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The Legacies of Soviet Repression and Displacement

The Multiple and Mobile Lives of
Memories

**Edited by Samira Saramo and
Ulla Savolainen**

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Assembling Memorability of Displacement and Soviet Repression

Ulla Savolainen

Introduction

Ella Ojala (1929–2019, née Makara) published three fictionalized memoirs (1988, 1990, 1994) and a book containing her family photographs (1991) at the turn of the 1990s in Finland. Born in the Soviet Union in the historical area of Ingria located along the eastern and southern shore of the Gulf of Finland and around the city of Saint Petersburg/Petrograd/Leningrad, Ojala belonged to an ethnic group of Ingrian Finns (on the problematics of group labels, see Savolainen and Potinkara 2021, 75–78). During her childhood, she experienced deportation from her home village in Northern Ingria to Vologodskaya Oblast in the 1930s, a return to Ingria, and the German occupation of Ingria during World War II. Finally, in 1943, Ojala and her family were evacuated to Finland, where they settled. In her literary works, she reflects on growing up in the midst of these continuous uncertainties, the dispersal of her family and community, and multiple forced displacements.

One of the tropes in Ojala’s literature is a family album of photographs that travels with her across national borders, political regimes, and times. Aside from referring to the album in her memoirs, Ojala also published a book titled *Pelastunut albumi* (“Album Rescued,” 1991), which contains reprints of the actual photographs included in the family album and tells its story. When Ojala’s memoirs are read against the photos and stories included in *Pelastunut albumi*, it seems that the photographs and the album have participated in the construction of the narratives, including her life story, presented in the memoirs. Indeed, the stories that Ojala conveys in her memoirs seem to be partly afforded by the photographs that operate as mnemonic devices. Today, many of the photographs included in the album are held in the collections of the Finnish Literature Society’s archives in Helsinki.

Remembrance is always a highly selective process, which is why analysis of social and cultural memory has the power to expose values and preferences, as well as prejudices and structures of exclusion prevailing in culture. The question of what makes certain expressions, events, groups, or perspectives more memorable than others has recently been gaining increasing attention

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in the field of memory studies (e.g., Rigney 2012, 2016; Erll 2020; Savolainen 2021; see also Beiner 2018). Indeed, one of the recent emergent questions in the field is related to memorability: Why do certain pasts and perspectives become commemorated as reflections of acknowledged (and canonized) memories or institutionally validated histories while others remain irrelevant? Why do certain expressions and artifacts resonate and start to circulate temporally and spatially, engendering remediations, while others provoke only a minimal response? What is it that makes certain memories culturally, socially, and collectively memorable? Although the centrality of the question of memorability and the various social, medial, material, and aesthetic issues connected to it have been recognized, memorability has nonetheless remained somewhat undertheorized within the field, as Rigney (2016, 89) has pointed out.

In this chapter, my aim is to contribute to the discussions on memorability by applying assemblage theoretical thinking to the analysis of memory and by further developing the theoretical notion of *mnemonic affordance* (see Savolainen 2021). As a case study, I will analyze Ella Ojala's family photographs' affordances in the mediation of the memory of forced migrations and the dispersal of family on multiple scales (on the multiscalar approach, see De Cesari and Rigney 2014) and as part of assemblages. I will start my chapter by introducing its theoretical framework and by laying out the history represented in Ojala's literature. These will be followed by my tripartite analysis of the family album's mnemonic affordances. First, by focusing on the qualities of family photographs as material objects, visual representations, and products of cultural practice, I will explore the family photographs' affordances in mediating memory of dispersed family (on Ingrian family histories and memories, see Reuter 2021). Second, by analyzing the representations of the family album in memoir novels, I will explore the album's affordances in mediating Ojala's life story. Third, by contextualizing Ojala's works vis-à-vis the time of their publication at the turn of 1990s Finland and discussing their recent archiving as part of the Finnish Literature Society's collections, I will discuss affordances of the family album in mediation of the memory related to Ingrian Finns' history and experiences more generally. Through this analysis, my aim is to highlight the analytical benefits of the notion of mnemonic affordance in theorizing memorability and its preconditions on multiple scales. Moreover, my chapter indicates some of the potentials of assemblage thinking for conceptualizing and analyzing the ontology and existence of memory as processual, malleable, and contingent on various discursive-material and contextual circumstances.

Assemblage and Affordance

As a concept of contemporary social and political theory and cultural analysis, assemblage refers to the emerging and processual arrangement of versatile entities, such as bodies, objects, materialities, and semiotic content. Assemblages are relational formations through which socio-material

phenomena, such as memory, take their form. Although the concept of assemblage has been used for a long time in the field of archaeology (see, e.g., Hamilakis and Jones 2017), the roots of contemporary assemblage thinking lead most notably to the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), who introduced assemblage as a concept to examine ontological questions regarding the socio-material world. Since then, the idea has been applied widely and further developed in a variety of ways.

Assemblages are typically theorized as forming and existing through ongoing movement and continuous “becomings.” At the core of this is resistance to the idea that assemblages would hold any kind of stable essence. Instead of intrinsic qualities of entities, assemblages are defined by indeterminacy, relationality, and connections between elements, as well as their capacity to generate affect. Moreover, assemblage thinking is characterized by the understanding of phenomena as inherently socio-material, which questions the validity of the often taken-for-granted dualistic binaries such as “subject–object,” “culture–nature,” or “rational–emotional.” Moreover, it manifests an aim to challenge the dominance of language and narrative as the most important or only constituents of the social world. Related to this, agencies of non-human objects and technologies, as well as their interaction with humans in the production of socio-material worlds as components of assemblages, have been explored especially within the broad philosophical and analytical frame of the so-called new materialisms.

Memory studies typically understands memory as an interpretation of the past in the present through the continuous circulation of narratives between various media (e.g., Erll and Rigney 2009). Rather than being seen as a faithful or stagnant record of history, memory is conceived of as creative, selective, and dynamic, as well as inherently intertwined with negotiations of identity. Although emphasis on narratives as the primary “stuff” of memory has dominated the field, memory studies scholars have also applied assemblage thinking to the analysis of memory formation and transmission (e.g., Macdonald 2013). Many of these studies have explored remembrance in digital settings or analyzed the mediation of memories between analog and virtual environments (e.g., Reading 2011, 2016; Chidgey 2018). Rather than a clear methodological apparatus, assemblage theoretical thinking has often been described and applied as a philosophical stance or a point of view. For me, it enables turning the analytical focus on the agency of the photographs in generating remembrance in relation to and together with other entities, such as narratives, people, and institutions. Moreover, I suggest that the concept of affordance can complement and further the analysis of memory assemblages in terms of memorability.

As I have preliminarily suggested elsewhere (Savolainen 2021), the concept of affordance has the potential to enable analysis of various discursive, material, aesthetic, and affective as well as social, political, and contextual aspects of memorability in a nuanced way. The concept of mnemonic affordance refers to the properties of a certain expression or a medium of

memory and the qualities of performance or the reception situation (or a context) that can make the expression resonant and memorable for someone who perceives it. Originally, the concept was developed in the field of psychology of visual perception. According to Gibson (1977, 67–68), objects (e.g., a chair) have certain properties that afford a certain action (e.g., sitting) through the perception of a possible user (e.g., a human). Anthropologist Keane (2016, 29), who has extended Gibson’s views on affordance to the analysis of ethics and ethical action, has outlined that affordances of properties only emerge in a specific situation and through the perception of actors. This means that affordances are not only related to the properties of an object, situation, or individual perception but that they are inherently social and relational, affected by objects, actors (who perceive and use them), and contexts. Moreover, affordances emerge relationally from social evaluation, learning, and routines (see also Knappet 2004). Since its conception, affordance has been applied, extended, and developed further in the studies of materiality and practices in the fields of design (e.g., Norman 1988), archaeology (e.g., Knappet 2005), anthropology (e.g., Ingold 2000), and media, communication, and technology studies (e.g., Nagy and Neff 2015). In this chapter, I analyze the mnemonic affordances of family photographs in terms of the memorability of experiences of displacement and Soviet repression.

Ella Ojala’s Works and the History Narrated

Ella Ojala’s three works *Pitkä kotimatka* (“Long Journey Home,” 1988), *Suomi näkyy* (“Seeing Finland,” 1990), and *Ensimmäinen kevät* (“The First Spring,” 1994) are all written in Finnish and published in Finland.¹ Defined as memoir novels (Fin. *muistelmaromaani*) on their back covers, the works are framed as serving both referential or documentary and fictional functions. According to Leona Toker (1997), the same kind of multifunctionality is typical for testimonial literature generally. Even though paratexts of Ojala’s memoir novels explicitly connect the books’ contents to their author’s personal experiences, the works are not narrated in the first person. Instead, the external narrator conveys the story of the main character Elisa and her family. Noticeably, the name Elisa closely reminds of the author’s given name Ella. Although these features might blur the literary work’s referential quality, these memoir novels do not give rise to suspicion concerning their autobiographical nature or the narrator’s reliability for that matter. As for their style, Ojala’s memoir novels are chronologically organized, their narration is straightforward, and their intended meanings are articulated outright, which makes their style rather conventional. In her book *Pelastunut albumi* (“Rescued Album,” 1991), Ojala focuses on the story of the family album through photographs that are also reprinted in the book. In contrast to the three memoir novels, *Pelastunut albumi* is narrated in the first person. In this chapter, I treat all of Ojala’s works as autobiographical.

The three memoir novels by Ojala cover an approximate period from the mid-1930s to the late 1940s. In the beginning of *Pitkä kotimatka*, the main character Elisa lives with her family – father, mother, and little brother – in their home village of Lempaala (Rus. Lembolovo) in Northern Ingria, located north of Leningrad near the Finnish border, and she is about to start school soon. Many of their relatives had already died or been imprisoned or deported due to the Stalinist regime’s policies. Rather expectedly, Elisa’s family also receives an order to leave their home and to move to Vologodskaya Oblast, located approximately 1,000 kilometers east of Leningrad, to work on a collective farm.

The experiences recounted by Ojala are similar to the experiences of thousands of Finns who lived in the Soviet Union and the so-called area of Ingria. According to Matley (1979; see also Nevalainen 1991), between the late 1920s and mid-1930s, tens of thousands of Finns were imprisoned or deported from their home villages located near the Soviet-Finnish border. First, the repressions related to the collectivization of agriculture and later deportations were a result of the Soviet Union’s effort to secure border areas from an “unreliable population,” which in practice meant non-Russian ethnic groups. Although Finnish-speaking populations had lived in the historical area of Ingria since the beginning of the 1600s, the Soviet Union considered them to be potentially loyal to Finland, a country that had gained its independence from Russia in 1917, following the Bolshevik Revolution. The majority of these people spoke Finnish as their primary language, were Protestant Christians, and identified themselves as Finns (see Savolainen 2021, 913–914; Savolainen and Potinkara 2021, 75–78). In the Soviet Union, they were considered to belong to the Finnish nationality, which was also marked in their Soviet passports (see also Helle in this volume).

According to Ojala’s *Pitkä kotimatka*, after working one summer on the collective farm in Vologodskaya Oblast, Elisa’s parents decide to leave. Without the possibility of moving back to their old home village near the Finnish border, the family decides to relocate close to Leningrad. Elisa’s parents join a collective farm in Hyttilä led by Ingrian Finns and get a house in the nearby village of Russko-Vysotskoye, located twenty-five kilometers southwest from Leningrad. Their family also gains a new member when Elisa’s mother adopts her nephew, Mikko, after the deportation of his mother. Soon, Elisa begins her studies in primary school, becomes fluent in Russian, and starts to succeed in her studies.

After a couple of years, this relatively peaceful period comes to an end, as World War II begins. In the summer of 1941, Elisa’s new home village is occupied by German troops seeking to reach Leningrad. Life under occupation proves difficult. The crops are destroyed and food shortages are severe. According to Ojala’s memoir novel, Elisa’s family manages the situation rather well. After the first winter, they are able to grow potatoes, feed the cow, and exchange milk for other goods. Elisa’s father starts to work as a chauffeur for Germans; after learning German, fourteen-year-old Elisa, who is also fluent

in Russian and Finnish, begins to serve as an interpreter for the Germans. In 1943, however, the war between Germany and the Soviet Union intensifies. As a result, Germany and Finland – the war ally of Germany against the Soviet Union at that time – decide to relocate non-Russian civilians, mainly Ingrian Finns living in the area occupied by Germany, to Finland. Altogether 63,000 people are first taken to Estonia and from there to Finland by boat (see Nevalainen 1990; Flink 2010). In Ojala's book, Elisa and her family are among these people.

In her second memoir novel *Suomi näkyy* (1990), Ojala describes her and her family's arrival to Finland in November 1943 and their following choices. Finland's defeat by the Soviet Union in 1944 causes concerns for the family as well as for other Ingrians. The Moscow Armistice between Finland, the Soviet Union, and the UK, which was signed on September 19, 1944, stated that those Ingrians who were relocated to Finland against their will should be returned to the Soviet Union. For orphans and men who joined the Finnish army, the return was mandatory. Eventually, 55,000 out of the 63,000 Ingrians who were relocated to Finland during the war returned to the Soviet Union, and only 8,000 of them stayed in Finland or fled to Sweden. Fear of the Soviet occupation of Finland, general discontent in everyday life, and the pressure inflicted on Ingrian migrants by the officials explain why so many returned. Although the Soviet Union had stated that Ingrians could go back to their former homes, they were instead relocated to various places without permission to settle near Leningrad (see Nevalainen 1990; Flink 2010).

Ella Ojala's family were among the 8,000 people who did not return to the Soviet Union. After not hearing from their friends who went back, the family was convinced that their choice had been the right one. Ojala's third memoir novel, *Ensimmäinen kevät* (1994), focuses on Elisa's adolescence, her first love, and her growing up as a young woman with the continuing fear of possible forced return to the Soviet Union. Ella Ojala, the author of these books, lived the rest of her life in Finland, working as a writer, teacher, and translator. She passed away in 2019.

Affordances of Family Photographs

1. Mediation of Memory of Dispersed Family

Ella Ojala discusses the family album of photographs several times in her memoir novels. In 1991, she also published a book titled *Pelastunut albumi*, which contains reprints of photographs in the family album accompanied by narratives. In the beginning of *Pelastunut albumi*, Ojala summarizes the story of the album. When Germany started to approach Ojala's family's home village during World War II, the family hid the album in their neighbor's cellar. After the situation stabilized, twelve-year-old Ella went to look for their hidden property but found their belongings tossed around. Ripped out of the album, family photographs were dispersed everywhere, but Ojala managed to

gather them together. When she was walking back to her family in the nearby village, military airplanes appeared in the sky. She threw the album in a ditch and herself on top of it. After this, the rescued album traveled with Ojala's family to Finland in 1943 as one of the few things that survived the journey.

As it is presented in *Pelastunut albumi*, the family album consists of photographs of Ojala and her family during her childhood in the Soviet Union, along with photographs of her relatives, who ended up scattered in various places throughout the Soviet Union. As a moment and a practice, a photographic event is a sensorial assemblage composed of versatile entities, such as technology, people with their memories, things, the surrounding environment, and light, as Carabott, Hamilakis, and Papargyriou (2015, 11) have noted. Moreover, the practice of taking photographs always implies a human intention to capture or objectify a certain spatiotemporal moment in order to transfer it to the future. As a visual representation and a material mnemonic object, a photograph affords overcoming of temporal distances, creating belonging and bearing witness of distant places, people, and times (Alonso Rey 2016), and it has the ability to generate affects and sensory experiences (Edwards 2012, 230).

Pelastunut albumi contains many stories about Ojala's relatives presented in the photos. Ojala (1991, 14) recounts how some of the pictures have traveled to the album from the "hot cotton fields of Asia, from freezing Siberia, or from the similarly cold areas of Kola peninsula." She tells about difficult lives, sufferings, and losses experienced by her relatives, and she reflects on happier times in the past by reminiscing about children, social relationships, and personalities. Indeed, several of the photos relate to either weddings or funerals, reflecting the cultural and ideological conventions of photography that institutionalize the idea of family and its togetherness (Hirsch 1997, 7; see also Rose 2010). This also speaks to the ceremonial and ritualistic nature of the popular everyday practice of taking photographs in the twentieth century. Because photography mediates, interprets, and makes use of certain kinds of values (e.g., Hirsch 1997; Rose 2010), it also has the power to advance "ideologies of assimilation and exclusion," as Hirsch and Spitzer (2020, 16) have noted. Indeed, family photographs – with the aesthetic conventions and cultural practices through which they are created – convey and create ideologies of family. This means that they not only reflect and portray families out there, but they also participate in defining which kinds of constellations can be considered and remembered as a family in the first place.

Ojala's family photographs, as well as the album (see also Hirsch 2012, 237), are also concrete objects, memorabilia, that materialize the people represented in them and their life stories beyond the actual moment when the photographs were created. In *Pelastunut albumi*, Ojala tells how the photographs represent her relatives who disappeared and perished as a result of Soviet repressions. By telling how the photographs are links to the lost home and dispersed family, Ojala conveys an understanding that photographs

are not merely (past) reality's representations but also its materializations. In fact, this sense of indexical and almost tangible immediacy is something afforded by photography as a medium of representation, because the mere existence of a photograph requires that the person represented in it has indeed once been photographed. According to Barthes (1983, 76–81; also Hirsch 1997, 5, 19–20), photographs function as evidence of both death and life, as they materialize an indexical connection with the past and with the person photographed. Sontag (1999, 154) adds, a photograph not only represents reality but is a “trace, something directly stenciled off the real, like a footprint.” By being able to indexically embody the photographed object, or at least to create an impression of this kind of connection, photographs also materialize a temporal link between the photographed past and the present moment of looking at the photograph and allow emergence of affects. This kind of connection between the photograph at hand and the people from the past represented in the photograph also explains the significance of the family album as an embodiment of Ojala's family, which at the same time is ir retrievable.

Regardless of photographs' qualities, they can function as mnemonic objects only in interaction and cooperation with various other representations and actors, such as narratives and people. As part of these kinds of assemblages, photographs not only participate in building connections between the past and the present, but they also engender social, material, and affective realities (see Edwards 2010, 2012; Alonso Rey 2016; Canham et al. 2020, 2–4). In Ojala's literature, the mnemonic affordances of the photographs activate in relation to and as part of other media – memoirs, the autobiographic book of photographs, and the narratives included in them. In the first chapter of *Pelastunut albumi*, Ojala constructs the history of the family album into an exciting story by narrating how after repeatedly being in danger of destruction, the photographs were saved and transported from the Soviet Union to Finland. As a concrete example of the interplay of various media in producing their mnemonic affordance and efficacy, in *Pelastunut albumi* Ojala (1991, 15) replenishes the visual dimension of the family photographs by verbally describing the colors and fabrics of the outfits in the black-and-white photographs. She also describes the later appearances and life events of her relatives portrayed in the photos. One of these examples relate to a photo of Maria, Ella's aunt's husband's sister, in which she looks happy and healthy:

Sirkka, who managed to survive from Asia and move to a cooler climate, told in her letters that Maria had burned so dark and skinny. Nobody would have recognized her if she did not have her big eyes, even though they were full of pain. Maria could not pick cotton for the Great Soviet Union for a long time. Used to a different climate, she died without ever seeing this photo that was taken right before the deportation.

(Ojala 1991, 55)

The result is that in her book, Ojala conveys the photographs as part of a multimedia assemblage of image and narratives that affords remembrance of her dispersed family, reflection of family remembrance (“Sirkka told in her letters”) and the destinies of her family members beyond the actual photograph. Overall, these assemblages of photographs and narratives composed by Ojala produce double images of happiness and suffering, life and death, and absence and presence. Moreover, as a material object, the album collects the dispersed family members together, thus representing a *portable monument* (Rigney 2004) of the family. This very material connection and the fundamental interplay of life and death in family photographs participate in producing their affordance in the mediation of the memory of dispersed family.

2. Mediation of Ella Ojala’s Life Story

The story about the family album is also included in Ojala’s memoir novels, where the album appears as a trope through which Ojala reflects on and builds her life story projected onto the narrative of her alter ego, the main character Elisa. On the level of the narrated story, the photographs function as reference points through which Elisa reveals and explores her growth from a child into a young woman. The album’s role as a reference point is evident from the description of the moment when Elisa goes to look for it from the neighbor’s cellar, just before the German army occupies the family’s post-deportation home village in Ingria. In this description, a twelve-year-old Elisa finds her childhood photo materializing both her past early childhood and its bereavement:

Next, her hand caught a photo of a girl with big eyes and pigtails: The girl was wearing a beautiful dress, cunningly showing a little bit of lace from the underskirt, and with a bouquet of artificial flowers in her hand. ... Only big eyes and thick hair were left from that whimsical Elisa. Nowadays she was a thin schoolgirl, grown tall, who had flown here to the cellar as if from another star to gather the pieces of the past safe – and to soon fly from here toward something unknown again.

(Ojala 1988, 155–56)

At this moment, when the war is surrounding the family and Elisa is about to lose her home again, the photograph of her as a child reassures Elisa that her past really existed. Even though a lot has happened between the time when the photograph was taken and when she is looking at it, Elisa realizes that she is still the same girl as the girl in the photograph, although irrevocably changed. Here, the photograph, arguably the same photo that is also on the cover of *Pelastunut albumi* (see Figure 3.1), operates in the memoir as a tool for self-identification and anchoring, thus affording the construction of a life story. This kind of material reassurance becomes important when a



Figure 3.1 Ella Ojala's childhood photo on the cover of *Pelastunut albumi* (1991).

person is detached from their familiar material and social environments, from their home and relatives. In *Pelastunut albumi*, Ojala even compares the family album to home:

Of those objects that signified home for me, the most important was our family's large album of photographs with dark brown leather covers and silver rim. My treasures hidden inside the album were valuable as well: the report card from fourth grade and my honorary diplomas.

(Ojala 1991, 8)

While childhood photographs serve as reference points for self-identification and reflection of growth in Ojala's literature, the report card and the honorary diplomas – which are included in the family album and also reprinted in *Pelastunut albumi* – function as objects promoting reflection on national, ethnic, and spatial belonging. In *Pelastunut albumi*, Ojala explains why these documents are meaningful for her:

The fact that my report card was full of excellent grades was even more important for me, because when I started Russian school I was the only Finn among a hundred Russians. I was called *chukhna* and pulled by my pigtails until I learned to speak Russian the same way as the others, and

eventually I learned to speak it even better than the others. That way I became a model student.

I had started at a Russian school due to my mother's will and general circumstances. My mother wanted her children to succeed as much as possible, and Russian language was important for this.

(Ojala 1991, 8)

In Ojala's memoir novels, the report card and honorary diploma are tropes through which she reflects on her belonging, ethnic and linguistic identification, and position in relation to the categories of a Soviet citizen, Russian, Ingrian, and Finn. Moreover, through the report card, she discusses her complicated position as an Ingrian migrant in Finland with a Soviet school education. Ojala recounts how the honorary diploma, decorated with Stalin's and Lenin's pictures, was a great achievement for Elisa and a proof of her exceptional capabilities; as such, it was something that should be cherished and saved. After migrating to Finland, Elisa realizes that despite the diploma, which proves her great talents as a student, in the new country, she is a girl in her teens with inadequate skills. Fantasizing pessimistically about her further studies, Elisa also realizes that her treasure, the honorary diploma with the recognition from Stalin, has been transformed into a burden:

But how I would manage in Finnish school? Elisa suddenly wondered. In the Soviet Union all grades had been excellent, here only sevens and eights [on a scale of 4–10]. Embarrassment. And of course she was too old for secondary school. Most likely they would all stare at an almost adult, a 16-year-old, who would start from first grade. Also math was calculated in an odd way here and she did not know anything about geography and history in the Finnish system. And Swedish [the second official language in Finland] sounded as strange gibberish in her ears.

This means that she would not pass her classes. And then everyone would mock her: 'Stalin's brightest student! She cannot perform here in the Finnish secondary school, which is only for smart people!'

(Ojala 1990, 228)

Moreover, the honorary diploma affords Ojala the chance to discuss her feelings of not belonging properly anywhere. In the Soviet Union, Elisa and her family are Soviet citizens who identify as Finns and whose nationality in their Soviet passports is officially defined as Finnish. Elisa's father cannot even speak Russian, even though he has lived his whole life in the Soviet Union/Russia. In her memoir novels, Ojala also underlines that, even though she is aware of the category of Ingrians, Elisa identifies as a Finn. At school, however, she discovers that she can call herself Ingrian (*Ingermalanka*), in order to avoid the stigma of being categorized as a Finn by her Russian schoolmates. When the family is traveling to Finland in 1943, Elisa – who has considered herself a Finn – surprisingly finds out that not all Finnish

people in Finland consider the refugees to be Finns, instead seeing them as Ingrians. Here, Ojala articulates Elisa's experience of being harmfully labeled and disregarded by others, on both sides of the border. This kind of experience of being discriminated against on the basis of Finnishness in the Soviet Union while simultaneously not considered as a proper Finn in Finland is common to that of people who have gone through a so-called *ethnic migration* (see Oda 2010; Varjonen, Arnold, and Jasinskaja-Lahti 2013). In her memoir novels, the honorary diploma and the report cards included in the family album function as tropes for Ojala to reflect such experiences related to identity negotiations in complicated transnational settings. In this way, the family album affords the creation of her life story as a person forced to constantly negotiate her identity across various fuzzy borders and vis-à-vis labels created by others.

3. *Mediation of Ingrian Finns' History*

Through continuous (re)assembling, the photographs connect to present and future-oriented processes of remembrance beyond private scales of personal and family memory. Ella Ojala's literature demonstrates this kind of movement, through which family photographs transform from private memorabilia into something else. As a part of literature, the photographs publicly mediate personal and family memory. Through this shift from private to public scales, and from personal to exemplary, Ojala's personal and family history also become reframed more broadly as an example of Ingrian Finns' history. Ella Ojala explicitly reflects and promotes this shift in the final section of *Pelastunut albumi* by directly addressing the reader:

These photographs have drifted a long way to end up here for you to scrutinize. I wish that they will still continue to travel around the world as evidence of the destiny of the Ingrian people amidst the greater events. This album was rescued to tell its story. Among many others, these stories were experienced by a then-small Ella Makara – now the Grandma Ella of two children and grandchildren.

(Ojala 1991, 14)

In the excerpt, Ojala states that one of her intentions is to tell a Finnish audience about the tragic experiences of Ingrian Finns, with the help of the photographs. When the works were published in the 1990s, however, the topic did not attract broad public attention in Finland. Instead, the memory of Ingrian Finns' history persisted as what Olick and Robbins (1998; see also Rigney 2021) have defined as “inert,” meaning that it was not entirely forgotten or non-existent but as yet inactive and not reflected upon. When evaluating the reason for this lack of interest, the societal and political contexts in which the works were published become important.

Ojala's works were published in Finland between 1988 and 1994, coinciding with broader cultural and political shifts in Europe caused by political transformations in the Soviet Union, which eventually led to its disintegration. Among the changes, this shift led to the so-called *ethnic migration* (on the concept, see, e.g., Oda 2010) of Soviet/Russian nationals of Finnish descent, the majority of which had family ties to Ingria, along with their family members, to Finland. Eventually, more than 30,000 people "remigrated" to Finland (on the remigration, see, e.g., Varjonen, Arnold, and Jasinskaja-Lahti 2013, 113–114; Prindiville 2015). When Ojala's works were published, public discussions and popular opinions in Finland concerning Ingrians revolved around the Russianness or non-Finnishness of Ingrian "remigrants," who often spoke Russian as their primary language (Hakamies 2004; see also Davydova and Heikkinen 2004). Ingrian Finns' memories and experiences of Soviet repression and forced migrations, which were the main themes of Ojala's work – and the ones she wished to reflect and spread information about – were not topics of active discussion. As I have argued elsewhere (Savolainen 2021), instead of focusing on the transnational historical experiences of Ingrians whose Finnishness was questioned or often perceived as unfamiliar, the memory culture in Finland of the 1990s – characterized as neo-patriotic (Kinnunen and Jokisipilä 2012) – favored and offered frames for remembrance of historical events and perspectives that more easily fit with the national narrative. Memory culture revolved around events related to the conflict between Finland and the Soviet Union during World War II, often from the perspective of a more or less homogeneous construct of a nation.

What is more, Ojala's works cannot be considered as especially innovative in terms of their poetics. Instead, their style is rather conventional, which may have affected their ability to create remembrance or *aesthetic agency*, to use Rigney's (2021) term. As Rigney (2021, 14) has argued, the memorability of a specific history through literature or art not only requires preexisting familiar narrative frames through which it can be formulated and received, but it also needs to be formulated in a somehow unexpected or unfamiliar way, in order to "disrupt our usual habits of identification and understanding of what is memorable" and thus afford resonance and remembrance. The same kind of tension between recognition and strangeness, and familiarity and surprise, are also essential for *tellability* in general (e.g., Baroni 2021; Shuman and Bohmer 2012; Savolainen 2017).

When considering the afterlife of Ojala's literary works and the public memory they afford, it is necessary to point out that these works are not generally very well known in Finland today either. However, the history discussed by the works—Ingrian Finns' tragic transnational history – has recently become topical in Finland in a new way. One of the projects involved in this trend is a multimedia museum exhibition "Ingrians – The Forgotten Finns" by Lea Pakkanen, Santeri Pakkanen, and Meeri Koutaniemi. Focusing on Ingrian Finns' twentieth-century history and experiences, it was held at the

National Museum of Finland (see Savolainen and Potinkara 2021). Together with an award-winning popular history book, also published by the curators of the exhibition (Pakkanen and Pakkanen 2020), the exhibition attracted exceptionally wide media attention.

This museum exhibition was not an exception. At the same time, a data collection and management project titled “Ingria and Ingrians – recording histories, preserving memories” was implemented by the Finnish Literature Society, the cultural foundation Inkeriläisten Sivistysseura, and the National Archives of Finland. The project aimed at collecting the heritage and memories of Ingrian Finns – an allegedly disregarded minority – by promoting the acquisition and usability of documents and conducting oral history interviews with individuals with Ingrian Finnish backgrounds (see Finnish Literature Society n.d.). As part of this project, Ella Ojala’s family photographs, along with her other documents, were included in the Finnish Literature Society’s archive. Now, these photographs – or copies of them, as the originals continue their lives as family photographs – have ended up in a nationally prestigious location. As part of these collections, Ojala’s family photographs and the memory they mediate have again been reassembled. In addition to Ojala’s photographs and other data collected by the “Ingria and Ingrians” project, this assemblage includes the archive as a respected and authoritative memory institution that houses collections of folklore, literature, and history regarded as national cultural heritage. As part of this process, the photographs have become reassembled not only as a minority or Ingrian memory and but perhaps also as a Finnish or national memory and heritage.

Simultaneously with the emerged interest in the history of Ingrian Finns, public discussions concerning difficult and overlooked histories of other ethnic groups and nations – such as the Indigenous Sámi People, Karelians, and Finnish Roma – have accelerated in Finland during the last decade. Although I do not argue that the pasts and presents of these groups are comparable, I would argue that the simultaneous emergence of these topics within the mainstream public is not a coincidence. Rather, these public discussions can be seen as connecting with much broader contemporary phenomena through which memory discourses in general and previously overlooked pasts related to minorities in particular have gained societal, political, and cultural relevance *multidirectionally* (Rothberg 2009). These discussions, including the one concerning Ingrian Finns, can be seen as part of a larger phenomenon of deconstructing the earlier homogeneous notions of Finnishness and Finland and wider international discussions on minority memories and histories and their poor acknowledgment within master narratives and collective memories of nation states and empires (see also Savolainen 2021, 921–922). These kinds of processes, especially when they involve national heritage institutions, also raise critical questions concerning the representation of minority memories (see also Savolainen and Potinkara 2021). What happens to minority histories and experiences within national memory and heritage institutions? As part of these collections, what kinds of memories will they afford in the future? Are

they in danger of being absorbed under these institutions' inevitably homogenizing constructs of national memories and heritages instead of being represented on their own terms?

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have analyzed photographs' affordances in the mediation of the memory of forced migrations and the dispersal of memory on multiple scales. The multiple becomings of the family album manifest a process in which Ella Ojala's family photographs as well as their mnemonic affordances change through the process of reassembling. Exploration of the photographs from the perspective of assemblage thinking revealed the various qualities of memory media (photographs, literature, narratives) and contexts of publication and reception that participate in the formulation and mediation of the memory of Soviet repression and forced migrations on various scales. First, photographs are able to indexically embody the photographed object, which affords the creation of a temporal link between the past and the present. Due to this, the family album can operate as a portable monument of the family that is physically and temporally dispersed. Second, the family album with the report card and honorary diploma in it allows Ojala to create and reflect her life story as a person forced to constantly negotiate her identity across multiple national, ethnic, and political categories and borders. Third, as material of literature later archived in a nationally prestigious memory institution, the photographs' mnemonic affordances change. They became examples of Ingrian Finnish experiences in general and part of the complex of Finnish national memory and heritage. Through this analysis, I suggest that assemblage theory can fruitfully be used as an analytical optic through which to approach the processuality of memory and to conceptualize and analytically differentiate between various discursive-material, contextual, and ideological factors that have an effect on memorability.

Note

- 1 These works have not been translated into English. In this chapter, citations from these works in English as well as their English titles have been translated by the author of this chapter.

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