

“WOULD I HAVE BEEN BETTER OFF THERE?” COMPARISON, NEED AND CONDUCTIVENESS IN A FINNISH EMIGRANT’S ACCOUNT

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ABSTRACT

Processes of comparison are central when we make our decisive choices of ways of living. This article is based on an interview with an immigrant who negotiates with himself over why he went away from Finland and why he stayed in South Africa. His line of argument can be analysed using Abraham Maslow’s theory of human motivation. Conductiveness turns out to be his main motivation, and comparison is, implicitly or explicitly, a tool for verbalising this conductiveness.

KEYWORDS: emigration • comparison • conductiveness • negotiation • South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Processes of comparison are central when we make our decisive choices of ways of living (Lehmann 2007: 181). We shape our lives according to – or in contrast to – other people’s lives. Patterns for how other people have chosen to ‘make’ their lives can be regarded as positive models that are worthy of imitation as much as possible, or, at least, as an ideal to strive for. However, they can also be negative models that function as warnings: “This is exactly the kind of life that I do *not* want to lead”. In the first case, analogy and identification help us to accept a specific way of living (see, for example, Dutton 2009: 21 on comparison and analogy). In the second case we revolt against it. Consequently, comparison can have both a positive and a negative effect upon people’s lives. In this process of making choices, place is a meaningful component. The underlying questions are existential and could be something like: “Can I feel that this is the right place for me?” Behind this question a lot of other questions hide, such as: “Do I find my outcome here?”, “Do I find a companion for my life here?”, “Can I fill my needs in different aspects here?”

Moreover, when we remember and tell other people about our life choices, we re-enact them when, mentally, we establish contact with ourselves as a different person, the doings and decisions of whom we regard from the ‘outside’. We evaluate these life choices and negotiate with ourselves in a process of assessment (Wolf-Knuts 2000a: 129). We cope with our own decisions. Behind this process stand questions such as: “Did I really make a wise choice when I made up my mind about this place, what would have happened if or if not...?” It is probably important that we are able to find some kind of significance in the ways in which we shape our lives. When people regard their lives in the driving-mirror of life, they cope with a design that, over a great number of years,

their lives got, or a design that they think they gave to it. Generally, coping theories are rooted in crises or more or less sudden critical situations (cf. Pargament 1997). The theories try to explain how people overcome difficulties. However, in this case, when I interviewed an emigrant who settled well and told me about his decisions to go and to stay, the crisis is perhaps not sudden, not even obvious. The same need for significance and meaning can be seen as in a sudden critical situation for which coping is important. Here I want to ponder upon how a Finland-Swedish emigrant negotiates with me, and perhaps above all, with himself about his decision to leave Finland for South Africa. What made him decide to stay in South Africa? What was the central concept in his account? What kept him from going back and forth between South Africa and Finland, as so many other immigrants did?

MARTIN

In my work I interviewed Martin,¹ a person who was probably not used to formulating his life story.² I came to this conclusion because, during the interview, he was often searching for expressions that he could approve of. I was the one to ask him to tell me about his emigration. In that way, I forced him to formulate a consistent entity from his experiences. I was struck by his way of repeatedly³ correcting and modifying himself during the interview. Studies about this kind of account based on interviews can be divided along two lines. On the one hand the student concentrates on the contents, he or she studies what the narrator finds important enough to tell during an interview. On the other hand the student shows an interest in the form of the account, in how the interviewee formulates him- or herself in order to demonstrate what he or she finds important (Arvidsson 1998: 7). To me, a combination of these two perspectives is the best way to understand and interpret what Martin said.

Martin, born in 1943, comes from the Swedish speaking part of Ostrobothnia, along the central western coast of Finland. He decided to leave his home country Finland in 1960. He was then seventeen years old. After the Second World War Finland was a poor country, not able in every respect to satisfy people's dreams of a good life. Looking for work and a decent way of living Martin went to Sweden, a country that did not experience war in the same way that Finland did. He stayed there for a year, then returned to Finland and went to South Africa in 1962. There he married a South African woman of partly Finnish descent. In July 1967, he and his wife moved back to Finland. He tried to find some work there, but he was not content with the given opportunities so in 1968, after seven to eight months, the couple went to Sweden and Martin got a good job there. Around two years later, his wife's homesickness brought the couple back to South Africa, where they stayed, raised three children and founded an undertaking. (IF mgt 1998: 26; IF mgt 1998: 27–28) Martin's story about why and how he decided to leave Finland for other countries is my main field of interest here. He is one of hundreds of thousands of Nordic citizens who emigrated from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden from the middle of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century.⁴

I interviewed Martin in January 1998 in his home in a South African town. The interview lasted a little more than an hour. We had met before, so we knew each other, and

Martin also knew that I was familiar with his Swedish dialect, although he still wanted to speak English. This was quite a surprise to me since the other interviewees preferred Swedish, even those who were small children when their parents took them to South Africa. My presence did not inspire him to speak our common mother tongue, but he chose the language which, for the time being, he felt most convenient, that is, English, which was also the common language in his family and at work. Only a few words were in Swedish. I think it was of some help in establishing contact that Martin knew I was familiar with his home place in Ostrobothnia, and also that I knew some of his relatives in Finland and that I had conducted an interview with his wife some hours before. Still, he was quite tense when we started. He had a problem with his throat. A cough annoyed him repeatedly. I do not know if he had ever before verbalised his thoughts about his emigration, which might explain his tenseness and sore throat. Anyway, I had a vivid feeling that Martin was quite uncomfortable.⁵ Aware of the fact that some people tend to become so eager when they talk about their lives that they forget the recorder, I offered him the opportunity to stay anonymous, which he accepted. Consequently, Martin is not the real name of my informant.

Indeed, one single and relatively short interview does not tell very much about general ways of speaking about emigration or about general ways of negotiation. On the other hand, one interview makes it possible to go into detail that cannot be studied in a larger body of material. One interview can show that a person is able to make a specific place meaningful in different ways within a limited part of his life account. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that several interviews with one and the same interviewee do not change the kernel of narratives (cf. Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1996; Ukkonen 2000).⁶ I assume that this is true also for accounts. I want to investigate what reasons Martin gives me for his emigration. What did he find in South Africa that he did not find in Finland? How did he explain this to me? Certainly, in an interview about emigration, place is a central concept.

THE EMIGRATION MODEL

In Finland at the end of the nineteenth, and during the twentieth, century, the general model for young people was to go, for a longer or shorter period, sometimes for the rest of their lives, to another country in order to earn money. Sometimes they sent the money home to their parents, wife/husband and children, although they might also stay abroad for a long enough period to save money and bring a fortune back home. Certainly, many of them never returned. Quite a large portion of Ostrobothnian culture and economic prosperity shows influences that the emigrants found in the United States of America, Australia, or South Africa, not to mention the sheer money brought home and turned into visible material wealth (see, for instance, Rein 1895: 1; Ruusu-vuori 2010: 29). In other words, there was a grand narrative about emigration and the earning of money somewhere else, which touched everyone in Ostrobothnia, including Martin.⁷

In Finland in the 1950s and 1960s, economic conditions were hardly good. After the war there was much to do to restore and develop the country; however, there was very

little money for this great task. Moreover, during this time, and even in the 1970s, the widely spread custom of migration is explained by the fact that the generation born after the war was numerous. All these people reached working age at the same time. The majority of them were born in the countryside, but the labour opportunities were poor among rural people who were not born as family members on a farm. The working outcome did not meet with the young people's expectations for a good living standard. A large number of people left the countryside for the towns, where industrialisation intensified (Pitkänen 1994: 50). Others emigrated. For instance, an emigrant from Ostrobothnia working in construction told me about his will to work hard. However, it was weakened by the lack of working possibilities and by poor conditions. For instance, to him the cold winters were an impediment. He told me:

When one was working on a job in winter when it was cold and one's hands were frozen and [carpenter's] nails got stuck in one's fingers, well, well, when one should remove the snow from the timber when working, the bricks were frozen so that one had to warm them up before building. [...] It was life and distress, it was distress, to live, it was no joke. (IF mgt 1998: 34–35)

This informant repeatedly mentioned that distress and need were overwhelming, and that this was not the kind of life he wanted for himself. Therefore he emigrated. In other words, he acted according to the grand narrative about emigration and crossed it with another grand narrative, the narrative of a better life.

Martin also followed these two narratives when he left. In his account he related phase after phase of decisions that he made in order either to emigrate or to return, and he tried to convince himself and me that his decisions were correct. Certainly, geographical places and the quality of them were central factors in his story, but there were also other ingredients worthy of my attention when I tried to answer questions concerning by which means and strategies a person justified the form of his life, or how he negotiated his decision to shift dwelling places repeatedly, or what factors were most important when at last he stayed and how this place was related to the most important components in his life.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND METHOD

According to Abraham Maslow's now classic 1940s theory of human motivation, we should count five layers of need that may bring human beings to activity. They are the physiological drives, safety needs, the need for belongingness and love, esteem needs, and the need for self-actualization (see Maslow 1970: 35–58). Although Maslow has been criticized for, among other things, having created an armchair model difficult to apply empirically to a person's life narrative (see, for example, Sjöberg 1999), I have found his thoughts highly useful in the analysis of emigrants' lives.

Maslow states that physiological needs are crucial for man's wellbeing. As an example he says: "Utopia can be defined simply as a place where there is plenty of food" (Maslow 1970: 37). Meeting physiological needs is crucial, for if this is not done various other needs will be suppressed. I interpret Maslow in this case as saying that physiological needs point towards corporeal needs. According to Maslow, safety needs consist of

the need for, for instance, security and protection, freedom from fear and chaos, and the need for law and order (ibid.: 39). According to my understanding, safety needs are connected with work and income, knowledge and insight, or justice and equality. Insight can certainly be connected with knowledge of a practical kind, such as doing a metier, but insight also has a spiritual perspective: "insight is usually a bright, happy, emotional spot in any person's life" Maslow states (ibid.: 50). The needs for belongingness and love are easily understood, but we have to take into consideration that the opposite means rejection, friendlessness and rootlessness (ibid.: 43), which often lie behind emigration and immigration. Immigration can demonstrate how lonely a person really is in his or her new surroundings. Esteem needs are connected with self-esteem and the esteem of others. Maslow divides these needs into two categories: firstly, the desire to achieve something, the desire for competence, for the feeling of being useful, and, secondly, the "desire for reputation or prestige" (ibid.: 45). The feeling of being useful is opposed to the feelings of being useless or helpless. Lastly, and as the fifth layer of needs, Maslow mentions the need for self-actualization. Thereby he hints at the importance for people to do exactly what they are suited for, to fulfil their ideal. I interpret his thought of self-actualization as meaning that people cannot feel content unless they know that they are in every respect in the right place.

Need is a central concept in Maslow's theoretical construction. My central analytical tool is made up of words that relate to need, or other expressions that represent the meaning of something a person longs for to a greater or lesser extent. Its counterpart is satisfaction. When a need is fulfilled the person can feel satisfaction. However, satisfaction is not enough if one regards satisfaction as just fulfilling a need or removing the lack of something (cf. Dundes who, in 1964, introduced the concept of liquidated lack). There are differences in satisfaction: one can be more or less satisfied. A meal is fine if one is really hungry, shelter from rain might satisfy a person momentarily, and so forth. But for a lasting satisfaction the remedy should contain greater values: it should be conducive. It should even be conducive in the long run. According to The Chambers Dictionary conducive means, "leading, contributing or tending, favourable to or helping towards something", and conducive to means "helping towards, promoting or encouraging" (*The Chambers Dictionary* 2003: 317). The Oxford Thesaurus of English mentions "good for, helpful to, instrumental in, calculated to produce, productive of, useful for; favorable, beneficial, valuable, advantageous, opportune, propitious, encouraging, promising, convenient; (be conducive to) contribute to, lead to, tend to promote, make for, facilitate, favor, aid, assist, help, benefit, encourage" (Waite 2006: 160). Without doubt, conducive is a concept with positive connotations. However, the path to conduciveness can be difficult and filled with obstacles and tribulations. Not until the person who walks that path is able to interpret his or her experience in a manner that gives significance and meaning can this path be regarded as conducive. A person regards this path as conducive with the help of his or her entire frame of reference and with a specific goal in view.

The feeling of conduciveness is the result of comparison. It takes comparison to find out whether or not a satisfaction is conducive. Comparison is a research method very well known in the humanities, and also in folkloristics. For a long time it played a very sophisticated role. Comparison as a method of research is still scrutinized by philosophers of social sciences (see, for example, Gentner 1982; Wolf-Knuts 2000b; Arvidsson

2008: 59–64; Dutton 2009: 55–56). However, in this article I will not make use of comparison as a scholarly device to analyse folklore. Instead, I want to underline that the ways in which our co-operators in an interview, the interviewees, conduct comparison is less studied. Consequently, I want to see how an informant made use of comparison when he told about his choice of a conducive dwelling place abroad. My main questions are then: What needs did Martin experience, how did he decide what places were conducive for him when he tried to find a suitable living place?

I will analyse my interview along the lines of how Martin presented the different phases of his emigration. My starting point is that Martin chose his goals for emigration according to their tentative value in aspects of physiological needs, safety needs, needs for belongingness and love, esteem needs, and the need for self-actualization, and that he compared places in a way that was most significant and conducive to him in these aspects. With the help of a method based on close reading (Nordbäck 2009: 28–39) I want to conduct my analysis with the help of the concepts of comparison, need and conduciveness as my analytical tools.

THE INTERVIEW

The interview with Martin took place in his home. It was quite a big, solid building surrounded by a well-tended garden. The whole atmosphere was calm, harmonious, and there was evidence of wellbeing, prosperity and a good life without being ostentatious. Nobody else was there. Nobody listened to his account except me. Nobody disturbed us. Martin sat on the sofa and I sat opposite him on a chair near the sofa table, on which the recorder sat. The interview was conducted in his living room, windows opened to the warm fresh air from the Indian Ocean some miles away. Certainly, an interview is a situation in which the folklorist asks questions and the interviewee answers them. Today, an interview is regarded as co-operation between two equal partners, rather than a situation of questions and answers. But an interview is not only a 'closed' event that takes place at a special time in a special place. Certainly, physically it is so, but mentally an interview is open ended almost to infinity, so to say. When we were sitting there speaking about Martin's emigration, he selected what he wanted to speak about, he remembered places and events, he furnished them mentally with a landscape, with people, with sensations and emotions, with hope and grief. To some extent he used his imagination to make the images of his account vivid. I understood what he told me, but I hardly really understand what he was telling me, for I have not had his experiences (Dutton 2009: 21). When telling me about his moves around the world he re-shaped his life in front of me. He used his voice, words and gestures; I listened, and, to some extent, I saw his world with my inner eye. He re-entered his places through his memory and his language, he re-shaped them for me (Casey 2000: 186; Brockmeyer 2008: 21) and he invited me to go there, too, by every now and then leaving the narrative about his emigration and turning his attention back to me in his evaluations and negotiations. In this way I was not merely a listener, but also a person to whom he tried to explain himself and his deeds, a person whom he tried to convince, and who was a kind of a sounding board. When he told me about his emigration and his thoughts about the whole process he trusted me. I received his image of the move from Finland to South Africa as a gift

(Nynäs 2008: 165). According to Henri Lefebvre in my understanding, Martin spoke about his perceived places and I turned them into conceived places when I listened to his description, while both of us sat in a lived space, his sitting room (Lefebvre 1991: 38f; Österlund-Pötzsch 2010: 198).

MARTIN'S DECISION TO LEAVE FINLAND

The interview started with Martin's decision to leave Finland. He referred to his keenness to go away, because his brother had already left for America. The model of his brother was important to him. His father had also emigrated, and he stated: "like they used to do in those days, he would go away for a couple of years and come back, earn money, and come back to Finland" (IF mgt 1998: 26). To his father, lack of income was perhaps one of the reasons to leave Finland. At least, money was what he brought home. Another factor that made Martin think of emigration was his background in a home that did not encourage education. In this way Martin expressed an ideal of a home with support and encouragement, factors that he did not have. A third factor is implicit: times were bad in Finland; life there was poor.

The mechanism behind his decision to leave was a series of comparisons: between himself and his father and brother; between his family, uninterested in education and encouragement, and other families better off in this regard; between poor and rich countries. By comparison he valued his life in Finland in a way that he stated:

I suppose I also had, and as times were, with the background and the home I came from, I think it was conducive to leaving, and not having the encouragement, I think, which I suppose most homes would have, I never did have it to further my education, and I found it easiest to, not easiest, wanted so the big role, I suppose. (IF mgt 1998: 26)

Connecting this part of the analysis to Maslow's theory of needs, we find that Martin did not speak about physiological needs. Indeed, Finland was poor, but in the 1950s there was food enough. Most people had somewhere to live and clothes to protect them from cold weather. All these needs were mainly fulfilled at a basic level. We can draw the conclusion that the memory of corporeal needs did not create the strategy when Martin told me why he emigrated. I think that safety needs had driven him to make his decision. Maslow maintains that the safety needs category covers the need for security and order. I interpret Martin's mention of his family not supporting him in education as a critical standpoint towards his own position in the family. Obviously he wanted more than his family could offer. Perhaps he felt different from other members because he had higher ambitions than they did.⁸ This interpretation leads me to think that the need for esteem also played a role in his decision to go away. Many different kinds of deficiency in Finland, in combination with a comparison with other, better-off places, made him think of emigration to another, better place and also of realising this plan.

It is even questionable if his home surroundings could be regarded a place, after all. Edward S. Casey maintains a difference between site and place. According to him, a site has width, depth and breadth, but it is empty: "A site possesses no points of attachment onto which to hang our memories, much less to retrieve them" (Casey 2000: 186). A

place, he maintains, is filled with memories and helps us remember. Certainly, Martin remembers his home in Ostrobothnia, and does so in an emotionally negative way. His experience of being left without the support of his family made him see that he could have better conditions (see, also, Byrne 2003: 34). He did attach memories to his home, although negative. And he did retrieve his critical memories in our conversation. However, Casey also says when describing place that, "to be in a place is to be sheltered and sustained by its containing boundary" (Casey 2000: 186). Certainly, Martin did not feel sheltered and sustained at home. It was precisely because of his comparison between his real life and his dream of another life that he left Ostrobothnia.

There was a reason for why Martin picked South Africa, and this reason was a woman who visited his neighbourhood together with her father, who had also emigrated from Finland. His new home country was South Africa. The woman's name was Anne. Somewhat surprised, Martin told me that he wanted to emigrate "even before" he met Anne. From this statement I can see that her influence upon Martin was important, but that he would probably have emigrated somewhere, anyhow. Obviously the two fell in love, and when she went back home with her father, Martin followed them. He intended to stay for a few years. So he did, and returned to Finland with Anne, who was now his wife, and their first and then only son. In this passage we can see that not only did real factors play a role in Martin's wish to change his life, but that emotions were also important. In this case love facilitated his decision about which country he wanted to visit. According to Maslow, love is one of the most important needs for a human being. However, in the interview love did not play a very strong part in Martin's way of recounting his decision to emigrate. Love was an obvious factor neither in the reasons he gave for staying in South Africa, nor in the reasons why South Africa became his country. At the time of the interview it was clear that Anne is important in Martin's life. Perhaps after decades of marriage, Martin regarded love as a self-evident explanation, not worthy of any discussion, for why he lived in South Africa. When it comes to love I cannot find any clear utterance about need or conduciveness in the interview.

I asked Martin what he thought was the thing most difficult to leave behind. He told me that his sisters had lives of their own to maintain and that his brother was in the United States of America, but also that his mother was old and in poor health. He said: "I did find that a burden". I was impressed by his frank way of stating this real feeling. In making his decision to leave he had to compare two emotions: his love for Anne and the bond to his mother. In the interview he did not mention which one was the strongest one, but in any case he did follow Anne when she returned to her home in South Africa. In the interview the unspoken conduciveness of love beat feelings of duty and responsibility towards his ill mother.

However, afterwards this decision was not easy to accept, for even when the interview was made nearly forty years later, Martin admitted: "still today I have almost got a bit of a guilt feeling for leaving her, although she's dead now for many years" (IF mgt 1998: 26). Again we can see how his place in South Africa is not completely harmonious. There is a fly in the ointment. I had the feeling that Martin was excusing himself to me: it was more acceptable to him to have left his old mother if he admitted his bad conscience. He also told me that it was difficult to leave friends and other people, but that he did not miss Finland. He said that he wanted to go out into the world and look forward, so leaving his home country did not really worry him. In other words, he

expected to find more of what he was looking for in terms of work and ‘a life’ in a place other than at home.

MARTIN’S EXPECTATIONS AND IMPRESSIONS

Obviously Martin did not have any expectations about South Africa. At least he did not mention them to me. The only thing that he said was that his future sister-in-law had visited the country, but that she was not very happy there. During the interview he remembered that his first impression of Cape Town was that it was beautiful and hot:

The first impression, I came on a boat, which took four weeks from Göteborg [Gothenburg] in Sweden. We landed in Cape Town, I thought it was a stunning country, beautiful country, very hot, very hot, I think it was the first impression. (IF mgt 1998: 26)

When I asked Martin for his expectations he told me that the country was hazy to him, for he was so young, just twenty one years old. Everything was just too big. But he also stated frankly and repeatedly that he did not expect anything. He just wanted to work. Lack of work at home was one of the reasons why he left, he told me.

Lack of work might seem a rather trivial reason to leave one’s home country. However, if we regard work as one of the most important values in a person’s life, or in society, it is easier to understand how a shortage of work can influence people to make such a life-changing decision. The Ostrobothnian view of work has been obvious since the 19th century. In *Boken om vårt land* (The Book Of Our Country) (1876) Zacharias Topelius mentioned the Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnians as having both a good and a bad reputation. He regarded them partly as skilful craftsmen, especially within the realm of construction, and partly as ill tempered, especially if they had drunk too much (Rein 1895: 1; Topelius 1993 [1930]: 204–205). This book had an extremely significant impact for it was widely read in both Swedish schools in Finland and in Finnish schools. Indeed, this image of the skilful craftsman from Ostrobothnia survived for a long time.⁹ We have to combine it with the fact that the Swedish parts of Ostrobothnia were heavily influenced by Protestant revivalist movements, according to which work and diligence are sought-after and appreciated virtues. Proverbs such as *Den som inte vill arbeta han skall heller inte äta* (He who will not work shall not eat) (cf. 2 Thess. 3: 10), or *Lättjan är alla lasters moder* (Laziness is the mother of all vices) were accepted as ideals. John Lindow has demonstrated that the relationship between eating and work was crucial in Nordic peasant society. He maintained that seriously ill children who would eat and grow without producing food were regarded as changelings from the Other world (Lindow 2008: 222–223). “Quiet, i.e., gentleness, thrift, moderateness, diligence, drive, domesticity, and orderliness” (Wolf-Knuts 1991: 63) were ideals for a good inhabitant, and diligence in combination with entrepreneurship often resulted in economic success (Villstrand 2002: 47). Knowing this background it is easier to understand why Martin was not content with his life in Finland for he could not get the education he longed for. Neither could he have the work challenge that he desired. He dreamt of a conceived place to substitute for the one he perceived at home.

Martin also had to learn English. Being without knowledge of the general language of the place in which he lived would not have been conducive. To him, English was

so important that he said, "I just wanted to come and work, just work, and obviously the big thing was to learn the language and try and get into a life here". This statement gives the impression that Martin did not regard his time in Finland as a "life". If this is true, we can say that he emigrated in order to find a place where he could find a life according to his ideals. In Maslow's terminology, I see Martin's formulation as an expression of the need for esteem. At home, he thought that he did not have a life, that he was useless. He went away in order to achieve something, to get a life. But at the same time he stated: "I don't think I expected anything, I was, I was so green, I was so green and young" (IF mgt 1998: 26). During the interview, we see that Martin had a clear sense of himself. His need for esteem in combination with the lack of expectation and with the conceived place of which he dreamt as a place where his life might take quite a different, conducive, form compared to what he was used to, can be regarded in a positive way as facilitating adjustment to a new environment.

THE FIRST IMPRESSION OF SOUTH AFRICA

In his story about his emigration journey Martin mentioned the boat, but he left out all kinds of detail. I had the feeling that the boat and the journey itself did not mean very much to him. Perhaps in the terminology of Casey, we might say that Martin just passed a lot of sites. His first impression of Cape Town, where he landed, was that it was hot. The explanation for this came in the following sentence: "we came just before Christmas, and of course coming from Finland, Sweden then, it was, it was a shock to me" (IF mgt 1998: 26). And certainly, it must have been stunning to come from the complete December darkness in Sweden and Finland to the light of an African summer day, and from the cold and wet Finnish flat land of Ostrobothnia to the warm, moist and hilly coast of southern Africa. In his story he did not elaborate on his comparison in detail, but the way he expressed himself allows me to interpret what he said in this way. The first impression of Africa was positive.

However, right after this sentence, Martin continued: "although the race relations was a bit confusing to me. It was upsetting at times, I didn't understand it" (IF mgt 1998: 26). Lack of understanding could have ended in a negative opinion about African society as not acceptable or sustainable from the perspective of conduciveness, including a return to Sweden or Finland, but Martin stated:

I didn't understand it, the black and white relationship, but funny enough, being white one gets used to it very quickly, and because you are on the advantage side and you, should I say, you get used to it very quickly and you, you quite enjoy it (IF mgt 1998: 26).

Martin experienced a lack of understanding, or as a matter of fact a lack of regular rules about right and wrong, or even a lack of meaning in a traditional sense. In his account, this lack turned into an acceptance of circumstances that gave Martin a kind of advantage that was impossible to find in Finland. In the interview Martin explained to me what happened to him. An incomprehensible fact in his new country turned into an accepted and enjoyed ingredient of life. Martin was extremely honest when he admitted his mental change.

Applying Maslow's theory we have to regard the need for safety. Martin did not mention that, at that time of apartheid, the South African society was fairly safe and secure – for the white inhabitants. But another interviewee refers to this fact by stating that, during the time of apartheid, she could walk outdoors in the darkness without being afraid, whereas in 1998 when I interviewed her, she stayed indoors for she did not know what might happen. On the tape she even imitated a barking dog in order to demonstrate how she used to frighten uninvited guests from her house (IF mgt 1998: 36–37). It is possible that one of the reasons for Martin leaving Finland was a conceived lack of safety and security at home, although I do not believe it. A subcategory of the need for safety is the need for freedom from fear and chaos, and, at that time, this was reality for white people, at least from an official perspective. However, above all, I think that the need for esteem was again one of the reasons why Martin stayed in South Africa. The system of the society gave him prestige. This was a place where, in contrast to Finland, he felt that he could achieve a status high enough for his ideals, even at the cost of what he thought was just and fair.

Martin found that the relationship between the black and the white Africans was problematic. He told me that he could not accept it. It worried him. This was obvious in the way that he repeated how wrong it was. The reasons for his opinion were his religion and his upbringing:

It wasn't right, it wasn't right, I felt, ah, from any kind of religious background or upbringing you had, it wasn't right, it wasn't right. I must say it wasn't comfortable many times. (IF mgt 1998: 26)

His sense of himself as a white man did not conform to the role he had to play in South Africa. During the interview Martin implicitly compared Finnish and South African ways of treating people. Although he understood how wrong the system was, he still accepted South Africa as his place. I maintain that a place is not always only a comfortable surrounding. A place can also be filled with characteristics that are disturbing, yet a person may stick to it. In that case people may negotiate with themselves in order to accept it. Or, alternatively, as a newcomer Martin did not reflect on the relationship between blacks and whites. Perhaps his viewpoints in the interview are rationalizations that he formulated in his conversation with me, well aware that today it is not politically correct to express positive feelings about this issue. Here we can also see that he argues in a way that actualises conduciveness, be it through comparison as a white man making use of the blacks' weak position, or through his knowledge of what is politically correct at the end of the 1990s.

HOMESICKNESS

Until now, Martin and I mainly discussed perceived geographical places, for example Finland, Sweden, South Africa. However, when I asked if he had ever been homesick he changed his perspective to a conceived place. The passage between the perceived and the conceived was not immediate. Martin told me how real things from the perceived places caused homesickness in him, such as newspapers from Finland with information about people he knew. When reading them, he stated:

I really dream myself back into the situation. [...] I think, I would go into a quiet [not understandable] and Anne would pick it up very quickly, and she, she's been a great help to me always, she will get me out of it. (IF mgt 1998: 26)

We see how Martin used spatial prepositions, such as back, into, out. He did not verbalise how this "quiet" was structured or what it looked like, but from his way of speaking I interpreted him as going into conceived places of dream and depression. Comparison was an ingredient in this process when Martin remembered what he lost when he left Finland.

Homesickness is a feeling that can paralyse a person. Martin told me that he quite often had this feeling, and I could understand that those moments were moments of depression. Obviously, they were not creative and did not trigger anything, for he did not mention that homesickness would drive him to any activity. On the contrary, he told me that he would go into a silence, and that his wife had to help to get him out of it. The preposition 'out' demonstrated to me that he saw these periods as spent in a (mentally) different place from which his wife could fetch him.

When I asked Martin about his homesickness he stated that he could still feel how he might move back to Finland. But then rationality struck him, for he could see that he had changed a lot since he lived there. In his thoughts he conducted a comparison with himself as a South African and as a Finn: "Last time we went to Finland now I realised seeing my friends and what have you, I found I had changed a lot, not that I am better than them, no, I'm just different" (IF mgt 1998: 26). In the interview Martin demonstrated that his 'self' had developed into something other than during his time in Finland. The feeling of being different is the result of a process of comparison in self-analysis. Maslow speaks about the need for belongingness and love. Probably Martin no longer felt at home, he no longer felt belongingness, in Finland. In the interview he demonstrated how he almost had said too much, when he denied that he was better than the Finns, but then corrected himself with a more neutral concept, that is "different". Maslow's need for esteem, or, more exactly, self-esteem, came to the fore. In Finland, Martin thought that he was not accepted, not esteemed in a way that he would wish for. He felt that in South Africa this lack of self-esteem was corrected.

Although Martin regarded South Africa as his place, he still maintained Finnish citizenship through his Finnish passport. The family also celebrated Christmas in the Finnish way separately from the South African customs. Martin expressed positive feelings towards Finnish culture when he compared and described how his family in South Africa used to stick to Finnish customs in their way of celebrating birthdays. However, it turned out that he preferred to swear, count and pray in English. Swearing and praying are deeply connected to emotions. Consequently, I expected him to stick to Swedish in these situations. However, Martin had become a South African to such a degree that the language he used in automatic and intimate situations had changed. The fact that Martin used English during the interview, although our common mother tongue was Swedish, demonstrates how rooted he was in South Africa. His mental experiences of anger and belief took place there, and, consequently, his language for those matters was the language of the place in which the incidence occurred. Martin had even left his mother tongue to such a degree that he had to read my written agreement concerning the use of the interview twice, saying "I read it twice before it sinks in". Obviously, he did not deny the shift of language to this intensive knowledge of English. He did not

miss his Swedish. When it came to the need to express his innermost emotions he no longer had any needs to fulfil, his intensely striven-for English was enough.

THERE OR HERE?

Now the interview came close to its end, and, at the same time, Martin presented me with his definitive formulation for why he felt that South Africa was the right place for him. I asked if his decision to leave was an important decision and he answered: “*ja*,¹⁰ it has, it has been an important decision”. But then he asked himself: “Would I have been better off there. Or have I been bet[ter off here]?” (IF mgt 1998: 26) He found two answers to this question. Firstly, he established that he had developed as a person. He maintained that he became a better person for he had seen the world. We see that comparison is the prerequisite of his answer. Lack of character as a developed person, and lack of experience of seeing the world were remedied by emigration and thanks to his widened experience of the world he maintained that his recent place was better. However, there was also another factor that made him positively evaluate his expansion of place through emigration. He formulated it in the following way:

[I]f nothing else I've learnt to know God since I came here, not that I haven't, might not have done it [in] Finland, I might have done the same thing, but I certainly have got to know God as I do know him and Jesus Christ so to me it has been a great adventure (IF mgt 1998: 26).

This was obviously the peak experience in Martin's account about his life as an emigrant. He did not elucidate what it meant to him in detail or how it had transformed him, but to him meeting God was something overwhelming. Even in this answer he compared Finland and South Africa. The latter was the better, for he met God, but a quick, almost not verbalised comparison made Martin say, by way of an excuse and very politely, that he could have known God in Finland, too. It was in South Africa that Martin got to know God, therefore South Africa is the place in which Martin's life was furnished with a new, important and existential dimension. In South Africa he underwent a spiritual experience that he had not had before. The experience of his relationship with God had given him such an inner consolidation that he felt South Africa was where he wanted to stay. God's interference in Martin's life acted as evidence for Martin's feeling that South Africa was the right place for him. From a spiritual perspective he regarded this place as a perceived place with one more dimension than other places. His personal geography and even his life had a new dimension that was important for him, both when he judged his relationship to the black population and the recent situation in South Africa:

[S]ometimes I wonder as times are going in this country, I suppose, you know negative [unclear]: “Maybe I shouldn't have done it”, but even so, even so. *Ja*, I'm glad I've done it. (IF mgt 1998: 26)

Summing up his standpoint on emigration, he coped in a positive way, thanks to his act of believing. Despite it being a difficult decision – he left because of the lack of support from his family, he had to leave his ill mother and friends, he experienced all

sorts of problems with language and social order – he still found emigration a good thing because it developed his character and he underwent an inner transformation that introduced him to a kind of Christian faith that influenced the rest of his life. God became a vehicle that helped him interpret the stages of his life so that the stages he spent in South Africa were the best (Nynäs 2008: 159–162). This experience was overwhelming and it gave significance to him and his decision to emigrate. His emigration had been conducive.

Geographically Martin took me all over the world, mentioning nearly all the continents. He introduced me to his conceived places, to his place of homesickness and depression, and, finally, to his spiritual world. The place where he met God was to Martin his real place.

NEGOTIATION

Typical for Martin's way of relating his emigration was, as we have already seen repeatedly, his negotiation with himself – or with me. He was very careful when he selected his words. For example, when Martin told me that he had no expectations at all about South Africa, he took an excusing role, as he had several times before. I had the feeling that he wanted to excuse himself in front of me for not being reflexive enough and, perhaps, even a bit naïve. The way in which he explained this was by relating it to his youth and lack of experience.

The complicated and problematic relationship between black and white South Africans made Martin reflect on his own moral role. He was aware of the distorted state of matters, he was aware of the colour of his own skin in relation to the colour of most of the inhabitants of South Africa. The new place had pointed out his otherness. He underlined how wrong it was. He admitted honestly that he got used to it. But in the same sequence of the interview he ended his reflections on this topic by saying, "not that I would have liked to live with any blacks, no, no, because we're different, but the way they were treated, I think it was upsetting" (IF mgt 1998: 26). Again he negotiated with himself: he knew it was wrong, but then he withdrew from this position with his statement of comparison about the difference between the two groups within the population.

With me coming straight from Finland Martin obviously had the feeling that he had to be polite. When he told me that he left his mother and missed his friends, but not Finland, he immediately started to explain that Finland certainly had its beauties, but that this was not enough for him to stay: he wanted to go out into the world. He compared Finland to something else, something bigger. He conducted a comparison between needs (what he lacked) and assets.

To my surprise Martin prayed in English. He also gave a description of the circumstances surrounding his prayers. His sister visited him in South Africa and became upset when she found out that he said his prayers in English. His answer, and defence, was: "I'm sorry, I've got to pray in English because that, that's the way I've been introduced to Christianity" (IF mgt 1998: 26). Obviously, he had no functional Swedish for religious activity. He was born as a Lutheran, certainly, but as he stated, "it didn't mean anything to me at that time". It was not until Christianity meant something to him and

he needed to practise it that he found a language for this sort of activity. His language of prayer was closely connected to his new place. In the interview I can, again, hear how Martin excused himself to me, although in this situation he did it indirectly by referring to his experience with his annoyed sister.

In connection with my question about the language in which Martin swore, he reflected on his habit of swearing. Generally speaking he did not swear, but if a strong word came, it was in English. After that statement, he seemed to be a little surprised himself, for he started to explain to me how peculiar it was that, during the first couple of years in his new country, he almost blotted out his language. He did not even write letters to his family in Finland:

[B]ecause you want to get on with your life, and you, you don't want to sit with a leg on both sides, you want to be out there, so, subconsciously, you, sort of pulled out of it, and I know a lot of my family were very upset with me, it's "Why don't you write?" (IF mgt 1998: 26)

In fact, his sister is still alive. Perhaps there were other reasons for not writing to Finland, such as the feeling of being inadequately educated. In this case we can see how Martin shaped both his place and his life by creating a lack. By eradicating his language he showed in a very strong way his willingness to become a South African, to fit into his new place. So not only does the existing lack of something result in the shaping of place, but one can also intervene in the process by the fabrication of a deficiency. On the other hand, obviously, conduciveness played a role in this process, for otherwise life in the new place would not have gone on in the proper, and wished-for, way.

One can say that Martin negotiated with himself after his statement about 'pulling out' as a newcomer. In a way he felt guilty, because he said:

[B]ut then you get to a stage, now I also almost want to go back to it again, I want that my ties with the people there, I want them back, now more than before, maybe something to do with my age or so (IF mgt 1998: 26).

This reflective sentence was disarming, and it demonstrated how Martin would like to enlarge his place. I guess, when he said so, several memories and images of the past were on his mind. Again need played a role in his place making: the lack of bonds back in time and the lack of social relationships.

When he used to visit Finland Martin had compared the two countries. He stated that he was not longing to go back, but he weighed it up as follows:

[N]ot with a great, ah ... *ång*er [repentance] that you should have been back there, you should, no, not really, one sort of thinks, *ja*, you sort of in your mind you think: "Should you have done this or should you have done that?" (IF mgt 1998: 26)

From this sentence I see that the world was still open to Martin in his mind, his place in South Africa was not completely closed, he still maintained a process of comparison, for he had an idea of a conceived other place that might also have given him a conducive life. And his spiritual experience of knowing God, of well-being, of feeling that South Africa was a *lieu intime* (Casey 2000: 191) had come to convince him that he did the right thing in emigrating.

CONCLUSION

For the sake of conduciveness, Martin emigrated and shaped a new life for himself in a new place, South Africa. From a life in Finland without the qualities he wished for, emigration helped him structure better conditions with more dimensions. With the help of Abraham Maslow's theories about needs for action, I can demonstrate that Martin's new place was shaped with the help of his needs for safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation. Physiological needs, however, were not clearly mentioned. In his account, embodiment did not play a great role at all. Only once did he refer to his experience of South Africa as big and beautiful. One might also state that homesickness, which he described to some extent, and love, which he does not mention expressly, but which I can divine from his way of speaking about his wife, are bodily grounded, although he did not centre on corporeal experiences when he told his story. His new place was constructed by comparisons between Finland and South Africa. Needs found here were disguised in assets there.

The interview was a scene of remembering (Casey 2000: 183). However, Martin hesitated a lot in his account. I interpreted his hesitation as a kind of negotiation. He wanted to find the exact and correct expression for what he wanted to say. This, I conclude, was a sign that he re-shaped his life at these moments when he pondered over his language. The interview was also a time when Martin structured the parts of his life that were touched by his emigration. Martin spoke about a perceived place where he lived and worked every day. He also uttered thoughts about a conceived place in his dreams and expectations of Africa and in his attacks of depressive homesickness, although, at the same time, he admitted that he had obliterated much of what he had in Finland. As a very young man he saw that South Africa was his right and secure place. Therefore he stayed, and during the interview, being a man in his sixties, he felt that the country had shaped him into who he felt he was today. He was also able to state which place was most important to him, i.e., the place in which he met God. To Martin, earthly goods were not enough for a place. A spiritual dimension was needed.

How, then, was Martin's place making shaped in the interview? The portrayal of his life, when he remembered, re-shaped and told me about it, was not simple or incontrovertible. Neither was it a complete success story. He could have boasted about deep love, a long happy marriage, a successful family, much money, a beautiful house, or whatever. He could equally have expressed envy of those who stayed at home and had even more successful lives there. He did not do so. By carefully selecting his words he gave me the opportunity to notice his feelings of need and shortcomings that he compared to an image of a better way of living according to his ideals of conduciveness. Martin was very careful in not emphasising his personal achievements as easily made. He built his story explicitly or implicitly on an evaluation of his life in Finland through a comparison with his life in South Africa, always negotiating with himself and me during the interview, trying to find the right expression. Perhaps he did this so carefully as a consequence of his Christian belief, according to which boasting is discouraged. It was obvious that Martin could define needs that he could fulfil through his emigration account. In the negotiation, he strived to find the right wordings when trying to create a meaningful and significant image of himself as an emigrant. During the interview it came clear that Martin's main philosophy of life seemed to be conduciveness. However,

to Martin conduciveness did not mean material success only. South Africa was the place where his memories, bad and good, and his expectations, which he denied concerned the country as such but that he still had in relation to what he saw as a Good life, combined into his account of events, real and spiritual. All these components merged into a significant whole through the on-going process of negotiation that he presented. According to Peter Nynäs, “places are shaped by memories, expectations and by stories of real and imagined events” (2008: 171). The analysis of Martin’s way of shaping his South African place consists also of negotiation, some of which explain what happened and why it happened, whereas others excuse. My analysis demonstrates that still, more than thirty years after his emigration, Martin negotiated with himself about the right or wrong of leaving Finland, family and friends and adjusting to South Africa and the circumstances there. Mentally, his emigration seems to be an on-going process.

NOTES

1 My interest in emigration from Finland to South Africa started in the mid-1990s when I realised that young male Finnish descendants often kept their Finnish citizenship, and, consequently, had to do military service in Finland. Some of them stayed afterwards, which fascinated me. Martin belongs to the circle around one of those young men. In 1998 I therefore conducted fieldwork among Swedish Finn emigrants in South Africa. These people had moved voluntarily some time in the 1960s, not as representatives of any enterprise. I was looking for narratives about homesickness. Most, but not all, of the interviewees presented success stories (cf. Wolf-Knuts 2000a).

2 The concept of life story is not unproblematic. In 1980, Jeff Todd Titon devoted an article to the character of this ‘new’ genre in folkloristics. According to him, the difference between a life story and a life history is that the former consists of an oral narrative that is told or created during an interview or a conversation, while the latter is a written text emerging from oral speech (Titon 1980: 278; Svensson 2001: 39, who interprets the difference in a different way). In this interview there are no real stories with given beginnings and obvious endings. Consequently, I prefer to call the interview an account. Investigations with emigrants have often been based on interviews (cf. Dégh 1975; Wolf-Knuts 2000; Österlund-Pötzsch 2003).

3 Annikki Kaivola-Bregenhøj (2011: 35) mentions repetition as a narrative device. However, in this interview repetition was not a *narrative* device, but a sign of hesitance (see, also, Byrne 2003: 40).

4 See, for example, Kero 1996: 55, who counts the number of emigrants from Finland, Norway, and Sweden in the 1821–1929 period as 2,250,000. For more information about Finnish migration to South Africa, see Kupiainen 1991, especially the tables on pp. 377–380, 403, 408–409, 412–413. See also Olin 2000.

5 It is a well-known fact that men and women tell their emigrant stories in different ways. Gender differences also matter in the cooperation between interviewer and interviewee. (See, for example, Hagström 2002; Byrne 2003: 35; Bönisch-Brednich 2008). This specific field of research is not dealt with here.

6 Ukkonen based her study about female metal workers on an extremely small number of interviews.

7 See, for example, Kummel 1980, who gives a detailed overview of Ostrobothnian emigration; see Herberts 1977 and Herberts, Andberg 1979 on reasons for emigration from Ostrobothnia to Sweden.

8 However, in fact Martin did not tell me anything about what kind of an education he received in South Africa.

9 Twenty editions of *Boken om vårt land* were published in Swedish between 1875 and 1940, and its Finnish translation *Maamme kirja* came in 58 editions until 1981. Even in 1993 a facsimile edition in Finnish was published.

10 *Ja* is affirmation in Afrikaans and Swedish, and means 'yes'.

SOURCES

The Cultura Cultural Research Archive at the Åbo Akademi University

IF mgt 1998: 26

IF mgt 1998: 27–28

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