

# **DOMESTICATING THE SOVIET REGIME: AUTOBIOGRAPHIC EXPERIENCES OF THE “POST-WAR” GENERATION IN ESTONIA**

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## Abstract

It is a study of the autobiographical accounts of the Estonian “post-war”/“thaw” generation (born in 1940-1959), with a focus on the possible tension of the “ordinary” people between the simultaneous domestication and resistance of the Soviet regime. The study falls into the category of generational research, although it does not assume the presence of any “common generational experience” per se. Argumentation is based on fifty published and archival autobiographies collected by the Estonian Literary Museum and the Estonian National Museum.

The author argues that the paradigms of “everyday resistance” and “double-mindedness” do not reflect well their life experience of people during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era as reflected in their autobiographies written in the 1990s. The writers of life histories reflect much more of the “domestication” of the regime than any conscious “resistance” to it. Nevertheless, the author also argues that the attitude of the “ordinary” people towards the Communist regime and their personal ideological choices varied greatly and there seems to be no meaningful way for establishing a neither a causal generational relationship nor a class- or education-based generalisations about the people’s mentality during the Khrushchev’ and Brezhnev’s era.

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## Introduction

Our parents compared the Soviet regime with the first Estonian Republic and with the German regime; we can compare the Estonian SSR with the present Estonian Republic. Our generation has been called in many ways happy, at least that we have lived in interesting times. But is it really happiness if we simultaneously inhabit our parents' nostalgia, socialist realism and contemporary reality?<sup>1</sup>

One cannot choose the time of being born. I think, my times have been quite fine. I have not had to bear with any war, but I have witnessed the interesting period of regaining the [Estonian] independence. Personal life is not very dependent of the colours of the flag and of the people sitting on the Dome Hill [Parliament]. But, of course I wish that I did not have to buy any new flags and that the important gentlemen still sat on the Dome Hill and not in Kremlin.<sup>2</sup>

I have discussed with the colleagues of my age at work how much did we hear about the past and the real thoughts at home as children. Our parents have been mostly silent. [...] Very many people of my age belong to the generation of losers: we lack the knowledge of foreign languages and valuable professional skills. What comes next depends only on us: either we adapt or not.<sup>3</sup>

In the thesis, I will study the autobiographical accounts of the Estonian “post-war”/”thaw” generation (born in 1940-1959), with a focus on the possible tension of the “ordinary people” between the simultaneous domestication and resistance of the Soviet regime. I consider the experiences of the generation during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras as reflected in the life stories of the people themselves. The study falls into the category of generational research, although it does not assume the presence of any “common generational experience” per se.

My study was initially motivated by the sense that the “post-war” generation was part of two distinct but increasingly fused mentalities. As subjects of Soviet educational, social and political practices they internalised the “Soviet” values and parlance, possessing some belief in the positive future of life under the Soviet regime. In the 1960s and 1970s, few people seem to have believed in the possibility of the collapse of the vast Soviet empire that had changed local socio-cultural realities through accelerated industrialisation and

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<sup>1</sup> Harald (1954), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1334, 1. In the thesis, I will refer to the quotations from the original life stories by the first name and the year of birth of the author. The translations are done by the author of the thesis if not indicated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> Helja (1947), in *Eesti rahva elulood* (Life stories of Estonian people), vol. 3, *Elu Eesti ENSV-s* (Life in the ESSR), ed. Rutt Hinrikus (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2003), 325.

<sup>3</sup> Tiina (1958), in *Eesti rahva elulood* vol. 3, 398.

immigration policies for good.<sup>4</sup> However, Estonian family traditions, small circles of friends and increasing contacts with the West helped people to retain a distinct Estonian, rather “Western” identity, that was further expressed in the rise of Estonian nationalism.<sup>5</sup> In general, I assumed that the beliefs, values and consciousness of the “post-war” generation would form a fascinating interplay of repressed memories, family traditions, the new rise of nationalism and Soviet schooling. Their parents’ “fear of living” of the 1940s was replaced by hopes to establish some kind of logic and normalcy in one’s life.

Current historical scholarship in Estonia is closely related to building a (politicised) national narrative, in which the Soviet era is represented rather flatly as the “time of occupation” without any socio-cultural diversities. Up to now, most students of the autobiographies have also focused on the “suppressed memories” of the late Stalinist repressions, deportations and diaspora experiences of émigrés. Research of the post-Stalinist time has mainly dealt with the working life and some aspects of everyday routines, such as the deficit of goods.<sup>6</sup> I wish to introduce new aspects to historical accounts and question the current representation of Soviet times in historical scholarship. I also wish to see, how are the autobiographers influenced by the present Estonian nationalist “memory culture.”

There are two notions that conceptualise to a certain extent the generational experience and the ideological dilemmas of the “thaw” generation. In terms of the relations between the regime and the people, some Estonian scholars (e.g., Rein Ruutsoo) have argued that the post-Stalinist advancement of Estonian culture, the establishment of some quasi-civic organisations, the revival of massive national song festival, (but also a

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<sup>4</sup> Romuald Misiunas, and Rein Taagepera, *The Baltic States: Years of Dependence, 1940-1990* (London: C. Hurst, 1993), 215-216; 353.

<sup>5</sup> Hank Johnston and David Snow, “Subcultures and Emergence of the Estonian Nationalist Opposition 1945-1990,” *Sociological Perspectives* 41, (1998): 477.

<sup>6</sup> Based on: Rutt Hinrikus, “Eesti elulugude kogu ja selle uurimise perspektiiv” (The collection of Estonian life stories and their research perspectives), in *Võim ja kultuur* (Power and culture), ed. Arvo Krikmann and Sirje Olesk (Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, 2003), 171-214. Thorough literature overview will be provided in the next chapter. Here and afterwards the translation of the titles is from Estonian language to English are done by the author of the thesis, if not indicated otherwise.

“cunning” tolerance towards party careers for the sake of the “Estonian cause”) represent a new form of “everyday resistance/dissent” within the Soviet regime.<sup>7</sup> In terms of the mentality of people, Aili Aareleid-Tart has claimed that the repressions and general social rupture was overcome by the development of individual “double-mindedness”: a deep discrepancy between the private (Estonian) and public (Soviet) spheres. The “thaw” generation matured in a liberalised environment and become the “masters of double thinking” for whom the coexistence of conflicting world-views for normal.<sup>8</sup> These two notions derive from the memoirs and interviews of the elite and have been actively coined by the same elite. I do not aim to write an anti-establishment pamphlet, yet it is quite obvious that the ideas like “everyday dissent” and “double mindedness” legitimise the actions of elite both in the past and in the present, and fit well to the nationalist understanding of the Soviet era.<sup>9</sup>

I argue that the paradigms of “everyday resistance” and “double-mindedness” do not reflect well their life experience of the “thaw” generation during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era. In addition to being surprisingly diverse, the stories rather present integral lives that tended more towards “Sovietness” than one would like to admit today in public. Such a discovery is all more sticking considering that the autobiographies have been written down in the 1990s, in the era of cultivating the Estonian nationalist “collective memory” of the past.

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<sup>7</sup> Rein Ruutsoo, “Estonia,” in: *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*, ed. Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 126-128; Tõnu Parming, “Nationalism in Soviet Estonia since 1964,” in: *Nationalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the era of Brezhnev and Kosygin* ed. Georg Simmonds, 116-135 (Detroit: University of Detroit Press, 1977), 119-120.

<sup>8</sup> Aili Aareleid-Tart, “Double Mental Standards in the Baltic Countries – Three Generations,” in *The Baltic Countries under Occupation. Soviet and German Rule 1940-1991*, ed. A. M. Kõll, Acta Universitatis Stockholmensis, Studia Baltica Stockholmiensia, no. 23, 213-226 (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2003), 214. Republished in Aili Aareleid-Tart, *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*, 192-205 (Vaajakoski: Kikimora Publications, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> To my understanding, Aili Aareleid-Tart’s ideas do not correlate with the main nationalist paradigm in all the aspects, however, she has emphasised also herself that her informants were the “Estonian- minded” intellectuals and political elite.

In the thesis, I do not have an ambition to become involved in the methodological debates on the (quite notorious) impact of post-modernism on the historical scholarship, I approach autobiographies as oriented towards the “subjective truth” about peoples lived lives, I assume that the majority of “ordinary” people aim to write about their life how they think “it really was.”<sup>10</sup>

I wish to give voice to “ordinary” people in speaking about the everyday dilemmas during the post-Stalinist period based on the published and archival autobiographies collected by the Estonian Literary Museum and the Estonian National Museum. In a sense, I used the principle of random selection: in my thesis I use around fifty life stories of the generation that give consideration to the matters of mentality and the personal views on the Soviet ideology: there are a few members of elite, a few bitter alienated person and many “common” men and women.

The first chapter of my study will constitute a methodological and historiographical overview of studying the autobiographies in the post-Soviet context. In the second chapter will present an overview of the alternative concepts of the “post-war” generation and the ways to conceptualise their memories. In the third chapter I will present my own research results with the help of the quotations from the life stories themselves.

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<sup>10</sup> J. P. Roos, “Context, Authenticity, Referentiality, Reflexivity: Back to Basics in Autobiography,” in *Biographical research in Eastern Europe: Altered Lives and Broken Biographies*, ed. Robin Humphrey, Robert Miller, and Elena Zdravomyslova (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), 28-30.



# 1. Autobiography: methodology and historiography

## 1.1. Approaching lived lives: theoretical considerations

The biographical research in Estonia has developed in the last fifteen years on the crossroads of the public readiness for “autobiographic initiatives,” international scholarship and theoretical discussions, and local traditions of folkloristics, ethnology and oral history. Estonian studies are presently characterised by a common interest in the notions of memory, history and historical experience, with the main themes under research being the cultural, social, and political changes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and individual and group adjustments to these changes. Ene Kõresaar has suggested dividing the Estonian autobiographical research into four disciplinary sub-categories.<sup>11</sup> First, from the studies of Estonian folkloristics there has emerged an approach with an aim to research people’s views on social, historical and individual events, opinions and norms related to the past (“oral popular history”).<sup>12</sup> Second, the “ethnological memory research” deals with individual and collective experiences and with their roles in the formation of identity. “Memory-research” is interdisciplinary being mostly influenced by sociology and cultural psychology.<sup>13</sup> The third field of research stems

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<sup>11</sup> Ene Kõresaar, “Eluloolisest käsitlusviisist Eesti kultuuriteadustes” (Biographical methods in Estonian sciences of culture), in *Pärimus ja tõlgendus. Artikleid folkloristika ja etnoloogia meetodite ning uurimispraktika alalt* (Oral popular history and translation. Articles on the methods and practices of folkloristics and ethnology), ed. Tiit Jaago, 61-76 (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> In Estonia, Tiit Jaago has been the most influential scholar studying the family histories and biographies, and their relation to urbanisation, migration, and other social processes in order to find out how the oral traditions (folklore) have changed in relation to the human’s social conditions. It has been called “oral popular history” (in Estonian, *pärimuslik ajalugu*) that fits into the English-speaking tradition of “oral history.” Estonian “oral popular history” research direction is manifested and explained in two anthologies that contain both narrative and historical analyses: Tiit Jaago, ed., *Pärimuslik ajalugu* (Oral popular history) (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2001); Tiit Jaago, ed., *Lives, Histories and Identities. Studies on Oral Histories, Life- and Family Stories*, (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> The question of memory as a factor of culture is widely discussed, on the one hand as a question of social and cultural narrative strategies and codes (“normative orientations”) and, on the other hand, as relationships between the individual and collective, private and public (“experience level” in memory). For example: Ene Kõresaar and Terje Anepaio, ed., *Kultuur ja mälu* (Culture and memory), *Studia Ethnologica Tartuensia*, no. 4 (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2001); Ene Kõresaar and Terje Anepaio, eds, *Mälu kui kultuuritegur. Etnoloogilisi perspektiive* (Memory as a cultural phenomena. Ethnological perspectives). *Studia Ethnologica Tartuensia*, no. 6 (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2003); Ene Kõresaar and Art Leete, ed.,

also from ethnological studies and could be called the “ethnology of everyday life.” It is concerned with the practices and cultural categories of everyday life that structure and give meaning to individual experiences.<sup>14</sup> Fourth, “history of trivialities” asks the questions about social developments through their autobiographical representation. Although quite similar in its research questions to the previous field, its disciplinary foundations lie in sociology and historical studies as it deals with source-criticism in its aim to establish historical facts through studying subjective accounts. The approach asks about the background of contemporary social problems (such as integration) through their historicisation.<sup>15</sup>

It is well noticeable that the borderline between folkloristics, anthropology (ethnology in Estonian tradition), sociology and history has become vague, at least while dealing with the autobiographical and oral sources. By and large, the current study falls into the broad frames of “ethnology of everyday life” and “history of trivialities,” according to Kõresaar’s definitions. I am concerned with the cultural categories that structure and give meaning to their individual experiences, I ask about the social developments through their autobiographical representation. Nevertheless, in the conclusive part I will also tackle the

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*Everyday life and cultural patterns. International Festschrift for Elle Vunder*, Studies in Folk Culture, no. 3 (Tartu : Tartu University Press, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> The research has focused on people’s experiences, how they acquired strategies of adaptation in the new environment and how these strategies became a routine. “Ethnology of everyday life” is, similarly to “oral popular history” and “ethnological memory research,” rather concerned with discussing narrative experiences than with dealing with historical source-criticism. A study based on life history interviews and written life stories into the culture and self-definition of the Ingrian Finns in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was conducted by Riina Reinvelt, *Ingeri elud ja lood* (Ingerian lives and stories), Studia Ethnologica Tartuensia 5 (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2002). Biographical approach is also the centre of the research project of the “Strategies and Practices of Everyday Life in Soviet Estonia” of the Tartu University in 2002-2005. The main emphasis of the project was to study the experiences of individuals in order to describe their social and cultural world. For example: Ene Kõresaar, ed., *Pro Ethnologia* 16, Studies on Socialist and Post-socialist Everyday Life, (2003). Available from: <http://www.erm.ee/?node=451&lang=est>; Internet; accessed: 22 May 2007; Terje Anepaio et al., ed., *Eesti Rahva Muuseumi aastaraamat* (Yearbook of Estonian National Museum), vol. 49. (Tartu: Eesti Rahva Muuseum, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> Aili Aarelaid-Tart describes the cultural reality of Soviet everyday life and peoples mentality formed in it, in the number of her studies. She double-checks the autobiographical data with the knowledge of “objective” social structure (in the past) through repetitive appearance of motives, events, names, data in the subjective sources. Aarelaid-Tart’s studies are mostly based on the interviews with Estonian cultural and political elite, but also with the Russian immigrants and Estonian émigrés. For example: Aili Aarelaid, *Ikka kultuurile mõeldes* (Still thinking about the culture), Tallinn: Virgela, 1998; Aili Aarelaid-Tart, *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories* (Vaajakoski: Kikimora Publications). The latter includes Aarelaid-Tart’s former articles that have been published in English.

questions on “memory research,” because I am interested to consider why some experiences tend to be stressed and others rather superficially covered by the life story writers.

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In the 1980s the yet “innocent” biographical approach sought its validation in the originality and freshness of data and was therefore met with two sorts of criticism. First, there were doubts about using (auto)biographical and oral sources as they were certainly subjective, psychologically, socially and politically influenced and biased, and therefore unreliable. Indeed, from a Rankean or positivist point of view, the autobiographies might seem to represent even a “squared subjectivity” as they reflect subjective lives resulting from subjective skills of interpreting these lives.<sup>16</sup> Second, in contrast, the humanitarian studies were full of the postmodern “celebration of arbitrariness of subjectivity and [...] alleged “social structures”” that rendered any historical approach, which aimed to establish historical and stable facts, rather meaningless.<sup>17</sup>

In my understanding, J. P. Roos, who is an internationally famous Finnish student of autobiographies, offers a reasonable way to deal with the contradictory approaches to objectivity and subjectivity. He offers a three-stage “biblical/dialectic” story of “the paradise, the fall and the redemption.”<sup>18</sup> In the beginning, there was “the paradise of autobiographies,” when the early sociologists and historians approached autobiography as if it was telling and explaining what had really happened. Then, “the fall” came and the students needed to leave the “paradise of true life stories,” as the postmodern critique

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel Bertaux, “The Usefulness of Life Stories for a Realist and Meaningful Sociology,” in *Biographical research in Eastern Europe: Altered Lives and Broken Biographies*, ed. Robin Humphrey, Robert Miller, and Elena Zdravomyslova, 39-52 (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), 41.

<sup>17</sup> Prue Chamberlayne, Joanna Bornat, and Tom Wengraf, ed., introduction to *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science: Comparative Issues and Examples* (London: Routledge, 2000), 6.

<sup>18</sup> Roos, “Context, Authenticity, Referentiality, Reflexivity.”

relativised it all. In extreme, there was no more subject, no author, no reader, no reference, “I can write whatever I wish, call it autobiography (or even not call it autobiography, but a novel or a text), and autobiography it is (or if it is not, no matter).”<sup>19</sup> In terms of positivism, the researchers acknowledged that the power of autobiographies did not lie in the statistical representativity, but in another cognitive direction, in the in-depth description and understanding of how some social phenomenon takes place.<sup>20</sup>

Hence, after acknowledging the postmodern and neo-positivist challenge, the students could find a “redeeming” path “back to basics in autobiography.” “We had lost our innocence,” but should not “throw the baby out with the bathwater.”<sup>21</sup> Such a position holds a double postulate (realist perspective): there is reality out there, and that reality can be at least partially observed and understood through research.<sup>22</sup>

Things may not be what they look like; they may in fact be drastically different. But still, it is not all interpretation. And most importantly, there is something outside the text, outside the representation, outside the spoken word. [...] It eludes us, but it is there. Because I am not a philosopher, I like to call this reality, or real life. [...] With practice, with hard work, with creative insights, flashes, we can advance in our project and “get closer to the real truth” about a life.<sup>23</sup>

Essentially, autobiography is written by a person who wants to tell others about one’s life: how it was, what happened, what his or her views of it are, it is “an essentially reality- and truth-oriented narrative of practices, where the truth is seen from a unique, concrete viewpoint: that of the author.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 28-29. Roos follows with the conclusions of the postmodern critique one could draw in the field of autobiography. 1. An awareness of narrativity is a very important factor in the autobiography. 2. An awareness of the often tenuous relationship between *the author*, *the self* and *the “reality.”* 3. The problem of the identity of the self (continuity, perspectives, multiple identities, etc). 4. The multiple levels of authors and audiences. 5. The primacy of the text – that it is the text, not the life, with which one is dealing. 6. In one extreme case, autobiography may be seen as determining the life, not vice versa. In another, more Derridean extreme case, the autobiography and the life may have a totally contingent relationship.

<sup>20</sup> Bertaux, “The Usefulness of Life Stories,” 43. “When, where, why and with whom, according to which mechanisms and processes, norms and conflictual dynamics.”

<sup>21</sup> Roos, “Context, Authenticity, Referentiality, Reflexivity,” 30.

<sup>22</sup> Bertaux, “The Usefulness of Life Stories,” 45.

<sup>23</sup> Roos, “Context, Authenticity, Referentiality, Reflexivity,” 30-31.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

I presuppose that a large majority of the people under study in my thesis are the “ordinary authors,” who try to give a fair account based on their subjective understanding of their life at the moment of writing (J.P. Roos: “authenticity”).<sup>25</sup> While writing, the authors “anchor” their subjectivity in the “reality out there” with the reference to external significance frameworks, e.g., of generational experiences in a socio-historical process (J. P. Roos: “referentiality” and “context”).<sup>26</sup> However, at the same time, context is being built up by the general body of autobiographic accounts. In my research, I will look at “double mindedness” and “everyday resistance/dissent” as possible but questionable contexts for the lives under study. The sample of life stories of my study does not describe the “whole generation;” however, it gives a somewhat generic overview of the experiences and mentality of “ordinary” members of the “thaw” generation.

## 1.2. Soviet times: notes on previous studies

The reliability of historians’ profession has traditionally lied in documents and in their provenance. Nevertheless, already Paul Thompson in his classical work, *The Voice of the Past* (1978), found evidence of historians making use of personal testimonies for a long time. The next decade brought along a more conscious shift towards using the spoken and written words of people who had previously been seen as marginal or unreliable sources for history-writing or for sociological explanation. The boundaries between history, folklore, anthropology and sociology were redrawn or sometimes even withdrawn; the lower classes, post-colonial societies, but also women, Holocaust survivors and everyday life under

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 34. “Ordinary authors do not usually resort to any tricks, but create authenticity through their own straightforwardness: this is the story and that is all there is to it.”

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 32-35. Roos also touches upon referentiality, which means that an autobiography is essentially referring to something: it stands in relation to actions, events and “social reality;” and reflexivity: in the life story the narrator moves on different levels and uses different perspectives.

fascism were given special attention by the historians, who used oral accounts and life histories as their sources.<sup>27</sup>

Contemporary approaches to studying the history of the Soviet Union vary to a great extent from the emphasis on terror and its totalitarian nature to arguing for a large scale social support to the regime on behalf of the citizens. There is some consensus in looking at Stalinism as a “totalitarian” regime, but it is more complicated to characterise the post-Stalinist societies in their contradictions, hopes for liberalisation and simultaneous stagnation. Western historians, who have focused mainly on Stalinism, could be categorised into three “generations,” according to their approach to the social organisation of the Soviet Union and to the gradual development of the scholarship over time. These “generations” are: “totalitarian” school, “social” or “revisionist” school, and “cultural” or “linguistic” school.<sup>28</sup> The latest “cultural turn” in Soviet studies focused on the cultural mechanisms and

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<sup>27</sup> The first handbook on oral history was the following: Paul Thompson. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978; 2000). The collection of essays that emphasised the interdisciplinary nature of oral history: David Dunaway and Willa Baum, ed., *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2d ed. (American Association for State and Local History, 1984; Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 1996.). A path-breaking works in micro-history of the Medieval Mediterranean village in which the author used the written interrogation accounts of Inquisition with a reflection on the bias of the documents: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French village*, transl. Barbara Bray, 2d ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1990, 1978). The history of European peasants, workers, and artisans – people formerly without an history – in relation to major economic developments and trends, especially the development of capitalism since the 15<sup>th</sup> century: Eric Wolf, *Europe and The People Without History*, 2d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, 1982). One of the first works in history-writing that consciously emphasised and studied human subjectivity and ambivalence of remembering in relation to the memory of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, trans. Robert Lumley and Jude Bloomfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Original published in Italian in 1979.

<sup>28</sup> The representatives of the “totalitarian” school wrote in the spirit of the Cold War and described the Soviet life with a sharp focus on political regime and its ideology. Some of the main authors have been Richard Pipes, Robert Conquest; later Martin Malia. They wrote and viewed history “from outside,” from the external state-centred perspective in which the individuals were “atomised” and “alienated” from the coercive state. The “social” approach was undertaken by the “revisionists” who described the Soviet life as “a queue in an empty grocery store,” it was the history written and viewed “from below,” from the perspective of the people who built the regime, struggled within, accommodated and renegotiated it. The “revisionists” emphasised the weakness and contradictions of the Soviet state, and built on the developments of social sciences, however, they were severely criticised for ignoring ideology and underestimating the violence of the regime. The “social” approach drew attention to the “vertical dynamics” of Soviet careers and the previously heretical notion of social support for the regime. Some of the main authors have been Sheila Fitzpatrick, Moshe Lewin, Ronald Suny, Stephen Cohen, Robert Tucker. The “totalitarian” and “social” approach both developed as genuinely external to the Soviet Union as the scholarship was largely isolated from the archival sources.

linguistic means of representing history, hence, being part of a larger intellectual trend in Western historiography.<sup>29</sup> That larger trend has marked the convergence of humanitarian and social science methods “to describe people as historically formed actors, whose biographies are necessary to render fully intelligible their historical action in context – its conditions, meanings and outcomes, whether [...] conscious or unconscious.”<sup>30</sup> It has become important to discuss the meaning of experiences to historical actors; the subjectivity of the personal accounts on history has been given an explanatory value in comparison with the former negative connotations. In general, this process has been labelled as a “historical” turn (in social sciences), “cultural,” “linguistic,” “subjective,” or “biographical” turn (in humanitarian and social sciences), depending on the context and the point of view.<sup>31</sup> Some authors distinguish between “cultural/linguistic” turn and “biographical turn,” where – in reference to previous chapters – “cultural” turn marks rather the “fall” of paradise, but the “biographical” turn is the “redemption.”

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In the 1990s, the focus of Soviet history-writing turned towards describing the cultural mechanisms, language and semantics following an intellectual trend of the Western historiography in focusing on “the local and marginal, the constructedness and instability of categories, and the pervasiveness and polyvalency of power.” By describing how people experienced their lives the turn brought a “humanising effect” to the scholarship. “Cultural turn” is not only about the postmodern “constructedness and instability,” it does not predispose scholars to a particular meta-interpretation of history: it can either homogenise human experiences under the umbrella of the ideology that is brought “back in” or emphasise the incomplete accommodation of the ideology by people, who maintained their autonomous private spheres. In contrast, the “totalitarian” and “social” schools had rather clear ideas for the meta-interpretation of the sources, emphasising either the dynamics “from above” or “from below.” It has been argued that the “cultural turn” in the Soviet studies has been made possible by the “post”-condition of the scholarship: the students of Soviet era base their studies on the materials that were formerly inaccessible to them. (Some of the main authors of the “cultural approach” have been Stephen Kotkin, Jochen Hellbeck, Igal Halfin, and again Sheila Fitzpatrick.)

Based on: Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov, ed., introduction to *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 3-4; Ilya Gerasimov et al., “From the Editors: The Analysis of Subjectivisation Practices in the Early Stalinist Society,” *Ab Imperio* 3, (2002): 213-214; Alexander Etkind, “Soviet Subjectivity: Torture for the Sake of Salvation?” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, (2005): 172.

<sup>29</sup> I should also note that in terms of studying the history of the Baltic States such a three-generation model cannot be imposed well. However, the larger “cultural turn” in the Soviet studies has certainly had its influence. Secondly, it should be noted that even though the Soviet Regime in Estonia did not have time to reach its Stalinist “totalitarianism”, the mainstream Estonian nationalist scholarship has labelled almost the whole Soviet period (1944-1987) as a “totalitarian” one.

<sup>30</sup> Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf, introduction to *Turn to Biographical Methods*, 7-8.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Such a turn could even account for a paradigm change, as formerly social sciences that had become detached from the lived lives of people by positivist, determinist and social constructionist approaches.

Naturally, the research field that opened in Eastern Europe since 1989 is vast. Attention has been given, for example, to the lives of specific groups (for example, intelligentsia, peasants, dissidents, informers, communists, ethnic minorities, selected families) or to people who share similar experiences (for example, success, marginality, repression, trauma, sex); the biggest number of works has been published on the Soviet Union, and especially about Stalinism.<sup>32</sup>

A controversial contribution to studying Soviet life histories has been also done by Jochen Hellbeck and Igal Halfin, who studied Russian autobiographical practices of the Early Stalinist era, with their concept of “Soviet subjectivity” that could be understood as a “capacity for thought and action derived from a coherent sense of self in the frames of the Communist discourse.”<sup>33</sup> They claim that the “subjectivising practices” of the Stalinist 1930s created a new discourse that nobody could possibly escape and whose transformative frames were so great that human subjectivity could be traced from the autobiographical texts that describe the ideal of a New Soviet Man.<sup>34</sup> Naturally, Estonian subject conditions were

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<sup>32</sup> I should also mention notable works of Sheila Fitzpatrick, who has relied on autobiographical accounts in her later works of the period of “cultural turn.” Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Stalinism: New Directions* (London: Routledge, 2000); Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times, Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> Jochen Hellbeck, “Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts,” *The Russian Review* 60, (2001): 340.

<sup>34</sup> Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck represent the “cultural-linguistic” turn in the Soviet studies; the first has researched the diaries of Soviet citizens and the latter has written on Soviet confession and interrogation practices. There have been two forums organised around the “Soviet subjectivity” in academic journals. One in *The Russian Review* 60 (2001), featuring the articles of Igal Halfin, “Looking into the Oppositionists’ Souls: Inquisition Communist Style,” 316-339, Jochen Hellbeck, “Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts,” 340-359; and Eric Naiman, “On Soviet Subjects and the Scholars Who Make Them,” 307-315. The other one in *Ab Imperio* 3 (2002) featured a long interview with Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck (in Russian) eight critical contributions (mostly in Russian). For further information, see: Igal Halfin, *Terror in My Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003; Jochen Hellbeck and Klaus Heller, eds, *Autobiographical Practices in Russia*. Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2004; Jochen Hellbeck. *Revolution on My mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006. Halfin and Hellbeck were much influenced by the seminal book by Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).



different and one could only possibly claim for the presence of many aspects of “Soviet subjectivity.”<sup>35</sup>

Out of the international publications in English language, some compilations of articles based on autobiographical research stand out. These works are mostly based on contemporary, post-Socialist personal accounts on the past; as such, the interest lies in opening up the past reality and also the present conditions of the lives that have often been traumatised by the rapid changes of the 1990s. The post-Socialist lives are seen as being situated on the “historical watersheds,” where the “workings of their disposition of behaviour” open better to analytical insight than in regular conditions.<sup>36</sup>

There are a few publications that I should mention for creating a larger historiographical post-Socialist context for the thesis. *Biographical Research in Eastern Europe* (2003) is a collection of sociological-historical articles, including methodological discussion and works on the (auto)biographies of communists, dissidents, migrants, adaptation, ethnicity and sexuality, with the main focus on Soviet Russia.<sup>37</sup> Quite similar is the approach of a more historically-minded collection *On Living Through Soviet Russia* (2004) that is based on two intergenerational oral family history projects, which were conducted in Russia in the beginning of 1990s. In general, the book models the values and life patterns of different generations of various social strata.<sup>38</sup> *Biographies and the Division of Europe* (2000) compiles the life stories of people in Eastern Europe with a focus on their

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<sup>35</sup> In the framework of the current research I will not get engaged also in the construction of the modern “Western subjectivity,” its changes under the Soviet circumstances and the possible emergence of some “Soviet subjectivity.” I rely on the authors’ telling authentically about their subjective personal experiences that they gained in the “life events” in their generational context.

<sup>36</sup> Humphrey, Miller, and Zdravomyslova, introduction to *Biographical research in Eastern Europe*, 12-13.

<sup>37</sup> Robin Humphrey, Robert Miller, and Elena Zdravomyslova, ed., *Biographical research in Eastern Europe: Altered Lives and Broken Biographies* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003). Includes examples of work conducted in nine countries and seven languages in the Eastern Europe. The main focus is on Russia, but some articles also discuss Eastern Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Estonia. Some articles in the book provide evidence for further discussion in my thesis.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson, and Anna Rotkirch, ed., *On Living Through Soviet Russia* (London: Routledge, 2004). The book deals with intimate and family life, the position of a working mothers and successful women, old believers community and the life after returning from the Gulag.

personal and/or collective traumas, with borders both within and between societies, how people adjusted to the new conditions and reconceptualised the past.<sup>39</sup> Lastly, a Latvian exile scholar Vieda Skultans has written *The Testimony of Lives: Narrative and Memory in Post-Soviet Latvia* (1998).<sup>40</sup> She deals with the Sovietisation of Latvian society, with a focus on people who were (in majority) diagnosed with neurasthenia due to their earlier sufferings from the Stalinist repressions.

In summary, there are quite many studies on the Socialist lives being conducted using the autobiographical methodology, now it also seems to be a good moment to study such materials as the witnesses are still alive, the public interest is still high, but there is already some time gap to enable to take a reflective look. Nevertheless, I argue that while a lot of attention has been given to specific and often exceptional social groups and experiences, to some peculiar phenomena and to traumatic memories, much less has been dealt with conceptualising the experiences of people during the rather “ordinary” post-Stalinist times. Next, I show that a similar tendency is prevalent also in Estonian scholarship.

In the last ten years, the Estonian autobiographical scholarship has been mainly focused on conceptualising the traumatic War and Stalinist experiences either from the point of view of generational experiences or traumatised memory and remembering.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Roswitha Breckner, Devorah Kalekin-Fishman, and Ingrid Miethe, ed., *Biographies and the Division of Europe: Experience, Action, and Change on the “Eastern Side”* (Leske: Budrich, Opladen, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Vieda Skultans, *The Testimony of Lives: Narrative and Memory in post-Soviet Latvia* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Terje Anepaio, “Eesti mäletab!? Repressiooniteema retseptsioon Eesti ühiskonnas” (Reception of the topic of repressions in the Estonian society), in *Mälu kui kultuuritegur*, ed. Kõresaar and Anepaio, 206-230; Terje Anepaio, “Trauma ja mälu: mineviku ületamisest represseeritute kogemuses” (Trauma and memory: repressed Estonians coping with past), in *Kultuur ja mälu*, ed. Kõresaar and Anepaio, 198-213; Tiina Kirss, “Survivorship and the Eastern Exile: Estonian Women’s Life Narratives of the 1941 and 1949 Siberian Deportations,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 36, Special Issue: Baltic Life Stories, (Spring 2005): 13-38; Ene Kõresaar, “The Notion of Rupture in Estonian Narrative Memory: On the Construction of Meaning in Autobiographical Texts on the Stalinist Experience,” *Ab Imperio* 4, Reconciliation through the Past: Pan-European Perspectives, (2004): 313-339; Aigi Rahi, “Sündmus eri allikate valguses: küüditatute näite varal” (A historical even in the light of different sources: according to the reports of repressed people), in *Kultuur ja mälu*, ed. Kõresaar and Anepaio, 216-224; Reet Ruusmann, “The Establishment of Collective Farms and Their

Additionally, there have been some studies of the “older” Estonians’ (born in 1920-1930) generational experience, as they represent the memory of the interwar Republic that is seminal to the (perceived) legitimacy of the present regime,<sup>42</sup> some research of women’ autobiographies and family stories, which look at how people narrate the changes in their lives and how the historical events are constructed in their stories.<sup>43</sup> Research of the post-Stalinist era has been mostly dedicated to analysing work life and everyday routines of people, with one recent work on the post-Stalinist youth.<sup>44</sup> Only Aili Aarelaid-Tart has analysed the generational experiences and mentality of the post-Stalinist times and generations, however, she has done it based on the interviews with well-known Estonian

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Early Years as an Image of History in the Estonians' Life Stories,” *Pro Ethnologia* 16, Studies on Socialist and Post-socialist Everyday Life (2003): 21-38.

<sup>42</sup> Ene Kõresaar, *Elu ideoloogiad: kollektiivne mälu ja autobiograafilise minevikutõlgendus eestlaste elulugudes* (Life ideologies: collective memory and autobiographical assessment of the past in the memoirs of Estonians), Eesti Rahva Muuseumi Sari, no. 6 (The Series of Estonian National Museum) (Tartu: Eesti Rahva Muuseum, 2005); Ene Kõresaar, “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), in *Mälu kui kultuuritegur*, ed. Kõresaar and Anepaio, 60-91; Triin Mulla, “Minu õnnelik-rahutu lapsepõlv: 1940. aastad eestlaste lapsepõlvemälestustes” (My happy and turbulent childhood: the 1940s in childhood memories of Estonians), in *Mälu kui kultuuritegur*, ed. Kõresaar and Anepaio, 92-123; Kaari Siimer, “Võim, indiviid ja kohanemine elulugudes: vanemad eestlased elust Nõukogude Eestis” (Power, the individual and adaptation in biographies: life stories of elderly Estonians in Soviet Estonia), in *Mälu kui kultuuritegur*, ed. Kõresaar and Anepaio, 124-149.

<sup>43</sup> Tiina Kirss, Ene Kõresaar, and Marju Lauristin, ed., *She Who Remembers, Survives: Interpreting Estonian Women' Post-Soviet Life Stories* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2004); Tiiu Jaago, “Popular History as the Interpretations in the View of Oral Popular History Research,” in *Everyday life and cultural patterns*, ed. Kõresaar and Leete, 130-145; Tiiu Jaago, “Oral history as an opportunity to research the conflicts related to urbanisation and migration in Soviet and Post-Soviet Estonia,” *Memory and Globalisation*. 13<sup>th</sup> International Oral History Conference, Roma 2004. CD-publication; Tiiu Jaago, “Pere- ja suguvõsalood pärimuses: 20. sajandi teine pool” (Stories of family history in the popular tradition of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), in *Mälu kui kultuuritegur*, ed. Kõresaar and Anepaio, 33-59.

<sup>44</sup> Kristi Jõesalu, “What People Tell about Their Working Life in the ESSR, and How Do They Do It? Source-Centred Study of a Civil Servant's Career Biography,” *Pro Ethnologia* 16, Studies on Socialist and Post-socialist Everyday Life (2003): 61-88; Kristi Jõesalu, “Privaatse ja avaliku põimumisest Nõukogude Eesti eluilmas: postsotsialistlikke vaateid sotsiaalsele suhetele nõukogude tööelus” (Intertwining the private and the public in Soviet Estonian life-world: post-Socialist views on social relations in Soviet working life), in *Eesti Rahva Muuseumi aastaraamat*, ed. Anepaio et al., 91-118; Ene Kõresaar, “Towards a social memory of work. Politics and being a good teacher in Soviet teachers' biographies,” in *Arbeit im Sozialismus – Arbeit im Postsozialismus. Erkundungen der Arbeitswelt im östlichen Europa*, ed. Roth, Klaus, 291-310 (Münster, Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2004) (Freiburger Sozialanthropologische Studien, vol. 1, 2004); Ene Kõresaar, “Hea elu normatiivsus: nõukogudeaegse defitsiidikogemuse kujutamisest elulugudes” (Normativity of good life: depiction of the Soviet shortage of goods in life stories), in *Mälu kui kultuuritegur*, ed. Kõresaar and Anepaio, 150-178; Reet Piiri, “See varumise harjumus – toidukultuurist Nõukogude Eestis” (This storing habit about food culture in Soviet Estonia), in *Eesti Rahva Muuseumi aastaraamat*, ed. Anepaio et al., 49-85; Reet Ruusmann, “Defitsiit kui osa nõukogudeaegsest argielust Eesti NSV-s” (Deficit as part of Soviet-time everyday-life in the Estonian SSR), in *Eesti Rahva Muuseumi aastaraamat*, ed. Anepaio et al., 125-152; Ellen Värvi, “Noored 1950-1960. aastate Eesti NSVs” (The youth of the Estonian SSR in the 1950s-1960s), in *Eesti Rahva Muuseumi aastaraamat*, vol. 49, ed. Terje Anepaio et al., 11-48 (Tartu: Eesti Rahva Muuseum, 2006).

cultural and intellectual elite, dissidents and former high party officials who were all characterised by a general Estonian mindedness.<sup>45</sup> The studies of Aarelaid-Tart form a comparative background for and some inspiration to my current research.

### 1.3. Research gap: the "post-war" generation

It is mostly not due to the widespread dark "fascination with fascism"<sup>46</sup> or to somewhat lighter "communist nostalgias" that, similarly to the other post-Socialist nations, most of the present studies of contemporary history in Estonia focus on the years 1939-54. Rather, there is the sense of leaving a testimony of "what really happened," of researching the recently opened archives. I do not aim to diminish the Stalinist crimes in any way; it is natural and positive that the formerly forbidden painful memories have found their way to public discourse. However, with the establishment of the Estonian nationalist state, the memory of the recent past is becoming rather flattened and politicised.

First, in the public and political discourse one can notice a condemnation of the Soviet era in general, independently of the changes in Estonia during the 45 years of the regime, not to mention the lack of sensitivity to contradictions and compromises. The Estonian nation state is legitimised as a continuation of the interwar Republic to which the World War and The Soviet period only form an illegal and violent rupture. The emphasis on

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<sup>45</sup> Aarelaid-Tart, *Ikka kultuurile mõeldes*; Aarelaid-Tart, *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*; Aarelaid-Tart, "Double Mental Standards in the Baltic Countries – Three Generations"; Hank Johnston and Aili Aarelaid-Tart, "Generations, Micro-Cohorts, and Long-Term Mobilisation: The Estonian National Movement," *Sociological Perspectives* 43 (2000): 671-698. Republished in: Aarelaid-Tart, *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*, 122-152; Aili Aarelaid-Tart, "Estonian-Inclined Communists as Marginals," in *Biographical Research in Eastern Europe*, ed. Humphrey, Miller, and Zdravomyslova, 71-99. Republished in: Aarelaid-Tart, *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*, 168-192; Aili Aarelaid-Tart, "The Theory of Cultural Trauma as Applied to Investigation of the Mind-Set of Estonians under Soviet Rule (Based on Biographical Method)," in *Inherited 1990s*, ed. B. Kangere, Acta Universitatis Stockholmensis, Studia Baltica Stockholmensia (Stockholm: Stockholm University). Republished in: Aarelaid-Tart, *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*, 242-268.

<sup>46</sup> Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," *New York Review of Books*, 6 February 1975. Republished in *Under the Sign of Saturn*, by Susan Sontag, 73-105 (New York, 1980).

totalitarian and even terrorist nature of the Soviet Union has become a way of making the past usable and maybe even useful for the elites. Second, in accord with the general mentality, Estonian historical scholarship has taken a strongly nationalist perspective towards contemporary history. In addition to the justified focus on “the years of suffering,” there is a tendency for a biased discussion of the German occupation, the role of Russian immigrants or post-Stalinist developments, by emphasising Estonians’ role either as suffering victims or as dissident freedom fighters.<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, the everyday life experiences seem to have differed greatly from the ones emphasised by the scholarship, media and politicians; the abovementioned nationalist developments have effectively silenced many historical voices in Estonia.<sup>48</sup> One is quite

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<sup>47</sup> The best representative is the following generic study that represents the state of art of Estonian (mainstream) historical scholarship and forms the bases for teaching of history in schools and in also universities: Ago Pajur, Tõnu Tannberg, and Sulev Vahtre, eds., *Eesti ajalugu: Vabadussõjast taasiseseisvumiseni* (History of Estonia: from the Independence war until the regaining of the independence) (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 2005). Another example is a historian and politician, a recent Prime Minister, Mart Laar, who has published a great number of books: *Emajõgi 1944: II maailmasõja lahingud Lõuna-Eestis* (Emajõgi 1944: Battles of the Second World War in the Southern Estonia) (Tallinn: Varrak, 2005); *September 1944: Otto Tiefs valitsus* (September 1944: Government of Otto Tief) (Tallinn: Varrak, 2007); *Sinimäed 1944: II maailmasõja lahingud Kirde-Eestis* (Sinimäed 1944: Battles of the Second World War in the North-East Estonia) (Tallinn: Varrak, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> Vahur Made, “Just sellist (rahva)ajalugu” (Exactly such (public) history), *Sirp* (Tallinn), 10 March 2006; Rein Ruutsoo, “Ajalooline ideoloogia ja ajalooteadus” (Historical ideology and history as science), *Sirp* (Tallinn), 13 August 2004; Rein Ruutsoo, “Kuidas kirjutada XX sajandi Eesti ajalugu?” (How to write the history of Estonia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?), *Sirp* (Tallinn), 10 March 2006.

The controversy between the public historical narrative and the personal memories first occurred to me in the case of my family history. The stories of my grandparents have their share of Stalinist terror and some sense of victimisation. However, in general, they are rather filled with anecdotes on the Soviet system, the absurd small controversies and happenings, the accounts on deficit and *blat* (the “everyday corruption”), and most of all with the normalcy of raising the children, working, spending holidays and travelling (generally, inside the Soviet Union).

Born in 1932-1935, all my grandparents had been the war-time children and Stalinist youngsters. By 1947, three of them had lost their father: one had hanged himself in 1940, the other was shot by Germans in 1942 in Saaremaa (the people on the Island of Saaremaa were more Communist-minded, so had been my great-grandfather), and the third one was arrested in 1947 for being the “enemy of the state” (before the war, he owned a small private business with three lorries that carried goods to and away from the port).

I guess that my mother’s parents have been seminal in my personal “social becoming.” I would like to share a few more words on them. In September 1944, at the latest hour, the family and relatives of my grandmother started a way to the West coast to catch any ship to Sweden. As tens thousands of others, they arrived too late and returned to Tallinn. In 1947, my great-grandfather was arrested, and never returned. In March 1949, my grandmother and her mother were hiding at some relatives and escaped the deportation. Later, my grandmother would write for the purposes of official CV that her father had abandoned the family and she had no idea where he was. It seemed to be a fine, although not really credible, explanation for the authorities. Grandmother had never dared to tell even her best friends about the faith of her father. She did not tell it them also in the 1990s, why bother? She had rather preferred to tell the story of her father being the

surprised to notice that in addition to deporters, communist activists, and Russian immigrants, also the experiences of ordinary Estonians in the post-Stalinist era have deserved very little attention, because they somehow do not fit into the resurrected nationalist “imagined community” of Estonians.<sup>49</sup> Luckily, the years of re-gaining the independence have also marked the beginning of the “biographical boom” in Estonia. Even though a large number of the collected stories are the “testimonies of suffering and survival,” the tales of the post-War Estonians’ generation are much more diverse.

As argued before, there are only a few articles published on the post-Stalinist everyday lives and ideological dilemmas both in the international and the Estonian publications. The few works on Estonian lives in the 1960-1970s deal normally with evaluating the developments of political regime or local culture, based on the memoirs of active Estonians, or at best on a subjective understanding of the sociologist/historian about the events in the past. Such works they describe the general “Estonianness” of the time as widespread “dissent” and “everyday resistance” to the regime that was expressed in small (but significant) nationalist deeds. Aili Aareleid-Tart has gone a bit further and drew a “mental map” of the Soviet times, based on the interviews with the cultural and intellectual elite, dissidents and high party officials. She argued for the development of the Estonian “double mindedness,” which in time became a “natural mixture and normal coexistence of conflicting world-views.”<sup>50</sup>

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chauffeur of Lenin during in the revolutionary year of 1917 in Petrograd. It is probable that for a few days he could have even been driving Lenin around...

My grandmother’s husband, my grandfather, joined the Party in the late 1960s in order to be promoted to the position of the head engineer of the Estonian Renovation Company that dealt with renovating medieval architectural heritage. Indeed, he was quite good in handling the almost permanently drunk workmen. This position opened the path to some trips to socialist countries and to establishing a better “Soviet normality.” None of us has actually dared to ask grandfather about his real thoughts when committing such collaborative deeds. Anyway, I only remember my mother claiming during the Mid-Summer day of 1990, at the height of the independence movement, that “it is all fine, but this Soviet state cannot just end up...”

<sup>49</sup> On the construction of nationalist idea and political discourse: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on The Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1983, 1991); Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>50</sup> Aareleid-Tart, *Ikka kultuurile mõeldes*, 156

In short, the ideas of “everyday resistance” and “double mindedness” are based on the experience of Estonian minded elite, that has not only a higher ability to adapt to and reflect on social change, but also a higher need to legitimise oneself in its post-Soviet position. In the thesis, I shall question the validity of these notions based on the generational self-perception in the autobiographies written in the 1990s. I approach the life stories as containing the *context* of the lived lives in themselves and as being subjectively *authentic* representations of these lives.

I focus on the opinions of post-war Estonians (born in 1940-1959), who are united by a (somewhat vague) “generational experience,” taking up the “autobiographical initiative” and an ability to reflect on their position in relation to ideological choices and the regime. I describe the lives of mostly “ordinary” people, who belonged neither to elite nor to the marginal strata of the society and who would not possess specific traumatic experiences (such as being the children of the guerrilla fighters, being deported, or émigrated); the Soviet immigrants, active communists and dissidents are excluded from my analyses, as well, as marginals that have been researched more. From among the many superficial or family-history accounts, I selected the stories that, in one way or another, deal with author’s relationship to larger social processes and to the ideology of the Soviet regime, that reflect on the individual choices, values and opinions about the cooperation or dissent with the regime. I took a close look at around fifty life stories from the published and unpublished sources. I am aware that my choice does not constitute a “miniature” Estonian society; however, as argued earlier, statistical representativity cannot be the main aim in autobiographical research.

## 1.4. My sources: the Estonian autobiographical collection

Estonian literacy has a history of around 300 years, but the conditions for writing down personal life stories were created only by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even though there are a few earlier diaries preserved, the first proper Estonian's life history could be considered to have been written by a peasant under the name "Märt Mitt's life story told in a manner connected with history," in this case, the author was clearly conscious of himself as a subject of history.<sup>51</sup> The publication of memoirs became mainstream among the elite who possessed "the right to have a biography" by the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the whole Soviet era, however, the preservation of the accounts on private life was fraught with danger. Only a few authored figures could publish their memoirs which were at best limited to certain omissions and at worst just propagandistic, the stories also ended at a quite early period in order to avoid pure falsifications. Naturally, there also existed a small but uncertain number of autobiographic texts that were written for the drawer.<sup>52</sup>

The institutionalised collecting of Estonian autobiographies started in 1989, at the time that was "heavy with remembering, collecting memoirs and revising history."<sup>53</sup> Mart Laar, historian and future prime minister, encouraged people to put down "the memories of oneself or of one's parents or grandparents, as everyone can contribute to giving back history to our nation. [...] This small nation has been great in its sufferings. Let [remembering] give us now force to face the future."<sup>54</sup> Actually, the "biographical

<sup>51</sup> Märt Mitt (1833-1912) life story, Estonian Literature Museum, EKM EKLA, Fund 116, nr. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Based on: Hinrikus, "Eesti elulugude kogu ja selle uurimise perspektiive," 175-183; Rutt Hinrikus and Ene Kõresaar, "A Brief Overview of Life History Collection and Research in Estonia," in *She Who Remembers, Survives: Interpreting Estonian Women's Post-Soviet Life Stories*, ed. Tiina Kirss, Ene Kõresaar, and Marju Lauristin (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2004), 19-21.

<sup>53</sup> Hinrikus, "Eesti elulugude kogu ja selle uurimise perspektiive," 178.

<sup>54</sup> Mart Laar, "Veidi meie ajaloolisest mälust" (Some of our historical memory), *Kultuur ja elu* (Culture and life), nr. 4, (1988): 11-13.



initiatives” were widespread in all the former Socialist countries, so that the time could be labelled a “biographical boom,” manifested in publications and discussions of life stories, biographical competitions and searches for a family heritage. Even if mostly intellectuals and professional writers dominated the public sphere, there were many efforts to allow “the people” to speak.<sup>55</sup>

In the current thesis, first, the largest number of source materials comes from The Cultural History Archives of Estonian Literary Museum (founded in 1929) that has gathered most of its life histories in collection campaigns running since 1989 (~5000 “memory sediments collected up to now). After the initial excitement with collecting life stories was over, the Museum’s initiatives were revitalised at the turn of the century with the competitions of “One hundred lives of a century” (1999) and “My life and the life of my family in the Estonian SSR and the Estonian Republic” (2000), whose results were published in the three-volume selection of *The life stories of Estonian people* (2000, 2003).<sup>56</sup> I used both the published and unpublished autobiographies of the Museum’s Archives.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Robin Humphrey, Robert Miller, and Elena Zdravomyslova, ed., introduction to *Biographical research in Eastern Europe: Altered Lives and Broken Biographies* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), 15.

<sup>56</sup> The first call for the collection of Estonian life stories of the Cultural History Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum was published in newspapers in the autumn of 1989. By the end of 1991, a few hundred life stories had been submitted, including some earlier writings, monographs of thousands of pages and short notes on few papers. Due to significant social changes by 1995, however, the collection of the life histories decreased significantly. Since then, the collection campaigns/competitions were aligned around more concrete focus areas: “Women speak” (1995), “Life stories about love, marriage and sex” (1996), “Schoolteachers’ life stories from around the Baltic Sea” (1997).

With the approach of the end of the century, however, the focus was again widened, the campaign of “My destiny and the destiny of those close to me in the labyrinths of history” (1997) brought 262 stories, the competition “One hundred lives of a century” (1999) helped to collect 230 stories, the most popular was competition of “My life and the life of my family in the Estonian SSR and the Estonian Republic” (2000) with 330 of the works harvested. The latest collection projects are: “My life and the Patarei Prison” (2001), “Life during the German occupation” (2003) and the stories of Russian minority in Estonia (2003). Based on: Rutt Hinrikus and Ene Kõresaar, “A Brief Overview of Life History Collection and Research in Estonia,” 21-25.

<sup>57</sup> Unpublished sources: The Cultural History Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum, Fund 350 (Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi Kultuuriajaloo Arhiiv, Fond 350). In the thesis I shall use the abbreviation: KM EKLA, F350. The published sources of the Estonian Literary Museum were mainly the following: Rutt Hinrikus, ed., *Eesti rahva elulood* (Life stories of Estonian people), vol. 1-2, *Sajandi sada elulugu* (Hundred life stories of the century) (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2000); Rutt Hinrikus, ed., *Eesti rahva elulood* (Life stories of Estonian people), vol. 3, *Elu Eesti ENSV-s* (Life in the ESSR) (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2003). Some additional materials: Eve Annuk, ed., *Naised kõnelevad* (Women speak) (Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, 1997); Merle

Second, I used the sources of the Estonian National Museum (founded in 1909) has different “collection habits,” in 1931 a Museum’s correspondent network was established and it functions up to today with a main focus on the ethnographic descriptions for contextualising the Museum’s material collection (~3000 (auto)biographical texts collected up to now).<sup>58</sup> I found some valuable accounts from the correspondents of the National Museum; although a large majority of the respondents belonged to an earlier generation.<sup>59</sup> Third, while omitting the memoirs of prominent people, some other published autobiographies were used.<sup>60</sup> Fourth, I included two collections of the journalists’ autobiographies, although with a careful attention towards their possible bias for a more “fair” social representativity.<sup>61</sup>

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Karusoo, ed., *Kured läinud, kurjad ilmad* (The storks have flown, foul weather) (Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, 1997); Rutt Hinrikus and Volita Paklar, ed., *Rasskazhi o svoiei zhizni. Zhizneopisaniia estonozeml'tsev* (Tell me your story. The life stories of Estonian inhabitants) (Tallinn: Aleksandra, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> The Correspondents’ Network of The Estonian National Museum; available from <http://www.erm.ee/?lang=EST&node=57>; Internet; accessed 20 May 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Unpublished sources: The Archives of the Estonian National Museum (Eesti Rahva Muuseumi Arhiiv), the correspondents’ questionnaires: “Changes in Estonian society in the Soviet time” (2003, nr 215), “Youth cultures in the Soviet time” (2003, nr. 216) and “Work life and working in the Soviet Estonia” (2001, nr 211). Available from <http://www.erm.ee/?node=58>; Internet; accessed 20 May 2007. In the thesis I shall use the following abbreviations respectively: ERM, KL 215 and ERM, KL 211.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Tamkivi, ed., *Saarlaste elulood III* (Life stories of people from Saaremaa III) (Tallinn: Tallinna Saarlaste Ühendus, 2005); Enno Tammer, ed., *Nõukogude aeg ja inimene: meie mälestused* (Soviet time and people: our memoirs) (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2004); Enno Tammer, ed., *Elu jõud* (Force of life) (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2004); Enno Tammer, ed., *Elu jälg* (Trace of life) (Tallinn: Tänapäev, 2005).

<sup>61</sup> The collections form the first coherent body of life histories of journalists and people working at broadcasting in Estonia. Due to the general “social sensitivity,” reflection skills and the fact that the sources have not been used before, I decided to include them in my study. However, I shall use them with a permanent attention towards the possible bias deriving from the social position of the journalists in the Soviet society. Anu Pallas, ed., *Meie jäljed jäävad. Eesti ajakirjanike elulood I* (Our footsteps will remain. The life stories of Estonian journalists I) (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2004); Anu Pallas, Hedi Tammar, and Sulev Uus, ed., *Teelised helisillal. Ringhäälingurahva lood (Eesti ajakirjanike elulood II)* (Travellers on the acoustic bridge. Stories of the broadcasting people (The life stories of Estonian journalists II)) (Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 2006).

## 2. Theorising “post-war” generation

### 2.1. “Destined to live at the same time:”<sup>62</sup> the meaning of a generational experience

Generations, differences between the old and the new have been noticed since the beginning of history. The post World War I Europe saw a rise of remarkable generational consciousness that brought along the rejection of established social order and moral principles on the part of the young. Indeed, the Lost Generation of the twenties is a commonplace notion. However, a few fascinating historical studies have been conducted about the same generation, with a particular emphasis on the Central European intellectuals gathered around Georg (György) Lukács.<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, one of the young participants of the Lukács circle was Karl Mannheim, a classical sociologist who is noted for the first thorough socio-historical conceptualisation of a generation, as such. In this posthumous study, Mannheim argues that the generational factors had been under-researched in scholarship, even though the generational units were formed by significant historical events and the generational interactions play important part in defining the culture.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Such was also a title of the exhibition of Estonian art from the period 1944-1989, by the Estonian National Gallery.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Wohl, *The generation of 1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979). Wohl’s book aims to “rescue the generation of 1914 from the shadowland of myth and to restore it to the realm of history.” (Ibid., 2) based on the comparative study of Central and Eastern European experiences. Wohl’s study is based on the accounts of the contemporaries. Mary Gluck, *Georg Lukács and His Generation, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). Gluck’s book focuses on the early experiences of a small circle of radical artists and intellectuals who came of age in fin de siècle Budapest and who lived through the World War I. It is part of smaller cohort of the “generation of 1914.”

Additionally, I would like to mention two books on the history and generations. First, there is an interesting account on the conflict of the generations throughout the German modern history: Mark Roseman, ed., *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany, 1770-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Second, there is a collection of essays on methodology and cases on historical genealogy and family history in the United States: Rober Taylor, *Generations and Change: Genealogical Perspectives in Social History* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1986).

<sup>64</sup> Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, 276-320 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952).

Hank and Aareleid-Tart claim that the large generational units are shaped by a “collective action frame” that derives from a common experience of significant historical events that influence people in deciding what is appropriate, desirable and worth fighting for; it could also be called the “shared location in history.”<sup>65</sup> They divide Soviet Estonian population into four large generational units. First is the republican generation (born 1914-1928), who experienced Estonian independence in their youth. Second is the Stalinist generation (born 1928-40), who were young adults during the darkest years of repressions (1946-1954). Third, there is the generation of the “thaw” or the youth of the 1960s (born 1940-1955), who matured in a liberalised political and cultural environment (years 1956-1968). Fourth, the Brezhnev era youth (born 1955-1968) was a cynical generation, growing up during the years of stagnation and increased ideological control (years 1970-1985).

Naturally, the ideas of the “post-war” and of the “thaw” have different connotations, while the first stresses the heritage of the past and the latter view of the future, they bring the generation together, at least in my reading. The generation has been considered both the “winners” and the “losers” generation, depending on the emphasis. A large number of the members of the “thaw” generation were the winners of Socialist times and losers of the regained republic. Maybe one could argue further that it was the “Soviet” generation: they were destined to active self-realisation at the times of real “Sovietness” and stagnation of the regime. Certainly they were not “Lost,” however, as (many of) their parents had been. Acknowledging the other possible options, I chose the terms “post-war” and “thaw” to characterise people born in 1940-1959.

Summarising unique life narratives into a “generic shared experience” does not seem to be the wisest thing to do. I wish to refrain from the extremities, to avoid the general observations that often result in platitudes, but also not to conduct a close reading of only a

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<sup>65</sup> Johnston and Tart, “Generations, Micro-Cohorts, and Long-Term Mobilisation,” 674-675; 679.

few narratives. I will not divide the generation into smaller cohorts; this could be done in analysing answers to concrete questionnaires. However, based on around fifty narratives, I aim to argue with the two previously mentioned concepts and describe the main themes in the stories of the “ordinary” people. I wish to see if there is any, and if yes then what kind of, “collective action frame” in the autobiographies of people.

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It has been claimed that in the post-Stalinist period there were no clear shared narratives that would provide commonly accepted meanings for the authors to link their private lives. Although “everyday resistance” and “double mind” offer some publicly renowned frames, the “ordinary” lives reflect only traces of these two concepts. Therefore, most of the autobiographers do not describe themselves consciously as a *part of* a distinct generation. The generational aspect is more often mentioned distinctly in relation to the passing of time. In addition to the quotes that are mentioned in the beginning of the thesis, I found a direct reference to the generation in the life stories of three women:

To be fair, I do not know, what is going on. The only sure thing is that my life story is typical of an Estonian woman. Despite the fact that not all have written or translated books, songs and librettos – everyone has been able to feel the beautiful and difficult moments of the one’s time.<sup>66</sup>

I am a post-war child, I have seen the scars of the war in the forest and in the village, I have felt my father holding tight to the borders of the farm, although it had all been converted into one big collective farm. I saw the greed of chairmen and directors, the men giving up and drowning their problems in vodka. The Baltic chain and our own country were like wakeup calls, but there were already some who were more equal there, the ones who knew the price of it all. [...] I will be fifty years of age in spring; I plant flowers and bushes around the house. I will certainly find some job finally, no doubt about it. Estonia without the SSR is still a much better place.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Leelo (1947), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 346. Leelo was born to a repressed family, studied Estonian language and literature in the University of Tartu and became a publicly known poetess by the 1970s. She had recently lost her husband and was devoted to publishing original children books at the moment of writing the autobiography.

<sup>67</sup> Valli (1951), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 376. Valli has four children but no husband. She was a tractor driver – a job that she loved – during the Soviet times. At the moment of writing she was unemployed.

I often think that each generation has to carry its cross: some lost their former lives and objectives while the kolkhozes were made, some did so when the kolkhozes broke down... Only broken production buildings are left as testimonies of our work. (Tiiu, 1952)<sup>68</sup>

Autobiographies are the accounts of life that inherently offer an afterthought. The lives under study do so at least in two ways. These are the tales of Soviet lives in the post-Soviet national republic and these are the stories of the “after-life” of the Stalinist terror and traumas. Such a packing certainly rather obscures wider generalisations: the particular dual “post”-condition differs to a great extent from individual to individual. With reference to what happened before, most of the writers try to anchor their tale in the repressed past – today they know what had happened before them and the meaning of that experience much more clearly than their own.

Normally, the writers give a brief overview of the diverse destinies of their ancestors and relatives: some had just died, some had been killed in the war, some had emigrated in 1944, some had been arrested, and some were still around. I argue that the “post”-condition offers the shared frame to the stories of the “post-war” generation. It becomes clear why even most of the successful people offer some evidence of a cultural trauma of the 1990s, and why even the most traumatised and disappointed writers offer accounts of the national suffering of the 1940s.

[Beginning of life story.] I was made in the final year of the Republic, the father and the mother of our family with eight children had no idea that in June 1941 a great massacre will begin. I remember only the end of the war in 1944, when the Red troops were staying for a night in our house.<sup>69</sup>

[End of life story.] I have the impression that the politicians in our government and parties deal only with their own matters. [...] Most of Estonians are slaves deep inside. A slave does not want to get free. A slave wants to become a master. Freedom is alien to a slave, because freedom brings along the responsibility and the need to decide. People – it’s me, Estonian thinks. In general – shut up if you talk to me.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Tiiu (1952), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 385. Tiiu is from the countryside, She worked as a party cell secretary in a Kolkhoz, attended the Party school in the 1980s. After losing her job she became a cemetery guard.

<sup>69</sup> Paul (1941), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1281, 1. Paul’s story is one of the most pessimist one about the present Estonian republic.

<sup>70</sup> Andres (1955), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 229. Andres is a successful journalist and entrepreneur.

## 2.2. “Everyday resistance” and “double-mind”?

Resistance has been one of the central notions in historical accounts for the last two hundred years because it builds on the existence of active historical subject. The concept of resistance assumes the unassimilated nature of something in a new distressed context and establishes continuity of the subject in the “discontinuity and frailty” of the surrounding.<sup>71</sup> As the idea of resistance serves to distance some people from the regime the resistance-centred scholarship has not surprisingly been prominent, for example, in subaltern studies, histories of colonialism, the history of Nazi Germany, and in Soviet history.<sup>72</sup>

Actually it seems quite easy to argue that the modern state has always intervened in people’s lives and caused some sorts resistance that gets expressed in the expressions like “beating the system,” “defying authority,” or “conning someone.”<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the authors have argued for distinguishing between the open and more subtle forms of resistance. For example, James Scott brought the notion of “everyday resistance” to the lowest social strata studying peasants “working in the system to their minimum disadvantage”<sup>74</sup> based on the example of Malaysian villages in the 1970s and István Rév argued that the peasants managed to influence the totalitarian system of Hungary in the 1950s with their alienated behaviour.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Peter Fritzsche, “On the Subjects of Resistance,” in *The Resistance Debate in Russian and Soviet History*, ed. Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Marshall Poe. Kritika Historical Studies, nr.1 (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2003), 211.

<sup>72</sup> Michael David-Fox, Peter Holquist, and Marshall Poe, introduction to *The Resistance Debate in Russian and Soviet History*, 5. About the Eastern Europe see further: Vojtech Mastny, *East European Dissent*, (New York: Facts on File, 1972); Janusz Bugajski and Maxine Pollac, *East European Fault Lines: Dissent, Opposition, and Social Activism*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989).

<sup>73</sup> Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>74</sup> James Scott, *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1985.

<sup>75</sup> István Rév, “The Advantages of Being Atomised,” *Dissent* (Summer 1987): 335-350.

Rein Ruutsoo describes the phenomena of “accommodative resistance” in the Estonian context as a moderate dissatisfaction with the regime manifested in the behaviour of Estonian national community. It could also be called “everyday resistance” or an expression of the “extra-systemic subjectivity.”<sup>76</sup> According to the taxonomy of Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs such a behaviour would categorise as “dissent,” because it did not question publicly the legitimacy of the regime (“opposition”), it was not directed at the removal of the Communist regime (“resistance”), and it did not question the official ideological doctrine of the Party, nor was it making practical claims for expansion of individual freedoms and human rights (“dissidence”).<sup>77</sup> However, as “resistance” has given a more passive meaning in addition to Ruutsoo also by the other authors I consider the notions of “everyday dissent” and “everyday resistance” as synonyms in the present thesis.

Simply put, “accommodative resistance” was the semi-institutionalised persistence of an Estonian non-Sovietised culture and the “old” values, attitudes and habits of people.<sup>78</sup> Three aspects of it could be outlined: during the Khrushchev’s “thaw” there were “civic associations” established, for example, for researching local history or protecting nature, in Estonia; Estonian national culture was in general quite prospering, people became again connected to the West and maintained their distinct language community; and one can argue that the Estonians’ successful careers in official Soviet institutions made the state more tolerant towards the “Estonianness.” (Naturally, the latter is a problematic argument as in

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<sup>76</sup> Ruutsoo, “Estonia,” 121, 123.

<sup>77</sup> Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs, introduction to *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), xii-xiv

<sup>78</sup> Based on the concept of Ruutsoo, “Estonia,” 125-129; Johnston and Snow, “Estonian Nationalist Opposition 1945-1990.” I also used the ideas from the following publications: Jaak Allik, “Arvamus” (Opinion), in *Eesti identiteet ja iseseisvus* (Estonian Identity and Independence), ed. A. Bertriau, 167-176 (Tallinn: Avita, 2001), 170-175; Mart Laar, Urmas Ott, and Sirje Endre, *Teine Eesti: Eesti iseseisvuse taassünd 1986-1991* (The other Estonia: the re-birth of Estonian independence 1986-1991) (Tallinn: SE & JS, 2000), 60-66; Tõnu Parming, “Nationalism in Soviet Estonia since 1964,” in *Nationalism in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the era of Brezhnev and Kosygin*, ed. George Simmonds, 116-135 (Detroit: University of Detroit Press, 1977), 121-124.



addition to demonstrating dissent, it certainly also Sovietised locals who often pursued “Communist careers” out of self-interest.)

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Researchers of mental history have noticed that double mental standards have been present during almost every extraordinary and rapid socio-political turn and that the authoritarian state creates a strong discrepancy between the private and public world, as well. There are different mental configurations and moral norms that are expressed in “speaking or acting in two different ways concerning the same matter with intent to deceive.”<sup>79</sup> For Gail Kligman, who studied the behaviours in Ceausescu’s Romania in the context of the controlled birth policy, the dual mentality is a wilful and conscious behaviour in which social actors are aware of their intentions that, however led to the “drama of the double-self or the split between the “true” and “false” self.”<sup>80</sup>

Aili Aarelaid-Tart brings the idea into Estonian context and argues for a generational continuity mechanism of double-mindedness that was based on two oppositional, but complementary mental configurations, which determined the minds of people in the post-war conditions, as “Estonianness” that related to the ideals of the former independence and “Sovietness” that related to the values of a new regime.<sup>81</sup> In the post-war Stalinist

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<sup>79</sup> Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity*, 14.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>81</sup> Aarelaid-Tart, “Double Mental Standards in the Baltic Countries – Three Generations,” 214. She explains further: “The first was Estonianness, which is characterised as a will to continue the life interrupted in 1940 as it was before; an introverted life-style within one’s own farmstead, correctness at work; giving priority to the Estonian language at every stage of social interaction; pure nature as a guarantor of social stability etc. The keywords to mark this configuration were pastorality, individualism and localism as well as national feelings associated with the mother tongue. [The second configuration was Sovietness] consisting of orientations like communist internationalism which aimed at interrupting ties with the past full of enemies of the nation; deep class distinction and the ensuing forced collectivisation, industrialisation and urbanisation as the mainstream of building up Communism; a strong priority of the Russian language as a tool of imperialism. [...] The keywords for this configuration were huge heroic collectivism, a unprecedented “happy future” and empire-building plus giving a priority to Russians as “elder and more experiences brothers.”

conditions, “the emergence of double standards avoided a situation where a major part of the particular society [would feel] as losers in a complicated historic drama. Every human being would like to stay alive even under the conditions of violent dislocation, unjustified imprisonment or a terrorist political regime.”<sup>82</sup>

Aarelaid-Tart follows the gradual “accommodation” of “double-mindedness” according to large generational units mentioned above. The first republican generation experienced Estonian independence and was hit by the war and repressions as young adults, for them the double-mindedness was a coercive mental pattern. However, one needed to live and “on the basis of the experiments and their experience of hide-and-seek a cognitive structure was constructed that became an inevitability of everyday life for the next two generations.”<sup>83</sup> For the Stalinist generation who became of age during the repressive years, accepting the new double standards was the matter of life and death. “[It] became a white lie that they had grown accustomed to, something they could not escape. Most of this generation played this double game quite consciously [...], but also more ambitiously drawn by the fear of living.”<sup>84</sup>

The post-War generation of the “thaw” matured in a liberalised environment, becoming the “innocent masters of double thinking.” According to Aarelaid-Tart, for them, the double mindedness was a natural mixture and normal coexistence of conflicting world-views. The simultaneity of two cultural configurations was for them rather a *bricolage*,

a cultural process of improvisation or adaptation whereby objects, signs or practices are appropriated into different meaning systems and cultural settings and, as a result, are resignified. [---] [They] were no longer distressed by identity crises (first generation) or fears of living and everyday white lies (second generation). Although Sovietness was already the dominant cultural configuration due to circumstances, one could still make fun of it, using elements borrowed from the configuration of the Estonian period.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 224-225.

A former Estonian student in CEU might help to contextualise both the ideas of “everyday resistance” and the “everyday dissent.” Karmo Kroos writes that the intellectuals had a relatively privileged position in society, many of them enjoyed high official and unofficial social prestige and could relatively easily support themselves financially, the regime displayed them in all kinds of politicised bodies in order to buy legitimization in the eyes of the public. “Intellectuals were playing a double game, one for the regime and another for public.”<sup>86</sup>

In my understanding, the “accommodative/everyday resistance/dissent” is constructed as a bridge between the open opposition/resistance of the 1940s and the new rise of opposition/dissidence in the beginning of the 1970s that led to the protest movement of the 1980s. In hindsight, whenever “the cultural issues were displayed publicly, the main issue behind was always the survival of the ethnic community, and in Estonian case, of political nation.”<sup>87</sup> In this reading, “accommodative resistance” and also the “double-mindedness” not only explain the survival of Estonian culture, but also legitimise the present Estonian nation state as having always been present somewhere, at least in people’s minds, homes and traditions. Nevertheless, they also legitimises the compromises and collaborative actions that were taken in the frames of the Soviet regime, because such actions were taken for “resisting” until the freedom would arrive and the collaboration took place only with “one mental configuration”, whereas the other one remained pure and Estonian. In the following chapter I will argue with the abovementioned notions based on the autobiographic evidence.

In the next chapter I will demonstrate that the notions of “everyday resistance” and “double mind” are barely present in the autobiographies under the study.

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<sup>86</sup> Karmo Kroos, “Why There Is So Little Reform in Higher Education: Dual Identity of Estonian Intellectuals” (Budapest: Central European University, Political Science Departement, Master Thesis, nr 37, 2000), 15.

<sup>87</sup> Johnston and Snow, “Estonian Nationalist Opposition 1945-1990.”

### 2.3. “Patterns of cultural trauma:” thinking back on the lived life

The experiences of the War and of the late Stalinism “left indelible marks upon [people’s] group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways.”<sup>88</sup> Such a painful social process has been labelled recently as “cultural trauma.”<sup>89</sup> Piotr Sztompka studied the “cultural traumas” of Socialism and post-Socialism and emphasised that in these cases, in spite of the immediate negative consequences, the “trauma” had a positive and functional potential as a force of “social becoming.”<sup>90</sup>

Cultural trauma could be interpreted as a discourse, shared experience, or the paradigm for interpreting personal experiences. I should once again return to the research conducted by Aili Aareleid-Tart as she has brought the notion of cultural trauma to Estonian scholarship describing three distinct cultural trauma discourses in Estonian society in relation to speaking about the past during the current times: “Testimonies of the Soviet Reality” for local Estonians, “Refugee Romance” for émigré Estonians, and “The Fall of the

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<sup>88</sup> Jeffrey Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Jeffrey Alexander et al., 1-30 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>89</sup> Piotr Sztompka, “The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies,” in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, Jeffrey Alexander et al., 155-195 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 168-169.

Piotr Sztompka describes the cultural trauma as a six-step process: 1. Traumatogenic sudden, comprehensive, deep and unexpected change. 2. Disorganization of culture and accompanying cultural disorientation of actors. 3. Traumatizing situations or events, appearing as a result of traumatogenic change in areas other than culture and affecting the life-world of the people. 4. Traumatic condition, expressed by a set of traumatic mental or behavioural symptoms. 5. Postraumatic adaptations employing various strategies of coping with trauma. 6 Overcoming trauma by consolidating a new cultural complex.

<sup>90</sup> Piotr Sztompka, “The Trauma of Social Change,” 193-194 and Piotr Sztompka, “Cultural Trauma: The Other Face of Social Change,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 3, (2000): 463-465. According to Sztompka, there are two alternative scenarios possible for overcoming a cultural trauma, but in his opinion the second one is more applicable to Socialist reality: “one is the vicious cycle of cultural destruction, another, a virtuous cycle of cultural reconstruction. In spite of the disruption and disarray of cultural order that it brings about, in a different time-scale it may be seen as the seed of a new cultural system, the stimulus for cultural consolidation or construction.” (Ibid., 464)

Dreamland” for immigrant Russians.<sup>91</sup> The leitmotifs of the “Testimonies” correlate quite well to the general mentality of “everyday resistance.”<sup>92</sup> I would, however, like to argue that Aarelaid-Tart uses the concept of cultural trauma in order to embrace all three distinct generic discourses and the idea of a *trauma* loses some of its explanatory power. I will show that the “Testimonies” of the “post-war” generation are not necessarily traumatic.

While reading the autobiographies of the “post-war” Estonian generation, I discovered, with some discomfort, that almost half of the stories were written by “traumatised” people who had been more or less disappointed in the new Estonian Republic. Some lives had been permanently damaged; other people had managed to find their way to reconstructing their lives. The somewhat arbitrary “scale” of overcoming the “cultural trauma” leads to the other half of the accounts by people who are either satisfied with their current life or who at least maintain an optimistic view of it. Naturally, the representativity remains an open question: are half of the Estonians really so traumatised; is writing and submitting a life story a way of dealing with one’s problems?

Quite a few writers take a retrospective look at the Soviet times, comparing life now and then. Such a comparison could provide the reader with a good understanding of the “domestication” and “resistance” of the Soviet regime, but it must also be considered carefully in the present context of the author. In the next chapter I will discuss a few of the most representative autobiographies in their present context, to then proceed to arguing

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<sup>91</sup> Aarelaid-Tart, *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*, 62-64. As previously mentioned, Aarelaid-Tart’s study of local Estonians is based on the interviews with elite. Her samples of Estonians living in Sweden and Russian living in Estonia were much more diverse in terms of social diversity.

<sup>92</sup> Aarelaid-Tart claims that the cultural trauma of the changes from the Soviet order to capitalism has been overcome by leaving a testimony of the following leitmotifs: a) the civilisation incompetence of Russians who came to Estonia; b) the sufferings of their family during the Stalinist terror, including deportation and forced collective farming; c) a constant fear of being betrayed and falling into the grasp of the Soviet reprisal system; d) the personal efforts to survive in the radically changed circumstances; e) the personal experiences with KGB officials; f) confrontations concerning the entering of Komsomol and the CPSU; g) the illusions of Soviet liberalism caused by Khrushchev’s “thaw”; and h) participation in the voluntary societies keeping the resistance mentality alive. (Ibid., 62).

about the development of the generational mentality from childhood to adulthood, in its diversities.

### 3. Estonian “post-war” generation: autobiographical reflections on Sovietisation

#### 3.1. “This is where I am”: autobiographies in context

In the present lengthy sub-chapter I shall give some representative accounts on the ways people compare their life in the ideological context of today and of the past. I will proceed from the most traumatised accounts to more brighter stories I finish up with the story that reads as the most “typical” to me.

To begin with, there are some examples of extreme bitterness, like in the case of Paul (1941). Paul was a kolkhoz worker, and has chosen to wrap his life in a double trauma: the story starts with the Stalinist repressions and ends with his severe deception in the present Estonian state. His story pushes the limits of using suffering as a frame and source of meaning. It could represent the irreversible dark side of Sovietisation: relying on the idea of the State arranging lives, providing welfare and making things happen. It is the story of losing the material, social and cultural resources that the author had accumulated during the Socialist era. There are some alienated and embittered subjects such as Paul in every society, but it seems to me that in a closer reading his testimony is representative of quite a large number of people; the archives have simply failed to collect life stories of KGB informers, presently homeless people, and so forth. They are around, but what do they think?

[Beginning of life story:] In March 1949, when I arrived to the first class of Kudina school, half of the desks were empty. I remember that the word „deportation” was not to be used. The weather in Estonia was incredibly sunny and springy on the 5th of March 1953, in school we were told that the Great Father has died. The one whose moustache we had lengthened on the pictures. But our own father had passed away already two years ago [in 1951], because his heart could not stand such a state regime. Being the younger brother I had to cope with it all. I had to steal some food for the animals [that we had hid in the forest] during the moonlit nights from the fields of the collective farm. [...]

In 1970 I went [to work] in the collective farm named after Miina Härma. In 1970-1980, I was a shop-worker there. But as the wage-difference between the workers and the tractor drivers was large, I decided for the latter. Then, I had to work on two positions at the same time, from five in the morning until eight in the evening. There was a lot of work and I was very satisfied. In 1980-1990, I was the backhoe driver in a building brigade. [...]

All my dreams came true in 1991. First I understood that communism had really arrived. All that we were building in the last fifty years started to bear fruit. *Working* as such is not needed anymore. My tractor-backhoe was taken away from me, because it was more profitable to give it to EMEX [knackers] than to work with it. *Money* is also not needed anymore. They gave 150 kroons and the rest in the privatisation coupons [during the currency reform in 1992]. The people take as much as they need (10 millions) and give back as much as they can [reference to one political corruption scandal]. *The law* is not needed, because people are so educated (and there is no juridical help).<sup>93</sup>

If Paul's plain cynicism might have seemed somehow childish or simplistic, then Anton (1944) struck me with his good skills of reflection and an apparent ability to "play Soviet." On one hand, his story was one of the most unpleasant ones to read – it is the pure *Sovietisation* without any idealist belief in Socialism and bright future of Communism; on the other hand, the autobiography reads as a very sincere one. It left me thinking of the stories of all the successful players who use very different vocabulary to wrap their rather similar past lives. A large number of the writers refer to the loss of the feeling of security and stability that the Socialist state had provided. Anton lived his whole life on an Estonian island Hiiumaa. As a child he suffered from poliomyelitis, after which he moves with difficulty. After he was not encouraged in boarding school to continue at the university, he enrolled in the ESSR Party School. After he worked as a political worker and an economist-accountant in Hiiumaa, he retired in 1992.

After clarifying the situation for myself, it became clear that I would be not an idealist and that the job [of political organiser] is not very suitable for me. So it was better to join the general mentality of the kolkhoz: live and let the others to live. As I had been allocated the job, I had to start working. I organised compulsory trainings, kept the paperwork in order, did not report our internal problem to the big bosses, convinced some people to join the party. People were satisfied with my job. [...]

If summarizing my life, I could say that the Soviet power enabled me to live a biocomplete life that is totally impossible right now. The Soviet power gave me free education and a profession, with some income. Then, there were no problems for a handicapped person to get a job, if one was full of energy and had got some brains. I also did not feel any restriction of my freedoms. [...] I have nothing good to mention about the new Estonian Republic, though. In the first place, it took all my savings that I had collected through hard work; even the Soviet power had not taken the money from its citizens in the

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<sup>93</sup> Paul (1941), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1281, 1-2.



reforms in the 1960s. I do not care what will happen to Estonia, it took all my money and broke all my illusions (dreams) and, then, I lost the meaning of my life.<sup>94</sup>

In general, the traumas are not so acute and there is more potential of overcoming them. For example, Aarne (1959) describes his dissent towards the Soviet regime in meticulous detail. However, his dream of a normal life in the countryside during the new times did not come true either. The farmstead that he had developed in the 1980s was restituted to the pre-war owners, who forced them out of their home. Ten years later the new owners sold the farmstead, which had stayed inhabited for the entire time, back to Aarne. It is the story of a family who copes with the new system, but cannot forgive the (seemingly?) great injustice done to them.

We became the enemies of the republic who hampered the legal owners reinstating their rights. [...] The name “The Republic of Estonia” leaves me indifferent. I have decided that if that country should taunt us once more, I would not stand up during the anthem. Why pretend?<sup>95</sup>

In general, the women’s stories seem to be brighter. There are traumas, but there is always a notion of coping.<sup>96</sup> Irma’s (1948) father was arrested and sentenced with a typical 25 + 5 in 1945 for obscure reasons; her mother lost her job as the wife of the enemy, and yet she became an “ordinary” Soviet youngster and adult. Her story reads as typical of a simple but rather open minded person. In a way, she lost much in her living standards with the collapse

<sup>94</sup> Anton (1944), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1239, 3-5.

<sup>95</sup> Aarne, (1959), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 216.

<sup>96</sup> I would like to make a short reference here to a story that keeps disturbing me since the first time I read it. It is written by Helju (born in 1934) from an earlier generation. It is fascinating story because of being a *tragedy* per se and also because of indicating the limits of autobiography, the reader does not really understand *why* did it all go like that. Helju’s father was shot as a railway worker in 1941 by the Red army, mother died of tuberculosis in 1944. After graduating a school as a nurse, she was appointed to a job in totally Russified Narva where she spent most of her life. Her children forbid the mother to speak Estonian with them on the street in order to feel safer. Finally, in 1983 she managed to move to Tallinn with her two children. The short autobiography ends as follows:

“Then, everyone were excited with the liberation movement, I participated at all these events during the day and night. My daughter studied in the University of Tartu, but probably she did not enjoy the atmosphere there, after the II year in Tartu she swallowed a fatal dose of pills. But the sun still continued as a sportsman. Now all the possibilities for training and attending the competitions were opened. Once, during the Soviet times, we were on the island of Aegna and watched the ship Georg Ots [ship to Finland] and sighed: could we once go to Finland as well. Now all the roads were opened, but the faith interrupted. The competition in Germany did not take place for my son – the flagship of the new Estonian Republic “Estonia” took 852 people down to the bottom of the sea. My son, as well. [Note: Helju Pehk died in Tallinn on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2003.] (Helju, (1934), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 294-297.)

of the Soviet system. However, the presence of children and family in combination with a positive mindset help her to still enjoy the independent Estonia. Her story has only a few political considerations.

In 1966, when I graduated, everyone, who did not proceed with the studies, had to find a job right away. There was no sitting at home. Then one was considered a parasite. There was no unemployment either. I wanted to go to work to the Võru Gas Analysator Factory montage department. [...] In 1980, I filed an application for a tourism trip abroad to the labour union and in the same year I got an opportunity to visit Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The impressions of the first trip would deserve some more space for describing! I was drinking in all the art galleries, churches, restaurants and Lake Balaton. Although we could exchange very little money, I brought back new pairs of shoes for the children and a Czech vase. [...] It was easy to collect money with the help of life insurance. Every month I paid a small amount and after five years the money could be used for travel or for buying something bigger. So we bought a big colour TV, cupboard; made a renovation, I painted the kitchen dark red and decorated one room with orange wall-paper. I am not sure, but maybe the generally gray and monotonous life had started to get on my nerves.

I was fired in 1996. I was not very sad, because the work conditions had been inhumane. I received unemployment payment and some rent compensation. I went to a computer course, but really disliked it. When the farmsteads were reinstated, my mother donated her inheritance to me and Arne as we had been taking care of the lands already before. Initially, the life in the countryside started off pretty well. The village people constructed a new public swing and campfire place. [...] But it was financially all the more difficult. We had to sell of our cows as the milk price went so low. What joy could one feel from work in such conditions? [...] In 1999, I finally got a new job after three years at home. I work at the bottle depository. In the beginning I was nervous because half of my clientele are the homeless, whom I had not been in contact before. But many people live difficult lives and I was also helped by my course in psychology, so I could at least understand these people a bit and treat them as human beings. [...] One needs to hope that our children and grandchildren will have a better life some day, because if we were in a hole for 50 years, then the most difficult is to climb out of it in order to go on.<sup>97</sup>

Neenu (1952) was born into the family of Soviet clerks, who were both working in the Finance office of the Tartu city and county Executive Committee. Her home lacked the “Estonian” traditions as her parents tried to behave as appropriate for state officials. Nevertheless, almost all of her father’s relatives had actually emigrated in 1944. Neenu studied law at the university, which was considered a very “ideological” discipline at the time, and works presently in Job Inspection. Since she is a rather introverted person, the type of state regime seems rather unimportant for her; she sticks to her job and requirements that come with it. Neenu demonstrates good skills of self-reflection and the final sentences of her life story may also shed some new light on previous accounts.

When I was 5 years old, we suddenly received a letter from New York with the help of unknown people. In 1944, during the great departure, my father’s relatives – grandparents, aunt with children and

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<sup>97</sup> Irma (1948), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 347-355

husband – had all left. My father was also about to leave but then returned home from the port. Until receiving the letter my father had heard nothing about the relatives. Then, the correspondence started. Of course I did not understand why the letters were addressed to the name of my Mother's brother, why the names were changes in the letters and so on. [...] But foreign relatives had a pleasant effect on our everyday life. We started to receive a few packages a year. [...] We could have normal, even elegant clothes for the time. [...] Once my mother told me that wasn't it good that I got many dresses at the same time, that she never had so many dresses. I replied: "I did not receive these dresses from you, but from the Soviet regime!" I was home alone and listened to radio all the time.

After working for some years the Party agitator approached me with the news that now there is a free place for a younger female state official with higher education and if I do not use the chance I need to wait for quite a long time, because the ratios should not be violated. I refused, because I felt no need. I was offered the place once more but then they left me alone. I would not say that I had any problems because of it. I did not have to step out afterwards and tell stories about the bad times in the past. Though, some of my friends have said that that is why I have not accomplished much, I did not become member of the nomenklatura and did not have a good starting position for proceeding in the changed circumstances. I guess I have a conservative nature.

I have been very lucky, because some years ago I inherited a small deposit from aunt Linda that enables us to live much better than only with the salary. I can travel now and to the countries where I want to go, not where I am able to. We all live only once, therefore I allow myself maybe a bit more than would be normal for a person from a modest home. [...] Actually, I cannot even imagine how I would manage without this inheritance. Okay, I would not be totally down-and-out, but I would be probably a drain-hearted subject, bitter from niggardizing, cursing the government, envying the successful. And, I would not have anyone else to blame than myself (why am I not entrepreneurial, well adapting career-oriented type?), but in this case I would probably not be thinking like this.<sup>98</sup>

Valli's (1943) father was a commandant of the government summer cottages. She remembers the first difficult years of kolkhozes, and the beginnings of her independent life in Tallinn were also tough and poor. His uncle was in the labour camp in Vorkuta. He works currently as a simple worker. Valli represents another of the balanced accounts of the "ordinary" people. She has no illusions about the present, but she certainly does not long for the past either.

I still remember the death of Stalin. We were told to prepare a black rosette at home and wear it on the day of the funerals. But I could not manage to go to school and I was so sorry not to be able to wear the rosette. [...] Then it was the time of returning of the deportees [in the end of the 1950s]. As we were also living in a house of deportees we had to start looking for a new home. [...]

To my mind, the biggest problem of our time is the lack of feeling of security. Collecting any money for the time of retirement is meaningless. But there are also many good things, now. If you have money you can travel wherever you want. I like to travel, but I could cross the border only twice during in the Soviet time, I did not belong to the "chosen people," because I was not in the Party. The comrades could go somewhere every year. Now, I have travelled through almost all the Europe. I have chosen to travel instead of collecting money, the biggest constraint is time. It is nice that the young people, whoever has any opportunities and willingness, can go abroad, but it is sad if they choose to stay there and we need to bring more immigrants in. Who was red became blue-black-white and who did not

<sup>98</sup> Neenu (1952), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 356-366.

make politics then, does not now either. Only that formerly there was only one party and now there are many – the field of activities is wider but there is also more carelessness towards the others.<sup>99</sup>

In the case of Koit (1947) all the pre-conditions for a “Soviet success” were met. He was born in Tallinn to the family of workers and was blessed with an active character. He was an active child, who preferred singing in a band and repairing motorcycles to studying well. Koit became a director of the huge company of Estonian SSR “Lada” auto-service. In the beginning of the 1990s he entered politics and private business, but quit both in 1996 due to a bankruptcy. Currently, Koit runs the “Mercedes” auto-service. I chose his life story as an example of an active person, who managed to understand the rules of success in both the Soviet and capitalist society. However, it is interesting to notice the way he presents his historical conditions: just as he was a scapegoat working as a Soviet director, joining another party similarly becomes “just giving a signature to some paper.”

The fact that I was a Pioneer, Komsomol and later also a Party member did not mean that I had selected a red path in my life. But the older I got, the clearer it was to me that the return of the “Estonian time” is quite improbable. I did not believe in its return at school and also later, when I was already more capable of personal reflection. [...]

I have no reason to really condemn my two years of the time that I spent in the Soviet army. Rather, I received my first leadership experiences there. What else could it be, if you are a 20-year-old commander of a car brigade, which consists of 30 other men of your own age, to whom you need to explain the matters. The officers gave the order and I needed to find my way out of the impossible situation myself. [...]

I remember of the Americans’ phrase *give me a chance*. I think I have tried to grab some opportunities throughout my life. [...] [For a “Lada” auto-service national director], Togliatti had set certain criteria: higher education, experience and, interestingly, being of local nationality. It has a certain explanation. The car-service was a kind of valve for the Soviet system. From time to time it was good to find a scapegoat and punish him in the media. Blaming the car-service was not an anti-state activity. And if someone was to blame, then better to choose a local person. [...] In Estonia it happened all the time that the guarantee-service complaints were not withdrawn after the repairing work. The factory leadership was angry and at one meeting I was told that they will send me to a traineeship in Turkmenistan – there are no guarantee-service complaints. [...] After the meeting the Turkmenistan director asked me to explain what this guarantee-service was. [...]

After leaving the Communist Party I had no thoughts of becoming a member of another Party. But when Jaak Tamm initiated “Koonderakond” in 1992, joining it was much easier than joining the Communist Party had been. I was told to sit down and write an application. I wrote it and do not really regret it. [...]

I am a real optimist by nature. It would be a sin to whine and complain; I am happy with my life. Life has offered me some opportunities, the question is in me; sometimes I have not been able to use these opportunities.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Valli (1943), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1229, 11.

<sup>100</sup> Koit (1947), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 242, 244.

If I would have to choose one life story out of the fifty-sixty that I read, I would, with some hesitation, choose Helja (1947). Her relatives suffered from both the Stalinist and the Nazi terror, but her mother and father had been spared, in fact they were active members of the Soviet society. Helja studied mathematics in the University of Tartu and works in a statistical office since her graduation. To me, her story represents a genuine acceptance of the regime with a slight degree of dissent on the background. It is a tale of a wise but simple educated Estonian. It is hard to describe “normality” in a few quotations. I hope the longer example of Helja’s helps to approximate to the Soviet “normality” of the “post-war” generation.

I was born in November 1947. I have two sisters, who are respectively three and six years younger than me. I have lived all my life in Tartu Tammelinn district in a relatively small house that had been built in the 1920s as one of the first ones in the neighbourhood. [...] I have been baptised by Harri Haamer, when Sirje was born, he had been already sent far away [from Estonia]. My parents were not really religious, it was just a habit. [...] Of course we celebrated Christmas and coloured the Easter eggs. [...] Later when we were already schoolchildren, we were also visited by the Grandfather Frost [Soviet Santa Claus] for “practical considerations.”

Once Stalin’s picture was in the newspapers and we had a visitor. Someone asked who that was. Sirje replied that it was a donkey. Silence. Where did a three-year-old child get such an idea? My parents were daunted. Anyways, we had all the 15 volumes of Stalin’s collected works. Apparently, it had been compulsory for my father to buy them. We built furniture for our dolls out of these volumes. It was not praised but not forbidden either. Then we also had an album of *20 years of Estonian Independence*. We watched pictures from there but could not show it to the strangers.

My birthday was always prior to the Anniversary of Revolution [called October holidays]. In first form, we received the certificate and sang the anthem right on my birthday. It left a deep impression. When I returned home, I let my Mother teach me the words of the anthem [of Soviet Estonia]. Mother told me that that one also needs to respect the anthem and the flag, and that one needs to stand up during the anthem; it had always been like that in her childhood. We were aware that the flag and the anthem had been different then.

Then, I remember the appearance of “Ikarus” buses. At home I was told that the builders of these buses might be dead already and that there is a war in Hungary. It gave me some food for thought and the buses were somehow special afterwards. [...] My parents did not really influence the formation of my world view. I feel pity for the ones who were waiting for the White Ship [magic saviour] until the age of 40 and who complained about the desperate everyday reality at home. The Estonian Republic had been important to my mother, but she would add her surprise about hearing my grandmother saying that this Tsarist time had not been so bad either. At some moment I was a convinced Soviet citizen.

I liked the Pioneer costume a lot. I wanted to become a Pioneer! [...] But just before that ceremony I fell ill. And I did not become one. A few years passed. My desk-mate was not a Pioneer – she told me that is it lame. When they started to agitate again, we said that our parents would not let us. When I told this at home, parents became serious and I understood that there might be some problems. I joined. I thought that at least I would not become a Komsomol member, but right when I was invited at the age of fourteen, I went there. There were a few camps, but nothing very fascinating. Luckily it was not so easy to join the Party, because at my workplace there were no workers. Otherwise I might have joined it

as well. When I was made an offer, I had become a bit smarter and I turned it down. There was not much pressure.

We were very active in organising social and cultural events with the class. [...] I remember some meeting where we had to talk about plans and accomplishments. We were quite creative in creating the list of things. I stood up and started: we have had 39 Komsomol events last semester. Others were giggling a lot. Among the other matters we celebrated the Party Congress and teacher L. afterwards praised us: yes they did it, in my class. Such a balagan mood was prevalent throughout the whole school. It would be wrong to consider it political.

My belief was shaken first, when Khrushchev was dismissed in 1964. It was said that he retired, but also that "the Party shows the right place to the ones like him also in the future." [...] One of the boys in my class announced "Party program says that everyone hiding our problems is the enemy of the state. What should we think of teacher P. now?" There was no white bread at these times, but teacher P. had assures us that the USSR had food reserves for a long period. They even sent the KGB to visit one of my classmates. It was the first time I heard people saying that our elections are like in Paradise, where the God took Adam to Eve and said: choose yourself a wife! [...] Two of my classmates were in the War in the Czech Republic in 1968, it was the next stroke towards my sincere beliefs.

Every year we celebrated our department's anniversary with an excursion. We also participated in the Spartakiad of the statistical offices. Naturally, we also took part in the Socialist competitions. There was a story about three things that help life progress: the fear of death, sexual... and the socialist competition. [...] Each employee had his or her personal socialist responsibilities. I was assigned to the singing choir as I participated in it anyway. [...] I think, the winners were nominated according to some predetermined list.

At the peak time we were around 45 people at work. We celebrated birthdays, told anecdotes that there were much more of than nowadays. As we were a multi-ethnic group, the selection of anecdotes was large. We had only one party member among us, he attended the Party cell meetings in another statistical office. Once he had been reported for telling political anecdotes at work. Hence, also in our small group there was someone narking. [...] When Brezhnev died, my boss brought a TV to the office to watch the funeral together. We prepared sandwiches with some salami sausage. I do not remember the bottle on the table, but I naturally must have been there as well. The other nationalities at our workplace were certainly not more loyal to the state than Estonians, maybe even more courageous in expressing their thoughts.

When the tricolour was hoisted on the top of the Tall Hermann tower, we watched it at home on TV, and everyone stood up. We were appalled. Participating in the Baltic Chain in 1989 was also important. These were the high times. Everybody were consenting to each other. [...] In 1999, I took a trip to Italy. It gave me mostly some so-called social satisfaction. It is interesting to listen to the impressions of others and look at pictures, but it becomes a bit tedious. [...] We did not spend much. Once I became a bit annoyed of having to niggardize, but then I realised that it is the same at home, anyways. It made me feel better again.

Certainly, I am not the first one who considers life to be like a sinusoid, sometimes it goes up, then it descends again. Some have the higher peaks with the steeper declines. Looking at my home now, it feels like back in my childhood. Again there are three generations in the house, but now I belong to the oldest one. Life goes on, I hope that I will have time to get my share of it and enjoy it.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Helja (1947), III, 311-315, 317- 318, 321, 323, 325.

### 3.2. “These innocent carefree games of childhood”: home and school<sup>102</sup>

Now, with the diversities of the ways of remembering in mind, I will proceed to comparing aspects that were touched upon most in the life stories.

Some narrators contextualise their youth-time by starting with detailed accounts of the faith of their grandparents and parents; the others give only a brief overview of what came before them. In the present sub-chapter, I ask about the role of childhood experiences in the formation of the mentality of the “post-war” generation. The main areas of focus for me are the attitude of the parents and the relations with the Soviet youth organisations. I argue that almost the only universal theme in the “post-war” childhood is the “silence” of the parents about the past. At least, based on the generation’s own self-perception, most of the other mental configurations are very diverse.

By and large, there were three types of post-war homes: Estonian-minded ones, Socialist-minded homes, and ambiguous/absent ones. None of the groups is clearly dominating the others. Notwithstanding the difficulty of distinguishing the groups in reality, the story-tellers are quite clear in categorising their own homes, which are seen either “Estonian” or “Socialist,” and in the third case the author’s opinion is usually vague or missing.

First, Estonian-mindedness is expressed through grandparents and their stories (grandparents were more open, because they had “less to lose”) and with the persistence of traditions (Christmas as a family holiday). But even in the real “Estonian” homes, the open expression of opposition was very scarce.

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<sup>102</sup> From: Astrid Lindgren, *Bill Bergson Lives Dangerously* or *The Dangerous Life of Master Detective Kalle Blomkvist*, 1951. A quote by the Old Gren an hour before being murdered.

My grandfather had been in the army of the Estonian [independent] state. He passed some of the values and attitudes to me. It certainly was not a conscious spirit of dissent, though.<sup>103</sup>

I do not remember it being said often, but there was a clear attitude about considering the time of Estonian [independence] as the best. Even though it was not discussed and the national flag was not hidden anywhere.<sup>104</sup>

We had no fear of celebrating Christmas, even though my teacher Valve, who was a Communist, was checking on [pupils] from the window to see who had lit candles in the room.<sup>105</sup>

Second, there are somewhat fewer authors who admit that their family had really believed in the Socialist ideals. It mostly implies more “wishful thinking” and a more convinced acceptance of the Soviet regime, but really no “anti-Estonianness.”

Mother was a bit credulous and under the influence of Soviet ideology, maybe because of my father, who was the big love of her life and who had been a party official his whole life.<sup>106</sup>

My parents were convinced atheists. [...] There were only a few homes where Christmas was not celebrated. But at our place, the fir tree was brought in only for the New-Years Eve [and not before].<sup>107</sup>

My mother and father worked in the Soviet financial office, but had no affiliation with the Party. They did not cry for the Estonian Republic, did not hide the flag on attic nor celebrate Christmas behind the thickly closed curtains. [...] Mother justified later that since celebrating Christmas had been forbidden, they did not want to confuse me.<sup>108</sup>

Regardless of the tough treatment by the Soviet regime after the war and even later, my parents were quite naive Communists. Christmas was not celebrated, wedding rings as bourgeois relics were not worn. But there was no ideological work on us. [...] In 1988, my parents were singing the Estonian anthem by heart, under the national tricolour; we, the younger ones, were a bit embarrassed – we did not know the words well.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Andres (1955), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 223. Andres was the child of Soviet journalists and became an active student and journalist later on himself. Currently active in publishing textbooks.

<sup>104</sup> Koit (1947), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 241. Considering the context of the successful Soviet and post-Soviet career of the author, such an “clear attitude” seems not very convincing to me.

<sup>105</sup> Irma (1948), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 348.

<sup>106</sup> Laura (name changed, 1953), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 967, 7. Laura grew up with the mother. Studied in the University of Tartu, and became a teacher of Estonian language. At the moment of writing her life story she was teaching in a small town school.

<sup>107</sup> Tiit (1954), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 2, 417. Tiit grew up in a Socialist home as a “sincere believer” of the regime. As a student his dissent grew and he became a religious by the end of 1970s. Tiit lived hippie-dissident life in the 1980s and started to work as a protestant priest in 1989. At the moments of writing works in the Church.

<sup>108</sup> Neenu (1952), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 361. Neenu’s parents were the Soviet officials in the field of finance. However, they did not support her joining the Pioneer organisation. Neenu studied law and works for the state, as well.

<sup>109</sup> Tõnn (1949), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 2, 379. Tõnn grew up in a Socialist, but free-minded home. In the 1970 he became an Estonian folk-music activist with some connections to active dissidents. Currently keeps a small business.



Third, there are many people who grew up under only scarce influence of parents or relatives, often coming from broken families. “What did we know of deportations and of who had been deported?”<sup>110</sup>

Now, regardless to the mentality of homes, the common feature in most of the stories is silence about the past. Personal opinions about the War and especially about the Stalinist terror were not touched upon at home. Exceptional cases are some older or repressed relatives, who had “much less too lose.”<sup>111</sup>

The layer of clouds that covered the Estonian sky at that time rested on the shoulders of the grownups, and they knew how to hide it from the children. Many topics were not discussed in front of children.

I have been discussing with people of my age how much we were told at home about the past and the real thoughts. Out parents have mostly kept silent.<sup>112</sup>

I never got to know what my experienced and wise grandfather was thinking. He did not express his opinion on such matters.<sup>113</sup> ... My parents never spoke at home of politics and of how this new regime had been violently brought to us. I was pretty naïve up to very recent times. [At the same time my father did not allow me to become a Pioneer.]<sup>114</sup> ... My parents did not want to speak about the war and Russians [!]. I consider it to be the influence of the Stalinist time. But I was very interested in the past.<sup>115</sup> Mother and father only sighed, that we would maybe also live similarly [to Finland], unless... Such sentences remained always unfinished in our home.<sup>116</sup>

Nevertheless, the children were curious, unanswered questions produces additional fantasies, the silence of the adults was met with the presence of small details, youngsters made friends with children with a different background and heard the stories. The past was present in the after-the-war games with war-gadgets, in the furnishings of the apartments and in the books that could be found hidden here and there.

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<sup>110</sup> Harald (1954), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1334, 12. Harald came from a poor and broken family and grew up in a boarding school. He studied Estonian language and literature and became a Culture house project manager. Jobless at the time of writing.

<sup>111</sup> Naturally, there are some exceptions: “My father had “managed” to get drafted to the German army and had spent ten years in the prison camp in Siberia. As a strong and positive person he survived and all my childhood was accompanied with the stories of his sufferings.” (Tiina (1958), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 399)

<sup>112</sup> Tiina (1958), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 398. Tiina is from the countryside. She describes active life in the collective farm under the leadership of a great chairman. Has always worked with small children, now in the kindergarten.

<sup>113</sup> Laura (name changed, 1953), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 967, 7.

<sup>114</sup> Elle-Vaike (1944), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1214, 3. Elle was a good pupil from a small Estonian town. She became a teacher of Estonian language and is currently still teaching.

<sup>115</sup> Aarne (1959), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 212. Aarne is from countryside. After the collapse of the collective farming he tried to establish his own farm, but got in conflict with the pre-war owners to whom his home had been reinstated. At the moment of writing he has finally bought the house back.

<sup>116</sup> Tiina (1958), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 389.

It was in 1952, I have no idea how come we had heard of the Home Guard [Estonian pre-war paramilitary association]. One of us had prepared a sign “Home Guard Office.” Then he was sitting at the door of his home with the sign; and we walked in and out with very important faces. Luckily, nobody registered a complaint on us in the militia.<sup>117</sup>

The former owner of the house lived in the cellar floor in the smallest apartment. He/she seems to have been a lucky one; no-one had complained about him/her. [...] As the former owner still lived in the house, there was some confusion as to who could take the apples from the garden and who cannot.<sup>118</sup>

Once I came across a “Poem to Stalin” with my mother’s handwritten dedication: ““Look and envy – I am a Soviet citizen!” Majakovsky, An ode to the Soviet passport. To my brother Ilo for receiving a passport. On behalf of the sister and the brother in law.” [...] Once I and my brother found *The Estonian’s Year of Suffering* in my father’s room hidden behind the other books. It was a fascinating and dangerous discovery. We read it secretly and looked at the pictures.<sup>119</sup>

There is also a clear inter-generational difference here: the children of the 1940s have a somewhat personal relation to the Stalinist atmosphere, whereas the children born later, lack the reference to dark “fear of living.”

I was really afraid at night in the forest, because behind every tree there could have been some member of the notorious group of Ilp. There were a few of his victims buried in the cemetery near my mother’s grave. I still remember the funerals of a young district communist activist: a pale boy in the coffin, with a bullet-hole of a size of a 2-kopeck coin in the cheek. [...] Next to him rests an old couple that Ilp had murdered in their sleep at home. What kind of a high-principled man [that Ilp] could have been?<sup>120</sup>

During these difficult times, my mother and father often allowed the door to be locked from the outside to leave the impression that there is no one at home. As my grandparents lived in the house next to ours, they locked our door. Being the youngest, I did not understand anything of these fears and only now I realised that life was insecure, full of fear, stress and harassment (these two last words were not used then though).<sup>121</sup>

After my mother was taken away I no longer dreamed of men in black. Memme herself appeared in my dreams sitting in a circus ring, surrounded by four large tigers and one smaller, bloodthirsty one. Fear of Russians lived on in my unconscious mind for a good many years. [...] One beautiful morning day Tata, moved to tears, announced that Memme was finally coming home again. [...] And there was Memme: a short, buxom woman, her eyes red from crying, with her frostbitten forehead and cheeks. I was sure this was not my mother – this must be a deception, a diversion, something I had read often in Soviet adventure novel.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Avo Rein (1945), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 2, 338.

<sup>118</sup> Koit (1947), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 241.

<sup>119</sup> Tõnn (1949), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 2, 379-380. *The Estonian’s Year of Suffering* had been published in 1943 as a German propaganda, documenting, quite fairly, the Soviet terror in Estonia 1940-1941.

<sup>120</sup> Valli (1943), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1229, 4, 6.

<sup>121</sup> Elle-Vaike (1944), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1214, 4-5.

<sup>122</sup> Leelo (1947). in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 336. Translation to English in *She Who Remembers, Survives*, ed. Kirss, Kõresaar, Lauristin, 280.

Leelo’s grandmother was 84 years old when being deported to Siberia, where she survived the darkest times and lived until the death in 1955 with her oldest daughter. Before dying, grandmother received the news of the release of Leelo’s mother who had been imprisoned in 1951: Thus a peasant woman who had given birth to fourteen children and raised nine of them to adulthood, whose longest journey to date had been to visit her children in Tallinn, travelled in a locked kettle car across the Soviet Union to the village of Shadrino in Novosibirsk oblast. It is said that I thought the scurrying around the guards was for fun, and that I had invited them to play hide-and-seek with me. My horrible nightmares continued even more frequently, so that I would let my parents fall asleep only on condition that I had crept into their bed. Leelo (1947), in *Eesti rahva elulood* vol. 3, 333. Translation to English in *She Who Remembers, Survives*, ed. Kirss, Kõresaar, Lauristin, 278

School and friends are naturally the other important socialising factor for the “post-war” generation. Leelo, whose mother had just been released from prison, continues:

I had a thousand things to do at school – singing at school parties, poetry readings, acting in plays, drawings and writings for the wall newspaper, organising all kinds of carnivals and orienteering games. [...] I was elected chairman of the [Pioneer] group council, and as I embroidered two red parallelograms onto the sleeve of my blouse, I was reported to have said to Memme, “This means responsibility!” I hardly believe that anyone in my family praised my enthusiastic participation in the Pioneers movement, but probably the Siberian experience had made everyone so cautious that no-one besides Aunt Anne reprimanded me.<sup>123</sup>

This is where the influences on the children’s and adolescents’ development become very diverse, as well as the outcomes of the socialisation process. Most of the children were active members of their class, but some were the loners and lived in their own world of books and fantasies.

It was an ordinary childhood full of boys’ activities. There were plenty of boys around with whom I played and ran around.<sup>124</sup> ... All the boys at this time were impressed with Indians. [...] I spent all of my school vacations in Eastern Estonia at my grandfather’s. There I acquired weapons and grenades from the abandoned trenches. [...] The gang-wars between Hiiu and Lilleküla [two districts in Tallinn] are well known.<sup>125</sup> ... When I became nervous, my eyes started to tremble and the head was shaking here and there. The others laughed at me at school. [...] I was ostracised at school. It forced me to turn to the world of books.<sup>126</sup>

The attitudes of the parents towards their children participating in the Communist youth organisations varied radically. Some “Estonian-minded” parents did not mind that their children’ participated actively; other quite “Socialist” parents would have preferred for their child not to be involved in the “Red carnival.”

We all were Little Octobrists, and then became Pioneers and Komsomols, it was natural. Then, there was no alternative. Maybe some (really only some) could have had a reason to hate Soviet power. And to hate it enough to refuse principally to become part of a communist youth organisation. [...] What did we know of deportations and of who had been deported? [A boy, who grew up in the boarding school.]<sup>127</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Leelo (1947), in *Eesti rahva elulood* vol. 3, 337. Translation to English in *She Who Remembers, Survives*, ed. Kirss, Kõresaar, Lauristin, 284.

<sup>124</sup> Jaak (1954), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 252. Jaak grew up with a grandmother and mother in Tartu. In the university he became active in light athletics, and in 1980 he won a Gold medal in the Moscow Olympics. Works as a teacher of physical education in a private school.

<sup>125</sup> Andres (1955), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 222-223.

<sup>126</sup> Ülo (1960), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 232.

<sup>127</sup> Harald (1954), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1334, 12.

Father did not allow me to become a Pioneer. I was scrounging so many times. But once when my father was drunk I came again with my plea and then he shouted: “Join even the Party, if you wish!” I did not show off with my Pioneer scarf in front of him. [Father had survived the years 1945-1955 in the forced labour camp in Norilsk.]<sup>128</sup>

I was fascinated by the Pioneer meetings, spy games in the forest and so on – I wanted to join the others. My mother rather agreed, but my father was opposed. The day of admission had been already settled; I had learnt my oath by heart and had bought my red scarf. Yet, at the last moment, I decided not to join. I do not even know why. I just felt that my parents would be happy with my decision. [Parents worked in the Soviet state office. Christmas was not celebrated at home.]<sup>129</sup>

The hardly graspable group feeling, the social position of a child and the attitudes of teachers are, naturally, very important factors in shaping the mentality of a person. In the autobiographies, such topics were mostly touched on in relation to communist youth organisations. In most cases, it was quite difficult to distinguish between the representation of the situation of the child in the past and the “intervention” of other emotions related to friends and school. However, it seems that the ideological pressure varied even more from school to school than from decade to decade and that the majority of the class joined the organisations without any (external sign of) hesitation. In some cases general teenage dissent found its expression in protest against communist activism, and not the other way around.

In conclusion, people’s accounts of their youth of the 1950s and 1960s are varied. The estimates depend on family, friends, school and naturally also on one’s position in contemporary society. Some are influenced by their home, others go strongly against it. Some are conscious group members, most just go along, a few become oppositional. In summary, however, most of the accounts represent a clear acceptance of the regime as a youngster. Resistance was derived from teenager dissent rather than from ideological opposition. Only a few people explain their ideological position in the past and present openly. I will end the sub-chapter with some examples of diversity.

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<sup>128</sup> Irma (1948), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 349

<sup>129</sup> Neenu (1952), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 361

The wish of our class to be noticed and to differ was sometimes quite absurd. We did some things in a diametrically opposite way to the others in the school.<sup>130</sup> .... In the Secondary school we decided that either we all join Komsomol or that no-one would. We did not become an all-Komsomol class, though, because two girls did not join. We organised class parties and we spoke about life and studies at the meetings.<sup>131</sup> ... As for the extra-curricular activities, I went through all the stages from being a Little Octobrist to Komsomol member. Maybe our time was a bit different, but I do not remember any specific brainwashing having taken place. We sang all together "Great Lenin, so great-hearted, so caring, so smart and good...", but these were only words. [...] Most of the activities were about sport, carnivals, and outdoor games.<sup>132</sup>

But then, me and my friend acquired some oppositional mode and did not want to join anymore. We were called to the director's office and were convinced that if we want to become teachers we should join. [...] We did not find [Komsomol] compendium that evening and therefore we could not reply to any of the commission's questions the next day, but they anyways admitted us.<sup>133</sup> ... When it was the time to join the Komsomol, I started to oppose it. The majority of the class joined it right away without any further consideration. Me and some friends of mine did not want to and did not do it. In the 11<sup>th</sup> form they told that there is no way to enter the university without Komsomol. Of course they lied, but I joined the organisation.<sup>134</sup> [...] I did not want to join that organisation. I even do not now, why. [...] My brother Ilmar was working in the Komsomol committee of the town. Finally, my desk-mate just handed me the application form and a pen and I just filled it in. [...] We had very nice meetings, hikes, concerts. When the spring of graduation arrived all the graduates were the communist youth and was not oppositional anymore either.<sup>135</sup>

I do not remember any red pressure. I was a Little Octobrist, but refused to become a pioneer. Nobody said anything bad about it or pushed me to become one.<sup>136</sup> ... I have very unpleasant memories of being forced to join the Komsomol organisation. All our class was told to take a sheet of paper and write the application. It was well-known that the Komsomol members were forgiven much easier. And it was important at the graduation and for entering the university.<sup>137</sup> ... I kept away from that Pioneer-stuff, the meetings were so late in the evening that I would not have been able to catch the bus otherwise. But we all joined Komsomol in a ceremonial way together with almost the whole class.<sup>138</sup> ... Once they wanted to recruit me as a Pioneer at school, but then, suddenly all became silent. And I think it is quite easy to guess. Why. I am happy that I have not been neither a Pioneer, Komsomol or a Communist. Even if they really wanted to take me to Komsomol. [Boy's father had been killed and mother was prisoned in 1951.]<sup>139</sup>

In the first form I became a Little Octobrist, in the fourth a Pioneer. Although I was really afraid of my teacher and thought she did great injustice to me, I wholeheartedly believed her stories of our country and its Communist future. I do not know what was really in her mind, but she was able to make me believe in the communist ideals and forget God. (My great-grandmother believed in god and had transmitted this belief also to my childhood.) Naturally, a large, maybe the largest part was played by the book that told me of Lenin, Pioneer heroes and the other things like that. I was prone to magnanimous ideas, but I had no capacity to sense their background. My mother was a bit credulous

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<sup>130</sup> Vesta (1943), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr.126, 5. Vesta continues: "For example, everyone attended the October or May demonstration, but no-one went there from our class. Nobody wanted to join the Komsomol. Then we decided to shock the whole school and we joined all together."

<sup>131</sup> Tiitu (1952), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 379

<sup>132</sup> Tiitu (1952), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 379

<sup>133</sup> Tiina (1958), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 391

<sup>134</sup> Jaak (1954), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 252

<sup>135</sup> Elle-Vaike (1944), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1214, 1-7.

<sup>136</sup> Helmut (1956), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 186

<sup>137</sup> Varju (1949), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1313, 8. Varju continues: "I could escape it easily, as I had some "satisfactory" notes on my school certificate I could excuse myself telling that I am not worthy enough the belong to the ranks before I would manage to get "good" or "very good" marks only. Later there was less pressure and so I was the only one who did not belong to these ranks. There was also one case in the school when the whole class refused to write the applications. They had to stay in the school after classes for two weeks to chop wood."

<sup>138</sup> Merike (1958), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 410

<sup>139</sup> Vello (1943), nickname, Fund 350, life story nr. 465, 15.

and under the influence of Soviet ideology, maybe because my father, the big love of her life had been a life-long party clerk. I never got to know what was my experienced and wise grandfather thinking. He did not express his opinion on such matters. However, my step-father hated the Pioneer scarf (“Take this rag off!”), I hated him in my childishness. I became a wholehearted Pioneer and later a Communist youth. When cleaning the rooms as a pupil in the primary school, I sang “Marseillaise” and “Internationale.” Nevertheless, deep inside I did not enjoy the meetings and line-ups. I longed getting back home to my books. [...] In the 8<sup>th</sup> form we all joined Komsomol. I was still deeply influenced by the revolutionary books and films (by Lenin’s brother Alexander Ulyanov, Lenin, Krupskaya and so forth).<sup>140</sup>

### 3.3. “Domestication of the Communist ghost:”<sup>141</sup> becoming a Soviet Estonian

For the “post-war” generation, there had been no other reality than the Soviet one, almost all of them had grown up in the relative silence about the past and in active involvement in Soviet youth organisations. While they became older, they witnessed considerable improvements in their life quality. The liberalisation of the “thaw” created a hope that the system would be continuously getting better and better. However, the relaxation of the regime also arose curiosity: there were some relatives around who had returned from Siberia, there were some friends who knew better of what had “really happened” in the past. The growing knowledge about the nature of the regime could have caused some dissent that is expressed mostly in more or less anecdotal descriptions of the Brezhnev era everyday reality and some angry remarks about the growing Russification. It seems to be a logical way of becoming socialised. Indeed, many of the testimonies are like that.

However, I will show that the actual autobiographical accounts indicate, again, much more diversity. Moreover, the ideas of a “double mind” and “everyday resistance” become so blurred that they rather lose their meaning.

<sup>140</sup> Laura (name changed, 1953), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 967, 7, 10.

<sup>141</sup> The idea for the title from: Aarelaid, *Ikka kultuurile mõeldes*, 157.

The autobiographers balanced their dissent and oppositional feelings with the sombre understanding that the Soviet state could not (or could never) collapse and that the Estonian Republic could not be reinstated. Even the people who are very critical about the Brezhnevite Russification admit that they did not believe in the end to the “empire of absurd” – it was the grey normality.

The possibility of the return of the Estonian State never crossed my mind. But I still tried to avoid the red stuff. I remember that after giving up the sports I worked in the kolkhoz named after Viktor Kingissepp, and they wanted to recruit me to the Communist Party. Luckily I managed to find some other people who agreed to join the party instead and so they left me alone.<sup>142</sup>

Many writers describe the annoying and even stupid aspects of everyday life. People had no illusions: the illogical rules, permanent deficit, random allocation of exit visas, speaking Russian at work, “election circus” and May parade, permanent breaking down of everything – it was all part of their everyday life. But there were also the endless coffee breaks, high living standard in kolkhozes, hopes to get a new apartment, and a large “homeland” waiting to be explored. One of the sincere accounts of some dissent rising from the Soviet bureaucracy is given by a teacher called Laura in her descriptions of teachers’ everyday life in the 1970s. Laura actually calls herself a “sincere believer.”<sup>143</sup>

The stagnating 1970s are the time when the more socially active members of the “thaw” generation face the strict borders of the regime. The students of the Soviet era have noticed difficulties of conceptualising the decade as based on the autobiographic accounts it seems that the “history did not take place then.” People dealt actively with their ideological dilemmas during their adolescence, whereas when considering adulthood, the

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<sup>142</sup> Jaak (1954), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 251-262

<sup>143</sup> [During the first years as a teacher] my real work load was much higher than the nominal one. There was the request for a 100% progress in studies. The principle was: there are no bad children, there are only bad teachers. [...] Every negative mark in the grade journal of the class had to be followed by a positive mark. Before the end of the term there was a meeting of teachers, where the number of allowed negative marks was decided. [...] The final exams in the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> form had become a farce: the members of exam commission were walking between the desks and helped the ones who needed it. The teachers who corrected the graduation essays had to use blue pencil more than the red one. Failing a student had become a severe crime. Pioneering had become a burden to me as well. I could not agitate children to do as much as the Pioneer leader (wife of the director) of all-Union fame was asking for. Laura (name changed, 1953), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 967, 24.

autobiographies rather focus on private life and everyday reality. Indeed, it is hard to give account of dull and boring times, but it is even more difficult to admit becoming really “Sovietised.”

The “historical enemies” of Estonians had been Germans: it was part of the unifying myth of “700 years of slavery,” which had been cultivated already since the national awakening in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Within the single year of 1940-1941 the Russians acquired the position Germans held before in people’s consciousness people were not naïve towards Nazi propaganda, and even if so, general attitudes still changed very fast.<sup>144</sup> It would be worthwhile to notice an interesting discrepancy. On the one hand, the authors use “Russian” and “Soviet” almost as synonyms, “Russian stuff” means the Soviet way of organising things, and the Soviets are Russians, in the first place. On the other hand, one notices that a large portion of Estonians became quite “Sovietised,” but not “Russified” in any sense. In the end, it seems that being “Soviet” relates to more superficial aspects of social organisation, whereas being “Estonian” remained a deep part of people’s identity.

Here the difference of time certainly plays an important role: in the memories of the childhood and adolescence the focus lies on overcoming the (parents’) trauma of terror and on the hopes for a better Khrushchevian future. The stagnation of the regime in combination with the continuing immigration of Russian-speakers and the Russification of public life shows up also in the autobiographies. However, as there are some accounts about the dissent arising from the increasing presence of Russians, there are more stories about the unimportance of ethnic considerations in one’s life.<sup>145</sup>

In the first place I would still strangle Karl Vaino for his policy of Russification and for bringing in so many of these wogs [in the end of the 1970s].<sup>146</sup>

<sup>144</sup> Olaf Mertelsmann, “How the Russians Turned into the Image of the “National Enemy” of the Estonians,” *Pro Ethnologia* 19, The Russian Speaking Minorities in Estonia and Latvia (2005): 43-58.

<sup>145</sup> Recently my parents had quite a fierce argument about the “presence” of Russians in their youth. Being both from Tallinn, my mother grew up in the interwar-war suburban district and had almost no memories of anything Russian, whereas my father grew up in the Socialist prefab district and remembered of fierce fights between the Estonian and Russian boys gangs.

<sup>146</sup> Anton (1944), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1239, 5.



I do not remember that someone would have been speaking of the ethnic relations in the beginning of the 1960s. And I did not know much more of the Estonian history than I had been told in school. [...] That is why I was very surprised that when I met a Ukrainian boy (Jevgeni Netreba) in Leningrad, such a relationship was strongly opposed by all my relatives.<sup>147</sup>

The ideological dilemmas of adulthood were reflected mostly in relation to the ideas of the Communist party. Many mention the Party, but fewer analyse their understanding of the regime, in general. Aili Aarelaid-Tart has outlined three main motivations for joining the party based on the interviews with the elite: professional need, career ambitions, wishes for improving living conditions.<sup>148</sup> Similar notions could be found in the autobiographies, although as a fourth impulse stands out joining the Party because of believing in its principles and values. There are also many “pragmatists” who consider it as an indulgence to state that “at least there were only very few convinced Communists in my Party cell.” The majority, even the then “naïve” social actors, imply that joining the party out of personal or career interests was reasonable, whereas sincere believing or active opposition was the sign of stupidity. This seems to be a quintessence of the adaptation with the Soviet regime. Many life stories touch upon the Party without actually reflecting on ideology: the CP is described as any other of the other routine institutions which one needed to cope with. By the 1960s, the Communist Party had become certainly un-demonised and accepted as part of everyday reality. I will end the descriptive part of the chapter with examples on reflecting on the Communist party.

In the second year at school I became the member candidate of the CP. Nobody had forced me. The reason laid in my lack of knowledge of the real life: I knew nothing of the criminal nature of the CP, of the background of the theory of Communism. My father, whom I never met though, had been a party secretary for decades. Most of the teachers in the secondary school of Varstu belonged to the Party. A few years later I would have wanted to avoid it all, but it was too late then, I joined the Party. I was the Party member for a bit more than 10 years, until it became extinct.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Vesta (1943), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr.126, 5, 11, 23, 28.

<sup>148</sup> Aarelaid-Tart, *Ikka kultuurile mõeldes*, 138-140.

<sup>149</sup> Laura (name changed, 1953), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 967, 24.

The Communist Party, it was like a free appendix to the Soviet time that one had to inevitably bear with in some work positions. However, if a simple worker entered the party, there had to be some expectations for personal benefits there.<sup>150</sup>

After graduating [police/militia] school I realised that if I want to make any career, I should to have a tick filled in my personal file. Luckily I met only a few wholehearted Communist; it was mostly about paying membership fee and discussing the work-related matters at the meetings.<sup>151</sup>

I realised that if I want to reach any higher position, I should choose the party career. In addition, I was allured by the privileges of the party members. I applied to the ESSR Party School in Kehtna and to the CP. I also advised my mother to join the party although I knew that she would not be happy with the idea as the Russians had done a lot of harm to us. I just knew that if my mother is to be recognised for all the hard work she had done, she should be the communist.<sup>152</sup>

... of course I resisted. I told that my world-view is too (pale) pink and maybe nationalist, that maybe I am too critical and cannot stand the strict frames, and that I would be of no use to the Party. [...] But there were other people among the party members whose views I considered reasonable, who were by no means “red”, but who had to bear they membership due the being on the leading positions in some profession, and who were sometimes deeply embarrassed because of the Party membership.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Tiiu (1949), ERM KL 215, KV 1037, 129.

<sup>151</sup> Helmut (1956), in *Eesti rahva elulood*, vol. 3, 190-191. From an Estonian-minded home. Had not joined the Pioneer organisation.

<sup>152</sup> Anton (1944), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1239, 3-4.

<sup>153</sup> Harald (1954), EKM EKLA, Fund 350, life story nr. 1334, 43-44.

## Conclusion

In the thesis, I studied the autobiographical accounts of the Estonian “post-war”/”thaw” generation (born in 1940-1959), with a focus on the accounts of the “ordinary people.” I read the accounts by the people with very diverse backgrounds, faith, luck, ability to reflect, and so forth, aiming to bring some diversity to the current historical scholarship in Estonia that currently does not take interest the post-Stalinist developments, or in a few cases presents the era as a declining period of the “Empire of Absurd.”

To begin with, I presented a methodological and historiographical overview of the ways to approach autobiographical resources in the historical scholarship. My current study falls into the broad frames of “ethnology of everyday life” and “history of trivialities,” as I was concerned with the cultural categories that structure and give meaning to their individual experiences. I followed the example of J. P. Roos in presupposing that the “ordinary authors” try to give a fair account on their life based on their subjective understanding of it at the moment of writing. I also gave an overview of the former works on the autobiographies that inspired my research: most of the English-speaking publications reveal an interest in the Stalinist experiences of people, the Estonian authors follow the example by focusing on the difficult and traumatic years of 1939-1949 for Estonian nation. The studies of Aili Aareleid-Tart, however, have dealt with the period under the study and formed a comparative background and inspiration to my research, as she has dealt with conceptualising the experience of the Estonian Soviet elite.

More precisely, there were two notions that have been used by the scholars to conceptualise the experience and mentality of the “post-war” generation. One of them is “everyday/accommodative resistance/dissent” – the semi-institutionalised persistence of an Estonian non-Sovietised culture and the “old” values, attitudes and habits of people. And the

other one is the development of individual “double-mindedness”: a deep discrepancy between the private (Estonian) and public (Soviet) spheres that helped to maintain the “former” personal values while “playing” Soviet.

In my thesis, I argued that, while being certainly somewhat telling, the abovementioned concepts do not reflect well life experience of the “thaw” generation during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era as represented in the autobiographies under the study. My central finding was that in addition to being surprisingly diverse, the stories of the “post-war” generation rather present the story of an integral life that tended more towards “Sovietness” than people would like to admit today in public. Such a discovery is all more striking, when considering that the autobiographies have been written down in the 1990s, in the era when the Estonian past is presented through the nationalist paradigm in the public.

While thinking back to one’s lived life, the autobiographers are inherently part of the nationalist discourse and “memory culture” that I set out to “diversify” in the introduction of my thesis. Indeed, it is interesting how much counter-information the accounts of people present to the publicly accepted view on the past that considers the Soviet time, as a large unpleasant rupture to the “normal” development of Estonian nation. In a way, it seems that the writers actually present as much evidence of the “dissent” with the present democratic regime as with the former Soviet one. I illustrated this disappointment with the reference to the notion of “cultural trauma” – around half of the life stories under study were the accounts of people who were traumatised by the social changes in the 1990s. Therefore, maybe, the writers do not really “buy” the public nationalist view on the past. Nevertheless, almost all the autobiographers remain Estonian “in heart”: the memory of the national awakening is still dear and the overcoming of the threat of Russification by the changes is welcomed.

The stories often present the disappointment with the realisation that the ones “who were the winners then, are the winners also now,” and vice versa. On the other hand, many of the “winners then” have become the real “losers now.” Most of the people remain all the time somewhere in between the extremities. Diversity is prevalent in the “patterns of remembering” as well as in the life courses, in general.

People consider their relationship with the regime mostly in the beginning of the autobiography while thinking back on one’s home, parents and participation in Communist youth organisations. As a wide generalisation I conclude that almost everyone participated in the Pioneer and Komsomol movement enjoying the opportunity of spending free time with one’s friends. And even if there were people who refused to join or the ones who did not enjoy the organisational experience, the reasons varied from a teenage-adolescence protest to ideological considerations. The youth organisations are normally remembered of with nostalgia.

Even if the autobiographies represent some traits of “everyday dissent,” the motivation for remembering dissent remains unclear: the active and successful people express normally more dissent with the past, whereas the mediocre rather describe their everyday reality during the Soviet era without many ideological references. The everyday reality could be described as dissent: people sang in a choir, were interested in Estonian nature, kept in touch with the emigrated relatives, and were willing to dress like the young the West, and so forth. However, I propose to call such activities rather with their real names: these were aspects of the integral lives of people from a small nation with a distinct culture from the Russian one. Indeed, also autobiographers do not label such activities as the expressions of the “dissenting double mind.” Furthermore, even though joining the Communist party has been called a cunning form of resistance by some members of elite, the present study represents evidence of much more diversity.

Aarelaid-Tart's notion of "bricolage" – improvisation or adaptation in times, when the Soviet configuration was prevalent, seems a bit more telling. People used one type of language at home and the different one in public, they chose one's words. But with the time passing, the divide between the public and the private disappeared: the colleagues became friends, up to half of the work-time was spent in the coffee-corners and so on. While the elements of "bricolage" were certainly present in the life of the "post-war" generation, the autobiographies rather present their lives in integrity. In autobiographies, people do not pay attention to their possible "double-mindedness." On the one hand, maybe such a condition was so natural for them that they are not able to reflect on it; on the other hand, it seems people did not develop a dual moral and dual ways of judging matters. "Double-mindedness" is just too strong a statement and too wide a generalisation.

The central finding of my study was the diversity of lives: communist childhood did not lead to idealist lives, strong Estonian-mindedness did not always cause dissent with the regime, repressed relatives did not mean more silenced past nor more opened past. Actually, many youngsters from the Soviet homes became semi-dissenters and the children of Estonian-minded parents undertook an active Party career. While there certainly are some large sociological patterns and some individual micro-influences, the autobiography seems to offer exactly such a scale of approximation to lives and social reality, where the generalisations are not very meaningful. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the autobiographers of the nationalist "memory culture" of the 1990s express so much open domestication of the Soviet regime. It might be reasonable to argue for deeper Sovietisation of the minds of Estonian people than it is commonly accepted up to now. It might be also reasonable to question the larger paradigms and stereotypes of looking at the Soviet past in the present scholarship with undertaking further studies in the field. Outcomes could be unexpected.

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