

JOURNEY IN A LIFE STORY AND PILGRIMAGE:
 EXPLORING THE CONNECTION BETWEEN
 HUMANS AND PLACE IN A FIRST-PERSON
 NARRATIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper will explore the relationship between humans and place mediated in first-person narratives. By focusing on episodes that reveal the change in the ordinary role of the person, we examine how they describe the place and how they perceive the environment in their changed role. Drawing on interviews with a man who has walked a pilgrimage/hiking trail as well as a written life story from the collections of the Estonian Cultural History Archives, we analyse the description of modern journeys and the journeys that took place in the vortex of events during World War II. We suggest that the descriptions of place-making under consideration are related not only to subjective experiences and storytelling skills, but also to more general contexts, such as historical-political, economic, or religious frames. Comparing various kinds of place-making description we attempt to find the universal and context-sensitive aspects of journey descriptions. Finally, based on studies of oral history and cultural borders on the one hand, and pilgrimage studies on the other, a methodological question is asked: how should one apply these research methods and results to place-making research? Combining these research methods has turned out to be fruitful in creating a dialogue between experiences that have been formed in different circumstances, and through this to understand better the factors determining one's sense of place.

KEYWORDS: Home and homelessness • journey descriptions • life story • pilgrimage • dreams • liminality • experience

Drawing on two rather different journey descriptions – one in the form of an interview and the other a written life story – this article* will explore what the description of a journey can reveal about the nature of the relationship between humans and place. We found this subject as we were looking for ways to synthesise our earlier experiences of studying either life story or pilgrimage, respectively. In writing this article, we found common ground in the conception of a journey. Hence, we would like this article to be regarded as a quest in which various avenues were explored. In the true spirit of pilgrimage (which is also concerned with play and experimentation) we decided to be experimental and perhaps even playful in our approach.

SOURCES AND APPROACH

The first story was written as an autobiography in 1994–1995 by an Estonian man, Harald Võsu, whom we will call Harald in this article, and was submitted to the life story competition “The influence of the war on me and my family” held by the Estonian Life Histories Association ten years later. This 55-page manuscript is kept in the Cultural History Archives in Tartu (EKLA 350:1, 1752).

Harald was born in a small town in northern Estonia in 1924. We chose for analysis one part of his life story – the description of a six-year journey (which covers approximately two thirds of this life story). The narrator’s journey is framed by World War II: it begins with him being mobilised into the occupation army in 1943, continues with him being a political prisoner and ends with his release. Literary scholar Tiina Kirss (2006) has described this life story as a character development/formation narrative, in which the central role is played by the narrator’s ethical values. We agree that it is the ethical values that bind together the whole story including several ambivalent situations.

The second story emerges from interviews conducted with a young Englishman whom we will call James,¹ about his hiking trip/pilgrimage in spring 2015. The oral interview was conducted by Tiina Sepp in October 2019 (FM 2019), the follow-up interview via e-mail in October 2020 (FM 2020). James was born in southwest England in 1985. Since 2008 he has lived in Estonia, while making longer or shorter trips to other countries. In April–May 2015, he walked the 375-kilometre-long hiking trail from Oandu to Ikla;² it took him 19 days to complete the route. Here we can see an analogy to the journey described in the life story: both men’s journeys took place in foreign countries and therefore they tend to perceive the unfamiliar (while also reflecting on the significance of home and shelter).

When comparing the journey descriptions, we decided to exclude from our analysis those aspects that are not directly connected with the description of the journey, for example the historical-political and cultural details (especially the narrators’ contemplations about their era and principles), narrative time and form, and instead focus on the relationship between man and the environment. Our aim is to focus on the comparison between the experiences and ways of describing the journey. By looking into

* This work was supported by the Estonian Research Council (PRG670) and the Financial Mechanism Baltic Research Programme in Estonia (EMP340).

episodes that reveal the change in the ordinary role of the person, we examine how they describe the place and how they perceive the environment in their changed role.

We will begin by giving a detailed account of the journeys of Harald and the hiking trip/pilgrimage of James. Regarding our methodological approach, we decided to use the close reading method while focusing on the conception of placemaking. The chosen methodology enabled us to elicit from the texts the data relevant to our research (cf. Cobley and Siebers 2021). We examined how the narrators create correlations between the material elements of a place and their own subjective attitudes to the spatiality of the place. These correlations shape the experience and are at the same time expressed in it. We see in these descriptions a place that is born of the interplay of material and spiritual aspects, which can also be understood as the concept of ‘embodied space’ described by Setha Low (2014: 20). In our case we observed it in both narrators’ concepts of home/homelessness.

We are then going to investigate the following themes that emerge in these journey descriptions: I versus we; home versus homelessness; liminality and pilgrimage; dreams and dream-like states. Focusing on these aspects enabled us to compare the juxtaposed narratives that are entirely different in terms of the narrator’s background, narrating technique, the era in question. By using this approach, we started to research the narrators’ placemaking.

JOURNEY IN HARALD’S LIFE STORY

This written life story includes five distinguishable interconnected journeys, which all arise from World War II and the establishment of Soviet power in Estonia. Therefore, these journeys can also be construed as one journey divided into five stages. In the 55-page life story, pages 15–46 are dedicated to journey descriptions, covering the years 1943–1949 when the narrator served as a soldier in the Finnish army, Nazi Germany’s army, and as a prisoner of war in Komi and Estonia.

Harald does not begin his journey voluntarily. As a young man who was born in 1924 he had no choice but join the war. After finishing his gymnasium education in 1943, Harald wanted to go to university but because of the war he had to become a soldier. He sums up this twist in his life: “The most beautiful part of my life was over. What followed was something I couldn’t have imagined even in my worst nightmare. However, it was still a logical continuation to the upbringing received from home and school.” (EKLA 350:1, 1752, p. 15) The period he “couldn’t have imagined even in [his] worst nightmare” covers his wartime activities, beginning with labour service followed by being a soldier and finally a political prisoner. This period is divided into stages, where journey descriptions serve as links between one situation and the next. Let us look at these connecting episodes as separate journeys.

The first journey takes Harald together with engineers and technicians to the city of Lida, which was then in Poland, in order to dismantle a factory that was going to be brought to Estonia. His job was to make blueprints of the facilities. They were travelling by train and as the waiting time in the stations was quite long they used that time for sightseeing. Harald and his companions were cultural observers, who were comparing a new culture with their own. Harald does not describe the homeward journey, instead

he briefly mentions: "We finished the work by autumn and came back to Tallinn" (p. 16).

The second journey begins immediately after returning to Tallinn in the autumn of 1943. He cannot enter the university because this would have required prior service in the German army. Instead of joining the German army he and his friend flee to Finland. He prepared for and took this journey with another person, but they met several people who helped them flee from occupied Estonia to Finland. Unlike the previous journey, this one was illegal. This fact significantly shapes the way the journey is described (pp. 16–17): here beside the companions and modes of transport, an important role is played by references to the weather ("on a very cloudy night", "it was pitch dark", he had never been to the sea "in such rough weather"), dangers (the "shaft of light" that the border guard's search light cast at them, forcing the boatmen to enter a mined area and hope that the boat chocks would not touch the mines), physical and mental state ("interestingly, the experience did not leave extreme tension. It was more like curiosity about what would happen next"). He gives his readers an account of a situation that encompasses both the event (the activities in the boat) and the visualisation of time and space (dark night, rough weather at sea). On arrival in Finland after crossing the sea he started to feel a bit calmer – local elderly fishermen offered them coffee, their language was not understandable but its sound reminded him of a coastal dialect he had heard in childhood.³ Having rested, he "felt the tension from the last night" and "fear of the future got bigger". Harald describes "fabulously beautiful islands" near Helsinki, which made him forget the war, "that I am a refugee without a homeland". While noticing his surroundings, he is increasingly looking for support from the beautiful landscape around him (he does the same on his later journeys). While he was more of a cultural observer during his first journey, now his surroundings begin to balance the hardships that are coming his way. And this not only concerns the fleeting moments, indeed it includes all the beauty of the landscape that he stores in himself (p. 18): "The landscape was so captivating that the journey didn't even make me feel tired. I carry this magnificent image with me to this day." Here we can see emerge two supporting factors that he sums up in one sentence: "Good people and the beautiful nature created a state of mind that contrasted to the battles" (p. 19). His life as one of the Finnish Boys comes to an end when he returns to Estonia. The narrator sums up this stage in his life with the words (p. 23): "One stage in my life was over. One war had been fought."

The third journey has a smooth beginning: the situation on the front in Estonia was devastating; he was put in charge of the company's supply section (p. 25). The party he meets and moves on with is coincidental. Each acquaintance he is looking for or runs into has significance attached to them in this episode. He would like to discuss with his brother what to do next; when meeting his former classmates, they debate whether they should try to get back home (p. 26). He is constantly searching for those he could restore a sense of togetherness with, since on a personal level he refers to the uncertainty of his position in the current situation ("My role in the war was now very vague", *ibid.*). Moving from Estonia towards Germany through Latvia, another group forms around him, whom he defines in the following way: "We no longer represented a proper military unit. Rather a party of ex-soldiers." (*Ibid.*) The journey description grows increasingly detailed as to what helped the travellers survive and advance: accommodation and food, as well as transport methods (train, boat, travelling on foot) are pivotal. The ter-

rain is also discussed in relation to the hardships faced in crossing it (p. 30): the narrator is no longer a cultural observer. Meetings with locals (of Prussia, Germany) tend to be negative: the sight of retreating soldiers causes anger about the front and the advancing Red Army. The role of young men he knew before the war and men who had a similar experience in the war (the Finnish Boys), gradually increases (p. 28): "We were assigned to the 20th division. There were very few Finnish Boys. It was quite a mixed company."

He again concludes this stage with a new self-definition: "I was now a person without homeland, without purpose, unless you count survival, surviving the war, as a goal. I was a true mercenary, my employer being 'Great Germany' (now already smaller than before the war)." (Ibid.) He also touches somewhat on the relationship between German officers and Finnish Boys (p. 29): "We [Finnish Boys] were frowned upon because of our ideals. On top of that, Finland had, in the meantime, concluded peace with the Russians and declared war on Germany." The various facets of the narrator's soldier identity can also be observed: on one hand a former Finnish Boy, on the other, a mercenary in the German army, soon to become a war refugee once more. The close-knit company around him is cut down to a few men (p. 30): "There were three of us left: Aado and a boy lightly wounded in the leg, whose name I can't remember. I had never met him before." Decisions were, like previously, made together because they were in the same situation. In this state, they fell into the hands of the Red Army and another stage begins (p. 31): "In this way, I had finished fighting my third war. And unhappily – as a prisoner."

There is a smooth transition into the fourth journey, the direction being West to East this time, and once again in a new role, as a prisoner of war. They can no longer look for food or a place to sleep, this has been determined by the captors, as have the route and the method of transport. However, guidelines for surviving as a prisoner begin to appear in the descriptions: advice includes not to exchange bread for tobacco nor to talk of food when hungry. Illnesses are also among the new subjects that make their way into the narrative. Furthermore, now that the narrator is a passive onlooker, descriptions of the terrain re-emerge. One could look out through the cracks between the wooden planks of the goods wagon (p. 33): "There was certainly no special beauty in this landscape. These were ordinary Prussian fields and meadows, scarred by shell-fire. But for a prisoner everything in freedom seems very beautiful and unattainable." He is once again a cultural observer, but now his view is shaped by peering at freedom through a crack between two planks. He claims to have remembered that the people he saw then in this way seemed happy. At the time of narrating he doubts that: could there have been any happy people at all considering the circumstances; yet, they must have been in a better situation than the prisoner (ibid.). On this journey from Germany to the Komi Republic he is entirely dependent on others, on those who are serving the state. Neither sleep, food, schedule nor even sounds were under his control. He realises that they were being treated like commodities, "because we were also a commodity" from the viewpoint of Soviet authorities (p. 34). In the prisoner episodes he dwells more on Stalin and Soviet power. He also arrives at that topic when writing his memories (p. 37). It is a retrospective judgement on his life and the constraints imposed on him by Soviet rule. In the journey descriptions, however, he remains connected to contemporaneous feelings and situations. It is remarkable that as he becomes more exhausted, descrip-

tions regarding the connection between the physical and the moral state expand, as do descriptions of ways of resisting humiliation.

The fifth journey is about travelling to Estonia from the Komi Republic. Not as a free man but, nevertheless, with some hope that they would eventually make it from 'Siberia'⁴ to Estonia. The beginning of the description revolves around hope, patience, and the fear of those hopes being crushed. He also points out the differences in travelling the same distance the second time, for example "We began the journey by travelling along the routes of prisoners, except in the opposite direction" or

We started travelling in the opposite direction, compared to the year before. Of course, you cannot compare the two journeys. In autumn, exhausted people on their way nowhere. Now young men, almost at full strength, with a very faint hope of getting home. (P. 41)

The journey does involve dangers. The weather prevents them from travelling along the river as the ice is still thin. They attempt to save a companion who was too impatient to wait and falls through the ice – the rescue fails. The narrator himself falls ill and is now dependent on the help of his companions. His experience of the illness and his companion's support are described at length, blending in with cultural observation that stems from breaching local customs (having arrived at a Komi farm he drank from a mug beside a water bucket which he should not have used, knowing the local customs, *ibid.*). He also refers to his position in relation to others in the train station where a lot of people were bustling around the ticket office. He, in contrast, belonged to the group who were "half prisoners, who needed to be looked after by a convoy" (*ibid.*). The authorities were meant to have charge of them, furthermore, their fate and well-being generally depended on the same officials representing the state. That determines the passive voice as well as the situation they experienced: "We were placed in goods wagons with barred windows and bunk beds inside" (*ibid.*). Presuming that the same wagons had previously brought prisoners to their current location the situation was not, however, that desperate: he has a feeling that on this train he leaves behind "the republic of prisoners and forced labourers", moreover, the doors were no longer closed on the outside and they were able to leave the wagon freely as well as move around when the train stopped. The flow of contradictory feelings is also underscored by his sense of ironic delight on one hand: "It must have been an extraordinary coincidence for Russia to transport their own prisoners in that [Western] direction" (*ibid.*). On the other, a traumatising realisation dawns: going to the prison camp, there were around 500 of them, but few made it back: "We figured between ourselves that a quarter or even a third remained forever buried under the Komi snow" (*ibid.*). Arriving in Narva, the border town, on the sixth of November appears to be the end of the journey. His story continues in Narva as a prisoner with permission to work outside prison.

This description, filling three quarters of a page, showcases bitter irony towards the state as the captor, dependency on Soviet officials and becoming conscious of his prisoner status, the tension of waiting and hoping, but also references to the weather when providing details of the journey (hardships on the journey, associating hopelessness with weather conditions, an impatient companion perishing by falling through the thin river ice), his experience of the illness and the help of companions as an essential

prerequisite for moving forward on the journey; describing local conditions in turning points – a conflict during an overnight stay in a Komi village, bustling around the train station’s ticket office where the number of passengers was remarkably high for train travel.

JOURNEY IN JAMES’S INTERVIEWS

In spring 2015, James walked the 375-kilometre-long hiking trail from Oandu to Ikla, sleeping in forest huts along the way. James’s story emerges from the interviews conducted in 2019 and 2020. In the interview conducted in October 2019, the interviewer (Tiina) determines the starting point of the story (by asking James about the reason for going on the journey) and asks specifying questions about the route, the people met on the trail, and so on. The narrator is free to choose for reflection a few subthemes, which makes the interview sound more like an informal conversation. These subthemes (shaping the story) bind the isolated episodes together, which then become the so-called main story lines: inadequate preparation, too heavy a backpack, a shoulder injury; the prescribed route, strictly following the route as a goal *per se*, making a point of returning to exactly the point where he left the trail. In October 2020 we conducted a follow-up interview with James, this time by e-mail. Both interviews were held in English.

According to James, the main reason for doing the walk was financial:

Basically I was broke, I had no money pretty much at all. There was something coming in future but I just needed to find something to do with my time until that happened, I just wasn’t able to find any paying work. (FM 2019)

James also admitted that in addition to that, he had a problem with alcohol:

I sometimes lean on alcohol a bit too much, and that was happening back then. Combined with being broke it wasn’t working too well. So, I basically needed to take myself out of a situation where I didn’t need that much money, and also, I could distance myself from alcohol. That’s basically the reason why the walk ended up happening. (Ibid.)

James wasn’t well prepared for the walk in the sense that he lacked some of the basic camping equipment that people would take, such as a camp stove. He borrowed the backpack, tent and sleeping bag from his friends. He said it wasn’t necessary to use the tent because he slept in the cabins along the trail. This is how he put it to us:

I didn’t go there best prepared. Actually, it was basically just the clothes on my back, and a few changes of course. I did have a tent and a sleeping bag with me. I think I only set up the tent twice, and I never used the sleeping bag. (Ibid.)

The borrowed backpack was not designed to carry all these things, so everything was in the backpack or tied to it. As the weight distribution was not good, James ended up injuring his shoulder about half way into the journey, which was partly the reason why the walk took him so long. Some days he walked as much as 50 kilometres, and other days as little as 4 kilometres. It also partly depended on what was in the area and

whether he found it interesting. There were a couple of shops along the way, so James left the track every now and then to buy food. Often there was food in forest cabins, left by previous occupants (“Things like tins of very cheap tomato sauce, stale bread was always around. The further south I went there was meat from the Latvian military, which was completely filled with gristle.” [FM 2019]).

As it turned out, the walk didn’t fix either of the problems (being broke or leaning on alcohol). However, it seems that focusing on the journey helped James to distance himself also mentally from the problems he was facing before setting out.

As in Harald’s life story, in this journey narrative there are also “others” besides the narrator: they can be people walking the same route or just people randomly met during the journey, who could, for example, also help the protagonist. However, in his story no kind of *communitas* is formed. In a similar vein, he does not describe himself as a member of a community when explaining the reasons for undertaking the journey. When asked to specify if and how this journey may have changed his understanding and feelings about Estonia, he replies:

I’m not too sure I can really claim that, no. Even before that I had quite a bit of experience of the Estonian countryside. And to be honest, I have often lived or stayed for extended periods in kind of isolating situations. And I have also been homeless a couple of times in my past as well, so... [...] It didn’t really add anything to it. It might have changed a couple of things. During the course of that trail I did see a lot of different landscapes that I had never seen before. I’m often reminded of that walk actually because sometimes I will end up in random parts of the country, usually with Estonian people, and quite often they’ll be looking for something, and are kind of lost, and then I realise or I recognise something, and think, oh right, the trail comes through here. What are you looking for? They tell me. Ok, right, it’s down here, this way. That’s happened a couple of times, where, I’m technically a foreigner but I’m the only person who knows where we are. (Ibid.)

James does, however, express his views on relations between people and home. When the interviewer asks about the spiritual side of the journey, James replies that “there was definitely nothing spiritual about it at all” (ibid.). The interviewer then suggests that some people who are not really religious would say that walking in nature is a spiritual experience just because it is so powerful; James responds that he is not one of them even though he could understand why people would say it. When asked to elaborate on this he begins to reflect on people’s relationship with the countryside: they want to live in a city or at least in a more built-up area while nature and the countryside are more for recreation.

NARRATOR’S SELF-POSITIONING: “I” VERSUS “WE”

One way to analyse the descriptions of the journeys is through the framework of history telling and narrative modes as formulated by Alessandro Portelli (1997). Portelli has suggested three modes of “history-telling”: institutional, collective, and personal. These modes are distinguishable in terms of social and spatial boundaries as well as language usage. In the institutional mode the narrator is speaking from the perspective of a state

or nation on political, ideological, educational or similar topics, expressing a viewpoint not related to a particular individual (the third-person, impersonal point of view). In Estonian the institutional mode is conveyed through the impersonal voice, however, it can also be an anonymous clerk or any other person representing the authorities.

The collective mode is used for talking about the people and events in one's immediate circle (for example, neighbourhood, family, community). The grammatical form of first-person plural is used, whereby the narrator is one of "us". The personal mode involves the narrator's person. The events of the story take place with the speaker present and tending to use the first-person singular (see Portelli 1997: 27). In a narrative, these three modes are of course interwoven. As we are dealing with first-person narratives, the personal mode includes the narrator's sensory experiences, descriptions of emotional states and other aspects of personal experience that are based on episodic memory and do not expand to other persons.

A comparative reading of James's journey (in the form of an interview) and Harald's journey (written life story/autobiography) brought out a noticeable difference in the usage of the personal and collective modes.

Harald's journey is predominantly told from the perspective of "us" with Harald self-identifying as a member of a certain group. Describing the first journey – the trip to Lida – Harald predominantly writes in the third person plural, and rarely expresses his own individual viewpoint. For example, the "we" feeling is present when he compares what he has seen in the Polish town with his familiar Estonian environment ("The common opinion of our men was...", p. 16).

In Harald's account of his second journey – the escape to Finland – there is a balance between personal and communal/collective. For example, he describes a decision that was taken together: "We decided: Joining the German army is not an option. The only option is to go to Finland" (ibid.). The personal level reveals his emotional state and reliance on episodic memory: it is through this that he gives his audience an account of a situation that encompasses both the event (the activities in the boat) and the visualisation of time and space (dark night, rough weather at sea). He describes the arrival in Finland as a collective experience of everybody in the boat with few digressions to his own feelings. In this journey description, at the beginning of his life as a soldier he self-identifies as a refugee without homeland. However, he was still one of the members of his military unit and his daily schedule consists of training, soldier's free time or battle. He increasingly describes himself as a member of the group, giving the reader some idea about his individuality in the group and also about the judgements his companions passed on him (p. 18). Yet when speaking about the battles he uses the third person plural: together they repel an attack, together they retreat, together they see the falling of the Finnish flag from the tower of the Vyborg castle. Since the soldiers in the group were connected with each other, it is appropriate to use the expression "as one man". In the battle descriptions the opposite of "us" is "they", which is also used to refer to the different units of the same army. Only a few episodes refer to his individual experiences, for example, when the substance he found in a farm and used to oil his gun, turned out to be varnish (p. 25). His life as one of the Finnish Boys comes to an end when he returns to Estonia. Because this was arranged with the help of interstate agreements and national organisations, the institutional level is more prominent in his description than previously. In these changing circumstances it was to some extent pos-

sible to make individual decisions (whether to return to Estonia, stay in Finland, or flee from Finland to Sweden). He also speaks about the role of certain other individuals in his decision-making (p. 23): “My friend Maad also reckoned that we had to go [to occupied Estonia]. This is our duty.” It becomes obvious that individual choices are intertwined with group choices – “this is our duty”.

At the beginning of the third journey, the situation on the front in Estonia was devastating; Harald was put in charge of the company’s supply section (p. 25). This was an individual position and, indeed, the first-person plural recedes in the narrative as he describes the retreat. Nonetheless, he is constantly searching for those he could restore a sense of togetherness with, to minimise the uncertainty that being alone increased. The institutional level intersects with the communal, when he mentions an official attempt to organise the group of retreating soldiers into a military unit (p. 26). The institutional level is expressed indirectly in the description of the continuation of the escape route. For instance, by the attitude of the frightened locals (of Prussia, Germany) towards them, inherent within the question “Why won’t you hold your position?” is the narrator’s counter-question: but who started the war and why (p. 28, 30).

In the descriptions of his fourth journey as a prisoner of war travelling from West to East, the institutional mode, however, becomes increasingly dominant: they were dealt with in a certain way, they were given something to eat (or rather, they were not fed at all, e.g. p. 31). Prison guards representing the state become important travel companions and, as expected, the conflicted relationship between them and ‘us’ also emerges.

With regard to the ‘I’ versus ‘we’, James’s story is rather different from Harald’s in the sense that here it is the narrator’s personal perspective that dominates. The people James meets during the journey may help him, they may exchange information about the journey, etc. Nevertheless, he and they remain members of different groups. The aim and completion of James’s journey as well as various choices and decisions related to it are presented from the perspective of his own decisions and experiences.

We are now faced with the question about the narrator’s self-positioning in the field of events narrated in the story (see, for example, extending positioning theory in Block 2017). The narrator’s self-image and his different roles in relation to other characters are relatively stable in both stories. However, since the life story covers a longer period of time and the journey covers different stages in the narrator’s life, various aspects of the self-image emerge: a young man escaping from general mobilisation, soldier, prisoner of war. Indeed, we need to search his life story to find out how he binds the various aspects of his self-image into a whole. We suggest it is done by the narrator’s ethical considerations on the one hand, and his constant conflict with the authorities on the other.

The story presented in the interview covers a shorter period of time and only one episode in the narrator’s life. So only one aspect of his self-image stays in the focus of the journey – he is a wayfarer. However, it is still possible to conjecture his other roles, for example when he is explaining his motives for the journey. (See, for example, the study on roles and their multilevel activities and identities in birth narratives in Marander-Eklund 2006: 144–152: here also the status and activity described in the journey narrative enables one role to be identified that relates to the self-image in the big picture outside the described field.)

In the journey description the protagonist can be passive in his activities. For example, in a situation where he is a prisoner and the active agents – prison guards – are anonymous representatives of power. But also, when the narrator walks along the prescribed route on the official hiking trail. The mode of description changes when the protagonist has to make a decision: to support or save a fellow prisoner; alter his journey due to unforeseen circumstances such as the need to find food or cope with an injury. Here the narrator's self-positioning works on different levels: social self-positioning in relation to the authorities, community and self in various life stages that goes beyond the framework of the journey description on the one hand, and in relation to the changes occurring during the journey or isolated journey-shaping episodes on the other. This also emerges when our two protagonists describe themselves as homeless (deprived of home) when setting out.

HOME VERSUS HOMELESSNESS

'Home' and 'homelessness' are contradictory concepts, but at the same time they can be understood through each other (cf. e.g. McCarthy 2018: 960–962). Although both our narrators experience the homeless side of the journey, a comparison of the texts shows that their perception of home differs significantly. How is this reflected in the texts? The journey experience in the observed stories refers to the journey as an intermediate area between two fixed conditions. In Harald's story, the opposition of these conditions is unambiguous and linear: home, journey as a homeless person, home. His childhood and adolescence home, the one the narrator had before the journey, gave him the spiritual power to cope with the journey. The post-journey home, however, did not just mean returning to the home from where he had set out. The narrator repeatedly refers to that home using the word "destroyed" – destroyed due to the war, but especially, the presence of the foreign power. Rather, it was a home that he could create using existing conditions and those remaining from the past. In James's story, the connection between home and homelessness is not so linear. It appears that he became homeless before starting his journey and the reason for going on the journey was to fill in the gap between being homeless and finding a home.

The first stage of Harald's journey takes him out of Estonia for the first time. On this journey, together with his companions, he is a cultural observer: they discuss what they see abroad and how it seems in comparison to what they were familiar with in their domestic environment. Therefore, although he does not start the journey voluntarily, he does not feel homeless yet. Home is still there, it can be compared to what they experience during the journey, and they feel they will soon return home. It is the second stage (escape to Finland and service in the Finnish army) that brings the recognition: he is a "refugee without homeland" (p. 17). Moreover, he is no longer together with the companions he knew from his childhood and adolescence. He is looking for new props in his life to compensate for his homelessness. In Finland, he finds it in the beautiful landscape and so he gathers the feeling he gets from its beauty in him to be able to cope with difficulties. The feeling of maintaining homeliness (or compensating for homelessness) is enhanced by the second focus of the description: in his opinion, people stopped

noticing the “freaky landscape” (p. 20) ravaged by battles. In the third stage, he first returns to Estonian territory, but he is still in the service of the occupation army, from which he had escaped to Finland a year before. Step by step, alienation grows, and the more so as the front moves further to the West. When he had escaped to Finland, he described himself as a man without a homeland; now he also adds lack of purpose: “I was now a person without homeland, without purpose, unless you count survival, surviving the war, as a goal” (p. 28). This becomes even more prevalent on his journey as a prisoner of war from the West to the East. The last stage of his journey brings him back to the Estonian ground, closer to home, yet the re-creation of home takes time. He can no longer achieve what he had before the war. However, the experience gives him knowledge of parent–child relationships: while in prison, he thought his parents had lost hope, and he did not contact them to avoid increasing their anxiety about him again. He was not sure whether he would leave the prison camp alive. However, when he met his parents, he realised that they had been waiting and hoping all the time that he had spent in the war and the prison camp. When narrating the story, he already knows that parents never give up the hope of protecting and caring for their children. The home at the beginning of his story is, above all, a safe place among people close to him in a familiar physical environment, be it the sunshine or the sound of the language. In the post-journey period, the role of close relationships and values in creating the home feeling increases. Still, it must be emphasised: he lived under conditions of occupation, where external factors did not support the feeling of homeliness.

James’s feeling of home and homelessness are built up on entirely different principles. While in Harald’s story, the concept of home also included territorial and state borders and covered subjective aspects that are considered one’s own (i.e. interpersonal relationships, language use, values, environment experienced as beautiful, etc.), for James home is defined through the feeling of safety (for example, not having to fear any criminal activity in the streets) and that his family do not organise his life. It is noteworthy that the feeling of safety is not connected with his childhood environment. Unlike Harald’s concept of home, for James home is specified neither by a territory, national borders or organisation of state, nor parents and friends from childhood or adolescence. James does not define home through family and close relationships. He also questions the opinion as if a person’s place of birth and growing up somehow gives them a better or deeper knowledge of the place. This is how he put it to us:

The only place that I do feel like a stranger is England. That’s simply because of the prevailing flawed logic I find myself surrounded by wherever I go: that where you’re born/from is your home and that you should therefore understand it better than people from other places. It irritates me that people assume that I must have some great insight into England because I was born there, or that I automatically have a positive disposition towards the place. [...] The idea that being born in a place somehow gives you a greater insight into it is quite ridiculous. (FM 2020)

Places of living are something other than home. Home is defined through a feeling of safety and that in turn means that he does not have to fear any criminal activity in the streets and that his next of kin do not organise his life. James’s feeling of home reflects his need to be on his own, undisturbed, at peace. Home for him means “a place where I’m at peace, or at least feel peaceful” (ibid.).

In these two cases, there is a difference in the association between home and environment. For example, Harald compensated for the feeling of homelessness while in Finland by remembering the beautiful scenery there, the experience of the natural environment creating layers of the feeling of home for him to lean on while abroad. For James, nature is more of an abstract space: he says his favourite environment is the forest, yet that forest is not a specific place, it could be anywhere. So, it is quite expectable that even though James's journey takes place in a specific space (on the hiking route from Oandu to Ikla), he still focuses on himself rather than paying attention to his surroundings.

We suggest that the difference between Harald's and James's feeling of home and homelessness originates from a more general cultural framework. Harald comes from an environment characterised by a settled way of life. In such a case, all other places are experienced through one's own environment: in comparison or drawing analogies with it, opposing/contrasting, etc. For a person with a nomadic lifestyle, such as James, places form a certain network where he relates to each place in a different, yet mostly pragmatic way. His knowledge of one or other place is not guided by the experience of local inhabitants but by some other source of information, such as Google maps and trail markers, to find the way. Aspects connected with the language, culture, nature, etc., do not play a significant role in shaping the concept of home. Thus, it is to be expected that in shaping the feeling of home, more important than the geographical space is the way how one feels (in James's case, the feeling of safety), the feeling through which he identifies himself as belonging to a place.

Homelessness can be described as a state of liminality. In the following sections, we will develop the theme of liminality in greater depth.

JOURNEY AS A QUEST AND PILGRIMAGE

'Liminality' is the term used by Arnold van Gennep (1961) to denote the second of three stages in what he called a 'rite of passage'; this was further developed by Victor and Edith Turner. As the Turners have observed, pilgrimage is a liminal period during which the participants are removed from their everyday state (Turner and Turner 1978: 1–39, 249). During the liminal period, the characteristics of the liminars (the ritual subjects in this phase) are ambiguous because they pass through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state (*ibid.*). The liminal state has frequently been likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, darkness, bisexuality and the wilderness (Turner 1979: 94–96). These transitional or liminal beings are thought to be beyond the boundaries of the normal social structure, its norms and values; they are in a "no-man's land" that is inhabited by things and people that do not fit into ordinary categories (*ibid.*).

We could argue that in Harald's story, what is perceived as liminal in fact turns out to be permanent. On returning home he gets to a place that feels alien to him. In a way, the Soviet power was a liminal period between Estonia's stages of independence, yet it had permanent influence on post-Soviet society.

Both men's journeys can be seen as a quest; Harald was searching for the "self" (on the journey as well as when narrating it), James set himself a goal before starting the

journey. Both men's journeys involved testing their moral and physical strength, voluntarily for James, forced for Harald.

One of our research questions was: which words do the narrators use when speaking about their journey? Even though James refers to his hiking trip as a "walk", when talking with Tiina he sometimes calls it a pilgrimage. This is how he put it to us:

But it is actually back to that point about just doing every single step of the journey. I suppose that's mostly related to the reasons why I was doing it. I didn't have any money, I was at a kind of a down point considering alcohol, but I did do every single step of that journey even after I injured my shoulder. Maybe I would just refer to it now as a pilgrimage in the sense of accomplishment that it gave me. Because even though I was in a pretty bad situation, there was something pretty big that I managed to do that a lot of people wouldn't. [...] I gained a little bit of feeling of self-accomplishment, probably at the time that I really needed to feel it. That was the main thing really. (FM 2019)

James emphasised that even though he did leave the trail from time to time to go and buy food or just to have a look at a nearby place, he always made a point of returning exactly to the point where he had left the trail because he wanted to take every step of the trail. He said: "I didn't want to take any shortcuts although there were plenty of opportunities" (ibid.).

Why was "doing every single step of the journey" so important to James? It seems that the journey and the definitiveness of the route cover a lot more than just walking the trail. Apart from giving him the feeling of self-accomplishment, it probably provided some order in chaos, a tangible support in a hectic and unpredictable life. Focusing on the journey helped James to distance himself also mentally from the problems he was facing before setting out. What keeps him going is the accuracy of the route, the definitiveness. What keeps Harald going is, according to his life story, his home, his memories and dreams about home. Even when his home was physically destroyed, the memories continued to give him strength.

James told us that he had only retrospectively started to call his hiking trip a pilgrimage: "It's a name that's been given to it afterwards. I never considered it that way at the time." (FM 2020) He added that it was partly because of the previous conversations about pilgrimage that he had held with the interviewer. In the case of Harald's story as well, we are interested in the dynamics between the event, experience and narration. Harald wrote his autobiography in 1994–1995. This was several years before pilgrimage became popular in Estonia: it is only in recent decades that there has been an increase in pilgrimage activities in Estonia (see Sepp and Remmel 2020). Significantly, the translation of Paulo Coelho's *The Pilgrimage* (first published in 1987) into Estonian in 2002 undoubtedly paved the way for the Estonian 'Camino boom' and interest in pilgrimage generally.⁵

Here it would be rather tempting to conjecture and suggest that Harald might have used different words to describe his journey if he had written his life story about ten years later. However, speculating over whether or not Harald would have renamed his life story a pilgrimage is probably not the core of the matter. If we take this discussion to the level of our chosen methods, it seems that we are now faced with a question

about genre – do pilgrimage story and life story belong to similar genres? Furthermore, we also need to ask ourselves whether reading Harald’s journey as a description of a pilgrimage would provide us with a fresh perspective.

While we have been able to have a dialogue with James, it has not been possible with Harald. Looking at Harald’s journey as a pilgrimage would only work if we read his life story within the framework of pilgrimage studies, and not from the narrator’s perspective. Even though Harald is telling his life story, it is possible to look at it in the context of pilgrimage in a sense that it involves testing his ethical principles. And in the context of his life story, he can highlight his tenets.

DREAMS AND LIMINALITY

Dreams can also be seen as part of liminality. Both Harald and James talk about the dreams or dream-like conditions (hallucinations) they had during their journeys. What could these dreams possibly tell us about the state of the dreamers and their relation to other people? Aiming to apply different research methods and results to place-making research and being inspired by Reinhart Koselleck (2004) as well as Juri Lotman (2009), we decided to throw into the mix also dreams and dream-like conditions as research tools.

The German historian Reinhart Koselleck (2004: 209) has written:

Dreams, while they cannot be produced, nevertheless belong to the sphere of human fictions to the extent that, as dreams, they offer no real representation of reality. This does not, however, prevent them from belonging to life’s reality, and it is for this reason that from Herodotus to early modern times they were thought to be worthy of historical account. Apart from this, a divinatory power has, since ancient times, either been attributed to them or derived from them; they therefore possess a particular relation to the future.

By analysing the dreams of German citizens during the Third Reich, Koselleck demonstrates how dreams could be used to research history. He describes the realm of dreams as a methodological field “within which *res factae* and *res fictae* are mingled in an extraordinarily dramatic fashion” (ibid.). He argues that while dreams are initially singular and related to individuals, groups of dreams nevertheless have a supra-individual history (ibid.: 212).

Analysing Jean Cayrol’s accounts of salvational or future-oriented dreams originating in the concentration camps, Koselleck (ibid.: 214) notes:

The dreams of the future move in the temporal dimension of past life, fed by memory, and out of which all wishes and hopes are deduced. To a great extent, these wishes and hopes correspond to the daytime phantasies of the inmates. They subsist on a life from which the inmate is absolutely and irrevocably cut off. These are utopian camp dreams. They disclose a touching image of home beyond the electric fence, a home which the inmate seeks and recalls but which no longer exists for the inmate. The pure facticity of the camp is blanked out, and the past transferred into wishes for the future. Such dreams were the harbingers of death.

Juri Lotman (2009) has explored the functions of dreams in societies at different times in history. People have always 'seen' dreams. However, in order to be verbalised, the dream needs to have a meaning attached to it. Its function in society depends on that meaning. (Lotman 2009: 142–146). According to Lotman (ibid: 146), the dream has a special and essential cultural function: "to become the reserve of semiotic uncertainty, a space which must, of necessity, become filled with meaning. This renders the dream an ideal *ich-Erzählung*, capable of being filled up with diverse interpretations, both mystical and aesthetic."

From our perspective it is important to see how in the state of liminality, a dream can function as stress relief and enhance endurance. This is how Harald describes and also interprets his recurring dreams (p. 7):

When my life was extremely difficult (in the camp), I would mostly dream about summer at my aunt's. One dream that kept recurring until I was maybe forty, was very short, without any activities. I dreamed about lying behind the barn of the aunt's farm in the afternoon sun. There were some clouds very high in the sky. The bumblebees were buzzing around me. It smelled of dead-nettles and the blossoms of many other plants. On waking up, at the camp and later here, I could smell that fragrance in my nostrils and felt infinite peace. At the camp, my mind would then drift to those times and for a while I would forget about the insufferable reality. In my dreams about Lille street I was always a little boy and I was running out into the garden, first onto the dewy lawn and then to the raspberry bushes. The raspberries were so plentiful that I was eating them in handfuls. This was of course caused by hunger and longing for home.

James told us that on some of the days he hallucinated:

But when I say hallucinated, it's not really... I wasn't seeing people or animals or anything like that. I would normally see these kinds of Soviet era block flat buildings, for some reason, just behind the tree line. And it wasn't all the time, it was three or four times, I remember seeing that and thinking, why are there apartment buildings out here? (FM 2019)

We asked what he thought could be the meaning of these hallucinations and wondered if this could be connected to the fact that he was homeless at the time. James answered:

It could quite well be the point. My eyesight isn't particularly good and I wasn't wearing glasses throughout the trip. It could just have been the trick of the light combined with being tired. I don't think I was conjuring up anything that I particularly wanted to see because I'm not a fan of living in that type of building. And also, I remember that I felt a little bit agitated actually that I was in close proximity to people. Or I thought I was for a short period of time. [...] Just at that time I didn't really want to be around people, so I didn't really like the idea that oh ok, there's a big apartment building there. At the same time, this only happened late at night, maybe it was a trick of the light or maybe there were apartment buildings there. I think I was probably a little bit dehydrated because I could only carry so much water with me. (Ibid.)

Significantly, James did not want to be near people, so hallucinations about apartment blocks made him agitated. In our conversations James has emphasised that he always prefers to hike alone:

I have to admit that walking in the countryside, particularly longer walks, is something that I like to do on my own. [...] I've tried to do it as part of a group a few times, but unfortunately I don't find it very relaxing. (Personal communication with Tiina, March 4, 2020)

There are no people in either of Harald's recurring dreams. Arguably, the fact that both Harald and James considered it noteworthy to talk about their dreams or dream-like conditions and interpret them, shows that dreams and hallucinations play an important role in the state of liminality. While Koselleck's approach explains why people living at a certain time had particular dreams, Lotman helps to shed light on why the dreams were included in the descriptions.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we have drawn on our previous experiences in oral history and pilgrimage studies to find a perspective that combines these research experiences. We found a common focus by asking how the description of a journey can reveal the nature of the relationship between humans and place. Using the close reading method and drawing on the concept of placemaking, we aimed to explore the relationship between humans and the place to establish what factors shape that relationship. We see these connections as components of place identity.

When comparing descriptions of similar situations (a journey) we have excluded the historical-cultural factors and form-related aspects (in our case, written life story and an oral interview) of the narrative.

Our analysis revealed the realness or concreteness of the place on the one hand (determined by origin, culture, sense of belonging to a group) and the abstractness of the place on the other (forest as a homey place, private feeling of safety in a public space). However, how to reconcile different, at times contrary experiences? It seems to us that this can be done by using such general concepts as 'identity' and 'truth'.

Martin Ehala has analysed the importance of cognitive truth in the society. He explains how cognitive truth is bound to identity, which in its turn is expressed in core values. Ehala (2019: 664) notes:

Core values are values that are non-negotiable, for example, god, faith, homeland, mother tongue, nationality, flag and other symbols, as well as central moral principles [...] They have a considerable emotional significance for the members of a group, they are sacred.

In the context of our article, the concept of home could be regarded as a core value. We noticed that for Harald and James, the concept of home is built up on entirely different principles. Harald's story as well as James's also contain an 'instrument' to use against a different definition of home. At the end of his life story, Harald expresses his disap-

pointment in the society at the end of the 20th century, where people do not feel such responsibility for their homeland as he and his contemporaries did. This is why the core values shared by the society of his youth have receded to the sphere of family, thus narrowing the space perceived as home. James questions the connection between one's home(land) and origin. However, Ehala (ibid.) notes further that "questioning of core values [...] can cause a rather fierce counterreaction, which is why debates over core values tend to be passionate and uncompromising". We suggest that this may explain why the analysis of such different stories as Harald's and James's can be fruitful. It leads us to different concepts not through the conflicts arising from them but through experiences that exist together in real life.

In this article we have attempted to explore human experience in the changing world. What we have presented are not only James's and Harald's stories. The metaphor of the journey also helps to embrace the story of human beings more generally as well as the story of a nation.

NOTES

1 We have James's permission to use his real name.

2 Oandu-Ikla hiking route was created by the Estonian State Forest Management Centre (RMK, *Riigimetsa Majandamise Keskus*) as a nature walk and not a pilgrimage route.

3 Harald's mother tongue, Estonian, like Finnish, is one of the Balto-Finnic languages. Despite the fact that Estonian and Finnish have a lot in common, a person who speaks Estonian does not understand Finnish very well without learning it, and vice versa. At the same time, one of the dialects of the Estonian language that Harald is referring to here sounds similar to Finnish.

4 Siberia in this context is not a geographical place but is used as a popular synonym for the Gulag, or Soviet forced labour camps.

5 It is also important to mention the translation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan (1778 [1678]) into Estonian (in the 1750s).

SOURCES

EKLA 350 – Manuscript collection of Estonian life histories (from 1989–), Estonian Cultural History Archives at the Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu.

FM = Fieldwork materials. The materials are in the personal archives of the authors.

FM 2019 – 40-minute oral interview with James, October 2019.

FM 2020 – e-mail interview with James (2.5-page response to follow-up questions), October 2020.

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