

Performing and Reimagining White ‘Western’ Masculinity on the Baltic Screen

Liina-Ly Roos

Abstract: This article analyses two recent Baltic films, Jaak Kilmi’s *The Dissidents* (*Sangarid*, 2017, Estonia) and Romas Zabarauskas’s *The Lawyer* (*Advokatas*, 2020, Lithuania), which engage with migration, whiteness, white privilege and their intersection with gender and sexuality in countries that moved from ‘post-Soviet’, to becoming members of the European Union and realigning themselves with (Western) Europeanness. As this realignment often also comes with racial or colonial ideologies, these two films imagine different ways of navigating what this realignment might mean in the Baltic countries in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: whiteness, Westernness, masculinity, migration, Baltic cinema

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One of the recurring tropes in European cinema that deals with migration during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has been the victimised Eastern European (often a woman) who is seeking a better life in Western or Northern Europe. As Mariah Larsson (2010), Olof Hedling (2018), Mari Laaniste (2010), Anna Estera Mrozewicz (2018) among others, have demonstrated, Nordic filmmakers often chose the Baltic countries as a dark, desolate space that functioned as a proximate location of otherness during the first two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These films were almost exclusively about women from the Baltic countries who either get trapped in sex trafficking or participate in other ways in sexual transactions across the Baltic Sea¹. They migrate to the Nordic countries because the post-Soviet Baltic societies are portrayed as desolate, full of crime and hopelessness. As Olof Hedling, however, pointed out in an article published in 2018, along with the gradual stabilisation of conditions in the Baltic countries, “these countries and the associated tropes have largely disappeared from Swedish and Scandinavian screens” (2018, 253). On the Baltic screen, however, the 2010s brought a new kind of cinematic engagement not only with migration, but also with the meaning of whiteness, white privilege, and their intersection with gender and sexuality in these countries as they moved from ‘post-Soviet’ to becoming members of the European Union and realigning themselves with (Western)

¹ These sexual transactions were typically portrayed as morally questionable and deviant from the idea of ‘good Scandinavian sex’. See more on the discourses around moral and good sexual practices in Sweden in Kulick 2005. Examples of such films include *Lilja 4-ever* (2002) and *Torsk på Tallinn* (1999).

Europeanness. This article analyses closely how two such films, Jaak Kilmi's *The Dissidents* (*Sangarid*, 2017, Estonia) and Romas Zabarauskas's *The Lawyer* (*Advokatas*, 2020, Lithuania) establish this realignment by focusing on characters who perform, whether successfully or not, what they understand to be Western masculinity. Each film focuses on different implications of becoming Western and how that is connected to white privilege in the Baltic countries in the twenty-first century.

The Dissidents is an action-comedy that depicts three young Estonian men, Ralf (Märt Pius), Mario (Karl-Andreas Kalmet), and Einar/Kapp (Veiko Porkanen) who escape Soviet-occupied Estonia to Sweden in the 1980s. Framed by Ralf's life in Sweden in 2016 where he lives in a quiet neighbourhood and is a Swedish citizen and owner of a small company, the majority of the film is an extended flashback to another world, Soviet-occupied Estonia in the 1980s, where he and his friends are running an underground business buying various Western goods from Finnish tourists in Tallinn and selling them for profit (a common activity in the last decade of Soviet occupation). Ralf's upbeat voiceover and brightly coloured images mediate a way of remembering the last decade of Soviet occupation in Estonia – while acknowledging the oppression of the occupation and a general lack of necessities, it is also common to convey humorous stories of deceiving the Soviet powers and finding ways to get access to Western products and culture. After Mario's brother has been forcefully mobilised to fight in the Soviet-Afghan war, Ralf, Mario and Kapp decide to leave for Sweden through Finland. While the initial crossing of the Baltic Sea seems scary, they are able to easily get to Sweden, where they are welcomed by the local Swedish Estonian society (primarily made up of Estonian refugees from WWII) as heroes from behind the iron curtain. The film includes several comedic sequences that play on the novelty of products and behaviours that were not accessible to the men in the Soviet Union. After they are sent to a refugee centre and are offered menial jobs at a Volvo factory, Mario and Kapp decide that robbing a bank would be a better way of making money in this country. This leads to them committing two robberies; Kapp is caught, Mario escapes to an unknown country, and Ralf is imprisoned along with Kapp because he is falsely accused of planning the robberies. Once they have been released, however, they are quickly able to make themselves a good life in Sweden, and the film ends with present-day (around 2016) Ralf travelling to Estonia to identify the body of Mario who has died. In the film's last scene Ralf is on the ferry back to Sweden, notices some refugees hiding on the ferry and gives one of them his watch.

The Lawyer, which is inspired by the melodramas *All that Heaven Allows* by Douglas Sirk and *Ali, Fear Eats the Soul* by Rainer Werner Fassbinder in its form and storyline, takes place in the 2010s in Lithuania and Serbia, and tells a story of a wealthy Lithuanian lawyer Marius (Eimutis Kvoščiauskas) who develops a romantic interest in Ali

(Doğaç Yıldız), a sex cam worker and a Syrian refugee currently living in Serbia. They meet online through a sex cam chat, and after Marius's father dies, he travels to Serbia to meet Ali in person. The film's early scenes about Marius's life in Lithuania portray him as both minoritised and privileged as he is gay in a homophobic society while also having the means for a comfortable life in a classy downtown apartment. The film shows how he is confronted with his ignorance regarding other minoritised people in Lithuania. When he arrives in Serbia and learns more about Ali's life, Marius wants to help him get into the European Union, but as he tries to build a case for Ali as a LGBTQ+ refugee, he understands both that this is not enough for any of the refugee offices, and as Ali continues to tell him, he did not escape Syria because of his sexuality but because of the terrors of war. After they have decided that there is no legal way for Marius to help Ali, the film ends with them stealing another man's passport and driving away together. Paying homage to Sirk and Fassbinder's films about love stories that are impossible because of class or racial hierarchies and prejudice, *The Lawyer* foregrounds its exploration of an impossible love story in the twenty-first century, telling us about both the shifting and persistent hierarchies and prejudices regarding race, gender, and sexuality in Eastern Europe.

Both films were made around the time that Baltic societies were for the first time facing a possible influx of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (2015–2017). While the final destination of people escaping from the interrelated wars in these three countries was usually Western European or the Nordic countries, as part of the EU the Baltic countries were advised to accept a certain number of refugees. This caused heated debate in both Estonia and Lithuania, where many expressed suspicion of refugees of colour, often drawing from racist and Islamophobic ideologies (see, for example Sutkutė 2022; Soonvald 2015). While there is a long history of similar tendencies in Western European countries that have received migrants and refugees of colour for decades, the Baltic countries have more often, along with other Eastern European countries, been countries of origin for migrants and refugees. There were, of course, large waves of Russian-speakers who relocated to the Baltic countries during the Soviet Union, causing ethnic tensions and often representing the ideology of the occupier, which resulted in further suspicion of migration in the post-Soviet era. Both during the Soviet occupation and particularly after the fall of the Soviet Union, there were large waves of migration from many Eastern European countries to the UK, Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Finland, and as scholars such as Anca Parvulescu (2015) have demonstrated, Eastern European migrants were also racialised and not always fully accepted in Western Europe. Because of their close proximity to Western European countries and cultures, they were seen as not quite white or Western, though there was a possible trajectory towards becoming white and European, which distinguished

many of these not quite white migrants from people of colour and contributed to racialised hierarchies (see more in Parvulescu 2015; Braidotti 2007). Equating Westernness with whiteness has been a common rhetoric in the (post)colonial worldview that has impacted most countries in the world. As Sara Ahmed has written, colonialism makes “the world ‘white’ as a world that is inherited or already given” (2007, 111). This means that being white makes it easier to inhabit certain parts of this world (particularly in Europe and North America) and that this ease is often not noticeable to white people because whiteness has been the norm for so long. Thus, as David Theo Goldberg (2008), Fatima el-Tayeb, Tobias Hübinette and Catrin Lundström (2014) among others have argued, race and whiteness continue to be convoluted topics that haunt Europe. The concepts of whiteness, white privilege and race are even less talked about in countries like Estonia and Lithuania where the general consensus is that because these societies are predominantly white and have themselves suffered from the traumatic history of colonisations and/or occupations, talking about white privilege is not really relevant there.² However, we can see that the (post)colonial world view where Westernness equals whiteness continues to have an impact and reproduce stereotypes and racialisation in this region as well. For example, the 2015–2017 refugee movement in Europe were met with significant racist outcries against the refugees. Furthermore, as scholarship (see below) has shown, racial and colonial ideologies were present both in the early movements for independence in the Baltics and when these countries were realigning themselves with Western or Northern Europeanness after the fall of the Soviet Union

This article looks at how *The Dissidents* and *The Lawyer* engage with whiteness and white privilege in the Baltic societies as they imagine different stories of migration. First, I provide a short overview of scholarship touching on issues such as race, whiteness, and their intersection with gender in this region. This is followed by close analysis of how the two films construct characters who perform the normative ideas of white Western masculinity and who, to various extents, become aware of their privilege as white citizens of the European Union. *The Dissidents* does this in order to establish the trajectory of Estonians becoming white and Western. It does not complicate the final gesture of Ralf giving his watch to the refugee. Instead, his character asserts that an Estonian man can become a generous Westerner who can now help the nameless refugees on the boat, thus differentiating him clearly from refugees and migrants of colour and not really elaborating on what it means to have the privilege he enjoys. While a

2 Starting in the eighteenth century, both Estonia and Lithuania were under the rule of the Russian empire and after gaining independence in the early twentieth century, were occupied by the Soviet Union for about half of the century. Additionally, Estonian collective and cultural memory has often emphasised the narrative of 700 years of serfdom, as Estonia was ruled by various powers starting in the thirteenth century.

generically and thematically somewhat different film, *The Lawyer* starts out with the figure of the generous Western man in 2010s Baltic countries. It meditates on whether his attempts at helpful gestures towards a refugee with whom he is in love function as a rendition of the hackneyed white saviour motif in Western European and North American media, or whether he, as both a minoritised and privileged Baltic protagonist, might deconstruct the white saviour figure, a well-meaning but paternalistic and ultimately self-serving white character that is a common depiction of white European protagonists in European films about refugees and migrants (see more about such films in Celik Rappas and Phillis 2020). Playing more with film form, as it refers to Douglas Sirk's and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's melodramas, *The Lawyer* arrives at a similar conclusion as these films, which, according to Jonathan Goldberg (2016), shows how despite seeming progress in their respective societies, much is still the same. Thus, what both films ultimately maintain is the view that while whiteness and privilege have complicated histories in these previously colonised and occupied countries, realignment with Western and/or Northern Europeanness often also includes realigning with racial and colonial ideologies that have had a significant role in the forming core of modern European identity. As works of fiction, they imagine different ways of navigating these aspects of society.

Discourses of race and gender in the Baltics

In 2021, Estonia's KUMU national art museum featured an exhibition titled *Rendering Race (Erinevuste esteetika)*, the first of its kind to explore how Estonian artists depicted race and racial differences during the 1920s and 1930s, when the newly independent Estonian Republic was rapidly developing and Estonian artists had more opportunities to travel to Africa, Asia, and South America. Curated by American art historian Bart Pushaw, the exhibit demonstrated that in these works by canonical Estonian artists, there was both respectful engagement with artists and people of colour as well as instances of exotification and racist caricature. The curatorial decision to change the titles of those art works that used derogatory terms caused wide polemic discussion in Estonia, some accusing Pushaw of cancel culture and of seeing racism where it doesn't exist. As a result, the Estonian Parliament held a special session on the exhibition at which primarily right-wing politicians expressed concerns that talking about colonialism might force Estonians to feel guilty about things they do not deserve to feel guilty about (Velmet 2021). This incident is a poignant example of, as Jaanika Kingumets and Markku Sippola (2022) put it, "a lack of understanding among Estonians as a nation of what racialized othering means and how it works within complex webs of power as a structural and multifaceted system of privilege and disadvantage" (160). While each Baltic country has its nuanced history of race and whiteness, when looking

at society's attitudes to people of colour, especially refugees during the 2015–2017 period, we can see explicitly racist reactions in both Estonia and Lithuania, while the dominant narrative from state government has maintained that racism does not exist in these countries. This might sound similar to Nordic countries, which have much larger communities of people of colour, many of whom experience racism and discrimination, while much of the official rhetoric has continued to focus on the goodwill of these countries and pointed to other locations in the world that have issues with racism (see for example Hübnette and Tigervall 2009). In the contemporary Baltic countries, however, drawing attention to racism and racist ideologies is often seen as another example of a foreign concept forcefully brought into a country whose history is that of being colonised and occupied by different empires.

Jaanika Kingumets and Markku Sippola (2022) explain some of the reasons behind the perspective that talking about racism or anti-racist efforts is not relevant in Estonia, for example the legacy of Soviet ideology that propagated the belief that there was no racism in Soviet society; the focus in post-Soviet Estonia on language and citizenship politics from the point of view of ethnic tension; and the long history of being occupied or colonised by various empires, all of which have created a discourse of victimisation and exceptional suffering (see also Velvet 2011). This kind of rhetoric is problematic for several reasons. It overlooks the role that race had in the creation of Baltic nation-states in the early twentieth century where Estonia and Latvia adapted some German nationalistic ideas, racialised hierarchies of peoples as well as eugenic practices, or the “national sense of anti-Semitism [that] was especially exacerbated in the advent of Lithuanian independence” (Zakharov, Law and Harjo 2017, 22). Furthermore, as Bart Pushaw writes, during the interwar era, when blackness gained hypervisibility in popular culture, racialised stereotypes of black savagery also appeared in Estonian art, thus, contributing to racist understandings of people of colour. Due to centuries of colonisation by different imperial powers that had also categorised Baltic peoples as inferior races, both in the newly established nation-states of early twentieth century and after gaining re-independence in the early 1990s, official rhetoric focused on maintaining a homogenous national identity and memory as well as the nations realigning themselves with Western Europe (see Kalnanš 2016; Peiker 2016). As ‘Westernness’ has acquired a symbolic value in the Baltic countries that during the Soviet occupation was associated with freedom and had a significant role in resisting the totalitarian regime, the problematic understanding that Europeaness and Westernness mean whiteness has not been as visible. As postcolonial and critical race theories have argued, the West is a construction beyond geographical borders that was established to produce and maintain a colonial system that included racial hierarchies and othering in order to maintain power (see Said 1974; Mignolo 2000). Tracing the

images of Estonians (photographs and other art) from between 1850 and 1950, Pushaw demonstrates that this time period saw the transformation of Estonians portrayed by different imperial photographers or researchers as 'Asiatic' or as part of the animal kingdom, into 'European'. During the interwar era, Estonian racial purity became increasingly important under the premises of fears about miscegenation; it became "paramount to visualise virility as something desirable, distinctively white" (Pushaw 2020). While Estonians had essentially become white by the middle of the twentieth century, Eastern Europe continued to be understood as the incomplete self of Western Europe as proper Europe (Krivonos), and when the Soviet Union fell and the Baltic countries quickly strove to realign themselves with Western Europe, it also meant becoming white again.

The inherent expectation to reproduce whiteness in Estonia and Lithuania has been intersected with traditional gender roles based on heteronormative and patriarchal ideologies. Scholars such as Aro Velmet (2019) and Eve Annuk (2019) have pointed out that the endeavour to reconnect with the West after the fall of the Soviet Union meant primarily following the neoliberal economic model, which included subscription to heterosexual masculine nationalism. The dominant understanding of masculinity in both Estonia and Lithuania, according to Barbi Pilvre (2011) and Artūras Tereškinas (2010), has drawn on traits associated with hegemonic masculinities in Western societies. As R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt (2005) argue in their discussion of the concept 'hegemonic masculinity', while not at all representative of the diverse experiences of people, it functions as a way to describe idealised and admired masculine conduct in society that could be "exalted by churches, narrated by mass media, or celebrated by the state" (838). Different societies construct different idealised masculinities that become normative and hegemonic, which means that those who deviate from idealised forms of masculinity are often put down or seen as inferior, causing both resistance to these forms and attempts to perform normative masculinity. What is considered hegemonic masculinity is also constantly being transformed and reconstructed as society goes through changes (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 846). As I discuss in the following analysis of *The Dissidents* and *The Lawyer*, both films foreground performances of masculinity as they imagine changing ideas of what hegemonic and normative masculinity means in the Baltic region and how it is closely connected with dominant constructions of gender in Western European and North American media. While heterosexual masculine nationalism in the post-Soviet era (which still largely dominates) has drawn from hegemonic masculinities in the neoliberal Western world (particularly the United States), these films imagine how the changes in Western societies that moved towards more gender-inclusive and anti-racist practices, which often ended up propagating colourblind or well-meaning paternalistic 'white

saviour' and homonormative rhetoric, might translate to the Baltic region and to the goals of realignment with Westernness in the twenty-first century.

The Dissidents: Performing white Western masculinity

The scene in *The Dissidents* where Ralf, Mario, and Kapp are escaping from Soviet-occupied Estonia to Finland begins with suspense that is then relieved through comedy. After pushing a motorboat into the sea, the engine of the boat is found not to work, and when Kapp accidentally releases an emergency flare, they fear that they will be discovered by the Soviet border guard. It turns out, however, that the border guards are having a party and the flare is taken to be one of their fireworks. Ralf is then able to start the engine and they are on their way. This is followed by a few long shots of the night turning into morning and the three men floating in the boat on the wide sea. Once they see land and wonder if it is Finland, Kapp exclaims, "guys, these are Western trees!" and the camera follows them closely as they rush through the water to get to the rocks and trees. Mario cries out loud that this is the land of chewing gum and Kapp says that he is not afraid of anyone anymore. Soon after that they successfully order pizza in Finnish and find someone to take them to the Swedish border. Crossing this border is even easier, and while they are all nervous about being caught and sent back to the Soviet Union, they are able to blend in with other people walking across, passing the border guard who is reading a comic book and not paying attention to them.

These border-crossing sequences in *The Dissidents* exemplify the film's tongue-in-cheek portrayal of excitement about the 'Western life' and establish the ability of the men to pass as, and blend in with, white Nordic citizens. Filmed during 2016 when images of refugees in crowded boats crossing the Mediterranean Sea were widely circulating in the European media, *The Dissidents* both reminds Estonian audiences of Estonian refugees escaping to Sweden during WWII, and also establishes that as white men, it was easier for people like Ralf, Mario, and Kapp to blend in with white Nordic citizens than it is for refugees and migrants of colour. This recalls what Daria Krivonos has argued in her ethnographic study of Russian speakers in Finland: it is easier for this white group of migrants to pass from the racialised Eastern Europeans to white Europeans, drawing from and further contributing to the postcolonial paradigm where whiteness equals Westernness.³ In contrast to the experiences of Russian speakers, however, Estonia was seen, both in the Soviet Union and among Estonians, as the 'window on the West', the country with the best access to Western culture (particularly

3 Lönn (2018) observes similar tendency among Russian-speaking migrants in Sweden. As I have argued elsewhere, we can see implications of this also in several cultural texts articulating experiences of not-quiteneess in the Nordic region (Roos 2023).

due to its proximity to Finland). Jaak Kilmi's previous film, the docudrama *Disco and Atomic War* (2009, co-directed with Kiur Aarma), mediates this image of Estonia as Western by portraying the significant impact that Finnish television had on the lives of Estonian people during the 1980s. *Disco and Atomic War* features the absurd war between the totalitarian regime's censorship and the creative ways that people found to watch American shows such as *Dallas* and *Knight Rider* on Finnish television, essentially making the claim that this access to Western culture helped dissolve the Soviet Union. While this film is based on the collected memories of about fifty Estonians, it might exaggerate the role of watching American television shows during the fall of the Soviet Union. It does, however, exemplify the importance of being proximate to the Western world in Estonian collective memory and self-identity, and the ways in which popular culture broadened the mindsets of people living in the Soviet-occupied countries. Some of the humour in the film is drawn from popular ways of mocking the absurdity of the totalitarian regime as well as consuming Western culture in a vacuum where certain objects and images take on the symbolic value of freedom. *The Dissidents* also uses these themes as it draws from real memories of people's first visits to the free world, where shops full of food and access to a free press and uncensored entertainment were shocking and thrilling. As a comedy, *The Dissidents* pokes fun at some of the initial exposure to Western culture and how they produced humour because of silly misunderstandings, or it portrays characters eating copious amounts of fruit because it was inaccessible to them in Soviet Estonia.

At the same time, *The Dissidents* seeks to transform the image of Estonian men as either representing Soviet masculinity or what Barbi Pilvre has called the criminal macho society of 1990s Estonia. Specifically, according to Pilvre, the popular Estonian conceptualisation of Western men during the 1980s and particularly 1990s was a very specific idea of manhood that was informed by the features of hegemonic masculinity in Western neoliberal societies, which typically meant heterosexuality, financial success, physical strength and rationality. It assumed that women would take on traditional expectations for women, like staying home and raising children. Soviet masculinity, in turn, from the general perspective of Estonians, meant having no fashion sense, not knowing international etiquette or foreign languages (except Russian). Estonian men were supposed to get rid of these features as they entered the Western world in order not to "in a bad way be different from Western men" (Pilvre 2011, 51). Kapp's character draws on the performative aspects of both of these ideas of masculinity. Kapp is obsessed with bodybuilding and wants to achieve a body like Sylvester Stallone's, whose posters from *Rocky III* and *First Blood* are visible in his weight lifting room in Estonia in the early scenes of *The Dissidents*. The muscular male hero of the *Rocky* and *Rambo* films, as Yvonne Tasker argues, was often read as both a reassertion

of male dominance and a parodic performance of Western masculinist values, which signal a “hysterical and unstable image of manhood” (80) in the 1980s. Kapp’s desire to mimic one of the icons of the Western popular culture in that decade is coupled with his communist father who trains him to be strong enough to survive nuclear war, his muscular body referring also to the idealised images of the Soviet man⁴. Unlike Ralf and Mario, Kapp is portrayed as less aware of the politics, culture, and languages outside the Soviet Union, as his obsession with Western life is primarily about bodybuilding. Kapp’s unfamiliarity with Western products and languages produces comedy in scenes where after he overuses tanning lotion, he jumps into a hotel pool in Sweden and ruins the water, or when he drinks dishwashing liquid which he has confused with a muscle building drink because it has an image of a muscular man on the bottle. While Ralf and Mario can speak some Finnish or Swedish, Kapp is usually oblivious to these languages and tries to respond in Russian. The lack of language knowledge causes him to get flustered during his and Mario’s bank robbery in Finland and to get caught while Mario escapes.

Alongside Kapp’s parodic enactment of Soviet Estonian masculinity, which also parodies the desire to be like what was thought to be a Western man, Mario’s character is a rendition of someone who has been more successful at performing what was understood to be desirable Western masculinity. He is able to navigate in necessary languages and understands the interworking of neoliberal capitalist ideologies and masculine nationalism. When the three men first arrive in Sweden, they are interviewed at the Swedish Estonian society, where Kapp almost ruins the perception of them as heroic dissidents from behind the iron curtain by saying that he escaped in order to have more opportunities for bodybuilding. Mario is able to present an emotional story of how they do not want to fight for the Soviet army and want to live in the free world. When Ralf’s grandfather from the Swedish Estonian society organises a simple job for them at the Volvo factory, Mario proposes that they should not settle for this job, because that is not the most efficient way to make a lot of money, which is his goal. This leads to him and Kapp planning the jewellery and bank robberies in Helsinki and buying a fancy sports car. Mario, thus, also represents the image of Estonian (and other late Soviet and post-Soviet) criminal macho society during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Resembling the true story of four Estonian men who similarly escaped to Sweden and organised robberies, Mario is both a possibly unpleasant memory for Estonian audiences while at the same time performing the image of a tough man who acquires

4 As scholars such as Claire McCallum (2018) have highlighted, ideal Soviet masculinity was also transformed and reconstructed throughout the twentieth century, while some of the more commonly conveyed traits of the Soviet man included muscular bodies, self-discipline, and willingness to sacrifice for the collective.

all the features expected from the idea of a Western man during this period, including having a fancy car and money.

The true ability of the white Estonian man from Soviet Estonia to become Western, however, is developed fully through the storyline of Ralf, whose perspective from 2016 frames the film's narrative, and also performs a new version of ideal Western masculinity. Unlike Kapp and Mario, who engage in criminal activity in Sweden and Finland, and, thus, contribute to the stereotype of Estonian criminals in the Nordic media, Ralf does not participate in the robberies. Instead, while they stay at the refugee centre (where they are among the very few white refugees), Ralf starts to teach himself Swedish and goes to work for the Volvo company with his grandfather. Ralf is the only one with a family connection in Sweden, as his grandfather was an Estonian refugee who fled to Sweden during WWII. As Maija Runcis emphasises, Estonians were typically categorised as a well-integrated (according to some, the most integrated) and well-educated group of migrants in Sweden. Analysing *Life Destinies: The Estonian Diaspora in Sweden*, a collection that includes interviews with Estonians in Sweden at the beginning of the 1980s and is now preserved at the Nordiska Museet in Sweden, Runcis writes that the interviewees often described Estonian homes as typically Swedish-looking. The interviewees said that they were forced to leave their home country and differentiated themselves from migrants from outside of Europe who were "considered to receive more caring support and benefits from the Swedish welfare state than Baltic refugees" (2020, 114). Drawing from this history, *The Dissidents* depicts Ralf as the most rational, responsible, and moral of the three, shown to follow the line of his Estonian grandfather, as a well-integrated migrant. All three of the men seem also to be able to get their Swedish passports and leave the refugee centre more quickly than the refugees of colour they see there.

By locating Ralf's frame of narrative within the film in 2016, from where the memories of their adventures in the 1980s are described as another world, the film makes it explicit that in the contemporary world, Estonians in Sweden can pass as white Swedes and that contemporary Estonia looks nothing like the stereotypical images of hopeless post-Soviet locations in the Nordic media. The short sequence of Ralf's return to Estonia at the end of the film shows Tallinn as a modern urban centre and a stark contrast to the shots taken of Soviet Estonia. He stays the night at the Viru hotel, the same place where they used to conduct illegal business with the Western tourists who were allowed to stay at this hotel. He looks out of the window and thinks about Mario, who has died. The final sequence concludes the film with Ralf crossing the Baltic Sea one more time, this time on a ferry. There is no suspenseful or comedic element to this border crossing, instead the sequence is slow-paced, focusing on Ralf calling his wife in Sweden and throwing out Mario's ashes. As he says goodbye to his wife, Ralf notices

a child and other refugees looking at him from behind a barrier on the deck of the ferry. He gives the child his watch, to which the child replies “thank you, mister” in English. In this scene Ralf’s earlier experience crossing the Baltic Sea, portrayed in the film humorously as easier transitions to the Nordic societies, is differentiated from the experience of refugees of colour moving across borders. Giving one of the refugees his watch might function as a moment of realisation of that, but it also aligns Ralf with the common trope of the white Western European protagonist in European films about migrants and refugees who learn about them, tries to help them, but in a paternalistic or self-serving way, and without any real effect on the refugees’ lives as they often remain in precarious situations (see more in Celik Rappas and Phillis 2020). *The Dissidents* does not elaborate on this trope further, but by ending the film with Ralf becoming this figure, it establishes that he has become a Western European who can now make a generous gesture to refugees of colour, from whom he is differentiated. The framing of him and the refugees emphasises this visually, as it places a physical barrier between him and the refugees. *The Dissidents*, thus, constructs the figure of a white Estonian man who, in contrast to migrants of colour has the ability to become fully Western. In 2016, this also means becoming aware of one’s privilege, but in line with many of the mainstream European mediations, refugees of colour in *The Dissidents* function primarily as a device for the white European protagonists to do that. Aside from this scene on the ferry, the only other interactions that the Estonian men have with other refugees, is when they are at the refugee centre. In those brief encounters, the film shows that the three Estonian men see themselves as completely different from those at the centre: in the shots where Ralf, Mario and Kapp move through the building to their room, other refugees wordlessly watch them go by. Ralf is again the only one who briefly connects with the refugee children in a sequence that starts with him playing soccer with them, but he leaves them quickly because Mario is having a breakdown after his brother has died, and soon after that, they have received their Swedish passports and leave the refugee centre. The shot of them leaving frames them in front of the building, as Ralf says that this is their country now. They pick up their bags and start walking, while the refugee children sit on the stairs and look longingly towards them.

The Lawyer: Queer, white, Baltic saviour

The Lawyer takes a Baltic protagonist who is both minoritised and privileged as its starting point, and, with that, delves deeper into the theme of Baltic whiteness and privilege and their intersection with gender and sexuality in the twenty-first century. It imagines a wealthy Lithuanian man, Marius, who has a romantic relationship with and tries to help a Syrian refugee, Ali, in Serbia. In a scene in which Marius has just come

from the UN office where he tried to find a way for Ali to leave Serbia with him and get into the borders of the European Union, he delivers Ali the bad news that he was not able to find any way to help. Marius tells Ali that he now understands that Ali is not a victim but a hero. Ali responds by saying that he is neither a victim nor a hero, and that this is not a porn movie. He goes on to tell Marius that there will probably be more people who will similarly come to Serbia and try to help him because “refugees are trendy these days”. After this conversation, which functions as somewhat self-reflexive for a film that is about a refugee, Ali decides to leave. As the camera follows Marius and Ali in more fast-paced cuts and close-ups moving through the rooms, once the door has closed, the recurring dramatic music starts to play and the camera tracks closely around them, each waiting on the other side of the door. After a few moments of waiting, Ali knocks on the door and they kiss. This sequence exemplifies some of the key ways that *The Lawyer* approaches the cinematic depiction of global migration, specifically refugees: it incorporates the melodramatic mode to, on the surface, make visible structural problems faced by refugees of colour in Europe; but it is also a self-reflexive and self-aware film that constantly tries to resolve the tension between making another film about refugees (a trendy topic within Western European cinema that, as mentioned above, typically represents it in a simplified and paternalistic way) and deconstructing narratives of victims, heroes, and white male saviours. Similarly to *The Dissidents*, it foregrounds male characters and makes explicit references to the performance of masculinities as it navigates Baltic protagonists' privilege. *The Lawyer*, however, queers the Baltic man who has become both Western and white. This has several implications which I discuss in the following. On one hand, *The Lawyer* imagines an alternative to the heterosexual masculine nationalism in the Baltic societies, to the victimising Western European gaze towards people in the Baltics more broadly and the LGBTQ+ communities in particular, and to the common ways of making films about refugees. On the other hand, the wealthy white gay Lithuanian protagonist also takes on many of the normative traits of privileged Westerners whose encounters with refugees in numerous cinematic and other narratives function as a way for the Westerner to learn something or grow as a human.

Zabarauskas has addressed questions concerning race, migration, gender, and social homophobia in his previous films, which all take place in Lithuania and are all more formally experimental than *The Lawyer*. They have, in various ways explored the intersection and clash of Lithuanian nationalism and the desire to be included in and share values with Western Europe. While the country was required to pass legislation dealing with discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals in the workplace after joining the European Union in 2004, this was accompanied by conservative backlashes, leading to Lithuania gaining a reputation as one of the most homophobic countries in

Europe. In his analysis of Zabarauskas's earlier films, *Porno Melodrama* (2011) and *You Can't Escape Lithuania* (2016), Clinton Glenn (2020) argues that as examples of the very few films from the Baltic countries that focus on queer characters, their focus on white gay protagonists does not function as homonormative, a term that Lisa Duggan has used to describe upper-middle-class white gay men in Western societies who have social and economic capital and who "help to perpetuate the neoliberal status quo rather than challenge and reshape the dominant logics of heteropatriarchy and capitalist consumption" (Glenn 2020, 64). Homonormativity, as Martin F. Manalansan describes it further, "anesthetizes queer communities into passively accepting alternative forms of inequality in return for domestic privacy and the freedom to consume" (2005, 142). Glenn argues that despite the dominant subscription to neoliberal ideologies in the Baltic countries in the twenty-first century, the widespread homophobia constitutes a context that differs from the United States that Duggan writes about.⁵ At the same time, as Zabarauskas has emphasised in interviews, he wants to challenge the tendency of Western critics and journalists writing about his films or Baltic societies to victimise the queer communities there. Even though Lithuania does not have the necessary protections and rights for the LGBTQ+ community, Zabarauskas maintains that there are also lively queer communities there. *The Lawyer*, which was the first film by Zabarauskas to be partially funded by the Lithuanian Film Centre and that has been advertised as the first mainstream Lithuanian film to depict male same-sex relationships, explores much more closely what it means to have privilege as a white gay Lithuanian who learns about the life of a refugee. Furthermore, as I demonstrate below, with that emphasis on privilege *The Lawyer* also imagines what homonormativity might look like in the Baltics.

In its form, according to Zabarauskas, *The Lawyer* is inspired by the melodramatic mode, specifically as found in the films *All That Heaven Allows* (1955) by Douglas Sirk, and *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974) by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Both of these films, which depict love stories deemed impossible by societal norms around them (an upper class widow who falls in love with her arborist in the 1950s United States or a working-class widow who starts a relationship with a younger Moroccan guest worker in Germany in the 1970s), have been analysed as classics of the melodramatic mode showing us "people not up to the situations in which they are caught" (Goldberg 2016, 29). Through extensive use of *mise-en-scène*, films in melodramatic mode typically foreground suffering, victim-heroes, pathos, action, and a hope that justice will be done (Williams 1998). As a mode to convey ethical and political challenges, melodrama has

⁵ Another film by Zabarauskas, *We Will Riot* (2013), looks more closely at racism in Lithuania, focusing on a Black Lithuanian American man Luke who travels to Lithuania to meet his Lithuanian grandmother, who turns out to be a racist.

been common in European films about migrants and refugees. Ipek A. Celik, for example, argues that “melodrama provides the primary narrative frame through which the debates on Muslim minorities are pursued in German mass media” (2015, 111), and that while the politically well-meaning European directors “point to the limits of minority visibility through discourses of violence and eventfulness, [the films] themselves reproduce, in many different ways but repeatedly, the trope of inescapable victimhood for refugees, migrants, and minorities in Europe” (131). While Zabarauskas’s *The Lawyer* draws explicit parallels to films about refugees that construct them as victims and Western Europeans as their saviours, the work of melodrama in *The Lawyer* is closer to the films of Sirk and Fassbinder, which, as both Thomas Elsaesser (1987) and Goldberg (2016) argue, construct impossible stories with utopian happy endings that function more as ironic and subversive reflections on the structural problems in society. While a full-length analysis of *The Lawyer* as a remake of Sirk’s and Fassbinder’s melodrama is beyond the scope of this paper, paying attention to the ways in which *The Lawyer* incorporates the melodramatic mode makes visible how the film moves Marius in and out of the role of white saviour, the well-meaning white protagonist who learns about him- or herself through the character of the irregular migrant or refugee who functions primarily for that purpose and is not able to enter or stay in so-called Fortress Europe. This figure has been relatively absent in Eastern European cinema, especially in Baltic films, but *The Lawyer* imagines the emergence of that figure in a previously marginalised society that is, in the twenty-first century, one of the more developed post-Soviet countries, a member of the European Union and NATO, a country that continues to reimagine itself as a Western and Northern European country.

Starting in the film’s early scenes, *The Lawyer* constructs and complicates Marius as a victim-hero (which is a staple in films in melodramatic mode). Soon after the opening scene, in which he graciously agrees to help his female friend Darya (Darya Ekamasova) with a legal matter that his firm normally would not cover, Marius receives a phone call with the news that his father has died. As he is driving and speaking on the phone in this scene, the camera movement mimics his feelings of dizziness and shock, as he stops the car, goes to a cafe to order coffee, and drops the coffee cup. We find out soon after that his father had not approved of his sexuality. With these scenes the film paints Marius as both a hero and a victim, a gay in homophobic Lithuania who has acquired a privileged position due to his successful career as a corporate lawyer, and who also helps others when possible. At the same time, in between these two events Marius is confronted with his privilege. After a dinner party at Marius’s place, he is having a conversation with a trans man, Pranas (Danilas Paviljonis), while not aware that Pranas is trans. Responding to Marius’s off-hand comment that artists have an easy life because of governmental support, Pranas suggests that Marius is privileged

because of his well-paid job as a corporate lawyer. Marius counters by saying that he is “an old poof in a homophobic Lithuania”. When Pranas then asks Marius if he does not know that he is trans, Marius does not at first understand what he means, asking if he wants to become a woman. Pranas leaves his apartment, and when Marius asks if Pranas (who is an artist) would make him a sculpture that he could buy, Pranas replies that Marius could not afford that. After this conversation, the camera cuts to Marius cleaning up the dinner and then opening his computer and going to a website that provides sex cam shows. As he pays the fee to start the show and his performer shows up, Marius asks him some questions, and looks startled when the performer (Ali) replies that he is a refugee from Syria, living in Belgrade. Ali then starts dancing until the show is cut short because Marius’s phone rings. He asks for Ali’s phone number, which he gives him despite it not being allowed (he ends up losing his job because of this), and then Marius closes the computer. The red light from the computer and projector screen that had filled his otherwise dark living room changes into blue as the camera lingers on Marius’s contemplative face. While this use of lighting, colour, and a slow soundtrack establishes the beginning of the love story between Marius and Ali, these two successive encounters also draw our attention to Marius’s financial privilege and his subscription to the consumption-oriented mindset of Western neoliberal societies.

Before a two-week flash-forward in which Marius goes through a grieving period for his father and is getting ready to travel to Belgrade to meet Ali, the camera cuts to a sequence that further establishes the film’s self-reflective pondering on Marius’s, and by extension the film’s (filmmaker’s), privilege. Marius visits his friend Darya who is putting up a photography exhibition that features large photos of men, taken by a photographer who, as Darya explains it, works with masculinity. Marius looks at one of the photographs (featuring Pranas, played by Danilas Paviljonis) and Darya asks if Marius would like to have that photograph. Marius starts laughing and asks how much it costs. Darya offers to give him the photo as a gift after the exhibit is over, and they proceed to talk about what it means to have so much money that one does not have to think about it. The photo exhibit that we see in this sequence was created specifically for *The Lawyer* by Lithuanian photographer Arcana Femina and is titled “On Masculinity”. The five men whom she photographed represent different ages, races, and sexualities. In one of the accompanying texts to the exhibit, Zabarauskas writes that including this sequence of the photo exhibition was important because it makes one wonder whether having photographs that portray diverse masculinities and which emphasise that masculinity is a performance means anything if they are only accessible in the more restricted elite space of a private art collection (Zabarauskas 2020b, “Arcana Femina: fotografijų paroda „Apie vyriškumą“). In other words, as the film implies, Mar-

ius acquiring a photograph that features Pranas because of his friendship with the wealthy art collector does not change anything in the life of Pranas, who continues to face the transphobia and ignorance of people like Marius. These examples imagine the possible workings of homonormativity in Lithuania, something that was not really seen as possible in the Baltic societies, as Glenn (2020) argues in his analysis of Zabarauskas's earlier films. While Marius in *The Lawyer* still lives in homophobic Lithuania and Baltic neoliberal economic policies do not include the expansion of LGBTQ+ rights, Marius has social and economic capital, he takes part in capitalist consumption, and he does not challenge the dominant logics of heteropatriarchy. Marius, thus, performs another version of Western masculinity, one that affirms and celebrates queer identity, but only in a limited capacity (of white upper-middle-class men) and focuses more on "individualized, market-oriented solutions to structural problems revolving around the ability to consume" (El-Tayeb 2011, 123). While queer identities are not yet widely celebrated in Lithuania, *The Lawyer* imagines how homonormativity can exist under the surface in the homophobic countries that share Western culture and ideals.

As the film then moves on to imagine Marius's interaction with Ali, the refugee in Serbia, it further constructs Marius in line with the typical Western white protagonists who become aware of their privilege and exhibit personal growth with the help of the refugee, while the refugee and other marginalised communities remain in precarious positions. In the sequence that covers their first meeting in Serbia, Ali comes down the stairs of a massive concrete building, and we see the word "HOPE" graffitied on the wall. This framing brings to mind common themes in migration films that Yosefa Loshitzky (2011) has called "Journeys of Hope" where the migrants and refugees hope they can get into the EU but are denied access to what feels like Fortress Europe. Later, in their conversation on top of a desolate communist-era apartment building, Marius realises that Ali is asking for his help to get into the EU but says that since he knows nothing about migration law, he cannot help. The camera lingers on the dark cityscapes, and melancholy music accompanies the feeling of disappointment in Marius, who realises that while he has come to meet Ali with romantic intentions, Ali is actively trying to leave the prolonged precarious position in which he finds himself. This is followed by a cut to the next morning when Marius receives a phone call from Darya in Lithuania. Darya asks him to represent her against her husband in their divorce, which has unfolded suddenly. Marius tells her that he is not able to help her either, because his company represents Darya's husband. After Darya has hung up, the camera tracks slowly away from her, making her look small as she is standing in the midst of the large photos of men at her exhibit hall. With this image, in another self-reflexive gesture, the film suggests that while it imagines a space where a queer Baltic man has more power and agency, and where diverse performances of masculinity (or other identities) are

celebrated, it ultimately searches for a redemption for the white gay protagonist who goes to help a refugee so that he can have a relationship with him. Other marginalised and diverse communities are left in the empty exhibit hall when they are no longer necessary for the protagonist.

As the film then seeks to redeem Marius's ignorance and behaviour based on privilege, it comes close to fully constructing him as a white saviour figure. In the scene that follows Darya's phone call, we see Marius on top of the hotel roof with his phone, watching a coming out video made by Pranas. (The video was mentioned earlier in the film, when it was revealed that Marius had funded the video but never bothered to watch it, and therefore was not aware who Pranas was when he was talking to him.) The camera shows us Marius from a high-angle and then switches to close-up when Marius starts to cry as Pranas tells his story of standing up to discrimination and homophobia in Lithuania. Then the camera cuts to a long shot of Marius, looking up from his phone to the horizon, clearly inspired to help Ali. He has changed his mind about not being able to help him and the film cuts to him going to the refugee aid office, now clothed in a light suit, a motivated look in his eyes. Everything in this depiction of him resembles the white saviour figure, a wide-spread trope in American and Western European cinema that, according to Matthew Hughey, "racializes and separates people into those who are redeemers [white] and those who are redeemed or in need of redemption [non-whites]" (2014, 2). This patronage, which, as Hughey discusses further, knows no political boundaries, "enables an interpretation of nonwhite characters and culture as essentially broken, marginalized, and pathological", and imagines whites as "messianic characters that easily fix the nonwhite pariah with their superior moral and mental abilities" (2). As they do this, they learn about themselves and become better people. Even though Marius's visit to the refugee aid office is not successful, he goes to the refugee camp to reconcile with Ali and, as he says, to "do better".

Almost immediately after constructing this figure of the white saviour, however, the film complicates and deconstructs it. Specifically, Marius's attempts to build Ali's case as a victim and an LGBTQ+ refugee fail in several ways. Ali confronts Marius's assumptions about his past by explaining that he has not told anyone about his sexuality, and that he is not a victim, but is simply escaping from war. Even as their conversations with each other and with the UN office make visible the discrimination and lack of resources for LGBTQ+ refugees, Ali maintains that he has escaped because of the traumatic experiences in Syria where his friends and brothers were killed, not specifically because of his sexuality. In an emotional scene where Ali talks about his loss of friends and family, and his escape from Syria, Marius (and the film's viewers) make two realisations: as a non-white Syrian refugee it is not enough for Ali to have experienced tragic loss of people and home and the overthrow of his country to be able to cross the

border into the European Union; and that Marius is not able to help or save Ali. As is common to melodrama, various elements of the *mise-en-scène* in the following scenes visualise these realisations. For example, a 'no entry' traffic sign featured prominently in the foreground of a shot where Marius and Ali are taking a run; and there is also a notable shift in Marius's clothing, which changes from light to dark. With this, instead of providing superficial redemption to Marius' character through a white saviour narrative, the film attempts instead to resolve the need for that kind of redemption, which is based on privilege.

Before the final sequence of the film, Marius and Ali are sitting on the bed, Marius says that he does not like goodbyes, and Ali says that he hates them. The camera cuts to a few lingering shots of the dark cityscape, street cleaners washing the street with water, a red pen in the middle of a puddle, and the signature music picks up. Then the camera cuts to a man standing by a booth near the hotel, looking at his phone, and after that cuts back to the hotel room to show us Ali inviting the man in to have sex with him. While they are in the bedroom, Marius comes out of the bathroom and steals the man's passport. He drops the keys, causing an element of suspense, but Ali is able to distract the man and soon after this Ali and Marius are sitting in the backseat of a car. Marius hands Ali the passport and the last shot lingers on their faces for a while as they smile, and Ali rests his head on Marius' shoulder.

The episode of stealing the passport and leaving in a car together could be understood as an additional, imagined ending to the real ending where Marius simply leaves after saying that he does not like goodbyes. This would leave Ali in a precarious position in Serbia and while Marius would not have been able to save him, he would go home as a person who has changed his thinking thanks to the refugee. The other ending, however, adds a layer of uncertainty to both characters' stories. This ending has some parallels to Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows* and Fassbinder's *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* to which Zabarauskas pays homage. In both films, the endings find impossible couples together again, both Ron and Ali, respectively, lying sick in bed but on their way to recovery. As Jonathan Goldberg writes, however, the utopian happy ending in these films is wrong as "history is not simply moving forward" (2016, 41). He argues further that by resuscitating Sirk's 1950s melodrama, Fassbinder is showing what does not change: "we are placed in a life not made for us" (41). When Zabarauskas resuscitates elements of these melodramas in twenty-first century Lithuania and Serbia, the shot of Marius and Ali leaving together encompasses similar uncertainty in the seemingly happy ending. The uncertainty in *The Laywer*, however, is less about Marius and Ali as an impossible couple and more about the precariousness of Ali's life, as we do not know if he can cross the border with a stolen passport. We are also not sure whether Marius will return to Lithuania or accompany Ali to Germany, and what his life

would be like over there. Marius's gesture of handing Ali the passport, thus, both resembles the gesture of Ralf in *The Dissidents* as a Western privileged man handing a refugee his watch, and complicates it, drawing from the aesthetics of impossibility and uncertainty in this happy ending.

Conclusion

This article has argued that *The Dissidents* and *The Lawyer* provide cinematic explorations of Westernness and its close connection to whiteness and white privilege in the Baltic societies of the twenty-first century. Foregrounding male protagonists, the films construct various types of masculinity to imagine what it means to become Western and white, as they engage with and imagine alternatives to the dominant ideas in three Baltic societies that subscribe to heterosexual masculine nationalism. *The Dissidents* imagines this becoming as a trajectory from a Soviet or post-Soviet masculinity that was seen as not quite, or not yet, Western, according to hegemonic ideas of both whiteness and masculinity, to successfully performing white Western Europeanness. The successful passage differentiates the Estonian characters from the refugees and migrants of colour, emphasised with the generous gesture of the now white and Western man whose encounter with refugees has made him aware of his privilege. *The Lawyer* provokes questions about what it means to construct and deconstruct the Lithuanian protagonist as a Western and white male saviour figure, and whether the film's notably more complex and nuanced depiction of refugees and white Eastern Europeans might still be too centred on the white protagonist. Zabarauskas seems to be asking what it means to make a film that on one hand queers the dominant heteronormative white masculinity in the Baltic societies along with the figure of the white saviour, but on the other hand is obsessed with the white Baltic man saving the refugee of colour.

As two Baltic mainstream films, *The Dissidents* and *The Lawyer* address questions of Westernness as whiteness and gender that are in some ways familiar when one looks at Western and Northern European film production. Imagining these questions in the Baltic societies, where white privilege does not seem as relevant or appropriate because of the history of occupations and colonisations, draws attention to the persistence of whiteness as normative in Western cultural history and identity and how it has played an important role in Baltic self-image and identity.

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Valge „lääneliku“ mehelikkuse etendamine ja ümberkujutamine Balti kinoekraanil

Liina-Ly Roos

Võttesõnad: läänelikkus, valgesus, maskuliinsus, migratsioon, Balti film

Üks korduvaid troope Euroopa filmides migratsioonist on Ida-Euroopast pärit naisrändaja, kes koledast ja kriminaalsest Ida-Euroopast tulles otsib paremat elu Lääne- või Põhja-Euroopas, sattudes tihtipeale seksikaubanduse ohvriks. Balti filmides võib aga 2010. aastatel näha uusi migratsiooni kujutamise viise, eriti filmides, mis käsitlevad valgesust ja valget privileegi ning nende ristumist seksuaalsuse ja sooga nõukogudejärgsest perioodist edasi liikunud ühiskondades, mis Euroopa Liidu liikmeks saades end uuesti Lääne-Euroopa identiteediga sidusid. Artiklis analüüsitakse, kuidas kaks hiljutist filmi, Jaak Kilmi „Sangarid“ (2017, Eesti) ja Romas Zabarauski „Advokatas“ („Advokaat“, 2020, Leedu) seda taaskohandumist kujutavad, keskendudes tegelastele, kes etendavad eri arusaamasid Lääne maskuliinsusest. Artikkel väidab, et mõlemas filmis on näha erisuguseid läänelikuks saamise mõjusid ja tagajärgi ning selle suhestumist soo ja valge privileegi tähendusega 21. sajandi Baltimaades.

Artikkel lähtub postkolonialismi, valgesuse, rassi-, ja soouuringute kokkupuutepunktidest. Nagu Sara Ahmed väidab, on postkoloniaalses maailmas (kuhu ka Euroopa kuulub) läänelikkus ja tsiviliseeritus võrduvad valgesusega. See tähendab, et enesele teadmata või mitte, on valgetel inimestel Euroopas ja Põhja-Ameerikas kergem elada ning valgesuse normatiivsuse tõttu on neil seda privileegi tihtipeale raske märgata. Balti ühiskondades on valdaval kohal olnud arusaam, et rassismist või privileegist ei ole seal eriti mõtet rääkida, sest Balti inimesed on ise eri impeeriumide ning okupatsioonide all rõhutatud olnud ja Balti rahvastiku enamus on olnud valge. Artikkel tugineb ajaloolisele uurimusele sellest, millist rolli mängis rass ja valgesuse tähtsustamine 20. sajandi alguse Euroopas ning iseseisvaks saanud Balti riikides ja kuidas oli oluline Lääne-Euroopa silmis „valgeks saada“, et täielikult Euroopasse kuuluda, ning pärast Nõukogude Liidu lagunemist sümboliseeris uuesti valgeks saada, et võimalikult kiiresti Lääne-Euroopa kultuuriruumi naasta. See naasmine Läände tähendas samuti, nagu Aro Velmet ja teised on väitnud, neoliberaalse majandusmudeliga kaasneva heteroseksuaalse maskuliinse rahvusluse ideede järgimist, mis on Lääne-Euroopas ning USAs pikalt domineerinud, kuid viimaste aastakümnete jooksul mitmekesistunud.

Artikkel analüüsib, kuidas „Sangarid“ ja „Advokaat“ erisugust filmikeelt kasutades kujutavad migratsiooni Ida-Euroopas ja seda läänelikuks/valgeks saamise ning eri laadi maskuliinsuste etendamisega seovad. Täpsemini öeldes uurivad filmid, kas ja kuidas Lääne ühiskondade muutunud arusaamad rassi ja soo küsimustes kanduvad üle Balti kultuuri. „Sangarite“ tegevus keskendub küll 1980. aastatel Nõukogude Eestist põgenenud kolme mehe seiklustele Rootsis, kuid filmi raamib neist ühe, Ralfi käik Rootsist nüüdisaegsesse Eestisse. Filmi viimane stseen näitab Ralfi tagasiteel Rootsi andmas oma käekella ühele pagulaslapselisele, kes end laevas peidab. Artikli analüüs näitab, et komöödia, mis suuresti kujutab eestlastele tuttavaid naljakaid lugusid esimest korda Lääne toodete ja maailmaga kokkupuutumisest, parodeerib kahe meespeategelase kaudu nii Nõukogude Eesti mehelikkuse etendamist kui katseid etendada läänelikku mehelikkust. Samal ajal loob film Ralfi tegelaskuju kaudu pildi uuest läänelikust eesti mehest, kes sarnaselt levinud arusaamaga eestlastest kui „ideaalsetest pagulastest/sisserändajatest“ teise maailmasõja järgses Rootsis ehitab endale hea ja ausa elu ning on

täielikult Läände vastu võetud. Tema helde žest filmi lõpus kinnistab seda arusaama ning eristab teda nimetutest pagulastest. „Advokaat“, mille tegevus toimub 2010. aastatel Leedus ja Serbias, kujutab omakorda Leedu meest, kes esindab samal ajal nii vähemust kui privilegeeritud gruppi Leedu ühiskonnast, süvenedes seega rohkem Balti privileegi ja valgesuse temaatikasse ning selle seotusse soo ja seksuaalsusega 21. sajandil. Filmi peategelane, rikas Leedu gei Marius tutvub *sex cam*-teenuse kaudu Serbias elava Süüria pagulase Aliga ning pärast temaga kohtumist Serbias püüab tal aidata Euroopa Liitu pääseda, mis pole aga legaalselt võimalik. Kasutades melodramaatilist vormi, teeb film ühelt poolt nähtavaks struktuurilisi probleeme, millega eriti tumedama nahavärviga pagulased Euroopas silmitsi seisavad. Samal ajal on film mitmeti eneseteadlik ja enesele osutav ning püüab lahendada vastuolu järjekordse pagulase käsitleva filmi tegemise ja ohvritele, kangelastele ning „valge päästja“ tegelaskujule keskenduvate lugude übermõtestamise vahel. Sarnaselt „Sangaritega“ tõstab „Advokaat“ esiplaanile meestegelased, rõhutab maskuliinsuste etendamist ja uurib, mida valge privileeg Baltimaades tähendada võib. Erinevalt „Sangaritest“ kväärrib „Advokaat“ balti mehe, kes on saanud läänelikuks/valgeks. Artikkel väidab, et selle kväärimisega pakub „Advokaat“ ühest küljest alternatiive heteroseksuaalsele maskuliinsele rahvuselule Balti ühiskondades, Lääne-Euroopa lihtsustavale arusaamale Baltimaadest ja eriti sealsetest LGBTQ+ kogukondadest ning stereotüüpsetele filmidele pagulastest. Teisest küljest on filmi peategelane, jõukas valge Leedu gei ka mitmeti sarnane paljukasutatud „valge päästja“ tegelaskujuga Euroopa ja Põhja-Ameerika filmides ning loob vähemalt osaliselt pildi ka sellest, kuidas homonormatiivsus võib välja näha Balti ühiskondades, kus siiani domineerib homfoobia.

Mõlemad filmid loovad lõppkokkuvõttes pildi Eesti või Leedu mehest, kes etendab uut arusaama Lääne maskuliinsusest ja kes saab mingil määral teadlikuks oma privileegist valge Euroopa Liidu kodanikuna. Kui Balti filmi ja kultuuri vaatepunktist on neid teemasid vähem käsitletud, väidab artikkel, et nende filmide lähem vaatlus toob esile Lääne kultuuriruumis esineva valgesuse kui normatiivse läänelikkuse jätkumise Balti ühiskondades ja enesekuvandis.

Liina-Ly Roos – skandinavistika nooremprofessor Wisconsinis ülikoolis, Madisonis. Ta on kirjutanud Põhja- ja Baltimaade filmidest, televisioonist, kirjandusest ja kultuurist, tema uurimisvaldkonnad on migratsioon, rass, rahvus, seksuaalpoliitika, sugu, postkolonialism ja lapse kujutamine kultuuris. Käesolev raamatuprojekt pealkirjaga „The Not-Quite Child: Rethinking Whiteness and Colonial Histories in Sweden through Images of Childhood“ revideerib koloniaal- ja rassiküsimuste ajalugu Rootsis nüüdisaegsete rootsi filmide ja romaanide põhjal, mis konstrueerivad lapse kuju, kes katkestab ja mõtestab ümber ootuspärase üleskasvamistrajektoori rahvuslikult ja rahvusvaheliselt idealiseeritud rootsi lapsena.
e-post: lroos3[at]wisc.edu