

The Estonian Ethnologist Aliise Moora

A Female Researcher's Adaptation and Professional Fulfilment in a Changing Society

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Abstract

The article focuses on Aliise Moora's (1900–1996) career as a researcher within the changing sociopolitical situation in Estonia from the 1920s until the 1980s. Furthermore, it situates her contributions within the field of ethnological studies. How were her research and position influenced by the change of regimes and the possibility or impossibility of keeping up with the development of her discipline in the West? How did she adjust to the official ideology and the restrictions the authorities had imposed on ethnological research? To what extent did she accept the post-war Soviet research discourse, and what was her role in preserving and advancing ethnology as a national science? The article also examines how Aliise Moora's career was influenced by being a woman, the wife of the renowned archaeologist and academician Harri Moora, and the mother of a big family.

Keywords: Estonian ethnology, Aliise Moora, Sovietization, woman researchers, research career, national sciences

Introduction

Several studies discuss the role of women in the development of ethnology and anthropology, balancing the overall picture that, for a long time, tended to highlight the contribution of leading male scholars only. The challenges of academic women in these disciplinary settings have been examined from biographical and autobiographical perspectives (Beer 2007; Cattell & Schweitzer 2006; Alzheimer 1990, 1994), the lens of disciplinary history (Klein 2013), and also from a feminist and gender studies viewpoint (Behar & Gordon 1995; Jordan & de Caro 1986; *Journal of Folklore Research* 1988). The authors emphasize the difficulties of balancing family and professional life, often resulting in a slower or interrupted career, remaining in assistant positions in academic and museum settings, and limited acknowledgement of women's professional accomplishments.

Our study does not address feminist scholarship or women's studies. However, in this biographical account of the Estonian ethnologist Aliise

Moora's (1900–1996) long career, we emphasize how being a woman, the wife of renowned archaeologist and academician Harri Moora (1900–1968), and the mother of six children (born between 1926 and 1942), had an impact on it. Aliise Moora belonged to the generation that participated in the rapid modernization of Estonian society. She could be called “a new woman”, i.e., a woman whose path of life was still exceptional then and who made maximum use of the available opportunities for self-fulfilment (Robotham 1999; Kirss 2004). The transition from the largely oral peasant society to modern urban society, where the written word dominated in 1905–1915 (Kivimäe 2015), simultaneously meant the beginning of women's emancipation. In this process, the home milieu and education opportunities, possibilities for applying professional skills, and harmony between family and social as well as professional choices were of the utmost significance.

Estonia had become an independent nation state in 1918, and the University of Tartu, which had switched to Estonian as the language of instruction and accepted female students to study all disciplines from 1919,¹ greeted Aliise Moora in 1920 with a highly patriotic mentality and idealism. She graduated in 1927, qualifying as a teacher of history, already married and a mother of two children. In the 1930s–1940s the increased family created a long interruption in her professional life, which she was able to continue fully after World War II, now as an ethnologist at Eesti Rahva Muuseum (hereafter ERM; the Estonian National Museum) and later in the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. Her career as a researcher lasted for more than half a century.

The main focus of our paper is on the challenges of being an ethnologist under dramatic sociopolitical circumstances, demonstrating how personal history, political history, and the history of the discipline are closely intertwined. Furthermore, using Aliise Moora as an example, we deal at greater length with the Sovietization of Estonian ethnology in Stalinist society in the second half of the 1940s and the early 1950s, as the earlier treatments of research history have given a general overview of this era without examining biographical cases. Both ethnology as a discipline and its scholars experienced major political discrimination and repression in the Soviet Union (Karlson 2019; Treija 2019; Knight 2000), and to a lesser extent, in the whole socialist Eastern Bloc (Bitušíková 2017; Kiliánová 2012; Posern-Zieliński 2005). The Soviet occupation of Estonia (from 1944 to 1991) was a period of broken dreams and ruptured lives (Jõesalu & Kõresaar 2013). The generation that began their careers in the 1920s and 1930s, like Aliise Moora and her colleagues, suffered the most from political repressions (Nugin, Kannike, Raudsepp 2016:20). Some Estonian ethnologists who started working before World War II and survived were also arrested or had interruptions in their careers during Stalin's regime; others fled to the West and tried to continue their professional life in different cultural and

academic conditions. Concentration on research of peasant culture enabled Soviet Estonian ethnologists to covertly continue conveying pre-war patriotic ideas. Since the 1960s, Baltic intellectuals and creative personalities started consciously accentuating and valuing the local cultural or natural heritage to counterbalance Soviet reality and future-oriented ideology, particularly the vigorous Russification policy that began in the 1970s (Kaljundi 2022; Karlson 2019). This has been described as a culture of resistance, searching for cultural roots, a revival of national romanticism, and at the same time, an escape from actual socialism (Aareleid 1998:58, 208, 226; Kuutma 2008:590).

We shall observe how Aliise Moora's research and professional position were influenced by the change of regimes, including the limited possibilities to keep up with the development of her discipline in the West. As the longest part of her career as a researcher fell in the Soviet period, we analyse how she adjusted to the official ideology and the restrictions the authorities had imposed on the research field. To what extent did she accept the post-war Soviet research discourse, and what was her role in preserving and developing ethnology as a national science?

We mostly rely on the archival collections of ERM and the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR, materials collected by Aliise Moora herself, reports on her ongoing work, her correspondence, and research publications. An entirely new microlevel insight into dramatic turns in Aliise Moora's working life is offered by her work diaries from 1948–1972, which were found in 2021 and transferred to the collections of ERM. These were compulsory official diaries that had to follow a strict format and were regularly checked by the leaders of the institutions, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s. Therefore, opinions about social or work atmospheres appear in them rather rarely. Nonetheless, they reflect the changes in the writer's status and duties during the decades and the fluctuating pressure on forming the research staff into Soviet specialists by different means of ideological re-education. Everyday tasks written down in detail, communication with colleagues, preparation for publications, and presentations provide a good overview of Aliise Moora's personality and development as a researcher.

The Period of the Independent Republic of Estonia

Aliise Karu (from 1925 Moora) was born in Tallinn to a working-class family with many children where education and culture were valued and the Christian worldview was considered essential, but ties with rural life were also honoured. Thanks to her father's progressive attitudes, she was able to get a secondary education and continue her studies at the University of Tartu in the autumn of 1920, in the initial years of the independent Republic of Estonia. The young republic started to rearrange its government, economic

system, education, and research. The Estonian-language University of Tartu, which held its opening ceremony on 1 December 1919, even before the end of the Estonian War of Independence (1918–1920),² began to express the national mentality and idealism and fostered the development of patriotically-minded Estonian intellectuals (Karjahärm & Sirk 2001). The students who had started their studies in the autumn included soldiers who had just returned from the battlefield and women who had only now acquired the right to study all the disciplines.³

While creating the new structure of the University of Tartu, particular attention was paid to developing previously neglected research areas concerning Estonian culture. Departments were created for folkloristics, history, archaeology, literary studies, linguistics, art history, and ethnography or, in other words, “national sciences” the task of which was seen as “elucidation and consolidation of the specificity of the Estonian people” (Manninen 2005 (1924):317). As the number of Estonian intellectuals was small and attempts were made to avoid Baltic Germans or Russians in the teaching staff, several Scandinavian researchers were invited to teach in Tartu. Four Finns were significant in Aliise Moora’s formation as a researcher – Professor of Archaeology Aarne Michael Tallgren, Professor of History Arno Rafael Cederberg, Professor of Baltic-Finnic Languages Lauri Kettunen, and Associate Professor of Ethnography Ilmari Manninen. In the first years, she studied linguistics, archaeology, and history, and after Manninen’s arrival in Estonia also ethnography. Through her studies in archaeology, Aliise Moora also acquired a strong background in museology, as Tallgren was the first to lecture on it in Estonia (Linnus 1989). The disciplines she studied formed a symbiosis that provided a basis for later ethnographic research, which required profound knowledge of history and language. The early development of the discipline of ethnography closely followed the Finnish example (cf. Wolf-Knuts & Hakamies 2017; Siikala 2006).

Considering her later professional life, the most important part of Aliise Moora’s education was the study of ethnography with Associate Professor Ilmari Manninen. She recalled it fondly after having passed the threshold of eighty: “I came to the understanding that research could be made of old rural life, for which I had felt the greatest sympathy and closeness in my life” (Tarand 1982). Nonetheless, the discipline was still in its infancy in the early 1920s, and Aliise Moora witnessed its advancement as a young scholar with a modest contribution. Manninen arrived in Estonia in 1922 and, at first, was director of ERM.

When ERM was founded in 1909, examples were taken from Finland (*Kansallismuseo*) and Sweden (*Nordiska museet*), and its aim was initially seen as collecting objects representing Estonian folk culture and folk art. Similar processes happened elsewhere in Northern and Eastern Europe, where the birth of regional disciplines grew out of earlier collections of

objects and interest in ethnic peasant culture (Nic Craith 2008; Klein 2006; Löfgren 1990). Because of the need to arrange the museum collections and the concentration on studying material folk culture, the establishment of ethnographical research⁴ at the University of Tartu was directly related to ERM (Viires 1991:123–125; Jääts&Metslaid 2018:120). The decision-makers took an example from the Nordic countries, where, for instance, in Stockholm, the corresponding professorship had been founded at the Nordiska museet in 1918 (Klein 2006:61).

Manninen was elected to the post of Associate Professor of Ethnography in 1923. His programmatic article *On the Aims and Limits of Ethnography in Estonia* (Manninen 2005 (1924)) remained the foundational text of Estonian ethnology for decades. It defined the research area and methods of the discipline. In Manninen's formulation, the aim of ethnography was to provide an integrated overview of Estonian material peasant culture relying on typological, cartographic, and historical-geographical methods. He considered it essential to study the cultural aspects of ethnographic objects and the environment where they had been made and used (Talve 1992). He also emphasized the need for studying the cultural ties between Estonians and the neighbouring peoples and the cultures of other Finno-Ugric peoples. Reliance on the analysis of material culture connected the budding Estonian ethnology with corresponding disciplines in neighbouring countries (cf. Rogan 2014), although the emphasis could be somewhat different.

Estonian folk culture began to be studied according to the programme created by Manninen. Students' first seminar papers usually dealt with a narrow phenomenon of folk culture, which, after the systematization of collections of objects, was analysed following the prescribed methodology. Later Master's theses often relied on the materials collected by the students themselves during fieldwork. In addition to lectures and seminars, Manninen sent students to rural areas in the summer to collect information on all kinds of ethnographic phenomena, based on which they later wrote ethnographic descriptions that were stored in the museum archive. The final aim was seen as describing each particular "white spot" and "mapping the nation" (cf. Ó Giolláin 2007:63–93). During the interwar period, Estonian ethnologists studied folk costumes, folk art, buildings, fishing, beekeeping, and food (Jääts & Metslaid 2018:122). Folklore and ethnography, institutionalized as separate disciplines in the 1920s, were nevertheless close to each other. In the 1930s, ethnologists took a broader approach to culture, encompassing themes of religion and folk tradition (Metslaid 2016), and folkloristics in Estonia became more ethnological in its choice of topics and approach (Berg 2002:27).

Manninen returned to Finland at the end of 1928. Thereafter, Estonian ethnology was kept up by a few Estonian researchers, all of whom worked at ERM and lectured at the university part-time. Thus, as in the Nordic and

German-speaking countries, research mainly concentrated on material culture and remained closely connected with the museum's collections of objects. It was also necessary to consider the tasks of the museum as a heritage institution, be it the preparation for a grand permanent exhibition of Estonian folk culture (opened in 1927) or participation in activities popularizing folk costumes and folk art as part of the cultural propaganda directed by the state in the 1930s.

Like many of her fellow students,⁵ Aliise Moora started working at ERM during her studies. From 1923 to 1926, before the birth of her first child, she was a temporary assistant at the museum. Working along with her university studies was necessary because of her economic situation, but she also enjoyed it, and this determined her choice of profession. In addition to the theoretical knowledge acquired at the university, arranging collections of objects at the museum under Manninen's supervision gave the young student practical experience in the basics of systematization and analysis of folk culture. In addition to cataloguing and storing, Aliise Moora assisted in replenishing the museum's permanent exhibition by utilizing her close personal connections in the country to acquire new objects. For example, for the suit of a man from Harju-Jaani parish, her grandmother dyed the yarn with indigo, and her aunt wove the cloth (Marksoo 2000). The first ethnographic fieldwork at her mother's home parish of Harju-Jaani and later systematization of the collected materials for the museum's ethnographical archive gave her profound experience in creating ethnographic knowledge.⁶

However, becoming a married woman and a mother of several children did not enable Aliise Moora to continue her working life after graduation.⁷ During her studies in 1925 she married the archaeologist Harri Moora. Unlike many other women students, she did not stop striving for education when creating a family but managed to graduate in 1927 with the qualification of a history teacher. At that time, she was one of the few women with a university degree in Estonia.⁸ In the 1930s, Aliise Moora inevitably concentrated on family, like several other female scholars of her era elsewhere.

For the first academic women in Europe and America, a combination of a career and a family was generally impossible (Svanfeldt-Winter 2019:223). They faced a particular dilemma: marriage was a big risk that could endanger a future career, while remaining unmarried meant a certain breach of social norms. Several talented women decided to remain unmarried, for example, Martha Bringemeir and Mathilde Hain in Germany (Alzheimer-Haller 1990:262–267). Marrying an academic colleague was considered a good option as (if the marriage was happy) it provided intellectual and financial support. Yet, often this meant that the wife fulfilled the tasks of the husband's assistant, as in the cases of Jenny Paulaharju, Helmi Virtaranta, or Lyyli Rapola in Finland (Laakso 2005). Often married women postponed their active professional lives until late middle age. Having children was another aspect of private life that often blocked women from continuing a

career. Therefore, for example, in the case of the Finnish academic women, only one fourth had children in the 1930s and 1940s (Svanfeldt-Winter 2019:225).

Unlike his wife, Harri Moora made a quick career – as early as 1929, he became Acting Professor of Archaeology and later Full Professor, also working as Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Tartu. In the 1930s, Harri Moora belonged to the board of ERM, which meant close ties with the museum and guidance of its work. Through her husband, Aliise Moora kept in touch with academic and museum life. This probably helped her develop a clearer understanding of the opportunities for work in her discipline and her research interests. Experience with museum work was likely to strengthen her belief that she might also work as a researcher. Her personal career still had to wait for some time, but she wrote some articles about history and national culture for the magazine *Eesti Noored* (Estonian Youth) (Moora 1939a, 1939b, 1939c).

Generally, it could be said that, for a young woman at that time, graduation from the university opened an entirely different outlook on life than her ancestors had had, although a university diploma did not always secure a job in the 1920s–1930s. This was the time in Estonia when “the woman raised her head as a social thinker” (Mäelo 1999:73). By the second half of the 1930s, women’s independent careers and social activity had become acceptable, although not the predominant choice in Estonia (Kannike 2021). During the brief period of folklife studies before World War II, no women obtained a doctorate in ethnology (or folkloristics) in Estonia, but in Latvia, for example, the folklorist Anna Bērzkalne completed her doctorate in 1935 (Treija 2019, 24) and in Finland, the folklorist Elsa Enäjärvi-Haavio in 1932 (see in detail: Laakso 2005; Svanfeldt-Winter 2019). In comparison, the androcentric bias was similar elsewhere: even such distinguished American women anthropologists as Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead (who received their PhD degrees in the 1920s) were given professorships only in their mature years (Banner 2003); and in Sweden, women working in academia or museums were long taking assistant positions before achieving the posts as docents, full professors, or curators (Klein 2013). In Estonia, the first doctoral degrees in ethnology were awarded in 1938 to Ferdinand Linnus (1895–1942) who was a director of the ERM and lecturer at the University of Tartu, and Gustav Ränk (1902–1998), who started his studies in ethnology later than Aliise Moora and was elected Professor of Ethnography at the University of Tartu in 1939 (Metslaid 2016).

From Stalin’s Time to Khrushchev’s Thaw: 1945–1956

The years after World War II were difficult for the national research disciplines in Estonia. The majority of the leading researchers who had been

productive before the war or had just started their research had perished or fled to the West.⁹ The building housing ERM – the Raadi manor in Tartu – had burned down; the museum collections had been partly saved by evacuation and partly destroyed. During Joseph Stalin’s leadership (1922–1953) in the Soviet Union, ethnography as a discipline had already, since the late 1920s, been subjected to ideological pressure (Slezkine 1991), hundreds of scholars were repressed, killed, or died in forced labour camps (Knight 2000). For instance, Aliise Moora’s contemporary, a Ukrainian folklorist and ethnographer, Kateryna Hrushevska (1900–1943), was sentenced to a forced labour camp for anti-Soviet and nationalist activities and died in the Gulag (Hrymych 2020:123–125). A Russian ethnographer, folklorist, and writer, Nina Gagen-Torn (1900–1986) was sentenced to the Gulag twice for anti-Soviet activities during Stalin’s purges (Applebaum 2011:69–81).

The Stalinist period in Estonia (1944–1953) was not unambiguously repressive. Previous studies have characterized the first post-war years (1944–1948) as a relatively mild “breathing spell” or even “post-independence time”, as researchers and creative personalities could, broadly speaking, continue their earlier work, adjusting it only externally (quoting the classics of Marxism-Leninism, using topical political slogans) (Kreegipuu 2007; Karjahärm & Sirk 2007:203; Kalda 2002:55). In 1949–1950, however, ideological pressure increased sharply, and repressions followed. The central events of these years were the mass deportations of 1949 and a new wave of repressions after the 8th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist (Bolshevik) Party of Estonia in March 1950. The post-war repressions among researchers were extensive: in 1945–1950 nearly 200 researchers, particularly representatives of national research disciplines, were dismissed from work for up to 15 years (Karjahärm & Sirk 2007:543). Dismissals were accompanied by the demotion of people who had held leading posts to lower positions and the “strengthening of collectives” with Stalinists, Estonians with a Communist Party background who had come from Russia, and Russians. The aim of the attacks was to destroy Estonian national culture and exclude independence-era intellectuals from influential positions (*ibid.*:203).

In 1945, Aliise Moora was invited to work at ERM again, where she devoted herself to the restoration of museological activities. In 1947, she became the research secretary of the museum. The museum continued its work entirely in the pre-war spirit.¹⁰ On her initiative, the ERM network of correspondents (established in the 1930s), was revived and preparations were made for reopening the exhibition of peasant culture. Compiling the *Overview of Estonian Ethnography* was planned (Astel 2009:214–215). In 1946, Aliise Moora started fieldwork with her colleague Ida Kaldmaa in Petseri County with the aim of collecting ethnographic items as well as folklore from local Russians and Seto people (ERM EA 43:1/13–233; see



Figure 1. Aliise Moora talks with Seto woman Natalie Laine at Obinita cemetery, Petseri County. 19 August 1946. Photo: Ida Kaldmaa. ERM Fk 1071:28.

fig. 1). In the following year, Aliise Moora travelled through several counties in Estonia, restoring and enlivening relations with the museum's correspondents (ERM EA100:2/154–329).

In the first years, however, the ideological pressure on museum work was still chaotic and weak, the guidelines of Soviet ethnography had to be complied with. In the post-war years, the main focus in Soviet ethnography was ethnogenesis and studying ethnic groups in the Soviet Union as well as elsewhere. The theoretical basis was evolutionary Marxism, and ethnic mapping and cartography were important methodological tools. Ethnography was considered a branch of the discipline of history, even though attempts were made to study contemporary Soviet society. Using the works of Western ethnologists or anthropologists as well as “bourgeois” scholars of the pre-Stalinist era was ideologically prohibited (Alymov 2019; Alymov & Sokolovskiy 2018; Sokolovskiy 2017).¹¹ Like the entire life of the USSR, ethnography was a hierarchically centralized system, at the top of which were the Ethnography Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences in Moscow and the leading researchers working there. Representatives of the centre visited the periphery to instruct local ethnographic researchers.

As there was a shortage of ethnologists with academic degrees in Estonia, the theoretical and methodological development of the discipline was entrusted to Aliise Moora's husband, Professor of Archaeology Harri Moora, whose groundbreaking article “On Soviet Reconstruction of

Estonian Ethnography” appeared in the first post-war yearbook of ERM in 1947 (Moora 1947).¹² Harri Moora tried to adjust the requirements of Soviet ethnography to Estonian circumstances. In his assessment, ethnography had to continue to concentrate on studying the old, pre-capitalist peasant culture but consider more than before the social context of cultural phenomena and pay attention to the neighbouring peoples. From the present-day viewpoint, Moora was a patriotically minded man who tried to preserve ethnography, which was essential for national identity, under the new conditions (Jääts & Metslaid 2018:126). The analysis of Aliise Moora’s research and organizational work in these years leaves no doubt that, in principle, her position was similar to her husband’s – in the Soviet surroundings, she tried to preserve the essence of the ethnonational research discipline at the price of some compromises.

The entries in Aliise Moora’s work diary, which was started as an obligation in 1948, show that, in her tasks and responsibilities, Aliise Moora was both a conceptual and administrative leader who compiled work plans and reports, prepared all research papers for printing, was responsible for the museum’s official correspondence, and also for the popularization of museum research and the content of the exhibitions. She coordinated the work schedules of all the staff members and, if necessary, acted for the director. The list of work tasks in her work diary includes 17 items; it is also specified that she is an employee with “unlimited working time”.¹³ As a great part of the ERM staff had no command of the Russian language, which had become particularly important, Aliise Moora often had to do various translation jobs and guide museum tours in Russian. As a good communicator and a member of Harri Moora’s interdisciplinary research group on ethnic history, she also constantly conveyed the research papers and methods of leading Russian ethnologists. In addition, she edited colleagues’ papers that had been translated into Russian and helped them practise how to conduct exhibition tours in Russian. Each year, visits were arranged to Moscow, Leningrad, Latvia, and Lithuania; the works of the leading Soviet ethnographers Nikolai Cheboksarov, Sergei Tokarev, Pavel Kushner, and others were analysed at ERM and the Institute of History.

In addition to work tasks, Aliise Moora had to participate in extremely intensive political education. Despite being the mother of several young children, she had to attend the Evening University of Marxism-Leninism, and only in 1948 could she pass exams in Marxism-Leninism, history of the USSR, dialectical and historical materialism, and foreign policy and international relations. She also had to read ideological literature at home (at night, after the Evening University): Lenin and Marx as well as Stalin’s topical speeches or, for example, the resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Andrei Zhdanov’s¹⁴ assessments of the journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad*.¹⁵

A significant research theme in Soviet ethnography since 1948 was life on collective farms or kolkhozes. It was state-directed and ideologically biased research in which Soviet propaganda ideals were mixed with actual observations and (self-)censorship.¹⁶ Ethnographers struggled with the challenge of finding the right kolkhozes in the USSR that would correspond to an imagined Soviet reality. Mentioning the challenges of actual rural life was unthinkable in Stalinist public discourse. In some cases, focusing on historical issues (e.g., peasant life before collectivization) or material culture enabled the avoidance of certain aspects of social life in kolkhozes (Haber 2013; Alymov 2011; Abashin 2011).

In 1949, on the initiative of the Ethnography Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences, ERM organized the first joint fieldwork expedition to document contemporary life in recently founded collective farms in Estonia.¹⁷ Such expeditions continued in the following years and can be considered part of the Sovietization with the aim of integrating the local ethnographers into Soviet research methodology (Konksi 2004:14). Nonetheless, the methodological guidelines set by leading ethnographers in Moscow were not appropriate for Estonian circumstances, where collective farms had just been established and people were forced to join them (Jääts 2019:6). In spite of ideological pressure, fieldwork in Estonia concentrated on studying the pre-modern peasant society.

Aliise Moora's 1,323-page ethnographic description of the kolkhoz *Võimas Jõud* (Mighty Power) in Tartu County is based on fieldwork from 1949 to 1951 (ERM EA 101:1/2-368; ERM EA 102:1/2-275; ERM EA 103:1/2-180; ERM EA 104:1/5-278; ERM EA 105:1/5-13). It is worth mentioning that she chose this collective farm as a field site because it enabled her younger children to accompany her fieldwork encounters and also enjoy summer leisure time (Moora 2022, see fig. 2). She concentrated less on modern collective farm life and more on the traditional way of life of peasants, which locals remembered, or which was still a part of the collective farm's materiality. Ideologically, this kind of text met the aims of Soviet research and was presented so in work reports. Its content, however, corresponded to the classical ethnography of peasant culture. Aliise Moora valued fieldwork highly and took interviewing seriously. Being a skilful communicator and familiar with folk culture, she knew how to make her conversation partners talk. The materials stored at ERM archives show that she managed to create a trusting atmosphere even in the difficult post-war times,¹⁸ so that the locals were ready to share personal information. Yet, we have to consider self-censorship on the part of informants as well as Aliise Moora herself because it was impossible to mention certain topics. Generally, the theme of collective farm research remained remote for the Estonian ethnologists of the period, and no comprehensive study was compiled.



Figure 2. Aliise Moora, accompanied by her daughter Liis-Mail, interviews Ann Ope, on a field trip to the collective farm Mighty Power in 1949. Photo Harri Moora. ERM Fk 1182:85.

Thanks to Harri Moora's good relations with Russian ethnographers and his reputation among them, it was possible to concentrate on ethnogenesis and, through this, primarily on historical research (Viies 1993:11). In 1952, the Moscow Institute of Ethnography organized the Baltic ethnographical-anthropological expedition, or a complex expedition,¹⁹ which operated until 1960 (see fig. 3). Although the central authorities prescribed this format for cooperation, it allowed Estonian researchers in ethnonational research disciplines to maintain continuity in their work during challenging times and to foster collaboration between archaeologists, historians and ethnologists.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Aliise Moora dealt with several research themes in parallel, but in her work diary and reports, she emphasizes the studies of Estonian-Russian relations. This theme was also politically commissioned, and not only the contacts between Estonians and Russians but their "friendship" and the example and positive influence of Russian culture had to be emphasized. Although the museum staff were obliged to read Soviet Russian ethnographers' works and discuss them together, Aliise Moora's activities reflect the traditional approach. She worked with the sources of the Historical Archives, dealt with language materials concerning vocabulary, and looked for Russian loan words in Baltic German sources.²⁰ Concentration on ethnogenesis enabled her to study the traditional themes



Figure 3. Ethnographers on a complex expedition in Jõhvi district, 31 July 1952. From the left: photographer Uudo Rips, Dimitri Grevens, Natalie Grevens, ethnographers Aino Voolmaa from ERM and Aliise Moora from the Institute of History.

of folk culture, as settlement types, agricultural tools, folk costumes, etc., using the pre-war historical-geographical method, an essential part of which was drawing distribution maps and using sources of language history and materials from the Historical Archives. In 1954 and 1955, she passed the exams necessary for obtaining the Candidate's degree,²¹ but managed to defend her dissertation only ten years later. In the article "On Historical-Ethnographical Areas in Estonia", published in 1956 in the collection *On the Ethnic History of the Estonian People*, Aliise Moora substantiated the division of the country into Northern, Southern, and Western Estonia based on the analysis of material culture (Moora 1956). By doing so, she supported the approach that had already been developed in ethnology in the 1930s but did it in a new Soviet research context.²²

Along with ethnological studies, Aliise Moora and her colleagues had additional obligations caused by the misery of post-war everyday life, such as procuring and transporting firewood for the museum, assisting collective farms with grain harvesting, and participating in the liquidation of the war-related destructions on Sundays. The so-called socio-political activities were also compulsory; the work diary included a separate field for them. Every week, there were also obligatory political information sessions during worktime where Aliise Moora had to make presentations. For example, she had to acquaint the ERM staff with Lenin's works and, if necessary,

translate them, provide overviews of, for example, the construction of the Volga-Don canal²³ or explain the lowering of prices.²⁴

As early as 1945, Estonian intellectuals and creative personalities had to submit individual plans of work where so-called production, deadlines, and tasks of ideological and political education were noted down. Total planned economy prevailed; the fulfilment of plans of different levels (from months and years to five-year periods) was checked and discussed at the meetings of work collectives, creative unions, and their Communist Party organizations. The diaries show that although the main methods in ethnography – work with sources and literature, fieldwork – remained similar to the pre-war period, they had to be formulated and presented in Soviet rhetoric as “struggles” or “battles”. Additional tasks had to be fulfilled and reported at “production meetings” to demonstrate the employees’ loyalty and enthusiasm. Collective criticism of completed research papers became a usual practice (Karjahärm & Sirk 2007:209–210; Olesk 2022:60). Aliise Moora’s work diaries also reflect the load of Soviet bureaucracy: continuous statistical and political reports, five-year plans, and plans of staff education. These requirements, however, were not systematic but intensely chaotic, as Aliise Moora notes with frustration even in her official work diary in spring 1949: “...compiled the account of using ERM collections since 1946 for Comrade Kilvits again in a new variant (for the fourth time!).”²⁵

From the end of 1948, so-called revealing meetings began at the universities, research institutions, and creative unions of the Estonian SSR and gained greater momentum in 1949–1950. The peak of the revelations and purges was in 1950, and in April of the same year, Harri Moora was attacked at a meeting of party activists in Tartu (Vääri 2001:32). He lost his job as Professor of Archaeology at the University of Tartu but could still continue as Head of the Archaeology Department at the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences. At the same time, ERM was “revealed” as a nest of bourgeois-nationalist views and personalities. The director, Ida Kaldmaa, was dismissed, and Aliise Moora was demoted to the post of junior researcher. Most probably, the factors used to her detriment were her education acquired in the independent Republic of Estonia, papers written in the spirit of classical ethnography, and the degradation of her husband’s position. Reading her work diaries from 1949–1951, it is noticeable that she frequently had to be on night watch duty and guard the exhibition, which also seems to have been a peculiar form of repression.

The atmosphere of the period is vividly described in the minutes of the ERM work meeting of 17 May 1950. Among other questions, there was a discussion of Aliise Moora’s article “Estonians”, which was meant to be published as an overview in Russian in the USSR collection *Peoples of the World*. The article was sharply criticized by Oskar Sepre, an economist who had held high public offices in the Soviet Union.²⁶ He found that the article

had to be fully rewritten to emphasize class struggle and that “the huge progress of agriculture and all aspects of life in Soviet Estonia had to be shown.”²⁷ Neither did the article sufficiently mention the Russian influence and “help”; it was also blameworthy that the influence of Russian culture was presented “too dryly”.²⁸ In the section on Soviet Estonian agriculture, the author was also compelled to write about “the example of the collective farms of the sister republics”.²⁹ Conversely, in the section on the historical development of Estonian handicraft, the negative influence of the Germans should have been highlighted.³⁰ Ignoring historical facts, the author was also forced to foreground the deterioration of agriculture and nutrition in “bourgeois” Estonia or in 1918–1940.³¹ In the summer and autumn of 1950, Aliise Moora supplemented her article, particularly on collective farm life and other themes, but not according to the recommendations of Comrade Sepre but of Harri Moora, another leading archaeologist, Artur Vassar, and the folklorist Eduard Laugaste.³² Despite corrections, the article was not published, and it was put on hold. She resumed working on it in 1959, and the article was published as late as 1964.³³

Although Aliise Moora was in disfavour, her work diaries confirm that her workload and responsibility did not actually decrease. She still remained a leading ethnologist whose opinion had weight in the main research trends of the discipline and who constantly assessed and reviewed colleagues’ and degree applicants’ papers. She also advised the Faculty of Philology and History at the University of Tartu concerning curricula and the arrangement of studies.³⁴

In 1952, the name Estonian National Museum was abolished as being too nationalistic, and the institution was renamed the State Ethnographic Museum of the Estonian SSR.³⁵ In the same year, Aliise Moora started working in the archaeology sector³⁶ at the Institute of History at the Academy of Sciences³⁷ as a junior researcher. Her work diary, however, shows that this year and a major part of the next, she still worked at the museum and continued her earlier tasks. Thus, she dealt with organizing the network of correspondents, compiled folk costume outfits for a pertinent publication, and conducted fieldwork in East Estonia in the framework of the complex expedition.³⁸

Since the second half of the 1950s, Aliise Moora was also active as an expert in ethnology in the broader cultural space – she advised Estonian theatres and the film studio on questions of folk culture, reviewed film scripts, and published popular scientific articles on folk culture in the press and spoke on the radio. The proportion of direct political obligations dropped and was replaced with expert contributions essential from the viewpoint of national culture, such as consultations for researchers of local history, a tourist home or in relation to song celebrations. Nonetheless, for example, on 15 January 1956, she had to take an exam in air defence against nuclear weapons.³⁹

Despite political campaigns and persecutions, Aliise Moora's research predominantly continued to rely on classical ethnography and focus on peasant culture. Her studies demonstrate that although Moscow stressed the need for ideologization of humanities and the significance of studying the socialist present, the changes remained superficial, and, by the end of the Stalinist period and the beginning of Khrushchev's thaw, ethnology, archaeology and folkloristics had become even more conservative than before World War II (Saarlo 2018; Konksi 2004). By changing the discourse, an impression about the acquisition of the Marxist-Leninist worldview was created, but the necessary references and quotations had a ritual character. In the Stalinist era Aliise Moora retained a modest position in the official system of research due to political repressions against her as a scholar and as Harri Moora's wife.

A Mature Researcher in Advanced Socialist Society, 1957–1980

In the second half of the 1950s, Aliise Moora continued studying Russian-Estonian relations and folk culture on the shore of Lake Peipsi, with the aim of defending a Candidate's degree in history. The work diaries, however, show the diversity of her tasks, which clearly fragmented her energy and attention and caused a delay in completing the dissertation. For example,



Figure 4. Women ethnographers preparing a book on folk costumes at ERM in 1953. Standing from the left Jenny Nõu, Tamara Paevere, Endla Lõoke, Ella Vahe. Seated Lehti Konsin, Aliise Moora, Tiina Võti and Linda Trees. Photo Uudo Rips. ERM Fk 1185:29.

in 1957–1959, she reviewed the articles, reports, and fieldwork summaries of seventeen colleagues and helped them compile ethnographical questionnaires.⁴⁰ She also compiled an overview of peasant culture for the general history of the Estonian SSR and partly wrote and edited a book on folk costumes (Moora 1957). Although Harri Moora has been marked as the chief editor of the latter, the contribution of Aliise Moora and her female colleagues at ERM is clearly greater (see fig. 4). This is another example of women's invisible work in both academic and museological contexts (Klein 2013).

It is also noteworthy that, in addition to her own fieldwork in East Estonia and the Leningrad and Pskov regions of Russia, Aliise Moora also participated in her husband Harri Moora's archaeological expeditions, for example in 1957, even at three different places.⁴¹ Her activity as an expert was also extensive. She started counselling at the Estonian Open Air Museum, founded in 1957, and remained a member of its research council until the end of her life. She also advised on how to arrange the ethnographical collection of the Estonian History Museum. Likewise, she consistently gave advice about local history research that had been revived in the late 1950s. The latter became for decades one of the activities for preserving Estonian patriotism and opposing the Soviet treatment of history. The leading role in this movement belonged to pre-war intellectuals.

During the Stalinist regime, the works of Western researchers were inaccessible to Estonian ethnologists. The studies of both Estonian and Western colleagues written before World War II had been either destroyed or placed in special collections of libraries.⁴² In the late 1950s, researchers could read foreign authors' works again after a long time. The work diary shows that in 1958, Aliise Moora could use Toivo Vuorela's dictionary of ethnography (*Kansatieteen sanasto*) published in the same year.⁴³ In the following year, she could read Kustaa Vilkuna's papers on the folk calendar.⁴⁴ Little by little, personal contacts were revived. Vilkuna was the first foreign ethnographer to visit Estonia after World War II, in February 1956.⁴⁵ In the autumn of the same year, other scholars of the humanities, including Vuorela, came to Estonia (Raudsepp 2023:211). It can be supposed that during this visit, Vilkuna also met Harri and Aliise Moora. As Vilkuna had close contacts with Gustav Ränk, who lived in Sweden, he was most probably able to act as a mediator of information between Estonian ethnologists living in the homeland and abroad. It is also noteworthy that on the 50th anniversary of ERM in 1959, Niilo Valonen, who was Associate Professor of Finno-Ugric Ethnology at the University of Helsinki, was also allowed to visit the museum, and Aliise Moora talked to him. In 1960, she gained access to a book by August Nigol, who had studied Estonian settlements on the shore of Lake Peipsi but his works were prohibited in Soviet time.⁴⁶ In 1963, she could read the book on Votians by Gustav Ränk (Ränk 1960), and, in 1964,

Ilmar Talve's study on the sauna and the threshing barn (Talve 1960).⁴⁷ Both scholars had emigrated and were until then considered enemies by the Soviet regime. The mildening of the socio-political atmosphere can also be seen from the fact that from 1962, the compulsory field "ideological and political work" disappears from Aliise Moora's work diaries and is replaced with "voluntary work", which consisted of popularizing research as well as singing in the women's choir of the Academy of Sciences.⁴⁸

Aliise Moora defended her Candidate's dissertation *On the Ethnic History of the Shore of Lake Peipsi* as late as December 1964, when she was 62 (Moora 1964).⁴⁹ This concluded her research on Estonian-Russian relations and ethnogenesis that started in the 1940s. The dissertation is a regional study that deals with cultural contacts and the formation of ethnic composition in the region. The whole monograph is characterized by precision in historical and ethnographic details. Her approach is interdisciplinary, incorporating historical, archaeological, ethnographic, and linguistic analysis as well as the region's ecological and economic historical context. Along with settlement history, the author deals in greater detail with the history of agriculture, horticulture, fishing, handicrafts, and other fields of life in the region. She also discusses thoroughly the themes of folk economy, buildings, customs, food, folk costumes, the regional vocabulary, and semantics of folk culture in the border areas (in addition to Estonian-Russian contacts also Votian and Izhorian materials). Following the guidelines of the era, Aliise Moora emphasizes the friendly relations between Estonians and Russians, although the delay in the completion of the study enabled her to moderate the Soviet ideological rhetoric compared to the 1950s. Considering the time and circumstances of writing the dissertation, using contemporary Western studies was impossible.

Instead of the patronizing attitude to research subjects common in Soviet humanities research of the period, Aliise Moora showed sincere respect and attention to her interviewees, which is also expressed in the preface to the *Ethnic History of the Shore of Lake Peipsi*:

My deepest thanks go out to the people in the villages on the shore of Lake Peipsi who trustingly opened the doors of their homes during my expeditions to collect the material and kindly shared their knowledge, observations, and memories (Moora 1964:5).

In Soviet Estonian ethnography, the aim of ethnographic descriptions was to give as objective a description of culture as possible. The personalities of both the researcher (or questioner/collector) and respondent had to be eradicated from it. Consequently, often "man was completely eliminated" from Soviet-era ethnographies (Pärdi 1995:79–80). Thus, it is somewhat exceptional that in her ethnographic accounts, Aliise Moora has given voice to her informants, which characterizes her empathic attitude. In retrospect, she

has emphasized her emotional connection with traditional rural life since childhood, which helped her understand and value what country people shared with her (Tarand 1982). Such an attitude is expressed in the following examples from her monograph:

To get an idea of how this work is done, we let the Estonian women of Mustvee and Kasepää who grow chicory speak for themselves.

The life of Estonian fishermen in the Peipsi region is characterized by the memories of Ann Ope (born approximately 1870) who came from an old fishermen's family. (Moora 1964: 161, 167)

She does not, however, analyse the storytelling or narratives collected from people *per se*; stories are included in the ethnographic text as examples illustrating the historical reality of bygone times (cf. Metslaid 2019).

Even after Aliise Moora had been awarded the Candidate's degree, a great deal of her working time was filled with various technical tasks, e.g., taking minutes at meetings, technical editing of colleagues' manuscripts, dealing with formalities related to printing, editing, and proofreading of Russian translations, etc. Such tasks can be characterized as "institutional housekeeping" in academia because "it involves the invisible and supportive work of women that is usually performed without resources and recognition and is related to issues of institutional responsibility and women's academic advancement" (Bird, Litt & Wang 2004:195). In addition, she regularly wrote popular scientific articles for magazines, performed in radio broadcasts, and gave advice on questions concerning the cultural context in films and theatre productions.

The work diaries and work reports from the 1960s and early 1970s⁵⁰ reveal that, from the second half of the 1960s, one of the focuses of Aliise Moora's research was Estonian peasants' foodways. She worked on the relevant material in the collections of ERM, the archive and card index of the State Literary Museum of the Estonian SSR, and the materials of the dialect sector of the Institute of Language and Literature. To find comparative material, she did fieldwork in Latvia, Lithuania, and the Leningrad region of Russia. A real breakthrough in Aliise Moora's work was in 1969, when she got permission to work for three weeks in Helsinki.⁵¹ She worked intensively at the University of Helsinki, the National Museum of Finland, and the Finnish Literature Society, collecting material on the sources of folk food culture and consulting pertinent studies. Participation in the international congress of Finno-Ugrists in Tallinn in 1970 and in the USSR congress of Scandinavian studies in 1973, where she delivered the paper "Common Features in Estonian and Scandinavian Peasants' Food", also provided new opportunities for keeping in touch with contemporary Western research.⁵²

Aliise Moora's monograph, *The Older Food of Estonian Peasants*, which is until now the only historical ethnographic overview of Estonian peasants'

food culture, remained unpublished for many years. Its first part appeared as late as 1980, and the second part came out in independent Estonia in 1991 (Moora 1980; 1991). On the one hand, the delay in publishing research papers was usual in the Soviet period because of the bureaucracy; editing, censoring, and printing took months or even years. On the other hand, the holdup of Aliise Moora's study reflects the marginal status of food culture as a research topic in Soviet ethnography. Furthermore, the decision to focus on historical peasant foodways enabled her to avoid the challenges of Soviet reality. (Soviet food culture became a research interest for Estonian ethnologists only in the 2000s (see Bardone and Kannike 2020)). As noted by Håkan Jönsson, although research on food has been part of ethnological studies since the beginning of the 1900s, it was rarely considered the main research topic and has been revived in European ethnology only since the 1970s. Researchers of this period focused on mapping food as a form of cultural expression: the origins of foodstuffs, their production and consumption, and habits and customs related to food and eating (Jönsson 2022:181–182). Considering this, Aliise Moora's study fitted well into the ethnological scholarship on food of the time, albeit with limited connections with colleagues from the West.⁵³

In her research on food culture, Aliise Moora gave prominence to the methodological aims set by her teacher Ilmari Manninen for studying peasants' traditional material culture (see Manninen 2005 (1924)). She also paid great attention to language history, which was related to the historical-geographical method used in Estonian ethnography from the 1920s to the 1980s. Additionally, she also included the principles of diffusionism, or the spread of cultural elements, which were earlier known in anthropology (Annist & Kaaristo 2013; Jääts & Metslaid 2018). When writing *The Older Food of Estonian Peasants*, Aliise Moora's aim was to create a possibly comprehensive overview, to identify the most essential foods and the geographical spread of their typological variations, to establish the ethnographical cultural regions related to essential foodstuffs and dishes, and to find relations between the food cultures of Estonians and the neighbouring peoples. Following the historical-geographical method, Aliise Moora's study contains numerous distribution maps on which she provides an overview of the spread and names of concrete foods and drinks, ways and means of food processing, and eating habits and customs. The passion for mapping food culture survived longer in food research than in other fields of European ethnology (Bringéus 2000).⁵⁴

In *The Older Food of Estonian Peasants*, as with the study of the ethnic culture at the shore of Lake Peipsi, Aliise Moora values the manner of expression of her informants or the correspondents of the Ethnographic Museum, their language, and their world view. Aliise Moora also expressed this research principle in her article on "Collections of the Ethnographic Museum as a Basis for Studying Peasant Food":

the researcher gains a lot from the respondent's vivid explanations and apt comparisons about the phenomenon discussed. This can be more inspiring for understanding the situation in the past and drawing conclusions than a dry list of facts. (Moora 1973:264)

Aliise Moora's descriptions of the role of different foodstuffs in Estonian culture are also based on expressive and abundant folk heritage – for example, in the case of fish, descriptions of fishing rituals, attitudes towards varied species (e.g., eels were despised as food in older times), regional names, exchange of fish for grain, and finally, evaluation of farm masters depending on what kind of fish and how much was given to servants for food.

When writing *The Older Food of Estonian Peasants*, Aliise Moora relied on abundant material comparing Estonian and neighbouring cultures with the aim of pointing out cultural contacts and influences – what is original, what has been borrowed and from where, and how the cultural loans have been adopted and adjusted to the local situation.⁵⁵ Instead of the mainly Russian influences that were predominant in her dissertation, the author finds comparisons with peoples in the Baltic Sea region and kindred Finno-Ugric peoples. Particularly often, she used the works of the older generation of Finnish and Swedish researchers (Sigurd Erixon, Kustaa Vilkuna, Toivo Vuorela, Nils-Arvid Bringéus). To some extent, the studies of German ethnologists from the 1950s–1960s were also available to her. This reflects both the mildening of ideological pressure and the author's maturation as a researcher, including her ability to integrate the Estonian material into a broader cultural context and research discourse.

Aliise Moora's study on food has notable similarities with *From Milk to Cheese* (1966) by Gustav Ränk, who worked as Associate Professor of Ethnology at the University of Stockholm from 1955 (Ränk 1966). Ränk also relied on written answers to ethnological questionnaires, collections of objects and drawings at museums, and fieldwork in Sweden, with the aim of providing an extensive, synthesizing, and comparative study on the history of cheese in the Nordic countries (Ränk 2010:341–343). Both researchers were interested in the longer development history of foodstuffs from the archaeological material to the twentieth century, as well as the mapping of broad cultural geographical connections and influences. They documented the methods and tools of food processing, their regional differences, and the place of foodstuffs in the peasant diet and eating habits. Aliise Moora refers to most of Ränk's works published either before or after World War II and to his study on cheese which he sent to her in 1971. Nonetheless, the preserved correspondence shows that the two researchers communicated, asked for, and gave each other advice.⁵⁶

In the 1970s, when already a professor emeritus, Ränk commented appreciatively on Aliise Moora's research in his letter to her:

The most important is that you, as soon as possible, present the descriptive Estonian material, and completely. The field of the food economy in which you are working now is innovative and, therefore, has great value for research. When you finish it, you have done real pioneering work, which future researchers, not only in the homeland, will appreciate highly.⁵⁷

It is telling that her colleagues in the homeland did not fully acknowledge the significance of Aliise Moora's research, but recognition came from a compatriot living in exile. Ränk's assessment was more valuable, as he could see Aliise Moora's contribution in the broader context of European ethnology and food culture studies.

Even though the monograph *The Older Food of Estonian Peasants* is structured mainly around different foodstuffs, their production, and consumption, considerable space is also dedicated to meals and by whom, how, and when they are prepared and eaten. The attention paid to daily meals and eating habits as research units makes it possible to compare Aliise Moora's work with the trends in ethnological and anthropological food research in the 1970s. The German scholar Ulrich Tolksdorf called for the study of meals as complex sociocultural events structured not just by food but also by shared participation in space and time, whereas Günther Wiegelmann emphasized that a meal should be the basic research unit as it comprises all important aspects in ethnological food research; any eating situation can be considered a meal that is not only structured by culture but also structures people's everyday lives (Tolksdorf 1976; Wiegelmann 1972). The British anthropologist Mary Douglas saw a similarity between the grammatical structures that organize language and the elements and structures that organize meals in different cultures (Douglas 1972; Douglas & Nicod 1974). Although Aliise Moora does not use the theoretical ideas suggested by these scholars, she reaches fairly similar results when discussing peasants' eating habits in her monograph, demonstrating how working days were divided into periods between meals, which were the main meals of the day, and when some light snacks were taken, which foods were eaten on which days of the week, and which foods were used together during one meal, which special foods were eaten on holidays and at festive events, how the peasant family ate at the table on working days, and what rights everyone had (Moora 1980:65–97; Moora 1991:245–264). Moora likewise emphasizes how it is essential to view meals as social events, as by studying the meals one does not only get information on food but also on the culture and society of a period.

Despite her academic degree, fruitful activity, and research contacts, Aliise Moora had to compile a new CV and list of research papers in 1971 (at the age of 71!) to apply for the position of senior researcher. Thus, unlike her male colleagues, whose careers had also been interrupted during Stalin's time, Aliise Moora remained at the lowest level in the hierarchy

of researchers until the end of her professional life.⁵⁸ The same applies to other women who were active in ethnonational research disciplines – in ethnology, archaeology, and folkloristics; the positions of professors, museum directors, heads of departments, or sectors at institutes were without exception filled by men in the Soviet period.⁵⁹ Until the 1970s, women's situation in ethnology was challenging also in Scandinavian countries.⁶⁰ In addition, Aliise Moora's working conditions as a researcher were most inconvenient, even at her mature age. This can be seen from her letter sent to the director of the Institute of History in 1960, where she asks for permission to work at the institute in the evenings:

As our workroom has become ever more crowded, there is no peace and quiet there for working in the daytime. As you know, our room is used by 11 people; in addition, other staff members use the archives, catalogues, plans, etc., that are held in cabinets in our room. The collected material and everything else necessary for work is at the institute, and I have no room of my own for working at home either.⁶¹

From the late 1950s, Aliise Moora's work diaries and research papers reflect how, in the slowly liberalizing Soviet society, she used the opportunities to abandon politically compulsory themes and to delve into the history of peasant culture, which interested her most. Estonian peasants' pre-modern food culture gradually became her main research focus. She broadened her scholarly perspective by relying on Western colleagues' contemporary works that had become available through Finland. During her entire career as a researcher, Aliise Moora did not accept the paradigm of Soviet ethnography, which emphasized academic objectivity and distance from the research object and depicted peasants' material and intangible heritage as a backward phenomenon compared to the "progressive" present.

Conclusion

Aliise Moora's long life and career as a researcher provide a unique example of a female researcher's opportunities for self-realization and of using these opportunities for more than half a century under different political circumstances. She followed the guidelines and techniques of contemporary ethnology based on Scandinavian models in her research and work at the museum prior to World War II.

Aliise Moora's work diaries allow us to state that being the wife of Harri Moora, one of the most eminent Estonian researchers in the humanities in the 1930s–1960s, influenced her path as a researcher in a contradictory way. Thanks to joint interests in research, her connections with the development of ethnology and museology were not broken when she was taking care of their children in the 1930s. However, her husband being proclaimed a "bourgeois nationalist" in the peak years of the Stalinist regime hindered

her career and even led to repressions. All through her long life, it was essential for Aliise Moora, along with her own research, to help her spouse in his research and take care of their large family.

In the post-war years, Aliise Moora played a leading role in restoring the pre-war ethnological research and mission of ERM, but thereafter, she was demoted to a marginal position for political reasons. In Stalin's time, Estonian ethnologists had to follow strict ideological guidelines from Moscow in their research. Nonetheless, Aliise Moora used traditional sources and methods of ethnology in her research and preferred the politically more neutral historical analysis of peasant culture. Since the late 1950s, she managed to re-establish her authority as an ethnological expert but nevertheless remained in the position of a junior researcher. In the 1960s and 1970s, the control of and pressure on research by Soviet central authorities decreased, but contacts with foreign colleagues remained limited. Working at the History Institute of the Academy of Sciences, Aliise Moora could again gain access to Western studies, and establish personal contacts and correspondence. In her Candidate's dissertation on the ethnic history of the shore of Lake Peipsi, she had to consider the Soviet ideological framework and methodology to a certain extent. The subsequent treatment of peasants' food culture, however, was comparable to similar studies in European ethnology and social anthropology at the time.

Aliise Moora was a talented researcher and research administrator, but her career did not progress – obtaining the Candidate's degree was delayed, and she remained a junior researcher until her mature years. Although she was an undisputed authority in Estonian ethnology and its neighbouring disciplines and a consultant for many colleagues, a great part of her work consisted of technical and organizational activities. Aliise Moora did not join the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which was indispensable for advancement in one's professional career. Although the Soviet ideology emphasized equality between women and men, the research hierarchy was rather chauvinist, and it was considered natural that leading positions were filled by men. Women, however, fulfilled institutional housekeeping tasks in academic institutions.

Aliise Moora made a remarkable contribution to Estonian humanities as both an ethnologist and a research organizer. In the Soviet period, ethnological research was, among everything else, one of the ways to support the suppressed national identity. Aliise Moora's work has lasting value as a basis for contemporary interpretations of cultural heritage at both academic and applied levels.

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¹ The University of Tartu had begun to admit women as late as 1915, initially only to the Faculties of Medicine, History, and Philology, and they had been inscribed from 1917.

² The peace treaty with Soviet Russia was signed in February 1920.

³ In 1920, the number of students at the University of Tartu was approximately 700. In 1920–1940, approximately a third of the students were women. Still, many of them interrupted their studies for economic and family reasons (Laidla 2019).

⁴ The designations of ethnography and folklife studies (rahvateadus; kansatiede in Finnish; folkslivsforskning in Swedish) were both used in the interwar period; under the Soviet regime, the only accepted term was ethnography. From the contemporary perspective, we refer to the discipline as ethnology.

⁵ These included several women who studied ethnography at the same time: Helmi Reiman-Neggo, Helmi Kurrik, Ella Koern, and Helmi Üprus.

⁶ ERM EA 6:2/139–508

⁷ She worked temporarily (1927–1928 and 1930–1931) at the Archaeological Museum of the University of Tartu (ERM Archive, Stock 1, Series 1, Item 69), but stopped working in the 1930s.

⁸ In total, 1537 women graduated from the University of Tartu in 1919–1939 or 27% of all the graduates (Lepp 1940:229). Nonetheless, in 1934, such women comprised only 0.3% of the population of Estonia (Poska-Grünthal 1936:87).

⁹ For details see Viires 1993:7–8.

¹⁰ In 1946–1963 ERM was subordinated to the Academy of Sciences of the Estonian SSR.

¹¹ As mentioned above, many Soviet scholars were also accused of conducting anti-Soviet research and were repressed.

¹² The same yearbook included the instructive article by Sergey Tolstov, a leading Soviet ethnographer of the period, “Ethnography and the Present Day” (Tolstov 1947).

¹³ Work diary 1948–1950.

¹⁴ Andrei Zhdanov (1896–1948) was the second secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the leading figure in cultural policy in Stalin’s time.

¹⁵ The resolution published in August 1946 criticised the apolitical stance and bourgeois mentality of these literary journals, primarily the creations of Zoshchenko and Akhmatova published in them.

¹⁶ Censorship in academic research was practised at multiple levels, from researchers' field diaries, institutional reports, to publishing houses.

¹⁷ Collectivisation of farm-based rural life in Estonia began after the war, but became a mass campaign in 1949 after about 20 thousand people were deported.

¹⁸ Country people were forced to join collective farms by threats of violence and repressions.

¹⁹ The Baltic researchers who participated in complex expeditions were subjugated to control by Moscow researchers and had to submit reports to Moscow, but the material was analysed locally.

²⁰ Work diary 1948–1950: 1948, 1949.

²¹ The Candidate of Sciences was equivalent to a PhD, yet, the demands were high, the bureaucratic procedures complicated and therefore the thesis often turned out to be a scholar's lifework (Vunder 1996:17). Until the second half of the 1970s ethnologists could obtain the degree in Estonia, but later, according to the new rules, applicants had to defend their degrees at the universities in Moscow, St Petersburg, Minsk etc. (Viies 1993:16).

²² This division had earlier been described by Ferdinand Linnus (1895–1942), Gustav Ränk (1902–1998) et al. For understandable reasons, Aliise Moora could not refer to their studies.

²³ Work diary 1952–1954: Sunday, 8 June 1952.

²⁴ Work diary 1948–1950: 1949; work diary 1952–1954: 1952, 1954.

²⁵ Work diary 1948–1950: 16 March 1949.

²⁶ Oskar Sepre (1900–1968) had been imprisoned for communist activities before World War II. After the 1940 coup, he was Chairman of the Estonian SSR Planning Committee, later academician and researcher at the Institute of Economics.

²⁷ ERM Archive, Stock 1, Series 1, Item 47, p. 2. Work meeting of the Estonian National Museum of the Estonian SSR Academy of Sciences on 17 May 1950.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³² Work diary 1948–1950: 1949.

³³ *Peoples of the World: Ethnographic Essays. Peoples of the European Part of the USSR / Academy.* Moscow: Nauka, 1964. - Such long publishing cycles were typical in the Soviet Union.

³⁴ For example, in spring 1953, she discussed with Hilda Moosberg, Head of the Department of History at Tartu State University, the syllabus of ethnography – lectures, seminar papers and organisation of summer fieldwork for students. Work diary, February-March 1953.

³⁵ For the sake of clarity, we will still refer to the museum as ERM.

³⁶ Harri Moora was the leader of the sector. There were two ethnographers working there at the beginning, Aliise Moora and Jelizaveta Richter. The latter also came over from the museum.

³⁷ The number of ethnologists working in the sector of archaeology increased during the years. A separate sector of ethnography was founded as late as in 1983 (Viies 1993:15).

³⁸ Work diary 1952–1954: 1952–1953.

³⁹ Work diary 1954–1965: 15 January 1956.

⁴⁰ Work diary 1957–1958; Work diary 1959–1962.

⁴¹ Work diary 1957–1958: 1957.

⁴² To use them, a special written permit had to be applied for, which presumed consent by the management of the institution and security organs.

⁴³ Work diary 1957–1958: 1958.

⁴⁴ Work diary 1959–1962: 1959.

⁴⁵ This was obviously possible thanks to Vilkuuna's political reputation – he was a close adviser of President Urho Kekkonen. For details see: Honko 1981.

⁴⁶ Work diary 1959–1962: 1960. August Nigol had been killed by Bolsheviks in 1918.

⁴⁷ Work diary 1962–1964: 1963.

⁴⁸ Work diary 1962–1964.

⁴⁹ In the Soviet Union, women could retire at the age of 55, but Aliise Moora continued working for several decades after retirement.

⁵⁰ A. Moora's research report for 1968–1973.

⁵¹ In the eyes of the Soviet authorities, Aliise Moora was a suspicious person, as her eldest son, Rein Moora, had fled Estonia during the war, served in the Finnish army, and later lived in Sweden. The situation was even more complicated as, in the 1950s, the KGB tried to use Harri Moora to establish contacts with exile Estonian researchers in Sweden, writing letters under his name (for details, see Salminen 2012:106–107). Harri Moora visited Sweden for the first time in 1957, and both spouses went to Finland and Sweden in 1967.

⁵² Research report for 1968–1973.

⁵³ For instance, she could not attend international conferences organised by the Ethnological Food Research Group, which was established in 1970 following its first symposium in Lund the same year (see Bringéus 2000).

⁵⁴ Nils-Arvid Bringéus notes that one of the peculiarities of the ethnological food studies of the 1970s was the focus on different food elements, particularly material objects related to food culture, as a considerable part of food research was conducted in museums where household utensils formed a significant part of the collections; and additionally in institutes responsible for ethnological atlas work (1981:230).

⁵⁵ Manninen 2005 (1924); Viires 1970; on similar approach in Europe in general, see, e.g., Nic Craith 2008:9–10.

⁵⁶ ERM Ak 5:2/3, pp. 81–98.

⁵⁷ Gustav Ränk's letter to Aliise Moora, April 26, 1972, ERM Ak 5:2/3, p. 91.

⁵⁸ Ants Viires defended his Candidate's thesis in 1955 and became head of the ethnography sector at the Institute of History; Jüri Linnus defended his thesis in 1983 but held several leading positions, including that of research director at ERM from 1956–1986.

⁵⁹ The first woman Professor of Ethnology at the University of Tartu, Elle Vunder, was elected to this post in 1994.

⁶⁰ For example, Anna Brigitta Rooth (1919–2000) of the University of Uppsala became the first Swedish woman professor of ethnology as late as in 1973, and it was not simple for her to prove herself in the company of men (Klein 2013:140).

⁶¹ Aliise Moora's application to the director of the Institute of History at the Estonian SSR Academy of Sciences, 19 January 1960.