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Abstract

The creation of Finland as a grand duchy within the Russian Empire in 1809 opened up the question of what Finland was, in fact. Comparing Finland synchronously with other countries and diachronically with itself before and after its elevation into a grand duchy gained temporal features in which its level of development was assessed. Such temporal comparisons during the first half of the 19th century were used to shape Finland as a political unit, as they facilitated assessment of which parts of society needed to improve in order to make the country comparable with imagined or real others. Given that the Diet (the Estate Assembly) was not convened between 1809 and 1863, these comparative notions largely dealt with questions of political constitution and state institutions. The comparative mindset of the Finnish actors also developed in the process of conducting temporal comparisons. These comparisons can be analyzed through the analytical categories of descriptive synchronization, comparative synchronization, and participative synchronization, the last mentioned being possible only when Finnish actors began to think that Finland, indeed, had developed to a level of maturity.

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Finland, nineteenth century, synchronization, comparison, nation, state

Introduction: The night of the state

In 1809, Finland became part of the Russian Empire as a consequence of the shake-up of power relations during the Napoleonic Wars. A politically and administratively integrated part of the Swedish Kingdom became a political unit as a grand duchy within an autocratically ruled empire. As an important part of the transition, Russian Emperor, Alexander I, summoned the Finnish Estates to meet in the Finnish town of Borgå (Porvoo) to confirm that the old Swedish laws, customs, and privileges would be respected in the grand duchy and to allow his new subjects to pledge allegiance to him. It was 54 years before the Finnish Diet was summoned again, in 1863. Although the new grand duchy gained some governing institutions such as the senate and the central bank, the lack of estate meetings, which became increasingly apparent over time, was symbolically important when Finns assessed their country in comparison with other provinces, nations, or states.

In 1863, Finnish historian and upcoming Finnish-language nationalist Yrjö Koskinen coined the metaphor “the night of the state” (*valtioyö* in Finnish) to characterize the time between the two Diets (*Helsingin Uutiset*, 2 January 1863: 3). In using a metaphor comprising the words state (*valtio*) and night (*yö*), he made the claim that Finland had become a state in 1809, albeit one that had fallen asleep and that only now, in 1863, was about to wake up. He drew on the discourse of national awakening, which was among the main tropes of romantic language at the time (see Crane, 2000: 4–19). Finland was no exception in this regard, the trope having already been used in the Finnish press in the 1820s (*Åbo Morgonblad*, No. 40, 3 October 1821: 16; see also Wassholm, 2014: 66), but it became common only afterward, in the second half of the 19th century.

Koskinen was not alone in anticipating a new political age in Finland. The liberal newspaper *Helsingfors Dagblad*, the organ of Koskinen’s political contenders and the most vocal advocate of the idea that Finland was an autonomous constitutional state, wrote about the coming meeting of the Diet as “the beginning of a rebirth of the country” (*Helsingfors Dagblad*, No. 148, 1 July 1863: 1). Even J. V. Snellman, who was commonly regarded as the theoretical authority of the Finnish-language-based national movement, anticipated despite his increasingly conservative opinions that “a representative constitution must sooner or later become a precondition for the people’s material and spiritual progress” (quoted in Carl Qvist, 1861: 29).

The absence of political representation between 1809 and 1863 underlined the unclear political status of the country, as it was directly linked with the question of

whether Finland was a political nation, in other words a state with a political constitution. Discussions in earlier research have focused on how state, nation, and constitution should be defined, whether or not such criteria were fulfilled, and how some key historical actors understood these political concepts (e.g., Jussila, 1969, 1987; Kemiläinen, 1964; Klinge, 1996), but only few studies include a more comprehensive account of how the historical understanding of these concepts changed (Jussila, 1969; Krusius-Ahrenberg, 1934; Liikanen 2003; Pekonen 2014; Pulkkinen, 2003). Some studies refer to practices of comparison as a way of temporally aligning Finland (Jalava, 2014; Rantala, 2019; Stenius, 2004), but such practices have not been directly linked to the issue of state- and nation-building in the early 19th century.

The present article makes the claim that the notion of Finland as a political unit was fostered to a large extent in texts that Finnish newspapers published about other countries' constitutions, forms of political representation, and other institutions that characterized these political units. This practice tended to have a temporal and comparative outlook, it being rather common to include notions such as more "advanced," "developed" or "civilized" countries, or that something was "in accordance with the times," alternatively "ahead of" or "after" the described "development" or "progress" (cf. Jordheim, 2014: 510; Koselleck, 1979: 133; Steinmetz, 2019: 39; Steinmetz 2020). Such comparative notions shaped the political language in Finland and served as assessments of the country's potential future and experienced past. This practice of temporal comparison drew on new notions of progress as well as the economic rivalry between states that had become important in the 18th century (Hont, 2005; Koselleck and Meier, 1972; Nurmiainen, 2009), but the question of national advancement became topical in a new way with the nineteenth-century turn to seeing nation states as the most important units of comparison.

The comparative outlook was so strong that the very notion of a comparative perspective without any actual comparison often sufficed. Newspapers could for instance refer to "other countries' experiences" as a guideline, but without providing any concrete examples (e.g., *Åbo Tidningar*, 4 October 1837: 1). References to comparison such as these are examples of its "pure" use as a rhetorical device. The aim in this article, therefore, is to enhance understanding of the historical experiences of nineteenth-century Finns, not by comparing their predicaments with those in other contemporary countries but by studying how Finnish authors used the comparisons as building blocks in nation- and state-building. We therefore move from comparative history to the history of comparison as practice (Steinmetz, 2019; Stoler, 2001), or, as we like to call it, the rhetoric of temporal comparison.

Sweden, the former "motherland," had a special status as an object of comparison. The cultural border between Finland and Sweden was largely open, despite relatively restrictive censorship and the fact that Russian imperial rule

sought to limit connections between the two countries. Educated people in Finland were all fluent in Swedish, even in the case they may have mastered and preferred Finnish. Finnish intellectuals belonged to the Swedish cultural and political *Öffentlichkeit*, albeit often with some delay and as more or less passive spectators rather than active participants in cultural and political debate. This relationship made Swedish political life an obvious, yet at times politically delicate, point of comparison. Finland's Swedish heritage included a tension in the sense that Swedish culture, with all its political implications, was considered the source of civilization. This made it possible for Finns to strive toward building their nationality and statehood. At the same time, however, there was a strong, and not only language-based, motivation among the Finnish political and intellectual elite to develop Finnish culture as something different from Swedish traditions (e.g., *Joukainen*, 1845: 189–217; *Rein* 1856). As we will show, the comparative gaze at Sweden turned more explicit toward the end of the investigated period. Notably, nineteenth-century comparisons in the Finnish press had little, if anything, to do with the differences between Finland and Russia proper. It seems that Finnish intellectuals deemed commenting on the autocratic rule in Russia politically unwise.

The temporal comparisons under study materialized in two main ways. First, historical actors conceptualized their experiences by making comparisons between what had been and what was then, and between the present situation and what it would be in the future. The comparative pattern dealt mainly with the differences in circumstances in Finland between the Swedish and the Russian eras. As time passed, the distinction between “earlier” and “later” was increasingly about how the country developed between 1809 and the time of the publication of the text. Temporal comparisons such as these constituted a crucial aspect of nation- and state-building, covering notions of the development of language conditions, education, the economy, political institutions, and so forth.

Second, historical actors compared Finland's position to that of other countries and their political institutions. Given the widely shared view of the underdeveloped condition of their own country, such contemporary comparisons frequently contained a temporal aspect, situating the development of different countries on a “temporal scale” (*Steinmetz* 2019: 46). Innocent descriptions of cultural and political circumstances tended to contain markers such as “more advanced” or “more civilized countries.” Looking at examples from abroad represented a potential future, a past model to be followed or a dystopian example to be avoided. The notion of a historical development, shared by both the Hegel-inspired intellectuals and those who came to be identified as liberals, gave an impetus in Finland to find the country's place on the developmental path.

In a sense, comparison and competition were merged in the 19th century as a means of achieving development on all levels (*Steinmetz*, 2020: 45–46; see also *Kettunen*, 2006: 31–65). In the case of Finland, we argue that temporal

comparison also became a means of placing Finland on the map in that the country was integrated into the allegedly general path of advancement. In other words, the comparative rhetoric “synchronized” Finland with the linear, teleological time of progress (cf. Jordheim, 2014; 2017). The comparisons provided new possibilities in terms of imagining Finland as a political and cultural unit, which also meant new options for explicit comparisons with other countries. In the following, we trace how synchronization through comparison developed in Finland from the early 19th century to the 1860s.

Sources and methods

To examine the role of temporal comparisons, we perused a digitized record of all newspapers and periodicals published in Finland in this period (Pääkkönen et al., 2016). Our method was to collect examples systematically by means of keyword searches in the two available interfaces, Korp (Borin et al., 2012) and Digi¹. We thus approached the material through phrases such as “compared with” and “other countries’ examples” and also through words indicating different levels of advancement between countries, such as the terms “cultured countries” (*kulturländer, kulttuurimaat*), “civilized countries” and “developed countries.” We also consulted known key texts of the period dealing with the topic. At the time, newspapers in Finland were published in Swedish, Finnish, and German. Most newspapers and periodicals were published in Swedish, but the number of Finnish-language papers increased toward the end of the period. There were a few German-language papers, most of which were commerce-oriented (Marjanen et al., 2019).

Although the press provides a range of linguistic expressions that are crucial for this study, we also need to take into account that the Finnish press was hampered by censorship. Press freedom was, in general, slightly less limited in Finland than in Russia proper, but far more than in Sweden. For political news, the Finnish press relied mainly on foreign newspapers. They retrieved most of these articles from Swedish papers and the official Russian newspaper (*Journal de St.-Petersbourg*), but the transnational circulation of news in a wider sense was evident in that the first publication of the news in German, French, or Austrian newspapers, for example, is often mentioned. Moreover, there were some influential Finnish articles reviewing foreign literature in which political currents in Europe were introduced to the Finnish public. Many Swedish papers were read widely in Finland, making them both a source of valuable information for some people and an instigator of radical and dangerous ideas for others.

Mechanisms for active censorship as well as self-censorship in Finland largely followed patterns of European upheaval such as the Karlsbad decrees in 1819, the Decembrist coup attempt in 1825, the European revolutions of 1830 and 1848, and the Crimean War of 1853–1856. All but the last mentioned were followed by

more restricted public discourse in Finland (Häggman, 2008; Marjanen, 2019; Nurmio, 1934, 1947). This had obvious effects on what could be compared and to what extent temporal comparisons could be used as a way of criticizing current affairs. Sometimes, just describing foreign affairs without making an explicit comparison could be a way to bring out issues that would not have been discussed in a domestic setting; in other words, it was a way of circumventing censorship (Kurummäki, 2013, 2017). We use press voices in this article to analyze what was possible in public discourse in Finland at the time. Whether or not people held other opinions in private would certainly be relevant in an analysis of Finnish political thought at the time, but it is secondary in our attempt to examine the temporal comparisons that had an effect on how Finland was imagined as a political unit. As such, the comparisons in the press are indicative of a kind of “comparison horizons” (Steinmetz, 2020: 11); in other words, the things that were openly compared with other places reveal a kind of imagined normal development in, say, economic or political systems that an outside observer could somehow assess. As a result, to a certain extent, our periodization of the temporal comparisons in the material follows the development of newspapers as a medium and the level of censorship in the country. Again, we do not claim to grasp “real” comparisons, but we argue that it is not possible to separate such a comparative imaginary from the concrete practice of comparing. When censorship allowed for more explicitness, this also quite concretely meant a broadening of the comparison horizon in Finland.

It is possible to see this expansion as a change of comparative outlook in the making of the Finnish political culture. Jörn Leonhard (2004; 2011) proposes a three-step process in the reception of political concepts: imitating translation, adapting translation, and discursive integration. Imitation implies the use of new terminology by the author, but only as loan words and how it was used in the foreign context; adaptation relies on imported vocabulary to describe domestic contexts; and discursive integration happens when concepts are domesticized in the sense that connotations with the foreign (perhaps original) context are no longer present. In the Finnish case, one might add the even less reflexive descriptive reception, meaning that the recapitulation of foreign news creates the passive reception of political concepts from influential centers of politics and culture (Kurummäki, 2017: 258).

We propose a similar model to describe Finnish nineteenth-century developments in the case of synchronization through comparison: descriptive, comparative, and participative synchronization. Although this model is obviously analytical rather than chronological, it distinguishes between using descriptions as a way of introducing foreign contexts as models for Finland, explicitly comparing Finland with other countries and noting their advancement and, finally, assuming that the Finnish experience is part of the same transnational development as elsewhere. The descriptive mode of presenting potentially comparative notions

was dominant for the whole period, but it was, in effect, the only mode of comparison from 1809 to 1819. After this time, the radical papers made more use of comparative synchronization, which became even more common in the 1840s and 1850s in a shift that is particularly clear in the case of political topics. Synchronizing comparisons was also an effective way of pointing out potential futures for Finland, making it a form of political argumentation. Finally, with the expansion of political issues that were dealt with in public discourse from the mid-1850s on, examples of participative synchronization started to emerge. These three modes overlap to some extent, and a straightforward, quantifiable, distinction would not be fruitful. However, they can be used as an analytical tool to periodize the development of public discourse in Finland on a general level. After 1863, the Estate Assembly was summoned recurrently, which brought about some kind of normalization of political discourse. At this time, temporal comparison did not lose its rhetorical power, but neither was it particularly sensitive politically. Comparison as a strategy remained a key ingredient in the formation of a political culture (Kettunen, 2006; Jalava, 2014).

Descriptive synchronization, c. 1809–

In the period before 1809, Finland was referred to as a geographical and cultural unit, but in terms of institutions, it was largely integrated under Swedish state administration and cultural institutions. Among the few organizations to focus on Finland was the Finnish Economic Society, which was founded in 1797. Its founding immediately invited a comparison that laid out a potential future for Finland and the new organization: “The experience of foreign countries witnesses how private societies have laid the ground for the betterment and growth in agriculture, industries, arts, and commerce. It suffices to mention the examples of England, France, Switzerland, and Denmark” (*Åbo Tidningar*, 3 January 1798: 1). Comparisons relating to economic development had become central in eighteenth-century political economy as a kind of “jealousy of trade” (Hont, 2005), and such a perspective was also evident in the call of the Finnish Economic Society (Marjanen, 2013).

The rupture of 1809 created a new setting for comparisons. Assessing economic development remained important, but it was increasingly losing ground to the comparison of political institutions and cultural achievements as Finland founded new political institutions. A four-estate Diet was convened, a senate was created as a governing body, a committee for Finnish affairs was established in St. Petersburg, and the central bank was established (see, e.g., Jussila, 1987; Korhonen, 1963; Tommila and Salokangas, 1998). The forging of Finnish nationhood took place in this early phase both in the administrative-judicial consolidation of the new political unit and in attempts to create a cultural national spirit by a number of younger intellectuals who were influenced by romantic

currents in Sweden and continental Europe (Castrén, 1951; Kurunmäki & Liikanen, 2018, 401–403). These aspirations gave rise to cultural associations with a national focus, the Finnish Literature Society that was founded in 1831 being the first of them (Stenius, 1987: 144–174; Sulkunen, 2004; Marjanen, 2013). All these institutions provided more instances of potential comparison with foreign counterparts.

Despite the new political institutions and an emerging cultural life, explicit comparisons were rather few, especially with regard to politics, and could have been taken as critical of the government. It is also possible that the bureaucratic-political elite in Finland, including the official newspaper, wanted to avoid political comparisons in a situation in which the existence and legitimacy of the old laws and privileges was the first-order concern. What we find instead are examples of what we call descriptive synchronization, in which politically sensitive issues were described in a foreign context with a clear indication of more advanced political systems, but that lacked explicit references to Finland. For instance, the official newspaper, *Åbo Allmänna Tidning*, published an article in 1817 entitled “On the English Constitution” that gave an account of fundamental laws from the Magna Carta to the Union Acts with Scotland and Ireland. It then posited that the “reason why the British Constitution is regarded as a model for other Constitutions is primarily that the three powers of the state, the legislative, the executive, and the judicial, are carefully separated from one another and balanced against each other” (*Åbo Allmänna Tidning*, 26 April 1817: 1). At the time the article was published, the constitutional question in Finland remained unresolved (Jussila, 1969). *Åbo Allmänna Tidning*, the only newspaper between 1809 and 1819, reported the speeches of Alexander I and his constitutional engagements in France in 1814 and in connection with the opening of the Diet in Poland in 1818 (*Åbo Allmänna Tidning*, 7 May 1814; 30 April 1818). Although Alexander I was presented as the main champion of constitutional thinking in Europe, no link was made to the Finnish situation. However, the description of the contents of the English constitution and the statement that it was an advanced one made the implicit link to the domestic issue impossible to avoid.

It is often hard to assess the political intentions of editors in such descriptive accounts. For instance, a report on German estate assemblies from 1820 can be interpreted as an “innocent” reproduction of what had been discussed elsewhere, but we will nevertheless point out the potential political implications of this kind of information. The news item described how the estates in Baden would “most likely” convene in the coming month and mentioned that those in Saxony had already ended but had managed to do little due to the “restrictions in its rights to deliberate.” It then turned to Württemberg and quoted a speech that argued for the right of women to enter the galleries of the second chamber. As part of his argument, the speaker, Baron von Ow, pointed out that “other German parliaments have already repealed this political subjection of women” (*Finlands*

Allmänna Tidning, 26 May 1820: 2). The news item thus included a comparison of different German estate assemblies and made a point of their powers and restrictions. It also showed that actors from Germany were making comparisons that could be understood as temporal in that they played with the notion of more and less advanced assemblies. There are no comparisons with the Finnish situation even in this case, although it is hard to imagine that readers did not make such a connection, especially as the story explicitly mentions restrictions on estate assemblies and that they would likely convene. Alexander I had visited Finland a year earlier and local elites were disappointed that he had not summoned the estates at that time (e.g., Ahrenberg, 1923: 176–201; Halila, 1962: 550–558; Korhonen, 1963: 297–328).

This type of descriptive synchronization was dominant in the first decades after 1809 with regard to political representation and constitutions, and it continued to feature heavily in the discourse later on. However, we did find some examples of comparative synchronization of the Finnish situation from 1819 onward, especially in the radical romantic publications *Mnemosyne* and *Åbo Morgonblad*.

Comparative synchronization, c. 1819–

The notion of an epochal change caused by the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and the reorganization of political order in Europe was widely spread among intellectuals throughout Europe, as well as in Finland. In 1819, *Mnemosyne*, a new learned periodical published by young Herder-inspired romantics, argued for the founding of a new paper, referring to “rapidly spreading important truths, opinions, and ideas” on civic education, and echoing German ideas of progress through *Bildung*. It pointed out that similar publications already existed “in all civilized countries,” whereas Finland had “for a long time” lacked such a paper. Especially in Germany, the editorial continued, there were so many brilliant minds that had “the greatest impact on contemporary times,” but they were virtually unknown in Finland even among the educated public (*bildade allmänhet*) because of the lack of access to literary journals from other countries. The author described such journals as vehicles for making the transition to a new age of civilization (*Mnemosyne*, 2 January 1819: 1–2).

Mnemosyne’s description of its mission echoes the rhetoric of the above example relating to the Finnish Economic Society. However, the sense of a transition, the difference between an old and a new age, is stronger in the case of the journal. It also highlighted different elements as vehicles for progress for the whole country. Economic development had been replaced by the advancement of literature and journalism. Simply put, better texts and more elaborate discussions would put Finland, if not on par with more advanced countries, at least on the right path. Two years later, Adolf Ivar Arwidsson, the historian and publicist who belonged to the same group of Turku romantics, published an article entitled “A

View on Our Native Land” in his newspaper *Åbo Morgonblad*. This article is an early example of wide-ranging temporal rhetoric. It begins with the notion of general epochal change (*tidehvarvets störtande skiften*) and Finland’s participation in that profound transformation. According to Arwidsson, Finland was experiencing “a new age”, which meant that old ties were being broken and new circumstances were arising. It meant “a new day!,” a shift from Finland’s “immaturity to maturity.” In presenting the case of Finland as part of a general development, he made an explicit comparison between Finland under Swedish rule and during its union with Russia. His argument was that Finland could no longer be regarded as a province because the Russian monarch had granted the country “a constitution, which many other countries did not yet have” (*Åbo Morgonblad*, 13 January 1821: 1).

It is commonly accepted among historians that in the 1820s, Arwidsson did not agree that Alexander I’s intention to maintain the former constitution in Finland had any real political significance (e.g., [Castrén, 1951](#): 66–73; [Jussila, 1987](#): 66–68). On this occasion, however, he was intent on making the claim that Finland was a constitutional country and no longer a province lagging behind many other countries, thereby bringing it into a wider epochal context. Furthermore, although he wrote that the levels of education and spirit (*andeliga tillstånd*) were still rather low in the country, he claimed that “the situation in many other countries was similar, if not even worse” (*Åbo Morgonblad*, 13 January 1821: 1). The temporal comparisons of periods before and after 1809 were rhetorically used as a backdrop for the future development of state institutions and cultural life.

The forms of comparative synchronization that are visible in *Mnemosyne* and *Åbo Morgonblad* were still unusual in the 1820s. Arwidsson himself was exiled to Sweden in 1823, and the maneuvering space for newspapers in general became smaller in that decade ([Nurmi, 1934](#): 117–372). Civic engagement in Finland developed in a notably loyalist fashion following the Decembrist uprising in Russia in 1825 and the Polish revolutionary movements in 1830 ([Klinge, 1988](#): 143–153). In the following decades, newspapers in the country modernized and began to develop a distinct voice of their own. They gradually became more visionary in their debating and in reflecting upon domestic affairs in the course of the 1840s and 1850s ([Marjanen et al., 2019](#)). This also produced more comparisons that were coupled with ideas about Finland’s level of development. The examples from *Mnemosyne* and *Åbo Morgonblad* were still exceptions in their genre, but the examples below are more typically expressive about making Finland comparable to particular political units. What is more, different developmental aspects were fused into one notion of civilized countries according to the Swedish (and German) notions of *kulturländer*.

Developments in other countries were used both as exemplary cases, showing the route that Finland should take and marking the country’s delayed place at that moment, and as a warning example of premature reforms. As an instance of

a positive reference, *Borgå Tidning* combined the notions of culture (or civilization), industrial development, and political conditions, placing Finland on the lowest level of the three-stage model of development. The point was that there were “the old European civilized countries (*kulturländer*), France, England, Germany, and Holland,” in which the importance of the classes engaging in industry was recognized and members of these classes possessed talent and education, and then, there were countries such as Denmark and Sweden, which were advancing in the same direction. Finally, the fact that countries such as Norway and Finland, which were mainly concerned with state-building, had a strong need for educated civil servants meant that the classes engaged in industry comprised people with lower levels of education and intellectual capacity, because careers in the civil service were more prestigious than positions in the “independent industrially-oriented class” (*Borgå Tidning*, 31 July 1844: 2–3).

Taking lessons from successful countries and cultures was repeatedly put forward as a method of molding the nation into shape. In 1855, the newspaper *Wiborg* posed the question of whether Finland was a poor country and then explained that it was the duty of the paper to inform citizens about the paths taken by “more developed countries” to reach their position (*Wiborg*, 20 November 1855: 2). The article pointed out “the great *kulturländer* of the world,” such as Ancient Greece, the Netherlands of the Middle Ages, and Great Britain at the beginning of the modern age, in order to support the argument that their success had nothing to do with the size of the population, natural resources, or the climate, but rather depended on “the labor of each and every one for the common purpose” (*Wiborg* No. 92, 20/11 1855: 2–3). The main focus in this kind of comparative account was temporal, rather than comparison per se. The point was that even Finland could be a prosperous country. This required a spirit of progress based on an open “communication between one’s own people and others” so that lessons could be drawn from the success of others. Eventually, true progress came from the people, not from the government (*Wiborg* No. 92, 20/11 1855: 3).

As mentioned above, comparative notions also functioned as negative examples. Again, the warning in itself was more important than any actual comparison. “Discouraging” comparative rhetoric such as this (cf. [Steinmetz, 2019: 15](#)) is typical of the conservative rhetoric of political reform (see [Hirschman, 1991](#)), but we claim that it was also used in the construction of a national path, character, or development, and therefore, it partly served the same function as model-seeking rhetoric. *Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, the official newspaper in the country, is a good example of the symbiotic character of the two comparative patterns. At the beginning of 1840, the editor, professor of the history of science Alexander Blomqvist, in line with his conservative disposition, wrote about the increasing demands for political reform in Europe, indicating that such demands were being made even in Finland. In his view, Finland should stick to reforms that emerged from within. However, he also explained that his newspaper reported on

the circumstances in other countries, and even on reforms that, as he saw it, had proved to be mistakes, because such cases would serve as “useful warnings” (*Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 2 January 1840: 2). It is worth pointing out that this rhetoric of comparison concerned not only the notion of what was harmful as such but also the timing: a legitimate reform might come too early if it did not emerge from the needs of the country. What these needs were, was, of course, a matter of political judgment.

As a less politically laden way of achieving comparative synchronization, the bicentennial year of the (Swedish) university in Finland provided an excellent opportunity to place Finland on the map of civilization. While reminding readers that the university in Finland would celebrate its 200th anniversary, Blomqvist presented some other cases by way of comparison. He pointed out that it was 400 years since the invention of printed books, 200 years since the liberation of Portugal from Spanish rule and the emergence of parliamentary opposition in England, and 100 years since the accession to the throne of Frederick the Great and Maria Theresia in Prussia and Austria, respectively (*Finlands Allmänna Tidning*, 2 January 1840: 3). As these examples show, there was no message in this selection of comparisons other than to show that Finland possessed a venerable institution of higher education, and in that way, the country was part of the process of civilization in Europe.

Helsingfors Morgonblad, often considered the newspaper of intellectuals, used the 200th anniversary in a more explicit manner to discuss the history of Finland. According to the paper, the university had generated a patriotic spirit, “a self-conscious idea in the nation,” that linked Finnish civilization (*bildning*) with “humanity,” despite the fact that Finland was “hidden in an unprestigious corner of the world.” The paper also exploited the bicentennial anniversary to divide Finnish history into two epochs: between 1640 and 1809, and beyond 1809. It claimed that the latter period did not signify the forging of any close ties between the Finnish and Russian peoples; it was rather that the Finnish “cultural spirit” had been able to emerge (*Helsingfors Morgonblad*, 18 January 1841: 1).

Many early–nineteenth-century Finnish intellectuals were conscious nation- and state-builders, a position that allowed for both comparative and history-theoretical reflection. In his well-known essay “Do the Finnish people have a history?”², for instance, journalist and later history professor Zacharias Topelius wrote about the need to assess previous phases of Finland’s history through “comparative studies.” Referring to Hegel, he coupled the “national consciousness” with the “state” and thus made a distinction between the prehistorical Finnish nation and the political nation that could well be a state, the turning point being the year 1809 (*Joukahainen*, 1845: 189–217, 189–191). He was not the most prominent Hegelian (or historian) in mid–nineteenth-century Finland, but he captured the importance of raising the idea of Finland as a political nation. In a similar manner, *Helsingfors Morgonblad* suggested that Finland was a nation in

a proper elevated sense, which also made it comparable to other nations in Europe. A nation was not only a unit for comparison but was also a category that signified a goal for development. Imagining the Finnish nation entailed the historical interpretation of when, under what conditions, and how it could develop to be on a par with others. At the time, it was common to juxtapose the periods before and after 1809, in other words the Swedish era and the Russian era, but a tension was clearly present here. As in the case of Topelius, the Russian era was sometimes presented as a safe and peaceful imperial setting that allowed the Finnish nationality and the Finnish language to thrive (see, e.g., *Helsingfors Morgonblad*, 14 September 1835; 9 May 1842). On the other hand, and often in the same texts, authors would also emphasize the Swedish constitutional tradition, its religion, culture, and forms of administration as the basis on which to build a political culture in Finland. Sometimes, this also meant postulating the Finnish nation into the Swedish era (see, e.g., *Helsingfors Morgonblad*, 4 January 1841).

Here lies a paradox: because Finland was built on Swedish traditions, it needed the Russian imperial context to distance itself from its Swedish history and become a separate nation. In this way, it could remain Swedish and simultaneously become Finnish. This tension is clearly present in many of the comparisons of Finland before and after 1809. The dualism is also related to the space of maneuvering of the press. It was uncommon for the Finnish press to criticize the imperial government or to praise the former Swedish rule, but such voices were sometimes heard in the Swedish press, which obviously also had a readership on the Eastern side of the Gulf of Bothnia (see, e.g., [Suomalainen and \[Burghausen CF\], 1842](#)). The ambivalence toward Finland's Swedish heritage and the role of the Finnish nation before 1809 remained present, but during the second half of the 19th century, it became more common to self-assuredly write national history further back in time and to lose some of the constructivist interpretations from the first half of the century. As part of this reevaluation, the arguments put forward by Arwidsson and Topelius, presented above, were reinterpreted toward the end of the century. Rather than assessments of Finland's position compared to other countries and visions of a potential future, they became landmarks in the long history of a self-evident Finnishness in the present ([Klinge, 2012](#); [Marjanen, 2020](#); [Mustelin, 1957](#)).

Participative synchronization, c. 1855–

Comparative synchronization continued to be a common form of temporal comparison in Finland, but after the accession of Alexander II to the Russian Imperial throne in 1855, we also find examples in which Finland was placed on the same “temporal scale” as an active unit of comparison. This meant integrating Finland into the historical development of a world-historical process by elevating it to the position of a historical actor in that very process. By today's standards,

this notion comes across as Eurocentric, but for nineteenth-century Finnish actors, it fit perfectly in their Hegel-inspired take on activity in the state. We refer to this mode as participative synchronization, given that Finland was presented as playing the same game as the more developed states, albeit with more modest results and a lower ranking.

Alexander II was regarded as reform-minded, which encouraged some Finnish newspapers to take a more outspoken stand on political matters. His accession to the throne also gave the issue of political representation a new degree of topicality. In 1856, two prominent Finnish intellectuals even publicly requested the summoning of the Finnish Diet at the festive event arranged by the Imperial Alexander's University (currently the University of Helsinki) to honor the new Emperor. The text delivered by Rector Gabriel Rein and the speech given by Professor Frans Ludvig Schauman spelled out something that had previously only been expressed in private or in texts published in neighboring Sweden (Rein, 1856; Schauman, 1876 (1856)). Rein's text, which was for the most part an interpretation of the progress Finland had shown as part of the Russian Empire, and Schauman's speech calling for a Diet in the name of the Finnish people, attracted a lot of attention (see, e.g., Klinge, 1967: 52–57; Krusius-Ahrenberg, 1934: 104–113; Rein, 1905: 153–162). Both texts touched upon the same issues, but Schauman's was considered more radical in its claims at the time. Interestingly, they also sparked debate in Sweden. It was the first time that the political status of Finland was publicly discussed simultaneously in Finland and Sweden. The debate was synchronized not only analytically but also very concretely: it was fueled in Sweden by letters sent from Finland. After publication in Sweden, the issues came to be known in Finland as well because many Swedish newspapers were accessible also on the eastern side of the Gulf of Bothnia. Hence, there was a debate about Finnish political life in both countries and in the press, which was produced and consumed in both countries. It was a cross-border debate about two political systems moving at "different speeds" (cf. Jordheim, 2017).

Rein and Schauman did not position Finland on the same level as Sweden, but they provoked a situation in which the political development of Finland was compared with that of Sweden. Rein, in particular, implied that Sweden was somehow comparable with Finland, arguing that Finland had fared better as part of the Russian Empire than it would have if it had remained Swedish. His argument was built on the notion that Finnish-language-based nationality had developed from within the Russian Empire more strongly than would have been possible under Sweden. He even claimed that press liberties in Sweden had some negative consequences in terms of political radicalism, which Finland had avoided due to censorship (Rein 1856: 15, 22–23, 47–48). Despite the unresolved question of political representation and, as a consequence, the uncertainty regarding the status of the constitution, Finland at this point was made comparable

to Sweden. Meanwhile in Sweden, fueled by information and gossip from the Finnish side as well as anti-Russian and revanchist sentiments at home, Rein and Schauman's texts were assessed as representing different levels of civic courage. Schauman's text was judged to be closer to pan-Scandinavian ideas about the future of Finland, whereas Rein was seen as an example of Finnish-language-based compliance toward the Russian regime (e.g., *Aftonbladet*, 1 October 1856: 2; 14 October 1856: 3; *Göteborgs handels-och sjöfarts-tidning*, 22 October 1856: 2).

The inclusion of Finland and Sweden in the same debate revealed the asymmetrical relations between the countries on a concrete level. Many Finnish writers publicly stated their opinion that Swedish authors did not, in fact, know about the circumstances in Finland. The degree to which it was believed that other countries knew about the Finnish circumstances became a metric to assess the extent to which the country was included in general European development. For instance, the following extract is found in a Finnish newspaper:

The development of Finland has to a very limited degree drawn the attention of the great peoples, and it is only recently that knowledge about us and our circumstances has been spread in Europe. Finland was forgotten for a long time, and it was only the learned philologists who knew that a nation calling itself Finnish existed (*Borgå Bladet*, 31 August 1861: 1).

Other voices had a much more optimistic tone concerning what was known about Finnish circumstances. *Helsingfors Dagblad* claimed that "Finland's entrance among the independent nations was largely acknowledged, but our relationship with our current allied state, Russia, has not fully complied with what such a position should entail" (*Helsingfors Dagblad*, 1 July 1863: 1). The rhetorical thrust is different in this passage. Whereas *Borgå Bladet* emphasized progress made and downplayed past knowledge about Finland, *Helsingfors Dagblad* called for change, pointing to a supposed discrepancy between what others thought about the status of Finland and the reality.

The alignment with Sweden and the seeking of recognition from abroad clearly also had something to do with domestic assessments of political developments in the country. The liberal *Helsingfors Dagblad* argued in 1862 that Finland had reached a level of political maturity that was comparable with that in other countries: "Half a century has passed since our last Estate Assembly. Although this stagnation in constitutional circumstances has hampered our ability to develop materially and spiritually alongside other nations, we have nonetheless not been altogether untouched by the spirit of the times. Political concepts have also come into being with us" (*Helsingfors Dagblad*, 28 October 1862: 1).

A meeting of the four-estate Diet was already being prepared at the time, and the claim that Finland had political concepts was presented as a sign that the country deserved its representative meeting. It was no longer lagging that much

behind and it could and should enjoy full statehood. The argument may have been a response to Johan Vilhelm Snellman's earlier claim that it was not the lack of representation that made Finland so backward, but because of the backwardness, it did not justify Estate Assemblies (*Litteraturblad*, April 1862: 150). Here and elsewhere in his public life from the late 1830s onward, Snellman combined a Hegelian view of historical development with a Herderian take on the primacy of language in the formation of the nation-state. It was the theoretical backbone that characterized much of the education of Finnish intellectuals in the 19th century (Jalava, 2005; Manninen, 2003; Pulkkinen, 2003; Rantala, 2013). Snellman's argumentation was built on a comparative temporal assessment of the stages in the development of a nation as part of a general path of historical progress (see, e.g., Kurunmäki, 2007).

Indeed, participative comparisons sometimes contrasted synchronic comparisons in the present with temporal comparisons of different stages in Finland's development. According to an anonymous article published in the newspaper *Wiborg* in 1861, "the level of civilization (*kulturgrad*) our fatherland has reached is undeniably not high," but keeping in mind Finland's faraway position "from other civilized countries" and "dependency," in recent decades, it had nonetheless developed in a way that "must surprise anyone who objectively assesses the material and spiritual hindrances to its improvement." It goes on to claim that only someone "who can compare the past and present circumstances can reach a complete and lucid insight into the grace of providence" in the country (*Wiborg*, 19 November 1861: 2). The text includes tropes about Finland as a poor and remote country, but at the same time places it among civilized nations, not as one that had to develop to reach such a level. The temporal comparison is used to argue for major advancements in cultural and spiritual affairs, sending a mixed message implying that Finland was both lagging behind other similar countries but could still be content with its progress.

One result of the changes in the landscape of comparisons was that the press included more meta-discussion about which kinds of comparison were useful. For instance, the influential journalist August Schauman reacted to the frequent statements about the poor quality of newspapers published in Finland in comparison to models from Britain, France, and Germany. He admitted that the quality of Finnish newspapers was poor, but he argued that the comparison was unfair: they had been in existence for only half a century, whereas "the great countries' newspapers had required several centuries of constitutional freedom to reach the stage they were in," and further that "the newspapers in Finland were developing at the same pace as everything else in the country." Much of Schauman's annoyance with the critical remarks concerned the practice of cherry picking objects of comparison. Should they "compare with other things [like university teaching or administrative skills], their eyes would open!" (*Helsingfors Tidningar*, 3 June 1862: 1–2). This critique of unfair comparisons combined with

the author's allegedly fair ones is a sign of increased reflexivity in the Finnish public debate. Although Schauman was unhappy with some comparative criticism, he did in general regard comparisons with countries that had a long history of constitutional freedom as important. They represented a potential future.

Conclusions

Many of the comparisons relating to the political status of Finland touched upon the issue of representation and were published in Swedish. The strongest way of making the link between statehood and political representation was perhaps by translating the name of the representative organ into Finnish. The Estate Assembly of 1809 was called a *lantdag* in Swedish, following the names of regional assemblies during the Swedish period. The Assemblies that covered the whole of Sweden were called *riksdag*. The division into *riksdag* and *lantdag* echoes similar terminology in German-speaking Europe, and it was also immediately deployed in the Finnish Grand Duchy in 1809 as a marker of Finland as a new substructure in the Russian Empire. Finnish was not actively used at the assembly; consequently, the vocabulary was varied and did not really develop during the first decades of the 19th century (Halila, 1962, 497–498; Pulkkinen, 2003, 213–215, 227–240; see also Stenius, 2004).⁵ In 1847, a new term, *valtiopäivät*, was coined to describe representative assemblies elsewhere in Europe (*Suometar*, 19 October 1847: 3). The compound noun literally translates as “state days” and thus introduced the Finnish term state into the name of representative organs (see Pulkkinen, 2003, 236–237). Soon the newspaper *Suometar* used the term to describe the Estate Assembly in Borgå held in 1809. The article first used the new word to describe the *riksdag* in the Swedish town of Norrköping in 1800 (cf. German *Reichstag*), and a paragraph later, the *lantdag* in Borgå in 1809 (cf. German *Landstände*, *Suometar*, 10 November 1848: 1).³ In this way, the political representation of an independent political unit and the provincial representation of estate privileges were made seemingly equal, giving the Finnish representative organ a higher status than was perhaps perceived at the time.

The new term did not immediately replace other terms, but it was available as one of the names for the 1809 Diet. However, when the long anticipated meeting of the Diet was about to take place, and particularly afterward from 1863 onward, the term *valtiopäivät* became the only acceptable name for the representative assembly. Coined only in 1847, it had by 1863 become a word used more than two hundred times per one million words published that year. Competing terms such as *herrainpäivät* (*herredagar*; the Days of the Lords) and *maapäivät* (cf. German *Landtag*) remained under one time per one million words.⁴ The naming of previous and upcoming Estate Assemblies as *valtiopäivät* provided some sort of closure in comparing Finland to other European countries. Finland had its representative assembly and could therefore, according to contemporary authors,

compare itself with other nations and states in Europe. This also allowed the postulation of Finnish statehood back in 1809, as well as the conceptualization of a “night of the state” between 1809 and 1863. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the newspaper article in which Koskinen introduced the metaphor in 1863 largely dealt with parliamentary patterns in Britain, including the two-party division and the debating culture. On this point, he followed a more general European trend as British parliamentary procedures were increasingly referred to as the model of advanced parliamentary life (Velde, 2019: 29–31). While attempting to educate his readers on the parliamentary culture in Britain, Koskinen also synchronized the Finnish Diet with the parliamentary politics of more advanced countries.

By the 1860s, the notion of Finland as a nation and a state had become a central node around which many of the temporal comparisons assessing its level of development revolved. Talking about state institutions abroad, including the vocabulary of state in the name of the Diet or simply mentioning stately activity in translating politics into Finnish (Pulkkinen, 2003; see also Palonen, 2003) were all about setting the *telos* for Finland’s development. Similarly, the historical notion of an awakening of the Finnish nation served this purpose. However, the national imaginary was more flexible than the ideas related to statehood as the latter were so clearly linked to particular institutions such as the Diet and could not be postulated back in the period before 1809. In both cases, the method of choice was temporal comparison in what we call descriptive, comparative, and participative modes of synchronization. Such comparison was simultaneously a way to set goals, but also instrumental in reaching them.

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Notes

1. The interfaces can be found here: <https://korp.csc.fi> and <https://digi.kansalliskirjasto.fi/>. Any Finnish newspaper articles cited can be accessed through these interfaces, and references are given to the title and date of the newspaper. Newspaper articles published

- in Sweden can be accessed through <https://tidningar.kb.se>. If we know the author of a text, we mention this in connection with the reference.
2. In the Swedish original “Äger finska folket en historie?,” the people is used in the singular, making it an acting subject.
 3. For a discussion on German *Reichstag* and *Landstände*, see Podlech (1984), 528–531.
 4. We calculated the relative frequencies of the terms in Korp.
 5. We also draw on an unpublished study on the naming of the Diet by Onni Pekonen.

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