

(RE)CONSTRUCTING CONFLICT AND DIALOGUE
IN SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET ESTONIA:
ON MULTIVOCALITY
IN UNDERSTANDING OF HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION¹

The 20th century history of Estonia, primarily the wars, foreign occupations, and the processes concurrent with the Soviet-period “alien” power and changes in ethnic composition have created a field for the encounter of different, sporadically controversial images of history in a relatively restricted geographical and social space. Irrespective of their will, people were forced to step into a dialogue with the representatives of different conceptions of history. The abundance of such images, and the need for dialogue between them, actualised in specific crisis situations. The confrontation of the public with the economic policy of the Soviet state, which deepened during the last years of the Soviet Union, is a prime example. The state’s launch of the rehabilitation of the repressed and the restitution of properties, expropriated in the 1940^s, pursuant to the legislation of the newly independent Republic of Estonia, are no less important. Last, but not least, inhabitants of the newly independent state had to provide document-based evidence regarding their citizenship, showing their own origin or that of their parents or ancestors. Concurrent with the restitution of the national continuity of Estonia, a process started which centred on deliberating about and giving judgement on the conflicts caused by the Soviet occupation. This process encompassed remembering through personal biography that focused on conflicts between the individual and the official sphere of Soviet life.

¹ The research was supported by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Center of Excellence CECT) and ESF Grant No. 8190.

Scientific focal points for the study of oral history, both in Estonia as well as the Baltic countries in general, have evolved according to the general problems in society, inasmuch as “history only exists by way of society”². Contemporary oral history in Estonia is in every sense an outcome of the 1990^s. On one hand, the earlier study of vernacular history became actualised within cultural research, and simultaneously renewed itself in the methodological dimension. On the other hand, the representatives of different disciplines came together in researching the “biographic dimension of historical turning points”³.

The present article takes oral history as an interdisciplinary point of confluence and relates itself to conflict as a cultural theme characteristic of the 1990^s in the post-Soviet society. Our purpose is, from the perspective of an individual, to study the polarity of history conceptions caused by the conflict born as a result of the World War II, as well as the possibility of a dialogical relationship between them in the example of Estonia. We chose two sources of different types as the basis of our analysis with the purpose of revealing, comparatively, the dynamics of the conflict from one side and the complexity of the experience from the other side. The selected cases have only analytical connection to each other, the respective narrators are not otherwise related.

The first source is a court file put together by the Soviet powers, of which we chose the development of one case during three stages (in 1945, 1963, and 1990). The file has been taken from the branch office of the Estonian National Archive. It contains, among other materials, records of the Department of the Interior of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Security Committee of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic from the period of 1940–1991. Access to these materials was available after the disintegration of the Soviet Union; usage of the archival records, however, is defined by several government acts (like usage of personal data, etc.) We compare the dialogue in the court file with a woman’s autobiographical narrative from 2005. This narrative has been sent as an answer to a memoir collecting competition organized by the Estonian Life Stories Association, titled “War in My Life and My Relatives”. By the time the writer sent her reminiscences to the association, the collecting of life histories had, through repeated life writing campaigns, become a recognized tradition

² J. Kalela, *Muistitiedon näkökulma historiaan*, [in:] *Muistitietotutkimus. Metodologisia kysymyksiä*, ed. O. Fingerroos, R. Haanpää, A. Heimo, U-M. Peltonen, Tietolipas 214, Helsinki 2006.

³ T. Jaago, E. Kõresaar, A. Rahi-Tamm, *Oral History and Life Stories as a Research Area in Estonian History, Folkloristic and Ethnology*, “Elore”, 2006, vol. 1, no. 13, URL: http://cc.joensuu.fi/~loristi/1_06/jkr1_06.pdf (last accessed in 20.10.2011).

in Estonian society⁴. The writers usually have no other motives than to tell their story and the possibility of seeing it published in the association's collections. The noteworthy success of life writing appeals in Estonia, as a method of collecting (auto)biographical material has two clear sources. The first is a local tradition of using methods requiring personal initiatives (based on the 19th century activities led by Jakob Hurt⁵); the second is the nationwide respect given to the institutions behind the 'call', which in this case was to the Estonian Literary Museum.

The two source documents analysed here belong to a class of documents preserved at both the national and institutional level (State Archives and the Literary Museum);⁶ the initiatives behind the creation of these sources has been contrastingly different. Whereas security organs are responsible for preparing court files in the public arena as a legal requirement an autobiography, however, is the result of a voluntarily decision and is written in a secure and private situation. The text of the court files enables a diachronically based study while the autobiography allows a synchronically based study in retrospect. To create the right context, we have collected additional material, and contacted the relatives of the formerly accused and the author of the life story. The overarching context of the discussion is primarily a vernacular treatment of history, which includes the more specific context of the Estonian soviet and post-soviet official history⁷.

⁴ For more information about this particular practice of collecting life histories in Estonia see R. Hinrikus, E. 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. T. Kirss, E. Kõresaar, M. Lauristin, Tartu 2004.

⁵ This way of collecting (folklore) texts is based on the formation of local people into a literate nation in 19th century Estonia, and is also characteristic of the Scandinavian countries.

⁶ Regarding the complementary method of comparing historical court files and contemporary autobiography from the oral historical point of view see T. Jaago, E. Kõresaar, *Complementarity of sources in studying adaptation: an oral history viewpoint*, "Folklore", 2008, vol. 39.

⁷ Regarding contemporary popular treatment of history in Estonia see T. Kirss, E. Kõresaar, M. Lauristin, (ed.), *She Who Remembers, Survives: Interpreting Estonian Women's Post-Soviet Life Stories*, Tartu 2004; E. Kõresaar, (ed.) *Soldiers of Memory: World War II and Its Aftermath in Estonian Post-Soviet Life Stories*. New York, Amsterdam 2011; T. Jaago, *What actually happened in Estonian political history – stories of the 20th century events from the viewpoint of popular narrated history*, "Elore", 2006, vol. 13, no.1, URL: http://cc.joensuu.fi/~loristi/1_06/jaa1_06.pdf (last accessed 20.10.2011); T. Jaago, *After-effects of war and the narrative: depictions of war in Estonian and Finnish life histories in the twenty-first century*, "Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society", 2007, vol. 32, no. 4, Winter.

Theoretically we proceed from Yuri Lotman's concept of the semiosphere: i.e. the concept of semiotic space as an operating system in society which facilitates communication. The semiosphere is an abstraction, however, with immanently perceivable boundaries "translating external communications into the internal language of the semiosphere and vice versa. Thus, only with the help of the boundary is the semiosphere able to establish contact with non-semiotic and extra-semiotic spaces. [...] [The extra-semiotic] reality becomes for a given semiosphere "a reality in itself" only insofar as it has been translated into the language of the semiosphere [...]"⁸.

History offers situations where the semiosphere has to come into contact with the "alien" – with the non-semiotic space where understanding is impossible without translation. The more non-translatable are spaces that come into contact, the more unpredictable are the developments taking place in the semiosphere⁹. Thus, in principle, more rapid developments take place on the border of the semiosphere, but on the other hand critical situations in history can be observed as the catalysts of the developments (the border situations) taking place in the semiosphere. How the understanding of each occurs in such a critical historical situation is the focal issue of the current article.

In order to show the communicative relationship of the different texts, with sporadic controversial fields of meaning and interpretation, encountering on the border of the semiosphere, we used Yuri Lotman's concept "text within the text". We particularly used the concept's pragmatic aspect, concerning the alteration of the "mother text" as the "mother culture". According to Lotman, the working mechanism of the text pre-necessitates the introduction of certain external components (other text, reader, cultural context) into the text. The capacity of the text to generate new meanings becomes actualised under the following conditions: "As a generator of meaning, as a thinking mechanism capable of working, the text needs an interlocutor. This requirement reveals the profoundly dialogic nature of consciousness. To function, a consciousness requires another consciousness – the text within the text, the culture within the culture. The introduction of an external text into the immanent world of another text has far-reaching consequences. The external text is transformed in the structural field of the other text's meaning, and a new message is created. The transformation is made unpredictable by the complexity of the components participating in the textual interaction and by the multiplicity of their levels. However, the transformation occurs not only within the entering text; the entire semiotic situation

⁸ Y. Lotman, *On the semiosphere*, "Sign Systems Studies", 2005, vol. 33 (1), p 210.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp 205–226.

inside the other text is also changed. The introduction of the untranslatable, alien semiosis excites the ‘mother’ text [...] [which] begin[s] to differentiate and transform [...] [itself] according to the new, alien laws, producing new information. Removed from semiotic equilibrium, a text becomes capable of self-development. The powerful external textual eruptions in a culture conceived of as a huge text not only lead the culture to adapt outside messages and to introduce them into its memory but also stimulate the culture’s self-development, with unpredictable results”¹⁰.

The two sample texts we analysed in this current article were created under the circumstances where the current status is interrupted (i.e. “removed from semiotic equilibrium” according to Lotman¹¹), starting from 1944 (the re-occupation of Estonia by the Soviet Union) and since 1991 (when Estonia regained its independence). On the basis of the the court files containing data from the years 1945, 1963 and 1990, we can visualise how, as an outcome of World War II, there was a moment of “cultural explosion” in Estonia¹². In other words this was a moment when “the texts incorporated are more distant and untranslatable (or incomprehensible) from the point of view of the system”¹³. In such a situation, a conflict emerges between the opposing images of history and that of the concepts and categories that uphold this, and finally, the adaptation of the “mother culture“, which in this case is Estonian culture. The “mother culture” in this article is represented by individuals, whose texts – whether in form of replies to prosecutorial questions or autobiographical narratives – we hereby treat as having a “classificatory function”¹⁴.

We refer, with the help of the autobiographical source, to how adaptation becomes apparent sixty years after the emergence of the historical conflict; i.e. how adaptation with the “alien” text has proceeded and what the outcomes of this process are. For the analysis of the autobiographical source, we also rely on Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of narrative dialogicality, primarily on his ideas regarding the multi-voicedness of the text,¹⁵ in order to differentiate different texts, within the life story text, as “types of voices”¹⁶. In this way we make an attempt to show how the official Soviet image of history and the official way of self-description have been integrated into the autobiographical strategies for writing about the

¹⁰ Y. Lotman, *The Text within the Text*, “PMLA”, 1994, vol. 109, no. 3, pp 378–379.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 379.

¹² Y. Lotman, *Kultuur ja plahvatus*, transl. by P. Lotman, Tallinn 2001, pp 74–76.

¹³ *Id.*, *The Text within the Text*, p 379.

¹⁴ M. Foucault, What is an Author?, [in:] *The Foucault Reader. An Introduction to Foucault’s Thought*, ed. P. Rabinow, New York etc. 1984, p 107.

¹⁵ Bakhtin = M. Bahtin, *Valitud töid*, Tallinn 1987.

¹⁶ J. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, Cambridge 2002, p 17.

Soviet period in the 21st century. The background to this is an understanding that the concepts used in the texts or speech are based on experience¹⁷.

THE FIRST EXAMPLE:

DIALOGUE OF THE IMAGES OF HISTORY IN A DIACHRONIC DIMENSION

In the current article, the alteration of the historical situation in 1944, the re-establishment of Soviet power in Estonia, have determined the circumstances of rupture, which were accompanied by a wave of imprisonments. The documentation that “supported” these imprisonments offers an opportunity to study the events from the viewpoint of the semiosphere. Our analysis deals with the conflict of language and understanding, between the representative of power and the imprisoned person, inherent in the trial records. The court file under discussion contains the stories of two men during the period from 1945 to 1994.¹⁸ During the last years of the pre-war Republic of Estonia until the beginning of Soviet power in the summer of 1940, both men worked as civil servants in a rural municipality. Both men were sacked during the Soviet occupation 1940–1941, but both were restored to their jobs during the German occupation 1941–1944. Subsequently, upon the reinstatement of the Soviet power in 1944, both men were arrested. The main charge for both was “treason against the native country”. They were sentenced in 1945, pursuant to the laws of the Russian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic. One of the men died in imprisonment in spring 1946 and, as a result of a new investigation launched on the basis of his wife’s application, was rehabilitated in 1988.¹⁹ The other man was imprisoned for ten years, and additionally, deported for two years. Thereafter, he returned home and applied

¹⁷ About mutual and reciprocal (not unilateral) connectedness regarding the experiencing of the event and narrating about it, see, e.g. M. Sahlins, *Islands of History*, London, New York 1987; in the framework of folkloristic narrative research, this subject matter has been more closely dealt with by K. Salmi-Niklander, *Tapahtuma, kokemus ja kerronta*, [in:] *Muistitietotutkimus. Metodologisia kysymyksiä*, ed. O. Fingeroos, R. Haanpää, A. Heimo, U-M. Peltonen, Tietolipas 214, Helsinki 2006.

¹⁸ The court file includes for example, official questionnaires, trial records, the state prosecution’s closing speech; also letters and applications from private individuals to the representatives of power. ERAF.130SM-1–12640.

¹⁹ In the Soviet Union rehabilitation meant retroactive annulment of a court decision about repression (imprisonment, deportation, etc.). In the Soviet Union achieving the status of a rehabilitated citizen was very important as the regime limited the freedom of the repressed to find a job according to one’s profession, to make career, to travel abroad, etc. These limitations also extended to the closer relatives of the repressed person. It was the hardest to achieve rehabilitation for those who had been repressed for political reasons. We thank Aivar

for a review of his case in 1963. This, however, did not end in the desired result of an acquittal. However, he too was rehabilitated in 1990, eight years after his death²⁰.

Charges in the 1940s related to “treason against the native country” meant activities adversarial to the Soviet Union. In this particular case – the two men’s administrative work was deemed to favour a country, Nazi Germany, which was at war with the Soviet Union. Whereas the accused men did not consider the Soviet Union as their native country but Estonia, which both the Soviet Union and Germany had occupied.

The court file demonstrates the problem of national identity in connection with one of the accused men’s activities in the office of Mayor of the parish. The accusation stresses his being in this office during the German occupation, which from the point of view of the prosecutor equates to choosing the enemy’s side in the Great Patriotic War. When, however, the prosecutor asked for the duration of his work in the office, the accused states a month and a year since he was elected to the office — which took place before the war, in the Republic of Estonia. This means that the beginnings and consistencies are different for the prosecutor and the accused. The situation of 1945, which the court files describe, involves a conflict viewed from two sides. First, treating Estonia as a part of Soviet Russia from one side and extending the turning points of revolutionary history into Estonia. Secondly, being conscious of the consistency of the Estonia as a homeland, regardless of the country being an independent or occupied area, as well as the consistency of the Estonian state (1918–1940)).

For our analysis, we selected only one of the accusations for closer observation – “being in the forest” which was synonymous to “being a forest brother” (being a partisan) at the time that the military front in the war between Germany and the Soviet Union passed through Estonia, in the summer of 1941. It is evident from the records that at the level of language usage, there is a conflict of misunderstandings, from the points of view of the prosecutor and the accused.

Phase 1 (1945–1946). The prosecution and the defense argue during the trial sessions. There is, for the prosecution, the claim of the investigator, a representative of the Soviet state, that the accused joined a band of forest brethren. For the defense there is the representative of a local government organisation of the former Republic of Estonia, and the claim of the accused; he was hiding in the forest to avoid the war and was not connected with the band of forest brethren.

Niglas whose Doctor’s project at the University of Tartu deals with the problems of rehabilitation in the Estonian SSR for his help in adding this commentary.

²⁰ The last documents, compiled during the period 1991–1994, concern the restitution of illegitimately expropriated properties to the successors.

The witnesses of other trial records from the same file do not dispute this aspect of misunderstanding although they do not use the prosecutor's definition "a band of forest brothers" (cf. the third interrogation in the example below). Both parties – the prosecutor and the accused – hold a rigid position from start to end.

1st interrogation: 25.02.1945

Investigator's question in Russian: "Since when have you been a member of the band of forest brethren?"

Reply (in Russian translation): "I have not been in the band of forest brethren and have never become its member [emphasis by T.J., E.K.]".

3rd interrogation: 18.03.1945

Q: "Who else belonged in the band of «Forest brethren»?"

R: "Together with me there were five more men in the forest, the camp was near the Järve village".

6th interrogation: 19.10.1945

Q: "Why did you hide yourself in the forest in 1941 and join the band of forest brethren?"

R: "In 1941 I did not conceal myself in the forest and did not join the band, I was in the forest for four days, from August 8 to August 12 because I was afraid of the battles around the village".

Summary of accusation: 31.11.1945

"In July 1941, the accused concealed himself in the forest and joined the band of «Forest brethren»" [emphasis by T.J., E.K.]".

Phase 2 (1963). Pursuant to the application submitted by the accused, the state representatives have agreed to review the case. More precisely, the agreement is to check the case and to make some concessions regarding the points given above. The interrogator adopts the speaking manner of the accused, using the expression "being in the woods" (cf. the 2nd record of the following example). The accused, however, manages to exclude the claim of "the [armed] band of forest brethren" with a counterclaim: they did not have weapons in the forest; therefore it was not possible to talk about a [armed] band of Forest Brethren. This accusation is finally given up.

27.01.1963 An excerpt from the letter compiled in the Prosecutor's Office of the Estonian SSR, to the security officers, with an aim to review the investigation: "The fact whether the [accused] was a forest brother or concealed himself in the forest for a couple of days to escape the battles, prior to the arrival of the occupants (as he himself explains) has been raised in a similarly unjustifiable manner".

1st interrogation: 15.04.1963

The accused has to describe his charges: "The band of «Forest brethren» did not exist – we were in the forest together with the entire village, but we did not have any firearms".

2nd interrogation: 15.05.1963

Q: “Be more precise about being in the forest in 1941”.

V: “The entire village concealed from the battles”.

Summary of supplementary investigation from June 17, 1963: “The fact that the accused concealed himself in the forest and was a member of the band of forest brethren, i.e. that he was a bandit was neither confirmed during the investigation [1945] nor during the later checking of the issue [emphasis by T.J., E.K.]”.

Phase 3 (1990). When the man in question was rehabilitated on 15.11.1990, it was admitted at the state level that political accusations were not grounded. The basis for this was the relevant legislation in general, not his own personal application or the one filed by his family members. However, the definition given by the Soviet power in the rehabilitation decision from 1988, regarding a man who had been arrested at the same time and with the same charges, (relatives of the accused initiated this additional investigation), is interesting. At the end of the investigation, he is attested to be simply “the administrative employee of the occupation authorities” which is a significant change of language usage from the official charge of having committed “the treason against the native country”.

Trial records provide an opportunity to observe the dialogue (albeit, according to the choice of the records-taker) where the translation takes place at two levels. Firstly, from Estonian language into Russian, and vice versa (the records are in Russian). Secondly, translation occurs between the languages of the Soviet power (represented by the interrogator) and Estonian as an occupied culture (represented by the accused person). In this example, we encounter a situation described by Yuri Lotman with mutual connections of communication and linguistic spaces²¹. The linguistic spaces of communication partners need to overlap to some extent. If this precondition is not met, there is no communication; however, when such linguistic spaces totally coincide, communication becomes meaningless. The contingency of understanding proceeds from the common share of the described linguistic spaces. At this point Lotman comes forward with a contradiction: “It turns out that it is not the overlapping area that makes the dialogue valuable, but instead, the exchange of information between the non-overlapping areas. [...] We can say that the translation of the non-translatability occurs to be the carrier of valuable information”²². Returning to the example from 1945 it is possible to notice both the overlapping and non-overlapping of

²¹ Y. Lotman, *Kultuur ja plahvatus*, pp 14–16.

²² *Ibid.*, p 15.

the communication spaces of the dialogue partners. The meanings of the utterances are totally different for either of the parties: being in the forest while the battles passed *versus* being a member of the band of “Forest brethren”.²³ For example, the interrogator asks questions about different topics to which the accused replies in an affirmative way: is his name this and that; is his year of birth this and that; did he work there and there as a rural parish mayor during the German occupation? The first two questions are of neutral character, both for the enquirer and the respondent. By contrast, the third question, if answered in the affirmative, infers criminality from the standpoint of the interrogator but refers to the respondent, to his legitimate work as a rural parish mayor, as acknowledged by society. We could, consequently, ask at what point the interrogator and the prisoner do not understand each other. We could also ask what are the preconditions for either party (earlier experience, ideology, the context of a concrete situation) to interpret the course of events the way they do.

This particular court file is also interesting due to another aspect. The accused contests the court judgement after 12 years of serving the sentence and manages to achieve a new trial in 1963, during which we can again see mutual non-understanding between the parties. However, there appears a certain adaptation by the dialogue partners. The representative of power agrees to start the court case whereas the accused has already acquired the knowledge of how to fend off the charges. This process culminated in 1990. It is another issue whether the accusations were admitted as ungrounded, connected with the weakness of the Soviet Union or that the all the participants were deceased. We do not seek to answer these questions in this article. The court file as a source has been chosen with the purposes of showing the differences of opinions and terms of reference (the conflict) of, the representative of Estonian vernacular history and, by contrast, the representative of foreign power. The court file reflects the dynamics of the conflict between these two representatives throughout the Soviet period. The relevant examples also provide opportunities to fixate diachronically the adaptation to “the Other”. This does not infer attaining a certain unison, rather that the “other” language is being recognised and utilised, e.g., with an aim to express one’s standpoints or achieving one’s goals.

²³ The organisation of anti-soviet partisans under the name of “Forest brethren” has never existed. It is possible that it was simply a translation mistake. But even as such, the guilt of the accused person increases – the fact that the band was attributed a name immediately meant that it also had to have some organisational character (a certain structure, chain of command, activity goals, etc.).

THE SECOND EXAMPLE: THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE IMAGES OF HISTORY IN
A SYNCHRETIC SYSTEM

In order to study the problem of how “alien” texts and concepts have been “digested” to become culturally accepted, e.g., to the extent that they become a part of autobiographical narration; we have referred to written life stories. Time-wise, the selected life story falls into the 3rd phase of the previous example and reflects, in its own way, the dynamics that can also be found in the documents of the court file. However, life stories have been written in a retrospective manner in which the descriptions of earlier stages also contain knowledge about the future, how things turned out to be. Therefore, in life stories, the dialogical dynamics of different texts is revealed in a syncretic manner²⁴.

The author of the selected text is a woman, born on a West-Estonian island in 1939. Her story is handwritten and comprises 82 pages²⁵. There are several reasons for selecting her story. Firstly, her narrative represents the dominant post-Soviet culture of remembrance of the 20th century in Estonia. Secondly, regarding the standpoint of our problem-setting, her text is an outstanding example due to her style of writing. According to who “is speaking” it is possible to differentiate three levels in her text:

The self-voice of the author narrates about her own course of life and that of her family members on the basis of personal or second-hand memories. The involvement of the autobiographical self of her “the life story narrator” and her changing attitude towards altered circumstances is easily observable. She contrasts the worlds of the child and of the adult and does this relying on their attitudes towards violent or political changes around them. The child experiences her life in the world of continuance and the adult experiences the rupture of the life-world as a result of Soviet occupation and World War II.

From memory, she has written down fragments of remembrances and everyday-philosophical contemplations of local people, and presents these in an anonymous manner in her text as the “collective (Estonian) voice”. We refer to this as the “voice of the people” (Germ. *Volksmund*, Est. *rahvasuu*), which in this case represents both the pre-war village community and the Soviet-time informal sphere²⁶. In the entire text, she has made the “voice of the people” distinct, both in imagery and linguistically. The quotes from the “voice of

²⁴ Regarding syncretism as a property of life stories as a genre see E. Kõresaar, *Elu ideoloogiad*, pp 13–14.

²⁵ EKLA f. 350: 1809 Estonian Cultural History Archives.

²⁶ E. Zdravomyslova, V. Voronkov, *The Informal Public in Soviet Society: Double Morality at Work*, “Social Research”, 2002, vol. 69, no. 1, Spring.

people”, as opposed to the “self”-text, presented in the local dialect. The function of the “voice of people” is to comment on her and her family’s course of life, governing (political, economic, social) circumstances, and on what takes place in the official sphere. Sporadically, in particular in the final part of her story, the boundary between the “voice of people” and her own voice stops being visually discernable. The “voice of the people”, the everyday philosophical contemplations about “Estonian life” within the turmoil of history of the 20th century, dissolve in her discussions and function for the latter as a supporting resource for autobiographical memory²⁷. The “voice of the people“ supplemented the development of her autobiographical self. The need for discerning the “voice of people” disappears according to the process of how she as the narrator matures and becomes increasingly aware of what is going on around her.

The third distinctive speaker in her life story is the voice of power and self-legitimation of different occupation regimes. We refer to this as the “totalitarian voice”²⁸. This is revealed in the self-descriptive expressions of political regimes and in the fragments of understanding official history, in the totalitarian discourses²⁹. In her text (similar to the post-Soviet life stories of other Estonians) this is not represented first hand but rather revealed in hidden dialogicalities, both in her self-narrative as well as in the comments of the “voice of the people“.

Relying on Bakhtin, the different levels of her life story could be observed as different types of voices, being in reciprocal dialogical relationship, which simultaneously – consequent to retrospective interpretation – were already born from this dialogue³⁰. In the following, we will show how these three speakers relate to each other, particularly in how she describes her adaptation to the Soviet regime. We look at how the so-called official voice of the latter becomes a “thinking device” (Lotman). Hereby the verb “becomes“ is used conditionally as we cannot make conclusions about the process of adaptation following the same chronological principle that she uses as a starting point: prior to the creation of a concrete life story, the attitude towards official texts (concepts) has to be already existent. Thus, we can treat her adaptation as a conceptual experience and observe in what kind of syncretic narrative form this reveals itself. For the

²⁷ J.K. Olick, *Genre Memories and Memory Genres: A Dialogical Analysis of May 8, 1945 Commemoration in the Federal Republic of Germany*, “*American Sociological Review*”, 1999, vol. 64, no. 3, June.

²⁸ Using the phrase “totalitarian voice” we do not attempt to enter into the current discussion of totalitarianism but rather to point at a position from which individuals usually perceive the language of power in the Soviet society.

²⁹ C. Ilie, *The ideological remapping of semantic roles in totalitarian discourse, or, how to paint white roses red*, “*Discourse & Society*”, 1998, vol. 9, no. 1.

³⁰ Bakhtin = M. Bahtin, *Valitud töid*.

analysis of her life story, we focus on the period 1944–1948 which conditionally corresponds to the 1st phase of the court file example.

The author of the story is a war-time child. Still, she survives the war in a happy childhood world, thematising the war as a part of childhood. In addition to her parents, it is singing – her big love – that makes her childhood consistent. By way of the consistency and alteration of the singing tradition, she also perceives the changing of the external world. She is a representative of those life story narrators who present the occupation powers in a symmetric manner, not by giving evaluations (good or bad). In her story, there is no retrospective childhood nostalgia for the Nazi occupation, which marks some of the other life history narratives of women, also sent to the same competition,³¹ nor is it present in “the voice of the people” representing the collective opinion. Her own first war-time memories are contradictory. On one hand, she describes a memory of how her mother and she were threatened by an armed Red Army soldier in 1944: “The Russians had come to our place to ask for a horse in order to transport the wounded. My mother had tried to explain to them that the horse was far away in the pastureland and that it was not possible to get the horse right now. One of them happened to be an especially angry and nervous type who immediately concluded that the fascist did not want to give a horse³². The situation was solved by an Estonian in Russian uniform who, having heard the shouting, stepped closer and let us explain the situation to him [emphasis by T.J., E.K.]”.

On the other hand, she remembers how her father, imprisoned by the Nazi occupation authorities, came back home:

“[...] a stick in one hand and his other hand leaning on the stone fence from time to time, a gaunt figure with hollow cheeks, wearing a spotted dressing gown on top of his other clothes and smelling strangely [...]”

Her father teaches the child to be cautious about Nazi military propaganda (“For a long time, this «propaganda», well it does indeed sound in a slightly threatening way, became a synonym of something dangerous or ugly, a big worry for me”) but she describes her life after the end of the war, under the new occupation regime, as a *tabula rasa*:

“I couldn’t at all regard it as propaganda when the Hitler’s pictures were replaced with the ones of Lenin and Stalin, and that all Russians were heroes and that the victory over Germany had brought us freedom.”

³¹ R. Hinrikus (ed.), *Sõja ajal kasvanud tüdrukud. Eesti naiste mälestused Saksa okupatsioonist*, Tallinn 2006, pp 8–10.

³² The phrases underlined point to the Soviet “voice of power” inherent in autobiographical narration.

Instead, she attributes greater perspicacity, regarding the undergone changes, to ‘the voice of people’:

“Stalin in the Kremlin turns his moustache,
Estonia in my hands again.
Teaches us the magic arts –
how to starve in a Stakhanovite way.”

“Two old women from Sõrve had come from a meeting in the propaganda agitation centre and discussed between themselves: at the meeting they said we all have to fight for Stalin’s big thing. Who knows, does someone want to cut it off him or what? [emphasis by T.J., E.K.]”

Regarding her age, the autobiographer has many interests, she develops quickly and she goes to school earlier than expected. She perceives school life – thanks to her love of singing – as something continuous, not shaken by political changes; children’s songs taught at school are also a part of her mother’s repertoire. For her, the more serious encounter with the Soviet regime takes place through the life of her father. She narrates: “Our father was a socially active man. During the Estonian time, he acted in the society of young rural people, in the sports society and in the community centre. Once he had recovered from prison torments, he naturally started to contribute to the village life. According to his own words, he indeed wanted to keep away from politics, but as he was accustomed to the arrangement of life during the Estonian time, he probably did not fully understand that under the circumstances of the new Soviet order this could not be possible [emphasis by T.J., E.K.]”. He could only work together with the carriers of the new ideology. But when he figured something was wrong he could not spit it out any more. During the Estonian time you could express your opinion, you could also criticise. But now, everyone with authority inclinations had a trump card for suppressing any different opinions: Don’t you like Soviet power? – My father had a relatively sharp tongue, he was actually very good with words and all this turned out to be fatal for him”.

She also lets the “voice of the people” comment upon this: “This communist government is so-so touchy even if you don’t say much at all. Immediately you are the enemy of people. Well, see, during the Estonian time, it was all right, you could say anything you wanted [...] even the state leaders were cartooned by Gori”³³.

³³ Gori – a popular satirical artist (cartoonist), with a strong social nerve, worked in Estonia prior to World War II. He committed suicide in 1944. During the Stalinist era, Gori’s works were forbidden in the USSR.

Her father became the chairman of a recently established soviet consumers' cooperative. However, he lacked the experience to manage the organisation: "Soviet power was strict in guarding the inviolability of collective property. After some time, when it was discovered that the book-keeping of the cooperative was not in order, with deficits and surpluses and that inadmissible mistakes had been made in the collection of agricultural products, my father was brought to trial. [...] He was sentenced to eight years [emphasis by T.J., E.K.]".

Her mother stays alone in raising the children and the autobiographer, when growing up, starts to notice the post-war poverty of their's (and neighbourhood) families: "At home, we had nothing to be bumptious about but as comrade Stalin wisely said, during the collectivisation in 1929, when making bereft the villages of Russia: «Rural people would never be beset with hunger.» The Russians and the Ukrainians still did, but the Estonian village survived [emphasis by T.J., E.K.]".

Later on, she thematises the events that had moulded the life of people during the post-war years – the war with the forest brethren, mass deportation in 1949 and forced collectivisation, making a short comment about the standpoint of the regime: "In the eyes of the Soviet power it was very simple – the kulaks in more wealthy farmsteads and the bandits in the forests disturb the process" [emphasis by T.J., E.K.]. She finishes her narrative with observations regarding people's adaptational capacities and, at the end, with a story about how their family left their home island in 1952:³⁴ "In order to maintain the memory of my childhood home intact, I did not go, I didn't want to go [...] [back] for the whole of thirty years".

The ways, in which the representatives of Estonian culture as the "mother culture" – the I-narrator, her family members and "the people" – relate to the Soviet totalitarian discourse in this life story, can primarily be differentiated by the rate of conscious intention (or relevant absence thereof) and folklorisation. We can presume that the phrase "the fascists did not want to give a horse", used by a Soviet Russian soldier with regard to the author's mother carries the strongest syncretic quality. The word "fascist" comprises not only the attitude towards Estonians in the USSR, experienced during the later phase of the Soviet period, but also the more intensified discourse in the post-Soviet period concerning the nature and heritage of World War II in Estonia. The expressions regarding Soviet work-life, such as "inviolability of collective property" and

³⁴ The farm of the autobiographer's family was located in the Soviet border zone and, being convicted by the Soviet power, her father was prohibited to live there. He found a new job in the mainland and the family left together with him.

“inadmissible mistakes had been made in the collection of agricultural products” have probably been used in the least conscious manner and also other expressions with unlimited circulation in Soviet rhetoric such as “under the circumstances of Soviet order”. The work domain operated in Soviet society as a channel between the official public and the private³⁵. Post-Soviet life stories of Estonians provide evidence that the use of official phraseology, without any public criticism, is widespread when narrating about work-lives³⁶. The autobiographer’s way of narrating is witty and full of concealed meanings. For instance, in the expression “as comrade Stalin wisely said”, indicating the style of delivering public speeches, in a sentence describing the famine concurrent with collectivisation, she does not make her irony visually distinctive (e.g., by using quotation marks, etc.). However, should the reader know the general context and is aware of the Soviet wide spread expressions of everyday use, the irony of the narrator does not remain unnoticed. We would not wish to claim that these specific expressions of Soviet work-life would exclude a critical sub-tone, as the story in which they are used talks about the conviction of an innocent father.

The autobiographer, on certain occasions, emphasises the authoritarianism of the Soviet self-descriptive discourse by letting it sound separately, without showing her own relationship with different aspects of “the voice of the people”. The most characteristic example of this is her laconic statement regarding the post-war situation in Estonia: “In the eyes of the Soviet power it was very simple – the kulaks in more wealthy farmsteads and the bandits in the forests disturb the process”. Authoritarianism and univocality of the “totalitarian voice” indeed come forward in the fact that she seems to forbid herself to take her own viewpoint with regard to the Soviet standpoint, i.e. she does not comment upon “kulak”, “bandit” or any of the relevant concurrent statuses in society. Indeed, the “voice of the people” does comment upon the concept of the “people’s enemy”, but this, in contrast to many other sayings of the “voice of the people”, is given in a sincerely serious tone. This “people’s enemy” is general knowledge, but also involves an anti-Soviet mentality, and it would be inappropriate to comment (or ridicule), as it would show certain doubts about the correctness of one’s standpoint.

³⁵ M. Carcelon, *The Shadow of the Leviathan: Public and Private in Communist and Post-Communist Society*, [in:] *Public and private in thought and practice: perspectives on a grand dichotomy*, ed. J. Weintraub, K. Kumar, Chicago 1997; E. Zdravomyslova, V. Voronkov, *The Informal Public...*

³⁶ E. Kõresaar, *Elu ideoloogiad*, pp. 126–127.

The most strongly folklorised reactions in her story are the ones concerning the cult of Stalin, the hyper-leader,³⁷ Soviet official work culture, which was cultivated during the post-war time, and more generally, the radical rearrangement of the old life-world. These examples share a common feature in stressing the opposition of “own” with “alien” and foreign. There is also an emphasis on the encounter with the “external text” (Lotman) and the consequent evolution of the feeling of estrangement. This is evident, for example, in the discussion with a heavily sexual undertone, concerning “Stalin’s big thing”,³⁸ and the non-conformance of the “alien” text with real life, thus pointing at the absence of referentiality in official language. The song of the “voice of people” about the beginning of new life in post-World War II Estonia, under the guidance of Stalinist teachings, provides an example of a multi-layered dialogue with a totalitarian text. There are two outstanding layers. One layer is the contrary treatment of history: “Estonia in my hands again” *versus* socialist revolution in Estonia, the establishment of Soviet rule as a result of free elections and the liberation of Estonia from fascist occupation in 1944. The second layer is the discordance of the lived reality *versus* the ideology of work (“starve in a Stakhanovite way”³⁹).

SUMMARY

The discussion focused on the question as to what kind of “thinking device” did the Soviet official language metamorphose into in Estonia during the period of Soviet annexation. Was the language of power taken over univocally, in that

³⁷ About the role of hyper-agent in totalitarian discourse see C. Ilie, *The ideological remapping...*, pp 71–73.

³⁸ “Stalin’s big thing” is a raw translation from the Russian language: “za bol’shogo dela Stalina”. In Estonian, it becomes an ambiguous blue joke and as such, means ignoring the norms of politeness.

³⁹ Stakhanov as a historical person represents one of the most sustained heroic phenomena – hero of work. The Stakhanovite movement started in the USSR in 1935 as a campaign urging workers to emulate this and other alleged feats of super-productivity. Davies and Khlevnyuk suggest that Stakhanovism had no overall impact on economic development, for good or ill (R.W. Davies, O. Khlevnyuk, *Stakhanovism and the Soviet Economy*, “Europe-Asia Studies”, 2002, vol. 54, no. 6, September). Aleksej Stakhanov and the Stakhanovite movement inspired by him epitomised a new culture of work in Soviet ideology, extraordinary and superhuman enthusiasm, carried by the spirit of progress, love for Stalin and Soviet homeland. In Estonian popular understanding, in the relevant contra-culture, the concept “Stakhanovite” was related to the concepts of “adding to the written records” (playing with statistics) and “pokazukha” (this expression was not translated into Estonian but it means the showing of work that was actually not done).

unconditional adaptation to the totalitarian discourse occurred or did something else take place? We observed two different types of documents from the viewpoint of oral history: court files and a life story. First and foremost, we proceeded from the linguistic level, wherein we derived the communication parties on the basis of language use. Russian-language court files from the standpoint of Estonian culture contain a double-translation (the power-language and of the Russian language). These files enabled the observation of the dialogue between the power representative and the accused during different phases of history, thus making it possible to differentiate the phases of the dialogue in a historical chronology. We presented this process using one example. The outcome was that whereas in the beginning, (1945), both parties held rigidly opposing viewpoints; nearly 20 years later (1963), adaptation has begun to occur. The power representative agreed to review the accusation, and uses the wording of the accused in the prosecutor's speech (this was a concession from his side) while the accused was capable of explaining his war time actions using the language of the Soviet power. However, the opposing positions persisted as neither of the parties was prepared to distance themselves from the terms of reference that had shaped their convictions, which had, with the occupation of Estonia by the USSR, come into conflict. Nearly thirty years later, the Soviet totalitarian "voice" ceased to be the voice of power. Estonian life stories were written in the period following, and the second analysed text was chosen from among them. The life story enabled us to determine any trace of the "voice" of the Soviet regime in the post-Soviet interpretations of the past. It became evident that similar to the court file, an individual life story also comprises different "voices". In the court file, there are living people behind the different voices, whereas in the life story, these voices have been synthesised on the basis of the earlier experience of the narrator. The question posed at the start of the summary also concerns the issue as to how the narrator positions herself and her culture in relation to the Soviet "voice". By analysing the Soviet-cohesive phrases and concepts, a clearly defined opposition became evident. On one hand the use of irony and parody in forbidding such a relationship for oneself but excluding the contesting of one's convictions and, on the other, the inability to convey the Soviet experience using non-Soviet expressions, regarding work-life related issues. However, the boundary between the tendencies need not always be explicit.

The comparison of the two very different sources of this article became possible because we placed the individual, in both instances, into the focus of our study. Consequently we viewed the relationship between power and the individual through the point of view of the individual. As a result, our reading of the source became distanced from how those sources have been viewed traditionally. In the example of the court file, we did not only seek for the influence

of the regime (i.e. the circumstances characteristic to the period of history) on the individual but also viewed the individual as an active agent in the process where the individual has mostly been seen as a victim and an object⁴⁰. We did not seek only for explicit statements about the accommodation of an individual with the power from the life story but also how the individual instinctively describes their life in the language of the power. Yuri Lotman's theory of the semiosphere and Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogism enabled us to view both texts in the inner and reciprocal dialogue as well as in their conversion.

We could follow the adaptation to the "alien" language and see how this is connected to the historical context. In regard to adaptation, it is not possible to point out relevant unequivocal manifestations. The goals for using the "alien" language are different, starting from the need to stay alive, and finishing with the fact that alternative linguistic resources are non-existent. The new language, emerging as the "thinking device", is of an ambivalent nature. The reason being that the language for thinking about Soviet life relies on the pre-Soviet "own" language, which in our cases occurred to be more authoritative than the official Soviet language.

⁴⁰ Cf. V. Skultans, *Arguing with the KGB Archives. Archival and Narrative memory in Post-Soviet Latvia*, "Ethnos", 2001, vol. 66, no. 3.

