



Making Identity Count: Estonia 1995¹

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Introduction

In 1995, hegemonic identity discourses were centred on the market economy and nationalism. Neoliberal market hegemony was primarily (re)produced by elites and remained unchallenged by popular discourses, which generally took market reasoning and meritocratic justice for granted. Instead, public concerns focused on growing social stratification and the welfare state, democracy was often evaluated based on socio-economic outcomes rather than the functioning of formal parliamentary institutions. The masses identified more strongly than the elite with traditions, conservative values and rural life.

Nationalism functioned as a true ‘collective identity’, shared and positively valued by both elites and the masses. In particular, ethnic and cultural nationalism served as a filter through which contemporary and past periods of independence, as well as the most relevant historic Others (Imperial Russia and Baltic Germans), were evaluated.

The identity crisis stemming from the smallness of both state and of nation manifested in a persistent concern for national survival – despite the departure of the last Russian troops at the end of August 1994 – as well as in a need to emulate the accomplishments of the Nordic countries and an enduring aspiration to integrate into the (still) idealised West.

The overlapping socio-political crises of public order, political corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency, and a growing divide between political elite and the population were widely acknowledged. Russia remained the predominantly negative external Other, and Russian-speakers were perceived as a security threat unless they fully integrated into Estonian society.

The general public held more ambivalent feelings towards both the Soviet Union and the West, whereas the elite was more uniformly negative about the former and more positive about the latter. Nevertheless, among the masses, no efficient alternative discourse emerged that was more popular than the one produced by the elite: the West remained the most positively regarded external Other, and no serious alternatives to representative democracy or market economy gained traction.

1. Text selection and classification of sources

For 1995 archive (see ‘Sources’ below), the sample of leadership speeches included President Lennart Meri’s Independence Day Speech (24 February 1995) and Prime Minister Tiit Vähi’s speech *On the situation of the state (Olukorrast riigis)* (31 May 1995). In 1995, Lennart Meri served as President of Estonia (1992-2001) and Tiit Vähi was the Prime Minister of two consecutive government coalitions (formed on 17 April 1995 and 6 November 1995, respectively). The selected speeches were publicly delivered, addressed to the nation, focused primarily on domestic issues, and were published in major newspapers – either in full (*Postimees*, 1 June 1995) or in an abridged version (*Päevaleht*, 1 June 1995).

¹ This national identity report was completed as part of the *Making Identity Count (MIC) Estonia* project (PRG1052 – *National Identity and Estonian-Russian Relations: A Longitudinal Study of Elite and Mass Discourses*). The sampled material was coded using the standard MIC procedure (Allan 2016). The full collection of MIC Estonia national identity reports is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/10062/108183>.

In 1995, the highest-circulating daily papers were *Postimees* (50,000), *Rahva Hää* (49,000) and *Eesti Päevaleht* (23,000) (Vihalemm 2002, p. 287). For the archive *Postimees* and *Eesti Päevaleht* were selected, as *Rahva Hää* ceased publication on 2 June 1995.²

For the category of ‘opinion-editorials’, all opinion articles, editorials, and journalists-written articles published on the 15th of every month³ in the selected newspapers were scanned for identity-related content. This process yielded the selection of 169 op-ed articles (130 from *Päevaleht/Eesti Päevaleht* and 39 from *Postimees*), resulting in 594 initial codes (318 from *Päevaleht/Eesti Päevaleht* and 276 from *Postimees*). Of these, 555 codings were included in the final matrix, based on the list of most prominent categorical classifications.

The sample of letters consisted of reader submissions published throughout the year in the selected newspapers. *Postimees* published letters from readers in several regular sections, such as ‘Letter to the editor,’ ‘Reader’s opinion,’ ‘Room of letters,’ and ‘With a few lines,’ where editor quoted submitted letters or provided summaries of their content. Beginning in mid-May 1995, *Postimees* published a ‘Letter to the editor’ section in each issue, which resulted in the majority of scanned letters originating from *Postimees*. In total, 428 letters were scanned (302 from *Postimees* and 126 from *Päevaleht/Eesti Päevaleht*), yielding 581 codes (415 from *Postimees* and 166 from *Päevaleht/Eesti Päevaleht*), of which 555 codings were included in the final list of the most prominent categories.

Data on the most watched Estonian-produced films in cinemas for 1995 was unavailable. Consequently, two films were selected based on their critical acclaim and multiple awards: “Too Tired to Hate” (“Ma olen väsinud vihkamast”, 1995) and “The Firewater” (“Tulivesi”, 1994). “The Firewater” explores the illegal alcohol trade between Estonia and Finland during 1920s prohibition era. “Too Tired to Hate” addresses juvenile crime in the early 1990s and a struggle of an individual to escape the vicious circles of vendetta and violence.

As sales data for books was also unavailable, the selection was based on the most critically acclaimed or enduringly popular novels. The selected works were “Memoirs of Ivan Orav or the Past as Azure Mountains” (“Ivan Orava mälestused, ehk, Minevik kui helesinised mäed”) by Andrus Kivirähk (1995) and “Border State” (“Piiririik”) by Tõnu Õnnepalu (1993), the latter published under the *nom de plume* Emil Tode. Õnnepalu’s “Border State” received several literary awards (i.e., the Baltic Assembly Prize for Literature; an annual award of Estonian Culture Capital) in 1994 (Cultural Endowment of Estonia), was rapidly translated into 14 languages, and became the most translated Estonian book of the 1990s. Kivirähk’s “Memoirs of Ivan Orav” was nominated as the 1995 book of the year (Cultural Endowment of Estonia). Initially published as newspaper series, it was later adapted into a novel, a theatre play, and a television production.

Whereas in 1990, the most widely printed and circulated novels included fictional books directly addressing the history of the Stalinist period (deportations in the 1940s, experiences in Soviet prison camps, or the post-Gulag return to Estonia), the most popular novels of 1995 blended fantasy and reality. Õnnepalu’s “Border State” recounts the story of an unnamed Baltic man living in Paris in the form of series of letters written to a person named Angelo. Kivirähk’s “Memoirs of Ivan Orav” is a satirical, allegorical story employing grotesque exaggeration of 20th-century Estonian history through the perspective of a character close to the political authorities.

² *Eesti Päevaleht* was published under the title *Päevaleht* until 5 June 1995.

³ If newspaper was not published on the 15th day of the month, the issue of the 16th (or closest to the 15th) was selected.

The sample of Estonian history textbooks for secondary schools was limited to the only two available for that calendar year (Mäesalu et al. 1995 and Laur et al. 1995), with coding based on their 1997. Unlike to standard Making Identity Count method, which recommends starting from the early 20th century (Allan 2016, p. 35), we coded the content of textbooks from the period before Christianity's introduction to Estonia in 13th century through the 1990s. This approach was chosen because, during the Estonian state- and nation-building of the 1990s, historical narratives of Estonia and of 'free Estonia' began with the age of 'ancient freedoms' preceding the thirteenth-century German-Danish conquest, followed by centuries of struggle for liberty under the rule of the Teutonic Order, Swedes, Russians, and Soviets (Tamm 2008).

2. Raw identity categories

To balance the unequal distribution of raw identity codes among genres, we amended the standard Making Identity Count method for selecting aggregated categories in order. We calculated percentages normalized by genre to determine the relative prominence of raw codes across genres. The categories with average prominence across genres below 1.05% were eliminated, which ended up with a list of 33 categories and 2,673 codings.

Table 1 (at the end of this report) lists the raw counts of the most frequent identity categories by genre for the year 1995. Table 2 presents the topography of identity categories based on valences (+ for positive and aspirational, - for negative and aversive, ~ for ambiguous, and / for neutral).⁴

In the Table 2, the categories are grouped into six thematic clusters. The number of symbols in the cells of the Table 2 describes the affective relevance of a given identity category. Accordingly, within the cluster, the categories are arranged according to the numbers of valence symbols received.

The five categories receiving highest scores of valence symbols were: **SO: West** (24), **HO: Soviet Union** (22), **market economy** (22), **order/stability** (20) and **SO: Russia** (19). At the other extreme, five categories attained valence symbols only in one genre, or, to put it differently, had an affective relevance (Hopf 2016, p. 7) in one genre only. For instance, **alcohol** was prominent in the genre of movies mostly, as the script of the movie "The Firewater" extensively handled alcohol consumption, alcohol prohibition, and alcohol smuggling. Nevertheless, despite being affectively prominent in one genre only, alcohol scored raw codes also in three other genres (12 codings out of 28 were from textbooks, novels, and letters). A similar pattern applied to four other categories, holding affectively salience (in Table 2) in one genre only while being present in several other genres as well: **trust in political institutions** (op-eds), **religion** (textbooks), **youth/youthful** (leadership speeches), and **Interwar Estonia** (novels).

Comparing elite and mass discourse columns in Table 2 – where leadership speeches, textbooks, and op-eds represent "more elite" genres, while letters, novels and movies "are more mass" genres (Hopf 2016, p. 5) – demonstrates categories in which affective resonance relates primarily with the mass (**traditional, egalitarian/welfare state**), with the elite (**democracy/democratic, small state**), or with both (**order/stability, market economy**). The distinction between mass and elite discourse relies on the type of text (genre), not on the content of discourse. Both elite and mass discourses use and rely on assumed ideas and widely accepted

⁴ If a specific valence assigned to a code (e.g. independent "+") appeared in more than 1% of all code-valence pairs (where code "independent" and other valences have their own score) in a given genre (e.g., political speeches), it was represented in Table 2 by one symbol of valence attributed to the related category. The number of symbols followed the scale: 1.0–2.0 (1 symbol); 2.0–5.0 (2 symbols); 5.0–7.5 (3 symbols); 7.5–10.0 (4 symbols); above 10.0 (5 symbols).

social common sense (Vucetic 2022). Within these limits, differentiating elite and mass discourses allows for identifying discursive agreement, overlaps, and counter-discourses between the two.

Independent

This constellation encompasses identity categories linked to the independent statehood of Estonians. **Nationalist** was the only category to receive valence symbols across all genre, consistently scoring positive valences in the topography of identity table (Table 2). Correspondingly, by 1995, **nationalist** was for Estonian identity not only hegemonic – dominating discourse despite potential contestation and unfixity – but also sacred, positioned as self-evident *beyond* convention and critical discussion, a phenomenon perceived to be essentially “not social, therefore *not made*, thus *cannot be unmade*” (Hauggaard 2020, p. 95).

The objective of present and historical independent Estonian state has been the protection, preservation, and promotion of Estonian national culture. History textbook emphasised the increase in the preservation of Estonian national high culture during the interwar independence period (1918-1939):

The greatest achievement of the years of statehood was the development of a national culture at the European level. For the first time, Estonian culture received state attention and support, and the risk of losing national culture through Germanization or Russification disappeared. (Laur *et al.*, 1997, p. 81; {1995_T_LAUR_02440})⁵

Likewise, after the 1991 restoration of independence, the core expectation and legitimate role of the Estonian state remained upholding and promoting Estonian national culture:

Estonian national choral culture needs more attention, support, and uniformly throughout the country. There is something very wrong with the current cultural policy. (Uiga, 1995; {1995_P_POST_02620})

Consensus held that Estonia was a small country and small nation, though views diverged on whether openness or closure to the global culture and market serves best ensured the survival the culture of a small national:

As a small nation, we survive in the big world primarily because of our spirituality, because of our participation in the global cultural process, which requires constant modernization of educational and creative conditions, preservation of once created cultural values and of the level achieved. (Klein *et al.*, 1995; {1995_P_PAEV_02310})

Other voices argued for economic protectionism or the defence of native identity:

It would be very nice if our new government could find a pro-Estonian line and stop selling off the industry to foreigners at all costs, leaving Estonians with only the joy of working. (Vilba, 1995 {1995_L_POST_00590})

In the European Union we are going to, capital and labour have free movement. If there are not enough Estonians-natives, Turks, Albanians, Russians, Poles will come... So, what about the ideals of the War of Independence⁶ and the Singing

⁵ References indicate to the original source (can be found in lists of ‘Sources’ and ‘References’ below) and, in braces ({...}) the code ID used in the coding table (stored in the National Identity Database).

⁶ War of Independence was between Republic of Estonia and Soviet Russia from 28 November 1918 until 2 February 1920.

Revolution,⁷ dreams of an independent Estonian nation-state? (Kraak, 1995; {1995_P_POST_01470})

Discourses surrounding **independent/free, small state** identity, and **Baltic** distinctiveness were largely articulated by the elite. In their narrative, Estonian freedom was lost in 13th century and pursued persistently thereafter. According to the history textbook, during the St. George's Nights Uprising (1343-1345) of Estonian natives against German elite: "Estonians defended their freedom until the last chance." (Mäesalu *et al.*, 1997, p. 66; {1995_T_MAES_01540})

A similar emphasis on national commitment appears in the description of 20 September 1944, when the National Committee of the Republic of Estonia (formed by representatives of the last pre-Soviet occupation Estonian government) proclaimed the restoration of the Estonian state while German troops were retreating and Soviet army had not yet reached Tallinn. This attempt ended on 22 September 1944 when the Soviet army took control of Tallinn. The history textbook underscores the utmost commitment to independence Estonians demonstrated at this historical moment: "Despite all the suffering and efforts of Estonians, it was not possible to restore the independence of the Republic of Estonia" (Laur *et al.*, 1997, p. 108; {1995_T_LAUR_03180}).

In the film "Too Tired to Hate", a young boy, acknowledging the corruption and moral dubiousness of Estonian politics of the 1990s, expresses his commitment to protect Estonia:

In fact, I'm going to the army. I'm going to defend this bunch of crooks, thugs, and politicians. So, what. Still [our] own country. If I get a bullet, it's at least for the right thing. (Lintrop, Lintrop, 1995 00:29:34-00:30:11; {1995_M_MAOL_00270})

In 1995, **small** as an attribute of the state resonated with the elite as a liability rather than as an asset; later, in the 21st century, 'small' became increasingly linked to attributes such as 'open', 'entrepreneurial' and 'digital'. President Lennart Meri stressed the necessity of collective efforts to contribute to the welfare of the country, given the 'smallness' of both the population and territory: "We are just a very small country with a very small nation where everyone has to roll up their sleeves, especially young people" (Meri, 1995; {1995_S_MERI_00340}).

Such a small state would be likely to perceive itself vulnerable and threatened if excluded from the European Union and NATO. Marko Mihkelson, a Member of Parliament since 2003 and a former journalist of *Postimees* in 1995, wrote in an opinion article:

Estonia's national independence has not been more threatened in recent years than it is now. The coming months and years will decide whether our independence will survive. This is not a mere conjecture; unfortunately, is indicated by very serious processes. (Mihkelson, 1995; {1995_P_POST_02160})

The Estonian president encouraged the people to transcend the complex of smallness (and the accompanying sense of inferiority), to be culturally authentic, and to aspire to become a nation great in spirit:

We have used the past to pity ourselves: fifty years of occupation, seven hundred years of slavery, ten thousand years of the Stone Age – there is not much to do with this slavish masochism in Europe. Estonia has never been great in power. But

⁷ The term Singing Revolution was originally coined (by writer and activist Heinz Valk) for 10-11 June 1988 spontaneous mass evening singing demonstrations in Tallinn. Later the term has been used as a reference for the 1987-1991 period leading to the restoration of Estonian independence.

Estonia has been and can once again become great in spirit, remaining itself. (Meri, 1995; {1995_S_MERI_00470})

Smallness (as both an attribute of state and population) was also perceived to be accompanied also by an exaggerated reverence for great powers and foreign societies:

In contrast to national pride, we have an inflated awe of the great powers and the “foreign”. We convince ourselves that somewhere else is better, somewhere else there are smarter people, and the ideals we are just dreaming of have already been achieved there. [...] This is a legacy of the Soviet-era pattern of thinking, and our sociologists-psychologists must work hard to cure this disease. (Sild, 1995; {1995_P_PAEV_02880})

Similarly, the main character of the novel “Border State” expresses self-doubt and crisis of subjective identity, arising from two overlapping statuses: being small and at the border (between East and West), without a clear sense of meaning and existence of its own:

I once read the word “border state” on the page. That’s how the land I come from was called there. It was a political term. Very accurate, by the way. There can be no border state. There is something on this side of the border and something on that side of the border, but there is no border. There is an express road and a grain field with a farmhouse under large, thirsty trees, but where is the boundary between them? It’s not visible. And when you get to stand on the border, you won’t be seen either, not from either side. (Õnnepalu, 1993, p. 181; {1995_N_TODE_01970})

Elite discourse traditionally expressed positive identification with **Baltic** states and peoples. However, an unusual for the year 1995 was the ‘Herring War’, which began when Latvian ships targeted herring around the Estonian island of Ruhnu, caused diplomatic tensions between Estonia and Latvia. This conflict manifested itself in negative media coverage of “Latvians”:⁸

Two otherwise friendly small countries don’t quarrel over a couple of nets of herring. According to the outgoing Foreign Minister Jüri Luik, fish stocks in the disputed region are estimated at nearly 30,000 tons. (Järv, 1995; {1995_P_POST_00870})

Estonians have always considered Latvia to be a little slower and, in some ways, weaker. Thus, it’s unthinkable for us to give in to their demands. (Päevaleht, 1995a; {1995_P_PAEV_00760})

The category **Russian-speakers in Estonia** did not encompass all discourses related to Russians, the Russian language, and Russian-speakers in Estonia. Occasionally, the Soviet army and Soviet era were labelled uncritically as the ‘Russian (era)’ (as President Lennart Meri also did in the speech sampled in this report). Identity discourses coded from the perspective of Estonian identity, e.g., the concerns of a person in a city populated mostly by Russian-speakers who could not buy a train ticket because the ticket seller did not understand Estonian, were coded under category of the **Estonian language**. Similarly, a concern about the proficiency of Estonian, raised in the history textbook regarding foreign Estonians, was framed as follows: “Of their compatriots living outside Estonia today, only about half speak their mother tongue” (Laur et al., 1997, p. 154; {1995_T_LAUR_05190}).

⁸ The conflict was solved with the maritime border agreement between Estonia and Latvia on 10 October 1996.

When Russian-speakers in Estonia were addressed directly, the attitudes were multivocal. From the perspective of the European approach to human rights, Russians born and raised in Estonia were to be considered equal citizens, not occupants:

It is incomprehensible to European understandings that a person born and raised in a country continues to be an occupier, a colonist, and a foreigner subject to deportation. (Raid, 1995a; {1995_P_PAEV_00660})

On the other hand, those Russian-speakers who had not proactively acquired Estonian citizenship were occasionally viewed as a threat to state stability and security:

The Russian problem in Estonia is not limited to citizenship and migration, because most Russians in Estonia are not citizens (and probably do not intend to become citizens) and do not intend to emigrate either. (Eesti Päevaleht, 1995; {1995_P_PAEV_01465})

Such concerns were also expressed by Prime Minister Tiit Vähi:

One of the factors that significantly affects the stability of the country is the presence of a loyal citizenry. ... To date, however, 1/3 of foreigners residing on the territory of Estonia have not defined their status by applying for a state residence and work permit. ... figuratively speaking, such construction of the Russian state within the Estonian state is a strategic mistake in the current population policy. (Vähi, 1995; {1995_S_VAHI_00210})

Unintegrated Russian-speakers were considered a threat to the existence of Estonian state and nation due to the smallness and weakness of the latter:

In the West, one wonders how Estonians can avoid aversion to the people who were masters here for fifty years. ... However, there is a limit to everything. Self-denial for the sake of the well-being of strangers must not develop into self-destruction. ... Preserving the identity and spirit of the ethnic minority of Russians means the emergence of a bilingual and bicultural formation for Estonia. This means the imminent destruction of the smaller and weaker. (Rov, 1995; {1995_L_POST_03290})

Democratic

Within the cluster of identity categories related to democratic institutions and political class, **political class/elite** scored the highest number of valence symbols (15) in the topography table and did not receive any positive symbols. Both elite and mass discourses were critical of the political class/elite, disapproving of **corruption** and aspiring toward **competent/efficient government**. Distrust of the democratic representative elite was linked to perceived political corruption:

Today, the people can no longer make changes to the Constitution and can only exercise their higher state power through party politicians. Now the nation is struggling because many party politicians are unethical, immoral, cynical and corrupt. (Raid, 1995b; {1995_P_PAEV_02130})

By 5 May 1995, when the second parliamentary elections took place in re-independent Estonia, it had become customary to blame democratic politicians for seeking personal gain rather than serving the public interest:

While the interests of the people should be common here, politicians seem to be thinking only of future elections and following the motto of “the end justifies the means” (Kuusmann, 1995; {1995_P_POST_01510}).

General disapproval of newly formed elite's status difference and distance from the common people was expressed also by a government minister (himself a representative of the elite) addressing a public gathering in the movie "The Firewater":

The one who wants to talk to Estonian people must do so with his feet on the ground. Feet on our own free land, not on the podium. A ministerial chair does not give the right to look down on the people, because the Estonian people are free and no one should stand over a free nation. (Volmer, 1994, 00:23:22-00:23:44; {1995_M_TULI_00420})

The representative political elite was expected to be close to common people, demonstrating competence in both public communication and political decisions:

But most importantly, if politicians are unable to present their views clearly and convincingly justify their views to the people, and if they do not bother to properly prepare for a single televised debate, how can they govern the country? (Muuli, 1995; {1995_P_POST_00080})

Competent/Efficient Government was valued in both leadership speeches and readers' letters. While discussing the theme, President Meri contrasted the aspirational efficiency of the neoliberal minimal state with the administrative state of the 'Russian era', referring to the period of Soviet Estonia:

I will only say that improving the work of the government apparatus by increasing the number of incompetent officials, as it has been done so far, is a recipe taken from the Russian era and leads to the opposite results. The unprecedented number of government officials must be reduced. (Meri, 1995; {1995_S_MERI_00470})

At times, both the political elite *and* state administration (and bureaucracy) were seen as oppositional to the public. Ineffective public administration was a crucial factor in the alienation felt by citizens toward public institutions:

The state administration and apparatus can be the bottleneck where everything gets stuck. Not to mention the danger of alienation from the people of state power. (Maruste, 1995; {1995_P_PAEV_02500})

President Lennart Meri considered incompetent state bureaucrats even worse than inept parliamentarians, as citizens interacted more frequently with public officials than with parliamentarians. As the latter represent the state, therefore "[t]hrough an incompetent, bureaucratic or arrogant [state] official, he [voter] can get poisoned from his country." (Meri, 1995; {1995_S_MERI_00380})

Both elite and mass perceived **corruption** to be widespread:

Corruption, speculation, nepotism, and crime are rampant. (Kõrgesaar, 1995; {1995_L_POST_01040})

There is also an increase in the number of economic crimes, mainly cheating, bribery, as well as illegal handling of drugs and other crimes. (Vähi, 1995; {1995_S_VAHI_00300})

Dominant conception of democracy was parliamentary and representative. Calls for referenda, popular sovereignty, and direct democracy received too few codes to appear in the raw codes table, with only a single reader's letter expressing a wish for a president with the authority to issue decrees, who could be "a bit like a father" to the nation:

Couldn't the president be a bit like a father who, in exceptional cases, has the power to issue decrees that would improve the situation of a single person or a small group... (Silla, 1995; {1995_L_POST_00250})

Thus, while the predominant pattern of **democracy** was representative, this category attained affective valence symbols only among elite discourse (while mass discourses manifested anti-elitist moods towards the representative political class) and was positively assessed more as an aspirational goal than a reality:

In democracies, people have managed to do this, why do we think that we here in Estonia are not coping with it. Let's all try together, and we will advance the real democracy. Otherwise, we will only have to vent the current domestic political theatre endlessly and will remain dreaming of democracy. (Raid, 1995b; {1995_P_PAEV_02120})

The existence of widespread general distrust between the citizenry and the political elite was confirmed by the president:

I greatly appreciate the statesmanlike directness with which the Prime Minister pointed to the mistrust that has taken hold in Estonian society between the people and Toompea. (Meri, 1995; {1995_S_MERI_00150})

For some authors of reader's letters, the essence of democracy was less about formal institutions and more about socio-economic justice: "In democracies, it is the case that at the same time as the price increases, the pension is also increased. We do not have such a principle." (Kõrgesaar, 1995; {1995_L_POST_01050})

Conservative

Most salient category in the conservative cluster of identity categories was **order/stability**, gathering categories within which stability, safety, rule of law, due application of law by state administration and strict punishments for crime were demanded or lauded, and categories considering disorder, corruption, and rampant crime were perceived as an acute problem.

The laws currently in force are too liberal for criminals. (Rajasaar, 1995; {1995_L_POST_03240})

The correspondent's assessment of the situation in Latvia is harsh – the country has long proved to be the losing side in the fight against the mafia and corruption. Is the situation in Estonia better in this regard? Hardly. (Raid, 1995b; {1995_P_PAEV_02110})

The **rural/pastoral** category, mainly present in mass discourse, emphasized the identity of Estonians "as owners of the land", which was not a relevant narrative than for an elite and could exclude from the nation those who were not in favour of improving the welfare of farmers:

Becoming the owner of the land was a problem for Estonians for centuries. The people were predominantly rural people. By now, we have been alienated from the land, somehow, we can make a living without personally owning land. In the twenties, you couldn't ... The land is the basis of our nation's identity. ... We have always been a farmer's nation, and this profession must not be abolished. (Rast, 1995; {1995_L_POST_01360})

These are the enemies of the Estonian people, those who are not in favour of improving the living conditions of farmers and will not do anything about it. The

Estonian people live thanks to the rural people, and if there are no rural people, there is no Estonian nation either. (Kähari, 1995; {1995_L_POST_00770})

Similarly, in the movie “The Firewater”, a government minister delivers a speech for an audience consisting of rural people and reinforces the role of farmers at the core of the Estonian nation:

There in an unclean farmland, in dung and manure..., because your work, men and women, is the future of Estonia ... (Volmer, 1994, 00:24:22-00:24:30; {1995_M_TULI_00500})

Traditional was another category resonating mostly with the masses. Traditional was a composite category encompassing references to traditional culture (theatre, handicraft, folklore, customs), traditional gender norms (such as the appreciation of family and the elderly), and social conservative stances on issues like the death penalty, euthanasia, abortion, and punishment for crime.

All these claims, which are against the death penalty, are, after all, against punishment in general. Why should we even maintain courts at all and punish people... (Valter, 1995; {1995_L_PAEV_01200})

Among conservative positions, ‘strict punishments for crime’ was valued by both elite and the masses, while other conservative value positions were mostly characteristic of the masses. In line with this, Prime Minister Tiit Vähi recounted:

Talk of a lenient European penal system should cease at a time when Estonia is in the development phase of savage capitalism and crime is flowing in through doors and windows. (Vähi, 1995; {1995_S_VAHI_00330})

The category **brave/militant** was most salient in textbooks and movies that cautiously praised (with the main valences of the category being ambiguous and neutral) the heroism of soldiers in national struggles and the strong will to defend the nation, both in past and present:

In today’s harsh reality, Estonia’s security can only be guaranteed if, in addition to economic and military integration into Europe, we ourselves are also ready to repel a possible aggressor with a gun in our hands. The whole nation should be involved in the defence. (Nugis, 1995; {1995_P_POST_00470})

President Meri recalled the mythic heroism of secondary school students during the War of Independence (1918-1920):

Moreover, the dynamic and decisive role of young people in state work has been always characteristic for Estonia: in the first weeks of the War of Independence, schoolboys and students were the force who, with guns in their hands, stopped the overwhelming Red Army offensive, setting an example for the then much more hesitant older generation at the cost of their lives. (Meri, 1995, {1995_S_MERI_00315})

Alcohol was affectively salient only in a sampled movie but was perceived as a national health issue in other genres as well:

Prostitution does not destroy the people, but vodka does. (Pumbo, 1995; {1995_L_POST_03670})

Vodka has destroyed the Estonian people and is destroying them even more. This must be stopped. We need a prohibition law! (Volmer, 1994, 00:24:03-00:24:13; {1995_M_TULI_00460})

Market liberal

Transition to **market economy** was experienced with mixed feelings by both the elite and the masses, while the category of **youth/youthful** primarily resonated with the elite. Categories dealing with social justice – **egalitarian/welfare state, meritocratic/elitist, class hierarchy** – resonated with the masses.

The market economy was accepted as a self-evident reality (or a new era) without any conceivable alternative:

Today's Estonia is a young country with great contradictions, but increasingly stabilizing, internationally accepted, and predominantly transitioned to a market economy. (Vähi, 1995; {1995_S_VAHI_00060})

A history textbook affirms that the transition to a market economy was a process in the 1990s perceived as irreversible:

The Estonian economy has opened itself to the West, and economic integration with Europe has become an irreversible process. (Laur et al., 1997, p. 147; {1995_T_LAUR_04850})

Transition to a market economy ushered in a **meritocratic** era which favoured and required audacity:

It can be assumed that even those more equal than equal did not start with equal initial capital. Much also depended on the degree of audacity at the time. (Juurikas, 1995; {1995_L_PAEV_00110})

In cases where the logic and mentality of market economy was disapproved, it was still not rejected as a norm:

We're becoming a number that shows a group, a number of individuals, all of whom are pursuing self-interest. "We" means, at best, gross national product, not anymore mentality, a sense of belonging, or common goals. (Naelapea, 1995; {1995_L_POST_01290})

... the economy develops [...] on the principles of petty-bourgeois morality (valuing greed and accumulate wealth). (Uustal, 1995; {1995_L_PAEV_00750})

The rapidly increasing inequalities of status were acutely perceived by many, but they still retained belief in the possibility of upward social mobility. A young boy in the movie "Too Tired to Hate" promises to become law abiding and hopes soon to become a big player in the social game:

Once I get out of here, I don't do the little things anymore. I get clean papers for myself and then..." – "So what? You're going to drive the president's Mercedes away?" – "No, I'm going to be a banker... Or to be a politician... I'll get that Mercedes then as well... (Lintrop, Lintrop, 1995 00:29:05-00:29:31; {1995_M_MAOL_00260})

Part of the blame for rising class inequalities was attributed to the government of Mart Laar, in particular, who was Prime Minister from 21 October 1992 until 8 November 1994. His government eliminated price subsidies and controls and followed an aggressive free market policy (Raun 2001, p. 30). Another stimulus for public disappointment was the outcome of the law on restitution of property (e.g. land and real estate) confiscated during the period of Soviet occupation, adopted on 11 June 1991.

One of the ugliest things is that native Estonians have been pitted against each other due to the messy ownership reform. ... Under the previous government [of Mart Laar], the rich became richer, and the poor poorer. This separated the Estonians from each other. (Hint, 1995; {1995_L_POST_02100})

Similarly, Prime Minister Tiit Vähi acknowledged the growing class divide:

At the same time, the uneven distribution of income grew rapidly. Thus, the income of the wealthiest tenth of the population exceeded the income of the poor tenth in the first quarter of 1995 by 15.5 times ... It is beyond doubt that, in the case of low average earnings, the high differentiation of income plays a role in maintaining social tensions and aggravating a series of negative developments. (Vähi, 1995; {1995_S_VAHI_00370})

Nevertheless, while rising inequalities were recognized as a problem, it was still claimed that the era when one could prosper without meritocratic effort had passed:

But at the same time, many rural people have not yet realized that you can't get anything without work. I hope those times are over. (Rohu, 1995; {1995_L_PAEV_00090})

In 1995, when status differences increased quickly and were visible, elite groups were recognized and emphatically discussed in public discourse. The following excerpt from reader's letter refers to 'elitism' in the dimension of organization and culture, rather than economy or politics. It illustrates the emotional response of the author to the type of conduct he considered *inappropriate* for an elite individual:

Now things are so bad that Peeter Tulviste, the rector of the venerable University of Tartu, has himself behaved so improperly that he is participating in the opening of a gas station. ... In the olden days, it was not considered respectable for a high-ranking public official to allow himself to be lured away by some earnest merchant. Besides, we don't need these newfound gas stations in Tartu at all. (Karu, 1995; {1995_L_POST_01460})

The near-national faith in meritocracy as a path to success was expressed in the novel "Ivan Orav's Memoirs", which depicts a scene in which two most significant pre-Soviet Estonian political leaders – Konstantin Päts and Jaan Tõnisson – walk around hell, populated by self-made Estonians:

Then, Päts and Tõnisson invited me for a walk around hell. The place was not bad, it must be said. I was especially pleased by the fact that all Estonians had worked their way up and become self-made men. All the men had a big soft belly laughing over their belts – a symbol of goodness. (Kivirähk, 1995, p. 64; {1995_N_KIVI_02240})

The concept of an **egalitarian/welfare state** was predominately a categorical feature of mass discourse (46 out of 75 codings were from letters), involving comparisons with other countries or aspirations toward a situation in which salaries (for wage labourers in general, or for specific professions such as teachers) and pensions are considered 'just'. In cases where the state funds are limited, state budget cuts were argued to target the rich and affluent and preserve support for the poor:

The unemployed have lost all hope of life. [...] In other foreign countries, unemployment benefits are paid if the person does not have a job. (Töötu Lääne-Virumaal, 1995; {1995_L_PAEV_00880})

I think that the government's decision not to pay child support to rich families is fully justified. Indeed, when families swim in gold... Especially at a time when it is very difficult for families with children, but not only for them, to make ends meet. (Tarik, 1995; {1 995_L_PAEV_01050})

Significant Others

Three significant Others, in order of relevance, were the **West, Russia, and Northern Europe**. The category of West encompassed concerns regarding Estonia's international reputation (concerns about the reputation of the state in Western countries), Western mentality and culture, NATO, the European Union, and individual Western countries. The attitude regarding the West was mainly positive among the elite and predominantly ambiguous or neutral among the mass.

In a novel, the West was idealized in contrast to Eastern Europe as a place where one can be human and 'live a life':

Ah! Angelo, why on earth did I stuff my nose into the world of people, I should have stayed where my place was, in the plant kingdom, in probability, in Eastern Europe, in one of the rough apartments of my childhood, on the window of which my grandmother's herbaceous lilies proliferated. As soon as people and their wills come into play, there is nothing but misery and misery. I went with Franz because I was interested in how it is to be human and live a life. (Önnepalu, 1995, p. 131; {1995_N_TODE_01600})

Western policies were viewed as models to emulate. Additionally, security of the small nation was seen to dependent on successful integration with the West:

As the foreign and defence policies of a small country like Estonia are inevitably closely interlinked, the approach to Western economic policy and security organisations must be continued in a coordinated manner. (Nugis, 1995; {1995_P_POST_00350})

Estonia needs NATO to maintain its independence. (Nutt, 1995; {1995_P_POST_01960})

In the movie "The Firewater", the alcohol prohibition law in the United States (1920-1933) serves as an example to follow, while similar policies in the Russian Empire and early Soviet Union (1914-1927) are rejected. A young boy in the film runs on the street, shouting:

"The alcohol prohibition law will come. Estonia catches up with America!" (Volmer, 1994, 00:47:35-00:47:40; {1995_M_TULI_00720})

However, the prospect of full European integration was met by mixed feelings, both among elites and common people:

It doesn't hurt to think today about what becoming European entails for an Estonian [...] Euro pie (Euro-hamburger?) is a nice thing, but you should never forget with whom it will be shared with and how many can have it. (Tulp, 1995; {1995_L_POST_01570})

The slavish servility of our "nobility" in the face of everything American is known, after all! (Paabo, 1995; {1995_L_PAEV_00050})

Russia was salient and largely negatively assessed in both elite and mass discourses. Despite this, President Meri positively referred to the greeting of Russian President Boris Yeltsin on

Estonian Day of Independence as a basis of reciprocity, suggesting that he would respond likewise on a similar anniversary in Russian Federation:

Or, in the words of President Yeltsin: “I hope that Russian-Estonian relations will develop in a good neighbourly manner, on the basis of the principles of respect for and consideration of each other’s interests and respect for human rights.” If today had been a national holiday of the Russian Federation, I would have addressed President Yeltsin with exactly the same words... (Meri, 1995; {1995_S_MERI_00030})

However, President Meri faced significant public criticism for signing the July Treaties on 26 July 1994, which completed the withdrawal of Russian troops by the end of August 1994. Criticism was not about troops leaving the country, but about the perceived lack of jurisdiction to pursue such a deal with Russian government and that the Treaties would allow thousands of Russian army officers to stay in Estonia:

... his [Lennart Meri's] own political fallacy in signing the surrender agreement of 26 July 1994 has also become apparent. Ignoring even the more rudimentary national security needs, this agreement provides for the personnel of the occupying army to be permanently left in Estonia. Along with them, the entire civilian composition of the Russian armed forces. The families of all of them, too. (Park, 1995; {1995_L_POST_03810})

The Treaties agreements were ratified in the State Duma of Russian Federation in July 1995 and in Estonian Riigikogu in December 1995.

Russia was views as an unreliable and untrustworthy Other:

It is well known from history that compromises can only be made with those who accept compromises, and that agreements must only be made between partners who respect each other. So far, there are no examples of such trust in Estonian-Russian relations. (Nutt, 1995; {1995_P_POST_01950})

Estonia-Russia border was another contentious issue in relations with Russia. Although the border that existed during the Soviet period was largely agreed upon between Estonia and Russian Federation, formal border agreements were reached only in 2005 and 2014. Even then, the border treaty remained unratified by either party.

In 1995, many voices, particularly from the masses, advocated for the restoration of the borders set by the Tartu Peace Treaty (1920), which would have extended the territory of Estonia beyond the borders in force at the time of the Soviet Union:

I believe that the territory must not be given away to the aggressor for any reason. ... Estonia’s strength must come from the right of Estonians to live in their own country. (Vullo, 1995; {1995_L_POST_00730})

Politicians who are willing to give up the borders established by the Tartu Peace Treaty are either former or future communists. Now, they are securing their way back in case Russia suddenly conquers Estonia again. (R., 1995; {1995_L_PAEV_01480})

Third significant Other – **Northern Europe** – primarily encompasses mostly Finland, Sweden, and Scandinavia as a whole. In 1995, Sweden and Finland, having joined the European Union, were recognized as closest aspirational examples to follow. Finnish alcohol and telemedia regulation policies were praised, while Sweden was seen as an inspirational example of a more

civilized culture, notably in terms of MP salaries and of democratic social organisation in general:

Also in Estonia ... in this area, we should follow the example of Sweden, which has a long democratic tradition, where, on the one hand, citizens are active in joining social organisations in the fight against violence and, on the other hand, the country's authorities and the government are not afraid of contact with their citizens in order to achieve positive goals. (Siirak, 1995; {1995_L_POST_02990})

A while ago, I drove a car quite a lot in Sweden. It was a lot of fun to watch civilised people choose the right speed. ... It would be time to realize that ... The speeding driver does not think at all about the rules or their violation, neither the fines nor the dying pedestrians. ... The presence of such car drivers is a social problem. This is the level of development we are at the moment, neither the police, nor the power, nor any traffic controllers, can turn us into polite, mutually respectful, intelligent and loving road users. (Toots, 1995; {1995_L_POST_02600})

Historical Others

Soviet Union overwhelmingly dominates the cluster of historical Others, which includes also **Russia, Germany/Baltic Germans, and Interwar Estonia.**

In the case of Soviet Union, we distinguish between the Soviet Union in as a whole (encompassing its administration, leadership and chain of command, institutions and regime, communists and communism, politics of education and culture, and Soviet society and mentality) and categories related to Soviet Union as an occupying power, as well as Soviet economy and economic policy.

Identification with Soviet Union is predominantly negative, with the exception of the period of its last leader, Mikhail Gorbachev (General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1985 until 1991), and the nationalist or reformist communists of the same period.

In popular discourses, ex-communists were stigmatized, and their participation in political leadership was disapproved. In the following quote, one author of a reader's letter retrospectively categorizes all communists of the 'stagnation period' as 'bad communists' and advocates for their complete lustration (the removal from politics of anyone associated with the previous Soviet regime):

The power of communists in society continues as in the best years of stagnation, albeit, in a sense, in a mutated form (leadership positions attained in the economy by privatisation of state property yields them an opportunity to dictate public policy covertly) ... During the period of stagnation, there were neither good nor bad communists, but each Estonian communist made a personal contribution in his own way to the implementation of the policy of genocide against his people... (Mänd, 1995; {1995_L_POST_00190})

In another letter, the author criticizes 'right-wing' politicians for supporting a coalition government in which 75% of ministers were former Communist party members:

On what kind of grounds are you now bringing to power an electoral alliance 75% of whose representatives have belonged to the CPSU, including the local high *nomenklatura*? (Mäe, 1995; {1995_L_PAEV_00190})

The category of **Soviet Union: occupation** included themes related to various types of repressions, deportations (14 June 1941 and 25 March 1949), the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (officially the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist

Republics, signed on 23 August 1939), the Soviet army, and resistance, dissidence, opposition, and protests against the repressive regime. The occupation was straightforwardly condemned, while resistance to the regime was praised. More specifically, local collaborators such as the ‘June Communists’ (Soviet collaborators who joined Estonian the Communist Party after coup d’état in June 1940) and Red Army’s 8th Estonian Rifle Corps (which fought Germans in 1944-1945) were distinguished:

The post-war party and government cadre of the Estonian SSR consisted mainly of “June Communists”, Estonians from the corps, Estonians from Russia, and non-Estonians. Moscow, in particular, supported the cadre sent by itself and increasingly trusted them. (Laur *et al.*, 1997, p. 112; {1995_T_LAUR_03240})

Although Estonians fighting in the Rifle Corps of the Soviet Army were disapproved to a lesser extent than the ‘June Communists’, official memory – comprising of forms of commemoration and remembering legitimised by the national authorities (Miller, Kamentsev 2024, p. 41) – of history textbooks upholds the view that they were marginal and did not represent the attitude of Estonians.

For a long time, the majority of Estonians held a negative view of the reintroduction of Soviet power, which manifested itself in both passive and active resistance to the occupation regime. In 1944-1953, the centre of this resistance was a direct armed struggle – the Forest Brothers. (Laur *et al.*, 1995, p. 112; {1995_T_LAUR_03250})

The years of resistance by the Forest Brothers clearly showed that Estonia did not surrender without a fight. (Laur *et al.*, 1995, p. 115; {1995_T_LAUR_03310})

The Autumn 1980 wave of youth protests exemplified widespread national concern to protect the Estonian nation against the pressures of Russification:

Russification pressures exacerbated the sense of danger that national culture was doomed to extinction. This, in turn, caused a deepening of discontent in society, which found its initial expression in the youth riots of autumn of 1980. (Laur *et al.*, 1995, p. 130; {1995_T_LAUR_04000})

Veneration of resistance against the Soviet regime is expressed in the novel, where Ivan Orav says: “The years I spent in the woods while fighting against Soviet rule are among the most beautiful years of my life.” (Kivirähk, 1995, p. 37; {1995_N_KIVI_01600}).

Last, the crimes of the Soviet regime against the Estonian nation could not to be forgotten. One author of a letter to the editor expressed concern that public media did not commemorate the date of the deportations (24 March 1949, when over 20,000 people – more than 2.5% of the Estonian population – were deported to Siberia) as they should. Additionally, as the deportations had taken place during the Soviet period, the author demanded that President Meri refrain from participating in the Victory Parade in Moscow on May 9:

... how little our press covers these cruel times of genocide. In particular, *Postimees* was singled out, where, in the March 24 issue, there was no mention of those who were taken to Siberia. ... I therefore do not understand the move taken by President Lennart Meri when he takes part in a victory parade in Moscow. It would be a blow to the face to all the deportees, the repressed, a desecration of the memory of those who were tortured and killed. (Loolaid, 1995; {1995_L_POST_00820})

The assessment of **Soviet Union: economy** included codes related to environmental, agricultural, rural and economic policy, collective farms, professional employment, living

conditions and standards, and (insufficient supply of) deficit goods, social benefits, income, and pensions. The economic dimension of the Soviet period received ambiguous assessments, although the textbook tended to approach it from the perspective of regional, cultural, and demographic changes resulting from the influx of (im)migrant workers:

The most significant demographic consequence of the command economy was the mass influx of migrant workers that began in the post-war years. (Laur *et al.*, 1997, p. 121; {1995_T_LAUR_03550})

The immigrants initially came predominantly from the north-western regions of Russia, and their main mass consisted of low-skilled workers and the recent rural population. They brought with them different habits, customs, traditions, and attitude to life, forming here compact settlement areas with a Russian-speaking population. (Laur *et al.*, 1997, p. 121; {1995_T_LAUR_03560})

Positive assessments were expressed exclusively in letters from readers who nostalgically remembered the Soviet-era living standards and guaranteed income from work:

The liquidation of collective and state farms gave a painful blow, leaving many without work, mainly tractor operators, drivers and farm workers. ... The government's view that only those who are inept, drunkards and lazy are unemployed should be refuted... In my opinion, our life in Estonia is going downhill. Everything is getting more and more expensive. ... Murderers are ready to kill both night and day. ... During the much-despised period of stagnation, everyone had a job, were properly dressed, and had full stomachs. (Kõrgesaar, 1995; {1995_L_POST_01050})

The Soviet period was positively evaluated when present levels of state family allowances were compared with those of the 'period of stagnation' (a term coined by Mikhail Gorbachev to describe the economic difficulties of the period under leadership of Leonid Brezhnev, 1964-1982):

Even in a bad period of stagnation, families with children were supported with tax breaks. Now, competent authorities first take care of filling their own wallets and find only hypocritical pennies for child support. (Kelt, 1995; {1995_L_POST_03940})

People living in the countryside were particularly inclined to perceive a decline in their quality of life:

Many have recently started to miss former times and recall how well they lived in state farms and collective farms. It is said that at present we can no longer cope with life in the countryside. (Rohu, 1995; {1995_L_PAEV_00080})

Pre-Soviet (imperial) **Russia** was assessed positively in cases where, in the 19th century, the living conditions of Estonian peasants improved, peasants received civil rights and liberties, had better opportunities for education, or legal regulation of their relationship with landlords was enhanced. Most negative identifications were related to the imposition of the Russian language and cultural Russification, which peaked between 1889 and 1905: "Russification was a severe blow to Estonian cultural life. The revival during the national movement was replaced by feelings of anguish and pessimism." (Laur, 1997, p. 16; {1995_T_LAUR_00340})

Germany/Baltic Germans were evaluated positively for their contribution to Estonian independence and promoted Estonian language and culture from 19th century until World War I, and negatively when Estonian national aspirations were challenged by Germanization:

Baltic German Estonian enthusiasts – Estophiles – studied the Estonian language and culture, published fiction of considerable artistic quality, published newspapers and schoolbooks, and founded several scientific societies. (Mäesalu *et al.*, 1997, p. 160; 1995_T_MAES_05520)}

In his activities, J. Tõnisson prioritized the development of national self-awareness, standing up to both Russification and Germanization. (Laur *et al.*, 1997, p. 22; {1995_T_LAUR_00550})

The **Interwar era**, discussed only in textbooks and in one novel, had mostly positive valences. For example, the main character of an allegorical novel, Ivan Orav says:

This was the time when animals and birds were still talking. It wasn't until the Russian soldier's boot closed the mouths of these weaklings. During the time of the Republic of Estonia, everyone could say what they wanted. (Kivirähk, 1995, p. 3; {1995_N_KIVI_00040})

Negative and ambiguous valences occurred only regarding the 1934-1940 period of authoritarian rule, known as the 'Silent Era' (Taagepera, 2017, pp. 52-57), when, to prevent the rise to power of the Union of Participants in the Estonian War of Independence (later known as Vaps Movement), "the candidates for the head of state, K. Päts and J. Laidoner, decided to carry out a military coup" (Laur *et al.*, 1995, p. 71; {1995_T_LAUR_02070}).

3. The predominant discourse and its challengers

In 1995, the hegemonic categories of identity were nationalism and market reasoning. The transition to a market economy was adopted with mixed feelings, especially among the general population, yet the vocabulary of market reasoning was generally assumed and applied beyond explicitly socioeconomic issues. For example, an author of a letter advocating for a conservative position regarding death penalty sought legitimation by employing the underlying principles of market economy:

... well, let's call it giving life for life. If someone takes another's life, why shouldn't we follow the principle in this age of a market economy: commodity for commodity. (S., 1995; {1995_L_POST_04030})

When the logic of market was used to legitimate conservative solution regarding death penalty (i.e., appealing to the calculation of the costs for the prisoner for life), it was used to support the liberal legalization of prostitution:

It is not possible to ban prostitution... Our country does not need another branch of the shadow economy. ... It is absurd to justify the ban on prostitution with ethical beliefs. Ethical beliefs are a personal matter for everyone in our democratic and censorship-free society, and they can only be regulated by law if they endanger the property or lives of their fellow citizens. ... Prostitution is a job just like any other. (Ala, 1995; {1995_L_POST_03680})

A degree of disagreement between elite and the masses regarding neoliberal market hegemony was anticipated, as the masses, as a rule, tend to be less supportive or more ambivalent towards markets, capitalism, and neoliberalism (Hopf, Allan 2016, pp. 221, 222). In this context, mass disagreement with the elite concerning the market economy was weak and did not identify an alternative challenger category that would have been more preferred over the market economy.

Nationalism was hegemonic and constituted a true 'collective identity' in a context where state-building and nation-building processes were still ongoing, although the official political elite

and state apparatus were already “visibly Estonianised” (Park 1994, p. 72). The dominant pattern of nationalism was ethnic/cultural, with a particular emphasis on language (proven knowledge of Estonian language is required for obtaining citizenship through naturalization). Cultural nationalism acted as a filter, through which present and past periods of independence and key historic others (Imperial Russia and Baltic Germans) were evaluated *positively* when they promoted or contributed to the rights and opportunities of Estonian language and culture, and *negatively* when they did the opposite.

The identity crisis arising from the smallness of both the state and the nation manifested itself as a persisting concern for national survival, particularly because prospects of joining NATO remained distant (the first document approved by Estonian Parliament officially confirming the goal of Estonia to become full member of Estonia was adopted in 1996, when started official negotiations with NATO preparing for accession), while the association agreement between Estonia and the EU was signed on 12 July 1995. Accordingly, key West-oriented aspirations included admiration for the examples of Western countries, particularly Sweden and Finland, European integration, and the idealization of the West as a place where humans experience true happiness.

Elite-mass agreement was reflected in shared discourses regarding the crises of public order, political corruption, inefficient bureaucracy, and the rising cleavage between political elite and people. Both the masses and elite responded to these issues with a degree of anti-elitism, which, at that time, was not accompanied with commitments either to populism or direct democracy. Mass disapproval of ex-communists in positions of political power served as a proxy for anti-elitist attitudes.

Social status and ‘class hierarchy’ remained a contentious issue, particularly within mass discourse, which associated socioeconomic stratification with the democratic political regime: “After all, our republic does not need this much-vaunted democracy, where a small part bathes in gold, while the rest fade in the soil.” (Rander, 1995; {1995_L_PAEV_01410}).

Additionally, the masses identified more strongly national identity than elite, associating it with traditions, conservative values, and rural life. Among the masses, there was some nostalgia for Soviet economic policy and living conditions, yet this identification did not associate the historical Soviet Union to any aspirational goal.

Russia remained a predominantly negative external Other, and Russian-speakers were associated with a security threat if they remained unintegrated into Estonian society. This sentiment was evident in 1995, when a Russian-based alliance of three parties gained six seats in the 1995 Riigikogu elections, and an increasing number of Russian-speakers had acquired Estonian citizenship by naturalization.

4. Conclusion

In 1995, the transition to market economy and representative democracy, as well as Estonian nation- and state-building, were advancing rapidly, though all remained “works in progress” amidst multiple crises. The ideal of the “rule of law” was still an aspiration for the future. The general lack of faith in police, trust in the state, and in state institutions and public officials was the most serious domestic problem (Drechsler 1995, p. 113).

Predominantly elite discourse continued to frame Estonia as a small, survival-oriented, and vulnerable nation, therefore necessitating both integration with the West and emulation of the more developed and more civilized Western countries. The drive to emulate the accomplishments of other countries can be interpreted as a crisis of subjective self-confidence or an identification of Self with inferiority and relative backwardness (Lebow, 2012, p. 181).

Both the market economy and nationalism were sacred and hegemonic, with no relevant challenger discourses. The masses grew increasingly critical of the political class, while maintain strong behavioural commitment to representative democracy. The 5 March 1995 parliamentary elections (the second of such elections, following the first on 20 September 1992), achieved a higher participation rate (68.5%) than even the Constitutional Referendum of 1992.

Table 1. Raw Count

Category	Total codes	Speeches	Textbooks	Newspapers	Novels	Movies	Letters
SO: Russia	253	2	94	108	35		14
HO: Soviet Union	230	4	58	21	106	4	37
SO: West	203	3	46	88	27	10	29
Market economy	146	22	20	23	8	9	64
Nationalist	117	3	49	30	9	6	20
Political class / elite	113	3	1	44	6	18	41
HO: Germany / Baltic Germans	103		102		1		
Rural / Pastoral	103		58	5	8	1	31
HO: Soviet Union: occupation	100		48	5	40		7
Religion	94		71	9	2	3	9
Order / Stability	90	21		25	1	15	28
Small state	86	11	40	21	9		5
Brave / Militant	84	1	36	14	10	14	9
Traditional	84	2	15	5	19	8	35
Independent / Free	79	7	52		8	2	10
Egalitarian: welfare state	75	1	7	19	1	1	46
Indigenous / Native	66		28	4	13		21
HO: Russia	64		58		1	3	2
HO: Soviet Union: economy	59		20	8	9		22
Democracy / Democratic	55	9	9	26			11
Local	53	1	34	14	3	1	
HO: Interwar Estonia	49		13		36		
Estonian language	48		25	5	1		17
Class hierarchy	46		19	2	1	21	3
Baltic	42	2	15	23			2
Meritocratic / Elitist	42	1			5	6	30
Trust in political institutions	35	2		25			8
Russian-speakers in Estonia	30	6	5	11	1		7
Competent / Efficient Government	29	5		2			22
Alcohol	28		3		4	16	5
SO: Northern Europe	26			11		8	7
Corruption	25	3		6		6	10
Youth / Youthful	16	10		1	1	1	3
Totals	2673	119	926	555	365	153	555

Table 2. Topography of Estonian identity

	Speeches	Textbooks	Op-eds	Novels	Movies	Letters
<i>Independent</i>						
Nationalist	++	++	++	+	+	++
Small state	++// -	- +	+	- ~		
Independent / Free	+++	++		+		
Indigenous / Native		+		~		+ ~
Baltic	/		+ ~ -			
Estonian language		++				++
Russian-speakers in Estonia	+ ~ -		-			
<i>Democratic</i>						
Political class / elite			--- ~	~	~~~// --	-- /
Democracy / Democratic	+++		++-			
Corruption	--				~ / -	-
Competent / Efficient Government	++					++-
Trust in political institutions			--			
<i>Conservative</i>						
Order / Stability	+++++ - - - ~		-- +		-- ~ ~ / +	++
Traditional		+		-- /	++ ~	++-
Brave / Militant		+ -		-	++ ~ ~ - -	
Rural / Pastoral		-- ~ +		/		++
Religion		+++ - / ~				
Alcohol					--- +	
Local		+	+			
<i>Market Liberal</i>						
Market economy	+++++ - - // ~		+ ~	-	+ ~ /	+++ - / ~
Class hierarchy		-			--- + + ~ ~	
Egalitarian / welfare state			- +			+++ ~ -
Meritocratic / Elitist					/ ~	++-
Youth / Youthful	-- + +					
<i>Significant Others</i>						
SO: West	++	++	++++ ~ ~ // -	-- / ~	// ~ +	++ ~
SO: Russia		----	---- ~ ~ +	--- / +		- +
SO: Northern Europe			+		/ - ~	+
<i>Historic Others</i>						
HO: Soviet Union	--	---	--	----- ~ ~ ~ ++	/	-- ~ +

HO: Soviet Union: occupation		--		---~/		-
HO: Soviet Union: economy		-	-	-		- +
HO: Russia		-- +				-
HO: Germany/Baltic Germans		--- + ~				
HO: Interwar Estonia				++ ~~/		

Salience of categories is measured on the following scale: 1.0–2.0 (1); 2.0–5.0 (2); 5.0–7.5 (3); 7.5–10.0 (4); above 10.0 (5).

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