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“Touched by Time”: Geopolitical Themes of Estonian National Identity through Song Festivals

Mandy L. Hoggard

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“TOUCHED BY TIME”: GEOPOLITICAL THEMES OF ESTONIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY THROUGH FOLKLORE AND SONG FESTIVALS

by

Mandy L. Hoggard

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Political Science

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2016
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ABSTRACT

“Touched by Time”: Geopolitical Themes of Estonian National Identity through Song Festivals

by

Mandy L. Hoggard, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2016

Major Professor: Dr. Colin Flint
Department: Political Science

Estonian national identity is defined by its centuries-long struggle for independence and autonomy. This thesis examines this struggle and resulting identity through the lens of the laulupidu, or song festival, and its employment as a vehicle of political mobilization and re-constructor of Estonian history. Regarding folklore, in this case festivals and folk songs, as containers of the soul of the nation, I show how Estonians have produced and reproduced their national identity through the practice which they hold sacred: choral singing. I implemented a critical geopolitical approach coupled with Billig’s concepts of ‘hot’ and banal nationalism, and Paasi’s focus on independence, to study the 2014 song festival, entitled “Touched by Time. The Time to Touch.” Utilizing the song selection from the 2014 festival and comparing it against the programs from festivals ranging from 1869-2009 (from which selections were gleaned
for the 2014 event), this thesis shows how Estonian national identity and historical memory are reconstructed through the symbolic choice of song.

(106 pages)
PUBLIC ABSTRACT

“Touched by Time”: Geopolitical Themes of Estonian National Identity Through Folklore and Song Festivals

Mandy L. Hoggard

Estonian national identity—how Estonians imagine their values, history, and place in the world—is defined by their centuries-long struggle for independence and autonomy. This thesis examines this struggle and resulting identity through the lens of the laulupidu, or song festival, and its employment as a vehicle of political mobilization and re-constructor of Estonian history. Regarding folklore, in this case festivals and folk songs, as containers of the soul of the nation, I show how Estonians have produced and reproduced their national identity through the practice which they hold sacred: choral singing. I implemented a critical geopolitical approach, which emphasizes the power of discourse and representation, to examine the song festivals. I coupled this approach with Billig’s concepts of ‘hot’ and banal nationalism, and Paasi’s focus on independence, to study the 2014 song festival, entitled “Touched by Time. The Time to Touch.” Utilizing the song selection from the 2014 festival and comparing it against the programs from festivals ranging from 1869-2009 (from which selections were gleaned for the 2014 event), this thesis shows how Estonian national identity and historical memory are reconstructed through the symbolic choice of song.
I would like to acknowledge and thank Professor Colin Flint for his mentorship and guidance throughout my entire thesis-writing and graduate school experience. Thank you to my other committee members, Drs. Lynne S. McNeill and Robert Nalbandov, for their support, advisement, and useful comments and suggestions. I would also like to thank Shelly and Sara, the wonderful Political Science office staff, for their logistical support over the past two years.

Especially, I would like to thank my family and friends. Thank you to my husband, Michael, for his encouragement and endless support, and for helping me to put in that extra bit of work each day when I did not believe I could do any more. Also, I thank my fellow graduate students, who always make office life interesting and entertaining. I am grateful for all of your support and encouragement; you truly made this thesis possible.

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INTRODUCTION

The soul of a nation—its identity, worldview, and values—can often be found in its folklore (Dundes 1989, 8), which includes cultural traditions, festivals, rites of passage, nationally enshrined epics, legends, and myths, as well as folk songs and dances. One nation where this is certainly true is Estonia, where traditional choral music and song and dance festivals have entered the realm of the sacred for their intimate ties to Estonian nationhood and identity (Kuutma 1996a).

The Estonian identity developed in the crucible of multiple rounds of occupation and foreign rule. Invaders and occupiers hailing from Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Poland, and Russia have all controlled Estonian territory and waged wars over Estonian land in the past 800 years (Taagepera 1993, 16-17). It would seem that the natives of the land (identified by their Estonian language) who had resided in this much-contested territory since as early as 7500 BC were doomed to continually battle for freedom and autonomy. As a small nation often invaded by military giants, they frequently lived as inferior citizens of their own land under a foreign, ruling elite. It is often suppressed or minority cultures that feel the deepest need to define themselves (Dundes 1989, 10). Identity is just as much about similarities as it is about differences, and Estonians were almost never lacking an “other” with whom to contrast the self.

In my thesis, I examine Estonian identity through the lens of their song festivals. The Estonian laulupidu (song festival) has been a “powerful ritual of political mobilization” through all its eras—both in times of freedom and times of occupation (Brüggeman and Kasekamp 2014, 259). Song festivals are mass events in which choirs, bands, and dance troops participate from all regions of Estonia. At present, it occurs
every five years over a three-day period and takes place in the capital city of Tallinn.

Over the course of Estonia’s sometimes turbulent history, song festivals adapted to fill
the needs of the people as well as accommodate the ruling regime. They may have
changed method and message, but never ultimate purpose. Depending on the sentiments,
political conditions, and current events at the time of song festivals, “images of the past
(ware) … reconstructed in a selective way, (and) song festivals (were) on each occasion
made to suit present needs” (Brüggeman and Kasekamp 2014, 259). Today, one of those
present needs, and perhaps the most salient, is the need to reconstruct and affirm Estonian
national identity. Given tensions on Estonia’s Russian border as well as increased
integration with Europe and the rest of the world, this is a critical time in Estonia’s
independence and the prospect of the future is looming. The cultural memory of
Estonians was “formed in the context of a radical re-writing of history, of writing
Estonians into history as a nation” (Tamm 2008, 503). This re-forming and re-asserting
continues, as Estonians define the identity they will carry into their hopeful, but
uncertain, future.

The effort to reconstruct Estonian history and heritage was apparent at the 2014
song festival. This particular festival presented a unique opportunity to examine Estonian
conceptions of their nation—past, present, and future. Since 2004, each song festival has
been given a theme. In 2014, the theme was “Aja Puudutus. Puudutuse Aeg,” or
“Touched by Time. The Time to Touch.” This festival focused on the passage of time and
its ability to create mutual heritage, memories, and identities. In the official words of the
festival, “This is the story of time manifesting itself in our ancestors’ heritage and us
shaping our time through our own touches, contacts, caresses and impacts” (Eesti Laulu-ja Tantsupeo SA 2014, 5). The first concert of the festival, entitled “Touched by Time,” told the story of a nation through song. Each song festival, beginning with the first in 1869, was acknowledged through the performance of a piece of music that was performed at that specific festival. The second concert, “The Time to Touch,” celebrated the ability of the Estonian nation to choose their own path and create their own identity: “It is ours to decide what will be our time’s touch and story. It is the time of our touches” (Eesti Laulu-ja Tantsupeo SA 2014, 5). The meaning of “touch” here is significant. It implies the ability to influence and impact the world. It is agency and actor focused, emphasizing the power to shape and mold one’s own story and future. The entire festival symbolized a combination of a remembrance of the past and a hopeful outlook for the future of the Estonian nation.

Focusing on the selective construction of Estonian national identity through the 2014 Laulupidu, I endeavored to answer the question of how Estonian history was reconstructed through song selection and theme. The folklorist Henry Glassie asserted, “history is not the past; it is an artful assembly of materials from the past, designed for usefulness in the future” (2003, 176). Following this assumption, I examined the following questions: How do Estonians imagine their past? How was the Estonian national identity represented at the “Touched by Time” concert? How do Estonians imagine that their past as a nation influences their present and future? I hypothesized that songs were intentionally selected to construct a specific version of history—that of a resilient and independent Estonia, always patriotic to the Fatherland and resistant to
enemy occupiers. While many songs of differing type and theme were performed at every song festival, I suspected that only those of a certain type or theme were chosen for the 2014 festival.

To answer these questions, I employed a theoretical framework of critical geopolitics, with a special focus on ‘hot’ and banal nationalism (Billig 1995) and the active memory of independence (Paasi 2015). By examining every previous song festival and comparing it with the repertoire of the “Touched by Time” concert, I examined what themes and types of songs were used to reconstruct Estonian history and reaffirm Estonian identity. As folklorist Deborah A. Kapchan explains, “In their function as either preservers or reshapers of tradition, social performances are indexes of social transformation. Freezing the frames of such performative moments and comparing them to one another over time, it is possible to understand how individuals and collectivities create their local or national identities and how events such as civic celebrations, pageants, parades, and other crowd rituals define social movements” (2003, 122). By closely comparing and analyzing song festival choice, I assert that we can witness the (re)creation of Estonian identity—how they were “Touched by Time”—through their historic song festivals. By so doing, I attempted to discover how Estonians imagine their nation—its past, its current role and identity, and its place in the world.

My findings show how the Estonian song festivals evolved through multiple eras, including the steady increase in Estonian-origin songs as well as an increase in diversity of song themes. In addition to classifying and comparing song themes, I analyzed the “Touched by Time” concert in depth, and found that the focus and climax of the concert
was Estonian independence. This independence was multifaceted and included a longing for independence, sorrow over independence lost, and celebration in independence regained. This revealed insights into Estonian national identity and how Estonians imagine themselves. Overall, Estonians emphasize their resilience as a nation in overcoming occupation and domination. Additionally, Estonians regard their unique language and culture, including their national pastime of choral singing, as essential to their identity. By simultaneously finding strength from the past and looking forward with anticipation, Estonians imagine themselves as a small, but strong, progressive nation with a bright future.
HISTORY OF THE ESTONIAN SONG FESTIVALS

The first song festival, held in 1869, occurred in the midst of Estonia’s national awakening, which began in the 1860s and continued to the year 1900 (Raun 2001, 57). This national awakening was characterized by important agrarian reforms, increased general education, and a heightened awareness of and contact with the world beyond the Baltic region. However, the most seminal focus of the national awakening was the development of a modern Estonian nation, both in terms of culture and politics (ibid., 57). The first all-Estonian song festivals were at the apex of the national awakening, providing a medium and a venue for the celebration of the Estonian culture and language. The organizers of these first festivals were influential men who were also leaders of Estonia’s political awakening. Accordingly, the festivals they organized were focused on highlighting Estonia as a distinct nation. Subsequent festivals were also political and nationalistic in nature and continued through four distinct eras of Estonian history: the Tsarist era (1869-1910), the independence era (1923-1938), the Soviet era (1947-1990), and the second period of independence, post-Soviet rule (1993-present day) (Brüggeman and Kasekamp 2014). The political climate of the festivals varied greatly through the years depending on the concurrent governmental and external situations, but the song festivals always retained their distinct, if sometimes disguised, nationalism.
Tsarist Era Song Festivals

The Tsarist era was the stage for the first seven song festivals, the earliest of which was held in Tartu, Estonia in 1869 (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 12). At this time, modern Estonia was split into two Russian provinces: Estland encompassed northern Estonia (including the modern capital, Tallinn), while the southern half of modern Estonia and the northern part of modern Latvia were part of the Livland province (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Nineteenth-century German map of Estland and Livland. Estland is the northernmost province. Source: Estonian National Library Digital Archive.
Baltic Germans, still present from the German conquest of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, comprised a local ruling elite class in the provinces, yet the Russian Tsar and bureaucracy appointed governors who oversaw both Estland and Livland (Raun 2001, 15, 60).

The first festival was organized by the Vanemuise Society, which was named after the mythical god of music and established to promote musical culture in Tartu. Johan Voldemar Jannsen, founder of the Vanemuise Society and influential newspaper editor, was a political moderate who believed that Estonians should gradually emancipate themselves from foreign rule by working within the existing Baltic-German framework (Raun 2001, 64). He was impressed by German song festivals of the era and desired to emulate their example while at the same time creating something distinctly Estonian. The festival took place on 18-20 June 1869 in a Tartu garden. Eight hundred and seventy-eight singers or musicians participated in fifty-one choirs or bands to perform twenty-seven songs in total (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 12). Because of the local ruling German elite and the German nature of the song festival at the time, much of the festival consisted of both secular and religious songs of German origin (which were performed in Estonian). However, there were three original Estonian patriotic songs as well, including Mu Isamaa on minu Arm (“My Fatherland is my Love”), Mu Isamaa, mu Ōnn ja Rõõm (“My Fatherland, my Happiness and Joy”) and Sind Surmani (“Till I Die”), which were received very well (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 240).

The song festivals continued throughout the Tsarist era, with festivals in Tartu in 1879, 1891, and 1894, and festivals in Tallinn in 1880, 1896, and 1910. With each
festival, the choral repertoire as well as the scope of the festivals changed and expanded. In the first *laulupidu*, the percentage of songs written by Estonian composers was only eleven percent; by the seventh song festival in 1910, that number had increased to seventy-eight percent. Estonia was still governed by the Russians and Baltic Germans and had undergone many “Russification” reforms at the end of the nineteenth century. However, the festivals truly reflected the nationalist sentiment of the age and were successful at cultivating an Estonian culture and bringing ethnic Estonians together from all corners of the two Russian-Estonian provinces (Raun 2001, 65-66). This success was mostly due to “the enthusiasm of the participants, the energy of the choir leaders, and national spirit” (Talve 2005, 484 quoted in Brüggeman and Kasekamp 2014, 263).

Towards the end of the Tsarist era, the festivals included less German hymns and secular songs and more Estonian origin songs. For the first time in 1891, the festival president was an Estonian, Johan Köler, and Estonian composers wrote more than half of the songs. The Estonian Writer’s Society organized the festival, which was the most successful up to that point, boasting more performers (2,700) than the previous three festivals combined and fifteen thousand spectators (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 243). The song festivals became a form of Estonian national monument. Estonians could not erect traditional physical monuments because of Russian and German rule, so the festivals became the heart of Estonian nationalism (Brüggeman and Kasekamp 2014, 264). By the last song festival of the Tsarist era (1910), the grand majority of songs performed were of Estonian origin, with the exception of a couple German religious pieces, a handful of songs for brass bands written by foreign composers, and the official conclusion, “God
save the Tsar.” The Estonia Society organized the festival, but the Russian governor heavily censored the content, changing many lyrics to be more Russian friendly. After the conclusion, participants stood and spontaneously sang *Mu Isamaa, Mu Õnn ja Rõõm* (“My Fatherland, my Happiness and Joy”) without a conductor, which would become the future Estonian national anthem (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 246).

### The Era of Independence

The next song festival was not held for another thirteen years. World War I swept over Europe, beginning as a Russian-German conflict and ending as a war of independence for the peoples of the Baltic (Taagepera 1993, 41). The Bolsheviks ousted the Tsar in 1917, and on 24 February 1918, Estonia declared its independence from Russia as an autonomous state which would include the northern province of Estland as well as the Estonian-speaking areas of Livland (ibid., 41). The Estonians fought the Baltic Germans and Bolsheviks until the end of 1919 before gaining true autonomy. Similar processes took place in Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland, and by 1920 each had achieved a similar result: independent, parliamentary republics based on geographic areas of common culture and language (ibid., 48).

The *Eesti Lauljate Liit* (Estonian Singers’ Union - ELL), an all-Estonian organization of singers and musicians, organized the eighth song festival (1923) over the span of two years. It was the first festival during the period of independence and took place in Tallinn (see Figure 2). Estonians from every part of the country were invited to
participate, and the ELL appointed seventy regional choir directors to conduct rehearsals in their respective areas. Both Juhan Kukk, the State Elder, and Jaan Tõnisson, a member of parliament, gave speeches (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 247). This festival received more international attention than ever before: visiting choirs from Finland and Hungary performed and visitors and press came from Latvia, Finland, Italy, Denmark, England, Sweden and Poland (ibid., 247).

![Figure 2: 1923 Laulupidu, held in Tallinn. Source: Estonian National Library Digital Archives.](image)

Altogther, 10,562 singers and musicians performed in 386 choirs or bands during the eighth song festival. The next festival (the ELL decided at the eighth festival that song festivals would be held every five years) was the first to take place at the official song festival grounds in Tallinn—where the festival is held today—and boasted 15,049 participants in 436 choirs or bands (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 248).
While festivals during the Tsarist period had been covertly political, now they were significantly more overt in their celebration of Estonian identity, language, and nationalism. For the first time, Estonians participated in the festivals on a mass level, traveling to Tallinn from their home counties. At the ninth festival in 1928, 150,000 participants and observers were present at the song festival grounds, which was a full one-eighth of the population of Estonia (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 248). The tenth festival (1933) was the first to be broadcast over radio, which made the festival accessible to those not physically present. At that same festival, the newspaper *Rahvaleht* ran a song popularity contest in which 22,000 people cast votes (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 249).

Additionally, the festivals expanded to include “increasing ritualization, invention of traditions and commercialization in the form of souvenirs, commemorative postage stamps, pins, badges, and specially minted coins” (Brüggeman and Kasekamp 2014, 266). It had become a true mass culture event, centered on celebrating and perpetuating Estonian nationalism and identity. During the last song festival of the first independent period (1938), the nation celebrated its twentieth anniversary of independence and a mass folk dance was added to the festival (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 248).

**Soviet Era Song Festivals**

Estonia’s brief period of independence came to an abrupt end during World War II. The USSR officially annexed Estonia on 6 August 1940 and began the official process of Sovietization (Taagepera 1993, 63-64). Communist leaders ascended to power in local
and national government positions, the USSR established collective farms, education was taken over, and existing cultural and civic organizations were disbanded, including the ELL. However, it was not until June the following year that the “mass terror began; 6,640 were deported in a single night” and were given only hours to pack (ibid. 67). Men were sent to labor camps while women and children began the long journey to Siberia to live on collective farms. The Estonians were hopeful when they received word of a German attack on the USSR, but this led only to increased arrests and deportations in Estonia. Their hope for a restoration of independence was lost when their old enemies (yet the lesser evil compared to the USSR), the Germans, returned to occupy Estonia in July of 1941.

Estonians endured similar hardships under German rule, including mass deportations to work camps, compulsory labor service, and censorship in accordance with the Nazi regime in all levels of society (Taagepera 1993, 69-70). The ELL was reinstated under the Nazis, and the association tentatively made plans for another song festival in 1944 (Brüggeman and Kasekamp 2014, 266). However, the plans never came to fruition due to the Red Army’s advance and subsequent USSR re-occupation of Estonia, which was nearly complete by October 1944 (Taagepera 1993, 71). The first five years of occupation after independence took a great toll on the country, including its beloved song festivals; many of those who organized, participated in, and wrote and conducted music for the festivals were either deported, fled to the West, or did not survive the war (Brüggeman and Kasekamp 2014, 266).
The Soviet era song festivals can be succinctly summed up as “performance serving propaganda” (ibid., 266). Perhaps the only reason the song festivals were allowed to continue was the fondness Soviet leaders had for mass events which were “national in form, socialist in content” and were used to form unity while employing the vehicle of local custom (Raun 2001, 188). Choral singing is accessible to amateurs and experts alike; because the song festivals represented “music for the masses,” it aligned well with communist ideology and the Soviet leaders preferred it to other, more elite, forms of entertainment (Puderbaugh 2006, 88-89). The song festivals were nationalistic in nature from their very conception, and the Soviet leadership continued to tolerate this nationalism because they believed that “the Soviet Union could disarm nationalism’s class-transcendent appeal by controlling and granting only those particular forms of statehood that served larger Soviet interests” (Puderbaugh 2006, 93).

Communist party officials strictly controlled the Soviet era song festivals. The content and dates of the festivals were tailored to fit the goals of the communist regime. They assigned a new five-year cycle that corresponded to the celebration of significant Soviet dates, as well as regulated the song selection and content. Additionally, they oversaw the traditional pre-song festival procession through Tallinn to include portraits of Stalin, and later Marx, Engels, and Lenin. They banned many of the most overtly patriotic songs, including “My Fatherland,” while adding songs such as “Ode to Stalin” (Brüggeman and Kasekamp 2014, 268; Raun 2001, 188). The 1950 and 1955 festivals were reportedly extremely politicized, and the singers carried slogans “criticizing capitalist ‘war mongers’ reflecting the international tensions of the Cold War”
The 1960 festival was the first ever held at the modern song festival stadium. This festival included more Estonian compositions than the previous two festivals, and significantly, at the end of the festival the stadium broke out in a spontaneous rendition of the banned song “My Fatherland is my Love” (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 253).

The festivals retained their political air of resistance throughout the Soviet occupation. They functioned as a container of Estonian identity and a memory of an independent Estonia. Two sociologists went so far as to assert that “the single most important factor in preserving national identity during the long years of Soviet rule was participation in the song festivals” (Rakfeldt-Leetmaa and Rakfeldt 1996, 1574, quoted in Brüggeman and Kasekamp 2014, 269). In the end, the Soviet era festivals were “a sort of compromise, a stalemate between Soviet patriotism and Estonian nationalism” (Brüggeman and Kasekamp 2014, 271). The last strictly Soviet era song festival took place in 1985.

Return to Independence

Three years later, in the summer of 1988, the famous ‘Singing Revolution’ took the capital of Estonia by storm, as multiple long summer nights played host to spontaneous song festivals at the song festival grounds in Tallinn. These summer-night song festivals culminated on 11 September 1988 at the Eestimaa Laul 1988 (The Song of Estonia 1988) celebration, organized by the Popular Front. Nearly 300,000 people
gathered at the song festival stadium (a quarter of the entire Estonian population) to sing patriotic songs, hear speeches, and most importantly, to demand that Estonia be independent once more (Taagepera 1993, 142). The next year, on 23 August 1989, Estonians joined in solidarity with Latvians and Lithuanians to form the ‘Baltic Chain,’ a human chain connecting the nations of the Baltic from the Gulf of Finland to southern Lithuania. Together, they called for the reinstatement of their independence from the USSR (ibid., 156-157). The twenty-first song festival (1990), while still technically a Soviet festival, was much more open in song selection (a return of Estonian patriotic and religious songs was permitted) as well as festival organization. Singers and musicians formed the Management of Song and Dance Festivals organization to coordinate the festival. “Ärkamise Aeg” (The Time of Awakening), by René Eespere, was a new patriotic song for the 1990 festival. It was very warmly received and aptly conveyed the mood of the festival. Mikk Mikiver expressed a hopeful sentiment at the conclusion of the festival: “Today we sing this song still at the borderline of shadows and light. But the light is growing!” (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 257). The light was indeed growing—finally, after a long struggle, Estonia officially reclaimed independence from the Soviet Union on 20 August 1991.

The first general song festival of the re-independent Estonia took place during the summer of 1994 and was organized by the Head Committee of the Estonian Song Festival. Democratically elected president Lennart Meri presided over the festival, and Estonians celebrated their new independence with a concert entitled “Awake, My Heart.” In total, 25,802 singers and musicians participated in 817 choirs and bands (Eesti Laulu-

While the festivals no longer functioned as a vehicle for resistance against occupation and foreign rule, they continued to represent Estonian pride, spirit, and national identity. For the 1999 song festival, the Department of Conducting in the Estonian Music Academy put forward in their idea plan the notion that “it was important to value song festivals as carriers of the Estonian identity, and to preserve and renew the song festival tradition” (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 258). This idea took hold and has carried the song festivals into the twenty-first century. The song festival is dear to the Estonian people; most have even performed in it themselves or at least have been spectators singing along in the audience. In 1999, President Lennart Meri proclaimed that “The song festival is a matter of the heart. Like the Estonian language and spirit, like love!” (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 258). As the outlet of resistance during times of occupation and the symbol of national identity in modern times, the Estonian Laulupidu has proved essential in the formation and maintenance of Estonian nationalism. It has captured the soul of a people in a way only the artful and sacred can. By expressing themselves through song, Estonians forged a unique culture and identity that sustained them through troubling times and gave them the courage to reclaim their nation and homeland. The 2014 festival, “Touched by Time. The Time to Touch,” highlighted this very theme, showcasing how
the festival songs, and the festival itself, have carried Estonian nationalism and identity for 145 years.
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL APPROACH

A critical geopolitical approach provides insights into the geopolitical representations within the Estonian National Song Festival. Especially, Billig’s concepts of ‘hot’ and banal nationalism and Paasi’s focus on independence illustrate the intersection of geopolitics, national identity, folklore and songs. Over the past three decades, the field of geopolitics has been rapidly changing and expanding. Emerging as a new mode to analyze the complexities of geopolitical imaginations, visions, and discourses, geopolitics has fostered the creation of new ‘ways of seeing’ and new forms of analysis in previously overlooked data. This literature review focuses on three main points: first, the origins of the field of geopolitics, with a special focus on the modern geopolitical imagination; second, the rise of critical geopolitics and the expansion of the scope of the field; and third, new applications and new directions of study in geopolitics, including audience studies, studies in nationalism, as well as new approaches and methodologies, which are the basis for my study of Estonian National Song Festivals.

The Modern Geopolitical Imagination and Traditional Geopolitics

The first modern conception of geopolitics was rooted in the practice, scholarship, and cartography of rival European powers who were each seeking the advancement of state interests (Ó Tuathail 1996, 1). In the post-1648 Westphalian world of nation-states and rising imperial powers, European monarchs were eager to organize and administer space; they sought to define, delimit, and control territory in a way that was previously
unknown. Their study of geography was not a mere description of the world, but rather a political writing of space that assigned meaning and function. Early imperial geographers practiced a specific form of knowledge—more of a verb than a noun, “geo-graphing” was the application of “knowledge conceived in imperial capitals and dedicated to the territorialization of space” to expand territorial control (Ó Tuathail 1996, 1). Map production and dissemination were also central to “geo-graphing”; once an imperial power seized a new territory, “the function of cartography was (then) to transform seized space into a legible, ordered imperial territory” (ibid., 3). This so called “writing/righting” of space is a powerful tool employed for the discursive creation of spatial and territorial identity (Ó Tuathail 1996, 2; Strandsbjerg 2008).

John Agnew (2003) described the emergence of “classical geopolitics” as the specific paradigm that permeated the thought of European statesmen in the post-Westphalian world. The “modern geopolitical imagination” (MGI) that emerged consisted of four major assumptions that have continually shaped global politics and conquest since the sixteenth century (Agnew 2003): (1) Seeing the world as a single, whole entity, (2) the turning of time into space, (3) imagining the world as exclusively composed of territorial states, and (4) that states continually pursue primacy (Agnew 2003, 10). The modern geopolitical imagination was the foundation for how we see the world today, and most practitioners of geopolitics embrace its tenets. However, its intellectual foundations and practical applications are waning in credibility and frequency, and many political geographers argue that we should imagine the world in a different way (Agnew 2003, 128; Ó Tuathail 1996; Dittmer 2010). The critique of the
modern geopolitical imagination that revitalized academic geopolitics in the 1980s and 1990s was called critical geopolitics.

Critical Geopolitics

This revitalized geopolitics was focused on interrogating and problematizing the traditional view that “geopolitics is taken to be a domain of hard truths, material realities and irrepressible natural facts” (Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992, 192). This involved acknowledging that the enlightenment-era conception of an objective, disembodied gaze was an illusion. The cartographers and statesmen who once practiced geopolitics sporting a badge of objectivity were in fact acting subjectively to influence action and perception (Ó Tuathail 1996, 3). Critical geopolitics incorporated elements of poststructuralism, which was popular in other social science fields as well, by embracing the importance of culture and especially language in assigning meaning to the spaces and places of the world (Dittmer 2010, 28). While traditional geopolitics focused primarily on political and economic structure, critical geopolitics instead emphasized the power of language, discourse, and imagery to effectively represent the world in a specific way (ibid., 28).

Geopolitical Discourse

The concept of discourse has been central to re-conceptualizing geopolitics. In their seminal article of 1992, Ó Tuathail and Agnew proclaimed that, “Geopolitics…should be critically re-conceptualized as a discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft ‘spatialize’ international politics in such a way as to represent it
as a ‘world’ characterized by particular types of places, peoples, and dramas” (192). In this definition, discourse entails much more than speech or a piece of writing. It is meant as a cache of information that can be called upon to imply meaning. It is “sets of capabilities people have, as sets of socio-cultural resources used by people in the construction of meaning about their world and their activities” (ibid., 193). In its new conception, geopolitics is therefore a discursive practice in which power-wielders strategically call upon sets of knowledge to spatialize territory and assign meaning to world events. Discourses are highly varied and subject to human practices; they are constantly being invented and reinvented.

Early critical geopolitics scholarship grasped onto this concept of discourse and sought to demonstrate its power, or in other words, to “deconstruct, unravel, and expose discourses in order to lay bare the schemes of power operating beneath them” (Müller 2008, 325). Joanne Sharp examined articles from the popular magazine Reader’s Digest, which were published during the Cold War and were influential in creating and maintaining a villainous image of the Soviet Union (Sharp 1996). Klaus Dodds studied the discursive impact of cartoons in his article on Steve Bell and his cartoons’ impact during the Falklands War (1996). These are just two examples of the many ways scholars studied geopolitical discourse in the 1990s, including through newspaper, speeches, magazines, and cartoons.

At its core, critical geopolitics is closely related to theories and approaches in other fields—specifically, the constructivist school in international relations, which embraces similar theories and methodologies. Highly focused on social interactions and
how they shape international relations, constructivist scholars seek to find meaning in the
world through social interaction and experience. Constructivists reject the assertion that
we are able to objectively access reality and instead seek to show how our perceptions of
the world are socially constructed. Indeed, this approach challenges the assumption that
identities and interests are simply “given” in international relations—they must be
created (and constantly recreated) over time and through multiple interactions. Nicholas
Onuf, a founding scholar of constructivism, drew on the linguistic theory of Ludwig
Wittgenstein, who argued that language is the medium through which we both perceive
and make our world (Onuf 2013, 47-49). Other scholars in the field also urge a return to
language in international relations, and argue that language is the primary medium of
social construction and central to the foundation of international relations (Epstein 2013).

Critical theory has also shaped some key tenets of constructivism, namely the
rejection of solely positivist methods for obtaining knowledge and the notion that
identities and concepts are not fixed, but rather are changing entities dependent on social
experience and change (Griffiths, Roach, and Solomon 2009, 126). Constructivist IR
scholars and critical geopoliticians share a focus on the role of language and discourse in
international politics. The difference is that critical geopolitics pays close attention to
how places and spaces are discursively constructed—an essential element in
understanding nationalism.
Issues with Discourse: Conceptualization and Methodology

While discursive studies in geopolitics were highly successful and popular, at the same time the concept of discourse remained under-theorized and over-used, and the methodology remained ambiguous. Only a few authors have truly attempted to implement a systematized methodology (Ó Tuathail 2002; Müller 2010), and a common approach or standard of analysis has not yet been adopted. Müller (2008) pointed out the skewed emphasis on texts and images and the lack of focus on actual practice, which is crucial in producing and reproducing discourse. He also showed that while we are often actor-focused in our discursive studies, arguing that so-and-so’s speeches, cartoons, or articles are producing a discourse, it is actually more complicated.

Individuals cannot control discourse; they can either be enabled or restrained by discourse. Müller referred to this as the agency/structure dualism. He drew on the logic of Michel Foucault (1992) to conclude that “individuals can only acquire meaning if they identify themselves with the positions that discourses construct and thereby become subjects” and “It is not the individual that structures and manipulates discourse but vice-versa — discourses speak through the individual” (Müller 2008, 326-327). Much of the field of critical geopolitics has centered on actor-created texts that shape and form discourses, but Müller contended that this needs to change: we must acknowledge that individuals are not free to create discourses and that the field must embrace the study of discourse as practice if it is to move forward. A concept of discourse which includes social practice as well as language is better suited to analyze a complicated world in which individuals navigate through multiple discourses, all the while being both enabled
and restrained, to powerfully communicate and concert change (Müller 2008; Laclau and Mouffe 1990). The inclusion of practice also opens up the discipline to research in previously untapped areas, such as micro-contexts that have previously been overlooked.

**Popular Geopolitics**

One of these areas is popular geopolitics, or the geopolitics experienced by the seemingly insignificant, everyday person. Popular geopolitical discourse has significant impact on world events and conceptions of geopolitical realities. Popular geopolitics refers to the commonplace geopolitical discourses ordinary people are exposed to every day. Often manifested in widespread and taken-for-granted knowledge, popular geopolitics stems from the way average people understand and speak about their world. This discourse comes from more traditional sources such as the news media as well as non-traditional sources, such as comic books, movies, novels, and the internet (Dittmer 2010, 15). Popular geopolitics rests on the comprehension of certain identities, often called imagined communities, that inform the hearer of a discourse how they should think about a certain event. An “imagined community” is a group of people, often a nation, which is bound together by a common culture, language, and literature (Anderson 1983, 6). These imagined communities are a foundation for creating other “imaginary geographies” or “geographical imaginations” (Gregory 1994), which are conceptions of “truths” about how the world functions and the ways in which power is wielded. These geographical imaginations are most often linked to nationalities and national identities.
The study of popular geopolitics opened the field to non-traditional research and methodologies as well as introduced a new research agenda that focuses on everyday lived experiences (Dittmer and Gray 2010). A new round of popular geopolitics analysis began, and previously untapped areas of study were opened for exploration. For example, Dodds and Kirby analyzed the discourses of laughter and unlaughter, a category that would normally be neglected in classical geopolitical analysis (2013). Additionally, Liu, An, and Zhu (2015) employed a combined practical and popular geopolitical approach in their analysis of the popular songs of the China Central Television Spring Festival Gala. This new research agenda, which was remarkably open in its possibilities and methodologies, required an understanding and incorporation of new fields and approaches, such as feminist geopolitics, audience studies, non-representational studies, embodiment, emotion, and performativity.

Feminist Geopolitics and Audience Studies

Feminist geopolitics scholars seek to “dissolve the divide between the public and private spheres” to show how the private and domestic can simultaneously be political (Dittmer and Gray 2010, 1666). The goal of this scholarship is to empower and give a voice to those who are usually behind the scenes and who live their lives almost exclusively in a private sphere. Women’s bodies are an inherent, yet often hidden, part of international relations (Dowler and Sharp 2001, 168). Women often operate, with exception, on the international scale at a mundane level; they are usually not decision makers. Conversely, their places are as “international labourers and migrants, as images
in international advertising and as ‘victims’ to be protected by international peacekeepers” (Dowler and Sharp 2001, 168). While this means that women are usually not in the spotlight of international affairs, it does not mean they are absent. Women’s “agency is hidden from the traditional gaze of geopolitics,” and consequently feminist scholars sought to question why this is the case and what can be done to bring women’s voices forward and rewrite them into the traditionally masculine accounts of war, violence, and politics (ibid., 168-169). Accomplishing this feat goes back to the body and discourse—both to conceive of the body as a site of performance and to recognize that discourses manifest themselves through the body. Women and their bodies become the subjects of political discourses due to their inherent involvement in conflict and international affairs. Their role is often ignored, obscuring half of the truth.

The concept of performativity, specifically bodily performance, is linked to feminist theory and feminist geopolitics. Indeed, “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act,’ but rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (Butler 1993, 2). In this way, through repeated performances identities become fixed and the material body becomes embedded in discourse (Dittmer and Gray 2010, 1666). Another way to consider feminist geopolitics is through the lens of emotion. The emotions an individual feels when exposed to the geopolitics of everyday life may include joy, fear, apprehension, pride, anger, and (in)security. Dittmer and Gray (2010, 1667) wondered what popular geopolitics would look like if we studied the minutiae of everyday emotion. Combining the feminist geopolitics of the body as well as the experience of everyday emotion could
produce an interesting look into how geopolitics is experienced on the deepest, most personal levels.

Fan and audience studies in geopolitics also gained momentum as a part of ‘popular geopolitics 2.0.’ Audience studies recognize the reaction of audiences to geopolitical literature, film, comics, etc. as a “constituent power” in their message (Dittmer and Gray 2010, 1669). “Because audiences have differing degrees and varieties of cultural capital, audiences create their own systems of meanings within a text, consciously and unconsciously, which may or may not overlap or reflect that which it was originally intended to convey” (ibid., 1669). The meaning created by audiences is powerful; the way in which audiences engage with media can be influential in forming opinions and worldview. Audiences are the “location of ‘meaning making’” (Dittmer and Dodds 2008, 446). Fans can join together to create “interpretive communities,” or groups of people who prescribe similar meanings to text due to social and cultural similarities. Performances and the fan bases that consume them suggest that the creation and adoption of geopolitical discourses entail the coming together of a variety of practices and representations in particular settings, such as a song festival.

Affect and Assemblages

To address the intersection of practices, representations, and events, Müller (2015) suggested that geopolitics research become “more-than-representational.” Geopolitics includes much more than non-textual practices, and the field should evolve to include the little things and the details of everyday life. By focusing on the more-than-
representational, Müller encouraged a de-centering from humans as “the prime movers and shakers of the world” and an end to the fixation on cognitive processes and meaning production (ibid., 410). This does not mean the field should entirely abandon the representational, but rather that it should embrace practices, effects, emotions, and non-human objects and animals as sources for meaning creation as well as language.

A few of Müller’s propositions are critical to highlight before examining the more-than-representational research agenda: First, the world is made through performative practices that constantly bring new realities into being. Second, the world is always being made and re-made. Third, the world we live in is affective—we experience these affects through our bodies, sometimes subconsciously. Fourth, the world is more than human, and we must recognize the role of animals and objects. And fifth, more-than-representational research is experimental and requires new modes of presentation (Müller 2015, 410). Affect, or “something that works in and through the body and bodily experience,” is central to this study (Müller 2015, 411. Italics in original). Affect drives emotion and produces a response. It can consume its subject and is often pre-conscious, pre-cognitive, and irrational. Affect can also trigger intense feelings that influence behavior and action. The triggers of affect come in myriad forms, including events, performance, lighting, music, images, human and non-human interactions, films, etc. While they can be spontaneous, they can also be manipulated to produce an anticipated response. The media and politicians often use this tactic, often by employing fear-provoking (or other emotion) images and repeating emotion-provoking buzz words and phrases.
Müller (2015) also discussed the importance of assemblages, which are groups of items, objects, and all types of living or non-living things that coalesce to form new realities. Assemblages are wholes that cannot be reduced to their component parts. Different parts may influence each other, and ultimately it is the *capacities* of the parts, rather than simply their *properties*, which are essential to understanding the resultant assemblage (Dittmer 2014, 387). The creation of an assemblage is a process; it involves “arranging and organizing heterogeneous materials to hold together for some time and create new actions” (Müller 2015, 414). Affects, or the forces of desire, are the glue that holds assemblages together. Political geographers have used assemblages to study the seemingly unlikely linking together of distant locales and the distributed organization of social movements across large spaces (Müller 2015, 414). The Estonian song festivals combine multiple components, including festival songs and dances from all over Estonia, and even other countries, in addition to various symbolic objects and performance mediums. Hence, the song festivals act as an assemblage of diverse components all coalescing to create a unique whole. I regarded and analyzed song festivals as an assemblage of complex performance, emotion, and material objects that combine to tell a single, unique story. This meshes well with current trends in geopolitics scholarship, as assemblages are becoming a popular approach for explaining meaning-making and response.

This abstract and novel way of thinking and analyzing requires new ways of presenting research and findings. Because of the intense emotional component of such study, traditional textual presentation often falls short to convey the richness of the data.
This leaves two options for scholarly presentation—to remain in the representational mode and merely try to describe the more-than-representational, or alternatively, to attempt to evoke the same effect in the audience of the presentation. The latter option is referred to as *presencing*, or bringing something into being (Müller 2015, 416). This requires non-traditional presentation modes, such as creative writing, poetry, or the performing arts. This also includes the introduction of more sensory components into research presentations, such as audio and video clips. Folk song festivals are prime targets for such analysis, and require an understanding of nationalism as a particular assemblage of geopolitical practice and representation. While the bulk of my song classification involved analysis of text, specifically song lyrics, I nevertheless attempt to incorporate a more-than-representational approach in my in-depth analysis of the “Touched by Time” concert. I did this by looking into the specifics of the performance of five songs, including presenting data from my own memory of the ambiance of the festival as well as interpretation from video clips from the festival.

Nationalism

There are three main schools of nationalist though: primordialism, ethnosymbolism, and modernism (Ichijo and Uzelac 2005). According to primordialism, nations are naturally occurring and have existed as long as humans have lived in groups. Often marked by shared language, culture, and religion, a nation is theorized as an organic and an essential part of human nature. By claiming that nations and nationalism are primordial, natural, and even spiritual, the allegiance that many feel towards their
nation is easily explained. Instead of being created, primordial nationalism is seen as ‘given’ (Ichijo and Uzelac 2005, 52). Ethno-symbolism, while similar to primordialism in its emphasis on ethnic groups, has its own unique emphasis on history. Again, the nation is not simply invented, but emerges as a social group with a significant and undeniable historical connection. While this connection does not determine the group’s destiny, it certainly may influence it.

Modernism is the most dominant approach to understanding nationalism, and asserts that “nations and nationalism have appeared as consequences of the processes that mark the modern period of social development” (ibid., 10). With the eighteenth century emergence of the modern political state, industrialization, Enlightenment ideas, and increased education and literacy, the “intellectual project” of nationalism emerged. According to this perspective, nationalism is strictly a process of socio-cultural integration (Kedourie 1960, 9). With the rapid change of society, old traditions and values may be lost, and nationalism emerges as a replacement. This includes the invention of new traditions, a deep veneration of the community, and a new sort of ‘political religion’ (Ichijo and Uzelac 2005, 11-12). While nationalists often hark back to a long history of togetherness and shared culture, values, and community, modernists would argue that this is false. As Benedict Anderson pointed out, it was not until the widespread printing of literature combined with the rise of capitalism in Europe that the stage was created for national consciousness. As languages became standardized and unified, they became an essential medium of scholarly progression as well as national identification (Anderson 1991, 44-45).
The modernist theory of nationalism is ideal for examining the Estonian experience. In an era of socio-cultural integration and progress, educated Estonians saw the opportunity to create a distinctly Estonian culture and national identity. It was between the years of 1820 and 1920 that nationalist movements erupted across Europe, instilling a desire to define the nation, unify its outlying parts, and become politically independent (Anderson 1991, 67). Estonia was no exception, and Estonians shaped their own national awakening from about 1860-1885 (Raun 2001, 57). At the heart of the awakening was the goal to develop a distinct and modern Estonian culture. Educated Estonians created the Eesti Kirjameeste Selts (Estonian Literary Society) and the Eesti Aleksandrikool (Estonian Alexander School), which emphasized the importance of primary education in the Estonian language (ibid., 59). However, as Estonian historian Toivo Raun explained, “Certainly no other occasion symbolized the romantic optimism of the national awakening as much as the first all-Estonian song festival held in Tartu in 1869” (ibid., 75). Indeed, the Estonian National Song Festivals were at the very heart of the national awakening and were seen as a venue to create something distinctly Estonian. The first festival in 1869 “provided a powerful stimulus to the development of Estonian national consciousness” (ibid., 75). Additionally, in the 1870s the writing of the Estonian language was standardized and the North Estonian dialect was officially accepted as the national language (Raun 2001, 77). This clearly defined social and cultural awakening corresponds to a modernist view of nationalism—namely that nationalism creates nations. While Estonians may have pointed to their cultural heritage as a source to fuel
the national awakening, they were nonetheless creating something new and modern, very much in accordance with the nationalistic experiences of other Europeans.

‘Hot’ and Banal Nationalism

While nationalism is often associated with violence or revolution, it may also be medium through which to study the geopolitics of the everyday (Dittmer and Dodds 2008, 443). It is not the obvious displays of nationalism, but rather nationalism’s subtleties, that may be the most telling. In effect, nationalism comes in two varieties: ‘hot’ and banal (Billig 1995). The ‘hot’ moments of nationalism correspond to periods of war and violence, often in direct defense of territory and arguably, the nation. While this sort of nationalism is often heroically remembered and enshrined by the public, it is not the nationalism that fuels the everyday, mundane life of the nation. Banal nationalism operates silently, unnoticed. It is the contrast between a fiercely waving flag held in the hand of a patriot and the flag drifting in the wind on a lonely street in the local neighborhood, barely noticed (Billig 1995, 8). While ‘hot’ nationalism is unarguably powerful, banal nationalism is also not to be underestimated. It is the invisible force that lays dormant, waiting to spring to action if the need should arise. “In so many little ways, the citizenry are daily reminded of their national place in a world of nations…this reminding is so familiar, so continual, that it is not consciously registered as reminding” (ibid., 8).

Everyday nationalism is essential to the geopolitical identity of the nation; “National identity embraces all these forgotten reminders” (Billig 1995, 8), incorporating them into their ever-reinforced sense of national self. National identity includes more
than abstract notions of belief and values. National identity “involves being situated physically, legally, socially, as well as emotionally: typically, it means being situated within a homeland, which itself is situated within the world of nations” (ibid., 8). In other words, forming a national identity requires spatial socialization. Spatial socialization is the “process through which individual actors and collectivities are socialized as members of specific, territorially bounded spatial entities, and through which they more or less actively internalize territorial identity and shared traditions” (Paasi 1999, 4). To understand a specific nation’s brand of nationalism, one must understand their processes of spatial socialization and everyday, banal nationalism that inform their national identity.

Additionally, spatial socialization occurs in two related forms as it influences nationalism: first, the focus on nationalism as a belief system (the –ism). This system of belief revolves around the assumption that the modern world of nation-states is a natural order and embraces the erroneous assumption that every political state is the container of one and only one nation. Individuals are defined in regards to their membership in a specific nation-state and are expected to think, act, and believe in accordance with prescribed norms. Second, nationalism rests on the notion that human groups do in fact significantly differ from other human groups (the nation in nationalism). It acknowledges that we are all different, and that distinctions between “us” and “them” are real and important (Flint and Taylor 2011, 159). Both of these definitions of nationalism are vital in spatial socialization as well as expressions of ‘hot’ and banal nationalism.
Returning to the discussion of ‘hot’ and banal nationalism, we see that these two differing forms of nationalism accomplish two different tasks—the former performs the function of enabling war and violence, while the latter encompasses the commonplace and subconscious expressions of nationalism. However, these two can be bridged by the active memory of independence (Paasi 2015). The concept of independence means more than legal sovereignty;

“It is also the social process and set of practices/discourses that bring together an actual (or aspired) sovereignty, the history of a territory, as well as a selection of routinized habits, events, memories and also narratives and iconographies related to the purported national identity. Independence thus also encompasses national symbols, meanings, collective memory and the everyday” (Paasi 2015, 2).

The notion of independence thus fuses the ‘hot’ and banal together; the banal nationalism and attending re-affirmation of national identity that constantly occur often hark back to the ‘hot’ nationalism which forged the nation, often by war, in the first place. Using independence as a medium for viewing ‘hot’ and banal nationalism allows one to appreciate “the complexity and dynamism of nationalism and the institutional settings and events where nationalism occurs” (ibid., 2). This framework for examining nationalism provides a lens through which to analyze the everyday, unnoticed events that hark back to the core of a nation’s identity, often forged in war and resistance to outside power.

This framework of ‘hot’ and banal nationalism, powered and sustained by the concept of independence, provides a useful tool for analyzing the 2014 Estonian song festival. The purpose and theme of the festival was twofold—to remember Estonia’s past and also to look to the future. Flint and Taylor (2014) borrow Nairn’s (1977, 1997)
concept of the ‘modern Janus,’ the classical god who gazed both ahead and behind, to
describe the complex nature of nationalism:

“(It) does not only look backwards and forwards in time, using myths of national
history to mobilize a country towards an, apparently, bright new path. It also
looks inwards and outwards, possessing a double-spatial face to complement the
historic one” (Flint and Taylor 2014, 163-4).

This Janus-faced quality of nationalism is manifested in the 2014 festival and lends some
interesting insights into Estonian nationalism. Through the traditional (banal) means of
the song festival, Estonians gathered to reflect upon their past, their hard fought
independence, the struggles and triumphs of their nation since, and the possibility of the
future. By looking inward at their own ethnic and national history, they reinforce their
group identity. By looking outward and forward, they cast themselves as global
competitors and a collective member of the world of nation-states. Nationalism, whether
‘hot’ or banal, can represent more than initially meets the eye.

The nature of this Janus-faced nationalism is also dependent on how Estonians
define their national identity; in other words, it depends on their “geopolitical vision.”
This is related to how Estonians see themselves in connection with the rest of the world;
“A geopolitical vision requires at least a Them-and-Us distinction and emotional
attachment to a place” (Dijkink 1997, 11). Nations are often self-described by what they
are just as much as they describe themselves by what they are not. A geopolitical vision
encompasses “any idea concerning the relation between one’s own and other places,
involving feelings of (in) security or (dis) advantage (and/or) invoking ideas about a
collective mission or foreign policy strategy” (ibid., 11) This idea is related to national
identity, as reference to national similarity requires foreign difference. Political
community, a common set of institutions and laws, a notion of equality among community members, and a common homeland, culture, and civic ideology are created through reference to external others (Smith 1991, 8-11; Dijkink 1997, 11).

Geopolitical visions often rest on a creation and maintenance of national identity that discursively denotes the “foreign other” as dangerous and subversive (Campbell 1992). Furthermore, performance, emotion, national identity, and history come together to maintain national identity. The “history of the present” can be seen as a “mode of analysis (which) seeks to trace how (certain) rituals of power arose, took shape, gained importance, and effected politics” (ibid., 5). These rituals are performative in nature and may correspond in a similar way to the performative constitution of the body. Essentially, a state does not have a fixed identity that stems back to one founding moment, but rather it must continually create and re-create itself “through a stylized repetition of acts,” such as song festival rituals (ibid., 9). In essence, states do not possess stable identities, and the practice of nationalism represents a continual quest for legitimacy.

Performing national history in the present requires reflections on the nation’s history and experiences with foreign others. Hence, the way “others” are remembered is an essential aspect of contemporary practices of nationalism. The 2014 song festival related the touch of time through the ages; it essentially reconstructed the history of Estonia through song, starting with the first festival in 1869. It is the “mobilization of memory” (Paasi 2015, 2-3), particularly the memories of independence, through which national identity is constantly reconstructed that makes the song festival an interesting arena of Estonian nationalism (Tamm, 2008). “Cultural memory determines the general
framework within which the past acquires meaning and history becomes possible. Concomitantly, cultural memory determines the events to be recorded and passed on” (Tamm 2008, 501).

The reconstruction of the historical memory of Estonian identity as witnessed through the 2014 song festival presented a unique opportunity to study nationalism through a critical geopolitical lens. As an emotional festival that combined elements of song, speech, and dance, participants and audience engaged together in creating an intangible tribute to their nation. In the 2014 Estonian National Song Festival, unique components came together to form powerful assemblages of time, space, folklore, and nationalism. Affect, or the emotional glue that binds assemblages, was deeply present in the expressive remembrance of Estonia’s past, as well as a celebration of its present and future. The intercourse of performers and audience, conductor and choir, and, symbolically, Estonia and the world, represent a rich arena where a specific discourse of Estonia was employed to reinforce a distinct image of Estonian national identity.

This identity manifests itself through the songs selected to represent the history of the Estonian song festival. By analyzing the theme and lyrics of the twenty-nine songs chosen for the “Touched by Time” portion of the song festival, answers emerge to pertinent questions, such as ‘How do Estonians perceive their past?’ and, perhaps more telling, ‘What memories and themes from their past do Estonians celebrate and intentionally remember, and what parts are they attempting to forget?’ By analyzing data from the previous twenty-seven Estonian national song festivals, unique insights are revealed into Estonian national character and identity.
METHODOLOGY

Estonian folk song has a rich and varied history. Singing in groups, whether work songs, wedding songs, or children songs, has been a part of Estonian cultural for over two thousand years (Kuutma 1996b, 128). Estonian folk song may be divided into two categories: regilaulud or runo-songs, and newer songs that follow strophic form and use end-rhyme (Rüütel 1998, 35). The regilaul was the preindustrial and preliterate form of Estonian folk song and consisted of short, non-rhyming, melodic phrases that were often alliterations. It is believed that regilaul was present in Estonian villages as early as the last century BCE. This genre was employed by all Balto-Finnic peoples and followed the Kalevalaic verse meter (the Kalevala is the Finnish national epic and was the inspiration for the creation of Kalevipoeg, the Estonian national epic, which also follows Kalevalaic verse meter). Usually, regilaul was performed in groups with one lead-singer and a chorus that would repeat selected lines. They were frequently performed in the context of work, community rituals, and festivals (Kuutma 1996b, 125-126).

During the eighteenth century, Lutheran Baltic Germans popularized religious and folk choir singing in Estonia. The songs were translated into Estonian but were ultimately of German origin. They consisted of multi-part choral pieces and German folk song arrangements (ibid., 126). The transformation of Estonian music began in the eighteenth and continued into the nineteenth century, when instrumentation was modernized. The brass band was introduced in Estonia and local people made their first attempts at original song composition. As Kuutma explains, “this symbiosis of the inherited and borrowed
vocal tradition resulted in the evolution of strophical end-rhyme songlore…In modern academic terminology, this category is referred to as the newer Estonian folk song, corresponding to the European song tradition of the last centuries” (Kuutma 1996b, 126).

While many of the Estonian festival songs are of a folk origin, there are also numerous other types of songs. In the early festivals spiritual concerts were important, and many of the songs were religious and of a German origin. With each new festival, Estonian composers as well as composers of other nationalities contributed to the festivals with new and original contemporary songs. During the years of Soviet occupation, the festivals included folk and national songs from various states in the Soviet Union. Overall, the inclusion of works varied widely in the festivals, offering a rich data source for analyzing the theme and content of each festival. However, it is the twenty-sixth festival, in which select songs were performed from each previous song festival, which allows a unique and intriguing insight into Estonian perceptions of their own national identity.

To assess whether or not a specific version of history was constructed at the twenty-sixth Laulupidu, I examined every previous song festival, starting with the first festival in 1869. Because the songs selected for performance in the “Touched by Time” concert were exclusively of Estonian origin (with the exception of two instrumental pieces of unknown origin), I only classified songs of Estonian origin, which depending on the festival ranged from about ten to ninety percent. The festival organizers of the twenty-sixth Laulupidu only selected Estonian songs to represent their history. Therefore, I ignored foreign songs in all the festivals, as none of them were selected for the
“Touched by Time” concert. In total, I classified about nine hundred songs. Some of these songs were performed repeatedly at most festivals. I retrieved basic information on every song festival from the Estonian Song and Dance Celebration Foundation’s official website, sa.laulupidu.ee, which includes the program of every song festival, including titles of songs, composers, lyric authors, and music directors. I found song lyrics from numerous sources, including the Estonian National Library Digital Archives, the Estonian Runic Songs’ Database, and the large database of contemporary Estonian song lyrics, Laulud.ee. For contextual sources for each festival, I employed Toivo Ojaveski’s 130 Aastat Eesti Lauupidusid (130 Years of Estonian Song Festivals). Ojaveski describes each song festival, noting general information from each festival, as well as information on new song contributions, composers, and participants. I also used Guntis Smidchen’s Power of Song: Nonviolent National Culture in the Baltic Singing Revolution, in which he gives historical background, context, and English translations of the most popular and influential songs of Estonian song festivals.

The first part of my methodology involved classifying all Estonian songs from the first to the twenty-fifth festivals into themes. Song theme denotes the central focus or purpose of the song. While themes varied widely, I found that there were a limited number of themes that consistently appeared throughout the festivals (see Table 1). In addition to themes, I also added a special category for folk songs, which have no known author and originate from the Estonian people. I determined that these songs were fundamentally different and therefore put them in their own separate category. I classified folk songs into themes as well, and they were almost always colloquial, everyday themes.
To conduct the classification, I collected and analyzed song lyrics. Because my intention was not to conduct an in-depth analysis of every song, the classification of individual songs was conceptual and focused on the most apparent and overarching themes. Except in cases where an internal classification was available, I conducted an external classification of the songs myself by translating the lyrics and deducing themes and type.

While the first portion of methodology was essential for gaining an overarching image of themes and song types over the 145-year span of festivals, my in-depth analysis came from finding which themes were selected for the twenty-sixth song festival and analyzing specific pieces of music from that concert. Essentially, I was able to determine whether there was a similarity or diversity in themes and types of songs selected to represent how Estonia has been “Touched by Time.” Through my classification, I attempted to determine whether the contemporary moment of Estonian national identity is constructed by highlighting certain historic themes of national folklore while downplaying other themes. In other words, I analyzed whether the construction of Estonian collective memory through the choice of songs was partially a function of marginalizing certain themes and emphasizing others. Specifically, I evaluated whether or not a specific image of Estonian history was constructed for the 2014 song festival concert, “Touched by Time,” in which twenty-nine songs were performed from previous festivals, including a moment of silence for the second Soviet era song festival in 1950. The goal of this portion of my analysis was to discover if the 2014 festival portrayed a “geopolitical imagination” (Gregory 1994) with a distinct and consistent theme, and then speculate on the implications of this imagined history.
Table 1: Description of Themes of Songs of Estonian Origin in National Song Festivals

1 In my song classification, I also used the label of “folk song.” I did not include this distinction in table 1 because “folk song” is not a theme, but rather a category. The category of folk song is included in my analysis and denotes any song whose lyrics are of folk origin. While the themes of these songs vary, they are usually colloquial in nature. I believe these songs should be differentiated from other Estonian colloquial songs because of their unique folk qualities and their deep ties to Estonian identity. Additionally, if songs did not have folk lyrics but did have folk music, they were not classified as folk songs. This was due to my focus on the text of lyrics for classification, and not on music (in which I lack expertise).
In my analysis of specific songs from the 2014 festival, I followed the methodological approach of folklorist Barre Toelken in his study of the Anglo-American ballad (Toelken 1986). While the song festival pieces were not Anglo-American, similar principles may be applied to study the meaning and context of Estonian songs. Also, I chose a context/meaning approach over a comparative approach because I was interested in specific songs performed at a definite venue and time rather than a survey of multiple versions of songs sung in multiple locations and social settings. A context/meaning approach places focuses on a specific performance of a song, noting the cultural and historical context, as well as the unique meaning created in a certain time and space and by particular performer(s) and audience (Toelken 1986, 31-32). The Laulupidu is a structured and rehearsed setting and it can be inferred that songs chosen for performance were intended for wide consumption and appreciation. Also, a song’s placement in the festival program, whether or not it was repeated, and the level of enthusiasm in audience reception are all important for determining the overall meaning of the song. Audience interaction in the festival comes in the form of standing for particular songs, joining in the singing, swaying and holding hands, and holding up lighters or cell phone lights. The audience is just as powerful in the meaning-making process as the choir and the songs themselves, for their reaction can determine the energy and emotion of a song. This audience participation (or lack of) coincides with the critical geopolitics literature on audience studies—audiences make their own meanings, which may be in accordance or discordance with what the festival organizers may have intended. Of course, the actual song lyrics are also important, however it is “what the performance triggers off in the
minds of its listeners (which is) more important than the specific wording of a particular
text composed by a particular person” (Toelken 1986, 32).

The analysis, which was modeled after Toelken’s context and meaning approach,
was a combination of literary, historical, and ethnological approaches and included five
components (1986, 36-37). First of all, I assessed the human context of the performance.
This included an analysis of choir and audience as well as who is singing to whom.
Second, I examined the social context of the song festival performance. Third was the
cultural-psychological context. This was perhaps the most important aspect of the
analysis, as it centers on the cultural significance of the songs, including emotional and
nationalistic sentiments. Fourth, I briefly analyzed the physical context of the
performance, including the significance of the geographic location. Finally, I consider the
time context of the performance, including why the song was performed at this particular
occasion. As all of the songs I analyzed on a deeper level were performed at the same
concert, many of these points of analysis overlapped. However, their placement in the
festival, the energy level of the song (the opening piece vs. the climax of the concert),
and the lyrics were all taken into account to convey a rich analysis of the meaning and
significance of certain songs. The combination of a longitudinal song classification as
well as an in-depth analysis of the 2014 festival, including a closer look at a few key
songs, provides a unique insight into the “geopolitical imagination” (Gregory 1994) of
Estonians and their own constructed image of national identity—past, present, and future.
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

“The Estonian says: laulupidu. It is a beautiful word. It means holiday of song, celebration day of song, whither visitors travel from city and country. It is one very old nation’s, quite large, family reunion.

“Song is as natural as speaking. Song is a very old word. Song is a very powerful word. The Estonian says: laulupidu. This is one great, great sacredness to the heart; it is anticipated, it is built for, it is a moment of holding together, one great joyful and hopeful ship, which carries over the reefs.”

-Doris Kareva

Estonia’s song festivals varied widely in their organization, repertoire, and purpose throughout their 145-year span. In their early years, during the Tsarist Era, the cultural and ideological push of the song festivals focused on forging a unique Estonian identity, complete with its own unique language and culture. Later, after independence was achieved for the first time, the festivals shifted further from their German emulations to showcase a maturing and more established nation. For the first time, the song festival repertoires boasted almost complete Estonian origin. During the long Soviet occupation, the designated purpose of the festivals was state propaganda and socialist unity. However, for Estonians, a clandestine purpose remained: resisting the occupation through subtle, yet unmistakable, expressions of sustained loyalty and longing for a free, independent Estonia. Indeed, their “longing for their real independent homeland could be read between the verses of the songs; musical compositions used recognizable folk song motifs; and badges worn by organizers of the festivals carried historical and ethnic symbols” (Ranjärvi 2014, 67). After Estonia’s liberation from Soviet control, the song

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2 Translated by me from the original Estonian text. This short piece of prose was part of the theme of the 2004 song festival.
festivals shifted in purpose once again—with no foreign occupation to protest, what would the festivals now stand for? This is one of the questions I sought to address using the specific repertoire from the “Touched by Time” concert of the twenty-sixth song festival. By looking to the past, celebrating the present, and dreaming of the future, Estonians employ the medium of the Laulupidu to express the deepest and most sacred parts of their identity. Hidden in the repertoire of song festivals, the careful observer discovers clues, hidden in plain sight, which reveal how Estonians imagine themselves—their nation, their identity, their values, and their independence. Hence, the song festival is a cultural expression of the Janus-like quality of nationalism that is heightened by the politics of independence (Paasi 2015).

Looking Back: Themes of Estonian Song Festivals through Four Eras

One of the first things I examined in my study of Estonian songs festivals was the evolution of the number of Estonian versus foreign songs in the festival repertoire (Figure 3). In my classification, I considered a song Estonian if both its music and words were composed by an Estonian or were of Estonian folk origin. I did not include songs that were originally written in other languages and translated into Estonian. Many festivals also included orchestral pieces written by Estonian composers, which I also included in my analysis. To better interpret the data, I divided the song festivals into the four periods:

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3 One exception to this is the song “My Fatherland, My Happiness and Joy.” In this case, Johann Voldemar Jannsen wrote original Estonian words to a popular Finnish tune composed by Friedrich Pacius. I included this song because it is the modern Estonian national anthem and considered a quintessential Estonian patriotic song.
the Tsarist Era, the first era of independence, the Soviet era, and the second era of independence. By examining these four eras, patterns, and sometimes anomalies, emerge.

The early Tsarist era song festivals were characterized by an abundance of German religious choral pieces as well as songs praising the Russian Tsar. The pattern and form of these early festivals mirrored German counterparts, which is evident in song repertoire. However, over the seven festivals of the Tsarist era, it is clear that Estonian song composition increased. At the first festival, only eleven percent of songs were of Estonian origin. Six song festivals later, in 1910, that number had risen to seventy-eight percent (see Figure 3). In addition to the increase of number of Estonian songs, the diversity of these songs also expanded. Figure 4 shows the evolution of Estonian song themes throughout the Tsarist Era festivals. At the first festival, one-hundred percent of Estonian contributions were patriotically themed songs. By the next festival, religious songs as well as singing-themed songs of Estonian origin were also included. This diversity of themes increased in the following festivals, most notably with the inclusion of Estonian folk and colloquial songs. The 1910 festival stands out as the end product of forty years of festival change, both in regards to the Estonian song theme repertoire and the festival as a whole. The festival no longer was dominated by German religious music; spiritual songs only made up three percent of the entire festival repertoire, including foreign songs (Randärv 2014, 72). Instead, the festival was focused on Estonian identity
Figure 3: Number of Estonian versus Foreign Songs in 26 Song Festivals. For the 2014 song festival, only songs from the first concert, “Touched by Time,” were included. Songs of unknown composer (2) which were arranged by an Estonian were classified as Estonian.
and way of life. Of the Estonian compositions, patriotic, folk, and colloquial songs made up eighty-three percent of the repertoire, showing how central Estonian culture, patriotism, and way of life had become to the festival (see Figure 4).

The trend of increased percentage of Estonian compositions as well as increased theme diversity continued throughout the first era of independence. There were only four song festivals during this brief period, but it was in many ways a golden age. The festivals were now distinctively Estonian, including more original Estonian choral and orchestral music than ever before. Many of these songs were patriotic in nature, but emphasized loyalty to the Fatherland and the beauty and sacredness Estonia rather than a devotion to state leadership or government (Rändjärv 2014, 71). Celebrating Estonian
identity and independence was central to independence era festivals. Fresh from the war of independence (1918-1920), the ‘hot’ memory of violence and gaining freedom permeated the song festivals, inspiring new patriotic and nationalistic songs, such as *Kaunimad Laulud* (“The Most Beautiful Songs”), *Munamäel* (“On top of Egg Mountain”), and *Mu Sünnimaa* (“Land of My Birth”). Commonplace reminders of independence, such as a new choir song in the festival, served as subtle sources of banal nationalism, quietly reaffirming the existence of Estonian independence, nationalism, and identity (Paasi 2015).

By the last free Estonian song festival in 1938, ninety-six percent of songs were Estonian in origin (see Figure 3). One notable trend in this period is the increased inclusion of Estonian nationalistic songs. While there were a few included in the Tsarist era (so few that I assigned them to the “other” category), nationalistic songs took a prominent place in the independence era. These songs emphasize themes that are unique to the Estonian nation, including song lyrics that came directly from the Estonian national epic, *Kalevipoeg* (such as the popular song, *Enne ja Nüüd* (“Before and Now”)), which was performed at the 1923 festival and the 2014 festival), songs that discuss the ancient people of *Taara* (which is considered the name of the pre-Christian, nature-centered Estonian god), or songs about *Lembitu*, an Estonian national war hero of the thirteenth century. Such songs made up fourteen percent of the repertoire in 1928, just four percent less than patriotic songs (see Figure 5). While Estonian religious songs were still present in three of the four independence era festivals, their overall numbers were much lower than in the Tsarist era. This time period also witnessed a growth in folk song inclusion.
By the last independence era festival in 1938, nearly thirty-seven percent of Estonian songs in the festival were of folk origin, which was the highest percentage of any theme category. The themes of these folk songs varied widely, but were mostly focused on everyday occurrences and tasks of life, such as work, children’s play, courtship and marriage, and singing and dancing. When songs highlighting the banal practices of Estonian everyday life are interwoven with patriotic and nationalistic songs, the patriotic nature of the festival may be obscured. Nationalistic sentiments appear alongside themes of everyday life, making them feel commonplace. Although innocuous in their placement among colloquial songs, these patriotic and nationalistic songs contain powerful messages that are essential to the Estonian geopolitical identity. They contain messages about the physical and imagined homeland, the people who belong there, their language, and their beliefs and culture. Festival choral songs may seem banal to their singers and audience, but they contain the core of the nation’s identity.

**Estonian Song Themes - Independence Era (1923-1938)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Patriotic (P)</th>
<th>Religious (R)</th>
<th>Singing (S)</th>
<th>Folk (F)</th>
<th>Colloquial (C)</th>
<th>Nationalistic (N)</th>
<th>Other (O)</th>
<th>Unclassified (U)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>30% P</td>
<td>15% R</td>
<td>15% F</td>
<td>30% C</td>
<td>7% N</td>
<td>3% O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>18% P</td>
<td>32% F</td>
<td>29% C</td>
<td>14% N</td>
<td>3.5% O,U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>27.5% P</td>
<td>3% R</td>
<td>6% S</td>
<td>27.5% F</td>
<td>21% C</td>
<td>3% N</td>
<td>6% O</td>
<td>6% U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>30% P</td>
<td>9% R</td>
<td>36.5% F</td>
<td>15.5% C</td>
<td>6% N</td>
<td>3% O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Estonian Song Themes – Independence Era (1923-1938)
The song festival repertoires changed drastically during the time of Soviet occupation. The festival programs and preparations were strictly regulated by Soviet officials, who perceived them both as a dangerous vestige of independent Estonia as well as an opportune mass event to foster USSR unity (Puderbaugh 2006, 88). The biggest change was the incorporation of USSR patriotic songs, including songs praising Lenin, Stalin, the Soviet army, and the greatness and unity of the Soviet Union. These Soviet patriotic songs made up around thirty percent of the song festival repertoire throughout the occupation; however, they reached an all-time high in the 1950 song festival, where they made up forty-four percent (Randjärv 2014, 77). For most of the Soviet era festivals, Estonian music made up around sixty percent of the program, sometimes slightly less and sometimes more (see Figure 3). There were three notable exceptions to this—the song festivals in 1947, 1969, and 1990.

The 1947 song festival was the first under Soviet occupation. Interestingly, the preparations for this festival began during the German occupation of Estonia during World War II. The Nazis were focused on military and economic affairs during their occupation, and therefore were more lenient culturally than the Soviets (Puderbaugh 2006, 78). The festival repertoire was organized by the Estonian Singer’s Union under the direction of Tuudur Vettik, and included many blatantly patriotic Estonian songs. The festival was meant to be held in 1943, but because of wartime chaos, it was cancelled. The plans were resurrected in preparation for the 1947 festival, with the obligatory addition of a fair amount of Soviet patriotic songs honoring Lenin and Stalin. By 1947, the Sovietization process was not yet active, “and thanks to this, as incredible as it seems,
it was possible to organize this festival as one of the most patriotic All-Estonian Song Celebrations over the next fifty years” (Randjärv 2014, 73). One song in particular, Mis need ohjad meida hoidvad (“Why do these reins hold us”), was banned in 1945 but was still performed in the 1947 festival under a different name. This folk song, which focuses on the loss of freedom and a desire to be slaves no more, was embedded with a poignant message at the 1947 song festival. Estonia was newly occupied by the Soviet Union after a brief period of independence. This song stands as a symbol of Estonia’s fleeting freedom, and a symbolic glancing backwards at the ‘hot’ moments of independence—first gained in 1918 and then lost to the USSR during World War II. This folk song was also performed at the 2014 festival. Other patriotic songs were also part of the 1947 festival repertoire, including Mu Isamaa on Minu Arm (“My Fatherland is my Love”), by Gustav Ernesaks. Such a boldly patriotic festival did not go unnoticed. The organizers of the 1947 festival were cut off from leadership and the Estonian Singer’s Union was disbanded. The following festival (1950) was described as “the least joyous Song Celebration in the Estonian history” (Randjärv 2014, 76). During the 2014 festival, instead of commemorating this specific festival with a song, the choir and audience instead observed a moment of silence.

The second exception, the 1969 song festival, was held in commemoration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the first Estonian song festival in 1869. Out of all the Soviet era song festivals, this festival had the lowest percentage—a mere eighteen percent—of USSR patriotic songs (except the 1990 festival, during which Soviet oversight was absent) (Randjärv 2014, 77). The 1990 festival stands out as the third
exception. This is due to the non-existent Soviet oversight of the festival amidst crumbling control. Although Estonia did not technically gain independence until 1991, Soviet oversight of Estonia, including the song festivals, was rapidly dissipating by the late 1980s (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 256). In fact, many group this song festival together with those festivals following Estonia’s second independence (Eesti Laulu- ja Tantsupeo SA 2014, 53). Accordingly, this festival was jubilant and hopeful, showcasing numerous banned patriotic songs as well as new songs. Most notable of these new songs was Ärkamise Aeg (“Time of Awakening”) by René Eespere. After the official program was over, the participants and audience lingered at the song festival grounds, spontaneously singing several other patriotic songs (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 257).

Overall, the Estonian songs in the Soviet era festivals reflected the regulation of the times. Figure 4 reveals that patriotic songs, once central to the festival, were overtaken by colloquial and folk songs. While some patriotic songs were included, their numbers paled in comparison to USSR Patriotic songs, both of Estonian and foreign origin. The emphasis on colloquial and folk songs, which often focused on quotidian life, makes sense considering the Soviet authorities banned most patriotic songs. Also conspicuously absent from the Soviet festival repertoires are religious songs. They were central to the early festivals, somewhat marginalized during Estonia’s independence, and completely absent during the Soviet festivals, with the exception of one song performed at the 1975 festival, whose words were taken from Latin bible text, which is presumably why it was not banned (Randjärv 2014, 78).
After Estonia regained independence in 1991, the Estonian Choral Society and the Estonian Song Festival Management Head Committee were free to organize and choose any repertoire they desired for the 1994 song festival. They chose to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the first song festival. Twenty-four percent of the festival songs were nevertheless of foreign origin, representing choral and religious pieces from numerous Western countries (see Figure 3). Predictably, all traces of Soviet patriotism were removed from the repertoire. At this festival, religious songs were again incorporated into the program, making up fourteen percent of the Estonian origin songs (Figure 7). Folk

**Figure 6: Estonian Song Themes: Soviet Era (1947-1990)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Patriotic (P)</th>
<th>Soviet Patriotic (SP)</th>
<th>Singing (S)</th>
<th>Folk (F)</th>
<th>Colloquial (C)</th>
<th>Nationalistic (N)</th>
<th>Other (O)</th>
<th>Unclassified (U)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>14% P</td>
<td>12% SP</td>
<td>12% S</td>
<td>26% F</td>
<td>22% C</td>
<td>12% O</td>
<td>2% U</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>19% P</td>
<td>27% SP</td>
<td>23% F</td>
<td>15% C</td>
<td>4% O</td>
<td>12% U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>10% P 10% SP 3% S 13% F</td>
<td>47% C</td>
<td></td>
<td>3% O</td>
<td>13% U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>10% P 5% SP 7% S 20% F</td>
<td>51% C</td>
<td></td>
<td>5% O 2% U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>10% P 10% SP 3% S 24% F</td>
<td>45% C</td>
<td></td>
<td>3% N 3% U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>17% P 6% SP 9% S 26% F</td>
<td>21% C</td>
<td>2% N 13% O</td>
<td>6% U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>12% P 12% SP 4% S 24% F</td>
<td>28% C</td>
<td>4% N 4% O 12% U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>12% P 5% SP 12% S 17% F</td>
<td>38% C</td>
<td></td>
<td>14% O 2% U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>17% P 6% SP 19% S 14% F</td>
<td>28% C</td>
<td>3% N 6% O 8% U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>30% P 2% S 26% F 19% C</td>
<td>9% N 13% O 2% U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and colloquial songs remained in the repertoire at similar levels as during the Soviet era, however, the percentage of Estonian patriotic songs increased.

**Estonian Song Themes - Independence Era II (1994-2014)**

- Patriotic (P)
- Religious (R)
- Singing (S)
- Folk (F)
- Colloquial (C)
- Nationalistic (N)
- Other (O)
- Unclassified (U)

![Graph](image)

Figure 7: Estonian Song Themes: Independence Era II (1994-2014). Only songs from the “Touched by Time” concert were included for the 2014 festival.

The first concert of the 2014 festival utilized music from each previous song festival to show how Estonia has been “Touched by Time.” With hundreds of choices, the festival organizers, led by artistic director Hirvo Surva and his assistant Riina Roose, chose just twenty-nine songs to depict the transformation of Estonia through four distinct eras. These songs represent numerous different themes, woven together to convey a specific message. At this festival, what the organizers included is just as important as what was ignored; what themes did they focus on? How is this concert’s repertoire similar (or different) to past festivals? What does the symbolic choice of song reveal
about how Estonians imagine their past, or rather, how the festival organizers desire Estonians to imagine their past? What does this specific reflection on Estonia’s past convey about modern Estonians’ perceptions of their present and future? These are the questions I address by analyzing the concert repertoire.

Patriotic and nationalistic songs made up the largest percentage of the concert. Totaling forty-eight percent together, this number is nearly double the average percentage of the previous four free Estonian song festivals (twenty-six percent), and forty percent more than the average of patriotic and nationalistic songs from the first era of independence (thirty-four percent). This shows a distinct and significant emphasis on Estonian patriotism and nationalism that exceeds every other song festival. Twenty-four percent of the program consisted of colloquial songs, most of these (four out of six) representing festivals of the Soviet time. This is relatively accurate of the festivals, as Soviet-Estonian song festivals had the largest percentage of colloquial songs out of all four song festival eras. Interestingly, only one folk song was performed. This reflects a much lower than average representation of folk music compared to previous festivals, especially those of the first independence and Soviet eras. The under-representation of folk songs at the “Touched by Time” concert is telling; by favoring patriotic, nationalistic and colloquial themes over folk music, festival organizers send a message about what songs they believe are best-suited (and ill-suited) to represent Estonian identity. The folk song selected, however, is a well-known song about the longing for lost freedom and has been performed at seven different general song festivals (1923, 1938, 1947, 1960, 1969, 1994, 2014).
Not surprisingly, the concert pieces were almost exclusively of Estonian origin, with the exception of two orchestral pieces of unknown composer. The festival organizers chose not to include any Russian, Soviet or other foreign songs in the concert. While they did not ignore the occupation, they instead chose to focus on other aspects of the time, such as colloquial life. Another notable absence in the concert is religious songs. Considering the overwhelming number of religious songs in early festival repertoires and their (albeit modest) inclusion in every festival since Estonia’s re-liberation, this nonappearance is unexpected. It may, however, more accurately depict the religious leanings of modern Estonians. In 2009 and 2011 polls, Estonians ranked as the least religious people in the world, with less than twenty percent acknowledging any role of religion in their lives (Vucheva 2009, Esslemont 2011). Perhaps the festival organizers chose to highlight spirituality in a different way, instead emphasizing the holiness and beauty of nature, which is much more reflective of the modern Estonian’s spirituality (Esslemont 2011). This is reflected in songs from the concert such as Põhjavaim (“Spirit of the North”), Põhjarannik (“The Northern Coast”), Pääkeseratas (“Wheel of the Sun”), and Ilus Maa (“Beautiful Earth”).

Overall, the thematic analysis of songs over four periods of Estonian song festivals shows an illuminating portrait of a maturing nation. The early festivals were arenas in which Estonian intellectuals and nationalists gained their footing. Although emulating German festivals, they endeavored to create their own style, identity, and brand of festival and choral music. This is reflected in the boom of Estonian composition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as well as in the diversification of
song themes. The festivals found their climax during the first period of independence. They became bold declarers of Estonian pride and identity, focusing on original Estonian music and expanding to include more Estonian folk songs and dance. The role of the festivals shifted after independence was lost to the Soviet Union; Estonians were no longer able to openly declare their national pride, and the song festivals became covert preservers of Estonian identity and national hope right under the noses of Soviet officials. Song themes of this era were both reflections of Soviet regulation (banning patriotic songs, increasing colloquial themed songs) as well as symbols of Estonian resistance (spontaneously singing banned songs, inserting hidden national symbols in other songs).

Audience reaction and participation in this era were monumental in importance. The audience members were the receptors of the festivals, and therefore the center of meaning making (Dittmer and Gray 2010). Estonians were uniquely able to perceive symbols in songs which Soviet officials were not able to see (Šmidchens 2014, 172). As a mass crowd, tens of thousands strong, they were able to break out in banned songs without being punished (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 253). Their enthusiasm (or lack thereof) towards a song was symbolic of their true approval or disapproval. The festivals of the Soviet era were important containers of Estonian identity as well as covert statements of sustained nationalism.

While much information may be gleaned from comparatively examining song themes across festivals, one must go deeper and ‘read between the lines’ to get the full picture of the “Touched by Time” concert. In the next portion of analysis, I take a closer look at the festival as a whole, as well as selected songs of various themes. The purpose
of this is to delve further into the symbolic choice of song, and infer meaning from the inclusion, placement, and repetition of certain songs. This includes dissecting song lyrics to pinpoint specific moments of ‘hot’ and banal nationalism as well as an active remembrance of independence (Paasi 2015) as well as interpreting the physical and emotional reactions of the choir and audience to the performance (Dittmer and Gray 2010; Müller 2015). I assume that the festival organizers carefully considered song choice, placement, and message. By selecting individual songs, festival organizers were in effect able to shape a discourse of Estonian origin, history, and identity. They were able to dip into the cache of Estonian festival songs and select which ones most powerfully represent Estonia’s passage through time. While festival organizers did not themselves control the discourse (Müller 2008), they were enabled by their task of choosing the festival songs, and the discourse in turn was made manifest in the actions and reactions of the choirs, directors, and audience members. Overall, the meaning obtained from examining the minute details of the “Touched by Time” concert contributes to a representation of Estonian national identity, and reveals how modern Estonians imagine their past, present, and by extension, their future.

Estonian Song Festival 2014: “Touched by Time”

The Estonian song festival is rich in symbolism and ritual. While performing in the festival, choir members and dancers don the traditional clothes of their region. It is a common sight to see young maidens with corn flower wreaths in their hair, which is the Estonian national flower. The familiar blue-black-white colors of the flag, what Estonians
refer to as *sini-must-valge*, are ubiquitous—whether they are pinned to clothing or come in the form of a waving Estonian flag. Traditionally, the organizers and festival directors are given large wreaths of oak leaves which they wear around their necks. At the beginning of each song festival, there is a ceremonious lighting of the festival fire.

Similar to the Olympic torch, the festival fire travels through all regions of Estonia before finally arriving with the procession at the song festival grounds. Once lit, it will burn through to the end of the festival (see Figure 8).

![Figure 8: Kalev Stadium and the Song Festival Torch. July 5, 2014. Photo by Mandy Hoggard.](image)

In addition to the physical symbolism at the festival, choice of song can also be symbolic; the specific songs chosen to represent each song festival over the years may convey the mood of that festival, what was occurring historically, or conversely, how the festival organizers choose to remember that festival and how they would like others to
remember it. For example, instead of a song to commemorate the 1950 song festival, the audience instead stood for a moment of silence, remembering the difficulty of that time. Below, I analyze what I consider to be five symbolic song choices of the festival, highlighting their historical and modern significance. As earlier noted, I followed the framework for ballad analysis put forward by Barre Toelken (1983). Additionally, I also discuss these songs, and the festival as a whole, as representative of Estonian banal nationalism, which is ‘everyday’ nationalism that comes in many forms and often finds its focus in the ‘hot’ scenes of a nation gaining its independence (Billig 1995, 8; Paasi 2015). Toward the end of my analysis, I also reference the significance of emotion and affect as well as audience reaction as centers for meaning-making at the festival.

Estonians often define themselves as “the singing nation” (Randjärv 2014, 64). It is an identity which they believe began long before their song festivals. As the song below shows, the “beginning of song” for Estonians began centuries ago. *Laulu Algus* ("Beginning of Song") was performed for the first time in 1969 at the one-hundredth anniversary of the first song festival. The author of the lyrics, Hando Runnel, “express(es) the true meaning of the song festival and of Estonian singing traditions as a whole” (Šmidchens 2014, 171).

BEGINNING OF SONG  
Music Veljo Tormis  
Lyrics Hando Runnel

Listen, now!  
In faraway centuries, on the shores of Estonia, there once began, A song began.

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4 For the entire “Touched by Time” program, see Appendix A.
In the language of mothers, in the spirit of fathers, it carried across to us. In sonorous language, in the spirit of a million, it lives on.

This song began in a misty time, born in the work of the voiceless ones. This song began in a lowly house, and it rose as an oath in the night. A powerless clan began listening, this song was good for the soul, For it spoke a heavenly story, that freedom must come to them.

And the powerless clan awoke, and felt the heads on their shoulders. This song will not die, nor this story, this song for us is good. This song for us is good.

Leelo, leelo, leelo, leelo.

I stepped out to start my voice, ringing on the rocky hillside, Leelo, leelo Lifting up the celebration, cheering up the ring of friends, Leelo, leelo.

I know my friends by their eyes, I know my foes by their power, Leelo, leelo. I do not want enemies, wars have worn me out completely. I want, I want to be, I want to sing my own song.

Singing in the tongue of this land, where I have my pretty home. Here my cradle gently rocked, here my bed was softly swinging, Over fields light children running.

Leelo, leelo.

Listen, now! In faraway centuries, on the shores of Estonia, there once began, A song began.

(English translation quoted from Šmidchens 2014, 171)

Performed for the first time in 1969 during the Soviet Occupation, as well as at the 1990, 1999, 2009, and 2014 free song festivals, this song is both powerful and popular. When one considers the original context of the song, in 1969, it must have felt full of promise for a free Estonia. The song refers to a birth of song in a “misty time,” centuries ago. It was good for the soul, and spoke of freedom. It speaks of knowing friends by their eyes, and enemies by their power. The author is exhausted, and does not desire war, which has
“worn (him) out completely.” While this song is clear in its declaration of Estonia’s ancient identity as well as Estonians’ desire for freedom, it is also not explicitly anti-Soviet. However, if one looks closely, important symbols and clues appear in the song that only would have been apparent to a trained ear. For one, Runnel uses a distinctive refrain of ancient Estonian runic folk songs: Leelo. This word alone is a reference to Estonian folk tradition (Šmidchens 2014, 172), and would have represented a clear reference to Estonian (not Soviet-Estonian) identity. Also, composer Veljo Tormis inserted portions of the melody of a classic Estonian Patriotic song, “Till I Die,” into the song, which a sharp ear would have recognized as a patriotic symbol (ibid., 172).

The social and cultural-psychological context of the song at the 1969 festival in many ways carries over to the 2014 festival: in bold remembrance and declaration of their identity as both a singing and a free nation, Estonians remember their past—their roots and heritage. As Paasi (2015) explained, part of the active memory of independence involves calling on established practices and discourses, in this case a discourse of Estonian origin, to legitimize a certain identity. By emphasizing the history of the Estonian land, and its ancient inhabitants, the writer of the song weaves a story of a lowly people rising, eventually aspiring for freedom. Additionally, the reference to the “beginning of song” brings to mind the Estonian identity of a “singing nation,” and establishes singing as one of the “routinized habits” (ibid., 2) that make up Estonian identity. This looking back on ancient roots is central to the active memory of Independence; for without the myths and symbols that legitimize that independence, it would be far less powerful.
A mixed choir performed this song at the 2014 festival. The beginning notes are held out, the words coming slowly and syllable by syllable. The feeling of the song is powerful and epic. The symbols of the runic song, as well as the notes from “‘Till Death” still ring out. Estonians sang this song in 2014 to remember the jubilee song festival, their one-hundredth anniversary of song festivals. However, the song also represented a centuries-long struggle for independence, and a remembrance of the ‘hot’ moments of war that have fatigued the small nation. It represents an accomplishment, a striving for freedom and for an ancient identity that burned strong through wars and foreign occupations, through independence gained and lost.

Folk songs have played a significant role in the song festivals for over a century, and although the inclusion of folk songs at the “Touched by Time” concert was lacking, the choice is nevertheless symbolic. The choir sang “What are these Reins Holding Us?” in remembrance of the 1923 song festival, the first festival from the first period of independence.

**WHAT ARE THESE REINS HOLDING US?**

Music Mart Saar
Folk Lyrics

Lee, lee, lee, leelo, leelo,
What are these reins holding us,
Holding us,
Lee, lee, lee, leelo, leelo,

Lee, lee, lee, leelo, leelo,
What are these bonds binding us,
Binding us!
Ties, which bind us,
Bind us,
Lee, lee, lee, leelo, leelo,
Lee, lee, lee, leelo, leelo,
We crave freedom from oppression,
Freedom from oppression,
From slavery we long to be saved,
Long to be saved,
Lee, lee, lee, leelo, leelo!
(Part of this English translation from Puderbaugh 2006, 183; Partly translated by Mandy Hoggard).

While this song was originally a reference to feudalism (Puderbaugh 2006, 45), its themes nevertheless carry over to match the longings of multiple generations of Estonians. Performed for the first time in 1923, the 2014 performance marked the seventh time it has been performed at a general song festival (although sometimes under other names and slightly varying versions). It was banned multiple times by Soviet authorities (Randjärv 2014, 74), but still somehow found its way into the repertoires of three Soviet era song festivals (1947, 1960, 1969). The lyrics are fairly simple and the message is clear: the song speaks openly of a craving for freedom from oppression, to be liberated from bonds and reins which tie down. Again in this song, the traditional Estonian folklore runic-song refrain of “Lee, lee, lee, lee, leelo, leelo” signals the unique Estonian origin of the song, and the identity of those who are oppressed.

This song was performed relatively early in the program; although it could have been included in six different places, representing the different festivals at which it was performed, the festival organizers chose to commemorate the song’s debut at the 1923 festival. This placement in the program sets the stage for the Soviet period to follow, a time when Estonians craved freedom from oppression. The cultural-psychological context of this song acutely invokes an Estonian worldview—one of a history of bondage
and occupation and a longing to be free. A mixed choir performed the song, with women beginning the first verse, men taking up the second, and a joining of the two for the third. The feeling of the song is calm, not boisterous or rebellious. The multiple refrains of “Lee, lee, lee lee, leelo, leelo” are melodic and smooth, rather than sharp or jumpy. These attributes of the song combine to convey a sincere, steadfast desire to simply be free. The folk lyrics are powerful, and their meaning has transcended time to speak to Estonians of multiple generations. Through the song’s emphasis on freedom from slavery and oppression, modern Estonians are reminded of the ‘hot’ moments of their past, especially the Soviet occupation and the violence that attended it. However, it is through the banal medium of a folk song that these strong sentiments of sorrow from bondage and desire for freedom are communicated. The ultimate focus of the song is on independence—in this case, the desire for it above all else. The events and memories, as well as the narratives that accompany them, of Estonian occupation and independence become part of the collective memory and the everyday experience of Estonians through their own folk music. As Paasi explained, such a collective memory fuses ‘hot’ and banal nationalism together (Paasi 2015), simplifying the dynamic nature of nationalism into something as seemingly innocuous as a folk song.

During the festivals of the Soviet era, the percentage of colloquial songs grew to an average of thirty-one percent of all Estonian festival songs. During the 1955, 1960, and 1965 festivals, colloquial songs made up forty-five percent or more of the Estonian songs repertoire (see Figure 6). Two-thirds of the colloquial songs from the “Touched by Time” concert represented this era of Estonian history. They represented symbolic
choices. For example, *Noored Sepad* (“Young Blacksmiths”) describes the work of hammers, bellows, and forge, and fire. The last stanza ends in a telling line: “Make a sword, make a spear, that we might protect what is ours – our home!” (Eesti Laulu- ja Tantsupeo SA 2014, 74). Another colloquial song, *Karjapoiss on Kuningas* (“The Shepherd Boy is King”), was performed to commemorate the 1955 festival. This song focuses on the freedom of a shepherd boy, who is king over all the land and animals for which he cares. Perhaps it was a deliberate choice to include such a lighthearted song to highlight a festival in which over forty percent of the songs were USSR patriotic songs and odes to Stalin and Lenin (Randjärv 2014, 77), especially after the moment of silence to remember the 1950 festival. Another colloquial song in the 2014 festival was *Ei Saa Mitte Vaiki Olla* (“I Cannot be Silent”), by Anna Haava.

I CANNOT BE SILENT  
Music Miina Härma  
Lyrics Anna Haava

I cannot be silent,  
And finish my melody -  
Keeping silent would be wrong,  
And would make my heart to burst.

I want to sing very quietly,  
And play silently the harp -  
That you, my beloved,  
Would never be disturbed with my song.

But if the storm from my harp  
Will ever reach your ears,  
Then you have only yourself to blame,  
For being so dear to me.  
(English translation from Puderbaugh 2006, 185)
The social and cultural-psychological context of this song is striking when one considers the specific festival it was commemorating. The 1947 festival, discussed earlier, was significant because its repertoire was originally arranged in 1943 under the German occupation, and then carried over to the 1947 festival under the Soviet occupation (Randjärv 2014, 75). This festival was organized by Tuudur Vettik, Alfred Karindi, and Riho Päts, who boldly organized a patriotic festival, including banned songs, which somehow made it through Soviet inspection. The consequences were grave: both Vettik and Päts were forced to write apology letters in the newspaper Sirp ja Vasar for their inclusion of “bourgeois nationalistic” and “anti-Soviet” songs in the festival. Both were forced to cite their ideological error and promise to become true Soviet patriots (Vettik and Päts 1948, quoted in Puderbaugh 2006, 129). Vettik, Karindi, and Päts were arrested in 1950 and imprisoned; they were not released until the mid-1950s (Puderbaugh 2006, 136). A new, Soviet controlled committee was appointed for the organization of the 1950 song festival (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 251).

“I Cannot be Silent,” while not a political or patriotic song, was nevertheless important to the mood of the 1947 festival as well as the 2014 festival. The first stanza proclaims, “I cannot be silent…keeping silent would be wrong And would make my heart to burst.” The significance of these words, especially under a new Soviet occupation, takes on a different light when viewed as a symbolic declaration. The 1947 festival was unapologetically patriotic—it was the very opposite of being silent. As the first festival of a long occupation, it set the stage for a steadfast Estonian non-silence, often manifested in diverse and clandestine ways. For the 2014 festival, the song had similar implications. An
all-women choir performed the song, making the song feel feminine in nature. The emotion of the song is melancholic, almost foreboding. Its slow and melodic verses do not build, but ring out instead with a constant sadness in their notes.

One interpretation of this song is that it is symbolic of the experience of women during times of war and occupation. The dealings of women are often hidden from the traditional geopolitical view (Dowler and Sharp 2001, 168), including their suffering and unique experiences. Around the time of the 1947 song festival, the “mass terror” was occurring, when thousands of men were sent to labor camps and women and children were being deported to Siberia (Taagepera 1993, 67). Such a harrowing experience, full of uncertainty and fear, must have affected women on a deep level. The woman in the song desires to not be silent, but to sing and play, and the outcome may be a “storm” she produces with her harp. Women are often unable to speak through traditional, masculine means and must find alternative ways to express their viewpoints and emotions. Although feminine voices may be silenced, they find diverse and powerful ways of expressing themselves.

The time context of the song in the 2014 festival is significant—it came at the beginning of the remembrance of the Soviet era and directly preceding the moment of silence which marked the 1950 festival, which Estonians regard as the gloomiest ever song festival (Randjärv 2014, 75-76). “I Cannot be Silent” speaks of an individual singing to their beloved. It speaks of a longing to play silently the harp, and sing very quietly. Perhaps Estonians felt similar emotions in regard to their beloved homeland. There are many interpretations to this seemingly simple song. However, its legacy was
deemed important enough to represent one of the most patriotic Estonian song festivals ever, at one of the darkest and threatening times.

The Soviet era was commemorated at the 2014 festival through colloquial songs, orchestral music, a song about the power and significance of the Estonian coast, and one nationalistic Estonian song at the special 1969 jubilee festival. It is clear that all Russian and Soviet music was excluded, as well as patriotic songs of the time which praised the USSR. Festival organizers instead chose to focus on Estonian music of the everyday—the work, school, and natural world that made Estonian lives meaningful under the occupation. This trend contrasts sharply with what was the climax of the festival—the commemoration of the liberation of Estonia and the songs chosen from the 1990 festival onward.

At the end of the 1980s, Soviet power and regulation were gradually but surely waning, allowing Estonians to hope for freedom and self-determination (Taagepera 1993, 153-158). Although by the 1990 song festival Estonia was not technically free, momentum and hope were building to the point of overflow. This was clearly manifest at the 1990 festival; the Estonian organizers were free to choose the repertoire, including Estonian patriotic songs as well as religious songs (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 256). Committee members for festival organization were choir, dance, and cultural leaders instead of political and bureaucratic officials. In sum, the 1990 festival occurred at a time of great change as well as great uncertainty: it would still be more than a year before Estonia officially regained its independence. To commemorate this festival in the “Touched by Time” concert, festival organizers chose the concert’s most popular song, Ärkamise Aeg
(“Time of Awakening”). René Eespere, an Estonian composer, wrote both the lyrics and music. It was debuted at the 1990 festival finale (Ojaveski et al. 2002, 257)

**TIME OF AWAKENING**

Music and lyrics René Eespere

The sea here
Stood still,
Halted by someone;
Shoreline pushed
Water back,
There began the land:

Level, Golden, Rocky, Earthy,
Cloudy, Windy, Full of hope.

Next, the first mom and dad
Came together here,
Working hard, they built a home,
And brought children home.
There was mirth, there was joy,
There were laughs, there were tears,
There was work, there was pain,
In this land.

(refrain)
Estonia, Estonia,
You are my homeland,
You are close to my soul.

Estonia, Estonia,
You are my homeland,
You are deep in my heart.
With sword, with fire
Came a foreign man,
Bringing pain, wickedness,
Eating people’s bread.

Dad was killed, mommy too,
Brother too, still a child,
The whole land flooded, soaked in tears.
(refrain)

Father’s soul, mother’s tongue
I’ll hold in this land,
Daddy’s land, mommy’s land,
From the very start:

Level, golden, rocky, earthy,
Cloudy, windy, full of hope.
(refrain)
(English translation from Šmidchens 2014, 189-90)
This song ignited the beginning of the climax at the “Touched by Time” concert. Unlike other festival songs of multiple interpretations, the emotional impact of this song is clear and unveiled. It speaks of the land itself: “level, golden, rocky, earthy, cloudy, windy, full of hope.” Next it speaks of the first Memm and Taat (Mom and Dad. These are not the typical Estonian words for mother and father, but rather older variants of them) making a home—one of tears and pain, but also one of mirth, joy, and laughter. These combined sentiments of a rooted, familial identity bonded to a specific land portray a version of Estonian “spatial socialization” (Paasi 1999) as well as a distinct “geopolitical vision” (Dijkink 1997, 11). By defining an inhabited space, and then later showing how that space was violated by an enemy “other,” this song establishes Estonians as a distinct nation, possessing a unique culture and identity in a defined geographical space. It also defines Estonian by who they are not—their foreign occupiers. “Time of Awakening” refers to a “hot” moment in Estonian history and nationalism— not a moment of independence won, but of independence lost. The collective memory of the horrors of war and occupation are a significant force in modern Estonian nationalism. The last verse ends with a promise to remember those who came before – to “hold them in this land.” Remembering the sacrifices a nation has made for independence, especially in the violent moments of “hot” nationalism, is often central to banal nationalism. War monuments, symbols, and waving flags are everyday reminders of what has been sacrificed for independence.
The overall feeling of the song is simple and soft—the singing not too forceful, the melody smooth, the lyrics “like a parent’s conversation with a child” (Šmidchens 2014, 189). During the refrain, the course of the song changes musically; it is clearly distinguished from the verses and is an emotional highlight. Next, the men sang alone, more forcefully now of a foreign man invading with the sword, “bringing pain… (and) eating people’s bread.” After dad and mommy are killed, “the whole land flooded, soaked in tears.” This powerful imagery would have spoken to Estonians in a unique way; it tells their own national story over and over again—being invaded and occupied by multiple foreign empires and falling victims to foreign regimes. Not only does it tell Estonia’s early history, it also reveals their recent past. Under Soviet rule, tens of thousands and Estonians were either deported, disappeared, forced into exile, or killed (Taagepera 1993, 81). Estonians were forced to learn Russian and adopt Russian customs (Raun 2001, 196-197, 211). The song ends with a promise to hold father’s soul and mother’s tongue in the land. After the song was over, the audience erupted, and the composer, René Eespere, came onstage. After repeated cries of encore, the choir and audience sang together the last verse and refrain.

The cultural-psychological context of this song is significant. To the specific group of people present at the “Touched by Time” concert, the words are personal, and both the choir and audience became emotional. They joined hands, swayed together, and many had tears rolling down their cheeks. The feeling of this song signifies a shared worldview and a shared sense of sadness and loss, as well as hope and national cohesion. This sentiment continued with the next song of the concert, marking the 1994 festival.
Koit ("Dawn"), by Tõnis Mägi, was the unofficial song of the Singing Revolution and was first performed in 1988, but did not debut at an official song festival until 1994.

DAWN
Music and Lyrics Tõnis Mägi

It’s time again
To straighten the back
And cast off the robes of a slave,
So that everything
Can be born once again.

It’s dawn,
Majestic blaze,
Victory of light
Awakens the land.
Free Is the sky’s bright edge,
The very first ray
Falling on our land.

The call—
We all call out,
To breathe again
As free people.
Look,
The ice has cracked;
Let’s hold out our hands,
And join forces.

With mind,
Unified mind,
Unified power
We can do all.
Ahead,
The only road,
The road of liberty;
There’s no other road.

Power,
The power of light,
Freedom’s clan,
Let us go together,
A cry
Of joy on our lips,
Look,
The great giant
Has freed his hand from stone.

Faith
Leads us ahead,
The heavenly ray
Directs us on.
And so,
To victory,
Only one step more,
One short step, step.

Land,
Land of our fathers,
This land is holy,
And becoming free.
Song,
Our victory song,
It shall ring on,
You’ll see a free Estonia!
(English translation from Šmidchens 2014, 258-2

The imagery is significant in this song as well. One cannot help but see the image of “dawn, a majestic blaze… awakening the land,” or of broken ice, melting at the end of a long winter. Written in 1988, the song captures the mood of a generation that had grown during the Soviet era. Ready to break free, the lyrics proclaim, “Ahead, The only road, The road of liberty; There’s no other road.” A notable nationalistic reference in the song comes in the lines “Look, The Great Giant, Has freed his hand from stone.” This is a reference to the Estonian national epic, Kalevipoeg (“Son of Kalev”), whose hero is left with his hand fastened to stone at the end of the tale (Šmidchens 2014, 259). While the
lyrics of the song are boldly declarative of a freedom to be won, it is clear that said freedom is not yet obtained. “The road to liberty still lay ahead, long, seemingly endless, but dawn glimmering on the mountaintops beckoned and energized the traveler to take one more step, and another one, toward the distant goal” (ibid., 258). When Mägi composed “Dawn” in 1988, that freedom was still not within grasp. Estonians were simultaneously looking backwards at the occupation and forward to their independence. This Janus-faced quality of the song is manifested in the imagery of a long night being pierced by a bright dawn; and thick, winter ice cracking at the first warmth of spring. Looking inwards, the lyrics emphasize unity of mind, spirit, faith, and purpose. By unifying within, Estonians gaze boldly outwards, towards their independence.

The feeling of the song is almost march-like; it begins with the sound of drums and trumpets, and then moves onto lively strings. It is bold, sure, and unabashed. Instead of reading from their music books and programs, the choir and audience members instead sang from the heart. The emotion from “Time of Awakening” carries on into “Dawn,” as audience members again rise, join hands, and sing along. After the choir has finished singing, Tõnis Mägi enters the stage to a warm welcome. Again, after multiple encore chants, the music re-starts, but this time with Mägi singing with the audience. He sang the entire song, and this time, the song sounds more like a rock song. This was in fact its original form; Mägi had written, performed, and recorded “Dawn” as a rock song during the Singing Revolution in a matter of days (Šmidchens 2014, 259). Its reception then, and today, has been very warm. It was even voted Estonia’s favorite song in 2009 (Elu24 2009).
The “Touched by Time” concert was an emotional and affective experience for participants and audience. In this case, the affect produced in the audience was triggered by performance, as well as images and human interactions. As Müller pointed out, affect “works in and through the body and bodily experience” and creates an emotional response (Müller 2015, 411. Italics in original). It is pre-conscious and may trigger intense feelings that promote action. The entire experience of the song festival—the procession, the traditional costumes, the familiar songs, the song festival grounds, the food and merchandise, the choir and audience in their respective places—all coalesce to create an assemblage of new meaning and purpose that amounts to much more than its component parts. It is through this joining together that the song festival becomes a center for meaning-making. Looking simultaneously backwards and forwards, and inwards and outwards, Estonia’s Janus-faced nationalism lays the foundation for a community that has a distinct geopolitical vision: Estonians are sure of their identity, proud of their history, and optimistic for the future of their country. As shown by the festival organizers’ choice of song repertoire, they define themselves by what they are (a proud, small singing nation) just as much as by what they are not (under foreign (Russian) rule). They demarcate what belongs to them—their homeland, language, and culture—by referencing what land, culture, and language is not theirs. While this may have not been explicit in the festival repertoire, it is apparent when one considers both what was included and what was intentionally left out.

Nationalism is often synonymous with violence and revolution, but in the case of the song festivals, it takes a more banal form. Choral singing is part of everyday life in
Estonia, and the occasion to perform and observe a national song festival is part of that banal nationalism. The seemingly commonplace paraphernalia of the festivals, including Estonian flags waving in the breeze, donning of regional and national costumes, and wearing a corn flower wreath in one’s hair may seem ordinary to Estonians at the festival—it is part of the fabric of their daily lives, even if it is more visible, more celebrated on that day. These symbols, along with others, act as signs which situate Estonians “physically, legally, socially, as well as emotionally” and assign their place in the greater world (Billig 1995, 8). The song festivals are just one aspect of Estonia’s “spatial socialization”; through the various components of the song festivals, Estonians individually and collectively “internalize (their) territorial identity and shared traditions” (Paasi 1999, 4).

Paasi (2015) explains that ‘hot’ and banal nationalism are fused together in the active memory of independence. Paasi’s concept of independence signifies much more than the moment legal sovereignty was achieved—it encompasses the history of a territory, social practices, events, narratives, and discourses that are related to national identity. It also includes memories and symbols that are significant to independence (ibid., 2). At the “Touched by Time” concert, the performance reached its apex in the memory of a liberated Estonia, declaring independence for the second time. This theme was the focal point of the entire concert. While there was a wide variety of song types and themes, they ultimately combine to tell a single story. Paasi’s framework of ‘hot’ and banal nationalism, centered on independence, explains the symbolic choice of song. The story of an independent Estonia is more than a story about a nation gaining freedom; it is
a story about their ancient past and roots as a people (such as the songs “Before and Now,” “Beginning of Song,” and “Time of Awakening). It is also a story of independence in work and livelihood, and a desire to protect that which belongs to you (“Young Blacksmiths,” “The Shepherd Boy is King”). Most of all, it is a story about loving one’s homeland, protecting it, and admiring its beauty (“’Till I Die” “You are Beautiful, Fatherland”, “The Most Beautiful Songs,” “Dawn,” and “Beautiful Earth”). The culminates in the collective memory of what Estonians have experienced to arrive where they are today, including the practices and discourses that maintain that sense of independence. Through the banal means of the song festival, Estonians examined how their nation had been “touched by time.” By telling their national story through song, Estonians reinforce their collective national identity. This in turn informs their present and future, including their expectations about their place in their own homeland, as well as their role as Europeans and actors on a global stage.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I examined modern Estonian national identity through the lens of the song festival. By utilizing the unique program and purpose of the 2014 festival and the “Touched by Time” concert, I was able to examine Estonia’s “geopolitical vision” and imagined identity in a previously unobserved way. By scrutinizing the 2014 festival repertoire against the backdrop of every previous festival, it became clear that the symbolic choice of song and theme communicates a unique message. I found that this message was overwhelmingly patriotic and nationalistic; the volume of such songs in the “Touched by Time” concert exceeded every previous song festival. Even colloquial themed songs and the folk song in the repertoire ringed with themes of independence and a desire for freedom. While the concert focused on the human identity of Estonia, it also emphasized the unique and even holy nature of the Estonian land itself. Overall, I conclude that through the song festival lens, Estonians imagine their nation as small yet powerful—painfully aware of their turbulent past yet optimistic for their future. They are deeply tied to their land, language, and unique heritage. Estonians find an anchor in their shared history, but at the same time have turned outward to an expanding world, full of possibility and opportunity.

My thesis represents the only research that has ever attempted to infer meaning about Estonian national identity through the choice of song. While this approach is unconventional, the framework and methods are not unprecedented (see Liu, An, and Zhu 2015). Geopolitics scholars have found that by examining the banal, everyday experiences and discourses lived by a nation, one can infer deep meanings and
conceptions of geopolitical realities (Dittmer 2010). I employed a critical geopolitical approach, combining elements from popular geopolitics, including audience studies, feminist geopolitics, and emotion/affect, to examine the intertwining notions of ‘hot’ and banal nationalism made manifest in Estonia’s active memory of independence. By examining individual songs in-depth, I extracted both apparent and hidden meaning in song lyrics, which emphasized various aspects of Estonian historical experience. The rich palette of lyrics painted an image of Estonian ancient origins, struggle for freedom, sorrow in suffering, hope in deliverance, marvel at beautiful nature, and rejoicing in national unity and freedom. More than any other message, the unified theme of the song festivals showcased the history of a resilient nation, overcoming the dominion of multiple foreign occupiers and invaders.

The clear climax and focal point of the “Touched by Time” concert was the portion that highlighted Estonia’s liberation from the Soviet Union. It was the emotional peak of the concert, and brought Estonians to their feet and tears to their eyes. Only twenty-three years previous, the memory of liberation was salient and undimmed for many audience members who had witnessed it for themselves. One of the Estonians with whom I attended the concert remarked that she remembered the day she no longer had to wear her Soviet uniform to grade school. An older generation had lived their entire lives under the Soviet regime, and liberation was life-changing for them. This energy was apparent in the festival, and the celebration of glowing independence illuminated the entire concert. This independence meant more than freedom from foreign control—it encompassed the entire collective memory of what Estonians have experienced to arrive
where they are today. Through the everyday, banal practice of choral singing and song festivals, Estonians remember their heritage and independence in a subtle way. This constant, perhaps unnoticed, reminder of Estonian nationalism is powerful. While simultaneously glancing backwards, highlighting ‘hot’ moments in their history, Estonians gaze forward, collectively carrying their hard-earned freedom and corresponding identity into the future.

Although still textual in nature, the analyzing of song lyrics with the intent to extract meaning, emotions, and geopolitical imaginations, is part of a burgeoning field in critical geopolitics. As avenues open for exploration of previously overlooked data, scholars gain new opportunities to obtain knowledge in unconventional places, such as national and folk songs, as well as festivals. As part of Müller’s (2015) call for analyzing the more-than-representational, including performative practices as well as emotion and affect through bodily experiences, I analyzed the emotional and performative aspects of specific songs in the “Touched by Time” concert. Witnessing both spontaneous and manipulated emotional responses in choir and audience (such as audience members spontaneously joining hands compared to the planned repetition of the song, “Dawn” by Tõnis Mägi), I was able to discuss meaning and purpose in these songs, and from this infer knowledge about Estonians’ imaginations of their own identity. Overall, I found an emotionally rich and complex geopolitical imagination, centered on the notions of shared land, history, language, culture, and love of country.

In this thesis, my data were primarily songs, although I did analyze portions of specific festivals as well. Festivals are a genre of folklore studies in and of themselves,
and would be a rich source for study in the future. The rituals, traditions, structure, and significant changes in the Estonian song festivals convey meaning about changing attitudes, political atmosphere, and cultural beliefs. While the songs I analyzed for this thesis reveal significant meaning, there were also some limitations in my study. While I did my utmost to uncover hidden and culture-specific meanings in the songs I analyzed from the “Touched by Time” concert, some information might have been missed. This information could be meaning gleaned from understanding certain musical patterns (I am not a musician) or obscured cultural meanings in the rhythm, lyrics, or arrangement of the song that were inaccessible to me. While my data and interpretations are a good starting point, there is room for even more in-depth interpretation.

Overall, this systematic longitudinal survey of Estonian song festivals through time, combined with an in-depth qualitative study of the “Touched by Time” concert, intertwine to reveal a fascinating portrait of Estonian nationalism and identity. By using Paasi’s (2015) framework of ‘hot’ and banal nationalism, put into focus by the active memory of independence, I was able to expand and apply this approach in a previously unexamined way. Paasi’s explanation of independence encompasses multiple aspects, including narratives, discourses, routine habits, memories, symbols, and the everyday (ibid., 2). I have expanded this to include performances, folk and choral songs, festivals, and emotion. I have also expanded Paasi’s framework conceptually, allowing for an emphasis on the symbolic creation of meaning in relation to independence, in this case through song festival performance. This meaning-making transcends the un-planned banal activities of everyday life and ventures into the orchestrated and choreographed
imaginings of national identity. At this festival, the song festival organizers were at the helm of symbolic meaning making, with the audience validating and perpetuating their emphases and song choice. This orchestrated meaning-making medium, in relation to the active memory of independence, may be applied elsewhere in future studies, including numerous sources of media and state-sponsored events and messages.

The active memory of independence permeated the “Touched by Time” concert, especially in relation to Estonia’s liberation from the Soviet Union. The collective memory of independence is a key informer of modern Estonian national identity. By drawing on the strength of past experience and combining it with the narratives and discourses of the everyday, Estonians move with an attitude of optimism for the future, declaring “It is ours to decide what will be our time’s touch and story” (Eesti Laulu-ja Tantsupeo SA 2015, my translation).
REFERENCES


Epstein, Charlotte. 2013. Constructivism or the eternal return of universals in International Relations: Why returning to language is vital to prolonging the owl’s flight. *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 3: 499-519.


APPENDICES
Program for the 2014 “Touched by Time” Concert (Laulu-ja Tantsupeo SA 2014, 41-53)

Introductory Songs

1. “Dawn”  
   Music by Mihkel Lüdig  
   Lyrics by Friedrich Kuhlbars

2. “My Fatherland, My Happiness and Joy”  
   Music by Fredrik Pacius  
   Lyrics by Johann Voldemar Jannsen

3. “Sound”  
   Music by Gustav Ernesaks  
   Lyrics by Juhan Liiv

“Time of National Awakening – The Path to Independence”

4. “‘Till Death” (1869)  
   Music by Aleksander Kunileid  
   Lyrics by Lydia Koidula

5. “Forward Gallop” (1871)  
   Music by unknown composer  
   Arranged by Peeter Saan

6. “You are Beautiful, Fatherland” (1880)  
   Music by Karl August Hermann  
   Lyrics by Mihkel Veske

7. “Before and Now” (1891)  
   Music by Miina Härma  
   Lyrics by Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald

8. “The Most Beautiful Songs” (1894)  
   Music by Friedrich Saebelmann  
   Lyrics by Peeter Ruubel

   Music by unknown composer
10. “Young Blacksmiths” (1910)
   Music by Rudolf Tobias
   Lyrics by Gustav Suits

“The Republic of Estonia between the Two World Wars”

11. “What are these Reins Holding Us” (1923)
    Music by Mart Saar
    Folk Lyrics

12. “On Liberty’s Morning” (1928)
    Music by Konstantin Tünpu
    Lyrics by Marie Heiberg

13. “Kalev and Linda” (1933)
    Music by Eduard Tamm, Miina Härma

    Music by Mart Saar
    Lyrics by Marie Heiberg

“The Time of Occupation”

15. “I Cannot be Silent” (1947)
    Music by Miina Härma
    Lyrics by Anna Haava

16. Moment of Silence (1950)

17. “The Shepherd Boy is King” (1955)
    Music by Mart Saar
    Lyrics by Jakob Hurt

    Music by Villem Kapp
    Lyrics by Kersti Merilaas

19. Symphonic poem “St. John’s Night” (1965)
    Music by Mihkel Lüdig

    Music by Veljo Tormis
    Lyrics by Hando Runnel
Music by Heino Eller

22. “Nocturne” (1975)  
Music by Tuudur Vettik  
Lyrics by Kersti Merilaas

23. “School Bell” (1980)  
Music by Uno Naissoo  
Lyrics by Ira Lember

Music and Lyrics by Gustav Ernesaks

“Second Liberation”

Music and Lyrics by René Eespere

Music and Lyrics by Tõnis Mägi

27. “Wheel of the Sun” (1999)  
Music by Olav Ehala  
Lyrics by Juhan Viiding

Music by Rein Rannap  
Lyrics by Hando Runnel

29. “’Till I Die” (2009)  
Music by Alo Mattiisen  
Lyrics by Lydia Koidula and Jüri Leesment