

The island monastery of Valaam in Finnish homeland tourism: Constructing a “Thirdspace” in the Russian borderlands

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The Orthodox island monastery of Valaam in Russian Karelia is today a popular destination for Finnish tourists visiting Russia’s western borderlands. Many of these tourists are descendants of the Karelians who had evacuated the area following World War II. The monastery’s institutionally sanctioned genealogies construct it as the civilizing force, which had brought Christian enlightenment to the local heathen population. This discursive template is played out in the way the place is presented to visitors, with each highlight telling a carefully constructed story that promotes the monastery’s significance for the Russian religious and national identity. Yet, drawing on lived experience, as well as on popular culture, family lore and meanings from collective memory, the Finnish visitors break the monolithic official discourse and produce a complex “thirdspace” in their own measure. This paper is based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews conducted during a homeland visit to Ladogan Karelia in June 2010.

Keywords: homeland tourism, Valaam, Karelia, Finland, Russia, borderlands, “thirdspace”

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Introduction

At the northeastern fringes of Europe, Ladogan Karelia is a place where visible traces of a traumatic recent history seem to be strangely at odds with landscapes of extraordinary beauty. The symbolic center of this remote periphery is Lake Ladoga, the largest European lake, with its rugged shores indented with deep, narrow gulfs and walled in by high granite cliffs. The sheer immensity of this lake has earned it the appellation of an “inland sea” (Scott 1908: 167). In the northern part of the lake, an hour away from the town of Sortavala when traveling by hydrofoil, one finds the Valaam¹ archipelago: a group of some fifty islands, with the eponymous Orthodox monastery situated on the largest island.

A flagship of the budding tourism industry in Russian Karelia (see, e.g., Nilsson 2004), Valaam is today a popular destination for Finnish tourists visiting Russia’s western borderlands. Not surprisingly, many of them are descendants of the Karelians who had been forced to evacuate the area following World War II. As will be discussed in more detail below, the institutionally sanctioned genealogies of the monastery construct it as the civilizing force, which had brought Christian enlightenment to the local heathen population. This discursive template is emphatically played out in the way the place is presented to visitors, with each highlight of the itinerary contributing to the narrative promoting the monastery’s unique significance for the Russian religious and national identity.²

Data and methods

This paper is based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews conducted during a four-day homeland visit (Finnish, *kotiseutumatka*) to Ladogan Karelia undertaken in June 2010 by members of two extended families, originally deriving from the municipalities of Jaakkima, Lumivaara and Kurkijoki, on the shores of Lake Ladoga. In Ladogan Karelia, the ancestors of the two families lived around ten kilometers apart from each other. Their second- and third-generation descendants are now dispersed, with some living as far North as Finnish Lapland, and some as far South as Australia. Out of the seventeen travelers, interviews were conducted with ten. The participants, four women and six men, included second- and third-generation Karelians, as well as the travel guide, who was able to provide valuable insights due to his long-standing experience in organizing similar trips.³

Consent was obtained beforehand from the tour organizers and all interested participants. The interviews were conducted in convenient public spaces on neutral territory, including hotel lobbies, cafes and the tour bus. In all interview locales, it was possible to ensure that any distractions would be minimal. The interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. In most instances, the original Finnish language was translated into English.⁴ The informants' names are not disclosed, in order to protect confidentiality.

As this trip was a part of a larger project dealing with the European borderlands, the interviews were loosely structured, leaving enough freedom to the interviewees to describe their experience of borderland travel and reflect on their personal and collective memories and ethnic and national identification. Initially unaware of Valaam's significance in the personal and collective memories of my fellow travelers, I had not expected it to become one of the highlights of our trip. "This is the second time we are visiting Jaakkima", explained a woman from my travel party. "We did not visit Valamo then, which was a pity. This time we did not want to miss it" (Interview 2). It soon became clear that others in the group shared this sentiment. The visit to Valaam kept emerging in casual conversations, and became a prominent topic in the interviews. One man admitted that the physical encounter with the place triggered in him a feeling of loss and bitterness, like no other location we visited during the trip, his ancestral home-site

included (Interview 9). This meant that further questions needed to be asked, both in face-to-face interaction and by email, with that particular focus.

Additional research also needed to take into account the fact that the tropes of the ceded Karelian territory and of Valaam itself as a Karelian place of memory are firmly established in the Finnish popular culture. Those popular cultural texts that were mentioned in the interviews or in the follow-up emails were given particular attention, because of their mythopoetic quality, which plays a central role in the formation of collective memory. Scanned postcards and other documents were provided by the participants. The historical segments of the paper, which throw light on the temporal dimension of space production, are based solely on secondary sources.

The key questions this paper seeks to address are:

- 1) How is Ladogan Valaam experienced today by the descendants of the Karelians evacuated from the shores of Lake Ladoga after World War II? Is it experienced as "home", or as a place of otherness?
- 2) Does the nostalgia for the lost ancestral homeland encompass a place, which had maintained aspects of "Russianness" throughout its recorded history, including periods when it belonged to the Finnish Grand Duchy (1809–1917) and to independent Finland (1917–1944)?
- 3) What lessons can be learned from these insights, about space production in the borderlands?

In addressing these questions, I first discuss Valaam's patchy genealogy, emphasizing the temporal "gaps" and "discontinuities" that have allowed the co-existence of contradictory "emplacements" within a single physical space. These depend on the selective foregrounding of certain temporal layers, and the accommodation of others into acceptable frameworks. The following section focuses on the popular-cultural texts and artifacts, which have left a particular imprint in the childhood memories of the participants in the case study. These texts are of particular importance, because they partake in the social and cultural dimensions of space production. After this, field notes are used to explain our visit to Valaam as a lived experience, in which landscapes, sensorial stimuli, social and temporal dimensions coalesce and interact. To fully understand the nature of our experience, the concept of homeland tourism is also discussed. The paper concludes with a section that explains how this study engages with relevant theory.

Valaam's discontinuous genealogy

Valaam's foundational narrative, elaborated in the nineteenth century, paints the monastery as the arch-nemesis of the local pagan traditions. According to this narrative, Apostle Andrew came to Valaam in the 1st century A.D. to destroy heathen temples and teach Christian faith, predicting its great future as the beacon of holiness in the midst of pagan darkness. Apostolic blessing, according to Kati Parppei, was "yet another way to 'anchor' the image of the monastery to the collective cultural memory of the great story of Russia and to emphasize the specialty and particularity of Valaam in the Russian monastic scene" (2010: 133).

The origins of the monastery are shrouded in myth, and usually traced somewhere between the 10th and the 14th centuries. The legend of the two founders, the Greek monk Sergius and his Karelian counterpart, Herman, is of interest as a foundational narrative that has hybridity – a meeting of the Slavic and the Finno-Ugric worlds – at its core. This hybridity resonates with the stereotypical Karelian identity, often constructed as a watershed between East and West. The Karelians are often regarded, and regard themselves, both as characteristically Finnish, and as fundamentally different from the rest of the national community (cf. Häyrynen 2004: 23). The taciturn and generally reserved nature of the Finns is commonly said to be in stark contrast with the Karelians' warmth and joviality.⁵

For most of its early history, the monastery had to endure the continuing warfare between Sweden and Novgorod. At the beginning of the 17th century, violence and bloodshed forced the monks to leave the island and settle permanently in other monasteries. Under the Swedish rule, which lasted from 1617 to 1721, the monastery was virtually wiped out of existence. Eager to construct a far-reaching and uninterrupted genealogy of the monastery, the author of the historical sketch on Valaam's official website emphasizes that the future continuity of the place rested symbolically – if somewhat precariously – on the relics of the legendary founders, which had been left behind by the fleeing monks (*valaam.ru*). It was not before the early 18th century that a group of monks from the Kirillo-Belozero monastery set out to re-establish Valaam.

Valaam became part of the Grand Duchy of Finland in 1812. In the late nineteenth century, the relationship between the monastery and the Finn-

ish administration was far from harmonious, plagued as it was by numerous conflicts over land ownership, fishing rights and fiscal matters (Parppei 2010: 191). Tensions continued after Finland had become independent in the aftermath of World War I, and the Orthodox Church of Finland gained autonomous status.⁶ Since Valaam's ties with Russia had been traditionally strong, its co-option into the Finnish nation-building processes in the interwar period was not without problems. Most notably, the 1924/5 decision by the Finnish Orthodox Church to adopt the Gregorian calendar was met with bitter opposition by some of the Valaam monks. Given the ultimatum to accept the decision or leave, some of the dissenting monks preferred exile to the Soviet Union, while others found refuge in the Orthodox monasteries in the Balkans. As part of the overall effort to fennicize the monastery, the monks were now required to apply for Finnish citizenship, and fluency in the Finnish language became one of the criteria for recruitment (Kemppinen 1973: 40). As the Finnish Orthodox church gradually asserted its independence from the Russian hub, Valaam itself began to shed aspects of its pre-revolutionary Russian identity.

As pointed out by geographer Petri Raivo, the Orthodox community of Finnish Karelia in the inter-war period represented a minority among the mostly Lutheran inhabitants of the area, but their "different religion, their ties with Russo-Byzantine culture and the fact that they lived near the border with the Soviet Union made them a visible element in the processes of nationalization that took place in the peripheral areas of the young nation" (2002: 14). With its quaint wooden chapels (Karelian, *tsasouna*, from Russian часовня, часовня) and hermitages dotting the area, the Orthodox cultural landscape of the eastern periphery was eagerly embraced as an "essential, if peculiar, part of the nation" (Ibid.). At the same time, the perceived difference, or even exoticism of the eastern periphery gave a considerable boost to tourism industry, attracting both local and international pilgrims and tourists. The monastery's potential to contribute to the economy of the young country, both as a center of pilgrimage tourism and as a uniquely rich fishery, was recognized from the outset.

Valaam received its first high-level visits from Finland's Minister of Church and Education, Mikael Soinen in 1919, and from the first president, Kaarlo Juho Ståhlberg in 1920 (Kemppinen 1973:

39). Celebrations and church music festivals organized by the monastery gained considerable media exposure and attracted visitors from across Finland, Sweden and beyond. In a guide book, published in English by the Finnish Tourist Association, Valaam is described as affording “sights of rare beauty for the tourist to admire and enjoy” (1926: 21), and its *genius loci* is said to emanate a “devout atmosphere which everyone must feel, whatever his [sic] creed or lack of creed” (Ibid. 24). An hour-long program about Valaam, aired by the Finnish radio in 1934, proved so popular that several newspapers followed suit, with feature articles encouraging Finns to visit the monastery. According to Raivo, travel to Valaam “had reached its peak in the 1930s, when the increasing flow of tourists and pilgrims brought tens of thousands of people to the island every year” (2002: 19).

While the “oriental exoticism” was being appropriated at the institutional level, contributing to the nationalizing rhetoric of independent Finland, for the mostly Finno-Karelian population living on the shores of Lake Ladoga the island monastery existed as a natural part of daily life, even more so than it had done before the revolution. Following the transfer of the Archbishopal seat of the Finnish Orthodox Church from Vyborg (Finnish, *Viipuri*) to Sortavala, black-clad monks became a regular sight on the town’s streets. In late summer and early autumn, it was possible to see them doing their daily errands in the town center, selling produce at the marketplace, or buying supplies from the local hardware store (Kemppinen 1973: 191).

In 1939, the onset of the Winter War brought an abrupt end to the prosperity of the holy archipelago. For Finland, World War II involved several distinct struggles: the defensive Winter War in response to the Soviet invasion (1939–40), the counteroffensive Continuation War (1941–4) and the Lapland War, fought against Germany after the armistice with the Soviets had been signed (1944–5). It also entailed a loss of territory and, concomitantly, a major displacement of the Finnish population. Valaam monks evacuated in 1940, forced by repeated Soviet air raids. The entire archipelago was eventually annexed to the Soviet Union along with the rest of the ceded territories. The evacuated monks continued their monastic practice in the “New Valamo” monastery (Finnish, *Uusi Valamo*), which was founded in the town of Heinävesi in eastern Finland.⁷

The deserted old Valaam was left to decay, while being periodically put to use, as a navy school

(1940), a state farm (1949) and a boarding house for disabled soldiers and the elderly (1952–84) (*valaam.ru*). With the relaxation of the Soviet-era restrictions, the first monks moved to the island in 1989. Since then, Valaam has been not one but two, with one – the Russian Valaam – boasting “authenticity” based on physical location, and the other – the Finnish New Valamo – based on temporal continuity. The relationship between the two monasteries is described by historian Kati Parppe as “not strained, not overtly warm” (2010: 198), partly dictated by the historical and ideological differences between the Russian and the Finnish Orthodox Churches.

Over the last two decades, the old monastery on Lake Ladoga has been gradually restored to its former grandeur. As an important part of Russia’s cultural heritage, Valaam has been the beneficiary of a special assistance program of the Federal Government, with further funding coming from private sponsors (Zimin 2003: 14). The monastery now has its own economic infrastructure, which includes orchards, baking and dairy-production facilities, stables, a fleet and a network of dependent houses or farms in Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, Pirozersk, Sortavala and elsewhere (*valaam.ru*). Clearly, in today’s Russian Federation, Valaam is a thriving institution. Promoted as the “Athos of the North”, by reference to its counterpart in the Aegean Sea, the monastery presently counts nearly two hundred permanent residents, as well as growing numbers of visitors (Zimin 2003). Among the visitors, descendants of Karelian evacuees are a prominent group.

Valaam and the Finno-Karelian collective memory

My memories of Valamo: sacred peace and the church bells ringing all the way to heaven.

[My visit to Valamo] became the most memorable experience of my early youth, an experience that still continues to influence me. There are two things that I still remember clearly. First, the atmosphere. I would describe it as sacred peace that you encounter at every step. It radiated from the monks’ faces. It lived in the deep forests and under the arches of the churches. Everywhere...

And second, the bells. The famous Valamo bells, from the extremely large to the very small ones. When I was watching them with the eyes of a

child, I had the warm feeling that they could be heard all the way to heaven. Nostalgia for that place, for the peace of the monastery and to the whole Orthodox mystique, has taken me already many times to the Balkans and its numerous monasteries and churches. And once while I was sitting there on the shore of Lake Ohrid under the centuries-old trees of the monastery of St Naum, my memories of Valamo came alive.

(Runne in Kempainen 1973: 293)

The author of the above segment is Aili Runne (1920–99), the lyricist and composer of several immensely popular nostalgic songs commemorating the ancestral homeland in ceded parts of Karelia. Herself born in Parikkala, a municipality split in half by the 1944 border, Runne is best known for the song *Do You Remember Monrepos* (Finnish, *Muistatko Monrepos'n*), immortalized in the 1950s by the well-liked Finnish singer Annikki Tähti.⁸ Two of her songs, *Hermit's Cottage* (Finnish, *Erakkomaja*) and *Dreamer in the Bell Tower* (Finnish, *Uneksija Kellotornissa*) are inspired by her childhood visit to Valaam, and reflect the special sensibility to the "Orthodox mystique" that she claimed had followed her throughout her later life.

Runne was instrumental in entrenching the romantic image of Valaam into the Finno-Karelian collective memory. One of my second-generation respondents recalls:

We were regular listeners of the Listeners' Requests program on the radio. One of the songs most meaningful to me, a 10-year old child of evacuee parents, was *On the Hills of Karelia* [Finnish, *Karjalan kunnailla*]... Another memorable song was *I Am a Child of Karelia* [Finnish, *Laps olen Karjalan*]. It was written and composed by Aili Runne, who also wrote the lyrics for the popular 1967 song *The Bells of Valaam* [Finnish, *Valamon kellot*]. I remember it very well because it was performed by the Finnish "singing Cossack", Viktor Klimenko. He is quite an interesting character... I still remember how the church bells were ringing in the background (Interview 6).

Valaam's bells have been particularly expedient as mnemonic signs in the affective geographies of the evacuees and their descendants. In a legend known to several of my respondents, Valaam's main Bell of St Andrew's, which was sounded regularly to mark the deaths of the monastery's monks, is said to have been sounded twelve times before the monks' evacuation in 1940, as a sign that the

monastery itself was now dead. The bells of Valaam were thus a particularly evocative synecdoche - not only for the monastery, the archipelago and Lake Ladoga - but also for the entire ceded territory.

Second- and third-generation descendants of Karelian evacuees remember stories they were told by their parents and grandparents, about the interactions they had with Valaam monks in their daily lives. To quote the historian Hannu Kilpeläinen, the monastery was not just a "community of the faithful but a broader institution and religious center extending its influence to the surrounding region and inhabitants and providing a home and work for up to hundreds of men, women and children from outside the Monastery community" (2000: 462). Publications commemorating Valaam between the two World Wars (e.g. Kempainen 1973) were standard reading among evacuee circles and were coveted particularly by first-generation migrants. These books are remarkable, as they elevate the personal memories of ordinary people - the former Finnish soldiers stationed on the island in the 1930s, workers employed by the monastery and casual visitors - to the status of collective memory of the mythical lost homeland that symbolically extends beyond the evacuee population, to the entire Finnish national community.

In one extended family, souvenir photographs of Valaam and its monks had been among the treasured reminders of the old homeland:

My earliest memories regarding Valamo came from family gatherings where my father brought his photo album to the table and showed us pictures from Karelia. He had postcards about Valamo, showing monks in their robes, and several monks in a sailboat... He told us that he had seen the monks sailing like that on Lake Ladoga, where his home was. My father was Lutheran but I assume that he had visited Valamo on one of the steamships that travelled on the inland sea (Interview 5).

It is for a good reason that the father's Lutheran faith is emphasized here. Along with household items such as woven rugs, wooden barrels and kitchen utensils, images of Eastern Orthodoxy have become the iconic signifiers of the lost homeland, even though the family is not of Orthodox faith. It therefore comes as no surprise that the same visual prompts (see Fig. 1 and 2) seem to tell us simultaneously "who the father is" and "who he is not", thus signifying paradoxically both identity and otherness. The same aporia is at work during



Fig. 1. A souvenir photo in the possession of one of the participant families. The Transfiguration Cathedral, built according to legend on the remains of the founders Sergius and Herman. Both images were scanned by Interviewee 6. Dating is uncertain.



Fig. 2. Monks sailing on Lake Ladoga.

our visit, making it possible for the visitors to experience the lived spatiality of the monastery as both “home” and “abroad”.

Visit to Valaam: Mobility, landscape and lived experience

In order to capture the meanings produced through travel, geographies of tourism need to account for both mobility and stasis (Cresswell 2006). Mobility

is a rich resource for the production of narratives, with tourist itineraries signposting the narrative sequence. It is possible, for example, to compare two quite common scenarios for reaching the Valaam archipelago: via St. Petersburg, usually as part of a more comprehensive cruise which may or may not include other sites, a common one being the island-museum of Kizhi in lake Onega; or via Priozersk (Finnish, *Käkisalmi*) or Sortavala, often as part of a Finnish custom-made heritage trip such as ours. It was in Sortavala that many in our group were made manifestly aware of the multiple tem-

poral layers that coexisted in the ceded territory, in different degrees of visibility or erasure, and different levels of harmony or conflict. Here, we could appreciate a rich history of struggles over place, identity and belonging, which are symbolically enacted in Sortavala's architecture, public spaces and urban morphology.

In historical travel writing, Sortavala was described as emphatically Finnish, and in stark contrast with Valaam's Russianness (see, e.g., Tweedie 1897: 57). This distinction was all but erased when the city was emptied of its Finnish population in the 1940s. What remained of the old Finnish architecture in the ghost city ceded to the Soviets was gradually adapted and repurposed, and the city itself was repopulated and closed off to foreigners for the rest of the Soviet era. For almost half a century, both Sortavala and Valaam were non-places of little significance for either Finnish or Russian national discourse.

Since 1989, with the gradual restoration of both places, "traces" of the old opposition have been re-instated in physical symbols. As Denis Cosgrove has argued, the physical symbols in a human landscape "serve the purpose of reproducing cultural norms and establishing the values of dominant groups across all of a society" (Cosgrove 1989: 125). The Finnish architectural landscapes of Sortavala give way to symbols of Russianness as soon as we reach Valaam and disembark from the hydrofoil. Bearded, longhaired monks dressed in black robes greet the arriving groups of pilgrims. A congregation of women, their heads demurely covered with scarves, circle around a chapel, bowing in turn in front of the icon of the Virgin inside it, and chanting in Russian: "блаженна Ты, жена" ("woman, you are blessed"). As we follow a tree-lined path and a granite stairway toward the main part of the monastery, we are surrounded by lush vegetation similar to what is found in the rest of Karelia on both sides of the border. Visual stimuli conveying "home" alternate with those conveying radical difference. Yet, it is precisely this mix of "sameness" and "difference" that seems to resonate with images etched in the collective memory of my fellow travelers, and with their sense of self as Karelians.

The itinerary we follow on the archipelago is standard for most tourist groups. Every single highlight on it promotes Valaam's foundational narrative, which pitches the monastery – as an enlightening and civilizing agent – in direct opposition to its non-Orthodox surroundings. We begin our tour

with a visit to the Transfiguration Cathedral, built according to a legend on the remains of the founders Sergius and Herman, both credited with missionary work and conversion of the local pagan population. Herman himself, according to one version of the narrative, was a convert to Christianity, of local pagan background (Parpei 2010: 135). Our next stop is the monks' cemetery, where we visit the grave said to hold the remains of the fourteenth-century Swedish King Magnus Eriksson. As a legend sanctioned by the monastery in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries would have it, Magnus was shipwrecked on his way to sack the island and his entire fleet was sunk. Rescued by the monks, the King himself is said to have converted to the Orthodox faith, taken vows and then soon thereafter died as a monk of the monastery. Finally, the Resurrection hermitage, where Apostle Andrew is said to have erected a stone cross in sign of his victory over "demon-worshipping" heathens.

The narrative enshrined by the itinerary, however, represents only one way of producing space on Valaam island, albeit the dominant, institutional one. In producing their "third space" on the island during our visit, my fellow travelers re-imagined the period between the two World Wars, when both Valaam itself and the Finnish Orthodox Church more broadly were in the process of being co-opted into the Finnish national discourse, and interactions between the monastery and the local Finnish population were intensified. This is the period, which remained in the living memory of their parents and grandparents, which circulated in popular-cultural texts such as Aili Runne's songs, and which finally became an idealized topos in the collective memory of the evacuee community. This is how the image of black-robed monks, bountiful apple and cherry orchards and golden onion-shaped domes has come to represent an aspect of the lost "home" in the nostalgic imagination of my respondents, which has nothing to do with their religious affiliation.

Heritage tourism in the Russian borderlands

Our journey pertains to a category of travel, which burgeoned hand-in-hand with the "memory boom" of the 1970s (Huyssen 1995; Whitehead 2009). Following the waning of the forward-look-

ing utopian narratives of the post-war period, people found solace and inspiration in their collective pasts (Olick et al. 2011). At the same time, the ever-increasing population displacement around the globe meant that, for many, the past was quite literally a foreign country, as searching for roots involved crossing geo-political boundaries. Even though the original displacement may have occurred several generations ago, descendants of migrants now flock to their “original homelands”, hoping to experience a sense of belonging through immersion in locales that figure prominently in their personal or family histories. Their itineraries are eclectic and often unpredictable. They follow a logic dictated by hybrid family narratives, in which elements of collective and personal memories co-exist and feed off each other. They resist easy classification.

In the memory of many Finns who had evacuated Ladogan Karelia *en masse* after World War II, and of their descendants, this area continues to represent the ideal of ancestral home, a “Paradise Lost”, which was for decades out of their reach, hidden behind the Iron Curtain. Notwithstanding the relatively smooth assimilation of the evacuated Finns into their new environment in different parts of Finland itself, the sense of common origin has been passed on to younger generations. Since the first sporadic and semi-clandestine trips to the “old homeland” in the mid-1980s, searching for roots has become a form of ritual, a pilgrimage undertaken by many former evacuees from across the areas once ceded to the Soviets (Paasi 1996; Armstrong 2004; Alasuutari & Alasuutari 2009). In Finland, homeland visits to the Russian borderlands are often organized as custom-made tours, tailored to include the localities – ancestral farms, homes, churches, historical buildings, battle sites, memorials and other monuments – that hold significance for a specific family or community group.

Visiting the ancestral home in ceded Karelia has been described as a form of pilgrimage to the Holy Land (Paasi 1996: 295; Armstrong 2004: 13). Several of my respondents also experienced the trip as a rite of passage, a quest for a “grounded” sense of belonging at the intersection of several competing identifications. This kind of quest, however, should not be confused with nostalgic escapism, or with the territorializing impulses usually associated with nationalism and modernity. Territory here does not represent something to be symbolically (re)possessed, but rather something to be appreciated through intersubjective bodily practice. This

practice in turn serves to enrich the stockpile of collective memory tropes through sensory experience, and to strengthen the bonds within the extended family and the community of origin.

Heritage tourism operators always promote a particular form of identity, which tends to coincide with the hegemonic template of nationhood in a given context (Pretes 2003; Palmer 2005). Catherine Palmer has argued that, as a “mundane taken-for-granted aspect of social life, heritage tourism reminds people of the nation’s core traditions through the stories of nationhood recounted at sites of national significance” (2005: 22).

In the case of Valaam, this is reflected in the way visitors’ movements are conceived “from above”, in such a way to impel them to identify with, and celebrate a unifying version of Russianness presented by the monastery. Rather than unproblematically adhering to what is offered, the visitors enter into a process of negotiation, accepting some of the aspects of the hegemonic narrative, while rejecting others. This negotiation has a pronounced temporal dimension: the emotions and meanings attached to the place are seen as belonging to different strata of historical time, and different layers of personal and collective memory. It is precisely this space-time-sociality nexus that allows the visitors to turn the highly regulated conceived space of Valaam into a space that signified home and grounded belonging.

Hybridity, Thirdspace and *Khora*: Reconciling competing discourses

Homi Bhabha has theorized the notion of “third space”, in which cultural hybridities develop as a result of colonial encounters. Rather than postulating binary oppositions between competing identity discourses, he described his “third space” as a “space of enunciation” and a “precondition for the articulation of cultural difference” (1994: 38). For Bhabha, hybridity means that it is no longer possible to trace the two “original” discourses from which the third one emerges: “[Hybridity] to me is the ‘third space’, which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (1991: 211).

Also, this “third space”, according to Bhabha, involves a temporal dimension, as we “find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (1994: 1).

Drawing on the work of Homi Bhabha and others, geographer Edward Soja has developed a critique of social theory interested primarily in what he calls “firstspace”, or the real, material world; or “secondspace”, or the imagined world of representations of spatiality. His notion of “thirdspace”, as the privileged site of analysis, is the space in which all discursive dichotomies collapse (1996: 56):

Everything comes together in thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and unconsciousness, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history.

Another useful paradigm is that of *khora*, theorized most notably by Jacques Derrida (1995) and Julia Kristeva (1984). Described by Derrida as neither “sensible” nor “intelligible”, but rather belonging to a “third genus” and being “both this and that”⁹ (1995: 89), this paradigm has been fruitfully utilized by Anna-Kaisa Kuusisto-Arponen in her studies of the sense of place among second-generation descendants of Karelian refugees (2009).

Similarly, the produced spatiality of our visit can be understood as “both this and that”: representative of both “self” and “other”, homely and foreign at the same time. The “subjectivity” of the participants came together with the “objectivity” of historical contingency and the constraints imposed by the social practice of heritage tourism in the borderlands. A “thirdspace” was produced, which did not oppose or contest the competing “official” discourses, but rather took them with empathy and respect. This empathy was clearly expressed in several interviews. By and large, the participants of the second generation were aware that, after the exodus of the Finnish population from Ladogan Karelia in the 1940s, the area was forcefully resettled as part of the official recruiting plans of the Soviet regime.¹⁰ “The people living here are innocent,” one said. “Many [of these people] came from the South, they are totally different people,

who lived in totally different circumstances” (Interview 1). This “innocence” was clearly something that the current inhabitants of Ladogan Karelia, the Orthodox landscapes that had been all but obliterated under the Soviets, and the ancestors of the visitors themselves were seen as having in common.

Conclusion

Despite the beauty of its natural landscape, Valaam’s *genius loci* is far from being immune to historical contingency. Rather, its “spirit of place” and its “spirit of time” are in a dynamic relationship and feed off one another’s energies.¹¹ The production of space in Valaam is deeply contested, characterized by a heterotopic ability to juxtapose “in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (Foucault 1986 [1967]: 25). After a hiatus that lasted from 1940 to 1989, during which the archipelago was a kind of “non-place”, a forgotten “heterotopia of crisis” inhabited by disabled soldiers and others from the fringes of society, the post-Perestroika authorities set out to inscribe it with meaning. They had to “iron out” the existing temporal discontinuities and build a continuous narrative of Valaam as a beacon of civilization and a place of worship throughout the centuries, possessing a spirit of place that guaranteed timeless spirituality.

As can be expected in these circumstances, the tourist space on the archipelago is conceived “from above”, leaving as little room as possible for individual meaning-making interventions. Yet, drawing on lived experience, as well as on popular culture, family lore and meanings already inscribed in their collective memory, the Finnish visitors were able to subvert the monolithic official discourse and produce a “third space” in their own measure. The “thirdspace” they produced was essentially governed by the same aporia that made it possible to read the souvenir photograph from the family photo album as representing simultaneously “identity” and “otherness”.

The landscapes of Ladogan Valaam resonated strongly with the self-image of the participants in this case study. Vicariously – by way of popular songs and family photographs – the monastery had already represented “home” in their personal memories. They felt that compounding these memories with lived experience was deeply enriching, and further reinforced their feeling of belonging.

In conclusion, what lessons can be learned from this experience, about space production in the borderlands? My tentative answer to this question is positive and forward-looking. As a popular social practice in Finland, especially among the second- and third-generation descendants of the original Karelian evacuees, heritage travel contributes to the shaping of European borderlands as a zone of transition and cultural exchange. Rather than being conducive to conflict and cultural animosity, the collective memory at their disposal can be activated as a resource for overcoming past differences.

NOTES

¹ In the article, I use the Russian toponym, Valaam (Russian, Валаам), in my own text; and the Finnish name, Valamo, whenever quoting translations of Finnish text.

² In 1992, Valaam was declared the national property of Russia by the decree of the then President of Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin (Nilsson 2004).

³ Interviews 1 and 2: female, second generation; interviews 3 and 4: female, third generation; interviews 5, 6, 7 and 8: male, second generation; interview 9: male, third generation; interview 10: travel guide.

⁴ My husband Toivo Talikka's native command of the Finnish language was a valuable resource. I would like to thank him for all his hard work and dedication, not only in the interview stage, but also in collecting and translating many of the written sources. I would also like to thank Hanna Talikka for her interest in the project and her involvement in several of the interviews. Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to my informants, who were generous with their time and attention during an event that for each of them had a deep personal significance.

⁵ This point emerged in several of my interviews. A second-generation woman, for example, emphasized that she was "Karelian in spirit", and therefore found it hard to form friendships in her local environment, among the "more reserved" South-Western Finns (Interview 2).

⁶ The Church was granted autonomous status by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople in 1923. The Finnish language replaced Church Slavonic as the official language in the same year.

⁷ The independent Finnish Orthodox church, which today counts less than 60,000 members or 1% of the nation's total population continues to thrive today, mainly in eastern parts of Finland. It has some twen-

ty-five parishes, forty-one churches and seventy-seven chapels. In addition to New Valamo, there is another functioning monastery in Heinävesi, the Lintula Holy Trinity (Raivo 2002: 12).

⁸ When released in 1956, the song sold close to 50,000 copies and received Finland's first gold record award. Its centrality in the memory lore of Karelian Finns was recently underscored again in Aki Kaurismäki's acclaimed film, *The Man without a Past* (2002). In this film, personal memories are elevated symbolically to a collective level. The same song is sung again by the now aged singer in a nostalgic scene set significantly on Midsummer Eve, the Finnish "Flag Day", associated with ritualized expressions of the national sentiment.

⁹ Italics are reproduced from Derrida's text.

¹⁰ Anthropologist Ekaterina Melnikova has described the settlers as mostly non-Russian speaking young families with children, recruited from Ukraine, Belarus, the Mordovian and Chuvash autonomous republics, and the Ingrian villages of the Leningrad district (2009: 88).

¹¹ See Loukaki (2010) for a relevant discussion of the *genius loci* as historically contingent.

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