in a good education for all children, and they invest money on their young generation’s developments. Considering the number of children in each family, there seems to be no financial difficulty for them to spend in their hobbies and interests.

“I studied Exercise Science and Music at Southern Utah University for a year and worked as a custodian at the school as well as a ski instructor at a local ski resort. I enjoyed spending time with friends, both with new friends from school as well as old friends from home. I spent a lot of time skiing, as well as hiking in the mountains and national parks nearby.”

It is clear that parents are one of the components in the adulthood process, they send children to the communities and give them all the facilities to learn and grow, in modern societies, “A modern-day Rite of passage is achieved when parents and the community create and participate in experiences which are perceived to be transformative by youth and, in fact, offer them increased status within the community and facilitate their healthy transition through adolescence” (Blumenkrantz and Goldstein, 2010:43)

“Right before I left on my mission, I was attending school at Brigham Young University. A year before that, I was in high school. In high school, I enjoyed dancing and was on my school’s dance team. At college, I stopped dancing and began running and I was in a triathlon club. I absolutely love the outdoors with my whole heart. I love being active and I love adrenaline! These two loves brought me together with my best friends, who I met at school during a skydiving trip. They introduced me to rock climbing, which is a newfound hobby of mine. The summer after school and before my mission I spent at home with my family and working.”

In Mormon families, there should not be any limitation for girls to participate in any activities that they enjoy. They are free to follow their dreams and ambitions. Families encourage them for their decisions, and even when they are independent and have a job, the family relationship never disconnects. But it is also essential to see how much the parents' involvement can affect a children's decision. I think the choices are under the parent's authority, since they are still teenagers and need guidance. Because misguiding in the adolescence period might cause harmful consequences. Engaging in society is the way that keeps Mormon motivated, and it is a key to their success in raising the children.

“Before my mission, I was very active. In high school, I participated in student council, volleyball, basketball, yearbook, took hard classes, and spent time with my family and

friends. After graduating from high school, I went to a semester of college and studied science. I haven't picked a major yet, but I am hoping to start my own business when I return."

Culture and society are two important factors affecting the Rites of passage for adolescents. Rich or poor? American or European? Indian or Iranian? South Africa or Scandinavia? The interpretation of adulthood may vary. I always had the freedom to talk about everything with Mormon sisters; I told them we never could live like you in Iran. With all the restrictions for girls and our struggles with old thoughts and traditions, everyone can't enjoy their desired life all the time. Even if you grow in a wealthy family, you are still worried about problems such as war, sanctions, job opportunities, and financial crises. This is why so many of us decided to leave the country.

"I studied Business for 3 years before my mission at Utah Valley University. I played soccer with friends a lot, I kept up with the local and national politics. I have had a job since I was 13. My last job was working in the Billing Department for a Security Company. I had a lot of friends at school and at church. We would do lots of activities together, we would hike and play sports, watch movies. I also really like to ski. During the winter months, I skied with my brother 2-3 times a week. I was able to schedule work and school so I was able to spend as much time as possible in the mountains skiing. My entire family skis and is something that we all do together. Before my mission, I would spend a lot of time with my family. They didn't live too far away and so I was able to go home a lot and be with all my siblings and my parents."

It is clear that, in the modern days, it is not an exact time to announce our adulthood, as the sister mentioned above, she started to work when she was 13. It could be argued that cultural rituals and secular strategies in modern American society do not effectively assist in children's transition to adulthood. The lack of clearly established Rites of passage in America is partly due to the ambiguity about when and how one becomes an adult in contemporary society (Blumenkrantz and Goldstein, 2010:43)

The ages at which youth receive certain adult privileges (e.g., right to drive, right to vote, right to drink, etc.) are somewhat arbitrary and are not related to any individual's actual competencies or maturity who gain those privileges. (Blumenkrantz and Goldstein, 2010:43)

I believe it was not like this a long time ago, especially in the traditional and religious family girls, who had the prohibition of being an active member and having a job. Particularly in my country still, in so many families, we have the idea of "society is not safe enough for the girls and they should stay at home" what I believe is, religion is also flexible according to the social changes. But the urgency of these changes might differ between cultures.

“I loved my life before my mission! But the mission has been just as good, if not better. Before my mission, I graduated high school in the United States and then went to a year of university at Brigham Young University. I played tennis for 6 years before my mission (it’s the best sport ever invented), and I played that both recreationally as well as for my high school. I also played several other recreational sports, basketball, soccer, and volleyball, but not at a very high level. My friends are the very best people I know! I had a really good group of friends in high school, we did everything together! Then I moved to Utah for university and my two roommates became my best friends. We went to sporting events, did homework together, and traveled. I love to travel also! I haven’t been to a lot of places- traveling is expensive, but I really want to! I also love to hike and spend time in nature”.

4.2.3. The Decision for the mission

when I asked sister if she decided to be Mormon on her own or it is a family tradition to follow, she said:

“I decided myself, I asked God to show me the truth and I got my sign after that. Then I chose my own person in the church to baptize me when I was old enough to think and decide. there is no force from family”.

Out of all the stages of human life that are analyzed by developmental psychology, adolescence, and initiation in adulthood are most popular among readers. In describing these stages of life, psychological categories that intertwine are developmental crisis, identity transformation, and initiation. (Jaskulska, 2015:95)

as all the missionaries experience this transformation in a distinct time and age, it is crucial to figure out if the mission is countable as a new room to adulthood or not. Should we consider this decision as a start to separation? I would say yes, by this decision they start a new stage. Which is not the first growing stage and also not the last one. Who knows when they recognize themselves as an adult? At the graduation party? When they finish the mission? Or when they got married? There might also be cultural interpretation on the exact point that they count themselves as an adult. What if they are still students while they are waiting for the church acceptance? Can we say the liminal stage here is merging with the incorporation stage of the previous Rites of passage?

It is not an easy decision to be on a mission for two years in the Baltic area. It is not only cultural differences, but also the weather is different from the US, or even foods and social activities are not the same. There might be a great motivation behind that decision to spend their adolescence on the mission to get out of their comfort zone; the answers that I've got for this question was fascinating when I asked them how they made this decision. Although I think they were not aware of problems they might face, they decided to leave that easy and fun life that they already had to serve in a mission.

“My decision to be a missionary has been a long process. I never really wanted to go on a mission. I thought it would be better to stay. The summer before my senior year, one of my good friends committed suicide. It was a lot for me to handle and I felt like I should’ve done something more. In fact, I knew that I could’ve done something more. Rather than allowing that to crush me, I turned to God. I attended the temple (a sacred place for worship) weekly. Throughout my senior year, I began to realize the value of the knowledge that I had. The gospel of Jesus Christ had helped me through one of the hardest times in my life thus far. I began to pray about it to see if it was right for my life. Then I received a confirmation that going on a mission was right through my patriarchal blessing. So that is the long story about how I decided to be a missionary.”

I think, Inside Mormonism, the mission experience can signal an end to childhood and act as a transitional phase on the way to adulthood. I assume the reason for decreasing the minimum age required to attend the mission is related to modernism. With so many developments in the world such as technology, science, social media, etc., girls are quite ready to stay independent on 19. Also, the church laws are getting more and more up-to-date with the shifts in the society. Especially in gender-related matters, although it is not equal yet, but this is still improving to become equal one day.

“I had a few friends that went that made me consider the idea initially, and had grown up listening to my dad tell stories of his mission in New York when he was younger. It was something that I had always wanted to do, at the back of my mind, but I had decided that I wouldn’t go unless I received a witness from God that I needed to go. At the end of my senior year of high school, I remember I was at an activity, and very distinctly got the impression that I needed to serve a mission. So, I spent a lot of time praying about it, and a lot of time in one of the temples near my home (a special house of worship) and decided that that was my witness from God that I had been waiting for. So, I spent a year preparing, because I couldn’t go until I turned 19, and left as soon as I could.”

In October 2012, the President of the Church announced the lowering of the required age

for missionary service to 18 for males and 19 for females; previously, the ages were 19 and 21, respectively. Missionary applications surged from 58,700 in October 2012 to 80,300 in October 2013 (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints 2013). (Pepper, 2014:42)

“I decided to be a missionary when I was 18 in high school. I started to realize just how much God impacted my life, and I wanted to share that with other people. It’s like when you find a really good restaurant and you immediately want to tell your friends and family about it so they can taste how good the food is too. That’s how it was for me. I found joy and happiness in the decisions I had made, and I wanted to share that happiness.”

I believe talking about your mission of sharing your own spiritual beliefs to others is easy to say, but not in practice. Missionaries have the happiness under the god's will and sake. This is true. All human beings have their definition of God and the impacts of the presence of God on their life. But is it easy to share your beliefs and spiritual views with people who do not know you? How can they trust you? I would say it is not like an excellent restaurant to be recommended, it is much harder to influence modern people's mindset. Mormon missionaries grow up in the Mormon society. By the age of 19, they do not have enough ideas about outside of the Mormon community. I think this is the hardest part for them. Who can clarify that your important decision and goals is also crucial for your listener? This is why I would emphasize the difficulties and challenges in their way to grow, will they get disappointed or will they continue.

“Sorry if this answer gets really long! I have grown up a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. We always went to church on Sundays, I went to youth groups each week, and every night we read the Bible and the Book of Mormon and prayed together as a family. But then when I went to university, I decided that I didn’t want to live my life like that anymore. I stopped going to church and though I still believed in God, I didn’t pray very often or read the scriptures. One day, I realized that I

wasn't as happy as I had been before. So, I decided to go back to church- just to try it out. Well, turns out I really liked it! I finally felt like I had a personal relationship with God, one that wasn't just because my family had always gone to church or read the scriptures. So then, the next thing I wanted to do was share my belief in God with others! What better opportunity than to go on a mission? It's funny, because a lot of people look at going on a mission as a sacrifice. You have to spend your time, your own money, you don't get to see or talk to your family or friends very often, and you have some strict rules. But it has been the greatest decision of my life. I love being a missionary!"

When I met Mormon sisters, I was somehow convinced that the decisions we make on our 18 or earlier could be emotional, not logical. It is because of our lack of experience, for instance, when I wanted to go abroad to study, countless times I changed my mind in several ages, then finally I found myself ready to immigrate when I was 29. but before that in my life, I had a variety of decisions that left them unfinished. Because other options were more interesting for me. I do not know what will happen when sisters get older, but this mission does not seem to be a wrong decision unless they are in danger.

4.2.4. Financial and emotional supports

Since missionary service is voluntary, the prospective missionary is expected to contribute all the necessary funds needed to serve. Before their missions, future Mormon missionaries work and save money to pay for their support as missionaries. (Pepper, 2014:50)

"My father said that he would cover all the expenses of my missionary service, however, I have saved a lot of money myself and so we split the cost."

"I spent the last few years saving up money to be able to pay for my own mission, and

was actually planning on waiting a few more months before I left so that I could save up the rest of it, but my parents surprised me and told me that they would make up the difference so that I could go sooner.”

sisters made their decisions without asking for permission from parents or any kind of enforcement from families. When they announced their registration in the church, the family supported them, both emotionally and economically. all the sisters that I've met in the church had their own savings before the mission started. of course, those saving it is not enough for two years, but it shows that they feel responsible themselves. However, I think they could not have made it without family support.

“My family was incredibly supportive and encouraged me to find out for myself whether or not I was going to go.”

I did not interview families, but I could imagine that they are so proud of their girls. From my point of view, first, it is because of their commitments, second, because of their independence which leads them to become adults, third because of their own face in the Mormon society. Spending money for the mission is worth it for Mormon. I believe they also trust their children, which I do not know how this trust is built, but perhaps it is because they are confident of the church systems that take care of them all the time. It could also be related to their strong faith.

“An 18-month mission costs about 7,200 USD per missionary. My family contributed about 2,000, some family friends gave me 1,000, and then I earned the money to pay for the rest”

4.2.5. The church role and application process

Mormon missionaries, and the steps they take to start the missionary work, have changed dramatically since the founding of the Church of Latter-day Saints in 1830. The old phase of missionary training began early in the history of the Church and was very limited. (Pepper, 2014:39)

The School of the Prophets in Kirtland, Ohio, is the first formal attempt to develop missionaries to preach the gospel. This school trained missionaries in fundamental beliefs and was run by Joseph Smith personally; Parley P. Pratt headed a similar institution in Jackson County, Missouri, at the same time. (Pepper, 2014:39)

As Church headquarters moved west and the missionary force of the Church curtailed, this individualized instruction was abandoned. However, with the creation of Church-owned schools in the 1880s, programs for missionary training returned in the form of missionary meetings. (Pepper, 2014:39)

These meetings at Brigham Young Academy in Provo, Utah, were remarkably popular and were eventually approved by the First Presidency of the Church; but, participation in these meetings was limited to those members who were officially called as missionaries. (Pepper, 2014:39)

The course was free and included subjects like language, public speaking, penmanship, correspondence, singing, conducting meetings, and theology. (Pepper, 2014:39)

This format was so successful that it was copied, with variations in courses and materials, at many other church schools and universities across the United States. (Pepper, 2014:39)

In order to be a missionary, it is not enough to only send documents and complete the registration process, they also need to be mentally, emotionally, and physically stable, as they express themselves.

Here is some information about the steps that missionaries passed based on church law.

“The first step is that you must be 19 years old to be a sister missionary (the boys can be 18) There is an application that you submit to the Church headquarters. To apply there is a series of doctor visits. You must be physically healthy and have any previous medical conditions treated. You must also be interviewed by local church leaders and they ask questions about our faith in Jesus Christ and also if we are worthy and keeping the commandments of God, this is to help us be prepared when we are on our missions. Our church doesn't want to send anyone on a mission who doesn't believe in what they are doing. We then submit our application to our church headquarters.”

Missionaries do not decide about their area of assignment and do not know beforehand whether they will need to learn a language or not. The LDS youth magazine reports “An Apostle looks into each missionary’s eyes and receives revelation about where to assign him or her”, a process which we treat as quasi-random. (Crawford, 2019: 9)

“Our application is sent to the headquarters where members of the Quorum of the 12 apostles review it and they decide which part of the world we are going to serve as missionaries.”

Church leaders use a computer database with photographs of each missionary rather than a face-to-face meeting. Leaders have claimed that “every missionary called in this Church, and assigned or reassigned to a particular mission, is called by revelation from the Lord God Almighty through one of these, His servants.” (Crawford, 2019: 9)

“Our church leaders decide for us through revelation from God.”

Although there is no quantitative data, there is a thought that foreign missions are higher status than domestic missions. In particular, missionaries with pre-existing language skills or foreign experience may be more likely to be assigned to international missions. (Crawford, 2019: 9)

“I served in Latvia and Estonia on my mission, because I spoke Russian (the second

language in those countries)”.

Between 27 percent and 43 percent of Latter-day Saints (LDS) have served a full-time proselytizing mission. There are currently 67,000 Mormon missionaries serving full-time missions. (Crawford, 2019: 10) Most missionaries are young people under the age of 25, serving in more than 400 missions throughout the world. (Crawford, 2019: 10) 64 percent of returned missionaries who are still LDS and live in the United States served in the US or Canada, and 10% in Europe. (Crawford, 2019: 10)

“Everyone who has the desire to serve a mission, and whose health permits, has the opportunity. There are worthiness standards missionaries must uphold. Before submitting papers to become a missionary you must discuss those things with church leaders, whose role is to help you prepare in every needed way”.

Mormon leaders spend time and energy on their missionaries. Especially young missionaries. I have two assumptions on why churches support their missionaries. First, missionaries will spread the Mormonism around the world. This way, the religion will stay alive by missionaries. Young and energetic missionaries with more updated social skills are more effective than the older ones. If I see adults want to discuss the same religious thing, I will not stop for them to listen, because there is no common sense to be shared.

Second, after enduring this mission, the faith of missionaries will be more reliable. They have firm commitments to the church during their mission, which raise them in the religious sphere and guide them on how to follow the rules and how it stands for their beliefs.

After all, once volunteers receive their letters of acceptance, they will know about the mission area to serve, as I mentioned earlier, they usually open the letter with family

members, but one of my informants who were far from home because of the studies, said that she told the family on a phone call. Soon after, they must report to one of 17 Missionary Training Centers (MTC) throughout the world. There are a few different missionary training centers around the world. As far as I know the majority of missionaries going to the Baltics either went to the one in Provo, Utah USA or Madrid, Spain, or England.

Upon arriving at the MTC, and throughout their mission, missionaries are assigned, companions. With some exceptions, missionaries must remain in the presence of their companions at all times.

4.3. On the mission

When missionaries sign the papers, it means they accepted all the terms and conditions of the church for the mission. When they come to the mission area, they are not the same person as before. Everything is defined in the context of a missionary. Time tables, activities, clothing, friendship, communication, etc. are not structured for how the person wants to do; it is structured for how missionaries should do. They need to be more careful to spend every moment in the mission to achieve their goal. They have to concentrate and focus. They are on the mission to serve the church and god. Every step that they take, every activity or service should be aligned with their duties. Moreover, adapting to the situation, happens continuously at a slow pace for each missionary, at the last month of the mission, they are not the same person as they were the first day.

A period of transition during which the normal limits of thought, self-understanding, and behaviors are relaxed, opening the way to something new. It may be a land of recognition

for someone at the same time it may be land of oblivion for the others. (Sharma, 2013:111)

Upon the arrival of the new missionaries to Riga, other missionaries are welcoming them, and the leaders will guide them to places they are going to stay. On this particular day, missionaries also meet their companion who will be their trainer. From the time that they arrive at the Riga airport, they are called “sister”. With the new status, they will incorporate with the Latvian society. The new stage starts at the airport.

The missionaries' presence in Latvia has some impacts on the missionaries' personal life, and it affects Latvian's life too. Missionaries are interacting with Latvians when doing church services, such as meetings and conversions which take place in the streets, at least each Latvian has experienced once stopped by missionaries or talking to them in the streets. Latvians joining the Mormon are part of the missionary's goal. The missionary's duty can be done with ordinary Latvian people who stop and listen to them.

In this chapter, I will bring some highlights of Mormon sister's private life during the mission. It can be essential to see the changes in the lifestyle according to the new rules, which result from the new status.

4.3.1. Sisters private life

4.3.1.1. First days in Riga and a place to live

Unfortunately, I did not have the chance to visit Liepaja, but in Riga, sisters mostly live in good areas and convenient apartments. They do not live alone. Furthermore, they are always together as they serve in the same district.

It is the church that settles them to stay in Riga or move to Liepaja.

Sisters pay for the rent, but before they come to Riga, the church helps them to find a nice flat. When they arrive, there are no worries for them to find a flat. Even though young men and women volunteer to serve as missionaries, the Mormon Church requires its missionaries to pay for expenses incurred during the mission – namely, rent, utilities, and groceries. (Bordelon, 2013: 2)

when sisters arrived in Riga, first they need to go to the church building for some introductions and then they each will have one trainer who is their companion during the mission for a while, the companion or trainer might change after several months, the new missionary will be a trainer herself for another missionary, also, some missionaries change their serving districts times to times. Missionaries have multiple companions over the course of their missionary service; companions can serve together for days, weeks, or months. In all missionary companionships, there is a senior companion, who is responsible for their own companionship work, and a junior companion, who is responsible to work with, and follow, the senior companion in finding new individuals to teach. (Pepper, 2014:51)

“I traveled with a bigger group of missionaries from the United States to Riga. There were about 10 of us, a mix of Latvian, Lithuanian, Estonian, and Russian speakers, and there were 4 sisters and 6 elders. We stayed in a hotel the first night, and the next day we went to the church building in Riga, where we talked with the President of our mission in individual interviews. He just got to know us, asked about our families and why we came on a mission. Then we went to another meeting where we met the other missionaries that we would be living with. We called them our trainers, because they’re who trains you on

how to be a missionary! Then we all said goodbye to the missionaries we had traveled with and went with our trainers to our apartments. Because I was going to be working in Riga, we didn't have very far to travel, but some of the other missionaries traveled back to Lithuania and Estonia. When we got to our apartment, we unloaded all of our suitcases, and then immediately went outside and started talking with people! It was really weird and I didn't like it at first."

I believe, there is a chance for all the sisters that they do not feel comfortable with their trainer, or it is not easy for them to live with someone in a shared flat, especially considering the comfortable life they had in the USA, I suppose the first days might be difficult for them. They need to be patient. This is part of the deal but I never saw anyone complaining about the situation between the sisters.

"The first day I came to Riga I was very tired. Jet lagged. I came with a group of 5 people. We had our Mission President pick us up at the airport. We went to our church building and got to know him and some of the other missionaries, they fed us dinner (which was Lido and super delicious) then they took us to our hotel and we slept."

I cannot imagine being on a flight for more than 20 hours, sleep for a night, and start my mission a day after in a very distinct culture and be in so many unknown streets. When I came to Riga for the first time, I couldn't find myself as I was before. I was in a bubble for a month. It was stressful every day for me to get to know the city and places that I should go to, like the university, shops, hospitals...etc.

The early phases of integration are the hardest part, it is the time that a person should use all the knowledge that has, to survive. It is not a time to be scared or shy. The decision has been made.

"I traveled to Riga, Latvia from Provo, Utah with one other sister and three elders. It was a long day and I was exhausted by the time I got to Riga. I was so excited to finally be in Latvia! The mission president, his wife, and their two young kids picked us up at the

airport. I was greeted with a huge, welcoming hug from their daughter, they were so kind and loving right from the start. They drove us back to the church where we got to know one another. That first day consisted of buying a phone, getting to know a few other missionaries, talking to a few natives on the streets, and finally going to bed early. “

As I mentioned before, all human experience of their new life differently; maybe if I knew someone from Iran in Riga, it was easier for me to settle down. But at the same time, When I was looking for the proper flat in Riga, missionaries had another stressful moment: talking to the natives in the streets. But what I am sure about it is that we both were culturally shocked. It was not as easy as we thought it might be.

“The first day I was in Riga, I went with Sister M. and we talked to people on the streets between the church on Lāčplēša and Origo. I remember wondering how on earth I would get used to talking to people, even in English, and how I would be able to find my way around the city because I'm a little directionally challenged and tend to get lost easily. I remember the mess of streets and the masses of people being a little overwhelming, and also very exciting. And then after that we had dinner from Lido, which was tasty, but still very different from home. I remember getting to a hotel room that night, and tripping over the lip on the floor in all of the doorways, and being relieved to go to bed. That was an exciting day, but exhausting.”

What Van Gennep identified were the ways in which individuals move between social locations which are often age-related: for example, between boyhood and manhood or from being single to the married state. However, his overarching concern was with the stability of ‘society’ itself. Ritual and ceremonial, in his view, ensured that such transitions and movements were “regulated and guarded so that society as a whole will suffer no discomfort or injury” (Hockey, 2002:212).

Missionaries services are all under church supervision. Any action that they have is based on what they have been trained for. It is not a personal decision. Also, the church itself is

under the Latvian government authority supervision. There is a responsibility involved in all the social movements or activities.

4.3.1.2. Clothing

I would say their clothing is fantastic, always dressed up excellent and clean. At first, I did not know that missionaries have rules for clothing, but I found it out during my research. Not only do they dress well but also, they change the outfits every day. According to the church law, Dress code for Mormon missionaries generally includes a suit, tie, dress shoes, and white shirt for males and dresses, nice shirts, dress shoes, and knee-length skirts for females.

“Yes, we need to maintain a professional appearance during our mission, so Elders (male missionaries) wear suits and Sisters wear dresses/skirts/professional pants and outfits. “

“Yes, there are pretty strict guidelines as to what we can and can't wear as well as our hair and makeup.

<https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/callings/missionary/dress-grooming?lang=eng>”

Looking at their Facebook photos, the missionary outfits are not very different from their ordinary outfits. I think new outfits don't bother them because it almost goes with their own taste. But still they do not have that much freedom to wear anything that they want. I suppose even with the lack of freedom of choice, they have a pleasant feeling about it because boundaries make them more powerful, and also, they have more focus on their duties than thinking about fashion and style. Furthermore, if they don't care about the variety of clothing options, they can save more money during the mission. I remember, it was a rainy afternoon when I decided to go shopping and buy a scarf; I met my sisters for

tea before my shopping in an excellent cafe close to my place, I told them they could join me if they wanted to do some shopping. We went to the shopping mall together. I don't remember if sisters bought anything that day, but I am sure that they are cautious about spending the money while they are on the mission. This responsibility about saving money for them is essential, and a way for them to build their character as an adult. Adults know how to manage their financial life. Although they are allowed to spend money on foods, clothing, hobbies, but they are smart enough not to waste it because they are here to serve for the church not to enjoy some days out of the USA.

Besides the costs, missionary clothing is a public representation for the LDS church. Nowadays, many Latvians know the Mormon missionaries with their outfits and black labels on their clothes. As Katie Clark Blakesley mentioned in her article:

“Symbols and image have been and remain very important to both the leadership and the general membership of the LDS Church. Dress matters. Definitions of modest and appropriate appearance are somewhat fluid. As the larger culture and society change, fashion as a boundary matters, not necessarily because it produces immorality or because Zion's daughters must emphasize their femininity, but because dress fundamentally represents not only the individual, but the Church in general.” (Blakesley, 41, 2009)

4.3.1.3. Makeup and hairstyle

“Blush adds color to your cheeks and helps define your cheekbones. To apply, smile naturally and dust the blush brush on the apples of your cheeks. Then blend a little more color up near your hairline and back down again.”

The above advice is for female missionaries from the LDS Church, and is listed with other topics: suggested hairstyles for women, accessories for men, and guidelines for all aspects of bodily adornment, on the official website of LDS church. (Himonas, 2016:1)

All my six informants have long hair, they usually do not color their hair, at least in a time that I was with them, I did not notice any color-changing, just once I asked one sister if she dyes her hair or not and she said it is the sun that sometimes effects on her hair color. Their hairstyle is always simple; open on the shoulders, sometimes, they fasten the hair with a hair tie. The hair is always clean and shiny; cleanliness is crucial for them. They always smell good and fresh. As I mentioned above and as it has been announced in the website, Missionaries don't have that much makeup, maybe a bit eyelash, but they are always glowing and moist. Overall, they look beautiful.

On the other hand, it is not like that they always follow all the rules, sometimes they make mistakes but when they get the notice from the church. They try to not repeat the same mistake.

“It's not like for every rule there is a punishment. Honestly, there aren't really any punishments at all. The whole thing is just run on the honor system. If you do something really bad, like break a law or something, they will probably send you back home, but other than that there isn't anything else.”

4.3.1.4. Eating and drinking

For better integration with Latvian society, sisters know most of the restaurants and cafes in Riga, they love eating and enjoy all kinds of food, maybe this is coming from the American culture which made them food lovers. Mormon do not drink alcohol, black tea, and coffee. They believe that these three drinks are harmful for the body and we should keep our body healthy for God.

“We don't drink alcohol, people might think we do not have fun, but we have, we go to the parties, we dance and enjoy as much as we can, we are not boring people, if we go to the cafe we can have herbal tea or juices”

Since you believe in something, you do not consider it as a limitation. I remembered when I heard about drinking rules; I told them I would die without my morning coffee. But they told me to try and notice if you really want to change any habits you can. Honestly I never tried it afterward. Although the American taste is different from Latvian taste, sisters love to try all kinds of Latvian food. Speaking about culture and taste, I have attended a course, “Language and culture”. I have read one article for that course which was “Bad Sauce, good ethnography”. On this article, Paul Stoller and Cheryl Olkes (1986) represent an ethnography on peoples in Sahelian West Africa, and introducing the importance of food's place in their culture. They also follow up on the subject by bringing the anthropologist and researchers debate on the subject of taste and how culture influences on taste. When Latvian says something delicious, is it also delicious with American taste? But on the mission, although they prefer to eat their own typical food resources such as KFC or McDonalds, but to not separate themselves from Latvian society, they try out Latvian food and look for their eating habits.

4.3.1.5. Relationship

Same as other single girls anywhere in this world, Mormon can have relationships with males. Being in a relationship is only possible out of the mission area. While they are on the mission, they are not allowed to be in a relationship with their co-workers or anyone from the area that they serve. If they have a relationship with someone at home town, like the USA or anywhere out of the Baltic region, of course, they are allowed to continue, once in a week, via an email, they can talk with their beloved ones. It is highly recommended to pause relationships during a mission to be more focused on their duties.

“There are other, more important things to focus on, and so we avoid romantic relationships in general, in order to keep focused on the work, and to be able to serve with everything we've got.

“you cannot be in a relationship with another missionary in your mission or any people that you meet here in the Baltics. It's kind of like a rule that says you can't date your coworkers.”

4.3.1.6. Means of communication

In modern-day, we are dependent on social media and our smartphone; it has been a year that I decided to go on silent therapy in a charming city in the countryside of Sweden. My motivation for this decision is, to limit myself and to cut all the dependency in this world in order to release my anxiety. I wanted to meditate and calm myself down and get rid of this social media and virtual life that keeps us far from the reality. It can be seen as we are wasting so much time on them. I required myself to spend time for myself, even if it is hard to live without my iPhone. I am still planning for my decision but have not succeeded yet. I think I'm not ready yet to adapt myself to the new rules.

In my opinion, the rules for communication during the mission are hard; Missionaries have telephone, Facebook, Instagram, email, and skype accounts and are allowed to talk with their families or friends who are outside the mission area only once a week. The limited phone calls make them more concentrated on their tasks. On the other hand, virtual life is assisting them with their missionary services. On the missionaries Facebook home page, they share moments of the gathering, activities, singing, and memorial pictures on the mission. Moreover, they read some parts of the book of Mormon, film it, and publish them. Especially in the corona time, when they can't go out to meet people, they communicate with the members and also Latvian followers and friends using social media and online applications.

The first step for missionaries to get close to people is to ask for people's phone numbers and follow them on Facebook. Missionaries are very active on Facebook.

The sisters who take the person's number and contact her/him are the only sisters who are responsible for inviting the person to all the activities, informing them about Mormons and The book of Mormon and other related stuff.

4.3.2. Sisters church life

In this chapter, I will examine the spiritual developments of missionaries in parallel with their adulthood experiences. For spirituality developments, I am going to borrow what Brian S. Melton defined in his article, "The impact of missionary service on the spiritual development and psychological wellbeing of Mormon college students." as he said:

Spiritual development, closely related to faith development, is the growth process individuals go through in defining who they are and how they fit in the world. It

integrates the cognitive, moral, emotional, and social aspects of personal development with integrity, wholeness, and self-transcendence. (Melton, 2017, 11)

In his study, Spirituality makes up our inner selves, provides purpose and meaning in our lives, defines who we are, and helps us make sense of the world around us. (Melton, 2017, 12)

Spiritual development is closely associated with wellbeing, and understanding how college students develop their Spirituality can help them find purpose and meaning in life. Spiritual wellbeing is also dependent on other factors such as religious affiliation, cultural background, and personal preferences. Spirituality touches several parts of people's development, both internally in how they develop a sense of who they are, and externally in how they fit into a wider universe and within their communities (Melton, 2017, 12)

Melton's study looked at how these missions affect the spiritual development and wellbeing of these college students compared to those who have not served missions within the Mormon culture. It also looked at the differences in spiritual wellbeing between male and female students who serve Mormon missions. The connection between spiritual wellbeing and life purpose has also been studied from the perspective of service to others. This aspect of spiritual wellbeing helps individuals develop interconnections in their quest for something more substantial and engaging in meaningful endeavors outside themselves. (Melton, 2017, 4)

4.3.2.1. Rituals, praying and religious activities

On the 18th of May, 2019, there was a conference in the church building at Imanta. Sisters asked me to join them, and I accepted. Unfortunately, I had a night shift on Friday night, so I was a bit late for the program. When I arrived there, it was in the middle of the

mission president's speech. Sisters were waiting for me and welcomed me and gave me a translator device. The lectures were in Latvian and English, at the same time two missionaries, one sister and one elder, were translating both in Russian and English for guests, church members, and other missionaries.

Before I found a place to sit, one of the elders gave me a piece of paper to write my name on and stick it to my dress. Although I was not a church member, I tried to wear something suitable for the church environment. I thought it is better to be the same as others and follow the rules to show my respect. Anyway, Mormon never judges you by your appearance. I think it was my concern based on my preconceptions and all the stereotypes that I grew up with.

Mormon church building is very simple. The room in which we were sitting was a rectangle room with many windows to the garden, including chairs, piano, and the table in front of the guests for the one who is giving the speech.

I found an empty place and started listening to using the device. One of the sisters sat next to me and started introducing the mission leader, district leader, and the church members. It was the first time that I met Latvian LDS members.

On each mission, the chain of command starts with the mission president. He is the spiritual leader of the mission and can alter general mission rules—but not Church-wide missionary policies—to fit local circumstances. (Pepper, 2014:51) He has two Assistants that are trusted missionaries who help in training other missionaries and run some of the administrative aspects of the mission. (Pepper, 2014:51) The mission is divided into large geographic areas called zones and smaller geographic areas called districts. The zone leaders and district leaders are the backbone of mission leadership and are responsible for helping the missionaries assigned to them in their proselytizing efforts. (Pepper, 2014:51) Each district is composed of multiple areas with a single missionary companionship, responsible for the missionary work in that geographic location. (Pepper, 2014:51)

After two or three speeches, a couple wanted to talk about love and how they got together and pray for their happiness and give their testimonials.

The best part of that day for me was the singing part. They usually play a piano and sing together at the end of the program. Most of the sisters can play the piano and sing. However, it is not necessary to learn musical instruments, but they all do. They all at least know some original songs to play and sing.

“it is not a requirement; it just seems like every missionary knows how to play an instrument or sing. Our church is very musical, we sing several times during our church services because it is another way of feeling the Lord’s spirit”.

“singing is a big part of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. We have one of the best choirs in the world, Tabernacle at Temple Square.”

“It is a stereotype that a lot of missionaries play musical instruments or can sing, but it’s not a requirement!”

While they were singing, I could see the sunshine coming from the window into the room, and the shadow of the trees was like dancing on the floor. The spirituality of the prayers was truly understandable in the sister's eyes. Other church members, mostly Latvian, as I observed them, were not indeed in this spiritual atmosphere. During one of the speeches, I saw a church member who was sleeping. I was sleepy too, but my curiosity woke me up all the time. For that specific conference, there were also some members from Estonia and Lithuania.

After the testaments and praying, the ritual ended with a lovely song.

“In the church we have covenants and ordinances. A covenant is a sacred agreement between God and His people, and an ordinance is a sacred physical act performed under the priesthood that signifies we have entered into a covenant. One of my favoRite

ordinances is baptisms for the dead! This is something that occurs in our temples, when a living person is baptized in proxy for someone who has died without the Gospel. We believe that those who died without the Gospel will all have the opportunity to reject or accept it in the next life. I love performing baptisms for the dead because I feel such hope and peace knowing how merciful and loving Heavenly Father is."

It is incredible how sisters explain their faith. The word and sentences are part of their spiritual life, which rises during the mission. The developments of spirituality are very fast in them; it happens day after day during a mission; the sisters who have been on the mission for a year talk differently than the new ones, they are more confident and predominant.

Back to the conference day, after the actual ceremony ended, we went to the hallway, in the Imantas church building, there is a big door in the hall to the garden. The weather that day was fantastic, so they decided to have lunch outside. While they were preparing the lunch, the sisters introduced me to the mission president and his wife, who came to Latvia for the conference. We shook hands and they greeted me in a lovely, warm, and friendly way. That day I was the only person who was not a church member. I was a sister's guest. They made a beautiful lunch table, and we started to eat. Everyone seemed to have a great and joyful day.

During lunchtime, sisters who looked so formal grown-ups and severe during the morning rituals and prayers seemed to be back to their teenager's time again. Energetic, happy, talkative and loud. Latvian church members seemed a little bit shy and not socializing like Americans but trying to join them. I also became friends with other missionaries so fast.

After lunch, we went to the two separate rooms for a learning program. I decided to join the place where the mission leader from Ukraine had a lecture. Missionaries and church members prepared some presentation materials, and the leader and his wife were ready to start the lesson. The subject was "Confession".

The leader asked each missionary to read one part of the book of Mormon, which was related to the topic. Church members could participate in the reading. Missionaries also have to answer the questions that the leader asked. Actually, the topic was exciting for me; I could have my point of view and consider the lesson out of the religious frames and related it to my life.

Mormon women do not have a formal leading role in the church. But they are visible like other leaders. The leader's wife had a lecture after his husband. She was a powerful, serious, and confident lady, which I enjoyed her rhetoric a lot.

Another lady who caught my eyes was a fantastic Latvian church member who was responsible for the program and schedule. She was leading everything like a real leader, the time tables; the activities were all arranged by her carefully. Besides, she was entertaining and friendly. I believe, as my experience at school with teenagers, it is hard to make them follow the rules and be kind to them. She could handle those highly active missionaries very well. She also followed me on Facebook after the conference day.

When the lessons were finished, we were invited to join all together in the biggest room of the building to mingle, share our life and get to know each other. It was fun at first, but I got tired of talking with so many people about the same stuff. I left the room, got some fresh air outside, and had a little chat with one male missionary.

That day was a long day with lots of games and activities. Overall it was fun to spend a whole day with some strangers who are no longer strangers.

At the end of the program, I was invited to the Sunday program, the day after.

My Sunday morning was awful. Saturday night, I went home late and drunk, and I was hungover, but I also wanted to go and participate in the Sunday ritual. So I took a quick shower and went to the church late as always. I had a takeaway coffee on my way

because I knew there is no coffee in the church. When I arrived, it was in the middle of the sister's testament.

Unlike Mormon Temples, non-Mormon visitors are always welcome to attend these services in the church building. Active members of all ages meet at their local congregation for three hours each Sunday. These meetings are known as "block meetings," and they are planned and conducted by members, to encourage as many individuals and groups to participate. Each hour is dedicated to a different religious activity, such as Sacrament meeting, Sunday school, Relief Society or Priesthood meeting. On Sundays, the dress code is formal as women and girls are expected to wear dresses or skirts, and men and boys, ties and collared shirts. Members must remain alert, attentive, and involved for an extended period. It reflects the Church "s vigorous program of religious education made available to members of all ages. More importantly, members are willing to devote three hours each Sunday to the service of God and their Church. (Grava, 2011: 83)

The most important of the three meetings is the Sacrament meeting, which is a worship service that takes place at the beginning of the end of the block schedule.

The interesting part for me was the individual's testimonies of faith. Members address the congregation about their beliefs on various Mormon tenets and, as always, share their feelings of gratitude for blessings received. Most of the members present that day spoke, and many of them cried as they asserted their belief that the LDS Church is true. (Grava, 2011: 83)

“My favorite ritual or ceremony would be the Sacrament that we take each week. The bread and the water represent Christ’s body and blood and we take that so that we would always remember him and take the name of Christ onto ourselves. It helps me remember my life’s purpose, as a believer in Christ.”

“We don’t have many rituals in our church, but those we do have are called ordinances, like when we have the sacrament every Sunday at church. That is probably my favorite ordinance, because it is a symbol of our baptism and the promise, we made to always remember Christ, and to follow his example”.

The spirituality arises when they stand up in the room, walk slowly to the short stair in front of the leaders and members, stand up behind the table, open their notes, and read their sacrament. It is a shining moment for them.

Every time that is their turn to read, they are really excited and they are getting prepared for this time for about a week.

“Well, in the Church we have ordinances, which in other churches would probably be considered rituals, but because they're performed by the power of the priesthood, we call them ordinances. Through ordinances "the blessings and powers of heaven can flow into our individual lives." Ordinances are often connected with covenants, or two-way-promises made between God and His children. My favorite ordinance is the Sacrament. It's very simple, and we're able to partake of the sacrament every week, which I'm grateful for. It's not only an opportunity to remember Christ and His Atonement, but also an opportunity to renew the covenant that I made at baptism, and to feel those feelings of peace and joy again.”

The Sunday program mostly includes lunch and ends at 13.30. When the program ended, I asked sisters to sing and play the piano for me because one of them was the best singer. We went to the piano room and started to sing their best song, it was not very professional but it was heart-melting. the sisters enjoyed all the moments of their Sunday program. They wanted to go to the Lāčplēša building afterward to attend some meetings, so we said goodbye at Imanta. What is clear here is that sisters never get tired of their spiritual activities. They are drawn into faith and love. It is a never-ending joyful series of activities for them.

To be a good missionary, they need to pray more and more. What keeps them motivated is related to their praying. I remember any time that I was talking about my problems with them; they told me that they would pray for me. Or, anytime that we wanted to eat or drink, they prayed before the meal. What I love about their praying is that it feels sensible, simple and straightforward. It comes precisely from their heart. It is not just that they memorize some parts from the bible and read it aloud to you.

“I pray A lot. It depends on the activities I do during the day, but at least twice a day (morning and evening) as well as over meals, when we leave the apartment, when we start a new lesson with someone or a new activity. And in addition to that, any time I feel that I need extra help or clarity of mind, or if I feel particularly overwhelmed, then I'll take a few moments to myself and say a quick prayer”.

Here I would say, when sisters encounter some challenges of any kind, especially living alone as a foreigner, they pray.

The impact of spirituality growth after the mission might be the ability of handling feelings by praying. And also, it helps them to pass the difficult situations and be thankful for what they have. Praying works like a meditation for non-Mormon believers. It depends on how much time we work on ourselves to be strong and not get disappointed and broken; I think that we will be happy and prosperous when accepting realities. On the other word, the more vigorous your faith, the sooner you will grow.

“I kneel and fold my arm and close my eyes then I pray in my mind and heart.

I pray each morning and night, before and after I study the scriptures, before each meal, and then also before and after I study with my companion, before and after each time I study the language, every time we leave the apartment, and at night with my companion before bed. We also pray before and after each lesson we have with people. I pray a lot in my heart when I need help with something or need help to get courage to talk to people or during a lesson when I don't know how to help someone or when I forget how to speak

Latvian I pray. I don't know if there is a number you can put on it but at least 15 times a day.”

4.3.2.2. Working hours and missionaries schedule

Like any other type of job with working hours and daily schedules, Mormon also follows their plans. Their schedule is more flexible. Especially when they are in contact with someone totally new to Mormonism, like me. They are always ready and make time, as much as it takes, for those people who are new to the Mormon church.

“We don't really have a plan! Our mission President is the one who tells us if big changes will happen, like if we will have to move cities or countries or get a new companion. But otherwise we are in charge of planning our day every day and finding new things to do when we don't have anything on our schedule!”

Although they are free to choose what they want to do, the plans are not personal activities, it is all related to the missionaries' duties and LDS community services. The only day that it is for them to plan themselves, maybe for personal related activities, is Monday.

“We are missionaries 24/7 for our missions! The day usually begins at 9am until 9 pm. before and after 9 we can do things like write in journals, eat, exercise, etc. We wake up every day at 6:30 and go to bed at 10:30.”

Adapting to the new routines can be described as an inevitable part of missionaries' life on the mission. Their effort to get used to their new lifestyle and manage the situation is also crucial in the adulthood process as well as spiritual development.

“We work and study as missionaries from 9.00 - 21.00 every single day of the week,

Saturday and Sunday included. This doesn't include Mondays though, which is our time to talk to our families and hang out with other missionaries”

At the end of each week, missionaries report their activities to the mission president to get some advice from him. It is crucial for each missionary if they reached their goals through the week and to evaluate how much they develop their faith. They spend time sharing their faith and happiness. Whenever they talk to a person about Mormon beliefs and invite someone to the gospel, not only they encourage people to join the church, they also learn something themselves. It is essential to be active on their mission. Religious activities keep missionaries alive.

“We have called once a week on Sunday nights with a missionary who is in charge of checking on every missionary in the city where we are. We call him a district leader, but he's just kind of like a small group manager. He is usually only in charge of 6-8 missionaries total. Then he calls and reports on how we're doing to another missionary, who is called a zone leader, and he is in charge of a whole country in the Baltics, about 20-30 missionaries. Then that missionary makes one more call to the mission president's assistants, who are kind of just like the mission president's secretaries. They tell the mission president the results of the calls and if anything is wrong then he can better help the missionaries! These missionaries who are zone leaders, district leaders, and assistants are also just normal missionaries! They don't get called to be these kinds of special positions from the beginning of their mission, they just received these positions for being good missionaries and good leaders”

Besides all the activities, missionaries are usually learning a new language on their mission. In Latvia, they learn Russian or Latvian.

Earlier studies have reported that many Mormon missionaries learn a foreign language on their mission (Crawford, 2019: 6), and that returned missionaries have higher support for

immigration than those who have not served a mission. Those who learned a language on their mission had the highest support of all (Riess 2019). (Crawford, 2019: 6)

When they know the language, communication with local residents is easier, especially in the baltic area where older adults don't understand English. Moreover, knowing the language of a country of serving is knowing the culture. Cultural knowledge is leading missionaries to get closer to the people of the mission area. Most of them start learning Russian before the mission is started, when they are still at home. It is a great success for missionaries to speak Russian fluently soon after they start their mission. They are not only a Russian speaker missionary, but also a translator in the church.

4.3.2.3. Meetings and communications

Melford Spiros belief that religious behavior serves to reduce unconscious fears typifies the psychological approach, which briefly stated, sees religion as functioning to reduce anxiety. For example, the famous British social anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski held that the proper use of religious Rites reduced anxieties brought on by crisis. (like all theorists who apply the psychological approach, Ferude also believed that religion and ritual functioned to reduce anxieties, but unlike others, he saw faith as a neurotic need that humans would eventually outgrow) in contrast, the sociological viewpoint stresses the societal origins of religion. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim, for example, viewed religion as a manifestation of social solidarity and collective beliefs. According to Durkheim, members of society create religious objects, rituals, beliefs, and symbols to integrate their cultures. A. R. Radcliffe- Brown, a British social anthropologist, agreed with Durkheim that participation in annual religious Rites functioned to increase social solidarity. (Lehmann and, Myers, 1997)

The best and most significant part of a missionary's job is talking with people. From my point of view, it is also the most challenging part. I remember the first day that Mormon came to me in the park. She was so confident. She did a great job. She could stop me and guide me to stay calm and listen to her. Also, she knew how to start a conversation with a compelling sentence. She used some words like, awesome. perfect, wow, amazing and other expressions which were in her rhetoric and also the power of American accent works as an assistant for her duties. The first time that I saw her, I could not even imagine that she is only 19, she was like a real grown-up lady. of course, it was not her first day in the street, but when I asked her about the first time she said:

When I first talked to someone, I was so scared. Haha it is scary to talk to random people. But I remember thinking "this is why I decided to come. To help share my source of happiness." I started in Russian, which I had just started learning and my words came out all jumbled. The lady I was talking to seemed nice though and my trainer started speaking, and everything turned out okay.

They always have their trainer around, who has been in the mission before them. She has more experience than the new missionaries, but she is not more than an expert missionary.

"The first time I talked to someone in Latvian, I honestly had no idea what happened. Couldn't begin to tell you. I would stop them and say hi, and then my companion would talk with them, but I knew so little of the language that I only picked up words here and there, not enough to grasp where the conversation went, or even whether or not the person was kind or mean. I did have a few experiences talking to people in English, though, in my first few days, and nearly every single person was kind enough to stop and talk, though there were a fair few who simply hurried by."

Besides all the sweet parts of the missionary's job, there are times that people refuse

talking to them. Here is the time that all the faith might be questioned for them. Is it the time that we have to give up? Should we go on and continue? Or no, we will pass this day, and we will have another day to stay and continue. It is the time that they go and pray to god that makes them more durable. It is the time that they should remember their faith. It is not a time to cry; there is no family around to go to and complain, it is the time that they need to grow their faith individually.

“I usually just move on. Just because they weren't willing to talk doesn't mean that they won't in the future, or that the next person I talk to won't listen. I've also met missionaries who pray for those people, but that takes a presence of mind, and a strength that I haven't quite developed yet”.

It has been told to sisters not to force people to listen to them, they ask, and people might respond or not, but in some cases, people start to yell or say bad words, and in this situation, missionaries should leave the area if they do not feel safe. But the more they talk with people, the more confident they become, in the bigger picture, I would say, in the future, not only in the religious area, but also many different fields, even relationships; they will know how to be confident and manage the complicated situations. They are more confident to talk, to explain, to ask, and to advise. It is not unfair to say they will be a good mother like their own mother. In my interviews, I have also asked them to give me one advice and here is the best that I got:

"it's your choice whether this will hurt you or help you in the long run. You can learn from this and come higher, or it can be a stumbling block to block your way to progression. Either way it's your choice and your actions that will determine that."

4.3.2.4. Gathering and social activities

As Turner says, “whatever society we live in we are all related to one another; our own ‘big moments’ are ‘big moments’ for others as well” (1969: 7). (Hockey, 2002:215)

Mormon church is famous for its activities such as game night, English night, dinner night, lunch day, etc. Along with the LDS community services, sisters are free to meet the person who is learning Mormonism anytime and anywhere. We went to some cafes, shopping malls, and Saturday markets. I have also invited them to my place.

Public services and activities take place in the church building. The best of them that I participated in was Mexican day. I was always invited for the game days and other activities in the church, but as I was busy with my study, I could not join all of them. Moreover, I found it sometimes a little bit boring for my age. It was more interesting for people younger than me. But Mexican day sounds unusual for me since I love Mexico and the culture, so I couldn't resist. The schedule had been sent to me before, I went there on time to join all the activity. That day was fantastic, one of the sisters was very well educated about Mexican culture. We played some games. We had Mexican tacos, we made some Mexican art craft, and at the end we sang and danced. There were some other church members, Latvian and Russian, and also some guests like me who were invited by sisters or elders.

In modern life, Turner suggested that rituals are not a choice; instead, they represent a cultural obligation, and because of that, we cannot be a part of society if we are not allowing ourselves to participate in the rituals. Every individual in the society participates. The modern Rites of passage involve every individual in the society. Be that as it may, Turner mirrored the development "liminality" and recommended that it is more satisfactory to name the stage liminoid for our modern culture. This new name of the concept embraces our society. Modern life is developed with various social exercises: theater, artistry, literature, music, games, and others. All these activities are representing, in fact, a form of transition from a status to the next. In each circumstance of our life that incorporates our wishes to pass or integrate in a social club and turn into a member, liminality shows up, or how Turner referred to our modern times—liminoid. So, in this

case, to participate in a social form of our society, we are passing through the liminoid. (Teodorescu and Călin, 2015: 99)

I was also invited to a yoga day once at the Lāčplēša building. Sisters asked one of the church members who was a yoga trainer to instruct the session. I am in love with yoga, so I was willing to join them. We were only five people that day for yoga, and honestly, the trainer was not professional at all. We did some easy poses, and it got finished soon. Overall, it was not bad just because of the silence in the church building, which helps me to meditate a little bit.

5. CONCLUSION

Most of us are committed at any given moment to a movement or idea or line of action and further that the amount of time, money and effort we devote to this commitment indicates the depth of the commitment. the notion that since we do not all share the same goal, what may be important to one person may seem inconsequential even strange to another. (lively, 1993:152)

Out of six informants, only two of them are done with their services and came back to the USA. unfortunately, one of them did not respond to my interview question. Another returned sister, who I met the first time in Riga, who was my mentor to Mormonism, is now back in the USA. She has shared her feelings after the mission with me.

“Yes, I felt like an adult. And I still do. I know that I have changed a lot over my missionary service but I have felt grown up since the beginning. I am not a missionary anymore, but the experiences I had make me want to be a better person now, and continue to help people. I also had a very close connection with God on my mission, and I want that to continue.”

I’ve known her for more than a year and we are connected on Facebook, in my eyes, she has made good progress from being a normal missionary to a perfect missionary and I could easily see development in different aspects, spiritually and personally. The last month of her mission, she was more confident and predominant in doing her job, maybe they are not aware about their success in all the aspects of being a good missionary but for me as an outsider who is observing them it's visible.

Soon after their arrival to the USA, after their physical separation from Latvian society and mentally from being a “sister” they should start a new life and look for the new stages ahead of them.

There are some scenarios that I can assume to happen for the missionaries after the mission.

First of all, they go back to the USA, they start to realize life like it was before and remember how they used to live two years ago. but the question is that is it possible? are they the same people as they were before the mission? Of course not. The American society is still the same, with the same activities, restaurants, cafes, parks and so on. but they are not the same girls. so sisters are not going back, they will go forward. They might find a job or continue with studying.

“What changed is my perspective on life, my work ethic, and the way I view the world and treat people. I feel as though I am a better version of myself now.”

The second scenario is to get married, as they are age wise, old enough to be in a serious relationship. And according to the Mormon’s rules on not having relationships before marriage and also the important place of the marriage itself in the Mormon’s lifestyle, after the mission could be a start of a new chapter of their life as a married person.

Following the third scenario, they do not know what to do, they will hang around and enjoy everything that they missed. they are in and between the end of the mission and the next decision, so I would see this period, the days after the mission, like an ordinary American resident everyday life. Some of them have grown up feelings and recognize themselves as adults and some of them are still in a process of adulthood.

Whatever scenario they end up with after their return, what they have experienced and learned during the mission always stays with them. Going on the mission provides them with capabilities that can be used in any situation later on, whether religious or non-religious, for example their developed rhetoric skills or their ability to adopt. Several factors involved in the adulthood process, regardless of cultural and social context, such as, Independence, adaptability, integration, confidence, responsibility, awareness and so on, are influenced by their decision to participate on a mission.

“it’s taught me to be dedicated and focus on achieving my goals”

On the other hand, although missionaries and none-missionaries, are experiencing an adulthood process in the same society, there is one factor that distinguishes them, which is missionaries’ spiritual development. This development in parallel with adulthood, and the notion of rites of passage is happening within two years. The impacts of the spiritual developments on sisters' life will grow their faith and make them stronger to handle any future conflicts in their lives.

“I think everything that I do after my mission will be affected by it, a lot of my personality and sense of humor has been changed by the people that I serve with, and the people here in Latvia. After I go home, everything I will experience will be through glasses tinted with the experiences that I’ve had here, with the lessons that I’ve learned and the people I’ve met. How I choose to live will be changed because, while being here in Latvia, I’ve encouraged people to make good choices, and to live right and stick with those choices. How can I go forward and not require the same things of myself that I’ve asked these people to do?”

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The master's thesis with the title of 'Young Missionaries In Latvia: An Anthropological Research On Female Mormon Missionaries' (Jaunie misionāri Latvijā: Antropoloģiskie pētījumi par sievietes mormoņu misionārēm) was produced at the University of Latvia's Faculty of Humanities. I hereby confirm that the research was conducted independently and only the referenced resources have been used. Further, the electronic copy is identical to the submitted printed copy of the thesis.

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I hereby confirm that I recommend this thesis for defense.

Thesis supervisor: professor Gareth Hamilton, PhD.

Reviewer: Zane Linde-Ozola, PhD.

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