

# FROM A FRATRICIDE TO A FAMILY MEMORY

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## ABSTRACT

When a research deals with researcher's own family history, a significant challenge is presented: "What is the significance of the familiarity the researcher has for their object of research? What is the researcher's role and how their own memories influence their work?" In this article I explore the possibilities my own family history offers by observing a fratricide that took place in my family, as well as the narrations it has created.

My grandfather's brother Veikko, while drunk, stabbed and killed his brother Väinö in Kauhajoki in 1974. In my family, the event has been handled in various ways, and due to its uncommonness it has also been the theme of many stories which unveil our family's history and present lives as well as the relationships inside the family. I have chosen three interviewees as an object of closer inspection.

With these interviews, I explore Väinö's death and the attitudes towards it: "How has the killing been interpreted inside the family and what has it meant to the family?" I also examine the reactions towards the death in the society and the South-Ostrobothnian culture. Because the examined manslaughter is also inside my family viewed as an unusual death, it is interesting to raise conversation on *divergent deaths* in general. I will thusly also observe the point of views presented in the interviews and examine them in correlation with the researches done on *divergent death*.

KEYWORDS: oral history • family history • narration • interpreting • unusual death

Researching recent history always holds some amount of tension. In the best cases, both the reader's and the researcher's own memories and images, connected to the researched time and events, travel along and influence the work done. When the research, in addition to this starting point, deals with the researcher's own family history, a significant challenge has been presented: "What is the significance of the familiarity the researcher has for their object of research? What is the researcher's role and how their own memories influence their work?" In this article I explore the possibilities my own family history offers by observing a fratricide that took place in my family, as well as the narrations it has created. This survey is connected to my Post Doctoral research in the Researcher School of Cultural Interpretations *The Homicides by Jaska and Veikko – a Research on Characterisations Created by Narrations and Historical Documents*, in which I explore the South-Ostrobothnian society, culture and mentality through the lives of two criminals correlated to "knife fighters" and the stories told of them.

My grandfather's brother Veikko, while drunk, stabbed and killed his brother Väinö in Kauhajoki in 1974. In my family, the event has been handled in various ways, and due to its uncommonness<sup>1</sup> it has also been the theme of many stories which unveil our family's history and present lives as well as the relationships inside the family. I have chosen three interviews as an object of closer inspection: during the late summer 2001 I interviewed three women of my family, Ruut, Saara and Leea.<sup>2</sup> Ruut is the sister of Väinö and Veikko, Saara is their cousin and Leea their niece. I chose these interviews, for one thing, because they were done inside the same time frame so that I can at least assume that my own aims regarding the information recorded are similar in all the chosen interviews. With these interviews, I explore Väinö's death and the attitudes towards it: "How has the killing been interpreted inside the family and what has been its meaning to the family?" I also examine the reactions towards the death in the society and the South-Ostrobothnian culture. Because the examined manslaughter is also inside my family viewed as an unusual death, it is interesting to raise conversation on *divergent deaths* in general. I will thus also observe the points of views presented in the interviews and examine them in correlation with the researches done on *divergent death*, mainly Outi Fingerroos's work on the Finnish civil war in 1918 and the uncommon deaths of the Reds (i.e. the socialists, mostly consisting of the common folk) in the war.

Among others, Outi Fingerroos examines, in her doctoral thesis *Haudatut muistot* (2004), the question of what defines a divergent death and separates it from a normal one. Through the reminiscences of the evacuees from Karelia, Fingerroos has studied how the importance of the ritualised death is constructed and what kind of significance is to be found in oral history. A normal death is given a proper ritual of death, performed according to the rules. This ritual is public and worthy and it carries a great importance both for the living and for its true object, the dead person, who is thus given a status as a deceased, and through the communal rituals, also an acknowledged value as a respectable deceased. From this basis, Fingerroos (2004: 252) builds an interpretation of deeper levels of importance. Her interpretation mainly concentrates on exploring *divergent deaths*: deaths of children, suicides and especially deaths during the war. Particularly she emphasises one category: the hushed-up deaths of the Reds in the 1918 Civil War. In the context of these bad, sudden deaths, a totally new kind of light is cast on the various models of ritualisation of death: the publicity value of the Reds' death was divergent, they were ritualised divergently, and their communal conceptualisation and the later reminiscence have been divergent, as well. According to Fingerroos, the main function of the death rituals is their publicity and communal sharedness. However, when the value and publicity of a death is contradicted, the situation changes and the death called divergent, separating it from normal death and normal death rituals. Therefore, the divergent rituals are a consequence of a divergent way of dying.

As my research examines a historical event and also the interviewed stories about this event, it is also appropriate to take the source critical issues under consideration. From the historical documents, I only use the High Court's final, documented verdict and its attachments.<sup>3</sup> The value of trial records and records of police interrogations as sources has often been questioned, although they are used as primary sources in the study of criminal history. The failings of these sources are, on the other hand, seen to be inaccuracies of the witnesses' initial observations and unreliability in their statements, and on the other hand, possible distortions during the statement giving and record-

ing. The records are for these reasons seen to present rather the cultural and authorial structures of their own era than the issues connected with the actual cases treated (Rajala 2004: 44). In these source critical observations, the primary issue appears to be the aim to gain truthful and accurate information and recognise and analyse the factors possibly endangering this aim. However, the question of the value of trial and police interrogation records can also be seen from a different angle: what do they tell us about the reality around the recorded events? (Portelli 1991: 241–269; Ginzburg 1996: 156–164) More than actual evidence, the witnesses' statements are their views on the events that have happened. Thus, also when examining the court statements, the narrative and oral history views could be emphasised.

It is important to observe how the interviewed material I have collected has also been composed. As the object of the research is the researcher's own community and family, the advantages and disadvantages raised thereby. In the literature about field work, the aforementioned themes, as well as the role of a researcher when they work inside their own community, have been widely discussed. In this discussion the topics have been, for example, the researcher's personality as their tool, the outsider's view that should be maintained even when the researcher is an insider, the new kind of interview questions the new role of the interviewer creates and the necessity of "nothing is given" attitude (Suojanen 1997: 149–157). Pihla Vuorinen has also written about the advantages and problems the familiarity of the object and the subjects of the research can cause. The possible mutual experiences with the research subjects can be seen as an advantage – the researcher knows what to ask. Also, doing research on people and events close to oneself demands an objective and emotional understanding of the subject, which is seen to improve the research. As a problem, Vuorinen presents the possibility of confusing one's roles as a researcher and a member of the family researched. Also problematic can be to recognise the influence of the familiarity (Vuorinen 2002: 348–363).

Aforementioned observations have, almost explicitly, concentrated on the practices in field work and the interview situations. The critical grasp the researcher, observing his/her own culture and family, has on the work and how to recognise and be conscious of the issues under examination – these points have been left almost without discussion. When researching one's own family, a certain kind of approach is needed. For example, I myself have, in the interview situations, been first and foremost a member of my family – it did not hurt that I am known as a wise and scholarly one – and people I interviewed also saw me as such. Thus, I have been able to agree with my interviewees and when necessary, we have been able to discuss the course of events, both using our own memories and stories we have heard. My own memories on the stabbing of my uncle in the 1980s, for example, have been an interesting topic of discussion in the interview situations. In my memories, the event consists of a few strong images: my uncle steps in (the house in question is my grandparent's home) wearing a bloody shirt. He drinks water from a bucket with a dipper and then turns to my father: "So, Jaska, will you give me a ride to Seinäjoki (hospital)?"

This memory I have can be an imagined one. I myself cannot say anymore whether it is an actual memory or not. It feels like a true memory, firstly because of its content: it is true how members of my family often have found themselves in violent situations (see reference 1), and secondly, because I have very possibly *constructed it* to be a true memory, through the stories told in my family, through my own ideas and my own

nostalgia. However, the memory's most important function is that it connects me as a part of my family history, with my own personal recollections and experiences of the said history. In a way, with my memory, I am rendered a fully authorised member of my family and I am thus entitled to discuss similar events equally with my interviewees. My knowledge on these issues aids me to ask the right questions about killings. The interviews always include also my stories about the brothers:

RH: They used to fight a lot, Väinö and Veikko, together and with each other. Or not with each others, no, only when someone attacked. Once, someone had, in Kauhajoki, come on Väinö, and then Veikko had come and done him in.

Saara: Yes, yes, that's how he was, true.

Already before the interview situation, I had some information about how the interviewee viewed the event, as the killing had been discussed a lot and in several occasions. Thus, I was able to understand the events from the interviewee's point of view; because I had been raised inside, along and after the events and my family's values. All this made it possible to examine and discuss the events very thoroughly during the interviews. As a member of the family and a habitant of the environment in question, I am also able to describe the event's social surroundings in a way that the historical sources know nothing about. I have in my possession the family traditions, the common history's competence inherited from the previous generations, and I know how to act. As Jorma Kalela has said, (popular history) "is history that grows on you" (2000: 38).

But problems do arise – and an ambivalent attitude arises as my opinions change when analysing the interviews I have made. When the interview situation itself has gone along in the spirit of mutual understanding and friendly discussion – or so it has seemed at the moment of the recording – reading into it is more than difficult. How should one prepare oneself to face the reactions one's own community will have? As a researcher, am I supposed to understand in a different way, to bring out different opinions, or maybe even support some different, some other people's opinions on these familiar events? Helena Ruotsala (1998: 101) has also analysed the problems in researching one's own culture and she has arrived at the similar conclusions: the researcher who comes from the culture they research is expected to bring out new, different truths. As a solution to this problem, it is often recommended that the researcher should analyse their own blindness over the familiar culture as well as the problems of their own participation. One solution, however, is to let the various, wide and diversified oral history material speak for itself.

When I, in my research, concentrate on the event and how it is remembered, my aim is primarily to capture and understand the *experiences and interpretations* of the people reminiscing. As a narration, reminiscence talk typically constructs of bringing back the past and explaining it if necessary. The person remembering the events actively creates their own past and history when reminiscing. For the people remembering their own past, their own memories are always true, as an experience as well as psychologically. They aim at not only explaining and interpreting their memories, but also at understanding and controlling their own past, and in a way becoming aware of their own history. The motif to remember may also be a need to explain to oneself or to others how and why the past has been as it has been (Peltonen 1996: 282; Ukkonen 2000: 86, 237–238). I process the reminisced stories of the killing as a part of oral history, which

brings forth what people see worthwhile to remember and how they remember them, i.e. what is the importance of the events remembered. Oral history therefore tells more about the importance of the remembered event than the event itself (Ukkonen 2000: 30–31, 37; Portelli 1997: 22, 50; 2002: 67–69). For example, by examining my own family's stories about the killing I can analyse how the storytellers see their own history of importance. I can also reach conclusions on the cultural views and interpretations of my family that keep alive the memory of Veikko and Väinö.

Oral history material demands a new kind of source criticism. Oral history cannot be criticised by the traditional source criticism, which primarily concentrates on the truthfulness of the source, because various factors influence the creation of oral history material: the subjectivity and the interpretative character of the oral history, not to talk about today's influence on the interpretations done in past. These factors are not seen as problems in oral history study. Instead of evaluating oral history according to the truthfulness or accuracy of its information, the point is the *prolific information* it offers (Kalela 1999: 139–154; 2000: 90–91; Ukkonen 2000: 86–88). This way, the sources are no longer evaluated for their accuracy, but for their *informative values*. Especially the subjective nature of oral history thus opens up new possibilities to interpret its importance and interest.

Therefore, reminiscence can be seen not only as interpreting the past, but also as a social activity and an interactive process. Oral history material is often produced by interviewing, so when analysing the collected data, the interactive relations of the reminiscence and the nature of creating one's own history are evaluated. Also the reasons for the particular ways the events are remembered and reminisced can be examined: what are the cultural grounds or significances when, for example, the events that are experienced as sensitive or maybe even shameful are remembered incorrectly and "wrong" (Ukkonen 2000: 86, 95–97). The storytellers always have their own reasons for forgetting, changing or improving their past in order to render it appropriate for the present attitudes or for their own good (compare with Peltonen 2003: 13). Then, why wouldn't the researchers, exploring their own family, also have such needs to create their own personal views on the events in the family – just for the loyalty's sake, at least? When one researches one's own past, especially the sensitive events of the said past, one must make choices, both in relation with the persons researched and in relation to oneself. One has to decide what is it that they want to tell about their family through the interviews and what is the point of view they choose for the research. The point of view influences the results of the research, so this decision is not irrelevant, either. In a way, a research is constant negotiation between the researcher and the researched material. It is not possible for the researcher to objectively analyse their own family.

Constant attention has to be placed on the question how to write about criminals so that it is ethical<sup>4</sup>. Time is an important factor in the research of recent events, also: what determines that an adequate amount of time has passed after the death of a criminal and an individual so that they can be examined as a historical "story" among others? The researcher has an obligation for both the persons researched and the possible readers and overall, the ethical principals should be applied in every aspect of the research, not only when shielding the researched subjects' privacy. Thus, the real significance of the interviewed stories for me is in the information they give me about narrating the killing, attitudes on a *divergent death* and the interactive relations between an individual,

community and culture. In addition, when the aim is to present the past, history and the people of the past, it is best reached when respecting the individuality of those people and showing them as possible and credible, but not as the only possible, interpretations of the researcher (see Davis 2001: 8).

## SOUTH OSTROBOTHNIA

“A knife-fighter”, pursuing fame and glory by his violent acts is often presented as a stereotype of violence, and South Ostrobothnia does have a historical connection with violence. Violence and criminality were, compared to the rest of the country, exceptionally high in South Ostrobothnia since the 19th century. The violence has been explained in various ways: for example, how the use of knife became popular and how alcohol was used in inordinate amounts and it “made fools of men” (Virrankoski 1965: 182–190). According to Sakari Pälsi’s cautious estimation, a knife was used in a violent way once a day, and twice during a holiday, so that most of these stabbings were done by a drunken knife-fighter, used to “whittle the human skin” (Pälsi 1955: 64–75). Kustaa Vilkuna, on the other hand, sees the “money-weddings” (a wedding custom was to give money to the happy couple during multi-day weddings) with their free alcohol as a reason for the high homicide statistics, as a wedding was not a South Ostrobothnian one, unless at least one man died or was seriously stabbed (Vilkuna 1949: 131–135). Alcohol and knife do seem to have been a nearly inseparable pair. The worst fights were fought when drunk and especially the wedding killings were among these.

In his research on the knife-fighters, Heikki Ylikangas has examined the South Ostrobothnian values and sees them to be supportive towards violence. According to Ylikangas, the area’s exceptional criminality and amount of violence has rather been born from economic, social and environmental factors than simply because the use of knives and alcohol increased. Criminal acts were a hobby of young men, especially young men from the lower social classes (Ylikangas 1976: 253–269). Because of the large families, some of the children had to gain their living elsewhere, not on the family farm, and this lowered their social status. In addition to that, the diminishing of tar burning that had offered great working opportunities in South Ostrobothnia, heightened the financial differences still. As the social system emphasised individual enterprise and personal demonstrations of competence, failing to climb the social ladder certainly raised the spirit for protest (Ylikangas 1976: 255). The only form of protest was seen to be abnormal behaviour and the competence was demonstrated through crimes.

The stories about criminals and their deeds during the knife-fighting period bring forth much deeper cultural factors. How and what is told about the knife-fighters tells a lot about the South Ostrobothnian culture. The stories of criminals and violence are also clearly influenced by the knife-fighter tradition and popular culture. Previous and familiar tales of Antti from Isotalo and Rannanjärvi and Jaska from Pukkila are a part of the cultural competence my interviewees hold. Especially their knowledge on the South Ostrobothnian tradition shows this competence: “(Jaska from Pukkila) he had been their mate, Antti and Rannanjärvi, yes, but I’ve heard that this Antti, he did social work (Saara 2001).” Also the official, public representation of the knife-fighters with its commercial and literate products (for example *Puukkojunkkarit* by Santeri Alkio in

1894) has undoubtedly moulded the picture of the criminals and therefore also changed the significance given to the knife-fighters. Thus, the created picture of the South Ostrobothnian knife-fighter is still received with dual emotions. On the other hand, their memory is shamed and feared; on the other hand, people are proud of their famous criminals and ready to use them when advertising the South Ostrobothnian culture and identity (Ylikangas 1974: 10). Overall, South Ostrobothnia is viewed as the county of the knife-fighters and popular culture has obtained inspiration from this image. Maybe the roots for the stories told about Veikko and his crime are to be found in this tradition.

South Ostrobothnian nature has its own significance among the descriptions on Finnish tribal characterisations and the features associated with people from a specific county. These features have been used as convenient, even if stereotypical explanations. The South Ostrobothnian people are well-known, for good and bad. Juhani Sipilä has examined the national and regional identity as it is presented in Antti Tuuri's novel series *Pohjanmaa* (Ostrobothnia) and he describes the South Ostrobothnian code of act for men: "there is a conscious performance aspect in the tribunal stereotype: an Ostrobothnian male has to demonstrate his wild nature, so that he himself and the people around him won't forget that he has one" (2002: 176). But extremities of the Ostrobothnian nature are presented also in positive view: aforementioned values of hard work, individual enterprise and activity and success, which were on the other hand reasons for knife-fighting, are seen as the best features of Ostrobothnian nature, as well. Kustaa Vilkuna (1969: 170) has described South Ostrobothnia as a unique county, with its "grand architecture, own language, high quality folk art (...) and over this all, the unique nature of South Ostrobothnian people". According to Vilkuna, the uniqueness was born from following the strong regional ideals of the old county, "admired was a man, who was strong, authoritative, brave, rich and talked with determination (...) who wasn't afraid but rather provoked. He was the ideal for the young and women". Also in the South Ostrobothnian humour, especially when it is about Ostrobothnian themselves, willing and doing seem to be emphasised (Knuuttila 1994: 86–91). Being a South Ostrobothnian, therefore, includes the cultural features of honour, manliness, strength and handsomeness. Are these features presented and preserved when stories of the killing are told in my family and are Veikko and Väinö seen as true South Ostrobothnian males? Or is it possible for this historical, social and cultural Ostrobothnian category to change?

## THE KILL

In agricultural societies, the competition over the family's limited fortune, especially land, is seen as the primary motif for fateful fraternal conflicts. Conflicts have been particularly grave, even leading to fratricides, when they have taken place between the heirs of a farm that has been considered undividable. As an example, Anu Koski-virta has explored homicides in the late 19th century Eastern Finland and has found connections between fraternal competition and homicides. The amount of interaction and sharing responsibilities between the brothers influenced the commonness of these kinds of conflicts and the pressure caused by the increase of population provoked them. Fratricides happened primarily in households that lacked a strong, conciliating patri-

arch (Koskivirta 2001: 283–288). In the year 1974, the same motifs for a fratricide come forth again. According to the High Court records, the witnesses offer information and personal opinions on the quarrels film machinist Veikko (1932–1977) and his brother, general worker Väinö (1927–1974) had already before the killing had about the ownership of their home farm: “and (Veikko) had earlier threatened to kill Väinö and he had said that as Väinö will in any case die in two and a half years, it doesn’t matter if he’ll die before that.” (High Court records, number 1105/559)

At the time of the killing, the brothers were still both living on the home farm, Veikko as a bachelor and Väinö having been early widowed. Väinö’s children had already moved away. Other siblings had all respectively founded their own farms and homes nearby. The siblings were still constantly in touch with each others, especially the brothers, as they managed the home farm together. Before the killing, the relations between the family members had thus been quite normal and good. After the killing, however, the situation changed. Already in the court records, dual opinions about Veikko, Väinö and the relations inside the family and with the neighbours rose forth. Some of the siblings were not able to tell anything negative about the brothers’ relations, as “at least when I visited, I got the impression that they got on well enough”. The opinions between the family members were not similar when it came to the quarrels between the brothers about cashing-in on the home farm, either. There were more people involved and benefiting of the possible cashing-in than Veikko and Väinö alone. Some relatives thought that the brothers had been fighting already before the discussion on the home farm, and Veikko had many times been forced to give away his weapons of various kinds: the interviewee knows that “also other people in the village had been afraid of Veikko, so afraid that they had locked their doors when they had known that Veikko had been drinking again.” (High Court records, number 1105/559)

However, the events preceding the killing set off already in the previous evening when a group of men, including the brothers, started drinking alcohol. The next day, the party went to get more alcohol.

On the way, Veikko had gotten himself a kitten from a house and the kitten was with him in the car the party was travelling in. Väinö had opposed taking the cat and proposed that they should leave it. Veikko had gotten angry and said that if the kitten was to die, so was Väinö. After the party had returned to brothers’ house and continued drinking, Veikko had noticed that the kitten had disappeared. Upset, angry and blaming the others, Veikko had grabbed the knife on the table. (High Court records, number 1105/559)

My interviewee, Ruut, brothers’ sister, tells about the motifs of the kill as follows:

They had gotten booze from Hyyppä and drunken and they had a kitten with them that Veikko had gotten himself, and when he couldn’t see the cat, he had started to threaten Väinö with a knife accusing that Väinö had killed the cat and that he would now kill Väinö. But he had killed no cat, the cat was under the bed, and how was it...afterwards he lay there on the bed and how on earth had he went to bed with the knife, well, he was so upset that he had stabbed Väinö. (Ruut 2001.)

Veikko, same as everyone else, had been under the influence of alcohol. Diabetes, of which Veikko suffered, had probably also furthered the final result of the events. Ac-

ording to the medical certificate attached with the High Court's final verdict, Veikko had been "in a sort of haze, and therefore acted violently" (HC, number 105/559). The killing itself seems to have been a pure accident. Väinö had been calming his brother after Veikko had driven himself into rage and threatened others. When trying to prevent Veikko from knifing the others, Väinö had been stabbed in the chest and stomach, dying almost immediately after the stabs. The High Court records continue:

The Rural District Court had also cleared that Veikko, after the previously mentioned events, had threatened the two policemen who had come to arrest him, standing on the front steps and announcing that he would kill anyone who would try to come in. (High Court records, number 1105/559)

My interviewee, Leea the niece, who during the events was still a young child, explains Veikko's state of mind after he had killed his brother:

"So they said, that his eyes were all weird and turned over so that one couldn't see the pupils at all, he had been totally out of his mind." (Leea 2001)

Veikko was sentenced to prison for six and a half years. The High Court believed the killing to have been deliberate, because according to the court Veikko had had to understand that the several knife wounds were likely to kill Väinö. In addition to this verdict, Veikko's knife was confiscated and declared a possession of the state. (High Court records, number 1105/559) Veikko died in prison in 1977, only a couple of months before he would have received parole. His crime was judged as a deliberate act, and there are no possibilities to change that verdict. However, in addition to the sentence and the court records, there is also oral history on the killing and its motifs, mainly sustained by the family. Reading into this oral history, it is possible to found out the opinions, experiences and emotions that the event raised at the time.

#### REMINISCED DEATH

My interviewees have plenty of stories characterising the brothers. Especially the positive features are emphasised, concerning both of the brothers. The stories of their goodness, handsomeness and hard-working nature, as well as the South Ostrobothnic important character, their candour, were repeated over and over again. For example, Leea describes Veikko in the following way: "Veikko, he was so friendly and happy and happy and loved children and animals, too." The relations between Veikko and Väinö are sometimes described as good, sometimes less so. For example, according to Saara, who lived next to the brothers at the time: "some sort of a scuffle there was, always there." Overall, people did not feel that there was something seriously wrong between the brothers: "He was a fair man, he was. They had no quarrel with each other, no. On Sundays they would lay there, one on this bed and the other on that, they were both so handsome when they were young." (Ruut 2001) As the brothers' primary negative feature, the interviewees see their excessive use of alcohol, and this also helps them explain the killing and its reasons. According to Saara, Veikko was not an all-around nice man: "(And) Veikko, when he was drunk, he was not nice at all." Leea, however, tells that Väinö was the brother who was like the devil when drunk "really irritating and

awful". Thus it seems that depending of the storyteller and their chosen attitude, the villain of the story alters. The interviewees also explain and speculate the reasons for the opinions they know the other family members have. Saara, for example, feels that the brothers' sister had openly taken Veikko's side, as "she wouldn't really judge Veikko, she couldn't, as he was her beloved baby brother". Who is the storyteller and from which point of view they tell the story therefore determines how the story is chosen to be told. Anne Heimo has made similar conclusions when examining the oral history on the events in Sammatti during the Finnish Civil War of the year 1918. The stories of the war alter depending of whether they are told from the Red or from the White point of view. Different motifs are emphasised and both parties leave some stories untold (Peltonen 1996: 2003; Heimo 2000: 7). The Reds have preserved their own versions of the war stories, although the official Finland of the time gave a different kind of verdict on the events. Actually, when the authorities forbade the reminiscing, the families and communities were forced to develop their own, private forms of remembrance (among others Peltonen 1996; Fingerroos 2004: 257). An essential factor is also who asks the questions. Pihla Vuorinen (2001: 129–130) has researched storytelling traditions inside of a family, chatting and talking in an everyday manner and thus telling stories about family members. According to Vuorinen, especially the negative memories are difficult to tell when speaking with a stranger. For I am a member of my family, I have been able to collect differing opinions from my interviewees and it is even possible to draw some conclusions from the differences and their reasons.

However, nevertheless the differing opinions when describing the brothers, the interviewees still insist they was nothing wrong with the family relations in general: "We never, ever fought at all", (Ruut 2001) and "I never had any kind of quarrel with them, not ever" (Saara). The described good atmosphere in the family, especially when told of the time before the killing, shows the loyalty inside the family. After the killing, these loyalties changed. It was a known fact – according to the trials, already – that Väinö's children bore a grudge for Veikko after the event, "sure they bore a grudge and hated Veikko more than anybody, there's no doubt about it" (Leea 2001). Väinö's closest family also demanded that Veikko was to be sentenced the worst possible verdict, but the brothers' sisters were in their statements satisfied with the punishment the prosecutor proposed (High Court records, number 1105/559). Because of the events, the relations and communication between the family members diminished for years, until they finally recovered to nearly the state they were before the killing (for example Leea 2001; Ruut 2001).

Not only the arguments concerning the final verdict that arose during the trial, but also the opinions of the surrounding community increased and furthered the contradictory attitudes the family had towards Veikko and Väinö.

People wouldn't have accepted it, no they wouldn't. It was such a deed and then there was the trial and everything, and they collected names that he (Veikko) was not to get free. It was like a horror story here, in the village, that people would surely have been frightened had he walked free again (Saara 2001).

They asked from the prison if he was sane, and I told them I had never seen him acting like anything but. Veera (the brother's sister) had said that he must be locked up for the rest of his life. (Ruut 2001)

It was like a tragic event in the village and naturally people thought that what about when he'll get free. I think everybody was a bit afraid. Father (the brother's brother) waited for Veikko to get free and come home and all that. (Leea 2001)

Both parties, the family and the community, are quick to determine the other as an evil party and their reactions as negative ones. It seems that the community and their attitudes determine that the question about Veikko and the killing should be totally denied and forgotten. This attitude does not help the family to form positive opinions, although the power of the public judgement does not affect all of the family's views on the events. However, the family – or most of it – did alter or form their opinions after the public opinion. There is, still, a clear distinction depending on the object of the opinions the interviewees express: the deed itself, the killing, was seen as a negative act and the killer was condemned both inside the family and inside the community. On the other hand, the opinions of Veikko as a person, human being and a member of the family were not exclusively negative after the killing, either.

Veikko was still almost totally excluded from the family. A few letters and Christmas cards were exchanged (the author has some of the letters), but Veikko was no longer seen as a member of his family or his community. Veikko himself writes from prison: "as I now am on some sort of a black list and no-one wills to know me or remember me" (3.3.1975). As Veikko experienced himself a member of both his family and his community, their judgement was very important for him. A social death such as this (Bronfen, Webster Goodwind 1993: 6–9; Fingerroos 2004: 262–263) cannot be compared to a physical death, because a social death includes both evaluating factors towards the physical body and communal exercises of power. For example, a prisoner can be socially dead, as he has been sentenced to prison and therefore separated from his community. It was not about cultural evaluations or separation through death rituals, but an unofficial, kind of social control that the family and the community practised towards Veikko. This control and the "level of contact" were clearly determined by the feelings people had about Veikko and the fratricide: some people, especially those that had been closest to Väinö, saw Veikko as evil, dead and forgotten. For others, he was still alive as a part of the family and his release from prison was awaited.

Veikko's death in prison was thought to be a suicide: "They (the community, people in the village) thought that he had done himself in, that he felt he couldn't have a decent life anymore" (Saara 2001). According to the interviewee, Veikko was afraid of his release from prison and therefore committed suicide. Ulla-Maija Peltonen has in her doctoral thesis examined, for example, the stories and beliefs of the Reds in the 1918's Civil War. These stories carry a heavy influence of ancient folklore. The Reds created their own stories about what happened to the other side's executioners: who got ill, who ended up an alcoholic, who committed suicide. Through these stories Fate was believed to have punished the executioners when the law did not. (Peltonen 1996: 223) Adapting Peltonen's view, it can also be supposed that Veikko was seen to be punished in a way the village felt he was entitled to. Although Veikko had already done the time he was sentenced in prison, he would have been judged and punished anew had he committed suicide. Anyway, Veikko's funeral was a quiet, modest and private occasion, as his death did not deserve the normal, public rituals. According to Fingerroos (2004: 413) a quiet funeral can be seen as a sign of a *divergent death*. Still, there was a funeral, and the death was thus given some value, even though there was no obituary or an open

invitation to participate in the funeral. Instead of usual customs, especially the family members' personal feelings influenced the funeral's form. Veikko died in prison, broken by illness, and his death can be described as a divergent one for its scene. Still, the real reason for Veikko's death to be uncommon is the fratricide. Through the killing, Veikko was entitled to a moral judgement and as the villain he got what he had coming.

The Reds in the 1918's war were denied the normal ritual customs of death and the value of their memory. This was concretised as the authorities forbid talking about the deceased and their deaths. (Fingerroos 2004: 268–269) Veikko's death was not defined by the authorities and talking about it was not forbidden. Still, through its negative attitude, the village community unofficially controlled the remembrance of Veikko's death: in a way the individuals had the responsibility for what the community decided.

#### NO FAME, NO GLORY, NO HERO MATERIAL

Väinö's death was naturally an uncommon and undesired one, as his brother killed him. In a ritual sense it was not a *divergent death*, though. There was a funeral and the death was given its proper value. Veikko's death can be considered divergent, as his funeral was quiet and modest. Still, what in my material makes the brothers' deaths divergent, is the killing itself and how it was condemned.

Fingerroos' interpretations on *divergent deaths* with their value and publicity decided by ritual-like uses of power have some connections with my research material. Väinö's death can be compared to the category of the undesired, but still normal deaths, as a distinction from the category of the shameful deaths that are not talked about. However, there were no existing rules for confronting a sudden death or a killing like this. It shook the conceptions on life and its continuity without a warning.

*Shame* is an important factor in the fratricide and it has influenced also the stories told about the event. Partly, the family has adapted and embraced the community's condemning opinions. In a tight community, people have naturally been interested in each other's business, either negatively or in a positive way. A community demanded that its members conducted according to its norms and their conduct was also controlled in various methods. The official attitude, as well as the village's unofficial one, condemned Veikko to shame; the village community used moral disapproval and even opposed Veikko's return from prison in order to execute their unofficial verdict. (Unofficial control: Ylikangas 1976: 305–309; Rajala 2004: 26–27; the concept of shame: Siltala 1994: 13–16; opposing Veikko's return: Saara 2001.) The killing disturbed the village community's order. It made public both the death of the victim and the shame of the killer, but also the family's grief. In the fratricide, the shame and sorrow lay explicitly with the family, as others could not be blamed. When the events were made public, the community could take part into the grief, but they were thus also able to condemn the killer.

What is told of this event and, consequentially, of a *divergent death*, and how these stories are told? The family has mostly concentrated on Veikko and his personality. Each person speaks differently about Veikko. They have experienced the event differently, even if they are members of the same family, and they tell the story exactly as they see it. According to Seppo Knuutila, this is how reality is produced, how the past

is changed (1994: 23, 60–61). The meanings of the past events vary from a storyteller to another and these different variations of attitudes open up a possibility for examining the significance of the stories about Veikko. Each individual and more specifically each generation seems to interpret Veikko differently. The family members' attitudes alter depending on how close they were to Veikko. For example, Saara and Ruut, who represent the same generation as the brothers, aim to understand the event and its motifs and thus cope with it. They both want to give their statements – after decades of time – concerning, for example, the negative attitudes the village community fomented. Saara and Ruut emphasise Veikko's positive sides: his candour and hard-working nature, instead of the negative sides like his fighting. The women have thus given significance for the memories of Veikko by retelling the killing, but telling the stories has also made it possible to reminisce the good times. In the narratives, Veikko has become an active participant instead of only a problem.

Leea, representing another, younger generation, interprets the events through the influence of the mythical South Ostrobothnia. In addition to the actual killing, Leea emphasises the characteristics of the brothers. They are shown as tough but fair Ostrobothnian battlers, who could be admired, "they surely feared no-one, but never started a fight". Even though Veikko, first and foremost, is seen as the killer in Leea's stories, she has also different memories of Veikko as an easy-going devil-may-care hedonist: "Veikko, I think, was a care-free guy, for him it was easy come, easy go and he travelled the world and the county" (Leea 2001). This nonchalant way of Ostrobothnian storytelling and joking about Veikko's qualities has its roots in the historical knife-fighting and the model of the traditional man. Especially these sorts of stories about fights have interested storytellers, both men and women. Violence is one of the distinctive features connected to the past and in the background of the stories lie the values of the Ostrobothnian knife-fighters and the heroic tradition of manhood, handsomeness and prominent mob law (Siikala 1984: 209, 221).

Retellings of the killing show the importance of significances emerging from the oral history. In the stories Saara and Ruut tell, the fratricide and Veikko's story are something very different from the Ostrobothnian knife-fighter stereo-type. The event has been an incomprehensible tragedy that has forced the family to divide in order to survive. Especially as the community labelled Veikko as a dangerous and undesired individual, the survival inside the community was also demanding for the family. As a separate, brutal deed the killing might have brought out the previously hidden antipathies or then sympathies the community held for Veikko or for the whole family (compare with Nygård 2001: 145). It can be concluded that the tradition of retelling the killing has preserved itself better than the tradition of falling silent about it. The retelling of the event has clearly had a unifying influence on the family. Through the stories, it has been possible to explain the reasons and motifs for the events and also the disagreements inside the family. The stories are evidently voluntarily transported to the younger generations and the event has not been concealed: "It has been discussed, and I have told my sons, too" (Leea 2001). It is also interesting that when travelling through the generations, the stories have collected characteristics of the traditional Ostrobothnian knife-fighter stories.

Pauliina Latvala has in her book *Suvun suuri kertomus* (2001) researched material collected from a family, consisting of stories told in the family for generations. There are no exactly similar stories as the fratricide in Latvala's material, but on the other hand,

she has commented that the essential point the material unveils is the question of which stories and themes are valued in the family in question (Latvala 2000: 4). Therefore, it is important why the stories about the fratricide are told in my family. Evaluating one's own life can be one motif for telling stories about one's family (Latvala 2000: 4). However, it is hard to see how the fratricide could be used for example as a heroic story, aimed at gathering respect for the family's past and one's own roots. My family's stories about the fratricide seem to be primarily told as an evidence of the ability to survive, and this survival act includes jokes, splitting hairs or later, even boasting and blustering about the events. It is even possible that these customs of narration are typical for my family. Also time has had an influence on how the stories of the family's violent recent history are told: the events happened 30 years ago, and now people are able to and want to tell about their experiences, especially for a researcher from inside the family (compare with Latvala 2001: 10; Vuorinen 2001: 129–130). Time has influenced the family's loyalties, as well. The disagreements the killing created have been mended, partly through retelling and processing the events. Each of the family members has their own view and own opinions on the event. For example, Saara has a perfect explanation for everything:

One reason is, my mother thought that aunt (Femmi) was mental, and I think that Veikko had inherited that craziness, because it does pass from generation to the next, at least for three or four generations. (Saara 2001)

## CONCLUSION

What is reminisced through this uncommon death, this manslaughter? When analysing my material, I realised that the interviewees do not particularly remember Veikko's and Väinö's deaths through the rituals connected. Instead, they bring forth the significances the family or the community has given to the event: reminisced are the characteristics of the brothers, the opinions the family and the village had on the killing and the ways the family has survived.

This research has also opened up point of views to researching one's own culture and the problems it can create. There were surprisingly many difficulties in researching one's own family, especially when researching such a brutal event. Unfortunately – and luckily – most of these difficulties were born inside my own head. During my life, I have repeatedly heard about these events, their reasons and the reactions of the family members. Usually, the stories about Veikko and Väinö have been continued with stories about other fights and stabbings. For me, Veikko, Väinö and the killing are primarily images created by these stories, and when the event is linked with the other similar cases, it is in a way easier to see as a part of the family history's continuance. My enthusiasm, for thus understanding my family, made me examine this fratricide in the first place.

However, when examined as a separate case, the event is still too close and too difficult to research for me, both because of its recentness and the human relations connected: Veikko of the memories still lives for my interviewees. I find the women remembering the event surprising with their survival stories. Regardless of my foreknowledge and preconceptions, this has taken me unawares. On the other hand, this research has brought forth the importance of oral history. When the interviewees have been given time, they have produced different, new and deeper meanings for their memories. In

a way I have been forced, for once, to face the memories of the other family members and compare them with my own memories. My own memories have mostly been created from the stories told by my grandfather and his brother, and these stories have emphasised first the actual killing, and secondly, the other “heroics” of the brothers. The stories I had heard and embraced have thus followed the code of the traditional Ostrobothnian knife-fighter stories. Through these stories Veikko has been presented as a typical Ostarbothnian battler and I, as a member of the third generation after the events, have readily adopted this. From this ground, it would be interesting to examine how male memories of Veikko and Väinö differ from the memories of the women I interviewed – or from my own memories.

As a researcher, my concepts of the past have altered because of the interviewed stories. One of the problems for me has thus been how to interpret the conflicts born between my preconceptions and the new analyses; there have been situations I have been forced to decide whether I should include still this or that point in my research. This problem is closely connected with the question of what kind of truth I am expected to produce as a researcher. Do I have the right to emphasise some view at the expense of others? The worst part of scientific research is that one cannot resolve conflicts for example through fiction. Still, I have reached my Golgotha and carried my cross regardless of the devils harassing my brains. So, let us lay the killing to rest for now.

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## NOTES

**1** I use here the adjective uncommon because of the event's divergent and rare result: death. There have been several cases of stabbings in the branch of my family presented in this study, but they have not resulted in death. For example, my grandfather (brother of Väinö and Veikko) was sentenced to prison for a grievous assault with a knife in the 1940s. My uncle got his own experiences with knives in the 1970s, of which I have my personal memories, and another uncle of mine was involved in knife skirmishes both in the 1980s and in the 2000s. In this context, the story of the fratricide has naturally moved me, but still, I have rather seen it as a part of the family tradition's continuance. The event and its retelling have made me take responsibility as a researcher of my own family.

**2** For example, the use of the personal information from the interviewees and on the objects of the stories causes research ethical problems. The Law on Personal Information from the year 1999 states that personal information gathered from interviewees can only be used for the purposes for which they have given their permission to use it. Many tradition researchers recommend that in addition to getting permission, the researcher should use code names especially for the storytellers (Ukkonen 2000: 241). I myself introduce the interviewees with code names, but still reveal their true family relations regarding the brothers, as acknowledging the level and closeness of the family relations play a significant part in the results of my research. On the other hand, in historical research the actors of history are usually introduced by their real names, and some of the researchers doing *Oral History*-research also use their interviewees' real names. Alessandro Portelli (1997: 2002) uses the real names of the storytellers in his articles, and he also views the people reminiscing as his fellow researchers. Maybe the researched issues have been seen to be so unique that they belong to the individuals involved and therefore their real names should be used. Finnish oral history researchers, however, have almost without exception used code names for the storytellers in their researches. For example Peltonen (1996: 2003) or Fingerroos (2004: 392) do not use the interviewees real names. In my research, the objects of reminiscence, Väinö and Veikko, are introduced with their real first names, mainly because there are several public documents available on the event and it has also been widely covered in several newspapers. (The communal newspaper *Kauhajoen Kunnallislehti* had a first-page article *Man Lost Life in Knife-Fight* in 21.8.1974, and later on, the same paper published a story *Fratricide to Court* in 25.9.1974). I myself, as a researcher, have also been in the limelight because of the researched events.

**3** There is a lot of official material on the case, as it went as far as to the High Court after Veikko appealed his verdict. There are over 200 pages of police interrogation records, District Court records and High Court records.

**4** A newspaper article *Family History Society Fined for Revealing a Concealed Child* (*Helsingin Sanomat* 31.12.2004) brings forth interesting questions. Discussing the framed charge, the court drew the line in whether the Law on Personal Information should be adapted on the Family

History Society's book, and therefore admit that a member of the family had the right to forbid collecting and usage of the personal information concerning them. The final verdict stated that because the book in question was an independent literary product and included also other than purely genealogical information (i.e. historical facts, reminiscences of people and contemporary accounts) the Law had not been broken. In my opinion the point of the discussion is, however, the family and publishing and sharing the information. How is the published information chosen? Is it voluntary to get involved and into the pages of a Family History Society's publication? And, how is the level of privacy determined in the first place? Sharing of personal information is not public or generic. The Law on Personal Information obliges the researcher to see that they do not abuse the personal information on people or sensitive information on them. The Law, however, clears up the situation when the goal of the research is to publish. The law cannot be adapted to solely personal or similar cases. Discussions and continuant contact with the interviewees as well as asking their permission is therefore usually recommended as a solution to ethical problems (Ukkonen 2002: 4).