

Abstract

Ph.D. Dissertation at Göteborg University, Sweden, 2006

Title: *"Är du finsk eller ...?" En etnologisk studie om att växa upp och leva med finsk bakgrund i Sverige*

English title: *"Are you Finnish, or ...?" On growing up and living with Finnish background in Sweden*

Author: Marja Ågren

Language: Swedish, with an English summary

Department: Department of Ethnology, Göteborg University, Box 200, SE-405 30 Göteborg

This thesis has a starting point in the extensive migration from Finland to Sweden that took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these migrants ended up in Sweden, and today there are around 450,000 people of Finnish background living in Sweden. For this thesis, fourteen persons born and living in Gothenburg have been interviewed about what their Finnish background means to them – and how it takes form – in their everyday lives, with regard to their positions in society and as an element in their identities. The six men and eight women were born between 1967 and 1978 and they all have parents who migrated from Northern Finland to the Gothenburg region in the 1960s. Besides analysing these life stories the thesis also constructs a version of the history of Finns in Sweden. The two lines of stories reflect and shed light on each other, even though the collective one above all is to be seen as a contextual complement to the personal narratives. The main material of the study thus consists of the fourteen life stories, and the main theme is the one of identity and identification. However, throughout the book a number of concepts are touched upon, and developed in varying depths. These are, for instance, questions of ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, generation, language, segregation, representation, racialization and minority politics. The concept of "Finnish background" is taken from the rhetoric of Swedish integration policy. The background of the interviewees is not understood as signifying something "past" or seen as having a fixed content and meaning – and "the Finnishness" is only one element of it. The interviewees themselves are the ones who can tell its significance – and to analyse and describe what they say about that is the main purpose of the thesis. The informants' views of the "Finnishness" in their lives have varied along with different phases in their lives; today they all recognize it as an asset in their lives. All of the parents of the interviewees have had blue-collar jobs in Sweden, and some of the interviewees stress the significance of the working-class background, for instance when it comes to choices about education and work, and when interacting with people from other social classes. The thesis above all shows the complexity of the process of identification. All in all, the interviewees are fully capable of handling their positions of living in Sweden with a "foreign background", even the parts that might sometimes complicate their lives. In a sense these persons, from a Swedish perspective, can be seen as forerunners, since their experiences and their various ways of dealing with and using them, help to complicate the idea of what it is to be Swedish.

Keywords: Finnish background, identity, nationality, ethnicity, integration, working class, Gothenburg