Ene Koresaar, *Baltic Socialism Remembered. Memory and Life Story since 1989*, London / New York: Routledge, 2018. 154 p. ISBN 978-0367-892-17-3

The edited collection *Baltic Socialism Remembered. Memory and Life Story since 1989*, published in 2018 by Routledge, first appeared as a special edition of the multi-disciplinary academic *Journal of Baltic Studies*.¹ Ene Koresaar, an associate professor of ethnology from Tartu University in Estonia, brought together scholars and experts in oral history and memory studies from the three Baltic States to reflect on the still very sensitive topic of the post-Soviet memory, with the aim of demonstrating how life under socialism is being remembered in the post-communist present.

In recent years, academic and public spheres in the Baltic States have witnessed a significant growth in debates about conflicting memories of the socialist past. In 2018, the Latvian National Archives made public what until then had been secret KGB files on well-known Latvian politicians, officials, sportsmen, and other public figures. Meanwhile in Lithuania, heated discussions about Soviet monuments to famous (or infamous) writers and other historical figures have polarised society. These events uncovered the sensitive points in the multi-layered Baltic collective memory, which, even 30 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, still trigger controversy about the ways the traumatic past should or should not be remembered. Therefore, the appearance of this publication in this context is relevant, since it actualises the most important questions relating to the ‘Baltic memory’, and reveals different ways of remembering that might attract attention not only from researchers but also from an ordinary audience.

Together with six other researchers, Ene Koresaar investigates how political, social and individual forms of memory intersect in remembering ‘Baltic socialism’. However, it should be stressed that the authors use the notion of ‘Baltic memory’ as a separate mnemonic subject which encompasses the shared phenomenon of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian collective memories based on traumatic historical experience. As Koresaar suggests, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which incorporate

¹ *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 47, No 4 (December 2016).

dall three states into the Soviet Union, the postwar repressions and finally, the revolutionary movements of the late 1980s are major markers of what may be called 'the Baltic memory' (pp. 1–2). In this way, the authors contribute to the studies of regional mnemonic cultures of the post-socialist space creating an opportunity for further comparative analyses and research.

No less interesting are the theoretical and methodological approaches that the authors have chosen in order to reveal the research questions. All the contributing scientists use methodological tools that would usually be assigned to autobiographical or life story research. In different articles, the interviews, memoirs, biographies and written life stories create a basis for the research sources. This is not entirely typical in the usually much wider memory studies that often focus on extensive contexts, narratives or systems of meaning that influence individual modes of remembering. In contrast, Koresaar stresses that the chosen methodology allows us to identify how individual stories are framed into collective memories and vice versa. In other words, how different levels of collective memory act and interact with autobiographical remembering (pp. 2–6). This approach creates an opportunity to investigate from a bottom-up perspective. However, it also varies in the articles by different authors. Generational, professional, gendered, family, political and cultural modes of memory are studied in six different articles. Therefore, in order to create a broader picture for the reader, each part of the book must be presented separately.

In the article 'Re-Educating Teachers: Ways and Consequences of Sovietization in Estonia and Latvia (1940–1960) from the Biographical Perspective', the contributing authors Aigi Rahi Tamm and Irena Saleniece explore the strategies developed by teachers in the new socialist system after Estonia and Latvia lost their independence in 1940. The oral stories of generational cohorts of teachers born in the 1920s and 1930s have been chosen because they experienced the most significant changes, the transformation from the old system of values to the socialist ideology imposed by the new occupying regime. In the article, the authors consistently present different stages in the process of sovietisation, and identify the ways the teachers responded to it. As the authors note, at that time teachers were both victims and instruments of power (p. 30). The oral stories used as sources in the article also confirm this duality, by illustrating two parallel realities, the official and the lived one. This division is particularly interesting, since it appears in stories written after the collapse of the Soviet Union by former teachers. Nonetheless, the

authors avoid deeper reflection about present contexts, and concentrate mainly on primary research questions.

The same cannot be said about Dovilė Budrytė's article 'Points of Memory in the Narrative of a Mnemonic Warrior: Gender, Displacement, and the Anti-Soviet War of Resistance in Lithuania'. The author examines how an individual mode of memory intersects with the existing grand narratives or officially entrenched collective forms of memory. Taking an example of a Lithuanian memory entrepreneur, a member of the anti-Soviet partisan movement and a former deportee, Aldona Vilutienė, and her constructed autobiographical narrative of the past, Budrytė examines its points of memory: how, why, and for what purpose they are created, and how they correspond with the official paradigm of 'fight and suffer'. Budrytė reveals that Vilutienė's traumatic verbally expressed experiences provide a much more complex picture than the simplified story embodied in other points of memory (visuals, written memoirs, museum exhibits, etc), through which personal memory becomes collective (p. 62). But most importantly, Vilutienė's story highlights the gender issue in the Lithuanian partisan movement, and its post-Soviet memory dominated by 'masculine' heroism.

The versatility of the book also unfolds through the third article, 'Memory of Socialism and the Russian Orthodox Believers in Estonia' by Irina Paert. Even though this is the shortest article in the book, it reveals the very important and often problematic topic of the Russian memory in the Baltic States. As the author suggests, the collective memory of the Russian minority in the Baltic States is usually viewed from two main perspectives. The first one highlights the New Russian diaspora, for whom the fall of the Soviet Union creates a basis for a cultural and social identity. The second emphasises the shared Russian culture before the Second World War and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Besides these views, Paert innovatively introduces a third dimension of Orthodoxy (the religious memory) as part of the Russian identity. The author analyses the complexity of religious memory through seven interviews conducted with respondents born in the 1920s and 1930s, combining them with other written memoirs. In doing so, Paert compares points of intersection of the religious memory with the existing Russian and Estonian narratives.

Logically and consistently, the fourth article 'The Construction of Continuous Self in the Life Stories of Former Soviet Officials in Lithuania', written by Irena Šutinienė, continues exploring the strategies of former Soviet officials in relation to existing contemporary discourses.

The author analyses written life stories of Lithuanians born between the 1920s and 1940s, with the aim of uncovering their attempts to construct a positive self-image in the changed socio-political and cultural context. Štutienė presents commendably clearly features of the Lithuanian public memory culture that were influenced by the post-Soviet competition between the two main political powers, the Conservatives and ex-Communists, that promoted two general discourses: the traumatic and strictly anti-Soviet, versus 'Even then we worked for the sake of the nation' (pp. 84–87). Identifying this division allows the reader to understand better how former Soviet officials chose one or the other strategy to construct their stories in the present. The author extracts from them three main strategies that prevail: normalisation, critical reflection, and blame/guilt discourses. However, they all confront the dominant anti-Soviet narrative in different ways and at different levels (pp. 91–101). It should be mentioned that Štutienė's article contributes significantly to studies of the Baltic memory, because there are much fewer similar biographical examinations of the post-Soviet memory in Lithuania than in the other two Baltic States.

The next article 'Between Improvisation and Inevitability: Former Latvian Officials' Memoirs of the Soviet Era', written by Martins Kaprans, is similar in its problematic to the previous one. It deals with relatively similar research questions raised in Štutienė's article, but it focuses explicitly on the memoirs of former Latvian Soviet officials published in the 2000s. In order to understand post-communist Latvian society, Kaprans uses the concept of cognitive polyphasia proposed by Voelklein and Howarth.² This means the coexistence of various cognitive styles and forms of knowledge in either a social group or an individual. In other words, it shows the diversity of multi-layered memories and identities, whether collective or individual. The author investigates them from three different angles: identity construction, strategies for avoiding stigmatisation and collaboration, a comparison between the Soviet and post-Soviet experience. The findings show that most former officials justify their past by pragmatism, and distance themselves from the ideology (pp. 115–117). As for a comparison of Soviet and post-Soviet experiences, two patterns can be observed: progress, along with criticism of it (p. 118). Interestingly, similar observations about the strategies of

²C. Voelklein, C. Howarth, 'A Review of Controversies about Social Representations Theory: A British Debate', in: *Culture & Psychology* 11 (4) (2005), pp. 431–454.

former Soviet officials as a response to the new post-Soviet reality are made by Šutinienė. These findings create supportive arguments for the notion of trans-national Baltic memory.

However, nostalgia, another common feature of the Baltic memory, is examined exclusively in the last article, 'We were the Children of a Romantic Era: Nostalgia and the Nonideological Everyday through the Perspective of a "Silent Generation"' by Kirsti Joesalu. The author offers a slightly different approach, since she focuses on a private-public remembering of women born in the 1940s. Joesalu calls it 'a silent generation', because until recently its memoirs and experiences did not attract much attention in the public sphere. Interestingly enough, the life stories of these women reveal a discrepancy between their own private remembering and the official discourses about the socialist past. As Joesalu notes, asperities and other difficulties of the postwar years had an influence on the narrator's judgement of the late Soviet period, which was viewed as stable. This stability also contrasted with the changes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the transformation between the Soviet and democratic regimes took place (pp. 135–136). That is where the notion of nostalgia appears. Generally speaking, Joesalu touches the extremely topical subject of nostalgia for the socialist past, which still exists, not only in Estonia but also in other post-Soviet countries. However, it is not often articulated in official public discourses, or in the public sphere generally.

To conclude, a few important points should be stressed. First of all, the general question explored in the collected edition, how life lived under socialism is remembered in the post-communist present, is revealed clearly and coherently in most of the articles. Of course, we could say that some contributing authors³ could have reflected more on the wider context of memory culture in their articles. As Astrid Erll, one of the leading scholars of memory studies stressed, researchers of the collective memory should always pay attention to all three dimensions of memory culture: the *mental dimension* (cultural and socio-political frameworks that influence discourses), the *social dimension* (factors that influence the memory culture: the relationship with other memory cultures, public groups and their interrelations, memory techniques, etc), and the *material dimension* (memory strategies, symbols, points of

³This could be said especially about the article by A. Rahi-Tamm and I. Saleniece 'Re-Educating Teachers: Ways and Consequences of Sovietization in Estonia and Latvia (1940–1960) from the Biographical Perspective'. The authors pay more attention to historical contexts, without a deeper actualisation of memory in the present.

memory, etc).⁴ However, not all the articles respond equally to all three of them and if the reader pays attention only to the chosen parts of the book, the whole picture may not be seen. On the other hand, if the edited collection is evaluated as a whole, then a much clearer view of the investigated research object, the post-Soviet Baltic memory, emerges.

Furthermore, the book contributes to Baltic memory studies by creating the possibility to research it from a bottom-up perspective. The different modes of memory (generational, professional, gendered, family, political, cultural) selected by the contributing authors make this book multi-perspective and even more important. Nonetheless, the inclusion of a case of the Lithuanian-Polish memory would have enriched it, for, presumably, different narratives and strategies could have been observed. Despite that, the appearance of a peer-reviewed collection in the shape of a book is welcome, and should attract attention from scholars, students, and those who are interested in the Baltic memory, and memory studies in general.

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⁴A. Erll, *Memory in Culture* (Basingstoke, UK, 2011), pp. 102–104.