



Visions of the 105th Finnish Independence Day

CONTESTING THE NON-POLITIZATION
OF SYMBOLS OF THE NATION(AL)
PROJECT



After a hunderd years the flag is red again



Celebrating Independence in front of a building originally built for the Tsars senate some two hundred years ago



The regional Savo flag paying homage to Finnish Independence, the Finnish flag stands in shadow.



Just a band to you?



Whilst the light of our torches clears up the darkness of December, we march on the reverse footsteps of the Funeral march of G. E. Mannerheim



The hat: Once a symbol of the Tsars control - now of celebration

REFLECTIONS

The first idea and with what I originally approached the photography project was somewhat an "Andersonian" vision. I planned to take the photos to highlight the ways in which different artifacts, rituals and symbols during the Independence Day celebration create an Imagined Community of Finland and of the Savo Student Nation (Savolainen osakunta). I chose the 6th of December for the date of the photography, not just as it is a crucial part of Finnish state making and shows a lot of symbols, but to set myself limits on the creation process.

The Nations (osakunnat/nationerna) are special student organizations that were originally created with the first university in Finland in 17th century to keep an eye on the students. The composition of the nations, and what geographical areas "belong" to them, as in where the students joining a nation originate from, has changed throughout the years. For hundreds of years, it was mandatory for students to belong to a Nation (of their origin). When the university moved from Turku to Helsinki in the 19th century, the Nations followed suit. (osakunnat.fi)

The symbols of Nations (band/colours, flags, songs) create the feeling of belonging. Clothes choices by etiquette reflect the togetherness. The Independence Day is a day of creating national unity, but also a day of creating the Nation community. At the Savo Nation, the new members get their black and yellow colours/band (osakuntanauha) during the day. Through the possession of the band, they can officially represent the nation by wearing the colours to important events.

Here is where things took a turn: While photographing, I started to feel that my original research question was stating the obvious. I felt that the photos we're not telling anything new but we're mere replicas of reality in line with the status quo, accepting the supposed neutrality and "naturalness" of the symbols.

Inspired by Mookharjees (2011, p. 5) idea of avoiding the "things-as-they-are devoid of politics", I decided to take my view of the photos to a more abstract level; I want to show how these symbols and visions hide political affect in them, even though they might be seen as status quo, or even neutral, in the

community. With my photographs I want to argue and remind the watcher that the symbols and visions part of the Independence Day and nation building, are products of negotiation and authoritative decisions.

For me the most intriguing part of photography is the power of showing and framing that it holds. Work that especially inspired me was that of Yazan Khalili as shown in Nayrouz Abu Houtums 2011 article. With my photographs I want to challenge what we see as political. I want to courage through written and visual prompts the spectator to see and un-see politicalness in the visuality of the Finnish Independence Day. For me the most inspiring photo was the one with the Finnish flag being lit red by the Lynx-light figure. It reminded me of the fragility of the blue and white flag as the symbol of the Finnish nation – how the flag was and is a political statement and a product of negotiation. I feel that I would not have seen and started to question all the things that I saw without holding the camera with me.

I was not looking for the truth in these photographs. Instead, I am interested in challenging the status quo by creating alternative affects in the photos showing objects and scenes taken as granted by us grown in the Finnish nation state, as we have been subjected to certain affective experiences to grow into the Finnish nation. I believe that we can also question the things near and dear to us. When it comes to political events, I find it even necessary.

While photographing during the events of the 6th of December, I feel that I also had to learn how to do research and how to assert myself and take space, without limiting or distracting others. At times I was not able to photograph due to my own responsibilities during the day. At times I had to step out of my assigned status as a member of a group to be able to photograph and it did take some courage. I wanted the photos to be thought provoking, but respectful. A clear idea for me was to challenge and question, without the goal of destroying or shaming.

All in all, I found this exercise very thought provoking and I feel that I had to do a lot of thinking that in normal course essays I have not been even able to do. This way of producing knowledge feels hard. I personally struggled the most with presenting the photos so that my thought process comes through and with proving to myself that I truly need the photos - I was unsure at times. But all in all, I enjoyed the process, and I am happy I tried this method.

REFERENCES:

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