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## **Campaigning between East and West : Finland and the Cold War in the presidential campaign films of Urho Kekkonen: Vaalikampanjointia idän ja lännen välillä : Suomi ja kylmä sota Urho Kekkonen presidentinvaalien vaalifilmeissä**

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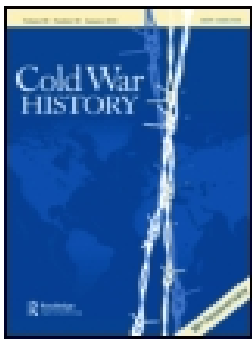
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# Campaigning between East and West: Finland and the Cold War in the presidential campaign films of Urho Kekkonen

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines political campaign films from the point of view of propaganda to explore how this idea fits into the context of a democratic Nordic nation. During the Cold War, Finland was governed by Urho Kekkonen as President for 25 years (1956–81). The authors look at Kekkonen's campaign films to see how his public image was meticulously planned and systematically shaped to create an almost mythical figure. The political and media context in which these films were presented is also analysed to understand how Eastern and Western influences affected the content and style of persuasion in the films. As a result, they find a bricolage of propagandistic influences from both sides of the Iron Curtain.

## KEYWORDS

Cold War; Finland; propaganda; campaigning; presidential election; Urho Kekkonen



## Introduction

Propaganda has traditionally been connected to authoritarian regimes and dictatorships, like the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany. Nowadays, after the popularity of terms like public relations, promotion, and political marketing, the term has again surfaced to describe the current atmosphere of 'info wars', 'cyber-attacks', 'trolling', 'disinformation', and 'post-truth politics'. Propaganda is having its revival.

Not only is propaganda a topical concept in world politics of the late 2010s, its revitalisation can also offer new understandings of Cold War history. As Cold War studies from new perspectives such as analysing multileveled-multipolar interaction have shown in recent years, these approaches provide fresh insights in comparison to more traditional studies on the Iron Curtain, bipolarity, and détente.<sup>1</sup> Earlier analyses of the role of propaganda in the Cold War have mostly concerned Soviet or American versions of it.<sup>2</sup> However, propaganda was also utilised by democratic, neutral countries in their internal policies.

Besides infamous totalitarian regimes, democratic systems have seen the massive use of modern media for propaganda purposes. Since 'propaganda is an integral feature of democratic societies', it is also necessary to examine democracies and their relation to propaganda to

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<sup>1</sup>E.g. Sari Autio-Saraso and Katalin Miklóssy, eds, *Reassessing Cold War Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>2</sup>E.g. Nicholas Cull, 'Reading, Viewing, and Tuning in to the Cold War,' in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War. Volume 2: Crises and Détente*, eds. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 438–59; and Walter. L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998).

understand more profoundly what propaganda is about, how widely it has been used historically, and how to draw the line between propaganda and other types of persuasion.<sup>3</sup> One way to look at this is to analyse how politicians have been presented in democracies. In terms of personality cult and image-making, the most evident examples can be found in political campaigning.

As our case study, we present Finland, a country attempting to balance Eastern and Western political influences during the Cold War. Of those European countries fighting in the Second World War, only Britain and Finland continued as parliamentary democracies throughout the war. Moreover, Finland survived as a democracy in the inter-war period, unlike most of the Eastern and Central European countries. After fighting the Soviet Union in two wars (1939–40 and 1941–44), Finland continued unoccupied. During the post-war years in the late 1940s, it was feared that Finland would follow in Czechoslovakia's footsteps and become a communist satellite. Finland did remain a Western capitalist society, but had to cope with the Soviets, who had an influence on not only the foreign, but also the internal politics of Finland. This meant that, in order to succeed in the Finnish political sphere, a politician had to have good relationships with the Soviets. This was one of the main reasons why Urho Kekkonen (1900–86) managed to remain in office as president for a term that lasted 25 years (1956–81).<sup>4</sup> This type of long-term position was a regular arrangement in the communist dictatorships of the Eastern bloc during the era, but not so much in Western democracies.<sup>5</sup> In Finland, it was partly due to the president's relatively wide powers at the time. Historically, this was grounded in a compromise made between monarchists and republicans when Finland gained its independence from Russia in 1917. As a result, the president had the right to summon and dissolve Parliament, as well as decide on Finland's relationships with other countries. The way Kekkonen used – often stretched – presidential powers served as remarkable grounds for changing the constitution.<sup>6</sup> Of the main democratic republics of Europe, the Finnish system resembled that of France.

Urho Kekkonen, Doctor of Laws and a parliamentarian of the Agrarian League beginning in 1936, was an extremely skilful and ambitious politician. Together with his political aides and *eminences grises*, he used the media to construct an image of a sovereign and brilliant father figure and leader of the nation. We take his campaign films, in the context of propaganda, as empirical material to analyse how his image was created. During the 1950s, propaganda as a term was still widely used both in the planning of campaigns as well as in academic<sup>7</sup> discussion. Moreover, we look at the political and media context, where these

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<sup>3</sup>Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo, 'Introduction: Thirteen Propositions about Propaganda,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*, eds. Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Online Publication 2014), 12.

<sup>4</sup>Kekkonen's relationship to the Soviet Union has been an issue of heated debate among Finnish historians as well as politicians in the decades after his era. Meinander has described this as an ideological power struggle around the 'kekkgographic disagreement', where Juhani Suomi and Hannu Rautkallio have represented opposite sides. See Henrik Meinander, *Kekkografia. Historiaesseitä* (Helsinki: Siltala, 2010).

<sup>5</sup>Kekkonen was not the only long-term Western state leader during the era. Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967) served as the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1949 to 1963 and the Prime Minister of Sweden, Tage Erlander (1901–85), was in office in 1946–69. However, neither was elected without an electoral process as Kekkonen was in 1974 (see later in this article).

<sup>6</sup>The constitution was changed in 2000, which diminished the powers of the president, moving from a 'semi-presidential' system to a more parliamentary one.

<sup>7</sup>Erkka Railo et al., *Kamppailu vallasta. Eduskuntavaalikampanjat 1945–2015* (Jyväskylä: Docendo, 2016), 1–153; Jaakko Nousiainen, *Tutkimus eräiden sanomalehtien vaalipropagandasta vuoden 1956 presidentinvaaleissa*. Acta Politica. Edidit institutum politicum universitatis Helsingiensis. Fasc. I. (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1958).

films were presented, in order to understand how Eastern and Western influences affected the content and style of persuasion.

In the analysis, we examine the Kekkonen campaign films from the point of view of ‘special techniques’ used in propaganda, as well as which traditions these techniques can be associated with. We thus refer and compare Kekkonen campaign films to propaganda and leader cults produced in the twentieth century totalitarian regimes on the one hand, and to the American presidential campaigns on the other. The idea is to present the most obvious similarities found with international films from both sides of the Iron Curtain, not to conduct a systematic comparison of certain designated campaign films. By examining the rhetorical elements found in the films, we aim to unravel how the leadership image and cult of personality was being constructed. These elements include particularly the ‘visual symbols of power’, ‘language usage’, and ‘music as propaganda’.<sup>8</sup>

### Propagandising leadership in democracy

Propaganda has belonged to the arsenals of sovereign rulers since Ancient times. Prominent examples can be found from Alexander the Great (356–23 BCE) and Julius Caesar (100–44 BCE) to Elisabeth I (1533–1603). Spectacles and symbolic rituals especially have served as popular propaganda media among sovereigns and monarchs prior to the phenomenon of contemporary mass media. In modern times, propaganda has been organised and targeted towards the masses, and the goal of communication has been to promote the ideological purposes of a propagandist. Media have been used according to the peculiarities of a medium. The American communication scholars Garth Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell have defined propaganda as ‘the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist’.<sup>9</sup> In this respect, the term propaganda as an umbrella concept not only concerns the evils of totalitarian systems or the means for carrying out martial law, but also democracies.

Jowett and O’Donnell classify propaganda as ranging from black, which is based on spreading lies, to white, where communication is basically accurate but biased; in between these is the grey area. White propaganda can be seen as synonymous with public-relations (PR), branding, and advertising. American communication scholar Michael Schudson has called American advertising ‘capitalist realism’.<sup>10</sup> Like socialist realist art, it ‘simplifies and typifies. It does not claim to picture reality as it is but reality as it should be – life and lives worth emulating.’ According to Schudson, whereas Soviet art idealises the producer, American art idealises the consumer.<sup>11</sup>

In this way, the relationship between advertising and totalitarian systems is not that far-fetched or even a metaphorical notion. Historically, both Nazi propaganda and American post-war advertising used Austrian (Jewish) based psychological ideas to

<sup>8</sup>Jowett and O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 327–9.

<sup>9</sup>Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion*, 6th ed. (London: Sage, 2015), 7.

<sup>10</sup>‘Capitalist realism’ refers to the concept of ‘commercial realism’ by sociologist Ervin Goffman. (Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion. Its Dubious Impact on American Society* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1984), 214.

<sup>11</sup>Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*, 214–15, 220 (citation 215).

persuade. In the name of *motivation research*, both were interested in finding ‘order out of chaos’, as ‘the father of PR’ Edward Bernays had famously put it in his 1928 book, *Propaganda*. In late 1950s America, that meant a great interest in ‘subliminal advertising’, which was supposed to target the subconscious. During the most paranoid times of the Cold War, this frightened people; it was seen as a key to effective mass propaganda and consequently as a sign of an Orwellian society.<sup>12</sup> Yet it soon appeared that subliminal advertising did not actually work. Motivation research, as well as the overall cultural influence of the advertising industry, started to be criticised not only by academics, but also by the public living under Cold War paranoia.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, American political campaigning has made beneficial use of advertising professionals since at least 1952, when one of the most celebrated American admen, Rosser Reeves, famously took care of Dwight D. Eisenhower’s presidential campaign ads – in ‘merchandising Ike’.<sup>14</sup> Eight years later, the biography-style film of John F. Kennedy, *The New Frontier*, became a symbol of campaign films. The film combined documentary techniques with photographs and produced a chronology of his personal history. Since the famous debate between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy in 1960, TV debates directed public attention towards the candidates’ need to create a positive TV image.<sup>15</sup> After 1960, both politicians and campaign officers were better informed on media logic, and the campaign films combined documentary expression, advertising techniques, and news style. In 1968, Nixon was sold like soap or cigarettes, as journalist Joe McGinnis wrote about Nixon’s campaign in his classic work, *The Selling of the president*.<sup>16</sup>

The construction of political leadership has been an important aspect of propaganda, oftentimes amounting to building the cult of personality, especially in totalitarian or authoritarian regimes. Cultural historian Peter Burke has analysed the idealising and making of a heroic leader or in some other way making leaders superior, calling it image management.<sup>17</sup> This idealisation involves constructing the leader as a mythical character, whose persona is essential to the regime. Myths are powerful as they help to analyse and understand the world, by underlining certain characteristics of matters and leaving out others. Myths also seek to naturalise the interpretations of reality they contain and disguise their constructed nature.<sup>18</sup> As propaganda entails affecting mental structures and as such people’s belief systems, it is also connected to myth-making.

<sup>12</sup>Lawrence R. Samuel, ‘“Order Out of Chaos”: Freud, Fascism, and the Golden Age of American Advertising’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies*, eds. Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Online Publication 2014), 262–76.

<sup>13</sup>On *Hidden Persuaders*, see e.g. Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness. Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 187–92; Stephen Fox, *The Mirror Makers* (London: Heinemann, 1984), 185–7; and David Haven Blake, *Liking Ike. Eisenhower, Advertising, and the Rise of Celebrity Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 112–18.

<sup>14</sup>See e.g. Diamond and Bates, *The Spot*, 51–65; and Blake, *Liking Ike*, 71–80.

<sup>15</sup>Joe McGinnis, *The Selling of the president* (London: Penguin, 1970); Joanne Morreale, *A New Beginning: A Textual Frame Analysis of the Political Campaign Film* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 4; and Diamond and Bates, *The Spot*, 109–12.

<sup>16</sup>McGinnis, *The Selling of the president*.

<sup>17</sup>Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing. The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 72–80.

<sup>18</sup>Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Pierre Vives, 1957); Mika Aaltonen, ‘Suomalaisen johtamisen kuvia Kalevalassa, Väinörikin Stoolin tarinoissa, Seitsemässä veljeksessä ja Tuntemattomassa sotilaassa,’ *Liiketaloudellinen aikakauskirja LTA – Finnish Journal of Business Economics* no. 2 (1998); Morreale, *A New Beginning*, 6, 46.

In constructing powerful mental images, concrete imagery is paramount. Even if written communication has a substantial role in politics, the significance of visual communication in making a politician known and appreciated is essential. Imagery appeals directly to emotions rather than to rationality. Unlike with factual argumentation, the viewer does not need to contemplate or analyse to understand the cultural myths that are recycled.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, analysing the visual symbols of power is one of the key areas in propaganda studies.<sup>20</sup>

Using visual communication in image construction is commonplace in the twenty-first century, but as Kekkonen fought to become president of Finland in 1955, it was still rather unheard of in Finnish political culture. After he became President, Kekkonen was a winning motif in imagery and a popular leader, who became well known and was sold to the people with pictures.<sup>21</sup> The imagery in the media constructed a Kekkonen who was at once sovereign and a stylish head of state, as well as an athlete and a strong fellow man. This public image was an essential part of his leadership, and in the course of time, its elements also constructed a mythical aura around his figure.

Obviously, as in every media historical approach, taking the historical climate into consideration is crucial when trying to understand a media-related phenomenon like propaganda. Understanding propaganda means understanding who, why, for whom, and for what purposes it is organised.<sup>22</sup> We start by examining the Finnish media context during the era in question.

## The Finnish media environment from the 1950s to the 1970s

In Kekkonen's era, the Finnish media landscape was characterised by public-service television offering limited programming, an active movie culture, and a strong party press, especially in the 1950s and 1960s; this created politically like-minded bubbles, just like in the current age of social media. At that time, an effective way to reach wide audiences was through the movie theatres, which had relatively big audiences. Finns particularly watched Finnish movies and in 1952, Finland produced more feature films than any other country per capita.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the production of documentaries or other short films was in its heyday. The use of news breaks in the cinema was also a common way to spread the word in the Soviet Union in the early decades. Although a film is a powerful tool of persuasion, film propaganda may not always have the effect hoped-for, since cinema culture is attuned to escapist entertainment or considered as an art form.<sup>24</sup> In the Finnish case, Finns had long been accustomed to shorts that operated somewhere between education and advertising.

Television broadcasting, in turn, started in Finland in 1956 with the commercially independent company TES-TV. Although the channel was financed by advertising and

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<sup>19</sup>Morreale, *A New Beginning*.

<sup>20</sup>Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion*, 327.

<sup>21</sup>Kalle Kultala, *Kohtalona Kekkonen* (Helsinki: Tammi, 1980), 4, 198.

<sup>22</sup>On the importance of the context in film, see Barbara Klinger, 'Film History Terminable and Interminable: Recovering the Past in Reception Studies,' *Screen* 38, no. 2 (1997): 108–28; on propaganda, see Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion*, 316–21.

<sup>23</sup>Kari Uusitalo, 'Suomalainen elokuvatuotanto 1948–1952,' in *Suomen kansallisfilmografia 4, 1948–1952*, chief ed. Kari Uusitalo (Helsinki: Edita, 1992), 21.

<sup>24</sup>Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda & Persuasion*, 265.

sponsorship – Finland being in the vanguard of commercial television in Europe – its broadcasting licence did not allow political advertising or news production. The national broadcasting company Yleisradio had a monopoly on news and political affairs until the 1980s, and political advertising only appeared on cable television in the late 1980s – and on the national network only in 1992. In terms of propaganda, a monopoly over the communication source can be a crucial point in whether the public is going to challenge the message.<sup>25</sup> When Yleisradio started its regular television broadcasting in 1958, it did so with the New Year’s speech of President Urho Kekkonen.

Even though television spread rather rapidly in Finland, it did not reach its position as a medium to gather a wide national audience until the mid-1960s.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, it created the national public sphere in which people became predisposed to the ideas and ideologies of others than their own party or other interest groups. It certainly influenced people’s political involvement, which was high during the rise of the baby boomers and the overall turmoil of the 1960s. During the 1960s, political television programmes were strictly regulated by political parties.<sup>27</sup> Overall, the culture of TV journalism discussing politics in Finland has been described as elite journalism, thus enabling the politicians to perform on the TV stage, while the people acted as an audience.<sup>28</sup> In Finnish political culture, a tradition of loyalty towards those in power, as well as a respectful attitude towards the institution of the presidency, prevailed at the same time.<sup>29</sup> Also, politicians have traditionally been among the first to take advantage of new modes of communication.<sup>30</sup>

### **Kekkonen: a controversial political animal**

Kekkonen had already become a shining example of his generation in his student years in the 1920s. He was a charismatic student leader and an activist, who soon showed himself to be an excellent rhetorician and skilled writer. He developed his ideas on nationalism, democratic rule, and the role of political institutions from early on.<sup>31</sup> In the early 1930s, Kekkonen was in Germany writing his doctoral dissertation and became Doctor of Laws in 1936. Even though he did not approve of fascism, he realised that the way the national socialists appealed to the people was very efficient.<sup>32</sup>

Before starting his political career, Kekkonen worked for the security police Etsivä keskuspoliisi in the 1920s.<sup>33</sup> Later in the 1930s, when Kekkonen became a minister

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 326.

<sup>26</sup>The number of TV licences in Finland reached half one million in 1964 and a million in 1969; the population was 4.5 million at that time.

<sup>27</sup>Ville Pitkänen, ‘The Changing Representations of Political Leadership. Political Television Debates in Finnish Newspapers from the 1960s to the New Millennium,’ in *Leadership and New Trends in Political Communication*, Selected Papers, eds. Emiliana De Blasio, Matthew Hibberd, and Michele Sorice (Rome: CMCS Working Papers), 263–92.

<sup>28</sup>Hannu Nieminen, ‘Viestintä ja demokratia. Kohti pluralistista julkisuutta?’, in *Viestinnän jäljillä. Näkökulmia uuden ajan ilmiöön*, eds. Ullamaija Kivikuru and Risto Kunelius (Helsinki: WSOY, 1998), 287; and Anne Koski, ‘Siirtoja kuvaruudulla. Television poliittisten ohjelmien poliittisuus 1960-luvulta nykypäivään,’ in *Television viisi vuosikymmentä. Suomalainen televisio ja sen ohjelmat 1950-luvulta*, ed. Juhani Wiio (Helsinki: SKS, 2007), 203.

<sup>29</sup>Jarmo Virmavirta, *Presidenttipeli ja sen pelaajat* (Helsinki: Kirjastudio, 2005), 10.

<sup>30</sup>Koski, ‘Siirtoja kuvaruudulla,’ 203.

<sup>31</sup>See e.g. Jukka Kortti, ‘Ylioppilaslehti and the University’s Language Struggle in the 1920s and 1930s,’ *Kasvatus & Aika* 3, no. 4 (2009): 7–23.

<sup>32</sup>Vesa Sisättö, Anu Ala-Korpela, and Mikko Metsämäki, *Operaatio Kekkonen* (Helsinki: Tammi, 2000), 23–4.

<sup>33</sup>Juhani Suomi, *Urho Kekkonen 1936–1944. Myrmysmies* (Helsinki: Otava 1986), 54–121.

(Minister of Justice, 1936–37, Minister of the Interior 1937–39) and tried to ban the fascist, right-wing party the Patriotic People's Movement (IKL), he faced his first significant political adversaries at the national level. IKL was established after the so-called Lapua Movement was banned at the turn of the 1930s. As in many European countries, right-wing radicalism also appeared in Finland during the inter-war period.

During the war years, he was not a minister, but was active in many governmental tasks and duties. What was remarkable for Kekkonen's later political life was his changing attitude towards the wartime enemy, the Soviet Union, during the war. After the Winter War (1939–40), he voted against the Moscow peace treaty, in which Finland had to cede areas along the eastern border with the Soviet Union. However, during the Continuation War (1941–44), when Finland fought on the German side, he became one of the leading politicians in the cross-party 'Peace opposition', which wanted Finland to step out of the war. Right after the war, Kekkonen became Minister of Justice again. During this post, he had to deal with the so-called war-responsibility trials against Finnish wartime leaders. In these trials, which were conducted entirely according to Finnish law (apart from the committee set up by the Allied Control Commission, which made a list of war criminals), many leading Finnish wartime leaders, including the wartime president of Finland, Risto Ryti, were sentenced to prison.<sup>34</sup> The trials evoked criticism of Kekkonen, particularly among the political right, which afterwards influenced his career.

In the post-war years, until the presidential election of 1956, Kekkonen was Deputy Speaker and Speaker of the Parliament, a Minister (besides Minister of Justice and Minister of Interior, also Minister of Foreign Affairs), and Prime Minister several times. During the 1950s, Kekkonen strongly supported President J.K. Paasikivi's policy of maintaining friendly relations with the Soviet Union. Kekkonen was already a presidential candidate for the Agrarian Party in the 1950 elections when Paasikivi was elected.

Overall, Kekkonen's background as an ardent anti-right-wing politician, yet not a left-winger, had a significant effect on how he was seen among the Finnish political right later in the post-war period. His changing policies towards the Soviet Union during and after the Second World War were seen as the first signs of his opportunistic politics towards the Soviets. The way he harnessed his Soviet relationships to the internal policy of Finland also displeased the Social Democrats. Moreover, his background in the security police was seen as evidence of how Kekkonen was indeed familiar with the methods that were not suitable in an open democracy, such as using personal, secret sources to enhance his position as a politician. He promoted his own cause and acquired a reputation as an intriguer. As the British minister to Helsinki described Kekkonen in 1949, he was a man whose 'ability has never been questioned, but his sardonic, mordant wit has earned him many enemies and his various flirtation with the communists has not added to his reputation for "reliability" in right-wing circles'.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, whereas Kekkonen's followers saw

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<sup>34</sup>See e.g. Helena P. Evans, *Diplomatic Deceptions. Anglo-Soviet Relations and the Fate of Finland 1944–1948* (Helsinki: SKS, 2011).

<sup>35</sup>Quoted from David Kirby, *A Concise History of Finland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 249, David Kirby uses 'minister' (with lower case). The diplomat in question, Sir Oswald Scott, was no an Ambassador. In other words, he was representing Britain in Finland during the post-war years but was not an official Ambassador.

all his political capabilities as skills and sharp pragmatism, his opponents considered Kekkonen as a calculative, cunning, and unprincipled politician.

Kekkonen was very conscious of the significance of a public image to the exercise of political power, and actively used different media to enhance such an image.<sup>36</sup> He and his backers had a strategic take on public appearances from early on. He produced – or let others produce for him – a wide array of political works wherein he argued his political views. He also understood the potential of radio, cinema, and later television in the construction of a public image. A substantial amount of film material about Kekkonen was produced during his political career.<sup>37</sup> Campaign films were special forms of addressing the people, and were used to appeal to voters and citizens. Kekkonen's long-time friends, the professor of ethnography Kustaa Vilkuna, governor of Lapland Kaarlo Hillilä, and party secretary Arvo Korsimo, acted as his 'powers behind the scene' for a long time. Especially regarding the presidential elections, Vilkuna as well as Korsimo constructed a well-thought-out image of Kekkonen as a national model and a great man.<sup>38</sup>

### The analysis: three decades, three films

The material consists of three of Kekkonen's campaign films from 1955, 1967, and 1978, all of them much longer than TV spots, as those did not appear in Finnish campaigning before the end of the 1980s. Moreover, these campaign films served as footage for the two-to-three-month duration of the campaigns.

The film *For the Nation* was produced for the 1956 election campaign. In 1968, running for the third time, Kekkonen appeared in the campaign film *President, Statesman*. In 1977, before the 1978 elections, a film called *Day of the President* was made about Kekkonen's work as President. The first two were produced by the Agrarian League party machinery and the third by Yleisradio. It was not an official campaign film, but one describing Kekkonen's work as a president. The 1956 and 1968 films were shown as short pictures in the movies and in party gatherings around the country, resembling in this way the presentation techniques of fascist regimes. The 1977 film was shown on TV, and it attracted 1.7 million viewers at its premiere, in a country of 4.5 million people.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>See Timo J. Tuikka, *Kekkosen konstit. Urho Kekkonen historia- ja politiikkakäsitykset teoriasta käytäntöön 1933–1981* (Jyväskylä: Jyväskylä University Printing House, 2007); Jukka-Pekka Puro, 'Puhumalla hallitseminen: vahvan johtajuuden ilmentyminen Kekkonen radiopuheissa vuosina 1937–1967,' *Lähikuva* 29, no. 2 (2016): 22–42; and Timonen and Lammi, 'Kekkosen matkassa.'

<sup>37</sup>Other movie productions about Kekkonen during his presidency were *Decades of Change: Urho Kaleva Kekkonen as the Navigator of Finnish Foreign Politics* (1975, shown by YLE), *The Creative Statesman* by Juhan af Grann for Kekkonen's 75th birthday (1975, shown by the commercial channel MTV), and Mikko Niskanen's *CSCCE – Peace as a Goal* (1980), which won the documentary category at the 1981 Moscow International Film Festival.

<sup>38</sup>Tuikka, *Kekkosen konstit*.

<sup>39</sup>The backgrounds for the films have been investigated by visiting the UKK Archive in Orimattila, Finland, by going through the campaign speeches of Kekkonen, the 'Rypsi' campaign plan and film manuscript of 1955, and writings in the Finnish and foreign press during elections. The following interviews were conducted: the director of the 1968 film Kari Uusitalo; the retired YLE reporter Timo-Erkki Heino; the journalist Maarit Huovinen, who was part of the 1977 film production crew; and Hanna Nurminen, the granddaughter of Kustaa Vilkuna, Kekkonen's *eminence gris*.

### ***For the nation in 1956: a solid statesman rising from the ranks of ordinary people***

For the 1956 presidential elections, Kekkonen's public image was laboriously built. His political aide and close friend Kustaa Vilkuna wrote a booklet, *Urho Kekkonen*, to introduce his political persona.<sup>40</sup> When the campaign film came out at the end of 1955, Kekkonen had been Prime Minister several times, and become a much-contested figure in Finnish political life.<sup>41</sup> The presidential election was a fierce battle, and a lot has been written about the Soviet influence on the result.<sup>42</sup> Even though Kekkonen had wide support, he also had adversaries in all the political parties, including his own.<sup>43</sup> Other candidates criticised him heavily for stirring up fear, over-emphasising foreign politics, and taking personal credit for all the achievements of foreign policy.<sup>44</sup> During the campaigning, the yellow press published many scandalous stories about Kekkonen, and he was depicted as a drunkard, rowdy, and a womaniser.

The campaign film was an attempt to build a credible and trustworthy image of Kekkonen. Politically disputed issues were addressed and vicious rumours were counter balanced with an overtly positive image of the politician. Kekkonen's political career needed to be presented in order to justify and legitimate his political message. Kekkonen's campaign was meticulously planned, creating an election organisation and involving large circles of people nationwide, as is revealed in the party planning documents.<sup>45</sup> During the campaign, Kekkonen toured the country widely, delivering hundreds of speeches. During the 1950s, before television and election programmes, the touring played a significant role in delivering the message.<sup>46</sup> Touring was something new in Finnish presidential campaigning and Kekkonen was accused of American-style campaigning. Many people thought this culture was not appropriate in the Finnish context.<sup>47</sup>

During Kekkonen's tenure, if one criticised him, one might very easily be labelled as opposing the Soviet Union and official foreign politics. Opponents started being labelled as 'extreme right', and were characterised as opposing 'the people', much in the same way as Soviets would talk about enemies of the people, and the Nazis would speak about Bolsheviks.

In the American context, negative campaigning in the form of mocking opponents, where the aim was to manipulate voters by highlighting the weaknesses of an opponent, had been done at least since the Adlai Stevenson campaign of 1956. A sort of milestone

<sup>40</sup>Sisättö et al., *Operaatio Kekkonen*, 28.

<sup>41</sup>*Kansakunnan puolesta* (For the Nation), directed by Johannes Huomo. Helsinki, Finland: Maalaisliitto ry, Mainos-Matti Oy, 1955.

<sup>42</sup>See e.g. Kimmo Rentola, *Niin kylmää että polttaa. Kommunistit, Kekkonen ja Kreml 1947–1958* (Helsinki: Otava, 1997); Lasse Lehtinen, *Aatosta jaloa ja alhaista mieltä. SDP:n ja Urho Kekkonen suhteet 1944–1981* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2002); and Tuikka, *Kekkonen konstit*.

<sup>43</sup>The Agrarian League (today known as the Centre Party of Finland) was established as a political party of rural communities in 1906. After the Second World War, the party became one of the four major political parties in Finland and, together with Social Democrats, formed centre-left governments during the building of the Scandinavian type of welfare state.

<sup>44</sup>Editorial, *Sosialidemokraatti* 13 January 1956; and Tuikka, *Kekkonen konstit*, 267–77.

<sup>45</sup>Presidentinvaali 1956, 'Kirjeitä, asiakirjoja, vaalipropagandaa 1952–1955, mm. toimintasuunnitelma "Rypsi", filmisuunnitelmia', file 21/87, UKA (The Archives of President Urho Kekkonen).

<sup>46</sup>Reijo Perälä, Paavo Rytäsä, and Elina Yli-Ojanperä, 'Kekkonen vuoden 1956 vaalikampanja,' 11 February 2014, *Virtual Archive of YLE*, <http://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2014/02/11/kekkonen-vuoden-1956-vaalikampanja> (accessed 30 September 2017).

<sup>47</sup>Nousiainen, *Tutkimus eräiden sanomalehtien vaalipropagandasta vuoden 1956 presidentinvaaleissa*, 15; and Virmavirta *Presidenttipeli ja sen pelaajat*, 17.

in American campaigning was seen to occur, when the famous ‘Daisy’ spot by the Lyndon B. Johnson campaign was aired (and ran only once before being pulled by the Johnson campaign) in 1964. The commercial, showing a little girl picking petals off a daisy, cut directly to a nuclear explosion, which was thought to characterise the militarism of the right-wing Republican candidate Barry Goldwater. It was held that if Goldwater were elected, he might start a nuclear war with the Soviets.<sup>48</sup> The candidate takes the role of a saviour when giving an account of the situation to the people: he knows the way forward. Ordinary farmers and workers’ families, who have lost family members in the war, are shown sitting by the radio. Everyone is dispirited and depressed. The crutches of a veteran listening to the radio symbolise support. Perhaps this support will also help to repair the broken nation, as well as the relationship between Finland and the Soviet Union?

After the destruction of war, a relationship of trust was to be built with the former enemy. Kekkonen speaks of facts and a ‘one and only’ possibility of carrying out a new policy. In Finnish political culture, necessity and the so-called TINA (‘there is no alternative’) argumentation has traditionally had a strong foothold. Creating an atmosphere where there are no alternatives, a kind of absoluteness, was a strong theme of the films, centring on foreign politics and Soviet relations. In this film, Kekkonen appeals directly to the people so that they would not stir up disagreement or desperation. The film shows the Finns as an original, pioneering people, who must find their way through the marshlands and hills, since ‘there are no wide roads for us’.

The figure and politics of Kekkonen lean strongly on those of Paasikivi, the former President (1946–56), who is employed as a supporter and legitimator of Kekkonen. The name of the famous foreign policy termed the *Paasikivi Kekkonen line* was actually developed by the campaign team (Johannes Huumo and Arvo Korsimo) for this campaign; in fact, it used to be called the *Paasikivi line*. During the Cold War period, it became an official concept in Finnish foreign policy.<sup>49</sup> ‘These men laid the foundation for Finnish foreign policy after the war,’ as it is declared in the film. Kekkonen is also established as part of a chain of great statesmen by showing the official portraits of former ministers, and revealing him as the most long-lived. To bring foreign politics across as the central theme of the campaign was a deliberate ‘propaganda agenda’ set by the Agrarian League in the 1956 election, which was especially underscored by its party press.<sup>50</sup>

After the two wars against the Soviet Union (the Winter War, 1939–40, and the Continuation War, 1941–44), there was heavy debate about how different politicians had acted and taken stands during them. The film went on to prove that Kekkonen had been consequential in his politics, and was laughed at, when he had spoken for peace in 1943. Kekkonen walks the aisles of Parliament as a steady and trustworthy figure who stands by his words. Through his books, articles, and speeches a canon of his political thinking is being built.

During the years of radicalism and extremism in the 1930s, Kekkonen is again presented as creating national unity amid the conflictual situation. As Kekkonen tried

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<sup>48</sup>Not only was Kekkonen a skilful rhetorician and speaker with a physically strong voice, but he also had extensive experience in performing on the radio. See Salokangas, *Yleisradio 1926–1996*, 97–8.

<sup>49</sup>Tuikka *Kekkosen konstit*, 268.

<sup>50</sup>Nousiainen, *Tutkimus eräiden sanomalehtien vaalipropagandasta vuoden 1956 presidentinvaaleissa*, 29.

to curb right-wing extremism as Minister of the Interior, he stayed firm, even though he was persecuted and harassed by threatening letters and phone calls at night.

By showing men doing physical labour on their farms as well as in construction, a bridge is being built towards the socialist parties, especially the Social Democrats. Building projects like dams also symbolise nation-building after the war. In addition to building a connection to the peasantry and working-class people, it was important to emphasise Kekkonen's roots and humble beginnings in a countryside croft. During the 1950s, Finland was still an agricultural country dominated by small farms. Therefore, as Kekkonen opened an agricultural exhibition it was underlined how he himself had also practised farming, and was still active in his region of birth. He also knows the wilderness and hikes up to meet the poor people who live on the outskirts. As a symbol of speaking for the disadvantaged, a road that had been built in the backwoods was named 'Urho Kekkonen road' by the local people. Economic policy was the second important theme of the propaganda employed by the Agrarian League during the campaign. But unlike the right-wing National Coalition Party, the Agrarian League concentrated on agricultural policy instead of general economy.<sup>51</sup>

For the finale towards the end of the film, foreign politics is addressed. At the end of 1955, the Soviet Union had just returned the area of Porkkala along the southern coast of Finland, which it had rented as a military base. President Paasikivi and Prime Minister Kekkonen return from Moscow on a plane to Helsinki in patriotic triumph: their line of foreign policy had brought back Porkkala, thus securing sovereignty and freedom for the nation. In the end, Kekkonen is represented as a strong authority and saviour of the country, as the film ends in a statement: 'Secure the continuity of the Paasikivi-Kekkonen line. It will guarantee our independence, it will secure a peaceful era of reconstruction for our people.'

This film from the 1950s reflects the tradition of propaganda cinema and the elements that prop up a personality cult. Throughout the film, Kekkonen is shown half in the dark, half in light, as if he is someone who is about to appear, someone for whom the people had been waiting. From the dark shadows of the war, the Finnish people are also coming into the light, and Kekkonen is showing the way.

Kekkonen won the presidential election by the narrowest possible margin: on the second round, his rival candidate K.A. Fagerholm (SDP) got 149 votes against Kekkonen's 151. After the election, the national papers wrote about a destructive election campaign.<sup>52</sup> The political atmosphere in Finland was quarrelsome, and a general strike broke out on the day of Kekkonen's inauguration.

### ***The 1968 elections: father of the nation and president of the people***

In 1968, Kekkonen had already been President for two terms, and ran for office for a third time. At this point, there were no serious rivals who would have threatened his position. In the elections, Kekkonen was the candidate for not only the Agrarian League, but also for the socialist Democratic Union of the Finnish People (Suomen

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>52</sup>Signum 4: *Lehtileikkeet ja painatteet* (newspapers and publications), "lehtileikkeitä" (newspaper clippings), file 41/10, UKA. See also e.g. *Karjalan Maa*, 1 March 1956; *Sosialidemokraatti*, 14 February 1956; *Maakansa*, 15 February 1956; and *Vapaa Sana*, 15 February 1956.

Kansan Demokraattinen Liitto i.e. Communists), the Social Democrats (SDP), the socialist Social Democratic Union of the Workers and Small Farmers (TPSL), and a minority of the Swedish People's Party (RKP). The other candidates were the right-wing National Coalition Party's (Kok) Matti Virkkunen and the populist Finnish Rural Party's (SMP) Veikko Vennamo. Virkkunen's campaign was described as a 'crusade against Kekkonen', because it was not respectful enough towards the President in office.<sup>53</sup> Particularly Virkkunen's slogan 'The Country Needs a President' irritated Kekkonen so much that it has been seen as one reason why the Nation Coalition Party did not get into the Cabinet during Kekkonen's presidency.

Kekkonen's objective, however, was not only to clinch victory, but also to gather as wide a support base as possible – thus becoming a president who was truly 'everyone's choice': the president of the people. As such, emphasising that a politician is close to the people is common in political rhetoric and discourse, but professing the leader to have paternalistic ties with the people was also one of the main pillars of Stalin's cult. At that point, in the late 1960s, Kekkonen started to achieve his superior position, if not yet undisputed, then overwhelmingly as leader.

Kekkonen would not agree to an election panel with the other two candidates, and so Yleisradio catered to his wishes and tailored an election programme, which has been described as Kekkonen's direct address to the people. By the same token, he was not willing to comment on the other candidates' election themes.<sup>54</sup> From the point of view of political culture, it is interesting that Kekkonen saw campaigning as something he should not have to comply with.<sup>55</sup> There was political calculation in how the other parties backed Kekkonen, and in the case of the SDP, it meant a clear shift. There had been fierce opposition to Kekkonen in the party, and many of its voters were still discontented as a result of his actions in domestic affairs.<sup>56</sup>

Also in the campaign film *President, Statesman* (1967), Kekkonen is portrayed as having the support of a broad coalition of different parties, who approach him to ask him to become their candidate.<sup>57</sup> They are supposed to represent not only the parties, but actually general opinion. He is also one to speak for the hold-outs – those who hold opposing views – as a father would when raising children. The party office commissioned the film from Suomi Filmi, one of the two large film-production companies in Finland, and gave specific instructions on how it should look: Kekkonen was to be presented simultaneously as a man of the people, someone from humble beginnings, but also as a statesman and a father figure for the nation.<sup>58</sup>

As the tradition of propaganda films of authoritarian origin was evident in the 1955 film, this film has some clear influences of the American-style propaganda used in political campaigning and the movie industry. The music is lighter, and resembles the film scores of American movies of the time. The style of shooting and narration is more intimate and playful. There are scenes from the president's personal life involved as well, which is a new theme. This Western phenomenon of politicians' private lives

<sup>53</sup>Virmavirta, *Presidenttipeli ja sen pelaajat*, 29.

<sup>54</sup>Sisäntö et al., *Operaatio Kekkonen*, 51.

<sup>55</sup>Virmavirta, *Presidenttipeli ja sen pelaajat*.

<sup>56</sup>Lauri Sivonen, *Presidentin tekemiset* (Helsinki: Kirjayhtymä, 1982), 38–9; and Virmavirta, *Presidenttipeli ja sen pelaajat*, 28.

<sup>57</sup>*Valtiomics, presidentti* (Statesman, President), directed by Kari Uusitalo. Helsinki, Finland: Suomi-Filmi 1967.

<sup>58</sup>Interview with Kari Uusitalo 9 May 2016.

slowly starting to enter the public sphere was taken up in the Kekkonen film as something rather novel in the Finnish context. Kekkonen is shown in his summer villa, where he relaxes, reads the papers and listens to the radio, sits down for afternoon coffee with his family and caresses a dog. A typical Finnish summer holiday involves a boat ride, fishing, and spending time with children and grandchildren; the same holds true for the president as well. Bringing the family and the dog to soften the image of a politician was already used in Nixon's famous vice-presidential campaign film of 1952, which introduced his wife Pat and dog Checkers.<sup>59</sup>

The camera approaches Tamminiemi, the official residence of the President, from the sea: the picture closes in on a man walking in a suit – Kekkonen. We hear how the task of a president is difficult and challenging in the country. Kekkonen is the eighth one in the job and 'undoubtedly our most experienced statesman'. As he walks in the woods, we learn how he has witnessed the Finnish nation's recent history, and knows the national character. By showing his birth croft in the countryside, his life is intertwined with that of the Finnish nation: rustic and unyielding. Even though he left the countryside to educate himself, his connection to his native area was never broken: he still understands the Finnish way of life and is faithful to his origins. This was a key point to emphasise in Finland, where industrialisation and migration to the cities occurred late, and where the connection between the small elite and the people, as well as societal cleavages, had always been challenging. The emphasising of modest country roots was common with the personal cults of communist leaders. The post-war structural change in Finland resembled that of Eastern Europe, where a country's economic structure transformed very quickly, not only towards an industrial, but also towards a post-industrial, society.<sup>60</sup>

The film cuts again to the theme of sports, and shows Kekkonen going for a run and jumping up the famous Seurasaari Park stone steps near his residence. As a young man, he challenged himself to become a champion of Finland in both the triple jump and high jump, and the skill had not been forgotten. Stressing the athleticism and youth of the leader has been common in image management both in totalitarian systems (Mussolini, Putin) as well as in American democracies (presidents playing golf).<sup>61</sup> Inasmuch as the sporting achievement of dictators, such as Nicolae Ceaușescu or the North-Korean Kims, have usually been fabricated, Kekkonen was a real athlete in his youth.

The theme of war, peace, and foreign policy is particularly addressed. Moving on to the graveyard and church, one learns that the Finnish people did not acquire their sovereignty for free, but had to defend it in taking up arms. While discussing neutrality policy and the desire for peace, the imagery moves on to a military parade and soldiers with medals of honour to emphasise the importance of the army. The last episode of the film handles international relations, which are carefully dealt with by going through an imagery of state visits. Kekkonen walks together with Kennedy and we learn that

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<sup>59</sup>Diamond and Bates, *The Spot*, 70–5.

<sup>60</sup>See e.g. Markus Wien and Georgi Dimitrov, 'Three Manifestations of his Cult,' in *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships. Stalin and the Eastern Bloc*, eds. Balázs Apor, Jan C. Behrends, Polly Jones, and E. A. Rees (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 195; and Timo Myllyntaus, 'Vaaran laelta toimiston nurkkaan – taloudellinen kehitys ja elämänmuodon muutokset,' in *Suuri muutos. Suomalaisen yhteiskunnan kehityspiirteitä*, ed. Marjatta Rahikainen (Lahti: University of Helsinki, Lahden tutkimus- ja koulutuskeskus, 1992), 47.

<sup>61</sup>Burke, *Eyewitnessing*, 71.

Western relations are important, since ‘no one can explain our point of view better than we.’ The President visits four continents, which means our foreign policy has been accepted in both East and West. Grandiose music is played as Kekkonen visits the Soviet Union: these relations form the basis of Finnish foreign politics, and the President’s person is extremely important in upholding them. Relating to the UN general assembly, it is stated that Finland takes the role of a doctor rather than a judge – a famous saying in Finland describing the effort to remain neutral during the Cold War.

The policy of neutrality and the sensitive geopolitical situation of Finland during the Cold War was central for Finland’s, and especially Kekkonen’s, foreign policy. Finnish-Soviet relations were based on the Agreement of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance (FCMA or YYA treaty) with the Soviet Union from 1948. The agreement, made with a Western European country, can be seen as a step moving towards the Eastern Bloc. However, it was much more favourable for the Finns than the agreements Moscow made with Romania and Hungary, which actually were models for the initial FCMA treaty by the Soviets.

Yet the Finnish policy of neutrality was criticised for *Finlandisation* – that Finland had to abide by the Soviet Union’s policy rules. Among European political commentators, Kekkonen’s policy was also seen as exceptionally skilled politics. As the Italian newspaper *Il Popolo* wrote in 1971, Kekkonen’s politics can be described as: never get yourself into a situation where you have to say ‘no’ to the Soviets, but proceed in a way that they say ‘yes’ to the Finns.<sup>62</sup>

At the end of the film, Kekkonen’s long political career is emphasised, and further authority is built on the words of the late President Paasikivi, who in 1955 stated: ‘Kekkonen is my candidate . . . I have not met another man so talented in my lifetime.’ Portrayed in the movie as a president for the people, Kekkonen won the 1968 election on the first round of voting, receiving 201 electors. Even though he received strong support, the other candidates, Virkkunen and Vennamo, got 66 and 32 votes, which disappointed Kekkonen, who was elected with votes from the leftist parties, including the SDP. Giving this political support, the SDP returned to the centre of political power.<sup>63</sup> After the election, the international press wrote that Kekkonen’s aim in becoming the President of the whole nation was not realised, as the campaigning was fierce and protest votes were made. The West German *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* commented that the campaign had opened old wounds, as it was fought fiercely by the opposing parties, the right-wing National Coalition and the populist Finnish Rural Party.<sup>64</sup> Kekkonen also received a record number of poison-pen letters and threats.<sup>65</sup> The special characteristics of Finnish political life, foreign politics dominated by the president and the inflamed political atmosphere, came out in the writings of the Nordic and West German papers.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Jorma Kallentautio, *Suomi kylmän rauhan maailmassa* (Helsinki: SKS. 2005), 303.

<sup>63</sup>Virmavirta, *Presidenttipeli ja sen pelaajat*, 30–1.

<sup>64</sup>Signum 2. *Sisällön mukaan akteiksi järjestetyt asiakirjat* (documents arranged according to subject matter), ‘Politiikka’ (politics), presidentinvaali 1968 (presidential election) file 21/116, UKA.

<sup>65</sup>Sisättö et al., *Operaatio Kekkonen*, 52.

<sup>66</sup>Signum 2. *Sisällön mukaan akteiksi järjestetyt asiakirjat* (documents arranged according to subject matter), ‘Politiikka’ (politics), presidentinvaali 1968 (presidential election) file 21/116, UKA.

At this point in Kekkonen's presidency, there are many similarities to the cult of Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia. Tito 'was represented as wise, far-sighted, resolute, proud, generous and sensitive', 'understands the essence of reality', and 'always takes the "right" decision'. Also, Tito's active role in international politics, which was uncommon among the Eastern Bloc countries, as Soviet satellites, resemble that of Kekkonen's.<sup>67</sup> In Finland during the late 1960s student revolt, Kekkonen, a former student radical himself, supported radicals. This included not only the most visible and soon-to-become mythical Finnish action of 1968, the occupation of the Old Student House in Helsinki, but also other ways to embrace the radicals. Tito, for his part, also used the student revolts of the late 1960s for his political needs and the strengthening of his cult of personality.<sup>68</sup>

### **President by profession in 1977**

After the presidential term 1968–74, the next four years in office were secured for Kekkonen by passing an exceptional law in Parliament; Kekkonen was elected for the fourth period without an electoral process. This period of Finnish contemporary history has been seen as the nadir of Finnish democracy. Kekkonen refused to enter the race but promised to continue, if he were elected by other means. Hence, all the major parties asked him to continue and passed the exceptional legislation. Kekkonen had achieved a superior position in Finnish politics at that point, but there was also a very topical case that made him and his personal relationship with the Soviets seem irreplaceable in the early 1970s. Finland was negotiating a free-trade agreement with the European Economic Community (EEC) which was crucial not only for foreign politics (to show that Finland was part of the West), but particularly for Finnish industrial and business life. The Soviets were very dubious about the motives of the EEC, but Kekkonen managed to assure them that the agreement would not jeopardise the Finnish-Soviet relationship. Moreover, the 1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), held in Helsinki, was coming up and Kekkonen wanted to host the conference.

For the 1978 elections, the biggest parties – the SDP first – had already chosen their candidate three years earlier, in 1975. This time, the National Coalition Party also chose Kekkonen. The elections were overwhelmed with votes for the President, as he received 82% of the vote and 259 of the 301 electors, backed by the four biggest parties. The other candidates represented small parties: Rauno Westerholm from the Finnish Christian League; Veikko Vennamo from the Finnish Rural Party; and Ahti M. Salonen from the Constitutional People's Party. As there were no serious rivals to challenge Kekkonen, the possibility of low voter turnout became a problem. Yleisradio published fact briefings to generate enthusiasm about the elections. There was an effort to make the campaign programmes as interesting as possible, but the presentation of

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<sup>67</sup>Stanislav Sretenovic and Artan Puto, 'Leader Cults in the Western Balkans (1945–90): Josip Broz Tito and Enver Hoxha,' in *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships. Stalin and the Eastern Bloc*, eds. Balázs Apor, Jan C. Behrends, Polly Jones, and E. A. Rees (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 209.

<sup>68</sup>Sretenovic and Puto, 'Leader Cults in the Western Balkans (1945–90),' 213–14. See also Boris Kanzleiter, 'Yugoslavia,' in *1968 in Europe. A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977*, eds. Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan 2008), 219–28.

the different candidates was incomplete, when Kekkonen again refused to appear together with the others. Instead, old short films of him were shown.<sup>69</sup> Kekkonen's slogan for the campaign was 'Trust Across Borders', which in popular speech became 'Kekkonen across borders'. As Kekkonen was already quite old and his condition had weakened, the campaigning was rather mild.<sup>70</sup>

*Day of the President*, which came out in 1977, was not a campaign film, but described a typical day in office of the president-elect and was presented as a documentary.<sup>71</sup> The idea of a documentary-style film was credited to Leo Tujunen, the chief editor of *Suomen Kuvalehti*, the Finnish equivalent of *Time* magazine. He worked with a background group including Kekkonen's old friend Kustaa Vilkuna and Maarit Huovinen, a young reporter close to Kekkonen. Reminiscing, Huovinen described the format as one where the viewers could see 'how a professional manages the daily work of a president'. The film was a way to address the people and bring them closer to the everyday experience of the president's work. It also gave them the chance to see the more unofficial side of the president.<sup>72</sup> The documentary producers, Merja Halmevaara-Molarius and Jorma Molarius, wanted to gather material on the President's persona and the way he interacted and exercised his power.<sup>73</sup> Two different versions of the film were made: an original Finnish one and a shorter version produced for the international market. The international version is a more polished one without the critical remarks of political opponents, or an emphasis on superpower relations, making it more a product of public diplomacy.

In the national version, the matter of the exceptional law is addressed right at the beginning (and omitted from the international one). Reading and commenting on the newspapers in the morning gives Kekkonen the opportunity to indirectly criticise the media as well as his political opponents. As Kekkonen goes out for a run, he is a President defying the storm. It was very important to show his physical fitness at this old age. At that time, Kekkonen already had serious health problems, which were known but silenced not only by his administration, but also by the media. The Finnish media practised self-censorship concerning both the President and Soviet affairs up until the 1980s.<sup>74</sup>

In the film, however, trees sway in the wind, but the President likes harsh weather: hardship does not bring him down, but on the contrary, gives him energy. Kekkonen is a man of many talents and interests: he knows culture, arts, and sports, but represents the original Finnish folk. In the sauna, naked, he is a robust Finnish man who can stand the heat – better than anyone else.

The day of President Kekkonen is endlessly long. He is a superman who flies from one moment and matter to another, changing roles and his dress in an instant. One sees in the film that fixing the presidential schedule is an exact business: he is an important

<sup>69</sup>Matti Paavonsalo, *Kekkosen valta* (Jyväskylä: Gummerus, 1995), 221; and *Virmavirta Presidenttipeli ja sen pelaajat*, 92.

<sup>70</sup>*Virmavirta, Presidenttipeli ja sen pelaajat*, 94.

<sup>71</sup>*Presidentin päivä* (Day of the President), directed by Jorma Molarius, Helsinki, Finland: Yleisradio TV1, Yhteiskunnalliset kohdeohjelmat, 1977.

<sup>72</sup>Interview with Maarit Huovinen, 12 May 2016.

<sup>73</sup>Paavo Rytäsä, 'Presidentin päivä,' *Yle Elävä Arkisto*, 3 June 2006, <http://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2007/06/03/presidentin-paiva> (accessed 30 September 2017).

<sup>74</sup>Lotta Lounasmeri, 'Through Rose or Blue and White Glasses? Decades of News about the Soviet Union in the Finnish Press,' *Nordicom Review* 34, no. 1 (2013): 105–23; and Esko Salminen, *Vaikeneva valtiomahti? Neuvostoliitto/Venäjä Suomen lehdistössä 1968–1991* (Helsinki: Edita, 1996).

man, who gives his time to others by the minute as he sees fit. Even though Kekkonen chats in an intimate manner with his closest political colleagues, friends, and staff, he receives a lot of respect from others, and is above others especially when performing his duties.

In the national film version, international relations of commerce are introduced in the form of icebreaker deals with the US, and the Kostamus construction project in the Soviet Union. Emphasising the role of the leader as the creator of economic success was also one of the pillars in Stalin's cult. However, the necessity of maintaining dynamic trading relations with Western markets was also important in Finnish foreign policy during the Cold War era.

In the film, intimacy between Kekkonen and the viewer is created by using close-ups: he looks into the camera intensely and addresses the viewer directly by saying, for example, 'just between us I would say ...'.<sup>75</sup> All in all, the film concentrates intensely on the persona and figure of the President: the interviewer is not shown. When reading the papers, only Kekkonen's head is shown. He looks at the camera and articulates his ideas carefully.

Again, the message of foreign policy becomes clear when it is stated that a broad majority stands for the Paasikivi-Kekkonen line, while at the same time marginalising opponents. The President speaks of Finland as a responsible nation when talking about world affairs, international cooperation, and development aid. The film culminates in a description of the President as a primal tree. He gets his strength from Finnish brown bread and can bear anything: his lonely work is as President, as he cannot share that power and responsibility.

### **Finnish Cold War campaign films: a bricolage of Eastern and Western influences**

As political campaigning, the films analysed are very impressive. At the time of their release, the reach they exhibited over voting citizens was of a scale not imaginable today. The power of these pictures was also in their seemingly documentary quality, as their propagandistic nature was more or less hidden. Nevertheless, the traditional elements of propaganda are visible in the contextual as well as textual elements. In the narrative being constructed in these films, similar elements were repeated from one decade to the next. The themes and issues that were discussed naturally varied according to the political and social situation of the time. Repetition is effective, as the same elements and symbols are reiterated. All of the films have a nationalistic and also populist tone, creating a spirit of sacrifice (especially the 1955 film which came out a decade after the war had ended), where everyone was needed to pull their weight under the leadership of a great man.

In visual terms, the influences of Soviet-style totalitarian propaganda are most obvious in the first film from 1955. The film is in black and white; the use of light and shadow as well as the editing of the film contribute to the building of the personality cult. In all of the films, the portrayal of Kekkonen's leadership bears elements similar to those of Stalin's leader cult, which was built on four mainstays.

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<sup>75</sup>Morreale, *A New Beginning*, 13.

First, his close relationship to Lenin was emphasised as he was depicted as Lenin's closest colleague, uniting heroes under the same themes. For Kekkonen, the significance of Paasikivi is repeatedly brought up, culminating in the official foreign-policy line carrying the names of the two presidents. Second, Stalin was seen as creator of economic success, as he carried out the Five-Year Plans. Kekkonen is shown going around the country, overseeing a series of construction projects and farming exhibitions. Third, Stalin's writings were considered authoritative. Much in the same way are the large array of texts and speeches produced by Kekkonen being underlined. Fourth, the Soviet leader's paternalistic ties with the people were emphasised, a point which is a central one in the communication of Kekkonen's films.<sup>76</sup>

Later, especially in the 1968 film, the American film industry and political campaign elements become more evident. Along with the style of filming, the elements of the stories are similar to those in their American counterparts. Plots in election films are generally simple. The leader is tested, he wins the challenges, and becomes wiser in the process. This pattern, typically used in American campaign films, is effective in all its clichés. Recycling, repetition, and simple expression offer an image of stability and certainty in a world that is uncertain and confusing to the point of chaos. The power of such myths is especially strong in visual representation. As in product advertising, American presidential campaign films were based on similar symbols repeated over and over. The visual clichés used symbolised America and were connected to the candidate: the presidential airplane; the US flag; farms and harvest; construction workers and factory workers. The significance of images was strengthened by textual narration. An idea has been repeated that the American people have gone through a lot of difficulties, but there will be a new beginning that the candidate will bring with him. In the storyline, many of the American films introduced the candidate first as a persona, followed by a presentation of his political achievements and international relations, ending in assurances of a commitment to peace.<sup>77</sup>

In all of Kekkonen's films, the same symbols constructing Kekkonen as a leader were repeated. He had risen from the ranks of ordinary folks and made an outstanding career as a statesman. In the films, Kekkonen represents and symbolises the Finnish people – original and undivided. He even becomes a Messianic figure who can unite the broken and wounded people and, in his wisdom, point in the right direction. Kekkonen appealed to the voters by presenting himself, on the one hand, as a man of the people and, on the other, as a wise hero who held a true vision for leading his people. In defending the poor and the inhabitants of remote backwoods he was at the same time 'one of us', a representative of the working Finnish people, and on the other, a father figure and a leader carrying the heavy burden of responsibility.

As a leader, he is sovereign and brilliant, and his abilities in all sectors are phenomenal. He becomes a mythical hero with no weaknesses. As the builder of inner unity and reconciliation, he simultaneously protected his people from outside threats. His personal, confidential relationships with the superpowers, with the Soviet Union in first place, guarantees the people's safety. Referring to the official foreign-policy line as the

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<sup>76</sup>Sarah Davis, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia. Terror, Propaganda and Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 148.

<sup>77</sup>Morreale, *A New Beginning*, 10–13.

Paasikivi-Kekkonen line is just made for constructing a basis for the personification of this policy in Kekkonen himself, so that in the end no other politician found it possible to challenge him. This theme was the core of Kekkonen's propaganda.

These political films show a carefully constructed narrative that kept pace with the president's position. Little by little, Kekkonen's public image became well established and harmonious, as the early stigmas as an opportunist, turncoat, womaniser, and drunkard faded. By depicting the national Finnish character and the history of the Finnish nation, the figure of Kekkonen is identified as symbolising that of the people. The will of the people is embodied in him. In the final analysis, the ideology communicated in the films is not really about political direction but about political truth, which is exactly what propaganda aims to construct.

Overall, what is particular in terms of propaganda for Kekkonen's campaign films is the balancing of Eastern and Western influences. As such, this was not Kekkonen's 'invention', nor did it concern only political communication. A central theme already present in the inter-war period in Finnish cultural propaganda and diplomacy was to show that Finland was part of the Western, not the Eastern, cultural sphere. After the Second World War, the policy continued, but the artists and diplomats were in a position where they had to consider the Soviets as well.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, the films present a modern, dynamic, but down-to-earth leader of a rapidly modernising Western country. The manner of presentation is familiar to the practice of American campaigning, whereas Kekkonen's films also resemble the personality cults and image-making of the communist leaders of the Eastern Block. To what degree the outcomes represented the intentional use of propaganda techniques originating from both East and West, is difficult to estimate.

This duality, the overall balancing between two sides of the Cold War, is the very essence of the Kekkonen era in the Finland of the twentieth century. The giant of Finnish diplomacy, Max Jacobson, saw this policy – including not so glorious forms of 'Finlandisation' – as a success story after all. This conservative policy was based on stability, 'designed to keep things as they are, and devoid of ideological ambitions'.<sup>79</sup>

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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<sup>78</sup>See Pekka Lähteenkorva and Jussi Pekkarinen, *Ikuisen Poudan maa. Virallinen Suomi-kuva 1918–1945* (Helsinki: WSOY, 2004); and Elina Melgin, *Propagandaa vai julkisuusdiplomatiaa. Taide ja kulttuuri Suomen maakuvan viestinnässä 1937–52* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2014).

<sup>79</sup>See e.g. Max Jacobson, 'Substance and Appearance: Finland,' *Foreign Affairs*, 1 June 1980. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/finland/1980-06-01/substance-and-appearance-finland>. (accessed November 8, 2018).

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