

# Make Love at War? Representing Gender and Memory in the Soviet Estonian Film *Dark Windows* (*Pimedad aknad*, Tõnis Kask, 1968)



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## ABSTRACT

Initially produced in 1968 as a three-part TV miniseries, and restored and re-edited in 2008 as a feature-length film, *Dark Windows* (*Pimedad aknad*, Tõnis Kask, Estonia) explores interpersonal relations and everyday life in September 1944, during the last days of Estonia's occupation by Nazi Germany. The story focuses on two young women and the struggles they face in making moral choices and falling in love with righteous men. The one who slips up and falls in love with a Nazi is condemned and made to feel responsible for the national decay. This article explores how the category of gender becomes a marker in the way the film reconstructs and reconstitutes the images of 'us' and 'them'. The article also discusses the re-appropriation process and analyses how re-editing relates to remembering of not only the filmmaking process and the wartime occupation, but also the Estonian women and how the ones who 'slipped up' are later reintegrated into the national narrative. Ultimately, the article seeks to understand how this film from the Soviet era is remembered as it becomes a part of Estonian national filmography.

## INTRODUCTION

*Tooni: 'Twenty eggs to be a Schöne Frau...'*

*Leeda: 'Is it a sin to love?'*

*Tooni: 'A woman is not a cattle trail for everyone to trample on.'*

In 1976, a great fire rampaged in the repository of Soviet Estonian Public Broadcasting Archive in Tallinn. In the fire, the original film elements of Tõnis Kask's first screen project at Eesti Telefilm (Estonian Television Film Studio) – the three-part miniseries *Dark Windows* (*Pimedad aknad*, Estonia, 1968) – were destroyed. Since the miniseries had also been broadcast in other Socialist states, it was hoped that

a copy could be found and restored. The film was found in the archives in Belarus, and between 2005 and 2007, the Estonian Public Broadcasting, in cooperation with Profilm, re-edited and restored the found footage. In the process, some scenes were omitted, while others were added or reshot. Since the original soundtrack was lost, new actors had to provide the characters with voices. The original miniseries became a feature-length film. On 13 February 2008, the new version premiered to a select audience, and in end of March of the same year to the general public. In 2012 it was shown on Estonian Television as a part of the celebrations for the centenary of Estonian film. *Dark Windows* was considered important

as it was arguably 'non-Soviet' and seemed to differ from the other Soviet films that depicted the Nazis (Kulli 2008). The film is set in Tallinn in September 1944 during the last month of the German occupation. It focuses on the moral choices faced by two young Estonian women – Maarja (Marianne Leover) and Leeda (Ada Lundver). Leeda, who falls in love with Gert (Jaak Tamleht), a Baltic German<sup>1</sup> officer, is condemned by the other Estonian women who are trying to keep a distance from the Germans. Maarja, on the other hand, is in love with Mati (Ao Peep), an Estonian partisan. She is imprisoned because Leeda testifies against her when Gert leaves Leeda's love unrequited. In what follows, I will argue that the film demonstrates the crucial role that gender plays in defining the enemy, by constructing 'us' and 'them'. The film also highlights the issues of gender relations, power and memory dynamics of the past and present.

The intersections of gender and national discourses in (post-) Soviet Estonian cultural memory have yet to be studied in depth. There have been ethnographic studies about autobiographies and collected life-stories (e.g. Kõresaar 2005, 2016; Jõesalu 2017; Jõesalu, Kõresaar 2013). In those studies, the main determinant has been generation, while societal groups and categories such as gender and ethnicity have attracted less attention. Women's memories have been scrutinised in a large body of literature dealing with women's war memories, which have been published by literary scholars (e.g. Käosaar-Kurvet 2018, Hinrikus 2009, Kirss 2006). These studies often treat men and women from an essentialist point of view, and do not focus on gendered hierarchies and power relations. So far only a few scholars

have treated gender as an analytical category when studying the gendered nature of the Estonian nation (e.g. Põldsaar 2009, Kivimaa 2001). As for (post-) Soviet Estonian cinema, some remarkable work has been done on the cinema of Soviet Estonia and Eastern Europe, including studies that have analysed how the concepts of nation and space are interrelated (e.g. Närepea 2012). Nonetheless, the exploration of the interdependencies of gender, nation and memory in the (post-) Soviet Estonian historiography and cinema is only beginning.

The main aim of this article is to look at how the configurations of gender reproduce the cultural and historical power hierarchies of the past and present, and how this is embedded in the national discourse. In other words, I am interested in how gender becomes a signifier in the way *Dark Windows* reconstructs and (de)stabilises the images of 'us' (Estonians) and 'the Other' (Germans). As the film was restored a decade ago, I am also interested in its memory dynamics – how the German occupation is remembered and how the film is integrated into the Estonian national narrative. Ultimately, I aim to demonstrate that the category of gender was used in the original miniseries as a means of explaining to the audience who the national enemies were, while also demonstrating the moral inferiority of the Germans.

The discussion is divided into three parts. In the first part I will establish the framework of my study. In this part I will approach *Dark Windows* from a feminist historian's perspective and not as a film or visual scholar. I will apply theories that allow me to analyse the representations of memory, gender and nation in film, particularly in *Dark Windows*. In the second part I will focus on the contextualisation of the film and how it currently relates to memory. Here, I will take into account what was said in the media about the film at the time it was restored. In the last, and main part of the article, I will take a closer look at what is seen and said in the film. I will trace the ways in which the images of gender and nation surface and act, creating the

1 Baltic Germans were an ethnic minority who had lived on the territory of Estonia since the 13th century, and formed a part of the upper class – the nobility and merchants. In the Estonian historiography, the Baltic Germans were often represented as the conquerors of Estonian peasants. Their dominance was resented and symbolically referred to as '700 years of serfdom' (Petersoo 2007: 122).

gendered national narrative of the past and present.

## ESTABLISHING THE FRAMEWORK

Astrid Erll and Stephanie Wodianka argue that film has the potential to form collective memory – to become a film of remembrance. Thus, the way a film forms memory and becomes a part of it depends on its ‘plurimedial networks’, i.e. how the film is discussed and interpreted in other medial contexts. Therefore, a film itself does not remember but remembering happens through and around it (Erll, Wodianka 2008: 6–8). Cultural memory is a site where certain ideas, values and stereotypes, as well as gender and nation, are re-produced, re-created and also contested. Memory and gender as interdependent categories are generated and reproduced at certain moments and in certain contexts. Temporality is crucial here as it refers to an on-going process and constant making – the dynamics of this should be taken into account when studying gender and memory. Therefore, I will reflect on the concept of remembering, as it occurs in and around the film, and take my own reading into account in reproducing certain images of memory.

Stuart Hall has pointed out that representation is the production of meaning through language – not only written and spoken language, but also through visual images that are used to express meaning. Representation is produced in a process that links the individual with shared cultural codes and conceptual maps. Meaning becomes firmly constituted by a complex representational system that, after a while, is seen as inevitable (Hall 1997: 15–19). According to Claudia Liebrand, gender configurations play a crucial role in organising the representational system in film. Genres, including film genres, are gender-connoted, and at the same time, gender is constructed and constituted in the process of film (Liebrand 2003: 7). Yet, representation is discursive – it changes and alters over time and the meaning will depend on the *reader's* perspective, premises, position

and context. In this essay I close read the re-edited version of *Dark Windows* from a feminist historian's perspective.

Feminist scholars have studied how nation and nationalism are not only constructed, but also how they are intersected with other categories, such as gender, race, class, ethnicity and generation. Anne McClintock has pointed out that nation and nationalism are often manifested through the ‘iconography of familial and domestic space’, i.e. through the trope of hierarchical family (McClintock 1993: 63). According to feminist scholars, nationalism and nations are male constructions that stem from masculine memory (e.g. McClintock 1993, Nagel 1998, Yuval-Davis 1997). This construction relies on a gender difference (McClintock 1993: 62). The gender difference, in turn, determines who has access to power and who does not. Masculinity is preferred over femininity. Men are seen as ‘metonymic’ with the nation as a whole, women are subsumed to a symbolic role, as the metaphorical limits and borders as well as bearers of nation that do not have agency (McClintock 1993).

Thomas Hylland Eriksen's study on sex, violence and nationalism complements earlier feminist approaches. He emphasises that nationalism is based on gender dualism rather than on masculinity. He sees the female role in the domestic sphere as being as important as the male ‘strength, violence and sacrifice’ (Eriksen 2017: 1442). Eriksen stresses the situationality of nations – their female, and thus passive, role is brought forth when they appear as victims or in the continuity of tradition, or when times are peaceful (Eriksen 2017: 1439). He proposes that gender is relational and that various types of masculinities come to the fore at different times (Eriksen 2017: 1440). In other words, certain masculinities are considered the ideal of national narratives at a certain time. As for my study, I will not only take into account the gender and national narrative of Soviet era, but position my study within the gendered nation(alism) of post-Soviet Estonian memory politics.

In order to do so, I employ Anja Schwarz and Sabine Lucia Müller's conceptualisation of gender and memory. In their view, memory is reconstructed and recontextualised in the present, the nature of memory is iterative and constantly reinvented, and the categories of memory and gender are interdependent. Gender is simultaneously a 'product of cultural memory and its important variable in producing the cultural memory' (Schwarz, Müller 2008: 10). Historical agents and figures are reconstructed from the contemporary perspective and depend on the current roles of gender. The category of gender reconstitutes what should or should not be remembered, and therefore, allowed or not allowed into the cultural memory (Schwarz, Müller 2008). Even though Schwarz and Müller focus on remembering the homosexual Holocaust victims, their study can be applied in other contexts, too. For example, the memory acts of Estonian heterosexual families and victims of deportations have long dominated post-Soviet remembering in Estonia, excluding the experiences of other social and ethnic groups.

Inspiring stories from and about the past create nations and help keep them together. Every nation follows a narrative pattern. Marek Tamm argues that the Estonian national historical narrative is based on 'fighting the foreign enemy' – connected with the idea of independence and a struggle for freedom. The Estonian national past is narrated along the lines of losing or gaining independence, and a long period of history is explained through battles and revolts that together form a grand struggle for independence (Tamm 2018: 18). I suggest that *Dark Windows* fits into this template of the national narrative – it depicts one occupation by speaking about the other; the film visualises national struggles against the foreign aggressor in general, and adds an emotional tone to it. To some extent, restoring the film may have been motivated by its good fit with the national narrative, thereby becoming a part of the process of integrating bits of the Soviet past with the national history.

According to Kirsti Jõesalu, since the 2000s there has been a growing interest in collecting and conceptualising the (everyday) life of Soviet Estonia – museums are exhibiting the material culture of late Socialism, and the newspapers have called for people to submit memories for publication. Jõesalu argues that the main reason for this shift lies in the discrepancy between the official narrative of suffering, and the memory of the generation that was born into the Soviet Union between the 1940s and 1970s, which has different memories and stories to tell (Jõesalu 2017). Restoring and showing films produced in the Soviet era can be seen as part of this same shift. Jaak Lõhmus has pointed out that the main reason for screening these films is to overturn the prevailing stereotype of the films being merely 'Red propaganda' and that it is important to see them as part of our cultural heritage (Palli 2012). Thereby, Soviet Estonian filmography becomes integrated with national history.

### THE RE-EDITING PROCESS OF DARK WINDOWS

Since *Dark Windows* was shot in the Soviet era and restored and re-edited in 2008, it relates to memory in a specific way, and contains memory layers from both the Soviet era and the present. In order to trace the memory work, it is useful to look at the restoration process and see how the film was re-appropriated for present-day audiences. As the original miniseries was not available to the public, I rely here on the TV programme *Kaadrisk (In the Frame)*, which introduced the film on Estonian Television in 2012 as a part of the centenary of Estonian cinema. The director and the actors of *Dark Windows* were invited to the studio to comment on the film and its creation and restoration process. I also rely on an interview<sup>2</sup> with Elvira Mutt who edited the original miniseries and candidly shared her memories with me.

2 The author's interview with Elvira Mutt on 12 July 2018.

Originally produced as a three-part miniseries, *Dark Windows* received a prime-time premiere between 1 and 3 April 1968. During the re-editing process, the series was shortened (for example, by omitting the beginning and ending of each episode) and turned into a full-length feature film. In *Kaadrís* the re-editing process is rather loosely described and presented as being an act of common sense – as if everyone would understand what is meant by it. For example, Tõnis Kask explains that he had to omit the parts that would not be ‘deemed believable today’. He also notes that certain topics and character types were originally included in the miniseries only as a way of getting away with other things (Lõhmus 2012). Introducing the film with this commentary not only contextualised and integrated it with the dominant national narrative of the Estonian past but also guided the audience how to watch the film.

Notably, Kask used archival footage to create a historic atmosphere and educate the younger generation about the occupation and the war (Anonymous 1967). In the re-edited version, only a few documentary sequences remained intact. Kask explained these omissions by arguing that most of this footage would not seem plausible anymore (Lõhmus 2012). This choosing and editing alludes to the memory dynamics of the past and present, and illustrates the point that Gary R. Edgerton has made in his study on television histories, namely that most popular historians are interested in contemporary perspectives about the past that are relevant for them and their target audience, and therefore, they are more inspired by various stories than by recapturing the objective truth about the past (Edgerton 2001: 3–4). In the case of *Dark Windows* this also applies to memory that reflects current relations and situations rather than those of the past. Remembering therefore has two layers here – firstly the remembering of the filmmaking process, and secondly the remembering of the occupations.

According to Ann Rigney, remembering is a process between forgetting and

‘unforgetting’ and this is never straightforward (Rigney 2018: 243). The miniseries contained scenes of Tallinn Old Town after its bombing with shots of the smouldering ruins. The focus was on the burnt St. Nicholas’ Church. Elvira Mutt has maintained that those scenes were included to remind the audience about who actually bombed Tallinn in March 1944 (i.e. the Soviets). She continues by saying that the focus should now be on human relations and the war in general. The scenes of bombed Tallinn and the burnt church were left out and replaced with new scenes of war refugees on the road.<sup>3</sup> It could be that looking back from a distance allows for a less grotesque representation (as the grotesque would be too much now) and brings the circulation of memories to the fore. Also, that which might have seemed self-evident then is not so today and vice versa.

In our interview, Mutt also described her own experience with editing the miniseries, the filmmaking process in Soviet Union generally, and compared the two versions. According to her, the main difference is in the representation of the Nazi Germans and the occupation. Firstly, the miniseries depicted more symbols of the Third Reich – its flag was shown on the top of the Tall Hermann tower. The scenes of people suffering and waiting for their execution in the Klooga<sup>4</sup> concentration camp were longer. The re-edited film depicts soldiers in Nazi uniforms and some scenes in Klooga, but it seems to put more emphasis on the war in general. Excluding the explicit and straightforward scenes about the Nazi occupation brings forth the dynamics of memory. In Estonian cultural memory, the German occupation is compared with the Soviet one, and in that context, the German era is often perceived in more positive terms (Hinrikus 2006).

Secondly, Mutt points out, the Nazi soldiers in the original miniseries were

3 The author’s interview with Elvira Mutt on 12 July 2018.  
4 In keeping with Soviet ideology, which avoided any ethnic and religious ‘tags’ when speaking about the Holocaust (Judt 2005: 823), the film depicts Estonians, not Jews, at the Klooga concentration camp.



depicted in more grotesque terms, because it was a canon of Soviet cinema to portray them as cruel and aggressive<sup>5</sup> (cf., e.g., Baraban 2007, Youngblood 2001). Mutt stresses that even the Baltic German officer (the main character) was represented as rather pitiless. In a scene that was omitted from the restored version, he was abusive and unforgiving towards an Estonian woman who was about to be burnt alive in Klooga. Mutt agrees that in the re-edited film the Germans are portrayed more ambivalently and less negatively than in the original miniseries. In life-stories, Nazi soldiers are often remembered rather positively – they were seen as clean, handsome and cultured in comparison with the Soviet soldiers. The romantic relationships with Nazi soldiers were not condemned because Nazis were considered to be ‘barbarous’ occupiers, but because they were seen as foreigners (Hinrikus 2006: 11–13). In this way, it seems that the re-appropriated film does not challenge the overall cultural memory of Nazi soldiers.

Mutt and Kask have both pointed out that the film was approved by the censors only with minor changes<sup>6</sup>. The main change required of the filmmakers concerned the end of the film. According to Kask, the ending

of the miniseries was considered too lenient by the censors as it was expected that no forgiveness would be shown to the women who had betrayed the nation and the Soviet Union. During the re-editing process the end was re-shot – the mother (Lisl Lindau) now forgave her daughter. Apparently, re-staging this scene the way it was initially planned was essential to Kask and the actors – no mother would leave her child behind (Lõhmus 2012). Women often symbolise the national collectivity – the roots and spirit (Yuval-Davis 1993: 627). The mother forgiving her daughter signifies the stabilisation of the image of nation – its essence. Symbolically, the ‘fallen’ women were integrated into the collectivity so that the nation could be a whole again. More on that later.

Below, I will perform a close reading of the re-edited film and study the representations of women and gender. I will explore how the categories of gender and nation are intersected and what other reflection spaces open up when studying *Dark Windows* from a contemporary feminist perspective.

### **DARK WINDOWS: MAKE LOVE AT WAR?**

*Gert: ‘Maarja, is that you? Now I know where to find you!’*

*Tooni: ‘So, here we have another schöne Frau.’<sup>7</sup>*

I argue that the film depicts a clash between two peoples – the Estonians and the (Baltic) Germans – and this conflict could be seen as gendered. According to McClintock ‘all the nations depend on powerful constructions of gender’ (McClintock 1995: 353). In other words, both nations and gender are reconstructed through historical practices – invented and performed – and constitute people’s identities through social contests. For example, in the beginning of the film there is a scene where the

5 For example, *The Fate of a Man* (*Судьба человека*, Sergei Bondarchuk, Russia, 1959) depicts a war trauma of a soldier (Sergei Bondarchuk) who is held captive in a concentration camp and loses his family. Baraban points out that this film is in many ways untypical as it does not centre around a heroically fighting Soviet soldier, but instead, portrays a lone but brave soldier suffering Nazi abuses in the camp. The Nazis are depicted as aggressive and not stoic. But they are indeed portrayed as clean and to some extent polite when they sit around the table and offer the prisoner a drink and a bite to eat (Baraban 2007: 518–519). Another example is *Madness* (*Hullumeelsus*, Kaljo Kiisk, 1968), a Soviet Estonian film that tells the story of a Gestapo officer (Jüri Järvet) looking for a spy hiding at a psychiatric hospital. He is portrayed as clever but loses his mind in the end because he cannot tell the difference between the real and the unreal. Furthermore, as Andres Maimik has argued, the Gestapo officer is not depicted as a fascist villain but a charming and insidious man. Surrounded by patients with psychiatric disorders, he loses his mind and becomes overly suspicious (Maimik 1999: 87).

6 It is important to note here that until the 1970s Eesti Telefilm was not censored as much as the main republican film studio Tallinnfilm. Political and ideological control and censorship was strengthened when the studio was integrated with the USSR broadcasting system in 1970 (Sein 2005: 73–74).

7 Gert, the Baltic German officer, finds out where Maarja works and promises to come and look for her. The head of the salon condemns Maarja for knowing Gert. Maarja feels ashamed.

passengers of a train undergo a search and the food items carried by men are confiscated. Young women, however, pass throughout the checkpoint without having to give up anything. The differentiation between the passengers on the basis of their gender and age can be read in two ways. On the one hand, it highlights the film's topic of young Estonian women (in their reproductive age) having affairs with flirtatious German men – indicating the dilemma of moral and immoral behaviour and blurring the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. On the other hand, this scene and the film in general offer insights into the memory layers that are associated with the era of the German occupation and also reflect the relations between German soldiers with Estonian women.

The image of Nazi German soldiers with whom young Estonian women fell in love has been widely re-circulated in the Estonian collective memory. Tiina Kirss has pointed out that, when comparing the German occupation with the Soviet one, many of the autobiographies collected in the 1980s focus on the human relations between the locals and the occupiers. In those life-stories, the German soldiers are often described as clean, nice and handsome, whereas the Soviets (equated with Russians) are depicted as unclean and lice-infested. The life-stories depend on the available, shifting patterns that are passed on in the collective. These patterns often represent the ideal of how something should be remembered (Kirss 2006: 142). *Dark Windows* depicts German men not as monstrous (as was typical of other Soviet films during that era<sup>8</sup>) but rather charming,

exuberant, and to a certain extent, polite. In so doing, the film echoes the culturally accepted way of remembering the German occupation, while reproducing and re-enforcing the same patterns and stereotypes.

According to Jill Steans, it was politically, as well as ideologically, important in the Soviet Union to find common agreement on how filmmakers should represent World War II. The Soviet films about the war served the ideological function of constructing the enemy as 'fascism', 'Nazism' or 'fascist Germany' and not simply 'Germany' (Steans 2010: 406). For the Soviet Estonian audience, this was adopted with an adjustment – here, the perfect image of the enemy was the Baltic German. Estonia has a long history of Germans being the ruling class and the formal<sup>9</sup> suzerains. In the 19th century, during the period of 'National Awakening', the Baltic Germans came to represent the national Other. Until the middle of the 20th century, they were depicted in the historiography as the 'conqueror[s]' and exploiter[s] of the Estonian peasantry' (Petersoo 2007: 122).

In *Dark Windows* this image is shifted slightly – the Germans are portrayed as handsome exploiters and conquerors, but not as much of the peasantry as of the land and its people, particularly the women. In alluring and seducing young female Estonians, the Nazi German officers rely on good manners as well as promises of a prosperous life in Germany. The relationship between the young Estonian women and the German men is sexualised and affects the national imagery. Eriksen stresses that the national symbolic expression is the nuclear family, and sex enters the national imagery exogenously along with violence, through expressions of conquest and rape. In this symbolic order, female sexuality threatens to discredit the nation (Eriksen 2017: 1440). This is at least partially

8 An example of this is the Soviet Estonian film *Ice Drift* (*Jääminek*, Kaljo Kiisk, Estonia, 1962), in which German soldiers are depicted as cruel and violent towards Estonians. Notably, a German soldier sexually abuses a young woman (Sirje Arbi) who asks him not to execute her father (Hugo Laur). Later, she and her family are despised by the entire village because her 'being with' the enemy was considered disgraceful. She is blamed for the rape and made responsible for what happened to her. Also, *The Ascent* (*Восхождение*, Larisa Shepitko, Russia, 1977) stresses the cruelty of the Germans as the Nazis are depicted enjoying themselves while they torture and hang war prisoners (Youngblood 2001: 851–852).

9 Although Estonia became a part of the Russian Empire in the 18th century, it retained a special status until the late 19th century. According to this special status, Baltic Germans exercised power by holding positions in local institutions and enjoying other privileges.



applicable to the *Dark Windows*. Although the women give in without explicit violence, their relationship with the German officers is depicted as slightly perverse and often oriented towards sexual pleasure (drinking and flirting at parties with more than one man at a time). Women's ability to reproduce (healthy national subjects) is therefore exploited and misused.

Therefore, Kask's film questions the national worthiness and morality of young Estonian women. At the hairdresser's salon – where both Maarja and Leeda work – the older women are judgemental about the younger women spending time with German officers. Notably, there is a scene with a young woman who is willing to pay twenty eggs for a haircut. She says that until a German officer asked her out, no one had ever paid any attention to her or told her that she was *schön*. Her actions are condemned by an older woman named Tooni (Evi Rauer) who says that 'a woman is not a cattle trail for everybody to trample on'. **(Figure 1)** In so doing the film directly condemns the relations between 'us' and the 'enemy', and represents the young women as being responsible for the immoral behaviour (of the nation). Here again, female sexuality poses a threat to the national body/integrity.

According to Lynne Attwood, female protagonists in Soviet war films serve a number of symbolic functions, among them being a symbol of morality. The female heroines are not only responsible for their personal morality, but that of the nation as well, and thereby become the symbols of the country itself (Attwood 1993: 68). *Dark Windows* is no exception. The spiritual strength of the nation is emphasised through the opposite actions of the female characters – Maarja and Leeda. Maarja stays faithful to the nation until the end, while Leeda seeks love from the 'wrong' men and falls into a trap as she is seduced by several German officers. Although she learns her lesson in the end, i.e. that she should not have trusted German men and that Maarja never lied to her but was captured because of her, it is too late to

undo her actions. She has not only let herself down, but she has let the entire nation down. Here, the nation being not the Russian or Soviet Motherland but the small Estonian nation. The trope is universal, ironically fitting with the slogan 'Soviet in content, national in form'.

In a review published in response to the original airing of the miniseries, Kalju Uiho emphasised the role of the women and their responsibility. He wrote that the film focuses on the individual responsibility of the self and the nation. Leeda's tragedy, according to Uiho, lies in her incapability to stay true to herself; instead, she forgets her moral sense, as well as her feminine and national pride. Maarja, Uiho continues, retains her human honesty and sense of truth, remaining truthful to herself and to her nation (Uiho 1968). The woman comes to represent the nation. According to Spike V. Peterson 'woman-as-nation signifies the boundaries of group identity, marking its difference from alien "others". Assigned responsibility for reproducing the group through time, women are singled out as custodians of cultural particularisms and the symbolic repository of group identity' (Peterson 1999: 49). To the extent that Leeda fails to represent the nation, she conforms with the Other.

Jill Steans has argued that in *The Cranes are Flying* (*Летят журавли*, Mikhail Kalatozov, Russia, 1957) the heroine's task is to wait. Yet, the waiting often becomes a game in which failure might mean the failure of the nation-state (Steans 2010: 412). I argue that Leeda's failure in *Dark Windows* not only ruins her reputation as an individual woman but also highlights the potential of national risk. As her love remains unrequited and her house burns down, she is vulnerable and easy to manipulate, so she seeks love and shelter from the enemy. She finds herself at Viuu's (Ita Ever) apartment – a soft-core brothel for German officers. She is a hostess for Viuu's guests – not only does she party with them and keep the mood up, but she also finds herself in bed with two officers. Furthermore, when she learns that Gert is



FIGURE 1. Tõnis Kask, *Dark Windows* (*Pimedad aknad*, Estonia, 1968). Leeda (Ada Lundver) and Tooni (Evi Rauer) at the hairdresser's salon with twenty eggs on the table.

in love with Maarja and that she is hiding Mati, Leeda reports this to the Nazis to get revenge, thus causing Maarja's arrest and death. Therefore, she unwittingly comes to represent the 'enemy within' and becomes a traitor of the nation.

It is the women, and not the men, who are portrayed, and at the same time stigmatised, as collaborators and being disloyal to the nation. This becomes particularly evident at Viuu's apartment where the lady of the house is trafficking young women to German officers in exchange for jewellery and promises to be taken to Germany. The film depicts exuberant parties where women are playing instruments, singing, dancing, entertaining and comforting German men. **(Figure 2)** There is also a close-up of a young lady with Hitler's moustache painted on her face, wearing a German uniform hat, sitting on the lap of a German officer – the act of cross-dressing not only implies her disloyalty, but also emasculates the enemy. **(Figure 3)** This glamorous partying ends when the German army retreats from Estonia. Viuu and Leeda are depicted sitting on their suitcases waiting for the officers, but only Leeda is picked up and not by an officer but by her mother. Therefore, it is the young female that is represented as a problem in the film – disrupting the national image and betraying the nation with the Other. Meanwhile, the Estonian men do not consort with the enemy and remain loyal to the nation and the women.

Leeda's mother forms an important metaphor of national forgiveness and unforgiveness. As she is taking her daughter back to the countryside, Leeda has to run after her, begging for forgiveness. The mother turns around, throws a stone towards her and waits. As mentioned above, this ending differs from the ending of the original miniseries. In the latter, the mother never forgave her daughter and did not wait for her. As pointed out in *Kaadrisk*, the Soviet censors required the closing of the film to be without forgiveness, because not even a mother should forgive her daughter for sleeping with Nazis

(Lõhmus 2012). This brings forth the iterative and constantly reinvented nature of cultural memory and enables the interdependencies of memory and gender to be identified (Schwarz, Müller 2008). The forgiveness highlights the passage of time – the Soviet experience dominates the cultural memory and plays a role in shifting the national Other. The Germans are seen in more positive terms, representing the imaginary West. Integrating the women who 'slipped up' functions as a way of resisting the Soviet ideology and its Others.

The hairdresser's salon is depicted as an opposite to Viuu's apartment as a place for women to gather in. Playing a central role in the film, it offers work and therefore independence and self-realisation for the women. At the same time, and even more importantly, it is the place that stresses feminine attributes – looks and beauty, in general. The hairdresser's salon is also a place where rumours are spread and judgments are passed, since it is open for all women and brings together women of different backgrounds and ethnicities (Germans and Estonians). It is also the place where Viuu comes to hire her 'girls'. She finds Leeda there and tries to convince the owner to give Maarja to her, but the owner stresses that Maarja has a better reputation (she is not 'that kind of a girl') and that Viuu should leave her alone. The salon functions as a place where the binaries of good and evil, moral and amoral, pure and dirty, responsible and irresponsible behaviours and decisions meet and play out.

The hairdresser's salon is also a locus for a subtle female resistance movement. At one point, the owner of the salon sees hungry and thirsty Russian-speaking prisoners of war working outside. She finds their circumstances unbearable and decides to give them potatoes. At first, the German officer who is guarding the prisoners allows this, but as soon as he sees his companion approaching from distance, he kills her, hitting her head with the back of his gun. This scene stresses the brutality of the Nazis – keeping prisoners hungry



Tõnis Kask, *Dark Windows* (*Pimedad aknad*, Estonia, 1968).

FIGURE 2. A party at Viuu's (Ita Ever) apartment, with Leeda in the front.

FIGURE 3. An Estonian woman with Hitler's moustache.

and thirsty, and violently killing an unarmed woman. In so doing, the film draws a clear line between the 'enemy' and 'us', and indicates that everybody suffered and sacrificed in order to fight the enemy. It is also the only occasion when we hear Russian spoken in the film. This widens the circle of 'us', by including the Russian-speakers. As they are portrayed harmless, they do not pose a threat to the national unity.

The sacrifice of a woman's life for a national cause also becomes dramatically evident on another occasion. Maarja becomes involved with the resistance movement only because of Mati with whom she has fallen in love. She decides to help Mati spread the word about the Nazis' plan to destroy all the factories in the city. Meanwhile, a jealous Leeda reports on Maarja's activities, and as Maarja returns home, she is captured by the Nazis and taken to the Klooga concentration camp. At the camp she demonstrates her strength as well as her humanity. When Gert comes to see her and insincerely promises that everything is going to be all right, she remains indifferent to him and does not break. Her humanity is highlighted when she is comforting a scared young prisoner. **(Figure 4)** Even though Maarja is about to die, she demonstrates her strength by dealing with the abuse and psychological pressure.

For Estonian viewers, the name Maarja is associated with Maarjamaa ('the Land of Mary'), which is a medieval name for Estonia. Maarja's self-sacrifice can be seen as an act made in the name of the nation, for a greater cause. Maarja – also an Estonian name for the Virgin Mary – becomes the feminine ideal and symbol of purity and integrity. She is idealised both as the symbol of the nation and as the symbolic reproducer of the culture. Maarja does her best to avoid relations with German officers. She is loyal, sincere and submissive – pure in her acts and thoughts. She longs for male protection and care. Mati offers her protection against German soldiers and she herself expresses her longing for her father's care who is fighting at the front.

Although she makes the 'right' choice by choosing Mati, she seems to lack agency and subjectivity, since it is Mati who is leading her and telling her how the country is suffering in the war, and how much he wants to be with her. In so doing, the purity and integrity of the nation is constituted in *Dark Windows* as subject to male possession and protection in every sphere.

Silke Wenk has argued that the male position is not simply a given, but the production of masculinity is based on relation and opposition to the feminine. Masculinity is reproduced through the defence of the feminine, and it is measured by its power and capability to protect the feminine (Wenk 2000: 68). The protection of one's own country against foreign powers is embodied in attempts at protecting the women of one's own nation against foreign seducers (see also Eriksen 2017: 1445). In *Dark Windows*, Mati demonstrates his masculinity through Maarja's femininity. His role of offering Maarja protection is already evident in the beginning, but it is truly accentuated in the scene where he fools a German officer into believing that Maarja is with him and therefore 'taken' – thereby offering Maarja protection. In so doing, the nation becomes whole through the feminine supplementing the masculine, forming the perfect young and vital heterosexual couple.

Interestingly, in the reviews of the original miniseries, Mati's character was the one most criticised. Even though his inner masculinity and uncompromising nature were clearly brought forth, his role was seen as secondary and without any depth. Furthermore, since the character arguably had no artistic value, it was unclear why Maarja would fall in love with him, and not with the more charming Baltic German (Panso 1969). On the one hand, those reviews could be interpreted as an expected reaction to the miniseries, which, in stark contrast to other war films, focused on the female perspective, and consequently omitted the heroic men in the battle. As Aleida Assmann has said, in canonical remembering women are the



Tõnis Kask, *Dark Windows* (*Pimedad aknad*, Estonia, 1968).

FIGURE 4. Maarja (Marianne Leover) is comforting a young prisoner.

FIGURE 5. Gert (Jaak Tamleht) tells Maarja that they will have a beautiful life together.

FIGURE 6. Mati (Ao Peep) tells the grandmother (Katrin Vålbe) about his experiences at war.



ones who remember and men are the ones who are remembered (cited in Penkwitt 2006: 7). On the other hand, such reviews reveal some concerns about representing Estonian masculinity as being too ambiguous, and therefore, vulnerable. Furthermore, calling him a 'dead man' in the film inherently destabilises Mati's role, and therefore, his capability to protect Maarja, i.e. the nation.

The nation's tragedy is ultimately explained through the betrayal of disabled men. According to Elena Iarskaia-Smirnova and Pavel Romanov, the disabled body functions as a metaphor in Soviet visual culture and signifies various issues depending on the genre. In dramas, the disabled male character usually represents the 'metaphor of contrast – a weak body and spirit that can be rehabilitated through care and commitment' (Iarskaia-Smirnova, Romanov 2014: 68). This is at least partially applicable to *Dark Windows*. Namely, there is a scene depicting a blind man in a shelter who truly believes that Hitler will soon come and save the Estonians. This makes him unpopular, and another man comments that he pities all whose eyes cannot see in darkness. In the end, the blind man is standing alone in the shelter, unable to walk because his dog has died. Clearly, his character signifies the short-sighted people who fought on the 'wrong side'. Left alone and without care, he represents the male who is unable to demonstrate his masculinity – to fight and protect – and is therefore subverting the integrity of the national body.

*Dark Windows* depicts the brutality of the masculine foreign power through implied – not explicit – visual and linguistic metaphors, which is often asserted through the manipulation and violation of Estonian women. For example, the film depicts Gert hitting Leeda, a soldier killing the hairdresser for her kindness, and the Nazis burning the – mostly female – prisoners alive, as well as using Estonian women for their sexual pleasure. This constitutes a symbolical violation of the entire nation. In my opinion, in so doing the film is also

making political and ideological statements about the war and the enemy. As part of the broader Soviet visual ideology, *Dark Windows* was used not only to depict war to remember it, but also to offer explanations for the suffering and losses (Youngblood 2001: 840).

Kask's film reconstructs a sense of national belonging through othering and re-enforces the idea of national suffering and repression under a foreign power. As an example of this, Maarja is forced to go out with Gert not only because he is her former lover, but also because he is a German officer who has power and a gun. The film then switches to Maarja's grandmother (Katrin Välbe) with Mati telling the grandmother how he was about to be executed but managed to flee. Mati is telling the story for others (the grandmother) to remember, thereby making him a subject of memory. Here, the film juxtaposes the national characters of Estonians and Germans. This scene not only emphasises the oppression but also, and most importantly, the (bodily) humiliation of the nation.

I suggest that the scene is important on at least two levels. Firstly, it calls for a different kind of attention because of its representation of gender and nation. Both Gert and Mati recall their memories and retell their past experiences – how they should be remembered. While Gert paints a beautiful picture with his words to Maarja about their past happiness and the prosperous future after Hitler has had his 'last word', Mati is telling the grandmother about his suffering and losses – the loss of his parents and home in the countryside.

**(Figures 5 and 6)** Maarja and her grandmother are both positioned in the role of a passive listener. Maarja is unable to act because Gert is armed; grandmother is wheelchair-bound, and therefore, cannot walk away. This is how the film contextualises men's experiences, yet the remembering occurs through women's bodies, their reactions.

Secondly, *Dark Windows* portrays the masculine foreign power as both insidious and deceitful. Having loud and drunken

soldiers in the background as Gert tries to warm up his past friendship with Maarja destroys the potential of romance and his sincerity. Similarly, Mati's serious and brave confession undermines Gert's, and in turn the foreign power's, position as well. Therefore, the scene accentuates the discrepancy between the narrative of the people in power and the stories of the oppressed, giving credit to the latter. In so doing, the film highlights ideas of national survival, suffering and collective memory, as well as different conceptualisations of the truth. It opens up a possible reading, according to which the truth belongs to us and not to the Other, because the Other is untrustworthy.

This makes the film important and relevant even today. After Estonia regained its independence, the hegemonic narrative about the Soviet era took the form of national survival, in which many texts produced in the Soviet era are read through a national lens. According to this interpretation, the texts were subverting the Soviet order and ideology, while maintaining the national identity and character. This also becomes evident on the *Kaادرis* TV show, when comments are made that, in many ways, filmmaking was a negotiation with 'Moscow' – the depiction of some (national) themes was tolerated only if other (Soviet) ideas were included as well. The interviews on *Kaادرis* also point out that *Dark Windows* depicts aspects that were typical of both the German and Soviet occupations, which enables us to view the film in a wider national context (Lõhmus 2012). It could be read as depicting one occupation, while speaking about the other.

However, the *Dark Windows* miniseries was not exceptional back then. There was another film released the same year that also questioned the totalitarian regime. *Madness* is set in an unnamed European country in 1944, and the German Army is about to eliminate a psychiatric hospital with all its patients. The Germans believe that a British spy is hiding in the hospital and send a Gestapo officer to expose the secret agent. In the end, the officer him-

self loses his mind. The film could be read as antifascist, and therefore, consistent with Soviet ideology. But, as Lauri Kärk has pointed out, it could also be interpreted as questioning *any* totalitarian regime (Kärk 2010: 111).

This is not to say that people at the time were unaware of how the war ended and what came next. However, seeing the film only as an attempt to subvert Soviet ideology would dismiss the complexity of the Soviet Estonian film culture, and the dynamics of memory and national narrative. Moreover, as Marek Tamm has argued, the Estonian national narrative is based on fighting for freedom – in other words, narrating the Estonian past has been done through the terms of losing or gaining independence. Various forms of this narrative have surfaced since the 'National Awakening' in the 19th century. The German, as well as the Soviet, occupations are battles in the great struggle that was finally won in 1991 when Estonia regained its independence (Tamm 2018: 18). To this extent, *Dark Windows* supports the national narrative as it depicts the national struggle against a masculine foreign power.

## CONCLUSION

*Dark Windows* fits well with the general trends of depicting World War II and the fight against Germans in Soviet cinema. While it focuses on individual psychology and human nature as such, the narrative is structured through intersections of gender and nation – representing the feminine as responsible for the national decay. Gender discourse acts vitally in constructing the borders between 'us' and 'them'. The German men, depicted to some extent as polite and clean, possess many negative traits, including egoism and aggression. Even though the film forms part of Soviet film culture, placing it within its local and regional context allows for a diversification of its readings. Also, restoring *Dark Windows* in the 2000s can be interpreted as an attempt to integrate the Soviet past with the national narrative – not to normalise the Soviet Union, but to re-discover the

national past. Re-appropriating the film for the current audience illuminates the dynamics of memory – the war is now portrayed as being less grotesque and less unforgiving. The re-edited film shapes the understanding of the past and of the film-making in the past, reminding us that all meanings are relational, depending on various codes and representational systems.

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