

Migrant Finns: A Local, Multidisciplinary Overview***Päivikki Antola***

Marjatta Huhta 2020. *Konginkankaalta maailmalle. Siirtolaistarinoina Keski-Suomesta* [From Konginkangas to the world. Migrant stories from central Finland]. Konginkangas: Kömin Kilta ry. 374 pp. ISBN 978-951-98284-9-0.

Marjatta Huhta has selected an ethnologically intriguing subject by researching regional migration and Finns living abroad in the context of regional studies. She is senior lecturer emerita at Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, a Doctor of Science (Technology) and a returnee herself: she was an exchange student in the United States in 1967–1968 and completed her master's degree in Sweden in 1969–1972. During her career, she has studied language and communication challenges in the working world and developed methods to identify communication needs in business (e.g. Huhta et al. 2013). Marjatta Huhta's father served as a parson of the Konginkangas congregation, in central Finland, in the years 1953–1955. Huhta and her family has also had a summer cottage by Lake Keitele in Konginkangas since 1972. She retired there in 2016.

The idea to introduce Konginkangas returnees came from Matti K. Suojanen (1937–2003), professor of Finnish language at the University of Tampere, who himself was born in Konginkangas and active in the local heritage society, Kömin Kilta (est. 1948). He launched a regional newsletter in 1999 and introduced Konginkangas returnees as one of the topics of that newsletter. Kömin Kilta accepted the challenge of conducting migrant research, and the idea matured into an extensive ethnological study led by Marjatta Huhta. With assistance from nine members of Kömin Kilta's editorial board, Marjatta Huhta became interested in surveying the Finnish expatriate experiences of migrants and returnees in Konginkangas.

The main focus of the project, entitled 'From Konginkangas to the world', is to understand Finnish migration and Finns living abroad through individual experience between the years 1890 and 1990. Professor of Ethnology Pirjo Korhonen, from the University of Jyväskylä, worked as an expert member on the project and also wrote one chapter of the book. The book is a collection of individual stories and explains how local migrants and Finns abroad relate to Finnish migration as an international phenomenon. The book also

contains a literary review of migration as a social phenomenon, thus connecting individual experiences with the international development of migration.

The project examines migration in all its forms: permanent (actual immigration), short-term (one period, for example project work) or cyclical (recurrent) migration, and returnees. The book uses the term *expatriate Finnishness* to refer to all forms of migration.

The book is based on an extensive survey and empirical interviews carried out during the years 2018–2020. The research forms were translated into English and Swedish and were sent to 215 persons. The response rate was 48%, which encompassed both the surveys and the interviews. The respondents came from the following countries: Finland, Sweden, Norway, Germany, the United States and Canada. There were altogether 107 respondents, less than half of whom were returnees.

The project aimed to answer four research questions. 1) What happened to the migrants from a specific region in light of their life stories? 2) What kind of life emerged from the courageous decision to migrate? 3) Can expatriate life stories teach something to all Finns? 4) Do any roots remain in the home country? If so, are there any means to nurture them?

This kind of a research project would not have been feasible without a key informant, whose knowledge of local networks was needed to contact Finnish expatriates and their relatives in Finland. This key informant, Reetta Korjonen (1948–), is a local veteran member of *Kömin Kilta*, its secretary, the erstwhile chairperson and the spiritual mentor of the project.

The book was written in many instances at the last possible moment to gather such stories, as the average age of the respondents was 69 years. The oldest was a 93-year-old person from Konginkangas, while the youngest a 32-year-old from the United States. The respondents included 43 men and 60 women, as well as another four people who were also interviewed. Survey responses were uploaded to a computer program to ensure their smooth handling.

Huhta's research utilises both quantitative research, which includes the systematic gathering and analysis of data, and qualitative research, which includes the use and gathering of different kinds of empirical materials. These materials encompass personal experiences, life stories, interviews, artefacts and cultural texts. Content analysis was used to formulate the research material into the 12 central themes of the book.

The book is constructed thematically, which means that the same person can appear in multiple chapters, for example in the chapters 'Stories of working heroes', 'Love stories' and 'Hobbies'. The focus is to portray how migrants experienced their lives when they left Finland, arrived abroad and lived there, and how those who returned to Finland felt upon arriving back where they

started. The study begins with a general discussion of migration with respect to how going abroad from Konginkangas relates to migration from central Finland and the whole country. From there, the writer explains how the study was conducted and the materials collected, including what kind of data was gathered, who the respondents were and where they lived. The third chapter discusses travel abroad, family, friends, and the resulting feelings of contentment and homesickness while abroad. The chapter 'Tales from the United States' begins with stories from the turn of the century and spans the decades after the Second World War. The chapter on children's memories of war was written by professor Pirjo Korhonen. The chapter 'Stories of working heroes' illustrates migrant life, from factory workers to entrepreneurs.

Chapter 7 is called 'Returnee stories'. Surprisingly, many migrants from Konginkangas were involved in missionary work or worked as evangelists. The chapter 'World travellers by vocation' was written by journalist Eeva Summala, who has a master's degree in education. The chapter 'Hunger for education and many talents' discusses the different ways to obtain an education abroad and the opportunities to develop individual talents, while 'Love stories' describes how some individuals left Konginkangas after they had met an interesting person and how migrant life was shaped by this relationship. Some migrants did not want to become permanent expatriates but instead only sought fixed-term project work abroad. The chapter 'Adventurers' describes migrants who were driven by curiosity and a sense of adventure, while 'Promoting Finland abroad' describes those Finns who migrated in order to spread information about Finland. The following chapter 'Hobbies' describes migrants who left Finland because they were seeking opportunities to fulfill personal interests or ambitions. Finally, 'The benefits of migration' summarises what Finnish expatriates learned abroad about Finnishness and whether people in Finland could learn something from the experiences of these people.

Every chapter of the book ends with a summary to assist the reader. These summaries repeat the essential features of the theme. The final chapter brings together the answers to the research questions. One example worth mentioning is how Finnish expatriates reacted to the changes in their own way of living. The migrants became more open-minded, they accepted other cultures more readily and they grew into stronger and more tolerant individuals. These findings are presented together with extracts from actual expatriate interviews. Huhta's analytical handling of the research material has made it possible to present summaries on different levels. References are listed at the end of each chapter.

Marjatta Huhta's book presents a methodologically innovative and multifaceted perspective on the ethnographic research paradigm in Finnish region-

al studies. The study combines ethnological interview methods and survey methods from the social sciences. After the respondents had returned their questionnaires, Huhta and her research group began the interviews, which provided more depth on the survey data. She interviewed 69 persons in Finland and 12 in Sweden.

Marjatta Huhta's book proves that it is possible to apply measurable and quantitative research methods in a study of a Finnish home region and that these methods can be interpreted via a narrative research approach to individual migrant experiences. The study contributes significantly to Finnish ethnographic and ethnological research in regional studies as well as its underlying logic, methodology and content.

The book is an innovative and multidisciplinary read for home region enthusiasts, keen readers and other writers in the same field, and also for Finnish ethnologists, folklorists and cultural anthropologists. This large volume (374 pp.) offers a prime example of an ethnological study for researchers in the humanities with its combination of a methodological research framework, extensive research materials, thematic analysis and deductive reasoning as well as fluent text and interesting layout.

AUTHOR

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SOURCES

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