

# Empty Spaces and the Value of Symbols: Estonia's 'War of Monuments' from Another Angle

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Since the summer of 2004, the new EU member state of Estonia has been in the throes of what is described as a 'War of Monuments'. The events in question began in the town of Lihula in western Estonia, where a veterans' group erected a stone tablet commemorating those Estonians who in World War Two donned German uniform and fought on the eastern front against the USSR. Bearing the inscription '*To Estonian men who fought in 1940 - 1945 against Bolshevism and for the restoration of Estonian independence*', the Lihula stone became the latest of several monuments commemorating a group that most Estonians today regard as freedom fighters. In this case, however, the soldier depicted bore SS insignia. Hardly surprisingly, this fact elicited widespread international condemnation, notably from Russia, the EU and Jewish organisations. The groups behind the monument insisted that the men in question had had no truck with Nazism, and had only enlisted as a last resort in order to obtain access to arms with which to repel the Soviet invader. The display of the SS insignia nevertheless disregarded the taboo that surrounds the display of Nazi symbols in today's Europe. Also, while the vast majority of Estonian SS legionnaires did indeed sign up only in 1944 as the Soviet army advanced into their homeland, at least some had previously belonged to auxiliary police battalions which have been implicated in Nazi atrocities.[1](#)

Concerned to limit potential damage to Estonia's international reputation, the government of the day ordered the removal of the monument. The police operation to carry out this order on 2 September 2004 nevertheless provoked clashes with local residents, while the political fallout from the episode contributed to the fall of Prime Minister Juhan Parts several months later. Critics of the government action argued that if the Lihula monument was to be construed as a glorification of totalitarianism, then the same logic should be applied to Soviet monuments that had been left standing following the restoration of Estonian independence in 1991. Singled out in this regard was the 'Bronze Soldier' on Tõnismägi in central Tallinn—a post-war monument erected on the unmarked grave of Soviet troops who fell during the taking of the city in 1944. For the vast majority of Estonians, the arrival of the Soviet Army signalled the replacement of one brutal occupying regime by another, which quickly resumed the arrests, executions and large-scale deportations previously witnessed during the first year of Soviet rule in 1940 - 41. This remains the dominant perception amongst Estonians today. The leaders of post-Soviet Russia, by contrast, have adhered steadfastly to the Soviet-era view of these events as marking the liberation of Estonia from fascism. The defeat of the Nazis during 1941 - 45 remains central to Russia's self-understanding in the post-Soviet era; its

current leaders emphatically deny that the events of 1940 and 1944 in the Baltic states constituted a Soviet occupation, and refuse to acknowledge the suffering which the inhabitants of these countries experienced at the hands of the Soviet regime. Commentators in Russia have emphasised that they will brook no alternative interpretations of the Soviet Union's role in the events of 1939 - 45, and have therefore characterised calls for the removal of the T[otilde]nismägi monument as a manifestation of support for 'fascism'.

For many of the ethnic Russians who today make up nearly half of Tallinn's population, the Bronze Soldier has also remained a locus of identification, providing the site for continued unofficial commemorations on 9 May, which was celebrated as Victory Day during the Soviet period. Red paint was thrown over the monument just prior to 9 May 2005, when several other Soviet war memorials were also attacked across the country, and a German military cemetery desecrated in Narva. The following year, this date again elicited tensions: local Russian youth mounted round-the-clock surveillance at the Bronze Soldier, while an Estonian nationalist counter-demonstration led to scuffles on 9 May (Alas [2006a](#)). The monument was subsequently cordoned off by police pending a decision on its future. This formed the object of vigorous political debate ahead of the March 2007 parliamentary elections. Matters relating to the establishment and upkeep of public monuments in post-Soviet Estonia have for the most part fallen to local municipalities. In late 2006, however, new legislation was adopted giving central government the power to override local decision making in this regard. This provision was motivated expressly by a desire to remove the monument and the soldiers' remains from the centre of Tallinn to the more peripheral setting of the military cemetery on the city's outskirts (Alas [2006a](#), [2006b](#), [2006c](#); Rannamäe [2006](#)). The subsequent removal of the monument in late April 2007 provided the occasion for large-scale rioting in central Tallinn. On 9 May 2007 hundreds of people visited the monument at its new location in order to lay flowers.

Issues of 'past' or 'memory' politics<sup>2</sup> have assumed a growing prominence in recent scholarly work on Estonia and the other Baltic states, with a number of authors also highlighting the apparently divergent views of the past held by Estonians and Estonian Russians, and the obstacles that this poses in terms of societal integration (Hackmann [2003](#); Budryte [2005](#); Onken [2003](#), [2007a](#), [2007b](#)). Publicly sited monuments are evidently central to any discussion of such issues: as recent events in Estonia have shown, they frequently act as 'catalysts' eliciting both official and unsanctioned expressions of collective identity (Burch [2002a](#), [2004](#)).<sup>3</sup> Thus far, however, surprisingly little attention has been devoted to monuments within the relevant academic literature on Estonia. This article is intended as a contribution in this regard, but it approaches the issue from a slightly different angle. The 'War of Monuments' has focused political and media attention upon two different cases, one involving a settlement that is predominantly ethnically Estonian by population (Lihula) and the other a capital city (Tallinn) that is almost equally divided between Estonians and Russians. This article shifts the focus to the overwhelmingly Russian-speaking city of Narva, which today sits on Estonia's border with the Russian Federation. In particular, our study examines the local politics surrounding the 'Swedish Lion' monument (see [Figure 1](#)), which was erected in the city in November 2000 on the 300th anniversary of the Battle of Narva between Sweden and Russia.



FIGURE 1. Detail of the 'Swedish Lion' in Narva (a copy of Flaminio Vacca's work in Florence, c.1598). Note that the globe has been modified to include the three crowns—Sweden's national emblem  
Image: Stuart Burch

The Lion monument relates to a past that is far less immediate than the events of 1940 - 45, but which, as we demonstrate, is still highly salient to contemporary identity politics within Estonia. How, for instance, was the commemoration of a decisive Swedish victory over Russia framed and debated in a town where ethnic Russians and other Russian-speakers constitute 96% of the population? Equally significantly, today's Lion is depicted as the successor to a similar monument erected in 1936 during the period of Estonia's inter-war independence. The reappearance of this symbol could therefore potentially be understood as part of a state-sponsored effort to banish the Soviet past and reconnect with a past 'Golden Age'. Once again, one wonders how this was interpreted by a local population that was established in Narva as a direct consequence of the Soviet takeover and which, by dint of the legal continuity principle, mostly did not obtain the automatic right to Estonian citizenship after 1991.<sup>4</sup> Who then decided to erect the Lion monument, and why? What form did the commemoration of November 2000 take, and what are the main lines of public debate that have surrounded it? The current article will address these questions, and will also seek to link the Narva case to broader conceptual issues of identity politics and post-communist transition, particularly the current debate surrounding the possibilities for the development of a 'tamed' liberal/multicultural nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>5</sup>

### **Past politics and post-communism**

The dramatic events that have occurred in Europe over the past two decades have entailed a profound redefinition of collective identities at a variety of scales—national, supranational, regional and local. The end of the Cold War, the demise of the USSR, and the consequent processes of EU and NATO enlargement, all occurring within the overall context of economic globalisation and growing movement of population, have led communities and groups across the continent to revisit existing understandings of who 'We' are and where 'We' are going. Since historical memory is an essential component in the construction of collective identity, this process has necessarily involved renegotiation of the Past as well as debates concerning the Present and Future. Like all forms of identity politics, such 'memory work' is contested, being 'embedded in complex ... power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten) by whom, and for what end' (Gillis [1994](#), p. 3). In a similar vein, Graham *et al.* ([2000](#), pp. 17 - 18) remind us that heritage 'is time-specific and thus its meaning(s) can be altered as texts are re-read in changing times, circumstances and constructs of place and scale. Consequently, it is inevitable that such knowledges are also fields of contestation'.<sup>6</sup>

Publicly sited monuments offer a particularly useful way into researching this phenomenon, since they provide us with a tangible manifestation of some 'memory work' process. The memorial function of such objects can take the form of carefully choreographed gatherings at times of heightened political awareness, or precise moments of commemorative anniversaries. Wreaths might be laid; silence observed; political rallies enacted; pageants performed. Other actions might be characterised more by spontaneity: collective grief at a sudden, tragic event, or an iconoclastic attack on a memorial construed in negative terms. Individuals and groups will attach different, often mutually exclusive meanings to particular monuments. Moreover, such meanings are shifting and contingent: what constitutes an eloquent memorial at one particular moment in time (for instance during an annual commemoration) might become a mute, 'invisible' monument for the rest of the year. In this regard, being ignored is as significant as being noticed.<sup>7</sup> Political changes in the present can radically alter the import of a memorial, without any physical change on its part. This reiterates that the *context* of the monument is intrinsic to meaning. Context, however, can also be physically rendered, as with the shifting of a memorial/monument from some focal point to somewhere more peripheral and less visible.

Issues of collective identity have proved especially challenging in those states that have been created or recreated following the collapse of the USSR. These are for the most part configured as classic unitary nation states, and yet in nearly all cases, processes of state and nation building have been effectuated on the basis of societies that are deeply polyethnic or multinational in character (Brubaker [1996](#); Smith *et al.* [1998](#); Smith [1999](#)). Moreover, nearly all of the states in question have 'painful' pasts with which they need to come to terms (Budryte [2005](#), p. 1). In relation to this region, Paul Gready ([2003](#), p. 6) reminds us that 'stripped of the fossilising force of Cold War politics, nationalism has become central to political transitions, both as a means and an end'. Narratives of history that focus exclusively on the titular nationality and its subjugation and suffering at the hands of former colonial regimes invariably elicit opposition from minority groups, which can easily frame their own exclusivist narratives of history along the same lines. Indeed, as the Estonian case

exemplifies very well, conflicting narratives of the past can be seen as an integral part of the triadic nexus of nationalist politics—the relationship between 'nationalising' states, national minorities and 'external national homelands'—discerned by Rogers Brubaker in his 1996 work *Nationalism Reframed* (Petta [2006](#)).

In using the past for present purposes, political and intellectual elites in the Baltic and other Central and Eastern European states have also had to take account of the requirements of integration with the European Union, which in the Estonian and Latvian cases especially, has entailed significant changes to the direction of nation-building (Smith [2002a](#), [2002b](#), [2003a](#), [2003b](#), [2005](#); Budryte [2005](#); Kelley [2004](#); Galbreath [2005](#)). EU-supported state integration strategies launched at the start of the twenty-first century have set the goal of creating integrated 'multicultural democracies' which will enable representatives of the large non-titular, non-citizen population to preserve certain aspects of their distinct culture and heritage as they undergo integration into the polity and the dominant societal culture (Lauristin & Heidmets [2002](#)). According to a number of authors writing on the politics of the past and of memory, these efforts to promote an integrated multicultural society necessarily require all the parties involved to engage with a process of 'democratising history'. Democratisation in this context would imply that history is no longer used extensively for 'political' purposes, alternative readings are allowed to challenge dominant master narratives, a plurality of 'guardians of memory' is tolerated, and that rather than merely stressing the suffering endured by one's own nation, historical narratives recognise that other groups suffered equally, and that the nation in question served as both a bystander and a perpetrator as regards the suffering of others (see Onken [2003](#), [2007a](#); Budryte [2005](#)).

A significant step in this direction came during 1998, when all three Baltic states established historical commissions.<sup>8</sup> Composed of academic experts from home and abroad (in the Estonian case exclusively the latter), these bodies have been called upon to produce an independent assessment of events during the Nazi and Soviet occupations of 1940 - 91, and have already begun to publish their findings (Onken [2007b](#)). However, developments such as the Estonian 'War on Monuments' and the Baltic - Russian dispute over the commemoration held in Moscow to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War Two (Onken [2007a](#)) underline the extent to which the past is still underpinning conflictual political dynamics in the present. In this regard, Russia's increasing reliance on the Soviet past for nation-building purposes and its indiscriminate blanket accusations of 'fascist' tendencies in the Baltic states prompt Baltic politicians to insist that Soviet communism should join Nazism as one of the great evils against which contemporary European values should be defined.

As is the case with other aspects of post-communist transition, however, a focus on the state level tells us only so much about the renegotiation of identity in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe. In this highly complex multi-ethnic environment, the sub-state regional level cannot be disregarded (Batt [2002](#)). A focus on the sub-state level appears especially apposite as far as the study of Estonia's public monuments is concerned, for, until now at least, decisions in this area have rested with local rather than with national government. Furthermore, one can point to different political logics that obtain at national and local level. As a result of the citizenship law adopted in the aftermath

of independence, ethnic Estonians have constituted a comfortable majority of the national electorate during 1992 - 2007. The local election law of 1993, however, stipulates that while citizens alone can run for office, all permanent residents have the right to vote, regardless of citizenship status. This has meant that the ethnic composition of the electorate has in some cases been wholly different at municipal level.

In this regard, the outright repudiation of the Soviet past displayed by local elites in Lihula stands in marked contrast to trends observable in the capital Tallinn, where Russian-speakers make up almost half the population, and Russian and pro-Russian parties, such as the Centre Party (*Keskerakond*), have been able to obtain a significant foothold in local politics. This contrast became evident not least in 1995, when the fiftieth anniversary of the end of World War II brought calls for the removal of the 'Bronze Soldier'. The city council, however, tried instead to imbue this monument with an alternative meaning: a Soviet-era plaque referring to the 'liberation' of Tallinn by the Red Army in 1944 was replaced by one that reads simply 'to the fallen of World War Two'. This step can be read as an effort to inculcate some kind of shared understanding of a highly contentious past within a deeply multi-ethnic setting. What trends, however, can one identify in the more homogeneously Russian periphery that is Narva?

### **'Estonia's new best friend'. The rediscovery of Estonia's Swedish past**

The 'return' of the Swedish Lion monument to Narva, as one local newspaper described it (Sommer-Kalda [2000](#)), can be seen in many ways as the culmination of a process of Swedish re-engagement with the eastern Baltic 'Near Abroad' that began in 1990 with the establishment of a Swedish consulate in Tallinn. With considerable financial resources now being made available to support processes of economic and political transition in Estonia, Swedish cultural attaché Hans Lepp began to explore how past cultural links might be utilised in the service of what he has termed 'soft diplomacy'.<sup>9</sup>

Historic ties with Scandinavia have assumed an important place within the discourse of the ruling ethnic Estonian political elite since the 1990s, where they have been used to support the notion of a 'Return to Europe'—or, more broadly, a 'Return to the Western World' following the end of Soviet occupation (Lauristin *et al.* [1997](#); Smith [2001](#), [2003a](#), [2003b](#)). Within this framework, the period 1561 - 1710, when Sweden progressively extended its dominion over much of the territory of present-day Estonia and Latvia, is remembered as the 'Happy Swedish time', which is said to have brought about a considerable improvement in the lot of the Estonian peasantry, before serfdom was returned to its former rigour following entry to the Russian empire. Hans Lepp and his diplomatic colleagues were alive to the possibility of trading on this feeling of goodwill in order to make Sweden 'Estonia's best friend' in the Baltic region, with all that this implied in terms of political and economic influence.<sup>10</sup>

It quickly became apparent, however, that Swedish assistance was 'most needed' in Narva and its surrounding region of Ida-Virumaa. Quite apart from the socio-economic and environmental

challenges posed by this largely Russian-populated border region, rising nationalism in neighbouring Russia raised the prospect that the local inhabitants might look eastwards towards Moscow rather than westwards towards Tallinn, with drastic implications for regional stability and security.<sup>11</sup> In this specific context history had particular potential as a resource, given the important place of the Battle of Narva of 1700 within the Swedish historical imagination. Although the opening salvo in a disastrous war that saw the Baltic provinces ceded to Russia,<sup>12</sup> the first Battle of Narva was nevertheless a remarkable victory by the troops of King Charles XII (often referred to as the 'Lion of the North') against the numerically superior forces of Peter the Great. In this respect, Eldar Efendiev, who as Mayor of Narva planned the November 2000 commemoration of the battle, claimed in an interview with the authors that 'Swedes know three dates—the birthday of Gustav Vasa; the birthday of the present King; and the date of the Battle of Narva'.<sup>13</sup> The significance of the latter event had been seen already in the inter-war period with the installation of a Lion monument on the battlefield site in 1936.<sup>14</sup> Already prior to his appointment as cultural attaché in 1990, Hans Lepp—then Curator of the art collections at the Swedish Royal Palace in Stockholm—suggested to Efendiev (at that time Head of the Narva Museum) that the restoration of the Lion monument might help to foster closer ties between Narva and Sweden in the present. Lepp subsequently pursued the idea of restoring the Lion with Narva city council in his roles as Swedish cultural attaché to Estonia and member of the Swedish Institute. Not surprisingly, however, planning the commemoration of a decisive Swedish victory over Russia was a potentially fraught endeavour in a town where Russian-speakers now made up 96% of the population.

### **Narva: Eastern, Western or in-between?**

The more essentialising geopolitical discourses of the post-Cold War era would see Narva as sitting on the westward side of the border that divides Western Christianity from Eastern Orthodoxy. Those who discern a Huntingdonian civilisational fault line between Estonia and Russia could point by way of evidence to the presence of two great fortresses—one German, one Russian—on the respective banks of the Narova River that separates Narva from its neighbouring settlement of Ivangorod and which today marks the state border with the Russian Federation. Not unnaturally, however, the city's past is rather more complex. As noted on the current website of the city government, Narva has not merely served as a defensive outpost and site of struggle between competing regional powers, but has also constituted a locus for trade and interaction between West and East, not least during the period when the city belonged to the Hanseatic League.<sup>15</sup> From its foundation in the twelfth century to 1558, Narva did indeed constitute the easternmost point of the province of Estland, which was ruled first by the Danes and later by the German Livonian Order. Neighbouring Ivangorod takes its name from Tsar Ivan III, who ordered the construction of a fortress on the western border of his realm following Muscovy's annexation of Novgorod in the late fifteenth century. Muscovy subsequently conquered Narva during the mid-sixteenth century Livonian wars, controlling the city from 1558 to 1581. The city

then came under Swedish rule for 120 years following the Livonian Wars, a period which is described on the webpage of today's city government as Narva's 'Golden Age'.[16](#)

For nearly three and a half centuries, Narva and Ivangorod functioned in effect as a single composite settlement, first under Swedish rule and then later during the tsarist period, when Narva came under the joint jurisdiction of the Estland and Saint Petersburg *Gubernii* of the Russian Empire. The conjoined status of the two towns persisted after 1917, when the inhabitants of the Narva district voted in a July referendum to join the province of Estland created following the February Revolution.[17](#) After a brief spell of Bolshevik control during late 1918 to early 1919, when Narva functioned as the seat of the abortive 'Estonian Workers' Commune', both towns were incorporated into the Estonian Republic under the terms of the 1920 Treaty of Tartu. It was only after the Soviet occupation in 1945 that the border was redrawn so as to place Ivangorod in the territory of the Russian Republic of the USSR. Although this division was little more than an administrative formality within a Soviet context, the frontier revision set the scene for the establishment of a fully functioning state border between the two towns after 1992.

The Narva that emerged from the Soviet period is almost completely unrecognisable from the one that existed prior to World War Two. Previously characterised as the 'baroque jewel' of Northern Europe, the city was quite literally reduced to rubble in 1944 during fierce fighting between German and Soviet forces in eastern Estonia. While at least some historic buildings—notably the castle and the town hall—were restored, the ruins were for the most part demolished and the city entirely remodelled on the Soviet plan. As was the case with Königsberg (Kaliningrad), Narva 'was inhabited by both different inhabitants and a different ideology' after 1945 (Sezneva [2002](#), p. 48). The previous residents, having been evacuated by the occupying Nazi regime, were not allowed to return by its Soviet successor, and were replaced by workers from neighbouring Russia, who oversaw a process of Soviet-style industrialisation in the region. Today, Estonians make up less than 5% of the town's inhabitants.

As part of Narva's transformation into a 'Soviet place', new monuments were erected to commemorate the fallen of the Great Patriotic War and of the brief period of rule by the Estonian Workers' Commune.[18](#) All remaining traces of the pre-war Estonian Republic were swept away following the Soviet re-conquest of 1944. The 1936 Swedish Lion monument, which had been erected at the approaches to the city during a visit by the Swedish Crown Prince, was destroyed by artillery fire and the bronze lion removed by German forces during their retreat. This monument did not reappear under Soviet rule. The authorities did, however, restore and maintain objects linked to the city's Russian past, such as the two tsarist-era monuments to Russian soldiers killed in the battles of 1700 and 1704.

As the movement for Estonian independence gathered momentum between 1988 and 1991, Narva gained a reputation as a bastion of support for the maintenance of Soviet power. The city government that came to office in December 1989 set itself resolutely against political change, demanding autonomy for north-east Estonia within the context of a renewed Soviet federation and, in August 1991, voicing support for the abortive Moscow coup which precipitated the collapse of the



USSR. The Council was promptly dissolved in the aftermath of Estonian independence; yet, remarkably, its former leaders were allowed to stand in new elections, and were returned to power in October 1991, albeit on a turnout of only 30%. As ethnic tensions mounted in Estonia between 1991 and 1993, and Narva's economy went into freefall, local leaders again set themselves in opposition to central government policies that were designed to engineer a decisive political and economic break with the Soviet past. The last stand of the Soviet-era leadership came in the summer of 1993: with fresh local elections scheduled for the autumn, the city government organised an unofficial referendum on local autonomy, in which it gained a 97% majority in favour on an officially proclaimed 55% turnout of local voters. With the national government standing firm and refusing to acknowledge the legality of the vote, and no support forthcoming from neighbouring Russia, a growing section of the local political elite appeared to accept that intransigent opposition to the new state order was blocking any prospect of achieving much needed economic renewal. These circles now called upon the existing leadership to give up power peacefully, which it did in October 1993 (Smith [2002b](#)).

At the time, the referendum of July 1993 was widely regarded as secessionist in intent. Available evidence, however, would seem to suggest that redrawing physical borders was not on the agenda: the aim was rather to tip the overall political balance within Estonia in favour of the Russian-speaking part of the population and, in this way, to bring Estonia as a whole more firmly within the ambit of Russia and the CIS. In this way, the leadership hoped both to retain power and to restore the city's previous economic ties with the East as well as developing new links with the West (Smith [2002b](#)).<sup>19</sup> While 'Soviet' constituted the principal identity marker for Estonia's Russian-speaking population prior to 1991, this did not preclude the development of a simultaneous strong identification with the specific territory of the Estonian SSR (widely identified in other republics as the 'Soviet West' or the 'Soviet Abroad'), and with the local place of residence. Between 1989 and 1991, the movement to assert Estonian sovereignty gained support from a significant minority (perhaps as much as one third) of local Russian-speakers, who could subscribe to a vision of Estonia as an economic 'bridge' between East and West.

Such feelings were by no means absent in Narva, where the 1989 census revealed that seven out of 10 residents had actually been born in Estonia (Kirch *et al.* [1993](#), p. 177). Even so, the collapse of the USSR inevitably created something of an identity void as far as Estonia's Russian-speakers were concerned. Despite perceptions of discrimination, recent survey work has confirmed a growing identification with the Estonian state (Kolsto [2002](#); Budryte [2005](#); Ehin [2007](#)) as well as significant support for EU membership. Most Russians, however, have scarcely been able to identify themselves with any notion of Estonian national community, with local place of residence and ethnicity serving as the prime markers of identity (Ehin [2007](#)). Despite having an obvious cultural affinity with Russia and with the transnational Russian community across the territory of the former Soviet Union, a population raised in the different socio-cultural setting of the Baltic has found it hard to conceive of actually living in Russia or to identify politically with the contemporary Russian state. It is with this complex identity that the post-1993 leadership in Narva has had to reckon.

The Estonian law on local elections passed in May 1993 stipulated that non-citizens could vote but not stand for office. This excluded much of the local population from seeking election, including a substantial proportion of the Soviet-era leadership. Ahead of the October 1993 poll in Narva, however, the state was able to co-opt elements of the local political elite through a process of accelerated naturalisation on the grounds of special services rendered to the state. The elections of October 1993 saw a strong turnout by local voters, and brought to power a coalition of locally based parties and interest groups. The city governments elected during the period 1993 - 2005—a period when the national-level Centre Party attained the dominant position within local politics—were far more ready than their predecessors to embrace the new political economy of post-socialism, and thus better placed to cooperate both with central government and with Western partners within the wider Baltic Sea area. In this regard, the commemoration of the Battle of Narva and the installation of the Swedish Lion can be understood as an attempt to create a narrative of the city's past capable of underpinning growing ties with Sweden in the present. These ties assumed a particular significance after 1995, when Swedish textile firm Boras Wärfveri purchased a 75% stake in Narva's historic Kreenholm Mill, then the city's second-largest employer. According to Raivo Murd, the ethnic Estonian who served as Mayor of Narva from 1993 to 1996, the investment was proof that Narva was finally beginning to shed the 'Red' image that had prevailed under the former political dispensation.<sup>20</sup>

In a clear sign of its determination to break with the Soviet past, the city government appointed in October 1993 removed Estonia's last remaining statue of Lenin, which had remained standing in the central Peter's Square in Narva during the first two years of Estonian independence. The subsequent period has seen the installation of new monuments commemorating—*inter alia*—the victims of Stalinist deportations during the 1940s and key moments in the transition to Estonian independence during 1917 - 20. The Old Narva Society founded by surviving pre-1944 residents of Narva also put up a number of commemorative plaques marking the sites of churches and other key buildings from the pre-war city.

Yet the post-1993 political elite has also been obliged to display a degree of sensitivity towards the Soviet past in order to maintain legitimacy with the local electorate on which its power rests. Graham Smith and Andrew Wilson (1997, p. 852) for instance, observe that although the new leadership has functioned as an 'agenda gatekeeper' moderating the political demands of more radical elements within the local community, many councillors have been responsive first and foremost to their constituents, and in this regard have not ceased to question aspects of the new state order. Within this context, the new public monuments described above coexist with Soviet-era monuments that continue to provide a focus for local commemorations. The continued salience of Soviet-era monuments was clearly demonstrated in late April 2007, when up to 3,000 people gathered peacefully at the 1941 - 45 war memorial adjacent to Peter's Square in order to protest against the removal of the Bronze Soldier from central Tallinn.<sup>21</sup> In this regard it is notable that the Lenin monument formerly located on Peter's Square was not definitively removed from the city, but relocated to a quiet corner of the castle grounds, where it stands somewhat incongruously alongside a recently mounted plaque commemorating Finnish fighters who helped to liberate the city from Bolshevik rule in 1919.

Ironically, one current member of the city government hinted that the statue has proved to be quite an attraction for the many foreign tourists who make a brief stop in Narva before crossing the Estonian - Russian border en route from Tallinn to St. Petersburg.[22](#)

In a recent article on the formerly closed and largely Russian-speaking port city of Paldiski, previously home to a Soviet submarine base, Tiina Peil ([2005](#)) asserts that the Soviet heritage of ugly grey buildings has nothing to offer in terms of promoting tourism and economic development. This claim requires some qualification in the case of Narva's neighbouring town of Sillamäe, which was built in a highly distinctive style during the 1950s and is today beginning to market itself as a unique museum of Stalinist baroque architecture. As Peil rightly asserts, however, the socio-political changes since 1991 have impelled local Russians to connect to an ever greater degree with the pre-Soviet past as they strive to renegotiate their identities within the context of independent Estonia. Since most of the urban Russian population lack any obvious affinity to the era of inter-war independence, this quest for historical roots has in many cases led back to the more distant tsarist era.

The Narva city government readily acknowledged and recognised the importance of Russian history and culture to Narva's inhabitants during the decade or so after 1993. Once again, however, it sought to interpret and present this past in a manner broadly compatible with dominant national-level discourses on national identity. Following the removal of the Lenin monument in 1993, some local residents argued that a statue of Peter the Great should now be erected in its place on the main town square, which was named after the Russian Tsar (Solodov [2000](#)). Advocates of this move could point to an historical precedent, in that an obelisk commemorating the anniversary of Peter's birth was erected in Narva's town hall square during the late tsarist period, only to be removed in 1922 following the attainment of Estonian independence. Any suggestion of restoring a Peter monument has, however, been deeply controversial given that the Tsar—whom Estonians in any case regard as a foreign conqueror—enjoys a privileged place within the current nation-building project of the Russian Federation. Eldar Efendiev, who served as mayor from 1999 to 2000, insisted that while he was in favour of restoring certain buildings and objects connected with Peter, he was opposed to the idea of a new statue. The option favoured by the city council during the late 1990s was to emphasise Narva's rather more tenuous links to one of the central figures of Russian culture—the poet Aleksandr Pushkin. There is in fact little that connects Pushkin to Narva aside from the fact that one of the city's main thoroughfares still carries his name. A bust of the poet was nevertheless mounted there in 1999, as part of a festival of Russian culture in the town.[23](#)

### **The 'return' of the Swedish Lion**

According to Efendiev, the Russian festival served as an important prelude to the November 2000 commemoration of the Battle of Narva. Still by far the single largest festival organised in the city since independence, the 'Swedish days' consisted of a range of different events, from concerts and exhibitions to an academic conference and programmes designed to foster awareness of social and health issues such as drug addiction and HIV. When it came to the centrepiece of the festivities—the

unveiling of the Lion monument—the Council and its Swedish partners were at pains to frame this not as a celebration of a Swedish military victory, but rather as a tribute to everyone—Swedish and Russian—who perished in the wider struggle for Narva during the course of the Great Northern War, and a symbol of the continuing friendship and cooperation between Narva and Sweden.<sup>24</sup> In order to underscore this vision of a shared commemoration, the Swedish Ambassador to Estonia laid a wreath at the 1900 tsarist monument to the Russian fallen in the northern suburb of Siiversti, thereby replicating a gesture made by the Swedish Crown Prince during his visit in 1936.<sup>25</sup>

Eldar Efendiev summed up his own view of the Lion as follows:

the significance of the monument is cultural, and I would say the same about the meaning of the other Great Northern War monuments for Russians. We're not talking here about the seizure and destruction of the town in 1704, we're talking about other things. This is a symbol connected with history, culture and our cultural environment.<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, Efendiev and other leaders of the council understood that the planned events could all too easily be manipulated in order to provoke a 'cheap political scandal'.<sup>27</sup> The city government was apparently careful to keep council members and the local and national media as fully informed as possible of the planning for the festival. However, it still had to contend with considerable press speculation as regards the form, location and aspect of the Lion monument. The Swedish Lion of 1936 had been erected at the western approaches to the city, on the actual site of the 1700 battle, and it faced eastwards towards Russia. The 2000 version was smaller, different in form, and was put up in the centre of the city, at a site adjacent to the Estonian - Russian border. Facing westwards, away from Russia, it stands at a viewing point overlooking the Narva and Ivangorod fortresses and the river that separates them (see [Figure 2](#)).



FIGURE 2. The 'Swedish Lion' (2000) on the promontory overlooking the fortresses of Narva (left) and Ivangorod (right) Image: Stuart Burch

Commenting on the choice of location, an article in the Russian-language daily *Estoniya* claimed that the Swedish donors had been anxious to ensure that the new 'Memory of Sweden' would not in some way 'suffer the fate of its predecessor'. The article also noted that the monument was now clearly visible from the Russian side of the river, and speculated that this might have been a factor of some importance when deciding on location (Smirnov [2000](#)). A commentator in the Estonian-language cultural journal *Sirp*, meanwhile, characterised the Lion in rather different terms, as a more 'politically correct' successor to the 1936 original—smaller in size, and, above all, facing west rather than eastwards towards Russia.[28](#)

The local organisers readily admitted that security was a factor when it came to deciding on the site and the aspect of the monument, as there had been a number of attacks on public objects in the town. Most important, however, were aesthetic and practical considerations: the choice of the viewing platform, framed by the panorama of the two fortresses, enhanced the visual impact of the Lion, while also ensuring that it would be easily accessible both to local residents and to tourists. As for the smaller size and different form of the monument, this was simply due to the fact that the moulds for the original Lion had been lost and it would have been too costly to replicate them.[29](#) The Swedish donors were therefore asked to commission an alternative model, a fact which was apparently communicated to the local council only two months prior to the installation of the monument.[30](#)

The local media for its part remarked on the absence of leading Estonian state officials at the inauguration ceremony, at a time of apparently strained relations between the Centre Party-

dominated local council and right-of-centre government in Tallinn. President Lennart Meri was apparently due to attend the ceremony, but had to pull out at the last moment. Prime Minister Mart Laar was also unable to attend, sending as his representative the Minister of Education T[õtilde]nis Lukas (Ivanova [2000](#)).<sup>31</sup> Compared to the speeches of the Narva Mayor and Swedish representative, Lukas' own words at the unveiling of the monument dwelled more upon the remarkable nature of Charles XII's victory over the Russians in 1700, but he too called this victory 'the reason for today's friendship between us all'. While welcoming the growth in ties between Sweden and Narva, Lukas reminded his audience that Narva was also very important to Estonia, quipping that hopefully the Estonian language would be able to compete successfully with Swedish in the town (Sommer-Kalda [2000](#)). Although made in jest, this remark is consistent with other statements by Estonian state officials, who have emphasised the need to integrate Narva into the framework of a unitary Estonian nation-state rather than into some loosely defined post-sovereign 'Europe of the Regions'.<sup>32</sup>

### **'Empty spaces should be filled'. The Lion as a catalyst for the debate on the politics of identity**

In his interview with the authors, Eldar Efendiev described the Lion monument as a 'visiting card', which would hopefully give further impetus to the already close contacts that Narva had established with Sweden during the preceding decade.<sup>33</sup> Evidence suggests, however, that the November 2000 festival in fact represented the high water mark of this cooperation. Narva has maintained ties with its twin city of Karlskoga; more broadly, however, local commentators spoke of a decline in interest once Estonia's entry to the EU had been confirmed in December 2002, at which point the Swedish partners seemingly considered their mission to be accomplished.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, despite the inclusive intent of the November 2000 Swedish days, the absence of a Swedish delegation at subsequent commemorations led one local respondent to opine that the Swedes had simply 'come, put up their monument and left'.<sup>35</sup>

Claims in a recent guide book that the Lion is 'just about tolerated' by local residents (Bousfield [2004](#), p. 374) can only be properly assessed through further survey research amongst the city's population, but they seem at first sight to be greatly exaggerated. A preliminary review of public debate presents us with a rather mixed picture. Shortly after the Lion was installed, persons unknown removed an explanatory plaque that had been installed in the garden area adjacent to the monument. The above-cited article in *Estoniya* might easily lead one to conclude that this was a case of politically motivated iconoclasm. An article in *Narvskaya Gazeta*, however, portrayed it as part of a more indiscriminate wave of vandalism. In it, local journalist Aleksandr Solodov concluded bitterly that a series of events held earlier that year in connection with the World Day for the Preservation of Monuments had clearly failed in their aim of inculcating a more respectful attitude towards public sculpture on the part of the town's inhabitants. The problem, he suggested, could not be solved through security surveillance of every monument in the town. It was, rather, a question of 'inner

culture'. Why, he asked, had no-one taught local youth that at the root of the term 'memorial' (*pamyatnik*) lay the word 'memory' (*pamyat'*) (Solodov [2000](#))?

Developing this theme further, one local commentator suggested that the statue was indeed more of a mute monument than an active memorial, stating that 'it symbolises nothing—it is a lion, that's all, just like the stone lions you see by the banks of the river in St Petersburg. No-one asks why they are there, they just say "there's a statue of a lion"'.<sup>36</sup> As the present authors themselves remarked during their latest visit to the city, the meaning of the statue proper would indeed be unclear to anyone who is not familiar with the history of Northern Europe, as the plinth simply bears the date 1700 and the Latin inscription *Svecia Memor*.

The appearance of the Lion clearly did, however, act as a catalyst for a wider debate about monuments amongst the city's elite and broader population. This becomes clear from a further article by Aleksandr Solodov published in the Saturday supplement of *Narvskaya Gazeta* at the end of November 2000. The article alludes to a lively discussion surrounding Narva's monuments, and claims that local opinion was divided between those who thought the city had too few monuments and those—mostly from the more deprived sections of the population—who considered the new monument to be a terrible waste of money. The author, however, claimed that everyone was in agreement over the need to do something with the empty plinth that had been left standing in Peter's Square following the removal of the Lenin monument in 1993. Entitling his piece simply '*Svyato mesto pusto ne byvaet*' ('if there's an empty space it should be filled'), the author argued that the current situation was shameful for the town, particularly when the site in question was less than 100 metres from the state border (Solodov [2000](#)).

Although his own suggestion was for a monument to the town's first elected Mayor Adolf Hahn, the author also used the article to revisit the question of a memorial to Peter the Great, noting that there was on the horizon an anniversary—of the 1704 battle of Narva—'no less significant to local people' than that which had prompted the restoration of the Swedish Lion (Solodov [2000](#)). However inclusive in intent the Swedish days had been, they were never likely to stand as the 'definitive' commemoration of the Great Northern War as far as the city was concerned. Indeed, in an interview with Deputy Mayor Galina Moldon conducted shortly after the Swedish days, a local journalist pointed out that the many suggestions received from local people had included a proposal for a statue of Charles XII in the centre of town, and a statue of Peter I on Peter's Square. Moldon sidestepped the question by replying that the Swedes were very restrained in their attitude to the victories of Charles XII, considering that his rule marked an end to the bloodiest period in Sweden's history. She also reiterated the claim that, according to the understanding of the Swedish partners, historical events can be the basis for the development of cooperation rather than for calculations of victory and defeat. The journalist retorted that a monument to Charles XII (the Lion) had nevertheless appeared in the town as a result of the Swedish days, to which Moldon replied that this was not the only 'gift' that Swedish partners had given the town—as well as the monument, largely paid for by sponsors, money had been donated to a local children's home and for other less well-off residents of the town (Ivanova [2000](#)).

As the 300th anniversary of 1704 drew nearer, the city government apparently approached 'the Russian side' with proposals for a major event that would serve to 'balance' the earlier Swedish days.<sup>37</sup> In September 2004 Narva did host a 'Days of St Petersburg' cultural festival, yet the commemoration of the July anniversary of the 1704 battle was seemingly rather muted. The major event connected to the anniversary was a small-scale re-enactment of the battle staged in the castle grounds by local enthusiasts who in 2003 formed their own company of the St Petersburg-based Preobrazhenskii regiment.

Interestingly, the Narva branch of this re-enacting society made its first major public appearance in November 2003 on the 303rd anniversary of the *first* Battle of Narva. On this date, the Narva group and its invited guests from St Petersburg assembled at the base of the Swedish Lion and held a procession through the town which ended at the tsarist-era monument in Siiversti. This event elicited an interesting range of comments on the online pages of the *Narvskaya Gazeta*. Responding to an announcement that the group had invited fellow enthusiasts in Sweden to participate in the re-enactment of the 1704 Narva battle, one reader asked why

the Swedes should come and commemorate their defeat? And why on former Swedish land? Is any celebration of the Swedish victory being planned? What's more, the Swedish Lion was not erected in honour of a Russian victory. If residents are asked in ten years time, they'll all say that it was put up in honour of Peter.

In response, a member of the group emphasised that the intention had not been to celebrate the victory of one side over the other, but to recreate—in line with re-enacting societies the world over—the conditions of the particular historical epoch and to commemorate everyone—Russian and Swedish—that had fallen during the Great Northern War. It was precisely for this reason that the march had begun at the Swedish Lion before moving on to those objects having greater historical meaning to the Russian community.<sup>38</sup>

Swedish enthusiasts were absent from the Narva battle held in July 2004, when an Estonian group from nearby Rakvere stood in as opponents for the Preobrazhenskii Regiment. A year later, however, the Swedes did come, while in 2006 groups from Estonia, Russia, Sweden, Finland, Latvia and Germany took part in what seems set to become an annual event.<sup>39</sup> In the promotional literature, the 2006 re-enactment had the appearance of a popular summer festival where—very much as its organisers intended—observers were probably indifferent to the question of who won or who lost. In this regard, the Narva battle bears comparison with the Sealed Knot re-enactments of English Civil War battles that are regularly held in England. Expressing a code common to re-enactment groups elsewhere, members of the Preobrazhenskii Group were most emphatic that their activity had nothing to do with politics—it was simply motivated by the amateur historian's desire to recreate the past as faithfully as possible.<sup>40</sup>

## **Conclusion**



At the time of writing, the space in Narva once occupied by the Lenin monument remained empty, a symbol perhaps of the still unfilled identity void bequeathed to the city by the collapse of the USSR.<sup>41</sup> It would seem that for many of Narva's residents, there are in fact more immediate concerns than 'the politics of memory'. However, in so far as local residents do attach importance to their past, recent events appear to confirm Peil's assertion that Estonia's Russians are looking to the heritage of tsarist Russian rule in the Baltic provinces but also to the specific history of their city as they seek to renegotiate their identities within the framework of an independent state (Peil 2005). In this context, the Swedish Lion which appeared in November 2000 seems to have been regarded either with indifference or as a legitimate symbol of Narva's history, rather than an unwelcome incursion by some alien 'Other'. The Soviet identity project did indeed nurture local patriotism alongside identification with the Soviet state and 'Soviet people'; in her recent work on Kaliningrad, Olga Sezneva (2002) underscores the complexity of identity formation in the city, noting how official and popular interpretations of the city's identity did not always coincide during the Soviet period, and local people developed their own interpretation drawing on the Western heritage of the area. A similar phenomenon would seem to be apparent to some degree in post-Soviet Narva, where Efendiev described the remaining elements of the city's old town as an 'integral part of the mentality of any Narvitan'.<sup>42</sup>

In this respect, it would appear that many local people have been able to subscribe to the notion of the Swedish past as a 'Golden Age', especially when this is set against the background of growing engagement with Sweden in the present. And yet, for all of the undoubted sensitivity and inclusivity of the November 2000 commemoration, the 'official' version of the past embodied in these events did not adequately accommodate the specifically Russian dimension of the Great Northern War, or put another way, did not map fully onto 'social memory' within the city. As such, it elicited calls from within civil society for further heritage events based around the Russian victory of 1704.

The challenge in the current political climate is of course how to ensure that such commemorations are seen as cultural in nature rather than as an expression of nationalist politics. Seen from the standpoint of 'democratising history', the Narva battles staged since 2004 seem to have represented a successful negotiation of the past, one that is consonant with the declared goal of 'multicultural integration' within the framework of an independent Estonia. Like the Swedish days before them, the spectacles of 2004 - 06 have sought to frame the Great Northern War as part of a 'shared past' capable of uniting Russians, Estonians and Swedes. Perhaps more pertinently, they would lead one to the conclusion that, unlike the events of 1940s, the Great Northern War *is* the past rather than—as Michael Ignatieff puts it—the 'past in the present'.<sup>43</sup> Here it is notable that the re-enactors involved in organising these events largely echoed Efendiev's views regarding proposals for a Peter the Great monument. For them, restoring 'authentic' places connected with the Russian Tsar was far more important than putting up a monument in a place where one had not stood before. Such proposals, observed one of the group, only arise when someone in authority sees a 'political need' for them.<sup>44</sup>

The preceding remark, however, brings to mind George Schöpflin's point about the difficulty of 'creating rules beyond the political contest' (Schöpflin [2002](#), p. 135). This was exemplified several months after the fieldwork for this article was conducted, when Narva city council adopted a resolution authorising its Chairman, Mikhail Stalnuhkin of the Centre Party fraction, to begin negotiations with Russian funding bodies on the erection of a life-sized statue of Peter the Great in the city—not on the main square, but on one of the surviving bastions of the city walls of old Narva. Hardly surprisingly, the council ruling elicited a heated discussion, both locally and nationally. Stalnuhkin for his part said he found it incredible that anyone should even ask whether it was necessary to put up a monument to Peter in the town, noting that 'in Narva there is a monument to the Swedish King, the Swedish Lion. Why should one not also put up a monument to Peter I, who did battle with Charles XII?'[45](#) Such a move was apparently also justified on the grounds that it would attract a considerable number of tourists and thus additional revenue to the town. Stalnuhkin added that none of the key historical figures connected to Narva was entirely controversial: since inter-war Estonian President Konstantin Päts had been the first honorary citizen of Narva, one could argue that he too should have his own monument. This suggestion, however, would also elicit contrasting reactions within the town.[46](#) Yet, in an echo of the line hitherto adopted by the city government, Narva Town Secretary Ants Liimets argued that Peter's historical importance to Narva was overshadowed by the questionable reputation of conqueror which he commands within Estonia as a whole. In this respect, Liimets remarked that while Ghengis Khan and Napoleon were undoubtedly notable figures in the history of Russia, it seemed highly unlikely that any Russian city would erect a monument in their honour.[47](#)

Estonian Prime Minister Andrus Ansip made this point in even more forceful terms, observing that neither Narva nor Estonia as a whole had any reason to be thankful to Peter. Commenting on the proposal, Ansip associated the Russian invasion of the Baltic provinces primarily with the destruction of his home city of Tartu, but also noted that Peter's forces killed or deported a significant proportion of Narva's population after the city fell in 1704.[48](#) Most tellingly, however, Ansip referred to the removal of Peter the Great monuments from inter-war Estonia, and argued that re-establishing these would be to 'spit in the face' of Estonia's inter-war leaders. Putting up monuments to conquerors, he insisted, showed disregard for national consciousness: while upholding such consciousness should not imply isolation, it did entail the need to 'keep order in one's own backyard'. In recent times, Estonia had allowed the infiltration of signs and symbols absolutely alien to its culture: 'we have been ultra-tolerant during this time, but tell me: what should foreigners admire when they come here? That which is already familiar to them from their homeland?'[49](#)

In this respect, Ansip added, a Peter the Great statue at Kadriorg in Tallinn (the eighteenth-century palace that the Tsar had built for his wife and which is today the official residence of the President of Estonia) might attract thousands of tourists and millions of kroons in revenue, but one cannot simply reduce everything to money and especially not symbols, which have a far more substantial significance.[50](#) Returning to the points made at the start of this article, this recent controversy does indeed further underline the potentially (though not inexorably) charged symbolic

nature of public monuments—particularly statues of historical figures—as well as the potential that they offer for 'historical populism' (to use a phrase from Estonian media commentary on the recent electoral campaign). The controversy also serves to illustrate that 'transition' in Central and Eastern Europe should not be understood as some kind of smooth and linear progression towards a fixed endpoint of 'tamed' or 'civic' nationalism. As numerous authors have noted in recent times, different forms of nationalism—civic/ethnic, inclusive/intolerant—coexist within *all* European societies, be they Western or Eastern (Billig [1995](#); Roshwald [2000](#); Kuzio [2001](#); Auer [2004](#)). Scholarship in this area should therefore focus upon the struggle of ideas and contested quality of nationhood, while viewing transition as a 'process, shot through with considerations of political power, ... and characterised by continuity as well as multi-faceted, if often uneven, change' (Gready [2003](#), p. 2).

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>See [http://www.historycommission.ee/temp/pdf/conclusions\\_en.pdf](http://www.historycommission.ee/temp/pdf/conclusions_en.pdf), accessed 8 February 2007; also Budryte (2005, pp. 185 - 86).

<sup>2</sup>On memory politics generally, see for instance: Gillis (1994), Cruz (2000), de Brito *et al.* (2001), Crawley and Reid (2002) and Gready (2003). This phenomenon can also be subsumed under the broad heading of heritage, which Graham *et al.* (2000, pp. 17 - 18) define as 'that part of the past which we select in the present for contemporary purposes, be they economic, cultural, political or social'.

<sup>3</sup>In this regard, monuments also help to illuminate the relationship between what Elizabeth Jelin ([1998](#)) calls the different 'layers and levels' of memory—official, collective/social, and individual.

<sup>4</sup>With the exception of Nazi Germany and Sweden, no state gave full *de jure* recognition to Soviet sovereignty over the Baltic states, whose incorporation into the USSR after 1940 was condemned as a process of forcible annexation. The Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian states restored in 1991 thus claimed direct legal continuity from the republics originally founded in 1918. In line with this principle, Estonia and Latvia stipulated in 1991 - 92 that only citizens of the inter-war republics and their descendants could claim automatic citizenship; Soviet-era settlers and their descendents (30% of Estonia's population by 1989) who wished to obtain citizenship were required to undergo a process of naturalisation requiring them to demonstrate a knowledge of the relevant state language. Legislative changes introduced in 1999 extended automatic citizenship rights to everyone born in Estonia after 1992. However, despite ongoing progress in naturalisation, an estimated 20% of the population still lacked full Estonian citizenship in May 2004.

<sup>5</sup>Most normally associated with Will Kymlicka ([1995](#), [2001](#)) and Yael Tamir ([1995](#)), the concept of liberal nationalism implies the possibility of reconciling the universal demands of liberalism with particularistic attachments to a national culture; or, to paraphrase another key author writing on this concept, a belief that 'political liberalism with its focus on individual freedom [can] accommodate the political demands of groups and conceptualise a multicultural society free of culturally based oppression and domination' (Auer [2004](#), p. 30). For a further discussion in a Central and East European context, see Kymlicka and Opalski ([2001](#)). On 'taming' nationalism, see Budryte ([2005](#)).

<sup>6</sup>For a further interesting discussion on the contingent and contested nature of heritage in a Baltic context, see Mintaurs ([2006](#)).

<sup>7</sup>Here one thinks especially of Michael Billig's work on nationalism, which directs us to focus not on days of national celebration, but rather on the more mundane or 'banal' symbols and social forms which sustain and reproduce national identity on a day-to-day basis. In this regard 'the metonymic image of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being constantly waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building' (Billig [1995](#), p. 7).

<sup>8</sup>Gready ([2003](#), p. 1) observes that use of such commissions derives from a 'post-Cold War rhetorical mainstreaming of human rights', that has 'entrenched a legal/quasi-legal orthodoxy as the preferred way to come to terms with the past'.

<sup>9</sup>Interview with the authors and Hans Lepp, Swedish Institute, Stockholm, 26 March 2007.

<sup>10</sup>See Rausing (2004). In this regard, Lepp contrasted Sweden's role with that of Finland, which he characterised as an historic 'big brother' to Estonia.

<sup>11</sup>See Rausing ([2004](#)).

<sup>12</sup>Narva was recaptured by Russian troops in July 1704 and Sweden ultimately ceded the Baltic provinces, Ingermanland and part of Finland to Russia following a decisive reverse at the Battle of Poltava in 1709.

<sup>13</sup>Interview with the authors and Eldar Efendiev, Narva, 28 March 2006.

<sup>14</sup>It is revealing in this connection that Hans Lepp's first visit to Narva as Swedish cultural attaché in October 1991 was timed to coincide with the fifty-fifth anniversary of the unveiling of the original 'Swedish Lion' monument. Interview with the authors and Hans Lepp, Swedish Institute, Stockholm, 26 March 2007.

<sup>15</sup>The frontier location of Narva is the most characteristic feature of both the past and the present of the town. By the Middle Ages the historic border has been already running there, along the banks of rapid river swiftly flowing its waters out the Lake Peipsi into Baltic Sea and dividing the two civilizations—the Catholic European North and Orthodox Slavonic East. However, the border is not a mere line that separates, but also a place where two cultural worlds meet, mutually influence and interpenetrate each other.' Available at: [www.narva.ee/eng/](http://www.narva.ee/eng/), accessed 15 January 2007. On the early modern history of the town and the wider region, see Kirby (1990).

<sup>16</sup>Available at: <http://www.narva.ee/eng/index.php?paremal/ajaloost/>, accessed 15 January 2007.

<sup>17</sup>Weiss-Wendt (1997, pp. 36 - 40). At this time, around half of the city's population was Estonian by ethnicity. The other half consisted of Russians and other ethnic groups, such as Germans, Ingrian Finns and Jews.

<sup>18</sup>This was apparently the principal reason for the restoration of the old town hall, which had served as the seat of the Bolshevik government.

<sup>19</sup>As already noted, initial discussions with Swedish partners on the restoration of the Lion monument had previously taken place in October 1991, when Soviet-era leaders Chuikin and Mizui were still in office. This in itself suggests that the leadership was not averse to forging contacts with the West.

<sup>20</sup>Interview with David Smith and Raivo Murd, Narva, 12 October 1994.

<sup>21</sup>A further example in this regard would be the T34 tank that still stands to the north of the city. This is a place where some newly-married couples go to have their photographs taken.

<sup>22</sup>Interview with the authors and Evgeniya Torokvei, vice mayor of Narva, Narva, 27 March 2006.

<sup>23</sup>Interview with the authors and Eldar Efendiev, Narva, 28 March 2006.

<sup>24</sup>Sommer-Kalda (2000); interview with the authors and Eldar Efendiev 28 March 2006; interview with the authors and Galina Moldon, vice mayor of Narva from 1993 to 2005, 28 March 2006; interview with the authors and Hans Lepp, Swedish Institute, Stockholm, 26 March 2007; see also interview with Galina Moldon in Ivanova (2000).

<sup>25</sup>This was done at the suggestion of Galina Moldon.

<sup>26</sup>Interview with the authors and Eldar Efendiev 28 March 2006.

<sup>27</sup>Interview with the authors and Eldar Efendiev 28 March 2006.

<sup>28</sup>Available at: <http://www.sirp.ee/2000/24.11.00/Varamu/varamu1-1.html>, accessed 1 March 2006.

<sup>29</sup>Interview with the authors and Eldar Efendiev, 28 March 2006; interview with the authors and Galina Moldon, 28 March 2006; interview with the authors and Hans Lepp, 26 March 2007.

<sup>30</sup>Interview with the authors and Eldar Efendiev, 28 March 2006; interview with the authors and Galina Moldon, 28 March 2006. The aesthetic aspect of the Lion's location was also underlined by acting mayor of Narva Aksel Ers and Swedish Deputy Foreign Minister Lena Hjelm-Wallen in their speeches at the unveiling of the monument (see Sommer-Kalda 2000).



<sup>31</sup>It is, of course, possible that the Estonian government consciously and deliberately adopted a low-key approach to this commemoration, in the same way that from the Swedish side, the Narva days and the monument were depicted as a gift from the Swedish Institute rather than the Swedish government as such.

<sup>32</sup>See, for instance, Totskaya (2000) and the discussion in D. Smith (2002b, pp. 102 - 3).

<sup>33</sup>Interview with the authors and Eldar Efendiev, 28 March 2006.

<sup>34</sup>Interview with the authors and Eldar Efendiev, 28 March 2006; interview with the authors and Galina Moldon, 28 March 2006; interview with the authors and Evgeniya Torokvei, 27 March 2006. Hans Lepp expressed a similar view in his interview with the authors on 28 March 2007, as did Ola Olsson, who served as a Project Director for the 2000 Narva events, when the authors spoke to him on 28 March 2007, also at the Swedish Institute.

<sup>35</sup>Anonymous communication to the authors, March 2006.

<sup>36</sup>Anonymous communication to the authors. The same commentator also observed that the explanatory plaque had most likely been removed from the site on account of its potential scrap value.

<sup>37</sup>Interview with the authors and Eldar Efendiev, 28 March 2006.

<sup>38</sup>'I gde-to slishen sabel' zvon', *Narvskaya Gazeta*, 26 November 2003. Available at: <http://www.gazeta.ee>, accessed 15 March 2006.

<sup>39</sup>'Narvas taaselustati kolmandat korda P[otilde]hjas[otilde]ja lahinguid' Toimetaja Kerttu Rannamäe, Autor Tanel Mazur, *Eesti Päevaleht Online*, 13 August 2006, available at: <http://www.epl.ee/artikkel/350747>, accessed 20 September 2006.

<sup>40</sup>Meeting with the authors and members of the Narva Preobrazhenskii Regiment Historical Club, Narva, 29 March 2006.

<sup>41</sup>Recent suggestions for its use include a monument to the famous Estonian chess player Paul Keres (a native of Narva) or the placing of a 'wedding tree' where local couples could celebrate their anniversary.

<sup>42</sup>Interview with the authors and Eldar Efendiev, 28 March 2006.

<sup>43</sup>Following Ignatieff (1996), Paul Gready speaks of a need in divided societies 'to liberate the present and the future from the burden of the past that threatens to overwhelm them. To come to terms with the past means superimposing serial time on simultaneous time' (Gready 2003, p. 2).

<sup>44</sup>Meeting with the authors and members of the Narva Preobrazhenskii Regiment Historical Club, Narva, 29 March 2006.

<sup>45</sup>Irina Tokareva, 'Peeter I mälestusmärgi püstitamine Narva p[otilde]hjustab vaidlusi', *P[otilde]hjarannik Online*, 30 August 2006, available at: <http://www.pohjarannik.ee/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=3588>, accessed 1 September 2006.

<sup>46</sup>Irina Tokareva, 'Peeter I mälestusmärgi püstitamine Narva p[otilde]hjustab vaidlusi', *P[otilde]hjarannik Online*, 30 August 2006, available at: <http://www.pohjarannik.ee/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=3588>, accessed 1 September 2006.

<sup>47</sup>Irina Tokareva, 'Peeter I mälestusmärgi püstitamine Narva p[otilde]hjustab vaidlusi', *P[otilde]hjarannik Online*, 30 August 2006, available at: <http://www.pohjarannik.ee/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=3588>, accessed 1 September 2006.

<sup>48</sup>Iosef Kats, 'Tsena simbola', *Molodezh' Estonii*, 1 September 2006.

<sup>49</sup>Iosef Kats, 'Tsena simbola', *Molodezh' Estonii*, 1 September 2006.

<sup>50</sup>Iosef Kats, 'Tsena simbola', *Molodezh' Estonii*, 1 September 2006. In the grounds of Kadriorg stands a house used by Peter the Great, which is today a museum. At the time of writing, the suggestion to erect a Peter the Great monument in Narva appeared to have been dropped, especially after parliamentary leaders of the Centre Party—which until March 2007 formed part of the ruling coalition along with Ansip's Reform Party (*Reformierakond*)—refused to back the initiative by their local-level colleagues.

### List of Figures



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FIGURE 1. Detail of the 'Swedish Lion' in Narva (a copy of Flaminio Vacca's work in Florence, c.1598). Note that the globe has been modified to include the three crowns—Sweden's national emblem  
Image: Stuart Burch



[\[Enlarge Image\]](#)

FIGURE 2. The 'Swedish Lion' (2000) on the promontory overlooking the fortresses of Narva (left) and Ivangorod (right) Image: Stuart Burch