

Reception of the Topic of Repressions in the Estonian Society

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Introduction

The present article has been prepared in the framework of the research project “Memory as a Cultural Factor in the Biographical Narratives of Estonians” (1998–2001)¹. The aim of the project was to investigate the role of memory in the Estonian culture of the second half of the 20th century through individual biographical narratives. The problem setting proceeded from the rapidly developing and changing socio-cultural situation in Estonia in the 1990s. This situation was characterised by conflicts and increasing controversy between different social strata, generations, Estonians living in Estonia and in exile (Vunder, Anepaio, Kõresaar 1998). We presumed that the roots of many phenomena and attitudes were to be found in the recent past of Estonians – in people’s experience and in the background for the formation of their attitudes and behaviour in contemporary society. Another significant aspect was the present perspective, i.e. how social discourses and the present situation of an individual influence the interpretation of his experience of time.

My paper is about the *encounter* of the Estonian society of the transition time with its past and concentrates on the tragic part of this encounter, namely the Soviet repressions. I will regard the deportations of the 1940s as a set of events in the social memory of Estonians and follow the dynamics of reception of the topic of repressions in the Estonian society. The emphasis is on the processes that characterise the social memory of Estonians.

In my analysis I proceed from the model of social memory developed by the German social scientist Peter Alheit (1989), which reflects the shaping of biographical experience and its development from the level of autobiographical memories to the higher forms of social knowledge. Peter Alheit distinguishes two levels in the social memory expressed by a recollection scheme (*Erinnerungsschemata*) and an

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interpretation scheme (*Deutungsschemata*). A level of experiences and events, based on experiences/events and their verbal relaying (first) in a personal and/or (later) a traditional form, emerges around the recollection scheme. Thus an individual ties his/her experiences with common ones. The interpretation scheme comprises various organised and institutionalised forms of processing the social experience. The interpretation scheme starts with the creation of interpretations at the everyday level (e.g. shaping of value attitudes of a certain group or social stratum) and continues with the more developed levels of interpretation (mass media, associations or law and sciences). We may also say that the experience level belongs to the private sphere of an individual, whereas the interpretation level is a part of the public sphere.

There may be several such social memories in a society. The position of one or another memory in a specific society depends on how the two levels of the specific memory are interlinked, i.e. the memory with a stronger/wider interpretation level becomes dominant in the society.

Leaving the problem of multitude of memories aside, I will concentrate on the memory where the repressions hold an important position. Within the framework of this memory I will emphasise the distinction between the experience (or private) level and the organised (or public) interpretation level, analysing their mutual relationships and their dynamics in the Estonian society in the 1990s.

The topic of repressions in the Soviet society

When a large power wants to deprive a small country of its national consciousness, it uses the method of organised forgetting (Connerton 1991: 14). It is well-known that the Soviet regime pushed the tragic memories of Stalinist repressions into public oblivion for decades. The society experienced a collective amnesia serving political purposes. Throughout the Soviet time people kept such memories to themselves or limited to an intimate and narrow domain – usually family or relatives. The wish/unwillingness to forward this traumatic experience and the thoroughness of what was shared depended on the internal coping of the specific individual with his/her experience, which also determined the strategy selected (e.g. circle of reliable friends, attention to the impact of the information on them, see Anepaio 2001: 202–206). The general silence was primarily caused by the fear of (possible new) repressions and also the desire to conceal the stigmatisation and

overcome it by getting integrated into the society. However, the fear of the authorities or existence of a silent circle of the repressed was not always the reason (see also Anepaio 2001: 205–206). The forwarding of the experiences of the repressed was also determined by (deliberate) indifference and ignorance of the listeners with different experiential backgrounds. The following example originates from an interview with a woman who had been deported:

... And when you go and tell to a person who has not experienced it – he will never descend to this level. I have a relative like that – he doesn't listen to it ... my nephew ... well, he was not touched by all this ... he won't tell you anything, he avoids all this (woman, b. 1931, Tartu).

Up to now the Estonian society has not become particularly conscious of its unwillingness to know, which has been manifest at different times at different levels of the society.

Thus social amnesia was being created officially and many facilitated it by preferring to avoid knowledge, even if they had been offered to learn about the repressions. In sum, as elsewhere in Eastern and Central Europe, real past was systematically eliminated from social memory.

Institutionalisation of the experience of repressions

Publicising of the past

The social landslide of the end of the 1980s forcefully introduced the topic of repressions into public debate. The topic of the deportations is considered to be launched by an article published in 1987 in the main cultural newspaper of the country by the historian Evald Laasi (1987). Alongside with the period of Estonia's independence between the World Wars, the topic of repressions was central in creating a new construction of the past to replace the previous model. These were the main past events that the totalitarian system had distorted and not mentioned as they pointedly represented the violence and illegality of the Soviet system.

Presentation and publicising of the tragic repressions in the past flooded all types of (mass) media. Nearly simultaneously with the national newspapers and magazines, materials on the tragic past started to appear in local publications. Beside the generalising surveys of the events primarily presented by professional historians and lawyers and also relayed by public figures, individual experience quickly started to

gain ground in the form of memories of the actual victims in shorter and longer layouts. The radio broadcast both factological surveys and memories of the victims (e.g. the series *Kirjutamata memuaare* (“Unwritten Memoirs”)). The past became actualised and started to feed fiction, the initial mild interpretations of it soon were replaced by much harsher reflections of reality. All kinds of memoirs and documentary books based on recollections abounded. The authors were the repressed themselves and also various mediators who collected reminiscences in order to publish them.² Theatre performances reviving the past tragedy filled theatres with emotionally sympathetic audiences.³

Public commemoration

The past started to be remembered and celebrated also through ceremonies and symbols. Mass ceremonies took place on deportation anniversaries and reflected in the press (e.g. Sildam 1988; Jullis 1989; Neilt... 1989). Symbolic commemoration of the repressions gained increasing public attention (e.g. Ruutsoo 1988).

At first the commemoration events were held at locations symbolically or directly connected with the repressions (e.g. railway stations), but soon monuments dedicated to the tragic past started to be erected. It was decided to build a central memorial in the middle of Estonia at Pilstvere (Jeletsky 1989).

The formerly covert past, i.e. the deportations, thus became a conscious and official part of social memory. At this point it is important to mention the recognition extended to the past by the authorities in the speech of the then Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Arnold Rüütel broadcast by the Estonian Television connected with the 40th anniversary of the March deportation in 1989 (ENSV... 1989) and in *Address to the people of Estonia* published in the same year on the anniversary of the June deportation by three government bodies (the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Estonia, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian Soviet Socialist

² E.g. Jaan Ellen, a retired journalist from South Estonia, published several documentary stories based on the memories of the repressed people in 1994–2001 (Ellen 1994; 1995; 1998; 1999; 2001).

³ E.g. the productions of Jaan Kruusvall's play *Vaikuse vallamaja* (“The Community House of Vaikuse”) at the Tallinn Drama Theatre named after V. Kingissepp and the Theatre “Vanemuine” in Tartu, Rein Saluri's play *Minek* (“The Departure”) at the Tallinn Drama Theatre and the Pärnu Drama Theatre named after L. Koidula and Raimond Kaugver's play *Saturnuse lapsed* (“The Children of Saturn”) at the Theatre “Endla” in Pärnu.

Republic and the Council of Ministers of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic) (Pöördumine... 1989).

In the course of opening up and sharing of the past a horizontal linkage within the generation who had suffered the repressions and a vertical linkage with the next generations are forged (the memories are relayed also by the younger generation of journalists) and personal recollections become collective. The formerly private communication between the repressed people (cf. Anepaio 2001) intensifies and becomes public. Many dare to meet and gather publicly, manifesting their experience. At such meetings, which mostly brought together people from one location of deportation (e.g. a local *kolkhoz*), the past was reconstructed jointly – common memories were regained, shared and exchanged.

Organisations

The repressed manifested themselves also through organisations and the association “Memento” founded on March 25, 1989 becomes the central umbrella organisation for the branches in the counties. These organisations start to restore and create their own version (the view of the repressed) of the past and disseminate it in the society. Proceeding from Peter Alheit’s model of social memory, we are looking at the level of organised interpretation systems. On the one hand, the emphasis is on maximum clarification and publicising of the repressions in order to find information about all the repressed people⁴ and to gather recollections. On the other hand, the anniversaries connected with repressions were celebrated and monuments erected. In other words, a social practice of commemoration is born and people recall and celebrate events and persons that are part of their jointly acknowledged generational and cultural identity and common understanding (Middleton, Edwards 1997).

The new situation generated a wider interest in the society; for instance, the repressed people started sharing their past at alumni conventions of schools and classes, which had also become accessible for Estonians living in the West.

In this process of regeneration of covert past professional historians

⁴ A separate information and history committee is working at “Memento”, in 1990 the Register Bureau of the Estonian Victims of Repressions was established. A 12-volume series of publications on the repressions has been planned, by now four volumes have been published. See Helk 2002.

and lawyers provided a legal and factual numerical framework for the repressions. In her study of the March deportation of 1949 the historian Aigi Rahi has written that the treatment of the topic of the deportations first underwent a so-called legal period, when the central problem was the provision of a competent legal assessment – only later the number of the deportees was focused on (Rahi 1998: 9–11). The public and legally grounded condemnation of the past violence gave the people the courage to talk about what actually had happened to them and say that it had been wrong. The numerical framework supported this conviction and provided a picture of the scope of the violence. Thereafter people started to fill it in with their memories. As a result of this process, a common metalevel narrative was gradually created.

A symbolically important step was the inclusion of this narrative in school textbooks:

“Mass deportation of June 14, 1941. In June 1941 the repressions of the Soviet regime assumed the character of massive and state-sponsored terror. On the night of June 14 NKVD carried out a criminal mass deportation in Estonia. Similar actions were simultaneously conducted in Latvia and Lithuania.

The deportation in June 1941 was an act of administrative violation, as the victims were not given a chance to say a word in their defence. The houses or apartments were surrounded at night; people were woken up and read decisions on deportation. Some time (from twenty minutes to an hour) was given to pack up and under guard the families were escorted to railway stations where railway cars supplied with bars were waiting. At the stations men were separated from the rest of the family members, as they were considered to be under arrest, whereas others were classified as persons to be deported. The trains stopped at the stations for several days until the journey to Russia began. There the men were taken to prison camps and other family members were settled in villages.

According to existing data **10 157 people were deported from Estonia in June 1941** (*Eesti ajalugu* 1991: 350–351).

“Mass deportation of March 25, 1949. On the night of March 25–26, 1949 the plan of genocide was implemented. This was a time when the spring school vacation had not yet ended and the boarding students were still at home.

The horrors of the night of June 14, 1941 repeated themselves. As in 1941 the action had hit the population totally unexpectedly, then now people were aware of several signs of danger (accumulation of trucks,

gossip, warnings). As a result many succeeded to hide from deportation and were replaced by people drawn from the “reserve”. On the other hand the deportation of 1949 was even more callous than in 1941: people who fled were shot at, property of deported people was openly appropriated.

According to existing data 20 702 people or 2.5% of Estonians living in their homeland were deported. The victims were sent to western Siberia or northern Kazakhstan in freight cars meant for livestock. The farms with all property left there were subsumed into kolkhozes, part of farms remained empty and decayed” (ibid.: 395).

The school textbooks merge the interpretation level (academic study) and the experience level (living memory) and the official interpretation of the repressions is a combination of both levels. Indeed, the inclusion of the experience, i.e. memories, in a school textbook itself is an indicator of institutionalisation.

Re-privatisation of experience in the second half of the 1990s

The Estonian society was predictably quick to accept this narrative. This acceptance also constituted a protest against the former Soviet narrative, which treated the deportations as necessary actions against the enemies of the Soviet system.⁵

While the rapid recognition of the narrative was predictable, it is quite surprising that the meaning of this narrative started to decrease at a similar pace. From the middle of the 1990s the topic of repressions lost its prominent position in public debate, being preserved in official discourse as “a crime against humanity” and leaving two annual commemoration days in the official memory of the nation. June 14 is commemorated as a national mourning day (Pühade...1994), when national mourning flags are to be hoisted, March 25 is a national commemoration day and there is no official requirement to use mourning flags.

At the same time, memories enter the scope of academic attention and in-depth study of the mass repressions begins. However, the number of professional researchers is small and analysis is conducted largely by the repressed people themselves.⁶

⁵ A classic example can be found in Vol. III of *An Overview of the History of the Communist Party of Estonia*, pp. 49, 264–275 (*Ülevaade... 1972*).

⁶ A thorough survey of the current state of the research and its results has been made by A. Rahi (2002).

Alongside with research, systematic collection of the past experience for scientific purposes was started. In the second half of the 1990s two central *lieux de mémoires* emerged: the Estonian Literary Museum extended its activities in gathering biographies and the Estonian National Museum started the collection of memoirs connected with the repressions. The Estonian Literary Museum had started the collection in 1989 and among others also biographies from the people who had been repressed were received in the cultural archives. The collection of biographies gathered greater momentum with the creation of the Estonian Biography-Researcher's Society "Estonian Life Stories" in 1996. The results of the biography competition "My fate and the lives of my relatives during the troubled times in history", oriented to the preservation of information about hard times and complex destinies and held by the association, contained particularly numerous descriptions of the repressions.⁷ The Estonian National Museum gathered recollections of the repressions (deportations) in the traditional questionnaire form.⁸

Memories and data about the repressions continue to be collected by the organisations of the victims who frequently cooperate with local museums. However, the attention paid by the Estonian society to research, professional and more balanced treatments of the topic is decreasing.

Changing values in a changing society

The rapid socio-economic changes typical of the former socialist camp happened also in Estonia. The attempt to survive economically in the quickly changing times and orientation to the future became a priority at both social and individual levels. In such development the past was left on the background – a tendency characteristic of societies oriented to rapid changes, results and achievements. Albrecht Lehmann has described how the flight and deportation of people from East Germany after World War II and coping in the West-German society quickly lost

⁷ The collections of the Estonian Literary Museum hold over two hundred biographies of the deported people (Hinrikus 1999: 6, data about later acquisitions from Rutt Hinrikus).

⁸ Questionnaire no. 200 : 1941. *aasta küüditamine, elu asumisel (The deportation of 1941, life in the location of deportation)*, Tartu: ENM 1998 and questionnaire no. 201: 1949. *aasta küüditamine, elu asumisel (The deportation of 1949, life in the location of deportation)*, Tartu: ENM 1998. In the museum the answers to the questionnaires are preserved in the archives of the answers of correspondents (ERM KV 867–883).

its political urgency and communicative meaning in both the family circle and the public sphere. In many families these topics were pushed to the background by political and economic developments (Lehmann 1989: 185; 1991: 7).

In Estonia the process of forgetting was sped up by the increasing openness of the society to the world. Information made available by the traditional media channels (printed press, television, radio) concerned not only the nation's history, but also a wide spectrum of global affairs. This process was catalysed by the information revolution and the advent of new information technologies. As a result, in comparison with the past situation, the general information flow underwent explosive growth. The Internet, the modern provider of infinite possibilities, reached Estonia in 1991 and in April 1992, the first international connections were set up.⁹ The proportion of information representing the tragic past in the general information flow decreased rapidly and, particularly for the young, the past started to lose its significance.

At the same time, the Internet has become/is becoming a channel, which helps (or at least provides a possibility) to convey the tragic past experience to the young.

Currently the web contains a homepage on the deportations including a historical survey, photos and recollections of the victims and also references to literature, debates and country study materials on the deportations compiled by young people.¹⁰ However, members of the older generation, whose connections with the information society are not so close, feel that the past so important to them has been neglected by the young. This neglect and disregard is amplified for them because the reception of the past experience, or at least a part of it, occurs in a sphere unknown to this generation and therefore cannot be influenced by them in any significant extent.

An important role in the relevant processes is played by the ideological change in the new social elite. The young (both in terms of age and experience) political and economic elites of Estonia have together embarked on the creation of a new image for Estonia and Estonians. Estonians are no longer presented as suffering, unhappy and helpless, but as a nation able rapidly to integrate with the West (see Lauristin, Vihalemm 1997: 106). The desire of the state to move forward

⁹ See <http://www.ioc.ee/eesti/6.html> 14.08.02.

¹⁰ <http://el.kolhoos.ee/~14.08.02>; <http://www.estpak.ee/~vastkk/almanahh/tood.htm>

and create itself an image attractive for the world outside leads to changed attitudes in domestic policies. “National ideology and national history” are deemed necessary only as far as they are pragmatically reasonable.

This means that although the commemoration days are celebrated, ceremonies are carried out and the past is regularly remembered, the history is actually largely ignored. The following excerpt from an interview illustrates the way how a person who has been deported feels about it:

You know, I have been there on Linda Hill [a monument in Tallinn of the mourning Mother Linda of the main hero of the national epic Kalevipoeg – TA] on the anniversary of deportation /—/ You can see there those unhappy, tired, worn-out – now that’s an interesting picture – those old people. You can see the masses. Now, further away, quite far away, you can see the members of the parliament in fancy coats who feel extremely uneasy /—/ They do not step up to any people, to anybody. No way. They make their speeches. It is necessary, isn’t it. Well, you can make your speech there. They are happy to go to the monument of “Estonia” [monument to the victims of the shipwreck of Tallinn-Stockholm ferry “Estonia” – TA], but here they feel extremely uneasy (woman, b. 1932, Tallinn).

The schism between the generations is a general result of the development of the society striving to fast reforms, achievement and liberal economy. The Estonian society is divided into young and optimistic “winners” oriented to the future and the older disappointed generation (cf. Lauristin, Vihalemm 1997: 109). This schism is also expressed in the remembering of the repression experience and the wish to remember and commemorate it.

Joint remembrance has ceased to work as it used to. The audience of the commemoration events is mainly the repressed people themselves and the following generations are not present. Other generations have withdrawn and this is true also of a part of the repressed people themselves.

Thus the repressed people may share their memories and relay their experience, but this information is primarily consumed by museums, i.e. institutions which are specifically meant for storage of all types of memories. The memories of repressions are nothing special any more and have become a part of routinely collected memoirs (memory).

The situation which prevailed for decades when the repressed people had to be silent has been quickly replaced with an environment where (they find that) nobody is interested in their past and their recollections any more. Thus the past which for a time was commonly shared is pushed back to the personal level of the repressed people. Formerly and officially these memories belong to everybody, but actually they are turned back into a private affair of the victims.

Conflicts in the changed present reality

In their everyday life the victims of repressions frequently interpret the changed social values as conflicts.

The legislation of the Republic of Estonia has freed the repressed people from the state-imposed stigma. The victims of mass repressions have been legally rehabilitated¹¹ and the restitution of property is in its final stages. In order to compensate the difficulties of deportation or prison years those are tripled when calculating the pensions.

The theoretically restorable justice is often out of balance with respect to the realities of life. The following example was brought by an activist of the organisation “Memento” in the press. A family of four members who had all come through the repressions and whose total time of stay in Siberia was 66 years received as compensation for their 14-room presentable home a sum which today buys half of a 1-room apartment in the cheapest district of apartment houses in Tallinn (Virkus 2000: 25).

The repressed people perceive the restitution not only as the return of their property, which is politically a part of legal continuity of the state and economically a part of the general privatisation, but also as a stand taken by the state to the injustice suffered by them. However, many people are not satisfied with such a stand or, to be more precise, its extent and the state is expected to show even greater caring and justice.¹²

Part of the victims find the bonus pensions insufficient and the following example represents an argument to this effect by a woman deported in 1941.

¹¹ *Riigi Teataja* 1988, 52, 754; 1989, 10, 118; 1990, 7, 85; 1992, 7, 103; 1992, 33, 437.

¹² The same is felt, for instance, by Volga German repatriates with respect to the German state (Brake 1993: 73).

It [Siberia – TA] has deprived us of everything – what does this little of pension give us. I spend 500 crowns a month on medicines – I cannot take my prescription to the social care, as I have such a big pension! But those whose pensions are smaller go to the social care – and they get 300 crowns for medicines. And in the beginning, when they paid this residence compensation – the same thing – small pension, they go there and get compensation. But with this bigger pension you don't win anything – in the end it's the same thing – you see! I have lost everything! I have lost my parents, for my whole life I have lived such a defenceless life. It is very hard to be an orphan. /—/ I recently thought about it and came to this decision /—/ that Laar said – to put it more politely - Prime Minister Laar, that well – they get a higher pension. /—/ But I know that this was near the end of the Russian (time) [i.e. the Soviet period – TA] – I don't know how long you had to be in the party – and then you got free medicines, a free flat, and for a certain sum you also could use free tailor's services – for the party members. I wouldn't have wanted anything else, but the free medicines. For every old person uses them. /—/ Because, well – you see, it wasn't a kind of voluntary thing, after all (woman, b. 1932, Valga).

People feel themselves as cadres loyal to the Estonian state, hence the parallel in the above example with the party members (members of the CPSU) who constituted cadres loyal to the previous system. People have suffered for the Estonian state because they have been Estonians and therefore they expect a greater understanding, support and recognition from the restored state.

On the other hand, the material advantages of the repressed have caused a certain social opposition to them. The repressed people have experienced reproaches from other people who stayed in Estonia and who emphasise that in Estonia those years were also difficult times of panic fear and economic chaos. These criticisms express protest over preferring one past over another.

Public support for the organisations of the repressed people has diminished. A member of a local West-Estonian chapter of the association “Memento” has put it bitterly: *The lords up there do not want to hear anything about us!* (Fieldwork notes, March 2001). The repressed people expect to receive material support, as it is material difficulties that largely hinder their organised activities. For authorities (also at local level) the organisations of the repressed people are just one of the many categories requesting support. To the repressed people this indicates that their relative social value in the eyes of the state has

fallen.

A crucial controversy is felt by the repressed people in connection with leaving behind the past so important for them. For them the past has opened up to a much greater extent: it is not only the telling about it and announcing about them, but the possibility to learn about the wider context and to listen to or read the stories of others. This has indubitably added value to their pasts. At the same time they perceive that the interest and attention of the surrounding world has weakened in comparison, for instance, with the early 1990s.

For one, although small, part of the repressed people the break with the past has been very abrupt. Those are people who returned from Russia to Estonia not at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s as most victims, but only at the beginning of the 1990s during the social turning point. Ten years, if not more, have passed from their “homecoming”. For those noticeably Russified people the repressions are the connecting link enabling them to associate with the Estonian society.

The prevalent opinion is that the repressed people are not understood in today’s Estonia. As a primary cause of the lack of understanding, differences of experiences are quoted, but it is also found that by distancing itself from the repressions, the state has created further misunderstanding. The repressed people see the preservation of the past in their memories as an obligation and also a necessity. In their view the time of compensation has been too short and they feel that their social experience – the suffering which was meanwhile esteemed – again threatens to turn worthless. Therefore a part of them finds it extremely important to keep on sharing the experience between the generations. There is an additional apprehension that when they disappear, the experience ceases to be transmitted or is not relayed in a sufficient extent.

Real and spurious dialogue

What will further fate of the past revived be like? Will it be forgotten or will it be kept alive in the social memory of the Estonian society? Maybe even in a shape which the participants themselves may not like?

In March of 2001, I organised a discussion group on the topic of the past and the repressions with some students of a Tartu secondary school. It was the time when (bearing in mind the following campaign) the public was still “quiet” and the tragic past was socially “not refreshed”. Thus the discussion in the group indirectly reflected the

stage of development that this aspect of social memory had reached by the middle of the 1990s.

In the discussion group it became clear that the future consumers of history, high school youngsters aged 17–18, did not evaluate the repressions as violence directed specifically against Estonians, but as another proof of the negative side of the nature of mankind.

This is just a proof of certain bad traits of character of man /—/ Estonians are not guilty here, neither are Russians /—/ Well, it's just like a thing that happened here and elsewhere. Now it is also actually happening somewhere, I don't know where, where there is war. People are like that, that they do bad things to one another (girl, form 11).

They do not favour fetishism or instrumentalisation of past suffering and find that it is only human, but unfair of those who have gone through this suffering, to presume that the young should have similar feelings.

They [the victims of the repressions – TA] cannot force the feeling on us. Only those, who were kind of directly involved in the event, only they know, what it was like. I cannot experience this feeling – no-one has forced me out of my bed (girl, form 11).

The young handle participation in the commemoration ceremonies as another duty and find that commemoration on their part does not change anything. For young people the repressions are located in the chain of historical events, which in 25 years will still be connected with the ones who remember and commemorate, but to which in 50 years probably no importance will be attached.

To my mind it is a fact that goes in the history textbooks and when you read it, you feel exactly like – in the future – like reading that Estonians were conquered in 1227 – were subjugated to a foreign power (boy, form 12).

At the same time they identify themselves as a generation who has contact with the living memory of the repressions through the older generation (grandparents, older relatives). For them a “living bond”, which brings the tragic past nearer, lends a meaning to it and helps to understand its commemoration, is still there.

Maybe we are the last people who are still so close and, well, are still in touch with these people. Grandfather or granduncle or whoever may talk about it – and he is important for us, then maybe these events are also important for us (girl, form 11).

In connection with organised or institutional forgetting and remembering, it has been emphasised that collective remembering is essential to the identity and integrity of a community (Middleton, Edwards 1997: 10). The possibility that this “living bond” will not be realised and the speed of the break with the past have caused apprehensions among the Estonian power elite who is conscious of the fragility of the communal social memory necessary to preserve the national identity and the state.

By involving different generations in the process, this realisation was reflected by the campaign of actualisation of the past carried out in the spring of 2001 in which president Lennart Meri had a leading part. The campaign sought to unite the valuation of the past and the orientation to the future.

On April 9, 2001 all larger Estonian newspapers and electronic media published the address of the President of the Republic of Estonia to school students. To commemorate the 60th anniversary of the first deportation of 1941 on June 14 the president announced the campaign of collection of memoirs, calling the students up to write down the recollections of those who had survived through the deportations. This call was an address to the new generation and its aim was to create memories extending across generations and to preserve the linkage at the level of living memory.

The media has suggested that the call of the president came too late both from the historic point of view as well as from the current perspective (cf. Varahiline... 2001). However, it helped and contributes to forging a bond. In the works received the bond is evidenced by the descriptions of the experiences of the young in discovering the past. The tragedy experienced by the old generation had reached them, shattering many of the prejudices. The media covered the “discovery” of the past as well and even valued it. One of the collectors of memories, a 17-year-old high school student wrote: “People with different fates live by our side. They are our neighbours, acquaintances and relatives. We had no idea what the past was like. History books do not include all the details” (Leiman 2001).

Another facet that was emphasised was the mutual (interest) dialogue of different generations: “... 6th form pupil Diore Arovald (12)

travelled to her grandmother's living in Rapla County to write a biography of her great-grandfather. "I felt that grandmother talked about her father with great interest and seemed to be eager for me to hear the story," said Arovald. "At the same time, she was a bit sad." Arovald said that she was very interested in hearing about her great-grandfather's life. "I did it absolutely voluntarily and when I listened to the story, I got very interested in all that past"" (Koch 2001).

The works of the students clearly indicate what the currently forming narrative is like – it contains tragic events, but the presentation is adventurous, the authors have presented amusing and strange stories about the past events and there is little complaining. The repressed people interpret their experience in a way that in their opinion might be interesting for the third generation. They do so because they are worried that otherwise their past experience would remain a private affair (of the older generation). Therefore the storytellers (deliberately or intuitively) select the facts that they find suitable for telling.

Thus, we can claim that a new stage of shaping the collective memory has been reached.

The second part of the campaign was "Estonia Remembers", an event that was specifically for the repressed, in the course of which the president visited every county and handed out symbolic mourning tokens of Broken Cornflower with the Estonian national flower to "those whom a foreign power had arrested or deported or to whom it had caused suffering" (Reinsalu 2001). This campaign showed what had become of the relationship with the past and thereby also of perception of the past at the level of an individual. Participating in the events, I felt that this ceremony was important for many repressed people: the president who is a symbol presents them with a token – it is an acknowledgement and symbolic identification in a collective experience.

By presenting the tokens, the president delivered the message: share your memories. Formally, the call was meant for the repressed, but actually it was also directed to the younger generations: listen to the memories. The two addressees indicate that at least a part of the power of the state (the president) had socially (and more importantly at the state level) understood the fragility of this vital thread of memory. Moreover, he dared to admit the fact, even though the Estonian society was unwilling to do it.

The unwillingness of the society to listen was what most hurt the repressed, as they had assumed that their experience would be recog-

nised to a higher degree.

The campaign initiated by the president pointed to a qualitative change. As late as at the beginning of the 1990s, the vertical ties in the Estonian society were being shaped spontaneously, but during the decade the process had died down and the state in the person of the president took the forging of such ties into its own hands. This indicates that the process of shaping the vertical ties of the social memory is becoming increasingly state-controlled. It is a separate question to what degree we are willing to admit it.

Summary: The dynamics of social memory in Estonia in the 1990s

The facets and processes of the social memory connected with remembering the repression experience can be shortly characterised as follows. In the Soviet period the experience of the repressions in Estonia, including the knowledge of the deportations, was dominantly private. It was carefully hidden from the society as a whole and concealed primarily at the experiential level of certain segments of the society. Awareness of the repression experience of Estonians was launched into the public sphere in the second half of the 1980s. The rich assortment of the formerly hidden (deliberately concealed) recollections gains extreme popularity and by the beginning of the last decade of the century knowledge of the repressions acquires a very extensive public scope. Commemoration of the repressions becomes organised at several levels and the repressed individuals join organised associations, whereas such organisations get a weighty say in making decisions with respect to legal assessment of the repressions, rehabilitation of innocent victims and compensation for the injustice. Academic study of the tragic past gathers momentum and a repression narrative with an official status for the society as a whole starts to take shape. Following P. Alheit, it may be said that the private experiential level of social memory is used to construe a public level of interpretation and as a result a so-called “public memory culture” or commemoration emerges.

However, the heightened interest of the society in the repression experience is passing. The reconstruction of the state and economy and the development of the new elite lead to new priorities which are increasingly connected with the future. Not only the topic of the repressions, but the past as such loses its position in the eyes of the society and retreats from the positions won at the beginning of the decade. The organisations representing the victims retain their pres-

ence at the level of interpretation, but they lack their earlier influence, let alone possibilities to participate in decision-making. The state has reserved the pragmatically necessary official recognition for such organisations and the repression experience carried by them and allocated them a certain status in “the public memory”, but no more. Due to the waning interest of the society, this experience is progressively shifted back to the private sphere of the social memory and the social basis for (conscious) reception and relaying of the past is decreasing. The repressions and related events increasingly become “a private affair” of the people affected.

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