

Kalmre, Eda. *The Human Sausage Factory: A Study of Post-war Rumour in Tartu* (On the Boundary of Two Worlds: Identity, Freedom, and Moral Imagination in the Baltics, 34). Amsterdam-New York, NY: Rodopi, 2013. Notes. Bibliography. Index. 180 pp. Price \$65.00 (paper). ISBN 978-90-420-3717-5.

The author discusses the cultural and mental landscape of Estonia after World War II – a small country which experienced war, three occupations (by USSR, Nazis, and again USSR), national humiliation, purges and social division. The 1947 case of persisting rumors about a small sausage factory in Tartu processing human flesh and selling it on the market tells us how grand narratives of catastrophe develops in a particular cultural and colonial perspective. As the author posits: “The aim of this study is not to reconstruct the historical truth of the attempt to find out whether this atrocious blood crime indeed took place in Tartu” (24), but to study the tradition as a process.

Anxiety, frustration, humiliation, post-traumatic syndrome, everyday violence found symbolic outlet in popular legend that in conditions of a lack of information (which Mark Bloc saw as a trigger of all rumors) released emotions and helped ordinary people, whom James Scott called “subaltern” and “weak” to have a feeling of gaining control over the situation. The narrative of cannibalism embodied in the rumor Eda Kalmre placed in a global and temporal context of many regions’ lore and Estonian lore from past centuries. In this important point of correlation between many folkloric narratives, the study could benefit from the classical work by Sir James George Frazer *The Golden Bough*, but, alas, it is not used in this book. The study really profits from comparison of an Estonian tale about a sausage factory with plenty of different rumors that circulated both in Europe and the Soviet Union, for example talks of cannibalism in besieged Leningrad.

The book approaches the legend from the ethnocentric, gender, and anthropological perspectives. Beside these fruitful elaborations, as a historian, I was especially interested in the political component of many horror rumors centered on the Soviet security police (misnamed KGB by the author, though it was called MGB in 1947),

which expanded its operations to Tartu first in 1940 and then in 1944 with the occupation of the country by the Soviet Union. Several popular interpretations hold KGB (sic) directly responsible for the imagined sausage factory crimes. The horror of the time was expressed in legends about a black car kidnapping people from the streets, a meat grinder (or centrifuge???) in the cellar of the building occupied by this organization processing the corpses of the shot people (pp. 45-56) – all resonating to similar themes in Leningrad lore of the 1930s. The image of the enemy: a man in a leather coat, or KGB officer, replaces the image of a German baron typical for old Estonian rumors, and became an embodiment of evil, together with other characters—the Jews and Russian immigrants.

The sources used in this study were letters, memoirs, eyewitness interviews conducted in Tartu in 2001-2007, the post war diaries (especially of Jaan Roos), newspapers and materials collected by the Estonian Folklore and Estonian Historical Archives (not in the list of the sources, but mentioned in the text) since 1990. The copy of the MGB report pertaining the rumors and arrests in this connection from February 1947 illustrates the story brilliantly, but raises the question of if Estonian KGB archives were available for the study.

Historically, cases of cannibalism are associated with periods of terrible famines and mass death, but the author informs us that in February 1947, (12) “life [in Tartu] began to return to normal, food rationing stopped at the end 1947, although the continuing shortage of food caused endless queues. Employed people received sufficient bread rations.” However, Eda Kalmre does not discuss this disassociation though provides good historical and social background of post-war Tartu.

The book shows many photographs of contemporary Tartu and caricatures from the newspapers. Unfortunately the publication does not tell us a word about the author and her background. Composition of the book is a bit chaotic but the translation into English is professional and good.

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