

## ABHANDLUNGEN

### **Unity through modernity: The agrarian media and the national question in Estonia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

by Johan Eellend

#### *Zusammenfassung*

Mit dem vorliegenden Beitrag werden Linien von Inklusion und Exklusion nachgezeichnet, wie sie sich in den Medien für die ländliche Öffentlichkeit in Estland um die Jahrhundertwende zum 20. Jahrhundert darstellten. Der Fokus liegt dabei auf estnisch-sprachigen Landwirtschaftszeitschriften und -zeitungen sowie die ihnen zugrunde liegenden Verständnisse von Geschichte, Modernisierung und Sozialstruktur. Ein weiterer Blickwinkel ist auf die publizistischen Methoden gerichtet, die sich in ihrer Aussage gegen die deutschbaltischen adligen Landbesitzer richteten. Diese Publikationsorgane waren von großer Wichtigkeit für die Formierung und den Charakter einer estnisch-nationalen Identität sowie auch für die Modernisierung der estnischen Landbevölkerung. Unter Berücksichtigung einer erweiterten Herangehensweise bei der die Zeitschriften gleichsam als Beiträge und Bilder zu verstehen sind, werden Mechanismen von sozialer und ethnischer Division und Integration analysiert. In der vorliegenden Studie werden die Bezüge zu Geschichte und Vorstellungen von Modernisierung betrachtet, durch die soziale und ethnische Linien gezogen und konserviert wurden, zugleich werden auch der Austausch von deutscher und estnischer Sprachsphäre herausgefiltert und eine Entwicklungslinie hin zur Identifizierung von ähnlichen Zielen nachgezeichnet. Auf diese Weise können – während drei unterschiedlichen Perioden von 1860 bis 1914 – die Entwicklungen der ländlich zu verortenden Gesellschaftsschichten als erste Plattform für überkommene ethnische und soziale Spannungen zwischen der neu entstandenen unabhängigen Bauernschicht und den adligen Großgrundbesitzern verstanden werden.

## **The problem**

In Estonian narratives, folk culture and history the relationship between the Baltic German lords and the Estonian rural population is commonly described as polarized and tense. The history of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century rural society is thereby described as a continuum of the relation of the situation during serfdom. The picture is underlined by the focus in Estonian 19<sup>th</sup> century history on the national movement, providing an ethnically polarized picture of the Estonian countryside. However, the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was also marked by a rapid modernization of the Baltic societies, which radically changed the conditions in rural society. The modernization shows pictures of conflict as well as cooperation and of interdependence as well as different paths chosen by the Estonian farmers and their former lords, the Baltic German nobility. The aim of the article is to study media attached to the rural public sphere in Estonia at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The focus will be on Estonian journals and newspapers and their underlying understandings on history, modernization and the role of the farmer. This picture will be contrasted with the dominating understandings among the Baltic German nobility, and the images they tried to mediate to the farmers, on the same issues. In much this article a description of a contest and merging of ideas is given, rather than outspoken polemics between the spheres. The article will display a conscious use of references to history and ideas of modernization used in order to create and maintain social and ethnic lines, but also a merging over time between the Estonian and German language spheres and an identification of common aims. Thus the modernization of rural society can be understood as providing incitements for overcoming ethnic and social tension in the Estonian society at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

## **The rural public**

The new rural public that constitutes the context for the subject matter of the article emerged in the Baltic provinces during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its formation slowly began with the formal abolishment of serfdom during the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the abolish-

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<sup>1</sup> Estonia here refers to Tsarist Russia's north-eastern province, Estland, and the Estonian speaking areas of northern Livland.

ment the peasants were released from most of their duties, but also lost the landlords' protection. Thus the landlords influence over the rural society marginally increased, and the basic relations between the lords and the peasants were changed from duties to agreements. The land reforms initiated in the 1860s by the Tsarist authorities, and the progressive landlords provided the farmers with relatively large consolidated farms, able to produce a surplus for the market. The farms were generally established outside the traditional villages, and thereby broke up the customary village community and its traditions. In the rural townships this caused an increasing gap between the newly landed farmers and the landless rural proletariat.<sup>2</sup> From living and working together in farmhouses and villages, their work and living quarters became separated. Simultaneously the farmers increased their political and administrative power over the rural townships. Both narratives and scholars have described this process as a division of the native rural population into distinct classes.<sup>3</sup> Hand in hand with the establishment of the new farms there was a move from self-sufficiency to market oriented production and thereby a need for improving agricultural methods and attain possibilities to market agricultural products. Self-help literature promoting this transformation had been published in Estonian language since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but now increased. Inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment, the authors wanted to bring new knowledge focusing on advice about land reclamation and meteorology and other useful information. From the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century general newspapers also gave agricultural advice. They were often written in a simple and popular style and widely distributed through regional networks, making it reasonable to expect that they reached many of the literate farmers.<sup>4</sup> The best known of these were the agricultural sections of "Perno Postimees" (1857–1864) and "Eesti Postimees" (1863–1894). The publisher behind these papers was the elementary schoolteacher Johann

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<sup>2</sup> Gea Troska, *Eesti talurahva majanduse ja olme arenguajooni 19. ja 20. sajandil* [Developments of the Estonian peasant economy and Living Conditions during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century]. Tallinn 1979.

<sup>3</sup> M. Martna, *Külast: Mälestused ja tähelepanekud eesti külaelu arenemisest pärast 60-id aastaid* [Memories and Observations in the Development of Estonian Village Life after the 1860s]. Tallinn 1914, pp. 26 ff., 34, 67 ff.; Ray Abrahams, *Juhan Kahk, Barons and Farmers: Continuity and Transformation in Rural Estonia (1816–1994)*. Göteborg 1994, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Jānis Andrupis, *Vitauš Kalve, Latvian Literature: Essays*. Stockholm 1953, pp. 47-88; August Annist, Jaan Roos, Johannes Käis, *Eesti populariteaduslik kirjandus* [Estonian popular-scientific literature]. Tartu 1940.

Voldemar Jannsen (1819–1890). Jannsen was one of the leaders of the national movement advocating gradual social and political reforms within the framework of existing institutions. Thus he also considered the dominant position of the Baltic German as inevitable, as they were too strong and the Estonians too immature. He urged the native farmers to learn from the Baltic German manors in order to improve the agriculture. The message of improvement encouraged the farmers to transform their agriculture from grain growing to cattle breeding and dairy production, and to become familiar with the latest agricultural tools, methods and knowledge. They were further advised to grow clover, as fodder and as fertilizer, and to change the system of crop rotation, and thereby improve their agriculture without need for large investments. The journals also stressed the idea of founding agricultural schools and associations for agricultural education. Despite the identified need of joint learning and the overall aim to support the nation, the journals primarily addressed the single farm and farmer. The advice considered the cultivating and improvement of the single farm and the issue of improvement was made the responsibility of the single farmer. A similar approach was also visible in the Baltic German journals, which often addressed the single manor owner and underlined the importance of the manor owner to manage his agriculture purposefully and in bringing knowledge and enlightenment to the countryside.<sup>5</sup>

Jannsen's approach was, however, contested by a more nationalist approach by the newspaper editor Carl Robert Jakobson. His editorials and writings on agricultural issues in the newspaper "Sakala" (1878–1906) and agricultural instruction book "Teadus ja Seadus Põllul" ("Knowledge and Law in the Field", 1867) became a model for most of the advice given in journals and self-help literature up to World War I.<sup>6</sup> The presentations were picturesque. Subjects were often introduced through his reflections on farm life and nature. Lyrics and anecdotes were inserted between chapters. Throughout the book, the author emphasized his viewpoints by arguing with an imaginary opponent who expressed scepticism about innovations and satisfac-

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<sup>5</sup> See f.e. *Baltische Wochenschrift* 1888, 1894, 1896, 1906.

<sup>6</sup> Väino Sirk, *Põllumajanduslik mõte ja põllumajanduslik kirjandus Eestis 19. sajandi keskpaigast 1917. aastani* [The Agricultural Idea and Agric Literature in Estonia from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century until 1917], in: *Eesti Teaduste Akadeemia Toimetised. Humanitaar- ja Sotsiaalteadused* 43 (1994), 2, p. 190; Annist, Roos, Käis, *Popularteaduslik kirjandus* (see note 4), p. 57.

tion with present conditions.<sup>7</sup> In this style a line between the traditional farmers and those who wanted to improve agriculture was created. Jakobson's most important contribution was probably the way he combined an emphasis on both the practical and theoretical sides of agriculture. In his great admiration for the farmer and his work – which he considered to be the backbone of the nation – Jakobson declared that “the experience of life has much more worth than knowledge in books” (“*elu õppetus on sagedaste enam väärt kui raamatuõppetus*”), but he added that the farmer who had both would be superior.<sup>8</sup> By making traditional knowledge equal to acquired learning, he presented traditional knowledge as the foundation of agriculture, but a foundation in need of improvement. The goal was to liberate the farmers and landless from the influence of the Baltic German nobility, the former masters and landowners. This approach clearly made his ideas a vital part of the intellectual capital of the national movement.<sup>9</sup> To make this liberation possible, the economic situation of the native rural population had to be improved, a development that would call for radical change. Jakobson stressed that the future lay in the introduction of rational agriculture based on small-scale dairy farming. Supported by cooperatives and agricultural associations, dairy farming would be much more productive than the larger estates which grew grain. With this he established the idea of the family farm as the most basic and most effective unit in the agriculture. A full transformation to small-scale farming required a far going land reform but Jakobson did not promote the radical expropriation of estate and church lands. Instead, he proposed that land should be bought for a fair price.<sup>10</sup> In a European context this must be considered a modest demand from a nationally minded leader, especially in a society where there was ethnic conflict between the land-owning elite and the rural population.<sup>11</sup> Jakobson's solution to the land problem seems to have been supported by the majority of the rural population since radical demands on land were not made

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<sup>7</sup> Sakala 1878, 1879, 1881.

<sup>8</sup> Carl Robert Jakobson, *Teadus ja Seadus Põllul* [Science and Law in the Field]. St. Petersburg 1869, p. VII.

<sup>9</sup> Mart Laar, *Äratjad: Rahvuslik ärkamisaeg Eestis 19. sajandil ja selle kandjad* [The Awakened. National Awakening in Estonia in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and its main Supporters]. Tartu 2005, pp. 355 f.

<sup>10</sup> Ea Jansen, C.R. Jakobsoni Sakala [The Journal “Sakala” of C.R. Jakobson]. Tallinn 1971, pp. 208 ff.

<sup>11</sup> I.T. Berend, *Agriculture*, in: *The Economic History of Eastern Europe 1919–1975*, vol. I, ed. by M.C. Kaser, E.A. Radice. Oxford 1985.

until the eve of the revolution of 1905. Up till then, the claims on “historic rights” to land did imply that Estonians had a greater right to till the soil than others, but did not refer to the individual peasants right to own a piece of land.<sup>12</sup> To improve the farmers’ position in society Jakobson considered it to be of great importance to build up their self-confidence. This would come about, not only through farmers owning their own land, but also through education and uniting the farmers in joint work, in accordance to the understanding that the united strength of the farmers was stronger than sum of the individuals.<sup>13</sup> To make education an ongoing process Jakobson urged the establishment of local agriculture associations, which should educate the younger generation and allow farmers the opportunity to share their knowledge and experience. The message directed to the farmers had a clear nationalist approach as agricultural development was considered as one of the primary means of the national movement to create a strong and independent Estonian culture equal to other European cultures. Jakobson was convinced that the Estonian people and language in itself belonged to the western cultures, and that it could develop to a culture at the same level as the Baltic German. In order to put his words into practice, he was active in founding agricultural associations, and keeping public lectures. In the rural sphere it seems as if Jakobson’s interpretation was the dominating one. As founder of agricultural associations he attracted far more members than Jannsen.<sup>14</sup>

The nationalist content of the agricultural instructions in the context of the national movement worried the Baltic Germans who supported a presentation of agricultural improvement but were worried about the ethnic polarization. The response to this concern was the first real agricultural journal “Eesti Põllumees” (1868/69), published as a supplement to the weekly “Eesti Postimees” between 1869 and 1881, and having a Baltic German friendly approach. The supplement was followed by a separate journal “Kündja” (1882–1891) published in Riga.<sup>15</sup> The Baltic German attempt to take over the publishing of

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<sup>12</sup> Abrahams, Kahk, Barons (see note 3), p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Abel Käbin, C.R. Jakobson kui eesti põllumeeste juht [C.R. Jakobson as Leader of the Estonian Farmers]. Tallinn 1933, pp. 43-49.

<sup>14</sup> Aleksander Kruusberg, Tartu Eesti Põllumeeste Seltsi algpäevilt [From the Beginning of the Tartu Estonian Farmers’ Association]. Tartu 1926; Jaanus Arukaevu, Seltsiliikumise üldoluslik 1880. aastale: Võim ja organiseerimine [The Social Context of Society Movement in the 1880s: Power and Organization], in: Kleio (1994), No. 10, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Sirk, Mäte (see note 6), p. 183 f.

agricultural journals reflects the potential political threat of agricultural advice. Following the same popular style as the most widespread journals the journals supported by the Baltic Germans however failed to receive the same popularity as they lacked the rhetoric edge that nationalism and social radicalism gave these journals.<sup>16</sup>

The publishing of journals and self-help literature, regardless of language, declined radically during the Tsarist authorities attempts to russify education and administration in the Baltic provinces from the mid 1880s. The authorities' fear of every kind of uncontrolled public activities also restricted the agricultural associations' possibilities to work. However, from the mid 1890s the authorities' grip over the rural public decreased. Among the farmers, the need for improvement was met by a growing network of agricultural associations in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and by establishment of rural cooperatives in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In difference to the agricultural associations founded during the era of national awakening in the 1860s (and primary focusing on a culturally nationalist agenda) the associations founded after the period of Russification in the 1890s, were solidly focused on rural issues and agricultural development.<sup>17</sup> In order to link the agricultural associations and to spread information and the latest knowledge on agriculture a number of Estonian language agricultural journals were founded, by "enlighteners" and with the support of the larger agricultural associations. Most continuous of them was "Põllumees" (1895–1912) and "Põllutööleht" (1906–1918). In style and content the journals often had European models, but despite the direct mediation of facts and scientific results, the visible influence from the Baltic German media was modest. From the perspective of the native farmers, the advice given in the Baltic Germans' journals was often considered as too manor oriented. Instead advice was taken directly from German sources and adapted to the Baltic farm conditions. In a short time the Estonian language journals gained a firm position as arenas and mirrors of the rural public. In many areas as many as one out of ten independent farmers had subscribed to an own agricultural journal at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But journals were also extensively circulated among the members in agricultural and cultural associations. Besides the aim of improving

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<sup>16</sup> Eesti Postimees 1879, 1881; Kündja, 1882, 1884, 1888.

<sup>17</sup> Aili Raendi, Eesti põllumeeste seltside näitused 19. sajandi 70.–80. aastatel [Expositions of the Estonian Farmers' Association in the 1870s and 1880s], in: Etnograafia muuseumi aastaraamat [Yearbook of the Museum of Ethnography]. Tartu 1975.

rural conditions the journals mirrored the local life, and especially that of the agricultural associations.<sup>18</sup>

### A Competing History

One of the issues where Jakobson's works established a clear model was the understanding of history and modernity. This model was directly or indirectly used to position the farmers against nobility. According to the understanding promoted by the rural journals and agricultural self-help literature of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, history was partly formed by the hand of God and partly driven by human social evolution. God supplied the means such as land, but humans had to build their lives and create societies through their own actions. In the presented understanding of history, humans, after being expelled from the Garden of Eden, came to live on what they could hunt and gather in the woods or fish in lakes and rivers. It was an era of freedom and equality when humans were only dependent on their families and the closest relatives. With time the hunters became shepherds guarding the animals and leading them to better pasturage. However, to be in possession of domesticated animals and the need for fodder, humans fenced land and settled close to the animals. They built houses and began to grow and reap what they before had collected, and searched for new crops to cultivate.<sup>19</sup> Thus men took control over their surroundings and began to master nature. This was understood as a vital step in the history of mankind. It introduced a sense of belonging and laid the foundation for the institution of property rights. From families living alone, humans slowly evolved into tribes and communities. They became aware of the need to cooperate with their neighbours to manage common problems and interests. They created common laws to settle conflicts and live in peace. Among the people living together, common traditions and customs grew and the languages were slowly harmonized. Tribes and communities slowly

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<sup>18</sup> Johan Eellend, *Cultivating the Rural Citizen: Modernity, Agrarianism and Citizenship in Late Tsarist Estonia*. Stockholm 2007, pp. 62 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Jakobson, Teadus (see note 8), p. 1 f. Note similarities with Georg Markus, *Mõistlik Põllumees* [The level-headed farmer]. Tartu 1893, p. 11; Mikkel Kampmann, *Surnud miljonid: Äratuse sõnake soomaade harimisest* [The dead millions: an awakening word about the cultivation of wetlands]. Wiljandi 1897, p. 3; *Inimese elu* [Men's Life], in: *Põllumees* (1898), p.1.



evolved into nations as the final cultural achievement.<sup>20</sup> With every new step in history humans, through cultivating land, acquired more knowledge and become more sophisticated, reasonable and peaceful.<sup>21</sup> Establishment of peace and order, thus, became a vital part of cultural development, reflecting the character and needs of rural society. In accordance with Herder, the development of nations and the wellbeing of every nation were seen as a way to prevent conflict and create harmony.<sup>22</sup> Wars and struggle during the last centuries should thus primarily be understood as caused by struggle and ambitions of the nobility. It was claimed that unlike farmers the nobility lacked the naturally peaceful character. The historic considerations mostly ended with the achievement of culture and unity in the rural society. Factual historical periods, such as that of serfdom were avoided or just referred to as “the times of darkness.”<sup>23</sup> This interpretation of human history was not unique for the Estonian agricultural journals, but can be found among numerous East European agrarian writings of the time.<sup>24</sup>

The evolutionary ideas clearly broke with an understanding of society as resting on tradition and of being in the hands of God. The understanding of evolution was clearly linked to Darwin, and the contemporary social sciences, which had developed in accordance to his ideas. Especially influential were the Russian scholars questioning Darwin’s focus on the individual and with examples from animal life stressing the survival for those who were most fit to cooperate.<sup>25</sup> Indirectly, though, the idea of an Estonian culture based on agriculture can be interpreted as a way of putting the means of progress in

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<sup>20</sup> Jakobson, Teadus (see note 8), p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Ostuühisus ja ühistegewusemõtte [Buying Cooperative and the Idea of Cooperative Movement], in: Postimees (1901), p. 234, supplement.

<sup>22</sup> H.B. Nisbet, Herder: The Nation in History, in: National History and Identity: Approaches to the Writing of National History in the North-East Baltic Region Nineteenth and Twentieth Century, ed. by Michael Branch. Helsinki 1999, pp. 82, 86.

<sup>23</sup> Markus, Mõistlik Põllumees (see note 19), p. 85; Põllumees ja teadus [Farmer and Science], in: Põllumees (1895), p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Stjepan Radic, Die bäuerliche soziale Bewegung ist für die Bauernvölker die einzige echte Demokratie, Forword in: Rudolf Herceg, Die Ideologie der kroatischen Bauernbewegung. Zagreb 1923, p. 18; John D. Bell, Peasants in Power: Aleksander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, 1899–1923. Princeton 1977, p. 59; Georg M. Dimitrov, Agrarianism, in: European Ideologies: A Survey of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Political Ideas, ed. by Feliks Gros. New York 1948, p. 379.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel P. Todes, Darwinism Without Malthus: The Struggle for Existence in Russian Evolutionary Thought. Oxford 1989, pp. 104-143; Andrej Walicki, A History of Russian Thought: From the Enlightenment to Marxism. Stanford 1979, pp. 280-290.

the hands of the Estonian farmers, emphasizing the distance between them and the Baltic Germans based on class and ethnicity. Through using a different style than Baltic German journals, like “Baltische Monatsschrift” and “Baltische Wochenschrift”, which solidly referred to history in terms of factual events and political history, the Estonian journals established its own understanding of history without having to compete with the Baltic German history over symbols and factualities.<sup>26</sup> This understanding of history was also met with silence by “Kündja”, which constantly avoided historic references.<sup>27</sup>

The understanding of history presented in the agricultural journals and self-help literature, and its understanding of the mechanisms of history also opened up for a competition with the Baltic Germans over the issue of culture. It opposed their self-image as “Kulturträger” – bearers of western culture, civilization and order in the Baltic lands. Indirect attempts were also made to take over the foundation of the Baltic German historiography and its roots in classic European culture. From the 1890s, many Estonian journals and manuals propagated an idea of classic schooling focusing on classic Greek and Roman history.<sup>28</sup> In this perspective agriculture was once again given the role as the foundation of all civilization, from the evolution of ancient Egypt and classical Greece down to the present day. The Estonian farmers were placed in the line as founders and maintainers of culture, without any references to other groups or classes in society. The farmers’ position was consequently not only the oldest and most natural way of life, but also the most essential and honourable.<sup>29</sup> A clear link was established between the ownership and cultivation of land on one hand, and the creation of culture and civilization on the other.

### The modern man

Besides framing the farmer’s historical position, the use of history in the Estonian-language agricultural journals and self-help literature had the aim of pointing out the direction towards prosperous future.

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<sup>26</sup> Baltische Monatsschrift 1882, 1884, 1888, 1906; Baltische Wochenschrift 1888, 1894, 1896, 1906.

<sup>27</sup> Kündja 1882, 1884, 1888.

<sup>28</sup> Põllumajandus (1910), p. 1; Ajaloo pildid [Pictures of History], in: Linda (1898), p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Markus, Mõistlik Põllumees (see note 19), p. 11.

This future always laid in the transformation and modernization of the agriculture promoted by the journals.<sup>30</sup>

To visualize the program of modernization, the journals and instruction books sketched a picture of an ideal farmer. He was always a man and by his actions provided the basic characteristics of an independent member of the local community, fulfilling the expectations of self-confidence and independence set in the self-help literature from the 1860s.<sup>31</sup> The ideal farmer's abilities were characterised as a combination of practical skills, the theoretical knowledge needed to manage a modern farm, and the ability to market his product. The presented characteristics in much followed the model outlined by Jakobson, but moved the focus to stress the modern aspects of agriculture. Moreover the farmer's ability to cooperate with others in the local community was stressed, and presented not only as an economic necessity but also as a cultural goal. Unlike the manor owner the self-help literature pictured the farmer as one among the work force, but naturally the one who would lead and supervise the work. The farmer's position as a work leader was based on his ability to handle every imaginable task on the farm, so that everyone working on the farm could look up to him without doubts about his competence. The farmer was also to approach the workers, calmly and with respect. Honour and mutual respect were thereby the central characteristics in the relationship between the farmer and the workers.<sup>32</sup>

The ownership of land was fundamental to this outlook. It provided the farmer with the essentials of life and with economic and social security. But it also brought a responsibility towards the land and its inhabitants, which only could be taken if the farmer tilled the land by his own hands.<sup>33</sup> This understanding of responsibility contested the ages of long Baltic German understanding of landowning. As for the farmers, the land owning was the foundation of the independent

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<sup>30</sup> Johan Eellend, Fredrik Wawrzeniuk Eriksson, *Den agraramodernitetens spegel: Agrarpresen i Estland, Galizien och Sverige 1890–1917* [The mirror of agrarian modernity: agrarian journals in Estonia, Galicia and Sweden 1890–1917], in: *Presshistorisk Årsbok* (2008), p. 80.

<sup>31</sup> Markus, *Mõistlik Põllumees* (see note 19), pp. 10–15; N. Ödegaard, *Põllutöö õppetuse* [Agricultural Instruction], Tartu 1899, pp. 339 ff.; *Töö* [Work], in: *Põllumees* (1898), p. 1; *Inimese elu* [Men's Life], in: *Põllumees* (1899), p. 1; *Töötegemisest* [About Work], in: *Ibid.*; *Tööst ja kokkuvõidmisest* [About Work and Unity], in: *Põllumees* (1903), p. 2; *Põllumees ja teadus* [Farmer and Science], in: *Põllumees* (1895), p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Ödegaard, *Põllutöö õppetuse* (see note 31), p. 333.

<sup>33</sup> *Kodaniku käsiraamat I* [Citizen's Handbook], ed. by Jaan Tõnisson. Tartu 1911; *Kodaniku käsiraamat 2* [Citizen's Handbook], ed. by Jüri Parik. Tartu 1913.

man. It also contained other values than strict economic ones. But unlike the farmers who understood their obligations to be towards their families, the local community and the nature, the nobility too understood their responsibilities as being towards the land and the monarch. And while the nobility had a responsibility for the tradition of their “stand”, the farmers’ self-help literature promoted a rational relationship to the land.<sup>34</sup>

### The modern farm

The ideas of modernity and modernization presented in the journals and self-help literature was at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century closely tied to technical improvements in agricultural practice. Articles and chapters in self-help literature were devoted to the latest agricultural tools and equipment. The spirit of modernity was created in the journals by using exactness and definitions whenever possible.<sup>35</sup>

The keyword for the spirit of modernity was ‘rationality’. Rational farm work was consciously planned in accordance to good sense, scientific knowledge, and sufficient time. It should always be conducted so that no time was wasted on useless work and no task was left unfinished, the goal being to maximize farm production. Unlike the ideas on improvement presented at the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, stressing the importance of tradition and modernity, the self-help literature and journals at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century solidly promoted the idea of modernity. Further, the responsibility for the modernization could no longer rest upon the shoulders of the single farmer but on the whole local community. There was a growing understanding in both Estonian and German language journals that it was not possible to only modernize one part of the society or the agriculture. This argument rose in association with the promotion of specialization and differentiation in the agriculture. In order to involve different sectors of the local community, the journals stressed the known advice to form agricultural associations. On the local level, the advice was generally followed. From 1895 up to 1905 almost 65 local agricultural associations were founded on the Estonian country-

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<sup>34</sup> Heide W. Whelan, *Adapting to Modernity: Family, Caste and Capitalism among the Baltic German Nobility*. Köln 1999, pp. 43 ff.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Ogram, *Põllumehe Käsiaraamat [Farmer’s Handbook]*. Tartu 1893, pp. 28-35; Ödegaard, *Põllutöö õppetuis* (see note 31), pp. 96 f.

side. The associations attracted member from both the self-owning farmers and the local nobility. When the nobility and clergy were present they always had positions in the association boards, accompanied by farmers. The presence of nobility in the associations has been interpreted as an attempt by the nobility to control the rural public and especially the associations, which during the 1860s that been important for promoting national ideas. But at the same time it is realistic to expect that the farmers benefited much from the nobility's presence, both in terms of being less suspect in the eyes of the Tsarist regime, and in gaining knowledge from the outside world. According to the descriptions of local association life in the journals the cooperation between the farmers and the nobility went smoothly. Especially during the early years of the associations the nobility and clergy contributed extensively to lectures and by opening their farms as models for the associations, a picture that is supported by many association minutes.<sup>36</sup> Common aims, such as improving the standard of crops and cattle, and common problems, such as finding reliable farm workers were often identified. These aims did not only display a common understanding of the promoted modernization, but also a merging of the farmers' and nobility's class interests against the farm worker and landless. Disagreements could, however, occur if the lack of farm workers was to blame on the farmers or the nobility. A durable, but often hidden disagreement arose on the different understandings on the differentiation. Here some manors wanted to subordinate the farms to support the production of the manors, so that the manors would breed cattle and the farmers grow fodder. As an answer, the farmers often suggested small-scale solutions, like agricultural cooperatives, which did not suite the manors. In their reports, Estonian-language agricultural journals focused the achievements, not the conflicts. In the journals the climate of cooperation was further underlined through articles by and references to prominent Baltic German modernizers, such as Graf Friedrich Georg Magnus von Berg. He often published his findings and advice in Estonian-language journals. Graf Berg was accepted in the Estonian sphere to the extent that his participation in the international world fair in Chicago 1898 almost was considered as an achievement of one of the Estonian journals.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Eellend, *Cultivating* (see note 18), pp. 123 ff.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

The cooperation between the native farmers and the nobility, however, ended abruptly during the revolution 1905. Narratives of the revolutionary events in the villages state that farmers tried to calm down the manor workers' aggression against the noble manor owners, but without lasting success.<sup>38</sup> In the Estonian-language agricultural journals the revolution was neglected. When the hard times were commented, it was instead done with references to the Russian-Japanese war. Effects of the revolution and the punishment raids carried out by Baltic Germans and the army were not openly discussed. Reconstruction of burnt property etc. was mentioned, but without the causes for the destruction being presented. This attitude can be explained by the Tsarist censorship but also by the idea that the journals were un-political and that the agriculture and its problems stood above the day-to-day problems of politics. Further, it was an expression of the understanding of the farmer as peaceful and un-revolutionary, and that the revolution, consequently, was not their concern. After the revolution the associations continued their work, but without the presence of nobility. In the associations and Estonian-language agricultural journals the promotion of agrarian cooperatives rose as one of the prime subjects. Unlike in the 1860s, when the idea of agricultural cooperatives was first promoted, the promotion after 1905 did not raise national arguments but strongly focused on the economic aspects. The evolutionary understanding of history, with its focus on the survival and development of the collective, was here used to promote cooperative ideas and principles in the agriculture. The common references to the basic principles of cooperative management even stated that an inclusion of all groups in society was needed, but without any practical results. Instead, the cooperative ideas on small-scale production indirectly distanced the farmers from the manor owners, at the same time as the growing network of cooperatives after 1910 began to contest the manors' production in many sectors.<sup>39</sup>

With the change of focus towards cooperative production, the articles written by nobles also disappeared from the Estonian-language journals. Instead, a new native Estonian agrarian elite of agricultural instructors and cooperative promoters, like Jaan Hünernesson, Henrik

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<sup>38</sup> Punased aastad [Red Years], ed. by Hans Kruus. Tartu 1932; A. Tupits, 1905. aasta vabadusliikumine Koeru kihelkonnas [The Liberation Movement of 1905 in the District of Koeru]. Tallinn 1935.

<sup>39</sup> Eellend, *Cultivating* (see note 18), p. 190 ff.

Laas and [Dr.] Aleksander Eisenschmidt, began to emerge. The ideal character of this new agrarian elite is pictured in an obituary in "Põllutööleht" over Jakob Hurt, an intellectual, clergyman and the front person of the national movement. His life was described both through the perspective of an educated person focusing on improving his knowledge and sharing it with the common people, and through the perspective of a hard working farmer. Seeking knowledge in his youth he returned to till the soil in his adulthood.<sup>40</sup> The description of his lifeline has many similarities with the way of life the editors of the agricultural journals were described and it is obvious that the practical skills of agriculture and cultivating frequently necessary characteristics to obtain respect among the farmers.

## Conclusion

From the time when native peasants in Estland and Livland were given the right and possibility to purchase land in the 1860s there was an increasing demand for knowledge on agricultural improvement and specialization. The publishing of Estonian-language self-help literature and a number of agricultural supplements to newspapers and agricultural journals met the demand. The growing number of agricultural associations often supported the journals. During the time of national awakening from the 1860s on these journals often had a complex relation to the former Baltic German lords. Among the publishers Jakobson and his likeminded dominated. They stressed the importance of agricultural improvement in order to economically, politically and culturally liberate the native population from the Baltic German dominance. According to this understanding, a modern and wealthy agriculture would make up the backbone for a strong and independent Estonian culture. In order to position the farmers an alternative understanding of history and human development, based on the farmers, was presented. Picturing the farmer, and the work of the farmer, as the main force was an indirect way to challenge the Baltic German self image of being the prime promoter and bearer of order, culture and development in the Baltic lands. This understanding was, however, contested by authors and journals under the influence of the more Baltic German friendly Johann Voldemar Jannsen. According

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<sup>40</sup> Dr. Jakob Hurt †, in: Põllutööleht (1907), p. 4.

to this line, the Estonian culture was not yet mature, and therefore had to learn from the Baltic German. The two sides argued over concrete political and national issues, but not over abstract issues, like the path of history. While the general arguments during this time often were abstract and tied to ideas on culture and nation, the concrete advice were often addressing the single farmer, and dealing with the development of the single farm.

During the Tsarist attempts to administratively and culturally russianize the Baltic provinces from the mid 1880s, most of the periodicals on agricultural improvement were silenced. However, when the Tsarist pressure loosened in the mid 1890s, the number of journals and agricultural associations promoting agricultural improvement grew. This period was characterised by a merging of the interests of the native farmers and the Baltic German manor owners on the issues of agricultural improvement. Baltic Germans were active in the local agricultural associations and as authors in agricultural journals. Part of an explanation for this merging of interests can be the growing number of relative wealthy self-owning farmers, sharing the same problems of marketing products and finding farm workers as the manors. Despite this interdependence, the Estonian-language journals continued to create a distance through the use of an alternative history, and through picturing an ideal farmer. In contrast to the understanding of the manor owner, this ideal farmer tilled the soil by himself and had a relationship to his workers characterized by mutual respect and honour. Unlike the farm and nation based advice on agricultural improvement given in the 1860s, the advice given at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century focused on the farmer as a member of the local community, and pictured the development of every single farmer as dependent on his neighbours.

However, the cooperation between the farmers and the manor owners was short lived. The events of the Revolution 1905 divided the two groups. The Revolution generally caused the Baltic Germans to withdraw from the public and to concentrate on their own affairs. After the revolution, the growing group of farmers also chose another path of modernization. This path was based on an expansion of cooperative production and cooperative based networks, and by its organization, but not rhetoric, distanced the farmers from the Baltic Germans.



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