Use of *us-them* polarization
in constructing ideological discourses
(Estonia 1940-1989)
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*The frightening thing was that it might all be true.*

George Orwell

**ABSTRACT:** *Us-them* polarization is a reflection of certain oppositional ideologies that represent different interests of social groups in a society. Ideologies are also “being developed to ’legitimate’ power or social inequality.”

This paper focuses on different ways of using *us-them* polarization in the Estonian newspaper texts. With references to the political and social contexts of particular periods in the Estonian history it will be demonstrated: how *us – them* polarization was effectively used for both – legitimisation and strengthening the Soviet power during 1940 and after the World War II, and for resistance to it; how representation of *us* versus *them* was used for both - suppressing and supporting national consciousness and identity by different forces in the society; and how *us* and *them* polarization was used for restoring Estonian identity and democratic political discourse during the struggle for independence in 1987-1989. As a method for my research I used close reading and discourse analysis of Estonian newspaper texts of the 1940s – late 1980s.

**Introduction**

The media texts express and reflect in several different ways the changes in society and people’s minds during major societal breaks and crises. They also reflect power relations and their alteration in political struggle. One of the most interesting textual phenomena in this respect is *us-them* polarization that displays the struggle between oppositional forces in a society. *Us-them* polarization reflects the existence of particular oppositional ideologies that groups create and use for identifying and placing themselves within the network of societal structures and relations.

My analysis departs from the concept of ideology as represented by Teun van Dijk, which interprets the representation of *us* and *them* as social groups as a key function of


2 Ibid.
ideologies. Ideologies reflect the fundamental social, economic, political or cultural interests of social groups, and conflicts between *us* and *them*, serving also as a means of self-determination and identity building. Van Dijk argues: “If ideologies monitor the way people as *group members* interpret and act in their social world, they also function as the basis of their social identities”.³ This statement also applies to nation as a group and national identity as a group identity. In case of Estonia, suppressing and destroying national identity was an important task of the Soviet ideology and respectively, the official mass media. The conflict between *us* and *them* was largely a conflict between nationalism of an oppressed nation and communist ‘internationalism’ of the Communist Party that aimed at assimilation and Russification of the nations incorporated into the Soviet Union.

The main function of the news media in the Soviet Union (as well as in the other countries of the Communist block) was to serve as an ‘ideological weapon’ of the Communist Party. The task of the ‘weapon’ was to contribute to the legitimisation of the power and authority of the Communist Party. The (official) media content was “strongly propagandistic and designed directly to serve the strengthening of the political system and ideological education of the masses”.⁴ The party principle governing journalism was absolute. Therefore, in the former Soviet Union, there was a “direct and close supervision by the political elite over the daily workings of all of the mass media”.⁵ This ‘direct and close’ supervision had various forms from an overwhelming censorship system with overt bans and secret lists of forbidden data up to the so-called ‘telephone right’ where the instructions and bans of the higher authorities were mediated orally. “/---/ When the telephone rang on the table of the editor after the publishing a critical article, s/he could easily guess *who* is calling and *what* he is going to say /---/”.⁶

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³ Ibid., 71.
An important function of the communist ideology was also creating a ‘virtual reality’ of a happy communist society. The mass media was used “to provide evidence of the system’s success in attaining its goals and to attest to the truth of its claims to superiority over capitalism". In this context, us – them polarization was also skilfully used to polarize the whole world, especially during the Cold War years: ‘our happy Communist world’ versus ‘their rotten capitalist world’.

Ignoring a more specific discussion about the relations between ideology, media and society, I focus in my paper on the use of us-them polarization in the Estonian newspaper texts during different periods of the Soviet occupation. Us – them polarization was one of the most widespread methods of ideological manipulation in the Soviet media. It was used in several ways for legitimisation and strengthening of the Soviet power and hegemony of the Communist Party in Estonia. It is also striking to see how the meaning of us - them polarization changed by the end of the Soviet rule, and how it started to fulfil quite an opposite function – to undermine this hegemony. I will also demonstrate how the us – them polarization in the Estonian media content was also used as a means of resistance.

**Contexts and framework**

The functions and meanings of us – them polarization in the media texts varied largely during different periods of the Soviet rule. The intensity and ways of the use of the means of ideological manipulation depended first of all on changing policy of the Communist Party.

The ideological pressure was the strongest and the most brutal during the years of Stalinism (in Estonia in 1940-1941, 1944-1956). During the next decade, propaganda and persuasion stopped to be the only functions of the media; certain pluralism was allowed and “the category of ‘system-indifferent’ content appeared, or rather grew considerably in

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importance. It was heavily censored and purged of anything that could be construed as politically undesirable, but did not entirely serve the purpose of educating Homo Sovieticus”.

Political control over the media was loosened and several new publications started to appear (especially cultural ones). In Estonia, it was namely the cultural media where a latent opposition to the ruling system started gradually to develop and surface.

The so-called period of Khrushchev’s thaw in 1956-1964 and early Brezhnev’s era up to 1968 meant liberation from the shackles of complete totalitarianism and certain development of economy and culture. Also the world opened up for Estonian people – the iron curtain became more transparent and communication with the Western countries became possible.

During the period after the Prague Spring in 1968 until the late 1970s, all types of culture, journalism and science, which had moved away from Communist Party control, were again gradually subjected to restrictions and supervision. Unlike the Stalinist period, this was done through ‘softer’ and more insidious forms of ideological coercion than with direct repression and terror.

In the late 1970s, Moscow launched a purposeful ideological attack on the three Baltic countries with the aim of sovietization and complete Russification of the area. The influx of immigrants from all over the Soviet Union into the Baltic republics was greatly increased. Use of Russian language was promoted in all spheres of life and the use of native languages suppressed. This policy created protest and a national instinct of self-defence that most often surfaced in the private and cultural spheres. Within this context, the polarization of us and them obtained a rather strong nationalistic dimension that (under the strict censorship) could mostly be expressed behind the lines.

The use of us – them polarization also depended on the general ambivalent character of the official media in Estonia: they were definitely an important part of the totalitarian state machinery on one hand, but on the other – they carried an opposition spirit and

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8 Jakubowicz 1992, 84.
formed a means of so-called ‘silent resistance’ to the Soviet system. Thus, quite often the
\textit{us} – \textit{them} polarization was used in two parallel ways at the same time: to prove the
‘communist truth’ in the official content and to undermine the same ‘truth’ in unofficial,
‘system-indifferent’ or ‘system-challenging’ content.\textsuperscript{11}

This was possible because the control over the content differed on various levels of the
hierarchy of the Soviet media system. Vihalem and Lauristin (1997)\textsuperscript{12} have defined five
levels in the hierarchy of the legal press:

- All-Union CP press (Pravda), Russian-language CP press in Soviet republics
- CP press in national languages
- Local newspapers, \textit{Komsomol} and youth press
- Cultural and scientific press, women’s, sport magazines
- ‘Samizdat’, alternative publications (almost non-existent in Estonia).

Coverage of ideological, political and historical topics of all-union importance, which
could be presented only in one, official version, belonged to the first level of political
control and ideological canonisation. In general, in the media discourse “the nature of the
power relations is often not clear, and there are reasons for seeing it as involving hidden
relations of power”.\textsuperscript{13} On the highest levels of the hierarchy, power relations were rather
explicit. The producers of texts as well as the sources more often than not spoke with the
voice of the power-holders; the power relations were also embodied in the canonised
nature of the texts. On the lower levels, more flexibility was permitted. The oppositional
discourse developed in the cultural publications (in ‘system-challenging’ and ‘system-
opposing’ contents), which were less strictly controlled and less canonised, and also in
various forms of literary texts and theatre. Many Estonian journalists and authors
purposefully developed a certain metaphoric language, ‘style’ of writing between the
lines and behind the lines. \textit{Us} – \textit{them} polarization was one of the components of such use
of language and texts. Most probably, a mental phenomenon, still not enough studied in

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 31-33
\textsuperscript{11} Jakubowicz 1995, 87
during the Soviet Period. \textit{Vom Instrument der Partei zur "vierten Gewalt"}. Ed. by E. Mühle. Marburg:
Herder-Institut, 104.
Estonia – the double thinking – remarkably supported this kind of journalism and contributed to understanding of its messages.

**Double thinking**

The meanings of *us* and *them* in the newspaper content were in many cases clearly related to the practice of ‘double thinking’ on the background. An Estonian researcher of cultural history,\(^\text{14}\) explains this phenomenon as a socio-psychological mechanism of mental defence within the framework of the conflict of cultural and political configurations of two oppositional political regimes. She argues that the tragedy of the Baltic nations lies in the fact that under the pressure of an alien power the signboards of two worlds – *our* and *their* – were changed, and people were violently forced to recognize and adopt *their*, *alien* world as the *real*, *our* world. People became double-dealing and double-minded, speaking one thing and meaning another. On the one hand, under the Soviet regime, people tried to stay loyal to the hitherto experiences, norms and values, but had to hide those within the close circles of friends and families. On the other hand, in order to gain at least a minimum of mental and physical safety, they had publicly to follow the norms and values that they did not accept, and to pretend loyalty to the regime.\(^\text{15}\) This duality of the world was often reflected in the use of *us* – *them* opposition in the texts with messages behind the lines. It is fair to say that in a way, double thinking contributed to the decoding of such messages, as it helped to determine the meanings of *us* and *them* in particular texts. For example, in an article against the unification of Estonian school system with the Russian one, a rather strong statement was published: “No! Even all animals cannot be tamed, not all can be made tame circus animals” (Sirp ja Vasar 9.01.1970, no 2). Within the context of the time, the message between the lines was decoded like: “Estonians never become obedient servants of the Communist regime”. An author and journalist used a commentary in a national paper to state: “Isn’t it so that the state of our existence reminds the situation of a human being who has very long time


\(^{\text{15}}\) Ibid, 759.
lived in primeval forest, and got used to its rules and regulations /---/.” (Edasi 25.1.1980, no 21).

**Two conflicts, two worlds**
The key-element of *us – them* polarization is conflict of interests. The nature and parties of the conflict are historically, politically and culturally determined and vary within different societies and periods. Therefore, the contexts of ideologies become relevant. According to the nature of conflict and its parties, we can speak about two confronting discourses that emerged and existed in parallel (sometimes overlapping) in Estonia. The Soviet ideological discourse was constructed upon a basic social conflict of Marxism-Leninism – that of class conflict and class struggle. The values promoted were communist internationalism (with emphasis on Russian language as a language of international communication within the Soviet Union), loyalty to the idea of communism (accompanied with the image of an enemy: *who is not with us is against us*), heroic collectivism, and a happy future of the communist society. These ideas and values were transmitted into Estonian reality in 1940 with extreme violence that accompanied the Soviet occupation and forcible incorporation of Estonia into the Soviet Union. Hypocrisy of the Soviet authorities, repressions, forcible collectivisation and establishing so-called *kolkhozes*, massive deportations to Siberia, nationalisation of private property etc. from the very beginning discredited the communist ideology among Estonian people. For them, these actions and values represented a world hostile to their existence as a democratic country and an independent nation. Furthermore, along with the introduction of the idea of communist internationalism and *homo sovieticus*, their physical existence as a nation became a question. By the beginning of the 1990s, the proportion of the ethnic population had fallen to 62 per cent in Estonia (and to 51 per cent in Latvia). The rest of the population (mainly Russian speaking) had settled in Estonia during the decades after the World War II, bringing along an aggressive intrusion of Russian language into all spheres of life. In official discourse this was represented in the following way: “*In our republic*, people from many different nations live and work, **among them** 948.000

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16 Van Dijk 1998, Oktar 2001
Thus, the main conflict for Estonian indigenous population can be called *existential* as it arise from the real danger of physical annihilation and therefore, was strongly based on national identity. In the reality and minds of Estonian people the opposite parties of the conflict were the alien superpower = *them*, and the world of the oppressed nation = *us*. Their world was represented by the official public sphere. *Our world*, based on common language, common historical memory and experience, ideas of national solidarity and opposition to the Soviet regime, could be expressed exclusively in private and (sometimes) in unofficial public spheres. The Soviet ideology remained the only legal and dominating ideology throughout the decades of the Soviet rule in Estonia. The open struggle against it started only after the advent of *glasnost* in the late 1980s.

The dividing line between the two worlds and two discourses was not equally clear and unambiguous for different generations. As Aarelaid\(^{17}\) points out, the first generation of Estonians under the Soviet rule had grown up within an increasing nationalism of the 1930s. They valued highly national culture and other related values. They had personal experience of freedom fight and independent democratic republic of Estonia. Therefore, they reflected the Soviet occupation and annexation in 1940 as a violent clash of *ours* and *others*. The dividing line was very clear for them. This generation consciously started to build the basis for a ‘survival strategy’ – the double thinking and double behaviour that was accompanied with a deep identity crisis. The next generation, born in the late 1930s – 1940s, inherited the basic rules of the game from their parents, learned to perform their social roles ‘correctly’. They realized that what they learned at school and heard at home were two contradictory value systems and that it was vital to keep them apart. A mistake here could be dangerous to life.

By the late 1950s, it was quite evident that the Soviet regime will not end in the nearest future and it will be safer not to educate the young generation to hate the regime, but to

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\(^{17}\) Aarelaid 2000, 762-763.
adapt to it. The past independence was not talked about; the past of the parents was covered with deliberate silence. The 1950s generations, the more the generation of the 1960s, did not experience the contrast of the two value systems as painfully as their parents and grandparents. Furthermore, living in two contradictory value systems at the same time produced a kind of “self-denial and psychological semi-suicide”\(^\text{18}\) – the politically ‘right’ behaviour tends to be partly internalised “because people who have behaved under compulsion as if they loved their oppressive political environment end up half-loving it”.\(^\text{19}\) Many values obtained for them different meanings than for earlier generations: fatherland was Estonia and the Soviet Union at the same time, independent Estonian republic of the 1920s and 1930s was a ‘bourgeois Estonia’ as taught by the official history etc. The \textit{ours} and \textit{theirs} began to exchange positions in the minds of this generation.

On the other hand, while people acted according to the officially acceptable way, they also developed a way of ‘double behaviour’, a way of ridicule the \textit{others’} reality. \textit{Homo sovieticus} was at the same time also \textit{homo ludens}, who invented various ways of presenting official as unofficial and vice versa. The more the Soviet \textit{other} tried to perform as \textit{ours} the more people hanged on their Estonian identity and tried to defend and hide this from the \textit{others}.\(^\text{20}\) The game of mixing deliberately \textit{theirs} with \textit{ours} and vice versa became a popular way of indicating oppositional values between the lines.

A certain way in which Baltic people used Russian as the ‘language of international communication’ serves as an example how \textit{theirs} was used as \textit{ours} in everyday life. Russian was the only alternative for an Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian to be able to understand each other during the Soviet time. Knowledge of foreign languages was not sufficient, and they also had a very poor knowledge of each others’ languages. To demonstrate that “I am not Russian although I am speaking Russian to you”, they would intentionally use a broken form of Russian as a lingua franca. Today, they mostly use English instead.

\(^{18}\) Jakubowicz 1992, 89.  
\(^{19}\) Ibid.  
\(^{20}\) Ibid.
Double standards in the people’s minds strengthened and activated again in connection with the aftermath of the Prague Spring of 1968. A new generation of authors appeared in Estonian literature that consciously cultivated the use of metaphorical language and double meanings, and ‘smuggled’ this also into the media texts.

**Functions and meanings of *us* and *them* in the newspaper content**

**Assumed consensus of ‘all of us’**

Chilton and Schäffner\(^{21}\) argue that “in ordinary conversation *we* would usually include the speaker and the hearer(s) /---/, in political discourse in general, *we* (and its related forms) is often open to several different understandings of its intended referents.”

In newspaper discourse the pronoun *we* typically suggests a conjunction of the newspaper and its readership in an ‘implied consensus’.\(^{22}\) Both journalists and their audience presume that when reading the articles referring to *we*, the readers imagine to be a part of a community of readers simultaneously performing the same activity.\(^{23}\) Common language makes it easier to identify with this imagined readership, collective *we*. In case of national newspapers, *we* usually refers to the whole nation, even if it is not explicitly expressed in the texts. Arguments articulated on behalf of *we* sound convincing and are easy to admit as *ours*. Therefore, this phenomenon is frequently used as a means of ideological manipulation.

Throughout the Soviet period, this was one of the ways used to legitimise the Soviet power in Estonia. Newspapers that exclusively spoke with the voice of the Communist Party demonstrated the overall consent of people with the Party policy and ideology by

\(^{20}\) Aarelaid 2000, 760.  
stressing the unity of *us* = readers with *us*=supporters of the Soviet regime and
*us*=representatives of the regime. For example: “**We**, workers, farmers, working
intelligentsia, trade unions, cultural and educational organisations, Estonian women and
Estonian Communist Party /---/” (Kommunist 6.7.1940, no 3). “**All Estonian people**
know that only the Soviet order gave them their current happy life. Only under the
leadership of the Party and Comrade Stalin **our** big success has become possible.” (Sirp
ja Vasar 11.03.1950, no 10; my emphasises – E.L.).

The same method was used to emphasize the overall adoption of the Communist ideas
among Estonian people and to demonstrate that the consensus extended to the nation as a
whole: “**We** have seen that our **people**, having been liberated from the suppression of
reactionary forces, can feel happy, and **we** have a good reason to be happy. **Our destiny**
has united **us** with the greatest friend of nations – the Soviet Union who wants to defend
our existence and independence /---/”. (Postimees 25.6.1940, no 168). “And **we** are sure
that new victories of building Communism will be achieved to celebrate the anniversary
year of Lenin.” (Rahva Hääl 3.1.1980, no 2; my emphasises – E.L.).

The connotation of ‘*us* = readers’ with ‘readership=nation’ was also used to replace the
meaning of **Estonian people** with an ideologically coloured **Estonian working people** (not
working class!), **our working people**, **Soviet Estonian people**. For example: “On their
meetings Soviet Estonian people demonstrate their loyalty and support to the bolsheivist
party and Soviet power. Working people express their fully responsible attitude towards
the elections” (RH 13.01.1950, no 11). In other cases, **Estonian people** was exclusively
used in the **Soviet** context: “The hearts of Estonian people beat in the gratitude towards
the leader of nations, comrade Stalin and the victorious Red Army /---/” (Kommunist
2.08.1940, no 30). “Estonian people can read in their mother tongue almost all Lenin’s
works, their circulation reaches 1.1 million” (RH 11.01.1980, no 9).

**Imposing ‘their’ identity**

From the very beginning of the Soviet regime, the communist ideology purposefully
destroyed everything that Estonian people were used to identify with. Big efforts were
made to construct different, Soviet identity using typical methods of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, which Van Dijk calls a fundamental property of ideologies.\(^{24}\) The hitherto values were replaced by a completely different, and in most cases opposite values. For example, “Christmas /---/ have always exposed terrible conflicts of the capitalist world. Capitalist holidays cannot be holidays in the Soviet country.” (Sirp ja Vasar 21.12.1940). Religion was condemned and atheism glorified.

Everything that reminded Estonia’s independent national republic before the Soviet regime was condemned as ‘bourgeois’, hostile, reactionary, capitalist – theirs. “For the working people of Estonia, their hitherto “republic” has only been a stepfather. /---/ Estonians’ dream about real independence has only now been fully realised.” (Postimees 25.6.1940, no 168). “In our so-called “republic” the notion of freedom had a specific, capitalist meaning” (Postimees 22.06.1940, no 167). “The previous Estonian Government that everybody hated /---/” (Kommunist 6.07.1940, no 3).

Estonia as a country, ‘Fatherland’ had to disappear from the people’s minds and be replaced with the ‘large Soviet Homeland’. Unity of Estonia with the Soviet Union and the Soviet patriotism was propagated as our values: “Every citizen of the Estonian SSR is at the same time also the citizen of the Soviet Union, says the Constitution of our Republic. The whole Soviet country, from Pacific to the Baltic Sea, is now also the Homeland of Estonians.” (Rahva Hääl 23.6.1950, 202). Those who did not identify themselves with Soviet Estonia and Soviet Estonian people were treated as ‘enemies of nation’, traitors – they.

However, Estonians never entirely identified themselves with the Soviet us. Represented in the official media we clearly contradicted with the reality – it was never all Estonian people who supported the Soviet regime. Many of the readers of these texts had their own painful experience of getting burned by the ‘Stalinist sun’, or inherited this pain from their parents. We of the official Soviet discourse was interpreted by people most often

\(^{24}\) Van Dijk 1998, 69.
like some kind of abstraction that did not have equivalent in reality. As a result, official texts were not taken very seriously.

At the same time, another we surfaced now and then that was possible for people to identify with. It happened seldom during the Stalinist years, but more and more often during the periods when the control over the public word eased. “We are a nation of culture, I have the pleasure to say,” a young author wrote (Sirp ja Vasar 11.10.1968, no 41) and continued in the next issue: “We are too small nation to afford ourselves the luxury to play too many bad dramas and to publish too many bad books,” (Sirp ja Vasar 18.10.1968, no 42). We, a small nation was in no case the ‘Soviet Estonian people’.

**Enemy discourse**

The concept of enemy is one of the basic justifications of a totalitarian regime and its violence. Therefore, a sophisticated ‘enemy discourse’ was elaborated and largely used in the Soviet ideology. This consisted of two components: internal and external enemy. In the Estonian newspaper texts, the first prevailed during the Stalinist period (in connection with collectivisation and later on with the hunt for ‘bourgeois nationalists’). Because a totalitarian state never allows a legal opposition, the regime fights with hidden opposition, suspecting everything and everybody. A sacred commitment of a loyal citizen is to be vigilant, disclose hidden enemies and report about them to the authorities. Every good patriot should be a voluntary spy of the totalitarian state: even the dirtiest act is appreciated and nice if it is done in the interests of the state, Coudenhove-Kalergi has argued.²⁵

Image of *our common enemy – them* was systematically constructed. The feeling of common danger should strengthen the loyalty of people to the Communist regime. “It is wrong to think that the enemy is sleeping. He is awake and lurking for a favourable moment to spread impediments on the road of the happy future of our nation.” (Kommunist 2. 8. 1940, no 30). In addition, appeals to disclose these enemies were often

published: “Every Communist and every member of the Young Communists’ League, every worker, every honest member of the family of working people has to sharpen one’s revolutionary vigilance, ability to see and recognize class enemy /---/” (Kommunist 21.8.1940, no 49). “Do not show mercy to the enemies of nation, agent provocateurs and slanderers.” (Kommunist 6.7.1940, no 3). “Thanks to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party and personally to Comrade Stalin, who tirelessly take care of the development of the Estonian socialist culture, the detrimental activities of the bourgeois nationalists will be disclosed” (RH 25.04.1950, no 99). However, the internal enemy was still rather vaguely determined (e.g., class enemies, bourgeois nationalists, servants of the old order, saboteurs) and made it possible to accuse whomever of being an enemy.

The image of external enemy was intensively exploited during the ‘Cold War’ years, and less overtly up to the late 1980s. The external enemy was usually called ‘anticommunism’, imperialism, capitalist camp as a whole, remarking the division of the world into two confronting camps: “Our enemies – imperialists and all kinds of anticommunists /---/” (RH 25.01.1980). Accordingly, the essential difference of the two camps was frequently stressed, especially in connection with elections. The favourite example to demonstrate the difference of ‘our good society’ and ‘their bad society’ was to compare ‘socialist’ and ‘bourgeois’ democracy: “In comparison with bourgeois, formal democracy the socialist democracy is the real democracy, because it is based on social justice and equality, socialist ownership of the means of production /---/” (RH 10.02.1980, no 35).

Language barrier
Within the framework of linguistic discrimination and introduction of Soviet Newspeak\textsuperscript{26} into the media and political public sphere, the conflict between our and their world obtained an additional important dimension – that of language. Russian language was an efficient means of creating Soviet identity. As the official organ of the CP in Estonia

Rahva Hääl/The People’s Voice declared, Russian language “guarantees the nationwide, political and cultural unity of all citizens of our multinational state” (RH 15.02.1980, no 39). Estonian self-identity was historically developed as ethnic and language based identity. As Benedict Anderson demonstrates, the national spirit could often be seen in the language of a nation and its culture expressed through language.\(^{27}\) The Estonian language became a crucial national attribute for Estonians, the symbol of human dignity, and the value that united people since Estonians began to consolidate and develop as a nation in the middle of the 19th century. Threat to the mother tongue was experienced also as the threat to the national existence. Therefore, the attempts of the authorities at breaking the language barrier with using Russification, met the strongest resistance among Estonians. The national language became a certain secret code: it allowed playing with the ambiguity of the meanings, to use metaphors and to make purposefully translation mistakes (in both ways – from Russian to Estonian and vice versa). The vocabulary used in Russian Newspeak was odd and difficult to translate into Estonian, as many of its words did not have an equivalent in Estonia’s reality. Sometimes it even enabled to make ideological expression a joke. For example, an expression, often used in Russian newspapers – *borba za bolshoje djelo Lenina i Stalina* (*struggle for the great undertaking of Lenin and Stalin*) – was literally translated like: “The Soviet journalist must be an uncompromising fighter for the big thing of Lenin and Stalin /---/.” (Kommunist 12.11.1940, no 130). ‘Big thing’ has an indecent connotation in Estonian.

**Discourse of resistance**

In contrast with the official ideological discourse during the early 1960s and the 1970s, a more human-oriented one appeared and developed, which emphasized apolitical, human and cultural values. The both could simultaneously appear even in the same issue of a publication, contradicting to each other. For example, in an issue of the cultural weekly Sirp ja Vasar (Sickle and Hammer) a big official material under the title “Party principle of the Soviet literature” was published (26.4.1968, no 17). It was said: “For the Soviet literature, struggle for Communism means also the struggle against the bourgeois ideology, bourgeois art, against their influence in our country. /---/ The Communist party

spirit is a part of the conscience of a Soviet artist.” On the next page, there was a whole-page article in occasion of the 100th anniversary of an Estonian author Ernst Peterson-Särgava who had nothing to do with communist ideology, but stressed the enlightening and cultural functions of the literature. Furthermore, some issues later, a young Estonian author Teet Kallas wrote: “Only humanism can be a common and most important nature of the art of literature /---/. There is no bigger threat to the art than party intolerance /---/”. (S&V 18.10.1968, no 42).

Journalists (often also those who belonged to the Communist Party) started to value people not according to their loyalty to the regime, but according to their ‘human face’. For example, before the elections to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in 1980, the official party newspaper Rahva Hääl/The People’s Voice published a series of articles introducing the candidates to the deputies of the Supreme Soviet. All of a sudden, these people were presented like ‘one among us’, stressing their human features – kindness, honesty, wisdom, love for their professions and families etc. It was possible to identify with these people who were made to fulfil a puppet’s role in the election game, and to sympathize with them.

Although the discourse of resistance existed more or less covertly in the official media throughout the Soviet regime, up to the beginning of glasnost the Soviet one overwhelmingly prevailed. During the years of independence movement of 1987-1990, the opposition of two discourses became explicit in the public texts. Censorship eased and made it possible to express oppositional views more overtly than ever before. In the texts and speeches of 1988, for the first time, the Soviet we was explicitly identified as they through emphasizing us and our common ideals and aspirations as a nation. “We are not so-called indigenous people any more, but we are Estonians again /---/. Free nation in a free country – this has been our ideal that the people have carried in their souls for centuries. /---/ We are not allowed to give up with our ideal” (RH 13. 09. 1988).

Aspirations for achieving national sovereignty were publicly declared: “According to article 68 of the Constitution of the Estonian SSR, Estonia is a sovereign state that
executes independent state power on its territory. But why then does a sovereign state that can independently deal with its affairs, have to ask for permission from Moscow to launch a newspaper?” (Sirp ja Vasar 15.4.1988). Newspapers also wrote about the “rights that have been taken away from us” and called upon restoration of Estonian independence: “Let’s fight for the restoration of our independent statehood that expresses the will of Estonian nation who has been oppressed for 48 years /---/” (Sirp ja Vasar 15.04.1988, no 16). Thus, ‘system-challenging’ and even ‘system-opposing’ contents appeared in these years in parallel with the ‘system-supporting content’ in the same outlets, representing opposite discourses.

Legitimising democratic discourse
During 1987-1988, a systematic erosion of the positions of the Soviet political discourse in the Estonian media occurred simultaneously with the legitimisation of a qualitatively new democratic discourse. Let us examine one example, the process of legitimisation of the word *Republic* as a notion of the independent Estonia already three-four years before the political independence was achieved. Here, the ‘us – them’ polarization comes up in converting the meaning of ‘their’ Soviet Republic into ‘our’ independent Republic with using linguistic means.

In Estonian language, it is possible to create new words by connecting two words into one and get a different from both components meaning. *Republic/vabariik* is one of these kinds. The term consists of two words: *vaba* (free) and *riik* (state), that of course, associates with the notion of a free state. In 1940, the Republic of Estonia (*Eesti Vabariik*) was renamed the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic, still containing the word *vabariik* (free state) although in a different context. During Soviet rule, it was strictly forbidden to use the expression *Estonian Republic* in public texts because it directly associated with the past independent statehood and people easily identified with this Estonian Republic. Therefore, the word *Estonia* had to be used only with compulsory attributes *Soviet* (which had a positive connotation) or *bourgeois* (with a negative connotation) to make a clear distinction between the two ‘free states’. Both attributes gave to the word *Estonia* an ideological connotation and removed the national one. An
old journalist recalled in his column in 1989: “During over 30 years I was suggested not to use the word Estonia in my journalistic work. It was also wise to avoid using the words Estonian and Russian”. Thus, a practice emerged to use solely the Republic to mark Estonia as a part of the Soviet Union. For example: “Guided by the resolutions of the 1985 April session of the Central Committee of the CP of the Soviet Union and 27th Congress of the CP of the Soviet Union and the 19th Congress of the CP of the Estonian SSR /---/ working people of the Republic (my emphasis – EL) made big progress in the socialist competition and achieved great success in advancing the socialist production during the first quarter of 1986” (Rahva Hääl, 30.04.1986).

Along with this, an intentional practice of ‘misusing’ the word Republic in its literal meaning – free state – gradually developed. A part of this was occasional ‘misprints’, where vabariik was printed in two words and Soviet was omitted before Estonia. Sometimes, in order to give the word Republic a national connotation, the expression koduvabariik – home republic was used. Another similar expression was meie vabariik (our republic), where our was explicitly associated with the ethnic population. The next step was to connect again Estonia and Republic in public texts. By the end of 1988, these words started do be increasingly used without any reference to Estonia’s political status as a member of the Soviet Union. The administrative, economic, cultural institutions were presented in newspaper texts without the compulsory component ‘of the Estonian SSR’, but simply as the Ministry of Education, the Union of Journalists etc. In August 1989, two years before the actual political independence was achieved, the daily Rahva Hääl/The People’s Voice published a news item under the title “Estonian Ministers in Finland”, which began with the words “Three representatives of the Estonian Government /---/.” And only after that the full titles of the ministers with all required components followed: ‘the Chairman of the Council of the Ministers of the Estonian SSR’ etc. (Rahva Hääl 4.8.1989). Already as early as in November 1988, in an article about Estonian stamps one could read in Edasi: “Stamps are the visiting cards of a state.

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For a small state it is especially important to present itself to the world” and therefore, Estonia needs stamps with an inscription ‘Estonian Mail’ (Edasi, 17.11.1988).

Within the Estonian political reality at that time it still expressed a wishful thinking, which was presented in the texts like already existing reality. *Vabariik (republic)* mainly marked a fully independent Estonian nation state. “/---/ The Parliament of the Republic is trying to /---/ create lawful guarantees with its legislation for reorganisation of the society” (Rahva Hääl 29.11.1988). In the described way, also many other democratic values (sovereignty, human rights, legal state etc) were legitimised as *ours*, and the old ones that were imposed by the Soviet ideology were rejected as *theirs*.

**Some conclusions**

In the media content of the Soviet time Estonia (1940-41, 1944-1991) the *us – them* polarization reflected the confrontation of two discourses in the reality and minds of Estonian people: 1) the Soviet ideological discourse and 2) the discourse of resistance. While the dissident and underground media was almost non-existent in Estonia, the both discourses existed in parallel on the different levels of the hierarchy of the official media. The first was mostly represented in and by the ‘system-supporting’ content, the latter – ‘system-indifferent’ and ‘system-challenging’ contents. In the ‘system-supporting’ content, *us – them* polarization served the purpose of legitimising the communist regime in two main ways: 1) by demonstrating the overall consensus of the people with the Soviet authorities, and 2) by cultivating ‘enemy discourse’ to create an air of fear and suspicion. In the illegal, nationally shaped discourse of resistance, *us – them* polarization reflected the conflict between *us* – oppressed nation and *them* – the alien superpower. This conflict created the phenomenon of ‘double thinking’ that became a certain strategy of survival for several generations of Estonian people. Oppositional ideas and views surfaced mainly in the ‘system-indifferent’ and ‘system-challenging’ contents; during the late 1980s, also ‘system-opposing’ content appeared. The ‘system-opposing’ content was largely used for restoring and legitimising democratic values and institutions during 1987-1989. In fact, they became a reality in Estonia only after independence in 1991.
References


