

## THE ROLE OF FOLKLORE IN MAINTAINING IDENTITY AMONG A KARELIAN GROUP IN EASTERN FINLAND

There is a general border between West and east cleaving Europe from the Barents Sea to the Balkans. On the border area cultures have had to adapt to the situation, fluctuation of the state borders and immigration of new inhabitant groups. My paper is aimed at illuminating one case in the North Europe, which represents also some common problems of the border area.

The Karelians are the oldest known indigenous group in the area nowadays known as North Karelia in Finland. At the beginning of the modern period Karelians were subjects of the Russian Empire, they belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church and their culture had Karelian ethnic characteristics. These Karelians became a minority in the 17th century, when the area was ceded to the expansive kingdom of Sweden and large groups of Lutheran immigrants from eastern Finland moved in to the newly acquired part of the country. According to the peace treaty of Stolbovo 1618, the population remaining in the area had the right to preserve their old religion, and no pressure on religious grounds was to be applied, but in practice the treaty had little effect. Karelians living in the area suffered from religious and economic discrimination, and the majority fled to the Russian side of the border. Hostile attitudes of the Orthodox and Lutheran groups weakened during the latter half of the 17th century and since the 18th century there has been no manifest antagonism between these groups.

Significant groups of Orthodox Karelians remained in a number of villages in the western part of present-day North Karelia of Finland in the parishes of Liperi and Polvijärvi. As the first permanent settlers in the area they had selected fields best suited to cultivation, and presumably their solid economic position was the reason preventing their emigration to Russia. The Lutherans, in contrast, sometimes came to North Karelia as deserters with little more property than an axe. During the 17th and 18th centuries the Orthodox population of the Taipale parish differed significantly from the Lutheran population in regard to average wealth. Their strong economic position is often mentioned in the letters of the Lutheran clergy, and it is also apparent in the documents of local administrators in the 19th century. By the middle of that century about two-thirds of the Orthodox still belonged to the group of wealthy landowning peasants, while three-quarters of the Lutherans were landless. Thus a social gap between the Orthodox and Lutherans arose alongside the already existing ethnic and religious divisions.

It was probably the sound economic position of the Orthodox that made it possible for them to maintain an ethnically distinctive Karelian character during centuries as a small isolated group among the Lutheran majority in some villages in Finnish North Karelia. The Lutheran clergy tried continuously, on one hand to convert Orthodox to Lutheranism, and on the other hand, to inhibit their reciprocal relations with the Lutheran population. Administrative problems appeared especially during the 18th century, when the Orthodox lived under Swedish rule with their priest serving the Russian church but under the supervision of the Swedish church.

At the 17th century in this area two ethnic groups fell in confrontation. The Karelians, who were Orthodox, i.e. belonged to the Russian church, originally felt loyalty to the Russian Empire and were bearers of the Karelian culture and language, were called *Russians* by the Lutheran population, who, in turn, spoke eastern Finnish dialect, associated with the Kingdom of Sweden and bore the eastern Finnish culture and who were called *Swedes* by the Orthodox Karelian population in Finland as well as on the Russian side of the Swedish-Russian border. During the following centuries the confrontation weakened but the ethnic boundary was still maintained; later it was based most strongly on the confessional factor, i.e. on the membership of the Lutheran or the Orthodox church. These labels, which often had a somewhat pejorative character, were preserved to some extent until the middle of the 20th century<sup>1</sup>.

As Fredrik Barth (1969) has pointed, ethnic distinction does not depend on isolation and absence of interaction with other groups. Instead, interaction may promote the maintenance of the ethnic boundary between "own" and "alien" group. It is problematic whether the Orthodox Karelians of

Taipale parish can be regarded as an ethnic group, how long time they maintained their ethnic identity and what kind of process its disappearance has been. During the last few centuries the Orthodox and Lutherans have lived in close interaction. There has not been any ecological differences between the groups, both of them using the same ecological niche, simple agriculture. It can be assumed that the Orthodox minority which was isolated from the main population of Karelians at the beginning of the 17th century soon began to assimilate gradually to the majority. Anyhow, the boundary between the Orthodox and Lutherans remained clear, which Barth sees crucial for the existence of an ethnic group. Some traits of the culture of the Orthodox Karelians seem to have been prominent in maintaining ethnic identity.

According to Fredrik Barth, the classification of people as members of an ethnic group must depend on their exhibiting the particular traits of their culture. This, in turn, can be analyzed by the researcher on the basis of the materials attainable (ibid.: 12).

Folklore has generally been seen to occupy an important position in the formation of group identity (Dundes 1989; Honko 1988). Among the Orthodox Karelians in Liperi parish, some elements of their old culture seem to have acquired a special ethnic label on the basis of the absence of similar tradition among the Lutherans. They have been used in the formation of identity and especially in emphasizing their own ethnicity in comparison with the Lutherans. This additional function has helped these elements to survive, although the Orthodox Karelians have gradually been assimilated in to the Lutheran majority to that extent that the sole factor distinguishing them has during this century been their membership in the Orthodox church. Therefore, any field work and collection of new material that would be relevant to ethnic differentiation has been very difficult to carry out. I have mainly had to base my research on old, somewhat fragmentary archive materials.

On the basis of the common economics and ecology, considerable part of the culture of the Orthodox Karelians and Lutherans has been similar, so the maintenance of ethnic identity has been based on few distinguishing traits. In the light of surviving material these ethnically distinctive traits have been, besides the religion, some aspects of dress and appearance and a part of the folklore and ritual culture.

In the folklore, wedding habits and wedding poetry have played an important role in maintaining and expressing ethnic identity. The Orthodox and Lutheran wedding rituals have both been bilocal and had two parts. The ritual began at the home of the bride, where the leave-taking ceremony was celebrated. This was followed by the marriage ritual in the church and then the proper wedding or homecoming ceremony at the home of the groom. The ritual as a whole was a meeting of two families, even though the other villagers have also participated. (On wedding ritual in general in Finland see Sarmela 1994:63-88.)

The Orthodox and Lutheran rituals have differed in some rites and habits. In the Orthodox wedding it was customary for the bride to perform laments; these were absent from the Lutheran wedding. During the last few centuries the Orthodox population of Liperi has formed the westernmost fringe of the eastern, Karelian-Russian lament culture. In Karelia the bride's lamentation usually began at the betrothal, when the engagement was confirmed, and continued until the end of the leave-taking ceremony. Laments were ritual communication in which the bride and her mother could unburden their minds at the moment the daughter was leaving forever her home, where she had spent her entire childhood. In the Orthodox weddings of Liperi the lamentation did not begin immediately after the betrothal but only at the leave-taking ceremony, when the daughter's separation from her parents and home was already in progress. According to ethnographic descriptions, the bride took leave of her parents, other relatives and friends in the communication provided by the laments. In fact, in Liperi not all brides could actually perform these laments, and there were specially skilled women, lamenters, who did this in the name of the bride, as was the case elsewhere in Karelia. At the end of the leave-taking ceremony the lamenter called the bride to sit down on a bench in the middle of the room, unloosened her braid and asked all the participants to comb her hair. Her hair was then arranged in a manner typical to married women and she received her *säpsä* (<russian *čepčik*), the headdress used only by married women as a sign of their social status. This was the end of the leave-taking ceremony and the bride left with the groom and their escort to the church and then to his home.

At the home of the groom the general atmosphere was not coloured by the sadness of the

separation but by joy. The mother of the groom stood at the door to meet the bridal pair and sang them a ritual song of welcome, *Tulovirsi*, an old wedding song in the Kalevala metre in which the coming of the bride to the home of the groom is described and the bride is advised about how to behave in her new home. There were also other fixed wedding songs and poetry, but this song seems to have been the most common.

Wedding folklore and the songs in particular have remained relatively unchanged. The Karelians of Liperi had already been separated from the core Karelian population in the Middle Ages, and no regular contacts between these groups have been documented in recent centuries. In any case, the wedding songs have remained quite similar in regard to both text and melody to the wedding songs in other parts of Karelia, especially in the archaic northern Russian Karelia, although these populations have been separated by roughly 300 miles and 600 years.

The archaic Karelian traits seem to have been preserved in the weddings of the Liperi Orthodox until the 1870s. At that time the old customs began to be scorned, and, for instance, at weddings young boys could pay lamenters with buttons instead of coins. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, collectors of folklore could still find old women who could not only perform ritual laments but also improvise occasional laments on request.

Until the beginning of the 19th century the dress of orthodox women in Liperi included some items of Russian origin, such as the *feresi* skirt and *säpsä* headdress that was already mentioned. These were not worn by Lutherans, and they have been a clear ethnic marker. Presumably the *feresi* skirt was superseded by western-type dress as early as the first decades of the 19th century, as it is only mentioned occasionally in the documents of that period. In contrast, the *säpsä* headdress remained in use as a sign of the married Orthodox woman until the latter half of the century. Its final citations in local inventory documents are from the 1860s and at the beginning of 20th century old Orthodox women could give detailed descriptions of the *säpsä* to ethnographers. One *säpsä* headdress has been preserved in the local museum.

The preservation of elements of the old culture seem to be typical of women in general, and this has also been the case in Liperi. Men did not have any ethnically distinctive clothing in Liperi, nor did they have in Karelia in general in comparison with the Finns. Instead of dress, the Karelian men could have beards as a distinctive trait. The growing of beard was based on the tradition of Orthodox church. In Liperi there is no definitive evidence of the ethnic meaning of the beard, but in Ladoga Karelia in the old Russo-Finnish border area the beard was an element of ethnic distinction. Nevertheless there are in the materials some cues pointing to the possible meaning of the beard as a symbol of ethnic differentiation also in Liperi<sup>2</sup>.

The Orthodox Karelian cultural traits referred to above seem to have been those in which ethnic identity was manifested. Partially they have been selected because of their connections to the main rituals of their bearers. The wedding has always been a very important event not only in the life of the individual but also for the whole community. In the established village communities the wedding ritual also acquired position which expressed the social status of the celebrants (Sarmela 1974; Sarmela 1969:105). Bearing in mind the fact that the Orthodox Karelians in Liperi were mainly wealthy farmers, it seems natural to conclude that the ethnic labels, i.e. the Karelian elements in the wedding ritual, were gradually associated with the social position of their users and became a sign of that position. The use of some clearly Karelian rites at the wedding celebration was a sign to the whole village that the participants belonged to the highest social stratum. This may be the reason why the *säpsä* headdress was used as the last Karelian item of dressing - it did have a double meaning as symbol of social status of a married woman and of a member of the wealthy Orthodox part of the community. It was closely related to the wedding ritual, it was placed on the head of the bride in a certain rite, and it had a clear symbolic meaning in representing social position.

The old, archaic elements of the wedding ritual acquired a new, secondary function together with the original and, gradually, instead of it. Initially the main function of the laments was to release the emotional tensions connected with the bride's leaving home and conducting the wedding ritual. Correspondingly, the wedding songs had their own function in installing the bride in to her new position in the family of the groom (Nenola-Kallio 1982:181). In Liperi the performing of laments manifested the social position of the celebrants and, gradually, lost its original function. In this way

the content of the wedding folklore lost its earlier meaning to a certain degree, as the mere existence of that folklore was a sufficient message to the village. Thus archaic folklore could be preserved for a long time in a cultural context that no longer corresponded to the content of that folklore.

In Liperi there was also some kind of condensation of the wedding ritual: laments were no longer performed from the betrothal to the leave-taking ceremony as was the case elsewhere in Karelia but only just at that very moment when the bride was leaving her home. Wedding songs were also performed mostly at the reception of bride at the home of the groom. In Liperi those parts of wedding folklore were preserved longest that had the strongest ties to the culmination points of the wedding ritual, the role changes of the bride in the rite of passage (van Gennep 1960:116ff). They were specifically the most important parts of the wedding ritual, in which the Karelian ethnic identity was manifested.

Language has also been considered as an element of ethnicity (Fishman 1977). There is very little material which can show any linguistic elements in the identity of the Orthodox Karelians in Liperi. There seem to have been some typical Karelianisms in the vocabulary and morphology in the language of the Orthodox people, and there are some notions that the linguistic difference was really felt in the latter half of the 19th century. The archive materials also contain a single, fragmentary report of a traditional Karelian religious village feast "praasniekka" (<prazdnik in Russian), which was celebrated at the latter half of the 19th century.

The Karelian traits of the wedding ritual were phased out in the latter half of 19th century, presumably during the 1870s. At that time the säpsä was also abandoned, and other traits of Karelian culture such as distinctive features of dialect and the praasniekka village feasts ceased to be transmitted to the younger generations. At the beginning of the 20th century older Orthodox people could still remember some wedding songs, laments, use of the säpsä headdress and the former existence of some other elements belonging to the old Karelian folk culture, but they told that this all was a living tradition when they were young.

In the 1870s the Liperi district underwent rapid development and changes. The mobility of the people increased, the economic structure became more diversified and general primary education was organized. Karelian culture traits began to look even more outdated, came into conflict with everyday life, and lost their former prestige. At the same time the marriage norms of the Orthodox changed. Until that time the wealthy Orthodox men could traditionally marry poorer Orthodox women but not wealthy Lutherans. From the 1870s on the social border became more important than the religious-ethnic one that was rarely crossed in earlier days. Until then the group identity of the Orthodox people consisted of three dimensions: religious, social and ethnic. During the 1870s the social and religious identity was separated from ethnic identity and the latter lost its former position. The ethnic differentiation began to serve as a disadvantage as it went in an increasing discrepancy with regard to the surrounding culture.

Shortly afterwards, the Orthodox population in Liperi suffered from religious oppression that lasted to the middle of the 20th century. This was caused by the nationalistically oriented part of the Lutheran population, but it seems to have been initially connected with the rising social problems of that period in Liperi. As a result, the Orthodox tried to avoid any behavior that would distinguish them from the Lutheran population. During the life span of three generations the old Karelian tradition was forgotten so completely that no remnants of wedding laments or other elements of their past Karelian culture exist today.

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<sup>1</sup>It has to be noted that it is difficult to choose correct terms to be used about the ethnic-religious groups in the Finnish North Karelia. The terms based on religion are the most often used ones which is partially due to the fact that religion has been the reason for an official differentiation of the population. Confessional factor should, however, not be over-estimated, as it has been only one of several dissimilarities which all have been generated by the administrative border between Russia and Sweden which gradually became a cultural border as well. Lutherans are mostly of Savo origin but later they did not consider themselves belonging to Savo as they lived in a region called Karelia. On the other hand, they can not be called Karelians as this has traditionally referred to another, distinctive group. This historical background causes even nowadays some confusion in the defining of the regional identity in the Finnish North Karelia; <sup>2</sup>It is important to note that the traits discussed here were relevant for the ethnic distinction between Karelians and Finns. In relation to the Russians quite another cultural traits were meaningful for the ethnic identity of the Karelians. These included first of all language and the archaic part of folklore.

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### ДО ПИТАННЯ ПРО ЗБЕРЕЖЕННЯ УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ЕТНІЧНОСТІ НА БАЛКАНАХ

Проблеми міжнаціональних відносин на Балканах впродовж останніх років постійно турбують європейську громадськість, а починаючи з 1991 р. – не сходять з перших сторінок світової преси. Балканський регіон характеризується постійними переселенськими міграційними процесами, яскравою поліконфесійністю, що й привело в кінцевому результаті до різкого загострення ситуації в регіоні. Очевидним є, що основною протистояння на Балканах є проблема збереження національної ідентичності.

У даній розвідці зроблено спробу проаналізувати становище українців у країнах колишньої Югославії, з'ясувати роль українського етнічного фактору в складних перипетіях військово-політичного конфлікту на Балканах. Дослідження стану української етнічності саме у цьому регіоні має й пізнавальне значення, адже за своє 250-річне проживання на півдні Європи українське населення, подекуди в над звичайних умовах, змогло вистояти та намагається й сьогодні зберегти свою історію, мову та традиції.

Перші поселенці українського походження почали переселятися на територію Воєводини із Закарпаття (угорського Підкарпаття) ще на початку XVIII ст.<sup>1</sup> Починаючи з 30-х рр., розпочинається основна хвиля переселень, яка носила, правда, стихійний характер. З 1751р. український переселенський процес на Балкани став організованим. Доля більшості переселенців складалася по-різному. Частина з них через нестачу харчів змушена була припинити мандрівку й найматися на роботу, щоб заробити на зворотню дорогу. Більшість все ж зуміла подолати труднощі та дістатися до своїх нових земель, де було закладено поселення, збудовано церкви, розорено цілинні землі.

До 1763 р. найбільш інтенсивний вплив закарпатських українців був спрямований до Бачки (Воєводина). Загалом, перша хвиля українських переселенців, в основному в Хорватію та Воєводину завершилась 1787 р.

На початку XIX ст. еміграція з українських земель продовжувалася. Поряд з цим, відбувається й розселення родин переселенців із своїх первісних осередків – Керестура і Коцура, через перенаселення та нестачу вільної землі. Осідали вони головним чином за Дунаєм – у Славонії (Хорватія), де у містечку Шід було 1832 р. засновано першу колонію<sup>2</sup>.

1848 р., після відміни панщини, розпочалася наступ на хвиля переселень із Закарпаття, пізніше – з Лемківщини та Галичини. У другій половині XIX ст. українці-русини склали вже 1,1 % усього населення Бачки а їх чисельність у придунайських землях перевищила 20 тис. осіб<sup>3</sup>.

Згодом, із Східної Галичини та Закарпаття прибуло до Боснії ще 15 тис. українських селян. Першим місцем, де вони осіли, було селище Прнявор, звідки прибули з часом розселилися по