

Riitta-Liisa Valijärvi

Uppsala University
University College London

Representations of Finland in contemporary Finnish popular music

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to study representations of Finland in song lyrics of contemporary Finnish popular music. This paper was inspired Ilkka Malmberg's (1999) article *Murheellisten laulujen maa* 'The Land of Sad Songs', in which he analyses how the image of Finland changes over time in Finnish popular music from Kaj Chydenius's and Aulikki Oksanen's *Laulu siirtotyöläisestä* 'A Song about the Migrant Worker' (1969) to Ultra Bra's *Hei Kuule Suomi* 'Hey Listen Finland' (1999). Malmberg maps the song lyrics onto changes in Finnish society and Finland's economy: the migrant worker described in the song is unemployed and on a train moving to Southern Finland or possibly Sweden. This is connected to the mass exodus from the countryside, urbanisation and emigration, which reached its peak in the late 1960s. Ultra Bra's song reflects the culmination of this urbanisation process, where Helsinki is the central point from where we view the rest of the unknown Finland. Other themes in the songs analysed by Malmberg (1999) are internationalisation and the rise of technology, suicide and marginalisation, idealised images of nature and pathos in the description of the countryside and even the city, and self-critical and ironic takes on the excessive use of alcohol and other Finnish clichés.

As Finland is turning 100, it is a good time to self-reflect and take stock of the country's self-image. One way of investigating this collective and subconscious self-image is to focus on general trends in the depiction of Finland

in song lyrics from 1999 to 2016. Since the publication of Malmberg's (1999) article, Finland has adopted the euro and experienced yet another economic downturn as a consequence of the global economic crisis of 2008. Nokia has fallen but vibrant start-ups have sprung up in its place. Terror attacks have become more common across the world and a refugee crisis has stirred media debate, and a right-leaning government has been in charge of Finland's affairs. Finland is more connected to the world than ever before through financial, political and cultural ties. Since 1999 Finland has also consciously aimed to brand itself as the land of problem solving, clean nature and education (Maa-brändivaltuuskunta 2010). This paper focuses on the unconscious and unintentional branding taking place in popular music, and how these depictions reflect changes in Finnish society, economy and culture.

Many of the previous studies on Finnish music focus on the musical, tonal qualities of Finnish music; the phenomena surrounding music (such as reception studies, music education or radio channels); or a specific historical or ethnic genre, which is why zooming in on the content of the lyrics in contemporary pop music is valuable. The current paper complements and relates to the following studies. Tervo & Ridapää (2016) analysed humour and parody in Finnish rap videos, whereas Forss (2015) studied the history of political music in Finland. Heinonen et al.'s (1999) volume on Finnish pop music contains an analysis of modern tango and rock. Aho & Kärjä (2007) edited a textbook on the study of popular music from different angles. Skaniakos (2013) studied representations of Finnishness in *Saimaa-ilmio*, a rock music documentary from 1981. Jaakkola & Toivonen (2004) analysed the use of Kalevala poetry in Finnish music, and Kopomaa (2014) described the evolution of Finnish rock music.

For an overview of the history of Finnish music and composers see the *Suomen musiikin historia* 'History of Finnish Music' series starting from Dahlström et al. (1995), and also Howell (2006) and Aho et al. (1996). For a description of Finnish popular music see Jalkanen & Kurkela (2003). For further insight into Finnish song lyric writing see Hämäläinen (2011), who interviewed 20 Finnish authors of rock lyrics, analysed typical themes in their songs and investigated the stories behind the lyrics.

2. Research questions

My research questions are:

- 1) How is Finland portrayed by Finnish lyricists and songwriters in Finnish pop music from 1999 to 2016?
- 2) What are the commonly occurring themes in terms of self-representation of Finnishness?

3) How do the themes relate to the themes identified in Malmberg's (1999) article?

4) How does the representation of Finland relate to the historical, economic, political and cultural context in which the song lyrics were written?

5) Is there intertextuality in the song lyrics, i.e. do they follow a certain style of writing and imagery linking the representations to previous stories Finland tells about itself or possibly to other types of literature, poetry or song writing?

3. Theory

Theoretically, the present study is an instance of Cultural Studies in as much as it seeks to understand how meaning is created in a certain context through texts and how underlying social structures are represented through language. In other words, it attempts to decode the way in which "the world is socially constructed and represented by us in meaningful ways" (Barker 2011: 8). Texts are here seen as a signifying practice that creates hegemony (ibidem: 10) and as narratives that, in this case, a country creates collectively about itself (ibidem: 35). Barker (ibidem: 259) writes: "Nations are not simply political formations but systems of cultural representation by which national identity is continually reproduced through discursive action." Thus, this paper explores the way in which Finnish popular music recreates a certain kind of image of Finland through texts. Texts can, naturally, be interpreted in a number of different ways and the present interpretation is only one out of many. One should also bear in mind that popular culture is commercially produced and consumed and thus has an agenda (ibidem: 53). However, one could think that by being commercial, popular music taps into the collective psyche as it aims to please the masses.

4. Method

The study is qualitative, comparative and critical. I will make use of Content Analysis (Krippendorff 2013), in which communication content is analysed and classified. The focus in this study is on intentionality and its implications, rather than coding and statistics. In other words, I will make use of relational or semantic analysis by identifying concepts and classifying their relationship to each other.

Furthermore, in accordance with Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2013) the data will be analysed on three levels as follows:

1) A micro level: I will investigate representations of Finland in individual songs and exemplify them with extracts from the song lyrics.

2) A meso level: in addition to grouping the representations of Finland featured in the songs thematically, I will identify the musical genres of the songs.

3) A macro level: I will account for the intertextual, historical and societal context of the song lyrics and link them to the micro and meso levels.

Only the content of the song lyrics is analysed. An investigation of the musical and tonal aspect of the songs, accompanying videos and poetic means, such as meter and metaphor, and the band's or artist's biography are beyond the scope of this study. The same applies to the study of listener reception or use of texts on radio or in musical contexts or other ethnomusicological approaches (cf. Aho & Kärjä 2007, Oksanen 2007, Moisala & Seye 2013).

5. Data

The songs have been selected from a website listing the top 75 biggest singles in Finland each year (Pennanen 2016). The data is based on various factors such as single sales, album sales, live streaming and downloading.

I have selected mostly one, sometimes two or three Finnish-language songs from each year. The primary criterion has been that the topic of the song relates to Finland. The genres vary from pop rock and heavy metal to reggae and hip hop. Songs that are of universal appeal about love or dancing have been excluded, as have songs the lyrics of which have been written in English. The spread between different years is slightly uneven as the approach is qualitative and in some years the top 75 songs (such as 2008) say little about Finland, whereas in other years the selection of suitable songs is greater. Table 1 contains the songs have been included in the study.

Table 1. Songs and artists included in the study including the musical genre, English translation of the song titles and year of release.

Artist	Musical genre	Song	English translation of song title	Year of release
Maija Vilkkumaa	pop rock, Finnish rock	Satumaatango	Fairytale Land Tango	1999
Yölintu	schlager	Liian suuri city	Too Big a City	2000
Anssi Kela	rock	Nummela	Nummela (<i>a small town in Southern Finland</i>)	2001

Timo Rautianen & Trio Niskalaukaus	heavy metal, hard rock	Surupuku	Widow's Weeds	2002
PMMP	pop rock	Joutsenet	Swans	2003
Hector	Finnish rock, folk rock	Kuunnellaan vaan taivasta	Let's Just Listen to Heaven	2004
Jani Wickholm	pop rock	Suomen neito	Maiden of Finland	2005
Kotiteollisuus	heavy metal, hard rock	Arkunnaula	Nail in the Coffin	2006
Kristian Meurman	pop, rock, schlager	Lapin kesä	Summer of Lapland	2007
Chisu	pop	Baden Baden	Baden Baden (<i>a thermal resort town in Germany</i>)	2009
Paleface	hip hop, folk	Shangri-La	Shangri-La (<i>a mystical fictional utopia</i>)	2010
Pariisin kevät	indie pop, indie rock, electronic	Tämän kylän poikki	A Boy from This Village	2010
Arttu Wiskari	pop, Finnish rock, blues	Mökkitie	Summer Cottage Road	2011
Haloo Helsinki	pop rock	Maailman toisella puolen	On the Other Side of the World	2011
Petri Nygård & Lord est	rap, comedy rap	Selvä päivä	A Sober Day	2011
Jukka Poika	reggae	Älä tyri nyt	Don't Mess it up Now	2012
Sanni	pop	Prinsessoja ja astronautteja	Princesses and Astronauts	2013
Tuomas Kauhanen	rap	Pummilla Tallinnaan	To Tallinn without Paying	2014
Kuningasidea	reggae, rap, pop	Pohjolan tuulet	Winds of the North	2014
Teflon Brothers & Mariska	rap, pop, dance	Lähiöunelmii	Suburban Dreams	2016
Paula Vesala	pop rock	Älä droppaa mun tunnelmaa	Don't Drop My Mood	2016

6. Analysis

6.1. Ironic take on depression and alcohol

Depression and alcohol are often associated with Finland. The often-quoted suicide statistics and infamous binge drinking are perhaps less of a problem now, which is why Chisu's ironic pop hit *Baden Baden* (2009) is possible. *Baden Baden* is a cheerful and ironic response to the economic crisis of the previous year. The protagonist has been fired and starts to cry. The solution to her predicament is to bottle the tears of Finns and send them to the Sahara where the dry land needs them. An even better idea turns out to be to send the bottled tears to the spas of Baden Baden as the following quote shows:

*Mun ideasta kuuli itse presidenttikin
Tuumi tässä ratkaisu ois ventiongelmiin
Tuotanto halpaa ois, on Suomi varsin masentunut maa
Ja Afrikan sijaan Euroopasta isommat rahat saa*
Even the president heard about my idea
He thought that this could be the solution to export problems
The production would be cheap, Finland is a pretty depressed country
And you get better money from Europe than Africa
(Chisu, *Baden Baden*, 2009)

One could claim that the start-up spirit and problem solving expertise called for by the branding committee (Maabrändivaltuuskunta 2010) are present in the ironic approach to depression accompanied by a happy danceable pop tune. When the tears start running out the protagonist proposes lowering the alcohol tax, implying that it will lead to more drinking and more social problems, and thus to more revenue.

Petri Nygård's and Lord Est's hip-hop hit *Selvä päivä* 'Sober Day' (2011), on the other hand, is an ode to the folk and rock singer Irwin Goodman, active in the 70s and 80s. Irwin is even mentioned by name in the song. This bohemian male culture that Irwin embodies glorifies being drunk. The singer is asking us to follow him, marinade our livers, raise a toast, and get pissed. He lists his favourite drinks in the following extract:

*R.I.P. maksa good bye aivosolut
Edessä viskii ja kylmä olut [...]
Jalluu kossuu ja kaljaa
Hölkyn kölkyn! Me nostetaan maljaa! [...]
Jos sulla on jano suu auki (Aah)
Hyvä juoma parempi mieli
Kuiva kurkku ikenet kieli*

R.I.P liver good bye brain cells
 In front of us whiskey and a cold beer [...]
 Jaloviina [cut brandy brand], Koskenkorva [vodka brand] and beer
 Cheers! We raise a toast! [...]
 If you're thirsty open your mouth
 A good drink a better mood
 Dry throat gums tongue
 (Petri Nygård & Lord Est, *Selvä päivä*, 2011)

Lemmy from the heavy metal band Motörhead and the director of Hollywood action films Renny Harlin are mentioned. The song is also an ode to the *äijä* 'real man, tough guy' culture. This links in with the representation of men in the Finnish schlager culture: carnivalistic alcohol consumption and manly power are a typical feature of Finnish popular music (Aho 2003, Kopomaa 2014: 114–115).

Both the songs can be connected to the *rillumarei* tradition in Finnish music, which is characterised by humour, wild and free folk culture, parody, and a mocking attitude to anything serious. This *rillumarei* tradition is provocative in nature and was needed during the second world war and straight after the war to cheer people up (Ammond 1999: 2–5, 17–25). The idea is that you can survive any situation with trickery and cunning, and there are always women and booze and a festive atmosphere (ibidem: 23). One could also imagine that *Selvä päivä* parodies African-American ghetto culture (cf. Tervo & Ridapää 2016).

6.2. Marginalisation

Tämän kylän poikii 'A Boy from this Village' (2010) by *Pariisin kevät* is an indie rock song about a protagonist who says that there are too many wrong choices, he cannot find his way back, he drifts, buys empty lottery tickets and does not do much. Things simply glide past him. The protagonist says that it is important to look busy and sexy. The twist in the song comes with the chorus:

Heihei mutsi, mä en oo syöny mun lääkkeitä
Äiti tuu hakee mut pois täältä
Heihei mutsi
 Hi Mum I haven't taken my medication
 Mum come and get me from here
 Hi Mum
 (Pariisin kevät, *Tämän kylän poikii*, 2010)

The protagonist is dependent on his mother and on medication, implying mental health problems. He is marginalised and unemployed like many of his contemporaries. Youth unemployment has been a dramatic and severe problem in Finland in the 2010s (Hämäläinen & Tuomala 2013). The approach in the song is still playful and ironic in spite of the serious theme, and the song matches the band Leevi and Leevings' lyrics where the antihero lives in his dreams and the grotesque is celebrated (Vuoristo 2010).

Jukka Poika's reggae song *Älä tyri nyt* 'Don't Mess It up Now' (2012) does not celebrate the antihero, instead it contains advice and a warning to the marginalised youth. The singer is telling the listener to hold on. If s/he stays patient and does not blow it s/he will be able to get out there:

*Älä tyri nyt, älä lyö yli nyt, älä antaudu angstin valtaan.
Jengi pykinyt, on huolella leikkinyt kuoleman kanssa jo vuosia nyt.
Käy koulut ja hanki pätevyys, et voi panna sitä päihteiden syyks.
Ettet pystynyt pitämään rotia, vaikket nyt kestä sun kotia mee eteenpäin kuin sotilas.*

Don't blow it now, don't overdo it, don't let anxiety take over
People have been cracking, carefully playing with death for years already
Go to school and get qualifications, you can't blame it on drugs
That you couldn't keep things together, although you can't stand your home
keep going like a soldier

(Jukka Poika, *Älä tyri nyt*, 2012)

According to official statistics, most drug addicts in Finland are young male adults (THL 2017). More men than women die of drugs and the number of deaths had been on the rise up until 2014 (Suomen virallinen tilasto 2014). *Älä tyri nyt* echoes the statistics and tries to address this problem.

6.3. Patriotic landscapes

The Finnish landscape has had a great role in shaping and defining Finnish identity. During the national romantic era and the struggle for independence, nature became a central symbol of Finnish identity and is still perhaps the most efficient way of turning the abstract concept of nationhood into something concrete (Skaniakos 2013: 304–305).

Jani Wickholm's pop rock song *Suomen neito* 'Maiden of Finland' (2005) is an unashamed patriotic ode to the Maiden of Finland, the symbol of the country. Note the way in which she is personified as nature and seasons:

*Hän on sateinen päivä ja talvinen yö
Hän on routainen tie joka jalvoja syö*

*Hän on kesäinen ilta ja rannalla puu
Suomen neito*

She's the rainy day and wintery night
She's the frozen road that eats your feet
She's a summery evening and tree on the shore
Finnish maiden

(Jani Wickholm, *Suomen neito*, 2005)

Kuningasidea's slow rap fusion ballad *Pohjolan tuulet* 'Winds of the North' (2014) is another patriotic ode to Finland. The singer has travelled across deserts and cities, and sailed the wide oceans but did not find any happiness. Now he has found a path, forest and river, and feels that he is safe:

*Lauluni laulan sulle, kun kesäyön aurinko laskee
Ja pohjolan lempeät tuulet vastaa uua uua uua uuu
Läpi yön lauluni sulle, se kaikuu järveltä kaskeen*

I sing my song to you when the summer night's sun sets
And the gentle winds of the north reply uua uua uua uuu
All through the night my song to you, it echoes from the lake to the slash-and-burn land

(Kuningasidea, *Pohjolan tuulet*, 2014)

The branding committee's marketing of Finland as a land of wild and clean nature (Maabrändiraportti 2014) seamlessly matches the representation of Finland in contemporary pop music.

6.4. Glorified countryside

Malmberg (1999) identified a trend in Finnish songs of glorifying the countryside, possibly linked to the late and rapid process of urbanisation. It is as if Finland was still mourning the loss and decline of small towns and the countryside, which came to symbolise something pure. One consciously romanticises and idealises the countryside, a pre-industrial heaven (Skaniakos 2013: 307). One could also link these songs to the Finnish tango lyrics tradition, full of melancholy, loss and nostalgia (Ammond 1999: 6–16).

The most obvious example of this strand in contemporary Finnish popular music is Yölintu's *Liian suuri city* 'Too Big a City' (2000), the protagonist of which is in a bar. No one cares about him in the city. The police stop him sometimes and only prostitutes will keep him company. He is unable to sort out the mess that is his life. Things did not go the way he planned and he has made up his mind to return back to the countryside, where he could share the rural landscape with his beloved:

*Siellä landella on sentään ilmaa
Kotijärvellä voi kalastaa
Oma itseni oon, enkä filmaa
Siellä kaunis on metsä ja maa*

There in the countryside there's at least air
You can fish in the nearby lake
I am myself and I don't pretend
The forest and land are beautiful there
(Yölintu, *Liian suuri city*, 2000)

Arttu Wiskari's *Mökkitie* 'Summer Cottage Road' (2011) describes the protagonist's memories from the 80s of going to the summer cottage. His parents are divorced and the gravel road to the cottage has now been paved. He remembers his grandfather talking about the war. Now the grandfather is dead and the protagonist understands him better and appreciates his actions:

*Faija anna mun ajaa mökkitie
lupaan että saunaan vettä vien
muistan kivet ja kannot tän soratien
mielessäni olin Henri Toivonen
ralli idoli pienten poikien*

Daddy let me drive the summer cottage road
I promise that I will take water to the sauna
I remember the rocks and tree stumps of this gravel road
In my mind I was Henri Toivonen
The rally idol of small boys
(Arttu Wiskari, *Mökkitie*, 2011)

Henri Toivonen was a successful Finnish rally driver in the 80s who won several races but died in an accident in 1986. In Wiskari's song, Finland is the land of rally, saunas, unpaved roads, tree stumps and a lost idyllic existence.

6.5. Materialistic and meaningless lives of millennials

A celebration of the extravagant lifestyle of millennials is represented in Teflon Brothers' song *Lähiöunelmii* 'Suburban Dreams' (2017). The protagonist had very little growing up and wanted more material things, such as a mountain bike and fancy football boots. He has dreams where he swims in new things:

*Tee läksyt boi, mutsi huutaa mutten voi
En haluu elää sen elämää, vaan dan bilzerianin
Haluun rimmata lennot bangokiin*

*Täyden viinakaapin mun mansoniin
Isokannusen hutsun mun hammockii
Ei pläänei, vaan randomii
Haluun tänään, en haluu huomen
Haluun nyt koska huomen mä kuolen*

Do your homework, boy, mum shouts but I can't
I don't want to live her life but Dan Bilzerian's instead
I want to rhyme flights to Bangkok
A full bar in my mansion
A big-breasted chick in my hammock
No plans, just random
I want it today, not tomorrow
I want it now because tomorrow I'll be dead

(Teflon Brothers, *Lähiöunelmii*, 2017)

Dan Bilzerian is an American poker player and a trust fund beneficiary known for his partying and drug abuse. *Lähiöunelmii* is an anthem of Generation Y.

Sanni's *Prinsessoja ja astronautteja* 'Princesses and Astronauts' (2013) is in line with the previously described nostalgic genre of the world changing and not for the better. The protagonist sees life as consisting of empty status updates and flashy shoes, alcohol and empty words. The protagonist and his friends did not become princesses or astronauts. Love is something that is used once. The protagonist's mother looked after her when she was little and put a plaster on a cut and tried to make her feel better. The question is who does it now:

*Ajat vaihtuu ja viisarit liikkuu,
Iho vanhenee ja kasvot muuttuu,
Ennen syötiin lettuja, nyt
Lasketaan kaloreita.*

Times changes and hands of the clock move
Skin ages and the face changes
We used to eat pancakes, now
We count calories

(Sanni, *Prinsessoja ja astronautteja*, 2013)

The vanity and emptiness of the now echoes the sentiments and concerns of the millennials for whom the meaninglessness of social media and a party lifestyle are not fulfilling. Enjoyment is low because you have to look good and count your calories.

Tuomas Kauhanen's *Pummilla Tallinnaan* 'To Tallinn without Paying' (2014) is about being a songwriter and having little money while dreaming

of a glamorous and luxurious lifestyle. The singer suggests meeting at the airport and randomly choosing where to go. The name suggests going at least to Tallinn without paying. The protagonist would take his woman on a date to Berlin, for breakfast to Paris and then fly to New York and get married in Vegas. The glamorous lifestyle links the song back to *Lähiö-unelmii* yet it is also connected to *Baden Baden* where Finnish melancholy is made into a source of funding:

*Siihen mun pesot ei riitä,
mut keksin miten selvitään siitä!*

My money won't stretch to that
but I know how to sort that out!
[...]

*Koska kyl hätä keinot keksii
Suomalaista melankoliaa tekstiin
Ois rahaa taas hetkeks*

Necessity is the mother of invention
Finnish melancholy into song lyrics
Then there'd be money for a while again
(Tuomas Kauhanen, *Pummilla Tallinnaan*, 2014)

The protagonist does not have the money to pay for the extravagant trips but he knows how to solve the problem.

6.6. Finns and the world

The effects of globalisation are evident in the data. Hector's *Kuunnellaan vaan taivasta* 'Let's Just Listen to Heaven' (2004) offers a perspective on a world where war is commonplace and love is invented in Hollywood. The chorus encourages us to listen to and pray to heaven even if there's no reply and God is asleep:

*Onko rakkautta ilmassa
onko tänään turvallista ulkona
Vai onko vuorotteluvapaalla
samaan aikaan sekä Allah että Jumala
Mä en avaa ulko-ovea,
siellä väijyy tulevaisuutemme historia*

Is there love in the air
Is it safe outside
Or are Allah and God both
On a sabbatical

I won't open the front door
 Lurking there is the history of our future
 (Hector, *Kuunnellaan vaan taivasta*, 2004)

Hector's song embodies the fear of acts of terror and the dichotomy between Muslims and Christians. An older Finn looks at the world, which has changed and is not safe. This chimes with a recent interview survey commissioned by the Finnish Ministry of Defence (Maanpuolustustiedotuksen suunnittelukunta 2016), according to which the sense of security among Finns is at an all-time low. Terrorism and unemployment are the main concerns. This is line with the fact that with globalisation "metaphors of uncertainty, contingency and chaos are replacing those of order, stability and systematicity" (Barker 2011:160).

Haloo Helsinki's pop rock song *Mailman toisella puolen* 'On the Other Side of the World' (2011), on the other hand, is the voice the younger generation of Finns for whom travel abroad is second nature. According to a 2014 survey, Finns travel the most of any nationality in the world due to having the money for it, wanting to escape the weather, and being used to certain kind of holiday culture, i.e. going to the summer cottage (Kauppa-lehti 2014). These Finns put their suitcase on the conveyor belt and have their last drink at the airport:

Kohta pilvien päältä
Voin muistaa tämän maan
Ei mulla oo tarkkaa suuntaa
Mä menen minne sattuma johtaa
 Soon above the clouds
 I can remember this country
 I don't have a clear direction
 I go wherever chance takes me
 (Haloo Helsinki, *Mailman toisella puolen*, 2011)

They are telling dad that they are on the other side of the world, and saying to mum that she does not need to worry, they will look after themselves. These young Finns have been to be to poor places, been followed by children and seen suffering in their eyes. The protagonist of *Mailman toisella puolen* is aware of injustice and poverty and global problems.

6.7. Gothic dystopia

Gothic dystopia relates to the dark undertone in Finnish music and literature, and the popularity of heavy rock and metal music. Finland is said

to have the largest number of heavy metal bands per capita. The typical imagery has to do with death, darkness and cold stars. These dark aesthetics often relate to nature and the Kalevala tradition (cf. Jaakkola & Toivonen 2004).

PMMP's *Joutsenet* 'Swans' (2001) is a dystopian description of a state of mind and a place where nothing touches you, funfairs do not make you laugh and you cannot have anyone. The swan is Finland's national bird, whereas snow and ice are often used to attract tourists to Finland. PMMP turns this imagery around:

*Lumi on syönyt kaiken
Routa raiskaa tämän maan
Joutsenetkin jäätyy kiinni jaloistaan
Unelmat vaihtuu toisiin
Valuen vuosiin vihaisiin
Lähtisin mut se vaan ei mee enää niin*

Snow has eaten everything
Frost rapes this land
Even swans are frozen stuck by their feet
Dreams are swapped with others
Leaking into angry years
I would leave but that's not how it goes

(PMMP, *Joutsenet*, 2001)

The heavy metal song *Surupuku* 'Widow's Weeds' (2003) by Timo Rautiainen & Trio Niskalaukaus represents the same dystopian view of the world. The protagonist does not want to see sadness but does not know what else to do. Great men stumble in the dark with chaos on their heels. A shared world is just a figment of the imagination. The protagonist would wear white if there were more justice in the world. Everything begins with and returns to crying:

*Kun kokonaiset kansat
Käyvät pelaamaan pedon lukuun
Siksi pukeudun mustaan
Musta on surupuku*

When entire nations
Start to play the number of the beast
That is why I wear black
Black is the widow's weeds

(Timo Rautiainen & Trio Niskalaukaus, *Surupuku*, 2003)

The heavy metal song *Arkunnaula* 'Nail in the Coffin' (2006) by Kotiteollisuus addresses the younger generation by saying that they are having fun and enjoying themselves although nothing is right. The protagonist is turning forty and has bought a coffin and burial plot right by the church. For him the world is an antechamber of death and he watches how others ruin it from behind the curtains. The effect of this darkness is almost comical and becomes a parody of itself, as the following extract shows:

*Tämä maa on tyhjyyttä täynnä
täynnä kuolon ääniä
ankara tuuli taivaalta raivaa
esiin kylmiä tähtiä
viimeistä arkunnaulaa
juuri äsken naulattiin
ja lapsikuoro haudalla laulaa*

This world is full of emptiness
Full of sounds of death
A harsh wind from the sky
Brings forth cold stars
The last nail
Was just nailed
And a children's choir sings at the grave
(Kotiteollisuus, *Arkunnaula*, 2006)

Kristian Meurman's *Lapin kesä* 'Summer of Lapland' (2006) is a recording of Eino Leino's 1902 poem that starts with dark gothic thoughts about why so many beautiful things die in Finland, and why there are so many mentally ill people and so few players of the traditional plucked string instrument, the kantele. The reason for the melancholic thoughts is the brief summer in Lapland where joy is short-lived. This shows that Finns have been making the link between the harsh climate and dark thoughts and sadness for over a hundred years.

6.8. Political protest

The songs in this category represent the world-wide tradition of protest songs and political music. Workers' music developed alongside the rise of the working class in the 1800s. It developed with communism and other radical political movements. In Finland it was inspired by the arrival of folk music from America in the 60s and the later solidarity movements with the people of Vietnam and Chile in the 70s (Forss 2015). The most intensive years of the political movement in Finland were the 70s, after which protest songs

and political songs were overtaken by the punk rock and peace movements (ibidem: 329, 340, 347). Ultra Bra, who were mentioned in the introduction to this paper, have continued this tradition, as has Paleface, who has even played political music on radio as a DJ (ibidem: 356–358).

Paleface's *Shangri La* (2010) is a guitar-accompanied rap song about everything that is wrong with Finland. It could be seen as a reaction to the economic downturn of 2008 and a more right-wing government and politics. In *Shangri La*, Finland is a country where workers are brought over from Tallinn to save money, and CCTV and the nanny state reign over alternative subculture leftie people. The country is full of beggars, homeless people, trashy media, unnecessary celebrities, doping, snitches, school shootings and poor migration policies. Drug addicts are not getting the treatment they need, and everyone is in debt as the following extract shows:

*Pissiksillä luottokortit, valtavasti lainaa
unholaan on vaipunut jo Veikko Hursti vainaa
hurahuhhahhei, heitä pois ja osta uusi
Visa, pikavippi, karhukirje, maksuhäiriö*

Teenyboppers have credit cards, huge debts
We have forgotten about the late Veikko Hursti
hurahuhhahhei, throw away and buy a new one
Visa, payday loan, payment reminder, poor credit score

(Paleface, *Shangri La*, 2010)

Veikko Hursti is a philanthropist who helped the poor, homeless and alcoholics in the Helsinki region up until his death in 2005.

Maija Vilkkumaa's *Satumaatango* 'Fairytale Land Tango' (1999) has ironically borrowed the name of tango song *Satumaa*, which describes Finnish landscapes and romantic longing. Vilkkumaa's main character lives in an exclusive area, is well off, plays loud music and goes to bed to avoid hearing when those in need are shouting. The character has influence, power and connections with the police. He/she educates others, tells them what to do, decides what is right and what is wrong, who has the right to speak and in what way. Vilkkumaa appears to be saying that the generation in power is disconnected from the common people. The following extract summarises the attitude of the evil main character who is clearly from the previous generation:

*Älä sano mitään, mua ei kiinnosta
Mä ammun sua haulikolla, suljen sut vankilaan
Sä et tiedä mitään, isäs joutunut ei sotimaan*

Don't say anything, I'm not interested
 I'll shoot you with a shotgun, lock you up in prison
 You don't know anything, your father didn't have to go to war
 (Maija Vilkkumaa, *Satumaatango*, 1999)

6.9. Everything is okay

The final theme in this paper is a positive one. For some, everything is okay. Finland is still a safe country, an idyllic and peaceful place. Anssi Kela's *Nummela* (2001) is about a town in Southern Finland to where the protagonist moved at the age of twelve and experienced his father's death and a difficult time. However, it all turned out well; the protagonist writes songs now and is married. Here is how he describes the idyllic small-town life:

*Nämä kadut kaupungin, huvilat ja puutarhat
 Kävelytän koiraa ja mieleen palaa vuodet parhaimmat*
 These streets of the town, villas and gardens
 I'm walking the dog and the best years come to mind
 [...]
*Ja mä kelaan että kaikki taitaa olla kohdallaan
 Mä taidan kuulua tänne*
 And I think that everything seems to be okay
 I think I belong here
 (Anssi Kela, *Nummela*, 2001)

A positive take on the gloomy Finnish spirits and the short summer is Paula Vesala's *Älä droppaa mun tunnelmaa* 'Don't Drop My Mood' (2016). The protagonist has just one summer holiday and it has been raining for most of it. She has been working hard (which is still a Finnish virtue) and has only a messy backyard and a barbecue. Yet, she has decided that this is Costa Rica. She cannot make the rain clouds go away but she can get the person she is addressing to stop being negative:

*Älä tuu siihen droppaa mun tunnelmaa
 mitään eilistä juttua jankuttaa
 Voit sä vetää suupielet ylöspäin*
 Don't come and drop my mood
 Don't go on about some old story
 Can you turn your frown upside-down
 (Paula Vesala, *Älä droppaa mun tunnelmaa*, 2016)

She deserves her lower pulse and has bought dolphin pool floats. She is yearning for the sun, vitamins and sleep. This reflects a positive, upbeat attitude. Life is okay.

7. Summary and conclusions

This study shows that in contemporary Finnish popular music the critical voices and idealising voices mix with the playful and parodical. The themes that I identified in the songs are: an ironic take on depression and alcohol, marginalisation, patriotic landscapes, glorified countryside, materialistic and meaningless lives of millennials, Finns and the world, gothic dystopia, political protest, and everything is okay.

There is a spirit of problem solving in some of the songs, whereas others relish dark aesthetics. Instead of the countryside/town dichotomy that Malmberg (1999) described, there is a dichotomy between two different generations: either the materialistic and shallow millennials vs. their parents, or the radical and politically minded lefties vs. the older people in power. The patriotic stream is now accompanied by a sense of nostalgia. Marginalisation due to depression and drugs is a theme that Malmberg does not write about. In the songs Malmberg chose, Finns are intimidated by foreign lands, whereas in my data Finland is comfortable in the world, aims to get out there and has a global social conscience. The fear of global threats is another topic that Malmberg did not write about. There is a strand of contentment and positivity in my data, which is missing in Malmberg's songs. Joking about alcohol, idealising the countryside, praising Finland and dark gothic scenes are themes that are still going strong.

One should note that globalisation, American cultural hegemony and capitalism have not lead to sameness and eradication of lyrics and themes that are typically Finnish (cf. Barker 2011: 161). *Suomirock*, Finnish rock, is still very much alive and consciously takes inspiration from Finnish history and culture, thus creating a national genre (Kopomaa 2014: 160–161). *Suomirock* is used here in a wider sense to stand for all national popular music. To summarise, Finnish popular music is, like Sibelius's music, a national project where Finnishness is recreated and enforced (cf. de Gorog 1989).

The representations of Finnish men and women in the songs warrant further study. A quantitative analysis of a larger number of Finnish popular songs would also yield interesting results, as would a comparison between the content of lyrics of popular music in several countries.

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Abstract

Representations of Finland in contemporary Finnish popular music

The purpose of this paper is to study representations of Finland in contemporary Finnish popular music. Finland's self-image and concerns are reflected in the popular music of the time and it is important to take stock and self-evaluate as Finland turns 100. Theoretically, this study relies on Cultural Studies in the sense that it views nations as being continuously reproduced through texts and other discursive actions. The data consists of 21 songs of different genres of popular music and released between 1999 and 2016. The method combines qualitative Relational Content Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. I identify and exemplify commonly occurring themes with extracts from the songs. The themes are then analysed with regard to their cultural, historical and economic context. I relate the recurring representations to the themes identified by Malmberg's (1999) journalistic analysis of the content of pop song lyrics. I also comment on the intertextual connections between the Finland and Finnishness presented in the songs. My study shows that Finland is represented in Finnish popular music through the following themes: an ironic take on depression and alcohol, marginalisation, patriotic landscapes, glorified countryside, materialistic and meaningless lives of millennials, Finns and the world, gothic dystopia, political protest, and everything is okay.