

'THE QUIET FINN' NATIONAL STEREOTYPES, POLITICS AND THE MEDIA IN A SMALL COUNTRY

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Many of the most loved figures in Finnish history and arts are quiet persons. In most cases they are men, they have an agrarian or working class background, and they prove their stamina and mental strength either in war, sports or in hard work. Let me take a few examples.

According to an old legend, in the middle of the 12th century peasant Lalli met the English bishop Henrik on the ice of a Finnish lake. Lalli did not say a word, but he skillfully chopped the bishop's head off with his hatchet. The catholic church later tried to make bishop Henrik into a hero and martyr, but people sympathized more with peasant Lalli, and he was glorified as a defender of Finland.

When Paavo Nurmi, the long-distance runner who won nine Olympic gold medals and broke 55 world records, came home from the Antwerp Olympic Games in 1920, there was a huge crowd on the streets celebrating and welcoming him. Nurmi walked across the crowd, not saying a single word,

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went into his flat and did not open the door again. The cheering crowd was astonished and gradually dissolved.

One of the most popular quiet heroes was created by the author Väinö Linna in his novel **The Unknown Soldier** which is one of the most appreciated and controversial novels in post-war Finnish literature. The novel, published in 1954, has been filmed twice and translated into several languages, for the first time into English as early as 1957. **The Unknown Soldier** is the story of young Finnish soldiers in the so-called Continuation War against the Soviet Union in 1941-4. One of them was Vilho Koskela. I quote how the author introduces him to the reader:

Vilho Koskela who commanded the third platoon was ... a reserve officer, the son of a small farmer in Häme, from whom he had inherited the traditional attributes of men from that part of Finland: a stocky build, blond hair, blue eyes and the habit of silence. The men had heard tales of his feats in the Winter War, but he himself never referred to them.

Koskela found it embarrassing to give orders to men. He never shouted, and he preferred to lead his men by example; he simply did everything himself first and let the men follow. Men adored him.

According to the laws of drama, Väinö Linna created a counter-figure for Vilho Koskela. That man was also a young officer, but had an upper-class background, slick manners and used foreign words and shouted and bullied. Rank-and-file soldiers hated him.

We can find the same kind of roles and types in war novels all over the world, but Vilho Koskela and the **The Unknown Soldier** were something more than fiction. For many people belonging to the war generation the novel was history itself, part of their experience and life. And they found their idealized self-image in Vilho Koskela who was clumsy in social games but firm like a hard, grey rock when things got tough.

Vilho Koskela rehabilitated the ordinary Finnish people in their own history, history which for several decades had been written from an upper-class perspective and had a negative and suspicious attitude towards 'the masses'. Vilho Koskela gave to the ordinary unlearned people their honour back in the history of the nation.

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In this article I discuss how stereotypes concerning the Finnish character were formulated in the building process of the nation, and what has been the political importance and use of those stereotypes. At the end of the article I pay special attention to the Finnish media, to the way they have been constructing the Finnish national identity.

DISSIDENT JOKES

Jokes about the Finns are a good starting point. Pekka is a very common Finnish first name, and the so-called 'Pekka jokes' tell about the peculiar behaviour of the Finns. For instance: 'Pekka, why are you so quiet today?' 'I have a sharp knife, why talk?'. Or: Pekka's brother had been abroad for 30 years. Then he comes to Finland to see Pekka. They do not say anything. They just start drinking vodka. They go to sauna and they drink vodka. They have supper and they drink vodka. They do not speak. Then, after five hours, Pekka's brother says: 'Jaanoh, how is our old mother?' Pekka replies angrily: 'Are we here to drink or to talk rubbish!'

These jokes contain a lot of the well-known stereotypes of the Finnish character: untalkative, unsocial, a bit stupid and violent, only interested in sauna and vodka. The last joke: Pekka used to live in a deep forest with his two brothers. One day his brothers went to the nearest town to buy what they needed. When they came back, they had 55 bottles of vodka and one loaf of bread. 'What the hell', shouted Pekka, 'what do you think we do with all that bread!'

I guess that most Finns do not feel offended when jokes like that are told. In fact, many are proud and tell the jokes themselves - as I do here. In modern Finland these kind of jokes are often nostalgic recollections which remind about the time when Finland was still a bit naive, innocent, unhurried and unique place before the radical changes of the 1980s and 1990s. Like some films by director Aki Kaurismäki, the jokes contrast the 'old' Finland of melancholic Finnish tango and crazy originality with the present internationalized mass culture and standardized life-style, 'macdonaldized' Finland. The jokes can also be seen as part of a dissident thinking, a gentle way to oppose demands to 'improve' Finnish behaviour to meet the needs of international interaction.

Finnish jokes often understate and ridicule the Finns themselves, which is often seen as a sign of low self-esteem. The modest self-irony can also be

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interpreted as a form of everyday resistance in which the 'low culture' tries to cope with the demands of the 'high-culture' by exaggerating and ridiculing the criticism.

In the Finnish mass media, there has been and there still is a permanent battle between these two perspectives. One is serious, educative and tries to convince everybody that the Finns must be and are 'as good as other Europeans'. The other is carnivalistic and shameless, even crude, and ridicules all campaigns to 'civilize' the Finnish character.

The media love people who represent these two attitudes and the permanent cultural and social tension. At the moment the drama is best personalized by two media figures: a male javelin thrower and a female business consultant. The lady acquired a symbolic status in this battle when she once stated that Finnish business men destroy the image of Finland by wearing white tennis socks abroad. He, the javelin thrower, ignores all standards of good behaviour and mocks the media: 'How have you been preparing for the Games', asked one reporter eagerly. 'By drinking beer'.

My aim is not to idealize that javelin thrower because the other side of the coin of his refreshing originality is actually his rather banal and xenophobic rudeness. However, it is interesting to see that the worse he behaves, the more ordinary Finnish men seem to adore him. For them the javelin thrower is peasant Lalli, Paavo Nurmi and Vilho Koskela in one person. A man who speaks through his achievements.

THREE STEREOTYPES

There seem to be several major stereotypes and myths about the Finnish character which have political and cultural importance, and which are used for instance by politicians, teachers and journalists as arguments for certain policies and social programmes. I will describe here only three of them which I find interesting and illustrative examples.

Drinking

The first one is the belief of bad Finnish drinking habits: that the Finns are eager to get totally drunk and aggressive when under influence.

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The Finnish historian Matti Peltonen (Peltonen 1988 and 1996) has been studying this belief for a long time, and it starts to seem a pure myth. Statistically, the Finns have not been and are not worse drinkers than their Scandinavian neighbours - not to mention the Russians or the English football fans. The myth of 'bad drinking' was created at the beginning of this century by the temperance movement. Because the consumption figures of alcohol were by that time in Finland the lowest in the whole of Europe, the temperance movement had to invent the bad quality of Finnish drinking in order to have a powerful argument.

However, this belief started to guide alcohol policy in Finland: first the Prohibition Act, then the very restricted licencing system in which alcohol can be bought only in state-owned shops. It has been said that even the standard Finnish vodka bottle was designed to minimize the violence of drinking: It contains half a litre, which is enough to get properly drunk but does not lead into an uncontrollable state. It is round in order to make it more difficult to be smuggled to restaurants or dance halls. And it has no neck so that it is a useless weapon in fights.

In the late 1960s the policy slightly changed. The purpose was to 'tame Finnish drinking'. The idea was to teach people to drink beer and wine instead of vodka and to civilize Finnish drinking habits. The result was predictable: people started to drink beer and wine as well as vodka, and the consumption of alcohol increased rapidly.

Even now, when Finland is adapting to the free alcohol policy of the European Union, both the opponents and advocates of liberalization use 'the bad drinking' myth as an argument. The opponents say that easy availability of alcohol leads to more violence. The advocates say that the Finns will never 'learn to drink in a European way' if alcohol is not sold freely.

It is not easy to analyze the interaction between factual behaviour and educational projects. Stereotypes, when repeated often and reinforced by schools and the media, tend to transform from beliefs into social facts. When the expected behaviour actualizes often enough, the myth starts to reproduce itself in action. Exaggerated 'mythical' behaviour can also be, like self-ironical jokes, a sign of resistance. 'They do not like us to drink two bottles. Let us drink three, perkele!'

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Hatred of superiors

The second stereotype that is still powerful is the belief that the Finns have a special hatred for superiors, that ordinary Finns are exceptionally envious and embittered towards the elites of the country. This phrase is repeated in many ways in the contemporary Finnish media: talented people move abroad because the Finns are envious and can not stand seeing anybody succeed. The only reason labour unions oppose reasonable pay differentials is because nobody is allowed to do better than the others. And every publicly criticized politician, businessman or civil servant knows that he or she is haunted by the press only because the masses love to see powerful people humiliated.

It looks probable that this myth was largely created during the period of social unrest in the beginning of this century, especially after the Finnish Civil War in 1918. Until the early years of the 20th century, the Finnish elites had an idealized image of the Finnish people. They were regarded as a bit slow and melancholic, but honest and frank, mentally and physically strong, loyal and God-fearing - really a people which deserved to have a nation state of its own. But when the social revolution broke out, the economic and cultural elite of the country changed its mind. The common Finns were an ordinary mob guided by their animal instincts and low morale, an envious and uncivilized riff-raff who tried to steal the property of the more hard-working and talented people. 'We had a nice dream about the noble Finnish people', wrote one newspaper in 1918, 'unfortunately it was just an illusion' (Luostarinen 1986, p.143).

The experience of the Civil War crystallized into the belief that the Finnish people have the irrational tendency to hate their superiors. In actual fact, Finland has been a country with exceptionally few social rebellions and class-based controversies. Loyalty has been the dominant Finnish attitude, loyalty to the Swedish kings, loyalty to the Russian czars and loyalty to the Finnish state.

Besides the 1918 Civil War the only major clash was a peasant revolt in 1596-97, the so called Cudgel War. It is very revealing how interpretations of that war have been changing in Finnish history writing. Before the Civil War, when the idealized image of the people was still dominant among the Finnish establishment, the Cudgel War was most often seen as a justified uprising by free peasants against slavery. After the Civil War it was often labelled as a lawless rebellion against legal authority. And starting from the 1960s, it regained its glory as a justified uprising by freedom-loving people.

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These changes are typical of historical research and other nationally oriented disciplines in Finland. In the 19th century history writing, the common people, their work and achievements, were a central theme. Historical studies were seen as an emancipatory project of collective social pride the purpose of which was to get the people to know and value their own talent, energy and creativity and to see their active role in history. That attitude changed dramatically after the Civil War and academic history writing started to emphasize the importance of great individuals who were far-sighted and brave enough to act according to their individual view, and to oppose the short-sighted desires of the masses. When Finnish history was re-written from the point of view of the new independence, common people were no longer seen as subjects of history but more as objects who were guided to the right goal by the Great Men of the nationalistic movement. The social historical approach, 'the view from below', started to gain more ground in the 1960s.

Withdrawn

The third stereotype is the unsocial and withdrawn Finnish character. According to the dominant explanation, the Finns are used to living in isolation in big forests and they have restricted competence for city life and sociality.

This belief can often be found in contemporary Finnish media discourse and political argumentation. It is common to say, for instance, that the eagerness of the Finns to use modern communication technology such as mobile telephones and the internet arises from their inability to communicate face to face; the Finns prefer to communicate via technology. During the discussion on European Union membership, it was often claimed that the Finns should overcome their inhibitions and avoid their instinctive desire for isolation and join the 'European family' and learn natural sociability. The restrictive Finnish refugee policy and xenophobia have also been explained or defended by referring to the Finnish character; the Finns are not used to living with foreign people, it has been said.

This stereotype seems to be historically more firmly based than the two other myths mentioned above. Reserved behaviour is such an old belief that it has transformed into a social fact which can be observed in scientific studies. The Finns, for instance, have longer pauses in their discussions than most Europeans. It is not socially disturbing to be quiet. (Lehtonen and Sajavaara 1985)

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This stereotype, however, has also its political and cultural history. Traditionally, the Finns have not lived in isolation. The biggest part of the population used to live near the coast in tight villages with considerable international contacts (Peltonen 1996). Even the people who lived further north in the inland had a close network of relatives and neighbours. As many observers notice, like the Italian Giuseppi Acerbi in his book **Travels through Sweden, Finland and Lapland to the North Cape in the years 1798 and 1799**, the cold and harsh climate and big distances did not separate people and make them hard and selfish. It was vice versa. Difficult conditions made people more dependent on each other, and altruism was a social rule. Like shipwrecked people on a desert island, people living in the wilderness either had to cooperate or die.

'The reserved Finn' stereotype seemed to gain more and more ground during the 19th century. The growing Finnish nationalist movement started to construct a coherent 'model character' among the various local cultures and mentalities in the country. Influenced by the spirit of romanticism and early German nationalism, the 'original', 'noble' and 'unspoiled' Finnish character was found in the peasant culture, in its 'simple' life and close contacts to the nature.

It was an obvious choice to reject those areas and local cultures which were most influenced by the Russian culture and the Swedish life style, like the Eastern part of Finland, Karelia, and the cities on the West and South coast. The most original character was found in Middle-Finland.

The leading figures of the Finnish national movement were talented, energetic and insightful men, but most of them represented the still very small upper and middle classes of the society and had an academic education. When meeting common Finns they could not avoid the communication problems caused by differences in class, language and habits, and a certain reservedness was a predictable result of those problems.

It was also a tactical choice to see the 'model Finn' as taciturn, uncommunicative and a bit stubborn. The nationalistic movement planned a huge educational project to create a new 'civilized' culture and nation. It was believed that the simple Finn, facing for the first time the demands of civilization, would feel himself inferior and embarrassed. The purpose of idealizing his natural clumsiness was to give him enough confidence so that he could go over the first shocks of civilization. It was a well-intended and useful, but by nature a patronizing attitude

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After the Civil War, reserved and individual stereotyping got a more political content. It was a rather common belief among the Whites that socialism was a 'Russian attitude'. The Russians were described as collectivist, lazy, unreliable and lively, even anarchistic. Socialism, it was said, reflected their character. Soldiers of the Finnish red army, mainly workers from cities and landless population from rural areas, were said to be 'infected by the Russian poison of socialism'.

The 'real' Finnish character had to be something different: independent and individualistic, hard-working, honest, serious and loyal to legal authority. The Whites got a lot of support among land-owning farmers. And especially the peasants of Ostrobothnia, who formed the core of the White Army, got a symbolic status as the 'real common Finns' after the war. Ostrobothnia is an area with long agricultural traditions of independent peasantry and serious-minded Pietist religion. Pietist virtues, like simple life, hard work and loyalty to both the earthly and heavenly authority were typical of the region.

The Finns as such had disappointed the elite, so the men of Ostrobothnia took the role as representatives of the real, unpoisoned, unspoiled and uninfected Finnish people. That change again reinforced the stereotype of the serious, reserved Finnish character in education and media when the young nation started to construct its identity as an independent state.

CHANGES IN IDENTITY

Next let me describe the most important changes of identity production in the independent Finland.

Identity work contains four dimensions in a young state. First, national identity must be made coherent and visible enough to be recognized by the members of the nation themselves and by outsiders. Identity must be clearly identifiable. Second, national identity must have social importance and force in relation to other forms of identification, such as religion, gender, class position or region. For instance in time of war, people must identify themselves primarily as members of the nation. Soldiers cannot say: 'OK, I will kill all other enemies except those who are male, protestants, workers and Manchester United fans'. Third, national identity typically makes distinctions from other groups; it creates its own special characteristics in relation to the neighbouring nations or the former rulers, sometimes even

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conveying enemy images. Fourth, national identity must have continuation, it needs a common history and common goals for the future.

When constructing the content of the potential national identity, three possible approaches can be used: territorial identity, cultural identity and genealogical identity. The first one emphasizes a common political agenda and common fate as an administrative unit. The second emphasizes common language, religion, habits, values etc. And genealogical identity is based on assumed shared racial roots or kinship (Saukkonen 1996). Normally, national identities are an eclectic collection of bits and pieces of this and that, a combination that usually fits some political needs.

People in the newly independent Finland who were most responsible for the distribution of the national ideology and identity models - teachers, journalists, historians and politicians - knew all challenges and possibilities, in part instinctively, in part after studying nationalism as an ideology. Coherence, distinction, compelling social status, continuity, administration, culture, race: anyone who reads textbooks, scientific studies, political speeches or newspapers from the 1920s and 1930s finds a huge project going on, a project which could be called identity construction. Journalists felt that they were the midwives of the nation.

Identity construction in the First Republic

However, the project had two problems before the Second World War, in the so-called First Republic of Finland. First, it largely excluded the lower classes of the society. Workers and poor farmers had their own separate organisations and public communication. Especially industrial towns were territorially and organisationally divided into a working class part and into a middle- and upper-class part. There was a worker's theatre and newspaper and a bourgeoisie theatre and newspaper, a left-wing sports club and a right-wing sports club, co-operative shops for the workers and privately owned shops for the well-off people.

For instance the newspapers represented very different world views: there is an anecdotal headline from a left-wing paper: 'A rich man's dog bit a worker's child'. In the same way, there was no consensus or agreement on the idealized Finnish character or on the desired national identity.

Second, the nationalistic project by the elites was very fixated on the enemy image towards the Soviet Union and the Russians, who were both an

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ideological enemy and the former rulers of the Finnish territory. A common threat and a scapegoat is a handy way to integrate a divided nation, but if the enemy gets too dominant a position, it becomes an obstacle to developing more original, positive and emancipatory forms of nationalism. Self-image which is based on negation is not stable.

The national self-image and identity of the First Republic was a rather serious and gloomy way of nationalistic thinking in which the Finns got their historical value mainly in relation to Soviet Russia: Finland was to be the 'Fortress of the West' and to stop all efforts by the Barbarian East to attack the West.

It was a negative form of nationalism which emphasized the duties of the citizen, strict exclusion of foreign influences and eternal antagonism between different nations. It demanded unity and mental preparedness for sacrifices in war. It replaced the optimistic cultural emphasis of early Finnish nationalism with heavy, state-oriented and pessimistic thinking.

Sure, there were many real reasons for pessimism, and the worst nightmares of the Finns came true when the Soviet Union attacked Finland in 1939. During the war years, there was an episode which is very illustrative of the connection between political demands and identity work. Finland joined Germany in its attack against the Soviet Union in 1941, but it was a very unstable alliance and full of concern from the Finnish point of view. One of the concerns was that, in the racial hierarchies of the Nazis, the Finns scored very badly. They were among the Slavs and other subservient peoples. It was not a very promising prospect to fight with an ally who was likely to subordinate you later on.

In this situation, the Finnish government launched an interesting operation. It decided to convince the Nazis - and in part also its own population - that Finland and the Finns were of German origin, perhaps not genetically, but at least culturally. The Finns should be presented as an old, Western civilization having extremely tight links with Germany. And consequently, Finland should be considered to be able to rule, not only its own territory, but the Northern part of occupied Russia as well.

Many of the best brains of Finnish journalism, science, military, politics and diplomacy were mobilized in this effort to 'Germanize' Finland. The effort materialized in the form of several books and articles in newspapers and

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magazines - both in Germany and in Finland - in speeches, in school education and in confidential discussions.

Everything changes

And then, after the war, everything changed overnight. Finland had lost, and there was an immediate need for re-orientation in foreign policy. The Finnish media started to hate the Germans and to publish stories about the fruitful historical co-operation between Finland and Russia. Even the late national poet, Johan Ludwig Runeberg - formerly known as one of the central anti-Russian figures in Finnish arts - was now proved to be a friend of the big neighbour. The poems in which he describes the Russian soldiers as tough opponents were re-interpreted as a sign of credit and appreciation.

For the Finns, this was too rapid a change. In a short period they had been taught to hate and admire the Germans, to hate and admire the Russians, to emphasize their Western connections and to highlight their Eastern roots. After 50 years, when the Finns eventually started to really believe in friendship with the Soviet Union, the direction was again changed strongly towards the West.

Even more important in identity production than the foreign policy was the still problematic relation between the common people and the elite.

The Olympic Games were organised in Finland in Helsinki in 1952, but after the sufferings of the war the country was neither physically nor mentally in the best shape to welcome foreign guests and to improve its international image. During the long war years, Finnish propaganda had exploited the hard and violent stereotypes about the Finnish character. A rather brutal, aggressive and quiet person was an ideal soldier but not the best host for international guests. The leader of the organising committee of the games stated in 1949:

Our guests will certainly take notice of our social circumstances and our everyday life, and not least of our public behaviour. If the foreigners will come to the conclusion that the Finnish people are a civilized people, it is much more important than gold medals and world records.

(Friman et al 1992, p.92)

An intensive campaign was started by the media, several official bodies and non-governmental organisations to get the Finns rid themselves of impolite

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behaviour and untidiness during the games. The Finns should take care of their personal hygiene, clean public lavatories and kill vermin. And, what was most important, to stop drinking and fighting (Peltonen 1996).

This campaign was a sign that the image of the common people was still low among the elite of the country. Common people had proved their patriotism and stamina during the long war but they were still something which could not be shown to the foreigners. Cultural hegemony and ability to define the ideal identity was still in the hands of the elite.

Rehabilitation of common people

Now we come to the years of the publication of the novel **The Unknown Soldier** by Väinö Linna. It is illustrative of the Finnish society of the 1950s that the rehabilitation of the common people as honourable subjects of national history was not done by academics, journalists or politicians. It was done by an author with a working class background. And he also was the first to tackle openly the trauma of the Civil War by writing another monumental novel in which the losers, the red side, got recognition for its memories and perspective on the national agenda.

It was not earlier than in the 1960s, in the wave of international changes of moral and political values, that a hegemonic change in the image of the people gradually took place. Väinö Linna, first marginalized by the establishment, was now celebrated as a people's hero. It was a period of rapid economic development, urbanization and building of the welfare state. It was also a period of practical and low-key, sometimes almost invisible nationalism, and in the media the Soviet Union and its influence in Finnish politics was partly a self-censored issue.

One could call this period a time of democratization of power, wealth and education. From the point of view of the former Establishment, it looked more like a period of moral decay, Finlandization, unpatriotism and mediocre, materialistic middle-class rule. This difference of perspectives caused a number of cultural clashes, but most of them were won by social democratic or moderate centrist thinking which dominated Finland for a long time. This development was helped by the media, especially by television and the bigger local newspapers, which created big integrated audiences including all social classes. Consensus-oriented media empowered the political centre.

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At the same time the composition of elites and the Establishment started to change. Until the 1960s the Finnish establishment was a surprisingly narrow social group which occupied the top positions in industry, diplomacy, military, administration, politics, universities, church, media etc. It was the development of the welfare state and the radical extensions in education which integrated the society in less than one generation. New elites were born, people now having their background in Finnish-speaking working class or farming families. Rapid growth in both economy and administration opened new jobs and possibilities for upward social mobility. For young Finnish-speaking people coming from the lower classes the welfare state was 'our state', and everything looked fine until the late 1980s. Finland was called the Japan of Europe. It was among the richest countries of the world, having a developed social and educational system and political stability. Then, suddenly, the good times were over.

Integration with the West

In the early 1990s the Finnish economy went into a deep recession, in part because of its inner problems and in part because of unfortunate external reasons, like the rapid decrease in Soviet trade. Unemployment exploded, and at its worst it was over 20 per cent. The state has been claimed to have been almost bankrupt in 1993.

It was a bad stroke for the whole country but especially for the new elites. Their strongholds, like labour unions, agricultural businesses, home market industries and the public sector suffered the worst. The old elites overcame the crisis much better because their material and cultural property was more firmly based. They were also better prepared for the integration process towards the West. Experienced in foreign trade and diplomacy, with established international contacts and knowledge of European languages, members of the traditional elite were the natural vanguard of integration.

In terms of identity work, there was a new switch. The mainstream media, which fully supported Finland's membership of the European Union, again started to behave like during the 1952 Olympic Games: bad Finnish habits, unsocial character, senseless drinking, tasteless clothes etc were brought back as problems on the national agenda.

In a contradictory way, Finland experienced at the same time a surge of new patriotism which highlighted the rough side of the Finnish character. This paradox is best explained by referring to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

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This made it possible for Finland to integrate into the West and to openly express the old, suffocated forms of nationalism, even militarism.

The media, always eager to find people who personify the tendencies of the time, found an old general and made him a national hero. He was an ideal solution to the contradictions in identification models: he is a tough war hero and a gentleman with the brilliant manners of the man of the world.

In the new situation of the 1990s, in which both the old elites and the patriotic sentiments got new powers, the re-writing of the history of Finland started again. Not surprisingly, the Civil War was re-interpreted once again by some academics as an irrational outburst by an envious and blood-thirsty underclass. Not surprisingly, the history of World War II was re-written from the point of view of generals and leaders of the war. Not surprisingly, Finland's relation with Russia and the Soviet Union was seen mainly in the context of war, subordination and exploitation. And what is most important, the politics of the 1960s and 1970s, the welfare state project, was heavily criticized as a mediocre and depressing 'mass politics'.

The welfare state seems to be a clear watershed between the internationally oriented academic and cultural elite and the contemporary Finnish man of the street. According to the Establishment critique, the welfare state has a lot of disadvantages: it is collectivist, it does not encourage individual initiatives, it rewards lazy and unenterprising people living on social assistance. In short: the welfare state is a part of an underclass mentality.

According to opinion polls, most ordinary Finns agree that the welfare system is complicated and expensive but they, however, defend it very firmly as a social principle. They seem to consider it as an achievement of the people which should not be taken away.

The future of Finnish society, reforms of the welfare state and labour markets, are not only economic or ideological questions. They are issues deeply linked to national identity and the image of the common people. If the common people are seen by the elites and by the media - once again - as a badly behaving riff-raff, a bunch of alcoholics and lazy social bums, a logical consequence is to restrict the social services they enjoy and to implement more strict social discipline.

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THE MEDIA AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

In many studies of nationalism and the press, the role of the media has been seen as important, even crucial in the creation of nation states. Such concepts as 'imagined community' or 'community in anonymity' by Benedict Anderson (1983) often have been used to describe the process in which people start to identify with unknown fellow countrymen, to feel solidarity and to believe in common fate.

The media, it has been said, create a common national time which manifests itself in the form of common behaviour, common rites, habits, celebrations, subjects of interest and political agendas. The media distribute symbols, stereotypes and models to integrate thinking and behaviour. To put the idea in a very simple way, the media synchronize time and values by giving a common agenda of interest for their audiences.

Here, in this idea, we meet one tradition of mass media research, represented for instance by the Americans John Dewey and James Carey (Carey 1975). According to them the media are mainly about community and consensus.

From that perspective journalism is a form of shared experience, typical of bigger societies which have outgrown their oral and physical ways of community and communication. According to James Carey, the 'ritual' way of understanding journalism, as he calls it, emphasizes the drama and identification possibilities of news stories. Journalism is not only cold and mechanical transportation of information, but an emotionally loaded drama in which the audience is invited to take part. Reading a newspaper enables you to take different roles, to feel sorrow or pride, to evaluate statements from your ethical and interest positions, to hate and to love.

In the case of nationalism, journalism offers for its audience identification positions in which the national dimension has a predominant role. Journalism often invites us to co-act on the scene as members of the nation. It suggests that we set our empathy and identification from the national perspective.

The Finnish example shows that this rather usual way of understanding the role of the media has its advantages but also its flaws and problems. National identity is a permanent bone of contention between different social classes and local cultures. Very often it is created and constructed by the elites as part of educational programmes, and reflects the idealizations, hopes and fears of the elites rather than the way of everyday thinking and behaviour of

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the citizens. The media often contain contradictory and even oppositional definitions of the hoped and idealized national identification, definitions which depend on the political situation and power balance between various social groups or between various elites.

It is worth noticing that the role of the media changes according to different phases of the nation state and that the media seem to define the national needs and virtues from a dominantly male point of view. For instance in the Finnish press, women as actors in the national building process were almost invisible until the 1960s.

The stereotype about the quiet and reserved Finn has been used and can be used by the elites and by the people in many different ways in different political and cultural situations. It has been criticized by the elites in times of internationalization and encouraged in times of national crisis. The same behaviour which is most useful on the battlefield can be seen as dysfunctional when lobbying in Brussels. For the people themselves, the same stereotype can be a source of confidence and self-esteem and a reason for feelings of inferiority.

Thus, when we take a closer look, the problems of national identity seem not so much national, but basically social and political.

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