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A Farewell to Involuntary Mobility: Narratives on Homeownership in Mid-Twentieth-Century Finland

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Abstract
Until the Interwar period, the majority of the Finnish population lived in small peasant communities in remote parts of the country. Since the growing season was short, much of the country was unsuitable for arable farming, and, in the beginning of the twentieth century, traditional agriculture was not able to employ the increasing population. People moved to towns and industrial centers to seek better economic opportunities and lifestyles and to find employment. In this article, I will analyze the life stories of the common Finnish people, born between 1874 and 1939, who felt compelled to move from their rural family communities. Many of the narrators had integration difficulties in their new environments; for example, living as a tenant in a block of flats was depicted as difficult and, therefore, many of them returned to the rural countryside in order to set up a smallholding of their own. For many, ownership of a small farm and the rural lifestyle it provided represented the cultural norm, and the images of a farmhouse received the typical characteristics of a "key-symbol." The article discusses mobility within a nation-state as a cultural involuntary experience.

Keywords: life stories, personal narratives, Finnish peasants, rural culture, urbanization, homeownership

Introduction

In early twentieth-century Finland, a specific view of the good society emerged, emphasizing the home as the core unit of society. A permanent dwelling began to signify a locale from where all the good things would radiate into the community and, more broadly, a place where the nation's moral basis would be created. It has been claimed that especially the bourgeoisie and the members of the social movements of the time had "invented" such an ideology and had propagated it among the masses, the

poor strata of the Finnish population (Ruonavaara 1996, 89–92; Ollila 1993, 62–65; Saarikangas 1993, 65–75). Many scholars have dismissed the view as the perception of a narrow, educated elite. A permanent dwelling symbolizing distinctive homeownership has thus been studied through the sources that were produced by the wealthy and educated members of early twentieth-century Finland, seldom by the people who suffered from an itinerant way of life. Therefore, it is important to expand the scope and consider the actual interests, goals, and strategies of ordinary people who had difficulties settling down or buying their own dwellings.

In the present article, I analyze the life stories of Finnish commoners who in their youth and early adulthood felt compelled to leave their rural family communities to find work. The term 'commoner' refers to those individuals who performed physical labor for a living, either in agriculture or the lumber industry, or as skilled craftsmen. The lack of a permanent dwelling, the shortage of rental dwellings, and weak tenancy rights were familiar to the narrators in my analysis as they also were to the majority of the commoners in mid-twentieth-century Finland. It has been argued, however, that having a dwelling of one's own was not as highly valued among the rural migrants as it was for the nascent middle class in towns (Ruonavaara 1996, 92; Lönnqvist 1986, 12–13). Lower-class people have been presumed to be accustomed to their meager life and satisfied with little. Nonetheless, we do not know exactly what the common rural people's personal strategies for individual social mobility were during the rise and formation of the modern welfare state in twentieth-century Finland. One answer could be in the analytical concept of "history from below" which re-evaluates individual experiences by searching for the personal and private views among populations (Lyons 2013, 16; Thompson [1966] 2007). The life stories of ordinary Finns, which in this article are under scrutiny, represent narratives from below, an emic genre which many of the narrators themselves also regarded as authentic and true.

The common features of these autobiographical narratives are that the experience of geographical labor mobility as well as social mobility and settlement affected not only the life of the narrators but also how mobility was narrated. Many of these people have articulated the negative aspects of living an itinerant life and how they experienced difficulties integrating into ever-changing environments: for example, being a day laborer and living as a tenant cottager were depicted negatively, and therefore hundreds of thousands wanted to set up their own smallholdings when the government-initiated land reforms of 1918, 1922, and 1945 came into effect. The setting up of new smallholdings was seen as necessary, and by increasing the number of independent farmers, the Finnish governments enhanced the position of smallholders in general, and also improved rural housing conditions, which had long been characterized by poverty (Alapuro 1988, 205; Saarikangas 1993, 84).

Although Finnish homeownership had a rural background because the majority of the houses were first built in the rural countryside, it

was similar to the mobility processes which had occurred earlier in more industrialized societies, such as Britain and the United States, particularly the expansion of home-owning in suburban areas (Hollows 2008, 37–42). In Finland and elsewhere, too, the idea of homeownership later became so widespread that it could be seen as the dominant cultural ideology. Therefore, it is important to consider the point of view expressed by the commoners and to examine how people narrated the peasant ideal that stood in contrast to the way of life that they themselves were growing accustomed to, that is, moving from one place to another and from one job to another.

It is the holistic descriptions of tacit cultural knowledge in these life stories that are particularly valuable and that can provide insights into the culturally shared meanings of "home ideology" and mobility behind it. In this article, I analyze the dynamics of historical experience "from below" and cultural ideals and the ways they are intertwined.

Narratives from Below and Aspects of Mobility

I base my discussion on sixty-five autobiographical narratives that are central of understanding the lives of rural people in the twentieth century. The body of my data consists of two types of life stories. The first set of life stories came from the Finnish Literature Society's Traditional and Contemporary Culture Collections (KRA, i.e., "Perinteen ja nykykulttuurin kokoelma"). These materials originate from the autobiographical writing contest, a method that encourages so-called ordinary people, as opposed to celebrities and professional writers, to write about their lives. The autobiographical contests were originally set up through newspaper advertisements; the first one was held for Finnish women in 1991, and a second one was held for Finnish men in 1992–93. The Finnish Literature Society and the Kalevala Women's Association organized the women's contest ("Satasärmäinen nainen"), and there is a total of 567 life stories in the data. Of these, twenty-one narratives serve as my primary data. Likewise, the Finnish Literature Society, together with the Council for Gender Equality, organized the men's writing contest ("Eläköön mies"). This resulted in 360 texts, out of which thirty-six are used as primary sources in my analysis.

The participants in both competitions were born between the years 1900 and 1980, but the narrators I analyze were born in the first four decades of the twentieth century. I chose these particular life stories according to the age of the author, the older the better, and according to the length and depth of their poverty narratives. Simply, these authors wrote more extensively of an economically unstable life and rural poverty than most of the other writers in the data. I have analyzed poverty narratives elsewhere in greater depth (Stark 2011), but here I concentrate only on the topics of regional mobility and homeownership. These data, that is, the autobiographical narratives stored by the Finnish Literature Society, have been studied frequently (e.g., Apo 1995; Stark 2014; Ojajärvi and Laukkanen 2015).

The second type of data consists of the life stories produced by the Labour Archives and the Commission of Finnish Labour Tradition (TMT, i.e., "Työväen Muistitietotoimikunta"); these narratives are from individuals who had been active in the labor movement. The lumber industry and the expanded production of forest products at the end of the nineteenth century were accompanied by the emergence of a working class in Finland. The living and working conditions of the new industrial laborers were poor, and large numbers of workers had a rural background. The autobiographical narratives from the Labour Archives consist of both written and interviewed life stories, which amount to eight texts. Altogether, the Commission of Finnish Labour Tradition collections contain 10,000 oral history interview recordings and partial transcripts of interviews. The objective in the 1960s, when the collection activities took place, was to collect oral history about the 1918 Civil War from "the Reds" who had been defeated in the war. Later, the collection came to include oral histories about aspects of the lives of the Finnish working class and important events in their family histories. The explicit aim was to collect oral histories and folklore that the existing archival establishments, such as the Archives of the Finnish Literature Society, were not interested in receiving. This was the reason why I added a few life stories to my other materials. My hypothesis, based on my knowledge of Finnish working-class and welfare-state history, was that mobility and homeownership as narrative themes were similarly featured in the materials preserved in the Finnish Literature Society. Finally, both sets of data depict in narrative form how different historical events affected people's lives as well as the kinds of social and cultural developments that occurred.

The oldest of the narrators was born in 1900 and the youngest in 1939, and all of them had direct insight into the agrarian practices and ways of life in Finland. Although the age gap between the oldest and youngest narrator is forty years, they are treated in this paper as a generation; the term refers to a group of individuals of similar ages, but more importantly, whose members have experienced a noteworthy historical event within a set period of time (e.g., Mannheim 1956; Roos 1985; Virtanen 2001). This is because of the early development of the Finnish welfare state, which was slow and gradual and occurred in different phases. The southern and southwestern areas of the country developed some thirty years earlier than the eastern and northern parts (see Haatanen 1968; Stark 2011).

The narrators were people who had witnessed an impoverished Finnish peasant state transform itself into a modern, technologically advanced welfare state. They are the sons and daughters of crofters, smallholders, or agricultural workers. Only a few were born into a farming family—their parents had started farming in the narrators' youths—and consequently almost all the narrators repeatedly describe the traditional peasant ideal and family ownership. Together with poverty, one of the major discourse themes in these autobiographical narratives is, in fact,

the lack of a smallholding or a simple, but owned dwelling place, and later the setting up of one. Therefore, to understand the role of mobility in these narratives, we must also explore the concept of home that wove strong emotional ties between the land and the family, on the one hand, and the idea of possession that reinforced and justified family strategies, on the other. In the past, place of residence, work, and family were all closely linked (Segalen 1983, 65), and, unlike urban life, rural life was generally considered to blend the ties of family, community, place, and ethnicity (Bell and Osti 2010, 199).

Forms of mobility within the discourses of rural poverty and ownership of a dwelling place are examined as forms of culturally expressed speech, namely autobiographical narratives. By definition, an autobiography is "a retrospective account in prose that a real person makes of his/her own existence stressing his/her individual life and especially the history of his personality" (Lejeune 1989, 4). In the autobiographical narratives examined here, people recount their life from birth to the time of writing; they include recollections of poverty in the past that had long ago been left behind. Until the Second World War, most Finns lived in a society with few institutions to guarantee their safety and well-being. Poverty was eventually reduced because of economic growth within the process of modern industrialization and consumerism that raised the standard of living even for those who were otherwise too poor to afford consumer products. A dwelling place—or in modern terms, housing—along with the home loans it involved, is a key theme in the authors' narratives, among other things such as family, marriage, children, education, and work.

In the material analyzed in this article, the life stories begin in the author's childhood family and involve growth and expansion in the early years, in order to trace later adversities back to earlier problems (McAdams 2008, 246–47). This was also expected in the autobiographical writing contest guidelines, which encouraged the authors to begin with their childhood and their family background, and then cover their later adult life up until the time of writing (Nätkin 2010, 99). The autobiographical narratives that were compiled in interviews conducted by the Labour Archives' representatives followed a similar pattern. The life stories as narratives reflect cultural knowledge that is always strongly linked to historical processes and contexts. Each culture also has its own standards for telling tales and narratives. For example, Finns often narrate about the importance of warm shelter and proper clothing in winter weather conditions. In addition, at the time of the narrators' youth and early adulthood in the mid-twentieth century, travel by car in Finland was difficult because of inadequate roads; this meant that people generally traveled on foot, by train, or even by horse-drawn vehicles. Hence, the common feature of these life stories is that the experience of mobility stems mainly from first-hand experiences of poor, undeveloped infrastructure and poverty. Stories and experiences are not, however, the same, because, to be precise, stories are constructions of experiences (Shuman 1986, 20; K. Douglas 2010,

15). Although some of the narrators occasionally tell of the experiences of their parents, too, the stories in the autobiographical narratives have, as their primary focus, a point about the speaker, not a general point about the way the world is (e.g., Linde 1993, 21). When citing the stories, I use pseudonyms for the narrators mentioned in the analysis.

The narratives have the potential to inform us about the individual level of mobility in past peasant societies. Forms of mobility are examined with an approach "from below," thus considering ordinary readers and writers as active agents in the shaping of their own lives and cultures (Lyons 2013, 16). Rather than being passive victims of their lives, the narrators looked for alternatives to move ahead and to make life more bearable. In this fashion, they, as people who did physically demanding rural work, can be treated as the rural working-class that expresses itself "in happening," that is, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared) which make them feel and articulate the identity of their interests between themselves and against other people (Thompson 1963, 9–10). Therefore, mobility has to be viewed within a historical relation to immobile systems which were typical for the Finnish rural poor. To understand what characterized people's sense of home-dwelling, we need to take into account their routes to and within places, and the practices involved in both (e.g., Arp Fallov, Jørgensen, and Knudsen 2013, 471). My understanding of the concept of mobilities concerns here not only physical movement from one place to another (when seeking work) but also the meanings the narrators attach to forms of dwelling and place-making.

Although the material has been "filtered" by the narrators who selectively chose the elements of the narratives, there remain several key elements dealing with the concept of mobility that are distinguished by central topics, typical contexts of expression and emotional entwinement. In combining the narratives into a historical contextualization of Finnish land tenure, I suggest that there existed a three-staged pattern of the idea of home with regard to ownership. I label these patterns as "drifting," "diligence," and "haven." All of these patterns involve the elaboration of a "mobile idea of home" into a social history of Finland.

Drifting

The vast majority of the peasants were itinerant agricultural workers who moved from one place to another (with slightly different growing seasons) to find work. Having the status of being landless meant "drifting," that is, geographical labor mobility and ever-changing employment and, thus, numerous tenant farm accommodations. Permanent shelter was the most acute need of everyone, and explicitly for the poor. The need as well as longing for smallholding ownership was rooted in the low status of the landless population and its need to ascend the social ladder (Juntto 1990, 61). Although many of the narrators lived for years in rented cottages, they emphasize how it did not feel like one's own home; lacking a building of one's own, people had no sense of permanence, no status, and no clear

identity. The landless are depicted as 'refugees'; not having a house of one's own represented a lack of human dignity. The life of constantly changing dwellings was not easy, as Tania states:

> Our next home was in the center of the village in a structure owned by the Ahlström Corporation, a rotting wooden house made for three families and overrun by rats. Our room was so small that when the bed was unfolded there was not enough space to move about. The environment was noisy: traffic, fighting neighbors, and noisy drunks in the labor hall next to us. (Tania, b. 1933)[1]

Drifting, in other words, frequent moves, was caused by continuously changing employment, as the following excerpt from Johanna's narrative points out:

> During her marriage, my mother lived in housing shared with others. Our housing changed frequently, depending on employment, because my father was a laborer and mostly in casual work. (Johanna, b. 1907)

The itinerant poor, whose lives were based upon "restlessness and mobility" (Urry 2007, 21), were not, however, the only social group in such circumstances, because the forest workers also moved frequently. Contrary to the rural working class, whose mobility was interpreted as obligatory, the more educated foresters and their wives did not see their moves as 'drifting' but rather as positive challenges that a husband's work offered (Paaskoski 2008, 153–65). Therefore, moving houses, changing jobs, and associating with new people in a new environment all signified a better social status: for individuals in a higher position in society, mobility offered an opportunity to upgrade, but for the poor, mobility was interpreted as occurring out of necessity and thus viewed negatively. When moving to a new abode, the educated foresters were positioned high in the local social hierarchy, with the landless poor at the lowest level. In spite of the low social position of the poor, however, mobility as a coercive transition sometimes enabled a better standard of living, as Tania concludes when discussing her own parents:

> These two people [the narrator's parents], originally from the lowest social class, went far away from their birth place to look for a better future. They did not want to settle for the same thing. They had seen the fate of poor people at the beginning of the twentieth century. (Tania, b. 1933)

1 All excerpts from the narratives have been translated from Finnish into English by Eija Stark.

Without one's own dwelling place and often being forced to move, stability and longing for a permanent home became the most important values, as the next narrator, Arne, who was born in 1914, reflects:

> I believe that anyone who has lived their childhood in a poor but owned home does not understand what it means to move into one's own house, if you have lived in a space owned by others or in the cottages of the logging sites. (Arne, b. 1914)

Building one's own house was justified by the lack of self-determination that the landless felt when they did not have their own dwellings and when they became tired of drifting. Living in close quarters in other people's properties, the poor found it hard to tolerate other people's behavior. This is how one male narrator, Otto (b. 1924), described the circumstances of these kinds of people: "We lived in a tightly squeezed rented dump, where endless bickering and fights kept people antagonistic toward each other."

Land reforms secured land for tenant farmers and farm workers and, as a result, hundreds of thousands of small farms were established, but these could support families only if they had the extra income from forest work (Hjerppe 2008). Smallholdings were usually farms supporting a single family; hence, the increased state intervention and new social policies protected traditional small-size family farming as a way of life, and, for example, almost every farm had a cow as late as the early 1950s. Finnish governments pursued a policy of establishing agricultural self-sufficiency, and the food shortage following the Second World War made rebuilding agriculture a post-war priority. The main aim of Finnish housing policy was to resettle landless persons, and vigorous building in hinterland areas commenced as land was cleared for cultivation. The Finnish peasant and rural traditions were seen as native values, as they had been during the nineteenth-century period of National Romanticism (Saarikangas 1993, 54–55).

Agricultural life that was based on individual ownership of land, as encoded in the law, displaced many peasants from the land and compelled them, often unwillingly, to become urban factory workers. Working in a factory, however, sometimes brought a kind of stability, because the rented apartment offered a sense of home. In the following example a male narrator, Arne, describes dreaming about a home:

> Even in my childhood I dreamt of my own house, no matter how bad. I didn't like the constant moves and always being in the way of the better people. My dream came true already at the beginning of my adult years even though it required persistence and saving money. (Arne, b. 1914)

In other words, Arne understood his earlier mobility as an itinerant manual worker who was disturbing a rich man's life. People dreamt of

a stable and even immobile life, but their frequent moves carried biased social implications. As one can read from Arne's narrative, twentieth-century Finland was as "a gigantic machine for uprooting countrymen" (Hobsbawm 1977, 231).

For a long period of time, the high rate of mortality kept the number of heirs to property low. However, as a result of better infectious disease control, family size began to increase rapidly, and transferring wealth within families became a problem (Gaunt 1987, 136). Because the number of average family members rose, especially after the Second World War, many recently set up smallholdings were too small for the big families. The new housing was satisfactory for the older landless generation but not for younger persons who had no first-hand experience of landlessness. Poverty, poor housing, and large families living in small quarters had an influence on many levels. Matti describes his feelings of making a breakaway from his parents' place when he was able to move in to a new rented apartment with his newlywed wife:

> We managed to get one room with an alcove on the upper floor of a house in what we called *Kotiranta* ('Homebay'). It became our first home, and we stayed for many years. There weren't many facilities. Water came in and went out if one could carry it from the well. A privy was located in the backyard. We were satisfied with this. Those years we lived in this imperfect lodging were somehow some of the happiest in my life. There was a shortage of everything and we received food coupons. But we had something else, we got on together well. We both were accustomed to having little. Was that love or something else? (Matti, b. 1928)

The following narrator, Calle, who left an inherited small farm for industrial work and company housing, had a similar experience. He was content even though he had little:

> I again had a reason to live. I had an apartment and my family with me. The first night we slept on the floor because we had no beds. The next day we went to buy a bed made of iron, a coffee table, a kitchen table and four chairs. Some of these had to be bought on credit since we did not have enough money for everything we needed. So we started from the rented apartment, but so did most of the working men in the factory. (Calle, b. 1931)

Home is a site of belonging but also a place of leaving and returning as well as movement and fluidity (Johansson and Saarikangas 2009, 18), and becoming independent meant a breakaway from the childhood home and the burden of a small, poor farm.

Diligence

Building one's own dwelling, which also had to be functional, required years of physical work, savings to continue the work, and the paying back of state loans. Farmhouses—on either large farms or extensive land holdings—had formerly, in the nineteenth century and before that, been built by *talkoot*, mutual voluntary aid from villagers (Talve 1997, 182), but the land reforms resulted in thousands of individual builders who did the job themselves with members of the nuclear family. The uniform houses that were designed by the government for the landless population had to be built quickly when many required rehousing, and each peasant house was a self-sufficient unit (Saarikangas 1993, 84). Arne did not calculate the working hours he spent on the construction of his house:

> There were no caterpillar machines then, all the stumps had to be cleared manually by simple brawn [. . .] there was enough work. Later I cleared all the fields with hired help. I never had time for a holiday. (Arne, b. 1914)

Folklorist Satu Apo has pointed out that many landless families, as the result of the twentieth-century Finnish land reforms, were infected by ergomania, an excessive devotion to work. A small house had to be set up even in austere, middle-of-nowhere circumstances, and even at the expense of one's health (Apo 1995, 219). This was particularly a dream of men: building a small house with one's own hands, sweat, and blood, an idyll that included a wife and a place to work. These aspects were crucial in gaining self-respect. One of the narrators, for example, mentioned how owning a house was "a sign of masculine power."

Home-ownership, which required years of hard physical work and the saving of money, was an ideal that was mostly shared by women, too—but not always, as in the case of Jokke and his wife:

> I was keen to go, and thought that finally I, too, had a permanent place that I could feel was my own and safe for my children. I told the news to my wife but got a cold answer: "I won't walk with my backside naked." Of course, building our own house would have meant tight finances in the following years but would have brought our family more together. I knew what kind of complaining there would have been had I started to build, and therefore I gave up of the idea. Fine, damn, I thought. (Jokke, b. 1926)

The couple divorced a few years later. Jokke's narrative reflects the general attitude in which farming and the household economy should be harmonious and represent a traditional lifestyle (Östman 2009, 21). It also reveals how a landless man expected his wife, too, to take part in his dream and to understand the honor of a man and, on a broader level, how social life presupposed issues of movement but also non-movement (Urry

2007, 17). Later, Jokke found a second wife who shared his ideas about a decent life that included homeownership.

The next narrator, Anna, identifies farming and a farmhouse as representing a cultural norm. In the 1930s, Anna and her husband were able to build their own farmhouse:

> After sorting things out and the negotiations, we finally got the money we needed and so we had a home! And then came the day when I had a chance to milk my own cow. With the help of our relatives, we made all this happen. Somehow I felt like now we were equal to other people. We were not itinerant cottagers but instead, a normal logger family. (Anna, b. 1901)

As Anna's narrative reflects, homeownership represented individual autonomy, and, by having a home of one's own, it was possible to gain full selfhood (Apo 1995, 222). A peasant—no matter how small the arable land he had—could for the first time experience the rural idyll (Silvasti 2003, 145; Blakesaune, Haugen, and Villa 2010, 225). For Anna, homeownership was a question of equality. She continues her story: "It was like a miracle. We didn't have to be in the same circles anymore. We felt like we had equal status with the other people in the countryside." It was obvious that the psychological aspect of becoming an independent farmer was more important than the economic aspect. Above all, their new independence conferred greater self-esteem, and with their new status as farmers, these formerly landless people expected better treatment. The small, 2.5-hectare farms alone did not provide a sufficient livelihood but nonetheless instilled a sense of pride, as in the case of Laura's (b. 1926) parents in the 1930s: "Until then my father's status had been that of a farmhand or laborer or something like that, but once we got that piece of land, there was on every document a title 'farmer'."

On a large scale, the widening of the farmer/peasant class by the mid-twentieth century played a crucial role in developing the Finnish welfare state. The wood-processing industry was an important link between the peasant-owned forests and the seasonal demand for labor in logging, and therefore it gained a hegemonic role in the general national project (Kettunen 2001, 226). For many, gaining the status of an independent farmer and therefore becoming a homeowner was satisfactory although livelihoods and conditions were still meager, in many cases even poor. But building a house of one's own, in other words a permanent home, was a dream of urban workers, too, whose roots were in the rural countryside. Many industrial workers in fact returned to the countryside from the towns in order to settle down, even though the organized labor movement's attitude in the first decades of the twentieth century toward working-class aspirations for homeownership was less than enthusiastic (Markkola 1994, 40). Nevertheless, because of the urgent need for housing after the

Second World War, houses were built in rural and urban districts alike, and many urban workers gained ownership of their dwellings.

Sometimes an owned house proved to be something other than what had been dreamt about. It was not unusual that the new farms meant only a few hectares in the middle of nowhere, such as male narrator Kauko recounts:

> The established farms were called 'cold farms.' When the counsellor and I got out of the car, I said that this must be the wrong place since there was no farm there at all. I'd imagined that because we'd talked about a farm, then there would have been somebody there before. In this place, there were no signs of settlement at all, only dark forest right from the side of the road. We couldn't get through the forest to see the plot that had been planned for my house. Luckily, the plot was quite near the road so we did get there. (Kauko, b. 1922)

After the Second World War, many small farms, "homes," were created out of very little. This was the result of the particular historical situation—both the state and most of the population were poor—but also because the hinterland of Finland had not been systematically "developed," as a result of sufficient production systems not yet being in place. Practically, it meant that people suffered from a lack of building materials such as bricks, planks, and nails. Small farm houses literally popped out in the middle of nowhere.

Haven

For the narrators, living a mobile life in poverty was expressed with metaphors such as "vulnerability" and "homelessness," and the underlying idea was that living in rented accommodations meant not having authority over one's own life. In contemporary and more affluent societies, the concept of home has wider connotations than just that of a house or a building; it also means social relations and matters of domestic culture such as comfort, security, and warmth (Johansson and Saarikangas 2009, 18). In the narratives analyzed in this article, however, a dwelling of one's own is a prerequisite for a home to have true meaning. Setting up a home, sometimes more of a cottage than a proper house, was expressed as a desire or basic need, and, without it, there could be no domestic culture either. As a result, when construction work began, the joy and happiness was said to be unlimited. The narrators emphasized how the dwelling might have been very simple as a building, but still, it was one's own; to own a house symbolized the capability to master one's life, and homeownership raised the landless poor to a level more equal to better-off people, that is, it undoubtedly diminished the sense of social class.

The other side of the coin was that an owned home became a norm that every decent person should aim at. Living in his senior years in Helsinki, a male narrator, Topi, tells how people wanted to take out loans in order

to own a home, which he sarcastically refers to as "a standard of living competition." For Topi, those who did not participate in this competition and who did not want to own their dwelling place were an anomaly:

> I go back to the period when we built this home. We lived in poverty, in real need, like many others. Often when I heard my colleagues' stories about spending their days off, how they had been on the dance floor in a bar, I asked myself why on earth should I be building a house and miss all those things. Today, these other people enjoy housing benefits, I don't. We were so foolish that we even took money from our work-pension contributions in order to pay off our mortgage. Those who can use the system, go first abroad and then on the dole. (Topi, b. 1920)

Although Topi is critical of his ostensible gullibility and of being too honest, the example is narrated only to show his actual feeling of moral superiority over those who did not own their homes, in other words, "people on the dole." At the same time, the example reveals the reason why an owned home is so revered: it has been built by one's own hands and by sacrificing savings and years of free time.

When a new house was ready, it was described in the narratives as a "haven," as in Sonja's (b. 1911) example: "The new house there, up on the hill, sheltered by the forest but near the village road; it was now our home, where we came back from the world in order to vent angst; home that we constructed all together." Mary Douglas (1991) has pointed out that although a home is not necessarily located in a fixed place, it needs a space that is considered to be under control. Home represents an organization of space over time: each type of building implies a capacity to plan, to allocate materials, and to anticipate needs (289, 295).

A place becomes a home through the feelings that are connected to it (Olsson 2009, 41). For the narrators analyzed in this paper, an owned dwelling was treasured for the sake of selfhood, and having a real home meant fulfilling oneself, as Olli's example depicts:

> It was the most glorious moment in my life when I became the owner of the house. In April, we moved into it. I fixed this and that; the floor was cold so I insulated it. Nonetheless it was fun to be busy with my first home. In the summer, I brought over our well water in a barrel that was fastened to a buggy. In the winter, when the well water froze, my wife melted ice for the laundry and sauna. The cottage was small, only about twenty square meters, but I was happy there. (Olli, b. 1938)

For the formerly landless population, a real home was considered as such by the status of ownership, as "a haven," a place of security, no matter how challenging the outward circumstances were. For the narrators,

the term "home" was the antithesis of all other places: home stood for calmness and warmth while the outside stood for excitement but also danger (Gullestad 1993, 66–67; Johansson and Saarikangas 2009, 17; Vacher 2010, 55). In a similar fashion, a home could be small and look uncomfortable to outsiders, but still, it was owned by oneself, such as in Laura's (b. 1926) case: "We managed to build a small cottage with a kitchen; it wasn't the biggest of the big but still we owned it."

I argue that it was only after the Finnish rural smallholding boom—from the 1920s to early 1960s—when the home began to gain a new significance and came to represent a distinctive place apart from the work sphere and public life. The idea of an owned home that was a place where individuals could have a secure and stable life (Ruonavaara 1996, 93) was reinforced by the factual state of exercising possession over the dwelling. The wealthier the narrators became during the course of their lives, the more they began to reflect the idea of the bourgeois family model. In it, the family consisted of a married couple with children and was characterized by a private, intimate parent-child relationship, and also by a strict awareness of the gender-specific roles of men and women (Löfgren 2003, 148–49). The ideal home was an owned home with a father who earned money outside the family and a mother who took care of the children and domestic chores (Ollila 1993, 56; Ruonavaara 1996, 93). A first home of one's own was described as a nest that shut out everything dangerous and bad in the world, as a female narrator, Inka (b. in the 1930s), describes: "All were now so well, we got our new house that was nice and modern. Money stretched better although I was not in paid work. At that time, mothers usually stayed at home. It was the best time of my life because everything was so good."

The new dwellings were usually simple and austere. The same room was frequently used for different purposes such as eating, working, entertaining, and sleeping (Löfgren 2003, 150). The old and poor rural lifestyle was described as disorganized and chaotic, that is to say, in negative terms, as it often did not match the ideal family model that had found favor with people better off. In addition, when a new home was built or bought after years of hard work and saving money, the role of women in it changed as well. Women began to approximate more closely the ideal roles of bourgeois wives who did not go to salaried work but instead stayed at home with the children. The difference, however, between the better-off and the working-class women was that whereas working-class women were responsible for the domestic chores and the children as were the bourgeois mothers, too, they still continued working outside home. This upward mobility was by no means altogether pleasurable since the women's daily lives were full of work.

Conclusions

During the first half of the twentieth century, rural people's lives in Finland were itinerant because of poverty. In the course of time and as part of the historical process, at least two kinds of explicit mobility affected people

and their ways of life: geographical labor mobility and social mobility. Narratives "from below" reflect the interests and priorities of rural working-class people who moved to towns or industrial centers in search of employment and better economic opportunities, and these narratives provide a broader picture of the cultural knowledge the people possessed. The life stories of the Finns who were from either a landless or smallholding background indicated that although various forms of mobility were experienced over the course of a lifetime, these mobility practices were often seen as an unwanted but necessary evil and hence as something negative. At the same time and perhaps because of their negativity (McAdams 2008), they formed the central narrative elements, the most fundamental aspects making up an individual's life story.

The narratives repeatedly articulated the uncertainty of a past rural life without secure accommodation, where individuals were very dependent on one another and social contacts were close but often oppressive. In the narrators' new lives, the traditional rules of hierarchy and social control no longer seemed to apply (Löfgren 2003, 149). The ideology of homeownership was more firmly rooted in their minds. Just how ideological this filtering down from the bourgeoisie to the lower strata of the population was is arguable and needs to be analyzed from the perspective of poverty that the commoners experienced. By definition, poverty means a lack of food, clothing, and housing. Furthermore, and in the narrated form, poverty instantiated social and cultural consequences, too, such as moving or being moved and changing social roles.

For the older generation, landlessness meant having no permanent dwelling; thus, "drifting" emerged as one of the major cultural themes in the narratives. Living without a house of one's own was expressed this way, a metaphor used for an unsettled life and the inability to enjoy the customs of domestic culture. The second theme in the narratives was diligence. That, too, was linked to the twentieth-century land reforms which resulted in hundreds of thousands of Finns building their own houses. This required years of hard physical work since the means of construction were rudimentary and the work had to be done mostly by the people themselves, a factor that also intertwined with the concepts of peasantry and home. For many, a farmhouse represented the ideal home. The ideal representation of a farm—an owned house and separate barn—was regarded as the basis of a better life. The third theme concerned shifting from the ideal of owning a dwelling to the actual norm of ownership, and everything it implies. In its normative representation, the home was described as a warm, stable, and permanent place that was built and maintained with love.

An itinerant life was viewed as an obstacle to living a life of fulfillment. Life satisfaction depended on stable and settled living conditions, which, according to the narratives here, meant the ownership of a house. For the homeowners, the newly built dwellings represented individualism, private ownership, and upward mobility—qualities that were familiar from the upper strata of the early twentieth century. At the ideological

level, homeownership became normalized, but it did so because there was, behind the ideal, the real itinerant lives and involuntary mobility of the poor. In this sense, the ideology of homeownership cannot be argued to represent only "an invented" top-down bourgeoisie project but rather as commonly shared, a cultural practice.

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