

# **Coming Home or Moving Home?**

“Westernising” Narratives in Finnish Foreign Policy  
and the Re-interpretation of Past Identities

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*Coming Home or Moving Home? “Westernising” Narratives in Finnish  
Foreign Policy and the Re-interpretation of Past Identities*

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## *Introduction*<sup>#</sup>

*“Finland has come home, but she is not used to being at home”*

Risto Penttilä quoted in Tomas Ries – ‘Lessons of the Winter War’

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Since the end of the Cold War it is widely accepted that Finnish foreign policy has oriented increasingly towards the ‘West’, the most pertinent and concrete example of which, to date, has been accession to the EU. Implicit in many commentaries is the assumption that this orientation is a natural phenomenon, the natural culmination of an effervescent Finnish ‘Western’ cultural identity. Whilst the rhetorical style perhaps differs espousers of this view draw on Herderian and Hegelian assumptions, essentially arguing that after the unfortunate interruption and deviation from its true path occasioned by the Cold War the Finnish ‘national spirit’ is now back on its rightful historical and linear course to national fulfilment and blossoming. Looking into the nation’s history such discourses see Finland’s cultural and political roots as lying in the West and hence posit that with the break-up of the Soviet Union Finland is returning to these organic origins in Western civilisation, with all the effects for foreign policy such a ‘Western’ identity will entail. This is what we may term the ‘Westernising’ narrative of current debates about Finnish identity and Finnish foreign policy. On this basis the Finnish Cold War foreign policy of neutrality is characterised, either as having been a total aberration and betrayal of the Finnish ‘Western’ Self, or, and perhaps more commonly, as having been the best possible option available to the Finnish elite at the time: constrained by the dictates of power, agile Finnish political leaders were able to manoeuvre the Finnish ship of state through the various pitfalls and traps waiting to beguile them in the stormy waters of great power Cold War politics. Now free of such power dictates these current ‘Westernising’ discourses are attempting to push Finnish foreign policy towards the West, legitimising such a move to the Finnish public and the wider international audience on the grounds of Finland’s claimed historical Western identity. To note the title of this panel discussion, ‘Defining New Identities Between East and West’, for Westernising discourses there is no *between* about it. As an organically Western state why would Finland want to be between East and West any longer? On this basis the

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Finnish neutrality of the Cold War period merely disguised the true Finnish identity, a ruse so that Finland could in the future once more live as its true self when conditions once again permitted.

The opening quote by Risto Penttilä, a former leader of the Young Finn Party and an academic on Finnish foreign policy, that “Finland has come home, but she is not used to being at home”, reflects something of this Westernising narrative. From its Cold War hideaway Finland is returning to the comforts of home. At the same time though Penttilä problematises just how natural this home identity is for the Finns. The Finns are not used to being at home. Similarly, in the article this quote is taken from Tomas Ries also immediately goes on to add that after four years of EU membership “*familiarity with home is becoming all the more apparent in Finland*”. Both Penttilä and Ries point to an interesting contradiction. Home was not really home before, this Western home is only becoming *more like* home, more *familiar*. This undermines the justification for arguing Finland is an organically/naturally Western state since Finns are still unsure what it is to be Western. What this points us towards however, is that Finland is undergoing an *identity transformation* – it is in fact “moving home”, rather than “coming home”, the implication being that Finns have had prior national identities distinct from a purely Western identification which have felt equally as real and natural and which have relied on different stories of the self for their justification. At the same time the ‘Westernising’ narrative of post-Cold War Finnish foreign policy is far from being uncontended. Other narratives of the history and identity of the Finnish self exist in contradiction and contestation with the Westernising narrative and such contradictions are also evident in various aspects of Finnish foreign policy which rely on these different, and far from complementary, understandings of the self and of others. Thus, although we can posit that an identity transformation is underway in Finland from the dominantly accepted Cold War understanding of Finnish identity, it is far from certain as to where any reorientation will end up.

In this paper I explore three central issues raised here. First, I outline how narratives of the nation’s history play a decisive role in the construction of national identities. Second, I aim to further problematise the Westernising narrative of Finnish foreign policy by showing, in the first instance, that Finnish Cold War identities were just as real and efficacious as post-Cold War ‘Western’ ones are and, in the second instance,

to illustrate more precisely how Westernising arguments operate, the premises they use and how they reinterpret history. In particular there will be a focus on how the language they use and the stories they tell attempt to construct for the audience the reality of the situation and make what is in fact *not* natural, *seem* natural, what is in fact *moving* home feel like *coming* home. Finally, I will analyse two central contradictions I currently see in Finnish foreign policy. The first of these is the point that different aspects of Finnish foreign policy rely on starkly contradictory understandings of the Finnish self in relation to perceived understandings of Finland's principle constituting other, Russia. The second, and closely related, is the ambiguity of the term 'West' in these debates.

### ***History, Narrative and Identity***

Narratives, or telling stories about ourselves of how we understand ourselves and others and the unravelling world about us, are a vital if often unconscious aspect of our lives which serves as "a way of organising experience and making sense of the world in which we live, that is to say, of constructing meaning".<sup>1</sup> In this respect, "Narrative is not just an explanatory device, but is actually constitutive of the way we experience things".<sup>2</sup> In a disparate confusing world beyond our individual or collective control narratives of the self constitute an essential way in which selves are able to establish a sense of belonging, order and security vis-à-vis their social environment. In Calvin Schrag's terms the self is really a "narrating self... a storyteller who both finds herself in stories already told and strives for a self-constitution by emplotting herself in stories in the making". Indeed, for Schrag such storytelling is the essence of selfhood: "To be a self is to be able to render an account of oneself, to be able to tell the story of one's life".<sup>3</sup> By establishing a linear story from who we were in the past up until the present narratives create a framework within which our experiences become intelligible to ourselves and to others. On this basis history, narrative and identity are clearly intricately intertwined concepts. As the

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<sup>1</sup> Claire Moon (1998) 'True Fictions: truth, reconciliation, and the narrativisation of identity'. Paper presented at the Aberystwyth Postinternational Group conference on "Linking Theory and Practice: Issues in the Politics of Identity" held at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, September 9-11, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Johnson quoted in Calvin O. Schrag (1997) *The Self after Postmodernity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press) p.23

<sup>3</sup> Calvin O. Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity*, p.26

historian Simon Schama therefore notes, history “is a story we carry with us”,<sup>4</sup> for it is the stories we tell about our, and our society’s, past which condition, not only what we think of our (collective) self now, of who we are, but which also impinge on our understandings of the identities and interests of others. This is for the reason that all stories of the self presuppose specific relations with and understandings of other selves. Indeed, to reiterate something of a gospel of truth in the literature on identity, the self’s identity is constructed more in relation to what it is not than to anything else. Thus, the notion of Finland’s between East and West identity of the Cold War presupposed a definable East and West between which to be. At the same time there is never any single story of history, in fact, history is very much at the mercy of narrating selves in the present possessed of the ability and often the need to be creative with the narrative and to engage in re-readings and re-interpretations of the past. Being *temporalised* the self relies on re-interpreting past experiences in terms of conditions the self finds itself in now as a result of developments in the wider social environment out of its control.<sup>5</sup> The self inevitably faces the need to reposition itself in the face of new developments and this requires retrospectively revising, selecting and ordering past details and experiences “in such a way as to create a self-narrative that is coherent and satisfying and that will serve as a justification for one’s present condition and situation”.<sup>6</sup>

As such narratives are as much about the future as about the past in that they contain implicit assumptions of the current and the potentialities for the future emerging identity of the self. As Schrag notes, the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of discourse are often two sides of the same coin. “A description of the state of affairs in regard to overpopulation is also a normative judgement that issues a call for social change and political action”.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, a description of a nation’s historical experience and its identity as, for example, ‘Western’, also implies similar prescriptive action for the nation’s leaders into the future. Importantly, therefore, narratives of the past are carriers of power in that they attempt to construct our experience of social reality and thus our future being. In this respect the ‘facts’ of history are constituted in the very narrative, which likewise also serves to attempt to

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in *The Observer*, 03.01.99, p.19

<sup>5</sup> Calvin O. Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity*, p.37

<sup>6</sup> Polkinghorne quoted in Calvin O Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity*, pp.37-38, footnote 14

construct for us what we value and what our social conscience should be, all of which is implicit in the very process of narrating to us who we are and where we are going.<sup>8</sup> As such different narratives of the self also exist as competing claims to knowledge in which current political disputes are projected into the past.<sup>9</sup> Different narratives of the nation as, say, Western or of a between East and West identity, are each attempting to appropriate and clarify the truth of the nation's history and identity for the population and hence to legitimise certain future courses of action. And, to this extent, different narratives exist in competition with each other in their attempt to attain hegemony and hence the right to define the 'we' of the nation. At the same time therefore, narratives of history can also carry the prospect of the 'liberation' from the 'legacy of the past',<sup>10</sup> which, as we will see, is one aspect central to 'Westernising' narratives in the current Finnish foreign policy debates. Such narratives of liberation operate essentially on the basis of exposing the past for 'what it really was', therefore offering a claim to knowledge about the 'truth' of the past, which competes with previously accepted interpretations and understandings and which must, thus, by implication be untrue and even deceitful.

Narratives can therefore be viewed as being in conversation with each other with each propagating a different set of relationships between the self and others with recourse to particular implied readings of history for evidence. In espousing one particular narrative the propagators of that narrative are appealing to an audience who may simultaneously be telling contrary narratives and thus may or may not be receptive to the first narrative. One story may be modified and incorporated into the other or they may continue to exist in antithesis until one or the other attains a hegemonic position and is thus largely able to silence the competitor from the public gaze. Indeed, such was the position during the Cold War period when the Finnish political elite, and in particular president Kekkonen, successfully muted voices deviating from the Paasikivi-Kekkonen line by establishing a particular narrative framework of Finnish identity throughout society so encompassing that dissenting voices were largely

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<sup>7</sup> Calvin O. Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity*, p.92

<sup>8</sup> Calvin O. Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity*, pp.92-94

<sup>9</sup> Gerhard Brunn (1992) 'Historical Consciousness and Historical Myths', in A. Kappeler (ed) *The Formation of National Elites* (Dartmouth: European Science Foundation, New York University Press) p.334

<sup>10</sup> Hanna Järä (1999) *Dealing with the Past: The Case of Estonia* (Helsinki: UPI Working Papers; The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, No.15) p.6

excluded, being tarnished with the brush of irresponsibility and illegitimacy as representative voices of the Finnish self. This in itself points us towards the ways in which narratives can act in the construction of collective identities, and in this case national identities. Thus, whilst psychological literature can point us towards the need of the individual to identify with a wider social in-group vis-à-vis a differentiation from out-groups,<sup>11</sup> it is the language and symbolisations that are utilised in specific narratives which are able to create across a group of people a feeling of a shared national experience and a common identity – that is, to use Schama’s terms, to create an historical memory we (collectively) carry with us. At the same time it is the language and entailed symbolisations of a narrative which also act to construct the boundaries between in-groups and out-groups, between us and them, between the self and others.

Given the ‘vexatious fact’ of the social world, which continually changes and transforms beyond anyone’s control,<sup>12</sup> such boundaries differentiating the self from others are in constant need of reaffirmation and at times even reconstruction in order to reflect developing perceptions of changing conditions. For example, the ending of the Cold War has, for many Finns, stripped the Finnish identity of neutrality of its contemporary relevance by removing its foundational premises of the world as split between two mutually hostile blocs of East and West. To this extent accepted concepts, which derive from conceptions of self identity in relation to the identity of others, now appear for many as redundant. The result, as Erkki Toivanen has noted, is the emergence of “a general desire to make a fresh start”.<sup>13</sup> This is as much as to say Finns feel the need to reconceptualise the Finnish self in respect of the new conditions facing them. The Westernising narrative is one, if contested, such aspect of this debate over the place, the identity, of Finland and the Finns in the post-Cold War world.

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<sup>11</sup> On the need to identify with an in-group see, for example, Mary Caputi’s discussion of the theories of Kristeva and Volkan. Mary Caputi (1996) ‘National Identity in Contemporary Theory’, *Political Psychology* (Vol.17, No.4)

<sup>12</sup> I take this concept from Margaret Archer who argues that society is vexatious for the reason that “‘society’ is that which nobody wants in exactly the form they find it and yet it resists both individual and collective efforts at transformation – not necessarily by remaining unchanged but altering to become something else which still conforms to no one’s ideal”. Margaret Archer (1995) *Realist social theory: the morphogenetic approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) p.2

<sup>13</sup> Erkki Toivanen (1994) ‘Finland’s Quest for Security’, in Walter Goldstein (ed) *Security in Europe: The Role of NATO after the Cold War* (London: Brassey’s) p.65



As noted in the introduction Westernising narratives claim for Finland a national identity which is naturally, even organically, ‘Western’. In the above it has been argued that as identities rely on narratives for their construction of realness such an essentialist claim is misleading and serves overtly political purposes. In the following section I wish to problematise the Westernising claim further.

### ***Westernising Narratives and the Re-interpretation of History***

#### *Meet the Physician: Cold War Finnish Identities*

Finnish identity has not always been Western. At times, it has in fact been premised on precisely not being Western or Eastern. For example, Øle Waever has shown how during the Cold War “Nordicity” became an intrinsic element of the national identities of all the Nordic states. Nordic identity he notes, was “a model of the enlightenment, anti-militaristic society that was superior to the old Europe”.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Nordic identity was the promise of a better future and as such it was premised precisely on its differentiation from the militaristic Cold War combatants.<sup>15</sup> Norden was not East or West, it was a third way based on humanitarian principles, peace, co-operation and disarmament, and not least on a distinctive model of the welfare state. In a similar vein we can note Urho Kekkonen’s famous phrase in a speech to the United Nations in 1961 that: “We see ourselves as physicians rather than judges; it is not for us to pass judgement nor to condemn, it is rather to diagnose and to try to cure”.<sup>16</sup> The physician is a very positive image here, it also carries moralistic tones reminiscent of Waever’s point, in that as Finnish neutrality was justified on the basis of keeping out of the conflicts between the great powers it can be seen to presume that the judges, those willing to condemn, sentence, pass judgement and execute punishment, were these very great powers. By contrast Finland stood aloof, occupying the moral high ground, the benevolent physician.

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<sup>14</sup> Øle Waever (1992) ‘Nordic Nostalgia: Northern Europe after the Cold War’, *International Affairs* (Vol.68, No.1) p.77. For a similar set of arguments also see, Hans Mouritzen (1995) ‘The Nordic Model as a Foreign Policy Instrument: Its Rise and Fall’, *Journal of Peace Research* (Vol.32, No.1) pp.9-21

<sup>15</sup> Øle Waever, ‘Nordic Nostalgia’, p.79

<sup>16</sup> Speech entitled “Finland’s attitude to problems in world politics” delivered to the General Assembly of the United Nations on 19.10.1961 and reprinted in Tuomas Vilkkuna (ed) *Neutrality: The Finnish*

Indeed, rather than being ‘Western’ the West and its institutions (in particularly NATO) were seen as a destabilising force and a threat to world and Finnish security.<sup>17</sup> From the perspective of the dominant Finnish narrative of the time an important essence of Western identity was understood as being anti-East, and more specifically as anti-Russian. In the Finnish narratives the East was depicted differently. Whereas in salient Western narratives the West was depicted in opposition to the evil expansionist Eastern empire and as such the West stood as the upholders of humanity’s freedom and morality, in Finnish narratives the East was emploted more favourably, not as an enemy but as a potential friend. This Finnish conception of the East, the Soviet Union and Russians and hence also of Finnish identity in the world, itself rested on the emergence of a new dominant narrative of the Finnish self and of Finnish history at the end of the Second World War. In brief, the essence of this narrative, to a great extent initiated and championed by Juho Paasikivi, was that it was Finnish national identity of the inter-war period which was responsible for Finland’s wars with the Soviet Union. This inter-war identity, it was claimed, had basically been characterised by widespread russophobia in Finnish society and the resulting depiction of the Soviet Union as Finland’s *perivihollinen* – the hereditary enemy.<sup>18</sup> Russophobia, as Heikki Luostarinen notes, was “the notion that Finland and Russia cannot live in peaceful co-existence”.<sup>19</sup> In short, the result was that Finns widely saw themselves as “the Western World’s outpost in the East” facing an evil and expansionist communist empire the result of which was that Finland abandoned “itself in a national recklessness which left little room for a more sober and politically practical viewpoint”.<sup>20</sup> As such it was argued that Finnish proclamations of neutrality at the end of the 1930s simply were not believed by the Soviets and as such Finland

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*Position. Speeches by Dr Urho Kekkonen* (London: Heinemann; 1973) Translated by P. Ojansuu and L. A. Keyworth

<sup>17</sup> Tuomas Forsberg (1999) ‘Between Neutrality and Membership: Finland’s and Sweden’s Place in the NATO Family’, in *NATO 50 mapping the future. The Washington Summit 23-25 April 1999* (London: Agenda Publishing Limited) p.112

<sup>18</sup> Fred Singleton (1981) ‘The Myth of Finlandisation’, *International Affairs* (Vol.57, No.2) p.275; Roy Allison (1985) *Finland’s Relations with the Soviet Union 1944-84* (Macmillan) pp.5,17

<sup>19</sup> Heikki Luostarinen (1989) ‘Finnish Russophobia: The Story of an Enemy Image’, *Journal of Peace Research* (Vol.26, No.2) p.128. Luostarinen argues that to understand the emergence of Russophobia we need to go back to the Finnish Civil War and the founding of the First Republic, which saw a separation of Finland from Russia at the state level, but more importantly at the ideological level in consequence of the victory of the Whites over the Communist inspired Reds. As such the Soviet Union became characterised as representing that aspect of Finnish society which had sought to destroy the bourgeois state.

became viewed as a 'legitimate' security threat. Finnish rhetoric had made them untrustworthy and hence the Soviets necessarily felt obliged to deal with the Finns with force. In these narratives therefore the impression pervades that in the inter-war period foreign policy was hijacked by the allure of "national aspirations, and deep emotionalism [which] combine[d] to form national policy".<sup>21</sup>

The emergence of this new and increasingly dominant narrative following the end of the war essentially served to elicit a narrative closure on the past it depicted. The narrative retold history and claimed to tell it 'how it really was' with the implication that negative views of Russians had been misconceived. Russians were resurrected from their negative position in the collective Finnish consciousness whilst at the same time the Finns were being 'liberated' from the chains of their inter-war past. Exposing history 'for what it was' served as a way of moving forward, of becoming. The Soviet Union's security concerns were no longer conceived of as pig-headed expansionism but as legitimate.<sup>22</sup> Of particular importance in this new narrative was Paasikivi's appropriation of the scientific language of the Enlightenment as a description of his own policies. The appropriation of terms such as realism, rationalism and pragmatism as intrinsic elements of the language of the new narrative essentially delegitimised both inter-war foreign policy and current contending views as irrational and therefore as irresponsible and non-viable. As Schrag put it, the description of the past entailed a prescription for the future. In this instance the previously irrational and hot-headed Finns would now become pragmatic and circumspect, less prone to nationalist emotional outbursts, but rather viewing the world through the lenses of "cool rationalism"<sup>23</sup> and the "unsentimental calculation of the national interest".<sup>24</sup> Thus, through a particular description of the past a different future became possible ultimately based on the reconstitution of Soviet identity in Finnish eyes.

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<sup>20</sup> Aimo Pajunen (1969) 'Finland's Security Policy', in Ilkka Heiskanen, Jukka Huopaniemi, Keijo Korhonen and Klaus Törnudd (eds) *Essays on Finnish Foreign Policy* (Helsinki: Finnish Political Science Association, Vammala) p.8

<sup>21</sup> Anatole Mazour (1956) *Finland: Between East and West* (London: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc) p.200

<sup>22</sup> For example, in a speech in 1967 Kekkonen noted, "I have read in the history of Russia that she has been attacked fourteen times in the last 150 years... It is justifiable to claim that if the leaders of a great country... were not concerned about the security of their country, they would not be fulfilling their duty". Speech entitled, "Finland's Path in a World of Tensions", delivered at the General Church Meeting in Vaasa, Finland on 06.01.1967, in Tuomas Vilkuna (ed) *Neutrality: The Finnish Position. Speeches by Dr Urho Kekkonen*, p.196

<sup>23</sup> Anatole Mazour, *Finland: Between East and West*, p.200

Repositioning Soviet identity vis-à-vis the Finns in the new narrative likewise served as a departure for Finnish identity in the Cold War conflict.

The distinctiveness of this new identity in relation to the West became particularly evident in the Finlandisation debates of the 1960s-1980s. In the West Finland's 'good neighbourly' relations with the Soviet Union, as the Soviets liked to term it,<sup>25</sup> were regarded with utmost suspicion. Coined in internal political debates in Germany 'Finlandisation' implied "subservience to the Soviet Union and a tendency to anticipate and comply with Soviet wishes even before they are formulated".<sup>26</sup> Finlandisation implied a distinctly negative and expansionist view of the Soviet Union and of communism and as such protagonists of the concept tended to view Finland as a Soviet Trojan horse, dressed in Western garb but under Soviet control.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, defenders of the tendency of Finnish decision-makers to pay heed to Soviet wishes and concerns saw such a policy as the pragmatic and rational course of action given Finland's geopolitical position and its different and less suspicious understanding of Soviet identity.<sup>28</sup> To this extent the contesting interpretations of the Finlandisation hypothesis thus represented competing claims to knowledge about the world in which each narrative attempted to frame reality by implicitly invoking different images and identities of actors in the world. From the Western viewpoint the Soviet Union was seen as aggressive and subversive and communist society the *specter*, to use Walter Laqueur's phrase, of an unpleasant and fearful alternative to Western liberal democracy to be contained at all costs. By contrast such views of the Soviet Union, particularly in respect to Finland, were seen as misconceived in Finland and as deriving from a distinct lack of knowledge of Finland, the Soviet Union and Finnish-Soviet history. It was therefore such a view of Soviet identity, as distinct from that held in the West, which facilitated the construction of a between East and West

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<sup>24</sup> Max Jakobson 'Substance and Appearance', *Foreign Affairs* (Vol.58, No.5) p.1042

<sup>25</sup> For example, see Y. Golosubov (1978) 'The USSR and Finland – Good Neighbourly Relations', *International Affairs (Moscow)* (May) pp.12-18; A. Medvedev (1981) 'USSR and Finland – Good Neighbours', *International Affairs (Moscow)* (February) pp.80-84

<sup>26</sup> Fred Singleton (1978) 'Finland between East and West', *World Today* (Vol.34, No.8) p.325

<sup>27</sup> Two writers in particular have gained notoriety for their Finlandisation attacks on Finnish foreign policy: Walter Laqueur and Nils Orvik. See Walter Laqueur (1977) 'Europe: The Specter of Finlandization', *Commentary* (Vol.64, No.6); and for a summary of Orvik's position see David Kirby, *Finland in the Twentieth Century* (London: C. Hurst and Company) p.188 and Roy Allison, *Finland's Relations with the Soviet Union 1944-84*, p.2

identity for the Finns, and enabled Kekkonen to promote an international image of Finland as a physician, a healer of rifts and a mediator in the prevailing ideological conflict. Given this the current Westernising claim that Finland has always been ‘Western’, that Finland is coming home, must therefore be seen as a retrospective view of history – meaning today’s conceptions of identity are implanted back on the past and taken to be self-evident of the whole of history. Importantly, therefore, we need to analyse just how the narratives of Finnish post-war history being told by the Westernisers are attempting to reconstruct collective memories of Finnish history in such a way as to make ‘moving home’ *feel like* ‘coming home’.

### *Putting the Physician in a Straitjacket*

A useful and representative starting point is the following statement by Jukka Valtasaari, Secretary of State at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs:

“No longer are we watching developments from a position restrained by  
the straitjacket of our Cold War neutrality”<sup>29</sup>

Straitjacket is interesting here, it is doing something and conjures up certain negative images. Straitjackets prevent you doing what you want to do, they constrain you, they suppress your movement and action and prevent you from demonstrating your true expressions. Being in a straitjacket also carries the assumption that you are somehow (mentally) ill (or at least need to be repressed). So from being the physician of post-war neutrality interpretations (justifications) of the time, with the positive connotations for identity that entailed, Finland is now being represented as the physician in a *straitjacket* – the ill physician. This is to say that Finland was having to be suppressed to prevent itself from voicing its true opinions.<sup>30</sup> Now the Cold War is

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<sup>28</sup> See Max Jakobson, ‘Substance and Appearance’, p.1040; Erkki Berndtson (1991) ‘Finlandization: Paradoxes of External and Internal Dynamics’, *Government and Opposition* (Vol.26, No.1) p.26; George Maude (1976) *The Finnish Dilemma* (London: Oxford University Press) p.23

<sup>29</sup> Jukka Valtasaari speech entitled, ‘A Finnish Perspective on the Changing Europe’, delivered at the Academy for Social and National Development of Uzbekistan on 08.01.1999.  
<http://virtual.finland.fi/news/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=1101&intNWSCategoryID=2> . The same statement was also included by Valtasaari in a slightly amended version of the same speech delivered at SASS, Shanghai on 10.05.1999.

<http://virtual.finland.fi/news/showarticle.asp?intNWSAID=2610&intNWSCategoryID=2>

<sup>30</sup> A more positive view of this argument is that whilst constrained by the power dictates of the Cold War and Finland’s geopolitical position, Finnish leaders oriented Finland as far West as was

over Finland is out of the straitjacket and no longer needs to be suppressed. Finland's true identity can come out. If Finland is moving to the West we should not be surprised, that is what we should in fact naturally expect for as Risto Penttilä noted, on this reading Finland is coming home.

One method of justifying this move Westwards has being in a resurfacing of the Cold War Finlandisation debates. However, unlike before when this was largely an international debate, in the 1990s it has been overwhelmingly of internal dimensions. Rather than rejecting the Finlandisation hypothesis as before, Westernising narratives of Finland's post-war history actually seek to expose what they see has having been a very real and malignant Finnish illness. Thus, whereas during the Cold War the Finns defended their position arguing, like Max Jakobson, that Finland was "at the mercy of" itinerant columnists with only "superficial and fragmentary" knowledge of the Finnish position,<sup>31</sup> we are now told that those journalists were in fact right, that Finlandisation "was not merely a figment of the imaginations of Western journalists and anti-Soviet scholars, but a part of Finnish reality".<sup>32</sup>

According to this view during the Cold War years, and especially during the tenure of Kekkonen as president, an 'official religion' of "national self-censorship and official admiration of the neighbour to the east"<sup>33</sup> was established across Finnish society. Accordingly it is argued that "for a country with liberal democratic traditions there was an unnatural degree of consensus"<sup>34</sup> to the detriment of the weighing up of different opinions<sup>35</sup> and self-censorship reached alarming proportions with the steady integration of the media "with the state and its foreign policy",<sup>36</sup> all of which it is

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pragmatically and realistically possible given the premises of the Paasikivi-Kekkonen line. For example, Erkki Toivanen argues "The direction of the policy was clear – Finland was firmly steering for the West while looking over her shoulder to the East. Finland joined all the major western institutions – the World Bank and the IMF, the OECD, EFTA and the Council of Europe. Each step had to be 'cleared' with Moscow. It was not an easy process. To overcome Soviet objections and reluctance, Finnish governments had to make concessions and thus give added credence to accusations of finlandisation". Erkki Toivanen, 'Finland's Quest for Security', p.65

<sup>31</sup> Max Jakobson (1984) *Finland Survived: An Account of the Finnish-Soviet Winter War 1939-40* (Helsinki: Otava Publishing Co.) p.xiii

<sup>32</sup> Risto E.J. Penttilä (1992) 'Official Religions', *Books From Finland* (No.1) p.41

<sup>33</sup> Risto E.J. Penttilä, 'Official Religions', p.41

<sup>34</sup> Mikko Majander (1999) 'The Paradoxes of Finlandization', *Northern Dimensions* (The Finnish Institute of International Affairs Yearbook) p.88

<sup>35</sup> Jaakko Tapaninen (1994) 'End of the Line', *Books From Finland* (No.2) p.113

<sup>36</sup> Esko Salminen (1999) *The Silenced Media: The Propaganda War between Russia and the West in Northern Europe* (Macmillan Press Ltd) p.171

contended seriously undermined and damaged Finnish democratic institutions and traditions.<sup>37</sup> Rather than having skilfully avoided the pitfalls of Cold War power politics to maintain a position of magnanimous neutrality, the Westernising narrative contends Finland in fact slid down the Eastern precipice to become the propaganda mouthpiece of the Soviet totalitarian empire with its expansionist communist ideology and agenda. In this light rather than being the prime examples of Finland's bridge-building and healing role, in calling for a Nordic Nuclear Weapons Free Zone and proposing the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe with its ultimate ratification of the post-war division of Europe, Finland was in fact playing the tune of the Soviet piper.<sup>38</sup> Whilst the West came in for criticism the media refrained from attacks on the Soviet Union towards which totalitarian and Stalinist society, Vihavainen argues, the Finns retained an illusory level of optimism.<sup>39</sup> As such the Westernising narrative of Finnish history has therefore come to accept the dominant Western view of the Soviet Union during the Cold War as an expansionist evil empire and Finland's peaceful coexistence with its neighbour as akin to flirting with the devil. In Westernising narratives the responsibility for such a dangerous liaison is generally being placed at the feet of the Finnish political elite and in particular of Urho Kekkonen who's relationship with the Soviet elite, in these accounts, is widely interpreted as having gone beyond the bounds of normal and acceptable diplomatic practice. Indeed, Kekkonen's playing of the 'Moscow Card' is now widely understood as having been a euphemism for the legitimisation of authoritarian style politics at home.

Once again, though, the Westernising narrative's description of the past is serving as a prescription for a possible future Finnish identity. In constructing both Finnish and Soviet Cold War identities negatively, and therefore the Finnish-Soviet relationship as morally anathema, the narrative again serves to erect a closure around this part of Finnish history. In "crying out aloud how Finlandized they were in past decades"<sup>40</sup> this aspect of the Westernising narrative psychologically acts to shut the book on what

<sup>37</sup> Erkki Toivanen, 'Finland's Quest for Security', p.64

<sup>38</sup> Mikko Majander, 'The Paradoxes of Finlandization', p.89

<sup>39</sup> See Risto E.J. Penttilä, 'Official Religions', p.42 which is a review of Timo Vihavainen (1991) *Kansakunta rähmällään. Suomettumisen lyhyt historia* [A nation flat on its face. A short history of Finland] (Helsinki: Otava). Also see Juhana Aunesluoma (1999) 'Grim Tales', in *Northern Dimensions* (The Finnish Institute of International Affairs Yearbook) p.98 which is a review of Timo Vihavainen (1998) *Stalin ja Suomalaiset* [Stalin and the Finns] (Helsinki: Otava)

is perceived as a sordid immoral episode. As such the Westernising narrative implies Finland's future 'becoming' will be in antithesis to this reconceptualisation of both the Cold War Soviet other and the Finnish prior self. By exposing the past for what it was, by writing the 'real' history of post-war Finland as Finlandised, a claim which was vehemently denied at the time, the narrative opens the possibility for future liberation and transformation. This transformation away from the previous between East and West identity is made more palatable by the Westernising narrative's general vilification of Kekkonen and other 'Finlandised' Finnish elites of the time. In placing the responsibility for Finland's dealings with the 'devil' with Kekkonen<sup>41</sup> the Finnish people as a whole are absolved from blame. The need to identify those 'responsible' in the narrative preserves the nation as a whole as sacrosanct, uncompromised and free from shame and therefore as resurrectable to a better, truer and moral future. Kekkonen, it is implied, through playing the Moscow Card established himself as "an autocrat whose dominance suffocated true democracy"<sup>42</sup> and who, from this all powerful position, duped, misguided and led astray the nation from its true path and historical traditions. As such it becomes possible to say the Finns are 'coming home' to their Western roots as Finland's Cold War identity was not 'really real', it was the fabrication of immoral leaders.

On the other hand, this Westernising interpretation of a Finlandised Finland and of the responsibility of Kekkonen is controversial and contested in Finland. Indeed, as Virkkula notes, "political history has become a kind of national sport",<sup>43</sup> particularly centred around an ongoing and largely televised debate between the historians Hannu Rautkallio and Juhani Suomi. Whilst Suomi sees Kekkonen as "a great patriot, intellectually as well as tactically superior to any other Finnish politician, the man who saved the country by skilfully mixing appeasement and resistance in exactly the right portions under constant Soviet pressure",<sup>44</sup> Rautkallio has acted as the prosecutor for the Westernising narrative's more sombre interpretation of Kekkonen. In constituting the 'facts' of history differently the important point to note is that the

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<sup>40</sup> Mikko Majander, 'The Paradoxes of Finlandization', p.88

<sup>41</sup> Majander notes that this revisionist view of history "starts off by claiming that Kekkonen made a Faustian deal by entering into close relations with Soviet representatives already in 1943-44, after which he acted in constant symbiosis with his foreign masters". Mikko Majander, 'The Paradoxes of Finlandization', p.89

<sup>42</sup> Simopekka Virkkula (1993) 'Sins of the fathers?', *Books From Finland* (No.1) p.32

<sup>43</sup> Simopekka Virkkula, 'Sins of the fathers?', p.31



different narratives construct competing notions of Finnish identity and the identity of others in the present, all of which will have different implications for foreign policy.

As noted, therefore, the Westernising narrative contains within its very premises and various emplotments of the self in relation to others, its prescriptions for a future ‘becoming’ of Finland – i.e., not only does it open the way for liberation it tells us what that liberation will be by constructing for the audience Finnish society’s future values and social conscience. To simplify we can posit an internal and external dimension to this national liberation. At the internal level the narrative’s very description of post-war self-censorship and autocratic style politics in Finland, both of which are interpreted negatively and as having been unethical, establishes this prior self as a negative other from which the ‘real’ Western Finland needs to distance itself. The explicit injunction in this negative story of the past is for the establishment of more open and transparent politics, support for freedom of expression, and the delinking of the media from the state to its development into a ‘fourth estate’ free to challenge the political establishment and to say “how things are”.<sup>45</sup>

At the external level the effect of the narrative is to push Finland further into integration with Western institutions. In its terms the Westernising narrative basically delegitimises the Cold War policy of neutrality by claiming to show that the Western understanding of Soviet identity and intentions was the correct version, the Finns were wrong and as such neutrality was akin to free-riding on the back of Western security institutions established to contain the Soviet threat. At the same time, the narrative provides another justification for greater Western integration through its critique of Kekkonen as having misled the Finns and the consequent argument that Western integration is therefore only ‘natural’. Notably such Westernising narratives of Finland’s past Finlandised self were utilised in the campaign to make Finland a part of the European Union.<sup>46</sup> At the same time the Westernising narrative’s description of

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<sup>44</sup> Mikko Majander, ‘The Paradoxes of Finlandization’, p.89

<sup>45</sup> Esko Salminen, *The Silenced Media*, p.171

<sup>46</sup> Anna Rotkirch (1996) ‘Finlandisation and post-Finlandisation’, *Books From Finland* (No.3) p.199. Interestingly the ‘No’ campaign against EU membership also utilised the concept of Finlandisation as a propaganda tool, instead arguing that Finnish membership of the EU would itself be an instance of Finlandisation towards a great power which would damage national unity and independence. Mikko Majander, ‘The Paradoxes of Finlandization’, p.91. Hans Mouritzen makes much the same argument in his 1993 article, ‘The Two Musterknaben and the Naughty Boy: Sweden, Finland and Denmark in the Process of European Integration’, *Cooperation and Conflict* (Vol.28, No.4). Whilst not using the term

the past has also resurrected NATO from a negative interpretation in the Finnish consciousness as a potential threat to security to the positive interpretation that it was precisely this institution which facilitated the containment of communism and thus provided peace and stability for the West's liberal democracies. The fact that NATO no longer carries such negative connotations as in the past can be seen in the recent rhetoric of Tarja Halonen, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Anneli Taina, the then Minister for Defence, that Finland is respectively either "cohabiting" or "betrothed" to NATO. Thus, "NATO has changed in official rhetoric from a four-letter word to an acronym of a lover".<sup>47</sup> Such images are not neutral for they convey expectations of future Finnish behaviour to other states and to the Finnish people and as such also carry notions of Finnish identity. Indeed, in Finland the notion has widely taken root that the political elite are performing a *fait accompli* as regards NATO membership and Finnish citizens are already getting accustomed to this potential and developing aspect of Finnish identity.<sup>48</sup> Not least the dropping of the (discredited?) term 'neutrality' for 'non-alignment' has been interpreted, in particular by Paavo Väyrynen, as a "deliberate semantic shift on the part of those (especially on the political right) who viewed a policy of non-alignment as a first step down the road to military alignment".<sup>49</sup> Indeed, in the context of the Westernising narrative Finnish NATO membership could be interpreted as the crowning symbolisation of Finland's Western rehabilitation following the end of the Cold War. This is for the reason that, in the interpretation presented here, the Westernising narrative is premised on a negative constitution of Soviet identity and intentions during the Cold War and a positive one of 'Western' identity in the form of NATO's opposition to the expansionist East. In this respect in the terms of the Westernising narrative NATO membership would be the ultimate resurrection of the Finnish self from its post-war

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Finlandisation, Mouritzen argues that Finland has basically exchanged 'adaptive acquiescence' towards the Soviet Union with adaptive acquiescence towards the EC.

<sup>47</sup> Henriikki Heikka (1999) 'The Evolution of Russian Grand Strategy and Its Implications on Finnish Security', *Northern Dimensions* (Finnish Institute of International Affairs Yearbook) p.31

<sup>48</sup> Tuomas Forsberg, 'Between Neutrality and Membership', p.114. Tapani Vaahtoranta (1998) 'Why the EU, but not Nato? Finland's Non-Alignment in Post-Cold War Europe', *Northern Dimensions* (Finnish Institute of International Affairs Yearbook) p.4

<sup>49</sup> David Arter (1996) 'Finland: From Neutrality to NATO?', *European Security* (Vol.5, No.4) p.628. The same argument has also been expressed by Western diplomats in Helsinki. For example, Reuters recently reported one Western diplomat as saying: "The change of wording shows they are trying to get away from the Cold War rhetoric and make sure there are no obstacles to their participation in developing common European defence". Reported at <http://virtual.finland.fi/news> on 10.05.1999. At the same time the fact that no major political party has excluded the NATO option and that the defence

neutrality, however, on this reading ‘coming home’ is coming home to join the ‘old’ Cold War NATO with its emphasis on territorial defence. The implication in ‘coming home’ in the Westernising narrative is that the East *was* a threat, it *was* expansionist and it *was* dangerous. Being West on this reading is that which is not East. Thus, not only does the narrative describe the past, it also sets out the present and the future emplotment of the self and of others. Therefore, it can be noted that negative views of Russia, in line with this understanding of the implications of the Westernising narrative, have been constructed and have taken hold in Finland. Thus, Vaahtoranta and Forsberg note that a common mode of thought in Finland today is to believe that a great power status is an essential aspect of Russia’s identity and that “Russia sees herself as the centre of the Eurasian civilisation and fundamentally different from other civilisations. According to this view, Russia is not aiming at joining the Western structures but is instead strengthening her own significance”.<sup>50</sup> This view was further backed up in a recent and much publicly debated report by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.<sup>51</sup> Likewise Erkki Toivanen notes that “there is some reason to doubt whether Russia’s imperial habit can disappear overnight or even by the end of this century”.<sup>52</sup> On this understanding NATO membership is seen as providing security for Finland against a Russian neighbour with a propensity for expansionism, an imperial habit. This is a depiction of Russia essentially identical to that espoused by the West during the Cold War. Even stripped of a communist ideology for world revolution, expansionism is seen as in Russia’s nature and as an essential part of its identity. The prevalence of such negative sentiments about Russia have also extended to a widespread castigation of Russian society with an emphasis being placed on such negative issues as prostitution, drug trafficking, the Russian mafia, pollution, poverty,

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forces are being harmonised with NATO systems also serves to add credence to this argument. Tapani Vaahtoranta, ‘Why the EU, but not Nato?’, p.11

<sup>50</sup> Tapani Vaahtoranta and Tuomas Forsberg (1998) ‘Finland’s Three Security Strategies’, in Mathias Jopp and Sven Arnsfeldt (eds) *The European Union and the Baltic States: Visions, Interests and Strategies for the Baltic Sea Region* (Kauhava: Ulkopoliittinen instituutti and Institut für Europäische Politik) pp.193,194

<sup>51</sup> The Finnish Institute of International Affairs (1999) *Russia Beyond 2000: The prospects for Russian development and their implications for Finland* (Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs; No.1) In particular the report noted that “Russia is not committed to the principles of democratic peace and common values” and that “Its chosen line of multipolarity implies that Russia is entitled to its own sphere of influence and the unilateral use of military force within it”. p.1

<sup>52</sup> Erkki Toivanen, ‘Finland’s Quest for Security’, p.68. Jukka Nevakivi made a similar point in 1997, arguing that Finland’s geostrategic position remains the same as in the pre-1990 period for the reason that the “traditional eastern threat still prevails, even though the new Russia is by no means militarily comparable to former Soviet Union might”. Quoted in Christer Pursiainen (1999) *Finland’s Security*

the degeneration of the rule of law and nuclear hazards, to such an extent that the term ‘post-Finlandisation’ has been coined to depict the “current Finnish tendency, in which Russia and everything Russian is presented in an utmost negative light”.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, whilst officially Russia is not, at least openly, considered a security threat, but rather as only a cause of uncertainty,<sup>54</sup> from the Westernising narrative point of view the fact that NATO membership remains open, that the defence forces are integrating with NATO structures and that Finland remains unwilling to abandon conscription and the use of landmines, all seems to posit a rather pessimistic view of Russia underlying this strategy.

Last but not least the Westernising narrative also contains within its structure an important tool of critique against dissenters. In making a claim to the truth of Finland’s Finlandised past, which is essentially portrayed as having been the result of immoral autocratic political leaders, it encompasses within its framework the propaganda to label opponents as irresponsible and immoral and to de-legitimise competing claims regarding Finnish identity. As Majander notes, the term ‘Finlandised’ is increasingly been thrown as slander at those persons deemed not to have learned the lessons of the past.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, in a recent editorial *Helsingin Sanomat* referred to the “many ex-Stalinists who have opposition to NATO in their blood”.<sup>56</sup> Given the generally accepted version of the revealing of the ‘truth’ of Stalinist society, which has accompanied the opening of the Kremlin archives, labelling someone as ‘Finlandised’ or as ‘Stalinist’ serves to discredit them and to silence them from having a ‘legitimate’ opinion on Finland, on Russia and on Finnish-Russian relations. In this light it is interesting to see how Martti Valkonen responded to what he took as an ‘accusation’ of ‘post-Finlandisation’ levelled at him and his co-editors, Anne Sailas and Ilmari Susiluoto, by Anne Rotkirch in a review of their book, *Venäjä – jättiläinen tuuliajolla* [Russia – a drifting giant].<sup>57</sup> In his response Valkonen retorted with the accusation that those going round labelling people as post-Finlandised are setting themselves up as the “watchful guardians of morality... [that

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*Policy Towards Russia: From Bilateralism to Multilateralism* (Helsinki: UPI Working Papers, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, No.14) p.3

<sup>53</sup> Mikko Majander, ‘The Paradoxes of Finlandization’, p.92. Also see Anna Rotkirch, ‘Finlandisation and post-Finlandisation’, pp.198-199.

<sup>54</sup> Tuomas Forsberg, ‘Between Neutrality and Membership’, p.113

<sup>55</sup> Mikko Majander, ‘The Paradoxes of Finlandization’, p.89

<sup>56</sup> Quoted by Reuters and cited at <http://virtual.finland.fi/news/> on 10.05.1999

is, of]... what can be written about Russia without offending it. The campaign brings to mind”, he continues, “the Soviet period of self-censorship, which was controlled by Finland’s eastern neighbour. Self-censorship was Finlandisation, which made Finland, in the eyes of both West and East almost a satellite of the Soviet Union”.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, in 1998 Valkonen continued his Westernising offensive in a book on the present continuation of Finlandisation in Finland,<sup>59</sup> all of which is measured to push Finland further down the Westernising narrative’s road. Finally, Valkonen’s strong response interestingly illustrates the extent to which Finlandisation and post-Finlandisation are widely understood as politically charged concepts in Finland rather than as neutral academic descriptions. As Rotkirch herself noted in reply to Valkonen and his colleagues in a continuation of the exchange:

Their reactions say as much about the difficulties of discussing Russia in Finland during the past few decades, when any kind of interest in or knowledge of the big neighbour was inevitably placed in some camp, and interpreted as some kind of strategic opportunism.<sup>60</sup>

### ***The Ambiguity of ‘Russia’ and the ‘West’ in Finnish Discourse***

As we have seen above the Westernising narrative’s claim that Finland is ‘coming home’ to the West, a claim which has been widely used to interpret developments in Finnish foreign policy during the 1990s, especially regarding EU accession and moves towards membership of NATO (e.g., Finland’s participation in the Partnership for Peace programme and its seat on the North Atlantic Co-operation Council), also entails the employment of a negative view of Russia, the East, away from which Finland is returning westwards. The Westernising narrative serves to put an ideological distance between Finland and Russia. Finland is constructed by the narrative as part of the West in juxtaposition to the Russian Eastern other. With the Westernising narrative’s reappraisal of Finland’s post-war past as Finlandised ‘coming home’ to the West emplots the West as all that was deemed as anti-Eastern in

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<sup>57</sup> Anna Rotkirch, ‘Finlandisation and post-Finlandisation’.

<sup>58</sup> Ilmari Susiluoto, Anne Kuorsalo, Martti Valkonen and Anne Rotkirch (1996) ‘The legacy of Finlandisation: an exchange’, *Books From Finland* (No.4) p.291

<sup>59</sup> Henri Vogt (1999) ‘On Finlandization’, *Northern Dimensions* (The Finnish Institute of International Affairs Yearbook) p.100. This is a review of Martti Valkonen’s book, *Suomettaminen jatkuu yhä* [Continuing to Make Finland More Finlandized] (Helsinki: Tammi)

<sup>60</sup> Ilmari Susiluoto, Anne Kuorsalo, Martti Valkonen and Anna Rotkirch, ‘The legacy of Finlandisation: an exchange’, p.294

the past. Thus, whilst during the Cold War the Soviet's negative view towards such organisations as the EC and the Council of Europe as anti-Communist acted as a veto on Finnish membership, from the Westernising perspective membership is today regarded as an essential aspect of Western identity. Being Western implies, from this perspective, acquiring all that had been denied in the past because of its deemed anti-Easterness. 'Western identity' is therefore largely equated, in the Westernising narrative, with membership in 'Western' institutions. Thus, Max Jakobson has noted that those voting 'yes' to EU membership in the 1994 referendum did so, for the most part, not as a result of weighing up the economic and social costs and benefits of membership, but because membership was seen "to affirm Finland's Western identity".<sup>61</sup> Membership was thus seen as a passport to the Western club. By contrast, the Norwegians could vote 'no' without having any need to question whether this would in some way make them 'less' Western, as such a no vote implied in Finland. Furthermore, from the Westernising narrative's perspective there is the implication that Russia should be excluded from Western institutions. Indeed, given the underlying view here that Russian identity is inherently tied up with notions of being an expansionist great power such a view indicates that Russian exclusion is essential in order to defend the West from Russian advances.

However, if we look at other aspects of recent Finnish foreign policy, particularly as expressed in the Northern Dimension initiative, understandings of Russia and the West in Finland become much more ambiguous for the reason that the initiative implicitly relies on a different narrative of Finnish history and hence a different understanding of Finnish and Russian identities. This narrative is largely predicated on the Paasikivi-Kekkonen line's understanding of the Soviet Union and Russia, not as being an inherently bad and expansionist great power, but merely as having legitimate security interests and as amenable to peaceful coexistence with the West. It therefore rejects the Westernising narrative's essentialist interpretation of Russian identity and implies a positive view for change. More specifically the Northern Dimension initiative of the EU aims at stabilising Russia and *also* integrating Russia into those very European structures the Westernising narrative would like to exclude

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<sup>61</sup> Max Jakobson (1998) *Finland in the New Europe* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger) p.111. Also see David Arter (1995) 'The EU Referendum in Finland on 16 October 1994: A Vote for the West, not for Maastricht', *Journal of Common Market Studies* (Vol.33, No.3) p.383

it from. The whole initiative basically accepts the theory of democratic peace that, as president Martti Ahtisaari has noted, “democracies do not wage war with each other”,<sup>62</sup> the idea being that “If Russia is integrated economically and institutionally into the European Union and other international structures, it is less likely that Russia will pose a military threat to Finland in the future”.<sup>63</sup> The aim is therefore explicitly to instigate a change in Russian identity. Maybe the aim is not to go quite so far as to let Russia share the Finnish bed-sit (home) in Europe, but it is to create highly amicable neighbours with an identity not so different from that of the Finnish Western European self. On the face of it such a policy appears to derive from a continuation of Finland’s between East and West identity of the Cold War and in particular on Kekkonen’s conceptualisation of Finland as a physician and a bridge-builder. However, as Hanna Ojanen has interestingly argued, the Northern Dimension initiative can be seen as an attempt by Finnish leaders to *customise* the EU by orienting it increasingly towards Finnish concerns and identity questions.<sup>64</sup> To this extent the initiative can be seen as an attempt by Finnish leaders not only to continue acting as bridge-builders between East and West but in fact to inspire both Russia and Western Europe to begin crossing the bridge, meeting in the middle, and thereby constructing all as being between East and West. That is to say to get rid of the East-West dichotomy, as understood in Cold War terms, altogether. In this respect the Northern Dimension initiative threatens to pull the rug from under the feet of the Westernising narrative. For the Westernising narrative being ‘Western’ is more or less understood in the Cold War terms of not being Eastern and of representing the East as a threat. Such a perspective generally implies NATO is an anti-Russian alliance. By contrast the Northern Dimension threatens to deny the Westernising narrative of its principle constituting other of Finnish identity by integrating Russia into the West. As such this narrative tends to understand Finnish integration with Western institutions, not so much as in response to a negative employment of Russia, but as the opportunity to draw the East and West closer together. Therefore, there is a tendency from this point of view to look towards a ‘new’ NATO based on collective crisis-management and commonly accepted principles, rather than as a security organisation directed

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<sup>62</sup> Ahtisaari quoted in Tapani Vaahtoranta and Tuomas Forsberg, ‘Finland’s Three Security Strategies’, p.194

<sup>63</sup> Tapani Vaahtoranta and Tuomas Forsberg, ‘Finland’s Three Security Strategies’, p.206

<sup>64</sup> Hanna Ojanen (1999) ‘How to Customise Your Union: Finland and the “Northern Dimension of the EU”’, *Northern Dimensions* (Finnish Institute of International Affairs Yearbook)

against Russia. 'West', from this perspective, therefore transcends the East-West divide and places an emphasis on the establishment of co-operation, the rule of law, respect for human rights and liberal democracy...etc..., and which no longer constructs the 'West' in opposition to the 'East'. Such a narrative is also reflected by those people who now look back into history and see Finland's period as a Grand Duchy of Russia (1809-1917) as having been a progressive period in Finland's historical past. As Vaahtoranta and Forsberg note, "Some people think that the happiest period in Finnish history was the latter part of the nineteenth century when Finland was simultaneously a part of the West and a part of Russia"<sup>65</sup> - i.e., a period which is constructed by them as having also been one when the terms East and West were less polarised. Thus, for quite different reasons to the Westernising narrative, from this perspective the panel title of 'Defining New Identities Between East and West' once again appears inapplicable. Whereas the Westernising narrative clearly puts Finland in the Western camp, this narrative seeks to destroy the dichotomy altogether.

If Finland does have a potential future identity between East and West it appears to lie in Finnish proclamations of Finland as a 'Gateway to the East'. This narrative, aimed at the West, essentially accepts the Westernising premises of a natural difference between East and West which will keep the two divided. Similarly, the employment of Russia in this narrative is also implicitly negative. The Gateway to the East argument has largely been used as an economic strategy to attract Western companies interested in doing business with Russia to base their operations from Finland. The implication is clear and plays on traditional prejudices in Western thought concerning the East which sees the East as representing irrationality, unpredictability and the chaos of a Slavic people with an unfamiliar and menacing society.<sup>66</sup> The 'Gateway to the East' points the Western mind to reports of the Russian mafia and the general breakdown of the rule of law in Russia, thus asking Western businessmen whether they really want to base production in Russia? In contrast to this negative construction of the Russian other, it is implied Finland is all Russia is not. Finland is a law-abiding and orderly

<sup>65</sup> Tapani Vaahtoranta and Tuomas Forsberg, 'Finland's Three Security Strategies', p.196

<sup>66</sup> For such analyses of the East and of Russia in Finnish and Western thought see, Sergei Medvedev (1998) *Russia as the Subconsciousness of Finland* (Helsinki: UPI Working Papers, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, No.7) and Johan Bäckman (1998) 'The Russia-Genre as a



society, transport works on time, power supplies are guaranteed and bosses need not worry about assassination for their failure to pay protection money. Likewise the concept draws on more than Finland's geopolitical position and societal conditions. The claim is also made that as a result of its Cold War experience Finns *know* and have *expertise* in dealing with Russians.<sup>67</sup> In this respect the 'Gateway' narrative deviates from the Westernising one by implying that the Finns really did know how to deal with Russia during the Cold War and that Finnish neutrality was therefore not overly beset by problems of Finlandisation. Though not necessarily spoken about in the same contexts the security strategy to such a narrative can perhaps be seen in certain justifications for Finland's abstention from NATO membership. The argument being that were Finland to join it would provoke Russia into action against the Baltic states in preservation of its 'legitimate security interests'. As Jakobson notes, such an argument is essentially a re-hashing of the Nordic Balance concept "according to which the neutrality of Sweden and the self-imposed restraints of Norway's role within NATO helped Finland maintain its independence".<sup>68</sup> Implicitly, therefore, such an argument, whilst constructing the Russian other negatively, also further emplots NATO in its classical 'old' form as a container of Russian ambitions.

An uncomfortable contradiction exists in Finnish foreign policy for the reason that as yet no single narrative has attained a hegemonic position amongst the foreign policy elite and as a consequence Finnish leaders can be seen to utilise different of these different narratives as justifications for their policies depending on the context and the immediate audience being addressed. Thus, for example, whilst Ahtisaari has campaigned for the Northern Dimension view of the possibilities for the integration of

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Construction of Reality', *Northern Dimensions* (The Finnish Institute of International Affairs Yearbook)

<sup>67</sup> Urpo Kivikari in fact even goes so far as to claim that as a result of Finland's bilateral trade with the East during the Cold War the Finns developed an explicit understanding of the 'Homo Sovieticus' and of the 'Russian soul'. Urpo Kivikari (1995) *From a Giant to a Gateway in East-West Trade: Finland's Adaptation to Radical Changes in Eastern Europe* (Turku: Turku School of Economics and Business Administration Business Research and Development Centre and Institute of East-West Trade, Series C Discussion 2/95) p.34. Indeed, Anne Rotkirch notes the Finns have been rather successful in promoting this image in Europe. Anne Rotkirch, 'Finlandisation and post-Finlandisation', p.198. Such success can be seen in an article in the *Economist* in 1997 assessing the reasons why Acer computers decided to base their operations for the Russian market in Finland. The article compares the "orderly calm of Finland" with the "feral badlands of Russia" and notes that beyond the border "lies a Russia where criminal gangs prey, potholes gape, and the next place southbound for a decent cup of tea is Turkey". Furthermore, "Finland, with its law-abiding business environment and highly developed infrastructure, offered a vision of everything Russia was not". *Economist* 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> September 1997, pp.89-90

<sup>68</sup> Max Jakobson, *Finland in the New Europe*, p.144

Russia with the West, and therefore positing a positive view of Russia's potential, he has also drawn on the Westernising premise of a great power Russia in believing that "Russia will not become democratic in his lifetime".<sup>69</sup> The result is that Finnish foreign policies are riven with contradictory understandings of the self in relation to the others of Russia and the West, but particularly regarding Russia. Thus, whereas the Westernising narrative attempts to construct Finnish identity through a re-interpretation of post-war history to make Finland Western in contradistinction to the Russian East, the Northern Dimension initiative reflects the extent to which many Finns *fear* this dichotomy. The Northern Dimension is an attempt to prevent Russia orienting further East (with all the negative connotations East implies in Western thought), to prevent the development of a return to authoritarianism, nationalism and to Cold War politics. Finnish policy makers, therefore, whilst justifying aspects of Finnish foreign policy, on the one hand, by using the East-West dichotomy between self and other, are at the same time trying to prevent such a dichotomy developing again. Ironically, on the one hand they are working on the premise that the Russian other, in its Soviet communist totalitarian guise, still exists across the border, whilst on the other hand, the Northern Dimension project relies on the premise that this identity is no longer of such strength in Russia. The aim is to prevent it developing, which implies either it does not yet hold sway in the identity politics of the Russian state with democratic forces being equally able to gain control of the right to define the identity of the state, or that it simply does not exist.

***Conclusion: The Dangers and Comforts of Ambiguity***

The aim of this paper has been threefold: first, to illustrate that national identities are to a great extent constructed out of narratives of history; second, to illustrate that, given this, Westernising arguments making an essentialist claim to an immutable Finnish national identity are precisely that, a claim, which through their very narrative of history attempt to appropriate the 'truth' of history for their own political agenda and; thirdly, that given the existence of other contradictory narratives in Finnish political discourse Finnish identity, in terms of the understanding of the self in relation to others in the various stories which the nation tells about its present in the

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<sup>69</sup> Tapani Vaahtoranta and Tuomas Forsberg, 'Finland's Three Security Strategies', p.194

context of its past, is extremely ambiguous. Given the dramatic changes which shook the international system in the late 1980s – early 1990s and which continue to reverberate today, such ambiguity in a nation's identity is inevitable. In the Finnish case this is especially so given that the end of the Cold War robbed it of its two central defining poles of difference of the previous half a century. In such periods of upheaval nations inevitably need time to reinterpret past experiences in terms of the new conditions facing them. New narratives of history need to be told in order to chart a linear course of development for the nation which makes the present appear a natural development of the past. To conclude I will make two points, one concerning the possible dangers of ambiguity, the other which sees such ambiguity over the nation's identity as a cause of comfort.

If there is a danger in the current ambiguity over Finnish identity highlighted in the narratives analysed above it relates to Russian understandings of Finnish debates. The public nature of most foreign relations and discourses and the fact that in different contexts and in front of different audiences Finnish decision-makers utilise different arguments which draw on different narratives of Finnish and Russian identities, entails that the Russians hear both positive and negative narratives of the Finnish emplotment of the Russian self. If there is a danger it is that such 'two-facedness' can lead to unease in Russia as to Finnish identity and intentions. This is to say that the ambiguity entailed in such multifarious narratives of history and identity in Finland threatens to cancel each other out by creating confusion in Russia over the 'nature' of the Finnish self and, in this respect, such ambiguity may serve to reconstruct the very East-West dichotomy the Finns patently fear. In this regard it is notable that some Russians have become much less enthusiastic about the Northern Dimension, with some suspicious voices seeing it as a plot to further dissolve and fragment Russia, or as even being the vehicle of Western neo-imperialism.<sup>70</sup> Such is also, of course, the danger implicit in the Westernising narrative in which the negative emplotment of Russia in the narrative in fact threatens to socially construct such a negative image as reality. Likewise, given that Russia retains an 'old' Cold War view of NATO, debates

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<sup>70</sup> Such a view can be seen in the complaint of Slavo Hodko, the head of the St. Petersburg International Cooperation Centre, that: "The northern dimension sees Russia solely as a source of raw materials but overlooks the development of the country's industry and tourism. It is in our national interests that we should not just sell raw materials". Quoted in *Demari* and cited at <http://virtual.finland.fi/news/> on 06.04.1999

in Finland over NATO membership, whether implying membership of the ‘old’ or ‘new’ NATO, further feed into suspicions concerning Finnish identity.<sup>71</sup>

On the other hand, much of the ambiguity in Finnish discourse is no doubt a reflection of uncertainty relating, not just to the future development of Russia, but also to the future development of Finland’s other neighbours (the Baltics and Sweden), the EU and NATO, and more generally the international system as a whole. In such conditions ambiguity may in fact be a comfort leaving greater freedom to respond to wider developments than would be the case if one of the narratives was to be in a position of relative hegemony vis-à-vis others. At the same time the continuance of ambiguity relieves decision-makers of the need to take the grand decisions which would decrease ambiguity<sup>72</sup> and which would threaten to alienate segments of the public and certain other states. Ambiguity, in such a view, can be seen as the basis for broad based support for the reason that such ambiguity can be more inclusive and less alienating in that it offers a voice to many narratives, thus reducing the radicalised dissatisfaction which can emerge from the total exclusion of competing narratives as representative voices of the nation. And as a final word of comfort the freedom to be ambiguous may be seen as an essential element of a functioning liberal democratic society, thus making ambiguity difficult to avoid and even of value in itself.

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<sup>71</sup> For example, in January 1999 Gennadi Selezynov, Speaker of the Duma, expressed such concern over Finnish intentions regarding NATO, first noting, “We regard the continued policy of alliance in Europe to be an expression of a new Cold War”, and going on to say, “We know that many people in Finland take a more optimistic view of the role of NATO. But we have our reasons for concern”. Quoted in *Hufvudstadsbladet*, cited at <http://virtual.finland.fi/news/> on 28.01.1999.

<sup>72</sup> Hanna Ojanen makes this point in relation to the ambiguous nature of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. For Finland such ambiguity, she argues, “makes it possible for Finland to participate on its own terms, in organisations as it likes them, while giving a good impression to others and thus enhancing its credibility as a member country”. Hanna Ojanen (1998) *The Comfort of Ambiguity, or the advantages of the CFSP for Finland* (Helsinki: UPI Working Papers; The Finnish Institute of International Affairs; No.11) p.15

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