Reverse, restore, repeat!
Class, ethnicity, and the Russian-speaking miners of Estonia

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Abstract: In this article, I look at Russian-speaking miners' perception of their position in Estonian society, along with their moral economy. Former heroes, glorified for their class and ethnicity, they feel like a racialized underclass in neoliberal Estonia. Excluded from the nation on the basis of ethnicity, they try to maintain their dignity through the discourse of hard work as a basis for membership in society. Based on the longer-term analysis of Estonian history, I argue that the current outcome for the Russian-speaking working class is related to longer historical processes of class formation whereby each period in the Estonian history of the twentieth century seems to be the reversal of the previous one. I also argue for analysis of social change in Eastern Europe that does not focus solely on ethnicity but is linked to class formation processes.

Keywords: class, ethnicity, Estonia, miners, postsocialism, Russian speakers

Introduction

> Miners chasing after brown gold inside the earth have hollowed out Ida-Virumaa from underneath like moles. Since the beginning of the Soviet period until today they have emptied out about 300 square kilometers of land. But even today, newspapers report about opening a new mine and heroic miners who shovel oil shale to the surface, to benefit the state and the people.

complains the journalist Lepassalu (2013). In a newspaper article about the mining disturbing the local villages, he quotes the local municipality leader, who says that continuing mining "will destroy the Estonian-speaking and Estonian-minded community that has been living in the villages since the thirteenth century." Russian-speaking miners, who mine oil shale to produce electricity for all of Estonia, are seen as dangerous, polluting the land and the local villages. Another journalist, Hvostov (2013), replies to Lepassalu ironically: "The enemy is amongst us. Even worse—he is underneath our feet, he hollows out the land underneath us … made cracks in our houses and fields. … Moles. Moles sent here during the Soviet power to fulfill their task—to destroy the Estonian nation."

This discussion shows that the Russian, the ethnic other, is considered dangerous in Estonia not only for its cultural and linguistic otherness often emphasized in the media and social

Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology 72 (2015): 95–108
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doi:10.3167/fcl.2015.720108

science research, but also for the type of work performed. In a country where the surface is populated with indigenous farming villages while migrants are doing the industrial and dirty work underneath the surface, hollowing out the ground, the conflict should not be framed only in terms of Estonian nationalism. Similar to other nationalist movements in Central and Eastern Europe, ethnic tensions have class tensions running alongside and underneath them, hidden from the official discourse and in spite of that very relevant. Miners are seen as problematic not only because of their Russianness, but also because they are part of the untrustworthy and backward industrial working class. Furthermore, as members of that class, they carry a questionable morality that celebrates hard manual work and demands respect for such labor. With my ethnography,[1] I am calling for analysis of Eastern Europe that goes beyond nationalism and ethnic conflict. I argue that the dispossession of miners of former economic and symbolic status is related to the wider events of Estonian history, where right- and left-wing political economies and ideologies of socialism and nationalism keep replacing each other, rejecting the key elements of the previous regime. These wider events affected and were part of class formation processes in which different groups were struggling for power, gaining and losing it based on how world political events played out in Estonia and Eastern Europe. The condition of the immigrant working class has to be understood in the context of these historical developments.

One of the main focuses of postsocialist scholarship in Central and Eastern Europe has been ethnicity, ethnic conflict, nationalism, and citizenship. The emergence of nationalism after the collapse of the Soviet Union has been explained by the particularities of the Soviet institutionalized legacy of political and territorial nationhood on the one hand, and extraterritorial and ethnocultural nationhood on the other (Hirsch 2000; Slezkine 1994; Suny and Martin 2001; Verdery 1998). It enabled a relatively orderly breakup of already existing units with their own national elites. It also created Russian minorities living in the new nation-states, understanding themselves as belonging to a different nation from the titular state-bearing nation (Brubaker 1994, 1996). In the Estonian case, research has focused on the successful legitimizing of Estonian nationalism and citizenship policy, as well as the potential political mobilization of Russian speakers (Feldman 2005b; Laitin 2007; Smith and Wilson 1997). In general, the emphasis of these approaches has been more on the political and institutional side, rather than looking at the class formation processes behind nationalism.

In the two decades since the fall of socialism, class as an analytic category has fallen out of favor in Eastern Europe. To many local and international researchers, class seemed a passé and useless concept, loaded with communist baggage (Kalb 2009), and any critique of capitalism has been silenced by the analysis of idealized return to the West (e.g., Lauristin and Vihalemm 1997). If used at all, it mostly focused on the emergence of the new elites or the middle class. Studies of postsocialist working-class lives are characterized by a tone of defeat and hopelessness (Burawoy et al. 2000; Kideckel 2008; Stenning 2005). Some of the more recent scholarship in anthropology, however, sees Eastern Europe as the place where the outcomes of the processes of making and remaking class are especially visible (Kalb 2011: 19), and current work by young scholars of Eastern Europe tends to be framed more in terms of class (Kalb and Halmai 2011).

My work aims to contribute to this body of literature, understanding class not as a social category but rather as a process of constructing social relations through active practice over time, formed as a result of common experiences (Thompson 1980). Class always creates its own external other who is continually recreated in capital expansion and dispossession in places previously outside the reach of capitalism (Harvey 2005). The concept of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 1999, 2005; Kasmir and Carbonella 2008) is increasingly used to describe the neoliberal order, and its results can be witnessed with particular starkness in the post-

socialist space after the Washington consensus (Kalb 2002). However, Chari and Verdery (2009: 14) believe that the term can also be used to think through and compare "spatial dynamics of government, accumulation, and commodification across empires. What, if not accumulation by dispossession, were the nationalizations and collectivizations the Soviets imposed on their satellites?" The focus on dispossession as a recurrent process in the lives and cultures of the working class allows for capturing the mutability of class relations, understanding class as a fluid movement of real people in real contexts (Kasmir and Carbonella 2008). I start with the analysis of historical processes of class formation and nationalism to then show in the second half of the article how these affect the lives and class identity of the present-day immigrant working class in Estonia.

Estonia in the twentieth century: Replacement, rejection, restoration

Until 1917, Estonia was part of tsarist Russia, locally ruled by German Baltic barons who Estonian peasants saw as their main enemy, instead of the more distant Russians. Ironically, the first ideas of Estonia as a separate nation were created by the Baltic Germans, taken over by the emerging Estonian elite. Ideas of Estonia as a nation were validated by the work of Herder as well as ideas of civic equality (Raun 2003). Lack of written sources made the constructors of "Estonian culture" draw on the oral traditions found in folklore and in the romantic peasant way of life and attachment to land (Abrahams 1994; Gross 2002) (a land with no occupying moles underneath their feet) as well as ethnicity, language, culture, and race.

When tracing the history of nationalism and capitalism in Estonia in the early twentieth century, it is important to note two aspects. First, in the beginning of the twentieth century, socialism was fairly popular in Estonia,[2] but Estonian socialism was always related to nationalism and aspirations of autonomy. In 1917, socialism was still seen as an attractive option for many, and the Bolshevik Workers' Commune had significant support. The eventual preference for the nationalist bourgeois state in the 1918 elections was related to the commune's inability to deal with the nationalist agenda. Instead, the Estonian Social Democrats, more successful in "integrating national and social revolutionary themes," won the elections in 1918 (Brüggemann 2006). Second, in the first decades of the twentieth century, Russians were not the only or obvious enemy. Instead, the German occupation in the Estonian war for independence in 1918 was seen as the culmination of 700 years of the German yoke, and defeating the Germans was a major victory (ibid.). This is to say that the outcome of the anti-Soviet, anti-Russian state was not an obvious path at this point.

After the establishment of the Estonian Republic, the often changing governments of the 1920s granted rights for minorities, adopting innovative and unique legislation on nonterritorial cultural autonomy whereby groups were entitled to govern their own cultural and educational affairs (Hiden and Smith 2006). According to Alenius's (2004) discourse analysis, Estonians characterized Germans and Russians with terms such as "higher estate," "lust for power," and "hostile to the Estonians." Russians were additionally characterized as "uneducated" or "the mob," "having chauvinist Russian monarchist hopes" (ibid.: 44). In economic policy, due to international pressure from the League of Nations, priority was given to development of agriculture over industry from the early 1920s onward (Klesment 2005).

The economic crisis reached Estonia in 1930 and hit particularly hard in the autumn of 1931, after Estonia's main export destination countries devalued their currencies (Valge 2011). The crisis brought along the increasing popularity of the right-wing organization of ex-servicemen. In 1934, President Päts executed a coup to prevent the increasingly popular ex-servicemen's organization from coming to power, implementing a nationalist economic system (Klesment 2005). It was accompanied by a strong national-

izing tendency, promoting the Estonianization of public life, supporting indigenous culture and reducing foreign influences, that is, those of German and Russian culture, and cutting off the political voice and cultural freedoms granted in the 1920s (Smith 1999).

In northeast Estonia, oil shale mining and chemical processing had started in the 1920s with national, British, and Swedish capital. Volumes of production were initially small, halting completely in the years of economic crisis. Uprisings and strikes took place throughout 1936 in the oil shale basin, involving miners and oil shale chemical plant workers. Police forces were used to break the strike, miners achieved only a 40 percent pay increase from their initial demands, and the strike committee members were fired and sent out of the mining towns. In order to prevent such strikes in the future, miners from Poland were brought in as cheap and obedient labor (Tambet et al. 2008).

Thus, the first Estonian Republic can be characterized by strong nationalism, especially in the 1930s, echoing tendencies in the rest of Europe: negative attitudes toward Germans and Russians, a corporatist economic policy directed at agriculture, and suppression of industrial labor. The prevailing value was nationalism, and the legitimate classes besides the elite were the Estonian peasants, while workers were seen as a threat to the national order, holding socialist views not corresponding to the existing authoritarian order.

The project of the Estonian nation-state ended with the Soviet occupation in 1940, followed by the German occupation and then again Soviet occupation in 1944, changing the political economy and ethnic composition of Estonia. Soviet power replaced the corporatist-capitalist economic policy with a socialist planned economy, and Estonian nationalism with Soviet internationalism, which sometimes took the form of outright Russification. Industrialization, accompanied by large-scale immigration of workers, was made a priority over agriculture.

Ida-Virumaa, the mining area, with its capital, Kohtla-Järve, underwent the most radical changes. The war casualties and deportations during World War II decreased the native population of Ida-Virumaa by 60 percent (Vseviov 2002). The existence of oil shale deposits and industrial infrastructure made it one of the Soviet priority areas of industrial development and influenced the population formation of the area. Intense construction of several mines started immediately. The oil shale industry was placed under the direct control of the all-union coal industry, supplying gas and electricity to the Leningrad area. The colonial model of economy, whereby natural resources from the periphery were used to benefit the center, can be seen as accumulation by dispossession.

The immigration of workers to urban areas "created urban islands of non-Estonian population in a sea of rural Estonians" (Mettam and Williams 2001: 147). Growth of the population after the war was supported by organized recruitment from other parts of the Soviet Union, mostly of unskilled workers (Vseviov 2002). In 1946, the population of Kohtla-Järve was about 10,000, and by 1989 it was 91,000. According to the census of 1989, only 44 percent of the city's population was born in Kohtla-Järve (Valge 2005). The Soviet policy led to a particular social structure, where the urban Russian speakers were the high government elite and the industrial workers constituted a separate Russian worker ethnoclass in the northeast of Estonia (Smith and Wilson 1997). The Estonian speakers occupied the middle-class positions in arts and culture. Mettam and Williams (1998: 384) hypothesize that such cultural division of labor had an "important influence on the Estonian nationalist movement as its leaders sought greater and greater levels of autonomy and finally independence." Although the Soviet power imposed control and censorship on the public sphere, Estonian political resistance existed in the informal spaces of society (Virkkunen 1999: 85).

Restoration of the Estonian Republic

The Soviet period could be characterized as a radical rejection and reversal of everything that came before, as Estonian nationalism was re-

placed by internationalism/Russification, and the idyll of the Estonian peasant with extensive industrialization and urbanization. New classes of Russian-speaking industrial workers and a Russian-speaking political elite were formed, while Estonians maintained their positions in culture, arts, and agriculture, preserving the values of the first republic to a certain extent. Thus, the beginning of the restored Estonian Republic was another radical rejection, reversal, and restoration project. This meant rejecting Soviet ethnic, economic, and class policy and trying to restore the order of the first republic. Socialism was associated with Russianness and vice versa, and both of these were considered outright evil, since Estonians had suffered under Soviet occupation for 50 years. Restoring the pre-Soviet republic consisting of Estonians was accompanied by the hope that Russians would return to their ethnic homeland (Ehala 2009). The term "minority" was applied only to ethnic minorities who were present in Estonia before 1940, while the Russian-speaking newcomers were often termed colonists or occupants (Petersoo 2007). A restrictive citizenship policy was applied whereby everyone who was not, or whose ancestors had not been, Estonian citizens before the Soviet occupation in 1940 had to take a language test to receive citizenship. This included the Russian minority of the country, nearly 30 percent of the total population of 1.5 million inhabitants. Hroch (1996) calls this a "repeat performance" whereby leaders of new national movements use the successful methods of old national movements and believe that ethnic values can be restored.

The discourse of politicians in Estonia emphasized Estonia's cultural belonging to the West. Estonians were quick to take advantage of the Huntingtonian discourse of the clash of civilizations. As Merritt (2000: 248) puts it,

> Huntington writes of a civilizational divide: and, as the temptation presents itself, countries that are on the western side of the divide are quick to comprehend the difference as one of civilized versus uncivilized. Estonia's [Lutheran] Christian rather than Orthodox past is understood as Western in a way that Russia can never hope to be; this line of argument suggests a permanence about difference that neatly fits extreme nationalist insistence in both countries about the inflexibility of identity.

The foreign policy discourse emphasized the "existential insecurity" stemming from Russia's presence (Feldman 2005a; Feldman 2005b), and politicians tried to present themselves as pro-Western, meaning pro-security, in opposition to those who were pro-Russian and therefore dangerous. More importantly, Kuus (2007) emphasizes that in this discourse, Russia is not referred to only as the Russian state, but Russianness more generally, including also the domestic presence of Russian speakers. As late as 1999, more than four years after the Soviet army's withdrawal from Estonia, 63 percent of Estonians considered Russophones to be a national threat (Pettai 2000: 95, quoted in Ehala 2009).

The restoration also included economic policy. Ruutsoo (1998) argues that the main aims in establishing an ethnocentric citizenship law were to detach Estonia from the Russian economy and to connect the economy to the West by enforcing (neo)liberal economic policy. Russians were seen as a potential threat, primarily in developing economic relations with Russia, while the official policy was disconnecting Estonia from the Russian economic sphere and connecting it with Europe. Furthermore, the "socialist mentality" of Russian speakers was seen as a threat to the liberal economy envisioned by the state. In other words, Estonia's citizenship law and nationalism were inseparable from the project of crystallizing the power of a particular class that was to execute its vision on liberal economic policy.

Tensions that had lain under the surface emerged during the so-called Bronze Night in 2007 when removing a Soviet World War II memorial caused riots and increased ethnic tensions in Estonian society. Ordinary Estonian speakers believed that the suffering of Estonians during World War II and the Soviet occupa-

tion delegitimized the Russian speakers' right to their own memories of suffering (Melchior and Visser 2011). Ehala (2009: 152) argues that it was "the feeling of the threat of weakening ethnic identity and the blurring of boundaries between Estonians and Russophones that motivated small right wing groups on both sides to look for measures to increase ethnic mobilization." Bronze Soldier events have also been interpreted as an ethnic counterreaction to forced multiculturalism imposed by the European Union (Saarts 2008). Although there is truth in the above statements, the events around the Bronze Soldier did not concern only ethnic fear and the rejection of multiculturalism, but rather echoed the processes of right-wing nationalism elsewhere. As Kalb (2011) argues, the working classes are turning to right-wing politics due to a lack of left-wing voices, as the elite has abandoned the joint program of the welfare state and the only legitimate way for the working class to be part of larger society is through the discourse of nationalism. Estonian and Russian nationalism is related to economic and welfare dispossession of the working class, and through nationalism, its members are voicing their disapproval of the liberal economic policy. But as the discourse of Estonian nationalism was not available for the Russian-speaking working class, they instead turned to the discourse of hard work, which I will address in the final part of this article.

The exclusion of the Russian-speaking part of the working class from national politics has been one of the guarantees of the continued success of right-wing parties at the elections. For example, miners, who often did not have Estonian citizenship, were politically rather indifferent and passive, but when they did vote, they voted for the populist left-leaning Centre Party. This was the only party that had systematically tried to engage with the Russian-speaking population and was also preferred by other Estonian residents who were poorer, older, and often did not have higher education. Nevertheless, since Estonian nationalism was coupled with liberal economic policy, it channeled most of the Estonian voters to support parties that talked about the Russian danger and integration with the West. If the Soviet system was pro-industry and workers, relatively egalitarian and international with a Russian flavor, then the restoration project was to reverse this: valuing entrepreneurs rather than workers, competition instead of egalitarianism, and Estonians instead of Russians. This also affected class formation processes through which the Estonian speakers previously in the middle of the society assumed elite positions and the dispossessed working class moved to the bottom. This produced important consequences for Russian-speaking miners, to whose life and work I now turn.

Being an Afro-Russian

Since 1991, the Russian-speaking industrial region of Ida-Virumaa has suffered more than other areas of Estonia. Unemployment has been significantly higher than in the rest of Estonia, reaching 25 percent during the economic crisis of 2008. The average income in Ida-Virumaa stayed considerably lower than the Estonian average. The mining sector experienced large cutbacks. Production that reached 30 million tons in 1980 has dropped to 11–15 tons a year in the last decade (Holmberg 2008; Varb and Tambet 2008), and the 10,000 miners of 1999 were reduced to about 3,000 by 2010. Out of ten underground and open-cast mines, three currently remain open. But if there is one group of workers who could still be satisfied with their lives, it would be miners. They have a stable job, and their salary is significantly higher than the Estonian average. Moreover, their work is crucial for the country's energy production—Estonia produces about 90 percent of its electricity from oil shale, and the country is completely dependent on it. Nevertheless, miners feel at a loss.

In the Homeland[3] mine where I did my fieldwork, most workers and middle-level engineers were Russian-speaking. Estonian workers were a minority who usually tried to keep quiet and mind their own business of earning good piece

rates. Since every department or unit had a couple of Estonian speakers at the most, conflicts rarely emerged, and Estonians were rather a rare curiosity. In the First Production Department, there were three Estonians and 70 Russian speakers. The two Estonian miners, Peeter and Märt, usually worked together. The common language in the department was Russian, but Peeter curiously used Estonian swear words even in his Russian. For the Estonians it was a place where speaking Russian was absolutely necessary.

Conflicts emerged during bigger political events like the Bronze Night in 2007 and the Russia-Georgia war a year later. Estonian speakers described how, in this case, they felt that it was too much listening to their colleagues' political opinions for days; sometimes, uncharacteristically, they exploded, saying things like, "If you do not like it here, go to Russia." The mine was still a place where Russian speakers were the majority; their opinions prevailed, and the Estonian minority usually avoided discussions about politics. People tried to maintain the friendly working relations that they remembered from the Soviet period and kept politics out of the mine. Therefore, in the underground space of the mine, ethnicity lost its significance in everyday interactions. Only those in the top management of the mining company, in their distant offices, were Estonians.

But at the level of the general society, miners were unhappy with their position. Their grievances were related to the working-class experience more generally, and highlighted that being Russian often meant being working class and more working-class people were Russian-speaking, because of their history of labor migration for heavy industry. With the decline of the status of the working class, all members of the working class felt at a loss, but since Russians were the majority and also faced difficulties due to language and citizenship laws, it was especially hard for them. Despite the general perception that Russian speakers felt discriminated against in Estonian society, this discrimination was not based only on the fact that the victim was Russian. It was also about the deterioration of the status and quality of life for the working class in general.

The new language requirements meant that Russian speakers felt more fixed or enslaved in the position of being workers in heavy industry because a lack of Estonian language skills barred them from service or office jobs. Interestingly, the dissatisfaction was not framed in terms of the small number of Russian speakers working in white-collar jobs. Instead, I was often asked why there were so few Estonians working underground. One day I was repairing mining machinery with Jura when he asked me this question. I asked what he thought the reason was. "I do not know. Maybe they like warm offices better." Ljosha joined our conversation and explained that to work on the surface, one would need to know the Estonian language, and there were more Russians working underground because Russians were the majority in northeast Estonia. Jura did not quite agree. "Well, maybe half of the population in northeast Estonia is Russian, but how many Estonians do we have in our department? Three out of 70." Then Kolja, the foreman, joined in and said that Estonians did not want to work in the mines simply because it was very dirty.

Miners felt that they do not have the wages or the respect that they used to have, and that they carried out work that Estonians considered too dirty. Sometimes this brought racial undertones to the miners' discourse, as they called themselves "Afro-Russians" or "Russian Negroes." This did not only signify workers, but anyone who was working underground. The two managers of the First Production Department were telling me about their experiences with other Soviet mines when one of them taught me that the deepest mine is in South Africa, three kilometers deep, and there, engineers do not go to the deepest levels at all; only Negroes [*negry*] work there. "Negroes?" I asked, to verify that I had heard correctly. The mechanic was laughing. "Well, those Negroes probably get a better salary than Estonian Negroes. Everyone who works here is a Negro. Only Estonian

white-skinned Negroes." The mechanic was referring to the fact that now everyone working in the mines was the underclass. Thus, anyone working in heavy industry, which was now somehow seen as redundant, especially underground, considered themselves "Negroes", whether they were a worker or a foreman. The miners' statements above show that besides the violence of imposing racist categories on the other, race is also becoming part of the group's self-identification, a self-subscribed identity used with a certain irony. Their statement might echo what Serbian workers are expressing when they compare Serbia to Africa, characterized by poverty and underdevelopment, translated into personal humiliation and loss of dignity (Vetta 2011). The Estonian miners are not completely deprived of modernity (Ferguson 1999; Kalb 2011): indeed, their stable jobs allow them to be part of the new consumer society, and new machinery has considerably reduced the physical load of their work. At the same time, in 2010, miners were simultaneously struggling with the threat of shortened annual leave, rising retirement age, deteriorating health care, increasing unemployment, and the overall economic decline of the region. The destruction of industry and economic and symbolic dispossession seemed to make them feel as if their own role in this modernity was somehow reduced, leaving them irony as the only tool to maintain their dignity. Industrial professions are seen as unprestigious and linked to a particular class experience because of a general loss of security and welfare and the absence of the dominant ethnic group working in such positions. In language describing themselves, they mix both class and racial categories to try to explain their situation.

Everywhere in Central and Eastern Europe, the working classes have lost their status and have become the internal enemy. As Stenning (2005: 984) describes, both urban and rural working-class communities are depicted as "hopeless, redundant, aggressive, miserable and pathological," characterized as passive and dependent poor who lack entrepreneurialism and responsibility. As Buchowski (2006) explains, the degree to which certain groups have embraced free market ideology determines whether they are grouped together with the elites or Orientalized as the internal other. This divides people based on "capitalism and socialism, civility and primitivism, and class distinction into elites and plebs" (p.466). Stigmatization of the working class is not only a postsocialist phenomenon but a wider postindustrial tendency (Jones 2011). Metcalfe (1990: 46) believes that miners, more than any other members of the working class, have been particularly stigmatized. "For centuries they have been seen as less than fully human, either because they are bestial, immoral, immature or sick. The language used to describe them would be called racist if their skin was black by nature rather than occupation."

In the case of Estonia, Orientalizing was similarly directed against workers and rural populations, but Russians, who culturally belonged to the other side of the civilizational border, were an especially easy target. As Buchowski points out, "others" are characterized by harmful or dangerous characteristics of displaying solidarity, resisting the market economy, and rejecting social inequality (2006: 474). The danger, it seems, is not limited to belonging to a particular group, like the rural poor or the Russians, but displaying particular modes of thought that contradict hegemonic liberal capitalism. Sociological surveys in Estonia have shown that those who could be considered the "losers" of transition—the poor, women, people in the countryside, and Russian speakers—tend to have a more egalitarian, left-leaning worldview and blame their economic hardships after transition on external causes rather than a lack of particular individual qualities (Lauristin 2004; Lindemann and Saar 2008; Saar 2002).

Dangerous morality of hard work

Expressing a particular morality helps to construct class boundaries based on certain values

that a particular group shares and that are different from those of the elites. Michele Lamont (2001) argues that class identity is constructed as workers create moral boundaries around people who share their values, whereby they contrast themselves with those above them and below them. People's attitudes about the world around them, about questions of the value of work, gender roles, and how the country should be run, are tools for constructing class and ethnic boundaries and a way through which workers aim to gain dignity and respect. These moral boundaries are constructed differently based on different histories, political-economic conditions, and cultural features.

The working class of Central and Eastern Europe, deprived of a leftist alternative, turns to nationalism. For Russian speakers in Estonia, nationalism is not a viable option; they have been excluded from this discourse. Instead, they maintain the discourse of egalitarian society and hard work as a way of ordering their world and having a voice. I argue that this discourse is simultaneously their way of resisting the neoliberal order and trying to be part of it.

From the conversations with mine workers, it was clear that they preferred their own community to be fairly egalitarian, as miners and managers continued to enjoy similar leisure practices and protest against new management policies that would create a larger social difference between miners and engineers. They also wished for a better welfare state, lamenting about the declining social, educational, and medical services. This aspect of miners' moral economy can be seen as a way to reject the current neoliberal order. The elite and the media see these ideals as old-fashioned, "Soviet", and therefore anti-Estonian.

Besides sharing the egalitarian worldview with the other dispossessed of the new Estonia, miners have a particular aspect that is central to their moral code: their dignity is linked with doing hard work. It is not the hard work of Estonian peasants toiling on the land, but hard work related to progress in heavy industry. This applies to both Estonian- and Russian-speaking miners; this morality was shared by both.

All the retired miners and engineers talked of how the Soviet miners survived very tough, wet, dirty, dusty, and dangerous conditions and were paid for it accordingly. Mine workers saw themselves as those who did the real work, those who worked hard, as opposed to white-collar workers, who tended to be Estonians, different because of their position in their relation to production and their moral code. Being an industrial worker and working hard were synonymous for them and formed the basis for their entitlements. "My parents worked in the mine, how could they be lazy?! My husband worked in the mine, what laziness?," Valya, a 50-year-old dispatcher from the processing plant, lamented. "Valya, this is just how the media presents it," her colleague Lera, also in her fifties, consoled her. "We work normally [*normalno*]," Valya insisted. "Mostly Russians worked in the mine, right? And this is the same now. In the construction industry there are only Russians. They are where the work is hardest," Lera concluded.

The workers emphasized the strong work ethic of anyone who worked in the mine. If their parents had come all the way from Russia to rebuild the ruins after the war, surely they must have worked hard. Their migrant status both as restorers of the country, in the Soviet period, and as those with fewer opportunities than Estonian speakers during the last twenty years allowed Russian-speaking workers to construct their image not only of miners as hard workers but also of Russian speakers as hard workers. The discourse of hard work was partially related to the objectively hard working conditions and partially the glorifying Soviet discourse that miners were used to hearing about their work. Even more importantly, the discourse of hard work allowed Russian speakers and miners to maintain their respectability in the neoliberal atmosphere where industrial work was no longer prestigious. Deprived of citizenship on the basis of ethnicity, they were trying to access their place as worthy citizens of the new

order by emphasizing their labor. Nonetheless, this was never fully satisfactory, as the type of hard work that miners were doing did not correspond to the new type of hard work mostly based in the clean offices on the surface. This introduced an uneasy tension where the idea of hard work was shared by both the elite and the workers, but the understanding of what constituted *real work* was viewed differently.

Mine workers, men and women, were also proud of their identity as workers, despite simultaneously feeling like a downtrodden underclass. One day I was standing in the windy and dusty yard between two railways with some women from the loading department who were taking a short break. As always, the women were complaining about their hard work and poor pay. "Raising the kid alone, I only have money for basic food, I cannot travel, I cannot afford to fix my teeth," said Anya, a militant young loading operator. "But who wouldn't have these problems?" asked Masha, an older woman, trying to calm Anya down. "Those who have education don't have these problems," Anya replied. "Well, in that case, you should have gotten some education," Masha said. But Anya was not happy with this response: "If we all become educated, who is then going to do the work?" Anya, despite being in her mid-thirties, with little experience of the Soviet Union, had quit school when she was 16 and done different blue-collar jobs after that. She, like many other unskilled workers, firmly believed in the value of physical labor. This dialogue shows Anya's understanding that blue-collar workers were the ones who were actually working hard, while the activities of the educated classes were seen as dubious and nonproductive. Workers were needed so that some *actual* productive work would be done in the country. Thus, they were claiming citizenship and respect based on hard work that was also real work. Belief in an egalitarian society and hard work was the way that miners simultaneously maintained their class boundaries and rejected the neoliberal economy. At the same time, the discourse of hard work situated the miners in Estonia's dominant neoliberal discourse when they were deprived of the discourse of nationalism.

Conclusion

Russian-speaking miners comprise a particular segment of the Estonian working class. They represent everything that the Estonian Republic is not. They are Russian speakers, while mainstream society speaks Estonian. They are recent immigrants, while the archetypical Estonian peasant, the symbol of Estonian nationalism, has lived on the land since time immemorial. The Russian-speaking miner was the hero of the Soviet period, symbolically glorified and materially better off than other social groups. He believed in socialism and has not given up the ideas of egalitarianism and the welfare state looking after its workers. Moreover, even though he believes in the morality of hard work that fits the neoliberal times, he believes that this work can be hard, physical work in a polluting industry and that respect and monetary privileges should be rewarded for it. His character is anti-Estonian because he does not fit into the early nineteenth-century nationalist romanticism nor the agriculture-based nationalism of the first republic, where Russians, Germans, and the working class were seen as alien elements. His moment of glory in the Soviet period was the Estonian nation's moment of suffering. So now let him suffer. And he does. He feels dispossessed due to the material decline around him, and dispossessed of glory.

What this Russian miner represents and his ways of maintaining dignity are related to larger class formation processes. I have tried to track these processes from the early twentieth century, when the main opposition was between the Estonian peasantry and the German barons. The barons nevertheless inspired the emerging local elite's ideas about creating the Estonian nation. The barons were the most hated enemy as well as the cultural link to the West that later firmly fixed Estonia to the West of the Huntingtonian divide. The Russians were the more

distant rulers during tsarist times and the poor and uneducated peasants of the first republic. At that time, socialism was not only associated with Russia and Russians, as socialism also had strong support among Estonians. But Estonian socialism was always linked to nationalism, later giving way to the bourgeois state. In Estonian society the worker seemed to be a controversial figure who was present but needed to be suppressed to defend the interests of the state. The Soviet Union represented the reversal of the regime and strongly influenced class formation processes. Part of the old national elite migrated, was deported, or was killed. The remaining national elite and the class of small peasants were repositioned with the immigration of political elites and workers from Russia. The Soviet period represented a struggle in which the Russian-speaking workers and elite were formally the powerful classes in society, but the Estonian cultural elite resisted the ideology of socialism and Russification, never fully accepting the new order. With the reshuffling of world politics and the collapse of the Soviet Union, their opportunity emerged. This was followed by the complete reversal of what had been, with economic policy and nationalism being its strongest markers. The new class formation processes saw the Estonian-speaking, economically liberal elite emerging, playing on nationalism to achieve a particular economic outcome and securing its own position. The industrial and agricultural workers, the poor, women, and minorities were economically and symbolically dispossessed. For them, their only way of being part of the Estonian success story was to buy into the neoliberal parties' economic vision and Estonian nationalism. However, this group is not homogenous; the "immigrants" cannot be part of Estonian nationalism because of their ethnicity, and they cannot be part of the economic vision because of their position as industrial workers with a wrong and dangerous moral economy. Russian miners try to become citizens based on their labor when they cannot do it on the basis of ethnicity, but the type of labor they do is no longer valued. Thus, looking only at ethnic conflict does not tell the full story of long-term class formation processes and projects of capitalist and socialist dispossession.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Frances Pine, Mao Mollona, and Nicholas DeGenova for helping me with the initial version of this article during my PhD studies. John Schoeberlein and Alima Bissenova gave constructive feedback during the presentation of an earlier version of this article at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan. During a workshop held at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Don Kalb, Christian Strümpell, Chris Hann, Jonathan Parry, Catherine Alexander, Andrew Sanchez, Dina Makram-Ebeid, Dimitra Kofti, Tommaso Trevisani, and Michael Hoffmann constructively helped me shape the article. David Pepper and Irina Andrushko gave their invaluable assistance when I was struggling with languages that are not my mother tongue. I would also like to thank the editors and reviewers at *Focaal* for helpful and productive suggestions on improvements.

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Notes

1. My research is based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork in the mining area of Ida-Virumaa, northeast Estonia, the former industrial area populated mostly by Russian speakers. During the fieldwork I lived together with the family of a local mining engineer, observed the everyday work of various departments in a mine, and participated in various management and trade union meetings. My

native language is Estonian, and having learned Russian at school very poorly, as a young person's way of resisting Russian occupation and cultural domination, I had to make a significant effort to learn the language as a PhD student years later after realizing that the tables of cultural domination and economic privileges had turned in Estonia.

2. The first Estonian party, established in 1905, was the Estonian Social Democratic Workers' Union (ESDWU). Furthermore, Bolsheviks gathered nearly 40 percent of the vote in the Constituent Assembly elections of 1917.
3. Its name has been changed to protect workers' anonymity.

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