

# LATVIANS IN GUERNSEY

## AN EMERGING TRANSLOCAL LABOR DIASPORA

by **Aija Lulle**

Large-scale emigration is one of the fundamental concerns of post-socialist Latvia: more than 213,000 people have emigrated during the past decade, and in 2012, Latvia's population was barely 2 million, down from the 2.3 million counted in the 2001 census.<sup>1</sup> So roughly 10% of the population, mainly economically active people, left Latvia over the course of just one decade. Emigration peaked after Latvia joined the European Union in 2004, and again during the economic recession that started in late 2008.<sup>2</sup> There are several distinct types of motivation for people to leave the country or choose to shuttle between work abroad and a permanent residence in Latvia: desire to escape from poverty, low salaries, unemployment, underemployment, family reasons, the appeal of a "Western" lifestyle, personal liberation, or a sense of adventure and self-realization.

Guernsey, along with Great Britain and Ireland, has been among the first and most popular places for Latvians to look for work abroad since the mid-1990s. At that time, Latvia had recently established its independence from the Soviet Union and had embarked upon its journey towards accession to the EU. The Channel Islands, which have a unique status as direct territorial dependencies of the British Crown – maintaining their own legislative, monetary, and taxation systems, together with their own parliaments and a governor appointed by the British Crown, and with no

membership in the EU nor in the European Economic Area – are themselves worthy of research as a *world within a world*. As migration scholars underline, these specific insular territories are particularly productive and intense sites for current migration research.<sup>3</sup>

Guernsey, an island of 63.3 square kilometers and around 63,000 inhabitants,<sup>4</sup> mostly of British and Norman descent, is a naturally bounded place, but it is also a shifting and rapidly changing social space due to its experience of different migration rhythms. It should be stressed that Guernsey is a special case due to its restrictive housing regulations and population management in a limited geographical space. Despite, or even because of, those restrictions, research in the insular context allows us to see more clearly some aspects of migration and its associated social dynamics that we might overlook in other, larger territorial contexts.

**IN THIS PAPER** I examine the emergence and continued growth of the Latvian community in Guernsey by looking at recruitment practices, at the evolution of



related geographical and social mobilities as reflected in migrant social networks, and at how all these can be conceived in relation to the translocal time-space of Latvia-Guernsey, with its attendant circuits and rhythms of migration, visiting, and traveling. I suggest that instead of using the language of "sending" and "receiving" countries, it is more fruitful to look at the emergence of a labor diaspora in Guernsey, and in Europe at large, made up of mobile, circulating workers who become

a structural feature of host countries' economies, yet at the same time often remain a population that combines "floating" back and forth with an increasing tendency to set down roots through extended periods of stay and the development of personal relations.

In my discussion of the Latvian migration to Guernsey, I employ a variety of key concepts derived mainly from geographical research on migration. I distinguish first between *migration*, a purposeful move to another place for a significant period, generally motivated by economic reasons as in the case of recent Latvian migration, and *mobility*, which includes shorter visits

**Hierarchies are highly visible on a small island. But they exist everywhere of course.**



Guernsey, approaching from the east.

and vacations. Having made this distinction, we will also see how Latvian movements to and from Guernsey actually blur this division with circular migrations, working vacations, etc. Next, I see migration and mobility as *time-space* events which are articulated within the *translocal* space that is formed by Guernsey and Latvia, and in particular a person's place of origin in Latvia. The concept of translocal geographies involves not only the fact of being situated in different locales over time and across space, but also draws attention to everyday local movements and events in a place outside the country of origin. This approach *grounds* the story of migration and mobilities in particular spaces and places, and across time periods that may express a rhythmic regularity, for instance, nine months in Guernsey and three months in a hometown or village in Latvia; in cases of shorter visits, rhythms of mobility back to Latvia are often aligned with school holidays.

### Interviews and participant observation

Before I go on to develop these theoretical ideas and present some findings, I will briefly explain my methodological approach. The analytical strategy uses a qualitative approach to understand how research participants make sense of their experiences. My main line of analysis is based on interviews and participant

observation: I lived in guesthouses in places where migrants work; I attended clubs and home parties, participated in everyday tasks, helped out in a bar and in greenhouses, took part in leisure activities, went shopping, and traveled together with my participants on the island and between Latvia and Guernsey. Observation of and participation in the daily activities of Latvian migrants provided me with great insights into the materiality and mundane routines of people's lives. More formally, I conducted 96 in-depth interviews in Guernsey between January 2010 and April 2012. Most of the interviews were tape-recorded with the explicit permission of the research participants, while some were conducted without a tape recorder at the wish of the research participant. Some interviews were repeated at different stages of the fieldwork. In addition, I kept a researcher's diary during the fieldwork, gathered visual material by taking pictures of everyday life in Guernsey, and analyzed other sources, including social portal website discussions, the press, and official documents. I reviewed and compared transcripts and notes several times to find interrelated themes and relevant situations in the working lives of the participants and their relationships with places and people in Latvia, and developed my interpretations inductively, looking for what is significant to the research participants themselves.<sup>5</sup> I presented myself as a researcher both in actual encounters and in on-

line discussions, and I was positioned by my research participants as an acquaintance and friend, a known guest, yet simultaneously as a researcher and not as a fellow worker. I was seen as both an insider to the transnational realm (as a Latvian abroad) and an outsider on the island (because I was not really employed there). Moreover, I was positioned as *different* by the state officials, employers, and recruiters I interviewed in Guernsey. "You are the kind of Latvian person who I meet at conferences. I meet Latvians from Riga, from finance, they are more like you. Even if you sound like a Latvian, I would not put you together [with other Latvians in Guernsey]." This is how one of the employers appraised me during an interview, simultaneously drawing a line between the emerging labor diaspora in Guernsey and other Latvians like myself, emphasizing his perception and knowledge of the regional and social inequalities in Latvia that shape different mobilities out of the country in the post-socialist era.

### Aspiring to the material goal of a better life

In most of the interviews, when asked about their lives and how they had decided to come to Guernsey, my research participants stressed that they had not heard of Guernsey initially, and could not even locate it on the map. "I wanted to go abroad to earn money," was

the most typical answer to my question about why they left Latvia. The island itself initially was not as important as a desire to discover what an individual can achieve through the migration strategy; in other words, how much faster one could begin to achieve a material ambition by stepping out from a place in Latvia and earning several times more abroad than one could earn in Latvia.

As noted in the introduction, after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the geopolitical repositioning of Latvia as a former Soviet republic entailed the aspiration to “return to Europe”, a geographical expression of a value of radical individualism as the route to material success and as the measure of social worth. The most significant drivers of Latvia’s fast GDP growth in the mid-2000s (an average of 10% per year) were consumption and mortgage loans rather than investment in industrial enterprises. In the economic recession that followed, with a 14.8% decline in GDP in 2009, many Latvian workers looked for employment abroad because they had to repay mortgage loans at home. For those ordinary Latvian people, Guernsey was one of the places in which they could pursue their ambition to reach a better life faster. Latvian migration to Guernsey, like most migrations, can be visualized through the prism of, for example, shifting temporary moves away from the home area, in relation to the contrasting economic well-being of different territorial units, while subjective well-being was expressed as a feeling of belonging to places in Latvia. For many Latvians, going abroad signified a recognition of a new geography that presented an opportunity to compress the individual’s journey towards a better life. Moreover, the decision to migrate is often narrated as a moment of transition in a person’s life-course and family cycle. In a related sense, it is also a historic moment embedded in the evolution of a nation’s life – in Latvia’s case, the transition from its Soviet socialist past towards neoliberal Europe.

**MY STUDY OF EMIGRATION** from Latvia revealed that the difference in the level of real wages was the main driving force and the most frequent motivation of those with secondary or vocational education and low-paid jobs in Latvia who were more likely to come from outside the capital.<sup>6</sup> I also found that the majority of respondents intended for their emigration to be short-term. Ilze, in her forties, is a mother of two, divorced a year before her departure to England and then Guernsey in 2009. Her main concern was that she needed to provide decent material support for her teenage daughters. She also had monthly mortgage payments for an apartment. Despite holding two jobs in Latvia – in a shop and in a gas station – she could not make ends meet and moved in with her sister and mother in their homestead.

**“We did not see any other solution to paying back loans while I was living alone with the children. I decided to leave the children with my sister and mother. I thought I would earn enough money to repay the loans in a year or so. Now I understand that those were unrealistic dreams.”**

After her first return home, Ilze left for Guernsey again three months later to continue earning abroad



Sergejs and Liilita preparing a flag for the Latvian Independence Day celebration in Guernsey, November 2010.



to cover expenses in Latvia. A recent study showed that most “crisis migrants”, those who left during the recession that started in late 2008, were not only striving to earn more, but had left out of desperation over their unemployment and the burden of mortgage loans.<sup>7</sup>

Almost half of those who have left Latvia during the past decade, more than 100,000, went to Great Britain. Data from the Bank of Latvia on remittances showed that about half of all migrant remittances came from Great Britain in 2011–2012.<sup>8</sup> It is assumed that, on average, migrants send half of the British minimum wage back to Latvia, and spend the other half on their own daily expenses. All together, migrant remittances to Latvia are estimated to amount to 2.5% of Latvia’s gross domestic product.<sup>9</sup> Latvia exemplified the new rhythms of post-1990 East-West mobility. In this new circulatory model, people do not intend to relocate permanently, but rather move back and forth between the UK and their home countries.<sup>10</sup> Migration from the A8 countries, those that joined the EU in 2004, generally had a temporary or circular nature both during the 1990s and after the EU enlargement.<sup>11</sup> Although these observations do not allow us to predict future settlement and mobility patterns, my respondents report strong intentions to return to their country of origin at some point.

In class terms, the core of my research participants can be characterized as erstwhile working class who had few structural opportunities left to earn self-respect through work in Latvia’s rapidly changing labor market. This new labor market witnessed a growing inequality of wages as many industries were dismantled, and growing regional inequalities exacerbated unemployment problems outside the capital, Riga. The country’s geopolitical return to Europe opened up previously inaccessible opportunities in the segmented labor market in Guernsey. The Guernsey option made even greater sense for those who were weak and powerless in the labor market – those not in a position to become rich quickly in their own country, for example by securing well-paid work in the newly privatized economy.

### The emergence of a “permanent temporary community”

Instead of a common migration control regime enacted through residence permits, migration to Guernsey is controlled by a complex system of housing permits. The real estate market in Guernsey is divided into two sectors: the local market, which in 2012 constituted about 94% of all housing, and the remaining approximately 6%, which functions as an open market where the rent in 2012 was at least 50% greater than in the local market. In general, housing permits are linked to specific economic sectors and a person’s qualifications. For example, a person willing to work in the horticultural sector can qualify for a permit allowing him or her to stay on the island for up to nine months per year; the person must spend three months off the island. Most horticultural workers live in hotels or staff houses. In other sectors, such as restaurants and hotels, a person can receive a housing permit for up to three years, and is often provided with accommodation in staff hotels, so that the migrant workers literally live like working guests. Most employment in shops or in geriatric care qualifies the employee for a permit of up to five years, but at the same time, it demands a higher contribution to the economy through rent payments because migrants with these sector-specific work permits must obtain housing on the open market.

Migrant labor is sought in order to maintain certain economic activities on the island, but migrants are accepted only temporarily and only as contributors to the economic growth of the island. This strategy is pursued with the aim of avoiding overpopulation of the island with “outsiders” who are no longer of an economically productive age or are unemployed.

In the mid-1990s, employers in Guernsey’s horticulture sector were seeking migrant labor from their previous main source, the island of Madeira, where the tourism industry was rapidly growing, so that sufficient workers were no longer available. Employers therefore decided to establish contacts with another source country. At the same time, Latvia



The Latvian shop "Jāniši", Mill Street, Guernsey.

had embarked on its "return" to Europe, undergoing profound restructuring, and had just applied for accession to the EU. One employer summed up the situation as follows:

"Basically, at that time, in 1997 [...] somebody suggested: 'Latvia, good workers!' And then we went to an agency and started working with them. [...] In a way it was a bit of luck, because after Madeira it was the first country we tried. It just worked out."

At the beginning, migration to Guernsey was organized by a private recruitment agency. Opportunities to work and earn money were accompanied by specific rules, such as a restricted period of stay on the island. Another restriction was the practice of issuing housing and work permits to single working persons, and there was little inducement to overstay as there were almost no social allowances. These conditions of "managed" migration implied that, instead of a complete human being, an employer received only a productive worker whose reproductive side (including growing up, schooling, sickness, child rearing, and retirement) was left on the other side of the border, off the island. The worker was aware of these rules, and as the guest worker situation has shown both in Europe historically and in Guernsey, this condition of being suspended between two places and two lives, also known as liminality, is constructed by the shared expectation of employers and employees that the latter will leave after the work is completed. These and other regulations were not seen as unacceptable, however, by most of my Latvian informants. On the contrary, they fit well with the people's construction of their life project: to go to work for a short period of time, earn the amount of cash they wanted, and then come back to Latvia to fulfill their dream.

**LATVIANS FORM THE LARGEST** national group of Eastern European migrants in Guernsey, but due to a lack of data, it is impossible to provide reliable numbers. The constant shifting of people back and forth does not



Sabine, arriving in Guernsey by ferry for the first time hoping to find some short-term job for the summer, holding her passport ready for inspection if necessary. June 2011.



Women have packed goods in big bags they want to send home using individual entrepreneurs who provide delivery services between Guernsey and Latvia. June 2011.



A typical room in a dormitory where some women live during their short-term contracts in Guernsey. January 2010.

**A better life. What does this mean? It depends on who you are and what you expect.**

allow us to obtain precise statistical figures, and they are not publicly available by national breakdown. Latvians in Guernsey themselves believe their numbers to be large, and this may be related both to the constant shifting of people creating a multiform “imagined community”,<sup>12</sup> and to their constantly mobile migratory trajectories, which make Latvians cross paths more often with other Latvians than with locals. Some Latvian migrants themselves believe 5,000 to 8,000 to be the average over the decade 1997–2007, with new arrivals replacing those who return to Latvia. The numbers declined in the late 2000s but started climbing again in 2010 with the impact of the severe recession in Latvia. The numbers of housing permits issued are reduced or increased according to the unemployment rate among the permanent population of the island. Depending on the season, there may be 1,500 to 2,000 Latvians present on the island. These numbers crop up in many unrelated interviews and conversations, yet I have not established firm sources for them, nor do I insist that exact numbers are a cornerstone of the Guernsey story. What we can say for certain is that 701 Latvian citizens in Guernsey voted in the referendum against Russian as a second official language in Latvia in February 2012.<sup>13</sup> I treat the lack of exact figures for the number of Latvians in Guernsey as an indicator of the temporary and volatile nature of migration flows. They are a dialogical construction of both the Latvian migrant community in Guernsey and local politics. In this construction, coming and going involves strict control, but also provides some space for maneuvering in alliances among the state, employers, and migrant employees. As an employer explained, “Some come for nine months, some just for ten weeks or three months when we have busy production times. [...] It is better for them as they can go back home to their families.”

**THE FOLLOWING CHRONOLOGICAL** stages of migration evolution can be traced in Guernsey. Organized recruitment commenced from 1997 to 2001 when women, for the most part, were recruited to work in the horticultural sector (greenhouses and related seed-packing factories or individual farms). Recruitment was carried out mainly through a private agency in Latvia but was paid for by the Guernsey employers. Gradually, jobs in the hospitality sector (hotels) were also opened to Latvians. Recruitment in this sector was organized mainly by the same agency. Housing and work permits were issued for nine months.

During the pre-EU-accession years of 2001–2004, recruitment for the horticultural sector continued, and various other sectors were also opened up for both men and women. More diverse housing and work permits were also issued for up to three years. More Latvians started working in the hospitality sector as well – in hotels and restaurants – and in shops, homes for the elderly, warehouses, factories, in construction, and in other work. Parallel to the agency’s efforts, recruitment through social networks spread: settled Latvians invited their relatives and friends to visit them or to work in Guernsey.

The biggest change in time-space rhythms dictated by the regime of work visas emerged after Latvia joined the EU in 2004. Although Guernsey is not part of the EU, it does subscribe to the regulations on the free movement of labor within the European Union



View towards the sea from St. Peter Port.



St. Peter Port, urban landscape.

and the European Economic Area. Migrant workers have typically worked in horticulture, warehouses, cleaning services, homes for the elderly, factories, hotels, restaurants and cafeterias, various shops and services, and construction. A few are employed in the education sector, banks, financial companies, and even governmental institutions, and several have established their own businesses.

**SOME OF THOSE** who had started working in Guernsey in previous years continued to travel back and forth between Latvia and Guernsey. Gunārs, in his forties, originally came from the Liepāja region and went to Guernsey in 2005 due to low wages paid under the table, a rather typical situation in many private enterprises in Latvia.<sup>14</sup> His hours and wages were not fixed, and his income was unstable. Gunārs emphasized that it was “very difficult for me as a man, that feeling that you will not be able to pay [for various expenses]”. He described his unstable income as something that disturbed his sense of self, his masculinity, and his ability to maintain relationships. Gunārs found a job in Guernsey in his profession and worked as a plumber. In the first year, he saved money to launch a new life with his partner in Latvia, but when the relationship went sour he returned to Guernsey. However, he does not want to stay there permanently, nor does he want to move to a third country to work. Gunārs still intends to return to Latvia, as he told me during one of the follow-up interviews in 2012:

**“I have achieved what I planned and I have plans for the future. Two more years and I go back to Latvia for good. If everything continues as it is now.”**

It is difficult to predict whether he will really return, or whether the idea will prove to have been a myth. At present, however, his desire to return to Latvia is strong.

Many migrant workers have changed employment sectors several times and climbed the career ladder in Guernsey. Recruitment was very heterogeneous:

while agency recruitment still continued in the horticultural sector, social networks and individual contacts have clearly become the dominant ways to search for a job due to the increase in information circulating in online social networks. For example, the social Internet portal draugiem.lv<sup>15</sup> (a local competitor to Facebook) is often used by potential migrants to inquire about job opportunities abroad. For those who are familiar with Guernsey, returning is the result of multiple attachment points in addition to those involving work, such as friends and acquaintances who reside there, nature, and a preference for a small, bounded place; while first-time migrants go to the island mostly because there is work. As Jānis, who went to Guernsey in late 2009 and started as a night porter in a hotel explained, “I asked my friends all over the place and wrote letters on draugiem.lv. I asked people to tell me frankly where it would be possible to go without previous contacts or a contract and find a job. I was told that Guernsey is such a place.” Patterns of travel back to Latvia also changed over time: “The first few years, I was always going back to Latvia on vacation; I did not even consider any other place. I was going back home! [...] But now, since my husband is also here, we have had vacations in Spain, in Tenerife, and we usually go to Latvia two times a year for a week or two,” as Ilona, in her fifties, explained.

**TO SUM UP**, the space-time rhythms of migrating, circulating, being on the island, having to leave, and visiting friends and relatives back home – references to which were a constant refrain in the interview narratives I sketched – create a form of collective “permanent temporariness”, while at the same time a more settled labor diaspora of Latvians is emerging on the island. The condition of permanent temporariness reflects a constellation of factors related to legal status, employment opportunities (which are limited to certain types of work with predefined housing and work contract regulations), and the perceived need to keep in touch with “home”. These “rhythmic mobilities” of Latvian migration and mobility to and from Guernsey are explored in more detail in the next section.



Castle Cornet, illuminated in the evening.

## Multiple rhythms and the making of migration time

Hard work, long hours, and frequent switching of jobs within and between employment sectors are all justified by many informants as a part of their overarching purpose: “I am here to work”, and therefore, they believe they are on Guernsey for a limited time. However, in “pendulum migration”, the time spent in Guernsey is usually longer than the time spent in “normal life”: typically, migrants spend nine months in Guernsey and three months in Latvia. As a woman who works in a warehouse said with certainty, “I am here only for work, I live in Latvia!” Yet after reflecting on her “inner” time and “belonging” in relation to linear time, she reformulated the answer: “But [...] actually, it is true that I spend most of my time here”. Yet the everyday rhythms of a person’s lifetime are not usually reflected in this way. The self is perceived through the physical presence in a place, memories, and future intentions, and together these constitute the life-world. For my informants, the variable divisions between time spent in Guernsey and time spent in Latvia make it almost impossible to answer the question “Where do you live?” in a straightforward way.

The length of stay in Guernsey varies considerably: some migrants come for fixed periods (nine months or up to five years, depending on the housing and work permits received), while some come for only one to three months. Many shuttle continuously back and forth between countries, which one research participant, employed in a restaurant business in Guernsey, explained in this way:

**“I am at home every third month. I don’t immerse myself here [in Guernsey]; I don’t want to get attached to a tiny single room here. I have my kitchen and bathroom in Riga. I come [to Guernsey] for 2 or 3 months, buy tickets in advance for May, September, etc. I am never here for too long.”**

Also, visiting friends and relatives becomes a rather

common event embedded in migration cultural practices across the borders. Eva, in her forties, says:

**“I go to visit my mother three or four times a year. I miss my mother; she is very old. I buy tickets well in advance. I also take care of other things I need to do, such as health checkups. But one week at a time is enough. [...] I might add some extra time if friends are getting married or something like that is happening.”**

If the migrants do not return to Latvia, relatives and friends come to visit them in Guernsey, so the island has become a multi-directional, transnational meeting place. Moreover, even when migrants “stay put”, Latvia and Guernsey are brought together through material things. There are heavy flows of goods back and forth, and several companies have been established to convey goods bought in Guernsey to Latvia, mainly presents to family and friends, while presents, personal belongings, and food made in Latvia flow back to Guernsey on a much smaller scale. Latvians’ beloved black bread and even homemade meatballs arrive in Guernsey in about two days via the migrant workers’ transportation routes, which have already become institutionalized practices. Also, communication between Latvia and Guernsey is intensive in everyday life: even if migrants are not mobile for some period of time, they are constantly in touch with Latvia via Skype, e-mail, text messages, and telephone.

Most migrants have several part-time jobs and are locally mobile on the island. For example, my informant Maija works full-time in a managerial position in a department store, but early in the morning, late at night, and on weekends she cleans houses and also works in a restaurant. In many cases, different forms of social mobility – having several jobs, moving from work in horticulture to hospitality and services, or changes in family status – intersect with geographical mobility on the island, and have the effect of changing the rhythms of visits to friends and relatives in Latvia.

In addition to this social-geographical intersection,

it should be noted that social security and “better jobs”, e.g. jobs in the financial sector or with government agencies, are more easily available if a person has a “stable” attachment to the island. In most cases, this implies being married or cohabiting with a local person. Thus intimate and personal relationships, as soon as they are officially announced to the authorities, become a powerful vehicle of social mobility and enhanced stability on the island.

Temporary translocal rhythms of movement are governed from above by specific regulations in Guernsey, such as work contracts and housing permits on the island, but some employers routinely invite people back after they have spent the compulsory period off the island that makes them eligible for a new housing permit, often described by my informants as “an empty time” or “waiting time” in Latvia. In other cases, Guernsey is constructed as “our place” through gradually learned knowledge of the island. Ilva for example, in her forties, explained why she and her family returned after an interlude in Latvia and in Bradford, England, even though there was no work waiting for them on the island: “When everything went down [referring to the onset of the recession], we thought, let’s go to Guernsey again, at least we know the place and with luck we’ll find some work there!” Also, although workers often expect to stay on the island temporarily or come back regularly until the target (usually a financial one) is reached, for many the target often becomes more and more distant or changes in various ways: the house requires more expensive repairs, so more years abroad are needed to make the regular mortgage payments, or a son or daughter, having reached a certain age, needs support to go on to university or further education.

The anticipated and imagined rhythms of possible return are also subject to alteration due to the changes in life-course and family care rhythms: when children have to be sent to school, or the retirement age has been reached, Latvia can become the place where movement is suspended and turned into a *pause*.<sup>16</sup> Zelma explained her mobility project in the following way: “I have been here for eight years already and I am 62 years old. I will stick with my work here at least two more years to get a minimum old-age pension from Guernsey, and only then can think about returning to Latvia.”

**TIME MANAGEMENT** is seldom the same year after year: in order to transform the “empty time” in one’s life and overcome the binary opposition of family in Latvia and work in Guernsey, people also strategically manipulate various systems of time-space discipline.<sup>17</sup> For example, schoolchildren and students in Latvia have three months break during the summer, which coincides with the time tourists are allowed to stay on the island without a permit. So migrants bring their children and relatives to the island and choose a different period for their own vacation to extend the time spent together, thereby making the migrant’s space less fragmented in both locations. Those established more permanently in Guernsey often use Latvia as a long summer vacation time-space. Furthermore, the strategies employed to expand or compress migration time and reach a “normal” life back in Latvia also change. Wages earned abroad become an integral part of a household budget, and work options in Latvia are

no longer considered even if there are vacancies and it is possible to earn sufficient income. In other cases, children whose studies were paid for in Latvia accompany their parents and become migrant workers themselves on the island.

In various local and translocal spatial mobilities and representations of spaces, people also “make” time. For example, many create a specific “time of migration” by perceiving their transnational interlude as “time off” from “real life” in Latvia. The latter is less financially rewarding, but ultimately the place where their habitus fits their environment of everyday rooted normality. To be able to cross borders was a dream which simultaneously created the path of return – imagined or real. Yet the migrants return as different selves – richer, and in a better social position both in their own and in others’ eyes. In that sense, the “return” to Europe was a strategic and provisional mobility – actually, a vehicle for the opposite: a “return” to European Latvia. The period of work abroad promises rewards in a compressed time calculation, hastening the achievement of broader life-goals that could not be realized within Latvia, but would ultimately be enjoyed there. However, an idea of actual return is constantly evaluated in relation to the new capitalist rhythms of Latvia, where instability and crisis prevent return and instead motivate people to continue their translocal travel and affective attachments beyond the scale of the state, or to settle outside Latvia more permanently.

## Conclusion

Through a translocal description of one particular migration circuit, I have shown in this paper how the temporality and continuation of migration is produced and how a labor diaspora of Latvians in Guernsey has emerged through the intersections of various migratory rhythms. A small island is not limitless, and multiple regulatory spaces control the scale and nature of the flow and settlement of migrants on the island of Guernsey. The temporality of migrants’ space in Guernsey is a result of regulations that have both local and transnational ramifications. The presence of a highly mobile Latvian community in Guernsey can be perceived as a process of permanent temporariness: Guernsey’s housing and work permit laws stipulate the constant rotation of migrants, but place-specific attachments and subjectivities also encourage some people to move continuously back and forth. Individuals may only be in Guernsey for a short time, yet Latvians as a migrant community have already become established and are permanently present there.

Translocal spatial practices, by their very definition, exceed national territories, and most of my research participants themselves avoid entanglements with state institutions. Meanwhile, the issue of broader political rights is not on the agenda of Latvian migrants in Guernsey because they perceive themselves as being on the island only temporarily, “just to work”.

Through showing some examples of how time-space and life-course rhythms shape various mobilities in places, I have suggested that current international migration and identity formations can be better grasped not just by looking at the national scale but must also focus on translocal and local-local interactions: work, family and friends, and place-based

experiences. Moreover, the translocal lens does not undermine the importance of space politics that is exercised on national or global scales; on the contrary, a grounded approach to studying concrete experiences in specific places allows spatial practices to be seen in more detail. As both the Latvian case and the general migration literature suggest, by choosing to work abroad instead of exerting pressure on nation-state institutions to improve employment opportunities, wages and living conditions, the migration culture not only emerges as a significant part of post-socialist society, but it also enforces the *status quo*: individual households rely on foreign wages translocally, and the state benefits from remittances that sustain the national balance of payments.<sup>18</sup> However, this is potentially a dangerous and fragile dependency, especially in a small country like Latvia.

Understanding the large scale of emigration as a matter of national concern, in 2012 the political institutions in Latvia adopted a Return Migration plan with the aim of attracting back some of those who have left.<sup>19</sup> This may seem an economically rational idea, and it certainly fits in with a wider international migration discourse of “mobilizing” the diaspora to return in order to kick-start development in countries that have been denuded by what is seen as excessive migration. And in Latvia’s case, there is the additional specter of demographic collapse due to the combination of mass emigration and sub-replacement fertility. But my case-study evidence presented in this paper also stresses the importance of a more realist, relational approach based on a critical study of emigration realities shaped by the unique translocal rhythms that have developed over time to link the two places in question. These attachments and mobilities are governed partly by the regulatory regimes of the insular host society of Guernsey and partly by the personalized aspirations of the migrants for social mobility, their emotional links to Latvia as “home”, and their family and care responsibilities in multiple localities. ✕

Note: All essays are scholarly articles and have been peer-reviewed by specialists under the supervision of Baltic Worlds’ editorial advisory board.

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- 14 The shadow economy, defined as “all legal production of goods and services that is deliberately concealed from public authorities”, accounted for 21.1% of the GDP in Latvia in 2012, and was even higher in previous years: 30.2% in 2011, 38.1% in 2010, and 36.6% in 2009. Non-taxed wages, usually paid in cash, constitute the largest proportion – 42.9% of the shadow economy of Latvia in 2009–2012. The next component is unreported profit, 39.5%. Finally, unreported employees make up the remainder, which accounts for 17.6% of the shadow economy in Latvia. See Arnis Sauka and Tālis Putniņš, *Shadow Economy Index for the Baltic countries 2009–2012* (Riga: Stockholm School of Economics, 2013): 6–13.
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