Between Landscape and Language

The Finnish National Self-image in Transition

Matti Peltonen

1. Us and other

A study conducted in the mid-1980s on the drinking habits of Norwegians, Swedes, Icelanders and Finns uncovered a surprisingly uniform set of attitudes towards alcohol in all of these countries. Similar views on the use of alcohol, and particularly intoxication, were noted in all of the Scandinavian countries studied. Key shared features included, for example, the restriction of alcohol to non-work situations, or the sanctioning of intoxication only in the context of certain free-time occasions. Another common feature was the negative attitude adopted toward alcohol in general and drunkenness in particular. Iceland was the only exception in this case, since according to the study, Icelanders took a positive view of alcohol and even intoxication.[1]

From the Finnish perspective, these results were surprising, since Finns have, from the start of the 20th century, held it to be an incontrovertible fact that Finnish behaviour and attitudes associated with alcohol diverge from the customs of other Scandinavians. In particular, Finns have been accustomed to believing that there exist large differences in the drinking habits of Finns and Swedes. The supposedly unique relationship between Finns and alcohol is summed up in the concept of "the Finnish boozing mentality". This notion, which dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, refers to the fact that the Finns' relationship to alcohol is exceptional when compared with that of other nationalities or language groups. According to this concept, Finns, in contrast to other nationalities, seek from alcohol only intoxication, become drunk more easily than members of "civilized nations", and are, moreover, more violent than other nationalities when drunk. References to "the Finnish boozing mentality" were common up until recent years. The concept, it is true, has been renamed "intoxication-oriented drinking habits", or "Finnish drinking habits", particularly among alcohol researchers.

Matti Peltonen, *born 1952, is Professor of Economic and Social History in the Department of Social Science History at the University of Helsinki. His published works include* Talolliset ja torpparit *(1992)* Matala katse *(1992)* Kerta kiellon paalle *(1997*); Mikrohistoriasta *(1999*) *He is currently engaged in research on Finnish social history of the 1950s and 1960s.*

Address: *Department of Social Science History, Pb 54, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland.*

R. Hauge & O. Irgens-Jensen, red., *Alkoholen i Norden. En sammenliknende undersokelse av bruk av alkohol, holdninger til alkohol og konsekvenser av alkoholbruk i Finland, Island, Norge og Sverige* (Helsinki, 1987); K. Mäkelä, "Attitudes Towards Drinking in Four Scandinavian Countries", in T. F. Babor, ed. *Alcohol and Culture: Comparative Perspectives from Europe and America. Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences,* vol 472 (1986), pp. 21-32.

The notion of "the Finnish boozing mentality" is part of our national self-image, a dominant concept of what it is to be Finnish. National stereotypes are long-term cultural images upheld by education and the mass media, and have a long history in Europe.[3] They are usually negative or derisive portrayals of closely neighbouring nationalities. Even in the Middle Ages, educated persons were familiar with the notion of Spaniards as arrogant, the French as unreliable, the English as unintelligent and Germans as drunkards.[4] The image of Finnishness which utilizes the concept of "the Finnish boozing mentality", however, is not a typical national stereotype but a *national self-image,* and such images are rarely as self-denigrating as the Finnish one. While this feature does not make our picture of Finnishness unique, it is nonetheless the most interesting aspect of the phenomenon.[5]

I use the concept *national self-image* in the same sense that Norbert Elias used it in his *Studien uber die Deutschen.*[6] The point is to have a concept that is somehow between (national) *identity* and (national) *mentality.* An identity is more subjective and event-like, an experience, which is created by using common symbols and rituals and shared by those belonging to a certain group. A mentality is for its part more stable and at least partly unconscious, and has to do with the typical ways the members of a group react towards its environment. This means that national images and self-images are more "invented" than national identities or mentalities.[7] On the other hand, it must be stressed that a national self-image can affect the way identities are constructed.

[2] Numerous studies concerning the "image" of Finnishness have appeared in the past decade. This point of view was opened in the volume by A. Kemiläinen, M. Hietala & P. Suvanto, eds., *Mongoleja vai germaaneja? — Rotuteorioiden suomalaiset (Historiallinen Arkisto* 86, 1985) A. Halmesvirta's dissertation *The British Conception of the Finnish "Race", Nation and Culture, 1760—1918 (Studia Historica* 34, 1990) and K. Alenius's dissertation *Ahkeruus, edistys, ylimielisyys. Virolaisten Suomi-kuva kansallisen heräämisen ajalta tsaarinvallanpaattymiseen (n. 1850—1917)(Studia Historica Septentrionalia* 27, 1996)focus on the image of the Finnish held by other nationalities. In this respect the most multi-faceted material dealing with the image of Finland abroad is found in H. Sihvo, ed. *Toisten Suomi. Mitä meistä kerrotaan maailmalla (Jyvaskyla, 1995).* The most generalized work dealing with (literary) images offoreign nationalities is L. de Anna's article "Vieraiden kansojen kirjallisesta kuvasta", *Historiallinen Arkisto* 96 (1991), pp. 21 — 33. The article is accompanied by an annotated bibliography of older works on the subject. On the older self-image of the Finns, see P. Rantanen, *Suolatut säkeet. Suomen ja suomalaisuuden diskursiivinen muovautuminen 1600-luvulta Topeliukseen (Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seuran toimituksia* 690, 1997).

[3] Founding texts in the field of the history of European thought concerning concepts of national character are John Barcley's *Icon Animorum* (1612) and David Hume's *Of National Characters* (1742). Concepts of national character were important tools of the trade in diplomacy and statesmanship. See M. Fumaroli, "A Scottish Voltaire. John Barcley and the Character of Nations", *Times Literary Supplement,* January 19 (1996), pp. 16—17.

[4] E. Weber, "Of Stereotypes and of the French", *Journal of Contemporary History* 25 (1990), pp. 169—203.

[5] For a another negative self-image, see S. L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-hatred. Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language ofthe Jews* (Baltimore, 1986).

[6] N. Elias, *Studien uaber die Deutschen. Machtkaampfe und Habitusentwicklung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Nordlingen, 1991), p 178.

[7] On the "invention" of nationalities, see E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983). For a critical view of "inventing" nationalities, see A. D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (London, 1999), pp. 117—142.

It is clear that those qualities which we most commonly associate with Finnishness do not significantly diverge from those of Finland's neighbours. The comparative study of attitudes toward alcohol mentioned earlier is just one example of shared similarities. But the self-image of the Finns has been typified by a negative assessment of our characteristics — real or imagined — a tendency to go to extremes in order to discredit our own national character, the like of which is not readily found among other European nationalities. It is little wonder that the fictional character of Headmaster Peura in Eila Pennanen's novel *Mongolit (Mongols, 1956),* who throughout the course of the novel prepares a presentation on Finnishness, finally concludes that Finns hate themselves.

It must be confessed that the image of Finnishness associated with "the Finnish boozing mentality" is only part of the picture of Finnishness in Finnish discourse. There have also been historical situations in which it was desirable for the Finnish "backwoods mentality" to be seen in a positive light. In these cases, taciturnity and the capacity for doing what needs to be done without further ado are referred to as "Finnish sisu (guts)" or as the Finnish pioneering spirit. When Finnishness has been defined as positive, thanks to the accomplishment of some Finn, at issue is usually individual achievement in the field of sports or the arts and names like Paavo Nurmi, Jean Sibelius or Alvar Aalto are referred to. An exception has been World War II discourse surrounding the Finnish wilderness soldier (soldiers skilled in forest fighting), who were seen to possess almost intellectual qualities.[8]

A second qualification is associated with gender. In Finnish discourse on Finnishness, it is the Finnishness of Finnish *men* that is always at issue. There are no feminine counterparts to Paavo Saarijärvi, Juutas Putkinotko or Jooseppi Ryysyranta, well-known literary characters widely believed to represent the typical Finnish male. The "maid of Finland" whose contours are traced out by Finland's geographic borders, has certainly been a worthy symbol of Finland. As Aimo Reitala has shown, the maid of Finland is a direct descendant of the *Mama Svea* of Sweden and is reminiscent of France's *Marianne.*[9] But Finnishness has not been personified in any one historical or imaginary female figure. This is true despite the fact that some public figures have occasionally been portrayed as "the typical

[8] Immediately after the war, Jussi Tenkku collected his experiences in a brief study and compared Finns to both Germans and Russians in an interesting way. "The inhabitant of the Finnish backwoods is slow to react. Before fleeing, he normally takes time to reflect on whether or not he really should leave. … The resident of the cold North is not so prone to infection as the hot-blooded Southerner. … The same must be said of the difference between city-dwellers and country-dwellers. The former are more susceptible to epidemics, more superficial, vacillating and hungry for sensation. . The peaceful Finn does not bother to take fright or flee to safety when the enemy appears. He can calmly ponder the situation where he is and wait for the right moment". J. Tenkku, *Alaston ihminen murrosajan kuvastimessa* (Keuruu, 1945), pp. 68—69.

[9] For more on the Maid of Finland, see A. Reitala, *Suomi-neito. Suomen kuvallisen henkilöitymän vaiheet* (Keuruu, 1983)

Finnish females" or "Finnish *Aino* types"[10] Stereotypical Finnishness is, above all, the Finnishness of Finnish men This qualification applies, however, only to the Finns' own image of themselves, not to the notions held by non-Finns about Finns[11]

2. The national self-image and the social history of language

The concept "the Finnish boozing mentality" became established at the beginning of the 20th century as a result of the temperance movement's need to justify its activities The existence ofa strong temperance movement was particularly difficult to justify, given the extremely low consumption of alcohol per capita, the prohibition mentality which was much more broad-based than the temperance movement itself, and finally, the Parliament's unanimous decision in favour of prohibition, which occurred in 1907 Why was such strict guardianship in alcohol politics necessary in one of the "driest" and most teetotal countries in Europe? The need to find new justification for the temperance movement does not, however, explain the form taken by this temperance mentality, which was influenced by both the prevailing political situation and the long-term cultural climate

The political developments at the beginning of this century — including the ideological emancipation and organizational strengthening of the labour move¬ment, the General Strike of 1905, the Parliamentary reform and Labour Party's victory of 1907, as well as the acute nature of the crofter issue — all led, in the intellectual climate of the period, to a phenomenon known as the "breakdown of the national image" This phenomenon was first written about by literary historian Annamari Sarajas[12] At issue, above all, was the new attitude adopted by the Finnish-speaking elite toward the "rank and file", the working classes and rural population At the beginning of this century, particularly following the General Strike of 1905, a new image of the "folk" emerged within the circles of the Finnish-speaking intelligentsia "Saddest of all is that the Finnish people have not shown

[10] Cf. M. Hietala, "Suomalaisen naistyypin etsiminen", in A. Kemilainen, M. Hietala & P. Suvanto, op. cit., pp. 421—446. The image of the Finnish woman can be considered more enduringly "Topelian" than the image of the Finnish man, which has been reconstituted at a number of historical junctures. The "Topelian" image of the Finnish woman can be seen from the work *Maataloudellinen kotitalousopetus* (Porvoo, 1939) published by the Home Economics Department of the National Board of Agriculture. In the introduction, the Finnish woman is described thus: "The daily women's work ofthe Finnish farm mistress, who is humble but generous in adversity, is the heart of our country's home economics training. Through the centuries, women in Finland have occupied a unique status. When her husband donned his military uniform as the enemy threatened the borders, the mistress was capable oftaking to the plow, and when frost had levelled the grain in the field, she mixed pine bark into the bread without complaint. She is seasoned and prudent, but at the same time as sensitive as the nature she lives in." Greta von Frencell-Thesleff also wrote of Finland's "noble and persevering women" in presenting the novelist and playwright Minna Canth as the embodiment of "Finnish sisu (stamina, guts)". G. von Frenckell-Thesleff, "Minna Canth", in A. Kaari, ed. *Rakastava sydän. Kirja Suomen naisesta* (Helsinki, 1947), p. 7. What is "Topelian" about these descriptions is that, even for women, this list ofgood qualities does not include a positive assessment of their intellectual capacity. Nonetheless, female figures are not usually paraded whenever concepts of Finnishness or Finnish mentality are blamed for Finland's social problems.

[11] Compare the numerous descriptions of Finnish women in the volume edited by H. Sihvo, op. cit., passim.

[12] Sarajas, "Routavuodet ja kansankuvan murros". A. Sarajas, *Viimeiset romantikot. Kirjallisuuden aatteiden vaihtelua 1880-luvun jälkeen* (Porvoo, 1962), pp. 93—181.

themselves to be the people I imagined them to be", agonized writer Juhani Aho in his private correspondence from the year 1902.[13]

Following the General Strike and rise of the labour movement, the old Runebergian image ofthe Finnish "folk" collapsed, and the Finnish-speaking upper classes were able to vent their fear and distrust of the "rank and file". The old Runebergian or Topelian model members of the "folk", the Mattis and the Paavos, had been "beautiful, humble, quiet, law-abiding, God-fearing, a bit simple-minded, but good-hearted and slow to anger", according to Eino Leino's ironic description from the year 1907.[14] Now in their stead came "passive, warped, incapable and anti-social" Topis, Juhas and Juuttaas.[15] Following the ideological currents of the time, there emerged the idea that the *Finnish-speaking* "folk" comprised an entirely different race distinguished by their lower level of civilization, the crudity of their habits and other diverse sorts of cultural deficiencies. At issue was a new emphasis, for in the 18th and beginning of the 19th centuries the Swedish language was also considered a folk vernacular from which the elite had to distance themselves by learning "the languages of civilized nations". An illustrative example of this earlier layer of attitudes is a tongue-in-cheek article concerning proper behaviour published in the Turku weekly newspaper *Angenäma Sjelfsvåld* at the beginning of the 1780s. It states: "He who knows none other than his native tongue is considered a poorly educated lout when in polite society and is viewed as belonging to another world." Languages of refinement were, for women, French and Italian, and for men, English and German. The tone of the article indicates that the author, apparently the editor of the newspaper, had not entirely internalized the behavioural ideals he described. "One achieves greater effect if one is able to include in one's speech some meaningless words in French than if one is able to say something sensible and relevant to the occasion in his mother tongue."[16]

The Finns' own self-image of Finnishness emerged during a period of European history which has been called the second phase in the development of nationalism (roughly from the 1870s to the 1920s).[17] At this time, in contrast to earlier forms of nationalism, language became a key issue in the defining of nationalities. The Finnish language has also always played a central role in the determination of Finnishness. The negative image of Finnishness which emerged at the turn of the century was doubtless influenced by the way in which Finnish became an official language. Although the social history of the Finnish language has not yet been studied as such, some observations can be made from a comparative perspective.

The historical development of the Finnish language occurred in a manner that diverged greatly from the development of official languages in the older nations of Europe. In these latter cases, the language of the elite and centres of power became

[13] J. Niemi, ed., *Juhani Ahon kirjeitä* (Helsinki, 1986), p. 266 (a letter to Werner Söderström 28.8.1902).
[14] Quoted in A. Sarajas, op. cit., p. 129.
[15] Taken from Hagar Olsson's texts, cited in H. Salminen, "Kuvia kansasta"; J. Salminen, *Rajamaa. Esseitä* (Juva, 1985), p. 72. The names mentioned refer to characters in the novels by F. E. Sillanpää, Joel Lehtonen and Ilmari Kianto.
[16] M. Juva, V. Niitemaa, & P. Tommila, eds., *Suomen historian dokumentteja.* (Helsinki, 1968), p. 399.
[17] Cf. B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* Revised edition. (London, 1991) and E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990).

the official language, which was then taught to the folk. Such was the case, for example, in Great Britain and France. In Italy, even after unification in the 1860s, what became the official language was originally only a local dialect spoken by a minute fraction (approx. 2%) of the population. In Finland, the adoption of an official language proceeded in the opposite direction. The language of the folk was developed into the official language and rather than educating the rural and urban lower classes, resources were allocated toward the educating of the elite and the upwardly mobile. Both Swedish and Finnish are still official languages in Finland. At the end of the 1800s, highest priority was given to secondary schools and universities rather than to the development of a primary school system, as was the case in the rest of Europe.

When the language of the common people becomes the linguistic standard, it takes time for this language to produce "high culture". Finnish-language theatre, opera and literature had to be invented. And the Fennoman movements devoted themselves just as energetically to the construction of Finnish high culture as they had to the development of the secondary school institution. In this situation, however, the Finnish language was at a disadvantage: even such Finnish cultural symbols as the national anthem *Maamme* (Our Country) or Topelius's book by the same name were originally written in Swedish. Since high culture had not yet appeared in the Finnish language, it was possible both to feel and to declare that Finnish culture was less developed because it was younger. The unstated assumption here was that the cultural imbalance which had prevailed in former times would inevitably be carried into the future as well, inherited as if some sort of irreversible racial trait. This line of reasoning has remained a powerful one in Finnish discourse up to the present day. All manner of deficiencies in the Finnish lifestyle are expertly explained by the fact that the Finnish culture is younger than some culture somewhere else. The notion itself can actually be traced back much further. Gunnar Suolahti wrote in a certain essay at the beginning of this century how this same sense of inferiority brought about by youngness of one's culture in the face of the long-standing traditions of more southern nations already characterized the Ancient Greeks in their dealings with the Egyptians.[18]

Basing concepts of Finnishness on assumptions about the characteristics of different languages becomes visible in a many-faceted manner in the cultural debates that took place at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. The articles written by theatre director Kaarlo Bergbom in the 1870s concerning the development of Finnish theatre are illustrative on this point. Bergbom was forced to defend Finnish-language theatre against severe criticism. In the eyes of its critics, the Finnish language did not meet the requirements of the theatre owing to its lack of development, because it did not lend itself to "the expression of deep, poetic emotions, to the interpretation of grand ideas."[19] In his essay *Stämningar och förhållanden i Finland*, the Swede, Sven Palme, wrote in 1891 that in the opinion of Finnish physicians, the Finnish language with its "small and underdeveloped" vocabulary did not even suffice for an autopsy report.[20] In his 1917 essay *Kansallista*

[18] G. Suolahti, *Vuosisatain takaa. Kulttuurihistoriallisia kuvia 1500-1700 -luvuilta* (Porvoo, 1913), p. 3.
[19] [K. Bergbom], *Kaarlo Bergbom ja Suomalaisen teatterin synty* (Keuruu, 1960), passim.
[20] Quoted in S. Hognas, *Kustens och skogarnas folk. Om synen på svenskt och finskt lynne* (Stockholm, 1995), p. 25.

itsetutkistelua (National self-examination), Finnish author Volter Kilpi compared Swedish-language culture and Finnish-language culture in the following words:

> On the one hand the old, traditional culture: its more pliant facility for form, its more refined intellectual capacity, and more sensitive individuality, which furnishes each of its members with not only a more prepared and agile mind, but also with a focused, concise, apposite matter-of-factness; on the other hand, the young culture still in its infancy and formative period: its tendency to resist form, its fumbling generality, its lax, slightly superficial and indiscreet idealism, under whose influence the individual cannot yet receive, as an established tradition, that cultivation, sharpening and intensifying of the intellect which only a civilized culture of long standing, an atmosphere charged by the old culture, can provide.[21]

Kilpi identified the Finnish language culture with Eastern Finland and the Swedish-speaking culture with Western Finland and assumed that that regional difference alone sufficed to explain the youth ofthe Finnish language culture. The explanation for the deficiencies apparent in the Finnish character and culture was simply "the language difference created by historical circumstances, the difference in developmental levels caused by the older age of the civilized culture".[22] Many others, in the manner ofKilpi, also emphasized language as the key foundation for the formation of national character. For example, Eirik Hornborg wrote in the periodical *Finsk Tidskrift* in 1917 that language has a decisive influence on the rhythm of thought and the mood of the soul.[23] Volter Kilpi characterized the youth and immaturity of Finnish-language high culture quite eloquently using the metaphor of newly cleared land associated with agriculture:

> Finnish-language civilized culture and intelligentsia are sprouting from the newly-cleared land of civilisation, and they carry, and will carry for generations, the rugged stamp of this new land. Here and there virgin forest still peeps out from between the fields, and the land in its entirety is still only shallowly cultivated, its soil coarse and unbreakable. And from all sides grates the sound of tool against stone, everywhere the ground hardens stubbornly against the workers, with each thrust ofthe shovel, with each turn ofthe plow, one can feel the untilled state of the soil.

For Kilpi the close relationship between the Finnish language and an uncleared woodland was a figure of speech, he never actually took up the subject of the history of Finnish settlement.[24]

[21] V. Kilpi, *Kansallista itsetutkistelua. Suomalaisia kulttuuri-ääriviivoja* (Helsinki, 1917), p. 41.
[22] V. Kilpi, op. cit., 41.
[23] Eirik Hornborg in the periodical *Finsk Tidskrift* (1917), quoted in S. Hognas, op. cit., p. 101.
[24] V. Kilpi, op. cit., p. 125.

In the 1930s, it was clear to Jaakko Forsman that "Finns are apparently not only physically but also psychologically more roughly made and more clumsy and for this reason slower to adapt to civilized culture and its forms than, for example, Swedes."[25] When the Finn Ester Toivonen was chosen to be a European beauty queen at the beginning of the 1930s, the press had to make it clear that her background really was Finnish and not Swedish-Finnish, as many had wished to believe.[26] Even in the late 1940s and early 1950s, for sociologist Veli Verkko the inferior Finnish trait of not being able to handle one's liquor and Finnish society's high level of violent crimes were explained by the separate origins of the Finnish-*speaking* population. According to Verkko, Finns inherited their problem because they came to Finland from a different direction than the Swedes.[27] On the bookshelves of many homes today still sits a telling example of this older, derogatory attitude toward the Finnish language: the reference book which in neighbouring countries is known as a guide to foreign language terms we call a dictionary of civilized terms, *Sivistyssanakirja.* Even the name indicates that our native tongue was missing from the ranks of the civilized languages.

Prior to the bipolar mental model anchored in language, the status of Finnishness was perceived through the relationship between the different demographic groups and nature. The basis for this was the idea developed by Porthan concerning the opposition between coastal and interior Finland. The coastal area familiar to Porthan represented civilization, whereas the strange conditions and language of the hinterlands represented a state of wildness which had to be tamed.[28] On the other hand, the nationalistic thinking developed by Runeberg, Topelius and Lonnrot elevated the value of the interior's landscape. In more festive moments it was even compared to Swiss or Greek vistas, which in point of fact had never been seen by those who drew the comparisons. The lake-studded scenery of the Finnish interior was constructed to be a national symbol still in wide use today, an image of a poor but beautiful natural scenery unspoiled by human traces. The comparison made by Porthan between the coast and interior as symbols for civilized culture and wilderness continued in another form which was overshadowed by the image of Finnishness based on the inferiority of the Finnish language. Particularly in the discourse and literature of the Swedish-speaking Finns at the end of the period of self-administration under Russia, different landscape types were readily compared

[25] Jaakko Forsman in his 1935 article "Suomalaisuus ja ruotsalaisuus Suomessa", in F. Forsman *Mihin olemme menossa? Aikamme arvostelua* (Helsinki, 1935), pp. 114 — 147.

[26] M. Hietala, op. cit., p. 433.

[27] This concept can be seen particularly clearly in Verkko's principle work, V. Verkko, *Lähimmäisen ja oma henki. Sosiaalipatologisia tutkimuksia Suomen kansasta* (Jyväskylä, 1949) see also the somewhat later English edition: V. Verkko, *Homicides and Suicides and Their Dependence on National Character (Scandinavian Studies in Sociology* 3, 1951) On Verkko's background, see R. Jaakkola, *Veli Verkko Moraalistatistikko ja Suomen ensimmäinen kriminologi* (Helsinki, 1986)

[28] M. Klinge, *Kaksi Suomea* (Keuruu, 1982), p. 106. Besides Matti Klinge others have also written about the Finnish national landscape. See, for instance, M. Suutala, "Luonto ja kansallinen itsekäsitys. Runeberg, Topelius, Lönnrot ja Snellman suomalaisen luontosuhteen muovaajina", in J. Manninen & I. Patoluoto, eds. *Hyöty, sivistys, kansakunta. Suomalaista aatehistoriaa* (Oulu, 1986), pp. 237 — 270 as well as the aforementioned S. Högnas in his *Kustens och skogarnasfolk.* The best overview of the current perception of the national landscape is the illustrated work published by the Ministry of the Environment L. Putkonen, *Kansallismaisema* (Vantaa, 1993).

to different national characters. The varied and vivid coastal scenery which unfolded for the viewer (to the west) was seen to produce active, even belligerent human types which were nonetheless superficial and short-sighted in their thinking. The enclosed, immutable and monotonous forest landscape of the interior was, for its part, the basis for a more peaceful, even under-achieving, but at the same time more deep-thinking and reflective disposition.[29]

3. From language to landscape

Some years ago the Finnish afternoon papers carried the story of a brawl that had occurred in Spain. In the vicinity of a particular tourist resort, the Spanish police had bludgeoned a Finnish couple — as a result of which one of the Finns received broken bones — and the explanation given for this unnecessary violence was that the Spanish police had thought the young Finnish couple to be English. At the same time, the Finnish media discovered not only English and Swedish youths who were terrorizing holiday resorts in Central Europe, but also football hooliganism, which had long been a common European phenomenon but that was missing only in Scandinavia. Finns were taken aback by the odd-sounding headlines in the press: "Ski resort has had enough of Swedes. Boozing youth nuisance"[30], or "Alpine terror recurs on winter holiday"[31], or "What draws Brits to the sunny southern coasts. To be different on the Continent — drink, brawl and collapse!".[32] New things were being learned about the old civilized cultures.

The expansion of Finnish media coverage is an example of a much broader phenomenon. Only in the last few decades has the interest taken by research and the media in everyday life and customs begun to yield information about the lives of European peoples. Our knowledge now touches on more than just royal families and Hollywood movie stars. The daily lives of ordinary people, their problems and joys, have entered the sphere of sociohistorical research in particular. At the same time, it has been noted that "civilized" countries also have their countrysides and corners of forests. Thus we have begun, in recent years, to receive information about other European nationalities with which we can compare our own image of the "boozing" and "brawling" "forest Finn". Cinema, television and even mass tourism are broadening our understanding. In this sort of situation, the old national stereotypes that emerged without the possibility for concrete comparison are beginning to crumble.

At the same time, however, the cultural images used in tracing the contours of Finnishness and "the Finnish boozing mentality" have retained something of their continuity. Perhaps the most telling example of the durability of these attitudes is a long-standing introductory sociology textbook in which the use of alcohol is discussed under the heading of "deviant behaviour".[33] This negativity is not just

[29] S. Hognas, op. cit., pp. 7—14.
[30] Ilta-Sanomat 10.3.1990.
[31] Iltalehti 23.2.1989.
[32] Iltalehti 4.8.1989.
[33] I am referring to the textbook *Sosiologia* (Porvoo, 1964) by Erik Allardt and Yrjö Littunen, in which the situation described here may have come about without the authors' notice as a result of corrections and deletions made to the first edition which was published six years before.

associated with the depiction of Finnish alcohol culture, rather, it is the general tone of our perception of Finnishness as a self-portrait. It is easy to list recent examples of rigid attitudes on this subject, especially among the cultural elite. A Finnish design expert claimed that our society and urban culture lack foundation because there are no " coffee shops, those forums for cheesecake, cafe au lait, current issues reviews, bright lights and light discussion".[34] A Finnish sociologist explained the absence of any significant critical consumer movement by saying that Finns have only just recently moved from the fields and forests to the factories and offices - the lack of an "urban lifestyle" hinders the development of a "consumer culture".[35] A Finnish theatre director claimed that Finns are unable to communicate through gesture, because the country's "young interactive culture diverges from the old conversation culture found in the cities of Central Europe".[36] In these explanatory models lurks the image of the "forest Finn" who has been raised in the uncharted wilderness beyond the reach of society. But now, rather than appealing to any notion of the inferior origins of the Finnish language, the explanation is based on the uncivilized essence of the Finnish landscape. Now Finns are inferior because the Finnish scenery is not the same as the milieu of the "old civilized nations".

While at the beginning of the 1900 s it was natural to conceive of the peculiar features of Finnishness as having derived from the lack of development and lowly (eastern) origins of the Finnish language, now the prevailing scheme for perceiving the distinctive features of Finnishness is rooted in mythical concepts associated with our historical environment. Finnish high culture has developed for over a century in such a way that Finns can no longer feel inferior when compared to Swedish-language cultural life. In other ways, too, historical developments have led to a situation in which the opposition between Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking cultures can no longer dominate. In its stead has come a much broader conceptualization of Finnishness, which is perceived in relation to a much larger group of nationalities. The most established comparison through which the distinctive features of Finnishness have been sought in the past few decades has been between Finnish society and the rest of (Western) Europe. In these comparisons, which are not carried out in any concrete sense but which exist at the level of stereotypes or even mythical concepts, the "forest" nature of Finns is contrasted with the old European urban culture.

The concept of the Finn as a backwoods dweller or a pioneer is naturally much older. It can even be glimpsed, for example, in Runeberg's poem about *Paavo Saarijärvi* or the Impivaara episode in Aleksis Kivi's .*Seven Brothers.* But these are depictions of exceptional circumstances, for Kivi's 'brothers' lived most of their lives in the village of Toukola, and the hinterland described in many of Runeberg's poems is portrayed as a bustling society with its villages and manor houses. When in 1939 Eino Krohn wrote of the Finnish national character to an international audience, he too mentioned the Impivaara myth as an aside. Krohn wrote that in addition to the more important factors, which for him were race, blood and

[34] Interview with Kaj Kalin in the newspaper *Uusi Suomi,* 22. 9. 1991.
[35] Interview with Kai Ilmonen in the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat,* 31.12.1988.
[36] Interview with Marja-Leena Haapanen in the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* 6. 3. 1996.

historical destiny, there was one more phenomenon which could explain the Finnish national character. In his opinion, "a people which has lived isolated in the silence of the vast wilderness naturally could have become uncommunicative and introverted."[37] At the time that this idea was presented, however, it did not seem entirely plausible. Krohn's characterizations, which follow general notions concerning the actual groups that inhabited Finland's forest areas, the Savolainens and Karelians, conflicted with the notion of the "forest Finn", since the more eastern Finnish groups such as the Karelians are not usually known for their taciturnity or reserve.

In 1957 Yrjo Niiniluoto, the editor of the prominent Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat,* outlined Finnishness in his book *Mitä on olla suomalainen* (What it is to be Finnish). In the manner of many other writers of his time, he took up the consideration of certain literary characters, seeing them as Finnish basic types, above all Jooseppi from Kianto's *Ryyysyranta* and Juutas Käkriäinen from Lehtonen's *Putkinotko,* whose "chief characteristic is laziness, extreme incapability, the impossibility of his doing anything which would improve his family's standard of living". In Niiniluoto's conception, Finland — or at least the Finnish countryside — becomes, in the course of his explanation of the fictional character's mentality, a wholly trackless wilderness in which people spend most of their time in a winter torpor:

> And it must be asked, is it the boundless lethargy which afflicts them, this Finnish original sin which is rooted in the conditions in which the people of the uncharted backwoods and generally still today in the countryside are forced to spend long winters in isolation, with sleeping as the only way of passing the time.[38]

The idealized national landscape, the idyll of the sparkling blue lakes, which even in the 1940s could be glimpsed as a positive resonance of the concept of the Finnish "forest soldier", was once again transformed into the rugged and barbarous terrain of Porthan's depictions. At the same time, the Finnish language was released from the pillory. At the beginning ofhis essay, journalist and writer Niiniluoto said of the tool of his own trade: "In our language, born of primitive circumstances, there has been a certain developmental principle which allowed it to refine and enrich itself into a language of culture, and to furthermore translate all of the newest and most difficult concepts of civilized culture so that even the 'rank and file' could comprehend them."[39]

The Finns' relationship with their own language has thus clearly changed since the war. The easing of the old, language-based dichotomy can also be perceived in another way, by seeing the need to constantly compare one's own national character with something else as a feature of the *Nordic* mentality. In 1950 Goran Schildt's highly popular *Toivematka* (Dream Journey) was published, in which he

[37] Eino Krohn in his article "Suomen kansan luonteesta", in E. Krohn, *Esseita ja tutkielmia* (Porvoo, 1967), pp. 177—201.
[38] Y. Niiniluoto, *Mita on olla suomalainen* (Keuruu 1957), p. 97.
[39] Y. Niiniluoto, op. cit., p. 7.

describes a sailboat trip from Stockholm to Rapallo made in 1947. For most of the journey the craft wound its way through French rivers and channels. Schildt makes numerous comparisons between Scandinavian and Continental European, particularly French, lifestyles. Compared with French civility, even the Swedes are, to his mind, "unsure and often behave so tastelessly, upholding appearances of conventionality, and are uncertain of their own worth".[40] Even when fishing, the Frenchman displays the trappings of millenniums of civilization: "When he sees the fishing lines, floats, hooks, poles, bait, the folding fishing chairs and all of the other highly specialized versions of the niceties which belong to the art of angling, the Scandinavian inevitably feels himself to be an ignorant barbarian".[41] Although in Schildt's comparison one may recognize the travel book's witty and vivid style, it is nonetheless essential to realize that he bases his notions of national differences on the idea of different experiences of nature. "While we inhabitants of the North roam with pleasure over the fjelds, seek our way to unspoiled nature or long for rocky islets in the sea, the limitless panorama of a world unfamiliar to human beings, the Frenchman rejoices most in seeing a rich cultural landscape sculpted by human hands."[42]

In his 1948 essay "Korven asukkaan perintö" (The legacy of the backwoods dweller), Paavo Aarnio also made comparisons between the national characters of northern and southern European peoples. He pondered how the basic qualities of the Finnish character, which were for him a steady equanimity, perseverance and stamina as well as a love of freedom and independence, "reflect the influence of our chilly climate, of our nation's rugged nature, the melancholy solitude and poor living conditions of our former backwoods dwellers".[43] This basic Finnish character can be most readily discerned against the backdrop of random variation "if we compare it to the fiery and fickle temperament expressed by residents of hotter countries". "Remoteness from the cultural centers" have given rise to "the isolation-seeking nature of the backwoods dweller" and "prevents one from being open to the true assimilation of various phenomena of civilized culture."[44] The picture presented by Aarnio is not at all "Topelian". Rather, he emphasizes the ease with which Finnish equanimity actually masks another side to the Finnish character which can flare up and is in fact expressed in "individual violence" and in "rash acts committed in large groups".[45]

The situation in which the Finnish countryside could, in the manner of Niiniluoto, still be referred to as late as the 1950s as a "trackless wilderness" has nothing to do with actual reality, nor does this discourse concern any actual countryside. In his passages quoted earlier, Niiniluoto has passed, perhaps without realizing it, into the realm of mythical thought, into talking about Finnishness in a mythical sense. Myths are essential in creating awareness, for by using them it is

[40] G. Schildt, *Toivematka. Toinen uudistettu laitos* (Keuruu, 1996 [1950]), p. 59.
[41] G. Schildt, op. cit., p. 188.
[42] G. Schildt, op. cit., p. 190.
[43] P. Aarnio, "Korven asukkaan perintö", in T. Aaltonen, P. Aarnio & E. Vuorela, eds. *Kerho 33. Runoja, novelleja, esseitä*(Helsinki, 1948), p. 5.
[44] Aarnio, op. cit., pp. 5-6. The manner of perceiving the world that is evident from Aarnio's texts is similar to that of J. Tenkku, quoted in note 6.
[45] P. Aarnio, op. cit., pp. 5 -10.

possible to condense a large amount of information into a small space. It is naturally a problem that not all myths hold true, but this is a dilemma common to all knowledge. Myths usually tell us something about our origins, where we come from, on a level at which this sort of information could not exist in any other form. For this reason it is not possible to fight myths with facts; what keeps a myth alive is its usefulness.[46]

According to the myth, we Finns hail from the forest. This is, however, only an image belonging to mythical thought, and not a historical truth. The picture given by historical research concerning the development of Finnish society is naturally different. For most of history, Finns have lived in southern Finland, mostly in the vicinity of the coast, organized into dense village settlements. Only a fraction of the population was engaged in clearing the forested interior through burn-beating at any given time. The mythical image of Finnishness that has emerged approaches an image which is part of German thought; that of the noble Germanic peoples as men of the forest, and is even reminiscent of the English legend of Robin Hood.[47] However, the Finnish image is characterized by a negative evaluation not found in these other forest images.

4. Miss Universum and the Olympic Games

Earlier, I characterized, relying on the social history of the Finnish language, the period of transition in thinking concerning Finnishness at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. The same sort of "national transition" is also associated with the post-war period, the end of the 1940s and beginning of the 1950s, at which time the features of our modern national self-image became established. One landmark year in conceptualizations of Finnishness was 1952. Armi Kuusela was crowned Miss Universe just before the Helsinki Olympics, and Finns went wild. Once again it had been convincingly demonstrated that Finnish women, at least, were not Mongols. The Olympic Games were a disappointment in terms of athletics, for they were the final proof that the era of Finnish greatness in sports had come to an end. Even so, the games were still held in Helsinki. Thanks to Armi and the Olympic Games, Finland and the Finns received international attention. In Finland, many years of preparation had naturally gone into staging the Olympics and the Finns constantly kept in mind the possible criticism from international guests who would be flocking to the event. What would they say about us? The mayor of Helsinki, Erik von Frenckell, who directed the Olympic preparations, stated in 1949: "… our guests will certainly pay attention to our social conditions and our everyday lives and not least to our public conduct. If foreigners are given the impression that the Finnish people are a people of culture, this is

[46] The Fre nch historian Paul Veyne has addressed belief in myth in a challenging manner in his *Did Greeks Believe in Their Myths?* (Chicago, 1988)

[47] S Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York, 1995) The first part of the work is dedicated to the forest

much more important than a gold medal or a world record." [48] The interesting aspect of this period is that all these "victories" were not enough to change our self-image into a more positive one.

The official Olympic committee led by Frenckell was not the only organization that took the initiative to involve itself in preparing Finland and Finns for the Olympics. One interesting organization was the Finnish People's Moral Movement, the organization funded by the State Alcohol Monopoly ALKO and dedicated to educating Finns in proper behaviour. This organization tried to help Finns pull themselves together after the ordeal of the war and start a new life.[49] In addition to the Moral Movement, there were other organizations concerned with the presentability of the Finnish surroundings. At the end of the 1940s, the Minister of Agriculture founded a committee to beautify the image presented by the countryside for the start of the Olympic Games. The Central Committee of the Women's Agricultural Organization, the Farmers' Cultural Foundation and the Central Union of Citizens' Temperance Activities had banded together in order to urge parish-wide programmess for sprucing up, tidying and house-painting[50]

The Moral Movement began its Olympic campaign in 1948 by drawing up a three-year plan for its Olympic-oriented activities. The first significant campaign took place in April 1950, and was designated "Friendship Week". The motto of the theme week was a smiling daisy and the slogan "Isännyys velvoittaa, ystävällisyys valloittaa (Hosting obligates, friendliness captivates)". A campaign stressing the importance of friendliness was appropriate, since a poll had been taken the previous year which had revealed that Finns themselves considered drunkenness, unfriendliness and uncleanness to be the greatest vices. The campaign led by the Moral Movement was also interesting because of the wide attention it received. It was reported in American newspapers, and a "Good Behaviour Week", inspired by the Finnish campaign, was organized in the summer of the same year in France.

In the opinion of the Moral Movement, the fact that Finland was hosting the Olympics could be directly exploited for the betterment of Finnish behaviour and morals. "The Olympic Games are well suited for this, because they are a focal point for the activities of our entire nation and because our nation, as a young and small nation, appears to consider what foreigners say about us very important. If we do not try to strive to better ourselves for ourselves, then we do it more willingly in the hope that it is recognized by others or out of fear of criticism.": Tapakasvatus Association (Helsinki) Archives of the Finnish People's Moral Movement. The chairman of the Moral Movement's central committee, Veikko Loppi, analysed the

[48] H. Friman, M. Haro, K. Laitinen & M.-L. Lehto, *Olympiakaupunki Helsinki* (Helsinki, 1992), p. 92. The expectations placed on the Helsinki Olympics in Finland bring to mind the atmosphere of expectancy preceding the 1966 World Football Championships in England. There, fears concerning what others would think about English football spectators and their behaviour gave rise to a new watchword in the media, "football hooliganism". E. Dunning, P. Murphy & J. Williams, *The Roots of Football Hooliganism. An Historical and Sociological Study* (London, 1988), pp. 148 — 154.

[49] On the founding and early phase of the Moral Movement, see M. Peltonen, "Vetande, makt, sociologi. Debatten 1948 mellan Veli Verkko och Pekka Kuusi om 'det finska välsinnet' *Nordisk Alkoholtidskrift* 8 (1991), pp. 221 — 237 and M. Peltonen, "Olympia vuoden käytösopas", in M. Peltonen, ed. *Rillumavei ja valistus* (Helsinki, 1996), pp. 283—307.

[50] H. Friman, M. Haro, K. Laitinen & M.-L. Lehto, op. cit., p. 121.

situation in his speech in April of 1950 According to Loppi, urbanization had brought with it tension and the good old country habits had been forgotten Finns were by nature individualists, woodsmen and pioneers, he claimed Adaptation to social life should now be promoted with the aid of good, friendly types of behaviour

But what would foreigners think? An attempt was made to coerce Finns with this anxiety-producing uncertainty as early as 1948, during the "Moral Week", particularly with the aid of the illustrated flyers distributed by the Moral Movement, in which Finns were depicted as club-wielding cave men dressed in animal skins.[51] During the entire three years of the Movement's planned activities, the Finnish situation was made brutally clear. This was to be a very different situation than earlier Olympics held in other countries or comparable occasions when Finnish participants had been limited to a few dozen. Now foreigners would be shown so much Finnishness that they might not be able to endure it:

> In the context of the games tens of thousands of foreigners will come into contact with hundreds of thousands of Finns. Our entire nation — with its good and bad qualities — will thus be forced into the international spotlight. Whether our nation can conduct itself as the host of the Games in a straightforward and upright manner, is, from the national perspective, just as important a question as our success in the Games' organization and athletic competition.
>
> The harsh reality is that in addition to being an athletic nation, we are also a drunken and brawling nation. If we are unable to improve our behaviour in this area, there is a danger that the "good will" which can be achieved through our athletic endeavours and the organizational skills of our Games' coordinators, of which we are already reaping the benefits, will be lost through acts committed while intoxicated in front of an international audience.[52]

The Helsinki Olympic Games, and particularly the preparations for them, thus brought years of painful comparisons to the attention of the Finnish public. How would poor Finland appear in the eyes of rich and civilized guests? An ideal opportunity to see the Finnish nation in a more positive light had been missed, and the "self-hate" aspect of the old stereotype remained an important element even in the new national self-image which emerged in the 1940s and 1950s.

[51] Cf. M. Peltonen, "Vetande, makt, sociologi", pp. 227—230.

[52] Tapakasvatus Association (Helsinki), Archives of the Finnish People's Moral Movement.

5. Continuity and change

I have already depicted the Finnish national self-image in terms of a bipolar model. Finnishness was first perceived as the antithesis of Swedishness using language-based stereotypical concepts. Later, the Finnish wilderness was contrasted with the European urban culture and its long history. As observed in an article by Juri Lotman and Boris Uspenski (1985) dealing with bipolar models in Russian cultural history, the new is never simply the old turned on its head, nor is all of the old automatically wiped away.[53] Despite the powerful nature of experiences associated with transitions and turning-points, the semi-subconscious continuities of history exert a compelling force all their own. The most enduring feature of the Finnish self-image is that even at its most favourable, even in Topelius's "Matti", Finnishness is defined as a lack of intellectual capacity. On the other hand, however, periods of transition are highly interesting because at these junctures, what start out as seemingly insignificant events may prove to be crucial in guiding activity onto the course it will take for some time. At historical turning-points, the mythical elements of older stereotypes are transformed in exciting ways.

The turning-points for the Finnish self-image, that is, the turn of the last century and post-war years, were periods of dramatic change in terms of Finland's position in the international community and internal power relations. These external and internal aspects are also tightly interwoven in our national stereotypes. The fears and anxieties of the elite engaged in defining these stereotypes were projected onto the "folk" and were transformed into the "folk's" problematic qualities, intellectual incapacity and cultural immaturity. It is possible to conjecture that a new geographically bipolar image of Finnishness founded on mythical concepts may have taken shape in the 1990s. The regional distribution of the votes for and against European Union membership was one of the most reported aspects of the referendum results. In addition, many bargaining issues and administrative arrangements have brought regional groupings into the public eye. At the level of imagery, Finland has already been repeatedly divided into two parts which could become known as "Euro-Finland" and "Forest-Finland". We are clearly reverting to the Porthanian division of the 1700s, which was founded on the distinction between the civilized and forward-looking inhabitants of the coastal regions, and the reserved and backward population of the hinterlands. The significant difference is, however, that now the "Forest-Finland" tends to reach the coast even in the capital region and the "Euro-Finland" is in danger of falling entirely outside Finnish borders.

[55] M. Lotman & B. A. Uspenski, "Binary Models in the Dynamics of Russian Culture (to the End of the Eighteenth Century)", in A. D. Nakhimovsky & Alice Stone Nakhimovsky, eds. *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History* (London, 1985) pp. 30—66.

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