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## Images of Ideal Citizens and Gender in Finland in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century

Eira Juntti

Nationalist ideology gained support among the educated elite in Finland already in the 1820s and 1830s. The emphasis of nationalist activity was initially on culture, on recording what was still left of the old oral poetry and other folk traditions. By the 1840s the goal was set at making Finnish the primary language of the country. Considering that the administrative language had thus far always been Swedish, and beyond the primary level there was no education available in Finnish, that was quite a task. In the 1840s and 1850s, newspapers were really the only available readings in Finnish besides the Bible and other religious texts, such as the hymnal and Catechism. They were also the only place – besides face-to-face meetings – where public discussion could take place. Already in the 1830s, the few existing newspapers, whether published in Swedish or Finnish, defined their mission in very patriotic terms. They were interested in furthering the knowledge of Finnish history and promoting Finnish literature.<sup>1</sup> By the 1840s and 1850s, especially the newspapers published in Finnish were eager to promote 'common' or 'national' causes.

In the discussion on these national causes, or 'national activities' as the newspapers called them, the papers also constructed images of ideal Finnish citizens. It is not surprising to a gender historian that the citizen was considered to be primarily a man, and women had a different role reserved for them. I will begin by discussing articles on these so-called 'national activities', and what they tell us about the image of an ideal Finnish citizen and the construction of gendered spheres in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, I will discuss the specific image of a peasant man as an ideal Finn and the gendered construction of that image. Furthermore, I will reflect on the creators of that image, the educated gentry men, and how they also represented the ideal Finnish citizen, even if the image was not as well

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<sup>1</sup> Tommila 1988, 113-129.

articulated as the image of the peasant citizen. The discussion is based primarily on an analysis of the key Finnish language newspapers in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>2</sup>

### 'National Activities' and the Ideal Citizen

One of the themes Finnish newspapers in the 1840s and 1850s were concerned with was 'communality', usually expressed by the terms *yhteisyys*, *yhteisöllisyys*, or *yhteys-elämä*.<sup>3</sup> The papers, which also saw themselves as embodiments of such 'communality', tried to encourage the readers to take up common causes, such as improving agriculture, building roads, establishing schools, libraries, savings banks, fire insurance associations, and so on. The papers commonly referred to these as *kansalliset harjoitukset*, which can be translated as 'national exercises' or 'national activities'. *Kansallinen* or 'national' meant more or less the same as *yhteinen* or 'common' (as for example in 'common cause'). What made the various civic activities 'national' was the 'national spirit' (*kansallinen henki*) that guided them and gave them a common direction.<sup>4</sup>

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the concept *kansallinen* (national) was a new one and in the 1840s and 1850s its meaning and usage had not yet been codified. Etymologically the word derives from the Finnish word *kansa* which means 'people' (German *Volk*) and was used in the meaning 'national' for the first time in 1828.<sup>5</sup> But besides 'the nation', *kansallinen* also referred to community or society in general.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I am using the same material I used in my dissertation (Juntti 2004). The papers are: *Oulun Viikko-Sanomia* (Weekly News from Oulu), *Sanan Saattaja Viipurista* (Messages from Viipuri), *Kanava* (Canal, published in Viipuri), and *Suometar* (published in Helsinki).

<sup>3</sup> For example: "Kunnioitettavalle yhteisyydelle Suomessa," *Kanava* 1 (4.1.1845) 2-3; "Muutamista Yhtein asioista Suomessa," *Kanava* 0 (29.11.1846) 2-3; "Yhteis-henki Suomessa," *Suometar* 43 (24.10.1856) 2-3 and 44 (31.10.1856) 2; "Yhteys-elämä Suomessa," *Sanan-Lennätin* 1 (5.1.1856) 3.

<sup>4</sup> None of the articles really defined what the 'national spirit' was, but for example Z. Topelius in his famous 1843 speech "Do the Finnish people have a history?" spoke of the 'national spirit' as an innate spiritual quality that all Finns shared. Topelius 1949.

<sup>5</sup> Rapola 1960, 37. In Finnish the word *kansa* is the root word for a number of concepts related to nationalism and nation states coined in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century: *kansakunta* (nation), *kansalainen* (citizen, first used in 1828), *kansalaisuus* (citizenship, 1860), and *kansallisuus* (nationality, 1836). Rapola 1960.

<sup>6</sup> According to Stenius, in the 1860s Elias Lönnrot – the chief authority on Finnish language at the time – understood *kansallinen* to have two, closely related aspects: it referred to *yhteiskuntaelämä yleensä* or

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the public sphere in the sense of a forum where public debates are carried out and citizens are active in their own associations was in its initial stages in Finland. Newspapers were an important part of the public sphere. It was in the 1840s and 1850s that the publication of Finnish language newspapers gained momentum, and all of the papers published in Finnish were 'nationalist': they wanted to promote 'Finnishness' (*suomalaisuus*), meaning everything that could promote the cause of Finnish culture, and 'common good', or improving the overall conditions in the country.

In their effort to promote Finnish culture, the papers made sure to mention every new book, paper, or magazine published in Finnish. The papers followed plans to establish Finnish schools. They also published travel accounts by Finnish scientists, such as Elias Lönnrot who collected Finnish folk poems in Finland and Russia, and M. A. Castrén who researched the origins of Finnish language and traveled far into Siberia. Many 'firsts' were recorded, such as the first master's thesis ever written in Finnish,<sup>7</sup> and even the first wedding invitation written in Finnish.<sup>8</sup>

The way in which these 'national activities' were discussed indicates that they were conceptualized as male activities. We do know that gentry<sup>9</sup> women also participated in promoting 'common causes', for example they established schools for poor children and

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social life in general, that is, things common to everyone, and to *kansakuntainen* or things relating to the nation. Stenius 2003, 329.

<sup>7</sup> Julius Krohn from Viipuri was the first one to write his master's thesis in Finnish. "Kotimaalta: Suomalaisuutta," *Sanan-Lennätin* 22 (30.5.1857) 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> "Kotimaalta," *Kanava* 46 (2.12.1846) 1.

<sup>9</sup> For the sake of convenience, I am using the term gentry as an equivalent of the Finnish concept *säätyläiset* and Swedish *ståndspersoner*, which mean 'persons of status'. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the population had come to be divided to two groups socially: *säätyläiset* or the 'persons of status', and the common people (*kansa* or *rahvas* in Finnish, *allmoge* in Swedish). According to Alapuro, "in Swedish usage, the concept of the gentry initially referred to the nobility, the clergy, and their social equals. Later the term *other gentry* was used to refer to commoners who had entered the military and bureaucratic ranks and to any teachers or professionals who did not fall into the traditional 'learned estate' of the clergy" (1988, 26). The key difference between the groups was not so much wealth, but family origin and access to education. Knowledge of Swedish language also distinguished the gentry from the commoners (except in the Swedish speaking parts of the country). Jutikkala emphasises that by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the division was primarily a social one, it was not connected to the system of legal right of representation through the four estates or the system of privileges bestowed upon corporations (1968, 183).

collected money for different kinds of charities.<sup>10</sup> However, women's involvement in 'common causes' was usually mentioned only among the short domestic news, not in the articles where 'communality' or 'Finnishness' were discussed at length. It was by no means a question of ignorance: the editors and contributors did know what the women were doing – as mentioned, they even reported the women's activities among the short news. Furthermore, the women in question were from their own families: their wives, sisters, mothers, cousins, and so on. However, the articles on 'national activities' focused on what men did. In addition, they were addressed to men – that is, the intended audience was other men who were encouraged to take up similar projects. For example, an article stated:

Kansalliset harjoitukset ovat nykyisempinä vuosina enemmän kun millonkaan maassamme varmistuneet, ja ne *miehet* jotka niitä ovat edesauttaneet erinomaisen maalaistensa rakkauden ansainneet.... Mikä lavia ala *maanmiehillemme* kansallisiin harjoituksiin.<sup>11</sup>

National activities have in recent years more than ever become stronger in our country, and the *men* who have pushed them forward deserve the love of their fellow countrymen.... What a wide area for *our country's men* for national activities.

At times it was outright stated that 'the wealth and strength of a nation' was in its men:

Kansan rikkaus ja voima, sekä maallinen että hengellinen, se on kansan toimellisimmissa *miehissä*, se on kansan nerokkaimmissa ja viisaimmissa.... Ja se kansa, jolla vielä on yksikään kunnon *mies*, ei ole köyhä eikä voimaton...<sup>12</sup>

The wealth and strength of a nation, both earthly and spiritual, it is in the most active *men*, it is in the most brilliant and wisest of the nation... And the nation, which has even one decent *man* left, is not poor or powerless...

That is, men are seen as the initiators and participants, not women.

Unlike in English, in Finnish the word *mies*, 'man', is usually not used in the meaning 'person' or 'human being'. In the above examples, 'man' should not be read as referring to a generic human being, it is used in a gender specific sense, meaning a man. In Finnish,

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<sup>10</sup> E.g. Ramsay 1993.

<sup>11</sup> "Sovinto-oikeuksista ja niiden tarpeellisuudesta Suomessa," *Kanava* 4 (25.1.1845) 2; emphasis added.

<sup>12</sup> "Missä on kansan rikkaus ja voima?" *Sanan-Lennätin* 2 (9.1.1858) 2; emphasis added.

the term for a generic human being is *ihminen*. For example, there is no 'mankind' in Finnish, it is *ihmiskunta* – human kind.

The way in which gentry women's activities were reported underlines the impression that men and women were seen as belonging to different spheres. Firstly, the activities of the Ladies' Societies were most often reported shortly, and only in the late 1850s they received more attention. Secondly, and more importantly, the reports were often congratulatory, drawing attention to the fact that gentry *women* had undertaken such activities - not to criticize them, but rather to set them up as examples:

We hear from Kuopio that the ladies of the town have donated sewing and other handicrafts to be sold in a lottery, to benefit a school which is to be established for daughters of the poorest workers. In this way has already been collected 170 silver Rubles and it has been decided that the school will open immediately. Certain young woman has taken it on herself to be the teacher, and almost eighty students have already registered. *Certainly a beautiful example for others to follow.*<sup>13</sup>

In the same vein, *Suometar* reported that gentry women in Hollola parish in Central Finland had began to teach children and stated: "We *especially* have to mention, that many of the young gentry women in the county have been helping the teachers in these schools."<sup>14</sup> In a report of a lottery ball organized by the Helsinki Ladies' Society, the reporter became almost poetic when describing the gentry women's enthusiasm:

... of gentle joy and Christian love shined the women's eyes, seeing and feeling what good they could bring about to aid in the civilization of humanity. Is there a more beautiful sight for one's eyes, a more refreshing feeling in one's heart, than when we see a Woman who can freely follow the voice in her heart: to show love and help where the hand of misfortune weighs heavily, or where tears of insecurity flow.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Kuopiosta kirjoitetaan (Saima) että kaupungin vallasnaisilta on lahjotettu ompeluksia ja muita käsitöitä arpakaupassa myötäväksi, yhden köyhemmän rahvaan tyttärille varustettavan koulun tarpeeksi. Sillä tavalla on jo 170 Ruplaa hop. saatu kootuksi ja koulu päätetty siis heti alkavaksi. Muuan nuori nainen on ottanut ruvetaksensa opettajaksi, ja kaheksatta kymmentä oppilasta jo ovat siihen ilmoittaneet. *Totisesti kaunis esimerkki muuallaki seurattavaksi*". "Kotimaalta," *Kanava* 23 (17.06.1846) 1; emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup> "Erittäin on mainittava, että monta pitäjän nuorista Herras-naisista ovat näissä kouluissa olleet opettajan apuna". "Kotimaalta: Hollolasta," *Suometar* 41 (14.10.1851) 4; emphasis added.

<sup>15</sup> "... lempiästä ilosta ja kristillisestä rakkaudesta loistivat naisten silmät, nähden ja tuntein mitä hyvää he voivat matkaansaattaa ihmiskunnan sivistyksen edesauttamiseksi. Mikä silmälle kauniimpi näkö, mikä sydämelle virvoittavaisempi tunto, kun koska näemme Naisen vapaasti saavan seurata sydämensä ääntä: osottaa rakkautta ja auttaa missä onnettomuuden käsi kovin painaa, tai missä turvattomuuden kyynäleet vuotavat". "Kotimaalta: Helsingistä," *Suometar* 9 (11.3.1851) 4.

The praise and singling out the fact that gentry *women* had undertaken such activities indicate that it was considered exceptional, and that the gentry women had ventured into an area where they normally did not belong. Venturing outside of the domestic area could raise questions about their class and even their gender. Therefore their actions needed to be explained. The praise is meant to counter negative feelings about gentry women's changing role in society. There was a strong norm against gentry women working outside of the home: it was thought as shameful for them to be working for living.<sup>16</sup> However, charity work was seen as suitable for them.<sup>17</sup> The message the authors wish to convey is that charity work is respectable, that it is not the kind of wage work that servants and laborers do. That is, there is a desire to separate gentry women's charity work from 'actual' work, to represent it as appropriate and respectable.

Though from today's perspective the kinds of activities gentry women were involved in would seem to belong to the category 'national activities', at the time they were conceptualized as private, not public, and therefore not 'national'. If women crossed over to what was considered the male public sphere, as gentry women who participated in charity work through their own association to a degree did, a great care was taken in constructing their activities as feminine. The phrases like "gentle joy" and "a beautiful example" served precisely to feminize the women and charity work. Feminizing the women and their work was all part of an attempt to maintain the separateness of the gendered spheres even when men and women's activities were in fact quite similar.

In sum, in the nationalist discourse the activities promoting the common good and 'Finnishness' were conceived as men's activities. The underlying conception was that men

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<sup>16</sup> Despite the normative ideas, in reality especially unmarried gentry women and widows had to work unless their families were wealthy enough to provide for them. For example, after losing her home in the 1827 fire of Turku Fredrika Runeberg, the niece of the bishop, earned money by selling handicrafts and painting decorations, but she could not sell them openly, it had to be done in secret because of her gentry status (Allardt-Ekelund 1945, 50-52). In general, work opportunities for gentry women were scarce in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Besides selling different kinds of handicrafts, the other options were working as a teacher or governess (Vattula 1981, 64-65, 80-81; Pohls 1990, 59).

<sup>17</sup> Ramsay 1993. See also "Kotimaalta: Helsingistä," *Suometar* 9 (11.3.1851) 4; "Kotimaalta: Maaseuduilta, Kuopion läänistä," *Sanan-Lennätin* 14 (4.4.1857) 1.

- and this did not self-evidently include for example men servants - were the ones capable of undertaking such activities. This is connected to the gendering of the public sphere: men were seen as acting in public, and whatever women did was considered part of the private.

In discussing the 'national activities', the texts also construct an image of an ideal citizen. However, we have to remember that the concept 'citizen' in the sense of a member of a state with certain political and legal rights did not yet exist in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in Finland.<sup>18</sup> The idea that all citizens would have the same rights did not fit well into a society divided by rank. As discussed by Stenius, when the concept *kansalainen* does crystallize in Finnish, its meaning is not the same as the meaning of 'citizen' in Central European, urban societies. Specifically, the concept *kansalainen* was not connected to a discourse of political rights. A *kansalainen* had certain limited legal rights and responsibilities, but more importantly this citizen had the possibility of participating in the project of building the nation.<sup>19</sup> That is, the concept of citizenship adopted in Finland was very broad.<sup>20</sup> Specific rights were not emphasized; rather, the 'citizen' was burdened by a moral duty to participate in 'civic' or 'national' pursuits. When citizenship is defined in such broad terms, at first it seems difficult to claim that any specific group, such as women, would be excluded from it. However, it is evident from the newspaper discussion that whenever 'national activities' are concretized, they are clearly activities considered suitable only for men. In short, in discussing the 'national activities' the papers also constructed an image of an ideal Finnish citizen, and the ideal citizen was a man.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Peasant Citizen**

Another interesting aspect of the nationalist discourse is that the ideal Finn was often depicted as a peasant man, not a middle-class/bourgeois man, or an educated man, but a

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<sup>18</sup> Stenius 2003, 322-340.

<sup>19</sup> Stenius 2003, 336-338.

<sup>20</sup> Stenius 2003, 326.

<sup>21</sup> For international comparisons, see Blom et al. 2000.



hard-working, simple, peasant man. The educated elite looked to the peasant culture to find what was truly 'Finnish'. In the nationalist imagination, the peasantry was seen as the authentic representative of the Finnish nation, unspoiled by foreign influences. This is evident in Finnish literature, which "was born very much as a national literature" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> The precedent was set early on, in the 1830s, when J. L. Runeberg created his first peasant characters in the poem "Paavo of Saarijärvi" (published in *Dikter*<sup>23</sup> [Poems], 1832) and then in the poetic work *The Elk Shooters* (*Elgskyttarne*, 1832)<sup>24</sup>.

According to Pirjo Lyytikäinen,

Paavo of Saarijärvi is one of the most enduring icons of Finnishness, and was elevated by the educated elite into a national archetype: a humble, tenacious and devout peasant, who stands firm in the face of suffering. He personified the kind of people that the educated elite was prepared to love.<sup>25</sup>

As Lyytikäinen emphasizes, Paavo of Saarijärvi was an image created by an author who viewed his subjects from a distance: Runeberg as well as the rest of the educated elite saw the peasantry "as an exotic Other".<sup>26</sup> Most of the people writing for the Finnish newspapers were not peasants, but belonged to the gentry; some had peasant 'origins', but that often meant that they were sons of relatively well-off farmers or sons of Lutheran ministers from a country parish.

Though the idealized image of the peasant man was elevated above others as the most authentic representative of the Finnish nation<sup>27</sup>, when looking for images of an ideal Finnish citizen I think we can not forget the men who created that image: as public personas, in many ways they were also seen as exemplary Finns and citizens. Therefore I argue that there were two ideals of a Finnish citizen: the educated gentry man, who was socially and politically active, participating in the building of the Finnish nation through

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<sup>22</sup> Lyytikäinen 1999, 140.

<sup>23</sup> J. L. Runeberg wrote in Swedish.

<sup>24</sup> Lyytikäinen 1999, 143.

<sup>25</sup> Lyytikäinen 1999, 143.

<sup>26</sup> Lyytikäinen 1999, 143.

<sup>27</sup> In the nationalist imagination, the Finnish-speaking peasant man was an inhabitant of the 'inland', not of the Swedish speaking coastal regions. The inhabitants of the coastal regions were seen as more active, industrious, and gregarious than people in the 'inland'. This division to two different kinds of peoples had emerged already in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. When Runeberg elevated the Finnish-speaking people of the 'inland' to national heroes and praised their humbleness and devotion, he in effect reversed the hierarchy between these two peoples. See Klinge 1982, 12-13, 21-22, 79-86, 106-125.

his professional or volunteer activities, and the peasant man, who was clever even though he lacked formal education, a good farmer, and also active in his community. Some of the 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalists were living examples of such ideal gentry citizens, for example Yrjö Koskinen (1830-1903), one of the leading figures in nationalist politics as well as a university professor, and Julius Krohn (1835-1888), a scholar of Finnish folk poetry and Finnish literature, a journalist, and a poet. But the ideal peasant citizen often appears more fictional than real, even if without doubt we can find some historical examples that fit the image. Even though the peasant man was hailed as the authentic Finn by the nationalists, they also saw themselves as the builders of the nation, the future hope without which the nation would not be realized. Some of them were very conscious of their role as leaders, and sought to set an example to their peers through their life choices. In their view, the peasants needed to be enlightened, and ultimately only an educated Finnish speaking elite could do that.

In reality, there was tension between the gentry and the peasantry, due to social, economic, and political conditions, but the nationalist imagery suppressed that tension. The image of the ideal peasant citizen served the ideological purpose of allowing the gentry to believe that the problems could be overcome on their terms. In the fictional stories published in newspapers in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the ideal peasant acted as the nationalists wished him to act.<sup>28</sup>

One example of such a peasant character is Elias of Toimela (*Toimelan Elias* in Finnish), whose adventures the readers could follow regularly in the newspaper *Oulun Viikko-Sanomia* (Weekly News from Oulu) from 1855 through 1862. Toimela is the name of the farm where Elias was born. It derives from the word *toimi*, meaning a chore or an activity, and the name indicates that his childhood home was a busy, industrious place. The author was Johan Bäckvall, originally a farmer's son who became a Lutheran minister. He edited *Oulun Viikko-Sanomia* from 1854 through 1864. Finnish was his native language and he translated several works from Swedish into Finnish. Later he also

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<sup>28</sup> Pertti Karkama has discussed the problematic of the intelligentsia imagining 'the people'. See Karkama 1999, 90-97 and Karkama 1985, 39-41.

served as a representative of his own estate, the Clergy, in the Finnish Diet.<sup>29</sup> Though not well known to the public and mostly forgotten by posterity, he can be considered a model citizen in the sense the Finnish nationalists defined the term.

The character of Elias was not really unique, rather it was similar to many other characters which appeared in Finnish newspapers from the 1840s through the 1860s. Elias was an enlightened peasant man who sought to educate the people of his village through his stories and by setting a good example. Elias either discussed the conditions in his home village or he told stories about his adventures in different parts of the world. The main purpose of the stories was educational. The stories are written in the tradition of peasant enlightenment (*talonpoikaisvalistus*), which dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century but influenced cultural life in Finland well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> The underlying ideology of peasant enlightenment is utilitarianism and it focuses on economic progress: enlightening peasants ('people') is considered necessary for the economy to improve.<sup>31</sup> A well-known example of this type of writing is Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanach*. Parts of Franklin's book had been translated into Finnish already in 1826 and many of the Finnish authors from the early and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century must have been familiar with it.<sup>32</sup>

One characteristic of the genre of peasant enlightenment is a dialogue format: usually a wise, old man tells a story to a younger listener. J. V. Snellman, one of the leading Finnish nationalists, used the format when writing for *Maamiehen Ystävä* (The Farmer's Friend), a newspaper meant for a peasant reader, in 1844. In these stories 'the Farmer's Friend' instructs an average peasant, Matti, with whom the readers are meant to identify.<sup>33</sup> Another well-known example of the dialogue format was a book by Antero Warelius, *Enon opetuksia luonnon asioissa* (Uncle's Instructions on Nature), published in 1845. It was one of the first natural scientific books published in Finnish in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and was read widely.<sup>34</sup> The dialogue format was also familiar from the

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<sup>29</sup> Tommila 1984, 56-58; *Kansallinen elämäkerrasto* 1927.

<sup>30</sup> Karkama 2001, 10, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Karkama 2001, 23, 96.

<sup>32</sup> Karkama 2001, 98-99, 122-23.

<sup>33</sup> Rantanen 1997, 192.

<sup>34</sup> Tommila 1984, 102.

Catechism.<sup>35</sup> The format establishes a hierarchy between the 'I', the wise old man, and the reader/audience, which remains in the position of a child. Besides the age difference, there is often also a difference of social status.

Another interesting characteristic of the genre is that the dialogue usually takes place among men. This is especially true of the stories on Elias. Even when he talks to 'the villagers', it is evident that he is not talking to both men and women, but only men. If the character's gender is identified in the text, either by name or some other referent, the character is always revealed to be a man (e.g. *Korpelan Perttu*, Perttu of Korpela; *Ketolan vanha vaari*, the grandpa of Ketola; *eräs ukko*, some old man, etc.). Women do not participate in the dialogue, they are never identified by name, and they are only referred to as members of a gendered group, which is always marked by some negative characteristics. For example, in a story on 'Value', 'ladies' (*rouvas ihminen*) and 'women' (*vaimot*) are depicted as vain and greedy, since they prefer diamonds and gold to natural flowers.<sup>36</sup> In another story, women are characterized as cowards and accused of superstition and ignorance, because they are afraid of ball lightning.<sup>37</sup>

At first sight, it seems possible to explain the absence of women by the gendered division of labor in the Finnish agricultural society. It was common for men and women to work in same-gender groups, performing different kinds of tasks.<sup>38</sup> In light of this, it might first appear natural that Elias only talks with other men. But on a second thought, there is nothing natural about it. Though there were gendered spheres, the boundaries were not absolute. Women and men often worked within the same space, even if their tasks were different, so that a dialogue was possible. For example, in the winter-time people gathered in the big common room *tupa* or *pirtti*. In fact, Elias often tells his stories to a crowd gathered in such a common room. Moreover, the educational stories written specifically for the peasant audience, are not the only ones in which women are absent. This was true also in the articles on 'national activities' discussed above. Therefore the

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<sup>35</sup> Tommila 1988, 159.

<sup>36</sup> "Toimelan Elias: Arvosta," *Oulun Viikko-Sanomia* 3 (21.2.1857) 1.

<sup>37</sup> "Toimelan Elias: Tulipalloista," *Oulun Viikko-Sanomia* 11 (13.3.1858) 1.

<sup>38</sup> Markkola 1990, 20-21; Talve 1997, 173-174.

absence of women has more to do with the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century political, economic, and social context, than with the gendered division of labor in the agrarian society: the rise of nationalist ideology, the growth of industries and market economy, and emerging class divisions. Newspapers were a new medium, very much part of the cultural avant-garde. Rather than just reflect 'traditional' views, newspapers also represented new views, and saw themselves as agents of change. The construction of a community of men talking to one another and men acting to change the society is part of a conscious effort, it is not produced accidentally or 'unconsciously'.

The stated goal of some of the Finnish papers, especially *Oulun Viikko-Sanomia* and *Maamiehen Ystävä*, was to reach the peasantry.<sup>39</sup> Though on the surface, the Finnish rhetoric on 'the people' is gender-neutral, in concrete examples 'the people' often means only peasant men. For example, in *Maamiehen Ystävä*, the purpose of the paper is explained in a story that consists of a dialogue between the Farmer's Friend and a peasant (*talonpoika*<sup>40</sup>). There are no attempts in the story to address peasant women as a potential audience. The peasant is always a man:

"Kyllä se talonpoika oppii poika isältänsä." [A peasant sure can learn from father to son.]

"Mutta ei niin viisasta miestä ole, joka ei neuomalla mahdais viisaammaksi tulla." [There is no man so wise that he could not become wiser through instruction.]<sup>41</sup>

The series on Elias of Toimela also did not try to appeal to women in any particular way, for example by discussing topics that might be of special interest to them, or by including a woman as one of the discussants.<sup>42</sup> The way in which it appealed to peasant men was by simply placing them and their interests center stage, and letting peasant men do the

<sup>39</sup> Tomila 1984, 71-74; Tommila 1988 125-126, 159.

<sup>40</sup> The term for a peasant is *talonpoika* in Finnish, and literally means 'the son of a house/farm'. When used in plural, *talonpoijat*, it becomes unclear whether only men or both men and women are included. There is also a collective term, *talonpoikaisto*, which means 'peasantry' and appears more inclusive in its meaning.

<sup>41</sup> "Mitä Maamiehen Ystävällä on sanomista," *Maamiehen Ystävä* 1 (5.1.1844) 1-3.

<sup>42</sup> I have found one educational story which includes a discussion between a man and a woman: a story published in *Oulun Viikko-Sanomia* in 1855 titled "Niemelän isäntä", "The Master of Niemelä." Despite the title, it features both the master and the matron (*emäntä*) discussing the pros and cons of moving to northern Norway. The author is not named, it is only noted that the story was sent by a reader.

talking. The absence of women is also a feature in the educational stories written by Elias Lönnrot for *Oulun Viikko-Sanomia* in the early 1850s. Some of them discuss women, for example giving advice on marriage and how to choose a good wife. But women do not participate in the discussion.<sup>43</sup>

Rather than accept it as 'natural' that Elias only talks to other men, or that all of the 'actors' are always men, we have to realize that it is part of an effort to construct a new world: an 'imagined community' with a male public sphere, which is also a 'modern' world of technological innovations and forward-looking mentality. In terms of gender, it is a world in which gender differences came to mean something different than what they meant before, and the idea of separate spheres gained in importance.<sup>44</sup>

Besides the gendered construction of the ideal peasant citizen, the stories of Elias reveal the contrast between the ideal and non-ideal image. The most interesting moment in the story is the opening, for it is the only time Elias is characterized:

Toimelan torppa oli Laajalan kylässä ja Kuulusan lautamiehen maalla. Elias oli torpan nuorin poika, virkiä luontoinen ja hyvin liikkuva. Kaikissa kylän poikain leikissä oli Elias paraana; hän oli sukkelin katoille ja puihin kiipeämään ja rohkein sieltä alas hyppäämään... Kuitenkin oli Eliaksella hyvä sydän; hän ei koskaan valehdellut, eikä ollut tottelematoin vanhempiaan kohtaan. Eliaksen vanhemmat kuolivat; hän asui vielä torpassa, jonka vanhin veli sai haltuunsa.<sup>45</sup>

The Toimela croft was in the village of Laajala and part of the farm of Kuulusa, whose master was a juryman. Elias was the youngest son of the crofter, astute by his nature and quick on his feet. In all the games of the village boys Elias was the best; he was the first to climb up on to the roofs and trees, and the bravest when jumping down from there... However, Elias had a good heart; he never lied, and never disobeyed his parents. His parents died; he was still living in the croft, which was taken over by his eldest brother.

The beginning establishes Elias' socio-economic status, describes his character, and gives the most crucial facts about his early life. The opening follows what seems to have been an established formula, for there are other similar openings in the newspaper. For

<sup>43</sup> Karkama 2001, 120, 133.

<sup>44</sup> Sulkunen 1990, 50-53 ; Hall 1992, esp. Ch. 3, 4, 7; Davidoff and Hall 2002, 114-118, and Ch. 10.

<sup>45</sup> "Toimelan Elias," *Oulun Viikko-Sanomia* 35 (1.9.1855) 1.

example, a story sent by a reader tells the life story of Paavo Luonnokas, apparently a real historical figure, and opens like this:

Paavo Luonnokas syntyi etelä Suomessa eräässä torpassa... Matalassa majassa kasvatettiin hän vanhemmiltaan kristillisesti. Erinomainen ymmärtäväisyys ja vilppaus vallitsi jo lapsuudessa Paavossa; muitten lasten seurassa kulki hän usein ja käytti itsensä niin heitä kohtaan, että kaikki mielistyivät häneen.<sup>46</sup>

Paavo Luonnokas was born in southern Finland in a crofter's cottage... In the low cottage he was raised by his parents to be a good Christian. Paavo was especially understanding and alert already in childhood; he played with other children often and treated them so that everybody liked him.

Similar to Elias, Paavo has a good character despite his humble beginnings. This kind of an opening might sound familiar to readers of Finnish literature even today, for we find a variation of it in one of the most famous works of Finnish fiction, *The Seven Brothers* by Aleksis Kivi, first published in 1870:

Jukolan talo, eteläisessä Hämeessä, seisoo erään mäen pohjaisella rinteellä, liki Toukolan kylää. Sen läheisin ympäristö on kivinen tanner, mutta alempana alkaa pellot, joissa, ennenkuin talo oli häviöön mennyt, aaltoili teräinen vilja.<sup>47</sup>

Jukola Farm, in the southern part of Häme, lies on the northern slope of a hill not far from a village called Toukola. Around the house the ground is studded with boulders, but farther down the slope are fields, where once, before the farm fell into decay, heavy-eared crops used to wave.<sup>48</sup>

Kivi's opening is much longer and richer in detail, but in four paragraphs he establishes the same information about the seven brothers as we know about Elias: They were sons of a farmer living in their inherited farm. The farm used to be prosperous, but had begun to decline already during their father's time since he was more interested in hunting than farming. Their father was killed by a bear when the brothers were still young. Their mother had been a good Christian, but unfortunately the brothers did not listen to her advice. They were not too keen on working hard and, like their father, enjoyed roaming free in the woods more than keeping up the farm.

<sup>46</sup> "Paavo Luonnokkaan elämän-tapauksia," *Oulun Viikko-Sanomia* 2 (9.1.1858) 2.

<sup>47</sup> Kivi [1870] 2000, 3.

<sup>48</sup> Kivi [1870] 1962, 13.

If we contrast the opening of *The Seven Brothers* with the opening of "Elias of Toimela", it becomes even clearer that Elias is the model peasant citizen, whereas the seven brothers have a shadow cast on their character: they seemed likely to follow in their father's footsteps. As is well known, Kivi's novel was hotly debated when first published in 1870. August Ahlqvist, the professor of Finnish language, wrote a scathing critique, and though many thought he had gone too far, many also silently agreed with what he said.<sup>49</sup> The underlying cause of the controversy was the depiction of the brothers, which did not fit the national-romantic image of Finnish peasants.<sup>50</sup> Ahlqvist stated:

Nowhere are the people of this country like this, nor have they ever been like the protagonists of this book; the quiet, steady people, who have cleared and still continue to clear the wilds for cultivation, is totally different from the pioneers of Impivaara.<sup>51</sup>

Elias was a steady, hard-working man, curious about the world but not drawn to vices like drinking. He was a well-liked, social character, not one to withdraw from the community. The brothers were the opposite of this till the hardships they encounter in the woods teach them the value of community. Characters like Elias were in abundance in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century newspapers, which makes it understandable why the audience was shocked by Kivi's novel. Only in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century was the public ready to appreciate Kivi's depiction of the seven brothers as a representation of the 'Finnish character'.<sup>52</sup>

This brings me back to the educated elite and the image of an ideal citizen. The nationalists, who were part of the gentry, created an image of the ideal Finnish peasant man and citizen to reflect their values and goals (Karkama 1985, 73). They made him a kind of a noble peasant, with some exceptional qualities, which made him fit to lead his people. At the same time, the nationalists were very aware of their own role, they did see

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<sup>49</sup> Sulkunen 2004, 163.

<sup>50</sup> Lyytikäinen 1999, 150-152; for a discussion of the whole controversy, see Sihvo 2002, 216-223; Sulkunen 2004, 121-166.

<sup>51</sup> "Tämä rahvas ei ole missään sellainen, eikä ole koskaan ollutkaan sellainen kuin tämän kirjan sankarit; hiljainen, vakaa kansa, joka on raivannut ja yhä edelleen raivaa maamme korvet viljelykselle, on avian toista laatua kuin Impivaaran uudisasukkaat." Qtd. in Sihvo 2002, 220. Impivaara is the place where the brothers flee to. The name Impivaara means 'Virgin Hill'.

<sup>52</sup> Varpio 2000, xiv-xvi,



themselves as essential for the building of the Finnish nation. Some of them crafted their own image as carefully as they crafted the images in the newspaper stories.

The image of a gentry man as an ideal citizen was not well articulated in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century newspaper texts, but we do find hints of the image. For example, the Farmer's Friend, the wise, old man instructing the peasant Matti, is certainly such an ideal citizen, even if he remains in the background. However, to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century readers, the Farmer's Friend was most likely a familiar character, a kind of a schoolmaster, and some might have identified him with the author J. V. Snellman, who was a well-known figure. The gentry man, especially in the form of a young student, became a staple character in Finnish literature in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are a number of works, which describe the journey of a young man from the provinces to Helsinki to study at the university or even going abroad.<sup>53</sup> The story often includes a woman, a sweetheart, who has to stay behind in the home village or home country.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusions

In this article, I have argued that in the nationalist discourse in Finnish newspapers, men were constructed as active citizens, building the nation, acting in the public sphere. Women were relegated into the private sphere. However, the division did not depend on what women and men actually did, it was a question of an a priori definition of women as part of the private, and men of the public. When for example the gentry women formed associations and worked for charities, their actions were feminized. The division to gendered spheres was not a continuation of an old tradition, but more of a 19<sup>th</sup> century construction which became more pronounced by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, I have argued that the image of the peasant man as an ideal citizen was only one representation of an ideal Finnish citizen, created by the educated, nationalist elite, reflecting their

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<sup>53</sup> They include: Juhani Aho, *Helsinkiin* (To Helsinki) and *Yksin* (Alone); Arvid Järnefelt, *Isänmaa* (Fatherland).

<sup>54</sup> This the central theme in Juhani Aho's *Papin tytär* (Minister's Daughter) and *Papin rouva* (Minister's Wife).

values. There was another image, though not yet well defined in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the gentry man, who was in fact the 'self', the one with the power to create. In the nationalist discourse in the newspapers, peasant men and women, as well as gentry women, were the 'others'.

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