Battling to be 'European': myth and the finnish race debate

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Abstract. This article will examine the debate over the racial origins of the Finns in a new way by looking at the dominant perspective in terms of myth. Focussing on Kemiläinen’s (1998, 2000) discussion, as one of the most salient, the article will dissect the structure of her racial myth and look at how, following Levi-Strauss and Kunin, this myth helps to uphold the contemporary, dominant idea amongst the Finnish elite that Finns are ‘Western’ or ‘European.’ It will note that Kemiläinen’s discussion (in spite of counter evidence) indeed upholds the dominant cultural discourse in contemporary Finland and it will look at how Finland’s status could be understood in this context.

Introduction
The Finns are one of those peoples that don’t quite fit. They were ruled by Sweden (until 1809) and then by Russia until independence in 1917. They are predominantly Lutheran but their language is related to Hungarian, a string of languages across northern Russia and, some believe, Mongolian and even Japanese (see Gleason 1969). They are not quite Eastern yet they are not quite Western (see Mead 1993, Kirby 2006, blurb). And the Finns have long fascinated anybody interested in race. Many writers have just given-up and accepted what Dale (1986, 26) sees as the almost religious idea that Finns are a ‘unique culture’: a northern mystery that is simply beyond comprehension (see, for example, Lewis 2005).

However, ‘race’ is one of the reasons why Finns have been seen to inhabit this mysterious twilight zone ‘between East and West.’

The question of how Finns should be understood in racial or more recently genetic terms has provoked heated debate amongst anthropologists, geneticists and Finnish scholars for over two hundred years. Originally it was assumed that as the Finnish language was related to Sámi – spoken by tribes perceived as Mongolian in origin – and as many Finns supposedly looked ‘Eastern,’ that Finns were ‘Mongoloid’ and this view remained relatively unchanged until the beginning of the twentieth century. Since that point, and particularly since the 1990s, it has been increasingly argued that Finns should be seen as ‘European’ but with a considerably more ‘eastern’ influence than many other Europeans. Some – almost always Finnish – scholars have argued that Finns have no eastern dimension to them at all and are completely European (for example Kemiläinen 1998, 228).

This ‘struggle to be European’ has all the makings of a scintillating – and yet dangerous – anthropological myth. There is strong evidence that some Finnish scholars – harbouring an overwhelming desire that Finns should be seen as ‘white’ – are presenting what is, alas, tendentious scholarship to the wider world in order to suppress the debate over the origins of their own people and have them accepted as ‘white’ without question. The genetic and physical anthropological arguments have been widely debated and, in general as will be discussed below, different conclusions are reached according to which model of analysis is employed. This article, however, is more interested in understanding the structure of Finnish racial identity as expressed by those who wish to assert that Finns are ‘European.’ It aims to understand exactly how this ‘myth’ - that Finns are completely European - actually operates and therefore understand more about how cultures that are ‘struggling to be European’ work, something which could be applied more broadly.

This article will mainly concentrate on Finns in the Shadow of “Aryans”: Race Theories and Racism (1998, 2000) by the late Aira Kemiläinen (1919 – 2006) who was, at the time, ‘Emeritus Professor of World History’ (stated in blurb) at Finland’s Jyväskyla University. This article will draw upon the most prominent Finnish-authored, English language discussion of Finnish racial identity in order to examine its dynamics as a ‘national myth.’ It will draw upon the English language work that it does because this, precisely because it is in English, reflects how Finland would like to be perceived or, at least, how the author and her backers would like it to be perceived. Indeed, it is published by a substantially government-funded publisher and thus – following Andreski (1974) – is likely to reflect the worldview of the elite that funds it. Moreover, it reflects an attempt to persuade Finns towards this particular racial model. The article will examine what might be called ‘the Myth of Finnish European-ness’ from a primarily Structuralist perspective. It will argue that the ‘myth’ that Finns are European is very important in justifying its current position in the European Union, which it joined in 1995. The structural dynamic of this myth will be dissected and it will be argued that the Finnish myth is based around a binary distinction: that to be ‘civilised’ means to be ‘European’ and to be ‘uncivilised’ means to be ‘Mongoloid’. It is this very ‘civilised’ nature, so runs the myth, that has pushed the historically racially ambiguous Finns into the seemingly more confident world of being ‘European’ and ‘white’. This structure may also apply to other ‘wannabe’ Europeans.

Structuralism
One of the most significant structuralists was British anthropologist Sir Edmund Leach. He admitted, as do I, that Structuralism is ‘a way of looking at things.’ It is a method that offers ‘insights’ and will always be open to criticism accordingly like any such method from psycho-analysis to feminism. Gellner observes that psycho-analysis cannot really objectively prove the existence of ‘unconscious archetypes’ or the ‘Oedipus Complex.’ By definition, they are suppressed in the ‘unconscious’ and not open to normal empirical analysis.
Levi-Strauss notes in more scientific than psycho-analysis. ways, deepening our understanding, ulti-
sense of the world (Leach 1973, 37), in structuring that which we do not
in relation to each other but are internally coherent. The same, Levi-
strauss suggests, is true of culture. Hence, cultures – like languages – can be
categorised according to certain common features and, as with languages, some
can be perceived to be closely related to each other on a structural level even if
there is no evidence or a genetic or histo-
rical relationship. Cultures are distingui-
sed by random aberrations just like lan-
guages and these can be categorised and
distinguished. To give an example, Pentecostal Christianity generally wants
to convert others to being in its group, at
least in theory. It is thus an ‘A plus B
Culture’ with regard to relationship with the ‘other.’ Hinduism does not generally
do this. You are born a Hindu, in most
Hindu groups, because of hereditary
caste. Thus, it is an ‘A not B Culture.’
Levi-Strauss maintains, therefore, that
there are levels of structure. S(1), most
controversially, is deepest, universal
structure. S(2) establishes relations bet-
ween units of structure (such as myths)
while S(3) is the overt culture which is
likely to differ substantially even betwee
structurally related groups (Kunin 2004).

Levi-Strauss employs myth to discern the
structure of societies. A substantial body
of literature exists on the subject of
myths. A very useful summary of these
discussions has been presented by Seth
Kunin in The Logic of Incest. Kunin
draws upon Levi-Strauss’ argument that
there are two kinds of society: ‘hot’ and
‘cold.’ Hot societies perceive themselves
to be constantly changing and are thus
very conscious of history. Cold societies
perceive themselves to be static and lack
a consciousness of history. All societies,
Levi-Strauss maintains, are ranged some-
where between Hot and Cold. (Levi-
Strauss 1985). Following this, Kunin
argues that every society has some kind
of symbolic system and that this system
appears uniquely logical to that society
even if it does not appear so to outsiders.
Society, Kunin argues, needs to make
sense and, as such, where there are con-
tradictions these need to be covered in
some way. (Kunin 1995, 24) Myths,
Kunin claims, are that which is employed
to cover contradictions in society and to
render beliefs or activities seemingly nat-
ural and logical. Thus, he argues, there is
no inherent reason why incest is wrong
but it is rendered unnatural through
myth. (24)

Myths, Kunin argues, can take a variety
of forms such as hero stories, supernatu-
ral stories, perceptions of history, sacred

tales and primitive scientific understand-
ing. A myth survives by virtue of its
power and the degree to which people
believe it. (25) Thus, a myth may be
based around an actual historical event.
But that event can still be a myth if it is
employed as a symbol at the heart of
society’s symbolic system and if people
are highly emotionally attached to it.
In the same analysis, Kunin also critiques
far narrower definitions of myth such as
those advocated by Pitt-Rivers who
claims that myth must always involve
supernatural elements (26). This, per-
haps, suffers from the same difficulties as
a similar definition of religion. He also
criticizes Robertson-Smith who saw all
myth as an explanation of the ‘cycles of
life’ and attempted to apply this narrow
definition across all cultures (27). This
article will thus examine the mythic
dimensions of Finnish race and how this
myth has developed and changed.iv

The Finnish Race Debate

The Finnish-language essay collection
Mongoloids or Germanics?, edited by
Kemiläinen (1985), examines the issue
of Finnish racial history in depth and
each essay has a detailed English sum-
mary. I appreciate that I will hold up a
work by Kemiläinen as evidence of ten-
dentious scholarship but they neverthe-
less provide useful summaries of the
debates that go outside social anthropo-
logy. In this volume, Virtanen argues that race
was academically categorised in terms of
a hierarchy in around 1853 by French
physical anthropologist Count Arthur de
Gobineau. He divided hierarchically be-
 tween ‘whites,’ ‘yellows’ and ‘blacks’ and
argued, based on physical evidence, that
Finns were ‘yellow,’ something promo-
ted by the supposedly ‘white’ Finland-
Swedes to further their authority to rule a
supposedly inferior race (Virtanen 1985,
514). This work can only be understood
in the context of Social Darwinism which
argued that some races are more cultural-
ly and intellectually evolved than others
and is also discussed in this volume
(Kaikkonen 1985, 512). Kemiläinen
(1998, 225) also dismisses the idea of
race as ‘discredited’ and its academic
proponents as racist (287). It should be
noted, as an aside, that Lynn (2006, Ch.
1) defends the concept of race arguing
that it is not ‘discredited’ as the majority
of academics still accept or propound it
using terms meaning the same thing such
as ‘cluster.’ He suggests that where it is

(Gellner 1993, 148). However, they help
in structuring that which we do not
understand and so, like any scientific
model, offer insights and help to make
sense of the world (Leach 1973, 37),
albeit as a way of seeing things.
Structuralism allows us to appreciate
why certain groups operate in similar
ways, deepening our understanding, ulti-
ately, of human nature. This said, I will
argue below that Structuralism is far
more scientific than psycho-analysis.

Leach, in explaining Structuralism, argues that the business of
anthropologists is the study of ‘customa-
ry behaviour’ and it is by this behaviour
that cultures can be superficially distin-
guished. The presupposition of structural
anthropology is that humans have broad-
ly similar minds – because they have all
developed the internal classification
structure of language – and that there is,
therefore, a kind of universal human
mind which works through similar struc-
tures in all cultures.iii Thus, Claude Levi-
Strauss argues that culture is like a lan-
guage. Languages can differ superficially
to a tremendous extent – as in the enor-
mous differences in grammar and wor-
ding between Finnish and English.
However, all languages follow certain
principles – such as having a grammar
system – and, thus, beneath the myriad
of languages there are ‘deep level univer-
sals’ that can be discerned (Leach 40).
Levi-Strauss argues that the same is true
with human cultures. There are certain
underlying principles – because all
humans have the same basic drives and
all employ language – and these constitu-
te the ‘deep universals’ of culture.iii

Levi-Strauss notes in The Raw and the
Cooked that in all cultures human-being
make certain ‘binary distinctions’ such as
‘Left/Right’ from which follows con-
cepts such as ‘Good/Bad’ and
‘Right/Wrong.’ All cultures also distin-
guish ‘Raw/Cooked’ which distinguishes
them from animals and from which fol-
ows other distinctions. Equally, all cul-
tures have numerous common spatial and
existential oppositions such as
‘High/Low,’ ‘Wet/Dry’ and so on (Leach
48). Anthropologists such as Roger
Sandall (2001) have emphasised essen-
tial differences between ‘tribal’ and ‘civili-
sed’ culture. But these would still appe-
ar to be universals. In languages, univer-
sal structures underpin a system of signs
which are superficially random and make
sense only in relation to each other but

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seen as ‘discredited’ this is often for political rather than academic reasons as critics do not attempt to jettison taxonomies such as species and ‘race’ only suffers from the same difficulties – and is only as essentialist – as any taxonomy. He outlines why he believes the concept still to be scientifically valid. But this debate is beyond the scope of this discussion.

Continuing with our discussion of Kemiliäinen’s edited volume, Hietala (1985, 517) examines the way in which the ‘Mongol Finn’ idea led to eugenics and financial incentives for Finland-Swedes to have more children. Kilpeläinen looks at the way that nineteenth century anthropologist Johannes Blumenbach found that Finnish skulls were very similar to Sami and assumed Finns were ‘nomads from the steppes.’ Indeed, he argued that they were related to the Inuit. This was known as the Turanian theory and was developed by a Dane called ‘Rasmus Rask (1818).’ This further developed into the ‘Mongol Theory’ where it was argued that the Finns were related to Mongolians and this was substantiated by arguments suggesting that the language was ultimately mongolid taken up by Finland-Swede M. A. Castrén. This in turn was connected to Gobineau’s theory. He regarded the Finns as ‘ugly and lazy’ and, by the nineteenth century, a mixture of Mongoloid and Germanic (Kilpeläinen 1985). Until as recently as the 1960s Nordic encyclopaedias defined Finns as ‘mongolid’ (Aro 1985, 520) and Kemiliäinen (1998) provides a detailed history of how up to and throughout the twentieth century mainstream Swedes, Finland-Swedes, Finns themselves and numerous other nationalities regarded Finns as partially mongolid. Other essays in the earlier volume discuss the political reasons behind why Finland-Swedes and Russians would want to believe that Finns were Mongoloid and Hamåälen summarises that, ‘A fundamental psychological tradition of Finnish society was that which emphasised the greater prestige of the highest Swedish-speaking social layers compared to the Finnish-speaking social layers’ (Hämäläinen 1985, 527).

Theories of Finnish Origin: Migration from the East or Proto-European?

Niskanen (2002) notes two main sides to the discussion. One group propound what is the called the ‘Migration Theory.’ In summary, they suggest that Finns arrived in Europe 3000 years ago from either North East Europe or North West Siberia and the latter idea has become more commonly known. Around 2000 years ago they separated into different tribes and the Finns separated from the Estonians by moving north. As discussed, the Finnish ‘mongolid look’ was originally used, along with the language, to justify this idea. Many physical anthropologists and geneticists argue that Finns are, at the very least, more ‘eastern’ than most Europeans. Kittles et al (1998) find that the ‘Y Chromosome Haplotype variation’ reveals that Finns have ‘dual origins’ between Mongolid and Germanic. Also twenty-seven percent of Finns carry the ‘Tat C’ eastern genetic marker compared to only seven percent in Norway. Gugliemo et al (1999) argue that Finns are the most ‘Eastern’ of Europeans with ten percent eastern genes on average while others have estimated that Finns have a quarter or more ‘eastern’ genes. Ruoslahi et al (1968) find that Finns carry genetic markers found in the Chinese but in no other European populations. Research has also noted that Finland-Swedes are genetically hardly distinguishable from Finns and have more in common with them than with Swedes (Hyypää and Mäki 2003). As stated, Wiik (2006) argues that Finns are around a third mongolid genetically with the genetic origins of Finnish males being in the east. However, Niskanen argues that the Finnish ‘mongolid look’ actually involves features inherited from early European (Cro-Magnon) man which have remained due to Finland’s cold environment and its relatively late move to agriculture. Niskanen therefore argues in favour of the ‘Continuity Theory’ which began to gain a following from around 1980 onwards. In a detailed discussion of racial history, Niskanen argues that Finns are not actually ‘Mongolid.’ Finland has been inhabited since the end of the last Ice Age and the Finns arrived somewhere between 10,000 and 6000 years ago in waves. Niskanen argues that Finns are a mixture of a number of European ‘sub-races’: Finns are ‘Old Europeans,’ amongst the earliest settlers to northern Europe, and Proto-Nordics, otherwise known as Cro-Magnon Man. The isolation of the Finns has meant that they have retained features from these groups explaining their distinctive and supposedly Mongolid look, which in fact evidences adaptation to the cold. Then, most recently, Finns have been influenced by Indo-European ‘Nordics’ who came originally from what is now Russia and who dominate much of Scandinavia. Wiik, however, counters that Finns (in terms of male genes) arrived from 10000 years ago onwards from the east when there were already ‘Old Europeans’ settled in Europe, rendering the Finns from the east (2008, 37). Villenes et al (2000) argue that the ‘Tat-C’ ‘eastern’ genetic marker is actually a ‘northern’ rather than an ‘eastern’ marker. It is also found in the Finno-Ugric Siberian peoples and in Greenland and it appears to have migrated from Finland to the East. Also, Anttonen (132) stresses that Finnish nationalism often plays down relatively recent immigration to present the ‘Finns’ as a ‘homogenous race.’ In fact, he argues, there has been immigration from Sweden and, under Russian rule, from Russia and Tatarstan and this has mixed with the ‘Finnish’ population. But whether Finns are partially mongolid or some perceived ‘mongoloids’ are originally, in some way, Finnish or some Finns have maintained or evolved a mongolid-type facial structure in response to the environment making them ‘Arctic’, Finns have been perceived historically as not being entirely like other ‘Europeans’ for linguistic, physical and more recently genetic reasons. This is an historical academic perception, though many relevant scholars still hold this view in a nuanced form and it has, in some ways, influenced Finnish self-perception. There remains this ‘debate’ and we might suggest that certain Finns are battling to be recognised as European.

The Finnish Myth

This genetically mixed idea of Finnish racial identity has become generally accepted – whatever the reality – and it is even reflected in Finnish history books. For example, Juutikkala and Pirinen (1996, 21) write that:

‘Genetic research indicates that the genes carried by the Finnish population are ¾ European and ¼ Uralian or...’
It might be countered that this is potentially based on erroneous research but it demonstrates that being at least ‘slightly eastern’ is, for many, part of being Finnish. Indeed, Kemiläinen (1998, 193) notes that in the 1920s, Finnish school children were told that they were Mongols and Finno-Uralic areas were marked yellow on the map along with Mongolia. However, during the 1990s in particular, many mainly Finnish scholars have played down Finland’s eastern origins. Anttonen (2005, 132) observes the gradual trend is for Finns to have moved ‘westwards’ in terms of how they wish to be perceived: ‘The emphasis on the Western-ness of the Finns is a recent phenomenon’ rendering Finland’s joining the European Union a ‘return to Europe.’ Thus, he notes that Jutikkala and Pirinen’s English-language history of Finland has evolved from claiming that ‘Finns are part of the East Baltic race and partially the Nordic race’ in 1962 to making a more nuanced claim in 1996 (132) but even these accept that Finns are genetically partially eastern. In the most recent edition of the book - in 2003 - the idea that Finns are eastern has been dropped altogether. Moreover, Anttonen seems to imply that the desire to represent Finns as completely ‘western’ (or completely eastern) may be politically motivated. Thus, he notes that in Kemiläinen’s work ‘ideas of race and civilization are linked, as the “Western Genetic Heritage” of the Finnish population is used as an argument for Finland belonging to Western Civilization’ (132). Likewise Browning (1999) notes that since the end of the Cold War – in which Finland was heavily oriented towards the Soviet Union in a policy known as Finlandization - the two main discourses in Finnish nationalism can be approximately described as ‘Westernisers’ and ‘Easternisers’ or, at least, those who do not embrace the Westernising narrative. The former are currently dominant within the elite. During the Cold War narratives of being partially eastern were more salient due to political convenience. Equally, Anttonen notes that Finnish scholars tend to separate ‘language’ and ‘race’ in order to keep Finns ‘white’ but conflate the two when discussing the Sámi, which then distinguishes them from the Finns despite their similar language and relatively similar genetic heritage in many cases (133). It should be emphasised as well that Kemiläinen’s volume was re-published (Kemiläinen 2000) by the Finnish Literature Society. This is a government-funded organisation run by established academics and, as Andreski (1974, 49) points out, is therefore very likely to reflect the cultural view favoured by the Finnish establishment – a view that Finns are ‘Western’ – in its academic publishing.vi

**Finnish Race and Myth**

*Finns in the Shadow of the “Aryans”* does, indeed, appear to follow this pattern. It appears to reflect a Finnish insecurity about race and European-ness and attempts to promote – regardless of the evidence – the idea that Finns are ‘European.’ The use of fallacy and faulty logic is widespread in this Westernising narrative dressed-up as scholarship. Kemiläinen seems to argue that Finland is not genetically eastern because it is apparently highly democratic and children learn foreign languages: ‘Finland is in many respects more European than the older members of the European Union. From the view-point of human rights, we may emphasise that there was never servility . . . All children learn the second national language and at least one foreign language’ (Kemiläinen 1998, 287). She also argues that a backlash against the idea that Finns are wholly white was caused by a combination of Soviet brainwashing and ignorance. The attitude to racism took a surprising turn in the 1960s until the 1980s when the young and often leftist and radical generation . . . began to criticise the older generation . . . because they had denied the Mongol origin of the Finns. The young people . . . accused patriotic parents of nationalist fervour . . . the young thought that nationalism and race pride prevented the first generation of an independent state accepting that their ancestors had Mongol roots. It is evident that the young did not know the nature of the racial debates . . . the drops of Mongolian blood were mentioned with a smile or with satisfaction (284-5)

Indeed, disagreement with Kemiläinen’s arguments is met with counters that might hardly be regarded as academic. One is just to assert that her critics are wrong with no attempt at justification. In response to scholars claiming that Finns have mongoloid appearance, she simply writes, ‘In fact this oriental appearance does not exist in Finland’ without any attempt to justify this statement at all (Kemiläinen 1998, 80). Later, again attempting to refute opinions that some Finns look ‘mongoloid,’ she asserts ‘The Finnish mouth is not broad’ (164) without any citation.

Another tactic is to simply claim that opponents are ‘racist’ (287) something that I would argue is a fallacious appeal to emotion considering the contemporary power of this word, and as ‘common people’ (79). She also presents half truths, arguing that stereotypes about Finns being ‘disorganised’ are wrong because they won the Winter War. However, they ultimately lost a lot of land, the army leader was a Finland-Swede and this has little, again, to do with race. Moreover, she ignores the articles cited above about the Dual Origins of Finns or any related work by Richard Lynn (2006, 18) which would raise at least a challenge to her thesis with Lynn summarising that only ‘Western Finns’ are ‘Nordic’ while the racial dimension of eastern Finns is more complex. Kemiläinen’s language is also constantly in the first person plural with references to ‘we Finns’ and ‘our land’ as if it is a kind of nationalist appeal to the Finnish people. By using ‘we’ she is stirring-up a national identity – ‘we’ who have suffered together, ‘we’ who have fought together, an obvious rhetorical device. It this kind of form which raises the very questions – that Anttonen has speculated on – over whether Kemiläinen’s English summary of the racial debate is more than mere historical anthropology. What, then, is the essential mythic idea that is propounded by Kemiläinen and others in the academic writing on the Finnish race? Drawing upon *Finns in the Shadow the Aryans* – which essentially summarises in English the ideas in *Mongoloids or Germans?* – I think we can discern the following racial myth or idea in Kemiläinen’s work (as the most widely publicised example of such work):

**A. Finns are white and European.** Historically, they were seen as mongoloid (apart from by Finland’s heroes such as Elias Lönnrot, the compiler of their ‘national epic’ Kalevala). This was because of (1) Poor scholarship employed the ‘discredited’ idea of physical racial differences. (2) Biased science – Finns being ‘mongoloid’ justified Swedish, Russian and Finland-Swede dominion over
them as mongoloids were perceived as inferior. (3) Conflation of language and race leading to the erroneous conclusion that Finns were racially mongoloid. (4) Because, during the Cold War, people had been, in some sense, brainwashed by Soviet propaganda to this effect or were just uneducated or unpatriotic.

B. Modern genetic research – mainly by Finns - demonstrates that Finns are either hardly eastern or completely European. The fact that Finland is a ‘highly educated’ and ‘egalitarian’ society further demonstrates that it is racially European as does its ability to win the Winter War against the Soviets. Finns do not look eastern and that is a fact. Moreover, those who disagree are racists.

In Kunin’s sense this idea is a myth because it holds together Finland as a European country. It covers contradictions. During the Cold War, Finland was oriented towards the Soviet Union – towards the East – and, in that context, its Eastern-ness was emphasised by English-language scholars such as Jutikkala and Pirinen. Finland was eastern oriented and the idea that it had an Eastern origin, somewhere in the then Soviet Union such as Mongolia, was perhaps not un-useful. However, it also maintained relations with the ‘West.’ Thus, the ‘mixed’ model then propounded by Jutikkala and Pirinen – that Finland is in the ‘East Baltic Race’ - was a useful compromise. Finland was politically (in theory) neutral and so ‘between east and west’ (even if in reality it was oriented towards the USSR) and its race reflected that (see Lavery 2003). It was thus a kind of myth.

Now Finland is in the European Union and is substantially oriented towards the West. I would suggest, therefore, that it is now in its interests to be seen as European and ‘Western’ and, moreover, it has been argued that Finns always had a strong desire to be seen as white. Laine (2006) provides a detailed discussion of the Finnish inferiority complex or ‘Cultural Cringe’ (see Philips 1958). She observes that:

What, then, is the structure of the form of racial myth propounded by Kemiläinen and how is this reflected in Finnish culture?

European (Civilised) v Mongoloid (Uncivilised)

Firstly, there is a noticeable binary opposition between ‘European’ and ‘Mongoloid.’ ‘European’ implies educated, civilised, egalitarian, organised and high social status. ‘Mongoloid’ is the very antithesis of this otherwise Kemiläinen would not confute racial and social arguments. To be ‘Mongoloid’ is to be uncivilised, uneducated, aristocratic in organisation, disorganised and of low social status. Thus, the she seems to accept the very nineteenth century reasoning that she condemns as illogical. European culture is clearly looked up to as a higher culture and, connected to this, a higher race. This, I would suggest, is congruous with the kind of national low self-esteem discussed by Laine. Hence, when Finns were perceived as Mongoloid they were also perceived as illiterate peasants. Now this latter perception has changed, the former must logically change too. Finns may have ‘eastern genes’ but civilisation pushes them into Europe. Hence, the more civilised one is, the more European one is. This may explain the strong emphasis in Finland on the importance of education (see, for example, Lander 1976, 93). There is a need to prove ones self in the light of historic negative perceptions. Laine (2006, 74) observes that:... the Finnish ‘backwoods culture’ has been represented as uncultured, uncommunicative, impolite, culturally and biologically pathological... too straightforward and far too serious compared to the civilised and well-behaved urban cultures of the other European nations.

One way of over-compensating for this is with the relatively high number of Masters Degrees and Doctorates. Finland’s relatively high level of education has been noted in for example Järvinen and Vanttaja (2001). Finnish tourist literature equally demonstrates that Finns wish to be perceived as a highly educated people, demonstrating the importance of education for status in Finland. The website www.visitfinland.com has a specific section on ‘Education.’ It claims that: That Finnish literacy rates are among the highest - if not the highest - in the world is a tribute to the effectiveness of the Finnish education system... Today there are 20 universities in Finland, mostly owned and funded by the State. Students do not have to pay study fees. Universities are required ‘to attain a high international standard of research, education and instruction, whilst abiding by ethical principles and good scientific practice.’ Also under ‘Culture and Lifestyle’ the site asserts that: As one of the world’s best-educated nations, Finns enjoy a high standard of living and hold cultural expression of all kinds in high regard. Innovative high technology infiltrates every Finnish home; but an appreciation of the simple joys of the unspoilt natural environment is equally widespread.

Finland is a small country with a rich cultural heritage. Reflecting this, Finns count among the world’s top readers, and libraries, theatres and museums exert an irresistible attraction. A nation of five million people continues to enrich the world with great musicians, architects, designers and dancers.

Other tourist literature commonly includes photographs of Finns receiving PhDs – wearing the distinctive top hat that is worn by graduating doctoral students at German influenced universities (e.g Otava 2005, 108). This further demonstrates the importance of education in Finland. Finns want foreigners to perceive them as highly educated and indeed ‘cultured’ people.

Past (Negative) v Present (Positive)

The second distinction is ‘past’ and ‘present.’ Kemiläinen emphasises that in the past scholarship and the understanding of Finnish race was poor quality and suspect. It was based around ‘discredited’ racial theories and the conflation of language with race; it was biased because Russians, Soviets, Swedes and
Finland-Swedes all held strong motives to want ‘science’ to prove that Finns were mongoloid; genetics had not yet been discovered and, more recently, the Cold War meant that Finns were susceptible to Soviet propaganda, supposedly undermining their critical faculties. The past involved poor science and a time un-conducive to critical research.

By contrast, modern genetics – as presented mainly by Finnish scholars ‘proves’ that Finns are not Mongoloid and this is not subjected to the same critique. For Popper (1966) this kind of distinction evidences a false-rationalist acceptance of contemporary scientific knowledge as ‘truth’ despite the way in which rationalism should always critique the orthodox view. Equally, the possibility that modern Finnish racial theories have underlying motivations or that there might be an element of ‘brainwashing’ involved in these is not discussed at all. Hence, there was a time in the past when all Finns were misled in relation to their racial origins. But now genetics ‘proves,’ almost beyond doubt, that Finns are European.

This emphasis on, effectively, the future is highly significant in terms of Finnish identity. The idea of ‘Cultural Cringe’ was developed by Australian social anthropologist A. A. Philips (1958). Cultural Cringe was manifested, often in post-colonial countries, where people dismissed the achievements of their culture and regarded it as inferior to others. It is also seen, Philips argued, in a somewhat anti-intellectual attitude in some cases as well as in an emphasis on the ‘the future’ rather than country’s past which is perceived in negative terms. Philips noted that this phenomenon was particularly pronounced amongst Australians where, Philips argued, there was the belief that their culture occupied an inferior and peripheral place in global terms. We have already discussed the way in which such an idea exists in Finland and it might be argued that Kemiläinen’s racial myth reflects that. The past was mongoloid but the future is European.

Finnish Scholarship (Honest) v Foreign Scholarship (Politically Motivated)

Further implicit in Kemiläinen’s presentation is that modern Finnish scholarship is reputable while foreign scholarship is somewhat less so.8 Kemiläinen argues that contemporary genetics ‘proves’ that Finns are European. However, what she is actually referring to is a series of contemporary mainly Finnish scholars who have emphasised that Finns are European drawing upon a certain interpretation of the information, often publishing in Finnish (see Anttonen 2005, 132). Other contemporary scholars – from many different countries such as the USA, Russia and Italy – have continued to emphasise the eastern dimension to Finns as we have seen, but these are essentially ignored in the analysis. Foreign scholars are specifically accused of political bias, with it clearly delineated – even in recent history - that Russians, Soviets, Swedes and Finland-Swedes (Finland’s traditional, stereotyped ‘aristocracy’ due to former Swedish rule) have an essentially racist desire for Finns to be eastern or ‘mongoloid.’ By contrast, modern Finnish scholars are assumed to be honest and without such motivations. This would be congruous with Laine’s (2006) argument that to be ‘honest’ is regarded as an essential Finnish quality lacking in ‘Europeans’ and reflects low self-esteem – Finns may not be powerful but ‘at least we are honest’. She highlights this as a Finnish ‘national myth’ and Kemiläinen’s racial ideas appear to be reflecting it. It might also be seen to imply a strongly nationalistic culture which Anttonen (2005, 125) also remarks on.

Finns (Correct) v Foreigners (Incorrect)

This distinction is related to the above point. In general, Finnish scholars are drawn upon as ‘authorities’ while foreign scholars – whose racial ideas are disagreeable – are heavily critiqued. This is most clearly seen, as quoted above, when Kemiläinen quotes numerous foreign observers who claim that there is some kind of Mongoloid look amongst many Finns and counters simply that, ‘In fact this oriental appearance does not exist in Finland’ without any attempt to justify this at all. It is thus a very clear appeal to authority – herself as a university professor perhaps. Again and again, throughout the works, Finnish scholars who argue that Finns are European are presented essentially uncritically, such as ‘Dr Pauli Kajunjoja’ (228). Kemiläinen also dismisses a particular Estonian anthropologist because a particular Finnish anthropologist has criticised her, without even feeling the need to say what the criticism was (221). And those who disagree have their motives questioned or are simply dismissed as incorrect. There thus appears to be a very basic Finnish patriotism here. Anttonen (2005, 125) remarks that Finland is a strongly consensus-based society which sees itself as being very united. He argues that Finns generally dislike outsiders to a greater extent than other European nations. It is thus, he argues, a highly patriotic society and this aspect of the myth may reflect that.

‘Finns are European’ (Cultural Heroes) v ‘Finns are Mongoloid’ (Racists)

This is a fascinating distinction in terms of myth. Kemiläinen makes a point of emphasising that while it was the case that during the nineteenth century there was general agreement amongst Finnish and foreign intellectuals that Finns should be perceived as Mongoloid, Finland’s de facto ‘cultural heroes’ did not concur with this. During most of the nineteenth century, intellectuals, like all who were educated in Finland, were primarily Swedish-speaking. However, a divide gradually developed between Fennomans – who, drawing upon romantic ideas, believed that the Finnish-language and culture ‘of the people’ had to be promoted – and the Finland-Swedes who wanted to specifically promote a Finland-Swedish culture based around perceived ethnic difference from Finns. The former group and especially J. V. Snellman (1806-81) (a cultural expert who was actually raised in Sweden proper) and Elias Lönnrot (1802-84) (who compiled the Finnish folk epic Kalevala) both argued, though not perhaps scientifically, that Finns should be seen as European.18 Finnish anthropologist Juha Pentikäinen (1999, 252) has observed that Kalevala has gained the status of a kind of ‘sacred scripture’ within Finnish ‘Civic Religion’ cementing the place of Lönnrot as a cultural hero. Kemiläinen thus points out that, ‘Lönnrot remarked that the characteristics of the Mongols – as far as he knew them – did not fit the Finns . . . He considered Finns to belong to the Caucasian race, if they were not between this and the Mongolian race’ (64). Snellman is slightly more ambiguous over this issue so Kemiläinen maintains that, ‘The champion of the Fennoman or pro-Finnish movement, Johan Vilhelm Snellman (1806-1881), considered the question of race and racial roots insignificant’ (66). Hence, both of these Finland-Swedes who have been...
admitted as ‘Finnish’ historical national heroes are held to agree, in some way, with the viewpoint propounded by Kemiläinen.

By contrast, foreign nineteenth century scholars, with a few isolated exceptions, from Germany, Sweden, Russia, England and France regarded Finns as primarily mongolid in origin (69). These scholars are also termed as ‘racist’ (68). Thus, a fascinating binary distinction is found here between the idolised heroes of Finnish culture (who believe that Finns are European or at least not Mongolid or that race does not matter) and ‘foreign racists’ who believe they are Mongolid. Thus, ultimately it would appear that in Kemiläinen’s myth ‘racism’ against the Finns has been defeated by mainly Finnish scholarship – and Finland becoming ‘civilised’ - which has underlined the veracity of Finland’s cultural heroes. Hence, the myth of Finland’s racial origins has effectively been a battle against ‘foreign racism’ which Finns have ultimately won by ‘proving’ themselves that they are European. As discussed, racism has been defeated, in Kemiläinen’s myth, in ‘racist’ terms whereby ‘European’ is conflated with ‘civilised’ and so on.

Anti-Racist (Logical, Acceptable) v Racist (Illogical, Unacceptable)

Of course, this also reflects an important idea that has gained strong currency in European culture since World War II – that ‘racism’ – or specifically an academic study of racial differences - is effectively a kind of heresy against ‘truth’. Kemiläinen dismisses certain scholars simply by accusing them, due to their academically argued views, of being ‘racist’, a fallacious appeal to emotion as already discussed. Therefore, we can see the broader shift from past scholarship (racist, negative) to present scholarship (not racist, positive).

Ellis (2004) argues that the dismissal of discussion of racial differences reflects a Neo-Marxist emphasis on those who are perceived to be disempowered which has moved from ‘the worker’ to the ethnic minority, for example. This itself reflects what Popper has termed a ‘false rationalist’ world-view. Popper (1966, 39) argues that Marxism draws on the Hegelian dialectic whereby a thesis must lead to an antithesis and synthesis. Popper argues that any Hegelian-based ideology, must always have an enemy (a contradiction) otherwise the dialectic is disproved. Moreover, Romanticism (and thus its successor philosophies such as Nationalism, Marxism, Fascism, Cultural Relativism and the other philosophies of the Continental School) do not, and cannot, prove their premises that, for example, ‘All history . . . is the history of class struggles’ or ‘The most natural state . . . is a single people with a single national character’ (Popper 1966, 52). They are asserted as founding principles; as undisputable truths. Popper (21) observes that in Romanticism there is ‘a new kind of dogmatism . . . it confronts us with a dictum. And we can take it or leave it’. It is an ‘age of dishonesty’ which does little more than ‘bewitch’ the reader. It asserts truth as eternal rather than constantly critique it and this is false rationalism. Moreover, the need for an ‘other’ makes the ideology – like all Hegelian ideologies - positively dange-rous.

It might be suggested that Kemiläinen’s myth reflects this intolerant, false rationalist idea. Those who portrayed Finns as mongolid expound ‘racist’ ideas which can be dismissed for that very reason. Their opposites are clearly preferable, and more coherent, because they are not ‘racist’ and are, therefore, not ‘discredited’ which Lynn (2006, Ch 1) points out seems to mean ‘disagreed with’ by certain anthropologists no matter what the theories’ are all example of ‘racism,’ when this term is, of course, highly politically charged and relating, Ellis at least has argued, to a certain ideological construction. Hence, we can see that implicit to Kemiläinen’s myth is the idea that Finns – though they were ‘between east and west’ – have moved to being white because they are civilised and educated. Whiteness is something that they have effectively achieved the right to. The second thread is that present scholarship – where it is presented – is seen uncritically as fact as it, in her presentation, substantiates the idea that Finns are European. This is congruous with the Cultural Cringe dimension to Finnish culture. Thirdly, Finns are implicitly perceived as ‘honest’ in their scholarship while others are generally seen as politically motivated and even ‘racist’ in theirs, something which may reflect Cultural Cringe as we have discussed. And finally, Finns are portrayed quite uncritically while foreign scholars are criticised, often dismissively. This may possibly reflect a Finnish cultural dimension of not engaging in public disagreement or simply a sense of Finnish patriotism. Moreover, the patriotic dimensions to the myth are further underlined by her argument that Finland’s cultural heroes always believed Finns to be European while only ‘foreign racists’ disagreed with this. Finland has thus won an intellectual and social battle against ‘foreign racists’ and it has been won by Finnish scholars and by Finnish social advancement.

Conclusion

This article has conducted a structuralist analysis of a summary of the racial arguments of the prominent Finnish historian of the anthropology of race Aira Kemiläinen. It has drawn mainly upon her work because hers is one of the few summaries of the arguments over Finnish racial identity presented in English which would imply that it reflects how Finns, or at least those promoting the Finnish-European model, wish to be perceived by foreigners. Increasingly, it is this model, albeit less stridently presented, that has gained acceptance in other English-language literature on these issues published in Finland such as Jutikkala and Pirinen (2003). I quite appreciate that there are difficulties with the Structuralist method and the article attempts to address those problems. But centrally, it argues, in accord with Anttonen, that there has been a gradual change in Finnish perception - as reflected in Finnish scholarship – from an emphasis on the Eastern dimension of the Finns to an emphasis on the Western dimensions. This change, it has argued, can be seen as play for status underpinned by the implicit view that to be civilised means to be ‘white.’ The article has demonstrated that Kemiläinen produces effectively a myth of the Finns’ racial origins which, following the Levi-Straussian model of myth, covers up contradictions in order to justify the present or desired societal structure. Hence, this European idea has become especially significant since Finland joined the European Union in 1995. Kemiläinen’s myth reflects a number of
oppositions which are congruous with other research on Finnish national identity. First of all, there is the view that to be white and European means to be civilised and that Finns have achieved whiteness through civilisation. There is the prizing of the present over the past, which might be seen to reflect Cultural Cringe. There is the idea that Finnish scholars are somehow more ‘honest’ and rational than foreigners and there is essentially the view that foreign observers are wrong and Finnish scholars are correct. Finally, there is the centrality of historic Finnish cultural heroes who are pitted, intellectually, against ‘foreign’ and ‘racist’ scholars and who have ultimately been vindicated by modern Finnish scholars. Moreover, there is implicit racist (negativity) vs anti-racist (positive, acceptable) dichotomy whereby opponents can be dismissed as ‘racist’ – for propounding academic arguments - and thus supposedly not worth debating with. This is a false rationalist thought-system. Perhaps it is not too much of an exaggeration to suggest that Kemiläinen’s myth – while, of course, raising questions about Finnish scholarship in this area - is a kind of intellectual, nationalist battle. The past was a negative time for Finland when she was ruled by foreigners (Sweden and then Russia) and perceived as uncivilised and Mongoloid. But during this time there were Finnish heroes who disagreed. In the twentieth century, a combination of Finnish scholars and social advancement has proven – against incorrect or politically motivated or just racist foreign intellectuals – that Finns are European. And this is what Finland’s heroes from the past had always said. Thus, Finland has won its place in Europe as an equal nation, as its heroes always believed it was. Certainly, this kind of mythic analysis demonstrates that the intellectual debate over race in Finland has civic religious and political dimensions, while there may also be scholarship in this area that does not. Many scholars agree that the question of the Finnish race remains unanswered. I would argue that on structural level, drawing upon a modern myth, they should be categorised as ‘Battling to be White’ which may also be the case with a number of other peripheral European nations in terms of racial scholarship. Further comparative research in this area would be of great interest such as in relation to Greenland as an example of a nation on Europe’s borders.

Notes
1. They have been widely described in this way. See, for example, Otava (2005) or Rajanen (1984). Obviously, the terms ‘east’ and ‘west’ are fluid and have been widely critiqued. See Gray (2007) or Said (1979) for further discussion.
2. More recently this idea has been criticised by scholars such as Pinker (1994) and his perspective has been itself heavily criticised by Sampson (2007).
3. I am aware of the debate over the term ‘culture’ (see, for example, Fox and King 2002). I think much of this reflects the old argument over words between essentialists and nominalists and is nothing specific to ‘culture’ itself.
4. For a detailed defence of structuralist see Miles-Watson (2008).
5. Also, Marunic (2005) argues that both the Finns and the Greenlander – as well as a J Curve of peoples down to parts of Slovenia – have a gene which means they are not resistant to alcohol. Along this curve alcoholism and suicide are very high and he connects the gene to mongoloid influence.
6. See Dutton (2008) or Wilson (1976) for evidence of a political agenda in this organisation’s publishing. I should stress, however, that I have also read some very interesting works from this publisher.
7. It might be countered that this is a straw-man argument reflecting the fact that Kemiläinen’s English may not have been of an especially high standard. But she emphasises in her preface that the book has edited by an English native speaker working in the language centre of her university.
8. Of course, some might suggest that the fact that the fact that arguments as illogical as Kemiläinen’s got through peer-review rather raises questions about historical and anthropological scholarship in Finland.
9. Both have special ‘flag days’ in their honour and also both came very high in Finland’s 2004 television programme ‘Greatest Finns’ with Lonnrot at ‘10’ and Snellman at ‘24’.

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