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Master's Thesis

CONTROVERSIAL NARRATIVES: YOUNG PEOPLE IN ESTONIA AND THE
SINGING REVOLUTION

Maria Sootak

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This Master's thesis explores the different narratives and the collective memory of the Singing Revolution (1987-1991) in Estonia. The analysis of the narratives includes a snapshot of the media coverage of the Singing Revolution, a brief overview of the secondary school history textbooks in comparison with the narratives by 15 people aged 20-24. The aim of the thesis was to discover whether a coherent narrative exists that can be attributed to the whole group of the 15 interviewees, to describe this narrative and to parallel it with the narrative provided by the analysis of the media and school books. The empirical data for this thesis consisted of media articles, school text books and interviews. The interviews were conducted from August 2017 to November 2018 in a semi-structured format. The data was subsequently organised and analysed using a combination of adapted methodologies of phenomenology, phenomenography and a framework introduced by Bert Vanhulle.

The study found that there exists a common general narrative among the 15 interviewees with characteristic derivations among each individual. The interviewees often emphasised aspects of the Singing Revolution according to their own cultural group belonging. The narratives by the interviewees were in substance consistent with the narratives by the media and school books, the main difference was the orientation in time and space. The interviewees' narratives were brief and often emphasised aspects of the Singing Revolution that the media and school books considered marginal. The brevity of the interviewees' knowledge of the Singing Revolution should be considered when composing new curricula for history teaching in Estonia if the Estonian society aims to maintain the importance of the collective memory of the Singing Revolution.

Keywords

Singing Revolution, Estonian restoration of independence, collective memory, narrative, history teaching, recent history.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Aim and Significance

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 historical research has witnessed a boom of memory studies. The shift towards oral history particularly in Eastern Europe but equally in the whole Western world has unravelled new narratives about the 20th century and earlier. The liberation of the previously occupied Baltic States has unleashed generations of stories about the Soviet Union and life under it. The national trauma and reconciliation process is at the same time extremely interesting to researchers and painfully real for witnesses. On the one side, the democratic part of the world had the opportunity to satisfy their curiosity for the Soviet Union: censorship, everyday life under the system, the political system, the resistance. On the other side, the newly independent states wanted to create new narratives to show the world how the oppressed people had not only survived but managed to thrive. After 1991, a new generation has emerged in the post-Soviet states: a generation of young people who have reached adulthood in late 2000s and early 2010s. This generation has never directly been subjected to the trauma of occupation but then again they are mostly also strangers to the euphoria of liberation. This generation and its perceptive minds might well be influenced by the very recent collapse of the Soviet Union and by the emotionally charged narratives of centuries of historical turmoil in Eastern Europe particularly, however their acknowledgment of these narratives have developed within an environment of freedom and independence.

However small a nation and its achievements are, they are always the greatest for the people of that nation. The Singing Revolution (1986/1987-1991), used as a synonym for the restoration of independence in this thesis, has prevailed in the official Estonian historical national narrative as a highly emotional memory and essential part of self-determination. The annual song festivals see tens of thousands Estonians singing in the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds up to this day. Not only do the Estonians hold this narrative close to their hearts in the country's internal discussions, they have also convinced others of its special nature – an illustrative example is the film “The Singing Revolution” by Americans Maureen and James Tusty. They introduce the content of the film with the following words: “The Singing Revolution tells the moving and dramatic story of how the Estonian people strategically, wilfully, sung their way to freedom - and

helped topple an empire along the way.”¹ Estonian academic public, as have most sensible research communities, has aimed towards creating an objective national historical narrative and tried to steer clear from bias. The reasons for this ambitious goal lie in the years of Soviet occupation where oppressive narratives were forced upon all the occupied states. However, as will be briefly discussed in this thesis, the past 25 years of the newly independent state have seen the modern Estonian historical writing still leaning towards a national narrative of antagonism and idealism. Now, a new generation of Estonians has reached adulthood – young people born during or after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These individuals lack any personal memory of the Soviet time and its collapse and therefore are influenced solely by recounts of the past. They are on the one hand presumably still patriotic and proud of their nation’s achievements, *i.e.* passionate and idealistic. These characteristics are important parts of the driving force of any ambitious individual. On the other hand, these young people are detached from the direct personal traumas of the Soviet past and therefore possess the preconditions to see the current society from a different perspective and ultimately perhaps more objectively. Is it thus possible that people in Estonia, born after the collapse in 1991, have a different perspective on the restoration of independence since they have had the opportunity to consider the wider context and do not possess personal memories of the Singing Revolution? The reason why it is important to explore the mind-sets of young people in this thesis and in society in general is inspired by Herwig Reiter’s justification for choosing young adults as interviewees for his research on the transition period in Lithuania: “[–] they hold a significant position in the process of knowledge renewal as they have to negotiate ‘old’ meanings and bear them onwards into the new society.”² It is thus a convenient time to begin mapping the perspectives of young people in Estonia since they influence future and present narratives of historical knowledge, as will they pass their own narratives of the Singing Revolution, for example, further to next generations. The aim of this research is to define how young people’s perceptions of the Singing Revolution differ, if at all, in comparison to the national narrative? In order to answer this question the discussion part of this thesis will first try to answer whether there is a coherent narrative that applies to the majority of the interviewees. If so, what is the

¹ About. The Singing Revolution. <http://www.singingrevolution.com/cgi-local/content.cgi?pg=1&p=3>.

² Herwig Reiter, “Catching up with the West? An insider’s perspective from Lithuania,” in *Baltic biographies*, eds. Aarelaid-Tart, Bennich-Björkman, 147.

narrative of young Estonians and how does it reflect the narrative offered by the media and textbooks?

This thesis is divided into four main chapters – Introduction where the prevailing concepts are introduced and explained, along with a literature review and historical background about the Singing Revolution; Data and Methods that discusses the methodology for analysing the media, school books and interviews; National Narrative where the curricula, media and school books are analysed according to the methodology presented in the previous chapter; and Discussion where 15 interviews with people aged 20-24 are analysed according to the previous methodology and compared to the narrative by the school books and media. The last chapters of the thesis consist of the Conclusion, Annexes and Bibliography.

1.2 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Before submerging into the analysis of the narratives prevailing in the Estonian society, some theoretical and conceptual terminology must be addressed. Although the focus of this thesis steers clear of oral history and of personal memory in the neuropsychological sense, the two contribute presumably to the construction of the subjects' perspective on the Singing Revolution. Therefore, it is constructive to glance into the essence of oral history and memory. Ene Kõresaar defines memory as “a social construct, which is based on social interaction and communication and which is structured by language.”³ Anne Ollila⁴ and Jorma Kalela⁵ justify using oral history and memory in historical research as a way of understanding and subsequently reconstructing the person's perspective of the world around them. Ollila explains this as follows: “Memory is closely tied into our articulation and processing of information; when we analyse memory, we can therefore also analyze alternative ways of organizing information and reality.”⁶ Kalela goes even

³ Ene Kõresaar, *Memory and history in Estonian post-Soviet life stories*, (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2004), 20.

⁴ Anne Ollila, “Introduction: History as Memory and Memory as History,” in *Historical Perspectives on Memory*, ed. Anne Ollila (Helsinki: SHS, 1999), 10-11.

⁵ Jorma Kalela, “The Challenge of Oral History – the Need to Rethink Source Criticism,” in *Historical Perspectives*, 139-145.

⁶ Ollila, “Introduction,” 10-11.

further by criticising Leopold von Ranke's "*wie es eigentlich gewesen*" traditional method of source criticism by claiming that memories enable the researcher to "reconstruct the whole of the informant's way of thinking."⁷ While Michael Billig⁸ too refers to individual memory, he develops these ideas to the notion that an individual's ideas and ideologies are a symbiosis of past "echoes" and present influences. Thus, exploring this thesis' subjects' understanding of the Singing Revolution, we might discover a pattern of how they understand the past in general. In a society where information is mostly free and accessible, the narrative is at times more influential than painfully detailed recounts and descriptions. Therefore, whether individuals gather information from individual memories or second-hand narratives should make little difference when analysing the construction of the narrative of the Singing Revolution. The subjects of this thesis likely construct the narrative according to their own perspective of the social world. The way they reconstruct their narrative of the Singing Revolution is likely one of the ways they construct their perspective of the whole world.

The existence of a national narrative on the Singing Revolution lies on the presumption that there exists an Estonian collective memory. In order to explore the effects of education and background systems, such as the media, school, family and friends that influence a young person in Estonia, the concept of collective memory must be discussed further. The term "collective memory" was first introduced into scientific discussion in 1925 by the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. Halbwachs⁹ clearly separates collective and individual memory – individual memory constitutes itself in the frames of social groups but always remains the dominating instance over the two memories. Collective memory completes individual memory but never mixes with it. The part of the individual's mind that is collective memory, or *memoire historique* (historical memory in English), can be mastered to perfection but is always "borrowed". Historical events, with their numerous dates, personalities and descriptions, will never make sense to the individual unless they associate these events to their current social setting. According to Halbwachs, collective memory can only exist within the social frameworks of which an individual is part of.

⁷ Kalela, "The Challenge of Oral History," 145.

⁸ Michael Billig, "Collective Memory, Ideology and the British Royal Family," in *Collective Remembering*, eds. David Middleton, Derek Edwards (London: Sage Publications, 1991), 61-63.

⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, *La memoire collective*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), 35-40.

All explanations of collective memory emanate from the researcher's individual focus. The following discussions on collective memory will be numerously referenced to in the different analytical sections of this thesis. As there are as many different memories as there are people sharing them, there is an umpteen number of definitions for collective memory. Amy Corning and Howard Schuman¹⁰ attempt to capture a share of them by listing 14 examples and by concluding: "In sum, the term "collective memory" appears in many different contexts, used by writers of all kinds; the common conceptual element is simply remembrance of the past in some form by or for a collectivity, large or small." Thus, very simply, the collective memory of the Singing Revolution is the collective reminiscing of any form by a group of people. As long as the event is remembered, publicly or privately, by more than one person, a collective memory of the Singing Revolution exists.

According to Kõresaar¹¹ a common "Baltic memory" exists which unites the understanding of historical consciousness for Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, created by quasi identical historical external influences by various foreign powers, especially the Soviet occupation. While the emphasis in this thesis is still on Estonia's individual experience, some parallels might and will be drawn to other Baltic States. Kõresaar¹² separates two possibilities to regard collective memory: cumulative and distributive. The first possibility rests on a bottom-up approach – the shared narrative of the past is determined by how many people in a society share this particular perspective. The second approach is characteristically top-down – public organisations and institutions determine the official historical narrative. In a democratic society, however, it should be a combination of the two, as is attempted in Estonia – state institutions promote a narrative that is influenced by the most popular memories, aiming as much as possible towards complete accuracy, and the people trust the public narrative to be truthful while complementing their personal narratives with it. The narratives in this thesis are analysed in the belief that the Estonian collective memory of the Singing Revolution follows this combination of state induced narrative and the large number of recounts from the witnesses circulating the society. However, if the clash between the state-imposed narrative and the public narrative is too substantial, achieving compromise is complicated

¹⁰ Amy Corning; Howard Schuman, *Generations and Collective Memory* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 2-6.

¹¹ Ene Kõresaar, "Life story as cultural memory: making and medicating Baltic socialism since 1989. In memoriam: Aili Aarelaid-Tart," *Journal of Baltic Studies*, volume 47, issue 4 (December 2016): 431.

¹² Ene Kõresaar, *Elu ideoloogiad* (Tartu: Eesti Rahva Muuseum, 2005), 200, 211.

and potential conflicts may arise. This is why it is important to begin mapping a share of the population's perspectives and potential different understandings of the past than the state's or witnesses'.

While Kõresaar interprets collective memory in a context of oral history and individual remembering, James V. Wertsch¹³ and Wulf Kansteiner¹⁴ provide ample explanations on collective memory also relevant to this thesis. Wertsch discusses collective memory not as memory proper but as something that is reflected by those who have not lived through these events. Wertsch explains: "Specifically, it is based on 'textual resources' provided by others – narratives that stand in, or mediate, between the events and our understanding of them."¹⁵ Kansteiner draws a clear distinction between psychological memory and "collected memory", something that has little to do with psychological remembering. He defines collective memories as such: "[–] (collective memories – M.S.) originate from shared communications about the meaning of the past that are anchored in life-worlds of individuals who partake in the communal life of the respective collective."¹⁶ Wertsch illustrates his theoretical approach on collective memory using his own experience on interacting with a Russian school boy and the latter's views on World War II which strongly differ from the narrative in the United States and professional historical recounts. He emphasises that the pupils had not done any individual research on World War II. This lack of individual academic research is important at finding interviewees for this thesis exactly because the majority of young people in Estonia have similarly little experience in conducting academic research on the Singing Revolution and thus there is a possibility that their narratives strongly differ from the states'. Their narratives of those events are their own constructions – they acknowledge their narrative, as uncertain and incompetent they might think it is, as their truth in their cultural and social environment. While there are always exceptions and people with exceptionally adequate analytical skills, I believe this attitude holds true for most of the interviewees and young people in Estonia in general.

¹³ James, V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 4-7.

¹⁴ Wulf Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, eds. Jeffrey K. Olick; Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi; Daniel Levy, (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 300-303.

¹⁵ Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 5.

¹⁶ Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory," 302.

James W. Pennebaker and Becky L. Banasik¹⁷ describe collective memory as a “dynamic social and psychological process” presuming that it is talked about. This is the key moment in any study concerning the collective memory of any phenomenon – the fact that it still lives in the oral or written culture of this society. As will be discussed further in this thesis, the Singing Revolution is still actively discussed in the media, literature, school education and social settings in the Estonian quotidian society. The other aspect of collective memory that Pennebaker and Banasik highlight is the impact of the event in question – whether the event had a lasting effect on the people and the society. Here, again, the impact of the Singing Revolution – admittedly, not entirely causal, is clear – the reinstatement of independence. Nico H. Frijda’s¹⁸ discussion on commemorations links directly to the previous authors’ presumptions on collective memory by claiming that individuals cling to certain historical events to justify their belonging to a larger group. According to Frijda, in order to remain sane, functioning individuals constantly need to position themselves in time and space. Since the Singing Revolution had an influential effect on the Estonian society, young people without personal memories of the event, might still value the narrative. Understanding historical events and, thus, empathising with them, provide a sense of security and belonging.

“The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods” explains narrative as follows: “[–] a speaker connects events to a sequence that is consequential for later action and for the meanings listeners are supposed to take away from the story. Events are described as important, selected, organized, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular listener,” and “Here, narrative refers to a discrete unit of discourse, an extended answer by a research participant to a single question, topically centered and temporally organized.”¹⁹ Joep Leerssen²⁰ adapts this idea of a narrative in history writing by explaining that while narratives always have a clear beginning, middle and ending, modern historical narratives are more difficult to limit in this way. He claims that historical national narratives begin with the people and their national awakening and they

¹⁷ James W. Pennebaker; Becky L. Banasik, “On the Creation and Maintenance of Collective Memories: History as Social Psychology,” in *Collective Memory of Political Events*, eds. James W. Pennebaker; Dario Paez and Bernard Rimé (New York; London: Psychology Press, 2008), 4-6.

¹⁸ Nico H. Frijda, “Commemorating,” in *Collective Memory of Political Events*, eds. James W.

Pennebaker; Dario Paez and Bernard Rimé (New York; London: Psychology Press, 2008), 107-114.

¹⁹ Lisa. M. Given, ed. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, (Los Angeles [i.e. Thousand Oaks, Calif.]: SAGE Publications, 2008), 539.

²⁰ Joep Leerssen, “Setting the Scene for National History,” in *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe*, eds. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 71-73.

often end with the present day, leaving the possibility of a continuum. While the following discussion on the media and school books provide an organised narrative with the beginning usually quite clearly set, the interviewees' individual answers often fall short of such necessary complexity. However, the perspective on the national narrative that is constructed in this thesis by analysing the national history curricula, the media coverage of August 20th and the school books, roughly still follows this definition.

Stefan Berger and Christoph Conrad²¹ describe historical narrative as a way to legitimise the existence of the nation and the state and lists key elements in the construction of national historical narratives, for example: spatiality, étatism, people's history, a search for origins, medievalism, heroes and enemies of the nation, and 'othering'. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone²² contribute to this discussion by claiming that national narratives are always constructed from different perspectives and according to the constructor's, *i.e.* the nations, current needs. The narrative by nations whose regime has changed, like the people living in Estonia, need to legitimise and rediscover continuity. All of these elements are present in the Estonian national narrative and while the analysis is executed according to a different framework, the existence of these elements will become apparent in the subsequent discussions.

Lastly and most importantly, the prerequisite for any kind of narrative to exist is its retrospective meaning –Hodgkin and Radstone²³ point out that every historical event subject to memories or official narratives have been granted a greater meaning after the events have occurred, however strongly influenced by the authorities and media. It would be nearly impossible to discuss about a historical narrative of the Singing Revolution if it had been without consequences of any kind. The true meaning and significance of the Singing Revolution will be ever-changing but it is incontestable that this event strongly influenced at least the Estonian society.

It is important to understand that the emphasis in this thesis is on the narrative, rather than proving whether the historical facts of the Singing Revolution are rightfully represented

²¹ Stefan Berger; Christoph Conrad, *The Past as History: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Modern Europe*, (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2-4, 362-363.

²² Katharine Hodgkin; Susannah Radstone, "Patterning the National Past: Introduction," in *Contested Pasts: The politics of Memory*, eds. Katharine Hodgkin; Susannah Radstone (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 170.

²³ Hodgkin; Radstone, "Introduction," in *Contested Pasts*, 4-5.

in the media, schoolbooks and interviewees. Kõresaar *et. al.*²⁴ explain that narratives rest upon the act of speaking and language, and with each telling of a story, some of its content is lost. Disregarding neurological memory and different people's ability to accurately remember facts, every person decides, whether consciously or subconsciously, to emphasise aspects in a story or narrative that they personally value. Likewise, every person decides to remember and value certain facts and aspects in a narrative that is told to them. This particularity of a narrative compared to historical tales needs to be considered when handling this thesis. Young people who were interviewed for this thesis have only processed narratives of the Singing Revolution rather than remembering historical events. They have chosen to construct their own individual narrative using suitable fragments of various narratives that they have heard or acquired from 'textual resources' as defined earlier by Wertsch. The aspect of selective forgetting is an important context in the discussion part of this thesis.

Geoffrey Cubitt²⁵ sums up adequately the essence of any theory on collective memory: "It remains important, however, to remember that the collective past is always a constructed past (and continually under reconstruction), that its construction is part of the process by which societies do not smoothly inherit but actively thrash out and negotiate forms of collective identity, and that this thrashing out and negotiating is always at least latently and potentially problematic and disharmonious – an affair of claims and counter-claims, of power and resistance, and not just of mutual recognition and collective celebration." Since the events of the Singing Revolution only happened a few decades ago, the collective understanding of them and the dynamic around the results are still incredibly volatile. This thesis aims to provide an overview of the collective memory and national narrative dominating the contemporary discourse; the historical truth and predictions lie in other researchers' hands.

The pretext of a collective memory existing in the Estonian society is that there exists a social community – an imagined community, the concept emanating from Benedict Anderson²⁶. This concept understands nations as socially constructed unities where the members of which have or never will establish contact with every other member but they

²⁴ Ene Kõresaar, Epp Lauk and Kristin Kuutma, eds., *The burden of remembering: recollections and representations of the 20th century* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2009), 12-13.

²⁵ Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory*, (Manchester, GBR: Manchester University Press, 2007), ProQuest ebrary, 230-231.

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London; New York: Verso, 2006), 5-7, 145.

still carry a sense of unity towards those strangers. Anderson elaborates on the exceptionalism of singing the national anthem and the strikingly simultaneous way that strangers can sing one song in unison at any given moment. The Estonian national anthem definitely possesses this spontaneity but equally or even more do some of the songs from the Singing Revolution like “Ei ole ükski ükski maa” (“No Country Stands Alone” in English) or “Koit” (“Dawn” in English). The belonging to socially constructed community or group will be one of the key points in the analysis of the interviews as many interviewees claimed that they have little personal association with the Singing Revolution but still expressed aspects of belonging to the community.

The combined different narratives of the Singing Revolution thus attribute to a volatile collective memory of Estonia’s past. The young people that are the subjects of this thesis have their own personal, however brief, narratives that are presumably created within their social communities by adopting ‘textual resources’ and recounts by witnesses.

1.3 Literature Review

A great deal of previous research on collective memory in Estonia mostly focuses on World War II and the subsequent occupation period, the latter including numerous studies on every-day life under the Soviet regime. A popular approach is comparison – comparing communist and national socialist rule, comparing different post-Soviet countries and the evolution after the fall of the Soviet Union, comparing Western and Eastern European countries, comparison of different narratives between countries – these are just an underwhelming fragment of examples. Researchers of memory studies and politics in Estonia have often conducted research on how history is used for the sake of politics or how the Estonian narrative of World War II and communism is completely different from the Russian or even Western countries’ ones. There is a relatively small body of literature that is concerned with collective memory on events that the subjects have not experienced personally. Michael Billig’s research on the historical consciousness of the Royal Family aptly includes collective passively experienced memory as such: “For royalty to be experienced this way (collectively and subconsciously including the history as one’s own – M.S.) it is necessary for people to have historical consciousness, which is more than a

memory for historical events, but which is a consciousness, or ideology, of history itself.”

²⁷ Unfortunately, Billig’s research focuses neither on Estonia, nor on the right time period, nor on a specific event.

Furthermore, the amount decreases when discussing events that are positive in essence – traumatic experiences tend to attract more public and academic attention. For example, Corning and Schuman²⁸ discuss the theory of “critical years” – every generation has their own predominant collective memories because they experienced these events in their younger receptive years – ages 10 to 30, approximately. Anyone older than that might have overlapping memories of similar events that have happened previously during their lifetime. The authors, however, pinpoint the holocaust as an exception for the “critical years” theory. However relevant to this thesis in the sense of the collective memory upheld by people without a personal memory of the event, the Holocaust is still a very traumatic occurrence. Aili Aarelaid-Tart and Li Bennich-Björkman²⁹ consider the regaining of independence in the Baltic states as an important part of these countries’ collective memory but they too tend to focus on the traumatic transition part of the event, e.g. the ethnic Russian minorities’ struggles and the often less educated 1980s generation in a whirlpool of opportunities and challenges. Clearly, collective memory as a society’s common memory has mostly been discussed by using past events that were traumatic. Negativity tends to influence individuals and the public more strongly than positivity, the same applies to events. While memory processes might function similarly, the dealing with trauma is still different than dealing with happy historical events. James W. Pennebaker *et. al.*³⁰ provide a thorough research on collective memory of mostly traumatic political events – World War II, the Kennedy assassination, Spanish Civil War, etc. In her Bachelor’s thesis, Eeva Esse³¹ examines how anniversary journalism has shaped the collective memory of a historical event and its transformation in time, using the Estonian example of deportation. Although sometimes controversial and depending on the perspective, the Singing Revolution is considered as a positive event in Estonia’s

²⁷ Billig, “Collective Memory,” 74.

²⁸ Corning; Schuman, *Generations and Collective Memory*, 109, 123, 129-130.

²⁹ Aili Aarelaid-Tart; Li Bennich-Björkman, eds., *Baltic biographies at historical crossroads*, (London: Routledge, 2015).

³⁰ James W. Pennebaker; Dario Paez and Bernard Rimé, eds. *Collective Memory of Political Events* (New York; London: Psychology Press, 2008).

³¹ Eva Esse, “Kollektiivse mälu kujunemine ja muutumine tähtpäevaajakirjanduses küüditamiste näitel,” (BA Thesis, University of Tartu, 2012).

past, thus the mind patterns presumably function in slightly different ways in processing it.

Wertsch³² presents a relevant overview of collective memory constructed using ‘textual resources’ in post-Soviet Russia. His methods and conclusions are frequently referenced in this thesis and taken as examples for further discussions. Nevertheless, Wertsch admits that his focus slightly overlooks informal learning and private means of obtaining information, such as personal exchange between family members and friends. I consider this form of communication an essential but very complex part of narrative construction, which will be addressed in the interviews. Additionally, Wertsch’s empirical and theoretical basis is Russia and the Soviet Union, both having exercised up to extreme state control on history writing, thus the study’s focus has to adapt accordingly. The part of the state control in this thesis, while present and influential, is potentially less imposing.

Pierre Nora regards memory in relation to the concept of *lieux de mémoire*, in English: realms or sites of memory. According to Nora³³ a *lieu de mémoire* is a material, symbolic or functional phenomenon that has a significant lasting effect on a certain group of people. Realms of memory help explain a nation’s emotional values, often strange and odd for outsiders, but important for a society’s identity as a nation. The preposition for this thesis is that the Singing Revolution is one of Estonia’s *lieux de mémoire* since it continues to thrive in people’s personal memories, as well as in the collective narrative of the entire nation.

Experimental psychologists William Hirst and Charles B. Stone³⁴ explore the psychological side of collective and collected memory by exploring collective forgetting processes. Although this thesis contributes more to the research community of social sciences and humanities than psychology, their research is highly relevant to this thesis including the psychological side of retaining information includes excluding, *i.e.* forgetting irrelevant facts. The notion of forgetting aspects about the Singing Revolution is later addressed in the discussion part of this thesis.

³² Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 172.

³³ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989): 12-22, doi: 10.2307/2928520.

³⁴ William Hirst; Charles B. Stone, “A Unified Approach to Collective Memory: Sociology, Psychology and the Extended Mind,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion on Memory Studies*, ed. Siobhan Kattago (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2015).

Studies on the Singing Revolution obviously exist and the phenomenon has briefly been studied. Kaarel Piirimäe and Pertti Grönholm³⁵ present an exhaustive analysis on the competition of two important actors in the process of restoring independence in Estonia – Edgar Savisaar and Lennart Meri. While the authors acutely capture the political rivalry of the period, the focus remains on the influence that these two characters, who will be briefly mentioned in further discussion in this thesis, had on the national narrative and collective memory. Another example is Wolf Christoph Seifert³⁶ who compares the film “The Singing Revolution” (2006) to a German counterpart “Sound of Heimat – Deutschland Singt” (“The Sound of the Fatherland – Germany Sings” in English – M.S.) but fails to elaborate further on the impact of this film on its audience and on memory politics. The existing studies on the Singing Revolution mostly focus on the event itself and its political and cultural implications, rather than the collective memory or subsequently the possible conflicting narratives surrounding it.

Researchers of memory studies like Ollila³⁷ often focus on the relationship between state history and people’s history. Ollila’s main argument is that different groups remember various events from a different perspective. This emphasis on remembering is also reflected in Meike Wulf’s³⁸ research on the dynamic between identity and history in Estonia. In sum, the previous research mainly focuses on remembering, which surely influences the results of this research, but it is not the objective of this thesis. Young people in Estonia, who have not experienced the Singing Revolution lack personal memories of the event but they possess a constructed narrative of the Singing Revolution.

One of the most influential, perhaps even the most important researcher on Estonia’s collective memory of the 20th century, particularly oral and autobiographical history is Ene Kõresaar³⁹. Kõresaar’s research includes the symbiosis of different autobiographical stories into one narrative, discussion on change in Baltic narratives before and after the

³⁵ Kaarel Piirimäe; Pertti Grönholm, “Historical consciousness, personal life experiences and the orientation of Estonian foreign policy toward the West, 1988–1991,” *Ajalooline Ajakiri*, No. 3 (2016), 477-511.

³⁶ Wolf Christoph Seifert “Gesang der Heimat, Gesang der Revolution. Zur Inszenierung des Zusammenhangs von Gesang, Musik und nationaler Identität im Dokumentarfilm,” in *Zum Beispiel Estland. Das eine Land und die vielen Sprachen*, eds. Silke Pasewalck, Anna Bers, Reet Bender (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2017), 171-182.

³⁷ Anne Ollila, ed. *Historical Perspectives on Memory*, (Helsinki: SHS, 1999).

³⁸ Meike Wulf, *Shadowlands: Memory and History in Post-Soviet Estonia*, (New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2016).

³⁹ For example: Kõresaar *et. al.*, *The burden of remembering*; 2009; Kõresaar, *Elu ideoloogiad*, 2005; Kõresaar, *Memory and history in Estonian post-Soviet life stories*, 2004; Ene Kõresaar, ed., *Baltic Socialism Remembered : Memory and Life Story Since 1989*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2018).

collapse of the Soviet Union, collective guilt and trauma, and generational differences of remembering. Kõresaar's work has substantially inspired and influenced this thesis. Despite her focus leaning towards oral and autobiographical history, the frameworks on collective memory in Estonia that she has laid out are highly applicable to the general research ideas of this thesis.

Remarkable researchers of memory, including collective memory, are undoubtedly Maurice Halbwachs⁴⁰ and Frederic C. Bartlett⁴¹ who mostly explain the process of individual reconstruction of memory in relation to the society. Halbwachs being the introducer of the term "collective memory" into the academic world, claims that only in dreams do individuals perceive the world separately from the collective memory – the conscious memory is always affected by society's collective memory. Bartlett's schema theory assumes that individuals reconstruct stories, including personal memories, according to the social background of their "group" and that they change the aspects they fail to comprehend to notions that are understandable for them. Anthony Smith⁴² contributes to this discussion by claiming that while it is true that every generation rewrites their social group's history, they do so within their unique cultural and national landscape, shaped by centuries of various external and internal influences. While it is definitely relevant to this thesis how the subjects of this thesis have changed their narratives of the Singing Revolution over time and what influences have caused these changes, and while the interview questions briefly touch upon that very topic, it is beyond the reach of this particular study to conclude an in depth analysis on the exact sources of information influencing these narratives.

Another notable researcher of memory politics, along with further analysis on realms of memory, is Siobhan Kattago⁴³. Kattago has contributed to the discussion on Estonian collective memory with her research on monuments, notably the events regarding the displacement of the Bronze Soldier in 2007 but also by editing a rather excessive volume

⁴⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁴¹ Frederic C. Bartlett, *Remembering: a study in experimental and social psychology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁴² Anthony Smith, "The Ethnic Origins of Nations," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, eds. Jeffrey K. Olick; Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi; Daniel Levy, (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 231-236.

⁴³ Siobhan Kattago, *Memory and representation in contemporary Europe: the persistence of the past*, (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2011).

on memory studies⁴⁴. The latter examines the dynamics of the relationship between past events and memory, many articles of which have been referenced multiple times in this thesis.

Lastly, to understand the general concept of collective memory, Jeffrey K. Olick *et. al.*⁴⁵ provide a concise, albeit superficial overview of the topic in their 497-page volume of extracts from the most influential researchers of memory studies. This volume includes, among many others, an extract by Jan Assmann⁴⁶ who developed the theory of cultural and communicative memory, declaring that individuals construct their memory by communication and socialisation within cultural settings. The idea of a cultural and social background system that influences the individual's narrative of past events will be further addressed in the discussion part of this thesis.

1.4 Historical Context

“The memory of an event or of a historical experience begins with the event or experience itself.”

-Geoffrey Cubitt⁴⁷

By the late 1980s the Soviet Union was in a state of near bankruptcy. The leaders of the Union were ceaselessly pressured for social and economic change. The country's leader from 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev began the reforming process in the hopes of restoring the Soviet Union to its former glory. Modernising the society included political change, introduction of freedom of speech, diminishing the one party rule and reintroducing private ownership. In retrospect, however, the reforms sped up the collapse of the Soviet Union and as Mati Graf, an Estonian historian specialising in the 20th century turmoil of Estonian restoration of independence concludes, Gorbachev's “ambitious endeavours did result in great changes in the world – one of the two super powers disappeared – the

⁴⁴ Siobhan Kattago, ed, *The Ashgate Research Companion on Memory Studies*, (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2015).

⁴⁵ Jeffrey K. Olick; Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi; Daniel Levy, eds., *The Collective Memory Reader*, eds. (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴⁶ Jan Assmann, “Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism,” in *The Collective Memory Reader*, eds. Jeffrey K. Olick; Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi; Daniel Levy, (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴⁷ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 206.

communist empire of the USSR, socialism in Eastern Europe disappeared and the Cold War ended, the Baltic States regained independence.”⁴⁸

In 1986-1987 the Soviet authorities launched preparations for mining phosphorite in North-East Estonia. Graf⁴⁹ describes the consequences for this initiative in the Rakvere-Kabala-Toolse area as possible damage to resources of groundwater in North-East Estonia and mass-immigration from other Soviet countries to Estonia. However, the environmental dangers were only a spark that ignited the hay pile of decades of suppressed anger, constant fear and forbidden patriotism. The mining plans were met with public protests all over Estonia, mostly led by students and university activists. Karl Vaino, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Estonia who was the equivalent to a president or the highest local political authority, considered these public expressions of protest a rising sentiment of *bourgeois* nationalism. The protests for the environmental cause soon developed into public meetings like the Hirvepark meeting in August 1987 where about a thousand people gathered to peacefully demand the publication of the secret protocol of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, among other discussions. In 1988, the Estonian Heritage Conservation Society (Eesti Muinsuskaitse Selts) and the Popular Front of Estonia (Rahvarinne) were founded by respectively Trivimi Velliste and Edgar Savisaar. These organisations took initiative in slowly but steadily increasing demands to the Soviet overrule. These pro-independence groupings were met with counter forces like the political movement Intermovement (Interrinne), led by Yevgeni Kogan. The Intermovement membership included mostly Russian speakers who were against Estonia’s restoration of independence; their agenda peaked with the failed attack on Toompea Castle in 1990.

However, the pro-independence camp was divided as well – the side who wanted a restoration of the independence lost in 1940 and the side who preferred to install a new republic without the complete extraction from the Soviet Union. Academic and future politician Marju Lauristin and diplomat and future president Lennart Meri supported the first camp, Edgar Savisaar, politician and future prime minister supported the second camp. This confrontation created complex political tensions during the restoration of independence, as well as in the political landscape in the republic long after 1991; the

⁴⁸ Mati Graf, *Impeeriumi lõpp ja Eesti taasiseseisvumine 1988-1991*, (Tallinn: Argo, 2012), 12.

⁴⁹ Mati Graf, *Kalevipoja tagasitulek* (Tallinn: Argo, 2008), 211-215.

analysis of which be out of the scope of this thesis, although it will be briefly referenced to in following sections.

In the summer and spring of 1988, Estonian lawyers led by Igor Gräzin drafted a project for a constitutional reform for the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic (ESSR) which included proposals for a sovereign federal state, the right for the Estonians to self-determination, Estonian as one of the official languages and an Estonian citizenship. The supreme power of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was initially left untouched by the proposal. Graf⁵⁰, characteristically subjective towards the Estonian efforts, particularly highlights this special Estonian part in the collapse of the Soviet Union, stating that Soviet high functionaries were especially agitated by the Estonian efforts for independence and that the delegation was the only Baltic State specifically summoned to Moscow for questioning in November 9, 1988. However, on November 16, 1988 the ESSR changed course and passed the Estonian Sovereignty Declaration asserting Estonia's sovereignty and the supremacy of the Estonian law over Soviet Union's law. The declaration included a proposal for a new Union Treaty between the Soviet Union and the ESSR; the Estonians were initially highly prudent to steer clear of any mention of independence.

In June 1988, after the conclusion of Tallinn Old Town Days, masses of people started spontaneously moving towards the Song Festival Grounds while singing patriotic songs in unison. These gatherings lasted for almost a week and spread all over Estonia, instigating national sentiment and patriotic feelings in the participants. The song festivals culminated in September 1988 with the event Eestimaa Laul ("Song of Estonia" in English) in Tallinn where reportedly 300,000 people participated. The term "Singing Revolution", its particularity in Estonian and English addressed further later in this thesis, was coined by the Estonian activist Heinz Valk in an article in the magazine *Sirp ja Vasar*. Karsten Brüggemann and Andres Kasekamp observe that this article affirmed singing in the "national myth" of Estonia: "The national myth of singing the people into a nation was amplified by the power of peaceful resistance, and the ritual thus reloaded with old weapons. The ritual became a source of power in the struggle for independence and thus part of social reality."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Graf, *Impeeriumi lõpp*, 29-30.

⁵¹ Karsten Brüggemann; Andres Kasekamp, "Singing oneself into a nation? Estonian song festivals as rituals of political mobilisation," *Nations and Nationalism*, No. 20(2), (2014), 272.

On August 23, 1989 the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was anew brought into focus by the public when approximately two million people joined hands commemorating the losses suffered because of this pact's secret protocol forming a human chain across the three Baltic States from Tallinn to Vilnius, spanning 675.5 kilometres in total. Among commemoration the aim was to show the world the unified desire from the three Baltic States to achieve independence. The Soviet authorities' failure to respond adequately to disperse the action gave further hope to the pro-independence forces that independence was becoming a reality rather than a futile daydream.

In 1991, from the 19th until the 22nd of August a group of members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union attempted a *coup d'état*, later referred to as the August Coup, to retake power from the Soviet President and General Secretary Mikhaïl Gorbachev. Estonia, among numerous other Soviet republics, seized the opportunity and declared their independence among the turmoil and confusion. On August 20, 1991 at 11:02 PM the Estonian Supreme Soviet passed the declaration of its Restoration of Independence with 69 votes in favour: 70 delegates were present from the 105 members of the Supreme Soviet. Estonia had regained its independence after 51 years of foreign occupation.

2 DATA AND METHODS

2.1 Methodology

The guiding paradigm for the methodology in this thesis is the interpretivist approach. "The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods"⁵² explains this approach as follows: "They assume that social phenomena are constructed or co-constructed by self and can be discovered by collecting and analyzing conversations and texts." The analysis of textbooks, newspaper articles and history curricula are thus the texts that were analysed and the interviews the conversations.

When analysing memory, it is important to acknowledge the relationship between the individual actor and the "cultural tools" that they use. Textbooks, media, the internet and

⁵² Given, *The Sage Encyclopedia*, 512.

the national curricula are the “cultural tools” influencing individuals under focus in this thesis and are important factors to include for understanding young people’s narratives in Estonia. To provide a snapshot of the national narrative of the Singing Revolution a combination of secondary school textbooks, newspaper articles and the relevant history curricula were briefly analysed. Although not a comprehensive review, these findings provide a sufficient background for this study. Textbooks, national curricula and media are “cultural tools” according to Wertsch⁵³ – people utilise them to construct a memory and thus a narrative. In this thesis, the pre-existing knowledge for the subjects of the research is the narrative they have constructed by communicating with their family and friends.

The methodology of this thesis consisted of gathering data from textbooks and newspaper articles and analysing them for meaningful trends and frequencies according to the framework presented by Bert Vanhulle in his article “The path of history: narrative analysis of history textbooks – a case study of Belgian history textbooks (1945–2004)”⁵⁴. Although historical developments in Belgium after World War II were cardinally different from Estonian counterparts, Vanhulle presents a quite universal model for analysing historical narratives in general. The framework along with the appropriate questions are similarly applicable to the narrative presented by the main newspapers in Estonia. Naturally, the analytical questions were accustomed to fit the Estonian context and narrowed down since Vanhulle was analysing whole textbooks in an extended timeframe – almost 60 years. Additionally, as the main focus of this thesis is the attitude of young people, the analysis is simplified. Then, the findings were synthesised to provide a concise overview of the trends describing events that took place during the Singing Revolution.

Analytical questions for this framework are as follows⁵⁵:

1. Can the narrative be defined as a “liberal *narratio*”, an expression introduced by Vanhulle. The adaption of this concept used in this thesis consists of a negative beginning and a quest for a solution. Are these present in the narrative? Was the

⁵³ Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 11.

⁵⁴ Bert Vanhulle, “The path of history: narrative analysis of history textbooks – a case study of Belgian history textbooks (1945–2004),” *History of Education* 38:2 (2009): 263-264, accessed August 12, 2016, doi:10.1080/00467600701827837.

⁵⁵ Vanhulle, “The path of history,” 265-269.

independence a logical continuation for the course of history of Estonians? Ending then being liberation from the Communist occupation.

2. Are there clear actors that play a main or crucial role in the narrative? Vanhulle identifies three different types of heroes – hero character: type A, who helps the people or draws their attention to the negative situation in the society, not taking direct action yet. Secondly, hero type B who is a leader. Lastly, the antihero: hero type C. While one of the definitions of ‘hero’ by the Merriam-Webster dictionary is “a person admired for achievements and noble qualities,”⁵⁶ Vanhulle and this thesis use the word as a synonym for a type of important person or character, both with positive and negative influences towards the Singing Revolution. Although the first two hero types follow the positive connotation of the word, hero type C is definitely a negative character. In the interests of readability and to accord with the framework’s author’s original vocabulary, the word ‘hero’ will be likewise, albeit controversially, used to define characters with negative connotation.
3. What is the role of the ‘paratext’ – do illustrations, source fragments, colour use, titles, etc. allow space for reflection or offer a critical note or do they just support the main narrative? This segment relates directly to the interviews in a cognitive way that people absorb information – Wertsch⁵⁷ explains this as how we are emotionally manipulated into believing or not believing something by pressuring our emotional values and empathy related to our identity. The Singing Revolution is supposedly an emotional topic discussed among family, therefore the ‘paratext’ is an important factor in enhancing or discouraging these emotions.
4. Lastly, the role of violence, Vanhulle presents violence as means for the greater good in the Belgian textbooks, whereas the Singing Revolution is distinct by its almost complete lack of violence and casualties.

Wertsch⁵⁸, when analysing and comparing the representation of the Russian Civil War of 1918-1920 and World War II in Soviet and post-Soviet history text books, discovered that a particular trait for Russians as a people, is the existence of a “triumph-over-alien-forces” narrative. While this narrative analysis method might apply to this thesis, its starting point is slightly different from the one at hand. Wertsch applies Vladimir Propp’s peaceful “initial situation” as a starting point, whereas the Singing Revolution sparked

⁵⁶ “hero,” *Merriam-Webster.com*, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hero>.

⁵⁷ Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 9.

⁵⁸ Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 93-113.

from a situation of unrest and disconcert. Therefore, using this method would presume starting from the middle – subsection 3: “A time of crisis and great suffering.” It is possible, however, that with decades of Soviet and Russian influences, traces of this narrative are still present in the Estonian narrative and adequate references will be indicated in the analysis part of this thesis. Furthermore, Propp’s⁵⁹ method of analysis presumes the existence of a completely completed story, fairy tale to be precise. If the interviewees had managed to construct concise narratives with a clear beginning, development and ending, positive and negative characters; the method would have been applicable. However, as can be observed in the discussion part of the thesis, the interviewees were often able to provide only two or three sentences about the event itself, rather than including them into their narrative, only by further questioning did the interviewees begin to briefly list positive or negative characters. Lastly, Propp excludes context, which is the essential part of this thesis. Propp’s basic thesis was that “all fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure”⁶⁰, whether the narratives by the subjects of this study are constructed as a fairy tale or not, is irrelevant.

Although Vanhulle’s framework often overlooks the aspects of voluntary and involuntary forgetting, discussed further in the discussion section of this thesis, the relative simplicity of the model is fitting to analyse the textbooks, media and interviews simultaneously to provide comparability between those different instances. Admittedly, news items often fail to produce a coherent narrative within this one article, for example, but the elements fitting Vanhulle’s “liberal *narratio*” are present. The role of violence and the meaning of the lack of it will be further discussed in the discussion part of the thesis but here as well, Vanhulle’s framework creates a basis on which to build deeper analysis of the Estonian society. While the media and school books could be analysed according to different more profound methodologies in their own respective fields, the interviews require a simplistic model because of the occasionally shallow depth of the answers. Vanhulle’s model is thus applicable to all three instances of data and therefore allows a better comparability.

⁵⁹ Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the folktale*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), xi-xvi, 19-24.

⁶⁰ Propp, *Morphology of the folktale*, 23.

2.2 School Textbooks

Four textbooks were chosen and analysed according to the framework described earlier in this Chapter. This analysis was then synthesised into a concise snapshot of the trends in history teaching in Estonia after re-independence. The four books were chosen by briefly consulting up to ten people who recently graduated from secondary school and were thus able to inform me which textbooks they used. The four books⁶¹ and their respective authors are “Estonian History for High School” (2004) by Lauri Vahtre, “Estonian History for High School” (2004) by Andres Adamson and Toomas Karjahärm, “Estonian History II: From the 20th Century to Today” (2006) by Ago Pajur and Tõnu Tannberg, and “Contemporary History for High School II” (2007) by Mart Laar and Lauri Vahtre. All books belong to the list of accredited history books for the Estonian national curriculum of history teaching. It is important to indicate that the textbook by Mart Laar and Lauri Vahtre focuses more broadly on the history of the world, whereas the other books almost exclusively concentrate on Estonian history. Therefore the historical context and emphasis within the narrative differ somewhat from the other books. Hereby, the author’s personality and professional background is relevant – Mart Laar is an Estonian historian and an active politician since late 1980s. Jörg Hackmann⁶² explains his views on the Estonian historical national narrative as follows: “[–] Laar wants to modify the picture of the national development with the observation that national activities were even more widespread than depicted in historiography so far,” and illustrates his views on the Estonian national awakening in the 19th century as politically “anti-Soviet”. Although the analysed school books’ chapters focus on a later time period, the desire to emphasise national developments must be taken into consideration when considering these texts.

⁶¹ The titles of these books are translated by myself, for the original titles, see Bibliography.

⁶² Jörg Hackmann, “Narrating the Building of a Small Nation: Divergence and Convergence in the Historiography of Estonian ‘National Awakening’, 1868-2005,” in *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe*, eds. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 189-190.

2.3 Media

For the media analysis, three sources were chosen, two of them are simultaneously published in print and online – *Postimees* and *SL Õhtuleht* and one solely online – *Delfi*. However, some articles that *Delfi* publishes online are the property of *Eesti Päevaleht* and are also published in print, these were considered as part of *Delfi* in the analysis. The average circulation in December, 2017⁶³ for *Postimees*, *Õhtuleht* and *Päevaleht* were respectively 44,700, 47,600 and 15,300, *i.e.* these papers constitute the most read print media in Estonia. As for online media, *Postimees* and *Delfi* clearly have the upper hand in the number of unique users – in the first half of 2017⁶⁴, both were close to or by 600,000 users per month. *Õhtuleht* registered about 330,000 users. *Postimees* is Estonia's oldest consistent printed daily newspaper that is simultaneously accessible online. The paper is considered to largely represent right-wing liberal views. *Õhtuleht*, while similar in popularity and circulation, generally attracts readers with shocking and scandalous titles and content. The online content of *Delfi* is often similar to *Postimees*' liberal views but like *Õhtuleht*, tries to surprise readers with fetching titles. *Päevaleht*, being part of *Delfi*, therefore takes a more moderate approach and publishes more extensive and content-rich articles. Importantly, some of *Postimees*'s, *Õhtuleht*'s and *Päevaleht*'s content is only accessible to registered paying users. All of the newspapers are still accessible free of charge in public libraries.

The time frame for the media analysis, *i.e.* publishing dates of the articles that were analysed, was August 14, 2016 until August 21, 2016 when Estonia celebrated its 25th Day of Restoration of Independence on August 20, 2016. Therefore, the subjects of this study were presumably more susceptible to the descriptions on the time period of 1987-1991 than in normal circumstances. The total number of articles published during this time in the three media publications was 123: *Delfi* 78, *Postimees* 24 and *Õhtuleht* 21. Interestingly, *Delfi* published more articles than the other two combined. *Delfi*, as mentioned, almost exclusively publishes online, and had multiple articles using the same video clips in several different news items. Additionally, due to the nature of an online

⁶³ "EALL liikmeslehed seisuga 4. jaanuar 2018," Eesti Ajalehtede Liit, as of January 17, 2018, http://www.eall.ee/eall_liikmed.html.

⁶⁴ "2017 II kvartali ja I poolaasta konsolideeritud vahearuanne," AS Ekspress Grupp: 19, as of January 17, 2017, http://www.nasdaqbaltic.com/upload/reports/eeg/2017_q2_et_eur_con_00.pdf.

news organisation, *Delfi* is presumably able to publish more frequently than the other sources.

The media’s representation of the Singing Revolution can be analysed as a separated study according to many methodologies, the volume of it would certainly allow for an extensive analysis. The number of articles from only three sources published during a week – 123, illustrates the vast potential of this topic. However, it is relevant that the next two years of celebrations around August 20 failed to create such volume in the media. It will be interesting to observe the media in August 2021 when Estonia will celebrate 30 years of restored independence. Nonetheless, the news items analysed in this thesis should provide for a reference point to aid the analysis and comparison with the interviews.

2.4 Internet

Wertsch’s “cultural tools” include the internet as a prominent information source in remembering. Since it is highly complicated to analyse the narrative that just the Internet provides for its audience, due to its vastness and overlapping information with other textual tools, a modest snapshot of Google results for different keywords is provided (see Table 1).

Table 1: Frequency of Google keywords

Keyword	Translation to English	No. of results
“Singing Revolution”		59,000,000
“Estonia restoration of independence”		691,000
“Balti kett”	Baltic Way	671,000
“Estonia regaining independence”		597,000
“Eesti taasiseseisvumine”	regaining independence	354,000
“20 august 1991”		323,000
“Eesti iseseisvuse taastamine”	restoration of Estonian independence	277,000
“Baltic Way”		115,000
“laulev revolutsioon”	Singing Revolution	86,300
“reindependence”		45,500

Stunningly, the keyword with the highest number of results, as of April 19, 2019, is “Singing Revolution” with over 59 million results and the least popular search word is

“laulev revolutsioon”. While both keywords are a translation of the other, this indicates the difference in terminology in the Estonian and English literature of the event which will be addressed in further sections of this thesis. However, all the Estonian search terms have fewer results than the English ones. There are exceptions to this rule, like the keyword “reindependence”, which is a subjectively false direct translation from the Estonian word “taasiseseisvumine”. The most popular results of this word, interestingly, include almost exclusively the Estonian restoration of independence. Another example is the keyword for the Baltic Way, which seems to be more known in the Estonian public. Nevertheless, purely statistically, the Estonian material for the subjects is significantly limited compared to the results in English. As for the articles that were analysed in depth, all were published online, so this part of the analysis already strongly relies on Internet resources.

2.5 Interviews

The interviews, *i.e.* the empirical data part of this thesis, were conducted on 15 people in Estonia, interview material totalling in approximately 5 hours and 32 minutes (questions and additional remarks included). The interviewees were almost complete strangers to me and mostly found by making inquiries at my sports club teammates in Tartu and subsequently by the “snowball effect” where an interviewee suggested another acquaintance. The conditions set for the interviewees were their age – 20-24 years, and the fact that they had not studied history in university. The age criterion was set to eliminate people who have experienced the Singing Revolution themselves to analyse a truly artificially constructed narrative and allowing a time gap of a few years after the interviewees’ graduation from secondary school. Allowing two or more years after graduation would hopefully have allowed the interviewee to construct a personal narrative of the Singing Revolution and not cite it by heart from the textbook.

None of the interviewees were rewarded financially, subsequently locating interviewees who were negatively attuned towards the Singing Revolution proved extremely difficult since these people would not be interested in voluntarily participating in an interview.

Table 2: Interviewees

No	Age	Gender	Studying/working	Date of interview (D/M/Y)
1	22	Female	Studying/working	07.08.2017
2	24	Male	Neither	01.09.2017
3	20	Female	Studying	15.09.2017
4	22	Female	Studying/working	19.09.2017
5	24	Female	Working	26.09.2017
6	24	Male	Working	27.09.2017
7	20	Female	Studying/working	05.10.2017
8	22	Female	Studying	07.10.2017
9	23	Female	Studying/working	08.10.2017
10	22	Male	Studying/working	20.11.2017
11	21	Male	Studying/working	01.12.2017
12	20	Male	Studying	08.12.2017
13	22	Male	Studying	24.11.2018
14	24	Female	Studying/working	24.11.2018
15	21	Male	Studying	29.11.2018

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format resembling a narrative interview, *e.g.* including open-ended questions and reinforcing the participant to construct their own story – a narrative. There were 16 main questions with the possibility to ask additional questions to give the interviewee an opportunity to elaborate further on a specific topic. The interviews were in Estonian and conducted from August 2017 to November 2018. The citations in this thesis are therefore translated from Estonian. Before the interview, the interviewee was given a number that is only known to the interviewer and the interviewee. They were recorded, transcribed and analysed with the help of the NVivo software. Eight of the interviews were conducted in a neutral building – a breakroom in a sports facility in Tartu where distractions were minimal. Five interviews were conducted in cafes in Tartu, Tallinn and Viljandi, one in a library in Tartu and one in a school classroom in Tartu. The interviewee was always given the option to suggest a preferable location for themselves and if they did not have a suitable location, they were given the option of meeting in the breakroom in Tartu, given that the interview took place in Tartu.

Rick H. Hoyle *et. al.*⁶⁵ stress the importance of creating a positive atmosphere for the interviewee for the interview to be as objective and efficient as possible. To meet this

⁶⁵ Rick H. Hoyle, Monica J. Harris, and Charles M. Judd eds., *Research Methods In Social Relations*, (California: Wadsworth, 2002, 7th ed.), 144-151.

requirement the negative forces were minimised as much as possible. To avoid the interviewee being pressed for time, they were informed beforehand that the interview would last between 20-40 minutes. Unfortunately, due to a misunderstanding, this requirement was not met with interviewee no. 11, where the interview was conducted in rushed conditions because he was expected elsewhere during the interview. To negate the feeling of ignorance or embarrassment, the interviewees were informed beforehand that their answers were anonymous and that the aim of the interview was to explore their “side of the story”, rather than examining them for history knowledge. Sometimes even the phrase “the less you know, the better” proved useful to convince people to participate in the interview and to help them feel less subconscious about their lack of knowledge. The negative consequences of participating were minimised by providing anonymity so the answers given in the interviews are difficult to trace to the interviewee. The only risk that partly failed to be managed was the dislike for the interview content, as people who disliked the Singing Revolution are difficult to convince to participate in an interview about the same subject. Here, a method of concealment and secrecy could persuade people to participate out of curiosity but the ethics of this conduct is highly questionable. Again, a financial reward would also serve as a motivator. Unfortunately, paying 15 interviewees a sum that is motivating enough to participate was not an option. The selection process provided an additional positive force since every interviewee was suggested to me by a mutual contact whom the interviewee trusted. All interviewees were informed that the interview was recorded therefore providing them with assurance that their answers could be verified if necessary. During the interviews I tried to maintain a friendly smile, an open body language and engage in a fluent conversation rather than back-to-back rigid questions. In order to avoid bias and ensure comparability, the interview questions were consistent during all of the interviews.

The interviews were analysed with a symbiosis of methodologies. Meri-Liis Laherand⁶⁶ introduces six most typical “research designs” utilised for qualitative research: case study, phenomenological research, ethnographical research, narrative research, grounded theory, action research and phenomenographic research. Since this thesis seeks to analyse the narrative of the Singing Revolution, not the event itself, a case study, ethnographical research or action research would all be non-compatible or simply chronologically impossible. However, since I as the researcher have grown up in the same large

⁶⁶ Meri-Liis Laherand, *Kvalitatiivne uurimisviis*, (Tallinn: Infotrükk, 2008), 73-175.

environment as most of the subjects, the methodology always includes an ethnographic subtext. Action research focuses on resolving different practical problems in, for example, a work environment. Although this thesis might highlight some practical problems in history teaching or national narrative, the practical problems and their potential solutions related to the Singing Revolution will be the material for future research. A phenomenological study could be considered as a research method for this thesis. Phenomenology, however, seeks to understand the event itself, rather than the individual's perception of it. Additionally, phenomenology presumes that individuals experience the world only through experiences – something that completely contradicts the essence of this thesis since the interviewees specifically lack personal experiences of the Singing Revolution.

The interview transcriptions were divided into units of data – codes related to the supposed national narrative. The coding method used for this study was the holistic coding method. Johnny Saldaña⁶⁷ describes this method as an application of “a single code to each large unit of data in the corpus to capture a sense of the overall contents and the possible categories that may develop.” Some of the codes were pre-existent according to Vanhulle's methodology and some codes developed during the coding process. Although other methods like for example emotion coding seems an appropriate coding method since much of the narrative on the Singing Revolution relies on emotional value, the aim of this research was exploring the essence and existence of a narrative, rather than particular emotional reactions. Interviewees were asked to describe their emotions and attribute names to their emotions but this for the purpose of illustrating the narrative and giving it a direction. The NVivo software was chosen for coding because of its convenience, since the program was specifically designed for qualitative research. Besides, the largest advantage of computer software in any time of analysis, rather than paper-based analysis, lies in the speed of the process.

Sharan B. Merriam⁶⁸ lists the necessary criteria for constructing categories in a qualitative study – they should be responsive to the purpose of the research, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitising and conceptually congruent. While the codes are mutually exclusive, Graham R. Gibbs⁶⁹ stresses that the content that is coded holistically has often

⁶⁷ Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, (London: SAGE, 2009), 118.

⁶⁸ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 185-186.

⁶⁹ Graham R. Gibbs, *Qualitative data analysis: explorations with NVivo*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006), 4.

overlapping codes attached to it. Each code reflects the data that is gathered under it in a wholesome but distinctive way. The initial categories that were used for coding the interviews for this thesis were: “Interest in history”, “Meaning of the Singing Revolution”, “Using of the ‘we’ form”. These categories divided into subcategories and further individual nodes with separate codes.

The codes and categories were analysed using a symbiosis of phenomenography and Vanhulle’s framework introduced earlier. Phenomenography “[–] is directed at studying and mapping variation in experiences of a phenomenon.”⁷⁰ Laherand⁷¹ highlights that phenomenography attempts to explain people’s cognitive understanding of reality or an event, as is the case for this thesis by exploring how young people understand the Singing Revolution and how they experience the reality and narratives surrounding it. Phenomenographic studies mostly use interviews as empiric data. Documents, drawings and other writings are also often used – as is the case for this thesis, but their empiric efficiency is considerably lower than interviews. Interviews allow the researcher to elaborate in depth on a specific and necessary topic for the thesis. Although Laherand highlights the importance of understanding how individuals experience a phenomenon, rather than focusing on the question ‘why’, asking the interviewees the ‘why’ could lead to understanding their ‘how’. The latter is a strong argument for choosing interviews as the empiric method, rather than exploring pre-set documents or writings.

As every individual narrative analysed in this thesis is different, the methodology for analysing the interviews will deviate from any previously existing theory. Gibbs supports this approach by claiming that “Although almost all qualitative researchers will to some degree draw upon existing theories and concepts, all will to a lesser or greater extent conceptualize and formulate theory as it comes from data.”⁷² The need to create a symbiosis of methodologies will become evident in the discussion part of the thesis. Evidently, it is almost impossible to analyse the whole information package of young people’s knowledge of the Singing Revolution as the information society enables massive flows of information. Another important source are the subjects’ parents and close family which will be further discussed when analysing the findings from the interviews. The national historical narrative is additionally strongly influenced by the guidelines provided

⁷⁰ Given, *The Sage Encyclopedia*, 612.

⁷¹ Laherand, *Kvalitatiivne uurimisviis*, 143-145.

⁷² Gibbs, *Qualitative data analysis*, 2.

by the national history curriculum for secondary education, the effects of which are further discussed in the chapter on national narrative.

3 NATIONAL NARRATIVE

3.1. Introduction

Aare Ristikivi⁷³ expresses the necessity of analysing recent tendencies of history education in secondary school in his review of Mare Oja's dissertation about changes in history teaching in the Estonian school system: "Our educational system in general and, specifically, history teaching is in constant change, and in order to assure that this direction is the right one, we have to constantly analyse where we are and how we got here." Whereas the academic public has acknowledged the need to research history teaching in Estonia, research on the effect on pupils has been scarce. This section contributes a modest addition to the research on the tendencies in secondary school history teaching and media coverage to provide a wider background for the national narrative of the Singing Revolution.

In order to understand and analyse a small part of the national narrative, it is essential to provide an explanation of the larger picture – the construction of the Estonian national historical narrative in history textbooks, national curriculum and media coverage. However, before exploring the national narrative of the Singing Revolution, it is important to highlight the essence of the whole Estonian historical narrative. Marek Tamm states that the "Estonian national historical narrative is inseparable from the concept of independence. Estonian national history has always starting from the very first endeavours in this area, been analysed from the perspective of losing and gaining liberty."⁷⁴ Tamm places the end of the narrative with the restoration of independence in 1991. While the end of the narrative analysed in this thesis is also at 1991, the beginning is centuries later than the 13th century as presented by Tamm. Nevertheless, the miniscule

⁷³ Aare Ristikivi, "Arvustus – Ajalooõpetuse muutumine Eestis 1987. aastast tänapäevani. Mare Oja," *Akadeemia* 12 (2016): 2234.

⁷⁴ Marek Tamm, "History as Cultural Memory: Mnemohistory and the Construction of the Estonian Nation," in *Contested and Shared Places of Memory: History and Politics in North Eastern Europe*, eds. Jörg Hakmann; Marko Lehti, (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 122.

morsel of the national historical narrative in this thesis must always be considered in regards of this yearning for independence.

Wertsch⁷⁵ explains compulsory history teaching in education as one of the means for states to impose a unifying sentiment to construct a national identity and loyalty – a socially constructed nationhood. However, Wertsch admits, having conducted a large amount of interviews with people educated in the Soviet and post-Soviet school setting, that when state-imposed narrative fades, unilateral collective memory also fades. Thus, rather than considering any synthesis of the Estonian national narrative as the only source for individual narratives, the following analysis, among other factors, provides a comparative moment.

While subjects of a nation are mostly all different individuals, a partial sense of patriotism, including willingness to protect one's country, is one of the necessary prerequisites to maintain a state. Here, history is a way of introducing the country's past hardships and achievements and spark a sentiment of pride in the pupils. Whereas the Singing Revolution is just a microscopic part of Estonian history, the narratives that the official curricula attempt to create are a vital part of history teaching and identity creation for today's youth. The Song Festivals, public meetings and finally, the declaration of independence were an expression of emotions accumulated during decades of oppression, but also, of success-stories and cheerful memories. These memories and stories were shared within the safe walls of one's home during the Soviet time but also half-hidden in literature and later, in the 1980s, exclaimed at public meetings. Subsequently, these stories and memories were conserved additionally in books which eventually developed into history textbooks and nation curricula where today's young people gain their first academically organised knowledge of the Singing Revolution. While these memories are loaded with personal memories, the next generation, whether from a textbook or from a parent, will acknowledge them as "second-hand" and, thus presumably more objectively. As Geoffrey Cubitt illustrates it: "One generation's vivid or traumatic memories of personal experience become, in the end, later generations' general historical knowledge."⁷⁶

Therefore, the first source to be briefly analysed is the national curriculum for history in secondary schools, then some textbooks used to teach this curriculum, and finally, the

⁷⁵ Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 67-70, 159.

⁷⁶ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 122.

media. Whereas it is almost impossible to determine where exactly the subjects of this thesis, the interviewees, have obtained bits of information from, a large part of their narrative is supposedly constructed using ‘textual resources’ – textbooks, internet, and media coverage. Wertsch⁷⁷ exemplifies this difficulty in admitting that determining whether a pupil has “appropriated”, *i.e.* accepted the information as their own, a certain narrative text, is highly difficult. Examinations only prove only the (temporary) mastery of a certain topic. Thus, rather than attempting to evaluate whether the interviewees have appropriated the following national narrative, I will try to consider their personal narrative in comparison to the national narrative.

3.2 National Curricula

As Vanhulle⁷⁸ explains in his article on narrative analysis of history textbooks, historians often disregard national curricula in secondary education history teaching. Their reasoning is often related to the simplicity and generality of history textbooks in secondary education. Based on Vanhulle’s views, we should not overlook the fact that the majority of a society’s population lacks thorough scientific education in historical methods and events – those textbooks are the first, and sometimes the last, academic insight into the world’s past. What is more, Vanhulle finds that these interpretations provided by the textbook authors “give form to the construction of history and to the narrative itself” by presenting their own vision of past events and the structure set by the curriculum. The pressure to do this in a “clear and logical narrative” and mostly, objectively, is immense since pupils are yet to develop, if at all, a sense of source criticism. Thus, students are subject to a narrative that might as well be the truth in their eyes for the rest of their lives. It is, therefore, essential to understand how this narrative has been presented to them and how they understand it.

Before providing an analysis of specific textbooks, a brief overview should be given on the national curricula for history. While Wertsch⁷⁹ remains hesitant whether official

⁷⁷ Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 119-123.

⁷⁸ Vanhulle, “The path of history,” 263-265.

⁷⁹ Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering*, 70-72.

history can be considered as official collective memory due to the vague objectives of whether history teaching in schools aims to awaken source criticism or national sentiments, the curricula should at least be examined to provide a background system for further analysis. Young Estonians, aged 20-24 during the interviews, had been studying history in school according to two versions of national curricula for history teaching in secondary education. Older pupils studied according to the curriculum in force as of 2002 until 2010. The younger Estonians of that age group studied history in secondary school according to the curriculum in force from 2011. The curriculum of 2002⁸⁰ consisted of three main modules: “Estonian history”, “World history: the individual, the society, the culture” and “Contemporary history”. The first module was sub-divided into chronologically advancing courses from Estonia’s ancient history until the regaining of independence in the 1990s. The second module covered roughly the same time span in Europe, except ending with the 19th century. The third module covered 20th century Europe and the United States of America.

The newer curriculum of 2011⁸¹ consists of six compulsory thematic courses and two voluntary thematic courses. The six obligatory courses are: “General History”, “Estonian history I (until the turn of the 16th and 17th century)”, “Estonian history II (until the end of the 19th century)”, “Contemporary history I – Estonia and the world in the first half of the 20th century”, “Contemporary history II – Estonia and the world in the second half of the 20th century” and “Contemporary history III – main developments of the 20th century: Estonia and the world”. The two optional courses are: “General history – history of the world: civilisation outside Europe” and “General history – history of European countries and the United States of America”.

Unless the pupils have an above average motivation to study other countries’ history, the compulsory part of the new curriculum tends to be quite biased towards Estonian history and events related to Estonia. Whereas the old curriculum was aimed to create a picture of Estonia in the world, the new curriculum seems to create a picture of Estonia and the world. The learning objectives of the 2002 curriculum included generalisation of historical knowledge, “understanding and valuing modern events in Estonia and in the world in a historical background system”, “feeling the wholeness of historical process”.

⁸⁰“Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi riiklik õppekava,” Vabariigi valitsus, Riigiteataja, <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/174787>.

⁸¹ “Ajalugu,” Innove õppekavad, <https://oppekava.innove.ee/gumnaasiumiharidus/sotsiaalsained/ajalugu/>.

Although the latter strives towards a Marxist understanding of history, the general notion is to create a general image of historical processes leading to certain events. Thus, when considering this perspective of a logical course towards the restoration of independence, the possible existence of the “liberal *narratio*” is logically compatible. The general emphasis in the 2002 curriculum was on understanding what the causes for major changes in history were and what the consequences of certain actions have been. The new curriculum highlights the need to embrace differences between cultures and stresses the importance of tolerance. Interestingly, the words “Estonia” or “Estonian” (“*Eesti*” or “*eestlane*” in Estonian) are not present at all in the section “Studying and learning objectives” of the 2011 curriculum. The pupils have to, however, be aware of the “opportunities of being the conserver and the carrier of the cultural heritage”. While cultural differences and how the latter makes a society stronger are stressed, the emphasis on Estonian history and society in the curriculum itself seems controversial. In general, both curricula highlight the necessity of additional historical sources and source criticism, and draw attention to cause-effect relationships of historical events.

According to Oja⁸² the previous curriculum set the pupils on a path of discovering their own truth – as relativism in historical debate was prominently present in the time period, this created a controversy in history teaching in school. Historians should avoid looking for a single truth in history but simultaneously avoid claims that there is no truth at all. The pupils were thus given a framework of historical facts and thereafter the option of filling this “empty case” with their own perceptions and conclusions. Oja stresses that with the progressively developing technology and constant flow of accessible information, the second curriculum stressed the importance of diverse methods of learning and focusing on the learner. The student has to, in addition to forming their own perception of a historical truth, develop an individual opinion on historical events.

The aim of the national curricula for history teaching in secondary schools seem to steer towards a narrative with strong national and patriotic sentiments while remaining open to other influences, as explained in the objectives of the curriculum: “[–] the student [–] defines themselves as a member of their nation and of the society of Estonia, and as a European and a citizen of the world.”⁸³ The students are encouraged to formulate their

⁸² Mare Oja, “Muutused üldhariduskooli ajalooõpetuses alates 1987. aastast – Nõukogulikust tänapäevaseks” (“*Changes in History Teaching in General Education Since 1987 – From Soviet to Modern*”) (diss. on Humanities, Tallinn University, 2016), 56-57, 61.

⁸³ “Ajalugu”, <https://oppekava.innove.ee/gumnaasiumiharidus/sotsiaaalained/ajalugu/>.

own narratives, thus the narratives of the Singing Revolution could be different for each individual. The curricula, especially the second one, should then promote a patriotic and perhaps even emotional narrative.

3.3 Textbooks Analysis

Before commencing the analysis of the textbooks, there is a terminological aspect that needs to be addressed. While studies in English consider the Singing Revolution as the whole time period of restoration of independence in all of the Baltic States from 1986/7 to 1991, the Estonian literature and public understands the Singing Revolution much more narrowly. The Singing Revolution in the Estonian research terminology is a brief period of time in 1988 with nightly patriotic punk and rock student song festivals happening in Tartu and partly, Tallinn. The general name for the restoration of independence is called “re-independence”, the term was addressed in the methodology section. For the benefit of the international reader and credibility this thesis uses the term Singing Revolution as the English speaking researchers do – covering the whole period of Estonia’s restoration of independence.

Vanhulle stresses the importance of a starting point to the liberal narrative, particularly a negative context surrounding this beginning. All books set the beginning of the Singing Revolution, to the year 1986. In that year, Moscow published plans to build additional phosphorite mines in Estonia, which would likely have concluded in further environmental damage. “*Fosforiidikampaania*” (“The Phosphorite Campaign” in English) was considered the rallying point and kick-off for subsequent developments towards re-independence. The overall trend begins with the people’s awakening and progressive enlightenment of the Soviet Union’s and the world’s political situation. The careful and academic initiatives are described as growing organically into public protests, where the unity of the people is charged with emotion. Vahtre uses phrases like: “The Soviet organisations of repression and ideology were powerless against the unity of the people,”⁸⁴ Pajur and Tannberg illustrate this with statistics: the first political meeting in

⁸⁴ Lauri Vahtre, *Eesti ajalugu gümnaasiumile*, (Tallinn: Ilo Kirjastus, 2004), 305.

Hirvepark in Tallinn in 1987 was attended by 2,000 people and the first Night Song Festival had nearly 100,000 participants. However, two textbooks, Mart Laar and Lauri Vahtre's book along with Adamson and Karjahärm's, somewhat diverge from other narratives by neglecting to follow a predestined flow towards an inevitable independence. Rather, they focus on neutrally describing the relevant events and explaining the external influences leading up to these events in Estonia. Adamson and Karjahärm's narrative about the Singing Revolution is significantly briefer than in the others – only one chapter of 7 pages compared to 17 and 18 in the other books. Adamson and Karjahärm's chapter ends with a sentence in bold stating the restoration of independence in 1991 and the failure of the *coup* in Moscow a day later. Overall, the liberal narrative in the other books ends with the restoration of independence as a positive result to the struggles of the Estonian people.

Interestingly, the latter two books present a more neutral narrative, yet they also emphasise the importance of Estonia's role in the wider context of the Soviet Union's collapse. Adamson and Karjahärm include this implication in the beginning of the chapter by providing a wide historical context of the Soviet Union's political and economic situation during the *perestroika*, the expression used for describing the political reforms in the Soviet Union in the 1980s, continuing with numerous statements that Estonia and the other Baltic States were the core of the Soviet Union's downfall. Laar and Vahtre somewhat downplay the Estonian role by stressing that the Singing Revolution was a role model for other countries' aspirations towards independence, rather than claiming that it was the reason for the whole collapse.

School textbooks describing the Singing Revolution, present a variety of different people and organisations as significant actors in the path to restoring independence and, some, equally, trying to hinder it or trying to find different ways of achieving it. Therefore, it is difficult to clearly highlight one or two individuals as hero types according to Vanhulle's framework – Laar and Vahtre mention over 20 names, for example. Here, Piirimäe and Grönholm's⁸⁵ framework on political rivalries between the different fronts during the restoration of independence might apply. However, as will become evident in the discussion part of this thesis, the interviewees have failed to retain enough information to create an exhaustive picture of the Singing Revolution, let alone a constructive antagonistic narrative with different internal factions and arguments. Thus, an extended

⁸⁵ Piirimäe; Grönholm, "Historical Consciousness," 480-482.

version of Vanhulle's hero classification will be utilised in the analysis to simplify the discussion on the rather superficial knowledge on different actors by the interviewees.

Most books identify non-governmental organisations from 1986-1987, such as the Estonian Heritage Conservation Society, and the people as type A heroes – the enlighteners. As for the type B hero – the leader, Edgar Savisaar is undoubtedly the most commonly mentioned actor in this setting – nine times in total. Other names with a single or two mentions include Tunne Kelam, Arnold Rüütel and Marju Lauristin. Finally, following the trend for type A heroes, type C heroes, *i.e.* antiheroes, are again vague – Moscow or the USSR are rather used than the names of the organisers of the failed *coup d'état* of 1991. While people commemorating these events and the media often use the expression “putšistid” (literally “*coup*-ists” in English), textbooks evade this emotionally charged word that has a negative connotation. Karl Vaino and the *Interliikumine* (“Intermovement” in English) – a pro-Soviet political movement, also deserve attention, as they were mentioned more than once in the books.

If the four analysed books have aspects supporting and, equally, contradicting the liberal *narratio*, the ‘paratext’ almost exclusively enhances the nationalistic and patriotic narrative of united struggles against the oppressive foreign powers. Pajur and Tannberg mostly include images of mass gatherings with emotionally loaded footnotes next to them, *e.g.* “[–] the demonstration which turned from means to exert pressure to an event celebrating the joy of victory under the blue-black-white flags.”⁸⁶ Vahtre presents only photos as ‘paratext’ in the relevant chapters, with 15 out of 16 pictures supporting the connotations in the text (the one exception being a picture of the Intermovement's public meeting). Additionally, while most pictures of that era are black and white, the pictures in these book chapters, have been edited in a way that certain features in the pictures, originally in grey and black tones, have been made dark blue. Furthermore, one of the pictures shows Heinz Valk giving a speech with a text box saying “Ükskord me võidame niikuinii!” (“One day, no matter what we will win!” in English) which became the main slogan for this era in Estonian history. The only contradicting “paratexts” come from Pajur and Tannberg's book and Laar and Vahtre's book, the latter includes a memory by a former member of the Estonian Defence League, describing his frustration towards the numerous Estonians scared of fighting for their country. Also, Pajur and Tannberg provide abstracts for additional reading which include citations from the opposition, *i.e.*

⁸⁶ Paju, Tannberg, *Eesti ajalugu II*, 142.

Soviet friendly powers. These abstracts could, nevertheless, influence people emotionally by providing hostile opinions that lead to antagonism rather than reflection.

Where the role of violence is mentioned, it is either used as a tool to show the moral fibre of the Estonian people and Gorbachev's willingness to achieve compromise, or utilised as a point of comparison with other Baltic states and how Moscow learned from previous experiences in these countries. Namely that resolving conflicts peacefully in Estonia or settling with a compromise would be preferable. Laar and Vahre present many photos of violence in other Soviet countries, always accompanied with a comparison to the Estonian revolution and its lack of violence.

In sum, although these four books create a patriotic, partly even nationalistic, narrative, they tend to engender a positive attitude, trying to avoid shaming and blaming, hence the vagueness of "Moscow" as an antihero. Individual characters are often upstaged by generic emotional accounts of the relentless battle towards the goal of an independent state. Generally, the narrative follows a "logical" course from the tipping point of the potentially disastrous Phosphorite Campaign to the regaining of independence with little room for deviation. The narrative fits, for the most part, into Vanhulle's liberal *narratio* and conforms with the ultimate quest for independence as presented by Tamm.

3.4 Main Newspapers

All three sources emphasise particularly the coverage of the events of August 19 until August 21, 1991. Such events include the failed *coup d'état* in Moscow and its implications on Estonia as well as the declaration to restore independence and protecting the TV tower in Tallinn against the Soviet military. There is little or no mention of the years preceding 1991 – Delfi being the exception, publishing a series of articles during August 12 to August 16 about the main historical events from 1987 until 1991. Interestingly, this trend shows what the media chooses to emphasise in terms of the whole period of the Singing Revolution.

The general direction of the articles aims towards recreating the same emotions and sentiment from the days preceding and following August 20, 1991. All three sources

present testimonies from relevant people describing their personal memories of the events, including their fears and achievements. Delfi even created a “live blog” chronologically recalling the events of August 18 until August 20, 1991⁸⁷. The testimonies are pro-independence, lacking supporters of arguments against the restoration of independence. The difference in the accounts lies in the age of the respondents. For example, people from the then younger generation, now around 45-50 years old, had not lived through the deportation waves in the 1940s, hence generally refused to believe that this could happen again after the Declaration of Independence. Older people, on the other hand, often described having experienced fear of another “trip to Siberia”. All sources, however, attempt to bring the reader/viewer back to those days in August and create a sentiment of anxiety, patriotism and hope.

In total, 40% of the articles follow the model of the liberal *narratio* (see Table 3), presenting Estonia and Estonians as the victims of an oppressive and negative Soviet power with the restoration of independence as the positive end result. Rather than indicating that the rest of the articles disagreed with the *narratio* presented by Vanhulle, most of the other articles just followed a different structure. The ratio of articles supporting this *narratio* in Postimees is 15 out of 24 articles in total, *i.e.* 63%, and in Õhtuleht six out of 21, *i.e.* 29%, for example. Also, the overall and Delfi’s own percentage of articles presenting the liberal *narratio* (28 out of 78, *i.e.* 36%) is strongly influenced by Delfi’s series of video clips of a number of politicians who voted pro-independence in 1991 (“20. Augusti Klubi” – The Club of 20th of August). Thirty eight articles were solely videos of two to five minutes of length, wherein people discussed their emotions and actions from August 19 to August 21, 1991 which failed to wholly fit into the liberal *narratio* model. Oppositely, Õhtuleht is the only source to present some material on the opposing powers and opinions by publishing video material from public meetings held by anti-independence and pro-Soviet parties. However, as was the presumption with the opposing testimonies in Pajur and Tannberg’s textbook, this could indicate a desire to create antagonism.

⁸⁷ Maarja Pakats (ed.), Ester Vaitmaa, Linda-Riin Võeras, AJALOOLINE OTSEBLOGI: Oht on möödas, Eesti on vaba! (“Historical live blog: The danger has passed, Estonia is free!”) <http://forte.delfi.ee/news/eesti1991/ajalooline-otseblogi-oht-on-moodas-eston-on-vaba?id=75379683>.

Table 3: "Liberal narratio", 'paratext' and violence - media analysis

Newspaper/ Framework trait	"Liberal <i>narratio</i> "		No. of articles with 'paratext' supporting the narrative		Mention of lack and prevention violence	
Postimees	15	63%	16	67%	8	33%
Delfi	28	36%	37	47%	17	22%
SL Õhtuleht	6	29%	8	38%	6	29%
Total	49	40%	61	50%	31	25%

Overall, nearly half (61 out of 123) of all the articles were accompanied by 'paratext', e.g. pictures of politicians or war machines advancing through Estonia on Tallinn, along with documents or videos supporting the liberal *narratio*. The remaining half were articles where no 'paratext' was presented at all although no 'paratext' that contradicted the liberal *narratio* was offered either. The proportion of articles with or without the supporting 'paratext' is again strongly influenced by Delfi's series of short video clips. These 38 video clips did not present any additional audio-visual or photos but were counted as separate articles included in the total number of articles. Interestingly, Õhtuleht distinctly uses the word "*vabadus*" ("freedom" in English) more frequently in the headlines than other sources, hinting that the previous time period was a time of oppression or even captivity.

As is the case with textbooks, the media presents equally as many, if not more, hero types classifiable within Vanhulle's framework. When analysing media coverage, three most "popular" actors were chosen for every type of hero. Marju Lauristin was most commonly mentioned as a type A hero, *i.e.* the enlightener – eight times, followed by the generic term of "the people" – five times and Gorbachev and Yeltsin three times. The low number of mentions is due to a very high number of actors influencing the national awakening and, also, the vagueness of Vanhulle's criteria for this type of hero. The three most common figurations as type B heroes, *i.e.* the leader, were Arnold Rüütel – 22 mentions, Edgar Savisaar – 22 and Ülo Nugis – 16. Interestingly, the would-be first president of the newly independent Estonia and the foreign minister then – Lennart Meri, was only mentioned seven times in that role. Lastly, the three anti-heroes, or type C heroes, were the *coup* organisers – 26 times, Edgar Savisaar – seven and Gorbachev – three mentions. The fact that Savisaar and Gorbachev are strongly present as two types of heroes illustrates the ambiguity of the hero-narratives in the Estonian media. What is more,

Savisaar is often presented as a type C hero when including his direct accounts in articles, not as an objective counter-narrative.

In sum, the media, from August 14 to August 21, 1991 presented a positive picture of the Singing Revolution, emphasising the days preceding and following the restoration of independence on August 20, 1991. Importantly, despite somewhat refusing to follow the liberal *narratio* by Vanhulle, all media coverages agree that the restoration of independence was the right decision. With the many accounts of witnesses and important actors, the picture of confusion, anxiety is created. Despite internal conflicts and disagreements, compromise was achieved. The Estonian media in 2016 recreated the atmosphere of anxiety and confusion with its many accounts of witnesses and important events.

3.5 Narrative Conclusions

The combination of national curricula, history text books and media coverage, combined formulating a national narrative, provided for this thesis mostly follows the model of Bert Vanhulle's framework. When considering the national curricula, there seems to have been a shift towards an even more patriotic and nationalistic narrative in the last few years. However, the popular textbooks that were also analysed in this thesis were all published at the time when the previous, supposedly more neutral, curriculum was still in force. This trend in teachers' and schools' preferences and the results of the textbooks' analysis shows that the national narrative in schools was and remains a liberal *narratio*, as Vanhulle describes it. The media enhances this perspective by introducing personal memories and additional numerous relatable hero-characters.

While violence is mostly present in the media coverage as fear of deportation, textbooks clearly emphasise the lack of casualties and disastrous consequences of the Singing Revolution in Estonia. However, neither instance directly justifies or idealises violence as a "necessary evil" to defeat the enemy. Violence in these narratives remains an instrument for the anti-hero and the prevention of it a source of pride.

There are very few mentions of counter-independence forces in the media and school books. Graf explains the situation before the declaration of independence, with noticeable bias: “There was a feeling that with those who’ll bail would not be stood on ceremony. Media would execute them in a heartbeat.”⁸⁸ The Estonian media has successfully avoided shaming pro-Soviet personalities; this amnesia could be allied to solidarity or just negligence to admit that there were unpatriotic Estonians working against the restoration of independence.

The school teaching, text books included, and the media are obviously aimed at different audiences which can overlap, however. While school curricula have fairly strict guidelines on the structure of teaching history of the Singing Revolution and the audience are pupils, the media has a wider range of possibilities and a more diverse audience to satisfy. Therefore the differences in the narratives are partly caused by the characteristics of the audiences. The media has to consider the click-bait nature of today’s world and attract interest in the reader with a few words, the school text books have to consider the compulsory nature of teaching. Here then lies also a similarity in these two – both aim to attract the reader’s interest within their respective frameworks.

It is important to highlight that the snapshot of the national narrative analysed above is biased – it focuses on the Estonian-speaking majority of the country and scarcely mentions the Russian-speaking minority, if so then only as a counter-acting force with a negative connotation. The relationship between the official narrative and possible “counter-narratives” will remain a highly interesting and necessary future topic for research. In sum, the Estonian national narrative, following the restoration of independence in 1991 can be perfectly summarised in the words of Eva-Clarita Pettai: “With the re-establishment of national independence, the social memories became institutionalized through laws and declarations, school textbooks and public commemorative practices, turning into a national myth of victimhood and heroism.”⁸⁹ The role of the researcher in this thesis is thus to offer an analytical and constructively critical perspective on the Estonian narrative of this national myth. The next chapter presents the results of the interviews with the subjects of this thesis and compares their views on the combined narrative of the curricula, textbooks and media coverage.

⁸⁸ Graf, *Impeeriumi lõpp*, 28.

⁸⁹ Eva-Clarita Pettai, “Interactions between History and Memory: Historical Truth Commissions and Reconciliation,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion on Memory Studies*, ed. Siobhan Kattago (Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2015), 247.

4 DISCUSSION

Kõresaar⁹⁰ suggests that memory is an important factor in defining and accomplishing one's identity, continuing by claiming that memory links history with identity and *vice versa*. Since Kõresaar has prominently done research on biographies, the question remains whether collective non-personal memory has a comparable amount of influence on identity. She elaborates further that there is a "constant dialogue between different times, realities, systems of experiences and interpretations" in collective memory. "This makes memory the base of identity and the carrier of consistency," she concludes. It is still unclear, however, if she includes identities that are utilising collective memory to create their own secondary narrative of past events. One of the purposes of the interviews conducted for this thesis is to clarify whether the interviewees use the collective memory of the Singing Revolution to place themselves in their own respective cultural and social settings. The aspect of identifying oneself according to a group's cultural memory and characteristics will be addressed in the section about the "liberal *narratio*".

Importantly, at the time of the interviews the national sentiment towards Estonian history was relatively neutral and calm. The results and answers would supposedly somewhat differ if there was a national scandal, general turmoil or a similar traumatising or arousing public event. Therefore, these results are anything but definite, but rather ever-changing and dynamic corresponding with the current social setting and public events.

The interviews were, to provide a comparative perspective, analysed according to Vanhulle's framework's four main points: the "liberal *narratio*", the hero types, the 'paratext' and the role of violence. However, in the course of the analysis and the interviews, Vanhulle's framework failed to address some aspects. Thus, some additions were included in this section, which will be addressed further in this section. The previous analysis on the national narrative will be addressed in a comparative perspective to the interviews.

⁹⁰ Kõresaar, *Elu ideoloogiad*, 10-11.

4.1 The 'Liberal *Narratio*' and Social Belonging

It is difficult to find a dominating 'liberal *narratio*' as presented by Vanhulle on the basis of the 15 interviews conducted for this thesis. The 'liberal *narratio*' of the Singing Revolution presented earlier in this thesis should include a clear beginning under a negative oppressive rule and conclude with the restoration of independence. Only six interviewees presented what could be considered as a linear progress from the beginning of the Singing Revolution to the declaration of independence in 1991. Furthermore, calling the statements by interviewee no. 12 and 14 cohesive narratives is a stretch, to say the least:

"This whole thing ("kammajaa" in Estonian – M.S.) began in '87, I think? And then, well, until the restoration of independence in '91,"

and:

"Well, it was when everyone gathered in Tartu and then there were these "Five Patriotic Songs" and Heinz Valk... And then this, basically like, (people – M.S.) sang themselves free, so to say."

Interviewee no. 12 was moreover the only interviewee who established a time frame with a beginning and ending for the period, still diverging from the starting point presented in the school books by a year. Curiously, while all of the school books begin their narrative of the Singing Revolution with the "Phosphorite Campaign" in 1986, only four interviewees remembered this initiative, no. 4 stating that she thinks that it was impressive but probably not the core reason for the independence. While these four just about placed the beginning of the Singing Revolution with the "Phosphorite Campaign" they rarely based a linear narrative on this event but rather presented vague statements like interviewee no. 5:

"[–] when they wanted to create phosphorite mines here and people started actively protesting against it. And then they came together and sang."

The most common events that were associated with the Singing Revolution were the Baltic Way (12), the song festivals (6) and the TV tower incident in 1991 (5) where a handful of men “defended” the TV tower in Tallinn by blocking the elevator on the 22nd floor to stop the Soviet military from occupying it. Many interviewees, when asked to describe in their words what the Singing Revolution was, automatically drew a parallel with the Baltic Way. While the political implications of the Baltic Way remain marginal, it is compelling that 12 interviewees remembered the event without being asked to specifically list events of the Singing Revolution. Subsequently, the Baltic Way is a *lieu de mémoire* within this sample, an aspect for further evaluation in a larger sample. However brief, six interviewees still presented the general idea that there is a trace of causality, something that was lacking from the other interviews.

The generalised description, *i.e.* an attempt for a coherent narrative, of the restoration of independence based on the 15 interviews conducted for this thesis could be summarised as follows: In the 1980s there was unrest among the people in Estonia who had been suppressed for decades by the Soviet rule. When people discovered that public gatherings with national subtext were not persecuted, song festivals were organised where patriotic songs prevailed. All these processes, along with international political influences, led to the people’s initiative of the Baltic Way which fuelled the inevitable progress towards the restoration of independence in 1991. This attempt for a generalised narrative is far from a representative narrative of the whole population, let alone the whole age group, but it illustrates the general thought patterns of this group of 15 young people interviewed for this thesis. The following discussion focuses on the motives that contribute to the formation of that particular narrative; one of the shortcomings with Vanhulle’s framework as it somewhat fails to address the background systems contributing in creation of the ‘liberal *narratio*’.

One of the main presumptions to form a narrative is the individual’s position in a social group. In order to function in a society, individuals associate themselves consciously or subconsciously with groups. One of the most simple ways to determine group belonging is language – the subject’s usage of the first-person plural – the ‘we’, to describe events. Out of the 15 interviewees, 10 used the first-person plural at least once to describe the Singing Revolution. For example, when asked to give their own explanation of the Singing Revolution, no. 13 answered:

“Well, that we became free so that we didn’t have to... basically kill anyone... that we sang ourselves free. We started from singing together and finished with taking the country back.”

Some interviewees, like no. 10, only used the ‘we’ form as a description of what the participants of the event wanted to achieve, for example: “[–] they wanted to show that we want to be independent [–].” Thus, he didn’t associate himself with the event as a participant but still chose to use the first-person plural to describe the sentiments. The remaining five interviewees phrased the description of events as something that happened to, at or by Estonia or Estonians, like interviewee no. 2: “fighting against the Soviet regime.” The tendency to associate oneself with the events by using the first-person plural suggest a personal connection to the event itself and to the group of independence fighters in most of the interviewees.

Another way to define belonging to a group is participation in the group’s traditions or activities. Billig⁹¹ explains that the fact that some events are celebrated and commemorated nationally and in the closed family circle, suggests that these events include common-sense themes for the people celebrating them. Billig uses the example of the British Royal Family in explaining that the automatic existence of the Royal Family’s history and collective narrative in an ordinary family’s quotidian consciousness and family history. The hoisting of the national flag on the Day of Restoration of Independence on August 20 as a tradition can be interpreted as a desire to participate in the traditions of a group. Six interviewees mentioned the importance of hoisting the Estonian flag on the 20th of August, notably none of the questions included a mention of the flag; the initiative to mention the activity came solely from the interviewees. A subconscious need to participate exists, therefore, and some of the interviewees feel the need to belong in the celebrations, probably in the whole age group. Curiously, while Cubitt⁹² emphasises the particular importance of commemorations of historical events in shaping the memory of the collective event, none of the interviewees admitted they actually celebrated August 20 too festively. While nine of the interviewees admitted to having cake and sitting down with the family on this day, the main reason to it was mainly a holiday from work or school. Six people compared it to February 24 – Independence Day, as in the words of no. 4:

⁹¹ Billig, “Collective Memory,” 62-74.

⁹² Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 214-222.

“When I lived at home, we always had cake and stuff and everything was nice. Yes, but still – I guess, the 20th (of August – M.S.) we don’t celebrate like February 24th. 20th is a lovely day and since it’s a holiday, I think it lies in that as well, that it’s a holiday and everybody is together. They can be.”

However, interviewee no. 8 showed even surprise to the notion of celebrating the day:

“Like... I haven’t even heard that it is celebrated somehow. Like my friends or somebody. I haven’t even thought about it, that it should be celebrated in any way...”

Nevertheless, the need to celebrate August 20 by the majority of the interviewees, while not with the same grandeur as February 24, draws to the conclusion that the interviewees share a sense of importance or belonging regarding the Singing Revolution and accept it as a part of their collective tradition. When elaborating further on the importance of national historical celebrations, it is remarkable that interviewees place more emphasis on February 24 which celebrates events dating from 1918. Therefore, February 24 might carry a deeper emotional meaning than August 20 although it precedes the restoration of independence by 73 years. Here, the interviewees showed a desire of belonging to a group that values historical patriotic events. Both events, however, carry this meaning which concludes that this particular group can incorporate people who value February 24, as well as August 20.

Halbwachs⁹³ explains that individuals reconstitute their memories and collective knowledge according to their own course of life – they begin to value and emphasise episodes in the past as a reaction to their subjective relatable experiences in their respective social groups. Eviatar Zerubavel⁹⁴ explains that experiencing events in the same way and feeling the same emotions as those who relieved it is a presumption of being a social being – pride, pain and shame are a part of the “deal” when individuals join a social group. For example, interviewee no. 10 admitted feeling emotional when everyone is singing under the dome during the annual song festivals, associating the Singing Revolution to his own musical background. None of the interviewees expressed

⁹³ Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, 64-68.

⁹⁴Eviatar Zerubavel, “Social memories: Steps towards a Sociology of the Past,” in *The Collective Memory Reader*, eds. Jeffrey K. Olick; Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi; Daniel Levy, (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 224.

any shame, on the other hand, about any aspects of the Singing Revolution. The lack of shame in their narratives is as telling as the existence of it in other narratives, as the national narrative described earlier in this thesis expresses little or no shame at all. Therefore, the interviewees have adopted this part of the narrative almost unconditionally. Another social group that prevailed during the interviews was a small nation or state that can mobilise a large part of its residents in the pursuit of a common goal. Interviewee no. 14 reflected on her experiences of the night song festivals in Tartu as follows:

“That simply thanks to all of these songs this all began and we are here and all is like united and everyone has this one purpose. And that, well, that is good that we are free.”

This sentiment of belonging to a large social group indicates the existence of a socially constructed community. None of the interviewees have met all of the members of this community, yet they sense a unity towards them. Although only a microscopic handful of the population is represented in this study, the fact remains that these individuals already constitute an artificial but very real unity.

Halbwachs⁹⁵, while reminiscing about his childhood in the late 19th century, admits that his personality traits are foremost influenced by his own parents and their époque. He thus continues that he feels more personally connected towards the history of his parents’ generation’s than that of the centuries before. Although he acknowledges that having personal memories of that time is impossible, that particular time period is part of his individual memory. It is entirely possible that the subjects of this thesis, despite sometimes consciously claiming to exclude the Singing Revolution from their individual memory, still possess traces of the Singing Revolution in their personality. Subsequently, interviewee no. 7 even expressed the sentiment of pride while discussing her school time and how people took pride in their parents’ involvement in the Singing Revolution. Interviewee no. 10, for example, stressed the importance of personal experiences in his family and how these shared stories carry the emotional meaning of the whole event.

What concerns the interviewees’ sources of information about the Singing Revolution, school (13), internet (12) and family (11) were most commonly highlighted. While school homework and internet are surely closely related, 11 interviewees mentioned having

⁹⁵ Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, 43.

discussed the events with their family and all had done so out of personal interest, rather than for a school project. Only two interviewees stated that they had discussed the Singing Revolution with friends. The discussions with families mostly included questions whether the family members participated in the relevant events like the Baltic Way or the song festivals. Many seem to take the positive information they obtained for granted – they only mention conflicts between them and their family when the family's attitude towards the Singing Revolution is negative. This tentative for conflict indicates the overall positive attitude and a certain defensiveness towards the events despite some of the respondents claiming that they consider the Singing Revolution with a sense of neutrality. The opposing arguments against the 'liberal *narratio*' will be discussed further later in this thesis but the overall attitude regarding the national narrative by these interviewees can be summarised as positive. Most of the interviewees include morsels of the collective memory of the Singing Revolution in their personal narrative by relying on family history or the imagined community of the nation or a group. Nevertheless, the constructed narrative falls short of Vanhulle's model of the 'liberal *narratio*' as many interviewees' recounts on the Singing Revolution fail to present both the beginning and the ending with the complex dynamics of the era. One of these complexities are the actors that participated in the restoration of independence – the heroes. The hero types will be addressed in the next section of the thesis.

4.2 The Hero Types

Contrary to the school books and media's overflow of names in the descriptions of the Singing Revolution, the interviewees had occasionally difficulties remembering any influential names at all. Even by remembering some names, many interviewees often found it difficult to explain why exactly those characters mattered. While the analysed media and school books tend to paint a quite detailed picture of the events and actors involved, the interviewees on the other hand have a generalised overview of the Singing Revolution, as already explained in the previous section. From the considerable amount of heroes, altogether 19 names were mentioned, and eight were generic mentions (see

Table 4). In comparison, in their school text book, Laar and Vahtre alone introduce 20 names.

The most popular character, *i.e.* hero mentions were Heinz Valk, Edgar Savisaar and the general term of USSR authorities. The considerable number of mentions of Valk is curious because the media and the school books neglect to grant him too much importance. It is relevant to indicate that the number of mentions excludes the times when interviewees recognised Valk after seeing the picture of him later during the interview. This tendency of recognising a hero who is quite insignificant in the media and school books' perspective illustrates the influence of emotional material like pictures or commemorations rather than state imposed narrative. While Piirimäe and Grönholm⁹⁶, and likely many other political analytics, grant the foreign minister in 1990-1992 and president in 1992-2001, Lennart Meri a very significant role, only two interviewees remembered him as an important character. This tendency correlates with the media and school books as Meri was scarcely present in those recounts as well.

Table 4: Heroes in interviews

Heroes	No. of mentions in different interviews
Heinz Valk, Edgar Savisaar, USSR authorities	6
Mikhail Gorbachev, Alo Mattiisen,	5
TV tower defenders	4
Mart Laar	3
Arnold Rüütel, “collaborators with the USSR”, Lennart Meri, Ivo Linna	2
Boris Yeltsin, Rahvarinne, heroes from the first Republic, Iceland, Interrinne, Leonid Brezhnev Liia Hänni, Marju Lauristin, Muinsuskaitse Selts, Nikita Khrushchev, Peeter Volkonski, Rein Veidemann, Silvi Vrait, Tõnis Mägi, Tõnu Trubetsky, Villu Tamme	1

As for the types of heroes as presented by Vanhulle: type A – the enlightener, type B – the leader and type C – the anti-hero, the most common attribution was given to the enlightener, *i. e.* type A. Heinz Valk and Alo Mattiisen were solely represented as the type A heroes, mainly because of Valk’s famous phrase “One day, no matter what we will win!” and Mattiisen’s “Five Patriotic Songs” which had given ignition to the already glowing national sentiments. Partly contrary to the previously analysed national narrative,

⁹⁶ Piirimäe; Grönholm, “Historical Consciousness,” 500-509.

Savisaar was mainly presented as the leader – hero type B; none of the interviewees mentioned his controversial role in the tumult of the restoration of independence. The only antagonism that surfaced was his role in the current political situation as interviewees admitted that his somewhat pro-Russian sentiments now cast a shadow over his positive influence on the Singing Revolution. Interviewee no. 13 illustrated the issue as follows:

“[–] since we learned it in school then I took some interest in it. That what the Popular Front of Estonia is and how important Edgar Savisaar is to us. While right now he is slandered to the ground, no one knows what he did. That maybe now he is pro-Russian but at the time he did lead the thing that Estonia could be free.”

This finding further suggests that the complex narrative of the internal struggle between pro-independence powers among the Estonian leaders is either too confusing or even irrelevant to the interviewees.

The remaining two more popular characters – the TV tower defenders (4) and Mart Laar (3) clearly serve as type A heroes: the instigators, informers, enlighteners. Since Laar was a very popular and long-serving politician during decades in the Estonian society, adding to that his long feud with Edgar Savisaar which kept him in the public’s eye for a long time, his presence in the interviewees’ narratives is understandable. While the school textbooks put little emphasis on the TV tower defenders, the media has presumably had a strong influence on the minds of the subjects of this thesis. Traditionally, the Estonian broadcasting channels air the film “August 1991” at the time of the celebrations for August 20. The film is a mixture of fiction and historical documentary, the plot follows people during three days in August 1991, focusing a large part of it on the TV tower incident in Tallinn. While it is made clear from the start that the film is fictional with a statement saying “This film does not have the whole truth about those days in August. Many facts have been contorted and many important characters have been left out. But when you ask what to feel when remembering these days, then we will say that it all happened exactly this way,”⁹⁷ some of the interviewees clearly assimilated the narrative of the TV tower incident into their own. It should be noted that this film was purposefully left out of the media analysis since it represents fiction that is a completely separate subject to be considered and broadens the subject unnecessarily for this thesis.

⁹⁷ *August 1991*, <https://arhiiv.err.ee/vaata/798>, directed by Ilmar Raag, 2005.

Notwithstanding, the incident at the TV tower and the aforementioned film deserve acknowledgment as relevant influencers in the interviewees' narratives.

The media highlighted the *coup* organisers as the most common anti-hero, the hero type C. The interviews were mostly consistent with this view, however, the emphasis was on the general term of Soviet authorities – the “*coup*-ists”, as presented in the media, were absent from the answers. Two interviewees vaguely mentioned “pro-Soviet Estonians” but failed to elaborate further on their motives or names. Again, the general notion was that the Soviet powers tried to hinder the Estonian restoration of independence, the specific circumstances of the counteractions remained untouched by the interviewees. Nevertheless, this might indicate to a closer relationship to the school programmes, where the textbooks likewise paint a more general picture of the anti-heroes as USSR authorities, rather than naming specific actors. The relatively marginal number of type C heroes mentioned by the interviewees can be directly related to the media and school books coverage of the events. It is therefore not surprising that none of the interviewees managed to name an Estonian or any anti-hero in Estonia, like the leader of the Intermovement Yevgeni Kogan, by name. One interviewee expressed shame towards these Estonians that collaborated with the pro-Soviet forces but failed to name any of them. The only relevant characters from the Soviet authorities that protruded by name were Mikhail Gorbachev (5) and Boris Yeltsin (1). From the five mentions of Gorbachev, two were characterised as negative and two as positive and one, interviewee no. 3, stated that he was “neither this nor that”. Gorbachev's role in the fall of the Soviet Union is admittedly complex and it strongly depends on whether the perspective is from the Russian or the Estonian side. Subsequently, one of the interviewees that characterised him as a type C hero was from a Russian speaking background. Contrary to the dynamics of media coverage of the *coup*-ists versus the interviewees' views, here the ambiguity of Gorbachev's position in the interviews rather reflects the media's representation of the events.

Further investigation into other areas of history and history teaching might enlighten whether a thorough detail oriented description of history could perhaps lead to the lesser knowledge of details. The interviewees in this study definitely remembered small amounts of information which might hinder the construction of a thorough conscious narrative of the Singing Revolution. Here, a reference point to another narrative from the interviewees' individual memories from a certain event from their own lives could help understanding whether the reason for this lack of knowledge lies in the individual's

process of constructing narratives or in ignorance. For example, when asked whether he remembered any names from the Singing Revolution interviewee no 12 answered:

“Not specifically. I guess there were some characters in the school book but it simply hasn’t been very interesting to specifically remember these names.”

In the interest of objectivity, it is important to note that interviewee no. 5 was not asked about negative characters influencing the Singing Revolution due to my own forgetfulness. What is clear, however, is that the information that the interviewees in this study have chosen to remember is limited far beneath the information that the media and school system have provided. What is more, the interviewees have selected some relevant information from the media and some from the schoolbooks, virtually hand-picking a narrative that best suits their vision. The question whether this selection has been conscious or just randomly retained information by coincidence remains unanswered as is natural to human nature since it is virtually impossible to pinpoint where one has obtained every piece of information during their lifetime. The aspects of forgetting and choosing process will be addressed further later in this chapter.

4.3 The ‘Paratext’

While ‘paratext’ is omnipresent in media coverage and school books, it is difficult to pinpoint which part of an interviewee’s knowledge or emotions originate from ‘paratext’ and which elsewhere. Nevertheless, this study provides two certain instances of ‘paratext’ to consider when analysing interviews, one included in the interview and the other coincidental. One of the questions included showing a picture of Heinz Valk giving a speech during the song festival Eestimaa Laul in 1988 (see Annex 2) and asking the interviewee whether they experienced any emotions seeing that photo. Coincidentally, Estonian television aired a commercial for the Finnish coffee brand Paulig⁹⁸ in November 2017, featuring Heinz Valk and his speech in 1988 with his famous saying “One day, no

⁹⁸ “Hea algus järgmiseks aastasajaks - Heinz Valk” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4orBO3ZbVk>, Nov. 2017.

matter what we will win!” 10 of the interviews were conducted before the commercial aired, thus some interviews conducted after November 2017 might have been affected by it and two interviewees specifically mentioned Heinz Valk in relation to this commercial. What is more, the picture shown in the interview featured the exact moment in the speech aired in television. However, while five interviews were conducted after the airing of the commercial, the interviewees seemed to be relatively unperturbed by the advert. One interviewee, having recently seen the advert, admitted that it was just an advert to him but the picture had a deeper emotional meaning.

Only four interviewees admitted that the picture left them neutral, all of the others expressed some sentiment of pride or desire to have experienced the event itself. Thus, the picture has a powerful meaning as ‘paratext’ but only in relation to the specific event. Rather than arousing patriotic sentiments by itself, the picture reminded the subjects of other, more powerful, recounts of the Singing Revolution. When asked whether this picture kindles any sentiment in her, interviewee no. 7 answered:

“This does because I have heard (stories – M.S.) from my mother as well. My mother went to this party (Eestimaa Laul – M.S.). [–] Well, it is the same – somehow the “No country stands alone” and all this stuff.”

Subsequently, the ‘paratext’ in these interviews mostly supported the narrative of pride and unity, or rather, it often roused positive feelings. Although four interviewees remained neutral, none expressed negative feelings towards the photo, thus the ‘paratext’ supports the national narrative, or at the least does not contradict it.

Once more, Vanhulle’s framework fails to entirely match the characteristic of this thesis. Here, as the model is created to analyse school books, where the ‘paratext’ is apparent, it is difficult to apply the same model in its entirety on interviews. However, by introducing a picture to the interviews this aspect was somewhat achieved. In retrospect, an illustration with the purpose to counter the supporting ‘paratext’ or including an audio file with the patriotic songs could have achieved interesting results as well. All things considered, the picture of Heinz Valk during his famous speech served its purpose of supporting the general narrative without contradicting it otherwise. The ‘paratext’ of the Paulig commercial was clearly created for commercial purposes but applies on the nation’s patriotic sentiments nevertheless. This aim for patriotism shows that the Singing Revolution is still a strong part of the Estonian collective memory.

4.4 The Role of Violence

While Vanhulle describes the role of violence in his ‘liberal *narratio*’ as something nations justify as the “necessary evil” for the greater good, the school books emphasise the particularity of the Singing Revolution as unusually peaceful. Nine interviewees specifically clarified that the revolution or the restoration of independence was peaceful or “happened without shedding any blood”, several subjects used the illustrative phrase that “Estonia sang itself free”. Participants also drew parallels to the Lithuanian TV tower incident in January 1991 where 14 were killed and hundreds injured. Here, the expression “Singing Revolution” surely contributes to the focus on peace more than for example the “French” or “October Revolution”. The semantics of the word ‘revolution’ suggests to a tendency to violence and the fact that it includes an adjective – “singing”, that indirectly contradicts the core of the word, not only neutralises the expression but actually reverses its meaning. Therefore, the simple expression has most likely created in some of the interviewees’ subconscious the notion that the peaceful characteristic of the transition to independence is particularly important. Additionally, while most interviewees consider the particular expression “Laulev Revolutsioon” as discussed earlier in this thesis as a part of the restoration of independence, they might contribute the non-violence part to the whole process. The narrative of the Singing Revolution by these young people surely, in many examples, includes the notion that the restoration of independence was done in a non-violent way.

The interviewees interpreted the non-violence part of the Singing Revolution as a lesson from history and an example for other countries, case in point by interviewees no. 13 and 4 respectively:

“Well, it shows that it’s possible to restore freedom without war and there doesn’t have to be conflicts all the time everywhere.”

“It’s awesome in the sense that we did it without blood, so to say. And when in Lithuania, things didn’t go that well, for example, in this sense we could be an example.”

The role of violence in Vanhulle's framework illustrates the "means to an end" to achieve the greater good; the existence of violence in the narrative of the Singing Revolution is marginal but simultaneously significant. The peacefulness of the Singing Revolution strikes interest because the narratives of the Independence War (1918-1920) and Saint George's Night Uprising (1343–1345) rely heavily on the role of violence and the Estonian fighting spirit. Additionally, the controversial figure of the first President of Estonia, Konstantin Päts and his decision to concede Estonia to the Soviet powers in 1940 without any battles still creates controversy and often shame in the Estonia society. Thus, violence is far from lacking or shunned in the Estonian historical national narrative which grants the positive emotion towards the lack of it more importance. Of course, one has to consider that the Singing Revolution, as well as the Independence War had positive outcomes to the Estonian state and society. Had they gone otherwise, the narratives regarding violence would surely be different.

The school books stress the peaceful character of the revolution in Estonia, Tony Judt⁹⁹ however maintains that the Soviet Union collapsed in a fairly bloodless way but fails to mention the peaceful way of the revolution in Estonia. When discussing the Baltic countries' role in the revolution, however, he draws the reader's attention to the casualties in Latvia and Lithuania, calling the events even the "bloodshed in the Baltics". Therefore, the initiative for emphasising the peaceful nature of the revolution originates rather from the internal narrative rather than the international one.

In sum, this admittance from most of the interviewees that the restoration of independence was done in a non-violent way shows on the one hand that they, again, accept and prefer the school books narrative and on the other hand that they have acknowledged the singing peaceful part into their narrative of the Singing Revolution. None of the interviewees mentioned violence as a positive reaction to any of the events of the Singing Revolution, following thus the perspective of the national narrative analysed earlier. One could presume a national trait of being the "bigger man" by resisting without shedding any blood but remaining resilient all the same.

⁹⁹ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Vintage Books, 2005), 647, 657-658.

4.5 Disinterest in the Narrative and Forgetting

Hirst and Stone approach collective memory by admitting that “[–] no matter how one defines collective memory, it will involve not just what one remembers, but also what one forgets.”¹⁰⁰ Cubitt¹⁰¹ indirectly contributes to the discussion by explaining that preserving information from the past in a society could hint at a sentiment expressing the necessity to maintain that information in the collective memory of a certain group in order to utilise it in the future. Therefore, if a group of individuals has, for whatever reason, neglected to remember or simply forgotten seemingly valuable facts and information about the Singing Revolution, one possible explanation would be that this group denies the possibility of these experiences being valuable in the future. One could even argue that these young interviewees consider it unlikely that they would have to fight for their individual and collective freedom. Regardless, the theories and possibilities of hostile events against Estonian sovereignty are for international relations and political sciences to research. Highlighting the potentially unstable thought patterns of a certain group of young people, however, falls within the aim of this thesis.

The motivator for not remembering is often a difficult trait to pinpoint and was not focused in depth in the interviews, either. The specific origins of the lack of motivation to remember important actors or facts will remain a task for psychological research. Nevertheless, without diving into psychological nuances, forgetting or not remembering something in the contemporary world is always a choice and this section attempts to elaborate on the processes of neglecting historical knowledge from their narrative.

Sometimes the choice of forgetting has been made by some external influencer – a parent, a teacher, the author of a newspaper article. Hirst and Stone¹⁰² call this phenomenon the “socially shared retrieval-induced forgetting” – socially motivated retrieving of and reflecting information as the previous source has conveyed, along with the non-conveyed facts. Therefore the one explanation of interviewees failing to remember the specifics of the Singing Revolution might lie in the fact that their previous information sources had voluntarily or involuntarily deprived them of some information. For example, the

¹⁰⁰ Hirst; Stone, “A Unified Approach to Collective Memory”, 106.

¹⁰¹ Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 178.

¹⁰² Hirst; Stone, “A Unified Approach to Collective Memory”, 108-109.

unspoken taboo in the media of mentioning actors who preferred staying in the Soviet Union.

It is important and simultaneously complex to distinguish two types of memory in the mnemonic process described and analysed thus far: memory of learning about the Singing Revolution like facts, events, people; and collective memory of the Singing Revolution attributed to the Estonian society as a whole. These two memories have blended into the narratives of the young interviewees. A new generation consciously or unconsciously choosing to retain certain information about the Singing Revolution contributes to further reshaping and developing the collective memory of the event. Some of the interviewees admitted that their lack of knowledge about the Singing Revolution is a direct consequence of a lack of interest. Interviewee no. 1 admitted that she had not searched for information on the internet about the Singing Revolution “mainly because of lack of interest. I know that it existed and that’s all I’ve needed (to know – M. S).” In a world of information overflow and accessible Internet to everyone, missing information about something is always a choice. Therefore, forgetting some of the important developments of the Singing Revolution is a choice that these individuals have made and therefore, subconsciously perhaps, feel that the lessons learned from these events have little value for them.

The interviewees were, almost always asked to elaborate why they failed to name specifics, names or events of the Singing Revolution. 11 interviewees expressed the sentiment that the Singing Revolution is irrelevant to them and to their social circle. Marek Tamm¹⁰³, along with Piirimäe and Grönholm¹⁰⁴, state that the newly independent Estonia based a great share of identity on history since the majority of the ruling positions were held by historians. However, many interviewees plainly state that history is uninteresting to them and their friends thus beginning to overturn the idea of ‘Republic of Historians’. For example, when asked why the Singing Revolution has evaded discussions with foreigners, interviewee no. 3 very firmly expressed her views on history in general:

¹⁰³ Tamm, “History as Cultural Memory,” 122.

¹⁰⁴ Piirimäe; Grönholm, “Historical Consciousness,” 479.

“It’s more of a historical aspect. [–] No matter what country we ask about, let’s say, when we go to Italy we won’t ask what happened 50 years ago?”

This sentiment expresses the large difference with previous generations where many notable Estonian statesmen were and are historians and where historical truth was at the centre of many social discourses. The rather cold attitude towards the Singing Revolution itself might therefore lie in the disinterest in history, rather than in the event itself. However, 14 interviewees answered positively to the question of whether Estonian history is important to them, only one interviewee doubted its importance by stating that she does not love history too much. As for the others’ explanation on why Estonian history might be important the prevailing reasons were that one should know its country’s past with the people living in it (9) and that knowing history is common knowledge (8). The interviewees were furthermore asked whether they felt shame towards anything related to Estonian history and seven interviewees answered negatively. This lack of shame towards history could equally indicate to a sense of loyalty to ignorance. The reasons for this lack of shame is difficult to pinpoint since the interviewees were occasionally baffled by the question and failed to coherently explain their answer.

Seven interviewees, when asked whether the Singing Revolution has a personal meaning for them, specifically stated that they had no personal connection to the event. The two main reasons for personal distance were: not an interesting enough topic in conversations (10) and lack of personal connection because of age (4). Interviewee no. 9, who is from a Russian speaking family and studies law, explained her lack of emotional connection to the Singing Revolutions very objectively by claiming that she can only create an opinion on something that she has experienced to have the possibility to form her own opinion based on her personal realistic views. Three interviewees explained that they felt a strong emotional pressure from society to feel positively emotional for the Singing Revolution. Interviewee no. 10 admitted that August 20th is certainly important but it always comes with an agenda:

“Yes, but I think that it could be again linked to the fact that it’s a day of celebration and then we have to somehow feel that it’s important to us. That maybe they (friends and acquaintances – M. S.) don’t like place too

much importance on it but when the moment comes it's certainly important, yes."

Lastly, some interviewees admitted that because the topic of the Singing Revolution was, according to the curriculum, scheduled for the end of the school year, the teachers often slid over it quite quickly and shallowly.

4.6 Concluding Remarks on Generations

One of the reasons for the emotional difference in the interviewees' perspective and the narrative from school books and media might be memory itself. Young people born after 1991 lack what Halbwachs¹⁰⁵ calls "nostalgia of the past", the perquisite for this nostalgia being autobiographical memories of the past events. When people get older, they tend to idealise the past and recreate their memories from a subjectively positive perspective. The national narrative was shaped by people who had first-hand experiences of the event and therefore have a seemingly moral right to relish on their successes and struggles. The subjects of this thesis have had the opportunity to construct their own narrative, based on however biased stories, rather than finding a compromise between their personal nostalgia and facts. Halbwachs¹⁰⁶ also stresses that as long as the generation that carries the first-hand memories of a historically significant event exists, *ergo* lives, the collective memory of this event endures in the whole population. The narrative of the Singing Revolution is carried by several generations in Estonia who still maintain its, although nostalgic and emotionally charged, value. The continuation and evolution of the narrative, in whatever form, in the next decades depends on how new generations process this information. In time, the collective memory of the Singing Revolution will fade in facts and figures but might keep its emotional influence. Yet, the process of forgetting and reshaping a society's collective memory of events is natural, Halbwachs on the matter: "[–] society, in each period, rearranges its recollections in such a way as to adjust them to the variable conditions of its equilibrium."¹⁰⁷ It is therefore, entirely possible that in a few decades or

¹⁰⁵ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 49.

¹⁰⁶ Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, 73-74.

¹⁰⁷ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 183.

years the Singing Revolution will become more relevant again, the upsurge caused by the next generation's current social and political environment.

This study is unfortunately too limited to compare the narratives of these 15 young people to a sample of people who participated in the Singing Revolution. The national narrative, including the media and school books are, however, mainly composed by exactly those people. These people have experienced the Singing Revolution during their "critical years" as introduced by Corning and Schuman in the Introduction part of this thesis. Every generation has their own predominant collective memories because they experienced these events in their younger receptive years – ages 10 to 30. Moreover, the authors¹⁰⁸ describe the collective memory of the events of the attack on the Vilnius TV tower in Lithuania in 1991 which was a massive influencer of people's mind-sets during the Tallinn TV tower incident. Corning and Schuman discover that when an event is so powerful and influential, it edges itself in the collective memory of people whose "critical years" have already passed becoming a "lifetime event". This event attaches itself in the collective memories of everyone who experienced it or followed the live coverage on the media. Corning and Schumann highlight that retrospective experience of the same media coverage would almost always be less emotionally influential. Thus, the interviewees' relative coldness in admitting any personal strong feelings towards the Singing Revolution in contrast to the media and school books' representation is explicable by the fact that their "critical years" are still in progress. However powerful a nation's collective memory is, personal memories remain an important part of maintaining the emotional value of an event.

Aarelaid-Tart and Bennich-Björkman¹⁰⁹ bring another perspective to the differences between generations in the Baltic States – each generation, starting from the Republican generation born in the 1920s and ending with the independent generation born around 1991 and onwards, has experienced their own turmoil of historically meaningful events. This turmoil has disrupted the natural intra-generational communication: "History and nationalism have instead become the common glue". Therefore, while each previous generation has experienced their own "lifetime event", different from the one of their parent's generation, it might be possible that the new generation born into an independent Estonia is on the search for their own "lifetime event" as has become quasi customary in

¹⁰⁸ Corning; Schuman, *Generations and Collective Memory*, 111-115, 129.

¹⁰⁹ Aarelaid-Tart; Bennich-Björkman, *Baltic biographies*, 2-3.

Estonia. While in need of further deeper research, this definitely contributes to the differences in narratives of the Singing Revolution. The narrative of the Singing Revolution is predictably going to fade in some aspects giving way to the new generation's "critical years" and their "lifetime events".

Lastly, in her book about memory in post-Soviet Estonia Meike Wulf¹¹⁰ claims that victimhood is "constitutive to Estonian identity" and thus encourages current stereotypes. Whereas the majority of Estonian population Wulf's research on collective remembering of the Soviet period might support this argument, it remains unclear whether the future generations starting with the 1991's children share those stereotypes and prejudices. One of the victim narratives of the Estonian society are the deportations in the 1940s: interviewee no. 10 mentioned deportations in his family in relation to his personal connection to the Singing Revolution and historical commemorations and how the celebrations on August 20th every year remind him of these events. He admits that these emotional commemorations are in a way part of the powerful celebrations of the restoration of independence. For him, there is thus an emotional pressure from the Estonian society to celebrate and commemorate at the same time which supports Wulf's claim that victimhood is omnipresent in the Estonian society, even in celebrations. Another sentiment of victimhood could be attributed to the 'Napoleon complex' of Estonians – falling behind Estonia's small population and territory, especially in the vicinity of a large Russia. Here, seven interviewees attributed pride or meaning to the Singing Revolution in relation to a small state gaining independence in the large world and sometimes even "against all odds". The only interviewee who directly mentioned victimhood was interviewee no. 13:

"Maybe that we have been a nation of slaves for 700 years. That we are still that kind of people who doesn't have the courage to say anything out loud and who doesn't have the courage to stand up when needed."

Otherwise, this was the only interviewee who directly mentioned the notion of victimhood but simultaneously explicitly expressed the feeling of shame towards it. Although only one of 15, this young person has already begun the process of contradicting the narrative of Estonians as victims, thus invoking a change. Additionally, while the notion of victimhood beams through the claims of a small state liberation against a large

¹¹⁰ Meike Wulf, *Shadowlands*, 174.

country, the emphasis in the interviewees' answers was always on the sentiment of pride towards Estonians, rather than on the injustice of the Soviet Union or other powers. It is entirely possible that since the new generation has experienced far less oppressive events during their "critical years", the notion of victimhood will slowly begin to edge itself out of the national narrative.

5 CONCLUSION

Before beginning to conclude this thesis there are some thanks in order. This thesis would hardly be a reality without my supervisors Pertti Grönholm, Kirsi Tuohela and Nina Tynkkynen who kept faith and patience in my progress throughout some years. Also, thank you, 15 interviewees who voluntarily agreed to participate in a stranger's study on a topic they rarely discuss in their everyday lives. Lastly, thank you, University of Turku and my peers for this opportunity and your valuable feedback during the process. This thesis is only a reality thanks to your dedicated involvement.

As every generation writes its own history, creating it as they progress through time, they also rewrite history that has already been written. The national narrative of the Singing Revolution is ever-changing, as is the narrative of the War of Independence or the Holocaust – emphasis and perspective change according to current political and cultural climate. As became evident in the introduction part of this thesis and subsequently in the discussion part, individuals interpret history according to their social group, as do whole generations. The section discussing the "liberal *narratio*" presents an attempt of a unified narrative by the 15 young people interviewed for this thesis. This narrative can be considered coherent for the most part; while every interviewee regards the Singing Revolution from an individual perspective, the general flow remains homogenous.

The narrative by the analysed media and school books is a fact-ridden detailed at times emotionally charged description of the events of the Singing Revolution. This is consistent with the fact that the carriers of this narrative are mostly witnesses and participants in the restoration of independence in 1991. None of the 15 interviewees of this thesis have any autobiographical experiences of the Singing Revolution. It is thus perhaps expected that their narrative carries far less precise details. The surprising part is,

however, how fragmentary their knowledge of the Singing Revolution is in substance. Compared to the narrative presented and present in the media and school books, the interviewees have retained a very modest drawing of the whole picture. The chronologic timeline is inconsistent at the least, with the majority of the interviewees failing to determine the beginning and the end of the Singing Revolution by a date. Admittedly, had the interviews included a precise question to articulate the beginning and ending, the results would presumably be somewhat different. Nevertheless, it is likely that had the interviewees been asked to describe the War of Independence or Second World War, for example, the dates of these events would have most likely spontaneously arisen in their narratives. While this is speculation and material for future research, the scarcity of dates, even by year, in the interviewees' answers is still stunning. Furthermore, the interviewees' orientation in the time and space continuum of the Singing Revolution was mostly vague and chaotic. For example, the Baltic Way and Heinz Valk that occurred in the majority of interviews had little room in the media's and school books' narratives and their strong impact on the whole process of restoring independence is questionable. The conclusions in the interviewees' narratives might thus be either biased according to their own social group belonging, emotionally driven by 'paratext' or induced by forgetting aspects that have little value for them.

Although the narratives by the interviewees are partially vague and inconsistent, the general attitude follows the media and school books' lead. The concept of gaining independence is eminent and omnipresent, all analysed narratives follow the general national historical narrative of focusing on aspects of liberty. The interviewees mostly agreed that the Singing Revolution was important and positive in essence. The usage of violence, while differently represented in the media and school books, was shunned and deemed as negative. Here, the interviewees' views mostly corresponded with the school books' narrative that independence was restored without shedding blood. While the interviewees admitted that they remember little from the school programmes, this narrative of "singing oneself free" is a direct adoption of the school books' narrative.

In answer to the question in the Introduction part of this thesis: the narrative presented by the 15 interviewees differs from the national narrative by the media and school books by its complexity and depth but not by its substance. This variation was to be expected since the national narrative thus far been constructed by people who still have personal memories of the Singing Revolution. However, most interviewees valued the Singing

Revolution and while their “critical years” are still in course and their “lifetime events” might still arrive, they mostly agreed that the Singing Revolution was an important event for Estonia, Europe and the world.

Lastly, the answer to why the collective memory of the Singing Revolution should be studied lies in the words of Jan Assmann: “Events tend to be forgotten unless they live on in collective memory.”¹¹¹ The narratives and the emphasis on the Singing Revolution differ somewhat from school books to the media to the 15 subjects of this thesis, but the event itself is undeniably one of the most important events in Estonia’s recent history and rightfully holds a *lieu de mémoire* within the collective memory of Estonia. In order to preserve the memory and historical meaning of the Singing Revolution the narratives must be revisited and revised constantly – the Estonian society currently still has direct witnesses to carry this task but in time it will be future generations, including these 15 interviewees, who shall take over the revitalisation of this narrative.

¹¹¹ Jan Assmann, “Moses the Egyptian,” 210.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Interview Questions

Questions in English:

1. State your age and interviewee number.
2. Are you currently working? Studying? In what area?
3. Have you heard or read about the Singing Revolution? About the “restoration of independence”?
 - Yes. What have you heard about it?
 - No. Have you heard stories or read about how Estonia regained independence in 1991?
 - Tell your own account on how these events happened. In your own free form. Where do you get your information from?
4. Is Estonian history important to you?
 - Yes/no. Why is/isn't history important?
 - Is there anything you are proud of in Estonia's recent history? Ashamed of? Is it a specific event, development, some people, anything else? Why?
 - In what social setting and situation do you feel that history is important to you? Where does it come up as a topic?
5. What do the “time of restoration of independence” and the Singing Revolution mean to you? Why?
 - What do you think about the importance of the “restoration of independence” and the Singing Revolution for the Estonians/ for Europe / for the World? Why?
6. Have you discussed those events with anyone? If yes, with whom, what about and why? If no, why not?
7. If the topic comes up, what is the general attitude in the respective groups: very positive, positive, neutral, negative, very negative? Something in between? Why?
 - Did any of your family participate in the events?
8. Have you used Internet to research/look up aspects of the restoration of independence? Did you find the information you were looking for? If yes, what kind of information did you find? Did the information you found spark any emotional response? If yes, what kind of sentiments
9. Can you name some important people from the “time of restoration of independence”? Why them, why do you think they were important?
 - Can you name some people who had a negative impact or negative intentions on these events? Why them?
 - If no names come up, is it because you don't remember the names or because there are no distinct actors? Something else?
10. Pictures of the SR – what's happening? Does it spark any sentiment? If yes then what?
11. Have you had contact with foreigners in the sense that you had to explain Estonia and Estonians to them? Have you told foreigners about the restoration of independence or the Singing Revolution?
 - Yes. What particular moments of it? How do you feel when discussing it?
 - No. Why not? (Interviewee doesn't feel competent enough to explain it/ not important enough/ forgotten about it/ the foreigner doesn't care?)

12. Have you participated in the Song Festivals?
 - Yes. As a singer or as a spectator? What feelings do you get when singing/listening to these songs? Do you think about the restoration of independence or the Singing Revolution when participating?
 - No. Why not?
13. Have you participated in the Night-time song festivals? *Same sequence as in 12*
14. Do you celebrate the 20th of August?
 - Yes. How do you celebrate and what feelings do you have doing it?
15. Did you post something relatable on social media on the 20th of August 2016 (or 2017)?
 - Yes. What and why?
 - No. Why not?

Questions in Estonian:

1. Ütle palun oma vanus ja intervjuueeritava number.
2. Kas sa töötad hetkel? Õpid? Mis alal?
3. Kas Eesti ajalugu on sinu jaoks oluline?
 - Jah/ei. Miks see sinu jaoks oluline on/ei ole?
 - Kas on midagi mille üle sina oled uhke Eesti lähiajaloo? Tunned millegi pärast häbi? On see mingi kindel sündmus, areng, inimene või midagi muud? Selgita.
4. Millistes sotsiaalsetes olukordades sa tunned, et ajalugu on sinu jaoks oluline? Millistes olukordades üldse ajalugu teemana üles kerkib?
5. Kas sa oled kuulnud või lugenud laulvast revolutsioonist? Taasiseseisvumisajast?
 - Jah. Mida sa sellest kuulnud oled?
 - Ei. Kas sa oled kuulnud või lugenud lugusid sellest, kuidas Eesti taasiseseisvus 1991. aastal?
 - Räägi oma sõnadega, mis tookord sündis. Kust sa selle kohta infot oled saanud?
6. Mida tähendab sinu jaoks taasiseseisvumisaeg ja mida tähendab laulev revolutsioon? Selgita.
 - Mida sa arvad taasiseseisvumisaja ja laulva revolutsiooni olulisusest eestlastele/ Euroopale/ maailmale? Selgita.
7. Kas sa oled neid sündmusi kellegagi arutanud? Kui jah, siis kellega ja millest te rääkisite? Kui ei, siis miks mitte?
 - Kas su vanemad/sugulased osalesid mingitel laulva revolutsiooni üritustel?
8. Kui arutad mingis grupis taasiseseisvumisaega, siis mis hoiak üldiselt nendes gruppides taasiseseisvumisaja kohta on: väga positiivne, positiivne, neutraalne, negatiivne, väga negatiivne? Midagi vahepealset? Selgita.
9. Kas sa oled internetist otsinud informatsiooni taasiseseisvumisaja kohta? Kas sa leidsid, mis otsisid? Kui jah, siis mis informatsiooni sa leidsid? Kas see, mis sa leidsid tekitas sinus mingit emotsiooni? Kui jah, siis milliseid tundeid see sinus tekitas?
10. Oskad sa nimetada mõnda olulist inimest taasiseseisvumisajast? Miks nemad, miks nad olulised olid?

- Oskad sa nimetada mõnda inimest, kellel oli negatiivne mõju taasiseseisvumisajale või kellel olid pahatahtlikud kavatsused? Miks nemad?
 - Kui ühtegi inimest nimetada ei oska, siis kas seetõttu, et sa ei mäleta nende nimesid või sellepärast, et sinu meelest polnud ühtegi konkreetset isikut?
11. Pilte laulvast revolutsioonist – mis toimub? Kas see tekitab sinus mingeid tundeid? Kui jah, siis milliseid?
12. Kas sa oled suhelnud välismaalastega selles võtmes, et oled pidanud neile tutvustama Eestit ja eestlasi? Kas sa oled välismaalastele rääkinud taasiseseisvumisajast ja/või laulvast revolutsioonist?
- Jah. Millistest hetkedest täpsemalt? Kuidas sa ennast tundsid, kui nendest sündmustest rääkisid?
 - Ei. Miks mitte? Kas sa ei tunne ennast piisavalt teadlikuna või tähtsana/ oled unustanud/ välismaalast pole huvitanud või pole teemaks tulnud?
13. Kas sa oled Laulupeol osalenud?
- Jah. Lauljana või pealtvaatajana? Mis tunded sind valdavad, kui neid laule kuulad või laulad? Kas sa oled mõelnud taasiseseisvumisaja või laulva revolutsiooni peale mõelnud, kui Laulupeol osalesid?
 - Ei. Miks mitte?
14. Kas sa oled osalenud öölaulupidudel? *sama järjekord nagu nr. 12 küsimusel*
15. Kas sa tähistad 20. augustit?
- Jah. Kuidas ja mis tunded sind seda tehes valdavad?
 - Ei. Miks mitte?
16. Kas sa postitasid midagi asjakohast sotsiaalmeediasse 2016. või (2017.) aasta 20. augustil?
- Jah. Mida ja miks?
 - Ei. Miks mitte?

Annex 2: Photo of Heinz Valk, shown during the interview



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¹¹² Screenshot from the Youtube video “Sinine, must, valge 1988. 25.-27. detsembril kell 18.45 ETV-s”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6JroHigRJw>.

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