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Symbols as Means of Creating Cultural Communication and Identity. The Estonian Case[*]

In the present article my main interest is to find out which kind of role symbols play in the self-description of Estonian culture and in the internal communication and how the "cultural formatting" of the society has occurred.[1]

Estonian culture can broadly be divided into two epochs. The first one comprises prehistoric (Raun 1987: 4–13) ancient Estonian culture during the period 1000 – 1200 (Talve 2004: 7–23) until the beginning of the 19th century. In the context of European culture it denotes the involvement of a geographical periphery into history, so to say "europisation of Europe" (Bartlett 1993: 388–419), because already the term "Ancient Estonia" sound paradoxical in comparison with the Early Middle Ages in Europe. The gap between Ancient Estonia and the cradle of the European culture – Ancient Greece is at least 1,400 years, and in regard to the oldest European epics *Iliad* and *Odyssey* recorded in 750 and 650 BC respectively.

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[1] I have discussed the problems of the identity and self-description in Estonian culture from different aspects also in earlier articles, published in the author's collection *Tuikav tekst* (Throbbing texts; Veidemann 2006) and *Eksistentsiaalne Eesti* (Existential Estonia; Veidemann 2010). The articles published in English are: "About the Meaning of Estonian Literature" (Veidemann 2007: 63–72), "About the Boundary/Boundaries of Estonian Culture" (Veidemann 2009: 129–141) and "History of Estonian Literature as a Kernel Structure of Estonian Culture" (Veidemann 2010: 75–84) and in German "Fr.R. Kreutzwald's "Kalevipoeg" als ein Heiliger Text der estnischen literarischen Kultur" (Veidemann 2004: 263 - 268) and "Eine kurze Einführung zum Verständnis der estnischen Literatur" (Veidemann 2005: 19–49).

The first epoch is characterised by a process which Juri Lotman describes in his cultural semiotics as the creation of space sphere in terms of “internal” and “external”, “intrinsic” and “alien” (Lotman 1990: 309). The so-called traditional societies having the animistic approach to the world also characterising the culture of Ancient-Estonia, irreversibly influenced the emergence and spread of the monotheistic religion. Alongside the conquest of the Teutonic Order in the 13th century, the forcible invasion of Christianity commenced in Estonia and Livonia. Text connected with Christianity, hereby we also have to consider rituals as “texts” and their acceptance caused, according to Lotman “a powerful cultural explosion”, which transferred the former cultural tradition into a “dynamic state” (Lotman 1990: 293).

In ancient times Estonians lived in villages and parishes and their **symbolic communication could be described as adjusting.** Estonian-Finnish ethnologist and cultural historian Ilmar Talve has called the oral tradition “practical poetry” because folk songs, fairy tales, proverbs and customs (rituals) served the purpose of explaining the world, transferring the traditional knowledge and elementary organisation of the society (Talve 2004: 21). Estonian folk faith is especially rich in symbols in regard to the adjusting-practical function (Paulson 1997: 158), including folk medicine. The etymology of diseases, diagnosis and treatment was surrounded by a dense network of symbols, due to which we can discuss the phenomenon of peculiar “clinical reality” (Kleinman 1980: 42, Honko 1983: 43). It comprises beliefs, expectations, norms, behavioural patterns connected with diseases, communication between the healer and the patient, therapeutic procedures and the evaluation of the achieved results. (By the way, today natural and alternative treatment is also influenced by geo-cultural conditions and peculiarities).

Various magic activities (sacrifice and magic sayings e.g. incantation and exorcism, but also creating impact in literature by using palindromes and other magic formulas) helped to reaffirm the pact with nature. Hereby, the magic procedure did not lose its practical purpose to ensure necessary conditions, procure means (food), achieve economic benefits and establish reconciliation with natural forces. However, several anthropologists (see e.g. Kiev

(editor) 1964) and psychological approaches (Krippner 2004) indicate that shamanism could also have had a practical purpose – psychotherapy.

The places of action acquired sacral-symbolic value. In Estonian folk heritage communication with the forest has always been of special importance. The importance of the forest and the cult of trees have provided the basis for handling the earlier periods of folk culture as the tree culture (see Viires, A. 2000). Burial places in the woods acquired a sacral meaning in the word "his" (sacred grove). Forest fairies were the soul of the forest (rulers), which have proved to be the most viable among the anthropomorphic natural spirits (Loorits 1949, Paulson 1997: 58–59). Bigger trees growing by roads or near crossroads have been marked with a cross in honour of a deceased person. This reflects the mental picture rooted in people during thousands of years that after death the human spirit is transferred into a tree (Kõivupuu 2009: 28–29). Big rocks with holes or of meteoric origin were used as sacrificial stones.

This illustrates the process of how natural objects were transferred into objects of cultural importance and acquired a symbolic meaning. Today the tradition is retained in the custom of planting trees in the honour of people or events. For example, on the slope of the song festival ground in Tallinn oaks planted in the commemoration of the song festivals form a whole park already. The same trend is observed in placing boulders. The Estonian semiotician Anti Randviir who has studied the intercourse of nature and text has described a case, which involves both – trees and a commemoration stone (Randviir 2000).

The conversion of Estonians to Christianity in the 13th century denoted the transfer from the earlier magic system of relationships characterised by contractual and gradual withdrawal from the religious consciousness. "A religious act" as stated by Juri Lotman "is not based on exchange but on the unconditional dispossession of oneself to the dominion of the other party". (Lotman 1999: 240). In symbolic communication it denotes the replacement of a pragmatic (equally useful) relationship by a sacral relationship. No exchange of values occurs in religion as it was characteristic of magic consciousness. Communication here is linear (in one line): communication of a

man restricted by his/her lifetime against eternity (hereafter, paradise) representing the absoluteness. Absoluteness (God-eternity) speaks to people through symbols. The volume and complexity of the repertoire of symbols requires an intermediator and the position is taken by the church.

Although “alien texts” (Catholic Christianity) entered into Estonian peasants’ *resp* folk culture, people got used to it due to adjusting communication. E.g. sacrificing known in folk religion obtained a new content, the church “synchronised” religious holidays with the cyclic rituals (Midsummer’s Day, Yule) of the traditional calendar. According to Ilmar Talve the “cultural explosion” caused by the acceptance of Christianity constitutes in the fact “that the doctrine developed by the church was far ahead of the “folk faiths” as the system had no blanks, and gave answers to all questions agonizing a reasoning person” (Talve 2004: 49).

The human being was shown how to live in the world created by God following Christian ethics, norms and symbols in order to deserve bliss and eternal life after death. Death was much closer to people in the Early Middle Ages than today because the average life expectancy was much shorter, life was a constant fight of war, famine and epidemics. Christianity denoted the entrance of the existential dimension into Estonian culture, becoming later one of recurrent features and the *primus motor* of Estonian literature (Veidemann 2010: 179–191).

The above-mentioned “Swedish time” (which has acquired mythological-symbolic colouring in the discourse of Estonian history) (See Laidre 1994: 957–962) characterises the (written) invasion of the elite culture versus the folk (oral) culture, which considerably deformed people’s treatment of the universe (Veispak 1990: 244). The training was “so to say enforced and meant a large scale interference with the development of folk culture.” (Vahtre 1992: 28). Learning based on religious texts moulded the consciousness of new generations to the extent that people started to feel themselves as members of the Christian congregation. At the end of the 17th century, which is considered to be the highlight of Estonian aculturisation (from the European point of view civilisation) (Veispak 1990: 244), Estonian peasants donated church bells,

chandeliers and chalices etc. to the church. Stone crosses were put up in graveyards; fences were built to keep wild animals away from the graves (Paul 1999: 62). This is an explicit example of accepting Christian-symbolic communication, although it might have comprised a lot of formality and obligation. However, the church still represented foreign power to Estonians till the end of the 19th century.

Although the importance of Reformation in the emergence of the Estonian language is indisputable, an important phase of Estonians becoming a part of Europe (Europeization) is rather the religious awakening of the fraternity congregations in the 18th century. Fraternity congregations gathered in houses of prayer, taprooms or in some peasant's threshing barn. Unlike going to church, they went there of their free will and interest. The religious information exchanged in the fraternity congregation, praying and singing increased self-awareness (Paul 1999: 62). Namely, this is how the Estonian "awareness of congregation" ("congregation" as a symbol) was formed, which in the 19th century became the mental foundation of the nation (*resp* "Estonian speaking congregation") and the primary civil society (unions, organisations). The irony of the situations is reflected in the fact that as long as the church was fighting against Estonian paganism, animism remained viable, but the sacred groves and other holy places were chopped down by the Estonians who had joined the movement of fraternity congregations (Ilja 1994: 62). The fact may be treated as the withdrawal or even the end of the adaptable (adjusting) communication.

The second, or the modern epoch of Estonian culture has its beginnings in the 19th century. It includes the creation of the Baltic-German Estophilia influenced by Romanticism in Europe, the beginning of Estonian national journalism and literature, which formed the basis of the awareness of Estonians as a nation (the years between 1830–1870). It also witnesses the development of the national cultural institutions (general song festivals, theatre, literature and music associations) at the end of the 19th century, on which the many-sided Estonian professional high culture was based in the first decades of the 20th century.

The symbolic communication of this epoch is characterised as focusing. The focusing use of symbols may be of different intensity, and it may develop in different and even opposite directions, however, the creation of symbols serves certain purposes (the development and consolidation of a national or the state ideology, mobilisation of people and the society in critical situations).

At the beginning of the 19th century the Estonian language becomes a symbol of the developing Estonian intellectuals. For example, the first Estonian national poet Kristian Jaak Peterson (1801–1822) writes his ode "The Moon" (1818) and claims for the right of eternal existence for "the language of this country". Or paraphrasing: (the Estonian) language was elevated to the level of the ideal.

The Estonian language had not yet become a unified national language and Peterson could have referred to the language as a divine attribute as described by Wilhelm Friedrich Hezel (1754–1824) – his exegetics professor in Tartu University, and Rosenplänter – an authorityative language philosopher, who published the Estophilic magazine *Beiträge*. At that time Hezel already represented "the anachronistic tendency, according to which the language saved from the flood by Noah and his family became the original language of mankind." (Undusk 2001: 16). Peterson's message had to wait for the readers for an entire century.

The creation of symbols and communication within the next decades was definitely influenced by the doctor and the literary man, the lecturer of the Estonian language in Tartu University Friedrich Robert Faehlmann and his "Estonian legends" presented in the German language at the Learned Estonian Association on the second of February 1838 and numerous later publications in Estonian – the first one was published in the *Perno Postimees* in 1866. The composition of this Estonian pseudo-mythological work follows Kristfrid Ganander's *Mythologia Fennica* published in Turku in 1789, the adapted version of which was translated from Swedish into German by K. J. Peterson. The ancient archetypes and heroes performing symbolic acts included such characters as Vanemuine, Ilmarine, Lämmeküne, Vibuane, Kalev and Kalevipoeg living in Kaleva.

The turning point in the symbolic communication of the 19th century was the publication of Fr. R. Kreutzwald's epic *Kalevipoeg* (in 1853, 1857–1861, 1862). To prove that it was a "national project", a patriotic goal to create a symbolic text for Estonians is Kreutzwald's letter sent to the Learned Estonian Association (16.11.1853) after the initial version of *Kalevipoeg* was finished. He admits that *Kalevipoeg* is the main work of his life, which, like Homer today, will be found 1000 years later in libraries of people who do not understand a word of it. *Kalevipoeg* started functioning as a text creating a nation (Undusk 1994: 148, Talvet 2003: 888).

Like the Bible draws together Christians, Kreutzwald's epic attracted the nation to the story of Kalevipoeg and the system of values of the epic, inspiring the national feeling of togetherness and self-confidence. August Annist (1899–1972) – a major authority on *Kalevipoeg* – states that the centre of the 19th century was a preparation for the emergence of national leaders[2]. Kalevipoeg – a hero representing an ancient Estonian king was just one part of it. "Kalevipoeg as the first broader human character in Estonian literature may also be considered the first developed Estonian national character," writes Annist (Annist 2005: 748). Furthermore, Kalevipoeg symbolises the all countrymen, it is a "symbolic hero of masses" performing physical labour (ib. 749). The traces of Kalevipoeg and the whole epic in Estonian literature, art, theatre and music in the following years allow us to talk about Estonian culture before and after *Kalevipoeg* (Talvet 2003: 889).

Kalevipoeg not only becomes a means of communication of symbols, but also other pseudo-mythological characters participated in it. The Estonian ethnologist Ants Viires has referred to several similar cases in which ancient gods are engaged in the service of

[2] In relation to the circumstances it is appropriate to refer to the memoirs of the theologist Johann Kõpp from the period of Estonian awakening in the 19th century, when it was quite usual to turn almost in prayer to the symbolic leader of the nation Kalev, who was the father of the Estonian nation always thinking of his people, who was expected to come home and bring happiness to "his children", "to re-create the Estonian generations" – as it is said in the last verses of "Kalevipoeg". See Kõpp 1991: 130; Undusk 1994: 171).

Estonian society in the 19th century. After the publication of the people's edition of *Kalevipoeg* in Tartu (1862), the singing association in Tartu was given the name of "Vanemuine" in 1865. When the German song festival took place in Tallinn, there was a gate erected through which the participants of the song festival marched and on which the God of Song Vanemuine was sitting and putting a wreath of flowers on every choir flag. Mythological characters Dawn and Dusk were standing on either side of the gate and throwing flowers under the singers' feet (Viires 2001: 220).

Kalevipoeg's mother Linda, father Kalev, Saarepiiga (Island Maid), the Finnish blacksmith, Tuuslar, Kalevipoeg's horses, dogs, the hedgehog and other animals, the storyline of the epic, landscapes (which symbolic marker is created by Kreutzwald's word "Kungla") become "decisive" in interpreting the *loci communes*[3] of Estonian culture, on which Estonians' narrative of identity is based.

Since 1896 the symbol of national identity has been the general song festival that takes place once every five years. The event is a manifestation of focusing (let us recall that we have to keep in mind its concentration and purposefulness) communication when we consider the birth of the initial idea and pre-story of the song festival tradition. The idea was borrowed from Switzerland and Germany in the first half of the 19th century. In the 1850s Baltic-German singing associations commenced their activities in Estonian towns, followed by the first outstanding achievement in the form of a song festival of German choirs in Tallinn in 1857. At the same time the newspaper *Perno*

[3] The term comes from work *Loci communes rerum theologicarum seu hypotyposes theologicae* (1521) by Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560), who was Martin Luther's fellow fighter and supposedly the actual founder of Lutheranism, stating that *loci communes* are the key explanations of the interpreted holy texts. This statement gave basis to the opponents' attacks according to which this enabled discretional interpretation of the Bible. The reformers did not mean presuppositional understanding of the Bible, but proceeding from the sacral text itself – from its intrinsic idea naturally focussed on Christ (see Tool 1997: 257–258). I am attracted to the term because it allows comparison of *loci communes* and the symbols used in cultural communication. Both are based on instructive, pastoral and directive nature.

Postimees was published in Pärnu and the founder and editor Johann Voldemar Jannsen delivered the news of the German song festivals held in Zürich, Hannover, Tallinn and Riga. In 1861 Jannsen was present at the German song festival in Riga (Põldmäe 1969: 23–24).

When Jannsen moved to Tartu in 1863, he started planning a major national festival for Estonians dedicated (=focused!) to the 50th anniversary of the liberation of peasants from serfdom. In 1865 a singing association "Vanemuine" was founded for that purpose. In 1867, at the conference of parish clerks and teachers in Viljandi, Jannsen introduced his idea and invited "all Estonian /church /my comment R.V./ congregation choirs to take part in it." (Ib. 30). The stress is on the word "congregation" because the idea of the song festival was to show Estonians as a people of "congregation". It is this intimate form of togetherness that differentiates Estonian nationalism from other European nations that were formed in the 18th and 19th centuries.

It may be stated that the structure of the general song festival serves the purpose of symbolic communication starting with the repertoire, preparation for the song festival (rehearsals and competitions in singing, song festivals in counties) and ending with the rituals connected with the song festival (lighting the fire, procession, symbolic opening and closing songs, making speeches, putting wreaths around the conductors' necks).

The occurrence of the general song festival in every 5 years latently amplifies the cyclic nature of ancient Estonians' perception of life (seasons, day and night and work and rituals connected with them). The opening song of the general song festival and lighting the fire are explicitly related to the mythology of rebirth, like the final song – "Mu isamaa on minu arm" (My fatherland is my love) by Lydia Koidula/Gustav Ernesaks declaring faithfulness to one's country and nation (*resp* to the congregation) after death, became the traditional final song of song festivals after the war. The participants of the song festival leaving the song festival grounds, which becomes a sacral space during the song festival, is not sad or mournful, because the end of one song festival is the beginning of the next one. The cleansing effect of the song festival proceeds from its shamanistic nature. Tens of thousands of singers, their conductors and tens

of thousands of spectators literarily speaking form a circle of energy, which serves one goal – to perceive and confirm transcendental (divine, symbolic) unity (Veidemann 2006: 73–77).

In the last decades of the 19th century, in the communication of symbols real creators of culture stand next to pseudo-mythological and literary heroes (e.g. Bornhöhe's national romantic adventure stories "Tasuja" (The Avenger), "Villu võitlused" (The Struggles of Villu) and "Vürst Gabriel" (Duke Gabriel). It is illustrated by the fact that Lydia Jannsen – the poet and the founder of Estonian theatre, the daughter of Johann Voldemar Jannsen, is given a pen-name "Koidula" (The Homeland of the Rising Sun) by Carl Robert Jakobson, and Fr. R. Kreutzwald becomes known as "Lauluisa" (Father of Song). The portrait composition of Fr. R. Kreutzwad – "Kaugelt näen kodu kasvamas" (I see my home growing from afar) made by artist Ants Laikmaa in 1903, and Lydia Koidula's portrait painted in 1924 acquired the status of an icon. The legend of Koidula in Estonian literary history was "shaped" by the Finnish-Estonian writer Aino Kallas in her essayistic biography *Tähdenlento* (1915; in Estonian *Tähelend* (Shooting star) (1918).

On the 4th of July 1884, the Association of Estonian Students consecrated (*sic!* – a symbolic act) their flag with the colour combination of blue-black-white, which later becomes the basis of national and state symbols. The song "Mu isamaa" (My Fatherland) by Fr. Paciuse/J.V. Jannsen sung at the first general song festival becomes an anthem after the birth of the Republic of Estonia. It should be noted that the song was initially created by a German composer and conductor (based on Johan Ludvig Runeberg's poem "Vårt land" – "Maamme") living in Finland and was the most popular song among Finns in the middle of the 19th century. Including the song in the program of the song festival was a symbolic gesture of the Fennophile Jannsen to the closest neighbour.[4] So the unity of kindred nations is manifested in the same anthem of Finland and Estonia (although the words are different).

[4] At the festive dinner, organised on the second day of the general song festival in 1869, J.V. Jannsen greeted guests from Finland and expressed a

The myth of Noor-Eesti came into being during the years 1920 – 1930. The cultural movement of Noor-Eesti (1905–1915), motivated and enhanced by the European modernism (including French symbolism) at the end of the 19th century was clearly focused on the renewal of the expressiveness of the Estonian literature. Initially it was a project of the elite of the new generation of intellectuals. The manifesto by the poet Gustav Suits "Olgem eestlased, aga saagem eurooplasteks!" (Let us be Estonians but become Europeans) symbolises "Europe" as anything new and prophetic (new literary and art language, new authors, themes, motifs, etc). Linguist Johannes Aavik "worded it as the requirement of the new 'Estonian style', which would substitute the style of the village people and teacher by the style of educated people writing to each other" (Olesk, Laak 2008: 9). Symbolic communication had to serve Estonia by writing biographies of their own outstanding Estonian people (symbolic figures) (in addition to Kallas's biography of Koidula, also the monograph of Juhan Liiv by F. Tuglas and the monograph of Anna Haava by Villem Grünthal were published in 1914 and in 1929 respectively).

When one of the founders of the movement Friedebert Tuglas, whose short stories actually reached the level of world literature (Undusk 2009: 464–465), summarises the importance of Noor-Eesti thirty years after the beginning of the movement and the meaning of Noor-Eesti in Estonian (literary) culture, he sees it as a symbolic centre (source of emanation) surrounded by concentric circles of the developing Estonian literature and culture (Tuglas 1936: 177).

Anton H. Tammsaare's *Tõde ja õigus* (Truth and Justice) acquires the status of a symbol. For example, Estonians compare their memories and childhood experience with the fictional landscapes of Vargamäe from the first volume of *Tõde ja õigus* (Kõresaar 2005: 61).

Symbolic communication acquires a special place in the Republic of Estonia in the second half of the 1930s. By that time a strong middle class, the economic, political and cultural elite has developed in the Estonian society. The global economic crises, Nazism in Germany and the rise of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union, the

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wish that Estonians should always be together with the Finnish people (Põldmäe 1969: 148).

increase of overall instability in Europe also had an impact on the political development in Estonia.

Estonia as a state was born in 1918 as the result of ethno-linguistic cultural nationalism. “If earlier nationalism created the state” write the historians Toomas Karjahärm and Väino Sirk, “now [in the 1930s – my remark R.V.] the reverse process is launched: the state starts to form the people and the nation.” (Karjahärm, Sirk 2001: 255). New terms are introduced: “programmed nationalism”, “new nationalism”, “national solidarity”, “national unity”. Small nations and countries, including Estonians and Estonia, are seen as carrying on a unique mission “to retain the status of an intellectual oasis of culture among big countries with clashing interest of power” (Semper 1940: 33).

Culture (especially its visual and ritual expressions) becomes a means of propaganda for the state. Mass events are organised to confirm Estonian statehood (days of the Estonian flag, numerous parades, gymnastic festivals, erection of statuses for the War of Independence) and the national authenticity (Estonization of names, promoting national handicraft, decorating homes). It is the competition of building and designing “the most beautiful Estonian home that creates the connection between “the state narratives and more private family heritage.” (Kõresaar 2005: 60) the Estonian state becomes the symbol of the Estonian home.

The development of Estonian culture is violently interrupted in 1940 followed by “the war of symbols”. This is how the establishment of the Soviet-Stalinist system of symbols[5] and the discourse in Estonian social-political and cultural communication and the counter-reactions may be characterised. Ene Kõresaar has investigated biographies of Estonian people and describes the loss of the state in 1940 and the sufferings experienced after that as interruptions and “the fall of symbols” (ib. 86)[6].

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[5] Jaan Undusk has made a thorough survey of the effect of the Stalinist system of symbols on Estonian literary culture “Mystical and magical signs of Stalinism. Juhan Smuul's “Poem to Stalin” in its rhetoric surroundings” (Undusk 1998: 137–164).

[6] Kõresaare's approach proceeds from the “interruption", when the central image of the historical picture of Estonians form “glasses” for those

The generation of the new Soviet symbols is also characterised by purposefulness and focus, as it was in the case of the formation of the national culture in the 19th century and the modernisation of culture at the beginning of the 20th century. But this time the goal is the subjection of Estonian culture to the totalitarian Soviet ideology. As it is the intrusion of foreign semiosis, the shaped communication of symbols is diverted into the conservation and opposition of the regime.

One example of such “diversion” (which has a typological resemblance to the adjustment of the Estonian animistic culture against the invasion of Christianity at the beginning of the 13th century) is the general song festival in 1947.

The new authorities expected it to be a promotional event. But the Estonian classical choir music and the pieces from the 1920–1930s dominated in the repertoire. “Mu isamaa on minu arm” (My Fatherland is My Love) by Gustav Ernesaks/Lydia Koidula was performed there for the very first time and became a national anthem for the coming decades. It is interesting to observe how Soviet symbolism mixes with the national. A pentagon is printed on the “Harp of Vanemuine” on the traditional emblem of the song festival, singers dressed in folk costumes with red flags in their hand dominate on the song festival posters. The authors of the new anthem of Estonia, incorporated into the Soviet Union, are Johannes Semper (text) and Gustav Ernesaks (melody). It is so typical that the first lines of the anthem (“Jää kestma Kalevite kange rahvas ja seisa kaljuna me kodumaa”) refer to the mythical history of Estonians,

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Estonians whose childhood and youth passed in the Republic of Estonian before the Second World War (Kõresaar 2005: 199). The fact that the later memories of the biographers from the later Soviet period (1970s – 1980s) remain superfluous, the author comes to the conclusion that the Soviet period itself is handled as a kind of “interruption”, which forms “a kind of intermediate” period and separates the period of Estonian national independence from the period of the Post-Soviet recollection culture” (Kõresaar 2005: 201). The problem is that the keyword “interruption” in recollection culture should not be expanded to the description of those years representing “continuity".

which was used as the basis of the new national-mythological history in the middle of the 19th century.

The reversal of the symbolic communication in the literary culture of the Soviet Estonia is vividly expressed in the first part of the novel *Tuuline rand* (Windy Coast) by Aadu Hint, describing life in an Estonian fishing village at the beginning of the 20th century. It is written in the mode of Estonian critical realism and according to the literary scientist Sirje Olesk belongs to "the common texts" which have most evident connections for example with the "anti-German pathos" of /E. Vilde – my remark R.V./ *Mahtra sõda* (The War of Mahtra) (Olesk 2003: 478). When the book was published in 1951, the doctrinaire criticism demanded changing the novel in tune with the proletarian hegemony. In 1952 the second edition of the novel was published (the improved edition). The author of a history of the Estonian literature written in the German language Cornelius Hasselblatt classifies it as an independent novel and recommends the re-publication of *Tuuline rand* in its initial form (Hasselblatt 2005: 271–284).

During the decades after the war the communication of national symbols is transferred from the public sphere to the private sphere and forms the "second society" which functioned next to the official society (Ruutsoo 2002: 42–43). Although the Soviet authorities tried to keep a strict eye on it (e.g. celebrating Christmas is declared to be a "bourgeoisie vestige", church weddings are discouraged), people later recall proudly how national colours and patterns were knitted into hand-made cardigans, socks and mittens, how despite poor everyday life and lack of food the traditional menu for holidays and wakes was ensured or how enthusiastically pre-war magazines and books, hidden in the attics, were read. Such transfer is vividly described through the eyes of Viivi Luik – a writer, who was a child in the 1950s, in her novel *Seitsmes rahukevad* (The Seventh Spring of Peace) (1985). (See also Kannike 2001: 145–146). The father of Leelo Tungal, who also belongs to the same generation, says in the memoirs *Samet ja saepuru* (2009) (Velvet and Sawdust) that in the countryside "people from the first Estonian period" retained their customs and behaviour patterns also in the Soviet period. It may be stated that a whole era in history and Estonians representing it

acquire a symbolic and normative meaning "as a national opposite to the Soviet", as "the rearranged cultural space /---/ chaos causing unsociability" (ib. 143).

The symbolism of the Republic of Estonia is expressed more contrastively in the communication of Estonians, who fled from Estonia due to the Soviet regime in 1944 and created an emigrant society in the West (mainly in Sweden and Canada). It may be stated that the *primus motoris* of the emigrant culture was the Republic of Estonia itself as "the paradise lost". It is confirmed by the fact that "the subject matter comprising memories and numerous memoirs is one of the most distinguishing features of literature in exile." (Kruuspere 2008: 13). It is only in the 1960s (due to the change of generations) that next to the exile identity a new and more modern and open foreign-Estonian identity emerged (Hennoste 1994: 70–75). By implication it refers to the recognition of "Home Estonia" (Geographical Estonia) as the existential centre of Estonian culture in homeland.

At the same time, as the referred above "Home Estonia" was divided into two: the official (the Soviet) and the private, focused on Estonia as the "second society". The public expression of such a "second society" becomes folk culture. Ideological "battles" to retain national feelings are held in relation to the repertoire of local song and dance festivals, singing ensembles, drama groups (Aarelaid 2001: 101).

The opposite phenomenon to the above-described shift in Estonian literature and theatre that took place at the end on the 1950s (the beginning of the so-called Khrushchev's thaw) and lasted until the beginning of the 1990s was "reading between the lines". It is an intellectual phenomenon characterising the relationship between the author, the literary work and the reader (space for allusions) (Mihkelev 2005: 20) with the purpose of applying national identity and express political-cultural oppositions.

"Reading between the lines" is important due to multiple censorships that could be outsmarted only if the message from Estonian history or describing the Soviet reality was coded in a way that the top layer of the text structure retained the illusory compliance with the dominant ideological doctrine, but still made possible the

communication of symbols between the writer and the reader/readers in the deeper layers of the structure (in the theatre: spectators).

Several times authorities were involved in notorious cases, e.g. in the connection with Arvo Valton's collection of short stories *Kaheksa jaapanlannat* (The Eight Japanese Women) and Heino Kiik's novel *Tondiöömaja* (The Ghost's Nest) and the staging of Paul-Eerik Rummo's play *Tuhkatriinumäng* (The Cinderella Game) at the end of the 1960s. The public reception of Hando Runnel's collection of poems *Punaste õhtute purpur* (The Purple of Red Evenings) published in 1982 was blocked for years..

The cultural boom that started in the 1960s (the so-called spotlight period of the new generation in literature, theatre, music, fine arts in the 1960s; the restoration of continuity in literature; the arrival of world literature and philosophy in Estonia via intensive translation work; the beginning of television and the possibility to watch Finnish TV) together with the educational system operating in the Estonian language, has been described as cultural autonomy within an empire (Karjahärm, Sirk 2007: 254). This kind of autonomy reproduced a necessary network of symbols which was for Estonians the main resource in the political fight for independence at the end of the 1980s (Ruutsoo 2002: 175–176). Or in other words, the focus of the symbolic communication is the idea of the retention of independent Estonia and a readiness to restore it.

The 1990s mark the emergence of postmodernism in Estonia which began with the technological revolution and the re-structuring of the industrial society in the west during the 1950s–1960s. According to the most outstanding theoretician of postmodernism Fredrik Jameson, postmodernism is characterised by the globalisation of economy and the triumph of electronic technology in all areas of life, the cultural equivalents of which are fragmentation, randomness and heterogeneity, the disappearance of differences between the high and mass culture and their blurring borderlines (Jameson 1992: 410–412, see also Kraavi 2005: 96). According to Piret Viires, what sets Estonia apart here is that postmodernism's influence in Estonia remained only partial, as the era of postmodernism in the west was already drawing to a close. The symbolic sign to mark that closure was the terrorist attack against the World

Trade Centre in New York on Sept. 11, 2001. As a result, post-modernism was never to be the leading discourse in Estonian cultural theory (Viires 2006: 84).

From the point of view of **the symbolic communication it has definitely added diffusiveness and dispersion.** The explosion of new technology has brought along a “semiotic changeover” (Tart 2001: 119). The Internet environment and the spread of multimedia has led to the atomisation of the unified and divisible truth marked by symbols. The public and the private, the fact and the fantasy, the reality and the virtual have become an unlimited playground. It is clear that symbols, which are like gateways into major narratives, freeze in the Internet environment into clichés or empty markers. Indrek Tart vividly describes the situation as follows:

> The lack of mechanisms that ensure the continuity of culture or their deficient impact may lead to the loss of identity of social associations, which profoundly change their existence. New tribes, clans and gangs are formed, which function according to new and different principles. /---/ The entire time-space dimension is pressed together into a momentary icon, which disappears with a motion of a finger. Memory is not open to time and is not an unrolling process, in which events and meanings proceed from each other, but form a bit on the disk space, having a momentary (deleting, recording, and temporarily saved) value. (Tart 2001: 129).

However, the peculiarity of Estonia is constituted in the fact that it “is positioned in the field of tension between conservatism and postmodernism” (Viires 2006: 92), which leaves adjusting space for external ideologies and cultural practices.

At the beginning of the 21st century an increase in Neo-Conservatism may be observed in Estonia characterised e.g. by the privileges of the “state nation” dictating to other peoples living in Estonia (and especially the big majority of the Russian speaking community) how to live. This led to a dramatic conflict between Estonians and Russians in the spring of 2007, when the Estonia government decided to relocate a monument of the Second World War from the town centre to the military cemetery. It is a typical

situation from the "war of symbols". The centrepiece of the monument is a Soviet soldier, who symbolises for the Estonian Russians the victory of the Soviet Union (especially for the Russians) in the Second World War, whereas Estonians associate it with the continuation of the Soviet occupation in 1944. (See Vetik 2007: 34–50, 103–111 and the special edition of the magazine *Vikerkaar* 2008, 4/5). A glass monument with a cross on top was erected in the city of Tallinn to commemorate the victory in the War of Independence (1918–1920) in 2009. This confirms the fact that the focusing symbolic communication has been restored in the public space of Estonia.

Irrespective of the ways of expressing the symbolic communication it has to be admitted that from the point of view of Estonian culture the self-description of culture and the creation of identity has an important existential meaning.

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