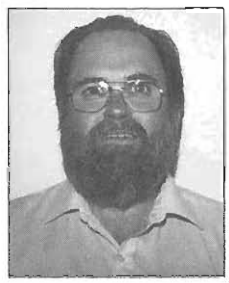
Stanley F. Hunnisett

Opportunities for Ethnology in Finnish Migration Research: Two Pilot Projects



Migration study is, by its very nature, a subject which cuts across traditional academic divisions and offers opportunities to researchers of many different disciplines. Surely historians have risen to the challenge and have produced an impressive body of research. Perhaps this is inevitable; except for recent migrations, an historical perspective is the most basic. Still, I believe that, although valuable beginnings have been made in several fields, a considerable opportunity exists for other disciplines to contribute to our knowledge of Finnish migration (Pentikäinen 1988, 44).

I do not, however, feel qualified to comment on the possibilities in fields other than my own, so I shall restrict myself accordingly [1]. In North America this field is called Cultural Anthropology; in Britain, Social Anthropology; in much of Europe, Ethnology (Swedish: *Etnologi*); and, in Finland, *Kansatiede, Etnologia*, or *Kulttuuriantropologia*. For convenience, I shall use the name ethnology.

The author is a doctoral candidate in cultural anthropology at the University of Iowa, USA. A Canadian citizen, his specialty is sub-arctic studies. He spent 1988–89 at the University of Turku studying Finnish language and culture.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest some ways in which ethnology might further contribute to Finnish Migration Research.

In order to test out some of the ideas suggested here, I carried out two pilot projects. Their results are not conclusive but do indicate a direction for further research. The first project, my MA thesis work, which was carried out in Northern Ontario, Canada, over an eight week period in the summer of 1987, concerned relations between native Indians and Finnish immigrants during the first half of this century (Hunnisett 1988). During the course of that investigation I coincidentally discovered that many of the Finnish immigrants in Nipigon had come from the parish of Karvia in Satakunta. This led to the second project, really just a mini-project undertaken during not much more than a long weekend, in the parish of Karvia and in the nearby city of Kankaanpää. There I met and spoke with people with knowledge of local migration patterns and genealogy.

Unfortunately, my work has been restricted by my less-than-proficient abilities in the Finnish language. Reading Finnish is still a slow and painful process so I have restricted my reading almost exclusively to the English language litera-

ture. This is a limitation I sorely regret and I apologize to anyone whose work I have overlooked because of it. Furthermore, while my spoken Finnish is adequate for simple tasks such as travelling, I found it totally inadequate for formal interviewing. In Finland, however, I partially compensated for this problem by writing my questions down and having my non-English-speaking informants record their responses on tape – an unorthodox, but in this case effective, solution.

Opportunities for Ethnology

a) A Holistic Perspective

Ethnology, especially as a part of American anthropology, is by nature a holistic discipline. Possibly, then, ethnology's greatest contribution to Finnish migration research might be in the broadening of our perspectives. I wholeheartedly support and wish to expand upon Michael Berry's ideas along this line (Berry 1989, 22). People have been migrating into, around, and out of what is now Finland since prehistoric times. Often, however, scholars have tended to consider the particular migration pattern studied as an isolated phenomenon. In fact, we seem to have tacitly assumed that Finnish migration is a unique phenomenon and thus have virtually ignored the large body of data and theory existing on other migrations and ethnicity generally. So, as well as creating an overall theory of Finnish migration and situating our own projects within it, I believe we need to take better account of general migration theory; in short, we need to put our own work into context. Furthermore, when we are able to do this, Finnish migration research will be able to contribute significantly to the general body of migration and ethnicity knowledge and theory.

I believe we could also take a more holistic approach to the research process itself. Surely a multi-disciplinary field calls for multi-disciplinary research teams, particularly involving Finnish and host country researchers (Alanen 1988, 74; Pentikäinen 1988, 55; Söderling 1987, 17). Not only does such an arrangement provide the practical advantages of researchers working in their home countries, but it also allows a variety of perspectives to interact.

b) Determinants of Migration Patterns

One important specific way in which ethnologists should be able to make a substantial contribution is through an increased understanding of why and how migrations have occurred, particularly with respect to cultural and social contexts. To illustrate my comments, I will concentrate hereafter on the mass migration of the 1870–1930 period, but I believe the ideas are generally applicable.

While it is often noted that there was a wide variety of reasons why people migrated during this period, it is commonly argued that the major cause was the structural dislocations which occurred in the Ostrobothnian economy. These, combined with other factors such as population growth and inheritance governed by primogeniture, left young adults with little choice but to migrate (Hummasti 1988, 154; Lindstrom-Best 1985, 4–5; Pentikäinen 1988, 52). While I do not dispute the importance of these factors, I somehow feel that such an analysis unduly glosses over a very complex pattern of human behavior.

While the external migration was overwhelmingly from Ostrobothnia, we should also note that most Finns – even Ostrobothnians – stayed in Finland (Hummasti 1988, 154), either in their home parishes or by migrating internally

(which brings up an interesting question: should we consider pre-1917 migration within the Russian empire internal or external?). One basic question which arises, then, is: "How did individuals or groups decide whether to stay home, migrate internally, or go abroad?"

Although Ostrobothnia was the source of the preponderance of emigrants, we must note that structural displacements also occurred in eastern Finland. Is there a cultural component to Ostrobothnians' greater propensity to leave Finland? Olin (1989, 20) suggests that tales sent or brought back from New Sweden injected a positive view of America as a land of opportunity into the local folklore and ultimately contributed to both "St Barth's" and "America fever" one and two centuries later, respectively. Could something, furthermore, be made of the fact that Ostrobothnians, first as shipbuilders and later as carpenters, were accustomed to leaving home to work on distant construction projects? On the other hand, what of north Karelians who were also accustomed to long-distance work as peddlers?

Another important factor which is often overlooked in migration research is the idea that, traditionally, there were two distinct Finnish cultures, or at least subcultures. Western Finnish society was based on fixed-field (*pelto*) agriculture and the nuclear family. In the east, the corresponding institutions were swidden ("burn-beating" or *kaski*) agriculture and the co-residential extended family. Such basic differences in society resulted in very different cultures. What role, if any, did these differences play in migration patterns?

Considering only those people who decided to emigrate, how did they decide where to go? Clearly there are correspondences between places of origin in Finland and destinations in North America such as Nipigon-Karvia (Hummasti 1988, Kero 1980). The literature stresses the need for employment (Alanen 1988, 60) and certainly that was important; in Karvia I was told that the availability of forest work in Nipigon was a major attraction. On the other hand, a genealogical research team in Kankaanpää suggested to me that the maintenance of family integrity, an important value in peasant society, was a serious consideration (Hummasti 1988, 156). In fact, chain migration is a well documented phenomenon in many cases and we might do well to delve into the substantial literature regarding it (Foster 1979, MacDonald and MacDonald 1964, Reichl 1988, Wolfe 1978).

Often, again, it seems to me that we make a tacit assumption, Pentikäinen's comments (1988, 46) notwithstanding, that emigrants are somehow created spontaneously in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean (Hummasti 1988 provides one welcome exception). We seem to take for granted the fact that they were born in Finland and socialized into (western or eastern) Finnish culture. Factors such as their goals, how they experience their new home, and how the host society experiences and reacts to them are conditioned by this inescapable fact. It may be facile to say that the experiences of Finnish emigrants are necessarily different from (and, in some ways, similar to) those of Ukrainians, Italians, Jews, Chinese or Sikhs, yet it sometimes seems to me that we are losing sight of this elementary fact. By taking it into account deliberately, we raise more interesting questions.

For example, to what extent did Finnish background influence the destinations of Finns within their host countries? Do employment opportunities fully explain the fact that they were concentrated into certain regions and cities/towns?

Consider for a moment the Canadian example. During the first part of this century, the time when most Finns entered Canada, the Canadian government was actively recruiting immigrants to populate the western prairies, a location to which many Slavs, for example, migrated. Few Finns went there, however. The largest group of them settled in northern Ontario where available agricultural land was much poorer. Was this a desire to locate in scenery similar to that in Finland? This idea has been bandied about with some authors apparently assuming it to be important, others, trivial. Might it not be more relevant that Finns had worked out in Finland an effective northern forest adaptation which gave them an advantage over other ethnic groups in settling this part of the country? They already knew how to cut trees efficiently, how to sharpen a saw, and how to earn a living with an eclectic mix of forestry, (dairy) farming, hunting and fishing, and (often seasonal) wage labour, specific skills and a pattern others may have had to learn. Saarinen and Tapper (1988) have made a valuable beginning in this direction for one Canadian community. And what of cultural values such as the desire to own rural land (ibid, 171–173)? Clearly, this whole area of inquiry could benefit from further research.

c) Interethnic Relations

We could also ask a number of questions about how Finnishness affected relations, or lack of them, with other ethnic groups. While Finns may have concentrated in certain areas (and not even learned local languages), they could not have avoided dealing with at least the majority ethnic group. What patterns of interethnic relations resulted, especially those involving discrimination and predjudice? Other than a brief note by Hirvonen (1988, 345), I am aware of no research on the latter topic although many authors have commented on its importance (Dahlie 1988, 516; Laine 1981, 3; Pentikäinen 1988).

What of relations with other minority ethnic groups? The conventional wisdom here seems to be that there were none, but it is also agreed that the Finn halls were often the focus of community social life and that all ethnic groups were welcome at their functions. Lahtinen (1946, 51)) gives a tantilizing glimpse of interaction under such circumstances at a hall near Hearst, Ont.

> *"Seurataloon järjestettyihin tilaisuuksiin saapuu aina muutakin kansallisuutta olevia ihmisiä, joten yleisö saattaa olla hyvinkin kansainvälinen. Esimerkiksi ranskalaiset ovat uskollisia iltamavieraita, jotka ohjelman päätyttyä ottavat innokkaasti osaa yleiseen tanssiin. Usein heille pitää soittaa heidän omia kappaleitaan, ja silloin on meluisa riemu heidän keskuudessaan korkealla. Mutta kyllä he tanssivat mielellään vanhan maan polkkaakin, minkä taidon ovat oppineet suomalaisilta."*

Karni (1967) has dealt briefly with Finnish-Irish conflict in Minnesota and Alanen (1988) in some depth with Scandinavians but both these are more descriptive than analytical. Alanen (1988, 79) has also made useful suggestions for further research. While my own MA work was concerned with relations between Finns and Indians, a phenomenon which occurred solely because of the particular nature of Finnish culture, it seems to me that we have only begun to scratch the surface of this important field.

Trends in second language learning are an interesting aspect of this interaction. A wide range of behaviors is encountered, from Finns remaining essentially unilingual to those who became vir-

tual polyglots; in Canada I have met examples of both extremes myself, as well as of the majority who fell somewhere between. Furthermore, Finns are supposed to have found English learning more difficult than did others who spoke Indo-European languages (Kivisto 1988, 92) To what extent is this so [2)]? And what of others, say the Chinese? While a valuable start has been made in sociolinguistic research into these questions, it is mainly technical in nature, concerning the effect of local languages on Finnish (Martin 1981, Virtaranta 1988), language retention (Roinila 1987) or the process of Finns learning English (Pietilä 1989). While Hirvonen (1988) and Pietilä (1988) have done admirable sociolinguistic analyses of English learning, ethnologists could contribute their own perspective to the particular cultural factors involved in the acquisition of new languages.

d) Assimilation

This leads naturally to the consideration of assimilation. While this topic has been addressed in the past (Kivisto 1988), an ethnological perspective could increase our understanding of the processes and products of culture contact both within and across generations (Pentikäinen 1988). Tuomi-Nikula (1987–88) has presented an excellent ethnological study of Finns currently married in West Germany and I understand that a promising beginning is presently being made with respect to earlier migration at the University of Jyväskylä.

While Finnish immigrants have generally been in situations in which they have had to assimilate to the norms of a majority, it is also interesting to ask what influence Finns might have had on their host societies' cultures. This topic has received some attention with respect to New Sweden, especially concerning log buildings. Sutyla (1977) has also documented the sauna in Manitoba. Otherwise, there seems to be some scope for scholarly studies of Finnish influences on their receiving cultures.

e) Return Migration

This brings me to my final group of questions, those concerning return migration. Why did people return – or not return? In Karvia I was accommodated in a farmhouse purchased by my host's grandfather with the rewards of his 10 years in America; he did exactly what migrants were "supposed" to do, strike it rich and return home to buy a farm. But other migrants, such as one long-deceased Nipigon resident who became quite wealthy, did not return. Did success – or failure – act as a motivation to stay or to return home? And how many left Finland with no intention of returning home? How many with no intention of staying?

A related question concerns the effects returning migrants might have had on Finnish society and culture. Finnish ethnologists are well positioned to contribute to the resolution of this question, especially for migrants returning in the 1880–1930 period, when Finnish society was undergoing a basic structural upheaval. To what extent did returning migrants contribute to reshaping Finnish culture using ideas, skills, and capital gained abroad? Kero (1988) has considered contributions to industrialization but much scope would appear to remain.

f) Social Problems

Part of the Finnish stereotype in North America includes high rates of suicide and alcohol problems (Jarvenpa 1976). While the alcohol problem is often noted, at least reflexively in reference to temperance societies (Alanen 1988, 63–64),

suicide has scarcely been mentioned. Both these problems are receiving considerable attention in Finland today. Is it not time for a serious academic study of these and other social problems related to migration?

g) "Burn-Beating Finns"

As an aside, considerable attention has recently been paid to the role of Finnish swidden farmers ("burn-beaters") in New Sweden and Michael Berry (1989, 25) has raised some interesting questions about them and their relationships with the environment. But little reference has been made to the considerable ethnological literature on swidden agriculture (Rappaport 1975). This includes considerable material on Finland. For example, the journal *Suomen Antropologi* devoted an entire issue (4/1987), in English, to swidden agriculture (see especially Sarmela 1987).

Two Important Tasks

The core of ethnological study is the extended fieldwork method. This is nonproblematic with current phenomena and completely impossible with phenomena much beyond the lifetimes of those currently alive. The 1880–1930 mass migration falls somewhere in between and there are still a few elderly migrants and their contemporaries left from the end of this period. It is absolutely urgent that we redouble our efforts, possibly to the exclusion of other activities in the short term, to record their knowledge before they are gone.

A related approach, but one which would be useful in any time frame, is a body of longitudinal case studies [3]. Such studies would consider individuals, families, or communities, ground them firmly in Finland then follow their life histories through migration and establishment or return, hopefully over several generations (Pentikäinen 1988, 50). Such a body of information could make data readily available to and be an invaluable resource for researchers in several disciplines [4].

Conclusion

Given its concern with culture, ethnology is in an ideal position to contribute to our understanding of the sorts of decision-making processes discussed above. Furthermore, working as members of interdisciplinary and multi-national research teams, I believe they can make a major contribution to Finnish – and general – migration research.

Notes

1) Except to note, on a personal level, as a former *poikatalo* owner, that I would appreciate seeing some documentation of this uniquely (?) Finnish-American institution.
2) One problem I encountered in learning Finnish in Finland was the "excessive" success modern Finns have had in their English language learning!
3) I am indebted to Timo J. Virtanen, Department of Ethnology, University of Turku, for helping develop this idea.
4) It might also tie in with the Migration Institute's planned computer register.

Literature

Alanen, Arnold R.: Finns and Other Immigrant Groups in the American Upper Midwest. In: Finns in North America; Proceedings of Finn Forum III. Turku, 1988.

Berry, Michael: Delaware 350: Some Observations. Siirtolaisuus-Migration, 1989:2, 22–26.

Dahlie, Jörgen: Language and Interaction. In: Finns in North America; Proceedings of Finn Forum III. Turku, 1988.

Hirvonen, Pekka: American Finns as Language Learners; In: Finns in North America; Proceedings of Finn Forum III. Turku, 1988.

Hummasti, P. George: From Kälviä to Astoria: Finnish Families in Transition. In: Finns in North America; Proceedings of Finn Forum III. Turku, 1988.

Hunnisett, Stanley F.: From Pohjanmaa to the Shores of Gitchee Gumee: Finns and Indians in Northern Ontario, 1900–1950. MA Thesis, U of Iowa, 1988.

Jarvenpa, Robert W.: 1976, Visual Expressions in Finnish-American Ethnic Slurs. Journal of American Folklore 89, 90–91.

Karni, Michael G.: Otto Walta, Finnish Folk Hero of the Iron Range. Minnesota History 40, 1967, 391–402.

Kero, Reino: The Finns in North America, Destinations and Compositions of Immigrant Societies in North America Before WW I. Turku, 1980.

Kero, Reino: American Immigrants as Bearers of Entrepreneurial Ideas and Technology during the Early Stages of Industrialization in Finland. In: Finns in North America; Proceedings of Finn Forum III. Turku, 1988.

Kivisto, Peter: From Immigrants to Ethnics: The Problem of the Third Generation Revisited. In: Finns in North America; Proceedings of Finn Forum III. Turku, 1988.

Lahtinen, Erkki: Suomalaisia Intiaanien Poluilla. Jyväskylä, 1946.

Laine, Edward W.: Community in Crisis: The Finnish-Canadian Quest for Cultural Identity 1900–1979. In: M. Karni (ed.), Finnish Diaspora I. Toronto, 1981.

Lindstrom-Best, Varpu: The Finns in Canada. Ottawa, 1985.

MacDonald, John S. & MacDonald, Leatrice D.: Chain Migration; Ethnic Neighborhood Formation and Social Networks. Millbank Memorial Fund Quarterly, 42, 1964, 82–87.

Martin, Marja-Liisa: Finnish as a Means of Communication in Thunder Bay. In: M. Karni (ed.), Finnish Diaspora I. Toronto, 1981.

Martin, Marja-Liisa: The Role of Code-switching among Canadian Finnish-English Bilinguals. In: Finns in North America; Proceedings of Finn Forum III. Turku, 1988.

Olin, Karl-Gustav: Delaware 350 - A Finnish View. Siirtolaisuus-Migration, 1989:2, 18–21.

Pentikäinen, Juha: Towards the Interpretation of Finnish-American Culture. In: Finns in North America; Proceedings of Finn Forum III. Turku, 1988.

Pietilä, Päivi: The English of Finnish Immigrants in the United States: the Use of Communication Strategies. In: Finns in North America; Proceedings of Finn Forum III. Turku, 1988.

Pietilä, Päivi: Forthcoming Ph.D. Thesis, U of Turku, Dept. of English, 1989.

Rappaport, Roy: Pigs for the Ancestors. New Haven, 1968.

Reichl, Christopher A.: Japanese Newcomers in Brazil: A Social Model of Migration. Ph.D. Dissertation, U of Iowa, 1988.

Roinila, Mike: Language Retention in the Ethnic Identification of Winnipeg's Finnish Population. Siirtolaisuus–Migration, 1987:2, 6–11.

Saarinen, O.W. and Tapper, G.O.: The Beaver Lake Finnish-Canadian Community: A Case Study of Ethnic Transition as Influenced by the Variables of Time and Spatial Networks, ca. 1907–1983. In: Finns in North America; Proceedings of Finn Forum III. Turku, 1988.

Sarmela, Matti: Swidden Cultivation in Finland as a Cultural System. Suomen Antropologi, 1987:4.

Söderling, Ismo: Social, Historical and Archival Aspects of the Finnish Migration to Michigan. Siirtolaisuus-Migration, 1987:2, 12–17.

Sutyla, Charles M.: The Finnish Sauna in Manitoba. Ottawa, 1977.

Tuomi-Nikula, Outi: Acculturation in the Ethnic Mixed Marriage. Ethnologia Fennica 16, 1987–1988, 5–26.

Virtaranta, Pertti: Considerations on American Finnish, Particularly Its Vocabulary. In: Finns in North America; Proceedings of Finn Forum III. Turku, 1988.

Wolfe, Alvin W.: The Rise of Network Thinking in Anthropology. Social Networks, 1978:1, 53–64.