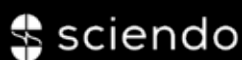


The Extradition of the Balts from Sweden to the USSR – *Baltutlämningen* – retold



PĒTERIS ALBERTS, University of Latvia, Latvia, e-mail: pa23022@edu.lu.lv

ABSTRACT

The tragic event when Sweden extradited the Balts to the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1946 has been discussed in numerous publications in scientific literature, belles-lettres, and fiction (P. O. Enquist: *Legionärerna. En roman om baltutlämningen*, 1968), and on the screen (J. Bergenstråhle: *Baltutlämningen*, 1970). Sometimes, when historic events are described, deviations from facts, omissions and errors are introduced. The present aim is to summarise some of these and show their possible effects on the overall description of a historical event. Examples were obtained from a review by Kristensen and Burman (2018). The results show that while care should be taken to avoid deviations, omissions and errors, if sufficiently numerous, they may lead to a skewed interpretation of the historical event. Furthermore, the authors “argue that Enquist established a Swedish war trauma that was not self-evident in the social imagination before his novel”, and that the film “changes the focus of the trauma by downplaying the bad conscience of the Swedes”. However, these lines of thought were not followed up, and the authors did not take the opportunity to discuss what could have been a logical continuation. Namely, the possible post-factum application by Enquist of a rhetorical strategy known as playing the victim. This is when an aggressor pretends to be a victim to justify his or her own aggression. In conclusion, the present results suggest that deviations from facts, omissions, and errors may seriously distort the description of the actual event and lead to conclusions not supported by evidence.

INTRODUCTION

Sweden's extradition of the Balts to the USSR in 1946 has drawn much attention and has been described in many contexts. A novel translated into several languages is *Legionärerna. En roman om baltutlämningen*

by P. O. Enquist (1968). Unfortunately, even some academic authors have relied on this book as a scientific source of facts (data) (a recent example, Carlberg, 2023). In this scientific uncertainty, facts are sometimes treated in a flexible manner. The main aim

of this study is to investigate what effects this tendency may have on the description of the actual event. Examples were obtained from a review by Kristensen and Burman (2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main part of the article by Kristensen and Burman (2018) is a review of reviews about a novel based on the extradition and the subsequent film, which the authors call “Enquist’s and Bergenstråhle’s creative endeavours”. Their article contains several deviations from facts, omissions, and errors. While they may seem to be of minor importance at first glance, they are so numerous that the extradition of the Balts in their interpretation turns out to be a completely different story.

The authors state that the book by P. O. Enquist “The Legionnaires: A Documentary Novel” (*Legionärerna. En roman om baltutlämningen*, 1968) was “well received by readers and critics”. However, this is not entirely the case. Many critics who did not or could not check the facts liked the novel. However, critics who made fact checks were devastating in their reviews. The latter were largely ignored or dismissed by the authors.

The authors write “The Legionnaires is felt, or thought, to be truthful by the author, while at the same time not being wholly factual” and that “The book was re-released in 2018 by the publisher Norstedt as part of the novel’s 50th anniversary. In the new preface entitled “A Swedish Trauma” the Norwegian reporter and author Åsne Seierstad argues that Enquist’s novel is a testimony against the rise of “alternative facts, fake news, individual truths”. Since this statement is not commented upon or opposed by the authors, the reader is left to understand that they agree. Furthermore, the authors fully adopted the use of the word trauma, which in all its forms they used 88 times. They did not even mention the word dilemma, which is something else. In the Preface Enquist used the word dilemma, not trauma; and in the book he used the word trauma only 8 times.

If critical reviews of the book had been considered, it would have been found that the main criticism was its lack of objectivity. Actually, Enquist himself wrote in the Preface that “My intention was to give a completely objective and accurate account of this completely unique event in Swedish contemporary history. I have, as will be seen, failed to present an objective description. I don’t think this objective description is possible to give.” It should be noted that in the Preface Enquist did not write that he tried to be objective.

Several statements in the book are wrong; see, for example, Landsmanis (1970) and Ekholm (1984). The importance of these objections is diminished or even ridiculed by the authors; for example, by calling Landsmanis’s book a pamphlet.

Therefore, Seierstad contradicts Enquist’s writings in the Preface. The question of objectivity in Enquist’s book is central, and this discrepancy should have been pointed out.

Enquist’s Preface in itself acts as a disclaimer. An author is entitled to write a novel as he or she wishes. In this case, for example, while the author writes about scientific processes and discloses some sources of information he has used, he does not use citations and does not give references to specific statements. However, objectivity and transparency are prerequisites for scientific papers.

Kristensen and Burman (2018) write that the “international literature on the Baltic question makes no mention of the event” (the extradition of the Balts) to the USSR by Sweden in 1946 and that one of their aims is to seek to fill this gap in the academic literature. Therefore, it is surprising that the authors only once mention the only academic doctoral thesis about the extradition of the Balts by Curt Ekholm (1984), and not even then in the context of the extradition proper. Moreover, in contrast to this objective, the article has little facts about the extradition, and what little it has is not entirely correct. As an example, in the first sentence of the Introduction the authors state that “In January

1946, 146 soldiers from the Baltic countries boarded the Soviet ship *Beloostrov* ... They were Baltic soldiers wearing German uniforms ... in Trelleborg were sent back to the now USSR as part of the peace agreement between the major warring nations". The men were escorted by armed guards onboard the ship. The Title does not mention the destination of the extradition, the USSR. Of the 146, 130 were Latvians. The authors also do not mention that all of the interned Balts and Germans participated in a hunger strike in protest against the extradition, that many of them committed self-mutilations, that 24 made serious suicide attempts, and that 7 of them committed suicide. Finally, Sweden was not a belligerent nation during World War II, it was neutral and, thus, neither part of the peace agreement nor bound by it.

The three Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, were occupied by the USSR in 1940 during the Second World War. The annexation was soon recognised by Germany and Sweden. Later, during the war, the three Baltic countries were occupied by Germany, and once again by the USSR in 1945. Although the Latvians, Estonians, and Lithuanians were drafted in violation of the Hague Conventions, the USSR would consider them as traitors. On 4 June 1945 the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs received a note in Swedish from the Embassy of the USSR dated 2 June 1945 (Zalcmanis 1984). In the note, the Embassy of the USSR mentions the peace agreement and "approaches the Swedish government with a proposal to extradite to the government of the USSR all German (and those under German control) soldiers, officers and other military personnel who have arrived in Swedish ports." The note also states that the government of the USSR instructed the Embassy to "receive an official confirmation from the Swedish government that it will not give shelter to any soldier or officer who fled from the USSR-German front to Sweden after the signing of the German military surrender." In the response dated 16 June 1945, Sweden said that it would extradite German and German-controlled

former military personnel to the USSR, including those who arrived in Sweden before the signing of the instrument of surrender and that it would not grant asylum to the aforementioned persons. All of the interned Balts had left the front before the German surrender (Freivalds 1968: 172) and most of the extradited Latvians (112 or 114 of 130; Freivalds 1968: 91; Landsmanis 1970: 48) had already left the front as early as in March (Ekholm 1984, part I). As mentioned, Sweden was not bound by the peace agreement. Thus, Sweden knowingly agreed to extradite quite a few legionnaires who were not covered by the USSR note, including all of the Balts. This, however, is not discussed by the authors. In addition, the authors do not discuss the extradition in view of the Hague and Geneva Conventions.

Kristensen and Burman (2018) use one example as proof of their hypothesis that the extradition "is a national (Swedish) trauma rather than a trauma of the Baltic diaspora" since a Latvian author living in exile in Sweden (Zenta Mauriņa), apparently wrote just a little something about the extradition in her diaries published in 1968. However, these diaries span the years 1951-1958. Zenta Mauriņa has indeed written extensively about the extradition of the Balts in the book based on her diaries spanning the late 1940ies called *Trimdas traģika, Zviedrijas dienasgrāmatas 1946-1948* (The tragedy of the exile, Swedish diaries 1946-1948) (Mauriņa 1965). A title that compares quite well with other book titles, like *Latviešu karavīru traģēdija Zviedrijā* (The tragedy of the Latvian soldiers in Sweden) (Freivalds, Alksnis 1956) and *De internerade balternas tragedi i Sverige år 1945-1946* (The tragedy of the interned Balts in Sweden in 1945-1946; interestingly, the authors erroneously translated "internerade" to "prisoners"; it should be noted that the interned were not prisoners) (Freivalds 1968).

Kristensen and Burman (2018) also ignore the fact that in contrast to the Western allies Sweden regarded refugees from Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania as USSR citizens until 1991. Many of them did not

feel safe in Sweden and during the first 10-year period after the war and the extradition, several thousand re-emigrated to the UK, USA, and Canada. The Lutheran and Catholic clergymen who visited the interned legionnaires in 1945-1946 did indeed hold intercessions on extradition anniversaries in Stockholm and other places in Sweden, including a camp site in Småland. Articles and books about the extradition were published by Latvians in exile, for example by J. Lamberts (1955), O. Freivalds and E. Alksnis (1956), Z. Mauriņa (1965), and O. Freivalds (1968), to mention those published before Enquist's "The Legionnaires".

In the Conclusion section, the authors state that "many consider the decision to extradite to be a politically correct one." Surprisingly, this is written in the present tense. However, it is unclear where this conclusion comes from, since the public opinion at any point of time among Swedes about the extradition is not discussed at all in the article, and therefore the statement appears unexpectedly in the Conclusion. In addition, its relevance is questionable, since the protests and demonstrations held against the extradition of the Balts in 1945 were among the largest ever in Sweden (**Figure 1**) (Freivalds, 1991). Finally, the authors do not mention that the Swedish government invited the surviving extradited Latvians, Estonians, and Lithuanians to Stockholm in 1994. Then the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed the government's critique of the extradition and the King of Sweden received the extradited in audience (Figure 2) (Ehrensward 1994, Lundegård 1994). And that so did the Swedish Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt in 2011 (Baltic Times 2011).

The authors raise the question of why Enquist selected this traumatic event for a book. They cite an American friend that allegedly has said "The Swedes have the world's only transportable conscience; they go around like professional moralists. They never speak of the situations when they themselves have been faced with moral conflicts. The troop transits, the extradition of the Balts ... For Enquist, the extradition of the Balts becomes a trauma." The authors write about "a national war trauma". This is forgetting that Sweden was neutral during the war and that the war in Europe had ended in May 1945. The note from the USSR was received the following month, after the end of the war in June.

Last but not least, Kristensen and Burman (2018) write "We argue that Enquist established a Swedish war trauma that was not self-evident in the social imagination before his novel" and that the film "changes the focus of the trauma by downplaying the bad conscience of the Swedes". However, these lines of thought are not followed up. Therefore, the authors missed the opportunity to discuss what could have been a logical continuation. Namely, the possible post-factum application by Enquist of a rhetorical strategy known as playing the victim (Snyder 2023). This is when an aggressor pretends to be the victim in order to justify his or her own aggression. Such rhetoric is not based on truth; thus, objectivity can be overlooked.

In conclusion, the present results suggest that deviations from facts, omissions, and errors may seriously distort the description of the actual event and lead to conclusions not supported by evidence.



FIGURE 1. Protest demonstration in Eksjö against the extradition of the Baltic legionnaires from Sweden to the USSR on 26 November 1945. Photographer Sven Rosenlöf. From the collections of Eksjö museum, with permission.

FIGURE 2. Extradited Balts on 20 June 1994 with King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden at the Stockholm Royal Palace. From the collections of the Latvian War Museum with permission.

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