

Research Note:
Mackinder, Westermarck and the Åland Question

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”You see those little holes?’ a local asked An American visitor to Lvov, on the disputed border between Russia and Poland. ‘We call them here ‘Wilson’s Points.’ They have been made with machine guns; the big gaps have been made with hand grenades. We are now engaged in self-determination, and God knows what and when the end will be.’”²

1. Introduction

In the wake of last year’s award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos for his efforts to bring the country’s more than 50-year-long civil war to an end, the words of another Colombian Nobel Prize winner sprung to mind. Upon receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982, Gabriel García Márquez lectured on the solitude of Latin America. The crux of that solitude being, he explained, the lack of conventional means to render the lives of some on the continent believable. Lives reflected, one may assume, through the characters in his famous novel from 1967, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, members of the Buendía family in the fictive Macondo.

In Finland, 2017 has been a year of recollection. The anniversary of one hundred years of Finnish independence has spurred a buzz of conversations and events that have brought to life in the minds of many more or less legendary or forgotten figures from the past. One of my personal favourites is the police officer Walter Rohde, who in the island of Pargas outside Finland’s former capital Åbo (Turku in Finnish) in 1907 is supposed to have assisted Lenin finding a horse in his escape from the country only to later be shot three times in the head by red revolutionaries during the Finnish civil war. Are we not haunted, like the villagers in Macondo, by ghosts?

1 The author, Heidi Öst, is in the final stage of her doctoral studies in Public Law at Åbo Akademi University, where she is finalizing her thesis which concerns citizenship and voting rights in four autonomous areas, with Åland as one of the case studies. Previously she has also studied Global Politics at Keele University and has done research for the Åland Islands Peace Institute. Currently she is also acting as the mediation officer at the Peace institute’s Åland Mediation office.

2 Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919 : six months that changed the world*, Random House Trade Paperback Edition, 2003, at p. 58.

On the anniversary year of one hundred years of Finnish independence, it seems appropriate to initiate an examination of the role played by Edvard Westermarck in the Åland settlement and the extent to which, if any, it was influenced by the geopolitical outlook of Sir Halford Mackinder. Edvard Westermarck was the first rector of the resurrected Swedish-language academy in Åbo (the present Åbo Akademi University, hereinafter referred to as Åbo Academy in this work), and had acted prior to this both as professor of sociology in London School of Economics (LSE) and of practical philosophy in Helsinki University³. Westermarck represented the Swedish Assembly of Finland in the League of Nations when the question of the status of the islands was discussed. Westermarck's time at the LSE links him to Sir Halford Mackinder, director of the LSE between 1903 and 1908, and thus to a certain geopolitical outlook shaped by Mackinder, which has had tremendous influence over foreign policy discourse during the last century.⁴ Given that these two prominent LSE pioneers were active several years in the same academic community, one may ask whether Westermarck was influenced by Mackinder's world view and/or vice versa?

In the following, I will first revisit the views presented by Mackinder in one of his most famous lectures. I will then examine Westermarck's time at the LSE, with the view to identify potential points of connection with Mackinder. Finally I will turn to the Åland Islands question and examine what Westermarck himself has remarked about his involvement in the issue.

2. Mackinder's mapping of the world

Mackinder was a student of Oxford University with an affinity for maps, who had visited Harvard, Princeton and Johns Hopkins to inquire about their geographical teaching in 1882.⁵ Later on, as the president of the geography section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Mackinder argued for the establishment of a school of geography. He was eventually made Director of the first School of Geography at Oxford in 1899. He was also interested in economic and military strategy. Mackinder taught at the LSE, founded by the socialist Fabian society in 1895, more or less from the start, and in 1903 he was appointed Director.

3 The University of Helsinki was at that point – until 1919 – officially known as the Imperial Alexander University in Finland. The University was also in fact the renamed successor of the original Royal Academy of Åbo.

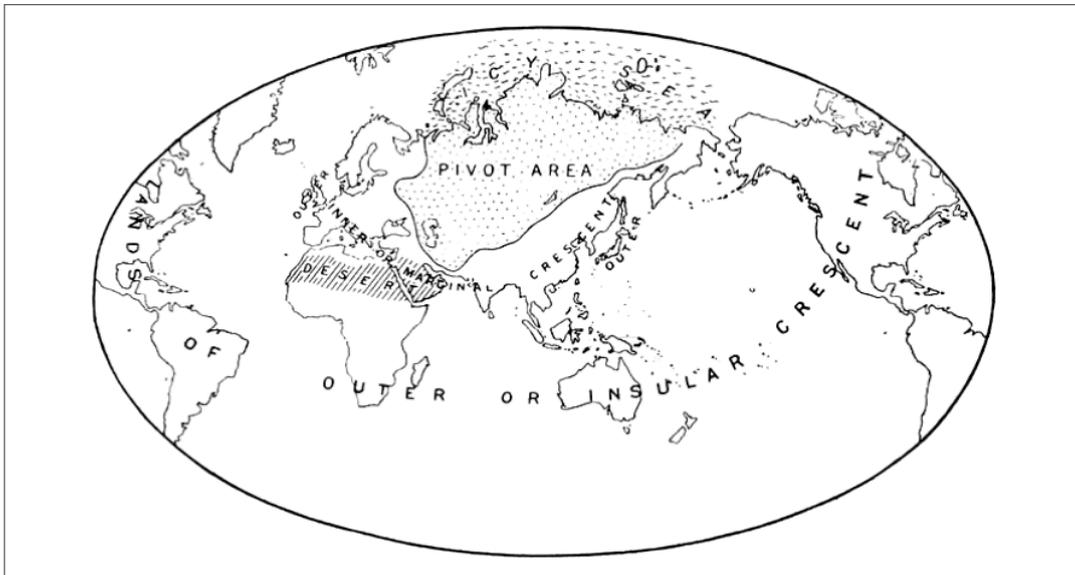
4 Westermarck was appointed as a lector in sociology at the LSE in 1904, and promoted to professor in the same subject in 1907. He served as a professor of LSE until 1930. Biografiskt lexikon för Finland, <http://www.blf.fi/artikel.php?ref=sok&id=3685> (visited 12 October 2017). The tremendous influence this piece has had on the foreign policy discourse during the first half of the 20th century was pointed out by Charles Kruszewski in an article in *Foreign Affairs* in 1954. See Charles Kruszewski, "The Pivot of History", *Foreign Affairs*, 1954. Writing for the *Guardian* in 2004 Paul Kennedy testified to the continuous interest in Mackinder's thesis during the cold war. See Paul Kennedy, "The Pivot of History", *The Guardian*, 2004. On the significance of Mackinder's geopolitical concepts to policy makers and strategic thinkers see also Anita Sengupta, *Heartlands of Eurasia*, Lexington books, 2009 and Gerry Kearns, *Geopolitics and empire; the legacy of Halford Mackinder*, Oxford University Press, 2009.

5 Kruszewski, 1954.

In "The Geographical Pivot of History", which Mackinder read to the Royal Geographical Society on 25 January 1904, Mackinder outlined a theory that later has become known as the Heartland Theory. When the lecture commenced Mackinder captured the moment in the passing of time:

"When historians in the remote future come to look back on the group of centuries through which we are now passing, as we to-day see Egyptian dynasties, it may well be that they will describe the last 400 years as the Columbian epoch, and will say it ended soon after 1900".⁶

He proceeded with an analysis of European political divisions throughout history, but then shifted viewpoint to consider what he called "the Old World in its entirety".⁷ He noted that two-thirds of the world's population was "concentrated in relatively small areas along the margins of the great continent"⁸ and then, with reference to the Mongolian expansion of the mid-14th century, that "all the settled margins of the Old World sooner or later felt the expansive force of mobile power originating from the steppe".⁹ He spoke of the Eurasian steppe as the heart of Asia, surrounded as he saw it to the east, south and west "by marginal regions, ranged in a vast crescent, accessible to shipmen."¹⁰ The natural rival of the mobility of the hordes of the steppe was according to Mackinder the mobility offered by navigation over oceans and oceanic rivers.¹¹ To illustrate what he saw as the world's competing natural seats of power, Mackinder provided the following Mercator-projection:¹²



6 Halford J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History", *Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4, April 1904, 421-435, p. 421.

7 Id., p. 428.

8 Id., p. 428.

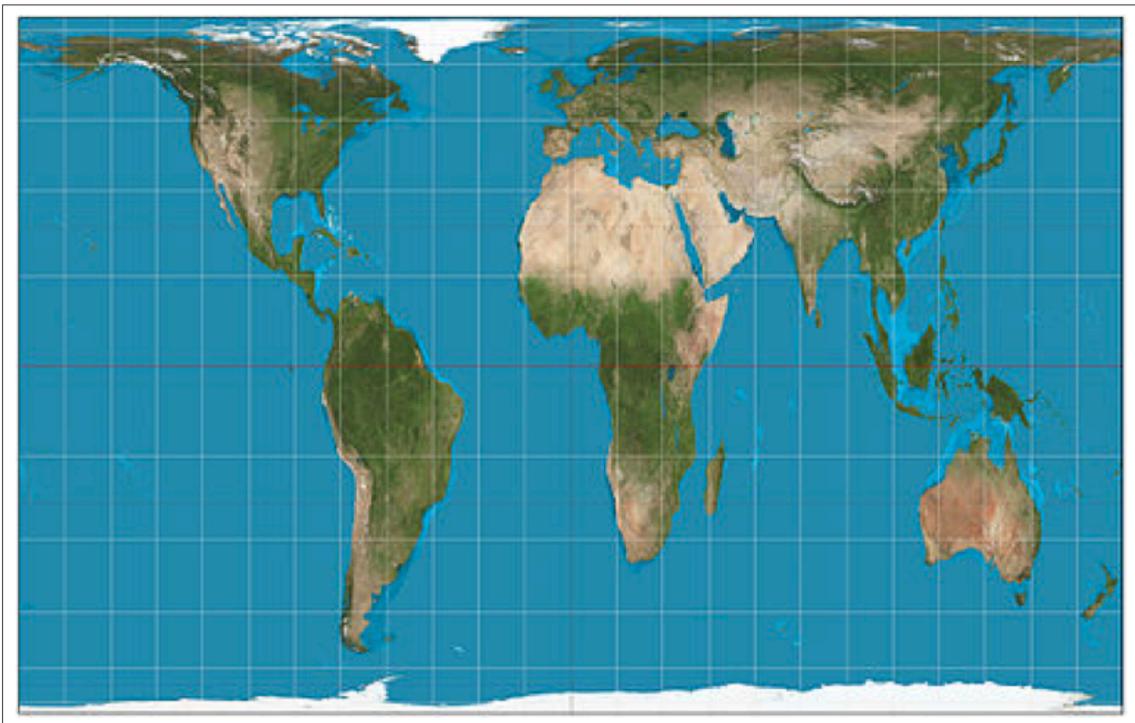
9 Id., p. 430.

10 Mackinder, 1904, p. 431.

11 Id., p. 432.

12 Halford J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History", *Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4, April 1904, 421-435, p. 421.

Like all maps, Mackinder's map is an approximation of reality, and as all Mercator-projections, it distorts the size of objects as the latitude increases from the Equator to the poles, so that Greenland appears to be as large as or even larger than Australia, when in fact Australia is more than three and a half times as large as Greenland. In 1885, a Scottish clergyman named James Gall had published a paper on the use of cylindrical projections for geographical, astronomical and scientific purposes, a method revived in the early 1970's by Arno Peters.¹³ As an illustrative comparison to Mackinder's map, the Gall-Peters projection, which maps all areas according to their actual size relative to each other, is provided below:¹⁴



The reasons for which Mackinder illustrated his thesis with a Mercator-projection and not made any mentioning of Gall's work are not known to the present author. Can it be that Mackinder, given his strong historical interest, simply had failed to take note of Gall's projections and therefore ignored them? Why did he otherwise choose the centuries-old Mercator-projection? Today, when we have more sophisticated tools to help us navigate in the world, Mackinder's mapping of the world may seem deeply flawed and Eurocentric,

13 James Gall, "Use of cylindrical projections for geographical, astronomical, and scientific purposes".
Scottish Geographical Magazine 1 (4) 1885, 119–123.

14 The Gall-Peters projection of the world map by Strebe, 2011. Imagery is a derivative of NASA's Blue Marble summer month composite with oceans lightened to enhance legibility and contrast. Image created with the Geocart map projection software. From "Gall-Peters projection", Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gall-Peters_projection (visited 29 November 2017).

and even unimaginative when contrasted with the work of Gall from the same period. In 1954 however Mackinder was credited by Kruszewski with having "boldly shifted the conventional European centre and showed the Americas on the edge of each side of Africa, Europe and Asia".¹⁵ In his strive to consider "the Old World in its entirety" Mackinder did in fact move Europe, if only slightly, from its traditional position in the middle of the world map.

Mackinder's lecture on the geographical pivot of history proceeded by asking whether the heartland of Eurasia was not "the pivot region of the world's politics"¹⁶ also at the moment of his lecturing, when it was about to be covered by a network of railways: "Russia replaces the Mongol empire. Her pressure on Finland, on Scandinavia, on Turkey, on Persia, on India, and on China, replaces the centrifugal raids of the steppemen".¹⁷ As the lecture was about to end, he elaborated on the perceived threat from Russia and presented a strategic response:

"The oversetting of the balance of power in favour of the pivot state, resulting in its expansion over the marginal lands of Euro-Asia, would permit of the use of vast continental resources for fleet-building, and the empire of the world would then be in site. This might happen if Germany was to ally herself with Russia. The threat of such an event should, therefore, throw France into alliance with the over-sea powers, and France, Italy, Egypt, India and Corea would become so many bridge heads where the outside navies would support armies to compel the pivot allies to deploy land forces and prevent them from concentrating their whole strength on fleets."¹⁸

Curiously, Mackinder in the end linked the general threat he perceived globally from the "pivot region" to a specific European scenario – that of Germany allying herself with Russia – which he implied might set the scene for a Russian/German empire of the world. The rest, as the saying goes, is history.

3. The connection between Mackinder and Westermarck

The year after Mackinder had been made Director of the LSE and the same year as he had read "The Geographical Pivot of History" to the Royal Geographical Society, Edvard Westermarck was appointed as a lector in sociology at the LSE.¹⁹ According to Westermarck, he was approached originally in 1903 with an invitation to take part in the setting up of a sociological society sponsored by a Scottish former member of the lower chamber of the British parliament, Martin White, and later invited by the University in

15 Kruszewski, 1954.

16 Mackinder, 1904, p. 434.

17 Id., p. 436.

18 Mackinder, 1904, p. 436.

19 Biografiskt lexikon för Finland, <http://www.blf.fi/artikel.php?ref=sok&id=3685> (visited 12 October 2017).

London to lecture on sociology at the School of Economics and Politics.²⁰ The donor's aim as perceived by Westermarck was to fill a gap in the education of future parliamentarians in sociology.²¹ Westermarck's audience was small in the beginning, but Martin White was patient and would regularly attend the last seminar of term himself.²² Westermarck was promoted to professor in sociology at LSE in 1907.

It seems fair to assume that Mackinder and Westermarck not only were in contact with one another, but that their relationship likely was one of mutual inspiration and interest. Besides Westermarck's Finnish background, the anthropological research that Westermarck had conducted in Morocco in 1898 could have been noted by Mackinder, who himself led an expedition up Mount Kenya in 1899. Both Westermarck and Mackinder did at some point attend social events organized by members of the socialist Fabian society such as the Webbs.²³ Westermarck's biography does not however mention Mackinder, though the chapter on English acquaintances notes that Martin White introduced Westermarck to Lloyd George.²⁴

In Finland, the anti-Russian feeling had spilled over in deadly violence when Eugene Schauman shot governor Bobrikov in the Finnish Senate in the summer of 1904. According to Westermarck, he read the news in Geneva, where he had gone for an excursion.²⁵ In October 1904, as Westermarck started lecturing at the LSE, the so-called Doggerbank incident, in which Russian warships on their way to the Far East attacked fishing vessels in the North Sea, seriously disrupted the relations between Russia and Britain. Westermarck spent the autumn and the following spring in London and travelled back to Finland only in the autumn of 1905.²⁶ He was called as professor of practical philosophy at Helsinki University in 1906, but spent both the spring terms of 1906 and 1907 in London. After the Finnish declaration of independence in December 1917 and the ensuing civil war, Åbo Academy was founded in 1918, and Westermarck was appointed professor in philosophy and elected rector there. At this point he left Helsinki University, but remained a professor of LSE and continued to serve as such until 1930.

20 Edvard Westermarck, *Minnen ur mitt liv*, p. 249. Westermarck's version of the events in the biography is supported by citations of letters he wrote that are included in Rolf Lagerborg's *Edvard Westermarck och verken från hans verkstad under hans tolv sista år 1927-39*, p. 57. The Sociological Society in London was set up on 20th of November 1903 and the first lecture meeting was held on the 18th of April 1904, where Westermarck lectured on the position of women in early civilization. See id., p. 71.

21 Edvard Westermarck, *Minnen ur mitt liv*, p. 252.

22 Id., p. 254.

23 Westermarck's biography mentions dinner and evening parties at Sidney Webb's. Id., p. 38, 263. Mackinder was a member of the Coefficients dining club that the Webb's founded in 1902. See Catalogue of LSE Library's archive holdings, <https://archives.lse.ac.uk/Record.aspx?src=CalmView.Catalog&id=ASSOC+17&pos=1> (visited 15 November 2017).

24 Edvard Westermarck, *Minnen ur mitt liv*, p. 267.

25 Id., pp. 251-252.

26 Rolf Lagerborg, 1951, p. 75-76.

Further research is required to establish exactly to what extent, if any, Mackinder's world view influenced Westermarck and/or vice versa. To answer this question, one would at least need to manage a thorough reading of both these two productive gentlemen's many volumes, as well as of all the literature surrounding these two personalities. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to access all the relevant literature in time for this manuscript. In the next section the involvement of Westermarck with the question of the status of the Åland Islands will be examined.

4. Westermarck and the Åland Islands settlement

Following the civil war, when Westermarck and others were engaged in re-establishing the Åbo Academy, a constituent assembly was set up in the Åland Islands. The doctrine of self-determination and the ongoing struggles over this concept in the Polish border areas had caught the islanders' attention. The Åland assembly and the Swedish government pleaded that the question of the future status of the islands would be discussed during the peace conference in Paris.

During 1919, the world was focused on Paris, where the six-months long peace conference came to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in the summer of 1919.²⁷ The question of the status of the Åland Islands was discussed by the Baltic Sea section of the conference, but eventually the question was transferred to the Council of the League of Nations. Westermarck, who presided over the opening of the Åbo Academy 11-12 October 1919, now intervened. In a piece called the Aaland Question in *The Contemporary Review*, Westermarck addressed what the Council of the League of Nations had to decide upon in 1920.²⁸ The article sums up Westermarck's view before the negotiations and forcefully argues that the Åland Islands belongs to Finland. The arguments laid forth by Westermarck refer the need to take account not only of the Swedish-speakers on Åland, but also of those living elsewhere in Finland, and portray the Åland population as a subset of the larger Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. In the grand scheme of things, strengthening the influence of Scandinavian culture in the region was, argued Westermarck, linked to the strive for maintenance of peace, a more important consideration than that of fulfilling the wishes and hopes of the people of the Åland Islands to be reunited with Sweden:

"The Council of the League of Nations desires by its settlement of the question of the Aaland Islands "to establish conditions favourable to the maintenance of peace in that part of the world." We cannot conceive that, if the Aaland Islands continued to remain under the sovereignty of Finland, Sweden would make an attempt to conquer them or support an armed rebellion on the islands.

27 See Macmillan, 2003.

28 Edvard Westermarck, "The Aaland Question", *The Contemporary Review*, 1920.

If, on the other hand, Finland in some way or other were compelled to cede Åland to Sweden, there is the danger that Finland may in the future look for the assistance of some mighty ally on the Baltic to regain the territory torn from her. As a native of Finland and a sincere friend of Sweden, I hope that such a danger will never arise. I trust that the Council of the League of Nations will find some recommendation which, instead of alienating the two countries from each other, will bring them closer together and make them friends and allies.”²⁹

In the very end, Westermarck seems to echo Mackinder, when he provides a direct reference to ”a Fenno-Scandia spoken of by geographers”³⁰, which, he claims, ought to be matched by a political Fenno-Scandia: ”As friends with common aims, the four small nations of the North may form a political combination of importance on the shores of the Baltic.”³¹ Would Westermarck ever have written this were it not for Mackinder? In his biography, Westermarck recalls that he made a visit to Lord Bryce to hear his opinion with respect to the Åland question.³² Lord Bryce was at the time 83 years old, of good vigour, and “naturally completely on our side” writes Westermarck.

As mentioned in the introduction, Westermarck represented the Swedish Assembly of Finland to the League of Nations in 1920-21 when discussions were scheduled to take place concerning the status of the Åland Islands. Due to his absence from Åbo Academy, the Academy appointed another head during this time.³³ Upon his return, Westermarck spoke about the negotiations at a social gathering of the student union of the Academy. His speech was published in the Finnish Swedish-language daily *Hufvudstadsbladet* 21 October 1921.³⁴ Before the members of the student union of the Åbo Academy, Westermarck noted that the Åland question contained elements that ought to be forgotten as quickly as possible, as errors had been committed on both sides.

5. Conclusion

On the anniversary year of one hundred years of Finnish independence, are we not yet ready to examine the role played by Edvard Westermarck in the Åland settlement and the extent to which, if any, it was influenced by the geopolitical outlook of Sir Halford Mackinder? This research note first revisited Mackinder’s world-view and the arguments he presented in his 1904 lecture on the geographical pivot of history. It then proceeded to examine the connection between Mackinder and Edvard Westermarck. The sources

29 Id.

30 Id.

31 Id.

32 Edvard Westermarck, *Minnen ur mitt liv*, p. 263.

33 Biografiskt lexikon för Finland, <http://www.blf.fi/artikel.php?ref=sok&id=3685> (visited 12 October 2017).

34 Edvard Westermarck, ”Efter Ålandsfrågan”, *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 21 October, 1921. Available at: <http://www.filosofia.fi/se/arkiv/text/6022> (visited 16 October 2017).

suggest that the relationship between Mackinder and Westermarck was one of mutual inspiration and interest. However, Westermarck makes no mentioning of Mackinder in his biography. Further research is necessary to better understand their relationship and to what extent they influenced one another. Finally, the involvement of Westermarck in the Åland question was examined. It is another area where additional research may reveal new details. Within the restraints of this piece of research however, Westermarck's intervention in the Åland question seems to have been motivated by political ambitions in line with those of Mackinder. Perhaps by the one hundred years anniversary of the autonomy of the Åland Islands we will know a little more.

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Illustrations:

Daniel R. Strebe, The world on Gall–Peters projection. 15° graticule. Imagery is a derivative of NASA's Blue Marble summer month composite with oceans lightened to enhance legibility and contrast. Image created with the Geocart map projection software. Created on 15 August 2011. Copyright: Creative Commons, some rights reserved (CC BY-SA 3.0). Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gall-Peters_projection_SW.jpg

