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The Ingrian Product: Processes and Projects. An Ethnological View to the Levels of Activity

Just some three weeks after our meeting in St. Petersburg I received a statement, actually a proposal, from the Finnish Ministry of the Interior (Inkerinsuomalaisten... 1996). This concerned the Ingrian remigrant rules I mentioned at the meeting. However, in this article I would like to repeat and continue the discussion I had the opportunity to begin at the "Civil Society in the European North" seminar held in St. Petersburg on 18-19 January 1996. I will also add some information to update my paper. I am pleased to express my interest in regard to the topic of the seminar, but I also have to admit that I may be more or less an outsider in this discourse. Through meetings such as this and growing networks we can, however, gain a closer contact and understanding between different traditions and discussions of civil society.

Our Institute (Ethnology) has recently concentrated in its research and teaching on the problems of ethnicity and cultural encounter, especially on the cultural confrontation in everyday life (Everyday Life and Ethnicity...1994). Though the concept of civil society has not occupied a central position in Finnish ethnology, I "will try to approach the topic as closely as possible: for example, the idea of the intermediary level (later *mellom niva*) is also familiar from the classical approaches of civil society. However, I will not repeat here our ethnological and anthropological discussion about integration, about the nature of ethnicity and the cultural location of "The Other". But I must say that in the Ingrian case I see myself more on the constructive than the primordial side of ethnicity (cf. remigrant rules later; Eriksen 1994, 11-12).

To be more exact, I took part in the workshop because of an ongoing joint Finnish-Russian-Estonian research project "Ingria and Ingrians" (Virtanen 1996). This is not simply a question of urban life as was the case in our former project with Russians and Estonians (Everyday Life and Ethnicity... 1994), but also about specific villages in the vicinity of St. Petersburg and the towns of Turku and Tartu. The main theme is biographical. We collect life stories, the individual routes through time and space. This means changing everyday life and at the same, time trying to follow the reconstruction process of the individual's own ethnic identity. As I have noted, these stories have to be seen in connection with cultural and ethnic confrontation, in the context of majority and minority relations, life strategies, adaptation and integration (cf. Toivonen-Malinen-Lehtonen 1994). There is also another ethnographical objective in our project, namely traditional folk culture, e.g., buildings, food, clothing, etc. I will not discuss this aspect here.

Our project is coordinated by the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Turku (Ethnology and Folkloristics) and our partners are from the Academies of Science of Russia and Estonia, from the Universities of St. Petersburg and Tartu and also from museums in St. Petersburg. In addition to Turku and Tartu the fieldwork areas are situated in northern Ingria, in the parish of Toksovo. These include small villages like Toksova, Kuisma- la, Rappula, Kuivaisi, Hittola, Osselki, Sarky, and some others, old Finnish-speaking villages, about 30 kilometers north of St. Petersburg. In fact, there are about 400 registered members of the Finnish church in this area. This does not mean that all these people are really Finnish-speaking; the elderly usually are, but the younger generation is mostly Russian-speaking. Our fieldwork area covers the most important regions of the Ingrian migration. Siberia is not yet included as a fieldwork area, though a large amount of

material already exists concerning, e.g., everyday life in the fishing camps and forests of Siberia.

At the same time we can meet the demands of the "third alternative". According to Lauri Honko (Honko 1990) this means that in addition to interviews of (re)migrants and archive work, fieldwork in Ingria should also be carried out. The tradition of individual field-workers is changing and after the collapse of the Soviet Union there have also been efforts to establish larger expeditions with Russian and Estonian colleagues.

Actually I chose my topic for this meeting for many reasons. Firstly, when speaking about the Ingrians, St. Petersburg is exactly the right place since it is the capital of Ingria. Secondly, as I stated, I was doing fieldwork with my students in the area in 1994 and 1995. The third reason is the remigrant situation. The whole migration process is a series of interesting episodes between Finland and Russia (Soviet Union). Finnish Minister of the Interior Enestam established a working group on 18 October 1995 to develop a program for Parliament concerning alien and refugee policy. On 24 November 1995 the task was broadened. This committee was also asked to make a proposal concerning the definition of ethnic origins in regard to the Ingrian case. Before this new official statement can be enacted as a law, it will be debated officially at different bureaucratic levels. All the various attitudes can be traced back to a television statement by President Mauno Koivisto in 1990. The broad discussion has generally been criticized and the old solution more or less seen in the context of the labour policy of the early 1990s. During the last five years about 14,000 Ingrian remigrants have arrived in Finland from Russia and Estonia. There has been a vociferous discussion in the Finnish media about this matter. On the one hand, there have been positive voices seeking to help our own (Ingrian) people in their misery and want to build churches and to collect money. On the other, there has also been critical discussion about criminals and false passports. Before 1996 the ethnic definition of being Ingrian was based on various possibilities of demonstrating one's Ingrian ethnicity. The rules will now be tightened to limit the number of remigrants to 2000 per year and each will have to prove that he or she, her parent or at least two grandparents are of Finnish origin. There are also other alternatives available to demonstrate their Finnishness in regard to their position and status during the war as well.

I mentioned labour policy, but there may also be human interest factors behind these attitudes towards remigrants. Mr. Koivisto, the former President of Finland, lived for some months in an Ingrian family during his years in Turku. According to our later interviews he also gained a good deal of knowledge about Ingria at that time. So, while there is an official state level, there may also be an individual factor behind the "real truth".

That is why I would like to expand on my title "Product, processes and projects" more exactly. The manipulated product (the Ingrian phenomena) is constructed with time- and space-bound cultural processes (e.g., migration and adaptation, language struggle or demographic influences) and smaller projects (e.g., church building, second-hand markets, language courses). However, one cannot always identify the internal elements of the product or the processes, the individual actor. Unfortunately the kind of knowledge Mr. Koivisto got is more or less rare among state officials today. Different people live their own lives on different levels. This is clear when we speak about the cultural axis or stratigraphy: an Ingrian old woman living in Toksovo and a Finnish minister making a decision about her everyday life usually do not know so much about each other's everyday life, though the socio-political rhetoric is commonly used in the media to show something else. Unfortunately the density of everyday life and the richness of ethnography are too distant from this discourse. These people exist in the same product, but in different processes and projects. It is also clear that in some cases the projects in the same process can also act as

opposite forces. However, all these projects are not necessarily visible to each other. For example, people speak about *aburaba* (the Estonian word for public assistance payments) and others speak about Ingrian rehabilitation without knowing the real situation. We can also surmise, e.g., that people in Toksova villages and remigrants in Turku live in different ethnic times and use their life histories and ethnicity in different ways (Virtanen 1994). They reconstruct their "primordial" ethnicity in relation to their ethnically spatial and temporal environments.

Let me give an example of the situation in Finland. Some institutions arranged the "Ingrian Remigrant Seminar" in November, 1995, in Turku. They invited one minister, a number of officials from various ministries, some city officials and a city manager. About one hundred Ingrian remigrants were there, but could only listen to the truth told to them by these experts. The situation of an authority subject possessing knowledge and a primitive native object seems to be quite familiar in the Ingrian discussion. Of course the remigrants had the opportunity to ask questions, but there was no "horizon of understanding" in this discussion. But to be honest, they actually had their moment. An Ingrian chorus was invited to sing some songs, but there was time for only one because the minister was late and so was the program.

I would like to elaborate on this stratigraphia and the levels in the product. My research work is basically concentrated, as I have stated, on four levels: product, process, project and the individual actor. In connection with them, the crucial key themes have been ethnicity (Everyday life and Ethnicity... 1994), nationalism (Eriksen 1994) and everyday life (Greverus 1978; Bockhorn 1987). Different combinations involving space, place and time can produce different cultural groups (Selmer 1988) inside the ethnic product. Thus the Ingrian minority is superficially the most interesting object in a comparative or parallel meaning. From the standpoint of Turku, stigmatized ethnicity, lost homeland and the diaspora of the population is continuously reconstructing its identity (cf. Niedermuller on post-Soviet Central Europe). The "Soviet-Ingrian time" is becoming the "Finnish-Ingrian, Ingrian-Russian, Finnish or Russian time".

Like many ethnic minorities in the former Soviet territories, the Ingrians are also eager to express their cultural identity. In many cases this is connected with the Finnish church. New organizations have also been founded to save the Ingrian culture; primarily these organizations are closely related to the church. This has been obvious in Turku and in Toksovo. In recent years volunteer groups have renovated some churches and built new houses for elderly people in the Ingrian area. There has been a lot of discussion about rehabilitation in the last five or six years. In the Ingrian case the results are, however, minor compared, e.g., to the Russian-Germans, who have moved back to St. Petersburg region. This migration is based on the financial agreement between Russia and Germany, as well as on the fact that these people can get land near the town, if they promise to cultivate it. They have found their home again. The Ingrian product, in my opinion, is different. It is a complex collection of memories, displacements, topophilia and reconstruction. Fredrik Barth argues in his article "Manifestasjon og prosess":

Vi må tenke generativt. De fenomene vi skall gjøre rede for, er så komplekse at vi ikke må tenke oss dem som "ting" med en form, som vi skall avbilde del for del og eventuelt ta fra hverandre som en maskin eller en organisme for å vise hvordan delene fungerer samme. Vi må heller tenke oss det vi ser som et komplekst "pro-duk", et resultat av et samspill av prosesser, og så må vi prøve så naturtro som mulig modellere de prosessene vi kan oppdage... (Barth 1994, 13)

In his text Barth underlines the idea of the processes instead of the "thing-like"

machine or organism. He emphasizes the fact that the phenomenon is more like a complex product which ought to be understood as the co-operation between the different processes. Barth also points out the importance of "bridge-building" between different macro and micro levels. He writes about a *mellom niva*. I would like to comment another Norwegian anthropologist, namely Thomas Hylland Eriksen, who writes in his book *Ethnicity and Nationalism* that "the Sami and other groups in similar situations, are crucially dependent on interethnic brokers who can represent their interests in the greater society, who can complementarise with the authorities and with world opinion" (Eriksen 1993, 127).

As previously noted, there are organizations like the "Inkerin Liitto", but traditionally brokers of this kind have formerly been churchmen and the same situation still exists in the 1990s. In addition to the priests there are many deacons and other volunteers in St. Petersburg and in the villages. In fact, the church may be "the place" where different kinds of brokers can meet. During the fieldwork periods of 1994-1995 we had numerous official and unofficial contacts with churchmen and those visiting the church. Some were too busy to help us, but in the Toksovo region we could not have managed without the assistance these people gave us with transportation and parish registers.

The village of Toksovo is a central village because of the church. The church is clearly a "key point" in ethnic everyday life, a clear ethnic arena. We have to remember that only a few years ago this church acted as a movie theatre and dance club. It is important that many of the actions taken by individual villagers were somehow connected to the church. There is not so much social activity between villages and people in same the village, as there is activity concerning the church. Many people can no longer go to church on Sunday. However, they like to know who was there, what events transpired, etc. The idea of social control is also involved. Stories are commonly told about those who were all too eager to get gifts before and after the service. People are referred to as real beggars (*puistajat*). These people, not only the *puistajat*, but also other active people visiting the church, are, however, types of brokers, too. They exchange addresses, they visit their Finnish friends more often and they know what procedures to follow if someone wishes to move to Finland. In fact, one of the crucial themes in the discussions is whether to go or not.

All these brokers: ordinary people, churchmen, people from different organizations, journalists and research workers, too, are not only subjects of the research, but also objects. They are the natural bridges mentioned above. They have created ethnographies about the real everyday life, life strategies and identity; they have been secular and non-secular agents helping people with their troubles. In comparing this with the situation in Turku among the remigrants, we again see churchmen, but also teachers in language courses and the officials at the job centre.

While this new situation in Finland differs from the old, there are also similarities. Ingrians are used to being "between two worlds" (Virtanen 1996), between the Soviet Union and Finland, between Toksovo and Siberia, between the Russian and Finnish languages. These people are used to being on the road, they have used to being "The Other". When an Ingrian remigrant from Turku goes to St. Petersburg he sees himself in the following way: "Up to the border I am Russian, ten minutes after that I am Ingrian and after that *tsuhna*."

These words are expressive of the route of a nation, a route through time, space and ethnicity. These people are experts in their own lives. In thinking about this product we can ask: what kind of cultural and ethnic group are Ingrians going to be? What kind of Ingria is Russian-speaking Ingria in Toksova or St. Petersburg? What kind of Ingria is Russian-speaking or Finnish-speaking Ingria in Turku?

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