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CHILDREN AS CONSUMERS AND CO-CREATORS OF CULTURAL PRODUCTS: THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN FILMS ON ESTONIAN CHILDREN'S CULTURE IN THE 1950s

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Abstract: This article gives a folkloristic insight into how cinema and films influenced Estonian children's culture in the late 1940s and in the 1950s. During this period, Estonia was occupied by the Soviet Union. Due to the lack of Soviet film production at that time, the cinemas began to show American, German, and other films of the 1930s, so-called foreign films or trophies. The post-World War II trophy films, which differed from Soviet films in both themes and images, but also ideals, characters, and soundtrack, became box-office hits. The source material comes from the relevant essays sent to the Estonian Folklore Archives at the Estonian Literary Museum. As memories show, cinema and films had a strong influence on children and young people. Trophy films had an impact on children's culture, and children's games and activities found inspiration in them. Children build the culture of their peers, being both consumers of the culture and creating a culture of their own based on the culture of adults. Adult films helped them to socialise and take part in cultural exchanges.

Keywords: children's culture, interpretative reproduction, post-war period, Soviet cinema, Stalinist Estonia, trophy films, youth culture

> *My trips to the cinema started during the German occupation. There was a war going on. We needed something beautiful, something calming to balance the anxiety and worry. My friend's mother attended church. My mother went to the cinema. … During the Soviet era, my mother used to sew a lot at her desk. We rarely went to the cinema. But when we did, the film had to be staged afterwards as vividly as possible for her by scampering around the room.* (ERA, DK 638, 24–25 < Tartu < Viljandi – K. H., b. 1938 (2019))

The passage chosen to open this article aptly illustrates the importance of cinema for children and their parents during and after World War II – even to the extent that the stories seen at the cinema were re-enacted and re-lived through play. In this article I will explore, on the basis of memoirs, the influence cinema had on children's culture. I discuss only the influence of cinema, because even though Estonian Television started broadcasting already in 1955, many families did not have a TV set until much later. Different sources, based on personal experiences, describe games that were inspired by films as well as the trend of collecting photographs of actors. Even though those who reminisce about their experiences preferred watching foreign films that were not about war and fighting, such as the so-called trophy films that were released in the late 1940s, the article also discusses Soviet war films.

THE MEDIA AS A ROLE MODEL AND GUIDE FOR CHILDREN'S GAMES AND ACTIVITIES

Children bring characters, plots, and themes seen in the media into their games. Many scenarios find their way into children's games through children's own day-to-day observations and are inspired by the environment and the real world they are familiar with. Children gather and weave together characters, ideas, and themes from other sources too, including their peers and different media channels. The influence of the media is not limited to television: before the arrival of television, games could be fashioned from things heard on the radio or read in books, and prior to that, from the stories told by adults (Kalliala 2006: 52; Opie & Opie 1984: 12, 330). The importance of media influence on children's culture of play has been highlighted by several scholars. It has been established that play scenarios have increasingly moved away from real life; in the past, most characters and ideals in imaginary games were derived from daily life (Vissel 2004: 187; Korkiakangas 1996: 75; Kalliala 2006: 72–73).

Sociologists consider children as active social participants with their own will, interests, and desires. Children create their own unique peer cultures, using influences from the world of adults in innovative and creative ways. Children themselves are active participants in both cultures (Corsaro 2005 [1997]). Researchers investigating children's games and the media do not favour the view that children are merely passive bystanders who are influenced unidirectionally by what they see in the media (Tucker 2008: 111; Kalliala 2006: 52). Kate Willet calls the media-inspired games "remixes", where children mix together different source materials and re-enact them in games that build on their personal cultural knowledge, skills, and desires. She highlights children's role in

the process, arguing that this is how children create new fields of meaning in their remixed culture (Willett 2014: 149).

The influence of the media is not neutral; it is ideologically charged. The media is seen as playing an efficient role in children's socialisation, especially these days when screen media takes up more and more time. Andra Siibak and Kristi Vinter have pointed out that many children form their "sense of self with the help of the media. Through media idols, children experiment with new roles, construct identities and form social relationships with other children. Among other things, the media is seen as a powerful tool in shaping children's gender roles and perceptions" (Siibak & Vinter 2014: 85).

Fantasy games have been interpreted as a direct preparation for roles in adult life. Children learn about gender roles and role-play through their games (Shuffelton 2009: 225; Tucker 2008: 108–112). As such, games function as tools for socialisation, helping children to learn a behaviour that is considered "appropriate" for men and women, as determined by cultural norms (Tucker 2008: 108–112).

The role of the media in modern society is significantly greater than it was in the 1950s. Today, children spend plenty of time on screen media. They are directly targeted by both media products and the toy industry, which commercialises the characters seen in the media in the form of toys (Chudacoff 2007: 161–195). A major difference between the two generations of children is that, while in the twenty-first century the media is used by everyone (including nursery and school-age children), in the past it was exclusive and not as readily accessible (Süss 2007: 783). In the 1950s, however, it became possible for children to go to the cinema and this opportunity was widely exploited.

SOURCES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As materials, I have used entries to the children's games competition organised by the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum. 45 individuals of different ages participated in the competition. The contributions not only describe childhood activities, but also give explanations, revealing their background and reflecting on them. The guidelines did not include specific questions about the films or the games based on films. They did, however, ask about the imaginative or fantasy games that the participants themselves had invented. The article draws also on ten contributions from a group of writers on biography and folklore. Members of this group usually write a one- or two-page text at home and then read it to the group, which meets once a month.[1] I will look at stories that deal with the subject "Cinema in my life". The cinema-themed

database on which the article is based consists of the work of 19 people, two of them men, the rest women, all of whom are Estonians and have grown up in Estonia. The birth dates of these contributors range from 1929 to 1953. The authors who grew up in the 1950s are now retired but active people.

The texts are written specifically for competitions or meetings and are based on the writers' first-hand experiences. In the field of folkloristics, such entries, sent specifically for collection competitions, are known as thematic storytelling (Estonian: *teemajutustus*) or thematic writing (Estonian: *teemakirjutus*) (Jaago 2018: 6; Pöysä 2009: 41). A number of personal thematic collections have been organised by the Estonian Folklore Archives in recent years and this has become a common way for acquiring archival material. However, the outcome of these collection competitions or thematic writing events has not been analysed significantly in Estonia.

Descriptions of visits to the cinema, film experiences and film-inspired games and hobbies in childhood form a part of childhood memories. As the thematic writings presented here are based on older people's memories of their childhood, it is important to also consider aspects related to memory and the historical perspective when analysing them. The writing of memoirs is always selective, subjective, and evaluative. Memories can be re-evaluated over the course of a lifetime and are influenced by later events in collective and individual experience. Writing memoirs is a way of processing both the present and the future through the past, where the past is given meaning from the perspective of the present. Memories do not convey the events themselves, but the meanings given to them (Kõresaar 2005; Portelli 2000 [1998]).

Similarly, it is not possible to speak about games and hobbies in terms of their precise descriptions, but of our memories of them. Many games have fallen into oblivion, but this means that there is all the more reason to dwell on games and ways of playing that recur in the works of several authors. One type is the games and activities inspired by films seen at cinemas and recalled by retired writers.

There are many ways to narrate the past, but the focus is always chosen by the writer. The memoirists' failure to place their play experiences in a broader historical and social context is likely caused by the biographical time (childhood) and the way of collecting, as the instructions did not require this. The chosen perspective is that of the child. The memories are presented as much as possible from the point of view of the child – any broader knowledge of the historical and political context is shared to a very limited extent with the imaginary reader. Sometimes people may identify with a group and speak on behalf of an entire group, such as a generation. The depiction of the Soviet era in Estonian memory culture has been one-sided, biographers have viewed it as

a "time of suffering" and the dominant line has been images of "rupture", where Estonian national development has stalled (Aarelaid-Tart 2006; Kõresaar 2005; Jõesalu & Kõresaar 2013).

In the twenty-first century, on the basis of the contributions sent in the form of thematic writings, it is particularly valuable to explore the attitudes and views of the writers. It is not possible to establish a coherent picture of the past and the historical truth of an entire generation (Pöysä 2009: 51–52). The focus in this paper is on what these authors have tried to express in their contributions. In order to understand, as a researcher, the children's experiences of the 1950s, I will explore the historical and cultural context of the time. As a research method I will use contextualisation (Bauman & Briggs 1990: 66–72) and William Corsaro's thoughts on the nature of interpretive reproduction of children's culture (Corsaro 2005 [1997]).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The independent Republic of Estonia (1919–1940) was occupied by the Soviet Union in the course of World War II, in 1944. The late Stalinist period (1944–1953) saw the beginning of large-scale social Sovietisation. Ideological pressures in society intensified. The existing economic system was dismantled, the command economy came into force, collective agricultural cooperatives (kolkhozes) were formed, and collectivisation devastated a large part of the rural population. The repression of the Stalinist regime culminated with mass deportations in March 1949. The post-war decade was the heyday of the so-called Forest Brothers movement (Est. *metsavennad*). The large-scale immigration of Russian speakers changed the ethnic and demographic structure of Estonia. There were shortages of both food and other commodities, and the production of staple goods and meeting people's everyday needs were greatly hampered by the prioritisation of heavy industry. Nearly all essentials were hard to come by: groceries, consumer goods, tools, clothes, furniture, etc. People's meals were meagre.

Ideological pressures in society intensified. Literature and art demanded a flattering portrayal and glorification of Soviet society, and the cult of personality was imposed without moderation. Strict censorship and Stalinist propaganda were introduced, Joseph Stalin became the central figure in literature, art, cinema, and theatre. Public information channels were largely employed in the service of communist brainwashing, so that the new Soviet person (Rus. *sovetsky chelovek*) was constantly subjected to propaganda.

The goal of the state authorities of the Soviet Union was to sever ties with the outside world and the period of independence of the Republic of Estonia.

The borders of the Soviet Union were closed; only people with special permits were allowed to go abroad. Foreign newspapers, radio and TV channels were not available; they were blocked. The use of textbooks printed during the Republic of Estonia was prohibited in schools. Political organisations for children and young people were set up, and membership of children's and youth organisations was compulsory (Pajur & Tannberg 2005: 271–288; Mertelsmann 2012; Raun 2001 [1987]: 169–188).

SOVIET CINEMA IN THE 1950s

The first local cinema in Estonia was opened in Tartu in 1908; later cinema houses were built in larger towns. After World War II, travelling cinemas started to operate in the Soviet Union, including Estonia.[2] The travelling cinema sessions took place in community centres, school buildings, kolkhoz centres, and also in the open air. There was great interest, as cinema was not only the most important visual medium before television, but also a "window onto the West" (Mertelsmann 2012: 151). Cinemas were places where the village youth could socialise, as in the post-war decades a film was usually followed by dancing. The showing of films was organised nationally, for a long time by the National Cinema Committee of the ESSR. There were strict regulations as to what could be shown: films, including trophy films, were preceded by a propaganda round-up of Soviet life. Even though there were very few films aimed directly at children and young people, the latter formed a significant and responsive audience. Cinema was available to children in both the city and the countryside because it was cheap or free, and films were shown in the halls of almost every major schoolhouse or community centre.

The Soviet state (most notably Joseph Stalin) had set out to cinematise the entire Soviet empire, whilst hoping that it would also help fill the national treasury. The film production of the Soviet Union was scarce at the time. This is how foreign or trophy films were introduced in cinemas. In Germany, 17,000 feature films were found in the *Reichsfilmarchiv*, which remained in the Soviet zone after Germany's defeat in 1945. Some of these trophy films were copied, dubbed, and screened in the Soviet Union between 1947 and 1956, and informally also later (Kanter 2014; Kenez 2009: 191–195; Mertelsmann 2012: 149–151).

Trophy films were criticised for being ideologically inappropriate for the Soviet people, and attempts were made to prohibit and regulate their screening, but this did not succeed (Kanter 2014; Kenez 2009: 193). Trophy films became widely popular throughout the Soviet Union, turning into something of a cultural phenomenon and causing a culture shock (Mertelsmann 2011: 65;

2012: 150; Tanis 2017). People were fascinated by the films and expressed their fascination in different ways – these screenings caused quite a stir.[3] Actresses like Marika Rökk became female role models for an entire generation across the Soviet Union (Tanis 2017). One reason why these films became so popular was that they were very different from Soviet films. These were mainly American, but also German musical, comedy, and adventure films. On the one hand, they represented a "window into another world" and a different lifestyle, and on the other hand, they did not deal with daily affairs, but were a kind of "escapist fairy tales". They were very different from the socialist realism of Soviet filmmaking (Mertelsmann 2011: 67–68).[4]

The first post-war films starring Estonian actors, *Elu tsitadellis* (Life in the Citadel) (1947) and *Valgus Koordis* (Light in Koordi) (1951), were also released, and well received (Raun 2001 [1987]: 187).

Soviet films were used as propaganda devices to promote the ideological principles of Soviet power. The concept of the hero and the enemy played an important role, among others, in ideological pedagogy. The number one nemesis during the post-war years was fascism, contrasted with Soviet patriotism. Films for children and young adults, as well as books and radio broadcasts, featured young heroes fighting for their country (Raudsepp & Veski 2015: 209–210).

Thus, the trophy films differed from Soviet films in both their subjects and their presentation. The entire setting was different, creating a contrast especially for children and young people who had been born and raised in the realities of the post-war years, in an economically poor environment. The treatment of love and romance in trophy and Soviet (war) films differed markedly. Soviet films subordinated even love to ideology. Catherine Clark has conducted an in-depth analysis of Soviet novels of the 1930s and 1940s, including the novel that became the basis for the film *The Young Guard*. The socialist realism that prevailed in both cinema and literature embodied a certain puritanism – erotic scenes were prohibited, sexual relations and sexual desire made taboo. The foundation of the Soviet family was not love. She writes: "In the Stalinist novel, however, love is an auxiliary ingredient in the plot. The hero's love life is not valuable in itself; it serves only to aid him in fulfilling his tasks and in attaining 'consciousness'" (Clark 1981: 182–183).

The romantic angle was feeble and constrained, the portrayal of emotions restrictive (Borisova 2008). Foreign films portrayed love as a true, great, and self-sacrificing emotion. From the mid-1950s onwards, but especially in the following decades, Indian and Argentine love films shaped the way Soviet people and the children of the period understood romantic relationships and behaviour (Borisov 2002: 290; Kalmre 2015a: 1333; Rupprecht 2017 [2015]: 85–87).

CHILDREN'S PLAY CULTURE IN THE 1950S

There are several distinctive features that characterise growing up and play in the post-war years. Even though children had a considerable workload, they still found time for play. Some studies reveal the way Estonian children played in the post-war period (Grauberg 2003; Tuisk 2018, 2019). Based on the memories under discussion, many games inspired by the countryside were played, imitating home life. One of these was the farm household game using twigs, cones, and stones. The scarcity of toys during and after World War II, and the way children had to make their own toys from natural and other accessible resources, is highlighted in some studies of childhood play (Ramšak 2009; Paksuniemi & Mättä & Uusiautti 2015). Outdoor games were prevalent and group activities enhanced the children's sense of team spirit. Memories also mention objects that are not actually intended for children to play with. One of these is the munitions left over from the war, which the children used in their activities. Playing with munitions continued after the war: children's playthings included cartridges and shells left over from the war, as well as guns and pieces of military equipment (Tuisk 2018).

The abundance of war games during and after World War II is highlighted in the works of researchers as well as in the competition works about children's games. Ideas for games were taken from real life: for example, deportations, chasing escaping convicts, but also kolkhoz assemblies and weddings. Ideas for war games could also be found in films and books.

Yet no imitation of Pavlik Morozov or other Soviet child heroes can be found in the memoirs I examined. However, children imitated films whose plots were adventurous, such as children's film *Timur and His Team*,[5] as described by a woman born in 1952. In comparison, Soviet children's films of the mid-twentieth century were dominated by ideological struggles and markedly polarised characters. In addition to the "enemies", children's films featured battles against disloyal and selfish companions, who occasionally transformed during the course of the film (Fedorov & Levitskaya & Gorbatkova 2017).

Adventure games got their inspiration from books, among other things. Reminiscences point out that Indians and cowboys, Robinson Crusoe, as well as the adventures of Matsi poeg Mats (Mats's son Mats) were played.[6]

THE MEMOIRISTS' PERSPECTIVE: WAR FILMS, TROPHY AND OTHER FOREIGN FILMS, AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON ACTIVITIES

Cinema-themed reports describe the emotional impact of cinema and films on children or even young women and men. In addition to the storyline of the film, they also remember the events leading up to the cinema visit, how they felt while watching the film, etc. It is meaningful and indicative of their importance that both games and other activities inspired by the films are still remembered today, in old age. War and trophy films have a particular place in the memoirs and are often contrasted.

Children were heavily influenced by what they saw in war films. For example, a woman who went to a school on Muhu Island describes how, after seeing the film *The Young Guard*,[7] children started to play it so passionately that their teachers banned the game (ERA, DK 124, 1–10 < Tallinn < Muhu parish – M. L., b. 1940 (2013)). The film is about the resistance movement of young people during the German occupation; the events are tragic, and the film is not suitable for younger children. There is also a romantic angle, as in most Soviet war films (see, e.g., Clark 1981).

A number of those who write about their childhood cinema experiences emphasise how war films instilled fear in them. For a man born in 1929, the mandatory viewing of *The Young Guard* left a deep, paralysing impression: "The film overwhelmed my psyche so horribly that I did not go to the cinema again for several years" (EFA I 316, 55–56 < Kambja parish < Tallinn – K. K., b. 1929 (2019)). Children could experience similar unnerving feelings when war games were staged or turned too cruel, as several accounts point out.

One of the films that is mentioned in the memoirs is *Tarzan*.[8] This is recalled in both children's games competitions, where the writing is inspired by games, and in cinema-themed stories. The Tarzan series (1932, 1934, 1936) were shown in Estonian cinemas as early as the 1930s. A woman who grew up in a small village in southern Estonia reflects on her experience of watching the film and playing a Tarzan game; three other women also talk about playing the game:

> *Tarzan, starring Johnny Weissmuller and Jane Maureen O'Sullivan, was very popular. There was such a crowd at Tagula* [village] *that the audience could not fit in. We climbed in through the window and sat on the floor, a metre from the screen. It was May. Afterwards the boys learned to make Tarzan noises in the schoolyard and tied ropes to the branches of trees to swing on them as if they were vines. And then they were looking for a Jane who could be lifted to the top of the tree – I was the smallest*

> *and lightest in our class.* (ERA, DK 632, 16–17 < Kuressaare < Sangaste parish – M. P., b. 1938 (2019))

The impact of foreign films on girls (or rather, young ladies) is highlighted by a memoirist who explicitly contrasts the heroes of Soviet war films with other film actors and the themes of war with the love themes of foreign films. At the very end of the passage, she reveals that she was in love with one of the actors:

> *I was fed up with the characters made into heroes by Soviet propaganda. Again Pavel Korchagin, Pavlik Morozov, Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, Volodya Dubinin. We had to repeat them over and over again from class to class, memorising pieces of the transcript. Some passages have stuck in my memory like a memento. Now I fell in love with new heroes who bore no resemblance to the previous ones. They did not wave red flags, they did not carry guns, they did not have the slightest desire to throw themselves onto the barrel of a machine gun. They were beautiful and successful, courageous and enterprising characters. And they were played by great actors. My favourite ones were Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison from the film "My Fair Lady".*[9] (ERA, DK 633, 16–18 < Tartu < Suure-Jaani parish – E. U., b. 1945 (2019))

The three women recall that they were captivated by the beautiful songs and music of the films and that they danced and sang as seen in the films. "All kinds of love stories" were danced, sung, and invented while wearing old lace curtains, explains a woman born in 1946. In addition to Indian and Egyptian films, the activities were based on photographs of the actors, which were seen in magazines and advertising brochures (ERA, DK 387, 1-5 < Tartu <Lüganuse parish; Jõhvi parish, Kiviõli; Sompa borough (2016)).

Collecting photos of the actors, exchanging them and pasting them into albums was another hobby of the girls, and one that is also linked to the film about Tarzan (EFA I 169, 111–122 < Valga – T. K., b. 1940 (2013); ERA, DK 638, 24–25 < Tartu < Viljandi – K. H., b. 1938 (2019)); ERA, DK 632, 16–17 < Kuressaare < Sangaste parish – M. P., b. 1938 (2019)). Memories of such collecting activities are also shared in biographies (ERA, DK 387, 1–5 < Tartu < Viru-Nigula parish < Hargla parish – V. S., b. 1946 (2017); Mertelsmann 2012: 151). The same girl from Tagula school, who later went to school in Viljandi, writes at length about her collection. Three pages of her photo album of film actors are dedicated to Tarzan:[10]

> *All the girls in my room and I myself developed the greatest interest in film actors, especially foreign actors, in 1953–1957, when we studied at Viljandi Pedagogical School and shared the same room at 32 Jakobsoni Street. Some schoolboys came to the dormitory to offer us photos. Every time we saw a film, they would come with their photos. We had hardly any money, but we could not resist buying the photos. Sometimes the price of a photo was 2 roubles, sometimes 1 rouble a piece. We saw many films twice, all depending on the actors, like Eddy Nelson, Robert Taylor, Clark Gable, the films* Tarzan *and* The Call of Destiny. (ERA, DK 632, 16–17 < Kuressaare < Sangaste parish – M. P., b. 1938 (2019))

As these descriptions show, pictures of actors and actresses were also cut out from cinema adverts in newspapers and magazines from the era of the Republic of Estonia. The photos were collected, exchanged, and shared.[11] One contributor describes the photos as priceless items, which were smoothed out, and even washed and ironed (ERA, DK 638, 24–25 < Tartu < Viljandi – K. H., b. 1938 (2019)).[12]

One activity recalled from childhood is making paper dolls, drawing clothes for them and playing with them. This activity is also associated with the portrayal of film and theatre actors.

Considering the limited time during which the trophy films were shown, the games, hobbies and perceptions that derive from them occupy a remarkably large part of the memories.

THE FILM OF TARZAN AS A BASIS FOR CHILDREN'S CREATIVE INTERPRETATIONS

Re-enactments of Tarzan are cited as an example in a number of studies of children's games of the mid-twentieth century (Virtanen 1978: 29–30; Opie & Opie 1984: 338; Vissel 2004: 188; Chudacoff 2007: 130). Leea Virtanen presents the Tarzan game in her chapter on war games, and Peter and Iona Opie place it among their Storybook World games. This includes games imitating different kinds of adventures, as well as "modern fairy tales", such as the adventures of Cinderella-like orphans or treasure-hunters (Opie & Opie 1984: 337–338). The descriptions suggest that the game mimics the actions of Tarzan. As children like to imagine different adventures in games (Opie & Opie 1984: 332; Kalliala 2006: 73–82), the Tarzan film provides a good example. Tarzan's portrayal can be found in both

biographies (EKM EKLA, f 350, m 1: 2679) and fiction, such as Leelo Tungal's *Seltsimees laps ja suured inimesed* (Comrade Child and the Grownups) (2008).

Tarzan was reportedly imitated specifically by boys. Two women recall playing Tarzan together with boys. One of them remembers the Tarzan-like "hanging from tree vines" and the copying of his yell, but she names boys as the performers. She thought they liked Tarzan because he was as bold and skilful as they wanted to be (K. H., b. 1938). The recaller and her schoolmates adapted the film to their own culture, imagining themselves adventuring in the jungle like Tarzan. It is also important that the narrator uses our-form, as does another woman born in 1938, whose memory is quoted above. According to William Corsaro (2005 [1997]), a common peer culture is created collectively, using the products of adult culture creatively and interpretively. The latter means that they take over the necessary traits of their culture that matter to them. In the present case, the idea (there may be other ideas) of a brave and courageous hero finds re-use in children's culture.

In addition to the adventurous theme, boys probably liked the character of Tarzan. Most children's play researchers (e.g., Evaldsson 2009: 323; Hughes 1993) acknowledge that boys' and girls' favourite characters, as well as the favourite heroes they portray, are different. In general, studies of children's games have shown that boys prefer to show their physical dexterity, courage, and toughness, fighting spirit and aggression, while girls' participatory culture is characterised by cooperation, close relationships, verbality and peacefulness. Ann-Carita Evaldsson (2009: 316–328), in her survey of children's games and play, provides a number of examples of how pre-school and primary school age children's gender roles are constructed and manifested through play, but underlines that one has to be cautious in drawing rigid conclusions. Both boys and girls learn, experiment, challenge, and refute stereotypical gender roles while constructing overlapping social identities through playful interaction.

The masculinity of the Tarzan character in the film is also emphasised in discussions. Tarzan is a fictional character, a white Englishman raised by apes in the wild African jungle. Tarzan combines a rugged jungle upbringing with a natural hereditary intelligence, and as such embodies the American ideal of masculinity (Reid 2017: 147–148).[13]

If we place Tarzan in the post-war context of the Soviet Union, an important feature emerges that distinguishes Tarzan's character from Soviet film heroes. Among the trophy films were several films based on cowboy and pirate themes, these "wonderful films were more attractive and interesting than the boring and slow ones of the Soviets" (Zhuk 2014: 596). Sergei Zhuk notes:

> *Screened in the USSR during the 1940s and 50s, Tarzan and the adventurous pirates from the American films taught Soviet children the first lessons of individual freedom as an absolute value, while cowboys and sheriffs from the western films showed a model of personal responsibility and what Joseph Brodsky later called 'the momentous justice'. Thus American popular culture introduced ideas of personal independence, which shaped the entire imagination and perception of the outside world for this Soviet post-war generation.* (Zhuk 2014: 597)

THE ROLE OF TROPHY FILMS AND OTHER FOREIGN FILMS IN THE SOCIALISATION OF GIRLS

Girls were fascinated by beautiful actors and were performing films and plays, dancing to music and singing. Making paper dolls, drawing clothes for them and playing with them was very popular with the girls of that period. This too has been associated with the portrayal of the work and life of film as well as theatre actors.

A woman, born in the 1930s, shares her impressions of how she and her girlfriends played the lives of actresses, aspiring to be like the beautiful actresses seen in cinemas, and re-enacting their roles. Shirley Temple, Zarah Leander, and other actresses of the period were the beauty icons of the era.

> *In my schooldays, trophy films with happy endings were shown in cinemas, starring famous actors and actresses: Zarah Leander, Deanna Durbin, Marika Rökk, Shirley Temple, Lilian Harvey, the figure skater Sonja Henie. These films captivated us with their beauty, dance, and music. … Eventually, we began to play these film stars ourselves. Each of us took the name of one of our favourites and "incarnated" as that actress. My deskmate was the best, because she herself was a tiny, beautiful, adorable little poser like Shirley Temple. We wrote letters to each other in the role of the film stars. When we came to school, we exchanged them.* (ERA, DK 638, 24–25 < Tartu < Viljandi – K. H., b. 1938 (2019))

Dressing oneself or one's dolls in beautiful clothes, portraying them as beautiful and fancy, is a way of creating an "illusion of luxury and fine living" (Illouz

1997). Films and film actors are also used to "sell" and create romantic sentiment – girls' romantic culture is strongly linked with consumerism. Films (as commodities) shape girls' perceptions of romantic feelings and relationships (ibid.). Researchers have pointed out that girls in their activities do not so much imitate the activities of actresses and their lives, as they learn from popular culture exactly how to imagine themselves as desired objects, how to be a woman (Gannon & Byers & Gonick 2014: 125–126).

In the 1950s, the dreams of adolescent girls were nourished, among other things, by foreign romantic films. As mentioned previously, the middle of the decade saw the arrival of Indian musical romances and Argentinian melodramatic films in Soviet cinemas.[14] Essays on cinematic themes describe how, after seeing an Indian love film, people would walk the streets with tear-stained faces – a melodramatic film had a profound effect on young women (EFA I 317, 16–17< Valga < Kose parish – E. M., b. 1944 (2019)).

The prevalence of romantic themes – love and relationships – is also seen as part of girls' culture. A woman who remembers the film *The Hussar Ballad*[15] as her greatest cinematic experience, describes the effect the film had on her:

> *It was colourful, about love, and with very beautiful actors. I was particularly touched by a scene where a girl was singing with a doll on her lap. The song was about longing for her lover. The subject and the emotion touched me deeply because I myself longed for that feeling, but had not yet experienced it.* (ERA, DK 630, 15–17 < Häädemeeste parish – M. J., b. 1952 (2019))

As was also pointed out above, girls collected pictures of actors in their albums and exchanged them. The popularity of handmade scrapbooks, songbooks, and diaries among girls in the twentieth century is believed to be the result of the fact that, through these activities, young women were able to realise their unfulfilled desires, unanswered feelings, and longings. In the studies of girls' subculture, this kind of self-representation has been recognised as one of the most important markers of age, identity, and group behaviour. Analysing love stories among girls, Eda Kalmre concludes that for them, the themes of love and friendship that predominate in these written collections were important elements in their maturing process (Kalmre 2010, 2015b). Collecting photos of film actors in albums may have served the same purpose – to be a repository of important topics at the time when one was growing from a girl into a woman. Regardless of time, environment, and context, girls define their lives and identities through romantic culture (Kalmre 2015a: 1340).

In the 1950s, adolescent girls' dreams were fuelled by foreign romance films. They tried to create a romantic culture for girls by collecting photos of actors and dancing and singing like actors in movies. This was one of the sources on which they built their gender identity.

Childhood memories written several decades later do not usually show exactly how fantasy games were played, as the narrators no longer remember it. Also, the source material is not ample enough to draw extensive statistical conclusions. However, comparing the playful activities inspired by the trophy films, it turns out that different groups of girls came up with different activities. In this way, they portrayed themselves directly as actors, exchanging letters, as in the example of Shirley Temple the woman born in 1938 recalls. But they also played, sang, and danced based on the beautiful music and love themes of Indian and trophy films, as the woman born in 1946 recalls. It is noteworthy and repetitive in the descriptions that this was done collectively by many people together. According to William Corsaro, young children create and participate in a common peer culture. They provide information about adult culture, but they interpret and reproduce it creatively in the course of social interaction, giving new meanings to cultural products and thus shaping a common peer culture. Children are active social participants with their own will, interests, and desires (Corsaro 2005 [1997]).

CONCLUSIONS

In post-war Estonia, just like the rest of the Soviet Union, cinema was one of the few forms of entertainment. Interest in cinema was great, as it was the most important visual medium in the late Stalinist era before television, as well as a window to the West, which shaped the entire imagination and perception of the outside world for this Soviet post-war generation. The post-World War II trophy films, which differed from Soviet films in terms of their themes, ideas, presentation, and setting, became box-office hits. A luxurious, glittering, and gorgeous world was contrasted with the impoverished realities, fears, and ideological oppression of the 1950s Soviet Estonia. Cinema and films had a strong influence on children and young people in particular, who in their memoirs highlight the contrast with Soviet war films.

Trophy films had an impact on children's culture. Children were borrowing, recycling, and reinterpreting cultural representations and ideas in a creative manner. By interpreting trophy and other foreign films made for adults, children created their own, children's culture. At the same time, films as cultural products

also influenced them, shaping their views and perceptions. In particular, films had an impact on children in building their gender identity. Trophies and other foreign films have left a deep imprint on Estonians' collective memory.

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NOTES

[1] For further information on the biography group, see Kirss & Hinrikus 2010. A similar group of contributors of the Folklore Archives in the Tartu region was formed in 2019.

[2] A travelling cinema is a mobile unit engaged in the scheduled screening of films (on the premises designed for this purpose or in random locations, as well as in the open air). In 1960 there were 27,890 travelling cinemas in the Soviet Union and 197 in Estonia (ENE 1975: 16). In addition to travelling cinemas, there were also local cinemas in Estonia: in 1950, 207 venues were listed as showing films in Estonia (Mertelsmann 2011: 64).

[3] "The spring of 1947, Marika Rökk, but especially the screening of *The Woman of My Dreams* (1944) in Moscow was recalled for years to come – from the queues to the speculation on tickets, the like of which had never been seen…" (Kanter 2014: 126). According to Bulat Okudzhava from Tbilisi: "Normal life in the city stopped. Everyone was talking about the film and rushed to see it when they had the chance. People on streets were whistling the tunes of the songs from the film, and you could hear people playing the songs on the piano through open windows" (Kenez 2009: 192–193).

[4] The more entertaining productions of the Soviet cinema in the 1930s were the hugely successful musical comedies starring Liubov Orlova as the lead: *The Merry Lads*; *Volga, Volga*; and *Circus* (Mertelsmann 2011: 67–68). The adventure and fairy tale films of the 1930s specially intended for children were also mostly free of ideology, but they were rarely screened in Estonian cinemas at that time.

[5] The film *Timur and His Team* was released in 1940, and dubbed into Estonian in 1945. Arkadi Gaidar's book was published in Estonian in 1945, the radio play was completed in 1952.

[6] Both Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* and Karl August Hindrey's story "Matsi poeg Mats" were published in Estonian as early as 1880.

[7] *The Young Guard* (1948) was directed by Sergei Gerasimov at Mosfilm. The film is based on the novel by the same name by Alexander Fadeyev (1947). Alexander Fadeyev was one of the most important exponents of Stalinist ideology and policy in literature.

[8] The first film based on the Tarzan stories was made in 1918. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's first film *Tarzan the Ape Man*, starring Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan, was released in 1932 and was a huge hit. The film was followed by sequels and was distributed worldwide. The film is based on the stories of the American writer Edgar Rice Burroughs, published during the 1910s. Several of Burroughs's stories about Tarzan's life were also published in Estonian from 1923 onwards. Children growing up in the 1950s may have been familiar with these books.

[9] *My Fair Lady* is the 1964 film adaptation of the stage musical of the same name, which won eight Oscar awards. The film was directed by George Cukor and starred Audrey Hepburn and Rex Harrison (see http://www.filmiveeb.ee/filmid/2486/Minu-veetlev-leedi/, last accessed on 27 June 2022).

[10] In addition to the Tarzan film, the album also contains photos of Indian films, other US-produced trophy films and actors, as well as Soviet film actors such as Liubov Orlova, Pavel Kadochnikov, and others; photos of theatre Estonia operas *Yevgeny Onegin* and *The Young Guard*, and actors (Elsa Maasik, Georg Ots, and others), signed in Estonian and Russian.

[11] For more on the Estonian girls' scrapbooks and other albums, see Kalmre 2010. For information on this practice in New Zealand in the 1950s, see Sutton-Smith 1981: 218–220.

[12] The reflections under consideration reiterate that personal toys, as well as books, were very important, valued, and cherished (Tuisk 2019: 59–60).

[13] The author of the story, Burroughs, characterises Tarzan as "the perfect specimen of manhood", which was precisely what he intended to portray (Reid 2017).

[14] Indian actor Raj Kapoor and Argentine actress Lolita Torres became legendary. Concerning Latin American films in the Soviet Union, see Rupprecht 2017 [2015].

[15] *The Hussar Ballad* (Mosfilm, 1962) is a musical comedy directed by Eldar Riazanov, starring Yuri Yakovlev and Larisa Golubkina. It takes place in 1812.

ARCHIVAL SOURCES

EKM EKLA – Estonian Cultural History Archives, Estonian Literary Museum
ERA – Estonian Folklore Archives, Estonian Literary Museum
EFA – Folklore collection of the Estonian Folklore Archives
DK – Digital manuscripts of the Estonian Folklore Archives

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