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ABSTRACT

This comparative analysis of sociopolitical and cultural discourses in the Estonian SSR from 1987–1991 concentrates on the tension between postmodernism as a cultural logic of late socialism and neoliberalism as a then-emergent modern ideology. Postmodernist and neoliberal ideas both emerged from decolonial reactions to Soviet rule, albeit from different aspects of it. Postmodernism reacted to the sense that the stagnation-era Soviet regime was 'stuck in presentness' and to the Soviet grand narrative of building communism. Neoliberal aspirations developed in reaction to the way Soviet rule obstructed local economic initiative and local participation in the global market, finding support in Gorbachev's call for enterprise-level economic autonomy.

KEYWORDS Neoliberalism; postmodernism; Estonian SSR; decolonization; Mati Unt; perestroika; self-management; Soviet Union

Introduction

Elevated moods. Mass demonstrations. Crowded open-air concerts. Singing and speeches. Shared exhilaration. The final years of the Soviet Union – from about 1987 to 1991 – are typically remembered by Estonian speakers as an era of public excitement: people were coming together, animated by a sharp, clear sense of hope and promise. Estonians 'sang themselves free,' as outsiders would occasionally say of this era – as if, in the late 1980s, Estonians formed one homogeneous national body with hundreds of thousands of singing mouths, all pouring forth their enthusiasm in unison.

This article seeks to complicate the narrative of the transition era by looking comparatively at sociopolitical and cultural discourses, and by analyzing the conflicts and inconsistencies of these years in the context of the late Soviet years that preceded them. While such complications are manifold, I concentrate here on one substantial – hitherto unaddressed – large-scale disconnect: the tension between *postmodernism* as a cultural logic of late socialism and *neoliberalism* as a then-emergent *modern* ideology. I do not claim that postmodernism and neoliberalism formed one strong opposition that jointly structured public moods in this era; rather, this article follows two

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sociocultural impulses, among others. There were other powerful drives and hopes also at work in those years, which we leave aside here: environmentalism, nostalgia for one or another imaginary version of the national past, nationalism, politically motivated decolonial opposition to Soviet rule – and more. As ever, various cultural impulses and aspirations intertwined, occasionally converged, and at times conflicted with one another.

In Estonia, postmodernist and neoliberal frameworks both emerged in decolonial reaction to Soviet rule, albeit to different aspects of it. Postmodernism reacted to the sense that the stagnation-era Soviet regime was 'stuck in presentness' and it reflected the common feeling that the official self-presentation of Soviet society had turned into an empty discourse that had lost contact with everyday realities (Annus 2000a, 2000b). Neoliberal aspiration developed in reaction to the way Soviet rule obstructed local economic initiative and local participation in the global market. It drew support from Gorbachev's call for enterprise-level economic autonomy, but also from the glamorous images of the capitalist world system on display in serials such as *Dallas*, whose broadcast on Finnish television reached viewers in northern Estonia. Quite apart from the extreme wealth at the heart of *Dallas*, there was an awkward sense that ordinary people in the West seemed to enjoy everyday small pleasures that were out of reach in the Soviet Union. In this way, postmodernist and neoliberalist perspectives in Estonia also reflected and responded to sociocultural developments from outside the Soviet sphere. By the late 1980s, postmodernism and neoliberalism had become phenomena that, in important respects, shaped and motivated the global circulation of cultural, political, and economic ideas – and these ideas and frameworks left their mark on Baltic shores.

This article will first contextualize and articulate the complexities of neoliberal ideas and postmodernism in the context of the late Soviet era. Then, it will open these up in more detail through a comparative analysis of the discourse of 'Self-Managing Estonia' in the media of 1987–1988 and articulations of postmodernist sentiments by popular Estonian writers with a special focus on the writings by Mati Unt. This parallel reading will highlight some widely-held ideas, hopes, and assumptions about the era and, thereby, shed light upon those hazy aspects of social life that could be called public moods, shared cultural imaginaries, or hegemonic discursive formations.

Neoliberalism and postmodernism in the context of decolonization

In late capitalist societies, postmodernism and neoliberalism are typically regarded as two sides of the same coin, minted by the machinery of late capitalism. *Neoliberalism*, as it is commonly understood, is an ideology and an economic principle which grants priority to market relations in the generation of wealth and the management of labor, where the state performs the role of guarantor in the smooth functioning of the market economy and in the promotion of competition (compare to Saidel 2023, 5). According to a much-quoted definition by David Harvey (2007, 2), neoliberalism 'proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.' In Harvey's critical account of the neoliberal vision of the state, 'The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such [neoliberal] practices' (Harvey 2007, 2). As such, both in theory and in practice, neoliberalism includes great variation (Boas and Gans-Morse 2009; Watts 2022).

Neoliberalism developed from the critique of liberalism in the 1930s. It discarded the classical liberal view of the market as naturally evolving and it grasped the need to guide and guard the functioning of the market through the power of the state apparatus (Dardot and Laval 2014). The broader impact of neoliberal economic theories is attributed to the dissemination of economic theories developed by Milton Friedman, Friedrich von Hayek, and others, together with their implementations by the Reagan-Thatcher duo in the 1980s. Its earliest field demonstration, so to speak, famously began in Chile under the Pinochet dictatorship, and under the direct influence of Milton Friedman, the leading figure at the Chicago School of Economics, who personally met with Pinochet and advised his government on economic policy (Fischer 2009).

In Galen Watts's account, neoliberal economic policies may include 'privatization of public assets, deregulation of capital markets, lowering of trade barriers, eliminating price controls, contraction of democratic institutions, fiscal austerity, tighter control of the money supply, restrictions on labour organization, labour market deregulation, elimination of budget deficits, curtailment of government subsidies, reductions of progressive taxation and tax-cuts for corporations' (Watts 2022, 460). Yet, with our interest in the final years of the Soviet Union, it is not concrete economic policies, but rather public attitudes toward a possible future implementation of a market-driven society that demand our closer attention.

In the context of the historical development of ideas, as pertaining to the Soviet zone, one can perceive a circular movement, or a toggling back and forth, from classical liberalism to Marxism to neoliberalism: nineteenth-century Marxism inspired the 1917 Revolution, the development of a Marxist-Leninist ideological framework, and the establishment of the authoritarian-colonial version of state socialism in the USSR. Marxism itself had initially developed in response to the laissez faire principles of classical liberalism – or, to the wretched labor and living conditions for workers in an era without effective state regulation. In the 1980s and the early 1990s, an immediate and adverse experience with authoritarian-colonial state socialism created conditions for reformist thought in Estonia to explore liberal thought precisely in its phase of neoliberal development.[1]

In the post-Soviet sphere, neoliberalism is typically associated with the 1990s. Mart Laar, the Estonian prime minister from 1992 to 1994, has repeatedly acknowledged Milton Friedman's work as inspirational, and it is considered common knowledge that the Estonian Republic was rebuilt in the early 1990s according to neoliberal principles (Laar 2014). Yet it would be naïve to take this tendency as a great invention of Mart Laar and his team: the Estonian politician Kalev Kukk, for example, recalled that the flat tax – a hallmark neoliberal policy of Laar's government – was already under discussion before Laar took office (Ellis 2010, 67). So why precisely were these principles adopted and how did they find sufficient public support in fair elections such that subsequent governments of the 1990s maintained the same course? What were the deeper roots of these developments?

One start of the explanation is simply to observe that the spread of some version of neoliberal values was already underway elsewhere in the late 1980s. The British and American neoliberal turn of the late 1970s and 1980s had aroused interest in Estonia, even as the long-term consequences of these policies were, of course, still unknown. Reagan and Thatcher were well-known figures; as celebrated foreign heads of state, their fame was comparable perhaps only to Kennedy's in earlier decades. In 1982, Tartu State University professor Kaido Jaanson published a series, *Of England and English*

People, in the newspaper *Edasi* (Forward); he dedicated one entry to the 'Iron Lady' Margaret Thatcher and the economic policies her government implemented under the influence of Milton Friedman's economic ideas (Jaanson 1982). Friedman's ideas were typically introduced under the rubric of 'monetarism' (Härm 1984; Köörna 1984), though 'neoliberalism' was used in introducing Friedrich von Hayek's work (Laak 1977).

Eerik-Niiles Kross (2022) has observed that 'Thatcher and Reagan were probably never as popular in their homelands as they were among young Estonians in their occupied homeland in the 1980s.' Kross himself was part of the Euromais youth team of 1982, a student summer construction team – one among many. The Euromais group (their name was an ironic reference to Nikita Khrushchev's corn campaign) built its identity around the imaginary of a British NATO base. Their signature song, sung to the melody of Yankee Doodle Dandy (the opening tune for Voice of America's news broadcasts), declared them to be 'A NATO family united, to whom Reagan, Thatcher, and Pinochet, gave warmest greetings.' Remarkably, this song became very popular among pre-perestroika-era Estonian youth – creative gatherings of the all-Estonian summer construction teams introduced it and popularized it among the wider population. Mart Laar, the future prime minister and, in 1982, a 22-year-old member of the Euromais team, is credited with supplementing the song with a chorus shouting, in English, 'I love Thatcher!' (Simson 2004). Kross traces the context of this song to Estonians' gratitude for British support in the Estonian Independence War of 1918–1920, and to Estonian culture's special affection for the British in the years since. There were other associations that likewise testified to the prestige and affection enjoyed by British culture in the late Soviet years in Estonia – Trivimi Velliste, for example, a founder in 1974 of the book club Tõru and a graduate of English philology at Tartu State University, has described these social gatherings, held informally around a fireplace, as an adoption from an old English tradition (Bennich-Björkman 2007, 325–326), in deliberate opposition to the compulsory and utilitarian aesthetic that prevailed in official Soviet meeting culture.

It was, in short, a widely shared perspective that the Soviet state apparatus was a hindrance to personal freedom, to one's possibilities of self-realization and general wellbeing – and this perspective established conditions for entertaining alternative orientations. The limited information available about life under Reagan and Thatcher made British and American ways of life seem greatly desirable – a certain improvement, in any case, over what prevailed in Soviet Estonia. With perestroika's call for economic autonomy and improved efficiency, neoliberal-style preferences for the market economy, and a state apparatus geared toward market efficiency found new life in the era-specific promotion of radical change.

Here, an additional factor needs to be taken into account: the coloniality of Soviet rule which, with a new series of initiatives promoting Russo-centrism from the late 1970s onwards, began to excite local anxieties about national survival (Annus 2018; Piirimäe 2020). In this context, it is unsurprising that neoliberal-style suspicions of the welfare state found mutual support with Estonia's decolonial aspirations in the 1980s: from the perspective of the colonized borderlands, the combination of a massive state apparatus and colonial-style long-distance rule was clearly both economically inefficient as well as ruinously indifferent to local circumstances.

As Stuart Hall (2011, 706) explains, 'Neo-liberalism is grounded in the idea of the "free, possessive individual." It sees the state as tyrannical and oppressive.' To describe the Soviet state as oppressive, tyrannical, and unduly hampering individual freedom – this was very much the decolonial perspective of the late 1980s. Ivi Masso, commenting on Estonian attitudes, observed that the state was 'mistrusted by habit' (Masso 2001, 30). She linked

Estonian neoliberalism in the 1990s to earlier historical layers of individualist thinking: 'Our individualist culture has provided a favourable climate for neoliberal ideology' (24).

Sociological research has demonstrated the strong presence of individualistic values in the late 1980s Estonia: according to Andu Rämmer's findings, the optimism of the era was powered by the central emphasis placed on individual achievement. Rämmer (2017, 46) explains that by 1990, two-thirds of all Estonian residents 'were convinced that individuals, rather than the state, should take responsibility for their own wellbeing.'[2] Rämmer's research suggests differences in Estonian speakers' and Russian speakers' value opinions, attributable to each group's different position in the Soviet colonial spectrum: in 1990, 94% of ethnic Estonians and 85% of Russophone populations agreed that 'income inequality should be further increased to promote private initiative;' and 77% of ethnic Estonians and 47% of Russophone populations agreed that 'people should take more responsibility for ensuring their own wellbeing' (96). As Rämmer (2017, 47) concludes,

> The belief that hard work usually leads to a better standard of living was shared by the vast majority of Estonian residents, with Estonians being the most vocal supporters. Among Estonian Russians, the view was somewhat more common that success depends more on luck and connections. [. . .] Egalitarian principles were associated with the Soviet Union, which resulted in either opposition or merely low-intensity support for the principle of equality.

Such positions, while not necessarily neoliberal per se, nonetheless indicate a readiness to accept neoliberal forms of governmentality (Foucault 2008).

Stuart Hall (2011, 708) has argued that 'Neo-liberalism has many variants. It is not a single system. [. . .] It combines with other models, modifying them. It borrows, evolves and diversifies. It is constantly "in process."' In late Soviet Estonia, a neoliberalist-style aversion to state control found common cause with the protest against imperial control, while at the same time legitimizing decolonial nation-building.

When perestroika permitted an initially cautious but quickly more outspoken expression of decolonial sentiment, Gorbachev's own emphasis on economic restructuring allowed decolonial critique to be openly expressed in the form of critiquing Soviet economic dysfunction. As events transpired, Estonia's initial efforts at economic restructuring were indeed accepted by Moscow, even as they were also strongly, even radically, decolonial in their potential. In Estonia, by 1987–1988, a conversation about economic change snowballed into a hegemonic decolonizing discourse, articulated and analyzed from different perspectives.

Individualistic visions in 1980s Estonia were considerably removed from neoliberal political realities – the pernicious social effects of growing inequality and rising poverty, and the alienation and divided horizons characteristics of unequal societies. At this point, neoliberalist-style frameworks exerted their attraction as part of a cultural mood, not as an implemented policy. This set of ideas carried a modern tonality, full of forward-looking aspirations.

The 1980s is also commonly described as part of the long durée of *postmodernism*. Postmodernism is a cultural phenomenon that celebrates plurality, is ironical of dominant master-narratives, laughs at Enlightenment ideals of progress, and believes in not much of anything.[3] Its early manifestations can be located in the 1950s (and according to some scholars, even earlier), although its diffusion as a cultural logic is usually dated to the late 1970s. Jean-François Lyotard(1984, xxiv) most famously, defined the postmodern condition as a reaction to modernism, and foregrounded its 'incredulity toward

metanarratives' as a central feature. For postmodernists, great figures and great ideas had lost much of their credibility: 'The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages; its great goal' (Lyotard 1984, xxiv). Hans Bertens (1995, 5) similarly, describes postmodernism as a complex of anti-modernist artistic strategies: 'they all seek to transcend what they see as the self-imposed limitations of modernism, which in its search for autonomy and purity or for timeless, representational truth has subjected experience to unacceptable intellectualizations and reductions.' Fredric Jameson (1984, 53) likewise connects postmodernism with the exhaustion of 'a high modernist impulse.' Jameson's notions of 'the waning of affect' (61), 'new depthlessness' (58), and 'decorative exhilaration' (61) characterize postmodernism quite precisely: if the modern subject strives and suffers, the postmodern subject laughs and observes, and does not see much sense in setting exalted goals or suffering too deeply. 'The alienation of the subject is replaced by the fragmentation of the subject,' summarizes Jameson, contrasting Edward Munch's high modernist, anxiety-filled painting *The Scream* with Andy Warhol's serialized Campbell soups and Marilyn Monroes (Jameson 1984, 63).[4]

The postmodernist worldview found fertile soil in stagnation-era Soviet society, where the master-narrative of the Soviet state about the bright future of communism was commonly considered as lacking any real substance. Take the Russian postmodernist cult novel *Moscow-Petushki* (Moscow Stations) by Venedikt Yerofeyev, written in 1969–1970.[5] In this one-day travelogue, the intellectual drunkard Venichka observes and reflects on the people and places around him; both Venichka and his world are downtrodden, stuck in a futureless, gloomy present, yet this condition inspires not modernist irritation, anxiety, or protest, but rather laughter and self-irony.

Soviet-era Estonian novelistic visions did not come close to Yerofeyev's alcohol-soaked world of absurdist misery, but their postmodernist sentiments were clearly distinguishable from the 1960s onwards. The preeminent postmodernist writer in Estonia, Mati Unt, had been acclaimed since the 1960s as a writer with his finger on the pulse of his times. Unt was appreciated for his special talent for sensing and documenting his era, 'the things, ideas, spiritual maladies, attitudes, concepts, idols, persons, popular clichés, sentences, text fragments, lines from songs, and phrases that were, in the given moment, fashionable' (Runnel 1980, 115). At least in his work from the late 1960s onwards, Unt's fictional worlds were carried by ontological doubt and loose, fragmentary modes of subjectification. In his works, historical processes form a confusing mix, and sincerity is overwritten with satire. One critic characterized Unt's style as 'a poetics of fragmentariness' (Krull 1993, 66) – it works by piling up facts upon chance encounters, seemingly indifferent to the task of crafting deeply-involving narratives or developing characters with great psychological depth.

Postmodernist writers observe changing times from a critical distance

Acceleration, multiplication, pluralization, and diversity are keywords that characterize both postmodernism and neoliberalism. Yet, there is a fundamental tension between neoliberalism and postmodernism, even as they may also produce syntheses of various kinds. Their clash is clearly manifested in their opposing temporalities: neoliberalism is firmly rooted in the ideology of growth and progress. There must always be more profit, more growth, new markets, new desires, and new products – its success is dependent on the constant creation of novelty.[6] The

temporality of postmodernism is quite different: here, ideas of progress are laughed at, since its roots lie in disappointment with the great master narratives of Enlightenment and progress. In the words of Martín Hopenhayn (1993, 96), 'For the postmodernists, history does not march in an ascending path; it is discontinuous, asynchronic, pregnant with multiple directions and with growing margins of uncertainty about the future.'

Estonian postmodernist thinkers in the 1980s were noncommittal about the grand ideas of change and progress; they were more closely aligned with the Foucauldian project of examining how ideas are formed and situated in their specific contexts. In the late 1980s, however, the postmodernist project found itself facing a new wave of decolonial, utopian modernism. Interestingly, even as the deeply modern national decolonizing mood started to prevail in the streets and to a significant extent also in the media, postmodernist sentiments did not vanish. Instead, something of a dissonance emerged between the highly modern aspiration toward newly resurfaced great goals – national freedom and potentially also personal enrichment – and postmodernist writings imagining, for example, Tarzan's activities in Estonia during national celebrations of freedom, as in *Tarzani seiklused Tallinnas* (Tarzan's adventures in Tallinn, 1991), by Toomas Raudam.

Mati Unt (1993, 57) said in a 1988 interview, 'I do not know what freedom is. But I am interested in people's imaginaries of freedom. I borrow those conceptions.' Such a position was clearly at odds with the mood typified by the 'singing revolution' of the same era, yet Unt was not an exceptional voice in this respect: a number of outstanding writers expressed their discomfort with mass-gatherings and mass excitement. Take Ene Mihkelson, the most important Estonian author writing about the transformation era. In her novel *Nime vaev* (The Torment of the Name, 1994), the main character espouses the 'I want to know how' perspective also shared by Mati Unt. Mihkelson's character elaborates her impressions from the Tartu demonstration of 1988, a mass gathering where the national tricolor was re-displayed for the first time in public,

> Collective emotional enthusiasm of any kind will fail to stimulate an absolute degree of corresponding empathy in my soul. I don't want to lose even a drop of the feeling of the sea that arose suddenly. But, at the same time, I also want to explore how it appears and develops… In fact, I didn't even join the procession with the others; instead, I waited at the corner of Juhan Liiv and N. Burdenko Street for the arrival of the roaring human wave. (Mihkelson 1994, 6)

Mihkelson's novelistic vision bears some similarity to Mati Unt's personal recollections, articulated in his interviews. Mihkelson's prose typically aims for an analytical disentanglement of the various traumas of the Soviet decades, its characters unable to come to terms with the past.

Mati Unt has in retrospect presented the mass elation of the late 1980s through a self-ironic articulation of his own conformism:

> One of the darkest experiences for me was when I went to a concert given by my friend Tõnis Mägi during the 'days of the revolution.' As he began to sing 'Koit,' everyone stood up and began to sway. For the first time in my life, I found myself in a place where it was mandatory to sway. My first thought was that I would simply refuse to get up. But there was a small child by my side, looking at me innocently, eyes wide open, and I had no choice but to stand. 'Koit' is one of those songs that is completely unsuitable for swaying, but there they all were: everyone swaying away conscientiously, and then I thought, no, no, no, no… But my conformism asserted itself and I swayed through the whole song! I still feel terribly ashamed!. (Unt and Mikli 1992, 86)

Tõnis Mägi was one of the leading singers of the Estonian 'singing revolution;' the hymnic *Koit* (Dawn) became one of the most beloved tunes of the era. *Koit* is written in a revolutionary mood: it calls for the people to 'cast off the garments of slavery' and assume a free and dignified posture, and it imagines 'the victory of light' that 'rouses the sleeping land.' The song exhorts its audience, 'let us stretch out our hands towards each other, let us join our forces together' and then it affirms that, in this way, 'we' can accomplish anything we wish. The song explicitly calls for collective action and linking hands and, in those days, it was indeed commonly sung by people holding hands and swaying collectively to the rise and fall of its rhythm. Unt, however, prefers to recount his own concert experience not through the image of national unity, but through his bodily discomfort.

In their writings, Mihkelson, Unt, and others depict the figure of the intellectual as a critical observer, someone suspicious of high sentiment and grand ideas. The West, for such writers, did not necessarily represent ideals worthy of emulation. Such a critical stance, a typical feature of postmodernism, was familiar to many in late Soviet times. Peeter Sauter's acclaimed autobiographical novel *Indigo*, from 1990, displayed a similar indifference toward larger social processes and aspirations of personal wellbeing: *Indigo* poeticizes doing next to nothing, describing in minute detail the ordinary movements of making a sandwich or walking in the streets, without troubling to refer to those interested in pursuing progress or aspiring toward new achievements (Sauter 1990).

In the next section, to more fully articulate the particularities of decolonial neoliberal tonalities of the era, I will limit my focus to one specific set of ideas circulating in late 1980s in Estonia – namely the public conversation pertaining to IME, an Estonian acronym for 'self-managing Estonia' (also a pun: *ime*, as a non-acronym, means 'miracle' in Estonian). The article will then proceed to examine postmodernist re-renderings of IME ideas: in Mati Unt's fiction IME discussions become rearticulated and relativized, without erasing its decolonial potential. This comparison will allow us to more fully articulate the differences between modern-neoliberal and postmodernist sensibilities of the era, while also acknowledging the presence of other ideas and motivations.

Economic self-management

In the Estonian SSR, an important public discussion was launched on 26 September 1987, when the newspaper *Edasi* published the programmatic article 'Ettepanek: Kogu Eesti NSV täielikule isemajandamisele' (A proposal for all the Estonian SSR to fully assume economic self-management). As the title of the proposal suggests, the authors argued for the necessity of reorganizing the economy of the Estonian SSR in a self-managing manner, such that decisions pertaining to the local economy would be devolved to the republic-level, and no longer retained across various All-Union ministries and departments.[7] Their recommendation was that Estonia should assume the 'total self-financing, self-supply, and self-management' of its own economy, with the aim that 'The [Estonian] economy will be reorganized to guarantee the primary development of those areas that are based principally on local resources and that are, for us, economically viable, culturally acceptable, and in tune with our economic traditions' (Kallas et al. 1987). The central idea of the proposal was the transfer of enterprises from All-Union economic governance to the republic level. There was also, however, an acknowledgment that this process would involve a shift from a planned economy to a market economy.

The proposal initiated one of the most important and consequential conversations of the era: over the next year, over two hundred articles were published in Estonian newspapers that discussed and disputed various aspects of the idea of economic self-government.[8] These articles form a diverse and intriguing body of thought that far exceeded any programmatic economic project; thus, they document, in their very multiplicity, the public moods of the era. In important respects, the IME discussion came to define the era, together with heritage conservation movements, environmental action, and the incentive for the USSR to openly acknowledge the secret protocols of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.[9] The Estonian expression *Isemajandav Eesti* (IME or self-managing Estonia), functioned in this context as an economic framework, but it also started to signify the promise of social change in general. This discourse developed into a demand for full sovereignty, officially declared on 16 November 1988, a step that was later followed by all other Soviet republics. In Juhan Saharov's (2022, 810) assessment, this 'plan for an unprecedented economic decoupling' from the central government had, in the end, 'unexpected political consequences for the whole Soviet Union.'[10]

IME articles were written by well-informed economists, sociologists, legal scholars, and public intellectuals. These texts offered detailed explanations of Soviet economic principles and structures, and clearly articulated their significant shortcomings at the republic level. Some articles also very soberly addressed the challenges that would result from a complete reorganization of the economic system in the transfer from central governance to a local system of government and from a planned economy to a market economy. The initial programmatic article gave Communist Party guidelines their rhetorical due – for example, it presented the problem of the stagnating economy in light of pronouncements made by the June 1987 plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, the principles proposed for a new economic mechanism and the subsequent discussion about the Soviet economy ended up exposing its colonial matrix – even as, in 1987, the Soviet state could not yet openly be acknowledged as either 'colonial' or 'imperial.' Thus, the IME discourse worked to educate the general readership about the shortcomings of the Moscow-led system, directed attention to various ways the present system neglected local interests (Terk 1988), and expounded quite precisely on the poor organizational design of the system.

One of the cornerstones of the IME discussion was a critique of the unproductive system of pricing, where sale prices for local produce were fixed in Moscow and did not necessarily cover local production costs (Lippmaa 1988; Pollisinski 1987; Udam and Raig 1987). Getting approval for local innovation from Moscow was judged to be a hindrance to local development, slowing or canceling out innovative efforts and discouraging local initiative (Isotamm 1988). In its ideas for change, the IME movement could extrapolate from established experience with limited models of economic self-governance that were already in place in some local industries (Saharov 2018, 2023).[11] Environmental discourse, which had developed since the 1960s and turned into mass-protests in the spring of 1987, also entered into these conversations, giving rise to concern about the local lack of authority to control and counter the ecological damage inflicted by Union-led enterprises.

The vision of the future offered by the IME discussions was dominated by a rational tone, with a deliberate restraint imposed on the making of easy promises. As the writer Jaak Jõerüüt (1987) put it in his supportive essay, 'Do we believe that a magic wand has been found that will realize all of our fondest wishes? Of course

not. We must acknowledge that what is being proposed first promises more work, and not more pleasure or fun.' Indeed, much of the discussion focused on different aspects of responsibility that would accompany economic independence: the repeated keyword was *peremehetunne*, literally 'a sense of husbandry,' a caretaking responsibility over one's belongings. In one of the first IME articles, Peeter Vihalemm (1987) explained how the cultural place of this notion had eroded over the Soviet decades, and suggested that 'Only real experience, a sharp increase in opportunities for decision-making and responsibility, can lead to the recovery and strengthening of *peremehetunne*.'[12] In Vihalemm's vision, the need to cultivate this sense of husbandry extended the importance of the IME program, from economy to society at large.

The cultural work of the IME discussions certainly contributed to Estonia's relative success during the first post-Soviet decade. From the perspective of the late 1980s, its significant presence in the media sphere directed Estonian decolonizing nation-building in a specific direction. As the IME conversation began – and continued to primarily function – as an economic proposal for self-governance, and as this conversation led to the demand for Estonia's sovereignty, it followed that *economic terms significantly defined the process of nation-building in this era*. The values that were foregrounded in this discussion can be interpreted as neoliberal: the emphasis was on providing the best possibilities for entrepreneurial thinking, and arguments often concerned the best possible ways to establish a market economy. The IME discussion from its very beginning foregrounded the special role of entrepreneurs. Take the words of Jaak Leimann (1987), one of the economists behind the initial proposal: 'Special attention should be given to truly talented and entrepreneurial people. We have such people, and, by concentrating on today's opportunities, we can develop their possibilities to the maximum extent.' The economic logic sounded solid: conditions must be created for stimulating people to put maximum effort into their productivity, such that 'people's wellbeing would become quite directly dependent on their labor input' (Teder 1987). Michel Foucault (2008, 242) has described such logic as creating the neoliberal ideal of 'a *homo economicus* as entrepreneur of himself, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer.' Much the same logic of a direct correlation between people's personal input and their wellbeing was later used in characterizing the 1990s. 'The majority of young adults remained passive and missed their chances. Transitional society provides numerous opportunities, and the failure to take action, or multiple actions, changes the odds for moving up the income scale and avoiding downward mobility,' as Mikk Titma (2004, 9) writes in her summary of the findings of a longitudinal research project. According to such a thoroughly neoliberal moral logic, those who did not succeed were held to be personally responsible for the consequence of their passivity and failure to take action. At the same time, as early as 1987, critics of the IME proposal pointed to the regional inequalities that a transition to a market-driven economy would bring about (Tepandi 1987, 16).

The specific model of subjecthood that the IME discussion promoted was a person with a highly modern mind-set and clear-sighted ambition, guided by a belief in progress and rationality, and ready to cut ties with the stagnant status quo. Such figures would define progress in terms of economic wellbeing. Their actions could only proceed from a clearly oppositional decolonial stance, since this subject's very premise was the erasure or end of Soviet rule in its present mode. One imagines such persons always on the move – organizing, arranging, calculating – with clear vision and creative

determination constantly producing new energy and new actions. They were, in short, figures utterly unlike the fragmented and disillusioned postmodernist subject.

As is well known, writers and artists took an active part in the decolonizing processes of the late 1980s. Meetings of creative unions became venues for expressing radically new ideas. Some writers, such as Paul-Eerik Rummo and Jaak Jõerüüt, actively engaged in the political arena, while others, like Mati Unt, remained as observers. Writers also had their own responses to economic ideas about self-government; this article has already mentioned Jõerüüt's support for the IME proposal, and more was to follow. The editors of the journal *Looming* (Creation) even invited writers to voice their opinions: one set of responses was published in the January 1988 issue, another arrived in the March 1988 issue.

Notably, the January 1988 issue of *Looming* published Mati Unt's response first. Unt avoids offering a sincere personal opinion about economic self-governance; he opts for a meta-critical stance and comments on the reaction to IME, instead of the proposal itself:

> The opponents of the proposal demonstrate national nihilism and lack of interest in their own economy and culture. Indeed, they lack interest in improving anything – they are cynical defeatists. One could at least *want* to help, even if one doesn't know how. The a priori opponents of the proposal can be equated with those who would have gladly allowed the phosphate mines to be opened, but who were forced to stop only by the fuss that had arisen. I distrust such individuals, especially those in eminent positions. (Unt et al. 1988, 138)

In the same period, Mati Unt was composing a more substantial addition to the IME discussion: his novel *Doonori meelespea* (Diary of a Blood Donor), finished in 1989 and published in 1990, situates its main storyline within the tumultuous perestroika era of the 1980s.[13] The novel is a clever and ironic rewriting of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*: Unt resituates the vampire narrative within Estonian contexts, thus offering a fantastic version of the era's cultural complexities. His vampire story unfolds in and around conversations about national freedom, including the disputes around the idea of a self-managing Estonia. The novel, thoroughly postmodernist in its tonality, carves a space of connection between different modes of the era; it provides a multidirectional vision of the late 1980s, where high-modern aspirations of nation-building are mixed with mysterious happenings, tangled historical associations, and era-specific references to everyday shortages of basic consumer products. In a striking departure from media conversations, the novel shows no interest in the neoliberal-style dreams of future economic achievements.

Vampires, blood, and the dissolution of the subject: postmodern rearticulations

Unt's novel *Doonori meelespea* perfectly exemplifies the postmodernist side of Estonian decolonial imaginaries in the late 1980s. Unt's novel is about the weirdness of life, about accidental similitudes and convergences, about the jumble of bodily, mythical, and political aspects of culture, about history as a cacophony that could not be 'tamed' into coherent sense. Unt brings some relief from the weight of history through irony and intertextual games, by inserting vampires and the atmosphere of supernatural crime into his version of the late 1980s. Unt also conceived a complex semi-fantastic, semi-realistic backstory to the 1980s 'vampire attacks,'

locating their originating impulses a hundred years in the past and bridging the years 1886 and 1986 through reincarnations and motifs of unresolved guilt and injustice, all while representing events from different periods in documentary detail. The novel was heralded as one of the most outstanding fictional works published that year in Estonia.[14] Together with Unt's novel *Öös on asju* (Things in the Night), also published in 1990, it was considered 'the pinnacle of Unt's postmodernist prose' (Epner 2001, 498).

Unt's novel lacks unambiguously positive characters with whom readers could easily identify and, generally, its characters were sketchy and loosely defined: 'If I keep on calling him MAN, he'll just get mixed up with other men. Let's give him a name. Let's call him Joosep. Why shouldn't he be a Joosep?' (Unt 2008, 71).[15] Intertextual webs link *Doonori meelespea* to Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, yet it will take a while (if at all) before the reader makes the connection and realizes that young women Lussi and Minni should be read as reflections of Stoker's Lucy and Mina, and that the main character Joonatan Hark is the modern equivalent of Stoker's young Jonathan. Yet Unt's novel makes no effort to replicate Dracula's drama, passion, and urgency; here, there is no heroic struggle to defeat the vampires.

Doonori meelespea very loosely follows the plotline of *Dracula*: while Stoker's Jonathan goes to visit Count Dracula, in Unt's novel, Joonatan takes a train to Leningrad to meet, by the cruiser Aurora, the unknown author of an anonymous letter written in Russian. Even as many scenes in the text unfold as if accidentally, characters and actions become linked together through associative chains and through the fear of vampire attack: small children disappear, uncanny rumors proliferate, party officials try to solve the mystery, yet Joosep, the blasé representative of party organs, loses his fight, and turns himself into a vampire.

Joonatan's journey leads to reminiscences about his boyhood trip to Leningrad, in 1950, when his Aunt Ida had taken him to buy sugar in Leningrad's better-provisioned stores; he had felt embarrassed by cheating – going through the same queue twice, to get two kilos of the precious granules instead of one. The present-day trip to the unknown – who sent the letter? what do they want of him? – also leads to a series of recollections about other somewhat mysterious trips undertaken in the past decades, such as one to a youth camp in Värska in 1964 with 'lively discussions by the campfire' of which Joonatan has to admit that 'the gist of arguments, unfortunately, has escaped me. But I repeat: we were certainly progressive' (Unt 2008, 11). Joonatan recollects an uncomfortable walk in the sweltering heat undertaken one day in the Värska area and the unexpected meeting of his company with a 'fleshy, sun-baked, half-naked man' (12). Such deviations scatter the focus from the main storyline, yet Unt is not interested in narrative coherence. The frequent side stories in the novel support the general aim of documenting life in its plurality as precisely as possible.

The novel presents itself as a detailed account of its era. Joonatan does not simply start his day with drinking coffee, instead the reader is informed that 'Using the last packet my Finnish publisher had sent me, I brewed some coffee, added sugar I had obtained with my ration card' (Unt 2008, 5). The impression of documentary detail is further reinforced by the insertion of letters and dated diary entries into the narrative. Occasionally, the documentary accounts contribute to ideational dissonance. In the section 'More synchronized events,' Event 9 is the summary of a news report about Gorbachev's visit to the Far East. In Vladivostok, Gorbachev apparently spoke to ordinary people in the streets and was reassured to hear confirmations that one could buy

everything necessary from the stores, and that people were now satisfied with the freedom they enjoyed and did not ask for more (45).

Themes of decolonization form one important backdrop of the novel, together with era-specific descriptions of shortages in consumer products. When characters think about freedom, they are hardly motivated by the national cause. Joonatan, for example, remains ambivalent, even skeptical, of talk of freedom: 'I'm not sure if I even want to be free. Freedom is so burdened with agitators and obstructionists, sometimes you just want to seek refuge in autism, bury your head in the sand, and stop breathing altogether' (Unt 2008, 9). Or later: 'Perhaps it would be truer if my people would wilt away at dawn like the flowers of the Queen of the Night? [. . .] What kind of life is this? And what alternative could there be? The Western world is no model' (Unt 1990, 15–16; 2008, 13–14, translation altered).

The theme of the dawn, metaphorically related to the era of new beginnings, is carried forward with the reincarnation of the poet Lydia Koidula (*koit* means 'dawn' in Estonian), who died in Kronstadt in 1886, exactly a hundred years before the novel's main storyline in 1986. Dawn associations radiate through the novel: the famous revolutionary vessel Aurora is named after the Roman goddess of the dawn, one episode describes *aurora borealis* ('northern lights'), and one scene is about the confusion of a drunk peasant who wakes up at 4 pm and thinks it is 4am. The narrator comments: 'The real dawn is still to come. [. . .] Sleep until dawn, peasant. Sleep' (Unt 2008, 32).[16]

The meeting by the cruiser Aurora effectively highlights the novel's topos of colonial hybridity. In the account of the initial conversation, three languages are on display in just a single sentence: '"*Guten Tag*," öeldi mu selja taga, "*Izvinite, što opozdal*"' (Unt 1990, 83).[17] The conversation by the Aurora continues in a mix of German and Russian – indeed German and Russian phrases are occasionally used in dialogs throughout this Estonian novel. This easy multilingualism refers to the hybrid, postcolonial character of Estonian nation-building, of which Koidula's life itself offers another striking exemplar. Joonatan declares that his own interest lies less in Koidula's poetry, and more 'in her private life, her strange character, various temporal collisions' (Unt 1990, 64). Another important work of the 1980s, Unt's play *Vaimude tund Jannseni tänaval* (The hour of ghosts on Jannsen Street), recalls some of the well-known details of Koidula's life: she was born Lydia Jannsen, she spoke German at home and wrote her first verses in that language, she later switched to Estonian and became the most outstanding poetic voice in the nineteenth-century Estonian nation-building movement.[18] She accepted a marriage proposal from the Latvian-born, German-speaking Eduard Michelson who was later stationed as a doctor in Kronstadt – as a result, Koidula spent a good part of her short life outside Estonia. Her remains were repatriated to Estonia in 1946. The novel presents such thorough-going cultural hybridity as a natural state of affairs, too complex to unambivalently support grand ideas of freedom and self-determination.[19]

Notwithstanding the novel's ambivalent relation to the enthusiasms of collective political action, it is through the aspirations of self-governing Estonia that the vampire is tamed, and order established in the end. Michelson arrives in Estonia as a vampirical materialization of Estonia's guilty national conscience: when the remains of his wife Lydia Koidula were moved from Kronstadt to Tallinn in 1946, Michelson's bones were left behind. This historical fact provides the basic kernel for the action of Unt's novel; the same violation was also a motif foregrounded in Unt's drama *Vaimude tund*. In the novel, this posthumous separation of the married couple, this gravesite violation, and

the guilty feelings troubling the Estonian national unconscious – all this materialized in Michelson's vampiric attacks in Estonia in summer 1986. The novel presents the 1946 reburial through documentary and memoir evidence: what appears to be an original document about the reburial is reprinted in the novel – and read aloud in Unt's 1984 drama *Vaimude tund*. In *Doonori meelespea*, following the text of the official document, the novel prints lines from the memoirs of the writer Mart Raud, one of the historical participants in the reburial,

> The autumn evening is turning into night and there's no more sunlight. Batteries supply light to work by. One by one we pick up the bones while up on the rim of the grave the prominent party official Comrade Smirnov, prominent members of the Naval Forces, Comrade Kadasadze, and a slew of other Kronstadters – true aficionados of poetry – read, with great devotion, Koidula's poems in faultless Russian translation (Unt 1990, 112; 2008, 123, translation altered)[20]

For Unt, this scene presents a strange mix of grotesquely outdated ideological pathos and abject bodily materiality – the body, buried decades ago, has lost its integrity, and has become a loose pile of fleshless bones, which for some unaccountable reason have been assigned symbolic weight for the national cause. For a postmodernist writer, nineteenth-century romantic poetry is embarrassingly full of pointless flourish, and the image of prominent Communist Party officials reading 'with great devotion' Koidula's poetry 'in perfect Russian translation' is indeed for Estonian readers a grotesque one – yet the incongruous presence of the disintegrated body shifts any impulse of laughter into an uneasy register.

In the novel *Doonori meelespea*, the past, revived in the figure of the vampire and entwined within different colonial layers, gradually comes to engage with contemporary IME type aspirations. The novel culminates in a semi-sincere, semi-grotesque speech from the vampire, who describes his change of heart since he first arrived in Estonia, angry and bloodthirsty:

> After a while, though, I began to sober up, began to appreciate your struggles for freedom, your natural desire to conduct your own affairs, to be a free nation in a free land. Of course – I do need blood! That I won't deny. But, as I've already said at least three times – only from a blood bank! I no longer infect anyone.
>
> 'So you support the economic self-governance of Estonia?' asked Renner with, for him, unexpected earnestness.
>
> 'I do,' responded Michelson (Unt 1990, 156; 2008, 173, translation altered).

At this very general level of plot resolution, Unt's novel, notwithstanding its ironies, affirms the IME project, as a modern decolonial cause that even vampires can get behind. The vampire Michelson settles on a farm in the countryside and starts to receive blood from the blood bank; the Soviet leadership, meanwhile, faces its complete failure. Yet, how seriously can one take the endorsement of a vampire? Or the failure of Communist Party officials to be victorious over vampires?

If Unt's text commits to one clear judgment, it concerns Lydia Koidula's reburial, an act that the novel presents as a clear violation.[21] Nationhood, by contrast, is treated with relative indifference; national heroes have turned into vampires (the poet Koidula, too, has become a vampire in Unt's novel), and seriousness has faded from decolonial efforts.[22] Human life-worlds are presented as indissociable from body and flesh, yet also as enmeshed within tangled layers of history. IME aspirations, while presented with sympathy, are seen as one chapter among others in the general unfolding of Estonian

(post-)colonial history. As such, the novel both acknowledges and problematizes the unidirectional aspirations of decolonization of the era. While it admits even vampires into the ranks of supporters for a self-governing Estonia, the novel also displays Estonia's deep-rooted cultural hybridity, the consequence of the long history of colonial regimes. Unt's self-aware hybrid postcolonial subject will remain 'stuck in history.'[23] While the novel displays its support, albeit through the prism of irony, to decolonization, it is quite uninterested in the economic side of it. Unt's main character, a doubting observer, is rather an opposite of the *homo economicus* envisioned in the media discourse during these very years.

Conclusion

In the 1980s, a substantial difference emerged in Estonian cultural moods and interpretive registers: *postmodern* sensibilities among the cultural avant-garde remained separate from the *modern* aspirations of hegemonic decolonial nation-building with an emphasis on improving economic efficiency. This significant difference produced inconsistent and incongruous understandings of the role of history and the space for human agency, and it foregrounded different models of subjecthood.

While significant parts of the Estonian cultural avant-garde operated in the mode of postmodern sensibilities, socioeconomic and political discourses became dominated by distinctly modern aspirations. At work in economically-oriented discussions and in environmental protests was the logic of an existential either/or: either a new socio-economic order would be established, or else stagnation and deterioration would persist and deepen. In journalistic essays exploring the theme of a self-governing Estonia, the social world was figured to have been brought into dysfunction by Soviet rule, and in dire need of re-organization. Postmodernist fiction, by contrast, reveled in the deep 'messiness' of shared social coexistence and it highlighted the artificiality of supposedly clear distinctions, identities, labels, and political declarations.

When we read IME-themed articles in parallel with contemporaneous cultural texts with a postmodernist orientation, we find that Estonia's cultural sensibilities in the late 1980s included different aspirations and models of subjecthood. The implied subject of the IME discourse, the revolutionary with a neoliberal twist, was accompanied by the disengaged subject roaming the pages of postmodernist fiction.[24]

The appearance, in August 1991, of Soviet tanks on Estonian streets forced a convergence in cultural mood. It was time to take a stance: the postmodern subject could remain skeptical of the overflowing pathos on display in mass demonstrations, but tanks in the streets was a different matter. Yet, once this concrete physical threat to national self-determination had passed, the 1990s witnessed a rapid proliferation of different models for subject formation.

As this article has shown, neoliberal dreams of the late 1980s supported the grand narrative of a modern, decolonial nation-building in Estonia. The decolonizing impulse, for its part, both accelerated and softened the emergence of neoliberalism. Since it was the Soviet Union which had hindered economic advancement and personal flourishing, and since the newly independent republic enjoyed an as-yet unblemished moral prestige, it could in the early 1990s implement a neoliberal-style flat tax regime and display a disregard for the 'losers' in this new economy, even as it could also sustain and improve the state-run healthcare system and, in 1994, reinstate the flexible and efficient *Kultuurkapital*

(Cultural Endowment of Estonia) – a valuable reminder, if one were needed, that neoliberalism is not a homogeneous system that functions in the same way everywhere across the globe: it evolves, it accommodates, and it forms local alliances. To this, postmodernism offered a healthy cultural counterbalance, highlighting the hybridity and complexity of historical processes, as well as embracing irony and playfulness.

Notes

1. Differences between classical liberal and neoliberal or 'new liberal' political thought have not always been clearly observed in the scholarly literature. Estonian scholars and politicians often use 'liberal' in the context of what is now typically framed as 'neoliberal.' The term '"new liberalism" (*uusliberalism*) is also occasionally used, and one will find references to the 'Chicago boys' or the 'Washington consensus' (Lauristin and Vihalemm 2009; Masso 2001; Michnik 1990).
2. Rämmer himself does not link such views to neoliberal values.
3. This section repeats basic points that I elaborated in more detail in a set of articles twenty years ago (Annus 2000a, 2000b). My views have not changed.
4. For some theorists, postmodernism is also tightly interwoven with specifically late capitalist information technologies. Now, however, decades later, this connection seems not to have survived the test of time: while there is a consensus that the era of postmodernism ended at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the information society has hardly stopped developing and, rather to the contrary, has extended to new territories. Consumer culture still flourishes. Claims that postmodernism is the specific cultural condition of post-industrial/consumer/information society seem unwarranted – all these societal descriptors still pertain, yet the postmodernist worldview has lost its bearings. I agree with Piret Viires and others that the 11 September 2001 attacks in New York could well mark the end of postmodernism. 'Directly after the attack, on 24 September, Rogen Rosenblatt, for example, wrote in *Time* magazine that "the age of irony has ended" [. . .] The terrorist attack was thus seen as the invasion of a clear and indisputably objective reality into the vague world of postmodern relativity and pluralist truths,' wrote Viires (2012, 115).
5. The novel was first published in the USSR only in 1989 (Erofeev 2003).
6. Hence the difficulty of responding productively to climate change in a human world dominated by neoliberalist logic: the neoliberal world order calls for a constant flow of new resources and its main worry is a slowdown in the pace of profit-making. Climate change, by contrast, necessitates a substantial investment in sustainable practices.
7. The article included the names of Siim Kallas, Tiit Made, Edgar Savisaar, and Mikk Titma as its authors, even as it was prepared by a larger (and somewhat different) group of authors, which included Ivi Proos, Peeter Kross, Jaak Leimann, and others. According to Peeter Kross, the final version was put together by Edgar Savisaar and Ivi Proos. Kross's recollections imply some disappointment that other members of the group were not listed as authors. Peeter Kross and Ivar Raig suggest that Savisaar sought the signatures of well-known persons to give the proposal more weight (P. Kross 2002, 12; Raig 2002, 13).
8. A selective list of more 'substantial' IME articles, from 26 September 1987 to December 1988, compiled in 1989, includes 236 entries (Aunma 1989).
9. The environmental movement, one should note, was not just a phenomenon of the 1980s – its roots predate the Soviet era and the movement already played a substantial role in the Estonian SSR as early as the 1960s (Annus 2023).
10. Juhan Saharov has drawn attention to the language games that allowed for such a discussion to develop in ways that were both highly inspiring and still within the limits of acceptability: the Russian *khozraschet* or *khozyaystvennyy raschyot*, an accounting term in use during the perestroika era and earlier (and already during the NEP era), translated into Estonian as *isemajandav*, including the suffix *ise* – 'self' – that is contained also in the word *iseseisev*, 'independent' (Saharov 2021).
11. IME efforts built upon decades of work in management development that began in Estonia as early as the 1960s under the leadership of Raoul Üksvärav (Saharov 2023; Terk 2020).
12. Vihalemm's article was published three days after the release of the initial IME program and inspired other discussants. See articles by Gunnar Isotamm (1988) and Mati Heidmets (1988).

13. See Unt (2008). A more literal translation of the title would be *Donor's Guidelines*. Unt somewhat compresses the late 1980s in his novel: the storyline can be dated as unfolding from mid-July to August 1986, but it includes IME moods and conversations that actually started in 1987.
14. It is generally acknowledged that the year 1990 was a turning point in Estonian fiction, and Unt's novel, together with two other works, set the tone (Annus et al. 2001). Mati Unt was a highly acclaimed author in this era; his triple role as a fiction writer, essayist, and theater producer gave him special prominence. He was well attuned to critical theory; *Doonori meelespea*, for example, makes references to Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan; earlier he engaged with Gaston Bachelard and had always been drawn to Jung's ideas.
15. Unt's novel is available in English. I cite the English translation whenever possible; when the nuance I seek is not apparent in the published English translation, I cite the Estonian original and the translation is mine.
16. I referred earlier to Unt's discomfort at a concert he attended, when Tõnis Mägi sang the popular song, *Koit* (Dawn); in the novel, the imaginary dimensions of dawn scintillate with the late 1980s promise of new beginnings.
17. 'Hello [German],' I heard someone say [Estonian], 'Sorry I'm late [Russian]'.
18. Unt's drama premiered in 1984, it ran continuously on stage for 11 years and a total of 314 performances; it was screened for television and also premiered as a radio play in 1987. The sheer number of performances is partially attributable to them being held in a small space in a museum rather than a theater.
19. About colonial hybridity in Estonian nineteenth-century nation-building, see Annus (2018, 2019).
20. In the drama *Vaimude tund*, Unt magnifies the awkwardness of this scene, letting the ghost of Koidula read the account, while the gramophone plays the tune of Koidula's well-known patriotic song 'My fatherland is my love' – a scene that members of the audience still remembered decades later as powerful and deeply uncanny (Vellerand 1985, 60). In a 2020 presentation on this topic, three members of my audience shared their recollections and confirmed their similar impressions.
21. *Doonori meelespea* does not treat the larger context of the reburial. In 1946, this was a great national manifestation, a display demonstrating that even though sovereignty had been lost with the Soviet occupation, there was still space for national sentiment (Rummo 1961). Starting from about late 1948, such displays became impossible, and Koidula's hymnic patriotism ceased to be part of official Soviet Estonian culture.
22. Unt's postmodernist deconstruction of national history had started already in the 1970s, when he published the short story *Lehekülgi eesti kultuuri ajaloost* (Pages from the History of Estonian Culture).
23. One can find similar characters in other east European literatures. Unt's postcolonial subject bears resemblance to Serhiy Zhadan's Pasha, an indecisive schoolteacher, as he appears at the beginning of the novel *Internat* (The Orphanage, 2017). Over the course of the novel, Pasha develops into a character with a clear decolonial stance.
24. This article follows just two major cultural modalities of the era. Other cultural forms also provided combinations of neoliberal values and postmodern modalities, as seen in movements such as ethnofuturism and Eesti Kostabi-$elts (Hennoste 2012; Viires 1996).

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