

Special Thematic Section "Collective Memories and Present-Day Intergroup Relations: A Social-Psychological Perspective"

Identity and Othering in Past and Present: Representations of the Soviet Era in Estonian Post-Soviet Textbooks

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Abstract

This paper analyses representations of the 'core Soviet era' (1945-1985) in Estonian post-Soviet history textbooks (1989-2016). Attitudes towards the Soviet system have been a rich resource for identity building, and hence a powerful political tool across the whole of the post-Soviet block. Based on an analysis of sections about the Soviet era in Estonia in 21 textbooks, the paper takes a look at how textbooks reflect broader processes of social meaning making, identity building and othering after a profound social and political turn. In 1989 and during the early 1990s, perspectives and narratives in Estonian history textbooks were closely related to social memory and national politics, enacting a specific social representation of the Soviet era that dominated the Estonian-speaking public space during the 1990s. The Soviet era, Russia and local Russians became the main Others for Estonia and Estonians. Over time, public discourse has diversified. The national curriculum and textbooks, however, still maintain the canon that formed in 1990s and thus reflect earlier sentiments. Apart from the increasing salience of Soviet-era daily life in more recent textbooks, the thematic choices and emphases have changed little since the 1990s. Therefore, even if the style of writing has 'cooled down', issues of identity preservation, resistance and accommodation, together with a saliently negative representation of wrongdoings by the Soviet system, still prevail. On the one hand, this testifies to the resilience of an established tradition in the textbook genre in general. On the other hand, it reflects the dominance of an ethnocentric tradition in Estonian history textbook writing. The paper discusses the implications of these findings for interethnic relations in Estonia.

Keywords: history politics, history textbooks, social memory, immigration, intergroup relations, othering, Estonia, Russian-speakers

Non-Technical Summary

Background

When group interests conflict in the present, a historical period often becomes an arena where conflict is fought out symbolically. In the former Eastern block, one such period is the post-WWII Soviet period. The question of how to evaluate the Soviet period still produces controversial answers and is a frequent matter of social and political contention. In Estonia the two main ethno-linguistic communities – native Estonian-speakers and native Russian-speakers – remember the Soviet era differently: native Estonian-speakers evaluate the era much more negatively than native Russian-speakers. This 'mnemonic conflict' causes difficulties in history teaching because what Russian-speaking students have heard at home may conflict with what they hear from a teacher or read in history textbooks. In addition, some native Russian-speaking students may be offended by how the Soviet era is represented in these textbooks. They may feel that, since the Soviet era is represented as a time of Russian oppression in Estonia, they too, as Russians, will be cast in a negative light in the textbooks. Moreover, native Estonian-speaking students also view the Soviet era as something increasingly distant and difficult to comprehend.

Why was this study conducted?

The first aim of the study was to research the representations existent in Estonian history textbooks about the Soviet era, specifically the period between 1945 and 1985. The second aim was to discuss the possible implications of textbook representations for intergroup relations in Estonia.

What did the researchers do and what did they find?

I analysed the relevant sections about the Soviet era in 21 textbooks that were published between 1989 and 2016. By doing so, I reconstructed the main trends in representing the post-WWII Soviet era (1945-1985). I had the following research questions in mind when analysing the textbooks: What themes constitute the post-war Soviet era in the textbooks, and from what perspectives are the themes approached? How do the textbooks relate to social memory and politics after a profound social and political turn? What changes can be detected in the textbook representations over time? What may be the implications for students from ethnic minorities (specifically, Russian-speakers) and students from the majority (Estonian) group? I paid attention to 1) explicit and clearly visible topics; and 2) less explicit, underlying themes. I found that except for the increasing prevalence of Soviet-era daily life in more recent textbooks, the thematic choices and emphases have changed little since the 1990s. At the same time, the style of writing has cooled down in the textbooks. So on the surface, the textbooks have become friendlier towards Russian-speaking students. However, due to the stability of thematic choices, the textbooks are still clearly written with native Estonian-speaking, rather than Russian-speaking, students in mind. That is to say, underlying themes still speak mainly to ethnic Estonians, rather than to any other possible group of readers.

What do these findings mean?

These findings help explain why some Estonian native Russian-speakers are still offended by the way in which the Soviet era is depicted in textbooks. The findings also demonstrate the importance of paying attention to both the visible, surface level, and underlying deep level of a text when analysing and evaluating school history textbooks. Both levels can have an impact on intergroup relations in at least two ways: 1) they can affect how a group of readers feels when reading the textbook and how it makes them feel about another social group with which they associate the textbook; and 2) they can affect what stereotypes about the self and the other the text enhances or reduces.

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Estonia is a country that has gone through several radical ruptures of political regimes, ideology and identity in the last century. After declaring independence in 1918, and reinforcing it in the Independence War (between 1918 and 1920), Estonia lost its independent statehood in 1940 to the Soviet Union. Between 1941 and 1944 the German occupation followed, only to be replaced once more by Soviet rule from 1944 to 1991. Soviet rule has been one of the most divisive historical issues in Estonian society since the collapse of the Soviet Union (e.g. Kus, Liu, &

Ward, 2013). This paper examines school history textbooks as sites of social, political and academic sense-making about the post-war Soviet period, more specifically the period between 1945 and 1985.

It is characteristic of post-Soviet countries that the Soviet era is an object of ongoing sense-making, mnemonic clashes, and dialogue (e.g. Bassin & Kelly, 2012; Bernhard & Kubik, 2014). Compared to other Eastern European countries, the Baltics, and Estonia in particular, are known for their relatively solid anti-Soviet stance since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Getting rid of the 'Soviet legacy' and presenting Estonia as distant from the 'East' has been one of the key issues in Estonian politics and society since the early 1990s (Kasekamp, 2010; Wulf, 2016). Over time however, an increasing plurality of perspectives has become visible in Estonian public space: aside from representing the Soviet era as a national tragedy and historical rupture that still resonates in official and political contexts (Nugin, 2016), presently, the social remembrance of the era also includes a certain retrospective normalisation that emphasises the everyday dimension of the late Socialism and enables some nostalgia (Grünberg, 2009; Jõesalu, 2016; Nugin, 2015).

School history textbooks are one site where socially contentious topics are elaborated (e.g. Christophe, *in press*; László, 2014; Sakki, 2016). Depending on style and approach, history teaching can promote dialogic and fact-based sense-making as well as contribute to the enhancement, and entrenchment, of social conflicts (Grever, 2007). Analysing representations of the Soviet era in Estonian post-Soviet history textbooks, the present study asks the following questions: What themes, both manifest and underlying, constitute the post-WWII Soviet era in the textbooks, and from what perspectives are the themes approached? How do the textbooks relate to social memory and politics after a profound social and political turn? What changes can be detected in the textbook representations over time? What are the implications for students from ethnic minorities (specifically, Russian-speakers) and students from the majority (Estonian) group?

Context and Relevance

Social remembrance of the Soviet era in Estonia is a classic case of heteroreferential representation of an issue where group- and identity-building works in two directions: One group's representation of an issue is shaped and strengthened by knowing how it is perceived by a specific out-group (Wagner, Raudsepp, Holtz, & Sen, 2017). During the Soviet era, workforce immigration resulted in large Russian-speaking communities in Estonia, amounting to 38 per cent of Estonia's population by 1989 (Kulu, 2004).¹ Opposing oneself to 'the Soviet' and/or 'the Russian' – including, by extension, local Russian-speakers – has been an important part of ethnic Estonians' identity establishment (Petersoo, 2007; Raudsepp & Wagner, 2011). Among other things, native Estonian-speakers see their Russian-speaking compatriots as victims of both Soviet and contemporary Russian propaganda (e.g. Kus et al., 2013). Among Estonian Russian-speakers, in turn, the relatively widespread view is that both the Estonian state and Estonian-speakers exaggerate the negative aspects and harms done to Estonia by the Soviet system (Kus et al., 2013; Raudsepp & Wagner, 2011). Indeed, even if ethnic Estonians engage in the discussion of the late Soviet era in a cheerful and nostalgic tone at times (Grünberg, 2009; Jõesalu, 2016; Nugin, 2015), they often show little tolerance for local Russian-speakers' more positive view of the Soviet Union as a regime and state (e.g. Kus et al., 2013).

These mnemonic differences are partly caused by which part of the Soviet era one has in mind: Stalin's time, or 'late Socialism' (Jõesalu & Kõresaar, 2013; Kõresaar, 2004). The Stalin era until 1953 was marked by repressions and terror that left lasting scars on Estonian social memory (Aarelaid, 2016; Rahi-Tamm, 2016). After 1953, gradual liberalisation and normalisation of daily life followed. The Soviet regime gave up its totalitarian ambition

and rather became a peculiar case of authoritarianism (Piirimäe & Mertelsmann, *in press*; Yurchak, 2006). Political rights and freedom of expression were nevertheless very limited and an increasing threat to Estonian ethnic identity was felt from the 1970s onwards (Kasekamp, 2010; Liivik, *in press*). While Stalin era traumas were common to both Estonian- and Russian-speakers, in the post-Stalin era the feelings of identity threat and political pressure by the Soviet Union rather characterised ethnic Estonians (Vihalemm & Jakobson, 2011).

A recent study showed that apart from WWII, the Soviet era is still among the most sensitive issues for Estonian history teachers. The reasons seem to differ for teachers of Estonian- and Russian-speaking students: While a teacher who taught mainly Estonian-speaking students explained that the era was difficult to teach about because “the present generation doesn’t get that absurd time” (Kello & Raudsepp, 2017, p. 115), teachers who had Russian-speaking students in their classes explained that the issue was sensitive due to incongruences between the dominant Estonian view and Russian-speaking students’ ‘home memories’, as well as due to alternative interpretations in the current Russian media (Kello & Raudsepp, 2017).ⁱⁱ In addition, Russian-speaking students’ feelings may be hurt if they feel that their in-group is presented in a negative light together with the Soviet system. As one teacher wrote, the Russian-speaking students “often get the feeling that because the Soviet Union was bad, they are bad by association” (Kello & Raudsepp, 2017, p. 115). The challenge for history teaching thus derives from both student and teacher backgrounds, which may either conflict in the classroom or clash with the broader Estonian and Russian memory politics (Kello, 2016; Oja, 2014, 2016).

All the more important is the role of history textbooks as facilitators in history teaching. Textbooks have the potential to mediate between different positions both by offering a balanced and neutral view, and by explaining different positions (Grever, 2007). Of course, such mediation faces format- and genre-specific (Wagner, Kello, & Sakki, *in press*) as well as political (Nakou & Barca, 2010) challenges.

Based on existing research in Estonia, one can assume that history teachers find little support from textbooks when dealing with memory conflicts in society. First of all, there is the feeling among Russian-speaking teachers and students that the textbooks represent a narrow Estonian perspective – indeed, some Russian-speaking students seem to think of textbooks as government propaganda (Kello, 2016; Kello & Raudsepp, 2017). Some history teachers who work with Russian-speaking students feel they need to excuse or at least explain the Estonian position, as reflected in history textbooks, to their Russian-speaking students (Kello & Wagner, 2014, 2017). Time and again Russian-speaking youngsters bring up the issue of the lack of inclusiveness in school textbooks, or even perceived hostility towards Russian-speakers in the textbook narrative (e.g. Nugin, 2016). At the same time, Estonian-speaking history teachers tend to defend the textbooks, denying excessive ethnocentrism (cf. Kello & Masso, 2012). Unlike their Russian-speaking colleagues they evidently share the social memory position reflected in the textbooks (Kello & Wagner, 2014).

Given such divergent perceptions, even among professionals who use the textbooks daily, it is crucial to see what a close reading of the textbook discourse, as it developed over time, will reveal. To the best of my knowledge, no analysis specifically focusing on representations of the Soviet era in Estonian textbooks is yet available. Some authors have touched upon representations of the period when analysing other aspects, such as representations of the Other, in history textbooks: representations of minorities and neighbouring states over a longer time span, or representations of selected sensitive issues (e.g. Arutyunyan, 2014; Oja, 2013; Pääbo, 2011; Raudsepp & Veski, 2013). With regard to the Soviet era, these studies accord in expressing concern about the influence of

textbooks on interethnic relations because both Soviet rule and Russian-speaking immigrants are portrayed from an ethnic Estonian perspective – that is, in a predominantly negative way.

This paper analyses representations of all salient aspects of the post-WWII Soviet era rather than merely well-known problematic aspects such as immigration or Stalinist crimes, because both in social memory and in textbook representations it is also the interplay of different aspects, and divergent evaluations attached to them, that contribute to the sensitivity of the Soviet era.

Textbooks Between History, Politics and Society

From its beginnings as a modern school subject in Europe and other Western countries in the 19th century, history teaching has served political, identity-related and patriotic interests (e.g. Carretero, 2011). Although many new conceptions of history teaching have developed in the meantime, this is how its main aims are still perceived by the broader public (e.g. Nakou & Barca, 2010). Apart from a state's interest in enhancing a collective memory-based sense of civic commitment to the nation, there is also a common expectation that, in order to function as educated individuals, pupils should acquire a body of central narratives (Grever & Stuurman, 2007).

There is a wealth of research on history textbooks as one of the most significant tools of enactment and transmission of collective memory, identity and worldview (e.g. Foster, 2011; Holmén, 2006; László, 2014; Pääbo, 2011; Sakki, 2016). Such research shows how textbooks are used to enhance collective identity by marginalising or even demonising other groups (Foster, 2011; Repoussi & Tutiaux-Guillon, 2010). At the same time, history textbooks are rarely univocal tools of any one institution (state, academy, publishing business). Rather, they are products of complex relationships between the interests of various agents (such as teachers, officials, authors, publishers, and politicians), negotiating their space between social memory, political agendas, pedagogy and academic research. To what extent curricula and textbooks reflect any of these factors, and how exactly they interrelate with each other, varies from context to context (cf. Christophe, *in press*; Lässig, 2010; Sakki, 2016; Verschaffel & Wils, 2012). At least in cases where school textbooks are written by academic historians, they are the product of popular historiography, located between academic history and collective memory (Lässig, 2010; László & Ehmann, 2012). Just as a science textbook is a means of popularising science, a history textbook is expected to transmit findings from academic history – ideally together with insights from other relevant scholarship such as memory studies, anthropology, political psychology, and more (cf. Kello, 2014). There is evidence that academic textbook authors believe in the role of history textbooks as a means of transmitting academic scholarship to a lay audience, while remaining aware of the social expectations that limit what content will be accepted by teachers, students and their families (Kaljundi, 2016). Academic authorship is however not characteristic of all national contexts (cf. Lässig, 2010) and there may be differences between textbooks within the same country. This is the case in Estonia, where some textbooks are written by professionally active academic historians, some by historians who specialise in popularisation, and some by history teachers.

Yet another factor is the method of textbook reproduction. Some publishers produce new textbooks by new authors frequently, whereas others recycle the same books for decades. In both cases – recycling old material and writing new – existing texts and discourses are influential. In the textbook genre, the copy-paste effects that occur when a new textbook is based on an old one from the same authors or publishers are particularly notable. Often one can speak of parts of textbooks reproducing themselves even without the authors noticing (cf. Lässig, 2010; László & Ehmann, 2012).

History Curricula and Textbook Provision in Post-Soviet Estonia

Curricula

Education discourses were no exception to the profound changes that occurred in Estonian society since 1987 and 1988. Within a teacher-initiated grassroots movement, the need to change hitherto Soviet ideology-based history teaching was cautiously discussed since 1987 and several provisional syllabi were proposed already in 1989. Nevertheless, the first mandatory national curriculum was issued only in 1996 (Oja, 2014, 2016).

Altogether, three national curricula have been mandated in post-Soviet Estonia: in 1996, 2002, and 2011 (Estonian Government, 1996, 2002, 2011a, 2011b). These have been written by work groups composed of active history teachers, a few academic scholars and one or two civil servants who deal with history and social studies, and are rather similar in structure and content (Oja, 2016). According to all of them, history is a compulsory subject in grades 5 to 12, that is, for 11 to 19 years old students, in general education schools.

In the introductory course in grade 5, the main aim is to raise interest in the subject. No topics are prescribed and teachers are free to decide how to introduce the new subject. Based on existing research it seems that teachers prefer to do this in a rather traditional manner, mainly using textbooks that present a chronological overview of Estonian history (Oja, 2016).

From grades 6 to 9 the first Eurocentric overview of world history, with chapters on Estonian history, is provided. In grade 9, 20th century history is studied with separate chapters about Estonia.

At upper secondary level (grades 10 to 12), a similar round of world history is reiterated. Until 2011, a separate course on Estonian history was compulsory at the upper secondary level in addition to courses on 20th century world history. Schools could decide which of these courses to teach at grade 11 and which at grade 12. Since the curriculum revision of 2011, 20th century Estonian history has been integrated into the courses on world history.

In 1996, the upper secondary section of the curriculum detailed the topic of the *Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic* using five keywords: *economy, population, culture, resistance to the foreign power, exile*. For grade 9, only the general topic *Estonia under Soviet Occupation* was mentioned (Estonian Government, 1996). The curriculum was accompanied by an official commentary (Ministry of Education of Estonian Republic, 1997) that explained the aims and contents of the curriculum in more detail.ⁱⁱⁱ The commentary specified the mandatory curriculum by means of a few additional topics such as *border changes, Stalinist repressions, and political structures* for both grade 9 and the upper secondary level (grades 11 or 12 depending on the school's curriculum), and *living standards* for grade 9 (see the Appendix for details).

As can be seen in the Appendix, the topics remained more or less the same in the 2002 and the 2011 curricula. In fact, partly similar keywords were already present in the 1990 provisional syllabus (Ahonen, 1992).

The keywords are not elaborated further in the curricula. Only by studying the related textbooks' contents – the canon in the sense of “a shared framework of historical interpretations [...] consisting of a range of selected historical facts and interpretations” (Grever, 2007, p. 40) – can we understand the keywords' meaning in the textbooks.

Textbook Provision

There are no regional or other differences in the range of textbooks used in general education schools except the school's language of instruction which I address briefly below.^{iv}

Until 2007, the state supervised textbook production through the Subject Council of History – a state-approved but independent body of acknowledged history teachers, scholars and textbook authors, partly the same people who participate in curriculum design (Oja, 2016). The council evaluated each textbook based on its own judgement and invited reviews. According to a study by Oja (2016), the council reviewed some of the textbooks many times before giving its approval, but none were rejected. Since 2007 there has been no state supervision and publishers appoint their own reviewers. From 1996 to 2007 the reverse of the title page for each approved textbook bore the note, "The Ministry of Education affirms: This textbook accords with the national curriculum". Since 2007 "ministry" has been replaced with "publisher" in the affirmation.

School textbooks are normally not purchased by students – or their parents – in Estonia. Instead, schools buy the textbooks by means of a specific state subsidy, and lend them out to students. The teachers officially have the freedom to use any material in their lessons, as long as they follow the curriculum. If there are alternatives on the market, schools decide which textbooks should be bought. Usually the teacher of a particular subject or the school's librarian makes the decision (Oja, 2016).

New textbooks appear relatively rarely and there are few alternatives available due to the small market size. The specific textbook provision method and the fact that the curriculum has changed little over time imply that the textbooks have no expiry date (cf. Oja, 2014). Older textbooks can be used with newer curricula if the school lacks the money to buy new ones, or if the teacher chooses to do so. Because the textbook sets are owned by schools, i.e. kept in school libraries, teachers are less dependent on what textbooks are currently on the market: They can give out older alternatives to their students as well. Some teachers prefer to use older and newer sets concurrently, either to practice multi-perspective teaching or because they like an earlier textbook's treatment of a particular topic (Oja, 2016). On the other hand, there is less flexibility for teachers to replace old textbooks with newer or alternative versions.

A selection of Estonian textbooks has been translated into Russian for the Russian-speaking schools (Oja, 2014, 2016). Since the gradual transition to Estonian-language instruction in Russian-speaking schools that was introduced in 2007, these translations are mainly used at the lower secondary level, that is in grades 5 and 9. At the upper secondary level – grades 10 to 12 – Russian-speaking students are increasingly expected to learn history in Estonian, using textbooks in Estonian (Masso, Kello, & Djačkova, 2011).^v

Method and Data

Textbooks

To answer the research questions, I collected all history textbooks on post-WWII Estonian or world history, published in Estonian for general education schools between 1989 and 2016, including revised versions of earlier texts. In total, there are 25 such textbooks (cf. Oja, 2016). To include a textbook in the present analysis I set the condition that it must include a focused treatment – at least a separate subsection – of the Soviet era in Estonia or the Baltic states. Twenty textbooks met this condition. In addition to school textbooks in the strict sense, I included a general

interest textbook from 1989 in the analysis, as it was also used in schools at the time (see more below). Thus, altogether 21 textbooks were included in the analysis (Table 1). From these textbooks, all sections – usually one to several chapters long – on the post-WWII Soviet era in Estonia (or Baltic countries) were included in the analysis.

Table 1

Textbooks in the Present Study (N = 21)

Time of Publication	Grade 5: Estonian History	Grades 6 to 9: Estonian or Contemporary History	Upper Secondary: Estonian History (Grade 11 or 12)	Upper Secondary: Contemporary History (Grade 11 or 12)	General interest textbook used in schools
1989			Õispuu (Ed.), 1989		Laar, Vahtrre, & Valk, 1989
1991-2000	Toomet, 1993 Laar, Tilk, & Hergauk, 1997	Sarapuu, 1994 Värä, Tannberg, & Pajur, 1999	Arjakas, Laur, Lukas, & Mäesalu, 1991 Laur, Pajur, & Tannberg, 1995 Adamson & Valdmaa, 1999	Jaanson (Ed.), 1994	
2001-2010	Hergauk, Laar, & Tilk, 2002 Piir, 2009	Värä & Tannberg, 2004	Adamson & Karjahärm, 2004 Vahtre, 2004 Pajur & Tannberg, 2006	Laar & Vahtrre, 2007	
2011-2016	Antons & Hallik, 2015	Bahovski & Piir, 2016 Värä & Tannberg, 2016		Laar, 2016	

From all post-WWII history textbooks that were published in the timespan studied, the condition that the textbook must include a substantial treatment of the Soviet era in Estonia or the Baltic states leaves out three grade 5 textbooks (Sarapuu, 2002; Värä & Adamson, 2001; Vseviiov, 2002) and two upper secondary textbooks (Adamson, Ant, Mihkelson, Valdmaa, & Värä, 2000; Fjodorov, 2002). These textbooks either do not deal with the Soviet era in Estonia or the Baltic states at all, or review it in only a few paragraphs.^{vi}

The first two ‘post-Soviet’ textbooks appeared in 1989, even before the Soviet era was officially over. The first textbook that re-interpreted the whole Soviet narrative in Estonia was *The Story of Home* by Laar, Vahtrre, and Valk (1989). The two slim volumes of this book (110 and 109 pages respectively) were aimed at a broader public, although they were also used to teach history in many schools. The book’s narrative about the Soviet era deserves to be included in the present study both because the book was used as a school textbook in practice, and because of its foundational role in shaping later textbook discourse. Oja (2016) also includes the book in the list of Estonian school textbooks.

The other textbook that appeared in 1989 (Õispuu, 1989) was specifically aimed at the upper secondary school level. It combined new knowledge and the inclusion of facts that were denied during the Soviet era, with some remnants from Soviet historiography, such as continuing to use the Soviet designation of WWII, the “Great Patriotic War”. Similarly to Laar et al. (1989), it was also used in other grades due to the scarcity of materials at the time (Oja, 2016; Pääbo, 2014). From 1991 onwards, thicker and richer textbooks followed, written by various, but often recurrent, author groups (see Table 1).

Analysis: Describing Manifest Topics and Reconstructing Underlying Themes

The analysis proceeded in two steps. The first part of the analysis aimed to find out through which aspects the Soviet era is represented in the textbooks. The thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the selected chapters combined inductive and deductive elements. Based on a close reading of an initial selection of textbooks from different decades, I formulated an initial list of thematic categories that I used to code all chapters. In this process I complemented the initial category list. My aim was to be as open as possible in this process, although awareness of existing curricular topics necessarily influenced the categories that formed (cf. Charmaz, 2006). In the findings section below, I present the findings deductively based on the main curricular categories.

As the study focuses on the Soviet-era *in* Estonia, I excluded chapters and sections on all-Union and international events and processes, even if they related to Estonia. Although officially the Soviet era did not end until 1991 when Estonian independence was re-established, in the present study I cover the post-WWII period until 1985 – virtually all textbooks depict the second half of the 1980s as another story. Thus, the era of Gorbachev normally introduces a chapter about gradual liberation rather than concluding the chapter about the Soviet era. For this reason, its representation in textbooks requires a separate study.

Whereas in the first part of the analysis I describe the manifest themes as they appear in the textbooks and point out typical characteristics of each of them, the second part of the study discusses underlying themes present beneath the manifest layer. The underlying, deep themes mediate between national storylines or master narratives (as studied by many scholars of history and memory; e.g. Carretero & López Rodríguez, 2010; Tamm, 2008; Wertsch, 2002) and smaller narratives about specific events or processes. To the immediately visible level of discourse, they add a partly underlying level that shapes and gives meaning to the surface. Together with the master narrative they delimit both what is significant (cf. Liu & Hilton, 2005), and what can or cannot be said at the manifest level (cf. Wagner & Hayes, 2005). The underlying level helps us to interpret the meanings and messages of, and connections between, the manifest topics and topoi. Among other things this deep level helps us to see how deeper meanings relevant to intergroup relations may be implied even in topics that may seem irrelevant at first glance.

Wagner (2011) likens reconstructing the level of underlying representations to finding offbeat in Latin American music: determining the location of something not audible yet definitely there as ‘shared ground’ or a clue to individual pieces of data. It may be that none of the texts explicitly articulates the underlying clue – but it can nevertheless be felt “everywhere ‘underneath’ the texts” (Wagner, 2011, p. 6). Technically this part of the study meant interpreting manifest representations of a pre-selected set of recurring and interesting themes and topoi, iteratively testing and clarifying preliminary impressions and assumptions, akin to “selective” or “focused coding” in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Main Findings: Manifest Topics Constituting the Era

Table 2 gives an overview of the presence and relevance of curricular topics (Appendix) in the textbooks. The designation “salience of a topic” refers to the relative space devoted to the topic within a textbook. For the sake of simplicity, I regard the five most prevalent topics in terms of row count within a textbook as “prominent” in that textbook.

Table 2

Presence of Curriculum Topics in Textbooks

Categories in 1996, 2002, and 2011 curricula and their commentaries. Grade 9 and upper secondary level ^{vii}	Salience in Textbooks. 1989-2016. Grades 5, 9 and upper secondary level
Political structures	Short mentions in grade 5 textbooks, prominent treatment in most grade 9 and upper secondary textbooks.
Border changes	Short reviews in most grade 9 and upper secondary textbooks, no mention in grade 5 textbooks.
Repressions	Prominent treatment in most textbooks; at least short mentions in all textbooks.
Resistance	Prominent treatment in most textbooks; at least short mentions in all textbooks.
Economy	Prominent treatment in all textbooks.
Population changes	Prominent treatment in some textbooks; at least short mentions in all textbooks.
Culture and daily life	Prominent treatment in most textbooks, except for some upper secondary textbooks. High professional culture more prominent in grade 9 and upper secondary textbooks, everyday life more prominent in grade 5 textbooks.

All the core topics of the curriculum are present in all textbooks from 1989 already – except for the topics *culture and daily life* in Jaanson (1994), *political structures* in three grade 5 textbooks, and *border changes* in all grade 5 textbooks and two upper secondary textbooks. In addition, the *daily life* part of *culture and daily life* has been mainly a grade 5 topic, mentioned only fleetingly in grade 9 and upper secondary textbooks. A notable exception to this is Vahtre (2004), a grade 12 textbook giving a prominent position to daily life. The first grade 9 textbook where daily life is prominent appeared only in 2016 (Värä & Tannberg, 2016).

In short, inductive coding shows that no other topics take up as much space across the textbooks as the ones that are also present in the curriculum. Rather, the smaller topics and topoi that recur in the textbooks can all be related to curriculum categories. Therefore, one can say that from 1989 onwards the textbooks of all grades contributed to defining a canon that has largely remained the same since then.

More specifically, *political structures* is a salient topic in almost all textbooks, omitted only from some grade 5 books. This is a rather dry and institutional topic usually written in a formal way, even if livened up by some events within the Communist Party and short descriptions of leading figures. If present in textbooks for younger, i.e. grade 5 students, the presentation is fleeting:

Almost all of our lives were managed from Moscow. All decisions on the economy, governance and people's everyday lives were made by the Communist Party, which was the only party allowed in the Soviet Union. (Antons & Hallik, 2015, p. 110)

A central issue in the representations of the power structures is the clash between Estonian and Soviet interests. While implied as self-evident in textbooks published later, a textbook published in the early 1990s formulates this conflict of interests explicitly:

The main (unresolved) question of post-war Estonian history is the struggle between the inner logic of Estonian social development, and an imposed Stalinist system; a struggle to preserve ESTONIA. The central axis of this struggle focuses mainly on the relationship between the Moscow and Tallinn authorities and power apparatuses: how much did Moscow decide, how much did Tallinn decide? Which instructions,

received from the Centre, could be softened in Estonia; which instructions were implemented even more severely and incompetently? Within a totalitarian system it was not possible to change the essence of the system, but within certain limits it was possible to play with how earnestly the instructions were followed. (Arjakas et al., 1991, p. 372)

Border changes is the least visible curricular theme in the textbooks. It is the only topic that is present solely in older students' textbooks, i.e. grade 9 and upper secondary. Even here, however, it is either dealt with rather quickly in a single paragraph that dryly states the facts, or omitted altogether (cf. above in Table 2). The focus is on the fact that Estonia lost some territory (5%, mainly inhabited by Russians) to Russia after WWII. This issue has come to the fore intermittently in Estonian politics since the 1990s, and probably established itself as a curricular topic in the 1990s as part of the more general underlying theme "wrongdoings by the foreign power" (more on this below).

In contrast to the border issue, the topics of *repressions* and *resistance*, together with issues related to them (such as collectivisation of farms as related to Stalin-era repressions and culture as part of resistance and survival, see below), are among the most visible in the textbooks.

Stalin era repressions, particularly the mass deportations of 1949, are mentioned in all textbooks, whereas *armed resistance during the Stalin era* (the Forest Brothers) is mentioned in all but the latest grade 5 textbook (Antons & Hallik, 2015). Sometimes the tone is kept neutral and descriptive, as if letting the facts speak for themselves:

The plan was to deport 7,500 families, that is 22,326 people, from the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic, of whom only 3,077 were 'kulak' families. The remaining 4,432 families belonged to the so-called German henchmen, bandits (Forest Brothers), their helpers, and 'other anti-Soviet elements' [...]. In addition to the 7,500 families a reserve – 1,906 families – was planned [...]. This means that during the deportation it was important to comply with the planned numbers. (Õispuu, 1989, p. 134)

A more emotional tone is present in the textbooks that use eyewitness accounts of the hardships and deaths during the deportation process and in Siberia.

Resistance during the post-Stalin era (1960s to 1980s) is mentioned in all grade 9 and upper secondary textbooks. The focus is on dissident movement mainly in the 1970s, and sometimes on various post-Stalin era youth movements in the 1950s and 60s.

In addition, *resistance and survival* is latently present in most other topics. As I will show shortly, it pervades the textbook narratives from everyday life to the cultural sphere.

Economy, which includes the subtopics *collective farms*, *industry*, and *planned economy* (cf. Appendix), proves to be the most visible manifest topic in the textbooks. This is a prominent topic in all textbooks. Taken as a whole, the view is predominantly negative: the Soviet system is unanimously represented as having done much more harm than good. The harm is portrayed in economic, ecological and cultural terms. Depicting the Estonian economy as exploited by a foreign power is usual and the term "colonial economy" is often used. A typical tone is illustrated by the following quote: "The goal was exploitation of local resources in the interests of the empire, and therefore the Russification of the occupied areas." (Laar & Vahre, 2007, p. 34).

Due to the forced collectivisation in 1949, which was interconnected with a large-scale deportation of farmer families (21,000 people) to Siberia in 1949, the treatment of agriculture in the Stalin era is always related to the

repressions at that time. Similarly, *industrialisation* is depicted as one of the misdeeds of the Soviet government and as having harmed the Estonian nation and nature.

Population changes, mainly due to *mass immigration* (present in all textbooks) are usually mentioned in relation to industrialisation. The following quotes are typical examples of how this is presented to the younger (grade 5) students:

According to the orders of the central power, large factories and mines that didn't suit the local conditions were established. Their produce was mainly exported. To obtain the necessary workforce, thousands of Russian-speaking people were moved here, so that Estonians faced the danger of becoming a minority in their own country. (Piir, 2009, p. 77)

Immigrants did not want to learn Estonian and they didn't understand our culture and history. To accommodate the foreign people who had come here, new residential areas were built with identical large apartment buildings. (Antons & Hallik, 2015, p. 111)

While sometimes only the "demographic misbalance" is explicitly mentioned, as in the quote above, in many textbooks immigration is more or less explicitly equated to *Russification* and presented as a danger to local language and culture. The following quote is one of the most explicit in stating this position:

In Estonia a number of new factories, mines and power plants were built that Estonia didn't need at all. The output of these companies went to the East, while here there was industrial pollution and workers with no knowledge of the language and with a cultural background and habits alien to us [...]. The goal of the Kremlin leaders was [...] to create a new, Russian-speaking, 'Soviet people'. In this, too, they were partly successful: among the foreigners who settled in Estonia there were many landless nomads who had lost their nationality, language and roots, and who, in addition, were even proud of this. (Adamson & Karjahärm, 2004, p. 247)

In fact, immigration is usually the only context in which minorities are mentioned in the chapters on the Soviet era. They appear as Russian-speaking immigrants who are often represented merely as tools of the industrialisation-oriented Soviet system. In some textbooks they *choose* to move to Soviet Estonia because of better, Western-like, living conditions, the general appeal of the place, or by pure chance, being thus represented to some extent as active agents. But their agency goes little beyond that and is rather determined by external factors or chance:

Why did I go to Tallinn? Why not Moscow? Why not Kiev [...]? There was no rational motivation. Just a car that drove there happened to go by (Laar, 2016, p. 165, quotation from a memoir excerpt)

Culture is the most heterogeneous topic in terms of both content and textbook approach. Quantitatively, descriptions of high and professional culture dominate, for example through overviews of important artists, writers, etc. These chapters usually start with Stalinist ideological pressure and repressions against artists, followed by much more creative freedom during 1960s, the so-called 'Golden Sixties'. Such narratives are present in most textbooks, often as a separate chapter. Sometimes, the double position of the artist as the Soviet state's propaganda instrument on the one hand, and as someone trying to find space for creative freedom and resistance to ideological pressure on the other, is mentioned.

A separate section or chapter on high and professional culture disappears from the upper secondary curriculum as an aspect of the Soviet era in 2011 and is omitted from the latest upper secondary textbook (Laar, 2016).

Often, descriptions of culture refer to the underlying topos of “culture as means of survival”, or “cultural resistance”, more or less explicitly – for example, by mentioning the “writing between the lines” that occurred in poems and novels. Thus, culture is represented as an important support mechanism for Estonians throughout the Soviet era:

In the subsequent decades culture turned into a means of self-preservation for people. Interest in culture was greater than ever. Virtually all new books were sold out and it was difficult to get theatre or concert tickets. Through poetry or drama Estonians could sometimes straighten their backs at least in spirit. (Toomet, 1993, pp. 251-252)

Both high professional culture and popular culture are depicted as means of survival and resistance.

Resistance to the foreign power increasingly shifted to the cultural sphere. By keeping and promoting national culture, one tried to keep and protect national identity, and to somehow cope with the difficult circumstances. This way, even those who did not dare to take part in direct actions of resistance, could express their protest. (Laar & Vahtrre, 2007, p. 105)

Some authors extend the concept of cultural resistance to the unspoken and implicit realm of disagreement with Soviet ideology. It is, of course, difficult to present any evidence of how widespread such a mind-set used to be, *post hoc*: one cannot study from outside whether, for example, participating in cultural activities was just that, or also an expression of silent protest. Thus, there appears to be a scale of resistance forms ranging from armed struggle, i.e., *resistance movement*, to hidden dislike and even unwitting *perseverance* – for example, by preserving one’s immunity to propaganda (cf. Hollander & Einwohner, 2004, on the concept of resistance in various research strands). In 1990s Estonian society, the cultural resistance topos was so deeply entrenched that it was almost an innovation to propose any reason other than cultural resistance or defiance of the regime – such as lack of alternatives for cultural consumption – for the widespread interest in high culture during the Soviet era (cf. Johnson, 2007). Some of the textbooks preserve this approach. The national curricula have possibly had an influence on textbook approaches as well, since one of the curricular keywords has been “resistance” rather than “dissent” or “silent opposition”. Therefore, the latter phenomena become subsumed under the former term in the textbooks.

Daily life and living conditions in the material sense – i.e. coping on a daily basis, consumption, shortages, home and family, trends and fashions – is a category present in all grade 5 textbooks, whereas in older students’ textbooks its importance has grown over time (cf. Appendix on the category’s increasing prevalence in national curricula). Interestingly, in Estonian society too, everyday Soviet life has become a more prevalent object of sense-making (Jõesalu & Kõresaar, 2013). Thus, *everyday life* is the only topic where an increase in importance within textbooks and curricula matches a corresponding change in social importance.

Several grade 5 textbooks depict children’s lives, usually focusing on school life:

Smaller children joined the Little Octobrists, slightly older children joined the Pioneers while those who were older still joined the Communist Youth. Although these organisations aimed at raising the children in the spirit of Communism, [in reality] most time was spent organising leisure activities and hiking. (Hergauk et al., 2002, p. 173)

In the textbooks of the older grades, the treatment of daily life is generally brief and focused on shortages as a significant peculiarity of Soviet life. In fact, while some improvement in daily life is admitted in several textbooks, for example better living standards from the 1960s, this is usually tempered by mentioning the shortages, and often by comparing Soviet Estonian living conditions to Western or even pre-WWII conditions. The deficit of various

common goods, particularly from the 1970s onwards, is mainly explained through the dysfunctional planned economy.

In connection with life in Soviet Estonia, contact with and information from the West – represented as the positive counterpart to the Soviet Union – are mentioned in most textbooks. Whereas in one grade 5 textbook the presentation is simplified – “the Soviet people had almost no contact with the rest of the world [..]. People knew little about what happened elsewhere [..]. One attempted to convince the people that one lived in the best country in the world” (Piiir, 2009, p. 77) – other textbooks stress the amount of counter-information that was available to Soviet propaganda either through correspondence with relatives in the West, by listening to Western radio channels or by watching Finnish TV. As per another grade 5 textbook, people “secretly listened to foreign radio stations and watched Finnish television, so that they learned how people lived in other parts of the world. This increased opposition to the foreign regime and encouraged people to think about how to get rid of it” (Hergauk et al., 2002, p. 173).

Most grade 9 and upper secondary textbooks stress that Estonia was known as the “Soviet West” within the Soviet Union due to its relatively Western looking goods and fashions. Concurrently it is stressed that Soviet Estonia functioned as a Soviet showcase for the West.

Western music, clothing and hippie ideology spread. All of this shaped the Baltic countries into a kind of false Soviet West, where people from the rest of the Soviet Union came to learn about the Western lifestyle. (Laar & Vahtre, 2007, pp. 104-105)

A recurring frame through which life during the Soviet era is viewed can be called *everyday life as accommodation*. This framing implicitly juxtaposes opposition to the regime, on the one hand, and living a normal modern life on the other hand. Through this juxtaposition, everyday life becomes part of a broader network of moral choices.

[During the years 1953-1964] Society’s values became blurred. Although direct pressure weakened, an increasing number of people settled with the conditions that had developed. For example, even in the most difficult times, during the years of the most terrible Stalinist mass repressions, the majority of Estonians did not turn their backs on the Church. Now it was done. People began building private homes and summerhouses, buying cars, refrigerators and TV sets. (Adamson & Valdmaa, 1999, p. 213)

Indeed, in several textbooks, consumption is represented as adjustment to the Soviet system.

The drawback of this [better living conditions from the 1960s] was that the younger and middle-aged generations adjusted fairly well to the Soviet system. (Laur et al., 1995, p. 127, as translated in the textbook’s English version Laur, Lukas, Mäesalu, Pajur, & Tannberg, 2000, pp. 295-296)

This statement, still present in Värä and Tannberg (2016), concludes a section about increasing living standards, people’s increased focus on consumption, the “westernisation” of Soviet Estonia from 1960, and Estonia’s markedly better position as compared to the Soviet average. Considering everyday-life adaptation a drawback seems to stem from the interpretation that the system somehow ‘bought’ the people by means of goods, thus silencing their inner resistance.

Indeed, a textbook from 1991 explicitly represents consumption as collaboration:

The cooperation with the authorities that was necessary to get these [deficit] goods was justified as inevitable. Sharing or not sharing deficit goods enabled the party, Soviet and trade union bureaucracy to strengthen social control over individuals in society. (Arjakas et al., 1991, p. 436)

A contrasting view, also present in several textbooks, can be called *everyday life as refuge*:

In this situation it wasn't really possible to set any higher goals. It was good if a person was able to realise themselves in their field, such as science or art, and in personal life by creating a family and purchasing a summerhouse and a Finnish sauna. (Vahtre, 2004, p. 292)

All in all, *culture* and *daily life* markedly brighten up the textbooks' representations of the Soviet era.

Discussion

Except for the topic of daily life, the topics present in curricula and textbooks remain relatively stable over time. Even the two most recent curricula from 2011 display continuity with their predecessors. The prevalent issues in curricula and textbooks can be explained in two ways. Firstly, they represent dominant themes in traditional historiography: politics, economy and high culture. Second, the way the topics are narrated in the textbooks is underpinned by what is regarded as important in *Estonian* history. The textbook narratives predominantly derive from the self-image of Estonia as an occupied colony, with a focus on ethno-national resistance and survival, and the associated responsibility of a foreign power for the harm it has done. This holds even for those textbooks that avoid the term "Soviet occupation": textbooks univocally see Estonia not as an integral part of the Soviet Union, but as an unjustly Sovietised, essentially separate, unit. At the same time, it is noteworthy that, in contrast to the social and political public memory of the 1990s (Kõresaar, 2004), all textbooks in the sample acknowledge the diversity within the Soviet era – none of them denies the normalisation of life and the "Golden Sixties" after Stalin's death. In this regard the early post-Soviet textbooks preceded related discussions in the public space. Thus, there are aspects where the textbooks combined an academic and a social perspective from the very start, rather than only reflecting the latter. On the other hand, in case of another topic – by the increasing attention paid to Soviet-era daily life over time – the textbooks rather *reflect* developments in societal discourses (on the latter, cf. Jõesalu & Kõresaar, 2013).

Together with the manifest topics in the curriculum, the *underlying themes* also seem to have remained relatively stable over time. To understand later textbooks, their context and meanings, one needs to be aware of both earlier 1990s textbooks and the social representations prevalent at that time.

Deep Themes: Underlying Meanings of Textbooks' Representations

The present findings align with other studies on Estonian post-Soviet sense-making according to which the issues of *survival*, *resistance*, and *accommodation* frame and determine the remembrance of the Soviet era (e.g. Kannike, 2006; Mertelmann, 2012; Wulf, 2016). Drawing from the research here presented, I would add *wrongdoings by the foreign power* to this list. These deep themes help us to understand the deeper meanings of the prevalent curriculum topics described above.

Most of the underlying themes: *surviving* and *resisting* – or *persevering* – as well as *accommodation* to the given conditions as a precondition of such endurance reflect core values in Estonian-speaking historiography since its

inception in the 1920s. Being mainly a history of peasants until the 19th century, the Estonian grand narrative has always presented a “view from below” (Grönholm, 2007; Tamm, 2008; Wulf, 2016). An important part of this has been looking for evidence of ethnic and class dignity – or at least resilience – despite oppression (cf. Pääbo, 2011; Tamm, 2008; Wulf, 2016). Wulf (2016) notes that the 700-year narrative of Estonian history “has simultaneously been one of suffering and of resistance and resilience, because Estonians both endure and survive” (p. 116). Therefore, although one might expect a storyline of centuries long oppression to be gloomy, it is not univocally so: the implied collective heroism and resilience, together with the happy ending, give it a glorious touch (cf. Pääbo, 2011). Also in the textbook sections analysed, Estonians are represented as either resisting or adapting, i.e. as agents with choices, rather than victims – even though Stalin-era repressions and other Soviet wrongdoings take a prominent place as well. An illustration of this in the textbook sections analysed is the relatively large space devoted to dissidents notwithstanding their actually small number – about 20 to 30 persons (Wulf, 2016). As we saw above, the meanings of resistance are also quite stretched in the textbooks, from active armed resistance to immunity to Soviet ideology.

In contrast, the prominence of the deep theme *wrongdoings by the foreign power* draws on the strongly anti-Soviet attitude and the need to come to terms with the hitherto silenced Soviet-era traumas that were particularly prominent in the early post-Soviet years (e.g. Kõresaar, 2004). The trauma of the large-scale Stalinist repressions that could in principle hit anyone regardless of their views or former position can be felt in Estonian society to this day (Aarelaid, 2016; Kello & Raudsepp, 2017; Rahi-Tamm, 2016). In 1941, the first Soviet mass deportations to Siberia, of about 10,000 civilians, mainly affected the wealthy elite, although many civil servants, such as policemen, and their families, were also involved. While women and children who made up two thirds of the deportees were sent to Siberian settlements, men were sent to prison camps (Mertelsmann & Rahi-Tamm, 2009). In 1949 the second mass deportation, this time of over 20,000 civilians, focused on the countryside and was mainly directed against those farmer families who had been defined as *kulaks*, i.e. relatively wealthy farmers (those who were able to hire farmhands), as well as those identified as anti-Soviet minded. Such a broad definition subsumed most of the rural population (Mertelsmann & Rahi-Tamm, 2009; Strods & Kott, 2002). Smaller actions took place in between, and followed in the early 1950s. Mertelsmann (2012, p. 80) calls the scale “staggering: more than one-tenth of the population was arrested, deported or spent time in a Soviet camp, and four per cent died as a result”. It is therefore understandable that in curriculum and textbook representations, Stalinist atrocities take one of the more prominent positions. What is *central* when writing about those years is relatively easily determined. One could add levels and perspectives to the treatment of that time and, for example, write about culture, politics and everyday life from various perspectives (e.g. Mertelsmann, 2012), or discuss collaboration in more nuanced ways (Rahi-Tamm, 2016), but the large-scale systematic crimes would nevertheless overshadow the other perspectives.

The same does not apply to the post-Stalin years when conditions normalised: when there were no more great ruptures that would overshadow the rest. The underlying themes however retain their importance. *Survival and resistance*, as I showed above, gain new meanings such as cultural resistance, and *survival and accommodation* shift to the realm of everyday life. Similarly, the theme *wrongdoings by the foreign power* becomes more abstract and manifests itself more specifically as *industrialisation, immigration, urbanisation, and Russification*. There might not be another way to explain the importance of these topics in the curricula, textbooks and social representations more generally than the notion of threat and harm to Estonian identity (e.g. Wulf, 2016). In the early 1990s in particular, the social ideal that was most prevalent in Estonia was the pre-WWII Estonian republic (Kannike, 2006; Kõresaar, 2004). Almost all notable changes introduced during the Soviet era were easily represented as “Soviet” and thus negative. With regard to Estonian history, Soviet industrial development together with the immigrant

workforce was perceived as intentionally targeting local identity. Indeed, in the textbooks not only Stalin era terror, but also industrialisation and urbanisation are often represented as tools or instances of ethnic or national oppression, if not a deliberate attempt to extinguish Estonian identity, often perceived as rooted in pre-WWII rural culture (cf. [Kannike, 2006](#)). Thus, in a way, industrialisation and urbanisation can even be said to become milder forms of continuations of the Stalin-era repression of Estonian farmers, lifestyle and culture.

Immigration, industrialisation and urbanisation are connected to *Russification*. The Soviet Russification policy – extending the use of Russian and one-sided promotion of bilingualism – is mentioned in almost all textbooks. In some of the shorter sections on the Soviet era, e.g. in grade 5 textbooks, the mentions are brief and the term Russification is not always used explicitly. In longer treatments, Russification is described as something attempted by the Soviet state since the 1940s, mainly by a forced influx of new members of the workforce, and since 1970s as a policy of reducing the space available for Estonian language. In short, Russification is seen as a wrongdoing perpetrated by Soviet leaders who are represented as using Russian-speaking immigrants as one of their tools.

To conclude, it is interesting to see how quickly a profound change can take place in the course of deep social and political transformations, like those that occurred in Estonia around 1990, and how quickly a new, relatively stable representation then formed. As an underlying perspective of textbook narratives, the latter is preserved to this day, even if the wordings and style of expression have cooled down and diversifying nuances have been added. From the perspective of intergroup relations, one consequence of this is that even if outward hostilities are removed at the surface level, the deep themes that underlie them can retain a life of their own. For example, even if Soviet-era immigrants are no longer disapproved of explicitly, or even if the story of deportations is told in a more differentiated way, the story of the Estonian people still includes an underlying antagonism to its eastern neighbour.

Implications for Intergroup Relations

A few years ago, the following dialogue took place in a Russian-speaking student focus group about Estonian history:

Irina: For instance, in the Estonian textbook it says that Russians are like, bad, that they occupied Estonian land and... in general, I don't know, they're mocking, or... Marina: Negatively... Irina: Well, yes, that's the evaluation. They love Germans, but Russians... they don't. ([Nugin, 2016](#), p. 21)

Why do the students still feel this way, even though the textbooks are becoming more careful in their wordings? The present study identified several factors. Most notably, while empowering for ethnic Estonians, the attribution of agency that underlies the textbooks' narratives is markedly ethnocentric. As it is visible from representations of immigration, even if represented by means of a neutral wording and not explicitly included among the description of wrongdoings, Russian-speakers appear mainly as tools of the Soviet system. They have little agency even when deciding to come to Estonia. In a similar vein, one of the most salient modes of agency of ethnic Estonians is 'retaining Estonianness' as a form of cultural resistance. In *what* is represented as harmful and needing resistance, the Russian and the Soviet merge (cf. a similar finding in earlier studies: [Arutyunyan, 2014](#); [Nugin, 2016](#); [Oja, 2013](#); [Pääbo, 2011](#)). Moreover, the sometimes offensive expressions still present in 2004 (as in [Adamson & Karjahärm, 2004](#)) testify that some textbook authors and publishers forget or wilfully disregard the fact that Russian-speaking students are present in Estonian classrooms. They appear to be oblivious of the potential of textbooks to create and increase conflict and reinforce stereotypes ([Grever, 2007](#)).

Of course, what happened in the past narrows down what it is possible to narrate. It is also understandable that the early post-Soviet approaches present in the textbooks were a reaction to Soviet-era ideological, indoctrinating approaches (Oja, 2014) and derived from an urgent need to correct the flaws, silenced issues and outright lies of Soviet propaganda (Ahonen, 1992; Undusk, 2015). Once canonised and reified, the new narratives became resistant to change and pluralisation (cf. Ahonen, 2001). It is however obvious that such representations include aspects and assumptions that are not helpful and may even be damaging to the students today. Dry and rigid recounting of facts, or hiding controversies, is as unhelpful as paying respect only to one of the social memory groups within the present.^{viii} One can assume that the stereotypes of the outgroup, where they already existed, could be enhanced by representations found in textbooks. On the one hand, negative stereotypes of Russian-speaking compatriots may induce or increase ethnic Estonian readers' prejudice. On the other hand, facing negative representations may create feelings of aversion and defiance against Estonians in Russian-speaking students (cf. Arutyunyan, 2014; Nugin, 2016). Russian-speaking students may feel left out of what it means to be Estonian, which in turn can influence dynamics of cohesion and national identity. It is also possible that, indirectly, textbook representations of Soviet-era immigration influence representations of new "others", such as refugees and other groups coming to Estonia today (cf. Jetten & Wohl, 2012).

In general, if a textbook offers no anchors for the convictions and positions that students already hold, they may simply reject the textbook's story (Hawkey & Prior, 2011; Tulviste, 1994). In the Estonian case, this is a well-known problem and in fact more probable with Russian-speaking students. However, Estonian-speaking ethnic majority students may also not identify with rigid monophonic representations and top-down evaluations any more than their Russian-speaking peers. The Soviet era may seem to them as far away as any other ancient and bygone past (Kello & Harro-Loit, 2017). Future research among both Estonian- and Russian-speaking youngsters would be necessary to find out to what extent they sympathise with the collective angst and identity concerns of previous generations.

All in all, there are several challenges for textbook development stemming from today's real-world intergroup relations and mutual stereotypes of ethnic majority (Estonian) and minority (Russian) students, their mutual representations, attributions of collective guilt and victimhood as well as analogies that people inevitably draw between the past and the present (Kus et al., 2013; Nugin, 2016). Textbook representations may influence intergroup relations not only through surface level texts such as explicit representations of Russia or immigrants, but also through the incompatibility of underlying narratives and worldviews (cf. Wagner & Hayes, 2005). Statements and wordings are much more easily changed and 'corrected' than deeper, hidden, implicit level narrations. Indeed, noticing or not noticing the deep level beneath the narration, or how prominent the us-them juxtaposition is in textbooks, is probably the reason why Estonian- and Russian-speaking readers – both teachers and students – perceive the same textbooks differently. It is more probable that the underlying deep level accords with the Estonian-speaking, rather than Russian-speaking, worldview. At the same time, while no text has one unequivocal meaning for any reader group and there is no direct textbook influence on the reader's mind (Kalmus, 2004), one can assume that textbooks have an influence on social representations, either by strengthening existing representations, or by heteroreferentially strengthening counter positions (cf. Wagner et al., 2017).

Limitations and Future Research

The present study offers an illustration of the interconnections between politics, identities, intergroup relations between majority and minority groups, and education. It does not come without limitations. To start with, only one

person conducted the analysis. As in any qualitative analysis, some subjectivity cannot be avoided when delimiting themes, particularly at the latent level of the underlying themes. This must be kept in mind when reading the findings. Although the descriptions and explanations are data-based, there is no conclusive way, and there could not have been even if several authors were engaged, “to be sure that the extracted representation is the ‘right’ one; that we are not tapping our feet to a wrong ‘rhythm’” (Wagner, 2011, p. 7) other than confronting the material both critically myself and with other research, as I do in the discussion of my findings. In doing this, I have attempted not to violate the “fine line [...] between interpreting data and imposing a preexisting frame on it” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 68).

Secondly, deep historical themes and narratives are likely to be perceived in similar ways by many people (Wagner & Hayes, 2005; Wertsch, 2002). Nevertheless, the present study is in a way limited by being based on textual analysis. In this line, the main future research desideratum is to conduct studies among teachers and students from different mnemonic groups within Estonian society. In particular, research designs including students and teachers with different ethnic backgrounds would help to shed more light on the present study’s topics. A highly desirable further line of research would also be to conduct comparative studies in other post-Soviet countries. This could help produce interdisciplinary textbooks that not only take into account academic history, but also memory studies and other disciplines that study both past and present sense-making. It goes without saying that such findings need to be contextualised socio-politically in order to enable new insights into the transformations that societies face over time.

Conclusion

Textbooks are loci of negotiation between authors’ individual positions, academic history and social memory, official and normative positions on how a certain era should be remembered, and didactic positions and curriculum demands. Ideally, representations within textbooks should be loci of *dialogues*, too – of different perspectives both *within* the past, as well as *on* the past. In fact, history textbooks are one of the institutions that can contribute to dialogue in society. Hopefully, in the future, history textbooks will support teachers and students who deal with conflicting interpretations of the past. In doing so, textbooks may help generate empathy, dialogue and better intergroup relations.

Notes

- i) ‘Russian-speaking’ refers to Russian as a native language rather than monolingualism here. I prefer this term to ‘Estonian Russians’ because it includes other ethnic groups (e.g. Ukrainians) in Estonia who identify as part of the local Russian-speaking community. Since Estonia’s re-independence the proportion of people in this group has sunk below 30 per cent.
- ii) As part of Soviet era heritage there are two strands of schools in Estonia, working based on the same national curriculum since 1996 but designed for students with Estonian and Russian native language, respectively. At present, about 20 per cent of Estonian students attend schools for native Russian-speakers, that is, schools where most or some of the subjects are taught in Russian. A growing number of native Russian-speaking students are attending schools with Estonian as the sole language of instruction. These schools are therefore becoming increasingly mixed.
- iii) A similar commentary accompanied the next curriculum in 2002 (Sepp & Peet, 2002).
- iv) The same textbooks are used in vocational schools, comprising about one third of upper secondary level students (OECD, 2016).

v) In addition to the translated versions, one shortened textbook version in slightly simplified Estonian language was produced in 2010 (Vahtre, 2010). Similarly to the translations, this textbook substantially replicates its original version (Vahtre, 2004). However, some adaptations made to address Russian-speaking students identity needs are telling: some (although not all) potentially offensive expressions have been removed (e.g. referring to immigrants as ‘civil occupation’), and some details such as names of Russian dissidents, as well as a paragraph stating that local Russians also suffered under Stalinism, have been added.

vi) In a revised version of the textbook by Adamson et al. (2000) that appeared in 2003, a short 1.5 page review under a third-level heading “The Baltic states under Soviet occupation” has been added. It is however still too short to be compared with other textbook sections that are included in this study.

vii) There are no Soviet era related topics prescribed in grade 5 curricula, however most grade 5 textbooks portray the era optionally as part of Estonian history. ‘Upper secondary level’ means grades 10 to 12. As compared to lower secondary grades 5 and 9, schools have relatively more freedom to decide at which particular grade an upper secondary course is taught. For example, some schools offer the course on Estonian history at grade 11, and others at grade 12. Therefore, in contrast to the lower secondary level, the curriculum as well as most textbooks are addressed at ‘upper secondary’ students rather than at a particular grade.

viii) The question of the ‘truthfulness’ or ‘adequacy’ of the textbook narratives is a separate issue that cannot be dealt with in detail here. Historical narratives cannot really be assessed in terms of their *correctness*; only factual propositions – individual names, dates, and figures – can (Ankersmit, 2012). Narratives can be compared to each other in terms of coherence, adequacy of the included propositions, as well as relative bias (Holmén, 2006). They cannot, however, be compared to the past itself – the past is not an untold story against which we can check what is said about it (Ankersmit, 2012). There is no reason to doubt that most of the factual claims in the textbooks are correct. What can be questioned is the *selection* of the facts and their framing, together with the meanings attached to them. The problem is thus the deep underlying representations and the resulting evaluations of past events and processes.

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Competing Interests

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Appendix

Table A.1

Keywords Related to the Post-WW2 Soviet-Era (From 1945 to 1985) in Estonia or Baltic Countries Present in the Estonian National Curricula and Commentaries That Accompany the Respective Curricula

Category	Grade 9		
	1996	2002	2011
Name of the period	Estonia under the Soviet occupation	Estonia under the Soviet occupation	Estonia under the Soviet occupation
Border changes	(Border changes)	(Border changes)	Border changes
Repressions	(Mass repressions)	(Mass repressions)	Repressions
Economy	(Collectivisation and development of agriculture)	(Forced collectivisation)	Collectivisation
	(Industrialisation and development of industry)	(Forced industrialisation)	Industrialisation
Population Changes	(Guided migration)	(Guided migration)	—
Political structures	(Political command. J. Vares, N. Karotamm. The 8th Plenum of Estonian CP Central Committee. Russian Estonians' political role. J. Käbin and K. Vaino [Soviet-era leaders of ESSR])	(Political command Optional topic: The 8th Plenum of Estonian CP Central Committee)	Political command
Culture and daily life	(Cultural life during the Soviet era)	(Culture)	Culture
	(Living Standards)	(...and living conditions during the Soviet era)	(...and living conditions)
	(Connections to the rest of the world)	—	—
Resistance	(Resistance movement and dissidence)	(Resistance movement)	—
Emigree Estonians [not included in analysis]	(Exile)	(Optional topic: Exile Estonians)	—

Note. Explanations and additional topics in commentaries are added in brackets. The 1996 and 2002 national curricula were accompanied by official booklets (Ministry of Education of Estonian Republic, 1997; Sepp & Peet, 2002), i.e. commentaries to the respective curricula. Besides comments and teaching examples the booklets included explications of, and additions to, the topics mandated in the curriculum. As these lists were used to design national final examination tests (from 1997 to 2012), they can be considered the semi-official national curriculum. In fact, in addition to 'normal topics', some 'optional topics' were explicitly outlined in the commentaries.

Table A.1 (continued)

Keywords Related to the Post-WW2 Soviet-Era (From 1945 to 1985) in Estonia or Baltic Countries Present in the Estonian National Curricula and Commentaries That Accompany the Respective Curricula

Category	Upper Secondary			
	1996		2002	2011
Name of the period	Baltic states under the Soviet occupation (similarities and differences)	Estonian SSR	Estonian SSR	Estonian SSR
Border changes	(Border changes)	—	—	—
Repressions	(Mass repressions)	(Mass deportations)	(March deportations [1949])	—
Economy	—	Economy (Economic development)	Economy (Economic development. Centralised management and command economy)	Economic development
	(Collectivisation)	(Founding kolkhozes)	(Forced collectivisation)	—
	(Forced industrialisation)	—	(Forced industrialisation)	—
Population Changes	(Guided migration)	Population	Population (Guided migration)	Population
Political structures	(Political command)	(Political development. The 8th Plenum)	(Administration and governing. Political command. The 8th Plenum. Political thaw and stagnation)	—
Culture and daily life	—	Culture (Cultural life)	Culture (Culture as propaganda instrument Optional topic: the Golden Sixties) (Everyday life and living conditions)	—
	—	—	Society	Society
Resistance	(Resistance movement)	Resistance to foreign power (Resistance to foreign power)	Resistance to foreign power (Forest Brothers. Dissidence. The Letter of 40)	Forms of resistance
Emigree Estonians [not included in analysis]	—	Exile	Exile (Exile Estonians)	Relations with exile Estonians

Note. Explanations and additional topics in commentaries are added in brackets. The 1996 and 2002 national curricula were accompanied by official booklets (Ministry of Education of Estonian Republic, 1997; Sepp & Peet, 2002), i.e. commentaries to the respective curricula. Besides comments and teaching examples the booklets included explications of, and additions to, the topics mandated in the curriculum. As these lists were used to design national final examination tests (from 1997 to 2012), they can be considered the semi-official national curriculum. In fact, in addition to 'normal topics', some 'optional topics' were explicitly outlined in the commentaries.