

## **Narrative Connection and Disconnection in Post Soviet Latvia**

*Vieda Skultans*

*Department of Sociology, University of Bristol*

My paper addresses the theme of this conference, namely, the importance of aesthetic design and literary form for memory and self-understanding. However, it challenges the idea that changes in the telling of life histories depend solely upon the development of a person's life story. Rather, I shall be arguing that the social framing of life, in particular, of sorrow, is just as important as the contingencies that afflict individual lives. I shall take as my material a comparison of extracts of lives recounted to me on the cusp of independence and stories recounted to me now, some sixteen years later. Vitebsky has described the Soviet Union as "the most psychologically intrusive empire the world has ever seen" (2005: 382). I do not want to dispute his evaluation, but I will be arguing that soviet intrusiveness was easily recognized and could, therefore, be challenged. The techniques of neo-liberalism are more subtle and disguised and, therefore, less easy to identify and resist.