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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between national cultural spaces and identity in a former Soviet-Bloc state. Through the lens of Estonian history museums and national performances, this paper studies how representations of national identity in the post-Soviet context are a reaction to dominant transnational forces that increasingly challenge the post-Soviet state’s perceptions of respect and power. Applying critical discourse analysis (CDA) theory, I connect museum and song texts to their social and political environment and to overarching global factors. In particular, I analyze Estonian song themes and historical narratives in relation to the Estonian nation, how they fit within the state’s political goals of ‘returning to Europe’, abide by the cultural models of what it means to be ‘European’, and project idealized conditions of a nation-state, such as ethnic homogeneity. Based on my evidence, I argue that the national performance and museum narratives are representing diverging ideals of the nation and state, respectively, in the contemporary era. Although the two representations are not completely incompatible, they position the state on an unstable foundation, which could lead to state sanctioned unrest in the future.
Introduction

I sat on the grassy hill facing the large outdoor amphitheater on a brisk August afternoon. People of all ages sat around me—parents with young children, young adults hanging out with friends or significant others, older adults with friends or family—chatting and drinking as they waited for the singing to begin. I felt like I was at a rock concert. In reality I was waiting for hundreds of people dressed in modern or peasant clothing to lead 100 minutes of folk singing.

This performance on August 19, 2018 celebrated the 100th anniversary of the independent Republic of Estonia in February 1918. The date, August 19, is special to the Estonian nation-state because it represents the eve of Estonia’s independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 (on August 20, 1991). As I tried to follow along with an Estonian language program, those around me danced and sang in unison, showing the communal and participatory aspect of the performance. The big screens shared videos of Estonians all over the world singing parts of the songs and showing loyalty and love for Estonia. Near the end of the performance, the people sang Mu Isamaa On Minu Arm ("My Fatherland Is My Love"), the song that united Estonia when it was under Soviet Occupation. In this moment the people around me were on the verge of tears. When I saw and heard the Estonians’ emotional response, I could not doubt the people’s pride in their country.

This performance reminds me of a video I saw at the Estonian History Museum—The Great Guild. The video included a floating ghost, who called himself “the spirit of survival”. The ghost described the different tribulations the Estonian people had experienced over the course of 11,000 years of their history and how magnificent it is that Estonia is finally united and independent. I found the name of the ghost to be odd. He was not the spirit of the nation or spirit of the Estonian people, but rather a universal state of being. At first glance, this strong emphasis
on “surviving” is perplexing. ‘Survive’ implies overcoming hardship or struggle, yet Estonia is one of the few former Soviet countries that have made a successful transition from Communism to democratic capitalism. Additionally, Estonia has been a member of NATO and the EU for over a decade. My research shows that the Estonian spirit of survival is repeatedly tested in the modern era. The national performance celebrating their 100th anniversary not only symbolizes the nation’s overcoming Soviet Occupation and World War II but the nation-state surviving in the transnational, co-dependent, modern era.

Grounded in research on and fieldwork at Estonian museums and national singing performances that reveal various representations of the nation, I show how differences between the song celebrations and museums’ national narratives reflect the ideals of the Estonian nation and the Estonian state, respectively. I argue that Estonia, like other states in the former Soviet Bloc, has not found a secure cultural or political position within the European geopolitical region and that this condition contributes to the precarious foundation that characterizes the post-Soviet nation-state.

My thesis will challenge accepted conceptions about statehood and identity. As proposed by twentieth century political philosophy professors Yael Tamir (who wrote the influential book *Liberal Nationalism*) and Kai Neilson, the proclamation and approval of statehood should allow for the members of the nation-state to live a satisfying life and have the autonomy and authority

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to preserve national culture. I argue, however, that statehood has not allowed newly independent nation-states to have complete autonomy in the current transnational geopolitical climate. Dominant outside influences are significantly impacting the ways that the individual states govern. Multilateral, transnational organizations such as the European Union (EU) are increasingly diminishing state authority and autonomy because they determine how states interact with one another and govern their own populations. States, especially those with newer political power, can no longer govern with complete autonomy.

This thesis contributes to the emerging research on the European geopolitical environment. While there has been substantial research in English on power dynamics in Europe, mainly focusing on “core” Northwestern Europe and Balkans, most of this research was published in the 1990s and early 2000s, before many of the post-Soviet countries gained EU membership. More recent discussions of power in the EU focuses predominately on economic relations or the EU versus other global powers, suggesting less research on the interactions between newer and older EU states. I will demonstrate how power dynamics continue to impact former-Soviet states despite admittance into the European Union. Additionally, my research provides a nuanced perspective on the representation and goals of post-Soviet countries. Given the emerging political climate of populism and ethno-centric state discourse seen throughout

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Central and Eastern Europe, it is becoming increasingly important to understand the ways that groups interact with existing geopolitical power dynamics.

Additionally, my thesis contributes to the existing literature on contemporary museum narratives. Multiple scholars argue that museums are systems of representation that produce meaning through their displays. While scholars have examined the role of the museum in promoting specific national narratives, I struggled to find English language research on how museums create national narratives as a response to international influences. In the post-Soviet context, research has predominately focused on the representation of World War II and Soviet Occupation (1939-1991) in relation to the state’s national identity. With my thesis, I demonstrate that the contemporary forces are directly impacting how states tailor their historical narratives throughout the last several centuries, including the Occupation era.

My research investigated museum exhibits and websites, ethnographic notes, the 100th year celebration event program, and online English language translations of Estonian songs. I collected data over a two-week period in August 2018 in the two largest cities in Estonia, Tallinn and Tartu. Tallinn, located on the Baltic coast, is the capital of Estonia and has a diverse population of ethnic and non-ethnic Estonians whereas Tartu, located significantly inland, has a homogenous ethnic Estonian population. As part of my investigation, I traveled to several museums in each of these cities and collected official museum publications, took photos of museum exhibitions/texts, and wrote down notes regarding videos and overall impressions of the

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different museums. Although the thesis will focus predominately on four museums—the Tallinn City Museum, the Estonian History Museum, the Estonian National Museum, and the Museum of Occupation and Freedom—I visited 12 museums in total. In the Appendix, I include a complete museum list with their location, areas of focus, and whether they were included in this analysis and other specific details. The 100th year song celebration occurred at the Song Festival grounds in Tallinn. Although I did not attend Laulupidu, Estonia’s largest song celebration, I will generalize my observations of the 100th year song celebration to discuss the impact of Estonian song festivals. I can make this generalization because the 100th year celebration included several songs traditionally sung at Laulupidu and recordings of the Laulupidu and the 100th year celebration strongly resemble one another.

i. An Overview of the Estonian Nation-State

Estonia is a nation-state located on the northeastern edge of Europe, south of Finland and west of Russia. It has a population of approximately 1.3 million.9 Its capital city is Tallinn and has a population of approximately 400,000 (thirty percent of the state’s population). The only official state language is Estonian. A significant portion of the country remains undeveloped; about half of the country’s land consists of forest.10 However, the country prides itself on its modernity. Estonia was the first country to adapt an online voting system in 2005.

The first national awakening movement of the Estonian nation occurred in the mid-19th century; prior to this point the ethnic Estonian people were not known as “Estonian” but as the “peasant peoples” who were controlled for centuries by local Baltic Germans and the Danish, [9 “Estonia Population 2019,” World Population Review, February 17, 2019, http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/estonia-population/ (Accessed March 24, 2019).
Swedish, or Russian empires. During the 1850s, the intellectuals of the region identified common values and history that bound the native people together under a singular identity. In their efforts, the peasant culture and language became Estonian national tenets. The current nation’s connection to this peasant heritage is still celebrated throughout Estonian society as seen through Laulupidu (“Song Festival”) and Tantsupidu, (“Dance Festival”), national folk singing and dancing celebrations.

In the modern era, the Estonian language is the strongest national identifier. The Estonian language is spoken only in this small geographical area (approximately 17,000 square miles). Additionally, the Estonian language is significantly different linguistically than many other languages on the continent of Europe. While most languages on the continent are either Indo-European or Slavic languages, Estonian is a Finno-Ugric language that only has familial ties with Finnish and Hungarian. Therefore, Latvians, Germans, Swedes, Russians or people who speak the English language cannot use their own language to vaguely understand the Estonian language.

The Soviet Era serves as a defining part of the Estonian canon. The nation-state experienced significant trauma during this time period. In August 1939, Joseph Stalin and Adolf Hitler signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. In this pact, which set the stage for Nazi Germany’s invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, the two political leaders divided the territory of

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Central-Eastern Europe amongst themselves to create respective ‘spheres of influence’. After approximately 20 years of political independence from 1918-1939, the Estonian nation-state was forced by the Soviet Union to sign agreements that allowed the Soviet Union to exert its military power within Estonia. Consequently, Estonia suffered more than 50 years under totalitarian regimes (1939-1991), first the Soviets (1939-1941), then the Nazis (1941-1944), and then the Soviets again (1944-1991). During World War II, 1939-1945, Estonia lost one-fifth of its population as a result of warfare, firing squads, German concentration camps, and Soviet gulags. Under the Stalinist terror regime of the 1940s and 1950s, widespread paranoia and suffering decimated the population further. It was only in the 1980s that the Estonian nation, through its peaceful “Singing Revolution”, began to reclaim state authority from the Soviet Union. Between 1988 and 1991, a third of Estonia’s population participated in non-violent political rallies protesting Soviet Occupation and expressed their wish for Estonian independence. One notable moment of the Singing Revolution was the Baltic Chain. On August 23, 1989, the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, two million people in the three Baltic states—Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—joined hands to create a human chain, uniting the three countries against Soviet Occupation.

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15 Ibid.
16 Auers, Comparative Politics and Government, 29.
17 Ibid., 29.
On August 20, 1991, the state formally declared and received full political independence from the Soviet Union. Now, the state serves as protector of the Estonian people and promotes the nation-state’s sovereignty over its homeland.

The demographics of contemporary Estonia are significantly different compared to Interwar (1918-1939) Estonia. Prior to World War II, the population of Estonia was homogenous, with ethnic Estonians making up 90 percent of the population.\textsuperscript{22} During Soviet Occupation, the country became much more diverse as Russian-speakers moved into the region and, since reclaiming independence, has remained so. In 2000, there were reportedly 142 different ethnic groups within the country.\textsuperscript{23} In 2009, approximately 69 percent of the population identified as ethnic-Estonian and approximately 29 percent identified as Russian or Russian-speaking.\textsuperscript{24} Therefore, as the country has promoted and supported its titular group, it has run into obstacles achieving an idealized homogenous nation-state.

\textsuperscript{21} “Estonia celebrates the day of restoration of independence,” \textit{Estonian World}.
\textsuperscript{22} Auers, \textit{Comparative Politics and Government}, 29.
\textsuperscript{24} Auers, \textit{Comparative Politics and Government}, 150.
Additionally, contemporary Estonia is part of a larger geopolitical environment. Since 2004, Estonia has been a member of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The EU, which was created by the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, is a transnational political and economic organization that currently has 28 member states. Through its multinational governing bodies—the European Parliament, the European Council, and the Council of the EU—the EU creates and implements policies that impact all member states’ societies and citizens. All member states of the EU abide by the same laws and mandates, such as engaging in the Single Market and having high food and environment standards. Also, Estonia is one of the 19 EU countries that use the Euro as its currency. As a member of NATO, Estonia contributes a portion of its GDP and military forces to the organization’s collective defense and makes decisions on security issues with other NATO member states. Therefore, Estonia is politically and economically interdependent with many other countries.

ii. Terminology

The primary sources in this thesis focus on, and may be produced by, the Estonian nation-state. According to Ernest Gellner and Anthony Smith, nation-states are institutions that protect and represent the interests of a particular nation. Nation-states are not naturally occurring phenomena. Western national scholars like Gellner and Hans Kohn cemented this relationship. Their work argues that nationalism, the ideology of nations, fuels the formation and

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maintenance of these political organizations. While the two terms have become strongly linked, it is important to differentiate ‘nation’ and ‘state’ because they center on different aspects of Estonian society. The term ‘nation’ does not simply refer to ‘the people’ because many countries, including Estonia, have diverse populations that may not be part of the same nation. Rather, the nation, as Leoussi and Grosby describe it, is, “a community of collective self consciousness,” that feels connected through different values, myths, and symbols. In simpler terms, Smith asserts that a nation consists of political and cultural bonds, which unite particular people as one political community. The nation is a shared active identity that is constantly expressed through its members. Furthermore, it is not a stagnant identity but one that is made relevant to the specific social political environment that the group of people is living in. In the case of Estonia, the Estonian nation specifically refers to the 70 percent of the state’s population who identify as ethnically Estonian. Estonian scholars and political figures such as former Estonian President Lennart Meri assert that the contemporary Estonian nation is fundamentally based on ancestral ties to the land that inform national consciousness.

Likewise, the term ‘state’ is not entirely synonymous with ‘government’. Instead, the state, as defined by Christopher Pierson, refers to a political organization made up of public bureaucracy and other institutions. Although states may appeal to the nation using national or

31 Smith, National Identity, 14.
32 Smith, National Identity, 40.
popular terms, a state is most importantly concerned with maintaining its power.\textsuperscript{35} A state is characterized by how it exercises power. Both Pierson and Smith argue that states have control over the means of violence and coercion in their given territories.\textsuperscript{36} Additionally, states utilize impersonal power over people in their borders so that they can project ideas of uncontested authority and legitimacy.\textsuperscript{37} In my research, I examine museums as state institutions because they receive financial support from the government and promote the historical legitimacy of the current nation-state.

The achievement of a recognized nation-state has become very important in nationalist efforts. Smith asserts that nationalism aims at attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity, and identity for a particular group of people.\textsuperscript{38} These three goals highlight the active character of nationalism. Additionally, since the early twentieth century, political officials have accepted the principle of self-determination, which is the idea that every national group has the human right to self-rule. Throughout history, national leaders believed that the most effective way to achieve nationalist goals was through achieving political representation in the form of the state.\textsuperscript{39} In creating a nation-state that is recognized by other states, the existing nation assumes that it can finally represent itself truthfully and feel secure within its geopolitical position.

In Estonia, the state protects the Estonian nation. The Estonian Constitution asserts that the state guarantees, “…the preservation of the Estonian people, the Estonian language, and the Estonian culture through the ages,”\textsuperscript{40} suggesting unity between and the importance of the three listed aspects. However, the use of the phrase “Estonian people” has some inherent ambiguity to

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{35} Smith, \textit{National Identity}, 15.
\textsuperscript{36} Pierson, \textit{The Modern State}, 8; Smith, \textit{National Identity}, 14.
\textsuperscript{37} Pierson, \textit{The Modern State}, 8.
\textsuperscript{38} Smith, \textit{National Identity}, 73.
\textsuperscript{40} The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, Preamble.
\end{flushleft}
it. Because the Constitution references “people” instead of “nation”, it is unclear whether “Estonian people” refers to “ethnically Estonian people (the nation)” or “people who reside in Estonia”, which are two very distinct groups of people. The latter term would suggest that the Estonian state supports its multiethnic population as part of its people, who may not fully practice the Estonian culture or use the Estonian language.

Throughout this thesis, I connect Estonian performances and museums with existing stereotypes regarding nations. These national stereotypes are part of a discourse known as “Kohn’s Dichotomy” that asserts that nationalism takes either a “civic” or “ethnic” form. Several 19th and 20th century scholars, most notably Hans Kohn but also Friedrich Meinecke, Karl Marx, and Michael Ignatieff, have asserted that societies either utilize civic nationalism (Staatsnation) based upon universalist principles of the Enlightenment (freedom, equality, rationalism) or mystical, ethnic nationalism (Kulturnation) based upon race/culture/people (Volk). These scholars have favored the civic form of nationalism because it focuses on individualism and liberty of members to choose to be a part of a nation; in contrast, they critiqued ethnic nationalism because it was detrimental to individual liberties and focused too heavily on community. Additionally, Kohn and subsequent scholars such as Michael Ignatieff have applied the categories within the geographical context of Europe; they proclaimed that Western European countries practice civic nationalism whereas Eastern/Central European countries practice ethnic nationalism. More importantly, Kohn and Ignatieff, who were writing about nationalism after witnessing Nazism and Yugoslav Wars, respectively, associated the two forms

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of nationalism with morality and the nature of the people and society. Kohn’s dichotomy harshly critiques ethnic nationalism as the antithesis of civic nationalism, stating that ethnic nationalism can only take place within ‘backward’ nations that have not developed successfully and therefore needed the historical myths to unite the people. Ignatieff reaffirmed the moral and societal supremacy of civic nationalism. Ignatieff asserted in his 1993 book Blood and Belonging that ethnic nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe was violent, bigoted, and a threat to the contemporary world. To Ignatieff, civic nationalism was the nationalism of established European democracies at their best. As a result, the “civic-ethnic” dichotomy has become aligned with “West-East”, “moral-immoral” “modern-backwards”, and, as will be important throughout this paper, “European-non-European”.

Many scholars have refuted this strict dichotomy. John Coakley, David Brown, and Taras Kuzio suggest that the dichotomy is an oversimplification and undermines the complexity of states and nationalist efforts. Historically, civic nations do not always lead to civil, liberal societies (for example, Jacobin France was authoritarian) and ethnic nations do not always equate to illiberal, violent societies (for example, the Baltic states had peaceful revolutions). Furthermore, even though civic nations are supposed to be based upon universal values, many civic nations utilize the regional language, culture, and history (designated factors of the ethnic nation) to build community. Moreover, recent research surveys focusing on nations and opinions about ethnicity in Europe have not found a clear geographical divide between civic and

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47 Ignatieff, Blood and Belonging, quoted in Billig, Banal Nationalism, 47.
49 Brown, “Are there good and bad nationalisms?,” 287.
ethnic nation-states, suggesting that the connections to East and West, respectively, are not completely accurate. These scholars show that the stereotypes of nations do not have absolute historical or cultural precedent. Nevertheless, the discourse regarding “West/civic” and “East/ethnic” nations, nationalism, and societies remains powerful because it portrays the West as morally and societally superior to other countries.

iii. Methodology

The method of analysis used throughout this paper will be critical discourse analysis (CDA). Discourse is the way that language shapes knowledge of a particular concept or reality. CDA is a method that aims to understand how societies work and how different power structures manifest in social institutions by examining the language they use. Therefore, the main bodies of analysis are text passages. Compared to other methods for analyzing language, CDA has a social justice orientation, meaning that the main goal of CDA is to identify the ways that the discourse expresses or contributes to societal inequalities. CDA is guided by a three dimensional examination framework—discourse as text [the language itself], discourse as discursive practice [how the use of language creates meaning], and discourse as social practice [how the language used perpetuates particular societal norms]—that demonstrates the connections between the micro-level text and the macro-level societal norms. This method is applicable to my research because my primary sources consist of text passages from museum exhibits, museum websites, and song lyrics, each of which contains significant representations of societal ideals and norms.

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51 Coakley, “National Identity,” 266.
55 Ibid., 8.
Specifically in relation to museums, Sotiria Grek has outlined ways that the CDA method has been applied to museums and exhibition narratives. Grek asserts that, “the poetics of exhibitionary language is a unique communicating style, laden with social value and symbolic efficacy,” highlighting the political, not-objective nature of museum narrations. Additionally, she states that this CDA model can incorporate visual images and sounds alongside its analysis of text. I find this approach useful because contemporary museums utilize audio, text, video, objects, and various other forms of media to culminate into a single message. Therefore, in my analysis of museum exhibits, I will utilize the CDA model illustrated below that locates the source of information in the exhibition. Throughout my thesis, I plan to utilize this analytical model by presenting the text within the exhibit and analyzing the text for its significance in the space. Then I will relate the message to the larger national and geopolitical environment. This model will allow me to make conclusions about the relationship between the local and global influences and the museum narratives.

The main limitation of my research is that I chose not to interview Estonians. I made this choice so that I could successfully collect all of my data during my on-site two-week time frame. Additionally, while I was able to observe hundreds of Estonians at the 100th year singing celebration, I only saw a few people, mainly foreigners, on my visits to museums. In August, many Estonian families are on summer vacation away from the cities. Additionally, cruise tourists made Tallinn very busy, discouraging natives from entering the city center. When I did see locals at museums such as the Estonian History Museum—Maarjamäe Palace on the outskirts of Tallinn, the people were there for the open-air park, not the history museum. Therefore, although I can make claims about the Estonian nation in my analysis of national song performances, I cannot argue how the common Estonian feels about the museums or how accurately the museums represent the Estonian nation. I have to limit my analysis of the museums to the Estonian state and the Estonian intellectuals who curated the exhibits. The

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museum narratives analyzed throughout this thesis can therefore only be seen as an example of a state-sanctioned ‘top-down’ approach to national history, rather than a narrative that emerged from the consensus memory of the common people. As most Estonian state officials and intellectuals identify with the Estonian nation, some of the exhibits might be reflective of national sentiment. However, I cannot confirm that or to what extent it reflects contemporary common national beliefs.

iv. Overview of the Chapters

Chapter 1 focuses on state-sponsored song celebrations as described at the beginning of the introduction. I examine the folk singing celebrations and traditions that are central to the Estonian national identity by analyzing lyrics of songs sung at the 100th year celebration. This is a significant but important contrast to the texts seen in the museums. I argue that the national songs performed at this event provide a glimpse into values of the contemporary Estonian nation. Additionally, the Estonian people attending the event visualize the ideal Estonian, which is the 19th century peasant, by embracing and supporting their folk heritage. I suggest that the authentic embodiment of this ideal is what provides the strongest sense of national unity and uniqueness for the ethnic Estonian nation. It also indicates that the contemporary Estonian nation, regardless of what the museums present in later chapters, remains to be a nation solely based around ethnically Estonian history and values.

Chapter 2 centers on the historical narratives at the Tallinn City Museum and the Estonian History Museum—The Great Guild. In this chapter, I will discuss the European/non-European dichotomy and how the museums’ narratives are a reaction to this transnational phenomenon. I argue that these Estonian history museums are attempting to establish Estonia’s status as a European state by promoting medieval connections to various European groups and values.
Additionally, I demonstrate that the European/non-European dichotomy has resulted in the museums presenting an ambivalent narrative on Estonia’s affiliations with Russia.

Chapter 3 concentrates on the sections of the *Vabamu: Museum of Occupations and Freedom* and *Estonian National Museum* that discuss ‘freedom’. I will argue that these two museums demonstrate the country’s continued efforts to convince Western European countries that Estonia is a modern, liberal, democratic European nation-state. However, the explicit discussions and embodiments of freedom at these two sites ultimately reveal the state’s tensions with the EU’s versions of freedom (the legal definition of freedom and what the EU actually protects within its organization). The museums reveal the state’s insecurity about its own liberty and freedom within the larger geopolitical environment.
Chapter 1: The Estonian Folk Heart and Performing the Past

Estonian song festivals have been an important part of the national culture since their origin in 1869.\textsuperscript{59} The largest Estonian song festival is \textit{Laulupidu}, which became a UNESCO oral and intangible heritage site in 2003. The song festivals serve as sacred sites of the Estonian culture in times of both independence and occupation.\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Laulupidu} takes place every 2-3 years, alternating between the general Estonian Song celebration (most recently occurring in July 2014 with the next one in July 2019) and the more specific Youth Song celebration (most recently occurring in July 2017). In addition, there are special occasion singing festivals like the 100-year celebration I attended in August 2018. These festivals take place at Tallinn’s Song Festival Grounds, whose stage can accommodate 15,000 singers.\textsuperscript{61} They last several hours or days and bring together thousands of people from around the world. The last general \textit{Laulupidu} in 2014 had more than 100,000 spectators plus 40,000 singers and dancers.\textsuperscript{62} For a country of approximately 1.3 million people, that means that more than 10 percent of the country participated in the most recent 2014 celebration. The special one-day 100-year celebration reportedly attracted more than 50,000 participants worldwide and was televised.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{60} Tusty and Castle Tusty, \textit{The Singing Revolution}.
\textsuperscript{61} Hellrand, “Estonian Song Celebration timeline,” \textit{Estonian World}.
I will examine the folk singing celebrations by analyzing lyrics of songs sung at the 100th anniversary celebration. I will demonstrate that Estonian song festivals are an active portrayal of the Estonian farm peasant and show the importance of their folk culture to the Estonian identity today. Therefore, the song festivals demonstrate that the contemporary Estonian nation continues to base itself on 19th century ideals (the das Volk) as well as a specific ethnicity. While the festivals foster community for members of the Estonian nation, they ultimately present the Estonian nation as part of the past rather than as part of the modern, cosmopolitan world.

1.1 Song Festivals: The Keeper of Tradition

Former Estonian President Lennart Meri stated, “song celebration is not a matter of fashion. Song celebration is a matter of the heart.”\textsuperscript{64} For the ethnic Estonians, choral music has been the emotional unifier of its people since, the beginning of the Estonian national awakening in the mid-19th century. Prior to this time period, the Estonian people were simply the ‘peasants’,

\textsuperscript{64}“History,” \textit{Eesti Laulu-ja tantsupeo SA}. 
ruled at different times by the Danish, Swedish or Russian empires and resident Baltic German speaking elites. Historically, Estonia was split into two provinces, northern *Estland* around Tallinn and southern *Livland* containing Tartu.⁶⁵ Like other national movements in 19th century Central Europe, the intellectual population began to collect folk songs, culture, and tales in the two provinces and labeled them all as part of the common ‘Estonian’ identity, sparking the national awakening movement.⁶⁶ One of the Estonian intellectuals leading the national awakening movement was Johann Voldemar Jannsen. Jannsen, a journalist and poet, was the first person to officially call the people of the region “Estonians” in his newspaper in 1857.⁶⁷ Additionally, he reinforced the link between songs and Estonian national identity by publishing an Estonian songbook (*Eesti laulik*) in 1860 meant for the entire population of contemporary Estonia, not just those in *Estland*.⁶⁸ Additionally, he orchestrated the first Estonian song festival in 1869.⁶⁹ This festival, which was held in Tartu, people throughout the territory sang not only hymns and songs for the tsar but also folk songs and new songs that praised their ‘fatherland’ of Estonia.⁷⁰ It was through these 19th century performances that the concept of ‘Estonia’ was fully formed. Natives began to recognize in one another a common identity based solely on shared culture and the Estonian language. The song festivals set the stage for later nationalist independence movements in the 20th century.

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⁶⁷ Tartu Song Festival Museum [primary source]; Estonian History Museum, Guild Hall location [primary source].


⁶⁹ Kepp, “Estonia Above All,” 293.

⁷⁰ Pawlus, “Estonian song celebration,” 259; Brüggemann and Kasekamp, “‘Singing oneself into a nation’?”, 263.
During the Soviet era, singing served as a form of Estonian resistance to the oppressive regime. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Soviet government controlled the song festivals. They used the festivals for Soviet propaganda. They banned the singing of songs that were sentimental to the Estonian nation. However, at the 1969 Laulupidu, which was the 100th anniversary of the first song festival, the Estonian people mandated that the celebration end with the illegal songs. The Estonians’ moment of resistance demonstrated that in this nationally symbolic space the oppressed Estonians had the collective power to challenge the Soviets. Two decades later, singing played a central role in Estonia’s peaceful independence movement, referred to as Estonia’s “Singing Revolution”. The Estonians used singing to mobilize the nation and gain support for the state’s political autonomy. In June 1988, more than 300,000 Estonians (about a third of the state’s population) showed up at the Song Festival grounds in Tallinn to participate in a political rally against Soviet Occupation. Instead of using violence to strengthen national identity, the population of ethnically Estonians sang.

Since independence in 1991, singing has remained the most popular method of promoting national folk culture. Approximately 40,000 Estonians annually report that they practice amateur choir music, the umbrella term for all of the different types of choir—mixed, female, male, youth, children’s, and chamber—that Estonians can participate in. As can be seen in the map below, people in all areas of Estonia partake in the tradition of amateur choir music, ranging from a few hundred in island areas like Saaremaa and Hiiumaa to 14,400 people participating in Tallinn.

72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
Figure 1-2: Map of Amateur Choir Participation, 2014

The map also highlights the disparities in participation in different regions of Estonia. In most areas, regardless of number of singers, at least 2.5 percent of the population participates in amateur singing, with most regions having at least 4 percent participation. The dark green area to the right of Tallinn (area with the greatest percentage of singers) has approximately 7.6 percent. The higher participation is possibly due to the area being more ethnically homogenous than Tallinn. Although overall the country has approximately a 30 percent minority population, most of this non-ethnic Estonian population resides in Tallinn; Tallinn has a 50 percent minority population, making it more multicultural, whereas the islands and southern Estonia have predominately remained ethnically Estonian. In contrast, the light green area to the far right, which contains Narva, the third largest city in Estonia, has the smallest percentage of people participating at 1.4 percent. Notably, this region, which shares a border with Russia, has a

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population that is overwhelmingly (more than 80 percent) ethnically Russian. Therefore, areas with larger ethnic Estonian populations appear to embrace the singing tradition more than areas that do not. In other words, the singing activity has largely remained an ethnic Estonian activity rather than something that all people in Estonia partake in.

The song festivals serve as the Estonian people’s national compass. As President Meri stated, the value of the song festival does not come from its popularity or spectacle nature. In the 2007 documentary *The Singing Revolution*, one of the ethnic Estonian people interviewed by the American filmmakers states, “the song festival is not only a musical event, it is primarily an opportunity to experience that we are Estonians, that we are one nation.” The Tartu Song Festival website (not the main festival that occurs in Tallinn), promotes the upcoming June 2019 celebration this way:

> The song festival is an important awakener and keeper of the Estonian people – it would be hard to find Estonians who do not hold the song festival dear; this is a special event that [Estonians] find time for and will even travel home for from afar. At the festival, we Estonians are at our best.

In both of these quotes there is an emphasis on the transcendant, deeply emotional impact that the festival has on the Estonian people. Additionally, the quotes highlight that Estonians agree upon the symbolic value of these gatherings in contemporary Estonia. Both of these quotes imply that the Estonian people do not fully connect to the nation and the national community in their lives outside of these traditions. It is in this nationally orchestrated event space that occurs once every few years that the people as a whole feel united and at their ‘best’.

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78 Tusty and Castle Tusty, *The Singing Revolution*.
1.2 Estonian Songs: Themes and Values

The song festivals make Estonians remember their ‘best’ versions of self. It is thereby important to understand the Estonian values and heritage promoted in these songs. The Estonia 100-year event, which had an entry fee equivalent to $16 U.S., consisted of 100 minutes of group singing followed by several hours of pop music. Event orchestrators specifically chose the 26 sing-along songs because they were “well known and loved symbolic songs” of the Estonian people.\(^80\) In this chapter, I will analyze the titles and lyrics of seven songs sung at the 100\(^{th}\) year festival. I chose these songs because they had reliable online English-language translations published by Estonian speakers. I will identify key themes and messages of these songs to understand why Estonians remain sentimental about them.

While the paper copy of the program I received at the event was in Estonian, the national news outlet later posted a partially English-translated digital version with links to videos of the performance. In both the paper and digital versions of the program, each song title has a descriptive phrase that identifies the theme of the song. For example, one program entry is “4. Mother’s song (‘emalaul’): “Ema süda”.”\(^81\) Only the thematic phrases were translated into English; the actual song titles and their respective lyrics were only available in Estonian. These performances have an increasingly international audience—the 100\(^{th}\) year celebration was marketed as a ‘global’ sing-along and the event cameramen repeatedly showed attendee Swedish Crown Princess Victoria on the screens—but the songs are exclusively sung in Estonian. The partial translation is one way the Estonian people appeal to a global audience while maintaining


\(^81\) “All Sunday’s Estonia 100 singing event songs together with lyrics,” ERR News. [primary source]
the sacred nature of Estonian song celebrations. The labels allowed attendees to quickly grasp
the songs’ subject and importance without having to understand the songs themselves.

The songs’ English language labels have predominately pastoral characteristics. The
following categories emerge: familial/community (“mother’s song”, “uncle’s song”, “hunter’s
song”, “men’s song”, “people’s song”), activity (“beer song”, “dance song”, “prayer song”,
“birthday song”, “sleeping song”, “eating song”), nature (“spring song”, “song of the sea”,
“sunbathing song”) and songs that reference Estonia specifically (“Estonian flag song”,
“Estonian folk song”, “patriotic song” and “Estonian song of wishes”). Additionally, two songs
had the label “Estonia song festival closing songs”, signaling that they were the most sentimental
songs included in the 100\textsuperscript{th} year celebration and that their context was more noteworthy than the
songs subjects. Because these songs were specifically chosen because of their symbolism to the
Estonian people, I will argue that they articulate the values of the Estonian nation. From these
labels, valuing family, the environment, and the importance of simple communal activities
emerge as aspects of the Estonian culture.

Notably, the songs lack reference to abstract qualities such as “freedom” or “peace”. Of
the 26 song labels, only one of them, “love song”, had an intangible subject. The omission of
abstract values is most jarring in the song \textit{Eesti Lipp} (“The Estonian Flag”). The lyrics of the
100\textsuperscript{th} year celebration’s opening song were from a late 19\textsuperscript{th} century poem by Martin Lipp.\textsuperscript{83} The
national flag was established by the Estonian Students’ Society in Tartu in 1884 and served as a
uniting national symbol during the Singing Revolution. It consists of three—one blue, one black,
one white—equal sized horizontal rectangles that represent the Estonian sky, the Estonian soil,

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{82} “All Sunday’s Estonia 100 singing event songs together with lyrics,” \textit{ERR News}. [primary source]
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and light and purity, respectively. However, in the English translation of the *Eesti Lipp* lyrics, there is an unequal mention of the colors:

> May you decorate the homes of Estonia/with three colors of the home/under which the sons of Estonia could gather in unity/may their mission be united in one with love for their brothers…/blue is the color of your sky, my dear homeland, Estonia/should you be in danger of trouble, look right up there, in the sky/black is the color of your soil, that has been toiled in sweat/black is the soil which has covered our lands, since times of old/blue, black, and white may you decorate the Estonia …

The flag itself does not prioritize a particular color or value. The song, however, only emphasizes blue and black. These two colors connect the Estonian people to the sky above them and the land beneath them. The colors remind them of their historical reliance upon the land and its continued importance in the future. Historically, Estonians felt connected to nature because so much of their life relied on the land. Until the 19th/20th centuries, Estonians lived a predominately rural life as peasant farmers in small villages; national stories say that the people have been farming the territory and living off the land for thousands of years, growing primarily grains.

The third color, white, in contrast, is not noted as having value from its designated symbolism. White is mentioned just at the end of the song as one of the three colors that decorates Estonia. Officially, the values of light and purity are considered as important as the Estonian sky and soul, but the song suggests otherwise. The song implies that the tangible, natural aspects of their culture are more important to the Estonian identity than more universal ideals.

Throughout the August 19th celebration, Estonian nation’s love of nature is obvious. It can be seen in images of the Estonian countryside shown on two massive screens flanking the stage while choirs are singing. Several songs reference nature. In *Juba linnukesed* (labeled as the

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86 Exhibit at Estonian History Museum, Guild Hall Location [primary source]
Spring song), written by nineteenth century Estonian poet Karl August Hermann, people sing about the end of winter and beginning of spring (“as the sad dark hours start to go away”) and children named Minni, Manni, Juku, and Tonni are now able to explore the outdoors once again. As noted earlier, Eesti Lipp highlights the strong connections between the ethnic Estonian people and their peasant, rural heritage. Not only does the song mention the natural symbolism of two of the national colors, but one of the last lines of the song, “grain, shall you sprout well, may they be fully grown” is a direct reference to the Estonian agrarian lifestyle and the hope of Estonians for the bounty of harvests.

The closing songs for both the 100th year celebration and Laulupidu suggest that nature frames the way that Estonians view the world and their place in it. One song, Ta lendab mesipuu poole (“He Flies Towards the Beehive”) compares, for instance the ethnic Estonian to a bee and the Estonian homeland to a beehive. It states, “he flies from flower to flower, and flies towards his beehive/and though a thundercloud rises to the sky/he still flies towards his beehive.” The emotional symbolism becomes clearer in later stanzas as the people sing about how the Estonian soul longs for the fatherland regardless of where the person is. Overall the song hints at the significant efforts that Estonians make to maintain their connections to the homeland. The use of the bee metaphor demonstrates the way that Estonian people use nature to explain life and more complex ideas like survival, struggle and longing. Furthermore, the imagery of the bees and beehive highlight the connection and importance of family and community.

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88 KraChZiman, “Eesti Lipu Laul”. [primary source]
The other closing song of the festivals, *Mu isamaa on minu arm* (“My Fatherland is my love”), also reinforces the Estonian people’s strong emotional connection to the land. The song has historical significance to the Estonian people; it premiered at the inaugural Estonian song festival in 1869 and has lyrics written by Estonian poet Lydia Koidula (“Lydia of the Dawn”). Additionally, *Mu isamaa on minu arm* was the unofficial national anthem during the Soviet Occupation and served as the primary song of national resistance from 1969 to 1991. Although Koidula wrote the song before the common Estonian identity was fully formed, it has become a defining part of the Estonian national narrative.\(^90\) In *Mu isamaa on minu arm*, the people sing as the final stanza, “My Fatherland is my love, and I want to rest/I lay into your arms, My Sacred Estonia!/ Your birds will sing sleep to me/ you will bloom flowers from my ashes/ my fatherland, my fatherland!”\(^91\). With the natural imagery of Estonian beauty growing from the people’s ashes, the song directly links the body of the common Estonian to the land, joining the land-body spirits in such a way that cannot be separated even with death. Further, the cycle of life-death-growth seen in both man and nature allows for Estonians to conceptualize their mutual give and take relationship with the land as farmers, their own mortality, and their eventual acceptance of death.

The connection to nature continues to be a uniting force for contemporary Estonian people and is evident in more recent songs. Their affinity for a simple life in an Estonian village over cosmopolitan cities is most clearly seen in *Kauges Kūlas* (“In a distant village”; labeled in the program as the “sunbathing song”). The massively popular song was first released in 2014 by the American bluegrass-inspired Estonian band “Curly Strings” and won the award for Estonian

\(^90\) Bruggemann and Kasekamp, “‘Singing Oneself into a Nation?’,” 262.
song of the year in 2015. In the song, a female singer discusses living for a summer with her grandparents in a remote town that has no shops or ATMs. Although she did not find much to do there when she was young, she now reflects fondly on familial community, the empty beach, and the wild thyme of the area. The band performed the song live at the 100th year celebration. The song was the only contemporary popular song chosen for the celebration. The song’s quiet village remains symbolic to the modern Estonian people; it is a place of community, simplicity, and serenity, which is becoming increasingly rare in the modern era.

1.2.1 Children’s Songs

Of the 26 songs at the 100th year celebration, 5 were Estonian children’s songs. The event program did not label these songs as children’s songs; rather, the English translations referred to them as children’s songs. Children’s music is a central part of Estonian social life and development. Thousands of Estonian children regularly participate in youth or toddler choirs. The practice of group singing has been a part of Estonian primary school education since the 1930s. Estonian scholars Inge Raudsepp and Maie Vikat assert that music education teaches children group collaboration, coordination skills, listening skills, and national values. Since 1962, every five years (the last one being in 2017) Estonia holds a youth song and dance festival similar to Laulupidu, dedicated specifically to youth songs and dance traditions. Performers are mostly between the ages of 7 and 27. In 2007 more than 13 percent of the total youth

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95 Ibid., 105.
population participated in the youth song and dance festival.\(^{97}\) In 2017, approximately 30,000 youths (not including attendees), with the average age being 14, sang together on stage at the youth song festival.\(^{98}\) Youth (ages 11-20) increasingly participate in *Laulupidu* as well. Young children’s choirs have been allowed to participate in *Laulupidu* since 1999, thereby allowing children in Estonia to sing at large nationwide festivals once every 2-3 years.\(^{99}\)

Although Estonia is generally referred to as a ‘fatherland’, in *Ema süda* (“A Mother’s heart”), the concept of a mother’s love serves as a metaphor for the Estonian nation. While the majority of the stanzas directly refer to the purity and uniqueness of a mother’s heart, the first stanza noticeably does not. The opening lyrics are, “There’s a place in this world/Where there’s faithfulness, grace and happiness./All that’s so rare in this world/has found a safe haven there./All that’s so rare in this world/has found a safe haven there.”\(^{100}\) The next line continues with, “Do you know a mother’s heart? So tender, so sure, unchanged.” Until this direct mention of mother, the “place in this world” is expressed as a physical place. This rare “haven” provides a sanctuary of happiness from the surrounding world, which is supposedly lacking such qualities. One reason to believe that the song refers to Estonia as the safe haven in the first stanza is because the lyrics were written by nineteenth century Estonian poet Lydia Koidula.\(^{101}\) Lydia Koidula was the daughter of Estonian nationalist leader Johann Voldemar Jannsen. She is one of the most famous Estonian poets and wrote many nationalist poems, including the national anthem “My Fatherland Is My Love”. Koidula was known to depict Estonia as a divine, mystic

\(^{97}\) Raudsepp and Vikat, “Joint Singing as a Phenomenon,” 106.
\(^{98}\) Tambur, “Estonia’s Youth Song and Dance,” *Estonian World*.
\(^{99}\) “History,” *Eesti Laulu-ja tantsupeo SA*.
place for the Estonian people. By creating a song that discusses the importance of appreciating a mother’s love creates a powerful image that is understandable for young children and reminds people to cherish the purity of their life in Estonia.

The presence of children’s songs serves to unite the young and old, regardless of how much knowledge the individual may have about Estonian history and culture. At the 100th year celebration, three Estonian children—one girl and two boys—in traditional Estonian clothing sang Kaera-Jaan (labeled “the dance song”) and led everyone in an eponymous dance. Everyone on the grass ground around me was bouncing, clearly excited for the dance to start, and began a sequence of coordinated hand and foot movements, turning, and clapping that looked automatic. All ages smiled as they turned to dance partners to link hands for several portions of the three and a half minute song. The song became progressively louder as more people joined in and yelled the verses. The lyrics of the song are simple and repetitive, all relatively similar to this one stanza: “Oh Kaera Jann, oh Kaera Jann/ hop outside and go see!/ Has the rooster been in the oats,/have the chicken gone into the barley?” Therefore, it seems that the people’s sentiment of the song may be more powerful than the words themselves.

When reviewing the ERR publication of the Kaera-Jaan performance, I noticed that as part of the recording they added in clips of Estonians abroad in London doing the same dance on busy sidewalks and crosswalks throughout the foreign city, as seen below. It was unclear if this was previous or a live recording.

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Some of them were even wearing traditional Estonian clothing as they danced.

Throughout the 100th anniversary “Power of Song” performance the screens show video clips of Estonians in Washington, D.C., Rome, and Sweden singing along to the songs, which highlights how the songs help keep the Estonian identity alive in an increasingly global world. However, in these videos the Estonian people were standing by themselves and wearing contemporary clothing. The public display of song and dance demonstrates the strong commitment that the Estonian people have for their traditional culture; people are willing to disrupt the societal norms of other parts of the world for the chance of community.

1.3 The Estonian Das Volk

Based on my observations, I find that the song festivals remain a crucial part of contemporary Estonia. Although the majority of the songs date to the 19th century, the song festival experience has been modernized. There were food trucks lining the peripheral sidewalk, screens flanking the stage, and people sitting on blankets and taking photos with friends. But the

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power of the song celebration came from its older elements and traditions. When the Estonian people were dancing to *Kaera-Jann* or singing *Mu Isamaa on Minu Arm*, thousands were united in their voices, movements, and understanding of who they were as a people. Especially for the songs that consistently close *Laulupidu*—*Mu Isamaa on Minu Arm* and *Ta lendab mesipuu poole*—I noticed that many older festival attendees were choked up. Although Estonia is now independent and able to celebrate its 100th anniversary (it has only been 28 years since the fall of the Iron Curtain), the event reminds Estonians of previous time periods when the people were not free.

Estonian song festivals are a space where ethnically Estonian people come together as a community and remember the Estonian nation’s history and values. This purpose reflects the eighteenth century German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder’s idea of *das Volk* (the people). To Herder, *das Volk* was the “common man” who was the most uncorrupted safe keeper of the nation’s authenticity and soul. In many historical national narratives, including Estonia’s, *das Volk* was the uneducated peasant who had not been sullied by outside forces or other ethnicities or cultures. In the first national awakening, Estonian intellectuals collected the various folk songs and tales as a way for them to identify and preserve the Estonian *Volk*. Indeed, Herder asserted that singing has a direct impact on the defining of *das Volk* and the creation of community. Although the concept of *das Volk* is more than two hundred years old, the song festivals are serving as contemporary active representations of the accepted *das Volk*, embodied within the 19th century Estonian peasant.

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My use of the term *das Volk* to describe the song festivals is not without reservation. Since the era of Estonia’s first national awakening, *Volk* has become a highly polarizing term. In Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler associated the Aryan *Volk* with racial purity and justified mass exclusion and mistreatment as a means to protect the *Volk*.107 After World War II, the protection/use of *das Volk* has become associated with government-supported ethnic violence, bigotry, xenophobia, and conservatism. Even today, the contemporary Alternative for Germany party, a radical right political party that won 94 seats in German Parliament in 2017, proclaims protection of the German *Volk* by promising anti-immigration policies.108 Similar ultranationalist right wing political parties have become popular in Poland (The Law and Justice Party) and Hungary (Jobbik Party), promoting ‘clean blood’ nationalism and ethnic purity at the expense of democratic values.109 Although *das Volk* is associated with violence and extremism, I will continue to use it to describe the Estonian song festivals because the term captures the emotive and ancestral elements of the national identity.

The song festivals embody the Estonian *Volk* because of its inherent physical quality. Scholars Karsten Brüggemann and Andres Kasekamp who previously analyzed the impact of *Laulupidu* asserted that these mass gatherings allow for members of the community to feel interconnected and interdependent.110 They determined that the national singing tradition serves

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110 Brüggemann and Kasekamp, “‘Singing oneself into a nation?’,” 260.
as a ‘real’ ritualistic counterpart to the ‘imagined’ national myth.\textsuperscript{111} It is in the moment of performance ritual that the people construct an insurmountable and unquestioned reality of their nation, projecting national resiliency and community regardless of actual conditions.\textsuperscript{112} The idea of the ideal Estonian as the hardworking and persevering peasant is temporarily actualized and brought into the real life. My analysis of the festival adds to their previous research by analyzing the songs themselves rather than the festival holistically. The song lyrics preserve the Estonian myths and national values of appreciating nature and simple lives. Although lyrics are only a few words, Herder proclaimed that when they are sung they gain significantly more meaning.\textsuperscript{113} Through singing, the songs represent the nation in visceral, audial, and visual ways. The Estonian songs allow for members of the nation to bind the national community under a clear, visual metaphor\textsuperscript{114}. As a person sings about bees flying towards the hive, he recognizes his fellow members striving towards the nation and ultimate salvation in the national identity.

The Estonian people, through their songs, dance, and clothing, personify \textit{das Volk}. They wear anachronistic clothing based on the Estonian “common man” that looks like an ethnographic exhibit of 19\textsuperscript{th} century Estonian culture at the \textit{Estonian National Museum}. They sing songs that laud their connection to Estonian soil when many Estonian people today do not toil the land themselves. The embodiment of \textit{das Volk} in this temporary space is one of the only ways that contemporary Estonians can relate to the 19\textsuperscript{th} century Estonian narrative.

\textsuperscript{111} Brüggemann and Kasekamp, “‘Singing oneself into a nation?’,” 260.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 273.
\textsuperscript{113} Mondelli, “Singing Print, Reading Song,” 379.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 380.
Figure 1-4: Photo I took of teenage girl performers, 100th year celebration

The Estonian people make many efforts to embody the *das Volk* peasant because he does not really exist in contemporary Estonia. Throughout the twentieth century, urbanization and modernization strategies resulted in the majority of the Estonian population moving from rural villages into urban environments.\(^{115}\) In 2018, nearly 70 percent of the Estonian population lived in an urban environment yet none of the songs sung at the festival praised this type of lifestyle.\(^{116}\) The country’s population has not been homogenous since the 1950s, when significant numbers of Russian speakers migrated into the country. None of the songs at the 100\(^{th}\) anniversary celebration mentioned diversity of the population. A significant portion of the contemporary population is bilingual in English and the global mass culture has impacted Estonia. Only the newly applied song labels have been officially translated into English. The spirit of the “common man” still lives on within these song environments and is clearly the driving force of many of the

\(^{115}\) Estonian History Museum—Guild Hall Location [primary source]

\(^{116}\) “Urban population (% of total),” *The World Bank*,
festival choices still implemented today because that is what uniquely appeals and unites people who are ethnically Estonians.

Additionally, the song festivals highlight one of the main tensions between the civic and ethnic nationalism dichotomy. The Estonian song festivals’ connection to the Estonian das Volk establishes the song festivals as a form of ethnic nationalism. As discussed in the introduction of the thesis, ethnic nationalism is a form of nationalism based upon the race, history, and culture of a particular group.\textsuperscript{117} Political scholars have consistently critiqued this form of nationalism, stereotyping ethnic nationalism as focusing too much on community, infringing on individual rights, and only taking place in societies that have developed unsuccessfully.\textsuperscript{118} Additionally, ethnic nationalism, like das Volk, has become associated with violence.

Elements of the ethnically Estonian culture and stereotypical ethnic nationalism can be seen throughout the event. Singers wear traditional Estonian clothing for the purpose of embodying the ethnic Estonian peasant farmer who lived during a time of subjugation by Baltic Germans and Russians. The song festival, by nature, is a group activity where people’s individual voices become lost within the massive sea of others to make a culminating sound. The event is not completely open to all because of the Estonian language requirement. Estonia then seems to fall on the wrong side of nationalism.

\textbf{1.4 Conclusion}

The song festivals, initially used to unite the Estonian people during the first national awakening, continually reinforce the Estonian people’s pride in their country. Based upon onsite observation and analysis of the songs and performances at the Estonian 100\textsuperscript{th} year celebration, the song festival demonstrates a continued emphasis on the nineteenth century construction of

\textsuperscript{117} Coakley, “National Identity and the ‘Kohn Dichotomy’,” 254.
\textsuperscript{118} Kuzio, “The myth of the civic state,” 22.
Estonian Volk, which is still thought to be the purest essence of the Estonian soul. The performances unite the Estonian people in the “common man” spirit and provide an opportunity for Estonians to fully embody their folk values in the modern world. This presentation of ethnic nationalism supported by the contemporary state and the ethnic Estonian population demonstrates that the contemporary nation still bases itself on its ethnicity, despite demographic and cultural changes to the region. The celebration links Estonia to the concept of an ethnic nation and the implications of this identity. In the next two chapters, I will identify ways that the state, not the nation, has tried to cope with this stereotype by promoting new official narratives that do not focus on the Estonian folk.
Chapter 2: Estonia’s Desire for European Solidarity

On my first full day in Tallinn, I paused at a stereotypical souvenir shop’s window front in the Old Town Center. What caught my eye about this storefront were the rows of tiny Vikings, moose, and troll figurines encased in packaging with the label “Nordic gifts”. These items strongly reminded me of my previous trips to Sweden and Norway where the gift shops essentially consisted only of Vikings, moose, and troll references. But these countries were on the other side of the Baltic Sea hundreds of miles away. I had not expected to see these items in Estonia. Did these items that I knew from other cultures represent Estonia as well? Throughout my time in Tallinn I kept reflecting on this question. Based on my museum experiences, it seems that museums were trying to convince me that the answer to my question was yes.

I will analyze the historical narratives presented at the Tallinn City Museum and the Estonian History Museum at The Great Guild (both located in the Old Town Center of Tallinn). These two museums include Estonian history before 1850. This time period is before the beginning of Estonia’s first national awakening in the 1860s, when the collective Estonian identity began to emerge. The Tallinn City Museum, opened in 1937, is located in an old merchant home within the old town center and provides a comprehensive history of Tallinn from the medieval era (when it was part of the Danish Empire) through Estonian independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The museum seeks to “preserve, present, and research the history and rich cultural heritage of Tallinn.”\footnote{“Organization,” Tallinn City Museum, \url{https://linnamuuseum.ee/en/tlm-organisation/organization/} (Accessed February 19, 2019).} The Estonian History Museum at The Great Guild Location (hereafter The Great Guild) has been open since 1952—initially as the Estonian SSR Museum of Natural History—and is part of the larger Estonian History Museum located on the outskirts of
Tallinn. The Great Guild location was historically a meeting place for members of Tallinn’s Great Guild, a powerful mercantile association during the medieval era. Since 2011, the museum has contained “11,000 years of Estonian History” (the year is in reference to when settlers first inhabited Estonia).\(^{121}\)

The historical narratives presented at these museums depict imagined solidarity and idealized large communities that support the Estonian state. The narratives position the Estonian state as ‘European’ by establishing the territory’s cultural and historical ties with various European states. Additionally, the museums attempt to establish separation between contemporary Estonia and its Soviet/Russian past. Overall, the museum exhibits hint at the state’s perception of its precarious location between ‘Europe’ and ‘not-Europe’.

### 2.1 Is Estonia a European Country?

Estonia has been an independent state for only about 50 years in two segments (1918-1939 and 1991-today). Other times, the territory has been part of numerous empires and kingdoms. Outside of these 50 years, the people who identified as Estonian were not the people in control of the region locally; instead, wealthy Baltic Germans had power over the trade and the peasant population (the Estonian people). It was only in 1918 that members of the Estonian nation had the opportunity to gain power and claim autonomy.

Despite this short history, The Great Guild and the Tallinn City Museum attempt to demonstrate the historical depth of Estonian identity. At the Tallinn City Museum, the basement and entire first floor of the museum present the history of Tallinn between the 12\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\)


centuries. It mentions people identifying as nationally Estonian in the 17th century even though that term did not exist for another 200 years. The main exhibit at *The Great Guild* focuses on “11,000 years of Estonian history.” I initially found the museum’s focus on Estonia’s very early origins puzzling. Estonia was currently celebrating its 100th anniversary of independence. Additionally, I knew that natives did not identify as Estonian until after 1857, the year when Johann Voldemar Jannsen first officially called the people of the region “Estonians” in his newspaper. Yet the time frame emphasizes the contemporary Estonian nation-state’s historical justification over its territory. Through their presentation of small trinkets and artifacts dating back thousands of years, the museums create a link between the ancient tribal settlers and contemporary residents. These exhibits suggest that *The Great Guild* and the *Tallinn City Museum* are acting as tools of the Estonian state in order to help protect its legitimacy over the territory’s expansive history.

The exhibits at *The Great Guild* characterize Estonia’s history as a subjected, powerless territory. The museum states that it provides a captivating overview of Estonian history through exhibits on the previous functions of the Great Guild Hall and Estonian coins. What the description does not mention is that the exhibits make considerable references to several other states in Europe. The first room included a film titled “11,000 years of Estonian history.” The film, narrated by a personified *Spirit of Survival* of the Estonian people, spends the first half of the video reviewing how people created the first settlement in Estonia near modern-day Pärnu. During the 12th-19th centuries, Danes, Swedes, and Russians divided Estonia into small feudal states. The *Spirit of Survival* states that the people of the region were exposed to Christianity and Danish, Swedish, and Russian cultures through the Estonian Crusades (1208-1227), Livonian

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122 Tartu Song Festival Museum [primary source]; Estonian History Museum, Guild Hall location [primary source]
123 “Spirit of Survival. 11,000 Years of Estonian History,” *Estonian History Museum.*
War (1558-1583), and the Great Northern War (1700-1721). An exhibit on an adjacent wall highlights when the territory of Estonia first likely appeared on maps depicting Europe (as early as the twelfth century but clearly by the fifteenth century). In a different room, an exhibit titled “How Many Rulers Have There Been In Estonia?” states that 10 different powers (the previously listed empires and multiple German military orders) have controlled Estonia in the last 800 years. Another exhibit, titled “Is Estonia a Nordic Country?” aligns Estonia to a group of Northern European countries that includes Sweden and Denmark. Although the purpose of the museum focuses exclusively on Estonia, the museum is choosing to emphasize Estonia’s historical, cultural, and political connections with other countries located in Europe.

The Tallinn City Museum also illustrates the influence that other countries and ethnic groups have on the development of Tallinn. Because Tallinn is located on the Baltic Sea, the city served as an important port and fortress from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries. One of the earliest historical periods depicted in the museum describes how Vikings would stop in the region on their travels to Novgorod (in contemporary Russia). The Danes, who conquered Tallinn and the surrounding northern portion of contemporary Estonia in the thirteenth century, fostered commercial growth. A map of the Hanseatic League, a merchant organization that dominated economic activity in Northern Europe between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, shows how Tallinn was connected to distant cities such as London, Bergen, Hamburg, and Novgorod. On this map, “Tallinn” is referred to by its Danish name “Reval”, which it was called until 1918. Tallinn’s port was called “New Holland” during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, demonstrating that even after the Danes lost control of Tallinn in the 16th century there

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124 Exhibit, Estonian History Museum
were still strong international influences. These exhibits highlight that since its earliest days, Tallinn and its inhabitants have always been connected to other groups throughout Europe.

These museum narratives are an example of the Estonian state’s efforts to insert Estonia into the European community. Between 1991 and 2004 (the dates of Estonian independence from the Soviet Union and Estonia’s acceptance into the European Union, respectively), Estonian state officials promoted Estonia’s “return to Europe” to a global audience.126 This ‘return to Europe’ was not simply a reference to Estonia gaining independence from the Soviet Union and now having access to Western Europe. To post-Soviet state officials, Estonia’s ‘return to Europe’ was symbolic of the country’s return to ‘normalcy’.127 Additionally, the phrase implied that Estonia had previously been a part of Europe, but Soviet Occupation had severed its connection. Therefore, the state chose to reemphasize the country’s connections to Europe and make parallels between Estonia and modern European countries. For example, former Estonian President Lennart Meri stated in 1998 that during the first century, Estonia had already been economically integrated into the Roman Empire.128 President Meri also added that because Estonia had been a member of the Hanseatic League, or as he called it the ‘previous European Union’, it historically had a variety of European attributes.129 The museums did not mention the Roman Empire or compare the Hanseatic League to the European Union; however, they have adopted this version of the state’s political message and provided it a legitimate space for domestic and international audiences.

129 Ibid., 97.
The Estonian state’s efforts highlight the ambiguity of the European label. ‘European’ does not refer to countries represented on a contemporary map of the continent of Europe. As shown at *The Great Guild*, the territory of contemporary Estonia has been recorded on maps depicting the continent of Europe for centuries. However, the “return to Europe” phrase implies a separation between Estonia and Europe. The geopolitical line between “Europe” and “Not Europe” is not a stark, definitive line determined by the EU or Schengen Area. Rather the boundary of Europe is an amorphous, unclear enclosure; it is a constructed entity that may change depending upon political and cultural conditions.\(^{130}\)

The European identity roots itself in specific religious ideals and cultural moments in the last several hundred years. Historical scholars Alberto Martinelli and Gavin Murray-Miller have determined that Christianity (specifically Catholicism and Protestantism), the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment are the basis of European identity.\(^{131}\) Today, countries located in the northwestern area of the European continent including the United Kingdom and Scandinavia (Sweden, Denmark) have the most secure claims to the European identity because they share this history and do not have any threatening foreign powers (Russia, African countries, Middle East, etc.) on their borders.\(^{132}\) They argue that the following characteristics define the European identity: unprecedented industrial and commercial world order, open societies that protect individual freedoms, and the development of critical thinking skills that allow members of society to challenge societally accepted conceptions.\(^{133}\) The European identity has also become

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\(^{133}\) Martinelli, “European Identity,” 7; Murray-Miller, “Civilization, Modernity and Europe,” 421.
closely linked with the concept of modernity. Murray-Miller asserts that the term European emerged in the eighteenth century in France and the United Kingdom along with the Enlightenment idea of civilization; the French Revolution cemented the relationship between the two ideas as people in French society fought for and created a new society based on moral and modern values. The two terms became linked—to be European was to be civilized and to be civilized was to be European—and ultimately justified European countries’ power and authority over uncivilized places throughout the world. The European identity and roots cemented the inverse idea as well: that to be uncivilized meant that you were not European.

The Cold War cemented the European/non-European paradigm as a continent-wide class system. After World War II ended in 1945, the countries on the continent were divided under two ideological ideals: states were either democratic capitalist states (usually Western Europe) or communist under the Soviet Union’s influence (Eastern and Central Europe). Western/Northern Europe became simply known as ‘Europe’ and the protector of peace while the Soviet Union and its satellite states like Czechoslovakia emerged as the threatening non-European other that bordered European countries. Despite the Soviet Union collapsing more than twenty years ago, the European/non-European dichotomy still exists as a cultural, religious, social border; however, the borders between Europe and non-Europe have become increasingly blurry as states become more interconnected.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia has kept its non-European status. In addition to Russia’s communist past, Russia does not have historical connections to the three listed factors of the European Identity. Russia did not experience the Renaissance because

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136 Ibid., 422.
138 Ibid., 262.
the Mongols controlled Russia from 1238 to 1462, cutting the territory off from the West.\textsuperscript{139} Additionally, Russia has strong relations with Russian Orthodoxy (a sect of Christianity very different from Catholicism and Protestantism).

In the museum narratives discussed, I suggest that Estonia is attempting to prove that it is European and therefore not uncivilized. Given that state officials thought that the state had to ‘return to Europe’, they recognized that Estonia was not considered a European country in 1991. The country’s status as formerly part of the Soviet Bloc positioned Estonia as a semi-European place on the borderland between Europe and not-Europe. Former President Meri acknowledged Estonia’s precarious position during his presidency. In 1999, he stated that “only a small push is needed to make us [the Estonian nation-state] fall into one side [Russia] or rise into the other [Europe].”\textsuperscript{140} The former Estonian President’s use of the words ‘rise’ and ‘fall’ to describe Estonia’s possible fate demonstrates the state’s belief that Russia was a threatening, ‘not European’ country. While the quote is from 1999, researcher Alena Pfoser highlights that the border between Estonia and Russia still serves as a deep-seated civilizational divide between Europe and not-Europe.\textsuperscript{141} The continued credence in the perceived civilizational divide indicates a connection between Estonia, the museum narratives, and the European/non-European dichotomy.

Therefore, my reading of the museums is that they stress historical relationships with European countries, even those that were contentious. The most prime example at the museums is in relation to the Baltic Germans. Before 1940, the rule of Baltic Germans in Tallinn was depicted as ‘700 years of slavery’ and, as described by Vahur Made in his research on Estonian

\textsuperscript{139}W.R. Morfell, “Russia Under the Mongols (1238-1462),” \textit{Russia China and Eurasia} 30 no.5/6 (2014): 503.

\textsuperscript{140} Feldman, “European Integration,” 11.

historical narratives, “German conquest interrupted the existence of an independent nation and blocked free communication between the Estonians and the rest of Europe for centuries.”142 But the discussion of German people and influence in Estonia at the Tallinn City Museum does not show this narrative. Instead, during the expansion of Tallinn in the seventeenth century, the museum states that, “the builders of Tallinn came mostly from the vicinity of the town and were Estonians, Swedes, or Finns, only about a third of them might have been Germans. In construction the need for labour was so pressing that nationality was not considered when people appealed for mastership.” The inclusion of the last sentence was initially perplexing to me because the concept of “nationality” did not fully exist for any of these countries in the seventeenth century. The emphasis on a multinational group constructing this city highlights that not only did the city function as a multicultural town but that multiculturalism was in its brick and mortar. In another section of the Tallinn City Museum, titled “First books in the Estonian Language”, the museum states that, “One of the most important reforms of the Lutheran Church [a sect of Protestantism] was the service in the national languages. Thanks to the translations of ecclesiastical material, the Estonian written language was born. The first books published [in the Estonian language] were catechisms.” In other words, the Lutheran Church, which originated in Germany, was directly responsible for the codification and publication of the Estonian language. It appears that the current state promotes a previously strained relationship with German culture and peoples because it is that narrative that serves its current political goal.143

2.2 Separating Contemporary Estonia from Russian influence

These two museums reflect select portions of Estonia’s relationship with Russia. Russia and the Soviet Union have significantly impacted Estonia since 1710 when Tsar Peter the Great gained control of Estonia during the Great Northern War. During the late nineteenth century, Tsar Alexander III began to enforce “Russification” policies. These policies mandated that Estonian people know the Russian language and increased the presence of the Russian Orthodoxy and culture. Estonia later gained independence from the Russian Empire in 1918, but was then a part of the Soviet Union between 1939 and 1991. Although Estonia has been an independent county since 1991, it remains geographically linked with Russia because of their shared border.

The *Tallinn City Museum* highlights the oppressive nature of Soviet Occupation. On the top floor of the *Tallinn City Museum*, there is a room devoted to the time period of 1939-1991. Three walls are painted bright red, a symbolic color of the Soviet Union, and covered in photos, letters, and examples of propaganda from World War II and the early Soviet era. The portion that struck me the most was the exhibit’s physical reconstruction of an Iron curtain. As seen below, metal-looking bars have been placed in front of the room’s only white wall. On the wall there are icons of Estonian culture, such as Estonian national colors and dress, advertisements for a shipping company, and “MTV”.

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144 *Tallinn City Museum* exhibit
Initially when looking at this wall I thought that the images represented aspects of capitalist, western life Soviet Estonia was cut off from (largely due to me associating MTV with the popular western television network). However, upon further study, I realized that the white wall represented Estonia. I think that this distinction is important: I look at the wall from the perspective of an outsider rather than someone looking out from the enclosed Estonia.

In addition to this imagery, the exhibit makes it clear that the Soviet Union was a detrimental, oppressive time for Estonia. Right before I entered the room for Soviet Occupation was the passage:

On 28 September 1939 Estonia was forced to sign the mutual assistance pact [with the Soviet Union]…Estonia became a Soviet republic on 6 August 1940. In the occupation period Estonia was separated from the western world behind the so-called Iron curtain. The Customary democratic system of life was disrupted; enterprises were nationalized. Mass deportations, arrests, escapes to the West and victims of the Second Cold War together decreased the population by 17.5 per cent. Everything was dictated from Moscow and carried out by the communist party. Every new idea was suppressed and
declared bourgeois nationalism. The colonization of the Russian-speaking population was favored by granting them jobs in the economic sphere and government system. In fifty years the nation that had had been almost homogenous was turned into a state where there were only about 60 per cent of Estonians left. The democratic as well as economic development was restrained for 50 years. Thanks to the break-up of the Soviet Union and the so-called singing revolution Estonia became an independent democratic republic again in 1991.

This passage, which provides a general overview of the Occupation Era, frames Soviet Occupation as the disruptive, divisive agent that separated Estonia from the west. Before even entering the exhibit, the museum presents Soviet forces and mentality as the causes that derided Estonia from its path as a democratic nation-state. In this text, the Soviet forces are the only occupiers mentioned. However, another group impacted Estonia during this time period. During World War II, the Nazi regime had sole control over Estonia between 1941 and 1944 and deported/killed thousands of Estonians, but the text does not mention this.145 Instead, it proposes an uninterrupted narrative of Soviet Occupation of Estonia beginning unofficially in 1939. By doing so, the exhibit suggests that all of the blame for Estonian suffering is because of the Soviet regime. Additionally, the last sentence of the text seems almost idyllic; it implies that since the oppressor is gone Estonia can go back the norm it had prior to Soviet Occupation.

The text naturalizes the idea that Estonia, when independent, is a democratic republic. It claims that the Soviets disrupted Estonia’s customary democratic system, which suggests that there was one to disrupt. This idea is false. Between 1934 and 1940, an authoritarian regime led by Estonian President Konstantin Päts controlled Estonia.146 Therefore, the Tallinn City Museum is presenting a narrative that positions Estonia in direct contrast to the Soviet Union’s power and ideology rather than imply any possible similarity.

146 Brüggemann and Kasekamp, “‘Singing oneself into a nation’?,” 265.
Moving forward, I do not want to dismiss the suffering of the Estonian people and society under Soviet Occupation in my analysis of museum narratives. It was a traumatic, oppressive time period, especially during World War II and the Stalin Era (1945-1953). Rather, I want to point out the promoted Soviet narrative before demonstrating ways that museums erase the continuing traces of Russian/Soviet history on contemporary Estonia.

The Tallinn City Museum restricts the narrative regarding Russia’s impact on Tallinn to the Soviet Era. Little information is presented regarding any other time of history outside of that 50-year period, despite Estonia’s 300 years of history with Russia. For example, on the second floor of the museum is a room filled with maps and dioramas devoted to Tallinn’s growth and changes over several centuries. When Tallinn was part of the Russian Empire, the reigning Czars commissioned several significant building projects, such as a new harbor (completed in 1722), factories, Kadriorg Palace (completed in 1725), and Alexander Nevsky Cathedral (completed in 1900). The latter two continue to be important buildings in contemporary Tallinn; Kadriorg Palace operates as an art museum and Alexander Nevsky Cathedral (noteworthy on Tallinn’s skyline) serves the Russian Orthodox community in Tallinn. Yet the section of the exhibit that discusses building construction in Tallinn during this time frame does not mention any of these buildings; the narrative talks only about Estonian buildings, such as the Estonian Theater built in 1913. The museum ignores any building associated with Russia. This omission does not impact the Russian buildings’ existence or their value in Tallinn society. Therefore, the museum exhibit demonstrates a theoretical ideal of Tallinn untainted by Russian influence because only by removing it from the narrative can Tallinn exist as only Estonian and European.

The Great Guild undervalues the Soviet Era when talking about Russian immigration into Estonia. At The Great Guild, an area of the museum is devoted specifically to minorities in
Estonia. The exhibit discusses the “arrival, stay, and new beginnings” of different minority groups, such as Russians, Jews, Latvians, Swedes, and Finns. For the section on Russians, the museum asserts that, “Russian immigration to Estonia occurred in large waves due to the persecution of ‘Old Believers’ [a niche sect of Russian Orthodoxy] during tsarist Russia, the policy of Russification, and 19th and 20th century industrialization.” The quote provides a broad narrative on Russian immigration. While the persecution of the Old Believers does refer to a specific group of Russians, industrialization encapsulates a 200-year period. The museum does not differentiate between the industrialization efforts made by the Estonian state in the interwar period (1918-1939) and the later forced Soviet industrialization policies in the 1940s and 1950s. However, multiple scholars of Estonian history have noted that hundreds of thousands of Russians immigrated to Estonia during the Soviet era. The text at the Tallinn City Museum shown previously states that the ethnically Estonian population decreased from almost 100 to 60 percent during Russian colonization, which strongly suggests that the Soviet Era was when the most Russians entered Estonia. Yet the broad narrative hides this fact, not distinguishing any moment of history as being more influential than the others. Therefore, The Great Guild’s exhibit seems to be minimizing the impact of the Soviet Era on the Estonian state.

Additionally, when the museum provides details on the lives of Russians in Estonia, it focuses predominately on a small group of Russians who came to Estonia before World War II. The museum states that there were, “two culturally separate groups of Russians that settled in Estonia, the Old Believers being the more distinctive of the two.” The museum refers to the other group as simply “Russians” (even though the term is still applicable to the Old Believers as they are also ethnically Russian). On subsequent panels the museum provides a glimpse into the lives

of the Old Believers during the early twentieth century, stating how the Old Believers made a living in Estonia by fishing and growing ‘famous’ onions. The museum presents a near idyllic image, suggesting that the Old Believers enjoyed their life in Estonia. When discussing the Soviet Era, the museum states that, “the Stalinist repression of 1940s also affected the lives of the local Russians. Their organizations and publications were banned…” Next to the text is an image of rubble with the caption, “in 1944 the Soviet army destroyed Old Believer settlements on the Western shores of Lake Peipus [lake on Estonia’s Eastern border] with canons.” On this slide, although the museum initially states ‘Russians were affected’, based on the image provided the museum only shows how the Old Believers were affected. The last sentence of the Russian portion of the exhibit mentions how Old Believers have had a cultural reawakening since Estonian independence, finishing the museum’s narrative arch on Old Believers in Estonia. The museum is providing more information on the Old Believers than on the other, less distinct Russians, suggesting that they made up a significant portion of the Russian minority population. However, Old Believers have historically only made up a minute percentage of the overall Russian population in Estonia. In 1897, there were only about 6,700 Old Believers in Estonia. The museum states that in 1934 there were approximately 92,000 Russians living in Estonia. The 1934 census recorded 5,276 Old Believers living in Estonia, making up less ten percent of the Russian minority population and less than one percent of Estonia’s population. They still do not have large representation in Estonia. In 2011, there were only about 2,600 Old Believers living in Estonia. In other words, the museum’s narrative on the Russian minority does not

148 Jaanus Plaat, “The Identity and Demographic Situation of Russian Old Believers in Estonia (With Regard to the Period of the 18th to the Early 21st century),” *Pro Ethnologia* 19 (2005): 10. [publication supported by the Estonian National Museum]


accurately reflect the majority experience. Rather than ending the exhibit on a reflection of the group’s holistic experiences in contemporary Estonia, it specifically focuses only on a group that makes up approximately 0.2 percent of the current population (contemporary state population’s is 1.3 million).

The museum’s final panels featuring different minority groups highlight the museum’s biased treatment of these groups in contemporary Estonia. The last panels for other minority groups, such as the Swedish and Jewish populations in Estonia, specifically focused on life after 1991. The panel discussing the Russians is noticeably vague about life after 1991. The last panel of the Russian portion of the exhibit the museum asserts that in 1960 the 240,000 Russians in Estonia did not have a united cultural network because of different backgrounds and social diversity within the population. The last panels of the respective minority groups include images that supposedly represent the lives of these groups in contemporary Estonia. The last image of the Russian population in Estonia, which is included below, is from 1940 (approximately when the Soviet Union first gained control over Estonia).

![Image](image.png)

Figure 2-2 Last Image of Estonian Russians at the National Minorities exhibit, *The Great Guild* (photo taken in 1940)
The photo was taken in Kohtla-Järve, a town in the northeastern part of Estonia (near Narva), approximately 55 kilometers from the Estonia-Russian border and 150 kilometers from Tallinn. I’ve also included the last photos for the Jewish and Swedish portions of the national minorities exhibit. The Jewish population one was taken at the opening of a new synagogue in Tallinn and the Swedish population one was taken at the Swedish St. Michael’s Church of Tallinn.

Figure 2-3 Last Image of the Estonian Swedish Population at the National Minorities Exhibit, *The Great Guild* (date unspecified)
There are stark differences. The photos of the Swedish and Jewish populations are high definition and in color and were clearly taken more recently than the photo of the Russians, which is now almost 80 years old. A group of young innocent-looking children represents the Swedish population whereas a group of stoic, uncomforting middle-age men represents the Russian population. Additionally, the photos of Estonia’s Jewish and Swedish populations present the groups at religious sites in Tallinn. The Russians are shown at an industrial mine located far outside of Tallinn. While the former images focus on religion and community, the image of Russians is a work activity devoid of obvious cultural references. Given that the previous portions of the Russian exhibit focused specifically on Old Believers, Russians known for their specific practice of Russian Orthodoxy, the industrial image is an odd depiction. The museum’s choice to not show Russians in a religious place is also odd because state officials know that the Russian population is religious. In 2011, the government agency Statistics Estonia published a census that showed that 50 percent of the Russian population felt affiliated with Russian Orthodoxy, significantly higher than the national rate of religious affiliation of 29
percent.\textsuperscript{151} The dissimilarities in the minority groups’ representation ultimately suggest the theme that the Jewish and Swedish communities are members of contemporary Estonian society and actively participate within the Tallinn community and the Russians are members of Estonia only in the state’s past.

Statistically, however, Russians make up a significant portion of contemporary Estonia’s population. During the Soviet Era, almost 600,000 Russian-speaking people, predominately from Russia but from other Russian-speaking areas like Ukraine and Belarus, entered the region.\textsuperscript{152} The last statistic shown from 1960 (240,000 Russians living in Estonia) is less than half the number of Russian speakers who eventually lived in Estonia during the twentieth century. Russian minorities still make up approximately 25% of Estonia’s population—the second largest ethnic group in Estonia, population-wise (behind Estonian)—but there is nothing in the display to indicate such a significant number. All but the last display focuses on the era before 1940, the period prior to the time of Soviet immigration policies when the Russian minority group made up only 10 percent of the total population.\textsuperscript{153} The exhibit provides an outdated portrayal of Russians that is not reflective of contemporary Estonia’s Russian population. In contrast, the other national minorities represented in the display, with modern depictions of their culture shown, make up a minute portion of Estonia’s population. All of the non-Russian national groups mentioned in this section are among the 142 ethnic groups that make up approximately 2% of contemporary Estonia’s population.\textsuperscript{154}

The museums’ gaps and differences in narrative indicate to me that Estonia is ambivalent about its Russian affiliations. It is not incidental perhaps that Russia is not considered to be a

\textsuperscript{151} Statistics Estonia, 2011, “PHC 2011: Over a Quarter of the Population are Affiliated With a Particular Religion”.
\textsuperscript{152} Sjöstedt, “Beyond Compliance,”166.
\textsuperscript{153} Tallinn City Museum Exhibit
European state. The museums are part of an ambiguous narrative largely informed about what it means to be European/non-European. As Merje Kuus asserted, the Estonian state officials believe that any admission of Russian history that is not one of oppression would be detrimental to state development because it would immediately undermine Estonia’s claims as a European state. The Tallinn City Museum’s exhibit on the Soviet Era adds to Estonia’s claim to European-ness because it contrasts Estonia with the Soviet Union ideologically and economically, connecting Estonia with values and systems of traditionally European states. Kuus’ assertion is why I believe the other two exhibits at the Tallinn City Museum and The Great Guild choose to diminish the Russian narrative. A demonstration of the lives of Russians living in contemporary Estonia and practicing Russian Orthodoxy or attending Russian-language schools would highlight the actual diversity of the Estonian state’s ethnic demographics. It would indicate that Estonia’s claim to European identity is not definitive because the impact of the non-European period of history still lingers within Estonia.

2.3 Conclusion

The historical narratives presented at the Tallinn City Museum and the Estonian History Museum – The Great Guild are a product of the state’s ‘return to Europe’ campaign of the late 1990s and early 2000s. The museums reframe Estonia’s history of subjugation so that it can be part of the ancient European community. The exhibits base themselves on the constructed ideas of what it means to be part of the imagined, amorphous community that is Europe. Additionally, the exhibits attempt to demonstrate Estonia’s European characteristics while separating Estonia from its contemporary non-European/Russian features. However, because the museums create narratives based predominately on this constructed geopolitical categorization, I believe that the

museums suggest the Estonian state’s ambivalence towards its Russian associations and its place as a country on the ‘borderlands’. The museums’ narratives subtly perpetuate Estonia’s status as a state susceptible to either powerful influence (Europe or Russia) rather than a fully sovereign state.
Chapter 3: The Strife Over European Acceptance and ‘Freedom’

On the bus ride from downtown Tartu to the *Estonian National Museum*, which is located on the outskirts of Tartu, all I initially see are green flat plains and trees. Then on the horizon a dark shape appears in my vision, growing bigger and bigger as the bus approaches. When I get off the bus, I am standing in front of the massive black box that is the *Estonian National Museum*. The organic world and bright August summer day contrast with its rigid straight lines and progressively darker exterior. To enter the museum, I must walk under the building’s jutted roof. The shade encapsulates me. Once I enter, I am surrounded by light from the rows of windows on both sides of the building and from the building’s white interior walls and furniture. Ergo, the architectural design of the building creates and then dispels an internal tension. While I do not know the cause or origin of that tension, when I enter into the light I feel it has been resolved. The surrounding stress is intended to be a metaphor for Estonia’s recent history. In reality, I will assert that many of the Estonian tensions—the Soviet Past and European identity—are not completely resolved.

In this chapter, I will highlight the *Vabamu: Museum of Occupations and Freedom* (hereafter *Vabamu*) and the *Estonian National Museum*’s presentations of ‘freedom’. The *Vabamu* opened in Tallinn in 2003, around the same time of Estonia’s acceptance into the EU, and focuses on the Nazi and Soviet Occupation of Estonia from 1940-1991.\(^{157}\) The *Estonian National Museum* opened in Tartu in 2016 and provides an ethnographic display of Estonian and other cultures. Although the *Vabamu* is older than the *Estonian National Museum*, in 2018 its permanent exhibit was completely redone, making both exhibits less than three years old. These museums have accommodations for those who speak English, Estonian, Russian, French,

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Finnish, or Spanish. Each of the museums greets a significant number of international visitors, with nearly 50 percent of the Vabamu’s annual attendance visiting from another country. Although most of the 13 museums I visited in Estonia discuss ‘freedom’ in some capacity, I found that only these two museums incorporated freedom throughout the museum experience and took the conversation of ‘freedom’ beyond that of Estonian independence.

The museums’ narration of freedom provides a conflicted view on Estonia in the larger geopolitical climate. The full embodiment of ‘freedom’ that occurs in these two spaces creates an idyllic perspective on Estonia’s place in Europe. The museums’ narration on freedom is another example of the Estonian government’s continuing campaign to be a European state. However, the topic of ‘freedom’ in Estonia has become increasingly tense because of Estonia’s relationship with the EU and its Russian population. More significantly, the need to construct such narratives suggests that Estonia still struggles to establish a secure, autonomous status in the modern geopolitical climate.

3.1 Mandated EU Changes to Estonia

In 2004, the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), two transnational organizations, granted Estonia membership. Estonia’s acceptance into these organizations was a pivotal moment for the Estonian state, especially regarding the EU. Estonia’s ascension signified that the state had met the standards the various EU committees set for membership and had therefore complied with EU standards on several Estonian national economic and social policies. As set out in the Copenhagen Criteria enacted in 1993, Estonia had to demonstrate that it had completed all of these tasks before joining the EU:

[1] Stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; [2] a functioning market economy and the capacity to

cope with competition and market forces in the EU; [3] the ability to take on and implement effectively the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union...[and the] adoption, implementation and enforcement of all current EU rules (the “acquis”).

The adoption of these criteria is not a small feat; the ‘acquis’ described above consists of rules governing 35 different policy areas such as energy, social policy, and environment. It took Estonia approximately 13 years (1991-2004) to successfully incorporate these extensive guidelines and current EU laws into its state infrastructure.

As part of the EU and NATO acceptance process, Estonia had to officially make concessions to its minority populations (especially its Russian speaking population). The EU officially supports minority populations (although it does not have a formal definition of minority) in member states and throughout the world to help them achieve various political, economic, and cultural rights. NATO also declares in its Membership Action Plan guidelines that applying states must demonstrate commitment to human rights. Therefore, Estonia had to change policies that could be seen as infringing on its minority population’s rights. An example of concessions can be seen in Estonian citizenship laws. After independence in 1991, the Estonian government wanted to recreate the independent Estonian nation-state from the Interwar era and introduced policies that legally protected the ethnic Estonian nation. In 1992, the Estonian government passed a law that took away citizenship rights from anyone whose family

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160 Ibid.


did not live in Estonia prior to 1939. Additionally, the government implemented an arduous naturalization process that required fluency in the Estonian language (a main facet of the ethnic Estonian nation). These laws meant that only the ethnically Estonian people were Estonian citizens. However, when the state started EU accession negotiations in 1998, Estonia had to show that it did not discriminate against its minority population. In 1999, to please the EU’s Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Estonia altered its citizenship policy so that anyone born in Estonia after 1991 would have Estonian citizenship and relaxed its naturalization process. The Estonian state used this new policy to demonstrate to the OSCE that it was supporting this minority population’s integration into Estonian society at least legislatively.

The text on EU membership criteria highlights the primary tenets of the EU—democratic values/rights and market economy. Within this text there is no explicit prioritization of the different criteria; however, since 2000 the motto of the EU has been ‘unity in diversity’, possibly suggesting that the first statement regarding protecting all groups of people might be of more importance than the rest. Clearly though the market economy is the leading value. The most important sector of the EU is its Single Market guided by the “four freedoms”—freedom of goods, peoples (as in migration between countries), services and capital (money). The guidelines outlined in requirement [2] and [3] are referring to the country’s participation in and

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167 The Four freedoms in the EU: Are they Inseparable?, Bertelsmann Stiftung and Jacques Delors Institute (2017)
support of the Single Market through the removal of trade barriers and market regulations.\textsuperscript{169} The European transnational community’s protection on human rights falls second to its protection of economic prosperity.

Historically, the EU has had a much stronger relationship with economic rights than human rights. The early forms of the EU, the European Coal and Steel Community and European Economic Community (EEC), focused strictly on the economic requirements of the participating countries. Therefore, the origins of the European Union, which was officially created by the Maastricht Treaty in 1991 and incorporated the EEC, emerged from the idea of creating peace through economic cooperation and dependency using a single monetary union. Although the EU states that it was founded on universal values of humanity and democracy, social policies and legislation regarding human rights and immigration were introduced only in the most recent form of the multinational organization.\textsuperscript{170} The OSCE was not an important overseer until the 1990s when minority rights were becoming more paramount in the geopolitical region of Europe. Respect of human rights did not become legally binding until the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009.

Estonia’s acceptance into the EU and NATO was not only a legislative accomplishment but also a symbolic one. To the Estonian state officials, Estonia’s membership into these organizations was supposed to grant the country access to security and prosperity it could not have as an unaligned independent country. As discussed in the previous chapter, Estonian state officials asserted that Estonia must ‘return to Europe’, which meant that the Estonian state wanted to convince the designated European countries (Western Europe) that Estonia was part of


Europe. The Estonian state officials believed that membership in the EU would mean that Estonia had achieved European status.\textsuperscript{171} Regarding NATO, the founding 1949 treaty states that only European states can be invited into NATO, which suggests that Estonia had now achieved European status.\textsuperscript{172} With EU and NATO codependency, Estonian officials believed that Estonia would be fully protected from the perceived Russian threat on its eastern border.

3.2 ‘Freedom’ at the Vabamu and Estonian National Museum

‘Freedom’ has a central role at these two museums. However, ‘freedom’ is not a tangible object that can be seen in an exhibit. In these museums, ‘freedom’ is largely defined as people’s rights to certain actions or beliefs. The Vabamu website states, “we stand for the freedom of expression, opinion, religion, mobility, print enterprise, and all the other forms of freedom.”\textsuperscript{173} At the Estonian National Museum, near the main entrance of the largest permanent exhibit, is a section that provides clear definitions of ‘freedom’ and ‘lack of freedom’: “Freedom is regarded, among other things, as equality, material independence, privacy, an opportunity to vote, to speak, to decide for yourself, and the right to be different. The lack of freedom is associated with illnesses, crime, loneliness, work, addictions, regulations and limitations.” Although the two museums’ definitions vary, they both stress the importance of liberty of the individual, a main tenet of the political ideology of liberalism. In liberal ideology, individual freedoms allow people to achieve self-fulfillment and improve their skills; the associations with a lack of freedom are therefore results of people being unable to achieve this goal. The significance placed upon individual freedom dates to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, periods of Western

\textsuperscript{171} Kuus, “Identity Narratives in Estonia,” 97.
\textsuperscript{173} “About the Museum,” Vabamu.
European history that stressed the importance of the individual and humankind.\textsuperscript{174} For Western European scholars such as John Locke, freedom became regarded as a sacred inalienable right alongside life and personal realization, which must be protected by the state.\textsuperscript{175} These ideals of freedom also serve as central tenets of the constructed European identity.

The museums’ definitions of ‘freedom’ reflect overarching national and transnational sentiment. In the Estonian Constitution enacted in 1992, the state explicitly defines the protected rights of Estonian citizens: freedoms of self-realization, conscience, religion, thought, privacy, and the freedom to disseminate ideas, opinions, and beliefs.\textsuperscript{176} Additionally, all of these stated rights align with those outlined within the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000) (legally binding in 2009).\textsuperscript{177} Therefore, the ‘freedoms’ outlined at the two museums reflect not only what the state asserts for its own population but meets one of the EU criteria. In contrast, there is a notable discrepancy between the rights outlined at the museum and the “four freedoms” guiding the EU—the museums’ version of freedom focuses much more on protecting individual identity versus economic opportunity. The two perspectives represent the two sects of liberal thought: political and economic liberalism. Both museums’ definitions of freedom are largely based in political liberalism because they focus on how the relationship between the state and citizens can foster self-fulfillment. The EU “four freedoms” are based on economic liberalism, which asserts that it is through the economic freedom of markets and goods that people are able to achieve individual

\textsuperscript{174} Martinelli, “The European Identity,” 11.
\textsuperscript{175} Martinelli, “The European Identity,” 11.
\textsuperscript{176} The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, Ch. 2.
liberty and realization. These differing perspectives on what freedoms benefit individuals will be important later in the chapter.

3.2.1 The Value in Freedom: Museum Purpose Statements

The *Vabamu* asserts that Estonia’s history of Occupation provides a glimpse into the universal importance of freedom. On the *Vabamu: Museum of Occupations and Freedom*’s website, the first body of text that pops up on the computer screen is “The Story of Our Freedom: We educate and involve the people of Estonia and its visitors and encourage everyone to think about the recent past, to sense the fragility of freedom, and to stand for freedom and justice.”

Next to the text is a black and white outline of an old woman closing her eyes, overlayed with a black and white moving photo of smiling children to illustrate memories. On the website page “About the Museum”, it states that the museum’s purpose is, “to tell touching stories about Estonia’s recent history that make people think about the value and fragility of freedom.”

Additionally, it states that the values of the museum include initiating inclusive discussions that “unite friends, visitors, and Estonian society to encourage them to carry on the ideals of liberty.” In all of these statements, Estonia does not emerge as the primary subject; grammatically, ‘Estonia’ is either in possessive or adjective form. Estonian history is instead treated as an educational tool for people and visitors that may or may not be from Estonia. The statements vaguely allude to the subject matter of the *Vabamu’s* permanent exhibit, the Nazi and Soviet Occupations of Estonia, but never reference them directly. Rather, the statement focuses on making visitors think about freedom and liberty in their own lives. Although *Vabamu’s* official name (*Museum of Occupations and Freedoms*) connects the phrase “recent history” with

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179 “About the museum”, *Vabamu* [primary source]

180 “About the museum”, *Vabamu* [primary source]
Nazi/Soviet Occupation, the museum’s purpose statement is much more muted in tone than comparable museums in Latvia and Lithuania, the other Baltic States. The Latvian and Lithuanian museums explicitly mention how Nazi and Soviet forces killed Latvian or Lithuanian peoples.\textsuperscript{181} The \textit{Vabamu}’s focus on freedom rather than occupation in the purpose statement suggests that the museum attempts to provide a universal experience for visitors rather than restrict it to the emotions that Estonians felt during this time period.

The \textit{Vabamu}’s purpose statement alludes to the ideas of western political philosophers. The ‘fragility of freedom’ phrase that appears multiple times on the \textit{Vabamu}’s website proposes the idea that freedom is naturally and perennially tenuous. This concept of freedom originated in the Enlightenment Era. Eighteenth century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau asserted that human freedom is fragile because while men are born free, from their social contract and relationship with the state they become state-controlled and ultimately suffer.\textsuperscript{182} However, in the case of \textit{Vabamu}, there is little reference to the agent hurting people’s freedom other than ‘recent history’ or ‘occupation’.

Although the \textit{Vabamu}’s purpose statement makes it seem as though the museum has always presented this freedom and justice narrative, that is not true. In July 2018, the \textit{Vabamu} reopened after a six-month renovation.\textsuperscript{183} Although the building was the same, the previous permanent exhibit, which inhabited the space from 2003 until early 2018, left visitors with a different view of the Estonian nation. The update is most clearly seen in the change in mission

statement. The original goal for the museum was to, “document the catastrophes and cataclysms, which took place during the last fifty years”\textsuperscript{184}, which highlights a stronger victim narrative and is similar to the goals still outlined by the Latvian and Lithuanian museums that focus on the same time period. Aro Velmet\textsuperscript{185}, a researcher who critically analyzed all of the Baltic Occupation History Museums in 2011 and prepared the \textit{Vabamu’s} updated section on Estonian restoration of independence, asserted that the narrative at the previous version of the museum was a reflection of the ethnic Estonian nation’s feelings of victimization during this period of suffering under Soviets. In contrast, the renovated museum that I visited in August 2018, which had the new purpose statement, did not noticeably have this overarching narrative. For example, in the section on the Stalin Regime of the 1940s and 1950s that instilled terror in all Estonians, the exhibit audio narrator makes it clear that it was the local government and normal people who would report on neighbors. This admission, which implicitly indicts the ethnically Estonian people in this dark period of history, undermines previous depictions of total victimization by an encapsulating, oppressive power. Velmet also does not mention the museum’s strong focus on freedom as a philosophical idea, suggesting that it may only have been instituted in the new version.\textsuperscript{186} The changes in museum narrative appear to suggest a shift in political environment and agenda since the early 2000s.

The \textit{Estonian National Museum} does not make as explicit of a connection to freedom in its purpose statement but instead it focuses on diversity. Initially, the first incarnation of the \textit{Estonian National Museum}, established in 1909 and destroyed during World War II, predominately displayed important aspects of traditional Estonian national culture such as

\textsuperscript{184} Velmet, “Occupied Identities,” 191.  
\textsuperscript{186} Velmet, “Occupied Identities,” 198.
During this time period Estonia’s population was overwhelmingly ethnically Estonian, and therefore the museum largely reflected only one culture. In 2006, during reconstruction discussions, a government-appointed committee decided that rather than simply recreate the original Estonian National Museum, the museum should “reflect everyday life and culture as a way of life, taking into account its periodical, spatial, and social diversity…of Estonians, Estonian minorities, and Finno-Ugric people”. To be clear, the committee was made up of intellectuals rather than average Estonian citizens. The broadening of focus by the Estonian National Museum to include minorities and small, underrepresented tribes as part of the permanent exhibit might result from the EU’s focus on “unity through diversity”. The intellectual committee attempted to demonstrate the state’s protection of individual differences in culture and religion (aspects of defined ‘freedom’) by creating a physical space for representations of those who are not ethnically Estonian. It is a way for them to demonstrate the state’s acceptance of cultural diversity.

3.2.2 Freedom Embodied: Museum Architecture

From their architectural designs, the Vabamu and the Estonian National Museum demonstrate the Estonian government’s strive for modernity. Previously, museums in Estonia such as the Tallinn City Museum were staged in preexisting buildings such as old merchant homes or workshops. Compared to older museums in Estonia, the buildings for these two museums were designed specifically to become museum spaces, with the Vabamu being the first

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museum in Estonia to be created for this purpose.\textsuperscript{189} The Vabamu and the Estonian National Museum are modern looking and minimalist and built predominately with dark stone/concrete and floor-to-ceiling glass.\textsuperscript{190} This is important because the designs of these buildings play an active role in meaning production of the museums’ objects and messages.\textsuperscript{191} The photos included below highlight the stark differences between Estonia’s old and new museums. At the Tallinn City Museum, the building serves only as a residence for the museum, detaching museum architecture from the exhibits. In contrast, the architects specifically designed the outside of the Vabamu and the Estonian National Museum to create a holistic, dynamic experience for visitors.

\begin{center}
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\end{center}

\textbf{Figure 3-1 Exterior of the Tallinn City Museum}\textsuperscript{192}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{189} “About the museum,” Vabamu Museum of Occupations and Freedom [primary source]
\end{footnotesize}
The national committee specifically chose the design for the Estonian National Museum’s building because the state wanted to create an environment that acknowledged and incorporated Estonia’s Soviet past. The architects of the Museum stated that their design, “resembles a glass wedge inserted into the landscape that slowly reaches upward from the ground – a built allegory

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for the country’s emerging history.”¹⁹⁶ They created a dramatic contrast between the *Estonian National Museum* and the organic environment as described at the beginning of the chapter to mimic the Soviet military airplane runway previously in this location.¹⁹⁷ The museum’s design not only represents the past but also serves as a visual representation of the hope for the future; the Estonian nation-state rises from its dark Soviet past to prosperity with their newfound freedom. With this design, the Estonian state demonstrates that the country has taken control of its Soviet history and moved beyond it rather than let the history be its defining characteristic.

The *Vabamu*’s design also provides a similar metaphorical experience. Compared to the massive rectangular *Estonian National Museum*, the *Vabamu*, whose main floor has low angular ceilings, feels small and crowded. That feeling is intentional. The architects of the *Vabamu* stated that, “the architecture deliberately avoids centre points and symbols. The fragile feel of the museum forms a conscious contrast with the means of expression of recent history.”¹⁹⁸ To enter the permanent exhibit I had to descend into the basement, leaving the floor of light. It was in the dark basement that I saw exhibits about World War II and the Stalinist era. I only emerged back into natural lighting when the exhibit focused on the 1980s, when Estonians began to show resistance to the Soviet regime and reclaim their independence. I as the visitor then associate darkness with the Occupation Era and lightness with independent Estonia.

### 3.2.3 Freedom Brings Tension: Exhibit Narratives

The two museums’ sections on freedom feel strategically placed. At the *Vabamu*, the specific narration on the nature of freedom occurs at the end of the audio-guided tour after I had

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¹⁹⁷ “Why This Location,” *Estonian National Museum*.

¹⁹⁸ “About the Museum,” *Vabamu*. 
walked through the section on Estonia’s independence from the Soviet Union and its acceptance into the EU. In contrast, in the *Estonian National Museum* the section on freedom, titled “The Time of Freedoms”, is near the front of the main exhibit hall. Here, before I saw the sections that included dozens of examples of traditional Estonian clothing and farm equipment, I saw exhibits with modern day chairs, laptops, and floppy disks alongside passages about contemporary Estonian life. Once I reached the end of the exhibit, which focuses on ancient Estonian life, I had to retrace my steps and also exit through this “Time of Freedoms” section to get back to the bus stop. Therefore, it seemed to me that the conversations of ‘freedom’ at the *Estonian National Museum* greet the visitors and say goodbye to them too. The reorganization of the messages between the two museums results in different effects; at *Vabamu* the visitor’s perception of ‘freedom’ is framed by the recent history of occupation and Estonian independence, whereas the *Estonian National Museum* uses ‘freedom’ as the framing mechanism for the rest of the exhibit.

The discussion of freedom at the *Vabamu* focuses on humanity’s struggle with freedom. At the *Vabamu*, the only permanent exhibit is entitled “Freedom without Borders.” The last section of the exhibit focuses specifically on how, “freedom is a state of tension, in which balance must be struck between freedoms and responsibilities.”199 This statement contrasts with the name of the exhibit because “Freedom without Borders” implies a lack of restriction on freedom. The museum visualizes this tension in a moving art installation of two children standing on opposite sides of a turning seesaw, shown below. At first glance, I thought that the seesaw represented the fragility of freedom because of the how easy it can be to fall off of a seesaw. However, the audio narrator corrected me. He said that the seesaw represented the, “ideal balance of freedom between the multitude of possibilities than can drive you crazy and your true wish deep inside you.” For a museum that uses the majority of its space to discuss a

199 “Permanent Exhibitions: Freedom Without Borders,” *Vabamu* [primary source]
time when people were under oppressive regimes, this narrative felt out of place for me because it challenged me to think about the possible negative aspects of freedom. It is not a celebratory representation of achieving freedom. It implies that “freedom without borders” could actually be bad because the lack of restraint would drive you crazy. Additionally, the use of the word ‘ideal’ suggests that in reality an actual imbalance of the two forces exists; one take away lesson of the museum’s narrative is to promote more balance between freedom and restrictions.

Figure 3-4: Photo I took of Seesaw Installation at the Vabamu

The “Time of Freedom” portion of the Estonian National Museum’s permanent exhibit captures the supposed mindsets of the Estonian people. At one section, also titled “Time of Freedom”, the author of the following text writing in a collective Estonian ‘we’, states that:

The country finally settled into its newfound free existence in the 2000s. Now we know that in addition to enjoying membership [in the] European Union, accelerated economic growth and becoming an innovative e-country, we must also recognize and solve new problems. We now realize that freedom manifests itself in many ways. The freedom to live a good life is always weighted against readiness to give up certain personal liberties for the common good. Freedom is also a responsibility, and an obligation.
This quote mimics the physical seesaw installation at Vabamu. It specifically mentions that people need to give up certain freedoms in order to help the greater society. This idea is a reflection of Enlightenment philosopher Thomas Hobbes’ view of the social contract between people and the state; the described versions of ‘freedom’ are less about the inalienable quality of freedom but what freedoms people must give up so that society functions well. However, unlike the seesaw installation, this text implies that this is how contemporary Estonians feel about their own position and that they are willing to give up freedoms for this ideal.

In this narrative, the museums are representing the contemporary Estonian nation-state as a ‘European’ country. As discussed in Chapter 2, the ideas from the Enlightenment are some of the main supposed tenets of the constructed European identity. These exhibits at two museums in different cities with differing historical focuses are presenting the same Enlightenment ideal regarding freedom and state. Additionally, the Estonian National Museum is connecting this perspective on the nuances of ‘freedom’ to Estonia’s advancement as a EU country. The text demonstrates that the contemporary Estonian nation-state, which only exists through its acceptance into the EU, is conscious of both the importance of individual ‘freedom’ and collective peace and the understanding that at times freedoms need to be forsaken for the common good. It is through exposure to other European countries that ‘we’ (which based on the premise of the permanent exhibit is referring to the ethnic Estonians exclusively) have this perspective on freedom as a responsibility and obligation. Ultimately, the text serves as a reminder that contemporary Estonia, which enjoys and benefits from EU membership, is different from its past forms. It suggests that the Estonian nation as a whole has changed its perspective on ‘freedom’ so that it can engage with the larger EU community.

200 Bristow, “Enlightenment”.
At another section of the museum, entitled “Stories of Freedom”, the museum highlights the tensions of ‘freedom’ in an attempt to naturalize the idea that ‘freedom’ can be contested. Here, the museum text demonstrates that ‘freedom’ can have varying interpretations. As part of a list of examples of differing conceptions of freedom, the narrator states that:

[1] Some people think that we are free as long as our thoughts are free, but others believe that there is no such thing as complete freedom. [2] Some may have been able to experience a pure ecstasy of freedom in Siberian prison camp; for others, contemporary Estonian society suppresses and limits their freedom. [3] For some, freedom is gained by learning to know the word of God in their early childhood, whereas for others, religion takes away the liberty to make decisions of their own about their own lives. [4] Some believe that people from different races or sexual orientations may live next to each other in a free country; others see it as taking away their opportunity to feel free. [5] If some see consumptions, study and work as liberties, others take them, on the contrary, as constraints. [6] In the Stories of Freedom, Estonian people talk openly about how they understand freedom. What makes Estonian people free?

The paragraph above lists five highly polarizing pairs of perspectives on freedom. By including the examples in the exhibit, the museum grants each of these perspectives a degree of credibility. Through the use of the words ‘some’ or ‘others’, it is implied to the reader that there are many in Estonia who have the point of view of at least one of the statements listed, although there is no reference to quantity. Each statement appears equal. The paragraph promotes the idea that freedom is largely a relative phenomenon that is based upon the individual’s perception of society and values. Although each of the statements discusses a perception of freedom, the only freedom that is completely protected is the right to an opinion. Therefore, any individual view of freedom is valid.

The impact of the contrast sentences dilutes the significance that some of these statements have in contemporary Estonia. Take for example this statement: “some may have been able to experience a pure ecstasy of freedom in Siberian prison camp; for others, contemporary Estonian society suppresses and limits their freedom.” By connecting these two
statements together, I feel that I am to assume that these two sentences are complete opposites of one another with the same weight and likelihood. By referring to Estonian society as the antithesis of prison experience, it suggests that Estonian society is therefore the opposite of a prison camp and generally supports people’s freedoms. Yet the statement about Estonia infringing upon people’s rights actually reflects the sentiment of Estonia’s Russian speaking population. Although the OSCE found the Estonian government to have gotten rid of its discriminatory policies prior to its admittance into the EU, the Russian speaking population continues to suffer under labor and social discrimination.202 There remains a lack of support for integration of the Russian speakers into Estonian society. Citizenship tests are still largely based upon proving knowledge of the Estonian language.203 The state education plan still focuses on making the Estonian language the primary language for all Estonian public schools, which limits the fundamental freedoms of the Russian population throughout the country.204 There remains significant geographical separation between ethnic groups throughout the country and in Tallinn, as seen below, where the blue dots represent areas where ethnic Estonians live and yellow dots represent where ethnic Russians live.

203 Ibid., 168.
204 Sjöstedt, “Beyond Compliance,” 166.
Russians, who make up a significant portion of Tallinn’s population, are still clustered in peripheral residential districts like Lasnamäe (far right yellow area). These residential districts, called “dormitory suburbs”, were built initially during the Soviet Era and have not been updated since, thereby remaining cultural artifacts of the Soviet period. The ethnically Estonians attribute the residential separation and lack of integration to cultural differences between Russians and Estonians rather than the state’s marginalization of the Russian population.

I argue that this museum text reflects how the state handles its marginalization issue.

Statement 2 (“…for others, contemporary Estonian society suppresses and limits their freedom.”)

and 4 ("some believe that people from different races or sexual orientations may live next to each other in a free country; others see it as taking away their opportunity to feel free"), reflect the sentiment of a significant percentage of people today, but referring to them as generic ‘some’ or ‘others’ takes power away from those groups. The text can acknowledge that this happens but does not provide details that would identify who feels this way in Estonia. In text that is attempting to legitimize any perspective of freedom, it ultimately serves to preserve only the ethnically Estonian perspective of freedom. This is emphasized in the last sentence of the paragraph that directs the visitor’s attention to the common (ethnically) Estonian people’s accounts of freedom. It protects the Estonian’s right to an opinion against the Russians rather than protecting all people in the country.

3.3 Is Estonia Free?

The different ways that freedom is discussed and embodied at the Vabamu and Estonian National Museum are the Estonian state’s attempts to demonstrate to global visitors that the Estonian nation-state is a European place that promotes freedom. The museums physically embody the contemporary Estonian nation-state’s modernity and success. Through their narration with the universal ‘we’, the museums emphasize that Estonians can critically think about ‘freedom’ and protect individual rights and opinions. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Estonian state officials believed that EU/NATO membership would signify that Estonian was recognized as European and therefore have the security and respect of a European state.

However, my reading of the exhibits is that they cumulatively reflect that Estonia’s status as European has not been fully accepted by European nation-states. The museums’ narratives on freedom suggest that while the EU can grant Estonia European citizenship, the EU and NATO are ambivalent on granting European cultural acceptance to Estonia. Belonging to the EU once
aligned neatly with European because prior to the 1970s, the Western European countries were the only states within the pre-EU transnational organizations. NATO, which was formed as a response to the threat of the Soviet Union, also initially consisted of Western European and North American countries. Yet the European identity, although it claims a particular political and cultural background, is not an identity based only on political values; rather, as described by Francesca Ammaturo, the European identity is based on power and ‘whiteness’ at the ‘core’ Europe (western Europe); she states that “European” is hegemonic categorical identity for citizens of a Northern European virtuous state.208 The European identity strictly serves to protect this subset of nation-states by separating them from the non-European other, the latter of which categorizes Estonia.209 The identity’s basis on power rather than social values is why despite the Estonian state highlighting the way that it can discuss freedom as an ‘obligation’ and a ‘right’ does not sway European states’ opinions because freedom is not the true basis. The states with the European identity will not expand the definition in fear of diminishing the power and social capital of the label.

The power hierarchy between European/non-European identities has existed for centuries. The dichotomy Ammaturo describes between European and non-European reflects that of the Occident (oppressor) and Orient (oppressed) dynamic Edward Said explains in his book on Orientalism.210 Said asserted in the 1970s that since the nineteenth century Western European intellectuals and institutions constructed culture-based power hierarchies that justified the West’s superiority over others communities and that depictions of the other are what ultimately cemented the idea of what it meant to be ‘Western’.211 Furthermore, within the hegemonic

208 Ammaturo, “Europe and whiteness,” 5-8.
209 Ammaturo, “Europe and whiteness,” 5.
211 Said, Orientalism,
system the Orient does not have the power to govern its own portrayal. Although Said focused on the relationship between Europe and the Middle East/Asia, Ammaturo’s argument demonstrates that these power dynamics are occurring within modern-day Europe. The Estonian state, the Eastern Orient, cannot self-assign itself the European label because it does not have the power to do so.

The EU, which is largely influenced by the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, is an institution actively perpetuating these unequal power dynamics. Estonian state officials thought that acceptance into the EU would bring Estonia closer to achieving European status and security in the contemporary geopolitical environment. As a result, they submitted the state to the dominating power of the EU. For Estonia to join the EU, the state had to concede its economic and political autonomy and conform to the accepted EU political and economic beliefs seen in section 3.1 to interact with others. The EU asserts that it protects individual rights and facilitates self-fulfillments by enforcing free trade and minimal government barriers for all of its members. However, the lack of government interference in the market is much more beneficial to the states who already have significant economic power, like France, than those who have little economic power and are trying to achieve more, like Estonia. Therefore, the access to individual freedoms and self-fulfillment is unequally distributed among the EU states because economic principles are the primary determinant for rights. The social rights outlined in the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Freedoms are not provided authority and treated as secondary compared to rights that align with pro-market principles. Furthermore, because the EU restricts the authority of the member state to decide what policies and structures it is allowed to invest in using public

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dollars, Estonia is unable to invest in social programs that would fully protect the individual rights of its citizens.\textsuperscript{214}

Ultimately, my reading is that the museums promote ‘freedom’ because they want to portray Estonia as having freedom and control within its geopolitical climate. To clarify, I am not arguing that the Estonian people are less free now than they were before Estonia was in the EU. Rather, the museums provide insight into the state’s perceptions of its own powers within the larger geopolitical climate. As discussed in the introduction, states are institutions based on maintaining their power over their defined territory. Therefore, the museums are making significant efforts to establish the idea that Estonia is a free place because the larger geopolitical climate and power dynamics that Estonia finds itself in threaten this conception. The promotion and embodiment of freedom therefore reveal the insecurity of the Estonian state; museums portray the fragility of freedom not because of the past Occupations but because the freedom of the state’s actions remain tenuous. In one of the museum exhibits at the \textit{Estonian National Museum}, the museum states that, “the freedom to live a good life is always weighted against readiness to give up certain personal liberties for the common good.” Estonia has given up certain liberties for the common good of the EU but the security in the ‘good life’ has yet to come.

\textbf{3.4 Conclusion}

At the \textit{Vabamu: Museum of Occupations and Freedom} and the \textit{Estonian National Museum}, ‘freedom’ is discussed throughout the museum experience—it is in the walls, the exhibits, and promotional materials. The new museums’ representations of freedom demonstrate the Estonian state’s continued desire to be seen as a modern European state that understands and

\textsuperscript{214} Pye, “Fundamental rights in the Eurozone,” 569.
abides by the social contract of freedom. They present a narrative that is based more on Enlightenment values than the feelings of people in Estonia today. My reading of the museum narratives suggests that the Estonian state remains insecure about its position in Europe because, despite EU and NATO membership, it has not achieved the autonomy and security it desired from these relationships. As the seesaw illustrated, the freedom represented is an ideal rather than a way of being.
Conclusion – Where does Estonia stand?

When I think back on my time in Estonia, I remember the stark juxtaposition of past and present throughout Tallinn. In one part of Tallinn people sang and danced to traditional Estonian folk songs at the 100th year celebration. In another, at the Tallinn City Museum, there was a special 100th year commemorative museum exhibit that included a Barbie, a photo of Backstreet Boys, and an iPhone to signify life after Soviet independence. In one case, I felt that the people were celebrating and embracing their distinctive heritage. In the other, I felt that the museum was trying to communicate how Estonians were just like me, the typical American woman. Why such different representations? More importantly, can these opposing representations of the nation-state exist in harmony?

When Estonia regained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, it asserted itself as a continuation of the earlier nation-state of the 1920s and 1930s. Like its predecessor, the state strived to be a safe haven for the ethnic Estonians and to preserve the Estonian language and culture. Twentieth century self-determination theory asserts that political autonomy in the form of statehood would guarantee these ideals and secure the Estonian nation-state territorial sovereignty. However, my analysis suggests that contemporary Estonia is still struggling to achieve these goals. In Chapter 1, I analyzed the Estonian song festival tradition and how they represent Estonia as an ethnic nation-state based around das Volk. In Chapter 2, I discussed museum narratives that insist upon Estonia’s status as European, which demonstrates the Estonian state’s anxiety about its location on the outskirts of Europe. In Chapter 3, I found that museums’ portrayal of freedom represents the state’s reactions to the European views of freedom and how they are implemented in the EU. The representations of Estonian history seen at the

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museums subtly reveal the ways that the Estonian state is looking for security based in other groups’ identity rather than securing itself in its own nation’s identity.

Part of this struggle is due to international forces outside of Estonia’s control. The modern geopolitical environment is significantly different than that of the interwar period. The time period of flourishing independent homogenous nation-states (late 19th and early 20th century) is over. Contemporary Estonia emerged in an era when isolation meant fragility and solidarity meant security. While Estonia was under Soviet control, Western European states created transnational economic and political communities such as NATO and early forms of the EU that ensured interdependence and cooperation among states. People around the world became connected through Western-dominated global culture and media. Estonian state officials recognized this change and sought to adapt the state to fit this outlined model to maintain its power. Michael Billig asserted in his study of late 20th century nationalism that in the international arena nations seek recognition from other nations and achieve this by resembling one another as much as possible. Yet what I think that is occurring now, more than twenty years after his publication, is that it is the state that desires recognition from outsiders, not the nation. The Estonian state entered agreements that mandated political similarity among members in the hope of recognition and acceptance from the EU in particular.

My thesis is an attempt to understand some of the complexity of the status of the post-Soviet nation-state in an increasingly international and interdependent world. As I discussed in the introduction, Western national scholars have naturalized the term “nation-state.” The hyphen that links these two words, “nation” and “state” together demonstrates a supposed strong, possibly unbreakable, bond between them. The supposed goal of the state in this relationship is to protect and represent the interests of the nation. Yet throughout the thesis there is disconnect

216 Billig, Banal Nationalism, 85.
between nation and state. In Chapter 1, I demonstrated values and history that the Estonian nation continues to promote and embody through large song festivals such as the 100-year Singing Celebration. In this contemporary space, people voluntarily connect to the Estonian folk heritage based on 19th century ideals and temporarily bond with the ‘purest’ form of the nation. However, the museums discussed in Chapters 2 and 3—The Tallinn City Museum, The Estonian History Museum-Guild Hall Location, Vabamu: Museum of Occupations and Freedom, and The Estonian National Museum—portray completely different values and versions of Estonians. In these spaces, Estonians are people who have multinational relationships and strongly believe in abstract values such as freedom and liberty. Estonians are modern and European. Although Estonian folk culture does have a noticeable presence at the Estonian National Museum and Estonian History Museum-Guild Hall Location, they are not the only representation of Estonian people presented. Furthermore, the museums display the objects demonstrating folk heritage in a way that communicates them as remnants of the past era rather than items people continually wear and celebrate on particular occasions. At the national song performance, while there are people on stage wearing contemporary clothing and international political officials attend the event, the power and meaning of the ceremony does not come from them but from the culturally based songs sung exclusively in the Estonian language.

Perhaps these differing views on the Estonian identity simply provide a nuanced, multidimensional perspective of the typical Estonian. However, I am arguing that the national performances and museums are presenting two diverging ideals of Estonia: protecting cultural heritage or fully embracing modernity. Within the larger geopolitical climate, the two ideals representing ethnic/eastern/non-European and civic/western/European, respectively, cannot successfully exist together in harmony. The incompatibility is not because Estonia has to truly be
one or the other—trying to put Estonia into a single category would undermine the complexity of the people and society. Rather, it is because Estonia does not have enough geopolitical power to be recognized as both. The nation-state wanted to establish cultural stability and security in the modern era but in its attempts to do so it has ceded its autonomy to a larger political force and therefore maintained its precarious position. Based on my reading of the museums, the Estonian state’s efforts to achieve more power, such as stressing its European identity and joining the EU, have ultimately perpetuated Estonia’s subjection to the East/ethnic/non-European and West/civic/European discourse.

One repercussion of the Estonian state’s efforts is the marginalization of the Russian speaking population in Estonia. As demonstrated in Chapters 2 and 3, the museums chose to under-acknowledge the nation-state’s Russian history and current Russian population to further promote Estonia’s representation as a European country. Although the Estonian government has created and implemented integration plans to support this population, efforts have not been successful thus far because Estonian nation and state still associate the Russian population with non-European values and Soviet occupation. In 2018, Stanford Professor A. Lorraine Kaljund demonstrated in her study that Estonians still consider Russians and housing sectors built in the Soviet era culturally inferior and threats to the Estonian domain.217 I suggest that contemporary Estonia has not been able to successfully integrate and respect this population because it has not found stability or security within the European/non-European dichotomy. Although my research does not cover this, additional research could investigate the impact that the subjugation of Russians in Estonia has on Russian identity and on the Estonian nation-state.

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Reflecting back to the conversation of *das Volk* and ethnic nationalism in Chapter 1, I predict that the inharmonious relationship between the two national representations might lead to future violence. The nation-states in Central and Eastern Europe constantly strive to present a strong, stable identity. The conflicting ideas promoted in Estonia’s museums and national performances undermine this identity. Historically, when a state perceives a threat to its power, violence occurs in some form. This insecure reaction can currently be seen in multiple countries throughout Europe. Over the last few years, ultranationalist, radical right political parties have been emerging in multiple states and gaining legitimate power through elections. These parties claim to represent and protect the ‘true’ people of the nation (the *Volk*) rather than abiding by the multicultural, democratic ideals set out by transnational organizations. They want to take power back for the nation and recreate the idealized homogenous nation-state. They validate xenophobic opinions and make discrimination against immigrants and minorities acceptable in their state. Now, these groups are beginning to gain power in Estonia. In Estonia’s most recent election in March 2019, the far-right Conservative People’s party (EKRE) garnered 17.8% of the vote, more than double the percentage it had in the previous election.218 Like what is happening in other former Soviet-Bloc states, this moment suggests that the nation and state are beginning to come back in alignment to ensure the nation-state’s security.

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218 “Estonia election: opposition party wins but far-right support doubles,” *The Guardian.*
## Appendix

### List of Museums I Visited in Estonia in August 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Analyzed in this thesis?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tallinn City Museum</td>
<td>Tallinn</td>
<td>Tallinn’s general History from the 13th century</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estonian History Museum -- Great Guild Hall</td>
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<td>Estonia’s general History from ancient beginnings</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estonian History Museum – Maarjamäe Palace</td>
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<td>20th century history (1900-)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vabamu: Museum of Occupations and Freedom</td>
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<td>20th century history (1939-)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KGB Museum</td>
<td>Tallinn</td>
<td>Soviet History (1970s/1980s)</td>
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<td>Soviet History (1980s)</td>
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<td>Tallinn</td>
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<td>University’s history (17th century -)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tartu City Museum</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>Tartu’s Overall history from ancient beginnings</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonian National Museum</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>Estonia’s general history from ancient beginnings</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Song Festival Museum</td>
<td>Tartu</td>
<td>Estonian music history (19th/20th century)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum of Photography</td>
<td>Tallinn</td>
<td>Estonian art history (19th/20th century)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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