

# SUCCESS STORY OR TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE? AN ATTEMPT TO INTEGRATE TRAUMA THEORY WITH ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF FIRST-PERSON STORIES

**Tiiu Jaago**

*Associate Professor*

*Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore*

*Institute of Cultural Research*

*University of Tartu, Estonia*

*tiiu.jaago@ut.ee*

**Abstract:** This article focuses on the following issues: (1) how a narrator describes life under political repression in a retrospective first-person story; (2) the extent to which such a story can be analysed from the perspective of trauma theory; (3) what the use of trauma theory in combination with the methods of folk narrative and oral history research can offer for a more diverse interpretation of such a story. The story selected for observation was written in 2001, focusing on events in Soviet Estonia (1940–1941, 1944–1991). At the time of telling this story, the Soviet era was publicly interpreted as a period of interruption of Estonian cultural and political continuity. Social scientists observed the Soviet period from the perspective of cultural trauma. In this way, the narrator presented complex past events in a framework that points to the restoration of historical justice. Although this story represents a positive attitude towards historical and cultural developments in Estonia, the analysis of this story indicates that traces of trauma can be found at the levels of the story that reflect the formation of the narrator's identity.

**Keywords:** conflicting identities, life story, oral history, Stalinist era, trauma

## INTRODUCTION

Writing this article goes back to the second half of the 2010s, when I was involved in a trauma research project that had just been launched.<sup>1</sup> Because I had previously researched oral history for two decades, the question arose of how to reconcile these concepts and methods in the study of real-life narratives. This article aims to introduce the results of this research and present new

methodological possibilities by incorporating insights from trauma theory into the study of oral history and first-person stories. Combining these theoretical concepts made it possible to better interpret the narrative about the past, and to understand how the narrators simultaneously present difficult (traumatic) experiences and success stories.

Initially, however, it was necessary to find an impetus to start this research. One incident with students gave me inspiration on how to deal with this issue. A multidisciplinary course, “Life Story in the Study of the 20th Century”, was taught at the University of Tartu. This course provided MA students with an opportunity to discuss how the events of the twentieth century are recalled in the stories told in the 1990s and 2000s, based on manuscripts of life stories (EKLA f 350).<sup>2</sup> The discussion topics focused on the years of the Soviet regime in Estonia, including political repressions and the events of the Second World War on Estonian soil. These are the subjects that the researchers of life stories had studied mainly from the perspective of oral history research and memory studies (see, e.g., Kirss & Kõresaar & Lauristin 2004; Kõresaar 2011).

What caught my attention was an opinion expressed by the students that the narrators often too readily laid the blame for their personal failures and misfortunes at the door of the Stalinist regime. The issue came to the fore when discussing the story of one particular narrator (EKLA f 350:1:1120). The students were unconvinced that the narrator’s relationship problems and difficulties at work in the 1970s could be linked with the imprisonment of her father in the 1950s. My initial reaction was to question why they would not be linked. But then I started to wonder how I would know that my interpretation was the right one. In other words, which arguments could I use to defend my interpretation? And also, to ask what has shaped the students’ interpretation.

In order to find arguments for interpretation, I decided to analyse this story from the trauma perspective. The choice was based on the premise that since a traumatic experience can be seen as a process, it enables us to see the links between different events and situations (see, e.g., BenEzer 2014 [1999]: 29–30). In addition, researchers of trauma expression have noted that the return to the same topic in the story can be one of the indications of trauma (Sütterlin 2020: 19–20). By closely observing this story, I try to find arguments supporting my interpretation and also answer the question of why the narrator justifies the events that took place in the 1970s with what had happened twenty years earlier, during the Stalinist era. To better understand the events and situations described in the observed life story, the oral history viewpoint was added to the analysis. Combining the techniques of trauma theory and oral history allowed me to arrive at a deeper and more diverse interpretation of the narrative, which I would not have achieved using just one of these approaches.

## **NARRATIVE AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT TO THE ANALYSED TEXT**

The life story analysed here is one of the almost 3,500 manuscripts from the collection *Estonian Life Histories* (EKLA 350). A significant proportion of the stories written in the late 1990s and early 2000s focus on the splitting of the narrator's identity caused by the conflict between the individual and the Soviet state. Before the Soviet period, these narrators or their parents were ordinary citizens of the Republic of Estonia. However, the Soviet authorities regarded them as enemies who had to be isolated from society (imprisonment, forced re-settlement) or whose activities had to be significantly restricted and controlled. At the same time, these stories cover topics that were not discussed in public during the Soviet era. The narrators' and their relatives' status was restored after the Republic of Estonia regained independence. As the stories were told after the restoration of this status, the stories are framed by the victory of the people's sense of justice, although the topics to be told relate to very difficult experiences from the past decades (Kirss 2004: 123; cf. Dawson 2014). The general tonality in the stories reflects the concept of cultural continuity.

The above also applies to the story which is examined in more detail here (EKLA 350:1:1120). The narrator and main character of this story is Urve,<sup>3</sup> who was born in a village in central Estonia in 1934. Her parents were farmers whose ancestors had lived and worked in the same village since the early eighteenth century. Urve emphasises the generational continuity of life and field of activity, which had lasted for more than two centuries and ended abruptly with the establishment of Soviet power in Estonia in 1940. The period of individual farming ended in the late 1940s due to the socialist restructuring of agriculture. Urve's family moved to the city because her father and mother did not want to work on a collective farm (kolkhoz). Her father was arrested in the early 1950s, and his family members now belonged to the group of people that were ostracised by the Soviet rule and who were called "enemies of the people" in the rhetoric of Soviet authorities. This status did not allow Urve to obtain her desired education. After Stalin's death, the situation normalised, and she could continue her studies and become a teacher. During the Soviet era, she worked as a school principal and a teacher of Estonian language and literature. At the time of the narration, she was retired.

In this and other stories in the same text collection, the turning point of the narrator's life is the establishment of Soviet power in the 1940s. Although the level of events in the stories primarily reflects Soviet repressions, the narrators' view of the past focuses on preserving the nation, language and culture. Hence, it should be emphasised that the narrators do not use the concept of trauma.

Instead, these stories express satisfaction at achieving national independence and cultural continuity. This very controversial issue has been discussed by Leena Kurvet-Käosaar. She has studied the Gulag experience based on Baltic women's life stories from the point of view of trauma. In these stories, the narrators describe survival and avoid re-opening the wounds from the painful experiences of Stalinist repressions (Kurvet-Käosaar 2020: 312). Referring to the study of the Gulag experience in general, Kurvet-Käosaar talks about the need to consider specific cultural and historical factors when studying the ways of expressing trauma in this context (ibid.).

A similar contradiction – describing difficult past events on the one hand, but acknowledging the success made through national independence on the other – also characterises Urve's story analysed here. This is one of the reasons why it is justified to combine oral history research techniques with the analysis techniques of trauma theory. The need to combine research methods from the aspect of memory research has also been explained by trauma researchers: the combination of research methods is seen as an opportunity to find out more about the connections between the past and the present without going to the extremes, be it success or trauma (Rigney 2018: 369–370; Bond & Craps 2020: 139–141).

## **TRAUMA, ORAL HISTORY, AND FOLK NARRATIVE RESEARCH**

In defining trauma in life story analysis, the social and literary researchers' views proved to be effective. According to them, both collective and individual trauma is defined based on an event or events that significantly change the narrator's identity, wherein the change is perceived as negative (Jackson 2002: 45; Debs 2012; Aareleid-Tart 2016 [2010]: 43; Talebreza-May 2015; Balaev 2018: 366). The assessment of the Soviet period in Estonian society in the 1990s has been described based on the concept of cultural trauma (Aareleid-Tart 2006: 53–56). Although cultural trauma is a social and discursive construction and does not necessarily describe an individual's experiences, society must shape its picture of history, considering the traumatic experiences of the individual members of society. Jeffrey C. Alexander emphatically states: "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander 2017 [2012]: 6). Also, the *pluralistic trauma theory*, according to which trauma is subjective and defined in cultural terms, is worth bearing in mind (see, e.g., Balaev 2018: 366). Thus, it is an interpretive, rather than an unambiguously identifiable phenomenon. The experiential diversity

of trauma is manifested both in the way it occurs and how it is presented, and in the plurality of the opinions of the persons who define it.

Trauma is, above all, an analytical category in this observation, which allows me to interpret the assessments presented by the narrator. To define trauma, I use (1) narrative research techniques (positioning, self-presentation); (2) the sociological concept of cultural trauma, which, among other issues, indicates that the described events are perceived as negative; (3) and I closely study the interrelations between keeping silent, or not talking, and talking. The latter topic has significant relevance to why the narrator made these choices in the story written in 2001, and whether and how the narrator and the story's listener or reader understand each other.

Two more approaches have been used here to make the trauma-centred interpretation more versatile: the folkloristic perspective to narrative research and the oral history research.

From the folkloristic perspective, I interpret Urve's life story (EKLA f 350:1:1120) as one of the presentations of her life narrative. In folklore research, the term *variant*, or *version*, is used in this context. To find variants, the above-mentioned life story is compared to other presentations of the same narrator. Her book *Minevikku minemine* (Going to the Past; Buschmann 2014) is used here. In the book, she published the correspondence of her imprisoned father with the family members and added her memories and explanatory comments to the letters. The book reflects how the narrator's family coped in the 1950s. While writing the article, and especially, trying to find an answer to the question that arose in communicating with students, I contacted Urve Buschmann. So this analysis includes my conversations and communication with her in March 2018 (MK: EKLA f 350:1:1120. Annex).

Comparing the texts as the variants of the same life narrative enabled me to understand whether the link between the 1950s and 1970s, which raised the questions, was an isolated case or whether this connection also appeared in Urve's other presentations. Since this connection was evident in more than one writing, it can be concluded that the connection in the story written in 2001 was not coincidental.

In addition to identifying recurring elements, the folkloristic (variability-based) approach draws attention to how the text is affected by the situation in which a story is told (cf. Bronner 2006: 226; Metsvahi 2004: 138–147; Latvala 2005: 39–47; Palmenfelt 2006: 111–112). This perspective is necessary to discuss why Urve structured her life story this way, and why she chose the specific events and subtopics to compile her life story. This approach also helped me understand why Urve expected empathy from the reader when telling her story.

An analogous view of the early decades of the Soviet era was generally common in Estonian society in the 1990s and early 2000s.

The use of oral history research techniques offered me opportunities to understand both the ways of recounting history and the historical-political context of the observed story.

## **TEXT ANALYSIS TOOLS**

The text analysis techniques used in this study come from trauma theory and oral history research. The choice of these tools depended, on the one hand, on the need to notice signs of trauma in the text, and on the other hand, to find in the text details that are, at first glance, overshadowed by the storyline. Although most of the techniques involved are based on the analysis of an oral interview, this knowledge can also be adapted for analysing a written text; because orality and writing relate to the technique of presentation but do not change the narrator's relationship with what he or she is talking about (see, e.g., Pöysä 2006: 228–231; Jaago 2014a: 294–299).

According to researchers, one of the important markers of trauma is related to the narrator's emotions. Gadi BenEzer, for instance, when distinguishing signs of trauma in an oral interview, notes, among other things, loss of control over emotions (this can include crying and extreme numbness), repeated return to the topic or silence, as well as changes in the body language or use of the voice (BenEzer 2014: 34–36). Alessandro Portelli, a researcher of oral history, also describes the ways to interpret oral speech, pointing out emotional information contained in the speech. Although Portelli does not offer unambiguous rules for associating the nuances of volume, intonation and rhythm with specific meanings, information is hidden in the changes in these features (Portelli 1991: 48). Social psychologist Harald Welzer (2000) points out the same aspect: emotions either support or hinder memorisation, and by way of this, emotions have an impact on how the event and the relevant experiences are presented in the narrative (Welzer 2000: 55–56). Analysing the life stories of Hungarians residing in Sweden, Katalin Henriksson notes that the shock of traumatic experience prevents narrators from describing the events without the story touching the narrators themselves. She believes this is one reason why it is so difficult to speak about traumatic experiences. At the same time, she as a researcher has seen that traumatic experiences need to be expressed (Henriksson 2015: 41–42). Thus, Henriksson highlights the peculiarities of expressing trauma and the reason for this: traumatic experience touches the

narrator differently from everyday experiences. This statement is in line with Welzer's assertion discussed above.

We cannot see emotions in written narratives in the same way as in an oral interview. Based on the research results of oral interviews, however, we can say that it is also important to monitor changes in the style of a written story, as these changes point to the narrator's relationships with the events or situations described, as well as to changes in these relationships. The analysis of Urve's life story is based on a definition of trauma that focuses on the change in the narrator's identity, caused by the events related to the establishment of the Soviet regime. Urve's identity is apparent, for example, from the way she introduces herself in the story and positions the characters in the story realm. In light of the above, trauma is analysed using the *positioning theory* (see, e.g., Block 2017). Urve positions herself in her story based on her role in the recounted events and situations and in society at large. She introduces herself, on the one hand, from the viewpoint of herself and her family members, and, on the other hand, from the position assigned to them by the regime. The multi-layered story setup enables her to present herself and her family as "enemies of the people", which is the regime's perspective and contrasts with her self-identification. The identities presented in the story conflict with one another. It has been argued that in the case of conflicting identities, an individual is trying to suppress one of the identities (Ataria 2017: 170). This is also clearly visible in Urve's story.

The analysis also includes aspects of interpretation. In addition to the self-presentation and positioning presented in the story and the emotional attitude expressed in it, other layers appear that create and affect interpretations; for instance, the intertextuality that has taken shape in the socio-historical and cultural contexts, as well as social and institutional opinions that have developed over time, but also change from time to time (cf. *the extending positioning theory*, Block 2017). In this context, it is essential to distinguish between the time of the events described in the story and the time when the story is told: they both influence how the past is presented. On the one hand, the described events in Urve's story take place during the Soviet era between 1944–1991, which offers the context for the formation of the double identity of Urve. On the other hand, she told this story a decade after the collapse of the Soviet regime, in 2001, when the public and cultural/interpretive contexts had drastically changed.

In summary, the following aspects are important in the analysis of Urve's life story: the identity of the narrator, which opens up in how she positions herself in the story realm; her attitudes towards the narrated events and situations, which are expressed in the choice of the narration style; non-narrative factors that influence her choices in presenting her story (general social attitudes during narration; motivation for narration, among others).

## **ANALYSIS OF URVE'S STORY: TEXT AND INTERPRETATION**

This analysis aims to find arguments justifying Urve's choice to link the events and situations of the 1970s with those that happened in the 1950s. I focus on the reader's perspective rather than the narrator's, i.e., on the interpretation, rather than the narrator's self-presentation. I used the concept of trauma as a means of analysis that offered one way of achieving the goal mentioned above.

Urve's story is titled "My life story". It was submitted to the life story collection competition titled "My life and the life of my family in the Estonian SSR and the Republic of Estonia" in 2001. The competition organisers asked narrators to recount how they had lived during the Soviet period to open up the everyday life of that time to readers who had no personal experience with it (Eesti Päevaleht 2000). This aspect is relevant to the discussion amongst the students. They were born in the 1990s, yet the story describing the life of that time remained incomprehensible to them.

Urve's story is twelve and a half typewritten pages long and divided into eleven sections or chapters. The first two chapters are titled "A short family history" and "History breaks in". The first one is devoted to a short history of the development of farming society, while the second one deals with the events leading to the destruction of that society. This is also the first reference to the upheaval that the establishment of the Soviet regime in Estonia in 1940 brought along.

At the end of the chapter "History breaks in", Urve stops the flow of personal memories. She has recounted the pre-war history of her family and the events of 1941, the first year of the war. She then changes her style, addressing the imaginary reader directly. She has doubts about the reception of her story by the reader. The narrator's appeal to the imaginary reader has been described as one of the narrative strategies (Latvala 2002: 367) that also points to the communicative nature of the narrative (Abrams 2010: 109). From the aspect of the interpretation of narration, such a technique is helpful for understanding what kind of dialogue with the reader the narrator expects. Starting a dialogue with an imaginary reader by interrupting the narrative flow about the events also allows Urve to emphasise the impact of these events on her and her family. She is in doubt: perhaps the organisers of the collecting competition were expecting a nostalgic reminiscence of the past, but her story is harsh. An opposition between expectations and reality makes the complication of the situations described in her story even more pronounced. She adds that perhaps she needed to write the story to "finally vent [her] hidden frustrations", which had accumulated over time and were "still brewing deep inside" (EKLA 350:1:1120, p. 3). She appears to be driven not so much by nostalgia but suppressed grievance.



The upheaval (which is also emphasised by changing the style of narration) is related to historical and family events and the narrator's transition from one life period to another. It also appears that the emotional condition caused by these upheavals persisted.

She describes the upheaval in more detail in her book, lamenting that the "farm that had been in the hands of the same family for at least eight generations" (ibid.) has been destroyed and is gone now (Buschmann 2014: 7). Urve places her and her sisters' childhood into a turning point, i.e., the moment continuity was interrupted: the continuity created by her ancestors over centuries, in contrast to the action of the Soviet regime directed at interrupting that continuity.

The chapter of her life story titled "History breaks in", describing the interruption in her former lifestyle, is followed by a description of adapting to the Soviet pattern of living. People must adapt to the circumstances in both their family life and the life of the community – to the circumstances that they perceive as unfavourable. She comments on her experience with school: "You had to be aware of what to think and what to say", referring to the discrepancy between attitudes/opinions and what was said aloud, to avoid getting on bad terms with the authorities (EKLA 350:1:1120, p. 5). What is even more important from the perspective of research is Urve's remark about a shift in her feelings: while in the past she had been afraid of ghosts and spooks, now there was an added fear of people. This fear of people was not abstract. It seems to have been more a sense of danger and a defence mechanism rooted in the collective experience aimed at avoiding imprisonment, forced resettlement or similar political action. When the extreme actions ended after Stalin's death in 1953, the fear receded into precaution. To what extent can this feeling of fear be associated with a traumatic experience? It no longer seems to influence the narrator's consciousness and feelings at the time of narration. However, the existence of this feeling is one of the essential features of the described period (cf. Kalmre 2007: 74–77).

In the chapter with the expressive title "Like being in a toothpaste tube", she expresses her experiences from the next period of her life, from the end of the war in 1944 to the establishment of kolkhozes and mass deportations in 1949.<sup>4</sup> Among other things, she describes how she and her school friends planned to express their opposition to the Soviet regime. Somebody in the community got wind of their plan and stopped them. She describes what happened next, "It was quietly made clear to us how close we had been to Siberia" (EKLA 359:1.1120, p. 6). This illustrates how the rhetoric related to imprisonment was formed in people's minds and speech – here, *Siberia* is used as a synonym for prison. The phrase "Siberia is close" refers to the eagerness of the Soviet authorities

to arrest people, rather than to the geographical distance between Estonia and Siberia. The word *quietly* should also be noted. This word is characteristic of that time: it was reasonable not to speak out, not to talk about oneself or others, about the past or one's attitudes.

The title of the next chapter, "From village to city. Enemies of the people", refers to two turning points in Urve's life. Firstly, the fact that her family was forced to move meant that they had to adapt to a completely different lifestyle. Moreover, leaving the family home and moving to the city was not voluntary. The loss of the family home is an experience that Urve does not narrate in more detail in her life story. She presents this period as a sequence of facts: the job her father found, where the family found lodgings, and other practical issues. Such a style of presentation is often used in life stories to describe critical situations (see, e.g., Kirss 2004: 125; Jaago 2018: 125–127). The topic of losing the family home, however, is discussed in considerable detail in the letters sent by her father from prison as well as in her comments in the book *Minevikku minemine* (Buschmann 2014: 244–245). The family members experienced the same events and situations, but the father's and the daughter's life trajectories were different. The father talked about how his dreams and aspirations had been shattered, asking who he was after that. The daughter, however, dreamed about studying and mused about what she would like to become and to what extent it was possible, considering the political restrictions. The common denominator of both situations was the political status of the father and daughter: the regime considered both of them enemies of the people, which had an impact on their life choices.

In her life story, Urve explains her situation after her father was imprisoned for political reasons: she had enrolled in the teacher training college and realised that her life at school and at home were at odds with each other.

*I was sixteen when my double life began: at school I had to recite the history that was taught, march in demonstrations, vote at Komsomol meetings that lasted whole weekends ... At home, we worried about our future, but mostly about our father who was being taken from one prison to another...*  
(EKLA 350:1:1120, p. 6.)

She also describes her double life and involuntary double role in her book *Minevikku minemine* (Buschmann 2014: 56). At school, she assumed the role of an *exemplary citizen*. At home, however, she had to stay beside her mother, which meant both *fighting deep depression* and taking care of everyday chores. Although her parents' political status was not her fault, she had to bear the consequences. Her description reveals that the dividing line was not only between

the regime and the family but also between her and her family members, “I felt it was unfair that I had suddenly become an outcast – a ‘kulak’s kid’ in terms of that time.” She admits that such a feeling was a *bitter secret* that she did not share with her family (Buschmann 2014: 56). This aspect is not highlighted in her life story.

In her life story, she describes the ambivalent feeling she had at school (the discrepancy between what people thought and what they said), “It was weird to talk in history class about the ‘bootlickers’ of the Nazis and the liquidation of kulaks as a class”. The phrases *bootlicker of the Nazis* and *the liquidation of kulaks as a class* belonged to the rhetoric of the Soviet regime. It was odd because she could have been one of those, as had already happened to a number of her classmates. She concludes the episode with a sigh: why did she have to be the one stigmatised? Why couldn’t she be “an upbeat and enthusiastic exemplary citizen”? (EKLA 350:1.:1120, p. 7.)

In her life story Urve does not dwell on what happened after she was expelled from school. She notes briefly that she worked in a factory and continued her education at night school. After Stalin’s death in 1953, she was able to continue her studies at the teacher training college. The letters exchanged between her father and family members, published in the book *Minevikku minemine*, however, reveal how difficult it was for the young woman to reconcile her choices, which were determined by political restrictions, and her expectations for self-development, as well as to reconcile the latter with the needs of her family. Her father was imprisoned, and mother struggled to earn enough to feed and educate four children. These aspects become evident in the letters written at the time of events and are revived in the context of the family archives. This topic is not touched upon in the retrospective life story – a text that explains, rather than reconstructs, the events.

Urve started her independent life in 1956, when her father returned from prison. To a certain extent, the style of the life story changes at that point: feelings are no longer related to fear, and the topic of political repressions is replaced by the depiction of everyday life in the Soviet Union. However, the topic of being an “enemy of the people” does come up when she describes her struggles related to work and family in the 1970s – but not so much in the 1980s. While my students felt that references to the Stalinist era in connection with the 1970s were unjustified (as explained above at the beginning of this paper), the text analysis reveals that there were reasons for such references.

The episodes that gave rise to the debate were work relations in the 1970s and family relations in the same period. We learn from the chapter of the life story titled “Life with a huge bunch of keys” that Urve, who was working as a teacher, “never, under any conditions, wanted to become a school principal”

(EKLA 350:1:1120, p. 9). This is followed by a description of the nature of the job of a school principal (major repairs to the school building are in progress, but building materials are hard to find) and the Communist Party's control over the school principal. As a result of enormous stress and injustice, "at the age of 37, I was hospitalised for one and a half months with pre-heart attack symptoms" (EKLA 350:1:1120, p. 9). However, it is not in her character to be passive. She seeks to voice her opinions and experiences by writing articles for newspapers. This leads to a proposal from the Minister of Education that she should accept the post of editor-in-chief of the newspaper for teachers. She would have liked to accept the job but the local Central Committee of the Communist Party did not approve her candidacy for the post because her dossier included information about her father's imprisonment. Urve summarises the topic by stating, "The system defined me based on my dossier, not on who I was." (EKLA 350:1:1120, p. 9.)

Her family situation at the time is described as follows: Urve and her husband were given a flat, thanks to the husband's job: "My husband accepted a job with the local Communist Party committee, and we were given a 32 square-meter (!) two-bedroom flat" (EKLA 350:1:1120, p. 8.). She also reveals that her husband's career was developing more slowly than expected.

*My husband's expectations were bigger than the reality – he is a decent, hardworking, and ambitious person and was hoping to progress up the career ladder but got stuck. At one time, he took it out on me, complaining that I had not helped him to be successful. Perhaps he was being polite, not wanting to say that his marriage to a daughter of an enemy of the people had prevented him from becoming the big cheese.* (EKLA 350:1:1120, p. 8)

Her wording (marriage to a daughter of an enemy of the people) points to both internal and external tensions. As mentioned above, she was tormented by her double role in the early 1950s and by her dossier in the 1970s, which meant that her father's imprisonment determined her life. Urve herself would have liked to be at the forefront, both at work and in public life, but this was impossible for political reasons. The episode also sheds light on life during the Soviet time. The situation in the 1970s was a direct result of the events of the 1940s and 1950s. In the 1970s, the everyday lives of Estonians were shaped by the political framework and legal model imposed on Estonia in the early days of the Soviet regime – in the 1940s and 1950s. By the 1970s, Urve had achieved what was possible, considering her political baggage from the 1950s. This included the conditions of getting a home (a flat) and opportunities for self-realisation – both areas were controlled by the Soviet authorities through the Communist

Party and trade unions. Her opportunities as a daughter of an “enemy of the people” were more limited than the opportunities of those who had merit in the eyes of the Soviet regime. She refers to these restrictions when writing about problems at work and in her personal life in the 1970s.

In the 1980s, she could utilise what she had achieved a decade earlier, and in describing the events of that decade, she no longer refers to the political context of her youth. She revisits the topic of repressions when talking about the 1990s. During this period, there was also a great public interest in the issue of repression. Naturally, the public discourse of the 1990s concerning Stalinist repressions differed by 180 degrees from what it was during the Soviet era. Among other things, the documents related to the victims of repression were published in the book *Political arrests in Estonia 1940–1988*. The first volume of the book contains information about the imprisonment of Urve’s father (Õispuu 1996: 608).

Trauma (which is defined by the researcher, not the narrator herself) in this story is manifested in the persistent split of identity in Urve. A split between the natural life course and the historical-political events that interrupted that course; a split between her feelings/desires and the retributions of the regime; a split between the official/public discourse and what was said at home / in private settings; and, last but not least, an internal split caused by her double roles.

This life story was written a decade after the collapse of the Soviet regime, and this allowed Urve to describe the difficulties experienced in the Soviet period retrospectively. She no longer had to adapt to the circumstances that had led to the traumatic experience, and which also fed and preserved it. However, she could not let them go completely, although the interpretive context of her double role and the difficulties caused by it had changed. It seems that despite the change in the external framework of the story (the political situation and the attitude of the public), she could not really get rid of the experience of the past. Consequently, her life story is not based on the juxtaposition of isolated life events. Rather, the focus is on the narrator’s contradictory identity, the development of which she describes through events chosen to be included in the story.

In conclusion, it can be explained why I gave a negative answer to the students’ question about whether the narrator’s linking the repressions of the 1950s with the events and situations of the 1970s is habitual rather than justified. The students’ decision was based on an analysis of the events of the story rather than the narrator’s attitudes and feelings. They also based their interpretation of Soviet life on their experience gained from post-Soviet era discussions. The analysis, however, revealed that the events of those decades were connected through traumatic experience. Although Urve had not used that concept at the interpretation level, trauma was revealed through the evolution of her identity.

## **TO REMAIN SILENT OR TALK: THE QUESTION OF UNDERSTANDING**

While writing the article, I contacted Urve Buschmann to ask what she thought of the students' opinions. She answered that the students had no personal experience with those years (the 1970s). A precondition for understanding a text was, in her opinion, that the reader was familiar with the time and situation described in the text (MK: EKLA f 350:1:p. 120. Annex). It turns out that the choice to either speak or remain silent is significantly related to two aspects: what factors form the narrator's identity (as described above) and the extent to which the narrator expects understanding or dialogue from her audience. The last-mentioned statement is related to the communicative aspect of storytelling which may also lead to social forgetting (Vree 2013).

Could the theme of silence appearing in Urve's stories refer to trauma? Remaining silent has indeed been considered to be one expression of a traumatic experience (BenEzer 2014: 34; Baddeley & Singer 2010). It may indicate a shock caused by trauma (Eyerman 2012: 565; Henriksson 2015: 41–42; Brooker 2017: 289). At the same time, trauma theorists have also discussed the associations between remaining silent and cultural norms: what is said or not said may stem from the cultural background at the time of narration (Balaev 2018: 360–367). It means that remaining silent (shutting up) can result from the narrator's feelings (control of emotions or loss of control, self-protection, shame, etc.). The narrator's choice to speak or not to speak can be influenced by cultural context (e.g., taboo, norms, courtesy).

Only indirect references to the reasons for remaining silent, such as shame, cultural norms, etc., can be found in Urve's narratives. Instead, Urve emphasises being silent for political reasons, both in the social context and in the family. For instance, she mentions that she did not talk at home about her desire to be a prominent young woman in Soviet society. (She did not have the opportunity to be active in society because of her father's imprisonment and the resulting social status.) It would have been inappropriate from the perspective of her home: it would have seemed as if she had betrayed her parents.

What did remaining silent mean during the period of repression? Urve mentioned the fear of people. This fear, driven by the desire to survive, included information on how to know things that were not to be talked about. In the observed historical and political circumstances, the way how community members interacted with each other (i.e., outside formal interrogations) also changed. For instance, a man born in Estonia in 1904 describes the post-war years – the early years of the Soviet regime – as follows:

*It wasn't the destruction of war that left the deepest imprint on the life of the city. The biggest changes occurred in people. People did not trust each other anymore. When people met, they did not talk about the pre-war and war-time lives of their families and relatives. Nobody knew who was who anymore. Only true friends were open-minded without fearing that what they said would reach the ears of informers. (EKLA f 350:1:1759)*

While Urve mentioned a new fear in her life that emerged with the establishment of the Soviet regime – the fear of people – the text fragment above speaks about exactly the same phenomenon. The period of social change is often described through the changes in people, their relationships and roles (see Lotman 2009 [1992]: 15; Jaago 2014b: 1084–1086).

If the situation was ambivalent, how did people acquire the skill of knowing when to talk and when not to talk? An example is provided by a man born in 1953: on the one hand, he mentions that by the time he started school, he already knew what to say and where to speak; on the other hand, he points out that such things were not explicitly taught and that he was not expected to be hypocritical.

*I am one of those who was told the truth about our history and the fate of the Estonian people from the time I was very young. It may seem surprising, but that's how it was. And another thing that seems somewhat surprising to me when I think about it now, although I am confident that there is no mistake, is that when I started school at the age of seven, I knew very well what I could or could not speak about at school. Based on the prior knowledge obtained from home, it was self-evident that the truth learned at home was not disseminated, and certain matters were not to be discussed outside home. Therefore, I do not remember being specifically instructed before starting school. What is certain is that I was not taught to be hypocritical: say this at home and that at school (i.e., pretend to praise the communist regime). I took note of what was told at school during that controversial time, and if I had to give a recitation on a lesson in class I recited what I had been taught at school and kept my opinion to myself; in any other case I tried to avoid discussing the matter as much as possible. (EKLA f 350:1:2744)*

When comparing this explanation with the double role described by Urve in her life story, it is apparent that by the 1960s people had adapted to double roles and double truths. Naturally, the situation considerably improved after Stalin's death.

How does the time of talking affect how the past is talked about? The issue of repressions in the early Soviet years featured prominently in the public debate in the 1990s and 2000s. Therefore, it is understandable that Urve pays the most attention to this topic in her life story. Of the total twelve and a half pages, family history is covered on one page, and life in the early Soviet period of 1940–1956 on five and a half pages. The next four pages contain a description of everyday life in Soviet times over three decades, only half of which is dedicated to personal life events (under the title “What about personal life?”). The life story ends with a two-page summary titled “No whining!”. In this section, she gives clues to what happened in the late 1980s and in the 1990s: she describes the ways of coping with an economically difficult situation; talks about the last days in her mother’s and father’s life and the well-being of her children. This segment also includes two joyful acknowledgements: firstly, that her parents took part in the rebuilding of the Republic of Estonia, and secondly, that she is so active in her retirement.

Three-quarters of Urve’s life story is devoted to Stalinist repressions and the formation of the life course that accompanied them. It is characteristic of the stories told during this period generally. However, the situation developed gradually. For instance, a survey on Stalinist repressions carried out by the Heritage Society in the late 1980s showed that the answers were brief. Of course, this can result from the genre – after all, these are answers to questions. Nevertheless, the answers are laconic and display that respondents are confused about this topic (see Mälu). Literary scholar Tiina Kirss points to the fact that the recounting of Stalinist repressions may be inhibited by the passage of time, by the Soviet-era ban on public debate of this issue and, consequently, the lack of discursive strategy (Kirss 2004: 134–135). At the same time, the issue of repressions remained alive in family tradition: it was characterised by defiant resistance to the injustice experienced (*ibid.*: 123). Kirss argues that the memories preserved in the private sphere began to shape the tonality of the life stories sent to the archives in the 1990s and early 2000s (*ibid.*: 135).

The time of storytelling favoured the emergence of the issue of Soviet repressions. The public discussion of the topics shaped the situation where the narrators perceived the retreat of the suppressed sense of injustice, which had taken place for half a century, and the restoration of justice. It was thus logical that they also expected the reader to understand their point of view. At the same time, however, it can be seen that the preferred topics of conversation vary, probably related to the change in the expected (understanding) audience. The Soviet past has been exhaustively discussed in society today. Public interest has shifted to new current issues. The students’ opinion mentioned above reflects namely changes in the framework of interpretation.



In conclusion, the persistence of the traumatic experience lies in the conflicting identities of the narrator. When external factors influencing the narration change, it also changes the narrators' strategies for silence or speaking. At the same time, these external factors also shape the narrator's identity, including the multilevel nature of identity. However, the layers contained in the identity remain despite the change of time. Also, in Urve's life story, it seems that the traumatic experience associated with the formation of her identity levels manifests itself in the narrative, regardless of how she presents the level of events.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

In this analysis, defining trauma is related to the researcher's aim to analyse the link between different events and situations in a life story. We can see from Urve's storyline how the loss of the family home and her father's imprisonment after the establishment of the Soviet regime transforms from a description of past events into an interpretation of the past. Both the presentation and interpretation of historical events take place within the political context (independent Republic of Estonia versus the Soviet regime in Estonia). The change of power and the period of war in the 1940s are depicted as negative changes at the levels of both events and emotions: death of family members, loss of family home, and the fear of people (as a new feeling). After these events, the narrator's life continues on two levels. On the one hand, she is an active and exemplary citizen with excellent leadership qualities; on the other hand, she is one of the people called the "enemies of the people", whose life is repeatedly shaped in an undesirable way for political reasons. Such a split identity provides an opportunity to analyse trauma in her story, which results in parallel chronologies (cf. Ataria 2017: 166 ff.). On the one hand, there is family history and its continuity; on the other hand, there is a series of events caused by the interruption ("History breaks in"), which fits in with the double identity (i.e., the topic of identity conflict). Although the environment that leads to a traumatic experience (splitting of identity) disappears, and the frame of narration changes, the trauma persists at the level of identity.

From the research/methodological point of view, the inclusion of techniques of trauma theory in the analysis proved fruitful. This point of view made it possible to notice more profoundly the aspects related to the narrator's feelings, which were overshadowed by the superficial layers of the series of events. The splitting of identity and the related multifaceted conflicts both in the narrator and in her relationship with her parents and the authorities point to the narrator's traumatic experience. At the same time, the general tonality of the story

is related to the search for and formulation of lasting values, which provides a positive background for understanding the whole story. Trauma-theoretical approach also provided an opportunity to understand the narrator's arguments about why she linked events and situations that took place during the Stalinist period and twenty years later. On the one hand, these events were related through the cause-and-effect principle, and on the other hand, through the split identity of the narrator.

Using the techniques of folkloristic narrative research confirmed that the narrator does not change her view of the past, although the scope and style of the performance are determined by the narrative situation and genre. The oral history study provided opportunities to contextualise the historical background of the events mediated in Urve's story. It was also necessary to use an oral history view to describe the effect of the narration time on the structure of the story under consideration. Through this approach, it is possible to understand what life was like in a situation of repression. This approach also provided opportunities to point to the conditions that prevailed at the time of narrating and made this narrative a success story rather than a trauma story.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by the Estonian Research Council grant PRG670, "Vernacular Interpretations of the Incomprehensible: Folkloristic Perspectives Towards Uncertainty".

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This research project was titled "Traumatized Borders: Reviving Subversive Narratives of Borders, and Other" (2016–2020), supported by the Academy of Finland. The author thanks the members of the project team, especially Kirsi Laurén, discussions with whom greatly contributed to the completion of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Life story (Est. *elulugu*), in the context of this article, is a first-person story covering the narrator's entire life course and pointing to the narrator's choices through which he/she interprets his/her own life. From a literary point of view, these stories have been associated with the genres of memoir literature, for instance, memoirs, autobiographies, life writing, etc. (Kurvet-Käosaar 2010: 7–10; Hinrikus 2010; cf. Kadar 2013). From the perspective of memory research in Estonian ethnology, the narrator's experiences, which narrators have mediated with the familiar cultural narration techniques, have been emphasised in connection with these stories (Kõresaar 2005: 14). From a folkloristic point of view (also represented in this article), these stories have been associated with the so-called thematic writing: they are stories told by volunteer correspondents of the archive, motivated by the researchers' appeal. In most cases,

researchers also suggest a specific topic for writing in these appeals. Nevertheless, the thematic writings are freely structured by the narrators (Jaago 2014a: 290–299).

- <sup>3</sup> Urve Buschmann's life story was published in the collection *Eesti rahva elulood* (Life Stories of the Estonian People), edited by Rutt Hinrikus, in 2003. In connection with the publication of her story, she also gave permission to publish her name. According to the practice of studying Estonian life stories, researchers often use the narrator's first name in their writings (see, e.g., Kirss & Kõresaar & Lauristin 2004). In order to facilitate reading while avoiding too much personality, I have used this practice in this article as well.
- <sup>4</sup> In March 1949, mass deportations took place in Estonia (as well as in Latvia and Lithuania). "20,702 people were deported from Estonia, about 70% of them being women, children and the elderly". The operation was intended by the Soviet authorities to destroy the Estonian village and farming society and to support the establishment of collective farms (kolkhozes and sovkhoses) (Rahi-Tamm 2005: 29).

## ARCHIVAL SOURCES

- EKLA f 350 – the collection of Estonian life histories since 1989. Cultural History Archives, Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia
- MK – fieldwork materials collected by Tiiu Jaago. The Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu, Estonia
- Mälu [Memory] – the collection of the Estonian Heritage Society, 1989. Haapsalu and Lääne County Museums Foundation, Estonia

## REFERENCES

- Aarelaid-Tart, Aili 2006. *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*. Kikimora Publications A 15. Helsinki: Kikimora. Available at <https://helda.helsinki.fi/bitstreams/0c7b9414-2e51-4717-a3da-9f578f66b74e/download>, last accessed on 5 April 2024.
- Aarelaid-Tart, Aili 2016 [2010]. The Theory of Cultural Trauma and Applying It to Explain the Estonians' Soviet-time Mentality (Based on the Biographical Method). In: Kirsti Jõesalu & Anu Kannike (eds.) *Cultural Patterns and Life Stories*. Tallinn: TLU Press, pp. 39–76.
- Abrams, Lynn 2010. *Oral History Theory*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. 2017 [2012]. *Trauma: A Social Theory*. Cambridge & Malden: Polity.
- Ataria, Yochai 2017. *The Structural Trauma of Western Culture: Toward the End of Humanity*. Transl. by Donna Bossin. Cham: Springer.
- Baddeley, Jenna & Singer, Jefferson A. 2010. A Loss in the Family: Silence, Memory, and Narrative Identity after Bereavement. *Memory*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 198–207. <http://doi:10.1080/09658210903143858>.
- Balaev, Michelle 2018. Trauma Studies. In: David H. Richter (ed.) *A Companion to Literary Theory*. Oxford: Wiley, pp. 360–371. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118958933.ch29>.

- BenEzer, Gadi 2014 [1999]. Trauma Signals in Life Stories. In: Kim Lacy Rogers & Selma Leydesdorff & Graham Dawson (eds.) *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives*. Routledge Studies in Memory and Narrative. London & New York: Routledge, pp. 29–44.
- Block, David 2017. Positioning Theory and Life-Story Interviews: Discursive Fields, Gaze and Resistance. In: Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta & Aase Lyngvær Hansen & Julie Feilberg (eds.) *Identity Revisited and Reimagined: Empirical and Theoretical Contributions on Embodied Communication Across Time and Space*. Cham: Springer, pp. 25–39. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58056-2\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-58056-2_2).
- Bond, Lucy & Craps, Stef 2020. *Trauma*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Bronner, Simon J. (ed.) 2006. *Encyclopedia of American Folklife*. Vols. 1–4. London & New York: Routledge.
- Brooker, Peter (ed.) 2017. *A Glossary of Literary and Cultural Theory*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Buschmann, Urve 2014. *Minevikku minemine*. [Going to the Past.] Tallinn: Greif.
- Dawson, Graham 2014. The Desire for Justice, Psychic Reparation and the Politics of Memory in ‘Post-Conflict’ Northern Ireland. *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 265–288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2013.858450>.
- Debs, Mira 2012. The Suffering of Symbols: Giotto Frescoes and the Cultural Trauma of Objects. *Cultural Sociology*, Vol. 7, No. 4, pp. 479–494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749975512454086>.
- Eesti Päevaleht 2000 = Algab eluloovõistlus ENSV aegsete mälestuste kohta. [The Competition to Write Memories of Life in the Estonian SSR Begins.] *Eesti Päevaleht*, 9 November. Available at <https://epl.delfi.ee/artikkel/50850030/ee-algab-eluloovõistlus-ensv-aegsete-malestuste-kohta>, last accessed on 5 April 2024.
- Eyerman, Ron 2012. Cultural Trauma: Emotion and Narration. In: Jeffrey C. Alexander & Ronald N. Jacobs & Philip Smith (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Cultural Sociology*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 564–582.
- Henriksson, Katalin 2015. *Roots and Routes: Life Stories of Exiled Hungarian Women in Sweden*. Lund: Lund University. Available at <http://portal.research.lu.se/ws/files/5500182/8506468.pdf>, last accessed on 5 April 2024.
- Hinrikus, Rutt (ed.) 2003. *Eesti rahva elulood*. [Life Stories of the Estonian People.] III. Tallinn: Tänapäev.
- Hinrikus, Rutt 2010. Eesti autobiograafilise kirjutuse kujunemisest 18. sajandist Teise maailmasõjani. [The Development of Estonian Autobiographical Writing from the 18th Century to the Second World War.] *Methis: Studia Humaniora Estonica*, Vol. 5/6, pp. 20–37. <https://doi.org/10.7592/methis.v4i5-6.516>.
- Jaago, Tiiu 2014a. Genre Creation within Memory Collection. In: Valter Lang & Kalevi Kull (eds.) *Estonian Approaches to Culture Theory*. Tartu: University of Tartu Press, pp. 284–305.
- Jaago, Tiiu 2014b. Discontinuity and Continuity in Representations of 20th Century Estonian History. *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*, Vol. 6, No. 6, pp. 1071–1094. <https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.1466>.
- Jaago, Tiiu 2018. Trauma ja elulood. [Trauma and Life Stories.] *Mäetagused*, Vol. 71, pp. 111–142. <https://doi.org/10.7592/MT2018.71.jaago2>.

- Jackson, Michael 2002. *The Politics of Storytelling: Violence, Transgression and Intersubjectivity*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Kadar, Marlene 2013. Coming to Terms: Life Writing – from Genre to Critical Practice. In: Hans Renders & Binne de Haan (eds.) *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing*. Lewiston & Queenston & Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, pp. 295–310.
- Kalmre, Eda 2007. *Hirm ja võõraviha sõjajärgses Tartus: Pärimuslooline uurimus kannibalistlikest kuulujuttudest*. [Fear and Hatred of the “Other” in Post-War Tartu: A Folkloristic Study of Cannibalistic Rumours.] Tänapäeva folkloorist 7. Tartu: EKM Teaduskirjastus.
- Kirss, Tiina 2004. Three Generations of Estonian Women: Selves, Lives, Texts. In: Tiina Kirss & Ene Kõresaar & Marju Lauristin (eds.) *She Who Remembers Survives: Interpreting Estonian Women’s Post-Soviet Life Stories*. Tartu: Tartu University Press, pp. 112–143.
- Kirss, Tiina & Kõresaar, Ene & Lauristin, Marju (eds.) 2004. *She Who Remembers Survives: Interpreting Estonian Women’s Post-Soviet Life Stories*. Tartu: Tartu University Press.
- Kõresaar, Ene 2005. *Elu ideoloogiad: Kollektiivne mälu ja autobiograafilise minevikutõlgendus eestlaste elulugudes*. [Ideologies of Life: Collective Memory and Autobiographical Meaning-Making of the Past in Estonian Post-Soviet Life Stories.] Eesti Rahva Muuseum 6. Tartu: Eesti Rahva Muuseum.
- Kõresaar, Ene (ed.) 2011. *Soldiers of Memory: World War II and Its Aftermath in Estonian Post-Soviet Life Stories*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi.
- Kurvet-Käosaar, Leena 2010. Mõistete rägastikus: Autobiograafiafiast omaelulookirjutuseni. [In a Maze of Concepts: From Autobiography to Life Writing.] *Methis: Studia Humaniora Estonica*, Vol. 5/6, pp. 7–19. <https://doi.org/10.7592/methis.v4i5-6.514>.
- Kurvet-Käosaar, Leena 2020. Trauma and Life-Writing. In: Colin Davis & Hanna Meretoja (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*. London & New York: Routledge, pp. 305–316.
- Latvala, Pauliina 2002. Voices of Family History: Problems of the Textualization Strategy. In: Tiiu Jaago & Mare Kõiva & Kairika Kärsna (eds.) *Lives, Histories, and Identities III. Studies on Oral History, Life- and Family Stories*. Contemporary Folklore 3. Tartu: University of Tartu & Estonian Literary Museum, pp. 364–375.
- Latvala, Pauliina 2005. *Katse menneisyyteen: Folkloristinen tutkimus suvun muistitiedosta*. [A Glimpse into the Past: A Folkloristic Investigation into Oral History of the Family.] Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seuran Toimituksia 1024. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.
- Lotman, Yuri 2009 [1992]. *Culture and Explosion*. Transl. by Wilma Clark. Berlin & New York: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Metsvahi, Merili 2004. Cultural Differences of Narrating Life-Stories. In: Art Leete & Ülo Valk (eds.) *Studies in Folk Culture*, Vol. 2. Tartu: Tartu University Press, pp. 132–159.
- Õispuu, Leo 1996. *Poliitilised arreteerimised Eestis 1940–1988. Kõide 1 / Political Arrests in Estonia 1940–1988, Volume 1*. Tallinn: Eesti Represseeritute Registri Büroo. Available at <https://www.digar.ee/arhiiv/et/raamatud/42218>, last accessed on 4 April 2024.

- Palmenfelt, Ulf 2006. The Dark Shadow of the Un-mentioned Event: Collapsing Taleworlds and Narrative Reparation. In: Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj & Barbo Klein & Ulf Palmenfelt (eds.) *Narrating, Doing, Experiencing: Nordic Folkloristic Perspectives*. Studia Fennica Folkloristica 16. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, pp. 101–116.
- Portelli, Alessandro 1991. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. SUNY Series in Oral and Public History. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Pöysä, Jyrki 2006. Kilpakirjoitukset muistitietotutkimuksessa. [Thematic Writing in Memory and Oral History Research]. In: Outi Fingerroos & Riina Haanpää & Anne Heimo & Ulla-Maija Peltonen (eds.) *Muistitietotutkimus: Metodologisia kysymyksiä*. Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, pp. 221–244.
- Rahi-Tamm, Aigi 2005. Inimkaotused. [Human Losses.] In: Ülo Ennuste & Erast Parmasto & Enn Tarvel & Peep Varju (eds.) *Valge raamat: Eesti rahvastiku kaotustest okupatsioonide läbi 1940–1991*. Tallinn: Eesti Entsüklopeediakirjastus, pp. 23–42. Available at <https://www.digar.ee/arhiiv/et/raamatud/12312>, last accessed on 5 April 2024.
- Rigney, Ann 2018. Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism beyond the Traumatic. *Memory Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3, pp. 368–380. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698018771869>.
- Sütterlin, Nicole A. 2020. History of Trauma Theory. In: Colin Davis & Hanna Meretoja (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*. London & New York: Routledge, pp. 11–22.
- Talebrea-May, Jon 2015. Cultural Trauma in the Lives of Men in Northern New Mexico. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 119–132. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1060826515582521>.
- Vree, Frank van 2013. Absent Memories. *Cultural Analysis*, Vol. 12, pp. 1–17. Available at [https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~culturalanalysis/volume12/vol12\\_van\\_Vree.html](https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~culturalanalysis/volume12/vol12_van_Vree.html), last accessed on 5 April 2024.
- Welzer, Harald 2000. Das Interview als Artefakt: Zur Kritik der Zeitzeugenforchung. *BIOS: Zeitschrift für Biographieforschung, Oral History und Lebensverlaufanalysen*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 51–63.

**Tiiu Jaago** (PhD) is Associate Professor at the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, Institute of Cultural Research, University of Tartu, Estonia. Her main fields of research include older Estonian folksong (figurative language, socio-historical background of song tradition), oral history (family histories, folksy views of history, migration, and multicultural experience).

tiiu.jaago@ut.ee