

Nousiainen, Miika. (2007). *Vadelmavenepakolainen* [Raspberry Boat Refugee]. Helsinki: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Otava

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RASPBERRY BOAT REFUGEE

(pp. 26-29)

Finland doesn't need me. I'm not cut for Finland. Nor definitely for being a Finn. I don't get excited about Formula One or emotional when hearing the Finnish national anthem, I don't like the sauna too hot nor I am particularly keen on staying silent, alone, for hours. To me war veterans represent only a bunch of men who ventured somewhere to the eastern border and lost the war. But yeah, their effort eventually went in favour of Sweden too.

In Sweden I feel fully alive. In Sweden the doors of old apartment buildings swing escorting you inside. They welcome the guest, whereas in Finland you have to yank a door open while sidestepping in the freezing draughty outdoors to dodge it. In Sweden bike bells warble in a cheerful tone, in Finland the same bell would snap at dawdling pedestrians to get the fuck out of the cycle way.

I want to wait in the line for the cashpoint by the wall, just like Swedes do. In Finland queues form inconveniently on the pavement clogging the path. In Sweden cars stop at crosswalks letting the pedestrian walk over; even drivers are kind and friendly. They don't eye pedestrians swearingly when these are exercising their legal right to cross the road.

In Sweden sports reporters talk normally, they don't shout. For some reason their Finnish counterparts reckon that the ardour put into news reporting must be the same of that driving athletes in their performances. Back in the day TVs were invented to this end, so that nobody would need to yell. Technology brings messages into our homes in an even tone. Yet Finnish sports journalists take it that reporting about Formula One requires personally roaring like one of the Formula-cars.

In Sweden minorities are part of the people and the welfare state. What better indication of this successful integration than the fast-food chain Folkets Kebab? The people's kebab! Food served by our Turkish friends is a part of Swedish culture: nothing is taken away from this, but rather an exquisite touch is added to it.

As an ethnic tranny I constitute a one-person minority in Finland, whose human rights are poorly recognised. Amnesty International and other interest clubs have indeed time for all the Burmese and Turkish prisoners of conscience in the world, as well as for those Muslims tortured to death in unclear circumstances. But on us few under their noses they coldly turn their backs. They claim that one person is not enough to count as a minority. Fine, but in a shocking way this is also too much for a problem to be pushed to the side. Because it's to the side that I'm pushed. Ethnic transvestism entails unnecessary bureaucracy as well as infinite attempts to evade this misery and acquire a dream nationality with heritage annexed. It's a battle, a constant feeling of insignificance and inadequacy.

Sitting at an adjacent table my friends Bosse and Maria from Stockholm interrupt this stream of thoughts in the worst possible way.

- Hey there, Finn!

- Hey back, Swedes.

- You know, it's already been a few days now that I've been meaning to tell you a joke, do you want to hear it?

- Of course, always all ears for a joke, fire away.

- Two Finnish brothers meet up after five years. To celebrate they get drunk. A week after the booze-up one of the brothers asks: "How's mum doing?" Glaring angrily at the other this replies: "Have you come here to get hammered or spill out nonsense?"

I've heard this joke 412 times. My friends are laughing hysterically while repeating its punchline.

- Did you like the joke?

- Quite funny, rather accurate, that's how they are in Finland.

- What about Christmas, are you having plenty of your Finnish vodka?

- I think I'll take it quite easy.

They are trying to be amusing. I'm not amused. I don't like Finnish vodka nor I want it to be jokingly offered to me as a beverage at one of those Swedish sausage kiosks, when my terrible secret is revealed by my accent. I don't want to be the party weirdo everyone is staring at when I don't know the traditional drinking songs. Besides, I do know drinking songs. And I have a shot of Swedish firewater at the end of them. It's perfectly delectable in the right company.

I want to be one of the Swedes. I want to be included in those magnificently intricate 3-hour long conversations in which it's decided that the housing co-operative's lawnmower needs changing its blade. It has become dull and it's important that our children get to grow in an environment where the grass is well trimmed. Children's wellbeing is paramount in our building. That's why the blade has to be changed. I want to be asked precisely those real and important things. I want to be taken seriously.

Such thoughts are running through my head here on the shore of the Indian Ocean on Christmas Eve. My sense of Swedishness is so powerful that it grows stronger even thousands of miles away from Stockholm.

There is a communal Christmas celebration in the evening, all the charming Swedish families will gather there. Luckily I have not been invited, I would just get jealous. I'll spend the evening on my own. Swedish Christmas songs are playing in the restaurant. Swedes are having a good time while my Finnish self is lying alone amidst sorrows. It takes a while before the party's fun fades. It takes even a while longer before I fall asleep.