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FINNISH CITIZENS ON SWEDISH SOIL – YEOMANRY, MASCULINITY AND THE POSITION OF THE SWEDISH MINORITY IN FINLAND

I. Nationalisms and gender

“The Yeoman is working hard. The crop of the fall has to be gathered. It is a pleasure to watch the quick Peasant cutting the ripening fields. Our Swedish lineage¹ has got plenty of backbone.”²

This text, published in 1932, is describing a farming man in a Swedish-speaking rural district in Western Finland. In this passage, the author is describing farm work with quite ceremonial words. When using the term peasant the writer is making a connection to the group: the peasant is romanticized and made the heart of the Swedish “folk”.

This paper studies notions of agrarian masculinity and representations of national ideals. It focuses on the meanings of agrarian masculinity in a Swedish-speaking area in Finland in the 1920s and 1930s. Using the approach of microhistory, I analyse the popular discourses on masculinity and farming in one single community.³ The community under study is located at the language-border – a border which was given a new meaning at this time when the idea of “Swedish-speaking Finland”, a Swedish territory within Finland, was established. My major aim is to discuss connections between discourses on nation, citizenship and an agrarian masculinity among the Swedish-speaking peasantry in the province of Ostrobothnia.

¹ Cf. the German word *Volk*. The Swedish term *Folk* can be compared to the German “Volk” but it is, according to Sørensen and Strååth, less holistic and less ideologically charged. ØYSTEIN SØRENSEN/BO STRÅÅTH, Introduction, in: *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, ed. by ØYSTEIN SØRENSEN/BO STRÅÅTH, Oslo 1997, pp. 1-24, here pp. 14-16.

² Jakobstads Tidning (JT) 3. 9. 1932.

³ This article is the first part of a project in which I study the juncture of gender and representations of the nation during the construction of “Swedish-Finland” from the perspective of rurality. My study is part of a multi-disciplinary research project, *Ethnicity and gender*, at the Institute of Women’s Studies at Åbo Akademi University.

My analysis is based on a collection of letters, about 50 altogether, published in local or regional newspapers. The letters describe everyday life, work and society in the Ostrobothnian community of Purmo, an almost unilingual Swedish commune. These public letters show the meanings ascribed to farming in the 1920s and 1930s. Due to commercialization and mechanization the structures of agriculture were changing at this time, and a new collective identity of the farmers was formed.

These short articles – all focussed on one single community – demonstrate how notions of national ideology were reworked and formulated on a local level. Some of the texts are short, just notices. Most of the texts are written by farming men in Purmo, others by visitors or local school-teachers. Many letters like these were published in the papers which appeared in the Swedish-speaking towns along the Ostrobothnian coast. The letters were not introduced by the editor. The writers almost functioned as local reporters: they wrote regularly about different villages or communes. They were probably paid, and the letters were without any doubt edited before publishing. Many texts published with the title “Letters from Purmo” are written by Anders Pass, who used the initials “AP”. Pass, the son of a peasant in Purmo, was born in 1890 and he had studied theology. In the 1920s he started to work as a teacher in a local folk high-school. When describing this community he emphasized the importance of agriculture.

In the following, I focus on the representation of the male peasant, posing questions related to both conceptual history and discourse analysis. I cannot be sure that these letters show the national identity of the “common people”, but they display the uses of a national ideology. The article shows how ideas of nationalism were used in relation to the countryside, in the description of agriculture and in the construction of an agrarian masculinity.

The meanings of gender and different nationalisms

“All nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous”. By writing this Anne McClintock shows the connections between the construction of gender and the creation of national identities. These processes are, as McClintock and other feminist scholars note, intertwined: all nations depend on gendered constructions, and nationalism is a constitutive part of gendered identities.⁴ The categories of gender⁵ and nation are constructed and re-

⁴ ANNE MCCLINTOCK, *Family Feuds. Gender, Nationalism and the Family*, in: *Feminist Review* 44 (1993), pp. 63-79, here p. 63.

produced through a series of different social relations and symbolic constructs. Much of recent feminist writing on nationalism has focused on the gendering of national symbols and imagery: women are often constructed as the symbolic form of nations whereas men are represented as actors.⁶ According to George Mosse nationalisms use masculine stereotypes to represent nations.⁷

In much of the research on nations, a clear distinction is drawn between civic nationalism and cultural nationalism – between groups constructed around cultural, ethnic and/or linguistic aspects on the one hand, and around the state and citizenship on the other. As Nira Yuval-Davis concludes, women are important and gender is significant in the processes of all nationalisms. However, Yuval-Davis notes that culture and origin should not be confused. For this reason she differentiates between the dimensions of *Staatsnation* (with focus on citizenship), *Kulturnation* (with focus on culture) and *Volksnation* (with focus on origin).⁸ In the first form there are gender dimensions in the construction of citizenship, in the second, gender is connected to the construction of the group and its boundaries, and in the *Volksnation* women are controlled as the biological reproducers.⁹ Catherine Hall and others note that a gendered perspective shows “the complex – perhaps integral – relationship between forms of nationalisms”.¹⁰

My paper exemplifies the salience of national discourses in the construction of agrarian masculinity, and argues that there was a combination of different kinds of nationalisms, connected both to culture and citizenship, in the local understandings of masculinity. I will demonstrate how the yeomen

⁵ Gender is in this study understood, according to Joan Scott, as sets of contextually specific cultural meanings and prescriptions attached to femininity and masculinity; these meanings are hierarchical and asymmetrical. Scott also emphasizes the intertwined construction of nation and gender. JOAN W. SCOTT, *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York 1988, pp. 42-46.

⁶ For an overview of the literature see RICK WILFORD, *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism. Surveying the Ground*, in: *Women, Ethnicity and Nationalism*, ed. by RICK WILFORD/ROBERT L. MILLER, London 1998, pp. 1-22 and NIRA YUVAL-DAVIS, *Gender and Nation*, *ibid.*, pp. 23-35. Cf. MCCLINTOCK, *Family* (see note 4).

⁷ GEORGE L. MOSSE, *The Image of Man. The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, Oxford 1996, pp. 4-7 and 16.

⁸ YUVAL-DAVIS, *Gender and Nation* (see note 6), pp. 25-26 and 31-32.

⁹ The Swedish historian Monika Edgren draws the conclusion that the distinction between different kinds of nationalisms is less relevant when gender is included in the analysis, and emphasizes that all types define women through their reproductive capacity. MONIKA EDGREN, *Nationalismer och genus (Nationalisms and Gender)*, in: *Historisk Tidskrift för Sverige* 116 (1996), pp. 233-256.

¹⁰ CATHERINE HALL et al., *Introduction*, in: *Gender & History* 5 (1993), pp. 159-164, here p. 160-161.

– who represented the hegemonic group in this commune – used ideas connected to the Swedish nation building-process in Finland and how “citizenship” was an important part of the construction of a new agrarian masculinity. The studies on masculinity and nation have, however, often focused on bourgeois ideals of masculinity.¹¹ I argue that the perspective of agrarianism is relevant for understanding the meanings of nationalisms in many European countries, but particularly when we study Northern and Eastern Europe during the time between the wars.¹²

The Peasantry in National Discourses in Finland

In 1920 the Swedish-speaking minority amounted to 11% (about 340,000 individuals) of the entire population in Finland. The Swedish-speaking population was heterogeneous and consisted of different groups, including a working class. Finland gained independence in 1917. Since the Middle Ages Finland had been an integrated part of the Swedish realm. In 1809 Finland became a separate political entity, the Grand Duchy of Finland. This was the consequence of the Russian conquest. At this time different Swedish-speaking groups lived in Finland. The majority of the Swedish-speakers lived in rural areas along the coast, but the upper classes in Finland (aristocracy, civil servants, the bourgeoisie, the educated) had historically been Swedish-speaking. Between these groups – the upper classes and the intellectual élite on the one hand, and the common people on the other – bonds were made in the late nineteenth century. The term *Svenskfinland* (“Swedish-Finland” or “Swedish-speaking Finland”), referring to communities where Swedish was the dominant language, was established in the 1910s, and also the concept *finlandssvenskar* (Swedish-speaking Finns, literally Finland-Swedes) is a construct of this decade.

¹¹ See e.g. Mosse’s analysis of the connection between nationalism and bourgeois respectability in Western European countries: MOSSE, *The Image of Man* (see note 7). In two early studies Marilyn Lake has connected agrarian masculinity and nationalism. She has shown the importance of the bushman-ideal – the free, independent and mobile rural worker – in the late 19th century nationalist ideology in Australia. Lake has also analysed the meaning of yeomanry in the construction of citizenship in early 20th century Australia. MARILYN LAKE, *The Politics of Respectability. Identifying the Masculinist Context*, in: *Historical Studies* 86 (1986), pp. 116-131 and MARILYN LAKE, *The Limits of Hope. Soldier Settlement in Victoria 1915-1938*, Melbourne 1997.

¹² Cf. LEO GRANBERG/JOUKU NIKULA, Introduction, in: *The Peasant State. The State and Rural Questions in 20th Century Finland*, ed. by LEO GRANBERG/JOUKU NIKULA, Rovaniemi 1995.

I use the concept nation as an analytical tool for understanding nationalism when studying Swedish-speaking Finland from a historical perspective. Should the group be labelled national or ethnic? The idea of a Swedish nation in Finland was never materialized into a political territory¹³, but there was a project of nation-building that involved the politicization of the language and other elements connected to the process of nation-building, which according to Smith are a sense of national consciousness, a linguistic representation of a territory, and an ideology shaped around the language.¹⁴ The new group, this nation, was created by means of both language and culture. Dimensions connected to both the *Volksnation* and *Kulturnation* were used, and the language was the basic element in the discourses defining *Svenskfinland* (Swedish-speaking Finland). In this process the image of the peasant was, besides the image of the fisherman, important.¹⁵

Øystein Sørensen and Bo Strååth note that the construction of the free and equal peasant was an important element of the Scandinavian Enlightenment. They also argue that this image was important in the processes of modernization and nation-building during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The freeholder functioned as a national icon. Similar to the Scandinavian nationalist discourses of the late nineteenth century, the image of the peasant, of the free and equal freeholder, was used in several ways in the construction of a Swedish group in Finland. The peasant symbolized both the land and the people, but also – as the Scandinavian freeholder-icon – an image of the society, of a collective and classless society. This ideology also idealised the authenticity of the people.¹⁶

Both on a political and symbolical level agrarianism characterized the Finnish state in the 1920s. The newly independent state was characterized by

¹³ There were plans in 1918 for self-government, but only the demand for equality was realized, not autonomy. Both Finnish and Swedish were recognized on an equal basis as “national languages” in the constitution of 1919. The law also guaranteed cultural autonomy and separate Swedish-speaking institutions, as for example schools. See MAX ENGMAN, Finns and Swedes in Finland, in: *Ethnicity and Nation Building in the Nordic World*, ed. by SVEN TÄGIL, London 1995, pp. 179-216.

¹⁴ ANTHONY D. SMITH, *National Identity*, Harmondsworth 1991, p. 72.

¹⁵ BO LÖNNQVIST, *Folkkulturen i svenskhetens tjänst* (Folk Culture in the Service of Swedishness), in: *Svenskt i Finland 1. Studier i språk och nationalitet efter 1860* (Swedish in Finland 1. Studies in Language and literature after 1860), ed. by MAX ENGMAN/HENRIK STENIUS, Helsingfors, pp. 178-205. MAX ENGMAN, *The Finland-Swedes: a case of a failed national history?* In: *National History and Identity*, ed. by MICHAEL BRANCH, Helsinki 1999, pp. 166-177.

¹⁶ Cf. SØRENSEN’S and STRÅÅTH’S (see note 1, pp. 3-11) description of the construction of *Norden* (North), with BO LÖNNQVIST’S (see note 15) analysis of the uses of *folk*, the common people, in the construction of “Finland-Swedishness”.

class differences, the breakdown of the Russian empire, the aftermath of a severe civil war and struggles over language. A society composed of independent landowning farmers (homesteaders) would, according to an agrarian ideology, guarantee greater political stability. At this time, land was seen as a solution to social problems. The freeing of the crofters increased the predominance of smallholders in all parts of Finland, and the celebration of family farms was strong.¹⁷ At another level the peasantry was, as in other countries, seen as an authentic national character. In the interwar decades “Finnishness” was often embodied by the landowning, honest and progressive farmer. Finnish society in the time between the wars has been labelled as a peasant state; a state where agrarianism dominated socially, culturally and politically.¹⁸

II. The Yeoman – protecting the Land

The Soil: The practical and the symbolic

Different concepts are used to describe the working man in the letters, but the term “lantman” is most often employed. This Swedish word is difficult to translate. The English word “yeoman” can be seen as an intermediate term between the concept of “peasant” and that of “farmer”.¹⁹ However, in this context the Swedish term has a somewhat more modern connotation. In the text presented in the beginning of the article – a text very typical for the letters – two terms are used: in the same passage the man is described as a peasant and as a farmer. This text is written by a farming man, but the author of the letter is positioned as an observer, describing the year’s harvest. The term peasant is used to describe the Swedish group. In the following text the more modern concept “farmer” is connected to the native land.

“The ground is hacked on some places, on other ones the harrow and the plough are making great furrows in the soil which now is prepared and soon is to be sowed. [...] In these wonderful spring days, the farmer looks interested. He knows that hard working-days are approaching, but he has a free and airy

¹⁷ GRANBERG/NIKULA, Introduction (see note 12), pp. 12-15. ILKKA ALANEN, Finland as a Peasant Society and the Agrarian Reforms, in: *The Peasant State* (see note 12), pp. 42-53. KENNETH MCRAE, Conflict and Compromise in Multilingual Societies, Waterloo, Ont. 1997, pp. 64-65.

¹⁸ ALANEN, Finland as a Peasant Society (see note 17).

¹⁹ The Swedish term *lantman* can be compared to the English term “yeoman-farmer”. For a comparison and a further discussion of the changing meanings of these concepts in 19th century Sweden, see SØRENSEN/STRÅÅTH, Introduction (see note 1), p. 5.

workplace. It shall not be a heavy burden, but something that he will carry out willingly and joyfully. And then, he is handling the soil of his village (*hembygd*)²⁰, the soil of the fathers and of generations to come.”²¹

The Swedish word *jord* (which can be translated to soil, land and ground) is often employed both in an abstract way and in a very concrete way. The same term is used when the proper preparation of the ground is described and when the author is referring to the land of succeeding generations. This mixing of levels is meaningful. The words used to describe the land in a symbolic way are connected to the vocabulary of everyday experience. As a result, the work of the farmer is linked to the ideas of the nation. In many of the letters the daily agricultural work is connected to the Swedish-speaking nation, to *Svenskfinland*. In one text the language is, in a typical way, connected to the mother, but the soil – or the land – to fathers and grandfathers. In order to protect both the language and the land, the people – here called the parish people – have to keep working. “But also in times like these we have to tend the heritage of the forefathers.”²²

In this letter, written by the educated Anders Pass, agricultural work is connected both to the native place and the land. Whether the land is referring to the whole of Finland or to Swedish territory remains open in this letter, but the same author shows emotional attachment to the native land, to the Swedish community called *hembygd*, in other letters.

The Yeoman connecting past, present and future

By referring to the fathers and grandfathers, as in the quotation above, the letter-writing men create a feeling of continuity. The yeoman-farmer in the letters is gendered: the stories told are connected to aspects seen as masculine, as the focus on rye – an important feature of these letters – exemplifies. Since the late nineteenth century agriculture had been transformed. The predominance of dairy farming in Finnish agriculture was established at the end of the nineteenth century and lasted well into the 1930s. Due to the dairy production hay and oats became the most important grains. One important element of change in the province of Ostrobothnia was the decrease in the cultivation of rye.

²⁰ The Swedish word *hembygd* is difficult to translate into English; “home district” or “homeland” could be comparable terms, but the German word *Heimat* is more suitable.

²¹ JT 19. 5. 1936.

²² JT 26. 10. 1921 (AP).

However, in these letters, especially in those from the 1920s, a lot of fields with thickly growing rye are described. Rye was, I argue, a key reconstruction of the past, which underpinned the cultural representation of the Ostrobothnian yeoman. Despite the importance of the dairy, the milk and the barn – with a connection to women and femininity – are almost invisible in these letters. By using the image of the rye-field, the letters are emphasizing a masculine ambience. But this is also a way of constructing a feeling of continuity in time: by reconstructing the rye, a link to the past is created. The past is described through farming and its traditions of work and ownership: this creates an illusion of continuity and feelings of unity. In many letters the rye is harvested with a sickle. Although mechanization had changed working-processes, much work – especially in connection to rye – was still performed manually.²³ And the man working without modern machines is a second insistent theme in the letters. This exemplifies how ideas of the past formed both the self-perception and the social identity of the farmer in the early twentieth century.

But the yeoman was also depicted as a progressive farmer. In emphasizing the term yeoman the authors of the letters are combining a strong sense of the past with visions of the future, stressing professional skills. New techniques are discussed and presented, and in the following passage the modern and rational is connected to the farmer, a man who loves his land.

“A lot of modern smooth-running machines, which are employed in the heavy work, have been bought this year. Yes, and the local resident is as before the interested farmer. He loves his land, the land of the fathers, he wants to see it well-tended and to see his beloved *hembygd* progress year after year.”²⁴

This farmer embodies rational progress, but also romanticized and emotional bonds to the land. Furthermore, the use of the word *hembygd*, one of the key concepts in the the understanding of Swedish-Finland, links nationhood, the Swedish idea, to a modern agrarian masculinity. Whereas women’s contribution to farming and to the progress of the community was rendered invisible, the yeoman is depicted in the letters as working on his own. He is represented in a singular form despite the fact that agricultural work was often collective.

²³ JT 15. 8. 1933.

²⁴ JT 27. 7. 1935.

The Guardians of the Soil

Ownership is a consistent theme connecting understandings of nation with masculinity and agriculture. The yeoman was, as in several quotations already presented, depicted as a good professional. And in many letters it is emphasized that he should own the land he is cultivating – for his own good, but also for the benefit of the community. Especially in the 1920s, the threat of massive land purchases is discussed in the letters. The need to keep the Swedish soil in Swedish ownership is emphasized, in particular in the village closest to the language-border, to the neighbouring Finnish communes. The threat, a constructed one in this region, is emphasized in the letters. In one letter the threat from the land-purchasing Finns is called the sword of Damocles. This sword is hanging over the heads of people in Purmo, because some of them are prepared to sell land to Finns or to marry a Finnish-speaker. The money given for the land is called blood-money, the biblical thirty pieces of silver:

“Peace and reconciliation can sometimes be very good, but not always. No, Swedish and Finnish do not, and can never belong together. Our Swedishness obliges. Keep the border clear!”²⁵

In another letter the same border village is said to be under threat, but an old peasant is seen as guardian of the soil:

“A conversation with the peasant Willman shows that he is an ardent advocate of Swedishness, and as long as such men inhabit the border area, the Finnish language will not make new conquests. The agriculture in Purmo is on a particularly high level. Along the journey you can only see well-tended fields.”²⁶

This description was made in the main Swedish newspaper, by a person not directly connected to agriculture. However, the connection between a male peasant, the land and “Swedishness” is very clear in this passage.

There are few explicit arguments about the primordial rights to land. But these are implicit when the need to protect the land of the ancestors is stressed.

“Nowadays nobody wants to lose one’s land, which has become dearer and dearer, and which has been trodden by the fathers and the forefathers. And on the rare occasions when the land is auctioned off, the intending buyer from the neighbouring commune has to stay in the entrance hall and the Finn in the yard.”²⁷

²⁵ Wasaposten 15. 11. 1928 (Trifolium).

²⁶ Hufvudstadsbladet 2. 8. 1934.

²⁷ Pedersöre 6. 6. 1923.

Those who are accused of selling off to Finns, are – in another letter entitled Swedish Treason – called deserters willing to betray the Swedish settlement: “May the Swedish people stand up for the Swedish soil”.²⁸ These letters show that Swedish-speaking farmers, or yeomen, saw themselves – and were seen – as defenders of the land, in this case the Swedish soil in Finland. This position was seen as important, and it was an important element in the understanding of agrarian masculinity.

The representations of national identity found in these letters are based on the symbols of the dominant discourse of the Swedish-speaking national movement in Finland. During this time of agricultural modernization, new notions of agrarian masculinity were given meaning on the local level by a gendered and gendering national discourse. The metaphors of the soil were taken from the symbolic context of Swedish nation-building in Finland: the farming men – the yeomen – were defined against the representations of a Finno-Swedish nation.

III. The Yeoman as a Citizen Patriot

In 1918, shortly after the civil war, the Ostrobothnian peasants were described in a heroic way:

“They seldom, or never, keep tenants, farm-hands or maids beneath themselves – no, rather beside themselves. Never any landlords, gentlefolk or other bigwig above them. They have shared the soil, so that everybody has just enough. They stand as a thick pine forest of uniform height, where each tree has a place in the sun alongside with the others. Therefore the wind sings powerfully in the trees when a gale is blowing over the land. The Swedes of Ostrobothnia have as no other men in this country broken the lawlessness of the Red and the old Russian bonds.”²⁹

In this passage, the writer is showing the reader that the Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnians had a unique position; they had guaranteed the freedom of the Fatherland, of Finland. The special traits of this peasant society are connected to the outcome of the civil war. Many peasants from this district, both Swedish- and Finnish-speaking, had participated on the winning White side. In this text the ideal of the peasant society is used to depict the Ostrobothnians: the image of a more or less classless society and of the free and equal peasant comes out strongly. The ability to defend Finland is connected

²⁸ Pedersöre 10. 6. 1925.

²⁹ Svenska Folkskolans Vänner 1918, 133. This passage is about Swedish-speaking peasants in Ostrobothnia in general.

to the understanding of the peasant society, a society characterized by the “Swedish” heritage.

“Village-men” and citizens

The Ostrobothnian community, and the rural commune under study, was characterized by an early dominance of small freehold peasants. The whole area lacked a local gentry, and the proportion of landless people – tenants and agricultural workers – was larger in other parts of Finland. In this district, which had a smallholding tradition, the possibility of acting in public arenas in a peasant-collective was important in the construction of an agrarian masculinity in the late nineteenth century.³⁰

This participation was exclusionary, because many forms of cooperation were based on ownership of land.³¹ The master of the house (or the head-of-the-household) was called “byaman” (village-man or villager) when acting within these arenas. The joint tasks and interests of agriculture were exercised in contexts which to a large extent excluded women. Even though participation in many of the local community’s joint activities was formally linked with household position and ownership, this cooperation at the informal level was marked by homosociality. Not even women in a master-position – a matron responsible for the farm while the husband was away or dead – used to take part in these kind of meetings. Men owning no land could join as labourers. Women were not explicitly excluded, but this activity seems to have been considered unsuitable for them. Notions of patriarchal power and male independence excluded women from the public sphere generally, and local social arenas were important for the construction of masculinity.³²

Rural society was reorganized during the early twentieth century, but these older understandings of local participation were reshaped. The village-

³⁰ For a longer discussion, see ANN-CATRIN ÖSTMAN, *Mjölk och jord. Om kvinnlighet, manlighet och arbete i ett österbottniskt jordbrukssamhälle ca 1870-1940* (Milk and Soil. On Femininity, Masculinity and Work in an Ostrobothnian Agrarian Community, ca. 1870-1940), Åbo 2000, pp. 252-257.

³¹ The arenas open for men can, to a great extent, be connected to the “public sphere”. Besides the village there were other forms of local self-government. The Swedish historian Peter Aronsson has studied the practices of the parish assembly in the 19th century. This assembly was characterized by a communal-egalitarian principle, but also by new bourgeois forms of organization. PETER ARONSSON, *Bönder gör politik. Det lokala självstyret i tre Smålandssocknar* (Peasants Making Politics. Local Government in three Parishes in Småland), 1680-1850, Lund 1992, pp. 160-165.

³² ÖSTMAN, *Mjölk och jord* (see note 30), pp. 257-262.

man was gradually transferred into a “communal-man”, but the social spheres linked to agriculture continued to be the men’s. They were still crucial in the construction of agrarian masculinity. Modern notions of citizenship were bound up with the meanings of the villager or village-man. In Purmo a farm club called the yeoman club was founded in 1902. The initial meeting was held in a new school-building. In the minutes from this meeting two terms are used to describe the participants: they are called “village-men” and “citizens”. This exemplifies how different meanings were invested in such societies; it also shows how different traditions of participation are connected. The more traditional and collective, community-based, participation is related to the concept of citizen. The latter carries more modern and, perhaps³³, individual connotations. Men’s participation was thus built both on an older tradition, in which the collective was more important than the individual, and on new understandings of citizenship.

When introduced, the concept of yeoman connected the village-man to the citizen: participation in these more modern organizations was understood in relation to more traditional forms of cooperation. In Purmo, the old village community remained almost intact right up to the first decades of the twentieth century. At this time several new joint organizations had been established. There were numerous different cooperatives: in Purmo, the most important of these was the dairy cooperative. By the 1930s four cooperative dairies had been set up in a community with roughly 2000 inhabitants. Many men were becoming members of new voluntary societies connected to agriculture. Only freeholders were found in the earliest associations. Partly because of older traditions cooperatives and farm clubs were identified with men and masculinity. Men with property had, to a greater extent, individual rights to act in public, and the public arenas connected to agriculture can be described as homosocial communities: participation was important and at the same time women were excluded.

³³ In Swedish the word for citizen, *medborgare* (fellow citizen), is connected to the German language, and to a more liberal tradition. In Finnish the word *kansalainen* (national) is connected to the more collective concept of “the folk” and the nation. For a discussion about different concepts, see TUJJA PULKKINEN, *The Postmodern and Political Agency*, Helsinki 1996, pp. 143-163. For a discussion about local notions of citizenship, see PETER ARONSSON, *Local Politics – The Invisible Political Culture*, in: *The Cultural Construction of Norden* (see note 1), pp. 172-205, here pp. 187-192.

“Civic duties”

The “yeoman-farmers” are given a role of authority within the community. According to the letters, the duty, the right and the privilege to act and work outside the farm – for the good of the farm – still characterized men’s work and the understandings of masculinity. The letter-writing men describe themselves as free and independent landowners and peasants, but also as professional agriculturalists and as citizens taking responsibility for their community. In a letter published at a time when there was a growing right-wing movement (the Lapua movement, which resorted to violent methods at the beginning of the 1930s), the farming men in this district are described as both democratic and patriotic.³⁴ In descriptions of individual men, e.g. in obituary notices, their participation in local arenas and their work for the common good is often mentioned. Being a member of the school board, of the cooperative dairy or of the farmers’ club are connected to a virtuous citizenship.³⁵ Full participation was still connected to economic independence and landowning. Despite the fact that local citizenship had acquired new meanings, land was still a source, and a major one, of political and social honour.

Anders Pass, the peasant’s son from Purmo working as a teacher, described the commune Purmo as a good but poor community, saved by laborious and capable inhabitants. Moral attitudes are connected to social cohesion.³⁶ One of the Finnish neighbouring communes, Evijärvi, is depicted as a poor commune incapable of paying for roads and schools. This rural municipality had a rather large proportion of socialist voters, but this is not explicitly written in the letters. In another text the men in Purmo are described as decent citizens: “The fact that he has had to give up some of the things he had wanted, does not lessen his importance as a citizen.” In the same passage the letter writer emphasizes that the people of Purmo do not have to be responsible for

“individuals who are not careful with money and who don’t take responsibility for themselves. Give the neighbour a sound thrashing if he happens to rent a little cottage to some of the troublesome couples from the neighbouring communes, whose main talent and ability is to increase the birth-rate”.³⁷

³⁴ Wasaposten 29. 7. 1930 (Trifolium Pratt).

³⁵ Vasabladet 17. 12. 1931. Cf. JT 11. 10. 1933, Hufvudstadsbladet 29. 3. 1935, Hufvudstadsbladet 2. 8. 34.

³⁶ Vasabladet 20. 1. 1921.

³⁷ JT 7. 2. 1933 (61)

The Finns were – as this passage clearly states – represented as a social problem, and the image of the respectable peasant of Purmo was partly built on the descriptions of the neighbouring Finns.

It is interesting to note that aspects of “citizenship” are stressed in the self-understanding of the farmers. The yeoman described in the letters can be seen as a combination between the freeholder-peasant and the agriculturalist-farmer. Public participation and ideas of a societal position play a crucial role in this conjuncture. The men were still looking outside the family and the household towards public institutions for positions. Ideal citizenship was still in an exclusive way tied to landownership and to the position of men within the household on a local level: landownership was important for full membership in the community, for civic involvement. Something that could be called “local citizenship” was an important part of the construction of a new agrarian masculinity.

IV. Discourses on Nationalism in the Construction of Agrarian Masculinity

Letters written by or about men in agriculture demonstrate how national ideologies were maintained and consolidated on a local level. My conclusion is that different discourses on the nation were used when describing this local community and its farmers. When writing the letters, the authors chose to represent themselves and their community in different contexts. On the one hand, ideas of land, soil and nation were in the foreground. The letter writers identified themselves with *Svenskfinland* (Swedish-speaking Finland) and the Swedes in Finland, a group which had declared that they represented a separate nationality. The discourses of the “soil” and the *hembygd* (Heimat), which had connections to the idea of Swedishness in Finland, were most conspicuous in the 1920s.

At the same time, these letters also use understandings of an exemplary citizen to give agrarian masculinity meaning. In this local commune, citizenship was given meaning in different ways, and it was partly based on the collective tradition of the agrarian community. The local understandings of citizenship combined collective traditions and patriotic notions with ideas about the meaning of agriculture in a modern society. These different ideas were also mixed on the local level. Civic values, which were seen as a heritage from the Swedish peasant society, made these Swedish-speaking yeomen good, even outstanding, Finnish citizens.

Scholars have often noted the tension between the two main ways in which “nation” has been understood: as a cultural, ethnic or linguistic grouping on the one hand, as a group connected to the state on the other.

The comprehension of agrarian masculinity in the district examined here was built upon these two different understandings of the nation, and both were critical to the construction of masculinity. The national and masculine identity of these men is connected, through their public role, to a citizenship within a (nation)state but also, through the land and the soil, to a Finland-Swedish nation building in Finland. Rather than conflicting with each other these understandings seem to have been non-competitive lines of identities: ideas from both constructions were used to give the concept of yeoman-farmer meaning. They also involved interrelated elements. Landownership was crucial to both understandings, and the image of the other – the poor Finn or the Finnish land-purchaser – are used in different ways when a new understanding of an agrarian masculinity was constructed. The complex connections between gender, the local community, the Finno-Swedish nation and the new state enabled simultaneous loyalties. These understandings of agrarian masculinity connected ideas of the past, stressing the peasant icon connected to a Scandinavian ideology, with ideals about the present and the future of a yeoman-citizen in a Finnish agrarian state.