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MEMORY-THEATER AS CULTURAL GENERATIVITY: *ESLINGENA*: A MUSICAL IN TORONTO AND RIGA

Inta Gāle Carpenter

Linking the concept of generativity to expressive culture as a communicative resource, this article asks how recontextualization shifts meanings. I focus on the reception by audiences in Toronto and Riga of *Eslingena: A Musical*, a play about life in a Latvian Displaced Persons camp in post-World War II Germany. North American audiences responded to *Eslingena* as performed memory. Anticipation of its performance in Riga suggested it might evoke countervailing memories that would trigger memory as a competition about suffering. Instead, *Eslingena* successfully mediated diasporic and homeland memories to produce a dialogue about agency grounded in differential experience.

Keywords: Latvian diaspora; exile; memory-theater; cultural generativity; recontextualization; tradition; expressive culture; memory; post-memory

In the fall of 2004, a Latvian-American theatrical production caught my eye, both as a site of memory and as an exemplar of cultural generativity. Called *Eslingena: A Musical*, it was a romantic, lighthearted play about a post-World War II Latvian refugee camp established in Esslingen, Germany in 1945. *Eslingena*, as it was called in Latvian, came to be nicknamed ‘Little Riga’ and was known for its culturally rich refugee life. Among Latvians subsequently dispersed in host countries, stories about life in the Displaced Persons (DP) camps proliferated, appearing in oral accounts, fiction, memoirs, poetry, and drama. *Eslingena*, thus, was a version of such DP camp remembrances. Its libretto was written in Latvian by two Latvian-Americans (one in Chicago, the other in Los Angeles) who had lived in the Esslingen camp. It was scored by an American-born, Emmy award-winning Latvian-American composer working in Hollywood. The musical premiered in Toronto in July 2004.

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I became aware of it as it was touring via big-screen video to Latvian communities in the United States as part of an effort to raise funds for its performance in Riga.¹ I first saw it on video in Chicago, then in Indianapolis, before observing rehearsals and performances in Riga in July 2005.²

After providing an overview of World War II Latvian refugees and examining the content and structure of *Eslingena*, I explore its performance and reception by audiences in North America and Latvia. When it became known that *Eslingena* would be performed in Riga, a good many North American Latvians worried that their suffering, keyed to music and comedy, would appear trivial compared to that endured by Latvians deported to Siberia by the Soviet authorities. They realized that the DP camps and emigration to the West symbolized freedom, abundance, and relative ease in contrast to the surveillance, scarcity, and hard labor of the *gulag*.

Eslingena is the latest example, and certainly one of the most spectacular, of the intense preoccupation of Latvians abroad with embodying memory in expressive forms as a means of *cultural generativity*. With the term cultural generativity, I extend psychologist Erik Erikson's notion of generativity, which he describes as the midlife stage of the human life cycle during which individuals seek to create a legacy that will 'outlive the self' (Erikson 1959; Kotre 1984). Exile experience suggests that generativity need not be linked in a hard and fast way to developmental sequences or specific age ranges nor limited to personal identity. Instead, as Erikson himself suggested but few scholarly works have explored, the concept can be extended to encompass the socially valued work of creative individuals who seek to instill cultural knowledge and values in constituencies responsive to such goals, especially next generations. It is a creative response to and a healthy result of the struggle to find new purpose in emigration. Cultural generativity is a concept closely related to the anthropological notion of cultural production, but its original connection to the importance of personal motivation highlights the investment of individual talent, energy, time (and often money) in fashioning new discourses and attracting recruits.

The resources for cultural generativity that particularly interest me are memory and expressive culture. During 50 years of self-described exile, Latvians lived off the territory of home, working and waiting for the restoration of Latvian independence (finally achieved in 1991 following the break-up of the Soviet Union). A myriad of 'sites of memory' (*lieux de mémoire*), as French historian Pierre Nora describes the objects, places, texts, concepts, even phrases that evolve as shared national icons, connected them to Latvia through imagination, word, and practice. In Nora's understanding, memory is not the imitative recall of stored physical descriptions but an imaginary *act* that dynamically re-categorizes experience and selects particular 'exemplars' from the 'formless potential' that is the past (Nora 2001, pp. 23, 25).

Memory takes expressive form in contemporary repertoires of tradition: stories, anecdotes, customs, songs, celebrations, commemorations, musical forms, worldviews. These forms encode deeply felt and widely shared values and tastes (Hymes 1975), transmit social knowledge, and set forth 'guidelines for social action by allying wisdom with pleasure' (Abrahams 1971, p. 17). Storytellers (individually or as community discourse) derive the power to influence action from their ability to create 'aesthetic emotion' in listeners of any generation (p. 18). When stories are well performed (and because they are often embodied in ritual and movement and sound),

they are effective attention-grabbers and forceful, mobilizing ‘rhetorics of community’ (p. 19). Because they are easy to remember, they are likely to be transmitted in the ongoing process of acting together to create a shared culture. Endlessly open to recontextualization and always oriented to other texts, forms of expressive culture are evaluated by audiences on the basis of familiarity with past performances, collective conventions, and current emotions (Bauman 2004, p. 9).

Among Latvians abroad, time and space disrupted cultural continuity with the homeland and encouraged adherence to customs and beliefs that soon were anachronistic from the standpoint of the people who remain in the homeland (Frank 2005, p. 6). It thus becomes increasingly important for exiles to generate new stories and ‘post-memories’, as Karl Mannheim calls the indirect memories that derive from representations of the ‘personally acquired memories’ of elders (Mannheim 1952). To the extent that offspring emotionally absorb post-memories they offset the inevitable, incremental loss of the parents’ historical and cultural knowledge. As children re-tell what they have been told or what they have experienced in community programs, ‘post-memory’ becomes a resource for creating new stories that extend adherence to ‘cause’ and foster identification *as Latvians*. The exiles’ success in transmitting post-memory to subsequent generations became evident when Latvia regained its independence in 1991. Children born abroad contemplated ‘returning’ to Latvia – going back to a place where they had never been. *Eslingena’s* self-described goal was to transfer memory and emotion across time and space. As a site of cultural generativity, it stimulated a kind of festival time set off from the daily routine, and created a space within which to embody experience and contemplate communality – past, present, and future – in music and laughter.

Displaced Persons Camps as Enabling Structures

In 1943, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) was created to administer the first international refugee resettlement effort, in response to the 30 million refugees scattered throughout Europe. UNRRA cared for about 120,000 Latvians (Plakans 1995, pp. 152, 223). Esslingen, the largest Latvian refugee camp, housed 6,000 Latvians. UNRRA was founded on the assumption that DPs would repatriate after the war, but, along with others from the Baltic states, Latvians were afraid to return to countries under Soviet control. In the fall of 1945, Balts were exempted from forcible repatriation on the basis that the United States and Britain did not recognize the Soviet occupation of the Baltic countries (Carpenter 1989, 1990). Latvians lived in DP camps for two to five years. Emigration increased rapidly after 1948. In the United States, DPs represented the largest concentrated immigration of the twentieth century – nearly 400,000. One-tenth of them – 40,000-plus – were Latvians. Some 13,000 settled in Canada.

Usually, refugee camps are perceived as ‘technologies of power’, which Michel Foucault identifies as sites that monitor and constrain inhabitants through marginalizing definitions and categorizations (Foucault 1977; see also Malkki 1995). Latvians experienced aspects of the refugee camps as constraints – especially as sources of an unexpected ‘spoiled identity’ (Goffman 1963). UNRRA’s mandate was

to identify 'bona fide' refugees for camp care and to screen out Nazi collaborators and suspected war criminals. Initially, Latvians as a whole were stigmatized by the Allies and UNRRA officials as German sympathizers because Latvian soldiers had served in the German army. Most of these soldiers, called *Leģionāri* in Latvian, had been mobilized into Latvian Legions under threat of punishment during the German occupation from 1941 to 1944 (Plakans 1995, pp. 148–53). Some had volunteered for service to avenge the Soviet deportations that sent 35,000 Latvians to Siberia from June 1940 to June 1941. The stigma cast on the *Leģionāri* clashed with Latvian perceptions of them as heroes who symbolized the collective struggle against Soviet power.³ After the war, 25,000–30,000 former Latvian POWs in Allied camps sought UNRRA care. They were a difficult case to sort out. Only in 1950 did an UNRRA investigation of the Baltic Waffen SS units conclude that the Baltic Legions had not been 'hostile to the Government of the U.S.' (Ezergailis 1997). As a result, *Leģionāri* were allowed to emigrate to the United States under the Displaced Persons Act.

Although the refugee camps functioned as constraining technologies of power, they also became *enabling structures* for putting a cultural *cīņa* (struggle) into practice. UNRRA prohibited direct political engagement in the camps, but encouraged cultural activity as a morale booster. Latvian DPs enthusiastically set to work. After the chaos and dispersion of the war years, the camps were the first significant sites for regrouping and for cultural generativity. Although clustered together in tight, sometimes inadequate, quarters, the DPs were at least minimally fed, housed, and clothed.⁴ They had ample free time. About two-thirds were between 18 and 44 years old. Many were educated, fervent patriots, professionals who had been instrumental in achieving Latvia's brief national independence from 1918 to 1940 or who had grown to maturity during those years.

The refugee camps, and Esslingen in particular, were populated by many individuals Victor Turner calls *star-groupers* – that is, active makers of community (1981, p. 146). Noyes refers to them as 'the sponsors of collective effervescences' (1995, p. 472). Esslingen's camp was flush with young, cosmopolitan cultural activists well practiced in creating, producing (and responding to) cultural forms that fostered collective identity. A Latvian woman in Columbus, Indiana, offers a formulaic portrayal of the rich cultural life in the camps, a view that is consistent with *Eslingena*:

We had writers and actors and singers and ballet dancers, and everything, so cultural life didn't stop. Even though there were no pretty dresses and our stomachs were sometimes empty, and the bed was just a bunk bed, the children didn't stop learning We kept laughing that all the refugees were employed taking care of each other. Some of them became cooks and kitchen workers. Some chopped wood. My mother worked as a doctor. There were nurses, teachers, street sweepers. I mean, they were all doing something, taking care of each other. . . . [For the young, camp life was relatively normal.] I'm studying. I have friends. I find a boy. I fall in love. You know, all that stuff. (Cooper 1978)

At first, cultural generativity was a ritual action that helped efface the physical displacement from home. Directors, set designers, actors, composers, teachers, musicians, writers, dancers and publishers continued disrupted professions.

Improvising and making do, the DPs transformed ammunition boxes and empty sacks into stage decorations and costumes. Parents opened Latvian-language schools. A song festival attracted 3,000 refugees from all the camps in Germany to Esslingen in 1946, just a year after the end of the war. As Mould (drawing upon Hymes) suggests, the classic and traditional cultural forms that Latvians turned to were a means by which to ground themselves ‘in the past rather than be bulldozed by the present’ (2005, p. 258).

Patriotism, which was not uppermost in the minds of the departing refugees in 1944, took center stage later. The refugees became their own past-masters – the ‘vanquished victors’ who mobilized memory in the service of self-articulation, collective identity formation, and nation. Gradually they transformed themselves from *citizens* of independent Latvia to *exile activists* united in their determination to restore Latvian independence (Carpenter 1988, 1990, 1996a, b). Reconceptualizing space as a geography of social relations, they resolutely again took up residence in *pre-1939 Latvia*, which became the Lost Paradise⁵ and sole legitimate site for the continuation of Latvian culture, history, and social life (Carpenter 1989, 1992). The most conservative adherents represented Soviet Latvia as a contaminated and taboo place.

In the long run, the years in the DP camps provided the refugees who chose to affiliate as Latvians with important social and cultural experiences. They learned how to live in (and against) a foreign society without belonging to it and they developed a complex, well-integrated, and differentiated social system that resembled the society and culture of their origin (Veidemanis 1963). They continued to practice the intense volunteerism that blossomed during the cultural awakening of the nineteenth century and which burst forth full strength in the short decades of Latvian independence. When the opportunity to resettle in host countries arose, they took with them enduring strategies and symbols articulated, shaped, and implemented in the camps.

In host countries, Latvians lived a split life: economically integrated, politically welcomed as Cold War warriors, but socially segregated into a handful of vigorous Latvian colonies worldwide. In Canada, the United States, Brazil, Australia, Sweden, Germany and England, Latvians dedicated themselves to establishing a proxy nation replete with Saturday schools; summer camps; cultural and intergenerational seminars; an international high school in Münster, Germany; song festivals; youth congresses; academic associations; welfare organizations; community centers; and periodic protests on a global scale, such as in 1980 in Madrid, and in the 1985 Baltic Peace and Freedom Cruise.⁶ They conformed to rules of their own making – most particularly to sustaining national identity, preserving native language, and adhering to familiar ways. Such dedication, it was said, would one day ensure a seamless return. It also meant that elders did not have to ‘leave’ the homeland,⁷ while children born abroad could ‘live in it’ symbolically. The ways of the elders guided community life, although younger generations introduced innovation and change absorbed from host societies. *Esslingena* is an instance of cultural generativity on behalf of Latvia as cause and as collective identity.

Esslingen Becomes Memory-Theater as *Esslingena*: A Musical

Modernist memory-theater, according to Jeanette Malkin, is a coherent dramatic enunciation of subjective remembrances that (as suggested by the pioneering work by

Maurice Halbwachs 1992) turns to the past in order to explain a life course in a socially and collectively constructed way (Malkin 1999, pp. 20–1, 23). *Eslingena* celebrates the resilience of the elders (on stage and in the audience) who, despite their losses, forged ahead to create a vibrant substitute world grounded in collective efforts and a deep knowledge of Latvian culture and history. For the young, *Eslingena* provided a three-dimensional history lesson, replete with familiar themes and images from grandparent-tales and from multitudinous recontextualizations. In contrast to post-modernist theater, *Eslingena* does not uproot, fragment or jumble memory, scenes, images, and temporalities nor does it force audiences to remember traumatic history (Malkin 1999, pp. 20–1, 31; Savran 1999). Its linearity and causality seek to illuminate, restore, and explain, not to problematize, question, or challenge. By telling a coherent, chronological story, *Eslingena* claims historical veracity as it subscribes to the particular, perhaps idiosyncratic, worldview of its primary creator.

Theater has played an important role in Latvian cultural life since the national awakening of the 1860s. Like many others from small nations, Latvians perceive their past in terms of oppression by colonizing dominant foreigners – historically, Swedes, Germans, and Russians. Theater emerged as an oppositional force and gained strength as a largely utilitarian form of indigenous culture that gave birth to new discourses about identity. Authorities, perceiving culture to be innocuous, did not prohibit large numbers of Latvians from congregating in theaters. As a result, theaters (along with song festivals) were among the first sites where Latvianness, Latvian history and Latvian traditions were constructed and represented in the Latvian language. After performances, Latvians could be heard proudly speaking to each other in Latvian rather than in the hegemonic German popular among aspirant elites.

According to Latvian theater scholar Viktors Hausmanis, the theater always helped Latvians survive (2005, p. 13). Famous Latvian actors and directors displaced by the war established several DP theater troupes, which performed in their own camps and also toured to others. Esslingen's was the largest and most active. Plays provided an escape from the dreary routine of life and enabled a 'return' to Latvia via beloved classics or new scripts that confronted thorny contemporary issues. Theater was an effective means of cultural generativity because it guaranteed enthusiastic participation from actors or audiences of all ages.

Eslingena: A Musical was inspired by the memory work of Alberts Legzdiņš, a Chicago Latvian-American born in Latvia in 1933. According to the program booklet, Legzdiņš was motivated to produce *Eslingena* by the 'desire to immortalize moments from Latvian refugee life (1945–49) before the dispersal to host countries' (p. 4). It was his brainchild – and 'dream' – to write a play about the camp where he spent six years of his life (from 11 to 17) and where he 'learned to appreciate his Latvian heritage'. Legzdiņš' memories set the tone for *Eslingena*: 'My memories of the camp are light, happy. Some say that I have shaped the production by looking through rose-colored glasses, but that can't be helped – that's how I remember the time'. He recalls that in Esslingen he experienced his first kiss, put on his first long pants, and scored his first goal in soccer ('*pie dzīvoju savu pirmo skūpstu, tiku pie pirmajām garajām biksēm, un iesitu pirmos vārtus futbolē*') (Burve 2005, p. 22). When asked about his past,

Legzdiņš juxtaposes the trauma of displacement from the homeland with the plethora of cultural activity in the DP camp:

In November 1944, we left the battlefield that Kurzeme had become, fled from the Russians through Poland, and experienced the biggest air attacks in Berlin. Luckily we survived, got to southern Germany, where authorities were beginning to gather up the refugees and were putting them into camps by nationality. Esslingen, I have to say, was a lucky spot. We got there toward the end of 1946. There were about 6,000 Latvians. Lots of ballet dancers, theater people – almost all of those from the National Theater – were there. The journalists immediately began to publish a newspaper, print books. There were countless events. Schools and high schools, summer camps, sports, lots of young people. It was an ideal place for young people to grow up, to begin to develop. (Puķītis 2005, p. 41)

Eslingena created a buzz in North America and in Latvia precisely because it was perceived as Legzdiņš' performance of memory. He is well known and well loved in diaspora and in Latvia for founding the musical group *Čikāgas piecīši* (Chicago Five) in 1968. Known for its unpretentious music and hilarious skits poking fun at the Latvian diaspora establishment, it was popular across the generations, except among a handful of the most conservative. The group sustained legendary status among Latvians worldwide for 40 years, well into the early 1990s, when health and age and death took their toll. The *Piecīši* provided Latvian exiles, who were well-practiced in the solemn commemorative practices of geopiety – Yi-Fu Tuan's term for the intense love for home among those separated from it – with the opportunity to laugh rather than wipe away tears (Tuan 1976). The *Piecīši* 'went public'⁸ with the private, iconoclastic, mutterings of the younger generation. Members of the *Piecīši* were children in the DP camps and teens when they entered host countries. They were directly familiar with both the Old Country and the cultural/social life of the refugee camps, but also open to the host societies they encountered. This liminal position propelled and characterized their style and content.

In 1989, just as the Soviet Union was collapsing, the *Piecīši* finally was permitted to perform in Riga. A capacity crowd filled a huge outdoor arena. For most, it was their first look at the *Piecīši* whose records and audio cassettes were smuggled into Soviet Latvia stripped of images and then copied and circulated hand-to-hand as *samizdat*. After independence, the *Piecīši* began to receive less than enthusiastic reviews as the group's daring satiric relevance waned. In a post-*Čikāgas piecīši* era, *Eslingena* provided Legzdiņš, a performer used to applause, with an outlet for his creativity as well as a chance to take stock of his life and of the exile that defined it. Latvians granted Legzdiņš the authority of his vision, though they understood that granting him authority was a different matter from granting him historical accuracy or completeness. Legzdiņš' *Eslingena* was a redemptive tale about adjustment to loss.

To strengthen the play's claim as an authorizing utterance – 'as our story' – Legzdiņš reached beyond his own memories by tapping into what others knew and remembered. He solicited photographs and stories from former Esslingenites scattered throughout the world. They responded with a deluge of materials that lent *Eslingena* a documentary air. As a result, *Eslingena* was an eclectic combination of sources: skits adapted by Legzdiņš from the well-known *Čikāgas piecīši* repertoire,

new scenes written collaboratively in Los Angeles, allusions to autobiographical details, and traditionalized incidents based on countless well-loved stories and iconic images. In press accounts leading up to *Eslingena*'s premieres, Legzdiņš and others created a discourse of collectivity, collaboration, and volunteerism. Vignettes of their life stories recounted and duplicated in newspaper articles⁹ amplified the interpretive importance of *Eslingena* as history and as collectively validated performance.

Legzdiņš' many artistic collaborators constituted an extensive global network of star-groupers. Their involvement gave ample proof of the diaspora Latvians' success in building an infrastructure that could bring together spatially and generationally separated individuals. They were ardent Latvians and successful professionals (including directors, vocalists, sound and video engineers, composers, technical producers, choir conductors) who had worked together previously. Throughout the months of preparation, they came together via email and plane ticket. The artistic collaborators, as Legzdiņš recalls, were 'a creative group, who flew to California for a week, sat at a long table and endlessly tossed out ideas. If one of them was good, we rang a bell and wrote it down' (Puķītis 2005, p. 41).¹⁰ Together, they turned a 'bunch of skits' ('enough for a six-hour performance') into a two-hour libretto, transforming Legzdiņš' 35-page draft by adding 'something about camp life, with its 6,000 inhabitants, something of their joys and sorrows' (Judina 2005, p. 9; Šaitere 2005).

In contrast to the professional status of the production crew and the vocalists, the actors were volunteers and amateurs. They were relatives and friends, active in Latvian-oriented 'other life' activities after work and on weekends. Altogether 51 performers from North America traveled to Riga. Most were recruited from Toronto, but others lived in Hamilton, Montreal, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Philadelphia and Hamburg; nine were from Riga. In Toronto, they rehearsed at a Latvian summer camp from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. for 10 days straight. In Riga, rehearsing at the National Theater, 'No one complained about being exhausted. There was a lot of enthusiasm. And our efforts were rewarded by the response of the audience', said director Vērenieks (Šaitere 2005, n.p.). Actors ranged in age from 6 to 90, but more than 80% were under 45. They were second-, third-, and fourth-generation American-born attendees of Latvian Saturday schools and summer language camps. Musical director Makšiņa told me she recruited the 'cream of the crop' from Toronto's Latvian school: 'The most self-assured, most extroverted, and [the ones who] had the best voices. Not too many [like that] to choose from'. A few of the young cast members demonstrated language ability on stage, but most speaking parts were entrusted to elders, who had an excellent command of Latvian and were seasoned members of Latvian community theater.

Collectively, the cast, crew, and audience constituted an archive of both direct and appropriated stories about the refugee years. Those who wrote, scored, directed, produced, staged, sang, danced, and acted in *Eslingena* recognized its connection to their own lives and this identification intensified *Eslingena* as memory-theater. Only a couple of the older actors had lived in Esslingen, but others (including many in the audience) had lived in comparable camps. Younger members had at least heard stories. A second-generation Latvian remarked to me in Indianapolis that 'Just about every line reminded me of a story I'd heard from my parents'. For audiences in Riga, *Eslingena* was emotionally charged in a way it could not have

been had it been performed by professionals, as Legzdiņš had originally imagined (Laimons 2005, n.p.).

Eslingena's point of view on refugee camp life

Eslingena is the most recent dividend of the exiles' investment in cultural capital and cultural generativity. Latvians from four generations performed together, in Latvian, for thousands of spectators. Its performance created a temporary remembrance space by vividly conjuring up oft-told stories and familiar actions, sights, smells, tastes, and sounds. *Eslingena* selectively accessed, validated, and enlivened the familiar 'talk of the elders' that monopolized exile society and in time came to comprise the narrative canon of community history. Its themes of love and service for the homeland meshed with the ideology of exile practiced since the DP camps (Carpenter 1989). Laimonis Siliņš, a long-time community theater actor and lead in *Eslingena*, is quoted as saying that its quality was 'most impressive', especially 'at a time when exile theater is almost dead We were able to prepare a play which can most definitely be compared to the best that has ever been created in exile. I had never felt so good between the old and the young, between the "stars" and the support crew, as I did during the time of *Eslingena*. *Eslingena* was a miracle'.¹¹

Setting the scene: collective history

Eslingena's libretto is built on an alternating present–past structure of narrated recall and flashback. The 'present' is accomplished through the frame of memory-narration; the past reappears through 19 flashbacks. Flashbacks and musical numbers serve distinct purposes: choruses typically set the scene and characterize the collectivity, while solos confront and lightly linger on painful personal emotions and homesickness. *Eslingena's* core is comprised of humorous skits and songs (that 'bunch of skits' Legzdiņš took to California), which represent camp life in the self-ironic, humorous tone familiar from the repertoire of the *Čikāgas piecīši*. The drama of a love triangle (resolved happily) provides a unifying plotline. The stage is populated by a variety of types: boastful, affluent city dwellers, single mothers and small children, teenagers, frail elders, former soldiers, widows, speculators, professionals. They are shown intermingling with those from other nationalities – flirtatious American soldiers, visiting American generals, angry German civilians, Soviet repatriation officers, German nightclub divas, UNRRA screening officials.

Eslingena begins with the roar of planes and exploding bombs. Historic photos and film footage flash on a large, embedded screen and provide a feeling of documentary authority. The set depicts the German town of Esslingen as a picturesque, historic place that has not been devastated by bombs. After a recorded voiceover summarizes the wartime situation, two actors climb on stage from the audience. They portray a married couple from Canada who lived in Esslingen as young refugees and have returned to visit after 55 years. Their narrated frame projects both the intimate reminiscence of an old married couple and provides a (sometimes stilted) history lesson. Both actors lived in refugee camps as young adults, though not in Esslingen.

Two juxtaposed, introductory flashbacks and songs characterize the situation and mood of the arriving refugees. The first shows them, suitcases in hand, craning their necks and gesturing excitedly as they evaluate Esslingen. Snatches of dialogue function as kernel stories (Kalčík 1975), that is, as brief allusions to the longer stories familiar to the group. For example, a young woman sighs as she recalls the tragic side of refugee life, 'So many ruined lives', while a stylishly dressed older woman prods her henpecked husband, 'Tell the camp commander that we left a seven-room apartment in Riga, and we can't live all cramped together with the other refugees'. To older Latvians, these lines constitute story prompts, as was amply demonstrated by narrative exchanges after the Toronto and Riga performances.

The opening song is set to a melody that is all motion, as if echoing the clatter of the many fast-moving trains that have carried the refugees to this point. It is called 'Eslingena, Eslingena':

Eslingena, Eslingena,
 City by the Nekar River,
 Encircled by historic towers,
 Untouched by the ravages of war,
 Eslingena, Eslingena, Eslingena.

Vineyards blossom all around.
 The people here seem quite nice.
 They work the fields with oxen.
 Strange, how they do that here
 In Eslingena, Eslingena, Eslingena.

We can safely stay here,
 For the war has passed by.
 Nothing has happened here,
 Just a few bombs have been dropped.

The orchards are well-tended,
 The plums will brew strong brandy.
 After the war, we need everything,
 We just have to hold our breath when we drink it
 Here in Eslingena, Eslingena, Eslingena.

Eslingena, Eslingena,
 This will be a good place to stay,
 Who knows when we'll be able
 To go back home.¹²

The refugees become almost carefree as they look around and evaluate Esslingen's abundance: beautiful gardens, lush fields, friendly people – even plums for homemade brandy. The scene is keyed to the irrepressible potential for sociability among these strangers of all ages and backgrounds. The upbeat rhythm emphasizes a willingness to move on with life despite individual fears, uncertainties, and losses. The reference to home-brew drew chuckles from audiences who remembered illicit stills guarded in shifts from the prying eyes of camp officials (see Carpenter 1989;

Sventeckis 2005). In the concluding verse, the present of the past and the present of the future collide. In scripted lyrics, the refugees-as-actors expect to return to Latvia soon. Simultaneously, cast members and audience know that Latvian DPs will live for five decades as self-defined exiles before return is possible.

The second flashback further underscores the readiness for collective action. In rapid-fire dialogue, the refugees bombard the (Latvian) DP camp commander with questions: Will we have schools? What about culture? Will there be sports? But what about parties? They then sing ‘Kas te notiksies?’ (What’s Going to Happen Here?), with its anxious first question: ‘We want to know, we want to know/We want to know, what’s going to happen here?’ In a rousing solo response, the commander projects the future as a satisfying continuation of life in Latvia. He begins in the third-person plural but in the third verse shifts to first-person plural, thus drawing all those present into the creation of their own future:

A huge throng will live together here,
They’ll come, marry, and rejoice.
Like little bugs in the spring,
Infants will soon crawl about everywhere.

Kindergartens will be full of little ones.
A new generation will grow like a wave.
There will be a high school, a grade school,
With two and three sitting on each bench.

Artists will have a roof over their heads,
And we’ll give the best of them prizes.
We’ll publish books, magazines,
And organize concerts and exhibits.

We’ll print Latvian newspapers.
We’ll immediately organize Latvian theater.
I tell you, cultural life here
Will explode like a national rocket.

The refugees grow animated in response to his proffered vision, in which cultural continuity and nation are linked. When they join in to sing with the commander, they enlist in his predictions: ‘we’ will produce children and educate them; ‘we’ will provide for each other’s well-being; ‘we’ will build social solidarity, recognize achievement, plan concerts, print books and newspapers. These images richly evoke the sites of memory associated with camp life. The song’s reference to new generations born and educated in the camps simultaneously warns against expecting a speedy return. Instead, it urgently connects displacement to cultural generativity abroad.

For the young, this prophetic scene is a kernel story writ large – an etiological tale about beginnings. It previews the socially shared sites and practices through which offspring were socialized as Latvians abroad: Saturday schools, patriotic commemorations, folk dance and theater rehearsals and performances, scouts, political demonstrations, summer camps, church confirmations, youth congresses. Participation in *Eslingena* also increased the curiosity of the young about Latvia.

Choreographer Tamāra Ēķe recalled: ‘It was a very moving moment when the young people said they’d never been to the parent’s homeland, but after *Eslingena* they wanted to visit it with all their heart’ (Krauja 2005, p. 11).¹³ In Riga, one of the most popular stories circulating informally and in the press centered on the youngest actor, an eight year old from Toronto who, it was said, begged her parents to take her to Latvia, so she could be in *Eslingena* there.

Missing from *Eslingena*’s remembrances about Latvian cultural life are the solemn national commemorations – e.g. of Latvian Independence Day on 18 November and of the deportations of 14 June 1941. Their absence underscored that *Eslingena* was less about nation than about the human impulse to love, laugh, befriend, reconnect, and survive by building a nurturing substitute community abroad.

Acknowledging the pain

In the third flashback, a young soldier and a young woman sing a split-stage duet called ‘The War is Over’. Stage left, the ex-soldier, Andrejs, sits on his bunk bed in a barracks as his buddies play cards; on the right, Laila, homesick for her family, sits alone on a bed in her room. Andrejs recalls his missing companions, wonders where they are, and mourns the known dead. Laila sings of her home, her parents, the pain of her departure from them and from Latvia. Their refrain echoes the questions introduced in the first two flashbacks: ‘The war is over, but there’s still no peace./Only God knows when peace will come./Can someone tell us/What is going to happen to us?’ The song immerses the audience in memories of – and younger generations in stories about – personally experienced loss. The duet’s poignant melody intensifies the stark setting and conveys the wrenching recent experiences:

Andrejs:

Where are my war buddies today,
Those who fought together with me?
We once walked together on battle fields,
But who knows where they are today?

Laila:

Where are my beloved mother and father today?
Are they walking the paths of our fields?
I cried when I waved goodbye to them,
As I set out alone on my far journey.

Together:

The war is over, but there’s still no peace.
Only God knows when peace will come.
Can someone tell us
What is going to happen to us?

Andrejs:

We were yanked from school benches
And given war uniforms to wear.

We once walked so gaily through the streets of Riga,
Proud to be defending our country's freedom.

Laila:

Today I am in a strange land,
Where foreign tongues sing a foreign song.
I don't know what road to take
Now that all the roads to my land of birth are closed.

Andrejs:

Only a few of us will have savored that first kiss,
Or felt true love
Or whispered promises of eternal faithfulness
To anyone.

Together:

The war is over, but there's still no peace.
Only God knows when peace will come.
Can someone tell us
What is going to happen to us?

The lyrics resonate with motifs and themes recorded in life stories and pervasive in social and commemorative life (Carpenter 1988, 1990; Zirnīte & Hinkle 2003; Bela-Krūmiņa & Zirnīte 2006). The line 'We were yanked from school benches' is another kernel story, frequently fleshed out with personal memories. Another familiar image is that of the 'empty chairs of classmates' following the deportations of 14 June 1941. Both convey the sense of unexpected and unwelcome recruitment and characterize the time as one of unanticipated, almost randomized, threats perpetrated on innocents by the Soviets. On the other hand, the line 'We once walked so gaily through the streets of Riga, / Proud to be defending our country's freedom' undercuts the idea of unwilling service. It alludes to the soldiers' and the nation's pride in the *cīņa* waged on behalf of Latvian independence and against Soviet power. In lyrics and through scraps of dialogue and brief asides, the ex-soldiers transmit the communally authorized interpretation of the past: i.e. Latvia's young men, who heroically fought for Latvia's freedom, were unfairly cast out of the DP camps, segregated in barracks, and barred from emigrating to the United States.

Re-experiencing agency, with a lighthearted touch

The mood of uncertainty and longing created in the introductory flashbacks gives way to refugee action, lightheartedness, self-irony, and frivolity in the next five: school children protest overzealous school marms who harp upon the minutia of Latvian history ('How many cows were there in Latvia and at what times were they milked?'), speculators provide scarce provisions through traditional shenanigans (hiding a pig in a baby carriage),¹⁴ a volunteer crew of 'academic elites' marches off to cut wood, audiences frantically rush from one cultural and social event to another, friends

socialize in a corner tavern while young girls flirtatiously jitter-bug with American soldiers, and the refugees contemplate emigration.¹⁵

The juxtaposition of pathos and humor prompted several audience members to observe that ‘there was great sorrow behind the light-heartedness’ of *Eslingena*. ‘The Anti-Emigration Song’ (Dziesma pret emigrāciju) is a case in point. It is sung and danced to a samba beat, even though its subject is the anxiety-producing period of UNRRA screenings for emigration. Eligibility and destination depended upon age, health, and family composition. There are reports of aged family members committing suicide in order to facilitate emigration for the rest of the family (Carpenter 1990). The words of the song hint at the heated internal debates about emigration vs. ‘waiting it out right here’ in Germany. Those who too quickly began to contemplate emigration were labeled ‘traitors’ to Latvia (see, for example, Sveteckis 2005, p. 94). In contrast to the streets paved with gold saga associated with economic emigrants, the song projects stereotypical images of host countries that suggest the DPs will be exploited and unappreciated. The samba beat pokes fun at Latvians headed for what was perceived to be the most exotic and unsuitable place of all – Brazil:

Only problems await you in Brazil
Where you’ll have to work on the rancheros.
Bugs will crawl all over you, they’ll sting and buzz.
At night bats will suck your blood.

Ai, ai, ai, ai, ai, ai,
Hot days and mucho problemas in the South
Ai, ai, ai, ai, ai, ai,
Hot days and mucho problemas in the South

When at night you dream of your lover’s touch
It’ll be a huge boa constrictor climbing into your bed.
It’ll crawl up to you like the queen of the tropics
Squash you like a pancake and slowly eat you up!

Ai, ai, ai, ai, ai, ai,
Hot days and mucho problemas in the South
Ai, ai, ai, ai, ai, ai,
Hot days and mucho problemas in the South

It’ll even be hard in America, where you’ll be worked to death
If you don’t work fast enough, the bosses will chew you out.
I don’t recommend going far away from the homeland. No!
Only in Hollywood does everything turn out OK.

And in Canada, oh horrors! You’ll see for yourself
In the winter, you’ll fish for seals with the Eskimos.
You’ll cut trees in British Columbia,
But you’ll drink up your wages on payday.

Ai, ai, ai, ai, ai, ai,
Consider carefully,
How you’re going to fare in strange lands.

Eslingena's cast and its audiences in North America and in Latvia experienced the past depicted on stage from today's distance and today's concerns about the future. The play elicited a powerful contrast between the destitute and fearful refugees on stage and the relatively well-heeled, secure audiences and cast members. Audiences fleshed out scenes of the past with their personal knowledge of 'what happened next', whether to themselves, to someone else or to the community as a whole. They knew how much of what was first imagined and achieved in the camps in the name of collectivity – and was mimetically embodied on stage in *Eslingena* – came to fruition in host countries over the next five decades.

Receptions and recontextualizations: Toronto and Riga

North American reception

Eslingena was written for the 2004 Toronto Latvian Song Festival. Song festivals have taken place in North America every five years since 1953 and attract audiences of between six and eight thousand (Carpenter 1996b). Musicals are a staple of the festival schedule. In Toronto, tickets for all four performances of *Eslingena* sold out. Scalpers reportedly were asking more than \$300 for the few available tickets (Krauja 2005, p. 11).

Because of *Eslingena*'s subject matter, enthusiasm was high. Expectations about its artistic quality, on the other hand, were guarded. Latvian diaspora cultural performances depend on volunteer efforts and audiences attend out of loyalty and nostalgia,¹⁶ happy that 'something is still being performed in Latvian'. The 'old masters' trained in Latvia are no more (as they were in the DP camps and in the early years abroad), and there are no viable economic opportunities for Latvian artists. *Eslingena*'s level of professionalism was a happy surprise to the audiences and even to the performers themselves. Director Vērenieks recalls warning his cast that *Eslingena* 'won't be a volunteer undertaking, so you'll have to observe strict discipline. I'm more of a pessimist than an optimist. I need everything to be perfect' (Šaitere 2005, n.p.). After the last curtain went down to enthusiastic applause on the final night in Toronto, the troupe reportedly burst out in a thunderous, if unprofessional, cheer for their own achievement.

By sidestepping post-modern 'mires of memory', *Eslingena* served as a 'cultural silencer' on stage. But off stage – before, even during, and certainly after the show – the displacement of the somber notes of commemoration by the upbeat rhythms of musical comedy prompted strong and varied response. Few were indifferent and everyone was speaking at once in the animated surround of informal talk. The complexities of competing memories prompted disputation and elaboration. Rehearsals in Toronto had triggered several exchanges 'because everyone remembered the time, the circumstances, the people differently' (quoted from Vērenieks in Šaitere 2005, n.p.; see also Judina 2005, p. 9). For some, *Eslingena*'s sunny interpretation invalidated the play as a representation of their experience and history. The most extreme comment I heard came from a woman who had been a child in the Esslingen DP camp. She told Legzdīņš – and others – that he had 'raped Esslingen'. The exaggerated scenes of the speculators, the 'unpleasant Lido bar girls',

the too-pervasive humor offended her.¹⁷ Many asked, ‘Where were depictions of the heartache, the funerals, the losses, and hardships?’

Post-performance reflections continued in print and online. In a letter to the editor of *Laiks*, a man who had submitted memories to Legzdiņš wrote that he felt ‘he had been erased’. Māra Gulēna, long-time editor of the *Toronto ziņas* (<http://www.torontozinās.com/>) and one of the most active second-generation Latvians, was less interested in *Eslingena*’s truth value than in its potential to unmoor her cohorts’ comfortable reification of the past. She writes (in English) that *Eslingena* relied on the formula that undergirded Latvian events for more than 60 years abroad: ‘Let’s keep together, let’s create a small Latvia, and let’s not give up’. The rich cultural infrastructure created ‘little Latvian islands’ from which to draw energy and on which to feel ‘at home’; enforced Latvian language use filtered out the unworthy and closed off a broader social surround. Now, however, there was Latvia itself. Events like the song festival and *Eslingena* no longer produced that old ‘adrenalin rush of anticipation’, and that ‘intense feeling of “being Latvian”’ no longer had to be ‘chased around the globe’ of diaspora. She asks: ‘If we were always so intent on being together, [why] haven’t we all moved to Latvia?’ Why do those who go there ‘end up confused that we don’t feel the same togetherness and warmth [there that we did on our] self-made islands’? She answers her own question: ‘We want Latvians from Latvia to blend into our Latvian enclaves with *Eslingenian* zeal, even though our mini-Latvia concept is completely foreign to them’. *Eslingena* suggested to her that it was ‘time to give the islands a farewell’.¹⁸

In contrast to Gulēna’s reflections on the past, *Eslingena* conjured up fears about the future for Minnesota Latvian Andris Straumanis, editor of *Latvians Online* (<http://www.latviansonline.com/>). He describes the final song, ‘Vai tu vari tagad pateikt?’ (Can You Now Tell Me?), whose lyrics ask a variant of the question with which *Eslingena* began: ‘Can you now tell me what is going to happen in our lives? In what direction will the winds carry us? Where will the boats take us?’ Positioned at the end of the play, the question is re-cast from the chaos of wartime and the hopes for return to fears about the imminent scattering of emigration. Straumanis poses questions about the diaspora’s future:

Why did I cry? It wasn’t for the love story that was the underlying theme of ‘*Eslingena*’. It wasn’t longing for life in the DP camps, because I was born a decade too late. It was for once again catching a wave in that collective memory we as Latvians share, one that we perhaps too often forget

At the end of ‘*Eslingena*’, the audience joined hands and, led by the actors and crew, sang again the closing song: ‘Vai tu vari man tagad pateikt, Kas mums dzīvē notiks?’ Can you tell me now what will become of us? It is a question that is as relevant now as it was in the Esslingen DP camp, and as it has been in much of Latvian history.

We don’t know the answer. That’s why I cried.

Eslingena recontextualized informal accounts of DP experience and triggered a multilayered reconstitution of the past (Bauman & Briggs 1990). For its historical authority and collective point of view, *Eslingena* relied on what Richard Schechner (in writing about restored behavior; see Schechner 1985) refers

to as ‘the already said’ – that is, on the script, the skits of the *Čikāgas piecīši*, and the talk of the elders from which both derived. The ‘just now said’ on stage created an experience-in-common for cast and audience. But by embodying a particular version of the past, *Eslingena* enlivened a spirited ‘to be said’ off stage, as friends and family fleshed out, evaluated, debated – and thus transmitted – diverse versions and variants of remembered experience.

Eslingena recontextualized in Riga

The idea of touring *Eslingena* to Latvia surfaced during its triumphant performances in Toronto, prompted in part by the encouragement of visitors from Latvia. Legzdiņš considered offering the script to the National Theater but his troupe protested, claiming they had ‘earned’ the chance to perform in Riga. They agreed to cover all personal expenses, so that fundraising could target transporting necessary equipment, costumes, and printing. *Eslingena* was rehearsed and staged at the historic National Theater, a stage ripe with meaning. Nineteenth-century Latvian theater first premiered there, and Latvian independence was proclaimed there in 1918. Throughout the rehearsals, older troupe members shared personal memories of being backstage as children or having acting careers cut short by the war.

Traveling to Riga to perform *Eslingena* was indeed to step off familiar territory and to go before audiences who did not share the DP frame of reference. It was also clear that Legzdiņš and others feared they might be misunderstood by or disgraced before the sophisticated theater-going public in Riga. In media interviews in the spring of 2004, Legzdiņš and Vērenieks prepped Latvian audiences by speaking about *Eslingena*. Legzdiņš stated and re-stated a range of missions in Riga: to entertain, to stimulate interest, perhaps even to effect better diaspora–native relations by redressing a ‘gap in historical knowledge’, to show the activity- and creativity-filled *milieu* born in the refugee camps despite the harsh reality of the times, to charge up Latvia’s Latvians (Burve 2005, p. 22; Judina 2005, p. 9). Along with others, Vērenieks feared that *Eslingena* would evoke memories about Siberia among audiences in Riga and thereby trigger a competition about suffering that not only would displace refugee history but also would leave the impression that the DPs only ‘lived it up’ in the camps – dancing, singing, courting, laughing. He stressed: ‘I want people to understand – no one was shooting at us in Esslingen. We were not starving to death, as were many Latvians in Siberia, but our food was spongy American white bread and most often a green soup, which we called ‘the green horror’. Many of us were a little bit hungry all the time’ (Šaitere 2005, n.p.). As late as the dress rehearsal (which was opened to the public because of demand for tickets), Vērenieks signaled the troupe’s continuing anxiety. Coming out from behind the curtain wearing a baseball cap, slacks, and T-shirt, he issued a contextualizing disclaimer about the troupe’s intent and underscored again that *Eslingena* was Alberts Legzdiņš’ interpretation of the past, not an inclusive – or multi-sided – historical account. To my knowledge, nothing like this happened in Toronto.

I’m so emotionally high right now. Almost all the seats for the dress rehearsal have been sold. That’s amazing. I am sweating beads of fear, seeing you all. We’re not here as any kind of fat cats – no, that’s not what we want to suggest.

We've also not come here for you to feel sorry for us. Alberts Legzdiņš wants to show you a time period – his memories about that time. Others contend, 'It wasn't like that.' But these are Alberts' memories, and so we go along with him. Watch it, experience it, and judge for yourself. (Author's translation)

Despite this disclaimer, cast members reported that during his frequent reminiscences about Esslingen, Vērenieks claimed *Eslingena* as a story about his youth as well.

Other troupe members similarly voiced anxiety: there had been too much hoop-la and the performance would fall short of expectations; audiences would think they had been paid to perform and would critique them as 'professionals';¹⁹ native audiences would miss the most important point that *Eslingena* demonstrates, namely 'who we became and who we are'. Worry about audience reception increased as word spread about the high volume of early ticket sales.²⁰

Eslingena's directors became perfectionists in Riga. Each one had a personal, historical or professional stake in the quality of the production. All took license in proffering advice beyond their official capacity, thus creating something of a free-for-all and a director's nightmare, though Vērenieks took it in stride, publicly at least. 'Don't hope for great support from the audience' became a generalized warning that increased everyone's performance anxiety. Vērenieks said that the kinds of things that could be overlooked in Toronto would matter in Riga: 'be conscious of what you're playing, what's going on, and act accordingly'. Sound director Lolita Ritmane told the cast they had 'accomplished a lot' and were 'doing well, remarkably well for amateurs', but then went on to ask: 'Do we want to be better? I'm uncomfortable in telling you this, but the theater folks are coming up to me and saying, "Do they think it's so easy?"' During rehearsals, Vērenieks was quick to yell, chastise, be blunt in his criticism for weak acting, failure to emote, even for unprofessional tardiness: 'I want you here on time. Don't arrive 15–20 minutes late. Take an earlier trolley. You are not tourists!' The sound directors demanded meticulous attention to microphone placement. Choreographer Tamāra Ēķe pulled rank as a Riga native when she repeatedly and bluntly reminded the cast that 'she knew this audience well' and their expectations would be high. She drilled the dancers with such intensity that I feared some of the young women, struggling with tricky swing routines, would break bones or strain muscles. The musical director wanted 'correct Latvian pronunciation'. Legzdiņš typically whispered his observations to Vērenieks, but occasionally would also freely yell out from his seat. Such criticism alternated with pep talks: Ēķe praised her dancers for their progress; the musical director recognized the troupe's fatigue but urged them on: 'There won't be another event like this one, so give it your all'; Vērenieks said he had to admit 'that yesterday things were already better. On Monday there was chaos. Yesterday partial chaos'.²¹

Recontextualizing *Eslingena* in Riga was disorienting for the troupe. To prepare for the new interpretive frame, Legzdiņš and Ritmanis rewrote minor parts of the script. In order to downplay the better living conditions in the DP camps compared to Siberia, they deleted references to the abundance of rich food. To avoid language misunderstandings, they changed words adapted from English ('janitors'). The word *Leģionāri* was neutralized to 'ex-soldiers'. This shift was difficult for the actors, who

not only had used *Leģionāri* in Toronto but who also were accustomed to it as a commonly used word of opprobrium, not a taboo. Up to the last day of rehearsal, Vērenieks repeatedly corrected actors: 'Four times now you have used the no-no word', that is, *Leģionāri*.

Used to thinking of Latvia from the perspective of the West, the cast easily slipped from scripted roles into life roles. They often misspoke: pronouncing words as they would in English (Eisenhower, not Ēzenhauer) or identifying home as Los Angeles not Riga. A young actor from Chicago said 'when I return from Latvia' (what he normally does) rather than 'when I return to Latvia' (what he would have hoped to do from the refugee camps). The dancers had a hard time thrusting their hips forward and backward in the swing number. As one dancer put it, 'I'm used to my Latvian folk dance stance, not this'. Latvian grammar lessons abounded. Legzdiņš sought advice on 'labākās kundēs' vs. 'labākie kundēs' (best customers). Directors corrected the harsh sound of the letter 't' which has become an identity marker and a source of ridicule by natives of English-speaking Latvians. On the other hand, when the tables were turned, diaspora Latvians tread lightly. The heavy English accent of two Riga natives who played American soldiers was noted by the crew but when they urged Legzdiņš to 'talk to them, teach them', he demurred (at least publicly). Their accent remained. Code-switching and the insertion of English words into Latvian sentences prevailed during moments of high stress.²²

Coaching through stories. Periodically, a kind of 'stop-action' punctuated rehearsals, as memory exploded on stage. Vērenieks repeatedly encouraged the cast to imagine themselves on the very landscape they had so often narrativized.²³ One of the young cast members told me that Vērenieks prefaced just about every scene in Toronto with a story. The opening formula for his spirited reminiscences was 'I want you to feel the experience so you can act it out on stage, so I'll tell you about what happened to me when ...'. He urged the older actors to 'remember how you felt, what you did. The suitcases were heavy and precious – carry them accordingly'. They would sometimes validate his experience, thus generalizing memory, but they would often also proffer a contrary view. In rehearsing a scene that recreates a confirmation ceremony, a heated debate about flowers reached beyond the stage into the darkened theater: 'There's a sea of flowers at Latvian confirmations. What you've got is skimpy', Legzdiņš yelled out from his seat. 'You're mixing up what we do today with then. We were all poor then', retorted an actor on stage. Vērenieks ended the dispute by saying, 'There were always flowers growing in the fields', thereby invoking popular images of Latvians as resourceful and as nature lovers. He ended the debate by ordering the prop manager 'to get more flowers'.

Coaching-through-stories enhanced everyone's performance, but it affected the post-memory competency of the young most directly. They were actors suddenly turned audience, learning from the excited exchange of their elders. In contrast to the depth and complexity of detail known to their parents, the young 'look back' with nostalgic sentimentality to a world they never lost. By performing in *Eslingena*, they became links in the biological and cultural chain, proxy-rememberers and transmitters. Post-memory competency expanded as they absorbed the content and its aesthetic emotion into their own bodies, as they inhabited what Schechner calls a

'not-me/not-not me' self. *Eslingena* mediated life-storytelling, extracting something from one life and making it available for others to incorporate – or to dispute. 'He's begun to repeat himself', a teenager lamented. 'By now we all know his stories by heart'.

Audience reception in Riga. Latvian natives were intrigued by *Eslingena* partly because they were curious about diaspora Latvians, who are both admired and envied for their apparent material and professional success. Just about every family has direct knowledge through relatives or friends abroad. Excitement thus was high, but expectations of *Eslingena's* theatrical quality were low because of previously experienced diaspora amateur productions performed in Latvia. The score and vocalists drew the heartiest reviews. Riga audiences, especially younger ones, liked its pop music sound. On my way into rehearsal one day, I asked a guard what he thought of the music emanating from the theater. He replied, 'It's not what we're used to, but we like it'. Audiences responded positively to *Eslingena's* self-irony. Legzdiņš got high marks for lyrics that – as is his wont – 'hit the nail on the head' and moved the plot along through succinctly rendered vignettes and indexical phrases or words. He got low marks from critics who described his lyrics as banal and primitive; his melodies, as sing-songy. More than one person suggested that if *Eslingena* had been written by a native Latvian for native audiences, 'it would have been one long whine'.

Audience response foregrounded the divergent experiences and memories of Latvians at home and abroad. In each setting, *Eslingena* prompted a flood of memories and the nudge of recognition, indicated by the prod of an elbow, a smile, exchanged glances, whispers during the performance as well as the buzz of talk during intermission, after the last curtain-call, and, by all accounts, during many exchanges in subsequent social occasions and letters to the editor and on websites (see *Latvians Online* and *Toronto ziņas*). As a live performance event, *Eslingena* was constantly open to alteration. Something unexpected – a gasp, a laugh, tears from the audience, a flub, an improvisation by the cast – made each night's performance unique. Cast members reported that in Toronto the intensity of audience response was palpable: tears alternating with abundant laughter affected their performance.

In Riga, emblematic stories revealed the experiential differences. For example, the confirmation scene had little personal meaning for Latvians who had lived in a secular society; the sprightly chorus line of departing coal miners shared subject territory with the deadly coal mines of Siberia and prompted a catch in the breath rather than gaiety. The 'school marm' scene elicited mutual glee. However, the teacher's admonition about the importance of maintaining cultural identity abroad, 'You'll disappear in the world's sea and won't amount to this or that' (*Pazudīs pasaules jūrā un nebūs ne šīs ne tas*), hit a sore point among homeland Latvians anxious about the large numbers of Latvians emigrating for work in Ireland. Native/diaspora difference emerged most clearly in a scene depicting the arrival of Soviet repatriation officers in the camps. Though they were stereotypically ridiculed (through slang, gestures, costumes, and propagandistic lines),²⁴ in Toronto they had produced a gut fear that muted laughter. In Riga, audiences laughed heartily. Intermission came soon after this

scene and I could sense the excitement it had generated. The musical director stopped me in the lobby to say excitedly, ‘Inta, you have to write about the repatriation officers for they were a sensation!’ Latvians who had lived with Soviet power and propaganda credited *Eslingena* for daring so aptly and openly to satirize the Soviets, something for which they themselves do not yet have the distance.

In Riga, a parallel repertoire of stories about World War II emerged in response to *Eslingena*. For example, I struck up a conversation with a woman sitting beside me at the dress rehearsal performance. She was in her seventies, from a small town in northwest Latvia. She had come to see *Eslingena* because her family had housed and fed refugees as well as Russian and German soldiers in 1944. She was particularly agitated by the depiction of the Soviet repatriation officers. ‘They were too civilized’, she contended, and then elaborated with a grizzly recounting that concluded, ‘My parents, of course, hid me from them, for I was a young girl and they were monsters’. For her, the portrayal of the Soviets had been too frivolous; the somber history she had experienced could not be rekeyed to laughter. She also challenged the depiction of Latvian soldiers. By her account, they had not been uniformly dedicated to fighting for Latvia’s freedom. As they sensed defeat, she claimed, they would do anything to evade service – deliberately break a leg, for example. Despite these experiential disjunctions, *Eslingena* brought tears to her eyes and she applauded it, saying: ‘Marvelous, marvelous’ (*burvīgi*).

Before going to Riga, I was among those who thought that *Eslingena*’s monologic content would trigger memory as a competition about suffering and thus displace Legzdīņš’ desire to educate and reconcile. And to a certain degree it did. I was told of exile–native gatherings in Riga where comparative stories about Siberia had dominated (and ruined) an evening. There seemed to be a marked tendency, however, to attribute such comparisons to generational difference: older Latvians, I was told, are simply bitter, and a touch jealous.²⁵

I myself experienced a comparative storytelling exchange on my first day in Riga when my mother and I visited her brother and his wife, Vija. When Vija learned of my research interest in *Eslingena* she responded with a story about her friend Ārija. I jotted down a paraphrased account afterwards. Ārija had been deported to Siberia – where she experienced hunger, terrible cold, hard labor, and ever-present death. Ārija denied Latvians abroad the right to the word ‘exile’ since they had left Latvia of their own accord. Vija reported her friend saying: ‘It makes me sick to hear them refer to themselves as exiles’. Vija did not explicitly concur with her friend’s estimation but by telling the story to two (self-styled exile) Latvian-Americans (my mother and me) she in effect disputed an equal claim to the designation ‘exile’. Through the reported speech she attributed to Ārija with its pronoun *viņi* (they), meaning ‘not-us’, she joined the prevalent Othering of Latvians abroad.

In response, my mother did not contest the use of the word ‘exile’ but immediately launched into the story of her departure from Latvia, with me, then a six-week-old baby, in her arms. For months, she said, she had no basin or hot water to wash me. Finally, she got permission to use one of the big pots in the camp kitchen. When she lowered me into the warm water, I screamed. She had pulled me out without washing me, for fear that the noise would awaken others and get the cook in trouble. We all laughed heartily at her story, in which she had turned hardship

into farce. She followed with another. An acquaintance she and her brother knew from their childhood was in the DP camps. He had had a hard time adjusting to the rich fare and had gone to the woods to pick berries. Happily returning with a bucketful, he meets an UNRRA staff member who takes one look at the berries, assumes the man is starved, grabs the bucket, empties it, and, to the man's horror, fills it with fatty meat.

In a vein similar to *Eslingena*, my mother's stories hinted at sorrow but were told so as to elicit laughter. Vija's story, on the other hand, intended no laughter. It was that 'long whine' Latvians expected of themselves. My mother concluded by describing an interaction that she had had with a woman from Riga after they watched *Eslingena* on video in Indianapolis. My mother had asked her how she had liked it. In response, the woman described her hardships in Siberia, leaving my mother with the impression that in this woman's estimation Latvians in the West had suffered 'very little', and suffering was a mark of honor.

Overall, *Eslingena* in Riga successfully mediated the staged representation of diasporic memory and the co-present outpouring of homeland memories. Most audiences seemed to understand that self-imposed exile in the West could not usefully be compared to Soviet deportations to Siberia. A regional high school superintendent in his early forties considered *Eslingena* a *notikums* (a happening), comparable to the 1990 song festival that first brought large numbers of exiles to Latvia. He speculated that *Eslingena* would arouse interest in refugee history. When our talk turned to the two 'exiles' (Siberia and the West), he found little basis for comparison. A musical comedy, he said, is an apt genre for the DP camps where Latvians were clustered together in a supportive environment and where they didn't fear for their lives. He concluded a bit facetiously that *Eslingena's* biggest contribution might be to demonstrate that 'something good can come from the West'. His quip alluded both to the tense relations between homeland and diaspora Latvians and to the European disdain for Western popular culture.

Eslingena's prompting of a more positive than usual assessment of Latvians abroad – despite their heavy accents and their often overbearing manner – was reiterated by Canadian cast member Sandra Cifersone's account of her goodbyes to guards at the National Theater:

On the last day when I returned the keys to the changing rooms to the guard and thanked him for his help, I said: 'Now you will finally get some peace and quiet after this large attack'. To this he replied that the workers of the theater had talked about how sad they will be to see us leave, because we had surprised them with our enormous Latvian passion, with how happily and professionally we worked, and, most importantly – how we had accepted them in our midst and worked together like one large family. He asked us to bring another production to Latvia! (*Toronto ziņas* #93, 13 September 2005)

In Riga, *Eslingena* served as a catalyst for self-reflection. Post-independence natives seem befuddled about how to create a collective identity and how to build solidarity. 'We can only marvel at how powerfully Latvian identity is still maintained' abroad, wrote one critic (Eglīte 2005, n.p.). Audiences seemed less intrigued by *Eslingena* as history than by its demonstration of agency – both in the referential past of

the DP camps and in current diaspora. *Eslingena*'s last song, 'Vai tu vari tagad pateikt?' (Can You Now Tell Me?), with its emphasis on the idea of sticking together as a strategy for survival, brought tears in North America. In Riga it prompted questions: what are *we* prepared to do collectively? How do we rehabilitate the idea of collective action after the 'involuntary volunteerism' imposed by the Soviets? How do we move beyond our spoiled identity? *Eslingena* demonstrated the bodily basis to community (Noyes 1995, p. 469): how 'acting' in common made community real – whether in the DP camps or now on stage (and behind). It affirmed human resilience. People meet, fall in love, marry, have children, want to learn, want to do. The lyrics of the penultimate song, 'Going Toward a New Life', captured this human, rather than narrowly ethnic or broadly national, response to adversity and uncertainty: 'Sometimes we cry, sometimes we laugh . . . but through language and song/perhaps we'll survive'. For Latvians in Latvia, the capacity of diaspora Latvians to organize socially and to produce culturally remains vibrant, perhaps even enviably so.

Conclusion: Embodied Generativity

In 1990, still in the frame of 'exile', diaspora Latvians temporarily 'returned home' during the 20th Latvian Song Festival in Riga (Carpenter 1996b). Choirs from dozens of diaspora colonies climbed on stage to sing together with natives. Exiles officially embraced the 1990 festival because it was the first one publicly to recoup independent Latvia's – *their* Latvia's – history and repertoire. They expected an easy merger: blood would erase distance and time. They failed to take into account that the passively shared qualities of birth and language were insufficient for generating a shared social identity. Diaspora Latvians found themselves in alien territory and among people who referred to them not as Latvians but as *ārzemieki* – foreigners. Furthermore, natives seemed ignorant or little impressed by their 50-year struggle on behalf of Latvia. They were viewed as rich relatives who hadn't suffered either the Soviet deportations and oppression or economic deprivations. They felt erased, separated, and a decade-plus of strained relations followed this first return and encounter.

In 2005, diaspora Latvians dared to climb on stage in Riga *alone*, performing *Eslingena* despite their fear of native critique, their doubt about their theatrical abilities, and their less certain authority as 'Latvians in Latvia'. When audiences in Riga praised *Eslingena* and the actors (for their stamina, resilience, creativity, resolve, and dual competency), diaspora Latvians basked in the desired but unaccustomed glory. But something more happened.

Recontextualized in Riga, *Eslingena* was successful as a generative tool for the diaspora Latvians themselves who, by performing in Riga, were touched in a variety of ways: 'During the last play, our youngest cast members had tears in their eyes knowing the dream was about to end. I dried their tears and tried to pacify them by saying there will be other shows' (Alberts Legzdīņš); 'I was most impressed by the feeling of solidarity among the *Eslingena* cast – we operated like one large family . . . I will never forget the wonderful summer evenings after the performances, which I spent together with the other members of the cast in various Riga restaurants and beer gardens' (Arnis Markitants); 'I am still euphoric about *Eslingena*.

Something within me has definitely changed' (Kaiva Sukse) (see *Toronto ziņas* #93, posted 13 December 2005). The *doing* of *Eslingena* generated new experiences, new stories, and new interpretations of self and community.

Eslingena displayed the dual cultural competency of the diaspora: the knowledge of things Latvian and the assimilation of other cultural styles and forms and identities. In performance, the cast (and, vicariously, also diaspora Latvians in the audience) became real to themselves in new terms, not as the 'pure' Latvians they had expected to be at the 1990 song festival, but as the only kind of Latvians they could be: *Latvians abroad* who had become so by living through, not despite, difference (Hall 1990, p. 235; 1993). This Westernized self was not embraced in 1990 when exiles still thought of themselves as – or hoped for themselves to be – Latvians-in-kind with those at home. *Eslingena* demonstrated that diasporas create new forms through contestation over authenticity and ownership of culture. The song festival had been about an imagined nation; *Eslingena* was about coming to terms with an unexpected life turning and being transformed in the process. In 1990, exiles tried to suppress what in *Eslingena* they now displayed as authentic: namely, the uncontestable fact that they were inhabited by the many colliding rhythms of the America *they inhabited*. In the end, those little Latvian islands were not so isolated after all. While diaspora Latvians feared disgracing themselves as amateurs, they no longer asked to be accepted as natives but as what they had become.

After the final performance in Riga, *Eslingena* ceased to exist as theatrical performance, but it continues to be re-recontextualized – in memory exchanges, as CD and video, in diaspora 'DP parties' (where costumed guests may arrive with or without suitcases). *Eslingena* is available as artefact and as scripted potentiality. Like everyday forms of expressive culture, it can be rekeyed for new interpretive frames. Yet it perhaps does expressive culture one better. The traditions upon which *Eslingena* is based at best exist as well-performed and memorable talk in small groups. But increasingly, stories grounded in direct memory will die away and post-memories will grow thin. *Eslingena's* power as an instance of cultural generativity resides in its coherent storyline that shifts the past tense of narration to the present tense of enactment. *Eslingena* recontextualizes community memory by knitting episodic accounts together into a whole that stands for the past, at least as Alberts Legzdīņš remembers it. Its embodied memory will outlast the originating group – exiles – and contemporary discourses will continuously amplify and renew its meaning. *Eslingena's* cultural generativity lives in the possibility that ever-new bodies will take audiences 'back to the camp again' to re-experience the emotions and speak the words of elders to subsequent generations (albeit perhaps in translation and certainly with subtitles).²⁶

Notes

- 1 *Eslingena's* sponsors in Toronto and Riga included Latvian and Latvian-American cultural and political organizations, private companies (which donated funds, hosted meals, and shipped props to Riga), cultural centers (which provided rehearsal space), and embassies (which financed receptions). In Riga, the National Theater provided rehearsal and performance space at no cost beyond utilities and wages for staff. Newspapers, websites, magazines, radio and TV provided

ample coverage before, during, and after the performances. (From an interview with *Eslingena* cast member Arnis Markitants posted on the *Toronto ziņas* website, #92, 22 June 2005.)

- 2 Documenting the rehearsals and performances of *Eslingena* in Riga was the toughest fieldwork I've ever done, largely because I had stepped into a temporarily constituted tight community of insiders, some of whose relationships extended over decades and whose depth of meaning I could never fully grasp. I also knew, as I was doing this work, that post-performance interviews were unlikely, given the widely dispersed cast. My presence at the rehearsals was sanctioned by Legzdiņš, who introduced me to the crew in true Legzdiņš' style with these teasing words: 'She plans to write something scholarly about us, as if that's possible – so, talk to her seriously'. I was a stranger, hanging around during a stressful time. I was competing with eager press journalists from Latvia and from abroad whose interviews would yield immediate dividends – publicity. The cast was preoccupied and fatigued. On free days, they scurried to sightsee or visit relatives and friends. I abandoned my original plan to ask 'pre-performance' and biographical questions. I relied instead on abundant media reports, participant observation, notes, and targeted but unrecorded conversations. The cast members were friendly and open. The older ones easily launched into autobiographical stories. I taped only one interview, with *Eslingena*'s choreographer, Tamāra Ēķe, who lives in Riga and would be inaccessible to me after I returned to the United States.
- 3 It is a stigma that still rankles and that has been transmitted to younger generations. When introducing the video of *Eslingena* to an audience in Indianapolis in 2004, the young president of the Latvian community center invoked familiar rhetoric when he referred to *Eslingena* as part of the battle (*cīņa*) that Latvians waged via cultural action. The word '*cīņa*' connected the play to stories of the heroic *cīņa* of the Latvian Legion for Latvia's independence.
- 4 The close quarters inevitably turned the DP camps into tiny villages where everyone's actions were observed and judged. *Eslingena* humorously depicts the camp's gossiping women (*nometnes klaču bābas*) as familiar character types.
- 5 This excerpt from a letter written by a Latvian refugee to a well-known Latvian writer also living in Germany illustrates how children absorbed and reacted to the 'idea of Latvia' that was being transmitted to them in the camps and later in host countries:

Jānīts each night asks me, 'When will we return to Latvia?' and I always say, 'Soon, soon, little boy, when you grow just a bit bigger'. He knows that there are beautiful forests, beautiful rivers, beautiful birches and meadows and green grass in Latvia, where you can roll and turn somersaults, without fear from all sorts of bugs. Silvīte continues to think that Latvia is one large house. She says, 'When we get to Latvia, we will close all the door and windows, then the communists will not get in any more'. (Janunsudrabiņš 1956, p. 293; Carpenter 1989)

In a summer 2005 issue of the Latvian-American newspaper *Laiks*, Ints Rupners, past president of the Free World Federation of Latvians, reiterates a version of Latvia as Lost Paradise: 'Our parents and grandparents . . . left as sacrificial lambs of an idyllic Ulmanis vision (*ulmaniskās idilles upuri*). In their memories, Latvia was perfect – everything was beautiful, a paradise. The war, distance, separation caused them to

forget a few memories' (*Laiks*, 18–24 June, p. 13). Kārlis Ulmanis was the last president (1936–40) of the first independent Latvia. He was deported by Soviet authorities to Siberia, where he died. The exile establishment revered him for his patriotism and dedication to Latvia's cultural, social, and economic development, although liberal Latvians viewed him as an authoritarian president (Plakans 1995).

6 In Madrid, Māris Ķirsons, then a 39-year-old Lutheran minister from Philadelphia, punctured a vein and dripped blood on a Soviet flag to protest Moscow's dominance of the Baltic states. In 1985, 300 Baltic diaspora youths boarded 'The Baltic Star' to sail along the coasts of Latvia and Estonia as part of the 'The Baltic Peace and Freedom Cruise'.

7 At a Baltic Studies conference Lithuanian literary scholar Rimvydas Šilbajoris once quipped that the older generation of exiles 'never left in order to never return'.

8 Agata Nesaule also went public, in her case with a memoir called *Woman in Amber* (1995), in which she writes about personally experienced horrors during the war and the Latvian community's unresolved issues of anti-Semitism. Nesaule broke the accepted diaspora establishment norms for memoirs and was severely criticized for her blunt and unflinching outspokenness. Although Legzdiņš and Nesaule both turn personal experiences into stories (or skits), the communal authority granted to them differs, partially perhaps because of the difference in the nature of their textual production – comedy vs. testimony.

9 I plan to interview Legzdiņš in the future, for a post-*Eslingena* reflection. In this article, I focus on media representations of the play and the lives of its troupe.

10 Media accounts reveal the high degree of traditionalizing among friends and collaborators, e.g. Lolita Ritmane's version of the collaboration in *Laiks* (9–15 July 2005, p. 11):

Alberts had the idea, my father invited him to California, where they sat in our house and tossed out ideas, drawing on Artūrs Rūsis, Daira Osis, and my sister Brigita. Gunārs Vērenieks was elsewhere at the time but he actively shared his ideas with us. We felt his spirit. Mom cooked and this creative group just tossed out ideas until the vision of *Eslingena* was born. (My translation)

11 Quoted on the 13 September 2005 posting of *Toronto ziņas* 93. *Eslingena* came to be characterized as a diaspora miracle in the media and in informal talk. On a 22 June 2005 posting, for example, *Eslingena*'s cast member Arnis Markitants comments: 'Even from an exile point of view, I think this is a phenomenal undertaking! How can 50 Latvians from four generations, who were born or have lived most of their lives in the West, go to Latvia with a Latvian show, which tells so much about our history?'

12 All song texts are my translations from the Latvian originals.

13 In the fall of 2005, in Bloomington, Indiana, when I talked to a college-aged peer of some of *Eslingena*'s teenaged actors, she confirmed that *Eslingena* had enormously amplified sketchy impressions or disconnected stories about the refugee years. She added, however, that most of her friends had returned to daily pre-*Eslingena* routines. Without follow-up interviews, it is impossible to know whether participation yielded a transformative experience or only temporarily intensified already existent identification as Latvians.

- 14 Legzdiņš was asked whether the two speculators (Miks and Fredis) were actual prototypes:

Absolutely. We had tons of speculators, a whole organization. The camp provided enough calories, but the food was all so boring. Lots of canned food, canned potatoes, powdered milk, powdered eggs. Children received fresh food – a little bit of milk, eggs. If someone wanted a bite of something delicious, they had to go to the German farmers. The nearest ones were quickly picked clean, so the speculators took the train to villages that weren't yet overrun and exchanged goods (cigarettes, coffee) for sausages, pork. They covered the entire English zone and filled their suitcases with herring, which they smoked and sold in the camps. Audiences recognize Mika and Fredis – 'Oh, that was my grandfather!' (Puķītis 2005, p. 41, my translation)

- 15 Sveteckis (2005) was an early resource for Legzdiņš (personal communication from Sveteckis, fall 2005, Indianapolis). His memoir contains many of the stories used in *Eslingena*. Sveteckis and Legzdiņš are in-laws.
- 16 'I'll admit I went to [*Eslingena*] prepared not to be impressed. My last encounter with a song festival musical wasn't wonderful' (Andris Straumanis, *Latvians Online*, 6 July 2004).
- 17 She wouldn't consent to an interview but in a phone conversation she elaborated on the comment she'd initially expressed.
- 18 Her column, entitled 'The *Eslingena* Phenomenon', inspired reader feedback: 'Thanks for your deep insights into our string of islands. Especially for your ability to put it all into understandable language'; 'Is it not possible that during those long years in exile what we've learned best is how to HATE – communism, Russians, worldwide stupidity, even our own clan back in Latvia?'; '*Eslingena* and the responses to it show that we also have love within us. Whether we'll be able to put it to use, or whether it's too late – only time will tell. Also you and me' (*Toronto ziņas* #77, posted 17 August 2004).
- 19 Latvian theater critics liked the structure, the inspirational music, the vigorous directing, the choreography, the unified style, the excellent sound, and the moving libretto. Some, however, added slightly snobbish asides, e.g. 'As a volunteer performance, it in no sense merits professional evaluation/critique' (Zole 2005, p. 8; see also Eglīte 2005, n.p.).
- 20 Rumors spread that tickets had been sold out three months prior to opening, creating a flurry that Latvia's 'theater buffs' considered 'very rare'. Four additional performances were added and the opening night set attendance records (*Toronto ziņas* #93, posted 13 September 2005). Among Latvians abroad, the news of *Eslingena*'s positive reception spread like wildfire. Though it intensified fears that *Eslingena* would be perceived as trivial, it also linked up with hopes for better diaspora-native relations: 'I heard that *Eslingena* is all but a sensation in Riga and that all the tickets have been sold out. It's great that there's such interest about exile history in Latvia. Relations are starting to shift, to normalize' (email received during week of rehearsals).
- 21 These observations and quotes are from my field notes.
- 22 Examples from my field notes: Vērenieks: '*Nu jūs divi veči. Come-on now!*' (Hey you two guys, come on now!); '*Ok, tad mums tas "timing" jāzin*'

- (Ok, then we have to know the timing); Ritmane: '*Liels mishmash – atverat space*' (It's a big mishmash. Open up some space); Artūrs Rūsis at a moment of high stress switched completely to English: 'Can you turn the monitor down. It's really loud'. Mark Mattson and Ritmane answered in English until they resolved the problem.
- 23 A supporting cast member described *Eslingena* as 'a huge experience because it brought up so many memories and exchanges at the song festival. *Eslingena* stands for all the camps, so everyone could take part, remember'. She then proceeded, unasked, to tell me about being a refugee family in Germany, including the tragic fate of her father and the stoicism of her mother. Though this exchange took place in Riga, I witnessed similar flows of associational memory in response to the video showing of *Eslingena* in Chicago and Indianapolis in 2004 and 2005. In Toronto, memories apparently flooded forth with even greater intensity. The storytelling continues into 2007, partially in print form (see Sveteckis 2005) and on proliferating websites. In Riga, memory had to assume a more pedagogical tone.
- 24 Two females and two males in uniforms, with carefully choreographed, synchronized gestures (salutes, signing of documents) and sprinklings of Russian, sang 'Uz dzimteni, uz dzimteni' (To the Homeland):

Raz! Dva! Tri!

You'll reach the homeland, the homeland really fast

If you sign this document.

All the sins of your youth – *raz, dva* – will be forgiven,

And your belongings and property, immediately returned.

Don't listen to what others promise, just listen to what we say:

Great Stalin in Moscow guarantees it all!

You'll travel to Riga in a first-class train

And Kirchenstein* himself will greet you at the gate with flowers!

Then you'll be able to laugh again,

And pour a glass of vodka,

And dance *vecerinkas, nu cto, davai*, get going!

You'll reach the homeland, the homeland, really fast

If you sign this document.

(*Kirchensteins replaced Ulmanis as president of Latvia.)

- 25 One response I heard extended the scope of the suffering beyond the camps in Siberia. After viewing *Eslingena*, a young woman, who was born in the early 1960s and grew up in Latvia, said to me, 'You *there* didn't suffer nearly as much as those sent North'. She was preoccupied with her own biographical consequences: having relatives in the West and a father who was deported to Siberia had prevented her from being accepted into law school in Soviet Latvia.
- 26 The CD of *Eslingena* taped in Riga has English subtitles.

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