

# Facing the Foreign: The Aftermath of World War II and Estonian as Otherness in Two Films by Ingmar Bergman



CHRISTO BURMAN, Linneaus University, Sweden; email: [christo.burman@lnu.se](mailto:christo.burman@lnu.se)

## ABSTRACT

**Drawing on a few concepts of postcolonialism, including Edward Said's idea of Orientalism and Stuart Hall's theory on representation, this article explores the representations of Estonian culture and language in two films by Ingmar Bergman, *This Can't Happen Here* (*Sånt händer inte här*, Sweden, 1950; also known as *High Tension*) and *The Silence* (*Tystnaden*, Sweden, 1963). Through a descriptive textual analysis of the Estonian representational elements in these films, the article suggests that Bergman uses Estonian language and culture to establish a certain kind of Otherness, marking a cultural hegemony and exotifying a new foreign element in post-war Sweden. An additional aim of the article is to present and contextualise the exiled Estonian actors that starred in *This Can't Happen Here*, as this has not been done in a scholarly context, and since the film ended up being their only cinematic appearance in their new adopted country.**

## INTRODUCTION

Until World War II, Sweden was a country more ethnically homogeneous than many of its European neighbours, largely due to its restrictive immigration policies. However, in the aftermath of the war, a wave of immigration occurred and Estonian refugees quickly became the first large group of immigrants in Sweden (Berge 1992: 33). Their integration into the Swedish community was almost seamless, and many of them went on to lead productive lives in their new adopted country. But despite the Estonian community in Sweden being vital, working actively to preserve its national heritage through different organisations, as well as raising awareness about Estonia, several Estonians later addressed their feeling of fear and uncertainty regarding the Soviet neighbours. The matter was especially alarming after the extradition of the Baltic soldiers in 1946, which

demonstrated a compliant attitude on the part of the Swedes towards demands from the Communist regime in Moscow. For a time, the Swedish government even imposed a prohibition on anti-Soviet activity, which was noted in the Estonians' foreign passports, thereby forcing Estonians to keep silent about the conditions they had experienced at home. 'We were quiet: we had received shelter in Sweden and sensed the War,' as one of the refugees said (Bennich-Björkman 2007: 58). The political silencing of the Estonians, in combination with the Swedes' limited experience of immigration, resulted in the Estonian culture rarely being embraced in the Swedish cultural arena, although the Estonians were a minority spread throughout the country. Therefore, the few exceptions are even more relevant to explore, in order to avoid minority ethnic and diasporic elements ending up at the periphery of history

and research – especially since, Sweden afterwards has often been portrayed as the most inclusive of the Nordic countries, with more open migration and refugee policies than its neighbours.

In this article, I will discuss and exemplify the Estonian element in Swedish post-war culture by focusing on two feature films by Ingmar Bergman, *This Can't Happen Here* (*Sånt händer inte här*, Sweden, 1950; also known as *High Tension*) and *The Silence* (*Tystnaden*, Sweden, 1963). Drawing on certain concepts of postcolonialism, including Edward Said's idea of Orientalism and Stuart Hall's theory on representation, I will argue that the Estonian elements in these films are exotified, focusing on difference and foreignness, thereby constituting Sweden as the Self and Estonia as the Other. Larry Wolff and Milica Bakić-Hayden are two, among many, who claim that Eastern Europe has been constructed by the West as its Other, thereby paralleling the Orientalism of Said (Wolff 1994, Bakić-Hayden 1995). The stereotyping of the Estonian refugees in *This Can't Happen Here* and the portrayal of them as the exotic Other within the nation has been previously discussed (albeit in passing) by Eva Näripea, Ewa Mazierska and Lars Kristensen (Näripea et al. 2016: 65). In this article I aim to examine this theme more thoroughly, by combining my analysis with an examination of *The Silence* and showing that Bergman continued to represent Estonians as the Other despite making the second film in a different time period.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In spite of maintaining its official policy of neutrality throughout World War II, Sweden was influenced by and involved in the war in several ways. Not only did the Swedish government at times breach the nation's neutrality in favour of both Nazi Germany (whose army was allowed to pass through Sweden) and the Western Allies (with whom Sweden shared military intelligence as well as, later on, airbases), Sweden also became a refuge for Jewish, anti-Fascist and anti-Communist refugees from all over Europe,

the latter including a sizable community from the Baltic countries. The largest number of refugees during World War II came from Estonia.

Estonia has had a special relationship with Sweden ever since it was wholly or partially ruled by Sweden (from 1558–1561 to 1710–1721). Of course, the inhabitants of present-day Sweden and Estonia had been in contact much earlier, at least dating back to the Viking Age, whereupon Swedish-speaking groups (later known as coastal Swedes – *rannarootslased* in Estonian), settled in Estonia, but it was the 150 years under Swedish rule that cemented the idea of a Swedish Estonia. When Swedish rule was followed by two harsh centuries as a part of the Russian Empire, Estonians began to refer colloquially to the Swedish era as the 'good old Swedish times' (*vana hea Rootsi aeg*), thereby expressing a wish for a return to Swedish rule. For Sweden as well, the Duchy of Estonia had been an important part of the realm, not only as a granary, but also a centre for education, as demonstrated by the establishment of the second Swedish university in Tartu in 1632 by King Gustavus II Adolphus. This important move was accompanied by the founding of other institutions like Tallinn's Gustav Adolf Grammar School (1631), a court of appeals in Tartu, and providing an Estonian translation of the Bible. However, as the Great Northern War proved disastrous to Sweden, Estonia was lost for good, and in some ways, was forced out of the national Swedish consciousness (although Swedish-speakers continued to live on the Estonian coast). That is at least until World War II, when many Estonians – and Estonian Swedes – fled to Sweden, mostly prior to the second invasion of Estonia by the Soviet army in 1944. Thereby, a kind of re-connection was made – although Sweden became one of the first among the few countries to recognise the Soviet occupation of the Baltic countries. On 8 June 1945, there were 6,554 Estonian Swedes and 21,815 ethnic Estonian refugees in Sweden and they became the first larger group of immigrants in Sweden (Berge 1992: 33).

However, at that time, official policy paid very little attention to the needs or rights of ethnic minorities, including their need for recognition and respect. Li Bennich-Björkman has written about the Estonians in post-war Sweden and how they were astonished by and resentful of the Swedish authorities' unwillingness to grant them 'cultural autonomy' (Bennich-Björkman 2007: 55–56). That said, it can still be argued that World War II created a new awareness of and interest in the Estonian people and also their language and culture in Sweden, which I aim to showcase in this article.

### BERGMAN AND POLITICS

Ingmar Bergman, who was born just after the end of World War I on 14 July 1918, grew up in a conservative and devout Lutheran household, his father Erik being a prominent parish minister. Although Sweden had mostly social democratic governments during the interwar period (not to mention after World War II) and the reorientation from German to Anglo-American culture began towards the end of World War I, Sweden was still economically – and, among the upper classes, also culturally – dependent on Germany at the time. German literature was widely read, and the political developments of the country, especially the increasing influence of National Socialists in the 1930s, was followed with great interest. Already in 1922, during Bergman's early years in his hometown of Uppsala, Sweden had become the first country in the world to found a State Institute for Race Biology, financed by the social democratic government – although the establishment of such an institute was supported by all major political parties.

In the summer of 1934, Bergman aged 16 was sent to Germany as an exchange student to spend the summer vacation with family friends. In his autobiography *The Magic Lantern* (*Laterna Magica*, 1987) he recalls attending a Nazi rally in Weimar at which he saw Adolf Hitler speak, followed by a parade: 'I had never seen anything like this eruption of immense energy. I shouted

like everyone else, held out my arm like everyone else, howled like everyone else and loved it like everyone else' (Bergman 1989: 123). The family in Thüringen gave Bergman a photograph of Hitler as a birthday present and Bergman admits:

I loved him too. For many years, I was on Hitler's side, delighted by his successes and saddened by his defeats. My brother was one of the founders and organizers of the Swedish National-Socialist Party, and my father voted several times for them. Our history teacher worshipped 'the old Germany', our gymnastics teacher went to officers' meetings in Bavaria every summer; some of the pastors in the parish were crypto-Nazis and the family's closest friends expressed strong sympathies for the 'new Germany'. (Bergman 1989: 123)

Bergman's youthful admiration of Nazism and Adolf Hitler received much attention in subsequent years, and this is unquestionably a complex field (especially since Bergman himself dictated this understanding, through his autobiography and interviews). However, I think the quoted passage reveals more than Bergman's personal state of mind – it shows how there was a much larger than thought pro-Nazi contingent in officially neutral Sweden. Yet, from Sweden's point of view, once the war ended, there seemed to be no need for analysing its behaviour during the National Socialism – instead the main strategy after the war became the rejection of all things associated with National Socialism and the rapid absorption of Anglo-American values of modernity and rationality.

After the war, when the evidence from the concentration and death camps poured out, Bergman was one of many Swedes whose eyes were opened: 'When the truth finally conquered my resistance, I was overcome with despair, and my

self-contempt, already a severe burden, accelerated beyond the borders of endurance, I did not realize until long afterwards that I was guilty by association only,' he writes in *The Magic Lantern* (Bergman 1989: 124). Having his innocence ripped away after he had merely gone along with the crowd, Bergman made an important decision: 'Politics – never again!' (Bergman 1989: 124). This statement is relevant for this article, which will nevertheless address political phenomena, exploring how the years after World War II and post-war phenomena are reflected in two of Bergman's films that were of very different genres, but both of which demonstrate connections to Estonia. The first is the little-known spy thriller *This Can't Happen Here*, produced in the early years of the Cold War, covering the period in the Baltic Sea region immediately after World War II. The other one is the controversial classic *The Silence*, in which the main characters end up at a hotel in an Eastern European country apparently on the verge of war. Despite being a Bergman film, *This Can't Happen Here* has received almost no scholarly attention (some of the reasons for this will be discussed below), while *The Silence* has been one of the most viewed as well as widely discussed and analysed Bergman films ever since its premiere.

## FACING THE OTHER

By the early 1950s Bergman already had a reputation as a writer-director. With the exception of *Thirst* (*Törst*, Sweden, 1949), which was written by Herbert Grevenius, three of Bergman's recent films had been based on his own screenplays. Therefore, *This Can't Happen Here* constitutes an exception. **(Figure 1)** Its screenplay was also written by Herbert Grevenius, called *Twelve Hours*, based on the 1944 novel *Within 12 Hours* (*I løpet av tolv timer*) by the Norwegian writer Peter Valentin (a pen name of Waldemar Brøgger). The few lines Marc Gervais dedicates to the film are somewhat representative of the kind of information and attention that has surrounded the film until now:

With several households to support, Bergman was in dire straits financially. *This Can't Happen Here* is a job, no more, no less. It is a political thriller, dealing in international intrigue, Baltic style, with a strong cast headed by Alf Kjellin, Ulf Palme, and Swedish Hollywood star Signe Hasso. A well-made commercial film noir, it has received merciless treatment by Bergman himself, who sees it simply as a regrettable aberration forced on him by his need for money, and he wants no one to see it. Well, two or three things, it seems to me, should be noted here: *This Can't Happen Here* is by no means a bad film, and it demonstrates that Bergman was now a highly skilled technician capable of making a solid commercial (recipe) entertainment when he had a mind to. And because it in no way can be referred to as a recognizably 'Bergman' film, it also demonstrates in comparison how immensely personal the films that followed it (and some that preceded it) really are. (Gervais 1999: 30)

Marianne Höök, an early Bergman critic, devotes even fewer lines to the film. According to her *This Can't Happen Here* was merely 'an unsuccessful attempt in the spy thriller genre with current political affiliation, far from Ingmar Bergman's own paths', and she deems it to be a work under contract, 'without much interest' (Höök 1962: 58–59). Peter Cowie describes it as a 'quickie' and 'at best, a hollow and contrived thriller about the Cold War' (Cowie 1992: 91).

Although *This Can't Happen Here* was not written by Bergman and his directing style is hardly recognisable in the film, it still became the last officially political film directed by him. Bergman was never





FIGURE 1. The original Swedish poster for Ingmar Bergman's *This Can't Happen Here* (*Sånt händer inte här*, Sweden, 1950).

considered a very political filmmaker, especially when compared to the younger filmmakers of the 1960s, such as Bo Widerberg, who often criticised Bergman for his lack of political engagement. Yet several of Bergman's films do have different kinds of political impacts, including *Persona* (Sweden, 1966) and *The Shame* (*Skammen*, Sweden, 1968), both released during the Vietnam War. This article aims to show that politics are also embedded in Bergman's representation of the Estonians, their language and culture. I find *This Can't Happen Here* to be a highly interesting piece of work. The rather simple murder thriller is set in a mixed Baltic diaspora community in Stockholm, and provides a unique perspective for a Swedish film of the 1950s, while also discussing other aspects of war (concentration camps, deportation, executions, etc.).

The film is a political allegory aimed at the Soviet Union, and based on the new reality of the post-war/early Cold War era. The idea is that after the Soviet Union occupied the Baltic countries, dangerous political spies were able to operate in idyllic and neutral Sweden – something that is even more clearly emphasised in the title of the film – *This Can't Happen Here*, as well as in several scenes in which the point is repeatedly made that Swedes are able to ignore anything that does not fit into their idyll. The fate of Sweden's neighbouring countries was a tangible reality in the late 1940s. The Swedish government had extradited 146 men from the Baltic countries, who had been conscripted into the Waffen SS and fled the Soviet re-occupation in order to find refuge in Sweden, to the Soviet Union – something that is still seen as a traumatic event in Swedish politics today. Furthermore, thousands of war refugees from the Baltic countries had made a palpable impact on the country, although as mentioned above, the Swedish government did its best to prohibit any anti-Soviet activity.

*This Can't Happen Here* opens with a 'background of dark clouds and a commentary spoken by a soft, ingratiating voice' announcing the location of a small,

sheltered country and emphasising the fictional aspects of the story, but saying that the apparent similarities with reality are by no means accidental (Furhammar, Isaksson 1971: 134). Right after the credits, the main villain of the film arrives by plane. The character, played by Ulf Palme, carries a diplomatic passport from the country of Liquidatzia and we see a close-up of the passport as he passes through passport control, whereupon, the voice-over provides the final comment: 'The passport says "Engineer" and we would really like to believe that. However, it means very little when we are dealing with a guest from a modern dictatorship, such as Liquidatzia.' In reality, he is an agent who is spying on the refugees in Sweden. We also hear the name of the demonic character – Atkä Natas – which to the Swedes might seem like an Estonian name, but read backwards means 'Real Satan' in Swedish. As James Hoberman notes in one of few prior analyses of *This Can't Happen Here*, the language of Liquidatzians, i.e. Russians, is actually 'backward Swedish' (Hoberman 1998: 182). This statement – which is repeated at the end of the film, when we see a Liquidatzian steamer named *Mrofnimok Gadyń* (which spelled backward makes 'Nydag Kominform' – *Ny dag* [New Day] being the name of the daily newspaper of the Swedish Communist Party) – should not be confused with the language of the refugees in the film, which is either Estonian or Swedish, i.e. not a made-up or backward language.

The allegorical mode of the film and the need for creating Liquidatzia – i.e. depicting a fictional dictatorship instead of a real one – can most likely be associated with the zeitgeist of the late 1940s and the Swedish government's agenda of not upsetting the regime in Moscow. The question is whether the motive would have been the same a decade later, when in *The Silence*, Bergman once more uses Estonian culture (more specifically, the Estonian language) to portray a foreign element, along the lines of Edward Said's Orientalist paradigm of the us-and-them.

In *This Can't Happen Here*, the first clear reference to Estonia occurs eight minutes into the film when we see an older woman (Marje Parikas) screaming for her life, in Estonian: 'No! Don't want to!' (**Figure 2**) In the screenplay by Grevenius – which we will see differs somewhat from the final film – the woman is supposed to be 'seemingly lifeless', and the smell of gas is mentioned. However, in the film the woman is very much alive. She has merely attempted suicide and is soon carried away by police. The woman, believing that she will be deported, seems to mistake the Swedish police for the Liquidatziian secret police. Here, both the use of Estonian (i.e. foreign) language and a backstory consisting of a fear of deportations, are unusual in the Swedish context.

When the police continue to investigate the attempted suicide, a custodian informs them that the older woman lived alone in the apartment: 'Her son and daughter travelled on to Canada. Last week. Since then she has mostly locked herself in. She did not dare go outside. You might say that she was always a bit weird, like all foreigners.' This description corresponds to the stories of many Estonian refugees who left Sweden in the late 1940s for more remote countries, in fear of the Soviet Union's aggressive repatriation policies. At the same time, the character of the custodian also clearly demonstrates a prejudiced and narrow view of foreigners. The question is whether her comments can be seen as being representative of Swedes on the whole, when they were encountering large-scale migration for the very first time. Nevertheless, early on in the narrative – through these comments and events – the film distinguishes between the natives and the refugees and emphasises the strangeness of the latter. Stuart Hall has pointed out that identities are constructed through discursive representation and within the competing relations of power, as 'the product of the marking of difference and exclusion' (Hall 1996: 4).

The custodian furthermore informs the police that the woman's relatives will be at

a wedding that night. The police also find a handout addressed to Baltic refugees, which they read out loud:

Refugees! Do not imagine that you're safe just because you have come here. World War III, which you may have heard of, could break out at any time and you can probably figure out what will happen in this small country. Return to your homeland voluntarily while there is still time. There you will be secure.  
Signed by Many Friends.

Tension is again being built up, between 'here' and 'there', 'us' and 'them', the categorisation of the centre and the margin. Yet, in the following scene the 'them' talks back to the 'us', something utterly relevant for the postcolonial discourse. One could argue that this scene is the one that most exoticifies the foreign element.

Björn Almkvist (Alf Kjellin), one of the police officers, looks up the address of the wedding being attended by the older woman's relatives and goes there to meet them. The scene opens with the sound of *Wedding Merriment* (*Pulmalust*), a traditional Estonian folk song, while the police officer searches for the correct door in the dark. He enters, and finds himself in the midst of a festive wedding reception. The director's choice to shoot this first scene in the apartment with a moving camera captures the turmoil of the festivities. As we join the celebration both the bride and the groom – the camera moving from one to the other – have been blindfolded and are placing her crown and his hat on the heads of the girl and the bachelor who, according to an Estonian wedding tradition, will be next to marry. Considering the short time that was spent preparing and shooting the film, it is likely that the Estonians in the cast told Bergman about these traditions, or even carried them out on their own, thereby giving them a unique possibility to represent their national heritage on screen and raise awareness about Estonia in their new home



country. But at the same time, I would like to argue that the scene exotifies the Estonian refugees as they are seen through a Swedish gaze. The Estonian actors are in their national costumes, singing and dancing, signifying a stereotypical representation and a clearly foreign element in Swedish society. Although focusing mainly on a racialised regime of representation, Stuart Hall has stressed that stereotyping ‘facilitates the “binding” or bonding together of all of Us who are “normal” into one “imagined community”; and it sends into symbolic exile all of Them – “the Others” – who are in some way different – “beyond the pale”’ (Hall 1997: 258).

Most of the specific Estonian wedding traditions were not mentioned in the shooting script, in which the bride and groom are still named Grigor and Vanya, which are typical Russian names. Grevenius does include the shouting of ‘Bitter! Bitter!’, which can be seen as a translation of the Estonian ‘Kibe! Kibe!’ (words often shouted at Estonian weddings, in order to force the newlyweds to kiss and make the drinks sweet again). At the same time, this is originally a Russian custom, introduced into the Estonian wedding context during the 19th century. However, most interesting is the screenplay’s description of the bride and groom: ‘Farmers, apparently, but not Swedish, that was obvious from her somewhat formal rural bridal gown with crown and veil’ (Grevenius 1950: 17). The description also includes some racial aspects: ‘The tanned and somewhat broad faces of both bride and groom also suggest they are of a different extraction than Swedish’ (Grevenius 1950: 17–18). The names, customs and descriptions seem to allude to the fact that the fictional country of Liquidatzia in the screenplay was never intended to be Estonia, but rather a representation of a more rural Eastern culture. Yet, the participation of the exiled Estonian actors and the historical context surrounding them weighed to their advantage.

In both the film and the screenplay, the wedding song ends when the bride and groom (in the film named Linda and Leino

and played by Helene and Edmar Kuus, a couple in real life) move toward the pastor (Hanno Kompus). **(Figure 3)** The cleric begins his speech to the gathered, which is notably presented in Swedish (certainly a compromise considering the intended Swedish audience, but also showcasing the language skills of the Estonians only a few years after their arrival in Sweden):

These young people are close to all our hearts. We will support them as much as we can. They are worth it. They haven’t had it easy. Four months ago, Leino and Linda came over here in an open boat. She had to be carried ashore and he was in a bad way as well. Everything had been taken from them. But they made a fresh start. They found their way to each other and to us. Perhaps they will never settle down for real. Probably, we never will. Particularly, those of us who are old. But there is a time for everything. This is the time to rejoice. Tonight, we will be back in the homeland. Back in the villages from which they chased us. The farms are slumbering in the summer night, the grain maturing outside the windows. The morning star is shining in the east, and it is a joyful time to live.

As we can see, the speech begins with the introduction of the characters, and a description of the difficult circumstances under which the refugees arrived in Sweden. But then – as the pastor moves closer to the camera – it changes into a national romantic vision of their home country. At the same time, the pastor’s vision emphasises the fact that the Estonians come from villages, farms and grain fields, which I would like to correlate with Edward Said’s description of the Orient as ‘aberrant, undeveloped, inferior’, while the West/Occident is seen as ‘rational, developed, humane, superior’ (Said 1978: 300). In reality, as we



Ingmar Bergman, *This Can't Happen Here* (*Sånt händer inte här*, Sweden, 1950).

FIGURE 2. An older woman (Marje Parikas) screaming for her life, in Estonian, apparently afraid of being deported.

FIGURE 3. The pastor (Hanno Kompus) with the bride and groom, Linda and Leino (played by Helene and Edmar Kuus, a couple in real life). Only a few years earlier all three actors were working on prestigious theatrical stages in Estonia.

will see below, the actors had actually been urbanites in Estonia, but in the process of exoticification, the emphasis on a rural origin is relevant for the construction of a stereotypical image of 'the Orient'. However, it is difficult to assert that the Swedes view Estonian culture as being savage in nature, due to the aforementioned common history of the countries. But although the refugees in the film are not necessarily portrayed as barbaric, their state (at least for the pastor) tends to be static, retrospective – not developing or moving forward. It should be noted, since the Swedes' own connection to an agricultural past is strong, Swedish cinema sometimes represents its own culture through a similar nostalgic and romantic lens. Yet this specific film merely frames the Estonians – or refugees from Liquidatzia – as being 'backward' people while the Swedes are represented as belonging to a modern urbanised society.

The warm atmosphere that the pastor's speech creates is shattered by one of the guests, Vera Irmelin (Signe Hasso), who adds: 'It is the red morning star that is shining in the east.' This remark is the first reference to Communist ideology in the film, and even more clearly emphasises the anti-Soviet viewpoint of the film. Vera turns out to be a refugee as well, and as such, is aware and critical of what has happened to her homeland, and despite the prompting, is unable to feel joyful. Later, we learn that she has found work as a lab technician, thereby adjusting to her new country. But more importantly for the plot, she is the wife of Atkä Natas (having been forced to marry him to protect her parents who were left behind in her native country).

But let's take another closer look at the wedding reception. The pastor tells Vera not to talk about the political situation. The bridal couple steps forward and Leino says: 'Vera is of the opinion that it is irresponsible for people in our situation to get married and bring children into the world.' The matter is waved aside by the pastor who says that he will accept that responsibility: 'The others are many, and we must be too. It is our only chance!' It is clear that the pastor

reflects a worldview based on difference, and stresses the importance of differentiating Estonian children from 'the others', which can be seen as a reference to the majority culture, possibly the Swedes, but most likely the Russians – or even both.

The policeman finds Vera and it turns out she already knows him. When she asks what has happened and why he is on duty and at the wedding reception, Bergman cuts to another Estonian element: the traditional folk dance *Kaerajaan*, which the wedding guests in national costumes begin to dance. The dance is interrupted when Vera returns with a worried look on her face, and finds a couple that we can assume are the relatives of the older woman who appeared to have attempted to commit suicide. Now, though, the woman is described as dead – something that makes more sense in the screenplay where we have already encountered her as 'seemingly lifeless'. One of the relatives shows the police a similar kind of handout that they read earlier and adds: 'It was this that killed her' – referring to the intimidation she was subjected to by the Liquidatzian agents in Sweden. Then, the police officer is suddenly surrounded by the Estonians, who are looking to him for help: 'Don't you understand? They will never leave us alone. Things like this shouldn't happen. It isn't fair.' This message can be seen as a rebuke of the police officer and the judicial system, but also of the 'us', the assumed centre, and as a cry by the refugees for recognition and respect.

We meet some of the Estonian refugees once more, in a scene that takes place behind the screen in the *Lejonungen* movie theatre while a Donald Duck film is being screened, and where the groom Leino is revealed to be an agent spying on the refugees on behalf of the Liquidatzians. However, the rest of the film is more focused on the plot and the Estonian references are less prominent. Therefore, it seems reasonable to focus on what Bergman himself wrote about the production process. He described it as 'complete torture from beginning to end' but the main problem was the Estonians in the film:

A creative paralysis hit me after only four days of shooting. That was exactly when I met the exiled Baltic actors who were going to participate. The encounter was a shock. Suddenly I realized which film we ought to be making. Among those exiled actors I discovered such a richness of lives and experiences that the unevenly developed intrigue in *This Can't Happen Here* seemed almost obscene. Before the end of the first week, I demanded to see Svensk Filmindustri's chief executive, Carl Anders Dymling, and pleaded with him to cancel the project. But our train was running its course and could not be stopped. (Bergman 2011: 286)

This text, acknowledging the richness of the lives and experiences of the exiled Estonians, is also the clearest description of Bergman's attitude that I have found in his writings about the refugees and the immigration to Sweden from Estonia (or the Baltic, as Bergman late in life uses another colonial term for lumping together the three small adjacent nations on the Baltic Sea). I would also like to emphasise that among the small roles and extras in the film, we find a veritable Who's Who of Estonian theatre and culture, out of which many had fled to Sweden in 1944. The director Hanno Kompus and actor Edmar Kuus are quite likely the best known Estonian names in the film (Kompus was also renown as an architect and art critic), but the actresses Marje Parikas, Agnes Lepp-Kaasik and Riina Reinik, actor Rudolf Lipp (the husband of Reinik) and opera soloists Els Vaarman, Priit Hallap and Harri Kaasik should also be mentioned, along with the actor and dancer Teet Koppel – all of them had previously been connected to the prestigious Estonia Theatre in Tallinn, the Estonian national stage that was heavily damaged in the Soviet air raid on Tallinn in March 1944. In addition to these Estonian stage

celebrities, the film, as previously noted, also starred Helene Kuus (Lensi Rõmmer), the real-life wife of Edmar Kuus, who had previously been active on several stages in Tallinn and Pärnu; the actors Gustav Laupman and Karl Sööder; the pianist Hilma Nerep, daughter of Verner Nerep, the legendary chief conductor at the Estonia Theatre, as well as Verner Nerep's brother Ilmar Nerep and sister-in-law Helmi Nerep. Listing these famous Estonian participants in the film is relevant as I believe it has not been done in a scholarly context, and also because these were their only film roles in Sweden – although most of them remained in the country. In a unique way, they were playing roles as well as portraying themselves – most of them were not only refugees, but had also crossed the Baltic Sea in open boats.

According to Bergman himself, the film 'was regarded as a fiasco, a well-deserved failure, in the eyes of both the critics and the public' (Bergman 2011: 290). Later on, he made a great effort to prevent public screenings of the film, as he considered it so bad and not proportionate to the gravity of the situation portrayed. Therefore, the film still has no official distribution, although it has been shown at several cinemathèques and film festivals, and permission was also granted (by rights' holder Svensk Filmindustri and the Bergman family) for a limited number of screenings during the centenary of the director's birth. Yet Bergman still showed the producers that he was able to work rapidly and efficiently with a commercial project. In the years that followed, he moved on to make nine commercials for Bris soap – another of his less-known projects (Burman 2010: 221–247). Furthermore, the Estonians in Sweden were positive about the film – as they saw it, they were finally visible, represented on screen, addressing their own concerns and their own culture (Macnab 2007: 33). 'It is not unusual that diasporas latch on to a stereotypical depiction of selves in lack of real images of the homeland,' as Näripea et al. have noted (Näripea et al. 2016: 65, cf. Naficy 2001).

At the same time, I would still argue that Bergman, at least to some extent, exotifies the Estonian culture, by exposing their language, traditional folk songs and dances, and the overall historical context of migration and underground resistance. The reality of the Estonian refugees, as seen through a Westerner's eyes, becomes something on which to build tension and entertainment. As we have seen, this is related to the idea of Otherness, as the Westerner automatically is the Self, turning the Estonians in the film into the Other, someone different from and alien to the norm. The enjoyment of the pleasures of Otherness is also underlined in the scene where the custodian tells the police about the fears of the old Estonian woman and sums things up by saying that all foreigners are a bit weird, i.e. unlike 'us' – followed by the police finding the handout addressed to refugees, urging them to leave Sweden while there is still time, as they won't be safe there for long.

### WORDS IN THE SILENCE

Bergman's next connection to Estonia was his fourth marriage, this time to the Estonian pianist Käbi Laretei. They met in the late 1950s, were married in 1959 and had a son (Daniel Bergman) in 1962. It is well-known that Laretei introduced Bergman to a variety of music, and – although it is never revealed in Bergman's interviews or writings – most likely also to the exile Estonian context as she was in her twenties when her family fled from Estonia to Sweden, and her father Heinrich Laretei had been a diplomat in the service of the Republic of Estonia.

Käbi Laretei played an important creative part related to *The Silence*, which premiered in 1963. In regard to *The Silence* I would like to argue that Bergman's potential exotification of things Estonian continued, at least to a certain extent. Bergman has written that the film 'was originally called *Timoka*. That was pure coincidence. I saw the title of an Estonian book without knowing what the word meant. I thought it was a good name for a foreign city. In fact, the word means "belonging to the

executioner'" (Bergman 2011: 104). As a curiosity, it is worth noting that Bergman uses the sound of the word as it would be spelled in Swedish, rather than the written Estonian spelling (*Timuka*). Coincidentally, the working title for the film, and the name of the foreign city featured in it, are hardly the only Estonian word in *The Silence*. On the contrary, in the city of Timoka, the locals (or at least the room-service waiter [Håkan Jahnberg] we are introduced to) speak a made-up language in large part based on Estonian. In fact, almost every word uttered in the native tongue of the locals is an Estonian word. It is reasonable to believe that Laretei helped Bergman develop the 'exotic' language for *The Silence*. Hoberman is the only commentator I have found who draws a connection between *This Can't Happen Here* and *The Silence* when, towards the end of his analysis of *This Can't Happen Here*, he speaks of Liquidatzia as 'the grim, terrorized land that Bergman would depict, a dozen years later, in *The Silence*' (Hoberman 1998: 182).

*The Silence* centres around two sisters, Anna (Gunnel Lindblom) and Ester (Ingrid Thulin), on their way home to Sweden with Anna's young son Johan (Jörgen Lindström). However, Ester's illness forces them to check into a hotel in a foreign city and most of the film takes place in that hotel. The title of the film reflects the lack of communication between the two sisters. While Anna and Johan are taking an afternoon nap, Ester starts drinking and strikes up an acquaintance with an old room-service waiter who brings her another bottle of liquor. She tries to communicate with him in French, English and German, alas with no success. Instead, she learns a new word in the foreign language: *kasi*, meaning 'hand' which the waiter both pronounces and writes down for her. **(Figure 4)**

This is the first time an Estonian word is mentioned in the film – something that Birgitta Steene also points out (Steene 1968: 112) – although the word is spelled *käsi* in Estonian (and Finnish). However, the pronunciation from the all-Swedish cast more resembles *käsi* than *kasi*. A similar





Ingmar Bergman, *The Silence* (*Tystnaden*, Sweden, 1963).

FIGURE 4. The waiter (Håkan Jahnberg) teaches Ester (Ingrid Thulin) her first word in the foreign language – *kasi*, meaning 'hand'.

FIGURE 5. Johan (Jörgen Lindström) the foreign words, *najgo* and *kasi*, meaning 'face' and 'hand'.

pronunciation follows when Ester is listening to a performance of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Goldberg Variations* (*Goldberg-Variationen*, 1741) on the radio. The old waiter returns and comments on the music by pronouncing it *muusik*, again similar to the Estonian pronunciation of the word (spelled *muusika*). It is worth noting that while the Estonian language is presented as something foreign and absolutely Other, the few words that are uttered establish something that, within the context of the film, could be seen as a true human communication. The character of the waiter, the primary speaker of the made-up (but primarily Estonian) language, is by far the most human and most caring figure in the film.

The next time we hear the word *kasi* is when Johan is in bed and asks Ester in the next room why she became a translator and whether she knows the language of the country they are in. She denies knowing the language, but says that she has learned a few words. Johan then tells her not to forget to write them down for him, and she promises to do so. Then she comes in to check on him in bed, and in passing, asks him: 'Do you know what "face" is called in this language? It is called *najgo* and "hand" is called *kasi*.' The word *najgo* in turn clearly resembles the Estonian word *nägu*, meaning 'face'. (Figure 5) The two words selected by Ester – the hand and the face – are most certainly in line with the problem of communication that lies at the heart of the film, while creating a special bond between Ester and Johan.

Maaret Koskinen rightfully stresses that the screenplay includes more words, and these are definitely not Estonian, not least in the final shot, and that also applies to the newspaper that Anna is leafing through (Koskinen 2010: 86, 90–91), but in the completed film, the only foreign word that Johan reads out loud is *hadjek* (in the screenplay spelled *hajdek*), meaning 'spirit' or 'soul' (Bergman 2018: 48).

Even if *The Silence* is not widely presented as being a film specifically about Estonia or Estonians – Peter Cowie for

instance writes that the film is set in a 'unidentified country in Eastern Europe' (Cowie 1992: 211) – the more or less clear references to the Estonian language as something foreign, and therefore exotic, confirm the view of the Estonians as the Other.

Furthermore, the film, as well as the screenplay, addresses the idea of the strangeness of the city and country where *The Silence* takes place. In the screenplay, the language is called 'their own language', and the characters talk about 'peculiar words', 'the weird language', 'a strange language' and 'alien incomprehensible words', thereby clearly creating a distance – the Other is everything the Self is not.

## CONCLUSIONS

*This Can't Happen Here* and *The Silence* reflect upon the trauma and impact of World War II in different ways, and both do so from a Westerner's point of view. A common denominator, and in some way, a part of the exotification of Estonianness in both films is Bergman's use of Estonian culture as a part of fictionalised foreign countries. Based on these films, one could assume that, in Bergman's universe, if something is seen as foreign and strange, it is most likely Estonian – despite the close cultural and historical connections between Sweden and Estonia. Interestingly the films also belong to very different genres, the first is a genre film, the second an art film based on an original script by Bergman, the auteur. On the one hand, it is clear that Bergman would have preferred to avoid these issues, because he did not want to be seen as a political director, and politics could undermine his position as a director dealing with existential issues that exist beyond and above politics. On the other hand, the power of cultural representation should not be taken lightly and it is difficult to deny that *This Can't Happen Here* and *The Silence* both expose different aspects of the Estonian language and culture, by focusing on difference and foreignness, constituting Sweden as the Self and Estonia as the Other.

In conclusion, I propose that there are distinctive features in these two Bergman films, *This Can't Happen Here* and *The Silence*, which can be read as examples of the exotification, stereotyping and differentiation of the Estonian culture and language within the framework of Edward Said's Orientalism and Stuart Hall's theory on representation. This is done in order to establish a certain kind of Otherness, which is not necessarily connected to race, class or gender, but still indicates a difference and a cultural hegemony, exotifying the new foreign element in post-war Sweden. It is important to recognise and challenge these structures and the dichotomy between the East/Orient and the West/Occident, and – as I have tried to do in this article – to put it into its historical and cultural context, thereby hopefully developing a discussion about a long-forgotten field.

## REFERENCES

- Bakić-Hayden, Milica** 1995. 'Nesting Orientalism: The Case of Former Yugoslavia'. – *Slavic Review* 54, 4, 917–931.
- Bennich-Björkman, Li** 2007. *Political Culture under Institutional Pressure: How Institutional Change Transforms Early Socialization*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Berge, Anders** 1992. *Flyktningpolitik i stormakts skugga. Sverige och de sovjetiska flyktningarna under andra världskriget*. Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, centrum för multietnisk forskning.
- Bergman, Ingmar** 1989. *The Magic Lantern: An Autobiography*. Trans. Joan Tate. New York: Penguin Books.
- Bergman, Ingmar** 2011. *Images: My Life in Film*. Trans. Marianne Ruuth. New York: Arcade Publishing.
- Bergman, Ingmar** 2018. *Tystnaden*. Stockholm: Norstedts.
- Burman, Christo** 2010. *I teatralitetens brännvidd. Om Ingmar Bergmans filmkonst*. Umeå: Atrium.
- Cowie, Peter** 1992. *Ingmar Bergman: A Critical Biography*. New, updated ed. London: Andre Deutsch.
- Furhammar, Leif; Isaksson, Folke** 1971. *Politics and Film*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Gervais, Marc** 1999. *Ingmar Bergman: Magician and Prophet*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Grevenius, Herbert** 1950. *Tolv timmar*. Shooting script for *This Can't Happen Here*. Archived at the Swedish Film Institute.
- Hall, Stuart** 1996. 'Who Needs "Identity"? – Stuart Hall, Paul du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1–17.
- Hall, Stuart** 1997. 'The Spectacle of the "Other"'. – Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage, 223–290.
- Hoberman, James** 1998. *The Red Atlantis: Communist Culture in the Absence of Communism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Höök, Marianne** 1962. *Ingmar Bergman*. Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand.
- Koskinen, Maaret** 2010. *Ingmar Bergman's The Silence: Pictures in the Typewriter, Writings on the Screen*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Macnab, Geoffrey** 2007. 'Now I See a Darkness'. – *Sight and Sound* 12, 32–34.
- Naficy, Hamid** 2001. *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Näripea, Eva; Mazierska, Ewa; Kristensen, Lars** 2016. 'Gazing at the Baltic: Tourist Discourse in the Cinema of the Baltic Sea Countries'. – Simo Mikkonen, Pekka Suutari (eds.), *Music, Art and Diplomacy: East-West Cultural Interactions and the Cold War*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 49–66.
- Said, Edward** 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Steene, Birgitta** 1968. *Ingmar Bergman*. New York: Twayne.
- Wolff, Larry** 1994. *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.