

The Legacies of Soviet Repression and Displacement

The Multiple and Mobile Lives of
Memories

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Ene Kõresaar and Terje Anepaio

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Introduction

The commemoration of totalitarian crimes under Stalin is one of Estonia's post-Soviet national narrative hallmarks. It has a prominent place in the national calendar as well as in history textbooks. It is visible in the landscape of monuments and in history exhibitions in museums, and it is still salient with the media and public speakers of all levels frequently refer to the sufferings of the Soviet era in a contemporary context. Throughout the period of independence, national policy on historical memory has moved in the direction of coherent and unitary commemoration, which would be capable of fostering a national sense of unity (Tamm 2012). Compared to state commemoration, group-specific commemoration practices may show different dynamics and tensions and different ways of creating and sustaining memories (Kõresaar 2018). Underlying the grassroots initiatives are personal memories of past experiences, the need to mourn and offer social support to fellow victims in order to keep the memory of events alive, and the aim to achieve social and state recognition and material compensation.

Grassroots commemoration is characterized by a small number of community leaders taking on different roles and developing additional skillsets to fulfill the commemorative functions of organization and to sustain and expand their mnemonic capital in society. Their role has received little attention, as commemoration research has focused primarily on organizations and institutions as collective actors and memory entrepreneurs. This chapter¹ highlights the role of the individual actor in making, materializing, and mediating the memory of Stalinist mass repressions in twenty-first-century Estonia. Until quite recently, the study of commemoration has emphasized collectivism (Kansteiner 2010) or the discursive capacities of memory entrepreneurs (Bernhard and Kubik 2014; Törnquist-Plewa 2016). By focusing on the individualized practice of commemoration, this chapter aims at providing a more differentiated insight into the entanglement of autobiographical, social, political, and cultural remembering. It offers an example of the individual labor of memory, understood as an activity involving the “direction and

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application of material and immaterial resources and capacities of production and reproduction of conditions for achieving remembrance” (Allen 2014, 5; Reading 2021). As Anna Reading (2021, 97) has critically noted, there is a lack of research that “bring[s] to the surface how mnemonic labor generates forms of memory that may be further transformed through the value accrued in memory work.”

This study combines economic, biographical, performative, and narrative approaches to commemoration to understand the process of how the memory of the Stalinist repressions gains mnemonic capital through individualized practice. By extension of Bourdieu’s concept of cultural and symbolic capital, Reading (2021, 97) suggests that mnemonic capital can also accumulate value in embodied, objectified, and institutionalized forms. To highlight individual agency in the commemoration process, we draw on further aspects of Bourdieu’s study of cultural producers and cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu 1984).

The term “cultural producer” brings out the complex and conflicting role of the individual in the process of social perpetuation and their ability to initiate social changes (Mahon 2000). Through the political dimension of social and cultural representation, cultural output can take on the form of cultural activism: the cultural producers deliberately implement creative forms of expression to intermediate in historical social interruptions, influence public debate, and transform stereotypes, prejudices, and the meanings of national, ethnic, and other group identities (Ginsburg 1991, cit. Mahon 2000, 475). The role of the cultural intermediary is shaped in the value creation taking place in the process of intermediation. The pioneer of the term, Pierre Bourdieu, used it in the context of employees in institutions who supply symbolic goods and services. Positioned in the art world between creator and consumer, the cultural intermediary serves as presenter and re-presenter of a cultural product (Negus 2002, 502). In addition, the term “cultural intermediary” provides an avenue for exploring the relations between cultural and economic practices and mutual dependencies (Nixon and du Gay 2002, 498), as well as questions concerning the autonomy and authorship of the cultural intermediary and the means and repertoire at their disposal (Matthews and Smith Maguire 2014, 2).

Bourdieu, his adherents, and his critics use the terms “cultural producer” and “cultural intermediary” to denote different categories of professions in the professional cultural sphere. In this study, they are used as role-related terms: we analyze how the different roles function, what they consist of, and how the adoption of these roles is related to the individual experience of repression, historical consciousness, and the relationship to the cultural textual community. The performative viewpoint allows the roles of the individual acting on the “cultural stage” to be differentiated further (Bardone 2013, 36). Different roles encompass different decisions regarding the time, place, form, content, and narrative structure of commemorative activities,

the physical and symbolic design of the place/space, the implementer and the audience, and public relations, among many others.

The case study under analysis is that of the non-governmental organization (NGO) Broken Cornflower (founded in 2003) and its founder and chair Enno Uiibo, a child-survivor of the Stalinist mass deportation of 1949. The analysis is rooted in long-term fieldwork conducted by Terje Anepaio between 2006 and 2008 and since 2010; media coverage of the NGO starting in 2004; the association's website and newsletter content; visual analysis of commemoration places and monuments; performative analysis of the NGO's commemoration rituals; narrative and discourse analysis of the NGO's publications; and an interview conducted by both authors with Enno Uiibo at the Estonian National Museum.

Broken Cornflower and the Memory of Stalinist Mass Repressions in Estonia

The Stalinist repressions – and above all the two mass deportations in June 1941 and March 1949 – not only make up an important segment in Estonians' counter-memory against the official Soviet discourse on the past but also constitute the core of the Estonian national narrative since the end of the Cold War. After occupying the Republic of Estonia (founded in 1918) in 1940, massive deportation and other repressions were carried out by the Soviets to eliminate resistance. A similar strategy was used after re-occupation in 1944² as a part of the Soviet plan to stop any resistance to collectivizing and to thwart support for partisans. The mass deportations of 1941 and 1949 affected about 31,000 people,³ although in the long term they influenced the lives of many more. The Singing Revolution at the end of the 1980s brought the topic of repression into the open. In particular, the fortieth anniversary of the March 1949 deportations was massively commemorated, and the connected ceremonies kickstarted the public commemoration of repressions in Estonia and gave rise to the tradition of marking the anniversary of the mass deportations on June 14 and March 25 with public observances. These were initially held only in the places directly connected to the deportations (for example, train stations where wagons were loaded with people) or in prestigious public spaces (such as Town Hall Square in Tartu). This phase was immediately followed by the erection of memorials. Since 1994, June 14 has been a national day of mourning, dedicated to the remembrance of deportations under all occupation regimes, while March 25, the anniversary of the 1949 deportation, is a day of remembrance (Anepaio 2003).

The founding of the Broken Cornflower NGO (Estonian abbreviation MRÜ, *Murtud Rukkilille Ühing*) in 2003 coincided with the actualizing of the topic of Stalinist mass repressions at the start of the century. It was directly inspired by the nationwide Estonia Remembers campaign, which spanned summer 2001 with President Lennart Meri playing a central role. As part of the campaign, ceremonies under the tagline “Estonia Remembers” were held

in every county in the run-up to the sixtieth anniversary of the 1941 mass deportation, where Meri personally bestowed a Broken Cornflower decoration, inspired by the cornflower (the Estonian national flower since 1969), on thousands of people who had endured repressions under the occupation regimes. The Broken Cornflower decoration created for the campaign remains a symbol of the victims of the occupying regimes, and the bestowal and use of the symbol are governed by a government act (2004).

The 2001 campaign was a prologue, as the state became more consistently involved in historical memory and the legacy of totalitarian repression. During and after the post-communist turn, the victims of Soviet repression were accorded high symbolic and political significance, and moral, legal, and material compensation for injustices committed under Stalin was provided by the state. However, the period of national unity in the late 1980s and early 1990s was quickly supplanted by rapid socio-economic change, and the topic of the repressions lost its importance for a transitional society with a struggling economy (Lauristin and Vihalemm 1997, 106, 109; Anepaio 2003, 216–218). Just as national memory policy in the mid- to late 1990s was characterized by pragmatism and stability (Tamm 2012), so too public space became more and more present- and less past-oriented. By the end of the decade, the repression experience lay increasingly within the private sphere of social memory, and the social base for (conscious) reception and transmission of the past diminished (Anepaio 2002). In addition, material support for the activities of stakeholder groups advocating for the victims of crimes of totalitarianism had decreased.

The Estonia Remembers campaign was aimed at addressing the declining social status of formerly repressed people and at activating historical memory. In subsequent years, with the active participation of the victims themselves, a legal resolution was devised for the victims of the crimes of totalitarianism. In 2003, the parliament adopted a law regarding individuals repressed by the occupation regimes, defining people who were unlawfully persecuted and setting out their allowances, benefits, and right to a pension. Based on this law, since 2004, the state has made a variety of small-scale benefits available to victims, above all in the fields of medicine and transportation. In April 2006, a charitable foundation established by the law, *Represseritute Abistamise Fond* (SA ERAF, essentially “Fund for Assistance to the Victims of Totalitarianism”), was established to provide material aid for stakeholder organizations. Memory work, including documenting, studying, publishing memoirs, and erecting memorials, also took place via the foundation.

The founding of MRÜ in 2003 was a result of the fluctuating status of formerly repressed people. MRÜ noted as the reason for its establishment that victims of totalitarianism had become “neglected in Estonia both by the state and society” (Kirsman 2003). As its paramount objective, MRÜ declared advocacy and protection for victims of repressions, and the gathering and documenting of the recollections of those affected. The MRÜ board has five members, with 700–800 members, plus a youth chapter and supporter

members. MRÜ's main activity is dealing with the social problems faced by its members and improving everyday lives. It organizes conferences, excursions, and "health days," arranges rehabilitative care, and counsels elderly members on social matters. Once a year, it holds a Cornflower Day, to which formerly repressed people from all over the country are welcomed. It also publishes the newsletter *Rukkilill* ("Cornflower"). Commemoration of Stalinist mass repressions has also been one of the organization's main activities from day one.

MRÜ has active contacts with different political forces, a hallmark of the lobby's orientation from as soon as the organization was established. For instance, Urmas Reinsalu, a conservative politician and minister in multiple administrations, and Director of the Office of President Lennart Meri in the years 1998–2001, who oversaw bestowals of the Broken Cornflower decoration in 2001, has served as patron of the organization since 2003. The project united Reinsalu's interests and previous ties with the topic of victims of totalitarianism and MRÜ's interest in politicians conversant in the related topics. In 2006, then-President Arnold Rüütel took part in the opening of a memorial organized by MRÜ. The organization has had cooperation agreements with the Centre Party, the Reform Party, and the Tallinn City Government (Centre Party). It also receives funding from the state budget.

The organization's founder and leader Enno Uibo plays a pivotal part in the activity and high profile of MRÜ. He is proactive and his experience as an entrepreneur in the construction sector has built a foundation of trust for government representatives. He has been awarded several high state decorations, most notably the Order of the White Star (Fifth Class) in 2014 and the Estonian Freedom Oak Wreath in 2018.⁴

Enno Uibo: The Life Story Behind the Commemoration Activity

The founder and chair of MRÜ, Enno Uibo, represents the 1.5 generation of victims of the Stalinist mass repressions. He was born in 1945 in Mõniste Municipality in Võru County, the youngest child in a farming family. His father received his farmland from the Republic of Estonia in return for fighting in the War of Independence (1918–1920). On March 25, 1949, the family – father, mother, daughter, and two sons, including four-year-old Enno – were deported to Irkutsk Oblast in Siberia. When interviewed, Uibo said his earliest memory was of a brief moment when the family was in the back of the truck, ready to leave, and he had his last view of their home "in his child's eyes." Uibo associated one of his credos with that view: "from the moment we were deported, I retained that dream of my home, that my feet would one day rest under my own table."

Uibo was the first member of his family to be cleared to return to Estonia. He was able to do so in 1955, thanks to the so-called "children's amnesty," a directive of the USSR interior minister (no. 00597, July 16, 1954), under

which children under the age of sixteen were released from exile restrictions. The return of these children to Estonia depended on whether they had close relatives who had been allowed to remain in Estonia and who were prepared to take the children. Ten-year-old Enno moved in with his maternal aunt. The other deportees in his family returned three years later. The family's oldest son died in the forests as a member of the resistance movement during a security forces raid in 1955. Enno had been back from Siberia for two months at that point and was the last to see his older brother alive. The family was able to move back to their home parish after repeated negotiations with the local authorities, who did not, however, allow them to return to their homestead. Some of the farm buildings had been destroyed, and some had been moved to the local collective farm's (*kolkhoz*) central complex.

Though the family's time in Siberia was kept a secret from their home community, Uibo's surviving brother had a hard time getting employment due to his Siberian past. Uibo himself made the decision to study at the Pedagogical Institute in Pskov (Russia) in order to escape stigmatization in his home county. He worked at school only in brief stints because his background as a deportee was a problem for him. He sought employment in the construction field and worked in several places in southern Estonia before moving in 1980 to Kuusalu, in northern Estonia, where he raised a family. From the late 1980s until his retirement, Uibo was a construction contractor.

During the national independence movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Uibo joined the Popular Front, one of the major forces in the Estonian independence movement that led to the re-establishment of the Republic of Estonia and took part actively in political demonstrations. In the 1980s, the former deportees began meeting at places from which they were deported. Uibo took part in such get-togethers in Võru, and in the 1990s, he also acquainted himself with organizations representing victims of totalitarianism in northern Estonia. In 2001, Uibo was awarded a Broken Cornflower during the Estonia Remembers campaign. That, and contacts with victim and war veteran organizations, inspired him to found the MRÜ in Kuusalu, along with three other victims of totalitarianism:

TERJE: But how did the idea to establish the MRÜ occur to you and what is the story behind it?

UIBO: It was back when President Meri was handing out the [Broken Cornflower] decorations ... and that gave me a push. I took a look and saw there were quite many of us!

TERJE: Where did you receive the decoration?

UIBO: At Tallinn Song Festival Grounds. And I wondered why we couldn't have the people together on that basis, too. It seemed that the deportees, Memento and freedom fighters, wounded warriors were all separate and ... my goal was for everyone ... to get on together and organize events together.

Enno Uibo positioned the establishment of MRÜ within the broader context of Estonia's fissured memory landscape. He considers as MRÜ's objective the overcoming of conflicts both between various repressed groups and between groups with different historical experiences. Referring to the still unresolved conflicting memories related to the Nazi and Soviet occupations of Estonia, Uibo notes that "there really could be reconciliation, you know; it's the same Estonian families" and emphasizes that with regard to the MRÜ's members, "we don't draw distinctions between each other, no matter what our fate was."

"Everything Has to Have Someone in Charge": Materializing Commemoration

In the following, we outline MRÜ's commemorative activity chronologically, focusing on the roles the leader of the organization, Enno Uibo, has taken in this process. The study of commemoration tends to focus on the end result of the commemoration, such as the artifacts, rituals, and language used in the commemoration rituals (Misztal 2003). The following is an attempt to change the viewpoint and to center the analysis on how ideas take form and how they are carried out, and how existing material, symbolic, and social resources are used to implement ideas. Taking an individual-centered perspective on a memory organization's activity allows us to analyze the mundane "backstage" and the decision-making process of the commemoration. It also enables an understanding of how these decisions as well as the roles that the decision-making individual takes depend on multiple factors coinciding, often by accident.

In 2004, at the very beginning of its activity, the MRÜ launched active efforts to lay the foundation for the annual conference, *Times of Oppression*. The conference was held in June as a reference to the June deportation. Paide, a small town in central Estonia, was chosen as the venue in order to facilitate access from all parts of the country. Uibo, as the main organizer, talked with the Paide city government about organizing the conference, which led to the idea of creating a monument in conjunction with the conference. The idea itself relied on making use of existing resources:

Uibo: And then they found that ... there was a man, Rooba. ... He had hewn out a rock, and received some award for it, but ... at the time, the rock was not used. But someone from the city government remembered that it was somewhere in the nettles. We went and looked for it and saw that it would be suitable. ... And then it got placed by the old railway station in Paide where the deportation began. And then people got to talking, the people of Paide came around and found it was a nice thing, and I felt moved and that's how it started.

The monument, inscribed "Memento," was opened in Paide on June 4, 2004, along with an additional plaque with text by Uibo himself (who organized its

installation): “This text started haunting me, and as it didn’t fit onto the Paide rock, it was put aside for that reason.” The text on the additional plaque – “Remember the victims of the foreign powers; they lost their lives, families, homeland” – was related to the original idea of founding the MRÜ, with the attempt to overcome the internal conflicts in a society fragmented into different memory groups. The memorial is now called the Broken Cornflower monument and people meet there on the anniversary of the mass deportation.

A couple of weeks later, on June 14, 2004, another monument was opened in Uibo’s hometown of Kuusalu. Its metal plaque bears the same message. The MRÜ announced a design competition for the Kuusalu memorial, which drew a response from sculptor Ekke Väli, who proposed an idea of a telephone that rings regularly, referring to the so-called “telephone justice” characteristic of Soviet society. Uibo himself was inspired by the idea that “Operation Priboi⁵ was ordered over the telephone from Moscow” (from the interview). The image of the rusty iron telephone initially also symbolized informers and the fact that locals were complicit in the deportation (Kuusalus on, 2004). That message was rarely voiced in public, however, due to the ontological threat it poses to the occupation paradigm underlying the Estonian national narrative; it was relegated to the background during the later use of the monument. The “Telefon” sculpture was oriented toward the municipal government building, toward the former village council, to recall the operation behind the March deportation of 1949. The Kuusalu memorial also had support from the local government and has been embraced in local commemorative practices.

The MRÜ’s most extensive commemorative event in terms of idea, execution, and further applications was the establishment of the Estonian Home memorial on the grounds of Uibo’s home farm in Mõniste in 2006 (see Figure 5.1). In the interview, Uibo stressed the complexity of preparations for the Mõniste memorial, starting with finding a suitable place for it and solutions that would be appropriate for the material possibilities, right up to potential cooperation partners. Uibo’s decision to offer his childhood home as the site of the memorial and to enter his own design in the competition was predicated on material reasons – “there were those who entered designs, but everyone asked for so much money” – along with the emotional connection and memories associated with the place.

The Uibo-designed monument, approved by the MRÜ due to both its symbolic expressive power and affordable cost, depicts a wall made of concrete, with a window, a towering chimney in front, and an exposed stove. Uibo himself has described the monument as follows:

It symbolizes the ruins that many Estonian homes ended up as after World War II and the mass deportations. ... [It] is dedicated to all those Estonian homes and people who suffered in the tempest of war and who were driven out of their own homes with the deportations, away from their families and homeland.

(Uibo 2006)



Figure 5.1 The Estonian Home complex was opened on the sixty-fifth anniversary of the June deportation (2006). The memorial complex regularly hosts commemorative ceremonies and local events. Annual Cornflower Day at the Estonian Home memorial in August 2010. Photo: Ere Uiibo. Courtesy NGO Broken Cornflower.

Apart from his role as designer, Uiibo had to engage in efficient managerial work, organizing community efforts to tidy the area, doing concrete work, negotiating with the local municipality, companies, and organizations, and seeking support from the authorities and the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The Estonian Home complex was opened on the sixty-fifth anniversary of the June deportation. Considering the modest location of the memorial, those who came to the opening ceremony represented a prestigious group: the Võru County governor, who was also the patron of Estonian Home, representatives of the Võru County association of municipalities, Mõniste municipality elders, the provost of the Lutheran Church in Võru (who read out a message from the archbishop), Estonian President Arnold Rüütel, and MP Urmas Reinsalu, a patron of MRÜ. The Estonian Defence League paramilitary organization was also present. Uiibo had added a deeply personal detail to the opening ceremony, an Estonian flag sewn before the war by his mother, which the family took to Siberia with them.⁶

In 2007, a year after the opening, the Estonian Home complex received an addition, a wooden sculpture entitled “Peremees jõudis tagasi koju” (“The Master Has Returned Home,” loosely translated from Estonian), by the artist Robert Ollo (see Figure 5.2). The idea for the sculpture again came from Uiibo, who recently had been part of the MRÜ delegation at the opening of a sculpture dedicated to Estonian women in another county (Eesti Naine 2006). In the interview, Uiibo recalled:

We got to talking with [the initiator of the Estonian women’s monument] and he said ... there was material left over, and he developed the idea that since there is an Estonian woman [Uiibo describes her as looking like a quintessential motif of an Estonian woman waiting at the gate for the family or the herd to come home] ... since there’s a mistress of the house, there should be a master as well. And Ollo the artist was there as well and we started discussing it and he told me what motif it should have and he wanted to see a picture of my father, too, to get a basic idea and another time we went to look at the oak and he said it would do nicely.

The sheer number of people who took part in the opening of the sculpture again attests to how effective the MRÜ and its chairperson were in building a positive image for the organization and in bringing about cooperation at the government authority, county, municipality, and grassroots levels. The story of the making of the master sculpture in turn shows how ideas are shaped in the network of victims of totalitarianism, sometimes by fortuitous coincidence.

The memorial complex has been repeatedly updated with new elements over the years. One of the major additions to the complex was the Cry of Freedom monument, which opened in 2019. According to MRÜ’s explanation, the monument depicts Kalevipoeg, the eponymous mythical hero from the Estonian national epic, standing in the opening of a concrete bunker, dispelling “the historical gates of pain” and “leav[ing] the hell of [foreign] occupations” (Eesti Kodu, 2019). Recently, the Estonian Home complex has gained a new theme: the tragedy of deportation and loss of home(s) has been supplemented by the commemoration of the Forest Brothers, Estonia’s anti-communist Post-World War II (WWII) armed resistance, who were very active in the southern Estonian forests. The Forest Brothers also had a direct link to Uiibo’s family history: his older brother was killed by operatives of the Soviet secret police agency (NKVD) in a raid in 1955, while a young nephew had died in a raid on a Forest Brothers bunker five years earlier. In 2021, the Estonian Forest Brothers Memorial Column was erected in the Estonian Home complex. The new monument is an enlarged copy of a wooden sculpture made by a Forest Brother in 1946, depicting three partisans holding a woman wearing a flower wreath and a national flag (Metsavennad, 2021). The theme of resistance is symbolically linked to the Estonian Home memorial



Figure 5.2 The wooden sculpture “The Master Has Returned Home” was opened at the Estonian Home complex on August 25, 2007. The sculpture symbolizes the return of the master of the house from Siberia. Photo: Terje Anepaio.

through the Forest Brothers motif of longing for home. The monument was erected in cooperation with the Estonian Association of Former Forest Brothers.

Uibo has successfully used the Cornflower and Estonian Home themes in creating new events and looking for cooperation partners. A summer Cornflower Day has been held in Mõniste since 2007 (Uibo 2008), while various home-themed events are held all year, including drawing and essay competitions for children and a “beautiful country home” competition called Cornflower Home. The memorial complex in Mõniste regularly hosts commemorative ceremonies and local events.

An example of how the MRÜ under Uibo’s leadership has expanded its activities and found people of common cause and action is the symbiosis of the Destroyed Estonian Home memorial and a cooperation project linking Estonia’s furthest municipalities at each point of the compass. After completion of the Estonian Home complex, Uibo worked together with a youth NGO engaged with finding leisure activities for youth, networking between Estonia’s peripheral regions, and developing village movements in the municipalities at the periphery. After joining the project, Uibo was instrumental in similar memorial plaques in memory of destroyed homes being installed in other municipalities, based on the example of Mõniste. Similarly, Uibo has worked with local youth to create an adventure hiking trail (named after Uibo’s fallen brother Joonas, a former partisan), inspired by the theme of armed resistance at the memorial complex. Plans include combining sports and entertainment with memory education, building a model bunker, and adding information stands with the stories of the Forest Brothers.

Analysis of Uibo’s activities shows that his role of cultural producer and cultural intermediary in the commemoration process is situational, depending on specific possibilities and means. Changing one’s role involves improvisation, the need to adapt to changing conditions, and an expression of “vernacular creativity” (Edensor et al. 2010, 8). Particularly, in the establishment of the Estonian Home memorial complex, the MRÜ Chair fulfilled myriad different roles: to use a theatrical simile, not only did he direct the entire process but he also took part in the different stages as artist and stage manager, screenwriter, director and actor, stagehand, and producer. In the context of role changes, the importance of personal contacts and networks also comes up. Uibo has involved in his commemorative activity his family and the network he developed during his career as an entrepreneur and in his home districts of Kuusalu and Mõniste. The social capital and personal communication skills he has developed in his profession have been pivotal factors in MRÜ as an organization being able to expand its activity and network with other civic initiatives outside the commemoration sphere.

Cornflower, Estonian Home, and the Epic Hero: Developing the Cultural Repertoire of Commemoration

The roles of a cultural producer and a cultural intermediary are defined by their actions in creating and intermediating culture and, through that, cultivating taste. Although “taste” and related decisions are perceived in everyday life as personal and natural, they are inseparable from the social positioning of the individual and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984), creative and intermediary networks (Godart and Mears 2009), and political, economic, institutional, and media contexts (Bourdieu 1984, 231–232; Smith Maguire 2014, 18). The creativity of the individual in everyday life is already encompassed in existing cultural formats, ideas, meanings, and symbols (Edensor et al. 2010, 8). All of these factors, combined with the individual’s psychological history, affect their ability to change the surrounding world (Born 2010, 182).

Through the lens of a cultural producer and cultural intermediary, an important personal aspect is added to the theories of collective memory that deal with the dynamics of remembering. These theories focus on the active creation and mediation of the meaning of the past and changing memory in the social process. Emphasis is placed on analysis of identities and systems of meaning in their (historical) development when change is seen not only in the changing effect of the present on what is remembered but also in continuity. This means, among other things, analyzing how the new social and symbolic structures that bring about social change do not necessarily replace the old ones and recognizing that there is a synergy in which new commemorative practices build on existing ones. This creates a “memory of memory” (Olick 2007, 12), for example, in the form of narrative templates characteristic of textual communities (Wertsch 2009). This continues over time, adapts well to social change, and can be used to interpret temporally distant events. In what follows, we point out the individual practice-based perspective on the relationship between memory creation and textual community. This shows that the choice of symbols used in commemoration and creating a repertoire that legitimizes commemoration rest on both earlier (collective) commemorative practice and narrative resources as well as on the cultural capital and specific past experience of the decision-making individual. We will devote closer analysis to three motifs in MRÜ’s commemorative repertoire: the cornflower, the Estonian home, and the national epic *Kalevipoeg*.

The cornflower symbol is applied a great deal in MRÜ’s activities: it is used for the newsletter and at conferences, on monuments, and on MRÜ’s flag. In addition, the association hands out the Cornflower Home award to the owner of the most beautiful country home in the rural municipality of Mõniste. The continuity of the cornflower symbol is based on the meaning ascribed to it in the national textual community. Drawing connections with the broader national meaning of the cornflower – for instance, linking activities with the folk calendar by holding Cornflower Day on Assumption

(August 15) – MRÜ has been able to link itself and its commemorative activities with grassroots initiatives that take place outside the field of commemoration. At the same time, the use of the cornflower motif in the commemoration of mass repressions amplifies the place of these events in the national memory. Linking the cornflower and mass deportations in the commemoration space started before the restoration of the Republic of Estonia in 1991. The first example was the Cornflower memorial established by the Memento organization in Tartu in 1990. The monument, based on Paul Saar’s design “Cornflower on Siberian Stones,” is dedicated to “all victims of the Soviet occupation and those who fell for Estonian freedom” (Tartu Memento). The bestowal of the Broken Cornflower decoration by the president of Estonia to nearly 10,000 former deportees during the commemoration campaign in 2001 was the second major milestone in the integration of the national cornflower motif and commemoration of Stalinist repressions (Office of the President of the Republic 2001). The Cornflower symbolizes the destruction wrought by WWII in Estonia, and President Lennart Meri conceived the idea for the symbol. As mentioned above, the recipients of the decoration included Uibo, on whose initiative MRÜ was founded. In 2014, to mark the sixty-fifth anniversary of the March deportation, MRÜ created its own cornflower decoration, which combined the flower symbol with the railway, a symbol of the deportations.

Another powerful symbol used by MRÜ is the (Estonian) home. The home theme was actualized in the commemoration activity of MRÜ with the opening of the Estonian Home memorial complex in Mõniste. Above, we explained how Uibo’s personal role was manifest in the establishment of the memorial: he invested his own private capital in the commemorative activity and designed the monument at the center of the memorial, drawing inspiration from his childhood memory of his destroyed home and by doing so created a new narrative resource for MRÜ’s activities. At the memorial opening ceremony in June 2006, the theme of the home was explored in four ways in connection with the Stalinist mass deportations: the individual dimension expressed by the destruction of a farm; the social dimension expressed in the long-term effects of deportations that left thousands of homes empty; the national dimension created by the continuity of the pre-WWII and post-restoration of independence homes; and the mythological dimension, stressing the ancient origins of Estonian homes and interruptions and the continuity in Estonian history marked by foreign occupation. “Home” as a key element in deportation discourse makes possible both the position of victim (loss of home) and hero/martyr (defense of home), and it can be successfully applied to various historical circumstances. The latest addition to the Estonian Home memorial – a monument to post-war anti-communist partisans – was linked to the memorial through the metaphor of “defending one’s home and arriving home again” (Uus 2021). Moreover, the motif of the home has been successfully exploited by MRÜ outside the limited discourse of deportation in cooperation with other grassroots initiatives, such as cooperation between

municipalities. The MRÜ has made a proposal to the government to add Estonian Home Day to the state calendar of Estonian holidays (Uibo 2016).

In turn, the Estonian home theme as interpreted by MRÜ and Uibo relies on one of the core texts of Estonian culture, the national epic *Kalevipoeg*. The epic served as inspiration for the MRÜ anthem. At the opening of the Estonian Home memorial, certain lines from the epic were quoted – “Here is where Kalev established his home, lighted kindling in Linda’s hearth, the Estonian national tribe had its inception” – emphasizing the mythological dimension and continuity of the Estonian home. “The Master Has Returned Home” wooden sculpture dedicated on Uibo’s initiative in 2007 also refers to *Kalevipoeg*, using the motif of Kalev returning home to his people in the context of Stalinist mass repression. The plaque, loosely translated, states: “From far away, through times of tribulations, the master returned home.” The mythological dimension is also emphasized by MRÜ’s interpretation: “The master, fashioned from an old oak from a sacred grove, symbolizes the return of the master of the house from Siberia” (Uibo 2007). The sculpture’s link to the national epic is also stressed by the two-volume collection of remembrances from deportees published by Enno and Ere Uibo in 2012 and 2017, *Kalevipoja lapsed* (“*Kalevipoeg’s Children*”), the cover image of which depicts a paterfamilias sitting between the crumbling walls of a farm, with ominous thunderheads in the sky and railway tracks symbolizing the Siberian journey. Finally, the Cry of Freedom monument, recently added to the Estonian Home memorial, depicts the epic hero *Kalevipoeg* breaking out of hell (or foreign occupations) (see Figure 5.3).

The national epic constitutes a textual tradition that has been intertextually interwoven with both elite and everyday culture. The durability of the *Kalevipoeg* textual tradition can on one hand be attributed to the intratextual characteristics of the epic: similar topics and motifs are repeated in different variations, with lyrical tension arising between each one and new meanings rearing their heads. On the other hand, the epic has also seen attempts to hitch it to the wagon of various cultural–ideological causes ever since the late-nineteenth-century national awakening (Laak 2003, 131, 137). There have been many layers to the hero: in the 1930s, *Kalevipoeg* was the symbol of the hard-working Estonian, and in the 1950s, he was harnessed for socialist reconstruction (Uibo 1986). *Kalevipoeg’s* antagonist *Sarvik* (the devil) has been a symbol of both a northern armored knight (with a reference to the struggle against Christian crusaders), fascist Germany and Hitler in the Great Patriotic War, and Stalin. In the memoirs dating from the 1990s, the underworld figure of *Sarvik* is a metaphor for evil and the personification of a great malign force in the context of WWII. For Estonian nationalism, the *Kalevipoeg* epic is a monument to the Estonian people and the independent nation-state (Petersen 2003), symbolically represented as being home. In the reception of the epic, the motifs of the farm and returning home have had the greatest influence in creating new meanings and metaphors.



Figure 5.3 The Cry of Freedom monument depicts Kalevipoeg, the eponymous mythical hero from the Estonian national epic, standing in the opening of a concrete bunker, dispelling “the historical gates of pain” and “leav[ing] the hell of [foreign] occupations.” Photo: Terje Anepaio.

The image of Kalev returning home – beloved by Estonian nationalism – has also been used in life stories written in the 1990s to tell the story of the Estonian people amid the twists and turns of twentieth-century history. These texts express Estonia’s identity as a small nation, which is used to position itself in the space characterized by the great game of ideologies and foreign powers during and after WWII. In Estonia, the Soviet occupation is also seen as a period of national interruption, which again emphasizes the idea of state and national continuity – that is, when Kalev has arrived home (Kõresaar 2016).

MRÜ’s narrative practice can be placed in the context of post-Soviet memory work, but it also has a strong personal significance for Uiibo. The pre-war edition of *Kalevipoeg* was one of the few Estonian-language books that Uiibo had access to in Siberia when he was a child:

It must have been one of the few books that came into my hands in Siberia. ... There were relatively few Estonian books and I was a major book-worm and even whined and carried on about not having anything to read. It was brought to me for a few days to read. ... From there I remembered the line ‘Lend me your *kannel* [zither].’

MRÜ’s narrative practice shows how, based on the cornflower and Estonian home themes and the motifs of the national epic as realms of memory, the meaning of another, later realm of memory, Stalinist mass repressions, is created. It is also evident that the organization’s narrative practice has specific personal trajectories: the selection of repertoire has been affected by the decision-making individual’s own experience as a victim of mass repressions and their cultural capital. Personal factors and input have usually been hidden from the public face of commemoration and from the organization-focused lens of (collective) memory studies, yet they are pivotal to commemoration coming about (i.e., for memories to become materialized, explained, understood, shared, and recognized).

Conclusion

Through the lens of the commemorative activities of an Estonian non-profit organization founded in 2004, the Broken Cornflower NGO, this chapter analyzed how individual, social, political, cultural, and material aspects intertwine in grassroots commemoration of the Stalinist mass deportations. In particular, we highlighted the role and labor of memory of one individual in the commemoration process. Analyzing the activities of MRÜ’s founder and long-term chair, Enno Uiibo, we demonstrated that an individual engaged in the field of commemoration can be regarded as a cultural producer and intermediary fulfilling a whole array of different roles, adapting to changing conditions and improvising as the situation demands. The success of the commemorative activities of the organization depends significantly on the

material and intangible resources at the disposal of the decision-making individual and the “vernacular creativity” the individual employs. In this way, Uibo could use existing mnemonic infrastructure, creating a new infrastructure to expand the mnemonic capital of the traumatic experience of Stalinist repressions. Analyzing MRÜ’s narrative practice, we also showed that the selection of symbols used in the commemorative process relies on earlier collective mnemonic practices and resources of the national textual community and the cultural and embodied capital of the decision-making individual. The choice of inclusive narrative forms, combined with active grassroots networking, has made it possible to link deportation memory to the interests of other memory communities. By extending the chains of memory labor, most significantly involving the youth and other organizations outside of the field of commemoration, the Chair of MRÜ has created an opportunity for the memory of the Stalinist mass repressions to transform and adapt to societal change.

In more general terms, this chapter aimed to make a point about the significance of studying and recognizing the major impact of individuals on group-specific and even national commemorative practices. Although the roles of individuals may vary by organization, it is through their mnemonic labor – their capacity to find and apply material, social, political, and symbolic resources, and their effort to create conditions and forms for memory work, often inspired by their own embodied experiences – that respective memories accumulate value and find a receptive base in society.

Notes

- 1 This work was supported by the Estonian Research Council grant (PRG1097).
- 2 Between the fall of 1941 and the fall of 1944, Estonian territory was occupied by Nazi Germany.
- 3 Altogether more than 70,000 Estonian inhabitants – about 6% of the pre-war population – fell victim to the Stalinist repressions (1940–1941 and 1944–1953).
- 4 The Estonian Freedom Oak Wreath (established for the centennial of the Republic of Estonia) is awarded to persons who deserve merit for preserving and passing on the memory of the recent history of the Estonian state and people, participating in the freedom struggle and the armed and unarmed resistance movement, and capturing and researching the Estonian freedom struggle and resistance movement.
- 5 Operation Priboi was the codename for the Soviet mass deportation from the Baltic states on March 25–28, 1949.
- 6 Uibo later donated this flag to a local museum.

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