

”Much more than a passport” Markers of Finnish national identity in Australia

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A person's national identity is not generally seen as being dependent upon outward markers of nationality such as citizenship or language; rather it is considered to be a more abstract sense of belonging to an ancestral home (Anderson, 1983, 14-16). Indeed, a Finnish person living in Finland might not consider markers of ethnicity to have a central role in constructing his or her identity. However, in a migrant context, such markers can become tools with which people choose to emphasise their sense of Finnishness. This essay will examine the role certain markers – namely citizenship, religion and language – have in maintaining and creating a sense of Finnish identity in an Australian expatriate context.

Finnish migration to Australia

Finnish migration to Australia has a long history, although because Finns were documented as

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Swedish or Russian nationals before the country's independence in 1917 it has been difficult to conduct reliable research into the early migration patterns of Finns. It is, however, known that Finns took part in the gold rush of the 1850s, and there are records of Finnish sailors living in Australia from the mid nineteenth century (Korkiasaari, 1989, 45).

A relatively high proportion of Finns compared to migrants from other Nordic countries settled permanently in Australia immediately after the Second World War. The fact that Finns were forced to "(accept) a lower standard of living" (Jutikkala and Pirinen, 1979, 250) compared to other Nordic nations in order to pay war reparations to the U.S.S.R. could explain the comparative willingness of Finns to travel long distances in order to start a new life (Jupp, 1999, 38). The largely Protestant Finns were also a welcome addition to Australian society as they were assumed to be able to assimilate easily into the existing population (Jupp, 1999, 30). The large numbers of Finnish settlers had the opposite effect, however: Finnish ethnic vitality was high and increasing migration lead to Finnish communities functioning in virtual isolation from the rest of Australian society.

When the White Australia policy, which had favoured Caucasian immigrants, came to an end the face of Finnish migration to Australia started to change. The Numerical Assessment Scheme, introduced in 1979, meant migrants had to be proficient in English and have recognised professional qualifications (Iredale, 2001, 5) in order to gain entry into Australia. As a result Finnish migration to Australia became increasingly transient, and Finnish ethnic communities began to weaken. While many Finns continued to visit Australia, for example as students or holiday-makers, they were unlikely to take part in activities organised by ethnic associations as the temporary nature of their visit did not endanger their sense of Finnishness.

Questionnaires

In order to examine the role citizenship, language and religion play in constructing the national identity of expatriate Finns in Australia, a survey questionnaire was prepared with the help of Dr Cheryl Lange from the University of WA and Professor Olavi Koivukangas from the Migration Institute in Finland. The questionnaire was distributed via email to 22 representatives of Finnish churches and societies in Australia and as a hard copy to the participants of the Im-

manuel Finnish Lutheran Church midsummer celebrations in Perth on Saturday the 21st of June 2003. The questionnaire was circulated in both Finnish and English. Participants were asked to return the questionnaire by the 31st of July 2003. Twenty-five copies were returned, three of which had been completed in English. Completed questionnaires were numbered according to language used and order of arrival, e.g. FIN-7 and ENG-2. When quoting specific informants, the number of their questionnaire will be used.

Due to the fact that the questionnaires were distributed through Finnish churches and societies, respondents would necessarily identify as being Finnish, at least to a certain extent. In this sense the results of the questionnaire are not indicative of the Finnish population of Australia as a whole. As such the intention of the questionnaire is not to discover whether the respondents identify as Finns, but to discover the extent to which religion, language and citizenship play a part in the migrants' Finnish identity, and the different ways in which they define 'Finnishness'.

Of the twenty-five respondents who returned the questionnaire seventeen were women and eight were men. The ages of the informants ranged from 39 to 79, with the majority (52 %) being aged over 60.

Most respondents (72%) had arrived in Australia between the ages of 21 and 40. Two informants had arrived in Australia as teenagers in 1970, and a further two as children aged six and seven in 1960 and 1969 respectively. Only four respondents (16%)

had migrated in their forties and fifties. A rough division may be made among the migrants according to age on arrival. Of those who migrated to Australia before 1970, none were over 40 on arrival. In fact, the majority of those who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s were in their mid- to late twenties (64%), the remaining four out of eleven migrants consisted of the two child migrants, and two women in their thirties. By contrast, those who arrived after 1970 tended to be older. Six out of eleven migrants from the post-1970 era were aged between 31 and 37. Three were older than 40 and only two were younger than 30.

The ages of the migrants suggest a changing pattern of migration around the time when the White Australia policy began to be phased out. The increased age of migrants may indicate the arrival of people who had achieved a higher level of skill in their professions, as preferred by the Numerical Assessment Scheme (Iredale, 2001, 5).

All respondents were born in Finland, and the native language of all the informants was Finnish. Twelve informants (48%) still used only Finnish as their home language; seven (28%) preferred English and the remaining six (24%) used both. The language currently used at home was not clearly divided by the time which a migrant had spent in Australia. For example, the three people who had spent the longest time in Australia all spoke Finnish at home, only one using it in conjunction with English. Equally those who had lived in Australia for 20 years or less included three who used

only English at home, three who used only Finnish and one who used both languages. The fact that the three respondents who had spent the longest time in Australia still spoke mainly Finnish suggests that at the time of their arrival, in the late 1950s, not only were there limited possibilities of learning English, but also that the existence of large Finnish communities made it possible to not use English in day-to-day interactions¹.

Of those who had lived in Australia for longer than 20 years, nine in total, or 50%, still spoke only Finnish at home, while four (22%) used only English and five (28%) used both languages. There are many possible explanations for these figures, including, for example, that those who arrived in the fifties and sixties were more likely to meet other Finns due to the great numbers of Finns migrating to Australia around that time, creating more opportunities for endogamous marriages. It is also possible that those who have migrated to Australia more recently have had a greater command over the English language from the very beginning, compared to earlier arrivals, who might have spoken only a limited amount of English upon arrival, or none at all.

A division in the use of English and Finnish becomes clearer if the age at arrival is taken into consideration. Of the twelve migrants who were over thirty on arrival only two used solely English at home and another two used both English and Finnish. The remaining eight spoke only Finnish at home. Those who were under 30 on arrival were more evenly divided according to language

use at home: five used only English, four spoke only Finnish and another four used both languages at home. Not surprisingly, the two informants who had arrived in Australia as children were among those who used only English at home. These informants were also among the three who completed the questionnaire in English.

Based on these figures it is likely that those who arrived in Australia before the age of thirty have been more able to adapt to English-language usage and have perhaps had better opportunities to study English upon arrival than those who arrived at an older age.

Citizenship

When citing factors in national identity, scholars often overlook citizenship. Joshua Fishman argues that such neglect is due to the common perception that national identity is fundamentally linked to ethnicity, which in turn is necessarily primordial and blood-bound (Fishman, 1999, 446). Citizenship, on the other hand, appears to be simply a bureaucratic necessity and possibly more easy to attain than a foreign language or culture (Oommen, 1997, 228).

Stephen Castles suggests that Australia's multicultural approach to nationhood is based on the principle that "it [is] no longer necessary to be culturally assimilated to be an Australian citizen" (Castles, 1997, 126). Castles' argument supports the idea that a passport does not need to signal a shift in allegiance, or a change in identity, but can be viewed solely as a bureaucratic tool. However, citizenship among migrants can act as a manifestation of the extent

to which a person has assimilated into the host society, in particular when naturalisation has been optional. When migrants adopt a second citizenship, or replace one with another voluntarily, they may also demonstrate a sense of belonging to the new homeland.

The "Basic details"-section of the questionnaire revealed that fifteen informants had Australian citizenship, while the remaining ten had retained their Finnish citizenship². Perhaps unsurprisingly, those who had chosen not to apply for Australian citizenship had, generally speaking, lived in the country for a shorter period of time than those with Australian citizenship. The most obvious exceptions were one man and two women who had lived in Australia for 44, 33 and 45 years respectively without adopting a new passport. The findings suggest that migrants tend to apply for naturalisation only after significant periods of stay in the host country. The fact that some informants did not want to relinquish their Finnish citizenship³ even after decades of stay in Australia suggests that some people consider citizenship to be an important factor in identity, perhaps due to the fact that citizenship is thought to be essentially an exchange of loyalty between a state and a citizen. The interpretation that citizenship does carry some symbolic meaning is supported by the fact that not one migrant who had lived in Australia for less than twenty years had become an Australian citizen.

Informants were then asked to elaborate on their reasons for relinquishing or retaining Finnish citizenship, their attitudes

to citizenship and whether they would want to apply for dual citizenship. Of the fifteen who were Australian citizens seven indicated family-related reasons for the change, three mentioned work and the remaining five had other reasons, or the reasons were not stated. Notably all who had changed their citizenship for family reasons were women, supporting earlier studies that women were more likely to migrate permanently to Australia due to marriage (Koivukangas, 1975, 21).

Of the three people who relinquished their Finnish citizenship for work purposes all had been naturalised in the 1970s. Some informants did not specify a particular reason for naturalisation, although two indicated in no uncertain terms that they wanted the right to influence Australian politics: "A person's value = ability to vote"(FIN-14, my translation) and "I wanted the right to vote 'when in Rome...'"(FIN-15, my translation). These two people specifically confirm the notion of citizenship as "an instrument of equality" (Oommen, 1997, 38), as something, which is necessary in order to take an active, equal part in the host society. While these two informants form only a minority among the respondents, it is worth noting that their responses contradict Eleanor Palo Stoller's argument that expatriate Finns tended to be politically inactive (Palo Stoller, 1996, 154).

Of the ten informants who had not applied for Australian citizenship four indicated an unwillingness to relinquish their Finnish passport and five did not see a change in citizenship as necessary.

One man had a particular objection to acquiring Australian citizenship due to the country's current "questionable foreign and domestic policies" (FIN-17, my translation), although he admitted that originally he simply had not wanted to relinquish his Finnish citizenship.

The majority of those who did not want to acquire a second citizenship were naturalised Australians, all over the age of 60. The age of these informants could quite easily explain their disinclination to apply for dual citizenship. They are perhaps unlikely to move back to Finland or travel extensively within the EU, making a Finnish passport unnecessary. Of the four Finnish citizens who did not intend to apply for dual citizenship, two were approximately 70 years of age and two were aged 44 and 56. As the older Finnish citizens had spent a significant amount of time in Australia without needing the country's citizenship it would have been highly unlikely for them to want to acquire it at such a late stage. The younger Finnish citizens, on the other hand, had only spent two and seven years in Australia respectively and might still be uncertain of whether they will stay or not. The unwillingness of these two men to acquire Australian citizenship supports what was discovered in the "Basic details" section, that is, Finnish migrants tend to want to be naturalised only after over twenty years in Australia.

The fourth question in the "Citizenship" section asked informants who wanted to obtain or maintain their Finnish citizenship whether they considered a Finnish passport to be important

for practical or symbolic reasons. While this question was intended only for those ten people who either still had their Finnish citizenship or those who intended to apply for it, nineteen people in total responded to the question. Six people (31%) saw a Finnish passport as having mainly a practical value, two (11%) saw it as symbolic, six (31%) cited both reasons, three (16%) regarded Finnish citizenship as unimportant and the remaining two informants (11%) simply stated having a Finnish passport and did not elaborate on its significance.

All of those who saw Finnish citizenship as being unimportant were naturalised Australians who had either not thought about applying for dual citizenship or had no intention of doing so. The fact that many people, even one naturalised Australian who had no intention of regaining his Finnish citizenship, cited the symbolic value of a Finnish passport helps to explain why many people may have preferred not to apply for Australian citizenship when it still required relinquishing their Finnish citizenship. If a passport is considered to be not only a bureaucratic tool, but also a physical symbol of a connection to a particular country, then relinquishing the passport of one's native country would imply renouncing that connection.

The informants' responses also make it clear that a foreign passport has not greatly hindered migrants' lives, as many have lived in Australia for several years or even decades without needing to be naturalised.

The fifth question in the "Citizenship" section asked the in-

formants whether they considered citizenship to be an integral part of national identity. One person did not reply to this question, while thirteen others considered citizenship to be important for national identity (54%), seven (29%) disagreed and four (17%) either were not sure or did not provide a clear answer.

Those who were Finnish citizens were more likely to consider citizenship to be an important aspect of national identity, with only one person in ten believing there was no connection; naturalised Australians were more likely to emphasize that national identity does not depend on citizenship, one woman offering the following analogy: "[Being Finnish] is much more than a passport. It is like in a marriage; a marriage certificate does not 'make' a marriage" (ENG-1). While it could be concluded that the naturalised Australians would not consider citizenship to be particularly important to national identity precisely because they have relinquished their Finnish citizenship, the opposite is equally possible: that those who did not feel citizenship to have an impact on their national identity were happy to relinquish their Finnish citizenships.

The sixth and last question in the "Citizenship" section asked informants to indicate whether they considered themselves to be Finnish, Australian or something else. Twelve people (48%) considered themselves to be Finnish, five (20%) Australian, six (24%) saw themselves as being both and two (8%) felt they were neither. Some respondents indicated not being completely

sure what their national identity was, one woman saying "I don't consider myself to be anything.

If pressed, I was born in Finland and now live in Australia" (ENG-2).

Two people even mentioned being "world citizens". Similar identities have emerged in inter-

have identified as Australians after such a long stay in the country. These last two questions highlight the fact that even though people may have spent a significant amount of time in a foreign country, and even adopted a new citizenship, they will still continue

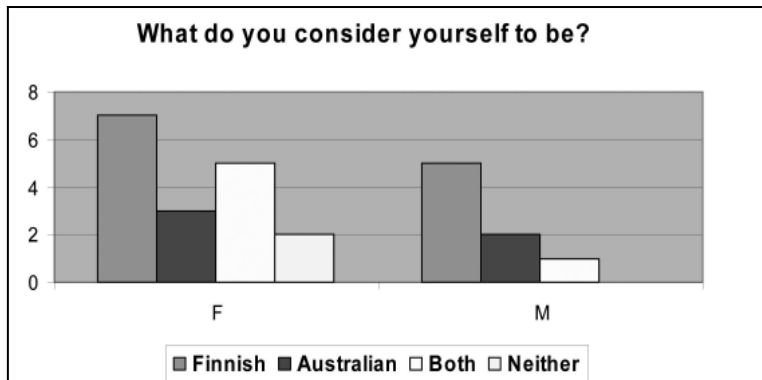


Figure 1: "What do you consider yourself to be?"

views conducted by Senja Baron. She found that "Finnish immigrants did not consider themselves as simply Finns living in Australia, but as sort of hybrids, not entirely Australian but not quite Finnish either" (Baron, 2000, 27).

The respondents' own views on their identity largely confirm the argument that migrants are not required or expected to attempt cultural assimilation in order to gain Australian citizenship (Castles, 1997, 126). Only three out of fifteen naturalised Australians considered themselves to be Australian, while all but two of the remaining respondents identified as at least partly Finnish. The small number of respondents who identified as purely Australian is significant particularly because all naturalised Australians had lived in Australia for over 20 years, and could have been thought to

to feel connected to and defined by their relationship with their home country (Hodge, 1984, 21)

Religion

The influence of a particular religion on individuals may become more pronounced when it represents a connection to an ancestral land. In a migrant context ethnic churches may help keep minority languages and customs alive and maintain connections to the homeland, and are in this sense "much more than religious organisations" (Douglas Ollila jr., quoted in Branch, 1996, 205). Earlier studies have found that Finns who were not particularly religious, would join a Finnish church in Australia and find their place in the community through participation in church activities (Parr, 1999, 264). Already in 1975 Olavi

Koivukangas noted that "church attendance increased [in Australia] despite the fact that Finnish church services were not available as often in Australia as they were in Finland" (Koivukangas, 1975, 204-205, my translation). One possible explanation for this phenomenon elevates the concept of "Finnishness" from abstract sense of ancestry to religious faith in a migrant context (Harri Peltola quoted in Branch, 1996, 206). Because 'Finnishness' is essentially a sense of belonging, it does not need to be affirmed whilst in Finland. However, attending Finnish church services in a foreign host society allows migrants to feel connected to Finland – a need they would not have if they still lived in their native country.

The concept of 'Finnishness' poses a problem in researching the importance of religion in national identity. It is difficult to ascertain whether church services are attended due to migrants' need of spiritual comfort or whether ethnic churches are seen as offering an opportunity to express and experience 'Finnishness'. Indeed it would appear that maintaining a sense of community among expatriate Finns has been integral to the survival of the migrant churches along with other ethnic institutions, leading to religious feeling and the concept of Finnishness becoming intertwined to a degree (Kansanaho, 1975, 46).

Certainly if a church holds services in Finnish, publishes a newsletter in Finnish and even holds lay celebrations which concentrate on Finnish traditions, foods and music – as is often the case with migrant churches – it is

more than likely that the church's influence is not restricted to the spiritual development of its members but will also promote group identity.

Of the twenty-five respondents eighteen in total (72%) mentioned being a member of a Finnish church and six (25%) stated they were not. One person did not respond⁴.

When asked whether they attended Finnish church services, nineteen (76%) replied that they did and five (20%) said they did not. Again one person (4%) did not respond. Those respondents who reported attending Finnish services "rarely" or "sometimes" have been counted as affirmative responses. When the figures for church membership and church attendance are compared, it becomes clear that while the majority of those who belong to a church attend services more or less regularly, services are also attended by those who are not members and conversely some church members do not attend services.

The third question in the "Religion"-section asked the informants to answer what were the most important aspects of Finnish church services. Four (16%) mentioned hearing the word of God as the single most important aspect of Finnish church services, four (16%) saw meeting other Finns as more important, eight (32%) considered both reasons to be of equal importance along with hearing the Finnish language and nine (36%) people mentioned a combination of other issues. No one considered Finnish language alone to be the most important aspect of Finnish church services, although of the

nine who provided miscellaneous reasons for attending services, three mentioned language as one important aspect of church services among others.

Of the three who mentioned language in one way or another, two mentioned maintaining the Finnish language and meeting other Finns, but did not list hearing the word of God as important at all. The fact that the majority of respondents did not see "hearing the word of God" as the single most important reason for attending church services supports the argument that the Finnish churches maintain not only a spiritual but a strong ethno-linguistic presence. For example the *Seurakuntaviesti* (church newsletter) of the Immanuel Finnish Lutheran Church in Perth includes notices of Finnish Independence Day celebrations, sewing circles and a dance organised not by the church but by the Perth Finnish Golf Society (Mäkinen, 2003). The purpose of the newsletter is clearly not only to inform church members of religious events, but to inform even the wider Finnish community of events with an ethnic emphasis.

The migrants' preference for Finnish language events becomes clear in the final question of the "Religion" section. The majority, thirteen (52%), claimed they would not attend church services held in English or any other language if Finnish services were unavailable, while nine said they would (36%). Four of the thirteen (31%) who did not attend foreign language church services cited language difficulties as a reason, while seven (54%) said they were not religious. Only two of the sev-

en people who claimed to not be religious did not attend Finnish services either. The remaining five who were not religious still attended Finnish church services, albeit irregularly. This finding supports the argument that in a migrant context, affirming a sense of Finnishness can often take on the appearance of religious belief (Harri Peltola quoted in Branch, 1996, 206). With one exception all of those who did not consider themselves religious were under 60 years of age. In addition only one of those who were not religious migrated to Australia before 1970, despite the fact that the majority of the informants had migrated to Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. One possible explanation for this is that participation in ethnic activities tends to become more important the longer a person stays in the host country, and the older a migrant becomes (Legge, 2003, n.p.). It is therefore possible that many consider their need for contact with the Finnish community to be a kind of spiritual longing. These tendencies appear to confirm the notion of 'Finnishness' as the common religion or spirituality of the Finnish people. Although there were a significant number of respondents who stated they were religious, including one respondent who is an ordained minister and two others who mentioned working in some capacity for their local church, the ethnic and linguistic preference in church attendance is clear.

Language

Language is often considered to be the strongest indicator of ethnic identity, as language shapes

the way in which people relate to their surroundings and themselves (Haarmann, 1999, 65).

While migrants may identify themselves with their country of origin through use of their native language, after prolonged stay in a foreign country the language of migrants often incorporates elements of the language of the host society. These changes in migrant language may be symptomatic of an identity shift. If a migrant group has a specific lexicon that differentiates it from any other group with the same native language background, the particular migrant language may serve as a starting point to becoming, for example, Finnish-Australian rather than simply Finnish or expatriate Finnish. Here one can see the difference between acquiring a language and acquiring a citizenship. While gaining a new citizenship may be attractive due to its functionality, use of a particular language may convey an individual's thoughts, and is as such a more personal marker of identity, even if a person is unaware of the importance of language (Fishman, 1989, 66).

Despite the potential link between changes in language and changes in identity, it is also important to re-evaluate whether fluency in Finnish is really necessary if one is to consider oneself Finnish. Even within Finland there is a perceived "discrepancy between linguistic and national identities" (Vikør, 2000, 118) – that is, it is possible to feel Finnish and yet speak Swedish as a native language. If this discrepancy between language and identity can be negotiated and managed in Finland,

surely the situation would be the same in a foreign host society.

In the "Language" section of the questionnaire the informants were asked to rate their fluency in both English and Finnish, with the exception of FIN-1 and FIN-2 who were only required to rate their ability in English⁵. Fourteen people (56%) claimed to speak English fluently, thirteen of those (87%) daily. Unsurprisingly, two of the fluent speakers of English were those who had migrated to Australia as children. There appeared to be more variation in the language skills of the women, four (24%) reporting speaking English poorly, while nine (52%) said they were fluent and three (18%) claimed adequate command over the language. The men were divided into only fluent speakers (62%) and "adequate" speakers (38%). It should, however, be noted that as these are the informants' personal evaluations instead of objectively examined findings, it is possible that some have evaluated their proficiency in English according to higher standards than others.

All claimed at least some level of understanding of spoken English, contradicting some of the informants' replies in the "Basic details" section, where five women claimed to only speak Finnish. This discrepancy between results suggests that some may have decided to list in the "Basic details"-section only those languages in which they considered themselves to be fluent.

While only fourteen people (56%) claimed to speak English fluently, seventeen (68%) spoke it daily. These seventeen informants included all of the men who

took part in the survey, indicating that men tend to have more contact with Australian society and other English-speaking people. Two out of seventeen women (11%) reported speaking English occasionally, a further two (11%) only rarely and one (6%) did not ever speak English, despite having lived in Australia for over thirty years. The two women who spoke English rarely had also lived in Australia for 27 and 39 years respectively. It is clear that particularly in older generations women have been able to manage with significantly weaker language skills than men, who have traditionally worked outside the home environment. It is also possible that women had had fewer opportunities to learn English upon arrival, particularly if they had young children to care for.

Informants tended to report slightly lower skill levels and frequencies of reading and writing English than speaking. Two people even claimed not to be able to read English at all. Overall people tended to read and write English less actively than they spoke English.

When asked to rate their fluency in spoken Finnish everyone who answered the question mentioned either being fluent or having adequate command over the language. The three people who spoke Finnish 'adequately' were the same three respondents who had completed the questionnaire in English. The majority of informants indicated speaking Finnish daily, and all reported speaking Finnish at least sometimes, even those who currently used only English at home.

The informants indicated a slightly less firm command of

written Finnish compared to spoken Finnish, however people tended to read and write Finnish more often than they spoke it. The fact that people read Finnish more frequently than they spoke it indicates that while some may not have frequent contact with other Finns, they still choose to maintain a connection to Finland by, for example, reading Finnish language newspapers and writing letters in Finnish.

While the majority indicated communicating fluently in Finnish, some responses in the questionnaire included instances of code switching. For example one woman stated she "became Australian citizenship" (FIN-3, "tulin Australian citizenship" in the original), two other respondents used anglicisms in their responses, and many others replaced the letters Ä and Ö, which are commonly used in Finnish, with A and O. The replacements occurred even when questionnaires were filled in by hand, so the errors in spelling could be explained by infrequent use of written Finnish rather than simply a lack of a Finnish keyboard, which could have been the case had the replacements occurred only in typed responses.

Of those who either did not read or speak Finnish fluently or daily, only one identified as Australian. All others considered themselves, at least in part, Finnish. Although many respondents considered themselves Finnish without having the opportunity to communicate using the Finnish language regularly, it cannot be concluded that Finnish identity would not be connected to the Finnish language, because all respondents understood at least some Finnish⁶.

A further study could perhaps map whether second generation Finnish migrants in Australia, or first generation migrants with significantly weaker Finnish language skills, still identify as Finns and feel an affinity with the Finnish language, as has been suggested in the North American context (Palo Stoller, 1996, 164).

Twelve people (48%) had a partner who spoke Finnish, while four (16%) did not and nine (36%) indicated either not having a partner or did not provide a clear response. Fourteen people (56%) had Finnish-speaking children, six (24%) had children who did not speak Finnish and five informants (20%) either did not have children or did not respond to this question. Two people specified that they would prefer younger people to speak Finnish so that they would be better able to communicate with their grandparents. The wishes of these two respondents support the observation that Finnish language abilities in migrant communities are weakening, making intergenerational communication harder (Kivisto, 1989, 77).

The final question in the "Language" section asked the inform-

ants whether they thought it was possible to consider oneself "Finnish" without understanding the Finnish language. Eleven people (44%) thought it was possible, nine did not (36%) and a further five (20%) either did not respond or did not provide a clear response.

All of those who completed the questionnaire in English indicated believing that it was possible to consider oneself Finnish without understanding the Finnish language, one of whom said "Being a Finn is a matter of heart" (ENG-1). The responses of the English-speaking respondents supported findings that it is possible to identify with a culture without speaking its language either regularly or fluently (Liebkind, 1999, 144). These findings suggest that from the point of view of identity, a number of people consider the appreciation of an ethnic language may be more important than the ability to communicate in it.

Some saw Finnishness as primordial – for example, one person who did not consider understanding the Finnish language as being essential to being Finnish said it was possible to consider oneself a Finn if "you're even a little inter-

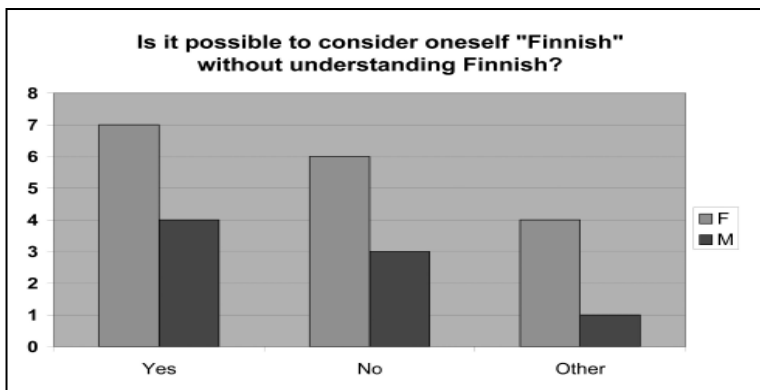


Figure 2: "Is it possible to consider oneself 'Finnish'...?"

ested in or your blood draws you to Finnish culture” (FIN-3, my translation). Some other informants considered ‘Finnishness’ to be more closely tied to customs, and as such possible to be learnt. As has been established, people tend to identify with their native country even after decades of stay in a host society. Further study on the ways in which migrants adopt markers of ‘Australianness’ and the extent to which they identify with their new home country would lead to better understanding of the integration process experienced by migrants. Such research would be particularly useful considering the assumption that Scandinavian migrants would be able to “discard the cultural traits of their country of origin and acquire the Australian way of life” (Baron, 2000, 22).

Those who believed it was not possible to identify as Finnish without understanding the language tended to see Finnish language as closely linked with the way Finnish people think. Even one man who thought it was possible to identify as a Finn without speaking Finnish added “[It is possible] but [in that case] there is a lot missing” (FIN-13, my translation).

Overall people tended to view language as an important aspect of Finnishness, although many also recognised that learning Finnish was not necessary when in Australia. It would appear that informants generally considered the Finnish language to be of significant symbolic value, particularly for first generation migrants, but recognised that teaching Finnish to later generations of migrants would be impractical as particularly second generation

migrants could identify as Finns without understanding Finnish.

Identity

The last question of the survey asked informants what they considered to be the most important aspect of Finnish identity. Only one person considered religion, and three saw citizenship as being the most important aspect of maintaining a Finnish identity as a migrant. Fifteen people mentioned the Finnish language in some respect, while twelve people mentioned one aspect or another of Finnish culture and customs as being essential in maintaining Finnish identity. In this section many informants elaborated on what they saw as quintessentially Finnish qualities, and comments included:

”1: The Finnish language. 2: Finns are always on time to an agreed meeting. 3: Finnish custom of taking flowers on the first visit. 4: As a Finn I always pay my debts on time, if I happen to have any”. (FIN-5, my translation)

”Language, music and food because they are daily things. To a certain extent public holidays. For example Christmas Eve is [the real] Christmas and a quiet family event. Ham and swede casserole and gingerbread and tarts... That’s Finnishness”. (FIN-7, my translation)

”Being Finnish is about being different without being threatening, like being American or English at the moment is.” (ENG-2)

The fact that very few people mentioned religion as being of importance to their identity, in fact many specifically discounted religion from being important, sup-

ports the theory that it was in fact the linguistic and ethnic, not spiritual, nature of the church services which attracted migrants (Branch, 1996, 206). Informants demonstrated some level of sentimental bond to their Finnish citizenship, although generally speaking passports were considered to be mainly of practical value.

The questionnaire results suggest that Finnish migrants in Australia see a certain sense of ‘Finnishness’ as the most important element of their national identity, along with an affinity with the Finnish language. It is possible that ‘Finnishness’ is important to the Finnish community because of the discrepancy between linguistic and national identities in Finland (Vikør, 2000, 118). This means that while the Finnish language is important to the national identity of many expatriate Finns, the abstract sense of ‘Finnishness’ is seen as more important because even in Finland a person whose native language is Swedish may identify as a Finn. The effect of official national multilingualism on expatriate linguistic and national identities could be studied by comparing expatriate nationals of multi- and monolingual nations. Such a study could reveal whether the equivalent of ‘Finnishness’ for other migrant communities remains tied to a national language.

Conclusion

The long history of migration from Finland to Australia has had a variety of motivating factors such as economic necessity, desire for adventure and family reunion. Finnish migration to Australia has also been aided by successive Austral-

ian governments' perception that Finnish migrants, along with other Northern Europeans, would assimilate quickly and without great difficulty into Australian society. Yet contrary to this belief, waves of Finnish migration in the early twentieth century and social insularity kept Finnish ethnic vitality high in Australia, making it possible for people to lead normal lives without regular contact with Australians.

Changes in Australia's migration policies since the late 1970s led to short-term migration becoming more common, with only small numbers of Finnish migrants settling permanently in Australia each year. Short-term migrants, such as students and tourists, may have a strong sense of Finnish national identity, but due to the temporary nature of their migratory experience they may not feel the need to participate in ethnic organisations. Thus while Finnish migration to Australia continues, the few migrants who arrive do not have a significant impact on the cultural life of Finnish communities in Australia, leading to a weakening Finnish ethnic community.

The questionnaire results suggest that Finnish expatriates in Australia tend to view Finnish language as an important part of their national identity, much more so than religion or citizenship. However while language did appear to have significance in the respondents' construction of their own national identities, a large proportion of them believed that it was possible to identify as a Finn without being able to speak Finnish at all. The responses to the questionnaire indicate that national identi-

ty is not dependent on one single marker above and beyond all others, but that a sense on Finnishness incorporates a variety of elements, including the desire to belong

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Notes

1 This possibility is highlight-
ed by the fact that one of these
respondents indicated having ex-
tremely low English proficiency
in the "Language" section.

2 Note that one informant in-
dicated having Finnish citizenship

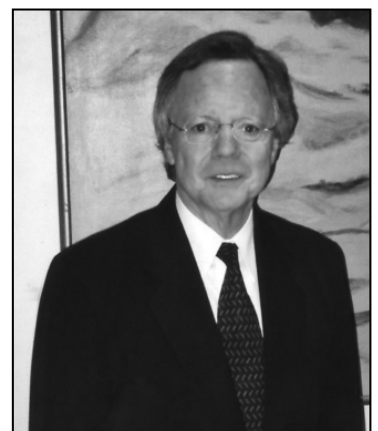
in the "Basic information"-sec-
tion, while describing being natu-
ralised as an Australian along with
her parents in the "Citizenship"-
section. In this case it has been as-
sumed that in her reply to the first
section the informant meant her
citizenship upon arrival to Austral-
ia. In this study she is included as a
holder of Australian citizenship.

3 If migrants wanted to acquire
the citizenship of their host socie-
ty before 2003, they had to relin-
quish their Finnish citizenship in
the process.

4 Again it should be stressed
that as many of the questionnaires
were distributed through Finnish
churches, the responses particu-
larly to the "Religion" section of
the questionnaire may be skewed.

5 FIN-1 and FIN-2 complet-
ed an early version of the ques-
tionnaire, which did not include
a question about Finnish language
proficiency.

6 Also the fact that many re-
spondents attended only Finnish
language church services suggests
that the language has a significant
impact on Finns' national identity.



Australian Suomen Suurlähettiläs
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instituutissa 25.10.2006.