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## The Sense of Belonging in Janis Balodis' My Father's Father

### A B S T R A C T

Janis Balodis investigates the process of negotiating belonging in his third play of The Ghost Trilogy which is , My Father's Father, where the children of Latvian displaced persons' process of belonging alternates between the two homes—the host country, Australia, and the country of their parents' birth, Latvia, and comes to an end where they regard Australia as their country to which they and their parents belong.

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## الإحساس بالانتماء في مسرحية جانيس بالوديس ( والد أبي )

الباحثة: رجاء كريم محمد أم.د. تامر راشد شيال الزبيدي

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## الملخص

يتناول الكاتب المسرحي جانيس بالوديس موضوع الانتماء في المسرحية الثالثة من ثلاثية الأشباح وهي مسرحية "والد أبي"، حيث يخوض في مشاعر لأبناء عائلة من النازحين اللاتفيين و تناقض شعورهم بالانتماء بين البلد المضيف الذي ولدوا فيه، أستراليا، وبين البلد الأصلي الذي ولد فيه آباءهم، لاتفيا، وفي النهاية يصلون إلى إدراكهم ان أستراليا بلدهم الذي ينتمون إليه هم وآبائهم..

الكلمات المفتاحية : الانتماء ، لاتفيا ، البلد المضيف ، مساحات الانتماء ، الظواهر المكانية

### The Sense of Belonging in Janis Balodis' *My Father's Father*

*My Father's Father*, the third play of Janis Balodis' *The Ghost Trilogy*, which alternates between the host nation, Australia, and the country of their parents' birth, Latvia, is the focus of this chapter's investigation of the process of negotiating belonging. In order to analyze the characters' feeling of belonging, the play also highlights the characters' associations with the past and their memories. It is important to note that "belonging has become a concept that can no longer be linked to a particular place or location but to a spectrum of various localities in different ways" (Anthias 2016:183).

Accordingly "Belonging" has been contextualized as "spaces of belonging" (Mills 2006; Nelson 2007), "places of belonging" (Nelson and Hiemstra 2008), "landscapes of belonging" (Trudeau 2006), or "sites of belonging" as an interdisciplinary notion (Dyck 2005; Tolia-Kelly 2006). Two viewpoints are differentiated by the belonging discourse. The first requires a top-down strategy since it falls under the jurisdiction of nation-state, where the boundaries of membership are established from above. The second, which is a bottom-up conception, refers to how people interpret their sense of belonging in relation to their affiliation with a certain location, community, or even country. Here, a person's subjective perception of their own connections, attachments, and affiliations to a particular environment becomes fundamental to their sense of belonging. The first conceptualization leads to a hierarchical notion of belonging, whereas the second prioritizes a multidimensional, overlapping understanding of belonging (Mayer and Trinh Tran, 2022, p. 146).

Since belonging is becoming an increasingly a spatial phenomena, the ways of people's belonging and connecting to different places become important to understand. People are moving and becoming more connected, which makes it possible for people to hold many allegiances and locales. This complicates the idea of belonging traditionally associated with a certain area (Soysal 2015). The scholars of transnationalism emphasize that immigrants might develop ties to numerous locations, feeling a sense of belonging both in their new home and in the areas they left behind (Castles and Davidson 2000; Levitt 2001).

One of the most important researchers on belonging is Nira Yuval-Davis (2004, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2010, and 2011), who writes from the standpoint of a political theorist. She emphasizes that:

[b]elonging is not just about membership, rights, and duties... Nor can it be reduced to identities and identifications, which are about individual and collective narratives of self and other, presentation and labeling, myths of origin and destiny. Belonging is a deep emotional need of people (2004, p.215).

Davis also suggests that there are three levels of analysis necessary to comprehend where people belong. Examining the person's social position is part of the first level. A person's age, family group, occupation, gender, color, class, nationality, or citizenship status are only a few examples of social locations. Not all social contexts exert the same status, sway, or authority. Instead, social sites frequently take up multiple power axes in a hierarchical order. Depending on the specific social environment, social solidarity, or historical period in which the individual is located, social locations grants them more or lower prestige and authority (Yuval-Davis 2006a, pp. 199-200).

The second level of the analysis of belonging is on how people identify with and are linked to certain social solidarities or social collectivities. Because they are created by repeatedly "doing," identifications and attachments are performative. This implies that people repeatedly engage in certain attitudes, values, behaviors, and social practices that identify them with particular social networks and sociocultural contexts. They then construct and communicate a specific identity narrative that supports their identifications and attachments through this process (Yuval-Davis 2011).

The third level for understanding and analyzing belonging is that it always involves moral and political principles, as well as the various ways in which these "are assessed and valued by the self and others" and "in many different ways by people with similar social locations" who "identify themselves as belonging to the same community or group" (Yuval-Davis 2011, p. 18). Attitudes, beliefs, ideologies, and discourses are in play in this space of ethical and political values and exert pressure on, shape, and produce the conditions of possibility that decide how certain identities, categories, and borders are articulated and delineated.

In *Displacement, Belonging, and Migrant Agency in the Face of Power*, Tamar Mayer and Trinh Tran , state that :

To reveal the many ways that migrants seek belonging and membership, we shift the main focus of analysis from states to individuals. Joining recent calls to de-fetishize migrant categories imposed by international law and the refugee regime, we move away from state labels and categories of migrants that render migrant agency and empowerment invisible (2022,p. 27).

Christine Halse in her *Interrogating Belonging for Young People in Schools* suggests that it is useful to consider the idea of belonging in terms of one's connection to certain social groupings, social solidarities, or social collectivities. These are all concepts with similar connotations that have been used by many writers ( Calhoun 2003; Yuval-Davis 2006a).

Social solidarities are not fixed, unchangeable things that can only exist in a certain area, space, neighborhood, or community. They are associations created by participation in certain currents of ideas, cultures, and social practices. They may also be established through emotional attachments to particular locations, spaces, people, animals, and objects (Halse .2018)..

*My Father's Father* skillfully expands on the thematic interest in placelessness and belonging by examining it from the viewpoints of two of the remaining DPs, Ilse and Karl, as they travel back to the "fatherland" and the family members they left behind nearly fifty years earlier. Ilse and Karl are now in their sixties. This storyline is intersected with scenes from Leichhardt's final journey, which took place a hundred and fifty years earlier, as well as footage from Australia, where Edvards one year earlier plans (and ultimately manipulates) his own demise . The trilogy's recurring motif of burial—earth, bones, fertilizer, and flowers—is brought into clearer focus in this work and given its most dramatic moment, directly addressing the issue of belonging. The consubstantiality of bodies and earth helps to infer the relationship in all of these plays, which center on ideas of human integration into the soil or the consumption of bodies by the land.

*My Father's Father* introduces Armand who appears taking photographs throughout the first scene and the following scenes as if he records all the incidents in the play . The characters are in Riga airport in Latvia . It is 1993 which means for Karl and Ilse forty – nine years to get back home , Latvia . However, it seems that they no longer consider it so as shown in their dialogue :

Karl: Don't think I'll kiss the ground . Might catch some disease .

Ilse : I'm not going to kiss any backsides . I'm Australian (p. 184)

This shows that Karl refuses to kiss the ground of Latvia. They are willing to reconnect with in Latvia other than seeing their families . Whereas Karl is afraid to get sick of Latvia's soil, Ilse states that she is Australian now . She is not Latvian and their belonging is not to Latvia anymore . They belong to Australia .

Second-generation Persons who are born in the new country but their lives are impacted upon by their parents' national expulsion often reflect this in artistic representations. As Armand tries to get a sense of belonging to Latvia ,his farther ignores his son's attempt claiming that his sense of belonging is for Australia now not for Latvia His response to the country of origin can be metaphorically explored when Karl and his sister , Marta, could not recognize each other when they met again after more than forty years. They appear to be strangers rather than twins. Marta thinks that Armand looks like his grandfather , Karl and Marta's father .On the other hand Alfred and Olga ,Ilse's relatives, think that Armand is like their father , his mother's father . Balodis depicts them as if trying to make a connection between Armand and his parents'fathers.

Vanessa Corby argues that according to Sigmund Freud's definition in "Constructions in Analysis," the analyst's task is " making out what had been forgotten from the traces which [experience] has left behind". A memory may go through a delayed remodeling that gives an earlier event a new, perhaps painful significance.Edvards' sense of belonging is connected with his wife's ghost. Ilse seems to feel the presence of Ruth's spirit whereas Edvards sees

Ruth's ghost coming to him. He regrets being alone, not married and having no children to connect him with Australia:

Edwards : I should have remarried . [.....] Too long I lived an empty life .Without marriage life has no centre . I have no children My only connection with this land will be my bones (p.196).

The characters of Edwards and Leichhardt are dying, feels isolated and regret because nothing connects them with the land. Both think that the trees which he carves with his initial and the year will be sole mark in land. Edwards thinks that the only connection with the host land will be his bones. Leichhardt shows his sense of belonging to the land that he loves but connects his going back home with failure. Edwards also believes that he has no thing in Latvia to go back for. He urges Karl and Ilse to go to Latvia because he thinks that they both have families there.

Balodis uses English language as an important evidence for belonging to Australia . The characters speaks English in Latvia , Armand tries to speak Latvian just to connect with his relatives but his father , Karl, speaks English with an accent with his sister Marta who cannot speak English and cannot understand him . “You’re speaking English”(p. 218). This revelation of his subconscious is an expression of his belonging to Australia.

In Scene Ten Ilse appears at a railway station to take the train back to her town. It is raining heavily and the porter describes it as being the mothers tears. For sons gone to war and daughters not come home(p.222). She could not catch the train for two days and nights.

Davis (2006: 199) proposes that people can concurrently "belong" in various ways to many entities and form attachments to several items. Being a dynamic process of "naturalized production of a certain hegemonic type of power relations," she defines belonging as "an act of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable, disputed, or ephemeral way" (Yuval-Davis 2006: 199).

Edwards asks Ruth's ghost to take some keepsake from the things which he bought before to remember him. Armand tells Edwards who is expecting his brother spirit to come and see him that Mum said those spirits couldn't come from Latvia. they belong to that place.

Brighenti (2010) believes that young people may claim distinctive landscape elements like walls in urban public space. By means of street art or graffiti, anyone claiming "ownership" may "mark" such things. This offers a chance to create hybrid environments and identities.

In Scene Twenty Six , Balodis presents the Latvians in fragments like a series of snapshots .In each fragment Balodis refers to their belonging . In fragment [A] Armand takes a group of photographs as usual when his aunt Marta asks him to bring his family “for a visit” to Latvia, he answers her with accent “ They are Australian . They don’t speak Latvians” (p. 270) . Marta calls Armand’s family for a visit because they are Australians . They don’t belong to Latvia but they can come for a visit . Armand also clarifies that they don’t speak Latvians because they are Australians. That shows that Armand tries to create a hybrid environment and identity by taking photos and speaking in Latvian .Whereas in fragment [B] Olga and Ilse talks about Gunnars , Ilse’s fiancé , who came asking for her after the war as her sister told her . Ilse stated that she has never told Karl about him .

Fragment [C] shows Alfred, Ilse's brother, and Peter, Karl's nephew, talking. Peter likens himself with "insects, worms, grubs, parasites, sucking the blood of the nation". Alfred replied "some people don't want to work. And why should they if the government is prepared to pay them not to? I can see you're not one of them" (p. 271). Balodis in this fragment blames the government for making people in Latvia idle and not industrious or diligent, as if he compares Latvia to Australia.

In fragment [D], Armand admits in English to Anita who cannot speak English that he "killed someone" (271). He refers to Edvards because he didn't try to stop his death. He watches him dying by the injection of drugs which helps him peacefully which was his will. His confession for Anita is a kind of comfort for his conscience. In fragment [E], the conversation between doctor McQuaide and Ilse reveals that Ilse is dying. That is her reason for going back to Latvia:

Ilse: [*accent*] Then better go when still can.

McQuaide: Go back home.

Ilse: [*accent*] Is how we think. In our heart. See where we born one more time (p. 272).

It seems as a farewell for the land in which she was born. She tries to see, her family, relatives in Latvia and the place in which she was born for the last time, because she has got cancer. Before she gets sick she never thinks of going back to Latvia. That appears evidently in fragment [j] when Olga asks Ilse "Would you ever think of coming back to live here?". Her answer is "No. Never", "I don't have the strength. Not in my body. Not in my will" (p. 273).

Fragment [O] is an important one, in which Balodis shows how the Latvians surrendered to the occupation:

Peter: We were sold out. Latvia was sold out. It started with your parents' generation. You let the Russians in and we accepted the lie and let them stay.

We surrendered our land.

Alfred: We surrendered \ our history.

Marta: We surrendered \ our culture.

Edvards: We surrendered \ our souls.

Anita: We surrendered \ our language.

Olga: We surrendered \ our children.

Ilse: We surrendered \ our hope.

Karl: We surrendered \ our lives.

Armand: We surrendered \ our identity (p. 275).

Karl and Ilse shows their belonging to Australia in many conditions even when Karl asks her if she wants to be buried in Latvia, she answered him "No. I'll sleep here. When I'm finally in this soil, that's

true belonging , the last coming home” . The same feeling is shared by Karl also reveals his sense of belonging:

I won't go back to Latvia again . What for ? When Marta dies there's nothing left . My family is here . There's nowhere to go. Right here is where I'll die . Right here is where I'll go on living (p.276).

Edwards refuses to go back to Latvia although he has got money , Latvia is safe , and he can buy a house there too. Beside that Marta is there and he can make a family there if he likes . Still, he prefers to stay And die in Australia. His sense of belonging is to his home, Australia , to the place and the people he loves.

At the end of the play, all the characters start singing but now the song is a mix of English and Latvian:

Blow breeze set sail , blow breeze set sail

We are leaving our home for a new land .

Put , vejini , dzen laivinu ,

Aizdzen mani Kurzeme ( p. 276).

This song is the same song at the beginning of the first play *Too Young For Ghosts* , while sailing to Australia.

Cutcher clarifies that although she has cast her lot with the locals and claim to be an Australian, it is not who she is in reality. She simply feels too strange and distant. And although while she is conscious that her studies have increased her knowledge of Australian history, she has not yet come to terms with her actual Australian identity:

*this feeling of in-between-ness is something that I am feeling more acutely. I am betwixt and between the cerebral borders of Australia and of Hungary and this space, this no-man's-land, is a place that I cannot describe, but it's where I feel most 'present'. I don't feel like a hybrid and I don't know where I truly belong. I am starting to wonder whether the tension between these selves will ever be resolved in my head. But I do feel that my journey is as yet unfinished and that by moving forwards I am at least making some sort of psychological progress. At least I can actually mentally support the notion of what it might be like to be Hungarian and what it might be like to be authentically Australian ( 2015, p.110).*

## Conclusion

My father's father conveys the impact of parents' diasporic experiences on their children. Parents are fundamentally the biggest influence on kids; what they do has a big impact on how they act. Children are more inclined to imitate their parents' behavior as I mentioned before. The identity crises are mostly brought on by a sense of cultural displacement for the first generation of migrants represented by Ilse and Karl and their son Armand. Armand's turning away from his parents' wishes and abandoning his studies as a doctor to pursue his artistic career is his first step to identifies his identity.

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