On the Boundary of Two Worlds:
Identity, Freedom, and Moral Imagination
in the Baltics

The Human Sausage Factory
A Study of Post-War Rumour in Tartu

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Acknowledgements

The idea to write about post-war rumours and their significance came to me when I was working at the Estonian Folklore Archives. Further focus on this specific topic took shape after two articles by Alo Lõhmus were published in the local Estonian newspaper Tartu Postimees in 2001: ‘The Secret of Tartu’s Cannibals Lives on in Folktales. Fingernails in Pies and Rings in Jellied Meat: Urban Folklore Savours Human Flesh’ (‘Tartu inimsõdijate saladus elab rahvajuttudes. Kütneed pirukas ja võrumas süldis – linnafolkloore meeldib inimliha’, 13 Nov) and ‘The Legend of the Human Sausage Factory as Political Horror Story’ (‘Inimvorstivabriku legend kui poliitiline õudusjutt’, 21 Dec).

I was not only interviewed for these articles, but also served as an expert in the field. After the first article was published I was approached by dozens of Tartu residents, and even more in the following years, whom I interviewed for this book. As is often the case, each person who knew something led on to the next.

I am eternally grateful to these people for sharing their recollections with me. Like a scholar of recent history, a folklorist exploring these topics often has to touch upon distressing details in people’s memories. According to my experience, the more recent the past, the more painful are the moral dilemmas raised in the belief stories and associated memories that relate to them. I noticed this when studying belief narratives about the sinking of the ferry MS Estonia, and also when interviewing my colleagues – employees of the Estonian Literary Museum – about the haunting of the museum building.

I am aware that some informants may not agree with my interpretations of the rumours that will be discussed in this book, because the mostly folkloristic interpretation offered here is merely one possible way to approach the material.

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