RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Town That Never Was – Archipelagos, Edgelands, Imaginations

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This article is an attempt at an interplay between Édouard Glissant’s archipelagic thinking, Marion Shoard’s edgeland and an imagined geography and history of a particular location and the people who have lived there. The town of Paldiski – the Baltic Port – bordering the Gulf of Finland, may be a remarkable Glissantian vantage point, and simultaneously an edgeland from which to draw attention to the creation and persistence of the ‘imaginaire’ that Glissant argued binds people as much as economic transactions. The port is both closed (as a military base or due to customs regulations) and open as a harbour. Thus, it frames all kinds of flows of peoples, materials and policies, yet it is on the edge literally and figuratively. In Paldiski, the imaginary seems independent of the physical environment, the past and future, and the people highlighted by the lifepaths of two historic figures.

Keywords: edgeland; ethnicity; Paldiski (Baltic Port); Carl Friedrich Kalk; Salawat Yulayev

Introduction

This contribution is an Édouard Glissant-inspired investigation into a history and geography of a town – Paldiski on the Pakri Peninsula, the south coast of the Gulf of Finland, on the Baltic Sea – that never got to be the hub that it was envisioned to be, despite a multitude of efforts to create a superior military port, or at least a flourishing commercial centre in a location persistently argued to be ideal for such enterprise. This is not to say that there are no physical traces of a settlement in this particular spot but its assumed potential has been contained within a strictly defined outline and described persistently in similar terms despite numerous tumultuous changes in the physical environment and political system. This compels us to paraphrase a question Michael Wiedorn (2021) asks about environmental determinism. Has Paldiski emerged because its geography and history encourage us to think in certain ways, or have they rather prohibited our thinking in other ways?

The aim is therefore to take a different approach to examining place by highlighting its archipelagic connections within a Glissantian Tout-monde – the contemporary world and our consciousness of it – and the imaginaire – a perception of the whole world outside any set limits (Glissant 1996). Glissant, who disliked precise definitions, argued for a poetics of place that would not presuppose an immediate or harmonious world, either physical or mental, but that would open up for new connections and therewith possibilities to examine how imagination can shape real locations and their relations to the world. In this spirit, I probe when and why such a strong idea of Paldiski’s character, its potential and possibilities, was formed, and why it has persisted. Three aspects of Paldiski may be highlighted – its harbour, its inhabitants (more precisely the question of their indigeneity and belonging), and its ruins. All have their origin in a steadfast conviction that natural conditions in this location are ideal for a flourishing harbour of great strategic and economic significance as summarized in an oft-presented image from 1798 (see Figure 1). The reality of mundane activities in a shadow of pretentious constructions is better captured in a forgotten image published a few years later (see Figure 2). Faith in its potential, recently again presented in a master’s thesis as a “new” vision for Paldiski (Tanne 2018), has not faded.

The argument is based on an analysis of articles in newspapers (published in the periods 1845–1945, the 1990s, and the 2010s; mostly digitized sources were used, which dictated the choice of material to some extent, for instance, Russian newspapers from the tsarist era are not easily available but nearly 500 articles in Estonian, German and some in Swedish were found about different aspects of Paldiski) and scientific publications (covering fields from geology to history, environmental, memory, literary and art studies); archival documents, including maps (the mere list of archival documents scrutinized from the period from 1785 to 1945 covers 58 pages); and memoirs, paintings and postcards. Altogether ca 3000 different titles and items were examined. In addition, a sociological survey was conducted among local inhabitants in 2002 (Peil 2006).
An outline with some keywords describing local history and geography inspired by Glissant (discussed further below) and deep mapping (for methodology, see Springett 2015), is provided in Figure 3 for a reader not at all familiar with the setting. The sequence of events and the lay of the land is otherwise ignored; instead, the focus is on identifying a few moments in time, events, some actors and their deeds, or the exploits of others in their name as keys for understanding the imaginaire of Paldiski. These “keys” are not necessarily the ones that would be familiar from previous research and descriptions of the town, tourism literature, or journalism, although the latter two genres have played a notable role in enforcing a certain persistent idea of what Paldiski either is, or should be, about. Before examining this specific case more closely, a short recess into archipelagos and edgelands is necessary for a broader contextual setting. Glissant’s engagement with language and the poetics of place certainly encourages a closer and critical look at concepts and how and where they are used.

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**Figure 1:** Paldiski, image from the Mellin atlas, 1798 ([https://www.loc.gov/resource/g7022lm.ghl00003/?sp=8&r=-0.012,0.315,0.664,0.319,0; accessed 5 March 2020](https://www.loc.gov/resource/g7022lm.ghl00003/?sp=8&r=-0.012,0.315,0.664,0.319,0; accessed 5 March 2020)). This was made into a postcard in the 1920s and dated 1795 to be taken as a true depiction of the town.

**Figure 2:** An image of the port, fort and the everyday in the late 18th century that has not stuck. S. Rosenberg *Gegend bei Baltischport in Ehstland* (in Petri 1802, between pages 268/269; [https://www.digar.ee/viewer/et/nlib-digar:104034/108579; accessed 5 March 2020](https://www.digar.ee/viewer/et/nlib-digar:104034/108579; accessed 5 March 2020)).
Symmons Roberts (2012) extended the concept of edgelands to include areas characterized by having to accommodate originally used to describe an area between the city and the country (being properly neither). Paul Farley and Michael Adapting this idea into the physical setting, the concept of edgeland was coined by Marion Shoard (2002). It was they act as shelter and support and thus foster alternatives: changes happen at edges where anything is possible.

The vantage point of Glissant’s archipelago may also function as both a physical and mental frame for the in-between place. The Glissantian course, however, leads in many directions, often also backwards, and between the existing and what was to be. His map of time was to be read in all directions and with special attention to the signs of time on this course are moorings – landmarks – that travellers strew all along their meandering journey, with detours, returns, repetitions, variations, and variants (Bojsen 2021). In scoffing at the traditional linear view of history and geography’s spatial organizing powers, Glissant’s story is opposing that one-dimensional view. History is registered in a space that it energizes, while, at the same time, appears to make no progress. Glissant saw a history of layers where tensions prevailed between the past and the future, between the existing and what was to be. His map of time was to be read in all directions and with special attention to aspects that are opaque or not glaringly obvious. There was, nevertheless, always a future in his writings – the future of abundant possibilities amidst a landscape bearing memories. The signs of time on this course are moorings – landmarks – that travellers strew all along their meandering journey, with detours, returns, repetitions, variations, and variants (Bojsen 2021). In scoffing at the traditional linear view of history and geography’s spatial organizing powers, Glissant’s story is opposing that one-dimensional view. History is registered in a space that it energizes, while, at the same time, taking on the properties of that space (Glissant 1997).

Glissant has been criticized for his “nomadism”, the ideas of determinatorialization and chaos (for context, see Dash 2006), as well as for giving unprecedented significance to his own place of origin in a world that in his view is supposed to be of equal values (Wiedorn 2021). Having a firm vantage point, an anchor is not necessarily amiss. In Glissant’s writing the turning towards particularity may be interpreted as a turning towards all other places. He argued against closed units, in favour of seeing his own Lieu (understood as place) as open and with material and conceptual ties to the whole world (Drabinski 2019). This is a paradoxical combination of simultaneously belonging to a particular place (and, in a way, using that place as a base) while sensing the entire world. In this world places and people are connected but have the right to their own past and future, their stories are told not to muster the numbers or the influence of counternarratives but to be remembered and possibly to offer an alternative for the future.

The vantage point of Glissant’s archipelago may also function as both a physical and mental frame for the in-between in the sense that Edward S. Casey (2008) has argued. Casey concludes that edges serve more as frames than as limits, they act as shelter and support and thus foster alternatives: changes happen at edges where anything is possible. Adapting this idea into the physical setting, the concept of edgeland was coined by Marion Shoard (2002). It was originally used to describe an area between the city and the country (being properly neither). Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts (2012) extended the concept of edgelands to include areas characterized by having to accommodate numerous unpleasant, better-out-of-sight activities. As such, these areas are often quite centrally located but hard-to-classify and are seen in planning discourse to be in a limbo, waiting to become something else, or simply in wait for a

### Figure 3: Timelines, landmarks and actors.

**Archipelagos and Edgelands**

Glissant’s poetics and philosophy of Relation (Glissant 1996, 1997) have been used widely in art, literary and postcolonial studies but they are less known in geography, and attempts to apply his ideas to other places in the world rather than the Caribbean have been met with criticism (Diaz 2006; Drabinski and Parham 2015). His writings were firmly anchored in Martinique but in his later work he argued that the whole world was becoming an archipelago. Although his argument was not meant to be taken literally (Wiedorn 2018), the adaption of his ideas in another part of the world, namely the Baltic – where the spatial and temporal context are as far removed from the Caribbean as can be imagined – is intellectually motivating both in regard to a broader geographical view on Glissant and in examining the connections between nature and culture, place and its peoples with a complicated and myth-bound history and a colonial past. The latter is not usually taken up in the Northern European context except when discussing Sámi rights, although the issue of “natives” and “colonists” combined with ethnicity, connectedness to place and indigeneity require a broader approach in the Baltic as well.

Glissant was a juggler of time and history, as well as of rhythm and narrative form. He made broad use of spatial terms, such as landscape (Baudot 1989; Mardorossian 2013), in his work but not in the sense in which geographers usually approach these concepts, instead he did so with times and places superimposed on each other. In Glissant’s writing, the physical setting is inseparable from the human being, and the human being is a tributary to the environment; they are bound on a journey through life. The Glissantian course, however, leads in many directions, often also backwards, and appears to make no progress. Glissant saw a history of layers where tensions prevailed between the past and the future, between the existing and what was to be. His map of time was to be read in all directions and with special attention to aspects that are opaque or not glaringly obvious. There was, nevertheless, always a future in his writings – the future of abundant possibilities amidst a landscape bearing memories. The signs of time on this course are moorings – landmarks – that travellers strew all along their meandering journey, with detours, returns, repetitions, variations, and variants (Bojsen 2021). In scoffing at the traditional linear view of history and geography’s spatial organizing powers, Glissant’s story is opposing that one-dimensional view. History is registered in a space that it energizes, while, at the same time, taking on the properties of that space (Glissant 1997).

**Table: Timelines, landmarks and actors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>harbour 1296 mythical Danish city</th>
<th>17th c mythical Swedish harbour</th>
<th>1718 Rogerwick</th>
<th>1762 Port Baltique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>visits (Russian) 1715 &amp; 1718 Peter I 1746 Elisabeth</td>
<td>1764 Katherine II 1803 Alexander I</td>
<td>1910 &amp; 1912 Nicolas II</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>militarization 1721</td>
<td>1768</td>
<td>1798</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>start military port construction</td>
<td>bastion completed, obliterated</td>
<td>re-activated</td>
<td>soviet military base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941–1944 German occupation</td>
<td>1944 the town burnt down</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968 soviet submarine training centre</td>
<td>1985 nuclear reactor II</td>
<td>1995 deserted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>military attacks</td>
<td>1790 Swedish 1808 English</td>
<td>1854 English</td>
<td>1916 German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lighthouse</td>
<td>1724</td>
<td>1808 repairs</td>
<td>1889 new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maritime school</td>
<td>1876 opened</td>
<td>1915 closed</td>
<td>submarines 1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>railway Paldiski — St Petersburg</td>
<td>1870</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farms Ochter Jürgen 1868 freeholds</td>
<td>1913 cottages</td>
<td>the 1920s new settlers</td>
<td>1935 Ipp-gården</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethnicity Swedish / Estonian</td>
<td>Russian merchants, Old Believers, fishermen</td>
<td>German craftsmen &amp; merchants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forced labourers from entire Russian Empire</td>
<td>refugees, concentration camp, POWs</td>
<td>smugglers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>migrants and military from entire Soviet Union</td>
<td>NATO military personnel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Vantage Point on the Edge – Paldiski

The port was founded in 17182 by Russian Tsar Peter I (see Figure 4) and the town ceased to exist as an independent administrative unit within the Republic of Estonia in 2018. In between, its history contains glimpses of great hope for a bright future and far longer periods of failure and degradation, as well as a mythological pre-history of great expectations (indicated in the legends of a Danish 13th-century city and a Swedish 16th-century port), as well as an afterlife with a brilliant future. The inevitable outcome of the failed plans is the physical setting of ruins that have dominated the local environment throughout its recorded history. In a nutshell, the narrative to justify embarking on yet another flamboyant plan is created around the declaration that everyone has desired the spot as their own. Everyone in this case indicates colonial powers – be it the Teutonic knights, the Danish or Swedish Kingdom, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, or Nazi Germany. To date, all have failed. Local processes are, as Glissant has shown with creolization (Dash 1995), never simple and seem to defy intentions, taking off in unexpected directions, therefore they have been given far less attention thus far.

Peter I’s strategic spot was named Port Baltique (Baltic Port, at the time commonly known by the translation into German – Baltischport; in Russian Baltisky Port)3 in 1762 by Russian Empress Catherine II. She made it a provincial centre (Kreisstadt) twenty years later, despite its meagre population of less than 200 civilians. The name reflects the ambitions, for it was supposed to become the ultimate port of the Baltic Sea. In another fifteen years, in 1796, her son Paul I withdrew the provincial town and military port status, leaving the town in limbo. In the mid-19th century, a campaign to build a railway from the port through Tallinn to Saint Petersburg enlivened the town for a while. The construction was completed in 1870 but the harbour was never extended and the rail connection to the Russian hinterland was only sporadically used. The vicinity of the port was too poor (in every sense of the word) to support any type of local industrial enterprise. Among English sailors the harbour was jokingly called “ballast port” indicating that ships forced to enter due to unfavourable weather conditions or mishap at sea rarely found the expected shelter, support, or cargo other than gravel as ballast.

The area became a soviet military base in October 1939 and the civilian population was evacuated in June 1940. After World War II, it was a base for soviet submarines and spy missions and remained closed to civilians until 1994. The soviet era has overshadowed many aspects of its past with the notable exception of a perfect harbour. Today it is a slightly exotic tourist destination with a centre around the lighthouse (Packer) and the coastal cliff. The roots of heritage-based tourism are found in the 1930s when a farmhouse on the island of Väike-Pakri was turned into the first folk museum in Estonia (Ipp-gården). The port (today North and South ports) has extended activity in wide fenced-in areas, simultaneously cutting off free access to the sea and possibilities for other enterprise.

The current slogan for Paldiski is “the city of green energy”. Once again, no false modesty in aiming at attracting fantastic enterprise4 to a location that, as stated by all promoters and visionaries, has had a poor reputation. Once again, the main attraction might be the gravel extracted in the process of building the new plant.

2 Alternative dates are 1715, the time of the first visit of Peter I to the area, and 1721, when the construction of fortifications was started after the signing of the peace treaty with Sweden as the final act of the Great Northern War. In 1718 Peter I supposedly threw a stone into the sea declaring the place a military port.

3 In history, a great variety of place names and their spelling in different languages have existed in the area. Throughout this article, I use contemporary standardized Estonian names to lessen confusion, although I am well aware that naming places is closely connected with claiming the right to that place and therefore one version of a name is as significant as another. I focus here on the contemporary image that is best characterized by the current official name – Paldiski – predominantly used (although alternatively spelled Baltiski in history) in Estonian.

Figure 4: A rare plan of the envisioned fortified harbour (not only because of the south-up map orientation but also due to listing actual construction in the 1720s [Plan du nouveau port de Rogrewick, dans la province d’Esten, 1728; Bibliothèque nationale de France, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53040798d] and a sketch of the military extravaganza as designed by Burchard Christoph von Münnich in the 1760s [Carl Russwurm’s manuscript titled Baltischport, dated 1869; the Estonian History Museum, Tallinn (AM.93.1.17, page 80).
The People

Very little is known of the first settlers and local settlement history is as myth-bound as that of the harbour.5 Historically, the population in Paldiski and in its vicinity included settlers from Sweden and Finland; Estonian serfs (for farming history see Peil and Bonow 2014); merchants from mainly German and Russian cities; officials from Latvia, Lithuania and Poland; seafarers from neighbouring countries but also from farther away, and military personnel. Free settlers, nobility and serfs, convicts, displaced persons and prisoners of war have lived side-by-side in Paldiski. The miserable living conditions for prisoners and their high death rate were habitually lamented in soviet history texts. The consequences of their presence and large numbers (in periods ten times the number of civilian population) for Paldiski have rarely been discussed (for an exceptional first-hand description of the conditions in town, see Petri 1802).

Self-determination was fluid, ethnicity defined by language or religion seemed not to have mattered and the inhabitants could declare themselves either German, Swedish, Estonian, or Russian at some stage of their lives. Other combinations, including Danish, Finnish, French, Livonian, or Polish occurred as well, although without necessarily being able to speak the language or able to find only meagre connections to the supposed motherland. Regrettably, very little has been recorded about local languages to discuss the “Creole” of Paldiski at any point in history and the particularities of local communication have been lost.

Religious belonging was also flexible among the people who have lived in Paldiski, with numerous conversions from Lutheran to Orthodox and back again, or from Lutheran to any of the free churches, from Judaism to Lutheran, and from Catholic to Orthodox. It seems that the only group for which faith was a determining factor of identity was the Orthodox Old Believers or Raskolniki, who were moved from their original settlement areas to Paldiski because of their refusal to adopt liturgical reforms. A persistent town legend insists that their curses have prohibited the town to prosper, which attributes a rather significant role to this group and their convictions, although there were many others with a multitude of reasons to curse the place.

Salawat Yulayev

The best-known convict is undoubtedly Salawat Yulayev (assumed 1752–1800), a Bashkir who was deported to Paldiski after Pugachev’s rebellion (1773–1775). A document from 1797 in the Estonian National Archives (EAA) mentions his name, age (47), health (good) and that he arrived in Paldiski in November 1775. The second document supposedly contains a mention of his death, which preliminary scanning did not reveal.6 No documentary evidence of his birth has ever been indicated. Salawat Yulayev, who is described as a poet and bard, was immortalized by the Russian poet Alexander Pushkin (Pushkin 1840: 148–149; on Pushkin’s role in depicting Pugachev’s rebellion see Bethea 2009). Yulayev’s poems (none of which have survived, although c.500 lines of poetry are attributed to him) were written to keep up the courage of his fellow Bashkirs and are still considered to be core texts in forming the nation today (Hairullina 2014).

In the early versions of his heroic lifethat he is described as participating in the Seven Years’ War (1756–1763) in Prussia and reaching Berlin, although he was barely ten when the war ended. The story was adapted to a version with his father being in the war and Salawat taking over his responsibilities at home and having his own family of three wives and four daughters (the Bashkirs were Muslims) by the age of twenty when he joined Pugachev’s rebellion. Another version has him as a fugitive due to wounding a Russian official in his early years.7

The Bashkirs were nomadic herdsmen who felt threatened by Catherine II’s reforms, which expanded Russian mining and industrial activities in the Ural Mountains, an encroachment into the area they inhabited. Wanting to stop Russian colonialism and gain political and cultural autonomy, they joined Pugachev and his rebellion, the aims and events of which have never been unanimously established (Bodger 1991). The Bashkirs had a crucial role in the revolt but they also had their own agenda. Their punishment was severe: execution or lifetime in prison. The prisoners had their

5 Biographical data on c.10,000 individuals who lived in Paldiski and its vicinity in the period 1785–1940 collected from censuses, church records and state population registers, as well as from personnel files (police, border guards and customs office, railway, military, etc) were used in this analysis.
6 EAA.29.1.169 l.12 Дело о смерти Салавата Юлаева и Канзафара Усаева. Рапорт о смерти Салавата Юлаева и Канзафара Усаева, 1797–1806. Inga Gvozdikova published a collection of documents in 1982, which I have been unable to find.
7 Litter, E. Ühest veast 4.klassi ajaloöopikus/A mistake in the level 4 history textbook/, Nõukogude Õpetaja (Soviet Teacher) 39:3, 28.09.1951 disputes the then-established “fact” of Salawat’s suicide due to exhaustion and indicating his arrival in Paldiski instead. V. Filov (Sirp ja Vasar 2:3, 12.01.1952) establishes the narrative of “finding” Salawat in Paldiski. A current version of Salawat’s biography in Estonian was published to celebrate his 260th anniversary (Hairullina 2014), but unfortunately the book is an uncritical repetition of hero-worship. Notably the variations in Yulayev’s life are rather different in Estonian and Russian versions of his biography.
were sent far away from home. For a currently highlighted historic link between Estonia and Bashkortostan, Estonian President Konstantin Päts with his family was deported to Ufa – the capital of Bashkortostan – in 1940.

The timing of the narrative of "finding" Salawat in Paldiski was significant and aimed at including recently occupied Estonia within the Soviet empire and establishing "historic" roots of common rebellion against repressors. The claim of Salawat fighting his way to Berlin at the time resonated with the recent (supposedly shared) history of repressed nations and their liberation by the Red Army. Simultaneously, the clearly anti-Russian and anti-colonial character of the Bashkirs’ part in the rebellion, as well as the religious (Muslim) content of the poetry about Salawat Yulayev, are topics not yet tackled in Bashkortostan (still a part of the Russian Federation today, although autonomous). Anti-colonialism could form the most obvious common platform for connections between Bashkirs and Estonians, but the situation is complicated further by many local politicians in Paldiski having Russian as their first language. They have also openly sought funds from the Russian Federation to “advance culture contacts”.

Ironically, the bronze statue of Yulayev erected in Paldiski in 1989 (modelled on the actor Arslan Muboryakov who played him in a film released in 1940) was stolen in the early 1990s, and probably shifted as scrap metal. The decision of the local town council to have a copy made and to name a street in the harbour area after Yulayev was locally explained as the council’s wish to promote trade in oil from Bashkortostan through Paldiski. No such trade has materialized. In 2020, the statue is well-maintained but hidden in shrubs; a person unaware of its existence could not easily find it. Another twist or chance connection in this story was found in an Estonian newspaper from 1937. Among the printed images is a photo of a statue of the Russian poet somewhere in Paldiski half-hidden by lilacs, titled “Pushkin stares from a bush”.

The figure of a near-fictional national hero made into a historical person with a biography adapted every now and then encapsulates the extent to which history, politics, or economics can be marshalled as an important theoretical and political corrective. The connections made have generally reflected the requirements of the official policy of the day. The story of Salawat also illuminates the role of chance and circumstance in one event or figure becoming essential in history or geography, while another vanishes into obscurity.

**Carl Friedrich Kalk**

Carl Friedrich Kalk (1804–1885) was a self-made man born and bred locally. His life is documented to the last detail but only a few know his name today despite the memorial stone in Paldiski. Nevertheless, I argue that Paldiski was dyed-in-the-wool due to this one man and his lifetime efforts to put the town on the map.

A brief look into his family history and life is needed in order to understand how it came to be that a man who lived a century after the founding of the town had such an impact on shaping it. Kalk’s grandfather, Georg Friedrich (1731–1799), who was a tailor by profession, had moved from Haapsalu (a small resort on the west coast of Estonia) to Paldiski in 1773, where he worked as a schoolteacher. His farther, Carl’s great-grandfather Bojert, had, in his turn, arrived in Haapsalu from Bremen. Carl’s own father, Georg Gottlieb (1765–1843) was also a teacher but held the posts of judge and notarius (public secretary) in Paldiski and tried his hand in trade. He was active in the local Lutheran church, for which he was warden until his death. Together with his son he collected the money for the church building. The female line included daughters of merchants and officials. The men earned next-to-nothing for teaching and holding sermons. In addition to their own contribution, in the mid-19th century they provided free accommodation

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8 By contrast, a report (includes a photo of his statue) of the Paldiski festival in 2014 describes the fascination of the head of the Bashkortostan National Museum, Gali Valiullin, a guest at the festival. Local Orthodox priest Valeri Nazarenko had shown him a musket and told that it might have belonged to Salawat. The idea, presented by a priest, repeated by an expert and a journalist, that prisoners deprived of all rights and humanity were carrying weapons across the empire is mind-blowing and indicates a need of material markers of imagined connections at an unprecedented level (Allar Viivik (2014) Paldiski rahvas pidas nädalavahetusel linnapäevi, Harju Elu 29:12, 18.07.2014 https://dea.digar.ee/cgi-bin/daa?d=&d=harjuelu20140718.2.18.2 (accessed 7 June 2020).


12 Kalk (christened Carl, the German spelling Karl is commonly used) was a hoarder and recorder and thus archival material about him is abundant despite the fact that due to misfortune in his lifetime and more recent political upheaval much has also been lost. He proudly listed his merits on every possible occasion, as well as his observations, and answered every questionnaire sent to Paldiski in his lifetime. His will (EAA.858.1.4317 Akte in Nachlasssachen und Testamenttssachen des ehemaligen Baltischportchen Gerichtsvogtes Carl Friedrich Kalk, 10.05.1886–08.10.1887) is proof of his material success but also bears witness to his values. His obituary (Revalische Zeitung 7:1, 10.01.1886; Tallinna Sõber 3:1–2, 17.01.1886) lists his achievements, as does a recent uncritical biography (Prass-Siim 2014).

13 EAA.1239.2.2 Haapsalu parish records, 1656–1774; page 48: the marriage of potter Bojert Kalck and Maria Catharina Fuhrloh; page 180: the death of potter Kalk on 28 December 1773; page 149p: the birth of their grandson, Georg Gottlieb on 18 July 1765 (parents Georg Friedrich Kalk and Juliana Christina), his birth date is often mistakenly given as 1763.
for teachers in schools for Estonian children and girls the family had established. The family was never prosperous but clearly valued education, and was at the same time deeply religious.

Carl Friedrich Kalk studied at the local school, then in Tallinn (1818–1822), and concluded his studies as a student of classical languages and theology at the University of Tartu (1822–1825). He then returned to North Estonia, where he found employment as a tutor in Põllküla, a manor less than ten kilometres south of his home town. In 1833 he returned to Paldiski, where he started out as the town secretary. As was typical of his time, Kalk was fluent in several languages; exceptionally he could also speak English. That, according to town legend, saved Paldiski from being bombed by the British during the Crimean War in 1854. He was interested in science and religion in equal measures.

In addition, he tried his hand in trading in, among other commodities, cotton, which (together with his knowledge of English) led to him becoming an honorary consul of America. He was elected judge in 1836, which at that time also meant being the mayor of Paldiski and held that position until his retirement in 1863. His only son Georg Carl (1838–1912) held the post after him, as well as the inherited title of honorary citizen. The son, however, lacked his father’s stamina and was forced to leave his position in 1872. He also failed in trade and land speculations and did, indeed, spend the rest of his life in court but as a claimant or defendant. The family faded from existence in the 20th century.

Carl Friedrich Kalk was simultaneously deeply religious, even pious, as some less-generous contemporaries have pointed out (Rigby 1842), and a man of science who put great faith in observation and statistics. He started to make regular meteorological observations in 1836 and continued until a few weeks before his death in 1885. He used his results in a campaign for the railway connection to St Petersburg in the 1840s and the frequent blatant argument for the superiority of Paldiski as the best port on the Gulf of Finland. He also worked for the extension of the harbour but never achieved the latter; thus things were left half-way. He was an opportunist and highly principled at the same time. Hence, it is no wonder then that the Paldiski that he created is such a fascinating combination of the imagined and the real; or to use Glissant’s words (1997: 190) “the texture of the weave” here is one of turbulence and movement.

Paldiski imagined

Paldiski has been determined by the claim of a perfect ice-free harbour, an ideal location with respect to seafaring and military strategy. The persistence of this supposition is all the more surprising given that its military history is one of failure and consists of rare military events that have ranged from embarrassing to downright ridiculous. The Danes and Swedes did nothing substantial (despite the folklore stating otherwise) but as Russian Tsar Peter I decided to act in the early 1720s, he is the indisputable founder of the town. However, due to his death in 1725, not much was completed in these early years. Intentions, along with their memorial and mythical traces can, however, also shape places, and his person inspired others into action. Most notably, Catherine II followed the course set by Peter I, whereas others did so more half-heartedly. Peter I was certainly an inspiration for Carl Friedrich Kalk who often used the tsar’s name in justification of his argument for the superiority of the location, adding the statement regarding the port being (nearly) ice-free. Hence, Kalk is the founder of Paldiski, its imaginary as we know it today, in equal measure to Peter I.

The creation of these two men, the claim to being an ideal ice-free harbour is still the most often repeated characterization of Paldiski today. Given the town’s latitude 59° 21' N it is baffling and may be seen as the “non-space” between content and expression, suggesting a mode of subjection and agency that is similar to Glissant’s (1997) errantry, or as Lauro (2014: 23; trans. Emily A. Maguire), has described, Glissant’s path “calling for continued repetition and contradiction, sometimes accepting rhetorical detours in the name of a poetics freed from the constraints of logic.” These are global connections based on local minutiae, or they are simultaneous displays of the persistence of the past and projections into the future.

Representations of the harbour suggest ambivalence about its nature, both popular and scholarly; the port is a reflection of the town’s absence, rather than its materiality. There is a sense that the port is a space of spectacles from far-flung countries or a space riven and traversed by invisible lines of social segregation or actual huge engineering projects (still on-going). That imaginary is compelling and has framed and limited development in Paldiski but it may also be a figure of potential that makes transformation in thought, and subsequently transformation in life possible. The natural divisions in the physical environment and the supernatural hauntings of past events and people can, however, only be made visible by a particular form of storytelling not yet undertaken for Paldiski.


15 Kalk’s meteorological observations constitute one of the earliest and longest unbroken series from the eastern Baltic and were the reason for erecting the memorial stone by the Estonian Geographical Society. In the analysis of ice conditions, I have used data collected by Estonian climate historian Andres Tarand (personal communication on 30.09.2018), published in Revuvaliche Zeitung (RZ 2:1, 3.01.1861) and found in archival sources. Usually, the ice melts in Paldiski two or three weeks earlier than in Tallinn. St Petersbourg was ice-bound for about five months compared with the average of two months in Paldiski in the nineteenth century.
Conclusions

Glissant’s archipelagic thinking highlights the adaptation and transformation of material, cultural and political practices, and frames the world as one in process with its vantage points and edges. In such a world, the edgeland as an area in-between draws attention to fluid cultural processes and sites of abstract and material relations of movement. Such sites – as a great port that might once have existed, has existed only in a reverie, or might still come to be – are dependent upon changing conditions of articulation or connections to oblique reflections. Glissant’s understanding of archipelagos and their shaping of human mentalities is manifest in, among other things, a particularity, or a sense of belonging to a particular place while defined by the relation to the entire world. At first glance, it may seem that the point illuminated here is a location where everything is fluid and to which nobody belongs, or has been allowed to belong due to the whims, dressed up as military strategy, of emperors and dictators. This should easily have led to Paldiski slipping into obscurity but for one man, Carl Friedrich Kalk, who made creating the town his life mission using a wide range of means. Some of his arguments were so powerful that they have created an imagery of a geography and history that, although not usually acknowledged as his creation, shapes the past, present and future of the town without letting anyone think of it in any other way than as an ideal, strategically located ice-free harbour. As a port, Paldiski has been influenced by its relations to the world, but at the same time, the town has never fulfilled its imagined potential, despite various efforts throughout the many state formations (i.e., political and ideological frameworks) that caused human suffering but no flourishing. The Bashkirs’ declaration of Paldiski as “holy ground” reinforces an entirely different, mythical connection to the world.

Paldiski, in its continued oblique, ruined form, could be seen as providing a truly particular vantage point in the spirit of Glissant’s archipelagic thinking. Paldiski is at once one and many. It is not Glissant’s archipelago of reference and the true creole, but nevertheless it is a complex spot in its own right. Paldiski could gain from opening up for exploration, and a future of abundant possibilities amidst a landscape imbued with histories and memories of ambition. I have argued that, to date, geography and history have rather prohibited thinking in other ways about Paldiski. Both the people who have lived in it, in its vicinity, or elsewhere see Paldiski not as a place to belong to but as a place for waiting amidst ruins for a better future.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

References


