



WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED IN ESTONIAN POLITICAL HISTORY **– STORIES OF THE 20TH CENTURY EVENTS FROM THE** **VIEWPOINT OF POPULAR NARRATED HISTORY**

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Since the early 1990s I have been dealing with an area of study in folklore that I call “popular narrated history” (*pärimuslik ajalugu*). The roots of this approach date back to the beginning of Estonian folklore research in the middle of the 19th century when Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald wrote about historical legend as one of many possible sources to study the past (Kreutzwald 2005 [1844]). This direction of folklore research became topical again in the 1920s and 1930s. Differently from contemporary study the approach described above was discipline-centred. In the 1990s folklore research became more interdisciplinary (Jaago 2002; 2005, 30–33; cf. Thompson 2000, 71–72; Burke 2004).

I am studying the interpretations of real life events as a part of the identity of narrators. This research area is connected with oral history, because the central issue in both is how the so-called common people understand historical events, how they experience them and what meanings do they attach to their experiences. My approach to this topic is nearer to the usage of the term “oral history” understood by researchers more as narrating about the past (Thompson 2000, 25–81), and not emphasising the oral nature of the medium (Portelli 2003, 23). In Estonia oral history exists often in the form of written stories or transcribed interviews. Research sources have been collected mainly with the help of voluntary correspondents and in the course of research expeditions. Most of these materials are stored in three central archives in Tartu: Estonian Cultural History Archives (EKLA), Estonian National Archives (ERM), and Estonian Folklore Archives (ERA), and in the mini-archives of researchers (in this article references to these are marked with the abbreviation MK). The issue is not so much whether the texts are oral or written but whether the text is capable of variation, which is impossible in the case of historical documents.

In this article (1) I deal with the mutual relations of historical events and the narratives connected with them. I provide a closer analysis of stories that speak of the same event, but open the course of the event in a completely different way. These stories do not give the researcher direct explanations about what actually happened, regardless of the fact that just this question motivated the narrating of most of the observed stories. Here the emphasis of the question is laid on the level of interpretation of the past. My aim is to show that narrating historical events is communication (what, why, to whom and how is narrated) rather than a documentary description of a historical event. This approach is similar for instance to that of Alessandro Portelli, in which different narratives are used to study how the past presented in memories is not a clear and one-layer picture of the real events, but a multi-layered composition, comprising different layers of interpretation (cf. Portelli 1991, 1–26).

From the aspect of the political history of Estonia in the 20th century the above-mentioned departure point for research is particularly topical: how the ideologies of the independence periods of Estonia (1918–1940, from 1991 to today) and how those of the Soviet period (1940–1991) have affected the interpretation of historical events. Historian David Vseiov has described this situation as a journey, the destination of which is the present and in which past events (more exactly – the choice of them) are like stopovers. When the present changes, the former main road may become a dead end. Vseiov's example is about the Estonian Workers' Commune or Narva Commune – an independent Estonian Soviet Republic, which was in power in the eastern part of the Estonian territory from 29 November 1918 to June 1919, in parallel with the bourgeois rule in the western part of Estonia:

This is how history builds a logical line from the past to the present, wishing to remember only the signs (facts) that are on this road. For example, in the Soviet period history remembered the Narva Commune as a logical stopover on the road to Socialism. If we look at it from the aspect of today's destination, which has brought us to the year 2000, remembering the Commune has no importance and it is forgotten. Or it has remained in the memory as a curious digression from the main road. (Vseiov 2001, 263.)

Vseiov gives an example from the year 1918. In this period the decisive events for the history of the Estonian state took place: On 24 February 1918 the independence manifesto of Estonia was declared. At the same time the German occupation started, which lasted until November (this was the end of World War I), and the right-wing Baltic Germans united with the aim to join the Estonian and the Latvian territory into the Baltic Duchy. On 28 November the War of Independence started with the invasion of the Soviet Russian troops into Estonia, and the next day, on 29 November the Soviet power was declared in Narva – the Estonian Workers' Commune. This means there were three opposing spheres of power in Estonia at that time, of which due to the further developments of history the opposition Estonia (independence of the state) vs. Russia (the Soviet power) are in the foreground today. (Vahtre 1994, 136–140.)

(The Baltic German theme, which was more critical than the others in 1918, has receded by now.) While in the context of the national independence of Estonia we talk of “the War of Independence” (1918–1920), the Soviet schools talked of “white terror” and “the attack of counter-revolution” (Lõhmus & Siilivask 1969, 74). The pre- and post-war period of independence was called before the Soviet period and is also called now the period of the Republic of Estonia. In the textbooks of the Soviet period the same years were called the “Estonian bourgeois dictatorship (1920–1940)” (Ibid., 84).

In this article I will concentrate more closely on the year 1918 in Estonian narrated history. I also ask how the reflection of the events of 1918 in narrated history dialogues with the official interpretations of history. The article consists of four parts. In the first part I will give an overview of the historical context of the Estonia during the 20th century. In the second part I will present some aspects of the comprehension of the past, which I have had contacts with during my research. In the third part I will observe the portrayal of the year 1918 in personal and family histories, and finally I will analyse one historical event from the year 1918 in Estonia and its different (Soviet, popular) interpretations.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Over two hundred years – since the 18th century to the studied period – the territory of Estonia belonged to the Russian Czardom. At the beginning of the 20th century this state started to show its weakness, which culminated in such historical events as the Russo-Japanese war (1904), the revolutions from 1905 to 1917 and World War I. In the course of these events the Russian Czardom ceased to exist. For Estonia, however, two important changes took place: there was a move towards the development of a modern society and Estonia achieved independence as a state in 1918.

Then a couple of decades of stability followed in the Republic of Estonia, when the events of the first decades of the century were interpreted in the context of national independence. In this period a collection of popular history stories was collected and stored in Estonian Cultural History Archives, which has also been used in this article (EKLA f. 199; f. 200). The new period of critical events – World War II and joining Estonia with Soviet Union – started in 1939 and reached its peak with the major deportation of Estonians to Russia on 14 June 1941 and 25 March 1949 (Rahi-Tamm 2004; Anepaio 2001; 2003). In this period Estonia lost 17.5 per cent of its former population due to repressions, war, and emigration. In the second half of the 1940s immigration from the eastern areas of Soviet Union into Estonia started, surpassing the emigration figures: by the 1950s the newcomers made up 22 per cent of the population, plus the military personnel, and the immigration process continued all through the Soviet period. These demographic processes brought along both the violation of ethnic balance and numerous social and cultural problems. (Sakkeus 1999.)

It is true that in the 1950s a new period of stability began, but it was in the presence of foreign authorities. In this period all the earlier historical events were reinterpreted in official channels (school textbooks, science, media) in a way as if the aim of those events had been the achievement of Socialism, which was realised by the Soviet power. We can have an idea about the popular treatments of history in this period from private sources (from anecdotes to family tradition), which were publicised starting from the end of the 1980s. In this article, in addition to memories published in local newspapers or in a book, manuscripts of written life stories are used (EKLA f. 350), memories from private collections that the author has got access to, and materials collected during fieldwork (MK).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 Estonian people are again facing the problem how to interpret the events of the 20th century: how to clean the interpretations from Soviet ideology and to interpret the past events from the aspect of independent Estonia. (2)

The historical events of the 20th century have had an immediate impact on the life of Estonian people, which is why in real-life narratives “autobiography intersects with history” (cf. Portelli 1997, viii–ix). All conflicts – both the ones that emerged in the course of the events of critical periods and those that lie in different interpretations of the events – are reflected in historical narratives. It is characteristic of Estonian narratives that they include discussions and arguments about the events and situations in the society. The private and the public in these stories are closely intertwined, as the public (the political power) vigorously intervened in people’s private sphere. What happened in the society is described proceeding from one’s immediate or narrated experience. In Estonian narratives the conflict is placed between the person and the society, and the narrators sense how their private life is violently shaped from the outside their own will – this is confirmed both by theoretic approaches to the life stories (Mikita 2000, 88) as well as the observations about Estonian life stories by a researcher from a stable society (Huima 2002).

NARRATED HISTORY IN ESTONIA

The phrase “What actually happened?” in the title refers to a statement I heard again and again when I began to study how people narrated real life events, especially historical events of which the narrators felt that official history did not speak truly of. People expressed their own viewpoint by beginning with the statement “Actually it was like this”. The question “What actually happened?” and the statement “Actually it was like this” include also another aspect. The people who meet in the same historical event at the same time and in the same place have a different cultural and social background and owing to this they experience the same event differently, and this is why they approach the same historical moment in different ways and describe the historical truth as they have experienced it. (3) Consequently, the reason for the existence of antagonistic interpretations of the past is not only due to the specificity

of the event itself or their after-effect to the narrator, but the interpretations develop in the interaction of several factors, whereas important are both the factors that existed before the event and the ones arising afterwards.

Indirectly, the question “What actually happened?” was also asked by scientists, primarily by historians in post-Soviet independent Estonia. One of the central issues for the historians was the question can autobiographical sources like people’s memoirs be regarded objective. Some historians openly doubt that popular narratives can be the sources of study of history. For example:

Using sources like these [autobiographies, interviews, memories stored at the Estonian Literary Museum] brings forward the common problems with oral histories. Memories are incomplete and subjective, many things are remembered erroneously. Remembering is influenced by collective memory and the present-day media. Memories have a narrative structure that tends to change while being rerecorded and retold. (Mertelsmann 2004, 132.)

The quotation above shows that these sources do not allow asking the question of classical history: what actually happened. So these sources are regarded as illustrations to history rather than as materials providing possibilities for a study on its own. Despite such doubts Estonian historians have still continuously tried to interpret popular narrated history in the context of classical history (see further: review in Jaago 2002, 395–398).

In my opinion, like in oral history research generally, the object of studying oral family and life histories is not so much the study of a historic event or period, but rather the journey of the narrator from the time of story-telling to that event (cf. e.g. Tonkin 1999, 93–94). In text analysis, researchers have proceeded from a principle that reality narratives are a reality on their own, where experiences and memories are worded according to the means (such as story-telling schemes) known by the teller (see also Hiiemäe 1978; Voolaid 2002; Jaago 2002). The diversity of stories is caused by both the diversity of text types and the subjectivity of story-tellers: their different viewpoints and story-telling tradition and ability. A story-teller’s journey is also accompanied by the journey of the researcher: one can understand the teller’s approach to the past in the context of their own knowledge and approaches. In oral history, the fact does not concentrate so much on the level of event, but rather on the level of communication: communication in a certain way, thinking about one’s past in a certain way and in a certain form. The interpretations of history are a reality too, not only the historical events.

I have used thematic narratives as sources: interviews and memoirs, both oral and written, stored in national or family archives (EKLA, ERM, ERA, MK). While historians proceed from historical events as their primary object of study (see e.g. Tarvel 1983; Pirsko 1995; Tarkiainen 2000; Rahi 2001), I, being a folklorist, start working on the narrative and after that I try to create a historical context to what is being narrated and when. First, I examine what narrative techniques the storyteller

uses, which respondent groups' opinion he or she represents. In the text analysis both the level of event reconstruction (of what and how he or she narrates), as well as the level of informing (to whom and why he or she narrates) are important. In the case of a more text-centred analysis the focus of the researcher is placed from the event ("what actually happened") to the communication level (what is considered necessary to remember and how it is done).

The parallel existence of several approaches to history, as also the reinterpretation of valid interpretations of history, results in its acuteness from the political history of Estonia (see Kõresaar 2004, 10–12). If we consider the co-existence of different approaches to history in Estonia, by the end of the Soviet period a situation had developed in which the approach to history was clearly divided into two levels: *the private* (hidden) and *the public* (official).

By the 1990s on the one hand an understanding had developed of the validity of one and only historical truth, but on the other hand, the former official history was giving up its authority to the history that had so far been considered private. In this period popular history materials were collected and published, for instance, responses to questionnaires, life stories, memoirs. This was when the expression: "actually it was like this..." became widespread. Gradually the border between the private and public approach to history started to fade. By the 2000s the acceptance of different interpretations of history had become common, and the concept of the "one and only" history was abandoned. This has recently been reflected also in the Estonian media, which has discussed the meaning of the end of World War II and the 9th of May at length due to the 60th anniversary of the ending of World War II in 2005. But it has also been reflected, for example, in the life stories and written autobiographies collected by the Estonian Cultural History Archives. In the turn of the century the collection of Estonian Life Stories began to receive stories based on very different experiences and reflecting different viewpoints. It became especially evident in the 9th collection contest of life stories called by "The impacts of war in the life of me and my family" (EKLA f. 350) which the archives has just ended (in spring 2005).

THE YEAR 1918 IN FAMILY HISTORIES

The year 1918 as a historical period is rarely dealt with in Estonian thematic narratives (life stories, family histories), but it did exist in Soviet Estonian history writing (1940–1991). More specifically, it concerns the conflict between the Reds and the Whites, which accompanied and followed the birth of the new state. I discovered this topic in the second half of the 1990s, when I comparatively studied Estonian and Finnish 20th century family stories: how modern story-tellers envision the past from the angle of their family and the fate (life) of their family members. (4) The observed material was very good for comparison, because both had been collected as written thematic narratives, sent to collection contests organised by archives, and both had been collected at the same time. (See also Kõresaar 2005; Latvala 2005.)

A brief glance at the texts showed that Estonians concentrated on the events of the 1940s (i.e. the events related with Soviet authority and World War II), while the Finnish stories concentrated on the 1918 Finnish Civil War from either a Red or White perspective. Although the political situation of Estonia and Finland in 1917–1918 was relatively similar (separation from the Russian Empire, creation of the independent state), in the Estonian stories the events of the year 1918 are mentioned rarely and indirectly. However, in the Finnish stories, these events are emphasised in the personal level, ideological context as a social conflict. (See also Latvala 2005, 186–193.)

There are several reasons why the civil war has a place in the family tradition of the Finnish, but not that of the Estonian. One reason is that the later history of Estonia (in this case related with the Soviet rule) has shaded the difficulties of the first decades of the 20th century in contemporary historical narratives. Another reason is that the Finnish civil war was very complicated as a domestic war and brought along numerous casualties (Salokangas 1987, 615–617; Ylikangas 1993; see also Alapuro 2002; Fingerroos 2004; Peltonen 1996; 2003; War victims in Finland 1914–1922, 2006; Upton 1980). In the context of the oral history it is undoubtedly important to find out what impact the events have on the time of the narration. But it can be assumed that the complicacy of the *historical events*, as was the case in Finland, sets clues to the *narrative events*.

In order to find out whether the events of 1918 disappeared from Estonian narratives after the Soviet period or even if they have ever existed in personal life histories, I will present two more kinds of texts in addition to the ones above. Firstly, I will present pre-Soviet sources, the popular stories of historical events collected by historians by interview programmes in the 1920s and 1930s (EKLA f. 199; f. 200). One of the questions in this programme namely concerns the end of World War I. In Estonia people have rarely spoken about this period. What is mentioned is mainly that either Russian or German troops took horses or feed. Secondly, I will present memoirs written in the Soviet period, manuscripts from family archives. One of them written by a man, who was born in 1900 in south-western Estonia and lived there most of his life (MK Pärnumaa 1977, 1981 [2003]). His story was written in 1977 and supplemented in 1981. I got this story through a folklore competition organised for schoolchildren in 2003. The author of the second story is a man born in southern Estonia in 1907, who later lived elsewhere (MK: Viljandimaa 1980 [2004]). His story was written in 1980 and I got it in 2004 from a student who took part in my Popular Narrated History course.

Both of the narratives are written in informal style and are addressed to successors. The older man comes from a poor farm, the other one from a rich one. Both story-tellers talk of the War of Independence (1918–1920), quite briefly if compared to other topics, concentrating mainly on a part of the War of Independence, the so-called Landeswehr War (in June–July 1919). *Landeswehr* – the Baltic Land Forces – was formed in view of the local interests of the Baltic Germans to establish the United Baltic Duchy in the territories of Estonia and Latvia. The Baltic German interests definitely did not coincide with Estonian interests. It is namely the victory

of Estonian troops over the German army in the Landeswehr War on 23 June 1919 that is celebrated as the Victory Day in Estonia. The first narrator describes his battle experience in the War of Independence (in Narva against the Russian Red Army, in Latvia against the German Landeswehr). The second narrator mentions schoolboys from Viljandi, who went to the Landeswehr War. Both narrators point out the conflict between Estonians and the Baltic Germans, the topic of the Red Army (Soviet power) is less dealt with. For example, the narrator from Pärnu County – the one who had been to the war – describes these relationships as follows:

I have so much to say about the mood of the Latvian people [the Landeswehr War partially took place in the Latvian territory, T.J.], that as far as the war was against the Reds, the Latvians' attitude to us was cold. It seems quite a lot of people shared the Communist views there. But when the war against the Germans [the Landeswehr, T.J.] started, also people became more supportive to us. The reputation of the Estonian Army was raised a lot by the fact that our army who managed to deal with the Reds also managed to fight back the German Iron Division. (MK: Pärnumaa 1977, 1981, 101–102.)

Like already mentioned at the beginning of this article, the official Soviet channels did not speak of the Estonian War of Independence. Now it has also disappeared from family lore.

Neither of the sources, the pre-Soviet and the post-Soviet, presents the main events of the observed year as the conflict of the so-called Reds or Whites. What comes to the fore is either the end of World War I (especially in the stories of local people) or the victory won in the Estonian War of Independence (descriptions by those who fought in the war). In principle, the year 1918 could also have offered a different point of view, because from November 1918 to June 1919 the eastern and southern part of the territory of Estonia was under the control of the Workers' Commune. The history textbooks of the Soviet era also speak of “white terror” in connection with this period, in the course of which “only in Tapa 300 Red Army soldiers and Soviet activists were killed. Hundreds of people were killed in Narva, Tartu and elsewhere” (Lõhmus & Siilivask 1969, 71–78). The above-mentioned man from Viljandi County lived just on the border of the two authorities in Tarvastu, but yet he does not handle this viewpoint in his story.

Estonian popular history sources do not spontaneously open the topic of Soviet power in 1918, because the focus is on other events. However, this topic is in the foreground in history writing of the Soviet period (which in turn does not touch upon the topic of the War of Independence). We may ask, whether the descriptions of 1918 in Soviet and popular interpretations in the second half of the 20th century are completely isolated from one another? They are not. In the following subsection the meeting points of these two interpretations are analysed.

ONE AND THE SAME EVENT – DIFFERENT DESCRIPTIONS

Texts about the events

The following paragraphs are about an armed conflict in a West-Estonian village Üdruma on 22 February 1918, immediately before Estonia was declared independent. First the pre-Soviet approach to this event is analysed and popular replies to it both during the Soviet period and immediately after the Soviet period, when there was a sharp conflict of understandings. In the second half of the subsection, however, the developments of these stories are observed now as the conflict of viewpoints has expired.

First the Soviet narrative and objections to it. German troops, Bolshevik army units and local village men took part in the conflict situation in these stories. The accounts are from a Soviet history book, local newspapers and memories of the village people, published in the press and in a memoir book. Rushing ahead, I would like to emphasise that the Soviet narrative was brought about not so much by the described event itself as by the quest of Soviet heroism in the late 1950s, when the 40-year anniversary of the October Revolution (7 November 1917) and the birth of the Soviet army (23 February 1918) was celebrated by the Soviet society. At that time a memorial was erected in the site of the described event. On this memorial there is an inscription in Estonian and in Russian “Here on 22 February 1918 the first armed conflict of Estonian Red Guard soldiers between the attacking German occupants took place”.

One important key for benchmarking different descriptions of the same event is how the characters – the parties of the conflict – are named and which activities they are involved in (cf. character in the narrative from the concept of time-space or *chronotope* in Bahtin 1987, 44–184; *stereotypes of life dramaturgy* in Nekljudov 1998, 291).

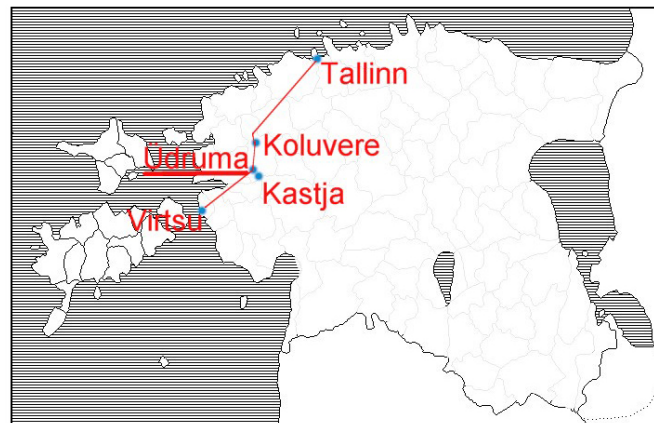


Illustration 1. Map of the event.

Text One, Historical writing, is from the Soviet period, published in 1971, written by Soviet historian Ülo Taigro:

The first Red Guard soldiers left Tallinn on the evening of 18 February. At the same time the Red Guard groups in the country also made preparations for meeting the enemy. When Red Guard soldiers K. Veigel, the Rüiberg and Konrak brothers and other members of the group of Kolovere (Läänemaa) manor workers heard that the enemy was approaching, they went on horseback to lurk near Libula on the evening of 21 February. From Üdroma parish hall they released the chairman and the secretary of the local executive committee, who had been arrested by the German reconnaissance patrol. The enemy's advance party that had been hiding near the parish hall opened fire at the Red Guard soldiers. The red guarders also responded with firing. On the next day (22 February) help arrived from Tallinn to the local Red Guard soldiers. They jointly tried to stop the occupants' attack, but under the pressure of the prevalent forces of regular troops they were forced to retreat.

At Kolovere manor, the Red Guard soldiers again opened fire at the occupants who were chasing them. Especially notable was the young worker A. Keskküla, who covered with fire the retreating comrades at the above-mentioned manor. Having fought until the last cartridge, he was imprisoned and killed by the occupants. (Taigro 1971, 99.)

What happened? The Red Guard troops together with groups of manor workers went lurking in western Estonia, because they had heard of German troops moving eastward. On their way, in a village of Üdroma, they released the chairman and the secretary of the local executive committee, who had been arrested by a German reconnaissance patrol. The titles chairman (Est. *täitevkomitee esimees*) and the secretary of the local executive committee (Est. *täitevkomitee sekretär*) indicate that these must have been members of the Bolshevik authority. At the parish hall the German and Bolshevik groups met and the Germans started firing. The next day auxiliary troops came to help the Bolsheviks, but still the German forces prevailed, which is why the Bolsheviks had to recede. Even withdrawing, they “fought for their comrades to their last drop of blood”.

Who were the parties in this conflict? On the one side Red Guard soldiers, manor workers, retreating comrades and a young worker, and on the other side the German reconnaissance patrol and regular troops, but also the “enemy” and “occupants”. Local people had chosen the Bolsheviks’ side (groups of manor workers, chairman and secretary of the executive committee).

Text Two is from the memoirs of Aleksander Veiderma, the local schoolteacher, written in the Soviet time in the 1960s, but published by his descendants in 2000.

The Red Guard was organised among workers. Warm clothes were collected from people, those who did not give were threatened with punishment. I gave some warm woollen things. A group of armed red soldiers was sent to Virtsu to confront the Germans. At Üdruma village a conflict is said to have taken place, and at the end of the fifties a monument was placed there to commemorate it.

As some older people told me, no battle had taken place there. Actually it had been as follows. A group of Red Guard soldiers came from Tallinn to Üdruma and stayed in the parish hall. They arrested Hans, the owner of the nearby Hiie farm, deputy parish elder, who was well known for his impetuous character. Hans' wife Liisu ran into the village to call for help to free her husband. The village men came together with guns. From behind the stone fence about 300 metres from the parish hall the men opened fire at the parish hall, and were fired back from there. The firing lasted until no more shots came from the parish hall. The men approached the parish hall, crawling. Then it turned out that the Red Guard had already fled. Whether any of them also got killed or wounded, remained unclear for the men. Anyway, there were no losses among the farmers. Hiie Hans, however, was released from prison. (Veiderma 2000, 202–203.)

This description contradicts the previous one, as it states that “there was no battle, actually it was as follows...” When the above story was written in the 1960s, the Soviet history writing dominated in the society, and that was contested in the private sphere. At the time the story was published there was no such direct dialogue any more, because the Soviet history writing had become past itself.

But what happened in this story and who were the parties of the conflict here? First the view of the local people was presented: wartime was a period that burdened people's daily lives, but they had to adapt to it. They did not choose ideological sides, but tried to survive by adapting to the situation. The course of the events, like also the heroism of Red Guard soldiers was questioned. The parties in the conflict met incidentally, retreat and release from imprisonment were not considered heroic in this description any more. There were neither German troops nor characters from the local executive committee in this story. The parties to the conflict were the Red Guard soldiers on the one hand, and the hot-blooded owner of the Hiie farm Hans, his wife and the local farmers on the other. The two stories coincide in the retreat of the Red Guard soldiers, although the wording of these texts is contrasting: the first text talks about the “retreating” of the Red Army, in the second it is referred to as “fleeing” (“the Red Guard had already fled”).

Text Three is written by a local man Alfred Peenoja. It is published in a local newspaper at the end of the Soviet time in the late 1980s – of the times of the singing revolution in Estonia. The author claims his article to be a reply to the articles that were previously published in newspapers. This narrator also questions the Soviet version of the “glorious” battle and says: “But this battle was entirely different, 70 years have passed – some details may have been forgotten – but I will try to write down correctly all that I remember” (Peenoja 1989).

He also describes, like the author of the previous text, the situation in the village where Russian soldiers were accommodated in the farms:

In our farm there were also more than ten men, the seven people of our family lived in the kiln-room, the soldiers in the chamber, they had a bunk bed made for sleeping in the chamber. In the back chamber my mother's aunt was living, she was very apprehensive and always kept her door locked, she could get out through the soldiers in the front chamber, where they always teased her, asking again and again "babushka, gde dedushka?" [grandma, where's grandpa?] The soldiers' horses were in the shed, because our animals had been taken to the grain-drying room. By the way, they got on fairly well with each another, except an Ahyosha, who did not get along with others. Their chief was a captain, so they "wintered" peacefully until the 20th or 21st February, when the order was given to leave immediately and fast, even the cooking was left unfinished and in less than an hour they were gone. The reason for their leaving was the announcement that the German army had come across the sea from Saaremaa to Virtsu. Village people were very excited, not knowing what the following day would bring along. (Peenoja 1989.)

This is followed by a description of the conflict observed here – the events at the parish hall on 22 February – but this event was not a stage in the glorious war, but only an episode in the daily village life during the wartime that was burdening for the people.

In his story the representative of the Red Guard was the group of workers from the neighbouring Koluvere manor, just like the Soviet historian also declared above. But differently from him, this narrator says that the newcomers wanted to seize power and arrested a local parish clerk and did not release the representatives of the Russian authority who had been imprisoned by the German army. The storyteller adds, "The ones who seized power also boasted that if the Germans showed from the woods of the Allika grassland, they would open fire at them" (Peenoja 1989).

Local farmers feared that such heedlessness of the "boasters" might bring ill fortune to the whole village and they decided to prevent it. The men who had returned from the Russian army with guns were convened and together they defeated the group of Red Guard soldiers who had gathered in the parish hall and "who had been in a great hurry with escaping". This story, too, includes retreating, or more precisely escaping.

Other explanations

The popular versions by Veiderma and Peenoja (Texts Two and Three, see above) are more overlapping. There are no German troops nor the imprisoned representatives of the Soviet authority neither do these stories speak of the heroic defence of comrades. However, these stories talk of local people who were adjusting to the war

conditions and tried to protect their homes and the village. As for the facts, the popular versions do not entirely coincide either. This is to be expected to some extent and the author also pointed this out:

But the rumours say the battle was mighty. On the one side there had been men from Kastja and Üdruma, all who had come home from the Russian army with guns, and on the other side the men from Koluvere. The parish hall had been riddled with holes and bullets had gone whining past each old woman's ear in the village. (Peenoja 1989.)

The participants themselves could not talk at length, the narrator says, because soon the German army arrived, and had to be accommodated in the houses, which in turn brought along problems with housing and feeding one's own and the soldiers' horses. The end of the story is quite typical: "The straws left by the Russians were cleaned from the bunk beds, the rooms were brushed up and the Germans had their own mattresses with them. In the morning, on 23 February they went on and no shots were fired at Üdruma village". (Peenoja 1989.)

In summer 2005, while I was visiting Üdruma village and talking about local life with people from near and far, it appeared that the described events are no longer part of the local popular narrated history. This was actually reflected in the above stories that relied on memories – the standpoints of Soviet history were opposed. The memorial also seems to be completely forgotten – it was overgrown with scrub and the path there was seldom trodden.



Illustration 2: A memorial erected at Üdruma in the Soviet period. In popular usage: Valge hobuse kivi - The White Horse Monument. Photo: Francisco Vaz da Silva, 2005.

Yet the story was mentioned in an article published by a local newspaper *Lääne Elu* [Western Life] about a work camp of young Irish volunteers in summer 2005 at Üdruma. It probably served as an entertaining introduction to the place in question:

There is also a place of interest at the society hall [earlier parish hall], the White Horse monument. It is said to have been erected in honour of the victorious battle by the Red Army at the end of World War I. The village legend goes, however, that the Red Army had got a message that the German troops were near. The reds were preparing for the battle but at Üdruma they met just one horse-cart driver. The soldiers thought it was a German enemy and shot the cart-driver's white horse dead. So the white horse was the only war victim at Üdruma. (Ansip 2005.)

After that newspaper article was published, I heard another version of the story at Üdruma in which it was said that the horse was actually only wounded. The above-quoted article by Alfred Peenoja is also mentioned in the picture caption “the White Horse battle, in which the only sufferer according to local lore was a white horse” (Peenoja 1989). One can notice that there are popular explanations of what “actually” happened related to this memorial. These explanations emphasise the facts connected with local life and people, like names of the characters and geography of the village (“wood of the grassland of Allika farm, where the road runs into the open between the fields when you come from the direction of Lihula” or “so they remained about 200 metres from the parish house in the fields of Riisma farm behind a large heap of stones”). Also the later events are associated with these places: a multi-layered “landscape” is formed. For example, the story-teller remarks that if the villagers were afraid in 1918 of a military conflict near the mentioned Allika farm, because the fire could spread to the whole village, this was the case during World War II: “then the withdrawing Red Army soldiers shot the German troops who were coming out of the Allika forest at the parish house, and the result was – that all the buildings of three farms with all what was in them burnt down and the windmill was damaged.” About the piles of stones in the fields of Riisma farm, the narrator notes “This heap of stones is still there, bird cherry bush is growing on it...”. The later “witnesses” of these past events are pointed out. There are also other stories about these characters, for instance the village song sung by Ilmar Jõesoo, a local cultural figure in 2004 and 2005:

*Hiie Hans oli Habermann,
Suurekivi Juban oli Jungermann.
Need olid külas tähtsad mehed,
nendel käisid ajalehed. (MK Läänemaa 2005.)*

*Hans from the Hiie farm was a Habermann, (5)
Juban from Suurekivi farm was a Jungermann.
They were important men in the village,
They had newspapers subscribed.*

The story of the white horse, however, seems to be meaningful for a larger circle of people: for those, who do not know the local village history of the geography. The message of both descriptions is the same: to ridicule the ideology of the Soviet Red-Army hero. The latter was not formulated in 1918, but much later, in the Soviet period. Interestingly, when going through all the 1958 issues of the local newspaper *Töörabva Lipp* [The Flag of Working Class] to find the notice of the erection of the monument, I did not find it. By contrast, I clearly felt the existence of two parallel histories – the popular and the authority-centred history, both in the same newspaper, consequently in this case both revealed in the public sphere. The topics of the popular interpretation were published in the local newspaper's monthly supplement *Haapsalu Koduloolane* [Local Lore of Haapsalu], which has been published since 1958. (Jaago 2003, 100.) While the newspaper itself was authority-centred, the supplement was completely Estonian-minded. In the February numbers of the newspaper many articles were dedicated to the 40th anniversary of the Soviet Army, including the immediate continuation of the Üdruma events on the following day in the battle at Keila, near Tallinn (6). What especially attracted my attention was the effort expressed in the newspaper to raise the local history of small Estonian places to the level of the great Soviet history. Probably also the memorial at Üdruma was a pale shadow in this effort to achieve a role in the Soviet history.

CONCLUSION

The history of the 20th century Estonia has markedly intervened in the daily life of people, which is why discussions of historical events is among the central topics in both life stories and family histories. The private (personal) narrative intersects or overlaps with the general history narrative, or contradicts with it. While the events of the year 1905 and the 1940s are in the foreground both in the private and the public history, the reflection of the events of 1918 is especially contradictory in popular narrated history and the general (Soviet) history.

The Estonian researcher of family lore and life stories notices that in Finnish family lore the topic of the fight between the Reds and Whites is incomparably more in the foreground than in Estonian narrated history. This motivated the question why this topic has been suppressed in Estonian family lore, regardless of the fact that the past events in Estonia also included the fighting of the Reds and Whites. Does the problem lie in that during the Republic of Estonia (1918–1940) it was not appropriate to talk of the Red viewpoint? Is the problem caused by the fact that the Soviet history writing (incl. school textbooks) had amplified the topic for Estonians – Estonians had experienced the Red rather than the White terror since 1940 and this might have restricted other approaches to this topic? Or was the problem in that the focus of fighting in these years was directed at the conflict between Estonia and the Baltic Germans, but now at the conflict between Estonia and the Soviet? Or maybe it

was because the events of 1905 and the 1940s in Estonian history were more pointed for the narrators. Were the difficulties of the year 1918 between those “times” modest compared to earlier and later traumatic experiences?

Really, the analysis of popular narrated history showed that events of the year 1918 did not bring about any revolutionary changes to people’s daily life. The events of 1918 are only presented as complicated hard times in Estonian historical narratives. Consequently, the by far more sweeping events which happened in the middle of the 20th century overshadowed the year 1918. World War II is associated exclusively with the destruction of home: both in the direct sense (deportation, death) and the more indirect sense (migration, legal arrangement, especially ownership problems, economy, work arrangement, borders, the echo of fighting on the so-called “right” and “wrong” side etc.). This is why the political events of the year 1918 were mentioned briefly and indirectly, regardless whether the narratives originated from the different political periods: from 1920–1930s, the 1970–1980s or the 1990–2000s. This topic is marginal in the popular history of Estonia. The main message from this period are not the ideological choices, but that “The people were in great trouble” like Hans Habermann put it in 1931, when he was interviewed by his son about the founding of the Estonian Defence Leagues at Üdruma in late autumn 1917 (*Lääne Elu* [Western Life] 1990). (The same Hans Habermann was one of the characters in Text Two and the above-quoted village song sung by Ilmar Jõesoo.)

What actually happened at Üdruma? It seems that namely the aforementioned keyword “the Estonian Defence Leagues” directs the researcher to the answer which events could have served as a basis for describing the armed conflicts at Üdruma in February 1918. The version presented by the local man is also confirmed by the collection of manuscripts of narrated history from the 1920s–1930s (EKLA f. 200, m: 3: 2, 135–136). This manuscript includes records about the establishment of local Defence Leagues not only at Üdruma but all over Estonia. The leagues were set up everywhere in Estonia at the end of WWI to defend the local people, their homes and villages from the lootings by the detachments of both the German and Russian armies. The armed conflicts in defence of local villages could be used by an author of Soviet history in the context of ideological opposition just as suitable for him. So the question what actually happened at Üdruma also gets the second answer: only it cannot be found in the year 1918, but in 1958, when the memorial was erected. After the Soviet time this event is not important any more neither for the Estonian nor for the local history.

One of the most interesting questions I have been asked in international academic circles in connection with this topic is the following: How is it possible to live with so many histories? My answer to this question is that it is not possible to live with a false or forced history. In Estonia’s current situation, the discussion on the interpretations of the past could be one possible way to more unified approaches to history. One of the aims of my research work has been to find out which rules of life and understandings are constant for people, despite changes in political situations, and which are continually replaceable “values”. The Soviet-heroic deed at Üdruma,

analysed in this article, undoubtedly belongs among the latter, even if it ever – forcedly – belonged to popular knowledge (for example due to keeping the monument in order, placing flowers there etc.).

In the course of work it was possible to observe how the events of critical times had changed into different stories depending on the political aims. It was much more complicated to distinguish between the interpretation layers in the corpus of texts. The studied event is not linear in the stories: first, the event at Üdruma on 22 February 1918 and then, narrating the event. This story seems to have been created as a narrative of Soviet history 40 years later, when the monument was erected at Üdruma and at that time a turn was made back to the year 1918. Reading the 1950s' issues of the local newspaper it seems to have been an official initiative, not the one of local home researchers. This is also confirmed by the version of Aleksander Veiderma (Text Two), written in the 1960s and relying on the memories of local people. Before the Soviet period the events of February 1918 were described as the final years of World War I, which meant accommodating and feeding the troops of both parties (the German and the Russian) by the villagers, and the founding of local armed defence units to protect their villages from plunderers. Such descriptions are not typical only to the studied area in western Estonia, but to Estonia in general (EKLA f. 199; f. 200). This version existed in parallel with the Soviet one, whereas probably the development of the Soviet heroic narrative gave it a new life: popular stories were needed to argue against the Soviet narrative. Among the analysed texts there were also those that tried to refute the Soviet treatment at the factual level (like Veiderma, Peenoja –Texts Two and Three), but there were also others, in which the (“correct”) viewpoint was presented with humour. The latter include the white horse stories (Peenoja 1989; Ansip 2005; MK Läänemaa 2005), which could not be found from the period before the Soviet narrative. These seem to have been created namely – and only – as objections to the unacceptable treatment of local history. In general, however, the whole discussion belongs to the sphere of literature (journalism), as the local oral history has dealt and is dealing with other themes.

The analysed example from the year 1918 characterises how important the existence of sources which are similar, but belong to different political “times”, is for a researcher of narrated history in Estonia. The historical tradition collected in the 1920–1930s (EKLA f. 199; f. 200) made it possible to read the interpretations of the events in early 20th century without the colouring of the Soviet period. The official history narratives of the Soviet period (like Lõhmus & Siilivask 1969; Taigro 1971) offered material for disputes over Estonian history, first in the private sphere, later – towards the end of the Soviet era – also in public (the media, research and school literature). Among the first mentioned, the texts written in the Soviet period for family archives (Veiderma 1960s; MK Pärnumaa 1977, 1981; MK Viljandimaa 1980) documented namely the Soviet-era popular understandings of the past events. So it is clear that the objections to the Soviet narrative, which were published during the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s and later, did not arise from the moods of the break-up of the Soviet union but supported on the earlier popular interpretation of the past. After Estonia regained independence in 1991, the active

opposition to Soviet history (“actually it was like this”) started to recede and humour came to the fore (e.g. the white horse stories). Also, the discussion focuses on such topics that are really considered as problems (e.g. the after-effects of the Soviet repressions). So, in the texts analysed in this article the interpretation truths step forward instead of the real-event truth. This is an example, which describes the disputatious nature of narrating Estonian history in general. Whether the roots of the disputatious narration tradition are hidden in the recent history of Estonia, cannot be confirmed by the scope of the available material. But it is evident that it is necessary and inevitable because of the 20th century political context of Estonia, as described at the beginning of the article. The intersecting points of history and biography are continuously studied, because history has become a part of autobiography.

NOTES

1. This article is based on a paper presented at the International Baltic Studies Conference in Valmiera, Latvia in June 2005. Research for this article was funded by the project “Aspects of Terminology and Source Criticism in Everyday Culture” under the national program “Estonian Language and National Memory”. The author is grateful to Ann Kuslap for translating the article from Estonian to English.
2. At the moment a good example of the differences in the interpretations of the past in Estonian independence period and the Soviet period is the analysis of the 1905 events. 100 years have passed from the events but the events of 1905 have been interpreted both in the context of the independent state (1918–1940) and in the Soviet context – these interpretations are antagonistic. At the moment the Estonian society needs a third interpretation, which does not disregard any of the earlier descriptions. What should the interpretation be like to satisfy the current period? If we ignore for the moment what happened in towns, the year 1905 in villages started with negotiations between peasants and manor lords in economic matters, but ended with the punitive troops sent by the Russian Czarist authorities – the so-called suppression of revolution, which meant both shootings and physical punishment. In the period of the Republic of Estonia (1918–1940) these events were handled as the beginning of the development of a modern society and a prologue to national independence. In Soviet history writing, however, these events were associated directly with the fight for the Soviet power. What made the situation more complicated was that the year 1905 was called the “red year” in Estonia also before the Soviet period (Jürisson 1907). This, however, did not overlap with the meaning of “red” in the Soviet period, when the Soviet (red) power introduced itself to Estonian local people through repressions. As at the end of the 20th century the Soviet (red) power related to Estonians with a traumatic experience and the ideology learnt at the Soviet school, naturally also the 1905 events were regarded with estrangement (cf. Kaljundi 2006, 19). In 2005 the events of 1905 were discussed

- quite actively in Estonian scientific circles, particularly in the area of history (Rosenberg 2006), but also from the viewpoint of popular narrated history (Jaago 2006; Lintrop 2006; Torp-Kõivupuu 2006).
3. See e.g. a study of the revelation of different treatments of history in one region in Jaago 2004, 153–162.
 4. In Estonia: the collection in the Estonian Literary Museum of life stories on the topic “Minu ja minu pere elu ajaloo keerdkäikudes” [My destiny and the destiny of my close ones in the labyrinth of history] 1996. In Finland: the collection in the archives of the Finnish Literary Society on the topic “Suvun suuri kertomus” [The Great Narrative of the Family] 1997.
 5. Hiie Hans was also the main character in the story told by A. Veiderma, which was presented above as the second example. In this story, Hiie is the farm name, and Habermann is the surname.
 6. An additional article could be written about the events of the battle of Keila concerning the differences in popular and Soviet-minded descriptions. Heroism is emphasised in one of them, the human aspect is underlined in the other.

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