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FROM ESTONIAN-RUSSIAN INTER-MARRIAGES TO “INTER-REGIONAL” MARRIAGES IN UKRAINE IN THE TIMES OF CRISIS

Abstract

This working paper discusses the issues with translating the research methodology and theoretical underpinnings from one inter-marriage situation in Estonia and to another in Ukraine. In my previous work, I researched “Estonian-Russian” intermarriages; my ongoing postdoctoral research focuses on the marriages between the people from different regions in Ukraine. In this paper I first offer an overview of my research methodology and theoretical framework. Second, I present an empirical illustration of some findings from Ukraine. In the end, I develop new reflections about my theoretical approach, directed towards rethinking the concept of “cultural world” and the meaning of “inter-marriage” in the diverse identification situation of Ukraine.

Keywords: Oral history, life-story, memory studies, Estonia, Ukraine, Soviet Union, Maidan.

Introduction

This working paper is about the problems of cultural identification in the Western borderlands of the former USSR at a time when the geopolitical conflict between the “West” and Russia is again captured in public in blunt Huntingtonian terms. In my doctoral dissertation I looked at the cultural divisions in the (Soviet) Estonian society and how this division reflected within individual inter-marriage situations: how “Russian newcomer” and “Estonian local” families connected to the Russian-Estonian cultural division in larger social terms. Prior to coming to New Europe College, I started a new research project about the oral histories of people in “inter-marriages” between different regions of Ukraine, discussing historical memory and personal trajectories of people whose family members come

from different parts of Ukraine. I spent the time from October 2015 to March 2016 in Kyiv and I will go back there in autumn 2016.

My approach to Ukraine has been based on the theoretical framework of my doctoral dissertation, but the complexity and spread of the country thirty times bigger than Estonia (population wise) has naturally challenged my original concepts and will potentially also shed new light on the interpretation of the Estonian data which I collected in 2009-11. In winter and early spring of 2016 I completed twenty interviews in Ukraine, which I transcribed in April-June. In this essay I trace the methodological and theoretical implications of changing the research paradigm from one Soviet borderland case to another. I will do it in three parts. First, I offer an overview of my research methodology and design; second, I discuss more thoroughly the theoretical underpinnings of my work; third, I develop some theoretical reflections that I have on my theoretical apparatus after conducting the Ukraine fieldwork; fourth, I present a preliminary empirical overview of my Ukraine research.

Methodology and Research

Many sociological and political science studies tackle unfolding inter-group relations and socio-cultural processes on the Western borderlands of the former USSR. In Estonia, the relocation of a soviet war monument which caused the Bronze Soldier crisis of 2007, started a boom of new studies of social representations, historical causes, and external actors in ethnic relations.¹ In the Ukrainian case, the cultural mixings and heritage of different historical experiences have received a fair amount of interest; however, the studies of ethno-linguistic and cultural relations have mostly focused on macro-level processes, and diverse identification patters from below are much less studied.²

My research takes a historical and biographical perspective³ through life-story narratives in inter-marriage settings.⁴ It is based on the coexistence of different patterns of ethno-linguistic heritage and memory cultures in Estonia (among "Estonian locals" and "Russian newcomers") and in Ukraine (varying regionally).

While there has been considerable work done in memory studies in Estonia,⁵ the studies of biographical processes among the Russian-speaking community in Estonia are scarce and inter-ethnic settings are unexplored altogether.⁶ Memory communities in Ukraine are currently in flux and

closer explorations of life-story perspectives and family narratives are absent. However, while tackling the Ukrainian case, studies of social origins and ethnic and class cultures will provide some useful background to this paper.

In my research of Estonia and Ukraine I focus on the “ordinary” people in families that bring together different cultural traditions and heritage. With oral history “from below,” I represent history and contemporary reality not at the level of the nation-state but rather through interactions, exchanges, and negotiations on the ground, building a “bottom-up,” historically minded ethnographic perspective to society. The main focus of the interviews was on the knowledge of family ancestry, related controversies, absences, migrations, and attachments to “great” historical events; an interview consisted of two parts: free and less guided life-story narration; and semi-structured follow up questions that built on the information received from the life-story narration.

In my Estonian research in 2009-2011, I conducted semi-structured life-story interviews with representatives from the families that brought together as spouses an “Estonian-speaking local” and a “Russian-speaking newcomer” in the Soviet period in Estonia (marriages from 1953 to late 1970s). I made ninety interviews with the people from different age cohorts, when possible interviewing various members of the same family, both the children and spouses. I attempted to meet with different social groups, but there is some overrepresentation of people with higher education due to easier access I had to their milieu. The majority of the interviews were in Estonian language, some were in Russian, and some were using both in a mixed manner.⁷

In my Ukrainian research in 2016, I conducted twenty semi-structured life-story interviews with regionally “inter-married” parents (marriages from 1960s–late 1980s) and their children who currently live in Kyiv, but whose relatives may live all around Ukraine. I used the snow-ball approach and internet advertisements contacts to find informants from various socio-economic backgrounds. Interview language was mostly Russian but some interviewees preferred English to it. Further interviews are scheduled for autumn and winter 2016-17 with, primarily, other members of the families whom I had already interviewed, with field trips to the Western and Eastern parts of Ukraine along the lines of family networks.

Theoretical Postulates

Marriage and family figure in my research primarily as heuristic micro-environments where options for social belonging are negotiated, helping to observe how human relationships and everyday practices transformed along with social changes and the passing of time. They make up the platform for looking towards the wider socio-cultural relations and borders. One of the underlying ideas of my research is that a cultural borderline situation in a marriage that connects different cultural realms opens up more possibilities to frame or give sense to one's own life-story narration. Hence, I aim to point towards the possible *macro* perspectives to society "from below" and "from within" personal life situations and *micro* perspectives to negotiation of social memory and belonging on the cultural "borderlands" of inter-marriage.

In Estonia, the idea of "inter-marriage" and "mixity" therein is quite straightforward: native Estonians were "locals" (present before WWII) and native Russian speakers were "newcomers" (arrived after WWII). In Ukraine, such clear-cut differences obviously do not exist; even if in macro view there are two possible "extremities" – Western Ukraine and industrialized towns of Eastern Ukraine – in real life situations they have been experienced quite differently, and even when looking at such polarization the linguistic border is fluid and much more penetratable than in Estonia. More generally: much more people in Ukraine live "in-between," inhabiting culturally diverse and not clearly bounded environments; there also appears quite a strong distinction between the worlds of countryside and city dwellers. After these short comments, I will turn to the discussion of the theoretical model of society.

First, about a macro-view of society. The basic cornerstone of my research in the case of Estonia has been *cultural world*, which I defined as a reproductive and structuring environment, a system of identification that offers people limited horizons of meaning, social action, future, and sense of belonging.⁸ Without delving too deep into theorizing culture, I would just distinguish between the contents and borders of cultural worlds. Contents could be understood as the "stuff" of culture – shared meanings and beliefs, histories, narrative templates, language – these are the elements that people socially identify with and through which they enact their social belonging.⁹ Borders, however, designate the surrounding and maintenance of the named cultural "stuff." Cultural borders result of human capacity to make distinctions and to externalize the unknown

and the unfitting, to distinguish between “one’s own” and the “others.”¹⁰ The students of culture have argued that attention to borders allows for a more dynamic look at the processual maintenance of cultural boundaries that round up individuals and personal identifications while designating where people should “belong.”¹¹

In my Ph.D. thesis I show that from the World War II onwards, the Estonian and Russian linguistic realms formed large clearly distinct *cultural worlds* in Estonia as their borders were defined quite solidly by the two mutually unintelligible languages and the local education system was arranged in two parallel linguistic tracks.¹² In these terms, Soviet Estonia was and contemporary Estonia remains a culturally dual entity, as both worlds offered different horizons of meaning, future perspectives, and sense of belonging; and they both functioned as reproductive and generative environments.¹³

But it should be said that, naturally, both cultural worlds offered diverse paths for socialization and personal identification; the worlds themselves were also intertwined and located within the other significant meanings constellations. In addition, “from below,” cultural worlds were perceived and lived in an asymmetric manner: the majority of the population lived primarily within one world and perceived the other “from outside,” however, Estonian-Russian inter-marriages were simultaneously placed within and between both worlds.

The Russian world and the Estonian world comprised two essentially different memory communities in Soviet Estonia.¹⁴ Personal experiences and communicative memories differed radically even if in the public realm many artefacts of the Estonian national memories were repressed and pushed aside by the all-encompassing “Soviet” narrative. The conflict between locals and newcomers was acutely felt by the local Estonians who carried immediate memories of the inter-war republic, Soviet annexation, and Stalinist terror – so that it has been claimed that within a single year “Russians turned into the main enemy of Estonians” – and none of this was openly discussed in Soviet Estonia.¹⁵ Such radical polarization appears to be true insofar as the annexation mobilized large parts of society and repressions were felt to be abusing the national body.¹⁶

Second, as for the micro views of society, while it seemingly deals with the manifold uses of the concept of “identity,” following Brubaker’s ideas, however, I suggest to rather use the concept of processual *identification* as this term enables to discuss how people see themselves and at times others in relation to the *cultural world* and public discourse more contextually.¹⁷

The patterns of identification that were available to individuals in the cultural worlds appeared both in permanent and situational ways. While paying attention to their generally situational, triggered nature, I also came to accept interviewees' stable understandings of their sense of belonging through the interviews. For example, in case of ethnicity, people would often wish to "possess" and "have" ethnicity – they identify themselves and others ethnically in a stable manner and they claim that it matters.

I study individuals within personalized webs of social identifications and cultural negotiation stemming from the sociological concepts of life-world and habitus. The notion of *life-world* designates how people build up their understanding of the world in relation to their personal dispositions, values, and habits; how they make sense of everyday life and their life-course.¹⁸ This phenomenological concept originates from the works of A. Schütz and bears similarity to P. Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* that is "an acquired scheme of values and disposition to action" which enables and restricts the personal horizon and perception of the world.¹⁹ Habitus draws attention to the fundamental dispositions (long-lasting identifications) that are often formed and fixed at a rather young age, mostly in the family environment, and that are resistant to later change; it stresses contingencies of the past, the relative stability of the adult self, and the limits to individual change. All in all, life-world and habitus take a holistic view of individuals; not only do they point to the irreducibility of life to social categories and to the contextuality of social identifications, but they also indicate stability and resistance to change in adult subjectivity.

In Estonian case, I showed that the inter-married spouses typically identify with the narratives of ethno-cultural belonging quite strongly by asserting in the interviews as being either "Russian" or "Estonian." However, they appear to have practically lived aside of the culturally conflictual identification patterns by not actualizing them in the marriage context; they rarely mention cultural conflicts in relation to their marriage. The spouses in my Estonian and Ukrainian research were and are mostly oriented to finding common grounds between cultural differences and making ways to participate in each other's lives. People shared with each other the things that could be shared, for which there were available words and suitable situations; but there were also cases in which social conflict entered the family realm all too powerfully (like in Ukraine since 2014 and in Estonia in 1989-92).

In short, I look at the macro- and micro-level cultural identification processes based on the oral histories with people whose marriages are located on the borderlands of the different cultural worlds. I use the idea of cultural world to describe socio-cultural divisions – including divided historical narration patterns – while trying to avoid singular determinisms, be they ethnic, linguistic, or ideological. As for individuals, I will discuss their patterns of identification with the available discourses, meanings, and dispositions – these could be either received through the public channels or from peers and through inter-generational transmission in the family.

Empirical Examples from Ukrainian Research

The Estonian inter-married spouses fit much more clearly into the binary division of Estonian and Russian cultural worlds – even if within these worlds the individual trajectories are naturally complex and the ways in which spouses and their children cross the boundaries vary. In Ukraine, the interviews attest to very complex cultural entanglements in relation to the pasts, ideologies, and migrations.

Here are just a few examples from among my interviews with middle-aged informants who ascribed to oneself to live in an “intermarriage” and to whom I talked in February-March 2016 in Kyiv. All the names are changed. First, **Anna’s** (1966) father was from Ternopil (towards Western Ukraine, but still central) and her mother was from Vinnytsia (central Ukraine), several of her relatives live today in Russia, she speaks mostly Ukrainian in her everyday life; she is married to a man whose parents also come from various regions of the country. Second, **Valentina’s** (1964) parental backgrounds are distinguished by other dimensions as her father is from a Ukrainian village and her mother is an ethnic Russian who lived her life in Lviv; her husband comes from a family of Russians in Kyiv, she speaks mostly Ukrainian in everyday life. Third, **Natalya’s** (1969) father is an ethnic German from Volga region who grew up as a deportee in Kazakhstan and her mother is Russian from a village in Russia (parents live today in Crimea); her husband is of Jewish origin, from Vinnytsa district; Natalya understands but would not speak Ukrainian. Fourth, the parents of **Lydia’s** (1975) father came to Ukraine from Siberia, one of her grandparents was originally from Kharkiv (North East) and the other was, as she says, “very Russian”; Lydia’s own mother is from central Russia. Lydia grew up with parents in Cherkasy (central Ukraine) but she herself identifies

mostly as Kharkovian, as she studied there. She speaks both languages and is in a relationship with a man from Dnipropetrovsk who has “very radical views” (in the interview these appeared to be pro-Ukrainian). Fifth, **Galyna** (1971) is from a Soviet military family; until the age of sixteen she “did not have a home town,” later they settled down in Zaporizhia (central Eastern Ukraine); she says that until 2014 she considered herself “Russian,” but now she is clearly “Ukrainian.” Sixth, **Aleksandr** (1979) explained his familial heritage to me already in his first e-mail, writing: “I am 1/4 Ukrainian, 1/4 Polish, 1/4 Czech, and 1/4 Jewish.” However, later in the interview it appeared even more complicated and the initially devised clear-cut four-dimensional division crumbled down. Seventh, **Sergei** (1977) is a Russian-speaker from Donetsk; his parents are Russians from Donetsk (moved to Kyiv in 2015) but Sergei considers himself clearly “Ukrainian” (“maybe a bit more now than before”). Sergei’s wife is also from Donetsk, and “probably she considers herself Russian” (but she herself did not agree to be interviewed). Eighth, **Ivan** (1947) and **Yulia** (1956) are clearly from different backgrounds: Ivan is from the countryside in Western Ukrainian borderlands and he calls himself the “Bandera’s guy”; Yulia is from a Russian military family and grew up in Kaliningrad; today they speak Ukrainian at home. As Ivan comes from the region of Ukraine that did not belong to the USSR prior to 1940, and many in his family fought against the Soviet Army, the story of Ivan and Yulia corresponds most to the differences in sociopolitical and cultural memory in the Estonian case.

Prior to starting my field-work in Ukraine I raised some research questions. Based on the data that I have gathered I would now offer some preliminary answers. First: How do the binary narratives of “East-West” and “Europe-Russia” fit with the identification patterns of people in geographically mixed marriages in Ukraine over their life-courses, when have such belongings gained significance? The people I interviewed in Lviv had quite clear and easy answers to this question: they would feel “European” and expect Kyiv and the rest of the country to follow the example. In return, the majority of interviewees in Kyiv were quite hesitant to choose between the two sides in such a dichotomy, most would dislike such binary discourse, in early 2016 it was easier to be “more European than Russian,” sometimes “being Ukrainian” would be a way out, sometimes it would be seen replicating the same problem with imaginary geography problem: where to place “being Ukrainian”?

Second: How do people relate to their own ancestral pasts vis-à-vis the politicized and conflictual historical interpretations? Which family

lineages and migrations would be stressed and which omitted? On the one hand, the references to distant history, for example to Holodomor, WWII, and the Soviet past, appeared biographically significant only when specially inquired by me in the second half of the interview, they were less important for most of my interviewees as they constructed their own life-stories and referred to ancestors. Sometimes, the ancestral pasts, which are located in Russia, were less well known than the pasts in Ukraine, but this was very systematic. On the other hand, the event which is often mentioned is the Chornobyl catastrophe of 1986, a clear milestone for Kyiv inhabitants that ties with the experiences of children who were sent out of town for the 1986-87 term. The collapse of the Soviet Union raised bright memories for some and was taken quite indifferently by the other interviewees; the same was the case for the 2013-14 events in Ukraine: very bright memories for some and quite indifferent for others, but in this case everyone had to take some stance.

Third: In which conditions are the family members able to live aside the societal conflict and when is the conflict “activated” in family life? How have family connections to relatives elsewhere (in Russia or in other parts of Ukraine) changed over time? It appeared that people often hid their active participation in Maidan in 2013-14 from some relatives who would not be supportive of it, but who would also just worry about their kin (this was most often the case with grandparents). By 2016, these situations had mostly been sorted out and discussed through. Most vivid stories in relation to the events in the last three years however pertain to the relationships with relatives in Russia. Two patterns were most significant here: either the family members stopped talking about politics but maintained otherwise “normal human communication” or the political conflict was overwriting all the themes and led to sometimes cutting the ties. Naturally, the reality often lied in between as people struggled to maintain some contact.

Fourth: How do age, class belonging, and gendered family roles influence changing identification patterns? These certainly matter, but it is yet too early to map these based on the twenty interviews that I have gathered. Many interviewees claim, in abstract, that they perceive a certain “generational gap,” the old are more pro-Soviet and the young are more pro-European. But when it comes to their own relatives and direct experiences, then they might be even reverse: I heard much about the growing frustrations and rather pessimist views of the future by the young

and middle-aged people, and the old people whom I spoke to were all supportive of the ideas and actions of Ukraine's revolutions.

Revisiting the Ideas of "Inter-Marriage" and "Cultural World"

The Russian-speaking community grew to a place of increasing importance during the Soviet Era and by the time the Soviet Union collapsed, the share of Russian-speakers had grown from ~5% (in 1944) to ~35% (1989) of Estonian total population. Ukraine is characterized by large population movements throughout the whole 20th century (famine of 1931-33, World War II, industrialization) and the number of Russian-speakers in many parts of the country grew significantly through migration and ethno-linguistic conversions. Whereas historical, contemporary and ethno-linguistic conditions in the Estonian and Ukrainian cases are very different, the political production of binary cultural belongings in public discourse and in the media is somewhat similar, as both enforce a normative identity choice between "East" and "West."

In Ukraine, the "borderlands turned into bloodlands"²⁰ in 2014 as Maidan shootings, Crimean annexation, and the military conflict forced people to take sides, depending on the place of living and on the followed media representations. At the same time, the publicly prevalent discourse of "two Ukraines" that has juxtaposed the "democratizing West" and the "authoritarian" and Soviet-nostalgic "East"²¹ has somewhat given way to the spread of civic identification with "Ukraine." Public discourse and its changing patterns certainly influence the domestic questions and problems and the study of the workings of social discourses on grass-root level insert shades and paradoxes to the formerly dominant discursive clash that has been portrayed as a struggle between the incommensurable agendas and also to the newly dominant hegemonic ideas of unifying civic Ukrainianness.

In short: my primary interest in both research cases has been to shift attention from the public conflict to the more private with the example of the family, while being still alert to differences that derive from ethno-cultural and linguistic heritage ("Estonian"- "Russian") or ("Ukrainian"- "Russian") and also from the socio-political contemporary experience ("local"- "newcomer" in Estonian case) or ("more Western" – "more Russian-leaning" in Ukrainian case) which create something of a "double mixity" in the familial setting.

Doing Ukrainian field work invited me, however, to revisit the idea of “inter-marriage” that had been easier to take as self-evidently grounded in Estonia, where the socio-cultural border was and is clearly linguistically marked. In Ukraine, I moved from the initial idea of “East-West” marriages inside the country (e.g., between a spouse from Lviv and one from Kharkiv) towards the idea of inter-marriage as “inter-regional” marriage, in order to acknowledge the complicated and diverse identification patterns and not to focus only on the conflictual “extremities.” However, the question still remains: what is really the cultural in-between quality in these family situations?

I position my research and aspirations in the field of oral history and this discipline stresses the role of individuals in connection with big History: “without violating that space [of encounter], [without] cracking the uniqueness of each spore with an arrogant need to scrutinize, to know, and to classify.”²² With this emphasis, oral history remains consciously on the borderlands of the scholarly endeavors that are so often brought together around the business of the “arrogant need to classify.” However, oral history does have the ambition not to remain in a vacuum but to somehow “connect life to times, uniqueness to representativeness, as well as orality to writing.”²³

There seems to be a tension between the theoretical design of my informant pool and the methodological approach to my interviewees and their stories. I refer to the tension between the focus on the sociologically determined “familial mixity” of categories and appreciating human lives as wholes; between looking at lives through the categories and looking at categories through the lives (analytically much more infinite process, emphasizing individual life-worlds in the making). This issue became more pronounced in the Ukrainian empirical setting.

I will touch now upon the contradiction of family-unit and individual life and then I will continue with the discussion of some silences in the interviews. The scholarly perspective on family, more precisely on the inter-generational transmission of knowledge and on the homely environment of growing up privileges potentially the dominant assumptions of familial normality. How to situate individual life-stories in the family context so that they would remain holistic; or should family in itself be seen holistically? A historically minded look at the “roots and origins” of biography somewhat downplays individual agency in favor of structure as the researcher is focusing on familial continuities. Even with attention to the “breaks” with the ancestral past that are rather normal in the post-

Stalinist biographies, these breaks would be observed at the background of the assumed familial transmission as a desired norm. In short, I have become increasingly aware that the desirable norms and “normalities” should be approached with utmost care both in the case of “family” and with regard to the harmonious “mixture” within it – in order to allow for individual voices to speak at the background of the persistence of social and scholarly hegemonic judgments.

Let’s now turn from the family unit to the silences in the life-stories that acted as an eye-opener about the potential over-ethnicization or conflictualization. Namely, it appeared that in the life-stories of people, the familial practices related to the cultural “mixture” were rather rarely mentioned, they were under-stressed from the Soviet period through the post-Soviet transformation until today. In reference to the Soviet era, I learned that the ideological background differences were very rarely discussed almost at all in the families (they were discussed a bit more in Estonia than in Ukraine). As for the time of interviewing – in Estonia in 2009-11 and in Ukraine in 2016 – the inter-cultural experiences were not particularly cherished and valued socially: apparently the nationalist “memory landscape” in Estonia and the ongoing war in Ukraine reinforced several silences. In terms of family life, silence or “avoidance” could also be seen as ways to keep the family intuitively closer; not meddling with the sources of potential endless misunderstanding, distrust, and conflict – as the process appears in the social realm, especially through the media. Whereas silence about in-betweenness and boundary-crossing could be appreciated as a functioning practical strategy in family life, it presents a rather un-reflected situation and as such, holds some explosive potential. Potential conflict and clash of meanings can be triggered by the same social forces that it should guard the family against.²⁴ This line of thought naturally shares an assumption that there has been an object for the silence in the first place, that there has been an inter-cultural aspect of family life – to be hidden, avoided, or reconfigured in the story told to me.

It should be worthwhile to take another look at the tension between the externally induced definition of “inter-cultural” situation and the oral history attempt to embrace lives holistically. In the end, two phenomena could be observed in parallel: inter-cultural position of marriage serves people both in the context-specific and experiential ways of perceiving and conceiving; and it also is socially used as a generic and nominal way of titling and naming.²⁵ When does “inter-cultural situation” then really

happen to the interviewees – and to biographies, to narratives, and to interview situations?

This approach is not so unique, of course. Perhaps it is just another way of bringing together *etic* concepts and *emic* research findings.²⁶ How and when are the markers of inter-marriage emically employed by the informants? Taking this path, however, would soften the violence, the ease with which I as a researcher had put my informants in that categorical box of inter-marriage in the first place; this move would create some space for meta-reflection about the researcher's role.

The construction of an "in-between" object of study draws attention to an important phenomena in social reality, but it is also a way to draw boundaries and divisions.²⁷ I am more cautious now about the interview setup and the ways in which to analyze them, as the interviews may also work as authoritative calls for informants to insert boundaries and divisions into their life-story and experiences. Thereby, silence is not only the lack of expected research findings and lack of cultural differences in "inter-marriages," but it is also about subtle resistance to academic authority and, as such, should be cherished.²⁸

NOTES

- ¹ Housden and Smith, *Forgotten Pages in Baltic History*; Mälksoo, "Liminality and Contested Europeanness: Conflicting Memory Politics in the Baltic Space"; Pettai, *Memory and Pluralism in the Baltic States*, Tamm and Petersoo, *Monumentaalne konflikt* (Monumental conflict); Wulf, "Politics of History in Estonia: Changing Memory Regimes 1987-2009."
- ² Some studies that touch upon social identification and historical influences in Ukraine are the following – all taking a more quantitative and political science perspective: Arel and Ruble, *Rebounding Identities*; Bassin and Kelly, *Soviet and Post-Soviet Identities*; Hrytsak, "National Identities in Post-Soviet Ukraine: The Case of Lviv and Donetsk"; Hrytsenko, "Perspectives on Ukraine's Ethno-Cultural Diversity"; Kulyk, "Language Identity, Linguistic Diversity and Political Cleavages"; Pirie, "National Identity and Politics in Southern and Eastern Ukraine"; Riabchuk, "One Nation, Two Languages, Three Cultures?"; Wilson, "Elements of a theory of Ukrainian ethno-national identities"; Zaharchenko, "Memory and Identity in Today's Ukraine"; Zhurzhenko, *Borderlands into Bordered Lands*.
- ³ See also: Bertaux, Rotkirch, Thompson, *On Living Through Soviet Russia*; Humphrey, Miller, Zdravomyslova, *Biographical Research in Eastern Europe: Altered Lives and Broken Biographies*.
- ⁴ For some other work on Eastern Europe, see: Buric, "Mixed Marriages of Bosnia-Herzegovina during the Life and Death of Yugoslavia"; Edgar, "Interethnic Intimacy in Post-war Central Asia in Comparative Perspective."
- ⁵ Kõresaar, *Elu ideoloogiad*; Aarelaid, *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*; Bennich-Björkman and Aarelaid, *Baltic Biographies at Historical Crossroads*; Jõesalu and Kõresaar, "Continuity or Discontinuity: On the Dynamics of Remembering."
- ⁶ A recent study about identification patterns in the Estonian town of Narva: Pfooser, "Between Russia and Estonia: Narratives of Place in a New Borderland."
- ⁷ It should be mentioned that I am an Estonian myself and I have been socialized into an Estonian milieu, and I bear an Estonian name. Among most of my social circles in Estonia there are no Russian-speakers.
- ⁸ I propose *cultural world* as a metaphor for stressing that such constellations contained most of people's day-to-day interactive spaces and experiences but that they were also limited, interconnected, and porous realms. "Cultural world" has less totalizing connotations than "culture," it appears less pre-existing and more resulting from human activities. Cultural worlds are not civic, political, ethnic or linguistic worlds, the latter constitute activated elements in them. There is no need to get involved here in the debate about "what is culture." However, I propose the following working definition of culture for the background of the discussion of "cultural worlds" by

- H. Spencer-Oatey (*Culturally Speaking*, 3): “Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour.”
- 9 Looking only at the “contents” of culture has a primordializing tendency due to a danger of buying into the cultural narratives of its intemporality. This is exemplified by the debate around Clifford Geertz’s “culturalist” account of ethnicity that discusses the “primordial” beliefs that actors have (Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 89; Geertz, *Primordial Loyalties and Standing Entities*).
- 10 A classical approach: Barth, “Introduction” to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Brubaker’s approach to ethnicity as cognition: Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov, “Ethnicity as Cognition.”
- 11 The dichotomy of contents and border-maintenance has been criticised by pointing to their deep ontological interplay; but also by pointing to the essentialized conclusions that both approaches may result to. See: Jenkins, *Rethinking ethnicity*, 169.
- 12 I should stress that these worlds contained the reservoirs of political and ethnic identifications, but they should *not* be understood as political or ethnic worlds. Political ideology and ethnic patterns should rather be seen as active elements within these cultural worlds. This distinction should help to pay attention to the wider social differences and plural identification patterns.
- 13 As mentioned before and explained below, these worlds had and have strongly ethnic (and sometimes political) connotations at times, but at other times, they do not. These worlds contained ethnic identification reservoirs, but calling them automatically ethnic worlds would over-ethnicize them.
- 14 Aarelaid, *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*; Bennich-Björkman and Aarelaid, *Baltic Biographies at Historical Crossroads*.
- 15 E.g.: Mertelsmann, “How the Russians Turned into the Image of the “National Enemy” of the Estonians.”
- 16 However, in my work I show that many young Estonians identified with the late Soviet regime and that the former assumption clearly assumes greater a coherence of the Estonian national body than actually existed. Diversification of the memories of Estonians about the late Soviet period is also shown by Jõesalu and Kõresaar, “Continuity or Discontinuity.”
- 17 For literature overview and some theoretical discussion of a similar proposal, see: Brubaker and Cooper, “Beyond “Identity.”” “As a processual, active term, derived from a verb, ‘identification’ lacks the reifying connotations of ‘identity.’ It invites us to specify the agents that do the identifying. And it does not presuppose that such identifying (even by powerful agents, such as the state) will necessarily result in the internal sameness, the distinctiveness,

- the bounded groupness that political entrepreneurs may seek to achieve” (Ibid, 14). See also: Apitzsch, “Ethnicity as Participation and Belonging.”
- 18 Alfred Schütz refers to *life-world* as “the world of everyday, governed by person’s spatially distributed and temporally arranged natural attitudes”; this is the area of reality which is logical and structured for the person. Life-world presents itself “as normal and self-evident, ordered and objective, and as such unquestioned” (Wuthrow et al, *Cultural Analysis*, 32). See also: Schütz and Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*.
- 19 Bourdieu, *Outline of A Theory of Practice*, 72. Habitus is individual’s system of acquired schemes of perception, thought and action in relation to the field(s) as social arena(s) of personal struggles. An oft-quoted definition of habitus is the following: “The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at an end or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.”
- 20 Zhurzhenko, “From Borderlands to Bloodlands.”
- 21 Zhurzhenko, “The Myth of Two Ukraines.”
- 22 Portelli, “Introduction,” viii.
- 23 Portelli, “Oral History as Genre,” 6.
- 24 In addition to these discursive and intuitive elements, it also seems that, at large, social class matters in how people articulate ethnicity in their life. In general, as much as vocalizing life-experiences in relation to abstract notions is facilitated by the skills acquired through socializing and education, oral history as a method might contribute to the silence it has called to break in the first place.
- 25 This is related to Brubaker et al who call for looking at ethnicity “as a modality of experience, rather than as a thing, a substance, an attribute that one “possesses.” [---] It happens at particular contexts. [---] Although we speak routinely of persons as having an ethnicity, we might more aptly speak of them doing an ethnicity at such moments.” See: Brubaker et al, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, 209-210.
- 26 E.g., see: Larin, “Conceptual Debates in Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Migration.”
- 27 There is an analogy to sociologists “making classes on paper” articulated by Pierre Bourdieu in various occasions. E.g., Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” 14-25.
- 28 On the other hand, with this situational view it becomes clearer that the importance of silence should not be overstretched. The situations in which “inter-cultural” family conditions are relevant for individual biographies and life-stories are easier to outline. Some occasions when it happened were

the following: in relation to certain life-course events, e.g., when children chose their “passport ethnicity” at the age of 16 in the Soviet Ukraine or Estonia between their parents’ nominal ethnicities it is often memorized as an event; calendar holidays are sometimes designated as ethnic by informants – the familial celebration of Christmas during the Soviet years and the appreciation of the Red Army day are often, respectively, referred to as “Estonian” / “Ukrainian” and “Russian” / “Soviet.” There are some historical periods in which one’s sense of cultural belonging seems to have mattered more: for example it would happen in relation to the restoration of Estonian independence (Singing revolution, 1988-91), the Bronze soldier crisis in Estonia (April 2007), during the Maidan revolution of 2014 and in the events since 2013.

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