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FROM FAMILY TRADITION TO NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF ESTONIAN KNITTING

Master's thesis

Supervisors:

Professor David Smith, University of Glasgow

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Tartu 2018

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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I recall a beautiful late-autumn night. November. Beijing. Over 6000 km away from Estonia. That was the first time when I saw the real beauty of Haapsalu shawl. At that moment, I was completely enchanted by the art of Estonian knitting: it was purely a love at first sight. Thank you, Ilona and Helen, for bringing me to the fantastic world of Estonian knitting. This paper is dedicated to you.

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ABSTRACT

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Knitting has been widely practised and appreciated by Estonian people as an indispensable part of Estonian cultural heritage. As a traditional handicraft skill with hundreds of years of history, knitting is not only of practical importance considering the nature condition but also to a certain extent being constructed as a symbol of Estonia throughout the twentieth century as well as nowadays.

This dissertation is an ethnographic study focusing on Estonian knitting, in particular, on the point of the role of knitting in the process of national identity construction. To dates, there is still a knowledge gap in the field of study on Estonian knitting in English-speaking academia. Apart from a limited amount of Estonian authors either being translated or write in English (for example Anu Pink, Siiri Reimann, Kristi Jõeste), the only English-speaking author whose work is regularly mentioned as a reference and to a certain extent considered to be with an academic character is Nancy Bush. Most of the publications on Estonian knitting have only focused on its practical aspect, i.e. patterns and techniques. In this dissertation, I aim to explore the function of knitting being a means of identity construction and link between individuals and nation space in Estonia. My theory bases are material culture studies and semiotic studies: I study knitting as material culture; my focus on the semiotic approach is made for decoding the meanings behind knitting and setting Estonian knitting as a signifier of collective cultural identity. I use ethnography as a method for this research project. In this dissertation, I present data collected during my fieldwork (including participant observation, visual data collection, interviews) period from September 2017 to August 2018. I also make autoethnography as a highlight considering my own identity of being at the same time an estophile and a knitter researching Estonian knitting.

This dissertation aims to explore the unique role of knitting in Estonian culture both on family and national levels. Specifically, I present my findings of knitting being a symbol of the cultural root in Estonia, in particular for those people who knit. Thus, knitting helps to construct a part of Estonian national identity and enhance people's sense of belonging to Estonia. I also attempt to show the importance of knitting in constructing a new image of the Estonian nation in a post-Soviet context.

Keywords: Estonia, folk knitting, national identity, handicrafts

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Estonian knitting: a cultural heritage

This dissertation is a piece of ethnographic study focusing on Estonian knitting and its importance to the construction of a collective Estonian identity both from a historical perspective and from a focus point in the context of post-Soviet identity reformation. It lies in between study of material culture (textile history and contemporary fashion trends), oral history, and study of national identity. Therefore, it can be deemed an interdisciplinary study of handicrafts with a particular focus of Estonian knitting. The outcome of this dissertation is based on a proper amount of fieldwork data collected in Estonia as well as in other countries. The main arguments of this dissertation are:

(1) Estonian knitting serves as a symbol of "root" and a way to present the national identity for Estonian people, in particular, knitters;

(2) Estonian knitting can be deemed a representative of Estonian culture; thus it is effective in constructing an image of the Estonian nation and can be used in the nation-branding process of Estonia in a post-Soviet context.

Limitations of my research including:

(1) Data used here cannot serve to create a panorama of the important of Estonian knitting for Estonian people. Some groups are not involved in this research project: e.g. Estonians living in other countries except the United Kingdom; male Estonians (only one out of nine respondents is male); people under 18; people over 60.

(2) The notion of "national identity" here is more likely to be limited to the specific group of Estonian knitters rather than Estonians in general;

(3) My personal identity as an enthusiastic knitter and estophile will result in the inevitable fact of subjectivity involved in this research, which may influence the raw data and the outcome of the data analysis.

As Turney (2009: 135) noted in her observation on knitting as a human activity with rich subtext meanings, the fact of knitting as a massively time-consuming activity in actual fact has turned it to be the representative of both the life of knitter and the ensuing life of the knitted object. On the individual level, Turney's argument shows the bonding relationship between knitted objects and knitter him/herself, thus indicates the link between object and human being; on the national level, meanings which constructed by bonding the handicraft items and people can be passed down from generation to generation, the repeating activity throughout a nation's history thus become a shared memory and a sign of culture.

The dissertation also put a highlight on knitting as a mean for promoting Estonian culture. Edensor (2002: 17) argues that national identity can be decoded from an abstractive concept to the mundane details of everyday life. Thus, through the process of interpreting national identity in practical ways, i.e. knitting in the context of this dissertation, it is possible to materialise the idea of nationalism in everyday life, which could be not only a specific way of making national bondings but also an attractive factor for self-labelling and nation-branding. This also confirmed Van Maanen (1988: 3)'s idea of the expression of culture itself in down-to-earth ways, i.e. knitting; and Dormer (1997: 219)'s claim of the cultural phenomenon of craft as an act of self-exploration. By exploring the "self" concept in everyday activity of knitting, Estonians could not only discover the culture itself but also make it a selling point of their culture.

This dissertation consists of six chapters in total.

Chapter one (current chapter) gives a brief introduction of the whole framework of this dissertation, including research design and methodology. **Chapter two** is dedicated to the theoretical background from two approaches: material culture studies and semiotic studies. By discussing how did the cultural concept of knitting has been constructed in an Estonian context, here in this chapter I address the importance of meaning-making process in both knittings and making the meaning of knitting itself. **Chapter three** contains three parts: the history review of Estonian knitting tradition (3.1) presents a brief introduction of Estonian knitting and its importance in old Estonian folk life, following by two sections where I explore the representation of knitting in (1) Estonian museums; (2) state education system. After looking at how knitting works inside

Estonia, in **Chapter four** I explore Estonian knitting as a means of constructing a sense of belonging to Estonia and national identity of oversea Estonians. Section 4.1. presents my fieldwork data collected in Bradford, England, with Estonians living overseas; section 4.2. focuses on the function of knitting being a link between individual and national space. Later on, I will go back to Estonia in **Chapter five** and mainly look at the knitting tradition in Estonian families. I also explore the representation of Estonian folk motif in contemporary Estonian fashion design and business here. Last but not least, **Chapter six** serves as a conclusion part of this dissertation where I discuss findings and limitations.

1.2. Research design and methodology

This research project is designed on an ethnographic basis. In section 1.2.1, I will introduce my research questions, followed by several hypotheses made at the stage of preparing the whole project (more specifically, in December 2016). Section 1.2.2 shows my research design and methods I have used. Considering it is my personal experience[1] and deep affection for Estonia and Estonians that has prompted this research, I also put autoethnography as an essential method throughout the whole working process. Section 1.2.3 is set up for discussing limitations.

1.2.1. Research questions

This dissertation will examine two research questions:

- How does knitting tradition work as a link between individuals and national space?
- What is the impact of Estonian knitting in foreign countries as a cultural symbol and national image?

The following hypotheses will be tested:

- On an individual level, knitting is a means for family bonding and expressing love; on a national level, knitting plays the role of generating a sense of belonging and therefore becomes a symbol of collective memory.
- Estonian knitting has for many years been recognised as significant globally in the field of handicrafts[2]. Nowadays, for nation-branding reasons, knitting to a certain extent can be used as a method of focusing international attention on Estonian culture. The character of Estonian knitting being “Nordic" also helps to set up a new national image for Estonia in a post-Soviet context.

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[1] In 2015, two Estonians (Ilona and Helen) taught me how to knit. Since then I cannot live without yarn and knitting needles anymore.

[2] Here I would like to highlight the influential factor of my own identity from an autoethnographic perspective. Being a knitter makes me more sensitive on such points compared with people who never knit. According to my personal experiences, I focus on the selling point of Estonian knitting on an international stage as I see by my own eyes that a certain amount of foreign knitters are attracted by Estonian folk knitting in international knitters' communities.

1.2.2. Research design and methods

As Van Maanen (2011: 1) noted in his famous book *Tales of the Field,* ethnography can be explained as a way of representing a culture in written form. Therefore, how to perceive a specific culture can be deemed one of the central elements of ethnographic studies. By using the word "perceive" here I introduce the idea of not only to observe but also to touch, feel, and join as a part of the everyday life of the research object - in my case, Estonian knitting.

Fieldwork is the best and maybe the only way to reach the goal of writing the representation of a culture. Although in past days, the "armchair mode of cultural investigation" was once a popular method for some anthropologists to conduct their studies at home by reading second-hand materials as well as having pen pals for getting information from exotic places (Van Maanen 2011: 15). Van Maanen also put an extra line with slight sarcasm to explain the motivation of using "armchair" method: compared with the natural conditions in, for example, the Amazon, it is obvious that local posts and libraries are more preferable (*ibid.*). Doing cultural research with "armchair" method may be an acceptable option when long-distance fieldwork would be problematic, or in a worse situation, would be impossible due to transport issues or other constraints. However, living in a globalised world, such occurrences are fairly rare. Here I leave out the extreme cases, e.g. war, natural disaster, etc. and only discuss on a general level. Since fieldwork is no longer a luxury or unreachable dream, ethnographers should always keep in mind to give fieldwork priority over desk work, i.e. "armchair" method.

For doing fieldwork, one is required to have the instincts of an exile (Van Maanen 2011: 2). In other words, ethnographers working in the field are supposed to have difficulties "inserting" themselves into a specific culture. Exile would never be an easy thing to do as it requires firstly a necessity to leave one's comfort zone, followed by the possibility of having issues both of financial status and psychological wellbeing. Ethnographers should be aware of potential risks during the fieldwork, for example, difficulties of having local contacts, or rejections from the group of people, on which they study. Despite all the negative aspects fieldwork may bring, I was determined to place ethnographic fieldwork, including visual data collection; participant observation; interviews; and autoethnography, as the major method for this project. I also use museum item analysis as a supportive method added to fieldwork.

- *Visual data*

One of the most apparent evidence of my fieldwork is the visual data which I collected during my eleven-month stay in Estonia from September 2017 to August 2018, when I was registered as a degree student at the University of Tartu. Throughout the duration of my study, I visited Tallinn, Viljandi, and several other Estonian towns during spare time[3], observing and collecting details relevant to knitting. However, as I was a full-time degree student with an intensive course schedule, fieldwork outside of Tartu on a long-term basis was logistically challenging to arrange. Additionally, the harsh Estonian winter weather has also rendered my fieldtrip plan less feasible, of which I was not aware before living through an Estonian winter myself.

There is a generations-long tradition for ethnographers to have a camera as an essential part of the research toolkit (Pink 2007: 65). When I was doing my fieldwork in Estonia, I followed this old tradition in a 21st-century style: taking pictures together with notes by a smartphone. First of all, since my motivation of using a camera is not for fine-art photography, there is no need to purchase a professional device and carry it all the way while travelling: it is heavy, and a valuable item which requires extra care. Also, a smartphone is more convenient than cameras because I will have to carry a phone no matter I am "on-work" or not. Therefore, I can always take pictures when I come up with anything related to Estonian knitting in everyday life. The everyday life of people has been placed in the centre of ethnographic research (Korkiakangas 2004: 114). By using a smartphone as a tool of visual data collection, I integrate myself not only in everyday life of my research object but also place the object in my own "everyday life" — and this is the basis of my argument for doing autoethnography, on which I will discuss further in the later part of this section.

Visual data in this project includes pictures which I planned to take (during scheduled fieldtrips) and also randomly in my personal daily life. I always ask for permission first when I am aware that an individual's face would appear clearly on a photo which I may use for my dissertation. Ethnographers who want to take photos would have first to give a positive image of being a trustworthy person with local people (Pink 2007: 73). This is not only for the consideration of ethical reasons but also for avoiding potential misunderstandings — since Estonia is a relatively small country, it would place oneself in a troublesome situation to have a bad reputation of being a "paparazzi" in a tight-knit community, where words spread fast. Additionally, asking for permission

[3] Exact date and location information please see *Appendix 1: List of illustrations.*

is always a perfect chance for small talks in a casual atmosphere, from where new contacts and useful details for fieldnotes may come.

The written description is deemed a necessity for photographs used as visual data (Ball & Smith, 2001: 308). Without descriptions the ethnographic importance of photographs taken on fieldtrip does not exist. Not every single shoot during a fieldtrip can be identified as "data" unless the content makes sense in academic writing outcome. Otherwise, it is just a touristic picture which by chance happened on a fieldtrip. All my photos are presented with a short descriptive text. Some photos are presented with additional reflective notes, showing "individual subjectivity and interpretation of images" (Pink 2007: 32).

- *Participant observation*

Fieldwork requires researchers to share firsthand observations, including the environment, problems, social relations, in details of a group of people who are bound to one another to some extent (Van Maanen 2011: 3). Thus, participant observation is the spine of fieldwork for its efficaciousness to get information as mentioned above.

The intention of doing participant observation is for investigating, experiencing, and representing the social life and social processes that occur in a setting of the research object (Emerson et al. 2001: 352). One of the most important outputs of participant observation is fieldnotes. However, writing fieldnotes does not mean to collect all aspects of the observed item, or simply put it in a journalistic form. Fieldnotes are selectively written: it is the ethnographer who decides which point should be seen as significant, and which point should be ignored (Emerson et al. 2001: 353).

How to arrange fieldnotes also follows the same logic: it is the ethnographer who assigns the role. According to the fieldnotes categories summed up by Emerson et al. (2001: 358-360), typical types of usage include treating it as prose; diary; representation of action; data. In my case, I decided to use my fieldnotes as a supportive part of the data. They can be compared as co-stars on stage: sometimes their performance will be placed under the spotlight, but in most times, they are under the shadow of the leading role.

Fieldnotes for this research project are relatively fragmental, as there was no long-term participant observation. Two pieces of fieldnotes are used as direct data: (1) diary of participating in the birthday party event of a local knitting master, Haapsalu, 22 May 2018; (2) diary of observing two classes in the University of Tartu Craft Camp, Olustvere, 10 July 2018.

The importance of cultural events as a specific part of the participant observation for this project shall be noted. Making things with a group of people has a long history in textiles (Twigger-Holroyd & Shercliff 2014: 2). Textile objects and practices are firmly linked with stories and narratives (Turney 2009: 135). A knitted item carries not only "stories and narratives" throughout its own lifespan from the moment the last stitch was finished, but also the "stories and narratives" during the process of its making. Therefore, placing themselves in an environment of making with others, more specifically, making with those people who are relevant to the research object, is of methodological importance for ethnographers studying handicrafts.

I have organised two group knitting events while doing this research project: the first one was scheduled on 3 December 2016, in Glasgow; the second one - 15 March 2018, in Tartu. The primary motivation of organising both events was to test my hypothesis of the importance of knitting to Estonian people in different environments: overseas, and inside of the country. For knitters, it is much easier to talk about knitting while knitting, rather than having chats at a "meeting point" - no matter it is in a park, a restaurant, or a cafe, - with a researcher who carries a pen, notebook, and a dictation device. What makes the idea of cultural events being distinctive from other forms of participant observation is that I was the one who started the idea and guided those events; therefore, the subjectivity here is relatively stronger.

Organising cultural events gives me an opportunity for gathering information and contacts effectively from my target group: Estonian knitters, or, Estonians who are enthusiastic about knitting. Also, those two cultural events are both "Estonian themed" instead of "exclusively for Estonians". Therefore, some participants are not ethnic Estonians, of whom there were even several members with very little knowledge about Estonia. The observation of how Estonian people introduce Estonian knitting and making Estonian-themed things with those non-Estonian participants helps me to understand better the importance of Estonian knitting as being a national symbol, as well as the role of knitting for branding Estonia in an international context.

My identity as a knitter guarantees the practical feasibility for using this method. First of all, I am able to knit together with the cultural event participants. This reduces the embarrassment to a certain extent. Secondly, as a knitter I understand more technical details compared to non-knitters, for example different ways of holding needles and yarn; style of pattern chart; knitting terminologies. As Twigger-Holroyd & Shercliff (2014: 13) noted, the privilege of being close to the making process would enable knitters to notice details in other people's action whilst making.

Moreover, without the instinct of my knitter's identity, it would be rather hard to understand some specific ways of teaching/learning knitting skills and also the reason behind the performance.

- *Interviews*

As a qualitative research method, ethnographic interviewing is deemed a means for gathering detailed data directly from the people on whom the study focuses (Heyl 2001: 369). Ethnographic interviews are recognisably different from those classical ways for doing interviews, which can be done in distance via telephone or Skype. For ethnographic interviews, a setting in the field is always a must. The situation of ethnographic interviewing itself constitutes a site of meaning construction, both from the immediate interactions as well as the relationship between the two parties during the interview process (Heyl 2001: 379).

The relationship mentioned above, for the establishment of which a massive amount of time is invested, is a key factor for the distinction between ethnographic and other types of interviews (*ibid.*). In order to collect interview data from my nine respondents, I have spent time on not only the interviewing process itself but also some extra work which was even more time-consuming compared with having interviews. For example, the recording of the interview which was done in Viljandi in December 2017 shows the main part which I have transcribed only lasts for 35'01''. However, to make this interview happen, I travelled twice from Tartu to Viljandi: the first trip was made in order to get my presence accepted; the second one was for the interview itself. The time cost for each trip was no less than five hours, including approximately three hours on buses plus two hours in Viljandi.

I am privileged to have the opportunities to spend time establishing such a precious relationship with my respondents and also with people who helped me to recruit respondents. Ethnographic interviewing indicates the personal experiences, interpersonal dynamics and cultural meanings of participants in specific social contexts (Heyl 2001: 372). Therefore, the importance of subtexts, which can be "transcribed" and interpreted only by observing and analysing every single noticeable detail during the time of the interview, should receive the same attention as the respondents' narrative answers to those scheduled questions. To get such subtext, interview design in an ethnographic style instead of a general ask-and-answer mode is of great importance.

For this dissertation, I have interviewed nine people in total. Interviews were conducted in incognito mode: all respondents remain anonymous. I assign a random pseudonym to every

individual in order to distinguish each other. Background information of respondents can be found in *Appendix 2: list of interviews*. There are three group interviews and two one-to-one interviews[4]:

Interview code	Date and location	Respondent(s)
G-EE1	02/12/17, Viljandi	V1: Kadri; V2: Kaja; V3: Katrin
G-UK1	03/02/18, Bradford	B1: Tarmo; B2: Terje
G-UK2	03/02/18, Bradford	B3: Triinu; B4: Tuule
I-EE2	22/05/18, Haapsalu	H1: Maarja
I-EE3	22/05/18, Haapsalu	H2: Margit

Respondents were recruited by the contact person(s) in UT Viljandi Academy; Eesti Kodu Bradford; and Haapsalu Pitsikeskus on my behalf. V1: Kadri; B3: Triinu; B4: Tuule can be considered as my key informants because: (1) Kadri has got a very strong passion about her family knitting tradition, she also studies knitting as a major at university; (2) Triinu and Tuule are Estonians living in the UK on long-term basis, however, they expressed their thoughts of the importance of their Estonian identity via knitting and both claimed that they noticed Estonian knitting being unique only after moving to the UK.

- *Autoethnography*

Barnard (2006: 21) highlights the reflexivity, a notion which became popular in the 1980s, as a characteristic point of recent ethnography. The ethnographer's self-presence is visible and valuable on the same level as the target group on which he/she studies. Reflexivity is not only a fieldwork method but also a writing style (*ibid.*). Ethnographers write not only on the study of a specific group of people but also on themselves throughout the whole study process.

Autoethnography as a method has not attracted much attention in the study of everyday life in a post-Soviet context (Pawłusz & Seliverstova 2016: 73). Doing autoethnography means to treat the activity of writing about personal feelings and emotions as an obligatory part for research (Emerson et al. 2001: 361). It transforms the field experience of the researcher himself/herself from career anecdotes to research objects. With the help of autoethnography as a research method,

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[4] Interview codes are made in *X-YY0* form. *X* indicates the way of interviewing — G for Group; I for Individual. *YY* indicates the location — EE for Estonia; UK for the United Kingdom.

ethnographers would be able to gain a deeper understanding of the field and culture, together with the awareness of their own performance in everyday life of their research exile, and reasons under the surface of such performance. However, sometimes this method could be dangerous to a certain extent because it has a potential risk of getting excessive subjectivity involved in research. For example, my identity of being a knitter (which is the most important identity in this research process) drives me to pay more attention on knitting whilst a non-knitter may does not care that much; as a knitter, I may unconsciously influence my respondents to value knitting on a higher level compared with what they wanted to do so.

Here I give a brief introduction of following actions and personal feelings which I recognise as key elements of my fieldwork and writing with autoethnography as a method:

(1) Ethnographic items in fieldwork toolkit

I have been interested in folk art since a long time ago even before the point when I first started to consider the idea of doing ethnography as a career option. Consequently, it is not strange or random at all that I would have had a thought of gradually setting up a personal collection of Estonian handicrafts. However, I was not aware that my collection could be helpful for fieldwork until I got my first interview done in Viljandi. The interview was scheduled on a cold winter day, right after the University of Tartu Annual Ball[5], on which people did Estonian folk dance in evening attire. When I was standing in front of my wardrobe on the morning of my fieldwork day, I was still in a shock by the fact that in Estonia white-tie and folk dance could be perfectly combined. At that moment, I decided to wear the folk costume of Tartu-Maarja parish from my collection, together with a pair of Kihnu mittens because of the cold weather.

My outfit on that day was advantageous to the interview process, especially knitted items, as it successfully got people to start talking about handicrafts in a relaxing atmosphere. Things in an ethnographic context are firmly linked with personal identities, therefore, people can construct, materialise, and objectify the self by talking about things (Tilley 2001: 264). The starting point of me using ethnographic items during fieldwork process was purely a coincidence. However, once I realised it would be a way for letting people to talk about folk attire and then the topic would smoothly go to handicraft things and memories, I always deliberately choose my outfit with the folk motif on fieldwork.

[5] 1 December 2017. The interview in Viljandi (G-EE1) was done on the following day.

The process of purchasing ethnographic items is also worth noting: in my fieldwork toolkit, items were not bought from those souvenir shops in the touristic area (example: *fig. 1*). Here I am not implying that handicraft items from tourists shops are not authentic. In Estonia, most items which one can purchase in a touristic handicraft store are authentic. The intention of my consumer behaviour is that the process of getting ethnographic items could be a part of participant observation of my ethnographic research project. By talking with the person who makes the item himself/herself, or the middleman, I get a full story together with the item which I purchased, the relationship between the maker and the item; the maker and generations of makers who have made the same item since a long time ago; the item and myself. Memories are preserved and personal experiences are embodied in things, which reflect the idea of talking about things as a method of organising the self (Tilley 2001: 264).

Figure 1. A handicraft shop near Tartu University Main Building, Tartu, 17 November 2017

The owner of this handicraft shop does not speak English at all. Items in this shop are either made by the owner herself or collected from local handicraftsmen, mostly old ladies. The owner of this shop helped me with my folk costume and other items as well as information which I used for my fieldwork.

(2) Yarn and knitting needles

In our days, knitting is no longer an "ordinary, domestic practice" — it can play significant roles in fine art, craft and design, fashion, filming, performing art, and even politics (Turney 2009: 3). Being a knitter as a young lady[6] is no longer something which may be awkward for having such a "granny-like" hobby. I am proud of my identity as a knitter, in particular, being a knitter in Estonian style. The Estonian knitting identity reduced my anxiety while doing lone fieldwork in an entirely foreign surroundings — "exile", as Van Maanen (2011: 2) suggested. Also, it is a way to show my affection to the research object: Estonian knitting, thus it would smooth my fieldwork process to a certain extent.

I also noticed that in Estonia, the nationalism is interwoven in knitted objects. One evidence which supports this argument is that the "nationalism section" in some yarn shops is apparent. People put blue-black-white — "Estonian colours" (*fig. 2*), — together as a combination for sale[7]. Knitting design with blue-black-white motifs is an interesting phenomenon to my foreign eyes but quite common to Estonians (*fig. 3*). In my fieldwork toolkit, I keep a knitting bag filled with yarn balls made from local sheep, and there is always a place for three little balls in blue, black, and white colours.

Figure 2. Yarn balls representing nationalism in Kaubamaja (a shopping mall in the city centre), Tartu, 20 February 2018

[6] I was in my early 20s when I started to knit obsessively in Estonian style.

[7] It could also be situational, as the majority part of my residency in Tartu was during the celebration period for the centenary of the Republic of Estonia — when milk, pork jelly, candies, hair bands, ice cream, and many other things were sold in blue-black-white colours.

Figure 3. The Veski Sculpture in Jakobi 2 building of the University of Tartu, with a knitted hat in Estonian flag colours, Tartu, 19 February 2018

Knitted hats, and other garments made in Estonian tricolours are rather common in Estonia as daily wear.

(3) Identity of being a perpetual outlander

The fact that I was born, am, and will forever be a non-Estonian is obvious. My thoughts and feelings while writing about the importance of Estonian knitting to Estonians reflect the process of cross-cultural communication. My position throughout the process of this research project is rather two-sided: I am a fellow knitter, an estophile, to some extent trying to pretend myself as a "fake Estonian", but also use the identity of me being an "ignorant foreigner" for getting a chance to observe what is the main point that Estonian people would pick up for introducing folk art heritage to someone who comes from an exotic background.

(4) Empathy

Being familiar with the depressive part of Estonian history, I am aware that some beautiful knitted items here may have horrendous stories along with them. A notable representative from this category is two jumpers (*fig. 4*) in Estonian National Museum, knitted by Estonian refugees in England and Germany. When I was taking fieldnotes for those two colourful jumpers with folk motifs, what I was supposed to do was simply write down general details with a sketch of patterns. However, at that moment when I started to read personal details of the maker, tears suddenly poured down my face without any portent, and I could not control it for minutes. I have to walk away for a while to calm down myself so that I could continue working. This is an unusual incident on which I did a lot of reflective fieldnotes later to discover the cause as well as the role of my own empathetic character as an impact factor on writing ethnography.

Figure 4. Knitted objects collected by Estonian National Museum from Estonian refugee communities in England and in Germany, Tartu, 16 March 2018

1.2.3. Research limitations

- *Practical constraints*

Doing ethnography is time- and money-consuming. Unlike classical academic deskwork, ethnography is a study that one shall get done on the road. Budgets, scholarly interests, and academic politics are attached to fieldwork in the practical worlds (Van Maanen 2011: 5). Due to various practical constraints, this study cannot show a panorama of Estonian knitting. To carry a comparison between Estonian knitting and knitting tradition on a world-wide scale also beyond the scope of my dissertation.

- *Language barrier*

Doing Estonian ethnography with only an intermediate level of Estonian language is difficult. The language barrier restrains me from accessing some historical materials, which is practically impossible for me to work on independently, and the financial constraint kept me away from hiring a professional translator as an assistant to this project. Moreover, I was not able to conduct interviews fully in Estonian: all interviews used in this dissertation were done in English[8], which is not the first language both to my respondents and myself.

- *Personal influential factors*

Doing ethnography means to put oneself on the joint-point between two worlds: their own world and the world of cultural members (Van Maanen 2011: 4). The importance of integrating oneself into a foreign context at the same time to keep the identity of being a bystander for ethnographic work is apparent.

I am a visible foreigner in a context of doing Estonian ethnography. Through my practice, I have found that this identity brings me mostly advantages. However, the disadvantage is also to a certain extent noteworthy. First of all, I can barely keep my presence concealed in some situations where I should have been invisible. My Asian features leave nowhere for me to hide: it is just way too exotic in such a context. For example, in my fieldnotes from observation on Craft Camp in Olustvere, I wrote:

...

[8] All respondents are aware of my working language. However, there were still several times that we have used Estonian as a supportive language for the interview.

Right after we talked about the anecdote of Kihnu mitten under a grey Soviet sky, a German lady started a talk about her Chinese friend living in Beijing who "knits like crazy". Then she asked in details about Chinese knitting. She said that Beijinger claims that there is no folk knitting in China. She asked me if that was true. I said maybe yes, and I made an honest confess that I know very little on Chinese knitting.

I did try hard to push the topic back to Estonia.

...

This experience did not cause any harm to my fieldwork process as I have successfully brought the topic back: another lady with Estonian heritage started to talk about her family stories of immigration right after my attempt of drawing back people's focus to Estonia instead of the ethnic identity of an extra member in the classroom. However, under some specific circumstances, the situation may get troublesome.

Here I present my reflective notes on an accident that happened in Bradford.

...

The old lady and her brother were introduced by one of their family members to me. It was already in the middle part of the dinner. Since I had very little time left because I have to catch my late bus, I was not that eager to get the interview done. Another concern was because of their age - both of them seem in their 80s to me. I usually do not interview people at this age for various reasons.

However, my curiosity had the advantage over all of those concerns. Also, the lady was very willing to talk - not to mention her family member was very kind and friendly to me. I told them that I have to record the interview and to get the paperwork, i.e. consent form and plain language statement done, so we moved to a small library upstairs. She was talking with passion about her family history before the interview. Her brother was comparatively silent, but sometimes he also add points to her narrative.

Suddenly, she stopped to talk and asks me to cancel the interview because she has a feel of spy. The "spy" thing comes all at once, without any indication beforehand. I even thought it was a joke at the very beginning. I only realised that she is serious when she says that it is very pleasant to meet me but she can't do this anymore. I apologised. Since I was not clear on which point comes the "spy" thing, so the only thing I could do was to keep saying "sorry" for as many times as I could.

The lady went away, left me in the library with a shock. Her brother was hesitating. He asked if he really needs to leave. But even if he decided to stay, I am not willing to continue this interview anymore.

*

I have never figured out the reason for what happened in that library, also, for the connection of knitting and spy movies. It could be the scene of interview reminded that lady of some personal experience (for the consent form, signature, or the dictation app on my phone), or maybe my asian face — like some people from certain parts of the Soviet Union?

After being a "spy", I had interview-phobia for quite a long time.

I was extremely afraid.

...

By analysing Lyotard and Foucault's work, Corin (2007: 240) demonstrates the idea that the circumstances of lost-in-translation do happen with ethnographic work, because it may be ultimately impossible to account for others' worlds in terms of the elements in our own worlds. The above-mentioned scene during that failed interview in Bradford is a perfect example of the dilemma in getting oneself into other's world. Furthermore, the refusal (which is the only rejection that I have ever got during the whole fieldwork process) to have a talk about knitting shows the severe concern about self-revelation. The ethnographic situation itself and the interaction between ethnographer and subject leads to the consequence of what should be deemed "personal" (Lovell 2007: 73). It is a shadow side of fieldwork, a potential risk and eternal fear — the cross which an ethnographer shall carry with him/her throughout whole career life.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

...
I knit to hold a good yarn
For stories bide with me
On a night like this, by the peat fire;
I like a story with a herringbone twist.
...

— Jackie Kay, "The Knitter"

2.1. Studying knitting as material culture

Knitting[9] is an action of producing fabrics by using needles to plait yarn in specific forms. Nowadays, there are a lot of books about knitting on the market; however, few of them are written for academic purposes. Knitting is marginalised from academic discourse (Turney 2009: 4). When we talk about "books about knitting", a common mental image would be some beautifully framed books in full-colour printing, being displayed in the "home" section together with cooking and gardening books. There are very small amount of scholars who have dedicated themselves entirely to knitting as a study focus (Pink et al. 2016: 8). The literature gap here is apparent.

Nonetheless, this does not imply that knitting possesses nothing of significance in an academic sense. As a traditional handicraft which has been performed and passed down from generation to generation already for at least several hundreds of years around the world, knitting itself carries the meaning of being an heirloom. Messages from ancestors together with complicated human emotions — most notably, love, — are hidden in knitting: in knitted objects, techniques, and stories. Therefore, by studying knitting in the context of material culture, we understand not only the role of knitting as a pre-industrial cloth making method but also the meaning-making procedure along with

[9] All the words of "knitting" used in this dissertation, if not specifically noted, are in the narrow sense of its meaning, i.e. hand knitting.

it. Knitting links the action and the object: without the action of knitting, knitted objects will not exist; without knitted objects, the action together with its deep meaning does not make sense, or simply vanishes. One of those "very few knitting scholars" Joanne Turney (2012: 310) has summarised three categories for knitting as a sign of love: (1) familial love; (2) platonic love; (3) romantic love. In Turney's classification system, almost all types of affectional human relationships can be presented in the action of knitting. Besides the relationship between individuals, knitting also carries the meaning of self-exploration — the eternal philosophical question: "Who am I?", — both on the identity of being a knitter and other identities performed through the action of knitting. Identity theories show that questions related to self-consciousness are central to understanding agency and culture (Fields 2014: 153). A knitter's self-perception of his/her identity of being a knitter would indicate background details, thus leads to an in-depth explanation of the whole culture, where he/she comes from. One of those good things that crafts can bring is to strengthen an individual's identity (Luutonen 2008: 332). Therefore, by researching the meanings behind the action of knitting as well as the products of knitting, it is possible to portray a picture of human emotion, and identity cognition.

For exploring symbolic meanings, in which emotion and identity get involved, I would highlight the importance of knitted objects here instead of the procedure of knitting. This does not mean that I would neglect the meaning-making process performed during the action of knitting (no matter on an individual level or in the context of knitting being a social activity); on the contrary, I argue that both the action of knitting and things produced by knitting shall be valued on the same scale, as the procedure itself carries a meaningful subtext. For example, being able to turn the heel while knitting a sock sometimes can be seen as a symbol of maturity because of the relatively complex skill that a little kid may not be able to acquire[10]. However, as the object itself has the advantage of visibility compared to its making process, it is always easier to talk about things rather than how to make them.

One of the most important roles of a knitted item is giftware. Hickey (1997: 83) argues that by examining the function of craft as giftware, it is possible to explore the variety of values and meanings which society allocates to the handicraft items. A gift can be given from one individual to another, or from one to oneself. The former way of gift-exchange represents human emotions involved in various relationships, the latter — identity. Moreover, knitted items as a symbol of identity can also be decoded in the form of gift for others, but it depends on which kind of identity

[10] I would like to acknowledge Mary Rose for her childhood memories and insights which inspired me here.

that the person who gives the gift wishes to present both for himself/herself and for the recipient. Its non-industrial making process reflects the uniqueness of handcrafted things: it requires time and skill, is usually made for a specific person and thus carries personal characters (Hickey 1997: 85; Turney 2012: 304). As the activity itself is both time- and energy-consuming, the outcome of knitting symbolises the existence of oneself, thus can be deemed a pricy gift. Therefore, the action of giving a hand-knitted item (which is made by the gift-giver) as a gift can be interpreted to mean the gift-giver is willing to give a piece of a representative of him/herself to the gift-receiver. This action thus indicates a relatively high level of trust, solicitude, and love between the two parties, or at least from one to the other. Knitted objects as gifts construct a tactile relationship, which implies the maker's desire to touch, protect, or nurture that specific person who is going to wear the item he/she made (Turney 2012: 308). Handmade items have characters because of the uniqueness brought by the makers— their presence is irreplaceable; therefore, a specific handmade item will never be reproduced. Comparing handmade items with machine-made products, the above-mentioned "character" constructs the distinctiveness. Handmade things are often very personal and are thus good examples of meaning-making products (Luutonen 2008: 332). By investing time and energy into the knitted item, the maker turns the object from a simple piece of clothes to a symbol of his/her existence, together with the message which he/she wants to send to the gift recipient. That is to say, when this giving-receiving relationship has been established with the knitted item as an intermediary symbol, the knitter will be in company with the person who receives the knitted item whenever the item is in use, no matter the actual situation whether the knitter is physically there or not.

As noted above, a knitted item can be seen as a symbol of presence for the individual who makes it. The shared character between the maker and the object demonstrates the understanding of those unspoken words which the maker puts into both the process of knitting and its outcome. The consumption of things which are hand-knitted is massively indicative of the sentimental, thus can be deemed an extension of the self (Turney 2009: 143). By analysing the stories behind hand-knitted items, it is possible to explore the meanings attached to the item, or emotions involved while the maker was in the process of knitting it, as well as the conversation between the maker and the external world — between the "self-ness" and the "other-ness". Therefore, in a narrow sense, knitted items portray the picture of inner space for a specific individual — the identity of the maker or the potential bearer; in a broader sense, knitted items is an indicator of social settings — in some specific cases, the symbol of culture, or national consciousness.

Knitting techniques around the world may be different from each other; and patterns, styles, colour preferences also vary. However, by analysing regional characteristics of knitting, we explore local culture in a down-to-earth way, therefore establish understandings of the essence of the phenomenon. Here I take two island communities — Shetland of Scotland, and Kihnu of Estonia, — as examples. For both islands, the local knitting tradition plays a role as being a representative of cultural heritage, which not only constructs a distinctive character for the place itself but also contributes to the local economy. For the Shetland case, it has a "maritime character" which resulted in the loss of male population (Abrams 2013: 152). The importance of women's role thus becomes in particular visible, compared to those communities where the gender balance keeps in a rather normal way. Kihnu has the same character with Shetland in this sense: Kihnu men have taken to sea for the fishing work[11], whilst Kihnu women remain on the island for farming work as well as maintaining the household (UNESCO 2008). The action of knitting presented here becomes symbolic in the sense of forming a "women's community". From the procedure of passing down the skill from generation to generation, solidarity of local women has been established not only in between households but also on a historical timeline, with which forms the character of heritage and tradition.

Nowadays, the productivity, as well as the mode of production has been significantly developed compared to the pre-industrial period. The situation of human-loss of those two island communities thus has already significantly improved. The ancient skill kept between local women's fingers when they had,to endure the lonely time while their significant others were suffering from the unpredictable fate on the sea, are being used in a contemporary way: for local branding. The colourful Shetland knitwear attracts attention from hundreds and thousands of domestic as well as international tourists. For those who visit the Kihnu island, it is always a good idea to bring some fishermen's jumper (*"troi")* or mittens in traditional patterns back home. After all, the decorative function of handcrafts is always there, and always will be (Greenhalgh 1997: 25). The pursuit of beauty is one of the natural instincts of human beings; therefore, it is immortal as long as human beings exist in this world. As a broad and amorphous practice, decoration is engaged in by all cultures (*ibid.*). Knitted items carry meanings which are presented in the form of decoration, more specifically, in knitting styles and patterns. Meanings are always hidden in various symbols. Consequently, for the consideration of decoding meanings, a semiotic perspective here is essential.

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[11] Traditionally, the job is to hunt seals and fish. Similar to the Shetland case, it is considerably dangerous and therefore a loss of population here shall be noted.

2.2. Signs and things: a semiotic approach

Contemporary semiotics has progressed from classical Saussurean semiology in the area of linguistics to a largely pragmatic, referential, and empirical field, where the theory can be applied to analysing meanings of signs in social and cultural contexts (Manning 2001: 145). Manning (*ibid.*) defines the work of semiotics as a tool for resolving problems in understanding "the coding of the world". Knitting can be seen as a coding system — or systems, since it can be explained in the context of knitting itself; knitted objects; knitting procedure; and human relationships, together with the social-cultural context in which they operate, in either the process of knitting or the outcome of knitting.

The title of this dissertation points out that my research on Estonian knitting is presented from an ethnographic perspective. What is the "ethnographic perspective" and why do I choose ethnography as my approach? On ethnography, various definitions already exist to explain its terms and conditions. Each has its own merits. From the pool of all of those definitions I would pick Geertz (1973)'s idea of thick description as a methodology that combines ethnography and semiotics, i.e. interpretative anthropology of Geertz.. To trace the original source, this term was in actual fact first introduced by the philosopher Gilbert Ryle (Geertz 1973: 6). Geertz was the one who borrowed this notion and developed it to explain his methodology of doing ethnography, — as the most proper one. According to Geertz (1973: 19), an ethnographer's work is to inscribe social discourse and turn it from a temporary scene into an account, which exists permanently in the written result and is able to be reconsulted. If we treat the whole text an ethnographer has written down during his/her fieldwork as a pool of various signs, to analyse the text equals to the work of decoding. Additionally, here I borrow a term from Lotman (2005): *semiosphere* to explain ethnographic texts. I note that the boundary of this specific semiosphere is not only based on the characters of the signs about which the ethnographer writes, but also the criteria used for selecting materials when he/she collects those signs and writes about them.

Why do signs matter? Lotman and Uspensky (1978: 213) illustrate culture as "the nonhereditary memory of the community" which can express itself under the condition of constraints and prescriptions. Consequently, culture makes sense only when the system exists, that is to say when the possibility of being decoded exists. Isolated individual actions do not constitute culture, it is the collective way of acting that makes culture — because the action, therefore, can be decoded with the understanding of the shared memory: the structured "context" thus exists. The existence of

culture indicates the existence of its related, structured system, and also the rules for prescribing individual experience into text (Lotman et al. 1978: 214). Here the importance of semiotics to cultural research is revealed: as the system is filled with signs together with its translation and the principle of the meaning-making process, it is purely semiological.

As an element of the semiosphere of a specific culture, knitting reflects the collective memory and identity of that culture which we aim to decode. Hodge and Kress (1988: 262) explains the cultural codes with classical Saussurean term: *signifier* and *signified* — the materialised sign in a message is its *signifier*, and the constructed referent here is its *signified*. Knitting as a concept of handicraft together with the outcomes from this activity — the knitted objects, — can be deemed a signifier of the meaning system which has its roots in the culture it represents. Talking about the study of handicrafts, Luutonen (2008: 333) argues that the outcome of handicraft activities delivers the message associated with cultural, psychological, social and economic values. Thus, the process of assigning meanings to products is solely a culture-bound process: meanings are interwoven in the product from a specific cultural background so that they can be delivered to the receiver of the product (*ibid.*).

A symbol is an object with cultural significance and resonance (Berger 1999: 24). Take the focus of this dissertation, Estonian knitting, as an example to explain cultural symbols, and here I argue that Estonian knitting is not just a technique, and its outcomes are also not just some beautiful fabrics which people use for decorating themselves. Estonian knitting is a signifier of collective cultural identity; thus it materialises the concept of Estonian-ness. Back to the framework of Saussurean linguistic theory on the differences of *language* and *speech* (de Saussure 1966: 14), here the style of Estonian knitting can be seen as *language*, and each element chosen by a specific individual, in other words personal style, *speech*. The pool of *speech* constructs the *language*, and the *language* reflects the *speech* when it has become systematised. By applying Saussurean linguistic theory to fashion clothing, Berger (1999: 43) argues that the action of an individual's dressing generally follows certain codes of combination, and those codes are in actual fact the indicators of a message with meanings in-depth. Apart from Berger, another notable figure in the field of interdisciplinary study of linguistics and fashion is the French philosopher Roland Barthes. Through his research on the language of fashion, Barthes (2013: 13) illustrates the idea of the dress as a signifier of the manner or the degree of the wearer's participation. Applying Barthes' idea — originally in his work, Barthes (2013: 7) uses the costume of Roman soldiers as an example for explaining meanings hidden in dress, — to Estonian knitting: the starting point of Estonian knitting

can be seen as pure necessities[12] due to the harsh climatic conditions in Northern Europe, however, after several centuries of developments and re-performance of this certain action, the notion of Estonian knitting has been transferred from survival needs to another kind of "survival needs": to help the idea of the Estonian nation survive in the materialised symbol of Estonian knitting. The Estonian identity can be preserved in a way by practising Estonian knitting. Identities can only work as points of identification and attachment when one can distinguish the "self" from the "other" (Hall 2000: 17).

Folk knitting is a semiotic repository where meanings are being settled (Luutonen 2008: 337). By reading into the semiotics of knitting traditions, one would be able to decode various cultural texts and therefore understand meanings hidden in the form of either the knitting process or knitted objects. In what ways can we read "Estonian knitting" as a semiotic text? According to Lotman (1988: 55-56), the socio-communicative function of a text can be explained in the following categories: (1) communication between addressant and addressee; (2) communication between the audience and the cultural tradition; (3) communication of the reader with himself; (4) communication of the reader with the text; (5) communication between a text and the cultural context. That is to say, when we read Estonian knitting as a text, it is of necessity to consider not only the message which knitting carries and delivers from one person to another (the *addressant* here can be a knitter, or maybe a knitted object; the *addressee* here can be another knitter, a recipient of the knitted object, or a witness of the knitting action), but also other elements such as the context (e.g. Estonian; partly Estonian; non-Estonian) or the reflection throughout the reading process.

As I already suggested in the title — from "family traditions" to "national consciousness", — the focus of this dissertation is to discover the function of Estonian knitting being a means for both family and nation bonding. According to Castells (1997: 30), our era of globalisation is also an era for calling back the awareness of the national identity — "nationalist resurgence". To make the (re)construction of identity on the basis of nationality happen, there is a need of setting up boundaries so that people can recognise the "self" and "others" (*ibid.*). In such a context, understanding symbolic meanings of specific cultural elements is of great importance. Knitting, or on a larger scale — clothing, can be read as a way of self-labelling and self-identification because it has a direct visual impact. *Vestis virum facit*[13]. People are being judged by their outfits because

[12] Of course, this basic function of knitting still exists in our era.

[13] Latin proverb: *Clothes makes a man.* (Erasmus, Adagia 3.1.60)

clothing style is a mirror of how a person would identify himself/herself as well as the messages which he/she would like the surrounding world to read and decode. One of the most straightforward ways to deliver messages via clothing is the usage of brands. By researching the importance of brands and identity, Berger (2010: 112) argues that the importance of luxurious brands, e.g. Prada, Dior, Louis Vuitton…are in actual fact a way for the consumers to be recognised at the same time as the brand is recognised by others. The importance of Estonian knitting thus can be demonstrated in a similar way. By practising Estonian knitting as well as putting the outcome of knitting in use, one can observe the function of knitted products as a marker of national identity and the boundary between self and other. Thus, in a specific sphere where members share the criteria to recognise — to read the context, or, in other words: to decode, knitting as a symbol can be used as a mean to interpret social subtexts. Estonian knitting here has the same function as Prada, Dior, and Louis Vuitton in essence.

Talking about the importance of Estonian knitting being a means to form and express a collective identity, we must look at the necessity of Estonian identity to Estonian people. Here I must make it clear that I have no intention to neglect the importance of identity for other ethnic groups — identity is always important, whether it is Estonian or not. What I would like to highlight here is the meaning of identity in an Estonian context from a historical perspective. Estonia, as one of the fifteen post-Soviet states, has only restored its independence in 1991 after 51-year-long Soviet occupation. In the Soviet Union, "identity" was officially allowed to be constructed in a dual system: ethnic/Soviet, with the latter being assigned the greatest importance (Castells 1997: 38). During those years of Estonia being a Soviet republic, a pure Estonian identity would be deemed one of the dangerous factors for nationalist unrest, thus a threat to the stability of the Soviet Union. Castells (1997: 39-40) also highlights an already quite obvious fact that in the former Soviet Union, the Russian identity was valued on a *de facto* higher scale compared with the ethnic identity of other nationalities. Thus, the process of Sovietisation can be seen as Russification to a certain extent. An interpretation of the rejection to the collective identity of being a Soviet citizen, which was created by Moscow, on which the most radical presentations can be observed in the Baltics, is that it symbolises the rejection of the enemy who erased the nation's independent existence. Here I cite the lyrics from a rock song performed during the singing revolution on the dawn of the collapse of the Soviet Union:

Eestlane olen ja eestlaseks jään,

kui mind eestlaseks loodi. [14]

This line is a direct protest[15] against the idea of the above-mentioned “Soviet dual identity”, with which the Estonian identity has been *de facto* diluted under such condition. Nowadays, although the Soviet Union does not exist anymore, the importance of saving the Estonian identity still requires immediate attention in a nationalist context because the process of globalisation is another form of “dual identity” imposition with the globalised one being in the dominant position.

In contrast to the Soviet times, where the “Estonian-ness” cannot be expressed purely and thoroughly, those good old days before the Soviet occupation thus became nostalgic which was used as a means for the reconstruction of Estonian identity after the 1991 independence (Korkiakangas 2004: 123). As objects carry memories and histories of individuals, it is possible to decode the abstractive “nostalgia” by analysing objects in everyday life (Korkiakangas 2004: 122). Things from the pre-Soviet period, in particular, late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century, thus play the role of portraying the “good old days” in a direct way with visual impacts. Here Estonian knitting can be selected as one representative because this time period overlaps with its heyday. Good-old days when Estonians practice folk elements in the knitted items on a daily basis. The symbols expressed in the form of knitting patterns as well as traditional knitting methods thus construct an essential part of being an Estonian, in other words: Estonian identity.

The Estonian patriotic poetess, Lydia Koidula (1918: 52), writes the following lines in her poem *Kaugelt koju tulles*:

Eesti leib, mul üksi magus maitsed,
Eesti piir, mind ikka kindlast kaitsed. [16]

Here Koidula expresses her affection towards the Estonian border for its function of defence. As a complement to Koidula’s beloved border, I add an aspect of the semiotic sense of border — in Lotmanian terminology: *boundary* for a specific semiosphere. The summary “bilingual translatable filters” defines the semiotic border (Lotman 2005: 208). What makes a certain semiosphere distinctive from others can be observed and analysed in the mechanism of the filtering process. That

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[14] Translation: *I am an Estonian and I shall remain like an Estonian, if I was created as an Estonian.* From the song *“Eestlane olen ja eestlaseks jään”* by Ivo Linna and the group *In spe*. A full version of lyrics can be found here: http://www.laulud.ee/laul/eestlane_olen_ja_eestlaseks_jaan-369.aspx [Last accessed on 31 August 2018]

[15] However, the nationalist idea reflected in these lines can also be deemed a rather primordial notion of ethnicity.

[16] Translation: *Estonian bread, you have good taste to me, / Estonian border, you still firmly protect me.*

is to say: to pick the “self-ness”, and filter the “other-ness”. A collective identity thus is established by the shared “self-ness” which expresses itself in various ways — in the case of this dissertation study: knitting.

Writing ethnography is a process of both coding and decoding: we pick what to write down while collecting raw data during fieldwork. The picking process thus can be deemed a way to make our own codes being interwoven with our narrative from a specific perspective, and the analysis work of those texts we have written down reflects the action of decoding the culture. Therefore, folk crafts as a cultural symbol is able to represent the tradition of a particular community (Luutonen 2008: 335). Consequently, taking ethnographic knitting as an entry point for decoding a specific culture is of practical feasibility.

3. ESTONIAN KNITTING AS A CULTURAL HERITAGE

...
Kristina kivella istus,
Someralla Suome piiga,
Someralla sormuksilla,
Vahtis miesta valgejada,
Uotis miesta oigejada.
Migäs mies meresta touseb,
Migäs kaabuni pääsa,
Migäs linti kaavu päälla,
Migäs saapaad jalassa,
Migäs kindaad kãessa,
Migäs vaated seljassagi?
...
Villamies meresta touseb,
Villakaabuni pääsa,
Villalinti kaavu päälla,
Villasaapaad jalassa,
Villakindaad kãessa,
Villavaated seljassagi.
Seda ta vottis, seda ta tahtis,
Seda ta ihu igatses,
Seda ta süda suatses.

— *Rigilaul. Kuusalu 1911*[17]

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[17] Translation (Kurrik 2013: 236-241): "Kristina languished on the rocks, / The Finnish maiden on the seashore, / On the seashore, on the sand, / She was looking for the bright man, / She was waiting for the right man. / What man arises from the sea, / What hat on his head, / What ribbon on his hat, / What boots on his feet, / What gloves on his hands, / What dress on his back? …*[Later came the Tinman, the Silverman, and the Goldman. Kristina did not want them]*…Woolman arises from the sea, / Woolhat on his head, / Woolribbon on this hat, / Woolboots on his feet, / Woolgloves on his hands, / Wooldress on his back. / Him she took, him she wanted, / Her body desired him, / Her heart fancied him."

3.1. A historical review of the Estonian knitting tradition

I would like to begin this chapter with a *regilaul* (*"rigilaul"* in a dialect form, directly cited from the original source), the very ancient form of Estonian folk song, collected in 1911 from Kuusalu[18]. When I first read the lyric of this regilaul, one detail that I noticed at the very first moment was the conditions the heroine has set up for her ideal future spouse: from all those rules and requirements there is one line dedicated explicitly for the future spouse's taste on mittens. It is obvious that the "man" here should be an Estonian man, from a Finnish maiden's viewpoint, he would be the one who comes — "arises from the sea", — crossing the Gulf of Finland. In the end, the maiden decided to take the one who wears woollen mittens[19]. To my foreign eyes, the importance of woollen mittens in love-seeking criteria here presented in a folk song from the beginning of the twentieth century seems to be quite confusing. Folk songs mirror the shared values among a certain group of people. Why did Kristina only have a crush on that man with woollen, and obviously, knitted mittens? Why do those finely-knitted colourful woollen mittens matter that much in the folklife of the Estonian people? To understand Kristina's choice, a glance back at the history of Estonian knitting is requisite.

I limit the focus of "Estonian knitting" in this dissertation on the peak of national knitting tradition in Estonia, which means those colourful patterns with local preferences in trend during the nineteenth century. However, despite the restricted range of my focus, a general overview on the knitting before its heyday is necessary because there is never a time period completely isolated from its own past.

It is widely accepted in the field of knitting research that the technique of needle-binding (also frequently referred as *nålbinding*[20]) is the predecessor, or, an embryonic form of knitting (Kaarma & Voolmaa 2015: 75; Pink et al. 2016: 13). Based on the archeological findings, we can track back the history of knitting in Estonia approximately to the thirteenth/fourteenth century: the oldest piece

[18] A village in Harjumaa, northern part of Estonia.

[19] I adjust Kurrik's translation from "gloves" to "mittens" here as the Estonian word "kindad" (which was written in a dialect form in the original text) can be translated for both, however, it seems that mittens would be more suitable for this scene because they are symbolic items in the Estonian folk tradition of love and wedding, on which I will discuss in the later part of this chapter.

[20] Originally, this word comes from Norwegian.

of knitting, a mitten-fragment[21], was found on a Votic woman's body in Jõuga[22] and is considered to be the oldest one from this archeological category in Northern and Eastern Europe (Piiri 2013: 11; Pink et al. 2016: 14). However, some scholars suggest that the contemporary form of knitting was introduced to Estonia around the seventeenth century (Bush 1994: 40; Kaarma & Voolmaa 2015: 75). As a hypothesis, this may be linked with the material or tool constraints, which was resulted by the general agricultural and cultural contact condition in the Middle Ages and the days before seventeenth century. The first written evidence of Estonian knitting comes from 1664: it is a record for 115 pairs of knitted objects made by Estonians and brought to Sweden (Pink et al. 2016: 8). The heyday of Estonian knitting appears in the nineteenth century when skills were fairly well developed and the nation-awakening movements were in trend. Such conscious attempt to establish and preserve an authentic national culture in the context of socio-economic and political modernisation can be interpreted as an invention of tradition", using a phrase from Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992). Traditional folk knitting was in fashion in countryside's as a part of daily wear of peasants until the beginning of the twentieth century. It started to fade from people's everyday life due to the urbanisation process, at the same time while the traditional folk costume was gradually dropping out from the fashion sight. Nevertheless, the technique of Estonian traditional folk knitting has attracted attention in academia way back in the early part of the twentieth century.

For the study on Estonian knitting, the very first academic output can be dated back to 1909 in the book *Ethnographische Forschungen auf dem Gebiete der Finnischen Völkerschaften. III, Die Volkstrachten in den Ostseeprovinzen und in Setukesien,* written by Axel Olai Heikel, a Finnish ethnologist (Pink et al. 2016: 9). The Estonian National Museum was founded at the same year. During that time period, the Estonian knitting tradition has attracted scholarly attention not only in its home but also among foreign collectors (Pink et al. 2016: 23). However, although such kind of thoughtful research on Estonian knitting has a considerably long history, there was very little information accessible to the English-speaking audience due to the language barrier until Nancy Bush's book *Folk Knitting in Estonia* was published in 1999 (Pink et al. 2016: 9).

The most iconic item of Estonian folk knitting is definitely mittens. In Estonia, mittens are not just a simple piece of daily cloth used as hand warmers; it has a wealth of customs and beliefs related (Pink et al. 2016: 36). Based on current archaeological shreds of evidence, the history of mitten-knitting in Estonia is the longest among all garment items. The very first archaeological

[21] Currently preserved at the Tallinn University Institute of History, item code AI 4008:XXII-156

[22] A village in Ida-Virumaa, northeastern part of Estonia.

finding which I mentioned above (item code AI 4008:XXII-156) is a part of one mitten in three colours. Besides this fragment, some of the other findings from the early historical period (e.g. the Siksälä find, item code AI 5101:CXLIII:9; the Tallinn find, item code AI 64 56; the Rabivere bog find, item code ERM 445:5/1) are also mittens. Apart from it very original function: hand warmers, mittens also have two cultural functions in Estonian context — (1) "protection": the patterns on the mitten are believed to be a magical spell which can protect the person who wears mitten from the evil spirits; (2) "identification": people can tell each other's local background by the different styles of mittens. Why do mittens have such ethnological importance in studying Estonian folk culture? Considering the cold weather in Estonia, the practicality of mittens in everyday life is apparent. However, in addition to pragmatism, let's also have a look at the symbolic function of Estonian mittens on ceremonies: most notably, weddings and funerals.

Hand knitted mittens are traditionally used as giftware during weddings and funerals. For weddings, the mittens can be deemed the most important item (Viires 1964: 263). It plays not only the giftware role but also a role of indicating those things which might be awkward to speak straightforwardly. An old Estonian pre-wedding custom shows that people exchange message of acceptance/rejection on the wedding proposal by using knitted mittens: a bottle of alcohol will be sent to the girl's family as a gift when the proposal has been made; and that "she said yes" scenario here would be an empty bottle with mittens tied by a belt (Bush 1999: 18; Piiri 2002: 2). After the engagement, one of the most important tasks for an Estonian fiancée is to knit as many mittens as she could, because she will need them for the wedding ceremony (Bush 1994: 41; Pink et al. 2016: 26). The bride is supposed to give away mittens in her dowry box to the wedding guests as gifts, also to those people who helped during the wedding; she will also have to put mittens in various places of her new home once when she first stepped in, and later her mother-in-law will collect all of those mittens; on the table of the wedding party, the groom and bride will eat together with mittens on their hands, and guests will judge bride's handicraft skill level by those knitted items from her dowry box (Bush 1994: 41; Piiri 2002: 2; Pink et al. 2016: 36; Piiri 2017: 11). For funerals: mittens cover hands of the deceased — we can date back this tradition to medieval times based on the oldest existing piece of Estonian knitting: that pair of Jõuga mittens, which were found on the hand of human remains; mittens are also given to helpers on funeral; moreover, as mittens play such symbolic roles on funeral which indicates the postmortem world, people even believe that a dream involving white mittens is a prediction of death (Bush 1999: 24; Piiri 2002: 3; Pink et al. 2016: 36).

Figure 5. Estonian National Museum postcard (Muhu lady knits stockings), Tartu, 03 January 2018

In addition to mittens, there are also some other knitted garments which are considered symbolic, i.e. items carrying meanings or function as a symbol of local identity, in Estonian folk costume and handicrafts. According to historical records, knitted jackets appeared as an item of folk costume only in the middle or second half of the nineteenth century (Piiri 2013: 13; Pink et al. 2016: 44). Most of those jackets collected in museum archives are from islands, one possible reason for this could be that those colourful island patterns are more attractive to the collectors' eyes compared with those from the mainland (Pink et al. 2016: 44). On the aspect of knitting tradition and technique, Muhu island and Kihnu island can be deemed the two most prominent places from all around the island area of Estonia. The Kihnu men's jumper (*"troi"*) is even considered one of the most popular knitted items: it has gained a symbolic value around the country as an iconic national garment, not only limited to Kihnu islanders (Piiri 2013: 13; Pink et al. 2016: 51). Muhu jumper is famous for its bright orange colour and the pattern "männakiri" (Piiri 2013: 40; Pink et al. 2016: 47). Apart from those well-known jumpers, stockings from Kihnu and Muhu *(see fig. 5)* are also

famous for being the most decorated with vivid colours in the whole country (Bush 1994: 44). Those typical Estonian patterns are being given constructed meanings by the state institution as a symbol of new-born nation-state of Estonia in 1930s; later as a representative of Estonians being a part of the Soviet multi-nationality family during Soviet times to serve the idea of the internationalism; after the collapse of the Soviet union, the usage of folk knitting has turned back in a style of the 1930s trend and now serves as a selling point in the process of nation-branding of Estonia.

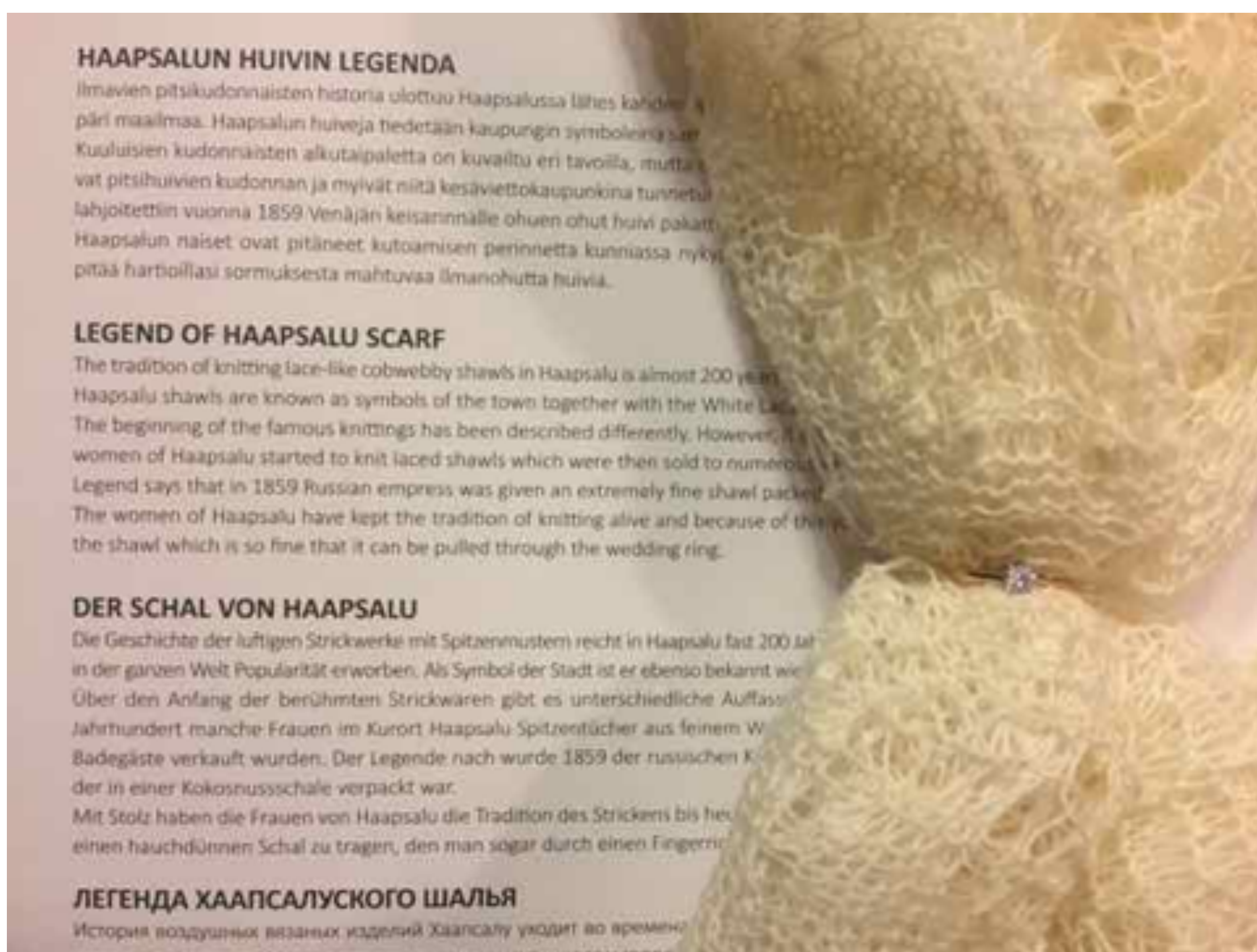

Figure 6. The "Haapsalu lace legend": woollen shawl goes through a ring, 22 May 2018, Haapsalu Examining a legend which makes the hand-knitted Haapsalu lace being famous for centuries. Shawl used in my experiment is a full-size shawl with the Silvia pattern.

Haapsalu lace (*see fig. 6*) knitting technique has received international attention in the past few years thanks to those gradually-developing publications in English, for example, Nancy Bush's in-depth introductory book *Knitted Lace of Estonia.* However, the fame of Haapsalu lace as a handicraft product can be dated back to the Russian Empire, when Haapsalu town has become a

famous tourist destination because of its healing spa resource. The luxurious knitted lace remain a popular local speciality of Haapsalu town from several hundred years ago till today (Viires 1964: 271; Bush 2008: 9; Pink et al. 2016: 72; Reimann 2017: 5). One knitting term for Haapsalu lace, *"nupp"*[23], has even become a popular Estonian loanword in English and is widely used among those English-speaking knitters around the world (Pink et al. 2016: 214).

From ancient time to our days, Estonian folk knitting has always been an indispensable part of domestic life in Estonia and is well-liked by the people. Knitting is that important for Estonians — they even created a special part in folk costume only for carrying knitting tools so that it would be possible to knit all the time and everywhere, not only when sitting at home (Bush 1999: 27; Pink et al. 2016: 27). However, we must note that folk costume is no longer everyday clothing in most parts of Estonia. Together with the declining tendency of the folk costume used in non-festive occasions, the everyday usage of folk knitting items is also to some extent a rare find in the sight of urban residents. Nowadays, it is rather hard to see someone wearing the folk costume on a daily basis, nevertheless, the whole folk tradition is well-preserved in museums all over Estonia. Therefore, to analyse the importance of knitting and its impact on national consciousness, it is essential to have an exploratory look into those messages which are hidden behind the exhibits displayed in museums.

[23] Estonian: button. As a knitting term, *nupp* refers to a distinguishing feature of Haapsalu lace. It is a kind of little decorative spherical objects on the knitted lace, which looks like small buttons.

3.2. Sign of heritage: Estonian knitting in museums

Walking through the library reading room of the Estonian National Museum; walking along the busy open office area and confusing corridors; passing through several locked doors and those dark, cold, quiet underground passages — the moment I first made myself stand in front of the archive rooms with *"villane"*[24] written on metal doors, I couldn't believe what I had seen. I was stunned, looking at the size of those storage rooms only for woollen items. I even felt suspicious if it was a dream until my supervisor allowed me to go nearer and check the collection with my own eyes and hands. It seems that my fellow Estonian colleagues were not surprised at all, as if such a huge amount of treasure of knitting in a national museum should be something ordinary like meal-deals in supermarkets. Although we were in the same situation — a group of young ethnographers setting their eyes on the exciting archival collection area in a museum for the very first time, the fact that I was utterly shocked by the size of the woollen collection in Estonian National Museum has obviously distinguished my Estonian colleagues from me, an ignorant foreigner. In fact, before I came to the Estonian National Museum and witnessed such a scene with my own eyes, I have never had any memory in any country where a national museum could have such a rich collection dedicated explicitly to woollen garments, and a considerably large amount from them are hand-knitted.

My limited personal experience and my knowledge gap could both be reasons for the shortage of ideas while thinking about other places where one can find a tremendous knitting collection in a national museum, but it remains that the Estonian National Museum is an outlier in collecting knitted items. There are around 5000 knitted items preserved in the Estonian National Museum — indeed an impressive figure even in Europe (Pink et al. 2016: 23). Estonia has a rich history of knitting. Estonians are among the very first peoples who tried to knit in Europe (Piiri 2013: 11). The continuous and long-lasting history of knitting on this land guaranteed that there are a lot of existing items which can be collected; and ethnographers' interest in those eye-catching folk knitting items (in particular, mittens) from the start of the intensive collecting work, i.e. around the time when the Estonian National Museum was founded in 1909 (Pink et al. 2016: 23), resulted in this massive inventory of museum collection. Apart from the Estonian National Museum, other museums around Estonia also have their own collections dedicated to the knitting culture with quite impressive size (Reemann & Õunapuu 2004: 2; Pink et al. 2016: 23). Furthermore, knitting presents not only in the

[24] Estonian: wool, woollen.

museum exhibition but also in the commercial section of Estonian museums: it is rather normal to find knitted items (sometimes even knitting tools!) in museum shops around Estonia (see *fig. 7, fig. 8, fig. 9*).

Figure 7. Haapsalu knitting tools in Estonian National Museum souvenir shop, Tartu, 16 December 2017

Figure 8. Knitted objects in Coastal Swedes' Museum shop, Haapsalu, 22 May 2018

Figure 9. Knitted items in Narva Castle Museum yard for sale, Narva, 26 May 2018

A museum is a place where the epitome of a culture is presented (Kõiva 2007: 60). Viires (1964: 271) addresses that the creation of the Estonian National Museum is driven by the motivation of preserving traditional Estonian decorative arts. As an important part of folk culture, knitted items are preserved in various museums all around Estonia; however, it is evident that from all of those museums the most distinctive figure is no doubt the Estonian National Museum. A considerably large amount of knitted items are displayed in the Estonian National Museum as a part of its permanent exhibition area named *Encounters*[25], dedicated to the daily life of people who lived in Estonia through the ages. In the subsection *Rural Life and Rural Beauty*, which shows the life of Estonian peasants (mostly in the nineteenth century, however, items from earlier period are also included) in the *Encounters* exhibition, models are dressed up in folk costumes from various parishes around Estonia. Here is one place in the Estonian National Museum where visitors can enjoy the beauty of Estonian folk knitting, looking at those finely knitted items in peasants' wardrobes as well as from their festive attire. In addition to this, a huge hall just next to the permanent exhibition *Echo of the Urals* is dedicated to a temporary exhibition specifically designed for 150 sets of folk costumes throughout the four seasons. The name of this exhibition is *Regarded as a norm, perennially worn*[26], which is open until August 31, 2018. Since knitted objects constitute a significant part of Estonian folk costume, knitting culture is presented here in the most important museum of Estonia at an almost overdosed level, which reflects its importance in Estonian culture.

In addition to those knitted treasure on display in museum exhibition halls, Estonian museums have also set up a well-developed online database, *MuIS*[27], which gives an opportunity for people to check museum archives without the hassle of long-distance travel (Pink et al. 2016: 24). From my interviews with degree students doing the knitting curriculum at the University of Tartu (Viljandi Academy), I noticed what an important role the *MuIS* plays on their daily knitting preferences:

> ...
>
> *[Interviewer]: From where do you get knitting patterns and yarns?*

---

[25] Permanent exhibition "*Encounters"* online info: http://www.erm.ee/en/content/encounters [Last accessed on 31 August 2018]

[26] Temporary exhibition "*Regarded as a norm, perennially worn*" online info: http://www.erm.ee/en/content/regarded-norm-perennially-worn [Last accessed on 31 August 2018]

[27] Estonian Museums Public Portal (Muuseumide infosüsteem - MuIS): https://www.muis.ee [Last accessed on 31 August 2018]

[Katrin]: We have this museum…hmm, MuIS…museum info system. They have all museums in Estonia: Estonian National Museum and all the other small ones…

[Kaja]: And most of the textiles are photographed.

[Interviewer]: So, it's like you prefer those historical patterns to the contemporary ones?

[All]: (unanimously) Yes, yes.

[Kadri]: (she changes language here from English to Estonian) We get inspired by old patterns. Although sometimes we also create new patterns. We bring all the patterns into…

[Katrin]: Like new contexts? Some people also take mitten patterns and weave it into fabric or make printing things or some other things out of it. Like, when you know the tradition, you have the tools to make patterns using techniques.

…

[Interview: G-EE1, 02 Dec 2017, Viljandi]

What Kadri and Katrin mentioned here has been confirmed in one of my later interviews with a knitting teacher, Margit:

…

[Interviewer]: Do you often wear knitted items with Estonian motifs?

[Margit]: (in Estonian) I add those folk patterns to my knitted items. My locality belongs to the Saaremaa Kihelkonna, so I have been in the Museum of Ethnography[28] *and checked their books, where patterns from this area are. And I have been knitting those (patterns) into my knitted items.*

…

[Interview: I-EE3, 22 May 2018, Haapsalu]

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[28] Here Margit's original word was *etnograafiamuuseumis* - in the Museum of Ethnography, which actually means in the Estonian National Museum (Eesti Rahva Muuseum). I put a note to highlight this detail which may lost in translation. I consider that it might be interesting for non-Estonian readers to notice that sometimes in an Estonian context, the national museum actually equals to an "ethnography museum". However, it is also worth noting that Margit is the eldest respondent. She is 53-years-old at the moment when I interview her. During Soviet times, the Estonian National Museum was renamed many times by the central government with the word "ethnography" as a key point, and being considered as a working place for ethnographers.

It seems that using museum archive to complete daily knitting project is a common thing for Estonian knitters with an enthusiasm of presenting their national identity. People benefit from the easily accessed data provided by museums both in exhibitions and online. Besides such convenience which we shall credit to the effort that the Estonian government, as well as cultural institutes and other relevant parties, has been investing continuously over the years, another important point is that Estonian people are willing to express the sense of belonging to their motherland, Estonia, by putting historical patterns which are preserved in museums into contemporary daily usage. This action reflects the idea of knitting activity as a mean of preserving the Estonian "root".

Figure 10. A mitten from Helme representing Estonian national costume in Ethnological Museum of Berlin, Berlin, 12 April 2018

Nation-states have always been using symbols, e.g. flags, colours, slogans, etc. to establish and mark their sovereignty (Jansen 2008: 122). Museums, as multifunctional institutions made for preserving various memories, constitute a unique network (Kõiva 2007: 49). The symbolic meanings which one can interpret by observing museum items, as well as descriptions attached to them, turn the abstract concept of nationalism to a more specific form, which helps people to understand and remember. Museum is a place for both personal and collective nostalgia (Korkiakangas 2004: 125). In the case of Estonian knitting in museums, such nostalgia is presented both in a form for symbolising the nation — as examples, one Estonian mitten from Helme is displayed in the Ethnological Museum in Berlin (*fig. 10*), presenting itself as a representative of Estonian folk culture; a huge, 160-square meter hand-knitted Estonian flag was once on exhibition in the Estonian National Museum as a part of the celebration for Estonia's centenary in 2018[29], — and in a form of visualised collective memory, e.g. those beautiful mittens and jackets from "good old days"; garment with folk elements which was once in Soviet fashion; knitted items worn by Estonian refugees (*fig. 11*) as well as those who were deported to Siberia (*fig. 12*).

Figure 11. Men's socks knitted in a refugee camp in Germany by a lady who worked as a cleaner, Tartu, 04 August 2018

[29] "Eesti mees koob kingitusena EV100 juubeliks maailma suurimat lippu" (An Estonian man knits the biggest flag in the world as a gift for the EV100 jubilee): https://www.ev100.ee/et/eesti-mees-koob-kingitusena-ev100-juubeliks-maailma-suurimat-lippu [Last accessed on 31 August 2018]

Figure 12. Gloves worn by Johannes Bender, deported to Siberia, Ülenurme, 04 November 2017

Here I take Kadri's story together with mittens (*fig. 12*) displayed in the Estonian Agricultural Museum as representatives for the dreadful collective memory of Soviet deportation:

> …
>
> *[Interviewer]: Do you have any interesting story about kitting to share with me? I mean, like no matter it is funny or something else, just one or two short stories.*
>
> *[Kadri]: My story is somehow a historical story. In Estonia, there was a mass deportation, you know. (a very short pause here — it seems that she wanted to confirm that I truly have a clue on the history of deportation.) You know, in 1949[30]. And our family too got deported to Siberia. And, luckily, we[31] had a good sense to bring along sewing machine and two big woollen blankets. During the worst Siberian winter, our grandmother and her mother relied on the blanket and used to knit their own socks and mittens. We also traded some of those*

---

[30] The second round of mass deportation from the Baltic States, which happened in March 1949.

[31] Interestingly, Kadri was not there on the deportation to Siberia. The fact that she insists to use "we" for an event that she was absent reflects her thoughts of being a whole team with her close family members, and treat such a collective memory as a part of her own experience which received as a heritage from previous generations.

knitted products for food items like potatoes and flour in order to survive the harsh Russian winter.

[Interviewer]: Yes, I think I have seen something knitted from deportation. I went to the Estonian Agricultural Museum several days before…there is an exhibition on deportation. People brought blankets and mittens with them. Well, I think it is indeed important because it helps you to keep warm…

[Kadri]: And, if you know, you have to…(changes her language from English back to Estonian)…keep these alive, you have to. It is our obligation. The tools.

…

[Interview: G-EE1, 02 Dec 2017, Viljandi]

Before coming to my interview, Kadri has voluntarily prepared a full page of her family story about knitting during the deportation. She was talking with such a passion that I could see sparkles in her eyes. According to Kadri's written piece, she always remembers her grandmother and great-grandmother[32] "with knitting needles in hands making beautiful items for the whole family". However, unfortunately, one woollen blanket and knitted items made from used yarns (which was from another woollen blanket that they had no choice but disassemble it) did not manage to save Kadri's great-grandmother's life from the harsh Siberian winter: in 1951, she passed away in Siberia — thousands of kilometres far from her beloved home. Knowing such family memory, it is not hard to imagine which kind of feelings Kadri would have if she was in front of that mitten worn by Johannes Bender (deported to Siberia in 1949-1957) and now displayed in the Estonian Agricultural Museum. The mitten in the exhibition is not just a simple piece of folk culture, it represents those dark days which Estonians once suffered together.

Knitting culture presented in Estonian museums is not limited to being "still examples" lying behind the cold glass. There are also some "live examples": in the Estonian Open Air Museum, we can enjoy the scenario of museum staff members dressed in attire from certain historical period sitting by the window, performing knitting as an inseparable part of folk life; visitors can purchase knitting patterns, needles, and yarn balls from the official shop of the Estonian National Museum so that they can have the museum exhibits back home via their own knitting practices. Knitting is

[32] For research ethical reasons, here I shall keep them anonymous. However, in Kadri's original narrative, she has written not only full names but also maiden names together with birth/marriage/death details of those two ladies with deep affection.

everywhere in Estonian museums not only in the sense of exhibition but also in environmental details which would make an impact on the visitor's memory on their museum-visiting experiences.

While focusing on the importance of knitting in Estonian museums as well as people's action of utilising the museum archive in their daily knitting, another question appears in my mind: why do Estonians enjoy the collective memory linked to knitting, and why does knitting is usually considered rather a normal skill among Estonians? Knitting education in Estonia has attracted my attention. After all, it is education that plays a vital role to give a possibility for integrating those silent museum items into vivid everyday life.

Mida Juku ei õpi, seda Juhan ei tea.[33]

— Estonian proverb

3.3. Keep calm and knit on: knitting education in Estonia

A grand knitting master is having her 90th birthday celebrated in the Haapsalu Lace Centre.

The reception room is filled with people: from old ladies with grey hair to little girl coming with her mother. Some people were sitting on the sofa next to the window, knitting while waiting for the party to start.

"She is very healthy at such an age — because she does handicraft all the time." A lady said, jokingly, or maybe not a joke at all, "She spent all her life knitting in Haapsalu."

The grand knitting master sits in the middle of the reception hall, with a lace shawl on her shoulder and an amiable smile on her face. People come one by one, greeting the master with bunches of flowers. A lady told me that most of the people here today are this master's students and students' students…nearly everyone who works at the Haapsalu Lace Centre is more or less influenced by her.

"You are the great woman[34] *among us." said the party host with a toast.*

The youngest girl attending the party is the master's great-granddaughter. While people come to greet the master face-to-face, she holds flowers (most of them are lily-of-the-valley, interestingly, this flower is also a motif of one classical Haapsalu pattern) on her great-grandmother's behalf.

"I have many books written by her," a lady approached to me and started to talk, "Many, at home."

She gave me a proud gesture showing the size of her collection.

"I was started to knit…" so passionately to tell me of her joy that she said, "Because of her."

---

[33] Translation: "The thing which little John doesn't learn, John doesn't know. " — Juku is a diminutive for Juhan (Estonian version for John). This proverb tells people that if you don't learn one thing when you were a kid, then you will not be able to know it as an adult.

[34] The original Estonian word used here was s*uur naine*, for which a more direct translation would be "big woman".

The above-presented scenario, which is sorted out from my fieldnotes in Haapsalu (22 May 2018), reflects a professional knitter's high social status as well as her influence among local people in a small town with rich knitting tradition. In Estonia, knitting is taught not only in the form of vocational education or professional training but also as a required course in the state education system. People who have received basic education in Estonia should at least know how to knit on an elementary level[35]. Therefore, the popularity rate of knitting as an essential living skill among Estonians, mostly ladies[36], can be deemed a result of general education. Here I present my field data as a shred of evidence to support the argument I have made:

* *Interview question — "How did you start to knit?"*

> *[Katrin]: I remember when I was very small, probably three or four years old, when I was sitting on my mother's lap — she was knitting. She is a handicraft teacher in elementary school…*
>
> *[Kaja]: I started at school when we had to knit…*
>
> *[Kadri]: I started when I was eleven, in school. During classes, we knit clothes and socks…*
>
> *[Interview: G-EE1, 02 Dec 2017, Viljandi]*

> *[Interviewer]: May I ask the first question…wait, you both knit right?*
>
> *[Tarmo]: (a bit shy[37]) Well…*
>
> *[Terje]: Well, a long time ago…because they made us learn in school!*
>
> *[Tarmo]: Oh yes.*
>
> *[Terje]: It's kind of compulsory, but I haven't done it in really really long times…*
>
> *[Tarmo]: If I got five minutes revising then I could do. (laugh)*

---

[35] Knitting is mostly taught on a gendered basis in schools, i.e. only girls learn how to knit.

[36] Gender is not a focus of this dissertation. However, it is clear that the role of gender stereotype in knitting education as well as knitting itself resulted in the fact that most knitters are females.

[37] Tarmo is the only male participant among all Estonian people whom I have interviewed for this research project. It is a fact that he has the knitting skill, however, he hesitated for seconds to admit that he knows how to knit. This reminds me of one scenario described by Nancy Bush (2008: 11) — the Haapsalu boys, who help with the family knitting business as a local tradition, but reluctant to divulge such secret.

[Terje]: We could do a scarf. (laugh)

[Interview: G-UK1, 03 Feb 2018, Bradford]

[Triinu]: I think probably at school, ah, because you might know, or you may not know, but when we attended general schools in Estonia, we have to. It was almost like compulsory…

[Tuule]: I remember I was probably six, it was pre-school…my great aunt taught me how to do it. But same, in school, later on…it was compulsory, let's say? So, by the time when the school lessons started, I had the basic skills already.

[Interview: G-UK2, 03 Feb 2018, Bradford]

[Margit]: Knitting was one part of my study, but I have learned knitting (first) from my grandmother, this is a traditional knitting skill[38]. And, in school, I have learned too…

[Interview: I-EE3, 22 May 2018, Haapsalu]

Seven respondents out of nine had confirmed that they started to "knit properly" from the time when they had compulsory school courses. Two respondents, Katrin (V3: G-EE1) and Maarja (H1: I-EE2), did not claim school as their starting point — but such absence can be explained by the fact that both of them are from "knitting families": Katrin's mother works as a school handicraft teacher; Maarja belongs to the family of the grand master of the Haapsalu lace.

Such intensive, widespread knitting education is not something new which only happens recently in Estonia — the history of knitting as a compulsory part in school education can be dated back to the ending stage of the imperial Russian and the period of the Republic of Estonia (*"EW": abbr. Eesti Wabariik*). In the early twentieth century, knitting was taught in school; handicraft magazine was published; and new-style design with traditional motif was in trend at that time (Bush 2008: 16; Piiri 2013: 5; Pink et al. 2016: 11). During the time of Soviet Occupation, although the concept of the Estonian folk knitting was to a certain extent reconstructed under the idea of serving the Soviet ideology, the spontaneous actions of educating folk knitting among Estonian people never came to a stop. Two outstanding figures of this time are considered to be Claire Hallik and Tiina Meeri: Hallik

[38] Here Maarja changes her language from English to Estonian. *Kudumisoskused* is the original word she used — it can be translated as *knitting skills*, or *the craft of knitting*.

is the author of the popular book *Silmuskudumine*[39], which was used by many Estonians as a teach-yourself textbook; Meeri wrote several knitting books and was teaching knitting skills on television (Pink et al. 2016: 82). After the collapse of the USSR, the folk knitting education became vivid again reinstating the EW-time style. The Estonian Folk Art and Craft Union was restored in Tallinn at the very beginning of the year 1992 (Reemann & Õunapuu 2004: 22). In 1994, the faculty of Estonian native crafts (examples of the knitting course outcome see *fig.13*) was founded at the University of Tartu (Viljandi Culture Academy), which raised the status of knitting education to a higher level; academic research on knitting culture started to prosper (Pink et al. 2016: 9).

Figure 13. University of Tartu students' knitting course work exhibition. Jõgeva, 05 December 2017

[39] Estonian: stitch-knitting.

While discussing the importance of teaching and learning knitting as a proper subject, I would like to adopt the idea from Anu Raud (2001: 9), one of the most notable handicrafts masters and educator in Estonia[40], who assesses the folk art education as a mean for "keeping the national backbone erect and strong" as well as the preservation of world cultural heritage. Anu Raud is also the advocate for knitted garments with folk motifs as school uniform in Estonia — in the academic year of 98/99, pupils of Halliste School were wearing knitted jackets with a stocking pattern from Halliste[41]; some other schools in Viljandi county[42] and Järva county[43] also had folk knitting items as uniforms (Piiri 2013: 9). According to Anu Raud's narrative, knitting in Estonia is taught not only on a technical level but also, and more importantly, on a "feeling" level that one can discover the root from ancestors in every sphere of life (Raud 2001: 9).

I have always thought that maybe most Estonians are still not aware of how unique their knitting education system is, and — what a treasure! Actually, it seems that such thought is not just a random bee in my bonnet, some Estonian knitters only have a chance to realise what a privilege they have after they moved abroad:

> *[Triinu]: …but, since moving abroad, actually I have a lot more appreciation for the skill, and for the tradition, I suppose as well, but mostly for the skill. Because I realised, how… it's very common, everybody in Estonia knows how to knit, but here (in England) people don't.*
>
> *[Interviewer]: Yeah, it's very hard.*
>
> *[Triinu]: I realised how…*
>
> *[Tuule]: Special.*

---

[40] When I started trying to get myself into the "circle" of Estonian knitting, Anu Raud's name was among the very first things that Estonian knitters mentioned to me in case "for the benefit of your research".

[41] This was Anu Raud's idea, and the pattern was designed by Riina Tomberg, another grand master of Estonian knitting. The jacket can be found in the Estonian National Museum, item code ERM A 923:5. Halliste is a small borough in Viljandi county, southern Estonia.

[42] A county located in the southern part of Estonia.

[43] A county located in the central part of Estonia.

[Triinu]: Yeah, how special the skill is! And I was sort of started to appreciate it and give it a bit more attention. And…and…(she hesitated a bit)…it is mixed with pride, you know, I am an Estonian and I can knit. You know, in a good way…

[Interview: G-UK2, 03 Feb 2018, Bradford]

In the latter part of the same interview, Triinu and Tuule repeatedly emphasised the amazement they had for the uniqueness of Estonian knitting education:

[Triinu]: I have never seen the skill of knitting as something being particularly Estonian since I moved here…

…

(Before the question of "interesting stories about knitting", the interview was interrupted by the baby with Triinu and Tuule. As the interview cannot be continued while baby keeps crying, I decided to talk about my experience of holding an Estonian baby in my arms during the knitting event in Glasgow, and thus we had a chance to talk about the baby-caring and what a typical Estonian family would look like.)

[Triinu]: Well, it is just such a normal thing in an Estonian family, like, everybody, all women knit, and…(pause)

[Tuule]: It's something like, skill? For me it's also because I come over here, and then I realised, oh, this is not such a common skill! Like (English) people actually think "Oh, you are really skilful!"…like, "Oh, you know how to knit!" — whilst we think like something that everybody can do.

[Interview: G-UK2, 03 Feb 2018, Bradford]

Triinu and Tuule's sudden awareness of their privilege of being taught knitting as a compulsory course in Estonian school system after they moved abroad reflects my thought of the fact that the distinctiveness of Estonian knitting in the education system is still to a certain extent being underestimated. As knitting is such a widespread phenomenon in Estonia, it would be rather difficult to be aware of the uniqueness of knitting being not distinctive but common skill for one who is living in the Estonia. Based on my interview materials, all oversea Estonians noted the

school education of knitting, and some of them emphasised the importance because this is what made Estonian knitting being a normal thing among Estonians.

Estonian knitting education not only make sense to Estonian knitters but also for giving knitting-lovers around the world a chance to learn such a special skill. If the "Estonian knitting education" which I received in Beijing[44] was more or less a coincidence, the knitting lessons and lifelong learning programmes organised by the national university of Estonia (for example the handicraft summer school "Craft Camp", see *fig. 14, 15, 16, 17, 18*) — the University of Tartu, can be deemed an application of Estonian knitting education for external usage.

Figure 14. Ruhnu pattern samples on a workshop, Tartu University Craft Camp, Olustvere, 10 July 2018

[44] Students enrolled in the Estonian class of Beijing Foreign Studies University have a chance to learn knitting on an elective basis. This voluntary part in the course curriculum was presented from 2015 to 2018. Furthermore, it is a class tradition that a scarf in Estonian flag colours, which jointly knitted by students who have taken the Estonian knitting training session, will be given to the Ambassador of Estonia to China as a festival gift on every Christmas.

Figure 15. Teacher explaining methods of framing Haapsalu lace to foreign students, Tartu University Craft Camp, Olustvere, 10 July 2018

Figure 16. Mitten knitting workshop, Tartu University Craft Camp, Olustvere, 10 July 2018

Figure 17. Haapsalu lace knitting workshop,
Tartu University Craft Camp, Olustvere, 10 July 2018

Figure 18. Old Haapsalu patterns from antique magazine,
Tartu University Craft Camp, Olustvere, 10 July 2018

Here I present two interesting facts which I observed during the Nordic Knitting Symposium[45] and Craft Camp[46] in 2018:

[Viljandi, 25 June 2018]

...

An event called "Knit and Walk Olympics" (see fig. 19) was organised for the participants of the Nordic Knitting Symposium by "Lossi Gild" ("Castle Guild", a craftsmen association). During the opening ceremony, this event has been highlighted and was explained in a way of "the action to reproduce the old Estonian knitting tradition".

...

Figure 19. Introducing "Knit and Walk" event on Nordic Knitting Symposium, Viljandi, 25 June 2018

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[45] An event dedicated to "Nordic knitting" (see *fig. 20* which shows the mittens with Estonian ethnographical patterns being displayed during the symposium), organised by the University of Tartu. Further information: https://sisu.ut.ee/knitting2018/avaleht [Last accessed on 31 August 2018]
Here the word "Nordic" refers to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and North-Western part of Russia, which seems to be a bit different from the notion of Nordic in the way that most people are familiar with.

[46] A summer programme in Olustvere, organised by the University of Tartu. Further information: https://www.kultuur.ut.ee/en/craft-camp

Figure 20. An exhibition of Estonian mittens on Nordic Knitting Symposium, Viljandi, 25 June 2018

*

[Olustvere, 10 July 2018]

…

In the classroom of Haapsalu lace, the most frequently used word is "nupp" — a knitting term which can be translated as "button", but anyway, nobody uses this term in English: although the majority of people in this room are English speakers, and probably can't speak Estonian at all.

"Your nupps are beautiful!" — said one American student to a Swiss student who sits next to her.

I guess the word "nupp" could be one of the most used Estonian word among foreigners, maybe only second to "tere"[47]. Maybe.

…

[47] Estonian: hello.

I am not sure whether the grand knitting master, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this section, knows or not that the Estonian word *"nupp"* has already been widely used by people around the world — for this phenomenon, the credit goes to the miraculous Haapsalu lace. Knitting links people in its unique ways. In the next chapter, I will discuss the importance of Estonian knitting among Estonians living outside of Estonia. Here I would like to close this section with the ending part of one of my interviews with two oversea Estonians:

> ...
>
> *[Terje]: I like it that they still do it (knitting) in school.*
>
> *[Tarmo]: Yeah.*
>
> *[Terje]: I love that thing, they include it…*
>
> *(The two are immersed in memories.)*

[Interview: G-UK1, 03 Feb 2018, Bradford]

4. KNITTED SOCIETY: ESTONIANS OUTSIDE OF ESTONIA

Lapsed kasvasid, sirgusid suureks,
pöördusid metsast ja maast,
rebisid puruks põlised juured,
lahkusid kodust nad.
Oo, Eestimaa, oo, sünnimaa,
kuni su küla veel elab,
elad sina ka.
…

— "Eestimaa - Tuhanded külad", Rajacas (1970) [48]

4.1. Exploring the "Estonian-ness" through knitting among oversea Estonians

I have noticed that young scholar already for quite a while.

Sitting in the assembly hall, listening to those typical opening-ceremonial style long speeches for a conference, it is understandable that my mind was like driftwood at that moment. That was the moment that I started to observe people sitting next to me, and a little bit further, several lines in front of me…

There is a lady sitting calmly, knitting. At the moment when I saw her, I immediately took out my hidden yarn balls and knitting needles from my handbag and started to knit.

---

[48] Translation: "Children grew up, grew up to big ones, / turned back to the forest and the land, / they destroyed the tree roots and torn the ancient roots, / they left home. / Oh Estonian-land, oh birth-land, / until your village is still alive, / you are also alive." — this is an excerpt from a famous 1970s song by Tartu students' assemble "Rajacas". Further information: http://www.laulud.ee/laul/eestimaa_tuhanded_kulad-506.aspx [Last accessed on 31 August 2018]

"She could be an Estonian, " casting-on a simple pattern adopted from classical Haapsalu shawl while peeking on that girl's finger movements from the backside, I told myself, "no, she must be."

Yes, she is indeed an Estonian — I have confirmed later after the opening ceremony.

And we knitted together through the whole conference.

The Estonian scholar who has appeared in the piece as mentioned above is not the only knitting Estonian whom I found outside of Estonia. Such kind of "Estonianness" occurs in the train wagon of ScotRail: sitting next to a knitting lady with her family, with great joy I heard the familiar Estonian language on an ordinary day in Scotland; in a small seminar room where I hosted the Estonian knitting event in Glasgow: the number of participants was much higher than what I have expected, many of them travelled all the way from other cities and brought to my event not only their own knitting needles but also a full suitcase of Estonian knitting books and tools — just for sharing their beloved patterns with people from non-Estonian background; in the Estonian school of Eesti Kodu Bradford, where the first thing I saw in the classroom was a box with a handwritten label *"lõng"*[49] *(fig. 21)*; in a university flat for foreign faculty members in Beijing, where I found a huge box with yarn and knitting tools which my Estonian teacher brought with her all the way from Estonia to China…

Figure 21. Yarn boxes and national costume pictures in Estonian School, Bradford, 03 February 2018

[49] Estonian: yarn

It seems that some knitting-relevant things are considered essential at least to a certain extent for most of the oversea Estonians whom I have encountered so far. For example, while taking with two respondents, Triinu (B3: G-UK2) and Tuule (B4: G-UK2), I noticed that one thing which they brought to the UK in their suitcase from Estonia is — no wonder, knitting toolkits:

> …
>
> *[Interviewer]: So you brought yarn from Estonia?!*
>
> *[Triinu]: Yes…well, that was the things which in the middle of doing, I mean, I was like… um…that…that was unfinished things. Unfortunately. Some of them, as I said, still like the last things…like…I did…um, I knitted…some mittens? (she laughs)*
>
> *[Interviewer]: Like this? (shows a pair of mittens with Kihnu patterns)*
>
> *[Triinu]: Well, the only thing I have to do, I mean, they are like…simplified — didn't have mitten like…(she looks at that pair of Kihnu mittens)…but the only part I didn't finish was the thumb. Because…you know, you leave your needles there, and five years later the thumb is still not there…(laughs hard)*
>
> *(All broke into a laugh)*
>
> *[Triinu]: It's still in the box of my handicraft!! Which…is…um…unfinished…*
>
> *[Interviewer]: You've got a box of handicraft?*
>
> *[Triinu]: Well, yeah. Those things that I brought (from Estonia), or the yarns, the needles, and, um…*
>
> *[Interviewer]: It seems that every Estonian, at least whom I know, has got a box of handicraft.*
>
> *[Tuule]: Yes, of course. (Triinu laughed here)*
>
> …
>
> *[Interview: G-UK2, 03 Feb 2018, Bradford]*

Later after Tuule and Triinu laughed on the handicraft box together, Tuule told me about her knitting project which was brought from Estonia, with patterns from a knitting book — also from Estonia. Tuule and Triinu also revealed to me that it was only after moving abroad that they started to notice the uniqueness of Estonian knitting and appreciate it as not only a sign of love but also a

representative of "culture and identity". Although here it was me, as an interviewer, who brought up the topic of "every Estonian knits"; however, it was a phenomenon which not only I have noticed through my personal experience with Estonians, but also mentioned by my respondents — one of them has clearly claimed that "take it for granted" (B3: Triinu).

Reemann and Õunapuu (2004: 10) present their finding that people who cherish the Estonian handicraft tradition the most are probably live abroad, as the handicraft tradition reflects the need of maintaining a root which one can link with their "past". In their work, Reemann and Õunapuu assess such phenomenon as "oddly enough", however, here I would argue that it is not odd at all. As what Reemann and Õunapuu have taken as an example is those Estonians who were persuaded or forced to leave during the nineteenth and the twentieth century, I apply the "cultural explosion" from Lotman (2009) to this case: for those Estonians, the epochal change impacts on them as a point of explosion. Since explosion produces the unpredictability, new concepts from the old context would be produced. Furthermore, as culture is the generators of structure and thus creates a social-sphere around human, therefore, the cultural identity reflects the self-understanding and self-communication (Lotman et al. 1978). In the case of oversea Estonians' attitudes toward the folk handicraft, we can interpret it as a discovery of selfness in the context of being exposed in an environment of culture explosion. Such representation of cherishing the folk culture on a higher level than people who remain in the comfort zone of their culture is not "oddly enough" at all.

Interestingly, my two group interviews with oversea Estonians in Bradford are very different from each other on some certain points. Two participants of the first interview (G-UK1), Tarmo (B1) and Terje (B2), seem to be the least interested in knitting ones, compared with all the people whom I have interviewed. At some moments they even more or less revealed a negative attitude towards knitting. For example, while talking about getting knitted things from Estonia, both of them did not show much excitement. According to Tarmo, knitting is "probably more important to people who live in Estonia — I've lost some of it". Both Tarmo and Terje pointed out that those folk knitting stuff reminds them of "tough childhood garment". When I showed my Kihnu mitten to them and asked if they had two choices: the normal one or folk one — both of them said that their choice would be the "normal", because "they (folk knitting) look not common". However, with the second group (G-UK2) in Bradford, Triinu (B3) and Tuule (B4) expressed their deep affection with folk patterns. Tuule told me that although she won't "walk around every day in jumpers or hats with national patterns", but she will always have some and wear it occasionally because it is "something to do with your roots, and feelings, and belongingness". Triinu agreed with Tuule on this point.

Furthermore, on the same question of "folk or others?" — Tuule's choice was folk, even when I emphasised "you would *definitely* pick up the Estonian one?", her answer was a solid "yes".

What could be the influencing factor for the relatively divergent results between those two groups? First of all, Tarmo has been living in the UK for thirteen years, whilst Terje — three months. For Tarmo, the time away from home is already considerably long, and looking back at the timeline: thirteen years before 2018 is around the point when Estonia joined the European Union. For Terje: three months is not really a long period away from home. However, although both Tarmo and Terje to a certain extent neglect the importance of folk knitting as a representative of national identity, both of them still expressed their affection to the knitting tradition, in particular: knitting in schools. One reason for their fondness to knitting, despite all the dislike towards traditional knitted items as something strange or uncomfortable, which more or less they have expressed through in between lines during our conversation, is probably that both of them have family memories which linked to knitting.

Triinu has been living in Leeds for five years, and Tuule — ten years in Manchester. The time they spent away from home is not as long as Tarmo, also not as short as Terje. For Triinu and Tuule, knitting plays a significant role in setting up their national identity as well as the sense of belonging to Estonia. When Triinu and Tuule mentioned that they still receive knitted gifts from relatives back in Estonia, although both of them pointed out that those knitted items seem to be less useful in the UK compared to its practical importance in Estonia, however, they consider those "useless gifts" as a link between oneself and Estonia. Such link is not limited to a geographical "Estonia" — Tuule shared a story that her friend in Germany, who is also an Estonian, will send knitted items to her daughter in mailboxes; Triinu added that her sister living in Norway will do the same thing. Such links between oversea Estonians in the form of knitted items in international mailboxes is accessed by Tuule as "tradition[50] still carries on actually". Also, when I praised the Estonian knitting skill and tradition, Triinu expressed that "we take it for granted", and emphasised the importance of tradition once again. For both Triinu and Tuule, it is apparent that the folk knitting tradition plays an important role for their self-identification, as well as to make it as a representative of the notion of "roots", with which they would feel a sense of belonging with their culture background.

Here in this chapter, all the "oversea Estonians" that I mentioned belong to the third wave of emigration — according to Tammaru et al. (2010: 1171), this definition is for those who immigrated

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[50] I understand Tuule's "tradition" in the sense of both knitting tradition and the gift-making tradition.

to the West since 1991. More precisely, all my respondents for this dissertation are immigrants after 2004 when Estonia joined the European Union. Thus, the importance of having folk elements as a way to preserve their to some extent endangered culture, as well as the link with roots are not as indispensable as what their predecessors — in particular, those who were forced to leave, — needed. Unlike those who fled as refugees, the recent generation of Estonian immigrants have the possibility to interact with Estonia and are able to travel freely. Therefore, it is not that crucial for them to set the national identity to a high level in case of survival. However, the meaning of folk knitting as a symbol of belongingness, from what Tuule noted while explaining her reason for choosing folk patterns, was once played a role for helping overseas Estonians getting "moments of solace", a mean for preserving cultural roots, and a sense of settle oneself back to the arms of their beloved motherland (Reemann & Õunapuu 2004: 10; Pink et al. 2016: 11; Bush 2008: 16-18). Apart from the identity which those overseas Estonians needed to keep deep in their heart, one interesting fact is that such identity which is expressed via the knitting activity has produced a chance for turning itself into visual forms. An example is the knitted hat (*harimüts*) with belt patterns, which was fashionable during the German occupation years and later among refugees — it was called "the Estonian hat", which symbolises the Estonian national identity (Pink et al. 2016: 79). A staff member of the Estonian National Museum, whom I met on the knitting event which I organised in Tartu, has taken me to a *harimüts* which is displayed in the permanent exhibition area of the Estonian National Museum. Later on, she reminded me repeatedly that the very important function of this hat is for helping Estonian refugee kids to keep good manners: because it is a symbol of Estonia, people shall behave properly while wearing it.

Of course, I was not only wearing my much loved Kihnu mittens in Bradford — I bring Estonian traditional folk handicraft literally everywhere. One of the most unforgettable experience which I encountered with people with Estonian roots outside of Estonia was happened in California when I was staying with one Estonian-American family through the local Estonian community. It was on the last night of my stay; we were sitting together on the kitchen table; my host and his wife brought out a box which is filled with ladies' folk costumes and knitted items. They told me how did they get them and from where the pattern belongs to. When my host was forced to leave Estonia, he was only a preschool boy. Now he sits in his Californian house with hair in silver colour, showing a collection of folk clothing and knitting to a foreign guest coming from his hometown. If the action of my host's American wife wearing Estonian folk costume can be interpreted as an expression of

love to her husband's root, then my host's affection towards folk handicrafts is exactly what I have presented in the former part of this section — the "link", "root", and "symbol of identity".

...
Eesti muld ja Eesti süda –
kes neid jõuaks lahuta.

— Lydia Koidula, "Eesti Muld ja Eesti Süda" [51]

4.2. A link from the past to the present: individuals and national space

I have seen many colourful yarn balls in suitcases which carried by oversea Estonians: from my first Estonian teacher and her friend to those Estonians who travelled from all over the United Kingdom to Glasgow for my knitting event. Beyond those people whom I personally had contact with, I also have to mention those who were forced to travel — from my respondent Kadri (V1: G-EE1)'s grandmother and great-grandmother's suitcase to Siberia[52], to those who fled to Germany living in refugee camps in 1940s, knitting folk items out of old yarn. What makes Estonian knitting resemble itself as a representation of the abstractive concept of "Estonian-ness"? In this section, I aim to decode the role of "link" which Estonian knitting plays in between individuals and national space.

In Estonia, a craft which involves the idea of "genuine" and "national" the most is considered[53] to be knitting (Reemann & Õunapuu 2004: 15). Primarily, it was because of the cold weather (*ibid.*). Without a doubt that cold weather should be deemed a reason for the popularity of knitted object, however, it should not be the root cause — necessity does not necessarily meant to be "national". According to Bartlett (2010: 3-4), the process of fashioning the ethnic dress in East Europe, Russia, and the Caucasus (the region where Estonia is located in[54]) is firmly linked with the process of developing the idea of national identity — ethnic dress here is used to support the idea of national awakening by being a strong visual statement. This argument mirrors Berger (1999: 24)'s idea of applying Saussurean linguistic theory to fashion, which presents garments as a combination of codes. During the nation-awakening period of Estonia, the festive dress of peasants gained its new role for participation in the creation of national identity (Värv 2010: 155). While folk costume has

[51] Translation: "Estonian soil and Estonian heart — / who can set them apart."

[52] See section 3.2 for more details.

[53] However, such a sense could be actually constructed by ethnographers; thus the concept of knitting being a national craft can be rather deemed invented.

[54] From Bartlett's perspective, Estonia falls in the category of "East Europe", which is to a certain extent questionable regarding the nation-branding point that I will discuss later in this section.

been made as a symbol of Estonian-ness, knitting, as an important part of traditional Estonian clothes, is at the same time being lifted to a level of presenting the existence of the nation — and this trend goes all the way through the nineteenth century, Soviet occupation times, to our days.

"National in form, Socialist in content", an idea from Stalin[55], is a motto of the Soviet nationality policy on minority cultures, under which Estonian folk elements were used for portraying the positive aspects of the Stalinist politics of nations. In Soviet times, products with folk elements were made and promoted firstly by the Soviet Estonian combines of art products, later the National Handicraft masters' Production Team UKU (established in 1966)[56]. As a central part of heritage protection, UKU products was deemed a national symbol and used as giftware to and by both foreigners and Estonians (Reemann & Õunapuu 2004: 21; Pink et al. 2016: 81). In Soviet Estonia, the handicrafts tradition and folk elements to a certain extent retained popularity (Viires 1964: 271-272). However, Värv (2010: 155) argues that during the years of the Soviet occupation, folk dressing elements were used on the one hand as a mean to regulate the official cultural policy, on the other hand — a way to express the national feelings by Estonians to against the authority control. This argument has also been affirmed in Jerlei (2017: 165)'s work on a dollhouse in Tartu Toy Museum, where the idea of certain crafts being used as a way of resistance during Stalinist

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[55] Originally published as a discourse transcript in the newspaper "Pravda" No. 177, 29 June 1930.
Russian text: *"Что такое национальная культура при диктатуре пролетариата? Социалистическая по своему содержанию и национальная по форме культура, имеющая своей целью воспитать массы в духе социализма и интернационализма."*
Translation: "What is national culture under the dictatorship of the proletariat? Socialist (culture) in content and national (culture) in form, which has its goal to educate the masses in the spirit of socialism and internationalism."
It is interesting to note that prior to this paragraph, Stalin describes the "national culture under the authority of the national bourgeoisie" as "a culture of bourgeois in content and national in form". The stress of Stalin's discourse here obviously falls on the contrasting point of "bourgeois" and "socialist", rather than "national" itself.

[56] Notes from the exhibition *"From the Village Road to the Red Carpet: A Hundred Years of National Fashion"* in Estonian National Museum. Further information: http://www.erm.ee/en/news/village-road-red-carpet-hundred-years-national-fashion [Last accessed on 31 August 2018]
NB: the title of this dissertation is not an imitation of this museum exhibition. The resemblance is purely a coincidence. (ERM exhibition was opened on 5 October 2017, whilst the title of this dissertation was confirmed in December 2016)

repression is presented[57]. Was such kind of Soviet-styled "collective" folk element being enough to Estonians for their Estonian-ness, or, was it considered by Estonians as a pure form of "Estonian-ness" is rather a complicated question to answer, not to mention that it also falls outside of the scope of this dissertation. However, it is obvious that "socialist" has gained a higher position to "national" here, as the idea of "national" is for serving the need of "socialist". In a Soviet context, the premise of promoting folk culture is the Soviet value, i.e. Marxism-Leninism, or internationalism, which unfortunately in the case of the Soviet Union was to a certain extent resembles Russian imperialism (Kuzio 2002: 242). Furthermore, according to Virkkunen (1999: 83-85), the intensive Soviet state-building initiatives made little impact on replacing the image of Estonian nation with "great Soviet motherland". The portion of "national" in the idea of "National in form, Socialist in content" is rather difficult to determine.

Here I present a story which I collected during my fieldtrip to Olustvere for portraying a picture of the complicated situation of folk knitting in Soviet times:

> …
>
> *When I come back from the Haapsalu shawl class, the teacher of the mitten-knitting class was already in the classroom. She started to chat with students. At some point, she says that in the Soviet time it was not allowed to show Estonian pattern "because of national identity".*
>
> *That German student started to share some German book on Estonian folk costumes and educated me about UKU folk traditions.*
>
> *The teacher pulled the topic back to Kihnu mittens in Soviet time. She recalls a day when she was walking pass by the town hall — she didn't mention the exact name of the town but pointed out "the grey sky" instead. One random guy asked her: "Why you wear Kihnu pattern?" As if the pattern itself was a secret code to identify each other.*
>
> …

[57] Jerlei also noted that the Estonian word for handicraft, *käsitöö*, is used both for the product as well as the activity to produce it — while the prominence is, according the Jerlei (2017: 163), on the process rather than its outcome.

The Kihnu pattern's function of identifying the "sense of belonging" to a specific group can be seen as a presentation of the semiotic boundary between "self" and "other"[58]. Furthermore, the pattern, i.e. folk knitting style itself can be deemed a Lotmanian "text", with which a user communicates (Lotman 1988: 57). The "border" notion of semiotic space has got its importance from both functional and structural perspectives (Lotman 2005: 210). The way that people recognise specific patterns in some certain contexts can be decoded as one reading the text for the sake of filtering "other" out of the "self", thus met the demand of identifying the "self". On the semiotic usage of folk knitting, Luutonen (2008: 333) explains the meaning-assigning action from people to products as a culture-bound process. People who made the craft item assign meaning into it, and people who use it — represent the meaning.

Nowadays, there is no more dilemma in Estonia for ethnic dress used in the service of opposing ideologies; expressing the national feelings against authorities (see Värv 2010: 155). Nonetheless, folk elements still present in the case of expressing the identity in daily life. Interviews which were done in Bradford (G-UK1, G-UK2)[59] show the result that all respondents have either "Estonian knitting items" with them while living outside of Estonia, or claimed having received knitted items from relatives. Of course, when we talk about national identity, things like flags and languages are

[58] From my point of view, Kihnu patterns here serve as a symbol of "Estonian" being the "self", instead of "Kihnu". As a similar example, Praakli (2016: 212) noted that it was possible to recognise Estonians in Moscow by the style of their mittens.

[59] Respondents, B1: Tarmo; B2: Terje from Group G-UK1 have comparatively less interest on Estonian knitting. Both of them said that folk knitting patterns being *"not common"(B1 & B2)* and *"remind me of uncomfortable clothes from childhood"(B2)*. However, Tarmo — a person who lived in the UK for thirteen years, mentioned that *"my mom still send me things which is knitted, maybe not she knitted them but she bought them, but still cultural - I think it is still cultural"*; Terje — a person who has just settled in the UK for three months, mentioned that she receives knitted items from her grandma.
Respondents, B3: Triinu; B4: Tuule from Group G-UK2 are more enthusiastic on knitting, and both of them are active knitters (whilst B1 & B2 claim that they can only knit after a "revision"). Triinu, a person who lived in the UK for five years, still receives knitted items from her aunt and sister; Tuule, a person who lived in the UK for ten years, also receives knitted items from her friend (Estonian) living in Germany, and the knitting book she uses now is brought from Estonia. Tuule also bought some folk knitting items from Saaremaa and claims that nations patterns are *"something to do with your roots, and feelings"*.

more apparent to be a representative[60]. Ethnicity and language are deemed a central part of nationhood (Hobsbawm 1990: 102). However, folk art elements such as knitting patterns have an ascendancy on visual communication, which makes them being advantageous in transforming the abstractive concept of national identity into an everyday-form of the symbol. In a collection of data on cultural attitudes and preferences in Estonia, which presented by Lõhmus et al. (2009: 84), a respondent claims that *"folk culture and national heritage are especially close to me"* — this is something that I also constantly noticed in my field data collected both inside and outside of Estonia. By visually symbolising the notion of nation and ethnicity, folk elements — in my research case: knitting, make itself being close to one's feelings of the abstractive concept of "nation".

Talking about the folk knitting tradition from the perspective of nationalism, it is clear that such knitting is to a certain extent an "invented tradition" — I borrow this term from Hobsbawm (1983). According to Hobsbawm (1983: 4), traditions are invented via formalisation and ritualisation. Korkiakangas (2004: 123) argues that in Estonia, the nostalgia of the pre-Soviet occupation time manifests itself at the time after the collapse of the Soviet Union as the lost paradise. Raun (2009: 527) also mentioned that the physical survival is a big issue in post-Soviet Estonia as the decline of the percentage of ethnic Estonians in Estonia, caused by the nationality policy of the Soviet Union, is still not fully recovered by the end of the twentieth century. Thus, the importance of emphasising the national identity became of crucial importance in such post-Soviet national conditions.

On its function of linking individuals to national space, the role of Estonian knitting is to a certain extent similar to Eurovision — a mean of nation-branding. The meaning which delivered by knitters, or knitting companies and organisations, to the knitted items carries a subtext of building a re-invented national image of Estonia in a post-Soviet context: mostly, "Nordic". In the encyclopaedic book *Estonian Knitting*, Pink et al. (2016: 13) state that most Estonian nålbinding stitches are adapted from Finnish ones. Such phrases which link the Estonian knitting to "Nordic" (many of them are using the culturally-close relationship with Finland) can be found everywhere from online introductory texts to academic publications from the Estonian National Museum. For example, a website for selling Estonian mittens and gloves is named "Nordic

[60] Respondent B3: Triinu pointed out that *"when it comes to the national identity, I think for me language is the number one"* in interview G-UK2. However, Triinu explains later that *"because I only have boys, so I have never thought about (to teach them knitting)"* whilst claiming that knitting is something to value and *"part of my identity as being an Estonian, and also as a woman who can knit"*.

knitters"[61]; an Estonian knitting designer in Scotland uses "Nordic craft" plus an Estonian word "käsitöö" for her public homepage[62]; Piiri (2002: 1) proposes the essentiality of mittens and gloves for "Nordic people" while introducing "Estonian gloves"…all of the above-mentioned usages of "Nordic" reflect the will of Estonian people branding themselves to be Nordic, rather than "Baltic" (a term which more likely to be linked with "Eastern Europe", i.e. the Soviet past). Jordan (2014: 291) argues that the focus of being Nordic helps Estonia to distance itself from both the Soviet and Baltic regionalism[63]. Through the process of nation-branding, only the aspects of a nation's identity which could help to market would be selected (Jansen 2008: 122). Thus, the symbols which can enhance the Nordic-ness in the semiosphere of Estonian-ness will attract more attention — knitting is one of them.

To sum up: from an individual perspective, Estonian knitting marks the "Estonian-ness" and visualises the national identity from people who choose to make or wear the folk style; from a national perspective, Estonian knitting is used as a mean to integrate "Estonian-ness" into "Nordic-ness" in the process of nation-branding. Furthermore, knitting as an handicraft activity helps to create a sense of identity of the crafter — although the emphasis of such identity usually falls on the identity of being a knitter rather than national identity, however, consider the fact that knitting is considered "common"[64] in Estonia, the identity of being a knitter can be linked to the uniqueness of the Estonian identity, which gives rise to a sense of being proud of the Estonian identity.

As I have mentioned the "Nordic-ness" in the "Estonian-ness" in this section, I would like to close the section with a post scriptum on Finnish knitting: Jussi and Korsnäs pullovers. Those colourful knitted items play a role of symbolising the "Finnish-ness" because memories are interwoven along with the life of the garment (Luutonen 2008: 340). Memories are a part of the

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[61] Nordic Knitters: http://nordicknitters.com [Last accessed on 31 August 2018]

[62] @KerlisNordicCraftPage: https://www.facebook.com/KerlisNordicCraftPage/ [Last accessed on 31 August 2018]

[63] However, it is tricky for knitting, because on this point Latvians also brand themselves being "Nordic" under some circumstances. Whether Latvia can be deemed Nordic or not is beyond not only the scope of my research but also my knowledge at the moment while writing this dissertation.

[64] See earlier texts on knitting education, as well as interview G-UK2 on the point of how Triinu and Tuule changed their attitude of knitting before moving to the UK and after spending five/ten years living in a foreign country. This point also reflects Hobsbawm (1983: 4)'s idea of the link between invented traditions and imposed repetition (knitting in Estonian schools can be seen as an "imposed repetition").

semiotic text which knitted items carry. After discussing mostly on the point of big “Estonian-ness”, I would like to put my focus down to a more-personal aspect: family memories.

5. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A KNITTER IN ESTONIA

...

Kodu lõhn on eriline,

Kodu värv ja maik.

Kodu on nii imeline,

Tavaline paik.

...

— "Kodulaul", from the film "Nukitsamees" (1981)[65]

5.1. Family traditions, family memories

"For me, it (knitting) is tradition. I remember my ***grandmother*** *knitting..." said 49-year-old Kadri;*

"I saw my ***grandma*** *(knitting), that's my first memory (on knitting)." said 22-year-old Kaja;*

"I remember when I was very small, probably three or four years old, when I was sitting in my ***mother****'s lap, then she was knitting..." said 24-year-old Katrin.*

All of us had knitting needles in our hands while doing the interview. Outside the window, snow has silently covered Viljandi.

[Interview: G-EE1, 02 Dec 2017]

[65] Translation: "The scent of home is special, / Home colour and taste. / Home is so wonderful, / a normal place."

*"Oh because my **grandma** used to do so (knitting), and my mom didn't do any knitting… so, probably from grandma." said 39-year-old Tarmo;*

*"Same for me, that was **grandma**. I think most of the kids are getting gifts from grandma's. Like…socks for every Christmas and jumpers…" said 32-year-old Terje;*

[Interview: G-UK1, 03 Feb 2018]

*"I don't have a specific picture in my head (about her first memory of knitting), but, it must have been my **grandmother** knitting." said 35-year-old Triinu;*

*"My **great-grandmother** was a lot into knitting. So before I actually attempted first time, I remember…hmm, I was probably four or five, her knitting…she particularly likes to knit gloves." said 36-year-old Tuule.*

Kids are running around when we had our interview; English and Estonian conversations were mixed, floating around my ears. A rainy night in Bradford.

[Interview: G-UK2, 03 Feb 2018]

*"When I saw my **grandmother**, when she visits me, I was…hmm, okay, like always, when she visited me, she always knitted. Always like…hmm…we are like…talking or whatever, and she was always always knitting." said 37-year-old Maarja;*

*"Knitting was one part of my study, but I have learned knitting from my **grandmother**, this is a traditional kudumisoskused[66]…" said 53-year-old Margit.*

We sat next to a huge knitting-blocking tool in a silent dark room of Haapsalu Lace Centre, talking about knitting. It was a sunny day outside. The gentle breeze blows, bringing the fresh smell from the Baltic Sea.

[Interview: G-EE2, 22 May 2018]

From the above-presented interview excerpts, it is easy to extract an image of female-family members[67] knitting as one of the very first memories for people linking with the knitting activity. A shared message that we can read from those scenarios of "grandmother memory" is knitting being passing down from generation to generation: a grandmother passes the skill which she got from her grandmother to her granddaughter, i.e. knitting as a common daily handicraft being preserved in

[66] Estonian: knitting skill

[67] Grandmother: 7/9; mother: 1/9; great-grandmother: 1/9

family by repeated actions. Such collective memory and shared experience can be deemed a base for knitting being constructed as a folk art heritage already from the era of the republic of Estonia in 1930s.

Estonians, as of many other peoples around the world, treasure the importance of ancestors' wisdom and lifestyles. Meanings which were hidden in the craftsmanship being passed down from generation to generation, carrying a shared value and secrets of Estonian people (Alatalu & Kõivupuu 2017: 56). Back to the nineteenth-century, Estonian girls were supposed to acquire knitting skills from their female family members before the age of seven (Pink et al. 2016: 26). Such kind of knitting education in family ensures that local characteristics will be preserved (*ibid.*). On this point, a highlight around whole Estonia is the unique Haapsalu knitting skill: it is a local tradition that the unique lace knitting techniques will be preserved in families and between people who know each other well. Bush (2008: 11) illustrates that Haapsalu girls and boys are involved in the family business of knitting since their early years; Reimann (2017: 26) argues that Haapsalu patterns spread between people who are relatively firmly linked — mother/daughter (blood link); neighbours/neighbours (location link or friendship link).

> *…*
>
> *[Maarja]: …She (grandmother) was always always knitting. When I was a little child, I was a little bit angry, because I wanted her to play with me [laugh]…and she was like… always knitting. Now I understand because I do the same thing now. [laugh]*
>
> *[Interviewer]: It's like a family business?*
>
> *[Maarja]: Oh yeah. Because I can't be without knitting. Like…I never look at TV or something, if I don't knit. [laugh]*
>
> *[Interviewer]: So, when you were a kid you did not understand, but now somehow you followed her path?*
>
> *[Maarja]: Oh yeah.*
>
> *…*
>
> *[Interview: I-EE 2, 22 May 2018]*

> *…*
>
> *[Margit]: When grandmother teaches me (knitting), I say to her "this is not for me, not my style". But she says "no, we take practice and try again".*
>
> *…*

[Interview: I-EE3, 22 May 2018]

Maarja's narrative shows the "repeating" between generations, and Margit's — "repeating" involved in the memory of acquiring knitting activity in the family. Furthermore, there is another interesting point from Maarja:

> …
>
> *[Interviewer]: Do you think Haapsalu knitting as a symbol of Estonia or just some sort of handicraft?*
>
> *[Maarja]: Well, I think if people doing it, it's good. Because it's lacy and so…I can imagine that, for example, Japanese people like it. Haapsalu scarf. For me, I don't know…it's like not an "Estonian" stuff but more like "Haapsalu" stuff. So it doesn't matter for me, for example, if they do it in Tartu or in Japan. But in Haapsalu it's like…Haapsalu stuff.*
>
> …

[Interview: I-EE2, 22 May 2018]

Maarja is the only respondent who pointed out the importance of separating local style from a collective "Estonian" style. In my other interviews, I used to carry a pair of typical Kihnu mittens[68] for making examples, but nobody stressed "Kihnu" — even if I kept mentioning the locality character, it is still "Estonian". Later when I double checked with Maarja to make sure on her "Haapsalu stuff" point, Maarja confirmed that it's a "local identity rather than the whole country". Considering Maarja's identity of being a member of a family with knitting tradition, her Haapsalu lace knitting skill is almost entirely a family heritage — it has to some extent proved the idea of the nineteenth-century style of family knitting education preserving local characteristics (see Pink et al. 2016: 26)

Here I decode the mechanism of "passing down knitting from generation to generation" from two aspects:

- Relationship between objects/people, and relationship between people/people via objects

The object/person relationship is comparatively more significant when the object is handmade (Turney 2012: 304). Handmade objects are unique because of its non-replicability, time and effort invested into them, and human emotions involved in them. Pink et al. (2016: 25) explain that

[68] Kihnu pattern is deemed one of the most recognisable local patterns due to its unique colour and style.

private knitting collections in Estonia are treated as family heritage because "it is handed down from ancestors". Hand-knitted items are precious things as not only they are garments but also they can present the existence of a specific person who made it[69].

When the hand-knitted items or technique of making them being passed from one person to another person, the relationship between people is symbolised via actions related to objects, thus the object itself or memories related to it can be seen as a presentation of human links. On knitting as a sign of familial devotion, Turney (2012: 307) argues that it involves the cult of domesticity which comes from the eighteenth century. Thus, the importance of knitting in families can be seen as a way of demonstrating family value: the core efficacy of "passing down" knitting is to inherit such value and lifestyle.

- Meaningful products

Luutonen (2008: 332) argues that handicrafts are "personal" thus can be deemed a representative of meaningful products. Knitted objects between family members present a link of familial love as well as the mutual dedication in the emotion of need and being needed[70]; knitting activity, which requires family members to be together, presents the family memory which can also be passed down from generation to generation[71] as the skill itself. For example, in pre-industrial Estonia, people spent a lot of time staying indoors during winter; thus the repeated family activities of handicrafts became a shared experience (Viires 2004: 26; Piiri 2017: 22). Such shared experience later can be integrated as a tradition and establish a sense of "roots" feelings for constructing people's national identity.

Knitting has been passed from the candlelit farmhouse, which symbolises the traditional Estonian lifestyle, to the Soviet workshop UKU, where people can earn extra income by their folk handicrafts skill; from the days which have left Tarmo (B1: G-UK1) and Terje (B2: G-UK2) an

[69] I have to note here that, as a knitter myself, I would like to repeat emphasising the preciousness of hand-knitted objects: apart from the large amount of time that one needs to invest in it (which is already a sacrifice), another cost which often being undervalued is the consume of human body — my wrists and fingers hurt so much every time after intensive knitting activities!

[70] Praakli (2009: 236) shows a typical case of "knitted relationship" between a boy living in Finland and his grandmother living in Estonia: boy is happy that grandmother knits things for him, and grandmother is happy for being needed by her little boy.

[71] See Kadri's story in Section 3.2.
NB: Although Kadri was not with her grandmother and great-grandmother when the knitting activity on the way to Siberia happened, she still uses "we" in her narrative of family knitting story.

impression of Kihnu mittens reminding them of "uncomfortable clothes of childhood", to our days that people attending university for a native crafts degree because of their fond family memories and interest in folk art[72]. In her three books about folk mitten and sock patterns from the Estonian National Museum archives, Praakli (2009; 2010; 2016) continuously mentions herself and other people's family memory on knitting linked with the traditional way of life. Based on personal experiences, Praakli (2016: 13-15) states that knitting to her is more satisfactory in Soviet times rather than nowadays, mostly because that in Soviet times knitting can bring extra income[73], but also because at that time knitting "did not cause stress" — nowadays, it is possible that the younger generation no longer has the same proficiency on knitting as their ancestors.

As Praakli (*ibid.*) did not list the detailed criteria of proper knitting skills, which from her perspective a great loss in the generation of our times, it is rather difficult to examine if her argument was solid or not. However, should we limit knitting as a "grandmother" thing in contemporary Estonia? In the next section, I will explore the application of traditional folk knitting from a relatively "younger" perspective: fashion design.

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[72] Respondent V1: Kadri, V2: Kaja, and V3: Katrin from interview G-EE1 are students attending knitting courses on university level.

[73] In Soviet Estonia, UKU pays people for their handicraft work so that craftspeople can earn extra cash in their spare time.

5.2. Knitting is the new fashion

To what extent should be considered the importance of clothing to people? A saying from Tartu-Maarja parish reflects an aspect of Estonian people's attitude towards garments — *What's in your tummy remain untold, but what you are wearing is there for all to behold* (Reemann & Õunapuu 2004: 6). Yes, clothing style is one of the most direct ways to recognise and characterise a specific person: his/her identity, background, opinions, etc. Regarding the language of fashion, Roland Barthes (2013: 6) argues that clothing resembles a sign of will for people integrating themselves into a specific system which is able to be recognised by others. The social function of clothing thus can be deemed a sign of self-expressing and self-labelling. Fashion, therefore, is a mean of making oneself distinction and assimilation in society (González 2012: 29). In my interviews with oversea Estonians, there are two contrasting opinions toward wearing garments with Estonian folk knitting motif:

> …
>
> *[Interviewer]: Like, if you have two choices — you've got normal ones (gloves), like a normal plain black one, and you've got this…(show Kihnu mittens as an example)*
>
> *[Tarmo]: Well, if I have to wear gloves, I wouldn't wear these…(pointing Kihnu mittens, laugh)*
>
> *[Terje]: Yes, they look not common.*
>
> *[Tarmo]: Yes…*
>
> *[Terje]: And remind me of…uncomfortable clothes from childhood.*
>
> *(All laugh)*
>
> …
>
> *[Interview: G-UK1, 03 Feb 2018]*

> …
>
> *[Tuule]: But certainly, same, like with you (she pointed her co-interviewee Triinu), I don't walk around every day in jumpers or hats with national patterns, but it plays a bit of role of, um, it's called "place in a culture". For example, I realised now when I go back to Estonia, then I will get things…those things have something to do with national patterns, for example, a few years ago we went to Saaremaa, I ended up buying jumper with national*

patterns. National patterns. So, yes, it is…I guess something to do with your roots…and feelings. Yes. And belongingness. Identity, somehow. So, if that was a choice of, um, I don't know, like "national Estonian knitting", and let's say, "other culture's patterns", then I would definitely go to Estonian patterns because it's my culture and identity.

[Triinu]: Yes.

[Interviewer]: Oh, so if you have to choose, like, from Estonian pattern, or from foreign patterns, you would definitely pick up the Estonian one?

[Tuule]: Yes.

…

[Interview: G-UK2, 03 Feb 2018]

During the interview G-UK1, both Tarmo and Terje kept mentioning their unwillingness of wearing Estonian knitting items, even though they still receive knitted items from family members as gifts. However, Tarmo and Terje did not deny the importance of Estonian knitting "in Estonia", their points were (1) Estonian knittings are "not common" in an overseas context; (2) folk knitting item reminds them of unpleasant "childhood memory"[74]. Tarmo mentioned later that knitting is "normal Estonian customs", and "if you live in Estonia probably it is a bigger part". As an Estonian living overseas for thirteen years, he admitted that "it was because we lived here for already many years, so probably lost some of its (Estonian knitting) meaning". Terje is the person who kept emphasising that there is no need to have knitted items in our contemporary consumer's world, where everything is available in shops. Terje also linked folk knitting to uncomfortable clothes while I put out my Kihnu mittens as an example. For both Tarmo and Terje, folk knitting has an image of somewhat "left-behind". Brach (2012: 56) argues that fashion identity marks self-recognition of a specific person, includes the elements of experiences, changes, choices etc. The case of Tarmo and Terje shows that their attempt of avoiding to display their "uncomfortable clothes of childhood", notwithstanding they both agreed that folk knitting still plays an important role in Estonia. For Tuule and Triinu in the interview G-UK2, however, folk knitting marks the aspect of their Estonian identity which they would like to proudly "show off" by using folk motif in fashion[75]. They also

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[74] To my understandings, the "unpleasant childhood memory" of Tarmo and Terje on folk knitting items may be related to the itchy wool; they have also mentioned that hand-knitted things will be repaired for many times and thus do not look good.

[75] The item which Tuule mentioned is not a piece of traditional folk costume but "jumper with national patterns".

mentioned that it was only after leaving Estonia that they realised the uniqueness of knitting in Estonia — and this probably is one of the motivations for Tuule getting garments with folk motif when she goes back to Estonia from the United Kingdom.

Figure 22. A Haapsalu lace wedding dress in Estonian National Museum, designed by Kristina Viirpalu, Tartu, 16 March 2018

Application of traditional elements into fashion design is not a new thing at all. Particular items of a full-set folk costume are moveable; style can always be made from a non-fashion context to fashion: for example, school uniform and Scottish kilt patterns (Brach 2012: 53). Just like the traditional Scottish knitted lace of Shetland was once appeared on Alexander McQueen's runway[76], Estonian knitted lace of Haapsalu has inspired not only folk knitters and knitting enthusiasts but also the famous Estonian designer Kristina Viirpalu[77], who has designed a lot of occasional and wedding dresses inspired by the Haapsalu lace motif (*fig. 22*). Viires (2001: 11) defines folk art a timeless phenomenon, as motifs are applicable and moveable. In my interviews, some of the

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[76] Alexander McQueen Spring 2017. Further reading: https://www.vogue.com/fashion-shows/spring-2017-ready-to-wear/alexander-mcqueen [Last accessed on 31 August 2018]

[77] KV Couture: https://kristinaviirpalu.com [Last accessed on 31 August 2018]

respondents claim that they attempt to keep the historical style in knitting at the same time of making new things out of it:

> …
>
> *[Katrin]: Most of the items we made in our days, they are from museum, which are collected in the nineteenth century[78]. So that's the link, which we can see in our days.*
>
> *[Interviewer]: It means you are reproducing your museum items? Old patterns?*
>
> *[Kaja]: Yeah…(she was concentrating on knitting while talking)…this mitten which I am making at the moment, it's an item that…hmm, there was a fragment from tomb, and I am reconstructing it from this piece.*
>
> *[Interviewer]: I see. It's a fragment of the archeological item, and you want to reproduce the history?*
>
> *[Kaja]: Yes, but something like to give something more. Just like I take the fragment of this cloth pattern and like to give something new.*
>
> *[Katrin]: Because it is so important, for example, that you know how to make some kind of wrist part so that you can create something new out of it, like give new colour combinations, or whatever comes into your mind.*
>
> …
>
> *[Interview: G-EE1, 02 Dec 2017]*

Both Katrin and Kaja are students major in native crafts, which means that one of their potential career paths could be designing clothes with folk motifs. For Katrin and Kaja, the message of "folk" in their handicrafts presents their feelings of "root", of a link to ancient times, of traditions that they would like to preserve and proudly display via garments; and what they are going to change from the "folk", or archeological part of their hand-work is the personal elements or styling in making things with designers' mark, rather than "reproducing history" as copies from the past.

In Estonia, the process of applying folk patterns in fashion started already at the beginning of the twentieth century, at the same time when traditional costume became less popular, gradually vanishing from people's daily life. In 1924, a Finnish author named Elsa Häkkinen published the

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[78] Actually, most of the museum items that Katrin mentioned here are collected during the twentieth century. I understand that the point which she wanted to make here was that those museum items are originate from the nineteenth century and even from earlier times.

first handicraft textbook in Estonian: *Naiskäsitööd*[79], in which the idea of applying the traditional knitting method to contemporary fashion design was presented (Pink et al. 2016: 77). It is understandable considering the fact that the need for traditional folk knitting is not as high as what it was in the time when folk costumes were used on a daily basis. Pink et. al. (2016: 78) argues that the period of new fashion style being introduced to replace traditional ones is also the period when people started to pay more attention to traditional clothing along with its fashion application. For example, the design of knitted bonnets with belt patterns were in fashion at the late 1930s to early 1940s (Pink et al. 2016: 79), follows a wider application of belt/mitten patterns into fashion garments: one trend of the 1940s and 1950s fashion was knitting vests and jumpers with those folk costume patterns. Here it is worth noting that in 1930s, the Estonian folk costumes were reinvented and used by the state as a tool of propaganda and nation building; following the trend in late 1940s and during 1950s as the Soviet regime used the same strategy in the framework of serving the Soviet ideology. Such fashion was not only found in Estonia but also in overseas Estonian communities at that time, i.e. refugees fled away due to unstable social situation. The "Estonian hat" displaying in the Estonian National Museum permanent exhibition shows that the fashion has already been taken to Sweden and even become a way to recognise Estonians. In such a context, Estonian knitting resembles national identity. Applying mitten and belt patterns into knitwear is still in trend in nowadays Estonia. According to one interview excerpt in the earlier part of this dissertation[80], respondent Katrin (V3: G-EE1) mentioned the contemporary application of mitten patterns in clothing design and compared "tradition" as "tools" for designing.

Thinking of the rich heritage of Estonian knitting, I assume that Estonians have already got quite a lot of "tools" — here I take Katrin's word, — from their ancestors. Apart from Kristina Viirpalu's "exclusive luxury design"[81] applying traditional elements to runway fashion, there are also many other designers and knitters in Estonia offering various hand-knitted items with folk knitting motif for occasions and daily wear. Throughout the whole year of my stay in Estonia, I have observed a considerably large amount of folk knitting elements in daily fashion e.g. Haapsalu patterns for wedding dresses; mitten patterns for socks; fishermen's jumper pattern knitted in a more

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[79] Estonian: women's handicraft

[80] See Interview: G-EE1 in 3.2.

[81] See first paragraph of introduction on KV Couture's homepage: https://kristinaviirpalu.com/about/ [Last accessed on 31 August 2018]

contemporary hoodie style…all those applications make folk knitting being fashionable, and also prove Viires (2001: 11)'s idea of folk art to be considered timeless because of its flexibility.

I might be fortunate, or just because I have "Estonian knitter's eyes", to recognise all those applications and usage of folk knitting motif in contemporary fashion. Praakli (2016: 212) expresses her disappointment for Estonian mittens being less noticeable in nowadays Estonia's street fashion while talking about the idea of giving mitten patterns a new use by knitting them into jumpers. Yes, if we limit "mitten" in its very traditional form, it is indeed not that frequent to be spotted on streets. Viires (2001: 11) argues that Estonian folk knitting keeps in fashion as a language of signs. After all, style is fluid — in the river of endless time, to define a stationary concept of what should be recognised as "traditionally folk" is not possible. When those "traditionally folk" nineteenth-century style garments were in fashion, probably the real style which means "tradition" for people at that time was something that we will not recognise as symbolically traditional at all from nowadays perspective. Folk knitting may not function as a part of garments in everyday use anymore, however, it still stays in fashion and used by Estonians who would like to have a closer link to their "roots" — or, not limited to Estonians but for all the people who treasure the heritage of Estonian handicrafts.

6. CONCLUSION

The beauty of Estonian knitting shines not only in the archive and museum exhibitions but also in people's daily life, education, family memories, and even their suitcases when travelling or moving overseas. Museums preserve the hundreds-year-long fascinating cultural heritage; nation-wide education makes knitting a basic skill in Estonia, which is deemed a distinction from most of the countries around the world; family tradition ensures the continuation of folk handicrafts; fashion trend makes folk knitting vivid in a contemporary context. Estonian knitting is everywhere. It is of course not only something beautiful, lying in those "kasitöö" shops waiting for customers as an exotic souvenir — behind those beautiful patterns, but there is also a whole world of codes, which people use as a mean to deliver messages and to materialise human emotions.

My current research on Estonian knitting set out to better understand the role of knitting in Estonian national identity. I aimed to examine the function of Estonian knitting as a link between individuals and national space; to explore the usage of knitting in labelling the national image of Estonia. Through a brief analysis of Estonian knitting, I presented not only historical facts, but also the meaning-making process of knitting and knitted items in folk customs as well as its symbolic importance. After the historical part, my lens turned to the presentation of knitting in museums. By combining my own experience together with data which I collected from my respondents, I argue that Estonian knitting is widely presented in museums around Estonia, and has been made a means of symbolising the nation. From the part of knitting education, I determine that folk knitting taught in schools is something beyond the skill for practical domestic usage — knitting is in actual fact a mean of enhancing the link between individuals and their nation. I also note the uniqueness of Estonian knitting education and its effect on spreading Estonian culture on an international stage. My focus with respondents from outside of Estonia falls on the point of "Estonian-ness", i.e.

national identity. I also explore the usage of labelling knitting as “Nordic” thus setting up a “Nordic” image for Estonia in the post-Soviet context. Family memory is the core in my interviews which were done in Estonia; however, I do not neglect oversea Estonians here because the “grandmother” style story is, of course, not only limited to Estonians living in Estonia. Last but not least, I glance at the current fashion with folk knitting elements with a brief analysis of knitting design history in the twentieth century.

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is the universality of Estonian knitting: from a large number of knitted items in museum archives to the apparent existence of knitting in everyday life. People, mostly females, knit everywhere in Estonia: from school kids (although some of them might be “forced” because knitting is obligatory in the curriculum) to pensioners; from professional artists to amateurs. The significant presence of knitting in Estonian people’s life makes the possibility for knitting being deemed a sign of the abstractive concept of nation.

The research has also shown that the rich history and exquisite techniques of Estonian knitting ensure the effectiveness of knitting as a mean of constructing the national identity and setting up an image of the nation. Firstly, from data which I presented in the main body of this dissertation, it is evident that to Estonian knitters both in Estonia and abroad, knitting is an impact factor on their understanding of the national identity. The idea of knitting being combined with the “root” has been mentioned regularly. By knitting and wearing folk elements, people gain a sense of belonging to their homeland not only from a present-day perspective but also the history, the ancestors of the land itself. Secondly, I would also highlight here the usage of marketing the concept of “Nordic” on Estonian knitting. It is one of my limitations that I am not able to tell to what extent the Nordic-ness is involved in Estonian knitting, and, where is the boundary of the so-called “Nordic”. However, what matters here is that knitting has got involved in promoting a brand-new image of a post-Soviet Estonia.

In general, Estonian knitting is a non-negligible part of Estonian people’s collective memory and, to a certain extent national identity. Rich history, which is reflected by museum resources, and the nation-wide knitting education, led by the government, are two main factors that constitute the precondition for the distinctive uniqueness of the role of knitting in Estonia. The practical usage of knitting as giftware makes it a medium of human emotions; therefore, it carries meaning and thus of semiotic importance. On a national-level, knitting can be deemed a representative of Estonian culture. As Estonian knitting has got the advantage of not only carrying a splendid history but also an exclusive style which can be easily recognised (for example: Haapsalu lace with nupps; bright

Muhu colour combinations; Kihnu and Ruhnu mitten style), it is attractive to non-Estonians, in particular: foreign knitters. Promoting the vernacular knitting, therefore, would be an efficient method of nation-labelling and nation-branding from an international perspective.

My dissertation contributes to existing knowledge of Estonian studies by providing an aspect of addressing the importance of knitting on both family and national levels. Notwithstanding the relatively small amount of data, the study shows that knitting plays a vital role in Estonian people's daily life. Here I shall not over-generalise the character of "Estonian people", however, based on what I have noticed in my life being close to Estonians and living in Estonia for one year, plus my own data collected for this dissertation, I argue that knitting is an indispensable part of "being an Estonian" for Estonian knitters; knitted objects together with memories or affections linked to them also being important for Estonians feel their sense of belonging — no matter it is on a level of constructing the national identity, or just simply some childhood memories or skills acquired in public schools.

Due to various constraints — mostly the language barrier and problems on transportation (I do not own a car, and my driving license is a provisional one), also time and financial limitations, — the size of my fieldwork data is not very large. In total, I have only conducted nine interviews in three cities (Estonia: Haapsalu, Viljandi; UK: Bradford) with Estonians. One unpredictable factor which caused this limitation on data size was my self-recovery period after the "spy" thing happened in Bradford, on which I already presented in the form of reflective notes at the end of the methodology section. Although I have received an immediate counselling from my supervisor, and mental supports from faculty members, the fear of doing interview still followed me for months — I was scared by my own identity of being a non-Estonian. The incident itself is rather fortuitous but it indeed to a certain extent made a negative impact on fieldwork.

An apparent weak point on literature which used for this research is that I am too dependent on some certain authors, for example: Pink, Reimann, and Jõeste who wrote *Estonian Knitting: Traditions and Techniques*, which is the only book I have got in English for a comprehensive study on Estonian knitting. As I have already mentioned in section 2.1, most of the books focusing on knitting are not academic at all. The language barrier could also be an indirect factor which caused this limitation because the majority part of research in Estonian knitting studies are written in Estonian.

The fact that most of my respondents are knitters adds further caution regarding the generalisability of findings. The lack of non-knitter data to a certain extent means some findings of this research might only be valid inside the knitter's circle. Also, the fact that eight out of nine respondents are females may cause issues on gender as well. Considering those limitations on data, it would be more appropriate to make applications of some specific findings from "Estonian" to a more specific group of "Estonian knitters". For example, the significant role of knitting in national identity is only applicable for knitters (V1, V2, V3, B3, B4, H1,H2), on non-knitter cases (B1, B2) it did not work. However, all the respondents expressed the thought of knitting being important in Estonia. Another shared point is family memories and the giftware function of knitting. Furthermore, my identity of being a knitter could be a limitation on this point as I would unconsciously put knitting on a higher level whilst for non-knitters there might be a different understanding. Such passion may also influence my informants — although it was not my intentional behaviour and I was not aware during the interview process at all, — and thus make the data being not accurate in a complete neutral sense.

The question raised by the current research project is to what extent knitting being significant for Estonians in forming their national identity. I also found the "Nordic" tone of Estonian knitting an interesting point which probably needs more attention from academia. More research is needed to develop a deeper understanding of functions of Estonian knitting and traditional motifs in contemporary and international contexts.

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Appendix 2: List of interviews

RESPONDENT	RELEVANT INFORMATION	PLACE	DATE
V1: KADRI, 49	From Tallinn. Student of knitting programme, UT Viljandi. Accountant.	Viljandi, Estonia	2 December 2017
V2: KAJA, 22	From Põitsamaa. Student of knitting programme, UT Viljandi. Waitress.	Viljandi, Estonia	2 December 2017
V3: KATRIN, 24	From Tartumaa. Student of knitting programme, UT Viljandi. Craft camp organiser.	Viljandi, Estonia	2 December 2017
B1: TARMO, 39	From Tartu, living in Manchester for 13 years. IT technician.	Bradford, United Kingdom	3 February 2018
B2: TERJE, 32	From Tallinn, living in Huddersfield for 3 months. Nanny.	Bradford, United Kingdom	3 February 2018
B3: TRIINU, 35	From Tartumaa, living in Leeds for 5 years. Administrator.	Bradford, United Kingdom	3 February 2018
B4: TUULE, 36	From Tallinn, living in Manchester for 10 years. Social worker.	Bradford, United Kingdom	3 February 2018
H1: MAARJA, 37	From Haapsalu. Artist. Family member of a knitting master.	Haapsalu, Estonia	22 May 2018
H2: MARGIT, 53	From Saaremaa. Knitting teacher.	Haapsalu, Estonia	22 May 2018

Appendix 3: Nine stories about knitting

*I set up the question **"Do you have any interesting story about knitting to share with me?"** as the ending part of every interview. Here are nine short stories which I collected from my respondents.*

<u>V1: Kadri (49), distance student/accountant</u>

My story is somehow a historical story. In Estonia, there was a mass deportation, you know. (a very short pause here — it seems that she wanted to confirm that I truly have a clue on the history of deportation.) You know, in 1949[82]. And our family too got deported to Siberia. And, luckily, we had a good sense to bring alone sewing machine and two big woollen blankets. During the worst Siberian winter, our grandmother and her mother relied on the blanket and used to knit their own socks and mittens. We also traded some of those knitted products for food items like potatoes and flour in order to survive the harsh Russian winter.

<u>V2: Kaja (22), student/waitress</u>

I was knitting when I sailed to Finland. I knitted my Muhu socks and many Finnish women came to see… "Oh it's so pretty!"…

(Interviewer: You were off to Finland and knit Muhu socks? It is interesting because you were somehow outside of the country but still doing traditional motif?)

…yes, and I have a mind that Finnish people are also interested in Estonian crafts. And crafts, also, their own too. Especially old ladies who came in attention.

<u>V3: Katrin (24), student/craft camp organiser</u>

Perhaps it's not related to Estonian knitting that much, but what came into my mind is that…hmm…I studied in Norway for two years and there I started, we have something like

[82] The second round of mass deportation from the Baltic States, which happened in March 1949.

“extra academic commitments”, so, I started craft activity, and in there I made cover for a tree or, I don’t know, like a…scarf?

(Interviewer: Scarf…for tree?)

…yes. The tree was maybe about fifty centimetres? In diameter. And then I collected all the leftover yarns and different yarns, then I knitted it into a simple scarf. And then I put together on a tree. It was so nice because we have the dormitory, and we have classrooms quite nearby. And the tree was in the middle of the walk to the classrooms. And then, people stood there more frequently and hug the tree, take pictures of the tree…

B1: Tarmo (39), IT technician

B2: Terje (32), nanny

Terje: Yeah, my grandma used to…like the sock she made, and then it worn out and get holes…*(laugh)*…in the bottom…and then she just use really rough things to patch them up…

Tarmo: *(laugh)* Oh yes yes, to patch them.

Terje: Haha yes, like to patch up it for ten times…and I was like “no no no who is going to wear this?” *(laugh)* just like go over there, over there, over there…

Tarmo: *(he was laughing really hard)* Exactly…oh, it happens, but maybe like twenty five years ago. So, yeah.

Terje: Good times.

B3: Triinu (35), administrator

I am…hmm…below average (regarding the knitting skills). When it comes to, you know, be able to do stuff. In Estonia, you know. But compare with people of my age group, in Estonia, then I am not a skilled knitter by any means. Because I was always, you know, just a hobby…I don’t have a skill that lots of other people have, so…I don’t have any, um…I just found one that probably interesting, I remember, I was fourteen, and in that year in school we have to knit a jumper. I found in a…well, it wasn’t an Estonian pattern but, I found in a magazine, um, like a really colourful one. Really colourful jumper. Then I ended

up making that for my school work. And another girl in my class she made the same one, but use different colours. And she made it. And we wore those jumpers…I consider it very fashionable, actually, it was the time at the beginning of 90s when you wouldn't have lots of clothes in shops for sale. So that's something like original and nice. Yeah, I ended up wearing that really colourful jumper…it wasn't Estonian pattern but it was made by myself, really colourful jumper…for three years I think. And I occasionally wear it with the same girl in my class. Like same jumper on the same day. Just like hers was in slightly different colours and different things but it is…the same, same model, same pattern.

B4: Tuule (36), social worker

I was an exchange student in Germany, so I did my last student year there. I had a boyfriend of Indian background. And…so he always found that Berlin is quite cold. So I thought, you know, I had the wish to make something, so I made him a vest…and he really wore it with pride, he was going around and saying, you know, "my girlfriend made it"…I found firstly embarrassed but…you know, firstly I thought it was really embarrassing because, you know, that…um…to show it off. But after a while I thought this is actually really sweet! Hmm, so it is strange that how…it is sort of change for me. But, yeah, it was interesting that this Indian young man found it, you know, "wow something handmade" when you used to think that in India that handicraft is so common…but probably not knitting *(laugh)*. He found knitting something special, really. That was some interesting moment.

H1: Maarja (37), freelance artist/designer

When I studied to knit Haapsalu scarf, I made the small ones first. And my grandmother was like "okay, do the small ones"…I did those, like, for couple of years. And then I was like "no I want to do the big ones". But I didn't like the patterns they have already. So, I mix them. Like my grandmother does the big scarfs, and I just mix up something…so right now what I knit, I have in my head, I don't have to look at the paper, I just know what I have to do. The only thing I do is those kind of scarfs, at the moment. It's like mixed. Like starts around and like…something…I don't know the pattern names but I know that nobody is doing this pattern at the moment.

My mother knits as well. I remember she told me that when she was younger…um, one of the, you know, the boring stuff to do for Haapsalu scarf is that you put the, you know, lace, on the scarf. You know, you have to like…this like…um, boring and, I don't know, nobody likes it. And when she was younger, my grandmother always told her that she has to do that. For her scarfs, you know. She was started with laces, not the whole scarf. But only laces and later you go on. But…I remember when I was in high school, I think, and I needed money. And my grandmother was like "okay, you can start, you know, to knit something". But first they were not like lacy, you know, they were lacy but they were thicker. Thicker yarn. Like what you use to knit with socks, you know, those big one. The big ones like triangle, with one star, like really easy stuff. And step by step, my grandma added this thing and that thing, and later I got the full pattern in my head. And then she was like…"oh now you have to frame it now, you have to wash it now", like, sneakily I got to do everything…

(Interviewer: Everything?)

Yeah, quite a lot. That was like quite sneaky you know. *(laugh)*

(Interviewer: I wonder if only female family members knit, or…)

Well, my son wants to knit because he wants to make money, but, yeah, he didn't do it yet. But he is thinking about it. But, my grandfather, you know, my grandmother's husband, he was like not knitting, but like…helping.

<u>H2: Margit (53), knitting teacher</u>

Last two or three years there has been the knitting of the Haapsalu shawl. When varied are too heavy, then slimed (stitches) are falling off from the needles. Then, one need to collect them back again. When it happens, it is nice to feel support from other women here (in Haapsalu Lace Centre) that you are not alone when it happens. Also, they are here and it could happen to them too. This is very positive experience and feeling.

** collected in Estonian, translated* [83]

[83] I acknowledge Dr Ilona Tragel's help on dictation and translation work of this piece.