



**MEMORY AND HISTORY  
IN ESTONIAN POST-SOVIET  
LIFE STORIES**

**PRIVATE AND PUBLIC, INDIVIDUAL AND  
COLLECTIVE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE  
OF BIOGRAPHICAL SYNCRETISM**

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TARTU UNIVERSITY  
**PRESS**

Dissertation is accepted for the commencement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Ethnology on 26. 05. 2004 by the Council of the Department of History, University of Tartu.

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Commencement: 31. 08. 2004 at 16.15 in the Session Room of the Council of the University of Tartu, Ülikooli 18, Tartu

The research for the preparation of this dissertation was carried out within the auspices of Estonian Science Foundation Grants 3272 and 5322, and the targeted project 'The Discourse of Everyday Culture and the Dialogue of Cultures'.

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Tartu University Press  
[www.tyk.ut.ee](http://www.tyk.ut.ee)  
Order No. 286

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>PREFACE</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>INSIGHTS INTO MEMORY, HISTORY AND LIFE STORY IN POST-SOVIET ESTONIA</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>SISSEVAATEID VALDKONDA</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>ARTICLES</b> .....	<b>67</b>
1. Memory, Time, Experience: the Gaze of a Life Stories Researcher	
2. Eluloolisest käsitlusviisist Eesti kultuuriteadustes On Biographical Approach in Estonian Cultural Research	
3. Lapsepõlv kui ajaloopilt. Rahvuse ja riigi metafoorne kujutamine vanemate eestlaste lapsepõlvemälestustes Childhood as an Image of History. Metaphoric Depiction of the Nation and the State in Childhood Memories of Elderly Estonians	
4. A Time Ignored? About the Role of Soviet Period in Biographies of Older Estonians	
5. Towards a Social Memory of Work. Politics and Being a Good Teacher in Soviet Teachers' Life Stories	
6. Private and Public, Individual and Collective in Linda's Life Story	
<b>APPENDIX 1</b> .....	<b>257</b>
Linda's Story	
<b>APPENDIX 2</b> .....	<b>279</b>
Sources and Full Bibliography	
<b>CV</b> .....	<b>294</b>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The articles presented in this dissertation were written in the course of the projects of Estonian Science Foundation ‘Memory as a Cultural Factor in the Biographical Narratives of Estonians’ (grant 3727) and ‘Strategies and Practices of Everyday Life in Soviet Estonia’ (grant 5322). With my research subject I have also participated with the staff of the Department of Ethnology of the University of Tartu in state target-financed projects ‘The Processes of Everyday Life in Estonia from Historical and Contemporary Perspectives’ and ‘The Discourse of Everyday Culture and the Dialogue of Cultures’. I am grateful to my colleagues from the department of ethnology, Estonian National Museum and the department of history, who have read and commented on the manuscript at different times, and particularly Elle Vunder, Art Leete, Liivo Niglas, Jaanus Plaat and Olaf Mertelsmann for their expert advice and friendly support.

My sincere gratitude to Rutt Hinrikus, Tiina Kirss, Aigi Rahi, Terje Anepaio, Riina Reinvelt, Marju Lauristin and Tiiu Jaago from the Estonian Life Histories Association for fruitful conversations and contagious ideas. I am particularly grateful to the ‘Iron Lady’ of the Association, Rutt Hinrikus for her unchanging support and tireless work on collecting life histories. I would also like to thank Anne Heimo from the University of Turku and Pirjo Korhonen from the University of Jyväskylä, who have helped me to find specialised literature and shared their knowledge. I would especially like to thank *prof. emer.* Christine Burckhardt-Seebass, who led me to the life story research. Many more colleagues and friends have helped me in my research, either directly or indirectly, and I am grateful to all of them.

I owe my heartiest gratitude and sincere respect to Tiiu Jaago, with whom I have had many inspiring discussions, and whose assistance and contribution to bringing my research work into this dissertation I appreciate extremely highly.

## PREFACE

The question what past means to us or what it should mean to us is one that has become increasingly charged in Estonian society. It reveals certain pre-suppositions about the relationship between the present and the past – and the discourse of memory has grown to have a central part in thinking about that relationship. The past is political and in that way it is always contested. The idea of contest evokes a struggle in the terrain of truth. Fifteen years ago the Estonian society struggled for ‘true historical facts’ – for the right to ‘get history back’. Today there are still problems concerning the past, but the emphasis has shifted from the facts to the meanings rather, and the time periods, the experience of which people regard themselves entitled to represent, are differentiated by generations.

I have dealt with life stories more thoroughly since 1996, starting with biographical interviews with Estonians living in Switzerland and when I began my doctoral studies in ethnology at the University of Tartu in 1997, I also joined the Estonian Life Histories Association. Participation in the jury of major life history competitions, which meant reading hundreds of life stories, has given me a priceless background for research work. Taking part in local life history events as a member of the Association has been a valuable experience, which has enabled me to follow what could be called the microprocesses of recollection.

This dissertation, which consists of six articles written during my doctoral studies, contains analytical insights into the dynamics of older Estonians’ autobiographical interpretation of the past in the 1990s in the context of the recent past of Estonia and the policy of remembering it. I approach the problem through the categories of the public and the private, the individual and the collective. In my dissertation I have focused on the analysis of life stories written in 1989–1999 by Estonians born in the 1920s. In the interests of concrete expositions of the problem I have involved life stories narrated in the course of biographical interviews from people, who may not fit in the boundaries of this birth decade, but who belong to the same generation according to its definition. If necessary, I have also included the perspective of several generations to the extent the written life stories allowed it. As the life stories of younger people are clearly in the minority among the texts sent to the appeals in the 1990s, I have used also some stories written in the years 2000–2001 for the exposition of one of the articles.

The articles presented in this dissertation represent different stages of analysis, therefore the number of biographical texts, which serve as the basis for different articles, is not identical. Within the limits of the chosen birth decade I started with about twenty life stories from the competition run by the Estonian Life Histories Association, ‘My Destiny and the Destiny of Those Close to Me

in the Labyrinths of History’ (1996/97) and ‘Teacher, Do You Remember Your Life Story?’ (1997) and finished with about a hundred life stories (about 60 by women and 40 by men) written in 1989–1999 by the time I completed the last article in 2003. Most of the studied life stories were sent to the collection competition ‘My Destiny and the Destiny of Those Close to Me in the Labyrinths of History’. Estonians born in the 1920s made up the most active part of the contributors to this competition.

The articles forming this dissertation were prepared, written and published in the years 1998–2004. The articles have not been enclosed in this paper according to the time they were completed, but according to the development of the theme. Generally, the dissertation is divided into two parts. The first part is made up of two articles, which introduce, respectively, the theoretical basis and method and the position of my approach in the field of the biographical research in Estonia. The second part, made up of four articles, focuses on the analysis of life stories. The structure of the dissertation is in general lines the following:

The first article ‘Memory, Time, Experience, and the Gaze of a Life Stories Researcher’ was published in 2004 in the collection of works by Estonian life story researchers ‘She Who Remembers, Survives. Interpreting Estonian Women’s Post-Soviet Life Stories’ (Tartu University Press), one of the editors of which I was.

The second article ‘On Biographical Approach in Estonian Cultural Research’ was published in Estonian a year earlier in the collection compiled by Tiiu Jaago *Pärimus ja tõlgendus. Artikleid folkloristika ja etnoloogia teooria, meetodite ning uurimispraktika alalt* (‘Oral Tradition and Interpretation. Articles on the Theory, Methodology and Research Practice of Folkloristics and Ethnology’) (Tartu University Press, 2003). A translation of the article into English has been included in the dissertation.

The third article ‘Childhood as an Image of History. Metaphoric Depiction of the Nation and the State in Childhood Memories of Elderly Estonians’ was also originally published in Estonian in the collection *Mälu kui kultuuritegur: etnoloogilisi perspektiive* (in English: ‘Ethnological Perspectives on Memory’) (Tartu University Press, 2003) and a translation of it into English is provided in this dissertation.

The fourth article ‘A Time Ignored? About the Role of Soviet Period in Biographies of Older Estonians’ was published in 2001 in the Finnish journal of ethnology *Ethnologia Fennica*.

The fifth article ‘Towards a Social Memory of Work. Politics and Being a Good Teacher in Soviet Teachers’ Life Stories’ will be published during 2004 in a collection of articles edited by Klaus Roth *Arbeit im Sozialismus – Arbeit im Postsozialismus. Erkundungen der Arbeitswelt im östlichen Europa* (‘Work in socialism – work in post-socialism. Studies of the sphere of work in Eastern Europe’) in the series *Freiburger Sozialanthropologische Studien* (LIT Verlag).

The sixth article ‘Private and Public, Individual and Collective in Linda’s Life Story’ was similarly to the first one published in the collection ‘She Who

Remembers, Survives' in 2004. Appendix 1 belongs to this article with a translation of the analysed life story, which was also published in the same collection.

On the basis of the articles I have written an introductory article to the dissertation, in which I deal with my problems, perspectives, methods and results across the dissertation. In the summary to this article I also sketch the dynamic relationship of the collective memory and the autobiographical meaning-making of the past on the basis of images of history expressed in the life stories written in Estonia in the 1990s by Estonians born in the 1920s.

The references of all the articles are concisely provided in Appendix 2.



## INSIGHTS INTO MEMORY, HISTORY AND LIFE STORY IN POST-SOVIET ESTONIA

*Whenever memory is invoked  
We should be asking ourselves:  
By whom, where, in which context,  
Against what?*  
(Zemon Davis, Starn 1989: 2)

Late 1980s have been retrospectively described as the time that was ‘pregnant with recollections, with collecting and reviewing historical memory’ (Hinrikus 2003b: 178). Evaluating the processes of social memory in Estonia at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, historian Meike Wulf has used the metaphor of ‘peeling-off’ the past. In Wulf’s interpretation, ‘Estonians peeled off, layer by layer, the interpretations of the past, which had been forced upon them, until their private or countermemory became (again) a part of the new official national memory in 1991’ (Wulf 2000: 43). As a metaphor, which has to briefly summarise the social and cultural processes that are contradictory and perhaps difficult to embrace, it coincides with the public rhetoric of its time and the more widespread understanding of the processes of social memory in Eastern and Central Europe. *Peeling-off* is a metaphor on the so-called event level, concentrating on the hegemonic opposition of forgetting and remembering, the public and the private during the period of Soviet occupation in the example of specific events.<sup>1</sup> In the national discourse of late 1980s the popular

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<sup>1</sup> In my opinion, the *peeling-off* metaphor has only partial explanatory power, because it sees the development of social memory only as a one-way process in terms of public-private relationship: memory, which has been ‘retained’ for a long time in the private sphere is ‘released’ layer by layer and is made into something publicly distributed, institutionalised. This presumes that memories of an event and/or experiencing them remain unchanged both during the period which separates the ‘release’ from the experience and during the ‘release’ process itself. Furthermore, it involves a presumption that the ‘public’ is just formed from the ‘private’, as if it were not a complex dialectic and dialogous process. In addition, the *peeling off* metaphor conceals a popular political understanding of historical experiential truth, i.e. that memories of repression, experiences of surviving and experiencing and suffering are more ‘authentic’ and thereby more ‘truthful’ than the memories of the so-called common (Soviet) person (cf. also Liljeström 2004: 235–236). I do not maintain here as if the autobiographic memories and family histories did not have a significant impact on the development of the public image of history in late 1980s and early 1990s. But as e.g. Terje Anepaio (2003) has shown on the ground of the dynamics of remembering mass repressions, this process was more complex, selective and multi-directional than expressed in the popular *peeling-off* metaphor. I deal with the dynamics of remembering from the aspect of public and private more thoroughly in the book *Elu ideoloogid. Kollektiivne mälu ja autobiograafiline minevikutõlgendus eestlaste elulugudes* (Estonian National Museum, 2004).

equivalent of the ‘peeling-off’ metaphor in Estonia was ‘to return to the nation its history’ (Laar 1988).

‘Returning the history to the nation’ coincided in popular rhetoric with ‘returning the life history to the individual’ (Merle Karusoo), which for the public involved a notable rise in the validity and reliability of memories and life stories. The ‘real’ story of the nation was seen as stored and living on in memories, which were to make up the history. The individual was dealt with as a part of the ‘body of nation’; the appeal to ‘return to Estonians their history’ also meant the reinterpretation of history in the (Estonian) nation-centred way – emphasising the collective experience reflecting the past events. Since 1987 the collection of memories and their dramatised ‘returning’ had been performed by the Memory Sector of Pirgu Development Centre, led by Merle Karusoo. On the one hand, the artistic media helped to identify with the ‘concealed history’, on the other hand it also had an elementary informative role, ‘a remedial course in history’.<sup>2</sup> Estonians’ ‘biographic awareness’<sup>3</sup> was also influenced in the 1980s by the radio programme *Kirjutamata memuaare* (‘Unwritten Memoirs’) hosted by Lembit Lauri and the publications of these recordings (Lauri 1986, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991ab; about the influence see also Rahi 2004).

In the renovation process of history the method of collecting oral history by means of public appeals became notably extensive. The campaign of ‘restoring’ oral tradition in 1988–1992, initiated by Estonian Heritage Society, who directly associated itself with the activities of Jakob Hurt a hundred years earlier, involved a lot of people. As a result, the collection of Estonian Heritage Society was formed, stored in Estonian Cultural Historical Archives, with more than 1700 archive files with various memories, records, letters and diaries.<sup>4</sup> Also the activities of the Estonian Life Histories Association and its predecessors<sup>5</sup> in collecting life histories by means of public appeals was part of

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<sup>2</sup> For example, in a review of *Maarjamaale* (‘To Maarjamaa’ = Estonia), a production of Noorsooteater at the end of 1988, dealing with the works of Estonians living in exile (compiled on the basis of materials from the special funds of Estonian libraries by Toomas Lõhmuste), the reviewer Tõnis Ritson appreciates the novel approach to facts in depicting the history of Estonia: ‘In this case, for example, I discovered some details that can be presented to students in history classes: that during the bombing of in March 1944, 1418 houses in Tallinn were destroyed, that 20,000 people remained homeless, that 50 German officers and 120 Russian prisoners of the war became victims of the attack and a lot more. At a certain moment I felt guilty as a historian – why should actors do my job ...’ (Ritson 1988)

<sup>3</sup> Wording by Rutt Hinrikus, from personal correspondence 06. 04. 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Information by Rutt Hinrikus, from personal correspondence.

<sup>5</sup> The Estonian Life Histories Association was officially founded on 6 March 1996, the first appeal to collect life histories ‘Do you remember your life story?’ was sent to many Estonian and some larger Russian newspapers at the end of summer 1989. Herein I only concentrate on appeals that are more important from the aspect of this

the national discourse of the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, focussing on the experience of the Great History from the aspect of an individual.<sup>6</sup>

### **Life stories, the context and methods of collecting them**

This dissertation raises a problem of the autobiographical meaning-making of the past and its dynamics in the 1990s, based on the life stories written by Estonians born in the 1920s in response to appeals in 1989–1999, in the context of the history of Estonia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the policy of remembering it. The articles presented in the dissertation concentrate mainly on the texts contributed in response to three major<sup>7</sup> appeals to write life stories (see

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dissertation and because of their content. More closely about the history of life story collection until 2004 see Hinrikus 2003b and Hinrikus, Kõresaar 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Without dealing more thoroughly the wider context of collecting memories and life histories, I would just like to comment that the rise of memories, which gained momentum in Estonia in late 1980s, on the one hand cannot be separated from similar renovation, reconstruction and nationalisation processes of history in other post-socialist countries (about the latter cf. Niedermüller 1997), but on the other hand it cannot be identified with the methods of conducting these processes. In the East- and Central-European discursive practice of the late 1980s and early 1990s the symbolic ‘restoration’ of history also meant certain individualisation, variety and multiplicity of everyday experiences and consciousnesses. This results in the ‘biographical boom’ typical of post-socialist societies (see also Humphrey et. al 2003). There is an attempt to illustrate historical processes through individual course of life. This should show that despite all the repressions during the communist period the plurality of historical awareness and experience did exist, that in the socialist period the history was not unified, although constantly efforts were made to bring it into uniformity. Decentralisation of history and privatisation of the past as strategies are opposed to the official socialist image of history and try to construe a ‘new history’ from individual and group-specific experiences. The specifics of Estonia in this context lies in the great eagerness of the Estonian-language population to write memories and send them to different institutions in response to public appeals, while in other countries the predominant method is rather the method of oral history (an exception among the post-socialist countries is Poland, with its long tradition of collecting written life stories). Such a notable success of the method of public appeals in Estonia can be associated with its traditions (or the tradition of similar methods requiring personal action) (is usually dated back to the appeal by Jakob Hurt in 1988) as well as the national importance attributed to the institutions who have published the appeals (e.g. the Estonian Literary Museum).

<sup>7</sup> In the article ‘Towards a Social Memory of Work. Politics and Being a Good Teacher in Soviet Teachers’ Life Stories’ I have used the texts contributed to the appeal ‘Teacher, can you remember your life story?’ (1997) and in addition, depending on the problem setting, also some life stories sent in response to the appeal ‘My life and the life of my family in the Estonian SSR and the Republic of Estonia’ (2000–2001).

comparison in table below). Roughly, about 300 life stories of people born in the 1920s were sent in reply to different appeals.<sup>8</sup> This analysis is based on 100 life stories (59 by women and 41 by men). The life stories are of different length, from a couple of pages to three hundred or even more. The longest texts were written by men. On average, their biographies are three times as lengthy as women's, extending to life chronicles in several volumes. Depending on the topic and the set of problems, I have also included some materials of life story interviews and life stories of younger generations for comparison. Also the texts published in life story anthologies in 1997–2003 (Annuk 1997; Karusoo 1997; Hinrikus 1999, 2000, 2003a) are important for background information.

**Table:** The topics of appeals to collect life stories, time and number of stories 1989–1999<sup>9</sup>

YEAR	TOPIC OF APPEAL	NUMBER OF STORIES	NOTES
1989	Eestima elulood Биографии людей Эстонии Estonian life stories	58	
1990		75 + 117	117 stories by 9–11-class students from Kuusalu and Paide, written on the initiative of their history teacher
1991–1994		113	
1995	Naiste elulood Women's life stories	18	

<sup>8</sup> The number of life stories is estimated, because in the archiving system the texts are not differentiated according to the appeals. This is a complicated task, because life stories are sent to the Estonian Life Histories Association also inbetween appeals and these do not belong under a narrower 'topic'. In general, the life stories contributed to the life story competitions since 1996 are more clearly definable. The earlier texts cannot be usually identified according to the appeals.

<sup>9</sup> The number of life stories is approximate, because during the whole period the appeals and stories contributed to them have not been accounted in unified manner. This table has been completed according to information from Annuk 1997, Hinrikus 2003b, Karusoo 1997 and directly from Rutt Hinrikus. I owe Rutt Hinrikus for the clarifying comments in the notes column.

Table continuation

YEAR	TOPIC OF APPEAL	NUMBER OF STORIES	NOTES
1995	Elulood armastusest ja seksuaalsusest  Life stories about love and sexuality	Approx. 60	Not included in the total number
1996	Minu ja minu lähedaste saatus ajaloo keerdkäikudes  My destiny and the destiny of my close ones in the labyrinths of history	262	
1997	Õpetaja, kas mäletad oma elulugu?  Teacher, do you remember your life story?	Approx. 30	At the same time teachers' life histories were also collected by Estonian National Museum, Tallinn Pedagogical University and the Archive-Museum of Pedagogy
1998	Sajandi sada elulugu  One hundred lives of the century	232	
1989–1999		In total about 1010	The total number also includes the estimated number of life histories sent into Estonian Cultural-Historical Archives inbetween the appeals. In addition, several of the people who have sent their life history to the museum have improved their stories in the following years and/or sent additional stories, which have been added to the existing files.
2000	Minu ja minu pere elu Eesti NSV-s ja Eesti Vabariigis  My life and the life my family in Estonian SSR and the Republic of Estonia	330	

As for the topics, their solutions and rhetoric and the audience, the appeals for life stories from 1989–1999 were, so to say, the children of its time, undergoing the processes characteristic to the decade, from the individualisation and diversification of history to reunification (Niedermüller 1997).<sup>10</sup> The first appeal in 1989, made by the Cultural-Historical Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum ‘Estonian life histories. Can you remember your life story?’ emphasised the importance and the historical mission of collecting life stories as the social memory, giving also a brief explanation of the concept of a life story (Hinrikus 2003b: 179). The appeal pointed out that ‘every life history, each fate is a part of the history of the Estonian nation’.<sup>11</sup> In the following years the archive repeatedly published appeals in the press, thereafter the collection of life histories receded for a few years,<sup>12</sup> until in 1996 the Estonian Life Histories Association was founded and announced the life story competition ‘My destiny and the destiny of those close to me in the labyrinths of history’. As a result of this competition the largest number of stories in the 1990s were sent. The appeal concentrated on the sphere of home and family and the changes that the ‘revolutionary times’ had brought along in it. From the aspect of my set of problems the title of this life history competition is interesting, as it includes meaningful references to how history and the role of an individual in it was interpreted. Like several Estonian researchers of life stories (cf. Huima 2002, Kirss 2004b) have pointed out, the concept of ‘destiny’ is related with an approach to the agency of an individual in history, it refers to being affected by external forces and is therefore directly associated with a small nation’s cognition and experience of history. In the context of the 1990s, however, the expression ‘labyrinths of history’ – the appeal specified it as ‘wars, revolutions, deportations or other kinds of violence’ – focuses on the events of history

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<sup>10</sup> Under reunification I mean the nationalisation of history in the early 1990s, i.e. the establishment of political, ethnical and social myths of origin and legalisation of social order through the historical continuity created by means of the myths. In a more informal interpretation, also the channels of publication refer to this nationalisation – while the 1989 appeal for life stories was published in both Estonian newspapers and larger ones in the Russian language, the output of the appeals in the second half of the 1990s was the Estonian-language press.

<sup>11</sup> Quoting the appeals of the life history competitions, I have used the texts in the archive of the Estonian Life Histories Association, because these reflect the aims of the collectors of life histories, their approach to history and the respective popular discourse better than the notices published in newspapers. Each newspaper abbreviated the appeals according to their possibilities and interests.

<sup>12</sup> According to the chairman of the Estonian Life Histories Association Rutt Hinrikus, much less life stories were sent in the years 1994–95. In 1995 Eve Annuk asked women to write about their experience of being a woman (all in all about twenty life stories, see also Annuk 1997), in 1996 in cooperation with Finnish sociologists stories about Estonians’ sexual experiences were collected (see also Karusoo 1997).

before and after World War II and in combination with ‘destiny’ refers to a certain way of interpretation.

The last major competition of life histories in the 1990s, ‘One hundred lives of a century’ (1998) was carried by the seemingly neutral idea of the end of the century and the aim to compile a representative anthology of life stories. The appeal to the life history competition again focused on the right of Estonians to their life history and the identification of biography with history in the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: ‘What discloses a person is his/her life history. All in all, it is history and the story of a nation. Even today some people are surprised, hearing the statement that for half a century the life stories of Estonians were prohibited. But when we did not include in official forms the Siberian years of ourselves or our parents, service in the German army, the departure of our relatives in autumn 1944 – what else was it?’ Contrarily to the two previous appeals, however, the possible conflict in the interpretation of the public and the private past is underlined not only in the conditions of Soviet occupation but also in the period of independence: ‘Probably there were prohibited life stories also before the year 1939: for example, due to belonging to the movement of the war of independence and supporting of communism. Today even the parliament is full of forbidden life stories: no one considers it self-evident to declare that he/she once belonged to the Communist Party. This is concealed like one’s bank account.’

The articles presented in this dissertation concentrate on the changing relationship of the public and the private and the individual and the collective in the (auto)biographical stories contributed to the life history competitions in the 1990s. I shall deal with my theoretical perspective and more specifically with the set of problems and method in the following subchapters. Here I would like to provide a brief insight into the generation perspective that I have used.

### **Generation perspective**

Estonians’ life histories have been observed more extensively from the generation perspective, relying on the concept of ‘revolutionary historical events’, as three so-called ‘destiny cohorts’ (Kirss 2004a). According to Rutt Hinrikus, ‘1) life histories of Estonians in their occupied homeland; 2) life histories of refugees or the Estonian diaspora in the West; 3) Estonian diaspora in the East, i.e. the life histories of the repressed, and the so-called Russian Estonians’ life histories (very few of the latter have been collected in comparison with the life histories of the deported) (Hinrikus 2003b: 187). In the articles included in this dissertation, mainly the life stories of the first group and, to a lesser degree, those of the third group have been analysed. I have not concentrated specifically on the experience of repression. My focus of attention is the autobiographical interpretation of the past more generally in the context of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Estonian history. Due to the same reason I have not separately underlined the

experience of war, which would already differentiate the men who did or did not undergo mobilisation within the selected birth decade. Referring to the birth decade – in the generation perspective the birth decade is undoubtedly narrower than a generation. According to the 20<sup>th</sup>-century biographical experience, the people born in the 1920s have been classified by different researchers into different ‘generation groups’. For example, in Aili Aarelaid’s interpretation the Estonians born in the 1920s belong to the generation 1914–1930, i.e. the so-called generation of the Estonian independence period, ‘who had grown in the tolerant atmosphere of the period of independence; for them the decade of the occupation coincided with their spring of life, when future plans are made and careers are shaped; the change in mental paradigms worked on them as an ordeal and brought along problems with retaining self-identity’ (Aarelaid 2000: 757). Rutt Hinrikus, however, has placed them in the group born in 1920–1939, whom she calls the ‘generation of bitter choices’: ‘The years of their youth fell either fully or partially to the so-called years of Estonia’s destiny 1939–1953 and their choices depended on the politics of major powers, containing dramatic oppositions, just like the for the previous generation. [---] No one managed to retain their existing lifestyle.’ (Hinrikus 2003b: 184.)

Both researchers proceed from both the objective historical events that shaped the life of the generation and the self-definition of the group in comparison with other groups. In the interests of the rationality of analysis I have limited the study with a narrower birth decade, which in the generation perspective I would rather define similarly to Aarelaid. According to the generation definition of the people born in the 1920s, primarily those born in the second half of the 1930s fall out of this generation – they are described ideologically as the ones *brought up a la Moscow*.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, this substantial estimate limiting the identification of the generation has not emerged from the written life stories, but in a comparison with life stories collected by means of biographical interviews. On the basis of written life stories, which serve as the basis of the generation definition by Hinrikus, it can really be stated that the experience of the years 1939–1953 is one exceeding the boundaries of a generation, expressed in the life stories of the pre- and postwar generation through the opposition of traumatic times and more stable periods, and the private and the public life (cf. Hinrikus 2003b: 209) and regarding the mentioned ‘revolutionary times’ as a factor forming the destiny of the generation.

Although I have limited the analysed group with a definite birth decade in the interests of rationality, my choice is also based on experience. The Estonians born in the 1920s were born in the Republic of Estonia, where they passed their childhood and where they obtained their education and acted in the national modernisation process of the time. The latter – to what extent the

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<sup>13</sup> See about the generation identity of older Estonians in the article ‘A Time Ignored? About the Role of the Soviet Period in Biographies of Older Estonians’ in this dissertation.



experiences of home and school as the private and the public sphere coincided/contrasted – is an important factor from the aspect of my set of problems. Part of those born in the first half of the 1920s became economically independent by the end of the 1930s and beginning of the 1940s. They did not yet manage to start anything great in life. It can be said that from proceeding from the generation perspective,<sup>14</sup> the environment of development for those born in the 1920s was more or less uniform, regardless of the relative age difference within the birth decade.

The life stories of Estonians born in the 1920s are interesting for a researcher of collective memory also from another perspective. They belong to the so-called Estonian [independence] period generation, to whom the society in the national movement of the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s attributed the privilege of being the carrier of national memory and the preserver of national identity during the Soviet occupation. Like already mentioned, the experience of political independence between the two world wars also plays an important role in the self-definition of this generation. But by the second half of the 1990s the Estonian society had changed its orientation – social identities were no longer defined through the past and in the eyes of the society the older generation lost its role as a carrier of memory. While the younger generation started to question the importance of the people and mentalities that had become the symbols of the ‘first independence period’, the older generation retained their self-identity and criticised the new, changing society from these grounds. Furthermore, the society failed to agree about the meaning of the later Soviet period in its history, which in its turn put the pressure on the older generation, who had lived their fruitful working life during the Soviet occupation. We can see that the individual, generational as well as the national memory was questioned within the 1990s in many ways – this makes the problems of the dynamics of the public and the private, the individual and the collective memory in the context of the newly independent Estonia even more intriguing.

Proceeding from the experience basis and the self-definition of the generation, I have crossed the limits of the birth decade in the analysis of comparative material, if necessary. In the analysis of the article ‘A Time Ignored? About the Role of the Soviet Period in Biographies of Older Estonians’ I have involved for comparison some biographical interviews with people born in the years 1914–1927, who fit in the above-mentioned delimitation of the generation. In order to outline the experience and the self-definition of the older generation more clearly, in the article dealing with the work biographies of teachers ‘Towards a Social Memory of Work. Politics and Being a Good Teacher in Soviet Teachers’ Life Stories’ I have compared the work biographies of teachers born in the 1920s with those born in later decades (1930s –1960s).

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<sup>14</sup> For example, sociologist Victoria Semenova is of the opinion that the first 17 years of life are determining for the birth decade to grow into a generation (Semenova 2002).

The focus and weight of the conclusions drawn from the comparisons, however, always lies on interpretation of the past expressed in the life stories of people born in the 1920s.

## **The axes of analysis: collective memory and the viewpoint of biographical syncretism**

To cover theoretically the problematics of the individual and the collective in life stories, I have used the concept of (collective) memory. In different ways, remembering and forgetting were important topics in Estonia all through the 1990s. The problems like living in the past or heading for the future, the inter-generational memory, the 'right' and 'wrong' remembering etc. directly concerned the relationship between the public and the private, the individual and the collective from the ideological grounds. At the same time it is an extremely interesting analytical problem. I deal with the problems of the collective memory and studying it on the basis of written life stories in the first article of this dissertation.

### **Memory – individual and collective**

'Collective memory' is in itself an extremely problematic concept, like any concept involving 'collectivity'. This is so because of the concept 'collective', which suggests a reference to the compulsory 'internal' uniformity of collectivity and which would make the disharmonies and conflicts difficult to explain. To say nothing of the fact that the concept 'collective' has been extremely ideologically charged one in the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A problem is also involved in the presumption that the collective memory has qualities, which can actually be expressed only on the individual level (Gedi et al 1996: 34).

In my approach I understand 'collective memory' relying on the memory conception of Maurice Halbwachs. The approach of Halbwachs of the inseparability of individual and collective memory reached life story research along different ways. What should be mentioned is David Lowenthal's interdisciplinary approach to memory and the approach to the past more widely (Lowenthal 1995, first edition 1985), which perhaps had more effect on life story research in the Nordic countries (Löfgren 1991). A discussion emerged, for instance about forgetting as an integral component of memory. In contemporary life story research an individual is seen as belonging to the social environment, but at the same time research does not proceed from the individual as an element of it. The focal point of life story research is that the biographical knowledge of an individual – how he/she interprets the surrounding world – is

socially defined (Gullestad 1996; Thorsen 1996; Löfgren 1991). Life story researchers of different disciplines focus on the question how and to what extent the individual life course/ life story expresses the relationships between the individual, the collective practice and the historical context (Niedermüller 1988). Memory is treated as a culturally organised phenomenon, which remembers/ reminisces, forgets, switches off or selects, but also preserves events, situations and interpretations, which acquire a symbolic content in this way. Just this was called the social framework of memory or collective memory by M. Halbwachs. In my approach, 'collective memory' is a covering term, within which, depending on the set of problems, the historical, social or cultural memory can be separately dealt with.

Therefore, comprehending 'collective memory' through historical, social and cultural relations and expressions, I have tried to theoretically cover the differences and contradictions between different ways of remembering, their dynamics and mutual influences, the problems of power. Through my development of memory conception I associate myself with the academic discourse of the last 15–20 years in memory research in humanities and social sciences, which comprehends memory as a mainly collective phenomenon with an emphasis on its historical, social and cultural basis. **I interpret memory as a social construct, which is based on social interaction and communication and which is structured by language. Memory is a dynamic and dialectic process between the past and the present, which joins the change and continuity into a whole. The collective memory of a group is immediately connected with biographical forms of knowledge and is incessantly changed by a person's activity.** Proceeding from the phenomenological life-world (*Lebenswelt*) conception, relying on the model of social memory by Peter Alheit (Alheit 1989) (see figure below), I differentiate in the collective memory the remembering scheme on the event or experience level, and the interpretation scheme on the level in which the social reality is processed and which is not closely dependent on the events. These schemes carry different interpretation patterns from everyday theories to institutionalised ideologies.

In collective memory there is an ongoing dialogue between different times, realities, experience and interpretation systems. This makes memory the main basis of identity and the carrier of continuity, at the same time what is remembered and how changes in the present time. The relation between the event-level remembering scheme and the institutionalised and organised interpretation level is also changing. According to this relation it is possible to differentiate the counter-memories that are predominant, competing and even conflicting in the society and in the group.

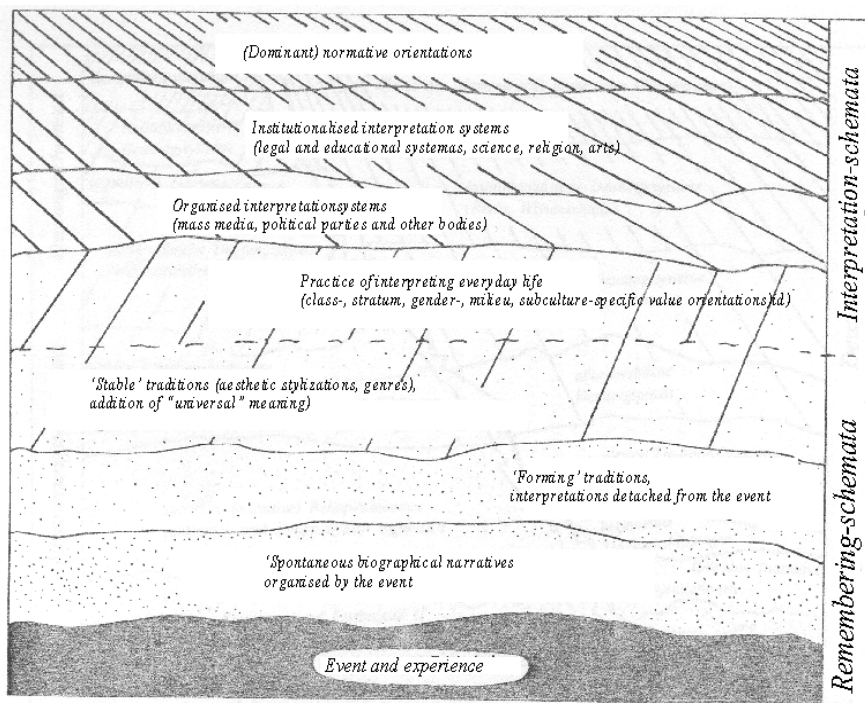


Figure: Model of social memory (Alheit 1989)

During lifetime a person comes into contact with a lot of representations of the past. The relation of the individual to these may be conflicting and opposing, but does not have to be such, because people actively use the so-called public memories, and the so-called ‘living memory’ of a group may be written into the public interpretation of the past. To a large extent, remembering in the form of a life story can be regarded as a ‘mediated activity’ (Wertsch 2002), in which individuals use certain cultural resources (e.g. the narratives created by the modern nation state, social myths) to provide a meaning to their experience in connection with wider social values.

As the next problem for me, the question arose, how the relation between the remembering and interpretation scheme of collective memory is expressed on the level of an individual (in the autobiographical memory) or in other words, how the cognition and interpretation frameworks of collective memory influence the individual’s sense of reality and activity (specifically e.g. the construction of life story). I approached the problem through the concepts of experience and biographical knowledge (or synthesis of experiences), which are inseparably connected with remembering. I dealt with experience as a biographical, social, cultural, historical and time-complex phenomenon at the same time. All these forms of experience are analytically differentiated. For an individual these are one – these are just his/her life experience.

## **Individual and collective, private and public on the life-story level**

The important qualities of experience are that an experience is synthesising, selecting and interpreting. These qualities of experience create a unique syncretism of different interpretation schemes in the life story. The term 'syncretism' has its history in ethnology and folkloristics; it is used to characterise different aspects of culture and in a broad sense syncretism means that different phenomena (e.g. originating from different eras and systems), even mutually exclusive at first sight, are matched into one (unified) system. For me, this system is the memory image expressed in life stories. The perspective of biographical syncretism was worded because of the need to theoretically enfold the question why people have told about a certain time and things in their life stories just the way they have done it, not otherwise.<sup>15</sup> Methodologically, the perspective of biographical syncretism is phenomenological, in a narrower sense it proceeds from the relation between the experience level and the interpretation level of collective memory like it is expressed in life stories. What is important is that as a theoretical perspective, biographical syncretism emphasises the dialogue between different times and realities.

The perspective of biographical syncretism tries to overcome the duality of the 'experienced life' and its textualised expression. Biographical researchers from different schools disagree in their viewpoints on whether the (auto)biography is the actual or the described life (Corsten 1994; Miller 2000). My development of the concept of biographical syncretism results from the opinion that the life story is not merely a reflection of past reality and not merely a representation. On the one hand I support on the thesis that a life story is based on real social experiences; on the other hand, that 'identity is narrative', i.e. experiences are expressed in life stories, using available narrative strategies, which in its turn cannot be separated from experience and identity. The relationship between life and the text is dynamic: the person uses narrative strategies to provide a form to experiences. But he/she cannot use just any narrative strategies, but those he/she has experienced, either directly or indirectly, e.g. through the intergenerational tradition or more widely, through participating in the text community. Every reader probably has a question, what in these memory images is reality and what not, what is personal experience and

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<sup>15</sup> Supposedly, each researcher has their own 'private' way how they have reached the wording of an understanding, approach or concept. In my case the figurative method preceded the analytical one. Seeking for a solution to the problem how to analytically deal with the complex relation between the individual and the collective memory on the level of a written life story, I tried to, figuratively speaking, place Alheit's model of social memory (see figure above) 'into' the form of life story. A reader might use the same method, try to picture all the 'layers' shown in the figure in a life story, and attempt to arrange them in a mutually dynamic proportion.

what is ideology (because these interpretations can undoubtedly be considered ideological), what is 'real' and what is 'just' a construction. The life-story syncretic perspective, which I rely on in my analysis of life stories, departs from the viewpoint that from the aspect of the life-story truth, 'life' and 'description' cannot be separated.

### **Theoretical-disciplinary background**

In wording the theoretical basis I have deemed it necessary to join and integrate such research traditions and viewpoints, which do not always come into contact – and not only in the Estonian research landscape. For instance, there are few common grounds worded in the memory studies of sociologists and historians (cf. e.g. Alheit 1989 and Assmann 1988) or in the biographical research by social scientists and literary theoreticians and folklorists (Gullestad 1996: 4ff). Estonian ethnology has also distanced itself from folkloristics, its neighbouring research field, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While in the 1930s ethnography and folkloristics had more contacts, researchers were familiar with each other's works, way of thinking and cultural approach and were able to apply it themselves, but by the 1990s these two disciplines had notably diverged from each other. This intermediate period of specialisation also included the isolation of disciplines resulting from the framework of the time. (Jaago 2003: 12.) It was hard for an ethnologist studying the 'facts' of folk culture through the texts that interpreted them, to understand the folklorist for whom the text was the 'fact'. In this sense it was easier for me, an ethnologist, to find a common language with sociologists or historians due to the boundaries of the disciplines. This also explains why I have got more support for creating my theoretical basis from these disciplines. I have less relied on the studies in the tradition of *oral history*, which does not mean that this approach should not have anything in common with it. Rather I have found support from the similarly functioning social anthropological biographical research, cultural-psychological memory research and the trend of popular oral history in folkloristics, which developed in Estonian research landscape in the 1990s.

In the 1990s the culture research of Estonia got a chance to take a more active part in the international research discussion and gain benefit from the general theoretical development. So, Estonian ethnology also occurred in the (after)waves of the hermeneutic and narrative turn, which brought it significantly closer to folkloristics, which also was undergoing its change of paradigm (Jaago 2001: 8). The same took place in sociology, which more and more started to prefer 'softer' methods. In the 1990s also the biographical approach became an issue in Estonia, mostly on the basis of ethnology, folkloristics and sociology. I deal with these comparatively in the second article of this dissertation, where in comparison I also provide a lengthier explanation of the position of my viewpoint among other disciplines in biographical research. The

central categories of this study – time-complexity, complexity of experience, life story truth and the dynamics of present perspectives – express the dialogous approach to time and reality, which I share within the biographical approach that emerged in Estonia in the 1990s with researchers of popular oral history and phenomenological ethnology of everyday life.

The problem of individual and collective experience, of its interpretation and identity building has been in the focus of ethnological memory research since the end of the 1990s. In 1998 in the department of ethnology of the University of Tartu the project ‘Memory as a cultural factor in the biographical narratives of Estonians’ was launched (1998–2001, project leader Prof. Elle Vunder), in which I took part with Terje Anepaio as main participants. The main aim of the project was to study the role of memory in Estonian culture in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, comparing the ‘arsenal of culture’ of different groups of Estonians on the individual level by means of their life narratives. We attempted to explain both the common cultural share, which joins individuals to a certain group and serves as a basis for the creation of identity, as a cultural difference, which is emphasised when standing in opposition with other groups. We used the concept of ‘memory’ as an analytical means, which enabled to study the time dimensions of the identity building and its association with the space and the social context.

The specific questions we raised at the beginning of the project were: How far back in time does one go in explaining and interpreting the turning points of one’s life, decisions and attitudes? What is the role of historical events in the biographies of individuals, how they are received by other people (following generations, peers) and which conditions influence it? Which memories have a collective role, in which variations do they occur, in which conditions they are formed? How do the political conflicts of recent history gain a cultural character in the biographies of individuals? Departing from the retrospective quality of memory, we also asked a question about the role of personal and collective memories in forming the attitude to the modern Estonian society. The exposition of the problems of the project proceeded from the fast-developing and -changing social-cultural situation in Estonia in the 1990s, characterised by conflicts and ever-growing disagreements between different social strata, generations, between Estonians home and Estonians in exile. We presumed that the roots of a lot of phenomena and attitudes had to be found in our most recent history – in what people had experienced and undergone and to the background of which they form their attitude and behaviour in contemporary society – and in the present perspective or how social discourses and the current situation of the individual influences the interpretation of his/her time experience.

(Vunder et. al 1998.) Half of the articles included in this dissertation<sup>16</sup> were written in the course of the project ‘Memory as a cultural factor’ and have been published in the publications of the project (Anepaio, Kõresaar 2001; Kõresaar, Anepaio 2003) or elsewhere.

I have developed the problem, how a certain historical period is depicted in life stories and how the picture of life lived in that period relates to images of other periods, working for the project ‘The strategies and practices of everyday life in Soviet Estonia’ (2002–2005, Department of Ethnology and Estonian National Museum). My share in this project has mainly been the opening the specifics of life story as a source and studying the problematics of remembering the experience of the Soviet period. From the articles written in the course of this ongoing project I have selected three for the dissertation.<sup>17</sup>

**The problematics of the public and the private,  
the individual and the collective  
in the life stories of older Estonians:  
Course of analysis, perspectives and main results**

*I do not want at all to write my life story, but the time, situations and people that have surrounded and formed a child. What has been important for this person that she became just what she is. How the society and the former government influenced the situation. (f, 1929, KMEKLA f. 350, 501: 1/1)*

The part of the empirical analysis of the dissertation is joined together by the question how the sense of the past is expressed in the life stories of older Estonians in time complex, in the categories of the public and the private, the individual and the collective.

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<sup>16</sup> Respectively, for example the Estonian versions of the articles ‘Memory, Time, Experience, and the Gaze of a Life Stories Researcher’ (Kõresaar 2003b) and ‘Childhood as an Image of History. Metaphoric Depiction of the Nation and the State in Childhood Memories of Elderly Estonians’ and the short version of the latter Kõresaar 2002b; but also ‘A Time Ignored? About the Role of Soviet Period in Biographies of Older Estonians’ and its Estonian version Kõresaar 2001. In the course of the project the conference *Kultuur ja mälu* (Culture and Memory) was organised (2000), which convened memory researchers of different disciplines.

<sup>17</sup> Respectively, the Estonian version of the article ‘On Biographical Approach in Estonian Cultural Research’ and the articles published in English only: ‘Towards a Social Memory of Work. Politics and Being a Good Teacher in Soviet Teachers’ Life Stories’ and ‘Private and Public, Individual and Collective in Linda’s Life Story’.



The context of writing life stories (and sending them to the museum) in the 1990s lies in the experienced and cognised conflict between the public and the private interpretations of the past – the solution to this conflict is seen in recording and storing the individual story to return the history to the ‘right’ collective. The relationship between the public and the private, the individual and the collective in the life stories written by Estonians during the so-called transition period are the key problems with their own history, present and future perspective. From this narrower national-political context I have also departed in my readings of life stories.

### **Levels of analysis**

From the perspective of biographical syncretism I differentiate several category levels of the public and the private. Firstly, the public and the private in the society as a time-specific framework of relationships, secondly – the experience of an individual in these relationships (and their changing), thirdly – the textual expression of this experience, under which I understand the way how an individual does (or does not) thematise the (changing) relationship of the public and the private, and fourth – the participation of the public discourses of different periods in the interpretation of private pasts.

The second problem, which, however, cannot be separated from the problem of the relation of the public and the private, is the relation of the individual and the collective. As an ethnologist proceeding from the conception of experience and memory, I understand collectivity as a cultural form, as a personal and a shared experience at the same time. The concept of collective always originates from the human mind (Laitinen 2003). Collectivity exists at least on the level of emotions and emerges only when people experience their belonging to or being part of this group. As a rule, for the purposes of this analysis I delimit ‘collectivity’ as belonging to the nation – a choice, which arises from the above-described context of writing life stories and also from the motivation, which is clearly expressed in the life stories. (As an exception I deal with the reminiscences of the Soviet period through professional identity in the life stories of teachers in the fifth article.) The national as the collective comes to the fore on the textual level of the life story at least from two aspects. First, the aspect of creating the text or the aspect of description and interpretation: how the individual thematises his/her relationship with the group and the group itself (e.g. through hierarchies, collective typologies or the so-called ideal collectivity). Secondly, the text is an expression of activity taking place in collectivity (here: in the nation state that has regained independence). Here one might ask how the specific individual representation of the past is connected with collective representations of the past. Approaches shaping the group or collectivity are on the one hand largely based on the impacts received from the public sphere (media, school system etc.), but on the other hand, also on the

perceptions emerging in the mutual interaction of the members of the same group.

In the course of analysis I try to understand what kind of a picture the authors of life stories transmit of the time in which they lived, how the creation of just such a picture is associated with the needs of the group and what is the experiential-historical background of these pictures. I also use the concept 'image of history', which I use to denote, relying on Heins (1993), image complexes formed as a result of the retrospective selection and evaluation, understandings of historical reality, which are based on the knowledge about common temporality (also cf. Fulbrook 1999).<sup>18</sup>

I have observed and compared how the images of history expressed in the life stories of older Estonians relate to institutionalised images of history as they are revealed in comprehensive school textbooks, and how they relate to images of history that are depicted by professionals in popular books of history. I have also followed how the subjects described in (auto)biographical texts relate to tendencies in the written press. I have not made a detailed analysis of events and persons, but rather compared the general tonality and orientation of describing different periods of history in public texts and in autobiographical interpretations of the past. I have placed the autobiographical interpretations of the past in the context of public texts. I have departed from the fact that public texts shape the popular discourse and thereby they 'lend words' to the life story writers to give meaning to private pasts.

A significant issue in my work has also been the question how the images of history formed about different periods relate to each other, influence, comment on or eliminate each other in life stories.

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<sup>18</sup> In ethnology also the concept 'collective tradition' has been used in the meaning of image of history (Eriksen 1997) to refer to the complexes of meanings and explanations included in the ways of interpretations of the past. A parallel term might be the 'myth' as it is used as a concept in *oral history* (Samuel, Thompson 1990), which in its turn supports on Lévi-Strauss' (cf. e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1987) and Barthes' (see e.g. Barthes 2000) treatment of myth. In life stories we can observe popular mythology more closely and how it carries moral values through ordering and naming events and evaluating them. The choice of types and persons in the description of a life or time period is, similarly to the choice of events, partially symbolic – to illustrate either the cruelty and injustice of the world or vice versa, its benevolence towards the writer. The concept of 'social script', used in psychology can also be understood as a version of myth (Roberts 2002: 131). The general tendency of interpreting the past in reminiscencing is also transmitted by the concept 'narrative template' (Wertsch 2002).

## **Analysis of life stories**

In the first two articles in this dissertation I word my theoretical starting point and method and place it in the context of the biographical approach in the research landscape of Estonia. I gave an overview of this in the previous chapter. In the following I describe more closely how I dealt with the life stories: which are the set of problems, starting points and analysis results of specific articles.

The article ‘Childhood as an Image of History: Metaphoric Depiction of the Nation and the State in Childhood Memories of Elderly Estonians’ seeks for an answer to the question how the relationship of the individual, the society, the state and nation is construed in the youth and childhood memories written by older Estonians in the 1990s, what is its context and moral. The hidden aim, which has not been worded in the article, but which partly motivated me to work on this topic, proceeded from the position of the older generation in Estonian society, which changed during the 1990s. Since the middle of the decade the older generation has not had the political meaning they had at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, when they were attributed the privilege of being the carrier of the Estonian national memory and the preserver of identity (cf. e.g. Lauristin, Vihalemm 1997). For a while, the social protests of pensioners in 1993–1994 made them troublesome whiners in the eyes of the ‘winners’, their social argumentation, which was largely based on the past experience evaluated in the restitution period, was devalued into ‘just’ nostalgia. My indirect aim was to show that the paradigm of the memories of older Estonians is actually the same, which was used to justify several political decisions in Estonia in the 1990s – the one of nationalism – and that why the older generation remembers just the way they do is caused by experiential-historical reasons.

The analysis of life stories revealed that childhood memories had an identity-building role for the older generation, which as a time in history obtain its quality first in comparison with the experience of the Stalinist period in Estonia and secondly with the restitution of independence. In the conditions of the change in the political system, the experience of independence in childhood was conceptualised as a source of national continuity and the Stalinist period as an interruption. Memories of childhood and youth are depicted in life stories in the metaphors of an ideal nation state and by using stereotypes of Estonians. From the experiential-historical aspect it is important that a large part of these narrative templates and symbols, which older Estonians use to give meaning to their memories, already existed in the discourse of national modernisation before World War II, which was again actualised at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. The rhetoric of childhood memories and the image of history it transmits do not considerably change during the 1990s. The reason for this in my opinion is that by the second half of the decade the image of history of the Republic of Estonia between the world wars became an argument in the

criticism of the modern-day society and continued to act as the carrier of generation-specific values in the dialogue with the changing society.

The next article 'A Time Ignored? About the Role of the Soviet Period in Biographies of Older Estonians' is a development of the paper presented at an international seminar in Tartu in 2000 and is partially the 'pre-story' to the article described above. Reading them in this order, the article begins where the previous one stopped. The starting point lies in the fact that while older Estonians describe life in the independence period between the wars and in the postwar Stalinist period concentrating on the historical time, assuming the role of a representative of the nation sharing the nation's destiny, their life from about the end of the 1950s to the 1980s is narrated through private life, proportionally notably more shortly and generally and the life and time (in the sense of historical time) of this period seems to be completely isolated from the comparison of the so-called independence periods. This was a general tendency, within which gender and educational differences emerged. When I asked the question, what the meaning of the so-called 'mature Socialist period' could be from viewpoint of a biography writer, and why it is on the background in the life stories written in 1996–97, I turned to look for comparison in the life stories collected a year later using the method of biographical interviews. The interviews included a question about the comparison of different historical periods. Having stuck on interpreting written life stories, I tried to find a key to understanding them in orally narrated stories. The interview materials disclosed the tendency to eliminate the Soviet period from the periods of independence, which was expressed not only by refusing to voluntarily involve the Soviet period in comparison, but also in the differentiated application of the categories that judgments are based on (especially moral and ethics) for different periods. On the other hand, the tendency to give different evaluations to the so-called 'mature Socialist period' from different levels: from the level of the system, the period is given a negative assessment, on the level of everyday life, a positive one, highly evaluating social equality and stability – the values, which are also central in written life stories for judging the independence period between the wars and on the basis of which the conflict narrative of the Estonia of the 1990s was created. In the interviews the three periods were compared on the grounds of equality principles and social security – the independence periods and the later Soviet period also from the aspect of class society. I analysed the question why such a comparison triangle is not apparent in written life stories sent to the museum, and why the life in later Soviet period 'disappears' from life stories, to the background of the discourse of restoring the history in the 1990s, which assesses the period of Soviet Estonia negatively as an occupation period with repressions, ideological pressure, the culture and language being in risk of destruction, and economic decline. On the level of everyday life, the individual also senses the stability of the Soviet period in comparison with the hectic and fast-changing modern day. At that time, however, the public discourse did not

accept the level of everyday life.<sup>19</sup> There is a disagreement between the judgments of different levels, which may cause a conflict in the life-story writer, and the best escape strategy from this may be to ignore the Soviet period.

The following article concentrated on the work biographies of teachers. The problem is how teachers of comprehensive schools thematise their work in Soviet schools and their relationships with the public sphere or the ideology, education system and the planned economy of the state. I approach the topic more closely through conflict narratives that deal with the ideological, political and bureaucratic requirements, prescriptions and circumstances, which interfered with the teachers and authors of life stories to work as 'good teachers'. Teachers' life stories are characterised by a very strong professional identity, which is expressed in lengthy and detailed work and career biographies. Being a good teacher is the central theme in teachers' life stories, which is also proved by the fact that their probable professional weaknesses are analysed through the prism of a 'good teacher'. At the same time, quite a strong self-censorship is characteristic to teachers' life stories, compared to the biographies of other people, especially those with lower education, – and not only concerning their language use but also the selection of the events, circumstances remembered and judgments. This corresponds to the observations made in the previous article about the education specifics of biographical memories. In addition, the prominent theme of the 'good teacher' in life stories can be considered a reaction to the intensive public criticism of school arrangement and teachers' mentality and working habits, which was published in the press at the same time with the appeals for life stories.

The focus of the article analysing teachers' life stories is slightly different than in the articles described above, distinguishing with more emphasis laid on the experience level of the individual.<sup>20</sup> In my analysis I presume that by interpreting the biographical representations of experiences it is possible to make conclusions about the practices of the teacher as an 'everyday life strategist' (de Certeau 1998) and their habitualisation. With this purpose I also included the perspective of several generations as much as the existing life stories allowed it.

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<sup>19</sup> The everyday life of the so-called mature socialist period has become an issue in public only quite recently, although single signs of it have been in the area of pop culture and entertainment earlier, too. It is noteworthy that for instance the discussion on the meaning of the later Soviet period, which started in the internet version of the Postimees newspaper, shows signs of the same dichotomy between the evaluations on different levels, which is also characteristic of the herein analysed interviews with Estonians of the older generation made in 1998 (cf. URL: <http://www.postimees.ee/150304/teade/124740.php>).

<sup>20</sup> The article is a development on the paper presented at a seminar of an international project 'Alltagskultur im Sozialismus. Praktiken und Strategien des Alltagslebens in den sozialistischen Ländern und ihre Folgen für die Transformation' in Munich in 2002.

Theoretically I relied on the idea of sociologist Fritz Schütze (1984) about the structural overlapping of the narrative and the biographical experience. The objective of Schütze's research is the reconstruction of the so-called 'cognitive figures' that structure and order the story-telling. For Schütze, it enables access to the structures and processing mechanisms of knowledge or the 'structures of recalled biographical experience layers'. I share Schütze's presumption that narrating one's experiences leads to the recollection of one's life history and the experience quality related with it. However, I do not share Schütze's approach to time. He departs from the point that the 'flow' of the actual narrative and the 'flow' of onetime experiences coincide, which involves at least two time-theoretical suppositions: first, that experiencing is linear (from a moment of experience to a moment of experience) and secondly, that the recollection process is linear (i.e. 'returning' to the experience from a moment of experience to a moment of experience).<sup>21</sup> In my life-story syncretic perspective I deal with time in its complexity, presuming that both in the biographical experience and in the recollection process, time perspectives and horizons – past, present, future – can be combined in different ways. So, I have proceeded from Schütze's linguistic-pragmatic proposition that an autobiographical narrative binds the narrator with it and that he/she must relate to his/her own experiences (so-called narrative compulsion). This does not in itself mean that the narrator transmits experiences 'as they actually happened', and leaves theoretical space for time-complex and context-complex dialogue.

Two periods can be discerned in how the teachers of the older generation thematise their relationship with the public sphere in the Soviet period – the 1940s–1950s and the 1960s–1980s. Most of the conflict narratives found in the life stories of older teachers concern their work experience in the first period, when several major political actions and the second mass deportation took place. Differently from the conflict narratives of the second period, where the cause of the conflict – the system or its representative is ridiculed or despised, the conflict narratives of the end of the 1940s and the 1950s express fear, helplessness, misunderstanding, and relief if one succeeded in coming out of a complicated situation. In teachers' stories the so-called 'motive of postponed punishment' reveals – the border of the allowed and the prohibited is not yet known exactly, the rules are not established yet, and therefore it is not possible to develop functioning strategies of behaviour. These conflict narratives are carried by emotions of shame, helplessness and sympathy and there is no solution that is favourable personally for the teacher-narrator. The narrative template of the teachers' work narratives of the Stalinist period coincide with recollection patterns in the life stories of their peers (Kõresaar 2002). According to Schütze, these are in accordance with the experience structure of the 'biographical trajectory', supported by 'collective trajectories' as processes that

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. criticism of Schütze's approach to time and comparison with other schools of biographical research in Corsten 1994.

mark the crisis of social relationships and the collapse of the habitual social reality.

In the biographies of older Estonians, which describe their work in the years 1960–1980, a significant change in recollection patterns is evident. First, there are fewer conflict narratives, in which teachers directly express the contradiction of the system's requirements with the work of a 'good teacher'. Secondly, in the existing conflict narratives, the teacher has a solution to the problem, i.e. he/she can manipulate the system, he/she knows the moves. In this sense, also the emotional nuance of the conflict narratives has changed – helplessness and fear is replaced by ridicule or contempt, also by indifference and neutrality. Thirdly, conflict narratives are no longer formed on the basis of single experiences, but rather summarise a number of similar experiences that the teacher has had during working in a certain school or during the whole period. Also, the conflict narratives may not concern personally the teacher but the whole school or the education system. The teacher's personality is involved in the conflict because the system's requirements contradict his/her understanding of good work. In Schütze's terms, therefore, the work experience in the so-called mature Socialist period is narrated in the context of the 'biographical action scheme', which shows that the narrator is in control of his/her life, he/she has adapted to the environment and actively planned his/her activities.

In the last article of this dissertation I present an in-depth synthesis of the statements presented in the above articles on the basis of a life story – Linda's story. Linda sent her life story to the Estonian Life Histories Association in response to the appeal 'One hundred lives of a century' in 1998. Among the older Estonians' so-called 'destiny cohorts' (Kirss 2004a), Linda belongs to the group, which was untouched by mass repressions, but together with her family she underwent other 'turns of the history' in Stalinist Estonia – this is a fact, which is essential for understanding her life story. I analyse Linda's story to the background of the problems of the public and the private, the individual and the collective relationship, underlining more clearly than in previous articles the dialogous relation of the narrative times in Estonians' life stories. As Linda's life story was written at the end of the 1990s and it bears the impress of the social criticism of that time, it is possible in comparison with other life stories to point out the dynamics how the images of different times in autobiographical representations of the past are in a changing relationship with public images of history. As a link from Linda's story to the following summarising chapter, it should be mentioned that the images of history revealed in it represent the 'typical' and the 'predominant' in the collective memory of Estonians in the 1990s.

**Summary:**  
**The dialogue and dynamics of images of history  
in the life stories of older Estonians**

Time and its meanings in the construction of memory are fundamental categories for understanding human activity (Adams 1990). A biographical narrative represents the complex relations of the perceptions of the past and the future in present experience and in its changing contexts. Therefore, the meaning attributed to a certain period of time and life reveals only in comparison with other times and in the meanings given to them in different contexts.

In the following I shall give an overview of how the dialogue and dynamics of times and their meanings is revealed in the life stories of older Estonians, analysed in the categories of the public and the private, the individual and the collective. It should be said in advance that on the basis of the analysis presented in the articles of this dissertation, for the present, summaries can be made only about what is dominant in the generational memory of older Estonians and how it relates to the image of history that is predominant in the public discourse and in the institutionalised memory. In various articles only brief references have been made to other ways of remembering, different from the dominant or differentiating it, but the whole problematics of the complexity of memory is still in need of a thorough analysis.

In the discourse of the so-called 'national awakening' that started at the end of the 1980s, the filling in of the 'gaps' in Estonian history had a leading role. Against the Soviet approach to history another, the national-normative approach to history was matched. According to the latter, national independence is the ultimate objective of a nation. History became an argument for becoming independent, playing the role of national consolidation, the construction of the 'Other' and setting the limits, as well as the role proving the illegality of the Soviet rule in Estonia. To counterweigh the official Soviet picture of the Stalinist period as a 'period of socialist construction', the image of 'national rupture' that supported on the national approach to history was set up. In the discourse of the rupture the so-called historical memory was evaluated in order to rehabilitate it. 'Historical memory' was primarily understood as the destiny of a small nation, who 'has been great in its sufferings' (Laar 1988: 13). At the same time the problem of the continuity of history actualised in the sense of 'returning' the history, which is more generally characteristic to post-Socialist countries. The renovation of events, situations and statuses in the ideology of late 1980s and early 1990s meant an effort to achieve a situation where the things are as they were 'before' (the interruption), with an aim to overcome the unwanted and burdening past. In the course of this discourse the older generation of Estonians were attributed the privilege to be the carrier of national continuity, who had retained the prewar values all through the occupation period.



Both in the public discourse and in life stories the ‘rupture’ became fixed as a dominant narrative template and an image of history for the Stalinist period in Estonia. Within the ‘rupture’ as an image of history there are dominating events and processes, which mark collective trajectories in the Estonian society of the 1940s and the early 1950s (repressions, ideological pressure and persecution, nationalisation and collectivisation, repressive political acts etc.). Individual course of life within these collective events is described as endangered by external forces and unable to control one’s life. The (Soviet) public sphere is constantly and threateningly existent. As a rule, this part of the life story is narrated by the autobiographer from the standpoint of the collective – the nation – using possibilities contained in the public discourse. A strong rhetoric of the victimization accompanies the image of the ‘rupture’ both in the public discourse and in life stories.

In dialogue with other images of history in the life stories of older Estonians the ‘rupture’ has a very multifaceted role to play.

Primarily, the use of the ‘rupture’ motif for the Stalinist period creates ‘glasses’, through which the older Estonians see the life in the Republic of Estonia before World War II, in the period of their childhood and youth. In light of the rupture the childhood becomes a national childhood in the society, which is ruled by patrimonial harmony and well-being, peasantlike wisdom (of the state) and national stereotypes and values, which *would have permanently remained, had they not been robbed from us* (f, 1926, KM EKLA f 350, 24). At the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s the happy picture of the pre-occupation Estonia played a significant role both in the process of restitution of independence as well as in the later argumentation in reorganising social and economic relations. By the middle of the previous decade, history had lost its former importance in the public sphere and the harmonious picture of the earlier period of independence had been revised. However, this does not bring about any changes in the structure and tonality of the life stories of older Estonians. Quite the opposite, in life stories written and sent to the Estonian Life Histories Association at the end of the 1990s, the picture of the ‘national childhood’ is fixed as a marker of the generation identity and continues to function as the basis for the social-critical argumentation about the transition society of Estonia.

At the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s the ‘rupture’ as a narrative interpretation template expanded in the public discourse to the whole socialist period in Estonia. In the life stories written at the beginning of the 1990s, especially in those written by men, who identify themselves in their memoirs with the fight against the regime, the same tendency is perceivable. During the 1990s history lost the position of the ‘most important science for the nation’ (Laar 1989: 42) attributed to it at the beginning of the decade. Also social identities were defined through the present and not through the past any more. In this context the expanded motif of the ‘rupture’ became into use in popular economic and social-political discourse in support of liberal reforms. The main

focus of the argument was laid on the category of culture – this emphasised the natural inability of the work experience and more generally, the mentality of the Soviet time to adapt to the needs of the capitalist future of Estonia. This argumentation coincides with the ideology of the ‘rupture’, which concentrates on the destruction of the national lifestyle and on the invasion of ‘alien’ norms, values and habits.

At the same time, the autobiographers retell their life in the period of ‘mature Socialism’ in a paradigm that refers to active and planned social activity. In the core of the stories reflecting this period are the events of personal life, people have settled down, had their families and they describe what they do for the benefit of themselves and their family, how they plan their future. The narrative does not follow single detailed descriptions of life events and experiences, but more often the types of experience, which summarise cycles and fields of experience: building a house or looking for an apartment, the experience of consuming and procuring things, the experience of marriage and growing up children, the experience of spending their leisure time, the experience of work. On the level of everyday life this is an interpretation of time and life with the positive sign. One sees oneself as an active, socially competent individual (cf. also Kõresaar 2003). This vision conflicted with the 1990s’ negative<sup>22</sup> or missing<sup>23</sup> public discourse about the experience of the later Soviet period.

The official approach to history did not offer much more support, because the idea of the level where ‘history took place’ did not coincide with the level in which people lived their life. For example, the institutionalised ‘documents of memory’ – history textbooks – treat the years of ‘mature Socialism’ from the political aspect, according to the scheme ideological pressure v. opposition, and focus mainly on the public or semi-public sphere. The focal point of the so-called average life-story writer was in the private sphere and semi-private relationships in the social sphere. (Cf. Carcelon 1997.)

Therefore, the expansion of the ‘rupture’ to the whole Soviet period in Estonia makes the latter a kind of an ‘intermediate’ period of interruption, which separates periods of national independence. This period – both in the sense of the historical and the lived time – is attributed different (often contradictory and even conflicting) meanings from the standpoint of the public and the private memory. This has made the recollection of the later Soviet period in the society problematic in terms of a coherent image of history.

In conclusion: the 1990s were in Estonians’ interpretations of the recent past the period of development of the so-called ‘collective tradition’ (Eriksen 1997, cf. footnote 8), especially as concerns the ‘interruption’ becoming a dominant image of history. ‘Collective tradition’ means that the official history

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. the article of teachers’ work memories in this dissertation.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the article of the public and the private, the individual and the collective with the example of Linda’s life story in this dissertation.

writings, the popular discourse and the individual life story ‘remember’ the 1940s – 1950s in a relatively coherent way, it is possible to replace one with another, without the meaning of the period changing. At the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s, when the ‘rupture’ was more extensively worded as an image of history, there was a question of the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ fact-centred recollection – the fact itself with its existence included a meaning, which could only be ‘right’ (national) or ‘wrong’ (Communist). Although the relationship between the public and the private, the collective and the individual is more complex, it can be stated that the memories and ‘testimonies’ (or: a certain part of them) of the older generation have played a significant role in establishing the ‘rupture’ as an image of history for the Stalinist period. Another issue is the question how many (negative) (inter)ruptures are acknowledged to have taken place in Estonian society: in older Estonians’ life stories from the second half of the 1990s, the Estonia of the transition period has become a time of a negative rupture, while in public manifestations the positive picture of the new start continued. A conflict became evident between the meanings on the level of everyday life and the level of the system. The same observation is true for the development of a coherent image of history about the later Soviet period, the experience of which is shared by a notably larger number of people than just one or two generations. It can be said that in the 1990s the experience of the older generation was eliminated from this process because of the ‘wrong’ level of recollection. The process itself (and continually also the opposition of the levels of everyday life and the system in it) continues already in the words of younger generations. Younger generations (of professionals and those interested in history) have also questioned the pillars of the older generation’s identity – the picture of the national and unified Republic of Estonia before World War II.

Therefore – distancing from the idea that the question of memory and history is a question of truth or distortion of truth does not mean as if memory were not problematic any longer – the struggle for meanings shall continue.

*Translated by Ann Kuslap*

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## SISSEVAATEID VALDKONDA

### Mälu, ajalugu ja elulugu 1980. aastate lõpu ja 1990. aastate Eestis

*Whenever memory is invoked  
We should be asking ourselves:  
By whom, where, in which context,  
Against what?  
(Zemon Davis, Starn 1989: 2)*

1980. aastate lõppu on tagantjärele iseloomustatud kui aega, mis oli “tiine meenutamisest, ajaloolise mälu kogumisest ja revideerimisest” (Hinrikus 2003b: 178). Andmaks hinnangut sotsiaalse mälu protsessidele Eestis 1980. aastate lõpul ja 1990. aastate algul, on ajaloolane Meike Wulf kasutanud ‘koorumise’ (*peeling-off*) metafoori. Wulfi interpretatsioonis “koorisid eestlased kihthaaval maha väljastpoolt pealesurutud minevikutõlgendused, kuni nende privaatne või vastumälu sai 1991 (taas) osaks uuest ametlikust rahvuslikust mälust” (Wulf 2000: 43). Metafoorina, mis peab linnulennult kokku võtma vastuolulisi ning ehk raskesti hõlmatavaid ühiskondlikke ja kultuurilisi protsesse, langeb see kokku oma aja avaliku retoorikaga ning laiemalt levinud arusaamaga sotsiaalse mälu protsessidest Ida- ja Kesk-Euroopas. *Peeling-off* on n.ö. sündmustetasandi metafoor, mis keskendub unustamise ja mäletamise, avaliku ja privaatse hegemoonilisele opositsioonile Nõukogude okupatsiooni ajal konkreetsete sündmuste näitel.<sup>24</sup> 1980. aastate lõpu rahvuslikus diskursuses oli

<sup>24</sup> Olen seisukohal, et *peeling-off*-metafoor on vaid osaliselt seletusjõuline, sest see näeb sotsiaalse mälu kujunemist avaliku-privaatse suhte seisukohalt vaid ühesuunalisena: kaua privaatse sfääris “hoitud” mälu “vabastatakse” kiht kihi haaval ning muudetakse avalikult jagatavaks, institutsionaliseeritakse. See eeldab, et mälestused mingist sündmusest ja/või selle kogemisest püsivad muutumatuna nii ajavahemikul, mis lahutab “vabastamist” kogemusest, kui ka “vabastamise” protsessis endas. Enamgi veel, see sisaldab eeldust, et ‘avalik’ lihtsalt moodustub ‘privaatsest’, mitte pole tegemist kompleksse dialektilise ja dialoogilise protsessiga. Lisaks sellele peitub *peeling off*-metafooris populaarpoliitiline arusaam ajaloolisest kogemustõest, st. et mälestused repressiooni, ellujäämise- ja üleelamiskogemustest ning kannatustest on “autentsemad” ning seeläbi rohkem “tõesed” kui nn. tavalise (nõukogude) inimese mälestused (vrd. ka Liljeström 2004: 235–236). Siinkohal ma ei väida, nagu ei oleks autobiograafilistel mälestustel ning pereajalugudel 1980. aastate lõpul ja 1990. aastate algul olnud tähelepanuväärset mõju avaliku ajaloopildi kujunemisele. Kuid nagu näiteks Terje Anepaio (2003) on näidanud repressioonide mäletamise dünaamika põhjal, oli see protsess komplekssem, selektiivsem ja mitmesuunalisem kui populaarses “koorumise”-metafooris väljendub. Käsitlen mäletamise dünaamikat avaliku-privaatse seisukohast põhjalikumalt valmivas raamatus “Elu ideoloogid. Kollektiivne mälu ja autobiograafiline minevikutõlgendus eestlaste elulugudes” (Eesti Rahva Muuseum, 2004).

‘peeling-off’-metafoori populaarseks vasteks Eestis “anda rahvale tagasi tema ajalugu” (Laar 1988).

“Ajaloole tagasiandmine rahvale” ühtis populaarses retoorikas “eluloo tagasiandmisega inimesele” (Merle Karusoo), millega kaasnes mälestuste ja elulugude kaalukuse ja usaldusväarsuse tuntav tõus avalikkuse jaoks. Mälestustes nähti alles hoitavat ja edasi elavat rahvuse „tõelist“ lugu, mis kokku pidi andma ajaloo. Indiviidi käsitleti kui osa “rahvuskehast”; üleskutse “anda eestlastele tagasi nende elulugu” tähendas ühtlasi ajaloo ümbermõtestamist (eesti) rahvuse keskselt – minevikus juhtunud kajastava kollektiivse kogemuse esile tõstmist. Alates 1987. aastast oli mälestuste kogumise ja nende teatraliseeritud “tagasiandmisega” tegelenud Merle Karusoo juhitud Pirgu Arenduskeskuse Mälu-sektor. Kunstiline meedia aitas ühelt poolt samastuda “varjatud ajalooa”, teiselt poolt täitis ka elementaarset informatiivset, “ajaloos järeleaitamise” rolli.<sup>25</sup> Eestlaste “elulooeadvust”<sup>26</sup> mõjutas 1980. aastatel oluliselt ka Lembit Lauri raadioaade “Kirjutamata memuaare” ning samanimelised trükised selle salvestistest (Lauri 1986, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991ab; vt. mõju kohta ka Rahi 2004).

Ajaloo renovatsiooni protsessis saavutas meetod koguda pärimust avalike ülekutsete teel märkimisväärse ulatuse. End otseselt Jakob Hurda saja aasta taguse eeskujuga seostav Eesti Muinsuskaitse Seltsi ajaloolise pärimuse “taastamise” aktsioon 1988–1992 haaras kaasa väga paljusid. Tulemusena tekkinud Eesti Muinsuskaitse Seltsi kogus, mis asub Eesti Kultuuriloolises Arhiivis, on üle 1700 säiliku mitmesuguseid mälestusi, teateid, kirju ja päevikuid.<sup>27</sup> Ka Ühenduse “Eesti elulood” ja tema eelkäijate tegevus<sup>28</sup> elulugude kogumisel kirjalike üleskutsete abil oli osa 1980. aastate lõpu ja 1990. aastate rahvuslikust diskursusest, keskendudes “suure ajaloo” kogemusele indiviidi seisukohast.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Näiteks retsensioonis Noorsooteatris 1988. aasta lõpul esietendunud väliseestlaste loomingut käsitlevale “Maarjamaale” (Eesti raamatukogude erifondide materjalide põhjal kokku pannud Toomas Lõhmuste) kiidab Tõnis Ritson etenduse faktiivsust Eesti ajaloo käsitlemisel: “Kõnealusel juhul sain näiteks juurde mõned üksikasjad, mida ajalootundides õpilastele ette kanda: et 1944.a. märtsipommitamisel hävis Tallinnas 1418 elumaja, et 20 000 inimest jäid seetõttu peavarjuta, et rünnaku ohvriks langes 50 Saksa ohvitseri ja 120 Vene sõjavangi ja mida kõike veel. Mingil hetkel tajusin ajaloolasena süütunnet, sest miks peavad minu tööd tegema näitlejad...” (Ritson 1988)

<sup>26</sup> Rutt Hinrikuse sõnastuses, isiklikust kirjavahetusest 06. 04. 2004.

<sup>27</sup> Rutt Hinrikuse informatsioon, isiklikust kirjavahetusest.

<sup>28</sup> Ühendus “Eesti elulood” asutati ametlikult 6. märtsil 1996, esimene ülekutse elulugude kogumiseks “Kas sa mäletad oma elulugu?” saadeti paljudele eestikeelsetele ja suurematele venekeelsetele ajalehtedele 1989. aasta suve lõpul. Keskendun siinkohal vaid käesoleva väitekirja seisukohalt olulisematele üleskutsetele ning nende sisule, elulugude kogumise ajaloost kuni 2004. aastani vt. lähemalt Hinrikus 2003b ja Hinrikus, Kõresaar 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Peatumata pikemalt mälestuste ja elulugude kogumise laiemal kontekstil märgin vaid, et Eestis 1980. aastate lõpul hoogu võttev mälestuste tõus ei ole ühelt poolt



## Elulood, nende kogumise kontekst ja meetod

Käesolev väitekirj esitab 1920. aastatel sündinud eestlaste aastatel 1989–1999 üleskutsete peale kirjutatud elulugude põhjal küsimuse autobiograafilisest minevikutõlgendusest ja selle dünaamikast 1990. aastatel Eesti 20. sajandi ajaloo ning selle mäletamise poliitika kontekstis. Väitekirjas esitatud artiklid keskenduvad peamiselt kolmele suuremale<sup>30</sup> elulugude kirjutamise üleskutsele saadetud tekstidele (vt. võrdlevalt tabel: *Elulugude üleskutsete teemad, aeg ja elulugude hulk*). 1920. aastatel sündinute lugusid on erinevatele üleskutsetele

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lahutatav samasugustest ajaloo renovatsiooni, rekonstruktsiooni ja rahvuslikustamise protsessidest teises postsotsialistlikes maades (vrd. viimaste kohta Niedermüller 1997), teisalt pole aga lõpuni samastatav nende protsesside läbiviimise meetoditega. 1980. aastate lõpu ning 1990. aastate alguse Ida- ja Kesk-Euroopa diskursiivses praktikas tähendas ajaloo sümbolne “taastamine” ka teatud individualiseerumist, argikogemuste ja -teadvuste mitmekesisust ja -häälsust. Siit tuleneb ka postsotsialistlikele ühiskondadele omane “biograafiline buum” (vt. ka Humphrey et. al 2003). Ajaloolisi protsesse tahetakse illustreerida individuaalse elukäigu kaudu. See peab näitama, et vaatamata kõigile repressioonidele kommunismi ajal eksisteeris ajalooteadvuse ja -kogemuse pluralism, et ajalugu ei olnud sotsialismi ajal ühtlik, kuigi seda püüti järjekindlalt ühelaadistada. Ajaloo detsentraliseerimine ja mineviku privatiseerimine kui strateegiad suunavad end ametliku sotsialistliku ajaloopildi vastu ning püüavad individuaalsetest ja grupispetsiifilistest kogemustest “uut ajalugu” konstrueerida. Eesti eripära ses kontekstis seisneb eestikeelse elanikkonna suures aktiivsuses ise kirjutada mälestusi ja elulugusid ning saata neid erinevatele institutsioonidele avalike üleskutsete peale, samal ajal kui teistes maades oli valdav pigem nn. suulise ajaloo meetod (postsotsialistlikest maadest on erandiks Poola, kus on pikk kirjalike elulugude kogumise traditsioon). Avaliku ülekutse meetodi nii märkimisväärne edu Eestis on seotud nii selle (või sarnaste, isiklikku aktiivsust eeldavate meetodite) traditsioonidega (tavaliselt tagasi viidav Jakob Hurda ülekutsele 1888) kui ka ülekutsete taga olevatele institutsioonidele (nt. Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum) omistatava rahvusliku tähtsusega.

<sup>30</sup> Artiklis “Towards a Social Memory of Work. Politics and Being a Good Teacher in Soviet Teachers’ Life Stories” olen lisaks kasutanud ka ülekutsele “Õpetaja, kas mäletad oma elulugu?” (1997) saadetud tekste ning küsimuseasetusest lähtuvalt ka mõningaid üleskutsele “Minu ja minu pere elu Eesti NSV-s ja Eesti Vabariigis” (2000–2001) laekunud elulugusid.

kokku laekunud umbes 300 eluloo ümber.<sup>31</sup> Siinne analüüs toetub kuni 100 (59 naise ja 41 mehe) eluloole. Elulood on väga erineva pikkusega, alates paarist leheküljest kuni kolmesaja-leheküljelise ja mahukamagi tekstini. Kõige pikemad tekstid on meeste kirjutatud, nende elulood on keskeltläbi kolm korda mahukamad naiste omadest, ulatudes mitmekõiteliste elukroonikateni. Vastavalt teemale ja probleemiasetusele olen võrdlevalt kaasanud ka eluloointervjuude materjali ning nooremate põlvkondade elulugusid. Taustaks on olulised ka aastatel 1997–2003 ilmunud elulooantoloogiates (Annuk 1997; Karusoo 1997; Hinrikus 1999, 2000, 2003a) avaldatud tekstid.

**Tabel:** Elulugude kogumise üleskutsete teemad, aeg ja lugude hulk 1989–1999<sup>32</sup>

AASTA	ÜLEKUTSE TEEMA	ELULUGUDE ARV	MÄRKUSED
1989	Eestimaa elulood Биографии людей Эстонии	58	
1990		75 + 117	117 Kuusalu ja Paide 9.–11. klassi õpilaste ajalooõpetaja initsiatiivil kirjutatud lugu
1991–1994		113	
1995	Naiste elulood	18	
1995	Elulood armastusest ja seksuaalsusest	u. 60	Ei ole üldarvestuses
1996	Minu ja minu lähedaste saatus ajaloo keerdkäikudes	262	
1997	Õpetaja, kas mäletad oma elulugu?	u. 30	Õpetajate elulugusid kogusid samal ajal ka Eesti Rahva Muuseum, Tallinna Pedagoogikaülikool ja Pedagoogika arhiiv-muuseum

<sup>31</sup> Elulugude arv on hinnanguline, sest tekstide arhiveerimise süsteemis ei eristata elulugusid alati üleskutsete järgi. See on ka komplitseeritud ülesanne, sest elulugusid saadetakse Ühendusele “Eesti elulood” ka eluloovõistluste vahepeal ning nad ei kuulu kitsamalt mingi “teema” alla. Üldiselt on selgemalt määratletavad elulood, mis on saadetud alates 1996. aastast organiseeritud eluloovõistlustele. Varem saadetud tekstid ei ole enamasti üleskutsete järgi identifitseeritavad.

<sup>32</sup> Elulugude hulk on antud hinnanguliselt, sest kogu perioodi vältel ei ole peetud ühtset arvestust üleskutsete ja neile laekunud lugude kohta. Siinne tabel on koostatud Annuk 1997, Hinrikus 2003b, Karusoo 1997 ja Rutt Hinrikuselt otse saadud andmete põhjal. Märkuste lahtris toodud täpsustavate kommentaaride eest olen tänu võlgu Rutt Hinrikusele.

Tabel järg

AASTA	ÜLEKUTSE TEEMA	ELULUGUDE ARV	MÄRKUSED
1998	Sajandi sada elulugu	232	
1989–1999		Kokku u. 1010	Koguarv sisaldab hinnanguliselt ka üleskutsete vahepeal Eesti Kultuuriloolisse arhiivi laekunud elulugusid. Lisaks on mitmed kord juba eluloo muuseumisse saatnud inimesed järgnevatel aastatel oma lugusid täiendanud ja/või juurde saatnud lisalugusid, mis on lisatud juba olemasolevasse säilikusse.
2000	Minu ja minu pere elu Eesti NSV-s ja Eesti Vabariigis	330	

Teemade, nende lahenduste ja retoorika ning publiku poolest olid 1989–1999 elulooüleskutsed n.ö. oma aja lapsed, tehes läbi kümnendile iseloomuliku protsessi ajaloo individualiseerimisest ja mitmekesistamisest kuni taasühtlustamiseni (Niedermüller 1997).<sup>33</sup> Esimene, 1989. aastal Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi kultuuriloolise arhiivi tehtud üleskutse “Eestimaa elulood. Kas sa mäletad oma elulugu?” rõhutas elulugude kui ühiskonna mälu kogumise tähtsust ning ajaloolist missiooni, selgitades lühidalt ka eluloo mõistet (Hinrikus 2003b: 179). Üleskutses rõhutati ka, et “iga elulugu, iga saatus on osa eesti rahva ajalooist”.<sup>34</sup> Järgnevatel aastatel avaldas arhiiv veel korduvalt üleskutseid ajakirjanduses, seejärel elulugude kogumine taandus mõneks aastaks,<sup>35</sup> kuni 1996. aastal

<sup>33</sup> Taasühtlustumise all pean silmas ajaloo rahvuslustumist 1990. aastate esimese poole jooksul, st. poliitiliste, etniliste ja sotsiaalsete päritolumüütide kinnistumist ning nende abil loodud ajaloolise kontinuiteedi kaudu ühiskonnakorra legaliseerimist. Rahvuslustumisele vabamas tõlgenduses viitavad ka üleskutsete avaldamise kanalid – kui 1989. aasta elulooüleskutse avaldati nii eesti- kui suuremates venekeelsetes ajalehtedes, siis 1990. aastate teise poole üleskutsete väljund oli eestikeelne ajakirjandus.

<sup>34</sup> Olen elulooüleskutsede üleskutseid tsiteerides kasutanud Ühenduse “Eesti elulood” arhiivis asuvaid tekste, kuna need peegeldavad paremini elulugude kogujate eesmärke, nende taga olevat ajalookäsitlust ja seda väljendavat populaarset retoorikat kui ajalehtedes ilmunud teated. Iga üksik meediaväljaanne lühendas üleskutseid oma võimailustest ja huvidest lähtuvalt.

<sup>35</sup> Ühenduse “Eesti elulood” esinaine Rutt Hinrikuse sõnul aeglustus elulugude laekumine tunduvalt aastatel 1994–95. 1995. a. kutsus Eve Annuk üles naisi kirjutama naisseks olemise kogemusest (kokku mõnikümmend elulugu, vt. ka Annuk 1997), 1996. a. koguti koostöös soome sotsioloogidega lugusid eestlaste seksuaalkogemusest (vt. ka Karusoo 1997).

kuulutas samal aastal asutatud Ühendus “Eesti elulood” välja eluloovõistluse “Minu ja minu lähedaste saatus ajaloo keerdkäikudes”. Selle eluloovõistluse tulemusena laekus 1990. aastate jooksul kõige rohkem lugusid. Üleskutses keskenduti inimese kodu- ja peresfäärile ning sellesse “pöördeliste aegade” tunginud muutustele. Minu küsimuseasetuse seisukohalt on huvitav eluloovõistluse pealkiri, kuivõrd see sisaldab tähenduslikke vihjeid selle kohta, kuidas tõlgendati ajalugu ning indiviidi rolli selles. Nagu mitmed eesti elulugude uurijad (vrd. Huima 2002, Kirss 2004b) on osutanud, on mõiste ‘saatus’ seotud käsitusega indiviidi tegususest ajaloos, viitab mõjutatusele välistest jõududest ning on sellega otseselt seotud väikerahvaliku ajalootunnetuse ja -kogemusega. Väljend ‘ajaloo keerdkäigud’ 1990. aastate kontekstis – üleskutses täpsustatud kui “sõda, riigipöörded, küüditamised või muu vägivald” – keskendub omakorda aga II maailmasõja eelsetele ja järgsetele ajalooüldmustele ning kombinatsioonis ‘saatus’ viitab teatud kindlale tõlgendusviisile.

1990. aastate viimane suurem eluloovõistlus “Sajandi sada elulugu” (1998) oli kantud esmapilgul neutraalsest sajandilõpu ideest ning mõttest koostada esinduslik eluloootoloogia. Eluloovõistluse üleskutses keskenduti taas eestlaste õigusele eluloole ning elu- ja ajaloo samasusele 20. sajandi kontekstis: “See, mis inimest ilmutab, on tema elu lugu. Kokku on see aja lugu ja ühe rahva lugu. Veel tänagi üllatatakse, kuuldes väidet, et pool sajandit olid eestlaste elulood keelatud. Aga kui me ankeetidesse ei märkinud enese või oma vanemate Siberiaastaid, saksa sõjaväge, sugulaste lahkumist 1944. aasta sügisel – mis muud see siis oli?” Erinevalt aga eelnevast kahest üleskutses rõhutatakse avaliku ja privaatsuse minevikutõlgenduse võimalikku konflikti mitte ainult Nõukogude okupatsiooni tingimustes, vaid ka iseseisvusaegadel: “Küllap oli keelatud elulugusid ka enne 39ndat aastat: seotus vabadussõdalaste liikumisega näiteks ja kommunistlik meelsus. Keelatud elulugusid on täna parlamentki täis: keegi ei pea enesestmõistetavaks nimetada, et kuulus kommunistlikkuse parteisse. Seda salatakse nagu oma pangaarvet.”

Siinses väitekirjas esitatud artiklid keskenduvadki avaliku-privaatse ning individuaalse ja kollektiivse muutuvatele suhetele 1990. aastatel eluloovõistlustele laekunud (auto)biograafilistes lugudes. Oma teoreetilist perspektiivi ning kitsamaid küsimuseasetusi ja meetodit käsitlen järgnevas alapeatükis. Siinkohal tahan teha põgusa sissevaate põlvkonnaperspektiivi, mida kasutan.

## **Põlvkonnaperspektiiv**

“Pöördeliste ajalooüldmuste” kontseptsioonile tuginedes on põlvkonnaperspektiivist laiemalt eestlaste elulugusid vaadeldud kolme nn. saatuskohordina (Kirss 2004a). Rutt Hinrikuse sõnastuses: “1) eestlaste elulood okupeeritud kodumaal; 2) põgenike elulood ehk eesti diasporaa Läänes; 3) eesti diasporaa Idas, s.o. represseeritute elulood ja nn. Venemaa eestlaste elulood (viimaseid on võrreldes küüditatute elulugudega kogutud väga vähe) (Hinrikus 2003b: 187).

Väitekirja artiklites on põhiliselt analüüsitud esimese grupi ning vähemal määral kolmanda grupi elulugusid. Spetsiifilisele repressioonikogemusele ei ole ma keskendunud, minu tähelepanu keskpunktis on autobiograafiline minevikutõlgendus üldisemalt Eesti 20. sajandi ajaloo kontekstis. Samal põhjusel ei ole ma eraldi esile toonud ka sõjakogemust, mis eristaks juba valitud sünnikümnendi sees näiteks mehed, kes kuulusid või mitte mobilisatsiooni(de) alla. Sünnikümnendist rääkides – põlvkonnaperspektiivis on sünnikümnend kindlasti kitsam kui põlvkond. 20. sajandi biograafilise kogemuse järgi on eri uurijad 1920. aastatel sündinud paigutanud erinevatesse “põlvkonnagruppidesse”. Näiteks Aili Aarelaiu interpretatsioonis kuuluvad 1920. aastatel sündinud eestlased põlvkonda 1914–1930, s.o. nn. eestiaegsete põlvkonda, “kes olid üles kasvanud iseseisvusaja vabameelses õhkkonnas; neil langes okupatsioonide kümnend kokku elukevadega, mil peetakse tulevikuplaane ja kujundatakse karjääri; vaimsete paradigmat muutus mõjus neile tohutu katsumusena ning tekitas endaksjäämise probleemid” (Aarelaid 2000: 757). Rutt Hinrikus aga paigutab nad gruppi sünniaastatega 1920–1939, keda ta nimetab “kibedate valikute põlvkonnaks”: “Nende noorusaastad langesid tervenisti või osaliselt Eesti nn. saatuseaastatesse 1939–1953 ja nende valikud sõltusid suurriikide poliitikast, sisaldades nii nagu eelmiselgi põlvkonnal dramaatilisi vastasseise. [...] Kellelgi ei õnnestunud säilitada väljakujunenud elulaadi.” (Hinrikus 2003b: 184.)

Mõlemad uurijad lähtuvad nii põlvkonna eluteed kujundanud objektiivsetest ajaloosündmustest kui grupi enesemääratlusest võrdluses teiste põlvkondadega. Olen end analüüsi ratsionaalsuse huvides piiranud kitsama sünnikümnendiga, mida põlvkonnaperspektiivis määratlen siiski pigem sarnaselt Aarelaiule. Võttes aluseks 1920. aastatel sündinute endi põlvkonnamääratluse, langevad sellest generatsioonist välja eelkõige 1930. aastate teisel poolel sündinud, keda iseloomustatakse ideoloogiliselt kui *Moskva kasvatus* saanuid.<sup>36</sup> Samas, see oluline põlvkonna-identifikatsiooni piirav hinnang ei ole välja tulnud kirjutatud elulugudest, vaid võrdluses biograafiliste intervjuude abil kogutud elulugudega. Kirjalike elulugude põhjal, mis on Hinrikuse põlvkonnamääratluse aluseks, võib tõesti öelda, et aastate 1939–1953 kogemus on põlvkonnapiire ületav kogemus, mille väljenduseks sõjaeelse ja järgse põlvkonna elulugudes on traumaatiliste aegade ja stabiilsemate perioodide vastandamine, isikliku ja avaliku elu vastandamine (vrd. Hinrikus 2003b: 209) ning nimetatud “pöördeliste aegade” pidamine põlvkonna saatust kujundavaks teguriks.

Kuigi olen analüüsivat gruppi piiranud kindla sünnikümnendiga ratsionaalsuse huvides, on minu valik ka kogemuspõhine. 1920. aastatel sündinud eestlased on sündinud Eesti Vabariiki, kus möödus nende lapsepõlv ning kus nad omandasid hariduse ja tegutsesid selleaegses rahvusliku moderniseerumise kontekstis. Viimane asjaolu – mil määral katus/vastandus kodu ja kooli kui

<sup>36</sup> Vt. vanemate eestlaste põlvkonnaidentifikatsioonist artiklis “A Time Ignored? About the Role of the Soviet Period in Biographies of Older Estonians” käesolevas väitekirjas.

privaatse ja avaliku sfääri kogemus – on minu küsimuseasetuse seisukohalt oluline faktor. 1920. aastate esimesel poolel sündinutest osad iseseisvusid majanduslikult 1930. aastate lõpuks ja 1940. aastate alguseks. Midagi suuremat nad oma eluga veel pihta ei jõudnud hakata. Võib öelda, et põlvkonnaperspektiivist lähtudes<sup>37</sup> oli 1920. aastatel sündinute kujunemiskeskond ühtlane, vaatamata suhtelisele vanusevahele sünnikümneni sees.

1920. aastatel sündinud eestlaste elulood on kollektiivse mälu uurijale ka teistpidi huvipakkuvad. Nad kuuluvad nn. eesti aja põlvkonda, kellele 1980. aastate lõpu ja 1990. aastate alguse rahvuslikus liikumises omistati eesti ühiskonna poolt privileeg olla rahvusliku mälu kandja ning identiteedi säilitaja nõukogude okupatsiooni ajal. Nagu öeldud, mängib kahe maailmasõja vahelise riikliku iseseisvuse kogemus suurt rolli ka selle põlvkonna enesemääratluses. 1990. aastate teiseks pooleks oli Eesti ühiskond oma suundumust muutnud, sotsiaalseid identiteete ei defineeritud enam mineviku kaudu ning vanem põlvkond kaotas ühiskonna silmis oma rolli mälu kandjana. Samal ajal kui nooremad põlvkonnad hakkasid vaidlustama “eesti aja” sümboleiks kujunenud isikute ja mõtteviiside tähtsust tuleviku jaoks, säilitas vanem põlvkond oma enesidentiteedi ning kritiseeris selle pinnalt uut, muutuvat ühiskonda. Lisaks ei suutnud ühiskond kokku leppida hilisema nõukogude perioodi tähenduses oma ajaloos, mis omakorda aetas surve alla vanema põlvkonna, kes oma viljaka tööaja oli elanud nõukogude okupatsiooni ajal. Näeme, et nii individuaalset, põlvkondlikku kui rahvuslikku mälu seati 1990. aastate jooksul mitmel viisil küsimuse alla – see muudab avaliku ja privaate, individuaalse ja kollektiivse mälu dünaamika problemaatika taasiseseisvunud Eesti kontekstis veelgi intrigeerivamaks.

Kogemuspõhisusest ja põlvkonna enesemääratlusest lähtudes olen võrdlusmaterjali analüüsil vajadusel ka sünnikümneni piiridest väljunud. Artiklis “A Time Ignored? About the Role of the Soviet period in Biographies of Older Estonians” kaasasin võrdlevalt analüüsi biograafilised intervjuud aastatel 1914–1927 sündinutega, kes mahuvad eespool toodud põlvkonnapiiritlusse. Et vanema põlvkonna kogemust ja enesemääratlust selgemini välja joonistada, olen õpetajate ametijutustusi käsitlevas artiklis “Towards a Social Memory of Work. Politics and Being a Good Teacher in Soviet Teachers’ Life Stories” 1920. aastatel sündinute tööbiograafiaid võrrelnud hilisemate sünnikümnenite (1930.–1960. aastad) omadega. Võrdluses välja joonistunud järelduste kese ja raskuspunkt on aga alati 1920. aastatel sündinute elulugudes avalduval minevikutõlgendusel.

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<sup>37</sup> Näiteks sotsioloog Victoria Semenova peab sünnikümneni kujunemisel põlvkonnaks määravaks esimest 17 eluaastat (Semenova 2002).

## **Analüüsi teljed: kollektiivne mälu ja eluloosünkretistlik vaatenurk**

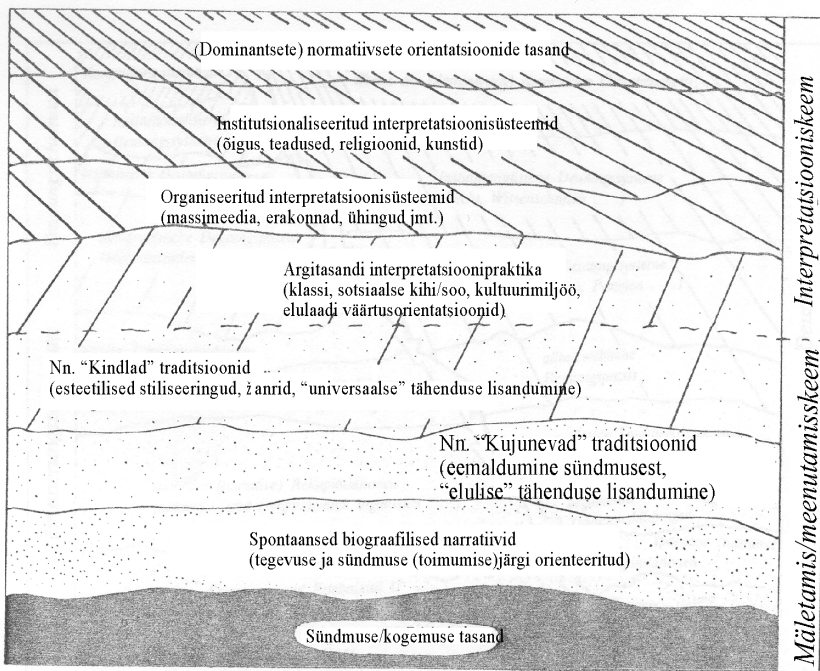
Hõlmamaks teoreetiliselt avaliku-privaatse ning individuaalse-kollektiivse problemaatikat elulugudes, võtsin kasutusele (kollektiivse) mälu mõiste. Mäletamine ja unustamine oli erinevatel viisidel kogu 1990. aastate jooksul oluline teema Eestis. Küsimused nagu minevikus elamine või suundumine tulevikku, põlvkondadevaheline mälu, 'õige' ja 'vale' mäletamine jne. puudutasid otseselt avaliku-privaatse, individuaalse ja kollektiivse suhet ideoloogiliselt pinnalt. Samas on see ka äärmiselt huvitav analüütiline probleem. Käsitlen kollektiivse mälu problemaatikat ning selle uurimise küsimusi kirjalike elulugude põhjal väitekirja esimeses artiklis.

### **Mälu – individuaalne ja kollektiivne**

'Kollektiivne mälu' on muidugi ise äärmiselt problemaatiline mõiste, nagu kõik mõisted, mis 'kollektiivsust' sisaldavad. Seda ühelt poolt mõiste 'kollektiivne' tõttu, mis nagu viitaks kollektiivsuse "sisesele" kohustuslikule ühtsusele ning teeks ebakõlad ja konflikti teoreetiliselt raskesti seletatavaks. Rääkimata sellest, et mõiste 'kollektiivne' on 20. sajandi kontekstis olnud väga ideoloogiliselt laetud. Probleem seisneb ka eelduses, et kollektiivsel mälul on omadused, mis tegelikult saavad avalduda vaid individuaalsel tasandil (Gedi et. al 1996: 34).

Oma käsitluses mõistan 'kollektiivset mälu' tuginedes Maurice Halbwachsi mälukontseptsioonile. Halbwachsi käsitlus individuaalse ja kollektiivse mälu lahutamatuses jõudis eluloouurimisse erinevaid teid pidi. Mainima peaks David Lowenthali ülevaadet interdistsiplinaarsetest mälukäsitlustest ja minevikuteadmisesest laiemalt (Lowenthal 1995, esmatrükk 1985), mis rohkem mõju eluloouurimisele avaldas vast Põhjamaades (Löfgren 1991). Tekkis diskussioon näiteks unustamisest kui mälu lahutamatu komponentist. Tänapäevases eluloouurimises nähakse indiviidi küll kokkukuuluvana sotsiaalse keskkonnaga, kuid seejuures ei lähtuta indiviidist kui elemendist selles. Eluloouurimise keskne lähtepunkt on, et indiviidi biograafiline teadmine – kuidas ta ümbritsevat maailma interpreteerib – on sotsiaalselt defineeritud (Gullestad 1996; Thorsen 1996; Löfgren 1991). Eri distsipliinide eluloouurijad keskenduvad küsimusele, kuidas ja mil määral individuaalne elukäik/elulugu väljendavad indiviidi, kollektiivse praktika ja ajaloolise konteksti vahelisi suhteid (Niedermüller 1988). Mälu käsitletakse kui kultuuriliselt organiseeritud fenomeni, mis mäletab/meenutab, unustab, lülitab või valib välja, aga ka konserveerib sündmusi, situatsioone ja tõlgendusi, mis sel moel saavad sümbolilise sisu. Just seda nimetas M. Halbwachs mälu sotsiaalseteks raamistusteks ehk kollektiivseks mäluks. 'Kollektiivne mälu' minu käsitluses on kattetermin, mille sees võib vastavalt küsimuseasetusele eraldi käsitleda ajaloolist, sotsiaalset või kultuurimälu.

Mõistes seega 'kollektiivset mälu' ajalooliste, sotsiaalsete ja kultuuriliste suhete ja väljenduste kaudu, olen püüdnud teoreetiliselt hõlmata ka erinevusi ja vastuolusid eri mäletamisviiside vahel, nende dünaamikat ja vastastikkusi mõjutusi, võimuproblemaatikat. Oma mälu kontseptsiooni arendusega seon end viimase 15–20 aasta akadeemilise diskursusega humanitaar- ja sotsiaalteaduslikus mälu-uurimises, mis mõistab mälu põhiliselt kollektiivse nähtusena rõhuasetusega selle ajaloolisele, sotsiaalsele ja kultuurilisele baasile. Tõlgendan mälu kui sotsiaalset konstruktsiooni, mis põhineb sotsiaalsel interaktsioonil ja kommunikatsioonil ning mida struktureerib keel. Mälu on dünaamiline ja dialektiline protsess mineviku ja oleviku vahel, mis ühendab muutuse ja järjepidevuse tervikuks. Grupi kollektiivne mälu on vahetult seotud biograafiliste teadmismvormidega ning muutub pidevalt inimese tegevuse läbi. Lähtudes fenomenoloogilisele elu ilma (*Lebenswelt*) kontseptsioonist eristan Peter Alheiti sotsiaalse mälu mudelile (Alheit 1989) tuginedes (vt. joonis) kollektiivses mälus sündmuse- ehk kogemustasandi mäletamiskeemi ning sündmusest otseselt sõltumatut sotsiaalse tegelikkuse töötlemise tasandi tõlgendus-skeemi, mis kannab erinevaid tõlgendustumustreid argiteooriatest institutsionaliseeritud ideoloogiateni.



Joonis: Sotsiaalse mälu mudel (Alheit 1989)

Kollektiivses mälus toimub pidev dialoog erinevate aegade, reaalsuste, kogemus- ja tõlgendussüsteemide vahel. See teeb mälust identiteedi põhialuse ja järjepidevuse kandja, samas kui see, mida ja kuidas mäletatakse, muutub ole-



vikuti. Muutuv on ka kogemustasandi mäletamisskeemi suhe institutsionaliseeritud ja organiseeritud tõlgenduskeemi. Selle suhte järgi on võimalik eristada ühiskonnas ja grupis dominantseid ning võistlevaid ja konfliktseidki vastumälusid.

Inimene puutub oma elu jooksul kokku paljude minevikurepresentatsioonidega. Indiviidi suhe neisse võib olla konfliktne ja vastanduv, aga ei pruugi seda olla, sest inimesed kasutavad nn. avalikke mälestusi aktiivselt ning teatud grupi nn. “elav mälestus” võib olla avalikku minevikutõlgendusse sisse kirjutatud. Mäletamist eluloovormis võib suures osas pidada seega “vahendatud tegevuseks” (Wertsch 2002), kus indiviidid kasutavad teatud kultuurilisi ressursse (nt. moodsa rahvusriigi loodud narratiivid, sotsiaalsed müüdid), et anda oma kogemusele tähendus seoses laiemate sotsiaalsete väärtustega.

Järgmise probleemina tõstatas minu jaoks küsimus, kuidas väljendub kollektiivse mälu mäletamis- ja tõlgenduskeemi suhe indiviidi tasandil (autobiograafilises mälus) ehk teisisõnu, kuidas kollektiivse mälu tunnetus- ja interpretatsiooniraamid mõjutavad indiviidi reaalsustaju ja tegevust (konkreetset nt. eluloo konstruktsiooni). Lähenesin probleemile kogemuse ja biograafilise teadmise (ehk kogemuste sünteesi) mõistete kaudu, mis on lahutamatu seotud mäletamisega. Kogemust käsitasin ühtaegu kui biograafilist, sotsiaalset, kultuurilist, ajaloolist ja ajakompleksset nähtust. Kõik need kogemusevormid on analüütiliselt eristatud. Indiviidi jaoks on nad üks – nad on lihtsalt tema elukogemus.

## **Individuaalne ja kollektiivne, privaatne ja avalik eluloo tasandil**

Olulised kogemuse tunnused on, et kogemus on sünteesiv, selekteeriv ja tõlgendav. Kogemuse need omadused tekitavad eluloos omapärase erinevate tõlgenduskeemide sünkretismi. Terminil ‘sünkretism’ on etnoloogias ja folkloristikas oma ajalugu; selle abil iseloomustatakse kultuuri eri aspekte ning laias laastus tähendab sünkretism seda, et erinevate (nt. eri ajastutest ja süsteemidest) pärit, esmapilgul võib-olla ka üksteist esmapilgul välistavad nähtused sobitatakse kokku üht(sess)e süsteemi. Minu jaoks see süsteem on elulugudes väljenduv mälu pilt. Eluloosünkretismi perspektiivi sõnastamise taga oli vajadus teoreetiliselt hõlmata küsimust, miks elulugudes mingist ajast ja asjadest just nii jutustatakse ning mitte teisiti.<sup>38</sup> Metodoloogiliselt on

<sup>38</sup> Oletatavasti on igal uurijal oma “privaatne” tee, kuidas ta mingi arusaama, käsitluse või mõiste sõnastamiseni on jõudnud. Minu puhul eelnes kujundlik meetod analüütilisele. Otsides lahendust küsimusele, kuidas käsitleda analüütiliselt individuaalse ja kollektiivse mälu kompleksset suhet kirjutatud eluloo tasandil, püüdsin piltlikult öeldes asetada Alheiti sotsiaalse mälu mudelit (vt. joonis eespool) eluloovormi “sisse”. Lugeja võib proovida sama meetodit, kujutades ühes eluloos ette kõiki joonisel kujutatud “kihte” ning püüda neid omavahel dünaamilisse suhtesse viia.

eluloosünkretistlik vaatenurk fenomenoloogiline, kitsamalt lähtub see küsimusest kollektiivse mälu kogemustasandi ja interpretatsioonitasandi suhtest nagu see elulugudes väljendub. Oluline on, et eluloosünkretism teoreetilise perspektiivina rõhutab dialoogi eri aegade ja reaalsuste vahel.

Eluloosünkretismi perspektiiv püüab ületada “elatud elu” ja selle tekstuaalseeritud väljenduse kahenemist. Eri koolkondade eluloouurijad lahknevad oma vaatepunktidelt sellele, kas elulugu on tegelik või kirjeldatud elu (Corsten 1994; Miller 2000). Eluloosünkretismi mõiste arendus minu poolt tuleneb vaatekohast, et elulugu pole pelgalt minevikutegelikkuse peegeldus ega ka mitte pelgalt representatsioon. Toetun ühelt poolt teesile, et elulugu põhineb reaalsel sotsiaalsetel kogemustel; teiselt poolt, et “identiteet on narratiivne”, st. eluloos väljendatakse kogemusi, kasutades kättesaadavaid narratiivseid strateegiaid, mis omakorda ei ole kogemusest ja identiteedist lahutatavad. Suhe elu ja teksti vahel on dünaamiline: inimene kasutab narratiivseid strateegiaid, et anda kogemuste vormi. Aga ta ei saa kasutada suvalisi narratiivseid strateegiaid, vaid neid, millest tal on kogemus, olgu see siis otsene või kaudne nt. põlvkondadevahelise pärimuse või laiemalt tekstikogukonnas osalemise kaudu. Usutavasti tekib igal lugejal küsimus, mis on neis mäluviltides reaalsus ja mis mitte, mis on personaalne kogemus ja mis ideoloogia (sest ideoloogilisteks võib neid tõlgendusi kahtlemata lugeda), mis on “päris” ja mis “ainult” konstruktsioon. Eluloosünkretistlik perspektiiv, millele mina oma elulugude analüüsis toetun, lähtub vaatenurgast, et elulootõde seisukohast pole “elu” ja “kirjeldus” lahutatavad.

### **Uurimuse teadustraditsiooniline taust**

Teoreetilise baasi sõnastamisel olen pidanud vajalikuks ühendada ja integreerida uurimustraditsioone ja vaatenurki, mis – ja mitte ainult Eesti teadusmaastikul – ei saa omavahel alati kokku. Nii näiteks on vähe sõnastatud kokkupuutepunkte sotsioloogide ja ajaloolaste mälu-uurimustes (vrd. nt. omavahel Alheit 1989 ja Assmann 1988) või sotsiaalteadlaste ning kirjandusteoreetikute ja folkloristide eluloouurimustes (Gullestad 1996: 4jj). Ka Eesti etnoloogia suhet lähiteadusesse folkloristikasse on 20. sajandi teisel poolel iseloomustanud kaugenemine. Kui 1930. aastatel tollane etnograafia ja folkloristika olid rohkem kontaktis, tunti teineteise töid, mõtlemist ja kultuurikäsitlust ning osati ka selles ise mõelda, siis 1990. aastateks olid need kaks distsipliini teineteisest märgatavalt kaugenenud. Vahepealne spetsialiseerumise periood sisaldas ka ajasturaamidest tulenevat teadusharude isolatsiooni. (Jaago 2003: 12.) Etnoloogil, kes uuris rahvakultuuri “fakte” neid vahendavate tekstide kaudu, oli raske aru saada folkloristist, kelle jaoks tekst oligi “fakt”. Ses mõttes oli minul kui etnoloogil distsipliinipiiridest lähtuvalt hõlpsam ühine keel leida sotsioloogi või ajaloolasega, mis selgitab ka, miks olen oma teoreetilise baasi kujundamisel algselt rohkem tuge leidnud just nendest distsipliinidest. Vähe olen toetunud *oral history* traditsioonis uurimustele, mis ei tähenda, et käesoleval käsitlusel ei

oleks sellega midagi ühist. Pigem olen tuge leidnud sarnaselt töötavast sotsiaal-antropoloogilisest eluloo uurimisest, kultuuripsühholoogilisest mälu-uurimisest ning Eesti teadusmaastikul 1990. aastatel Eestis välja arendatud pärimusliku ajaloo suunast folkloristikas.

1990. aastatel avanes Eesti kultuuriteadustel võimalus enam lülituda rahvusvahelisse teadusdiskussiooni ning kasu lõigata üldisest teadusteoreetilisest arengust. Nii sattus ka Eesti etnoloogia hermeneutilise ja narratiivse pöörde (järel)lainsesse, mis lähendas teda tunduvalt folkloristikale, kes samuti elas üle oma paradigmamuutust (Jaago 2001: 8). Sama toimus sotsioloogiaga, mis hakkas üha enam eelistama “pehmeid” meetodeid. 1990. aastatel saab Eestis hakata rääkima ka eluloolisest käsitlusviisist ning seda valdavalt etnoloogia, folkloristika ja sotsioloogia baasil. Käsitlen neid võrdlevalt väitekirja teises artiklis, kus võrdluse kaudu selgitan pikemalt ka oma vaatenurga kohta teiste eluloo uurimuste seas. Käesoleva uurimuse kesksed kategooriad – ajakomplekssus, kogemuse kompleksus, elulootõde ja olevikuperspektiivide dünaamika – väljendavad dialoogilist aja- ning reaalsusekäsitlust, mida jagan 1990. aastatel Eestis tekkinud eluloolise käsitlusviisi sees pärimusliku ajaloo ja fenomenoloogilise argielu etnoloogia osade uurijatega.

Küsimus individuaalsest ja kollektiivsest kogemusest, selle mõtestamisest ja identiteediloomest on etnoloogilise mälu-uurimise keskmes olnud alates 1990. aastate lõpust. Tartu Ülikooli etnoloogia õppetoolis käivitus 1998. aastal projekt “Mälu kui kultuuritegur eestlaste biograafilistes narratiivides” (1998–2001, projekti juht prof. Elle Vunder), millest võtsin koos kaasdoktorant Terje Anepaiga põhitäitjana osa. Projekti põhieesmärgiks oli uurida mälu rolli eesti kultuuris 20. sajandi teisel poolel, võrreldes eestlaste erinevate gruppide “kultuurilist arsenalit” indiviidide tasandil nende eluloojutustuste kaudu. Püüdsime selgitada nii kultuurilist ühisosa, mis seos indiviidide teatud grupiga ning on aluseks identiteediloomele, kui kultuurilist erinevust, mida rõhutatakse teistele gruppidele vastandudes. ‘Mälu’ mõistet kasutasime analüütilise vahendina, mis võimaldas uurida identiteediloomes ajalisi dimensioone ning selle seotust ruumi ja sotsiaalse kontekstiga.

Konkreetsed küsimused, mida projekti alguses püstitasime, olid: Kui kaugelt ajas minnakse oma elu pöördepunktide, otsuste ja suhtumist seletamisel ja tõlgendamisel? Milline on ajaloosündmuste roll indiviidide biograafiates, milline on nende retseptsioon lähikondlaste (järgnevad põlvkonnad, põlvkonna-kaaslased) hulgas ja millistel tingimustel see kujuneb? Millistel mälestustel on kollektiivne roll, millistes variatsioonides need esinevad, millised on nende kujunemise tingimused? Kuidas saavad lähiajaloo poliitilised vastuolud indiviidide biograafiates kultuurilise iseloomu? Mälu retrospektiivsest iseloomust lähtudes esitasime ka küsimuse isiklike ja kollektiivsete mälestuste rollist suhtumise kujunemises tänapäeva Eesti ühiskonda. Projekti probleemipüstitus lähtus 1990. aastate Eesti kiiresti arenevast ja muutuvast ühiskondlik-kultuurilisest situatsioonist, mida iseloomustasid konfliktid ja üha süvenevad vastuolud erinevate sotsiaalsete kihtide, põlvkondade, kodu- ja pagulaseestlaste vahel. Eelda-

sime, et paljude nähtuste ja suhtumiste juuri tuleb otsida meie lähimast minevikust – sellest, mida inimesed on kogenud ja läbi teinud ning mille taustal nad kujundavad oma suhtumise ning käitumise tänapäeva ühiskonnas – ning olevikuperspektiivist ehk sellest, kuidas ühiskondlikud diskursused ning indiviidi hetkeolukord mõjutab tema ajakogemuse interpretatsiooni. (Vunder et. al 1998.) Pooled käesoleva väitekirja moodustavatest artiklitest<sup>39</sup> on kirjutatud projekti “Mälu kui kultuuritegur” käigus ning avaldatud kas projekti publikatsioonides (Anepaio, Kõresaar 2001; Kõresaar, Anepaio 2003) või mujal.

Küsimust, kuidas kujutatakse mingit ajaloolist perioodi elulugudes ning kuidas pilt elust sel perioodil on suhtes piltidega teistest perioodidest, olen edasi arendanud, töötades projektis “Argielu strateegiad ja praktikad Nõukogude Eestis” (2002–2005, TÜ etnoloogia õppetool ja Eesti Rahva Muuseum). Minu osaks ses projektis on olnud peamiselt kirjutatud eluloo kui allika spetsiifika lahtikirjutamine ning Nõukogude aja kogemuse mäletamise probleematika uurimine. Selle, veel käimasoleva projekti käigus kirjutatud artiklitest olen väitekirja valinud ülejäänud kolm.<sup>40</sup>

## **Avalik-privaatse, individuaalse ja kollektiivse problematika vanemate eestlaste elulugudes: analüüsi käik, vaatenurgad ja põhilised tulemused**

*Ma ei taha üldse mitte kirjutada oma elulugu, vaid aega, olukorda ja inimesi, kes üht inimlast on ümbritsenud ja vorpunud. Mis on olnud tähtis sellele inimesele, et ta kujunes just selliseks. Kuidas ühiskond ja tollane valitsus mõjutab olukorda. (n, 1929, KM EKLA f. 350, 501: I/1)*

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<sup>39</sup> Vastavalt näiteks eestikeelsed versioonid artiklitest “Memory, Time, Experience, and the Gaze of a Life Stories Researcher” (Kõresaar 2003b) ja “Childhood as an Image of History. Metaphoric Depiction of the Nation and the State in Childhood Memories of Elderly Estonians” ning viimase lühiversioon Kõresaar 2002b; samuti “A Time Ignored? About the Role of Soviet Period in Biographies of Older Estonians” ning selle eestikeelne versioon Kõresaar 2001. Projekti käigus korraldati konverents “Kultuur ja mälu” (2000), mis tõi kokku erinevate distsipliinide mälu-uurijad.

<sup>40</sup> Vastavalt eestikeelne versioon artiklist “On Biographical Approach in Estonian Cultural Research” ning vaid ingliskeelsena ilmunud “Towards a Social Memory of Work. Politics and Being a Good Teacher in Soviet Teachers’ Life Stories” ja “Private and Public, Individual and Collective in Linda’s Life Story”.

Väitekirja empiirilise analüüsi osa ühendab küsimus, kuidas väljendub minevikutaju vanemate eestlaste elulugudes ajakompleksselt avaliku ja privaatse, individuaalse ja kollektiivse kategooriates.

Kogetud ja tunnetatud konflikt avaliku ja privaatse minevikutõlgenduse vahel on 1990. aastatel elulugude kirjutamise (ja muuseumisse saatmise) kontekst – konflikti lahendust nähakse individuaalse eluloo ülestähendamises ning tallele panemises, et anda ajalugu tagasi “õigele” kollektiivile. Avaliku ja privaatse, individuaalse ja kollektiivse suhe eestlaste nn. ülemineku-ajal kirjutatud elulugudes on võtmetähtsusega probleemid, millel on oma ajalugu, olevik ja tulevikuperspektiiv. Sellest kitsamast rahvuspoliitilisest kontekstist lähtusin ka mina oma eluloolugemistes.

### **Analüüsi tasandid**

Eluloosünkretismi perspektiivist eristan erinevaid avaliku-privaatse kategooria-tasandeid. Esiteks, avalik-privaatne ühiskonnas kui ajaspetsiifiline suheteraamistik, teiseks — indiviidi kogemus nendest suhetest (ja nende muutumisest), kolmandaks — selle kogemuse tekstuaalne väljendus, mille all pean silmas viisi, kuidas indiviid avaliku-privaatse (muutuvat) suhet tematiseerib (või ei tee seda), ning neljandaks — eri aegade avalike diskursuste osalisus privaatsete minevikkude tõlgenduses.

Teine küsimus, mis ometi ei ole lahutatav avalik-privaatse suhte probleemist, on individuaalse-kollektiivse suhe. Etnoloogina, kes lähtub kogemuse ja mälu kontseptsioonist, mõistan kollektiivsust kultuurilise vormina, personaalse ja samal ajal ka jagatud kogemusena. Kollektiivi mõiste on alati pärit inimmeelest (Laitinen 2003). Kollektiivsus on olemas vähemalt tundetasandil ning sünnib vaid siis, kui inimesed kogevad end kuuluvat või olevat osa sellest kollektiivist. ‘Kollektiivsust’ piiritlen antud analüüsi ulatuses reeglina rahvuse-rahvuskuluvusena – valik, mis tuleneb eelpoolkirjeldatud elulookirjutamise kontekstist ning samuti motivatsioonist, mis elulugudest selgelt väljendub. (Erandina käsitlen nõukogude aja mäletamist ameti-identiteedi kaudu õpetajate elulugudes viiendas artiklis.) Rahvuslik kui kollektiivne tuleb eluloos tekstuaalsel tasandil esile vähemalt kahest aspektist. Kõigepealt teksti loomise ehk kirjelduse ja tõlgenduse aspekt: kuidas indiviid tematiseerib oma suhet kollektiiviga ning kollektiivi ennast (nt. hierarhiate, kollektiivitüpoloogiate või nn. hea/õige kollektiivsuse ideaali kaudu). Teiseks on tekst kollektiivsuses (siin: taasiseseisvunud riigis) sündiva tegevuse väljendus. Siin võiks küsida, kuidas on konkreetne individuaalne minevikurepresentatsioon seotud kollektiivsete minevikurepresentatsioonidega. Kollektiivi või kollektiivsust kujundavad käsitlused põhinevad paljuski ühelt poolt avalikust sfäärist (meediast, koolisüsteemist jmt.) saadud mõjudel, teiselt poolt aga ka sama kollektiivi liikmete omavahelises interaktsioonis ilmnevatel ettekujutustel.

Analüüsi käigus püüan mõista, millise pildi elulookirjutajad edastavad elatud ajast, kuidas just sellise pildi loomine on seotud grupi vajadustega ning mis on nende piltide kogemusajalooline taust. Kasutan ka mõistet ‘ajaloopilt’, mille all pean Heinsile (1993) toetudes silmas mineviku kohta retrospektiivse valiku ja väärtustamise tulemusena tekkinud kujutluskompleksse, arusaamasid ajaloolisest reaalsusest, mille taga on teadmine ühisest ajalikkusest (vrd. ka Fulbrook 1999).<sup>41</sup>

Olen vaadelnud ja võrrelnud, kuidas vanemate eestlaste elulugudes avalduvad ajaloopildid suhtuvad institutsionaliseeritud ajaloopiltidesse nagu need avalduvad üldhariduskoolide õpikutes, ning ajaloopiltidesse, mida edastavad professionaalid populaarsetes ajalooraamatutes. Samuti olen jälginud, kuidas elulootekstides kirjeldatu suhestub tendentsidega kirjutavas meedias. Ma ei ole teinud üksikasjalikku sündmuste ja isikute formaalset analüüsi, vaid võrrelnud pigem eri ajalooperioodide kirjeldamise üldist tonaalsust ja suundumust avalikes tekstides ning autobiograafilistes minevikutõlgendustes. Olen asetanud autobiograafilised minevikutõlgendused avalike tekstide konteksti. Olen lähtunud sellest, et avalikud tekstid kujundavad populaarset diskursust ning sellega ‘laenavad sõnu’ elulookirjutajatele privaatsete minevikkudele tähenduse andmiseks.

Oluline problemaatika minu töös on ka olnud küsimus, kuidas eri ajalooperioodide kohta kujundatud ajaloopildid elulugudes suhestuvad üksteisega, mõjutavad, kommenteerivad või välistavad üksteist.

## Elulugude analüüs

Väitekirja kahes esimeses artiklis sõnastan oma teoreetilise lähtekoha ja meetodi ning paigutan selle eluloolise käsitlusviisi konteksti Eesti teadusmaastikule. Käsitlesin seda ülevaatlilikult eelmises peatükis. Järgnevalt tutvustan lähemalt,

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<sup>41</sup> Etnoloogias on ajaloopildi tähenduses kasutatud ka mõistet ‘kollektiivne traditsioon’ (Eriksen 1997), viitamaks mineviku mõtestamise viisides sisalduvatele tähendustele ja seletustele kompleksidele. Paralleelse mõistena võiks kõne alla tulla ‘müüt’ nagu see on kontseptsioonina kasutusel *oral history*’s (Samuel, Thompson 1990), mis omakorda toetub Lévi-Straussi (vrd. nt. Lévi-Strauss 1987) ja Barthes’i (vt. nt. Barthes 2000) müüdikäsitlusele. Elulugudes saame lähemalt vaadelda rahvapärast mütoloogiat ning kuidas see kannab moraalseid väärtusi selle kaudu, et reastab ja nimetab sündmusi ning annab neile hinnanguid. Tüüpide ja isikute valik mingi elu- ja ajaperioodi kirjeldamisel on, nagu ka sündmuste valik, osaliselt sümboolne – näitlikustamiseks kas maailma julmust ja ebaõiglust või vastupidi, selle põhilist heasoovlikkust kirjutaja suhtes. Psühholoogias kasutusel olev mõiste ‘sotsiaalne skript’ on samuti mõistetav kui üks müüdi versioon (Roberts 2002: 131). Mineviku mõtestamise üldist suundumust mäletamises annab edasi ka mõiste ‘narratiivne skeem’ (*narrative template*) (Wertsch 2002).

mida tegin elulugudega: millised on konkreetsete artiklite küsimuseasetused, lähtepunktid ning analüüsi tulemused.

Artikkel “Lapsepõlv kui ajaloopilt. Rahvuse ja riigi metafoorne kujutamine vanemate eestlaste lapsepõlvemälestustes” otsib vastust küsimusele, kuidas konstrueeritakse indiviidi, ühiskonna, riigi ja rahvuse suhet vanemate eestlaste 1990. aastatel kirjutatud nooruse- ja lapsepõlvemälestustes, mis on selle kontekst ja moraal. Varjatud eesmärk, mis on jäänud artiklis sõnastamata, kuid mis osaliselt motiveeris mind teemaga töötama, lähtus vanema generatsiooni muutunud positsioonist Eesti ühiskonnas 1990. aastate jooksul. Kümneni keskpäigast pole vanemal põlvkonnal seda poliitilist tähendust, mis 1980. aastate lõpul ja 1990. aastate alguses, mil neile omistati privileeg olla eesti rahvusliku mälu kandja ja identiteedi säilitaja (vrd. nt. Lauristin, Vihalemm 1997). Pensionäride sotsiaalse sisuga organiseeritud protestiavaldused 1993–1994 tegi neist mõneks ajaks “võitjate” silmis tülikad virisejad, nende sotsiaalne argumentatsioon, mis suures osas põhines restitutsiooniperioodil väärtustatud minevikukogemusel, taandati “pelgalt” nostalgiks. Minu kaudne eesmärk oli näidata, et vanemate eestlaste mälestuste paradigma on tegelikult sama, millega põhjendati mitmeid olulisi poliitilisi otsuseid 1990. aastate Eestis – rahvusluse oma – ja et sellel, miks vanem põlvkond mäletab just nii, on kogemusajaloolised põhjused.

Elulugude analüüsist nähtus lapsepõlvemälestuste identiteetiloov roll vanema põlvkonna jaoks, mis ajaloolise ajana omandavad oma kvaliteedi esiteks võrdluses stalinismiperioodi kogemusega Eestis ning teiseks riikliku taasiseseisvumisega. Süsteemivahetuse tingimustes kontseptualiseeriti lapsepõlve iseseisvuskogemus kui rahvusliku järjepidevuse allikas ja stalinismiperiood kui katkestus. Lapsepõlve- ja noorusmälestusi kirjeldatakse elulugudes ideaalse rahvusriigi metafoorides ning eestlaste stereotüüpe kasutades. Kogemusajaloolisest aspektist on oluline, et suur osa neist narratiivsetest skeemidest ja sümbolitest, mida vanemad eestlased kasutavad oma mälestustele tähenduse andmisel, olid olemas juba II maailmasõja eelses rahvusliku moderniseerumise diskursuses, mis omakorda aktualiseeriti 1980. aastate lõpul ja 1990. aastate algul. Lapsepõlvemälestuste retoorika ja selle poolt edastatav ajaloopilt elulugudes 1990. aastate jooksul märkimisväärselt ei muutu. Põhjuseks pean seda, et kümneni teiseks pooleks sai ajaloopilt sõdadevahelisest Eesti Vabariigist argumentiks tänapäeva ühiskonna kriitikas ning toimis edasi põlvkonnaspetsiifiliste väärtuste kandjana dialoogis muutuva ühiskonnaga.

Järgmine artikkel “A Time Ignored? About the Role of the Soviet Period in Biographies of Older Estonians” on edasiarendus 2000. aastal rahvusvahelisel seminaril Tartus peetud ettekandest ja on osaliselt eelkirjeldatud artikli “eel-lugu”. Praeguses järjekorras lugedes alustab artikkel aga sealt, kus eelmine peatus. Lähtepunkt on asjaolus, et kui vanemad eestlased kirjeldavad elu sõdadevahelisel riikliku iseseisvuse perioodil ning sõjajärgsel stalinismiperioodil ajaloolise aja keskselt, võttes endale oma rahva saatust jagava rahvuse esindaja rolli, siis elust keskeltläbi alates 1950. aastate lõpust kuni 1980. aastateni jutustatakse isikliku elu kaudu, proportsionaalselt silmnähtavalt lühemalt ja

üldisemalt ning selle perioodi elu ja aeg (ajaloolise aja mõttes) tundub olevat täielikult isoleeritud nn. Eesti aegade võrdlusest. See oli üldine tendents, mille sees tulid välja soolised ja hariduslikud erinevused. Kui esitasin küsimuse, mis võiks siiski olla nn. “küpse sotsialismiaja” tähendus elulookirjutaja seisukohalt, ning miks on ta 1996–97. aastatel kirjutatud elulugudes nii tagaplaanil, pöördusin võrdlust otsides nende elulugude poole, mis koguti aasta hiljem biograafiliste intervjuude meetodil. Intervjuudes oli esitatud küsimus erinevate ajalooliste aegade võrdluse kohta. Jooksnud kirjutatud elulugude interpreteerimisega ummikusse, lootsin leida võtit nende mõistmiseks suuliselt jutustatud lugudest. Intervjuumaterjali põhjal tuli ühest küljest välja tendents elimineerida nõukogude aeg nn. vabariigiaegadest, mis avaldub mitte ainult selles, et nõukogude aega ei kaasata omal initsiatiivil võrdlusesse, vaid ka selles, et hinnangute aluseks olevaid kategooriaid (eriti moraali ja eetikat) rakendatakse eri aegade suhtes diferentseeritult. Teisest küljest avaldus tendents anda nn. “küpsele sotsialismiajale” eri tasanditelt erimärgilisi hinnanguid: süsteemi tasandilt hinnatakse perioodi negatiivselt, argielu tasandilt aga positiivselt, väärtustades sotsiaalset võrdsust ja stabiilsust – väärtusi, mis on kirjalikes elulugudes kesksed ka sõdadevahelisele iseseisvusajale hinnangu andmisel ning mille põhjal loodi 1990. aastate Eesti konfliktinarratiivi. Intervjuudes võrreldi võrdsusprintsipi ja sotsiaalse turvalisuse pinnalt neid kolme aega – nn. eesti aegu ja hilisemat nõukogude aega ka klassiühiskonna seisukohalt. Küsimust, miks sellist võrdluskolmnurka ei teki muuseumile saadetud kirjutatud elulugudes, ning miks ikkagi elu hilisemal nõukogude ajal elulugudes “ära kaob”, analüüsisin 1990. aastate ajaloo tagasipööramise diskursuse taustal, mis hindab ENSV perioodi ühtlaselt negatiivselt kui okupatsiooniaega repressioonide, ideoloogilise surve, kultuuri- ja keele hävimisohtu sattumise ning majandusliku allakäiguga. Argielu tasandil tunnetab indiviid ka nõukogude aja stabiilsust, võrreldes hektilise ja kiiresti muutuva tänapäevaga. Avalik diskursus aga argielu tasandil tollal ei tunnistanud.<sup>42</sup> Tekib vastuolu eri tasandite hinnangute vahel, mis võib tekitada elulookirjutajas konflikti, millest parim väljapääsustrateegia võib olla nõukogude aja ignoreerimine.

Järgmine artikkel keskendub õpetajate tööbiograafiatele. Küsimus on, kuidas üldhariduskoolide õpetajad elulugudes tematiseerivad oma tööd nõukogude koolis ning suhteid avaliku sfääri ehk riikliku ideoloogia, haridussüsteemi ja plaanimajandusega. Kitsamalt lähenen teemale konfliktinarratiivide kaudu, mis käsitlevaid neid ideoloogilisi, poliitilisi ja bürookraatlikke nõudmisi,

<sup>42</sup> Nn. küpse sotsialismiaja argielule on avalikkuses suuremat tähelepanu hakatud pöörama alles üsna hiljuti, kuigi üksikuid märke populaarkultuuri ja meelelahutuse vallas on olnud varemgi. Tähelepanuväärne on, et näiteks ajalehe Postimees internetiveergudel käivitunud diskussioon hilisema nõukogude aja tähenduse üle näitab sama dihhotoomia märke eri tasandite hinnangute vahel, mis oli iseloomulik ka siin analüüsitud intervjuudega vanema põlvkonna eestlastega 1998. aastal (vrd. URL: <http://www.postimees.ee/150304/teade/124740.php>).



ettekirjutusi ja vahejuhtumeid, mis takistasid õpetajate-elulookirjutajate jaoks tegemast oma tööd kui 'hea õpetaja'. Õpetajate elulugusid iseloomustab väga tugev professionaalne identiteet, mis väljendub pikas ja üksikasjalikus töö- ja karjääribiograafias. Olla hea õpetaja on pedagoogide elulugudes keskne teema, seda näitab ka asjaolu, et oma arvatavaid nõrku külgi analüüsitakse läbi 'hea õpetaja' prisma. Samas on õpetajate elulugudele, võrreldes teiste, eriti madalama haridusega inimeste biograafiatega, iseloomulik üpris tugev enesetsensuur mitte ainult keelekasutuses vaid ka meenutatavate sündmuste, asjaolude ja hinnangute selektsioonis. See vastab eelmises artiklis tehtud tähelepanekutele biograafiliste mälestuste haridusspetsiifikast. Lisaks sellele võib nii tugevat 'hea õpetaja' teemat elulugudes pidada reaktsiooniks intensiivsele kriitikale avalikkuses koolikorralduse ning õpetajate mentaliteedi ja tööharjumuste kohta, mis toimus ajakirjanduses eluloolekutsetega samal ajal.

Õpetajate elulugusid analüüsiva artikli rõhuasetus on pisut teistsugune kui eelnevalt kirjeldatudel, eristudes suurema rõhuasetusega indiviidi kogemustasandile.<sup>43</sup> Eeldan oma analüüsis, et kogemuste biograafilisi representatsioone tõlgendades saab teha järeldusi õpetaja kui "argielustrateegi" (de Certeau 1998) praktikate ning nende habitualiseerumise kohta. Sel eesmärgil tõin sisse ka mitme põlvkonna perspektiivi sel määral, kui olemasolevad elulood seda lubasid.

Teoreetiliselt toetusin sotsioloog Fritz Schütze (1984) ideedele jutustuse ja biograafilise kogemuse struktuurilisest kattuvusest. Schütze uuringute eesmärk on jutustamist struktureerivate ja korrastavate nn. 'kognitiivsete figuride' rekonstruktsioon. Schütze jaoks võimaldab see ligipääsu teadmise struktuuridele ja töötlemismehhanismidele ehk "taasmeenutatavate elulooliste kogemuskihistuste struktuuridele". Jagan Schütze eeldust, et oma kogemustest jutustamine viib vähemalt kraadhaaval oma eluajaloo ja sellega seotud kogemuskvaliteedi meenutamiseni. Küll aga ei jaga ma Schütze ajakäsitlust. Tema lähtepunkt on, et aktuaalne jutustuse "vool" ja kunagiste kogemuste "vool" kattuvad, mis kätkeb endas vähemalt kahte ajateoreetilist oletust: esiteks, et kogemine on lineaarne (kogemusmomendist kogemusmomendini) ning teiseks, et meenutamisprotsess on lineaarne (st. kogemuste juurde "tagasipöördumine" kogemusmomendist kogemusmomendini).<sup>44</sup> Oma eluloosünkretismi perspektiivis käsitlen aega kompleksena eeldades, et nii biograafilises kogemuses kui ka meenutamisprotsessis on ajaperspektiivid ning horisondid – minevik, olevik, tulevik – eri viisidel kombineeritavad. Niisiis olen ma lähtunud Schütze keelepragmaatilisest eeldusest, et autobiograafiline jutustus seob jutustaja sellega, et ta peab suhestuma omaenese läbielamistega (nn. narratiivne sundus).

<sup>43</sup> Artikkel on edasiarendus 2002. aastal Münchenis rahvusvahelise projekti seminaril "Alltagskultur im Sozialismus. Praktiken und Strategien des Alltagslebens in den sozialistischen Ländern und ihre Folgen für die Transformation" peetud ettekandest.

<sup>44</sup> Vrd. Schütze ajakäsitluse kriitikat ja võrdlust teiste eluloouurimise koolkondadega Corsten 1994.

See ei tähenda iseenesestmõistetavalt, et jutustaja edastab kogemusi nii “nagu tegelikult juhtus”, ning jätab teoreetilise ruumi aja- ja kontekstikompleksseks dialoogiks.

Selles, kuidas vanema põlvkonna õpetajad tematiseerivad oma suhet avaliku sfääriga nõukogude ajal, on eristatavad kaks perioodi – 1940.–1950. aastad ning 1960.–1980. aastad. Enamik vanemate õpetajate elulugudes leiduvates konfliktinarratiividest puudutavad just töökogemust esimesel perioodil, mis toimus mitu suurt poliitilist aktsiooni ja teine suur küüditamine. Erinevalt teise perioodi konfliktinarratiividest, kus konflikti tekitajat – süsteemi või selle esindajat naeruvääristatakse või põlastatakse, väljendatakse 1940. aastate lõpu-1950. aastate konfliktinarratiivides hirmu, abitust, arusaamatust ning kergendus-tunnet, kui õnnestus keerulisest situatsioonist välja rabelda. Õpetajate lugudes avaldub nn “edasilükatud karistuse motiiv” – lubatu ja keelatu piiri veel täpselt ei teata, reeglid pole paigas ning seetõttu ei ole ka võimalik välja arendada töötavaid käitumisstrateegiaid. Need konfliktinarratiivid on kantud häbi, abituse ja kaastunde emotsioonidest ning neis puudub õpetaja-jutustaja enda jaoks soodne lahenduskäik. Narratiivselt skeemilt kattuvad õpetajate stalinismiaja töö-narratiivid meenutamismustritega nende põlvkonnakaaslaste elulugudes (Kõresaar 2002). Schütze järgi vastavad need ‘biograafilise trajektoori’ kogemusstruktuurile, millele sekundeerivad ‘kollektiivsed trajektoorid’ kui protsessid, mis märgistavad sotsiaalsete suhete kriisi ning harjumuspärase sotsiaalse reaalsuse kokkuvarisemist.

Vanemate õpetajate biograafiates, mis kirjeldavad nende tööd 1960.–1980. aastatel, ilmneb oluline meenutamismustrite muutus. Esiteks, konfliktinarratiive, milles õpetajad otseselt väljendavad süsteemi nõudmiste vastuolulisust ‘hea õpetaja’ tööga, tuleb vähem ette. Teiseks, ette tulevates konfliktinarratiivides on õpetajal olemas probleemile lahendus, st. ta võib süsteemiga manipuleerida, tal on lahenduskäigud ette teada. Selles mõttes muutub ka konfliktinarratiivide emotsionaalne varjund – abitus ja hirm vahetub naeruvääristamise või põlgusega, ka ükskõiksuse ja neutraalsusega. Kolmandaks, konfliktinarratiivid ei moodustu enam mitte niivõrd üksikute kogemuste põhjal, vaid võtavad pigem kokku rea ühelaadseid kogemusi, mida õpetaja tegi kas mingis teatud koolis töötamise ajal või terve perioodi vältel. Ka võivad konfliktinarratiivid puudutada mitte õpetaja isikut ennast, vaid käia kogu kooli või haridussüsteemi pihta. Õpetaja enda isik on konflikti kaasatud selle kaudu, et süsteemi nõudmised lähevad vastuollu tema arusaamisega heast tööst. Schütze terminites jutustatakse nn. küpse sotsialismi aja töökogemusest seega ‘biograafilise tegevusskeemi’ kontekstis, mis näitab, et jutustajal on olnud kontroll oma elu üle, ta on kohanenud keskkonnaga ning planeerinud aktiivselt oma tegevust.

Väitekirja viimases artiklis esitan süvendatud sünteesi eelnevate artiklite põhjal välja toodud väidetest ühe eluloo – Linda loo näitel. Linda saatis oma eluloo Ühendusele “Eesti elulood” 1998. aastal üleskutse peale “Sajandi sada elulugu”. Vanemate eestlaste nn. saatusekohortidest (Kirss 2004a) kuulub Linda

nende hulka, kes jäi küll puutumata suurtest massirepressioonidest, kuid tegi oma perega läbi muud „ajaloo keerdkäigud“ stalinistlikus Eestis – asjaolu, mis on otsustava tähtsusega tema eluloo mõistmisel. Analüüsingi Linda lugu avaliku ja privaatse, individuaalse ja kollektiivse suhte probleemistiku taustal, tuues eelnevate artiklitega selgemalt välja narratiivsete aegade dialoogilise suhte eestlaste elulugudes. Et Linda elulugu on kirjutatud 1990. aastate lõpul ning kannab selle aja sotsiaalse kriitika pitsert, on võrdlevas analüüsis teiste elulugudega võimalik välja tuua ka dünaamika selles, kuidas eri aegade pildid autobiograafilistes minevikurepresentatsioonides on muutuv suhtes avalike ajaloo-piltidega. Sidudes Linda lugu alljärgneva kokkuvõtliku peatükiga tuleks märkida ka, et selles avalduvad ajaloopildid esindavad “tüüpilist” ja “dominantset” eestlaste kollektiivses mälus 1990. aastatel.

### **Kokkuvõte: ajaloopiltide dialoog ja dünaamika vanemate eestlaste elulugudes**

Aeg ja selle tähendused mälu konstruksioonis on fundamentaalsed kategooriad inimtegevuse mõistmiseks (Adams 1990). Biograafiline narratiiv kujutab endast mineviku- ja tulevikutaju kompleksseid suhteid oleviku kogemuses ja selle muutuvates kontekstides. Seetõttu avaldub mingile aja- ja eluperioodile omistatav tähendus vaid võrdluses teiste aegade ja erinevates kontekstides neile antud tähendustega.

Järgnevalt annan kokkuvõtlikult ülevaate sellest, kuidas avaldub aegade ja nende tähenduste dialoog ja dünaamika vanemate eestlaste elulugudes, analüüsitud avaliku-privaatse, individuaalse ja kollektiivse kategooriates. Ette olgu öeldud, et väitekirja artiklites esitatud analüüsi põhjal saab esialgu teha kokkuvõtteid vaid selle kohta, mis on dominantne vanemate eestlaste põlvkonnamälu ning kuidas see suhtub ajaloopilti, mis domineerib avalikus diskursuses ning institutsionaliseeritud mälus. Erinevates artiklites on tehtud põgusaid viiteid teistele, dominantsest erinevatele või seda diferentseerivatele mäletamisviisidele, kuid kogu mälu kompleksuse problemaatika tahab veel põhjalikku analüüsi.

1980. aastate lõpul alanud nn. “rahvusliku ärkamise” diskursuses oli kesksel kohal Eesti ajaloo “valgete laikude” täitmine. Nõukogude ajalookäsitlusele seati vastu teine, rahvuslik-normatiivne ajalookäsitlus, mille järgi riiklik iseseisvus on rahvuse ülim eesmärk. Ajaloost sai rahvusliku iseseisvumise argument, mis täitis nii rahvusliku konsolideerumise, ‘teise’ konstrueerimise ja piiride tõmbamise kui Nõukogude võimu ebaseaduslikkuse tõestamise rolli. Vastukaaluks Nõukogude ametlikule ajaloopildile Stalini ajast kui “sotsialistlikust ülesehitusperioodist” seati rahvuslikule ajalookäsitlusele toetuv pilt “rahvuslikult katkestusest”. Katkestuse diskursuse raames väärtustati nn. ajaloolist mälu selle

rehabiliteerimise eesmärgiga. 'Ajaloolise mälu' all peeti eelkõige silmas väike-rahva saatust, kes "on olnud suur oma kannatustes" (Laar 1988: 13). Samaaegselt aktualiseerus ajaloo järjepidevuse probleem ajaloo "tagasipööramise" mõttes, mis oli iseloomulik postsotsialistlikele maadele laiemalt. Sündmuste, olukordade ja seisundite renovatsioon 1980. aastate lõpu ja 1990. aastate alguse ideoloogias tähendas püüdu saavutada olukord, kus asjad saavad olema nii, nagu nad oli "enne" (katkestust), eesmärgiga ületada soovimatu ja koormav minevik. Selle diskursuse raames omistati eestlaste vanemale põlvkonnale privileeg olla rahvusliku järjepidevuse kandja, kes säilitas II maailmasõja eelseid väärtusi kogu okupatsiooni aja.

Nii avalikus diskursuses kui elulugudes kinnistus 'katkestus' kui dominantne narratiivne skeem (*narrative template*) ja ajaloopilt stalinismiperioodi kohta Eestis. 'Katkestuses' kui ajaloopildis domineerivad sündmused ja protsessid, mis tähistavad kollektiivseid trajektoore 1940. aastate ja 1950. aastate alguse Eesti ühiskonnas (repressioonid, ideoloogiline surve ja tagakiusamine, natsionaliseerimine ja kollektiviseerimine, repressiivsed poliitilised aktsioonid jmt.). Individuaalset elukäiku nende kollektiivsete sündmuste sees kirjeldatakse ohustatuna väliste jõudude poolt ning võimetuna kontrollima oma elu. (Nõukogude) avalik sfäär on pidevalt ähvardavana olemasolev. Selle osa eluloost jutustab elulookirjutaja reeglina kollektiivi – rahvuse – seisukohalt avalikus diskursuses sisalduvaid võimalusi kasutades. 'Katkestuse' pildiga kaasnes nii avalikus diskursuses kui ka elulugudes tugev ohvri-retoorika.

Dialogis teiste ajaloopiltidega vanemate eestlaste elulugudes on 'katkestusel' täita väga mitmepalgeline roll.

Esmajoones kujundab 'katkestuse' motiivi kasutamine stalinismiaja kohta "prillid", läbi mille vanemad eestlased vaatavad elu II maailmasõja eelses Eesti Vabariigis, oma lapsepõlve- ja noorusajal. Katkestuse valguses saab lapsepõlvest rahvuslik lapsepõlv ühiskonnas, kus valitseb patrimonialne harmoonia ja heaolu, talupoeglik (riigi)tarkus ning rahvuslikud stereotüübid ja väärtused, mis *oleksid olnud jäävad, kui neid poleks meilt röövitud* (naine, 1926, KM EKLA f. 350, 24). 1980. aastate lõpul ja 1990. aastate alguses mängis helge pilt okupatsioonieelsest Eesti Vabariigist olulist rolli nii taasiseseisvumise protsessis kui hilisemas argumentatsioonis sotsiaalsete ja majandussuhete ümberkorraldamisel. Eelmise kümnendi keskpaigaks oli ajalugu oma senise tähtsuse avalikus sfääris minetanud ning harmoonilist pilti eelmisest vabariigiajast ka revideeritud. Kummatigi ei tekita see mingit muutust vanemate eestlaste elulugude konstruktsioonis ja tonaalsuses. Pigem vastupidi, 1990. aastate lõpul kirjutatud ja Ühendusele "Eesti elulood" saadetud elulugudes on pilt "rahvuslikust lapsepõlvest" kinnistunud põlvkonnaidentiteedi markerina ning toimib edasi sotsiaalkriitilise argumentatsiooni baasina Eesti ülemineku-ühiskonna kohta.

1980. aastate lõpul ja 1990. aastatel laienes 'katkestus' kui narratiivne tõlgendusskeem avalikus diskursuses tervele kommunismiajale Eestis. 1990. aastate algupoole elulugudes, eriti meeste omades, kes identifitseerivad end oma

mälestustes režiimivastase võitlusega, on tuntav sama tendents. 1990. aastate jooksul kaotas ajalugu talle kümnendi algul omistatud positsiooni kui “kõige olulisem teadus rahva jaoks” (Laar 1989: 42). Ka sotsiaalseid identiteete ei defineeritud enam mineviku, vaid oleviku kaudu. Ses kontekstis hakati laiendatud ‘katkestuse’ motiivi kasutama populaarses majandus- ja sotsiaalpoliitilises diskursuses liberaalsete reformide toetuseks. Argumendi põhifookus oli kultuurikategoorial – see rõhutas nõukogude aja töökogemuse ja üldisemalt mentaliteedi loomulikke võimetusi kohanduda Eesti kapitalistliku tuleviku vajadustega. See argumentatsioon vastab ‘katkestuse’ ideoloogiale, mis keskendub rahvusliku eluviisi hävitamisele ning ‘võõraste’ normide, väärtuste ja harjumuste invasioonile.

Samas elulookirjutajad jutustavad oma elust “küpse sotsialismi” ajal paradigmas, mis viitab aktiivsele ja planeeritud sotsiaalsele tegevusele. Seda perioodi kajastavate lugude keskmes on isikliku elu sündmused, inimesed on jalad alla saanud, perekonnad loonud ning nad kirjeldavad, mida nad enda ja pere hea käekäigu huvides ette võtavad, kuidas tulevikku planeerivad. Jutustus ei järgi mitte üksikuid detailselt kirjeldatud elusündmusi ja kogemusi, vaid pigem kogemustüüpe, mis võtavad kokku kogemustsükleid ja -valdkondi: majaanekstust või korteriotsinguid, tarbimis- ja asjade hankimise kogemust, lastekasvatuse ja abielu kogemust, vaba aja veetmise kogemust, töökogemust. Argielu tasandil on tegemist aja ja elu plussmärgiga tõlgendusega, milles end nähakse kui aktiivselt tegutsevat sotsiaalselt kompetentset indiviidi (vrd. ka Kõresaar 2003). Selline nägemus läks vastuollu 1990. aastatel negatiivse<sup>45</sup> või puuduva<sup>46</sup> avaliku diskursusega hilise nõukogude aja kogemusest.

Ametlik ajalookäsitlus ei pakkunud siin palju rohkem tuge, sest ettekujutus tasandist, kus “toimus ajalugu” ei kattunud tasandiga, milles elati elu. Näiteks institutsionaliseeritud “mälu dokumendid” – kooliõpikud – käsitlevad “küpse sotsialismi” aastaid poliitilisest aspektist, ideoloogiline surve vs. vastupanu skeemi järgi ning keskenduvad pigem avalikule ja poolavalikule sfäärile. Nn. tavalise elulookirjutaja kogemusliku eluilma keskpunkt oli aga privaatse sfääris ning poolprivaatsetes suhetes sotsiaalses sfääris. (Vrd. Carcelon 1997.)

Seega, ‘katkestuse’ laienemine kogu nõukogude ajale Eestis teeb viimasest omamoodi “vahepealse” aja, mis eraldab rahvusliku iseseisvuse perioode. Sellele perioodile – nii ajaloolise kui elatud aja mõttes – omistatakse nn. avaliku ja privaatse mälu seisukohast erinevaid (sageli vastukäivaid ja konfliktseidki) tähendusi, mis on muutnud hilise nõukogude aja mäletamise ühiskonnas koherentse ajaloo pildi kujunemise mõttes problemaatiliseks.

Lõpetuseks: 1990. aastad oli eestlaste lähimineküü tõlgenduses nn. ‘kollektiivse traditsiooni’ (Eriksen 1997, vrd. viide 8) kujunemise aeg, eriti, mis puudutab ‘katkestuse’ muutumist dominantseks ajaloo pildiks. ‘Kollektiivne

<sup>45</sup> Vrd. artikkel õpetajate töömälestustest käesolevas väitekirjas.

<sup>46</sup> Vrd. artiklit avalikust ja privaatsest, individuaalsest ja kollektiivsest Linda eluloo näitel käesolevas väitekirjas.

traditsioon' tähendab, et ametlik ajalookirjutus, populaarne diskursus ning individuaalne elulugu "mäletavad" 1940.–1950. aastaid suhteliselt koherentselt, üht on võimalik teisega asendada ilma, et perioodi tähendus sellest muutuks. 1980. aastate lõpul ja 1990. aastatel, kui 'katkestus' ajaloopildina laiemalt sõnastati, oli küsimus "õigest" ja "valest" faktikesksest mäletamisest – fakt ise oma olemasoluga sisaldas tähendust, mis sai olla vaid "õige" (rahvuslik) või "vale" (kommunistlik). Kuigi avaliku ja privaatsel, kollektiivse ja individuaalse suhe on komplekssem, võib öelda, et vanema põlvkonna mälestused ja "tunnistused" (ehk: teatud osa neist!) on mänginud olulist rolli 'katkestuse' kui ajaloopildi fikseerumises stalinismiperioodi kohta. Iseasi on küsimus, mitme (negatiivse) katkestuse toimumist tunnistatakse Eesti ühiskonnas: vanemate eestlaste 1990. aastate teise poole elulugudes on üleminekuaja Eesti muutunud negatiivse katkestuse ajaks, samas kui avalikes manifestatsioonides jätkus positiivne uue alguse pilt. Ilmnes konflikt argielu tasandi ja süsteemi tasandi tähenduste vahel. Sama tähelepanek kehtib ka koherentse ajaloopildi kujunemise kohta hilisemast nõukogude ajast, mille kogemust jagab märgatavalt suurem hulk inimesi kui üks või paar põlvkonda. Võib öelda, et 1990. aastatel elimineeriti vanema põlvkonna kogemus sellest protsessist n.ö. vale tasandi mäletamise tõttu, protsess ise (ja jätkuvalt argielu ja süsteemi tasandite vastandus selles) jätkub aga juba nooremate põlvkondade sõnadega. Nooremad põlvkonnad (professionaale ja ajaloo huvilisi) on vaidlustanud ka vanema põlvkonna identiteedi alustala – pildi rahvuslikust ja ühtsest II maailmasõja eelsest Eesti Vabariigist.

Seega – eemaldumine ettekujutusest, et küsimus mälust ja ajaloost on küsimus tõesest või selle moonutamisest ei tähenda, et mälu poleks enam probleemiline – jätkub heitlus tähenduste pärast.

## Allikad ja kirjandus

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## **ARTICLES**

**MEMORY, TIME, EXPERIENCE,  
AND THE GAZE OF A LIFE STORIES RESEARCHER**

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Published:  
Kõresaar, Ene 2004. Memory, Time, Experience and the Gaze of a Life Stories  
Researcher. In Kirss, T., Kõresaar, E. Lauristin, M. 2004. *She Who Remembers,  
Survives. Interpreting Estonian Women's Post-Soviet Life Stories*. Tartu: Tartu  
University Press, 35–61.

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## II

### ON BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH IN ESTONIAN CULTURAL RESEARCH

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Published:

Kõresaar, Ene 2003. Eluloolisest käsitlusviisist Eesti kultuuriteadustes.  
In Jaago, T. (ed.). *Pärimus ja tõlgendus. Artikleid folkloristika ja etnoloogia meetodite  
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# ON BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH IN ESTONIAN CULTURAL RESEARCH

## On the terms 'life story research' and 'biographical method' or how to say what we are dealing with

Starting to write this review, I found myself at the problem how to name things. In Estonia the terms 'eluloouurimine' (life story research) and 'biograafiline meetod' (biographical method) have been used in parallel. The 'history' of the former is local, so to say, while the latter is used wider in international scientific terminology.<sup>1</sup> I start with the questions what life story research is and whether 'life story research' would be adequate as a term denoting the activities of different disciplines. To answer the first half of the question, one must give a 'yes' or 'no' answer to the second half. On the one hand, life story research means both the narrative treatment, which focuses on the *story* of life, on the other hand life story research also means the study of the *history of* life or the history of an individual's experiences. Problems with the term 'life story research' arise when 'life story' is understood formally, i.e. as a written or an oral text, in which an individual has narrated his/her course of life (usually chronologically and 'from the beginning to the end'). Therefore, to regard the life story as a delimited genre, the term 'life story research' would be too narrow to include the whole research. The area of use of the term 'life story' in Estonia is somewhat wider than the genre-centred 'autobiography' – this is used to denote both a description of the whole life and an experience-centred thematic narrative (for example work biography, Siberian life stories), which may be included independently in a more extensive life story. The term 'life story research' also involves in itself the method of shaping the source – collecting biographical narratives by means of appeals and biographical interviews. The meaning of biographical interviews could be broader than that of life story interviews: in the former the focus is laid on different aspects of experience, in the latter, on describing and interpreting the life course of an individual. At the same time – not all researchers use the term 'biographical interview' for an interview which focuses on the history of experience nor associate it with the biographical method or life story research (Leete 2001).

In the scientific terminology in English the term used to mark the whole interdisciplinary field is 'biographical research' (Roberts 2002; cf. German 'Biographieforschung'), 'biographical methods' (Denzin 1989; Chamberlayne et.al 2000) or also 'narrative research' (Lieblich et. al 1998, Riessmann 1993). Similarly, different equivalents can be found for the term 'life story', depending

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. similar terminology problem with the term 'pärimuslik ajalugu' in Jaago 2001a: 10–11.

on the orientation of the treatment and the method of shaping the source (cf. Denzin 1989: 41ff). The emergence of 'biographical research' in social sciences is the result of a number of paradigmatic changes (cf. Roberts 2002: 3ff) and combines in itself different standpoints and approaches of different sciences (e.g. psychology, psychotherapy, educational sciences, and especially sociology and history), which often have common standpoints on the interdisciplinary level rather than within the disciplines. The latter in its turn means that terminology is also uniform where the problem is set up and the source is dealt with in a similar way, and it does not necessarily have to coincide with the boundaries of the disciplines. On the other hand, different disciplines may deal with the same subjects, but name them quite differently – in this case, not calling their activities by the term 'biographical research', for instance.

The way we name things we do depend on self-identification, which in its turn relies on traditions, areas of interest, research problems and how these are set, on contacts etc. As herein<sup>2</sup> I regard it my task to compare the directions of life story research in Estonia, I find it necessary to treat life story research in as wide a meaning as possible (but still not in an infinitely open meaning). In parallel with 'life story research' I use the term 'biographical approach' and interpret these as methodologically and interpretatively varied efforts to understand and explain how the individual lives and stories (and also maybe more broadly the expressions, because also e.g. material objects, and collections of them, etc. can be of essential meaning from the aspect of the life story) can be understood in changing social and cultural contexts, how the individuals see their position in the context of historical and social changes and how they interpret (their) history. In the context of Estonian cultural sciences I observe according to the central terms of three disciplines – folkloristics, ethnology and (historical-sociological) research of (modern) culture the practice of, respectively, oral history and/or life story research and/or the biographical method.

## **Pre-stories, prerequisites and developments**

Answers to the obvious question, why the different directions in Estonian life story research cannot be firmly defined, but vaguely or indefinitely 'yes/no', lie in several factors, three of which I would like to discuss briefly.

Life stories' research in Estonia has become what it is today first thanks to the internal development of different disciplines, and through dialogue with the

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<sup>2</sup> This article was written in the course of research under grant 5322 from Estonian Science Foundation and it is based on the paper presented to the international conference "The Role of Oral History in Shaping Cultural and Personal Identity" on 1-3 May 2003 in Riga.

transdisciplinary development of the same fields internationally. This has become possible over the last fifteen years.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the emergence of life stories research and the biographical method in Estonia is connected on the one hand with disciplines that have long traditions and experiences of ethnographic fieldwork and the foundation of sources. I refer specifically to folkloristics and ethnology, which in keeping with the specific foci of their research have been least 'worried' about the 'source critical value' of biographical narratives. On the other hand, the application of biographical method has brought with it the blurring and crossing of disciplinary boundaries. This tendency is most vividly to be seen in 'popular cultural studies,'<sup>3</sup> the (ethno)sociological direction of which has from the beginning had strong social historical and cultural theoretical roots.

Clearly the turn toward a biographical approach to the study of culture and society in Estonia could not have come out of nowhere. Public interest and the opportunity to collect and publish biographical sources, but particularly people's own readiness for biographical initiatives (Humphrey et. al 2003:15) are among the more important, but by no means the only aspects of this shift. Interest in life stories and biographical experience arose in Estonia in connection with the so-called second national awakening at the end of the 1980s. 'Beside the Estonian independence period between the wars, the treatment of repression had a central role in creating a new construction of the past instead of the one dominating so far. These had been the main past events, which the totalitarian system had distorted or concealed, because these gave an especially clear reflection of the violence and illegality of the Soviet system. [---] In addition to the general reviews of what had happened, presented primarily by professional historians and lawyers, paraphrased and interpreted by social figures and journalists, the individual experience quickly emerged – the memories of survivors, both in a shorter and longer form. Over the radio both factological surveys and memories of survivors could be heard (e.g. the 'Kirjutamata memuaare' (Unwritten memoirs) series. The past came to the fore and gave material to fiction, and the initial mild interpretations of it (e.g. 'Maria Siberimaal' (Maria in Siberia) by H. Kiik) were soon replaced by harsher reflections of reality. All kinds of memoirs and documentary books based on recollections abounded. [---] Theatre performances reviving the past tragedy filled theatres with emotionally sympathetic audiences.' (Anepaio 2003: 219–210.) Different museums and citizens' associations started active collection of oral history by means of written questionnaires, interviews and public appeals.<sup>4</sup> Life stories were treated primarily as a private historical memory, the task of

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<sup>3</sup> Here I refer to the one practised in the TPÜ & RASI Research Centre of Modern Culture, which the leader Aili Aareleid-Tart does not regard as definitely belonging to none of the narrower (traditional) disciplines (personal communication).

<sup>4</sup> On collection of life stories and oral history see Hinrikus 2000, 2002, 2003.

which was to ‘remedy’ the history writing with the aim to reveal the ‘real history’ of Estonians. Today the interest in biographical experience has grown into a real ‘biographical boom’, characterised by extensively published life stories and memoirs, genealogy, talk-shows etc.<sup>5</sup>

A second crucial aspect is the reality that in the 1990s Estonian cultural studies were increasingly able to insert themselves into international scholarly discussion, and to benefit from general theoretical developments in these disciplines. Therefore, burgeoning life stories research in Estonia did not develop from a limited local perspective, but rather can be placed in the context of ‘general waves’ of change in cultural studies, which have by no means come to an end. (see Miller 2000; Chamberlayne 2000). Quite to the contrary, new impulse was provided by the rise of oral history in the study of the memory of postsocialist societies. (Breckner et. al 2000; Humphrey et. al 2003). In Estonian cultural studies, the developments that followed have been described as a paradigm shift, characterized by a switch from discipline-centredness to problem- and context-centredness, from individual cultural phenomena to a holistic treatment of culture, from the external reality of the culture builder to a reality centred in the group and (particularly) individual experience (Vunder 1999; Jaago 2001a: 8). Consequently, methods of cultural studies began to be submitted to critical analysis, with the result of favouring *soft* or qualitative methods. Biographical method, which is one of them, is directly connected with the concept of an active subject, who interprets social reality from an individual perspective. (Aarelaid 2002b).

## **Biographical approaches: Cross-disciplinary and comparative perspectives**

In what follows I take a closer look at how the biographical approach is represented in the abovementioned three disciplines: what are the conditions and disciplinary contexts for the emergence of a biographical approach; what questions are asked, and what are the epistemological and methodological points of departure? In keeping with the context of Estonia of the 1990s, all research directions that proceed from a biographical approach share a characteristic interest in memory, history, and historical experience. Common themes are cultural, social, and political changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and individual and group adjustment to these changes.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. similar developments in post-communist countries BIOS 1990 and Huphrey et. al 2003.



## Oral popular history

The oral popular history research direction in Estonian folkloristics is the broadest of all the aforementioned. The creation of this direction is connected with the rethinking of the whole of folkloristics from the starting point of the communicativeness of texts (Jaago 2001a: 8ff). Oral popular history does not focus narrowly on any specific type of folk poetry or theory, but states as its broader goal to study people's 'perspective on social, historical, and individual events' (Ibid.), opinions and norms connected with the past. From a folkloristic perspective, it is Tiiu Jaago who has contributed the most to the shaping of oral popular history. Her research topics are kinship history, life stories, written thematic narratives about ancestors and other members of the family tree, in other words, family tradition, which she interprets in the context of urbanization, migration, and other social processes, examining the development of subjects depending on their social historical context (cf. eg. Jaago 2001b: 264; 2003). What is reflected in family tradition is a group's perception of the past, and the need to remember what has happened. Tiiu Jaago studies how the knowledge necessary to a group or an individual is reflected in different schemata of tradition, and how this in turn depends on the society in which we live.

Corresponding terms suggested for the Estonian 'pärimuslik ajalugu' are 'oral history' in English and 'muistietieto' in Finnish, although it is based most recognizably on the practice of local folklore studies. Similar to the changing interpretations of oral history in international scholarly discussion (cf. Roberts 2002: 96ff) popular oral history does not place rigid boundaries between oral and written sources, while recognizing their differences. As such, this broadens the source base of popular oral history, allowing the inclusion of the newer folksong (cf. Ehin 2003). With the example of the folk song another feature distinguishing oral history from the narrower life story research – a wider variety of genres in the source treatment. Thus, the song can be dealt with not so much as collective folklore but as a private text, which is used to express the changes in life and reflections of the changes in the surrounding world. Actually even here within the broader biographical approach, the traditional developments of different disciplines reveal: while the source base of the folkloristic research of popular oral history is more extensive and varied in genres, the ethnological life story research, for instance, also handles material objects as biographical expressions.

The anthology *Pärimuslik ajalugu* ('Popular Oral History'), and its expanded English version *Lives, Histories, and Identities* (ed. by Tiiu Jaago, published respectively 2001c, 2002) can be regarded as the first larger manifestations of this research direction. On the basis of these one can conclude that those who practice popular oral history from a folklore studies starting point focus on both narrative analysis (Tiiu Jaago, Marietta Aardam, Kalle Voolaid) and traditional analysis of customs (Tiia Ristolainen, Triin Viitamees, Astrid Tuisk). It is also

significant that both collections contain studies that should rather be considered historical (Alar Schönberg), or which have grown out of parallel research projects (Kaari Siemer, Ene Kõresaar). The selection of articles shows the breadth and diversity of the problematics of popular oral history, making of the concept 'popular oral history' a transdisciplinary cover term, which unites questions concerning the connections between individual and collective historical experience, the meanings given to it, and the narrative strategies that confer and exemplify these meanings.

### **Memory as a factor in culture**

The question of individual and collective experience, its remembering, and the formation of identity is also at the centre of ethnological memory research. (Vunder et. al 1998; Anepaio, Kõresaar 2001; Kõresaar, Anepaio 2003; Ruusmann 2003). Memory research is connected with broader paradigmatic changes in Estonian ethnology (Vunder 1999), and is rather interdisciplinary in its points of departure, influenced primarily by (phenomenological) sociology and cultural psychology. In the collection *Mälu kui kultuuritegur // Ethnological Perspectives on memory* (ed. by Ene Kõresaar ja Terje Anepaio 2003) the question of memory as a factor in culture is interpreted on the one hand as a question of social and cultural codes and narrative strategies. On the other, the relationships of individual and collective, private and public are problematized. Depending on the nature of the source (the researched texts – both written life stories and interviews conducted in fieldwork – are from the end of the 1980s), memory research is emphatically centred on recent history experience. It is researched what is narrated-remembered and why; how and why certain memory images emerge and what it tells about the identity and the 'memory culture' as a whole. The common question proposed by memory researchers is the relationship between the experiential level of memory and normative orientations, the dynamics of this relationship and its connection with a definite, specific historical and social context (Jõesalu 2003a; Kõresaar 2003bc; Mulla 2003; Siemer 2003), the problematics of trauma and memory (Anepaio 2001), and the dynamics of public and private in the remembering of the experience of repression (Anepaio 2003).

In parallel with ethnological memory research sociology also began to pay attention to the same problems in the 1990s. From the same epistemological basis, the theory of social construction of reality, Erle Rikmann (1997) raised the question of the influence of ruling political discourses on the ways in which Soviet social reality is constructed in biographical interviews.

## Ethnology of everyday life

The emergence of the ethnology of everyday life in Estonia in the 1990s is primarily connected with a phenomenological interpretation of culture. The ethnology of everyday life is interested in the central categories of culture, which structure the experiences and practices of individuals and provide them with a meaning. The specific feature of ethnology of everyday life is that it focuses on the self-evident in people's everyday life, opposing the everyday culture to the often impersonal 'system' (Kannike 2002: 7). The understanding of the individual as an active creator of culture, and the shifting of the focal point of research to the level of subjective experience and interpretation meant a greater amount of attention to the biographical approach as a method of creating and interpreting sources.

Despite the fact that the key word 'study of everyday life' subsumes the whole of the development of Estonian ethnology in the 1990s, I wish to focus here on those studies in which the researcher claims to depart from biographical methods. Like mentioned in the introduction, the biographical method in ethnology is more predominant than could be supposed according to the self-definition of the researchers. The decisive factor here is primarily in which research branch the researcher positions him/herself, the use of terminology established in this research branch, and not so much the radical differences in the used approach and/or method.

The first monographic biographical study in Estonian ethnology is Riina Reinvelt's *Ingeri elud ja lood // Ingrian Lives and Stories* (2002b). On the basis of life history interviews and written life stories she studies the changes in the culture and self-definition of the Ingrian Finns, important turning points in the history of Ingrian Finns in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In keeping with biographical method, one can discern the multivocality of history, the recognition of both private and public as well as generational diversity, and self-reflexivity on the part of the researcher.

The biographical approach is front and centre in the research project 'Strategies and Practices of Everyday Life in Soviet Estonia' (2002–2005), which focuses on the question how new strategies and tactics are acquired in order to cope in a new environment, how these are used, and how they become routine ie. are habitualized. (Jõesalu 2003b, 2004; Kõresaar 2003d; Ruusmann 2003a). The main emphasis is on the experiences of individuals, in order to open their social and cultural world. The combination of different methods and sources – open biographical interviews, written life stories, structured questionnaires – in the project has also aroused discussion about the comparability of their experiential and textual levels (Jõesalu 2003c). If the problem is raised in this way, the shift of the ethnology of everyday life can be seen from the historical source-critical method to the narrative approach to

experience,<sup>6</sup> which is also predominant in ethnological memory studies and in popular oral history. In reality the biographical method focused on the history of life inseparable from memory research, of which it is an outgrowth (cf. eg. Jõesalu 2003ac; Kõresaar 2003cd; Siemer 2002, 2003; Ruusmann 2003ab).

### **The history of trivialities and biographical method**

The so-called history of trivialities research direction within contemporary popular cultural studies raises questions similar to the ethnology of everyday life, and identifies itself primarily by the use of the biographical method. Life histories are considered to be 'windows', concretized manifestations of certain lines of social development. In this sense the problematics raised in contemporary popular culture studies have rather a sociological emphasis. The more distant goal of such research is to explain the backgrounds of contemporary social problems, such as adjustment and integration. These are approached through historical problems: what was the reality of Soviet everyday life and the mentality that was formed within it? (Aareleid 1998); how did the new mentality shape itself? (Aareleid 2000, 2003a); what were the differences between the ways Estonians from the homeland and the diaspora made their adjustments? (Aareleid 2001, 2002a, 2003b); how did 40 or 50 years of lived life in the totalitarian system influence one's adjustment to the changes in the Estonia of the 1990s? (see also Hatshaturjan 2003).

As distinct from the ethnology of everyday life, the biographical approach in the study of contemporary popular culture defines itself as neopositivist (Aareleid 2003ab; Hatshaturjan 2003), seeking in life story narratives objective indicators and facts about social processes. The character of comparable facts in neopositivist research is preformulated, for example Aili Aareleid estimates the rate of adaptation to cultural changes according to changes in the rites of passage, presenting the hypothesis that in a longer-term process integration is reflected on the everyday level in how life structures change. She defines the latter as historically conditioned culture patterns (family relationships, rites of passage, calendar highlights), which organise the life course of an individual (Aareleid 2002a). It is also important that the resulting figure would be as neutral and objective as possible. As because of the nature of life stories the researcher constantly has to consider the hermeneutic influence between the individual's subjective sense of reality and the existing objective social structure, the neopositivist researcher needs control mechanisms of objectivity. Objectivity is achieved when similar motives, events, names and dates

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<sup>6</sup> Again it should be pointed out that this change of angle is not characteristic only of the biographical approach, but the phenomenological ethnology in a wider sense (cf. e.g. Runnel 2003).

repeatedly occur in interviews; if necessary, the interview data is compared with the opinions of experts (e.g. other researchers) (see further Aarelaid 2003b).

It is characteristic that the turn that has also taken place in professional history toward autobiographical sources – life stories, memoirs, letters<sup>7</sup> and diaries, has taken place in areas where the accessibility of documentary historical sources has been difficult, where the sources have become fragmented or destroyed, or where they are one-sided and biased. Biographical sources have primarily been recognized in areas directly connected with the complicated study of recent history, especially the repressions and the sovietization of Estonia. If heretofore biographical sources have remained rather in the role of illustrative supplementary material, then the treatment of the problematics of deportation in the light of different sources has taken the discussion in the direction of the complementary use of documentary and traditional (pärimuslik) sources (Rahi 2001).

## **Methodological key questions**

In view of the above-mentioned, it should now be separately discussed whether and how the different approaches problematise the key questions of life story telling: what is the relation of the life story with reality, how is time conceptualised and how the so-called time problem is solved in practical research work, whether and how the question of the ‘truth’ is presented in different branches of research. Finally, on the basis of these questions I try to outline how the source is understood within the biographical approach in Estonia.

### **Approaches to time**

The problem of treatment of time has generally become a key one in all humanitarian and social sciences<sup>8</sup> (Roberts 2002: 140). Each human activity is related with the past, the present and the future. Interpretation of time and through time, also the reality is a key question in the biographical approach – this is where the interpretation of both the researcher and the research object proceeds from.

In Estonian life story research time and reality have been problematised through experience and the narrative time. Briefly, the researchers have paid

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<sup>7</sup> A good example of this is the colourful rubric edited by Aigi Rahi that introduces and analyses historical sources in ‘The Historical Journal’ (‘Ajalooline Ajakiri’).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. in Estonia e.g. Veidemann 2002 and the special issue of the *Akadeemia* magazine on time (5, 2003).

their attention to the complexity of time in biographical texts and it is interpreted through the complexity of experience.

Tiiu Jaago has pointed out in her research of oral popular history texts that time is reflected in different ways in oral tradition. So, firstly, the oral tradition reflects the so-called mythical time, which covers the past, the present and the future. Secondly, oral tradition intermediates historical events, even if the narrator does not have an immediate contact with them. Thirdly, oral tradition reflects narrator-centred past events, by means of which a meaning is provided to oneself and one's position in the current time and the future (Jaago 2001a). Jaago relies on the hermeneutic time treatment of Cassirer: the person does not repeat the past, but recreates it. Therefore, narrating the past is a creative and constructive process, which results in the co-occurrence of the past, the present and the future in oral history narratives (Jaago 2001c: 232). For the researcher of oral tradition it means concentrating on the present instead of the past or on the reason why a certain topic is important and topical for a certain informant group at the moment under research (idem: 229).

Analysing the life stories written by elderly Estonians from the aspect of collective memory, I have used the term 'life story syncretism' to characterise the memory images expressed in the life stories. This term,<sup>9</sup> used in ethnological and folkloristic culture study, and which generally means that different phenomena from different eras and systems, mutually excluding at first sight, are matched in a (unified) system. Methodologically the life story-syncretic angle is phenomenological, in a narrower sense it proceeds from the question of the relation between the experiential and interpretation levels of collective memory, as it is expressed in life stories (Kõresaar 2003a). When a life story is analysed in terms of memory problems, what we can see in the text is a syncretic presentation of different interpretations from different times and (phenomenologically) from different realities. I have approached the problem how different events, phenomena and interpretations, be they closely related with the event or not, are connected in the autobiographical memory, through the concept of experience, defining it as biographical, social, historical and cultural (Kõresaar 2003a: 19–24). Different forms of experience are analytically distinguished here. Different forms of experience relate to the individual just because of the singularity and uniqueness of the person's biographical knowledge and his/her personal experiences and emotions. These together make up the phenomenon, which is called life experience in the more general sense.

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<sup>9</sup> The term 'syncretism' has been used to characterise different aspects of culture, e.g. folklore and folk art and religion (see e.g. Tedre 1983; Vunder 1998; Valk 1998). The concept of syncretism emphasises that different areas of a phenomenon (e.g. aesthetics, religion, knowledge, but also the author, performer, melody and text in a runo song) do not only co-exist in this phenomenon, but they are also intertwined, they are mutually influencing, which results in the phenomenon becoming a unified system (and this is why it can be regarded as a phenomenon). Cf. also Jaago 2000: 18–19.

With the help of experience, diachrony can be involved in the perspective of life story syncretism, which would not be noticeable in syncretism, because at first it opens up as a static text. Syncretism, however, does not eliminate diachrony, but quite the opposite – contains it. Within a life story, the original (and controversial) syncretism of different schemes of interpretation is created by the quality of the experience to be time-complex, synthesising, selective and interpretive.

### **Approaches to reality**

Therefore, a biographical narrative is not just a linear chronology, but a complex perception of the past in present experience, in future perspectives and in their changing contexts. The traditional treatment of time as a flow following chronology or the model of a clock makes it complicated, if not impossible, to understand the ‘lived life’ and its relation to the ‘narrative or narrated time’. This relation, however, is directly connected with the question of the treatment of reality of the research object and the researcher (and how it should be expressed in the researcher’s analysis).

Generally, all the branches associated with the biographical approach in Estonia to a smaller or larger degree share the opinion that life story is essentially reality-oriented, i.e. what is narrated in a life story is not a random interpretation, or just a representation, but it is based on truthful experience – real life.<sup>10</sup> The approaches to reality of the biography researchers themselves differ mostly in terms of whether they study social reality in the life stories or life stories as a social reality<sup>11</sup> – that is, whether they focus on past or present reality. Another aspect distinguishing the researchers’ treatment of reality – as it is expressed in research practice – is how the researcher takes the reality conception of the researched subject itself into consideration and to what extent he/she expresses it in the analysis.

The starting point of studying oral tradition, especially family tradition and memory is the present. Here is a question, how the perception of the past in biographical narrating is expressed in the tension field of the private and the public, the personal and the cultural, the previous life experience and the future expectations. The central categories of these approaches is the dynamics of the complexity of the time, narrative truth, present perspectives, and intertextuality which is connected with the use of different cultural texts to express one’s experience. Focusing on present reality does not exclude diachrony (see above, e.g. life story syncretism). In creating a biographical text (oral or written), both the time of the narrated event, the time of narrating and the changing timespace

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<sup>10</sup> Sociologist I .P. Roos (2003) has called this view on life stories neorealistic in the context of the postmodernist discussion (realists v narrativists).

<sup>11</sup> See more about this problem, e.g. Corsten 1994, Miller 2000.

in between are connected (Jaago 2001a: 9ff). Also, the different narrated times relate to one another in a different way, according to what meaning is given to the lived time in the life story – this is true both for the storyteller and has to be also taken into account in the life story researcher’s analysis.

The research of the ethnology of everyday life and ‘trivial history’ concentrate on the reality of the past. Seen from different epistemological premises the past, which the research concentrates on, is different. Phenomenological ethnology evaluates the experiential past and the biographical knowledge of the individual (Jõesalu 2003c), which is expressed from the aspect of the present in a biographical interview or a written text. Therefore it is important for the biographical approach to keep the past and the present in a dialogue, interpreting one against the other and vice versa. Neopositivist research of the trivial history focuses on the lived past with the aim to construct the historical social reality to explain the background of current social processes. So, the problem placement departs from the present and solution is seen in the study of the past. In line with the problem placement, the neopositivist biographical approach evaluates ‘real biographies’, which should by using different techniques (see above) be distinguished from the ‘myths about the lived life’ that have shaped in present reality (Aarelaid 2002). Different conceptions of the past in the ethnology of everyday life and the study of trivial history are therefore also connected with the different time conception: in the case of researching experiential past the dialogue treatment is expressed, in the case of studying the lived past, the linear treatment of time.

## **Truth**

The question of the ‘truth’ and reliability of life stories is a problem, in which mainly those disciplines get stuck, which identify the category of ‘truth’ with control (Personal Narratives Group 1989). According to this approach, the ‘truth’ must meet certain definite neutral and generally accepted criteria – norms, which inevitably declare certain knowledge – actually the irregularity of human experience as such – to be a deviation. Using such a criterion of limited ‘truth’ acknowledges only one standard to perceive and interpret only a minor part of the complex reality. Life stories do not conform to these standards. Does it also mean that life stories essentially carry false information and their researcher is inevitably on the wrong track?

The neorealist biographical approach, which I have above regarded as more or less acceptable for all the branches of life story research in Estonia, presumes that life story – autobiography – is essentially oriented to the truth (cf. Roos 2003). Truth is seen from the point of the author – the life story writer–narrator, who narrates to others of his/her life: what happened and how he/she sees it. This emphasises the plurality of truths and the conditions and relationships that produce such truths (see Aarelaid 2002b; Jaago 2001c, 2002a; Reinvelt 2002a).



The task of the researcher is seen in reconstructing these truths as much as possible.

Methodologically it is important how the question of the relation between the researcher and the researched 'truth' is solved. This is a question that needs to be solved against the background of these theoretical conceptions, from which the researcher proceeds. This means that the discourse of the researcher needs to be visible in the analysis, and not hidden behind the mask<sup>12</sup> of neutrality. Secondly, the researcher's text must also show the researched (person's) text, so as to compare the different truths – both the researcher's and the researched one's. The criterion of the researcher's 'truth', therefore, is primarily transparency.

### **In summary: towards the changing treatment of the source**

The biographical approach, be it the research of oral tradition, memory or life stories or generally applying the biographical method, has contributed to the convergence of disciplines, which so far have acted relatively isolated from one another. At the same time, the different problems and points of departure, discipline-specifically varying research methods and emphases within a broader approach provide a multi-faceted picture even within the limited science community of Estonia.

According to how life stories are generally treated as a source, three main features can be outlined.

First, the understanding of biographical texts as carriers of a certain historical information. The subjective quality of the texts is handled as an insecure factor in the sense of source reliability. In Estonian research community such approach is revealed for example in using biographical texts merely for illustration, to give accent to 'hard facts'. The discussion sporadically activated in auditoriums and before advanced degree councils on the 'objective source value' has unfortunately not yet reached published expressions.

Secondly, the approach, which evaluates life stories just because of their 'subjective truth', which is seen as a key to understanding historical and social realities. Associations between the collective and the individual (value estimates, moral, mentalities, ideologies, human perception, personal motives and self-reflexion) and their gender and age-specific, social etc. aspects are analysed. Focus is laid, for example, on the synchronic description of certain

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. historian Thomas L. Haskell (2000) on objectivity as the acknowledgement of theoretical dimensions of scientific research work.

life areas or on life stories as a whole (i.e. narrating the life story as a social activity).

Thirdly, approaches, which concentrate on ‘other’ realisations in life stories – identities, memory, history or time perception, gender and generation specifics in biographical expressions.<sup>13</sup>

In summary it can be said that although there are very few projects and research groups that are based on biographical approach, it is diversifying the traditional treatment of the source and making it more integrated, open and dynamic.

Traditional source criticism nurtures the idea that life stories and memoirs are not reliable sources. Proceeding from this mindset, striving for the truthful knowledge assumes that the subjective elements of the source are identified and the pieces of truthful information are separated from the whole source. As there are fewer subjective elements in some sources, e.g. official documents, these are classified as more reliable. This method relies on the researcher understanding his/her role to be a presenter of true facts and not an interpreter. In the version of another source criticism (cf. Kalela 1999) what is placed in the foreground is the information the source includes, and not the truthfulness of the source. The idea of the ‘usable source’ is not absolute, but relative – which source can be used for solving which problem? (cf. Rahi 2001.)

Differently from the traditional method of criticism of historical sources, which has also predominated in folkloristics and ethnology for a long time, the research of life stories problematises the understanding of time and reality and the discourse, both the research object’s and the researcher’s. It is accepted that actually there are very different ways of ‘reading’ a source. For example the key to ‘memory as a source’ (Kalela 1999: 152) is included in the tension between the personal and the general, the private and the public, the individual and the collective, not to speak of narrative conventions, by means of which experiences are transferred. In biographical approach the source is not a definite ‘thing’ – e.g. a written document, but sooner an abstract analytical concept, which marks the complex, dynamic and changing entity – the human in his/her society and culture.

*Translated by Tiina Kirss and Ann Kuslap*

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<sup>13</sup> I would like to refer to some single studies, which have not been mentioned in this summary. See the relation of language and the perception of history in Estonian life stories in Huima 2002 and the problematics of identity in Kirss 2002.

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# III

## **CHILDHOOD AS AN IMAGE OF HISTORY: METAPHORIC DEPICTION OF THE NATION AND THE STATE IN CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF ELDERLY ESTONIANS**

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Published:  
Kõresaar, Ene 2003. Lapsepõlv kui ajaloopilt. Rahvuse ja riigi metafoorne kujutamine vanemate eestlaste lapsepõlvemälestustes. In Kõresaar, E. & Anepaio, T. (eds.). *Mälu kui kultuuritegur: Etnoloogilisi perspektiive // Ethnological Perspectives on Memory*. Studia Ethnologica Tartuensia 6. Tartu: Tartu University Press, 60–91.

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# **CHILDHOOD AS AN IMAGE OF HISTORY: METAPHORICAL DEPICTION OF THE NATION AND THE STATE IN CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF ELDERLY ESTONIANS**

## **Introduction**

Several biography researchers have in their studies referred to the strong relations between the childhood world in the memories and the nation as an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983/1991). It is emphasised that childhood memories may form an essential part of those metaphorical means that are necessary to envision a nation (Gullestad 1996b: 9–10). This article aims to search for an answer to the question how the relationship of an individual, society, state and nation is construed in the stories of Estonians born in the 1920s, written about their childhood and youth in the 1990s. I shall concentrate on the main childhood memories of the elderly Estonians of village, (father’s) farm and family, understanding the latter as metaphors of a nation state. Metaphors are meaningful expressions with which people verbalise their life experiences and conceptualise, interpret and structure them on the basis of their general level of experience and knowledge and practice of daily life (Straub, Sichler 1989: 222–223). These are part of the rhetoric of remembering, by which an individual not only shows his/her beliefs, but also the choice of paradigm. Here it is important to emphasise the constructive character of rhetoric: when narrating memories, an individual does not describe the reality of events, but rather creates a social and moral interpretation of this reality (cf. Korhakangas 1994: 60–66).

I try to interpret the text – the life narrative – through its relations with the writers’ experience, life and context, laying the focus on the mutual impact of the textual and the social (national). The latter are regarded as discursively constructed according to the models of social-anthropological life story research (cf. Gullestad 1994, 1996a-b). Instead treating the ‘national’ as a cultural category or a social identity, we could observe it as a stage on which different interest, loyalties and strategies are performed, where the ‘national’ is presented, mixed, contrasted and combined with different identities – class, gender, religion, generation identity etc. It is just the chameleonic nature of the ‘national’ that creates a false image of continuity: the ‘national problem’ is always paraphrased according to the specific situation. (Löfgren 1999: 110, cf. Billig 1995)



## **Childhood memories as images of history: the central position of history and nation state in life stories**

This analysis is based on life stories contributed to the Association for Estonian Life Histories in 1989–1997 in reply to several appeals. The largest ones<sup>1</sup> ‘Do you remember your life story? Estonian biographies’ (1989), ‘The fate of me and my kin in the turns of history’ (1996–7) concentrated on the relations of the individual, society and history, but particularly on memories of revolutionary times, because ‘this could include for future generations the experience of complicated times in Estonia’ (from the appeal ‘Estonian Biographies’). Each appeal also involved general instructions how to write a biography: ‘What is important is the author’s childhood, home, era, setting, political party membership, current situation in the writer’s life. Priority should be given to events that have had an impact on the writer’s fate and life.’ (ERE I: 7) Thus the biographers were given general outlines that could be adjusted and interpreted at one’s discretion. Participation in the collection contests was lively, more than 800 biographies of different length were contributed. 245 of them were biographies of people born in the twenties, including 132 written by women and 113 by men. For analysis 52 of these biographies, 6 written by men and 46 by women, have been used, written from 1989 to 1997. 46 of the autobiographers were born and/or lived in the country in childhood, of them 40 came from a farmer’s, 4 from a rural craftsman’s, 1 from a shopkeeper’s, 1 from a captain’s and 2 from a servant’s/field hand’s family. 6 of the biography writers were from towns, 1 of them from a shopkeeper’s, 3 from a clerk’s 1 from a worker’s and 1 from a railway worker’s family. The gender disproportion of the studied material is dependent on the current stage of work on these biographies. Although the proportion of men’s biographies is very low here, it can be stated that it does not affect the general results. For example, the comparison of biographies of men and women born in the 1920s, collected in 1998–1999 by means of biographical interviews, shows that the schemes, topics and accents of childhood memoirs are not subject to substantial gender discrepancies from this aspect (cf. Kõresaar 2001b: 121–122, 2001c: 45–46). The same conclusion is made by K. Siemer in the analysis about the depiction of the pre-war Republic of Estonia in the life stories of older Estonians (Siemer 2001b).

The relation with the Great History is central in the life stories of older Estonians. The fate of oneself and one’s family is represented as exemplary with regard to the history of the whole nation. The blows of fate that have hit one (repression, deportation, collectivisation etc.) should show what the

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<sup>1</sup> Between larger biography contests several smaller collections were organised, on a narrower topic: “Women’s Biographies” (1995), “Biographies about Love, Marriage and Sexuality” (1996), “Teacher, Tell Us about Your Life and Work” (1998, under the project “Life Stories of the Teachers of the Baltic Countries”). One of the most popular projects in the 1990s was “A Hundred Biographies of the Century” (1999).

Estonian nation has had to suffer. It is also characteristic that if one's own family was untouched by more serious trouble, the revolutionary events of history are described on the basis of the tragic life of an acquaintance, neighbour, schoolmate or a relative. The purpose of the narrative is to describe on the basis of one's course of life *how the society and the government of that time influenced the situation*. (f, 1929, EE501) The main line is the suffering of the nation and the survival of the nation. There are shorter and longer discussions on this subject:

*The Russian occupation – the war, the German occupation – the war, new Russian occupation, which lasted as long as half a century. How much has all this been spoken-written about and there is hardly anything new to add, but – maybe there is. Each person sees the life from his/her standpoint and although the destruction methods were the same, fates were still different.*

*I have often thought what a miraculous power it is that keeps alive and living this tiny nation, whose distant ancestors chose to live in this harsh, stony and windy, but still beautiful place – Estonia, Maarjamaa. Probably this power is the Estonians' great toughness, vitality, hard work and thirst for freedom. Like no storm can destroy a juniper on the rocky ground of an island, neither can the small Estonian nation be turned nonexistent, because its roots are too deep to reach them. When 2 hard wars, 3 occupations and several Stalinist 'spring cleanings' swept over Estonia in just a couple of years, at first it felt as if now there would not be even the sound of the Estonian language heard on the shores of the Baltic Sea. But what a surprise – in spite of all the devils, the Estonians survived. Like a bug in a crack, no fire or water could damage them.* (f, 1929, EE386)

The descriptions of the turns of life and history in the life stories of older Estonians are also closely connected with the definition of their generation, which combines both disruption (suffering) and continuity (survival). Disruption came with the Soviet occupation: *our destiny [---] was determined by the hard times following the Second World War* (f, 1925, EE38), continuity is included in the autobiographers' certain inner quality, which they maintained throughout the occupation period. The childhood spent in the first Republic of Estonia, the 'Estonian' education and beliefs are values, which in the generation definition of elderly Estonians make them the carriers of the continuity of the state and the nation:

*My generation, who was born at the time the former Republic of Estonia was flourishing, who got their elementary education and upbringing according to the principles of that time, would know how to and manage to build up the Estonian state with a better sense of mission, ethics and*

*and unselfishness than the current generation. I am convinced in it!* (f, 1927, EE372)

This is why the experience of national independence in childhood is very important in the life stories of older Estonians. It is the main experience that becomes the criterion of inter-generational differentiation. Identification with independence is very strong in their life stories.<sup>2</sup> Being born to the free country ‘as the first independent generation in Estonia’ is separately emphasised in the life stories:

*I came to this world in the first spring after the Peace [Treaty] of Tartu, therefore completely in the Republic of Estonia, on 20 May 1920.* (f, 1920, EE609)

*In 1918 the Republic of Estonia was declared, first de jure. Estonia became a republic de facto only in 1920 after the victory in the War of Independence, after the peace agreement was signed on 2 February. Together with the Republic I was born, too, on 1 January 1920. From that moment on I can call Johannes my father and Maali my mother. Estonia started peacefully to build up the country.* (man, 1920, EE596)

Also, state symbols and dates related to independence are referred to in childhood and schooltime memories as markers of independence. Most often the celebration of the anniversary of the Republic, the national blue-black-and-white flag, monuments of the War of Independence, meeting with leaders of the state (cf. Siemer 2001b: 23–26) or their pictures on classroom walls are mentioned. Being a witness to these carries the function of continuity.

*I went to Narva, to a large farm like home economics school in Kamarovska village at the Russian border, where the wires and red posts of the Russian border were, and at some distance there were the Estonian blue-black-and-white posts standing in a nice line.* (f, 1921, EE582)

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<sup>2</sup> I would like to emphasise the fact that it was just identification with the national independence, and not necessarily with a state. In life stories, being born in the Republic of Estonia between the two world wars marks birth as a member of a free nation. Independence (in the form of a nation state) is the true status and as such, an important – if not the essential – component of the national identity of older Estonians (cf. Karu 1997: 33), but it does not necessarily mean the authority of the state institution – both empirical studies and several observations have referred to its low status (for the former, see e.g. Karu 1997: 37, 48). T. Karjahärm remarks in his recent research of Estonian national thinking that over the history, Estonians have developed a strong cultural nationalism, but a weak identity based on statehood (2001: 276).

*I remember from the schooltime that every year at Christmas, on the anniversary of the Republic on 24 February and in May on mothers' day we had great parties in school. The schoolchildren themselves presented the programme. The headmaster made an opening speech and praised the better students. The children also got presents from the school. School equipment and sweets. Parents were the party guests. In the programme I often had to recite and also act in plays. At party time the blue-black-and-white national flag streamed in the flagpole in the schoolyard. I remember that on classroom walls the pictures of the head of the state K. Päts's and General Laidoner's were hung. (f, 1924, EE602)*

*When I was 8, mother took me to the Elementary School of the town of Tõrva. [---] In the first years I got only fives. In secondary school I got fours and fives. [---] I was courageous and had to recite really difficult poems quite early already. [---] I remember the 30 January of 1939, when the [anniversary of] liberation of the town of Tõrva in 1919 was celebrated. The large hall of Tõrva Fire Brigade was full of people. We, the 'Home Daughters' were standing at the stage, with burning candles in our hands. Behind us were the Girl Guides. All had conical papers in their hands. When the speaker called out the name of a person who perished in the fights near Tõrva in the War of Independence, one of the girls put out the candle. It was a great honour to stand there. (f, 1929, EE480)*

*Happy memories from Helme, the landscape there was very beautiful, comprehensive school: secondary education, complete skills in cooking, handicraft, agriculture. I remember the summer days, with the late head of state Mr. Konstantin Päts and the late Mr. Johannes Laidonär visiting. Thinking, how harsh was their destiny and that they could not escape. (f, 1923, EE490)*

The childhood memories of older Estonians, which *today [---] are history already* (f, 1929, EE386), are therefore also memories of the period of independence in the history of a nation. 'Pictures from childhood' are also pictures of history – image complexes that concern the history, created as a result of retrospective selection and evaluation. The images of history express a collective understanding of historical reality, they are a knowledge of common temporality and as such, an important factor of the development of group identities (Heins 1993: 63). It is important to keep in mind that narrating the past is primarily conveying the meanings with rhetorical means, which change and structure the idea of the narrative, textualise the experience, adding a new level of interpretation (cf. Geertz 1995: 253–260). The 'reality discourse' (White 1990: 20) of the childhood memories of older Estonians is also a discourse of nationalism, the rhetoric of its conveyance is a rhetoric of nationalism, which is expressed in the metaphors of an ideal nation state.

## **Experience, memory and nationhood: childhood narratives in context**

Memoirs are influenced by the worldview acquired in childhood. Therefore in the analysis of the elderly Estonians' childhood narratives one has to consider the context and mechanisms how they were taught to think nationally (and as a citizen of a nation state). Sociologist E. Sevänen comments, 'it is regular in the birth of new nation states that, having gained independence, they start to develop symbols, myths and rituals that join the people. They start to strengthen the sense of solidarity and togetherness in the citizens. But it can also be said that the nation has to accept a certain amount of common culture. [---] The second task the new states have to solve is connected with the relationship between the state and the citizens. The new states have to see to it that the citizens recognize the state, identify with it and be loyal to the group ruling the state. (Sevänen 1998: 129)

When statehood was gained a breakthrough took place in Estonians' cognition of life and mentality. With the Land Reform of 1919 the ideal of a free tiller of the soil started to come true. Nationalism was the primary factor in building the state, which matched the idealistic spirit of the young state (Karjahärm 2001: 224). The new generation in the new state was shaped according to the principles of national education. The precondition of it was belief in oneself and in one's nation, the foundation to it was to be laid at home, and continued at school. The school arrangement and education became democratic, national and was provided in the mother tongue, coming closer to the student, home and society (Sirk 2001: 380). An education, which would have an educational effect (on the nation), had to proceed from the history, work and life of this nation and the nature of homeland. In its discursive methods the national education at school did not differ from those ideological rituals and social habits that were introduced in the whole society, 'in a modest way reminding people every day of their position as a nation in a world of nations' (Billig 1995: 8). Social activities were a very important factor, which was interpreted as acting in the name of statehood (cf. Aarelaid 1999: 7).

The prewar Republic of Estonia, in which the central social force was the peasant – farmer, extensively supported the national rural life ideology, which emphasized the morality of rural life, the closeness of man to nature and the ancient history of peasantry (Karjahärm 2001: 252–253), and additionally stressed the continuity of generations and hence the eternity of the nation. The idea of national entity which was advocated by Estonian agrarian ideologists and nationalists started to be applied in the 'state ideology' of the second half of the 1930s: 'Common agreement on the level of the state and nation, state-oriented thinking, togetherness of all layers, new morals, new sense of honour, education of inherent discipline were the key words of the official ideology. In the centre of the society was not the individual any more, but the state as an

independent value. [---] The most important doctrine of the new order was solidarity, used by the government and the opposition alike. This postulates that the well-being of the society is a norm for both the state and the individual.’ (Idem: 286–287)

Namely in the 1930s is shaped the understanding of national patriotism and loyalty, which is very strong in the self-definition of the current generation of elderly Estonians. The collective individual was formed by introducing new habits – singing together, sports and military competitions, excursions, working together. Grandiose propaganda campaigns and mass events were organized to emphasize statehood (the spread of the Estonian flag, parades, erection of the monuments to the War of Independence) and national authenticity (Estonianization of names, national handicraft). The shaping of nation to a large extent took place through home improvement (the action of home decoration). Home as a secure place is also the basis of love for one’s homeland. Care for one’s home, creating the sense of home and ensuring that family life was full of love, was the woman’s task, while the man’s task was to be a mentally and physically strong and active citizen-defender of the state. Gender roles were promoted through public and youth organizations. The school was a link between home and society and its aim under the direction and supervision of the state<sup>3</sup> was to ‘increase state mentality, grow conscious citizens and awaken in them the will to take part in building the Estonian state and serve the national culture’ (*Algkooli õppekavad* 1937: 42, cit. Kitsing 2001: 17) on one hand, and on the other explain to the children the national-cultural importance of state campaigns so that it reached through them to their homes as well.

So the experience of nationalism had to be overwhelming in the childhood of elderly Estonians. Particularly towards the end of the 1930s the patriotic ideology covered nearly all the areas of (public) life and the school was especially receptive. The state ideology of nationalism was connected with active forms of co-operation and state supervision was not perceptible in them.

*As a 6<sup>th</sup> class student I have written in the same poetry album a number of quotations under the title ‘Life wisdom of Estonian men’: K.Eenpalu ‘Fire is eternal, also the life and fate of a nation are eternal’, A.H.Tammsaare ‘We are in this world in order to once live forever’, H.Visnapuu ‘Life is a tour to the face of the God’, Artur Kapp ‘Art is – Religion’, J.Tõnisson ‘In changeable situations everyone should be loyal to oneself and hold to one’s principles’, J.W.Janssen ‘We should always be ashamed of our stupidity,*

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<sup>3</sup> The government’s regulating role concerned every detail in school life in late 1930s. For example, with the purpose of wide promotion of folk art, a regulation of the Ministry of Education specified three folk dances – *viru valts*, *jooksupolka* and *jāmaja labajalg*, which each elementary school had to teach their pupils. These three folk dances were recommended to be included in the programme of the parties and meetings of schools and youth organisations both as society dances and performed dances. (Kitsing 2001: 39)

*but never because we are Estonians', M.Veske 'It is beautiful to die for one's fatherland, but it is even more beautiful to live for its benefit' etc. Reading these poem-book notes, I cannot explain it anyhow, what made and taught us to think in such a way and put down the thoughts. We had our heroes, ideals, principles already at such an early age and all this has been with us to this day, when we are already elderly people. (f, 1925, EE449)*

For many people the Soviet and German occupations meant the loss of their childhood home as a result of war actions, repression and/or collectivization. Life and the surrounding environment changed drastically, but childhood memories included a sense of security. As childhood had the same fate as the independent nation state, in the following decades of Soviet occupation a new level of interpretation is added to the childhood memories of elderly Estonians (beside nostalgia) – they begin to represent the period of independence in the history of the occupied nation. In the process of transmission they assume a role of nationalist counter-memory, opposing to the totalitarian forgetting policy of the Soviet power. Different treatments (cf. Aarelaid 2000; Lauristin, Vihalemm 1997: 75) have recognized the role of memories of the independence period and their carrier generation as a cornerstone of cultural resistance. The childhood memories of elderly Estonians have not been directly studied in inter-generational transmission, yet they have been referred to as an essential component of shaping and maintaining the national identity of the successive generations (Karu 1997: 28, 31). Psychologists H. Rakfeldt-Leetmaa and J. Rakfeldt in their article 'Retaining national identity in occupied Estonia' state that 'each family had their collection of memories of events, [---] their own history that is narrated to following generations.' 'The interviewees described their ideal vision of the Republic of Estonia, which had taken shape on the basis of people's talk and attitudes. [---] It was pointed out that what saved Estonian identity in the years of the occupation was the idealized picture of free independent Estonia.' (1996: 1581, 1574) Of course, communication between generations was different in different families, depending on several circumstances (cf. Anepaio 2001). The life stories of elderly Estonians reveal that the narrators of childhood stories had quite a clear understanding of which stories should be told and how. The topical focuses and certain conventional patterns of activity refer to the public (Heins 1993: 68), which in its turn refers to repeated narration.<sup>4</sup> During occupation period certain stories emerge that are repeatedly told, certain schemes (Kaivola-Bergenhøj 1993), by which the stories are structured and also meanings that are ascribed to the past – personal

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, only on the basis of the textual form conclusions cannot be made about each biographer's narrative practice and its intensity. People's skills of self-expression – particularly written skills – are different. Yet it can be stated that the amazingly frequent coincidence of themes of childhood memories, the structure of the stories and interpretation mainly refer to participation in the heritage process or being aware of it.

(childhood) memories become the intergenerational social memory, in which the period of the independent Republic of Estonia crystallizes into the national 'golden era' (Rakfeldt-Leetmaa, Rakfeldt 1996: 1574).

In the restitution discourse of the 'New Period of National Awakening' in the second half of the 1980s – beginning of 1990s the memory of the time of independence acquires a special status. National history is rediscovered and in this process oral history has the role of supplementing to the written one. The independence of half a century ago is a stronghold for new independence and the young state's search for identity. The life stories written at that time (the factual collection of which is itself part of time-specific discourse) express strong rhetoric of nationalism, in the centre of which are questions of national culture, identity and belonging, of 'our own' and 'alien' history and past and especially that of the nation (and state), which are expanded in the context of current politics. Childhood and youth memories of independent Republic of Estonia function as the renovation of history, which means winning back the historical experiences (of the nation), the 'improvement' of history (Niedermüller 1997: 253–254). An important motif here is also that of losing one's childhood, which assumed a considerable political aspect in the life stories of early 1990s – Soviet occupation as the destroyer of secure childhood society: *These would have been constant values, if they had not been stolen from us.* (f, 1926, EE24: 2)

Childhood memories in the life stories of the end of 1980s and beginning of 1990s are part of the discourse of the nationalism of that time, the discourse that idealistically, romantically and nostalgically valued the interwar time and set it as an example in the political sense. The two 'Estonian times' were inseparably intertwined; the second proceeded from the first. Therefore the function as a carrier of national continuity is important for the authors when narrating their childhood memories (cf. Kõresaar 2001b: 121–122).

The actual process of state-building in the 1990s meant drastic changes in the social environment. For a large part of the population the reforms brought the end to their customary lifestyle, pensioners were among the most sensitive groups in this process. Since 1993 the disparity between the young 'winner' and the old 'loser' generations increased (Lauristin/Vihalemm 1997: 109), readiness for social agreement was minimal. In the practice of the 1990s the golden age of childhood Estonia as a vision for the future failed to function (any more), rather the opposite – the experience of past independence and the rights formulated on that basis interfered with the new discourse of building up the state and were suppressed, using the strategy of ridicule.<sup>5</sup> The key argument of the new

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<sup>5</sup> Such strategy was widely used around mid-1990s, also in the speeches of researchers of social sciences, for example. Cf. 'The retiring generation today is at large the same mentally oppressed "radish", who has cursed the "Russian stuff" for fifty years, but who has no courage to boldly face scanty freedom. Nobody can convince me that the oldsters of today lead a worse life than their forefathers and –mothers did a hundred or two hundred years ago, they rather dream of the status of a manor lord.' (Aareleid 1996/1998: 67–68)



discourse was – ‘freedom is not an award for the suffering of the Estonian people’, freedom has a price and it has to be paid collectively.

More extensive protest actions of pensioners took place in 1993–1994, at that time topical political subjects begin to appear in written life stories. In the contributions to the collection contest of 1996/1997 ‘The fate of me and my kin in the turns of history’ the analysis of the current circumstances is notably present. As at the beginning of the decade identification with the state was very strong, the rebirth of independence was supposed to mean the return of childhood together with all its qualities, therefore disappointment and alienation is primarily expressed in criticism of the state. The main issues are the situation in rural areas (expressed as the *destruction* of rural people), the life of elderly Estonians after the monetary reform of 1992, squandering on the governmental level and lack of efficient and economical behaviour, supremacy of the capital city and detachment of the government from the people. Arguments and the vision how everything *should* be, come from the time of childhood Estonia, which survives as a basis on which the main moral values and ideals for oneself and the society are interpreted. Nationalism has the key role in this argument as well as in the comparison emerging from it between the ‘former’ and the ‘modern-day’:

*They should have established a new state, which was terminated in 1940. Then there was spirituality and people were cared for, now there is no such thing. There is just the anthem that can be heard over the radio every morning, but it seems to be too sacred for the state we have got. The same goes for the flag – it is as if the state did not deserve this flag. (f, 1923, EE554: 22–23)*

The feeling alienation is also perceivable in the biographies sent to the collection contest of 1996/1997. Elderly autobiographers express their awareness of danger because of the increasing ‘power of money’ and the altered social (intergenerational, family, personal etc) relationships. Even here their childhood experience becomes the basis and starting point of values important for them. Researchers of childhood memories (cf. Gullestad 1997; Korkiakangas 1994) have emphasized the idealization of the past, which arises from the feeling of alienation that accompanies the modernization process.<sup>6</sup> In this light particularly the elderly people tend to esteem their place of origin, childhood home and the related stability and safety.

So the childhood memories are also vital outside the discourse of patriotic nationalism, yet they cannot be separated from it in the context of Estonia. The elderly Estonians acquired their experiences of childhood and youth in a national environment, during the subsequent occupation period these experiences crystallized as national counter-experiences that were in opposition with

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<sup>6</sup> About the ‘partial modernization’ in the Socialist period see Srubar 1991.

reality and the way of narrating of ‘national’ childhood formed. In the atmosphere of national enthusiasm and restitution at the beginning of the ‘second national awakening’ and rebirth of independence, the (childhood) memories from the previous period of independence actualized and, although they have lost the wider social basis in the social-political development of the 1990s, they have maintained their importance as a carrier of group-specific values.

## **Village and farm as metaphors of the nation state**

Conceptions of the family, home and local community have generally been the central metaphoric devices since the beginning of modern nationalism. Home, kindred, local community and family are categories, which are closely linked with the idea of national identity (cf. Gullestad 1997, Morley 2001). These are sensed as natural and inborn qualities, on the one hand they are real, live experiences, on the other hand they are selected and adjusted – construed or ‘invented’ (Hobsbawm 1983).

For the purpose of this article it is useful to analyse childhood memories as (anthropological) ‘places’,<sup>7</sup> which are like partially materialised images of what the relationships of people in their opinion are with the territory, with their fellow people and with ‘others’ (Augé 1994: 64–69). Childhood as a place (cf. *going back to the land of one’s childhood*) combines in itself the physical quality of the place (farm, nature, village etc.) and the quality of social relations (family, community, school etc.). The function of childhood narratives as images of history lies in the constitution of the meaning of the past, in which the relation of the event to the image represents for the narrator the typical existence form of the nation state.

## **Village as the ideal society**

Childhood is referred to in the biographies as a period of happiest and warmest memories. The childhood community – mostly the village – is the *small* [personal] *world* of the biographer – *rich in smokes (farms) and children, a paradise of flowers and birds* (f, 1923, EE552). The childhood village is associated in the biographies with high social values like solidarity, mutual assistance and respect and informal equality:

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<sup>7</sup> I have used the term ‘anthropological place’ to analyse the category of the ‘lost homeland’ in the biographies of Estonians in exile (Kõresaar 2000).

*In the village people got on well with each other like one family. Especially the neighbouring families. If necessary they helped one another, no charge was taken. Carting of manure to the field and threshing were done together, others were helped with their work. Then also better meals were cooked for the people. When you had something better at home, fresh meat, fish or when the cow freshened, milk – was given to neighbours too. And when you ran out of bread before the new lot was ready, you borrowed it from the neighbours, weighed it with steelyard and afterwards gave back to the neighbours. [---] I played with neighbours' children. [---] We got on very well, I don't remember having any trouble or quarrels. When they sometimes said bad words to one another or called names, usually as a joke – they never used any bad language to me. And I didn't either. Later I understood that all their family were very good people. Our pastures were next to one another, with no fence between them. (f, 1923, EE554)*

The village like 'a family', much more informal communication than nowadays, the sense of belonging based on tradition – these are real childhood experiences. In the context of the whole life story these are applied more generally to the time and the society, it is represented as typical and conclusions are made about the state. For example in a later comparison with the Estonia of today in a biography written in 2000, the Estonia of the childhood is perceived as a country of real democracy:

*Childhood passed without worries and safely in the Republic of Estonia, a really democratic country. (m, 1925, ENSV183)*

A national ideal society is one where no one dominates or is in power with respect to others. The equal members of society co-operate so that the structure of the society could function harmoniously (cf. Treanor 1997). The *small world* of the childhood in the biographies of older Estonians has just such an ideal harmonious form, and their dialogue with the next societies in which they live arises from this basis:

*I often find myself pondering over the kind of social order my soul really yearns for. [---] In my dreams such an order should be established which is neither communist nor capitalist, where there is no crime, hunger or want. It would be a fair society of happiness and welfare. This notion is definitely not realisable and will remain just a dream or fantasy of an old woman. (f, 1923, EE444)*

The image of the childhood society as a harmonious association functioning on the basis of informal equality is the dominant perception in the biographies of senior Estonians. This does not mean that biographers belonging to different

social layers would not refer to social inequality in their memoirs. In short – the length of this article unfortunately does not allow a more thorough analysis – it can be pointed out that children of wealthier farmers and urban middle-class families see social hierarchy through positive experience,<sup>8</sup> whereas the children of poorer farmers and workers and craftsmen through negative experience.<sup>9</sup> Negative social experience does not change the general congenial picture of the childhood society, yet it may influence the interpretation of the whole course of life (cf. Siemer 2001b: 18–19). Among the analysed biographies there was only one story, which was in radical opposition to the dominant awareness of the equal (childhood) society. This two-part biography of a woman born in 1920, who later worked as a farm hand and house helper, is full of criticism of social inequality. The aim of her biography (or rather memories of her childhood and youth) is to express her protest against the predominant treatment of history:<sup>10</sup>

*To tell the truth, life in old Estonian times was not so good at all! Who had money, had authority. And poverty and wealth went 'side by side'. Housemaids, kitchen workers and other unskilled workers – their salaries were so low, and if they had a large family, they couldn't make ends meet. There was need all the time, they bought herring pickle to have with bread and potatoes, if they could afford it. (f, 1920, EE140 II)*

### **Farm as the proper place to spend one's childhood**

Home as a specific and social room is described in detail in childhood memoirs. Biographers from farmers' families dedicate a considerable part of their biographies to their home farm, its size (as a rule, the area of the farm is given exactly!)<sup>11</sup> and its physical environs, daily life on the farm (with animals as the inevitable part of the farm – their names are mentioned too), to rare leisure time and typical arrangement of farm life (cf. Jaago & Jaago 1996: 94–95).

*The size of our place was 14.3ha. Father and uncle built the house and a shed for animals 15–20 m from the sea. The house had a thatched roof. There were 3 rooms and a kitchen in the house. Grandfather was a small and smart, light-footed man. He worked in the field first. As many animals were kept on our small fisherman's farm as the place could afford. 1*

<sup>8</sup> Cf. e.g. EE456, 519, 252.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. e.g. EE850, ENSV293, EE137; EE602; EE140.

<sup>10</sup> Analogues to this can be found in only a few memories of later times, for instance in the biographies of men who had been war prisoners and who find that their sufferings have not been adequately reflected by the official history.

<sup>11</sup> Considering the retrospection of biography, its tendency towards the present and the future, the impact of the restitution of land in 1990es on farm memories can be assumed.

horse, 2 cows, 3 sheep, 2 pigs. The horse 'Juku' was a small brown gelding, with low legs, a very strong draught animal, 'thick-headed', as my father used to say. Father was 185cm tall, a strong man, they were a match with 'Juku'. It was father's task to feed animals, go to the mill, carry firewood etc. Father and uncle dealt more with fishing. Fishing was a seasonal work. In spring after ice broke up, in autumn, when water was colder already. In our family ice fishing was not practised in winter. In winter men made weirs. They knitted weirs in the house and looked for weir stakes in the woods. Everything had to be in order by spring fishing. Grandmother said about father: our Juri is such a man who can do anything. And it was true. He and uncle Jaan built the houses that were in the yard. Father was more like a 'supervisor' then. He made all the tables, chairs, beds. He made agricultural implements, wagons, and sledges himself. Beer casks, barrels, baths – all were made by father. All in all, my father was a real good man. He was good at work, could also relax, respected the Estonian people and the state and the national blue, black and white flag, which was always hoisted on Victory Day and on state anniversaries in our yard. (f, 1926, EE515)

Farm life is the true symbol of childhood in the biographies of town children as well. Their childhood memories include lengthy stories of summers in the country on the farm(s) of relatives, of the feeling of joy caused by meeting relatives and the beautiful scenery, romantic farm works: *My childhood is associated with these farms near Ahja.* (f, 1925, EE449)

For example a woman born in 1927 and raised in Tallinn describes her father's farm in Torma, Lullikatku village as her most significant childhood memory. In the farm there was grandmother, whom the family visited once in a while. Memories of the village and the farm are given in detail (in much more detail and colour than those of the home in Tallinn), she pictures the way to the farm, people who lived by the road and their life in later years:

*To the right, nearly in the middle of the village there was the large farm of my father's cousin Alfred Seppius. Wide folding doors. Glass porch. Ancient ash trees by the road. About 80 ha of field, on top of that, wood and grassland. Alfred Seppius was a small man, with slightly red hair and a narrow hook nose. He was the owner of a large farm, but he got on well with everybody. When 'kulaks' were deported in 1948, friends from the village council warned him. He harnessed the horse, took his family (wife and son) and went to Jõgeva. Seppius was denominated a 'kulak' /an exploiter; prosperous farmer/ only after the third meeting – he had so many friends among the poorer. But every village had to have its own 'kulak'.*

*When Alfred died, there were very a lot of people at the funeral. The well-known Torma brass band played all through the night and pastor*

*Muru said in his speech 'This farm was bought 150 years ago from the lord of the manor. Only thanks to the hard work and toughness of the Estonian peasant it became a large farm...' It was in the 60s–70s, don't remember exactly. (f, 1927, EE479)*

The woman continues with the description of her uncle Peeter's farm and household, her father's farmyard and house, her grandmother. She concludes the story of her childhood farms as follows:

*What do I remember from the visits to Torma? Warm, hot summer. Much sun. Wide fields. Dahlias under farmhouse windows. (f, 1927, EE479)*

A country home in the childhood symbolises safety, stability and continuity. The inevitable part of farm descriptions – nature is here an equivalent of certain social and human qualities – harmony, freedom, natural purity and goodness,<sup>12</sup> and in the biographies nature is given a 'national' content. A 'natural' childhood is also a 'national' childhood:

*I was happy to be born into a farm family. Nowhere else, nobody, even the royal children had such a nice childhood as the children on Estonian farms did. As soon as the child starts to walk, he climbs over the threshold and is in the middle of nature. There is soft green lawn under his feet, the sun and wind around him, blue sky above his head, birds and animals everywhere. The stronger the foot, the longer walks he can take around the home farm, to flowery meadows, woods, to rivers and lakes. You are free. Farm people have too little time to look after you. Maybe only when you are very small. Later your elder sisters-brothers look after you and they are not so strict.*

*Royal children have a nanny, a teacher and maybe also a bodyguard to watch their every step all the time. No freedom at all! (m, 1920, EE596; cf. Siemer 2001: 17)*

*That spring after the end of the schoolyear we moved to Merivälja, into our own home, as father said. He had wanted a home for himself and the family for a long time already – our own home and garden where children could grow in the midst of nature and learn to love everything that is beautiful in our country. (f, 1925, EE519)*

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<sup>12</sup> The detailed description of one's years of development is based on the belief that the atmosphere of one's childhood dominates his/her nature. For example, in a later biography written in 2000, a woman born in 1934 in western Estonia describes how the beautiful birch wood in her homeplace shaped her into *an emotional person with lyric temperament.* (EE1075)

Land and nature were the axis of national structure in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and an essential component of ethnic identity later during the occupation period. Also in the second half of the 1990s being an Estonian meant a place in the country – ‘one’s own place’ in the truest sense of the word (cf. *an Estonian in his own land*) and untouched nature (Karu 1997: 34–36, 48).<sup>13</sup> Nature-centeredness and love for nature are traditionally regarded peasant – Estonian – values together with industriousness, toughness and scantiness. Long detailed nature descriptions in biographies are an integral part of ‘national patriotic’ childhood, showing descent from ethnic environment both physically and socially.

### Farm as the model of nation state

Just like the farm in life stories is the ideal environment for childhood, the life arrangement and social relationships in the (home) farm represent the ideal order for the autobiographer. The farm is the metaphor of the nation state, focusing on internal purity, protection of (national) resources and self-determination (cf. Gullestad 1996a: 298). Several biographers who come from the country point out that buying the farm was father’s great dream, and that the whole family worked towards it:

*It was 8 May 1933 when father pushed the ploughshare into the earth of his Own Land for the first time. His great dream had come true!* (f, 1923, EE257)

*In 1938 we could buy the small Veski farm in Mahtra village. His own farm was father’s greatest dream. To get this, we all had to make steady efforts and give up a lot.* (f, 1928, EE500)

The method that leads to self-determination and secures it is honesty and diligence,<sup>14</sup> wise accounting, optimum division of work and planning ahead (the so-called *peasant wisdom*):

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<sup>13</sup> Here a remarkable difference from e.g. Swedish Estonians reveals, who determined their identity as Estonians primarily by means of family relations, ethnic community and its traditions (idem).

<sup>14</sup> Work as *a matter of honour* is a predominant knowledge gained from childhood. A socially divergent understanding is met rarely and indirectly, e.g. daughters as free labour force on the farm and disagreements between the parents or parents and children about farmwork and education (cf. e.g. EE8, EE264). The dream to study is mentioned, but father wanted farm hands at home: *This Massu 6-class school remained the end of my education. But I must have got good education there. [---] My deskmate [---] continued studying, I wanted to too, but father would not allow. [---] Father was generally understanding and smart, supported education, read newspapers and other reading, but it seems there was no chance for me to continue my studies. My elder sister*

*As far as I can remember, the family worked regularly on the farm. Father cultivated land, each year improved new field on account of forest and grassland. Fields were very stony, we picked the stones and used them for building stone fences and roadbeds. These were granite stones. In the field potatoes, rye, wheat, oats, mash and clover were grown. There was a definite order in the fields (seven years, I believe). Father was a careful farmer, he always had a grain reserve in case there was a crop failure. We never were short of grain, often neighbours came to borrow from us. Besides that we grew vegetables: carrots, swedes, cabbages, beets, chicory, dill and cucumbers. We could eat that all the year round. [---] Cucumber growing had an important role. (According to father, he had brought this 'fashion' to our neighbourhood). For that the land at the side of the meadow was used, but beds were also made on fallow land. That was quite hard to do. A spadeful of surface was taken from the furrow and turned, roots up. The same was done on the other side, so that there was grass in the middle. A thick layer of fresh manure was laid on that grass (as it was decomposed it warmed the plants). Then earth was taken from the furrow and was laid over the bed so: [drawing]. These [cucumbers] were grown mainly for sale, but were also on our table both fresh and pickled. (f, 1923, EE263)*

In the Estonian language such arrangement is called the *proper behaviour of a landowner* ('heaperemehelikkus'), which is regarded as the ideal model of functioning for both the system (the state) and private institutions (the family). In a later biography written at the end of the 1990s it is expressed in a criticism of the state.<sup>15</sup>

*I think that the state is like a farm. There lives a family and the head of the household. The latter sees to whether and how the land is cultivated, the family fed, so that the old ones could live respectably and children could grow and get educated. According to available means expenses are made to develop the farm etc. You have to live within your means, not waste money thoughtlessly. The state should act in the same way. (f, 1928, EE868)*

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*had already gone to town. She wanted to get free from farmwork and earn her own living. I had to stay in place of her to do farmwork. We had no hired farmhands. [---] Economic situation must have not afforded. [---] (f, 1923, EE554)*

<sup>15</sup> Emphasising that she originates from a farm the author especially sympathises with small farms today, because they are *more honest*. Expressing her opinion of the right arrangement of the state, she only hopes *the government would understand country people*. (EE868)



## National gender roles and the stereotype of the Estonian

Like farm management in the childhood memories of older Estonians has the role of a model how the state functions, the descriptions of family relations, especially of one's parents may serve as an idea how the (national) society should function, what the gender roles and areas of responsibility are, how the national traits of character and the contribution to the growing of the nation are divided.

Older Estonians characterise their family living in Estonia before its occupation as harmonious, warm, safe, keeping together, based on durable values. Quarrels were hidden from children, the atmosphere was cheerful, good humour was respected.

*[---] little is needed for a happy home. Bread, clothes, health and above all, affection. All this was conveyed and radiated from father and mother to us children and to the whole world. These would have been lasting values, if they hadn't been robbed from us. (f, 1926, EE24)*

*There was no wealth in our house, but we had a happy home and we learnt to support one another and we do it even today, those who are alive yet. [---] (f, 1920, EE489)*

*My parents' marriage [---] was a very harmonious one, I never knew what a domestic quarrel was. [---] All in all, my parents were very cheerful, they loved to sing, mother was a good portraitist, she could have become an actress if she had had education. Father was the chairman of the school council and a member of the parish council, he baptised children in the village, made funeral speeches when last tributes were paid to the dead at home and acted as the best man at weddings. We have inherited a good sense of humour from our parents. [---] My father was Santa Claus [at the school Christmas party], village people even had a song [about him]. (f, 1923, EE533)*

Characterisation of the head of the family – father – is essential for the biographers. Many call themselves a *father's child*. Father is described longer and in more detail, references to different life situations associated with father are much more frequent. Father's personal traits are included, compared to mother, whose life story is given. In several biographies a separate chapter (or appendix) is dedicated to father's life and events.

As a rule, both parents are described as hard-working and honest people. Father is skilled at every work, he is an *artist of life*, who takes the family through hard times and gives good education to children; mother is a clever housewife, talented home decorator. Mostly at least one of them has a talent,

which is inherited by children. Usually it is musicality: father plays the violin or the concertina, mother sings well. Furthermore, father is socially active, he organises choir singing or is connected with the local parish administration (mother's activities are mentioned by some town children). Also father's progressive open-mindedness is remembered: father is among the first to buy a radio, a car, he experiments with new methods of construction and land improvement, mother's open-mindedness is exposed for instance in home decoration and using the skills studied at home economics courses. Yearn for education, love for literature, freshness of mind and being well-informed of various matters of life are more often mentioned about father, but similarly negative traits or habits (short temper, excess drinking, gambling). Father is a many-sided person, mother stays in the background, she is rather remembered for one's own emotional safety (*mother's singing in twilight*) and care.

It is also significant what kind of learning children gain from their parents in the life stories. Mother teaches goodness, care and love, letters and fear of God. The words of wisdom attributed to mother in the biographies are practical and moral: *always be hard-working and strong, then your life won't be idle* (f, 1922, EE27).

*Mother sometimes told wise stories. 'You may do good a thousand times, deviate once. The good will be forgotten, much ado will be made about the bad.' Secondly she spoke that if you do not take care of yourself, you will be suppressed by everyone. There is much truth in these words, truth that I have experienced in my own life. Mother always stressed that a wife is 'like a lock to the house' and the man has to be strong and fearless, secure safety to the family, but the wife should be faithful to her husband and take care of and be responsible for the home.* (f, 1923, EE444)

The pattern how mother is remembered is generalised in a quote from a teacher's biography from the year 1990:

*Ella Treffner: Woman – Mother is the carrier and keeper of the nation's morals, she is the pacemaker in the family, in society and the whole nation's way of thinking. It is the task of the woman to animate our culture (Helmi Mäelo).*<sup>16</sup> (f, 1925, EE38)

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<sup>16</sup> She (partially) quotes the part dedicated to Ella Treffner from 'Estonian Woman through Ages. The Role of a Woman in the Social and Ethnic Development of Estonia' by H. Mäelo. Mäelo deals with E. Treffner's negative opinion of working mothers in her speech at the III Women's Congress in Tallinn in 1925. She says 'We see it in the first years of independence. No, our worldview must change, because the moral strength of the nation depends on the female sex. The woman is the pacemaker in the family, in society and the whole nation's way of thinking.' (Mäelo 1999: 113)

Father (or grandfather) teaches patriotism and being an Estonian through history and the symbols of the nation state. National patriotism, the idea of a nation state and independence is recalled more often in connection with the male members of the family:

*All in all, my father was a real good man. He was good at work, could also relax, he respected the Estonian people and the state and the national blue, black and white flag, which was always hoisted on Victory Day and on state anniversaries in our yard. (f, 1926, EE515)*

*Father could travel by train free of charge, like intended for the holders of the Cross of Freedom order. We had been to many of the most beautiful places of Estonia in summer – sometimes by bus, when the Kalev members wanted to show their families their earlier battle sites, where they had fought for the freedom and independence of our small nation. I remember a large rock in North Estonia, with the words cut in it... to this spot and not further – In that place the invading enemy's troops had been driven back. [---] (f, 1925, EE519)*

*I also remember something about grandpa. I was about 5–6 then. Granny sent me to take lunch to grandpa, to the field he was ploughing. I called him to the edge of the field, on the ditchbank, a cup of kvass in one hand, a small bundle with salted herring and bread in the other. Grandpa called me to him on the black earth. Sat beside the plough, ate the bread, the herring, put the herring on the ground and drank kvass... I felt sorry for grandpa, wanted to help him and hold the herring while he was eating bread and drinking kvass, but he said 'Earth is the colour of our flag, it gives us bread.' – 'But our flag is blue, too?' – 'Blue is the colour of the sea, that is where I get the fish, the sky is also blue, the skylarks sing there.' – 'But white?' Grandpa thought. The he suddenly patted on his heart with his large knobby hand, saying 'But here it is beating!' Such dialogue between us remained in my soul for a long time, at that time I could not understand everything. (f, 1923, EE552)*

*Another memory: I am holding father's hand tightly, because a lot of people are moving in front of and behind us. I can see the dusty road at my feet seeming so long. The sun is shining brightly and the whole neighbourhood seems as if covered in bright light. Singing is heard. I remembered the words: 'there in the wide world'. Later at festive occasions and singing our national anthem, I often recalled the picture of the road full of sunshine. As if I felt again that hand, which was once holding my tiny hand. Father, you have left this world a long time ago. You died when Estonia was free and as beautiful as ever. My feet are still walking on the ground of my long-suffered fatherland. Can I see you rise*

*from the dust and achieve your freedom – because people live about seventy years? I believe I can, still.* (f, 1920, EE252)

Billy Ehn has stated that in ethnic imagery masculine pictures are preferred, feminine elements do exist, but they are in minority (Hjerm 1998). Anderson, for example, uses the term ‘fraternity’ when speaking of nations (1983/1991: 7). Considering that ethnic identity is intertwined with gender identity,<sup>17</sup> it shows how the older Estonians’ descriptions of ‘patriotic’ childhood understand the role of the genders in the education of the nation (and the citizen) and the development of the nation state.<sup>18</sup>

The remembrances about one’s family, parents and close relatives also reveal the features attributed to the Estonian in the former period of Estonian independence (i.e. *Estonian time*). Definitely diligence and strive for self-determination is mentioned (buying one’s own land or house or dreaming about it), also love for education and culture, which is expressed in the newspapers-magazines that are read and in musical activities. Important is love for one’s land (also in the sense of patriotism) and a modest, natural way of life. The biography writers have a clear understanding of the national traits of character and – as they attribute similar traits to their generation – of solid national identity.

## **In conclusion**

Childhood experience is in a central position in the national identity of older Estonians. Home farm or summers in the country, nature, the informal environment of the village and family make up the experiential basis of the national ‘ideal community’. These are real experiences, which in the context of one’s life story are extended more generally to the time and the society and represented as typical. As such, the childhood memories are also pictures of history, representing a collective, group-specific understanding of historical reality.

The childhood and youth memories of older Estonians are also reminiscences of the national independence period preceding the Second World War. The society of one’s childhood in the independent country is depicted as egalitarian, based on mutual solidarity, assistance and respect. The metaphor of a proper nation state in the biographies is the farm. Farm ‘husbandry’ is

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. The outlines of the criticism of feminist representation analysed by Kivimaa (2001: 60–62), the construction of relations between the genders in the ‘fraternal’ nation in Germany see e.g. Küster 2001.

<sup>18</sup> The effect of this conception on the state structure through interaction between generations see e.g. Jõesalu 2002.

regarded as the ideal model of functioning of both the state and private institutions. The Estonian from the *Estonian time* (20s–30s) is in the biographies of the 1990s characterised by diligence and strive for self-determination, love for education and culture. Land and nature are the essential components of national identity for the older Estonians. National identity is intertwined with gender identity, which reveals in the distribution of roles: woman is the keeper of home and morals, man is the defender of national independence.

Memories of childhood and youth in the independent state of the 1920s–1930s were narrated in the national modernisation discourse, which actualised in the atmosphere of patriotic enthusiasm and restitution at the end of the 1980s – beginning of the 1990s. In the social-political development of the 1990s the discourse of the childhood national patriotism of older Estonians remained in the rear position, yet it functioned as the carrier of generation-specific values, on the basis of which the dialogue with the changing society could take place.

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# IV

## **A TIME IGNORED? ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE SOVIET PERIOD IN BIOGRAPHIES OF OLDER ESTONIANS**

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Published:  
Kõresaar, Ene 2001. A Time Ignored?  
About the Role of the Soviet Period in Biographies of Older Estonians.  
*Ethnologia Fennica. Finnish Studies in Ethnology* 29, 45–55.

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**TOWARDS A SOCIAL MEMORY OF WORK.  
POLITICS AND BEING A GOOD TEACHER IN SOVIET  
TEACHERS' LIFE STORIES**

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Published:  
Köresaar, Ene 2004. Towards a social memory of work. Politics and being a good teacher in Soviet teachers' life stories. In Roth, K. (Hg.). *Arbeit im Sozialismus — Arbeit im Postsozialismus. Erkundungen der Arbeitswelt im östlichen Europa*. Münster, Berlin: LIT Verlag (Freiburger Sozialanthropologische Studien, vol. 1) (forthcoming).

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# **TOWARDS A SOCIAL MEMORY OF WORK. POLITICS AND BEING A GOOD TEACHER IN SOVIET TEACHERS' LIFE STORIES**

*We have been pushed to new paths in the flow of time many times and it is not easy to find yourself again. I try to be honest and tell the truth. But did I want to lie when I was standing in front of the classroom and above my head the wings of a big swan were flapping and not only myself but also the class full of children heard the ringing voice of the hundred-year-old swan. The swan saw Estonia as it flew over it, wings whistling in autumn wind, in spring blue; it saw how the new life, the Soviet order made people happier in the land of many poor and few rich people. Did I lie? [---] It seems that you cannot write about life separately from politics. Even a person who is not involved in politics at all, lives in it, because one way or another, life is still politics – [---] nothing is detached from politics.*

(woman, 1929, elementary school teacher; EE610I: 2)

## **Introduction**

In the Soviet Estonia education was subject to extensive ideology as well as centrally planned economy. The working lives of teachers were marked by total control and permanent interventions of the communist party and state organs. In practice, however, there was a degree of freedom achieving of which was predicated upon subtle understanding of what was possible and what was not. On the basis of such an understanding certain adaptational and/or opportunistic strategies were developed in order to follow their best understanding of how to be a good teacher.

In my article I concentrate on how elementary and secondary school (i.e. comprehensive school) teachers in their life stories analyse their work in the Soviet school and their relationships with the state ideology, educational system and centrally planned economy. In my analysis of retrospective self-representations of the former Soviet teachers I am particularly interested in which rules and prescriptions of the state are found to be restrictive or in contrast to teachers' work, which behavioural strategies of creating a space of freedom are mentioned and how they are interpreted. I presume that by interpreting the biographical representations of experiences, conclusions can be made about the practices of the teacher as a 'strategist' and about the habituation of such practices.

## Method

For the purpose of this analysis I have chosen life stories in which teachers describe job-related problems in social context. I primarily concentrate on conflict narratives, which deal with those ideological, political and bureaucratic requirements, prescriptions and incidents that were hindrances for the teachers-biographers in doing their job as a good teacher. I observe how the conflicts were solved and to what degree the teachers showed their own initiative in it. Thereat I pay attention to time perspective in the sense whether there is any kind of dynamics noticeable in the rise of conflict narratives in older teachers' life and career descriptions and whether such dynamics could refer to the habituation of strategies of communicating with the system. For this purpose I also use the perspective of two or three generations to the extent allowed in the available life stories.

Analysing these narratives, one has to take into consideration the complexity of time structures, which is characteristic of this form of narrative, and which could be called *biographical syncretism*. It means that in the life story the individual, social and historical time (cf. Eriksen 1994, Lehmann 1983: 13–17) as well as the past, the present and the future are reflected in mutual interaction. It applies to the levels of experience, reminiscence and interpretation.<sup>1</sup> From the aspect of the individual the past, present and future reality are combined in his/her life story (cf. Jaago 2001a), likewise in the analysis of life story different times and contexts, in which experiences are acquired and recalled, have to be considered simultaneously. One's life story is narrated retrospectively; the experiences of work are integrated in one's general set of experience and knowledge, which serves as a basis for evaluation. Biographical narratives are also connected with the social structure of collective memory and influenced by the general historical context. Finally, the texts are entwined in the semantic environment, which conditions how something is recounted, as well as how these stories are received. The possibility that an event is narrated in some way is dependent on the forms of social discourse. Each narrating process takes place in certain notional conditions, accepted forms of narration and audience effects<sup>2</sup> (Heins 1993: 76).

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<sup>1</sup> About the reminiscence and interpretation level see the model of social memory in Alheit 1989, reference to the same Kõresaar 2001a: 49–53.

<sup>2</sup> In this context T. Jaago has emphasised the function of the heritage group: the emergence of tradition is directly dependent on the existence of the heritage group (the receiver) and it shaped according to its needs (Jaago 2001b).

## **Sources: Life stories written by teachers in 1989–2001**

This analysis has stemmed out of my Doctorate project, which deals with the depiction of the state and nationality in the life stories, written by older Estonians in the 1990s. Therefore this report mainly analyses the life stories of teachers born in the 1920s, sent to the Cultural Historical Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum in response to the appeals of the Association for Estonian Life Histories in 1989–2001.<sup>3</sup> The largest ones<sup>4</sup> ‘Do you remember your life story? Estonian life stories’ (1989), ‘The fate of me and my kin in the labyrinths of history’ (1997), ‘The 20<sup>th</sup> century’s life stories’ (1998), ‘My life in the Estonian SSR and the Republic of Estonia’ (2000) concentrated on the relations of the individual, society and history, but particularly on memories of revolutionary times, because ‘this could include for future generations the experience of complicated times in Estonia’ (from the appeal ‘Estonian Life stories’). Each appeal also involved general instructions how to write a biography: ‘What is important is the author’s childhood, home, era, setting, political party membership, current situation in the writer’s life. Priority should be given to events that have had an impact on the writer’s fate and life.’ (ERE I: 7) Thus the biographers were given general outlines that could be adjusted and interpreted at one’s discretion. In 1998 teachers’ life stories were collected in the framework of the project ‘The Life Stories of the Teachers of the Baltic States’ that concentrated particularly on the life and work of teachers. The project itself was stillborn but in reply to the appeal some twenty teachers sent their life stories to the museum.

The overall proportion of comprehensive school teachers among those who responded to the appeals is generally not very large – about 3% of 1500. In this analysis I rely on 29 life stories written by teachers. Most of them – 20 were born in the 1920s, 4 in the 1930s, 2 in the 1940s and 1 in the 1950s and 60s, respectively. All are qualified teachers – with specialist or university education. The selected life stories had to represent both detailed career biographies and have a connection with the context of time. The scarcity of life stories from younger generations is largely characteristic – people of working age rarely

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<sup>3</sup> The Association for Estonian Life Histories was founded in 1996 in order to coordinate collecting and researching of biographical material in Estonia. Almost every year a life story competition was organised and as a result, selected material was published in respective publications (Annuk 1997; Karusoo 1997; Hinrikus 1999, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Between larger biography contests several smaller collections were organised, on a narrower topic: ‘Women’s life stories’ (1995), ‘Life stories about love, marriage and sexuality’ (1996), ‘My life in 1968’ (2001).

respond to the appeals to write life stories.<sup>5</sup> The majority – 24 – of the authors are women. Women also accounted for the major part of Soviet teachers: in 1970s and 1980s three fourths of teachers with higher education and 100% of those with specialised vocational education were women (Roots, Vöörmann 1987: 77).

Teachers' life stories are characterised by extremely strong professional identity, expressed in long and detailed work and career biographies. They describe different schools and teaching staffs where they have worked, dealing with children, relationships with them and the results of their teaching. At least one chapter of the biography is dedicated to work, but even the whole life story may be in the form of work biography. Often photos of students, school events, copies of letters of honour and thanks are enclosed. The aim is to give an overview of one being a teacher. Being a good teacher is the central topic in teachers' life stories, which is also revealed by the fact that one's supposedly weak sides are analysed through the prism of a good teacher. At the same time teachers' life stories – compared to the life stories of other, especially less educated people – are characterised by strong self-censorship not only in language use but also in the selection of events, circumstances and evaluations that are remembered. Teachers rarely take a standpoint or express their opinion on the society and the processes that took place in it at that time from their working life aspect. Furthermore, many of the teachers' life stories are written in a very laconic form of career description.

### **The concept of a good teacher in the life stories as a dialogue between the past and the present**

The key concept for understanding the self-portraits of teachers is 'being a good teacher', which is the central category in their life stories. Equally important is to see the connections between the past and present experience of teachers, their professional identity and the public discourse at the time of writing, in order to understand why the topic of a good teacher emerges so strongly in the life stories of teachers.

In life stories, being a good teacher is seen as a way of life and a mission, especially in the life stories of older teachers. Many admit that already as a child they dreamt of becoming a teacher. This distinguishes older people from the educators of the younger generation, who rather regard their becoming a teacher as incidental or due to centralised appointment.

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<sup>5</sup> Generally, the appeals to write life stories are most actively responded by people born before the World War II. Among the authors of life stories written in the 1990s those born in 1944–1965 account for the smallest proportion (cf. e.g. Karusoo 1997:9).

A good teacher is characterised in the life stories through such human and professional qualities as honesty and conscience, strictness and exactingness both to oneself and to students. Emphasised are also the responsibility of a good teacher to the student, the ability to teach understanding of life and responsibility in the students. Maintaining discipline and creating a working atmosphere in the classroom is seen as a particular aspect of being a good teacher. An acknowledgement to a good teacher is when his/her students get on well in life, study in universities or become efficient workers. Being a teacher is dedication and contribution of oneself – in other words, a way of life.

*35 working years in schools and summers in pioneer camps were nice regardless of some few unpleasant situations. In my opinion I managed not only to teach young people, but also shape courage of life, humanity, honesty and optimism in them. It is always a great pleasure to meet my former students, to read or hear of them in the press.*

(woman, 1923, teacher of Estonian language and literature; EE963: 3)

*I was a teacher for thirty-six years. I was a teacher, a senior pioneer leader, a headmistress, a head teacher, also a cleaning woman, if necessary, and on a very cold night in the 1978/79 school year, when I feared the water might freeze in the central heating system of the schoolhouse, also a heater. [---] I heated and watched the fire so that it would not get out of the old, long disused stoves, I heated and watched my schoolhouse. In my life lessons and breaks, school years and summer holidays alternated with stable, continuous tension for me, with frequent worries but with as frequent pleasure. This was my life, in which my personal pleasures remained in shadow, pleasures that were not scarce, but which never became as complete as they could have, because of school. Could I have remained indifferent in this life, my school life?*

(woman, 1929, elementary school teacher; EE610I: 2–3)

In the life stories of older teachers, now retired, besides the strong professional identity, a very clear and powerful motif of being a good teacher seems to be closely connected with the transition discourse in Estonian society. Namely, in the 1990s the Soviet school and education system was reevaluated, which involved a discussion of the quality of education and teachers of that time and of their suitability for the ‘new society’. In its nature and logics this discussion was part of the wider discourse in the post-socialist Eastern and Central Europe, in which – according to Péter Niedermüller – the ‘winners’ of the change in the system follow the socialist logics and on the basis of their own onetime historical experiences, individual and group memories they try to fabricate an one and solely acceptable history, to force down any other consciousness (Niedermüller 1997: 256). The ‘winner’ in the change of system was young here, the educated elite, who came into politics at the end of the 1980s-

beginning of the 1990s, whose experience of the Soviet period falls into the time of their studies at school and university. The picture they created of the Soviet school and teachers has had impact on the policy of the reform of comprehensive education. According to their view based on their personal recollections, the Soviet school was a half-military institution, subordinated to total ideology, where teachers as the subjects of the system carry out mental terror and brainwash. Pupils are forbidden any self-initiative and free thought. For example, a member of the parliament born in 1960 writes in his memoirs ‘probably in all decent Estonian secondary schools there was a hidden war going on between the young striving for independence and the more or less loyal teachers. One component of loyalty was the repression of individuality and the authoritative attitude of the teacher towards the student. [---] It all was school slavery, which included continuous mental cruelty. [---] Take for example the continuous nagging about school uniform and other trifles, constantly – not allowed, not allowed, not allowed. [---] in the Soviet reality the school cap was more like a sign that a person here is not a real person yet...’ (Vahtre 1999: 13, 18)

The shortcomings the teachers of the 1990s were accused of were that the teachers’ education was outdated and insufficient for the current time, their thinking was petrified, so that they could not manage with the main task of the teachers of the ‘new age’ – ‘to educate their future financial supporters to be successful’ (Tarand 1997). Teachers are first and foremost old (according to critics, ‘Estonian schools have become real social welfare institutions for the ones who work in them.’ (Ibid)), and, having taught according to the programmes and mentality of the Soviet time, they do not fit in the new European educational system.

Criticism towards the school and teachers became particularly intense in the Estonian press in May 1997, after the teachers had threatened with a strike because the promised pay rise was not received, and it lasted for about two years. So, the period of criticism overlaps three relevant appeals for life stories,<sup>6</sup> and it is also reflected in the teachers’ life stories that were contributed in answer to those appeals. Especially retired or elderly, still working teachers react painfully in their life stories to the ridicule and downgrading of their work. One of their aims is to show that also in the Soviet time people worked well and with all heart.

*... unfortunately the time, when despite any efforts it is not possible to love school, is not far. And it is better to leave before the abuse often directed to old teachers in the press, is not yet directed personally to you. [---] As I know teachers and their work best, I would like to say something else that is on my heart. Although teachers are severely criticised, their job still is*

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<sup>6</sup> ‘My Life of Myself and My Close Ones in the Labyrinths of History’ 1997, ‘Teachers’ Life Stories’ 1998, and ‘Life stories of the Century’ 1998.

*a very respectable one. Of course, there are all kinds of people among teachers, but the majority of them do everything to grow our youth into fine efficient people.*

(woman, 1938, teacher of German language; ENSV121: 11, 19)

## **The relationship between the teacher's job and the 'system' in conflict narratives**

Now let us see how the older teachers in their life stories describe the teaching job in the Soviet system of education, in which education was associated with ideological training. I focus on narratives that treat situations, in which the requirements and prescriptions of the system conflicted with the teacher's best (professional) discretion.

Three areas can be distinguished according to how teachers classify their conflict experiences with the system:

Firstly, teacher and politics, meaning the teacher's job in the ideological education of students in the classroom, in pioneer and young communist organisation, the relationship of the teacher with political mass organisations, prescriptions to the ethics of teachers etc.

Secondly, teacher and the centrally planned economy, i.e. the responsibility of the teacher for the fulfilment of plans of academic progress, teaching and education.

Thirdly, the teacher's social tasks at school or so-called extra-curricular activities. Students' spare time was organised to the very detail during the Soviet years. There had to be hobby groups at school – drama, sports, dance, young naturalist groups etc. In the 1960s–1970s for this purpose separate institutions like pioneer houses, houses for young technicians and naturalists etc. were founded. These took over part of the schools' and teachers' functions in organising children's spare time. Besides, the subdivisions of different 'public organisations' – the Red Cross, the firemen's organisation – had to operate in schools and teachers were responsible for the work of these, too. In summers part of the teachers worked in pioneer or students' labour camps. Outside the school teachers were employed as agitators during election campaigns and such duties were compulsory. In the 1940s–1950s they also had to work collecting signatures for government bond documents, carry through official enumeration of domestic animals in rural areas, and provide ideological training to people in the neighbourhood, for instance by organising political groups. The experimental school reform of Khrushchev that lasted for a short time in 1959–1965 and that involved combining secondary education with vocational training, involved for teachers (and also students) the duty to do seasonal physical work in agricultural enterprises in addition to other



supplementary work. This situation actually lasted until the end of the 1980s. It meant enormous workload for the teachers.

The areas that I pointed out here are definitely interrelated, one proceeding from the another. I discern them analytically to show which conflicts are revealed in what way and how the differences are disclosed in time perspective when different working periods are reminisced. While teachers' work and duties cover a wide range, I concentrate only on the most evident problems.

### **Conflict narratives of the end of 1940s – 1950s**

Most of the teachers born in the 1920s started their work in the second half of the 1940s. By the beginning of 1945 most schools were opened and Soviet textbooks published. Soviet occupation authorities arranged mass teacher retraining schemes and brought in teachers from other areas of the Soviet Union. Large-scale ideological training courses were organised. Gradually young teachers who had been trained according to Soviet programmes were designated to the posts.

Most conflict narratives in the older teachers' life stories handle just the late 40s and the 50s, when several extensive political actions took place as well as the second deportation. The first working years form the time when teachers not only learn to do their job but also learn to fit in with the ideological framework in which they have to work. Differently from the conflict narratives of other periods when the generator of the conflict – the system or its representative – is ridiculed or despised, narratives from the end of the 1940s – 1950s express fear, helplessness, incomprehension, and relief when one managed to pull through a complicated situation. In the teachers' stories the so-called 'motif of postponed punishment' reveals – the border between the allowed and the forbidden is not known yet, the rules are not established and that is why operating strategies cannot be worked out. According to Baltic historians (about the cultural elite of that time, but it can be broadened to the whole society): 'Sometimes the supreme power tolerated passivity, sometimes not. [---] Later it can be said that collaboration was not safer than passivity, because collaborationists could unawares make ideological mistakes and they could be accused of undermining activities. Criticism was given at random and the punishment could be merely a public reprimand, degradation from the position or a house arrest, but also seizure, torture during interrogation and deportation.' (Misiunas, Taagepera 1997: 117)

## Teacher's job and the ideological framework

The stories about this period reveal that teachers did not know how to act. They mention several different conflicts that could be drawn around some main problems. One of the problems is the inability to combine ideological education with the main subject and this is particularly noticeable in the life stories of history teachers or those who had to teach history.

*We were quite embarrassed at school. The students asked 'Why?' We, teachers, also asked 'Why?' We asked no one. There were difficulties with teaching the history of the CPSU. Not always could we elicit the educational moment. In all other subjects we also had to write down the educational point in the lesson plans and this had to be done in the light of Marxism-Leninism. We had to read much literature related to this. Also we had to subscribe to the works of Stalin and Lenin and pay for these from our salary.*

(woman, 1921, teacher of history, Estonian and German language;  
EE945: 35)

This involves a conflict between the reality and ideological explanation patterns that were required from the teacher. Particular emphasis is laid on the disagreement in the experience of independent Estonia, deportation and collectivisation, and the official explanation and justification to these.

*When I took part in the first teachers' meeting I became aware that people and especially teachers must not tell the truth. One of the teachers at Martna school at that time spoke to the participants that the teacher has to be dishonest. We have to speak that collective farms brought us happiness, 'Where is this happiness?' the teacher asked. Our children see and witness how poorly collective farmers live, how low their income is. The same moment the director of the department of education took the floor and announced that the teacher who had just spoken had no place in the Soviet school. The teacher was dismissed the same day.*

(woman, 1934, teacher of geography and music, pioneer leader;  
EE1075: 10)

Conflict is also sensed in one's own position between the official ideology and the students. The work stories of the 1950s especially point out one's responsibility to students, concern about their welfare and future. They refer to such situations in which they have (or should have) shifted between the 'actual history' and 'fake history' or defend students against (possible or actual) political sanctions.

*I heard about a sadder incident some years later, after I had come back with my family from Viljandi, where we worked 1948–1950. Namely, the 7<sup>th</sup> class programme included Fadeyev's *The Young Guards*. Boys read about the activities of the young people from Krasnodar in the rear of the Fascists. We discussed and came to the conclusion that they really were well organised and courageous spreading leaflets and hoisting flags. The same young men had set up a conspiratorial organisation in Tartu and spread leaflets against Communist occupation. Of course, the young people were caught by NKVD, court proceedings followed and several were sentenced into prison. How did I not foresee it?*

(woman, 1929, teacher of Estonian language and literature; EE963: 24)

Generally teachers' life stories do not deal with opposite relationships with students, in which the teacher would suffer because of students-informers or should be careful because of them – it is an issue in the press at the end of the 1980s and 1990s. Still there are examples of cases where it was in the power of the students to inform on an ideologically mistaken teacher and now in the pages of the life story the teacher has a chance to thank them for their support and keeping silent:

*And now of a situation I am scared to write down even now. Probably the fear is due to the fact that through all the Russian time I was afraid it would be disclosed. I was young and 'stupidly bold'. Once in the VII form singing class pupils started to scold the Russian rule. I tried to remain neutral. Yet I had an urge to make the children know that I shared their views. I invited them to my room to listen to music over the radio. 'Accidentally' I tuned to the programme of the Voice of America. We listened eagerly. I think now what could have happened if some student had been an informer. Stalin did not die until a few months later and I would have got a sentence for 10 years in Siberia for sure. Thank you, dear children (now over 50 already) that you were silent.*

(woman, 1934, teacher of geography and music, pioneer leader; EE1075: 9)

Presumably the absence of the student-informer type in the life stories of teachers is directly connected with the idea of being a good teacher, which in association with students focuses rather on positive than negative aspects – besides, of course it is possible that none of these teachers had a related experience.

Teachers generally do not write how to manage in school in a society with changing rules and under continuous terror. Still some lines in smaller passages and single sentences say what was done or which strategies were acquired for further activities. 'Holding your tongue', taking a neutral position and shifting are the implied methods. Although teachers generally avoid describing their

school as a 'red' institution with strict discipline, in some stories that deal with the 1940s–1950s, rigorous order and strict fulfillment of plan is shown as a way to avoid possible repression. For example, a history teacher born in 1928, later a head teacher and headmistress writes about her school at the beginning of the 1950s, when the society was in political action against so-called bourgeois nationalists:

*At the beginning of the 1950s everywhere was strict order. Educated people were watched closely. Accordingly, discipline was quite strict at school. Students walked in the corridors in pairs, in the morning girls curtsied. There was no loud noise or screaming in the schoolhouse. The head teacher demandingly checked how syllabuses were followed. You were allowed to be behind or ahead of schedule by a couple of lessons only. Several staff meetings were dedicated to this topic. The state plan was to be fulfilled punctually.*

(woman, 1928, history teacher, head teacher, headmistress of school;  
EE949: 27)

### **Teacher as an agitator**

In the second half of the 1940s and 1950s the older teachers also gained their first experiences in the so-called socially useful tasks outside the school. In the analysed life stories experiences of being a canvasser of public orders and an organiser of compulsory enumeration of animals are presented as vivid conflict narratives. In these the teacher is in a helpless and powerless position between the frightened and poor village people and the pressure from the authorities (which could be embodied by the gunmen who accompanied the agitator). These conflict narratives are characterised by the emotions of shame, helplessness and compassion and no advantageous solutions are seen for the teacher-narrator.

*... the fifties were awful, no one trusted anyone. We had to go around in villages and beg for signatures for government bonds. People had just joined the collective farms and country people had practically no money. Now an unexpected visitor came to their homes, introduced herself and presented her insistent demand.*

*People were afraid, indignant and malicious. The village council had given us plans to fulfil. We, the commissioners of bonds, were between two fires. If we did not perform our duties, we were threatened with punishment. But the country people were in bad trouble. [---] We ourselves had to give our signatures that we agree to lend the government money in the sum of one month's salary.*

(woman, 1928, teacher of Russian language; EE603: 27)

As a rule, the extra-curricular work, which was connected with organising children's spare time activities, is not remembered in the form of a conflict narrative, even if it was related to ideological education. Intensive work with children, guiding and educating belongs to the concept of a good teacher. And the role that the school had in regulating this work is later interpreted as 'school traditions' – something that the teachers are proud of.

### **Conflict narratives of the 1960s–1980s**

Since 1944 each year there had been great social changes. From mid-1950s it can be said that the situation became normal in the sense that the social norms remained severe, but did not change any more, so one was able to adapt to them. The changed situation is directly expressed in teachers' life stories as well. Quoting a paragraph from the life story of a teacher, born in 1928:

*Step by step we became bolder and more open. During breaks we talked about politics, stupidities that were going on in our country, teachers' workload.*

(woman, 1928, teacher of Russian language; EE603: 29)

From the mid-1960s, after Khrushchev's experimental educational reforms Soviet Estonian education system became stable and school life, too. Rules were established, and this made it possible to adapt to them quickly. For instance, a literature teacher born in 1927, who moved to another school at the beginning of the 1960s, writes about her first years in the new school:

*within one year it was clear what must be done, what may be done and what may be omitted.*

(woman, 1927, teacher of Estonian language and literature;  
ENSV266: 65)

A considerable change in recollection patterns is revealed in the older teachers' life stories, which describe their job in the 1960s–1980s.

Firstly, there are fewer conflict narratives, in which teachers distinctly express the opposition of the system's requirements and good teaching.

Secondly, in the existing conflict narratives the teacher has a solution to the problem, i.e. he/she may manipulate with the system, he/she foresees the possible solutions. In this sense also the emotional gradation of conflict narratives has changed – helplessness and fear is exchanged by ridiculing or contempt, or indifference and neutrality.

Thirdly, the conflict narratives are not made up on the basis of single experiences, but rather summarize a number of similar experiences the teacher had while working in a specific school or during the whole period. Similarly, the conflict narratives may not be connected personally with the teacher, but with the whole school or educational system. The teacher him/herself is involved in the conflict because the system's requirements disagree with his/her understanding of good work.

### **Plan and inspection**

In the work life stories of the 1960s–1980s, both those of older and younger teachers, the pervading conflict is about performing the planned tasks and inspection. There were socialist competitions between schools<sup>7</sup> and because of that, especially in the 1970s the rate of academic progress (also called 'fat percentage' in teachers' life stories) became extremely important. Several all-Union programs, as a result of which the students' academic progress had to increase, were carried through. For teachers it meant higher workload – tutoring and revising, endless meetings, pressure on behalf of the school administration, who in their turn felt the pressure from the department of education. The school and teachers were scolded if the rate of progress was low and students' examination results were poor. School administration's pressure on teachers varied depending on the school and the headmaster, and on how far they went with this 'percentage mania', like the teachers call it in their life stories.

#### **Conflict:**

*Once a whole brigade came from the department of education to study why the progress rate in the school is only slightly over 80%. In many schools it was nearly 95% already. In Russia at that time the Lipetski programme was introduced, with which the progress rate had to grow to nearly 100%. The class journal was taken and analysed, as a result we were reprimanded because the half-term marks were too bad. I was*

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<sup>7</sup> The figures according to which the level of schools was assessed in socialist competition included academic progress, but also marks for conduct, number of late-comers and absentees, number of pioneers and young communists, drill contests and pioneer scarf inspection results, results of students at sports competitions etc. On the basis of these results the ranking lists of the city, county and the republic were compiled. Smaller-scale socialist competitions were conducted in schools, where classes competed in academic progress, collecting waste paper etc. The primary figure in socialist competition was the percentage of academic performance, which was under particular attention.

*called a public enemy, because I had given a student a two as the final mark in German, while the average was 2.6.*

(woman, 1931, teacher of German language, mathematics and Estonian; EE974: 5)

Conclusion:

*The percentage of academic progress, so-called fat percentage, was constantly under consideration. The director of the department of education said a number and each respectable headmaster regulated it as it was. [---] Many times people from the department of education came to check and scold us. We made our conclusions and learnt to defend ourselves.*

(man, 1929, headmaster; EE972: 5–6)

Example:

*This was my official workload, but the actual load was much higher. Namely during my first working years [1976–1979] there was the requirement of 100% progress. The principle was that there are no bad pupils, there are bad teachers only. This meant that after scheduled classes one had to spend hours dealing with pupils with lower performance. You had to teach them so long that they at least had the impression that they knew the subject. Beside every ‘two’ in the class journal there had to be a positive mark. Before the end of the half term there was a meeting for teachers and administration, where it was decided to which student and in which subject ‘twos’ will be given. In the whole school there could be 2–3 students with ‘twos’, not more (at that time in Varstu there were slightly fewer than 300 students). [---] [Next schoolyear] The percentage mania continued, still there were meetings, where the number of ‘twos’ were decided. The final examinations of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> year were like a farce: members of the examination committee walked around and helped the weaker students write their essays. Afterwards, when the essays were corrected, blue pens were more used than the red ones, because it would have been a major crime if the student had failed in the exam.*

(woman, 1948, teacher of Estonian language and literature; ENSV100: 22, 24)

The ‘regulation’ of academic progress, like a headmaster in the above quote bureaucratically calls it, was done in different ways. In teachers’ life stories the conflict appears because of the mechanical regulation of academic progress, which did not coincide with the teachers’ view of objective evaluation: the average was rounded to a higher mark, pupils were prompted at the examination

and mistakes were corrected before the assessment of examination papers. Some teachers also emphasise that the syllabuses were intensive, ideological beyond power and that the inspectors inflexibly monitored how they were followed. The older teachers do not speak about how to manage with the inspectors and prevent supposed reproach to their work. These issues are treated by younger teachers, and in one case also in a headmaster's biography.

According to a headmaster:

*Never – in any case you could leave a paper unfilled. Papers had to be in order and if they were in order, everything was all right.*

(man, 1929, headmaster; EE972: 5)

This method is specified by a young pioneer leader and music teacher, who went to work at school at the end of the 1970s, and who had to study useful knacks from her older and more experienced colleagues:

*A wise teacher was one who always used the same pen for filling in the class journal, then it was possible to add what was missing.*

(woman, 1958, music teacher, pioneer leader; ENSV180: 15)

A middle-aged teacher who sent her first teacher's biography to the museum, regards her a good teacher in comparison with the general practice which she describes as follows:

*During my working years I have seen tens, maybe hundreds of 'whipped-up' lessons of great and acknowledged teachers, presented as if they were routine lessons. Afterwards it could be heard from the students that the lesson had been rehearsed 3–4, sometimes even 8 times. This was a real Soviet 'pokazuhha'.*

(woman, 1940s; EE970: 10–11)

The generation differences that arise in reminiscences of the last Soviet decades from the aspect of working life are connected with the length of employment and experiences. In the life stories of older teachers the main conflict narratives are from the 1940s–1950s, the following years are already remembered as a stable period that was free of fear, when the scope of freedom was relatively wide and the rules were clear. Manipulating the latter had become a so-called habituated routine knowledge that is usually not handled in life stories (cf. Niedermüller 1988, Frykman 1990). On the other hand, this knowledge may not correspond to today's understanding of good work and therefore it has been selected out of the biography, proceeding from the concept of 'good teacher'. The main conflict experiences of younger teachers, however, belong to the later period (presumably they as younger colleagues were inspected more frequently)



and that is why they are remembered more clearly. In addition, the ‘Soviet past’ has in changed circumstances acquired an exotic nuance, so that the spicy events from the past are willingly recalled.<sup>8</sup>

### **Teacher’s job and the ideological framework**

Substantial adjustment of teaching with the prescribed ideological requirements as conflict narratives are clearly in the shadow of planning and inspection problems in older teachers’ life stories concerning the 1960s–1980s. The problem of ideological training is remembered in connection with the tasks of class teachers and pioneer leaders, in which it was required. In these narratives two tendencies of behaviour and attitude are revealed.

Firstly, ideological prescriptions were filled with ‘humane substance’, which means that practical content of general interest is placed under an ideological-patriotic title.

*[At the beginning of the 1980s] I had difficulties with class teacher’s lessons. There were 36 pupils in the class, half of them boys and half of them overgrown. In the class teacher’s lesson I had to educate them ideologically, it has always been unpleasant for me and laughable for pubertal children. How to cope with a 45-minute lesson so that it was like a lesson? I went to the director of the cinema and asked for help. He agreed to show educational films at agreed times. The cinema was opposite the schoolhouse. The lesson passed quickly and there were no discipline problems.*

(woman, 1928, teacher of Russian language; EE603: 40)

Secondly, if requirements inevitably had to be followed – they were performed, but announced ridiculous and unreasonable.<sup>9</sup>

*We had to talk to children of things that were really funny. I remember that once, introducing a stupid circular to the pioneers we had to take*

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<sup>8</sup> Similar difference between generations is also discernible in interview materials. The fieldwork material of an ethnology student who interviewed the teachers of the comprehensive schools of Tartu in 2002 for the final thesis, ‘Being a teacher in Tartu in 1980s’ shows for example, that the older teachers remember the 1980s as ‘free’ time, when they could do anything under the cover of carefully executed working plans, the younger ones remember inspectors sitting continuously in the classroom. Also, the younger teachers clearly remembered vivid events from the school life of the 1980s that the older colleagues did not find worth mentioning at all.

<sup>9</sup> Here in the life stories two simultaneous practices are revealed – on the one hand, the narrative practice, in which former ideological requirements are ridiculed, and on the other hand, the experiential behavioral practice, of which the life stories tell.

*turns with the pioneer leader to go out and laugh behind the door. In many cases I replaced the pioneer leader. We did work which was far from politics. It is such pleasure to pass a garden by the castle ruins, where is a tall birch we planted with pioneers 35 years ago.*

(woman, 1934, geography and music teacher, pioneer leader;  
EE1075: 14)

### **What is not remembered in teachers' life stories as conflicts?**

It is also significant to point out what the teachers do not remember as conflict in their work biographies. For example, differently from the school criticism of the 1990s, work with pioneers is not recalled as conflict. On the contrary, joint activities, pioneer camps and outings, competitions between political agitation brigades and pioneer groups are remembered as the brighter sides of their working years and they sympathise with children whose parents did not allow them to join the pioneer organisation. Intensive activities with pioneers have also offered especially country teachers a chance to lead a more active life, because in rural areas the possibilities of spending spare time were more limited than in town (Hion et. al 1988). Outings and pioneer camps provide in teachers' life stories similar travel biographies like tourist excursions in other Estonians' life stories (cf. Kõresaar 2001b).

Discipline in schools might be another example. In the 1970s, after the Prague spring, control over students in schools became stricter, extending to such details as the length of hair and clothes. Strict discipline, regulating the student's life and personality to every detail, which was one of the objects of school criticism in the 1990s, does not, however, account for conflict narratives in (older) teachers' life stories. The teachers seem to consider on the one hand, the dominating criticism in the society at the time of writing, and on the other hand they see its advantages over the drastic decline of the teachers' prestige in today's school.

*Sometimes when we are together with former colleagues and recall the years at school, we tend to wonder how we would manage in today's school, how we would get used to the freedom that is given to students. I am sure the students-teachers today (and sometimes we too) consider it downright stupidity how consistently we insisted on following the school rules: wearing the school uniform and cap, haircut, school parties etc. these were not rare cases when we 'measured' the length of the boys' hair in the headmaster's office (it was not to fall on the collar), we demanded young girls to clean their lips and brows of make-up. There were times, when the*

*so-called running coats (longer coats with shoulder straps and shining buttons) were in fashion. It was boring to fight against wearing such coats, but we could not give up the requirement of wearing the uniform. I remember heated discussions at the staff meeting, when someone had been spotted smoking or being at a late night dance-party. We also invited the parents of the violators of school rules to the meeting. It happened that some had to leave the school. And even today I do not think that the school violated any human rights!*

(man, 1925?, teacher of literature, head teacher; EE1040: 23–24)

## Summary

In the work biographies of older Estonian teachers broadly two periods and tendencies may be distinguished on the basis of stories that focus on the opposition between the good teacher and the prescriptions of the system.

Firstly, in the stories describing the working life at the end of the 1940s and in the 1950s, the conflict narratives are mostly made up of the disagreement between ideological rules and reality and the role of agitator that was forced upon teachers. In the stories helplessness and fear are expressed, there is no solution to the conflicts. The boundary between what is allowed and what is forbidden is unknown and therefore operating strategies are difficult to work out. References are made to the acquisition of such strategies as being silent, taking a neutral standpoint and shifting.

In the descriptions of working in the 1960s–1980s a change in the recollection patterns becomes evident. There are fewer conflict narratives, mostly the state planning of academic progress and inspection is emphasized. Differently from the previous period, the topic of manipulating the system is added. In this sense also the emotional shading of the conflict narratives has changed – helplessness and fear are replaced by indifference and neutrality, ridiculing and contempt. We may say that to a certain degree teachers feel that they are in control of matters and are tacitly aware of the limits of what is allowed and what is not. The dominating strategies that can be elicited from the older teachers' life stories and from the comparison in generation perspective, are 'life on the paper', 'showiness without substance' and giving a 'humane' content to the ideological form.

In overall patterns the social memory of work of older teachers coincide with the reminiscing patterns of the time experience of their peers. In the life stories of older Estonians the life events that occurred during the first decades of the Soviet time (the Stalinist period) are described in the context of biographical and collective trajectories, to use terms of the analysis of narration proposed by Fritz Schütze (1984). Biographical trajectory represents the process, in which an

individual is overwhelmed by outside forces that lead to the successive loss of control over his/her life. In addition there are also collective trajectories that are characterized by the breakdown of social relationships, a collapse of habitual social reality. Individuals are described as being forced to undertake certain activities against their will, and in this context the feeling of pressure and guilt appear. This part of biography is described in the context of collective experience and related to the collective tradition, i.e. collective knowledge is used in life story as a substitute story.

Life in the Soviet time since 1960s is reported in a more personalized way. Using Schütze's terms – the experiences of the mature Soviet society are narrated in the context of biographical action schemes which represent intentional principles for planned social action with regard to one's own life course. In this particular context the subject in the life stories no longer has only one role as a representative of the nation, the focus is on the individual rather than on the collective. Accordingly more than 30 years of active life is described in less detail and length than life in the 1920s-mid 1950s and the 1990s. Usually evaluating this period is also avoided in life stories. As noted by Peter Niedermüller (1997), probably the *Ausgrabung* strategy (A. Giddens) of cleaning post-socialist history of 'the communist garbage' has been present in life stories written in the 1990s like it was in the public discourse. Within this discourse a negative evaluation of the communist period and living (and work) experience of that period was given. However, an individual cannot give a totally negative evaluation to his/her whole life. Therefore, the individuals tend to avoid evaluations in their life stories. (Kõresaar 2002)

There were not enough life stories of the teachers of younger generations to draw generalizations on them. Yet differences arising from time and work experiences were disclosed, allowing to speak of different social memories on the basis of work narratives. A more exhaustive analysis of these differences will have to remain in the scope of interest of ethnologists-biography researchers in future as well.

*Translated by Ann Kuslap*

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- ENSV – Written life stories from the collection contest 'My Life in the ESSR and in the Estonian Republic' in 2000–2001 (represented by the author's gender, profession, time of birth and manuscript registration number).

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# VI

## PRIVATE AND PUBLIC, INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE IN LINDA'S LIFE STORY

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Published:

Kõresaar, Ene 2004. Private and Public, Individual and Collective  
in Linda's Life Story. In Kirss, T., Kõresaar, E. & Lauristin, M. (eds.).

*She Who Remembers, Survives.*

*Interpreting Estonian Women's Post-Soviet Life Stories.*

Tartu: Tartu University Press, 89–111.

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# APPENDIX I

## LINDA'S STORY

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Published:  
Linda's Story. In Kirss, T., Kõresaar, E. & Lauristin, M. (eds.).  
*She Who Remembers, Survives.*  
*Interpreting Estonian Women's Post-Soviet Life Stories.*  
Tartu: Tartu University Press, 242–261.

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# **APPENDIX II**

## **SOURCES AND FULL BIBLIOGRAPHY**

# SOURCES AND FULL BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- ENSV – Written life stories from the collection contest 'My Life in the ESSR and in the Estonian Republic' in 2000–2001 (represented by the author's gender, profession, time of birth and manuscript registration number).
- KM EKLA f.350 – Collection of life stories in the Cultural Historical Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum (contains also EE and ENSV).
- Recorded biographical interviews conducted in 1998 (the manuscript archives of the Chair of Ethnology, University of Tartu. Informants are represented by their gender, profession(s), time and place of birth).

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# PUBLICATIONS ON MEMORY AND LIFE STORIES

## Articles

1. Vital Things: Things in Biographies, Biographies in Things. *Pro Ethnologia* 6, 1998, 29–40.
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# PUBLIKATSIOONID MÄLU JA ELULUGUDE UURIMISE ALALT

## Artiklid

1. Vital Things: Things in Biographies, Biographies in Things. *Pro Ethnologia* 6, 1998, 29–40.
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