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In writing this chapter I have assumed that a nation is an abstract concept built upon a foundation of fact. Peoples and communities have an objective existence. Populations which share a common language, live together in a specific geographical space, share common value systems, usually based on religion and who make a common livelihood for themselves by common economic endeavour do exist. They provide the basic raw material from which nations are constructed. But this construction, the nation, is an artefact that exists only in the mind and therefore it has to be implanted and sustained in the mind by a deliberate and conscious process of acculturation. The target population must be persuaded that it has a unique identity, a national character, which distinguishes it from every other human group. A spectrum of cultural devices is employed to create the image and one of the most important of these, because it is indispensable, is history.

There cannot be a nation without a national history. This will show, by illustration, what the defining characteristics of the nation are and will confer legitimacy on the nation by describing its origins and development over time and in the process will define the nation’s place in the world alongside, and in competition with, other nations. History will define the friends and enemies of the nation and illustrate the conditions necessary for its survival and prosperity. It will suggest the values that have contributed to success and the failings that have endangered its well-being. History tells the nations what kind of people they are, what sort of policies they must pursue if the nation is to survive, and it delivers graphic warnings about nations which fail to read the lessons of history aright, which lose sight of their national destiny and perish as a consequence. For a nation, the knowledge of its history is held to be a matter of life and death.

In this respect there has been nothing peculiar about the nations of the North-East Baltic region, they have used the validating processes that only history can provide to the same extent as nations everywhere. The process is open-ended and can be seen operating currently in the United Kingdom where there has been widespread public debate about a national curriculum for British schools. The resulting report has been analysed by a Canadian professor, Ivor Goodson. He has concluded that ‘history has been chosen to revive and refocus national identity and ideology’. He has noted that in the proposed history curriculum the history of
the United Kingdom will be allotted some forty per cent of the time. Goodson has remarked that ‘the focus on British history in the formative years of schooling indicates a wish at an early stage to inculcate a sense of national identity’. He has argued that in a world moving towards globalisation the British have been gripped by the fear of losing control over their own society. ‘The school curriculum provides one arena for re-asserting control and for re-establishing national identity.’ (Goodson 1994) The British, in the years when they had no doubts about their own superiority in the world, liked to suggest that the nationalism they saw in other nations was something the British did not need. But in the current debate it can be seen how the British, like all the rest, see the assertion of their national identity as a condition of the community’s well-being, even of survival and that history is the foundation on which national identity rests.

**History and the Finnish identity**

The use of history to create and validate a national identity has long been familiar in Finland. Even before the modern concept of nationhood had been formulated, the Swedish kingdom, of which Finland was then a part, had resorted to history to assert a Swedish identity. During Sweden’s era of international assertiveness, Swedish historians were encouraged and subsidised by the crown to construct a Gothicist history of the Swedish kingdom. Johannes Magnus in his *Historia de omnibus gothorum sueonumque regibus* (1555) showed how the kings of Sweden descended in a direct line from Magog, the son of Japhet, who as a son of Noah was one of the founders of the nations of mankind that developed after the Flood. This enabled Magnus and his successors to show how the Swedes were heirs to a civilisation of great antiquity and in their Gothic manifestation had exercised ‘lawful government and mighty valour /.../ in many places over the wide world, and especially in Spain and Italy’ (Urpilainen 1993: 245).

The purpose of these writings was, evidently, to exhort and justify the Swedes of their own time to repeat the deeds of their ancestors. The writer who was arguably the greatest of these Gothicist historians, Olaus Rudbeck in his multi-volume *Atlantica* (1679-1702), did not exclude the Finnish people from this glorious inheritance and conceded generously that the Finns could also trace their descent from Japhet. So it was entirely natural that the first clearly Finnish national historian, Daniel Juslenius, in his *Abo vetus et nova* (1700) applied the Gothicist model directly to his own people and asserted that the Finns were indeed descendants of Japhet and heirs to one of the world’s oldest cultures. At the end of the seventeenth century, the starting point of any national history had to be the Bible, reinforced if possible by references from the classical historians, which conferred additional credibility and status. It was the misfortune of the Swedish Gothicists that references to the peoples of the Baltic region by Greek and Roman historians were sparse, imprecise and often derogatory.
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They had to be explained away as misunderstandings.

Juslenius and the writers who adopted his standpoint and method have presented some problems for modern Finnish commentators. Eino Jutilkala noted that Juslenius’ writing, ‘depicting the Finnish people and their culture as one of the world’s oldest does not have [...] scholarly value’ (Ora & Jutilkala 1936: 131). This was true and the eighteenth-century scholars who were gradually working towards a more academic style of history had already discovered this problem. Erkki Urpilainen’s recent study of Algot Scarin, one of the leading academic historians of eighteenth-century Finland, has shown how difficult it was to repudiate the more baroque fancies of the Gothicist historians without risking damage to the international image and status of the Swedish-Finnish kingdom. Scarin had discovered the central thesis of this paper, namely that because national identity is so closely linked to national history, the national historian has a responsibility as a guardian of the national identity. His duty to his nation may have to take precedence over his duty as an academic scholar. Scarin knew that the old histories were flawed and unscholarly but his responsibilities as a public servant of the crown set limits on his revisionism (Urpilainen 1993: passim).

The founding fathers of the Finnish national image knew that it must be grounded in history. Henrik Gabriel Porthan is rightly seen as the seminal figure in the construction of a Finnish national consciousness and he fully appreciated the importance of history. Zacharias Topelius wrote of Porthan’s contribution:

He taught us that the Finnish nation has received from God such a nature, peculiar to us, that of itself it will seek out its optimum vitality and develop freely in its own way [...] Just as Luther in time past interpreted the Bible and found God’s Gospel, so Porthan interpreted our country’s history, geography, national poetry and language and found them in the Finnish nation. (Topelius 1982: 349)

In this passage, Topelius described Porthan as a man who had grasped that a nation was processed out of the raw material provided by the community and we may note that in the list of ingredients history was placed first. Topelius set himself the task of following the example set by Porthan. His great *Maamme kirja* (Book of our country, 1876), first published in Swedish in 1875 (*Boken om vårt land*), was designed to use topographical and historical material to illustrate the national character of the Finns. He recognised the point being made in this chapter that for the purpose of promoting the national character something less demanding than fully scientific history was better suited to his purposes. Topelius wrote that historical ‘dissection in the anatomy theatre’ was not his concern: ‘I have now defined my task this way: communicating Finnish history to a wide public - let someone else work at communicating it to the educated.’ (Topelius 1982) But Topelius was sure that
history was the key to revealing national character, ‘the stamp that God has impressed on the Finnish nation we can best discern by examining the historical vicissitudes of this nation.’ (Topelius 1982: 124)

In pursuit of his task Topelius showed a genius for turning any historical episode, whatever its character, into an object lesson that illustrated some positive feature of the Finnish personality. He took pride in the great famine of 1696-97 because the starving victims did not resort to illegal violence even in extremities. ‘It was to the honour of the Finnish nation that although life was precious, even in a time of the greatest distress, it held the laws sacred /.../ Such courageous self-denial is met only in very few nations.’ (Topelius 1982: 306) In the same way the unswerving devotion of the Finnish people to the megalomaniac Charles XII demonstrated their special qualities. The Finns would never have endured such sufferings ‘without an enduring vigour, patience and trust in God’ (Topelius 1982: 305). Topelius’ gift for drawing inspiration from disaster was summed up when he wrote:

But the nation that has endured such trials and yet lives, and has risen again and flourishes once more such a nation is truly a chosen instrument of God to execute His will on earth. Such a nation cannot die before it has completed its task. (Topelius 1982: 320)

Topelius had constructed from his historical materials an image of the Finns as one of God’s chosen peoples, with the clear implication that it had a great future destiny to fulfil.

It is well known how the early nationalists took the discovery of traditional Finnish-Karelian oral poetry (later known as Kalevala-metre poetry) into service, naturally in the first instance to demonstrate the dignity and status of the Finnish language. But the poetry was also recognised as a valuable historical resource, perhaps especially valuable in that the poems floated free of any concrete references to known historical events. An enthusiastic admirer of Elias Lönnrot’s first edition of the *Kalevala* (1835) wrote that Finland, the owner and proprietor of these epic poems, will properly learn, thanks to her increased sense of self-confidence to understand her past and also her future intellectual advance. She can proclaim to herself: ‘I too have a history!’ (Hirvonen et al. 1981: 32)

The early nationalist movement was heavily grounded in the language, but perceptive observers saw that language alone was not enough to create a movement and an ideology that the masses could relate to. Johan Jakob Nervander made this point to Johan Vilhelm Snellman in 1844 when he wrote: ‘indeed peoples have fought for a book, for the Bible, but no nation has yet fought for its grammar’. He was telling Snellman that what Finland needed was not a literature but a history. The Finns certainly constitute a common population because they speak one language, but they do not constitute a nation be-
cause they do not have a history.’ (Ora & Jutikkala 1936: 170) It is a matter for debate whether the language revivalists or the historians made the greater contribution to the creation of the idea of a Finnish nation. They were all engaged on a common endeavour to raise the consciousness of the Finnish masses to the realisation that they were a nation with a specific identity. It may be that Johan Ludvig Runeberg, Topelius or Yrjö-Sakari Yrjö-Koskinen had more direct impact on the popular imagination than Anders Johan Sjögren or Matthias Alexander Castrén. What is clear is that the national image was constructed to a significant extent from historical materials.

The early nation-builders were lucky in their timing. The kind of written history they had at their disposal would, to the modern professional historian, scarcely be classed as serious history at all. When modern scientific history was brought to Finland, the model was taken from Germany and the ideals of Leopold von Ranke set the standard. He called for a historical science, rigorously grounded on primary sources, whose aim was to recover the truth about the past wie es eigentlich gewesen ist. Topelius was not much troubled by this new history, for when he was writing Maamme kirja there was little of it available that had any reference to Finland. Even so the poet in Topelius may have felt intuitively that a history based on the cold, scientific analysis of evidence might not serve the national image he wished to project, an image that could inspire the common man. If so his intuition was correct. In order to create an image of a national identity it is natural, even necessary to stress the differences between one nation and another, and to demonstrate how the national histories repeatedly exemplify and confirm these distinctions. It is important, once the main features of the national identity have been established, that written history shall confirm and reinforce the image.

In reality, however, it is inevitable that academic historians following the evidence wherever it leads, will uncover events and contingencies that do not fit comfortably with the accepted image. For history has demonstrated repeatedly that in comparable circumstances one nation behaves very much like any other nation. Behaviour between peoples does vary, but for reasons that are usually not grounded in national character. For example, large and powerful nations tend to behave differently (and usually worse) than small and weak nations. But this is not because their national characters are different but because their power is different: they have the capacity to use coercive force against their competitors.

Reappraisal

Facts can get in the way of images. It has been seen how Porthan and Topelius thought that God had endowed the Finnish nation with special
characteristics for a purpose. God had work for the Finnish nation to do. Heikki Ylikangas has pointed out how their successors, who have created the main body of historical writing about Finland, have agreed in identifying what that purpose was: ‘Most works dealing with Finnish history are written so that Finland’s independence forms by far the most important of its turning points.’ Thus the academic historians have identified the purpose that Porthan foreshadowed. Ylikangas continues: ‘becoming independent, and the developments that led to it, are "the scarlet thread" of Finnish history’. He then suggests that the historical realities do not support the hypothesis:

That would be justified if it could be shown that people in their real behaviour put the country’s independence before, for example, group self-interest, economic advantage, power or the structures of society. This condition is not met. The reality is that the secondary importance of independence can be demonstrated as true, its priority cannot. (Ylikangas 1986: 151)

This is a fundamental challenge for it would be difficult to articulate any credible image of national identity which did not put the striving towards the achievement of sovereignty as a primary characteristic. In the eighteenth century, Anders Chydenius had pondered about what the concept of the fatherland would mean to ordinary folk and concluded: ‘Fatherland without liberty and reward is a big word that has slight significance.’ Ylikangas has suggested that Chydenius showed himself wiser than the founders of the national idea in Finland:

Chydenius needed only his reason and powers of observation to notice what later has slipped past an entire army of researchers, interpreters and academics. It did not occur to them that a person will freely defend what he has, but not that which he does not have. (Ylikangas 1986: 263)

Ylikangas has gone on to discuss how history is involved in building and maintaining the national image and has suggested that academic history can both illustrate the image and correct illusions about it. He has remarked, ‘We have a fairly clear intuitive picture of what a Finn, German or Russian is. These images we experience as something enduring, unchanging.’ He then asks, ‘Do we have any research method to come to grips with what is called Finnishness? By what concrete means can we map out the landscape of the Finnish soul?’ He has suggested that there are several possibilities and one that is solidly documented is the study of criminality: ‘It will illustrate Finnishness from below, one might say through the backyard, but it illustrates it well.’ (Ylikangas 1986:263)

He has gone on to point out that one undoubted feature of the Finnish national character is its tendency to criminal violence. In Finland the rate
of violent killing has consistently been between two and three times higher than the norm for Western Europe. It has been an enduring feature for as far back as statistics have been collected. The rate has fluctuated with time and place, rising to a historic peak around 1905, but the distinctive tendency has remained constant down to the present day. Ylikangas has put forward interesting explanations of why this should be, which there is not time to explore in this chapter. The point here is that Ylikangas has demonstrated that modern historical research can contribute to a description of the national character, but that the contribution will not always be welcome to the guardians of the national image. What nation would feel happy with an image that included an exceptional propensity for lethal, inter-personal violence?

This is an illustration of how historical scholarship, in its search after *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* may discover unpalatable truths which are at variance with the accepted national image. It may be instructive to consider some Finnish writing about the country’s war aims during the 1941-1944 phase of Finland’s involvement in the Second World War, the period known in Finnish historiography as *Jatkosota* (Continuation war). There were strong reasons why Finland wanted to maintain that her involvement in Operation Barbarossa was defensive in intention and basically the result of forces outside Finland’s control the *ajopuu* (driftwood) scenario. The distinguished historian, Arvi Korhonen ended his monograph on the subject of the Barbarossa plan and Finland with a quotation from the German ambassador, W. von Blucher: ‘Finland was caught up in the currents of high politics, as a swift Finnish river snatches a piece of driftwood.’ (Korhonen 1961: 340) The national image required that Finland’s role be presented as reactive rather than proactive. This was consistent with a feature of the Finnish character that had been established by Topelius. He said that it was part of ‘that stamp that God has impressed on the Finnish nation’ and that the Finnish nation ‘is thus a peaceful nation, which has no lust for power, and which was not created to seek for a place among the powerful of the world.’ (Topelius 1982: 124)

In recent monographs, Ohto Manninen and Jukka Kulomaa have documented the plans of the Finnish leadership, well in advance of June 1941, to conquer and annex East Karelia (i.e. the eastern parts of Russian Karelia), and if the Germans would let them, take the Kola Peninsula as well. These were not vague theoretical aspirations since the agencies to carry them out were set up in readiness on the authority of Carl Gustav Mannerheim as commander in chief and Risto Ryti as president. Kulomaa has shown in great detail how the plans were put into execution once the territory had been occupied. Yet when General Erik Heinrichs made his biographical study of Mannerheim, *Mannerheim Suomen kohtaloissa* (Mannerheim in the fate of Finland), which is intended to be a serious historical account, and came to discuss the East Karelian issue in 1941, he stated that Mannerheim had no plans for annexing the territory, which
Heinrichs certainly knew was untrue. He had problems in discussing Mannerheim’s Commander in Chief’s Order of the Day No. 3 because its rather baroque wording included the statement: ‘The liberation of Karelia and a Great Finland glitter before us in the powerful avalanche of world historical events.’ Heinrichs affirmed that the liberation of which Mannerheim spoke ‘is to be understood as somewhat obscure poetic licence. One thing, at least, that Mannerheim did not want was to annex East Karelia to Finland.’ (Heinrichs 1959: 276) Heinrichs then noted that Ryti had always denied he had had any part in planning to annex East Karelia, yet Heinrichs certainly knew that this too was untrue. These are examples where upright and honourable men felt they had a duty to suppress the truth about East Karelia and the cynic might assume that since the plan had ended badly, its authors naturally preferred it be forgotten. But there is more to it than that. The episode does not fit the image of Finland, whose people, as Topelius affirmed, never had and never could aspire to conquer territory belonging to other peoples. In this case the historians have shown that in the right circumstances Finland will behave in just the same way as any other nation would. Yet the whole concept of national identity asserts the contrary; because the Finnish nation is different from all other nations, it behaves differently from them.

*The historian’s dilemma*

It is beginning to appear that the academic historian, who is committed to reconstructing the past impartially and to describing it as it really was, may have a problem if he is also the citizen of a national sovereign state, which most of us are. A feature of any nation-state is the creation of a national image with which its citizens can identify and which establishes parameters by which the conduct of the nation’s affairs can be assessed. If the work of the professional historian has the potential to damage or destabilise the national image, he may experience a conflict of duties.

Let us consider again the problems of Korhonen as he contemplated the events of 1941. Korhonen was a thoroughly professional scholar who believed in and upheld the Rankean values of objective history based on primary sources. He was also a strong Finnish nationalist. When he came to write *Barbarossa-suunitelma ja Suomi* (The Barbarossa Plan and Finland), he wanted to believe, and persuade others to believe that Finland had participated in Barbarossa reluctantly and at the lowest possible level. It is difficult to believe that a historian of his quality, if there had been no other considerations, could not have read the evidence and come to the same conclusions as Mauno Jokipii in his definitive work, *Jatkosodan synty* (Origin of the Continuation war). Jokipii wrote a quarter of a century later, and had a wider range of
sources to draw on, but they were not inherently different from those available to Korhonen. Yet these two professional historians reached very different conclusions. Jokipii has recognised that Finland’s leaders and her people too, to the extent that they knew what was happening, willingly responded to the German approaches to participate in Barbarossa. The one serious constraint was a realistic fear that Barbarossa might not happen, and Germany and the Soviet Union come to an agreement as they had in 1939. Korhonen’s commitment to protecting Finland’s national image compelled him to present her as a victim of events which her leaders could not effectively influence. This either blinded him to what the sources clearly indicated, or justified him in compromising his academic integrity by reporting conclusions that were consistent with what the national image required. So he asserted to the end that Finland only entered the conflict because she became the victim of Soviet aggression on 25 June 1941. He wrote:

The government had certainly decided to keep the country neutral as long as possible but all the circumstances influencing developments had the effect of making the continuance of even a nominal neutrality impossible. (Korhonen 1961: 336)

It may be thought that these are dead issues that have passed away with the wartime generation. After all, Jokipii has put the record straight on 1941 and there is little sign that anyone has a serious intention of challenging his conclusions. But the basic problem is not dead, it recurs in different contexts. There will be some painful readjustments to be made on the whole post-war period of Finland’s history as the contents of the archives of the former Soviet Union are investigated. For the question of the relationship between the Finnish people and Russia is an essential element of the national image. The concept of ‘Finlandisation’ was seen, understandably, as demeaning to the Finnish people, as offensive to their status as a sovereign people. It is possible that the former Soviet archives will yield material that will show to what extent that concept was based on realities. This could present new problems for Finnish historians. These problems are not of course peculiar to Finland. Historians everywhere face the same pressures, which were identified by Ylikangas:

Written history is something more than the memory of mankind. It is, or at least there is an effort everywhere to make it, a tool of the power holders. It is desired to make it show that the existing situation - that is the outcome of developments - is not only the best possible but also inevitable. (Ylikangas 1986: 154)

This would certainly fit Korhonen’s work which affirmed that the developments of 1941 were both in the best interests of the nation and in-
evitable. All this may suggest that the academic historians are caught in a trap. They are for the most part loyal members of a national community, which is built around a manufactured national image. Since history is an essential component of the image, the historians - when they are writing the history of their own country - may feel an obligation not to damage or subvert the national image. This in turn could put constraints in the way of their academic freedom to pursue the evidence wherever it leads. Free historical research and the preservation of the national identity may prove to be incompatible. One Finnish commentator thought so, and resolved the problem by declaring that the professional historians are inherently disqualified from commenting on or understanding the true history of their country. It is argued that to achieve a right understanding of the nation and its destiny it is best to ignore the historians.

A leading twentieth-century Finnish poet, Paavo Haavikko, set out his ideas on these questions in a book called *Kansakunnan linja* (The nation’s line). He has detected a basic underlying consistency in Finnish history since the middle of the nineteenth century which he has called ‘the nation’s line’. In internal affairs this has meant a steady development of Finnish society towards a unity of the centre. This has created a democratic consensus, first of all in the interwar decades, labelled Tanner’s republic (after Väinö Tanner, Finland’s first Social Democrat prime minister), and after 1948 in the emergent Finnish welfare state which developed into the current consumer society. There has been a successful coalescence round the moderate centre of politics, exemplified in the Agrarian-Socialist coalition of 1936 and the post-war consensus of the bureaucracy, the employers, the trade unions and the centrist parties. This increasingly solid centre has successfully defeated or marginalised attempts by extremists of all kinds to create internal conflict and division. That has been one face of Finland’s historic destiny; the other has been found in foreign policy. Here there has been an increasingly successful quest after neutrality, modified realistically to adapt to the legitimate security needs of the Russian great power. The high point in this field has been the Mutual Assistance Treaty of 1948. Like the internal convergence, this foreign policy has been an underlying tendency struggling to find expression, and succeeding finally in the presidencies of Juho K. Paasikivi and Urho Kaleva Kekkonen.

*The impossibility of national histories?*

The idea that the history of the nation is to be understood in terms of tendencies built into its structure and then working their way to the surface is one that Porthan or Topelius would have understood easily. It comes very close to Topelius’ concept of ‘that stamp that God has impressed on the Finnish nation’, or Porthan’s vision of the ‘noble seeds
which God has sown in this nation’ (Topelius 1982: 349). Thus if we stand back, and clear our vision of the misconceptions created by the historians, we can watch the seeds growing and understand as much as we ever shall of the history and destiny of the Finnish people. The disadvantage of taking this kind of broad perspective is that inconvenient facts, which the historians regard as the only valid basis for reconstructing the past, have to be passed over or marginalised. The technique involved has been shown in Haavikko’s depiction of Finland between the wars as Tanner’s republic. He has remarked, rather candidly, that: ‘I have called Finland of the 1920s and 1930s Tanner’s republic. Not many contemporaries would have understood that label.’

There is good reason for this since the actual events seem at odds with the concept. There was, for example, the upsurge of violent, radical right-wing activism, which surfaced in the Lapua movement in 1929 and reached its peak in the Mäntsälä revolt of 1932. This movement enjoyed solid popular support and was a move away from any tendencies for the nation to consolidate round the political centre. The development has therefore to be understood as spectacular but insignificant. ‘The beginning of the movement at Lapua and the end at Mäntsälä were spontaneous, demonstration-like events, without clear objectives and remained detached, spectacular and insignificant.’ (Haavikko 1977: 127) The evidence that these events constituted a determined attack on the democratic system, designed to eliminate first the communists and then the social democrats from participating in the political life of the nation, and the fact that in part the attack succeeded by the use of unlawful violence was hardly meaningless.

In reality, it illustrated how the divisive legacy of the 1918 Civil War was an operative factor in Finland’s interwar politics at least as important as any underlying tendency to coalesce around the democratic centre. The Lapua movement, which professional historians persist in seeing as a serious political challenge to the stability of the Finnish state and society, must somehow be written off, or written out because it does not fit the kansakunnan linja. Haavikko has simply denied its reality: ‘The Lapua movement was a legend in its own lifetime, was intended to be that and it remained a myth in the life of the nation.’ (Haavikko 1977: 123)

It was wholly inconsistent with the foreign policy side of the national line for Finland in 1941 to have joined deliberately the German attack on the Soviet Union. For Finland’s constant policy had been neutrality and a special regard for the security interest of Russia. Therefore in June 1941:

Finland’s objective was to preserve its sovereignty in the world of the great powers: when, on 22 June, Germany had attacked the territory of the Soviet Union, Finland wanted to remain neutral and announced this. ... Only when the bombing raids directed at Finland made it necessary to confirm the fact that the country was at war, did Finland be-
There is, however, the documentary evidence produced by the professional historians, which showed detailed advance planning by the Finnish and German authorities for joint offensive operations against the Soviet Union. It appears the historians have misunderstood the evidence ‘because in the historians’ opinion, it shows that in this way Finland had committed itself to attack together with Germany. It is clear that they do not understand general staff and intelligence work.’ The historians, in their ignorance, had failed to understand the nature of these documents, or how the agreements in them were of a non-binding, hypothetical character. The historians now stand corrected: ‘Preparation against attack is a part of security policy, an important part.’ (Haavikko 1977: 185)

The style of presentation found in *Kansakunnan linja*, in which the historical narrative is adapted so as to conform with a pre-determined view of the national identity, and any evidence conflicting with that view is ignored or explained away, has not been uncommon in Finland. For example an almost identical account of the events of June 1941 appeared in Stig Jägerskiöld’s biography of Mannerheim published in 1992. The reasons for this are similar. For Jägerskiöld, Mannerheim personified the characteristics of Finnish nationhood. His actions had, therefore, to be shown to be consistent with the values which that nationhood represents. All this may suggest that nationalists and historians are not comfortable partners. A national character or identity is an artefact that needs the historical component to give it credibility. But for its creators and guardians, history is a necessary servant but a bad master. For history too is an artefact, a creation of the human mind, it too has no objective existence. Ranke’s ideal of a scientific history that would recreate the past as it really was, was always an impossibility. So much of the evidence of the past has vanished beyond recovery that complete reconstruction is unattainable.

What distinguishes the creation of the historian from myth or fiction, and gives scholarly status and credibility to the work is respect for one basic rule: that the image which the historian presents shall be consistent with those elements of past reality which can be demonstrated to be true. The historian’s conclusions are always provisional, always in principle open to revision in the face of fresh evidence. Such history is of little use to the creators of national identities: they need a history that gives assurance, that will confirm and sustain the image of the nation that they have created. The function of the nationalist is to create and serve an icon. But the historian, by the nature of the trade is a critic of received ideas, an iconoclast. His duty is to challenge and to question.

It is probable that the nationalists and the historians should agree to an amicable divorce and go their separate ways. The historian like the proletarian has no fatherland. All human societies are held to be funda-
mentally similar and the differences between them derive from contingency, not from any inbuilt differences between the human beings who compose them. To the nationalist, each society is uniquely different and their environments do not create the national character but are created by it. For Ylikangas, some observed features of Finnish people derive from the contingency that they were forced to live isolated lives in a forest wilderness. For Topelius, the ability of Finns to create a society in a forest wilderness derived from prior national characteristics which equipped them to impose themselves on a hostile natural environment. Probably Haavikko was right, academic historians, with their inconvenient insistence that images of the past must be reconcilable with demonstrable realities are an obstacle to the creation and maintenance of the national identity. They should leave that to the poets.

NOTES
1 Concerning the Kalevala, see the chapter below by Engman.
2 Concerning Snellman, see the chapter below by Karkama.
3 Concerning the concept and politics of ‘East Karelia’, see the chapter below by Sihvo.

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