

Johanna Laakso, Universität Wien (johanna.laakso@univie.ac.at,  
http://homepage.univie.ac.at/Johanna.Laakso)

## **WOMEN IN THE NATIONAL SCIENCES**

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A few words about the background of this paper: I am a Finno-Ugrist, a linguist working mainly with questions of language contact and historical linguistics. This paper is something like a spin-off from a project recently appeared as a book (Laakso 2005). The book was a systematic collection of consciousness-raising essays about certain possible gender-relevant aspects of Finno-Ugric studies. As Finno-Ugristics, especially outside the so-called “Finno-Ugric countries”, includes a wide spectrum of linguistic, literary and cultural studies, I have ventured outside my domain of competence and will also deal with some gender-relevant questions of not only the history of Finnish and Finno-Ugric linguistics but also of folkloristics and historical studies, although historiography will be dealt with by experts at this symposium (cf. also Katainen & al. eds. 2005). For gender questions in folkloristics, Nenola & Timonen (eds. 1990) and Apo & al. (eds. 1998) sum up many important starting points. As for the history of linguistics and language planning, Laitinen (ed. 1988) includes many seminal papers that are still an invaluable source for further studies in these questions.

### ***“National sciences”, Nationalism and Gender***

In Finland as in many other countries as well, the rise of the National Romanticism in the 19th century triggered an interest towards the national language, the national culture and the nation’s past. Together with the professionalization of research in the humanities, this gave rise to the *Nationalwissenschaften* (Fi. *kansalliset tieteet*), i.e. research on national history and folklore, linguistic and philological studies of the national language. As linguistics shared the historicism prevalent in 19th-century science and scientific explanation was equated with the description of the roots and the developments (“evolution”) leading from the past to the present, national philologies often dealt with related languages as well, from a historical-comparative perspective. Linguistic prehistory was equated with the prehistory of the culture and the nation or the ethnic group. All this, from the truly great achievements of 19th-century historical linguistics to the historical-geographic or Finnish method in folkloristics (Hafstein 2001) dealt with the nation, perceived as an organism, and its “evolution”. Most of this even originated from one institutional source, or was originally included in one institution.

All national sciences certainly had their own methods, perspectives and problems, and as, for instance, Evelyn Fox Keller in her feminist critique of nature sciences (Keller 1996) points out, the tradition of science is always polyphonous and includes multiple, competing approaches. Yet, there were some common important background factors conditioning women’s role in the national sciences. The 19th century, which saw the institutionalization and professionalization of many national philologies and historical research, was a markedly patriarchal era. The Romantic Nationalism itself was a masculine project, ascribing masculine qualities to ideas previously seen as female (tradition and “manly education”, intuition, imagination, *Vaterland*) and seeing whole nations as patriarchal families (Fox 1993; Lempäinen 2002) or, as the Finnish psychohistorian Juha Siltala (1999) puts it, seeing the national cause as “The White Mother”. In this framework, women were excluded from active agency— on the ideological level. In reality, women were active in various fields of research. This controversy between ideals and reality, suppression of facts, seems to be a typical pattern of discrimination in general.

As Keller (1988) points out, the development of science and technology in the 19th century coincides with a more and more marked idealization of objectivity in science, making the object of science, i.e. nature, more and more soulless and “machine-like” and emphasizing the difference between the researcher and his (!) object. In this process, the relationship between the

scientist and his object was often described in terms of the dichotomy between dominant masculinity and passive femininity. Similar processes and metaphors of objectification can be seen in the humanities. As R. G. Collingwood (quoted in Katainen & al. 2005: 18) puts it, 19th-century historians gave up the “respectful” attitude of just “listening to” their sources and began to “torture” the sources for answers. In the study of language, the Neogrammarian school with its sound laws as laws of nature, tolerating no exceptions, made linguistics a nature science (anticipating most of 20th-century autonomous linguistics) and simultaneously put an end to earlier views, which had allowed for exceptions and irregularities as “caprices of Lady Language” (*Kielettären oikut*, Sajavaara 1988: 235). Perhaps a similar “dehumanization” can be seen in folkloristics as well, where the Finnish method, actually an application of the historical-comparative method in linguistics, reduced the carriers of folklore into passive vessels of a superhuman, abstract tradition.

In science, as in society in general, the separation of men’s and women’s roles was both institutionalized and naturalized (i.e. argued with the “natural” differences between the sexes). Paradoxically, the same century saw the rise of the movements for women’s rights. The cultural modernization and technological progress in general, although often described as “masculine” and contrasted with the “feminine”, ahistorical past, had strong feminine cross-currents (Felski 1995). The tensions between female and male components, however, remained long under the surface of national and scientific, allegedly gender-neutral structures.

### ***Outside or in the margin***

Already before women had access to formal academic education or university posts, they could be active in the margins of science, doing amateur research, collecting data and assisting male professional researchers. In the early phases of folkloristic fieldwork as studied by Irma-Riitta Järvinen, the female pioneer in Finland was Charlotta Europaeus (1794–1858), sister of the far better known folklore collector D. E. D. Europaeus. For women in those generations, there were no secondary schools or higher education available; Charlotta Europaeus had only studied with private teachers or governesses at home, possibly also in the German-language *Demoisellen-Schule* in Viipuri. Probably inspired by her brother and his friends, she wrote down more than two hundred Finnish folk poems, numerous riddles and proverbs for the collections of the Finnish Literature Society. Later, she learnt to know the Baltic-German doctor and writer Georg Julius Schultz-Bertram (a prominent figure in Estonian cultural history as well) and assisted him in editing a collection of Finnish folk tales and proverbs (*Jenseits der Scheeren oder der Geist Finnlands. Eine Sammlung finnischer Volksmärchen und Sprichwörter*. Leipzig 1854). (Järvinen 2005.)

After Charlotta Europaeus’s almost forgotten work, the next generations of female field folklorists only followed in the 1880s. These women could already graduate from secondary school and study in teacher seminars or even at the university. However, few of them aspired to an independent academic career. Lilli Lilius (later Rainio, 1861–1945) wrote down more than 850 folklore texts, numerous proverbs and riddles, ethnological observations etc. She had graduated from university, passing the MA exams in private, and worked for a while as an assistant of the renowned folklorist Kaarle Krohn, editing his collection of Finnish folktales. However, she ended up with a career typical of an educated unmarried woman of her generation: housekeeping for her brother, occasionally teaching in primary and Sunday schools, translating, writing and being active in various charitable and Christian organizations, such as *Valkonauhaliitto*, the Finnish branch of the World’s Christian Women’s Temperance Union. (Järvinen 2005.)

The folkloristic fieldwork of Charlotta Europaeus and Lilli Lilius, both unmarried, was inspired and supported by their brothers. The other option for many women was to work together with their husbands. Jenny Paulaharju (née Simelius, 1878–1964) assisted her husband, the ethnologist and folklorist Samuli Paulaharju in his work, especially by interviewing female informants about “feminine” matters such as women’s work or traditions and beliefs connected

with childbirth (Järvinen 2005). The first woman appearing in the history of Finnish Finno-Ugristics also combined the roles of wife and assistant: the Hungarian Julie Wichmann (née Hermann, 1881–1974) followed her husband, the Finnish linguist Yrjö Wichmann, to a combined honeymoon trip and field expedition to the Mari, where she pursued her own ethnographic studies (later published as Wichmann 1913) – alongside housekeeping, assisting her husband and studying Finnish, the language of her future homeland. To quote an illustrative passage from a letter of Yrjö Wichmann to his mother: »In the kitchen or oven compartment of the house, Julie usually busies herself until noon together with an old Cheremis woman in her bright-coloured clothing, as she now cooks all our meals herself, and excellently at that. [...] Julie herself likes being busy, as motion is very good for her health. [...] Her studies of the Finnish language do not proceed so fast here, because cooking takes a lot of time. Her ethnographic studies (on women's clothing etc.) are easier here, since we are living in a Cheremis family.» (Wichmann & Wichmann 1987: 60–61.)

Even in later Fennistics and Finno-Ugric studies, there have been women who remained in the history of the discipline as assistants to their husbands. The most beautiful example is probably Helmi Virtaranta (1919–1999), official and unofficial assistant of her husband Pertti Virtaranta, Professor of Finnish at the University of Helsinki. She participated in all aspects of his work, making and transcribing dialect interviews, editing his publications and illustrating them (she trained herself to an excellent photographer), but her name is mentioned as a co-author on the title page in only the latest publications. (Torikka 1999.) As Marja Torikka, her long-time colleague in the Karelian dialect dictionary, puts it in her beautiful obituary: “For Helmi Virtaranta, it was not so important *who* did the work, the main thing was that the work be done.” Similarly to Helmi Virtaranta, Lyyli Rapola (1904–1979) was the wife of a professor of Finnish and had herself an M.A. degree in Finnish language. She collected folklore, dialect vocabulary and toponyms and worked in typical “feminine” functions: as schoolteacher, research assistant, archivist and secretary of the Toponym Archive in the Dictionary Foundation (the predecessor of today's Research Centre for the Languages of Finland).<sup>1</sup> For these women, the marriage with a senior colleague probably had a double-edged effect: on one hand, it legitimized and facilitated their contact with research, on the other hand, it probably tied their hands – but since their role choices were a private and personal matter, we will never know whether or under what conditions these talented women would have aspired to higher academic achievements. In any case: even after it was possible and legitimate for a woman to attempt an academic career, some women chose to remain in an assistant's position.

In the first phases of the national sciences, women's assisting and supporting role was readily acknowledged. Nobody condemned the fieldwork activities of Charlotta Europæus or Lilli Lilius, or other almost nameless women – on the contrary, they were sometimes highly praised for their work. (For instance, Fanny Pajula, about whose biography very little is known, pursued folkloristic fieldwork in Ingria in the 1890s. In 1929, Väinö Salminen called this “an important second harvest for research”. [Järvinen 2005: 92–93.]) However, even in the generation of Lilli Lilius it was difficult or impossible for a woman to think of an independent academic career. In the framework of naturalized gender roles, nobody – perhaps not even the women themselves – saw this as discrimination. Women and men were simply serving the national cause in their respective sectors. As the professionalization in the national sciences was only beginning in the 19th century, the borders between linguistics, folkloristics, ethnology and literature studies were only slowly taking form, and the research, due to its national-romantic, positivist and historicist ideals, was focused on collecting data (salvaging endangered tradition, recording dialects representing an “original” state of affairs etc.), there was enough to do for both sexes. This division of labour was only challenged when more and more women began to fight for their rights to academic education and an academic career.

## ***The First Ones***

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One of the greatest obstacles for women's university studies was the lack of an adequate secondary school education, as only boys' schools could qualify their students for university studies. However, a way for women to knowledge outside the universities was opened relatively early: the development of elementary schools required women to be educated to schoolteacher's profession. In Finland, the founding fathers of the educational system often especially encouraged intelligent young women to become school-teachers and assume their responsibility as educators of the nation. The teacher seminar in Jyväskylä, the first Finnish-language institute of higher education open for both sexes since 1863, probably contributed to the awakening of women's educational ambitions also by making them conscious of discrimination. Although the leaders of the Finnish nationalist movement readily acknowledged women's importance in elementary education, they were far less eager to grant them rights for university studies (which could make women eligible for state office). The battle for the right to higher education, in fact, was one of the main incentives for Finnish women to get organized (Laitinen & Vartiainen 1988).

Formal equality in secondary education, as achieved by the end of the 19th century, did not directly lead to equality in academia. Eeva Kangasmaa-Minn, Finland's first female PhD in Finno-Ugric language studies, tells in her interview (Kytömäki & Rautala 1988) how her teacher in a girls' grammar school in the 1930s explicitly warned her pupils against academic studies: women should not pursue higher studies "unless they have a really ardent thirst for knowledge". Although the doors of universities were open to women in practice (by dispensation) from the 1870s on, right to state office, including professor's posts, only followed many decades later, in the 1920s. The new or growing research institutions, archives and scholarship systems in the national sciences made it possible for more and more academically educated women to engage themselves in research, but these women seldom made their way to a PhD.

For instance, a triad of women – Helmi Helminen (1905–1976), Astrid Reponen and Maija Juvas, also connected by a personal friendship – pursued linguistic and folkloristic fieldwork in the 1930s and 40s and collected valuable material (for instance, the debated data on the *Sampo* mythology among the "Forest Finns" in Värmland, Sweden; Kosonen 1988, Järvinen 2005). Maija Juvas was also the first female author to appear in the most important Finnish journal of Finno-Ugristics, *Finnisch-Ugrische Forschungen* (founded 1901), with her survey on folk rhymes and tradition about the ladybird, in 1937. These women were generally known as "the three *magistrae* of the Finnish Literature Society".

The first women who acquired a doctor's degree could not – or would not – rely on a secure academic future, not even after World War II, despite the massive expansion of academic institutions, the founding of new universities and institutes. Elsa Enäjärvi-Haavio (1901–1951), folklorist and Finland's first female PhD in her discipline, was a Docent ("Privatdozentin") at the University of Helsinki but never had a full-time post at the university. Before her premature death, she considered applying for an extraordinary professor's post. In reality, she remained torn between numerous activities, teaching, editing, writing, political and social activism, homemaking (she was mother of five children) and supporting her husband's career. Martti Haavio was a professor of folkloristics and a renowned poet. Elsa and Martti worked each on independent projects and themes of their own, but they also discussed their work with each other, supported and encouraged each other, and in 1931, Elsa Enäjärvi gave her own unused material to her husband to help him towards a docent's and professor's post<sup>2</sup>.

Eeva Lindén (1896–1992), first female PhD in Finnish language (1942), was appointed Docent of Finnish language at the university of Helsinki in 1952, and worked as a lecturer of Finnish at the university until her retirement in 1965, but until the 1970s, all other lecturer's posts at the Helsinki institute of Finnish remained firmly in male hands (although already in her generation a clear majority of the students of Finnish were female; Halonen 1996). Eeva Kangasmaa-Minn, Finland's first female PhD in Finno-Ugristics (1966), narrowly lost an ordinary professor's post to Alho Alhoniemi; in her interview she also expresses her belief that she would have similarly lost the associate professor's post to an equally competent male colleague in 1966, had

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.helsinki.fi/akka-info/tiedenaiset/enajarvi/aviopari.htm>, accessed May 2006.

he not been chosen to a full professor's post at another university. Both Lindén and Kangasmaa-Minn were granted an extraordinary or honorary professor's title only late in life.

Which academic disciplines were studied by women depended on various factors. Beside medicine and some nature sciences, history and literature were often considered particularly suitable for women. Furthermore, as the schoolteacher's profession was a socially accepted and financially rewarding career choice for a woman, many women also chose to study modern philologies, which qualified them for a language teacher's job.

The prejudices worked the other way round, too: the feminization of these disciplines was later taken as a sign of a crisis for the whole discipline, as in this quotation from a farewell speech held by Lauri Hakulinen, Professor of Finnish at the University of Helsinki, on the occasion of his retirement 1963:

A French professor of science once said to his colleagues, with esprit: "Actually, our sole mission is to lead the student up to the personal, deeply moving experience of creativity. Once he has experienced it, he has reached his goal [...]" I would not be surprised if this provokes our somewhat parched colleagues Öhmann, Reuter, Mustanoja and Thors [professors of European philologies] to a skeptical smile. We understand that when they step forward to meet their gigantic feminine audience, what they see in the eyes of their curly-headed listeners is not deep enthusiasm for learning but usually the desire to be able to teach "practical" German, English or Swedish to the people of Finland, as soon as possible. Nor will Pertti Virtaranta's [professor of Finnish] up to 80% female audience offer perspectives of any other kind: the only victor's laurel they are aspiring to is the green bough of a schoolteacher's post. This, I suppose, is the hard reality in our highest academic education. (L. Hakulinen 1999: 410, my translation)

As a contrast to Hakulinen's vivid picture: a photo taken in 1959 (and published in *Virittäjä* 1996, in the volume celebrating the 100th anniversary of Eeva Lindén's birth) shows the people who had to face the feminized audience, teachers of Finnish and related disciplines at the University of Helsinki in 1959. Eeva Lindén, the only woman in the front row, is surrounded by stern gentlemen in dark suits. It is obvious that this gender contrast between teachers and students was seen as something deeply disturbing, and it is very interesting to note how teachers interpreted this contrast.

In addition to the famous glass ceiling phenomenon, we could also speak of glass walls which avert women from certain disciplines and, even after they have fought their way into higher institutions of learning, separate them into certain feminized disciplines, schools or research approaches. This leads to a vicious circle of feminization: feminized disciplines losing their prestige and women being directed towards low-prestige disciplines.

### ***Inside and outside the glass walls***

In linguistics and folkloristics, we can observe the glass wall effect in two ways that can be seen as representing what Susan Gal (2005) has called "fractal recursion": basic distinctions repeating themselves on different levels of institutional organization. In this case, this means both "women's disciplines", i.e. feminization of certain disciplines, and "women's niches" within certain disciplines, feminized or not.

For instance, in Finnish folkloristics, before the 1970s women were often restricted to assistant functions and kept out of the most prestigious areas of study: mythology and heroic epic poetry. Elsa Enäjärvi-Haavio specialized in children's and women's lore, and even in the 1960s and 70s, young female folklorists were directed towards micro-folklore: riddles and proverbs. (Apo & al. 1998: 22.) In the history of Finnish language planning, the most famous example is probably "Kodin sanasto" (Home vocabulary) composed by the previously mentioned Lilli Lilius and Ilmi Hallstén in 1896: two educated ladies were given the task to find genuine Finnish words for the utensils and activities of an urban bourgeois home (Vartiainen 1988). The vocabulary introduced several words now firmly established in the Finnish language, such as *jäätelö* 'ice

cream' or *vuoka* 'bake form', but obviously nobody thought of giving women an active role outside this area perceived as specifically feminine. Women as language users were end users of a product created by men (Laitinen & Vartiainen 1988).

The second form of the glass wall effect is the feminization of certain disciplines and subdisciplines. In this respect, it is particularly interesting to compare Finnish and Finno-Ugric language studies, two disciplines which originally belonged closely together but were increasingly separated from each other during the 20th century. One of the factors connected with this separation was that while studies in Finnish gave the qualification for the schoolteacher's profession, Finno-Ugristics either did not or even if it did, it implied a lot of "useless" studies of exotic languages, historical linguistics etc. In her interview (Kytömäki & Rautala 1988), Eeva Kangasmaa-Minn, the first woman in Finland to acquire a PhD degree in Finno-Ugric linguistics, reminiscing on her student days, tells how she would have wanted to write her M.A. thesis on a Finno-Ugric theme but never dared to ask – the themes her professor gave her only dealt with the history and dialects of the Finnish language. Even as late as the late 1990s, the female majority of students of Finno-Ugric and Finnic languages at the University of Helsinki was slightly but consistently smaller than in Finnish language.

Obviously, Finnish was considered more appropriate for women. Not only was there a contrast between the "more practical" Finnish language, and the "more scientific" Finno-Ugric language studies. Fennistics – like folkloristics and ethnology – also included "women's niches", female-specific themes such as the vocabulary of women's handwork. Pirkko Nuolijärvi (1991) has analyzed papers written by women in Finland's leading journal of Fennistics, *Virittäjä*. Already in the 1930s, some 60 women wrote in *Virittäjä*, mostly about teaching Finnish at schools or about dialectological or folkloristic fieldwork. In the leading journal of Finno-Ugric studies, *Finnisch-Ugrische Forschungen*, in comparison, only one paper written by a woman, on a folkloristic theme, appeared in the 1930s, and Finnish female débutantes in the core area of Finno-Ugristics, i.e. historical-comparative language studies, only arrived in the 1950s.

In these women's niches, it has also been possible for women to bring in different perspectives or approaches. Already in the late 19th and early 20th century, some female field folklorists and ethnologists anticipated what has later been called "deep research" or "thick corpus", as opposed to the dominant historical-geographic approach, i.e. they emphasized a close and intensive, time-consuming work with one informant at a time, while male researchers typically wanted to "cover" as wide areas and as many informants as possible (Järvinen 2005: 92–95). Or, as Terhi Utriainen has pointed out, in the folkloristic study of laments – a women's genre *par excellence* – it was only the arrival of female researchers in more than token numbers that helped to see the lamenting woman in a social context, as a member of women's networks, and not as male researchers had portrayed the masters of lament poetry, as solitary phenomena, "alone of all her sex" like the Virgin Mary (Utriainen 1988: 184). In Finno-Ugristics, or at least in its core area, historical-comparative linguistics, no such women's niches can be found, as the research object is a gender-neutral abstraction, a language system shared by all speakers regardless of gender (cf. Laakso 2003). And if women's niches are found, they are sometimes covered with a specific glass ceiling – this seems to be the case with Finnish syntax and semantics in the 1920s and -30s. In traditional Neogrammarian linguistics, these themes were often neglected, but female students seemed to favour them in their M. A. theses – almost none of them continued to PhD (Halonen 1996).

## **Conclusions**

The question aroused by the comparison between Fennistics and Finno-Ugristics would deserve more detailed research. Is it really so, or why is it so that areas where gender-specific themes and approaches are difficult to find, i.e. purely theoretic and "scientific" areas of research are more masculine or resist the feminization of academia, in contrast with research themes pertaining to human behaviour and society? This can also be observed in linguistics in general, where applied

linguistics is often seen as more feminine or more feminized, compared with theoretical and autonomous linguistics. The latter may also serve as an example of “linguistic science”, a discipline on the border between culture (i.e. the humanities) and nature, and thus includes ideologies and attitudes typical of so-called patriarchal science, that is: a strict subject-object dichotomy, an emphasis on objectivity, formalizability, minimalism and hierarchical structures. Is it these qualities that avert women from science, by making it difficult for them to identify with the stereotypical masculine researcher, as some feminist critics have suggested? This could mean that a great part of the equality problems lies with recruitment of students, with the feminine-specific preferences of young women – in this case, the difference between the feminization of Fennistics and Finno-Ugristics could be symptomatic of a greater problem.

Another question especially relevant in this context is the relationship between the national sciences and the patriarchal ideologies underlying both Romantic Nationalism and the nation-state project. Serving the cause of the Fatherland inspired both women and men to work on the grassroots level of knowledge and research: in elementary education, in collecting and editing material for more theoretical studies. However, on higher levels of learning and research women were imprisoned under a glass ceiling or within glass walls, in a women’s niche. The existence of glass ceilings and glass walls was at least partly hidden by noble patriotic motivations. The pioneers of Finnish national sciences sometimes explicitly stated that they were primarily working for the greater glory of their Fatherland and nation, not in order to achieve academic merits. This idealism, a sense of a higher mission, can be effectively used to hide inequality and discrimination.

The framework of traditional gender roles within the construction of a nation as a “family writ large” allowed women to use their hands and hearts but not their heads; on the other hand, the legacy of the romantic genius cult in science also excluded women from active agency on higher levels of research. All this amounts to a pattern of discrimination, accumulating and building itself on the basis of alleged scientific gender neutrality. Women in national sciences have faced problems similar to those of women in all sciences – it is only that the specific goals of their research may have made inequality and discrimination less conspicuous, more difficult to tackle.

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