



**Children burnt by the war 1941-45  
(The last witnesses):  
War memories and post-war identity**



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## **Dedication**

To my family and friends

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## Contents

I.	<b>Dedication</b> .....	3
II.	<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	4
III.	<b>Contents</b> .....	5
1.	<b>Introduction</b> .....	7
2.	<b>The context</b> .....	11
2.1.	Historical background of the Great Patriotic War.....	11
2.2.	The organization “Children burnt by the war 1941-45”.....	15
3.	<b>Methodology</b> .....	17
3.1.	Anthropology at home: access, insider/outsider perspective and ethics.....	17
3.2.	Data collection and the influence of the camera.....	20
3.3.	The relationship between film and text.....	22
4.	<b>Theory</b> .....	25
5.	<b>Memories and identity</b> .....	27
5.1.	<b>Preservation of the war memories</b> .....	27
5.1.1.	The strongest collective memories.....	28
5.1.2.	The ways of preservation of the war memory.....	32
5.2.	<b>Organizing identification</b> .....	35
5.2.1.	Identity of the elderly people in historical perspective.....	35
5.2.2.	Aesthetics.....	40
5.3.	<b>Motivation behind the “memory work”</b> .....	43
5.3.1.	Post-war period: political retrospective.....	43
5.3.2.	The aims of the organization.....	45
a.	Generational drama.....	45
b.	Struggle for social justice.....	48
6.	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	51
7.	<b>References</b> .....	53



## 1. Introduction

“Despite the passing of the years after the war  
the fear still remains in the soul and memory.

That is why we do not want war ever happen in any country of the world.”

Galina Lebedeva

The war. Everybody is familiar with this term but not everyone can see the suffering hidden behind it. The Great Patriotic War. For the people who lived in the Soviet Union this was the word that came into daily use in 1941 and remained there for almost 4 years. During that time these words were constantly repeated by grandparents and parents, but what did their children think about it? What were their perceptions?

Being at a very gentle young age and having not yet received a proper education, they were probably not able to fully understand what happened that Sunday the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1941, but at the same time, they felt that something went wrong.

That war gave children an experience which they could never be taught in any school. They learned what fear was, what it was to get the letters saying that their fathers, brothers or uncles died or were missing; they knew it was to lose close people, they knew what it was to work night and day to help their mothers. The war taught them to survive and appreciate every single moment of their lives, to be glad to receive any tiny gift of destiny, to treasure every single piece of food. Hiding in the bomb shelters surrounded by other unknown people they had no idea what the next bombardment would bring.

Looking at the photos taken during the war years, we realize that together with war narratives, they contribute to a deeper understanding of what life was like during those years. They reflect a broad variety of emotions.

The picture on the front page makes us soak in the atmosphere of the war which surrounded the children during those horrible years. In their faces we see a mixture of different feelings: fear, astonishment, incomprehension, curiosity, grief. The children raise their eyes covering their heads by the hands unconsciously trying to protect themselves. They are scared not only because they do not know what will happen at the very next moment, but because they have no idea why all this is happening. Young minds want to explore the world together with their elder compatriots.

They wanted to hide but they could not, they wanted to eat but there was hardly anything left, they wanted to play games but they had to work. They grew up very quickly. This generation did not have childhood; their childhood was embedded in the war.

The Great Patriotic War has been over for 66 years now. The war participants and home front defenders are in their nineties and are passing away. The youngest of the children of the war, the ones who were born in 1945, are now 65 years old, and the oldest are in their seventies. The war veterans are also coming to their senior age. Now the war's children represent the last witnesses of those cruel years and they are the ones who are able to transmit their knowledge to the young generations.

My main informants, Galina and Slava Lebedevy, are the representatives of the generation of war children. In 2000, they established the organization called "Children burnt by the war 1941-1945 (The last witnesses)" that nowadays comprises around 6000 members. During my fieldwork, which was conducted in the North-Western Russia, Arkhangelsk, I sought to observe and analyze the lives of Galina and Slava through the perspective of their active social position as the leaders of this organization.

Their unique attitude towards the revitalization and preservation of the war memories and their aspiration to transmit their knowledge to the next generations made me reflect about the war as a very important part of their lives.

Therefore I formulated the hypothesis:

**The war as a major social event had a strong influence on the formation of the identities of the people who had experienced it in their early childhood. These strong experiences explained the need to establish an organization "Children burnt by the war" in order to pass their knowledge to the next generations as a means of creating continuity in society.**

To develop my hypothesis I posed the following research questions.

1. What are the strongest memories of the Great Patriotic War connected to? Why and how are they preserved and reproduced in the lives of the elderly people in Arkhangelsk?
2. In what way do the war memories contribute to elderly people's perception of self and the others? What other factors influenced their present identity?
3. What was the motivation for the decision to institutionalize these memories into the organization "Children burnt by the war"?

The inspiration for conducting this particular investigation was based on my individual life experience. I have strong personal connections to my main characters because they are my grandparents. Regarding their contribution to my upbringing, being able to see their organization's development from the very beginning and all the struggles within its functioning made me reflect upon the issues with which they are occupied. Their complete



dedication and involvement in the work of their organization influenced my nature greatly, which is why I found it significant to go deeper and discover new aspects of their identity, to discern the reasons for their enthusiasm to organize such an activity.

Therefore this project is of a great interest to me. From a researcher's point of view, the idea of gathering all the people who experienced the war as children in one organization is the first of its kind and is a unique opportunity to investigate those people's perceptions of the war as being the last witnesses. Moreover, complex and multifactor aspects of the identity issue in an historical perspective make it a challenging and up-to-date research theme. Another reason for choosing this topic is because making a film as a part of the research process became a great visual tool to preserve the memory for future generations that can be used further for educational purposes.

The thesis consists of the following chapters:

- The context: The description of the historical background of the Great Patriotic War in the Soviet Union and the story of the organization "Children burnt by the war 1941-45" creation and its functions.
- The methodology: The description of the challenges which occurred during the research process and how they influenced the process of knowledge creation.
- The main theoretical approaches, which formed the basis for my research.
- The content – Memories and Identity: Divided into three subchapters, which correspond to the aforementioned research questions and comprises the analysis of the data gathered during the research.

The first subchapter is devoted to the study of the strongest war memories narrated by the elderly people – citizens of Arkhangelsk – along with the analysis of the reasons why they try to preserve these memories in their present lives and in what ways they can share them with future generations.

The second subchapter deals with the questions of how the elderly people perceive themselves under the influence of their war memories. It describes their social statuses on the example of my main informants as the representatives of the children of the war generation and it suggests what other factors could affect their present identity.

The third subchapter investigates the reasons that caused the main characters institutionalize their memories into the organization "Children burnt by the war" and it portrays what role the institution plays in their present lives.

- The conclusion: Here I will summarize my research work and specify important details discovered during the investigation process.



## **2. The context**

### **2.1. Historical background of the Great Patriotic War**

In modern Western terminology, The Second World War is commonly used to define a worldwide military conflict that lasted from the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1939 till the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September 1945. It included international political participants from Europe, Asia and USA.

The term, Great Patriotic War, was introduced by Joseph Stalin – the leader of the Soviet Union during 1922-1953 – and since those times has been used in Russia and former Soviet republics to describe the war between Nazi Germany and the USSR. As Galina and Slava told me, the Germans had a plan “Barbarossa” to occupy the USSR, which was meant to be accomplished within 2-3 months. According to that plan, the Nazis wanted to kill 250 million people of the population of 300 million, leaving only 50 million people to be kept as their slaves. The plan included the demolition of Moscow and St. Petersburg. However, the patriotism of the Soviet soldiers and their love for the Motherland allowed them to protect and save the country from oppression. The Soviet soldiers also helped to release other occupied states: Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, etc.

It is important to give a brief overview of the Great Patriotic War years in the Soviet Union in order to be able to visualize the vivid picture of the events unfolding in that particular period in that particular part of the world.

Starting with official figures and data, further on, I will give examples of the stories from the war childhood narratives by the members of the organization who resided in Arkhangelsk and other regions of the USSR. Thus, it will be possible to try to understand at least a small part of their first-hand terrible war experience.

The Great Patriotic War lasted from the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1941 till the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1945, 1918 days and nights. According to Lomagin: - “The price paid for the war by the Soviet Union was uniquely great. The Soviet Union suffered more than other states: overall more than twenty-seven million people were lost. Of these, some 8.6 million soldiers and sailors were killed on the front lines, and around 5.3 million were captured and imprisoned. Of these latter, only 1.8 million returned... More than a million Soviet servicemen died in battles in Eastern and Central Europe, in the Balkans, in China, and in Korea. Of these, 600,000 died in Poland, 140,000 in Czechoslovakia, the same number in Hungary, and more than 100,000 in Germany. Millions of Soviet citizens died as a result of forced deportations to Germany or were destroyed by the invaders on occupied Soviet territory...

The war dealt an enormous blow to the Soviet economy. 25 million people remained without shelter. Some 1,710 towns and settlements were destroyed and more than 70,000 villages. Six million buildings were gone and 32,000 factories...” (Lomagin 2009, 409).

As Lomagin writes in his book: - “... every family lost someone – either at the front, under occupation, or on the home front. The Soviet quality of life declined dramatically. In towns and worker settlements basic supplies and industrial goods were dispensed using ration cards, with various norms for different levels of society.

Wartime levels of per capita consumption declined significantly, above all for such products as flour, meat, and sugar. The situation was particularly serious near the front and in liberated territory. There was simply not enough to eat. People died from hunger and famine-related illnesses. In Leningrad alone, blockaded by German and Finnish troops, more than 800,000 people died of starvation” (Lomagin 2009, 400).

And Arkhangelsk was second place on the death rate from hunger. From Slava’s and Galina’s narratives I learned that every third person was called for the army, every tenth inhabitant of pre-war Arkhangelsk had not returned from the front. No less shocking is another figure: during the years from 1941-1944, 38 thousand inhabitants died in town, half of them in 1942 from hunger and scurvy. Transporting thousands of tons of food, Arkhangelsk starved as people were obliged to unload the cargo ships and send the goods to the front, forbidden to take anything for themselves. Arkhangelsk paid the life of every fifth citizen in that war.

But people did not lose their courage; a spirit of patriotism was strong. A slogan in those times from the Soviet Union: “Everything to the front, everything to the Victory!” inspired people to continue their fight against German aggressors. And of course, Galina, Slava, and other children of the Great Patriotic War blame the Nazis for all the suffering they experienced. At this point in their narratives, they tend to praise the victory of the USSR over Germany, which is understandable and can be explained by the fact that it gave freedom to their country from oppression, saving them from certain annihilation.

Referring to Lomagin: - “The entire population was divided into four categories for purposes of supply: workers and those of equivalent status, service personnel, dependents, and all children under 12” (Lomagin 2009, 400).

The children – one of the most vulnerable and sensitive categories, had their own views of the war. Even if they did not fight at the front, they helped their mothers at the home front; they suffered from bombardments and hunger, they faced the war in their early years, and they could not forget it.

Galina Lebedeva was born in Arkhangelsk on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May 1937, and has been living in the city all her life. When the war started, her father and two uncles went off to war; hence leaving her mother to take care of four children and the grandparents. Galina says: - “It was very hard to live and shortly after the war my mother passed away. I remember very well the day of the beginning of the war; it was the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1941. The day was very warm, my family and I were sitting outside our house, talking, enjoying the summer. It was Sunday. Suddenly, my grandmother went out of the house with a face full of grief and told us that the war started. It was 12 pm. Maybe I didn’t fully realize what was happening, but watching the sad faces of my relatives, I understood that something was wrong. I was just 4 years old.” After the war, Galina graduated from the State Pedagogic Institute and started working as a teacher of Russian language and literature.

Slava Lebedev was born in Uzbekistan on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April 1938. He, along with his sister, brother, and mother, spent his childhood in Poland because his father was a frontier guard on service at Bialystok. When the war began, his father managed to evacuate the family to the USSR by train. Slava tells his story: - “We have been lucky because it was the only train that was able to escape. It was heavily bombed, making us move slowly with many stops. When the train was passing by a forest, it suddenly began to slow down. We were surrounded by German soldiers and it seemed that there was no way out. Everyone who could move ran into the woods, and so did we. We hid in a shell crater. The sounds of the fire activity and gun shots were everywhere. Suddenly, a German soldier appeared on the edge of the crater and looked at us. Seeing a woman with three kids he probably felt compassion. He said in broken Russian: - “Mother, sit still, then you will go there,” and showed the direction to the East. How long we stayed there is hard to remember. We had been wounded, bleeding, but we managed to walk sometimes on the road sometimes in the forests. In a while, we met our Soviet soldiers and they sent us to the town Smolensk, then to Moscow, and afterwards, our family was evacuated to the Middle East.” Afterwards, Slava finished school and graduated from the Marine Institute. He worked as a chief-engineer in the Trade Fleet.

Liya Panfilova is the best friend of Galina and one of the chief members of the organization’s Council. She was born in Arkhangelsk on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1935. In 1941, her father went off to the war because he was a military man. Liya was the oldest of three children. She experienced severe famine and heavy bombing during the war years. In 1943, she went to school; her family did not have any money, so she had to walk there on foot. During the big break in the middle of the day, pupils in Liya’s school were given half a piece

of bread and a tea spoon of sugar, which was the biggest treat for them as the standards were very low. Liya worked together with Galina at school as a teacher of German language.

Maya Ivanova was born in 1940 in Moscow. In 1941, she was sent to her grandparents to Bryansk region, which later was occupied by the Germans. There was no way out. They hid in the forests, moving from village to village without any food or clothing. Her family had not heard anything from her father until 1945, when he was eventually found in a village in the Komi republic. After the war, Maya went on to higher education as a lawyer.

Nikolai Ivanov is a friend of Galina and Slava's family and Maya's husband. He was born in 1935 in a village in the Pskov region. In 1940, their family consisting of 10 people was dispossessed and they were sent to different parts of the country. Nikolai went to the Borovichi town in the Leningrad region. Listening to his story in the film, it is possible to notice that he is stuttering. The stutter started after the war. He remembers: - "My elder brother and I took a train to visit my uncle's family. When we arrived at Leningrad, the war had already started. We were arrested because of the military situation, but eventually, we were released and sent back to Borovichi, which was an important strategic war point. They gave my brother some food supplies: around 5 cans of stewed meat. They also gave him bread and put us on the evacuation train. The train was attacked and we had to jump into the water to escape. Somebody saved me and my brother as well. The interesting thing is that every can had been hit by bullets. And not a single bullet hit us through the can. So we were really very lucky!" In 1943, Nikolai went to school; half of the school building was reorganized into the hospital. They were taught war crafts, how to be careful with bombs, and how to deactivate them. Afterwards, Nikolai worked as a chief-engineer for 40 years in the Northern Shipping Company.

Vitaliy Vasilchikov is my second grandfather. He met the war in the town Lubim in the Yaroslavl region. His father went off to war and was killed in 1942. Two children from his family died, he and his younger sister were lucky to live through the war. As Vitaliy told me, during the war there was famine. They had to stand in long queues of about two thousand people to receive rations. Sometimes they stayed for several days. Vitaliy and other children went to pick up the remains of seeds and any food from the fields; however they had to give all that they found to the authorities, who sent it to the front. No one was allowed to keep any food found for him or herself. After the war Vitaliy received higher education and had several jobs.

These narratives are small but significant parts of the history of the Great Patriotic War. They reflect the hardships and suffering of the people who experienced them in their early childhoods.

## **2.2. The organization “Children burnt by the war 1941-45”**

The organization was the main setting for my inquiries. It was formed in April 2000 in Arkhangelsk. The leader is Slava Lebedev, the secretary is Galina Lebedeva. The organization has a leading body, which is the Council consisting of 7 representatives. The main work is done in the apartment of Galina and Slava, which is why people close to the organization call the apartment “the headquarters.” However, they do have an official location for holding meetings with the members or other interested people. The meetings occur weekly on Wednesdays in the office of the local public concert hall. Usually one of the Council representatives is in charge of organizing the meeting.

The organization comprises of almost 6000 members throughout Arkhangelsk city and the neighbouring districts. Therefore, to be able to perform successful communication within the whole organization, its work is divided among the Council representatives who are responsible of taking care of certain membership groups.

The major functions of the Council are to make special evenings and concerts for the members so that they are able to meet and speak with each other in order to not feel lonely and forgotten; the Council is also in charge of congratulating members on birthdays, which brings the people a feeling happiness when they live alone and do not have close relatives. However, Galina and Slava are in charge for the most part of the events that are the driving force of the organization.

Therefore it is possible to see that Galina and Slava have formed a special network for keeping contact with the members. They make phone calls to congratulate members on anniversaries, give presents, and organize festive dinners for them. Together with that, Galina, Slava, and other active members do informational work by giving lectures to the students of various educational institutions so that they can transfer their historical knowledge about the war. They themselves call this patriotic work, or, I would name it, “memory work,” because they transfer their own memories to other people.

Through their social activities for the past decade, they have managed to achieve a lot. They have conducted approximately 600 patriotic talks with the school children, kids from orphanages, students from various educational institutions; they have published two editions of the book about the war memories narratives called “Childhood burnt by the war” in 2000

and 3000 copies respectively, which can be found at libraries in the USA, Poland, Germany, and Norway. They have initiated the installation of the Seal monument, dedicated to the animal whose meat saved many people's lives from starvation during the war.

To commemorate the heroic deeds of the soldiers, Galina and Slava managed to obtain from the state for Arkhangelsk the status, the City of the War Glory. During the years of the Great Patriotic War, Arkhangelsk had been bombed by German aircraft, but, at the same time, the city was able to organize the practical work of protecting the northern borders of Russia and to ensure the smooth work of army and navy' facilities. In both directions, lots of allied transports with food and other supplies passed through Arkhangelsk that contributed to the approach of victory.

And nowadays, their organization is not the only one; so-called "sister-organizations" have come out in Russia and the neighbouring countries of former Soviet republics. A great amount of their work is also engaged into the political struggle for the social justice.

This was a brief overview of the work of the organization's activity; all its important aspects relevant to the research topic will be uncovered in the following chapters of the thesis.



### **3. Methodology**

My fieldwork was conducted from the beginning of April till the end of July 2010 with a short break in May. This season of the year allowed me to observe the main activities in which my key informants – the leaders of the organization – were involved annually, such as the anniversary of their organization “Children burnt by the war.” In 2010, it had been 10 years since it was formed; then the birthday of Slava was on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April; the day that commemorated the opening of the Seal Monument was on the 6<sup>th</sup> of May, the birthday of Galina was on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May; Victory Day is held on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May; and the day of the beginning of the Great Patriotic War was on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June.

This was my first Master’s fieldwork, from which I learned that only by conducting the research yourself can you get real feelings and experiences that cannot be compared to any books or stories by other people, regardless of how brightly they are written or told. I noticed that it was really challenging to work in the field; it was always necessary to be attentive, listen carefully, notice every small detail and be on my feet holding a camera.

Therefore in this chapter I will outline the challenges that occurred during the research because they are an essential part of fieldwork. The unique experience received during the investigation process is one of the key steps towards carrying out a proper scientific analysis as it facilitates the progression of knowledge creation.

#### **3.1. Anthropology at home: access, insider/outsider perspective and ethics**

At this point, I will discuss my personal relationships with the informants and my position as a researcher from the insider/outsider perspective in doing anthropology at home, which is interwoven with the problem of access to the research setting and ethical considerations.

The main method used was participant observation, which in my case according to J. Spradley’s classification can be regarded as a complete participation: - “The highest level of involvement for ethnographers ... when they study a situation in which they are already ordinary participants” (Spradley 1980, 61). To make things clear, it is necessary to define the relationships, as my main informants Galina and Slava Lebedevy are my grandparents from my mother’s line, the grandparents from my father’s line were also involved into the research; I have also been acquainted with the other informants for a long period of time as they are either close friends or associates of my grandparents.

Here comes one of the biggest challenges in the methodological aspects of such research, which is “the more you know about the situation as an ordinary participant, the more difficult it is to study it as an ethnographer” (Spradley 1980, 61). This is one of the first concerns that comes out when going into the field. The researcher has to deal with the problems that can occur when looking at one’s own society, making it both in some ways easier and more difficult to make a study.

In terms of access to the setting, being an insider in the society and having close relationship with my main informants gave me the possibility beforehand to make an agreement that I was going to conduct a research. This provided greater opportunities to discover information that would be hidden from any other person. Furthermore, it was a big advantage that there were no language barriers as I was in the field of my native country. As Strathern puts it: - “...anthropologists on familiar terrain will achieve a greater understanding than elsewhere, because they do not have to surmount linguistic and cultural barriers” (Strathern 1987, 17).

On the other hand, being one of the representatives forming the society, I essentially took for granted many things which could be striking for outsiders. Therefore, starting to investigate my hometown and its inhabitants where all the surroundings were identical to those that I have experienced in my personal life for many years, it was necessary for me to be open and to be in a permanent search of something “exotic” in order to achieve a new level of understanding of the events that seemed casual and evident. Moreover, it was important to be able to convey the meaning of my findings. Hence I always had to bear in mind that I was primarily a researcher and only secondly a family member. The challenge at this point emerged also because the internal family relationship could reveal too intimate aspects of lives; to be able to approach them from the right analytical perspective, the research demanded deep concentration.

Besides that, I would like to reveal my experience as an outsider. During the time when I was conducting research I was not only acting as a family member, but also observed my informants and myself as objects of the research, thus acting as an outsider. In this sense, the camera was a tool to create distance. For example, when I was filming the concert I was a spectator among the other audience but at the same time I examined the behavior of my informants together with my own perceptions of the event. The difference in age between me and my characters and the diverse conditions with which we have been brought up were also factors that put me a little bit aside, even though I shared their viewpoints. As Spradley

notices: - “Doing ethnographic fieldwork involves alternating between the insider and outsider experience, and having both simultaneously.” (Spradley 1980, 57)

At this point the ability to look critically on gathered material also came to the forefront: being a granddaughter I called my main characters grandmother and grandfather whereas in my research paper I had to separate personal meaning from anthropological and call them by their names. But following the point of Altern and Holtedahl, in my analysis I use “a strategy for repersonalising the production of anthropological knowledge” (Altern, Holtedahl 2000, 35), which means that being a researcher I cannot be left out of the research situation and the influence of my presence there becomes of particular importance and makes the investigation more scientific.

Along with that, it is significant how my self-perception influenced the production of information. The knowledge is created through the mutual interaction and the process of communication between researcher and informants. Very important findings can be revealed especially through the analysis of personal relations. Belonging to the same culture and sharing its values together with being part of the family with its own traditions, added to the knowledge creation for me as a researcher. Because studying my own society I became in a way the object of study myself, which contributed to my perception of those being studied. This shows that it is important to know to what extent our self-knowledge is shared with the people under study.

Considering the ethical issue, which is usually very significant because researcher has to answer the question what are the limits, which define what kind of information is possible to be revealed and to what extent the findings might influence on the people under study, in my particular research situation, it was impossible to be anonymous because the camera as an important research tool was present during the fieldwork.

Talking with my informants before starting the fieldwork, I explained these practicalities and got informed consent from all the participants. I was also concerned about the age because elderly people have weaker health and are more sensitive in relation to the nostalgic memories, i.e. their feelings are easy to hurt. But at the same time, my informants were eager to talk about their war experiences because their social activity was aimed at distributing their knowledge to other people. Hence, bearing in mind which patterns of behavior could have been more appropriate in each particular situation and being tactful, I was, in a way, provoking my informants to reveal their memories. However, very often they started conversations by themselves and appreciated my special interest in their narratives.

### **3.2. Data collection and the influence of the camera**

In this part I will speak about the methods of data collection, the informants' relation towards the camera as an important research tool and the role of the audience as a remarkable matter that affects the behavior of the characters.

Doing participant observation with and without camera, I was collecting people's life stories mostly through conversations supplemented by showing various personal documents such as pictures, medals and other important individual belongings.

I tried not to make interviews and rather asked questions that would lead the discussion to the topic of my investigation. Using the narrative approach I asked my informants to talk about their memories and to describe how they perceived certain events in their past. Participant observation in this case was more under the direction of informants.

At this point I would like to give two examples. At the end of June 2010, Nikolai and Maya – the old friends of Galina and Slava – came to visit them, which they do once in a while. Nikolai started reminiscing the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 1941 because the anniversary of this date had passed a few days ago. He began talking about his war memories, famine, and food. It is important to mention that not everything was clear in his story as he was telling it full of emotions and describing the situations the way he perceived them, which was not easy to comprehend. Galina was asking him questions in order to shed more light on some aspects of his story, Maya was adding comments, too. That way his friends helped to reveal more information without my intrusion in the conversation.

Another example can be traced in Vitaliy's – my second grandfather – childhood story. We came for a visit and I asked him to tell about his war memories. Galina was interested in the discussion while Vitaliy was narrating and kept actively asking him questions. At the same time the wife of Vitaliy – my second grandmother – Lyudmila wanted him to be quick and not to tell a lot because she considered it was enough for him to speak.

This shows that the presence of others affects what people say, which in turn depends on their personal interrelations. As Davies states: - "The interaction between interviewees can be very informative for the ethnographer" (Davies 2008, 115). And observations can be highly revealing. For example, when filming Galina and Slava, it was easy to notice that Galina was dominant in the couple, in control of the events going on and trying to direct the conversation. Having the opportunity to compare these recent observations to the ones from my previous life they acted in a similar way, which meant that they did not deliberately perform in front of the camera but showed their real relationship.

However the presence of the camera has always an influence on the ways how characters behave. Thus referring to Henley: - "...performances motivated by the presence of the camera can be highly revealing, bringing to light aspects of personal identity, attitude, belief or fantasy that could otherwise remain hidden or unexpressed" (Henley 2004, 119).

Bearing in mind that they were being filmed, Galina brought the war issues up to the discussion more often than she generally would. Slava sometimes said poems on war thematic, which he never did before in an ordinary situation at home. This was striking because without the camera they would not do that and I learned more about their personalities.

At the beginning of the filming process Slava always looked into the camera and tried to show me what to film, however he did not pay attention to the way he looked like. On the contrary, Galina quickly got used to the presence of the camera and was behaving quite naturally but she was highly occupied with her appearance. She always wanted always to look good and asked me not to film her at several situations at home as she was concerned about the audience who would watch the film.

At this point, a query about whom the research is directed to comes to the forefront. Primarily aiming it at the academic world, it is necessary to be aware of the fact that among the addressees are also the informants. They have to know about the results that I came to after investigations. Nevertheless, producing knowledge with the help of the visual tools emerges another level of understanding, where the attitudes both of the researcher and the informants to the recipients become relevant, as Henley states: - "the audience becomes active participants in the construction of the meaning of the film" (Henley 2004, 116).

Having an explicit agenda of their work, Galina and Slava talked more about patriotic education, keeping in mind that the future film could be shown as one of the ways of transferring their knowledge to the other people. As for me, making a film and thinking about the viewers, it was important to find the optimal balance of providing anthropological knowledge and avoiding the evident descriptions of what everybody is familiar with in the society in terms of shared culture.

### **3.3. The relationship between film and text**

Taking into account that filming was a part of the investigation process and the analysis, watching the tapes became a relevant step towards the production of knowledge. I would like to develop this theme in this subchapter.

The film presents a strong visual tool that allows seeing people, places and events happening in reality, which contributes greatly to a deeper understanding of the research situation and aspects raised in the text.

The process of editing was of a great value to me as I met my characters over and over again, giving a unique opportunity to reflect thoroughly about what they said or did in different situations because being an active participant of the research and especially filming process is difficult to scrutinize the upcoming information and thoughtfully follow up all the events happening. In particular, editing helped me to reveal different aspects of the interrelationship between Galina and Slava, which I probably took for granted on beforehand.

Noticing small details how Slava and Galina relate to each other added to the comprehension how close they have become after living so many years together, getting used to each other's habits and taking care of each other. The tenderness with which Slava takes Galina by the hand and helps her walking, the way he makes little jokes celebrating his birthday in a family circle. These do not simply reflect their attitude towards each other but also reveal the complexity of their characters. They act as a team. And in my opinion they are very strong people because of being brought up in hard living conditions of the war and permanently struggling for survival, they managed to rise up, follow their dreams and achieve them and still today continue to go for new aims.

Choosing the scenes that I wanted to include in the film, I decided to focus on my main informants – Galina and Slava Lebedevy – and tried to find a balance between private and social spheres of their lives, in that way showing complexity of their personalities. Presenting my characters at home doing domesticities, I created juxtaposition by showing them in public. This juxtaposition tells a lot about what kind of people they are.

Analyzing the patterns of their behaviour it can be seen how important the organization is to Galina and Slava and how dedicated they are to the “memory work” they do within it. Their apartment has a special atmosphere. Galina receives and makes calls from home; there she discusses the questions concerning their work with Slava and other members of the Council. At the same time it is a place where they eat, celebrate festive events, where every room holds certain treasured memories of their previous life creating threads of connections to their present reality. Slava's ship models and steering wheels, his persistence

in making details for his models portrays his professional occupation and hobbies. Galina's books and seal figurines tell about what deeply interests her. This aesthetical aspect also contributes to the understanding of their personalities.

Their social work makes them reminisce about their war past very often. Sharing their memories they are working through them even though those hard years are impossible to forget. Galina performs her complete involvement into their social activity and she never loses an opportunity to tell stories to the media or any other ordinary people. This shows that the meaning of the job they do, in their view, has to be very important in the life of everyone.

The potential of the film contributes to the structure of the ethnographic knowledge. It stimulates our vision of a wider range of life aspects and gives access to deeper analysis, with the possibility to see emotions and senses, behaviors which cannot be expressed in the same way and along with words, it enriches the content of knowledge.

Reading a text gives one perception of the research, but the film lets us enter the life-worlds of the others and as MacDougall claims: - "is also well suited to expressing the unique individuality of human beings through their faces, gestures, postures, speech, and interactions with others" (MacDougall 2006, 272).

All in all preparing the research, conducting it, making field notes, recording video and sound, analyzing gathered material through the prism of theoretical perspectives, editing the film – this whole chain of actions provides the creation of anthropological knowledge.





#### **4. Theory**

In this chapter I am going to describe the basic theoretical approaches related to my investigations.

One of the main themes of my research is the concept of war memories. Analyzing it, I would like to set its definition in comparison with history. History is the study of the past as Favorini says: - “a chronological record of significant events affecting a nation or an institution” (Favorini in Hunt 2010, 98), when memory is “a set of recollections, repetitions and recapitulations that are socially, morally or politically useful for a group of community” (Favorini in Hunt 2010, 98-99). History includes objective generalized facts whereas memory consists of personal or group subjective reminiscences.

Talking about the memories which comprise the core part of my research I refer to ideas of Hunt, who says that “...memory has the ability to remember what is important about the past and to make use of this in a way that is beneficial to the present and the future” (Hunt 2010, 103). Thus memory is an emotional perception of the events that happen with people throughout their life history which remain valuable for them in the present due to certain reasons.

In my research analyzing the reasons why the people who had experienced the war in their early childhood still keep their memories alive and why they are very important to them I refer to the ideas of Connerton and Hunt.

Examining the narratives of my characters about their war memories I came to an understanding that these people have similar perceptions of this event that according to Connerton is “a feature of a communal memory” (Connerton 1989, 17). Paying special attention to the content of these memories and describing how the commemorative practices are exercised in present day, based on people’s knowledge of the past, I refer to the discussions of Connerton, who notices that “what is remembered in commemorative ceremonies is something in addition to a collectively organized variant of personal and cognitive memory” (Connerton 1989, 71). Talking about the importance of rituals as a ways of preserving war memory in present and for the future and regarding the aspects of the influence of the war on the lives of the elderly people and their determination to keep and transmit their memories I also refer to Hunt and Hobsbawm.

Furthermore, S. Lawler’s approach was motivating as he says: - “pain ... has become a powerful way through which we establish shared social ties” (Lawler 2008, 24). This statement gave an understanding in terms of the willingness of my informants to identify themselves with people who had the same painful experience. Discussing the ways of

overcoming the trauma of the war years through the coping strategies I appeal to the concepts of Hunt.

Coming to another theme of my research which is identity, I refer to Jenkins and Woodward: - “Identity combines how I see myself and how others see me” (Woodward 2004, 7). Thus social identity is on the one hand, the comprehension of the belonging to definite social group and community, and on the other, it is self-identity, the way how person perceives himself.

With the help of Jenkins, Barth and Grønhaug's perspectives, I follow the lifelines of my main informants Galina and Slava and investigate the patterns of their behavior, their social roles and their participation in the social structure of the society. Analyzing the social statuses of my main informants and the factors influencing their present identities I appeal to Connerton: - “...we identify a particular action by recalling at least two types of context for that action. We situate the agent’s behavior with reference to its place in their life history; and we situate that behavior also with reference to its place in the history of social settings to which they belong” (Connerton 1989, 21).

Concerning the aspect of time, as S.F. Moore states: - “It is always desirable for the ethnographer to know as much as possible how the present came into being, what sort of a sequence transformation took place before the present acquired its shape” (Moore 1994, 370-371).

Concerning the rationalization of the organization establishment Jenkins writes about institutionalizing identification: - “As “the way things are done”, collectivities and collective identifications are, almost by definition, institutionalized. And institutions are sources and sites of identification for individuals” (Jenkins 2008, 164). As Galina and Slava established the organization they created a new way of their identification uniting the people who shared the same war experience thus the issues of institutionalizing identification as a communal characteristic become relevant to the research.

Moreover, as Holtzman says: - “... memory is also commonly approached through a lens of nostalgia” (Holtzman 2009, 33), hence the reminiscing of my informants about their post-war experiences during their life in the Soviet period turned out to be a valuable knowledge which led me to the important findings throughout the investigative process.

All in all these theoretical approaches formed the basis for the analysis in my research.

## **5. Memories and identity**

### **5.1. Preservation of the war memories**

“...Where history seeks to understand the facts of past processes, memory is less concerned with facts than with what is now made of the past by individuals or social groups” (Holtzman 2009, 31).

In this subchapter I will discuss the following questions: what are the strongest war memories connected to? Why and how do the generation of the people who have been children during the Great Patriotic War try to preserve them?

By examining the quote from Hunt that “...without memory we do not exist. Where there is no remembered past there is no present, because present cannot be interpreted without knowledge of the past” (Hunt 2010, 100), I come to a conclusion that nobody can leave without the past as it makes life senseless. That is why since many years people have been taking care of their history. The war is always a part of the country’s history and historical knowledge in turn is always a part of the nation’s cultural heritage. To preserve it is a very significant mission.

Hunt says: - “the important wars at any time are those where there are living veterans, or where there are people living who remember the veterans – their children and grandchildren. Once these people die, then the wars they fought become less important...” (Hunt 2010, 180). On the one hand, this is true because the war tends to be meaningful only for the people who have personal connection to it, but on the other hand, “the memory, as it is transmitted through the children and grandchildren, may become a collective memory if it relates to a major societal event...” (Hunt 2010, 103).

In nearly every Russian family one or both grandparents have experienced the war times, their children have lived in the post-war period hearing a lot about the war, and my generation, who represent the grandchildren of the war witnesses, are also linked to it. Narrating war stories to their descendants for those who lived through it, creates a certain circle of informational exchange, which results in possibility of establishing continuity in society.

Having known Galina and Slava all my life, I must admit that very often they reminisce about the war times. Brought up on their war stories, I received unique knowledge about it and developed my own perceptions of the event. For example, it has been in my habits to not waste the food, take care of the old things. While this might be simply a feature of all the elderly people who transfer their traditions to their descendants, for my grandparents

this still has a strong tie with the war past. Discussing the war issues with some of my contemporaries, I am aware that we share the knowledge of our grandparents because analyzing the stories that I have collected from my fieldwork I came to an understanding that many elderly people had similar experiences during the war. Acquiring the knowledge of our ancestors my generation of course cannot feel the same way as they did in the forties. Our relation to this war is different but we are able to understand that those years were hard and people had to fight in order to survive.

Most of the war memories are connected to the aspect of pain. It is evident that the war always causes traumatic effect on those who went through it. And having the same painful experiences people share certain social ties (Lawler 2008), which bring them together and allow to cope more easily. Regarding the ways of overcoming this trauma, I refer to the “working through of problems” concept of Hunt who claims that “traumatic memories that are worked through are turned into narrative-explicit memories. Through the narrative, the individual deals with cognitions, emotions and behaviors associated with the memory” (Hunt 2010, 78). Thus I can conclude that talking over and over again about their war memories during their lives, telling them to their children and grandchildren, elderly people in a way manage to overcome war traumas and now perceive them differently. Their painful experiences transformed into the valuable knowledge of the past and became their spiritual heritage, which they want to keep for the future generations.

### **5.1.1. The strongest collective memories**

Spending time with my informants, talking with them or reading the book edited by Galina Lebedeva I found that the strongest collective memories of the children of the war are connected to the fear of bombarding, hunger, special attitudes to bread and seal fat. As Connerton claims: - “individuals remember in common” (Connerton 1989, 17). Their stories evoke strong emotions. In the following two examples, I will give a vivid picture of what people went through during the bombardments.

Galina Lebedeva tells: - “Arkhangelsk had been severely bombarded, it was terrifying. Near the town there had been located petroleum containers and if the Nazis would have found them, Arkhangelsk could have been burnt because the majority of the buildings were made of wood. I remember that during one of the bombardments, we stayed in our house. Mother embraced us and repeated that everything was going to be all right, and then one of the bombs fell in the vicinity of our house and exploded. Our front door opened from the blast and the saw, which was hanging on the wall of the corridor, was thrown into the room. It jumped and

fell on the floor and the glass from the windows fell off. It was horrible and ever since I am always scared when I hear thunder during a storm because it reminds me of those terrifying war years.”

One of the organization’s members – Margarita Nevzorova – who also met the war in Arkhangelsk remembers: - “There were many bombardments. At first we heard an air alert, the voice from the radio and then the roar of the German airplanes. Adults were normally outside during the bombardments in order to put out bombs and children and elderly people ran to the bomb shelters. I did not like those places and considered them unsafe, which is why I was usually standing on our porch. Nevertheless, it was terrifying and I always had a feeling of hunger. Perhaps it was because of the fear. Ever since, when I am scared I want to have something to eat.”

Reflecting about Galina’s and Margarita’s stories I refer to Connerton as they show an example of embodied memories that is carried in their habits (Connerton 1989) such as the sound of the thunder makes Galina have the same feelings as if it would be a bomb attack or whenever Margarita is scared she gets the feeling of hunger, which also goes back to the war years.

Another important war memory was connected to the food. Almost all of my informants mentioned it in their narratives both when we talked with them and while I was reading Galina’s book of war memories. That is why I am going to pay particular attention to this issue. Special attitude to food is explicable by the years of severe starvation during the warfare. Almost nobody had any substantial meals and everybody was in constant search for food.

Galina admitted: - “As long as I remember my childhood, we wanted to eat all the time. Once when we had been sawing wood, my mother spread the bed sheet so that sawdust did not fall on the ground. Then she collected it, mixed with the remains of flour and baked pancakes. We did not throw away the peel of potatoes; we washed it, fried or made thin pancakes. We also ate grass, white moss, and nettle. There were no dogs on the streets and no cats. And I know that in Leningrad, people had been eaten... Later on, cargo ships from the allies started to come to our town, but they brought food supplies to the front, so that nothing was left to the citizens. They transported the goods by the trains in winter and later in spring, when the snow melted. I went to the railway with a small cup and tried to find the seeds that could be left. To pick half a cup was a great luck for me. That meant that I was able to bring it back home to my mother and she could make something to eat.”

Galina continued: - “Our school had a piece of land and we children cultivated this soil in spring and grew potatoes, beets, carrot and cabbage. Then the cooks from the school kitchen boiled soup for us and poured it in the small plates, along with that we were given small pieces of bread and one spoon of sugar.”

Galina narrated: - “Our young bodies needed not only food but also vitamins so we gnawed our heating-stove to compensate them. Even though we had a cow, we did not have enough milk, because there were high quotas to deliver to the state” (Lebedeva 2005, 141. Childhood burnt by the war 1941 - 1945. My translation).

Ever since the war ended and up till now, the elderly people take special care of any kind of food. They try not to buy more than they can eat and do not throw away the leftovers because they simply do not allow them to get rotten in their houses.

In this respect, I would like to give an example from the Lebedevy’s family. On Slava’s birthday in April when there was time to serve tea I was sent to get sweets from the cupboard. When I opened it I saw a box of Norwegian salt, which I brought to my grandparents on last New Year’s vacations so that they could try it. However four months had passed and they had not even opened it. On Slava’s birthday, I insisted that they try it. It looked like a ritual, everyone, taking turns, carefully spilled salt on their food and ate it. They liked it. The reason they did not want to use it was simple: they remember hard times, when there was no food or when it was difficult to get. They had learned to save things.

Among the greatest food memories are those of bread. During the Great Patriotic War the bread allowance in Arkhangelsk hardly exceeded daily allowance in blockade Leningrad and was 125 grams. Bread had a special meaning in the life of the war children and it was considered a great luck and the biggest treat when they got it because very often they had to find substitution to the food and ate the products that are normally uneatable in ordinary life.

Since that time, the children of the war acquired the habit to keep every piece of bread. Even now, when everything needed can be purchased in the grocery store, this type of behavior is common to the people of war generation: they never leave bread crumbs on the plates or the table. And every time we have a meal, Galina licks her plate in order not to leave any food. As Holtzman says: - “Memories are often expressed in reference to the food one was eating at particular times...” (Holtzman 2009, 61).

For instance, as Nikolai Ivanov remembers: - “In autumn during the war we tried to find some potatoes and then baked cakes from it. And we valued bread, and even now I cannot live without it and can never throw out the bread crumbs. We eat them we just cannot throw them away.”

When there was no bread people tried to search for another sources of nutrition. One of the Arkhangelsk citizens Nina Kluntina remembers: - “We lived very hard, starved. I am still surprised how we managed to survive. Collective farm society did not give us any piece of land; therefore we could not grow potatoes there. My brothers and I helped my mother as much as we could. At nights we ran to the fields and picked up the remains of potatoes. Then at home mother dried and boiled them. Our mother exchanged our clothes for food, usually seeds or potatoes. For father’s suit she got only one bowl of seeds... During the summer, little boys worked in the fields making hay instead of adults. And we girls dried hay. There were a lot of mosquitoes but we continued because we knew that we would get food for that work.”

Maria Khohklyshina met the war in Smolensk. As she tells it: - “After the release of our town Smolensk, we returned to our village and settled down in a former pig sty. On a place of one hundred and twenty houses, only three half burnt wooden buildings remained. Rotten potatoes or chopped grass mixed with flower, which was given to us in amount of 400 grams per month per person, was the biggest treat. To eat at least a tiny piece of bread was a sweetest dream. I was raving about bread when I was lying in the bed swollen from hunger. Once my mother got a piece of dead horse skin, she burnt it on fire and boiled a soup from it, it was very tasty...”

Galina Varvarkaya, who spent her childhood in Arkhangelsk, narrated: - “We permanently felt hunger. We ate nettle, fried potato peel, made pancakes from the rotten potatoes. Mother tried to exchange anything to get some bread. Our neighbors helped by bringing us seal fat. Its meat supported my weakened body, gave me strength and hope.”

Everybody who suffered famine in Arkhangelsk remembers seal fat. The seal represents the memory of the past war and the symbol of the present life because its meat helped people to avoid starvation and made it possible for the present generations to live.

“We dreamt about the piece of bread but we did not have it, so seal meat despite the unpleasant smell was considered very tasty,” — admitted Galina.

Owing thousands of lives to this animal, Arkhangelsk and Leningrad citizens have been rescued. As Galina told me, in summer of 1942, a big group of Arkhangelsk citizens went to New Land to hunt seal. It was dangerous activity because only experienced hunters were able to do it, but people had no choice. In spring of 1943, the meat and fat of the seal from trade expeditions was sent to starving inhabitants of Arkhangelsk and the surrounding area. In 1944, for liquidation of the consequences of blockade more than a thousand tons of food and medical fat from the seal was sent from Arkhangelsk to Leningrad.

“What is so powerful about food is that it is constituted through complexity interwoven webs of causality and meaning that are simultaneously symbolic, psychological, social, emotional, biological and cultural. These webs are ... fundamental to how our subjects experience – and consequently, remember - food” (Holtzman 2009, 63).

The shortage of food that the generation of the elderly people experienced during their childhood left a strong imprint on their identity and those hard years of hunger are set in their memory forever. This contributed to their perception of food in terms of eating habits. And as far as I remember, the food in Lebedevy’s family has played a very important role. It has always been a special ritual to cook festive meals on different holidays along with the every day traditions of substantial meals which is revealed in the film, when Slava proudly shows the dishes he cooked for one of the dinners and the festive table full of food for his birthday.

### **5.1.2. The ways of preservation of the war memory**

The strong position of the people of the war generation is that they cannot let it happen again. That is why they are convinced that nobody should forget the past. In this sense, I would like to quote several Russian folk sayings, which I have heard from Galina and Slava: - “If you shoot the past from the pistol, the past will fire from the gun”; “If you forget about the war, it will come on Earth again”; “If people do not know the past, the history of their land, there will be no present or future”.

There is a number of ways to keep the memories. One of them was Galina’s idea to collect the narratives of the people whose childhood was crossed by war into one book. This idea was accomplished in 2005 when the book named “Childhood burnt by the war” was published.

Preservation is exercised by taking care of the monuments. This is especially important because there are many people who do not understand their value and want to damage the cultural memorials. For instance, several times Galina and Slava have asked the police to keep the security guards near the Victory monument because teenagers or tramps were keeping warm from the fire of the Eternal Flame. As Slava says: - “This monument was not intended to be an entertainment. Its aim is to commemorate the past and respect the memory and history of the Victory in the war in the twentieth century”.

However, they do not only want to keep the old monuments but also to create other ones which bear a special significance for them, the Seal monument in particular. The question of its installation has been discussed since 1946 but the possibility to establish it appeared only in recent years.



“I ate the meat of a seal and it was a real salvation. This smell remains in memory of everyone, - said the head of the youth theatre in Arkhangelsk Victor Panov, - The monument will commemorate townspeople thanks to whom we survived and are able to meet nowadays”. Galina added: - “This is the monument not only to the seal. This is the monument to our mothers and girls who hunted that animal during those terrible years”.

The collective memory about the seal is very strong. And the establishment of the monument symbolizes one more way to keep the war memory, which will remain in the history of Arkhangelsk for many years. Hence in the future whenever people will pass by the bronze seal they will wonder why this monument stands there and by reading the sign with the explanation, they will receive the knowledge, which their ancestors wanted to transmit. This will be a way to create collective memory and to ensure continuity within the community. In this sense, I would like to quote the following saying of Hunt: - “Having social or collective memories ensures that members of a community share a sense of unity... Individuals are linked to social memories... Most communities have war memorials which show how individuals from that community shared in the common social goals represented by those wars” (Hunt 2010, 105).

Taking as an example the Victory day, people come to the Eternal flame to put flowers near the monuments, showing their respect to the warriors and thanking them for saving the lives of the living and allowing future generations to be born. Talking to my contemporaries about the Victory day in Russia, most of them consider it a national day, despite the fact that the country has another official date for a nationalist commemoration. But, for many years, especially this day on the 9th of May, it has been the day with the biggest parades and demonstrations, when the atmosphere of a united society was being created. The feeling of belonging to the same nation has always been very important for the people of the war generation, as they have been brought up in the Soviet Union when communal ideas were very strong. They want to pass this on to the modern generations. Because as Guibernau and Goldblatt state: - “Human memory is short lived and relatively limited. The same is true of the collective memories that sustain collective national identities. National identities need to be upheld and reaffirmed at regular intervals. Rituals play a crucial role here...” (Guibernau and Goldblatt in Woodward 2004, 136). Consequently, along with the monuments, memory is maintained by commemorative practices and rituals and by celebrating the holidays connected to the war. People not only preserve memory, but also continue tradition, which becomes key element in supporting their belonging to the same nation. Another relevant example is that by establishing their organization and celebrating its

anniversary, Galina and Slava invented a new custom, which appealing to Hobsbawm is “essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past...” (Hobsbawm 1992, 4).

At the end of the film, we see the concert dedicated to the organization’s tenth anniversary. It has been celebrated every year and has already become sort of a ritual, where people not only give congratulations but also talk about the war, reviving the memories and showing the pictures, and playing music of those years. They in a way recreate the atmosphere of the war. The concert hall is always full of people, showing that they need this ritual. As Luning claims: - “ritual practices are thus described as activities that link people in the present to the past” (Luning 2006, 284).

Thinking about the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June – the day of the beginning of the war in the USSR, people in Russia still remember this date. Observing Galina and Slava on that day, they were wearing respectively a dress and a suit. As usual, they wanted to look good. Slowly they walked towards the Victory monument. It was raining. On the square, there were also people who came to put flowers to the monument. Afterwards Galina said that the sky was crying because it remembered the war. Compared to the Victory day, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June is not the same large scale event. Even though it is highlighted in the mass media, most of the meetings on that day are organized by ordinary people themselves. Thus, in every society according to Hunt: - “there is a strong need within people to have ritual, a series of fixed behaviors that are agreed by people in society and that represent, in terms of commemoration, a formal way in which we remember something in the past” (Hunt 2010, 173).

There is also a special custom, which is called “the minute of silence” and it symbolizes grief. During this minute, people rise to their feet and keep silent, that way giving their respect to the dead and commemorating fallen heroes. As Hunt says: - “the ritual of the silence means that there is a shared memory... that ensures society will not forget the dead” (Hunt 2010, 173).

Being part of the Second World War, the Great Patriotic War is literally a strong symbol of the twentieth century. It was one of the cruelest wars throughout history, with an incredible amount of deaths and huge destruction. From the narratives of the people who experienced it, we realize how much pain and loss it brought, which leads us to the thought that it is vitally important to prevent it from ever happening again. That is why it is important for the elderly people to preserve these memories through the rituals and commemoration practices. Because when the ones who remember the war pass away, embodied memories will revive the war past in order to create peaceful future.

## **5.2. Organizing identification**

“In order to create our identities we draw on cultural memories  
and historical understandings of our cultures.

Remembrance of the past is important in terms  
of our socialization into our culture.” (Hunt 2010, 106).

Having examined the importance of the war memories in the lives of the elderly people in the first subchapter here I am going to explore to what extent these memories influenced shaping their identities during the post-war period, and what other factors affected their present identity based on their narratives along with the observing their present lives.

### **5.2.1. Identity of the elderly people in historical perspective**

Investigating the identity of the elderly people throughout their life cycles, I will reflect on their comprehension of selves and the terms of their social interaction. To define identity, I refer to Jenkins, who says: - “identity is the human capacity... to know ‘who’s who’... a multi-dimensional classification or mapping of the human world and our places in it, as individuals and as members of collectivities” (Jenkins 2008, 5).

Spending most of the time of my fieldwork with Lebedevy’s family I would like to focus my interest on the analysis of their perception of self and the others being the representatives of the generation of the war children.

Studying identity in historical perspective, I followed the lifelines of Galina and Slava after the war and found out that both of them attended school, received higher education and then started to work. Galina studied at the State Pedagogic Institute in Arkhangelsk, then worked as a librarian and afterwards as a teacher of Russian language and literature in one of the city’s school. Slava graduated from the Arkhangelsk Marine Institute, then worked as a sailor, and later on as a chief-engineer in the Russian fleet. Both of them have forty years of working experience.

Throughout their lives, they have acquired different statuses, according to Jenkins: - “a status is an institutionalized identification viewed in the abstract” (Jenkins 2008, 164). Thus, occupying certain statuses, people bear the same duties and are considered to act according to certain patterns, which give them collective identification. But sharing a belonging with the people of the same status, each individual has his/her own personal identity embodied in a biography with a unique perception of the world.

To visualize the statement from Barth that “each of us is a compound person, the encumbent of many statuses” (Barth 1981, 121) in relationships to various aspects of life that

form multiple identities, I made a table where the main statuses obtained by Galina and Slava during their lives are presented.

**Slava’s and Galina’s social statuses.**

Table 5.2.1.

Slava Lebedev	Galina Lebedeva
Father	Mother
Grandfather	Grandmother
Former sailor, to be more specific chief-engineer	Former teacher of Russian language and literature
A member of communist party	Nonparty
Pensioner	
The children of the war	
The leader of the organization	The secretary of the organization
The friend of Maya, Nikolai, Liya	The friend of Maya, Nikolai, Liya and Nina

Regarding the statuses, first of all Slava and Galina are parents and grandparents. These statuses reflect their relations within the family.

Concerning their professions, Slava is a former sailor, to be more specific, chief-engineer, and Galina is a former teacher of Russian language and literature. These are the characteristics of their previous occupations and are not relevant at the moment, but due to these jobs, they are linked to other people, which has an influence on their present life.

According to party affiliation, Galina has never been a member of any political party. Slava has been a member of the Communist party since 1969. Even though all the people were considered to be equal, those who were communists have been a bit more privileged, however the income difference was not as great as compared to modern times.

When they retired on pension, they not only acquired a new status but also changed their previous one. Becoming pensioners, they started to share the same status with a large scale of people of the same age group.

“The children of the war” status specifies belonging to the certain group of people who had common war experiences in their childhood. Being children of the war, as many others, Galina and Slava represent the people of this generation, but at the same time they are quite unique because they are the only ones who decided to unite this category of people into

one collectivity by establishing their organization. Although it is typical for elders to tell their life stories to their descendants in order to keep memories alive, the distinguishing feature of Lebedevys is that they are the ones who have taken the responsibility to transmit this knowledge on a large scale level. This shows their personalities from a different perspective. Going with the flow, working with other citizens of the country during the Soviet times, Lebedevy did not identify themselves with any special sort of people. They had permanent jobs, salaries, and had a firm confidence in their future. Referring to J.A. Howard: - “at earlier historical moments, identity was not so much at issue; when societies were more stable...” (Howard in Jenkins 2008, 30), as it was in the recent past during the Soviet period. However, the transformation of the state structure made the concept of identity transform as well.

Giving a brief overview of the historical background of the period when my informants were born and brought up and the mode of life that they were accustomed to, I talk about the USSR – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was a socialist state established in 1922 with the consolidation of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic and Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a systematic process of disintegration caused by deep complex of political, economical and ideological problems that escalated during the last years of its existence. The result was the emergence of fifteen independent nation-states, one of which was the Russian Federation.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the birth of the new Russian Federation state was a very hard process accompanied by serious problems in economic development, decrease in the standards of living, which in turn provoked a crisis of identity. First of all, it resulted in the disintegration of the traditional society, which left a gaping emptiness in the conscious of many people. Such a state of mind was especially typical for pensioners, people who felt themselves lost and powerless in this world after the country they considered stable and united vanished. To get used to a new mode of life in a newly established state was difficult, which is why the aspects of transformation of the identity of the people growing up in the Soviet period are of particular importance. In order to cope with the crisis of changing social status and changing their status from working class to pensioners, they had to accept a rapidly changing political regime and innovations.

Probably the transition from the Soviet Union to a new political system in the Russian Federation was not very traumatic and complicated for Lebedevy in particular because, for example, Slava being a sailor for 40 years had travelled a lot and visited many foreign

countries and Galina also sometimes travelled with him or with other teachers. Therefore, the western ways of life and political systems were familiar to them. However, it is one thing to be a tourist in a country and watch other people and their cultures and totally different to be its citizen.

Moreover, considering their age group, to get used to any change becomes harder. Especially bearing in mind their positive attitude towards their previous lives. For them, there was an absence of serious discontent with the previous state political line and they had no problems with life conditions. This follows certain patterns: many people from the surroundings of Galina and Slava consider life better and easier to live during the Soviet times.

Agreeing with Grønhaug, “to understand how individuals are affected by societal forces, we can describe the individuals as they are involved in various organizational fields of social life” (Grønhaug 1975, 8). To be able to comprehend the positions of Galina and Slava in society, it is important to illustrate the interactional processes in their life as according to Jenkins: - “individuals negotiate their identities within the interaction order” (Jenkins 2008, 93).

Regarding the surroundings of Lebedevy, I learned that most of Galina’s friends were people with higher education, such as teachers and professors. When the students of Galina finished school and graduated from universities they got new statuses as doctors, scientists, or politicians, but Galina still remained their teacher.

Slava was working in a merchant fleet and travelled abroad a lot, his surroundings were also people with higher education: captains, leaders of a shipping company in the city and people in power. In those times to be a sailor was privileged and responsible job.

Mutual friends of Galina and Slava are also people with higher education: Liya, Nikolai and Maya – are teacher, sailor and lawyer respectively – the representatives of the intelligentsia. The factor of education played an important role along with their work experiences and social circles they belonged to. This influenced their perceptions of the world.

In regards to the connections within the organization: mostly Galina keeps in touch with the Council in order to lead their work and the representatives of the Council in its turn are in charge of congratulating and inviting the members of the organization to the festive events or concerts. The communication with the other people is mostly being done via telephone by Galina, the reason being that she is a good speaker and likes to talk in general, which probably is partly the influence of her previous job as a teacher. Slava in his turn

mostly meets with the politicians in the local administration, city hall or the deputy's assembly to make agreements or to ask for the support, which is also because Galina has health problems with her legs that do not allow her to go outside very often. That way they have divided their roles as a secretary and a leader within the organization.

Starting their social activity and becoming the organization's leader for Slava and the secretary for Galina gave them new statuses, which automatically joined them with a wide network of relationships within the political arena, not only on the local stage but also on the state level.

The duality of the relationship with the authorities is that trying to lobby the interests of the organization they have to be diplomatic in order to overcome obstacles because the success of their work is dependent on the decisions of politicians.

For example, it was hard to register an organization without the support from the local authorities. Moreover, to arrange a social event for celebrating anniversaries of the members is necessary to rent the hall, purchase food supplies and gifts. This cannot be done without external assistance as long as the organization of Slava and Galina is non-profit. All these services are extremely expensive. Therefore, relations with people in power play an important role in the creation and further functioning of the organization.

Being connected to the political leaders in their past through their previous statuses, i.e. some of the party's leaders are Galina's former students and some of the sponsors worked at the same shipping company with Slava, the Lebedevys get social and financial support from their side.

Their organization has achieved a mutual understanding and agreement with some of the local parties and it cooperates with them. These parties do real help to cope with problems of the elderly people and in response to their assistance, the organization promotes them during elections through pre-election propaganda and public relations. Supporting political parties, Lebedevy try not only to get financial help but at the same time improve the living conditions of the people of their generation.

During their lives, Galina and Slava have obtained a variety of statuses and nowadays being pensioners and represent the children of the war on the political arena. They have become important social actors. Of course involvement in political life does not change their identities a lot, but it gives them new statuses, overcoming obstacles on their way to struggling for the achievement of their aims. They have hardened their characters and all in all empowered their personalities, making them stronger and more self-confident.

### 5.2.2. Aesthetics

In this part I will dwell on the aesthetical aspect as the things that surround people can tell a lot about their habits and characters, revealing certain features of their identities because people organize their private space in accordance with their perceptions of self.

Trying to investigate the reminiscences of the war in present life of Lebedevy's family to find out how they affected their identities, I paid special attention to aesthetics: pictures, decorations, icons and other small details in their apartment. Because visual perception is a key that gives an additional value to the comprehension of the research setting and the life of main characters, it results in knowledge accumulation necessary for complete analysis. Together with that I studied their interests and hobbies, which shows how they identify themselves.

Observing the apartment where Galina and Slava live, I refer to Goffman that it is "the 'setting', involving furniture, décor, physical layout, and other background items which supply the scenery..." (Goffman 1959, 32). Lebedevy live in a 5-storeyed house in the third porch from the river side. The inner part of the house is decorated with various pictures on the walls, curtains on the windows and flowers on the windowsills. The cleanliness is kept by the neighbors, who are mostly people of the same age as Galina and Slava. I would like to explain this habit to clean the common areas of the house. It comes from the Soviet past when the dwelling apartments were competing to be called the best households, compared to nowadays when many of them remain in poor condition. But the elderly people who were brought up in the USSR try not to forget this habit.

Lebedevy live on the third floor in a single-room apartment that is quite big according to Russian standards, divided into a kitchen, bathroom, and storage room. The type of their apartment is called "Stalinka" because the house was built during the period when J. Stalin was the leader of the country.

Remembering from their narratives that the people of old generation tend to keep old things, clothes, and other personal belonging that they acquired during their lives, I have noticed it in reality. Galina explained to me that this tendency came from the war period when there was nothing to eat or to wear. The situation on the whole was unstable and the old things represent the memory of the past years. They keep them as a relic or as presents. Moreover, as Galina said, the clothes made during the Soviet times were of better quality than nowadays and she prefers to wear them rather than buy new ones that also have very high prices.



However it does not mean that the Lebedevys do not make changes in their surroundings. For instance, in recent years, they made renovations in their apartment, changed the wallpapers in the corridor and kitchen and renewed the balcony doors. Getting new technical utensils they repaired their old ones and gave them to people who are in need. For instance, they gave their old TV to the children's orphanage and a tape-recorder to the juvenile detention center.

Entering the Lebedevy's flat, there is a big wardrobe on the right side, to the left a bureau with a mirror and a shelf with many books. Galina enjoys reading them and learning poems by heart, as she says: - "reading is the best learning and despite that we are retired on pension, we still continue to read various literature".

There are pictures and icons on the walls both in the living room and kitchen. The paintings are presents, but the way Galina arranged them on the walls adds coziness to the apartment and the icons symbolize spirituality and belief.

In the film, we can see that on the tops of the shelves in the corridor there are located many ships models. Making them is Slava's hobby and they have been participated in exhibitions in Russia. In the film when Slava was showing me the model of Santa Maria caravel, he also paid attention to the helm, which he made for the city's anniversary. The pictures on it symbolize that Arkhangelsk was given War Glory status. Through this helm, he wants to keep the memory. It is clear that the aspect of memory is always present in Slava's life.

For every festive occasion, he wears his suit with many awards decorating it every medal was given to him for special merits and he is very proud of them. Slava likes to cook and experiment with new dishes from different countries. As I have discussed earlier in the paper, the concept of food bears a special meaning in the life of the elderly people. Thinking of the connection between food and identity, agreeing with J. Holtzman, I argue that identity is constructed by food being an integral part of people's lives throughout their history and constituting their present as "it is about this particular cultural-historical moment that allows food to play a central role" (Holtzman 2009, 60) in the life of the war children generation.

These small details, which comprise their lives' aesthetical aspect, for example, Galina's way of dressing and Slava's attitude to his medals, reveal how deeply elderly people are rooted in the Soviet society. By taking care of the things which they brought from their personal past, they show how strongly they identify themselves with the Soviet times and want to preserve the atmosphere of that period in their present.



### **5.3. Motivation behind the “memory work”**

In previous subchapters I analyzed how the identities of Galina and Slava as the representatives of the generation of the people who have experienced the Great Patriotic War have been shaped throughout their lives. In order to argue my hypothesis that the war was the major factor that influenced the formation of the present identity of the elderly, which resulted in the creation of their organization, I will focus on the analysis of the reasons that inspired Galina and Slava to institutionalize their “memory work”.

Starting my investigations with the question of what made Galina and Slava refusal of having calm senior citizenship, beginning even more energetic activity after retirement on pension, I asked them why they created organization in 2000 and not earlier. I was taking into account the fact that in their minds they have been preoccupied with the war issues almost since their childhood.

The very first information that I found out was that when becoming pensioners Slava and Galina wanted to do something to spend their spare time and decided to establish an organization. However, my curiosity made me dig deeper into the reasoning of their social activity.

#### **5.3.1. Post-war period: political retrospective**

Going back to history of the twentieth century, I paid special attention to important political issues that had a serious impact on people’s lives. With the following examples, I will argue about the quote from Hunt that “memories are manipulated by the state and by political groups” (Hunt 2010, 110).

From Slava’s narratives I learned that in 1947, right after the end of the Great Patriotic War, the USSR’s leader J. Stalin prohibited the organization of parades to celebrate Victory along with awarding medals and honors to the war heroes. The influence of the internal state policy on its citizens at those times was very strong. The authorities decided that it would be better for the population not to think about the war. Moreover, there were practical reasons: people simply did not have time to think about the war, they had to reconstruct the country after enormous devastations. Slava continued telling me that until the middle of the twentieth century there were no parades in the USSR.

The political line changed after Stalin’s death in 1953, when Khrushchev came to power. He criticized Stalin and the new policy was called de-Stalinization. The period of Khrushchev’s leadership in the country was named the “thaw” because the relationship with

the west started to develop again. Along with that, many Soviet cities received the honorific of hero-cities.

Referring to J.-W. Mèuller: “after the collapse of communism, memories of the Second World War were ‘unfrozen’ on both sides of the former Iron Curtain... both personal and collective memories were liberated from constraints imposed by the need for the state legitimation and friend-enemy thinking associated with the Cold War” (Mèuller 2002, 6).

As a result of changes in the state’s political life, in 1956 the Soviet Committee of the War Veterans was established in order to join the participants of the Great Patriotic War for the sake of patriotic education of the citizens for the examples of heroic deeds of the frontier soldiers, the development of relations between international veteran organizations, and the consolidation of peace and prevention possible wars in the future. However, at those times, working as a sailor and a teacher, Slava and Galina did not have enough time to be occupied with the war issues.

Later on, in the nineties, when the war heroes were already in their senior age and were passing away, the children of the war also started becoming older and retired on pension. At this age, people tend to reminisce about their past more often. Understanding that they have been a part of the major historical event and bearing the responsibility for the future of their descendants, Galina and Slava realized that they had to do something in order to not cut the thread binding the generations, to pass their knowledge further on to young people in that way keeping memory of the heroes who set our Motherland free.

Consequently, in 2000, coinciding with the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to the Great Victory, the Lebedevys decided to establish their organization. Thinking about the creation of something new, in general, it is evident that it is not an easy task, especially when it comes to foundation of an association. Therefore, I can conclude that Galina and Slava have a strong confidence in themselves to be able to organize such kind of activity right after they became pensioners – a vulnerable group of society compared to their former stability while working – and moreover to start participating enthusiastically on the city’s public arena.

Referring to Jenkins, Galina and Slava institutionalizing their work in the organization created a certain kind of collective identification. And now they, together with the other members, are representing one unity connected to each other by similar past experiences from their childhoods, i.e. they are the people of the same generation and have a common present and common future aims.

### **5.3.2. The aims of the organization**

In the following points I will analyze these aims and explain why Galina and Slava have chosen them as core elements of their organization's activity.

#### **a. Generational drama**

First of all, they wanted to take the legacy from war participants in order to establish strong connections to the young generations. Because as Galina keeps saying: - "There is no future without the past". Thus Galina and Slava prioritize patriotic upbringing and educating the youth. They visit city's educational institutions and give lectures telling about their war memories in order to transfer generational knowledge so that the people would not forget about the war and those cruel times would never repeat again.

According to Connerton: - "our experience of the present very largely depends upon our knowledge of the past" (Connerton 1989, 2). In general, taking under consideration such a significant event as the war, one can say that it definitely changes the lives of the people who experience it, especially the strong impression it makes on children because they meet it at the age when their character and personality are being shaped. And afterwards, they perceive the world in a different way: their relation to life is not the same as of those who live in peaceful times. Thus, their present modes of behavior are constructed on the basis of their past practices. Post-war generations did not experience all the hardships, losses, fear and famine to as great an extent as the children of the war did. Despite the fact that in modern Russian society living conditions are also not easy, obviously they cannot be compared to the uncertainty and horror of the war years. Hence the generational perception of life differs.

Starting to discuss generational aspect in the first chapter, I would like to develop this topic by analyzing the example from the patriotic work exercised by the Lebedevys working with the other members of the organization.

Once I accompanied Galina and Slava and their Norwegian guest Roald Jørgensen to the Arkhangelsk Marine Institute, where they had a lecture before the students about their organization, why they decided to establish it, and the work they do. Slava started the lecture. I should admit that both Slava and Galina are used to hold speeches, but Galina feels more comfortable in the role of speaker as she has forty years experience of teaching in front of different audiences. She always can find what to say and how to make a story interesting, but at the same time, she pays too much attention to the details and keeps talking in spite of other people's personal interest. From later discussion I learned that she did not notice that. From

her own position, she is a very good storyteller, which means for her people do not get bored or lose interest in the stories she tells.

Being dedicated to their patriotic work, Galina and Slava in fact do the job which is not always that easy because their strong will and eagerness to transmit their knowledge not always meets the same response from the young generations. The war memories are not equally important to the elderly people and their descendants.

Making this statement, I refer to my own observations, which are clearly seen in the film. While Galina narrated her story, the students were listening quietly because there was very strict discipline at the Institute. But at the same time, I noticed that some of them were less involved, which can be seen in the film as well.

From the words of Galina, Slava and the other members of the organization I learned that young children are always interested in their lectures. The dynamics between their positions as lecturers and mine as an observer is remarkable at this point because from my perspective not every student was involved in their stories. However my informants maintain a strong belief that all the children with whom they talk portray great interest.

Of course young people are different and some of them really want to know more about the history of the country. From my point of view, when at least one person in the auditorium where the Lebedevys give lectures would want to continue the conversation with them or start reading a book about war history, it already represents a big step. In this connection I would like to give an example, which was told by Galina. When they have been preparing the book “Children burnt by the war”, they organized various events connected with the image of the seal including a poetry competition. And a third grade school girl Natasha Kobzar’ wrote a poem, which won the competition and was published in the book. The architect who made a Seal monument chose a line of that poem for the inscription on the monument, which was “Oh, how many people you saved from hunger and cold...” (Natasha Kobzar’, 2010).

Noticing the interest of one particular girl in the patriotic activity, I claim that it is very hard to make all youngsters to show the same curiosity and their attitude towards the war issues is dependent on their level of education and family upbringing.

The people of my generation, despite the fact that we were born in the USSR, due to our young age, do not remember what life was like at that time. Even though there were problems in the nineties, the transition went smoother for us. Being used to contemporary life conditions, we learn about the Soviet Union from the stories of our grandparents and historical books. We do not have the experience of hunger and bombardments, thus we have a

different view on the war. Some of us are interested, some do not care, depending on various factors. Most commonly, family upbringing and the level of education influences whether we show or do not show respect to our elders. Living in modern Russia, we do not understand what it is not to have food because we have huge variety of grocery stores, we always can go and buy new clothes in case the old ones get spoiled, and we have all modern gadgets to be connected to each other in different parts of the world. This short comparison allows us to see that the real experience of the war is firmly settled in minds of elderly people, but just small pieces of the memories about it are left in the minds of young generations.

This situation reflects a social drama whereby the establishment of the communication between generations, the elderly not only want to transmit their knowledge but also want to teach youngsters the mode of life they considered was better. They strive to regain the dignity which has been lost in modern society in recent years.

Of course, this is a permanent cycle when older generations are always more judgemental towards the youngsters, as Goodenough claims: - "... the elders want the young to develop standards that bring their performance within the range of variance they are willing to accept." (Goodenough 1970, 100). But this statement reflects common sense and shows the reproduction of social life patterns.

For instance, it was a rule of common etiquette to stand up from the seat in public transport in order to let women or elderly people sit. In schools there were organized special units where pupils came to visit lonely pensioners in order to help them, to talk respectfully with people who are older, etc. There are of course exceptions, nevertheless, these ordinary rules of courtesy are lacking in modern society. But why do we behave that way towards the people who brought us up, gave us education and support, owing to whom we are leaving in the free country? This ambiguity of the relationship has become a serious problem that is why Galina and Slava talk to younger generations in order to make them think and maybe try to make changes in the future, so that people not only avoid the war but also will be able to live respectfully in peacetime.

Giving an interview to a journalism student, Galina once said: - "We are glad when young people get interested in our work. This is very important, because spiritual values are more significant than material ones..."

Saying such a fundamental truth that spiritual values are the most important in people's lives, she tried to underline that we do not have to forget about them because in our contemporary world material things started to become foremost for many people. This was not a big issue during the Soviet period when almost everybody was more or less equal.

Therefore, subconsciously, the elderly have been trying to reconstruct the mode of life they were used to, where they themselves felt comfortable. They praise the Soviet times saying that the weather was better, living standards and the quality of goods in shops were higher, relations between people were more respectful, although they know not everything was “perfect”. And the duality of the influence from the side of the authorities is evident, i.e. on the one hand, state ideology was positive as people felt themselves needed being members of the united society, but on the other hand, it deprived them of their creativity and uniqueness. People had to behave within the set of particular rules. Accepting the criticism of the Soviet era, they do not try to idealize those times because every historical epoch has its positive and negative sides, but by the comparison of their previous and present experiences in life, they prefer the way they lived in their past. Contemporary society, for them, has different priorities and points of view where spiritual and cultural values go to the second or even third place.

That is why they try to bring back the spirit of the patriotism, which is a part of spiritual heritage, because when people remember the heroic deeds of their brave ancestors and respect them, it contributes to the spiritual culture of the nation. And the feeling of patriotism in positive connotation as a basis for a successful existence is a part of building a new state, the process that Russia is still involved with nowadays.

In this connection I argue that possibly the establishment of their organization was a means of creating a patriotic ideology where it lacked in the country. An ideology they had during the Soviet times which was lost during the past 20 years after the collapse of the USSR.

### **b. Struggle for social justice**

Another important aim connected to the first ones was the struggle for social justice to improve the present life level of the children of the war. As Galina told me, their fathers were front-line soldiers, mothers – workers on the home front, and they – the war children – should also have more benefits, higher pensions, and privileges, free medicine and medical assistance. Even though they have some reductions of payments, compared to contemporary prices, they receive very low amount of pension.

The organization of Galina and Slava is a voluntary union and they work without being paid. Because of that, they are not able to give material support to the others but they try their best in order to help their generation. First of all, they congratulate the heroes of the anniversaries on their birthdays because for the elderly, every sign of attention brings



happiness, especially for lonely people whose health is not that strong anymore. Their childhood was crossed by the war but they survived and afterwards worked hard to contribute to the country's development. And now comes the time to support them. As the state was not able to do it properly, Galina and Slava took this burden on their shoulders.

By struggling for social justice, the Lebedevys mean that they want to achieve the official recognition of the status of the "Children of the war" because despite that fact that they were little children, they also experienced all the war troubles and helped to approach the victory. This status would give them an improvement of living conditions, economic support and respect in society.

This goes back to the time when the first president of the Russian Federation, Boris Eltsin, decided to give privileges to the people who were born before 1932, separating the children depending on the year of their birth and disregarding the similarity of the hard conditions of life during the war for all of them. The term "The Children of the war" appeared in the nineties. For instance, in the Ukraine, this status has been given a long time ago and the pensioners there have free public transport and 30% economic support to their pension amount.

Galina argues that it is not fair that people who also experienced the warfare and all the suffering, but happened to be less than 18 years old, are treated differently. Therefore, the target group to be a member of the organization should be for those who were born from 1932 till 1945 (the end of the Great Patriotic War). But of course, they also have some older and younger members, the stipulation being as long as they know how hard it was to live. The organization cannot relate to the people in the same unfair way as the state does.

To their requests, the government answers that they have already privileges as a certain categories of handicaps, therefore they would like at least to get this status on the regional level as it was already done in some of the Russian districts such as Vologodskaya, Kemerovskaya, Chelyabinskaya regions. Local deputies give them certain support in several questions but at this point this particular problem remains unsolved.

Despite the fact that in modern Russian society things are unstable and unpredictable, the Lebedevys have firm belief in their powers. As all strong people they have high ambitions, therefore, the aspect of the personal interest is present in their work. Putting big goals and doing a lot for the sake of their generation they want to achieve self-realization, which is an essential feeling of the people and making their organization an important political instrument. They achieved a lot by working hard during these past ten years.

On the one hand, the “memory work” of Galina’s and Slava’s organization is primarily related to the war childhood, but on the other hand, within this organization they became important people in the contemporary society who can make certain political influence on the local level. Through their social work they have something to offer to the society. They make a contribution to improving the life of the elderly people which is why they are valuable and needed. However in their fight for justice they remain fragile, being dependent on the decisions of the people in power. And even if the state gives certain benefits to them it does not necessarily mean that they achieve the same respect as they did during the Soviet times when the cultural education of every family was to respect not only elderly people but every person.

Slava noticed that their generation was not used to sitting still without work, and after retirement on pension they realized that the state was no longer going to take care of them, which is why they started their activity. And maybe, the deeper motivation is that their work will be continued further not only in terms of the “war issues”, but also as a social movement struggling for social justice for the next generations, who sooner or later will grow older and become pensioners, the same vulnerable class of the society.

## **6. Conclusion**

Building on the knowledge received during the analytical process I will summarize my findings. From the methodological side, anthropology at home was itself a challenge but it gave me opportunities to become more sensitive. It opened new horizons to reveal what could be hidden from others, especially taking into account my long-term acquaintance with the main informants. The theoretical approaches helped me to form the basis for my research and to analyze the information gathered during the fieldwork.

Being the descendant of Galina and Slava, the inheritor of their traditions, brought up on their narratives and sharing some of their view points, I am a representative who can communicate their knowledge, further continuing their social work. Thus my reflexivity upon our interrelations became one of the key elements of the elaboration of the data received during the research.

The initial hypothesis was that the war and the memories originated from it were a major factor that had a decisive influence on the formation of the identity of the elderly people which caused the establishment of the organization “Children burnt by the war 1941-1945 (The last witnesses)”.

After the Great Patriotic War, it was vitally important for the country to recover. People have been depressed by the fatalities because every family lost someone but there was no time for tears and despair, they had to be strong. Such state of mind and communal aim to reconstruct their Motherland united Soviet citizens even more. People had a common feeling that they were needed to the state and there was no big difference in incomes, which did not create huge class difference. The spirit of patriotism, a sense of belonging to one country as a positive embodiment of national identity was very strong.

Therefore war as a major reason for unification is explainable as almost every family in Russia has war memories, and the revival of those memories allows people get a feeling of sharing something in common. This is called collective memory that in turn does not let memory disappear, but encourages future generations to be aware of their past while creating their present and future.

That is why Galina and Slava constantly repeated that people should not forget about the war and expressed a strong will to prevent wars in the future. In this connection, they give special meaning to knowledge transmission to new generations, which is challenging because there are different knowledge systems within the society and the perception of Galina’s and Slava’s work from the point of view of the young people is diverse.

Of course the Great Patriotic War had an immense influence on the personalities of the elderly people in Russia: they still keep in mind the times of starvation, shortage of clothes, fear of bombardments, irretrievable losses. That war made them obtain different habits which they still reproduce and those memories will always remain in their hearts. Nevertheless, for most part their lives they spent during the post-war period and that Soviet upbringing made a strong imprint on their identities which is why when reminiscing about the war, my informants very often mention the Soviet mode of life and compared it to the modernity. Consequently, the collapse of the Soviet Union and formation of the new Russian Federation state brought huge changes to the political and social system of the country, the priorities shifted, which on the whole served as an accelerator for their recent activity.

Therefore, I can conclude that probably Soviet historical epoch had a major influence on the formation of their identity. In Soviet Russia, people were proud of their Motherland. Still feeling a very strong connection to the Soviet past by working in their organization, the elderly people want to reestablish their life in the post-war USSR: they want to recreate the feeling of patriotism – to revive national identity in modern Russia.

Along with that the foundation of the organization of the Lebedevys was also a way of adaptation to new conditions of life: lacking support from the state they started their struggle for social justice to enhance the life of the people of their generation, they wanted to restore their position in the new society, to regain dignity and counteract the rapidly decreasing respect from the younger generations. For these reasons, they became actively involved into the political life of the city and country in order to be heard, understood, and recognized. And now their organization has a very important meaning and brings positive motivation to the lives of the elderly people in Arkhangelsk. And probably they aspire that their work will be continued further also as a social movement struggling for social justice for the next generations, who will become pensioners, the same vulnerable class of the society.

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