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Editor's Note 3

Ulla-Maija Peltonen and Kirsti Salmi-Niklander

Introduction: Memory and Narration—

Interdisciplinary discussions of oral history methodology 4

ARTICLES

Ronald J. Grele

Reflections on the Practice of Oral History:

Retrieving what we can from an earlier critique 11

Baiba Bela

Narrative and Reality 24

Claudia Lenz and Helle Bjerg

"To Be Honest I Don't Think She Has Much to Say...":

Gender and authority in memories of the Second World War in Denmark and Norway 34

Tiiu Jaago

After-effects of War and the Narrative:

Depictions of war in Estonian and Finnish life histories in the twenty-first century 45

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VOLUME 32 NUMBER 4 WINTER 2007

Marja-Liisa Keinänen

*“Many a Time Blood Has Flowed in Northern Finskoga”:
The narrative construction of ethnic conflicts in Forest Finnish popular historiography* 59

Tuulikki Kurki

Oral History as an Articulated Meaning in Soviet Karelia’s Literature 74

REVIEWS

Angelina Snodgrass Godoy. *Popular Injustice:
Violence, community, and law in Latin America* 85

Toomas Gross

Tuulikki Pietilä. *Gossip, Markets, and Gender:
How dialogue constructs moral value in post-socialist Kilimanjaro* 89

Dorothy L. Hodgson

Kristina Helgesson. *“Walking in the Spirit”:
The complexity of belonging in two Pentecostal churches in Durban, South Africa* 92

Touko Martikainen

NEWS

Minna Ruckenstein

Anthropologists at ETMU Days 97

Publications received 98

Information for Contributors 100

EDITOR'S NOTE

This winter issue of *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* is, like that of autumn, a themed number—in this case bringing together the work of oral historians from universities in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Norway and Sweden, with a keynote article by Ronald F. Grele, former director of the Oral History Research Office at Colombia University. Although oral history studies are not part of the discipline of anthropology in the Finnish university system, the two are well positioned to inform each other, both in methodological and substantive fields.

This number has been guest-edited by two colleagues: Ulla-Maija Peltonen who is a senior researcher with the Finnish Literature Society and senior lecturer at the University of Helsinki, and Kirsti Salmi-Niklander, post-doctoral fellow with the Academy of Finland and the Department of Folklore Studies at the University of Helsinki. The selection of articles published here were originally presented at a Helsinki symposium held in November, 2006, entitled 'Memory and Narration—Oral History Research in the Northern European Context' (organized by the Finnish Literature Society, the Department of Folklore Studies (University of Helsinki) and the Finnish Oral History Network). I will leave further introduction of the subject and the content of this issue to the following discussion provided by my guest editors.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
MARIE-LOUISE KARTTUNEN

MEMORY AND NARRATION

INTERDISCIPLINARY DISCUSSIONS OF ORAL HISTORY METHODOLOGY

• ULLA-MAIJA PELTONEN AND KIRSTI SALMI-NIKLANDER •

Oral history research, micro-history and women's studies have all deepened our understanding of the past by demonstrating many innovative ways of formulating new questions on familiar subjects. The Italian microhistorian Giovanni Levi has stressed the fact that all social action—including narration—seems to result from continual negotiation and manipulation, the choices and decisions in the face of an individual's normative reality, which despite its apparently endless selection of options, does not offer much scope for personal interpretation or freedom (Levi 1991: 107).

Oral history has become an important part of the humanities and social sciences in Finland since the mid 1990s. Interdisciplinary initiative has come from folklore studies, history (especially history of mentalities and micro-history), gender studies, literature, anthropology, ethnology, comparative religion, psychology, sociology and linguistics. Several doctoral dissertations based on oral history have been published and defended since 2000.¹ The first interdisciplinary collection of articles on oral history methodology was published in 2006.² Oral history has also been strong in Estonia and Latvia where many archival and research projects have been organized during the last decades.

The symposium 'Memory and Narration—Oral History Research in the Northern European Context' (15–17 November 2006, University of Helsinki) was an important marker in the co-operation of researchers oriented to oral history in Northern Europe, and a stimulus for further projects. The symposium was organized by the Finnish Literature Society, the Department of Folklore Studies (University of Helsinki) and the Finnish Oral History Network (FOHN). The idea of the symposium originated in the meetings of the Nordic-Baltic network 'Oral History and Biographies as resources for Local and Cross-cultural Studies'.³ The purpose was to stimulate methodological discussion in oral history research.

During three intensive days 47 papers were presented in 15 sessions on various themes: conflicts, survival and silence; experience and narration; identity and narration; oral and literary narration; social and collective memory; memories of work and environment; life-stories and genre; everyday life and popular culture; popular historiography; fieldwork methodology.

Remembering and narrating

The key words of the symposium—memory and narration—are not fixed concepts but going through a fruitful debate. Memory can be defined as heterogeneous and multi-layered dialogue between the old and the new. In cultural or social memory, a new phenomenon never means complete replacement of the old, since the new always retains some latent part of the old, and is engaged in a dialectic and polemic relationship with it. New forms can in fact be born from older forms which themselves represented, at an earlier

point in time, latent forms within the new (see Lotman and Uspenskij 1984: 4–28; U-M Peltonen 1999: 115–118, 2003: 20–24).⁴ From the perspective of assumptions concerning the slow pace of mentalities, constancy is a more important focus for research than change.

The significance in the process of remembering lies in its constructive, social and argumentative nature. Social hierarchy is observable in memory. Researchers of mentalities have abandoned the assumption of a unified culture and have taken as their point of departure the parallel existence of a number of simultaneous mentalities. At issue are collective dispositions, that is, the mentalities and worldviews of persons representing different social classes, genders, religious or ethnic groups.⁵ Narrators choose the particular form of expression that best suits their experiences. The concepts transmitted by the narrators may be in complete opposition to the dominant value system in society. The meaning of the narratives to the listeners has a fundamental influence on both the preservation and narration of tradition (Benjamin 1988: 86; Siikala 1998: 4–18).

First person narrative or personal experience narrative is recollected narrative in the literal sense of the term. In the words of Walter Benjamin (1988: 202), “[a]n experienced event is finite—at any rate confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite, because it is only a key to everything that happened before it and after it.” It is pertinent to ask which topics may be discussed in public, which in private, and which may not be discussed at all.

The social settings of memory are neither neutral nor natural. Oral history is dominated by two frames of reference. Firstly, the referential reference which relates to real life. Writing or speaking about real life is not simply reproducing life; it is constructed around the writer’s or speaker’s own understanding of his or her life. Secondly, there is a signifying relationship between writer and reader or between listener and speaker. In this relationship, the intentions of both parties are open to misunderstandings (Lejeune 1989: 70–73; Portelli 1991: 20–21).⁶

During the past decades, many scholars have outlined ‘personal experience narratives’ as a genre of oral narration which does not fit into the traditional folkloristic genres. Sandra Stahl (1989: 12–13) defines personal experience narrative as a prose narrative referring to a personal experience, told in the first person and with untraditional content. Moreover, she argues that personal experience narratives have a dramatic narrative structure, the truth of the narrative is consistently implied and teller of the story is identical with the narrator (Stahl 1989: 14–15).⁷ However, the Italian literary historian Alessandro Portelli argues against the distinction between ‘factual’ and artistic narratives: “[T]here are no formal oral genres specifically destined to transmit historical information; historical, poetical and legendary narratives often become inextricably mixed up” (Portelli 1991: 49).

Finnish and Estonian oral history research is to a large extent based on written materials: autobiographies or responses to life writing competitions and thematic questionnaires organized by the archives. Autobiographical writing is an important although scarcely studied phenomenon in Finnish culture. The Folklore Archive of the Finnish Literature Society has, for example, preserved manuscripts of ordinary people from the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Since 1935 the archive has had its own network of correspondents. Finnish people have written to the archive about their

own lives, answered questionnaires concerning traditions or participated in life writing contests.⁸ Some competitions are targeted to specific professional groups, but most of them to a wide audience and the announcements are published in major newspapers and magazines. The analysis of written memoirs and oral interviews requires different methods, but the researchers of these materials have also found many common interests in oral history methodology. Collecting source material from life writing comes close to the Mass Observation project founded in 1937 in Britain, where a team of observers (“anthropology of ourselves”), and a panel of volunteer writers have studied the everyday lives of ordinary people.⁹

Multi-disciplinary and comparative perspectives

It is not only important to discuss the creation of oral and written sources and their analysis, but also to outline the wider theoretical starting points of oral history research. What is an acceptable subject for research? Who needs oral history? How do we create and recreate knowledge? How does oral history research broaden our understanding of the past?

These pertinent questions have provided the basis for this special issue. Roland J. Grele’s article, which reproduces his key-note lecture at the ‘Memory and Narration’ Symposium held here in Helsinki in 2006, summarizes the development of various methodological orientations in oral history research during the last decades. Ronald J. Grele has a long career in the field of oral history. He is the former director of the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University and has served as the editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Oral History* and the *International Annual of Oral History*. He is the author of *Envelopes of Sounds: The Art of Oral History*, which is a very well known classic. This book, first published in 1975, originated in a session at the 1973 annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians. It includes essays by other scholars in the field of oral history, including Studs Terkel, Jan Vansina, Dennis Tedlock, Saul Benison and Alice Kessler Harris.

Choosing between the other 47 high-quality papers presented at the Symposium was not easy, but discussion of essential methodological issues in oral history research was the most important basis for selection. We have also wanted to provide examples of different approaches to oral history in relation to research material, methods of analysis and theoretical orientation. As Ronald J. Grele points out in his article, oral history originated in the 1940s and 1950s with the production and use of taped interviews: a new kind of research material and historical evidence. During the following decades it has challenged the traditional hierarchies of history production. Oral history research challenges traditional source-criticism and the ways history is produced, but it also challenges the ways scholars define traditional oral and literary genres as their topic of research (Kalela 1999: 139–154; Fingerroos and Peltonen 2006: 7–21).

Writers in this issue utilize various source materials: archival collections, autobiographies, fiction, publications produced by amateur historians, and materials produced by life writing competitions. The first three of the selected articles focus on the oral history of the Second World War in Baltic and Nordic countries. Baiba Bela’s article “Narrative and Reality” explores essential questions of interpretation of an oral history interview.

She is a sociologist at the Latvian University (Riga) and has studied life stories as social messages. She has been involved in the Latvian National Oral History Project, which has systematically produced interviews on historical experience in twentieth-century Latvia.

The article by Tiiu Jaago and that co-written by Claudia Lenz and Helle Bjerg provide a comparative perspective on reflections of the war experiences in Nordic and Baltic countries. Tiiu Jaago compares the recollections of the Second World War in Finnish and Estonian writing competitions. The comparative perspective provides new insight into common narratives and opens up 'self-evident' conclusions to new interpretations. Tiiu Jaago is a folklorist at the University of Tartu. Her research has focused on family narratives and autobiographies in Estonia after the Soviet period.

Claudia Lenz and Helle Bjerg analyse family oral histories in Denmark and Norway, discussing their gendered elements, and also pointing to the family as a narrative community. Claudia Lenz is a political scientist at the Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities in Oslo. Her research is related to representations of the Norwegian women's resistance against the German occupation and the memory of occupation in Norwegian families. Helle Bjerg is a historian and a graduate student at the Department of Educational Psychology in the University of Aarhus. Her doctoral thesis deals with identity formation, power and resistance in school memories of three generations. She has previously studied the memory of the German occupation in Danish families.

Marja-Liisa Keinänen and Tuulikki Kurki utilize oral history as a methodological perspective, highlighting aspects of ethnicity and ethnic conflict. Marja-Liisa Keinänen is a scholar in comparative religion at the University of Stockholm and has studied the traditions of the Karelians and the ethnic minority of Forest Finns, the Finnish slash and burn cultivators who settled in central Sweden four hundred years ago. She analyses popular history production in Forest Finnish history and points out that even 'false' histories can express 'true' and authentic experiences in an ethnic conflict. This also casts light on the actualisation of the seventeenth-century 'Finn Wars' in public discussion. Tuulikki Kurki is a post-doctoral fellow in Folklore Studies at the University of Joensuu. Negotiation processes in literary life and folklore research are a continuing theme both in her doctoral thesis (Kurki 2000) and in her ongoing research. Her article focuses on fictional descriptions of village life ('local prose') by Soviet Karelian writers. She examines oral history as a cultural and political evaluation expressed in the literary critiques, noting that the relationship between fiction and locally significant history reflects the ideology and the aesthetics of the Soviet Union and negotiations in power dynamics at the time.

All the articles selected for this collection express the complexity of various debates within oral history. How to interpret the ambiguous information supplied by personal narratives, often replete with silences and contradictions? All the writers discuss oral history sources as dialogically constructed texts. This dialogue is most often multi-layered, proceeding between professional and amateur researchers, the author and the critics, the interviewer and the informant or between family members mutually reminiscing about dramatic historical events. In the best scenario, oral history projects (interviews or writing competitions organized by archives) produce new and more profound information about the past. The constructionist approach to historical knowledge is essential in oral history research.

As the scope of oral history research has widened, the formulation of the term itself has been questioned. Would, for example, “popular history” or the combination “oral and public history” (Frisch 1990) be more accurate labels for the new orientations presented by the writers of this issue? This question is still under debate, and we see no reason to establish and adhere to ‘orthodox’ positions. The papers of this issue provide an example of fruitful comparative perspectives and hopefully also ideas for new research projects.

NOTES

- ¹ For example: Ukkonen 2000; Fingerroos 2004; Tuomaala 2004; Latvala 2005.
- ² Fingerroos, Outi et al. (eds) *Muistitietotutkimus. Metodologisia kysymyksiä* (2006) [Oral History Research. Methodological issues].
- ³ Articles and reviews on oral history research in Finland, Russia and the Baltic countries were published in the special issue (in English) of the folkloristic internet journal *Elore* 1/2006 <http://www.elore.fi/arkisto/1_06/elore1_06.html>.
- ⁴ Jurij Lotman and the Tartu semiotic school describe this phenomenon with the term “cultural or traditional memory”. See Lotman and Uspenskij 1984.
- ⁵ See, for example, Levi 1991: 93–113; Knuuttila 1995: 18–23; M. Peltonen 1992: 14–31, 1995: 2–10; van den Braembussche 2000: 73–90.
- ⁶ Philippe Lejeune examines Sartre’s autobiography *Les Mots* (The Words) (1964). Many researchers have underlined the importance of examining the system of influence between reader and text.
- ⁷ The Estonian folklorist Mall Hiimäe has formulated the genre of “personal and situational narratives” (*pajatused*) which have a strong association with the concrete: persons of local fame, specific events and settings (Hiimäe 2005: 62).
- ⁸ Among the most large-scale thematic life writing contests are the collection of oral history and traditions about the Finnish Civil War 1918 (1965–66) and the collection of the traditions of lumberjacks (1969) at the Folklore Archives of Finnish Literature Society. The former resulted in 20,000 pages from 480 writers (U-M. Peltonen 1996) and the latter with 18,000 pages from 789 writers (Pöysä 1997). <<http://www.finlit.fi/english/kra/>>. On life writing research in Estonia, see Kirss, Kõresaar and Lauristin 2004.
- ⁹ See more details in “Mass Observation. Recording everyday life in Britain. Special collections at the University of Sussex Library.” <http://www.massobs.org.uk/archive_today.htm>. Accessed 30.10.2007.

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REFLECTIONS ON THE PRACTICE OF ORAL HISTORY RETRIEVING WHAT WE CAN FROM AN EARLIER CRITIQUE

• RONALD J. GRELE •

ABSTRACT

Oral history research as an academic discipline emerged in the 1940s and 1950s; this article explores its development and continuing challenges. During its first decades, the main focus was on the production of documents and new information, especially on the lives of people previously ignored by historians. A new perspective emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, when the oral history interview was reconceptualized as a dialogically constructed text, rather than a factual document. The interview is also discussed as a public and performative event, and as a blending and negotiation of individual and collective remembering. The author emphasizes the complex and creative relationship between history and collective memory. Oral history is defined as a conversational narrative created by the interaction of the interviewer and the interviewee and determined by linguistic, social and ideological structures. Finally, the contemporary challenges of oral history are discussed. The practice of oral history is moving to the stage of Internet and digitalization, while oral historians are participating in the actual debate on colonization and “social death”.

Key words: Oral history research, dialogic interview, collective memory, cultural construction, intersubjectivity, conversational narrative

This essay had its origins in a presentation at a conference: ‘Memory and Narration: Oral History in the Northern European Context held in Helsinki in 2006’. It is an attempt to place my early work in oral history, in which there still seemed to be some interest, in the context of the development of the field, meanwhile speculating on ways in which that earlier work speaks to the continuing challenges of oral history.

Very often in the Western world we begin our discussions of historical practice by talking about the history of that practice. There is something so intriguing about the merging of cognition and time that we simply assume that this is the way to understand what it is we do when we ‘do’ history. But I want to be clear that in the following discussion I am talking about the history of oral history, not simply the history of the ‘interview’, which has of course been part of the historian’s craft since Herodotus. In its initial incarnation, the aim of the practice of oral history, as it emerged in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, was the production of documents. There were essentially two aims, one having its origins in archival practice and the other in the so-called ‘new social history’. In the first, the concern was that in the age of the telephone and ever-busier schedules, men of affairs

would no longer keep diaries, write letters, or compose memoirs upon their retirement. Therefore it was incumbent upon the historian or the archivist, preferably the archivist, to interview people in order to build a body of documentation that the modern pace of life was making less and less possible. The aim was to complement the existing written record and fill in the gaps in that record. In the second case, the objective was to document the lives and past actions of classes of people heretofore ignored by historians; in particular the working class, but also racial and ethnic minorities, women, and sexual and political minorities. These are people whose lives were traditionally ignored or purposefully forgotten: people whose history was, at that time, understood by examining documents provided by those who were outsiders to the communities under study, upper class commentators for the most part, but also journalists, social and other service workers or anyone who had left a written record (Grele 1990, 2006).

Despite wide disagreements about the focus of one's attention, the uses to be made of recorded interviews, and the aims and ambitions of the historical profession, both archival practice and social history interviewing, at this time, shared a number of assumptions. The interview was a document. The power of a particular interview lay in its ability to provide the historian with a body of information—facts about the past. Truth resided in those facts just waiting to be revealed to the historian who approached the task with 'scientific precision'. The goal was to produce an accurate record that could be tested in the traditional ways in which historians tested their documents for reliability and validity. Talking their cue from the dominant modes of positivist and empiricist social science research, oral historians wanted to know with some precision what 'actually happened' in the past. If memory was considered at all it was discussed in terms of its accuracy or inaccuracy, and a good story was one that corresponded to the historian's interpretation of the past, or provided a useful anecdote to illuminate that interpretation. The real interest was in sequence (what happened next?) rather than narrative. Rarely did we ask, "Tell me your story?"; but very often we asked, "What happened next?"

In terms of the attitudes of those promoting oral history to the historical profession, as it was then understood, the situation was brilliantly captured by Michael Frisch as one of "more history" or "escape from history" (Frisch 1979). In the first case, a defensive argument, oral history would alter our understanding of the past by providing more and more documents. In the second, the offensive argument popular with writers and community historians, oral history would revolutionize historical understanding by bypassing the historian and talking directly to the people who had lived through the events under study. The voice of the people was to be trusted because the voice of the historian was so compromised by all of the professional, social and political compromises that he or she (for the most part, he) had settled upon in a search for a career. At its most extreme, this populist position argued that the oral history interview was a moment in consciousness-raising for both historian and interviewee. Neither 'more history' nor 'no history', Frisch noted, spoke to the complexity of the oral history interview or the larger methodological problems of the practice, such as memory and narrative (Frisch 1979: 70–79).

In the 1970s and early 1980s a new and different view of our work emerged. Although it would be interesting in a different context to detail these changes and how they related to larger changes taking place in thinking about most of the humanities and social science disciplines, for our purposes we can abbreviate the discussion by noting the main concern: the transformation of the object of investigation (the oral history) from a docu-

ment revealing what had happened in the past to a dialogically constructed text. This was a basic epistemological shift from a concern with accuracy to a concern with narrative construction.

Since a text must have an author and an audience, this shift had meaningful consequences for our view of, and the relationship between, the interviewer and the interviewee. Firstly, it accented the role of the interviewer. No longer a figure of contemplation, anonymous and objective, the new role ascribed to the interviewer highlighted the unique feature of an oral history: the fact that it was created by the active intervention of the historian/interviewer. The interview, it was now argued, would not exist, if not for the aims and ambitions, views and values of the historian. Alone among documents used by historians, oral histories were created by the interest of the historian. They are thus not documents of the time under investigation, the then and there, but documents of the here and now and thus tell us not only about the past, but of how the past lives on in and informs the present. There are, of course, other documents produced in the present about the past but none with the active intervention of the historian bringing a public voice to a private conversation. It was thus clear that if historians were to build an interpretation upon their own interviews it was necessary that they be very clear about their position in the process of creation.

Secondly, and probably more important, the person interviewed was no longer simply a source but a key creator and interpreter of a history, which, it was argued, was best understood as a cultural construction. Thus interest was now equally focused upon how things were said as well as upon what was said. How did people create and structure their own histories? What did they bring to the negotiation between past and present? What were their repertoires? How could we reach out beyond the traditional social science disciplines to capture the full meaning of the interview and the methods by which we were to decipher that meaning? Rather than biases and prejudices that had to be countered, values, attitudes, histories were vital elements in explicating the testimony. The historian was no longer a collector of observations but a co-creator of verbal texts. Since the transformation of event into text in verbal form demanded structuring, interest was now focused upon narrative, the ways in which the story of change over time was told, and upon the ways in which memory was mobilized in the creation of a usable past. Dialogically, the interview was the meeting place of two distinct interpretations of the past, one derived from the study of that past, the other derived from living in that past. Neither was necessarily to be privileged.¹

The key to the interview was negotiation: what Frisch called “a shared authority”, and others a ‘shared horizon’ or ‘intersubjectivity’ (Frisch 1990; Passerini 2001: 219–226; Portelli 1991: 29–44). It is important to stress here, this authority and these horizons were shared not only because one respected the story being told and the teller, but also because the historian ceded interpretative monopoly. It was not to be the case that the people we interviewed were to be allowed to speak only about the immediate and concrete dimensions of their own experiences, providing in many cases stories of victimization and abuse, while we, the experts, were granted all rights to interpret those experiences. Sharing authority meant sharing interpretative rights. It was this aspect that would, it was hoped, transform historical practice. The promised democratization of the profession by oral history was not to be achieved by simply bringing more people into history or escaping history but by taking seriously the rights of people to their own view of their own history;

seriously enough to not only capture it on tape but to argue about it and dispute it in the same way that we opened ourselves up to argumentation and disputation by those to whom we spoke. Henry Glassie (1982) has argued that all folk history is history and all history is folk history. By this he means that those whose history is being told are searching for the truth about the past in the same way as the historian, and that when examined the history of the historian is as prey to contingent interpretation as the history being collected (Glassie 1982: 648–655).

In Alessandro Portelli's (1991: 31) words the interview is the meeting place of difference. Each party to the interview brings to the meeting equal but differing ideas of what happened in the past. The dynamic of the interview is the back and forth of the conversation as the basic tensions between these visions are negotiated. The assumption here is, of course, that the conversation is based upon a pact to agree to disagree, that it is incumbent upon us to explain to those we interview that we will differ with them for any number of reasons, age, gender, ethnicity, politics, but most importantly because we have read the past in differing ways.

Thirdly is the question of audience. The oral history interview is more complicated than a conversation between two people both now seen as historians. Part of the negotiation over the interview is the recognition of its public nature. From the earliest days of the practice it had always been assumed that either as an archive or as a social history interview, the results of the conversation would be available publicly for interpretation and reinterpretation. In every project and every interview the initial stage of negotiation is informing the interviewee of the purposes of the interview and the public for whom it is intended. It is, essentially, setting the rules of the game, and one of those rules is that a recording is being made and eventually it will become available to others in one form or another. Thus, both parties to the conversation are involved in a very complicated dialogue with their own cultures. They speak to and through each other to other imagined audiences. The interview is thus a performative event as well as a conversation. In addition, because each party speaks within a set of socio-cultural constraints relying upon traditional ways of telling stories and learned repertoires of recollecting, the interview, and therefore the narrative, is multivocal.² For instance, when interviewing for my doctoral thesis, many times I asked particular questions because my mentor or a member of my committee had expressed an interest in those questions. Through me a third voice was brought into the conversation. In the same manner the person I was interviewing was using the situation of the interview to speak to his or her inner voices, his or her imagined audience. A question I have always thought to be interesting to explore is the ways in which the imagined audience keeps us both honest to our own histories.

The interview as constructed text about a usable past is also deeply dependent upon remembering. Over the next few days we will talk at length about memory for the most part in a manner consistent with several decades of research that has shown time and time again that memory is more a matter of reorganizing and reconstructing bits of information into a scheme than a matter of accurate recall of those isolated bits themselves. Along the way we will talk about individual and collective memory, the distinction between remembering and memory, the differences between collective and social memory, the tension between memory and history, remembering and re-experiencing, episodic memory and long term memory, memory as process and memory as ideology, and remembering

and narrative templates. Here I just want to make a few points that may guide us in that discussion.³

It now seems obvious that in an oral history interview there is a very complex blending and negotiation between individual and collective remembering. The repertoires we mentioned earlier are, to a large extent, dependent upon what we would call collective or social memory. People, however, live through events and recall them from the perspective of their own experiences. Much of what we have to say in the next few days will revolve around that tension for it is within this matrix that we can understand the socio-cultural formations and mediations that inform our interviews and the political and moral economy from which they in turn spring. Here I just want to issue a warning that may not be as significant in this geographic context [Finland] as in an American context, and that is a warning that we guard against a tendency to accent the individualism of memory.

By definition collective memory is cohesive, based upon agreement, consensus, and deep communal longings: what the community believes is the truth of its past. In interviewing we often find that individual memories vary from socially defined collective remembrances, and often contradict them. As Alistair Thomson (1994) notes, "memory is a battleground" full of secret collective and social histories, private objections and resentments, and memories of lost battles. Often that battleground is between the collective and the individual. By accenting that difference we may, however, lose sight of the fundamental cohesion of the collective, the moral economy based upon mutual sharing and strong and viable ties between people who share social and political space. While it is true that individuals do not participate equally in the events being remembered and that collective memory is therefore not homogenous, we must be careful not to base our discussions on individualistic principles of human interaction. We must go beyond the categories of collective and individual memory to find the particular mediations that distribute both—mediations that range from state action, religious beliefs, family traditions, media representations, daily life and conversations to all the other subtle limits upon individual choice and impulse. This is a point most recently brought home to me in reading the various essays in *Living Through the Soviet System* edited by Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson and Anna Rotkirch (2004).

In addition, in an oral history interview we must remain aware of our own remembering and what we, as interviewers, bring to the conversation. Such memories would include what we remember of what we have read, what others have told us, the shared memories that we have of such larger historical processes such as the Cold War, the Second World War or the great depression. Most of you are, of course, not of a generation that had direct experience of many of those events but most of you do have a well of half-remembered stories, tales, fictions that have been passed down to you from other generations and that have remained with you despite your research and reading and which you will draw upon in an interview. It is important in the analysis of the interviews we create that we be aware of the template designed by our own memories. The view of the interview as dialogic demands that we have a self-consciousness of our own participation in that interview in all the forms it may take.

Lastly on the topic of memory, I think it is necessary for us to think carefully about the common distinctions made between history and memory. From the earliest discussions of collective memory by Halbwachs that distinction has been drawn. History, it was argued, is a record of changes, a journal kept by outsiders to the community; it is tied to

a perspective, it constantly reinvents a past, undermines traditions, and so on. Collective memory, on the other hand, has about it constancy with the past, a stability, a continuity, a timelessness that history can never replicate. It does not enshrine the ambiguity so loved by and taught by historians. It prefers a unilinear story line. Thus, to some of a more romantic bent our present problem is that we have too much history and too little memory. As one critic put it, oral history is “the clearest expression yet of the terroristic effect of historicized memory” (Nora 1996: 9–10).

Recent work however, has questioned assumptions both about collective memory and history. Collective memory can change from generation to generation; it is constantly being formed and reformed by the mediations of collectivities, especially the state. History can no longer be seen as the work of objective outsiders, nor can it be limited only to the way it is created by political and social historians. In addition, the new forms of historical presentation in museums, on radio, on television and on the Internet have expanded our idea of history so significantly as to lead many to question whether or not the goal of history is to create analytic monographs or to discover new ways of presenting narratives of a usable past. It may be that as we expand what we think of as history, and who is a historian, we will have to view memory as simply another way to understand the past, a different kind of history. Two recent works in oral history illuminate the complex and creative relationship between history and memory in story telling as one becomes the other, as history becomes memory and memory becomes history: *The Order Has Been Carried Out* by Portelli (2003) and *Dona Maria's Story* by Daniel James (2000).

As with questions of memory, we must address questions of narrative: its nature, its structure in an oral history interview, the relationship between memory and narrative and what we can learn from a study of various theories of narrative. As noted, the focus of our historiography became not only what had happened in the past, but also how a narrative of a usable past is created as a text within the oral history interview and the social, political and cultural milieu of that construction. Since a divorce of the here and now from the then and there is impossible, the real questions are questions of the relations between past and present, between speaker and listener, and what those relations could tell us of the past. To start on this path it was then necessary to define oral history and our project within it.

I now want to return to a question I asked at the start of this paper about the relevance of the ideas in *Envelopes of Sound* (Grele 1975). In those essays, I defined an oral history as a conversational narrative created by the interaction of interviewer and interviewee. I still think that definition is a useful one. However, now I would add to it three other considerations. Firstly I think we have to make clear that the conversation is recorded. There are two particular aspects of recording to which I want to draw attention. If the interview is to be analyzed as a historical narrative, and if the interaction between interviewer and interviewee is fundamental to understanding the meaning of that creation, then we must have a full record of that interplay. Indeed, some have argued that even an audio record is not enough and that we must also have a video record. In addition, the fact that the document exists as a soundscape has dramatic consequences for our understanding of the interview. Not only does it raise serious questions about transcribing procedures that transform the spoken syntax into written syntax, but it also raises questions of language such as those posed by scholars who note the distinction between literacy and orality or the more practical considerations of the differences between writing and speaking.⁴

Secondly, there are also issues of speech and performance and above all, if we are serious about our interest in intersubjectivity, the ways in which the physical fact of the surroundability and penetration of sound contributes to psychological awareness, the ways in which nearness becomes thereness, and the ways in which we deal with the problems of how a heard experience of time and space becomes the basis of our speculation about the process of the collaborative construction of the past.

Returning to the expanded definition of conversational narrative, I think we have to be aware that the oral history originates in a private discussion that is on the way to becoming a public record in some sense, a transcript or video to be consulted by others, the basis for citation and quotation in a written history, part of a radio or filmed production. As noted, the public nature of the interview raises issues of audience, ethics, self presentation, trust, performance and professional responsibilities. Lastly, we have to expand the definition to embrace the fact that it is a remembrance or recollection. In some sense it is always dependent upon remembering. When elaborated upon in this way, I think we can talk about oral history as a genre: a conceptualization raised a number of years ago by Portelli (1997: 2–23). Oral history is a recorded conversational narrative, which is meant to be a public record based upon reflections about the past.

Following from the definition of conversational narrative, now expanded, I would still argue that it is defined by three interlocking but analytically separate structures: a linguistic structure, a social structure and an ideological structure, each exhibiting, because of the nature of the differences between speaker and listener, a set of tensions that must be mediated by the rules of the genre.

When I initially talked about linguistic structure I had in mind a limited sense of language. That argument had some resonance with speech communications theorists who were interested in examining the interview in terms of speech acts, turn taking and so on (see MacMahan 1989). A few years later I tried to expand on these considerations by examining the differing languages that the interviewer and the interviewee bring to the interview (Grele 1994). The argument then was that the interviewer/historian, in the format of questions and answers, speaks in the language of analysis, breaking things apart and reconfiguring them. It is the language of the professional historian. It is the language of this paper. The interviewee, on the other hand, speaks in the language of story—seeking to articulate a consistent usable past, often, but not always, through a chronological format. When examined closely we can see that the language of analysis on the part of the historian/interviewer has its basis in the story (narrative) we tell ourselves about who we are (scientists, objective observers etc.), while the narrative, in its assemblage of metaphors, pauses, the interweaving of paradigmatic and syntagmatic elements, dramatic turns, emplotment, and especially silences, has within itself its own analysis. Any consideration of the mediation of the language performance of both interviewer and interviewee, today, would have to center on textual construction, which I have tried to argue is narrative construction. This is, I think, the task before us at this time and in this place.

Initially I thought of the tension in the social situation of the interview as something that could be described in the traditional language of interviewing manuals: rapport, turn taking, focus, follow up and so on. Now I think we have a much richer oral history bibliography beginning with Frisch's idea of shared authority, and especially Portelli's idea of the oral history interview as an "experiment in equality" based upon the inherent equality

of the recognition of difference—an idea derived from feminist theory. These insights speak, I think, to a more complicated relationship than earlier imagined. Such considerations provide a deeper justification for many of our practices, from conduct within the interview to archiving and ethical and legal formalities.⁵

The cognitive tensions of the oral history narrative appear in two forms: one based upon the difference in historical consciousness between interviewee and interviewer and the other between imagination and event inherent in the construction of a usable history. In my initial presentation of this idea I described those tensions as the tensions between ideology and myth. The concept of ideology I used was heavily influenced by what Louis Althusser termed “the lived relations between men and their world” (Althusser and Balibar 1970). Ideologies not only reflect and interpret the realities that sustain them but also construct those realities and remain in constant dialectical tension with them. They are plans of action, using the past to control the present in order to manipulate the future. They are based upon human agency with usually elaborate historical conceptualizations justifying the role and position of a particular class of people as the only group capable of leading us into the agreed upon future. Myth is also a mode of social consciousness through which shared interpretative frameworks are constructed. But the object is social cohesiveness and timelessness in values, their validity often resting upon the ability of the ritual and articulation of the myth to replicate the collective emotion at the heart of the myth. If humans are thought to be able to change social arrangements it is because they are seen to have some greater access to a controlling hierarchical power, such as gods or a God, or a representative of non-temporal relations. Such a concept of myth was, at the time, popular in many anthropological circles.⁶ Usually framed in a manner pointing to a tension between history and myth rather than ideology and myth, it was often seen as a tension between agency (history) and structure (myth).

My argument at the time was that in an oral history interview we could see how, in dialogue, a usable past and a history were created that merged and blended in complicated and elegant ways the myths at the base of collective memory and the ideologies of a life in history, and how they were woven to resolve the contradictions of the social order and the economic life of the culture.

I will return to some of these considerations but now I want to interject a consideration of our work in oral history that comes from rooting the practice in its history—a consideration that I think raises questions for which I have no answer, and a consideration that makes me feel personally like a man of a different generation passing on to a new generation a set of dilemmas for which I offer no resolution.

Recent reviews of the history of oral history have begun to argue that the practice is moving to a fourth stage. The first stage was that which I described to you as a stage of empiricism and positivism and a looking to social science methods for descriptions of the task of oral history. The second stage was the stage of concern with text, memory and narrative. The third stage was the enormous growth of oral history both geographically and heuristically. The geographic growth was especially evident in the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking regions of the world, but also in Asia and Africa. The practice also expanded into fields such as gerontology, all varieties of community history, differing forms of therapeutic practices such as trauma studies, narrative medicine, life review and counseling. At the same time, of course, oral history was finding a warm reception in feminist studies, ethnic and race studies, gay studies and now such fields as disability

studies, queer studies and post-colonial studies. All of this culminated instrumentally in the formation and expansion of the International Oral History Association, the creation of specialized journals, national organizations, and the attempt to institutionalize an oral history curriculum at high schools, colleges, and universities.

The fourth stage, it is argued, is the coming stage of the Internet and digitization, web page construction, instant access of resources and holdings and new forms of archives and presentation (Thomson 2007: 49–70). While I think most of that future holds exciting possibilities and wonderful new views of our work (just think of the consequences of students posting the results of their work in oral history on their own web sites), and while I agree with the descriptions of the three stages of our growth of the oral history movement, I want to offer a muted dissent to the overly optimistic view of the digital future. I think we face a new stage for our work but it is a stage defined not by advancements in technology but by changes in our ideas about history, which are in turn related to changes in the political economy of our world.

Let me illustrate by a point stressed by Saskia Sassen (1998: ix–xxxvi). When we think of the use of electronic space we usually think of the Internet and its attributes of distributed power, decentralization, openness, the possibility of expansion, lack of hierarchy or center and no conditions for authoritarian or monopoly control. And, of course, our sympathies lay with the hackers in their battle with threatening media monopolies. But the new electronic networks also make possible other forms of power such as the operation of financial markets, which are now dependent upon their speed and interconnectivity. What follows then, is a concentration of global capital heretofore never seen and the formation of new power structures with the ability to discipline the marketplace and, often, the nation state, and to create enormous social inequalities. I think the latter use of electronic space is as vital for our work as the former.

Initial work in oral history moved between two poles: collecting memories around, or publishing monographs dealing with, politics in the broadest sense of public policy, and collecting interviews and publishing monographs in social history. Both centered upon power. More recent work expanded that vision to issues of culture and cultural construction. Despite the differences over time and in our interests, all of our work was informed by, and conceptualized within, the history of the Western industrial world, a world in which relations of class, race and gender intersected with each other and became public issues. It was a world defined by the events of two world wars, economic depression and then expansion and the Cold War. If one interviewed and collected the history of ‘movers and shakers’ it was because they occupied a position atop a class system and a national and international order rooted in the history of the industrial world. If one interviewed the more popular classes it was, similarly, to understand the internal operations of a class-based society, the lived experiences of people who were on their way to becoming industrial workers. At times the justifications of some oral historians were talked about in terms of empowering people with a usable past, which would lead to their organizing themselves in order to create nodes of opposition and hopefully undermine that class system. This was a particularly important thrust in oral history circles because so much of the work we did was part of the New Left project. Both liberal and Marxist historians were, however, tied to the industrial moral economy.

Over time the interest in subjectivity, and projects and interests centering upon the culture of particular minorities and their communities, began to speak of micro histories, multiple differences, the politics of identity in all of its possible constructions, differing autobiographical practices, trauma, memory and forms of oppression outside of class oppression. As is clear from a glance at the programs of the last few international oral history conferences, one can see a fracture in an otherwise and heretofore seamless web bounded by issues of class and formulated in the traditional European language of class and class motive. Responding to challenges raised by feminist and other scholars who argued that the particularities of the minorities and others they studied were buried and discounted by this concentration upon class, and increasingly aware of the gap between culture studies and social history, there was a decided shift in our fieldwork and thinking about our work.

There is no time for a detailed discussion of these changes. For now just let me offer a few terms that describe many of our interests today: multiple colonization, marginal and minority discourse, repressed narrative structures, hybridity, heteroglossia, diasporic identities, the undermining of the Western 'I'. Such interests, I would argue, speak to a globalized environment where the practice of oral history has a unique role to play in revealing in detail the ways in which the processes of that world impinge upon the everyday lives of those caught up in those changes: people who have a presence but no power, people who are subject to new employment regimes outside of traditional industrial models. In short, it represents a continued effort to bring into history the dispossessed but now with a far different conception of who they are and a richer idea of the cultures from which they speak.

Returning to the tension between myth and ideology I am now struck with what I sense is the resonance between the description of that tension, and the descriptions of the tensions between individual and collective memory and between history and collective memory mentioned earlier. I do not know if others may sense the same resonance but to me I think we should begin to map out the terrain between memory and myth in our interviews, in much the same manner as Anthony Smith in *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (1999).

More recently I have been intrigued with what I see to be a resonance with some of the ideas of Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Provincializing Europe* (2000).⁷ In his attempt to localize the European (Western) experience and undermine the universalistic claims of its traditional historiography he posits two distinct visions of history which he describes as the mobilization of the imagination to describe the past based upon "differing archives of thought and practices of human relations". One is the history we all know and practice; historiography which has its origins in the Renaissance, the universalism of the Enlightenment and the great theorists of the European nineteenth century, especially Marx. This is history which focuses upon abstractions such as man, labor and time: what we now often term the master narrative, which Chakrabarty calls 'History 1'. Particularly important in this historical vision for Chakrabarty, is the concept derived from Marx of abstract labor, which stands in for the whole concatenation of ideas of universality. It is in Marx's discussion of abstract labor that Chakrabarty claims to find hints of a situation in which abstract labor does not describe human relations. This is a very complicated and tendentious argument into which we do not have to delve. For me, the interesting part of the argument is the idea that such a situation outside the world of capital revolves around a conceptually different view of the world and a different history, what he terms 'History 2'.

This he finds in particular in the Indian subcontinent in the nineteenth century but notes that it can also be found among popular classes in many other places and many other times. This is a history based upon personal forms of work and identity, heavy on the collective understanding of ceaseless time, non-changing patterns of social and moral relations (somewhat akin to what Halbwachs described as ‘memory’). In opposition to analytic history and its abstractions, this is a history of affective narrative, of human belonging. It is a history full of miracles, emotive identities and drama. In many ways it resonates with what anthropologists have traditionally called myth, although I find a closer identification with the conceptualizations of myth in the work of Ernst Cassirer (1955). Chakrabarty is at pains to tell us that History 2 is not a precursor to History 1, nor is it a deranged or partial view of History 1. It is, he says, a different history reflecting a different way of being in the world: no better at understanding the world and no worse. In my view, because he sees History 1 as geographically and temporally contingent—linked to the world of the bourgeoisie—and such a conception of history is ideological, History 2, I think, can be described as myth. The kind of tension described between these two visions is, I think, a better way of conceptualizing the deeper tension of a historical narrative: it posits two different histories, not a tension between history and a mythic form of cognition, carrying with it all the baggage of otherness and the suspect ideological patrimony of the claim that the European world had history while the lesser peoples of the world had only myth.

The idea of two histories poses a dilemma for our understanding of one another. Chakrabarty uses the example of the ways in which those of us from a secular world of capital development respond to claims of historical causality resting upon concepts such as, “God brought it into being” or, “Then God directed me”. Our traditional position has been to historicize or anthropologize such statements rather than taking them at face value. I have in my mind two studies that challenge that opposition most clearly for us: Susan Harding’s (2000) study of an evangelical Christian community and Dennis Tedlock’s (1990, 1993) study of the Maya. For Harding, the attempt to bridge the gap between her and her interviewees led her to seriously question her own religious traditions. Tedlock, in turn, has argued that there is no way of understanding the Maya unless one accepts the validity and truth of magic. All I can do here is bring to the floor a concern that in our effort to use oral history to bring into history minority communities we are, in the process, re-colonizing them. Alternatively, must we admit to the limits of our historical practices in trying to understand a transnational history? Or, can we develop a way of living with multiple histories and multiple understandings about our past? Again, our task is to give room for those we study to pose their own agenda for the ways to build a usable past and, through our intervention in the process, to bring into existence a more complete expression of the basic tension contained within those multiple understandings.

In a different context, Orlando Paterson (1982), talking about the enslavement of Africans in the nineteenth century used the term ‘social death’. It seems clear that one of the most oppressive aspects of the current ideology of globalization is the relegation of millions of people to social death; people disappear, they are obliterated, their lives consigned to a place beyond memory (as I was told in a recent interview: people will simply have to find new skills and/or move to new locations). Thus we are instructed that we have no right to know what we know. That is our challenge—oral history is an important method of

countering a social death. That is how we will understand our past and present. Oral history is a way to start the process, it is not, however, the end.

NOTES

¹ The transformation from information to narrative is brilliantly shown in Passerini 1987. Chapter I is especially insightful on the relationship between the work of M. Bakhtin on narrative and oral history texts. See also Portelli 1991 and Tonkin 1992. Portelli 1991 analyzes in detail the relationship of interviewer and interviewee. See also Grele 1994. A clear distinction can be seen from a comparison between the chapter on evidence in Paul Thompson 1978: 91–137 and Mary Chamberlain 2006: 384–408.

² On the term “multivocal” see Bakhtin 1981.

³ Much of this discussion follows from a reading of James V. Wertsch 2002.

⁴ Ong 1991. See also the essays in Tannen 1982.

⁵ For insight into the complexity and continuing problematic see Briggs 2001: 911–922.

⁶ See, for example the essays in *Rethinking History and Myth: Indigenous South American Perspectives on History*, edited by Jonathan D. Hill (1988).

⁷ It should be borne in mind that in the following discussion the two distinct visions of history when articulated and expressed are done so with a discursive situation of inequality. A point made in a somewhat different context by Edward Said (1983: 48–50).

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NARRATIVE AND REALITY

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ABSTRACT

The article explores the narrative construction of reality in life stories. First, the context of the research is introduced and second, the concept of *reality* is discussed. Third, narrative construction of one life story is analysed, turning to the relationship between performance and content. As researchers, we have no access to the reality of past events, but only to memories, stories and documents. In oral history, both factual information and the meanings attributed to the past by the people who have lived through it are of equal importance, and both are constructed through emotional, involved, figurative production by the authors of life stories.

Key words: Life story, oral history, narrative, reality

One of the greatest challenges faced by researchers analysing narratives is how to approach the construction of social reality through the life stories told by individuals. How are these performances related to facts? Since oral history specialists are interested in social reality and social history (facts, events), this issue is of utmost importance. To quote the prominent Italian oral historian Alessandro Portelli: “Oral history shifts between performance-oriented *narrative* and content-oriented *document*” (1998: 26, emphasis in original). During field work the interviewer is often carried away by listening to narratives, following the thread of the story spun by a narrator. Yet, as these marvellously absorbing stories are transcribed and turned into written text, an interviewer often discovers that many of them contain very little factual information, are fragmentary and even chaotic, and not all of them have been told in formal or even grammatically acceptable language. Although some stories are told in a captivating and expressive manner, transcription may reveal a lack of order, with only a few brief passages appearing to be of scholarly interest. In my study of life stories I often confront a problem: what to do with the narratives that I suspect contain interesting information which is buried in a chaotic and artistic articulation?

The aim of this essay is to explore the narrative construction of reality in life stories and the relationship between performance-oriented storytelling and content-oriented description. First, I will discuss the context of the research; second, I will explore the concept of ‘reality’. Third, I will analyse the narrative construction of one life story, from the perspective of the relationship between performance and content.

The National Oral History research project

My interest in the narrative construction of reality was initiated by listening to, and analysing, life stories collected within the context of the National Oral History (henceforth NOH) research project in Latvia. The NOH project was founded at the Institute

of Philosophy and Sociology, University of Latvia. Its aim is to research the diversity of Latvian social life within a broad historical perspective; to record, preserve and analyse the life stories of the older generation, whose life experience covers the most important social changes and historic events of Latvia's recent history. There are approximately 3,000 audio-recorded life stories in the NOH archive.

The NOH research project was launched in 1992. In the early 1990s, life stories had a special significance for the post-socialist countries in general, and for Latvia in particular. Memories were used to construct a sense of continuity with the first period of Latvia's statehood (1918–1940) and they served as testimonies of the years of Soviet occupation (1940–1941 and 1944–1991); memories also played an important role in the process of mobilizing ethnic consciousness and constructing new identities at an individual as well as a national level (Tisenkopfs 1993: 4); and memories opened up new themes and new interpretations of events when official history from the Soviet period provided an incomplete, if not false, version of the past. As individual memories were told as testimonies to the past and as a part of national history, the question of authenticity of experience and truthfulness of story was of great importance.

I started to work with the NOH project as an interviewer and assistant about ten years ago. More than one hundred life stories have been recorded since then. I wrote my Ph.D. dissertation on the social construction of life stories a few years ago. Yet I am still intrigued about the subtle relationship between life, experience and story, as well as the complex task of solving this puzzle.

'Reality' in the context of oral history

By using biographies as sources in research, we are exploring the connections between biography and history, between individual experience and social change. Oral history research is sensitive to the historicity of personal experience and the role of the individual in the history of society and in public events (Portelli 1998: 26). In oral history research the balance between personal and social, biography and history is important.

However, there is no consensus on methodology: how this balance is to be achieved, the role of the historian and the kind of reality which is revealed through life stories and thereafter constructed in the historian's text. The term 'reality' can be defined in various ways and has a long and complicated linguistic history. In the Platonic sense, realism was clearly connected to the sphere of the absolute and objective existence of universals while in the fifteenth century the English word 'real' refers to something that actually exists. From the sixteenth century the sense becomes more general as 'real' is contrasted with 'imaginary' as well as with 'apparent': realism is connected with the purpose of revealing things as they really are (Williams 1988). These conceptions are well known to historians, who are interested in the broad picture of the past. But even the term 'history' has a double meaning in English, for it refers both to actual past events and to the narration or description of past events (Tonkin 1992: 117); the border between what actually happened and what appeared to spectators is blurred. What is more, as social historian Paul Thompson (1988) cautions, history is never knowledge for its own sake; it always depends upon its social purpose. This makes the problem all the more complex, for it means that in our memory we not only make note of some events and dismiss others, but that the historian of the past can also do the same thing.

Historians are generally interested in past events, how they really happened. In other words, they are keen to render an accurate picture of the past. In the 1960s, the task of the oral historian was thus formulated: eyewitnesses were interviewed in order to reconstruct the past. Drawing a distinction between true and false history and evidence was of great importance. Although contemporary oral historians now speak about the ‘construction of the past’ rather than its ‘reconstruction’, the question of truth continues to be of contemporary concern. For example, in his discussion of the achievements of oral history, Paul Thomson says: “Oral evidence, by transforming the ‘object’ of study into ‘subjects’, makes for a history which is not just richer, more vivid and heart-rending, but *truer*” (Thompson 1988: 99, emphasis in original text). ‘True’ being the adjectival form of ‘truth’, we now have an even more tendentious term than reality. Common dictionary definitions for truth include “agreement with fact or reality” (Wikipedia), or “the body of real things, events, and facts” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary and Thesaurus), but in philosophical discussions there is no single agreement about the meaning of *truth*.

There are two main approaches dealing with the problematic character of truth and reality in the social sciences. One view is based on a positivist approach, which is closely related to the natural sciences—reality or truth objectively exists (furthermore, only one truth is possible), and a scientist goes out into the field and discovers it (correspondence theory). Another view, the constructivist approach, contends that there is a significant distinction between nature and human society: in human society reality is always socially constructed in a particular time and space (constructivist theory). For example, the same events of the past can be seen and interpreted differently in various periods of time (Charmaz 2002). A telling example is the written or official history produced during totalitarian epochs. Even in a less controlled situation, however, social reality remains constructed and an opinion is recognised as true only according to mutual understanding and agreement. In these circumstances it is possible that people will be unable to agree on a single version of the truth (or the past), and that various social groups will hold distinct opinions on what happened—on what is objectively true and what is not. Oral history, to a large extent, is a child of postmodernism and pluralism, and projects a view of the recent past as a room where different voices coexist, thereby demonstrating just how complex and versatile so-called objective reality actually is.

The advantage of oral history is that, unlike most documentary sources of history, it proffers various views of the same event, in some cases challenging the established version accepted by the majority. Oral history sees the world as significantly diverse. However, this issue is even more intricate, because in oral history we have to deal not only with history, but with memory as well. As we know, reality and our perception and experience of it, as well as its recounting, differs according to circumstance (Bruner 1986; Riessmann 1993). The oral historian works with evidence—narratives that essentially are interpretations of experience in language and always structured according to some conventions. But the goal is to reveal a truer picture of reality.

As mentioned before, oral history shifts between performance-oriented *narrative* and content-oriented *document*. A life story recorded during a biographical interview is performance-oriented narrative, while the product of the historian’s research should be a content-oriented document which constructs or reconstructs the reality of past

events. In a life story the division between genres is nebulous—narrators do not draw a line between a true story based on facts and a good narrative, told with expression. Possibly, narrators are inspired by the joy of telling itself, whereas the historian looks for factual information. Portelli asks just what kind of truth can be found in narratives. For him, the answer resides in the possibility that the aesthetics of the narrative, through its symbols and feelings, may enlighten our understanding of history (Portelli 1998). Consequently, the task of the oral historian is much broader than simply being a rational analyst of the past. A symbolic and aesthetic narrative may turn out to be just as important as factual information if we are seeking to understand meanings attributed to the past by people who have lived through it, and how these meanings are constructed.

The introduction to Elvira's story

The following is an analysis of the construction of a particular story with an aim to explore the tangled web of narrative and facts (something factually existing). In oral history research it is relatively easy to analyse clear, well structured and factually-oriented narratives. Yet few narrators tell their tales to please the scholar, and scholarship would be impoverished if only the model narrators were studied. I would like to present a rather ordinary interview from which a life story was recorded. Recorded in 1996, it is a three hour interview conducted by researchers from the NOH project in the small village of Vadakste in Latvia. Elvira was born in 1935 and adopted when she was one year old. An agriculturist by education, she spent all her working life on a collective farm, mostly as a simple farm worker, but at some periods also as agriculturist. Thematically, the narrative focuses on the time of the collective farms and it is told as a web of anecdotal situations. Elvira's story is a very expressive performance, with rich intonations, changes in the speed of speech and various means of expression. It contains vivid information about the establishment of collective farms and the particularities of work on these farms. Nevertheless, the structure is chaotic, the narrative mode is mixed with the factual mode, and the episodes which are remarkable are often hidden amidst awkward narrations.

The sequence of episodes bears more resemblance to stream of consciousness texts than to a chronologically arranged life story. Succinctly put, the structure revealed during the first forty-five minutes makes it possible to distinguish twenty-four episodes or passages. To mention the first few: Elvira's origins; her foster-parents and the change of residence; the beginning of her schooling; her father, his education; schooling during the war; self-appraisal (the fanatical country dweller); attitude towards learning; attitude towards work in former times and nowadays. While some episodes do not exceed more than a minute, the few longer ones add up to five minutes of narrative. Two themes, namely education and work, predominate in these episodes. Each small episode or passage contains some interesting details, personal information or a scrap of factual information, as well as an abundance of reflection and appraisals. However, this entanglement of episodes is more associative than chronological, even though overall the narrative follows a linear sequence in the development of events (it begins with

childhood, proceeds with school and work, and concludes with the time after Latvia regained independence).

For example, when Elvira begins the story of her schooldays, a redirection takes place as she characterises primary-level education in pre-war independent Latvia based on the educational level of her father (who received only primary schooling), contrasting it with the level of training courses in the agricultural professional schools during the 1950s. She notes that her father was given the task of supervising the work of other trainees in the tractor courses, despite his ostensibly 'low' educational qualifications. When speaking of herself, she relates that she worked on a collective farm after graduation from primary school and it was only after three years of work experience that she went on to continue her education; then her son is mentioned, who went to professional school but after his first year there was contemplating abandoning his studies. The episodes are united by the same geographical location of action, and most importantly, by the same moral: simple labour makes one appreciate the value of education. Through the narrative, even though it is not a coherent, linear account, we discover facts about the life of the narrator and her close relatives, but more importantly, analysis allows us to explore Elvira's values and world view.

Knowledge or understanding

In order to elucidate the complexity of the narrative construction of reality, a specific transcription about the virtue of work makes a good example. The passage is a byplay (or redirection) in Elvira's story about her first work experience: it opens and closes with a reference to her first work experience on the collective farm but the middle is taken up by a comparative appraisal of the human virtue of industriousness; it appears to be an explanation of the changes that took place during Soviet times and simultaneously a juxtaposition which sheds light on the narrator's perception of work. In the course of the transcribed passage one can observe the complicated temporal construction characteristic of autobiographical narratives: events that are temporally distant from one another (the 1950s, the 1970s and the present 1990s) are brought together side by side and compared in one episode. This short narrative is seventy-seven seconds long, told in rapid-fire speech, with a sober intonation. Here it is not abbreviated; pauses are marked with dots and stronger emphases are marked in italics, but smaller intonation changes are not notated. Obviously, transcription from Latvian to English poses further problems, not specifically at issue here.

So you see, I worked on a collective farm for a while, didn't I.

But then just... what then, they just did not work then as they do now, *when* they work. By the way, I have such a saying, don't I, well, let's say a collective farm at the end of the 1970s, of the 1980s, isn't it... I used to say: "If we, let's say, in the beginning of the 1950s, when the collective farms began, had had the *machinery of today* and *the people of those times*, suppose: we would not know what to do. We would have managed it all, cultivated and... and... and then looked for, as they say, picking weeds off the roadsides, suppose..."... But then, still, that exceptionally...

By the way, between us, then there is an anecdotal expression, brought back sometime from Riga: why do we dis... why do we dislike Russians, don't we... The answer is then... that famous Arme-

nian radio, and the answer is, then—*because they stole the joy of working from us...* It is an anecdote, after all. The jobless of today, *all of them*. Well... well... well... is it...? Simply a man just does not realise, does not understand, what he should do and that he should do anything *at all*, if he has gone in the morning to... there to the repair garage, hasn't he, and you don't tell him—... do that and go there, and this here, he is not able to think of it himself. *The young ones, as well...* Well... Well, so it is. */a sigh/...* Well, then I worked properly at that time, for example, my duties were...

Does this excerpt tell us any facts about reality? We may deduce that in the 1950s all agricultural work was manual, people were hardworking and self-directed, but nowadays there are groups of people who have lost these qualities (jobless, youth). And thus we have one unit of Soviet folklore. The narration also reveals the narrator's perception of work—her evaluation of work habits, her explanation for changes in the attitude towards work during the Soviet period. It is the usage of a popular anecdote that links her subjective opinion to the one prevailing in the wider society. This episode is an illumination, elucidating a perception of the past: we are told that something happened to the work habits of people during the Soviet period and its consequences are still felt even today. Rather than the so-called hard facts of reality (statistics, concrete events), the saying and the anecdote are used so as to concisely and accurately characterise the age and the people. For the narrator it is important not only to mention her tasks, to describe the working day, but also to explain the attitude and to show the changes in work habits. Are historians interested in facts like these? For a constructivist approach, the understanding of the meanings attributed to facts is just as important as reaching for the knowledge of 'facts' themselves.

The work of genre

In the analysis of life stories we pay attention not only to what is told, but also to how it is told. After all, experiences are represented through language in narrative. The past may be constructed differently. Life stories may be told as testimonies, reports, or even simply as stories. The genres themselves structure the account. The rules of form and the means of expression are the tools through which reality (the past) is constructed. Elvira tells her life as a story by making use of rich cultural resources and it is their presence which allows one to perceive the factual information of the text rather like the elucidation of truth, as perceived by the narrator in her sense of that age.

The narrator often uses the word "anecdote", referring both to anecdotes as a recognised genre of folklore, as well as to various episodes of her life—not only comical, but also those in which individual values are juxtaposed with the officially dominant ones. The units of narrative in this case are also often built according to the principles of the structure of an anecdote, forming short stories which vividly show a particular aspect of life which contains a lesson for the listener and makes one smile (or sigh) at the same time. The narrator calls these small episodes anecdotes, stories and even—novels. Timothy G. Ashplant (1998) has studied anecdotes and jokes as a narrative genre in the life stories of British workers; these succinct narratives allow their narrators to characterise, and their listeners to recognize, an episode as comical. Ashplant (1998) has shown that the form of the narratives is borrowed from popular musicals, which provide an example based on which the story of private experience is constructed. Like

British workers, who have adjusted the form of musicals to narrate their life stories, the former farm worker in Latvia has adjusted an anecdote as a form which aids in the communication of her life experience. It must be noted, however, that some elements of the episodes are not comical at all, but the irony in this case makes for an easier telling and perception of a story which also includes difficult life situations (for example, the lodgement of new farm workers in the property in 1940, joining a collective farm in 1949, not entering Komsomol at the beginning of 1950s, etc.). The ironic anecdote is a lens through which life events are told. In these episodes the narrative mode prevails over the factual mode.

Certainly, the overall form of a life story involves far more complex modes of expression than that of an anecdote. This story also contains other manners of expression as well, such as language formulas that are related to the texts of folklore or their contemporary interpretation, and popular elements of colloquial speech which impart life and expression to the narrative (Bela-Krūmiņa 2004). The narrator uses expressive metaphors such as, for example, “Upeniek’s church” (when talking about a technicians’ workshop—‘Upeniek’ being the surname of the premise’s builder). She freely borrows means of expression from the folk repertoire when describing her job experiences: “I was one smart wife” (*Wagtail was a smart wife*, Latvian folksong No. LD 2594-0);¹ “mixing about up there” (*As I mixed about at the front*, Latvian folk song No. LD 7918-4). Stories of some episodes in her life often create ‘a special time’ and begin with a reiterated linguistic formula: “then again it was so”; “and then the situation was such that” (‘once upon a time’—a typical introductory formula to a fairy tale). She also introduces some narrative episodes with a title, just like a tale: “how the new farmers were made”; “how the collective farms were made”. The narrator uses the popular elements of contemporary colloquial speech and a humorous mode of expression, for example: “And I look, dear me!—Those are fields of beetroot!” and “Because, you see, I entered there from a farm, and got to be a head specialist for some reason, isn’t that right.”

The narrator builds expressive and picturesque scenes by using contrasts: “Damn! However didn’t I get white hair, do ya know? Maybe I did, it just can’t be seen in my case. That was a silent horror.” “Even though I lived on with a hope—it will all be alright somehow. It might become better, or then again it might not, we’ll live to see, won’t we?” The narrator uses, as she calls them herself, private sayings: “I served in a collective farm all my life as a *notes pulķis*” (a virtually untranslatable term describing someone who can substitute for others in almost any situation); “Well, it is no different than a manor” (about the collective farm); “I said: I have it well, I do not have to restructure, as I have not structured anything yet!” (about perestroika, the economic reform policy of Mikhail Gorbachev).

On the basis of a classic oral history interview (as well as in a classic oral text) one can find motives and themes emphasising the interconnection between the individual and the public. For example, narrators relish stories of ‘standing up to the big man’: theatrical anecdotes about a personal confrontation with representatives of institutional authorities (workers against superiors, students against the teaching staff, and so on), and personal courage, professional pride or political resistance in complicated representations (Portelli 1998). Elvira’s story is not an exception. A narrated discussion with the

secretary of the Komsomol is just such a classic motif and simultaneously this episode depicts important aspects of life during the Soviet regime and bears witness to the self-identity of a contemporary Latvian:

And then she tried to convince me all night—a person with the highest education of the Party—that I needed to enter Komsomol, did she not. And I, with my collective farm experience, a bit over 20 years and no child anymore, with my Party non-education contradicted her. And, do you understand, all night, and she did not convince me. She is telling me all the time, how it should be, but I oppose her from what I have seen every day. It even went as far as 1937, when Stalin shot two out of three of the Politburo. That was already a national secret. And she admits it all, and in the end I drove her to tears. And she said: “Shoot me today, but I am convinced that it is so.” And I said: “Here, I see the first that is [there] for her persuasion.” Because before that I’d had some unpleasant experiences that when you enter [Komsomol] for career reasons, well—because of some kind of advantage. I said: “If I had met someone earlier, who entered because of conviction, I might have entered a long time ago. But I don’t have that conviction that I must be there out of obligation.” (...) When she cannot convince me ideologically, she says: “It will be of a great importance at the allocation, when you will finish the professional school.” But I have a lot of heart, so I say: “I shall go herd the pigs, but I will not enter just to get a better allocation.” And, please, I have herded pigs all my life. I came to the collective farm, when the boss of agricultural inspection says: “You need an agriculturist in the collective farm.” “That agriculturist”, says the head of the collective farm, “will come to work, who can be a Party secretary.” Maybe then I would have started my career as an agriculturist right after that, wouldn’t I? But now, please, you see how her words fulfilled themselves.

Here, understanding Elvira’s version of ‘standing up to the big man’, or the depiction of the role and functioning of ideology and instruments of control in the Soviet system, becomes a matter of disciplinary training and education. The sociologist and oral historian will probably pay closer attention to the description of events, whereas the folklorist will focus on the cultural aspects. Power relations, the connection between ideology and upward mobility, the consequences of individual decisions in some aspects of Soviet reality are so vividly drawn in the narrative; colloquial speech, linguistic and performance skills are the means employed.

A tentative conclusion

Reality is a confusing term in oral history, the accepted view being that we have no access to it in terms of ‘what really happened’. All we have left are memories, stories, and in many cases, various documentary sources, also invariably coloured by their author’s subjectivity, aims and assumptions. All we can do is to attempt to bring these pieces together, evaluating their construction and the conditions of social use.

Life stories in the Latvian context are seen as authentic testimonies about an obscure or corrupted past. The value of eyewitness accounts is often taken for granted and narratives are considered as imprints of experienced events. In the National Oral History research project we want to collect testimonies of memories but we approach such testimonies as constructions of reality. Memories about ‘what really happened’ on the one hand, and the narrative strategies, genre and language repertoire, on the other, together shape life stories. In Elvira’s story, the figuratively depicted functionaries of the Party or Komsomol characterise the reality of that time, as do the changes that the

narrator notes regarding the peoples' work ethic during the Soviet period. The stories of economic management in post-war conditions, the formation of new labour farmers and the ensuing collectivisation reveal the feelings of the people involved and the details of everyday life masterfully. Almost every episode contains a well-targeted message that throws light on past events. Subjectivity is clearly visible and reality is constructed using tools associated with fiction rather than factual report. Elvira's story is a typical oral performance, an expressive message to the listeners; the narrator uses anecdotes, expressions, proverbs, as well as nonverbal tools such as intonations, speed of speech, and so on to tell her tale.

The language of life story interviews is an oral language and it depicts reality in a different way than written language and especially scientific discourse. The scientific description of reality is systematic, argument-based, well-ordered, critical and reflexive. An oral life story, however, is made up of vivid dialogue; quite often it is figurative, expressive and it primarily reveals appraisals and feelings, not a neutral configuration of events. Even though the discipline of oral history claims to reveal the view of the events from the vantage point of the witnesses, and, subsequently, the emotional appraisal and symbolic depiction which are an integral part of it, the framework of the academic tradition does not easily provide a corresponding form uniting the emotional, involved, figurative author's discourse and critical, systematic, argument-based scientific discourse into an organic whole. As genres, life stories and oral history offer different views of 'what really happened'.

NOTES

¹ The number of the song in *Latvju Dainas* (LD), an edition of Latvian folksongs.

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BAIBA BELA

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“TO BE HONEST I DON’T THINK
SHE HAS MUCH TO SAY ...”
GENDER AND AUTHORITY IN MEMORIES OF
THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN
DENMARK AND NORWAY

• CLAUDIA LENZ AND HELLE BJERG •

ABSTRACT

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This article is based on the research project ‘Traditions of Historical Consciousness’ in which three generations of Danish and Norwegian families were interviewed about their memories of the Second World War. The interplay between private (family) memories and public (national) narratives of the past plays a crucial role here. The starting point of analysis is the fact that gender plays an important role in structuring the ‘national basic narrative’ of the German Occupation of Denmark and Norway which has emerged in these countries since 1945. This gendered narrative offers very different possibilities of identification for men and women in the culture of memory. Based on the theoretical assumption that knowledge about the past is both regulated and reproduced by power relations, the authors investigate which kinds of topics and stories are told by, and expected from, men and women in order to grant them authority as speakers. Finally, it will be discussed how the younger generations ‘make use’ of these stories in order to think about values and morality. Gendered patterns of memory are contested and change over time.

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Introduction

When posterity invents the main characters on the stage of history, gender plays a decisive role. Actions which count as relevant and persons who are seen as active subjects in this history are determined very differently for men and for women. But gender also plays a part when it comes to who takes, and who is given, the authority to relate the past and to interpret history. This article is based on the findings of a research project in which three generations of Danish and Norwegian families were interviewed about their memories of the Second World War, and our focus here will be to outline how gender is interwoven with the ways in which we deal with the past.¹

The empirical material

The examples presented here are excerpted from interviews conducted in connection with the research project ‘Traditions of Historical Consciousness’. The project is comparative and deals with the question of how memories of the Second World War are passed on and reinterpreted in families in six European countries.² Three generations of twenty Danish

and twenty-four Norwegian families were interviewed. First, each family member was interviewed alone; subsequently all three generations were gathered for a family interview. The overall themes of the interviews were the memories and historical consciousness of the Second World War and how it was touched upon and handed over within a family context. Gender was not part of the main interest of the project and as such was not systematically taken into consideration in the layout of the project and the gathering of material. As we shall see however, it has been very fruitful to introduce gender as an interpretive category.

The tradition of memories in families

Space does not allow us to introduce the whole analytical framework of the project and we limit ourselves to presenting some basic premises of how the family works as a context of commemoration. We examine the *content* of familial memories and the *transition* or handing down of the memories through the generations.

Stemming from the strong emotional ties between family members, the family constitutes an important place for building and forming historical consciousness.³ Family memories do not consist of a well-defined fund of stories passed on from the eyewitness generation in a completed and fixed form. The past rather slips into the present as episodes that family members construct together in a joint process of sense-making (Welzer et al. 2002a; Jensen 2004). This temporal movement of fragments of memories through familial relations contributes to establishing a feeling of community and wholeness within the family. Moreover, the individual family members can maintain different versions of the 'family story' as long as their interpretations of history fit into a common normative frame of reference for other family members. The tradition of memories should therefore not be understood as fixed stories passed on to following generations, but as an active, ongoing, and mutual construction of these memories through speech (and/or silence). The fact that memories are mostly fragmentary and full of gaps creates spaces which listeners can fill with their own individual interpretations of the past. While they fill in the unspoken voids in and between the stories, however, both narrators and listeners always ensure that the story told is adjusted to the situational necessities within the family constellation.

The national culture of memory

In spite of the open and fragmentary character of family memories, the content of the stories is neither arbitrary nor accidental. Here the national culture of memory comprises the primary frame of reference for what can be regarded as plausible and possible to relate. Individual memories and memories passed on in families cannot be regarded independently of the 'basic narrative' of a nation. An important finding in both the Danish and the Norwegian studies is that the dominant version of the national historiography represents an extremely durable and effective interpretative framework. The concept and description of this national 'basic narrative' concerning the Second World War has been developed by the Norwegian ethnologist Anne Eriksen (1995) and the Danish historians Claus Bryld and Anette Warring (1998) as an outcome of analysis of the public cultures

of memory and commemoration in both countries. Despite a very different course of events in Denmark and Norway during the German occupation,⁴ which lasted from April 1940 until May 1945 in both countries, the dominating versions of this history resemble each other.

The time of the occupation embodies a mythically loaded state of emergency in national history: a time in which the people of a small state gathered around their deepest values and stood united against a more powerful external enemy. In this way the nation and the national community are symbolically and morally recreated through the notion of a homogenous national community, and the elision of political and social differences. The price of this tale of 'the nation in resistance' has been twofold: firstly, the immense and lasting stigmatization and exclusion of anyone branded as a traitor or inner enemy; and secondly, the suppression of existing political and social conflicts and differences before, during and after the occupation in order to maintain the image of a united nation.

The family as an intersection between public and private memory

Now we turn again to the family as a place of negotiation in interpreting the past. The family represents an intersection between individual or biographical memory on the one hand, and collective discourses and ideas of the past on the other. The memory work done in families complexly balances the self-understanding, loyalties and conflicts of the family with the publicly circulating images (conveyed through schooling, the media, public acts of commemoration, and so on). Our analysis shows that memories passed on in families are brought into harmony with the societal patterns of interpretation.

When you look at the transmission of memories in families from the perspective of gender relations, it becomes clear that the basic national narrative is not as neutral as it might seem at first sight. In fact, men and women are given very different subject positions and very different possibilities of identification. Thus, gender plays a conspicuous part in the public culture of memory as well as in dealing with the past within the private sphere. In the following we elaborate this argument through examples from the empirical material. We focus on one family each from Denmark and Norway respectively, but when it comes to the meaning of gender, both families can be seen as typifying a larger number of families represented in our study.

The Svendsen family, Denmark

From the Svendsen family three women were interviewed: grandmother, daughter and granddaughter. They were first interviewed individually and then together. Ida Svendsen, born in 1920, without any specific vocational training, is a retired pub owner; Karin Esmann, born in 1948, a laboratory assistant; and Sussi Jones, born in 1971, a nurse. During the occupation of Denmark, Ida Svendsen lived in the middle of Jutland. At the time of the interview all three of them lived in Copenhagen. They all stress that actually they do not have anything of importance to say about the time of the Occupation, and in that sense they resemble many of the interviewed women. However this attitude is also to be found among several of the men in the Danish interview material. This perspective demonstrates the—partially correct—assumption that 'the war took place somewhere else'

that is, in the bigger towns or in Germany. Even Norway is occasionally mentioned as the 'real' theatre of war. Denmark and the Danes were comparably less confronted with the Second World War and Nazi Occupation. However, the tendency to regard oneself as less competent to talk about the time of the occupation is much stronger amongst women. The women who are part of the eyewitness generation mostly express the idea that the life they led is of no importance in connection with the history of the Occupation. The women themselves do not regard their stories about the difficulties of shortage, rationing and the work of everyday family life as part of the 'true' war history.

During the time of the occupation, Grandmother Ida was employed as a maid, and at first sight her memories seem to concentrate on themes like the blackout, rationing and food shortages. The themes of her stories contribute to the description of her as 'a plain woman' given by both her daughter Karin and her granddaughter Sussi. They depict her as a woman who, having spent her whole life peeling potatoes, certainly has not had anything of importance to say about the war. Granddaughter Sussi explains in this way how her grandmother did not tell her much about the war: "Well, I don't find it so surprising when it comes to my grandmother. She is not a very clever woman... Educated, I mean. So she has not... in that way... I mean she was doing the housekeeping, you know, and it was all [only] about ration cards."

Sussi thus denies that her grandmother has any relevant experiences regarding the history of the Occupation. It is also made clear that Sussi quickly files the memories of her grandmother under the headword 'ration cards' in her encyclopaedia of collective memory.⁵ In so doing, Sussi carries out a double operation: she places her grandmother in a 'feminine' topos of public memory and thereby also positions her outside any authority as narrator or interpreter. Instead, the long dead grandfather plays the main part in the interviews with Sussi and her mother as well as in family conversation. During the war the grandfather was a policeman and he always held a central position in the family. He was spared by chance when the Danish police were arrested in the summer of 1943.⁶ Though Sussi presumes that he was in the Resistance, she has never gained any evidence of it. Still, the legends about him seemed to grow more and more during our conversations. Thus, in the way both granddaughter and daughter interpret their family history it becomes clear to what extent the public memory of the Occupation shapes the family memory. Even when neither descendant can lean on concrete memories or stories, they position grandfather as an active subject in the basic national narrative about the war.

The action of gender stereotypes in the transition of memories is additionally stressed by the fact that Grandmother Ida actually does have some really dramatic stories to tell from the time of war. The married couple for whom she worked as a maid was active in the Resistance and therefore Ida had to flee with their little daughter and bring her to a safe hiding place in Copenhagen. Moreover, she had to cover up her employers' activities and keep the secret of the whereabouts of their arms deposit. Thus Ida has plenty of opportunity to position herself as an important witness and as an active subject. But even when she does mention these dramatic events, they do not influence her self-understanding. And they are even less a part of the perspective that her daughter and granddaughter have on her past. During the individual interviews as well as in the family conversation both Karin and Sussi stress how much they could have learned about the time of the occupation "if only grandfather was still alive". And this position is maintained while Ida

is telling one story after another, dealing with topics that actually do have a place in the national basic narrative of the Occupation. But because Ida is a woman and because she was just a maid during the war, she is not taken seriously and is not seen as capable of telling the 'real' history of the occupation.

The legendary grandfather is considered 'worthy' whether or not he was involved in resistance activities. This is expressed by Karin in family conversation when the secrets the grandfather may have taken with him to his grave are discussed: "No matter if he was in it [the Resistance] or not... you could get to know so much more when he was still alive." Consequently the authority of the grandfather is not even dependent on his actual actions during the war; it is simply ascribed to him—just like the authority of Ida is simply denounced.

Knowledge and authority of interpretation

As shown above, gender has a great influence on the interplay between knowledge and power. Gender categories shape interpretations of the past, thus producing consequences in the present. The example of the Svendsen family has already shown that neither the status of eyewitness nor the participation in dramatic events authorize women to act as interpreters of the past. This dynamic can also be observed with some of the women of the second generation. They stress that actually their husbands would know more about the theme of the Second World War and that the interviewer should "instead talk to Jörgen". Mostly what they refer to is *factual knowledge* which they ascribe to the men and which is seen as more valuable than their own knowledge consisting of *private stories* passed on in the family. Besides the 'relevant' and 'less relevant' themes we can find another gender specific categorisation between 'factual knowledge' and 'everyday stories'. In several family conversations where the first generation is female and the second generation is male the gender-specific categorisation of relevant knowledge creates a certain dynamic. In such cases the son takes over the conversation and the role of 'theme-giver', thereby deciding whether or not the memories of the eyewitnesses are taken into consideration. As will be shown below, the conversation of the Norwegian family Solstad can be characterised this way.

We interviewed the following members of the family: grandmother, Sinnøve Solstad, born in 1925; her son Frederik Solstad, born in 1948; and her grandson Gunnar Solstad, born in 1972. Sinnøve has no special education and was a farmer during her working life; her son Fredrik is a construction manager. Gunnar is a carpenter and lives in Oslo. During the war, the family lived northwest of Oslo, where heavy battles between German and Norwegian troops took place in April 1940. Sinnøve Solstad begins with descriptions of her everyday life in a boarding school for girls "far from world events". However, the girls were expected to display the right patriotic attitude towards German soldiers. Sinnøve describes how the direct encounter confused the picture of the monstrous enemy:

You can imagine how they were seen as occupiers, can't you? And we were supposed to have nothing to do with them. But I still remember that we once stood at the corner (...) and we were three or four boys and girls hanging around. And one of us asked a German if he could have a cigarette. And then he talked [to us] like a... we thought they were such monsters. They were young people, young folks, just like us.

The expectation of keeping the Germans at a distance shows that in the situation of Occupation there was certainly no position outside the political, even though women in particular seem to describe their social spheres as being apparently very far from the spheres of war.

However, Sinnøve's story contains events that lead to serious discords in the family during and after the time of the Occupation. Her husband and brother stood on politically antagonistic sides with her brother voluntarily joining the Waffen-SS. In connection with this specific family history, Sinnøve Solstad complains again and again about what she sees as the double standards of the people who presented themselves as "good Norwegians" (*Jössinger*) after the war and who were also the ones to judge her brother for his membership of the Waffen-SS. She especially points out the farmers who profited from the occupying power during the war and afterwards distanced themselves from the Germans. Here the interdependence between the 'collective encyclopaedia' and the 'family album' is very clear, though in a negative form: her own family history does not align with the basic motif of 'everybody was in the Resistance' stemming from the national narrative, and therefore the family is in danger of being excluded from the national community.

Her son Fredrik Solstad seems to be strongly influenced by the fact that he grew up in the aftermath of the Occupation and its enduring family tensions. The lack of a consensual family history may also have contributed to his strongly distancing himself from the dominant patterns of interpretation of the basic national narrative. This is clearly shown in his sceptical attitude towards the farmers from his region whom he sees as the personification of people who profited from the war. To Frederik, a Norway 'united in resistance' never existed, but only comprised some who managed to get themselves on to 'the right side' more successfully than others after 1945. His view also defines his current political agenda, which he also puts forward in his domination of the family conversation. The pattern of memory shared between the generations here is not so much specific stories as it is a strategy of dealing with the family's position on the edge of a national narrative.

On the other hand the grandson Gunnar Solstad strongly distances himself from the family memory of the Occupation. In his opinion his grandmother has "nothing to contribute to the theme" with her personal stories and historical details: "I don't feel particularly acquainted with specific details about the ninth of April and the sort. What interests me is the whole thing, the big picture of the war." To Gunnar it is obvious that his grandmother Sinnøve does not have a say when it comes to "the big picture" and he expresses very clearly that he does not offer her any authority—either with regard to knowledge about, or interpretation of, the period:

To be honest I don't think she has much to say. I mean, I don't find it very interesting. She can probably talk about particular episodes, like how a Norwegian sits in a treetop shooting at a German, but... that is not so interesting. I'd rather have the whole picture than the small pieces. When I find anything of importance, I'll ask and dig further... And I'm almost 90% sure that she doesn't have any information of that sort. Therefore I have to say I have no interest in bothering to ask her anything.

Here we observe a dynamic reminiscent of the Svendsen family. The prejudice towards the grandmother—that she does not have anything 'interesting' to say—leads to the result that later generations shut themselves away from an actual eyewitness as a source of

knowledge. Sinnøve's stories are not heroic narratives. Instead they contain the ambiguous picture of a politically divided family—and in “the big picture” Gunnar focuses on, they also reveal a divided nation. But Gunnar seems to block himself off from this source of knowledge with the idea that details from the daily life of the war are boring, and through his prejudice against his grandmother. As a source of factual knowledge Gunnar refers to his well-read father-in-law. Gunnar constructs a kind of expert discourse between the two of them and places himself amongst those authorized to ‘contribute to the theme’. Thereby he can free himself of his own problematic and insecure family history as a frame of reference (though it is only vaguely known to him and loaded with unpleasant emotions). Through the devaluation of the memories of his grandmother, the connection with the family's ‘deviant’ history is rejected.

Consequently, Sinnøve hardly has a say in the family conversation. On the whole, Frederik dominates it with the transmission of his mistrust of the farmers who profited from the war in the past to the present organization of farmers, whereas Gunnar also jumps in on the level of present meanings when it comes to the neo-Nazis of today. Historical consciousness always plays a part in the meaning making of the present. In the Solstad family this means that men make meaning out of history *amongst* each other and that the eyewitness Sinnøve leaves this field to them without contradiction.

Conclusions and perspectives

We have described here a gender-system where men are assigned greater authority in narrating and ascribing meaning to the past, regardless of whether the stories they have to tell fit the scheme of the national narrative about the ‘good’ Norwegians and Danes. The way in which gender marks the transition of memories has been demonstrated in two ways: first, the public culture of memory is dominated by certain gender-specific images and attributes—at best the patriotic housewives are placed *beside* the male heroes in the Norwegian culture of memory (while the Danish history of the Occupation has had to do without militaristic heroism), but nevertheless the resistance fighter is definitely seen as male—for example, in the Danish language resistance fighters are called *modstandsmænd*, ‘men of the resistance’. Second, the narrative of the family is also formed by a gender-specific division of work and tasks. This gendered pattern allows certain stories to be told (while others remain silent), through asymmetrical authorization of those who have something to say about the past and its meaning. The stories of the women in the eyewitness generation are mainly about the sphere of the home, about rationing and the overall situation of lack of food and other daily necessities. These memories are influenced by the contemporary gender-specific division of work in two senses: they depict the actual space in which women could act, but frequently the women themselves also interpret their own actions as belonging to the private and not the public or political sphere. The consequence of this is that even the women who did participate in the Resistance, and therefore do have stories to tell about dramatic encounters with the occupying power, seldom acknowledge these stories as political or belonging to ‘big history’. Rather they depict their actions as belonging to their household duties (see also Lenz 2003). Women then have the tendency of not viewing themselves as actors in history, even when the archive of national memory opens up that possibility. They thereby contribute to being

positioned more as passive spectators than as active subjects of history, and to being denied the authority of worthy narrators and interpreters of the past in the present.

The gender-specific structure of authorization is continued by the later generations whose members are more liable to ascribe authority to male members of the eyewitness generation and—when of the male sex themselves—to place themselves in an authorized position based on the division between factual knowledge, inevitably coded as ‘male’ and more valuable, and personal knowledge, concomitantly coded as ‘female’ and less valued in the transmission of memory in the family as well as in the public culture of memory.

We conclude by pointing to some tendencies of change and differences amongst the generations and their gender specific uses of history. The examples discussed here show the extent to which memories of the war reproduce a general tendency in post-war Denmark and Norway, namely the re-establishment of the traditional order of the sexes in which men were responsible for public affairs and women for private ones. Everything that might have undermined this division of labour and responsibilities during the war (for example, the politicised meaning of women’s duties in their support for members of the Resistance or refugees) was neglected or reinterpreted in terms of the traditional gender pattern after 1945. But to leave it like that would be over-simplifying. Feminism, which became a strong political force from the 1980s onward, resulted in the need for new female role models and for narratives that reveal women as full participants in social, political and economic life. Alongside stories of the male, new images of courageous and active women who had participated in the struggle for national independence appeared. Women were pictured smuggling food, hiding and helping refugees, and otherwise engaging in resistance activities coded as feminine. However, they were also pictured with guns in their hands.

Further on, focusing on developments in the uses of history by the third generation, an interesting conjuncture between changes in the national culture of memory and the gendered uses of history takes form. Within the third generation we see that the gendered pattern of identification is more diversified than the two examples presented above might have shown. Amongst the group of young men, several of them do actually show an interest in their grandmothers’ memories of daily life, and the young women also identify with stories of (male) resistance fighters.

This development can be seen in connection with the transformation of the basic narrative about the Occupation, and how this narrative is approached by the third generation, who generally display a rather ambivalent relationship towards the national culture of memory. On the one hand the Occupation is still used as a point of reference for distinguishing between ‘doing right’ or ‘doing wrong’. As such, the younger generation connects the national Occupation to a broader perspective including the Second World War and specifically the Holocaust as reference points for supporting human rights and marking a distance from war as such. On the other hand, the black/white picture of identification is becoming more nuanced or complicated as historical research has added more stories and perspectives to the national narrative of resistance. Research about the national volunteers in the *Waffen-SS* (Christensen et al. 1998), the ‘German girls’ (Warring 1994) and the ‘German children’ (Bryld 1995), the liquidations committed by resistance fighters (Knudsen 2003) and other stories are adding new perspectives to the history of

the Occupation. They disturb the picture of a small nation standing united in resistance.⁷ These new stories are not only widely accepted but also welcomed and used by the third generation to open up reflections on the proposition that 'doing the right thing' is not a simple matter. With a focus on these dilemmas, and on figures excluded from the national narrative, the third generation also displays a reflective attitude towards moral dilemmas created by the Occupation.

Still, gendered patterns in the uses of history can be found within the third generation. It seems as if the young men are developing a broader set of perspectives in their relationship to, and uses of, history. On the one hand they continue to show a deep interest in and excitement about the 'war-aspect' which relates to the war games of their childhood, to cartoons and war movies. This often provides the starting point for seeking more knowledge about the broader strategic, but also political and ideological perspectives of the Second World War. This approach, however, is combined with a display of empathy towards individuals and their stories. As an example a group of young men argued that 'Band of Brothers'⁸ was a good depiction of the war because it included the emotions and losses of the soldiers. The young women have less ambition to display their factual knowledge about the war, nor do they position themselves as 'experts', rather they approach history from either an empathically or a dehistoricized moral perspective. As such, their repertoire of ways of relating to history does not seem as wide-ranging as that displayed by (some of) the young men. While young men still position themselves as 'experts' regarding historical knowledge (as Gunnar Solstad does), the definition of relevant and irrelevant stories and perspectives seems to be broadening and sometimes even moving towards 'universal' themes such as tolerance and human rights .

It may be concluded that the national narrative of the Occupation in both Norway and Denmark is under pressure, both in the sense that the notion of a homogeneous national unity is disturbed and in the sense that ('masculine') heroism is accompanied, if not partly replaced, by ('feminine') suffering and victimhood. From a gender perspective the gendered pattern of identification is definitely breaking up, but it seems as if the pattern of authorisation remains rather intact as it is more often the men of the younger generation who both position themselves as 'experts' in relation to both 'the facts' and the universal 'morality' implied in more empathic memories.

NOTES

¹ A modified version of this article has been published in German, together with Karen Steller Bjerregaard: *Jetzt müsste Opa hier sein, um zu erzählen... Die Bedeutung der Kategorie Geschlecht bei der Weitergabe von Besatzerinnerungen in Dänemark und Norwegen* (Bjerregaard et al. 2006).

² The comparative project was based on an already finished German project which sparked a lot of interest and discussion with the publication of the book *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Welzer et. al 2002b). More information on both projects can be found on this homepage: <<http://www.memory-research.de>>.

³ Historical consciousness is here understood in the terms of Jörn Rüsen (1997) as: *Sinnstiftung entlang des Leitfadens der Zeit*. Within this understanding the function of historical consciousness is seen as facilitating present orientation and future expectations.

⁴ In Norway, King Haakon VII and the government managed to escape from the capital on 9 April 1940, the day of the German raid. The king refused to agree to a German ultimatum to accept Ger-

man occupation as an act of 'protection'. In June 1940, the King and the government left Norway for exile in England. Already in April, Joseph Terboven had been installed as a German *Reichskommissar*. He built up a German civil rule which was the major power in the country, even when in September 1940 a collaborationist regime, headed by Vidkun Quisling, leader of the Nazi party '*Nasjonal Samling*', was installed. In Denmark, the King and government stayed in the country and agreed to a politics of co-operation with the German occupiers which left the existing Danish authorities some latitude, but forced them to compromise constantly under the German press. This arrangement broke down in August 1943, when Werner Best was inaugurated as *Reichskommissar* in Denmark and a regime comparable to the Norwegian one was installed. But the Danish Nazi party never came to play a role in Danish occupation politics.

⁵ 'Encyclopaedia' is here understood as a repertoire of themes from the culture of memory. These themes work associatively. There is no need to tell a specific story, but as soon as one of the main themes is touched upon, it draws upon a whole set of associations, meanings and narratives from the culture of memory

⁶ In August 1943 the collaboration policy between the Danish government and the German occupying power broke down. A German *Reichskommissariat* chaired by Werner Best was established and the Danish police as well as the military were seen as armed forces of the enemy and therefore arrested and partly deported to German concentration camps.

⁷ This development has been under way in Denmark for a longer period of time than in Norway. Still, similar tendencies can be seen within the culture of memory of the Occupation in both national contexts.

⁸ 'Band of Brothers' is a television series about the American 'Easy-company' and their landing in Normandy. It was shown on Danish television at the time of the interviews.

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AFTER-EFFECTS OF WAR AND THE NARRATIVE DEPICTIONS OF WAR IN ESTONIAN AND FINNISH LIFE HISTORIES IN THE TWENTY- FIRST CENTURY

• TIJU JAAGO •

ABSTRACT

The article compares descriptions of the period of the Second World War in the Estonian and Finnish life histories narrated in the early twenty-first century: how the Estonian and Finnish narrators describe the boundaries of wartime and peace time, and what made people talk of the war and what made them not to talk about it. While Finnish story-tellers in their narratives specify the moment of the beginning and the end of the war, expressing it through the description of weather, sounds, his/her activity at the moment and similar motifs, the Estonian narratives reveal that the war is not an independent historical event in the popular approach to history—it is understood as a part of Soviet colonization. ‘The continuation of war’ in Estonia (due to the establishment of Soviet power and its duration after the war) also kept alive the tradition of storytelling about the war. In Finland, however, people focused on peacetime problems after the war.

Introduction

Changes to the political map of Europe at the end of the twentieth century have given rise to reinterpretations of recent history. This is a common facet of the continuous experience of history in both public and private spheres. Archives that collect the autobiographical stories of common people serve as one of the links between these two spheres. The following article compares autobiographical narratives themed around micro-level effects of the Second World War, collected at the beginning of the twenty-first century and stored in Estonian and Finnish archives.

The subject of political independence is connected with the Second World War both in Finland and in Estonia.¹ The Soviet Union intruded on the eastern border of Finland in 1939 (the Winter War, which lasted from 30 November 1939 to 13 March 1940) and this conflict continued more than one year later (the Continuation War from 25 June 1941 to 19 September 1944). As a result of the military activity a portion of the eastern part of Finland became the possession of the Soviet Union.

The battles of the Second World War extended to the territory of Estonia in June 1941, soon after Nazi Germany had declared war on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. At that time Estonia was no longer an independent state, but had belonged to the Soviet Union since 6 August 1940. In summer 1941 the German occupation of Estonia started, lasting

until the late autumn of 1944 when Soviet forces drove them out. The same year an attempt was made to restore the national independence of Estonia, but it was unsuccessful (Laar 2005: 224–225). Estonia remained a part of the Soviet Union until 1991, when the independence of Estonia was reinstated. Although, in contrast to Finland, Estonia did not take part in the Second World War as an independent country, Estonians were drawn into the war nonetheless: during the Soviet and the German occupations young men were recruited into the Red Army or the German Army, respectively. Many young men evaded the mobilization (they were called ‘Forest Brothers’), some escaped into Sweden and some into Finland. The latter (*soomepoisid*) fought in the Finnish Army.

The incorporation of Estonia into the Soviet Union in 1940 and 1944 resulted in extensive political repression of local people. In recalling this period, people intermingle the occupations, battles, political repression, and escape from Estonia. There is no conventional name for this war (people talk of periods or ‘times’ such as ‘the German period’, ‘the Russian period’). The official Soviet Estonian treatment of history talked of the Great Patriotic War, a term that did not gain currency in everyday Estonian discourse. The modern treatment of history in Estonia refers to the Second World War, which included the occupation of Estonia and its repressions, the ‘German-Russian war on Estonian ground’ and the ‘Summer War’—the period of alternating occupations in 1941 (Pajur 2005: 181; about the Summer War see also Noormets 2003).

While related by their common theme, Finnish and Estonian war stories, the narratives produced in the two societies in which the topic is elaborated clearly differ in ways which this article addresses. Their differences raise the question of the extent to which the views expressed by narrators from the two neighbouring nations can be compared. In addition, close examination of the two archival collections has provided insights into the depiction of wartime emotions in the two nations and perceptions of borders between wartime and peacetime. This comparison casts light on the important choices made in both countries between openness and silence on these subjects.²

Before beginning analysis, some brief words about the provenance of both archives should be offered. In 2001 the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society organised a writing competition titled ‘Wartime in Our Memories’, to which 191 narrators sent their contributions. These are now archived in the Finnish Literature Society Folklore Archives (hereafter SKRA) in volumes titled SOTA-AIKA or ‘Wartime’ 2001 (hereafter S-A). In 2005 the Estonian Life Histories Association and the Cultural History Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum organised a writing competition, titled ‘Impacts of War on my Life and Our Family’, which received 190 stories. These are now stored in the Estonian Literary Museum, Estonian Cultural History Archives (hereafter EKLA) in the collection numbered f350. The number of the story is included in my references.

In Finland, the collection dealt with in this article is far from the first project of collection and study of autobiographical war narratives. The existence of earlier collections allows the analysis of changes in narrating the war and wartime; changes which are linked to variations in the historical background and the collecting ideology at the time of compilation. One study of this kind is offered by Eeva Peltonen (1997), in which she shows how the theme which began to appear in stories collected in the 1980s, which she summarises as “the war has become more beautiful”, had developed over years, involving

changes in both public and private spheres. She describes the impact of social movements (especially the leftism of the 1960s and 1970s and the anti-fascism and anti-war movements) on the discourse of war, but also the role of research studies in this process (in gender studies, for example, the issue of women's wartime heroism was juxtaposed with that of their being victims of the war—an emergent discourse). She also analyses the growth of greater knowledge and interpretations of the events and background of the war in the private sphere, based on the distribution of war experiences and the differences between generations.

In Estonia this treasury of texts is supplemented by another collection of life stories: 'My Life during the German Occupation (1941–1944)' which includes 190 contributions. Treatments of war can also be found in earlier history-focused life stories such as those in the archives of the Estonian Literary Museum³ as well as in the archives of the Estonian National Museum (ERM). For example, the stories sent to the writing competition 'The Post-War Village' in 1999, organised by the Estonian National Museum, include 'Memoirs of the Estonian Army 1939–1940, and joining the Red Army 1940–1941' (ERM, KV 960), and 'Memoirs of the New Russian Occupation in Estonia in 1944' (ERM, KV 961). However, no specifically war-thematic writing contests have been organised by the Estonian National Museum.⁴ There are no studies of the war narratives from the above described types of sources in Estonia, but research into remembering the Second World War has been initiated within the Estonian Science Foundation project 'Places of memory and cultures of remembrance in twenty-first century Estonia' (project leader Ene Kõresaar). A treatment close to this topic is provided in an essay by Jaan Undusk (2000), based on analysis of fiction, in which the author discusses the differences in the Estonian and major European nations' interpretations of the Second World War.

Two archives, two text collections: one topic, different interpretations

The following discussion is the result of analysis of 153 stories from the two principal collections mentioned above—87 from Estonia and 66 from Finland—conducted between 2004 and 2005.⁵ The aim of the project has been to delve beyond the 'surface' of the texts of two neighbouring countries in order to explore differences in what people say and *how* they talk today about events set in train more than half a century ago. The narratives are comparable in terms of their similar collection methods and the framing of the appeals, both of which aimed at generating thematically-guided, but relatively freely-structured, written autobiographical histories.⁶ At the same time, these texts reflect the different histories of Estonia and Finland and also the different dynamics of the narrators' own experiences, in particular the dialogue between their understandings from the time of the event to the time of narrating and public opinion during the same period.

Problems start as soon as we compare the wording of the topics of the writing competitions: in Estonia the word 'war' is used, in Finland 'wartime'. Although it may seem a minor difference at first sight, it becomes a material one if we ask what these concepts—war and wartime—involve, and what either concept excludes or what memories it does not elicit (battles, being a soldier, daily life in the war situation). Within the scope of the examined material it seems that in Estonian life stories the concept 'war' has a more extensive meaning than in Finnish life stories. My aim was to find comparable features

in the war narratives of both countries. As a researcher, however, I still cannot compare the Finnish and the Estonian stories as equivalent texts. Estonian war narratives are positioned against a cultural background that is familiar to me, and therefore enriched by my personal general knowledge. In contrast, Finnish stories began and ended for me exactly where the story-teller had set the borders of the story: I read these stories as an outsider, frequently encountering the unfamiliar. For example, the role of the clergy in delivering death announcements, and that of newspapers and radio in mediating war news are characteristic features of Finnish war narratives, but are either marginal in Estonian stories (the role of the media) or do not appear at all (the clergyman's role). Likewise, in Estonian stories there is frequent symmetrical comparison of 'German soldiers' and 'Russian soldiers', which cannot be found in the same manner in Finnish stories.

No claim can be made to finding a 'uniform voice' among the many different narratives which appear in the corpus of stories analysed. War may have been experienced as a child or an adult, as a combat soldier or as a woman living to the rear of the combat zones. Among the texts on which this study is based, the proportion of male narrators is larger in the Estonian than the Finnish sample, which emphasises the soldierly viewpoint in the former corpus, particularly as Estonian men fought in different armies. On the other hand, the two Finnish narrators who took active part in combat do not, in contrast to Estonian story-tellers, present their battle experiences, but rather discuss the subject of the war more generally (SKRA, S-A: 621–624; 860–894).⁷ The problem of general orientations is not reduced here, however, to the 'factual' difference or similarity in the texts (although this is meaningful, to some degree), but primarily to the ways of constructing and interpreting historical events.

How then to find the criteria on the basis of which the stories of the neighbouring countries could be compared? First to be considered was the 'level' of the narrative events (on 'thematization', see Apo 2001: 28–29), and on this basis I tried to reconstruct the past events that the narrator had regarded as important for his or her story. Thereafter I examined how the past was consistently interpreted in such a way as to be acceptable in the present, something which Grele (2000: 45–47) refers to as "the ideological level of life history". This is a treatment dependent on the cognitive definition of ideology by Teun van Dijk (2005: 66), whereby ideology is "a body of factual and evaluative beliefs or the knowledge and opinions of a group". Narrators characterising the war situation may present it via very different experiences and modes of description, but often these texts can be seen to coincide at an "ideological level" in van Dijk's sense of the term.

This understanding was the route to the key topics that I discuss more closely: description of emotions related with the war (or wartime), perception of the borders of wartime, talking or being silent about the war, and the period after the war. The issues arose from similar narratives of the same period, but located in specifically different historical contexts. For instance the choice whether to be silent or to talk can be largely reduced to the question of national independence. Estonia lost its brief status as a nation-state (1918–1940) when the war expanded onto its territory (1941) and neither was it independent after the war, unlike Finland. Independence or the lack of it considerably shaped the options available for common people—the story-tellers both during and after the war. Due to the loss of independence in 1940, the Second World War is not a separate event from the point of view of Estonian popular history, but is 'seated' in the context

of Soviet colonialism together with other dramatic events like political arrests and mass deportation. All these events are narrated together. During the Soviet period this subject was topical as a so-called counter-history to the official Soviet approach to history. This is why it is evident that Estonian narrators try to justify their emotions with facts more than the Finnish do, because Finns did not have to dispute over their history with the representatives of a foreign state, authoritative in their own country.

Estonian stories do not frame the Estonian nation as belonging to one or the other of the parties at war (the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany); the story-tellers are more likely to place themselves and their 'own world' in the context of the so-called 'bad' or 'confused times'. Although in Finnish stories the choices and options of the narrative characters are more clearly outlined than in Estonian stories, these stories are not characterised by a portrayal of soldiers' heroism or a linear depiction of the enemy either; in Finnish stories the war is often also referred to as the "hard times".⁸ Yet in the narratives, this is placed between periods of peacetime, which enables the qualities and borders of the time periods to be shown more precisely than in Estonian stories. I shall discuss these topics more precisely after presenting some notes on research methodology.

Remembering and identity

The events discussed in these corpora of narratives took place in real life, and offer the choice of either talking or being silent about them. The creation of a new reality—that of a popular narrating tradition—depends on this choice. In order to differentiate two time layers in these stories—the time of the narrated events, and the time of narrating them (why, about what and how the past time is narrated)—I use the methods developed in the study of oral history.⁹ According to Alessandro Portelli (2000: 67), these narratives talk "less about events than their *meaning*"¹⁰ and indeed, although at first sight the stories presented here appear to be evidentiary documents meant to reflect actual events, their close analysis supports Portelli's assertion, particularly in relation to the concepts of, firstly, 'the identity-creating process' and, secondly, 'the incentive of remembering'.

Firstly, in order to follow the narrative as a process, attention must be paid to the mutual relations of the narrated events and the meanings attached to them. In these relations the identity of the narrators is performed: one may observe how something experienced during an event or during a historical period—an individual experience—is adjusted to public opinion. For example, a woman born in 1927 argues, "When after the war [people] heard of the cruelty of the Germans, they were ashamed of their positive feelings [towards the Germans]." This is a possible first stage in identity creation: being ashamed of one's feelings. Reconciliation follows: "But in time it was understood that war makes all nations cruel" (SKRA, S-A: 12). This is the second stage: the acceptance or adoption of public opinion on the private level, as a result of which a compromise can be found between one's own feelings and public opinion.

Secondly, narrating is induced by certain so-called 'incentives for remembering' (see Tulving 1994: 68) which influence the depiction of an event, without being able to change it. Various forces work towards encouraging forgetfulness and silence or excavation and recording of memories, and the incentives to remember do not depend always and only on the narrator's will.¹¹ For example, an Estonian woman (born in 1939), writing about

an episode when her mother was threatened with death by an angry Russian soldier, comments: “Do you remember?”—Yes, I do. Of course. But maybe I would have preferred to forget” (EKLA f 350: 1809).

The written stories analysed here were produced under similar conditions: they are replies to a set of questions provided by the archives concerned, which, in this case, can be understood as the incentives for remembering. The results are, as noted, different in the ways in which salience has been given to continued discussion taking place after the cessation of active combat. Estonians, in their early twenty-first century memoirs, stress that wartime stories were constantly retold in the latter part of the twentieth century, while Finnish narrators note that ‘these things’ were not talked about during the same period in Finland. Clearly, the incentives for narrating the war in the two countries differed significantly and this is something which needs to be understood: the incentives, or the lack thereof, to narrate war-related life histories in the two post-war societies.

Evidence and feeling: about the style of the stories

Estonian stories generally start with descriptions of peaceful life in the Republic of Estonia, which was destroyed by wartime and Soviet power in its aftermath.¹² Wartime stories are built upon events in which the characters (including the narrator’s family members) faced choices, each seemingly worse than the other. The narrator concentrates usually on the question of how people coped. The after-effects of war are present not only in the second half of the 1940s, but also in the 1990s.

In Finnish stories, especially in those narrated by woman who grew up during the war, anxiety and a certain vague fear is described in connection with the topic of war. For example, a Finnish woman born in 1921 writes:

The threat of war was already an issue for some time before it started and we children were afraid of it. Everything was uncertain and no one knew what the war would be like. We children discussed it among ourselves. Our parents said that the war would not be like the one in 1918. Now they would be fighting along the border, when the war broke out. (SKRA, S-A: 348)

The narrator’s younger sister, in her own story, underlines the fear of war even more emotionally, describing a series of omens that she experienced as a child. For example, she tells how once when on her way to the milk shop she saw a squirrel running in the street and heard two men walking in front of her say that “it means war, if there are so many squirrels even in town” (SKRA, S-A: 900).¹³

An Estonian woman born in 1932 also notes that she had heard stories of war at home as a young child, but adds that these stories, told by her father about the First World War had a “slightly entertaining” tone, which was not frightening for the children (EKLA f 350: 1906). It is also true that childhood fear is not always expressed in Finnish stories as when, for example, a woman born in 1929 describes how adults’ war narratives inspired children’s games: “if clouds come from the east, there will be war” (SKRA, S-A: 636–638); inchoate feelings of fear may be described in an abstract way. Estonian narratives primarily concentrate on events, and feelings are also connected with specific episodes, while often becoming scattered by created distance, by humour or contrasting moods. In

the following quote, where an Estonian woman born in 1939 describes how she and her mother run across a field to escape the approaching battle, the narrator uses a dialogue between the experience at the time and later understanding to achieve such distance:

Going across the open field at Saue I heard the bullets whistle. Now I believe that this whistle only existed in my imagination, because who would ever shoot a mother with four children hurrying across a field? I told my brother about it and he tried to comfort me, saying that a bullet that you can hear whistle is already past you. (EKLA f 350: 1809)

This style evidently involves a mechanism of self-defence: such hard experiences could not be burdened with feelings. But descriptions of this kind—conveying detailed and factual real-life situations and moments—become fixed in the narrator’s memory as ‘ready-made episodes’, which are reinforced through their narration.¹⁴

In the analysed Finnish collection I did not find battle descriptions by soldiers, yet I did find claims that those who had been to the battle did not talk much about it, “father came back from the war but did not want to talk about it” being a common theme (SKRA, S-A: 72), expressed in a slightly different mode by the narrator who recorded that her father had been tormented by nightmares for decades, but only mentioned these to her shortly before he died (SKRA, S-A: 958). The narrator does not present the content of the nightmares. In contrast, the Estonian corpus commonly contains battle descriptions by both civilians and soldiers.¹⁵ Finnish stories record feelings associated with events, and memories of feelings; narrators generally discuss war in terms of the hardships that arose in the rear or in attacked areas. In Estonian stories concrete situations and events tend to be described, where the narrators were witnesses of those times.

How is the presentation of wartime feelings connected with marking the borders of wartime and peacetime? In Finnish stories, the negative feelings occasioned by the ‘hard times’ of the war era, feelings that have been largely withheld from public discussion for half a century, are presented in abstract terms, though strongly associated with a clearly defined, concrete time-frame. In Estonian narratives emotions are attached to concrete events, but the time-frame of these ‘war feelings’ is inchoate. This is a phenomenon worthy of closer examination.

Specification of wartime in narratives

On the one hand, time can be presented chronologically. For example, the ‘wartimes’ under discussion here actually comprised a series of somewhat discrete engagements: in Finland, the ‘Winter War’ (between Finland and Soviet Russia and conducted along Finland’s eastern border, principally as trench and guerrilla warfare) lasted from 30 November 1939 to 13 March 1940, followed by a period of uneasy tranquillity and then by what was known as the ‘Continuation War’ from 25 June 1941 to 19 September 1944, likewise taking place along the eastern border. It culminated in Finland suing for peace and accepting Soviet conditions which, though involving loss of territory, allowed Finland to retain sovereignty. To some extent, Finland’s conflict with Soviet Russia was offstage in terms of the global conflict conducted elsewhere, though, by default, the country was allied to Germany. Estonia, however, experienced the Second World War more directly,

as Russia and Germany fought across her territory in 1941 (when Germany became the victorious occupiers) and again in 1944 (when the Soviet Union replaced Germany). This comprises the chronological timeline in the two countries.

On the other hand, popular history narratives typically present time in terms of ‘periods’, titling them according to certain perceived qualities: ‘wartime’ (as opposed to peace time), ‘the Russian period’, ‘the German period’ (referring to the respective foreign power ruling in Estonia), ‘the blackberry time’ (referring to late summer). Such definitions of time underline both the quality of the period and the mutual relationships between different time-periods—from which the names of the periods actually derive: the events and circumstances that are possible ‘when blackberries are in flower’ cannot take place ‘on long dark autumn evenings’ and vice versa.¹⁶

In Finnish stories wartime is described through reference to fear or some other undefined feeling. This differentiates wartime from other periods, but at the same time also connects them: people talked of fear during peace time; the threat of war generated these feelings, but they were also felt during peace. In Estonia the contrast between ‘wartime’ and ‘peace time’ seems to have been emphasised at the beginning of the war (or, more precisely, as the ‘peaceful life’ during the period of independence that was terminated in the 1940s), but not after the war because the after-effects of war lasted throughout the post-war period. In Finnish stories, war usually begins with a clearly specified event or situation as narrators describe where they were or what they were doing at a precise moment: for example, they were at the breakfast table (SKRA, S-A: 273); they heard of the war from children who came home from school during the day (SKRA, S-A: 324); they were in a sweet shop buying strawberry candy (SKRA, S-A: 639), and so on. The end of war is likewise specified with description of a certain moment. For example, for a Finnish woman born in 1938, the end of war is associated with her father coming home: “Father came in autumn. There were a lot of red berries on the Alpine currant shrub. Golden sunflowers by the wall were blooming and the leaves on the large maple tree in the yard were still green.” This is followed by a brief description of the post-war period—it was a hard time and there was a lack of everything: clothes, sugar and coffee, but, as the storyteller adds—this is already “another story”. One no longer wanted to talk about war any more (SKRA, S-A: 70-72).

In Estonian stories the end of war is not so clearly specified. It takes place over a much longer and less bounded time span. For example, an Estonian man born in 1935 observes the blending of the end of war into peace as follows:

The war ended, but few Estonians felt that it was really over. The war did not end for us when we dared to raise our heads at home after the last front line went from here. It was not over on the eighth or ninth of May either, and not even when we got reliable information that all our family had survived. And not even decades later, when the last Russian military machines left the territory of Estonia, as they say now. The dates do not mean anything. As the war did not actually start for the Estonian people on 21 June that memorable year, likewise it did not end at a certain hour, which we could argue about. For us this war never ended. (EKLA f 350 1895)¹⁷

It is apparent that the repressions of the Soviet period are associated, in Estonian wartime narratives, with war history itself.

On the other hand, actual wartime is divided, in its turn, into ‘battle times’ and periods of more peaceful daily life. The following example is from the story of an Estonian woman born in 1932:

*And the war of our time began.*¹⁸ Vaike went to school in 1940. In the previous year I had learnt how to write my family name. [A paragraph of the story of the family name follows.] What I remember of the deportation in 1941... [A paragraph on deportation follows.] *The Russians left, the Germans came.* Several things have become confused in time—whether it was the first leaving of the Russians or their new coming. I recall escaping from home. We went to the wooded pasture of Võlla bog. I remember that silver items were hidden in the starling bird box at home. [A description of bird boxes and hidden items follows.] *The Germans left and again the Russians came.* I remember an awful dark autumn evening and night—when the town of Pärnu was bombed. Above the town ‘Christmas trees’ were burning, the lights could be seen from our yard. It was the last chance to flee to Sweden. (EKLA f 350: 1906; emphasis is the author’s)

Phrasing such as “the Russians left and the Germans came” and then vice versa, is typical. What is significant in this description is that it includes within this critical period (war-time) also different ‘smaller’ periods, in addition to the “Russian” and “German” periods, there is also the “last chance to flee to Sweden”.¹⁹

Some readers may be surprised by the statement, often expressed in Estonian war stories, that the arrival of German troops in their country in 1941 was favourably received rather than otherwise. Given the historical context, however, it is understandable. For example, a woman who was born in 1933 starts her story with memories from 14 June 1941, when Soviet authorities imprisoned and deported a huge number of people in Estonia. This day is known as the first day of mass repressions in Estonia and it is a national day of mourning now. The female narrator describes the overall anxiety, but also what had happened to acquaintances: “A bit later it turned out that these cars had stopped in front of the doors of so many acquaintances and well-known people and so many of them had been taken to somewhere unknown. Our things also stayed packed for a few days. No one knew what would come next.” In the turmoil of these anxious days she was also remained without her father: when father had taken the family to the country, he himself returned to town “ (...) and we never saw him again.” The narrator dedicates another small paragraph to her father, in which she explains the circumstances of the repression of her father and the information about her father’s death found in archive documents years later, and then moves back in her story to the beginning of the war, saying: “After such acts of terror as the Communists had perpetrated before they fled Estonia [in the couple of weeks after the major deportation in 1941, as the German troops attacked],²⁰ the Germans must have been seen as liberators” (EKLA f 350: 1737; cf. a similar example in EKLA f 350: 1727).

In addition, when Estonian narrators note the relief experienced at the ‘end of the war’, authors immediately launch into descriptions of post-war repressions. It is apparent that none of these war-related ‘time periods’ brought with them either liberation or the normalisation of the situation. Hope was expressed only on the basis that slight changes in the political situation might encourage even the slightest chance of escape from imprisonment and the existing danger of death.

The stories reveal that Soviet repression during and after the war had a stronger impact than the active hostilities of war itself, a fact which is understandable if we delve into

the subject more generally.²¹ Soviet repressions, which started in 1941, triggered a chain of events which could not be publicly discussed during the Soviet period, but which continued to affect Estonians powerfully even in the more 'peaceful' post-war Soviet period—interrupting, for instance, contact with relatives living in foreign countries. When narrating these wartime stories, the departure point for both Finnish and Estonian writers lies in the sensing of the different qualities of time periods characterised as 'peace' and 'war'. While this produces certain parallels, however, the major difference that repeatedly emerges is that, as already noted, in Estonian stories war is not a separate period but merges into the general 'hard times' related to Soviet occupation during the second half of the twentieth century, a difference caused by post-war realities in the two nations.

According with these chronological differences in experienced 'war/peace' time, the stories also culminate differently. In Estonian stories the narrative's 'turning point' revolves around tragic events: in other words, the transformation of a peaceful and balanced life into an era of occupation and repression.²² In Finnish stories the expectation of tragic events comes to the fore only when the author talks retrospectively about the pre-war period, while after the war fear of tragedy submerges. Here, two regions of narrative (popular narrated history) are distinguished which share similarities but whose differences provide compelling evidence that specific features in the description of emotions, and remembered emotions, are shaped by factors arising from different historical backgrounds, and the narrative techniques which inevitably arise from such historicities.

In summary

The Estonian and Finnish stories in these two collections provide a good basis for comparison, as they were collected at the same time and using the same methods. The appeals prepared by the archives included relatively similar requirements in terms of provision of incentives to produce such narratives.

The Estonian corpus is suggestive of an extensive treasury of stories behind and beside those sent to the archive. In contrast, the content of Finnish stories offers evidence that mid-twentieth-century 'wartime' was not much discussed after the war in Finland. There are references to memories so nightmarish that they could not be shared, and also to the fact that together with the event, the topicality of its narrating disappeared (for example, SKRA, S-A: 720). It is often stated that it was necessary 'to forget' in order to get on with life. In a stabilised society, which was Finland's goal after 1945, the problems and disruptions of wartime were no longer important: the past was unalterable, adjustment to the future a paramount value (for example, SKRA, S-A: 302). In Finnish stories (and probably also in real life) the end of the war was clearly delimited, whereupon there was little incentive to keep discussion of a painful subject open: a new time period and new topics had arrived. In contrast, in Estonia people did not have a sense of closure even after the battles were over, and it is natural that the subject for discussion and the need for remembering continued.

It is the thesis of this paper that the consensual choice of silence or continuing discourse on the subject of experienced wartime is associated with perceptions of its temporal demarcation: if wartime is placed as a contradictory period between precisely demarcated periods of peace as in Finnish stories, it loses its topicality from the perspective

of daily communication once it is over. It was not like that in Estonia: in addition to the daily hardships of post-war life (lack of food and other everyday commodities, the loss of homes and so on, which were similar in Finland), there were new repressions and other political transformations in Estonia. A more stable period emerged in the second half of the 1950s which allowed Estonians to begin the search for relatives who had been scattered by war. In the course of these activities it became apparent to many that the official Soviet interpretation of history, and that of large numbers of Russians who had immigrated to Estonia after the war, was at variance with their own experiences. Thus, traces of war remained in daily life even in the form of problematised versions of its conduct and outcome, leaving the subject open for continuous discussion. In recent heated debate about the meaning and location of Soviet-built war memorials on Estonian soil, Russia has accused Estonia of rewriting the history of the Second World War. Naturally, this specific narrative principally achieves primacy in recent propagandist speeches, but it is one that is also reflected in popular history. If one reads the memoirs of those who experienced the era personally, it is clear that the history of the mid-twentieth-century conflict as it involved Estonia, Soviet Russia and Finland is not being rewritten now, here at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It is rather that previously occluded voices have finally found a hearing in the public sphere.

NOTES

¹ Both Estonia and Finland gained their national independence in the course of the Russian revolutions: Finland in 1917 and Estonia in 1918. (Estonian territory belonged to Czarist Russia from the beginning of the eighteenth century and Finland from the beginning of the nineteenth.) While Finland succeeded in preserving its independence in the course of the events of the Second World War, Estonia did not. In Estonia the Second World War is associated both with the Soviet and the German occupation (see Pajur and Tännberg 2005: 136–393).

² I am grateful to the participants of the symposium ‘Memory and Narration’, and especially to Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj, for their constructive comments. Research 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 into English.

³ For a closer examination of Estonian life histories in the archives of the Estonian Literary Museum, see Hinrikus and Kõresaar 2004; Kõresaar 2005: 22–26.

⁴ On the archive of responses by the correspondents of the Estonian National Museum, see Tael 2006: 186–189.

⁵ Throughout this article I use the definitions ‘Estonian narrators/narratives’ and ‘Finnish narrators/narratives’ only in the framework of the examined collections, not in a more general sense.

⁶ About the life writing competition as a collecting method and about the ways of scientific interpretation of texts collected in this way see further Pöysä 2006. An example of strategies used for compiling answers to similar writing competitions is presented in Latvala 2005, particularly pp. 56–59.

⁷ Among Estonian narrators most of the men were born in the 1920s and most women in the 1930s, which means that male narratives predominantly represent the view of wartime youths, while female narratives reveal the view of wartime children. The Finnish narrators were mostly (78.8%) born in the 1930s, fewer in the 1920s (of the 66 narrators 25 women and 6 men and 17 women and 4 men, respectively. The remaining 14 were born either before 1920 or after 1939). Finnish narrators who were of the same age, born before the war, experienced the war completely

differently, depending on their home place: some knew about it thanks to the radio or by experiencing life in the rear zone, some felt the immediate presence of the war. “The war came to me one day, just before going to the dairy shop”, a woman born in Viipuri in 1935 writes (SKRA, S-A: 676). Children of the same age in one family may present the same events completely differently.

⁸ Finnish researcher Leena Huima (2002), in her article comparing the life histories of Estonian and Finnish women, has pointed out the mode of expression, typical to the Estonian language, used to personify time and other external factors: “the active operator is the events and eras”, which are subject to “the will of fate”, thus the life of a person is shaped by fate and not free will. Huima also underlines the difference between this mode of thought from that in Finnish life histories. However, it does not concern the depiction of wartime in Finland to an equal degree, where the story-teller’s life is, to a certain extent, also subordinated to the pressure of the ‘hard times’.

⁹ In Estonia this is referred to as the ‘popular narrated history method’, developed in the context of folklore studies (see, for example, Thompson 2000 [1978]: 71–76; for more on the research tradition in Estonia see Jaago, Kõresaar and Rahi-Tamm 2006).

¹⁰ The emphasis is the author’s. Portelli’s contention is reiterated in Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj’s study of the life histories of Ingrian women: “Narratives are interpretations of experiences which were important for these women. The researcher cannot in any way point out the border between the historical fact and the interpretation: it cannot be extrapolated” (Kaivola-Bregenhøj 2007: 210).

¹¹ Examples of the reasons for being silent based on analogous source material are provided in the studies by Ulla-Majja Peltonen, in which both the psychological and political causes for being silent are discussed (Peltonen 2003, 2007).

¹² A treatment of Estonian life histories departing from such ‘rhetoric of disruption’ is offered by Ene Kõresaar (2005).

¹³ There is also an example about squirrels predicting the outbreak of war in an Estonian story: “In summer 1930 there were many squirrels in the manor garden. Older people said that this means great war and destitution—and it came, but more about that below” (EKLA f 350: 741, 2).

¹⁴ Real life stories link the visual and verbal memory within them, as discussed by Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj (2007: 192) when she mentions that while listening to a story, she felt as if the story-teller were watching a film; such episodes in the narrative were in this case associated with extremely strong experiences.

¹⁵ See, for example, EKLA f 350: 1724 (battles in Tartu 1944); 1730 (experience of a “Finnish boy”—these were young Estonian men who escaped to the Finnish army so as not to be recruited by the German army); 1731 (invasion of Saaremaa Island); 1741 (life in the Soviet Army, including in a work battalion); 1755; 1889 (recruitment to the German Army).

¹⁶ On specific features of the diachronic and synchronic aspects of narratives based on memories, experiences and events see further Kirsti Salmi-Niklander 2006: 199–200

¹⁷ The examples above also reflect the different range of the story-tellers’ sense of *me* and *us*: the Finnish woman speaks from the perspective of her family and *me*, whereas the Estonian narrator matches the personal viewpoint with the viewpoint of the nation. Beyond the scope of this article, this opens further interesting lines of inquiry.

¹⁸ The story starts with a description of the wars of the narrator’s father’s generation (the First World War, 1914–1918, and the Estonian War of Independence, 1918–1920).

¹⁹ In this narrative, ‘wartime’—commencing at the beginning of the 1940s—was described on half a page. A lengthier description concerns all the narrator’s siblings’ later destinies, the natural development of which the war had interrupted. So the story-teller reaches the year 1990, when she meets her brother—a soldier who had been recruited by both armies (the Soviet and the German) and later imprisoned, who settled in Australia after the war. They had managed to keep in contact and write to one another prior to 1990, but not meet. The narrator says, the “visit to her brother is not directly a war story but [it is] a consequence of the war” (EKLA f 350: 1906, 16).

²⁰ On the major deportation on 14 June 1941, arrests and shootings see further *Poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis 1940–1988. Political Arrests in Estonia: Repressed Persons Records*, Book 1 (1996) and Book 2 (1998).

²¹ Mati Mandel's (2007) book *Kurjuse aasta Lõuna-Läänemaal 1940–1941* (The year of Evil in South Läänemaa 1940–1941) examines the complexity of the war and post-war situation, and the longevity of their impact on the Estonian people.

²² For a summary of Estonian traumatic life stories, see Rutt Hinrikus 2003.

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“MANY A TIME BLOOD HAS FLOWED IN NORTHERN FINSKOGA”¹

THE NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN FOREST FINNISH POPULAR HISTORIOGRAPHY

• MARJA-LIISA KEINÄNEN •

ABSTRACT

Tales about alleged persecutions of Finnish slash and burn cultivators who migrated to Central Sweden between 1580 and 1640—the so-called ‘Forest Finns’ of Sweden, specifically those settling in the Värmland area—were popularised in the common understanding of ‘Forest Finnish’ history during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The aim of this paper is to examine the process of popular history production in order to understand this phenomenon. What meanings did these tales convey to their narrators? Drawing on the theoretical findings of oral history research I will argue that while these tales may initially have been based on historical facts, they are less interesting in terms of offering reliable historical evidence than because they are psychologically true for the narrators. I suggest that ever since the tale-telling tradition became established among Värmland Finns during the nineteenth century—a period that coincided with their assimilation into the Swedish population—these tales have offered a metaphorical way for an ethnic minority to express its feelings of frustration in face of the death of their culture and language.

Key words: Popular history, oral history, Värmland, Forest Finns, ethnic minorities, discrimination, assimilation.

Introduction

When working with a project that studied revitalisation of Värmland Finnish culture in Sweden,² I soon came across dramatic tales that described animosities between the so-called Forest Finns and their Swedish neighbours—animosities which, according to these tales, sometimes amounted to actual battles between the ethnic groups. This is probably an inevitable outcome of two groups with different traditions potentially in competition for use of the same economic resources. The term ‘Forest’ or ‘Värmland’ Finns refers to Finnish slash and burn cultivators (swidden cultivators) who migrated from the region of Savo in Finland to the wide forest areas in Central Sweden about 1580–1640, expanding their settlements even across the state border of Sweden-Finland into south-eastern Norway, which at the time belonged to Denmark. Because of their special livelihood the Forest Finns are also known in Sweden as Slash-and-Burn Finns (*svedjefinnar*).

Due to their specific cultivation techniques, which could turn barren coniferous forest into arable land, the Finns found their niche in those areas which were not suitable for field cultivation as practised by the Swedish peasants. Since the Finns largely occupied forest areas owned by the crown, they did not directly compete for land with Swedish peasants, although the court minutes bear witness to occasional disputes caused by the Finns having expanded their cultivations into the forests owned by Swedish peasants or by the Finns' illegal hunting in their forests (Tarkiainen 1990: 172–195).

When the economic value of the forests suddenly increased—the growing mining industry required vast amounts of timber for making charcoal—slash and burn cultivation was banned in 1639 in the mining provinces. New forestry regulations dating from 1647 ordered state officials to survey the Finns that inhabited certain forest regions; those who were not willing to work for the mines but insisted on wasting valuable forest on food cultivation were to be banished from their farms. According to a decree in 1664, those who protected these Finns, and forest owners who allowed them to cultivate their forests, were to be punished. Even before these decrees, officials had attempted to seize control of the growing population in the forests by trying to trace various kinds of vagrants, runaway soldiers and so-called 'unattached Finns' (*lösfinnar*): itinerant Finns who worked as day-labourers and did not pay taxes to the crown. They were to be sent back to Finland if caught (Tarkiainen 1990: 189).

These regulations and the stricter system of control, as well as eviction of indispensable day-labourers, put an end to widespread swidden cultivation from the 1680s in Värmland (Bladh 1995: 152), the area which is the focus of the present study. However, it is important to note that the significance of this type of cultivation as a means of livelihood for the Forest Finns has been strongly exaggerated in popular history-writing. According to human geographer Gabriel Bladh, Finns practised field cultivation alongside it from the very outset. The contribution of livestock farming to the economy was already substantial during the seventeenth century, becoming the primary source of income in the eighteenth. In the nineteenth century, forestry work and timber trading became the principal source of income in the forests of Värmland (Bladh 1995: 153–156, 349).

The overemphasis on slash and burn cultivation as a means of subsistence can be explained by its functioning as an ethnic marker. This special livelihood distinguished the Forest Finns from the Swedish peasants, but also from the rest of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Finnish migrants, for instance from those who worked as miners or as various kinds of farm labourers in the same or adjacent regions. It also distinguished the Forest Finns from the Finns in the north of Sweden.

The oral-historical traditions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which highly exaggerate animosities between the Forest Finns and Swedes, echo the aforementioned historical turning points in various ways. In order to better understand why the persecution theme has received such acceptance in the common understanding of Forest Finnish history, in spite of the painstaking efforts by some scholars and source-critical local historians to correct the persistent misconceptions, I feel it is necessary to examine more closely the processes involved in popular history production.

In the belief that these 'tale traditions' did not survive only due to their entertainment value, but also because the narrators felt them to be particularly meaningful, this article examines the specific meanings that these traditions may have had for their tellers. Since the meanings that these traditions conveyed were shaped by cultural, social, economical,

and historical circumstances, it is important to study the development of themes of ethnic conflict and the supposed persecution of the Forest Finns in a more limited, historical context. The meanings that these tales had for representatives of a stigmatised Forest Finnish culture in nineteenth-century Värmland are quite different, for example, from those they have for their assimilated descendants in the twenty-first century, who cherish their Forest Finnish heritage with pride. According to ethnologist Richard Broberg's (1981) analysis, the persecution tales started to flourish in oral traditions in Värmland during the nineteenth century, gradually working their way into popular, local-history writing at the end of nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth century, and I will confine my study to this period of time. It is one which is no doubt of particular importance, since it also coincides with the accelerating assimilation of the Värmland Finns into the Swedish population. The process of their assimilation was more or less completed during the first decades of the twentieth century.

*"The history of the suffering of the Finnish immigrants in Sweden"*³

We can trace the historiography which emphasises the perspective of conflict in the study of ethnic relations in this region, back to nineteenth century Finnish scholar C.A. Gottlund, who was the first to draw attention to the history of Finns' suffering in Sweden (see Gottlund 1986). As a young student at Uppsala University, he visited the Finn Forests of Dalacarla in 1817 and the forests of Värmland (Sweden) and Solør (Norway) in 1821–1822. Oral family and settlement histories told by local Finns which Gottlund recorded abounded with stories about wrongs committed by Swedish and Norwegian authorities and about animosities between the Finns and the local population (see, for example, Forsberg and Persson 2003: 17, 25–27). Even although there is no doubt that Finns were subjected to wrongs and injustices by the local population—by Swedish and Norwegian authorities as well as mining and forestry companies in particular—it is obvious that Gottlund uncritically understood the tales people told him about the trials and tribulations of their forebears as historical facts, not as popular interpretations of these facts (Tarkiainen 1993: 139). Despite the fact that Gottlund's diaries were not actually published until more than a century after his journey, these, together with his voluminous notes and correspondence (held in the archives of the Finnish Literature Society), became extremely influential in subsequent Forest Finnish historiography.

The ethnographical survey conducted by Albrekt Segerstedt during the 1880s in the Forest Finnish areas of Sweden and south-eastern Norway also contributed to spreading the persecution theme, though this collection was published as late as 2006 (Wedin 2006). Segerstedt's findings clearly indicate that the oral traditions of animosities between the two ethnic groups were still thriving in the late nineteenth century. A Swedish vicar, E.G. Nylén, who served in the parishes of Finnskoga and Nyskoga in the north of Värmland from 1871 to 1885—both with substantial Finnish populations—and who therefore ought to have been quite familiar with the oral history of the region, has described the alleged centuries-long tension between Finns and Swedes as follows:

... We do not lack examples of bloody feuds between Swedes and Finns. Often they [the Finns] were violently driven from their homes. This inhumanity was supported by the decree issued by the guardian of King Carl XI, which ordered the Finns to be chased away with fire and the sword, and

if someone gave them protection or allowed them to build and live in their forest, he would be fined the first time 40 *dalers* in full, at relapse he would be punished by the gallows, which terrible edict was dated the 29th of August 1664.

This did not reduce the natural aversion and dislike the Finns felt towards the Swedes. A hostile relationship prevailed for a long time between these two ethnic groups generating suspicion and hate which still prevails to some extent. (Wedin 2006: 200; author's translation)

Segerstedt recorded that Olof Mattsson, a Forest Finn from Nyskoga parish—perhaps one of Nylen's parishioners—described more closely the fear and suspicion that the Finns were said to have felt towards the Swedes. He writes—obviously building on oral traditions—that when the Finns formerly visited the church they had to carry weapons in order to protect themselves. Later, he alleged, they went unarmed but travelled in large groups in order to ensure their personal safety (Wedin 2006: 393).

Writing at the turn of the twentieth century, Finnish historian Petrus Nordmann, who had closely studied Gottlund's manuscripts in the archives in Helsinki and apparently also Segerstedt's collection in Karlstad, was highly influenced by the conflict perspective of Gottlund and Segerstedt's Forest Finnish history informants. Nordmann's thesis (1994 [1888]) *Finnarne i Mellersta Sverige* ('The Finns in Central Sweden') helped to establish the idea of the persecution of the Forest Finns as a historical fact (Broberg 1981: 51). From Nordmann's thesis, which according to historian Kari Tarkiainen (1993: 161) is still a standard work in Forest Finnish history, this perspective was adopted by subsequent Finnish nationalistically-orientated academic history-writing.

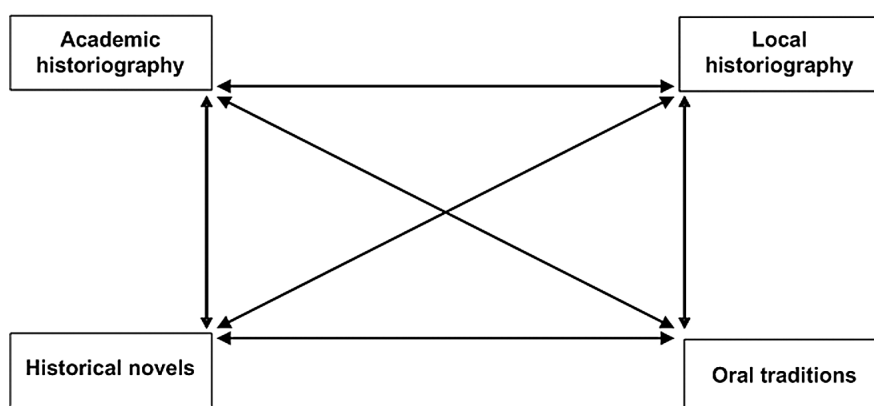
The rich oral traditions about the adventures of courageous Finns and their constant battles against their Swedish (or Norwegian) enemies were of course hot stuff for authors of historical novels. It was through the adventure books written during the 1890's by Gustaf Schröder that the battle theme reached a wider Swedish public. Schröder's historical novels became immensely influential in shaping the public view of Forest Finnish history.

In spite of concerted attempts by some Swedish scholars, especially the aforementioned ethnologist Richard Broberg, to prove that these two ethnic groups had actually lived relatively peacefully side by side for more than three centuries, the idea of Finns as having been subjected to constant persecutions has none the less persevered in popular presentations of Forest Finnish history throughout the twentieth century, and still does to a certain extent. TV-journalist Christian Catomeris's recent book *Det ohyggliga arvet. Sverige och främlingen genom tiderna* (The Dreadful Legacy. Sweden and the Alien over Time), for instance, cherishes the popular but quite one-sided view of the Finns' history in Sweden as being a long story of discrimination and misery. Even though Catomeris is clear about the fact that the feuds between Swedes and Forest Finns, as they are described in oral traditions and historical novels, are the product of a popular fantasy, he nevertheless implies that the Forest Finns were subject to discrimination by the Swedish authorities, not primarily because of their occupation as swidden cultivators, but as an ethnic group (Catomeris 2004: 77, 87). He dismisses Richard Broberg and other Swedish scholars who questioned prevailing ideas about the persecution of Finns and who sought to modulate common misconceptions of exclusively antagonistic relationships between Finns and Swedes. Time will show whether Catomeris's book will add fuel to the incipient

tendency among contemporary Finnish immigrants to Sweden to incorporate the persecution theme into their constructs of the Finns' history in Sweden. In some ethnopolitical discourses Forest Finns are viewed as antecedents of today's immigrants, giving historical legitimacy to the Finns' presence in Sweden. At the moment there are about 450,000 Finnish immigrants in Sweden, a large part of whom emigrated from Finland during 1960s and 1970s.

This brief summary of the history-writing that underlines the misery of Finns in Sweden shows how the perspective of conflict developed and gained strength in nineteenth-century popular and scholarly constructs of Forest Finnish history. It also demonstrates the dialectics between oral historical traditions and popular and academic history-writing. The victimisation model of interpretation blossomed in mid-nineteenth-century Forest Finnish oral traditions and came to inform the Finnish, nationalistically-orientated academic scholarship of the subsequent period. This model of interpretation also came to dominate the popular understanding of Forest Finnish history in the twentieth century up to date, while the competing model that emphasises the factual, peaceful cooperation and mutual exchange that took place between the two ethnic groups more or less since the Finns' settling down in Värmland (Bladh 2002a: 79), has not gained such acceptance.

The process of societal history production, however, is neither as static nor as straightforward and linear as this brief summary lets us believe. As Jorma Kalela (2004) has pointed out, the production is a spiral, open-ended and ongoing process in which historically interested locals, novelists, and lay and academic historians produce historical knowledge by building on various types of source materials and informing their constructs with perspectives from their specific fields of interest. Oral traditions—if we choose them as a starting point for our analysis—have provided materials for local historiography, historical novels and even academic history-writing, and received in their turn materials from historical literature—be it of local, fictional or scholarly nature. Academic historiography, in spite of its emphasis on historical documents as its primary sources, has nevertheless, as already shown, been influenced by oral traditions, local historiography and, perhaps, even by historical novels. This process can be illustrated with the following diagram:



Thus, the field of historiography is not static, and historical models of interpretation are under constant negotiation and reinterpretation between historically interested locals, between lay historians, between locals and lay historians, and finally, between locals, lay historians and academic historians. Following Kalela (2004, 16) we could characterise these history producers as “rivals in ‘the terrain of truth’ and in influencing the historical consciousness.” All the various categories of historians involved in this particular debate have made claims for the accuracy of their representations of history, but the principle battle has been between the adherents of the victimisation model and those who advocated the model of cooperation—represented principally by ethnologist Richard Broberg, but also by historian Kari Tarkiainen, and human geographer Gabriel Bladh.

Oral history and the historical truth

In order to prove his case, Broberg decided to unravel the truth value of certain historical, Värmland Finnish tale traditions. To this end he meticulously compared historical narratives with court minutes, parish records, and other historical documents. His conclusion was that these traditions appeared to be in some respects relatively reliable, especially the family histories, and that the tales sometimes even gave detailed information about a course of events in a distant past. However, since the tales had attracted elements from migratory legends and other cycles of tradition, he did not see them as reliable historical sources. He also stressed that occasionally oral traditions ‘got corrupted’, becoming then quite unreliable. This was particularly the case when traditions “under special circumstances happen to take a tendentious direction which makes them grow in extent and strength” (Broberg 1981: 61). By ‘tendentious’ tales Broberg meant specifically the persecution tales. His analysis of these stories shows that they had a historical core to which migratory tales and motifs had been attracted and become intertwined with “corrupted episodes” from tales about the border wars which had raged in the area throughout the seventeenth century, during which nearly all Finnish border villages had been burnt down. The periods of unrest gave rise to tale traditions which merged with Värmland Finnish immigration and settlement traditions in subsequent periods of peace, giving rise to the tales of Finn-Swede hostility (Broberg 1981: 54).

The aim of Richard Broberg, who himself was of Värmland Finnish descent and had grown up in the region, was to prove that Finns and Swedes had actually lived relatively peacefully, side by side over the centuries. He argued that if the relationship between Forest Finns and Swedes had been as hostile as the conflict-oriented history-writing suggested, he would find some evidence of it in legal documents of the time. In order to prove his case, Broberg investigated the Central Swedish court minutes from the seventeenth century and found among the numerous fights and homicides, only seven cases where both Swedes and Finns were involved. Three of the killings resulted from a fight between drunks and one was about hunting rights. The majority of the fights and homicides during the period were caused by disputes within the ethnic groups, not between the groups (Broberg 1981: 52).

Richard Broberg’s arguments sound reasonable, but nonetheless he failed to convince those local and academic historians who adhered to the perspective of conflict. This may be explained by the fact that Broberg was looking for a single, objective historical truth

which he believed was to be found in historical documents and by his failure to understand the deeper meaning of these tales for their tellers. The oral traditions were for him of secondary significance when compared to written historical sources. Even though he does not discard oral traditions completely, he asserts that they need to be thoroughly checked against historical data and fitted into an adequate historical context (Broberg 1981: 62). In addition, Broberg stressed that oral traditions are an important complement to historical documents—a point which is in agreement with the oral history research of today—but he diverges from the oral historian's view when reducing oral history to secondary illustrations of the primary sources.

As far as the reliability of the oral history sources is concerned we can agree with Alessandro Portelli, who argues that they are reliable, but not in the same sense as written sources. Oral sources may indeed be erroneous or vague when it comes to historical details or facts, but they are “psychologically ‘true’”, since “[w]hat informants believe is indeed a historical *fact* (that is, the fact that they believe it), as much as what really happened” (Portelli 1998: 67, 68). The specificity of oral history lies in its transmission of knowledge about the significance and meaning of the historical events to the narrators rather than in knowledge about actual historical facts; people's perceptions of reality are as important as objects of study as the actual historical events (Portelli 1998: 67).

Broberg, however, was not completely unaware of the psychological aspects of the narrative process when studying the rise and development of tale traditions. He was well aware of the fact that oral traditions did not attract motifs and themes in a random fashion but this process was steered by what he called “the law of interest dominance”. He argued that since the Finns, who did not master Swedish properly and were not familiar with Swedish laws and regulation, or the ways the society functioned, easily misunderstood the reactions of their neighbours or the actions taken by authorities. Under such circumstances an individual's factual controversies with his/her neighbours or the authorities gradually acquired the fixed form of a legend in the process of narration. According to Broberg, under such conditions the contents of a legend became easily “tendentious”, coming to deal with abuse and persecution more generally. Gradually these tales attracted various kinds of migratory legends and “corrupted episodes” from the tales about border wars, assuming finally the proportions of actual battles between the ethnic groups (Broberg 1981: 54).

Thus, Broberg saw factual experiences of frustration and a feeling of being wronged as the starting point of the persecution tales and even as a precondition of their continued life in oral traditions, but being primarily interested in their objective truth value, he failed to see the deeper meaning these tales may have had for their tellers. In the following I will recapitulate and discuss Broberg's analysis of the development of the Murder Isle (*Mordö*) tale in order to study more closely the process whereby a particular historical incident has been subjected to continuous interpretation and reinterpretation in the process of narration and the possible meanings that these tales had for their narrators. The legend of Murder Isle shows with exceptional clarity how a known historical incident has, over the years, been elaborated upon in orally transmitted historical legends. The orally transmitted tale of the original, historical incident gradually attracted themes from other historical legends and oral traditions, and found its way into historical novels, scholarly works and local historical presentations in the Solør (Norway)—Värmland (Sweden) area during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The fact that the tale of Murder Isle has

been recorded in different written sources during the nineteenth century and onward, makes it possible for us to follow the development of the narrative process.

The Murder Isle incident in written and oral sources

Richard Broberg has traced a certain cycle of persecution themes back to a historical incident that took place between some Swedish peasants and Finnish hunters in the north of Värmland in 1648, and is described in court minutes from 1649 and 1651. He seems to treat the minutes as a truthful description of the original incident and uses the text as a point of reference when studying the authenticity and development of subsequent oral and written traditions. Broberg, however, fails to see that not even the court minutes can provide us with an objective, accurate account of the actual events and their motives. Instead, we can read in the minutes several narrative versions of the homicide in northern Värmland in the mid-seventeenth century: first that of the victim's father, who had not been present at the incident, secondly that of the surviving victim and, thirdly the version of the accused Swedes. In the following I will recapitulate the main features of the incident as they are presented in the extract of the minutes, which is published as an appendix in Nordmann's (1994 [1888]) thesis.

According to the minutes, three Finns from the hamlet of Mangen, in northern Fryksdalen had been tracking an elk in Älvdalen, and finally brought it down in the parish of Dalby. The men camped for a night by a lake, which Broberg has identified as Lake Dypen. Eight Swedish peasants, who claimed to have been frequently pestered by thieving Finns, had followed the hunters' tracks and finally located the men by their camp fire. The Finns offered the peasants some food and lay down by the fire, where two of the peasants joined them. The rest of the Swedes slept further away by the forest line. When the Finns had fallen asleep, a Swede attacked them with an axe killing one of the men, while the rest of the Finns were badly injured in the ensuing tumult. The Swedes also shot the Finns' hunting dog and confiscated their weapons and the elk's hide. The peasants were fined 388 *dalers*, which, according to Broberg, was a considerable sum of money, whereas one of the Finns was fined twelve *dalers* for poaching (Nordmann 1994 [1888]: XV–XVIII; Broberg 1981: 56).

It is interesting to note that Broberg has omitted the peasants' pleading in his brief summary of the minutes, especially so, since their pleading would verify the fact that Finns occasionally were subjected to persecutions by local peasants. The Dalby Swedes defended themselves by claiming that they believed that the Finns they had suspected of poaching were outlawed and, referring to certain regulations, argued that they therefore were entitled to kill them. The court even postponed the case in order to check whether such regulations had been issued by regional authorities (Nordmann 1994: XV–XVIII). Although this incident clearly shows that the persecution tales were not just products of pure fantasy, that Finns occasionally were hounded by local Swedes on quite loose grounds and even punished unlawfully, it is important to note that we cannot use this kind of sporadic data as a proof of systematic persecutions of Finns (Broberg 1981: 51, 61).

The next record of this incident was noted down about 170 years later in 1821. C.A. Gottlund recorded a version of this tale from a Finn, Carl Lehmoinen at Bograngen, north of Värmland. According to Broberg (1981: 56), the historical core is clearly identi-

fiable in Lehmoinen's tale, even although many details have changed. The details incriminating the Finns, that is, their illegal hunt, were played down, whereas the treacherous nature of the Swedes was underscored by a further dramatisation of the killing episode. In the version noted down by Gottlund, the Finns now numbered four, and three of them were brutally killed. The dog that, according to the court minutes, was shot by the Swedish perpetrators because it sought to bite them was burned alive in this version of the tale (Gottlund 1986: 366–368).

The incident was now intimately linked to the physical surroundings of Lake Dypen. The legend had it that the Finns, in memory of the murders, named Dypån Creek *Lahtipuro* (Swe. *Slaktbäcken*, or 'Slaughter Creek') and Lake Dypen was hereafter called *Lahtijärvi* (Swe. *Slaktsjön*, or 'Slaughter Lake') (Gottlund 1986: 366–368). Broberg, however, has pointed out that the naming of the creek and the lake (sometimes even a valley) after this incident is not historically true, and suggests that the names Slaughter Creek and Slaughter Lake are just secondary, folk etymological interpretations of the Finnish names *Lahtipuro* and *Lahtijärvi*. The noun *lahti* meant in Värmland Finnish both 'bay', which is its original meaning, and 'slaughter' that was a borrowing from the Swedish *slakt* (Broberg 1981: 54).

The version of the Murder Isle tale that was recorded by Gottlund was, despite some changes, still quite true to the original, historical incident, but in the next literary recording the tale has undergone a radical transformation. Maximilian Axelson, who visited Slaughter Valley in 1850 guided by two local Finnish boys, recorded several legends about bloody battles between the Finns and Swedes in this area. He described the history of the valley as follows:

During the time when the Finns, partly because of certain royal edicts, partly because of the national hatred between them and the Swedes, often endured all kinds of persecutions, this very Slaughter Valley was a scene of many bloody incidents. (Axelson 1978 [1852]: 72–75; author's translation)

Even though Axelson asserted that the legends about these battles were so contradictory that it was quite impossible to establish the actual truth, Broberg did not relinquish his search and traced both of the versions back to certain historical incidents. According to him the first episode of the legend Axelson published alludes to a murder of a Finnish bear hunter by a Norwegian forester in 1649, near an isle in Klarälven, which actually was called Murder Isle. The second episode, Broberg argues, was reminiscent of the tales of Norwegian raids to Swedish villages by the border (Broberg 1981: 56–57).

We also find the tale of Murder Isle in Segerstedt's collection from 1880's, which means that it was still part of the living oral tradition, though the context and nature of the incident had now dramatically changed. Olof Mattsson from Nyskoga (mentioned above) had sent the following version of the tale to Segerstedt:

Dalby people once set out to cleanse the forest of Finns. In the evening they came to Bogran Mountain. They climbed up to the top of it in order to see if they saw smoke anywhere. When they saw smoke rising at Ungdypen, they went there and shot six Finns to death and buried them in a valley that now is called Laktnatko, Slagtardalen [Slaughter Valley] and the lake besides is still called Lak-tjärvi or Dråpsjön [Slaughter Lake].

From there the Swedes set off to Røjden, where they slew everyone at home but one person, who in mere underwear ran to Mangen to report what had happened. The Finns gathered their men and followed the person who had fled, and shot down nearly all the Dalby people. Ever since the Swedes have not dared to slay Finns overtly, but have instead murdered them in secret, whenever they had a chance, or have made false accusations against them. (Wedin 2006: 389; author's translation)

The murder that originally was caused by a quarrel over hunting rights has now turned into plain joy killing, if not ethnic cleansing. With the exception of Røjden, the place names, and the following motifs—the Dalby men, the murder incident and the Finns' camp fire—go back to the original, historical incident. However, the original homicide is only mentioned in passing, whereas the emphasis has been shifted to the assault at Røjden by the Norwegian border, which seems to be a later interpolation. Broberg (1981: 57–58) traces this attack back to tales about the Norwegians' ravaging the hamlet of Røjden in 1679.

"The Finn wars" in historical novels

Historical novels have played an important role in shaping the popular understanding of local history and have been an important medium for making persecution and war themes known to a larger audience, even although in a highly embellished and imaginative form. The adventure books written by Gustaf Schröder (1824–1912) were highly influential in this respect. Some of his concrete and detailed descriptions of Forest Finnish way of life indicate that Schröder was building on his own observations, but it is obvious that he also had studied Nordmann's thesis and Segerstedt's collection from 1899 (Tarkiainen 1993: 153). The first of his Finn Forest books, *Örjan Kajland och hans pojkar* (1893) ('Örjan Kajland and his sons'), revolves around the excitement of hunting, but especially around hostilities between stationary Swedes and Finns roaming in forests. As far as the historical and ethnographical details are concerned, they are quite accurate but the plot and the events are modelled on Fennimore Cooper's Wild West novels—Finns playing the part of the wild, but courageous Indians (Tarkiainen 1993: 153).

Through Schröder's novelistic production the war theme found its way into the minds of the general public and the work of many local historians. The compelling nature of his fiction is evidenced in the fact that the local historian, Olaf Lindtorp, had taken one of Schröder's fictive Finns for a real historical person (Olovsson 1956: 19).

"The Finn wars" in local popular history-writing

Books on local and regional history are an extremely popular genre in Sweden. As far as Forest Finnish history and culture is concerned, new titles are constantly being published by historically interested locals or by various local cultural organisations or societies. This local historical literature, which builds on oral traditions, academic and popular history-writing, as well as on historical novels, has been exceedingly influential in shaping people's understanding of local history. Many of these popular history books have cherished the persecution theme, especially the trilogy *Fra Finnskogene i Solør og Vermland* I, II, III ('From the Finn Forests in Solør and Värmland') by the aforementioned local historian Olaf Lindtorp.

Olaf Lindtorp (1877–1953) was born at the Lindtorpet farm on the south shore of Lake Rögden in Grue Finn Forest, south-eastern Norway. His parents were of Finnish descent and spoke Finnish together but Norwegian with their children. Therefore Lindtorp had only an elementary knowledge of written and spoken Finnish, but he “felt like a Finn”. He learned about Finnish family and settlement traditions, as well as about the trials and tribulations of the Finns in the Scandinavian forests from his father, who had an interest in history and worked for a while as a schoolteacher. Lindtorp also collected traditions from local men on both sides of the border. Besides the oral sources, Lindtorp has used historical documents from the Norwegian state archives, as well as transcripts of Gottlund’s diary. Petrus Nordmann’s thesis from 1888 is mentioned among his literary sources (Solheim 1943 [1940]: 4–5).

Norwegian folklorist Svale Solheim, who himself had studied historical legends and edited Lindtorp’s first book together with the author, mentions in the preface that even though the collection, which is largely based on oral traditions, does not have any scholarly pretensions, it nevertheless aims at giving as reliable picture of the life of the Finns in Finn Forests as possible (Solheim 1943 [1940]: 6). In spite of Solheim’s proviso, the fact that the first edition of the book was published by the Finnish Society of Antiquities (in 1940) must have created an impression of some kind of scientific standard and value. Lindtorp himself was no doubt convinced that he was writing true history. Although his way of presentation suggests to the reader that we are dealing with historical facts, in reality it is questionable whether Lindtorp’s books can even be seen as reliable representations of local oral history, since he has a tendency to give free rein to his imagination. As far as the tale of Murder Isle is concerned, Lindtorp may have been familiar with the oral traditions of this tale and had probably also read about the case in Gottlund’s notes and in Nordmann’s thesis, and finally processed them together in his literary presentation embellishing his story with dramatic elements borrowed from Schröder’s books.

In Lindtorp’s narrative version the incident of Murder Isle has developed into a bloody battle between Finns and the Dalby Swedes, who “had decided to wipe out all the Finns”. About *twenty* Finns were killed and submerged in Lake Dypen wherefore the lake, according to Lindtorp, is still called *Lahtijärvi* (‘Slaughter Lake’) and the creek where the killing had taken place was called *Lahtipuro* (‘Slaughter Creek’). In the second episode of Lindtorp’s tale we can discern strong influence from the Wild West. The surviving Finns gathered their compatriots with help of smoke signals and led by a skilful commander they lay in ambush. When one of the Swedes hit an old Finnish woman on the skull with an axe, because she refused to reveal the men’s whereabouts, the Finns charged and slew the Swedes to the very last man (Lindtorp 1943: 29–30).

Broberg and some source-critically minded local historians accused Lindtorp of exaggeration and ignorance of historical facts, as well as of his romanticising the Finns and their ways. Lindtorp countered their criticism by claiming that the authors, who accused him of exaggeration, were themselves guilty of ignorance and one-sidedness. He asserted that there indeed had been “bloody combats between Finns and Swedes”, but his critics had limited their studies to literature where these issues had been overlooked (Lindtorp 1948: 19). In spite of Lindtorp’s arguments, Olov Olovsson, a meticulous local lay-historian and one of the leading activists in the emerging Värmland Finnish revitalisation movement in the 1920s, established in his book review that Lindtorp’s books did not have any scholarly value whatsoever (Olovsson 1956: 18).

Meanings of the persecution tales

As the above description of the development of the murder theme has shown, Broberg and Olovsson are quite right: the popular presentations of Forest Finnish history do not meet the scientific demands of accuracy. But following the view put forward by oral history research, the significance of popular history interpretations does not lie in their being historically accurate, but in people's conviction of their historical accuracy. We can agree with Outi Lehtipuro, who has pointed out that historical tales often tell more about the narrator's time than about history. Therefore oral traditions can be seen as popular comments upon contemporary history (Lehtipuro 1982: 50). If we view the persecution tales as contemporary history in the aforementioned sense, what would the tales tell us about the contemporary history of the narrators?

Broberg has argued that the oral traditions of the persecution of the Finns did not come into being before the nineteenth century, because there was no breeding ground for the creation or dissemination of such tales. It was first the social and economic misery of the nineteenth century which hit the Finnish population particularly hard, that made these traditions blossom (Broberg 1981: 60). According to Broberg, the miserable economic and social conditions, paired with the decline of Värmland's Finnish culture, generated among the Finns indolence, lack of initiative, and feelings of discontent and inferiority towards the surrounding Swedish population. Broberg admits that the Finns had "a great story" to tell about their hard times, but being unwritten it lived "an insecure life" and was easily pushed in the wrong direction by harsh conditions, social opposition, fermenting nationalistic and political ideas, and by the Finns' desire for vindication. According to Broberg, these were the conditions that gave rise to the highly tendentious oral traditions about the maltreatment and discrimination of the Finns by disobliging Swedish authorities and ordinary people (Broberg 1981: 61).

Broberg is partly correct in his analysis, but he seems to have missed one highly important aspect of the matter. He saw the Finns primarily as victims of dire economic and social circumstances and stressed that their situation was further exacerbated by the fact that the crisis coincided with the decline of their culture. According to Broberg's analysis, the hard economic conditions, which were beyond the control of the Swedish authorities, generated among the deprived Finns unreasonably negative attitudes towards the authorities and the local Swedes. It is interesting, however, that Broberg, being both an ethnologist and of Forest Finnish descent, consistently avoided discussing the phenomenon of what he called "the decline of the Finnish culture", that is, the imminent cultural assimilation of the Finns. He actually blamed adherents of the persecution theories for having confused the notions of persecution and assimilation and points out that there prevailed at an early stage a good understanding between Finns and Swedes (Broberg 1981: 51). If I interpret Broberg correctly, he implies that assimilation was an inevitable outcome of the regular, peaceful interaction between these two ethnic groups. Broberg's view of the assimilation process is nevertheless far too simple, which is unfortunate, since I believe that the accelerating Swedification of the Finns during the latter half of the nineteenth century actually offers us a key to understanding the meaning of the persecution tales to their narrators during that period and the first half of the twentieth century. Therefore I will briefly recapitulate the main features of the assimilation process of Värmland Finns (see also Keinänen and Bjerén 2006).

The Finnish language and culture were rapidly declining in northern Värmland during the nineteenth century. C.A. Gottlund reckoned during the 1820s that there were about 10,000 Finnish speakers in the area, while their numbers were estimated at about 500 at the end of the century. A Swedish Fenno-Ugrist, K.B. Wiklund, who visited the area in 1894, considered the Finns to be nearly “an extinct nation”, who lacked “a sense of nationality” and looked upon their dying language with indifference or resignation. It seems that the missing sense of nationality was coupled to the stigma associated with the language and culture. In the dialect of Fryksdalen the verb *att finska*, in verbatim ‘to speak Finnish’, meant ‘to talk rubbish’ (Noreen 1878 in Bladh 2002b: 182). Wiklund continues:

Nobody acknowledged with pride and self-confidence their Finnish nationality—rather they seemed to perceive their Finnish stock as a kind of mark of low class, which nobody was anxious to preserve. The youth in particular were all but interested in their fathers’ language, and the indifference they showed to it was sometimes slightly mixed with contempt. (Wiklund 1902: 16–17; author’s translation)

Thus, even though we can agree with Richard Broberg that the ancestors of the Värmland Finns were not persecuted in the manner the oral traditions described, we can see that these narratives were psychologically true for their narrators. They were convinced of their truthfulness because the message of the tales corresponded to their own experiences of discrimination. The Forest Finns’ sense of being wronged was not a product of a suspicious mind, as Broberg insinuates, but had a factual basis, for instance in the actions of those local authorities who actively sought to stigmatise the Finnish language and actively discouraged the use of it. Segerstedt, who was an assistant master at the teachers training college, wrote that formerly the teachers and priests would reproach a child or a youngster who spoke Finnish (Wedin 2006: 371). This quite naturally resulted in the children’s refusal to talk Finnish publicly or their being ashamed of knowing their mother tongue at all. The vicar O. Andreasson, for instance, reported in 1886 to Segerstedt that the children in Östmark parish were quite ashamed to admit that they knew Finnish. Only the elders spoke Finnish together (Wedin 2006: 474).

When viewed against this background, the oral traditions which described the persecution of Finns offered a metaphorical way for an underprivileged group to talk about the discrimination to which they were subjected. The tales provided people, who literally were becoming muted, with a language to express the injustices that they felt had been committed against them. The Finns were not literally haunted with axes and guns as the tales make us believe, but the narrators felt quite correctly that their survival as an ethnic group was in danger. Following Ulla-Maija Peltonen (1996), who has studied the narratives of the Civil War in Finland, I will argue that the Finns, when narrating the battles in Finn Forests, strengthened their identity and self-esteem by defining through their tales who were the moral ‘us’ and who the immoral ‘them’. Moreover, through oral traditions people voiced the experience that had been contested and forgotten by the official, dominating culture (Peltonen 1996: 280, 283). Even Broberg, who was of Finnish descent, seems to have belonged to those who had forgotten.

NOTES

¹ The quotation from Albrekt Segerstedt in its entirety: “Numerous tales tell us about the battles fought between Swedes and Finns in the Finn Forests of Värmland and many a time blood has flowed in northern Finskoga” (Wedin 2006: 211).

² The project was part of a larger project *Ethnicity and gender* which in turn was part of a wider, bilateral research programme, called in Finnish *Kahden puolen Pohjanlahtea* and in Swedish *Svenskt i Finland—Finskt i Sverige* (“The Swedes in Finland—The Finns in Sweden”).

³ Lampén 1925: 206.

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ORAL HISTORY AS AN ARTICULATED MEANING IN SOVIET KARELIA'S LITERATURE

• TUULIKKI KURKI •

ABSTRACT

The paper studies prose literature which was published in the Finnish language in Soviet Karelia from the 1950s to the 1980s and the discussions of its documentary value. The term oral history is seen here as a cultural and political value, which is either given to, or denied from, a text in literary critiques. In Soviet Karelia, the role of fiction in representing locally significant history reflected negotiations in power dynamics, and must be understood in historical and ideological contexts. Immediately after the Second World War, or the Great Patriotic War 1939–1945 as it was also called in the Soviet Union, the locally significant articulations of history were repressed, as the construction of a unified Soviet culture, society and history were of primary interest. From the late 1960s onwards, and especially since the 1980s, the literature's meaning as a representation of locally significant history has gradually become more public and finally the dominating one during the post-Soviet period. At the same time the written artistic works are read as sources and preservers of (once) oral history.

Keywords: Finnish prose, Soviet Karelia, local history, oral history, articulation theory

Introduction

Ethnologists and folklorists have defined oral history as information which is not based on literary sources but on the memory of an informant. It has been considered reliable when the informant narrates her own experiences. Oral history thus tells about the facts which people believe, or which they had to believe, in a certain historical situation (Fingerroos and Peltonen 2006: 8–9). In Finnish oral history studies sources also include written texts, as the oral is often studied in a written or transcribed form (Fingerroos and Peltonen 2006: 9). In this article the term oral history is considered also as a cultural and political value, which is either given to, or denied from, a text in public literary discussions and critiques; thus, here I study both prose literature which was published in the Finnish language in Soviet Karelia after the Second World War¹ and also discussions of its documentary and local value.

Soviet Karelia refers here to the administrative area in the former north-western Soviet Union, which has had several names and statuses during its history. Due to its position in the border region between Russia/Soviet Union and Finland, it has been an area of interplay at both institutional and grassroots levels, and it has also been an area of political and symbolic conflicts throughout its history. After Finland gained independence from

Russia in 1917, and the Finnish Civil War between ‘whites’ and ‘reds’ in 1918, approximately 5,000 Finns migrated to Russian Karelia due to their political leaning. Some immigrants moved first to the United States and Canada, and later in the 1920s and 1930s relocated to Soviet Karelia.² In the early 1920s political leadership of Russian Karelia was in the hands of immigrant Finns. The Workers’ Commune of Karelia was founded in 1920 and contained the Russian provinces of Viena and Aunus. In 1923, after the Civil War in Karelia (1921–1922) and the establishment of the Soviet Regime, the Workers’ Commune of Karelia was transformed into the Autonomous Socialistic Soviet Republic of Karelia. During the 1920s and early 1930s, local Finnish leadership worked in accordance with the national politics of the Soviet Union, but in the course of Soviet repressions in the late 1930s which targeted minority nationalities Finnish leadership was superseded. After the Winter War (1939–1940) between Finland and its eastern neighbour, a significant part of Finnish Karelia (among other areas) was annexed to the Soviet Union and a Karelian-Finnish Socialistic Republic was founded in 1940; the Continuation war, which ended in 1944, resulted in the annexation of some parts of Soviet Karelia to the Leningrad and Murmansk areas, and the relocation of, among others, war refugees and the Finnish-speaking Ingrian population to Karelia. In 1956 the Autonomous Socialistic Republic of Karelia was founded which lasted until 1991, when it was transformed to the Republic of Karelia as we know it today.³

The majority of the population in Soviet Karelia has long been Russian. The largest ethnic minority are people of Karelian descent, who comprise approximately ten per cent of the population today while people with Finnish roots comprise approximately two per cent (Oksa and Varis 1994: 59–60). Despite its minority position, the Finnish language was officially supported by the state during the Soviet era, except for a short period in the late 1930s. Finnish was used alongside Russian in the education of the Karelian population, as the Karelian language (especially its northern dialect) resembles Finnish but never developed into a written language. Although the Finnish language lost its official position in Karelia in 1956, Finnish literary activities continued, and continued to serve the general cultural, ideological and pedagogical tasks of Soviet literature.

The prose published from the 1950s to the 1980s in Soviet Karelia was partly based on oral information, and one of its typical themes was quotidian life in the area: in the countryside and in the villages, in the farms and working *kolkhozi* (collective farms). At the same time, such locally-produced literature was tightly connected to the criteria, conventions and tasks of Soviet literature in general (Ermolaev 1997: 99; Clark 2000: 194).⁴ Further, despite its ostensibly fictional ambitions, a significant part of its literary critique has been based on its documentary value, either denying or confirming it. The questions of truthfulness and documentary value (ideological overtones included) were essential in the artistic method of socialist realism, which was established in Soviet literature and art in the early 1930s and remained the dominant method until the end of Soviet times. According to the tenets of socialist realism, even though novels were nominally fictional and artistic creations, they were expected to be truthful and documentary in their depictions of events, people and characteristics of a certain historical epoch (Hingley 1979: 198–199; Smirnov 1990). The writers were also expected to ground their works on firm documentary material. They did fieldwork, interviewed people, observed life in villages and work places; they applied their own memories and life-experiences, sources of oral tradition and also various kinds of archived materials and literary sources (Jaakkola 1960–

1961; Letter from Antti Timonen to Irma and Osmo Helin 20.1.1967; Perttu 2004 [1978]). In this paper I ask: How has the documentary and historical value of the novels of the era been discussed in literary public critique in Soviet Karelia from the late 1950s to the 1980s? How have the novels' meanings as representations of the local, unofficial (in relation to 'official' Soviet history), and at least partly orally transmitted history, emerged in literary discussions in the public sphere?

Discussion here focuses particularly on Nikolai Jaakkola's four-piece novel *Pirttijärven rantamalla* (1949–1968; Jaakkola 1977) ('On the Shores of Lake Pirttijärvi'), and Pekka Perttu's *Väinämöisen venehen jälki* (1978; Perttu 2004 [1978]) ('A Trace of Väinämöinen's Boat'). The main source of literary critique and discussion is the journal *Punalippu* ('Red Flag'), which was the most significant literary journal published in the Finnish language in Soviet Karelia. It was also an organ of the Soviet Writers' Union in Soviet Karelia from 1940 to 1990. Its successor is the journal *Carelia*, founded in 1990.

Finnish-speaking writers in Soviet Karelia: local prose?

Locating the heart of Finnish literature activities in Soviet Karelia is a complicated task. Finnish-language literature has represented an ethnic and linguistic minority in the area from the 1920s to the present. The first generation of writers comprised mostly Finnish-speaking immigrants from Finland, Ingemarland and North America, thus their cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds were heterogeneous.⁵ After the repressions which targeted minority nationalities in the 1930s, and the Second World War, there were only a few of this 'first generation' left to continue the work and writers of North Karelian origin soon became the leading figures in prose literature. The most noted names of the second generation were Nikolai Jaakkola (1905–1967), Antti Timonen (1915–1990), Pekka Perttu (1917–1992) and Jaakko Rugojev (1918–1993). The period from the mid 1950s to the early 1980s is regarded as the most productive in the history of Finnish literary activities in Karelia; the number of published works was at its height, as well as the number of writers belonging to the Soviet Writers' Union.

Nearly all of the leading second-generation prose writers originated from a relatively small area in North Karelia (Viena), and the network of active writers, critics and editors in Petrozavodsk—the absolute centre of the literary activities in Karelia—was closely knit. However, even during the most productive period of Finnish literary activities, the number of native Finnish-speaking writers in the Soviet Karelia's Writers' Union was rather low (Mazajev 1998: 96–87). Due to the scarcity of the Finnish-speaking professional literary critics, scholars and translators, many writers worked themselves as critics in the editorial boards of the literary journals and newspapers, as well as in the supervising commissions of literature under the two main censorship organizations: Glavlit and the Soviet Writers' Union (Totuus 12.4.1950: 3; Aalto 1987). One is even tempted to speak of a writing (and reading) sub-community even though the literature was part of the Soviet literature institution (see Kurki 2007). Due to their background, the second generation of writers formed a more linguistically and culturally unified group than their predecessors.⁶ The writers had a nearly natural command of Finnish language as the spoken dialect of North Karelia is closer to Finnish than any other dialect in Karelia, while the rich local oral tradition in North Karelia provided themes and styles for the writers.

Their societal position as writers also changed: all the noted writers belonged to the Soviet Writers' Union and became professionals. Further, they represented the first generation of local intelligentsia as most of them studied in the pedagogical institute in Petrozavodsk and some of them (such as Antti Timonen and Pekka Perttu) in the Gorki institute of literature in Moscow.

The writers aimed at describing significant local history and life within the larger frame of general Soviet literature. Usually they based their novels on their childhood home villages, home districts and familiar working places. The novels can be seen as a form of 'concentric writing', which potentially constructs local history, local feel and cultural identity—even though these meanings were not always articulated in the public sphere. The term concentric writing refers to realistic and partly documentary literature which describes an author's local environment, dwelling and native region, with its themes gradually widening outwards from home to neighbourhood, village, city, district and country (Knuuttila 2005: 52).

Even though the group of active writers seems small, fairly homogeneous and close, the sensing of a literary community was also actively constructed in writing, in the public reception of the texts and in literary histories (see Huff 2005). For example, the writers' connections with North Karelian oral folklore and poetry, and their shared North Karelian roots, were usually brought up as a significant and unifying factor and as a rich source of creativity (Timonen 1968; Vikström 1972; Karhu 1975). The literature's connection with folk culture was also ideologically motivated. The concept of Soviet art and literature was by definition both vernacular and party-oriented: elements of the folk cultures of each Soviet nationality should enrich the totality of multinational Soviet art and literature (*Elämän vaatimusten tasolle* 1954: 6–7).

Denying and accepting local history

Between 1950 and 1980, a small group of active persons in the Finnish literary field in Karelia comprised the writing and reading community, which produced textual representations of the past, present and possible future in novels and in public discussion of them. The literary activities (writing, public reception) can be seen as a device which connects the local, oral culture with the ideological discourse maintained by Soviet literature and ideology—or later with ideologies of the post-Soviet situation. Writing and reading activities thus attach cultural, political and ideological meanings to the described locations and historical events. Whether the descriptions were interpreted as representations of general Soviet history or of local history was a question for debate, as was the question of whether they were 'truthful' or not.

In literary studies, a text's fictionality and factuality are generally defined either as a semantic value (the text's purpose and its content's reliability in relation to the world outside of it) or as a pragmatic value which is given to a text through its public reception (Mikkonen 2006: 251–252). Assessment of the semantic value of Soviet prose, following the method of socialist realism, included the presupposition of its content's truthfulness and accuracy. A text's pragmatic value—which is of more interest here—comes close to the idea of 'articulation theory', which sees a text's documentary or fictional value as emerging through its reception and critique. Articulation theory (in cultural studies) includes the

idea of connecting phenomena together in a certain contextual situation, through which connection and context the phenomena receive their significance (Slack 1996: 112–127). Articulation always involves questions of power relations and competition between different articulations. In Soviet Karelia's literature the tension between different articulations was mainly between the novels' meaning as a representation of Soviet history vis-a-vis local Karelian history. The novels' value as expressions of Soviet history was the dominant articulation, and their value as representations of local history was awarded through literary discussion. Ideological circumstance determined which texts were interpreted as local history and when these articulations were possible.⁷

Nikolai Jaakkola's novel *On the Shores of Lake Pirttijärvi* depicts the history of the village of Pirttijärvi and its inhabitants. The story starts at the beginning of the First World War, goes through the Karelian Civil War (1921–1922) and ends in the establishment of the Soviet regime. Critics have assumed that the model for Pirttijärvi is Jaakkola's own home village of Kivijärvi, and many have seen elements of Jaakkola's own life in the novel's main character (Summanen 1973: 114; Staršova 2005: 81–93). Jaakkola conducted fieldwork in his native region in the 1940s and the 1960s in order to gather material for the book. He also used additional materials from archives and literature (Jaakkola 1960–1961; Staršova 2005: 86–87). The novel includes detailed descriptions of everyday village life in the countryside: customs, peasant houses, furniture, tools; there are dialogues written in vernacular dialects, examples of oral stories, legends and beliefs, chapters from folk songs and poems. Literary critiques from the late 1950s to the 1960s interpreted the story of Pirttijärvi and its elements of local culture and traditions in the context of Soviet modernization and common Soviet history. One of its most noted features was that through its diverse and ethnographically precise material it reflected the significant events of Soviet history at a local level and it complemented the epic of revolutionary events that Soviet literature in general had already depicted (*Sosialistisen realismin tietä* 1959: 115–121). It was also noted that without the connections made between local village life and the significant events in Soviet history, the novel would have remained too narrow in scope (Perttu 1959: 119–120). Thus the elements of local oral history and everyday life were articulated as representations of Soviet history.

While creating and commenting on the idea of a distinctly Karelian cultural and historical experience, the text also deconstructed the epic tale of official Soviet history. However, at times these local meanings were not expressed in public discussions because the descriptions that allowed this potential interpretation were regarded as unsuitable elements within Soviet literature. They were regarded as too narrow in scope, nationally or regionally too restricted, aesthetically 'low' or reality-distorting; such themes were also dangerously nostalgic about previous social forms like patriarchy and 'irrational' belief systems. For example, in the first volume of the novels Jaakkola had described an old folk-religious ritual, in which the villagers offered a goat to the wood spirit. In a footnote he added that he himself had witnessed such offerings as a child (Jaakkola 1949: 92). In the context of Soviet modernization the local traditional features, such as elements of folk-religion, poems and tales, were articulated as representations of irrational backwardness. As Eino Karhu mentioned in his critique of Jaakkola's novel:

This novel exemplifies the level of Karelian societal and national self esteem at the beginning of the October Revolution: the life-style, worldview, societal experience especially in North Karelia where

partially patriarchal conditions prevailed. (...) In this God-forsaken land the people lived almost in isolation from the rest of the world. (...) The mental life of the people is mostly reflected in epic folk poetry, and knowledge concerning historical events is gathered from the oral stories which are carried from one generation to the next. (Karhu 1965: 113–114; author's translation)

The significance of *On the Shores of Lake Pirttijärvi* as a document of local history and experience was gradually articulated in public discussions in the late 1960s and 1970s. At the same time there were public comments that the history of Karelia portrayed by previous historical studies was one-sided and dogmatic (Summanen 1973: 118–119). In the literary journal *Red Flag*, Jaakkola's novel was noted as an alternative presentation of Karelia's history (Karhu 1965; Summanen 1973; Rugojev 1975). Jaakkola also mentioned that one of his motives for writing the novel was that the history of the Karelian people had been previously pictured in a negative and distorting light (Perttu 1965: 111). An important detail in the novel was its reference to a 'Karelian legion' which fought in the Civil War (1921–1922). According to official history, the Karelian legion had been 'red', but in Jaakkola's novel it was neither red nor white, but a bit of both (Karhu 1965: 113–114; Jaakkola 1977: 387). Jaakkola thus described the political situation in Karelia as more fractured and contradictory than that proposed by official histories. Indeed, Finnish scholar Matti Kuusi has described Jaakkola's interpretation as "brave", especially when the historical and political context of the novel's publication is considered (Kuusi 1970). In 1973 the novel's significance as a representation of local history was noted in *Red Flag*:

During those years, when the author sketched out and wrote his novel, the events of the period 1918–1922 in North Karelia were still vaguely, one-sidedly and superficially known in historical studies. A problematic issue was also the dogmatic ideas which prevailed among researchers. Nikolai Jaakkola was a trail blazer in Soviet literature as he described these events. (...) As a result of these pages many readers will get an idea of the Civil War in Karelia. (Summanen 1973: 118; author's translation.)

After Jaakkola's groundbreaking novel, other historical epic novels were produced in Soviet Karelia's Finnish literature: novels such as Antti Timonen's *Me karjalaiset* ('We are Karelians') (1971) and Ortjo Stepanov's *Kotikunnan tarina* ('Tale of a Native District') (1969). They include ethnographically detailed descriptions, elements of oral tradition, dialogues in dialects and writers' biographical materials, merging them with larger and general historical epochs. They were received as representations of Karelian history at the time, but interpretations of them as representing general Soviet history were also common among critics. Stepanov's work described the life in a Karelian village during the 1920s. The dialogues in the novel were written in the local Karelian dialect, which received positive feedback in critiques, as they reflected the author's profound knowledge of his own homeland and people. However, at the same time, the characters' lives reflected the general trajectories and experiences of the Soviet people in the 1920s and 1930s (Pöllä 1974: 119–120). Antti Timonen, in *We are Karelians*, described the Karelian Civil War through individuals' perspectives and experiences. In his critique Eino Karhu made positive note of the features of local folk culture and tradition described in the novel, but he stressed that the novel also pictured the history and the psychological growth of a Soviet man (Karhu 1973). These novels have also some common features with so-called 'village

prose' (*derevenskaya proza*), which began to appear in Soviet literature in the latter half of the 1950s and continued in various forms until the 1980s. The village prose writers saw the features of national and local peasant life as valuable and worth describing as such (Clark 1989: 77–89; Parthé 1992: 107). Typical themes in village prose were: the village described as a separate island from the rest of the world, nature (forest, river, life in harmony with nature), home and the home district, the past (personal memory, nostalgia) and spoken vernacular dialects (Parthé 1992: 7–11). Jaakkola, Stepanov and Timonen discussed similar themes as the village prose writers, even though their novels lacked an explicit nostalgia for the past.

In the early 1980s similar articulations of local oral history and tradition were also provided in Pekka Perttu's (2004 [1978]) book *Väinämöisen venehen jälki* ('A Trace of Väinämöinen's Boat'). The book describes Perttunen's rune-singing family and the everyday life and history of the well-known rune-singing villages in North Karelia (Venehjärvi, Latvajärvi, Pirttilahti, Vuokkiniemi).⁸ The novel is based on Perttunen's own childhood memories and experiences in the area, field trips which he made as an adult and the discussions which he had with the village people and the members of the Perttunen family. In addition, he used both literary and archival sources. Perttunen sought to map out the condition of tradition in the 1970s and make a final alarm call in order to prevent it from disappearing (Perttu 2004 [1978]: 7–10).

The plot of the book follows Perttu's journey from one village to another and the discussions he had with the village people and his family members. The documentary-like narration links with Perttu's field notes on oral narratives of historical events and persons, folk songs and oral poems. In the text the author's personal comments and interpretations of past and present life are constantly intertwined with the transcribed texts: when Perttu arrives at a familiar childhood location by an old tree, he describes the tree and his own sentiments with verses of oral poetry and narrates orally-transmitted tales which were connected to the people who once lived there (Perttu 2004 [1978]: 25–27). According to Perttu, the book is not fiction, but not a 'study' either. The quoted narratives and memories were said to be authentic:

Along the years I had written down examples of poetry, proverbs, folk-tales and other 'small' folklore, written about the subject. While my story does not claim to be a study, it must be noted that there is no room for imagination, as one could expect from a novelist—the places and people, and the examples of poetry, stories and memories are authentic, as heard from the narrators, and are represented in a form similar to that used in the actual presentation if it was in a dialect. (Perttu 2004 [1978]: 7–9; author's translation)

In literary critiques and a meeting of the Soviet Writers' Union at the turn of the 1980s, Perttu's novel was evaluated as a prominent and successful belles lettres study of people's everyday life, traditions and customs (Karjalan kirjailijoiden 8. liittokokouksesta 1980). One of its most valued features was its detailed and 'ethnographically' precise observations, which were presented in a literary and lyrical style:

The writer's storytelling of people's life in the past and present is fluently intertwined with the plot. Thus the book could be defined as an original study about tradition-bearers and the living conditions of folklore. Characteristics of the book are figurative language and precision similar to a scientific study, so it could be described as a belles lettres study. Scientifically precise and reliable

information on folk customs, tradition and life in general, skilfully selected examples of folk poetry, folk humour, and the lyrical style create a truthful picture of people's life. *A Trace of Väinämöinen's Boat* takes many readers into the world of their childhood and youth and reminds us of those origins from which stems the rich and ancient spiritual culture of Karelia. (Lavonen and Stepanova 1979: 91–93; author's translation)

The villages which Perttu describes are mostly represented through transcribed oral stories, narration and songs which are connected with the historical people in the villages, buildings and geographical locations. The local narratives represent the villages and local physical milieu in a unique way which is significant and meaningful to the local inhabitants—but not necessarily to a wider audience.

Fact and history as articulations

Local prose in Soviet Karelia is a genre between fiction and ethnographic writing (documentation) and it has certain ideological overtones. The prose is aptly characterized by the term 'document prose', which appeared in Soviet literature in the 1970s, and is also widely used in Western literary studies (see Ekholm 1988: 9–26). The term refers to a fictional work, where documentary material is woven together with artistic and fictive descriptions (Palijeovski 1976: 76, 85; Pahomova 1977: 91). Even though the description was partly fictional, the typicality of the pictured object, event or person makes it documentary (*Kysymykseen tyypillisyydestä kirjallisuudessa* 1955: 128).

In Soviet literature prose is thus seen as an artistic form with historical value.⁹ This presumption is visible also in literary critiques, where the novels were read as genuine, artistic representations of reality outside of the texts and historical events. In the texts the aesthetic and artistic criteria are intertwined with representations of history and folk life, which separates the prose from straightforward documentation. Well-known Karelian scholar and critic, Eino Karhu, has compared a novelist's and a scholar's ranges of expression in writing:

(...) [A]s an artist the novelist has many more advantages than the historian. He can describe the truth in much more vivid and brighter colours and tones than the historian. When a historian uses the word 'patriarchal', he doesn't explain all the different sides of it. But the artist can create a precise conception of peasant customs and patriarchal worldview even without using the term as such. (Karhu 1965: 113; author's translation)

The division between historical fact and fiction is not an either/or question. Nor is the division between local and general histories, it seems. In the literature of Soviet Karelia, the question of fiction's historical value and significance as a representation of local history has been a politically debated one. Immediately after the Second World War, locally significant articulations of history were repressed, as the construction of a unified Soviet culture and society—and history as well—moved to the fore. Soon after Stalin's death in 1954, the second general meeting of the Soviet Writers' Union was held in Moscow. It was a significant one, as general meetings had not been held at all during Stalin's regime. At the meeting—and in the following one in 1958—the term 'local colour' was reintroduced into literary discussions. Local colour referred to characteristic elements in the art of each Soviet nationality by which the totality of Soviet art and literature was enriched.

The local features were based on each nationality's oral culture (for example, poetry, narratives and songs) and generally these elements thereby gained a positive aura, even though expressions of them were rather controlled (Timonen 1958: 6–19). In Karelia from the late 1960s onwards, and especially since the 1980s, an understanding of literature as a representation of locally significant history has become more public, finally coming to dominate during the post-Soviet period, even though the literary self-image and history represented in Karelia's prose is not homogenous. At the same time the written artistic works are read as sources and preservers of (once) oral history.

NOTES

¹ Here, 'Second World War' refers to what was also called in the Soviet Union the Great Patriotic War (1939–1945). The Soviet Union's western front, as well as the Karelian front, also involved confrontation with Finland. From Finland's perspective the period contained the Winter War (1939–1940) and the Continuation War (1941–1944). The wars shaped the geographical formation of Karelia, as parts of Finland were annexed to it; they also provided a significant watershed in the Soviet Union's as well as Soviet Karelia's literary scenes.

² Migration from Finland to Russian Karelia, however, had already taken place during the early years of the twentieth century.

³ This brief, geo-political contextualization is drawn principally from Laine (1994).

⁴ During the Soviet period, literature was connected with the aims of the Communist Party, and among the other arts it was considered a significant ideological tool. Through literature the Party broadcast certain values and attitudes which supported the idea of Soviet modernization and the construction of a common Soviet culture, society and (revolutionary) history (Ermolaev 1997: 99; Clark 2000: 194).

⁵ Many of the immigrants arrived there after the 1918 Civil War in Finland and during the 1920s and 30s, and they mostly shared a political ideology which supported a communist utopia. Some of them had already published poems and novels before the advent of Russian/Soviet Karelia; some of them started their careers after arriving (Jalava 1990).

⁶ The active writing community in North Karelia was also influenced by a local teacher named Matti Pirhonen. He originated from the Uhtua region (later Kalevala) and worked as a teacher in a local *kolkhoz* school in Lamminpohja from the 1930s onwards. He arranged study groups in which he introduced Finnish literature to the young students and inspired them to study literature and write in Finnish. According to Jaakko Rugojev (1983: 107–113, 121), the school opened up a whole new world for the young students, who came from remote rural villages. It also gave the national literature of Karelia a good push. Many well-known North Karelian writers, such as Jaakko Rugojev, Pekka Perttu, Ortjo Stepanov and Nikolai Laine, were Pirhonen's students.

⁷ The idea of a negotiation of meanings might be appealing here as it refers to the constructivist conception of social and cultural reality (e.g. Gergen 2001: 120–127). However it can be criticised for creating an illusion that participants have equal opportunities to express their views. This was hardly the case in the Soviet case, wherein literary activities were controlled by the political leadership.

⁸ Rune-singing refers here to the performance of oral folk poetry, especially to the Kalevala-metric epic poems.

⁹ Finnish historian Jorma Kalela (2000: 26–41) has presented an idea of a multilayered history. According to it there exists, simultaneously, institutionalised and layperson conceptions of history—produced by academic research institutions and groups of ordinary people.

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BOOK REVIEWS

ANGELINA SNODGRASS GODOY. *Popular Injustice: Violence, Community, and Law in Latin America*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006. xvii+233 pp. (cloth). ISBN 978-0-8047-5348-7.

Political anthropology has had a long interest in how order is maintained and how laws and norms are applied in different societies. Classical studies, like those by Evans-Pritchard about the Nuer or Leach about the Kachin, looked at these issues in social systems without clear and defined structures of authority. More recently, however, the anthropological gaze has shifted towards societies where authority structures are institutionalized, specifically states. Related to this shift is the growing anthropological attention to crime and violence, and this interest has gone far beyond the usual topics of feuding and factionalism and the 'traditional' ethnographic contexts of tribal societies.

Angelina Snodgrass Godoy's recent and eloquently written book *Popular Injustice: Violence, Community, and Law in Latin America* fits well into the context of these shifts. In a nutshell, Godoy's study explores the rise of lynching (*linchamientos*) and support for punitive *mano dura* politics in Guatemala. Godoy generalizes this case to the whole of Latin America, eventually linking it in her final conclusions to the post-9/11 US context and changes in the criminal justice institutions there.

Although Latin American history has for centuries been marred by dictatorships, violation of human rights, dirty civil wars, and state violence against its own citizens, most countries in the region have experienced positive political changes over the past two decades. As a result, most Latin American societies of today, with the notable exceptions of Cuba and Venezuela, have in general become more democratic, transparent, and free. And yet, this has not necessarily resulted in similar changes at the local level, where state violence has often been replaced by violence by non-state actors. Extra-legal violence in the name of justice and 'social cleansing' has become commonplace in many contexts. In the particular case of Guatemala, postwar legacies of terror tactics from the 36-year civil war—public executions and other violent rituals—are re-enacted on a regular basis in contemporary local communities. Even if people do not take law into their own hands directly, support for a new set of hyper-punitive criminal justice practices known as *mano dura* has been on the rise. According to Godoy (p. 2), as many as 75 percent of Guatemalans support a stricter, stronger state and extreme toughness on crime.

And from here derives the puzzle. As Godoy wonders,

How could it be that in so many communities across the Americas, people who had struggled for human rights for so long, many surviving periods of brutal state violence, could now themselves be carrying out acts of violence—even invoking terms (such as *mano dura*) that recalled authoritarianism, in deliberate defiance of the human rights discourse? (p. 6)

How can one reconcile the democratization of the political sphere with the growing support for the denial of basic civil rights? Why does increasing popular participation in many Latin American societies lead to constraining these rights, rather than extension of them? Why has the decline in state violence led to a 'war turned within'? These are some of the problems that Godoy's book tackles. Richly exemplified with excerpts

from interviews, Godoy scrutinizes the reasons and justifications behind the lynchings in Guatemala.

Godoy's study fits neatly into the context of various other, albeit not too numerous, anthropological studies of vigilantism and the relationship between legal and extra-legal violence.

The nation-state, according to Giddens (1981: 190), aims at a monopoly over the means of internal and external violence. Yet, despite the state's demands for an exclusive stake in the administration of justice and the control of violence, such claims are commonly contested. Vigilantism is one widely occurring form of confronting the state's monopoly in the field of law and order, and a phenomenon often explained by a lack of confidence in the state's efficiency (rather than in the concept of the state itself). Although the prime motivation of vigilantes is to react to crime, violence, and general disorder in areas where they perceive the state (especially its judicial system and police) failing to fulfil its functions, they themselves often turn to crime and counter-violence, lynching, mob-rule and similar activities.

In studies of violence and aggressive behaviour, vigilantism is an especially interesting and revealing phenomenon because it offers a perspective onto the continuity, or even overlap, between order and disorder, legality and illegality, as well casting light on images of communally acceptable and unacceptable violence, local interpretations of social norms, social order, and legitimate coercive force. Vigilantism highlights several ambiguities in the relationship between people and the state. For people marginalised at the edge of the state and at the bottom of the political hierarchy, vigilantism is part of their efforts to make sense of their lives and maintain some sort of order in their world. It is a phenomenon on an awkward borderline between law and illegality, and it is always capable of slipping and sliding in one direction or another.

Godoy's book makes a useful contribution to the discussion of these issues. She has an argument to make that goes beyond the obvious explanation for lynchings: that they extend the reach of law. Godoy claims that lynchings are acts misunderstood in at least three ways. First, contrary to the commonsense consensus on lynchings, she argues that lynchings are not about crime *per se*, but a reaction to fear and insecurity, and manifestations of lack of faith in public institutions. Related to this is her second argument: lynchings are not 'premodern', that is, not part of customary law. Violent acts of public vigilantism happen not because of their 'primitive' nature, but because of the lack of social capital—solidarity—in these communities. Godoy even refers to lynchings as the "rituals of death"—desperate attempts to rebuild solidarity through violence (p. 114). By ritualizing violence, as Godoy suggests, communities affirm that these acts are meaningful and legitimate, unlike the savage acts of criminals. Rather than being spontaneous eruptions of anger, lynchings are a deliberate attempt to reaffirm community values that people see as threatened due to the widespread anomie that is caused by a broad set of social transformations, the rise of criminality and lawlessness being just some of the symptoms.

Thirdly, and probably most importantly, Godoy claims that the 'answer' to lynchings is not to apply more law to a situation of lawlessness but to "understand the lynchings themselves as profoundly political commentaries on the distribution of power and resources in these deeply unequal societies" (p. 17). Lynchings reveal broader anxieties

about change and disorder, and could be treated as acts of resistance and empowerment, even despite their perverse nature (p. 123).

By and large, the social sciences tend to explain violence in terms of a 'spontaneous' reaction caused by certain inner drives (e.g. innateness theory) and/or social conditions (e.g. frustration theory), or as 'strategic behaviour' based on rational choice (e.g. social learning theory, mobilisation of social resources theory, social dominance theory). The so-called 'frustration hypothesis of aggressiveness', first posited by Dollard and others (1939) and later modified by Feierabend and others (1972), has probably been the most convenient theory to explain vigilante behaviour. It correlates levels of development, rates of socio-economic change and political violence, and argues that transition leads to political turmoil and violence: the faster the rate of socioeconomic change, the higher the level of political unrest. This, like most other frustration models, is actually based on the so-called J-curve theory of James C. Davies (1972), which tries to explain collective violence on the basis of an accumulation of frustration generated by social change that first raises people's expectations but then disappoints them.

Godoy's argument, however, is more sophisticated than reductionist explanations based purely on frustration. To understand lynchings, Godoy claims, one has to look at local-level violence and authoritative regimes on a continuum, and she traces the roots of lynchings to state terror. Lynchings for Godoy are simply one manifestation of *mano dura*, distinct in form but not so much in function from, for example, 'zero tolerance' criminal crackdowns and 'social cleansing'. This is why Godoy deliberately avoids the term 'popular justice', used so often in cases of vigilante behaviour, but rather prefers to discuss 'popular injustice'. *Mano dura*, as Godoy (p. 10) argues, "forces us to reconsider what has often been an assumption in democratization theory: the notion that civil society itself is an inherently democratizing force, that unfretted popular participation will in fact produce socially just outcomes." Moreover, *mano dura* represents "not a continuation of past practices or a reflection of some enduring element of political culture, but an attempt to import selected elements of dictatorship into an ostensibly democratic structure."

By way of conclusion, Godoy's book could be of great interest and use to a wide variety of readers. As Godoy (p. 14) herself emphasizes, her book is not just a study of lynchings but also an account of "the contentious politics of community belonging and control in settings of institutionalized mistrust, and about the meanings of justice and security in the increasingly polarized world that is characteristic of our times." It is a useful book for anyone interested in the anthropology of violence, crime and resistance or in local-level politics in Latin America, but it also resonates with discussions on post-9/11 global politics where security is increasingly purchased at the price of justice.

NOTES

¹ Despite its widespread occurrence, vigilantism has been relatively little studied in social sciences. There are a few earlier exceptions, such as studies by Rosenbaum and Sederberg (1976), and Burrows (1976). Vigilante behaviour is also under scrutiny in Graham and Gurr (1969); Brown (1975), a seminal work on the history of violence in America, and to a lesser extent in Gurr's (1976) treatment of urban crime and conflict. In anthropology 'proper', although there exist well-known

BOOK REVIEWS

studies of banditry by Hobsbawm (1969), and the mafia by Blok (1974) and Gambetta (1993), vigilantism has rarely been discussed, Abrahams's (1998) study being a noteworthy exception.

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TUULIKKI PIETILÄ. *Gossip, Markets, and Gender: How Dialogue Constructs Moral Value in Post-Socialist Kilimanjaro*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007.

280 pp. (cloth). ISBN 978-0-299-22090-7.

Although neoliberalism has become a topic of increasing study for Africanists, few have explored how everyday people negotiate the shifting structures and strictures of liberalization in their political, economic, social and moral lives and livelihoods. What does the complicated matrix of economic and political opportunities and challenges produced by neoliberal policies mean for men, women and children as they navigate personal reputations, household responsibilities, and social relationships? How has the neoliberal emphasis on individual profit-making influenced ideas of personhood, productivity, and profit? What are the gendered dynamics of these changes?

In *Gossip, Markets, and Gender*, Tuulikki Pietilä explores these questions and more from the perspective of Chagga people in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania in the mid-1990s. She has written a remarkable book, an eloquent description and elegant analysis of changing notions of personhood, morality, and gender in the neoliberal era. She analyzes the dynamics of these changes through the prism of dialogue among and about men and women, especially in the form of gossip. Gossip, Pietilä argues, can have a range of valences and motivations, including speculation, malice, curiosity, and light-hearted banter. It is a key domain in which people represent, discuss and negotiate their own and other people's reputations; "gossip is the prime medium through which truths and appearances presented as definite and unambiguous are persistently subjected to dialogue in Kilimanjaro" (p. 9). Drawing on extended participant-observation, formal and informal conversations, and what she calls "interpreted life histories", or "the stories people tell about themselves and others that often contain more or less hidden moral valuations and explanations for a person's fate" (p. 25), Pietilä presents a convincing and compelling analysis of how Chagga men and women understand, interpret and act upon their changing socio-economic context.

As anyone familiar with Tanzania knows (and Pietilä reminds us), Chagga people have a reputation for being avid and adaptable entrepreneurs, eager to embrace modernity in all of its aspects, especially Christian religion, a cash economy, and formal education. In addition to farming, Chagga people, especially women, have long been active as traders in local markets and with early trade caravans. Men were traders and farmers as well, although in recent years many have migrated to urban areas in search of wage labor and salaried jobs. The subdivision of patrilineally-inherited land holdings (*vihamba*) into smaller and smaller plots has further spurred the emigration of men in search of money and security. Women are therefore increasingly responsible for managing and feeding their households in the absence of men, but still under their nominal authority. And men's efforts to "straddle" the geographically separated spaces of work and home do not always succeed.

The book is divided into two parts, "Women" and "Men". The four chapters in "Women" explore the tensions faced by market women to justify their livelihoods and challenge their derogatory reputations as uncontrollable, promiscuous and greedy. Female traders are accused of valuing money and mobility over their children and home. The fact that

some choose to challenge male spaces and associations by eating meat and drinking beer in public bars incites further speculation about their immoral ways. To counter such accusations and deflect hostility, market women have mastered the “art of talk”, describing themselves as mothers rather than traders, explaining their motivations as feeding their children instead of making a profit, and constantly creating and maintaining social bonds with customers and each other through a range of verbal registers and practices (such as cajoling, praise, persuasion, requests, and promises). By extending idioms of kinship and the household into the marketplace, they “domesticate the market” by casting the acts of buying and selling as negotiations of social relationships rather than individual practices of profit-making and economic exploitation. As Pietilä argues, “Acts of giving or not-giving do not establish the moral value of a person and her action in and of themselves; valuation only comes about by means of the talk that accompanies and evaluates those acts and thereby constructs their meaning” (p. 12).

Pietilä introduces us to a range of women in these chapters, most of whom are struggling to balance the burden of being the primary providers for their households in the wake of the extended absences of their husbands with older ideas about the proper roles and relations of men and women. Chapter three focuses on the life and reputation of Mama Njau, one of the most wealthy and visible women traders in the area, and a therefore prime target for local gossip. Pietilä analyzes Mama Njau’s life history and moral reputation, exploring how the local community perceives her struggles and successes, especially “the recurring idioms and categories with which personal difference and moral value are discussed and constituted” (p. 92). Other chapters explore changes in the practice of “capture-marriage” and recent concerns with “bound men” and “loose women” as windows onto changing ideas and ideals of marital practice and female respect and sexuality.

In the second part, “Men”, Pietilä investigates the changing place of migrant men in relation to their homes and lineages, and the moral interpretations of their successes, but especially their failures. The increasing mobility of men has at once been prompted by, and produced changes in, land inheritance, subsistence strategies, and gender, generational and lineage relations. As in the chapters about women, Pietilä describes these dynamics through the stories, gossip and negotiations surrounding the practices and reputations of specific men. The stories of failed businessmen who die young or experience misfortune are explicit morality tales in which financial failure is attributed to the moral quality of the man and his actions. And so, for example, the stolen wealth that Ruben allegedly used to build his successful trading career eventually results in Ruben’s poverty, the early death of two of his sons and the presumed craziness of his third son.

In conclusion, *Gossip, Markets and Gender* makes several important contributions to African studies and gender studies. First, it is one of the most nuanced, accessible and engaging studies of changing gender relations that I have read in some time. Pietilä does a masterful job of grounding her analysis in the everyday lives and experiences of Chagga men and women, interwoven with concise, cogent explorations of the relevant theoretical and comparative literature. She deftly interrogates and demonstrates how agency, structure and power articulate in the production of social change in ways both expected and unexpected. Second, she demonstrates the centrality of linguistic analysis to cultural analysis by her emphasis on gossip, dialogue, and the verbal interpretations and negotia-

BOOK REVIEWS

tions of practices. As she emphasizes, “talk in Kilimanjaro is essential to the interpretation and discussion of the meaning and motive of exchange and other acts” (p. 198). Finally, this book is a model of the power of ethnography to challenge easy assessments about, for example, the impact of neoliberalism on people’s everyday lives. Neoliberal policies are not themselves judged by people in Kilimanjaro as “good” or “bad”. Instead, it is the complicated and sometimes contradictory expressions and experiences of neoliberalism in people’s actions (to migrate in search of work, to become the de facto head of household, and so on) that are discussed, debated, and judged. I highly recommend the book to scholars and students of Africa, gender, and cultural theory more generally. I hope that a paperback edition is forthcoming so that it can be used in courses on these topics.

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KRISTINA HELGESSON. *“Walking in the Spirit”: The Complexity of Belonging in Two Pentecostal Churches in Durban, South Africa.* Dissertations and Documents in Cultural Anthropology 7. Uppsala: Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, Uppsala University, 2006. 292 pp. ISBN 91-506-1892-X.

This work, a Ph.D. dissertation, joins a growing number of contemporary anthropological studies on Christianity. It illuminates the ways in which South African apartheid policies and ideologies manifest themselves in the religious ideologies and organizational structures of one Pentecostal church, Assemblies of God (henceforth AOG), with congregations in South Africa.

In the following I will briefly delineate the thematic structure of the thesis. While Helgesson’s discussion of apartheid and religion do not exhaust what the text has to offer, it is the principal ethnographic topic in the study, so I shall at this point focus on those chapters in which Helgesson most explicitly works with these issues. My main critique of Helgesson’s work confronts the overarching theoretical orientation of the thesis, as I feel that her treatment of phenomenological ideas fails to materialize into an ethnographical analysis. The details of this critique form the latter part of my review.

The book is divided into eight chapters. In chapters two and three Helgesson delineates the larger setting of the congregations which are her focus. She offers us a good account of the historical dynamics of racial segregation within the organizational structure of AOG and relates this to the formation and operation of the sociopolitical forces of apartheid-era South Africa. AOG originates in the USA where it was founded in 1914. The AOG in South Africa was recognized as a separate national church in 1932, and in 1938 was divided into four race-based sections. The ‘Group’ was for white members, the ‘Association’ for colored congregations, the ‘Movement’ for black congregations, while Autonomous congregations consisted of those groups choosing not to conform to these categorizations. Helgesson writes that many of the church’s leaders deny that the creation of these divisions had been explicitly made with racial segregation in mind; rather that they were more or less the products of local level developments.

Helgesson conducted her fieldwork in Durban, concentrating on two congregations: the first, ‘Olive Tree’, has predominately white members and is an ‘Autonomous’ group (as such, it does not receive funding from the AOG organization), while the second, the ‘Red Hill’ congregation, is labeled an ‘Association’, as comprising ‘colored’ worshippers. Helgesson writes that the Red Hill congregation has taken a stance against segregation and can be classified as a “multicultural” congregation (p. 90) yet in 2005 one of its leaders told Helgesson that: “The only churches who have the capacity to become multiracial are the white churches, because of the upward mobile [black people] going there” (p. 116, brackets in original).

Chapter four examines the narrativization of conversion experience as a central element of these Pentecostal denominations. Here, Helgesson views testimonies as integral parts of the processual self-formation of born-again Christians. In chapter five the focus is on the practices of communal participation and on the dynamics of official and unofficial leadership structures within the two congregations. Chapter six concerns the ways in which gender ideologies are a part of the differing sociopolitical views which these con-

gregations have towards post-apartheid South Africa. In these congregations, the position of males as household heads is presented as having its foundation in nature and in the Bible. Helgesson claims that most members of the Olive Tree congregation perceive the family structures of society eroding due to the career-building efforts of modern women. In addition, Helgesson delineates some of the ways in which the model of men as household leaders is accommodated to the changes people experience in contemporary society. Men are supposed to hold, and in some cases regain, their position as strong leaders of their families, but now one of the ways through which this position is legitimated is through the Biblical idea of leadership as servanthood: an idealized replacement both for fatherless families and for the traditional macho-father who rules his family in a harsh and authoritarian manner. In contrast to this, the major gender-related issue in the Red Hill congregation concerns the fact that many women feel themselves denied the promised equal opportunity to occupy leading positions in the church. In their view, society in general is developing faster than the church itself. Helgesson sees the difference in these gender-related attitudes to be partially explained by the differing positions which these two congregations have towards apartheid. The end of apartheid meant freedom for the non-white population, but for the white people the situation is more complex: in their view the end of apartheid brought not only desirable things, but also the loosening of moral and social order. Thus, in the Olive Tree congregation the perspectives on discourses of social equality are much more ambivalent than in the Red Hill congregation.

Chapter seven focuses on the social work performed by these congregations, as the rationale behind this work stems from an ideology in which social involvement is perceived as an indispensable part of personal salvation. Chapter eight contains an interesting analysis of the pro-Israeli ideology of the Olive Tree congregation. The majority of the members of this congregation are white, middle class/upper-middle class, and most of them of British descent. The Olive Tree congregation was formed in 1989 with the specific aim of being a "pro-Israeli voice in South Africa" (p. 93). This stress on Israel has brought people from other churches to join Olive Tree while simultaneously causing some members to leave the congregation. Helgesson points out that not all members of the Olive Tree congregation are equally committed to the pro-Israeli cause, and she gives voice to those members who wonder why so much effort is made on behalf of Israel while there is a lot of work remaining to be done in South Africa (p. 252). The fact that they celebrate Jewish feasts such as the Succoth and sing Hebrew songs has attracted criticism from other congregations, who claim that the Olive Tree congregation tries to imitate Jews (pp. 241, 243). The Olive Tree pastors claim that this is not the case, and that they just want to express their born-again faith by fellowshipping with the Jewish people and partaking in God's plan for mankind, yet a member of the congregation also claims that "I am a spiritual Jew" (p. 237). The issue is more complex than a case of simple imitation, and this chapter, which sheds light on the matter, is one of the most successful and interesting of the whole book. The complexity of the matter is made evident by the fact that the Olive Tree congregation has tried to bring Jews into its fold.

The biggest problem with the dissertation is the fact that Helgesson fails to explicate the very core theoretical perspective which purportedly motivated and oriented her research. The explicit purpose of this work is to explore the diverse and complex experiences of 'belonging' in these two congregations from the perspective of phenomenological anthropology, represented mainly by the works of Michael Jackson, as exemplified by his

Minima Ethnographica. Unfortunately, Helgesson merely presents us with some of the key concepts and dichotomies of this theoretical viewpoint, but does not offer us an account of the debates in which these concepts are used, let alone situating her own argumentation within these debates. For example, Helgesson cites Jackson when she defines the phenomenological notion of balance. This is a balance between being an actor and being acted upon, and it is essential to the experience of belonging or “being-at-home-in-the-world” (p. 26). As far as I understand it, the core meaning of this notion of balance refers to the fact that if either one of these constituents is removed, inability to act ensues: one has to have experience both of being an actor and of being acted upon in order to have an experience of ‘belonging’, in order to be a proper subject (p. 136). However, it is left unclear whether this is the only thing which gives meaning to the notion of balance. Furthermore, is working towards this balance some kind of a cultural universal constant of the human condition or “human consciousness” (p. 26) which perhaps then manifests itself in myriad cultural forms, or is it something which is a contingent feature of specific cultural configurations? The sense of superficial theoretical orientation only deepens when Helgesson introduces the notion of ‘intersubjectivity’ as an essential ingredient of the experience of belonging. This intersubjectivity is defined, not only as the social relations which individuals have with other human beings but also with a “world of ideas” (p. 123). Citing Jackson, Helgesson claims that this world of ideas includes “ancestors, spirits, collective representations and material things” (pp. 123-124). This intersubjectivity is stressed in order to vaccinate us against rampant individualism so that we could see ‘selfhood’ emerging from the field of interpersonal relations. It is quite clear that this definition of intersubjectivity is so general as to render it, if not absurd, then possibly useless. An inherent superficiality in delineating the phenomenological notions of subject and intersubjectivity makes it difficult to evaluate Helgesson’s application of the notion of balance between being an actor and being acted upon.

I also feel that for much of the work, the phenomenological perspective remains oddly inconsequential to the ethnographic description and analysis which Helgesson provides. For example, she might have missed an opportunity to deepen her analysis of the relationship which is built between the Gentiles and the Jews in the ideology of the Olive Tree congregation. By doing so Helgesson would have injected both theoretical and ethnographical substance to the notion of intersubjectivity that she claims to work with. In most of her definitions, the notion of intersubjectivity is simply equated with “...the social relationships individuals have with other human beings...” (p. 123), but in the chapter dealing with the Olive Tree’s pro-Israeli views, the formulation which Helgesson uses suggests that intersubjectivity refers to some aspects of these relationships: “In Olive Tree, it is through intersubjectivity... [reference omitted] ...in the relationship with the Jewish people and with other Christians who share their view on the role of Israel, that belonging is anchored.” (p. 123). This could have been a good place to exercise some of the conceptual tools which Helgesson claims phenomenological anthropology offers for her study. What kind of subjectivity is attributed to the Jewish people in the Messianic Theology? Or in other words: what kind of dynamic between being an actor/being acted upon on the part of the Olive Tree congregation builds their relationship with the Jewish people in this ideology? This could have been studied, for example, in the context of the

Jewish feasts which they celebrate. On whether or not phenomenological anthropology might have something to contribute here, Helgesson remains silent.

One theme in which the usefulness of phenomenological anthropology raises its head is that of conversion experience. The chapter which deals with this issue is perhaps the only chapter in the whole book in which Helgesson makes substantial, phenomenologically-grounded ethnographic claims. Yet, even here, the fact that Helgesson has not presented the general phenomenological discussion (regarding, for example, the notion of balance) costs her ethnographical clarity. Nevertheless, there is enough elaboration to render it open for debate.

In both *Olive Tree* and *Red Hill* almost all church services include testimonies, with lay-members describing the ways in which God has made an impact on their lives. An important sub-category of these stories concerns conversion experience. Helgesson claims that all of these narratives are about God acting upon the human subject. Yet, people also stress that they have to avail themselves to God, as "God does not force himself upon anyone." (p. 127). Helgesson notes that when people discuss the ways in which they have acquired strength to do appropriate things they stress that all thanks are due to God: He gave them the ability to act. From this material Helgesson goes on to claim that conversion experience is a case of being acted upon which "implicates agency on the part of the individual, a way of acting in the world" (p. 138). Helgesson notes that this is a lifelong project: "It is not enough to be born-again but one needs to come back to God repeatedly" (p. 139). These born-again Christians strive their whole lives in order to become "more holy", to open themselves up to God in order to strengthen the bond between themselves and the deity. Helgesson talks about this lifelong project as a "struggle for balance" between being an actor and being acted upon and describes the agony which some people feel when they are unable to speak in tongues. Due to this inability she records that they feel like "bad" Christians (pp. 138, 140), thereby seeming to equate this with the general phenomenological idea of existential balance. Helgesson uses terms 'horizontal' and 'vertical' to differentiate the types of relationships which human subjects have with each other and with God, but I think that she has not paid enough attention to the consequence which this fundamental difference has for phenomenological ideas concerning the ways in which one 'governs one's own fate'.

It is easy to see the perpetual dynamic between the two aspects of agency in this particular Christian relation between man and God: one needs to be an actor and to be acted upon. However, apart from this necessary presence of the two constituents of subjectivity, I fail to see the applicability of the notion of balance to this case. The way in which religious failures such as the inability to speak in tongues are elaborated demonstrates my point. One observes that in this particular cultural configuration of subjectivity, human subjects cannot produce the sufficient conditions for their religious or moral success but at the same time their failure in these realms is exhaustively a result of their own actions. When a member of the *Olive Tree* congregation describes the agony of being a bad Christian due to failure to speak in tongues, he knows that he cannot succeed without God, and yet he feels that the absence of tongues is a failure, his own fault. It would seem to me that the crucial existential project here is not the maintenance of a balance between being an actor and being acted upon but rather the maintenance of a successful imbalance or hierarchy between these constituents of subjectivity. When reflecting upon moments of

BOOK REVIEWS

success, they celebrate this asymmetry: “It’s only the Lord”, while in moments of failure, they lament it: “I’m a bad Christian”. In this context, the ‘inability to act’ is a permanent aspect of the human subject, not due to loss of balance in the relationship between man and God but due to the very structure of the relationship.

To conclude, I feel that Helgesson’s study is a welcome contribution to the anthropology of Christianity. For those interested in the dynamics of apartheid in the context of Pentecostal Christianity this is essential reading, and for those interested in phenomenological anthropology this thesis presents some interesting topics of research but fails to deliver any well-founded application of phenomenological ideas.

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ANTHROPOLOGISTS AT ETMU DAYS

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PRESIDENT OF THE FINNISH ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The Finnish Anthropological Society organized for the first time their own session at ETMU Days, the yearly conference of the Society for the Study of Ethnic Relations and International Migration (ETMU) in Finland. The aim was to bring to the conference an entire session, titled *Moving Beyond Nations*, dedicated to the anthropological perspective. Although ETMU has been doing valuable work in promoting scholarship on issues of ethnic relations and international migration, the anthropological perspective has been only marginally represented in the society. ETMU has been more concerned with issues of national agendas and interests, such as policies of integration, politics of multiculturalism and immigrant legislation, which from the anthropological perspective fall into a category of research that was referred to in the call for papers of this session as “methodological nationalism”.

Minna Ruckenstein introduced the session with a discussion of research that uses the concept of identity uncritically for studying ethnic relations. The papers that followed discussed ritual kinship and Caribbean migrations (Maarit Forde), politics of identity among transnational Lithuanians in the United States (Vytis Ciubrinskas) and Polish immigrant families in Finland (Anna Matyska). Overall, the papers and following comments made by Riina Isotalo aimed at promoting a more anthropological analysis of ethnic relations and international migrations. They paid attention to the heterogeneity of transnational social forms, complicating the way ethnic communities are used as units of transnational connectivity.

Unlike studies operating within the framework of methodological nationalism, anthropological research shows that people’s everyday experiences can have very little to do with the ways in which their ‘difference’ is seen or treated by the nation or the state. Framing the analysis around concepts such as family, kinship or religion reveals the worlds that people generate around them irrespective of the nation or the state. By documenting and analyzing the various kinds of social belongings, anthropologists demonstrate how the widely circulated discourses on ethnic identities and transnationalism might not advance our theorizing of differences at all, but merely transfer explanations from one nation to another. Thus the papers of the session agreed that we need detailed ethnographic analysis of what constitutes the significant differences in people’s lives; it is through these differences that we can truly appreciate the various transnational ‘we-communities’ that move people beyond nations.

The contribution made by the Finnish Anthropological Society was very well received by the conference organizers and participants: the discussions did not necessarily end in agreement, but the multidisciplinary dialogue was stimulating and informative. The Society aims to hold their own session again at next years ETMU Days in Helsinki (23.-24.10.2008). That conference focuses on migration, age and family ties—all topics of central interest to anthropologists.

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AVAILABLE FOR REVIEWERS

If you are interested in reviewing one or more of the following books, or another recent publication, please contact Review Editor Miia Halme: miia.halme@helsinki.fi.

Biehl, João 2007. *Will to Live: Aids Therapies and the Politics of Survival*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Coulter, Chris 2006. *Being a Bush Wife: Women's Lives through War and Peace in Northern Sierra Leone*. Uppsala: Uppsala University.

Eberhard, Christoph and Geneviève Vernicos (eds) 2006. *La quête anthropologique du droit*. Paris: Éditions Karthala.

Finnegan, Ruth 2007 [1989]. *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town*. Reissue. Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.

Glowczewski, Barbara and Rosita Henry (eds) 2007. *Le défi indigène: Entre spectacle et politique*. Montreuil: Aux lieux d'être.

Goodale, Mark and Sally Engle Merry 2007. *The Practice of Human Rights: Tracking Law Between the Local and the Global*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Janowski, Monica and Fiona Kerlogue (eds) 2007. *Kinship and Food in South East Asia*. NIAS Studies in Asian Topics No. 38. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.

Khuri, Fuad I 2007. *An Invitation to Laughter: A Lebanese Anthropologist in the Arab World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Modéus, Martin 2005. *Sacrifice and Symbol: Biblical Šēlāmîm in a Ritual Perspective*. Coniectanea Biblica. Old Testament Series 52. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International.

Riles, Annelise (ed.) 2006. *Documents: Artifacts of Modern Knowledge*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Ruckenstein, Minna and Marie-Louise Karttunen (eds) 2007. *On Foreign Ground: Moving between Countries and Categories*. Studia Fennica Anthropologica 1. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society.

Saldanha, Arun 2007. *Psychedelic White: Goa Trance and the Viscosity of Race*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Smekal, Peter 2006. *The Threatened Paradise: Tourism on a Greek Island*. Dissertations and Documents in Cultural Anthropology 8. Uppsala: Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, Uppsala University.

Stark, Laura 2006. *The Magical Self: Body, Society and the Supernatural in Early Modern Rural Finland*. FF Communications No. 290. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica/Department of Folklore Studies, University of Helsinki.

Finnish language publications

Antola, Päivikki 2007. *Kurjuuden kasvot. Etnososiaalinen kuvaus Nairobin slummeista*. Tampere: Tampereen yliopistopaino.

Aro, Päivi and Bo Löngvist 2007. *Autenttinen ihminen. Tulkintoja irtautumisen etnografiasta*. Jyväskylä: Atena-kustannus.

Laurén, Kirsi 2006. *Suo—sisulla ja sydämellä. Suomalaisten suokokemukset ja -kertomukset kulttuurisen luontosubteen ilmentäjinä*. Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia 1093. Helsinki: SKS.

Martikainen, Tuomas (toim.) 2006. *Ylirajainen kulttuuri. Etnisyys Suomessa 2000-luvulla*. Tietolipas 212. Helsinki: SKS.

Rauhala, Lauri 2005. *Ihminen kulttuurissa—kulttuuri ihmisessä*. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.

Rauhala, Lauri 2005 [1993]. *Hermeneuttisen tieteenfilosofian analyyseja ja sovelluksia*. Helsinki: Yliopistopaino.

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Hanks, William F. 1996. Exorcism and the Description of Participant Roles. In Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (eds), *Natural Histories of Discourse*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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The membership fee is 30 €, 20 € for students. The membership fee includes the subscription of the quarterly Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society and entitles members to purchase publications of the Society with a 20 % discount.

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