

**STORIES ABOUT STORIES:
LIFE STORY COLLECTING AS COMMEMORATION
AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM**

ILZE AKERBERGS

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Doctoral Committee

John McDowell, Ph.D., Co-chairperson

Inta Carpenter, Ph.D., Co-chairperson

Sandra Dolby, Ph.D.

Thom Gillespie, Ph.D.

Phil Stafford, Ph.D.

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PREFACE

This dissertation takes up issues surfacing in life story projects. It is about two women who have built up their life's mission around listening to people talk about their lives and teaching others to listen. In this dissertation, I offer a preliminary and hopefully tantalizing look at the methodologies, products, and agendas of life story collecting, issues that deserve a more thorough treatment than what I have given here. In an attempt to isolate and discuss these issues, I have used the phrase "master story" to suggest that a "master" issue and agenda has been created from life stories, one that became bigger than the life stories themselves. The "story" in "master story" suggests that these are not merely agendas and issues that have been declared, but they have been narrativized – that is, set in a loose "story" form. Similar to "story," the "master story" hides its messages between the lines, within a story plot, and is open to subjective interpretations. The "master story" thus emulates the creativity, flexibility, and elusiveness of life stories as the products of creative narrators. Set in such a frame, the concept of "master story" will, hopefully, be helpful in illuminating the ideas in this dissertation.

There are various concerns to which one can link these life story collecting endeavors. The timely topics of political and social reconciliation are evident in both projects. Māra's project in Latvia served to bring diaspora and native Latvians together in the field in order to collect stories and get to know each other. Separated for fifty years by the iron curtain, life story collecting provided fertile ground for working together on mutual interests of understanding and discovery. The 1990s were a time when diaspora Latvians "were trying to reconcile the difference between imagination and experience of

Latvia as home” (Carpenter 1996, 119). Collecting life stories in isolated Latvian rural farmsteads was a reality check for diaspora Latvians that allowed them to compare the stories and memories they heard about Latvia and the realities of present-day post-Soviet society. The insight and understanding the volunteer fieldworkers gained from the very process of interviewing storytellers were most likely much more valuable and enlightening for the participants than the final products they created. Similarly, Māra’s project with the video that she produced about the inhabitants of the port city of Liepāja was an experiment in reconciliation between native Latvians and members of the Soviet military who moved to Latvia along with the occupying Soviet regime. These interviews portrayed the diversity of viewpoints in present-day Latvia, but also functioned as an attempt to reconcile vestiges from the past with the realities of the present. Thus, the life story projects fostered dialogue between peoples of opposing political viewpoints and differing cultural backgrounds.

Māra’s and Karen’s life story collecting projects are examples of a contemporary trend to present stories in multimedia environments in the service of larger political agendas. This opens up the concept of the “politics of technology.” Karen, in particular, has a quite sophisticated methodology involving new media in all facets of life story collecting, from the production of CD-ROMs and films, interviewing with the latest digital equipment, teaching children from low-income families to interview with technology, to creating a virtual online “place” for a museum. Each technological facet has an ideological reasoning behind it that raises issues of representation through media. These are topics that are touched on here, but surely deserve another dissertation.

Finally, each of these organizations has a unique model for organizing story collecting projects. The recent proliferation of websites featuring life stories has raised the question of how to manage and unite all of these websites and life stories into a global network, following the current trend for globalization. Can such a global network serve a useful and practical function as an archive or a searchable database? So much information is hidden within the telling of the story. How can one best capture the event of storytelling in an online format so that the stories could be most useful as sources for projects?

The topic of online storytelling projects raises these and other important issues addressed in a preliminary form in this dissertation. Stories about stories open a large field of concerns that is waiting for other researchers to explore. The ever-changing technology is likely to continue opening up new matters and avenues in the area of “master storytelling.”

Ilze Akerbergs

STORIES ABOUT STORIES:
LIFE STORY COLLECTING AS COMMEMORATION AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM

The oral life story is a flexible genre that allows one to connect the private with the public world. It is a window that allows the world to catch a glimpse of the personal experiences and values of the ordinary person. The representations of self and the past that are embodied in life stories can be used as tools by researchers and activists for larger agendas that create meanings in culture and society. This dissertation deals with two different ways life story collecting has served two different objectives. Māra in Latvia has created a “master story” that fills and commemorates the “silenced gaps” in Latvian history left by its fifty years under Soviet rule; Karen in Brazil has created a “master story” that works for social change and embraces the diversity of Brazil and the world. Through analysis of Māra’s and Karen’s own life stories and the products they have produced, this study examines the “master story” each has created from the many life stories told to them, against the cultural and political backdrop of Latvia and Brazil.

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INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND, GOALS, METHODS, AND FIELDWORK

BACKGROUND

When I first met Māra in Latvia in 1997, she was organizing the introductory seminar for the second annual life story collecting field trip in Latvia. A group of twenty-five native and diaspora Latvians gathered together to discuss methodology for collecting life stories from older Latvians living in different parts of Latvia. I joined them, curious to find out how people represented their lives behind the former iron curtain. This world was out of reach for the thousands of exiled Latvians who had fled from the Soviet Union at the end of World War II. As a daughter of exiled Latvians in America, I had an opportunity to hear how native Latvians constructed their lives through personal narrative about a way of life I knew nothing about.

These life story collecting field trips, or *ekspedīcijas*, (as in the English “expeditions”) organized by Māra and her organization *Dzīvesstāsts* (Life Story), opened the door for my fellow participants and me to hear stories that earlier may have been told only in the most private of settings and meant only for the ears of family and trusted friends. The stories represented their world to us: survival techniques during deportation, the risks that people undertook in their everyday lives while involved in the resistance movement, and values held by people living in a country isolated by the Soviet Union for fifty years. These life stories represented many different regions of Latvia, the big cities

as well as the small villages and the lonely, self-sufficient farmsteads scattered throughout the Latvian countryside.

The field trip that I participated in took place only six years after Latvia had regained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. It would have been impossible to organize such an international life story collecting field trip in the 1980s, only ten years earlier, when people in Latvia feared that what they said would end up, to their detriment, in the files of the KGB, the dreaded Soviet security bureau. I was surprised to hear Māra say that in the deepest years of communism in the 1970s, people secretly wrote diaries and privately told personal experience stories to each other about their lives under the Soviet regime, discussing such taboo subjects as deportations and resistance. In the 1980s, the Soviet Union's policy of *glasnost* slowly opened up the iron curtain and gradually made it possible for Latvia's citizens to enjoy more freedom of speech and action. By 1988, Māra openly interviewed people and gathered their written memoirs for the "Human Archive" [*Cilvēkarhīvs*], an organization founded under the auspices of the Latvian Cultural Foundation.

I was moved by the passion with which Māra organized life story collecting projects. I observed her great curiosity when she listened to people's life stories. She took joy in re-telling these stories, emphasizing traits and values that she felt represented the various regions in Latvia, especially delighting in the contrasting nuances of speech and expression that set one region apart from another.

Māra continued organizing these field trips every summer, though I did not participate in any more until a few years later in 2001, after I had met Karen. Karen had arrived in the United States from Brazil with her husband and co-worker, José, to present

their *Museu da Pessoa* (Museum of the Person) to the American public. They hoped to drum up support and collaboration in building a global life story collecting network on the Internet. I went to hear their presentation at the university and public library in Bloomington and was swept away by Karen's enthusiasm and passion for the life story. She presented lofty goals for using the life story to fulfill her vision of every person's "right to a piece of eternity" and talked of life story collecting projects as ways to build a better and more just society. I noted that numerous academics, museum workers, students, and other citizens shared my enthusiasm for her ideas, as I listened to members of the audience remark about the simplicity of the idea and the importance of establishing such a virtual and socially-minded museum. Karen showed how the Internet could be used as a tool to help people claim a virtual space for their life story to be shared by people throughout the world, providing they had access to the Internet.

After my acquaintance with Karen, I scoured the Internet and noted the existence of many websites featuring life stories about different topics and representing various geographical regions. This great proliferation of life story-based websites made Karen's idea of a virtual museum based on people's life stories even more important and strengthened Karen's conviction that her mission was to build a central online repository or portal that would unite all the life stories scattered throughout the Internet into one accessible and searchable pool of life stories. Once this was accomplished, the portal could serve as a source for socially and culturally oriented projects that would ideally help build a better society.

My encounter with *Museu da Pessoa* and my observations of Karen's use of the life story in Brazil renewed my interest in Māra's *Dzīvesstāsts* and the way Māra used the

life story in Latvia. The Latin American tropical exuberance radiating from Brazil that was the setting for *Museu da Pessoa* made for an intriguing contrast to the home of *Dzīvesstāsts* set in the colder, northern, more introverted Latvia that I was used to. What were the differences and similarities in the ways Māra and Karen used the life story in these two different parts of the globe and what accounted for the difference of vision for each of them? In order to find answers to this question, I needed to establish a framework for what a life story actually is.

THREE LEVELS OF STORY

The oral life story is a concept that exists in various guises and contexts. For example, it can be a spontaneous story told in the privacy of the home, a structured interview composed for a community project, or it can exist in the form of a public documentary that constructs a “story” about a group of people or a whole nation. These three examples illustrate three levels of story, which is a method of approaching “life story” as a concept.

In its most everyday, private, and spontaneous level, the life story is both ubiquitous and elusive. It exists everywhere and in many different situations: at home, at the hairdresser’s, with the grandchildren, at happy hour. This first level of story could be called the “life-episode story.” People are constantly telling and retelling experiences and episodes, constructing and re-constructing their lives, meanings, and values through the process of telling stories as part of social life. The sum total of all these stories told in many settings and at different times can be regarded as the “life story” of the individual.

Charlotte Linde expressed this fluid idea by drawing an analogy with a “cloud of butterflies moving across a garden. Some butterflies drop out and others join in; each butterfly constantly changes its own position slightly within the cloud, and the entire cloud moves, too. If we can recognize such a cloud as an entity, we should also be able to recognize the life story as one” (1993, 36). Linde defines the life story through the eyes of a linguist, regarding each butterfly as a completed text uttered by the individual and then set free to interact with all of the other completed texts that the individual has uttered. In the eyes of a folklorist, these butterflies appear as porous amoebas, each requiring human interaction to change shape, fuse from one form into another, yet somehow in its multidimensionality, still be recognizable as the life story of an individual. The constantly changing shapes are the repeated tellings, or “performances,” within varied social contexts. The concept of “performing” a story within a “social context” takes a prominent place in folkloristics. Bauman noted:

Oral performance, like all human activity, is situated, its form, meaning, and functions rooted in culturally defined scenes or events – bounded segments of the flow of behavior and experience that constitute meaningful contexts for action, interpretation, and evaluation. In the ethnography of oral performance, the performance event has assumed a place beside the text as a fundamental unit of description and analysis, providing the most concretely empirical framework for the comprehension of oral literature as social action by directing attention to the actual conduct of artistic verbal performance in social life (1986, 3).

The combination of performance and text in social context illustrates how complex the life story is, for people are constantly re-contextualizing their stories at every telling to create a product that is born of interpersonal communication as part of social life.

The second level of story requires a structured setting, such as that created by the formal oral interview. This type of life story could be called the “structured life story.” The interviewer is part of the audience, but also is a collaborator who questions, documents, records, and registers the story in some medium or simply calls it forth in the listener’s memory. The “structured life story” can serve as a window into a life for other people who may not necessarily share the same experiences or worldview. Thus, the structured interview allows the public world to catch a glimpse of the stories and values of the private world.

An example of the window from private to public is illustrated in the publication of private letters written by exiled Latvian citizens in the German Displaced Persons camps after World War II. Though these are written life stories rather than oral, the private letters represent the “life-episode stories” that exist in everyday family and social life. Latvian author Jānis Jaunsudrabiņš later published these letters in his book, *Tā mums iet* (Carpenter 1990), therefore making the private letters accessible to the public world that may not have shared these experiences. The publication signifies a “structured life story,” one that requires a documenter to structure a life story for public view. By experiencing the originally private stories, the public gains insight, empathy, and understanding about refugee experiences. The “structured life story” is the level at which

Māra and Karen operate when they interview people for their life stories. It is also the level I refer to most often when I use the term “life story” in this dissertation.

The third level is what I call the “master story.” At this level, one may look upon Māra and Karen as the transmitters, storytellers in their own right, communicating to the public their agendas through their completed products. They have reacted to the value system of the storytellers and created their own “master stories” from the stories told to them. These, then, become a third party’s representations of the world and values depicted by the storytellers. Returning to the Jaunsudrabiņš’ example, his selection of personal letters from the many letters he had at his disposal from Latvian refugees represented his edited “master story,” or public tale, creating meanings from the life stories (or, in this case, private letters) of the Latvian refugee experience for larger agendas and ideals in Latvian culture and society. In Jaunsudrabiņš’ “master story,” Carpenter showed by his selection and repression of letters, that he was prescribing models of behavior that would serve the refugees as guides for the future (Carpenter 1990, 112). Similarly, “master stories” are what Māra and Karen create when they construct products, documentaries, and exhibits using the life stories told to them or to their staff.

MĀRA’S AND KAREN’S MASTER STORIES

There are many people involved in the creation of the master stories in *Dzīvesstāsts* and *Museu da Pessoa*. People other than Māra and Karen collected most of the life stories. Choosing whom to interview and how to turn the life story into a product

often involves more than Māra's and Karen's own personal wishes. Māra and Karen activate and facilitate the interests and talents of the fellow workers and volunteers who work with them, acting as "mediators" between the interview process and its public form – the master story. In this way, the activities of the organization coalesce into a master story created not only by the dictates of Māra and Karen, but also by the active involvement of all the people participating in the project.

Thus, the life story collecting organization acts as a "mediating structure," an institution that, according to Jay Mechling, "stands between the private home-world and the public world of the mega institutions of the market and of the state" (1997, 121). This structure mediates the values of the two worlds it stands between. "Janus-like, it looks both to home and public world for values and procedures" (1997, 123). *Dzīvesstāsts* and *Museu da Pessoa* function as mediating arenas where the people involved in the creation of master stories work together and respond to the values embodied in the life stories. They examine and adjust these values on the basis of their own values, and then negotiate with each other on how much the words can be re-shaped, edited, and re-contextualized to fit broader meanings in the public world, such as justice, social equality, nationhood.

I will not deal with all of the people involved in the creation of a master story within the limited scope of this dissertation. Rather, I will concentrate on the two leaders and founders of these organizations, Māra and Karen. They have their own agendas as storytellers and founded their organizations with certain visions and goals. The master stories they create embody these visions. In this dissertation, I will analyze the messages in their master stories, and how these messages have their foundations in Māra's and Karen's backgrounds and in their own personal life stories.

WHY LATVIA AND BRAZIL?

Latvia and Brazil are two very different countries set far apart in distance, one in Latin America and the other in the northern European Baltics. Brazil is as large in area as the continental United States, while Latvia is just slightly larger than the state of West Virginia. Brazil has an indigenous Indian culture while Latvia's indigenous culture is the Latvians themselves, though a good number of them have inter-married throughout the years with Germans, Russians, Slavs, Scandinavians, and members of the other Baltic nations. Brazil, as well, has undergone an intense mixing of races and ethnicities that characterizes Brazil's diverse population. Brazil has a large black population from Africa, due to the former slave trade when Brazil was a Portuguese colony, while Latvia is predominantly white European. In Latvia, the slaves of the 17th and 18th centuries were the Latvians themselves. Instead of being called "slaves," the Latvians working for the German aristocracy were called "serfs," servants of the German barons, who were the owners of the largest estates in Latvia.

Thus, despite their differences, Brazil and Latvia have dealt with similar issues of ethnic/racial mixing and political hegemony that resulted in serfdom, slavery, racial and ethnic tensions, immigration, domestic tyranny, and foreign domination. The contrasting situations bring into focus similar issues of identity, finding one's voice in a mixed society, dealing with oppression, and grappling with inequality in society. However, a difference in size may affect how each country relates to its own image of self. A smaller country may feel it needs to assert its identity so as not to get overshadowed or swallowed by larger countries, as we see in Latvia's constant fear of aggression from its

neighbor Russia and in its need to assert itself in the face of America's increasing influence. A larger country such as Brazil may be more tolerant of an identity defined by diversity rather than homogeneity.

One of the most striking similarities is that both Brazil and Latvia experienced dictatorships in the 20th century. Both totalitarian systems eventually folded, with a subsequent demand for a just settling of accounts by the population. There were parallels between the struggles towards a free-market society in the post-totalitarian countries of Latin America and the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe. Still, as Eastern European and Latin American specialist Lawrence Weschler noted, Eastern Europe has had a tougher time in setting itself free from the consequences of the totalitarian regime. "The Eastern European totalitarian system had been far more entrenched and dispersed than its South American counterpart. The 'decayed moral environment' had suffused the entire society, as Vaclav Havel endeavored to explain." (1998, 274). In contrast, Brazil's military dictatorship was brutal, yet relatively short-lived, lasting two decades compared to the Soviet Union's fifty years of rule. Afterwards, the facts of torture practiced during the dictatorship were established in the publication of the military's secret documents, *Brasil, nunca mais* (Brazil, never more), where the "actual history was inscribed in the common memory. . . . Truth set both themselves and their societies free" (Weschler 1998, 245). What can Latvia learn from Brazil's experiences of "settling accounts" with its totalitarian regime? What does Karen's story say about the dictatorship and its aftermath?

In this dissertation, I will examine how the life story collecting organizations *Dzīvesstāsts* and *Museu da Pessoa*, with their leaders and founders, Māra and Karen, strive to tell a public story, or master story, about the many stories told to them. They

come from contrasting backgrounds: Māra is from a small nation, occupied by a foreign power, but recently regaining its independence, while Karen comes from a large nation with no recent history of foreign domination, but a recent history of a military dictatorship. We will see that their master stories differ according to these backgrounds and cultural/historical contexts, but also share similarities. What are the differences and similarities? How do their master stories differ and why? I maintain that Māra looks more towards the past, commemorating Latvia's "silenced" portions of history from World War II and its aftermath, while Karen looks more towards the present and future, applying life story collecting to effect social change.

RESEARCH AND LANGUAGE ISSUES

My strategy in pursuing this research was to make a few month-long field trips in 2002-2003 to both Latvia and Brazil, acting as a participant observer within Māra's and Karen's organizations. My primary tools were my field notebook, tape recorder, and camera. My timing was fortunate, because both organizations were organizing international conferences in 2003 to mark the end of their first ten years of existence. This was a good opportunity to observe and compare Māra's and Karen's issues and approaches at presenting their goals and activities to the general public.

English, Latvian, and Portuguese are the three languages involved in my data. Since my knowledge of Portuguese is much weaker than of Latvian, participant observation has naturally been harder to do in Brazil than in Latvia. Much of the informal conversation among informants that is so important in gathering data in the field was lost

for me in Brazil due to my inability to follow the rapid pace of conversational Portuguese.

However, this gave me an excuse to ask the museum staff to explain the events of the day. In this way, I could comprehend the day's issues at a more leisurely pace through the reflective evaluation of the museum staff. Karen always spoke to me in English, not her native Portuguese, but Māra always spoke to me in her native Latvian. With translations, meanings have different nuances, depending on the language and one's familiarity with it. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, close readings of prose are not my prime concern. I will make a note in those cases where variations due to language are important for this study.

My data are my recorded life stories of Māra and Karen, my recordings of several meetings where they made presentations, an edited film produced by each of the two women and their organizations, and various informal comments made by Māra and Karen while I was shadowing them. I also have several field notebooks filled with accounts and observations that I noted while acting as a participant observer in Māra's and Karen's work.

There is much more data, though, that I did not use, and that have remained on the higher shelves of my bookcase. The primary difficulty of this topic was in its immensity and my attempts at wrestling the mass of issues and possibilities down to a manageable size. The results that I have finally arrived at highlight the main aspects that make Māra's and Karen's projects distinct, unique, and interesting in their richness of human experience.

FIELDWORK AND DATA

My fieldwork took me to both Brazil and Latvia. For the most part, my fieldwork consisted of participant observation. I strove to keep alert for relevant comments from Māra, Karen, and people associated with them. I carried around a tiny notebook, which I could easily put in, and take out of my pocket to scribble phrases and observations at opportune times. I conducted very few interviews, the only ones being with Māra, Karen, and Claudia (Karen's close co-worker). Nevertheless, I recorded various meetings, seminars, conferences, lectures, workshops, and in the end, had recorded twenty-one audiocassettes related to *Dzīvesstāsts* and Māra in Latvia, and twenty-seven audiocassettes related to Karen's *Museu da Pessoa* in Brazil. I use quotes from these recorded cassettes throughout my dissertation. The page numbers in parentheses are the page numbers of my transcriptions of Māra's and Karen's life stories. I translated all the Latvian and Portuguese quotes that I use in this dissertation into English.

I did not tape videos, but I copied several films, video-interviews, and demonstration films from Māra's and Karen's collection -- seven videotapes from Māra's *Dzīvesstāsts*, and six videotapes from Karen's *Museu da Pessoa*. I also have several products that Māra and Karen created from the life stories: three published books from *Dzīvesstāsts*, one book and one CD-ROM from *Museu da Pessoa*. In addition, I have a few articles written by Māra or Karen, programs and notes from each of their conferences, some PowerPoint presentations by the museum, along with folders of their blank documentation forms for archival purposes, training manuals, and other informational literature. I also have several e-mails from Māra and Karen when we

communicated back and forth about various questions, and some folders and notebooks with my field notes. All these materials I regard as potential data, since they reflect the mission and character of Karen and Māra, *Museu da Pessoa* and *Dzīvesstāsts*.

My main focus is not on the organization itself and the people who work there, nor the people that they interview, but on Māra and Karen as leaders and founders of these organizations. This dissertation is about how they realized their visions, goals, and ideals through the process of life story collecting and how they created their products using their visions within the cultural context in which they are based. Thus, I considered most important in my fieldwork to stay as close to Māra and Karen as possible, as they were my main objects of research. In practice, though, much time was spent with other people involved with the projects and there were many situations when Māra and Karen were just part of a crowd of other people.

Since the situation in each of the countries differed, I will briefly discuss my fieldwork situation in each country.

***Dzīvesstāsts*: Fieldwork with Māra in Latvia**

Since I am a first generation Latvian, born in the United States, I grew up with an education in Latvian history and culture. My father and mother both fled from Latvia at the end of World War II, not willing to remain there under the Soviet regime and, in my mother's case, risk being deported to Siberia. My native language was Latvian and while growing up in Brooklyn, New York, I attended weekend Latvian school as well as Latvian girl scouts, folk dance group, camp, and other Latvian activities. I was immersed

in the culture of exiled Latvians and thus, am familiar with the history and plight of Latvia. All this knowledge and experience was a great help to me in understanding the motivations and background of *Dzīvesstāsts*.

However, I didn't have much knowledge of the situation in Latvia between World War II and the present. Information for most exiled Latvians ended with World War II, since the iron curtain had fallen and the exile community regarded those individuals who attempted to communicate with Soviet Latvia with suspicion, considering them to have communist tendencies (for a discussion of exile Latvians and life story, see Carpenter 1988, 1990). When Latvia regained its independence in 1991 and the iron curtain had risen, information between Latvia and the exiled Latvians throughout the world (now renamed as the diaspora) flowed freely. In the early 1990s, I took advantage of the changed political climate and spent two to three years living in different parts of Latvia teaching English and Swedish.

The annual life story collecting field trips that *Dzīvesstāsts* organized were good opportunities for Latvians outside of Latvia to become familiar with the people in Latvia and to find out how they had lived during the "silenced" years between World War II and 1991. These field trips attracted a mix of native and exiled Latvians. Maija Hinkle, a Latvian-American, inspired by the idea of collecting life stories, founded a branch of *Dzīvesstāsts* in America to gather life stories from Latvians in the diaspora. I too was interested in attending one of the field trips in Latvia, and in June 1997, Inta Carpenter introduced me to Māra and *Dzīvesstāsts*. I already had some experience with interviewing Latvians in 1991 and 1992. In these early interviews, I interviewed Latvians who had survived deportation to Siberia, as well as farmers in the region of Latgale, eastern

Latvia, whom the Soviet regime had forced to join the collective kolchoz (farm) in the 1950s. Forced collectivization disrupted small village life and resulted in the disintegration of the small hamlets that were prevalent throughout Latgale. Through these experiences, I had become acquainted with the practice of interviewing, and my interest in life stories was piqued.

I then started to rummage through the Internet and found many other websites and organizations that dealt with storytelling, oral histories, digital storytelling, and life story collecting, among them *Dzīvesstāsts* and *Museu da Pessoa*. I thought it would be interesting to compare these two organizations, since I had become acquainted with both.

My fieldwork with Māra and *Dzīvesstāsts* consisted of two field trips in 2001 (Liepāja) and 2002 (Ventspils) and the *Dzīvesstāsts* conference in 2003 (Riga). This fieldwork could be divided up into three time frames: 1) during the field trips; 2) the time in-between the field trips; and 3) during the conference.

The Field Trips

Each field trip lasted one to two weeks. A one-day seminar introduced each field trip, to which Māra invited several scholars who had done work analyzing and collecting life stories. This was meant, as Māra said, to “entice” the participants so that they may discover what interests them. For instance, in Liepāja in 2001, the presenters were an anthropologist discussing various cultural groups and the categories of anthropological research; a folklorist discussing the folkloric themes one may come across in life story, such as rituals, material culture, dreams, and ornaments; a sociologist discussing her

research with the inhabitants of one city apartment building in Riga; a teacher discussing how she used life story in the classroom, and others. Each presented his/her side of what it meant to collect life stories and how they were used in their field of scholarship. Māra also asked several of the participants to say a few words about why they were interested in participating in the field trips. In Liepāja, for example, Māra asked one of the Liepāja University students to speak, as well as an exiled Latvian who recently had moved back to Latvia. Augusts Milts, a retired professor of philosophy, sociology, and ethics, whom Māra considers to be the “spiritual director” of *Dzīvesstāsts*, stressed the importance of uncovering people’s values through life stories in order to emphasize the spiritual nature of Latvians in everyday existence. All these viewpoints presented in the introductory seminar served to show the wide horizon of applications possible in research, and helped to alert the participants what to listen for when they conducted their interviews.

All through these presentations, some interviewing techniques were alluded to. Māra and Milts urged the participants not to overwhelm the interviewee with questions and to understand the importance of silence in an interview. However, nobody spent much time in teaching interviewing techniques. A few years earlier, however, in 1997, the field trip included a pre-workshop of several days with hands-on practice of interviewing techniques and equipment operation. On the most recent field trips, Māra left out the introductory interviewing workshop and focused rather on pairing up experienced interviewers with inexperienced ones, so that training could happen on the job through observation and coaching. The consequences of this method left the inexperienced interviewers without a firm foundation of basic interviewing techniques.

Rather, they learned by apprenticing with a master interviewer. Thus, the experienced interviewers shaped the interviewing skills of the beginners.

After that, the practical part of the field trip started. Māra divided people into groups according to the beginner/expert method, and according to the interests and wishes of the individual participants. Māra made sure that a group consisted of an experienced person and a couple of beginners. I tried to put myself where Māra would be most of the time. As it turned out, though, I spent only a portion of the time with Māra, since she was often on the road, visiting the various groups and making sure everything was running smoothly.

However, I did succeed in “shadowing” Mara in some situations. I could observe Māra in the role of interviewer while I served as her recording technician. During those times, I noted Māra’s keen sense of curiosity and interest in people’s lives. She often brought a few groups together in the evenings to discuss the day’s work and strategies for the next day. I was present when she searched for possible new interviewees and received recommendations for potential tellers from local cultural librarians, museum workers, and teachers. She was always in communication with somebody, and her characteristic pose was with a telephone in her hand. Sometimes she would gather a group of participants and accompany them to an interview. She was the facilitator, the catalyst, the perfect hostess, the advisor, and the “soul” of *Dzīvesstāsts* (as she was described by her colleagues), and constantly on the move to find more people to interview.

At the end of the week of interviews, all the groups came together for a final report on their findings. They were asked to point out what character traits and values had

crystallized from the interviews. In these final seminars, Māra acted as a facilitator and summarized the findings of the various groups that presented their work.

My results from this portion of the fieldwork appeared mostly in the form of scribbles in my notebook, notes and observations, and field notes that I took for each day. The notes were about Māra in action during fieldwork; of phrases she uttered that seemed particularly relevant, as well as comments from other people familiar with Māra's work. My notes also contained observations about Māra's interviewing techniques, and those of other participants, as well as myself, since I also participated in the interviews. My notes also contain observations about finding and choosing interviewees, carrying out interviews, various tips on training beginners, as well as observations about the different participants and tellers that I met in Latvia, which helped me to better understand the regional differences of people and life styles that exist in present-day Latvia. All these nuggets of information helped clarify the general philosophy of *Dzīvesstāsts* and its interests.

Before and after Field Trips

Before and after the field trips, I often went to Māra's office to help translate passages into English, chat, or just to sit around and watch what happens in the *Dzīvesstāsts* office while the staff is organizing or recuperating from a field trip. Sometimes, I accompanied Māra when she took on the role of tour guide for her international guests. She was a generous hostess, showing them the sites, places, institutions, and museums in Latvia. Sometimes she would take the guests with her as

she visited interviewees in the far east of Latvia. Once, I accompanied her to a Baltic conference in east Latvia (Latgale), which treated the theme of peripheral identity. She presented a paper about the work of *Dzīvesstāsts* and the appearance of local landmarks and dialects in life stories that embody the identities, values, and characteristics of the various regions in Latvia. All these situations were additional opportunities to get better acquainted with Māra and *Dzīvesstāsts*.

Māra and I also found time to sit down and talk about life stories. More often than not she was pressed for time, rushing to meet somebody, or constantly interrupted by telephone calls. In one exceptional case, though, we sat through the whole evening in her office with practically no interruptions as we recorded each other's life stories. This session remained particularly etched in my memory. The summer light of those long Nordic days grew dimmer and dimmer as it neared midnight, while the microphone was pointed first at me, and then at Māra.

Certainly, my role as an American-born Latvian granted me special status both as an insider (Latvian parents and Latvian native language) and an outsider (foreigner born outside of Latvia). I was accepted as a Latvian both by Māra and other Latvians. Yet, not having grown up in Latvia, I wasn't an insider in the everyday knowledge and existence of native Latvians. This granted me special attention as a foreigner whom Māra felt needed to be guided around to various sites in Latvia. My upbringing as a daughter of exiled Latvians taught me to hate communism and regard it as the source for the misery and downfall of Latvia during the communist regime. My attitudes toward recent Latvian history certainly influenced my work and observations in this dissertation, urging me to seek affirmation of the evil results of communism in Latvia, and to seek out individuals

who share my patriotic feelings. However, the range of interviewees that I met helped to soften my earlier black/white views on Latvian history, broadening my horizons, and learning to perceive the subtleties and nuances that surfaced when Latvians constructed their lives in the telling of life stories.

The Conference

In the spring of 2003, I attended a conference in Riga organized by *Dzīvesstāsts*. The conference was the culminating event that marked the end of the seven-year fieldwork funded by the Latvian Foundation in America.

In this conference, presenters arrived from many parts of Europe, the Baltics, as well as Latvians from the American diaspora. The conference was a chance to hear researchers from various disciplines and different parts of the world talk about their work with life stories and oral history. My role in the conference was that of listener. I recorded a few papers that seemed most relevant, such as the presentations of Baiba Bela (Māra's close assistant) and two Latvian folklorists (Bula and Pakalns), as well as the final closing panel that included Bela, medical anthropologist Vieda Skultāns from England, Maija Hinkle (the leader of the American branch of *Dzīvesstāsts*), and Augusts Milts. Māra herself did not present a paper. Instead, she stayed in the background, acting as a facilitator, gathering people for the breaks, giving announcements, and handing out the all-important symbolic tokens of appreciation and thanks to people who organized the conference and to those who had traveled the farthest. This made people feel appreciated and created a satisfactory note of closure at the end of the conference.

The conference marked a turning point for *Dzīvesstāsts* and its first ten years of existence, bringing it to a different level of emphasis. The conference was a summary of work done during the summer field trips and was an opportunity for academics to network and discuss each other's research. *Dzīvesstāsts* published a compilation of life stories for this conference in both English and Latvian.

Māra later told me that in this conference, she hoped to develop contacts with scholarly partners from the Nordic countries -- Finland, Sweden, and Norway, in order to work on a joint project with *Dzīvesstāsts*. This was to be a collaboration and exchange of information and experience among the Nordic countries. Thus, this conference marked the end of the organized *Dzīvesstāsts* field trips and the formal collaboration of exiled and native Latvians. Though Māra still continued to work together with exiled Latvians, the conference signaled the shift to a Nordic area of interest. The change in concentration to Nordic scholars was symptomatic, perhaps, of a shift in interest away from diaspora Latvians. Enthusiasm for the reconciliation between native and diaspora Latvians had begun to wane and native Latvians were showing more interest in collaborating with non-Latvians.

Museu da Pessoa: Fieldwork with Karen in Brazil

I first met Karen in Seattle in 2001 at the Museums and the Web conference where she presented *Museu da Pessoa* in a workshop dedicated to expanding the museum into an international *Museu da Pessoa*. A week later, she came to Bloomington to present

the museum to the university and the community. I have recorded all these public presentations.

I took my first month-long field trip to Brazil in November 2002. When I first entered the museum, I was instantly included in the life of the museum. Since I hadn't constructed a plan for what I wanted to do or see, Karen sat down with me and drew up an activities plan, "American style" as she put it, implying that systematic organization was very American. My days quickly filled up in the calendar as she entered recommendations for where I should participate in order to get acquainted with the museum's work. I soon learned, though, that appointments and times in Brazil and the museum were extremely fluid. Events were postponed at the last minute and people arrived for appointments an hour late without blinking an eye. It was yet another legacy of the "spontaneity" and informality of the Brazilian way of life.

I have divided my fieldwork into three sections: the museum, the field trips, and the conference.

The Museum on Rua Delfina

Since I didn't have a clear idea of how to get to know the museum, all the suggestions of whom to meet, where to go and who to talk to were Karen's ideas as to what was most important. She paired me up with Carol, a student intern at the museum with excellent English language skills. She gave me a general tour of the physical building in which the museum was housed and guided me through the virtual museum on their website.

Karen then set me up to get acquainted with all the main stations of the museum: the strategy-planning stage, the setting up of timelines for the various projects, the structure of the museum, the computer connection, the databases involved, the organization of the material into databases, the process of selecting photos, the summarizing of the interviews, the archival section, the vault full of cassettes. Some media were on VHS videotape, but the audio was mostly on DATs and entirely digital, since the museum was very much a part of the digital movement. I also observed the production crew videotaping and putting together edited videos using digital technology.

The museum staff was very generous with its time, exhibiting extraordinary patience in speaking English with me and in tolerating my attempts at conversing with them in Portuguese. Karen highly recommended I talk to Claudia, who had been a co-worker with Karen from the very first years of the museum and who was responsible for training new workers. I spent many hours with her, taking notes while she patiently explained in Portuguese the museum's philosophy, educational projects, and method of interviewing.

Often, I would just walk around in the museum and observe. There was almost always a meeting going on where I would be invited to listen. When I was not in a meeting, I would sit out in the reception room and observe the non-stop bustle. The two phones rang incessantly, messengers constantly came in to deliver or pick up something. There was always a steady stream of staff and guests who would drop by in an attempt to solve a problem, discuss, talk, grumble, but always with a dose of Brazilian kissing, hugging, joking, stories, and laughter.

I recorded many meetings and workshops and received folders full of blank archival forms, information about the museum, interviewing manuals, etc. I also interviewed Karen in English and Claudia in very slow Portuguese about the work of the museum and Claudia's method of teaching children about the concept of memory.

The Field Trips

The museum had many partnerships with commercial companies, non-profit organizations, educational, and cultural institutions, which required a large amount of travel to Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, Santos, and smaller cities inland, such as Uberaba and Uberlandia.

I traveled to Rio de Janeiro in order to observe the video cabin in action, the museum's mobile interviewing tent. In Rio, I also observed a four-hour life story session with a famous Carnival organizer, Joazinho III, and accompanied the museum to a meeting in the *favela* (slum) where the museum acted as facilitator in the organization of an oral history project. I also observed a meeting in the Institute for Digital Inclusion. In the inland cities, I witnessed the opening of an exhibit created by low income schoolchildren, who demonstrated their collaborative work interviewing residents from their communities. This educational project was the result of a partnership between the museum and the local Brazilian school system. In São Paulo, I witnessed the screening of a new film co-produced by the museum that was based on the life stories of Brazilian immigrants (discussed in Chapter 4). I also attended a function honoring the publication of the 2003 *Museu da Pessoa* calendar, which focused on the immigrants in São Paulo,

including historic photos and quotes from their life stories to mark each month of the year.

Fieldwork in Latvia was easier to carry out than in Brazil, due to my knowledge of Latvian language, culture, and history. Fortunately, in Brazil, my helper and friend, Sonia, served as my “key informant.” During my research in São Paulo, I rented rooms in the houses of the museum staff, which allowed for quality time to talk informally over a meal or on the road and ask questions about the museum, its work, or about Brazil in general. This helped immensely in understanding the museum and obtaining insight about Brazilian life and culture.

The Conference

Just like its counterpart, *Dzīvesstāsts*, the museum organized an international conference to mark its first ten years of existence, which, in both cases, took place in 2003. In the *Museu da Pessoa* conference, plenary lectures and panels took place in the mornings of the conference with simultaneous translation from Portuguese to English and from English to Portuguese. I recorded most of the plenary panels and lectures and even recorded some with English translation through headphones. In the afternoons, workshops were scheduled. I tried to track down Karen’s whereabouts, which sometimes succeeded. I recorded the conclusion to one of the workshops (Museums and the Web workshop), where Karen presented an informal and spontaneous “speech” about the main goals of a life story network.

The plenary sessions of the conference gave me an idea of who Karen's main "heroes" were, since the museum had invited all the guests who participated in those sessions and discussed ideas most relevant for the museum's work. These guests included Internet scholars and experts, professors with specialization in memory and oral history, the union leader of Brazil's biggest oil company with whom Karen collaborated in a commercial project, and Karen's good friend Paul Thompson, considered one of the world's leading oral historians and founder of the British Museum's Oral History Library. I also participated in the "internal seminar" the day after the conference, where all the foreign guests, the Board of the museum, and the staff participated in discussion groups devoted to planning strategies and working out issues for the next ten years of the museum. Karen concluded that the first ten years marked the museum's success in constructing a solid financial and collaborative foundation. In the next ten years, Karen emphasized the need to develop a global network that would centralize access to life stories, so that organizations throughout the world could use the network as a source for life story projects of cultural importance and for social change.

OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation contains four major sections divided into five chapters. After surveying the scholarly literature regarding life stories, I will analyze Māra's and Karen's own life stories in order to illustrate their agendas that will be the basis of their master stories. A closer analysis of two films that each has produced will show how each used

her agenda to create a master story in terms of a public product. Finally, I will examine their work in the larger historical context of the two countries – Latvia and Brazil.

I propose to pursue this study by examining the life story as a genre in Chapter 1. What is the life story? What do folklorists and historians say about the characteristics of life story? I will examine some definitions and ideas of researchers regarding life story, life narrative, personal experience narrative, and oral history. I selected these researchers either because they have written specifically about these genres or are authors whom Māra and Karen frequently referred to. The larger purpose of this chapter is to set the scene for the use of life stories for larger agendas and to introduce the concept of master story. Chapter 2 will present short backgrounds of the organization *Dzīvesstāsts*, founded by Māra in Latvia, and *Museu da Pessoa*, founded by Karen in Brazil, tracing the ideas that led to the “births” of these organizations from Māra’s and Karen’s childhood years to the maturation of *Dzīvesstāsts* and *Museu da Pessoa* as bona fide organizations.

In Chapter 3, I will examine Māra’s and Karen’s own life stories in light of the ideas I discussed in Chapter 1. Māra and Karen create their life stories to embody their own worldviews. How do they construct their life stories to represent the master story that they wish to convey? How do the conclusions in Chapter 1 figure into Māra’s and Karen’s thoughts about life story?

In Chapters 4 and 5, I will examine how Māra and Karen present their “master stories” through presentations and products. Chapter 4 examines two examples of products -- one edited film produced each by Māra and Karen. What life stories in the products do they choose to emphasize and exalt, and how do they interpret and translate these stories into bigger and more representative meanings? In Chapter 5, I analyze some

of these meanings in the bigger cultural and historical backdrop of Brazil and Latvia. I will discuss how their websites communicate their master stories and possible reasons why their master stories differ from each other.

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS LIFE STORY?

Life story has found a home in many disciplines. One can define, analyze, and use life story in numerous ways. Folklore, oral history, anthropology, and sociology each examines life story through its own lens. In this chapter, I will focus on some of these scholarly ideas regarding the identity and characteristics of life story. Though life story has gained the firmest foothold in anthropology, I will only mention some selected anthropological literature. (For discussions about life story and life history in the field of anthropology, see L.L. Langness, and many others.) Since I am writing from the folklorist's perspective and Māra and Karen are drawing heavily from the oral historian's angle, I will concentrate mostly on folklore and oral history literature.

The term "life story" is often used in everyday language and popular culture. The frequent use of the term in day-to-day contexts complicates the attempt to assign "life story" a scholarly definition. Moreover, it is difficult to extricate life story from the clutches of related genres such as personal narrative, life history, anecdote, and autobiography. Rather than burden this study with the daunting task of isolating a unique definition for life story, I will analyze some features that emphasize distinguishing traits of life story relevant to this study. Other related genres also may share some of these features.

In the first half of this chapter, I will refer primarily to the life story type that I call "structured life story," that is, life stories that are usually elicited by another person,

often in the form of a life story interview (see Introduction, p. 4). In order to set the scene, I will present a short history of the personal narrative and life story as folklore genres, followed by a short discussion on the definition of life story and some characteristics that the life story exhibits as discussed in scholarly literature: a) truth vs. fiction; b) authority of the teller vs. researcher; c) story vs. history; d) balance of power between interviewer and interviewee; and e) activism and testimonials. During the discussion process, I will examine life story with regard to the following factors: 1) purpose, 2) method of collection, 3) characteristics, 4) context, and 5) style.

In the final section of this chapter, I will explore the concept of master story and formulate and highlight its significance in this dissertation.

A HISTORY OF THE LIFE STORY AS A FOLKLORE GENRE

Life story as a genre is a relative newcomer to the field of folklore and takes its place among accepted old-timers such as proverbs, folktales, and the more recent personal experience narrative, though some folklore scholars still have not accepted life story as a full-fledged folklore genre. Only since the 1960s have stories about individual lives become more widely accepted as source material by folklorists, as noted by Titon: “In the past twenty years or so, many American folklorists have become more interested in people’s stories of their own lives and less interested in people’s stories of ghosts, fairies, talking animals, and the like” (1986, 166). Juha Pentikäinen, however, lamented about the lack of folklorists who studied life stories in the 1980s: “Surprisingly enough, there has been much less interest so far in life-history materials in folkloric circles than in

psychology, anthropology, and history, for example” (1986, 169). Pentikäinen’s comment points out how important life story was in other European academic disciplines, such as history and psychology. Juha Nirrko of the Finnish Literature Society’s Folklore Archives in Helsinki, however, observed that the life story was well accepted in the 1960s as archival material: “[In the 1960s], tape recorders grew lighter and tapes cheaper, with the result that systematic sound recording increased and more discourse of a life-story nature was deposited in the Archives” (1999, 23). Nirrko associated an increase in life story recordings with improvements in recording technology, which made it easier to record longer portions of speech.

For the folklorist, the roots of life story may be traced to narrative story genres such as the folktale of the 1800s. However, folktales did not emphasize the personal experiences of the storyteller, but, on the contrary, ignored the teller entirely. The Grimm Brothers published volumes of folktales that “emphasized the texts, and suppressed any information about the storytellers or their settings” (Dorson 1957, 53). The Grimm brothers edited these texts to reflect the Romanticist ideology of the times, which emphasized the search for the soul of the “folk” and the reconstruction of a heroic past (Dorson 1972, 15; Degh in Dorson 1972, 54; et al).

With the gaining impetus of industrialization and the aftermath of World War II, the changing life styles of many of the world’s cultures diverted the attention of folklorists from the reconstruction of past conditions to observation of the current impact of rapid industrialization, immigration, and urbanization (Degh 1975, ix). “True story” genres that were creations of the life of the storyteller such as the memorate and later the personal experience narrative became more interesting to folklorists. The spontaneity of

these personal oral forms of narrative was a stark contrast to the heavily edited written versions of narrative the Grimm brothers had created.

Historian Andre Jolles in 1929 described oral literary forms as “simple, spontaneous products originating in the spoken language, as opposed to complex, consciously created literary forms” (Degh in Dorson 1972, 53). Memorate, personal experience narrative, and life story are members of this broad field of oral literary forms. However, one would have to qualify the words “simple,” “spontaneous,” and “consciously created” in this definition. The teller creates oral narrative forms such as the life story in his/her mind throughout his/her lifetime. The act of telling the story is thus a mixture of spontaneity and consciously thought out narrative, really not a very “simple” form at all. Nevertheless, this definition serves as a basic distinction between a deliberately composed piece of written literature and the emergent spontaneous oral creation by the teller. Folklorists appreciated these simple, spontaneous oral products because of the wealth of cultural and aesthetic knowledge they contained. The folklorists’ job was to interpret these oral forms in order to understand the beliefs, traditions, artistry, and worldview of ethnic and social groups as well as individuals.

In the last half century, the role of the individual took on a sharper focus in folklore. Out of the general mass concept of the “folk,” the individuals crystallized out more clearly, while at the same time, the vagueness and masses of the “folk” as a group receded in the background (see Pentikäinen’s *Oral Repertoire and World view: an Anthropological Study of Marina Takalo’s Life History*, 1978; Tilton’s *From Blues to Pop: the Autobiography of Leonard ‘Baby Doo’ Caston*, 1974; Abrahams’ *A Singer and her Songs: Alameda Riddle’s Book of Ballads*, 1970, etc.). It became problematic to

define an anonymous folk mass in a society that was less homogenous and less isolated; and as technology allowed for better and faster communication and transportation, it was easier for groups to exchange information and to mix with each other, creating diversity and heterogeneity. The term “fusion” emerged as a common designation in popular musical culture, indicating a mixture of groups and traditions. In the eyes of folkloristics, the relationship between the individual and the group became multi-faceted and diverse and could include any common core of traditions. For the purposes of research, folklorists reduced the size of the “folk” group to “at least two persons . . . who share at least one common factor” (Dundes 1965, 2).

Along with the changing definitions of “folk” and the increasing preoccupation of the individual versus the collective, individual creativity acquired a new emphasis. The growing interest in the individual precipitated the problem of distinguishing between individual creativity and the collective tradition in which he/she was raised. Edward Ives in his book about Larry Gorman wonders, “how much I was dealing with a unique individual and how much with a tradition” (1964, 6). Shared meanings of the community made up an integral part of individual creativity, creating a rich and complicated relationship between the individual and his/her environment, as well as between the innovative and the traditional.

Thus, the gradual breakthrough of the individual to a more focal position and a growing interest in the creativity, artistry, and personality of the individual teller was an essential precursor to the acceptance of the life story genre in folkloristics. However, the length of the life story caused difficulties in its methodology and collection. The longer format and flexible structure of the life story made it more problematic to document and

analyze than traditional smaller genres. Moreover, in the first half of the 20th century, folklore was struggling to be recognized as an academic field and was more concerned with the collection of scientific, quantitative data, or “items,” similar to the quantitative collection of specimens intrinsic to the natural and concrete sciences. A personal experience narrative or life story was much too unwieldy and diffuse to be regarded seriously as a genre of folklore. It was difficult to define common form, characteristics, and methods for research.

In Latvia, as well, the life story has only recently been accepted into the field of folklore. *Nostāsts*, an emic genre well known to the Latvian public, is similar in meaning to the personal experience narrative. In the first half of the 20th century, Latvian folklorists regarded *nostāsts* as peripheral material within which may be contained “items” of folklore. The folklorist simply “cut out with scissors” the “real” items of folklore such as proverbs, jokes, and folk beliefs from the longer *nostāsts* (Pakalns 2003, Manuscript conference paper). A Latvian folklore collector’s handbook, written by members of the Latvian Academy of Sciences in 1958, gave *nostāsts* a marginal informative role. It described *nostāsts* as a “realistic story created from memories about contemporary life events and experiences...In folkloristics, it is most important as a source of information that testifies to the folk’s worldview in the past and provides facts in research about the folk’s work and life.” From this description, it is evident that *nostāsts* was a genre that mostly provided supplementary historical and factual information to the folklorist (Ambainis 1958, 80).

During the Soviet era of the 1950s, *nostāsts* acquired a political meaning for the collection of “present-day folklore” serving communist ideology. In this same handbook,

written in the initial years of Soviet Latvia, *nostāsts* was described as a genre assigned to collect experiences about the history of communism in Latvia, revolutionary activities, and other socially and politically oriented leftist themes (Ambainis 1958, 80). Folklorist Pakalns pointed out that, “interest in Latvia about present-day folklore arose within Soviet folkloristics in the 1940s, when folklorists were forced to collect folklore that would function as an ideological force in the work of building a socialistic and communist world.” This “ideologizing” of folklore created a distaste in Latvia for collecting present-day folklore for a long time (Pakalns in Lūse 2002, 49).

Despite the leftist burden that was thrust upon the Latvian *nostāsts* by Soviet ideology, folklorists in Latvia as well have gradually come to accept life story as a genre of folklore and as a way to collect past and present-day folklore. In recent years, folklorist Kursīte described life story as a “fresh breeze,” a new perspective that breathed new life into collecting folklore (2003, Manuscript conference paper). Folklorist Dace Bula as well confirms the acceptance of life story in Latvian folkloristics: “The personal narrative, the life story, has now officially taken its place in scholarship next to more traditional oral narrative -- folktales, legends, anecdotes” (Bula in Lūse 2002, 7).

SOME DISTINGUISHING TRAITS OF LIFE STORY

How can one define “life story?” How can one disentangle its nuances from those of its close relatives: oral history, life history, personal experience narrative, and its ancestor, the memorate? Perhaps this is a task not worth undertaking, since the boundaries of these genres are hazy and blend into each other and some scholarly

literature uses some of these terms interchangeably. Titon points out that folklorist Richard Dorson used the phrase “personal history” interchangeably with the phrase “life story” in his writings about the history of the elite and history of the folk (1980, 277), while folklorist Linda Degh uses “life story” and “life history” interchangeably in her book, *People in the tobacco belt: Four lives*. Degh argues for a more liberal handling of definitions, as she notes that there is an arbitrariness of genre terminology which is constructed by scholars for their own purposes of analysis and interpretation. “Instead of narrowing and tightening, categories should be broadened” (1984 manuscript, 1). Bauman points out that traditional approaches toward pure generic types tended to marginalize “blended forms.” He argues that genres need to be conceptualized as “open-ended, flexible, and manipulable sets of discursive conventions and expectations” (1992, 58).

Life story can be regarded as such a “blended form,” open-ended and flexible, blending into personal experience narrative, oral history, and life history. Therefore, a discussion about some features of the personal experience narrative would be useful, because they are characteristic of life story as well. Sandra Stahl, who first called attention to the personal experience narrative as a literary folkloristic genre, has defined the basic principles of personal experience narrative. A personal experience narrative is: 1) a dramatic narrative structure, relating a 2) personal experience, with the 3) self-same identity of the teller and the story’s main character, and 4) a consistently implied assertion that the narrative is true (Stahl 1989, 15). Life story is also grounded in these principles, as are the memorate, oral history, and life history. The memorate deals more often with supernatural experiences, whereas oral history, life history, and life story can

treat any life experiences. Thus, these genres are examples of blended forms that have common characteristics and therefore, statements about one can often be applied to the other.

Folklore literature on personal experience narrative is now rather common. However, with the exception of Jeff Tilton, whom I refer to often in this chapter, folklorists have not written much about the characteristics of the life story and how it differs from the other related narrative genres. Pat Mullen notes that personal narrative is a “part of the life story” (1992, 15). This implies that a life story is composed of many smaller personal narratives. Life story also implies a chronological order to these small narratives covering the lifespan of a person. Patricia Sawin notes that it may be the listener rather than the teller who arranges the individual narratives into a chronological life story: “Part of what we as listeners do with the personal anecdotes told us by an individual in whom we are interested is to organize the incidents chronologically in order to form some picture of a life trajectory” (2004, 22). Thus, Sawin adds a collaborative aspect to life story collecting, emphasizing that both the teller and listener construct a life story. “The cooperative construction of a life story was a discursive activity we actually shared” (2004, 14). This collaboration adds a dynamic and emergent aspect to the life story.

Thus, the conclusions that can be reached from the observations of these folklorists are as follows: life story differs from its relatives by the fact that it is composed of smaller personal narratives that may be set in chronological order, which is often accomplished by the collaborative efforts of both the teller and the listener, creating a dynamic, collaborative, and emergent aspect to the telling.

THE “TENSIONS” OF LIFE STORY

Truth vs. Fiction

The tensions that the life story exhibits illustrate the contradictions, vagueness, and subjectivity of life itself. One node of tension is the intersection between truth and fiction. Jeff Titon views life story as a “self-contained fiction” (1980, 276), which creates a tension with Stahl’s observation of the personal experience narrative’s “consistently implied assertion that the narrative is true.” The general view of life story and personal experience narrative as a “true” story and the life story’s “fictional” nature create a tug-of-war between fact and fiction. These two poles depict the historian/folklorist duality. The historians emphasize a reconstruction of the past, with the individual reflecting a personal perspective on impersonal facts. The folklorist’s view of life story is its reflection of the creativity and personality of the individual within his/her historical context, with little emphasis on “facts.” The historian/folklorist duality is an indication of the subjectivity of the life story, its confusing character, and its resultant flexibility. For this reason, Māra has named her compilation of articles on life story *Spogulis* (Mirror). Māra explained this to mean that every person regards the life story in his/her own way to reflect the interests of each individual researcher, interviewer, enthusiast, or storyteller.

Thus, it is obvious that personal experience narrative and life story is more than just a point-by-point description of a narrator’s experiences. When narrators speak about an event that has occurred, they are not representing reality, but their interpretations of

reality. Titon explains: “Life storytelling is a fiction, a making, an ordered past imposed by a present personality upon a disordered life” (Titon 1980, 290). Reality is just one endless stream of events. It is up to the narrators to choose and reconstruct events from their own perspectives of this endless stream and to construct narratives with themes and values important to them.

The narrated event, thus, is different from the event that happened at a specific point in time. As time passes, people change and the person narrating in the present about an event he/she experienced in the past is no longer the same person. Thus, there is a tension between the two time periods involved and the different identities of the teller now and the teller in the past. Though the narrator asserts that his/her story is a truthful account, memory is selective and thus, subjective.

The storyteller constructs dramatic action to represent the values and meanings that are important to the teller at that specific time and context. “The well-structured plots of the personal narrative serve both the teller and listener as vehicles for expressing and learning values” (1989, 19), notes Stahl. The teller, thus, creates his/her personality and values through the act of telling his/her life story, and it is the listener’s task to interpret and understand these values and meanings. Titon notes that: “Personality is the main ingredient in the life story. It is a fiction, just like the story. . . . The most interesting life stories expose the inner life, tell us about motives. Like all good autobiography, the life story’s singular achievement is that it affirms the identity of the storyteller in the act of telling. The life story tells who one thinks one is and how one thinks one came to be that way” (1980, 290). Thus, objective truth does not have anything to do with the telling of a life story. Rather, it is the teller’s inner sense of truth and identity that allows him/her to

take license with his/her memories in order to communicate their values to the audience. The audience, in turn, interprets the narrative through its own frame of experiences and reference. The result is thus a collaboration between audience and teller.

Authority of Teller vs. Researcher

Yet another point of tension is the tug-of-war between the authority of the teller as the main author of his/her story and the authority of a researcher who is directing the interview with questions based on the interviewer's own terms and interests. When presenting the life story to the public, researchers often claim that the published personal history is a first-hand account and authored by the teller, even though the researcher has directed the interview with questions, often edited the story, and sometimes "rearranged answers according to topic, deleted his questions and departed, ghostlike, from the text" (Titon 1980, 286). Elliott Oring tells how his informant regarded the life story he was telling as a product to appease the folklorist, rather than as something beneficial to the teller (1987, 243).

There is a contradiction between a researcher's claim to merely being a facilitator for the recording of a life story created by the teller and the researcher's obvious presence as a guide, an authority and "co-creator" of the teller's life story. This contradiction in authority led folklorist Botkin to view the life story as a "collaboration" between the interviewer and the teller rather than a creation by the solo teller existing in a vacuum (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 135). One must acknowledge the fact that the audience (in this case, the researcher) is an important part of the story, and the interaction between the

teller and the interviewer results in a product between the two. This view, however, was frowned upon by folklorists such as Richard Dorson, who espoused a more academically pure product and rejected Botkin's editing of life story for publication as fakelore, a literary reworking, a product for popular culture.

However, one cannot ignore the impact that the researcher has on the teller's life story and the impact the teller has on the researcher or interviewer. The life story cannot be regarded as a solo creation by the teller, nor is it a product just to appease the wishes of the interviewer. Rather, the life story is a collaboration of the two. Barbara Myerhoff describes this collaboration as the "third voice." "This could be called an 'ethno person,' the third person who is born by virtue of the collusion between interlocutor and subject" (1992, 292). One acknowledges a totally different product by this process, born from the collaboration between the teller and the interviewer. "Neither party remains the same. A new creation is constituted when two points of view are engaged in examining one life" (1992, 291). This "third voice" is a useful concept when examining the "master story," a new product created by the "master storyteller," born of the virtual collaboration of "master storyteller" and other life storytellers that have inspired the "master story."

Story vs. History

The borders separating the historical genre "oral history" and the anthropologic / folkloric genre "life story" are blurry and scholarly literature often uses the two terms interchangeably. The sharpest distinction between the oral historian and the folklorist is the question of truth and the historical record within the life story. The perspective of the

oral historian is more preoccupied by the actual events rather than the traditionality and creativity of the teller. The teller is a witness of history, an example of “history from the bottom up” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 135).

The oral historian has to deal with the tension between “story” and “history.” Jeff Titon describes the tensions between story and history thus: “A story is made, but history is found out. Story is language at play, history is language at work. The language of story is charged with power: it creates. The language of history is charged with knowledge: it discovers. Story is a literature of the imagination. History, though it be imaginative, drives toward fact” (1980, 278). These observations by Titon illustrate the contrasting nuances of these two concepts. There is a tug-of-war between the creativity, playfulness, and imagination of “story,” and the fact-driven, cerebral, and knowledge-oriented nature of history. It is no wonder that historians find themselves caught between these two poles and for a long time could not reconcile oral history and life story with the requirements of the historian’s discipline. The historian’s later acceptance of “story” for what it is opened up the discipline of history to the humanistic influences of oral history and life story.

Paul Thompson is one of the historians who pioneered the use of oral history within the discipline of history. He acknowledged and accepted oral history as a creative expression of the individual, much like folklorists. However, he still recommends that historians not lose sight of the “truth,” because without having some idea of what the “truth” might be, one cannot “measure the way in which memories are refashioned” (2004, 82). Positivist language such as “measurement” and “truth” shows the historian’s relative preoccupation with scientific fact. This quote, though, also shows the historian’s

willingness to negotiate the nebulous “qualitative” data such as individual creativity and imagination.

Oral historians such as Paul Thompson regarded oral history not merely as a historical record from the individual’s point of view, but also as a “different kind of credibility.” Thompson describes the “emotionality” of life stories as “the fears and fantasies carried by the metaphors of memory, which historians are afraid of and anxious to write out of their accounts” (Samuel/Thompson 1990, 2). Oral history “challenges the accepted categories of history.” Thompson credits oral historians Alessandro Portelli and Luisa Passerini for this new approach in the late 1970s that challenged the historians’ view of “truth” through oral history. “It is not only what people say and whether it was true, but how they remember it that matters: what they won’t say; what they forget; the silences of memory; the transformations that take place in memory; the inventions” (Thompson 2004, 82).

Thus, the view of oral history by historians has gradually transformed itself more towards a folkloric one, ever since the concept of oral history was first used by oral historians some thirty years ago. Feintuch remarks: “Folklorists have worked in quiet opposition to the historically and culturally canonical disciplines. . . . As disciplinary boundaries continue to blur . . . it is striking to see how many scholars have made forays onto the turf that folklorists and fellow travelers have long occupied” (1995, 391). Thus, some oral historians have ended up working closely with the ideas of folkloristics without necessarily naming or acknowledging them.

Balance of Power between Interviewer and Interviewee

Another issue that distinguishes the historic from the folkloric view of life story is interviewing technique. Jeff Titon stressed the importance of holding a non-directive interview with few questions that direct the interviewee in a specific direction. It is important to give the storyteller room to speak about what he/she feels is important, stresses Titon. The interviewer is there only as an “empathetic listener . . . not interrupting the train of thought until the story is finished” (1980, 276). He compares the interviewing technique in oral history and the life story in terms of the balance of power. “In oral history, the balance of power between informant and historian is in the historian’s favor, for he asks the questions. . . . In life story the balance tips the other way, to the storyteller, while the listener is sympathetic and his responses are encouraging and non-directive” (1980, 283). Paul Thompson advocates a mixture of open and semi-structured interviewing. “You are always prepared to drop your questions, just listen, and in the early stages of the interview, you try never to interrupt, you try to get the person flowing, and only then you introduce your questions” (2004, 83). Interviewing technique impacts the type of narrative that unfolds. A directive interview guided by many questions results in a narrative geared towards satisfying the specific issues that interest the interviewer and drives towards a fact-driven question and answer session, while a non-directive interview drives toward a narrative where the teller is given more room to be creative and to involve issues important to the teller.

Life Story as a Tool for Activism

The point where folklore and oral history coincide most is the idealism and activism that are often associated with life story. Folklorist Benjamin Botkin, one of the pioneers for use of personal narrative as oral history, recognized the importance of personal narrative for “history from the bottom up.” He believed in the potential of folklore “to make the world a better place” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 135). Botkin and his contemporaries had been making a case for oral history “as a way to empower the marginalized, give voice to the silent, and democratize the making of history” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1989, 137).

Similarly, historian Paul Thompson has espoused the activist and positive idealist potential of the life story in a global perspective. In his opening keynote speech at *Museu da Pessoa* conference in 2003, Thompson talked about the future global possibilities of the life story, of “creating new connections between people in different worlds through the oral -- creating new sympathies and new understandings -- maybe even helping to solve conflicts -- even, perhaps, to avoid wars.” (2003, Manuscript keynote conference speech).

Scholarly literature emphasizes the close connection between life story and social activism and change. One need only to read the many diaries of Brazilian slum dweller Carolina Maria de Jesus to see how powerfully the life story (though hers is a written life story rather than an oral one) can be used and manipulated by the press to reveal to the world the wretched conditions of the poor living in the slums of Brazil (1962, 1997, 1999). Marcia Watson examined how activist women used life story to craft an image of

an activist for the causes they espouse. “Ideally, the social movement activist will depict a life that is imitable, one that supporters can emulate as they seek to advance the shared cause” (1999, 4). Individuals use life stories to highlight the conditions of the lower class, or as a vehicle to bring out a portrait of activism, and by so doing, agitate for social awareness and change. The life story was a “technique that ostensibly empowered the subject by letting him speak for himself,” notes folklorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, who also pointed out the importance of first person accounts during the Depression, when social activists used life stories to mobilize help for the disadvantaged (1989, 131). These uses of life stories approach once again the third level of story, the master story, which is a new story for larger, public agendas, created by the interpretations of many life stories. In all these examples, one can sense the tension between the empowerment of the individual speaking for him/herself in his or her own life story, and the power that other individuals have in using and manipulating this life story for social causes, which may not have been the intention of the teller. As Shuman noted, “Storytelling offers as one of its greatest promises the possibility of empathy, of understanding others... Empathy offers the possibility of understanding across space and time, but it rarely changes the circumstances of those who suffer” (2005, 5). Thus, the diaries of de Jesus may have enabled those who have never lived in a slum to empathize with the slum dwellers, though it may not always result in improvements to the living conditions. However, there is no doubt that knowledge is power. Informing the general public about the dismal conditions of life is a powerful tool for stimulating activism that may result in concrete social changes.

Testimonials

The testimonial is a type of personal narrative mentioned in the disciplines of literature, anthropology, and sociology. The testimonial testifies to and bears witness to an injustice or suffering. Lynn Stephen describes the character of the testimonial:

“Because testimonials give voice to people whose experiences have been misrepresented or neglected, they promise to convey a unique authenticity, authority, and truth.” It often represents a collective struggle against oppression from an aggressor, and “expresses urgency, a story that must be told because of the struggles it represents” (1993, Conference paper 1). George Yudice characterizes testimonial literature in this way: “Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or exorcising and setting aright official history” (Yudice in Gugelberger and Kearney 1991, 4).

The testimonial is relevant for this dissertation because some of the life stories that Māra and Karen listened to can be categorized as testimonials, especially stories told by Latvians deported to Siberia during World War II. The Latvian word *liecības* (testimonials) is used for life stories dealing with deportations to Siberia, and the suffering of the oppressed during the Soviet regime. Vieda Skultāns calls her book about narrative and memory in post-Soviet Latvia *The Testimony of Lives*. Thus, the word “testimonial” is often used in conjunction with life story in Latvia. Since life story has an element of social activism that is often associated with it, the testimonial may be regarded as a close relative of life story. As one can see, defining testimonial for our purposes is a problem, especially since the use of the word “testimony” in Latvian and Portuguese may

have different meanings. The English word “testimony” in one dictionary is defined as “a formal declaration of truth or fact given under oath,” while the equivalent word derivative in Latvian *liecība*, is defined in a more active manner -- to actively “prove” something. The word *liecinieks*, the person giving the *liecība*, connotes a more passive, neutral account as to what actually happened, a word closer in meaning to the English “witness.” As one can see, these words hold hidden political meanings that perhaps contribute to the politically powerful and activist connotations associated with the testimonial life story.

THE “MASTER STORY”

Collaboration and the birth of the “third person” brings out the importance of the “interpretation” of the life story by the interviewer, researcher, or audience, and its presentation to others. In order to communicate, demonstrate or analyze a story, the presenter or researcher “cuts out” portions of the story to serve as examples of its interpreted meaning. Medical anthropologist Vieda Skultāns would describe these selected portions and choices as the “politics of quotation.” Often, these quotations show much of “our own agenda” (2003, Manuscript conference paper). As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, “quotation is a form of authorship” (1989, 131). Whenever a piece of a life story is extracted for publication or demonstration, it becomes inflected with the meanings and worldview of the person doing the extraction of the quotation. Different “authors” have different ideas on what is a “true” representation of the life story they are presenting to the public. Thus, Audalio Dantas, when editing Carolina Maria de Jesus’ life story for publication (de Jesus 1962), cut out enormous sections, deleted details,

switched diary entries “to enhance readability,” but claimed, however, that he had “not written a single word that was not hers” (Levine in Beattie 2004, 243). Botkin in his book *Lay my Burden Down* (1945) had to reduce the number of manuscript pages, fit the selections into a sequence, and eliminate dialect-writing in publishing the life stories of former slaves. Both authors showed their “own agenda” by what they deleted, and what they emphasized.

The notion of “master story” is thus an interpretation by a “master storyteller” of the stories told by many individuals or groups. These become the stories about the stories that are told to the public. The master stories embody the principles of the “politics of quotation,” which is the subjective selection of quotes for the purpose of presenting one’s own interpretation; the collaborative product of Myerhoff’s “third voice,” which creates a new “third being” that is a result of the agenda of the presenter in negotiation with the meanings and values of the tellers; Titon’s idea of life story as a fiction, which emphasizes the subjectivity and creativity of the story told by the “master storyteller;” Oring’s idea of life story as a construction for the appeasement of the interviewer’s agenda, showing the disconnect that may exist between the teller’s intentions and the master story; Sawin’s observations of the life story as a collaborative process requiring the listener to construct a chronological life story from the many smaller narratives told by the teller; and “quotation as a form of authorship” as expressed by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, where the presenter’s selection of quotations from the teller’s story retells the story according to the presenter’s interpretation. The master story differs from all of these approaches to life story in that it is often used in public presentation, and encompasses not just the account of one individual, but strives to create a new story from the accounts

of many individuals, told from the perspective of the “master storyteller” and his/her agenda. Amy Shuman notes: “When stories travel beyond their owners, the messages they convey are larger than an individual incident or an individual life” (2005, 6).

Personal stories then acquire more-than-personal meaning. Similarly, master tellers have traveled far from the owners of the source life stories, negotiating meanings in the life stories with their own agenda to create their master story.

Thus, the concept of “master story” establishes a connection between individual storytellers and the main “master storyteller” who is largely responsible for weaving a “master story” from the strands of the individual life stories. Vieda Skultāns refers to the concept of Latvia’s “master narrative” that represents the character and values of the Latvian people in specific historical periods (1998, 6), such as Latvians’ work ethic and their zest for rebuilding life during Latvia’s independence period in the 1920s. However, she makes little mention of where this “master narrative” came from, who constructed it, and how. Nor is there only one master story, or “unified master narrative,” as Renato Rosaldo points out. Each narrative, or life story, contains a number of viewpoints, and a number of life stories may fuel more than one master story with more than one set of larger ideals. Thus, my emphasis in this dissertation is on master stories in the plural, which taken together, achieve, “complex understandings of ever-changing, multifaceted social realities” (Rosaldo 1993, 128).

What allows the life story and the master story to carry so much meaning and essential information about values and character? Part of this flexibility and richness of the life story genre can be attributed to the “hybrid” nature of the structured life story of level two, the formal interview. Though the structured life story may contain personal

narratives and stories one would tell in a natural setting, it usually requires initiative from another person in order to document the personal narratives the teller tells and arrange them in a chronological life story. “The life story as a full, coherent oral narrative does not exist in nature; it is a synthetic product of social science, but no less precious for that,” states Portelli (1997, 4). This synthetic nature contains two faces: one facing the inner hearth and intimacy of the home, and the other facing the public, a window through which the public can catch a glimpse of the person’s worldview and values. This dual nature of life story explains the potential for Māra’s and Karen’s life story collecting organizations to serve as arenas for examining the home values of their storytellers in light of the participants’ own values and the larger issues of the public world. Māra and Karen oversee the negotiation of values between the tellers, the interviewers, and larger public agendas, which results in the creation of the master story in products such as films, books, websites, and exhibits. These tangible products are embodiments of Māra’s and Karen’s master stories and are thus readily accessible for analysis.

CHAPTER 2

A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MĀRA AND KAREN, AND THEIR LIFE STORY COLLECTING ORGANIZATIONS, *DZĪVESSTĀSTS* AND *MUSEU DA PESSOA*

MĀRA AND *DZĪVESSTĀSTS* (LIFE STORY)

The following is drawn from my recorded interview with Māra in 2002 and various supplementary printed materials.

Māra describes herself as a “wartime child,” born in 1943 in the midst of World War II in Latvia’s capital city, Riga. She fled with her family from the advancing communist troops in 1944, seeking refuge in the countryside of western Latvia (*Kurzeme*) before it too, fell to the victorious communist forces.

Māra attended high school and the university in Riga, but disliked the formal education system. She characterizes herself as “not a very obedient child,” always breaking away from family in search of her own independence. Despite Māra’s resistance to formal schooling, two of her aunts were teachers, and Māra strongly admired them for their high morals. Māra too was educated in the pedagogical field, though she was convinced that she would never be happy working as a teacher. Of all professions, teachers were forced to endure the worst ideological pressures, burdened by the responsibility of bringing up children to be loyal to the Soviet ideology.

Māra's father was a member of the oldest Latvian academic organization, *Austrums*. Academic organizations were considered by the Soviets as part of the bourgeoisie and generally frowned upon. Māra admired the dignity, humility, and brotherly support exhibited by members of this academic organization, sorely lacking, in her estimation, within the day-to-day Soviet existence. Māra feels emotional ties to this organization, since her father met his wife-to-be in the *Austrums* ball of 1939. Fifty-four years later, in 1993, Māra's mother died suddenly on the street from a heart attack on her way home after attending an *Austrums* ball.

Throughout her school years, Māra found friends with whom she shared interests and values. One such group shared a passion for movies. The group viewed and analyzed influential films, mostly from Soviet Russia, but also other quality films that were allowed during the Soviet years. Māra later applied this interest in film by producing several life story videos.

During her student years, Māra worked in the box office of the Philharmonic Concert Hall, checking tickets and hanging up peoples' coats. It was here that she met interesting people from a part of the community she knew little about. One of these was a person who had just returned from a forced labor camp in Siberia. He was a very good storyteller, and Māra, along with a group of friends, would listen for countless hours to his stories about the concentration camps in the Gulag.

Listening to these stories awakened a sense of anger against the injustice her country's people were forced to endure under the occupying regime. Her anger was directed against the purposeful flooding of Russian immigrants into Latvia, known as russification, and the ensuing Russian domination in all parts of everyday life and

government in Latvia. Her inner sense of injustice was “churning inside of her” and she thought that “something had to be done” to help Latvians survive as an ethnic group.

Māra decided she would become a journalist. She worked for a while as a TV reporter and wrote articles for various newspapers and magazines. Her TV show, “The Most Interesting People,” served as preliminary preparation for her later work with life stories.

However, she could not endure the double life she was forced to lead as a TV reporter. Her profession was expected to serve the ruling propaganda apparatus. At the same time, Māra was trying to define her own inner sense of values and morals that often came in conflict with her work.

Disgusted with the ideological pressure that the Soviet system was exerting on the media and educational system, Māra looked for other places of employment, one of which was the Ventspils museum. There, in 1975, she found a way to channel her feelings of frustration by doing fieldwork and listening to stories people told about their lives, as well as discussing with her colleagues what people told and what they were afraid to tell. In the supportive environment of the museum, Māra’s ideas began to take shape. Her ideas were based on the premise that institutions were interviewing and featuring many famous individuals, but ignoring ordinary peoples’ life testimonials. Nobody knew the hardships people had experienced and how they survived, Māra lamented. She decided that the truth could not be left untold. People wanted to talk about their lives and they were privately writing diaries and telling stories to each other about their experiences. There, at that moment, Māra began thinking about an idea to create a structure for collecting life stories.

After the Soviet Union started to break up in 1987, Māra brought the idea of the Human Archive (*Cilvēkarhīvs*) to the Latvian Cultural Foundation (LKF - *Latvijas Kultūras fonds*), which was a branch of the Soviet Cultural Foundation founded by Raisa Gorbachev during the first years of liberalization in the Soviet Union. Māra's primary idea was driven by a sense of urgency for people's firsthand accounts to become public, to serve as a testimony for the silenced years during the Soviet regime. She put out a call in 1987 for people to send in their written memoirs and diaries to this new archive.

The assumption Māra held was that during the time of *perestroika*, when the Soviet regime was beginning to loosen its grip, people in Latvia wanted everybody to know what had really happened to them during the Soviet years. Latvians were starting to talk more freely about taboo subjects, such as Soviet deportations to Siberia. Many answered the call for written testimonies and sent in their memoirs, encouraged by the supportive words of Latvia's most beloved poet, Imants Ziedonis, who was director of the LKF at the time.

At first, the emphasis was in collecting and publishing written life stories. After a while, Māra began to use a video camera when doing fieldwork and found that, with a little bit of encouragement, people not only wrote about their lives, but were eager to talk about their lives. A relative from America presented her with a small portable tape recorder. Armed with this "weapon," as Māra put it, she started to collect oral life stories. In 1990, she traveled to England, her first trip outside of the Soviet Union. Her father's affiliation with the academic organization *Austrums* helped her to find connections and places to stay in England. Her project was to interview former students of Kaucminde School, which existed in independent Latvia during the 1930s. This school was highly

regarded and respected in the 1930s for the training it provided in home-making and catering skills, also providing a training ground for the reception of governmental and diplomatic guests in independent Latvia.

In 1990, after Māra's trip to England, she was invited to teach life story collecting skills in a Latvian summer camp in the United States. There she met with Latvian colleagues from different parts of the world who gave the moral support Māra needed to believe in her ideas. These two trips strengthened Māra's convictions and helped to develop an international network of support for her endeavors.

However, when Māra returned to Latvia from America, she found that she had been fired from her job and was forced to find a home for her ideas elsewhere. At that time, the Latvian academic system was undergoing extensive reforms to fit in with a newly independent Latvia. The progression of political events in Latvia and the rest of the Soviet countries culminated in the failed coup attempt against the Soviet leader Gorbachev in 1991 and the resultant fall of the Soviet Union. After the international recognition of Latvia's independent status soon thereafter, the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Academy of Sciences gladly made room for Māra and her project. The Institute discarded its communist socialist philosophy, which left a vacuum to be filled with projects more appropriate to Latvia's newly independent ideology. In 1992, Māra, with the National Oral History project, officially started activities, prioritizing oral life story interviewing over written testimonies.

Thus, the three most important milestones for the foundation and development of *Dzīvesstāsts* were, according to Māra: 1) the formation of the "Human Archive" (*Cilvēkarhīvs*) in the LKF; 2) taking the *Cilvēkarhīvs* overseas to the Latvian exile

communities; and 3) becoming part of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Academy of Sciences as the “National Oral History Project.”

In her new position, Māra had access to colleagues and students who could help her collect life stories in the field. She sought out theoretical advice from academics in various fields, forming collaborations with folklorists, sociologists, philosophy specialists, historians, journalists, videographers, and psychologists.

In 1995, the Oral History project reached another turning point at the end of Mazirbes seminar, a week-long training seminar in oral history that the project had organized. Māra invited several colleagues from related fields such as anthropology, psychology, history, the Occupation Museum, and folklore, to discuss the future of the Oral History Project, how to present and process the materials already collected and possible ideas for taking the project further. At this seminar, the Oral History Project developed a strategy for undertaking annual life story field trips within Latvia. Māra’s colleague from the United States, Maija Hinkle, undertook the organization of life story-collecting projects in the Latvian diaspora. The non-profit organization *Dzīvesstāsts* was founded, along with its overseas branch, *Dzīvesstāsts Trimda* (Life Story in Exiled Communities). They agreed that the American branch would procure the financial backing for *Dzīvesstāsts* while Māra and the Latvian *Dzīvesstāsts* would undertake the organization of annual life story collecting field trips.

In 1996, with funding from the Latvian Foundation in America, *Dzīvesstāsts* began organizing annual summer field trips to different regions of Latvia, attracting a loyal group of Latvians from the diaspora, as well as native Latvian cultural workers, students, and teachers. By 2002, *Dzīvesstāsts* had accumulated about 2000 life stories.

After acquiring support from the Netherlands Embassy, *Dzīvesstāsts* organized and categorized the life stories under topics and themes. They developed a website which featured a searchable database of all the life stories they had thus far collected, though full transcripts of the interviews were only available through formal application. In 2001, *Dzīvesstāsts* published a collection of essays, *Spogulis* (Mirror), in Latvian, written by a wide range of academics from various disciplines dealing with the topics “life story” and “oral history,” applying these terms to *Dzīvesstāsts*’ work in Latvia.

In May 2003, *Dzīvesstāsts* organized an international conference on life story in Riga, the culmination of seven years of life story collecting summer field trips. Colleagues from the Baltic States, Scandinavia, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and the United States participated in this conference, examining various life story collecting projects, methodologies, and analysis techniques. Māra developed a network in this conference that would continue the work of *Dzīvesstāsts* in a scholarly Nordic vein, stressing cooperation between oral historians and folklorists in Latvia, Estonia, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. *Dzīvesstāsts* published a collection of life stories in both English and Latvian for this conference, containing life stories of different ethnicities, religions, and political ideologies representative in Latvia and in the diaspora.

Since the 2003 conference, *Dzīvesstāsts* has continued to collaborate with the Nordic countries, exchanging methodological, archival, and analytical information and experience. *Dzīvesstāsts* has continued as well to interview people in Latvia as well as in the Latvian diaspora. University professor Janīna Kursīte, along with folklore students attending the University of Latvia, took over the annual field trip tradition, organizing life

story collecting field trips to Siberia and Latvia, with Māra and others from *Dzīvesstāsts* accompanying them as consultants.

Dzīvesstāsts has a growing collection of videos produced by *Dzīvesstāsts*, but filmed and directed mainly by videographer Maruta Jurjane. These are 30-45 minute portraits of individual Latvians, mostly writers, poets, and other culturally active Latvians, many of whom live in the Latvian diaspora. Within this collection of videos is a portrait of the coastal city of Liepāja, filmed in 2002. The life stories of seven inhabitants of Liepāja are featured in this film, emphasizing the effect World War II had on their lives. Chapter 4 will contain a fuller analysis of this film.

Most recently, Māra has incorporated the help of even more students of folklore and related fields to develop a comprehensive database that would be part of an Internet-based repository of life stories, where all the life stories that have been collected thus far could be easily accessed through the web. This, then, according to Māra, is the next milestone for *Dzīvesstāsts*.

The *Dzīvesstāsts* team currently consists of nine employees, four of whom are full-time. There are two university students working as interns and the rest are in varying stages of their careers as PhDs. Most of the staff, therefore, is academics and researchers who also use the *Dzīvesstāsts* materials for their own projects, writing articles and presenting in conferences as well. When *Dzīvesstāsts* is planning a large project, such as readying a publication, then all employees join forces to help in the work. For special needs, such as assistants, editors, computer technicians, *Dzīvesstāsts* contracts specialists at an hourly rate, financing them from various grants. Māra is the main grant-writer,

requesting money mostly from the Latvian Cultural Capital Foundation (*Kultūrkapitālu fonds*).

KAREN AND *MUSEU DA PESSOA* (MUSEUM OF THE PERSON)

The following is drawn from my recorded interview with Karen in February 2003 and various supplementary and printed materials. I also draw from an interview done by a journalism student at the university in São Paulo, who interviewed Karen for a journalism project.

Karen describes herself as a daughter of an immigrant family. Her background is Jewish East European, born and raised in Brazil. Her father's family, being Jewish, left Poland when he was three years old, fleeing from the advancing Nazi holocaust. Her grandmother (mother's mother) was born in Romania, but her mother was born in Bahia, Brazil.

Already as a child, Karen developed the consciousness that people were different and that each person viewed his or her reality in different ways. She grew up in a household with maids, as was the custom in Brazilian middle class homes, and developed close ties with them, listening to their life stories and teaching one of them to read and write. After her parents' divorce when Karen was eight, she spent more time with her father, growing very close to him, and becoming acquainted with his wide circle of friends and his adventurous, entrepreneurial spirit, obviously passing on some of this spirit on to Karen. He was an engineer who founded a construction company, and after eight years of entrepreneurial risk-taking, he had become a millionaire. He sold his

company and embarked on many adventures, among them, building two hotels in Brazil, organizing a cultural circus, and participating in the Greenpeace movement. Karen remarks that he taught her many things about living life to the fullest.

Karen always felt she had a gift for listening and loved to listen to and read life stories and autobiographical literature. At an early age, she read the classics of notable authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Karen attended a Jewish school for the first few years and then attended high school run by Dominican priests. Some of the teachers in this Dominican high school had been fired from their previous jobs by the Brazilian military dictatorship and were notable thinkers and activists in their fields. There she was exposed to political influences and avidly read leftist literature about Marx, Lenin, and the Soviet Revolution. However, she never joined the Communist Party, which was enjoying a rise in popularity among students in Brazil during the military dictatorship. Though she was born shortly before the military coup in Brazil, her family was never affected by the first violent years of the 1960s. In the late 1970s, when Karen was a teenager, the dictatorship was already waning, and Karen immersed herself in the activist political life of a changing Brazil, joining the many student political demonstrations and activities.

Karen had always wanted to become a writer, but when she was eighteen, she decided to become a historian instead. These plans were postponed when her father gave her an airplane ticket to Europe as a gift. She stayed in Europe for a year, traveling, meeting and befriending different kinds of people in various countries, and learning several languages. She spent the following year in New York trying to make a living as a dancer, which she thoroughly enjoyed. These two years, Karen admits, were one of the

most important periods in her life, a valuable lesson in the diversity of the world. After a brief trip to Cuba, Karen finally resettled in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, marrying a French artist.

At age twenty, Karen worked more systematically towards finding a goal in her life. She returned to the university as a history student and became interested in how narrative was constructed in didactic history books of different periods. She compared the ideologies and worldviews of history textbooks written at different time periods. At this stage in her university career, she also learned about the importance of methodology and how to systematize data.

During her university years, she took part in her first big project dealing with oral history. Her mother was the president of a Jewish institution and together they worked on a project examining objects owned by Jewish immigrants in Brazil and the meanings these objects embody in their owners' lives. Karen noticed that these objects triggered stories about their lives. Inspired by these stories, she expanded the project to include oral interviews with the people, one of the more "fascinating periods in my life," as Karen described it. She raved about the "incredible" narrators and the many visions of Judaism and the rich personal experiences and memories from World War II that they described. "It was like a film," said Karen.

While working on this project, Karen mused about the many things one could do with this rich oral material, built on the identities and realities of people. Karen thought, "There are museums about everything. So why isn't there a museum of the person?" At that point, in 1985, the idea germinated.

Her next project was to undertake the archiving of photographs taken by a well-known photographer, which also involved the preparation of a book and exhibition of his work. She was amazed that each photograph she handled triggered a wealth of stories from the photographer. This confirmed how important telling stories was for people and how eager they were to tell them.

Stimulated by all these experiences, Karen moved to São Paulo in 1991 when she was twenty-nine and resolved to make this idea of the *Museu da Pessoa* a reality. She rented a small office in downtown São Paulo in 1992 and formed a nucleus of four people who shared her vision. After the initial brainstorming, the main ideas of the museum crystallized into products and methods: the public video booth, the CD-ROM, and film documentaries. The idea was not a physical collection of objects, but the formation of a publicly accessible multimedia database of people's stories, accessible in public format such as CD-ROMs or in a sidewalk kiosk. It was to be a museum not associated with a static physical place, but a movable public space. At that time, the Internet was not yet widely accessible in Brazil. One of the first projects that this new organization worked on was the publication of senior citizens' memories in a book funded by the Ministry of Culture. But the first actual life stories collected by the *Museu da Pessoa* were at the Museum of Image and Sound in São Paulo, where they installed an open video cabin accessible to anyone who would like to narrate.

The group began as a company in 1992 and approached the São Paulo subway with a life story collecting project. They proposed to set up a video booth in the subway to collect individual life stories as people passed by on their way to and from their trains. This was a public success. After that, they were hired to document the life stories of

members of the São Paulo football club, creating a collective history of the club. At the same time, Karen strengthened the foundation of her theoretical knowledge by studying for a Masters degree in Linguistics, researching the formal aspects of life stories and writing her thesis about narrative models and how these models explained the building and comprehension of stories.

In 1994, *Museu da Pessoa* was hired for its first job by a commercial company to work on the oral history of Johnson & Johnson. During the next few years, the nucleus of the museum worked hard to get CD-ROM jobs from companies, sometimes falling on hard times financially, barely having enough money to continue their existence. During this time, Karen divorced her first husband and married José, the videographer in the group. Soon Karen was juggling family life and work.

In 1997, the museum moved online by creating a website that allowed the public to download their own biographies and life stories, along with scanned images of photos and objects, thus providing a virtual place where all life stories could be preserved. In 1999, Karen reached an important milestone in her career when she was accepted as an Ashoka fellow, an organization that supported creative entrepreneurship for social change. This prestigious international organization recognized her talents as an innovative entrepreneur with ideas that had social impact.

Her admission into Ashoka encouraged Karen to develop life story collecting projects that would further pursue her ideas for social change through life stories. The focus of the museum shifted from commercial companies to the educational and social arena, using money earned from commercial projects to fund the newly-established non-profit institute for the *Museu da Pessoa*. The *Museu da Pessoa* institute collaborated with

schools and organizations within city slums, and various non-profit cultural and educational organizations to carry out projects that contained aspects of social change. These projects focused on education for low-income schoolchildren, and democratization through digital technology by teaching low-income children technological skills through the process of life story collecting. Karen was especially proud of her project, “Agents of History,” which taught senior citizens interviewing skills.

In 2003, the museum organized an international conference that brought together organizations and people who work with life stories, collective memory, and social change. The conference served as an arena for launching the museum’s new website. The conference workshops concentrated on strategies for collaboration and ways to make the web portal accessible to all organizations and individuals as the main repository for life stories.

The conference also hosted an all-day brainstorming session to explore options and strategies for the next ten years. The first ten years had concentrated on establishing the museum’s mission statement, which emphasized that each and every person had a right to tell his/her life story and to deposit it in an accessible place for posterity. This allowed ordinary people to become part of history. Karen envisioned the next ten years focused on the globalization of the museum by using the Internet as a worldwide repository for life stories. In an effort to make this happen, the museum is collaborating with organizations and individuals in several countries to create a global *Museu da Pessoa* web portal and database.

Presently, the museum employs about eighteen people full-time, with about twenty part-time researchers, consultants, production assistants, videographers,

technology specialists, journalists, marketers, and student trainees. The full-time staff consists of secretaries, an accountant, production director, content editors, computer technicians, recording engineers, and others. They inhabit a two-story house in São Paulo's Vila Madalena, much too small to accommodate their expanding needs for office space and the technology necessary for production projects.

In the fall of 2006, the museum moved into bigger and better working quarters nearby.

CHAPTER 3

CONSTRUCTING AN AGENDA:

AN ANALYSIS OF MĀRA'S AND KAREN'S OWN LIFE STORIES

In order to understand Māra's and Karen's agendas and "who they are," one has to hear their own life stories. This chapter explores the premise that Māra and Karen will strive to represent their lives within their life stories in ways that embody their most important philosophies, values, themes, and meanings that led them to embrace life story collecting as their mission and mode of operation. As Marcia Watson states: "Ideally, the social movement activist will depict a life that is imitable, one that supporters can emulate as they seek to advance the shared cause" (1999, 4). I will examine the life that Māra and Karen depict in their life stories and the themes that inform their agendas in the creation of their master stories.

The data are my interviews with Māra and Karen. Karen narrated in English, while Māra narrated in Latvian. Though English is not Karen's native tongue, she speaks it fluently and has had much practice expressing her ideas in English when presenting at international conferences and workshops. My data also include a Portuguese transcription of Karen's life story as told to Solange Mayumi Lemos, a journalism student examining Karen and her work for a university assignment. This life story emphasized some personal themes and details that Karen did not reveal to me, such as her relationship with her parents and her inner ponderings on life while growing up.

The first portions of Karen's and Māra's life stories that I recorded dealt with the time frame ranging from childhood until the birth of their organizations. This part served as a chronological overview, a life story uninterrupted by the interviewer's questions. In the second half, I posed the same questions to both Māra and Karen about various facets of life story: What are their perceptions of life story? What are the roles of identity, truth, social impact, and other themes in their work? One may call this the "question and answer" portion, since the interview was quite directive.

In the first half of this chapter, I will analyze the first portion of Māra's and Karen's life stories. I will discuss the main themes that crystallize from their constructed memories that reach back to early childhood and continue to the "birth" of their life story collecting organizations. How do these themes relate to their work with life stories in the present? What has prompted Māra and Karen to devote their lives to life story collecting? What meanings do they wish to convey? In the second half of this chapter, I will revisit the characteristics of life stories that I discussed in Chapter 1 and compare them to Karen's and Māra's thoughts on the nature of life story. Which particular characteristics do they emphasize and how do they compare to comments made by life story scholars?

I have selected Māra's and Karen's stories that I feel represent clearly defined themes and show the clearest story structure. The scope of this dissertation does not permit a close analysis of each story, but I will discuss some techniques that Māra and Karen use to tell their stories. Occasionally, I will bring into play part of William Labov's techniques of narrative analysis, specifically, the portion of the narrative that expresses an "evaluation." Labov defines this portion of the story as "the part of the narrative which reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative" (1967, 37). I regard these

“evaluations” as indications of Māra’s and Karen’s agendas that inform the construction of their master storytelling.

MĀRA’S AND KAREN’S EARLIEST MEMORIES UNTIL THE BIRTH OF *MUSEU DA PESSOA* AND *DZĪVESSTĀSTS*

Māra’s Life Story -- Earliest Memories

Māra created her life story around separate scenes and episodes that contained emotions and sensations of smell, sight, and hearing. These elements create a sense of atmosphere in her stories, constructing an environment that surrounds and supplements the full sensation of the moment. She once commented to me how she enjoyed listening to recordings where one could hear the atmosphere surrounding the person telling the life story – the toot of a car horn, the sound of the wind, the blare of a stereo. It is the “sensation of the moment” [*mirkļa sajūta*], says Māra.

One of Māra’s most compelling early memories was preserved through the sense of hearing, another component of “atmosphere” surrounding her stories. In this episode from 1953, Māra describes the complete and utter silence that enveloped her when she learned that Josef Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, had just died.

I was a student in Riga’s Third High School. That was a school in the downtown area. All the schools in downtown Riga, all the students were

taken to Lenin's statue. But there wasn't room for everybody. I stood somewhere on the Esplanade [a little further away from the statue]. And the atmosphere was such that it became utterly quiet. That was the minute of silence. And I just thought -- 'Oh God. What will happen now? The world will topple over if suddenly somebody sneezes.' And it was a little bit like observing everything from the side. And I understood -- no, I didn't understand much. Yes, I'll frankly tell you, I didn't understand much, but all that seemed so weird and I hadn't experienced anything like that in the past. And that -- what will happen now, what will change, I didn't know anything much at all yet. But what had been before that, that it was something full of fear -- yes. The times, the atmosphere was full of fear, of caution, and a kind of uncertainty (Māra 2002, 1).

In this story, Māra remembers that she had been standing and observing somewhere to the side, similar to her present role as "participant observer." Thus, Māra creates a picture of herself in her early years as an observer, an important prerequisite for her present life story collecting endeavors where she must constantly observe people -- how they act, what they tell of themselves, and how they tell it.

In the above story, the "sensation of the moment" creates sounds and silences that are symbolic for meaningful themes in Māra's life. The atmosphere created by the "minute of silence" was very powerful, representing the silenced people, the uncertainty of a world toppling over, and fear for the changes that will come in the future. The theme of silenced peoples thus creates a part of Māra's agenda for her master story. Māra tries

to evaluate her emotions at the time, but catches and corrects herself. “I understood -- no, I didn’t understand anything.” She is aware of the two planes of time -- the event being narrated in the past, and her present knowledge and experiences since that event which inserts information and understanding in a story that was not present at the time the event occurred. This tension between two time planes creates a tug-of-war between truth and fiction, a characteristic of life story. She further evaluated that “all that seemed so weird;” “what will happen now?” “something full of fear.” Māra paints an atmosphere where she feels very little control over her life, devoid of the security of home and preoccupied with a fearfulness of the future.

Māra’s earliest memory described her family going into temporary exile. She created an atmosphere that depicted sunlight shining through tree branches and a sense of well-being in the midst of upheaval.

I am a wartime child, born in 1943 in Riga. Although, if I look at my first childhood memory, then I see some kind of sun through some kind of apple tree branches, and together with stories and photographs, I see this memory. It is a good one, well, just like a normal childhood memory -- sort of cozy and home-like. But to tell you the truth, there was no home and our family had fled. And it was somewhere near Kandava, because my grandmother and my aunts and father and mother, we had all fled as refugees. And this childhood memory -- I think that’s the first thing that I remember -- probably it was in May 1945, or the spring. Well, probably,

because it might have been before the surrender, when I saw that kind of sun through some kind of branches. (Māra 2002, 1).

Māra constructed her own sense of identity: “I am a wartime child.” Wartime was important in shaping her and in defining who she is. The war, its effects and the many historical and social changes associated with that time period are constantly recurring themes around which Māra shapes her life story collecting activities. In this memory, Māra juxtaposes her warm, cozy, sunny feeling with the displacement of her family and the absence of home. The contrast of home and exile is sharp against the knowledge of imminent German capitulation. This story alludes to Māra’s strong sense and need for place and the importance of roots for her sense of well-being.

The last example creates a microcosm of Latvia’s political situation in Māra’s high school corridor. This story portrays fear, the peculiarities of Soviet school life, Stalinism, tyranny, the nationalist communists of 1959 and their submission into silence by the Moscow-led purges. In this one story, we can see the confusion of the changing times and the harsh reality of Soviet life in the setting of a simple school corridor.

We had a school -- and a director, whom a lot of people know who have gone to the Third High School. And she was ‘Little Stalin.’ She was completely tyrannical, without anything political. We had the usual long corridors. The floors were rubbed in with some kind of oil. I don’t even know why, but we could have fallen down there easily. There were these shoes with which one could easily trip and fall. But that oil, I don’t know

if it was disinfectant or what, it always stank. It was like asphalt covered with oil in the corridors. And along those corridors went [’Little Stalin’] yelling. And how she yelled! We all were trembling, us little ones. But after that -- she walked for a while with a Latvian necktie, ethnic one. She was kind of a big woman. And then, after a while, she didn’t wear one anymore. And after that, it turns out that she was in the nationalist communist supporters group. And that totally made her an even more vivid Stalin. We saw portraits along all the walls. Yes, but she was a kind of [embodiment of the times] in our midst (Māra 2002, 2).

This story shows how, for Māra, communism and the domination of a tyrannical power permeated her everyday life when she was a schoolgirl. One can feel the repressive atmosphere that she paints, the uncertainty of the times and the “dagger that is hanging in the air and may fall on you at any time” (told in a different story). Māra constructs an atmosphere of the Stalinist times that combines various ingredients: sound (yelling), smell (stinky corridors), emotion (uncertainty of slipping and falling), history (“first she walked with a Latvian necktie... and then she didn’t wear one anymore,” referring to the nationalist communist purges), and fear (“we trembled”).

These three stories narrated by Māra constructed emotions that showed the uncertainty of the times. These are some elements that will be important for the construction of the agenda for the master story: the importance of place and rootedness to place, the significance of silence, and identifying the self with wartime. These memories emphasize the importance of World War II for Māra. She has often focused on this time

period as an important era because of the many historical-political changes, embodied in the many projects and products that she produced that deal with that time period. The video film that *Dzīvesstāsts* produced, “Ordinary lives in extraordinary times,” focuses on the years 1939 and beyond, when the political power in Latvia changed hands many times, and after which the fifty years of Soviet occupation began. Chapter 4 includes an analysis of this film.

Karen’s Life Story – Earliest Memories

Karen did not retrieve memories and reflect on feelings or snapshots from her life as did Māra. Rather, she created a goal-oriented narrative that explained how one event led to another, and how all events fit together to accomplish her goal of creating *Museu da Pessoa*. One can say that many of the narratives in Karen’s life story are “evaluations,” as explained by Labov, that state clearly how Karen evaluated her past in the light of the present. Karen consciously traced how the idea for the museum originated, summarized the main stepping stones for its history, and carefully explained what had been most important in her life for her ideas to germinate. One of the earliest memories she constructed was of the maids in her house telling their life stories.

I always lived very close to maids. In Brazil you have maids in the houses, right? And I got really very close to them when I was -- some of them too, that worked in my mother’s house. We were really connected. So I knew their life stories. They always told me -- I was ten, I taught one of them to

read and write -- we were really close. We are close still today. Then I think at that moment, I started to understand that the reality can be very different from each person's point of view. And this was a point that got me interested in life. Like, if you were a maid, a Brazilian poor person, then life was in one way, and my grandmother thought life is another way (Karen 2003, 1).

Karen places many of her most important themes into this first narrative. Right away, Karen emphasized the importance of life stories in her childhood, her awareness of the different views of reality that people have, and the importance of diversity in her world. Here also, Karen talks about the social disparities in her life: the maid, a member of the lower class to whom she felt close, and the realities of her grandmother, an immigrant and member of the middle class who employed the services of maids. In this memory, Karen, though she was part of the middle class, sympathizes with the lower classes and sees herself as an empathetic observer of the maid's reality. In this short story, Karen repeatedly stressed being "close" to the maids. Evidently, attempting to bridge the gap between the economic classes is an important part of her agenda. In this first story, Karen has already established several main themes, consciously creating a story of herself that reveals her agenda in life story collecting: diversity, the different realities and viewpoints people have, the economic inequalities that exist in Brazil, her self-identity as a member of the Brazilian middle-class, her curiosity about peoples' lives, and a willingness to connect with them and share her knowledge.

Karen talks of her identity as a daughter of an immigrant family. Both her father and grandmother experienced exile from Poland and Romania to Brazil, just as the infant Māra and her parents experienced internal exile within rural Latvia. Neither Karen nor Māra used the word “exile,” however. Māra described her family as refugees, while Karen described her family as “immigrant,” a word that is more politically neutral than “refugees,” a further indication of Māra’s identification with war and its political/social consequences. In this next memory, Karen talks about her family.

My father is from Poland, my family is an immigrant family, you know. But they are Jewish. I always heard many stories about the, you know, my father’s family came out of the Holocaust, and my grandmother, the mother of my mother -- she used to tell me those stories about her childhood and Jewish and -- so I think this got me the sensation of that things were not exactly always the same. Something like that. I think if you are Brazilian and you were Brazilian always, then you don’t ask how you became a Brazilian (Karen 2003, 1).

In this memory, Karen tells that her identity as part of an immigrant family contributed to her exposure to the various viewpoints that exist in life. If her family had all been Brazilian, she wouldn’t have had this perception and curiosity about other people and realities. Here, Karen identifies her family as “immigrant,” rather than Brazilian. Karen’s story suggests that her father and grandmother had been impacted strongly by the Holocaust during World War II in Eastern Europe, having told Karen many stories about

their war experiences. Thus, Karen had listened to the stories her father and grandmother told of the time before they “became Brazilians,” though she herself had not been affected by the war. Karen also talks of another “reality,” that of her family being Jewish. Note, however, that in these first memories, Karen makes no mention of her own personal or ethnic identity. Does Karen see herself as the one who “became a Brazilian,” or the one who “was Brazilian always?” In this memory, Karen does not give an answer, but constructs a picture of various identities.

The last narrative about Karen’s school years was very different compared to Māra’s story of “little Stalin,” the little ones trembling, and the uncomfortable shoes one had to wear.

And this was very important for me. I went to a very good high school. Very political, very left. In Rio. It was organized by priests. They were leftist priests. Dominicans. And then I think the best teachers were chased out of the universities. Some of them went to the school because the priests hired them. So, I had very important and good history teachers. One of my Brazilian history teachers -- he was the Secretary of Education in Recife in the northeast. And he was exiled and then he came back. So I had these kind of teachers, you know. I really got an interesting view of Brazilian history. We had the only [student council] open in all of Rio de Janeiro. Student [council]. It’s called [*gremio*]. It’s a student’s organization. They had closed all the student organizations. But my school maintained it. And then we had elections. We had newspapers, theatre

groups, all very political. And I was really president of this student council for one year. And the Communist Party was there, and they had all this political information. And then I went to all the manifestations. We had many street manifestations at the time ending the dictatorship. My boyfriend at the time, his father was a very important writer in Brazil. Very, very important. He died, this father, but he wrote the main theatre plays. And then I got in this family that were all in the Communist Party. And some of them had died. So I had my life from my fifteen to eighteen years old completely involved in going to manifestations, to political organizations, being the president, organizing the newspaper. And we had like two million people in the streets saying “*Baixa a ditadura*,” “[Down with the dictatorship],” open amnesty, these kinds of things. And I took part in that. I took part in more deep things because of this family of my boyfriend at that period, which was an important family in the Communist Party. . . . So, I had this important historical approach, political approach. I was never in the Communist Party myself. I was involved with all those other activities. I think this was very important to my life. Very important, because my family in itself was more bourgeoisie, immigrant, you know, not so involved in this kind of activity. And I got really involved in that. That’s why I wanted to study history in life (Karen 2003, 23-24).

In this narrative, Karen is in the midst of a politically active high school taught by leftist teachers, some of whom had lost their jobs and had been sent into exile by the

military dictatorship. She felt she had the power to influence her world. She was involved with protests, manifestations, being president of the student body, and close interaction with important writers of the leftist opposition to the dictatorship. Karen's narrative is full of activity and involvement, something that perhaps ten years earlier may not have been possible when the dictatorship had been at its most ruthless stage. Here also, Karen is constantly evaluating the importance of these experiences in her life and work with life stories. Her evaluations are rational conclusions that she reached later in life, but inserted into the story about her past so that it would support her image of herself and ideology. The evaluation that begins this narrative, "And this was very important for me," is a phrase that Karen uses throughout her life story, characterizing her goal-oriented approach.

Comparing Māra's and Karen's Earliest Stories

There are several differences in techniques and themes in Māra's and Karen's early memories. Māra composed her narration with tiny nuggets of stories and memories filled with emotions, feelings, and "atmospheric" depictions, so that the listener can get a feeling for the moment in time. Karen does not compose her narrative in story form at all, but rather, leads the listener in a directional narrative with a purpose. This narrative is part of Karen's strategy to show how her life led logically to the important ideas of *Museu da Pessoa*. Karen's narrative was heavily biased from a viewpoint in the present, straight to the point and full of evaluative expressions such as "I think this was very important to my life," or "At that moment, I started to understand." These differences in

the ways Māra and Karen constructed their life stories are full of implications for the kinds of structures within which they work. Karen is goal-oriented, business-minded, an entrepreneur in a market-driven Brazil, while Māra takes a more reflective attitude, musing about the different life stories that she has recorded, taking a creative or poetic stance in life story collecting, working first within a socialist, and then an academic structure, waiting for the right political climate to realize her ideas. One can also see from these stories the impact that dictatorships and politics have had on both Māra and Karen. Māra constructed a story of a first-hand refugee experience. She immersed her stories in war, displacement -- a victim of the times. She projects a need for roots, a sense of place and home. Karen filled her story about her high school years with a sense of agency, first-hand activism, her ability to make a political impact, her sensation of control by being elected to president of the student council, her participation in protest manifestations, and her ability to freely read literature of many different political persuasions.

Karen is in the hub of activity and control, while Māra is in the hub of intimidation. Karen constructs herself as an active listener of stories, while Māra constructs herself as a passive observer. Karen could believe in her teachers and felt empowered by school, while Māra's teachers were part of the dominating regime, encouraging passivity. Māra grew up as part of the socialist system, while Karen grew up as part of the sanctioned opposition to the weakening military dictatorship, not experiencing first-hand her parents' stories of war and exile.

These basic differences in Māra's and Karen's early life stories defined who they became, how they worked, and what their "agenda" for creating their master stories would be. The type of structure they grew up in – Karen in a budding diverse market

economy and Māra in a closed socialist regime, set up different conditions in which they negotiated and mediated the birth of their organizations with the ruling society. The organizations they would found would serve as mediating structures between society and the people who told them their life stories.

Māra Narrates the “Birth” of *Dzīvesstāsts*

Māra associates her identity as a Latvian closely with the events leading up to the birth of her idea for *Dzīvesstāsts*. In the following story, Māra starts making connections between life stories, her growing sense of anger for the injustice against Latvians caused by the Soviet policy of russification, and her own character and mission in life.

And then I was working at the Philharmonic as a ticket agent. Or in the wardrobe room. Well, that was my full-time job, but it was very good, because it didn't interfere with my studies. But also, there I got acquainted with a certain part of society. And there I met a person who had just come back from the [*katorgas* - concentration camp], from the mine fields, from Siberia. And he was a good storyteller and he would tell us his stories.

And there were concerts in the Dzintara concerthall. And sometimes we would stay until the end. When the concert ended at 11, we would come back to Riga by foot. That was a kind of youthful enthusiastic venture. We were a small group -- 3-5 people. And he would tell us his stories about the concentration camp along the way. And it seemed to me that the

injustice committed against Latvians, against the Latvian people --
Because at that time Latvia was flooded with immigrants from the whole
Soviet Union. And everything Russian dominated here, and in all the
governing bodies and everywhere, and, in other words, forced upon us.
And against this injustice, everything was churning inside of me, against
this injustice, because I couldn't tolerate it. And in this story that this
person was telling us, well, I was just totally involved in it and empathized
with him. And I thought, if I were -- I like to hurry to somebody's aid, if
there is a need -- While we can, somehow, we have to think of something.
We have to think of something (Māra 2002, 5).

Here, Māra repeats the same line twice -- "We have to think of something,"
showing the urgency and conviction with which Māra was deliberating a plan of action to
"hurry to somebody's aid," which in this case meant hurrying to the aid of a distressed
Latvia. "Immigrants," in Māra's story, are the results of "injustice," because they were
"forced upon" Latvia as part of the Soviet russification policy. Māra uses strong words in
this story to create a sense of urgency and agitation about the policy the Soviet Union was
implementing against Latvia. "Everything was churning inside of me," Māra says. "I
couldn't tolerate it."

In the next story, Māra narrates how she gave birth to the idea for *Dzīvesstāsts*. At
this point, she had decided to leave her job as a TV journalist, tired of the ideological
pressure that the system was exerting on journalists to fulfill restrictive requirements of

the communist ideology. She looked for jobs elsewhere and found a summer job at the Ventspils museum, on the western coast of Latvia.

And then I went to work at Ventspils Museum, and there I met Ingrida Strunka. And there we went and did fieldwork. And she is a very competent historian, an impressive person. And we talked with her a lot about what people tell, what they don't tell, and what they tell even though the museum can't receive their stories. But even so, Ingrida accepted into the museum that walking stick with which that person had come from Siberia. Even though she couldn't exhibit it. And then we formulated it, that all kinds of testimonies are collected, but peoples' life testimonies are not. Nobody knows how his life had been. And it was especially obvious there around the 1970s. There still hadn't been any Awakening, but everything was just more and more bursting at the seams. The truth could not remain there. And people wrote diaries and they told their stories. They [the Soviets] hadn't calculated in the fact that people talked a lot. Now still some people are afraid to talk, but in the 1970s -- the museum people had a lot to tell. Well, maybe there, at that moment, it gave birth (Māra 2002, 6).

Māra narrated the birth of the idea for *Dzīvesstāsts* as a direct consequence of her revelation that people really did talk a lot, in spite of the silence that Māra had mentioned in her story on the occasion of Stalin's death. The silence of the people and the "yelling"

of “little Stalin” was broken by the many stories that were “bursting at the seams” at Ventspils museum. Here, Māra narrates about the presence of supportive people who shared her convictions and who opened her eyes to the stories people told about “forbidden” subjects such as the experiences of Latvians during Soviet deportation. The museum introduced her to the staff that accepted the walking stick from Siberia, evidence of the deportations that had secretly been taking place, but never talked about. Māra tells this story as an emotional crescendo of activities and feelings. Though in the 1970s it was still too early to be able to organize *Dzīvesstāsts*, Māra names that moment as the birth of the idea. Thus, Māra presented the birth of the idea for *Dzīvesstāsts* as a product of the repressive times during which she was living, and a direct inspiration from the stories people were already telling at a time when the telling of these stories was dangerous. *Dzīvesstāsts* was thus born, according to Māra’s narration, as a protest against the ruling system and resistance against fear, and a desire for “truth that couldn’t just remain there.”

Karen Narrates the “Birth” of *Museu da Pessoa*

Karen regarded the two years that she spent traveling and working in Europe and New York as very important experiences that helped shape her awareness of the diversity of cultures and paved the way for the birth of her ideas. After returning to Brazil, Karen worked for a famous photographer whose work influenced and inspired her. Karen tells about her excitement at discovering that each of his pictures triggered a story. She lived in a haze of stories in this job, an influential time for her that helped spark the idea for *Museu da Pessoa*. The sheer numbers of stories and their richness stimulated her.

Karen presented the Jewish Holocaust victim oral history project she was involved with as an important awareness stepping stone towards the idea for *Museu da Pessoa*. In terms of themes and impact, this story corresponds with the Gulag concentration camp stories that Māra listened to.

When the person told me, the person lived it again. These old Jewish people I got -- they were re-living it again. This was important for them. So important. So I think it's four items. I got the idea for the Museum of the Person. This idea, I think, that has a methodological point of view, a social point of view, and an individual one -- how history can be made out of many, many, many versions, and how this can be so rich for building a common history. . . . After that, when I was twenty-nine, I moved to São Paulo. . . . I moved to São Paulo and said -- I'm going to make this Museum of the Person (Karen 2003, 6).

Here Karen talks about the birth of the idea for *Museu da Pessoa*, listing a systematic succession of events that led her to the dramatic moment -- "And then I moved to São Paulo and said, 'I'm going to make this Museum of the Person.'" Her narrative is full of resolve and certainty. In this next example, Karen specifically earmarks the impact that narrative creates on immigrants and the importance for building identity. In this Jewish project, Karen sees how important telling one's life story is to the teller. Storytelling is viewed as a tool for self-therapy in popular culture, and is an example of how life story benefits the teller rather than the researcher.

In the middle of this project [about oral history of Jewish immigrants in Rio], interviewing these people, is when I think I started to perceive how many different ways there are of constructing a story, [constructing] your life, depending on the story that you make, and how this can be very important for the person. This is what builds the identity of a group, an individual. It's this that makes the future. I observed how this worked, depending on the ideology and the object of the story. . . . I saw how a specific object has much to do with us, how you construct a historical narrative effectively. . . . It was at this moment. So, I perceived this: the impact this created on immigrants, and, on the other hand, conceptually. There I think the idea of the Museum of the Person was born (Karen 2000, 11).

Here again, Karen talks about “the moment” when the idea for *Museu da Pessoa* was born. Karen was deeply involved in constructing history. She was fascinated with the many different types of historical narrative that exist, depending on the viewpoint of the times and the people writing it. History was connected to the different realities, which was connected to diversity and to the many different ways people told their life stories. In this last narrative, Karen, similarly to Māra, constructs a narrative that depicts “the person” as the most valuable link. Māra said: “And then we formulated it, that all kinds of testimonies are collected, but peoples’ life testimonies were not. Nobody knows how his life had been.” Compare how Karen told this story:

And then I said -- you have museums of everything. History is important for creating the identity on the one side. And each person is a door. So why don't you have a museum of the person. There I got the idea. This was 1985, 1984. You have to have a place where all the stories go and will serve for something. I got this idea completely at that moment. I never thought this should be just Jewish, never. I always thought -- if Jewish are like that, imagine the rest, you know what I mean" (Karen 2003, 5)?

Karen emphasized diversity: "I never thought this should be just Jewish, never." This comparison shows Mara's and Karen's differing agendas that grew out of their childhood experiences in two different cultures. Karen has created a goal-oriented life story that shows resolve, a wish to include the world in her creation, and an interest in the social disparities in Brazilian life, characteristics that began to develop from her interactions as a child with the maids in her household. Māra's creation of her life story was of a more poetic nature, including the smells, sounds, and pictures of her life, mirroring her interest in the life stories of the various small pockets of people that exist in different regions of Latvia: the sheep man in Eastern Latvia, the forest brother in Liepaja, the sounds of the various regional dialects still spoken today. Māra created *Dzīvesstāsts* in order to collect stories that confirm and strengthen the values and experiences of Latvians. Māra was thinking of the importance of historical Latvian "witnessing" stories, while Karen was reveling in the richness of diversity, rejecting the idea of focusing on one particular group -- "If Jewish are like that, imagine the rest."

CHARACTERISTICS OF LIFE STORY ACCORDING TO MĀRA AND KAREN

In my interview with Māra, she took a lot of time to ruminate and meditate about the nuances and meanings of life story. This was partly made possible by the considerably smaller size of *Dzīvesstāsts* and more relaxed atmosphere, as compared to Karen's *Museu da Pessoa*. Despite all the daily responsibilities and work that had to be done in connection with *Dzīvesstāsts*, Māra had more time to relax towards evening, and spend time with me, meditating slowly about the meanings and philosophies of life story. Additionally, my relationship to her was much closer than to Karen, since we had known each other for a longer time and my Latvian roots created a stronger bond. For this reason, the amount of material about Māra's thoughts regarding the characteristics of life story is considerably slanted in Māra's favor.

Moreover, the difference between small and large organization is reflected in each organization's mode of work: Māra's *Dzīvesstāsts* is introspective, intimate, centered around the locality, while Karen's *Museu da Pessoa* is aggressive, activist, and world-oriented.

In the following sections, I will discuss how some scholarly points about life story from chapter 1 are crafted into Māra's and Karen's own personal life stories. This portion is an analysis of the structured part of the interview, where I posed specific questions about life story to Māra and Karen.

Defining Distinguishing Traits of Life Story

In response to my question of “what is a life story,” Māra explained that it is something that shows *attieksmi uz dzīvi*, the teller’s relationship or attitude to the world, to life, to his/her feelings and values. If this attitude is present, then the story is a “life story” no matter how long or short. Māra’s statement suggests William Labov’s argument that a narrative that contains a plot and other components is not a complete narrative if it doesn’t contain an “evaluation.” He defines “evaluation” as “that part of the narrative which reveals the attitude of the narrator towards the narrative” (1967, 37). The evaluation briefly suspends the action of the story and makes a statement that reveals something about the teller’s character. For instance, Karen’s repeated statement, “This was very important to me,” or Māra’s, “I like to rush to a person’s aid,” are examples of evaluations that briefly suspend action within their own life stories. Māra explains that she has recorded many stories that, despite their brevity, can be called “life story.” These stories contain a key, important, fundamental fragment or narrated event, through which one can perceive his/her attitude towards life. The life story, thus, doesn’t have to cover the whole lifespan of the individual, from childhood to the present, as long as the recorded narrative expresses something about this person’s attitude or philosophy towards life. Māra ponders the question in this next narrative.

But that one episode in the film carried the solution to everything -- to that one person’s life, the key. I remember that sometimes -- it was sometimes

like that in the cassette interviews that I made. There, as well, are these small pieces -- pieces of life. . . . Because I was really thinking -- can I call everything a life story? But everything that we have recorded here, they are not all life stories. It is really oral history. Many of the interviews that are very short can be called life stories, if they have some fundamental fragment of life -- well, where you can understand the person -- that expresses that person's relationship to life. Yes, mostly his/her relationship to life, from one of his/her stories (Māra 2002, 19).

Thus, for Māra, understanding the individual and his/her inner being is fundamental in her life story collecting endeavors. Māra found that written life stories do not lend themselves so well to spotting these inner values, though her initial work with life story was through the written media – diaries and memoirs. Māra argued that written stories are not as open and spontaneous as oral stories. While writing a story, the person holds himself more in check, “controls” himself more with his mind and is more cautious about what he/she is writing. While talking, a person liberates him/herself from these controlling tendencies, says Māra, and more channels are freed that lead to the person's subconscious that adds more depth in the spontaneous, spoken word.

“But talking -- when talking, he/she is not so tied up. He/she is more relaxed, free. In that case, maybe there are things that creep in that are not just the rational ponderings. But something breaks through and frees the channels that exist in the person's deep subconscious. And maybe that is

what draws me more to the spoken story. Then we sometimes get closer to the subconscious moments that never materialize when written. That is the deepness of it all” (Māra 2002, 18).

Māra also mentions that life story is an opportunity to improvise, an opportunity to be creative. A person can formulate his/her life story in any way that he or she wants. “Life story is a concept in which a characteristic is the opportunity to improvise. The opportunity to present creatively, because it is you yourself who are talking about your life. And ‘story’ is that which we, in this case, want to lift out... The name ‘life story’ is very popular and the press uses it, but with a different meaning. We give it a different meaning. Maybe a deeper one -- life and story” (Māra 2002, 17). Thus, to Māra, life story is something that lifts out the individual and is fundamentally different than oral history, whose main ingredient is the plot and events it portrays. Life story is something that brings out the deeper meaning or attitude in the individual through his/her creativity and spontaneity.

When I approached Karen about the meaning of “life story,” she didn’t dwell on definitions or characteristics, but rather, focused on the different “realities” that existed in the world that the life stories portrayed. Amy Shuman notes that, “Folklorists are interested in... how people construct realities through the stories they tell about their experiences” (2006, 26). Life stories made Karen aware of the different realities, cultural backgrounds, classes, countries, professions, and worldviews of people. “Each life story is a unique way of understanding,” said Karen in a presentation. Thus, to Karen, life story is a way to lift out the uniqueness of the individual and the diversity of the world.

Therefore, both Māra and Karen feel there is a fundamental “key” to a life story: for Māra it’s *attieksme*, for Karen it’s a “unique way of understanding.” Both see life story as a way to lift up the individual. Contrary to Māra, who ponders long and hard about finding the “key” to understanding the individual, Karen leaves this job to others – researchers and collaborators – while she concentrates on accumulating more stories reflecting the diversity of people.

Story vs. History vs. Reality

Karen often used the word “history” when talking about life story and her work with other people’s life stories. Māra rarely used the Latvian word for history -- *vēsture* -- in her own life story, whereas Karen often used the two -- history and life story -- interchangeably, with the same meaning and ideas. Māra is more consumed with setting right an injustice that had been done to the Latvians, which consisted in documenting experiences in the everyday person’s life during the silenced years. Thus, Māra’s work with life stories, as reflected in her own life story, is very much a manner of protest against a dominating power.

Karen, however, creates strong ties between history and life story all throughout her narrative. Part of this has to do with the Portuguese language. The word for “history” and “story,” are the same in Portuguese -- *historia*, while in Latvian, story -- *stāsts* and history -- *vēsture*, are different. Karen’s point is that history is also just somebody’s narrative of what happened -- a way of organizing things, just like a person’s life story is just his/her way of organizing and seeing his/her life. Thus, the functions of history, life

story, and reality are intertwined. Here are some short examples of her interplay of these three concepts.

So this gave me a broader sense of how history is important to understand reality. . . . And then I remember thinking how her history was so different from mine, and how this made her behavior . . . different. . . . I had this interest in seeing how each person was different, and really, they lived in the same space, but not in the same reality. . . . And then I understood that reality is more -- is so rich. . . . And this you think is reality, but this is a narrative of reality. . . . And they are going to agree that this is the collective thing . . . this is our reality. This is history” (Karen 2003, 2-16).

Here we see Karen preoccupied with the concept of “realities,” and how the different realities are what made each person different. “Worldview” may be another word one may use for this sense of “reality.” Māra did not use the word “reality” in her life story when talking about the different worldviews people expressed. Rather, Māra preferred to delight in the variations people showed through their regional dialects, language, expressions, character, that paint a picture of the character of the individual, the geographical region, and historical era from whence they came. Māra prefers to use the formal word *realitāte* to mean the wider, more general meaning of existence.

Truth vs. Fiction

In Chapter 1, I emphasized the dual nature of life story, characterizing it as a “tug-of-war” between truth and fiction. Titon described the folklorist’s view of life story as a “self-contained fiction,” while historians, generally, appreciated life story’s more subjective lens through which to search for a more holistic representation of the facts. Oral historians such as Portelli and Thompson combine the two notions by saying that, “It is not only what people say and whether it was true, but how they remember it that matters: what they won’t say; what they forget; the silences of memory; the transformations that take place in memory; the inventions “ (Thompson 2004, 82).

Māra uses the word “truth” several times to describe her relationship to life story. “The truth” was something that needed to be vocalized. “Nobody knows how his life had been,” Māra says of the person that had just come back from the concentration camp in Siberia. “The truth could not just stay there.”

The Soviets are known for recreating historical truth on purpose -- creating a narrative that openly propagandizes the Soviet idea of a Soviet past. Journalists would silence what they regarded as anti-Soviet elements and exalt that which strengthened the communist ideal of the worker’s paradise. Māra grew up with this knowledge that the history around her and that which was being taught in schools was constantly being manipulated by the authorities. The media silenced the “truth” behind deportations, the Latvian resistance, and information about Latvia’s brief period of independence between 1920 and 1940. People whose life stories inform us about these periods of history, the

“era full of changes” [*pārmaiņām piesātinātais laikmets*] had high priority for Māra’s work.

However, Māra also believes strongly in the other side of the “truth” spectrum -- the creative nature of life stories. “Life story is a concept which includes the opportunity to improvise. It is the opportunity to present creatively, because it is you yourself who are talking about your life. And it is the story we want to lift out” (Māra 2002, 17). Truth, here, has taken a lower priority towards the more individual, personal, creative side of a person, and “what gives him meaning.”

Karen had a more categorical answer to the question of truth in life stories. “There is no truth in the absolute way,” says Karen. It’s always a narrative, a way of organizing things. Each person has a different reality and a different view and narrative of life story and of the reality. “So, it’s an illusion to think that history is this mirror of truth. It’s always a narrative and an ideology . . . always, always. That’s the first commandment” (Karen 2003, 15).

To Māra, an important function of life story was to tell the “truth” about what really happened, what people didn’t talk about, how people had really lived. To Karen, on the other hand, history and truth were closely connected to the ideology and reality of the person who was writing about it. History had no connection to “one” truth. To Karen, truth was not a word in her vocabulary. Rather, she concentrated on the diversity of different realities. She had not been brought up to experience repression of realities. For Māra, “truth” symbolized all the stories of peoples’ lives that had been repressed during the Soviet era. Her mission was to connect to the various “truths” of the communist times that had been silenced. “There still hadn’t been any Awakening, but everything was just

more and more bursting at the seams. The truth could not remain there. And people wrote diaries and they told their stories” (Māra 2002, 6).

Identity

Both Māra and Karen stress the important role of identity within the life story collecting process. As pointed out earlier by Jeff Titon, “The life story’s singular achievement is that it affirms the identity of the storyteller in the act of telling. The life story tells who one thinks one is and how one thinks one came to be that way” (Titon 1980, 290). Thus, life story is an intensely personal creation which the storyteller can bend and mold according to how he/she perceives himself or herself.

Māra’s idea of the importance of identity in life story projects is grounded in the establishment of a firmer foundation for the national and regional identity of Latvians. She takes a decidedly firm stance on life stories as a tool for strengthening national identity for Latvians, Livonians, and any other ethnic group. She identifies with the plight of small nations and folk groups. “I believe that every ethnic folk has the right to live and survive, and that they need to ensure their path into the future. Because that’s why I worked for a while, and gave special emphasis to the Livonians, who, after the Awakening, are regaining their Livonian self-esteem and want to somehow hold on to what they have” (Māra 2002, 6).

Another of Māra’s main missions in *Dzīvesstāsts* is to paint a characterization of the various regions in Latvia. Dialects, talking styles, and other differences are all

interesting to Māra, and all contribute to painting a portrait of all the different regions contained in Latvia, as well as the characters of other Baltic nations.

Karen's thoughts about identity are grounded in active language. The verbs she uses while talking about identity and life stories are "creating," "building," and actively making the identities of groups and individuals through the process of collecting and telling life stories. Karen speaks about "creating identity." If you recognize your story as important, you have a stronger sense of self as an individual and as a group. Constructing a story creates identity. "It was fantastic to understand how history has to do with patterns of behavior, how this is important to make the identity of kids -- how you build that in school . . . and this is very important for the idea of the Museum of the Person on the one side, because this was like history has an important role in creating identity, but in changing identity, too" (Karen 2003, 4).

National Identity

Māra formulated her national identity early in her life. "Already in school, it was clear to me that I was a Latvian" (Māra 2002, 4). Māra establishes a national identity for herself that she consciously felt as a child. It is something, says Māra that you have to feel inside of you and something that must be nurtured and cared for.

Karen, on the other hand, identifies herself more with immigrants than with her Jewish family history or her Brazilian roots. She emphasized that there is no real Brazilian identity, but many identities that a person and Brazilian group has. Brazil is a mixture, an immigrant nation, while Latvia is a small nation with a predominantly Latvian identity.

If you establish your own life story as something that is really important and recognize it, then you have a more strong self, as a group, as a Brazilian group. I don't think that is one identity. You have many, many, many. Brazil is very big. It's an immigrant. It's a mixture place. . . . If you are from a very small group, and everybody is the same, then you have a very clear thing -- I'm German because this and that and that. In Brazil, the identity is more, is more diverse. So, I think the Museum of the Person can be, is a very rich place to have it, because then you can rediscover many identities here. This is different social classes, different places, and different religions. So there is not a Brazilian identity, but this will give a whole idea of the country (Karen 2003, 17).

Note that Karen mentions "the whole idea of the country," in place of "Brazilian identity." This emphasizes the multi-faceted character of "identity" in Karen's eyes. Identity goes beyond nation or race, but covers class, religion, occupation, etc, and covers both group and individual identity. At the same time, Karen sees the political structure changing along with the times and the concept of identity. Now identity and the valuing of culture go hand in hand with "giving voice to the people" through life stories. "I think Brazil has changed a lot these last ten years, and this problem of identity, of valuing the culture, of recognizing that people have something to say is something that became strong in Brazil these last ten years. And we are part of this movement. That's why Lula came. Lula is the president. I think it's the same movement. It's like, let's give voice to the people. I hope that is. I hope" (Karen 2003, 17). Karen sees the museum as a direct

product of the times in Brazil -- the changing view and movement of Brazil and its recognition in recent years that people have something to say, inspired by the election of a president whose connection to the “common man” was rooted in his background in the poverty of Brazil’s slums.

Karen sees her own ethnic identity as a mixture. Karen stresses that she is not only a Brazilian, and a “daughter of immigrants,” but is also Jewish, Polish, and has come in contact with many other cultures and languages. “[I am] a daughter of an immigrant family. So, when you are really an immigrant, you naturally live together with some different cultures, right? Like you live in Brazil -- I am Brazilian, but also have Jewish traditions, Polish things, other languages -- so you become more relativistic towards reality in some way” (Karen 2003, 2-3). Here Karen emphasizes that being an immigrant brings one in closer contact to various cultures, and one’s identity is connected with various ethnicities and religions.

Karen claims that she does not have a close relationship with place. She has no strong connection to country where she feels more at home than in any other country. Neither did she wish to attach the *Museu da Pessoa* to a physical place. She always kept faithful to her idea that it would be a virtual place. Thus, it seems that the Internet is an ideal arena for Karen to feel at home in, since it is not closely bound to any one place. While Māra feels very Latvian, Karen claims that she doesn’t particularly feel the need for roots in one place. She could live anywhere in the world. Note that in this next excerpt, Karen doesn’t attribute being a Jew as part of her identity, but rather, sees herself as “from a Jewish family.”

I don't have a very deep relationship with places. When I was in Europe, I had a sensation that I could have been from there, and remain there a long time. I'm not such a person that has such a thing that: 'Ah, that culture. I can't adapt to it.' I think it has to do with the fact that I am from a Jewish family. It comes from my grandparents, because they are not very Brazilian. . . . So, she doesn't feel very Brazilian. And really, my grandmother had a theoretical [not emotional?] tie with Israel. And with the place where she originated also. . . . Nobody had such a thing -- 'let's return there,' like the Japanese have, 'our Japan.' I think I inherited some of this. . . . And I thought: boy, I could live wherever I am in the world! I didn't have this thing: 'Ah, I need my roots!' I never had this (Karen 2003, 6-10).

Identity is an important part of both Māra's and Karen's work. However, their angles are different. Māra, coming from a small country, struggles to affirm identity as part of a nation or ethnic group in hopes that it will help to secure that group's future. Karen hopes to "make" the future by "building" and making visible the multiple identities that people have as groups and as individuals. She hopes to make this happen during the process of telling stories, by collecting stories, by teaching children the technology, by writing one's story in the Internet, or by planning a product or a presentation in one's community.

The concept of place and roots may be the sharpest contrast between Māra and Karen. Māra's attachment to her roots is as important as is Karen's unattachment to

place. Though they may agree on other things, national identity and world identity are key concepts that separate the master stories of Māra and Karen.

Values

As mentioned in chapter 1, the action constructed by the storyteller represents the values and meanings that are important to the teller. “Behavior is a way of talking about values. The well-structured plots of the personal narrative serve both the teller and listener as vehicles for expressing and learning values (Stahl 1989, 19).” Karen does not specifically lift out this component of life story, though it is implied indirectly in her work, whereas Māra has picked a noted professor of philosophy and ethics as *Dzīvesstāsts*’ director, an indication that spirituality and values are important in her work. Māra has based the annual summer field trips on the premise that there are values that need to be discovered in people. “The Latvian Foundation has supported this fieldwork for many years. And the fact that one should organize them here in Latvia was totally clear to me, because I already knew that there are many values that have not been recognized in people” (2002, 16). An important objective for Māra is to deduce a way for “getting at” these values, for “pulling them out” of the life storyteller.

Karen is interested in values or lessons the listener learns from the very act of collecting life stories. The computers the child learns to operate while doing a life story project will put him on a firmer footing for the future and the pictures that the child draws to depict the interview with the storyteller bring out the creative drive of the child, which may not have been tapped in any other way. Thus, according to Māra, the values that the

story contains, must be interpreted later by the researcher, while for Karen, the “values” of the life story are reaped by the very act of story collecting.

Interview Techniques –

Balance of Power between the Interviewer and Interviewee

Folklorists generally appreciate life story as a whole unit, uninterrupted by directive questions from the interviewer. Jeff Titon states that the interviewer is there only as an “empathetic listener . . . not interrupting the train of thought until the story is finished” (1980, 276). Oral historian Paul Thompson describes the interviewer more as a catalyst: “In the early stages of the interview, you try never to interrupt, you try to get the person flowing and only then you introduce your questions” (2004, 83).

Both Māra and Karen value the listening skills of the interviewer. Māra notes that the “greatest value is a whole unit of speech not split by questions.”

I think that the greatest value is a live language entity that we get without it being divided, rifted apart, and bombarded by questions. But another viewpoint is also possible. It could be that the interviewing, if the questioning is done with sensitivity and meaning, that one can understand the teller more deeply, than letting him/her talk without interfering. We could evaluate which one is better. But I think it's not better. Probably either one or the other will do. But we can see by the text as a whole unit

and let it testify, not only about the interviewing situation, but by the skill of the teller (Māra 2002, 26-27).

Karen describes the life story as a “co-production,” and the most important thing is to “get the story out.” Thus, the collaborative aspect of the interviewer and interviewee are important in Karen’s interviewing techniques. Karen says that she always had this “listening talent,” and states that the first skill of the interviewer is to “really want to listen.” But she qualifies this in a manner of listening “not in a musical way, but in a historical way.” This implies that the listening is an active component of interviewing. The interviewer does not sit back and enjoy the story in a passive, aesthetic manner, but listens with a critical ear, and with resultant critical questions that guide the story out into the open.

“Interviewing is a hard skill,” Karen comments. “A bad interviewer stays at the skin of the onion. You need to get inside of the skin... You go until you get to the inside. Start with what’s your name, and you would start taking the things out, the closest part of the onion out. So a bad interview is when you stay at the skin. The outside part. All the time the skin, all the time. This is a bad interview” (Karen 2003, 13). Thus, both Māra and Karen regard the superficiality of the story as a result of an unsuccessful interview.

Māra also talks about how to “get the person flowing,” as Paul Thompson would say. She mentions how to get an interviewee going by starting with his/her childhood, and thus, “lighting the memory lamp.” The interviewer and interviewee need to keep these numerous “memory lamps” lighted and within easy spotting distance. “But it puts you on the right key, on the right track. Because then the person can little by little move

along those. The memory lamp has been lit and one just has to follow it” (Māra 2002, 27). “Lighting the memory lamp” implies a collaboration between interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer strives to jog the memory of the storyteller by suggesting key topics and by ensuring an empathetic and supportive audience that builds trust and sharing.

Thus, the balance of power between the interviewer and interviewee for Māra and Karen seems, in theory, tilted towards the storyteller, and getting the stories to come out as self-contained, uninterrupted entities, guided by the attentive and sensitive questioning of the interviewer. In practice, however, accomplishing this requires a trained ear from the interviewer that helps the storyteller to delve beneath the superficial. The important thing is to achieve an open and truthful narrative, full of meaning for the interviewer and the storyteller.

Good and Bad Storytellers

While Māra talks about the inherent talents of many of her interviewees, Karen plays down the importance of the qualities of a good storyteller. “I don’t think the Museum of the Person you can have only good storytellers. You can have everybody -- good and bad storytellers. But it’s not a place for good storytellers. It’s a place for stories” (Karen 2002, 13). Karen treats the story as a symbol or embodiment of the individual. The story’s placement on the Internet ensures the “eternity of the individual” that it represents. Thus, for Karen, the important thing is the accessibility of a story, not whether it’s told well or poorly.

Māra, on the other hand, expresses great admiration for the way people tell their stories, and the character of the person that comes through the telling of the story. Particularly admirable traits are those who are able to “speak humbly about complicated events and changes.” Māra admires a storyteller who “has within himself the whole world.” He doesn’t lift himself up, but extends the whole world to you. “I felt the wide, open expanse of his vivid and unique worldview.” Thus, for Māra, it is important to choose tellers that fulfill the qualifications of a good storyteller.

In some of the interviews in exile, for instance, they have been emotional. We sat there and while sitting we had to cry. That was the interview with Jāni Širmani, who, in his characteristic manner, was very unassuming, unpretentious and humbly told his tale. . . . And there was another who had within himself the whole world. He didn’t emphasize himself at all. He himself stood somewhere in the deepest and furthest background. But he offered you the whole world, and that’s Gunārs Janovskis. I felt a wide open expanse, even when he was just talking about himself. Maybe those aren’t typical people, but they are typical in that they are personalities that offer from their worldview something original, unrepeatably, and vivid (Māra 2002, 23).

CREATING AGENDAS FOR THE MASTER STORY

The “Politics of Quotation”

The “politics of quotation” is an expression I heard medical anthropologist Vieda Skultāne use in the final session of the *Dzīvesstāsts* conference in Riga, 2003. Skultāne described the politics of quotation in this way: “We can give our narrators voice, we can tape record them, but then, subsequently, what we do with those narratives, how we cite them, which bits we choose to incorporate into our academic papers, is very much to do with our own agenda, with politics of quotation” (Conference plenary talk 2003).

The “politics of quotation” is a useful term that describes how Māra and Karen use life stories to create their master stories. “Quotation” is involved in the retelling of the life stories that Māra and Karen have collected. They retell the stories, choose quotes and examples to create their products and presentations. These final master stories are embodiments of Māra’s and Karen’s own agendas, and show their own realities through the stories of the people they have come into contact with.

Māra’s Search for the “Essence”

“Essence” is a term that Johann Gottfried von Herder used in the Romantic era, when folk poetry, folksong, and folktale were considered to contain something close to nature, spontaneous... the quintessential expression as well as mold of the nation’s spiritual essence (Clark 1955, 253). It is a notion that describes and differentiates one folk’s unique spirituality from another. I maintain that Māra similarly uses life story to

capture the unique “essence” that differentiates one individual from another, one region from another, and one nation from another. Māra believes that the life story holds a key that could help bring inspiration to the Latvian nation. “But I’d like to involve everything that we have in our deep sack, deep well, our deep archives, everything that we’ve collected there, more with things that are happening at the moment. Because at the moment is happening a lot of things that cannot ensure that our nation will prevail very long” (Māra 2002, 6).

Here I am reminded of the expression used in a Latvian (Latgallian) folk song: “*Laima gryuši nūsapyute, Snīdzes pyura dybyna.*” In English, it is “Fate sighed heavily as she reached into the bottom of her hope chest.” Māra’s metaphor of a “deep sack” full of life stories has parallels in Latvian folk poetry, a perhaps subconscious example of Māra’s deep roots within the Latvian worldview.

Māra uses life story collecting to search for people’s sense of spirituality and to find values and meanings as defined in the various regions of Latvia. She emphasizes that she looks for people whose personalities contain a “spiritual concentrate” -- people who stand out in their humble presentations of themselves. This term is a way of visualizing people who demonstrate inspirational qualities -- those who are active in the community, older people with good memories and who are good storytellers, people who demonstrate regional differences in language or character, or who demonstrate admirable traits such as courage, skill, humbleness, or spirituality. In this next narrative, Māra explains how she chooses these people who have a high “spiritual concentrate.”

People-authorities play a big role -- those who don't hold any high offices, but whose personalities have left an impression, and who in a very concentrated manner have gathered within them the spiritual concentrate of a region. . . . People in the community know them. . . . They stand out from the rest. And the oldest generation interests me. . . . Those who have memories about that historical time full of changes. And older people with a good memory, those are usually the most vivid personalities. . . . I try to pick positive heroes. . . . For instance, for me the so-called 'goat man' was interesting, whom I chose. Somebody recommended him to me, because he could talk for hours in the bus -- let's say he has to go thirty kilometers -- he could talk non-stop from one end to the other. But he talks in an interesting way. In this case, this is very engaging. I don't know if he's a positive hero. But his language was very good. Very special, and very specific to his region (Māra 2002, 20).

In this narrative passage, Māra combined her many interests into one narration, describing her master stories. "That historical time full of changes" focuses on Māra's great interest in supplementing silenced knowledge about the decade during World War II. "Older people with good memory" emphasize her interest in historical experiences. "Vivid personalities" point to her interest in individual creativity and uniqueness. "Positive heroes" are good storytellers who combine within themselves "star" qualities in the art of storytelling and in possessing a "spiritual concentrate." Māra chooses her

“stars” carefully according to her agenda and interests, while Karen claims that *Museu da Pessoa* is a place for all storytellers, good and bad, ordinary and famous.

Capturing the “essence” of a story or a person is similar to capturing its “wonder bird,” as Māra explains: “I understand that it is like trying to catch a wonder bird. It is very hard to catch. You see its brightness and you are almost there. But still, when you go your rational way of sifting through your material, grouping, and commenting, then you can logically find a lot. But the real thing, the live thing, the life story, the magic, I think is very hard to catch with analysis” (2003, 33). A “wonder bird” is similar to a physical “essence,” that magical, spiritual thing that one can almost touch and capture and that holds the key to a person’s unique worldview. Mara struggles with the rationality of structured academic analysis and its inability to capture the elusive, non-definable “essence” and magic of an ordinary person’s inner aesthetic and value system that one can discover in his/her life story. There is also a “tug-of-war” and interplay between Mara’s former resistance to the formality of academics and her present location within the Academy of Sciences, bringing her back once again to the university.

In this final narrative, Māra once again treats the theme of “silence,” this time not only in the historical sense when history was silenced in the Soviet era, but in uncovering the important silenced nuances of the present that are capable of touching and inspiring people.

We have a responsibility to what our parents have experienced, about people’s role in various regimes, and about the changing duality. . . . We can’t say that in the Soviet times we were unhappy. And we can’t say that

we were happy. We were this way and that way. . . . But I think that we have to try to convince people to experience nuances. . . . We have to show the nuances that touch people's lives, people's position, and not only because of history, but for today's position. Because that is what is the most distressing, that today we don't take a stand, don't know where we stand, don't have an opinion, we don't have a position. Especially in Latvia. . . . The important things are silenced. We are looking for a method, and with this method we want to lift out the silenced nuances of life that touch people today (Māra 2003, 36).

In this narrative, Māra has tempered some of her earlier feelings of outrage and anger against the Soviet regime and perceives a duality -- Soviet times were neither unhappy nor happy. Māra does not perceive the world as black and white, but stresses the "nuances" that make a difference in the present. Māra sees life story today as a way to infuse spirituality back into Latvia by lifting out the silenced parts of history and by discovering the "silenced nuances of life that touch people today." Thus, when Māra talks about her mission with *Dzīvesstāsts*, she attempts to address the present through the past, to find the "spiritual essence and wonder bird" of the past to inspire people of the present.

In "lifting out the silenced nuances of life that touch people today," Māra also sees life story as the pure antidote against the dark aggression and domination of present-day mass communication. Elements within the life story can lift people up from the humdrum everyday world. One is reminded of Māra's earlier comment that during the Soviet regime, the person felt "small and gray." Māra is again struggling to lift herself

and others from a dominating and aggressive superpower that has forced the ordinary person into gray submission.

In our everyday, with all the possibilities of mass media, we try to focus on aggression and all kinds of social misfortunes. As if with that we would be able to solve them. We dump onto people all the darkness, the evil, the negative stream that comes often from mass media. And what do we want from that? What results do we get? What do we expect from all the people now dulled by all the catastrophes and crime? What kind of reaction do you want? You see, if a person is inspired and charged up by something out of the ordinary, non-standard, or something very intimate, some kind of personal experience or discovery, then he is ready to act inspired (Māra 2002, 28).

In the above narrative, Māra is applying narrative techniques to lift out the meaning of the text. Her rhetoric is more formal than in her other narratives, full of rhetorical questions and lofty ideology. Her style is almost like that of a “preacher” that protests against the evils of mass media and pleads for salvation that can be acquired through the inspiration of the intimate life story. This attests to the important role of life story as a form of protest in Māra’s system of beliefs and values.

Karen and Social Impact

Karen's language and agenda is immersed in activism and agency. The world is constructed by narratives, says Karen, and one can transform the world from these narratives.

My idea is to make a portal, collect groups, children, everybody composes a part of the same big community. It is like creating a big deposit of histories of a big community. . . . I think the world is constructed through the narratives that you have and society will transform and change the world through these narratives -- will re-make itself through these narratives. I think the power of the museum is in this. And I know that the museum changes values, changes patterns, education. It changes your notion of space -- why not a museum? It changes your notion of history (Karen 2003, 13.)

Karen composes her language with active and powerful verbs: "to transform," "to change the world," "to re-make itself," "the museum changes your notion of history." The "power of the museum" is to transform the world now through these historical narratives, says Karen. She uses the word "power" to describe oral history. The president of the corporation Johnson and Johnson recognized the "power" of oral history when he hired Karen to construct an oral history of his company. Commercial companies provide an important ingredient to *Museu da Pessoa*. Not only do they provide Karen with an

income, but they also get her messages out to the community and help provide for collaborators and supporters in future projects. By contrast, when contemplating the involvement of commercial companies within the work of *Dzīvesstāsts*, Māra expressed fear that commercial companies may compromise *Dzīvesstāsts*' work, thus "violating *Dzīvesstāsts*' virginity."

Karen describes her work as "political," devoted to history and social change. In the above narrative, the word "change" and "transforms" permeates the whole passage. "We want to interfere," says Karen. She is not just interested in the cultural and social, but the political in a historical sense.

I think what I do is totally political. I have no doubt about that. But I'm not in a party. . . . But I think I use history in a political way. . . . More in a political way and less, for example, in an academic way. It's an option. But I think it is a very political movement in some sense. It has to become more and more. . . . When you work with history and social change, it is a political thing. How you connect people. What kind of voice in history you try to help. And this is political, all the time. When you try and you want to work with social change, you are working politically. It's not that you work within a party, but politics is much more. Much broader than that. . . . We want to interfere. Try to interfere in education, the way history is told, and this kind of thing. But I never wanted the museum to be just a cultural thing or just an academic thing. Never. I wanted to

always that it would become more important in a political. But in this sense, the historical sense (Karen 2003, 25).

Unlike Māra, Karen shies away from the purely academic and cultural, but rather, strives to interfere in the political, educational, and historical. Karen often uses the word “history” in the work she does. Yet it is not historical in Māra’s sense of the word, where Māra strives to uncover certain neglected areas of history. For Karen, “history is about the moment, now.” Karen talks about using history as a way to further understanding in the present – “Creating new sympathies and new understandings,” as Paul Thompson noted (2003 Conference Manuscript).

But I think that history is not about the past, but about the present. It is history that makes one perceive what you are at the moment, or what you will be. This is for a person or for a group. So, I think that you and every person have your own history/story, and to create a big net of life stories is a way to really create a big social impact of changes. Only by listening to the world of another you can understand the other. Otherwise, everything is preconceived: the poor person is like this, the foreigner is like this.

There are so many worlds, and each one has its logic (Karen 2003, 13).

Technology has always been a political tool for Karen. At the very inception of *Museu da Pessoa*, Karen used digital technology to empower the work of the museum, creating products for her commercial partners with CD-ROMs. In its first years, the

museum collaborated with multimedia companies that, by coincidence, were housed in the same building where *Museu da Pessoa* had its first office. Technology has become an important political tool in schools, teaching kids digital tools in order to place them in a more advantageous position when looking for employment later in life.

The Internet is Karen's key that has potential for uniting global life story organizations, as well as providing access to these stories throughout the world and granting opportunities for everybody with access to the Internet to place their life story online. Karen places the emphasis on the story as a vehicle of equality that all people have a right to access. In contrast, Māra's agenda in life story collecting emphasizes choosing people that stand out with their power to inspire. Karen's world vision is expressed in this rhetorical, ideological mode of speaking. However, her narrative style is not introspective as is Māra's, but is in an active mode: "Now it's the moment. Let's [*Museu da Pessoa*] stop just trying to survive, what you've been doing these last ten years, and let's make something out of this. Go to the world. Go to the net. Make group work. And make this work in a world-wide dimension. And I think this is the future for the next ten years. This is the main challenge -- how you make this really worldwide dimension" (Karen 2003, 10).

In summary, one can see Karen and Māra create their agendas for their master stories through the personal narratives they have created about their lives. Karen created a life story powered by agency and activism, being brought up with a leftist, activist, political education, while going to a high school run by Dominican priests during the final years of the military dictatorship in Brazil. Many of the teachers in that school were leftists who were fired from their other teaching jobs by the military. However, the

dictatorship was waning during Karen's impressionable teenage years. The political activism of those times enabled her to immerse herself in student demonstrations and protests and to state and support her thoughts with open action. Māra, on the other hand, had grown up under the socialist, leftist regime of the Soviet Union in the deepest years of communism. Māra could only spur herself to action by her own inner sense of justice, but was forced to wait until the time was relatively "safe" to openly realize her life story collecting mission. This explains why Māra's political activism is more inwardly centered on spirituality and intimacy, lifting up the silenced, since she herself was part of the silenced masses. Karen, on the other hand, grew up kicking and fighting in a diverse immigrant society, and had the political and social means to go out into the world to experience the different realities that existed, while using the leftist literature she had been inspired by as fodder for her own sense of social justice and class equality.

CHAPTER 4

IDEOLOGY THROUGH PRODUCTS: COMPARING TWO FILMS

Now that we have examined how Māra and Karen constructed themselves and their agendas, our next task is to examine how they get their messages across. How do they apply their agendas to real products? This chapter examines the master story that they present to the public in the form of products created collectively by their organizations. For this limited study, I have picked one example of a film produced by Māra and Karen. I have selected these one-hour long edited films because I had witnessed part of the production process of these particular films and have noted their significance to Māra and Karen. Both films use life stories as foundation.

Māra's film, "Ordinary Lives in Extraordinary History," features seven storytellers whom Māra and her team had interviewed in the port city of Liepāja in 2001. I had also participated in this field trip as an interviewer and participant observer. The film was produced in 2002, and lists Māra in the opening credits as the first person in a non-alphabetical list of six people for recording, editing, and producing, showing that she had an important role in the production of this film. Māra submitted the film in 2004 to the Tartu International Documentary Film Festival. Karen's film, "The World in a Barber's Shop," or more literally translated as, "The Whole World Fits in a Barber's Chair," lists Karen in the opening credits as part of a team of three responsible for the storyline. This film features the life stories of six Brazilian immigrants. The researcher and co-producer were listed as *Museu da Pessoa*. I was present at the first screening of

the film in downtown São Paulo in December 2002. It was a formal affair with about 300 people in attendance, after which all were invited to a champagne reception in the theatre lobby. The screening of the film was preceded by a number of speeches by Karen and other co-producers, and introduced some of the “star” storytellers present at the screening. Karen’s film was co-produced by TV Cultura, Brazil’s public television channel, and supported by Brazilian governmental and non-governmental institutions. Māra’s film had received support primarily from the United States Information Center, Public Affairs Section of the US Embassy, Democracy Commission’s Small Grants Program.

I will mention four main ingredients of the films in my analysis: 1) the stories; 2) the images; 3) the narration; and 4) the printed text on the screen. My main goal is to extract some of the important themes of the films that make up Māra’s and Karen’s master story.

**“ORDINARY LIVES IN EXTRAORDINARY HISTORY: THE VIDEO BIOGRAPHIES” (*PARASTI DZĪVESSTASTI ATSKABARGAINĀ VĒSTURĒ*):
FILM PRODUCED BY *DZĪVESSTĀSTS***

Māra was constantly on the look out for avenues of support for her various projects. One avenue was a small grants program hosted by the US Embassy in Riga. Māra teamed up with Latvian-American history graduate student Māra Lazda in the United States to write a proposal in English for creating films using the life stories *Dzīvesstāsts* had collected. The proposal highlighted *Dzīvesstāsts*’ goal to “foster the

interaction of different social and ethnic groups in the study of their histories.” Māra wrote that *Dzīvesstāsts* “seeks to return the remembering, recording, and writing of history to the actors themselves – the individuals who have experienced this history.” The aim of the project was to “develop tolerance and democratization in Latvia’s diverse population” (Grant proposal 2001). Thus, Latvia’s diversity is a conscious theme in this film. Another important focus in the proposal as well as in the film is “how individuals made decisions” in the extraordinary and complicated backdrop of World War II. Thus, the diversity of situations people found themselves in, as well as the diversity of ethnicities and viewpoints are the focal points of both proposal and film. After the film was produced, the report to the US Embassy lists the main benefits of the project as the training of interviewers, students, and teachers from diverse backgrounds; and encouraging discussion between ethnic and social groups that included Jewish, Roma, Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, and Latvian. The film has also served as a focus for discussion in the university as part of the curriculum. Māra often showed excerpts from it when presenting papers or workshops.

Thus, the main emphasis of this film is on lifting out Latvia’s diversity and focusing on the life-affecting decisions people made during complicated historical events. Māra narrowed her geographical area to one strategic port city. She incorporated three people she had interviewed earlier, as well as others who were recommended to her by her fellow interviewers. She ended up with a picture of Latvia’s diversity, which is marked more by character, goals, and viewpoints (political, religious, cultural), as well as a range of representative ethnicities in Liepāja, of Russians, Latvians, Poles, Ukrainian Jews. The selection was also determined by the diversity of circumstances that had

brought people to live in Liepaja. *Dzīvesstāsts* acted as a mediating structure, assembling the viewpoints and ethnicities of the seven storytellers, the voices of the field workers, Māra's agenda for highlighting the spiritual nuances of individuals, her devotion to the World War II era, and the American Embassy's desire to finance projects with a "democratizing" aspect. The process of negotiation between all these viewpoints resulted in the selection and rejection of interview excerpts, creating a master story that is as much Māra's as a collaboration of everybody who was involved in this project – storytellers, interviewers, videographers, and editors.

From the very beginning of the film, one notices the central role given to "history" and an emphasis on the role that World War II played in peoples' lives. "War did not damage the fortifications of Liepaja, but it did scar the generation born between the two world wars," states the narrator in the form of printed text appearing in the middle of the screen. The main narrator never speaks, but appears only as printed text. This printed statement sets the scene and affirms that war is still entrenched in common memory and has "scarred" peoples' lives. It is the main premise of the film and one that assigns responsibility for peoples' present-day "scars" and troubles to events in the past.

The front cover of the video film jacket shows pictures of the storytellers posing in various habitats -- the forester in his woods, the head boatyard engineer in the streets of Liepaja, the others in their homes. The back cover shows vestiges of steps, doors, and bunkers from the old World War I fortress that sits on the coast of the Baltic Sea. This area was off limits to ordinary citizens during the fifty years of Soviet rule. These pictures transport one to an earlier time, yet the tellers tell their stories of World War II as if they were fresh in their memories. The text on the back cover supports this view:

“Seven people tell about their lives that started before World War II, a war that still hasn’t completely ended in their memories.” This text implies there is no closure. Memories and experiences during the war are still affecting the lives of people in the present.

The film begins with the sound of waves banging against the shore, the howl of the wind, and a view of the wide expanse of seashore where the city of Liepaja is located (the central geographical theme of this video). Wind and sea have been re-occurring threads going through several of *Dzīvesstāsts*’ videos. Videographer Maruta Jurjāne has produced three video films with *Dzīvesstāsts* that open and close with the sound of the blowing wind and images of the swelling sea. The significance of these sounds and images lies in Latvia’s location on the Baltic Sea. This strategically well-placed location has been an important stimulus for other countries to attack, dominate, and capture Latvia, an important factor during World War II as well. Metaphorically and poetically, one may imagine that the sounds and images of the sea represent Latvia straining to be free like the wind, listening to the sound of eternity like that of water ebbing and flowing.

Themes of the Stories

The obvious theme in all the stories of the video is war and its after-effects. How did each person experience the war and where were they? Each person’s story focused on a particular aspect of World War II and contained a theme that is of particular significance for Māra’s “master story.” Here is a short description of each of the storytellers portrayed in the film:

1) Kārlis was a feisty teenager who stole a revolver from a German officer, was arrested, escaped from the German Legion, hid in the woods, and later fled to Sweden in a fishing boat. A few years later, he emigrated from Sweden to Australia.

2) Vladislavs is a Polish-Lithuanian boatyard engineer who was disdained by the Soviet system for his Catholic religious tendencies and upon the demise of the Soviet system mourned the decline of the boatyard.

3) Olga is a Jewish woman born in the Ukraine of Latvian parents and who returned to Latvia at the exact moment in time, in June 1941, when thousands of Latvians were being deported from Latvia to Siberia in cattle cars by the Soviet regime.

4) Vasilijs was a Soviet Army officer who came to Latvia as a member of the Soviet military. He settled in Liepaja with his daughter, who is a theatre musician, and his grandson. His story in the full transcript contained several references to returning to Russia, but he ended up back in Latvia because he didn't feel welcomed in Russia.

5) Biruta was a supporter of the forest brothers, repressed by the Soviets for her activities with the resistance, interrogated, and imprisoned. She met her husband-to-be in Siberia when she went to visit her brother in captivity.

6) Modris hid in the forest because he refused to join the Soviet Army. He tells of the camaraderie he experienced with his fellow forest brothers and their day-to-day strategy for survival in the underground bunkers.

7) Genadijs was born in Siberia of Latvian heritage. His grandparents left Latvia before WWI in quest for a better life. He immigrated to Latvia in the 1950s to work as a forester in his parents' native land.

The over-arching topic of the life stories was of personal experiences during and after World War II. Several themes consistently reappear in each of these stories that are important for Māra's master story. One that appears prominently is the concept of place: leaving and entering, fleeing and hiding, being forced to abandon place to look for another. There was a chain of circumstances that led each of the storytellers to make decisions whether to pick up their roots and place them elsewhere, or to remain where they are and endure political occupation.

Māra's firm sense of place is rooted in Latvia, but many of her storytellers were forced to relocate to different places. Vladislavs lived in Liepaja all of his life, yet tells a story when he was a little boy and yearning for a different place that reflected an unknown ideal. Vladislavs narrates: "Once one of the captains from a ship that was being repaired invited me on board: 'Come on up, little boy!' He was a good captain, and he visited my parents and asked them to let me go with him. He offered to take me to his home somewhere abroad. It was a foreign ship. I wanted to go, but Mama wouldn't let me."

From the way Vladislavs told his story, it was obvious that, as a little boy, he very much wanted to go with this captain to an unknown, foreign place. Vladislavs' roots, though, are embodied in his mother, who wouldn't allow him to abandon his present place and seek another. Vladislavs constructed his story to show that he was yearning to pick up his roots and see new places, but his sense of duty kept him rooted in his present place.

Very important to the theme of changing one's sense of place is that moment of decision around which much of the storyteller's story hangs and which often is crucial in

steering the storyteller in one direction rather than in another. Māra emphasizes this as well in her proposal where she states her intentions to “understand the complexity of Latvia’s 20th century history by revealing how individuals made decisions in complicated situations.” The decisive instant in time is emphasized by Australian immigrant, Kārlis, who in his story, created the fateful moment when faced with the decision whether to leave or to stay: “When we crossed the Baltic Sea, we were looking for the right weather conditions to get closer to the Swedish coast. It was very dangerous -- Soviet patrol boats watched very carefully because this was the state border. It was foggy as we approached the coast of Sweden. The man who was at the helm asked us: ‘Boys, make a decision what to do -- stay in Sweden or turn back!’ We all decided to stay.” The fact that Kārlis depicted the leaving of Latvia contingent on that one moment of decision shows the great impact that this turn made in Kārlis’ life, and the anxiety he must have felt when turning his back on his homeland.

The appearance of a border separating here and there, as the one in Kārlis’ story between Latvia and Sweden, embodies within it the concept of leaving one way of life and entering another. That split moment of decision can also be looked upon as a border, though it is a border existing in time, rather than in a geographical location. This border separating two modes of life is also noted by the printed text in the video: “World War II divided Latvia’s population into winners and losers. The past continues to define their lives.” The assumption here is that the Soviet Union and its followers are the winners and the Latvian nation and its followers are the losers, both camps divided by the border created between the winning and losing.

The “losers” in the deal are observed in this next story by Olga, the Ukrainian Jew, who is looking in from the outside, observing the suffering of the “losers” as they were being deported to Siberia. The deportees were leaving one form of life and place to enter another to serve out their sentences of exile or death, crossing paths with Olga, who was leaving her way of life and place to enter a new one in Latvia:

And so we came here on June 16, 1941. We had come for a short visit. We arrived at a very tragic moment, because right on the border stood the cattle cars that were deporting people. We heard them call from the cars -- water, water! Along the way we met the officers who said to mama: ‘Madam, where are you going? War is about to break out.’ But mama had not seen her relatives for 26 years. There were so many relatives -- one in one place, others somewhere else in Latvia. On that fateful day we went to Aizpute. There were other Russian kids too. Mama left me there and returned to Liepaja. The next day, on Sunday, World War II started.

In this story, two parties are crossing paths, entering and leaving simultaneously. The border is very prominent, marking the transition for Olga from the Ukraine to a new life in Latvia, while for the “losers” in the cattle car, it was a transition from their normal lives in Latvia to one of exile or death in Siberia. Though Olga later became a devoted communist, attending the Communist Party school and becoming one of the local ruling elite, her “winner” status was superimposed over her “loser” status, having lost most of her family in the Holocaust.

In this next example, Genadijs experiences the ritual of crossing borders positively. Upon crossing the border, Genadijs talks about his patriotic feelings for Latvia and his sensation of having finally arrived at the home of his ancestors: “There is a huge difference between Russia and Latvia. I was born and raised in Russia. Still, when I crossed the border, I could tell immediately, a different country! Even through the window in the train I noticed small things. There are little roofs placed on the electric poles. Ingenuity! In order to protect the poles from rotting. And I had a feeling that I had arrived in my father’s land.”

Genadijs expressed admiration for Latvia through a simple object of engineering ingenuity. Māra, on the other hand, expressed a sense of disappointment on crossing the Latvian border in 2006 and not finding the necessary symbolic greetings that marked her sense of home and national identity. This excerpt from an article she wrote recently describes Māra’s re-entry into Latvia from Norway: “Returning back to Riga airport, I searched in vain for some kind of city symbol or a Latvian greeting. The only things that greeted me were functional advertisements and offers in English” (Zirnīte 2006). Māra’s entrance into Latvia was marred by unfulfilled expectations on the border, marked by the absence of simple objects that symbolize national identity.

Other stories contain the emotion of fear. The fear of instability in war time is exemplified in this quote by Biruta, a forest brother supporter, who describes her interrogation after being arrested: “For three days and nights they put me in a box, like a closet, where you cannot sit down. For three days and nights they did not let us sleep. That was torturous. Then they left me in a room with an iron bed. When I sat down, the bed sank. I could not understand -- the bed was sinking into the ground. I shouted, got

scared, looked through the little window and saw a guard observing me. That was the first scare tactic -- this bed's legs were made of rubber.”

This story was the only one that Māra included where Biruta mentioned fear during her time of interrogation, though in the full transcript, Biruta talked quite a bit about fear and the very difficult conditions during imprisonment. Perhaps Māra wanted to turn the viewer's attention away from the usual misery of repression in her master story and concentrate on the positive love story that Biruta told so well at the end of her life story. The fear depicted in this story by Biruta was not provoked by the inevitability of pain or torture, but of the instability created by a familiar home object, a bed, suddenly losing its familiarity and sinking into the ground. This can be metaphorically carried over to the fear and uncertainty people were feeling during the war period. It is the uncertainty and instability of the familiar. The fact that Biruta noticed the guard observing her showed that she had her wits around her and recognized the tactics that the Soviet authorities were using on her.

At the same time, humorous stories also appear that show the day-to-day life of the individual. Though not many humorous stories surfaced during the storytellers' accounts in the full transcript, Māra featured some that did appear in her film. Often, these humorous stories deal with the “first time” something is attempted and the ability to laugh at oneself while one is learning something new. These abilities and values helped Olga, just arriving in Latvia from the Ukraine, to survive in difficult and uncertain times:

Mama's friends advised me that if I wanted to stay alive, I must find a place in the country. On August 2, 1941, I went to the country. The

problems I had with milking the cows! The moment I touched the cow's udder, I felt sick. But I told the farmer's wife, "Oh, it's just been such a long time since I've milked!" I understood that if I did not do the milking, no one would keep me around. And in the morning I went to milk the cows. It was torture. The milk rolled down my arms more than into the pail. In a week I could milk nine cows a day.

A difficult "first time" experience here is converted into a humorous memory, illustrated by milk rolling down the arms. But this story also shows the teller's pride in herself that she could overcome these obstacles and ended up being so adept that she could milk many cows in one day. It is interesting that the English translation did not include the humorous punch line – "the milk rolled down my arms more than into the pail," perhaps because Olga described this fact more by gesture than by words. However, this is an oversight that made it difficult to perceive the humor in the story if one did not understand Latvian.

Fellowship and friendly contact with other human beings was another precondition for survival that appeared in the film. Even though most of Biruta's stories in the full transcript dealt with her dangerous work as a resistor to the Soviet regime and her collusion with the forest brother movement, Māra chose instead to highlight her story about falling in love. Biruta told of her "great fear" of Russia brought on by the stories she had heard of how badly deportees were treated in Siberia. Yet, ironically, she ended up finding her husband-to-be in one of the provinces of Russia and lived there with him for more than ten years. Māra named Biruta's story "Love in captivity," a romantic story

about meeting her future mate at the deportation site in Siberia while visiting her imprisoned brother:

That was when they started to release people from prison camps -- my dad returned, my brother returned. But one of my brothers remained in Dzezkazgan. There was nothing there -- no food, no clothing, absolutely nothing. I had just begun my vacation. And so I went. It took some two weeks travel, in a cargo train. There was no passenger train to Dzezkazgan. It came time to return home again. Several times I met a boy named Gunars. It turned out he was from Liepaja. I said, 'I have to go back home.' He says, 'No, don't go home.' I thought, why is this guy pursuing me? It turns out my brother had shown him my photograph. He had put it in his pocket and said, 'From this day that girl is mine!' I, of course, did not know this. As I said earlier, it was like a novel. So we stayed and married and I had a daughter and a son.

Not only love, but camaraderie and fellowship appeared as a central theme that helped people survive hard times. In this story, Modris describes the years he spent hiding in the forest as filled with "bright memories," due to the camaraderie of people who hid with him, believed in the same things, and who refused to fight in either of the occupying Soviet or German armies: "Still, I have fond memories of the time I spent in the forest. The camaraderie and the strong moral support that we had from our supporters, from the farmers, that all has remained bright in my memory. By contrast, the memories

of the camps where people died, all those are cast in dark colors. Until the period of the camp awakening, the strikes, the first uprisings in several camps. All that provided a sense of moral uplifting.”

Ideology and The Voice of the Producer

The themes and values Māra chose to show in the film represent her master story. To give a sense of unity to the film, Māra posed a final question to each of her life storytellers. The final question was an opportunity to bring out certain values that were important for Māra’s master story: “Did you feel that your life was ordinary or unusual?” The name of the movie, “Ordinary Lives in Extraordinary History,” juxtaposes ordinary with extraordinary, the “ordinary” signifying the individual life story, and the “extraordinary” signifying the events of Latvian history. The “extraordinariness” of historical events forced each person to find a way to cope with outside events in a way that would help them lead an “ordinary” life, one that is marked with the day-to-day human emotions such as love, companionship, humor, work. The fact that Māra chose not to dwell on Biruta’s extensive accounts of her experiences with the forest brothers, the resisters, and imprisonment, naming her life story, “Finding love in captivity,” illustrates Māra’s efforts to show that people were capable of living “ordinary” lives and finding love in “extraordinary” places, even in captivity in the remote republic of Dzekkazgan. Despite out-of-the ordinary wartime dilemmas that “scarred” peoples’ lives forever, each person strove to realize the same “ordinary” goals and desires of everyday life.

Yet, this final question was not a successful one for Māra, since none of her storytellers answered the question that she posed. It was successful in terms of bringing out the “ordinary” person’s interpretation of what Māra was asking them. Most of the storytellers understood this question to be an inquiry into the measure of happiness they had felt in their lives. Perhaps happiness is a measure of “ordinariness” in one’s life. If one has led a successful ordinary life, then one has been happy. The “complexity” of history is apparent only because Māra has told us that it is. In the eyes of the storytellers, happiness was what counted. Thus, there is a tension created by what the “producers” wanted and what the people said. Either way, the question signals the need for the storyteller to make some kind of life evaluation. Some answered that they have had an unhappy life. Kārlis, who had fled to Australia, answered that he felt he had a hard and lonely life until the 1960s when he met his wife-to-be. Vladislavs, the head boatyard engineer, felt that he had an unhappy life, but that he did “more good than harm.” He felt fortunate that he didn’t have to fight in the war. Olga from the Ukraine felt that “life wasn’t easy.” Though she was a supporter of the communist regime, she felt that the years working in the communal farms were difficult because she was forced to leave her young children alone all day while she was gone. The uncertainty and worry she felt for her young children who were forced to take care of themselves are a direct consequence of the “scars” of the Soviet regime.

Māra’s edited stories of Vasilijs, the Soviet Russian officer, left no clue about his life’s difficulties. He told his stories in Russian, and though the interview in the raw material lasted more than an hour, the film shows him telling only two stories, a humorous one about joining the Soviet Navy, and a wartime story about landing on an

Estonian island. In the film, he shows off dozens of medals that he had been awarded by the Soviet military. The master story constructs a picture of a smiling accordion-playing Soviet military officer with military medals pinned to his chest, creating a barrier that prevented the public from seeing how his life really had been. The Latvian version of this film contains a portion of the interview with his daughter, a teacher in Liepaja, who speaks impeccable Latvian, and who spoke of her love for the city of Liepaja. Apart from a short glimpse of her smiling face, the English version had left her out. The full transcript shows several topics that he had talked about: searching for a bride in Russia, becoming ill and weak for seven years after the war, how he used to live in a shared apartment with four people in one room, and how he tried, unsuccessfully, to return to Russia after 1991.

One can imagine that Vasilijs is a difficult member of Liepaja's "diverse" community to portray. For fifty years, the image of Soviet officers with chests covered by war medals had been symbolic for the hated Soviet regime – the embodiment of Māra's anger of "everything Russian dominating everything that's Latvian." Māra's master story of Vasilijs shows her acknowledgment and efforts at reconciliation with the "enemy," yet the sparse messages and information shown of Vasilijs' life story falls short of the richness when portraying the life stories of the other storytellers. Perhaps the message in the master story is in the stiffness and formality that still exists between Latvians and former officers of the Soviet Russian army who decided to remain in Latvia after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Modris was a person that Māra would have called a "positive hero." She was enthusiastic about Modris as a teller, one who embodies the "spiritual essence." She

returned to him many times during the course of the Liepaja field trip, as she recorded him telling his life story as a forest brother and resistor during World War II. The forest brother resistance movement was a favorite topic for Māra. The stories of former forest brothers embodied Māra's wish to lift Latvia's silenced voices. Modris' description of the camaraderie of his fellow forest brothers is reminiscent of Māra's admiration for her father's academic organization, *Austrums*. She admired the firm stance of the men in this organization, their virility and inner convictions. Thus, Māra brings out the "bright memories" Modris had when talking about the camaraderie of his fellow forest brothers in the surroundings of his beloved Latvian woods, and the "dark memories" he had of imprisonment, surrounded by the concrete walls and steel bars of a foreign ideology. Biruta was also a "positive hero," because of her courage as a forest brother supporter. Biruta stressed that she had led a happy life because of her loving husband and her harmonic relationship. A happy family life was the measure of her happiness. Genadijs gives an impression of one who is passionate about his life's work and finds happiness in the forests surrounding Liepaja. One of the last film frames show him hugging a tree. He stresses the satisfaction of having contributed to life with the work he did in the forest and the pond that he built there that will remain a legacy from him for a long time.

Thus, the storyteller's self-evaluation shows the happiness he/she feels with the "ordinariness" of his/her day-to-day life: a harmonious family life, camaraderie, and a satisfaction in one's life's work. These values are what give "ordinary" life stories their "ordinariness." The final written text of the movie states that, "Ordinary life stories provide paths to understanding individuals who took part in extraordinary events." Understanding the "diversity" of individual lives and their place in Latvia's history

fulfills one of the goals of the American Embassy's grant to promote a dialog between Latvia's diverse social and ethnic groups. The "ordinariness" gives each individual a common life goal realized in different ways. Even the Soviet army officer was given an "ordinary" aspect with his accordion playing.

In summary, this film showed us lives from seven different vantage points. The point was to show the diversity of people and to promote understanding between different viewpoints. Each person showed a different side of how war had affected his/her life. The Australian, Kārlis, represented the exiled who chose, along with thousands others, to flee from Latvia. The boatyard worker, Vladislavs, represented the religious who was not allowed to practice his beliefs under the communist system. Olga, the Ukrainian Jew, was billed as an "orphan" though she herself did not emphasize this except in the end of her narrative, representing the many children who were left without parents during the war. The Soviet officer, Vasilijs, was represented as a member of the Russian Army, showing off the medals and praise he had earned as a participant in the occupying Soviet regime. The forest brother supporter, Biruta, represented love that can flourish even in the middle of extraordinary circumstances during the aftermath of war. Modris, who "didn't want to fight," was convinced of his beliefs and hid from the dominating forces. He found fellowship with people who shared his cause. Finally, there was the "descendant of emigrants" who showed the significance of family heritage and the importance of place and ethnic roots.

It is possible that Māra has tempered the stories to fit the funder's demand for a product that shows dialogue across diversity. One type of quote that she chose not to include was comments alluding to animosity against ethnic groups during wartime,

mainly referring to the Germans and Russians. For example, in the full transcript, Biruta mentions her hate against Russians for slashing and destroying works of art. Māra also did not stress the sensitive topic of Latvian informers that some of her storytellers mentioned, as well as the painful topic of Latvians shooting Jews during the Nazi occupation of Latvia. Māra alludes to, but does not emphasize the traumatic disintegration of families that are evident in so many of the storytellers' stories, such as Olga, Biruta, and Kārlis.

Naturally, within the limited scope of the film, choices had to be made as to what will work best within the framework of an hour-long film. The selections Māra included and those she didn't include give clues as to what themes and values were most important for Māra to communicate to the public, and what would, at the same time, agree with the ideology of the funding American Embassy. This illustrates the concept of *Dzīvesstāsts* as a "mediating structure," an arena where different viewpoints come together and where negotiations among the viewpoints lead to adjustments and compromises, eventually leading to a product with messages containing values of both the home-world of the individuals as well as larger messages mirroring the values of society as a whole.

THE WORLD OF A BARBER'S SHOP (*TODO O MUNDO CABE NUMA CADEIRA DE BARBEIRO*): FILM PRODUCED BY *MUSEU DA PESSOA*

Though the production of this film involved many people, among them a "professional filmmaker," as Karen noted, the opening credits of this film list *Museu da Pessoa* as co-producer and responsible for the historical and character research. Karen

was responsible for the idea and storyline, along with Julio Worcman (her relative), and José Santos Matos (her husband). Karen and *Museu da Pessoa* did the basic research and fundraising. Karen writes in her correspondence to me: “We worked together during the whole process, either reading and commenting the script, looking at the interviews, doing the editing, and so on. It was an organic process.” The film team also involved a writer, director, art director, composer, and several others.

This product centers on the role of the immigrant in Brazil. Even the opening credits emphasize that all of the people involved in the making of this film are descendents of immigrants. The film is an account of immigrants’ lives, their journeys from their home countries to Brazil and how they settled down, found jobs, and raised families in Brazil. Both Māra’s and Karen’s films are historical in nature, but Māra’s film focused on World War II and its aftermath, while Karen’s film focused on immigration history in Brazil in the 20th century. Thus, Māra’s film is focused on Latvia, while Karen’s film involves the cultures of six other countries besides Brazil. Karen explained that she selected the people according to the most “representative ethnic groups” that had immigrated to Brazil.

The second point emphasized repeatedly in this film is the fact that everybody appears to be the same, yet, in reality, there is great diversity. Karen and *Museu da Pessoa* selected the metaphor of hair to represent human diversity. Hair has similar chemical make-up no matter whose head it resides on, yet the variations of hairstyles and types of hair may be very different. The emphasis is on the great diversity in Brazil. Yet people, like hair, are all basically made up of the same chemicals. Thus, there is a constant interplay between diversity and similarity in this film.

Ideology and the Voice of the Producer

This film differs from Māra's in that there is a strong element of oral narration. It is very much narrator-driven, yet the stories in-between give word to the people. The narration seems to be a violation of Karen's proud assertion that in her work, her job is to let the people speak for themselves without the presence of a narrator telling the listener what to think. Evidently, Karen was forced to negotiate and compromise with the other members of her film team.

We can divide this film into the same four basic materials as in Māra's film: the stories, the narration, the printed short commentaries that appear throughout, and the images – many of which are archival. I will analyze this film by examining the general topics of the immigrants' stories and the messages that the film relays to me. These messages make up Karen's master story, which she created using the following materials and methods: a) themes of the stories told by the immigrants; b) the specific questions of the interviewers, edited out of the film, yet present in the transcripts of the preliminary interviews; c) the text of the main narrator; d) the printed small text messages that appear throughout the film in conjunction with the spoken word; e) the visual images; and f) the artistic design of the film.

The stories are driven by specific questions posed by the interviewers who the viewer never sees or hears. Yet, within the frame of basic topics, the tellers tell stories they have created that speak of their own values and significant memories in their lives. The narration is often light-hearted, centering on the trivial phenomenon of hair. By

choosing a universal object, the film brings all humans down to the same level, thus emphasizing equality and the experiences that “all human beings” have in common. The stories of the immigrants intermingle with discussion of hair care. Through the stories of the immigrants, one hears a version of immigration history in Brazil. One-line statistical printed texts appear throughout the film. These small printed texts inform the straight, dry facts of immigration history in Brazil -- how many immigrated, why did they emigrate from their home countries, how many days it took to get to Brazil, how many years the dictatorships lasted in the mother countries. It also served as a contrast to the light-heartedness of the narration and the subjectivity of the immigrants’ life stories.

For example, the printed text in one portion of the film showed poverty statistics and numbers of favelas (slums) in São Paulo, superimposed over the immigrants’ stories about their first impressions of São Paulo. None of the immigrants’ first impressions mentioned poverty or unemployment.

- During the printed text: “The average unemployment is around 19%,” Lucy talks about being impressed when she first caught sight of São Paulo. She had never seen a place so big.
- Guimbra told how São Paulo amazed him at first when he arrived, while printed text flashes on the screen: “The top 10% of earners take home 40 times more than the income of the poorest 10%.”
- Yamaguchi talks about São Paulo’s most famous buildings, while the printed text flashes, “More than 3 million people live in slums.”
- There is silence while the printed text on the screen notifies that, “The city has 612 slums.”

During this exchange, one sees the skyline of São Paulo moving across the screen. The effect of this exchange between printed text and oral life story is one of intentional post-modernist irony, illustrating the economic problems and extensive poverty that lie beneath the awe-inspiring surface size of São Paulo. Karen and her team has constructed a master story using a mixture of statistics, present-day images and quotes from the storytellers, creating an unexpected collage of juxtapositions that projects messages beyond what the storytellers had intended. The producers here used quotes from the storytellers to tell a story with an agenda much bigger than that of the individual life stories, dealing with issues important to the larger society. The owner of the master story has traveled quite far from the original owners of the life stories, as Amy Shuman might have put it, attaching new meanings to the master story that are important to its new owner.

In another portion of the film, the printed text: “Helmets are worn to keep the hair in place and keep the bugs out,” takes the role of the light-hearted fool, juxtaposed over archival images on the screen depicting helmeted soldiers fighting and dying in battle.

Images and movie clips draw heavily on archival footage of immigrant labor in Brazil and of the evils of dictatorships in the home countries. Yet, throughout this footage, nothing is mentioned about the Brazilian dictatorship that took place at about the same time, though the transcript of the original interview contains references to the dictatorship in Brazil. Instead, the film focused on the stabilization of industrialization and immigrant entrepreneurship in Brazil as the prime historical footage of Brazilian history in the 20th century. This illustrates Karen’s focus and activity within the economic sphere of Brazilian history and society rather than its political history.

Karen's film is structured differently from that of Māra's. Instead of featuring one person at a time, Karen's film features one topic at a time, contrasting the responses of all six storytellers. Most of the topics are interviewer-driven and follow the paths from the immigrants' conditions in the home country, the journey to Brazil, to finding work, love, and a decent living in Brazil.

Themes of the Stories

The film divides the immigrants' stories into themes and topics. A substantial number of stories dealt with the process of fleeing from the homelands, leaving one place for another, similarly as did Māra's film. The homeland, in the stories of many of the immigrants, appeared in the 1920s through the 1940s as a place of poverty, famine, fear, filled with a feeling that "a huge war was about to happen." One is reminded of Māra's description of her sensation that a dagger was hanging above her head and about to fall. It is a feeling of uncertainty and fear, as if something terrible is about to happen, as in Olga's story where she mentions that, "The next day, on Sunday, World War II started." Both films depict this imminent danger looming close by. In Karen's film, however, the danger lies outside of Brazil, while in Māra's film, the danger lies inside of Latvia. The printed text and images of the film depicting the situation in the immigrants' homeland centered on armed conflict, death, explosions, corpses, and statistics about the horrors of Europe's dictatorships -- Franco, Salazar, Mussolini. The immigrants' stories dealt with hardships in their native countries. Fombelida from Spain tells us: "When my father used to come back from work, my mother used to get him some food and he would eat it."

There was no light. We used to cook the food over a wood fire. The problem was the cold, it was terrible. Then I wished my father wouldn't eat all the food, so there was some food left for me. The poor man knew that and used to leave some food for me.”

This story by Fombelida creates the sensation of cold, poverty, and hunger, as well as the proximity of war in 1930s Spain. Though the film mentions profusely the dictatorships, war, and military conflicts of the home countries, no mention is made of the dictatorship that had gripped Brazil in the 1960s and 1970s. This can indicate that either, 1) the dictatorship did not leave a large impression on Brazil's people; 2) the dictatorship was too painful a topic to broach; or 3) the healing process in the 1980s when the dictatorship ceased was dealt with so exhaustingly in books, discussions, and other forums, that there was a sense of closure for the Brazilians that allowed them to move on and not let the past weigh down on them so heavily. Karen offered a fourth alternative, that Brazilians have a notoriously short memory and “are not in the habit of discussing their own history.” Perhaps it is simply a short memory that allows the positive nature of Brazilians to come through in order to let go of past suffering, even though the “scars” from the dictatorship are still felt, as Karen noted, in the form of an inferior education system, corrupt police force, and everyday violence. Latvia and Māra, on the other hand, have felt the wounds of war and communist domination deeply, and often dwell on the scars that war has left on Latvia's inhabitants, as was evident in Māra's film.

Another theme discussed the immigrants' first meal and favorite food in Brazil, a light-hearted change of topic from the hardships depicted in their homelands. The film's pacing alternates serious with light-hearted topics, creating a film that is easier for the public to digest. In my opinion, this shows an unwillingness to dwell on the serious and

the suffering, but a propensity to bring out the interesting and positive in the everyday elements of the present, showing, as Māra would have said, the “ordinary” lives of people.

The immigrants declared the banana as their favorite Brazilian food. The banana was scarce in the countries represented by these immigrants and was a scarce item in Latvia as well, until the Latvian import business picked up the demand in the 1990s. “Food” stories brought out the humor in many of the immigrants, as one can see in Yamaguchi’s story about eating his first salami sandwich: “It’s a sad story. In Santos, when we were already on the train, they served us bread and a lot of mortadella [a type of salami], which is my favorite sandwich now. But we didn’t know it at the time. We were from the countryside and there wasn’t mortadella. We couldn’t stand the smell of it. So we would eat the bread and throw away the mortadella.”

In this story, Yamaguchi tells this humorous story a bit apologetically, throwing in the sarcastic comment that this is a “sad” story. The immigrants told “first time” experiences when trying new things, such as eating an unknown food for the first time, or trying to get accustomed to a new country where so much was unknown to them. Māra’s film also featured “first time” stories, when people were confronted with new challenges and new strategies for survival. These are often humorous stories. This story about the salami sandwich shows the humor with which Yamaguchi perceived the serious and sad existence they were leading, having just left their native land. At that time, Japan was encouraging its citizens to leave, so that they would alleviate the shortage of food in Japan. It must have been hard and “sad” to throw out real food, having just arrived from a hungry existence in 1930s Japan.

After a light-hearted episode where the immigrants stuck their tongues out at the camera, portraying a change of topic to “language,” the immigrants each spoke a sentence or two in their native tongues. Afterwards, one senses that the interviewer has just asked everybody what their favorite Portuguese words were and what they thought about the Portuguese language. Yamaguchi’s comment about the correlation between Japanese and Brazilian language and their philosophies of life brought out appreciative murmurs from the audience watching the screening of this film: “The Japanese philosophy was yes or no! It was all strict. So you could put things right or make huge errors. Yes or no! But western habits in Brazil are a bit different. There’s more flexibility. ‘If it’s God’s wish.’ ‘More or less!’ These words express the freedom of thought, it’s not as strict.” It was enlightening for Brazilians to hear an “outsider” comment about everyday Portuguese expressions and attach those meanings to Brazilian philosophies of life.

This bit of philosophy explains the film’s strategy of mixing heavy and light-heartedness together. This technique embodies the Brazilian way of life and Karen’s master story by giving the film a feeling of flexibility, a liberty of thinking, and non-strictness in the image of Brazil that the film is portraying. The Latvian film, on the other hand, is heavily troubled about Latvian history, struggling with its repercussions in today’s society. This heavy-heartedness is well expressed in a comment written online to the *Dzīvesstāsts* blog page by an Internet user viewing the web pages of *Dzīvesstāsts*: “The *Dzīvesstāsts* website is a bit heavy-hearted, as is everything that is connected to our [Latvian] history. I would like to see less heaviness and more brightness. My family history, to tell you the truth, has also had a lot of suffering. But I’d like to perceive in my

history also joy and humor, although I'm sure that wouldn't be easy" (*Dzīvesstāsts* website, blog page).

A large number of stories deal with the journey from the home country to Brazil. The journey is depicted as an important rite of passage from one lifestyle to another. The rite is accompanied by crying, hardships, long days, little or bad food, and deaths on board ship. This portion was seen as important for *Museu da Pessoa*, since Karen included these scenes to represent the museum's activities and products in the *Museu da Pessoa's* demonstration tape. The fact that excerpts from this film lasted about one minute in a five-minute total presentation is evidence that for the museum, this film was an important product. These are the excerpts of the film contained in the *Museu da Pessoa* presentation DVD:

Yamaguchi: "They played a special song for the farewell of the immigrants. Everybody was crying."

Consolato: "The food was really bad. One just gulped down warm water."

Guimbra: "I brought a boy with me. The boy died the following day."

Yamaguchi: "[The corpse] was thrown into the sea. That's mighty sad. It grabs you" (2005).

The images underlying these excerpts showed archival footage of ships heaving on restless seas, depicting the long journey from the homeland to Brazil. "Long, lonely, and crying" were the words most often used in these stories that represent the hardships and sadness of the home country, and the sadness and difficulties associated with the rite

of passage from one world to another. These stories have a correlation with Māra's "crossing the border" stories in her film, though in Karen's film, there is no decision involved. The decision had already been made in the home country.

The longest narratives represented in this film dealt with the subject of work. How did the immigrants find their first jobs, their professions? How did they get ahead in work, what did they earn, how did they make money? This topic formed the meat of the content of the film. Most footage of the immigrants was taken of them in the process of working, be it barber, cobbler, seamstress, fabric store-owner, shiatsu masseur, or taxi-driver. The portrayal of the work world is significant in Karen's master story for several reasons. One reason is because the industrialized and worker's culture is an important part of Brazilian history and of "being Brazilian." Karen remarked that the story of the Brazilian company is the story of Brazil, thus closely associating the work world with the identity of Brazil. Another reason is that Brazilians identify with the immigrants' dream (and the American dream) to get ahead in the world, to live a better life, to get some money in order to live comfortably, and to ensure a good life for their families. Another reason for highlighting work is that Karen's bread and butter comes from her projects with the big corporations and commercial companies. Thus, the work topic is also related to Karen's finances, budget, and the museum's funders. It makes sense that the museum would find companies and the commercial world as a viable way to make money. Creating company projects and products corresponds to Karen's vision of using life stories as a way to create a picture of present-day society and to show movement into the future. While Māra is looking for stories that unearth spiritual values and commemorate important events in Latvian history, commercial connections are still too sensitive, and

difficult to intertwine the “essence” of Latvian values with the cosmopolitan present-day aggressiveness of commercialism.

This story by Fombelida portrays conflict between worker and boss. Fombelida, as a barber in the real world, was part of the inspiration for the theme of this film:

Back then, barbers were always competing with each other. Unlike today, they don't seem to care nowadays. At that time, they were all good. That's how it is today. But then, barbers were really good. The guy who worked in the first barber's chair was the best. The chairs were their ranking -- first, second, third. If someone was working in the last chair, he was learning or something was wrong. I was in the second chair. . . . The old man got sick. And I was in charge of the barber shop. I was 16 or 17 years old. The youngest barber had been working there for 20 years. It was a famous barber shop. It was an amazing barber shop. . . . I worked there until 1963. 10 years with him. He didn't like communists. I'll never forget that. I didn't know what communism was. He was crazy about Mussolini. He hated it when I talked badly about Franco. “I'll fire you if you talk badly about him.” I wanted to work. I didn't care about that. But he had those ideas. I left because I had a lot of clients. One day, one of them, who is still my client, said, “Why don't you leave? I'll buy you a place and you can pay me later.” And I found a place nearby on the corner. Then my old boss got upset. His barber shop was no longer the best. He used to threaten me with a gun, saying he would kill me. But he didn't.

This story gives a hint of the violence that mars everyday life in São Paulo. Fombelida glides lightly over this theme, simply stating that his boss didn't go through with his threat to kill him. There is no sign of fear in this portion of the story. It is also evident from this passage and that of several others, that they felt good about themselves at work. They were proud of what they were doing and didn't hide the fact that they thought they were the best. Pride of profession, relations between bosses and workers, and healthy competition are all messages sent out by these narratives. The boss' fondness for Mussolini and Franco creates the political picture that fascism and dictatorship were looked upon positively by a segment of the population in Brazil. The story also shows the differences in experience between the locals and the immigrants. Fombelida's boss adored Franco, though he had never experienced his regime. He wouldn't listen to Fombelida's first-hand negative experiences living under the dictatorship of Franco in Spain. The two worlds meet in the workplace. Māra's work represents this Brazilian immigrant side of the story, since she herself has experienced first-hand life under communism and is struggling to come to terms with its history. The immigrants' story, though, is different from Māra's, since they fled from their dictatorships, and have found a new world within Brazil. Karen's admiration for the great revolutionary leftist thinkers represents the boss' theoretical knowledge of these regimes. Karen had immersed herself in the teachings of Lenin, but never experienced communist ideology firsthand, as did Māra.

After discussing work and housing, the topic turns to love, and meeting the future spouse. These stories differ from others for their extensive use of reported speech. One of the shorter stories is told by Consolato:

People used to hang around and talk a lot. Then this girl who is my wife now, said ‘Good evening.’ And I said: “Good evening.” She asked, “Is that true that your name is Consolato?” And I said, “Yes.” Then we talked a while and I asked her to be my girlfriend. And she accepted. No, she didn’t accept right away. She said, “I’ll think about it and we’ll talk tomorrow.” When I met her after a couple of days, we started talking, and then she kissed me. She didn’t need to answer me. We dated and got married. I don’t regret it. She was lovely. She was, because the poor woman is dead now.

This story shows Consolato’s spontaneity when creating his story. Halfway through the process of telling the story, Consolato corrects himself and remembers that she didn’t accept his proposal right away. He needed to account for that all important first kiss.

Lucy’s story differs from all the others, because her marriage ended up in an abusive relationship. Her husband beat her, but she was strong and independent enough to take her infant child and leave her husband. He then had threatened to kill her, another allusion to Brazil’s day-to-day violence. Later, he returned to Bolivia.

I was finishing in school and then went to the institute. And met the man who became my husband. I met him and my father didn't want me to see him. He didn't like him because he didn't study. He only worked. But I liked him, and he liked me. And then we both decided that we could live together and my father didn't like it, but he accepted it. Then we lived in Bolivia for three months, and then we came to Brazil. . . . I asked one friend to help me. I told her what was happening, because he used to beat me a lot. And I wanted to leave him. I decided to leave him and everything else there. I didn't think about anything else at the time. I took my baby girl, her clothes, my clothes, and left the place. When he came back I wasn't there. Then I called there to check what he was doing. They said that he was feeling sad and that he had told the owner of the place that if he saw me he would get our daughter and then kill me. [Silence.]

Lucy's difficult story was followed by silence, one of the very rare significant silent moments in an otherwise very "busy" film that was constantly filled with talk. After the screening of the film, I heard people in the audience commenting that Lucy seemed to have had the hardest life of all the immigrants portrayed. The moment of silence brought into focus the societal ills of domestic abuse and everyday violence. This particular story did not appear in the original transcript, an indication that Lucy needed more time to develop trust with the interviewers in order to broach such a difficult topic.

This solemn theme was followed by the sharply contrasting topic of football, and for the first time, the immigrants talked about a sense of nationalism. Both Lucy and

Fatimah supported a specific team just because the colors of their teams' flags were similar to their own home country's colors.

At this point, the film becomes more sentimental, drawing parallels between the roots of hair and the roots of a person. This portion was introduced by the narrator:

“People can move to another country and can change their appearance with a wig. But, just as a wig could look artificial or look like real hair, an immigrant can feel at home in his adopted country or like a fish out of water. However, there is one huge difference. While the strands of hair on a wig will never put down roots, people can.” This final portion of the film introduces the immigrants' love for Brazil, their hopes and dreams.

The final portion does not contain real stories, but consists mostly of statements in answer to questions about Brazil and the immigrants' dreams for the future. The first part answers the question what he/she likes the most about Brazil. Fatimah and Lucy enjoy the market place, parks, and plazas. Fombelida likes the fact that there are all kinds of ethnicities in Brazil -- Italians, Jews, Arabs, etc. and they are all welcoming. The printed text on screen, acting as a gadfly, says that black people earn half of what others earn. Yamaguchi stresses that there is no other paradise in the world like Brazil. The printed text again acts as a gadfly, saying that Brazil has been measured as 73rd in quality of life. It is a country full of hope, says another, rhetoric similar to what one hears about the United States -- a country with possibilities and opportunities to be somebody and to make something of yourself.

The second part asks whether the immigrants feel like Brazilians, and everybody agrees in the affirmative. They say that they feel more like Brazilians than members of their own home country. Fatimah admires the women in Brazil, saying that she will never

succeed in being like a Brazilian woman -- they are brave, determined, and out-going. She said that she “can’t be mistaken for a Brazilian woman,” finding the Brazilian woman a contrast to the women of her own home country.

The third part asks whether they feel happy. The answers are all positive. What makes them feel happy, say the immigrants, is that they are healthy, that they have a child who loves them, a nice house with bedroom and TV. “What else do I need?” says Consolato. “It would be a sin to wish for more.” Lucy wishes for more, but is happy that she has a daughter who is not sick. The opportunity to earn money is also mentioned by Guimbra as something that makes him happy.

The fourth and last part asks about dreams for the future. By this time, violin music has taken over in the background. The dreams range from social awareness to educational opportunity, to personal wishes to go from life easily. Yamaguchi wishes for peace and hopes that his descendents will contribute to Brazilian society. Lucy wishes to study and get a good job. Guimbra hopes that he will not have to suffer much when he has to die. Fombelida, who is the barber in real life, dreams that he will be able to cut hair until he is 90. On this note, the contents of the show end.

“All strands look alike, they are actually very different, as different as what lies below the thatch of hair,” ends the narrator. It ends on a note of diversity, rather than similarity.

This last portion was very directive, and the answers orchestrate a satisfying close to the film. One doesn’t hear the four questions, but by listening to the statements, it is obvious what was asked. The first question – What do you like about Brazil, leaves no room for answers that divulge what one doesn’t like about Brazil. One of the immigrants

maintained that Brazil is a paradise for him. The third question – Are you happy? – brought forth only positive answers as well. The one-sided quotes in this portion makes one wonder whose master story the ending is portraying. Was it the professional filmmaker’s vision, was it Karen’s, or was it a response to the organizations that provided the funding for the production of the film? And if the gadfly text was created to show the less positive side of São Paulo, why didn’t the producers include questions that would direct the immigrants to divulge what makes them unhappy about Brazil. Or perhaps the immigrants wanted to be well-behaved for their second homeland and did not want to appear ungrateful to a nation that gave them shelter and a good life.

MĀRA’S AND KAREN’S MASTER STORIES

What can one say about Māra’s and Karen’s master stories after this analysis of the two films? The most obvious difference is the main topic for the films. Māra concentrates on World War II, the different personal experiences during the war and the effects that people still feel today. It is a historical theme, yet, the fact that Māra talks about the “scars” from the war denotes an emphasis on the negative and a process that has, as of yet, not completely healed. The cast of characters is all insiders to Latvia. Latvia is their homeland, their parent’s homeland, or homeland as a consequence of political takeover. Thus, none of them could speak about the excitement of traveling to a completely foreign country as an immigrant in search of the good life, as did Karen’s cast of characters. Thus, the over-arching theme of the film centers on the effects of the past

that the people of present-day Latvia still need to process and the issues they need to deal with before a sense of closure can be reached, and the future met with confidence.

Karen concentrates on Brazilian immigrants, using them to represent Brazilian history through their stories. Thus, Karen's cast of characters is all outsiders, looking at Brazil with fresh and interested eyes. They are people that arrive in Brazil looking for a better life, full of hope. Some even are fleeing from a system that is repressing them. Thus, the theme is also historical, but the topics are different. As does Māra in her film, Karen has chosen to concentrate on the people of one city. The over-arching theme, though, is one of a celebration of diversity. Karen's film does not linger on the past, but deals a lot with the present – favorite foods, football, dreams, likes and dislikes, language. Karen uses a great deal of archival footage that matches the story of the immigrants about that particular historical point in time. However, the fact that these were real archival scenes gives an impression of separation of the past and present. The archival scenes do not linger on in the present in the film in order to interfere with the lives of present-day immigrants, but serve to keep the past in its place, so that society can concentrate on the present and future.

One result of being able to concentrate on the present is the ability to deal with present-day ills of society. Karen concentrates on social awareness, as is evidenced by the printed text one sees flashing on the screen, informing us about the cold statistics of Brazil's unemployment rate, racial discrimination, the widening rift between the rich and the poor, and the increasing number of slums in the country's big cities. Most of these subjects deal with economic inequality. The presence of the master storyteller is injected into the film in the form of short flashes of text, informing and educating the public

viewing the film, juxtaposing the master storyteller's knowledge of facts over the immigrants' life stories.

The central portion of Karen's film deals with the immigrants' occupations and how they found their line of work, how much they earned, and their relationships with their bosses. This part of the film contains the most footage of the immigrants in their present-day habitat. Work is a topic of importance for Karen. In context, Māra expressed little interest in this topic as she chose instead to concentrate on experiences during World War II. The concentration of work-centered narratives by the immigrants in Karen's film shows the interest Karen had in Brazilian economics. The film's narrator talks of Brazil's economic situation as a backdrop for the immigrants' arrival in Brazil. In the 1930s, it was the importance of immigrant entrepreneurship that boosted Brazil's economy. In the 1950s, it was the rise of industrialization that attracted immigrants to seek work in Brazil. Karen's concentration on the economic issues of Brazil has been a central force for her work, as has been historical issues of domination and oppression for Māra. Thus, the economic story of Brazil is also the history of Brazil.

In contrast, Māra mentions work rarely as something that consumes the identity and life experience in Latvia. An exception is Vladislavs, the head boatyard engineer, who feels that the boatyard is in the center of his life. Appens as well showed a devotion to his work as a forester. Work had less significance in Soviet Latvia for Māra's purposes, because work had been politicized to such a great extent in the process of creating a paradise for the proletariat. The government had taken away all incentive from the individuals to excel in their work endeavors in the Soviet regime's attempt to make all people equal in the workplace.

There are several topics that both films handle in common. One such topic is departure. Karen treats this topic rather superficially, mentioning hunger, death, cold, misery, and hardships in the home country from which the immigrant was fleeing. One can see that it is the story in Brazil that is more interesting and multi-faceted to her. Māra's treatment of departure, on the other hand, is more complex, dealing with that "moment of decision," the concept of the border separating one world from another, even the synchronous entering and leaving of two different people from two different worlds, meeting on the border, as told by Olga from the Ukraine. Karen's main treatment of this topic is through the long and perilous journey from the home country to Brazil, a journey that is characterized only by dark colors. These dark colors seem uncharacteristic to the rest of the film that is dressed in more light-hearted colors. Karen used these dark colors to represent the film in the demonstration DVD that presented the projects and activities *Museu da Pessoa* was involved in. While watching the presentation DVD, these dark memories set a contrast to the rest of the DVD, which depicted a more positive side, even for such serious topics as the difficult day-to-day existence of trash collectors in São Paulo. The journey from the home country to Brazil was emphasized as almost a rite of passage from the hardships of the home country to the new life in Brazil, thus setting Brazil in brighter colors in comparison to the home countries. By contrast, the journeys that Māra depicted that led to Siberia or to exile in Sweden or to a hiding place underground as a forest brother, were not just one-sided pictures of misery, but were rich with conflicts, moments of decision, camaraderie, humor, even love, as well as suffering.

Life starts in earnest in present-day Brazil when the immigrants talk about work, love, food, and football. Food or football is a topic that Māra does not touch at all, though

it is dealt with extensively in Karen's film. It is not surprising that football is given an important role, since not only is football the national sport of Brazil, but has also been a source of income for Karen when creating oral history projects for Brazilian football clubs. Football brought out the only narratives that contained some hint of nationalism for the immigrants' home countries. Several informants picked Brazilian football teams to root for solely on the basis of the similarities between the flags of the football teams and that of the home countries. Nationalism and football go together in Brazil, since football has long been nurtured as the national sport of Brazil, and one that brings out feelings of pride and nationalism in Brazilians. It is no wonder that the immigrants adopted this same concept by picking Brazilian teams according to their own nation's colors. This created a juxtaposition of the two worlds, and a way for the immigrants to affirm their home country identity through the rituals and customs of their second homeland. But when it came to "feeling Brazilian," all of the immigrants affirmed their feeling more Brazilian than Syrian, Italian, Spanish, Japanese, Portuguese, or Bolivian. Latvians, by contrast, are constantly struggling and needing to affirm their national identity, while the immigrants' sense of identity seemed non-problematic – they all "feel Brazilian." Thus, "place" and laying down roots is an important topic one finds in both films. For Māra, place and roots are something that she would like to maintain, nurture, and keep constant as a source of national and local identity. For Karen, place and roots are negotiable. The whole cast of characters in Karen's film had to pull out its roots from the home country and re-root in a completely foreign place.

The topics that brought out the most emotion in the storytellers varied. Latvians in Māra's film perceived instability and uncertainty emotionally in their stories because

these emotions were often accompanied by important “moments of decision” in the wake of uncertain times. In Karen’s film, it was the situation in the home country and the journey to Brazil that produced emotional stories, filled with crying, death, and war. Difficult situations in the present, for instance, domestic violence, didn’t produce stories filled with emotion. Rather they were stories that mentioned violence as almost a matter of course, without sign of fear or uncertainty. For instance, Fombelida mentioned in his story that his boss threatened to kill him, “but he didn’t.” However, when Lucy told her story of domestic violence, it was followed by silence, indicating the importance that Karen and her team felt for this topic, a sore one for the inhabitants of São Paulo. The master storyteller added the power of silence to the film by stopping all action in an otherwise “busy” film for an effective 2-3 seconds.

Karen’s main theme that has accompanied her work ever since she was a child, is one of diversity and difference. In Māra’s film, diversity of ethnicity and lifestyle is replaced by the diversity of situation and viewpoints provoking “moments of decision” that ran like threads through her film. She emphasizes the many different ways people perceived war times and the different ways they decided to cope. One went into hiding and resisted the dominating forces, another decided to support these resisters. One became the occupier himself as a member of the Soviet military, while another joined the Communist Party and participated in the ruling regime. Another decided he could not live with the Soviet regime and fled to Sweden, while another found satisfaction and joy in just immersing himself in his work as a forester and nurturing his family history and heritage. Thus, diversity existed in both films, yet they had different points of emphasis.

In general, both Māra's and Karen's transcripts from their "raw" interviews are heavily directive with many questions posed to the storytellers. The stories, thus, fulfilled the master storyteller's purpose for finding themes and topics relevant for their messages. Māra's and Karen's final question for each interview is a technique in common for both films. Karen has called this last interviewer's question the "ritorno," something that returns as a common theme posed to all of the tellers. Māra's final question is an evaluation of the past -- "Do you think you've had an unusual life?" Most tellers understood this question to mean if they think they've had a happy life. About half of the informants who answered this question answered that they think they have had an unhappy or a hard life, a further indication of the dissatisfaction people in Latvia have felt with their lot in life. Others, though, mentioned things that they are thankful for -- a successful marital relationship, or a legacy in life that will live on. Māra also tended to ask questions that would provoke disclosures of spiritual values such as "When were you happiest?" "What would you say are your main values?" "What has been the leading force in your life?" Karen's final questions or "ritornos" were about future dreams and present feelings of happiness. Most answered that they felt happy and thankful for what life had given them. Perhaps this again has to do with a positive outlook on life in Brazil, or simply a feeling of having put a difficult past behind them. Karen always asks her storytellers what they think of having told their life story to *Museu da Pessoa*. This question shows the practicality of the museum's methodology, because answers to this question are often useful for use as quotes in products and to further the cause of *Museu da Pessoa* for future projects. In this film however, this question does not appear, since

the film's purpose is not to espouse the activity of *Museu da Pessoa*, but to tell the story of immigration in Brazil.

In general, Māra's master story is drenched in the past and intent on uncovering the various stories and experiences that have had its roots in World War II. She lets her storytellers tell their own stories without much interference from a narrator, but positioned within a frame of serious examination of the "scars" developed through this point in history. Karen's master story is more light-hearted, mixing in the difficult with the humorous, concentrating on a present day-to-day world that includes bananas, football, and salami sandwiches, but with an undercurrent of social awareness that lets the audience know that the present hardships are not "scars" from the past, but are ever-present economic ills that will not go away: violence, economic inequality, and poverty.

CHAPTER 5

COMMEMORATION AND ACTIVISM:

STORIES ABOUT STORIES

What are the core issues that arise from inspection of these two life story projects?

We have examined how Māra and Karen shaped their own life stories, and how they embodied their master stories in their products. In this concluding chapter, I will analyze some examples of how Māra and Karen present their organizations and agendas to the public. Karen often makes presentations to groups in order to recruit collaborators in Brazil as well as North America. Māra is less oriented towards “performing” in front of audiences, but rather, seems to enjoy small groups, informal situations, and the written word. Karen speaks to the world outside as well as inside Brazil, while Māra nurtures the smaller circles of the Latvian and Nordic hearths.

I will begin by examining the opening home page of the *Dzīvesstāsts* and *Museu da Pessoa* websites.

COMPARING WEBSITES

One can learn a lot about the master stories of Māra and Karen by examining their interfaces to the public. Technology and the Internet have been important for both women when presenting their agendas. Here I will examine the opening page of the *Dzīvesstāsts* (www.dzivesstasts.lv) and *Museu da Pessoa* (www.museudapessoa.com.br) websites.

What activist messages do Māra and Karen create with their web pages?

The opening home page of *Dzīvesstāsts* contains historical images. Latvia's highly symbolic natural point of interest, the *Staburags*, dominates the page. This large and unique cliff has been under water since the Soviet Union built a hydroelectric station on the Daugava River in the 1960's. In the English version of the website, the user can click on the image and find out that "the fate of *Staburags* embodies the mission of the Latvian National Oral History Archive. . . . This part of Latvian history and culture is no longer visible and lives only in memories. . . . Through life stories, we seek to uncover this kind of invisible history or silenced memories of lives lived in Latvia." This quote emphasizes Māra's theme of "silence" and uses a natural symbol submerged under water as a metaphor for the stories and memories submerged by the policies of the Soviet regime.

Other images portray *Dzīvesstāsts*' historical mission, such as the old orthography and wax seals used in official documents during the 1930s. There is no image or reference to present-day Latvia or to everyday life during the period of Soviet domination. Even the picture of Riga shows only the church towers that have been there for hundreds of years, but does not show the new modern bridges built during Soviet times. A Latvian folk pattern serves as a substrate for *Dzīvesstāsts*, emphasizing the importance of Latvian material and spiritual culture, traditional meanings and values passed down through the generations, as well as the artistic inclination of Latvians.

Thus, the emphasis of *Dzīvesstāsts*' home page is on strengthening consciousness of the Latvian self by: 1) remembering, commemorating, and reclaiming its earlier history before Soviet occupation; 2) avoiding references to recent or Soviet times; 3) acknowledging the importance of Latvia's material and spiritual values through its

symbols and patterns; and 4) the lifting up of “submerged” and silenced life stories. In general, the nature of the web page is introverted, self-contained in its rectangular area set in the middle of the page, proud of its heritage, dominated by the earthy brown and green colors of Latvia’s natural beauty, with some blue mixed in for contrast, possibly symbolizing the proximity of the Baltic Sea.

The opening home page of *Museu da Pessoa* has a different impact. Where the Latvian home page had no text at all, the Portuguese version of the *Museu da Pessoa* site is full of text. Its style resembles that of informative, journalistic, and commercial websites. It is divided into three rows of tiny text telling the Internet user the various types of stories one can find within the site: learning to know the different regions of Brazil (“it is a part of Brazilian heritage”, one of the texts declare), and various cultural topics. A login box to one’s own personal museum occupies the prime real estate -- a place to put photos, text and audio about one’s own life. Words abound that talk directly to the user: “click here,” “visit this,” “look here,” “sign in,” “tell your story,” “know our partners.” There is a tutorial on how to tell your own story. The impression is that the home page is speaking directly to the person in the present. There is news of a partnership with Yahoo’s educational search engine. A prominent picture of an ordinary wedding lures people into submitting their own memories about a specific personal event in their lives. There are stories about love and the Internet, football, a photography exhibit. All this information is changed regularly to fit the topics that seem most appropriate for the time (for instance, soliciting stories about Carnival during Carnival season).

The English version of the website, however, is entirely different. Its general look is similar to the *Dzīvesstāsts* website, dominated by a collage of pictures. Contrary to *Dzīvesstāsts*, though, the pictures depict the process of life story collecting in the present -- a life story interview in progress, exhibits, and some pictures of present-day life. The central area lists the primary mission statement of the museum, that all human beings have a right to integrate their life story into a network of social memory. Another quote on the side highlights a person's feelings that, through the recording and videotaping of her life story, she has bared her soul -- "Did you record everything? My words, my hands, my eyes? Then you have photographed my soul." This quote expresses a similar sentiment to the phrase created by a Latvian storyteller, describing the life story as a "striptease of the soul." The emphasis is thus on the present day process of life story collecting, its revealing nature, global scope and importance, all tailored for the non-Brazilian audience. The English version of the website communicated a message that would speak to the contemplative soul, capturing the ideological idea of the life story, while the Brazilian version communicated a message geared towards the new, the present, urging people to "do" things -- to deposit and collect stories -- rather than just to "contemplate" the power of life story.

Thus, we see that *Museu da Pessoa*: 1) emphasizes the present, and tries to talk directly to the person without much symbolic or ideological imagery; 2) emphasizes the diversity of Brazil by soliciting stories about various regions, cities, and neighborhoods in Brazil; and 3) emphasizes casual, day-to-day life events, personal historic markers, sports, football. The general tone of the web page is loud, brash, wordy, and dominated by a fiery red -- keeping much in character with the general stereotype of Brazil.

These websites show the general orientations of Māra's and Karen's activism. Herein follows a brief discussion of some of the various forms of activism embodied within their master stories.

THE MANY FACES OF ACTIVISM

Spiritual Activism

Māra practices a form of spiritual activism, teaching Latvians about the positive values and the regional nuances of Latvia's geographical and cultural areas. Māra's use of life story to capture the spiritual concentrate [”*garīgais koncentrāts*”] in Latvians is closely linked to Herder's idea of the consciousness of a Volk that can be found in its folk songs, the “quintessential expression as well as molder of the nation's spiritual essence” (Clark in Oring 1994, 214). Herder situated identity in artifacts of the past and in oral channels of transmission (such as folk songs). In a similar way, Māra searches for spiritual essences that characterize regional Latvian identities through the narrative memories and characters of the older generation. Māra regarded a “*tīrrašņa*” [pure source being] as an ideal teller that would be most revealing, for it is one who has lived all her/his life in one place with a minimum of outside influences, thus, preserving a more intact and pure regional character.

Māra's creative methodology consists of an introspective and poetic manner of communicating this elusive essence and spirituality. She uses metaphorical phrases, such as “catching the wonder bird” of the story, or “lighting the memory lamps” to get the narrative going. Similarly, she heightened the sense of suspense and adventure for the

participants in this short monologue at the end of the opening seminar for the 2002 summer field trip in the port city of Ventspils. After a long afternoon of papers given by various scholars dealing with their research on various facets of oral history, Māra finally took the floor in a brief summarizing climax of the day. She created an atmosphere that made the group feel as if they were embarking on an important mission, entrusted with the collection of vital materials for Latvia's existence. The following are some fragments from my written notes:

This is all meant to increase the temptation. . . . It is meant so that you can more easily decide what you are interested in. . . . In seven years we have developed a style. . . . Two people, two interviews a day, not less than two hours with each interviewee. . . . Our assignment, by next Sunday, each one of us will carry back a piece that characterizes the regional image. Through ten cassettes one can more easily perceive this image. Each region has a comprehension about itself. You have to use all your imagination to get stories from people that characterize their individuality, their environment, their community, and customs. . . . You listen, but think of what questions could reveal and discover him/her (Field notes 2002).

At this point, *Dzīvesstāsts*' director, Professor of Philosophy and Sociology Augusts Milts added, "You need to think of how to open up a person's soul, with what kind of hook. Work together with him/her. Work a little, talk a little, be silent a little" (Field notes 2002). *Dzīvesstāsts*' spiritual searches are symbolized by Augusts Milts.

Māra describes him as somebody whose wisdom contributes to the values espoused by *Dzīvesstāsts* (Field notes 2003).

These phrases bring out the spirituality of the assignment, illustrated by the idea that there are “pieces” of the tellers and their environment that the interviewers need to bring back, so that all the pieces could be assembled together to create a “master image of Latvia” [*Latvijas koptēlu*], a phrase used in a Latvian newspaper article describing Māra’s fieldwork (2002). Māra’s use of numbers in her short monologue above suggests formulaic folk story telling techniques. For example, Māra explains that it took “seven” years to develop a style, and she repeats the number “two” three times, as in “two” people, “two” interviews, and “two” hours with each interviewee. The use of the magical number “seven” and the thrice-formulaic repetition of the number “two” created an atmosphere of discovery and suspense.

Thus, Māra’s activism attempts to influence Latvian society by teaching it about the regional spiritual nature of people’s lives and to recognize aspects of the human “soul,” as emphasized by Milts. Henry Glassie noted poetically, “People living in intense communication will orient to certain modes of performance and suffuse them so with emotion and meaning that they roll the collective soul open for contemplation” (Glassie in Oring 1994, 211). Along the same vein, one of *Dzīvesstāsts*’ storytellers described the telling of life stories as “striptease of the soul” [*dvēseļu striptīze*], confirming that some of the tellers as well have understood the revealing nature of *Dzīvesstāsts*’ work.

Though Karen uses more goal-oriented language, the opening quote on the *Museu da Pessoa* website version for non-Brazilians reveals her appreciation for the poetic and soulful expressions that arise when describing *Museu da Pessoa*’s work. Similar in nature

to the Latvian “striptease of the soul,” one of Karen’s storytellers poetically described the process of life story collecting as “photographing my soul.”

Activism Geared Towards Action

Karen represents a different form of activism based in the present problems of society. When presenting her ideas to others, Karen’s rhetoric is laden with active verbs and a focus towards action in the present. “Each person is a protagonist in society,” said Karen in her opening speech at the *Museu da Pessoa* conference (2003). “We are always recreating our identities,” commented Karen in a planning meeting for an oral history project with the large Brazilian company Votorantim (2002). “We are talking . . . about this vision, this portal, and . . . an invitation for you all to occupy this [virtual] house,” says Karen, when addressing the workshop on Memory, the Internet, and Education (2003). Karen summarizes the vision of the museum in her presentation in Bloomington: “Our main idea is how you turn the ordinary person’s life story into information so you can promote [understanding] among people and empower them to become protagonists of their lives” (2005). When Karen presents, she uses verbs and nouns directed towards action and power by individuals, such as, “recreating,” “protagonists,” “empower,” and directed to “you all” and “each person.”

In Karen’s presentation at the Monroe County Public Library in Bloomington, Indiana, Karen stresses how the museum avoids thematic stories so as to avoid categorizing people into “black,” “Jewish,” “worker,” which would transform the person into a “representative of a social category. And we don’t want to make sociology. We

want to make life stories” (2001). These words allude to her wish to avoid merely being an archive for academia, but to be useful for individuals, not “categories.” One way Karen accomplishes this is by focusing the museum’s activities towards products aimed at the public, for example, exhibits that are located in the middle of subways, malls, streets, or slums.

Karen maintains that Brazil is a country with an enormous amount of bureaucratic encumbrances that make it difficult to solicit financial support for activist and cultural organizations. “If we did it in Brazil, you can do it everywhere,” says Karen, illustrating Brazil’s bureaucratic hurdles (2005). Perhaps it is precisely this bureaucratic burden that forces activist groups such as *Museu da Pessoa* to become more active and search for other ways to finance, drive, and maintain its ideology and activities.

Economic Activism

Karen focuses her master story on the economic differences in Brazil, finding that Brazil’s identities are revealed in the histories of its commercial companies and in the rise of industrialization of the 1900s. Poverty, illiteracy, and violence in Brazil, often indications of economic inequality, have been signifiers of Brazil’s identity. Similarly, the misery and repression suffered by Latvians during World War II have been important signifiers of Latvia’s identity in many forms of art and media.

Karen strives to involve life story collecting with projects for social change and economic equality. She anchors herself in present society by creating a giant story network of equality that would represent “points of the web. We think that society is a

giant web and each one of us is a point in the web,” remarked Karen in her opening speech in the *Museu da Pessoa* conference (2003).

Karen uses stories for the purpose of lifting people up to a higher sense of self-esteem and a more inclusive role in society. She concentrates on people victimized by their economic standing. *Museu da Pessoa* has interviewed some garbage collectors, Brazil’s slum dwellers that live and survive from sifting through the city dumpsters. Karen tells this story about one of the garbage collectors who came to Karen’s life story video cabin: “And then they got him to the museum. But this guy lived his whole life collecting. And I was like, ‘Is he going to understand?’ You know, I was kind of nervous. And this was like three months ago. And then I said, ‘You know, we have this museum of life stories.’ And this guy looked at me and he said, ‘This is exactly what we need. Because we have to feel that we are not garbage any more. And society thinks we are garbage. So we need to tell our stories’” (2005).

Here one can see Māra’s and Karen’s contrasting backgrounds, Māra as an insider to the oppressive Soviet regime, and Karen as an outsider to the lower class society that she was standing up for. Karen was “kind of nervous,” because, judging by her statement, the idea of collecting garbage all one’s life was rather foreign to her.

Karen’s economic fixation in Brazil has its roots in the wide discrepancy between rich and poor, and the masses of the lower class that inhabit the huge slums in all of its major cities. Latvia too is in danger of developing this wide rift between the rich and the poor. As Weschler pointed out, “Brazil features a class of people who live in elegant, tree-lined neighborhoods, shop in Miami, and send their children to American universities -- people who might be seen, in a sense, more as Americans than as

Brazilians -- so Poland seems to be developing a class of international citizens who vacation in Switzerland and shop in Paris” (Weschler 1990, 93). Polish literature historian and socialist politician Jan Jozef Lipski warns, “of a precipitate polarization of both wealth and opportunity in Poland -- warning that the country seems to be dividing in two and, in that sense, is beginning to resemble places like Brazil” (Lipski in Weschler 1990, 93). Thus, both Weschler and Lipski warn the East European countries to avoid economic pitfalls that Brazil had already fallen into following its totalitarian regime.

For Brazil, however, “it’s not possible to think about national identity without including the very serious problem of absolute poverty in some parts of Brazil,” says contemporary Brazilian film director Nelson Pereira dos Santos (Sadlier 2003, 140). “The essential point in the struggle of anyone who wants to participate in the social movement in Brazil is the elimination of poverty.” Thus, poverty in Brazil takes an important place for Karen, as does ethnic identity for Māra. Karen collaborates with slums and schools in low-income districts, educating its teachers and leaders to activate life story collecting projects in their own communities, thus also attacking illiteracy at the same time. Māra focuses less on economics and entrepreneurship. One cannot find, for example, Māra’s master story of the Latvian railroad company, or of the passionate entrepreneurial volunteerism of the youth who turned the old Soviet military officers’ club into a cultural activities house for young inhabitants of Liepāja’s dilapidated former military port. Focusing instead on individual spiritualism, values of the older generation, and silenced historical voices, Māra found it hard to deal with the situation when confronted by a gypsy storyteller, who implored her life story interviewers to help her acquire a better apartment for herself and her large family. It was evident that in the gypsy’s mind,

participating with her life story in *Dzīvesstāsts* may result in an improvement of her economic situation. To Māra, however, helping the economic situation of a storyteller was difficult to reconcile with the sociological and cultural mission of *Dzīvesstāsts*. In 2001, however, Māra attempted to pursue a project through the World Bank based on alleviating the poverty and unemployment problems of the small community of Pļaviņas. She named this project, “Money is not enough: Fighting poverty through community integration.” In this proposal, Māra proposed to turn already existing buildings into community centers that would promote community projects and a sense of integration between the Russian-speaking and the Latvian-speaking inhabitants. Unfortunately, the project did not get funded.

Karen collaborates with the commercial companies of Brazil to bring forth the identity and history of Brazil, and bringing the economic side of Brazil as a full-fledged partner into the activities of life story collecting. This is exemplified by Karen’s inclusion of the workers’ union leader of Brazil’s biggest oil company, Petrobras, as one of the speakers in the opening session of the *Museu da Pessoa* conference. The fact that it is the union, but not the company that is represented, provides another angle in Karen’s collaborations, representing the organized workers’ side of the companies, rather than the company’s leadership. “Institutions, the story of organizations, businesses, are very important for the story of Brazil,” says Karen in the staff seminar after the *Museu da Pessoa* conference. “The story of the oil men is the same as the story of Brazil” (2003).

Commemoration as a Form of Activism

Stories and memory are connected to commemoration and memorialization. “Stories are a major means by which . . . actions and experiences are memorialized and given expression,” wrote Richard Bauman (1986, 76). “Memory is always memorializing. . . . To remember is to commemorate the past” (Casey 1987, 257). McDowell defines commemoration as “a jointly sustained ‘calling to mind,’ a ‘mentioning together’ (1992, 414) or “remembering together.” Remembering is “an honoring of the past, paying homage to it” (Casey 1987, 224). Thus, story-telling is not simply a reconstruction of the past or a representation of the individual and his/her values, but it is also an honoring of the past, dwelling on it in order to exalt its values that live on in the present generation. Casey writes:

Something that has come to an end in terms of world-time acquires an ongoing ending in and through commemoration. Insofar as such ending is not yet concluded, it will be going on in the future. Commemorating here exhibits its Janusian ability to look at once forward and backwards, or more exactly, to look ahead in looking back. . . . Commemoration not only looks forward in looking back, thereby transmitting deferred effects of the past, it affirms the past’s self-sameness in the present by means of a consolidated re-enactment, thus assuring a continuation of remembering into the future (Casey 1987, 256).

The “re-enactment” in Māra’s and Karen’s cases, is the telling and re-telling of life stories that, as Casey argues, has as much to do with the past as it does with the present and future. Similarly, McDowell stresses that Mexican corridos, which are stories in song form, are not simply accounts of past events, but acts to set a moral framework around the events, or to create a healing force for the present (McDowell 2004).

For Māra, remembering the formerly silenced parts of history during World War II and revisiting its historical context through stories is a substantial part of her work with *Dzīvesstāsts*. Many of the products published by *Dzīvesstāsts* are in collaboration with the Occupation Museum, a museum dedicated to documenting the years surrounding World War II and the Soviet era that followed. Māra focuses on the older generation who remembers this “complicated portion of history.” She coaches her prospective life story-gatherers to take into account the historical events of the region where they will be interviewing, including, for example, the various military and resistance groups during the war: the forest brothers, the sharpshooters, the German Legion, and the Soviet Army. In her introduction to *Ronis*, a book published by *Dzīvesstāsts* featuring the life story of independent Latvia’s last submarine commander during the 1930s, Māra writes that it is important to hear the stories of those who have “experienced history” (Legzdīņš 2002).

Thus, as Māra uncovers the silenced history of World War II, she is commemorating as well by lifting out the past in an effort to reinsert this part of Latvian history back into public discourse, so that Latvia can rightfully re-claim its past and connect it to its future. Similarly to uncovering the submerged *Staburags* that she refers to in her website, she seeks to preserve and stabilize the memory of *Staburags* and the

submerged events of Latvia's recent past. Casey mentions the durability of stone for memorialization (1987, 226). The durability of *Staburags* as a cliff is a fitting symbol of memorialization and commemoration. Life stories as well are especially adaptable to commemoration, due to the flexibility and elusiveness of the genre, for as Casey mentions, "A photograph is too clear. Commemoration thrives on indirection" (1987, 220). The elusiveness and indirection of life story allow reading between the lines and provokes subliminal allusions to emotions and memory. McDowell stated, that commemorative language is something that brings things to "a heightened plane of understanding" (2000, 24).

Though Karen's focus is closer to the present, she as well is commemorating by honoring, remembering, and celebrating Brazil's immigrant and commercial history, and by putting the diversity of that part of Brazilian history on record. Her focus has a propensity to look forward within the "Janusian" qualities of commemoration to present-day venues – subways, streets, and shopping malls. Contrary to Latvian society where the past is never far behind in its rhetoric, Karen's work is challenged by Brazilians' "short memory," as she herself described it, and the Brazilians' aversion to "discuss their own history." Thus, placing story collecting in everyday public places works well in Brazil to catch the attention of a society that doesn't ordinarily take the time to dwell on the past.

The Effects of Dictatorship on Activism

Māra and Karen have both lived under a totalitarian system. However, Karen admits that the military dictatorship that overthrew the Brazilian government in 1964 had

little effect on her life and family. She had, however, participated in the street demonstrations and protest movement during the late 1970s, when the dictatorship was beginning to loosen its grip. But for those students and educators who had actively participated in the leftist movements during the 1960s, the rightist dictatorship struck back at them with cruel force.

In Latvia, the communist totalitarian system reached deep into Latvian society. Nobody who lived in Latvia could avoid being affected. Families were broken up, property taken away, ideologies radically changed, farmers forced into collectivization, innocent people deported and executed, the religious persecuted, and history altered. Latvia was isolated from the rest of the non-communist world so that meaningful contact with people of foreign countries was extremely limited. Estonia was in a better position, since it was geographically close to Finland and could receive Finnish TV and radio. This leakage of information from the outside world helped Estonia alleviate its feeling of isolation and facilitated a better transition to the present market economy.

Latvia renewed its independence fifteen years ago. But during the fifty years of Soviet rule, its history of deportations and russification had driven Latvians as an ethnicity underground, only able to voice their dissatisfaction to Russian domination in quiet grumblings. Māra focuses much of her life story collecting energy in bringing out stories from these times. The oral history book that *Dzīvesstāsts* published for its conference contains six stories from Latvia with themes ranging from deportations to Siberia, physical and emotional persecution, to consequences of the Soviet period. This collection of life stories shows a historical time when Latvians were victimized. *Dzīvesstāsts* further commemorates this victimization by bestowing honorary

membership to Melanija Vanags, a woman who has survived deportation and written several books about her experiences.

So many negative experiences in Latvia's past have pushed Latvians into a feeling of victimization that needs to be overcome in order to help people feel more empowered. One of Māra's ideological goals is to use life stories in newly independent Latvia to help Latvians create a sense of value and worth as the totalitarian society "opens up." Māra writes in the introduction to the collection of essays on life story published by *Dzīvesstāsts*:

Just as the prisoner doesn't immediately free himself from his 'prisoner psychology,' [mentality] upon opening the prison gates, neither does the consciousness of a free person automatically crystallize as soon as a totalitarian system has transformed into an open society. Old habits disappear only when the images of the old system lose their power. That is why we regard life stories not only as a source of information, but also as a way for society to renew its very important system of values (Zirnīte 2001, 14).

Here, Māra expresses her wish to influence society through life stories in order to heal the "scars" Latvia had acquired from the years of Soviet occupation. As Vaclav Havel put it, "The 'decayed moral environment' had suffused the entire society" (Havel in Weschler 1998, 274). One way this manifests itself is the constant search for traitors and informers among Latvians. According to East European specialist Lawrence

Weschler, this “decayed moral environment” has shown itself in the form of “blame-projection and informing” that became problematic for channeling societal energy into building up a new civic, democratic society. Communications specialist Kruks comments, “The nation’s subjection to the foreign power is formulated in terms of treason in Zalite’s opera *Lāčplēsis*” which turned into the “perestroika slogan, ‘Look for Kangars [traitor portrayed in the Latvian epic *Lāčplēsis*] in our nation!’” (Kruks 2004, 25). “Ghosts” from the old Soviet regime cropped up continuously, provoking Latvians into the search for informers and traitors long after the demise of the Soviet system. Māra writes in an e-mail: “It seems sometimes that the secretive ‘communist specter’ is haunting us again so as to neutralize and eliminate everything [that is good in the new nation]” (2004). As pointed out earlier, Māra tended to leave out some of these negative messages when selecting excerpts for her film “Ordinary Lives in Extraordinary History,” in order to focus on positive images and the diversity of experience.

Fifteen years after Latvia has regained its independence, negative remains of the old communist regime are still evident in Latvian mentality. Many Latvians still blame societal and governmental setbacks on informers and hangers-on to the old system. Some looked upon the opening of the secret KGB files as a way to bring to justice the wrongdoers of the Soviet regime. Weschler noted that in Eastern Europe, the opening of the KGB files proved to be a destructive distraction from the necessary tasks at hand. “The [KGB] files were proving a veritable toxic dump at the core of the new democratic order and the frenzy for truth-telling suddenly seemed decidedly problematic” (Weschler 1998, 275). Vaclav Havel maintains that this search for informers and blame-projection on the vestiges of communism “detracted from the responsibility each of us now faces -- the

responsibility to act on our own initiative, freely, sensibly, and quickly” (Havel in Weschler 1998, 274).

In Latvia, this detraction from responsibility led to civic passivity, a “low commitment to social responsibility . . . to assume responsibility for the state” (King in Kruks 2004, 27). A solid constitutional foundation for the future, maintains Kruks, requires civic participation in its formation through elections, lobbies, protest meetings, grassroots activities, etc. He points out that in the midst of European nations, the Latvian population exhibits the lowest positive viewpoint towards protest demonstrations and activities. Sociological research shows low grassroots organizations, low self-worth and ignorance towards the power of collective activity (Zepa in Kruks manuscript, 3).

Constitutional law scholar Bruce Ackerman argues that “at the precarious moment of democratic transformation, a given polity could either focus on settling prior accounts or turn its attention to fashioning a future constitutional order. It couldn’t do both; to focus on the past was to fritter away precious moral capital, to provoke desperate opposition, and necessarily to rupture the tentative, delicate alliances necessary to the project of constitution building” (Ackerman in Weschler 1998, 276). “Constitutionalism faces the future and the need to make it unlike the past” (Ackerman 1992, 70).

Māra has chosen a path that opposes Ackerman’s urging to turn one’s attention away from the past. She works towards nationhood by reclaiming the past and affirming Latvian identity and values, rather than getting involved in actively changing and creating the new civil society through present political and civic activism. The importance of identity is an attempt to climb out from under the oppressors’ thumbs -- a quest for self-worth and proof that the Latvian nation has a right to prevail. In order to regain its dignity

and composure from a long history of victimization, cultural workers called on Latvians to assemble “a large file of evidence in order to prove itself the bearer of a distinctive culture,” (Vike-Freiberga in Kruks 2004, 7). The reasoning is that distinctiveness will help Latvia survive and prevail. Māra as well is intent on finding regional and national distinctiveness. In this way, she hopes to build up Latvia’s sense of self-worth, fighting the feeling that “we were made to feel small and gray.” Māra concentrates her efforts on lifting up the person from the “small and gray” frame of mind by valorizing their survival skills and spiritual values. The constant need to affirm self-worth shows that Latvia has a long way to go before its vision of itself comes close to Karen’s image of a web where all are interconnected and equally worthy.

The negative effects of Brazil’s dictatorship did not take root as deeply as did the effects of communist rule in Latvia. “The Eastern European totalitarian system had been far more entrenched and dispersed than its South American counterpart” writes Weschler (1998, 274). Māra has lived through the fifty years of totalitarian communist regime in Latvia, while Karen has merely studied about the communist ideology in books, though she has lived through fifteen years of the rightist military dictatorship in Brazil. When the military regime eventually folded, documents from the military archives giving detailed accounts of the torture methods wielded on enemies and dissenters of the regime were clandestinely published in book form, in *Torture in Brazil [Nunca mais]* (Wright 1986). The introductory article in this publication mentions that the publication and wide distribution of this book “had an extraordinary impact on Brazil” (Dassin in Wright 1986, x). The book was an attempt to publish as neutrally as possible the testimonies of people involved in the torture of the rightist regime. The author credits the catharsis of the

publication with the relatively quick (as compared to Eastern Europe) comeback the population could make to working actively towards a constitutional future, rather than a pondering of the past (Weschler 1990).

Karen's activism does not particularly focus on remembering the years of the dictatorship. Neither of the presentation DVDs produced by the *Museu da Pessoa* made any mention of themes related to the dictatorship. However, I was present when Joazinho III, a famous leader of a Carnival samba school in Rio de Janeiro, told stories about the dictatorship when prompted by the interviewer. He told of the way he outsmarted the dictatorial government into thinking that he was working in the zoo, rather than gambling in the very popular *bichos* [animals] game, which had been forced to go underground during the military regime. His memories from the dictatorial era were crafted as humorous ones, portraying how ordinary people outwitted the military officials. Māra represents the Soviet years quite differently. Though there are humorous stories as well, Māra takes a serious view of the past, highlighting good storytellers that are able to bring out the courage and resilience of Latvians. Karen's master story does not ponder the past, but rather, succeeds in viewing the difficult years of dictatorship from a more neutral distance, as just another part of Brazilian history and memory. The past is a method for shaping the future. The immigrants in Karen's film were talking about their past, but they were always seated in the context of the present in a barber's chair, as if just swapping stories with each other.

SMALL VS. BIG

Māra and Karen define their countries' identities in different ways. There is no one identity for Brazil, says Karen, but a mixture of identities found among immigrants, groups, ethnicities, occupations, religions, etc. Karen has constructed her own identity as "daughter of immigrants." The many products featuring immigrants -- documentaries, calendars, T-shirts -- testify to her conception of Brazil as a mixture of identities to which the immigrants had much to contribute. On the other hand, despite Latvia's historical mixture of Germans, Russians, Poles, Lithuanians, Gypsies, Ukrainians, and others, Māra primarily strove to justify Latvia's existence by strengthening the idea of the values and character of Latvians, and the identity of the Latvian nation.

Karen's emphasis on diversity and Māra's emphasis on the Latvian national identity have their foundations partly in the size differences of the two countries. Latvia's small size leaves it particularly vulnerable to the aggressive whims of larger nations. Kundera writes: "What distinguishes the small nations from the large is not the quantitative inferiority of the number of their inhabitants, it is something deeper. For the small nations, existence is not a self-evident certainty, but always a question, a wager, a risk; they are on the defensive against History, that force which is bigger than they, which does not take them into account, which does not even notice them" (Kundera 2007, 28). Thus, Latvia as a small nation has a constant need to affirm its identity and self-worth so that the larger nations and larger global issues do not swallow up its existence.

Karen acknowledges the "bigness" of Brazil and also works towards "big" goals. She explains: "My idea is to make a portal, collect groups, children, everybody composes

a part of the same big community. It is like creating a big deposit of histories of a big community.” One can correlate this to the notion of Brazil as a “big” country, as opposed to Latvia as a “small” country. The large size of Brazil has influenced Karen to widen her horizons to include the “big” community, as opposed to Māra’s pre-occupation with lifting Latvia out of the “small and gray,” exacerbated by Soviet politics.

RECONCILING THE PAST WITH THE PRESENT

Karen’s empowering form of activism, illustrated by her rich use of stories in her presentations, contrasts with Māra’s contemplative, introspective, poetic forays into the soul and spiritual values of Latvia’s inhabitants. It shows Latvia as a country immersed in getting its image straight [*koptēls*] by reclaiming its submerged past, while Brazil is trying to solve its problems by flinging itself into the technological present and future, which is plagued by economic and racial inequalities and a high rate of poverty and illiteracy.

Karen is confronted with the dilemma of how to utilize a tool -- life story -- that is concentrated on memory and the past and, at the same time, apply it to the furious activity of the present world. This tension between the politics of a hectic present and the preservation of a past through memory is illustrated in Karen’s article for the Museums and the Web conference in 1999. She presents the history of *Museu da Pessoa* and characterizes Brazil as having “a very unstable policy towards cultural projects, and more specifically, memory. In a country like Brazil, where the new prevails over the old and memory preservation is something almost inconceivable for the majority of the

population . . . selling history projects sounded like selling ice cream in Siberia” (Web page www.archimuse.com). It is precisely this battle between the “new prevailing over the old” that distinguishes Latvia from Brazil. Mara lifts up the “old” memories in order to “settle accounts” with the past, while Karen uses the “old” in order to grapple with problems in the present.

The differences in Māra’s and Karen’s master stories are grounded in the different experiences Māra and Karen had while growing up. Māra lived through the Soviet occupation and was one of the crowd that was made to feel “small and gray,” the “garbage” of society, while Karen observed the communist ideology from afar, yet never was subjected to its regime. Neither did Karen have to experience life as a slum dweller, since she grew up in a middle-class lifestyle that employed members of the lower class into her household. By helping others out of their feeling of inferiority, Māra was also identifying herself as part of this group that was subjected to hegemonic domination, while Karen worked out of a sense of mission to groups outside of her own middle-class upbringing. Māra is working from within, concentrating on her closest environment and the closest trees -- Latvians, while Karen is working from the outside, looking at the forest of trees that, ideally, includes the whole world.

Karen’s and Māra’s work with life stories can be summarized by their own quotes. Karen said in her opening speech at the *Museu da Pessoa* conference, “History is not about the past, but an interpretation of the future” (2003), while Māra writes in the introduction of her oral history publication that “the past does not end, but continues within the lives of individuals” (Zirnīte 2003). Karen has her mark set already on the future, while Māra is still pondering the past and its effects on the present. Perhaps

Latvia's master story needs more time to process the past and its long history of totalitarianism and serfdom, before it can regain its bearings in the present and set a confident foot towards the future.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Life story is a genre that can be used to create various meanings. Māra and Karen utilized life stories that they collected to create their own master stories of their country, people, and society. They used life stories in different ways to create two different master stories: one of ethnic national identity by commemorating history and nurturing values, and one of multi-identity idea of country by empowering society and focusing on work and economic class. Each master story is grounded within Māra's and Karen's contrasting backgrounds.

Māra's master story has a commemorative function, reclaiming history from voices that formerly had been silenced by the Soviet regime. Thus, the story of the Latvian nation is one that uncovers the repression of the small nation by the large hegemony. Māra emphasizes the story of the Latvian resistance during World War II, the twenty years of Latvian independence between world wars, and the deportations to Siberia during and after the war. She also lifts out the individuals from the "small and gray" masses that characterize communist ideology. Thus, Māra commemorates people and experiences that embody a resistive and spiritual Latvian soul, paying less attention to individuals that speak otherwise and that might soil this spirituality, e.g., communist and Nazi collaborators and supporters of the communist ideology. Her master story also says little about the stories of the poorest part of Latvian society -- street urchins and the homeless. Māra does not pay much attention to the commercial businesses, the rise of a

market economy, the “happy” moments in the security of the Soviet “workers’ paradise,” stories that may complicate *Dzīvesstāsts*’ historical and commemorative mission. The people she leaves out show her master story agenda, which is to teach Latvians about the injustice of the Soviet system and to lift up the “positive heroes” that have the ability to inspire others.

Karen’s master story shows the diversity of individual human experience and highlights the different “realities” that exist in Brazil. Thus, Karen’s form of commemoration is that of the collective portrait of diversity. Brazil is a large country that has historically attracted immigrants from many different areas of the world, even from Latvia. Since Latvia was victimized by the forced immigration of large Russian populations, Māra tries to give voice to the stories of the indigenous population that was overshadowed by this policy of russification. Karen, on the other hand, creates a master story that emphasizes the differences and similarities of the various individuals that make up Brazil. These two contrasting strategies have their roots in the sizes of the two countries. Brazil is a “big” country that has welcomed settlers from all over the world and didn’t need to preoccupy itself with the survival of the “Brazilian” culture, while Latvia is a “small” nation, trapped in “situations where [its] survival is at stake” (Kundera 2007, 30), and when existence is not a self-evident certainty, but “always a question, a wager, a risk” (Kundera 2007, 28).

Brazil’s industrialization in the 1950s was as important to Karen as the communist occupation in Latvia was to Māra. The building up of Brazil’s economy shifted Karen’s point of interest to the economic, to worker/employer relationships, and to the wide rift between the economically advantaged and disadvantaged. Thus, Karen’s

story of Brazil dwells in its economics -- its companies, its social classes, the lower incomes, unions, the common worker, and the common person on the street. There is more emphasis on the individual rather than the ethnic. Karen tries to address the social ills of an economically unequal population. More emphasis is placed on the “have-nots” who try to make it from the bottom up, as for example, the immigrants that settled in Brazil. As a result, her master story does not emphasize stories of the upper classes and the rich. One does not see Karen create projects for the upper 5% economic bracket of Brazil, though her commercial projects emphasize collecting life stories that range from the upper echelons where the president sits, to the lower floors where the elevator guard works. The museum does not have an easy time living up to its mission as defender of “every human being’s right to a piece of eternity” by recording every person’s life story. Neither did I see anybody invite the homeless woman who slept every night on the museum’s front stoop to come inside the museum to tell her life story.

Nevertheless, the master stories that Māra and Karen create from the life stories they collect are a creation of their idea of identity – “who we are,” and a projection of who they think Latvia and Brazil are. Māra’s story generally deals with an identity of place and roots -- the sense of values and meanings of Latvians, Livonians, Estonians, as well as the big Nordic picture. Karen’s story creates many identities, but roots itself in economics -- the lower class, the poor, as well as the higher income tiers of companies. Thus, the story easily includes commercial companies, the identity of workers, and the company’s sense of values and traditions. When creating the story of immigrants in Brazil, Karen’s emphasis lies strongly in their struggle to gain economic footing -- getting a job, gaining competency in an occupation, acquiring a nice home, and being

able to support a family. This contrasts with the exiled Latvian culture in America where the exiled communities laid great emphasis on Latvian cultural knowledge and transmission. Karen's film mentioned very little about the immigrants' efforts at keeping their cultures and traditions alive while living in Brazil. Despite their varying ethnicities, in the end, they are all Brazilians, allowing their Syrian, Italian, Portuguese, Japanese, Bolivian, and Spanish ethnicities to take a back seat to their acquired feelings of "being Brazilian." To the general Latvian diaspora, this approach would be disastrous to their efforts at cultivating a sense of "feeling Latvian" in their adopted land.

One can observe the two different ways that Māra and Karen created their master stories. Māra adopted a purist, conservatively folkloristic stance -- one that seeks the "untouched" islands of populations that are rooted to place, the rural, the older generations whose stories must be recorded before they are lost forever, and a devotion to reclaiming the past that had been silenced. She seeks the Herderian "essence" of a story and a people, the spiritual values of an individual, and the characterization of a folk group. Herder had lived in Riga for a number of years and Latvian folklorists hold him in high regard as a guiding inspiration for the Latvian folklore movement. Elliott Oring noted: "For Herder, only art that was spontaneous, natural, and unconscious could reflect the true identity of a people" (Oring 1994, 222). In a similar vein, Mara sought to unlock the unconscious meanings in the spontaneity and creativity of life stories that could reflect the true image, identity, values and character of individual Latvians, Latvia as a nation and Latvia's various regions.

Karen adopted a stance more akin to popular culture, with emphasis placed on the urban, the cosmopolitan, the individual, the global, the young, the worker, the

commercial companies, and the ills associated with a disadvantaged urban economic population. She seeks to actively involve her story with the present and the future, desiring to influence society by incorporating the process of life story collecting as a way to lift up the lower classes.

Part of the key that helps to explain these two contrasting methods for creating the master story can be found in the recent dictatorships that both countries have experienced. Latvia's communist dictatorship was all-encompassing. It suffused all of society, dragging Latvia into the turmoil of World Wars I and II. The wars squeezed Latvia between two world superpowers -- Germany and Russia. While Brazil's dictatorship was brutal, it was relatively short-lived and its dictators were Brazil's own military. It seems that Brazil managed to put some of the pain of the dictatorship behind it after its demise, so that the after effects of the dictatorship are not as apparent in Brazilian life stories as they are in Latvian life stories. The legacy of the Soviet regime is, at present, firmly tied up in the Latvian sense of its identity, and is expressed in countless creative forms, from memoirs, to plays, to novels, poetry, song, as well as folklore. Karen's story of Brazil contains little emphasis on this part of its history and as a result, Karen's master story actively emphasizes the future. Māra's master story of Latvia is drenched with the history and after effects of World War II and the Soviet occupation, still lingering on its significance and grappling with its long-lasting "scars" on society. However, when discussing the topic of dictatorship with some Brazilian students in America, they maintained that psychologically, the after effects of the dictatorship still live on in the minds of those who were active in that era. More concretely, Brazilians are still afraid of the powerful and corrupt Brazilian police force. Karen wrote in an e-mail to

me, that the effects still linger on in the form of bad public schools, problems with land ownership, and violence. Thus, one can say that Brazil as well is still dealing with the “scars” of their dictatorship. These “scars,” however, are not as chronically rooted deep within the undercurrent psyche of society, as it is in Latvia, where they manifest themselves in the form of low self-esteem, civic passivity, and a preoccupation with the “silenced voices” of history. Rather, in Brazil, the “scars” manifest themselves in the form of visible societal ills, such as violence and economic inequality. Thus, one can see why Karen’s activism takes place in the present and in the form of social change.

Both Māra and Karen are activists, though each takes a different path. For Māra, telling life stories is a way to break Latvia’s passivity, by the very process of telling the story. Michael Jackson notes: “Storytelling [is] a vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances. To reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one’s own imagination” (2002, 14). It is not so much a dialogue with others that Māra is looking for as, rather, her conviction that people want their story heard so that the public knows “how their lives had been.” Māra’s activism is focused on educating the public on the richness of Latvia’s “silenced history” and the values and regional traits of Latvia’s population.

Karen’s activism lies in raising literacy and technological savvy through the activity and process of collecting life stories. Karen’s use of technology in life story collecting has taken her master story to a more contemporary level. The whole idea of the “virtual” *Museu da Pessoa* is closely connected to new media. “Place” is no longer important to Karen. In order to reach as many people as possible, the “place” of the

museum must be as accessible as possible. She started with CD-ROMs, mobile life story tents, and life story “jukeboxes” in public places. When the Internet became more widely accessible, this was the most logical next step to take. She connected life story projects with philosophies of digital inclusion, which works on the premise that low income families, when given access to the digital world, are more empowered to participate competitively within society. Life story collecting projects were started in low income schools in order to help disadvantaged children get a boost in the modern technologically-oriented world. Learning computer skills was an important requirement before going out to one’s community to collect life stories. Bridging the “digital divide” became a part of the *Museu da Pessoa*’s social agenda.

At present, Karen sees as her main concern not to develop life story projects, but to create a “master source” repository of life stories for others to utilize for culturally and socially important life story projects. This next technological level must serve as a way to ideally connect and unite, with the help of technology, all the life stories in the world under one digital portal.

Māra and Karen have each, metaphorically speaking, taken the life story and raised it to maturity as a master story in different ways. Māra has taken the life story by the hand through a safer route, through rural Latvia, small towns, under the shelter of schools and museums, into peoples’ homes, hand-picking her storytellers, presenting and commemorating the “silenced” history in videos and newspapers with the help of educators and Latvian volunteers from America. Karen has taken life story into a riskier part of the world -- into slums, on street corners, metro stations, open to anybody who happens to pass by, subjected it to the worldliness of businesses and commercial

companies, introduced it into the rough hands of kids, placed it in the Internet and hopes that it will change the world.

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Dzīvesstāsts: <http://www.dzivesstasts.lv>

Museu da Pessoa: <http://www.museudapessoa.com.br>

Ilze Akerbergs

802-1/2 S. Washington St.

Bloomington, IN 47401

e-mail: iakerber@indiana.edu

Education:

Indiana University, Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology – Ph.D. 2007

Phil. Cand. (BA) in Ethnology – Stockholm University, Sweden (1996)

MA in Baltic Languages – Stockholm University, Sweden (1994)

BA & MA in Music, Organ Performance – Brooklyn College, NY (1977)

Indiana University Employment, Scholarships, and Assistantships:

Technical Assistant – Traditional Arts Indiana – a collaboration between the IU Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology and the Indiana Arts Commission – maintained and expanded website; created and edited video and slideshow presentations for the web; improved and maintained Access database; created and edited printed newsletter; did fieldwork for the I-69 project (2000-present)

Digitizing Technician – Hoagy Carmichael Collection and Starr-Gennett Records Digitizing Project – Archives of Traditional Music and IU Digital Library joint project – tasks included digitizing sound discs, reel-to-reel tapes, cassettes, CDs, etc. (1999-2003)

Foreign Language Assistantship (FLAS) in Estonian (1999)

Laura Boulton Fellowship – IU Archives of Traditional Music (1998)

Graduate Assistantship – IU Archives of Traditional Music (1995-1997)

Previous Work Experience:

Transcriber – American Latvian Oral History Project (2002-2003)

Participant Assistant – Smithsonian Folklife Festival, Washington, DC (1998)

English and Swedish Language Instructor – Latvia, Liepaja Pedagogical Institute

Preliminary Cataloger – Library of Congress, Washington, DC (1983-1986)

CDs with own compositions:

Christmas in Latvia (New York Latvian concert choir) – 1996

Christmas by the Amber Sea (New York Latvian concert choir – 2000

Joulud (Sirjelind Records) – 2000