

Article

Post-Soviet Trauma in the Nordic Imagination: Occupation and Sex Trafficking in *Purge* and *Lilya 4-Ever**



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ABSTRACT

The traumas of the twentieth century affected the development of trauma narrative in literature and cinema. Much of the trauma theory in different disciplines developed largely from the Holocaust literature as well as from gender-based violence. The criticism of many examples in contemporary trauma theory has been that they are applicable only to Western countries and do not take into account the difficult transitions between the non-Western and Western world. The countries that had gone through a brutal occupation of the Soviet Union also experienced the trauma of transformation, as whole societies turned into post-Soviet nations next to the developed Nordic/Western states. This article will examine the representations of trauma in Sofi Oksanen's fictional narrative *Purge* (*Puhdistus*, 2008) and Lukas Moodysson's cinematic narrative *Lilya 4-Ever* (*Lilja 4-ever*, Sweden/Denmark, 2002) and offer an analysis of the trauma of transitions in the borderland between the post-Soviet and Nordic countries. Both Oksanen and Moodysson, as observers from the Nordic countries (Finland and Sweden respectively), have chosen to depict the post-Soviet trauma through a female body which is trapped in forced prostitution in Western Europe or Scandinavia and her emotions and reactions to her trauma. This article will argue that both authors contribute to the post-Cold War discourse that discusses the cultural borders between "East" and "West", presenting a trauma of globalisation, drawing attention to unspoken subjects, but also contributing to the existing views of post-Soviet spaces as ruined and traumatising.

The twentieth century brought traumatic experiences to many countries in the world. Trauma theory that started developing in various disciplines at the end of the nineteenth century became crucial in analysing the survival narratives of the century. Roger Luckhurst writes in *The Trauma Question*, "[i]n its shock impact trauma is anti-narra-

tive, but it also generates the manic production of retrospective narratives that seek to explicate the trauma" (2008: 79). According to Luckhurst, in addition to the massive amount of autobiographical literature on Holocaust and Gulag experiences, the fictional narrative attempts to represent traumatic violence in ways that autobiography

and history cannot (*ibid.*: 97). He also claims that cinematic narratives “help organize popular conceptions of what trauma does to subjectivity” (*ibid.*: 208). The aim of this article is to examine representations of trauma in Sofi Oksanen’s fictional narrative *Purge* (Puhdistus, 2008) and Lukas Moodysson’s cinematic narrative *Lilya 4-Ever* (*Lilja 4-ever*, Sweden/Denmark, 2002). Oksanen’s *Purge* was also made into a film in 2012, however, in this article I will not analyse the film version of *Purge*, since it is an adaptation of the narrative. Instead, I will focus on analysing the original narratives of the novel *Purge* and the film *Lilya 4-Ever*. While being aware of the complexity of comparing two different modes of media – a film and a novel – I argue that the narrative of both works allows their audiences to analyse them as representing the collective trauma of the post-Soviet nations through the sufferings of individuals. Both authors contribute to the post-Cold War discourse that discusses the cultural borders between “East” and “West”, presenting a trauma of globalisation, drawing attention to unspoken subjects, but also contributing to the existing views of post-Soviet spaces as ruined and traumatising.

While Oksanen has a personal connection to Estonia and has devoted three of her novels¹ to the traumatic history of Estonia, both she and the Swedish filmmaker Moodysson are outsiders, distant witnesses to the traumas of the Soviet occupation and post-Soviet struggles of the countries formerly behind the Iron Curtain. Both Oksanen and Moodysson have chosen to depict the post-Soviet trauma through a female body that is trapped in forced prostitution in Western Europe or Scandinavia and her emotions and reactions to her trauma. These rather melodramatic narratives have raised questions in the post-Soviet countries (particularly in Estonia, where both stories take place) of whether such

a traumatic image of the life there is necessary². Both Oksanen and Moodysson have stated clearly their intentions in drawing attention to the trauma of sex trafficking and gender violence in post-Soviet countries, as well as in their own Nordic countries. Andrew Nestingen calls *Lilya 4-Ever* a “melodrama of demand”, which he defines as challenging “the understanding of nation by engaging struggles over ethnicity and transnationalism” (2008: 113). Päivi Lappalainen has expanded Nestingen’s analysis to prose literature, arguing that the narrative in *Purge* is another version of the “melodrama of demand” (2011: 276).

According to Nestingen’s analysis of crime fiction and fantasy in the Nordic countries, melodrama of demand became one of the characteristics of Nordic fiction in the twentieth century. A major argument in his book is that the “Nordic region is undergoing a transformative struggle over moral order” and that in the midst of changes, between national borders “popular culture has become a forum for struggling over these changes by creating, discussing, and contesting the self-representation of nation” (Nestingen 2008: 6). Both *Purge* and *Lilya 4-Ever* are participating in this new forum where the trauma of the Other from the poverty of the post-Soviet spaces enters the Nordic cultural space. The narratives by Oksanen and Moodysson add a different perspective to the discussion, focusing on the representation of the post-Soviet nation among the Nordic or Western nations and on how certain images of post-Soviet nations have been created. They have also tried to understand the self-representation of these post-Soviet nations, but they have done so with their Nordic

1 Stalin’s Cows (*Stalinin lehmät*, 2003), *Purge*, and *When the Doves Disappeared* (*Kun kyyhkyset katosivat*, 2012).

2 Jaan Kaplinski comments on *Purge* in his blog, “Our life in the Soviet Union was not a horror story! Of course, there were many horrific episodes, years of terror and counter-terror, but as a whole, we lived a life that was often quite interesting and funny.” (Kaplinski 2010) Piret Tali writes in a review that an author, grown up in the welfare state has used the savory pain of a suffering small nation to gain international success by molding the history of her distant and unknown motherland into a modern literature in Finnish or in French (Tali 2010). Ruta Nömmela sees *Lilya 4-Ever* as a portrayal of terrifying life in the Eastern Europe (Nömmela 2002).

backgrounds. Magdalena J. Zabrowska, Sibelan Forrester, and Elena Gapova theorise about the crises of post-Cold War representations in the continuing differentiation between the “East” and the “West”, and point to the symbol of the Iron Curtain as a theatre curtain that has now been lifted and separates the stage from the Western audience (2004: 13). In their works, both Oksanen and Moodysson place their characters on this post-Soviet stage, along with the ruined and decayed surroundings and conditions of that stage.

The post-Soviet stage of *Lilya 4-Ever* and *Purge* is mostly located in Estonia, but the inspiration of these narratives is transnational. Moodysson bases part of his narrative on the true story of a Lithuanian girl Danguolė Rasalaitė. Oksanen uses the memoirs and oral history of wartime sexual violence in different countries. However, Moodysson decided at the last minute not to name the location of the film at all, calling it vaguely “somewhere where the Soviet Union used to be” (Moodysson 2002). Therefore, the trauma of post-Soviet spaces does not explicitly represent the trauma of the Estonians, Russians, or Lithuanians. It is intended to have a broader reach, creating a space between the former Eastern Bloc and the Western welfare states. The wartime violence, global trauma of sex trafficking, as well as the cultural traumas of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are probably present everywhere in the world, but in this article, I will use the example of Estonia, as a borderline space, located next to the Nordic countries and with a history of desiring to be part of the Nordic countries. Mart Kuldkepp writes that at the beginning of the twentieth century, with their pre-national memory and geopolitical convictions, “Estonians were building up their own national identity as a people with a Nordic past and a Nordic future” (2013: 326). The Soviet occupation disrupted the development of this identity for almost fifty years. Marko Lehti writes that after the collapse of Soviet Union, Estonia felt the urgent need to reconnect to everything “Western” and move away from any-

thing “Eastern”, whereas “the existence of the Baltic countries was almost completely forgotten by the Finnish public during the Cold War years” (2003: 15).

In analysing these texts, I will treat them as narratives of trauma. While looking at the individual stories of the female protagonists who suffer from sexual violence, and their narratives composed by the Nordic authors, it would make sense to rely on Western trauma theories, which developed largely from Holocaust literature as well as from women being more vocal about sexual violence. Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman (1991) as well as Judith Herman (1997) among others have emphasised the importance of listening to the traumas, and providing a space for the testimony to escape the silence. In her often cited *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth analyses how traumatic events are represented in literature as repeating and haunting if not dealt with, and how, for a human being, survival becomes “an endless testimony to the impossibility of living” (1996: 62). Recently, this trauma theory has been criticised for being applicable only to Western countries, and for ignoring the non-Western, in this case also the former Soviet, countries. Stef Craps writes that trauma theory should be more globalised and should not be limited to the empires (the Holocaust in Europe and 9/11 in the USA), “if trauma theory is to redeem its promise of cross-cultural ethical engagement, the sufferings of those belonging to non-Western or minority cultures must be given due recognition” (2014: 46). According to Craps, one of the differences is that trauma can often be prolonged and not be connected to a single event, and in some instances, the possibly traumatising events might not affect the whole collective body. Therefore, when looking at the collective trauma of the post-Soviet nations, I do not wish to limit the analysis to the Western trauma theory, but will also rely on Piotr Sztompka’s suggestion that any kind of change in society, if considered “traumatogenic”, produces trauma. According to Sztompka, in addition to the forceful

domination of one culture, a more peaceful spreading of an alien culture (cultural globalisation, McDonaldisation, etc.) can also acquire a traumatic meaning (2004: 162).

TRAUMA OF THE PAST

Oksanen's *Purge* was first published in 2008 in Finnish and in 2010 in English. It has since been translated into more than 30 languages, receiving several prizes and extensive media attention. Most of the narrative is dedicated to the life of Aliide, who was raped by Soviet officers during the Soviet occupation and, in order to protect herself from further attack, betrays her family and people by marrying a communist named Martin and signing a document to have her sister Ingel and niece Linda deported to Siberia, because she is secretly in love with Ingel's husband Hans. Hans is part of the resistance movement and is hiding from the Soviets in a bunker inside Ingel and Aliide's childhood home. The more contemporary portions of the novel are set in 1992; a year after the collapse of the Soviet Union and, through flashbacks and Hans's diary entries, the reader uncovers Aliide's story as well as the traumatic experiences of Zara, Ingel's granddaughter who has grown up in Siberia. The latter has gotten trapped in a sex trafficking ring in Germany and found a way to escape to Aliide's house in Läänemaa, Estonia. This article will focus on Zara's story, but since the trauma of the past is so connected to Zara's trauma of present, I will also consider the depiction of Aliide's trauma.

The readers meet Aliide and Zara at the end of their traumatic journeys – Aliide is hiding in her house looking out the window, and Zara is lying in her yard in the middle of the “overgrown [grass] and mute” (Oksanen [2008] 2010: 7). The existence of trauma in both their lives is obvious. During the next three hundred pages, the readers relive the traumatic events with Aliide and Zara. Aliide's memories play an important role in her reliving her trauma. She has tried to forget the shame of her body being brutally invaded and all the wrong choices she has made. She expresses her unwillingness

to remember, “Those who poke around in the past will get a stick in their eye” (Oksanen [2008] 2010: 93), but she does remember. She looks at Zara, covered with bruises, and she remembers the same bruises on her skin, the shame of being invaded, and acting against all her convictions, she lets Zara into her house and into her life.

Violence against women in the 1940s in wartime Estonia has been touched upon in only a few works (for instance, Imbi Paju's *Memories Denied/Tõrjutud mälestused*, 2005), but the rape scenes that are depicted in *Purge* illustrate how the minds and bodies of the Estonian people were imprisoned. Since many Estonian men were hiding in the forest, the women who were suspected of co-operating with them, or of undermining the image of the Soviet Union in any way, had to be silenced. One of the most efficient methods for keeping these perceived threats from surfacing was rape³. Rape is a direct and psychological invasion of someone's body, and is often hushed up by the victims themselves, due to shame. Annemiek Richters writes, “rape can be considered the final symbolic expression of the humiliation of the male opponents who are not able to protect ‘their’ women (rape as a messenger of defeat)” (1998: 117). Thus, rape brings shame and humiliation to both the victims and the people (usually men) who were not able to defend the women. Shame, in most cases, causes silence and helps the dominant powers in their goal to terrorise, traumatise, silence, and erase memory.

The act of the officers invading Aliide's body is a turning point for her. On one level, it is an intensely traumatic experience for Aliide, the rape victim, in a totalitarian regime; on another level, since Aliide represents Estonia in this narrative, it can also

3 See further discussion on rape and sexual violence during wartime in *War's Dirty Secret* (2000) by Anne Llewellyn Barstow. Some of the examples from around the world include: the rape of Nanking in 1937 resulting in about 300,000 deaths out of which many women were first raped; extensive sexual abuse and rape in the Bosnia-Herzegovina war; the Rwandan genocide and Guatemalan war.

be read as a metaphor for the invasion of Estonian territory by foreign powers. The detailed description of the rape hints that Aliide, who was taken from the forest, a sacred place for Estonians, and dragged to the town hall to be interrogated and raped, kept her spirit alive by thinking of the roots and moles under the floor. Her behaviour after the incident reflects shame, and by trying to distract her thoughts by counting different styles of stockings, Aliide represents a typical victim of sexual violence. She cannot forget what has happened, and when she is taken back to the interrogation room with Linda and Ingel, and has to abuse Linda, the presence of Ingel and Linda as witnesses to her powerlessness, and the guilt of having to hurt Linda, increases her shame.

Two of the emotions experienced most often in trauma are shame and guilt. Judith Herman writes, “[s]hame is a response to helplessness, the violation of bodily integrity, and the indignity suffered in the eyes of another person” (1997: 53). Guilt is very similar for both the victims of rape and the traumatised soldiers, and in most cases, it is the victims rather than the perpetrators who experience guilt, since the feeling of not having done as well as one could seems more tolerable than the feeling of complete helplessness (*ibid.*: 53). A victimised person feels shame before the perpetrator and anyone who might potentially witness the attack, due to the complete loss of power and dignity over herself. As a result of this trauma, Aliide’s shame makes her turn away from anything and anyone that remind her of this shame. Sara Ahmed writes in her discussion about the cultural politics of emotions, “[t]he very physicality of shame – how it works on and through bodies – means that shame also involves de-forming and re-forming bodily and social spaces, as bodies ‘turn away’ from the others who witness the shame” (2004: 103). Aliide gets rid of Ingel and Linda, the witnesses closest to her shame, who she has the power to eliminate after marrying the communist Martin, and she avoids women on the street who she recognises as having gone through a

similar trauma. Decades later, she finds a familiar representation of trauma in her yard. Zara – whose trauma has been affected by the Soviet past and deportations, a past that has made her a victim of sex trafficking – has experienced the same trauma and shame of having her body violated.

TRAUMA OF SEX TRAFFICKING: ZARA AND LILYA

While Aliide experiences the brutal violence of the occupying officers invading her body to show their power over her and over her country, as well as to send a message to the men of her country that they are unable to defend their women, in the present-day trauma, it is again almost exclusively the women’s bodies that are invaded daily in sex trafficking. The role and position of women in both the Western and post-Soviet societies has changed greatly during the last century, but it is still the female bodies that suffer sexual violence. This trauma has become more global, reaching across borders and affecting different societies.

Zara has grown up in Siberia, where her mother and grandmother were deported from Estonia in 1949. After the collapse of Soviet Union, Zara is invited to work in Germany, but gets trapped in a sex trafficking ring. After working as a sex slave for months, she is able to travel to Estonia with her traffickers, kill one of her customers and escape to her great aunt Aliide’s house. Zara’s experience fits well with the theoretical understanding of trauma that, according to Cathy Caruth, is not a simple and healable event, but instead a repetitive action that haunts the survivor and only then reveals how traumatic it has been (1996: 4). In addition to the memories, and believing that her traffickers were right when they said she is good for nothing but being a prostitute, Zara realises how the traumatic experience has changed her. “She tried to reproduce the voice she sometimes used a long time ago when she ran into an old acquaintance on the street or in a shop. A voice that felt far away and strange, completely unfitted to the body that it came

from. It reminded her of a world she didn't belong to, a home she could never return to." (Oksanen [2008] 2010: 22) Zara's trauma has resulted in "othering" her in all the spaces where she used to feel, or could have felt, she belonged. The way that prostitutes are looked down on, whether or not they have been forced into prostitution, creates double shame in her body. Zara seems to know that her home community will never accept her, and in the new country, she will always be looked down on as a prostitute. She experiences the shame of the exposure and violence acted upon her body, the traumatic experience that she cannot put into words.

Trauma affects bodies through the feelings of shame and fear that silence the victims. According to Annemiek Richters, in all situations rape involves silencing and domination (1998: 112). Victims that remain silence contribute to their own domination, since in silence their shame and trauma are never resolved. Pierre Bourdieu writes that the structures of domination are always reproducing, since not only the singular agents and institutions, but also the dominated themselves contribute to them, which makes the domination seem natural, and can result in a "systematic self-deprecation, even self-denigration" ([1998] 2001: 35). Later, when Zara has already escaped the physical violence of her traffickers, she starts to question if one of them, Pasha, might have been right and thinks, "[m]aybe there really was something wrong with her – an inherent flaw. Maybe she really was good for nothing." (Oksanen [2008] 2010: 65) Thus, the domination of the sex traffickers is affecting her even when she is no longer directly under their power. She fears they will find her and has yet to resolve her shame. Sara Ahmed has pointed out in her discussion of shame that it always involves the others, the witnesses of shame (2004: 105) and Zara sees herself through the eyes of Aliide, her family, her potential boyfriend back home, and that makes her feel more embarrassed and disconnected. By "othering" herself, she too contributes to her own domination.

A similar domination and disconnection from the community caused by trauma are portrayed in Moodysson's 2002 film *Lilya 4-Ever*. Lilya (Oksana Akinshina) lives in a ruined town "somewhere that was once part of the Soviet Union", and the film is shot in Paldiski, a town in Estonia where a Soviet military based was located during the Soviet occupation. Lilya's mother leaves her to go to America, and her decision to give up her parenthood as well as Lilya's aunt's comments allow to assume that she continues her work as a prostitute there. Lilya tries to survive alone (with some help from her aunt), and at first, tries to avoid her mother's occupation, but ultimately still tries being a prostitute in a Tallinn night club. She gets lured into sex trafficking in Sweden, and realises it too late. She, too, manages to escape, but trusting no one in the new country, she commits suicide.

In Lilya's narrative, the audience also relives the traumatic experiences with the protagonist. In the first scene, Lilya is running in Sweden, looking panicked with her face beaten up. It is only after that scene that the viewers witness Lilya's traumatic story, almost as a flashback that Lilya could be having while running towards the bridge in Sweden. One of the strongest emotions Lilya experiences in her trauma is powerlessness. Throughout her time in Paldiski, she has tried to regain some power, and money plays an important role in this power play. Her trips to a local store are shown three times. Each time she is strongly impacted by her ability or inability to make a purchase. When she does not have enough money, her expression reflects embarrassment and anger; and when she has enough money, she smiles victoriously, enjoying the surprised reaction of the shopkeeper. However, once Lilya gets trapped in sex trafficking, she no longer has any power. Her body becomes one of the objects in, as Bourdieu puts it, "the market of symbolic goods" ([1998] 2001: 42). She is no longer able to trade, buy, or sell; instead she is being traded, bought, and sold.

As a contrast to the small local store in Paldiski, her trafficker takes her to a bright

mall in Malmö that has a large selection, but Lilya cannot buy anything there. In an interview, Moodysson commented on this sequence by saying “[s]he is being sold in the same market, but just in a darker corner” (O’Hagan 2003). She has become one of the goods in the diverse Western market and her customers, representing the upper, middle, and lower classes (businessmen with families and houses, and lonely men in small apartments) all contribute to her domination. Melissa Farley writes that according to one survivor, prostitution is “paid rape” (2006: 102). To simplify, the difference between sex trafficking and prostitution in this case is simply who is getting paid. According to Jennifer Suchland’s analysis of *Lilya 4-Ever*, Moodysson does simplify, since Lilya’s experience with sex trafficking seems to be very clearly connected to prostitution, therefore giving the film an anti-prostitution perspective (2013: 367). However, this simplification results in all prostitution being shown as traumatising and Moodysson thereby contributes to the stereotypes that he might want to break – i.e. in post-Soviet spaces poverty always leads to prostitution and prostitution always leads to sex slavery.

Lilya does not live very long after she has escaped the traumatising conditions, but the viewers are still given a glimpse of it. Before she jumps from the bridge, in addition to feeling helpless and powerless, she also feels shame. The shame of being naive enough to believe Andrei (Pavel Ponomarev), her sex-trafficker, of leaving her only friend Volodya (Artyom Bogucharski) in Paldiski (possibly causing his suicide), and the shame of being exposed to different customers every day and of becoming the absolute Other in a foreign country with no identification and no belief that anyone can help. Similarly to Zara’s traffickers, Lilya’s dominators know how shame works. They know that she would not want to face her community with the reputation she now has. This is another example of the stereotypes in the societies that also contribute to the domination. It is assumed that Lilya is destined to become a prostitute even before

she decides to try selling her body, because her mother is one (and Lilya’s aunt even suggests she do so).

The structures of domination are reproduced, and the assumptions and stereotypes contribute quite directly to other traumatic events in Lilya’s life. Trauma creates helplessness and shame, and as a response, Lilya turns away from anything that she has had faith in, including religion, as she throws away the picture of an angel that she always cared for. According to Judith Herman, people who have encountered trauma, seek their “first source of comfort and protection. Wounded soldiers and raped women cry out for their mothers, or for God and when this cry is unanswered, their sense of basic trust is shattered” (1997: 52). Lilya’s trauma begins when her mother leaves her. Everyone she trusts, except for Volodya, betrays her. Thus, later, when she is repeatedly experiencing trauma, being invaded by different customers every day, she has no one to turn to. Her trauma remains in isolation and silence, except for Volodya, who, as “a ghost” wearing angel wings appears to Lilya in her dreams to help her face her trauma.

THERAPIST FROM THE PAST

The narratives of Lilya and Zara are similar. Each of them carries a transgenerational (to use Luckhurst’s description of haunting secrets of trauma that reach across generations) traumatic past. The collapse of the Soviet Union has a traumatising effect for them too. They have both lived in poor circumstances in their homes in the post-Soviet spaces, and they have both gone to Western/Nordic countries, not thinking that they could end up trapped in sex trafficking. Zara’s story, however, has a different ending, since she has always believed she would find Aliide, and that faith has helped her stay strong while being trafficked. However, Zara’s appearance in Aliide’s yard is rather unreal. It is almost so unbelievable that she could be seen as a “ghost” from Aliide’s past. Zara assumes the role of witness/therapist for Aliide, since, to Aliide’s surprise, she is sincerely interested in Aliide’s story and

unlike many others in Aliide's community, Zara is not after her money or the various Finnish products Aliide hides in her chest of drawers. She needs a place to hide from her traffickers, but she also wants to know Aliide's story.

At first, Zara also tries to hide her trauma and shame from Aliide, but because her traffickers reveal pictures of Zara as a prostitute, Aliide becomes a witness to her story. According to Shoshana Felman's theory on testimony and witnessing, "[t]estimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking to *somebody*: to somebody they have been waiting for a long time" (1992: 70; emphasis in the original). Realising what Zara has gone through, and how personally she is connected to her, Aliide reveals more of her shame to Zara, than she has ever done before. Maybe that disclosure gives her the strength to stand up to Pasha and Lavrenti, Zara's traffickers, and shoot them to save Zara. In nature, near her forest – "[i]sn't it nice? The Estonian forest. My forest." (Oksanen [2008] 2010: 352) – she kills the two oppressors who via Zara's narrative and trauma are also remnants from Aliide's past. "Lavrenti's boots still shone. A soldier's boots." (*ibid.*: 353) Not only has Aliide been able to share and try to recover from her traumatic past (after Zara leaves, she writes a letter to Ingel) and save Zara's life, she has also been able to break the domination of the officers that has accompanied her daily throughout most of her life after the rape in the interrogation room.

Zara has become the witness to and listener of Aliide's story. Dori Laub has written about the different levels that a witness has. One level is "being a witness to oneself within the experience" (Laub, Felman 1991: 75). The witness, often in a form of a therapist, always has her own personal story and the way that she understands and is able to witness the trauma is always affected by her personal experience. Zara, who has been made to believe that she is nothing, and that she deserves nothing, is able to understand Aliide's shame better than most of the people in her village, and performs

the role of therapist for her. Her own experience with trauma has allowed her to relate to Aliide's shame. Her story, too, has affected Aliide and helped her uncover her shame. Zara does not express hatred towards Aliide, even after finding out that she might have been party to her grandmother being sent to Siberia. Zara just asks questions and listens, and by witnessing Aliide's shame, which has been hidden and therefore grown for decades, Zara comes to understand how strongly not talking could have affected her. However, even though Zara has acted as a therapist in Aliide's life, Aliide still kills herself in the end. She does not find recovery, but manifests the ultimate "turning away" from herself (Ahmed 2004: 104). Zara has helped Aliide out of her silence, but not affected her the way a therapist would hope to. Maybe it is because Zara's appearance in Aliide's yard is too unbelievable. If she is just a "ghost" from Aliide's past then she does not actually exist, and cannot bring Aliide recovery.

In many ways, Lilya's trauma has been similar to Zara's, but the loss of trust and the powerlessness that she feels in a completely foreign country without any identification, makes it worse for her. The appearance of Volodya, Lilya's dead childhood friend, in Lilya's dreams is also unreal. Volodya, who in his lifetime also suffered from the trauma of abandonment, wants to prevent her from jumping from the building to commit suicide. He tries to remind her of her past in Paldiski and how she never let bullies bother her; "[i]t is the same now. Everyone is spitting at you, but you're not ready. Jump if you want... But then you lose. And the assholes that spit at you win. You see?" Volodya shows Lilya that he does not condemn her, that he understands her shame, her loss of faith in everything. Similarly to Zara's encounter with Aliide, Lilya's actions change after the conversation with Volodya. She rebelliously draws herself an ugly face, tries to stand up to a customer, and escape from the trafficker's car. All of these attempts to regain power fail, and Lilya finds herself in the apartment, beaten up. Volodya appears again, witnessing her

trauma and telling her that the door is unlocked. The only sentence that Lilya says in the end, is “where do I go?” a question encapsulating her entire trauma. She is in Sweden, a welfare state, a land of freedom, and she has nowhere to go. She feels ashamed, hopeless, and helpless. “I’ve had it with this life. It’s complete shit. I don’t want this life. I’m not interested.” Talking to Volodya has helped her realise what she could have done differently at home, and in her mind, she tries to make it right. She also knows that Volodya, who has witnessed her shame and listened to her, does not judge her; he will always be her friend. Volodya also acts like a therapist for Lilya. His questions try to lead her away from her thoughts of suicide. However, he, too, is just a memory, a “ghost” from the past, supernatural and nonexistent. Therefore, like Aliide, Lilya does not find recovery, but commits suicide.

TRAUMA OF GLOBALISATION

All three female protagonists, Aliide, Zara, and Lilya suffer from sexual violence that causes individual trauma, but their stories also carry in them a broader cultural trauma. Brinton Tench Coxe writes that Lilya’s urban world is depicted as “a kind of forgotten space where the Soviet past is an image that lingers in the present” (2010: 37). In both *Purge* and *Lilya 4-Ever*, the Soviet past lingers in the nature or the urban spaces. In *Purge*, the female body is connected to the land and forest. It is also something that is sold, abused, and dominated. Zabrowska, Forrester and Gapova argue that “the booming East-West marriage market and the demand for “white” Eastern e-mail-order brides prove beyond a doubt that the post-1989 era is gendered and sexualized” (2004: 15). Both *Purge* and *Lilya 4-Ever* represent the sexualisation of the post-Soviet era and spaces.

Sofi Oksanen, who is writing her narrative as an outsider from Finland, has said in one of her interviews that, “Finland is a Motherland – the Maiden of Finland is a really strong figure, and I wanted to explore that matriarchal society which is also manifested in Estonia, within such a male-domi-

nated political landscape. There’s a strong relationship to Mother Nature within history – Estonia has been invaded so many times – by the Swedes, Russians, Germans.” (Damian 2012) In addition to drawing attention to this still often silenced form of violence, the rape in this narrative is representative of a pain experienced by a group of people. The nation experienced the rape of their country, as well as the resulting shame and powerlessness. Jeffrey Alexander has written that, “[t]rauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collective’s sense of its own identity.” (2004: 10) The occupation affected the identity of a country that had only been independent for twenty-two years, leaving a footprint in the core of the collective body of the Estonian nation, as well as on their image in the eyes of the nations looking on.

In *Lilya 4-Ever*, the post-Soviet urban spaces are carefully portrayed so that almost no nature is visible. We see either ruined buildings or ugly apartments, and the solitary trees look dead. If, at Aliide’s house, the forest as a place of refuge was threatened by the officers, in *Lilya 4-Ever* the forest has disappeared totally and the military bases, factories, and identical faceless apartment blocks have replaced any trace of nature. The dilapidated submarine base in Paldiski, a massive building mockingly called “The Pentagon”, is the place of refuge for Lilya and Volodya. There the local bullies cannot get to Lilya and Volodya, and the latter sleeps in the base when he is thrown out of his home. Lilya and Volodya go to “The Pentagon” to sniff glue, dance around the building, and dream of living in America. The Pentagon in the American context is a symbol of the US military, and during the Cold War, it was thought to be a possible target of attack for the Soviet Union. The dilapidated building in Paldiski is a symbol of the Soviet military; Lilya and Volodya find Brezhnev’s old speeches and a picture of Lenin on the wall, with its clear red colour the only thing that has survived from the time it was made. Lilya’s urban space is depicted as a leftover of Soviet

militarisation and occupation. Her dream of freedom in Sweden turns into sex slavery in a rather similar urban space. The industrial part of Malmö where she finds herself reminds her of her hometown.

The use of a prostitute as a symbol of the degeneration of a country was extensively used in Russia during and after the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁴ Estonian poet and philosopher Jaan Kaplinski has used a similar metaphor in his allegory of the reputation of Estonian artists and writers in 1992, equating the communist regime with a harem where the KGB and Communist Party guarded the artists from “dangerous Western influences”. “In a harem you must make love to your lord and you can’t do it with anybody else. A harem is a restricted area you can’t leave.” (Kaplinski 2007) In the first couple years of independence, he draws a parallel with women leaving a harem because there is no money to keep them, and many of them becoming prostitutes who now are allowed to sleep with rich Western men. “It’s not a long way from the harem to the brothel, or at least, the way from the harem to freedom is much longer and harder.” (*ibid.*) Therefore, *Lilya* symbolises a young naive country that would do anything to escape the depressing conditions and is ready to sell itself (resources, enterprises, etc.) to the foreign (often Western) investors.

Lukas Moodysson has stated his clear intention of writing about the difficult relations between nations, or in his words, primarily between the Eastern and Western Europeans, “[t]he situation in the Eastern Europe is a result of two acts of violence, first a communist and then a capitalist one. First the people lost their freedom and then their safety as well.” (Svenska Filminstitutet 2004; my translation) By depicting *Lilya*’s trauma, Moodysson intends to draw attention to the broader trauma in the midst of changes between East and West. Piotr Sztompka claims that many changes can be traumatising to a collective body. He distin-

guishes between mass trauma and collective trauma, saying that collective trauma appears “only when people start to be aware of the common plight, perceive the similarity of their situation with that of others, and define it as shared” (Sztompka 2004: 160). The change that happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union was positive for many occupied nations, but having all the characteristics of a traumatogenic change (sudden, widespread, radical, and unexpected – as defined by Sztompka), it was traumatic for the collective body of the whole post-Soviet region, and each occupied nation.

This traumatic change happened very close to the Nordic countries where the questions of equality, transnationalism, gender, and identity had been part of the cultural discourse (Nesting 2008: 9). The trauma of sex trafficking affects the former Soviet countries as well as the Western and Nordic countries. First, the sexual violence that is experienced by the victims is traumatic, and it also traumatises the witnesses who are now learning about how extensive the prostitution and sex trafficking from the Eastern countries is. After *Lilya 4-Ever* was released in Sweden, it became part of a project in Swedish schools where the students were shown the film and then asked to discuss what they have seen and how they feel about it. In a report made after a discussion with some secondary school students in Sweden (Svenska Filminstitutet 2004), the students were surprised by the violence occurring around them and wanted the government to take more steps to prevent such violence, as well as to find ways for the students themselves to help the society around them. The reaction to the brutal violence and *Lilya*’s awful human conditions is similar to the reactions people have after reading stories of war victims. Sweden as a country has been very supportive towards Estonia, but in this film the Swedish audiences see how some survivors or “leftovers” of the Soviet occupation suffer from even greater violence in their free welfare state, at the hands of their own fellow Swedes, maybe in an apartment

4 See Eliot Borenstein’s (2006) analysis of prostitution as a sign of Russian national humiliation.

house right next door. The shame of being a bystander, often unknowingly, and thereby somehow contributing to the domination, is also traumatic.

In both *Purge* and *Lilya 4-Ever*, the narrative is circular, it starts at the end and develops through memories or flashbacks. Memories are necessary for recovering from trauma, but in these narratives, the recovery does not occur. Jennifer Suchland sees “the eternal return of the same” (2013: 370) in *Lilya 4-Ever* where “this circularity of the narrative is not about liberation, but tragedy” (*ibid.*: 371). In *Purge*, to a certain extent as well, the haunting past is never really resolved. Aliide kills herself and Zara is liberated by money enabling her to travel to Finland. The happy or unhappy end of her story is left to the imagination of the readers.

As authors with a purpose, Oksanen and Moodysson have succeeded in achieving their aims. They have generated more discussion about traumatic memories and the present-day trauma of sex trafficking in both the Western/Nordic and post-Soviet societies. They wanted to traumatise their readers/viewers by making them relive the traumatic experiences of the characters, to demonstrate the importance of uncovering shame and listening to, and witnessing the trauma without condemning or creating stereotypes. Their portrayal of the trauma, when taken to the collective level, leaves the impression that the entire body of a post-Soviet nation is traumatised, and in *Lilya 4-Ever*, according to Jennifer Suchland, “the voyeurism that is common to representations of sexualized violence is replaced by post-socialist abjection” (2013: 364). In *Purge*, the voyeurism of both sexualised violence and post-socialist abjection seems to be present at times. The rainy, grey, and ruined town where Lilya lives or the detailed descriptions of Aliide’s use of spoiled meat, flies, and her husband’s disgusting body make the Western audiences sigh in relief that they do not live in places like post-Soviet towns, and may thereby be unwillingly contributing to the same stereotypes.

The trauma of sex trafficking is affecting the post-Soviet nations that are impacted by the Soviet past. The trauma is also influencing the Nordic countries, and is being affected by the stereotypes created in these countries. It exists and is being repeated in many countries. The structures of the dominations are reproduced by influencing each other and by many people constantly contributing to these dominations. Moodysson feels a responsibility to speak up, to express the affect that this particular trauma has had on him. He says in an interview, “[t]his film was to do with responsibility and guilt. I feel responsible for things that happen in the world and I think we all should.” (O’Hagan 2003)

Sofi Oksanen also feels responsible for challenging her readers to look beyond stereotypes. In addition to depicting the trauma of the war and occupation in Estonia, she analyses the trauma of the present that is affected by the traumatic past. Oksanen says in an interview with Márton Benedek, “[i]n Finland the stereotype is that Estonian women are prostitutes and Estonian men are criminals. So it would perhaps be more appropriate to write about very positive and honest characters, but I wanted to tear those stereotypes apart. It is of course not possible to deny them, but you can show where they come from.” (Benedek 2011) Oksanen takes the stereotypes and shows the connection between the history, trauma, emotions, dominations, and their mutual affect.

Moodysson and Oksanen are speaking to their own Nordic society that can, with its ignorance and stereotypes, contribute to the domination existing in sex trafficking; and they are speaking, as neutral outsiders, to the post-Soviet nations with a traumatic past. They are calling upon the victims not to remain in silence and their societies not to contribute to the dominations by imposing the same stereotypes. Oksanen and Moodysson are both showing the need for a therapist to help in the recovery from all the traumas that all four of their characters have suffered, and the supernatural nature of Zara and Volodya suggests that many

people with trauma in the post-Soviet countries will never have anyone in their lives who will listen, ask questions, and not condemn them.

The trauma of occupation and sex trafficking can be found in many countries in the world, but Oksanen and Moodysson have chosen the borderline space where the “West” and “East” meet, where the trauma of change is increased by the history of changes and traumatic disruptions to building up the collective identity. Their stories of individual suffering are powerful, traumatising, demanding, but on another level, they have contributed to the discourse on the traumatic changes in the cultural borders between Nordic/Western and post-Soviet spaces.

Estonian historian Vahur Made has said that national identity is “forged in the interplay between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’” (2003: 183). In *Purge* and *Lilya 4-Ever* the “other” is the character on the post-Soviet stage where the Iron Curtain has been lifted. Oksanen and Moodysson (a Finnish writer, influenced by Estonian and Eastern European history, and a Swedish filmmaker, producing the film together with the Danes, using Russian-speaking actors, filming in Estonia and Sweden) make use of transnational or transcultural spaces, which makes their narratives more relevant to wider audiences, emphasises the global trauma of sex trafficking and the haunting past. Both works also intend to present the post-Soviet trauma, but do so from a Nordic cultural space and understanding without the particular historical memory, and therefore tend to over-traumatise the images of the post-Soviet spaces.

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