



УДК 9с

DOI: 10.15393/j14.art.2016.86

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## **Eating Karelia: the geography, history, and memory of Karelian pies**

**Abstract:** This paper investigates the geography, history and memory of Karelian pies (*karjalanpiirakat* = *kalitki*) in Finland and beyond. Where exactly does this food come from? How did it spread from the transborder Karelia region to become a stereotypical «Finnish» food? How are Karelian pies tied into to intergenerational transmission within Finnish families? This paper presents interviews and discussions with Finnish women which demonstrate Karelian pies as Finnish familial inheritance. The paper also presents the results of research with North Karelian Finnish teens which indicates that they strongly associate the term «Karelia» with Karelian pies. This indicates the triumph of food as banal nationalism and the centrality of perceived regional food specialities in shaping local and familial Finnish identities. The paper examines the official and unofficial status and symbolism of this Karelian/Finnish foodstuff and how and why this previously local food was spread throughout Finland and beyond, becoming a staple part of Finnish national cuisine and hence national and cultural identity.

**Key words:** North Karelia, Cross-border Karelia, historical memory, Karelian pies, banal nationalism, a Finnish identity

### **Introduction: Finnish food between East and West**

Finnish cuisine is usually seen as being comprised of hearty and simple fare based on fresh, seasonally available produce. The link between food produced in Finland, the Finnish nation state and the geographic territory of Finland is a strong one. «The genuine taste of Finnish Food» declares the website Food from Finland, an online directory of Finnish food companies, «derives from our pure lakes, farmlands and forests.» [13] Finnish cuisine is also seen as being influenced by two other places: Sweden and Russia and two religious cultures: Catholicism and Orthodoxy [25]. Like Finland itself Finnish cuisine is situated «between the East and the West.»

Foods seen as Finnish but hailing from Eastern Finland have a more complex geography. Eastern Finnish cuisine «has its roots in the Slavonic, Orthodox [culinary] tradition» [25] therefore it can be quite different or «other» when compared to Western Finnish food, which is influenced by Swedish cuisine. For example mushrooms, a staple of Eastern Finnish cuisine are not found in traditionally Western Finnish cuisine.<sup>1</sup> Finnish Karelian cuisine, as part of Eastern Finnish cuisine, is seen as in some ways synonymous with Orthodox culinary traditions with both having an «abundance

<sup>1</sup> According to PV, whom I interviewed on the topic of Eastern Finnish foods, Finnish Karelian evacuees brought «mushroom culture» (ie collecting wild mushrooms and using them in cooking) to the rest of Finland who before this had thought mushrooms only «food for cows»[2].



of mushroom, fish and vegetable dishes...pies, pasties and rye loaves stuffed with swedes, potatoes and meat.» [25] Finnish North Karelia has adopted Eastern Finnish cuisine, with its strong Orthodox influences, as their «own.» [25] Eastern Finnish foods are those «you can just leave in the oven and they get better and better the longer they are in there.» [2] One respondent I interviewed for this paper told me she makes *karjalanpaisti* (Karelian stew) the «Russian way,» with chunks of meat. The «Swedish way» is to put a whole joint of meat in the pot.[2] This comment shows the respondent's awareness of «Finnish» food being influenced by both Swedish and Russian cuisines.

### Where and what is «Karelia»?

Karelia is a political-geographical region which spans the eastern and south eastern parts of Finland and the North Western corner of Russia. The term «Karelia» (*Karjala* in Finnish) is usually used in Finland to mean the part of Karelia ceded by Finland to the Soviet Union after World War II (hereafter WWII).<sup>1</sup> Within Finland today there are two counties bearing the name Karelia — North Karelia and South Karelia. This paper focuses in part on the role of Karelian pies in Finnish North Karelia. Finnish North Karelia seems to have the strongest claim to Karelian pies in Finland.

Within the Russian Federation the Republic of Karelia (Республика Карелия in Russian), which incorporates some of the territory of ceded Finnish Karelia, shares a 723km border with Finland and stretches east to surround the shores of Lake Onega and North to the White Sea. The other portion of the ceded Finnish territory — the Karelian Isthmus- nowadays forms part of the Leningrad Oblast (Ленинградская область).

### Where does the «Karelian pie» come from?

There are many different opinions and answers as to where exactly Karelian pies come from. Finnish chef and author Jaakko Kolmonen, for example, lists Karelian pies and Karelian stew as «countryside foods»<sup>2</sup> of both Karelia (the ceded territories) and Finnish North Karelia but not Finnish South Karelia. Kolmonen's 1987 book *Karjalan ja Petsamon pitäjäruoat* (*Parish foods of Karelia and Petsamo*) includes a series of maps of ceded Karelia showing which types of pies were produced in which parishes in the 1920s. According to Kolmonen Karelian pies, oblong-shaped rye crust pies with a rice porridge filling, were made in parishes along the Northern shore of Lake Ladoga and north of the lake. Kolmonen's map firmly anchors the Karelian pie to precise parishes within ceded Karelia and invests it with a very specific geographical heritage. Other explanations of the origins of the Karelian pie are vaguer, for example: «the Karelian pie's roots lie in Northern and Eastern Karelia» [18] (meaning here, I believe, the territory of what is now the Republic of Karelia). Another explanation, though still vague, manage to link Karelian pies to ideas of Finnish national identity. «[Karelian pies] originated in the eastern province of Karelia. This is the mythical birthplace of Kalevala, the epic 19th century poem that has become an essential part of the Finnish national identity.» [24] The Karelia described in this second quote — the Karelia from which The Kalevala comes — is a large expanse of territory which includes areas of present day Russian Karelia and the areas around Lake Ladoga where Kolmonen sites the pie's origins.

The Karelian pie's origins are contested: upon mentioning to a student from Petrozavodsk that I would be writing a paper on the Karelian pie as a Finnish food she replied: «But they are from Russian Karelia!» In reality rye crust pies of various shapes and with various fillings (mashed po-

<sup>1</sup> Although, complicating matters, the term Karelia is also appropriated to refer only to Finnish North Karelia. See, for example, [www.visitkarelia.fi/en](http://www.visitkarelia.fi/en)

<sup>2</sup> Under the heading «*Maakunta ruoat*» (*Countryside foods*) Kolmonen lists foods for each county of Finland plus Karelia and Petsamo (the ceded areas). [32].



tato, rice porridge, mashed carrot, barley porridge<sup>1</sup>, jam) were produced throughout Karelia (the whole region) before WWII. As Kolmonen points out: «The food cultures of Finnish and Russian Karelia had many similarities.» [33: 6]<sup>2</sup> It is only since the border change as a result of WWII and the creation of a diaspora of displaced Finnish Karelians throughout Finland — who brought their food culture with them- that the Karelian pie of the type made in the areas detailed by Kolmonen came to be seen as a symbol of Finnish cuisine (see below).

So where, then, can we locate Karelian pies within Finland? The strongest claim seems to come from North Karelia. However Karelian pies are available in supermarkets across Finland and are eaten in all parts of the country. They are a ubiquitous staple of Finnish cuisine. They are classed by the European Union as «foodstuff with a traditional composition, or produced according to a traditional production method» [7]<sup>3</sup>; they are not classed as a food originating from a certain place within Finland. It is only their name which nowadays links them to their place of origin. A place which is now more an idea than a real, geographic entity: «Karelia», Finland's cultural heartland, Finland's periphery and Finland's lost territory.

### **The spread of the Karelian pie across Finland: from local speciality to national staple**

Karelian pies have become a symbol, not just of Karelian cuisine, but of Finnish cuisine as a whole — they are one of Finland's most touted delicacies. [See eg 24] However this only came about post-WWII with the resettlement of Finnish Karelian evacuees, who left ceded Karelia in 1940 and / or 1944, throughout Finland. Before this Karelian pies were a transborder food found in Karelia on the Finnish and Russian sides of the national border which divided the region after 1917, but little known elsewhere in Finland.

WW II and the resettlement of over 400,000 [32]<sup>4</sup> Finnish Karelian evacuees (over 10% of Finland's population) throughout other parts of Finland is perceived in Finland as having had a «great effect on the development of our food culture.»[11] The Finnish Karelians «brought their own food culture with them, and it spread through the whole country. Dishes baked slowly in the oven, soft bread, Karelian casserole [stew] and Karelian pirogues [pies] are... commonly known dishes today throughout Finland.» [11] After the war and the resettlement «there was a considerable exchange between the Finnish and Karelian [culinary] traditions...Karelian [pies] spread throughout Finland, and their mass production soon became well established.» [6: 93; 20]

### **«You have to make them» [2] defining and defending «authentic» Karelian pies**

In an interview with PV, a North Karelian Finn, she stated that Karelian pies available from «small, home bakeries» in Joensuu, North Karelia can be «pretty close to the real deal» but agreed with other respondents that, for the best pies, «you have to make them.»[32] Others have commented that you can have «real» pies made for you by Finnish Karelians: one comment on a public Facebook post, by HG, enthused: «I grew up [eating pies] homemade by a chef who grew up till the Winter war in Karelia...Nothing like a Karelia pies made by a true Karelian!»[23] This comment

<sup>1</sup> According to PV, my interviewee on this topic, barley porridge must have been the traditional filling before rice was available [2].

<sup>2</sup> Original Finnish: «*Ruokakulttuurissa Suomella ja Venäjän Karjalalla ollut paljon yhteistä.*» All Finnish to English translations are the author's.

<sup>3</sup> Karelian pies have been granted Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG) status in Europe by the EU's European Commission [8]

<sup>4</sup> This figure is from Kinnunen and Kivimäki (eds.), 2012:491 but figures vary from 400,000 to 480,000.



indicates that, for some, «real» Karelian pies are not only hand made but need to be made by Finnish Karelians. Another comment on the same post, by JK, stated that «We bake them at least once a year with a friend who's also of Karelian origin. Parents from «behind the border» rajan takkaa.» The pies are linked back to Finnish Karelian evacuees. I myself learnt to make Karelian pies with an evacuee from Kuolemajärvi a parish south east of Vyborg although, ironically, she herself only learnt to make rice filled pies with a rye crust after she moved to Joensuu.[37]

Homemade, fresh pies are regarded as tastier, more traditional and superior to factory made pies. It is not just taste but looks that matter: according to DK, another of my Finnish respondents, the pies should «look different, like «you've done them»»[1]. The pies should look handmade and individual, they should not be too «perfect.» A minor furore was caused in Finland in January 2016 when the Finnish Post Office, Posti, issued a stamp featuring Karelian pies. National newspaper headlines stated that the «wrong kind» of pies were featured on the stamp [14]<sup>5</sup> and reported that the pies on the stamp were not «the real thing» because, according to Posti, «real» ie handmade pies «do not look good.»[15]<sup>6</sup> The factory-made pies featured on the stamp, stated the newspapers, were «too neat, even and uniform»[14]<sup>7</sup>, «too consistent in quality», and therefore did not represent «real and traditional Karelian pies.»[15]<sup>8</sup> Posti defended its decision to use a photo of factory-made pies by saying that they looked better as a stamp design than hand made pies [14]<sup>9</sup> and that «people eat factory made pies at home.» [14]<sup>10</sup>

### **A double dose of banal nationalism [29]: Karelian pies on a Finnish postage stamp**

The fact that Posti chose to feature Karelian pies on a stamp is important as, as Raento and Brunn have argued, imagery on postage stamps «contributes to the construction of national narratives, collective memory and a nation's self-image because stamps are products of the state» and are «constantly present» in everyday situations.[35: 49] Stamps «narrate the evolution of the Finnish state, nation and society, and reflect the changing relationship between the state and its subjects.» [35: 49] The Karelian pie was seen as an aspect or symbol of «Finnishness» worth putting on a stamp.<sup>11</sup> The fact that the stamp design was strongly criticized is also interesting, perhaps showing that people wanted to define what a Karelian pie should look like themselves, and were unhappy that the «wrong type of pie» was being promoted and circulated on the stamp. Raento and Brunn have argued that stamps are an «iconographical, promotional tool of a particular worldview and goals» and «are socio-political statements and tools for nation-building and moulding of public's collective memory»[35] (my emphasis) Rebellion over the stamp design could, then, be due to fact that the dominant collective memory of Karelian pies in Finland is of pies hand made together with one's family and the stamp was seen as an attempt to disrupt this.

<sup>5</sup> Original text: 'Vääränlainen' karjalanpiirakka postimerkissä kuohuttaa — Posti puolustautuu: Kodeissa syödään teollisia piirakoita.

<sup>6</sup> «Häpäiseekö uusi postimerkki karjalanpiirakat? Kuvassa ei ole aitoja piirakoita, koska»ne eivät näytä hyvältä»

<sup>7</sup> «liian siistiä, tasareunaista ja tasalaatuista kuvaa kullankeltaisesta karjalanpiirakasta uudessa postimerkissä.»

<sup>8</sup> «kyseiset piirakat ovat aivan liian tasalaatuisia ollakseen aitoja ja perinteisiä karjalanpiirakoita»

<sup>9</sup> «Piirakat ovat teollisia, merkin suunnittelija kyllä kokeili myös käsintehtyjä, mutta ne eivät näyttäneet postimerkkikoossa enää kovin hyvälle, siksi päädyttiin teollisiin.»

<sup>10</sup> 'Vääränlainen' karjalanpiirakka postimerkissä kuohuttaa — Posti puolustautuu: Kodeissa syödään teollisia piirakoita.»

<sup>11</sup> It is the only food item currently featured on a Finnish stamp as at the end of November 2016. [19]. The stamp is part of series, dubbed *Norden*, featuring «Nordic food culture» [20: 9].





For Raento and Brunn stamps are not merely «tiny receipt for the postage paid for (inter)national delivery of mail» but instead they also «serve the construction of an ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991) through ‘banal nationalism’ (Billig, 1995) by guaranteeing the visibility of the patria in quotidian landscapes and preventing its citizens from forgetting who they are (or are expected to be) and where they (are expected to) belong.»[35] On postage stamps «a carefully designed representation of ‘us’ is being ‘flagged’ in a constant, but often taken-for-granted, fashion.»[35] In the case of Posti’s Karelian pie stamp we have one aspect of the imagined community and one enforcer of banal nationalism, the postage stamp itself, emblazoned with the words «Suomi — Finland», featuring another aspect of banal nationalism, a «national food.» The Karelian pie stamp is thus a double representation of «Finnishness» and the imagined community of Finland.

Despite the controversy it caused the stamp went on sale with the design unaltered and is still available as at the end of November 2016. In their webshop Posti describes the stamp as depicting «a traditional Finnish food» and featuring «oven fresh golden brown Karelian pies»[20]. Their description links back to the idea of Karelian pies as a traditional and fresh food item. Posti also states however that the stamp design puts one in mind of «water lillies» or «rocks in water.»[20] Posti are presenting the stamp as a mini work of art featuring deliberately stylized Karelian pies. This therefore distances the stamp from the collective idea of «real» Karelian pies which are individually handmade.

### «I guess it’s in the genes»<sup>1</sup>: the transmission of pie-making lore in Finland

Despite their availability throughout Finland in mass produced frozen or chilled form Karelian pies are seen to be measured by a «location-specific quality»[28] which goes beyond simply being «made (somewhere) in Finland.» A «locational element of quality in the minds of many consumers is that of locally produced food which can be purchased from well-known and trusted individuals.»[28] Karelian pies can be made and sold anywhere in Finland but are differentiated in terms of quality not by whether they were made in Karelia (meaning here Finnish North or South Karelia) but by whether they are hand made or mass produced. This removes the «Karelian pie» from a specific geographic milieu: authentic, traditional Karelian pies can be produced anywhere (in Finland or abroad<sup>2</sup>) through being handmade and eaten fresh.

The knowledge of how to hand make Karelian pies can be passed down familial generations in Finland and pie making can be an activity performed by different generations of Finnish families working together. This is where the «memory» aspect of Karelian pies come into play. The pies are made within a context of drawing on memories of making the pies with older female members of the family, mothers, grandmothers, aunts. The knowledge of how to make the pies is family-specific and handed down and remembered by each family generation.

My interview with PV on this topic was prompted by her sending me an online message saying that «If you want info about Karelian pies, I might be able to tell you 3 generation stories [sic] from Lieksa [North Karelia] area.»[1] In our interview PV, a Finn in her 30s who lives in North Karelia, talked about making the pies with her grandmother and mother. PV does not remember being taught how to make the pies. She remembers her first job (which she says is the easier part of the pie-making process) was to cut circles in the dough with a round glass, she then moved on to folding and crimping the pies after they had been filled. «Every stage of the process requires skill,» she comments. «The absolutely hardest part» of the pie making process, says PV, is getting the dough thin enough without it tearing, the amount of flour is important here, the amount «has to be

<sup>1</sup> Comment by DK [1]. DK offered a wealth of my detailed information about making the pies.

<sup>2</sup> For example by Finnish Americans.



right.» Rolling out the dough was the final thing she was taught how to do. PV told me that her grandmother's dough was 90% rye flour and «so thin you could see the light through it.» Despite this thinness, it did not tear: «I have a feeling there is some magic involved,» she adds.

In a Facebook discussion with some Finnish women on the topic of making pies the knowledge passed between female family members, and several female generations of a family making the pies together were, as in the interview with PV, key themes. Pie making encompassed both the passing on of knowledge and memories of how to make the pies and creating new memories, and instilling new knowledge during the acts of making the pies together.

KR, a Finn in her 40's who lives in Helsinki, commented humorously on the way her mother and grandmother made the pies and how she had adopted their methods as her own:

My mom, a true Karelian never uses the milk-butter dipping. We brush piirakat [pies] with butter...My grandmother taught me how to use the pulikka [rolling pin] with just one hand, leaving the other free to use as you are fit. Quite often mine has a drink in it.[1]

KM, a Finnish female in her 30s who lives in Helsinki, adds her comment:

My mummi [grandma] made them a lot and she taught me also. I still remember the correct «rypytys» [crimps or ruffles around the edges of the pies]. I can even ask her advices and memories still, and she is from Carelia indeed (Impilahti<sup>1</sup>).

Two hours later KM added the unprompted comment «...And my mummi always used real butter to brush them [the pies] after oven...for me the only right flavour is a real normally salted butter.» KM added another unprompted comment «...Now my mummi is 94 so didn't have them [Karelian pies for] a while but lovely memories of karjalanpiirakat I have through her.» Both KR and KM's comments show the warm feelings associated with the familial inheritance of making the pies — and emphasise strong links to Karelia. KM focuses on her memories of pie making linked to her Karelian grandmother, memories that seemed to come to her after thinking about the Facebook discussion.

MK, a Finnish woman in her 50's who lives in North Karelia added to the Facebook discussion that «My mom makes the best Karelian pies ever and I can make them also (but not as good as my mom).» She continued «My mom is from Ilomantsi<sup>2</sup> and she learnt to make them at home when she was young. Probably from her mom and aunts. I have taught it to my daughter...» MK's story gives another good example of the intergenerational transmission of pie making. My respondents, especially DK, offered a wealth of tips and advice about making the pies: it seems that every family has a slightly different method and way of making the pies.

If one wants to learn how to make Karelian pies this information is also freely available from Finnish cook books, YouTube videos and cookery blogs [See, for example: 33; 18; 3] some of which even continue the idea of a traditional recipe handed down from grandmother or mother to daughter. [See eg 21] One online recipe on a cooking and lifestyle blog by an expat Finn states: «I think it is time to make some home made Karelian pies to satisfy my home sickness. My grandma is from Eastern Finland and therefore I have eaten these tasty pies for all my childhood. It is mixture of magic and tradition to bake Karelian pies.» [12] Another blogged recipe by a Finnish Australian states «Karjalanpiirakka are traditional pasties from the region of Karelia, but ask any Finn and they will know what they are and most likely love to indulge in them...I remember eating these as a kid and still enjoy them. This recipe was handed down by my Mum.»[21] Encapsulated in this

<sup>1</sup> Impilahti was a parish on the north shore of Lake Ladoga ceded to the Soviet Union in 1944.

<sup>2</sup> A town in Finnish North Karelia, about 20km from the Russian border.



quote is the idea of Karelian pies as a specifically regional food item which is at the same time known to «any Finn» (including, implicitly, diaspora Finns such as the blogger) as well as the idea of the pies as family inheritance and tradition.

### «Karjalanpiirakka was always part of the big family parties»<sup>1</sup>

The humble Karelian pie, as well as being an everyday food, features as a celebration, party food at family gatherings and occasions, and even at conferences and corporate events, throughout Finland.<sup>2</sup> At family parties the pies are often handmade by someone in the family: as KM states «Karjalanpiirakka was always part of the big family parties like weddings, bigger birthdays (like 50-years) and any occasions while she [Mummi, grandma] still could do them. This was always like her present to offer to make the piirakat.»[1]

PV says that her family makes the pies for every party or celebration, for example PV made them with her mum for her own (PV's) High School graduation party. PV has a family reunion coming up and says her cousins will make Karelian pies for that. Her family also makes them for Christmas, eating them on Christmas Day (December 25th).[2] PV talked of the «production line» which is set up when her family make the pies and that the pies made are normally *vierasvaraa* (reserved for guests) and frozen for future occasions. She has a childhood memory of such a production line and of the hot, oven fresh pies cooling with their butter glaze wrapped in baking paper, PV remembers that she and her cousins were not allowed to touch or take them!

The power of food as banal nationalism should not be overlooked here. As Karen Armstrong stated in her excellent book *Remembering Karelia*: «The patterns of daily existence are, in part why people feel Finnish; it is not an imagined common history but a lived reality for all classes.»[27] Consumption of certain foods on certain occasions reinforces a feeling of «Finnishness» and that these holidays or occasions are being celebrated in the «correct way». In a newspaper article on Finnish national foods (see below) journalist Olli Sorjonen comments that «Factory or home made, [Karelian] pies are perfect for any event.»[22]<sup>3</sup> Posti, in their description of their Karelian pie stamp (see above) state that «Karelian pies are very suitable for either the everyday or a party.»[20] Karelian pies are both a staple, everyday food but also have a place at Finnish parties and special occasions. They are a marker of «Finnishness» in both contexts.

### Karelia = Karelian pies

I have conducted previous research [See 36] which indicates that Finnish North Karelian youth today conceptualise the idea of «Karelia» in relation to certain traditional Finnish foods. The research found that Karelian pies are often the primary association the youth had with the term «Karelia» despite its thorny history as a disputed border region.

I visited seven classes of 8th and 9th graders (aged 14-16) in three different schools in Finnish North Karelia.<sup>4</sup> The class groups were asked what words or phrases they associated with the term «Karelia.» They first gave their answers out loud individually and then, in groups of 2-4 students, wrote a free association list of words which came to mind in association with the term «Karelia.»

<sup>1</sup> Comment by KM. [1].

<sup>2</sup> For example they were served with the morning coffee at the Geography Days Conference at the University of Eastern Finland in October this year.

<sup>3</sup> Original text: *Teollinen tai kotona tehty, piirakka on joka tapauksessa täydellinen tuote.*

<sup>4</sup> The visits took place in the winter-spring of 2013-2014. In total 87 students were asked what they associated with the term «Karelia.»



When asked what words or phrases they associated with the word «Karelia» at least one student in each of the seven classes associated the word Karelia with pie (*piirakka*). Other associations volunteered for the word Karelia were geographic in nature or related to the history of the area or its culture. Only two classes mentioned Karelia as associated for them with a ceded or lost area shows that this association with Karelia is still present, but it is not the foremost association.

For many of those asked Karelia makes them think of certain, common foods which are part of their everyday lives. Karelia as meaning a place or territory comes later as a secondary association or sometimes not at all. Two lists in the group written exercise which came after the class discussion, for example, featured only the answers «Karelian pie, Karelian stew» and another list featured only «Karelian pie, Karelian stew, beer<sup>1</sup>.» For the students in these groups the term Karelia did not conjure up any other associations. Even the shortest Karelia lists (between 1—4 answers) more often than not featured answers to do with food or beer. Of the four lists which gave only three answers all of them featured at least one answer to do with food. This implies that, even if the groups cannot think of many associations for the word Karelia they do normally make an association with food, a certain food, or beer. This is a complete reversal of what would have been the case before World War Two when Karelian food was almost unknown in other parts of Finland<sup>2</sup> — if Finnish students then had been asked what they associated with the term Karelia their answers would have been very different as Karelian foods were not part of their everyday lives.

### *Kansalaisruoka tulee Karjalasta (A national dish from Karelia)*<sup>3</sup>

The status and place of the Karelian pie as a symbol of both Karelianness and Finnishness seems assured as Finland prepares to celebrate 100 years of Independence in 2017. As part of the *Suomi 100 (Finland 100)* programme for next year's centenary of Finnish independence ELO, the Foundation for the Promotion of Finnish Food Culture, have organized an online vote to decide Finland's national food (*kansallisruoka*). The idea behind the competition is that «people see the specialties of Finnish food culture, so that we can be proud of them and at the same time to develop our food culture with an understanding of our strengths.»[16: np]<sup>4</sup> ELO urges «every Finn to vote for our country's national dish.»[5] The list of foods includes Karelian pies along with 11 other foodstuffs.<sup>5</sup> The voting closed on the 5th December 2016 and the winner will be announced at the Helsinki Travel show on 19th January 2017.[6] The Finnish regional daily newspaper *Karjalainen (Karelian)* published a «viewpoint» (*näkökulma*) article on the vote, headlined *A national dish from Karelia* which featured a photo of home made Karelian pies and the comment «From the Eastern Finnish perspective it's great that both Karelian stew and Karelian pies are in the final running.»[22]<sup>6</sup> The nomination, and the article in response to it, shows that the Karelian pie can be simultaneously both a Finnish national dish and yet still be located in Eastern Finland.

<sup>1</sup> There is a Finnish beer called *Karjala*.

<sup>2</sup> See Karelian Association, 1996: 21.

<sup>3</sup> Headline, *Karjalainen* newspaper, 12.10.2016, p: A16

<sup>4</sup> Original text: *Kansallisruokahankkeen tavoitteena on saada ihmiset näkemään suomalaisen ruokakulttuurin erikoispiirteet, jotta osamme olla niistä ylpeitä ja samalla kehittää ruokakulttuuriamme vahvuutemme ymmärtäen.*

<sup>5</sup> ELO organised an open vote for the first round where over 10,000 people voted and well over 1000 different foods were nominated (Karjalainen, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> «Itäsuomalaisittain on hienoa, että sekä karjalanpaisti että karjalanpiirakka ovat mukana kärkikamppailussa.»





## Conclusion

This paper has shown the centrality of regional food specialities in shaping local and national identities — in making Finns feel «Finnish.» The Karelian pie is claimed as a traditional and typical Finnish food: «all over Finland» «all Finns are familiar with this traditional baked food.»[20] The Karelian pie is a central part of Finnish cuisine and thus, via banal nationalism, of Finnish cultural and national identity. Making and eating the pies can reinforce both a Karelian and a Finnish identity.

Karelian pies have been adopted as traditional Finnish foods despite being unknown in Western Finland before WWII. Karelian pies crossed the new Finnish border with the Karelian evacuees and, through demonstration of their food culture by the dispersed evacuees, were adopted into general Finnish food culture with the Karelian pie elevated to national symbol, featured on postage stamps and nominated as Finland's «national dish». This paper has shown that Karelian pies can be a Finnish familial inheritance for Finns in Finland and abroad. This paper has also shown that Finnish North Karelian youth have a strong association between the term «Karelia» and Karelian pies showing the triumph of banal nationalism and the ubiquity of this seemingly mundane food item named after a lost Finnish territory.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all my interviewees and respondents and also Mildred Lau for her contribution of the phrase «the transmission of family lore» and her advice about this paper.

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### Acronyms / Abbreviations

WWII: World War Two

## Питание в Карелии: география и историческая память карельских «калиток»

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**Аннотация:** В статье исследуются география и историческая память о карельских пирогах (*karjalanpiirakat* = калитках) в Финляндии и за её пределами. Где именно этот род выпечки появился? Как он распространялся из трансграничной Карелии прежде, чем стал стереотипной «финской» пищей? Каким образом карельские пироги связывали финские семьи из поколения в поколение? Представлены интервью и дискуссии с финскими женщинами, которые демонстрируют карельские пироги как финское семейное достояние. Обсуждаются также результаты опроса подростков в финляндской Северной Карелии, который показал, что они прямо связывают понятие «Карелия» с карельскими пирогами. Это означает триумф питания как банальный национализм и центральное место предполагаемых региональных блюд в формировании местной и семейной финской идентичности. Автор рассматривает официальный и неофициальный статус и символизм этого карельского/финского продукта питания и выясняет, как и почему это изначально местное блюдо распространилось по всей Финляндии и за её пределами, став основной частью финской национальной кухни и, следовательно, признаком национальной и культурной самобытности.

**Ключевые слова:** Северная Карелия, трансграничная Карелия, историческая память, карельские пироги (калитки), банальный национализм, финская идентичность