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## Guardians of the Past - Views on the Role of the Historian in Finland 1990 – 2000

Elmgren, Ainur

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00



Ainur Elmgren  
Department of History  
Lund University  
Supervisor: Klas-Göran Karlsson  
International Seminar in Mariefred  
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## Guardians of the Past

Views on the Role of the Historian in Finland 1990 – 2000



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# 1. Introduction

This article represents a pilot project in my doctoral research. I attempt an in-depth analysis of a collection of articles published in historical periodicals in Finland between 1990 and 2000. My main interest in this research concerns how the writers – mainly professional historians, representatives of scientific ideals of their age – chose to discuss the idea of the nation during this decade, and how these discussions reflect a certain understanding of the work of a historian in relation to such matters as the nation-state and professional versus national identity.

Did the Finnish historians of the 1990's perceive their role as objective scholars in the service of science, or active participators in the process of nation-building? What identity questions were emphasized, what was seen as problematic and what was re-evaluated? Many of these questions seem difficult to answer without some prior knowledge of historiography on one hand and the historical culture of Finnish society on the other. This article is the result of a part of the research for my doctoral thesis on the images of Sweden in Finland during the time of national independence, from 1917 to the present. I have already studied similar subjects in my bachelor's and master's theses in history.<sup>1</sup> My master's thesis dealt with an overlapping period, and I hope to utilize some of the experiences that I gained from it in my present work.

As source materials I will be using two periodicals, namely the Finnish-language *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* (henceforth referred to as HA) and the Swedish-language *Historisk Tidskrift för Finland* (HTF). This brings up the peculiar situation of the Finnish historians' community, which is divided into two language-groups (although the Swedish-speaking scholars occasionally participate in the Finnish-language discussion and vice versa). I am also interested in the question, what other divisions run through the Finnish community of historians – or are the unifying traits enough to separate "us" – the professional historians – from "them" – the society as a whole? In Sweden, it has been claimed that the demarcation between professionals and laymen has distanced the historians from the general public. Is this also the case in Finland – or do we encounter an entirely different way of thinking here?

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<sup>1</sup> Ainur Elmgren: *Finlands sak är svår – Finland som spegel för svenska identiteter 1880-1944*. 2002; *Den allrakäraste fienden – föreställningar om Sverige, historia och nationell identitet i Finland 1970-2002*. 2002

## 2. Brief Theoretical and Methodological Outline

Everybody reflects over and integrates the past into the actions that define and express their identities. German historian Jörn Rüsen interprets *historical consciousness* as a way of making meaning, which every human being possesses, not merely an image of the past, but also shaped by expectations of the future and influenced by attempts at orientation in the present.<sup>2</sup> In Germany, the term historical consciousness (*Geschichtsbewusstsein*) has been connected to discussions of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ("coming to terms with the past") and the German *Sonderweg*. Germany's unique situation has fostered generations of historians that actively seek to deal with the past in a critical and constructive manner, conscious of the roles that their predecessors have played in the creation of national history. In Finland, the situation has been somewhat similar – traumatic events in the past have been perceived as unresolved, and historians see it as their duty to deal with "the burden of history" in their work. Wars and guilt affect the core of the personal experience. Germany has had its nationalist wars, its failed Weimar democracy, and its collective guilt for the Holocaust. Finland has the civil war of 1918 and the two wars against the Soviet Union – as well as the more subtle traumas of a nation-state without a history as an independent nation in a world shaped by nationalism, reminiscences of threatening right-wing rebellion and native and foreign communist scares, memories of the post-war years' humiliating finlandisation and economic struggle. This "burden" includes many traumatic events, but none of them is as easy to dismiss as a crime against humanity as the Holocaust. The lines between "good" and "evil" are blurred in the Finnish past, for better and for worse. This distinction is useful to keep in mind when using theoretical concepts that have been developed in a specific historical context.

Rüsen introduced the concept of historical culture (*Geschichtskultur*) to the theory of historical consciousness. "Historical culture" represents the particular frames and borders that shape the historical consciousness in a particular temporal and spatial context. Historical culture has been defined by Swedish historian Klas-Göran Karlsson as the chain of communication that includes what history is told, how it is told and by whom to which audience, and through what means (media, for example) it is conveyed.<sup>3</sup> In this article, I focus on a specific aspect of historical culture, namely ways of writing about the historian's role and the nation

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<sup>2</sup> Jörn Rüsen, "Einleitung". *Geschichtsbewusstsein*. 2001 (11)

<sup>3</sup> Klas-Göran Karlsson, "Historiedidaktik – begrepp, teori och analys" 2003 (11)

in Finland, by professional historians in two major periodicals that serve as a forum for debate and scientific articles within the field of history. As we shall see, the ways of discussing history are not freely chosen, but strongly dependent on the interpretation of the role of the historian and the character of the nation-state.

The identity of the collective lies in the possibility to understand itself as a group of human beings, whose common features outweigh the differences and who distinguish themselves from other groups as an independent unit. It has been argued that the continuous display of such a unity is only possible through accentuated reconstruction of historical perceptions.<sup>4</sup> Someone who wants to know their future and understand their past can only find answers within the perspective of their own past and the history of the collectives that they feel connected to.<sup>5</sup> The result of this is a biographical narrative, which also relates the narrated to the society, environment and culture, the familiar and the strange, to that extent which those serve as horizon for comparison, differentiation, limitation, and thus self-identification.<sup>6</sup> The historians' work is not free from these qualities. The processes of identity-building run through their work on both conscious and sub-conscious levels. As both an insider (a historian and Finn by birth) and outsider (a Swedish citizen and schooled in the Swedish historiographical tradition) I hope to disclose the particularities in the source material without developing a blind spot for the all-too-familiar, or reverting to exoticizing the different.

Methodologically I adhere to the principle of hermeneutics. Paul Ricoeur describes hermeneutics as understanding and capability to make the understood accessible to others.<sup>7</sup> While studying the variety of ideas and influences that run through a given text, hermeneutical analysis works as a double-edged process of understanding and criticism. This method differs from older hermeneutic tradition by not concentrating on the historical writer's consciousness, but rather on an understanding of the issue that the text is challenging. The writer's original purpose may be hidden from our view, but the text carries many meanings and interpretations that I have to disclose.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Karl-Ernst Jeismann, "Geschichtsbewusstsein", *Handbuch der Geschichtsdidaktik, Band 1*. 1979

<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Straub, "Temporale Orientierung und narrative Kompetenz". *Geschichtsbewusstsein*. (21)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. (22)

<sup>7</sup> Martin Alm, *Americanitis – Amerika som sjukdom eller läkemedel*. (27)

<sup>8</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Das Rätsel der Vergangenheit* (117)

### 3. The Historians' Role in the Construction of the Nation-State

*Scholarly research – historical studies or social scientific studies – is indeed an important aspect of the identity formation or the self-awareness of a national community.<sup>9</sup>*

Finland as a nation was invented and constructed from the most desirable and hope-inspiring traits found in anything that had been said and done within the borders of 1809. In this creative process, historians played an important role. Their aim was to create a national history for Finland, extracting the essence from the history of the Swedish state. However, a Hegelian state-nationalistic history was difficult to write before the existence of an independent Finnish state, and it would have linked Finland too tightly to Sweden. Thus, cultural history became important in the Finnish historiographical tradition. The scholars focused on the idealised common people and sought after a Hegelian national spirit in the traces of Finnish historical acts during the Swedish and Russian reign. For the early Finnish nationalist movements, the very existence of a Finnish nation was dependent on the power and stability of a Finnish language and a Finnish "spirit" which could be traced down the centuries. This was achieved with the help of diligent historians and creative writers such as Zacharias Topelius, Yrjö-Koskinen, Danielson-Kalmari and Väinö Voionmaa. Finns have retained this double-sided image of the creation of the nation until today. It is agreed that the idea of Finland as a nation was coined in the 19th century, and the Finnish nation-state was realized in the period of 1917-1944. On the other hand, the notion of the Finnish nation as something age-old and essential is commonplace. In such cases, the construction of the nation-state is described as a "national awakening" and a "struggle for freedom".

Hegelian philosophy was introduced in Finland by Johan Vilhelm Snellman in the mid-19th century.<sup>10</sup> This philosopher, journalist and writer was one of the most active minds behind the concept of an independent Finnish nation-state. In spite of the fact that he himself was a Swedish-speaker, he coined the slogan *one mind, one language* – because a nation ought to be built on the stable foundation of a "single" culture. While Hegel defined consensus as a political agreement between citizens of a state, this consensus was interpreted as national and cultural unanimity in Finland.<sup>11</sup> The Hegelian view of history as a process where the

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<sup>9</sup> Joakim Ekman, *National Identity in Divided and Unified Germany – Continuity and Change*. 2001 (19)

<sup>10</sup> Juha Sihvola, "Historian kansallinen tehtävä ennen ja nyt", (The national mission of history in the past and in the present) HA 1/2003 (2)

<sup>11</sup> Sihvola 2003 (3)



ultimate goal was an independent nation-state fitted the nationalist ideals in Finland. The challengers of Hegel, the theories of liberalism and Marxism/historical materialism, did not get a foothold in Finland until the 1960's.<sup>12</sup> Even the cultural history of Karl Lamprecht, which enjoyed a few decades of boom in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, could be adjusted to serve the nationalist cause.<sup>13</sup>

The German school of historicism was also an important influence in Finland, tempered by a strong tradition of source-criticism. A classic representative of Finnish historicism in the post-war decades was the venerable Pentti Renvall. As late as 1972, he strictly denied the importance of any kind of theoretical thinking in his work.<sup>14</sup> His championing of positivism occasionally culminated in almost biological determinism.

It is understandable that those who want to change present conditions in a very radical way feel irritated if their attempts are curbed by references to the limits which are set by reality and the historical continuum which is contained by reality. However, that kind of dissatisfaction does not change an iota of the character of reality, and sooner or later the incapability to understand reality gets its due and results in the failure of missions that do not take it into consideration.<sup>15</sup>

The problem with this point of view was that the historian with the benefit of hindsight could easily judge failed political and social movements as "unrealistic" without deeper analysis. The exact criteria for a successful movement were defined with shady terminology. The "basic values of historical life" should be taken into consideration, and if one should err from this path, the result would be "disharmony of human life and historical life".<sup>16</sup> For example, Renvall described the increasing egoism and openly displayed avarice of the 16th century man as a step forward in the development of the modern individualist man. However, the attempt for personal gain among participants in peasant revolts in 16th century Finland was seen by Renvall as moral regression and an example of the "backwoods' peasant's" primitivity.<sup>17</sup> Renvall's positivist determinism can be interpreted as a wish for

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<sup>12</sup> Ilkka Liikanen, *Fennomania ja kansa* (Fennomania and the people) 1995 (54)

<sup>13</sup> Pekka Ahtiainen & Jukka Tervonen, "Historiankirjoitus - Kansakunnan kompassi vai politiikan tuuliviiri" (Historiography - Compass of the nation or weatherwane of politics) *Tieteessä tapahtuu* 8/1996. For the nationalists, Lamprecht's theses meant that the Finnish-speaking masses could be interpreted as actors in a past beyond the limits of state politics. The Finnish-nationalist ambition to mobilize the masses was well served with this theoretical approach. The main opponents of Lamprecht in Finland were indeed found among those Swedish-speaking historians who opposed Finnish cultural nationalism.

<sup>14</sup> Matti Peltonen: "Pentti Renvall ja mentaliteettien historia." (Pentti Renvall and the history of mentalities) *Historiallisia papereita* 8, Pentti Renvallin perintö ja 2000-luvun historiantutkimus. <http://www.helsinki.fi/historia/yhdistys/julk/renvall/>

<sup>15</sup> Pentti Renvall (in *Nykyajan Historiantutkimus* 1965) from Pauli Kettunen: "Historian poliittisuus ja kansallinen katse" (The political character of history and the national view) *HA* 1/2003

<sup>16</sup> Pentti Renvall (1967), *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Peltonen, <http://www.helsinki.fi/historia/yhdistys/julk/renvall/peltonen.html>

consensus. The existence of one single historical "truth" means that all conflicts can be solved and overcome. Some have seen his uncompromising outlook as a reaction to the traumatic experience of the civil war in 1918.

A mixture of these ideas even among 1990's historians is not rare, although the notion of the nation as construction seems to be quietly accepted by the majority. Even when nationalism is seen as a tool rather than an innate urge, it is seen as an inevitable and ultimately beneficial tool, since it leads to national right to self-determination and protection of the culture of that particular nation. A post-modern questioning of an essentialist interpretation of "nation" does not seem to have influenced the historical discipline as much as other academic fields. However, other academic disciplines and historians of other universities and colleges outside Helsinki and Turku, the traditional seats of academy, have been more open for new ideas and theoretical approaches earlier on. The strong traditions and the high status of history as a discipline may have prevented a cross-pollination with social science and literary studies.

The radicalism of the 1960's and 1970's is an integral part of the Finnish historian's image of the past, but some have argued that it did not produce anything exceptional in the field of historical studies.<sup>18</sup> Others have pointed out that during this time, a greater acceptance and interest for social conflicts and conflicting ideologies within the nation was awakened among historians and other scholars alike.<sup>19</sup> However, the proximity to the Soviet Union forced thinkers inspired by Marxism to choose between the equally narrow paths of Moscow-led party communism or faithfulness to the Finnish national project. Historian Juha Sihvola has shown that the radical left was soon integrated in the political machinery of the time and were put into the service of the same national ideology that they had attempted to question.<sup>20</sup> Not even the fall of the Soviet Union could erase the rhetorics of consensus and unanimity from Finnish historical culture. Sihvola has noted that the national project has still not disappeared from the agenda, although it might have changed shape from a defensive attitude towards the USSR, to a Europe-focused interest in cultural consciousness and

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<sup>18</sup> Eino Jutikkala, "Yleisen historian asema vahvistumassa", HA 1/2003 (80) Jutikkala was HA:s editor-in-chief during the 1970's and he claims that the chief inheritances of the age of radicalism were the myth that Finland's independence was a gift from Lenin, and that the "Freedom War" epithet of the civil war of 1918 has become rare.

<sup>19</sup> Sihvola 2003 (3)

<sup>20</sup> Juha Sihvola: "Globalisaatio, eurooppalaiset arvot ja kansallinen identiteetti" (Globalization, European values and national identity) HA 4/2000 (301)

economical competitiveness.<sup>21</sup> The field has also opened up studies that focus on other identities than the national.

#### 4. Views on The Historian's Role in Finnish Historical Reviews

Each issue of HA (and HTF, generally) has a theme. The national theme occurs often and maintains its popularity and actuality throughout the 1990's.<sup>22</sup> In addition to such theme issues, the sheer volume of national history that is produced, reviewed and debated in the periodicals shows that whether consciously expressed or not, the national perspective weighs heavily in the field of historical studies. In the following study, two most important roles for the Finnish historian can be discerned from this material – the *Healer of national unity* and the *Defender of the nation*. They are by no means mutually exclusive or the only identification models available for historians. However, they are closely connected to the notion of the historian as an active participant in nation-building. The discussions about these roles show historians reflecting over their own role as producers and mediators of history, and how the history that they produce is linked to the "grand narrative" of the society, the people and the nation as a whole.

Juhani Mylly announces the end of the national project in HA 1/97, in his in-depth analysis of the history of Finnish historiography.<sup>23</sup> "The great national project of Finnish historiography has with its old traditions reached its way's end. It had a programme, a supporting ideology, and a cultural task. What is left to us?" The 1990's were indeed a time of self-reflection for the Finnish historians, but they did not necessarily agree about the end of the national project. There were quite a few historians who were ready to defend their traditional national mission. Some went as far as to defend what they saw as "strong and healthy" nationalism, claiming it to be "a necessary prerequisite for survival next to an imperialistic superpower".<sup>24</sup> In the next chapters, as I study the two predominant roles in the self-perception of historians, I will hopefully also show the discord and variation among the

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. (6)

<sup>22</sup> For example, the 2/92 issue of HA was titled "Suomi ja Suomalaiset" (Finland and the Finns), the very next issue was "Kansakunnan muisti ja menneisyys" (The memory and past of the nation). Interestingly, in 1992 HST also addressed similar themes in issue 4/1992 with articles such as "Beroende och osjälvständighet i Finlands moderna historia" (Dependence and subordination in Finland's modern history) and "Finland och imperiernas fall" (Finland and the fall of the empires), depicting Finland rather as dependent on outside powers and relations than as an independent "actor". The national boom of the early 90's has been repeated ten years later with such themes as "The national mission of history in the past and in the present" (HA 1/03)

<sup>23</sup> Juhani Mylly: "Sukellus suomalaiseen historiakirjoitukseen" (A dive into Finnish historiography) HA 1/97 (15)

<sup>24</sup> Pertti Pesonen & Olavi Riihinen, *Dynamic Finland – The Political System and the Welfare State*. 2000 (55)

identities that historians perceive for themselves. However, these identities are defined within a discourse of nation-building and thus framed in a limiting context.

#### 4.1 *The Historian as Healer of the Traumatic Past*

The legacy of previous centuries has been a tough subject for the historians to wrestle with. This burden of history has sometimes been said to be the reason for the seeming "time-lag" in Finnish historical sciences, concerning the post-modern turn. The Rankean approach is still a strong alternative for many historians, because there is a genuine need to find out *wie es eigentlich gewesen*. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1990 was sometimes perceived as a belated victory, and many historians took the opportunity to voice criticism against previous, "politically correct" interpretations of historical events, which by closer scrutiny turned out to have been problematised even in the 1960's and 1970's. Nevertheless, the mere idea that the 1990's was a period of upheaval was contagious and inspiring.

The civil war of 1918 has ever since its beginnings been an inflamed subject of discussion. Acclaimed historian Heikki Ylikangas' *Tie Tampereelle* (The Road to Tampere, 1990) received mixed criticism when it was reviewed in HA and HTF. Besides much praise, Rasila criticised Ylikangas for reverting to "accusations" and forgetting the why-question, "the most important question for a historian". Only a purely logical understanding would help to avoid the repetition of the mistakes that were made in the past.<sup>25</sup> While Ylikangas' work can be interpreted as an emancipatory attempt at healing by exposing the wound, Rasila's criticism is a warning against cutting too deep and causing more infections. Psychohistorian Juha Siltala uses the controversial term "ethnic cleansing" to explain his impressions of *Tie Tampereelle*. He tries to explain and nuance the thinking of the white side, which was expressed in terminology of "cleansing" and "disease". For Siltala, the psychological causes and reactions are of greatest interest. He sees even Ylikangas as influenced by national idealism, i.e. a wish to diminish the horrors of the war in favour of a more "rational" image of the people. It was a severe shock to the national idealists in 1918 to witness – and participate in – atrocities committed by Finns against Finns. This resulted in the denial of irrational cruelty on both sides, and an attempt to rationalize those occurrences of violence

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<sup>25</sup> Rasila: "Verevä kuvaus vuoden kahdeksantoista sodasta" (Full-blooded depiction of the war of the year eighteen) HA 1993

that could not be denied.<sup>26</sup> Siltala suggests that a way out of the vicious circle of projective identification could be to recognise and accept the same all-too-human features in oneself as in the enemy. Siltala's critique can be interpreted as a critique of the historian's role as a healer. For Siltala, mutual understanding is an alternative way of healing which fits well to his interest in psychohistory.

Intense debates concern correct terminology. Historians still cannot agree what to call the civil war that devastated Finland in 1918. Traditionally, those that sympathized with the white side have called it a "Freedom War", while more neutral or leftist commentators have used terms such as "Civil/Civic War" or "Brothers' War".<sup>27</sup> A second, less infected debate concerns the correct name of the pre-1809 Swedish state, and whether it is correct to call it *Ruotsi-Suomi* (Sweden-Finland – as many Finnish historians have written in Finnish-language publications) and whether it's merely "fashionable" to say *Ruotsi* (Sweden).<sup>28</sup> In the same issue of HA, it is possible to find both an openly critical stance towards the ahistorical double name and an article that unproblematically uses "Ruotsi-Suomi" interchangeably with "Ruotsi".<sup>29</sup> Surprisingly, the attitudes towards Sweden have hardly been explored. An exception is an article by Lauri Karvonen in HST<sup>30</sup>. Karvonen attempts to reconcile the "hate-love-relationship" to the western neighbour by advocating the importance of the inherited institutions from the Swedish reign, and by claiming that Finns have refused to acknowledge their fundamental value. He does not interpret history in a new and revolutionary manner, he merely repeats the arguments that conservative and Swedish-speaking debaters confronted Finnish nationalist movements with in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

If the interpretation of the Swedish reign has sometimes been quite bitter<sup>31</sup>, the prevailing view on the period of the autonomous grand-duchy of Finland under the tsar of Russia (1809-1917) has been ambivalent as well. Traditionally, the first tsars were depicted as liberal and the "national awakening" was seen as an auspicious consequence of the war in 1809. However, as nationalism spread throughout Europe, a similar "national awakening" in

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<sup>26</sup> Juha Siltala: "Etninen puhdistus Suomessa 1918" (Ethnic cleansing in Finland 1918) HA 1993

<sup>27</sup> Other terms include: *Kapina* (Revolt), *Luokkasota* (Class War), *Vallankumous* (Revolution), and the height of political correctness, *vuoden 1918 tapahtumat* (events of the year 1918). HA 1993/2

<sup>28</sup> HA 1990/2 (170)

<sup>29</sup> Pertti Haapala: "Menneisyyden vartijat" (Guardians of the past) HA 1/97 (22); Ali Pylkkänen: "Palkka-armeija ei ole pelkkä puolustuksellinen ratkaisu" (A mercenary army is not a mere defence solution) HA 1/97 (60-63)

<sup>30</sup> Lauri Karvonen: "Likadan på ett annat sätt. Sverige som motpol och modell" (The same in a different way. Sweden as antithesis and model) HST 4/1992 (529-547)

<sup>31</sup> Mauno Jokipii: "Ruotsin suomalaisten historia jatkuu" (The history of the Finns in Sweden continues) HA 4/1993 (337)

Russia lead to conflict as Russian leaders sought to incorporate Finland more firmly in their nation-cum-empire. Thus, the russification periods and revolutionary years of 1880-1917 were viewed as a time of struggle, necessary for the birth of an independent national consciousness. After the fall of the Soviet Union, it has become an interesting challenge to many writers to question the rosy image of the Autonomy period.<sup>32</sup> Some choose to emphasize the role of the Swedish heritage as a bulwark against russification, others point out the benefits of Russian contacts to the Finnish intelligentsia, bourgeoisie and officers in terms of cultural inspiration, career opportunities and trading.<sup>33</sup> The even more crisis-ridden history of Fenno-Russian relations in the 20th century was finally opened up for researchers both within and without the academy thanks to the availability of new sources, which made it possible to address this question and to reach Russian opinions and attitudes.<sup>34</sup>

Finnish historians are aware of the fact that some historians of other nations might be less affected by such problems. The view on neighbouring Sweden seems to be influenced by this idea, illuminated by an article such as Panu Pulma's in HA 4/1993.<sup>35</sup> Following the spring '93 debate in the Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* about the present and future of historical research and historiography, he proceeds to give an overview of the specific "Swedish" qualities in the debate. In contrast to Finnish historians, the Swedes seem to feel a problematic distance to the general public. Pulma does not attempt to analyze the Swedish situation or voice his own opinion on the issues, one can however sense a fine touch of sarcasm in the title of the article: "The boredom of history – history debate the Swedish way". The notion of Swedish history being boring is typical for the Finnish image of the Swedes as a people lacking contact with their history, due to the enviably long period of peace and prosperity that they have enjoyed.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ohto Manninen: "Onnellinen kansa – itsenäistynä Suomi" (A happy people – a Finland that becomes independent) HA 1/1997 (1-2)

<sup>33</sup> e. g.: Max Engman: "Finnar, finländare och svenskar. Nationalskolor och mångspråkighet i Petersburg" (Finns, Finlanders and Swedes. National Schools and Multilingualism in Petersburg) HTF 2/1999 (168)

<sup>34</sup> "Tallinnalle palautettiin historia" (History was returned to Tallinn); "Luovutetun Karjalan arkistot" (The archives of conceded Karelia) HA 1/1991

<sup>35</sup> Panu Pulma: "Historian tylsyys – historiakeskustelua ruotsalaisittain" (The boredom of history – history debate the Swedish way) HA 4/1993 (303-307)

<sup>36</sup> Elmgren: *Den allrakäraste fienden* (The Dearest of Enemies) 2002 (51-52)

#### 4.2 The Historian as Defender of the Nation

A tendency to defend the creative and constructive qualities of nationalism can be detected among some historians. Professor of war history and editor of HA, Ohto Manninen, speaks of "nationalism, that is, affinity that has developed in the past".<sup>37</sup> "Troubles and joys are experienced primarily within the state and the national community," he claims.<sup>38</sup> He comments on the symbolic significance of the renaming of the State Archives to the National Archives.<sup>39</sup> Manninen sees this as a step towards the republican traditions of the United States and France, while the neighbours – Russia/USSR (*gosudarstvennyj arhiv*), Estonia (*riiklike ajaloo arhiiv*) and "the Nordic brother peoples'" (*riksarkivet*) are left behind with the monarchist and state-lead past. "Maybe Finland's identity is better retained in a National Archive than in a [federal] state archive?" Manninen asks, referring to the membership in the EU.<sup>40</sup> Manninen has also defended the use of the term "Freedom War" in debates about the character of the civil war of 1918<sup>41</sup>. It would not be a far-fetched guess to assume that this stems from his conservative views on the nation and its meaning to a historian. In a way, the defenders of the nation may view themselves as healers of traumas in the past, because a stronger national unity and consensus is seen as a remedy against conflicts in the present and in the future.

Aira Kemiläinen, professor emerita and internationally acclaimed expert on racial stereotyping in history, defends nationalism in a review of Eric Hobsbawm's standard work on the issue and points at some blind spots in his analysis. Hobsbawm does not realize, she says, "that the linguistic nationalism meant the struggle of whole populations to reach education, and social as well as political power of influence."<sup>42</sup> Hobsbawm's work, she says, "is one-sided, because it does not emphasize the importance of language and culture to the successful development of the individual and the group."<sup>43</sup> The problems that Kemiläinen perceives in Hobsbawm's text are seen from a specifically Finnish perspective. She is sensitive to the opinions of a British and Marxist historian, and she suspects that his

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<sup>37</sup> Ohto Manninen: "Tempora mutantur" HA 3/1991

<sup>38</sup> Ohto Manninen: "Sotamuistoja" (War Memories) HA 2/1994 (97)

<sup>39</sup> However, only the Finnish name was changed, while the Swedish name remained *Riksarkivet*, which replaced the original *Statsarkivet* (State Archives) in the 1930's. The English language does not do justice to the difference between "rike" and "stat", that is, a monarchical state (such as the German Reich) and a state in general.

<sup>40</sup> Ohto Manninen: "KanA vai KansA" HA 4/1994 (289)

<sup>41</sup> Ohto Manninen: "Vapaussota" (Freedom War) HA 1993/2

<sup>42</sup> Kemiläinen, HA 93/2

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

perspective as a British citizen hinders him from understanding the benefits of a "national awakening". While Kemiläinen criticises Hobsbawm for having a condescending British point of view towards small nation-states' struggle for national independence, she does not acknowledge that Hobsbawm's migrant background might have influenced his views on nationalism in quite a different manner. Kemiläinen is not ready to take the step towards a relativist view on nationalism and her own nation's past.

Tony Judt, director of the Remarque Institute at New York University, says that Hobsbawm "clings to a pernicious illusion of the late Enlightenment: that if one can promise a benevolent outcome it would be worth the human cost. But one of the great lessons of the 20th century is that it's not true."<sup>44</sup> Just as nationalism is excused by its qualities as an inspiring and uniting force in the struggle for democracy and national self-determination, so are various other ideologies defended by their apologetes with reference to good intentions or chosen beneficial results. The dark side of the ideology is explained as an exceptional occurrence, due to the deteriorating influences of other factors. Kemiläinen clings to nationalism as if it is still necessary to justify the existence of an independent Finnish nation.

If apologetes of nationalism sometimes find a forum in HA, the contributors to HST seem to have been much more critical. The Finland-Swedish historians have gained a critical perspective of the monocultural concept of nation à la Snellman, as representatives of a linguistic minority.<sup>45</sup> However, the traditional defence consists of references to a "Swedish" inheritance that easily fits into the ideal of a modern "Nordic" or "European" nation. This ideal is depicted as somehow more "truthful" and original than the Finnish-nationalist one, mainly because the reference points lie deeper in the past. Historians such as Henrik Stenius and Matti Klinge lean towards this view, while Max Engman and Henrik Meinander combine a reconciling attitude with a critical eye on old ideals.<sup>46</sup> For example, Engman's subtle critique of the anti-Swedish propaganda of the Finnish national movements in the early 1930's can be read as a commentary on contemporary attitudes towards Sweden and Swedish history in Finland.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Maya Jaggi, "A Question Of Faith" *The Guardian*, September 14, 2002

<sup>45</sup> Henrik Stenius, "Finskhetens rörelsens historia fortfarande oskriven" (History of the Finnishness Movement Still Unwritten) HST 2/1992 (284)

<sup>46</sup> Max Engman, "Europa som tanke, upplevelse och verklighet" (Europe as Thought, Experience and Reality) HST 2/1994 (301)

<sup>47</sup> Max Engman: "Konungen eller hakkapeliterna? Gustav Adolfsminnet i Finland 1932" (The King or the Hakkapelites? Memorials of Gustavus Adolphus in Finland 1932) HST 4/1990 (573)



The idea of a national consciousness has worked as a unifying force in Finland's case, supporting political activism for democracy and motivating efforts and sacrifices for a common cause.<sup>48</sup> It has also in some ways encouraged creativity and competitiveness in the fields of art, science, and sports. However, the definition of *us* has been built on the notion that the differences to *the others* must be emphasized.<sup>49</sup> The Finnish nation, created in a process of conflicts between interest groups within and without, embraces the idea of consensus. The dissent and conflict is projected on *the others* outside the nation. The ideology of nationalism is very flexible but not easy to monopolize. Even if some politicians have attempted to use the power of nationalism for democratic purposes, there has always been plenty of other activists who have utilized the same arguments – national right to self-determination, freedom, a common Finnish spirit and so on – for non-democratic and anti-humanist purposes. If the national ideals stay unquestioned and are taken for granted, the negative sides of nationalism – “Othering”, border building, oppression of minorities and non-conformist elements that can be perceived as a threat to the nation – can easily take hold of the political agenda. The idea of the nation is connected to a never-ending struggle against real or imagined enemies that threaten its existence by questioning its real or imagined borders.

In more subtle ways, the defence of the nation continues in a historical discourse that persistently utilizes the terminology of nationalism without questioning the definition and the historical roots of the words. This is also an effect of the exclusively national focus of many Finnish historians – studies that solely concern Finland easily reproduce inherited ideas about nationhood and Finnishness. Comparative studies about the role of historians and self-reflections among colleagues in other countries are rare and focus on neighbours that can serve as a contrast – for example, the Swedish historians with their “boring” history and Russian historians whose views on history are assumed to be politically tainted and which are traditionally “read between the lines” by their Finnish colleagues.

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<sup>48</sup> This has also been presented as a beneficial effect of (“liberal”) nationalism by scholars of political science, for instance Margaret Moore, and with some modifications by David Brown, in *Nations and Nationalism* 7(1)2001 and 5(2)1999 respectively.

<sup>49</sup> Made clear in a famous Finnish slogan from the 19th century: *Swedes we are not, Russians we will not become – then let us be Finns!*

### 4.3 Conclusion

The Finnish historians' situation in the 1990's has been a struggle between two poles – the dream of national unity versus the reality of conflicting interest groups divided by class, language, culture, religion and ideology. Dealing with these matters, they have chosen different approaches – either adhering to a traditional grand narrative of the nation and defending the ideology that this narrative is built upon, or acting as *the healer of history*. The latter can be achieved either by exposing hitherto unacknowledged "diseases" or by mediating in conflicts between interest groups. After the fall of the Soviet Union and the EU-membership, new questions are formulated and old questions demand new answers. A fascinating theme that continues through the years is the ready *defence* of the historian's national mission, while other historians speak about the death of the nation state. Finnish historians have been constantly aware of the nation-building past of history as science, and discuss this openly. History as science carries the ideology of the nation-state in itself, just as the Finnish people might be described as carrying a "burden of history". The historians are still struggling with the national ideals of consensus and continuity, because the Finnish nation is a contradictory and perpetually threatened construction, in fact, constructed upon the very real sense of inner and outer threats against the ideal (but unobtainable) unity.

The seemingly academic bickering about the "true" names for important events in history is a sign of a trauma. I interpret this dilemma as a struggle for the grand narrative – to be able to tell a coherent (hi)story about a (presumed) nation, one has to agree on what to call the deciding events and factors that shape that story. If one views Finnish history through national frames, these problems appear, because the frame is merely an idealistic construction. The historical consciousness of the historians is shaped by their image of the nation-state. Conflicting images reveal the faultlines in this construction. This insecurity about the correct terminology is a source of perpetual re-evaluation of - and hopefully also refreshing change in - the historical culture.

As legitimate experts on the past, the Finnish historians had to construct a past for the young Finnish nation and the Finnish state; they had to provide explanations for traumatic events in the present and in the past, and they were expected to contribute to the "correct" education of children and adolescents. Swedish historians have occasionally imagined themselves as secluded from society in the ivory tower of scientific ideals – it is quite another issue that

their seemingly objective research has often reproduced the contemporary political agenda. Their Finnish colleagues have been too busy dealing with the demands of society and nation to play such games of hide-and-seek. Thus, it is difficult to draw a definite line between the historiographical community and the historical culture that permeates the entire society. The role of the historian is reconciled with its original purpose - the national mission.

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