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From the State of the Art in Migration Research to the Bicentennial of European Australia in 1988

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The relevance of historiography to the migrant community

From time to time, as the student of history pursues his research from one year to the next, he must pause to wonder what value or benefit his research may have; and this question may apply with particular force to migration research, especially where the population under scrutiny is small and the host country far away overseas. Yet, before we can consider the significance in historiographical terms of research into emigration and immigration, or indeed into migratory movement in general, we should first briefly consider the question: What is History? Is it a strict and methodical scientific discipline, proceeding by the application of regular principles? or is it (as Thomas Carlyle claimed) true poetry? Or something in between?

My starting point is the comment by the French historian, Louis Halphen, that "the immediate task of historiography is to preserve the events of the past from oblivion". History sets out to uncover the patterns of development within the past, the connections by which events are linked to each other, and the causes which have operated between various phenomena. Historiography orders history into totalities, into coherent wholes, published - so far - in book form, but no doubt in the future increasingly as cassettes, as films and in other audio-visual forms, or indeed as computer software. What is essential is that the findings of research should be preserved in abiding form. We can thus see historiography as the memory of the nation, preserved for future generations, however much each investigation reflects its own time.

A second essential feature of historiography is that history cannot be a mere collection of facts; for the presentation of history presupposes a process of selection and interpretation between the essential and the inessential. Historiography is based (or should be based) on a range of sources, the variety and inter-action of which make conclusions extremely difficult to draw and uncertain in nature. This leads historians into Source Criticism, and to the adoption of the widely-held principle that no source can be regarded as reliable unless it has been confirmed from at least one independent source. "Criticism", claimed Egon Fridell, "emerged from a lack of creativity"; and in the arts, this may possibly be a fair comment; but in historiography, the reverse is true, for it is precisely the critical analysis of their source material which enables historians to reconstruct the totality, and tease out the patterns of historical evolution. It is here that the perspective of time takes on its significance, enabling the historian to recognize the historical phenomena as a whole, and to map out the cause-and-effect chains operating between them; and this, no doubt, is one reason why so many historians, notwithstanding the marked increase in recent years in research into modern history, choose to investigate the more remote past.

The historical perspective is important, not only for the historiographer, but also for the reader. History is a beneficial discipline inasmuch as it enables people to make sense of their own past, and thus potentially to increase their understanding of current events and their background. Similarly, the exploration of the origins and development of some particular community may be of great importance to the members of that community, and this applies with particular force to immigrant communities. It is important, for small immigrant communities far overseas from their parent societies, that their histories should be investigated and the findings published - important for these communities self-respect, and their sense of identity, in the social-psychological sense of a community's relations with other ethnic groups, for example. An outstanding example of the significance of historiography for an immigrant community is provided by the studies published during the nineteen twenties and nineteen thirties of the history of the Finns in the United States (such as those by Wargelin, Ilmonen, or Vuorinen) which made the Finnish-American community aware of the Finlanders' contribution to the Swedish colony on the Delaware River in 1638-55. This led to many Finns taking an active part in the tercentennial celebrations of the New Sweden colony, held in Delaware in 1938, as well as reinforcing their sense of involvement in the peril faced by their former fatherland, felt by many migrants during the Second World War, and contributing to the active campaigns to raise aid and support for Finland.

A second example comes from Australia, where I lived for several years, and noticed how the Finnish-Australians' sense of self respect was boosted by the knowledge that one of Captain James Cook's companions aboard the Endeavour, when he claimed the eastern coast of Australia for the British Crown in 1770, was H.D. Spöring, born here in Turku, whose identity and work was effectively traced for the first time in the nineteen-sixties.

Migration Research Today and Tomorrow

Ten years ago, back in 1976, Sydney Goldstein suggested that migration research might well emerge as the most important area of demographic enquiry in the last quarter of the century. Whether this is happening or not, I am not sure, although it certainly seems that research into population mobility has at least been holding its own in demography, alongside the study of population fertility and mortality. (Of course, one might also see birth and death as a kind of 'migration'.) There have always been those, in every age, who have wished to change their place of residence, - often from one national jurisdiction to another, - so that there is plenty of work still to be done by future scholars in migration research, and there are certain sectors of the field which have previously received too little attention, as well as some new challenges.

One major focus which I would like to see greater attention paid to in migration research is in theory formation. To date, no scholar has succeeded in propounding a comprehensive general theory of migration. It has indeed been argued that a perfect (or even near-perfect) theory of migration is a logical impossibility. The problems begin, in fact, with the definition of the basic concept migration. The lack of an adequate theoretical basis has all too often led to mere methodological cleverness, and to the amassing of impossibly extensive research material, - where the end-result is mere *l'art pour l'art*, art for art's sake. In the future, the establishment of a firm theoretical grounding for research will be of crucial importance.

A second aspect demanding attention is the need for a multi-disciplinary and comparative perspective; and multidisciplinary, international projects in migration research thus represent an area where there is much to be done.

In addition to the development of theoretical studies, I would also wish to see major attention paid to the investigation of the lives of Finnish immigrants, and their descendants, in different parts of the world, in terms of living conditions, adaptation, and identity. Thanks to the investigations by Toivonen, Kero, and others, we now have a reasonably clear picture of the causes and background factors leading to emigration from Finland, and of the migration process itself. There are however relatively few research findings (from Finland, at any rate) on how the immigrants and their descendants have subsequently fared in their new homelands. There is considerable truth in the comment by the distinguished Finnish scholar Pentti Renwall, that the study of emigrants by historians tends to cover only the period when the emigrants maintain their contacts with their original home country.

Last summer, I had the opportunity to visit the Finnish community at Cocato, near Minneapolis. The first Finns arrived in this area came in 1865, coming, via the copper mines of Michigan from northern Norway. In Cocato, there is thus now the seventh generation of Finnish immigrants growing up, which would surely offer a marvellous field of research for ethnologist and linguists; for a Finnish community such as this offers a cultural freezer, packed with samples of mid-nineteenth-century culture and language. There could even be scope here for the anthropologist, for to judge by their physical build and rounded facial features, these Finnish immigrants' descendants would not be at all out of place among the crowd on a street in Turku, and I have noticed the same features among the present-day descendants of nineteenth-century Finnish immigrants to Australia. It is a striking experience to meet blonde, round-featured Australians who can still trace their ancestry back to Finland.

So far, the study of ethnic identity has mainly been dominated by historians, economists, and sociologists, but in recent years increasing attention has been paid to this field by psychologists as well. Here too, however, the historical perspective is crucial, for the phenomenon of migration, and the consequent emergence of an ethnic group in the host society, are tied to specific historical and geographical co-ordinates.

I would now like to move on closer to our own times, and to enquire what benefit migration has brought to the countries of origin. Let us start by considering the Interim Report on the principles of migration policy, submitted in 1980 by the Migration Committee here in Finland. The Interim Report says:

For Finnish society, emigration has been a negative and harmful factor. The steady drain of population has in many ways weakened the country's capacity for development. The concentration of emigration in particular age-groups and occupational groupings in the population has led to the distortion of the host population structure; the capital invested in the training of emigrants is wasted; and since only a few of those emigrating are, unemployed at the time of emigration, the impact on the national, unemployment rate, even in the short run, is negligible.

Nonetheless, it must also be pointed out that in the longer run, and indirectly, the capital lost through emigration may well have proved of benefit to Finland: in cultural terms, in spreading the name of Finland abroad, and in improving the prospects for exports.

The Interim Report also stresses the importance of research, in the drafting and realization of migration policy. The overall objective of migration policy in Finland is to ensure that migration questions are taken into consideration in social planning. This requires that up-to-date information be constantly available on the nature of migration and on current trends. In December 1985, the Migration Consultation Committee published a Research Program, demanding closer coordination in this field between research and policy-making. Even in Sweden, where the language teaching program for adult immigrants, for instance, costs hundreds of millions of crowns a year, hardly a fraction of this sum has been invested on migration research. This situation is, however, beginning to change in Sweden, with the identification of migration by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Council there as a major focus of attention in the next few years. This is an absolutely necessary move, for it has been estimated that by the year 2000, as many as one-third of the Swedish population aged 35 and under will be immigrant origin (i.e., second- and third-generation immigrants). Fertility rates are higher among the immigrant groups than in the host population. It is thus not surprising that an investigation recently completed at the Institute of Migration here into Finnish return migrants of school age was jointly funded by the Finnish and Swedish school authorities.

New research is however constantly needed, for the simple reason that the existing information is constantly going out of date. Only on the basis of research findings and insights into national and international migration movement is it possible to lay down guidelines for Finnish migration policy and determine its role within the international movement of labour. What we really need, as Wilbur Zelinsky has emphasized, is a new mode of thinking with regard to migration and society. The development of this new vision is a challenge facing public authorities, and the scholarly community, in both the countries of origin and the host societies. The crucial need, however, is for primary attention to be paid to the migrants themselves and their needs, so that they and their families would no longer need to be "the football being fought for by two opposed teams", as Professor Vilho Niitemaa expressed it.

In this context I would like to turn to one particular aspect of migration studies which has long fascinated me: the tyranny of distance.

In this age of the atom and the computer, it is perhaps difficult for us to appreciate the enormous significance which long distances used to have for migration or indeed for life in general. As the Bicentennial of European settlement in Australia approaches, it is worth recalling that in 1788, when the First Fleet made landfall near present-day Sydney, it had been at sea for eight months. Even a hundred years later, the voyage could take half a year by sail; nor is it therefore surprising that a considerable proportion of passengers were lost on voyage, as a consequence of poor food and of epidemics arising from inadequate hygiene.

A further consequence of the distance was the cost of the journey. For the ordinary European peasant farmer or land labourer, a ticket even to North America was an unachievable dream until the second half of the nineteenth century, when the advent of steam, the sharpening of competition between the shipping lines, and the construction of the railways both overseas and in Europe, brought emigration within the reach of the ordinary man, especially where some relative or acquaintance who had already emigrated was prepared to provide the ticket.

Yet there was always one occupation whose members were undisturbed by the cost of travel: seamen, whose ships took them to all the corners of the world. Skilled seamen, often also clever with their hands, could always find work in the coastal shipping and on the docks of North America or Australia, where the high rates of pay - not to mention the attractive climate - persuaded many European seamen to settle for good in the new country, and possibly to marry someone from a

nationality other than their own. These seamen thus became pioneer settlers, drawing relatives and acquaintances in their wake. Yet they are a group extremely difficult to investigate. They are unrecorded in the passport registers or emigration statistics of their home countries, and hardly even appear in the records of their new host countries other than perhaps in census returns or the reports of court proceedings following dockside brawls. Possibly the most reliable source for tracing them are the various naturalization records relating to those immigrants who chose to change their nationality. A close scrutiny of the seamen, who played a central role in Finnish migration to Australia, suggests however that in the nineteenth century, and the early twentieth, the phenomenon of clandestine immigration by seamen, especially to the North American continent, may have been considerably more extensive than has previously been suspected. This presents a research task which is both interesting and difficult in the extreme; for experience has shown that the investigation of migration movement to destinations far distant from Finland, and small in scale, requires a great deal of time, even for the collection of the necessary research material. If the worst comes to the worst, the entire investigation may be abandoned without being completed. Yet Finnish migration to the southern hemisphere is an important field of investigation, as a small contribution to the totality of understanding how European man set out in search of a better future, for himself and his children, than nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe was able to offer.

Finnish migration to Australia in a broader context

One of the overseas magnets attracting population - however much weaker this attraction was than that of North America - was Australia, on the opposite side of the world. Australia is one hundred per cent a country of immigrants. The aboriginal population of the continent - thought by anthropologists to be the most direct present day descendants of primitive man - arrived in the continent between thirty-five and twenty-five thousand years ago, via the islands of Indonesia. By the time that the next major wave of immigration arrived in the continent, with the arrival of the first European settlers in and after 1788, the aboriginals numbered about two hundred thousand. And Australia continues to be an immigrant society: one in five of the present day population of almost sixteen million is either an immigrant or the child of an immigrant.

In the period since the middle of the nineteenth century, approximately one hundred thousand persons have migrated from the Nordic countries to Australia; and twenty-five thousand of these, as Dr Ulf Beijbom, has demonstrated in his study *Australienfararna*, came from Sweden. Yet the Finnish contribution has been almost as large, amounting to twenty-four thousand. Australia has been the third most important destination for Finnish overseas emigration, after the United States and Canada, and Finnish settlement in Australia was more extensive and has a longer history than has previously been realized, as is shown by the findings of the present study.

Olavi Koivukangas received his Ph.D. in Demography at the Australian National University in Canberra in 1972. In 1974 he was appointed Director of the Institute of Migration in Turku. In September 20, 1986, his book: SEA, GOLD AND SUGARCANE; Attraction versus Distance. Finns in Australia 1851-1947, pp. 400, was examined at the University of Turku for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History. The Official Opponent was Doc. Ulf Beijbom from the House of Emigrants, in Växjö, Sweden and the Custos prof. Kalervo Hovi of the Institute of History, University of Turku.