

Changes in Naming Patterns in 19th Century Estonia. Discarding the Names of Parents and Godparents

Annika Hussar
Estonia

Abstract

There were extensive changes in names and naming patterns during the 19th century. In Estonia, in addition to other significant changes, the names chosen for children were less and less influenced by the surrounding community. In other countries, the practice of giving children their godparents' name has been researched by Smith-Bannister (1997); Garðarsdóttir (1999); Hacker (1999); Sangoi (1999); and van Poppel, Bloothoof, Gerritzen, and Verduin (1999). Social relationships played a far bigger role in the city than in the rural areas; thus the tradition of giving children their godparents' names was preserved better in the cities. The parents' choice was not regulated by the Lutheran church either. In Estonia, the practice of giving children double names spread only at the end of the 19th century; thus the emergence of modern names removed the names of the parents, grandparents and godparents from usage, especially in the case of girls' names.

For three to four hundred years, until mid-19th century, Estonians had been using names that the Germans had imported during Christianization. These Christian names were adopted in the 14th to 16th centuries (Rätsep 1982). The adopted Low German names were either already phonotactically suitable to the Estonian ear or they were adapted in their usage.

The size of the stock of names used during that time was small. Researchers have pointed to the fact that between the 16th to 18th centuries and the first half of the 19th century there were indeed few names used, especially female names. For example in Võnnu parish only 122 male and 94 female names were given to about 25,000 children during the 18th century, which means that the first name usage was relatively stable (Rootsmäe 1969).

However, a few changes did take place.

1. The popularity of some names changed over time, some of them became more rooted and are used even today, some had practically disappeared by the 19th century and today we only recognize them as contemporary family names or place names not as first names. Some of the most common first names that are still used and which are considered typical Estonian first names are e.g., *Mari* (derived from *Marie*), *Tiina* (< *Christina*), *Liisu*, *Liisa* (< *Elisabeth*), *Jaan*, *Juhan* (< *Johannes*), *Jaak* (< *Jakob*), *Jüri* (< *Georg*). Forgotten names are e.g., today's family name *Meos* (< *Bartholomeus*) or *Kriiska*, *Korjus* (< *Gregorius*) (Rajandi 1966, 35–36, 68–69).
2. Some first names are connected to a specific region and were not used in other areas, e.g., the female name *Ingel*, which was a common name at the beginning of the 19th century on Hiiumaa, the second biggest island of Estonia, was not recognized elsewhere in Estonia; it was not used even in other adjacent regions. Therefore, all females called *Ingel* in neighboring areas were probably from Hiiumaa.

The peasants in Estonia remained serfs until the beginning of the 19th century (in Liivi Province, in the South of Estonia until 1819, in the Estonian Province, in the North of Estonia, until 1816). This meant that the people in an area remained rather immobile and external influential factors reached them only through the church and the noblemen. We cannot discard the fact that Estonians were rather literate and displayed great interest in reading; school and newspapers also added new information. These must have been the main sources of new names for Estonians until the last decades of the 19th century when connection to the outer world was improved by the construction of railroads and the development of industry.

During the second half of the 19th century new names reached Estonians in various stages and caused a gradual change of names and name trends. First came the new names and other improvements, such as double name usage, which were introduced to various regions at different times; in some places new names were adopted very slowly, in others very quickly. However, the regional differences in name usage were quite diverse even in 1900.

The stages of introduction of new names can be described as follows:

First, the adapted names used earlier were replaced with their international spelling. If a child had been named *Mari* before, it now became *Marie* or *Maria*; *Jaan*, *Hans* and *Juhan* now became *Johannes*; and so on. On a daily basis it probably did not bring about changes and the regular variants *Mari* and *Jaan* were still used. In different areas such replacements occurred at different times, but overall the replacement generally took place from the 1850s until the end of the century.

Second, new, unknown names with no earlier equivalents entered the usage. Such names were *Rosalie*, *Amalie*, *Alide*, *Pauline*, *Eduard*, *Voldemar*. The new names appeared in general usage in the 1870s and 1880s. As of that period we can speak of changes in name trends and trendy names in Estonia. More and more such names appeared, there were new borrowings from other languages; and as time passed, new names were introduced through personal contacts from everywhere. Examples from the turn of the century are such names as *Alma*, *Ellen*, *Erika* and *Harri*.

While during the earlier centuries names in the ruling class had not been borrowed to supplement existing names (Tiik 1969, 83), the situation changed in the 19th century. The names of the second stage came probably through the local German population; these were first adopted by the more prosperous Estonians (such as innkeepers and tradesmen) or by people who had more contact with the Germans (such as gardeners working in mansions, coachmen, servants). In addition, those Estonians whose jobs included more socializing and who were able to receive more new information (e.g., shoemakers, tailors, blacksmiths, and millers) were more receptive to innovation. The new names reached ordinary Estonian peasants through these people as well as through urban people who had relocated to rural areas.

Third, a good indicator is the spread of Estonian names. The beginning of the 1860s to 70s has been called the time of national awakening. Its leaders were educated Estonians and German estophiles. The period is characterized by events such as the first Estonian song festival held in 1869, the publishing of the national epic *Kalevipoeg* in 1857 to 1861 and other events that helped to stir the Estonian spirit. In the 1880s the Estonian calendars started to introduce Estonian first names, which were now recommended instead of international ones. Among them were names that indeed had been formed on the basis of the Estonian language, e.g., *Õie* (Blossom in English), *Kalju* (Cliff). In addition names from other Finnic languages were recommended, e.g., the Finnish female name *Aino*. There were also names that were introduced and accepted as Estonian, which however were international. These names were also used in national novels as Estonian names (e.g., *Hilda*, *Ella*, *Hella*, *Helmi*) (Roos 1962). The best example is probably *Linda* – the name of the main hero's mother in the national epic *Kalevipoeg*. The new, Estonian sounding names were first given to girls, and in 1900 in some regions such names as *Õie*, *Salme*,

Helmi, Linda appear at the top of the list as the most popular ones. In these regions the previously mentioned stages had been introduced earlier than in others.

The changes in names brought about changes in name giving patterns. The following two trends: giving the child the names of its parents and according to Christian traditions, giving the child the name of the godparent, have been observed more closely.

The material of the present research comprises materials from the 19th century and 12 congregations, mostly rural ones from different Estonian regions, but also including one Tallinn congregation and one suburban one, the Viljandi Pauluse congregation. These congregations are Tallinn Pühavaimu, Keila, Ridala, Käina, Kaarma, Pärnu-Jaagupi, Karksi, Viljandi Pauluse, Hargla, Palamuse, Järva-Madise and Lüganuse.

Today parents do not regularly give their children their own name, although here and there such families do exist. In those cases the names given are the names that are passed on from generation to generation, which are the classical old borrowed names such as *Jaan, Hans* or *Hendrik*. For example, in 1995, one family gave their triplet boys a modern variant of their father's name *Margus* as the second name: *Karl Markus, Joel Markus* and *Hans Markus*.

Neither are the names of grandparents generally given to children – it is mostly done in cases when the name happens to be popular. The names of distant ancestors are rarely given, and not to honor the ancestors or to carry their name tradition; it is mostly coincidental. All the same, today there is another known tradition, not a very widespread one, to name the son after the father. However, the daughters are not named after the mother.

There is no material in Estonia – at least not any published one – about the traditions of passing names on within a family. Genealogists have noticed that some families have passed on the name of the farm owner – it stands out especially when the name is more untraditional in that particular area. The choice of the first name has also been influenced by particular diplomacy – to please the grandparents or other authorities. It is assumed that Estonians have given their first son the name of the father's father and the second son the name of the mother's father, the third son the father's name, the fourth son the name of the father's oldest brother, etc. By analogy the first daughter would have received the mother's mother's name, the second the father's mother's name, the third the mother's name, etc. (Must 2000, 41–42).

A certain systematic nature can be verified by research carried out by folklorists that depict the interpretations of Christianity in Estonian folk belief. According to the folklore researcher Valk (1997), it is possible that the tradition of naming the first child after a grandparent was part of the pre-Christianization era. People say that in that case the child will turn out to be as good as the previous name bearer; the child's name helps to commemorate the previous bearer's memory; the child will not die prematurely. There is also an exceptional explanation: when there were only sons, the child was given his grandparent's name, then the next child would be a daughter; and vice versa.

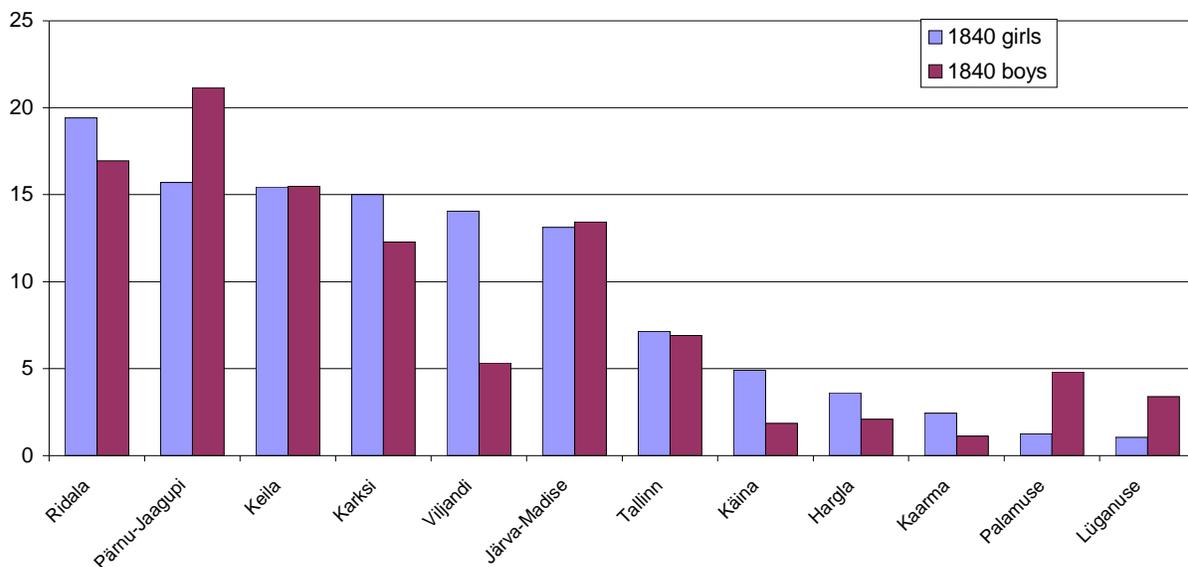
When the parents gave the child their own name, the following reasons were given: the child will have a long life. (If the first child is born to a young married couple, then it is baptized with the name of its parent; if it is a girl, then with her mother's; if it is a boy, with the name of his father. Then the child will not die, so they say.). By giving their own name, people tried to limit the number of children. (Quoting common people: There is a custom that those who have many children and do not want any more, give the last born child its father's name, then there will be no more babies.) Giving the parents' names has also been justified by the following: if there have been three successive children of the same sex in a family, that is sons, and if they wish to have a daughter, then the third son should be given his father's name, then a daughter can be expected. The same should be done when there are mostly daughters and they want to have a son, the third daughter should be given her mother's name. Then a son can be expected.

Therefore we can find contradicting opinions in folklore whether or not the child should bear the name of the parents or other ancestors. Based on additional sources to the main material of the present research, such as family trees and published census reports, we cannot draw any substantial conclusions to find an established pattern. Earlier census reports do not usually give information about children who died prematurely – and the death rate of children was high at the time. Therefore the count is not accurate. According to the documents found, the first son has been mostly given the name of the grandfather, especially the name of the grandfather whose farm they had inherited. Some later children have received the father's and mother's name which may verify the wish that the last desired child bear the name of the parent.

Most family trees that have been studied in Estonia do not give a complete overview even about the 18th century. The 19th century material seems to show that it has rather been the first son that has been named after the father. For the present research two years have been chosen: 1840 and 1890. The period between these years should reveal some of the most important changes in Estonian name usage. When comparing the names of parents and children only those cases have been taken into account where the child has received exactly the same name as one of the parents.

It may be said that naming the child after the mother as well as naming the son after the father has been fairly common at the beginning of the 19th century. In some areas up to 5 per cent of children received their parent's name, in some regions even a fifth of the children. Yet, when considering the large number of children in the family, there must have been at least one father's or mother's namesake in each family.

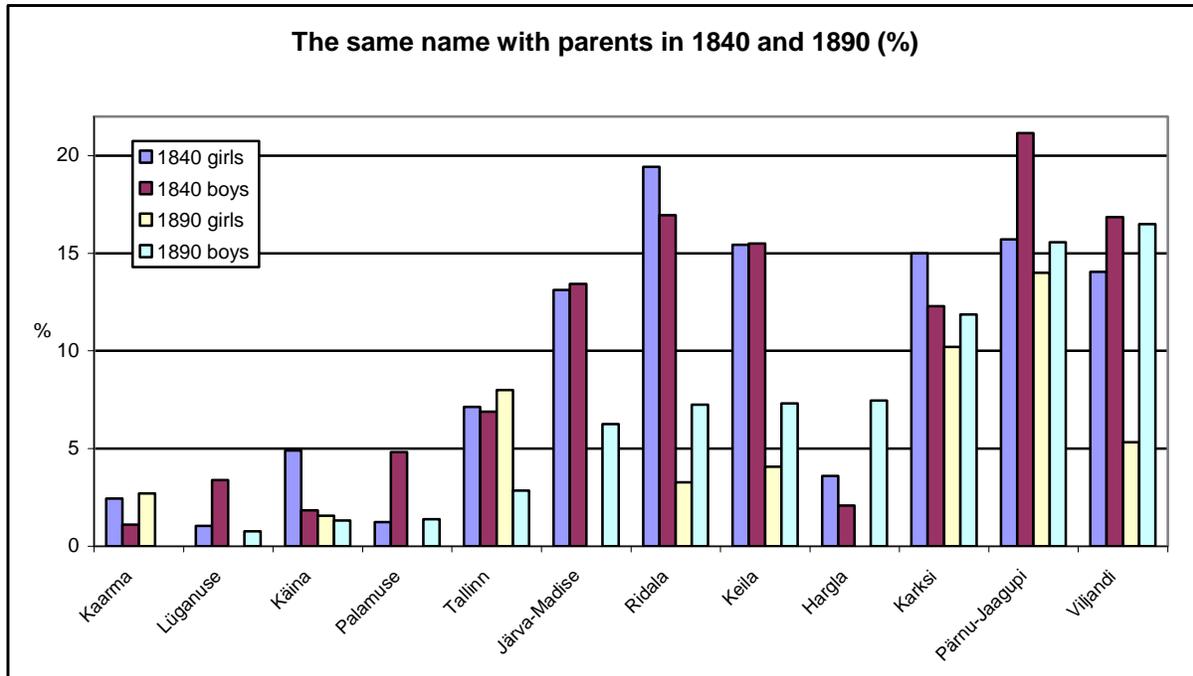
The same name with parents (%)



From the present point of view it is surprising that girls have been named after their mothers even more often than boys have after their father. Still, indeed, the number of female names was smaller and thus it must have been inevitable – as the families were really large at that time.

By the 1890s, the situation had changed completely. Everywhere, the parents' names were given less and less. In four areas in Estonia, no girl was named after her mother, in one parish no

boy was given his father's name. However, it is clear that by the end of the 19th century, boys received their father's name more often than girls received their mother's name.



This chart depicts all regions where boys born in 1890 were increasingly named after their parent. The congregations may be divided into three. To the right and left remain those where no significant changes were detected. The congregations on the right are characterized by widespread usage of the mother's name and this tradition has clearly been preserved, except for girls in the Viljandi Pauluse congregation, which is a suburban one. The congregations on the left haven't changed much either: the tradition was barely present in 1840 and has even weakened further. In the three middle range congregations the tradition has noticeably declined, especially in the case of girls.

The second big group of name donors consists of godparents who played an important role in the children's lives. It was similarly believed that the bearer of the godparent's name will inherit all good traits of the donor.

There were usually three godparents, boys had two male and one female godparent, and the girls had vice versa. In Saaremaa, the number increased to 5 or even to 7. This reflected the practical side of being a godparent: if something happened to the parent – which could have easily happened at sea – the godparents helped to support the child. It must be noted, however, that the child did not need to receive the godparent's name.

At the beginning of the 19th century the godparent whose name was given to the child was probably considered the most important one and in general, his or her name stands in the birth registers in first place.

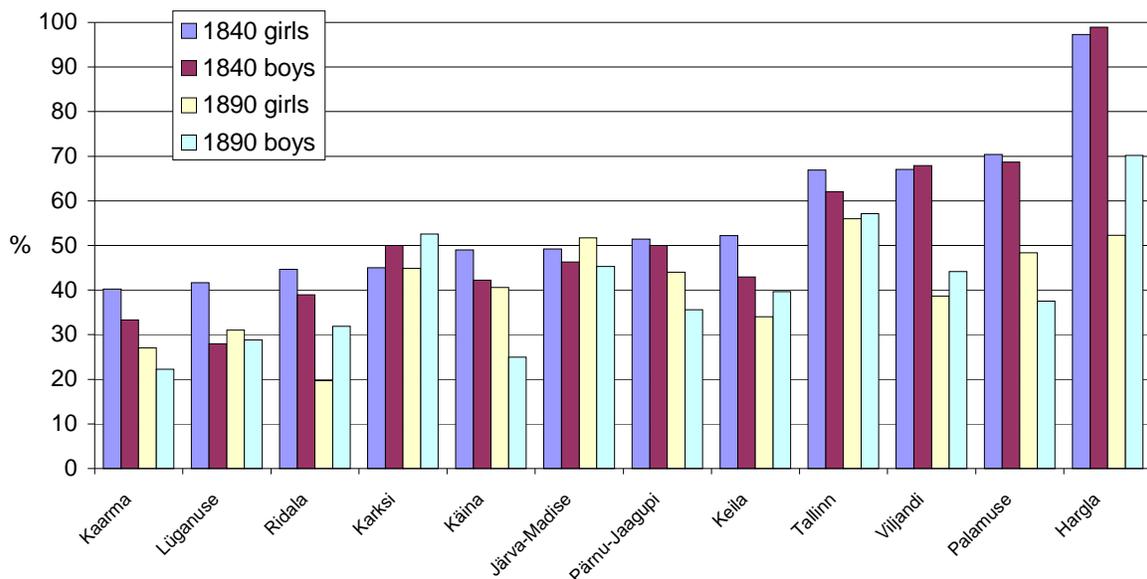
For the research also all the cases where the child had received the same name as one of the godparents have been included. In addition, these cases where the original name of the godparent has been replaced by the more modern variant have been taken into account, i.e., cases where the godmother's name was *Juuli* but the child was named *Julie* (or vice versa). The godfather's name was *Kusta* or *Kusti* but the child was named *August*. Nevertheless, in the data of 1840, cases where the child got the exact same name as the godparent prevail.

There are several references to the knowledge and conscientious usage of name connections. First there are references in contemporary literature and newspapers where such snobbish attempts to rise on the social ladder have often been ridiculed. The identification of such names, especially in earlier sources – can be proved by the fact that reference to the same person in different records has been done using different variants of the same name: when the mansion servant's or the pastor's child was baptized *Christina* then upon marrying a peasant the name was already marked *Stina*, *Tiina*, *Kersti* or *Kristi*, depending on the local trend (Tiik 1977, 284). The 19th century account books also reflect the change of people's social status and in the course of this the name could also change. There are examples where *Jaan Rätsep* or *Hans Kask* went to school but *Johannes Schneider* or *Johannes Birk* were the ones who graduated (Must 2000, 154–155). The official name changes also refer to Germanization of names and this concerned especially the urbanizing Estonians (Must 2000, 57–58).

Therefore it may be claimed that the parents wanted a higher social status for their child by giving him or her a more posh variant of the godparent's name, yet in everyday use the names were considered the same and both *Ann* and *Anna* were called *Ann*.

The names of the godparents are still very important in the 19th century; the connections between their and the children's names are rather strong. Yet, it is evident that the role in the next 50 years is declining.

The exact or close name with the godparent (%)



In 1840, girls received a slightly higher number of godmothers' names; in 1890 the situation is more equal. In 1840 in most congregations about half of the children were named after their godparents. Three congregations stand out where two thirds of the children receive their godparent's name and one congregation where almost all children do. In the case of the last, in the Hargla congregation in the South of Estonia, we may even ask: who didn't get a godparent's name? There was one boy whose father was a school teacher; the boy was named Rudolph – it must have been difficult for the educated parent to find a godparent with that particular name. Among the abovementioned four congregations is a Tallinn city congregation, Pühavaimu. It may

be assumed that one of the influencing factors are those Estonians who upon moving to the city came into contact with new people and chose a godparent with an unfamiliar name. In the case of Tallinn, it seems that the godparents were chosen amongst the new authorities who were the employers of urbanized Estonians. By 1890 the situation changes completely: in most congregations less than half of the children receive their godparents' names.

In conclusion, we may say the following: During the last fifty years of the 19th century not only the names but also naming patterns changed where one influenced the other. The tradition of giving a child the godparent's name receded gradually. This was very well represented in the records of the Tallinn city congregation which in turn refers to the influential nature of social relations in the particular environment. The social aspect must have been even more important as it was the time when Estonians started to move to the city.

It must also be noted that the children were less and less named after their parents. In some areas under observation the tradition of giving the daughter her mother's name disappeared completely. The tradition of giving the parent's name was preserved most in Karksi (more than 10 %), Pärnu-Jaaguipi, and in the case of boys, in Viljandi.

There may be several reasons for this. The number of children in a family decreased and the death rate went down. Children and everything connected to them must have become more important for the parents, children were perceived more as individuals. The baptizing of children and having godparents helped reinforce social relations and thus the godparenting tradition was strong and lasted longer. The small number of female names used needed an increase. Thus girls were given new names earlier and in greater number and the older names were more easily discarded. Also the tradition of giving a girl the godparent's or mother's name disappeared more quickly.

If we compare the changes concerning boys and girls according to 1890 data we may point to the following connections. Both share the well preserved tradition of being named after their parents as well as after their godparents. In those areas where many children were named after their godparents we may still see some differences: boys were also commonly named after their father whereas girls were rarely named after their mothers at all. This confirms the fact that the tradition of giving the daughter their mother's name receded more quickly. Thus it may be said that in order for the changes to take place, some of the traditions had to retire – the ones that did not support change by their nature.

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Annika Hussar
Tallinn University
Department of Estonian Philology
Narva mnt 25
10120 Tallinn
ESTONIA
ahussar@tlu.ee