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Picture This Country
Contemporary Narratives of Estonia

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ABSTRACT

I min pro gradu-avhandling presenterar och diskuterar jag exempel på samtida narrativa konstruktioner av nationen Estland. Mitt primära material består av både institutionella och utomstående narrativa texter som producerats under perioden 2006 – 2013. De institutionella, eller officiella, narrativa texterna utgörs av presidenten Toomas Hendrik Ilves tal till nationen, en turistbroschyr publicerad av Estlands turistbyrå samt Tallinns officiella ansökan om status som Europas kulturhuvudstad. De ”utomstående” eller inofficiella narrativa texterna utgörs av tre böcker inom genren reselitteratur som skrivits om Estland av utlänningar.

Narrativa beskrivningar av nationen är konstruktioner av en faktiskt eller upplevd verklighet. Jag använder mig av Benedict Andersons teori om nationen som en föreställd gemenskap. Vidare använder jag mig av Stuart Halls fem kännetecken på hur nationen konstrueras genom narrativ.

Det institutionella och officiella materialet beskriver och analyserar jag genom att titta på hur de konstruerar nationen Estland genom narrativ om frihet, modernitet och myter. De ”utomstående” och inofficiella texterna fokuserar på narrativa beskrivningar av Estland genom det äventyrliga, det underliga och det annorlunda.

Både de institutionella och de ”utomstående” narrativen använder sig medvetet, eller omedvetet, av idén om nationen som en föreställd gemenskap. De institutionella narrativen presenterar Estland som en västerländsk, modern och progressiv nation som har lämnat den sovjetiska perioden bakom sig. De ”utomstående” narrativen söker och framhåller spåren och kvarlämningar av den sovjetiska era.

Även om de två narrativa beskrivningarna av Estland kan tyckas motsatta så utesluter de inte varandra. Ingen nation har ett enda entydigt narrativ och varje beskrivning av Estland kommer att innehålla element från både de officiella och de inofficiella, de institutionella och de ”utomstående” narrativen .

KEYWORDS: Estonia, post-soviet, narratives, narrating the nation, institutional narrative, outsider narrative

1 INTRODUCTION

Nations might exist in many forms but they certainly, perhaps even primarily, exist as narrative constructs. (Kantsteiner 2008: 153)

Imagine if you will that you are visiting Estonia for the first time. You know hardly anything about this country, or its capital, the city of Tallinn. Like most first-time visitors, you will probably go online to find out more about your destination, or even buy yourself a ‘classic’ travel book or guide book. You will come across pictures of Tallinn’s scenic Old Town; you will find articles about Estonia and its membership in the EU; you will get advertisements for beautiful young women who would like to accompany you during your visit; and an invitation for you to book one of the capital’s posh hotels is guaranteed to pop up. You can read about this small nation that sang itself to independence from the Soviet Union. There will be articles that describe the ‘e-tiger’ that Estonia proudly calls itself, not least because it is the birthplace of Skype. This is the country where everyone is online! But, you can also read articles where this “off the radar” country is described as an unfortunate place populated by seemingly sour-faced and grey Soviet denizens. The winters are dark and seem endless. It is a place where the food is peculiar and the language unintelligible. There will be descriptions of Soviet era concrete suburbs and run-down areas. Behind the modern, glossy and touristic façade there seems to be another story lurking.

What will you, the visitor, make of these disparate images, descriptions and stories of Estonia? Which one of these Estonias will you see and experience during your visit? Is it the buzzing and digitalized or is it the post-Soviet and peripheral? What could be the purpose of these narratives and does it matter that they are different? In this thesis, I will present and discuss examples of contemporary narratives that I have found when reading about, visiting, and living in Estonia. By analyzing narratives of *freedom*, *modernity*, and *myth*, on one hand and the narratives of *adventure*, *oddity*, and *otherness*, on the other, I aim to demonstrate how contemporary narratives of Estonia produce – and reproduce – the nation both from the inside and the outside.

In his aforementioned research and now classic book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1991[1983]) Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an imagined political community (1991: 6). It is imagined because no member of a nation can know or meet all of his fellow-members, but nevertheless imagines that he shares certain values, beliefs or characteristics with the others. Instead of focusing on politics or ideology, Anderson focuses on the cultural aspects of belonging to a certain nation, and studies how national identities emerge and sustain themselves (Anderson 1991: 6).

In a similar vein, Homi K. Bhabha (1990) discusses the narrative of the nation in the introduction to *Nation and Narration*:

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizon in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation – or narration – might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. An idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a *symbolic force*. (Bhabha 1990: 1, emphasis added)

Both the fact that the nation is a cultural imagination, and that it is a product of Western tradition and historical ideas will be further discussed in this thesis. Naturally, every Estonian has her or his own construction and description of Estonia. The repertoire and narrative also differ depending on when and to whom one is describing Estonia. Visitors, tourists and ex-patriots also construct and describe Estonia in different ways.

1.1 Estonia: a Narrated Nation

In his well-known work *The Past is a Foreign Country* from 1985, the historian David Lowenthal notes the similarities between the needs and efforts of nations and the needs of individuals to create a glorious past and a cohesive personal narrative. Lowenthal writes:

In reviewing alterations of the past, students of nationalism and psychoanalysis and literary criticism share an awareness that individuals, like states, must continually confront the competing pulls of dependence and autonomy, following and leading, tradition and creativity, infancy and maturity. (Lowenthal 1985: xix)

Narrative research takes it as a premise that people live and/or understand their lives in storied forms, connecting events in the manner of a plot that has beginning, middle, and end points (Wertz 2011: 224). Not only do individuals make sense of their lives by narrating it. As already pointed out, groups, families, societies, and nations do it as well. Richard Kearney (2002) argues that “in our postmodern time of fragmentation and fracture” narrative is that which provides us with both individual and collective identity (Kearney 2002: 4).

There is a personal reason behind the choice of contemporary narratives of Estonia as the theme of this thesis. Some of the questions I ask of the reader in the very first paragraph have been on my mind for years. For someone like myself, a Westerner, and a sociologist, who has spent the better part of a decade living and working in a former Eastern European country, questions of national narration are bound to arise. It is precisely in the dichotomy of West versus East that many of the questions lay. The Berlin Wall came down, the Soviet Union disintegrated, the Cold War ceased, and yet it seems difficult for Western Europeans to move away from the polarization of ‘West’ versus ‘East’, ‘us’ versus ‘them’, ‘central’ versus ‘peripheral’, ‘modern’ versus ‘backwards’ or whatever contrasting examples one chooses to use. The grand narratives of the 20th century are no longer useful for telling the story of many present-day European countries. There is no longer a Socialist or Communist bloc to contrast the so-called free democratic countries of Old, Western Europe against. At the same time there is a lack of consensus of what the contemporary narrative – or narratives – should be. The ‘old’ stories find it difficult to incorporate the narratives of the newcomers. Likewise, post-Socialist and independent nations struggle to create new national narratives that could – to a smaller or larger extent – incorporate the years of Soviet occupation.

Like many other foreigners living in a post-Soviet country, I have often been baffled by, on one hand, the dismissal of the recent past [“that doesn’t count, it’s all different now”], and on the other hand, nostalgia for pre-Soviet days. The near-like worship of all things Western and capitalist and the attempts to modernize away anything post-1944 but pre-1991 can be frustrating. There seems to be a resolve to promote, on one hand, ‘ancient’ history, for example the medieval and picturesque Old Town, or on the other hand modern progression, for example the unlimited access to WIFI. All while the history – the times and lives – of people during the years of Soviet occupation seem to be disregarded or passed by.

Like many other visitors or ex-patriots, I have certainly had preconceived images of what Estonia was and is. While reading recent books that describe Estonia ‘from the outside’, I have found these images consciously or subconsciously referred to. My personal story is probably largely influenced by the official narrative of Estonia considering the length of time I have spent in the country. As anyone researching the nation, I find Benedict Anderson’s concept ‘the imagined community’ useful. Anderson has had a profound influence on subsequent research on nations and nationalism since he introduced the idea of the nation as an imagined community in 1983. The stories of Estonia that in this thesis are referred to as *institutional narratives* of the nation may be questioned both by the members of the nation themselves, and by outsiders. Still, it is the national narrative that unites a nation, in particular when it’s past or present is questioned by others. Sometimes unofficial or *outsider narratives* of a nation run, parallel to the official and institutional ones, but other times they deviate almost to the point of ambiguity.

What is excluded from a national narrative is certainly as interesting and exciting as what gets written into it. An important reason for my interest in exploring contemporary Estonian narratives of the nation is related to my previous research on Estonian’s small Swedish minority. However, Estonia has a much larger minority, the Russian speakers, consisting of nearly 25 percent of the population (Statistics Estonia, 2012). As is the case with many of the ‘new’ post-communist nations, the Estonian national narrative is not entirely coherent in its dealings with historical or ethnic minorities. Whose story

really gets told in the narrative of a nation? However, this thesis will not deal with the questions of whose version or narrative is more ‘truthful’ or ‘accurate’ or who should have the right to narrate the nation. For the purpose of this study, I have chosen narratives that, in my opinion, are narrative constructions of contemporary Estonia.

1.2 Material

In this thesis I study the narrative construction of Estonia through contemporary texts about the nation. The primary material used for this thesis, and describing what I defined as official or *institutional narratives* about Estonia, contained in chapter three, consist of several shorter sources. Firstly, there are the speeches of the President of the Estonian Republic, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves’s, on Independence Day 2010, on Independence Day 2011, on Independence Day 2013, and on New Year’s Eve 2010. Secondly, a brochure produced by the Estonian Tourism Board, *Where Medieval Meets Modern*, will be used. Finally, the official application of the City of Tallinn for the Capital of Culture for 2011 to the European Commission, *Everlasting Fairytale*, is analyzed.

The material for the part of the thesis concerning what I defined as unofficial or *outsider narratives* about Estonia, chapter four, consists mainly of three books, written by foreigners, that describe Estonia and the Estonians. In the case of the first two books – *My Estonia: Passport Forgery, Meat Jelly Eaters, and Other Stories* by Justin Petrone (2009), and *ESTONIA: a Ramble through the Periphery* by Alexander Theroux (2011) – the authors are Americans who have spent some time in Estonia. The third book, Otso Kantokorpi’s (2006) *Sankarimatkailijan Neuvosto-Tallinn* [The Herotraveller’s Soviet-Tallinn], is written by a Finnish cultural critic with a self-professed admiration for Estonian history, culture, and art.

In addition to the official material and the three books described above, different travel accounts that describe, review or mention Estonia will be analyzed. Many of these

sources write about the fascinated visitor's exploration of a place and a country between East and West, and many of the authors are looking very hard to find remnants of the post-Soviet period in Estonia. Some of the material used in this thesis has been written as information specifically for tourists by commercial producers. Other texts, on the other hand, are written by the so-called 'common man' as general information for an interested public. As travel has changed in our post-modern world so has travel writing. And indeed, so has narrating the nation. In the globalized consumerist era that we presently live in, a nation's narrative takes more and more of its cues from branding than from styles of travel writing or from the grand narratives of ideologies and nations.

1.2.1 Institutional Narratives: The Making of Official Estonia

The office of the President of Estonia, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, has its own webpage at <http://www.president.ee/>. On this page the visitor can find information in Estonian about the Republic of Estonia as well as information about the President's official duties, which include speeches and visits. The webpage also exists in an English and a Russian version. The contents of Mr. Ilves's speeches used for this thesis have thus been translated into English by the President's office¹.

It is virtually an obligatory duty of a head of state to speak to his citizens or subjects on certain occasions throughout the year, usually, on the beginning of a new year and on the country's national day or Independence Day. In the case of Estonia, there are two Independence Days to choose from. The first Independence Day, 24 February, originates from the declaration of independence in 1918 (Tannberg et al 2002: 210). During the Soviet occupation 1944-1991 this day was not an official holiday or commemorated in public. The second Independence Day, on 20 August, is celebrated in remembrance of the peaceful restoration of the independent Estonian Republic from the Soviet Union in 1991. The original Independence Day takes precedence and is considered more important and solemn, which can be seen in the rituals taking place in

¹ Estonian is the official language of Estonia. Russian as a native language is spoken by almost one fourth of the population. According to the latest census there are 321,198 permanent residents with Russian nationality living in Estonia (Statistics Estonia 2011).

this day. There is the rising of the flag on the Parliament building in early morning, a military parade at noon, the President's speech (TV, radio, Internet) and in the evening a formal reception. The second Independence Day is also a public holiday but celebrated with much less fanfare.

For this thesis, four of Mr. Ilves's speeches have been selected: the New Year's speech on 31 December 2010, the Independence Day speech on 24 February 2011, and the Independence Day speech on 24 February 2012. The speeches focus on both the year gone by and on times ahead. Both global events and national triumphs or disasters are commented on. President Ilves often refers to the unity and the strength of the nation in his speeches, making use of metaphors and myths (which will be further discussed in chapter 2.1.3).

Interestingly, in the case of Estonia and Mr. Ilves, it could be argued that he is aiming for an audience beyond his countrymen and women or the naturalized citizens of Estonia. Mr. Ilves speaks not only *to* the Estonians in the original oral and written speeches. He also speaks *of* Estonia and the Estonians to a wider audience in Estonian, English and Russian. Therefore the speeches of President Ilves contribute to the official narrative of Estonia. In a sense, Mr. Ilves is also branding the nation in his speeches. When pointing to success stories and advances of the nation, he is selling Estonia as a product. It is an attractive place for foreign investment, not only a good home for the Estonians themselves.

The brochure *Where Medieval Meets Modern* (MMM) introduces Estonia and in particular its capital Tallinn to foreign visitors. MMM was produced in 2010 by the Estonian Tourist Board under the heading "An Introduction to Estonia". MMM can be found at the address http://campaign.visitestonia.com/20100414_kataloog/Visitestonia-kataloog.pdf. MMM is 15 pages long and includes both text and pictures. The brochure is available in English, German, Russian, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Polish, and French on visit Estonia's webpage. MMM was one in a series of similar brochures produced by Enterprise Estonia in 2010. The other brochures in the series highlight the different geographical regions of Estonia (*Fun at Every Turn*, 2010) or certain themes

such as wellness or nature (*Never Fails to Amaze*, 2010, and *A Source of Vital Energy*, 2010).

MMM was chosen as material for this thesis for several reasons. Firstly, it is produced by the Tourist Board of Estonia, and can thus be said to represent an official narrative of the nation. Secondly, the print version of the brochure was included in the welcoming package given to delegates of an international academic conference at Tallinn University in 2010. MMM thus embodied the welcome and invitation of official Estonia to the foreign visitors. On the official Estonian Tourist Board webpage, MMM is summed up as follows:

This brochure contains a brief introductory overview of Estonia introducing Estonian culture, history, traditions, nature and way of life, proceeding from the core values of Welcome to Estonia (contrasts, first and fast, clean and northern, available, romantic). The structure of this brochure comprises four topics: city holiday, health holiday, Estonian differences and nature holiday. (Visit Estonia)

The application package *Everlasting Fairytale* (EF) of the city of Tallinn for the Capital of Culture for the year of 2011 was submitted to the European Union in 2007. The application can be found at http://www.tallinn2011.ee/pdf/tallinn2011_eng.pdf. The city of Tallinn was subsequently chosen by the European Union as one of two Capitals of Culture for 2011 (the other city being Turku in Finland).

EF is 42 pages long and consists of both text and accompanying pictures. The author of the text is Kaarel Tarand and the translator is Maris Vaga. The application package consists of both facts about Estonia, the objectives of the project of Cultural Capital of Europe as well as the proposed results:

In being the European Capital of Culture in 2011, Tallinn is eager to celebrate the level of maturity it has attained after being independent since 1991. As a free city, it has learned to be independent; it has rediscovered itself and gained the self-confidence to move boldly towards the future. The original objectives of the European Capital of Culture seems purpose-designed for Tallinn, despite the fact that back then its creators could neither foresee the enlargement of the European Union nor Estonia becoming a member state. Tallinn acknowledges

the fact that being a new member on the map of Europe can attract suspicion from some older members. To many Europeans, Tallinn is still more, like a mysterious fairy tale than a reality. (Tarand 2007: 21)

EF was chosen as an example of an official narrative, as it conveys, in my opinion, the wishes of the nation Estonia to be seen by, and accepted into, the European family or cultural sphere.

1.2.2 Outsider Narratives: The Unofficial Versions of Estonia

Travel writing, or travel narratives, differ from travel guides in the sense that they are more subjective than a guidebook and may have autobiographical features. Although, expected to be largely factual, they can take the form of a diary or a memoir and borrow from other literary genres. This is one of the dilemmas – but also pleasures – of reading travel narratives. The author can take many liberties with the descriptions and his/her analysis of places visited and people met, and as readers we are sometimes left wondering as to both the intentions of the author and the ‘accuracy’ of given information.

The first book chosen for this thesis is Justin Petrone’s *My Estonia: Passport Forgery, Meat Jelly Eaters, and Other Stories* published in English in 2009 by Petrone Print in Tallinn (a first edition in Estonian was also published in 2009). The book is 368 pages long and illustrated with color photographs taken by the author. In short, the outline of this book describes how an American journalism student named Justin meets an Estonian girl, Epp, and follows her first around Europe and finally to Estonia. He finds this country quirky, exotic and a little baffling. Justin tries to acclimatize and he is well liked for his good efforts to ‘go native’. *My Estonia* could be categorized both as a memoir as well a travel account. It fuses a biographical narrative with traditional observations of a foreign land.

The second book is *ESTONIA: a Ramble through the Periphery* by Alexander Theroux. The book was published in 2011 by Fantagraphics Books in Seattle, USA. *ESTONIA* is

351 pages long and illustrated with color photographs taken by the author and reproductions of paintings by his wife. The basic plot of the book is as follows: a middle-aged American author Alexander Theroux accompanies his much younger wife, who is on a Fulbright scholarship, to the peripheral country of Estonia. This country is both foreign and a challenge for the author. Theroux shares many facts about Estonia, its people, language and culture with the reader. However, it is difficult to categorize Theroux' *ESTONIA*, an issue which will be further dealt with in chapter 4.2.

The third book is Otso Kantokorpi's *Sankarimatkailijan Neuvosto-Tallinna* [The Herotraveller's Soviet-Tallinn] published in Finnish by LIKE in 2006. The book is 208 pages long and illustrated with black and white photographs taken by Kantokorpi. *Sankarimatkailija* is one book in a series of guidebooks by Kantokorpi on Tallinn. The aim of *Sankarimatkailija* is to take Finnish visitors off the beaten touristic track, that is, out of the Old Town of Tallinn. Kantokorpi has made it his mission to show the Finnish visitor the 'other sides' of Tallinn, past the shops selling alcohol and outside the tourist old town. This is the only material in this thesis not originally written in English and all the translations are my own.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis shows how a nation is constructed through narratives. In order to do so I define 'nation' and explain what I mean by a 'narrated nation'. In chapter two, "A Narrated Nation", I introduce Benedict Anderson's (1991) concept of the nation as an 'imagined community'. Furthermore, I give an overview of Stuart Hall's (1992) theory of the common elements used in the narration of a nation. Hall's five elements serve as my device for analyzing the official narratives of Estonia. In sub chapter 2.2, "Others Describing the Nation", I give a brief overview of the history and genres of travel writing. This sub chapter also introduces the concepts of stereotyping, post-colonialism, and branding, as relevant to national narrative. Sub chapter 2.3 "Narrating the Nation in a Post-Modern World" takes in the global and digitalized era. Furthermore, I will discuss how narrating the nation has changed in the post-modern global world.

In the analysis part of this thesis, chapters three and four, I will point to examples of contemporary narratives where Estonia is produced – and reproduced – both from the inside and from the outside.

In chapter three, “The Most Modern Medieval Country”, institutional narratives on Estonia, such as the President’s speeches, a travel brochures, and the city of Tallinn’s application for European Capital of Culture will be examined and analyzed.

In chapter four, “A Strange Northern Country”, outsider narratives of Estonia in the form of recently published books and web pages will be examined and analyzed. While it would certainly be fascinating to consider fictional and cinematic narratives of Estonia, this study will limit itself to written narratives in the form of books, speeches, brochures and web pages.

In chapter five, “Conclusion”, I will summarize the study and provide a conclusion of my analysis of the contemporary narratives of Estonia.

A NARRATED NATION

Telling stories is as old a custom as mankind. Narratives take many forms – myth, epic, sacred history, legend, saga, and so forth. Within every genre there are many sub-genres: oral and written, poetic and prosaic, historic and fictional. However, every story shares the common function of *someone telling something to someone about something* (Kearney 2002: 5). As people interact with each other they share stories and make sense of the world through these narratives.

2.1 Narrating the Nation

For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to examine contemporary narratives about a particular nation, Estonia. The narratives are representation of events that may be real or imagined. I see the narratives as social constructions of reality. Everyday life is presented as a reality that is interpreted and made meaningful by people. In this highly subjective process the world around them is made coherent (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 33).

Narratives construct the social world that we all live in and create our identities as individuals and as collectives. To be able to own a cohesive and well-presented narrative is just as important for a nation as it is for one of its single inhabitants. Maurice Halbwachs argued for the role of narratives in constructing and organizing social experience (Halbwachs 1992: 48-49). He claimed that people create and share stories that in order to understand the world they live in and in order to achieve a feeling of community.

So it is that when people are think they are alone, face to face with themselves, other people appear and with them the groups of which they are members. (Halbwachs, 1992: 49)

In this thesis I will focus on theories about the narrated nation and national identity. I agree with Stefan Berger (2008) who writes that “the stories we tell each other about

our national belonging and being constitute the nation. These stories change over time and place and are always contested, often violently (Berger 2008: 1). It is also worth pointing out, that in the same manner as we tell stories of our own national belonging, others tell stories about us.

Narratives are often obtained by interviewing people on a particular topic. However, narrative research can also involve the analysis of written text (Josselson 2011: 225). My definition of narrative texts in this particular case is a broad one. It includes everything from printed books to commercial web-pages.

In this chapter I will discuss how the nation is narrated – both from the inside and the outside. What does a nation mean in this context, and how is this nation is narrated from within? Why are the stories about the nation important and how are they created and communicated to others? I will examine the nation as a collective project and look at reasons for forgetfulness on the part of a national narrative. Furthermore, I will discuss how outsiders may narrate a nation, in this particular case through travel writing. Throughout the chapter I will give examples of the narrated nation, Estonian. Finally, I will discuss specific traits of nation narrating in a post-Communist context.

2.1.1 What is a Nation?

The term *nation* is most commonly understood as a group of people that share a common culture, language, ethnicity, and history. Most often it is also used to refer to a people that share a clearly defined territory or government, as in the *nation-state*. Nation carries various meanings for different users of the term, and the connotations and meanings have changed over time.

“What is a nation?” asks Ernest Renan in his famous essay from 1882. Is it, for example, race or a common language that unite a group of people into what we call a nation? According to Renan it is not. “A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle - - The nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and

devotion” (Renan 1990: 19). Like Renan, Benedict Anderson (1991) also goes beyond the physical or geopolitical when defining the nation. A nation is, in short, a *socially constructed community* held together by an imaginary bond and the memories of a common past.

In *Imagined Communities* (1991) Anderson gives three essential elements of the imagined cultural community that comprise a nation. Firstly, Anderson stresses the importance of language and states that a nation is “a community imagined through language. However, Anderson points out that “it is always a mistake to treat languages in the way that certain nationalist ideologues treat them – as an emblem of nation-ness, like flags, costumes, folk dances and the rest. More important is the capacity language has for generating imagined communities, building in effect *particular solidarities*” (Anderson 1991: 133, 146). Finland would be such an example, where having two national languages does not deflect from an imagined, collective identity of the nation.

However, having a shared language – or languages – is not enough to create an imagined community. The people must also be able to partake of what they have in common. The second of Anderson’s essential elements for the construction of an imagined community is communication, and namely, the technical development of print media (Anderson 1991: 44).

Finally, besides language and print media, Anderson associates the emergence of nationalism with capitalism. As print media developed and printed material became available to ‘the common man’, shared ideas of nationalism began to emerge and spread. Print capitalism made it possible for masses of people to share with each other, and to relate to each other in a completely new ways (Anderson 1991: 36).

It is also worth remembering what Anderson notes, namely, that one can be invited into a nationality, as the nation is conceived in language, not in blood. “Print-language is what invents nationalism, not *a* language per se (Anderson 1991: 134).

2.1.2 Why Stories Matter

According to Benedict Anderson (1991: 204), the narratives of a nation can be said to resemble that of an individual's autobiography. Like the individual, the nation needs the stories to make sense of, not only the present, but the past as well as a probably future. But why do we need stories? Kearney (2002) goes as far as arguing, by rephrasing Socrates, that an unnarrated life is not worth living (Kearney 2002: 14).

Ernst Renan (1990: 19) discusses the spiritual principle of the nation and what constitutes such a principle. The foundation for the nation's spiritual principle, or its soul, is two-fold. Firstly, the nation needs to be in a possession of a remembered past, and, secondly, there must be a willingness of the members of the nation to continue to live together and carry on their legacy. The condition for being a nation is to have achieved great things in the past and a wish to go on to perform further deeds.

A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of sacrifices that one has made in the past and those that one are prepared to make in the future. (Renan 1990: 19)

Likewise, in his article 'The Nation Form: History and Ideology', Etienne Balibar (1991:86) states that the history of nations, our own as well as the nations of others, are presented to us in the narrative form a continuity. The narrative of the nation is a project stretching over a long time "in which there are different stages and moments of coming to self-awareness". Some nations have indeed had the privilege of the uninterrupted development of their national project and the formation of its identity for centuries. Others, for example the Baltic States, enjoyed a few decades of independence in the early 20th century before being deprived of their freedom for almost half a century due to the Soviet Occupation. In the case of Estonia, the history and the identity formation of the young nation (1918-1940) violently interrupted has somehow to be joined together with that of the newly independent Estonia (1991-) so that the narrative appears to be cohesive and rational. The stories of the nation can almost be compared to a sort of glue that holds the nation together, at least in narrative form, and in particular in times of crisis.

2.1.3 How to Narrate a Nation

Stuart Hall (1992) identifies five main elements for telling the cultural narrative of a nation and to create a national identity for the entire nation. The first element is that “the narrative of the nation is told and retold in national histories, literatures, the media and popular culture” (Hall 1992: 293). This *repeated and reproduced narrative* provides the basis for everything from stories of historical events to national symbols, such as flags. The representations of shared experiences, whether triumphs or defeats, give meaning to the nation. The members of such an ‘imagined community’ share this narrative, which gives meaning, importance and significance to ordinary and individual lives (Hall 1992: 293). Hall (1992: 293). gives the example of England with its green and rolling hills and celebrations like Poppy Day that both define Englishness or what England *is*. In the same manner, Finland’s Finnishness can be identified through symbolic value of nature (the thousand lakes) and the geographical location (a cold and snowy northern land) (Kotila 2012: 80-82).

Hall’s second element is the emphasis on *origins, continuity, tradition, and timelessness* (Hall 1992: 294). The narratives of the nation tie the members of the nation and community to the past and give the promise of a bright future. According to Ernest Gellner (quoted in Hall 1992: 294), national identity is represented as something primordial, as a ‘natural’ phenomenon. If repressed or occupied, it could be described as slumbering and ready to be ‘awakened’ (Gellner). In the case of Estonia, the idea of the nation and its people existing and waiting for the dawn of freedom during the Soviet occupation is almost as powerful as the concept and narrative of independence (as discussed below). In another narrative, Tallinn is repeatedly referred to as an “ancient city by the sea”. The notion that the city has existed ‘forever’ is used repeatedly in touristic narratives (see for example Tarand 2007: 12; 49; 76).

The third strategy for national narrative that Hall discusses is what Hobsbawm and Ranger have termed the *invention of tradition*. By invented traditions they refer to different practices and rituals that by repetition imply continuity with a historical past (Hobsbawm & Ranger in Hall 1992: 294). In 2014 the Republic of Estonia officially

celebrated its 96th birthday. The raising of the flag on the Parliament building and the military parades overseen by the President follow the same procedure as they did during the period of the first Estonian Republic (1918 – 1940). For an outsider, it may be difficult to grasp the concept of celebrating 96 years of independence when the country was in fact occupied for nearly 50 of those years. However, the return to important traditions of celebrating a nation's independence, in the case of Estonia, cements the bond between two 'good' or preferable periods in the recent history.

The fourth example of the narrative of national culture is the *foundational myth*, which is the story that locates the origins of the nation (Hall 1992: 294). This story of the nation is trying to locate the origins of a nation and its people so early that they become "lost in mists, of not 'real', but 'mythic' times" (Hall 1992: 295). Invented traditions can make less desirable periods or events of history more understandable and fit them into a national narrative. Medieval traditions, whether truthful or not, brought to life for commemoration of significant historical dates seldom celebrate serfdom, but can serve as a reminder of a people's successful defence under a certain lord against a foreign aggressor. Marek Tamm (2008: 505) points out that, in the case of Estonia "the national historical narrative is inseparable from the concept of independence". The Singing Revolution, a series of events that took place between 1987 and 1991 and ultimately led to Estonia's independence from the Soviet Union, has already become a mythical period in Estonian history. Twenty-five years later it seems that "every" Estonian took part in protests, concerts, and other mass events to let their opinions be known. Subsequently, 'everyone' has a story to tell about this period. Naturally, this is not the case. Hundreds of thousands of people did participate in the actual events, but in the mythology of the Singing Revolution 'every' Estonian took part.

Finally, Hall (1992: 295) concludes that national identity is often grounded on the idea that the nation consists of one *pure, original people* or *'folk'*. In reality, there are hardly any primordial people left anywhere in the world, who exercise power over an original territory.

In *Nation and Narration* Homi K. Bhabha (1990: 3) explores “the Janus-faced ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation”. Bhabha asks for a wide dissemination through which the construction of the fields of meanings and symbols associated with national life can be carried out. According to Bhabha:

The nation-space needs to be investigated in the process of the articulation of elements; where meanings may be partial because they are *in media res*; and history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of ‘composing’ its powerful image. (Bhabha 1990: 3)

This is different from the persistent attempts of nationalist discourses to produce narratives of continuous national progress or the idea of a primeval *Volk* (Bhabha 1990: 1). The course of the life of ‘real’ nations is signified by stumbling and faltering, as well as by success and victory, which makes it all the more interesting, when the narratives do not always reflect the struggle.

2.1.4 Is the Narrated Nation a Collective Project?

No nation consists of a homogenous group of people. From historical wars and the shifting of territorial boundaries, to the migration of the modern, globalized world peoples have moved, and settled, and mixed voluntarily or by force. Even if nationalist narratives may strive to compose a narrative of an ethnically ‘clean’ or culturally uniform people, the reality is always something more ambiguous and muddled. Hall (1996: 296) notes that “nations are always composed of different social classes, gender, minorities, and ethnic groups. National cultures and national narratives are therefore also structures of power”. It is worth remembering that when a nation is unified by war or by a colonizing power, exercising cultural hegemony over the colonized or the occupied (Hall 1996: 297).

Both warfare, but also more peaceful political, social and economic changes can be unifying forces for a nation. To pull together for a common goal, to instil the notions of distinctiveness and uniqueness can strengthen the national identity project on the imaginary collective level. At the same time, it may also cause ‘othering’. (Petersoo 2007: 118.)

Alan Megill (2008: 3) also cautions against the construction of nations on identities rooted in history because “they tend to essentialise particular ways of belonging to the nation and exclude others”. The same narrative that can be used to unify a nation pointing to a common past and heritage could potentially be ‘turned against’ parts of the nation’s inhabitants and write them out of the narrative (Megill 2008: 3).

2.1.5 Why Nations Forget

Just as individuals cannot necessarily remember their childhood or every single event in their lives, neither can nations. As well as remembering and celebrating, or choosing to remember or celebrate, certain events of its history, the nation can also, as a collective, choose to forget. Benedict Anderson (1991: 204) comments on the oblivions of the nation: “All profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives”.

The past is a notoriously difficult subject for both the individual and the nation. Immanuel Wallerstein (1991: 78) writes about pastness as “a mode by which persons are persuaded to act in the present in ways they might not otherwise act”. Since this pastness is a central element for maintaining group socialization, it is a moral as well as political problem. In addition, Wallerstein argues, pastness is a contemporary problem. Moreover, since the reality is constantly changing, so is pastness (Wallerstein 1991: 78).

2.2 Outsiders on the Nation

In this chapter I will give a brief outline of travel writing and discuss how the outsider describing the nation has traditionally been a white male. Furthermore, I will give an overview of how Estonia has been described in writing by some men traveling in the past 150 years. Finally, I will discuss the problem of the outsiders narrating a nation. Is there a justified fear that the outsiders will not ‘get it right’, but rather resort to stereotyping or worse?

2.2.1 Travel Writing

Narratives of travelling are as old as travelling and fiction itself. From Herodotus to TripAdvisor people have been fascinated and intrigued by what others have experienced, and what advice they can bestow. The writer thus takes on the role of an authority, even if he or she is not expected to provide minute details concerning sights, transportation and such. I choose to stress the words *a greater authority* in the quote below, because I feel that Edward Said (2003) expresses something of what I find interesting within the genre of travel and guidebooks: namely, the fact that the narrative seems to acquire an authority beyond what it is actually is.

Travel books or guidebooks are about as ‘natural’ a kind of text, as logical in their composition and in their use, as any book one can think of, precisely because of this human tendency to fall back on a text when the uncertainties of travel in strange parts seem to threaten one’s equanimity. Many travellers find themselves saying of an experience in a new country that it wasn’t what they expected, meaning that it wasn’t what a book said it would be. And of course many writers of travel books or guidebooks compose them in order to say that a country is like this, or better, that it is more colourful, expensive, interesting, and so forth. The idea in either case is that people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires *a greater authority*, and use, even than the actuality it describes. (Said 2003: 93, emphasis added)

Said’s *Orientalism* (2003) is a central work in postcolonial studies and criticism. In it Said helps the reader to identify the processes that construct the binary opposites of

‘West’ and ‘East’ – or the ‘West’ and the ‘Rest’ – and uncover the values that cause these opposites to emerge. Examples of the opposites are: civilised/uncivilised, developed/undeveloped, and liberated/repressed. The academic interest in travel writing as a genre can be associated with the spread of postcolonial studies in humanities and social studies. Which is an interest that seeks to study and identify the European imperial project and its role in the foundation of our modern, globalized world (Thompson 2011: 3).

Travel writing, or literature, is mostly defined as narrative accounts about an individual’s encounter with another place. This is a unique form of fiction that includes everything from journals, and diaries to narratives of exploration and adventure (Blanton 2002: 2). Traditional travel guides, on the other hand, provide readers with more pragmatic information about a specific place. Sometimes these two overlap, but it is generally considered that travel writing provides an experience for the reader of a particular place, culture, or people seen through the eyes of the writer. This is what we have come to expect of travel literature today: impersonal and personal elements (Blanton 2002: 5). In addition to the aforementioned forms of travel writing, I would include blogs, weblogs, and other internet forums for travellers in the postmodern, digitalized world.

As Blanton points out, travel writing is an ancient business. It was, however, not until the eighteenth century that the idea of travel – and travel writing – for ‘every man’ came to be considered a worthwhile and essential undertaking. The Grand Tours were a sort of instructional rite the passage for students and writers, where they developed intellectual powers both through the exposure to culture and the self-reflections of writing (Blanton 2002: 11).

That both travel and travel writing were, for a long time, a predominantly male business, is evident. What was deemed worthwhile both for exploration and subsequently writing about would surely have been different if women had been allowed to travel and write. The white, male European travel and exploration writing produced “the rest of the world” for European readership. According to Mary Louise

Pratt (1992: 5), the travel writing by Europeans about non-Europeans still partake in this kind of ‘Euroimperialism’.

In her book *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) Pratt discusses the phenomenon of 1970s travel writing which she refers to as ‘white man’s lament’. According to Pratt (1992: 220), it “seems to remain remarkably uniform across representations of different places, and by westerners of different nationalities”. On one hand, there is the realization that, in a postcolonial and postmodern era, there are no more white spots on the map to be explored or conquered. On the other hand, the previously colonized areas are liberated, modernized, industrialized, and urbanized. The time of domination of the white, western male as the one to observe and define is coming to an end. Pratt (Pratt 1992: 220) writes:

It is in this fear that the contemporary seeing-man records what has always been there: the returning gaze of others, now demanding recognition as subjects of history.(Pratt 1992: 220)

With the age of Internet technology and the birth of modern electronic versions of travel writing in the late 20th century the death of traditional travel writing has been foreshadowed by some. The fact that anyone can publish their travelogues seems neither to have dampened ‘professional’ travel writing nor print publishing of travel books. One of the central issues of travel writing has always been the relationship between the self and the world, which means that the development of the genre of travel literature is closely linked to that of other genres of literature, in particular fiction and autobiography. As Blanton (2002: 29) points out “the genre has survived because it has changed”.

Travel writing in 2014 is not what it was in 1914 or 1814, but it lives on as a genre. Armchair travelers want to read about the adventures of people who have gone to foreign places and experienced exotic cultures. The forms and the contents of the story may have changed, but the mission is still the same. Oxfeldt (2010: 209) finds similarities between the classic travelogue, which is structured around a narrative of a

quest, with the postmodern and deconstructed narrative where the quest is downgraded “through irony, anticlimax, parody, and carnivalization”. A journey is a journey, whether it is written in the form of a memoir, a diary, or a blog post.

2.2.2 Estonia in Travel Writing

Stories about the distant land of Estonia were first told by the ancient explorers Pytheas and Tacitus. It was said that in the far north, at the last stop of the end of the world, there was a strange country with inhabitants and customs like no other. People knew about this place thanks to this tale, but few, if any, ever saw it with their own eyes. One thousand years later, Arab adventure seekers rediscovered this place. It was at this time that the 12th-century geographer and scientist, Al Idris, identified Tallinn as the “most important city” in this northern country. (Tarand 2007: 11)

In the application for European Capital of Culture, the author take some artistic freedom when describing the documentation of Estonia’s existence. Estonia was not known to the ancient world and certainly not under the name Estonia.

Modern Estonia has been mentioned and described by travellers and visitors particularly in the past 150 years. At the advent of this period, the authors are almost exclusively educated men from the Nordic countries or Western Europe. The German school inspector Carl Russwurm, who worked in Hapsal in the mid-19th century provides us with some insight into the conditions among the Estonian-Swedes in his work *Eibofolke oder die Schweden an den Küsten Ehistlands und auf Runö* (1855). Several Lutheran ministers write about their postings in remote locations and describe the peasant population and their daily lives (see Ekman 2003[1847]; Schantz 1967).

Curt Muthe’s *Estland och Lettland* (1938), published in Sweden, and Ronald Seth’s *Baltic Corner. Travel in Estonia* (1939), published in the UK, are examples from the inter-war period, when Estonia was an independent nation and raced to reach the standards of other independent European states and economies. Although the late 19th

or early 20th century traveller often found Estonia lacking in comfort and accommodation, the descriptions are usually favourable. The peasants are good-natured, if somehow backwards, the nature is pretty and there are few other tourists about. This enhanced the feeling of experiencing – almost exploring – a place previously untouched and therefore unique. Travel books published in the late 1930s are clearly intended for the budding mass tourism in Northern Europe. The visitors were unanimously surprised to find Estonia, and in particular Tallinn, such a developed and dynamic place. The coastal towns of Pärnu and Hapsal had high hopes of before long competing with the other spa towns along the Baltic coast for the attention of tourists. Regular ferry traffic ran between Sweden and Estonia in the summer. This was, naturally, a development that the outbreak of the Second World War put an end to.

When foreign or non-Soviet tourism to Estonia was resumed in the 1960s and 1970s, the capital was visited mostly by Finnish ferry tourists looking to buy cheap vodka. Travel in the Soviet Union was restricted and there were no opportunities of experiencing anything other than what was on the official agenda. After the fall of the Berlin wall, and the Soviet empire, and with Estonia regaining its independence in 1991, travel to the Baltic countries picked up quickly. No longer is it only the Finns seeking inexpensive alcohol, but also Europeans and Americans coming on large cruise ships in the summer. Tallinn was the European Capital of Culture in 2011 and has been on the list of cities-to-visit for the partying young for several years in a row.

2.2.3 What Are They Saying about Us?

In the case of a recent book about Estonia, Alexander Theroux' *ESTONIA: a Ramble through the Periphery*, which constitutes part of the primary material for this thesis, many a reader's patience was put to a test. Although Theroux expressed some admiration for his chosen subject, Estonia – the language, the culture, and the people – he, nonetheless, managed to offend native and foreign readers alike.

Even if this study does not include looking at fictional literature as representation of Estonia, it is worth mentioning a recent debate concerning literary representations of Estonia. The debate is interesting, because it highlights the question of ‘them’ and ‘us’, ‘Western’ and ‘Soviet’, among other issues. During the fall of 2010 there was a public debate within the cultural and literary circles Estonia focusing on the novel *Purge* (2008). This novel was written by the Finnish-Estonian author Sofi Oksanen and first published in Finnish and Estonian in 2008 and subsequently translated to many languages. In the debate which begun when *Purge* won several international, literary prizes, Oksanen was accused of giving a too nasty, glum, and even incorrect description of Estonian history and society. Some of Oksanen’s critics would have liked to see ‘nice’ books about Estonia written and preferably by ‘real’ Estonians. Somewhat more subdued criticism has also befallen other Finns who have written about Estonia, for example Seppo Zetterberg’s *Viron historia* [The History of Estonia] (2007). The following questions were: Why was this comprehensive and monumental work on Estonia’s history completed by a Finn and not an Estonian? Would its qualities have been different, and would the history have been told more accurately had the book been written by an Estonian? Both incidents raised the questions of *authority*: who can say what and how about Estonia, or any country for that matter. The debate also showed how difficult it is to keep separate different genres when emotions arise. Oksanen’s book is a work of fiction, but was read and analyzed by many as historical documentation. The same blurring of genres occurs both in the cases of the official narratives and unofficial narratives, such as travel narratives and travelogues.

Describing Estonia or constructing an image or narrative of the country and its people, whether in fiction or non-fiction, is not an easy task. The writer seems bound by several explicit or implicit contracts and rules. There are contracts concerning the relationship between the author and her/his readers, but also contracts and rules concerning the genre and the subject of the story. Although this thesis will not discuss narrator-reader relationships or contracts, one such aspects that can complicate the narration of a nation is worth mentioning, namely stereotyping.

In her article “The Uses and Abuses of National Stereotypes” Isobel Lindsay (1997) discusses Anglo-Scottish stereotypes and their use in politics:

Part of the nationalist strategy has been to use national stereotypes to project certain messages. It has been, if not a construction, at least a cultivation of aspects of identity. (Lindsay 1997)

Stereotyping can be used both by ‘us’ and ‘them’ to make a point, whether it is pleasant or unfair, accurate or false. Lindsay continues: “The stereotype is an essential component in the construction of identity. It is a universal way of trying to find pattern and predictability in complex experience” (Lindsay 1997). According to Lindsay, the importance in the national stereotypes is not whether they reflect truth or reality, past or present, but that they are part of our consciousness (Lindsay 1997). Because we all have preconceived notions of other groups and nations, these stereotypes may influence our behavior – and obviously also the narratives about these groups.

There is an old joke that has circulated in (Western) Europe for decades: “Heaven is where the police are British, the chefs are French, the mechanics are German, the lovers are Italian, and it is all organized by the Swiss. Hell is where the police are German, the chefs are English, the mechanics are French, the lovers are Swiss, and it’s all organized by the Italians”. Used as self-irony or for light banter, stereotypes can be both amusing and perhaps even useful. National and cultural stereotypes can be both descriptive and prescriptive in nature: they are the perceivers’ shared beliefs about the characteristics of a certain group and at the same time also function as social expectations (Lehtonen 2013).

It is when stereotypes cross over to prejudice they can become potentially harmful. In view of the past years’ economic recession in Europe, the labeling and the stereotyping has said to have hardened in the political rhetoric of the European Union. Previously latent north-south or south-north stereotypes are now used as arguments by both sides. Interestingly, neither of these jokes and the current political squabbles includes Eastern Europe. EUobserver.com writes:

Under the extreme version of the narrative, northern Europeans are depicted as hard-working, law-abiding people who live within their means. Southern Europeans are presented as work-shy, rule-bending and profligate. (Mahony 2012)

Understandably, neither Estonia, nor any other 'new' EU member state wishes to be seen as a country consisting of passport forgers or a cheap labor reserve for 'old' Europe. Estonia does not want to be stereotyped or seen as 'the other', but wants to be included as a rightful member in the (Western) European family.

While the institutional narratives are easier to control as far as acceptable stereotyping or the making of myths and legends, outsider narratives often pose a dilemma. Outsider narratives, such as travel literature, may put a nation on the map, but it might not be entirely in the manner or for the reasons one had wished.

3 THE MOST MODERN MEDIEVAL COUNTRY

This chapter presents and analyses the contemporary official and institutionalized narratives of Estonia that I have chosen for this thesis.

Like most – or all – of the former Eastern European countries, newly-independent Estonia took action in all areas of society to rid itself of the Soviet era heritage. The initial years of independence saw the birth of new laws, regulations, and institutions. As Marek Tamm (2013: 1) points out, these ‘new’, or transitional, societies have a dual task. They have to build a bright future while settling their accounts with an often contested and complicated past.

For a society that has recently undergone major upheaval, the need for a unifying narrative is especially strong. As will be shown in the examples of the official narratives of Estonia, the elements of *freedom*, *modernity*, and *myth* are used repeatedly. These elements can be found in the President’s speeches to the nation, in brochures published by the Tourist Board or by Brand Estonia, as well as in the Tallinn application for Capital of Culture of Europe for 2011. They send the following message from Estonia to the reader: (1) We are an independent and unique nation, (2) we are no longer an Eastern European country or a post-Soviet state, (3) we are part of the European Union, and (4) we are a modern, successful and dynamic country. Furthermore, themes such as digitalization, nature, and the historic European past are often utilized.

3.1 Narrative of Freedom: Soviet No More

Picture 1. The President of Estonia on the Independence Day 24.02.2013.



The current President of the Republic of Estonia, Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves (pictured above), makes official speeches to the nation on several occasions each year, as did his predecessors. The most important speeches, which are broadcast on radio, TV and the Internet are delivered on Estonia's original Independence Day, and on New Year's Eve. During his presidency, Mr. Ilves has had occasion to celebrate many Estonian milestones in his speeches.

Ladies and gentlemen, Ten months and a week from now, when Estonia becomes a member of the European monetary union, we will be the most integrated state in northern Europe. I repeat: the most integrated. Of the countries in Northern Europe, only Estonia is a participant in all four integration programs involving Western democracies – the euro zone, the Schengen acquis, the European Union and NATO. That means Estonia has never found itself so firmly at the centre of Europe. Never. This gives us an immense sense of security. It also gives us the responsibility of knowing what is going on in our four common spaces. It imposes on us the obligation to participate in the dialogue, if we want to be a functioning part of the centre of Europe. (The President of the Republic of Estonia 2010a)

Perhaps there is nothing peculiar about the President of Estonia, Mr. Ilves, calling his country the most integrated in Europe. This is expected of the leader of any nation. Ms. Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, who was re-elected in September 2013, calls her country 'an exceptional nation' in references to its strong economy in a European Union fraught by recessions (Hessel 2013). Mr. David Cameron, the British Prime Minister, declares that the UK "is still the greatest country on Earth" speaking to political supporters in October 2012 (Wheeler 2012). However, in a political and historical perspective, Estonia is a newcomer and lightweight in the European family compared to nations with the historic heritage such as the United Kingdom and Germany. Still, it is Mr. Ilves's duty and role to remind the Estonian people time after time that they are indeed a part of Europe, and, specifically, *Western* Europe. However, at times Mr. Ilves also uses the term 'northern' to define and locate Estonia (as seen in the example above).

The accepted and 'proper' official narrative about Estonia and its history, culture, language and people is both explicitly referred to and often implied. According to this

narrative, the first independent Estonian republic (1918-1940) is considered the ‘good old times’ against which everything else is compared and measured. The national identity and cultural uniqueness that had been born and developed during the national awakening of the late Czarist period was celebrated and cherished in the time between the two world wars. Unfortunately, due to the Nazi and Soviet occupations, the Estonians lost their freedom and independence for approximately 50 years. The Soviet period is per definition a “dark and bad” stretch in Estonia’s history and there are few things to celebrate about this era. Further, in the unofficial official narrative, the Estonian’s persevered and managed to hold on to their unique identity despite the attempts to ‘Sovietize’ them. The second Estonian republic, which gained its independence on 20 August 1991, is universally described as a success story. Nothing less is allowed or accepted. According to the modern myth, the Estonians first sang themselves to freedom in a peaceful revolution. Estonia then managed to join NATO, the European Union and the European Monetary Union. Estonia prides itself on being an ‘e-tiger’, a country where people not only pay bills and buy bus tickets online, but also vote in national elections.

In *Return to the Western World* Marju Lauristin (1997: 29) writes that for Estonian, it was a self-evident outcome of the 1991 independence that they would *return to Europe*. They fully expected to be accepted by the West and to be recognized as an integral part of the Western cultural realm (Lauristin 1997: 29). However, this view was, and is still not, entirely self-evident. Maria Mälksoo (2009: 655) describes Polish and Baltic processes to become European in the post-Cold War period. The “becoming European” in this case means the desire to achieve “full Europeanness” as opposed to the “lesser European” designation of Eastern Europe in comparison to the Western counterpart (Mälksoo 2009: 655).

The rewriting of history after 1991 is part of the redefining of collective identities and narratives in post-communist societies such as Estonia. The different ways of describing or commemorating the Second World War is one of them. In Russia the war is remembered as the Great Patriotic War whereby the Soviet Union liberated Europe from fascism. For Western Europeans it may be difficult to understand the discrepancies in

celebrating versus mourning the end of the Second World War that takes place every year in what is now the post-communist bloc.

While Putin-era Russian elites internalize the war as the triumphal foundational myth of the new Russia, the same war represents traumatic occupation and loss of national identity for the Estonian post-communist narrative. (Kattago 2012: 89)

Some former Soviet or post-communist countries embrace their geographical position on the border between the East and the West, and make the most of that position both in national narratives and in touristic campaigns: “the idea of being located at the crossroads of East and West” (Kaneva & Popescu 2011, 199). Estonia often shuns that position even if it has historically been given that position on numerous occasions.

In his speech to the nation on the 20th anniversary of the 1991 Independence Estonia’s President Mr. Ilves expressed the position of Estonia:

Our goal was to integrate, and to be integrated – within our borders and with respect to Europe – the Europe that the Young Estonia movement dreamed of a century ago - - In the grand scheme of things, in the large tapestry of the Estonian story, we have closed one chapter, the one that started in 1991, when we emerged from the valley of shadow. This chapter can truly be considered closed. Perhaps not just a chapter, but a volume, epic, an odyssey, entitled “The Return”. And our tomorrows shine with hope. - - We have access to all of Europe now, and as Europeans, the overwhelming majority of the world is open to us. (The President of the Republic of Estonia 2011)

It was Estonia’s return to the West, along with the unquenched spirit of the Estonians that made the following possible:

Tiger Leap, Skype, the digital prescription, the e-police and e-tax and customs board, as well as the X-Road’s database environment are studied or copied by countries across Europe and even further. (The President of the Republic of Estonia 2013)

As far as the official and contemporary narrative goes, Mr. Ilves declares Estonia's mission accomplished: Estonia has returned to Europe. In changing its national currency, the Estonian mark, for the euro, the Estonians gave up some of the independence, but gained an even stronger bond with (Western) Europe.

Good people of Estonia. This time, the beginning of the New Year is different. In a few seconds, the euro will become the currency in Estonia – the currency that is used by most European countries. (The President of the Republic of Estonia 2010b)

The Western world and its nations have changed dramatically since Benedict Anderson first published his *Imagined Communities* in 1983, which is not to say that Anderson's concept of the 'imagined community' is no longer relevant or applicable. President Ilves makes clever use of the idea in his Independence Day speech in February 2011:

Today, on the birthday of the Estonian state, let us talk about you and me, and our neighbours, relatives and co-workers. Let us talk about all people in Estonia, people we may not know personally but whose common threads run side by side, uninterrupted, like the striped patterns of Estonian folk costumes. They run together, as one fabric, on the loom of fate. (The President of the Republic of Estonia 2011)

However, in an increasingly globalized world, and in a post-Soviet context, in particular, there are additional aspects worth considering in the narration of a nation, such as Estonia. In his article "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post in Post-Soviet?" (2006) David Chioni Moore asks whether the descriptions of post-colonialism that are applied to Africa might be used for describing "the giant crescent from Estonia to Kazakhstan" (Moore 2006: 17). In this first anthology concerned with postcolonial studies in the *Baltic Postcolonialism and its Critics*, David Chioni Moore confesses to being struck by the silence on the subject of post-colonialism both by the Western postcolonial studies and the many scholars that specialize in post-Soviet studies (Moore 2006: 17). Violeta Keletras argues that part of the problem of not wanting to recognize post-colonialism as an issue in Baltic studies was psychological.

Preferring to think of themselves as superior to other colonized peoples, the Balts find being lumped together with the rest of colonized humanity unflattering, if not humiliating, and want to be with the civilized part of the world. (Kelertas 2006: 4)

In his speech on the Independence Day 2011 (quoted on the previous page) Mr. Ilves talks about the lives of Estonians running parallel like the threads in the folk costume the President himself always wears on national holidays. These threads are unique because they are part of the Estonian pattern, not the Soviet-Estonian, or the post-Soviet pattern. While the loom of fate has not always run smoothly for Estonians, there now seems to be a conscious effort on part of the institutional narrative to omit the bumpier parts of the story.

3.2 Narrative of Modernity: Lynx and Skype

Picture 2. Illustration from *Where Medieval Meets Modern*.



In the institutional, or official, narratives of Estonia the theme of modernity and repeated again and again. Even if nature – and the land/soil – has always been an important factor in traditional Estonian narrative it mostly takes the backseat in the contemporary ones. The brochure *Where Medieval Meets Modern* (MMM 2010) is one exception.

Estonia is a country of contrasts. Such pristine and untouched nature is found only in a few places in Europe. A few hundred meters off the highway you can find yourself in virgin forest, where wolves, bears, and lynx roam free. A large

proportion of our nation's land is designated as natural protection areas. At the same time, Estonia is on the vanguard of technological development. We invented the world famous free internet telephone service, Skype. Wireless internet is available even on buses and trains. On small farms deep in the forest news of the world arrives via internet, there is no need to drive to town to buy the newspaper. (MMM 2010: 2)

The quote above is from a chapter titled "Estonia – WIFI in the Forest" of the Estonian Tourist Board's said brochure. The allusion to wild prey is perhaps not the most successful, considering common misconceptions and stereotypical images of polar bears roaming the streets of cities located in the North. But lynx and boar make an exciting contrast to modern amenities like WIFI and Skype. The text above is accompanied by a photograph of a young woman surfing on her MacBook while sitting on a bale of hay. Presumably she is to be congratulated, because while enjoying her time in the refreshing countryside and nature, she will not have to endure a single moment of it offline. If we are to believe official Estonian narratives, this young woman lives in one of the most technologically advanced Western countries in the world. And the brochure assures the reader that should a visitor to Estonia lose the sense of time during the visit she or he should simply "open your laptop on the sauna bench and review your return ticket" (MMM 2010: 15)

The same narrative of modernity and advance is picked up and expanded on by journalists and reporters covering Estonia for Tallinn's status as European Capital of Culture in 2011. Regardless of the fact that many inhabitants in the most far-off countryside do not yet enjoy the modern blessings of electricity or indoor plumbing, and that the poor pensioners hardly own computers, the digital success narrative is repeated again and again.

Estonia guarantees its citizens internet access by law. The people of Tallinn regularly buy their parking tickets by SMS; the local public transport is well organized: tax returns can be completed in half an hour on the phone computer; and doctor's prescriptions are posted online and printed out at home. And obviously, the Estonians also vote electronically. (Bisping 2011: 85)

The authentic and the natural are set against the latest technology, and the medieval against the modern for maximum effect. On the cover of MMM what seems like a young happy modern couple are enjoying espressos while watching something on a laptop. Their location is Katariina käik, one of the most picturesque spots in old town Tallinn and one of the most photographed by tourists. On a closer look, the young man is wearing the armour of a medieval knight. Modern meets medieval in the most literal of fashions.

In their article on Romanian and Bulgarian national branding, Kaneva & Popescu (2011: 201) describe the current national branding narratives of the post-communist countries as “vacillating between an idyllic, folkloric, pre-modern past and a glitzy, luxurious, modern future. The lynx are notoriously difficult to spot and boar can be dangerous. In all likelihood few visitors to Estonia would want to meet them, save for in the Tallinn Zoo. Yet, the juxtaposition of an authentic and natural setting where wildlife *can* roam free with the urban capital with all its modern conveniences makes for a good story.

In the years 1993-1994, Sigrid Rausing did fieldwork in north-western Estonia for her doctoral thesis *History, Memory, and Identity in Post-Soviet Estonia* (2004). She writes:

For the Estonians, the North European identity did not signify ‘the other’ into which, for better or worse, they were emerging. Rather, they saw it as representing their own inner core, which had been denied its natural and normal expressions and development during the Soviet rule. (Rausing 2004: 38)

Being Estonian was being a Westerner, at least, in the comparison with Soviet Russians. Rausing (2004: 38) continues: “In the early 1990s the identity of Estonians shifted: as the country moved from the edges of the East to the edges of the West, the identity of the people changed from that of being Westerners in the East to being Easterners in the West”.

Close to fifteen years after Sigrid Rausing did her fieldwork in Noarootsi and ten years after years after *Return to the Western World* was published, Estonia and the Estonians still seem not to be entirely confident that they are fully integrated into Europe. Under the heading “Background: The Dream of Europe – Quality of Life” and sub-heading “Back to Europe”, the team behind the City of Tallinn’s the application for European Capital of Culture wrote in 2007:

As a candidate for the European Capital of Culture 2011, Tallinn and Estonia have the potential to return to the European cultural map as full members, forming a new European identity. (Tarand 2007: 25)

Perhaps Estonia has been placed on – or returned to – the geopolitical map of Europe, but there still are shadows of the past casting a doubt on how well this has succeeded in the eyes of other European countries.

The dream of Europe and the ambiguity in the self-identification can be seen on many different levels. One is in the need to define what one is *not*, as seen in the discussion in chapter 3.1.

3.3 Narrative of Myths: Fairy Tale Tallinn

Picture 3. Waitress dressed in medieval garb in Old Town, Tallinn.



As the narratives of freedom and modernity the narrative of myth is surprisingly urban. In every town around the Baltic Sea that claims a Hanseatic heritage, the visitor is met by people dressed in ‘medieval’ attire urging you to try their attraction, whether it be food, drink, an experience or an exhibition. Tallinn is, naturally, no exception. When fifteen years ago there was one single medieval themed restaurant in Old Town, there are now dozens. Roasted almonds medieval style and mulled wine is sold on every street corner. The visitor may buy her or his own pointed shoes or a leather hose. There is an exhibition of medieval torture equipment and possibilities to try one’s hand at archery and so forth. The narrative of the medieval and mythical is of a recent date.

Tallinn’s Old Town was added to the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites in 1997. Despite suffering heavy bombing in 1944, the Old Town survived the Soviet era more or less intact.

The Historic Centre (Old Town) of Tallinn is an exceptionally complete and well-preserved medieval northern European trading city on the coast of the Baltic Sea. The city developed as a significant centre of the Hanseatic League during the major period of activity of this great trading organization in the 13th-16th centuries. (UNESCO 2014)

In 2007 Estonia made an official application to the European Commission for the status of Capital of Culture for 2011. In a relatively short period of time since its 1991 independence Estonia had managed to become a member of NATO, join the European Union and was also on the waiting list to join the European Monetary Union². To showcase its capital to all of Europe and the world would permanently put Estonia on the conscious map of Western, cultured countries.

Balancing the image of a West European country, the medieval and the modern that Estonia wanted to present to its visitors with the expectations and preconceptions of the same visitors is not an easy task. However, the team behind the 2007 application, *Everlasting Fairytale* cannot be accused of not trying. They write:

² Estonia even won the European Song Contest in 2001, truly a sign of membership in the European family.

Tallinn is seen as an exciting destination city, and many people come here on a journey to discover without really knowing much about what it is they have come to see. It should not be seen as just another city among so many others, but as something absolutely unique and fabulous. Metaphorically speaking the fairy tale image is the best way to picture Tallinn, the city that makes everything possible and exciting, and where visitors usually experience a happy ending to their journey. Outside our everyday concerns, and problems, there is a fairy tale place called Tallinn that will help make people's dreams come true and provide them with a getaway destination. (Tarand 2007: 73)

The medieval era was not necessarily a period of romance or affluence – including the good food, mulled drinks and velvety clothes – for the majority of the population in Tallinn, or elsewhere. By focusing on the glossier or more commercially presentable version there is a risk that the visitor ends up with only a ‘medieval light’ version of history.

Tallinn, the city that is forever young and old, pairing modern and ancient cityscapes. The glass facades of high rise hotels, banking and commercial buildings reflect the towering spires of tiny churches and grand crowns of old linden trees. (Welcome to Estonia)

The narrative of the modern and the mythical is repeated over and over again. In addition, the narrative of the ‘non-Eastern’ is echoed in the article of a commercial travel magazine GEO, whose reporter has no doubt been the object of an intense charm and information campaign by the Estonian tourist authorities:

Almost everybody in Tallinn speaks English, just as in Scandinavia – a region with which the residents of the capital feel more closely connected with than Eastern Europe. (Bisping 2011: 83-85)

On the eve of the Capital of Culture year the President sums up the wishes for Estonia and points out the uniqueness of Estonian culture. It is European culture that supports the Estonian nation, and vice versa:

In a moment, Tallinn will receive the title of Cultural Capital of Europe. I do hope that we will use this opportunity to become more cultural and European, within ourselves. That we will realize how culture is supporting us, not vice versa. That our top orchestras and conductors and writers and museums and

more are invaluable. Without them there would be no Estonia, but rather something completely different. (The President of the Republic of Estonia 2010b)

3.4 Summary: Narrating the Nation in a Post-Modern World

Interestingly, there is nothing particularly novel about the concept of branding the nation. Only the word ‘brand’ is new. National image, national identity, [and] national reputation are all words traditionally used and they don’t seem to provoke the same visceral hostility as the word ‘brand’. Although the technologies are new and infinitely more powerful and pervasive than ever before, and the word ‘brand’ is also new, the concepts which it encompasses are as old as the nation itself. (Olins 2003)

As mentioned in Chapter one, narrating the nation in a global and post-modern context seems to increasingly take the form of *branding* the nation. Nation branding has been defined as “the self-conscious activities by which governments aim to produce a certain image of a nation, and is a relatively new phenomenon” (Bolin & Ståhlberg 2010: 82). Nation branding should not be confused with public diplomacy, which refers to the activities a government undertakes to promote the image of the nation-state and is the expression of political power and relations (Bolin & Ståhlberg 2010: 82). However, the borders between the two are becoming blurred. Materials such as brochures and websites are as widely used for marketing and selling a product as they are for selling the nation, whether as an experience or as a commodity, such as a new place to visit. In the case of Estonia, Stanislav Budnitskiy (2012) observes in his MA Thesis, that manifestations of Estonia’s nation branding are very diverse and numerous (Budnitskiy 2012: 70). Moreover, Morgan & Pritchard (2004) claim that:

The battle for consumers in tomorrow’s destination marketplace will be fought not over price but over hearts and minds, and this is how places have moved into territories previously reserved for consumer brands. (Morgan & Pritchard 2004: 61)

If a country must sell itself on the increasingly competitive global market, could it not then be argued that it is both psychologically easier and economically wiser, for a

country like Estonia, to choose to feature and sell its modern present, instead of displaying an ambiguous past? The nation is not, after all, sold and branded with its citizens in mind. Bolin & Ståhlberg (2010: 97) aptly warn us: “it should be a disturbing fact that powerful images of nations are produced for the market and not for ‘the people’”.

Kaneva & Popescu (2011: 191) also discuss the limits of national branding and the (negative) consequences of ‘badly’ executed branding: “this appropriation constrains national imaginaries with ahistorical, depoliticized frame resulting in a form of national identity lite”. The concept of a national narrative as ‘light’ will be further discussed in chapter 4.3 Post-Soviet Light?, as well as in the Conclusion.

Estonia is a relatively young nation, and is still in the process of creating its national narrative. What, and whom, should it include or exclude? The national narrative is needed to unify the imagined community that Estonia is – or should be – to its citizens. At the same time, a national narrative is needed in order to show to outsiders what Estonia has been, is, and will be in the future. Introducing the blurring between national narratives and the commercialised activities of nation branding into the equation does not make the process easier. Bolin & Ståhlberg argue that the traditional nationalistic rhetoric was directed towards a domestic audience with the purpose of unifying and building social solidarity. The new nationalistic rhetoric, on the other hand, seems to be directed towards an international audience of investors. At the same time, the old rhetoric can be used as a resource to address foreign tourists. (Bolin & Ståhlberg 2010: 80.) I agree with this assessment. However, one should keep in mind that nations are people with individual histories, and tourists are people with histories, as well. And people do not always behave according to consumerist analysis.

The entire image of the nation can end up being the “lite” version of itself if one is not careful (Kaneva & Popescu 2011).

4 A STRANGE NORTHERN COUNTRY

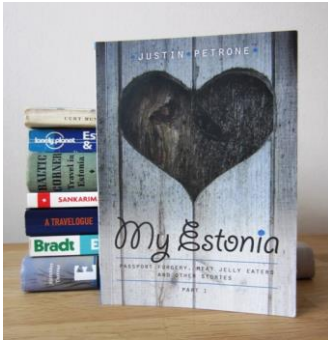
This chapter presents and analyses the contemporary unofficial or outsider narratives of Estonia that I have chosen for this thesis.

The official Estonian narratives' themes of *freedom*, *modernity*, and *myth* are also to some extent found in the outsider narratives. However, there are other themes that emerge more strongly, namely those of *adventure*, *oddity*, and *otherness*. While the official narratives of Estonia use for example progress through modernity, the purity and calm of nature, and a captivating historic past to describe the nation, the unofficial ones do it through discussions on anomaly, mediocre food, and the not-so-distant Soviet past, among other themes. Running throughout the narratives is the positioning of Estonia in the east, in Eastern Europe, or on the periphery of the Western world.

4.1 Narrative of Adventure: In the Land of the Meat-Jelly Eaters

Justin Petrone is a journalist, columnist, and the author of three books on Estonia to date as well as a popular blogger. Petrone's blog *Itching for Eestimaa* (2005-2013) is subtitled "a blog about the only post-communist nordic country". His latest blog is titled *North!* (2013 until present). All-in-all the American-Italian Petrone has spent over a decade living in and writing about his new homeland Estonia. The results is a vast collection of stories about life in Estonia seen through the eyes of a foreigner. Although published in 2009, *My Estonia: Passport Forgery, Meat Jelly Eaters, and Other Stories* tells the story of Petrone's first whimsical experiences in 2002-2003 of the country he calls "the least fortunate Scandinavian country" (Petrone 2009: back cover).

Picture 4. Travel books on Estonia and the Baltics: *My Estonia* in front.



For Justin Petrone, the narrative of both adventure as well as oddity starts even before he has moved to Estonia to join his future wife in her native country. Petrone himself tells the story of how, to Americans, travel to Estonia is an exotic and one-time adventure.

The same day I left Tallinn a month and a half previously, I had arrived back in JFK Airport in New York to be delivered by my parents to an Italian restaurant where I was quizzed about my trip. My father assured me that I would remember the faces of Epp the Estonian, Jevgeni the Russian, and Mitch the Canadian for the rest for the rest of my life. The way they made it sound, the adventure had now passed and real life had resumed in New York. From his perspective, I would soon find employment nearby, after that, perhaps in time, with my parents' approval, a spouse from the neighborhood, too. Then would come children, and after even more time, death and burial. To me, it seemed as if my obituary had already been written. Perhaps it would even include a sentence about my inclusion in the Finnish foreign correspondents' program. My mother meanwhile was still concerned about my visit to a former Soviet country. "Do you know where he's been?" she asked the teenage waitress at the restaurant, who probably had no idea where Estonia was. "No. Where?" "Estonia!" my mother said, as if it was synonymous with "Somalia". (Petrone 2009: 49-50)

Justin Petrone had a hard time convincing his parents that Estonia was a safe or smart place to visit – and eventually to make his home. The same suspicions can be detected in the comments Ronald Seth received upon setting out for his journey to the Baltics in the late 1930s:

When people learnt that I was going to Estonia, some said: 'Good Lord! Where on earth is that?' Others: 'Somewhere in the Balkans, isn't it? I have heard of it

once or twice.’ Yet others: ‘Ah, yes, Russia. But won’t it be dreadful there? One hears such terrible stories about the conditions, and some of them must be true. They haven’t even got enough to eat!’ All of which demonstrates how appallingly low the standard of geographical knowledge is among English-speaking people. (Seth 1939: 1)

It is almost as if the representations of Estonia – that far-away land on the outskirts of Europe – have not changed in 70 years between the publication of the two accounts. Yet, these, and other, adventurous men have braved the judgements of others and faced potential danger in order to see for themselves what kind of place Estonia is.

Before actually moving to Estonia Petrone first travels with his then girlfriend Epp around Europe. This is where the passport forgery of the book’s title is explained to us. Some of the Estonians make their living faking and selling passports to people desperate to get into the European Union. The first Estonians he meets are some of these passport forgers. Even if Petrone does not support this criminal activity – it makes for a catchy title – he, nevertheless, manages to reinforce the stereotypes of Eastern Europeans. At least the stereotypical image that right-wing politicians in ‘old’ Europe like to use when describing the possible threats from citizens of all the new member nations. Namely, that they will take advantage of the open borders of the European Union and commit crimes.

In his book Petrone tells the tale of how he fell in love with both an Estonian woman and her country. He gives us exactly what both the title and the cover promise: short stories of how a foreigner survives in that unfortunate country and makes it his own. Both Estonians and non-Estonians can laugh at the mishaps and misunderstandings of Petrone’s early days in the country, even when he explicitly or inadvertently makes fun of Estonia and Estonians. Love admittedly makes people try things they would otherwise perhaps not dare to. The narrative of Petrone’s first years of adventure, including his encounters with depressingly long winters and nearly inedible food, is told by a man who is willing to sacrifice many comforts for the love of his life.

Some people told me this book is romantic and maybe it is: a young American falls in love with an intriguing Estonian journalist and embarks on a journey

that restores his faith in himself and the world. I agree. It is romantic. But it was never easy. A foreigner arrives in the middle of a dark winter and must survive in Estonia, the least fortunate Scandinavian country, a land where people eat blood sausage and jellied meat, drink warm bread, and are always on time; a place where every family is haunted by the past and is struggling to catch up to the present. (Petrone 2009: back cover)

Justin Petrone first came to be acquainted with both Estonia, and his wife-to-be, during an international course for journalist students in Finland in 2002. Such courses and exchanges are regularly organized by foreign relations departments, presumably with hope of building a positive image of the country. Although, well-known in the Western hemisphere, Finland certainly shares Estonia's conundrum of how to rise above the news threshold internationally. Thus, the existence of courses and programmes designed to promote all aspects of Finnish society. At the same time, Finns have not always themselves given much favourable attention to their neighbour in the south. Estonian politicians and officials constantly complain of the dismissive, or at best, negative views of the country in foreign media. In 1997 Pertti Suhonen writes on the topic of "Finnish Views on Estonia and Other Neighbors" and states that "negative matters receive a disproportionate amount of attention, which is attributable to the traditional news criteria of Western journalism" (Suhonen 1997: 186). There used to be a tendency in Finnish media to identify Estonians with Russians or with the Soviet tradition. According to Suhonen, the Finnish media and public did not necessarily make the distinction between St. Petersburg and Tallinn (Suhonen 1997: 186-187). In the past fifteen years perhaps some of this incapacity to differentiate between Estonia and (Soviet) Russia has disappeared. However, there is still a tendency on the part of foreign media in general to interpret and narrate Estonia through the lens of post-communism. Justin Petrone also succumbs to this at times.

As already pointed out, Petrone writes that he arrives in Estonia in the middle of darkest winter and must make his home in an "unfortunate country" (Petrone 2009: back cover). The stereotypical image of Eastern Europe as a film played in black and white is here extended to include Scandinavia: "There were just grey people walking over black ice" (Petrone 2009: 83). However, it turns out that Petrone's most serious problem is not the darkness or the potential isolation.

When most people think about adjusting to life in a northern country during the winter, they think about being depressed by the dark and the cold and turning to alcohol for relief. But it wasn't the weather that starved me of joy in Estonia; it was the awful food. (Petrone 2009: 102)

Food is an essential part of most national identities and therefore also written into the narratives of a nation. As illustrated in the old joke quoted previously in chapter 2.2.3, stereotypes can display both negative and positive traits of for example a country's culinary identity. Food traditions and questions of authenticity has also become politics within the European Union, which perhaps help to illustrate how seriously nations and regions take questions of national food (DeSoucey 2010: 432). Some countries for example France and Italy are known for their cuisine, others are not. It would seem that Eastern European food cannot per definition be tasty, as it is all potatoes and cabbage. Yet, all countries have national and touristic narratives that often mention traditional dishes that are proudly displayed and offered to visitors.

Estonia is a Nordic country, which also says a lot about the Estonian cuisine: eating habits, food, ways of cooking etc. The rather sharp contrast between seasons, quite unusual for a southerner, is also reflected in the rhythm of the people, closer to nature than the average European. An Estonian tends to be slow and introvert in autumn and winter and much more energetic and communicative in summertime. (Suitsu 1998: 1)

Estonia and Estonians seek to brand their cuisine as Nordic or European, rather than as one infused with 'Eastern' flavours. It is worth pointing out, that since Petrone's initial years in Estonia the country has undergone large changes. The capital in particular is a much more cosmopolitan city with all sorts of international cuisines and foodstuffs available.

There was regular food available in Estonia. At the gigantic shopping center down the street, you could find whatever you needed. The only problem was that the mozzarella imported from Italy was several times more expensive than the local brands. (Petrone 2009: 104).

It is, of course, pointless to ask what Petrone considers 'regular' or 'normal' in this context, as food is matter of personal, cultural, and social opinion and habit. An Estonian proud of her or his cultural heritage could possibly accuse Petrone of

patronizing when he dismisses esteemed dishes, such as buckwheat porridge and meat-jelly as “awful” (Petrone 2009: 103). However, rather than embracing Estonian food in an adventurous manner Petrone’s personal food narratives continue much trying to avoid disgusting or odd dishes, such as the meat-jellies and blood sausages.

Justin Petrone’s *My Estonia* was met with favorable reviews, both in the Estonian press as well as online by native and foreign readers. The foreigners are not warned off and Estonians themselves can laugh at their own peculiarities without being offended, as in the case with the review below that ran in the biggest daily Estonian newspaper:

In conclusion, *My Estonia* is clever — one can chuckle a little after every few pages. Not even speaking of the fact that his New York point of view on wild Estonia inspires one to take a fresh look around oneself. I don’t agree with Justin Petrone every time, but everyone has the right to see things in their own way. (Meiessaar 2009).

Petrone throws in a disclaimer of sorts in the very title of his book *My Estonia: Passport Forgery, Meat Jelly Eaters, and Other Stories*. Petrone states that this is *his* take on Estonia we are reading about – take it or leave it. Most of the readers appreciate this approach and find Petrone’s observations both useful and accurate. In particular, foreigners who have themselves experienced life in Estonia found Petrone’s narratives of adventure in this remote land the closest thing they had read to narrative of real life.

For any foreigner married to an Estonian, this book is your bible! For anyone else, this book will give you not only an enjoyable and pleasant read, but also a detailed and extremely accurate overview of how life really is to live in modern Estonia from a foreigner's perspective, which is vastly different from the standard tourist information magazines you are likely to come across. (Harvey 2010)

Regardless of his misgivings about the food or the feelings of being isolated, Petrone manages to do most things right in writing *about* Estonia. He paints a favorable picture of the country. It is a dynamic and modern place to be for young people of any nationality. Petrone has followed this book up with a *My Estonia 2: Berry Junkies, Nordic Elves, and Real Estate Fever* (2011). Together with his wife, he runs Petrone

Print and has published to date 46 books on different peoples’ “own places”, e.g. *Minu Prantsusmaa* [My France] (Uus 2013), *Minu Alaska* [My Alaska] (Kupinskaja 2008). Justin Petrone’s adventures in Estonia continue.

4.2 Narrative of Oddity: Ramble through the Periphery

Alexander Theroux is an American scholar and author who has published in a wide variety of genres. He is also the brother of the well-known and acclaimed travel writer Paul Theroux. However, *ESTONIA: a Ramble through the Periphery* (2011) is Alexander Theroux’ first travel(ish) book – and it is not an easy one to categorize or define. Readers and reviewers alike struggle in what to make of this book. Is it “simply” one person’s “reactions to sights and sounds in Estonia, i.e. it is about Theroux himself” (Pettai 2012), or is it a “one of the most interesting travel books to happen by accident” (Rubin 2012). Several readers and reviewers agree on the assessment, that Theroux rambles more in his mind than in physical Estonia³. This said, Theroux *does* spend many months living in what seems to a godforsaken outpost of Europe and his book does offer *an outsiders* view on Estonia. Whether Theroux has “properly understood” Estonia, according to Estonians, or anyone else, is beside the point. *ESTONIA* offers a narrative of oddity that has now taken its place in the annals of (travel) literature on Estonia.

Picture 5. Travel books on Estonia and the Baltics: *Estonia* in front.



³ See for example Sweeny (2012), and Stuttaford (2012). The aim of this thesis is neither to judge Theroux’ *ESTONIA*, nor the opinions of its readers. Nevertheless, one of the aspects of postmodern travel writing is its “afterlife”. Due to the nature of social media anyone can now comment on, contest, and offer updates on recent publications available online.

Already in the introductory chapter of his *ESTONIA* Alexander Theroux (2011) constructs the narrative of an odd place. The initial feelings of excitement and adventure die quickly and are replaced by morose philosophizing.

Little Estonia. Sancho Panza. Peewee. A collapsing tiny box-set of a republic that is dark as a cave in winter, shit-cold for most of the year, a strange ignored dorp with no ice-free ports, a queer language, curious laws, rummy food, eccentric people, funny money, and a veritable forest of unreadable signs. I will say right off that I was eager to go to Estonia, for who would deny that to wake up to find oneself in any new place is surely one of the major thrills to be alive? When suddenly I awakened to find myself there, so abruptly it seemed to be without explanation, my only thought was: *just splendid: no one ever comes here and that's the delight!* - - So there I was, suddenly walking the icy streets and peering up at old wooden houses and living under the pewter skies of *Estland* among odd bustling crowd of natives, many who seemed sad in repose, extremely buttoned-up, busy in the city of briefcases and downflapped caps, and in other, outlying, rural areas where I took old wheezing buses to see an essentially sober, working, gum-booted population of snub-nosed *untermensch* quizzically holding up hay forks as you passed and seeming to wonder exactly what it was you wanted. I quickly began to wonder why Estonians were so – um, standoffish does not adequately describe the mood. (Theroux 2011: 10, 12-13)

Such is Alexander Theroux's image of Estonia. It does not get much brighter or more cheerful in the 320 pages that follow. Theroux describes the language, the people, the food, and his surroundings. As pointed out previously, one critic states that "the author rambles more in his mind than in physical Estonia", but nevertheless manages to throw in enormous amounts of facts, more or less, or not even remotely, accurate about Estonia, its people, language and culture. Numerous descriptions of Estonians (and Finns and practically every other nationality mentioned in the book) are offensive, at times insulting, and sometimes practically in the form of racial slurs. "What Mr. Theroux mostly shows us about the country and its people is exasperation, irritation, furious rage. To say that it – and they – got on his nerves is the mildest of understatements" (Rubin, 2012). Several readers of Theroux's book have found the title deceptive. They expected either a travelogue or an informative work on Estonia, and feel they were given neither.

It is Theroux's standards that everything around him is compared to. Finding himself in Estonia, Theroux is so lost that he has nothing to hold on to. Seeking similarities he finds only differences: "There is no limit to the incongruities, oddities, or unpredictable anti-cultural alarms in Estonia" (Theroux 2011: 74). These conflicts and disturbances may be the reasons for why he abandons fact checking which results in a narrative full of errors. Perhaps, in Theroux's view, this peripheral and tiny country on the outskirts of the civilized world is not important enough to merit accuracy or background research. Theroux's previous knowledge, as well as his tastes and prejudices that form the basis for his strongly voiced opinions about Estonia and the Estonians. In Theroux's narrative of oddity one detects a whiff of white man's travel writing that would not have been out of place in the 1890s or in the 1950s.

I detected in many people there a concave, vaguely worn-out appearance. People glumly hidden deep in rubbery winter coats, puffy as soufflés, do not radiate the temperatures of either Malibu or Al'Aziziyah. It is not the land of angel fish, piña coladas, mango sunsets, or perfervid heat. (Theroux 2011: 167)

Theroux contradicts himself in his laments of what Estonia lacks. After all, this is the country he himself has earlier in his book describes as "pretty much off the standard tourist radar, a low profile piece of Eastern Europe with a benighted tribal people that is keen to but not quite ready to adapt easily to other ways" (Theroux 2011: 15). To expect exotic alcoholic beverages with colorful umbrellas simply must be asking too much.

When reading a travel book or travelogue one usually expects the writer to provide accurate information on the places she/he has visited. Facts about transportation, lodging, local food and drink, quirky habits of the natives and even warnings should be included. Funny stories, ironies or sarcasm are allowed or even expected, but they should mainly be at the expense of the writer, not exclusively at the expense of the subjects of his writing. Alexander Theroux's *ESTONIA* provides the reader with no information about actual travel, save for an aborted bus ride to the Latvian capital Riga. The reader learns that Estonian rental flats lack warm water, refrigerators and often heating. Food in Estonia – at least the edible food, according to Theroux - is horribly over-priced. The same goes for alcohol. Theroux seems to find the same dilemma with

food in Estonia as Petrone does: it's either expensive and/or bad. "Estonian cuisine is something of an oxymoron" Theroux declares (Theroux (2011: 295). There are edible foods but they are prepared wrongly. Any international cuisine (Chinese, American) that Theroux encounters is not "authentic". The Estonian Tourist Board and Alexander Theroux have wildly dissimilar views on the gastronomic choices available in Estonia at the time of Theroux's visit.

Visitors from every nation find something familiar in Tallinn. The Irish find dark beer, the Italians pizza restaurants and the Russians taverns where the waiter's shirt is worn outside the belt to cover his trousers and vodka flows in thin ice streams. Those from the dark continent will find a man from Mozambique at work, chilli pepper and garlic in hand. (MMM 2010: 4).

Theroux interacted with precious few locals but he claims to have observed them from the first day he sat foot in the country and therefore feels himself equipped to judge them. The primary source of information for Theroux seems to be his "friend and sage" T. Peter Park, a fellow American of Estonian descent. Other Americans with experience of living in Estonia are not in agreement with Theroux's assessment of this odd country. A reader, who has bought *ESTONIA* on Amazon.com, left the following review:

Hello, I feel compelled to write a review as I am an American living in Tallinn and purchased this book. It is one of the most hateful books I've ever read. There is even an entire chapter called "Why I hate Estonia", and almost every sentence starts with "I hate...". (Ross 2011).

Clearly, many readers seem to blame Alexander Theroux for not following 'the script'. Both critics and readers feel that he violates the perceptions of how a foreigner is allowed to describe Estonia. Nevertheless, Theroux is the authoritative voice in his own narrative on Estonia. He simply takes things so far that they are past what could be considered a funny sketch and instead start bordering on insulting.

So a book that should have been a fun ride ends up resembling being trapped in a cramped airline seat for the longest flight on the planet, subjected to a champion talker's endless obsessions and prejudices. (Rubin, 2012)

Despite being described as “biting and satirical” as well as “curious and lyrical” Theroux’s *ESTONIA* (jacket 2011) has not been translated into Estonian. This narrative of the odd far-away country was published in the USA, and is fairly expensive by Estonian standards. Therefore, its publication caused minimal upset in Estonia. The few reviews in Estonian newspapers brushed the book aside as the work of a drunken eccentric (see for example Sweeny, 2012). The narrative of oddity ends up being more a description of the author himself than of the country he is describing.

4.3 Narrative of the Other Tallinn: Off the Beaten Path

Otso Kantokorpi is a Finnish journalist, art critic, and author of a popular series of travel and guidebooks. In many of these books Kantokorpi takes his readers to areas and places of the Estonian capital, Tallinn, that are not mentioned in the official tourist publications. Otso Kantokorpi’s guidebook *Sankarimatkailijan Neuvosto-Tallinna* [The Herotraveller’s Soviet-Tallinn] was published in Finnish in 2006. Kantokorpi was a pioneer in pointing out Tallinn’s Soviet heritage to Finnish visitors. Since the publication of *Sankarimatkailija* there has been an increase in exhibitions highlighting the Soviet period, for example the KGB museum in the centrally located Viru Hotel. At the same time, several of the buildings, structures, and architectural details that Kantokorpi recorded in 2006 no longer exist.

Picture 6. Travel books on Estonia and the Baltics: *Sankarimatkailija* in front.



The unmoved backyards on the outskirts of cities seldom make it onto the pages of institutional material, whether touristic, promotional, or not. In *Sankarimatkailija* Kantokorpi's (2006) narrative takes the reader/traveler off the beaten path and outside of the official picture.

The recent fate of the Bronze Soldier serves as a pertinent reminder that Estonia, like all post-communist states, is faced with a difficult reminder of what to do with its Soviet heritage. Of all the tangible legacies of this era the most poignant is the anachronistic pantheon of commemorative statues and memorials. One solution is to simply destroy them and erase all trace of their presence. Another is to remove the symbol itself and either leave the site blank or replace it with another, more acceptable sign. (Burch & Zander 2010: 62)

All over the former Soviet empire, in countries, cities and villages there is a scrap heap where the discarded Lenins, Stalins, Kalinins, and Marxs now await their fate. In some places there have been collective efforts to round up and disposed of the statues and busts. In other places, for lack of money or means to transport them away, the often outsized monuments have simply been demounted and tossed in the nearest shrubbery. Such a discarded Lenin is found on the cover of Kantokorpi's *Sankarimatkailija*. This particular Lenin statue (picture 6) can be found among other fallen heads in the backyard of the Estonian History Museum in Tallinn. Lenin once graced the roundabout outside the Party Headquarters, which is now the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in central Tallinn.

Kantokorpi has written his guidebook because he feels very passionately about Estonia's culture and history, both the contemporary and the past eras. He has made it his mission to show Finns 'the other' side of Tallinn and Estonia, as his guidebooks often stray from the beaten tourist path. Instead of the obligatory tour in the Old Town, Kantokorpi takes the reader and traveller to suburbs to look at Soviet era wall murals or abandoned cinemas. Even if Kantokorpi states in the foreword to *Sankarimatkailija* that Soviet Tallinn obviously is a thing of the past, he still feels that the visitor to Tallinn should be made aware of its one-time existence. Kantokorpi cites Jorge Luis Borges as an influence for his interest in archives, maps,

classifications, and the mysteries they promise: the opportunity to interpret and to understand. Kantokorpi continues:

That is exactly what Soviet-Tallinn is to me. It is a bunch of shapes and images that were born during a particular time and for a specific reason under a certain doctrine. At the same time it is dissidence and resistance. Shapes and images of resistance also tell a story of Soviet-Estonia. Therefore, all Soviet era architecture and art in Tallinn is not Soviet, but together they form a picture of what life was. That is why I am of the opinion that the new building boom and the passion to demolish Soviet era structures in Tallinn has gone too far, and in addition, it is brutal and goes against Tallinn's true tradition of civilisation. I also want my co-traveller to be attentive to this. (Kantokorpi 2006: 14)

What Kantokorpi means, is that you cannot make history go away simply by pulling down a building or remodelling away a certain style. Although there were less pleasant events that took place during the Soviet era, traces of them cannot be erased by demolishing buildings of cultural or historic value (Kantokorpi 2006: 11).

What Kantokorpi alludes to in the quote above is probably the decision to pull down the Sakala Centre in central Tallinn to make way for a shopping mall. Sakala Center was once the Politburo conference centre. The building was finished as late as 1985⁴.

The 1980 Olympics were hosted by Moscow but the aquatic competitions took place in Tallinn. For this event an Olympic village and sailing centre were built in Pirita and the city spruced up in for the benefit of foreign visitors. Many Estonians remember how they could buy consumer goods like Pepsi Cola and bananas in the shops during the Olympic Games. In order to point out the abilities and the greatness of Soviet power other architectural projects than those related to the Games were undertaken. One such point was made by building the massive Linnahall concert and recreation centre, which was originally a culture and sports palace bearing Lenin's name. Otso Kantokorpi writes that the eccentric architecture gives the building a resemblance of a temple to an ancient culture or the staging for a science fiction

⁴ The Sakala Centre was subsequently demolished in 2007 and replaced by a shopping centre which was completed in 2009.

movie (Kantokorpi 2006: 93). To this day, this colossal structure is the first thing that meets the majority of the millions of ferry tourists who arrive in Tallinn each year as it is located by the harbour. Abandoned and no longer in use, full of graffiti and crumbling, its presence and function remains a mystery to many visitors.

Kantokorpi does not limit himself to the pompous monuments of power, but makes a point of taking the traveller to residential areas and suburbs to point out where ordinary citizens lived during the Soviet time. Included in the book are pictures of “massive towering buildings” and rows of prefabricated houses from the 1960s. Of the suburb Lasnamäe Kantokorpi writes:

There is nothing in particular to see in Lasnamäe nor are there any tourist spots. It is the distressed area itself that is the attraction. Therefore the busy traveller chooses a bus route that provides the best view from a window and perhaps visits one place for a meal, a beer, or a cup of coffee. (Kantokorpi 2006: 73)

What is worth pointing out is that the same rows of block-houses that today are perceived by many as ghetto-like regions were, in fact, during the late Soviet period perceived as markers of a sort of status. The then-modern buildings had central heating and hot water, unlike the wooden building of the Czarist era or the run-down stone houses of the Estonian era (Jõesalu & Nugin 2012: 3).

What is now known in Tallinn as Räävala Boulevard was once called, for a limited time in history, Lenin Boulevard. If you stand today on Victory Square with a map from the 1980s it will give the name as Freedom Square. Kantokorpi urges us to see and interpret the narratives in buildings, in street signs and on maps. Only then can we try to understand the different periods this fascinating city and its people have gone through quite recently. Kantokorpi urges the reader/traveller to lift her or his eyes from the text of the official narrative and notice another narrative of Tallinn.

4.4 Summary: Narrative of Post-Soviet Light?

What is Estonia then? Is it a desperately peripheral outpost of the former Soviet empire that can these days be found – barely – on the ‘right’ side of the European Union borders? Or is it a destination that offers its visitor an opportunity for both self-scrutiny and stimulating confrontations with a different and exciting Europe.

Tallinn is artsy in a very much post-Soviet way, and a delightful place to hang out and people-watch from one of the sidewalk cafes. The folks here are restrained no more and amidst the fairy tale surroundings there is an "anything goes" ambience. And the shops, especially the galleries and antiques venues, serve up some interesting finds such as elaborate weavings from cloth artists and modern art from local painters; antique shops feature community memorabilia (Lenin paperweight, anyone?). (Golden 2104).

Justin Petrone, Alexander Theroux, and Otso Kantokorpi go to Estonia for different reasons, presumably looking for different things, and discover three different Estonias. Petrone’s narrative is that of an exciting and youthful adventure with unexpected pitfalls and delights. With Theroux one gets the sense that he sees more or less what he expected to see, without much exertion. The Estonia Theroux experiences, is odd, odd, odd, and bleak in abundance. Kantokorpi sets out with the determination of a 19th century explorer with the aim to remove the last white spots from a map, in order to aid others, who might follow in his path.

Whether true or not, Estonia and Tallinn are often regarded as a sort of *Russia Light* or *post-Soviet Light*, by which I mean, a destination where you supposedly can see and experience the traces of the Soviet period, without actually having to visit Russia. In Tallinn there are concrete suburbs, monuments, and buildings in pompous Soviet style to be seen and the souvenir shops sell amber necklaces and matryoska dolls (neither of which are authentic Estonian products). The fact that Estonia is a safe destination is also emphasized in both official and unofficial narratives. Tallinn is described as a “safe and accessible” place (Tarand 2007: 26). Kantokorpi also judges

this to be true, but nevertheless gives visitors tips on how to behave and what to avoid (Kantokorpi 2006: 43-33).

People like Justin Petrone, and Roald Seth long before him, were warned and discouraged when they told friends and family that they wanted to travel to Estonia. It was not considered safe or Western (civilized) enough. At the same time, this ‘non-Western European’ aura could also potentially work as a selling point for a country like Estonia, if we are to believe the potential visitors themselves. On forums such as Tripadvisor prospective visitors to Tallinn discuss where to see the statues mentioned above, in chapter 3.3.

Somewhere on this forum or in reviews of attractions I came across a mention of a museum with old soviet-era statues (e.g. Lenin) laying in a ruin in a yard. Where are these? (Tripadvisor 2012)

The signature “SixOneTwo” from Minneapolis has heard about the Soviet statues but has trouble finding information about them. The signature “JohntheFinn” answers: “They're at the back of the Estonian History Museum, a fine old building on the road to the Pirita district. And they look like this: flickr.com/photos/...” To which “SixOneTwo” replies: “<squealing with delight...> These are incredible! This is exactly the kind of odd / quirky thing I like to see in my travels. The Estonian History Museum is now on my list. THANK YOU!” (Tripadvisor 2012).

Tourists want, and expect, to see or at least be told about remnants of the Soviet legacy in Estonia’s, and in particular, Tallinn’s present-day life. The equation *Medieval + WIFI = Fairytale Tallinn* may work well for the Estonian Tourist Board, but many foreign visitors would like to see *Medieval + Soviet Period = 21st Century Tallinn*.

One can speculate as to whether the omission of Estonia’s Soviet past is deliberately withheld from glossy tourist brochures because of the fear of becoming a post-Soviet

stereotype. In the application for Culture Capital of Europe one of the mission statements is the urge to rid Estonia of the Post-communist epitaph.

The appearance and substance of Tallinn impacts one's general impression of the whole of Estonia. In this way, Tallinn can help to rid Estonia of epithets still used in Europe such as "new" and "post-communist". A Nordic city by tradition, it was only occupation by the USSR that brought that erroneous stigma of being a Russian based culture. (Tarand 2007: 26)

However, if no one – authority or layman – explains exactly what is implied by this particular 'Tallinn' or 'Estonia', that is neither 'new' nor 'post-Soviet', the visitor is likely to make her or his own interpretation. Things that look decrepit or run-down are more often than not judged as 'Soviet decrepit' or run-down rather than 'Estonian decrepit'. One visitor has walked the length of the Kultuurkilomeeter [Kilometer of Culture], a project completed during Tallinn's year as Capital of Culture.

The journey ended abruptly with a disused petrol station and another decrepit, empty building with a palimpsestuous sniff of the Soviet about it. (Art Theory and Practice 2012)

The buildings along the Kultuurkilomeeter are, in fact, mostly Czarist and first-republic Estonian era, such as a vacated prison and run-down industrial complexes. In the narrative above, the neglected and the dilapidated is interpreted as being traces of a 'false' Soviet past.

Otso Kantokorpi (2006) reflects on his choice of objects when visiting a Soviet-era concrete suburb outside of Tallinn.

I noticed a syndrome in myself: while photographing the area [Soviet-era suburb]. The camera had a tendency to search out the most hopeless and run-down spots, and I remembered nothing of children in the playground, youth kicking ball on the lawns or old women on park benches feeding the pigeons. (Kantokorpi 2006: 72)

It is almost as if Kantokorpi cannot rid himself of preconceived notions and see something other than what he expects to see. Like many other visitors, he has come looking for traces of a traumatic past, and is struggling to merge them the narrative interpretations of contemporary Estonia.

Perhaps, it would be wise to listen to the researchers of branding again, when they say that countries are much more complex than products to sell – or consume, for that matter. According to Govers & Go (cited in Mustata 2013: 36) a new product can be introduced to the market as a complete novelty, whereas a country has a history and cultures, that potential tourists possess background knowledge about. That kind of knowledge is impossible to erase and it will influence whatever the tourist or visitor sees or experiences. While institutional narratives of Estonia work persistently in order to tell the story of a modern and efficient destination for visitors and natives alike, the outsider narratives give readers glimpses and snapshots of both a complex and interesting reality.

5 CONCLUSION

“Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet”
The Ballad of East and West, Rudyard Kipling

The purpose of this thesis has been to show the reader examples of contemporary narratives of Estonia. Like individual human beings, nations also make sense of their existence and their past by narrating it. In this thesis, I provide examples of what I have chosen to call *institutional* narratives and *outsider* narratives of the nation.

The narrated version of a nation is an imagined creation, in the same sense as the nation is an imagination. I used the theory of Benedict Anderson (1991) in order to explain how the nation can be viewed as a united community, despite the diversity of its citizens.

Furthermore, I have used Stuart Hall's (1992) theories of narrating the nation as well as his elements for narrating the nation in discussing how the nation Estonia is narrated.

Both the institutional and the outsider narratives consciously, or unconsciously, make use of the idea of the nation as an imagined nation. The narrated, constructed, and imagined communities may consist of Skype inventors or meat jelly eaters, but also of communities that have suffered through history and persevered. The institutional narratives provide examples of the criteria for a community or a nation, that Anderson and Hall discuss and the outsider narratives are tested against them.

The institutional, or official, narratives of the nation could be likened to an open door inviting outsiders and visitors to come in and take a look at Estonia themselves. Presumably, every country wants to paint a pleasant picture of itself, and provide both its citizens and potential visitors with a coherent and fine national narrative. It is worth remembering that no nation's narrative, not even that of a so-called 'new' nation such as a newly independent post-Soviet nation, is made from scratch. The traditions and memories that national narratives are based upon are products of centuries of legends,

myths and beliefs that are pieced together to create a shared heritage. This process is much longer than a few decades, and has been in effect even during the times when Estonia was not independent.

If the institutional narratives described in this thesis are open doors inviting outsiders in, the unofficial narratives of the outsiders are rather opening a smallish window into Estonia for others to peek through. As all readers of fiction or non-fiction, all travelers have a preconceived notion of how things are “in real life”. It is difficult for people in ‘Old’ Europe to shake off decades of reports of atrocities, political brain-washing and bread queues, which might be the only thing they ever heard or saw of life in the Soviet Union. That image of the Soviet Union that existed only as an enormous entity was one where no distinction was made between Estonians, Romanians, or Georgians was made. Yet, there is a genuine interest on the part of many Westerners to explore that part of the history of the satellite states that were formerly occupied by the USSR by are now independent nations. There is no reason to despair as Kipling does, in the quote above, over the impossibility of East and West ever being able to meet.

The official and unofficial narratives are not mutually exclusive, neither should or could they be read as in opposition to each other. There are many points and instances where they converge, the narratives overlap, and they are in agreement. In Estonia, many things pertaining to the Soviet occupation of Estonia – apart from the fact that it happened – is contested and debated. The discussion of how Estonia and the Estonians have dealt with the legacy of this period and how they should proceed into the future is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the descriptions of the Soviet period, its legacy and its’ possible traces, are varying and ambiguous to an extent that they sometimes confuse the visitor to Estonia. Is there *one* Estonian national narrative, or is there not? Even the team behind the Capital of Culture application states that:

Tallinn acknowledges that its fifty-year long occupation has left a mark on the city and the mentality of its residents. Although Tallinn has almost always been an open and international city, a number of remnants from the past are not worth retaining. Among the city’s residents, there still remains a certain percentage of the population that views itself as neither Estonian nor European.

Beyond that, there are still more to whom Europe still means “them”, not “us”.
(Tarand 2007: 25)

While the institutional Estonian narratives talk about a modern, efficient, and prosperous country and the images – pictures and videos – accordingly show young people enjoying themselves in this representation of reality, the outsider narratives, at times, paint an entirely different picture. Even if not being critical or judgemental, they often talk of decay, greyness, remoteness, and oddity. In the way Otso Kantokorpi surprisingly focuses on the “hopeless and run-down” despite himself in the previous chapter.

The *institutional* narratives of the nation of Estonia demonstrate that Estonia is a Western, modern, and progressive country that has rid itself of an unfortunate Soviet past. The *outsider* narratives, on the other hand, while running parallel to the official ones at many points, also paint their own pictures of Estonia. It is pointless to debate whether Estonia is trying to offer the traveller ‘medieval light’ or if the visitor is looking for ‘Soviet light’. No national narrative is unambiguous and there are many different repertoires available also for the Estonians themselves. Both the individual and national, the foreign and native, narratives of Estonia are likely to include aspects or traces of both the official and the unofficial discussed in this study.

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