

Political Culture under Institutional Pressure

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Political Culture under Institutional Pressure

How Institutional Change Transforms Early Socialization

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To my Swedish and Estonian Family

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P R E F A C E A N D

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

In September 1944 my mother and her sister fled a war-torn Estonia. While my mother stayed in Sweden, her sister Erika continued to Toronto, Canada and became part of a large Estonian community there. Two sisters remained in the occupied Estonia. Even though contacts between the four grew over the decades as the Soviet power opened up, they lived profoundly different lives, spread as they were over the world and on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain. After Estonia regained its independence in 1991, my own contacts with the country, the culture, and our family there intensified. I noticed that despite living far apart culturally, I still could easily recognize my mother's mentality and values in the thoughts and behavior of her sisters. Values described as essentially Estonian united them, such as a very high consideration for individual achievements and education, a strong repudiation of Communism, a quite developed conservatism when it came to table manners and social codes—and the Estonian fixation with good looks! In other words, they were strangely familiar. Not in everything, though. I remember times of fierce discussions at the dinner table in the semidetached house in Toronto when my mother stubbornly defended the Swedish welfare state and egalitarianism against angry Canadian-Estonians who did not want to hear of the Swedish “socialist” experiment where nobody had to work! In Tallinn, my mother's choice to wear trousers at times became a constant source of sorrow to her even more socially correct sisters. Were not there any proper clothes in Sweden? The idea behind this book was thus partly born out of a curiosity to learn more about how the mentalities and values of my closest relatives had been shaped by being forced to adapt to new and unfamiliar institutional conditions as grown-ups. Did their common upbringing determine any

of the values that they now shared? Fortunately, how existing institutional contexts affect us individually and how much we are conditioned by cultural patterns socialized in the early years of the life span proved also to be one of the core questions of political culture studies. But for very many who share a history of being uprooted from a familiar context as refugees, labor migrants, by war or by having to suffer occupation it is indeed not only a question of theoretical interest but a real-world problem.

This book had not been possible to write without the contribution by the Estonian interwar generation itself. In Canada, Estonia, and in Sweden, several hundred persons have generously given of their time and their thoughts, opening up and sometimes sharing painful memories as questions have generated reflections on life trajectories that have not always been straightforward and simple. Having the privilege of getting insights into how the fate of this generation can contribute to our understanding of classic questions in political science problems has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional life. My three wonderful research assistants, Annika Tamra, Sofie Holmström, and Dr. Per Adman (who has written the appendix) deserve particular gratitude for their commitment and hard work. All of them made this work so much more stimulating. Mrs. Leida Marley in Toronto was a key person and contributed tremendously in helping to gain the confidence of the initially reluctant group of first-generation Canadian-Estonians. Through the *Eesti Maja* (Estonian House) in Stockholm I came in contact with Mai Raudpähn, to whom I am sincerely grateful for help with identifying the Swedish-Estonian respondents.

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