



Passages Westward

Edited by
Maria Lähteenmäki & Hanna Snellman

Studia Fennica
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Contents

CROSSING BORDERS	7
New Places, New Spaces	
<i>Maria Lähteenmäki</i> FINNISH EXPATRIATES IN BRUSSELS	13
<i>Katri Kaunisto</i> FOREST EXPERTISE OF EUROPE	35
<i>Minna Aalto</i> FINNISH IMMIGRANTS IN PROVENCE	51
<i>Katri Tanni</i> PERSPECTIVES ON AUSTRALIAN MULTICULTURALISM	64
The Second Generation	
<i>Hanna Snellman</i> GOING TO SCHOOL IN A DIASPORA	79
<i>Marja Ågren</i> “HELLO, MY NAME IS PIRKKO AND I AM...”	99
<i>Lotta Weckström</i> SYMBIOSIS OF LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY?	112
<i>Mirjaliisa Lukkarinen Kvist</i> HELPING US REMEMBER	128

The Making of New Finland

Terhi Willman

URBANIZED KARELIANS..... 143

Leena Louhivuori

THE JOURNEY TO THE SEVENTH FLOOR 165

Tarja Kytönen

FIVE GO TO FINLAND..... 176

Deep Roots

Päivi Maria Pihlaja

A NORTHERN SCIENCE 193

Oona Ilmolahti

TEACHERS ON GUARD AGAINST THE EAST..... 209

Leena Paaskoski

GREEN GOLD IN A SUITCASE..... 232

CONTRIBUTORS..... 247

Crossing Borders

The Finns living on the northern edge of Europe have always had close contacts with the western world. From the arrival of the Swedes to Finland in the 1150s up until 1809, Finland was part of Sweden. Learned people, savants and the clergy were in the vanguard of westernization. Since the Middle Ages, the Finns have crossed borders in search of western ideas from universities in Europe. For example, there were Finnish students at the University of Paris already in 1313. The universities of Prague, Leipzig, Heidelberg, Cologne, Rostock, Greifswald and Frankfurt all attracted Finnish students early on. In 1530 the father of the Finnish language and a key person in the Reformation, Mikael Agricola enrolled at the University of Wittenberg. The University of Leuven was also a destination for several students of theology from Finland.

Crossing borders has not necessarily involved Finns leaving Finland; western ideas were also brought to Finland. As the eastern part of Sweden, “Eastland”, Finland received a great number of visitors such as explorers and merchants. German merchants in particular took up residence in Finland at an early stage. With them they brought not only ideas, but also artefacts, which had an effect on the material culture of Finland in those areas where German burghers had settled. The first Finnish students at the universities of Central Europe were, in fact, descendants of these merchants. In addition to religious institutions and values, trade relations played a major role in westernizing. Works of art should also be mentioned; not only artists but also their works traveled.

However, the Finns were not only just attracted to Western Europe, the East also exerted a certain fascination. Russia and the Baltic received a Finnish population at an early stage. Tallinn was already a center of trade in the Middle Ages, and as such interested Finnish merchants. The founding of St. Petersburg at the beginning of the 1700s led to an extensive migration of Finns to the growing metropolis. In general, Finns have traveled because of war, famine, work and in search of scientific or artistic development.

In the nineteenth century, early Finnish nationalism came to rest on a particular movement within Western European ideology, namely German Romanticism. Science and the arts were harnessed to serve the formation of the nation. The World Fair in Paris in 1900 was a triumph for Finnish artists

– and the self-esteem of Finns, as it confirmed their sense of belonging to the West. Romanticism aroused interest amongst Finns in their own language and popular culture. As a consequence, the foundations of academic disciplines such as ethnology, Finnish history, folklore studies and Finnish literature were laid.

Finland's geopolitical location between East and West has caused a lot of tension in Finland over the past two hundred years. In particular from the nineteenth century onwards it has been argued that the Finns are European, not Asian or Slavic. The fact that the Finnish language belongs to the uralic language group, led the Finns to argue for their westernness. Finland was part of the Russian empire between 1809 and 1917, which also had an effect. The wish to distinguish itself from Russia, which had gone "Red" with the Bolshevik revolution, and the declaration of independence in 1917 only accelerated the urge to present Finland as an outpost of the West. In the 1920s the Pan-European movement extended to the north of Europe. For example, a well-known Finnish author demanded the "opening of windows to Europe". During the Second World War, Finland for one became a brother in arms alongside Hitler's Germany, against the "Giant of the East", the Soviet Union. Even genetics has been recruited to the cause of arguing for Finland's westernness: in the 1960s it was announced that Finns were genetically at least half European. In the 1990s, the European ancestry was proved to be seventy five.

A Pedagogical Experiment

Bringing out this anthology has involved crossing borders in many senses. It is the offspring of our joint PhD seminar between the disciplines of ethnology and history at the University of Helsinki. The seminar was a part of our ongoing projects at the Academy of Finland (project numbers 1211043 and 211152). The idea of the seminar was to give PhD students of ethnology, Katri Kaunisto, Leena Louhivuori, Leena Paaskoski, Terhi Willman, and history, Oona Ilmolahti, Tarja Kytönen, Päivi Maria Pihlaja, a chance, at an early stage of their research, to present their research results to an audience who do not share the same academic background. In addition, salient concepts frequent in today's academic discussions were analyzed. Visitors from the Universities of Gothenburg and Amsterdam contributed to the group. One aim of the seminar, which met for three years, was to write an anthology of ongoing projects. This book is the result. In addition, we invited scholars, not only, from different disciplines: applied linguistics (Lotta Weckström) and literature (Minna Aalto), but also, different corners of the world: a historian from the University of Canberra (Katri Tanni) and two ethnologists from the Universities of Gothenburg (Marja Ågren) and Linköping (Mirjaliisa Lukkarinen Kvist), to contribute to this book.

This study presents and evaluates Finnish people's relationships and links with the West with the help of fourteen case studies. For the Finns the West has provided new ideological and financial resources, fresh ideas, schemes of things and operational models. The West has also absorbed Finnish

expertise. Throughout the centuries, the West has attracted scholars and artists. Furthermore, Finns were a part of the great conquest of the West when they migrated to America at the turn of the century. Canada and Australia received their share of Finnish migrants during the twentieth century. Labor migration to Finland's neighbor, Sweden, in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s is a special case of its own. New generations of Finns are living in all these countries. Finland after the Second World War faced new challenges in its westernization.

In 1995 Finland joined the European Union, which has increased contacts between Brussels, Central-Europe and Finland. Because of the European Union's Bureaux and the common market area, more and more Finns are spending at least some of their working life outside Finland, for example, somewhere in Europe. Finns are free to seek employment in the countries of the European Union. The concept of a migrant has, therefore, gained new meanings.

The Faculty of Arts at the University of Helsinki gave us financial support for publishing this anthology. We want to thank the faculty and especially Aili Nenola, the Dean, and Petri Mirala, PhD, for the support. The Finnish Literature Society accepted our manuscript for its series. We want to thank the editorial staff of the Finnish Literature Society, for their excellent cooperation. Departmental amanuensis of Ethnology Katarina Koskiranta has acted as the sub-editor for this book. She and the authors of this book deserve our warmest appreciation. We are deeply indebted to the Research Council for Culture and Society at the Academy of Finland for giving us this opportunity to work on such an interdisciplinary and international pioneer project.

Helsinki May 4, 2006
Maria Lähteenmäki

Hanna Snellman

New Places, New Spaces

Finnish Expatriates in Brussels

It was a sunny Saturday evening, the last day of April. The crossroads of Rues de l'Etuve and du Chêne in the lower town of Brussels was thronged with dozens of people whose noisy laughter and eager talk was audible a long way off. Every now and then champagne corks popped and festival trumpets tooted. Precisely at 6 o'clock a young man in a black suit and a young woman in a tiny dress climbed up to the side of the small pool. They both wore white student caps on their heads. Most of the audience had similar hats. The man had a bigger cap in his hands and, carrying it solemnly, he placed it on the head of the Manneken Pis to loud applause. The ceremony had reached its traditional climax. Again, on the eve of the first of May the Manneken Pis had been crowned with his white student cap: the symbol of Finnishness. At the very same time in Helsinki, students were capping the beautiful statue of a naked woman, called Havis Amanda, and in Rovaniemi in Finnish Lapland, they capped the statue of a timber worker. In Brussels, the small statue of a little boy from the seventeenth century is, therefore a very suitable object for this ritual spring celebration of Finnish students.¹¹ The first time the statue in Brussels was given its Finnish student cap was in 1993.

In this article, I will present and analyze the experiences of Finns living in Brussels. Belgium is the latest notable destination for Finnish migration; it began to attract a few Finns in the 1950s, and after Finland joined the European Union (in 1995) the number of Finns has increased especially in Brussels. In 1991, the number of Finnish citizens living in Belgium was about 600, by 1999 it had risen already to 2,800, and by 2005, to approximately 3,500. During the twentieth century the most attractive destination for Finnish migrants has been Sweden. The next most popular destinations have been Germany, Great Britain and Norway.²²

Brussels is one of the most international cities in Europe.³³ In the region of Brussels there are about 270,000 foreigners out of a population of one million. This means that about one-third of the inhabitants of the region have citizenship other than Belgian. The biggest foreign communities in Brussels are the Italian, French and Dutch. Next come the Moroccan, Turkish, German, British and Portuguese. Together these groups make up almost 80 per cent of the foreign population in the region. Of the three regions of Belgium (Brussels, Flemish and Walloon) Brussels is the most cosmopolitan. Of the

French speaking population of the Walloon region about nine percent were foreigners and of the population of the Flemish region about five percent (in 2002).⁴⁴ The Finnish community is concentrated in the city Brussels although some Finns live in other parts of the country, like Antwerp and Ghent. Although the Finnish colony is not the biggest, it occasionally makes its presence felt, as the Manneken Pis celebrations indicate.

The history of Finnish migration can be divided into three main waves. The old (great) migration of the nineteenth century took Finns mainly to the USA and to Canada but at the beginning of the century, also to northern Norway and Russia, especially to St. Petersburg. The second important migration wave took place in the 1960s and 1970s: the main direction of migration at that time was Sweden. The third wave, the “new migration”, began in the 1990s and the destination countries for Finnish migrants were member countries of the European Union. The difference between the old and the new migration is so clear that the terms “*migration*” (siirtolaisuus) and “*migrants*” (siirtolaiset) are nowadays often replaced in Finnish discussions by the terms “*expatriation*” and “*expatriates*”. Expatriates are workers sent abroad by the national governments or companies. There is no exact Finnish translation for the term “expatriates” – Finns use a mixed English-Finnish word *ekspatriaattit*. The term of *ulkosuomalaiset* is normally used when discussing *Finns living abroad*. Later in this article, I will analyze the differences between the old migration and the new migration/expatriation. In this connection I will use the concept “expatriate”. It is a concept most of my interviewees defined themselves.

The theoretical framework of this paper is linked to discussions concerning the future of a united Europe, cultural and economical diversity and new identities – the return of old ones and the transformation of existing ones.⁵⁵ The question of identities is at the same time a question of about similarities and differences between Europeans and “others”. Identity became one of the unifying themes of social scientists during the 1990s. Everybody – anthropologists, geographers, historians, political scientists and sociologists – has something to say about this issue.⁶⁶ The famous cultural researcher Stuart Hall has stated that this is because western culture is in crisis. Also researcher Kobena Mercer has argued that identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent, and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty.⁷⁷ According to some researchers, a distinctive type of structural change is transforming modern societies in the late twentieth century and this is fragmenting the cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and nationality, which used to give us firm locations as social individuals. These transformations are also shifting our personal identities, undermining our sense of ourselves as integrated subjects.⁸⁸

According to the textbooks, *identity* means “sameness” or “exact likeness”; by identifying somebody we try to discover or recognize who or what a particular person or thing is. The Oxford English Dictionary offers the following definition: “Identity is the consistency or continuity over time that is the basis for establishing and grasping the definiteness and distinctiveness of something.” Sociologist Richard Jenkins has emphasized, as have many

other scholars, that individual as well as collective identities are systematically produced, reproduced, and implicated in each other.⁹⁹ According to Hall, identity bridges the gap between the “inside” and the “outside” – between the personal and public worlds.¹⁰

With this article, I want to turn a new page in the history of Finnish migration. Finland has been a member of the European Union since 1995, but there are no scientific studies about the experiences of Finns in Brussels. For other places – especially France (Paris, Bretagne and Provence) – there are some memoirs and travel books written by Finnish expatriates and travellers.¹¹ There are also lots of studies about the so-called old migration, for instance, to America and Sweden.¹² The main sources for this article are thirty interviews conducted in Brussels during May–June 2005.¹³ Most of the interviewed persons are Finnish expatriates (sent workers or their family members), and only a few are immigrants living permanently in Brussels. Another source has been the newspaper *Parlööri* (1978–2005) which is published by the Finnish Club of Belgium (Club Finlandais de Belgique).¹⁴ Whilst conducting my research, I lived in Brussels (in 2004–2005), so I was also part of the Finnish community.¹⁵

Early Contacts

The first image of Belgium which often comes to minds for Finns concerns the Walloons. Finns generally are eager to study their roots and quite a lot of families in Finland’s iron working communities have French speaking ironsmiths among their ancestors. The Walloons came to Sweden and Finland in the seventeenth century to teach iron working skills and some of them stayed. When Finland declared its independence in December 1917, contacts with Belgium took on an official nature. Belgium recognized Finland’s independence in June 1919 and diplomatic relations were established in July that year. Finnish Embassy was established in Belgium in 1938. Ten years earlier a Belgian Embassy had opened its doors in Helsinki.

The Finnish industry companies have been active in forming contacts with Belgium as well as other parts of Europe ever since Finland declared independence. Finnish companies became even more active in the 1970s: they opened own office in Brussels in 1974. Finnish industrial circles lobbied eagerly for Finland to join the European Union. Nowadays there are about 200 Finnish firms and 30 subsidiary companies active in Belgian market (2005). The biggest companies are Nokia (mobiles), UMP-Kymmene (paper, chemical pulp), Kemira (chemicals), Kone (elevators), and Valio (food products).¹⁶ These companies provide work for many Finnish expatriates. The EU-Commission and the European Parliament are also important employers of Finns. In 2005 there were 615 Finns working in the Commission and 155 in the Parliament. Of those working at the European Parliament about one-third work in Brussels and the rest in Luxembourg.¹⁷ In the last elections (2004) Finland sent fourteen members to the European Parliament. The Finnish government and individual ministries, national private organizations (like labor movement, employer’s organizations, political parties), international

schools (The European Schools, the Scandinavian School) and the Finnish Seaman's Mission,¹⁸ which has activities both in Brussels and Antwerp, are amongst the other employers of Finns. The Seaman's Mission opened its church in Antwerp in 1905. After the Finnish population in Belgium increased, a parsonage opened in Brussels in 2000. It is a very popular meeting place among Finns.

The areas favored by Finnish residences in Belgium have changed over time. The membership lists of the Finnish Club provide more information about the locations of the Finnish communities. In the 1970s the first members of the Finnish Club were living all around the country, for example in Waterloo, Antwerp, Overijsen, Zaventum, and Brussels. In the 1990s, members lived mainly in the region of Brussels, like in Rhode-St-Genève, Uccle, Ixelles and in the center of Brussels. All in all, the city contains 19 independent municipalities around the center. At the beginning of the 2000s, the biggest Finnish communities are to be found in the eastern part of the city, in Woluwe St. Lambert and Woluwe St. Pierre. Nowadays, the nearby regions, Etterbeek and Kraainem, are also popular residential areas for Finns.¹⁹ This is mainly because of the European School II: Finnish classes are available at that school. The metro line and the nice surroundings have also affected the decisions to settle in these areas – and, of course, the other Finns already living there. Finnish families want to live near other Finns because they want friends for their children and social activities for themselves. It is interesting that although Finns in Brussels can speak several languages they still choose to live regions where there are other Finns. The same phenomenon was found in Sweden in the 1960s and 1970s: Finns went to live near other Finns.²⁰ Single Finns prefer to live near the EU-buildings, in downtown Brussels, and in the Merode and Schuman areas. One of the interviewed Finns said that the areas in the East of Brussels are boring: “Middle class civil servants live there!” She herself lives near the center in the St. Gilles district, which is a popular area among artists and people with an alternative life style.²¹

Better Work, Better Wages

The most important reason for moving to Brussels for Finns has been work: work that is more interesting, more challenging, and better paid than in Finland. If we compare the new migrants/expatriates with the old migrants who moved to Sweden in the 1960s and the 1970s, fundamental differences are evident. First of all, expatriates are highly educated: the Commission, the EU-Parliament, international schools and private organizations require a university degree for most of their positions. The old migrants, on the contrary, were often uneducated and without foreign language skills. Most of the expatriates spoke at least three languages (Finnish, Swedish, English) when they arrived in Brussels. The cultural background is also different between these two groups: the old migrants come from the peripheral northern and eastern agrarian regions of Finland. Most of the expatriates come from the urban southern regions. The alternatives available to these Finns and their future plans regarding Finland reveal often differences between these two groups.

The West has always been a resource for the Finns. Scholars, artists and other professionals have sought contacts from Europe throughout the centuries. The Finnish experience in Western Europe and the New World is a story of migrant laborers, expatriates and specialists working abroad. But you don't have to be born in Finland to be a Finn. The experiences of second-generation Finnish immigrants and their descendants open up new possibilities for understanding the relationship between Finland and the West.

The Finnish passage westward has not always crossed national borders. Karelian evacuees headed west, as did young people from the Finnish countryside when opportunities to make a living in agriculture and forestry diminished in the post-war era. The legacy of these migrants is still visible in the suburbs of Finnish cities today.

This book is a joint effort of the Department of Ethnology and the Department of History at the University of Helsinki. It was written by Ph. D. students supervised by Academy Research Fellows Maria Lähteenmäki and Hanna Snellman, in collaboration with colleagues abroad interested in current research in ethnology and history.



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