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Translating Modernity: Visions and Uses of Europe in
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Stefan Nygård

European University Institute
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Abstract

Translating modernity to the periphery is a recurring theme in the discussions on Europe at its geo-cultural margins. In small and young countries such as Finland, “Europe” has been mobilized for nation-building in terms of accumulating cultural capital and, conversely, for challenging the strong national imperative in these countries; seeing things “from a European perspective” has often meant claiming to have a detached bird’s eye view on national questions. This article looks at some expressions of these dynamics in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Finland, notably within the cultural field, where identification with Europe has been articulated at the intersection of external pressures and internal debates, and in relation to other regional concepts such as Scandinavia.

Keywords

Europe, Finland, modernity, nineteenth and twentieth century, peripheries, cultural transfers.

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Stefan Nygård

Max Weber Fellow 2011-2012 and 2012-2013

Introduction

Diverging perceptions of Europe result from the wide range of contexts and positions in the cultural and political debates that “Europe” relates to in different national settings. This article looks at localized visions of Europe in Finland, notably in the cultural field, where identification with Europe has been articulated at the intersection of external pressures and internal dynamics, and in relation to other regional concepts such as Scandinavia. The focus is primarily on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the basic patterns of identification through inclusion and exclusion were established, with Europe fluctuating between “us” and “other” depending on the political and cultural viewpoint. Contingent notions of Europe in Finland are thus considered as non-essential elements of self-images (Malmborg & Stråth 2002), which form an intimate part of national political and cultural discourses.

Belonging and demarcation

The way Finland has identified with Europe since the formation of a Finnish nation and state in the nineteenth century is typically from its position as a geo-cultural border area, often as an outpost of “European values”, comparable to the way cultural identity discourses have been framed in the neighboring Baltic States. This hardly comes as a surprise considering the fact that Finland in the nineteenth century formed part of the margins of an empire, with typically unclear border zones, and in the following century belonged to the interest sphere of another empire. As geographical Europe lacks natural borders in the East, and since Russia’s European identity has been a topic of debate for centuries, Finland’s civilizational border-identity between Russia and Scandinavia has been a major concern in the country’s history.

From the Russian conquest in 1809 of the eastern parts of Sweden, transformed into a separate political entity known as the Grand Duchy of Finland, until independence in 1917, Finland played the double role of both Russia’s link to Europe and the Eastern outpost of “European” social, cultural and legal traditions, which Finland had inherited from the Swedish era. The notion of representing a Northern European polity with a Scandinavian type of social structure and political and religious culture is a recurring theme in the discourses on Finnish nationhood in relation to Western civilization. Especially in the twentieth century the idea of forming a “bulwark of Western civilization” merged with economic and security policy considerations in shaping the way Finns have related to Europe, today also as part of the European Union’s Eastern border (Eskola et al. 2011; Klinge 2003; Meinander 2002). When cultural identification is defined in terms of demarcation and belonging within a general framework of opposites such as North and South, East and West, Centre and Periphery, visions of Europe in Finland tend to focus more on demarcation when the North-South angle is the viewpoint and more on belonging along the East-West scale. The ambiguity of its position between center and periphery is discussed later in the article.

The political history of Finland exemplifies the predicament of the small and peripheral nations of Europe seeking to adjust themselves to shifts in the balance of power in and around Europe. The major events in Finnish history have consequently coincided with events beyond the control of the inhabitants of the region. This was the case when what was to become Finland was conquered by Russia as the result of the Franco-Russian treaty between Napoleon and Alexander I in 1807. This was also the case a century later when Finland declared independence in the absence of a Russian military presence in the country at the time of the Russian revolution. Between these two events a Finnish nation and culture was shaped in a process where the educated elites struggled to form a common culture with the people, notably the landowning peasants. The Finnish language gradually replaced Swedish, initially to a large extent through voluntary linguistic conversion among the Swedish-speaking elites. Another part of the project consisted in “translating Europe”, in emulating and appropriating cultural institutions, art and literature, whereby the latecomers asserted themselves as European nations sharing a Western cultural heritage. By the middle of the nineteenth century the Finnish national movement was well on its way towards creating a nation for the newly formed state, by unifying an agrarian people under God and the Russian Czar, and in between them a loyal

intelligentsia with a strong sense of representing and educating the people. In contrast to other minority regions in the empire a non-conflictual relationship with Russia, effectively managed by the educated elites, was maintained and regarded as a condition for the country's economic and administrative autonomy (Klinge 1996; Alapuro 1988 & 2004).

The most celebrated cultural achievements in Finland, such as the works of Sibelius and the painter Albert Edelfelt, were born at the intersection between a Finnish "people" and "Europe". The "Golden era" of Finnish painting and music around 1900 was, not uncommonly, born out of a political struggle over the degree of self-rule at a time when the Russian empire was strengthening its control over the borderlands, with sentiments of national enthusiasm growing as a response to external threats. In this struggle "Europe" was mobilized in the defense of what was portrayed as the Eastern outpost of its cultural sphere. In the wake of the Dreyfus affair in France, which by the turn of the century had become a European event engaging intellectuals against the arbitrary use of state power, the conditions were favorable for internationalizing the defense of the rights of small states against empires. The Finns profited from the sensitivity towards injustices committed between asymmetrical parts triggered by the affair, by launching a massive campaign for the cause of Finland abroad. Among other things the campaign produced an address in 1899 ("Pro Finlandia") intended for the Czar and signed by over 1000 leading European intellectuals, as well as a Finnish-French journal with the title *L'Européen* (1901–1905).¹

When shifted away from the political and intellectual elites and the orientation towards "Europe" in the struggle for Finnish autonomy, the relationship with Russia, and especially Saint Petersburg, appears less conflictual. For the numerous Finns who, in the nineteenth century, made careers in the Russian military, bureaucracy, industry and commerce, Russia was the land of opportunities and the imperial capital Saint Petersburg its center. Facilitated by improved sea and land communications in the middle of the century, the city functioned as a gate to the rest of Russia, and in terms of Finnish population it was also Finland's second largest city (Engman 2000).

The notion of civilizational bulwark was however strengthened in the conditions of the constitutional struggle over Finland's position in the empire towards the end of the nineteenth century. The topic had been part of the earlier discussions on Finnish nationhood, in relation to language and cultural orientation. The main parties in this debate were the Finnish nationalists, the so-called Fennomans, which based themselves mainly on the peasants and the clergy, and a liberal-constitutionalist fraction, which was supported by the urban middle and upper classes. The former sought to base nationhood on the Finnish language, ethnicity and the country's predominantly rural population, whereas the liberals emphasized legal and cultural traditions. The latter also underlined the relationship between the Swedish language and culture, claiming that Sweden and Scandinavia provided the necessary link between Finland and Europe, from medieval Christianization to more recent political culture. According to many liberals, Finland as a Scandinavian country was part of Protestant Europe, civilized and constitutional, whereas Finland without this link was barbaric. National identity should therefore be based on social and legal traditions, rather than language and ethnicity, although a Swedish nationalism in Finland also gained strength in the 1870s. For the Fennomans, "Europe" was more ambiguous. As their main concerns were the Finnish language, ethnicity and the capacity of Finland to stand on its own, they placed a greater emphasis on demarcation vis-à-vis Scandinavia. Importantly Russia, in the interest of deepening the cultural divide between Finland and the Swedish realm to support the political boundary, supported the Fennomans (e.g. Klinge 1996; Liikanen 1995; Meinander 2002).

The Fennoman-liberal polarization was thus not only about language, but also about how to understand Finland in relation to its significant others and to Europe. In simplified terms, the Fennomans argued that, because of geography, a lot had indeed been filtered through Sweden, but its role was merely to transfer European culture that originated elsewhere: classical antiquity in Athens; Christianity in Rome; commercially Germany was more important than Sweden; France had been the

¹ The marketing of Finland abroad had already begun earlier with a volume on *Finland in the nineteenth century* from 1893, focusing on Finnish legal and social structures and printed in six different languages, and it culminated in Finland's representation in the universal exhibition in Paris in 1900 (Smeds 1996: 328-336).

source of science and learning in the Middle Ages etc. As for the all-important question of language, the Fennomans regarded German and French as far more important links to European civilization than Swedish. Being equally useless to foreigners as the Finnish language, they argued that the liberals overstressed the importance of Swedish in relating Finland to European culture. It made more sense to import Europe “directly from the source” rather than mediated through Scandinavia. Consequently, there was no reason to keep Swedish as a “civilizational” language in Finland.² Under the guidance of the historian-politician Yrjö Koskinen the Fennoman movement from the 1860s became increasingly focused on presenting the Swedish era in a negative light. In tracing the continuity of Finnish nationhood backwards in time, Yrjö Koskinen depicted over six hundred years of Swedish rule as a prolonged suppression and discrimination of the Finnish nation.

The dispute between Fennomans and liberals was also about the relationship between nationalism and modernity. According to the liberals and the pro-European commercial bourgeoisie, all obstacles to westward integration should be removed in the interest of liberal economy, industrialization, communications and urbanization. In their defense of Finnish industry the Fennomans dismissed this view, arguing that industrialization should be controlled by the Finnish state in the interest of avoiding an invasion of foreign cultures and languages in Finland (Kuisma 1993). The nationalists perceived modernity as a series of parallel national trajectories, the Finnish nation-state alongside other nation-states, whereas the liberals, especially the more nationally disillusioned liberals of the late nineteenth century, emphasized transnational modernity and referred to Europe as a loosely defined progressive other that was contrasted to national anti-modernity. From their respective standpoints, both sides contributed to the consolidation of Finland vis-à-vis Russia. Often, but not always, they agreed that being European was a constituent element of Finnish identity. The differences lay in how to maintain this position and which transfer agents and routes should be preferred. Furthermore, while the liberals were clearly focused on establishing a civilizational border between Finland and Russia, the Finnish nationalists were more inclined towards including also Russia in the European cultural sphere. And if Russia was included, Finland was less of a periphery in Europe. This was certainly the case from an everyday perspective, considering the importance of Saint Petersburg for Finland, in terms of commerce, careers and cultural exchange (Engman 2000).

Hence the notion of Finland as a bulwark of Western civilization has a long history, which is related to internal political struggles between liberal and Fennoman visions of Europe. The former were closely associated with Swedish and Scandinavian culture, the latter programmatically not. For liberal intellectuals who identified to a lesser degree with the national project, especially as the Fennoman movement progressed, Europe functioned as a reference in defending positions in internal political debates as well as an alternative value community.

Europeanization and its critics

Finnish culture has been shaped at the intersection of appropriating “European” culture and intellectual life, expressed for example in the neo-classic architecture of early nineteenth-century historical Helsinki, and drawing on popular culture and a normative past as the basis of national community. Moreover, the notion of periphery has played an important role in the formation of Nordic identities. The geographical and cultural distance to the continent has, according to Matti Klinge, been translated into a reflection of the movements that characterize the wealthier civilizations of the South and as an assertion of a “uniqueness of remoteness”, where “Europe” features both as “other” and as “we” (Klinge 2003).

The process of cultural transfer in countries such as Finland is different from less peripheral regions. In the absence of the universalizing tendency of the cultural “centers”, actors in the peripheries and in marginal language regions are conspicuously aware of the importance of translation, transfer and appropriation in cultural and political life. The accumulation of national cultural resources has, in this light, been carried out in a process of appropriating “Europe”, from canonized literary works, to cultural and educational institutions, to the political language (Stenius 2004).

² These positions are summed up in the Fennoman journal *Uusi Suometar* 4.10.1869, p. 2-3.

In the field of social and political debate, the logic of cultural asymmetry and catching-up has made possible what Pauli Kettunen, with an expression from Alexander Gerschenkron, describes as “the advantages of backwardness”. International comparison being a key ingredient in the construction of national societies, the nation-building elites deliberately adopted the distinction between center and periphery. The elites as well as popular movements “could and should define their political tasks on the basis of knowledge already available in more developed – or more ‘civilized’ countries.” This type of positioning implied a peculiar form of “avant-gardism” among the intellectual and political elites of the periphery, meaning that problems could be anticipated, and their solutions prepared, by learning from the experiences and mistakes of more advanced societies. Finnish questions were, for example in relation to the labor question in the late nineteenth century, to be examined “from a European perspective” (Kettunen 2011: 22). Gerard Delanty suggests that such translation processes help to understand modernity beyond universalism and particularism, and that modernity in itself entails a particular logic by which translation becomes the very form of culture: “Modernity as a form of translation comes into play when culture becomes the condition of translation and where there are only translations.” (Delanty 2005: 443-445, 450). Of course, all cultures are ‘hybrid’, to use a fashionable term, but the awareness of the hybridity of national cultures is pronounced in small countries, where intellectuals and political actors are by necessity constantly involved in the activity of translating culture.

There are significant variations in the way the transfer of culture is approached in different types of peripheries even within “Norden”, where the older states, Sweden and Denmark, today hardly conceive of their geocultural position as peripheral in the way that is perhaps more characteristic of Finland and Norway. Sweden and Denmark may be closer to what in world-systems theory is referred to as the “semi-peripheries”, which see themselves as less dependent on the “centers”. In intellectual life this is manifested in Denmark’s role as the “gateway” to Europe for the other Scandinavian countries, and for European culture to Scandinavia. In Sweden, the country’s former position as a great European power has, in cultural life, taken the form of a certain degree of self-sufficiency, which according to Johan Strang, in the context of twentieth-century philosophy, means that the need to translate and incorporate “foreign” innovations into the national tradition has been more pronounced than in the neighboring countries Finland and Norway, where importing culture without changing the labels has been more accepted (Strang 2010: 169-196). In early twentieth-century Finland, with its modest cultural resources, there was thus comparatively little resistance in the form of established institutions or cultural traditions to overcome in order to introduce something new. In this situation, with Finland still in the midst of the process of “catching up” – in terms of accumulating cultural capital – the writer Eino Leino sarcastically notes that there was plenty of room “for the Gods of all people and all times” (Leino 1904). The downside of such open-mindedness was the lack of opportunities for specialization, leading Leino to complain about the rather bland form of eclecticism that according to him characterized Finnish cultural life.

Cultural import and Europeanization was an intimate part of the agenda in the first modern type of cultural journal in the Finnish language, *Valvoja* (“the Observer”), founded in 1880. Its program was described as an attempt to “humanize” or “Europeanize” the Finnish national movement. From this time, and well into the twentieth century, rival fractions within the cultural field competed in opening windows to Europe, which was the declared aim of virtually all cultural journals in Finland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Zilliacus & Knif 1985; Tuusvuori 2007). Europe was associated with modernization and the Finnish movement should, according to a younger fraction among the Fennomans, pay closer attention to the latest trends in European cultural life. Europeanization of course meant different things to different groups, but what they often had in common was that Europe was mobilized as an argument in a national debate, as a way of strengthening a critical position in a local context through internationalization.

At this time many Finnish intellectuals clearly conceived of themselves as translators of European modernity to the periphery through cultural import. Translation involved everything from communicating experiences encountered on travels in Europe to the introduction of artistic and intellectual currents and references to European journals and newspapers. In a letter to Georg Brandes,

the Danish critic and “Great European” as Nietzsche called him, the Finnish philologist and critic Werner Söderhjelm writes in 1900:

You know that I have always greatly sympathized with the Finnish efforts, and that I know of no higher objective for us, than to dress West-European culture in their forms, to make it comprehensible and gradually also to merge it with the peculiar Finnish mind-set, without transforming the latter (Söderhjelm 1900).

In the letter Söderhjelm, who unsuccessfully tried to create a balance between the Finnish and Swedish positions in the cultural debate, also expressed his disappointment with the negative view of Scandinavia in Finland at the time. Scandinavia, he claims, “is after all our closest route to Western Europe and for most there is no need to look further to have one’s intellectual needs satisfied to a higher extent than one can digest”.

There was thus clearly an elitist dimension to cultural mediation, conceived of as bringing modernity to the periphery. Claiming to have superior knowledge of a modernity that had not yet arrived in Finland was, however, not necessarily a successful strategy. The centre/periphery dichotomy could also work the other way around, by turning the “curse” of being on the periphery of Europe into a virtue. This way of describing Finland’s relationship to “Europe” – recognizing the unfortunate destiny of being born in a barren land far away from the centers of civilization, yet surrendering to geography and fate – is a recurring theme in the national romantic literature of the most influential nineteenth century Finnish intellectuals, such as Johan Ludvig Runeberg, Johan Vilhelm Snellman and Zacharias Topelius. In the context of the initial phases of nation building in the early nineteenth century, this perspective had been inspired by the romantic ideals of the higher moral standards of “mountain people”. On the one hand such a notion was influenced by romantic exoticism; on the other, it gave the elites an opportunity to freely mold Finland into a nation, by leading the way towards the development of a national culture for the newly revived people. The focus was on the original expressions of national oral cultures, “Volk” poetry and idealization of the peasantry, drawing from comparisons with Greek and Serbian revivalism. Antiquarian nationalism focusing on the distant Golden age of Ancient Finns was also the most successful way of exporting Finnish culture abroad (Klinge 1996 & 2003; Fewster 2006).

Backwardness and catching-up in the cultural field

In the discourses on cultural identification in Finland, rejecting the label of European periphery has arguably not been a prominent concern. Finns still “go to Europe” and intellectuals have looked to Europe as something that can be instrumentalized for national goals, as an imagined value community, or as a reference to the intellectual and social life of cultural capitals that provide impulses and models to translate, emulate or reject. Finnish political culture has been shaped in just such a process of appropriating key political concepts from other languages, from the mid-nineteenth century when Finnish became an administrative language alongside Swedish and Russian. Positions were established and defended with the knowledge that they represented only one among a number of alternatives, and the political culture was formed by weighing different alternatives against each other, in the interest of finding a solution that harmonized with the local culture and the specific agendas of the actors involved (Hyvärinen et al. 2003).

Mutual observation, imitation and the transfer of ideas and expertise thus determined the way national cultures and self-images were forged in the course of the nineteenth century by European intellectuals operating on two levels simultaneously: the international intellectual space – the literary republic – and the national field. The intellectuals positioned themselves between their commitments in the national field and their allegiance to a cosmopolitan community (Nygård 2011). For peripheral intellectuals, under no illusion that the relationship was symmetrical between larger and smaller or more and less central units in this community, the interplay between national and international spaces could be employed for various strategic purposes.

The rhetoric of ‘catching up’ implied by notions of centers and peripheries has been criticized for being too schematic, for making the peripheries into passive recipients etc. There are good reasons for this critique, but there is also a danger of strengthening hierarchies by denying the existence of

asymmetries. The cultural peripheries have, no doubt, in many ways been dependent on the centers, but their dependency is of a particular kind that in no way denies the margins of their innovative potential or makes them into passive recipients, starting from the obvious point that everything that is imported has to be adjusted and domesticated, which in itself is an active process from which something new is born.

As the notion of catching up entailed the idea of a more advanced center as the source of diffusion of social and cultural innovations, individuals and groups gained from being associated with the center in different ways. In the interest of stressing the contrast, the internationally oriented peripheral avant-gardes sometimes deliberately accentuated the marginal position of their native countries. Writing in the 1880s, the philosopher Hjalmar Neiglick claimed that the only thing worse than Finland's geographical location was its position on the cultural map of Europe. Therefore, he insisted, "we must go to Europe and not return until we can bring a part of it back with us" (Quoted in Lagerborg 1942: 184). Neiglick was playing the European card in the same way as his contemporaries August Strindberg and Henrik Ibsen: referring to or choosing a voluntary exile in the cultural capitals of Europe and, with the help of foreign recognition, challenging dominant positions at home, by acting as the representatives of European modernity in the periphery.

Because the profits to be gained from recognition in the cultural centers were significant, the peripheral intellectuals made great efforts to overcome the obstacles that writers and intellectuals from minor language regions had to deal with, including seeing their works modified according to the agendas of the cultural mediators in the centers (Casanova 1999). The reward, in terms of symbolic capital associated with the centers, was something similar to the formula suggested by the cultural anthropologist Ulf Hannerz: surrender abroad is mastery at home (Hannerz 1990). Strindberg in the 1880s determinedly struggled to be recognized in Paris, as a French writer, by making compromises and adjustments to his texts in appropriating them for a French audience. For him, the process of domestication even entailed careful consideration of the physical appearance of the book and its typology, which he chose according to what he considered to be a typically French style (D'Amico 2010).

Ibsen, who spent 27 years in Italy and Germany, is another well-known Nordic example of the interplay between national and international spaces. Ibsen did have to make artistic sacrifices and compromises in internationalizing his work, and what he gained were broader markets, audiences and symbolic capital that he could rely on in addressing the Scandinavian cultural field, which, according to Narve Fulsås, remained his primary audience (Fulsås 2011). A lesser-known Finnish example is the philosopher Rolf Lagerborg (1874-1954), whose dissertation on the nature of morality was rejected on moral-political grounds by the University of Helsinki in 1900. Lagerborg was compensated for his misfortunes at home when, in 1903, he received the highest grade for a French version of the same dissertation at the Sorbonne, with Émile Durkheim among the jury members (Nygård 2011).

The recognition that Lagerborg received from the intellectual authorities in Paris became a point of reference to which he repeatedly returned in his struggles at home. Looking back at his cosmopolitan struggles in nationalist Finland, he later noted that appealing to an international community was, for some, effective, mainly because the country was "superlatively anxious about its reputation outward" (Lagerborg 1945: 380). Anti-nationalist intellectuals, such as Lagerborg, in early twentieth-century Finland defended a cosmopolitan position against the national imperative and the limited possibilities for specialization in the periphery. For the most part, however, their cosmopolitanism was of a local nature, as they remained firmly anchored in their national cultural fields, despite frequently acting as denationalized progressive "Europeans".

Looking for support beyond the national context was particularly important for the early twentieth-century avant-gardes, for which being modern meant being international and even vice versa. As national recognition was sometimes associated with artistic conservatism, the avant-gardes, even in the "center", were inclined towards presenting themselves as misunderstood at home and recognized abroad (Joyeux-Prunel 2009). This was certainly the case for radical intellectuals in Finland such as the expressionist poet Elmer Diktonius who, especially in the early stages of his career in the 1920s, fashioned himself as the nationally misrecognized poet with broad international networks. "If the poetry of our age cannot be produced in this country, it has to be brought here from

elsewhere”, was the argument (Diktonius 1922: 24-25). Diktonius successes in Europe, in Paris and London, were very modest and it was primarily on the Finnish literary scene that he managed to establish himself during his years in exile, by making the most of symbolic capital accumulated abroad. He did contribute to an international anthology (*Les Cinq Continents. Anthologie mondiale de la poésie contemporaine*) edited by the writer Ivan Goll, but on the whole his contacts with the Parisian avant-garde were marked by an apparent lack of reciprocity, and he failed to mobilize his international networks at home. In the short-lived Finnish journal *Ultra* (1922) he was responsible for engaging foreign writers, but his promises to supply the journal with contributions from Goll, Henri Barbusse and D. H. Lawrence never materialized. In the Finnish cultural field Diktonius nevertheless adopted the pose of the nationally misunderstood and internationally recognized writer, as “little known in Finland, if at all, more so in France” (Diktonius 1995: 52-53; Svensson 1979: 161-162).

Acknowledging backwardness, being cosmopolitan at home and seeking recognition abroad, are thus examples of the uses of “Europe” by contenders in peripheral cultural fields.

Bulwark – of what?

Besides providing a strategy for individuals and groups pursuing specific objectives in the national field, references and appeals to Europe and international opinion has, in the context of foreign policy, obviously been important every time Finland, as a small state, has felt threatened. As the major turning points in Finnish history – 1809, 1917, the Second World War, 1989-1995 – have been immediate consequences of external developments, the notion of “geopolitical fate” has been at the center of Finnish identity discourses, especially in the twentieth century (Meinander 2002: 155-156).

In the previous century, the Fennomans had, as mentioned, benefitted from their loyalty to the Czar, and the Russian military, administration and industry provided career possibilities for many Finns. Moreover, Finland was not underdeveloped in terms of social and political structures vis-à-vis the imperial power and profited from its access to the Russian market. This condition, which continued with the Soviet Union, gave the country a particular “semi-peripheral” character based on its position between East and West. These were all reasons not to accentuate the cultural and political divide between Russia and Finland, at least until the political conflict over the “Russification” of Finland intensified towards the end of the nineteenth century. At this time, upholding the classical heritage in the Northern periphery became increasingly important, in the face of external pressure, for both fractions in the cultural and language struggle; as witnessed by Sibelius’ *Song of the Athenians* from 1899, or the writer Juhani Aho who, in the midst of the Finnish civil war in 1918, stated that Russia for Finns will forever be what Persia was for the Greeks. As one of the key myths in national self-imaging the notion of bulwark gave Finland a civilizational mission in the world (Salminen 1967).

Among the Swedish speaking cultural elites the outpost theme shifted between external (Russia) and internal (Finnish nationalism) others. In the cultural and language struggles in Finland in the late nineteenth century they reacted to declining social positions by adhering to aristocratic, pan-German or Hellenistic ideals. For them, the way the Finnish nationalists had distanced themselves from the Swedish-European cultural heritage had been particularly painful. Some of them reacted to the denial of the importance of Scandinavian culture in Finland by turning to “Viking” romanticism and nostalgia for Swedish greatness. Another strategy among this group was to follow the example established by Hjalmar Neiglick mentioned earlier, that is, to adopt a cosmopolitan or European position “beyond” national concerns, and to proclaim Europe as the “real fatherland”. Nation-building had, according to this view, begun from the wrong end. Instead of creating a unified people, the initial focus should have been on molding Finns into world citizens or, significantly in the same sentence, good Europeans (Siltala 1999: 374-376; Lagerborg 1945: 241). Implied in this view was the idea that minor cultures had a civilizational debt towards the older cultural nations. Rolf Lagerborg writes at the turn of the century:

To love Finland is to love one’s belfry. We forget what we owe foreign countries; in culture nearly everything. And that our cultural efforts should be directed towards repaying the loan. We are parasites on the cultural centers, all small people are. If they do not do their part, they have no right to exist (Lagerborg 1942: 250, diary quote from 1902).

The outpost theme shifted once again from the point of view of the educated elites and with respect to internal and external enemies during and in the years leading up to the civil war in 1918, when the main struggle was no longer primarily between Fennomans and liberals but increasingly against “the Reds”. Once again it was a battle against “the East”, also internally, as witnessed by the attempts to eliminate communists and left-wing socialists from parliament in the 1920s. Externally Finland dealt with the fear of being left alone by seeking alliances with the Nordic and Baltic States, and eventually with Germany in the Second World War. The heroic efforts of the Finnish military against the Soviet Union in the Winter War in 1939–1940 were seen as the most important event under the theme of defending, preserving and representing European values, even in coalition with Nazi Germany. After the Peace Treaty in March 1940 the Commander-in-Chief, Gustaf Mannerheim, announced that the Finns had paid off their debt to Western civilization, with their blood and to the last penny, just as the Fennoman leader Yrjö Koskinen in the previous century had stated that the Finns, in the many wars fought for Sweden over the centuries, had repaid their civilizational debt.

The ambiguous relationship to Sweden has also influenced other contexts in Finnish nineteenth- and twentieth-century history where the emphasis has been placed on demarcation from “Europe”. As Sweden in Finland has served as both internal and external other, rival and model country of modernization, the parts of Finland that were most untouched by Swedish influences – notably Karelia in the East – figured prominently in the historicist discourse on nationhood (Eskola, Räisä & Stenius 2011: 190-191). Karelianism thrived in the decades following World War I, the Finnish independence in 1917 and the civil war in 1918, when right-wing nationalists presented demands for a less compromising version of national integration than the national-romantic Fennomans of the previous century, culminating in the so-called Lapua movement around 1930. At the same time, Finland’s Westernness and Nordic ties were underlined in the domain of foreign policy, and ultimately the Scandinavian-type of social and political structures in Finland also prevented a fascist seizure of power (Alapuro 2004: 91-92).

In the conditions of the cultural climate of the inter-war period emphasis fluctuated recurrently between “East” and “West”. Fascism and unresolved issues after the Civil War merged with Spenglerian cultural pessimism, which was a reason for stressing the Eastern dimension of Finnish culture against the corruptness of Western culture, and reduced the appeal of civilizational bulwark imageries. Such sentiments merged with visions of the Eastward expansionism – “Greater Finland” – with the help of Germany, which was seen as the power that would defend European culture from the threat of bolshevism, generally perceived by Finnish intellectuals as the greater threat. If culture was ruined, wrote Finland’s leading philosopher Eino Kaila during the Second World War, the whole civilization would be gone; science would boil down to mere technology, philosophy to propaganda and justice to phrases. At stake was the “three-millennia-old temple of European high culture”, which brought together Hellenic ideals of knowledge and virtual life, Christian compassion and modern science and technology (Salmela 1999: 152).

Concluding remarks

As in other border-areas, the topic of “not quite” has played an important role in Finnish identity and identification discourses: not quite Western, not entirely monocultural (Swedish as the second official language), not quite neutral during the Cold War and the pre-Cold War era, not quite European. Being situated between two historically central players in the European balance of power, such uncertainties have been pronounced in Finland.

The themes of catching up, approaching and translating “Europe” reflect peripheral perceptions of Europe as modernity and progress, which in Finland as elsewhere have been counterbalanced by notions of Europe as something to distance oneself from. Both tendencies have often been present within the same individuals or groups, while one of the two aspects has naturally been more accentuated for some than others. On the whole, “Europe” has figured as an argument in national debates more than as some form of cultural commitment. Yet, Finland hesitated surprisingly little before joining the European Union in 1995, when this had only recently become a real option following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In searching for an explanation most commentators have referred to the primacy of economic and security policy considerations in a new historical

situation, where Finland sought compensation for the loss of the Soviet market as well as support in foreign policy with regard to its unstable neighbor. When historical tradition is evoked as an explanatory factor, the main parallel is 1809, when the educated elites had equally smoothly shifted allegiances from the Swedish king to the Russian emperor (Stenberg 1999; Meinander 2002; Eskola, Räisä & Stenius 2011). In the new context of the EU Finland could draw on its long history with Russia and the Soviet Union in balancing between supranational commitments and national politics.

History has in this view led to a pragmatic power-political realism with respect to unions and supranational commitments, leaving aside the question of whether such commitments are more or less desirable. Critics claimed that Finland had shifted from what, during the Soviet era, became known as “Finlandization”, i.e. the extensive willingness to go along with Soviet demands, and playing the “Eastern” card in internal politics, to “Europeanization”. The political leadership in Finland had used other terms to describe Finland’s coexistence with the Soviet Union, referring, as did the president Urho Kekkonen in the 1960s, to the “Finnish paradox” of maintaining Western political and social structures by earning confidence in the East. History also provides a parallel for the distinguishing features of the Finnish EU-debate. Just as the Russian empire in the nineteenth century had relied on a co-opted political elite in the minority regions to maintain political order, the Finnish elites were successful in marginalizing the Euroskeptics in 1994. In a longer historical perspective this debate, as pointed out by Max Engman, highlighted the tension between the two traditions in Finnish political life since 1809, one imperial and one nation-state centered, the latter being more skeptical towards Finland’s involvement in supra- or multi-national formations (Engman 2000; Hämäläinen 1998; Meinander 1999; Stenberg 1999).

The fact that Finnish state and nation formation had taken place under Russian auspices, and that Finland’s relation to the Soviet Union involved not only fear but also making the most of a privileged position of trade with the Eastern neighbor, may explain why joining the EU in 1995 was not experienced as a great threat to the country’s autonomy. On the other hand, replacing the shadow of the Soviet Union with a European commitment opened up a new search for identity, in which, especially as the EU through Finland received its first border with Russia, the theme of geographical uniqueness surfaced once again. In the Finnish-EU debate, security policy, economy and being closely involved in decisions concerning the future of Europe – under the general assumption that what counts are the consequences and the potential profits for the nation-state – outweighed the decrease in national decision-making power implied by EU-membership and criticism of the EU as a neoliberal project.

In many of these debates, and in the way “Europe” figured in the Finnish cultural and political identity discourses outlined in this article, Finland was conceived of as a representative part of something broader. To the extent that representation involves constructing the object that is represented, this process is highly imaginative when it comes to elusive concepts such as Europe. Depending on the context, “Europe” in Finland referred to the Europe of parallel nation-states, to more advanced alternatives to national traditions and to models of urbanization and industrialization, to European cultural capitals and to a transnational cultural community. Frequently, Europe simply referred to a loosely defined progressive other; seeing things “from a European perspective” meant claiming to have a distanced and detached bird’s eye view on national questions. In this perspective, the theme of translating modernity to the periphery calls attention to the way Europe was mobilized in the challenge of dominant positions in Finnish debates, by the cultural avant-gardes as well as by political contenders.

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